

Shushōgi Translated by 増永靈鳳 Masunaga Reihō (1902-1981)

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Chapter I. Introduction

1. To arrive at a thorough understanding of birth and death - this is the crucial problem for all Buddhists. If the Buddha dwells in birth and death, birth and death disappear.

Understand only that birth-death is nothing to avoid as birth-death, birth and death disappear. Understand only that birth-death is itself nirvana; there is nothing to avoid as birth-death and nothing to seek as nirvana. You then slough off the chains that bind you to birth-death. This - the supreme problem in Buddhism - must be thoroughly penetrated.

2. The human form is hard to gain, and Buddhism, hard to meet. But through the help of our past merits, the rare gifts of being born human and of meeting the Buddhist doctrines have come to us. This has opened up for us the possibility of the fullest life within the sphere of birth and death. We should not waste this chance by leaving our fragile life exposed to the wind of impermanence.

3. Impermanence offers us no foothold. The dew of our life - on what grass of the roadside will it fall? Even now this body does not belong to me. Life, transfigured by time, defies stopping even for an instant. Once gone, the face of youth vanishes irrevocably. We cannot bring back the past. When suddenly confronted with impermanence, we cannot bring back the past. When suddenly confronted with impermanence, we cannot look for salvation to kings, state ministers, relatives, servants, wife and children, or treasures. Alone we enter the kingdom of death, taking along only our karma of good and evil.

4. We should shun the deluded who are ignorant of the truth of retribution, of the three states of existence, and of good and evil. Obviously the law of cause and effect does not answer to my personal will. Without exception the evil falls, the good arises. If this were not so, Buddhas would not have appeared, nor would Bodhidharma have come from the West.

5. The effects of good and evil fall into three phases: 1) retribution in this world, 2) retribution in the next world, and 3) retribution in the world after next. Clear understanding of this principle must precede training in the way of the Buddhas and patriarchs. Otherwise, many will make mistakes and fall into wrong belief. Not only this, they will lead evil lives and suffer prolonged pain.

6. We must remember that in this life none of us have two or three bodies. How tragic then to lead an evil life stemming from wrong belief? We cannot escape retribution for evil done by erroneously asserting that we can do evil without recognizing it as such or reaping its reward.

Chapter II. Release Through Repentance

7. Through their boundless love the Buddhas and patriarchs have flung open the vast gates of compassion for all beings - whether man or deva. Although retribution for evil must come at one of three phases, repentance lightens the burden and brings release and purity.

8. So let us repent before the Buddhas with all our heart. Repentance before the Buddhas saves us and purifies us; it also helps the growth in us of pure, unimpeded conviction and earnest effort. Pure conviction, once aroused, not only changes us but others, and its benefits extend to all sentient beings and inanimate things.

9. The following petition embodies the essentials of repentance: "We ask the Buddhas and the patriarchs who have gained enlightenment through Buddhism to take compassion on us, to free us from obstructive suffering - the legacy of our past lives - and to help us share in

the merit- power that fills the countless worlds. The Buddhas and patriarchs in the past were like us, and we will in the future become Buddhas and patriarchs.

10. "The evil actions of our past lives stemmed from greed, anger, and stupidity. All these - the outcome of our body, mouth, and will - we repent now." If we repent in this way, we will open ourselves to the natural help of the Buddhas and patriarchs. So keeping this in mind and sitting upright before the Buddha, we should repeat this petition. Through this we cut off the roots of our wrong-doings.

Chapter III. Ordination and Initiation

11. Next we should deeply respect the Three Treasures - the Buddha, the teaching, and the Buddhist community. They deserve our respect and offerings no matter where we wander from life to life. It was respect for the Buddha, the teaching, and the Buddhist community that was truly transmitted from India to China by the Buddhas and patriarchs.

12. If the unfortunate and virtueless cannot even hear of the Three Treasures, how can they take refuge in them. Do not take refuge in the spirits of the mountains or the ghosts of the dead, and worship not at heretical shrines. Such refuge- seeking leads us away from salvation. Let us instead quickly take refuge in the Buddha, the teaching, and the Buddhist community, seeking there not only release from pain but complete enlightenment.

13. To take refuge in the Three Treasures we must come with pure heart. No matter when - whether at the time of the Buddha's appearance in the world or after his disappearance - we repeat with clasped hands and bowed head: "I take refuge in the Buddha. I take refuge in the teaching. I take refuge in the Buddhist community." I take refuge in the Buddha because he is our great teacher. I take refuge in the teaching because of its curative effect. I take refuge in the Buddhist community because here we find wisdom and warmth. To become followers of Buddhism, we must uphold the Three Treasures. We must lay this foundation before receiving the moral precepts.

14. The merit of the Triple Refuge will always ripen when a responsive communion takes place between the trainee and the Buddha. Those who experience this communion - whether deva, dwellers in hell, or animals - will take this refuge. The embodied merit increases through the various stages of existence and ultimately leads to highest right enlightenment. The Buddha himself confirmed the merit of the Triple Refuge as supremely valuable and inconceivably profound. All living beings should therefore take this refuge.

15. Next we should accept the three collective pure precepts - that embracing good behavior, that embracing good deeds, and that embracing all beings and saving them. We should then accept the 10 grave prohibitions:

1) Do not kill. 2) Do not steal. 3) Do not commit adultery. 4) Do not lie. 5) Do not sell liquor. 6) Do not bring up the faults of others. 7) Do not boast and blame others. 8) Do not withhold material and spiritual possessions. 9) Do not become angry. 10) Do not debase the Triple Treasure.

The Buddhas have received and kept the Triple Refuge, the three collective pure precepts, and the 10 grave prohibitions.

16. By accepting these precepts you will attain supreme enlightenment - the indestructible Buddhahood realized or to be realized by the Buddhas of the past, present, and future. Would any wise man reject this goal? To all living beings the Buddha has shown that when they accept the moral precepts, they attain Buddhahood - a rank equal to the Great Enlightened - and that they are truly the children of the Buddha.

17. All the Buddhas dwell here and embrace everything in their infinite wisdom. All beings, when they make this their dwelling place, see no distinction between subject and object.

When this happens, all things - whether earth, vegetation, fence post, brick or pebble - function as Buddhas. The resulting wind and fire, fanned by the profound influence of the Buddhas, drive us to intimate enlightenment. This is the merit of non-doing and non-striving - the awakening of the wisdom mind.

Chapter IV. Awakening of the Altruistic Vow

18. Awakening the wisdom mind means vowing to save all beings before we ourselves have crossed to the other shore. Everyone - whether layman, priest, deva, or man - whether enjoying pleasure or suffering pain - should quickly awaken this vow.

19. Though humble in appearance, anyone who has awakened this vow is already the teacher of mankind. Even a girl of seven may be the teacher of the four classes of Buddhists and the compassionate mother of all beings. This emphasis on the equality of the sexes represents one of the finest teachings of Buddhism.

20. After the desire for Buddhahood has been aroused, even wandering in the six worlds and the four forms of life becomes an opportunity to realize this desire. Though we may have wasted our time in the past, we still have time to arouse this vow. Our merits toward Buddhahood may have fully ripened, but let us concentrate this merit on enlightening all living beings. Through all ages some have put Buddhahood for themselves secondary to working for the benefit and salvation of all beings.

21. To benefit others we have four types of wisdom: charity, tenderness, benevolence, and sympathy. These represent the desires and efforts of the Bodhisattvas. Charity stands opposed to covetousness. It is the principle of not preventing offerings though we ourselves give nothing. We need not mind how small the gift so long as the results are true. Offering even a phrase or a verse of the teaching becomes the seed of good in this world and the next. Similarly goodness arises from the gift of one cent or a single blade of grass. The teaching is the treasure, and the treasure is the teaching. Let us not covet reward but share our power with others. Supplying a ferry and building a bridge are acts of charity - nor is industry in all its form separated from it.

22. Tenderness means viewing all beings with compassion and addressing them with kind words. Tenderness is to speak while bearing in mind the words: "I love all living beings as my children." Praise the virtuous and pity the virtuous. Through tenderness we make friends of our enemies and strengthen intimacy with our friends. Kind words, when spoken directly to anyone, brighten his face and warm his heart. When spoken behind his back, they leave a deep impression. We should learn that tenderness has a revolutionary impact on the human mind.

23. Benevolence means devising wise ways to benefit beings both high and low. Those who rescued the helpless tortoise or the sick sparrow did not look for reward: they acted solely out of benevolence. The foolish believe that their bene- fits dwindle because they help others, but this is not true. Benevolence, the universal law, benefits oneself as well as others.

24. Sympathy means non-differentiation - the identity of self and not-self. For example, the Tathagata appeared in the human world in human form. Sympathy refutes the distinction between self and others. Sometimes the self is infinite; sometimes, others. Sympathy, like the sea, repulses no water, and all waters gather to form the sea.

25. Seekers of enlightenment, meditate on these teachings. Do not belittle them. Revere and respect the merits that benefit all living beings and help them cross to the other shore.

Chapter V. Practice and Gratitude

26. The Buddha mind should be awakened in all sentient beings on this earth through causal relations. Their desire to be born in this world is fulfilled. Why shouldn't they be grateful to see the Sakyamuni Buddha?

27. If the Right Law had not permeated the world, we could not have met it even if we wanted to sacrifice our lives for it. We should quietly reflect on this fact. How fortunate to have been born at this moment when we can meet the Right Law. Remember that the Buddha said: "When you meet a Zen master who teaches the highest wisdom, don't consider his caste. Don't pay attention to his appearance, consider his shortcomings, or criticize his practices. In deference to his wisdom, just bow before him and do nothing to worry him."

28. We can see the Buddha now and listen to his teachings because of the altruistic Buddhas and patriarchs did not transmit the Law truly, how could it have come down to us today? We should appreciate even a phrase or portion of the Law. How can we help but be thankful for the great compassion of the highest law - the Eye and Treasury of the Right Law? The sick sparrow did not forget the kindness received and returned it with the ring of the three great ministers. Nor did the troubled tortoise forget: it showed its gratitude with the seal of Yofu.* So if even beasts return thanks, how can man do otherwise?

29. To show this gratitude you need no other teachings. Show it in the only real way - by daily practice. Without wasting time we should spend our daily life in selfless activity.

30. Time flies with more speed than an arrow; life moves on, more transient than dew. By what skilful means can you reinstate a day that has passed. To live one hundred years wastefully is to regret each day and month. Your body becomes filled with sorrow. Although you wander as the servant of the senses during the days and months of a hundred years - if you truly live one day, you not only live a life of a hundred years but save the hundred years of your future life. The life of this one day is the vital life. Your body becomes significant. This life and body deserve love and respect, for through them we can practice the Law and express the power of the Buddha. So true practice of the Law for one day is the seed of all the Buddha and their activities.

31. All the Buddhas are Buddha Sakyamuni himself. Buddhas past, present, and future become the Buddha Sakyamuni on attaining Buddhahood. This mind itself is the Buddha. By awakening to a thorough understanding of this mind, you will truly show your gratitude to the Buddhas.

*Refers to Ching-K'ang's legend of saving a tormented tortoise near Yün-pu-t'ing (Yofute).