

VII

Four Clear and Definitive Instructions on Purity

1

On Sexual Desire

Ānanda straightened his robes and in the midst of the assembly placed his palms together and bowed. At once joyful and sorrowful, he now understood perfectly the path his mind had taken. Wishing to benefit the beings of the future, he bowed his head and said respectfully, “Greatly Compassionate World-Honored One, now I understand this Dharma for becoming a Buddha. I can practice this method unhindered by the slightest doubt. I have often heard the Thus-Come One say that Bodhisattvas resolve to help others make the crossing¹ before completing the crossing themselves, while the Buddhas, having already completed the crossing, act in the world by guiding others to enlightenment. I myself have not completed the crossing, but I vow to bring across all beings who live in the future in the time of the Dharma’s ending.

“World-Honored One, the beings of that time will have become more and more distant from the Buddha. As many false teachers as there are sand grains in the River Ganges will pretend to teach the Dharma. Should any beings of that time wish to guard and focus their minds so that they can enter samādhi, how may I guide them towards establishing a place for awakening where their practice will be secured against demonic disturbances and where they will not retreat from their resolve to become enlightened?”

Then the World-Honored One praised Ānanda before the great assembly, saying, “Excellent! Excellent! You have asked how a place for awakening may be established in order to rescue and protect beings who are sinking and drowning during the time of the Dharma’s ending. Listen carefully, and I will tell you.” Ānanda and all the others in the assembly replied that they would respectfully accept and follow the instructions.

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “When I have explained the vinaya, you have often heard me speak of the three essential elements of spiritual practice: precepts, which require us to guard and focus the mind; samādhi, which arises from following precepts; and wisdom, which appears out of samādhi. These are the three practices that end outflows.

“Ānanda, why do I say that to follow the precepts is to guard and focus the mind? In all worlds, beings in the six destinies whose minds are free of sexual desire will not be bound to an unending cycle of deaths and rebirths. No matter how much you may practice in order to transcend the stress of entanglement with perceived objects, you will never transcend that stress until you have freed yourself from sexual desire. Even very intelligent people who can enter samādhi while practicing meditation in stillness will be certain to fall into the realm of demons upon their rebirth if they have not renounced sexual activity. The best among them will become kings among demons;

those at intermediate levels will be members of demon hordes; female demons will be at the lowest levels. These demons will attract groups of disciples and will tell them that they have realized unsurpassed enlightenment. After my nirvana, in the time of the Dharma's ending, many such demonic hordes will sweep like wildfire across the world and will openly parade their lustfulness while pretending to be good and wise teachers. These demons will cause beings to fall into the pit of sexual desire and wrong views concerning desire, and they will stray off the road to perfect enlightenment. Therefore, when you teach people to practice samādhi, first teach them to rid their minds of sexual desire. That is the first of four clear and definitive³ instructions on purity that have been given by the Thus-Come One and by all the Buddhas of the past, World-Honored Ones.

“Therefore, Ānanda, one who practices entering samādhi while practicing meditation in stillness without renouncing sexual activity is like one who cooks sand in the hope that it will turn into rice. A hundred thousand eons might pass and it would still be nothing but hot sand, since it wasn't rice to begin with. It was merely sand.

“In seeking the wondrous enlightenment of the Buddha while you still have sexual desire, you may gain some understanding of that wondrous enlightenment, but that understanding will be rooted in sexual desire. If the basis of your understanding is sexual desire, you will continually be reborn among the three lowly destinies, bound to the cycle of death and rebirth with no hope of escape. Then how will you find your way to practice and realization of the Thus-Come Ones' nirvana?

“You must purge yourself of the most subtle promptings of sexual desire, both physical and mental, to the point that you have purged even the act of purging. Then there will be hope that you may realize the full awakening of the Buddhas.

“What I have said is what Buddhas teach. Māra, the Evil One, teaches otherwise.”

2 On Killing

“Also, Ānanda, in all worlds, beings in the six destinies whose minds are free of all desire to kill will not be bound to an unending cycle of deaths and rebirths. No matter how much you may practice samādhi in order to transcend the stress of entanglement with perceived objects, you will never transcend that stress until you have freed yourself from thoughts of killing. Even very intelligent people who can enter samādhi while practicing meditation in stillness are certain to fall into the realm of ghosts and spirits upon their rebirth if they have not renounced all killing. The best among them will become ghosts of great power; those at intermediate levels will become flying yakṣas or leaders of ghostly hordes; those at the lowest levels will be rākṣasas that travel along the ground. These ghosts and spirits will attract groups of disciples and will tell them that they have realized the supreme enlightenment. After my nirvana, in the time of the Dharma’s ending, these ghosts and spirits will spread like wild fire across the worlds as they make the claim that eating meat will not obstruct the path to enlightenment. I have instructed the monks that there are five situations in which eating meat will not compromise purity. Ānanda, but even then I have used spiritual power to change the meat so that all traces of sentience have been removed.

“I have compassion also for those who wish to live purely but who live among humid marshlands or in hot deserts where grains and vegetables cannot be grown. Out of great kindness and by means of my spiritual power, I change the meat they eat so that it is without sentience. It is merely called meat and merely tastes like meat. But, after my nirvana, how will people who eat the flesh of beings deserve to be called disciples of Śākyamuni?

“You should understand that these people who eat flesh may gain some modicum of mental awakening while practicing samādhi, but they are all great rākṣasas who in the end must fall into the sea of death and rebirth. They are not disciples of the Buddha. Such people kill and devour each other, feeding on each other in an endless cycle. How could they possibly get out of the three realms?

“When you teach people in the world to practice samādhi, teach them to renounce all killing. That is the second of the clear and definitive instructions on purity that have been given by the Thus-Come One and by all the Buddhas of the past, World-Honored Ones.

“Therefore, Ānanda, one who enters samādhi while practicing meditation in stillness without renouncing all killing is like one who hopes that nobody will hear him shout if he stops up his own ears. He is trying to conceal what is perfectly evident. Bodhisattvas and pure monks walking on country paths will not even tread

on living grasses, much less uproot them. How then can it be compassionate to gorge on other beings' blood and flesh? Monks who will not wear silks from the East, whether coarse or fine; who will not wear shoes or boots of leather, nor furs, nor birds' down from our own country; and who will not consume milk, curds, or ghee, have truly freed themselves from the world. When they have paid their debts from previous lives, they will roam no longer through the three realms.

“Why? To wear parts of a being's body is to involve one's karma with that being, just as people have become bound to this earth by eating vegetables and grains. I can affirm that a person who neither eats the flesh of other beings nor wears any part of the bodies of other beings, nor even thinks of eating or wearing these things, is a person who will gain liberation.

“What I have said is what Buddhas teach. Māra, the Evil One, teaches otherwise.”

3

On Stealing

“Also, Ānanda, in all worlds, beings in the six destinies whose minds are free of all desire to steal will not be bound to an unending cycle of deaths and rebirths. No matter how much you may practice samādhi in order to transcend the stress of experiencing perceived objects, you will never transcend that stress until you have freed yourself from thoughts of stealing. Even very intelligent people who can enter samādhi while practicing meditation in stillness will be certain to fall into an evil realm upon their rebirth if they have not renounced stealing. The best among them will become energy-devouring nature-spirits; those at intermediate levels will be succubae or incubi; and those at the lowest levels will be unwholesome people possessed by such spirits. These unwholesome beings will attract groups of disciples and will tell them that they have realized the supreme enlightenment. After my nirvana, in the time of the Dharma’s ending, many such strange and unwholesome spirits will sweep like wild fire across the world. By cunning and deceit they will establish their claim to be good and wise teachers who have reached the level of a sage. Their boasting will delude the ignorant and will instill fear that will rob people of their good judgment. Wherever they go, these unwholesome spirits will destroy families and reduce households to penury.

“I teach the monks to make their alms rounds in whatever place they find themselves so that they may let go of craving and become enlightened. The monks do not cook for themselves; and leading the rest of their lives this way, they wander from place to place in the three realms so that, at the end of their lives, they will not have to return. How then can thieves wear a monk’s robe for the sake of personal gain, meanwhile engaging in all manner of acts which they falsely claim are in accord with the Buddha’s Dharma? They slander those who have entered the monastic life, saying that fully ordained monks are merely following the path of the Lesser Vehicle. In this way they confuse countless beings and lead them astray, and they will all fall into the Unrelenting Hell.

“I affirm that, after my nirvana, a monk whose resolve in the practice of samādhi is unshakable can, in a single moment, repay his debts from all his previous lives since time without beginning by burning lamp oil on his body before an image of the Buddha, or else by burning off a part of one of his fingers, or else by burning a piece of incense on his body. Then he will be able to bid a final farewell to this world and be forever free of outflows. He may not immediately understand how to advance towards supreme enlightenment, but he will have firmly committed himself to the Dharma. Without such small acts of physical renunciation, he will have to be reborn as a person

again, even if he has attained freedom from all influences. He will still have to repay his debts from previous lives, just as, to repay my debts, I had to eat horse feed.

“Therefore, when you teach people in the world to practice samādhi, teach them to renounce stealing. That is the third of the clear and definitive instructions on purity that have been given by the Thus-Come One and by all the Buddhas of the past, World-Honored Ones. Ānanda, one who enters samādhi while practicing meditation in stillness but who does not renounce stealing is like one who tries to fill a leaking cup with water. He may keep on trying for countless eons, but he will never fill it up.

“Let a monk own nothing except his robes and his alms bowl; let him give to hungry beings the alms he does not need; let him greet the assembly by bowing with joined palms; let him take scoldings and beatings as praise; let him truly renounce his mind and body by sharing his flesh, bones, and blood with other beings; and let him never confuse beginners by misconstruing the Thus-Come One’s teachings which are not definitive: I can affirm that such a monk truly practices samādhi.

“What I have said is what Buddhas teach. Māra, the Evil One, teaches otherwise.”

On Making False Claims

“Ānanda, beings in the worlds’ six destinies may be entirely free, in body and in mind of killing, stealing, and sexual desire, but their samādhi will not be pure if they make false claims. If they do, they will be possessed by demons of craving or by demons of delusion, and they will lose sight of their potential for becoming a Buddha. They will say that they have achieved what they have not achieved and that they have become what they have not become. Wishing that worldly people might hold them in the highest honor, they will say that they have reached the stage of entering the stream, or that they must be reborn once only, or that they need not be reborn, or that they are Arhats or Solitary Sages, or that they are Bodhisattvas at one of the Ten Grounds or at one of the stages previous to the Ten Grounds. In this way, in their craving for offerings, they encourage people to bow to them and to repent before them.

“These people who have no trust in the Dharma have ruined their potential for becoming a Buddha just as a tāla tree will die if it is cut down. The Buddha predicts that such people will destroy their foundation in the Dharma and that they will never regain right knowledge and right viewpoints. They will sink into the sea of three kinds of suffering and will be unable to enter samādhi.

“It is my command that after my nirvana, in the time of the Dharma’s ending, the Bodhisattvas and the Arhats will appear before beings in whatever bodily form may be appropriate for rescuing them from the cycle of death and rebirth. The Bodhisattvas and Arhats may appear as elder monks or nuns, or as white robed laity, or as kings, as high officials, as pure youths or maidens, or even as courtesans, widows, libertines, thieves, slaughterers, or traffickers in stolen goods. Working side by side with these people, in order to lead them to enter samādhi, the Bodhisattvas and Arhats praise the Buddha’s Vehicle. but they should never speak casually to people who have not yet studied the Dharma, saying, ‘I am actually a Bodhisattva,’ or ‘I am actually an Arhat,’ thus carelessly revealing the Buddha’s hidden intent. They can only reveal themselves at the end of their lives, and then only in private. Anyone who in any other way claims to be a Bodhisattva or an Arhat is deluding people with an egregious lie.

“Therefore, when you teach people in the world to practice samādhi, teach them to refrain from making false claims. This is the fourth of the clear and definitive instructions on purity that have been given by the Thus-Come One and by all the Buddhas of the past, World-Honored Ones.

“Ānanda, one who does not refrain from making false claims is like someone who molds a piece of excrement into the shape of a piece of sandalwood incense in the

hope that it will then be fragrant. That cannot be. I have taught the bhikṣus that the straightforward mind is the place for awakening and that there must be nothing whatever false in their cultivation of a stern and proper manner in all four comportments. Why then would they make a public claim about their attainment, saying they had reached the level of a sage? One who makes such false claims is like a pauper who claims to be king. Such a one is deliberately seeking his death. Even less should one claim the title of Dharma-King! If your direction is not true at the start, you will veer away from the goal. One who seeks the enlightenment of the Buddhas in this way is like one who tries to bite his own navel. Who could expect to succeed? Monks whose minds are as straight as lute strings and who are entirely genuine and truthful will never encounter demons when they enter samādhi. I can affirm that such people are certain to realize the unsurpassed wisdom and enlightenment of the Bodhisattvas.

“What I have said is what Buddhas teach. Māra, the Evil One, teaches otherwise.”