



The Three Turnings of the Dharma-wheel Part 1(三轉法輪一)

To learn Buddhism, we must first learn principles. We must seek out the principles, then we can learn Buddhism. All the Buddhist Sutras and treatises start with the idea of suffering. Suffering is a truth of life. Many things in our lives go against our wishes. We cannot have many things that we want. Isn't that a kind of suffering? We should know the truth of suffering.

Only when we fully realize it can we endure life's various difficulties. So this world is called the World of Endurance. If we are unable to endure, we truly cannot go on living in this world. If we can realize the truth of suffering, even when we have a hard life, we can turn our suffering into blessings. Thus our Wisdom-life will grow. The recycling volunteer Bodhisattvas often say, "Take suffering as a tonic." If we can endure and accept suffering, our wisdom grows with each experience. After suffering, there is joy. In Taiwanese, "difficulty" can also be written, "bitter-sweet." Instead of feeling the suffering of hardship, if we take the suffering as "bitter-sweet", we find that there's joy in suffering, and there's suffering in joy as well. If you have too much licorice, it will taste bitter as well as sweet. So those who willingly accept suffering in life will feel joy as well. Those who do not, only experience the hardship.

The world is full of suffering. When one truly realize the truth of suffering and accepts it willingly, one can withstand any hardship without any ill feelings. If one is not willing to accept, one suffers even more.

So, we must know that human life can be suffering beyond words. We have talked about the Eleven Universal Agents, the Twelve Entrances and the Eighteen Realms. All these afflictions are found in our everyday lives and our surroundings. In dealing with people and things, our minds are often driven by external



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conditions, and cling to those conditions. Often things do not go as we wish, which makes us more afflicted. So we should always be alert and mindful, and not become entangled by external conditions, which cause afflictions to arise. What is worth taking issue over? We have talked about the Elevenfold Emptiness. If we can see through the illusions, there will be no suffering. Life is but a play on a stage. When we have finished our part, we must bow out. What role will we play in our next life? We do not know yet. So we must play our role in this life well, and cooperate with our co-players. Then we will have good affinities next life, and turn obstructions into helpful conditions.

We should be mindful when interaction with people and things. In the philosophy of how to handle things, the Buddha taught us the truth of Emptiness. In True Emptiness there is Wondrous Existence. Don't think that Emptiness means nothing exists, so you can just ignore your co-players. This is wrong. We must try to get along with others, for everyone has karmic causes and effects. The seeds we plant in another's mind will be stored in that person's Eighth Consciousness. If the person does things to us, and we do not let go of our grudges and hatred, the seeds of negative affinity will not be eliminated and will stay in our minds, life after life. It will be truly miserable.

So if we have bad affinities with others, we should make peace with them in this life and transform negative affinities into good ones. We should believe that the world is actually empty. There is no need to dispute over anything. We should regard these things as empty. There is a subtle truth. These karmic causes or "seeds" are a part of Wondrous Existence. If we are always attached to them, we will have no control over our future lives. So in Emptiness there is Wondrous Existence. Eliminating an evil affinity can bring good ones in the future. This is the truth.



Some people say, “I am a practitioner. I know everything is empty. So there is no need to get upset with that person. I’ll simply ignore him.”

This is not right. We should think of how we can get along with them, so that our minds are at peace and we are able to turn the Dharma-wheel of the Twelve Applications.

We should understand the truth of suffering and emptiness, and live in harmony every day to transform evil affinities into god connections. Thus we will be at peace and able to turn the Dharma-wheel of the Twelve Applications.

We need to know the truth of suffering. Then we can understand its causes and see things in our daily lives more clearly. So, if we want to truly abide by the Middle Way and realize the genuine truth, we have to know the truth of suffering. After the Buddha attained enlightenment, He went to Deer Park to expound the Dharma for the five Bhiksus. His first lecture in the human world was on the Four Noble Truths, the truth of sufferings, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the Way. Could the Bhiksus understand after one lecture? They could not. So the Buddha had to lecture three times on the Four Noble Truths. These are the Three Turnings of the Dharma-wheel. A practitioner must fully realize the Buddha’s first turning of the Dharma-wheel. After enlightenment, the Buddha thought, “With whom can I share the Dharma?” He remembered that during His spiritual practice, His father, the king, was worried and sent five young men in the family after Him. The king’s original purpose was to persuade the Buddha to come home. Since the Buddha was determined, the king holed that the five men could follow the price in spiritual cultivation. They were very close with him and followed the prince in spiritual cultivation.

But Prince Siddhartha felt that after his journey of practice, he seemed to know the truth, yet did not seem to realize it fully. So he wanted to change his method



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of practice. Ascetic practice by itself did not work. He wanted to find a different way to further realize the truth. Knowing the truth without experiencing it would not do. That was why he left Deer Park, to reflect on the truth in a different way. He took a bath, but because he had led an ascetic lifestyle for years he was physically weak and fainted when he got up from it. A shepherd girl came to his aid and offered him some goat milk. He regained strength, and sat alone under a tree, reflecting on the truth all by himself.

Why was he alone? Because the five Bhiksus who had been looking for him saw him from afar being fed goat milk by the shepherd girl and suspected that the prince had lost his will to practice and was no longer worthy of being followed. They wanted to continue with their practice, so they left him and returned to Deer Park to continue with their spiritual cultivation. The prince sat alone under the tree, meditating. He felt that he wanted to be in clear, serene contemplative state. Though he had visited many Brahmins and learned the ways of Hindu practitioners, he knew these principles were not the ultimate. He hoped to fully realize the ultimate truth so he changed his methods. He gradually regained strength under the tree. He also regained his mental strength. Thus he sat there meditating. On the 21st night, he saw a bright star. Everybody knows that he saw a star on the eighth day of the twelfth month and His mind suddenly opened wide. His mind and the universe seemed to become one. His mind was totally clear and He realized the truth of everything. He attained enlightenment.

He thought that the world was wonderful, and so were human beings. Everyone must have the same wisdom and enlightened nature as the Buddha, the Enlightened One. This is the Buddha-nature. All living beings on Earth have the same enlightened nature as the Buddha. So after He saw the bright star, the first words He said were, "How amazing! How amazing! All beings have the Buddha's



enlightened nature. But because of a single thought of ignorance, they fell into the Three Destinies.” Enlightenment and ignorance are one thought apart. So when the Buddha’s enlightened nature arose, the Truth of the whole universe came to Him. The fact that all livings and all people have enlightened natures was totally clear to Him. He was filled with the joy of Dharma, which we can also experience.

With whom could He share the joy? At first He felt, “The Dharma is so profound, who would be able to understand it? According to the record of the Sutras, after the Buddha attained Buddhahood, many heavenly beings and all Buddhas of the Ten Directions appeared to congratulate Him. But when the Buddha began to expound the Dharma to these heavenly beings, they could not understand. The Buddha was disappointed for a time, thinking that if heavenly beings could not understand the Dharma, who could? So He thought of entering Parinivana.

At that time, all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas emerged to encourage Him and remind Him that what is most important is to transform sentient beings. Sentient beings are confused and lost and need the Great Enlightened One to save them. So the Enlightened One, Sakyamuni Buddha, Fundamental Teacher of the Saha World, began to think, “In that case, I must go out into the world to save sentient beings. But whom should I start with?” He thought He should start with the five practitioners who had followed Him.

When He arrived at Deer Park, they all shared the same thought, “The impure practitioner could not endure suffering and came back to look for us. Let’s ignore him.” Everyone agreed not to welcome him back. But when the Buddha slowly approached, drawing closer, step by step, the five men automatically faced Him all at once. Suddenly their hearts were moved by His dignified, perfect and virtuous appearance. Together they automatically knelt down, prostrated, and



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paid respect to Him, awed as they were by His virtuous appearance. Thus He approached the five ascetic practitioners, and reestablished His connection with them.

We often talk about the merit of practice. When one has inner cultivation, it shows outwardly as virtue. If you cultivate within, your outward demeanor becomes virtuous. You do not have to say anything, just walk slowly toward people, and your virtuous demeanor subdues their minds. So we should not underestimate inner cultivation. What is our inner cultivation? I have just said that in our daily living we come into contact with people and things. As the Six Roots connect to the Six Dusts, do not let the Six consciousnesses be driven the Eleven Universal Agents, causing our minds to be infected by afflictions. With afflictions, we create negative karma. So if we understand the Dharma explained earlier, we should attention when dealing with people and things, and not make mistakes. We should purify our minds first. This is inner cultivation.

If you cultivate within, the virtues will show outwardly. To help transform others, we must connect well with them. For the Buddha and Maitreya Bodhisattvas, it was important to form good connections with others over the course of many lifetimes of spiritual practice. You already know this. It is very important to cultivate within and to create good affinities sentient beings. When the Buddha returned to Deer Park, He turned the Dharma-wheel three times. So everyone, please always be mindful.