

Everlasting Happiness,
as Buddha Attains 7

Presented by Venerable Da Shi

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Preface

Buddha came into this world to lead all sentient beings away from suffering and towards enlightenment. He forsook his throne and worldly possessions for the pursuit of enlightenment. It was his wish to guide all sentient beings in their understanding of the karmic cycle and the path to Nirvana. After his passing into Parinirvana, his teachings were collected and compiled by his followers.

It is Venerable Da Shi's wish to continue the Buddha's teachings, spread the seeds of compassion, and carry on his wish for all sentient beings to attain Nirvana. Since his ordination, Venerable Da Shi has been actively involved in the teaching of the Dharma in many places, including Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore. In 2004/2005, Venerable Da Shi was invited by the Life Television Station in Taiwan to present talks on various Dharma topics. This book was written based on the consolidated content of Venerable Da Shi's televised talks, in hope that his compassionate wish would be furthered through the spreading of the Dharma.

Foreword

EVERLASTING HAPPINESS, AS BUDDHA ATTAINS

The Buddha was born into this world out of great compassion with the aim to help all mortal beings avoid sufferings and attain endless bliss.

The world of mortal beings is full of suffering. It is a surreal world of endless desires and yet fulfillment of all desires is impossible. We have to work hard to find fulfillment but it is all transient. It is like a trap where we relentlessly pursue wealth, appearance, fame, gastronomic satisfaction, and excessive sleep without ever pondering what all these could lead to. We repeatedly go through birth, aging, sickness, and death and in this continuous cyclic existence, we suffer immeasurably.

The Buddha is like an expert doctor with the ability to diagnose and treat all kinds of ailments. Indeed, he dispenses eighty four thousands procedures for as much trouble that mortal beings could possibly face in this world. All these are found in the Buddha's teachings. If we practice his teachings with complete faith and realization, besides saving ourselves from suffering in this life, we can also find liberation in time to come.

There are very few fortunate beings that have the chance to hear the Buddha's teachings. The number of people who are able to hear and learn the Buddha's Dharma teachings is said to be like the amount of soil caught in one's nail if one were to use hands to dig into the ground.

Everlasting Happiness, as Buddha Attains is translated from a Chinese compilation of Venerable Da Shi's Dharma teachings on television in Taiwan, R.O.C. He has used the Agama Sutra as the central focus of these teachings, supplemented by relevant Dharma from Mahayana Sutras, including the Prajna Sutras, the Middle Way, the Maha-prajna-paramita-Sastra, the Dasabhumika-Vibhasa-Sastra, the Saddharma-Pundarika, etc. for better understanding. Through his skillful narration and explanation, Venerable Da Shi has made the Buddha's Dharma very easy to understand and at the same time, interesting. There are also many citations of examples where one can apply in one's life and practice.

It is the wish of Venerable Da Shi that these teachings should reach out to more people, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. For Buddhists who have sought refuge in the Triple Gem, these teachings serve to strengthen their understanding of the Dharma and improve practices. For non-Buddhists, may it serve as a guide to attain true bliss.

After learning the teachings of practicing giving (Dana) and upholding precepts (Sila), the next step is to observe the impurities of worldly desires and to seek renunciation. This book focuses on three topics - taking rebirth in the heavenly realm; reflecting on the impurity and ramifications of desires; and the importance of renunciation. This is the seventh installment of a translated series and it will also be made available on our website at ***www.mypty.sg***. Other topics in the series will be published progressively in subsequent books.

The Dharma introduced in this series accords with the teachings in the Chinese Mahayana tradition, which have originally been translated from Sanskrit scriptures. Hence, Sanskrit has been used for the names and specific Buddhist terminologies in the text. Readers can find help from the footnotes on the relevant

pages and Glossary at the end of this book for explanation of common Buddhist terms (first appearance in italics) and concepts.

@@@ This work is an effort to uphold and support Venerable Da Shi's great vow of spreading the Dharma in gratitude of the Buddha's compassion. Please help to spread the wisdom and cheers of the Dharma by passing this book on to someone else should you feel that you do not need it anymore. As the Buddha taught, the gift of the Dharma excels all gifts! May all have the chance to know the Buddha's Dharma! @@@

Miao You Pu Ti Yuan (Singapore)

Impure are the Taints of Desires, Of Greatest Ramifications are Defilements, Of Highest Importance is Renunciation: Chapter 1

Desires, Defilements, and Renunciation

"Impure are the taints of desires, of greatest ramifications are defilements, of highest importance is renunciation".

The phrase above is a continuation on the Buddha's progressive teachings on giving, upholding precepts, and attaining rebirths in the heavenly realm.

What is meant by the phrase "impure are the taints of desires"?

The five impure desires are namely:

- (1) Desire for Form;
- (2) Desire for Sound;
- (3) Desire for Fragrance;
- (4) Desire for Taste; and
- (5) Desire for Contact

It is because of wanting to fulfill these five desires that sentient beings perform unwholesome deeds.

What is meant by "of greatest ramifications are defilements"?

Defilements are afflictions of the mind and they come in varying degrees. Whatever their degrees, afflictions are the cause for

our suffering, the cause of our loss of lives, or the cause of our rebirths in the three lower realms. Therefore, defilements are said to bring about many ramifications. Since we now understand that desires are impure and that defilements are of greatest ramifications, we should aspire to renounce. Thus we say "of greatest importance is renunciation".

Renunciation means letting go of the five desires and not getting attached to them. The best way of renunciation is to go forth into monasticism.

Renunciation – The Path to Greater Happiness

Comparing renunciation and lay life, we would see that renunciation brings more happiness.

Example 1

At one time, Venerable Nakabara (那伽波罗) was staying in the city of Sarnath. An elderly Brahmin, who was an old acquaintance, visited the well-respected Venerable. Having exchanged friendly greetings, the Brahmin sat to one side.

"Venerable, you seem to be the happiest person here," the Brahmin said with a heavy heart.

"Why do you say so?" Venerable Nakabara asked.

The Brahmin replied, "I am grieved beyond words. Seven days ago, seven of my sons died. All of them were young, brave and strong, with intelligence unparalleled by others. Six days ago, I lost twelve of my workers. When alive, they were hardworking and never passed a day without diligence in their work. Five days ago, four of my brothers met with their deaths. They were adept in all forms of skills while alive. Four days ago, my parents died of old age, leaving me behind. Three days ago, two of my extremely beautiful and elegant wives lost their lives. Even my

trove of treasures and gems stored at home disappeared without a trace yesterday! The extent of my loss and suffering has been so great and unbearable! But unlike me, you are free from all these sorrowful affairs. You exude happiness that comes from the practice of the Right Dharma. Thus, Venerable, you are indeed the happiest person here."

"Why did you not attempt to avoid their deaths?" asked the Venerable.

"Yes I did. I tried many ways to prevent the deaths of my loved ones and the loss of my treasures. I made donations and gave generously at every opportune time; I performed kind deeds, prayed and partook in rituals honoring the deities, and supported the livelihoods of the respectable elders; I recited different chants, learnt divination of the stars, studied herbs and made medicines, and donated food to the poor and hungry. But even as I did all these, I still could not prevent deaths and losses from happening," the Brahmin explained.

Knowing that the Brahmin had not understood and accepted impermanence, Venerable Nakabara said, "Brahmin, providing medicine to the sick, giving food to the poor, and reciting different chants cannot forestall impermanence and death from happening. Likewise, your undertaking of the precepts and offering of flowers to the deities cannot prevent your loved ones from dying even if you have wished for them to live eternally. Dedication of merits generated from supporting the lives of respectable elders and Brahmins and from your practice of the holy teachings cannot prevent the impermanence of anything, including the deaths of your loved ones."

Venerable Nakabara's words struck the Brahmin deeply.

"Venerable, if that is so, what should I do to be released from all these sufferings?" implored the Brahmin.

"O' good Brahmin, you should understand thus:

*The root of attachments and desires,
Is none other than ignorance,
Causing us to suffer,
Endlessly in cycles.*

*Weed out ignorance,
Uproot all attachments,
Suffering will cease,
Giving way to peace."*

Inspired by Venerable Nakabara's wise teachings, the Brahmin pronounced, "I now renounce my worldly life and will undertake to practice the path of liberation from suffering!"

And thus the Brahmin began his monastic life under the tutelage of Venerable Nakabara.

Under the guidance of Venerable Nakabara, the Brahmin learnt to meditate and reflect on the true nature of the body. With continuous effort, the Brahmin eventually became a *Srotapanna* and attained the *Pure Dharma Eye*. Exerting more intensive efforts in his practice, he attained Arahatsip thereafter.

Due to the influence of ignorance, we become afflicted with all kinds of desires and become very attached to our families, properties, and possessions. And because we follow after our desires, our ignorance gets thicker and thicker, leading us to suffer endlessly.

Renunciation is thus the way to end ignorance, attachment and all sufferings; it is the way to true everlasting happiness.

Example 2

Some people wonder if it is possible to renounce without physically renouncing lay life. If we were as accomplished as the great Vimalakirti Bodhisattva, then it would not be difficult. But since we are not, we ought to renounce lay life and go forth into monasticism.

Even if the conditions for our going forth are yet to ripen, we should still put in effort to practice the Buddha's teachings while at the same time keeping our minds anchored in the aspiration of going forth.

Example 3

King Prasenajit had two ministers, namely, Isiidatta and Puraana. One day, they went to visit the Buddha who would teach them, "You should practice the Six Kinds of Mindfulness: Mindfulness of the Buddha; Mindfulness of the Dharma; Mindfulness of the Sangha; Mindfulness of the Precepts; Mindfulness of Generosity; and Mindfulness of the Heavens. Whereas the lay life is replete with worries, afflictions and cravings, the life renounced is trouble-free and pure. You must therefore aspire for renunciation."

"World Honored One! Indeed. The lay life is indeed full of worries, troubles, and cravings. As ministers of King Prasenajit, we have to follow the king and his concubines around wherever they travel. While riding on the elephant, the king's concubines, one sitting in front and the other at the back, will cling on to my neck, shoulders, and clothes tightly whenever we go up and down hills. Although we come into bodily contact with the king's concubines while riding on the elephants, our concentration is centered on only three things:

- (1) Controlling the elephants, lest they go the wrong way;
- (2) Guarding our minds, lest we fall for the concubines (the result of which would be disastrous); and
- (3) Paying close attention to safety, lest we fall from the elephants.

"We have never had impure thoughts for the concubines while riding on the elephants. The lay life is indeed a mass of suffering while a life renounced is indeed pure and holy."

"Well done, well done. Both of you are able to guard your minds well. Your efforts are hard to come by!" So praised the Buddha.

Thus, we should know that we ought to go forth into monasticism to practice the path towards liberation.

Entanglements of the Mundane World

In this mundane world, sentient beings are caught up with three kinds of affairs and two kinds of fights. The three kinds of affairs that sentient beings chase after are namely:

(1) Food: Beings in the World of Sensuous Desires i.e. the heavenly beings, human beings, asuras, animals, ghosts, and hell beings spend most of their time eating and drinking. Some may even end up killing and doing unwholesome acts just to satisfy their desires for food.

(2) Men and women: Beings in the World of Sensuous Desires have sexual desires and some may even end up performing unwholesome acts just to satisfy their sexual desires.

(3) Fights: Heavenly beings in the World of Sensuous Desires wage battles with the asuras. Human beings fight with each other over fame, status, and wealth. Ghosts fight with each other over food and animals fight over food and territory. Hell beings also fight with each other over similar things.

The two kinds of fights are namely:

(1) Fights over desires: Beings fight in order to satisfy their desires for the Five Sensual Pleasures. For instance, in our pursuit of fame and fortune as our five sense bases crave for the

five sense objects, we create enmity and disregard others. At times, we may even end up harming their lives.

(2) Fights over views: Families, countries, ethnic groups and religious groups fight with one another because of different views and opinions, foolishly thinking, "We are right! They are wrong!"

For example, someone might address Venerable Da Shi as Master Da Shi while another might simply address as Venerable Da Shi. There could also be others who would address by the title Honorable Venerable Da Shi. People have different ways of addressing a person but they could end up quarrelling over which is the correct salutation to use.

Often, lay people fight over desires while renunciants quarrel over views and opinions.

Thus, the best way to overcome all these fights is to live a renounced life.

Ramifications of the Lay Life

What are some of the ramifications associated with living the lay life?

Example

In the ancient times of the Chu and Han dynasties, there was a warrior named Xiang Yu. He was defeated not by his enemy Han Xin, but by his very own concubine. How so?

During the intense battle between the two kingdoms, Xiang Yu did not focus on protecting his kingdom but was instead enjoying fun with his concubine. As a result, he lost his kingdom to Han Xin.

In fact, with further contemplation, we would see that Xiang Yu was actually defeated by his own sexual desires. We might have been someone like Xiang Yu, falling into our very own traps of desires and losing our way on the path towards Buddhahood.

As an old saying goes, "A beauty's grace is a hero's grave". Unmarried men are usually full of great ambitions. But as soon as they get married and have children, all their great ambitions simply fall apart.

Thus, the lay life can be compared to:

(1) a peacock – attractive though it may be, unable to fly it in fact is.

(2) a prison – locked in wealth and fame the lay life is, freed by merits the renounced life be; this is highlighted in the "Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom" composed by Nagarjuna Bodhisattva.

A renunciant is like a freed majestic bird, able to fly over a thousand miles freely. We should aspire to renounce and give up the five desires.

Example 1

The history of ancient China records King Zhou as the last emperor of the Shang Dynasty. He was a talented, quick-witted, strong, and eloquent man.

Born into high social status, King Zhou grew up proud and defiant.

He led an extravagant life and had a beautiful wife by the name of Daji. In order to please his wife, King Zhou made thousands of people build a grand three-mile wide hall in the country. The king also took away the jewelry of his people to embellish his palace where he would spend most of his time drinking, eating, and dancing.

King Zhou was a temperamental and cruel king. He would kill for no good reason such as the fact that he was upset. He also created many cruel punishments to punish those who criticized him and his ministers.

King Zhou's countrymen were dissatisfied with him and did not support him in the country's battle against King Wu's army. King Zhou, being defeated, immolated himself.

On deeper contemplation, we would see that King Zhou was defeated not by King Wu, but by his desires.

Example 2

A wise person sees the decadence of all things. A piece of cheesecake, when fresh, does not have worms. Worms appear only when it has decayed.

Similarly a healthy person does not show signs of illness. But if he is not healthy, all kinds of illnesses will start to manifest.

Therefore, all things in this world are subject to decadence and impermanence. Those who are wise will abandon the five desires.

Ramifications of Following After Desires

We can see the many ramifications that defilements can bring from the lay life we live.

Example 1

Once, a cab driver who had led a frugal life was found dead in his car in Taichung. The driver did not appear to have been killed by someone he did not know as the car doors and windows were all closed and the windshield was intact. Police investigations subsequently revealed that it was his two sons who had murdered him.

Why did the two sons kill their father? It was because they had been harassed by illegal moneylenders whom they owed some debts to. Having no other alternatives, the two sons killed their father in order to get a twenty million insurance pay out. They killed their father out of their own desires.

Thus, we see that "impure are the taints of desires, of greatest ramifications are defilements". Money will bring about sufferings and woes. People who are wise will abandon all these and seek renunciation.

Example 2

There once lived a Wheel Turning Monarch, known as King Murdhaja, who ruled the whole of Jambu Dvipa. He possessed large military troops and the seven treasures including carriages, elephants, horses, gems, concubines, armies, and ministers. He was also a father to thousands of capable princes. The monarch practiced the ten meritorious deeds and his people lived in wealth and comfort.

After some time, King Murdhaja thought, "This kingdom of mine is thirty-two thousand miles wide. My people live in affluence and my wealth is immeasurable. But I still want more wealth so that my entire palace is filled with treasures, covering all the way up to my knees."

Because King Murdhaja possessed great blessings and merits, treasures rained in his palace for seven days and nights, eventually covering his knees.

A hundred thousand years later, the monarch heard of another place called Aparā Godaniya where a lot of cattle, sheep and jewelries could be found. Having decided to conquer that land, the monarch brought along all his seven treasures to Aparā Godaniya.

People in Aparā Godaniya, who had heard so much praises about King Murdhaja, welcomed and pledged their allegiance to him.

Another hundred thousand years later, King Murdhaja came to know about another auspicious place known as Purva Videha. Again, he took along his seven treasures to the place and was received by the people in Purva Videha with great hospitality. The monarch likewise ruled the place by the ten meritorious deeds.

Another hundred thousand years later, the monarch came to know of Uttara Kuru where everyone lived a full lifespan of a thousand years and led happy lives free from clinging and miserliness.

Again, the monarch brought along his seven treasures to Uttara Kuru and was welcomed by the people there. The place came under his reign for a hundred thousand years.

By this time, King Murdhaja was already ruling the four big continents of the mundane world. However, he thought to himself one day, "Everything in this world already belongs to me. Now I would like to visit the Trayastimsat Heaven and see how it is like there."

His treasure of carriages brought him to this heavenly realm where he received a warm reception from King Sakra. Out of respect for the monarch's virtues, the King Sakra allowed King Murdhaja to sit beside him.

From the throne where he sat, the monarch was able to see the whole of King Sakra's palace. Before his eyes was a palace filled with gold, silver, crystals, diamonds, pearls and other treasures. Unable to resist these treasures, the monarch thought, "My

treasures and glory is nowhere compared to King Sakra's. Only if I got rid of him, would I become the ruler of heaven and earth!"

Just as this unwholesome thought arose, King Murdhaja fell back to Jambu Dvipa. All of his seven treasures also vanished instantly. The Wheel Turning Monarch fell from grace because of his greed. Not too long later, he became so seriously ill that even the most capable physicians could not cure him.

His minister asked, "My king, you are extremely ill. Is there anything you wish to tell your people?"

Aware of his failing health, King Murdhaja replied, "After my death, if someone were to ask how I died, tell them that my incurable illness was caused by my greed. It is too late to regret now. The only thing I could do now is to convey what I have learnt to my future generations. Never harbor unwholesome thoughts, abandon the five desires, and renounce to tread the path towards liberation."

King Murdhaja was the Buddha in one of his past lives. Out of compassion for us, the Buddha told us the past misdeeds that he had committed before he realized Buddhahood so that we would not repeat the same mistakes and fall into the lower realms.

The Buddha had taught us the Right Path, the way to practice, and the way to liberation. As disciples of the Buddha, we should be thankful to the Buddha and put his teachings into practice.

Let us all abide by the Buddha's teachings and cultivate the path earnestly so as to prevent ourselves from falling to the three lower realms.

Impure are the Taints of Desires, Of Greatest Ramifications are Defilements, Of Highest Importance is Renunciation: Chapter 2

Purpose of Renunciation

We now understand that the five desires are impure and tainted, and that we should seek renunciation. But what is our purpose of renunciation? Is it for the purpose of accumulating merits to lead a happier future life? No.

Renunciation is for the purpose of putting Dharma into practice in order to realize Nirvana here and now.

Example 1

A group of Bhikshus were quietly dyeing their robes in the offering hall when *Mara*, the king of demons, transformed himself into a young and strong Brahmin to disrupt the Bhikshus' practice.

"All of you are young and strong. You should be enjoying your lives and be with your families instead of leading this renounced life. Why are you forsaking present pleasures of desires to cultivate future happiness?" Mara daunted.

"We have not forsaken present happiness and renounced for the sake of future happiness. What we have forsaken is future happiness that is still subject to impermanence; we have

renounced so as to realize true happiness in this very life," replied the Bhikshus.

"How so?" asked Mara.

The Bhikshus explained, "As the Buddha says, happiness in the future life is merely suffering in disguise; transient and unbeneficial. Heavenly beings have to meet with suffering when they fall in the hell realm with the exhaustion of their merits.

"We suffer in unhappiness when we do not get the wealth, fame, status, achievements, and possessions that we desire for. Living in this mundane world is in and of itself a suffering, the suffering of which is just like the pain we get when our hearts are pierced with knives.

"Renunciants do not have to experience the mental anguishes that lay people have. Their hearts are at ease as a result of their diligent practice in the Dharma.

"As the Buddha's disciples, we cultivate the *Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, the *Four Right Endeavors*, the *Four Ways of Attaining Samadhi*, the *Five Wholesome Faculties*, the *Five Powers*, the *Seven Factors of Enlightenment*, and the Eightfold Noble Path.

"True happiness comes only from the realization of Nirvana. As The Great Buddha says, true happiness in this life is realized when all defilements are eradicated and when the heart abides in the *Bhutatahata* at all times.

"The Buddha has taught:

*'Every suffering that arises,
Is caused by our desires.
With the world filled with piercing pain,
Who would indulge in desires again?
Seeing the world as conditioned,
Like a knives-filled dungeon,
The wise strives for escape,
With every step he takes.
Even having countless dimes,
Like a king who rules the sky,
One can never be content,
Even with all at his expense.
Hence practice to see all as equal,
This I say to the wise and eager.' "*

Mara left hastily after knowing that he was not able to disrupt the diligent Bhikshus from their practice. The Bhikshus then sought the Buddha's advice on the Brahmin's sudden disappearance.

"It is Mara, the king of demons, who has come here to disrupt your practice and make you all his dependents by tempting you to return to lay life," explained the Buddha.

Without Right Mindfulness, we will continue to indulge in the Five Desires and *Six Sense Objects* such as fame and wealth, or partake in politics, even after we have renounced the lay life.

All conditioned phenomena in this mundane world are impermanent, suffering, devoid of self, and empty. Clinging to them only brings about immense suffering. It is wise for us to abandon them. We must strive to end our attachments to them and practice the Dharma wholeheartedly to eradicate our mental defilements.

The compassionate Buddha had instilled this world with the Right Dharma so that we do not succumb to the temptations of King Mara. Renunciation is therefore not for the purpose of gaining a happier future life, but rather for the purpose of realizing Nirvana.

Example 2

There were two Bhikshus who practiced together and each made a vow. One vowed to attain Arahatsip while the other vowed to be a Wheel Turning Monarch. The two later took rebirths as Bhikshu Nagasena and King Milinda respectively. Today, there are two Sutras, namely, "Sutra on The Questions of King Milinda" and "Nagasena-Bhikshu-Sutra", which records their dialogue about the Dharma.

Before the two met again, King Milinda had debated with one of the most prestigious Bhikshus of his time. The king asked the Bhikshu, "Why do Sramanas seek renunciation?"

"To accumulate great merits," the Bhikshu replied.

"If this is indeed so, laity too, are able to accumulate great merits by giving, offering and upholding the precepts," said the king.

"Yes, indeed," the Bhikshus replied.

"If so, isn't it unnecessary and redundant to go forth into renunciation?" asked the king.

The Bhikshus was left speechless when the king said this.

Renunciation is not for the purpose of accumulating great merits. It is for the purpose of realizing Nirvana. Even though merits are able to assist us on the path, they are not our ultimate goal.

Merits of Renunciation

There are four kinds of merits arising from renunciation, namely, happiness of an anchored mind, happiness of the one well gone, happiness of being a sramana, and happiness of Nirvana.

- (1) Happiness of an anchored mind comes from a mind that has abandoned all conditioned phenomena.
- (2) Happiness of the one well gone comes from knowing all phenomena as they truly are, knowing all appearances as delusive, and from being liberated from the cycles of birth and death.
- (3) Happiness of being a sramana comes from attaining the *four pairs and eight categories of Sravaka practitioners*.
- (4) Happiness of Nirvana comes from the complete extinguishment of greed, anger, ignorance, and all other mental afflictions.

We do not renounce for enjoyment, but for practicing to eradicate all defilements, upholding the precepts, cultivating mindfulness and developing wisdom.

Example 1

The Agama Sutra records that in the distant past, there once lived a merchant by the name of Pu Fu in the city of Varanasi.

One day, he led five hundred traders out to the sea for treasure hunting. While on their way back, a storm swept away their vessel and they landed on an island where a group of raksasa ghosts resided.

The raksasa ghosts were delighted to see the merchants. Quickly, they transformed themselves into beautiful and mesmerizing women to attract the merchants.

They said to the merchants, "Welcome to this great paradise! This is where you can enjoy rare treasures and great delicacies. As we have no men, you can stay with us here." The merchants were very excited upon hearing this and they fell in love with the women.

Just then, the merchant Pu Fu thought, "How do these women live on this abandoned island all by themselves? They are most likely the transformations of raksasa ghosts." He rejected the invitations of the women and said to them, "We do not need all these. We are not desirous of you."

In those times, the heavenly king would appear in the sky on the eighth, fourteenth, and fifteenth day of each lunar month to save the beings who were in trouble. It was on the fifteenth night when the heavenly king found the traders in danger and came to their rescue.

While planning to escape, the merchant Pu Fu saw the heavenly king in the sky and called out for him, "Five hundred of us have been blown onto this dangerous island! Please bring us across this ocean!"

The heavenly king replied, "I promise to send all of you ashore safely!"

Pu Fu was happy to hear the heavenly king's promise. However, his five hundred friends turned down the help extended, "We have been working so hard in the world for the sake of good clothes, beautiful women, good food, and wealth. This island has everything we want! We will stay here until all our wants are satisfied before going back. You can go first if you so wish, but we are staying!"

Pu Fu tried to talk sense into them, "Don't be foolish, my friends! How do these women survive living here on an abandoned

island surrounded by this big ocean? They can't possibly be human beings!"

"Forget about getting us to go back. We are staying no matter what!" said the other merchants.

"These women are transformations of raksasa ghosts! You will be killed by them!" Pu Fu warned again.

But the five hundred merchants bade farewell to Pu Fu and even requested him to convey their delayed returns to their families. Pu Fu said, "You don't even see that suffering has befallen on you! If you continue to be foolish, you will be eaten alive by these women anytime!"

With these final words, the merchant Pu Fu headed towards the heavenly king who then brought Pu Fu ashore to his safety. Back on the deserted island, the raksasa ghosts devoured the five hundred merchants alive.

The queen of the raksasa ghosts was furious that Pu Fu could not be found anywhere on the island and she screamed in anger, "I will get him no matter what!"

She transformed herself into a beautiful young woman carrying a baby and went into the city of Varanasi to see King Brahmadata. When questioned by the king, she alleged that Pu Fu had abandoned her and she had come to seek the king's help. Captivated by her beauty, the king summoned Pu Fu for questioning.

"Did you abandon your wife and son?" asked King Brahmadata.

"My King! This woman is not a human being! She is the transformation of a raksasa ghost!" Pu Fu tried to explain.

"My King! I have done him no wrong. But he is now accusing me of being a raksasa ghost!" the raksasa ghost cried.

"Very well. If you do not want your wife, I will have her instead," the king declared.

"My King! If you insist, so be it. But please know that she is a raksasa ghost!"

Not wanting to heed Pu Fu's advice, King Brahmadata took in the disguised raksasa ghost and was eventually killed by her.

After infinite cycles of rebirth, King Brahmadata took rebirth as an elder Bhikshu in the Buddha's time and was one of the attendants to the Buddha.

One day, a Brahmin visited the Buddha and wanted to offer his beautiful daughter to the Buddha. However, the Buddha rejected the Brahmin's offer three times. The Buddha said, "I accept your kindness. But as I have abandoned all lusts and desires, I do not need your daughter."

The elder Bhikshus said, "Please allow me to keep her if the Tathagata does not need her."

At that instance, the Buddha chastised the elder Bhikshu for his ignorance. "Foolish man! Do you not know that innumerable lifetimes ago, Bhikshu Sariputra was the merchant Pu Fu and the Tathagata was the heavenly King. The five hundred Bhikshus here were the five hundred traders who were killed by the raksasa ghosts. You were King Brahmadata who got killed eventually by the raksasa queen. The Brahmin's daughter was the raksasa queen. Do you want to be with her again?"

Hearing this, the elder Bhikshu understood that he had suffered for a long time as a result of lusts and desires. He decided that

he did not want to be with the Brahmin's daughter. With great effort, the elder Bhikshu applied his mind to the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and cultivated the Eightfold Noble Path diligently. He realized Arahatsip soon after.

Therefore, we must be mindful and always heed the advice of the virtuous ones.

Example 2

When sentient beings indulge in the five impure desires, they fall prey to jealousy, evil thoughts and unwholesome actions very easily.

During the Nan Dynasty, the emperor Liang Wu Ti composed the "Emperor Liang Jewelled Repentance" for Empress Xi. The origins of the "Emperor Liang Jewelled Repentance" came after several months following Empress Xi's demise.

One night, the emperor heard a sound coming from his doorstep. When he opened the doors, he was shocked to see a big python. He said, "My palace is heavily guarded, how did you manage to get in?"

The python replied, "I am Empress Xi. During my past life, I yearned so much for your love. I became evil, jealous, and vicious and even harmed others in order to have your love. As a result, I was reborn as a python when I died. I live in so much agony now; I have no food and no shelter. May I implore you to accumulate good merits on my behalf so that I can be liberated from this animal realm!"

The next day, the emperor told the Zen Master Zhi Gong about this occurrence. The Zen Master explained, "You must pay respect to the Buddha and repent on her behalf for the unwholesome karma she had committed."

The emperor requested the Zen Master Zhi Gong to compose a repentance text based on Buddhist sutras. In the end, a total of ten volumes of repentance text was composed. And Emperor Liang Wu Ti repented on behalf of Empress Xi.

One evening, a stream of fragrance filled the emperor's room. A heavenly being appeared and said to him, "Thank you to the emperor for the merits you have accumulated for me. I have been liberated from the animal realm and have taken rebirth in the Trayastrimsat Heaven."

Jealousy and hatred led Empress Xi to commit many unwholesome deeds, causing her to fall to the animal realm. This is an example of how much demerits there can be living the lay life.

When a wife notices her husband looking and talking to other women, she becomes jealous, angry and gets into arguments. If she does not abandon her attachment, she may end up falling into the lower realms, just like Empress Xi did.

So how should one avoid all these unwholesomeness? It is none other than renunciation.

Example 3

Even after renunciation, anger and jealousy can still arise if one does not practice the Dharma, uphold the precepts, cultivate patience or reflect on one's wrong doings. Occasionally, when a *Sramanerika* is being praised, other *Sramanerikas* will get jealous and find faults with her.

Thus, renunciants should practice according to what is taught in the Agama Sutras.

Example 4

Prince Ajatasatru was a tyrannical, brutal, and ruthless king who succeeded his father, King Prasenajit's throne. Seeing his ruthlessness, five hundred women from the Sakyan clan renounced their lay lives.

These newly ordained Bhikshunis discussed and concluded amongst themselves, "We have little knowledge of the Dharma. Our greed, anger, ignorance, conceit, jealousy have not been eradicated. We should seek the elder Bhikshuni's advice so as to put an end to our sufferings." So they proceeded to see the Bhikshuni Sthulananda.

Bhikshuni Sthulananda asked, "All of you came from the royal families. What has made you renounced? As a Bhikshuni, you have to uphold the precepts laid down by the Tathagata and practice diligently. It would be better for you to stay at home. You can practice giving and support the Triple Gem at your own wishes. Performing good deeds can also increase your merits."

The Bhikshunis were upset and disappointed when they heard this and so they left.

They went to seek out Bhikshuni Wei Miao for advice. They explained, "Although we have given up our good lives, we are still not able to put an end to our habits. Our greed and lust have not been put to rest. Please, guide us and show us how we can abandon all these."

Bhikshuni Wei Miao asked, "Do you want to know my past, present or future life?"

The Bhikshunis replied, "We wish to know the conditions of your present life so that we can clear our doubts on this path."

Bhikshuni Wei Miao explained,

*"Lust is like fire,
Rapidly burning,
Causing one to fall,
Deep into the abyss.
The three lower realms,
Are where life is wretched.
Yet the laity still craves,
For love and fame.
But when old age,
Illness and death,
Catches up with birth,
The laity gains nothing,
But only suffering and pain."*

The Bhikshuni continued:

"I was born into a noble family. I became pregnant shortly after my marriage. But my in-laws passed away as I was about to deliver my child. And so I decided to return to my parents. The way back home was difficult and rough. My family and I took our rest under a tree where my child was born at midnight. The outflow of bloody lochia discharge attracted a venomous snake that bit my husband to death. Only in the following morning did I know that my husband had died. Seeing his swollen and rotting corpse, I froze in fear and my eldest son burst out in tears. We had no choice but to leave my husband's corpse under the tree and we left quickly in search for another place.

"We came to a river but had no aid to cross over. And so I carried my newly delivered child over to the other shore first. My eldest son rushed to the river before I could reach out to him. He was swept away by rapid waters as I was too weak to save him.

"My newly delivered child was later devoured by the wolves. I was devastated by all these events.

"Then on the streets, I met a friend of my father and asked about my parents. He sighed and said that they had died in a fire.

"A few days later, a man proposed to me seeing my helpless state. I agreed to marry him. I was pregnant again and while giving birth, I locked the doors to prevent outsiders from coming in. My angry and drunk husband broke into the house when no one responded to him. He beat me despite my explanations. In the heat of the moment, he killed and cooked the newborn baby and forced me to eat it.

"I managed to escape from him. Eventually, I met a widower. We made good companions and got married. However, he passed away very soon after. As the laws required the widow of a deceased man to be buried together with him, I was buried as well. But I was saved by a tomb raider. The leader of the group of thieves was captivated by my beauty and wanted me as his wife. But not too long later, he was captured and beheaded and I too was buried along with him. I managed to escape when a pack of wild wolves and dogs dug the grave for food.

"With deep remorse, I reflected, 'I have suffered so much misfortune this life. What have I done to suffer all these? How should I live this wretched life?'

"As I contemplated all these events, I remembered Sakyamuni Buddha.

"I thought that since there was nothing else I yearned for in this world, I would just practice under the tutelage of the Tathagata. Without further hesitation, I headed towards the Jetavana Monastery where the Buddha was staying but I was too ashamed to meet the Buddha in my scantily-clad state.

"Give her some clothing', said the Buddha to Venerable Ananda.

"Having put on the clothing given to me, I paid respects to the Buddha and recounted all the miseries I had met earlier in my life. Thereafter, I requested the Buddha to accept my renunciation.

"Venerable Ananda brought me to meet Bhikshuni Mahapajapati and I was ordained by her.

"Bhikshuni Mahapajapati taught me the Four Noble Truths and advised me to contemplate on the impermanence, suffering, and emptiness of the *five aggregates*. I put the teachings into practice and through diligence, I realized Arahatsip and attained knowledge of the past and future (Pubbenivasnussati) within a short period of time. I finally understood that whatever we face in this life is the result of our past karmic actions."

The newly ordained Bhikshunis asked, "Please tell us what you did in your past lives that you have to suffer so badly in this life."

"I was the first wife of a man in my past life. As I had no heirs, I became jealous when his concubines bore him children. As a result, I pierced a needle into one of his concubine's baby's head, causing him to die. When questioned, I denied my acts and swore that if I was the murderer, I would suffer a wretched life in the future.

"At that time, I did not know of the law of karma. Thus, I had to suffer my own curse."

The five hundred Bhikshunis asked in shock, "So what is the cause for your multiple escapes from death and for your meeting the Buddha and attaining to Arahatsip?"

"In the past, Pratyeka Buddhas, Sravakas and other heretics resided on a mountain. One of the Pratyeka Buddhas would go for alms for food. An elderly woman saw the Pratyeka Buddha

and offered him some food. The Pratyeka Buddha exhibited his supernatural powers and the elderly woman, amazed, made a vow to practice and accomplished the same merits in her future life. The elderly woman was my past life.

"It was my past offering to the Pratyeka Buddha that led to such great merits. But despite attaining Arahatsip, I still had to endure needle-like piercing headaches constantly."

From this story, we should know that being attached to cravings will lead to jealousy, anger, and ill-will. These are the demerits of living the lay life. So let us we cherish the opportunity to renounce and to practice Buddha's teachings.

May we all have the conditions to renounce in this life and in all future lives as we cultivate the path towards Buddhahood.





Impure are the Taints of Desires, Of Greatest Ramifications are Defilements, Of Highest Importance is Renunciation: Chapter 3

Freeing Ourselves from the Desire for Wealth

As taught by the Buddha in the Agama Sutra, if one wishes to renounce and practice, it is best that one be born into a rich and honorable family instead of a poor family. If one is born into a poor family, one is pressed to work all day long just to make ends meet. How is it possible for one to renounce and practice if one doesn't have the time to do so?

If we studied the life of the Buddha, we would know that the Buddha was born a prince to a noble family. He led his life in his father's palace and need not have to worry nor concern himself with his daily amenities. Thus, it was easy for the prince to renounce his lay life.

Nonetheless, if one is born into a wealthy and noble family but does not associate himself with the Triple Gem nor practice the Dharma, one's life will be very miserable. Why so? Because one who is uncontented with one's wealth and who follows the snares of desires will eventually end up in pain and misery.

Example

Once there lived a very wealthy landlord who rented out his lands to some farmers for farming. During harvest, the farmers

would bring some of their harvests and hand them over to the landlord.

On one of the lands belonging to the landlord laid a big storehouse. Every season of harvest was a joyous occasion for the landlord because he could finally fill the storehouse with grains and wheat given to him.

On one particular day, the landlord sought out the farmers to find out how their harvests had been. But on his way to the farms, he chanced upon an even bigger storehouse that belonged to another landlord. He thought to himself, "I should build a bigger storehouse, buy more lands and rent them out to more farmers so that I would collect even more harvests!"

The landlord was in fact already leading a comfortable, wealthy and bountiful life. But he was still uncontented with what he had. He still had desires and greed.

Upon the construction of the new storehouse, the landlord transferred all the grains from the old storehouse into the new one. However, he felt very miserable and unhappy when he saw that all the grains could only fill up half of the new storehouse.

One day, the landlord went to seek the advice of a senior Bhikshu in a temple on this problem he had. He asked, "Venerable sir, I am facing such problem, what should I do?"

"Do you want to resolve the problem with the storehouse or the misery afflicting your mind?" asked the Bhikshu.

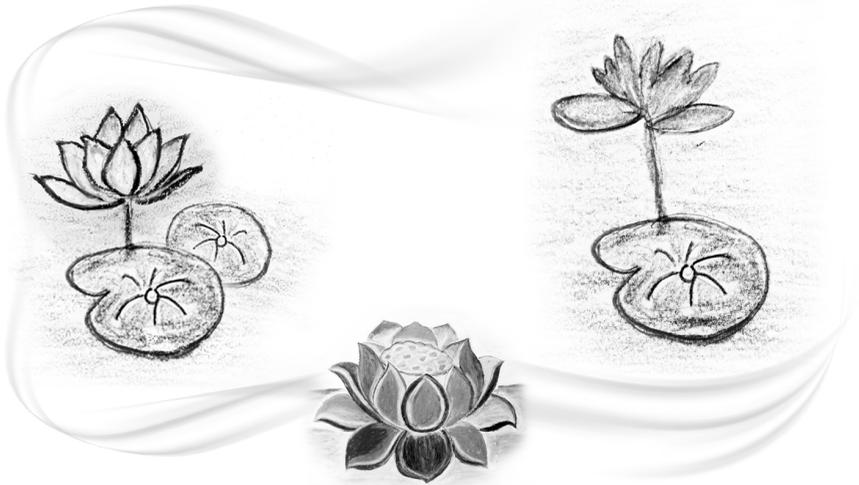
"I want to resolve the misery in my mind, Venerable sir."

The senior monk said, "It is not difficult to resolve the misery in your mind. All you need to do is to demolish the new storehouse and put the grains back into the old one."

The landlord heeded the advice of the senior Bhikshu and went back to tear down the new storehouse. He also transferred all the grains back into his old storehouse. After doing this, he felt happy.

The landlord understood that he had desired for the things that others had which he didn't have and it was desire that drove him to want to build a bigger storehouse without considering the ramifications that would follow. It was because of following desire that he ended up in misery. He understood that as long as he was able to weaken desires and be content with what he had, no unnecessary problems would arise again. Reflecting this way, the landlord regained his inner peace and became happy and calm again.

Thus, we see that the real issue here is not about having wealth or status, but about yielding to desires. Therefore we must learn to let go of cravings and be content with what we have. Otherwise, we will be afflicted with more defilements and end up in more suffering, unable to free ourselves from the cycles of birth and death.



Freeing Ourselves from Attachment to Forms

People in the mundane world generally love to marry beautiful wives or husbands. However, this desire for attractive forms will lead to suffering. How so?

Example 1

In the time of King Asoka, people from all over the world would bring rare and exquisite treasures to pay tribute to him.

There was an artist who wished to present something special to King Asoka. After giving some thoughts to what he could offer, the artist recalled that he had previously seen a lady of unsurpassable beauty while he was walking down a street one day. He decided that he would draw a painting of this beautiful lady and present it to the king.

Tempted by the beautiful lady in the painting, King Asoka asked, "Did you paint from your own imagination or did you paint a real beauty?"

The artist replied, "My King, I painted a real beauty."

"Tell me where she is now."

The artist recounted to the king on where he had seen the lady, and without further hesitation, the king immediately sent his messenger to look for her with the intention to marry and confer her as queen.

However, his messenger managed only to locate her parents. "My daughter is a married woman. How are we to answer to the king?"

The lady's parents knew it was impossible for them to defy the king's order. And so they decided to bring her back. They set forth to visit their son-in-law regarding the pressing situation.

The son-in-law was a Buddhist and knew that marrying a beautiful woman was bound to bring many problems. He decided to give up his wife and signed an agreement to let the king have her.

Later, he renounced and became a monk. With diligent practice, he finally cut off all the mental defilements and attained Arahathship.

As for the beautiful lady, she became the queen after she was married to the king. Living in the royal palace made her miss her former husband. One day, a stream of lotus fragrance triggered her fond memory of her former husband. "This lotus fragrance reminds me of my former husband," the queen murmured to herself.

King Asoka overheard what the queen said and became very furious. As the ruler of the great Maurya Empire, he could not allow the queen to have thoughts of another man. Thus he ordered his ministers to capture the former husband back to the palace.

"Is it true that your body exudes the fragrance of a lotus flower?" asked the king.

"Yes, indeed."

"Why do you have this fragrance?"

"It is because in the time of Kasyapa Buddha and in many of my past lives, I was a Bhikshu who taught the Dharma to people. The teachings of The Great Buddha benefitted celestial and human beings and helped them realize liberation from suffering. As a result of this, my body and mouth exude such fragrance."

The Bhikshu knew that it was very dangerous to follow one's desires and would easily bring about negative consequences.

Therefore he was able to give up his wife without further hesitation when the king asked for her.

If the Bhikshu had not made such a wise decision then, he would have been executed by the king. Therefore, we must learn to know what the right choice is and let go of our attachment when time comes for letting go arises. This way we save ourselves from endless suffering.

Example 2

In the era of Vipasyin Buddha, there lived a Brahmin by the name of Brahmin Sanajkumara. He bore features of the Brahma. Everyone was delighted at seeing him and enjoyed looking at him.

At the same time, there was a woman who looked very beautiful. When people turned their attention to her instead, Brahmin Sanajkumara grew jealous of her. He thought, "These people do not appreciate my good appearance. I must think of a way to make myself the center of attention."

The Brahmin knew that in order to have his wish fulfilled, he had to acquire merits. And so for seven days and nights, he brought beautiful and exquisite flowers as offerings for Vipasyin Buddha. At the end of the seventh night, the Brahmin laid down his vows, "May these merits enable me to become the most beautiful lady in my next life, and may whoever sees me like me. They will set their sights only on me."

After his death, the Brahmin took birth in the Trayastrimsat Heaven and became a female heavenly being. She surpassed all other female heavenly beings in her appearance, lifespan, fortune, status, divine power and all other aspects.

All the male heavenly beings vied to make her their wife. They resolved that whoever could render the best gatha (verse)

would be the winner amongst them to take her as his wife. The first male heavenly being uttered, "Throughout my awakesness, my heart yearns for her. I cannot stop yearning unless I am in sleep."

The second male heavenly being said, "Greater than yours is my desire for her. My love for her is like the sound of the war drum; bold and endless."

"My friend, drum beating stops when you are tired. So does your love for her. But my love for her is like a flowing river; flowing in currents and moving seamlessly. She should be mine," professed the third male heavenly being.

The fourth male heavenly being announced, "Your moving currents subside when hit by driftwoods. So does your love for her. But my love and adoration for her is so much that I cannot even get my eyes off her."

In turn, the fifth male heavenly being who was also the king of the heaven declared, "All of your love for her has died when you worked your minds on the gathas. For me, I do not even know if I now am dead or alive."

Amused by the verse of the heavenly king, the four other heavenly beings laughed and agreed, "O' King of Heaven! Your love for the female heavenly being indeed surpasses ours. You should have her."

Even the king of heaven and the heavenly beings could not overcome lust. As such, we can see that the affliction of desires is immeasurable.

Example 3

After the Buddha had realized enlightenment, he returned to his father's palace to lead Nanda out of his lay life.

One morning when Nanda saw the Buddha walking peacefully towards the palace for alms, he felt so much joy that he quickly went up to the Buddha, took the Buddha's alms bowl and filled it up with rice and vegetables. Holding it respectfully, Nanda put the alms bowl out to the Buddha.

"Where has the Buddha gone in just a short time?" Nanda thought as he could not see the Buddha anywhere.

As he looked afar, he saw that the Buddha had already set out towards the road. Hoping to return the filled alms bowl to the Buddha, he chased after the Buddha. But however fast he ran, Nanda could not catch up with the Buddha who was walking serenely and calmly.

Eventually, the chase led Nanda to the abode where the Buddha was residing. In the abode, the Buddha ordained Nanda against the latter's wishes who still had attachment to the worldly life. Venerable Nanda grieved as he wanted to be together with his beautiful wife, Sundari. Because of this, he would still wear the clothing of a lay man.

One day, Venerable Nanda put on a bright and colorful clothing for his alms round to Sravasti. The Bhikshus who saw Venerable Nanda in his colorful clothing reported this incident to the Buddha.

"Venerable sir, Venerable Nanda is not willing to become a Bhikshu. He has removed his monastic robe and has dressed like a lay person," explained the Bhikshus.

"Tell Nanda to come back. Say that the Buddha is looking for him," the Buddha said to one of the Bhikshus.

The Bhikshu went hurriedly in search of Venerable Nanda and conveyed, "Venerable Nanda, the Buddha is looking for you. Please return to the abode now."

Knowing that the Buddha was waiting for him in the abode, Venerable Nanda headed back to the abode immediately together with the Bhikshu. When he saw the Buddha, Venerable Nanda bowed in respect.

"Nanda, do you not want to become a Bhikshu and practice the path? Do you intend to return to the lay life?" asked the Buddha.

"Yes, Buddha. May you allow me to disrobe, please," Venerable Nanda answered respectfully.

"Why do you not want to stay as a Bhikshu?"

Venerable Nanda replied solemnly, "Buddha, my heart is engulfed in the fires of desire. I am not able to restrain myself."

"Are you missing your wife?"

"Yes, Venerable sir. I am missing Sundari."

Knowing that Venerable Nanda was still attached to his wife, the Buddha, using his unsurpassable divine powers, brought Venerable Nanda to the top of Fragrance Peak (香山).

The Buddha asked Venerable Nanda, "Do you see the blind macaque monkey in the cave?"

"Yes, I do."

"Between the blind monkey and Sundari, who to you is more beautiful?"

"Sundari is more beautiful! I am missing her very much."

The Buddha knew that Venerable Nanda still had love for Sundari. So with his divine powers, the Buddha brought

Venerable Nanda up to the Trayastrimsat Heaven. At that time, many heavenly beings were gathered at the Fine Dharma Hall of the heavens. Outside and not too far away from the Fine Dharma Hall, five hundred female heavenly beings were dancing and enjoying fun.

Intrigued, Venerable Nanda asked, "Buddha, why are there only female and no male heavenly beings here?"

The Buddha replied, "You could ask them, Nanda."

So Venerable Nanda approached the heavenly beings and probed, "Would you tell me where you are from? Why do I not see any male heavenly beings here?"

"The five hundred of us here do not have a husband. We are waiting for the Buddha's disciple by the name of Venerable Nanda who will be born here in his next life as our husband."

Venerable Nanda was overjoyed when he heard this. He thought, "They are waiting for me." Quickly, he returned to where the Buddha was sitting.

The World Honored One asked, "Nanda, what did the heavenly being say to you?"

"She said that they are waiting for the Buddha's disciple by the name of Venerable Nanda to be reborn here as their husband."

The World Honored One asked, "Nanda, how did you think?"

"This is what I thought at that time, 'They are waiting for me'," replied Venerable Nanda.

The Buddha exhorted, "Nanda! You will be reborn here to be their husband if you would continue with your practice."

"Now, between the five hundred female heavenly beings and Sundari, who to you is more beautiful?"

Venerable Nanda answered that the five hundred heavenly beings were more beautiful than Sundari who was likened to the blind monkey when compared to the heavenly beings.

From that day on, Venerable Nanda gave up his attachment to Sundari and practice wholeheartedly, hoping that he would one day be reborn in the heavenly realm.

Shortly after, the Buddha knew it was time for Venerable Nanda to extinguish the fires of desire in his mind before he lost sight of the right path. So one day, the Buddha brought Venerable Nanda to the hell realm with his divine powers.

There, they saw an innumerable amount of woks of boiling water with screaming beings who had sinned being cooked within.

Then Nanda noticed that there was a wok of boiling hot water vacant of any being.

Venerable Nanda asked, "Buddha, why is this wok empty?"

The World Honored One said, "You could ask the hell warden over there."

So Venerable Nanda, heeding the Buddha's suggestion, walked up the hell warden and asked, "Why is there no one in this wok? Who are you waiting for?"

"I am waiting for a Buddha's disciple by the name of Venerable Nanda. After the exhaustion of his merits in the heavenly realm, he will be reborn in this hell to suffer. This wok has been boiled for his punishment."

Fear and horror struck Venerable Nanda as he heard the words of the hell warden. He thought, "I will end up as the sufferer in this wok!"

With deep remorse, Venerable Nanda said to the Buddha: "Lately I have been practicing purification with the intention to enjoy future heavenly bliss. I am wrong. Please accept my repentance."

Venerable Nanda resolved to extinguish sensual desires and vowed not to crave for rebirths in the heavens after the Buddha accepted his repentance. Then, he composed himself, sat firmly under a tree and directed his mind to the Dharma. With *Right Concentration* and *Right Effort*, Venerable Nanda eradicated all mental defilements and attained Arahatsip.

Venerable Nanda contemplated and said:

*"Rare is the human life,
Yet not the most precious.
Long may life seem,
In the delightful heavens,
But in there life ends,
Ultimately in death.
In the woeful hells,
However we may yell,
This does not dispel,
Any of our ails.
Through this pain,
What do we gain?
The true understanding,
That Nirvana indeed is,
Our truest abiding."*

He got up from his seat, tidied his robes, went before the Buddha, bowed with respect and said, "I have earlier vowed to

marry the five hundreds heavenly beings. Now, I completely abandon this vow."

The Buddha replied, "Nanda, you are an Arahat now. I affirm that you have completely abandoned your previous vow."

The Buddha then explained to the rest of the Bhikshus, "Venerable Nanda has already attained Arahatship." Everyone rejoiced at the words of the Buddha.

Therefore, we must always remind ourselves not to follow the Five Desires and indulge in the six sense objects. We should cultivate wisdom and foresight, just like Venerable Nanda who, in the end, chose renunciation over sensual indulgence. Thus renunciation is vital as it is the key to end suffering.

Likenings of Desire

The Buddha had given various similes to describe desire:

(1) Desire is like a bone:

When a dog bites a seemingly juicy and nice-tasting bone, its mouth, gum and teeth will bleed when it tries to bite harder for the juice.

(2) Desire is like burning fire:

Desire is like raging fire that burns up our bodies.

Example 1

There is a story of a fishmonger in the Maha-prajna-paramita-sastra. One day while passing by a palace, the fishmonger saw a beautiful princess standing at the top of the palace. Immediately, he fell in love with her and could not stop thinking about her. Lust burnt inside him and he could neither sleep nor concentrate on his work.

His mother grew worried but was clueless as to how she could help her son.

"Son, why can't you sleep well nor concentrate on your work?"

The fishmonger replied his concerned mother, "I have fallen in love with the beautiful princess and I want to marry her."

"Silly child! You are just an ordinary peasant. How is it possible for you to marry her?"

"But I can't help it. If I can't marry her, I would rather die."

Thus the fishmonger's mother had to find a way to reach the princess. So every day she brought fish to the palace and gradually she became acquainted with the princess.

Days passed and one day the princess asked, "Why do you bring good fish to me every day?"

The mother replied, "My son loves you very much. He wants to be with you."

The princess felt very touched knowing that someone loved her so much. So she said, "Please tell your son to meet me at the temple on this day."

One day before their meeting, the princess told her father, "Father, I haven't been blessed these days. Please give me your permission for me to visit the temple tomorrow to attend a well-wishing prayer." The king granted permission and sent his men to accompany the princess to the temple.

When they arrived at the temple, the princess sent the men away and went in alone. But the fishmonger arrived long before the princess, and he hid behind the statue of a deity while waiting for her.

The deity residing in the temple was worried that the princess and the fishmonger would commit indecent acts in the temple. So using his powers, the deity cast the fishmonger into a deep sleep.

When the princess saw the fishmonger, she tried to wake him up but to no avail. In order to show that she had turned up for their meeting, the princess took off her ornaments and left them beside him.

The deity withdrew his powers on the fishmonger only after the princess had left. On seeing the princess' ornaments, the fishmonger felt so angry at himself for falling asleep. But because he could not stop thinking of her, the fires of desire in his mind eventually burnt him to death.

Desire is like burning fire, bright and igniting. But it burns our hands easily. Therefore, we must heed the Buddha's advice to abandon these fires so as to prevent ourselves from losing our lives and falling into the three lower realms.

Example 2

There was a couple who was in love for many years but did not get married. One day, the lady told her boyfriend that she intended to go to the United States to further her studies.

Her boyfriend objected and persuaded her to stay in Taiwan. But the lady refused. What happened then? The man killed her. Why? Because he believed that since they had been in love with each other for so many years, she should stay in Taiwan for him.

But when she refused, he took it as she no longer loved him. And since he could not have her, he would not let others to possess her as well. So he killed her.

Therefore, we must remind ourselves of the taints of desires, the ramifications of defilements, and the importance of renunciation. The best way to renounce is to enter monkhood.

(3) Desire is like a viper:

Desire is like a viper that will eventually bite us to death.

Example 1

There was an incident that occurred in one of the universities in southern Taiwan. The male student from a broken relationship splashed sulphuric acid on the face of his former girlfriend when he discovered that she had fallen in love with another man. While trying to hurt the lady, he had also hurt himself.

The desire for sexual relationship is as frightening as a poisonous viper.

Example 2

One day, the Buddha and Venerable Ananda were walking in meditation along a small path in the field when they saw a bag of shiny treasures at the side of the path. The Buddha told Venerable Ananda, "Ananda, there are poisonous snakes around."

Venerable Ananda replied, "Buddha, there are indeed vipers."

At that time, a farmer working in the field overheard what the Buddha and Venerable Ananda said. Curious, he thought, "Where are there poisonous snakes?"

He walked up to investigate further. But to his amazement, he saw a bag of gold lying by the side of the path. The farmer said, "So what the monks referred to as poisonous viper is actually a bag of gold!"

Quietly, he took the gold away when no one was around. And he became rich overnight. Using the gold he had picked up, he bought many clothing and food. Other farmers became very jealous of him and news of the poor farmer getting rich overnight soon spread to the ears of the king.

The king suspected that the farmer had obtained the gold illegally. He ordered his men to arrest the farmer and threw him into jail as a punishment for breaking the country's law.

While in prison, the farmer reflected with remorse, "What the Buddha and Venerable Ananda said was true. The bag of gold is just like a poisonous viper.

Puzzled by what the farmer said, a prison warden reported what he had heard to the king. The king then asked to bring the farmer to him for further investigation.

The farmer explained, "I was working out in the fields one day when the Buddha and Venerable Ananda were doing their walking meditation on a path. I overheard them saying that there was a viper nearby and so I went to look. But what I discovered was a bag of gold. Blinded by greed, I took away all the gold. This is how I ended up in this prison. I have understood that gold is a viper which brings great harm."

After listening to the farmer's explanation, the king knew that the farmer had accepted the Buddha's teaching and repented for his mistake. As such, the king gave him more treasures and released him.

For us, we must be mindful when we see something on the road; do not pick things up conveniently as doing so may bring about unnecessary consequences.

(4) Desire is like a dream:

Our dreams are unreal, so are desires.

We mistakenly spend our lifetime amassing wealth, fame and status. But these are things which we cannot bring along with us when we die. We can only bring with us our good and bad karma.

No matter who we are, be it a mayor, public representative, president, government official etc., we still have to step down after the political term ends. After stepping down, we will then realize what the Buddha said is true; that whatever we have acquired as ours will one day be lost. It is like waking up from a dream and finding that everything is gone.

Example

There was a criminal who was locked up in a prison. He met a Bhikshu who visited the prison to teach the Dharma. The Bhikshu said that indulging oneself in the outer beautiful appearance would lead one to suffer painful consequences and that one should learn to understand that everything is unreal, transient and a source of suffering.

This criminal contemplated the teaching and found it meaningful.

When he was released from the prison, his friends congratulated him on his freedom. But he said to his friends, "I'm not yet free. I am still attached to worldly desires. I love my body, I love beautiful woman and all sorts of desires. I am tied down by all these desires. Being so, am I still considered free?"

Finally, he renounced and ordained as a Bhikshu. He practiced diligently and attained Arahatsip.

(5) Desire is like creepers:

The five desires are creepers that can strangle us to death.

A bird that has eaten a kudzu seed defecated it next to a huge tree. This tree got worried as it knows that the seed will one day become a big creeper. But the neighboring trees say to this worried tree, "Don't worry! It will wither very soon when exposed to the wind and the sun. If not, it will be eaten up by the birds!"

After hearing these comforting words from neighboring trees, the big tree feels a little more at ease. However, days pass and the rain comes. The seed is neither eaten by birds nor blown away by the wind. Instead, it starts to sprout and grow slowly, coiling itself around the big tree.

Initially, the big tree feels worried. But later, the tenderness of the young creeper took away its fear. Instead, the big tree slowly begins to like the creeper. The creeper continues to grow around the big tree and also becomes thicker until the big tree is completely covered by the creeper. Eventually the big tree dies because of the overwhelming creeper.

Even while others are vying with each other for power and wealth, or attractive men and women, a wise person will not participate in such competitions knowing that there will be a lot of afflictions. If we are ignorant or oblivious to the dangers involved, our desires will grow stronger and stronger, just like the growing creeper, and when it grows out of control, we will die within our own desires.

(6) Desire is like sugar-coated poison:

When we consume a sugar-coated poison, we do not know that it is in fact a poison. It tastes sweet at first, but eventually causes us to die.

There are many crimes involving murder for money, relationship, or revenge. All these are caused by desires. Murdering for relationship is due to sexual desire; for money due to greed; and for revenge due to grudges relating to wealth, women, or fame.

Desire brings happiness at first, but eventually brings about even more suffering. We must bear this in mind.

(7) Desire is like an illusion:

Desire is like a mirage. Following desires is just like playing with snow on Mount He Huan. But when the sun rises, the snow melts into water, ungraspable and nowhere to be found.

In a relationship, everything tastes sweet in the beginning. As soon as the couple gets married, the happy days of courtship come to an end. They start to quarrel and fight over all kinds of issues.

Therefore we must not be blinded by lust and desires. For those who are still single, renounce quickly and practice diligently to achieve liberation. And for those who are married, try to get your spouses' consent to renounce.

(8) Desire is like a useless vase:

Our five desires are not real, like a painted vase. The exterior of the vase may look beautiful, but what is contained within is actually very filthy.

Once, while a Bhikshu was preaching the Dharma, the most beautiful prostitute from the brothel came to be part of the audience. The audience had been listening to the Dharma

attentively, but when they saw her, their attention turned towards her beauty instead.

Noticing that the prostitute had distracted the audience, the Bhikshu knew that she had created very bad karma. And so he compassionately asked the audience to pay no attention to the prostitute's good looks.

However the audience was unable to restrain themselves and was again distracted by the perfume on her. Using his supernatural powers, the Bhikshu directed the audience to see the prostitute's internal filthy and repulsive organs. Immediately, their desires ceased and they refocused on the Dharma.

Knowing that she was no longer the center of attraction and seeing that her own body was so impure, the woman quickly pleaded the Bhikshu to restore her original appearance as she still loved herself very much.

We must learn to see the true nature of forms and be wise. Only then will we not fall into the trap of our Five Desires and six sense objects.

(9) Desire is like a piece of meat:

A bird that has a piece of meat in its mouth will attract other birds to snatch it. If it doesn't let go of the meat quickly, it will be attacked or even be killed by the other hungry birds. Likewise, people who possess wealth, beauty, status or fame face the risk of being attacked by others. Do not fight with others over such things.

And thus,

Impure are the taints of desires,
Of greatest ramifications are defilements,
Of highest importance is renunciation.



Impure are the Taints of Desires, Of Greatest Ramifications are Defilements, Of Highest Importance is Renunciation: Chapter 4

Freeing Ourselves from Sensuous Desire

Since we understand that sensuous desires result in so much suffering, we should abandon these desires.

Example 1

On one occasion, the Buddha and Venerable Ananda were walking down a street when they saw a loving elderly couple burning cow-dung for warmth. This made the Buddha smile. Even though Venerable Ananda knew that the Buddha had smiled for a reason, he remained silent because it was improper to request Dharma teaching in the street.

When they reached the abode, Venerable Ananda asked the Buddha, "World Honored One, what was the reason for your smiling when you saw the elderly couple?"

The Buddha explained, "The elderly man and woman have reached their old age, but they are still desirous for each other. Not knowing the need to practice, they will end up suffering in the hell realm in their next lives."

"Couldn't they change this eventuality?"

"Yes, they could have. But it is too late now. If they had practiced when they were young, they would have attained Arahatship. Whereas if they, as householders, had worked hard for their living, they would have been the richest in this city today.

"If they had practiced diligently in their younger days, they would have attained to the stage of *Anagamins*. Whereas if they, as householders, had worked hard, they would have been the second richest in this city today.

"If they had practiced in their middle age, they would have attained to the stage of *Sakradagamins*. Whereas if they, as householders, had worked hard, they would have been the third richest in this city today.

"If they had started to practice in their early old age, they would have attained the stage of Srotapannas. And if they, as householders, had worked hard, they would have been the fourth richest in this city.

"But it is too late now."

Why had the elderly couple not become the richest, nor the second, third, or fourth richest as householders? Why had they not ordained nor attained to the stages of Srotapannas, Sakradagamins, Anagamins or Arahats? What is the reason?

It is because they were desirous for each other, smitten and blinded by love. They did not practice diligently and did not work hard to acquire wealth. Even when they grew old, they still had so much desire for each other. From this we learn that sexual desire is truly a cause of great suffering!

When a man and a woman become overly attached to each other, they cannot take their minds off each other even while working. How would one possibly achieve progress in his or her

career in such a state? Therefore, we ought to remind ourselves of the teaching:

*"Impure are the taints of desires,
And of greatest ramifications are defilements,
But of highest importance is renunciation."*

Example 2

Once, there was a king who was about to set off for an expedition. He appointed his younger brother to handle the state affairs on his behalf while he was away. Unable to disobey his brother's instruction, he undertook the task.

However, before he began his work, he had himself castrated. Why is this so? It was because he had the wisdom to foresee the future.

While he was performing the king's duties for his brother, his sister-in-law, the queen, developed affection for him.

The king's younger brother was an Upasaka who practiced the tenfold meritorious cause of action. Thus, he rejected the queen's love.

Enraged by the rejection, the queen told the king upon his return, "Your brother humiliated me while you were away! You must find justice for me."

The king became very angry and ordered his brother's execution. Just before he was put to death, the king's younger brother said, "My king, please hold! I had already castrated myself while you were away because I knew such thing would happen!"

Having learnt that his brother was telling the truth, the king realized that he had wronged his brother. Disgraced by the queen's misdeed, the king sentenced her to death.

The king's younger brother castrated himself in order to avoid future troubles. As such, we should see desires as impure and avoid acting on them. We should constantly remind ourselves of this.

The Taste, Ramifications, and Way Out of the Five Desires

During the time of the Buddha, the Bhikshus would discuss the Dharma with the heretics. Bhikshus who have yet to realize fruitions could not ascertain who had won the discussions. They would approach the Buddha who would advise them to contemplate and discuss on the taste, ramifications, and way out of desires.

So what is the taste of desire? What ramifications ensue from following desire? And why and how should we renounce it?

(1) What is the taste of desire?

The taste of desire refers to the mental enjoyment one has towards wealth, lust, fame, food, and sleep. When we crave for this pleasurable feeling, we are attracted to the taste of desire.

It is just like enjoying the taste of salty food. When one takes pleasure in the Five Desires, one develops attachment to their taste. But once we see the ramifications that these desires bring about, we will seek out a way to let go of them and cut them off at their roots. This is the renunciation of desires.

(2) What are the ramifications of desire?

Laypeople work hard to make a living. To have good and well-paying jobs, we try to amass many skills from a young age. We attend enrichment classes throughout our early life, and after university, we continue to pursue post-graduate and doctorate degrees. After all these, we spend our whole lifetime earning a

living and acquiring wealth. We go through so much suffering just to satisfy our desires.

Some new graduates may not be able to find jobs or jobs that meet their salary expectations. Many of the well-educated are unable to find a job nowadays. Isn't this a suffering that we get when we are unable to have what we desire?

And when we are successful in our careers, we become attached to status, authority and wealth. Our attachment causes us to fear losing these achievements. But our minds suffer so much anguish and pain.

In our quest to fulfill our desires, we lose ourselves in society's rat race. We compete with each other and allow our minds to scheme and plot. But we seldom realize that in the process of doing so, we create nothing but endless grudges. We gain nothing but enemies.

Vexations, troubles, worries, fear and restlessness are but some ramifications of following our desires. To free ourselves from these mental afflictions, we must cut off greed and seek renunciation. This is the teaching of the Buddha.

The Taste, Ramifications, and Way Out of Sensual Lust

(1) What is the taste of lust?

Lust is the arising of happiness and yearning to be together when a man sees a woman or when a woman sees a man. This is the taste of lust.

(2) What are the ramifications of lust?

Because of lust, one writes, calls, chats online, and emails the other. And after a period of courtship, they get married to each other. Gradually, the couple begins to lose their youthful looks, have white hair, lose their teeth, develop presbyopia, and have

wrinkles all over their faces. Their once beautiful appearances are gone! Such are the ramifications of lust.

When we are old, bedridden with illness, and are no longer youthful, we experience the anguish of losing what we hold dear.

We feel miserable when the other person gets angry and vents his or her frustrations on us.

When we hope to rekindle the lost passion or regain our health, we suffer when we cannot fulfill our hopes.

When new desires such as wanting to have a new spouse arise, we forget the painful ramifications of lust and instead get absorbed in it.

If we do not renounce from our desires, we will end up suffering endlessly. But once we see the ramifications of desires, we will cut them off and eventually be liberated from the restraints of future sufferings.

Example

There was a beautiful woman who passed away and her body was placed in a coffin. After a few days, her body started to smell and the stench leaked out of the coffin. As a result, the undertaker had to pry open and reseal the coffin. When the coffin was pried open, the stench was so overwhelming and unbearable.

What the undertaker saw in the coffin was no longer a beautiful and attractive woman. Instead, it was a repulsive corpse, bloated, decomposed, filthy and unsightly. After this encounter, the undertaker no longer believed that beautiful women exist in this world.

When a corpse lies unburied in the wild, wolves, dogs, and birds will feed on the corpse, tearing it up into many bits and pieces. The once attractive man or woman has disappeared. When the animals continue to feed on the corpse, what will be left are the bloody bones attached with ligaments. Are these remains attractive? No, of course!

Exposed to the wind and sun for some time, the ligaments begin to disintegrate and the bare bones are strewn and scattered all over. Sometime later, the color of the bare bones becomes the same as that of the surrounding soil. After further decay, the remains disintegrate into smaller units and finally turn into dust.

Where has the attractive woman gone? It has completely vanished and ceased to exist. Reflecting on the nature of our body, we would realize that there is nothing worth longing for and we must seek renunciation from sensual desire.

The Taste, Ramifications and Way Out of Feeling

Feelings arise when the six sense bases come into contact with the six sense objects. If the feeling is pleasant, unpleasant feeling and neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling will not arise.

Likewise, when there is unpleasant feeling, pleasant feeling as well as neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling will be absent.

Similarly, when neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling arises, pleasant feeling as well as unpleasant feeling will not arise.

When one loves the pleasant feeling that arises, one has become attached to this pleasant feeling. For instance, we feel happy when we start to eat our food. At this moment, we will not feel unhappy or have feelings of neither pleasantness nor unpleasantness.

But as we continue to eat, the pleasant feeling gradually diminishes and the feeling of neither pleasantness nor unpleasantness starts to arise. At this time, pleasant feeling has vanished and there is no unpleasant feeling.

However, if we continue to eat to our fullest, we begin to suffer. At this moment, there is only unpleasant feeling; pleasant feeling and neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling cannot be found.

As such, we can understand that even eating, a seemingly pleasurable thing to do, causes so much mental afflictions.

Sometimes, we may feel at ease and pleasant when we are not eating. But such pleasant feeling turns into neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling after some time. With more time, unpleasant feeling arises as we start to feel hungry. Hence, pleasant feeling will diminish; just as it arises, so does it cease. Happiness is thus impermanent and not lovable at all.

So we should not crave for pleasant feelings when they arise, but instead learn to let go of our desire for them. This is because pleasant feelings will inevitably turn into neither pleasant nor unpleasant feelings, and then into unpleasant feelings.

As long as we each have a body, we will experience pleasant feelings, neither pleasant nor unpleasant feelings, and unpleasant feelings. From letting go of our attachment to our body, we will gradually let go of our attachment to pleasant feelings. At the same time, we are also letting go of our unpleasant feelings. This is the practice of renouncing desires.

If we are able to clearly see the taste, ramifications and way out of the Five Desires, we will not develop attachment to desires. Once we let go of desires, we will be able to live a truly happy and free life.

*"Rare is the human life,
Yet not the most precious.
Long may life seem,
In the delightful heavens,
But in there life ends,
Ultimately in death.
In the woeful hells,
However we may yell,
This does not dispel,
Any of our ails.
Through this pain,
What do we gain?
The true understanding,
That Nirvana indeed is,
Our truest abiding."*

Recite this verse every day and remember the importance of seeking renunciation and liberation.

We should make the vow to seek renunciation not just in this life but in future lives as well. This is the first step towards attaining everlasting happiness.

The Nine Traps of a Woman

We need to know what the nine trappings of a woman are in order to avoid falling into a woman's entrapment.

- (1) Singing:** Singing refers not only to just singing songs, but also using soothing words and melodious sound. This includes playing various musical instruments to attract a man's attention.
- (2) Dancing:** In addition to dancing, women capture men's attention through graceful and gentle movements and

expressions. Some women will dance and move their bodies in an attractive manner to charm the hearts of men.

- (3) **Talent:** Women will use their specialized skills or talents to attract men, e.g., composing songs or poems.
- (4) **Happiness:** Women involve men in activities that make men happy and forget their worries, thus enticing men to seek their companionships. These activities include drinking, eating, and watching movies etc. Such enjoyment causes men to indulge in sensual desires and eventually slacken in their spiritual practice.
- (5) **Smiling:** Using sweet smiles to capture men's hearts. Once captivated, men will think that they have found the "real" refuge and give up their aspiration to seek refuge in the Triple Gem.
- (6) **Crying:** A woman sheds tears to evoke a man's compassion, making him reluctant to leave her.
- (7) **Asking assistance:** Women would often ask men for help or to seek their companionship, be it physical or spiritual. In particular, spiritual companionship results in the man constantly thinking of her every action and smile, even in his dreams.

A woman would also put on a frail and pitiful appearance so as to get hold of a man's attention. Moved by the helplessness of the woman, he would want to protect her.

If he is unmoved by the above tactic, she would resort to asking her children or brothers to look for the man under the pretext of clarifying doubts on Dharma teachings, all for the purpose of attracting and enticing him.

- (8) **Illusion:** To better control men, some women resort to the use of illusionary tactics, such as adorning themselves with

cosmetics and accessories. Men should not be tricked by such appearances but rather empathize with compassion towards such acts. We should help all sentient beings be relieved from their sufferings.

(9) Bodily contact: Bodily contact is the most powerful way of entrapping a man. A woman makes bodily contact with a man during dancing or even in normal circumstances. Once this happens, a man would be smitten.

Understanding these nine trappings would enable men to avoid being trapped by women. On the other hand, self-respecting women will steer clear of these nine undesirable behaviors, and seek liberation instead. Bhikshus also need to be aware of these nine ways women use to entrap men, as mentioned in the Agama Sutra.

The Right Way to Renounce the Five Desires

Ordination essentially signifies the renunciation of worldly desires. Practicing towards liberation in a wholesome environment supported by the monastic community enables one to avoid the pitfalls of the Five Desires.

Example

A rich man of the Sakyan clan once asked the Buddha how one should advise an ill person to let go.

The Buddha said to the rich man, "Teach him the Four Indestructible Purities, the Indestructible Purity of the Buddha, the Indestructible Purity of the Dharma, the Indestructible Purity of the Sangha, and the Indestructible Purity of Precepts.

"First, ask him if he missed his parents. If he said yes, ask him if his illness will get better by pining for his parents. If so, he should continue to think of his parents but if not, then there is no need to think of his parents.

"Once he comprehends, he will say, 'I will not think of my parents.'

"Ask him again, 'Do you miss your wife, children, servants, and wealth?'

"If he said yes, tell him to continue thinking of them if it helps him recover. But since this is not possible, he should stop thinking of them.

"Next, ask him if he yearns for the pleasures in the Kama Loka Heavens. If he said yes, tell him to continue thinking of such pleasures and see if it helps his illness get better, which is not possible.

"Even the happiness in the Rupa Loka Heavens is impermanent, so do not crave for such pleasures. Only the bliss of Nirvana is worth pursuing. Thus, liberate oneself from illness to attain true freedom from suffering."

The rich man became enlightened upon hearing the Buddha's teachings. Even though one is ill, one should still seek to attain Nirvana so as to be relieved from sufferings and to be freed from the cycles of birth and death.

The happiness derived from the gratification of the Five Desires in the mundane world is unreal, transient and short-lived. True happiness, as taught by the Buddha, is the bliss of Nirvana.

As such, to achieve everlasting happiness, we have to start by giving, upholding precepts, understanding the merits and demerits of taking rebirths in the heavenly realms, and ultimately understanding that renunciation is the right way out of suffering. One then extends oneself to the actual practice of the Four Noble Truths for the sake of realizing liberation.

May all be able to renounce the lay life and leave worldly desires behind and tread the path towards Nirvana.

Glossary

Anagamin: One who has attained the third stage of Liberation. Such a person has abandoned sensuous desires. Upon passing from the human realm, he will take rebirth in one of the five special worlds in the World of Form, called the Suddhavasā worlds, or "Pure Abodes", from which he will attain Arahatship and will never return to the human realm. Hence, he is also known as a Non Returner. An Anagamin has abandoned the five lower fetters, out of ten total fetters, that bind beings to the cycle of existence. See also Arahatship.

Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi: The Supreme and Complete Enlightenment.

Arahat: One who has traversed the Eightfold Noble Path to reach the fourth and final stage of Liberation, called Arahatship. An Arahat has abandoned all ten fetters that bind beings to the cycle of existence. Also known as the Perfect One. See also Arahatship.

Arahatship: The fourth and final stage of Liberation, in which one is fully liberated from Samsara and is no longer subject to death and rebirth. The four stages of Liberation are: The First stage known as Srotapanna; the Second stage known as Sakradagamin; the Third stage known as Anagamin; and the Fourth stage known as Arahat.

Atman: The essence of things that does not depend on others; it is an intrinsic nature. The non-existence of atman is selflessness.

Bhikshu: A fully ordained male member of the Buddhist Sangha or monk observing two hundred and fifty Precepts.

Bhikshuni: A fully ordained female member of the Buddhist Sangha or nun observing five hundred Precepts.

Bhutatathata: The true character of reality. The inherent or true nature of phenomena or true suchness. (诸法实相)

Bodhicitta: Also known as the Bodhi-mind or the Bodhi-heart, in which "Bodhi" means "enlightened". It is the aspiration to attain supreme Enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Bodhisattva: A being who has developed Bodhicitta and is striving for enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Brahma King: The King of the Brahma World.

Brahma World: In the widest sense, this is the name of the World of Form; in a narrower sense, it is the collective name of the first three heavens of the World of Form. See also Three worlds of existence.

Buddha: The Fully Enlightened One, who possesses perfect wisdom and compassion.

Compassion: Also known as Karuna. See also Four Divine States of Mind and Great Compassion.

Cycle of existence: See Samsara.

Dana: Charity; benevolence; generosity.

Defilements: The mental states of greed, hatred, and delusion which temporarily cloud the mind and manifest in unwholesome actions. These defilements are seen as the very roots of Samsaric existence and are known as the three poisons.

Deva: A heavenly being.

Dharma: The Teachings of the Buddha.

Dharma-kaya: The Dharma body, the truth body, the reality body.

Eight Precepts: Observed by lay Buddhists during certain retreats: (1) Do not kill; (2) Do not steal; (3) Do not engage in sexual activities; (4) Do not tell lies; (5) Do not take intoxicants; (6) do not wear bodily adornments, use perfumes, engage in singing and dancing, and watching dances or plays; (7) do not sleep in a raised bed; and (8) do not eat after noon.

Eightfold Noble Path: The fundamental teaching of the Buddha that shows the path that leads to the cessation of suffering: (1) Right View or Right Understanding; (2) Right Thought; (3) Right Speech; (4) Right Action; (5) Right Livelihood; (6) Right Effort; (7) Right Mindfulness; and (8) Right Concentration.

First Stage of Fruition: Also known as the first stage of Liberation. One who has attained the first stage of fruition is known as a Srotapanna or Stream Enterer.

Five aggregates: Form, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness.

Five Desires: Wealth, lust, fame, food, and sleep.

Five Powers: Obtained through the practice of the Five Wholesome Faculties: (1) Power of Faith; (2) Power of Effort; (3) Power of Mindfulness; (4) Power of Concentration; (5) Power of Wisdom.

Five Precepts: (1) Do not kill; (2) Do not steal; (3) Do not engage in sexual misconduct; (4) Do not tell lies; and (5) Do not take intoxicants.

Five sensual pleasures: Pleasurable feelings derived from the contact between the five sense bases of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, and the five sense objects of form, sound, odor, flavor, and tactile object.

Five Wholesome Faculties: (1) Faculty of Faith; (2) Faculty of Effort; (3) Faculty of Mindfulness; (4) Faculty of Concentration; (5) Faculty of Wisdom.

Four Divine States of Mind: (1) Maitri or Loving-kindness; (2) Karuna or Compassion; (3) Mudita or Altruistic Joy; and (4) Upeksa or Equanimity.

Four Foundations of Mindfulness: (1) Contemplation of the body; (2) Contemplation of feelings; (3) Contemplation of the state of mind; and (4) Contemplation of phenomena. See also Right Effort.

Four Noble Truths: (1) The noble truth of suffering; (2) The noble truth of the cause of suffering; (3) The noble truth of the cessation of suffering; and (4) The noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

Four pairs and eight categories of Sravaka practitioners: This refers to Sravaka practitioners who practice the Srotapanna path and those who have attained Srotapannaship; the ones who practice the Sakradagamin path and those who have attained Sakradagaminship; the ones who practice the Anagamin path and those who have attained Anagaminship; the ones who practice the Arahat path and those who have attained Arahatship.

Four Right Endeavors: (1) the effort to get rid of unwholesome thoughts that have already arisen in one's mind, such as the desire to take another's property; (2) the effort to prevent the arising of unwholesome thoughts; (3) the effort to develop wholesome thoughts of loving-kindness and compassion; and (4) the effort to maintain and develop further wholesome thoughts that have already arisen in one's mind.

Four Ways of Attaining Samadhi: The basis to attain Samadhi: (1) Desire to practice Concentration; (2) Effort; (3) Mindfulness; (4) Contemplation.

Great Compassion: The aspiration to remove the sufferings and causes of sufferings of all sentient beings.

Heavens of the Four Deva Kings: Also known as the Heavens of the Deva Kings of the Four Heavens. This is the first of the six heavens in the World of Sensuous Desires. See also Three worlds of existence.

Kalpa: Also known as Eon. It is often used to denote a very long period of time. There are small, medium, great, and incalculable kalpas. A great kalpa indicates the length of time between the creation and

recreation of a universe, spanning the period of the universe's formation, existence, destruction, and non-existence.

Karma: The deeds carried out by a person and their effects on the person's future, especially in relation to their succeeding rebirths. Karma can be classified as actions of the body, speech, and mind, each of which can have the moral quality of wholesomeness, unwholesomeness, or indeterminate.

Law of causality: Also known as the law of cause and effect. This is a fundamental concept within Buddhism governing all situations, in which all actions, which is a cause, will produce a corresponding effect. It is also stated as good begets good, evil begets evil; good will not beget evil, evil will not beget good.

Loving-kindness: Also known as Maitri. See also Four Divine States of Mind.

Mara: The Demon King who resides in the Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven.

Naga: Dragon or serpent. A beneficent divine being who governs the various water bodies, such as seas, lakes, rivers, and springs.

Nirmanarati Heaven: This is the fifth of the six heavens in the World of Sensuous Desires. See also Three worlds of existence.

Nirvana: The perfect state of mind that is free from greed, hatred, and delusion, and hence all suffering. See also Parinirvana and Residue-less Nirvana.

Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven: This is the sixth of the six heavens in the World of Sensuous Desires. Mara, the Demon King, resides in this heaven. See also Three worlds of existence.

Parinirvana: Also known as the Great Nirvana; it indicates the Buddha's entering into the state of residue-less Nirvana. See also Nirvana and Residue-less Nirvana.

Pratyeka Buddha: Also known as the Silent Buddha, or Self-enlightened One. The Pratyeka Buddha appears in an era when there is no Buddha or the Buddha's teachings. He lives apart from others and achieves enlightenment through self-contemplation and realization of dependent arising.

Pure Dharma Eye: The pure vision of the true Dharma.

Residue-less Nirvana: Also known as Nirvana without residue. It refers to the state of total liberation from all physical and mental conditions. This is in contrast with Nirvana with residue, where the body still exists. See also Nirvana and Parinirvana.

Right Action: To conduct oneself in moral, peaceful, and honorable ways, that is in keeping with the precepts of not killing, not stealing, and not committing sexual misconduct. See also Eightfold Noble Path and Tenfold meritorious cause of action.

Right Concentration: To develop one's meditation according to the four Dhyanas. See also Eightfold Noble Path.

Right Effort: To develop the Four Right Endeavors. See also Eightfold Noble Path.

Right Livelihood: To live honorably in a profession which is in no way harmful to sentient beings, and in keeping with the precepts. See also Eightfold Noble Path.

Right Mindfulness: To practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. See also Four Foundations of Mindfulness and Eightfold Noble Path.

Right Speech: To abstain from telling lies, slandering, frivolous speech, and harsh speech. See also Eightfold Noble Path and Tenfold meritorious cause of action.

Right Thought: To have only thoughts which are in line with Buddhist teachings. See also Eightfold Noble Path.

Right Understanding: See Right View.

Right View: To develop the understanding or view that complies with the Buddhist teaching of causality or the law of cause and effect; understanding the Four Noble Truths. See also Eightfold Noble Path and Right Understanding.

Sakra: The King of Trayastrimsat Heaven.

Sakradagamin: One who has attained the second stage of Liberation. Such a person, upon passing from the human realm, will take rebirth in the heavenly realms, after which he will be reborn in the human realm one last time to attain Arahatsip. Hence he is also known as a Once Returner. A Once Returner has abandoned the first three fetters, out of ten total fetters, that bind beings to the cycle of existence. He is distinguished from the Stream Enterer by the fact that the Once Returner has weakened greed, hatred, and delusion to a greater degree. Therefore, he has fewer than seven rebirths. See also Arahatsip.

Samadhi: Meditative concentration. Often used to denote the deepest state of pure concentration, in which the mind is free from distraction and totally absorbed in the object of concentration. There are many levels and types of Samadhi, such as the Samadhi of Loving-kindness and Compassion.

Samsara: Also known as the Cycle of existence or cyclic existence. This refers to the endless cycle of suffering caused by birth, death, and rebirth in the six realms of cyclic existence.

Sangha: The Buddhist monastic order or community.

Seven Factors of Enlightenment: (1) Mindfulness; (2) Discriminative investigation of the Dharma; (3) Effort; (4) Joy; (5) Ease of body and mind; (6) Concentration; and (7) Equanimity.

Sila: The precept; code of morality; Buddhist ethics.

Six Paramitas: The Sanskrit word Paramita means to cross over to the other shore. Paramita may also be translated as perfection, perfect realization, or reaching beyond limitation. Through the practice of these six Paramitas, we cross over the sea of suffering (Samsara) to the shore of happiness and awakening (Nirvana); we cross over from ignorance and delusion to enlightenment. The six Paramitas refer to:

- The Perfection of Generosity (Dana Paramita),
- The Perfection of Ethics (Sila Paramita),
- The Perfection of Patience (Ksanti Paramita)
- The Perfection of Joyous Effort / Enthusiastic Perseverance (Virya Paramita),
- The Perfection of Concentration (Dhyana Paramita),
- The Perfection of Wisdom (Prajna Paramita).

Six realms: The realms of hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, asuras, and heavenly beings.

Six sense bases: Eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

Six sense objects: Form, sound, odor, flavor, tactile object, and phenomena.

Sramanera: A male novice monk observing Ten Precepts.

Sramanerika: A female novice nun observing Ten Precepts.

Srotapanna: One who has attained the first stage of Liberation. One who has attained this stage is said to have entered the Stream that leads to Liberation, hence he is also known as a Stream Enterer. Due to the fact that the Stream Enterer has attained an intuitive grasp of Buddhist teachings ("Right View") and has complete confidence in the Triple Gem, he will not be reborn in the three lower realms again, and will take at most seven cycles of rebirths alternating between the heavenly realm and the human realm before attaining the final stage of Liberation, Arahatsip. A Stream Enterer has abandoned the first three fetters, out of ten total fetters, that bind beings to the cycle of existence. See also Arahatsip.

Supernatural powers: The six supernatural powers are: (1) Divine eye or clairvoyance; (2) Divine ear or clairaudience; (3) mental telepathy or ability to read the thoughts of others; (4) psychic travel or telekinesis; (5) knowledge of the past and future; and (6) ending contamination. The first five supernatural powers can be acquired by one who practices deep concentration, but the sixth supernatural power is only attainable when one has attained Arahatsip.

Tenfold meritorious cause of action: (1) Do not kill; (2) Do not steal; (3) Do not engage in sexual misconduct; (4) Do not tell lies; (5) Do not slander; (6) Do not engage in frivolous speech; (7) Do not engage in harsh speech; (8) Do not bear greed; (9) Do not bear hatred; and (10) Do not stay deluded.

Three lower realms: The three lower realms refer to hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals; as opposed to the three upper realms of humans, asuras, and heavenly beings. See also Six realms of cyclic existence.

Three obstacles: The three obstacles refer to afflictions (klesavarana), karmic deeds (karmavarana), and karmic retribution (vipakavarana). These obstruct our learning of the Dharma.

Three periods: The past, present, and future.

Three poisons: See Defilements.

Three worlds of existence: The World of Sensuous Desires, the World of Form, and the Formless World. All beings in the six realms of cyclic existence can be found in the World of Sensuous Desires as these beings are plagued by various sensuous desires. Beings in the World of Form have abandoned sensuous desires but still cling on to physical forms, while beings in the Formless World have even relinquished the physical forms and exist only in mental states.

Trayastrimsat Heaven: Also known as the Thirty-Three Heavens. It is the second of the six heavens in the World of Sensuous Desires. See also Three worlds of existence.

Triple Gem: The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

Tusita Heaven: This is the fourth of the six heavens in the World of Sensuous Desires. Maitreya Bodhisattva is currently residing in this heaven, awaiting for the cause and conditions to ripen for him to descend to the human realm and become the next Buddha to save and liberate all sentient beings. See also Three worlds of existence.

Wheel Turning Monarch: Also known as Chakravartin. A universal emperor and protector of Buddhism. It is a term used for an ideal universal ruler, who rules ethically and benevolently over the entire world. Wheel turning literally means whose chariot is rolling or whose Dharmachakra (Wheel of the Dharma) is turning everywhere without obstruction.

Yama Heaven: This is the third of the six heavens in the World of Sensuous Desires. See also Three worlds of existence.

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"Everlasting Happiness, as Buddha Attains" is based on a series of video Dharma teachings presented by Venerable Da Shi. We hope to continue releasing more titles in this series at a later date. You may check our website (www.mypty.sg) for updates.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank all who have contributed to the translation of this series of works into English.

Title: EVERLASTING HAPPINESS, AS BUDDHA ATTAINS 7
Presenter: Venerable Da Shi
Publisher: Miao You Pu Ti Yuan (Singapore)
Address: 15 Lorong 29 Geylang
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Publish date: May 2015
ISBN: 978-981-09-5200-6

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