

A Good Foundation Comes First

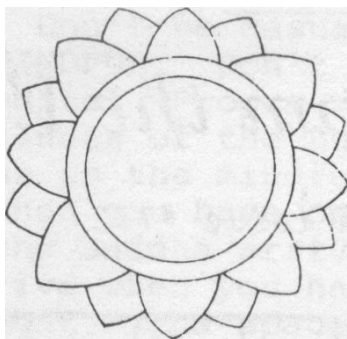
POEM:

In learning Buddhism, we must build a good foundation first;
Cultivate blessings, nurture wisdom, nourish our mani pearl;
Draw near a virtuous teacher, practice precepts and samadhi;
Hear of the Sages' Path one morning; die then without regret.

COMMENTARY:

This is a very simple verse. IN LEARNING BUDDHISM, WE MUST BUILD A GOOD FOUNDATION FIRST. A good foundation means creating merit and virtue by doing good deeds. It's not enough simply to tell other people to do good deeds, though; one must take the steps oneself. For example, a house must be built on a solid foundation. If one wants to build a Buddha--that is, if one wants to become a Buddha--one must build a foundation for Buddhahood. What's the foundation for studying to be a Buddha? One must have merit and virtue, blessings and wisdom. And so one must CULTIVATE BLESSINGS, NURTURE WISDOM, NOURISH OUR MANI PEARL. We cultivate our blessings by doing good deeds, and we nurture our wisdom by reading and reciting the Sutras of the Great Vehicle. We need to diligently cultivate prajna, to study the Dharma-door of wisdom. The mani could be said to be the spirit of kindness, compassion, joy, and renunciation, the Four Unlimited Minds, which should be cultivated always and everywhere. Basically, the mani pearl is the Wish-Fulfilling Pearl, the capital one absolutely must have for cultivation.

One must also DRAW NEAR A VIRTUOUS TEACHER and PRACTICE PRECEPTS AND SAMADHI. You need to study with a Good and Wise Advisor to learn the things you still don't know. You should be so keen to learn that you do not hesitate to inquire from those beneath you. You ought to be able to learn from those who are not as good as you. Good people can teach you how to act, and bad people can teach you how not to act. Cultivation of "precepts and samadhi" should be understood to include the cultivation of wisdom. HEAR OF THE SAGES' PATH ONE MORNING, the path to becoming a Sage or Worthy One; DIE THEN WITHOUT REGRET. If one morning I have genuinely heard about the Way of becoming a Buddha, I'd feel that it was already enough.



Therefore, in studying to be a Buddha, everyone should develop true skill. Don't be afraid to take a loss. Don't be unable to bear difficulty and enmity. One must always be patient with difficulty and enmity. The most fundamental and important Dharma-door for Buddhists is not to get angry or become afflicted. If

you don't have any temper or afflictions, then you are truly worthy of being called a Buddhist disciple. The practice of precepts, samadhi, and wisdom is simply the getting rid of greed, anger, and stupidity. As long as you are greedy, angry, and stupid, your temper will always be present. Thus, if you're not greedy, angry, or stupid, you will have precepts, samadhi, and wisdom. If you can truly be free of greed, anger, and stupidity, you'll no longer be like the other people of this world. Therefore, we must teach the old, the middle-aged, and the young the Six Great Principles of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas: no fighting, no greed, no seeking, no selfishness, no seeking for self-benefit, and no telling lies.

In short, in studying Buddhism you must work hard on the basic problems. Don't always be running away from them, or else the more you run, the farther away you will be from the Buddha. In the end, you'll be eighty-four thousand miles away from him. Not to get angry is the most important thing in cultivation. You should cultivate patience instead. You must bear what you cannot bear, yield what you cannot yield, eat what you cannot eat, and undergo what you cannot undergo. You have to be patient when people make trouble for you unjustifiably, perhaps unreasonably accusing you of doing something you did not do. That all comes from the karma of offenses you created in the past, which are now catching up with you to make you settle your accounts. Don't be afraid of paying your debts!

poem and commentary by Venerable Abbot Hua

translated by Upasaka David Rounds