

# *THE BUDDHA BEQUEATHS THE LAST TEACHING SUTRA, PART I.*

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When Shakyamuni Buddha first turned the Wheel of Dharma, he crossed over the Venerable Ajnatakaundinya. The very last time he spoke the Dharma, he crossed over the Venerable Subhadha. All of those whom he should have crossed over had already been crossed over. He was between the Twin Sala trees and was about to enter Nirvana. At this time, in the middle period of the night, it was quiet without any sound. Then for the sake of all of his disciples, he spoke on the essentials of the Dharma.

## UPHOLDING PRECEPTS

All of you Bhikshus, after my extinction, you should revere and honor the Pratimoksha. Encountering it is like finding a light in the darkness, or like the obtaining of a treasure by a poor person. You should know that it is your great teacher, and is not different from my actual presence in the world.

Those of you who uphold the pure precepts should not buy, sell, or trade. You should not covet fields or buildings, or keep servants or raise animals. You should stay far away from all kinds of agriculture and wealth as you would avoid a pit of fire. You should not cut down grass or trees, plow fields or dig the earth. Nor may you compound medicines, prophesize good and evil, observe the constellations, cast horoscopes by the waxing and waning of the moon, or compute astrological fortunes. All of these activities are improper.

Regulate yourselves by eating at the appropriate time and by living in purity. You should not participate in worldly affairs or act as an envoy, nor should you become involved with magical spells and elixiers of immortality, or with making connections with high-ranking people, being affectionate toward them and condescending toward the lowly.

With an upright mind and proper mindfulness you should seek to cross yourselves over. Do not conceal your faults or put on a special appearance to delude the multitudes. Know the limits and be content with the four kinds of offerings. When you receive offerings, do not store them up.

This is a general explanation of the characteristics of upholding the precepts. The precepts are the root of proper freedom, therefore they are called the Pratimoksha (literally, the "root of freedom.") By relying on these precepts, you will give rise to all dhyana concentrations, and reach the wisdom of the extinction of suffering. For this reason, Bhikshus, you should uphold the pure precepts and not allow them to be broken. If a person is able to uphold the pure precepts, he will, as a result, be able to have good dharmas. If one is without the pure precepts, no good merit and virtue can arise. Therefore you should know that the precepts are the dwelling place for the foremost and surest merit and virtue.

*-to be continued.*