

**Part Seven:**  
**NĀGĀRJUNA'S STORIES ON VARIOUS TOPICS**



## Early Life of the Buddha

Moreover, when the Bodhisattva was first born, he radiated a great brilliance which extended universally throughout the ten directions. He walked seven steps, surveyed the four quarters, and, roaring the lion's roar, he uttered a verse, proclaiming:

Birth from the womb for me is now ended.  
This is the very last physical form.  
Already I have achieved liberation  
And shall moreover bring deliverance to beings.

After pronouncing this pledge, in the course of time he grew to adulthood. He sought to relinquish his relatives and retinue, to leave behind the home life, and to cultivate the unsurpassed path. He arose in the night and, surveying the sleeping forms of his female entertainers and attendants, his wife and his consorts, beheld them as resembling decaying corpses.

He instructed Chaṇḍaka to saddle his white steed. At midnight they traversed the city wall, rode for twelve yojanas, and arrived at the forest inhabited by Bhārgava, the rishi. He then took up a knife, cut off his hair, and exchanged his wonderfully bejeweled raiments for a coarsely-woven *saṅghāṭī* robe.

On the banks of the Nairāñjanā River he cultivated bitterly ascetic practices for six years, eating only a sesame seed or a grain of rice each day. He thought to, "This method contradicts the Path."

At that time the Bodhisattva left behind the place where he had cultivated such ascetic practices and went and sat at the adamant place beneath the bodhi tree. The demon king brought a throng of his minions numbering eighteen myriads of *koṭīs* in an attempt to devastate the Bodhisattva. Because of the power of his wisdom and merit, the Bodhisattva overcame the demon hordes and afterwards achieved *anuttarasamyaksambodhi* (perfect enlightenment).

At that time the ruler of the trichiliocosm, the Brahma Heaven king named Śikhin, the gods of the form realm, Śakradevendra, and the gods of the desire realm as well as the four Heavenly Kings, all came to pay their respects to the Buddha and to encourage and request the Bhagavān to commence the turning of the wheel of Dharma. Because of this, the Bodhisattva recalled his original vow, and also because of his great kindness and great compassion, he acceded to the request and proclaimed the Dharma.

## Nāgārjuna's Discussion of the Buddha's Life

Furthermore, when the Buddha was first born, he dropped to the ground, strode seven steps, and spontaneously uttered words. After speaking, he then fell silent and, like other infants, neither walked nor talked. He was nursed to the age of three. His [step]mothers raised him and he gradually grew to maturity.

Now, although the bodies of the Buddha are countless and exceed in number the sum of all the worlds, for the sake of beings, he manifested like an ordinary person. Because the faculties of the body as well as the intellectual consciousness of ordinary people are not yet completely developed when they are born, the four types of deportment: sitting, lying down, walking and standing, as well as speaking, silence, and all manner of other human qualities—all of these are not yet perfected. As the days, months and years pass, one gradually practices, studies, and then is able to refine the various aspects of being a person.

Now, how was it that the Buddha, upon birth, was immediately able to speak and walk whereas, afterwards, he was no longer able to do so? One finds this astonishing. One should know that it is solely by dint of the power of skillful means that the Buddha manifests involvement in human endeavors, and comports himself as people do, thus influencing beings to believe in the profound Dharma.

If, when the Bodhisattva was born, he was then able from that point on to walk and talk, ordinary people of the world would think, "Now we behold this man such as has never existed in the world before. Certainly he is a god, a dragon, a ghost or a spirit. That dharma which he studies is certainly not such that people like us might accomplish it. Why is that? Our fleshly bodies, bound to birth and death, are dragged about by the karma of the fetters. We are unable to gain freedom. Who would be able to approach such a profound dharma as this?" In this manner they would cut themselves off so that they could not become receptacles for the Dharma of the Worthies and Āryas. It was for the sake of these very people that he was born in the Lumbini gardens.

Although he was capable of proceeding immediately to the Bodhi Tree and achieving buddhahood, because of the power of skillful means, he then manifest instead as an infant, as a youth, as a young man, and as a grown man, and in each phase sequentially took on the corresponding activities of playing, becoming skilled in the arts, having resort to the objects of the five desires, and consummately

perfecting human endeavors. Subsequently, he gradually perceiving the suffering of senescence , disease, and death and finally generated thoughts of aversion and distress which led to his traversing the city wall in the middle of the night, leaving behind the home life, and going to the location of the hermits Udraka and Ārāḍa. He gave the appearance of becoming a disciple, but did not practice their dharmas.

Although, on account of constant use of his superknowledges, he recalled his previous lives wherein at the time of Kāśyapa Buddha he upheld the prohibitions and cultivated the Path, still, he now manifest in the role of cultivating ascetic practices for six years in search of the Path .

Although the Bodhisattva was already the sovereign of the great trichiliocosm, he nonetheless demonstrated the capacity of demolishing the demon armies and realizing the unsurpassed Path. In order to go along with the dharmas of the world, he displayed these various transformations. Because in the *prajñāpāramitā* he now demonstrates the great power of superknowledges and wisdom, people ought to know that the Buddha's bodies are innumerable and surpass in number the sum of all worlds.

## Mahākauṣṭhila, the Long-Nailed Brahman

### Translator's Note

This is a story from the introductory section of the *Exegesis* wherein Nāgārjuna explains the various reasons why the Buddha spoke the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sutra*.

### The Story

Additionally, [the Buddha] spoke the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sutra* because he wished to cause the brahmacārin “Long Nails,” and other great dialecticians like him to develop faith in the Dharma of the Buddha. [At that time], there was a brahmacārin named “Long Nails” as well as Śreṇika Vatsagotra, Satyaka Nirgranthīputra and others. The great dialectical masters of Jambudvīpa such as these claimed that all treatises can be demolished, all discourses can be devastated, all beliefs can be subverted, and that therefore there are no genuine dharmas in which one may have faith or towards which one may feel reverence.

As recounted in the *Sutra on the Life of Śāriputra*, Śāriputra's uncle, Mahākauṣṭhila, discovered that he could no longer match his own sister, Śāri, in debate. Kauṣṭhila cogitated upon this and thought to himself, “This cannot be due to my sister's own power. It must be that she is pregnant with a wise man who is conveying his words to his mother's mouth. If, before he is even born, he is already like this, what will he be like once he's born and grown?”

Having thought this over, he became afflicted with [hurt] pride and, for the sake of gaining extensive dialectical knowledge, left home and became a brahmacārin. He went to the south of India and began to study the classical texts. People asked him, “What have you set your mind on obtaining? Which classic do you wish to study?”

“Long Nails” replied, “I wish to exhaustively study all of the eighteen great classics.”

Those people all said to him, “You could spend your entire lifetime studying and still would not be able to know even one. How much the less would you be able to know them all.”

“Long Nails” thought to himself, “Before, my pride was hurt on account of being defeated by my sister. Now, yet again, I'm subjected to humiliation by these people.” On account of these two events, he made a vow to himself, “I will not [even take time to] trim my fingernails. I must exhaustively study all of the eighteen

classics." People noticed his fingernails growing long. Because of this, they referred to him as the brahmacārin "Long Nails."

By using the power of wisdom derived from all types of classical texts, by using all manner of satirical barbs, [by maintaining that], "This is dharma," or that "This is non-dharma," "This is admissible," or "This is inadmissible," "This is true," or "This is not true," "This is existent," or "This is nonexistent," this man was able to refute other dialectical positions. He was like a mighty, crazed elephant which blocks and gores, kicks and tramples, and which none can bring under control.

After the brahmacārin "Long Nails" had employed his dialectical strength to smash and overcome all of the other dialecticians, he returned to the country of Magadha, to the city of Rājagṛha, to the community of Nara. He went to his birthplace and asked the people, "Where is that child born to my sister?"

Someone told him, "When your sister's son had reached the age of eight, he had already completely mastered all of the classical texts. When he reached the age of sixteen, he had overcome everyone in debate. There is a man of the Path from the Śākya clan named Gautama. [Your nephew] became his disciple."

When Long Nails heard this, he was overcome with arrogance and incredulousness and exclaimed, "What sort of trick could he have used to deceive and induce one so intelligent as my nephew to shave his head and become a disciple? Having said this, he proceeded directly to where the Buddha dwelt.

At this time Śāriputra had received the precepts [of monastic ordination] only a half-month before. He stood in service at the Buddha's side, using a fan to fan the Buddha.

The brahmacārin Long Nails went to see the Buddha and, having made salutations, sat off to one side and thought, "All treatises can be refuted, all discourse can be devastated, and all beliefs can be subverted. What is it in all of this that is the true character of dharmas? What is it that represents the ultimate meaning? What is it that constitutes the [true] nature? What are the characteristic features? And what is it that is not an inverted view?"

He continued reflecting in this manner: "[Resolving this quandary] is like seeking to completely reach the far shores and plumb the depths of a great ocean. Even though one may search for a long time, one can't find a single dharma actually admissible to the mind. What dialectical path could he have used to win over my nephew?"

After he had cogitated like this, he said to the Buddha, “Gautama, I do not accept any dharmas.”

The Buddha asked Long Nails, “Your not accepting any dharmas, this view—do you accept it or not?” The Buddha’s implicit meaning was, “You’ve already swallowed the poison of false views. Now get rid of this toxic influence.” He said, “All dharmas—you say you don’t accept them. But this poison of views: Do you accept it or not?”

At this time, the brahmacārin Long Nails was like a fine horse which, on merely seeing the shadow of the whip, immediately remembers to stay on the right track. The brahmacārin Long Nails, was also like this. The shadow of the whip of the Buddha’s speech entered his mind. He immediately cast off his arrogance, was contrite, and lowered his head.

He then thought, “The Buddha has defeated me with a dilemma: If I say, ‘I accept this view,’ then this fallacy is obvious and most everybody will be aware of it. Why did I say, ‘I don’t accept any dharmas?’ If I now say, ‘As for this view—I accept it,’ that would amount to a blatant error in discourse. It would be an obviously fallacious position. Most people would be aware of it.

“The alternative fallacious position is subtle. Since not that many people will be aware of it [as fallacious], I’ll choose to accept that alternative.”

Having pondered thus, he finally replied to the Buddha, “Gautama—this view that ‘I don’t accept any dharmas’—I don’t accept it, either.”

The Buddha said to the brahmacārin, “If you also don’t accept your view that you don’t accept any dharmas, then nothing is accepted. But, in this regard, you are no different from anyone else in this congregation. What then is the point in presenting in a haughty and arrogant manner like this?”

The brahmacārin Long Nails was unable to reply. He knew that he had fallen into a fallacious position. He then felt respect for and faith in the Buddha’s omniscience. He thought to himself, “I did fall into a fallacious position and yet the Bhagavān did not reveal the fact that I had been defeated. He did not speak of right or wrong. He ignored it. The Buddha’s mind is pliant. This is the ultimately pure stance. All rhetorical positions are extinguished in it. He has attained the extremely deep Dharma. This is a position which can be revered. He is supreme in the purity of his thought.”



Because the Buddha's speaking of Dharma had caused him to cut off his false views, in the very place where he sat, he succeeded in distancing himself from the dust and leaving behind impurity. He achieved the purification of the Dharma eye with respect to all dharmas.

When Śāriputra heard this dialogue, he realized arhatship. This brahmacārin Long Nails then left the home life and became a *śramaṇa*. He gained the realization of the mighty arhat.

### Nāgārjuna's Concluding Comments

If the brahmacārin Long Nails had not heard the spirit of the *prajñāpāramitā* which transcends the tetralemma and which is the Dharma corresponding to the ultimate meaning, he would not have developed even the faintest degree of faith, how much the less would he have been able to achieve the fruition of the way of the renunciant?

Thus it was also because the Buddha wished to lead forth such great dialectical masters and other such people of sharp faculties that he set forth this *Prajñāpāramitā Sutra*.

## The Gods Request the Buddha to Speak the Dharma

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble: On the Importance of Faith

The Buddha said, "If a person has faith, this person is able to enter the sea of my great Dharma, is able to obtain the fruit of the *śramaṇa*, and has not in vain shaven his head and donned the dyed robe. If one has no faith, this person is unable to enter the sea of my Dharma and is like a withered tree which produces neither flowers nor fruit. He will not obtain the fruit of the *śramaṇa*. Although he may have shaved his head, donned the dyed robe, studied all manner of scriptures, and may be able to pose and respond to difficult doctrinal questions, still, with respect to the Buddha's Dharma, his efforts are in vain, and he gains nothing whatsoever."

It is on account of this that the [true suchness] concept represented by "thus" [in "Thus I have heard, at one time..." is situated at the beginning of the Buddha's [discourses on] Dharma. It signifies their worthiness as objects of wholesome faith.

Moreover, the Dharma of the Buddha is profound and far-reaching. Only another Buddha would be able to fathom it. If a person has faith, even though he has not yet realized buddhahood, he is nonetheless still able, by virtue of the power of faith, to gain entry into the Dharma of the Buddha.

### Story: The Gods Request the Buddha to Speak Dharma

[This point was alluded to] when the King of the Brahma Heaven Gods requested the Buddha to begin the turning of the wheel of Dharma. He used a verse to entreat the Buddha:

There first have appeared in Jambudvīpa  
The many and varied impure dharmas.  
I pray you will open the sweet dew gateway  
And will thus proclaim the path that is pure.

The Buddha replied with a verse:

My Dharma's profoundly difficult to master.  
Yet able to sever all of the fetters.  
Those in the three realms with love-bound minds—  
Such persons as these cannot comprehend it.

The Brahma Heaven King addressed the Buddha, saying, "Venerable One. The wisdom encountered in the world may be superior, middling, or inferior. Those good people possessed of pliant and straightforward minds may easily obtain deliverance. If

these people do not hear the Dharma, they shall retreat and fall away into dreadful adversity.

“They are like lotuses in the water of which some are undeveloped and others more mature. There are those still immersed in the water which have not yet come forth. If they do not encounter the radiance of the sun, then they shall be unable to blossom. The Buddha’s present power is now just like that. May the Buddha employ the great kindness and compassion and, acting out of pity for beings, proclaim the Dharma for their sakes.”

The Buddha brought to mind the Dharma of all Buddhas of the three period of time—the past, the future, and the present—recalling, “They all delivered beings to liberation through proclaiming the Dharma for their sakes. I ought to do so as well.” After reflecting thus, he accepted the requests to proclaim the Dharma initiated by the Brahma Heaven King and the other gods. At that time the Bhagavān responded in verse:

I’ll open now the gates to the flavor of sweet dew ambrosia.  
 If there be those with faith, then delight shall be theirs.  
 Among all the people I’ll speak wondrous Dharma.  
 It’s not to afflict others that I now speak for their sakes.

### **Concluding Exegesis Discussion on the Importance of Faith**

The Buddha did not speak in this verse of those who practice giving as being those who would gain delight, nor did he refer to those who are learned, who uphold the moral precepts, who practice patience, who are vigorous, who cultivate dhyāna absorption, or who are wise as being those who would gain delight. He spoke only of those people who have faith.

The Buddha’s intent was this: “Unless one is omniscient, one will not be able to fathom my dharmas which are supremely profound, subtle and wondrous, immeasurable and innumerable, inconceivable and ineffable, unmoving and nondependent, unattached and devoid of anything gained.” Therefore, in the Dharma of the Buddha, it is the power of faith which is primary. It is by virtue of faith that one is able to gain entrance to it. It is not on account of giving, morality, dhyāna absorption, wisdom, and so forth that one gains initial entrance into the Buddha Dharma. This is as noted in a verse:

The minds of people of the world all move  
 From love for the rewards produced from merit.

And yet they are not fond of merit's causes,  
They seek existence and favor not cessation.  
At first they hear the dharmas of false views.  
Their minds attach and then they enter deeply.  
As for my Dharma which is extremely profound:  
If one has no faith, how could he comprehend it?

## Ānanda's Final Questions of the Buddha

"Thus I have heard" is a phrase spoken by Ānanda and other of the Buddha's great disciples. Because it signifies commencement of Dharma [spoken] by the Buddha, [scriptures beginning in this way] qualify thereby as the Dharma of the Buddha. This is as ordained at the time of the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*. He was in the state of Kuśinagara, lying down between a pair of *sāla* trees with his head to the North and was about to enter nirvāṇa.

At that time because Ānanda had not yet transcended the realm of desire, he had not yet gotten rid of the affection felt for one's relatives. His mind was immersed in a sea of grief and he was powerless to pull himself out of it.

Then the Venerable Aniruddha instructed Ānanda, "You are the one responsible for guarding the treasury of the Buddha's Dharma. You should not be immersed in a sea of grief in the manner of an ordinary person. All conditioned dharmas are characterized by impermanence. Don't be sorrowful.

"Furthermore, the Buddha, with his own hand, has entrusted the Dharma to you. By now being so overcome with grief, you are neglecting the responsibility you have undertaken. You should ask the Buddha, 'After the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, how shall we cultivate the Path? Who shall serve as our teacher? How shall we dwell together with the harshly-speaking Chaṇḍaka? What phrases shall be placed at the beginning of the Buddha's scriptures?' You should inquire of the Buddha on all manner of topics such as these which deal with the future."

When Ānanda heard about these matters, his troubled mind revived somewhat, he regained the power of being mindful of the Path, and assisted alongside the Buddha's final resting place. He asked the Buddha about these matters whereupon the Buddha told Ānanda, "Whether right here and now or whether after I am gone, one should take refuge in oneself, should take refuge in the Dharma, and should not take refuge in anything else. How is it that a bhikshu should take refuge in himself, should take refuge in the Dharma, and should not take refuge in anything else? In this regard, a bhikshu should undertake [the station of mindfulness consisting in] the contemplation of his own body. He should constantly employ single-mindedness, wisdom, diligent cultivation, and vigor in getting rid of the woe of worldly desire.

"The contemplation of other's bodies and then simultaneously of

both his own and other's bodies should be taken up in like manner. The stations of mindfulness with regard to feelings, with regard to thoughts, and with regard to dharmas should each be taken up in this manner as well. This is what is meant by, 'A bhikshu should take refuge in himself, take refuge in the Dharma, and should not take refuge in anything else.'

"From this very day onwards, the *Scripture on the Liberating Precepts* is your great master. In one's physical actions and verbal actions, one should conduct himself in accord with the declarations of the *Scripture on the Liberating Precepts*.

"As for the bhikshu Chaṇḍaka, after my nirvāṇa, treat him according to the brahman method [of the silent treatment]. If his mind then becomes pliant and subdued, he should then be taught the *Samthakātyāyana Sutra*. He may then be able to realize the Path.

"As for the treasury of Dharma jewels which I have accumulated throughout the course of three *asamkhyeya* kalpas, one should place this phrase at the beginning of [the scriptures in] this treasury: 'Thus I have heard, at one time the Buddha was at such-and-such a state, in such-and-such a region, in such-and-such a location, dwelling in the forest...'. Why? This phrasing has been spoken at the beginning of the scriptures of all of the Buddhas of the past. This phrase shall also be spoken at the beginning of the scriptures of all of the Buddhas of the future. All of the Buddhas of the present, at the very end, at the time of their *parinirvāṇa*—they, too, instruct that this phrase should be spoken. Now, after my *parinirvāṇa*—at the beginning of the scriptures—one should also declare, 'Thus I have heard at one time...'"

## The Buddha's *Parinirvāṇa*

As extensively described in the *Compilation of the Dharma Sutra*, when the Buddha entered nirvāṇa, the earth pitched about in six different ways, the rivers flowed backwards, a fierce tempest struck violently, black clouds boiled up in the four directions, fearsome thunder boomed, lightning bolts crashed, and suddenly a storm of hail and rain came pouring down. Meteors streaked everywhere. Ferocious beasts bellowed and roared, yowled and shrieked. The deities and worldlings howled loudly. The gods all cried out, "Oh, why has the Buddha chosen nirvāṇa so swiftly?! The eyes of the World have perished!"

Then, all at the same time, the grasses and woods, herbs and trees, flowers and leaves, all split apart and burst open. The Sumerus, kings among mountains, tilted askew as they shook. The waters of the oceans roiled and heaved up billows. The earth shuddered and jolted mightily. The mountains and crags shattered and collapsed. The trees all splintered and split. From the four quarters smoke surged up into the sky.

These occurrences were enormously horrifying. The waters of the marshes and ponds, rivers and streams all began to churn and turned turbid. Comets appeared in the daytime. The people wailed and wept. The gods were overcome with sorrow. The heavenly maidens were overwhelmed with grief, choking and sobbing, with intertwining streams of tears flowing down.

Those still at the stage of study (*śaikṣa*)<sup>1</sup> were all silent and unhappy. Those beyond study (*aśaikṣa*)<sup>2</sup> remained mindful that all conditioned dharmas are impermanent. And so, in this manner, the gods, men, *yakṣas*, *rākṣasas*, *gandharvas*, *kinṇaras*, *mahoraḡas* and dragons were all overcome with great grief. The arhats had been delivered from the sea of senescence, disease, and death and so thought to themselves:

We've crossed already the river of the common man's affection and passion.

The coil of aging, sickness, and death has been split apart and broken. We've seen the serpents of the four great elements within the bodily basket,<sup>3</sup>

And now we shall enter the nirvāṇa of remainderless cessation.

In the mountains, forests, and valleys, among flowing springs and streams, all of the great arhats, each according to his will, shed his body and entered *parinirvāṇa*. Additionally, there were arhats

who flew straight up into the air like the king of geese and, in leaving, displayed all manner of spiritual powers, thus influencing the minds of many people towards faith and purity. Afterwards, they then entered *parinirvāṇa*.

### Notes

1. This is a reference to the first three stages of arhatship.
2. This refers to those who have reached fourth-stage arhatship, the putative endpoint of the Hearer-vehicle path.
3. This is a reference to a famous analogy for the treacherous nature of delusions regarding the body. It derives from the *Buddha Speaks the Analogy of the Poisonous Snakes Sutra* and may be found in *Marvelous Stories from the Perfection of Wisdom*, among the stories on the perfection of giving.



## Gods Distressed at Dharma's Decline

The Gods, from the Six Desire Heavens on up to the Heaven of Universal Purity, observed all of the arhats opting for cessation, and each of them thought to himself, "Since the Buddha sun has set, the light of those disciples possessing all manner of dhyāna absorptions, liberations, and wisdom has gone out as well. All of these beings have all kinds of diseases arising from desire, anger and delusion. Now that these Dharma physicians have swiftly crossed into cessation, who shall treat them?"

"Now, those lotus-blossom disciples, grown up within the great sea of immeasurable wisdom, have withered and dried up. The tree of Dharma has been smashed and split apart. The cloud of Dharma has scattered and vanished. Since the greatly wise king of the elephants has passed on, the offspring of the elephant have gone away as well. Now that the merchant of Dharma has moved on, from whom shall we seek jewels of Dharma?" This is as stated in a verse:

The Buddha's achieved eternal quiescence and entered his nirvāṇa.  
That company which destroyed the fetters has also passed away.  
With this, the World is empty with none possessed of wisdom.  
The dark of ignorance has increased; the wisdom lamp's gone out.

At that point the Gods made obeisance at the feet of Mahākāśyapa and uttered a verse:

This elder is already rid of desire, hatefulness, and arrogance.  
His figure stands before us here like a purple golden pillar.  
Above, below, in stately refinement, he's wondrous without peer.  
The brightness of his eyes is pure and like unto the lotus.

After having praised him in this manner, they addressed Mahākāśyapa, saying, "Venerable Mahākāśyapa, is the Humane One aware or is he not, that the ship of Dharma is about to break up, the city wall of Dharma is about to collapse, the sea of Dharma is about to dry up, the banner of Dharma is about to fall, the lamp of Dharma is about to die down, the proclaimers of Dharma are about to depart, the practitioners of Dharma are becoming fewer, and the power of the depraved is now waxing full? One ought to bring forth the great kindheartedness and establish here the Dharma of the Buddha."

At that time the mind of Mahākāśyapa was like a great sea, limpid, silent, and tranquil. After a goodly while, he responded, "You

have spoken well. Truly, it is as you describe. Before long, the world shall be devoid of wisdom, blind, and plunged in darkness.”

With this, Mahākāśyapa silently acceded to their plea. At that point, the Gods made obeisance at the feet of Mahākāśyapa and suddenly disappeared, each returning whence he had come.

## Mahākāśyapa Convenes a Dharma Council

At this time, Mahākāśyapa pondered, “How can I now cause this Buddha Dharma, obtained through such difficulty across the course of three *asaṃkhyeya* kalpas, to be preserved for a long time? After pondering like this, he said, “I know that this Dharma can be caused to remain a long time. We should collect together and compile the Sutras, the Abhidharma, and the Vinaya and make a three-fold repository of Dharma. In this manner, the Buddha Dharma may be able to remain a long time. Thus people of future generations may be able to receive it and cultivate it.

“Why should we do this? It is because, in life after life, out of compassion and pity for beings, the Buddha was diligent and endured suffering to study and obtain this Dharma. He then expounded it for the sake of mankind. We, too, should undertake to put the Buddha’s teaching to use, propagating it for the transformation of others.”

After Mahākāśyapa had spoken these words, he went to the summit of Mount Sumeru and, striking a bronze *gaṇḍī* gong, uttered this verse:

All of you disciples of the Buddha,  
If the Buddha now you do recall,  
You should all repay the Buddha’s kindness.  
Do not now enter your nirvāṇa.

The sound of the *gaṇḍī* gong accompanied by the voice of Mahākāśyapa reached everywhere throughout the great trichilocosm such that everyone heard and was aware of it. Of all of the disciples throughout the various realms of existence, those who had gained spiritual powers all came and assembled where Mahākāśyapa dwelt.

At that time Mahākāśyapa told all of those assembled there, “The Buddha’s Dharma is about to become extinct. Out of compassion and pity for beings, the Buddha, for three *asaṃkhyeya* kalpas, was diligent and endured all manner of suffering in studying and obtaining this Dharma. After the Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa*, those disciples who knew the Dharma, upheld the Dharma, and recited the Dharma proceeded to follow the Buddha, crossing on into cessation.

“Now, the Dharma itself is about to become extinct. The beings of the future are extremely pitiable, for they will have lost the eye of wisdom and shall be lost in the blindness and darkness of

ignorance. With great kindness and compassion, the Buddha felt pity for beings. We, too, ought to undertake the work of putting the Buddha's teaching to use. We must wait until we have collected and compiled the repository of scriptures. After that, we may cross into cessation whenever we wish."

All of those who had assembled there accepted the instruction to remain. At that time Mahākāśyapa selected a thousand men. All of them except for Ānanda were arhats who had attained the six superknowledges, who were doubly-liberated (*ubhayato-bhāga-vimukta*),<sup>1</sup> and who had attained the unobstructed liberation (*asaṅga-vimokṣa*). They had all attained the three types of gnosis (*vidyā*)<sup>2</sup> and coursed freely in dhyāna samādhi. They were able to practice all of the samādhis in both ascending and descending order, and in all cases without hindrance. They could recite and had studied the three repositories of teachings and had knowledge of all the esoteric and exoteric scriptures. They had completely studied and understood the eighteen kinds of immense scriptures of the non-Buddhist schools of thought and were all able to debate and defeat the adherents of heterodox disciplines.

### Notes

1. This refers to possessing liberation through both wisdom and meditative absorption.
2. This is a reference to knowledge of past lives of self and others, possession of the vision of the heavenly eye, and realization of the cessation of all outflow impurities (*āsrava*).

## Why Mahākāśyapa Chose One Thousand Arhats

**Question:** At this time there were innumerable arhats such as these. Why did he select only a thousand men and no more?

**Response:** When King Bimbasāra gained the Path, 84,000 other officials and subordinates also gained the Path. At that time the King instructed those in his palace to always prepare enough food to make offerings to a thousand people. King Bimbasāra did not suspend this practice.

At that time Mahākāśyapa thought, “If we are always having to go forth on the alms round, there will be non-Buddhists who insist on aggressively imposing themselves on us with objections and queries, causing inefficiency and lapses in our Dharma endeavors. Now, in the city of Rājagṛha, they always prepare food to donate to a thousand people. We shall be able to dwell here to collect and compile the repository of scriptures. It was on account of this that he selected one thousand men and was unable to choose more.

## Ānanda's Banishment from the Dharma Council

At that time Mahākāśyapa arrived with a thousand men at the city of Rājagṛha on Mount Gṛdhrakūṭa. He informed King Ajātaśatru, "In providing food for us, have it brought to us each day. We are now in the process of compiling and collecting the repositories of scriptures and cannot be distracted by other activities." They dwelt therein for the three months of the summer retreat. During the initial fifteen days, at the time of the recitation of the prohibitions, they assembled the harmonious Sangha together.

Mahākāśyapa entered dhyāna absorption and, using the heavenly eye, surveyed the Assembly to see who still had afflictions which had not been brought to an end and thus who should be expelled therefrom. There was but one person, Ānanda, who had not put them to an end. The other nine hundred and ninety-nine had ended all outflow impurities, were pure, and thus were devoid of defilements.

Mahākāśyapa arose from dhyāna absorption and, from the midst of the Assembly, pulled Ānanda out by the hand, saying, "We are now engaged in collecting and compiling the repository of scriptures in the midst of the pure Assembly. Because your fetters have not yet been brought to an end, you should not remain here."

At this time, Ānanda was ashamed, wept sorrowfully, and thought to himself, "For twenty-five years I have followed along with and served the Bhagavān, providing him with assistance. Never before have I been so bitterly distressed! The Buddha was truly greatly virtuous, kind, compassionate and patient."

After he had this thought, he addressed Mahākāśyapa, saying, "The strength of my abilities is such that I could have realized the Path long ago. It's just that the arhats in the Buddha's Dharma wouldn't provide assistance or carry out directives. It is only because of this that I retain residual fetters which haven't yet been entirely cut off."

Mahākāśyapa said, "You still have offenses. The Buddha's intention was such that he did not wish to allow women to leave the home life. Because you so persistently petitioned, the Buddha allowed that they could take up the [monastic] Path. On account of this, after only five hundred years, the orthodox Dharma of the Buddha shall decline and diminish. In this you committed a *duṣkṛta* offense."

Ānanda said, "I felt pity for Gautamī. Moreover, the Dharma of all Buddhas of the three ages has had a fourfold community. Why

then should only our Shakyamuni Buddha be without it?"

Mahākāśyapa replied, "When the Buddha was about to enter nirvāṇa and was approaching the town of Kuśinagara, his back began to hurt. He spread out the *uttarāsaṅga* robe, folded it in four layers, lay down, and said to you, 'I need water.' You did not provide it for him. In this you committed a *duṣkṛta* offense."

Ānanda responded, "At that time five hundred carts were passing through the current and their fording caused the water to become turbid and dirty. It was because of this that I did not get any."

Mahākāśyapa replied, "Even given that they had caused the water to become dirty, the Buddha has great spiritual power by which he is able to cause even a great ocean of polluted water to become pure. Why didn't you give it to him? In this there was an offense committed by you. Go and perform the *duṣkṛta* repentance."

"Moreover," Mahākāśyapa said, "The Buddha, by way of prompting you, said, 'If there were a person who had well cultivated the four bases of psychic power, his lifetime could continue for a kalpa or somewhat less than a kalpa.' The Buddha had well cultivated the four bases of psychic power. He wished for his lifetime to continue for a kalpa or somewhat less than a kalpa. But you remained silent and made no reply. He placed this question before you three times, but you deliberately remained silent."

"If only you had replied to Buddha, 'The Buddha has well cultivated the four bases of psychic power. He should remain for a kalpa or perhaps somewhat less than a kalpa.' It was because of you that the Buddha, the Bhagavān, was caused to make an early entry into nirvāṇa. In this you committed a *duṣkṛta* offense."

Ānanda said, "Māra obscured my mind. It was because of this that I didn't say anything. It is not the case that I failed to reply to the Buddha on account of evil thoughts."

Mahākāśyapa responded, saying, "In your performing of the folding of the saṅghāṭī robe for the Buddha, you stepped on it. In this you committed a *duṣkṛta* offense."

Ānanda said, "At that time there was a big gust of wind which came up and nobody was assisting. When I picked up the robe, the wind blew it such that it came to fall under my foot. It is not the case that I was disrespectful and deliberately trod upon the Buddha's robe."

Mahākāśyapa replied, saying, "After the Buddha had entered *parinirvāṇa*, you revealed the Buddha's physical characteristic of

genital ensheathement to women. How shameful this is! In this you committed a *duṣkṛta* offense.”

Ānanda said, “At the time I thought, ‘If women notice the Buddha’s physical characteristic of genital ensheathement, then they might naturally come to feel chagrin regarding the female form and wish to gain rebirth in a male body whereby they might cultivate the characteristics of a Buddha and plant roots of merit.’ It was because of this that I revealed this characteristic to women. It was not a deliberate breaking of the prohibitions arising from shamelessness.”

Mahākāśyapa said, “You have committed six kinds of *duṣkṛta* offenses. For all of them you should repent your transgressions in the presence of the Sangha.”

Ānanda said, “Alright, I shall accord with the instructions of the Venerable Mahākāśyapa and the Sangha.” At this time Ānanda knelt, pressed his palms together, arranged his robe with the right shoulder bared, took off his sandals, and repented of six types of *duṣkṛta* offenses. From within the midst of the Assembly, Mahākāśyapa led Ānanda out by the hand and then said to Ānanda, “Completely cut off your outflow impurities and then afterwards you may come back in. As long as your residual fetters have not been brought to an end, you cannot come in.” After he had said this, he secured the door.



## Gavāṃpati After the Buddha's Nirvāṇa

At that time the Arhats began their discussions and asked, "Who is able to collect and compile the repository of the Vinaya Dharma?"

The Venerable Aniruddha said, "Śāriputra, second only to the Buddha, has a fine disciple named Gavāṃpati. He is one of supple mind and is both harmonious and refined. He always stays in a quiet place and abides in a feast of stillness of the mind. By his abilities, he has knowledge of the repository of the Vinaya Dharma. Now he is up in the heavens in the Śirīṣa Tree Gardens. Send a messenger requesting him to come."

Mahākāśyapa said to a subordinate bhikshu, "You are next in sequence to carry out the orders of the Sangha."

The subordinate bhikshu replied, "What directive does the Sangha have?"

Mahākāśyapa said, "The Sangha directs you to go to the Śirīṣa Tree Gardens up in the heavens to the place therein where Gavāṃpati, the arhat, dwells."

This bhikshu leaped up with delight, accepted the Sangha's command, and addressed Mahākāśyapa, asking, "When I reach the dwelling place of Gavāṃpati, the arhat, what matter should I set forth?"

Mahākāśyapa said, "After you arrive, tell Gavāṃpati, 'Mahākāśyapa and the other arhats who have put an end to out-flow impurities have all assembled in Jambudvīpa. The Sangha has taken up a great matter of Dharma. You may come immediately.'"

The subordinate bhikshu made full reverential prostrations before the Sangha, circumambulated them three times and then, like the great golden-winged [*garuḍa*] bird, flew straight up into space, went to the dwelling place of Gavāṃpati, made full reverential prostrations, and said to Gavāṃpati, "Oh, supple, good, and greatly virtuous one who has but few desires, knows sufficiency, and constantly dwells in dhyāna absorption—Mahākāśyapa pays his respects and sends this message: 'Now the Sangha has taken up a great matter of Dharma. You may descend immediately to survey that congregation of a multitude of jewels.'"

At this time, doubts arose in Gavāṃpati's mind and he said to this bhikshu, "The generals of Dharma don't have any matters in dispute wherefore they summon me to come, do they? There isn't anyone causing a schism in the Sangha, is there? Has the Buddha, the Sun, crossed into cessation?"

This bhikshu said, "It is truly as you say. The Great Master, the Buddha, has already crossed into cessation."

Gavāṃpati said, "The Buddha has passed into cessation too swiftly. The eye of the World has perished. That Dharma-wheel-turning general capable of continuing on after the Buddha—my *upādhyāya*, Śāriputra—where is he now?"

He replied, "He has already entered nirvāṇa."

Gavāṃpati said, "The Dharma generals of the Great Master have each taken their leave. What can one do about this? Mahāmaudgal-yāyana? Where is he now?"

The bhikshu said, "This one, too, has crossed into cessation."

Gavāṃpati said, "The Dharma of the Buddha is about to become scattered. The great men have passed on. Those beings who remain are to be pitied." He asked, "The Venerable Ānanda? what is he doing now?"

This bhikshu said, "After the Buddha crossed into cessation, the Venerable Ānanda was stricken with sorrow, weeping, and confusion-ridden desolation, so much so that he could not express himself clearly."

Gavāṃpati said, "Ānanda is so grief-stricken because he still possesses the fetters of affection and undergoes the suffering of separation. Rāhula? How was he?"

The reply: "Because Rāhula attained arhatship, he was neither sorrowful nor melancholy. He simply contemplated all dharmas as characterized by impermanence."

Gavāṃpati said, "When the affection which is difficult to cut off has been cut off, there is no sorrow or melancholy." Gavāṃpati continued, "I have lost the Great Master who transcended desire. Dwelling here in the Śirīśa Tree Gardens—what point is there in that? My *upādhyāya* and the Great Master—they have all crossed into cessation. Now I can never again return to Jambudvīpa. I shall abide in this *parinirvāṇa*."

As he finished speaking these words, he entered dhyāna absorption and leapt up into space. His body radiated brilliant light and also shot forth water and fire. He touched the sun and moon with his hands and displayed all manner of spiritual transformations.

From his mind, he put forth fire which burned up his body. From his body, he gushed forth water which descended in four streams to the place of Mahākāśyapa. From within the water there came a voice which uttered this verse:

“Gavāṃpati in reverence bows down before you,  
The foremost wondrous assembly, the greatly virtuous Sangha.  
I hear Buddha’s crossed into cessation and so follow and depart.  
As when the great elephant moves on, the young elephants follow  
too.”

At that time the subordinate bhikshu took up [Gavāṃpati’s] robe  
and bowl and returned to the Sangha.

## Ānanda's Return

During this time, Ānanda had been contemplating the nature of all dharmas and was seeking to bring his residual outflow impurities to an end. That night he sat in dhyāna contemplation and meditative walking, working diligently in his quest of the Path. This Ānanda was one whose wisdom was abundant but whose meditative power was scant. It was because of this that he did not immediately gain the Path. One whose absorptions and wisdom exist in equal measure may rapidly realize it.

When the final watch of the night was nearly over, his weariness was extreme and he was on the point of laying down to rest. In lying down, he took up the pillow. But, before his head reached the pillow, suddenly and expansively, he gained enlightenment. It was like when a flash of lightning appears: those immersed in darkness are able to see the road.

In this manner, Ānanda entered the *vajra* samādhi and shattered the mountain of all afflictions. He attained the three types of gnosis (*vidyā*), the six superknowledges, and the double liberation (*ubhayato-bhāga-vimukta*). He became an arhat possessed of great power. He then went in the night to the door of the Sangha hall, knocked upon the door, and called out. Mahākāśyapa asked, "Who's knocking at the door?"

The reply: "I'm Ānanda."

Mahākāśyapa queried, "Why have you come?"

Ānanda announced, "This very night I gained the ending of all outflow impurities."

Mahākāśyapa informed him, "We will not open the door for you. You come in through the keyhole."

Ānanda agreed: "It can be done that way." Then, using spiritual powers, he went in through the keyhole, prostrated himself in reverence at the feet of the Sangha, repented, and declared, "Mahākāśyapa, you need not censure me any more."

Mahākāśyapa rubbed the top of Ānanda's head with his hand and explained, "I deliberately and for your sake influenced you to gain the Path. You have no enmity. I too am thus. This is as you yourself have realized. This is like painting with the hand in empty space wherein there is no staining or adhering. The mind of the arhat is also like this. In the midst of all dharmas, one becomes such that there is nothing to which one clings. You may return to your original seat."

## The First Dharma Council

At this time, the Sangha returned to its deliberations, whereupon a question arose: "Gavāṃpati has already opted to cross into cessation. Who else is there who is able to collect and compile the treasury of scriptures?" The Venerable Aniruddha said, "Among the Buddha's disciples, this Venerable Ānanda constantly assisted and was near to the Buddha. He heard the scriptures and is able to retain them. The Buddha always praised him, saying, 'This Ānanda is able to collect and compile the treasury of scriptures.'"

Then the Venerable Mahākāśyapa rubbed the top of Ānanda's head, saying, "The Buddha bequeathed this responsibility to you, ordering you to uphold the treasury of Dharma. You should repay the Buddha's kindness. Where did the Buddha speak Dharma the very first time? All of the Buddha's great disciples who have the ability to maintain and guard the treasury of Dharma have crossed into cessation. There is only you, one person, remaining. Now you ought to accord with the mind of the Buddha and, out of sympathy for beings, collect together the treasury of the Buddha's Dharma."

Ānanda then, after paying reverence to the Sangha, sat atop the lion's seat. At that time Mahākāśyapa uttered this verse:

The Buddha is the sovereign of all the ārya lions.  
This Ānanda is a son unto the Buddha.  
He now sits in that place upon the lion's throne.  
Surveying this Assembly now without the Buddha.

Thus this congregation of the greatly virtuous,  
In the absence of the Buddha, has lost its awesome spirit.  
It now appears like a night without the brightness of the moon.  
Though replete with constellations, it still is not majestic.

And now, you greatly wise one, it's time for you to speak.  
You, scion of the Buddha, you ought now set it forth.  
Just where did Buddha first expound it?  
This now you should set forth and show.

Then, in a state of single-mindedness, the Venerable Ānanda pressed his palms together, faced the direction of the Buddha's nirvāṇa and spoke thus:

When first the Buddha spoke the Dharma,  
It was at a time I did not see.  
Like this I heard it roundabout that  
The Buddha was at Vārāṇasī.

The Buddha for five bhikshus spoke it,  
 First opened there the sweet dew gate.  
 The four truths Dharma then he spoke.  
 Of suffering, origination, cessation and Path.

[It was an ascetic], Ājñāta Kauṇḍinya,  
 Was very first then to gain seeing of the Path.  
 A host, too, of gods, eighty-thousand in number,  
 All entered as well there the track of the Path.

After these one thousand arhats heard these words, they rose into the air to height of seven *tāla* trees and all said, “Alas! The power of impermanence is extreme. It is like when we saw the Buddha speaking Dharma. But now he says, ‘I have heard!’” Then they uttered a verse:

We saw here once the marks of Buddha’s body  
 It was just like seeing a purple golden mountain.  
 The wondrous marks and many virtues perish.  
 So now there’s but a name alone remaining.

Hence therefore one should find a skillful method  
 To seek the exit from the triple world.  
 Diligently accumulate roots of goodness.  
 Nirvāṇa is the highest form of bliss.

At that time the Venerable Aniruddha also set forth a verse:

Alas! The World—there’s nothing in it constant.  
 It’s like the moon in water or plantain.  
 And though one’s merits fill the Triple World,  
 They shall be destroyed by winds of change.

At that time Mahākāśyapa spoke another verse:

Impermanence—its power’s very great.  
 The dull, the wise, the poor, the rich and noble—  
 Those who have gained the Path and those who have not—  
 Avoid it, none among them ever can.

Not with clever words or wondrous treasures,  
 Nor artifice, deception, strength, dispute.  
 It’s like a fire which burns the myriad objects.  
 Dharmas marked by impermanence are just thus.

Mahākāśyapa said to Ānanda, “From the Turning the Dharma Wheel Scripture up to the great *parinirvāṇa*, we have collected and compiled the *Four Āgamas*: the *Item-Added Āgama*, the *Middle-Length Āgama*, the *Long Āgama*, and the *Connected Āgama*. These constitute

the treasury of sutra Dharma.”

The Arhats also asked, “Who is able to clearly understand and collect the treasury of the *Vinaya* Dharma?” They all agreed, “Among the five hundred Arhats, the Venerable Upāli is the foremost in upholding the moral precepts. Let us now request his assistance.” They then summoned him, saying, “Arise. Go and sit upon the lion’s seat and explain where the Buddha first spoke the *Vinaya* and formulated prohibitions.”

Upāli accepted the instruction of the Sangha, sat in the lion’s seat and declared, “Thus I have heard, at one time, the Buddha was at Vaiśālī. At that time Sudinna, son of Kalanda, first indulged in concupiscence. For this reason, the Buddha formulated the first major transgression. The explication of the meaning of the two hundred and fifty prohibitions constitutes three sections. Additionally there are the seven dharmas, the eight dharmas, the *Bhikshuni Vinaya*, the *Item-Added Section*, the *Inquiries of Upāli on Various Topics Section*, the *Miscellaneous Section*, and the *Goodness Section*. Topics such as these in eight categories and ten sections constitute the treasury of the *Vinaya*.”

Again, the Arhats pondered further, “Who is able to clearly compile the treasury of the *Abhidharma*?” They thought, “Among the five hundred arhats, the Venerable Ānanda is foremost in the comprehension of the meaning of the sutras. Let us now request his assistance.” They then summoned him, saying, “Arise. Go and sit upon the lion’s seat. Where did the Buddha first set forth the *Abhidharma*?”

Ānanda accepted the instruction of the Sangha. He sat in the lion’s seat and declared, “Thus I have heard, at one time, the Buddha was at the town of Srāvastī. At that time the Buddha told the Bhikshus, ‘If throughout one’s existences, five dreadables, five violations, and five loathables are not expelled and are not destroyed—then on account of these causes and conditions—during this very life, one’s body and mind undergo immeasurable suffering. Moreover, in subsequent incarnations, one falls into the wretched destinies.

‘If throughout one’s existences, one does not have these five dreadables, five violations, five loathables—on account of these causes and conditions—during the present life, in body and in mind, one undergoes all manner of bliss. In subsequent incarnations, one is born in the blissful places in the heavens.

‘What are the five dreadables from which one ought to distance

oneself? The first is killing. The second is stealing. The third is sexual misconduct. The fourth is false speech. The fifth is the drinking of intoxicants.' Discourses such as these constitute the treasury of the Abhidharma."

When the treasuries of the three classes of Dharma were brought to completion, the gods, ghosts, spirits, dragons, and heavenly maidens presented all manner of offerings. There rained down celestial flowers, incense, banners, canopies and heavenly raiments as offerings to the Dharma. At that time those beings uttered a verse:

Acting here from pity for the beings of the World.  
Now you have compiled all three treasuries of Dharma.  
Issued from the ten-fold powers and issued from omniscience,  
This spoken wisdom's a beacon amid ignorance's darkness.



## Śāriputra's Unyielding Resolve

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble: On Elimination of Residual Karma

Then again, [in the name *bhagavat*, one of the ten honorific names of the Buddha], "*bhāga*" may also mean "to destroy," whereas "*vat*" may also mean "able to." Because such a person is able to destroy sexual desire, anger, and delusion, he is called "*bhagavat*."

**Question:** Those such as the Arhats and the Pratyekabuddhas have also destroyed lust, anger, and delusion. How are they any different from the Buddha?

**Response:** Although arhats and pratyekabuddhas have destroyed the three poisons, residual traces have not been entirely brought to an end. This is analogous to the case of a vessel which has been used to store perfume. Even though the perfume has been emptied out, its residual traces still remain. This is also comparable to firewood from shrubs and trees which, after the fire has burned and the smoke has disappeared, the coals and ashes are still not completely gone. This is because the strength of the fire has been weak.

In the case of the Buddha, the three poisons have been eternally ended, leaving no residual traces. This is analogous to the case of the fire occurring at the end of the kalpa which entirely burns up Mount Sumeru and the entire earth, leaving neither smoke nor coals.

Take for example the remaining traces of hatred in the case of Śāriputra, the remaining traces of lust in the case of Nanda, and the remaining traces of arrogance in the case of Pilindavatsa. These instances are comparable to the circumstance of someone only recently freed from shackles who, in proceeding to walk again, does not move about with [normal] facility.

### Story: Śāriputra's Unyielding Resolve

Once the Buddha arose from dhyāna and proceeded to walk along. Rāhula followed, walking with the Buddha.

The Buddha asked Rāhula, "Why are you so gaunt?" Rāhula replied to the Buddha in verse:

If one partakes of foods with oils, then one gains in strength.  
And if one partakes of curds as food, then one gains in color.  
In eating leftover sesame vegetables, one gains no color or strength.  
The Venerable Bhagavān would naturally know such things.

The Buddha asked Rāhula, “Who is the most senior within this community?”

Rāhula replied, “It is the *upādhyāya*, Śāriputra.”

The Buddha said, “Śāriputra consumes impure fare.”<sup>1</sup>

Śāriputra came to hear of this pronouncement indirectly and immediately spat out his food and made a vow to himself, saying, “From this very day, I shall never again accept invitations.”

At this time, King Prasenajit, Sudatta the Elder, and others came to pay a visit to Śāriputra and said to Śāriputra, “It is not without reason that the Buddha accepts people’s invitations. If the greatly virtuous Śāriputra no longer accepts invitations, how shall we and other such laypeople be able to obtain the purification associated with great faith?”

Śāriputra said, “My great master, the Buddha, has said, ‘Śāriputra consumes impure fare.’ Now I can no longer bear to accept people’s invitations.”

At this, Prasenajit and the others went to the Buddha and addressed the Buddha, saying, “The Buddha does not often accept people’s invitations. Śāriputra no longer accepts invitations. How shall the minds of [laypeople] such as us realize great faith? Pray, may the Buddha direct Śāriputra to continue to accept people’s invitations.”

The Buddha said, “This man’s resolve is solid and it cannot be moved or deflected.” Then the Buddha proceeded to recount the causes and conditions of an earlier lifetime:

“Formerly, there was a king who had been bitten by a poisonous snake. As that king was then on the verge of succumbing, he summoned the expert physicians and ordered them to treat the snake poisoning. Then the physicians said, “We must cause the snake to draw it out again. Then the poisonous effects shall cease.”

At this time the physicians each performed incantational rituals. The snake which had bitten the King then came to the King’s quarters. The physicians stacked up firewood, set it ablaze, and then commanded the snake, “Draw your poison back out again. If you don’t, then you shall have to enter this fire.”

The poisonous snake then thought, “Since I have already injected the poison, how can I draw it out again? This circumstance shall [inevitably] involve an agonizing death.” Having reflected thus, his mind became fixed: He immediately slithered into the midst of the flames.

That poisonous snake was Śāriputra. In life after life, his mind has continued to be solid and immovable.

### Notes

1. Śāriputra, by invitation, had led the monks to a prominent household where the senior monks were served a splendid meal while new ordines and novices such as Rāhula were served only a two-week-old mixture of rice, sesame, and vegetables. Hence the Buddha's declaration that the discriminatory meal constituted "impure fare."

## Pilindavatsa and the Ganges River Spirit

### Translator's Note:

Following immediately on the earlier story of “Śāriputra's Unyielding Resolve,” Nāgārjuna continues here to narrate instances of how, unlike the Buddha, arhats and pratyekabuddhas retain persistent residual traces of their previous afflictions even though they have indeed succeeded in cutting off the three poisons of attachment, aversion, and delusion.

### The Story

The venerable Pilindavatsa was constantly afflicted with eye pain. During his alms round, this personage regularly forded the River Ganges. Upon reaching the shore of the Ganges, he would snap his fingers and call out, “Little servant! Stop! Don't flow!” The waters would then part and he would be free to cross and seek alms food. This Ganges River spirit went to where the Buddha dwelt and addressed the Buddha, [complaining], “The Buddha's disciple, Pilindavatsa, is forever insulting me, saying, ‘Little servant! Stop! Don't flow!’”

The Buddha instructed Pilindavatsa to apologize to the Ganges spirit. Pilindavatsa immediately pressed his palms together and said to the Ganges spirit, “Little servant, don't be angry. I now apologize to you.” At this moment, the Great Assembly laughed at this, [exclaiming], “How could you make an apology, and yet insult her once again as you do so?”

The Buddha said to the Ganges spirit, “As you look at Pilindavatsa, is he pressing his palms together and apologizing or not? In his apologizing, he remains free of arrogance and yet still speaks in this fashion. You should realize that this is not an instance of wickedness. For the last five hundred lifetimes, this man has always been born into brahman households and has always been haughty, esteeming himself while slighting and demeaning others. This is just the manner of speaking which he originally practiced, that's all. In his mind, there is no longer any haughtiness.”

### Concluding Exegesis Discussion: Buddha's Superior Transcendence

In just this way, although the Arhats have cut off the fetters, they still retain residual traces of them.

In the case of a Buddha, the Bhagavān, were someone to cut off one arm with a knife while someone else anointed the other arm

with sandalwood fragrance, no sooner would his mind entertain hatred or affection towards either of those persons than it would cherish preferential regard for either his own left or right eye. This is because he has become eternally free of residual traces [of the fetters].

In the midst of the Great Assembly, Ciñca, the brahman woman, wearing a bowl [beneath her clothes], slandered the Buddha, saying, “You got me pregnant! Why are you so unconcerned about this? You should provide me with clothing and food!” She acted that way, shamelessly deceiving and deluding others. At that time five hundred brahman leaders all raised up their arms, yelling, “It is so! It is so! We all have knowledge of this affair!”

At that time the Buddha had no change in countenance, nor did he possess any appearance of humiliation. This matter was immediately revealed [as fraudulent], for the earth quaked mightily and the gods made offerings, scattering a profusion of rare blossoms as they praised the virtues of the Buddha. The Buddha then made no expression of delight [at that, either].

Moreover, when the Buddha was once compelled to eat feed grain intended for horses, he was not disheartened by that. And when the King of the Gods offered up delicacies replete with the hundred flavors, he was not moved to pleasure on account of that. He was of a single mind and remained free of any duality-based thought. Amidst all kinds of food, drink, clothing, and bedding, and amidst all manner of praise, blame, slighting, and displays of reverence, his mind did not differ.

[His mind] is like pure gold, which can be smelted, forged, wrought, and polished, all without either increase or decrease. On account of [qualitative differences such as] these, although the Arhats have cut off the fetters, because they still retain residual traces [of the fetters], they are not deserving of the honorific appellation, *bhagavat*, [which signifies complete destruction of all traces of the fetters].