

Belief and Understanding

Chapter 4

At that time the wise and long-lived Subhuti, Mahakatyayana, Mahakashyapa, Mahamaudgalyayana, having heard from the Buddha, Dharma such as they had never heard before, the bestowal of the prediction of anuttarasamyaksambodhi upon Shariputra, felt it very rare.

They rose from their seats, jumped for joy, straightened their robes, bared their right shoulders, placed their right knees on the ground, single-mindedly put their palms together, inclined themselves respectfully, gazed at the honored countenance and spoke to the Buddha, saying, “We, who dwell at the head of the Sangha and are advanced in years, told ourselves that we had already attained Nirvana and had no further responsibility, and we did not go forward to seek anuttarasamyaksambodhi.”

“The World Honored One has, from of old, been speaking the Dharma for a long time. Sitting here all this time, our bodies tired, we have merely been mindful of emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness, taking no delight in the Bodhisattva Dharmas, in their spiritual penetrations of playfulness, in their purification of Buddhalands, or in their maturation of living beings.”

“What is the reason? The World Honored One has led us to escape the Three Realms and attain certification to Nirvana. Besides, we are now advanced in years and when the Buddha taught the Bodhisattvas of

anuttarasamyaksambodhi we did not give rise to even a single thought of longing for it.”

“Now, in the presence of the Buddha, having heard him bestow upon the Hearers the anuttarasamyaksambodhi prediction, our hearts rejoice enthusiastically and we obtain what we never have had. We never thought that now we would suddenly be able to hear this rare Dharma. We rejoice profoundly, having gained great and good benefit.”

“It is as if, without our seeking them, limitless precious gems had come into our possession.”

“World Honored One, we would now like to speak a parable to clarify this principle.”

“It is as if there were a person who, in his youth, left his father and ran away, dwelling long in another country, perhaps ten, twenty or even fifty years.”

“As he grew older, he became poor and needy and ran about in the four directions in search of clothing and food. Gradually he wandered until he accidentally approached his native land.”

“His father, from the first, had set out seeking his son but in vain. He settled midway in a city. His household was one of great wealth, with limitless wealth and jewels, gold, silver, lapis lazuli, coral, amber, crystal, pearls, and other jewels. His granaries and treasuries were overflowing, and he had many servants, ministers and assistants, as well as countless elephants, horses, carriages, cattle, and sheep. The profits from his trade extended to the other countries, and there were also many traders and merchants.”

“Then the poor son, having wandered through various villages and passed through countries and cities, at last reached the city where his father had settled.”

“The father had always been mindful of his son. Although they had been separated for over fifty years, he had never spoken of the matter to anyone, but merely pondered over it, his heart filled with regret, as he thought, ‘I am old and decrepit. I have much wealth: gold, silver, and precious gems, granaries and storehouses filled to overflowing. Such a pity that I have no son! One day I’m bound to die, and when I do, my wealth will be scattered and lost, for I have no one to bequeath them to.’ This is why he ever earnestly thought of his son. ‘If I could only get my son back, I’d make him heir to my wealth. I’d be contented and happy and have no further worries.’”

“World Honored One, the poor son then, hiring himself as a laborer here and there, unexpectedly arrived at his father’s house. Standing by the gate, he saw his father seated on a Lion-seat. His feet were resting on a jeweled footstool, and he was reverently surrounded by Brahmans, Kshatriyas, and laypeople. Necklaces of pearls, their value in the millions, adorned his body.

Attendants and servants, holding white whisks, waited on him right and left. Above him was a jeweled canopy hung with flowers and pennants. Fragrant water was sprinkled on the ground, and expensive flowers were scattered about. Precious objects were placed in rows, which were passed out and taken in on leaving and

entering. Such were the adornments, and the majesty and authority of his awesome virtue.

When the poor son saw his father, possessed of such great power, he was immediately afraid and regretted having come there. Secretly he thought, 'This is perhaps a king, or one equal to a king. This is no place for me to hire myself out. I'd better go to a poor village where there will be room for me to work and where I can easily obtain clothing and food. If I stay here any longer, I may be forced to work.' And with this thought, he quickly ran off."

"Then the wealthy elder, seated on the Lion-seat, seeing his son, recognized him and his heart rejoiced greatly, as he thought, 'I now have someone to whom I can bequeath my wealth and treasures. I have constantly been mindful of my son, but had no way of seeing him. Then, all of a sudden, he came on his own, and my wish has been fulfilled. Although I am old and decrepit I still longed for him with regret.'"

"He then sent attendants to follow him and bring him back. Thereupon, the servants quickly apprehended him. The poor son in alarm shouted in resentment, "I have committed no offense. Why have I been seized?" The servants, with even greater haste, grabbed him and dragged him back. The poor son thought to himself. 'I am blameless and yet have been imprisoned. This surely means that I will die,' and, even more frightened, he fainted and fell to the ground."

"The father saw his son from afar and said to the servant, "I do not need this person. Do not force him to come along. Sprinkle cold water on his face to bring him to, but do not speak further with

him” Why was this? The father knew that his son’s resolve and will were inferior and lowly, and that his own nobility was a source of difficulty to his son.

Therefore, although he was certain that this was his son, he expediently refrained from telling anyone, “This is my son.” The servant said to the son, “I now set you free. You may go wherever you wish.” The poor son was delighted, having gained what he had never had before. He rose from the ground and went to a poor village to seek clothing and food.”

“Then the elder, wishing to induce his son, set up an expedient and secretly sent two people, haggard and undignified in appearance, saying to them, “You may go there and gently speak to that poor one. Tell him there is a place for him to work here where he can earn twice as much. If he agrees, bring him back and put him to work. If he asks what he is to do, tell him, ‘You are being hired to sweep out dung. We two will work along with you.’”

“Then the two servants sought out the poor son, and when they found him, they told him the above matter in detail.”

“At that time the poor son first took his salary and then joined them in sweeping away the dung. When the father saw his son, he felt pity and amazement.”

“Later, on another day, through a window, he saw his son at a distance, thin, haggard, soiled with dung, dirt, and filth.”

“He then removed his necklace of beads, his soft

upper garments, and his adornments and put on a coarse, worn out, and filthy robe, smeared himself with dirt and holding a dung shovel, looking frightful he addressed his workers, saying, "All of you, work hard! Do not be lax." By this device he draws near to his son, to whom he later says, "Hey, my boy! You should stay here and work. Don't go elsewhere. I will increase your wages. Whatever you need, be it pots, utensils, rice, flour, salt or vinegar or other such things, don't trouble yourself about it. I also have an old, worn-out servant you can have if you need him. So put your mind at rest. I am like your father, so have no more worries. Why? I am very old, and you are young and strong. Whenever you are working, you are never deceitful, remiss, angry, hateful, or grumbling. I have never seen you commit such evils as I have other workers. From now on you shall be just like my own son."

"Just then the elder gave him a name, calling him his son. The poor son, although delighted at this happening, still referred to himself as a lowly worker from outside. For this reason, for twenty years he was constantly kept at work sweeping away dung."

"After this, they trusted one another, and he came and went without difficulty. However, he still stayed in the same place as before."

"World Honored One: At that time, the elder grew sick and knew he would die before long. He said to the poor son, "I now possess much gold, silver, and jewels, and my granaries and storehouses are filled to overflowing. You should know in detail their quantities and the amounts to be received and given. Such are my thoughts, and you should understand what I mean. What is the

reason? You and I are now no different. You should be even more careful that nothing be lost.”

“At that time, the poor son, having received these instructions, took charge of all the goods, the gold, silver, and precious gems, as well as the granaries and storehouses, and yet he did not long for so much as a single meal. He continued to stay in the same place, still unable to let go of his lowly thoughts.”

“After a short while, the father knew that his son had grown more relaxed, that he had accomplished the great resolve and despised his former state of mind. Knowing that his own end was near, he ordered his son to gather together all the relatives, kings, great ministers, Kshatriyas, and lay people. When they had all assembled, he spoke to them saying, “All of you gentlemen should know that this is my son, begotten by me. In a certain city, he left me and ran away to suffer desolation, poverty, and hardship for over fifty years. His original name was such and such, and my name was such. Long ago, in my native city, I anxiously sought him. Suddenly, here, I have found him again! This is really my son. I am really his father. All of my wealth now belongs to my son, and all that has been paid out and taken in is known by him.”

“World Honored One, when the poor son heard what his father had said, he rejoiced greatly, having obtained what he had never had, and he thought, ‘Originally, I had no thought to seek anything, and now this treasury has come to me of itself.’”

“World Honored One, the great and wealthy elder

is the Thus Come One. We are all like the Buddha's sons."

"The Thus Come One always says that we are his sons."

"World Honored One, because of the three kinds of suffering, we have suffered much torment in the midst of births and deaths. Deluded and ignorant, we clung to petty dharmas."

"Today, the World Honored One has caused us to think about getting rid of the dung of frivolous discussions of the Dharma. We increased our vigor to earn one day's wage of Nirvana. Having attained this, our hearts rejoiced greatly, and we were content, saying to ourselves that, through our diligence and vigor, what we had gained in the Buddhadharma was plentiful."

"However, the World Honored One, knowing all along that our minds were attached to lowly desires and took delight in petty dharmas, let us go our own way and did not specify to us saying, 'You are all to have a share in the treasury of the Thus Come One's knowledge and vision.'"

"The World Honored One, using the power of expedient devices, has spoken of the Thus Come One's wisdom. Having gained from the Buddha the one day's wage of Nirvana, we took it to be a great attainment; we had no ambition to seek the Great Vehicle. Besides, the wisdom of the Thus Come One had been set forth for the sake of the Bodhisattvas, and so we held no expectations regarding it. What is the reason? The Buddha knew that our minds took delight in petty dharmas. He used the power of expedients to teach us in the appropriate manner, and we did

not know that we were truly the Buddha's sons."

"Now we know that the World Honored One is by no means ungenerous with the Buddha's wisdom. Why? From of old, we truly have been the Buddha's sons, and yet we delighted only in petty dharmas. If we had thought to delight in the great, the Buddha would then have spoken for us the Great Vehicle Dharma. This Sutra speaks of only One Vehicle. In the past, in the presence of the Bodhisattvas, the Buddha had belittled the Hearers who delight in lesser dharmas, but he was actually employing the Great Vehicle in teaching and transforming them."

"Therefore, we say that originally we had not hoped for or sought anything, and yet now these great jewels of the Dharma King have come to us of themselves. That which the Buddha's sons should attain, we have already attained."

At that time, Mahakashyapa, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke verses, saying,

"We, on this day,
Hearing the sound of the Buddha's teaching,
Jump for joy!
Gaining what we never had.

The Buddha says that Hearers,
Shall become Buddhas in the future.
A cluster of supreme gems,
We have gained, without our seeking.

It is like a youth,
Who, young and ignorant,
Ran away from his father
To another distant land,
Roaming from country to country
For fifty years and more.

His father, worried about him,
Sought him in the four directions
Until, tired of the search,
He stopped in a certain city,
Where he built himself a house
And amused himself with the five desires.

His household was large and wealthy,
With much gold and silver,
Mother-of-pearl, carnelian,
Real pearls, and lapis lazuli,
Elephants, horses, cattle, and sheep,
Hand-drawn carts, palanquins, and chariots,
Husbandmen and servants,
And a multitude of subjects.
The profits from his trade
Extended to the other countries.

Traders and merchants
Were present everywhere.
Multitudes in the hundreds of millions
Surrounded him reverently.

And always, by kings,
He was cherished and remembered.
The ministers and noble clans
All honored him.

For those reasons,
Those who came and went were many.
Such was his nobility, wealth,
And his great authority.

But then, as he grew old and decrepit,
He was filled with worry for his son.
Morning and evening, his only thought was,
“My time of death is drawing near.

My foolish son has left me now,
For over fifty years.
The things in my granaries and store-houses,
Whatever shall I do with them?

Then the poor son,
Seeking clothing and food,
Went from city to city,
From country to country,
Sometimes getting something,
Sometimes getting nothing.

Starving, emaciated,
Covered with scabs,
He went on his way until eventually,
He arrived in the city where his father lived.

Hiring himself out along the way,
He finally reached his father's house.
At that time, the elder,
Within his gateway,
Was covered by a large canopy,
And seated on a Lion-throne,
Surrounded by his retinue,
And various attendants.

Some of them were counting up
His gold, silver, and other valuables.
His income and expenses were
Recorded there on ledgers.

When the poor son saw his father,
Of such nobility and wealth,
He said, "This must be a king,
Or the equal of a king."
In fright, he reproved himself,
"Why have I come here?"
And further to himself, he said,
"If I stay here long,
I may be oppressed
And forced to go to work."
Having had this thought,
He hurriedly ran off
To a poor village, asking
To be hired to work.

Just then, the elder,
Seated on the lion-throne,
Saw his son at a distance,
And silently recognized him.

He then commanded his attendants
To seize him and bring him back.
The poor son cried out in alarm,
And fainted, falling to the ground.

“These people have caught me!
I shall certainly be killed!
Why, for food and clothing’s sake
Did I come to this place?”

The elder knew that his son
Was foolish and lowly.

“He wouldn’t believe me if I told him
He wouldn’t believe that I am his father.

Then he used an expedient,
And sent some other men,
One-eyed, squat, and ugly,
Lacking awesome virtue.

“Speak to him,” he said,
“And tell him, ‘You will work with us
Getting rid of dung and filth
At twice your normal wages.’”

When the poor son heard this,
He happily followed them back
And swept out the dung and filth,
Cleaning all the dwellings.

From his window, the elder
Would often watch his son,
Remembering that he was foolish and lowly
And enjoyed menial work.

Then the elder
Put on a worn and dirty robe,
And, holding a dung shovel,
Went to where his son was.

Expediently drawing near to him,
He said, "Work with diligence,
For I have increased your wages,
And shall give you oil for your feet,
And your fill of food and drink,
And thick, warm bedding."
Thus he spoke sharply saying,
"You must work hard!"
And then in gentler tones, he added,
"You are like my own son."

The elder, in his wisdom,
Eventually allowed him to come and go.
For a period of twenty years,
He was put in charge of household business.

He showed him his gold, silver,
Real pearls and crystal.
The income and expense of all these things,
He was caused to know.

And yet the son still lived outside the gate,
Dwelling in a grass hut
Thinking of his poverty:
"None of these things are mine."

The father knew his son's mind
Gradually had expanded,
And wishing to give him wealth,
He gathered together his relatives,
The kings, and great ministers,
The Kshatriyas and lay people.

In the midst of this great assembly ,
He said, "This is my son.
He left me and went away
Fifty years ago."

And it has been twenty years
Since I saw him return.
Long ago in a certain city
I lost my son.

Searching for him everywhere,
I came to this place.
Everything that I own,
My houses and servants,
I bequeath it all to him
That he may use it as he pleases

The son, recalling his former poverty
And his lowly intentions.
Who now, in his father's presence
Had obtained these precious jewels,
And these dwelling places,
And all such wealth,
Greatly rejoiced,
Having gained what he'd never had.

The Buddha in the same way
Knew our fondness for the petty.
And so he never said to us,
"You shall become Buddhas."

Instead he said that we
Could attain cessation of all outflows,
Realize the lesser vehicle,
And become Hearer Disciples.

The Buddha has instructed us
To speak of the unsurpassed Path,
And spoken of those who practice it
As being able to accomplish Buddhahood.

Receiving the Buddha's teaching, we
For the sake of the Great Bodhisattvas,
Use causes and conditions,
Various analogies,
And numerous expressions
To speak of the unsurpassed Path.

All the Buddha's disciples,
Having heard from us this Dharma,
Think upon it day and night,
And diligently practice it.

Thereupon, all the Buddhas,
Then bestow predictions upon them,
Saying, "You, in future age,
Shall become Buddhas."
This is the secret store of Dharma,
Of all the Buddhas.

Only for the Bodhisattvas
Are such real matters set forth.
And not for our sakes
Have such true essentials been spoken.

Just as the poor son.
Drew near his father, and
Although he knew of all his possessions,
In his heart he held no hope of getting them,
In just the same way,
Even though we have spoken
Of the Buddhadharma's precious store,
We personally never aspired to it.

Having attained inner-extinction,
We thought this sufficient,
For having completed this,
There was nothing else to be done.

And even if we had heard
Of purifying Buddhalands,
And teaching and transforming living beings,
We'd have taken no delight therein.

And for what reason?
All dharmas are
Completely empty and still,
Neither produced nor destroyed,
Neither great nor small,
Without outflows and unconditioned.

Reflecting in this way,
We did not give rise to joy.
During the long night,
We had no craving or attachment
For the Buddha's wisdom,

Nor did we aspire to it,
Yet, as to Dharma, we
Claimed we had the ultimate.

All through the long night,
We practiced and cultivated the Dharma of emptiness.
Having won release from the triple world
With its suffering, distress and calamities,
We dwell within our final bodies,
In nirvana with residue.

According to the Buddha's teaching,
We attained the Way which is not false,
And we assumed that we had
Thereby repaid the Buddha's kindness.

Although we, for the sake
Of the Buddha's disciples spoke
Of the Bodhisattvas Dharma,
With which they should seek Buddhahood,
Still in this Dharma,
We never took delight at all.

Our master saw this and let things be,
Because he saw into our hearts,
And so, at first, he did not encourage us
By telling of the real advantage.

Just as the wealthy elder
Used the power of expedients
To bring his mind under control,
And afterwards gave to him
All of his valuables,
The Buddha in the same way
Manifests rare things,
But for those who delight in the small,
He uses the power of expedients
To bring their minds under control,
Only then teaching the greater wisdom

On this day, we
Have gained what we never had!

That for which we lacked hope,
We now have attained.

Just as the poor son
Gained limitless treasure,
O World Honored One, now
We've obtained the Path and its fruits.
Within the non-outflow Dharma
We've gained the eye, pure and clear.

During the long night, we
Maintained the Buddha's pure morality
But only on this day,
Have we gained this reward.

In the Dharma Kings's Dharma,
Long have we cultivated Brahman conduct.
Now we've obtained that non-outflow,
The unsurpassed, great fruition.

Now we are all
Truly Hearers.
And taking the sound of the Buddha's Way,
We cause all to hear it.

Now we are all
Truly Arhats,
And in all the world,
With its gods, people, maras and Brahmas,
Everywhere among them
We are worthy of receiving offerings.

The World Honored One in his great kindness,
Uses this rare thing,
To pity, teach.
And benefit us,
Throughout limitless millions of eons.
Who could repay him?

Giving one's hands and feet,
Bowing reverently in obeisance,
Whatever offering one makes,
Never repays him.

If one bore him on one's head,
Or carried him upon one's shoulders,
For aeons as numerous as the Ganges' sands,
Exhausting one's mind in reverence-
Or further, if one used delicacies,
And limitless valuable clothing,
And all types of bedding,
And various medicines,
Ox-head sandalwood,
And various precious gems,
Or stupas and temples
Covering the ground with valuable cloth,
And if with such things as these,
One made offerings
Throughout aeons as numerous as the Ganges' sands,
One still never repays him.

The Buddhas are rare indeed.
Limitless and boundless,
Yes, inconceivable is the power,
Of their great spiritual penetrations.

Without outflows, unconditioned,
They are kings of all the Dharmas.
For the sake of lesser beings,
They bear up under this work.
To common folks who grasp at mark,
They teach what is appropriate.

The Buddhas have, within the Dharmas,
Attained to the highest comfort.
They understand all living beings'
Various desires and delights,
As well as the strength of their resolve,
According to what they can bear,
Using limitless analogies,
They teach them the Dharma,
In accord with living beings'
Wholesome roots from former lives.

And knowing those who have matured,
And those who have not yet matured,
Through such calculations,
They discriminate and understand,
And in the pathway of One Vehicle,
They appropriately speak of three.