

The Hundred Parables Sutra

37. Killing a Herd of Cattle

Once there was a man who owned two hundred and fifty head of cattle. He often took them out to the pasture to graze. One day a tiger ate one of the cows. The cattle owner said to himself, "Now that I've lost one cow, the herd is no longer complete. What's the point of keeping it at all?"

Thereupon he drove the cattle up to a high cliff and killed them all by pushing them down into the deep gorge below.

Foolish people in the world are like this too. Having taken the Thus Come One's complete precepts, they may happen to violate one precept. Not only do they not give rise to shame and remorse and try to repent and reform in a pure way, instead they say to themselves, "Since I have broken one of the precepts, they are no longer complete. What's the use of holding any of the others? Then they go on to violate all of the precepts with none remaining. They are like the foolish man who killed all of his cattle so that not a single one remained.

38. The Water Bucket

Once there was a man who was thirsty and tired from traveling. He drank some fresh water that was running into a wooden bucket. Having drunk his fill, he raised his hands in front of the wooden bucket and said to the water, "I've had enough to drink. Stop flowing!"

But the water kept on flowing. Then the man got angry and yelled, "I've had enough to drink and I told you to stop. Why don't you listen?"

An onlooker said to him, "You are very foolish and ignorant. Why don't you just leave?" Then he drew him away.

People of the world are this way, too. Someone driven by the thirsty craving of birth and death drinks the salty water of the five desires. After getting tired of the five desires, he says to them, "Get out of my sight--form, sounds, smells and tastes!" and yet the five desires continue without cease. Then the person gets angry and yells, "Quickly get out of my sight! Why do you keep arising so that I have to look at you?"

A wise man tells him, "If you wish to separate from the five desires, gather in your six senses organs by closing your mind. If polluted thinking does not arise, you will achieve liberation. Why do you need to tell them to be out of your sight so they won't arise again?"

This is just like the story of the foolish man who drank the water.

39. Plastering the Walls

Once there was a man who visited another man whose house had just had its walls plastered so they were made even and looked nice and neat. The man asked his host, "With what did you plaster the walls so that they look so nice?"

The host replied, "I used a mixture of rice bran, water, and clay to achieve such a fine result."

The foolish man thought to himself, "It would be better if he had used rice grain instead of rice bran. The walls would be even more smooth, white and clean."

Thereupon he mixed rice grain together with clay and plastered the walls of his own house, hoping for a smooth and tidy effect. But the walls became cracked and uneven. He had wasted the rice grain to no avail. He would have done better if he had used the grain to practice giving and thereby accrued some merit and virtue.

Common people are this way, too. They hear the sages preach Dharma, which says that if people cultivate good acts, after they die they will be born in the heavens and attain liberation. Then these people kill themselves, thinking they can be reborn in the heavens or attain liberation this way. They merely lose their lives and obtain nothing. They are like the stupid man with the plaster.

40. On Curing Baldness

Once there was a man who was completely bald. In the winter he felt very cold and in the summer he felt very hot. He was bitten by mosquitoes and gnats so that he felt afflicted day and night. One day, the bald man went to consult a physician skilled in medical practice. He said to the physician, "Great master, please cure my baldness!"

The physician took off his hat, showed the man that he was also bald, and said, "I am vexed by the same problem. If I could cure this problem, I would have done so for myself a long time ago."

People of this world are the same. Attacked by the disease of birth, old age, sickness and death, they seek for immortality. Hearing about shramanas and Brahmins who are good physicians of the world skilled in curing these diseases, they seek one out and say to such a Brahmin, "Please release me from this disease of the impermanence of birth and death, so that I can forever dwell in comfort and joy."

The Brahmin then says to them, "I myself also suffer from the disease of the impermanence of birth and death. I have made many attempts at seeking immortality, but

I still haven't found it. If I could help you attain it, I would first attain it myself and then help you attain it."

Thus is like the bald man who tired himself out pursuing a cure in vain.

41. Pishacha Ghosts

Once there were two pishacha ghosts who jointly owned a suitcase, a cane, and a pair of wooden shoes. The two ghosts fought over these items, each wishing to claim them for his own. They quarrelled all day long without ever reaching any kind of settlement. One day an onlooker came by and asked them, "What's so special about this suitcase, cane, and wooden shoes that causes the two of you to fight over them so bitterly?"

The two ghosts replied, "This suitcase of ours is able to bring forth all manner of provisions such as clothing, food and drink, bedding and mats. This cane is able to subdue all enemies so they don't dare resist. One who puts on these wooden shoes will be able to fly anywhere without hindrance."

The man immediately said to the ghosts, "Stand further back, and I will divide these things equally between the two of you."

The two ghosts moved away. The man quickly snatched the suitcase and the cane, put on the shoes, and flew off. The two ghosts were shocked, and they ended up with nothing. The man said, "I have what you were fighting over. Now there's no more reason for the two of you to argue."

The pishacha ghosts are an analogy for demons and heretics. The suitcase is an analogy for giving, for providing all the necessities of life for humans and gods in the five paths of rebirth. The cane is an analogy for Chan samadhi, able to vanquish demonic enemies and the thieves of afflictions. The wooden slippers are an analogy for holding precepts, which enables one to ascend to the realm of humans and gods. Demons and heretics fighting over the suitcase is an analogy for those who pursue the rewards of liberation while laboring in the midst of outflows--they will obtain nothing. However, if one is able to practice wholesome deeds, giving, holding precepts, and Chan samadhi, one will be able to leave suffering and attain the fruit of the Way.

42. The Trader and the Dead Camel

One time there was a trader who went traveling on business. In the middle of his journey, his camel died. The camel was laden with many jewels, fine carpets and other goods. The trader then flayed the dead camel and left it with his two apprentices, saying, "Watch over this camel hide. Do not let it get wet or ruined."

Later when it began to rain, the two foolish men covered the camel hide with a carpet of superior quality. As a result the carpet was completely ruined. The carpet was much more valuable than the hide, but because of their stupidity, the men covered the camel hide with the carpet.

People of the world act that way, too. The fine carpet is analogous to abstaining from killing. The camel hide is analogous to wealth and treasures. To let the carpet get wet when it is raining is analogous to destroying wholesome deeds through indulgence. To abstain from killing is the most superior, wonderful cause leading to the Buddha's Dharma body, and yet people do not practice it. Instead they build stupas and temples with their wealth to make offerings to the Sangha. They renounce the roots and grasp the branches, forsaking the basics. As a result they drift along the five paths of rebirth, unable to get out. Therefore, cultivators should intently and sincerely uphold the precept against killing.

43. Grinding a Large Stone

One time a man carved a large stone with great effort. After chipping away at it for days and months, he succeeded in making a small toy cow from the stone. When compared to the strenuous effort that was put into it, the result was trivial.

People of the world are like this, too. Carving the large stone is analogous to diligently pursuing learning. Making the small toy cow is analogous to people mutually deprecating each other because of their wish for fame and recognition. A scholar should intently investigate his learning so that he acquires subtle and all-encompassing knowledge. Furthermore, he should put his learning into practice in order to seek a sublime result. He should not seek fame and in the process become arrogant and haughty. This will only increase his faults and offenses.

