

The Hundred Parables Sutra

#51 A Maid Servant and Five Masters

Once there were five men who together bought one maid. One of them said to her, "Wash my clothes for me." Another told her to do the same thing. The maid said, "I will wash for whoever gave me the clothes first."

The second man broke out in anger and said, "I bought you with the others. Why should you wash only for the first person?" Thereupon he whipped her with ten strokes. The rest of her five masters did the same, each whipping her ten strokes.

The five skandhas are this way, too. They are the causes and conditions of afflictions and combine to make up this body. And yet the five skandhas constantly whip living beings with the limitless suffering of birth, old age, sickness and death.

#52 The Musician

Once there was a musician. He played music before a king who promised to pay him a thousand coins. Afterwards he asked the king for the money, but the king refused to give it to him and said, "Just as the music you played only served to please me momentarily, so too, the money I planned to give to you would only serve to please you for a little while."

Worldly rewards are the same way. Although one may enjoy a small amount of pleasure in the human or heavenly realms, this pleasure is not true and actual. Impermanent and subject to destruction, it is like the music that gives only temporary pleasure and cannot last long.

#53 The Master's Hurting Legs and His Two Disciples

One time a master instructed his two disciples to take care of his hurting legs. Each disciple was told to continuously massage one leg. But each of the two disciples disliked and felt jealousy toward the other. If one disciple went out, the other would use a stone to break the leg the first one had been massaging. When the first one came back, out of anger he would break the leg that the second one had been massaging.

The same is true of Buddhist disciples. Scholars of the Vaipulya (Great Vehicle) deprecate scholars of the Theravada, while scholars of the Theravada also deprecate scholars of the Vaipulya. This threatens to bring about the destruction of the scriptures of both schools of the Great Sage.

#54 The Snake Whose Head and Tail Had an Argument

Once there was a snake whose tail told its head, "I should be in front."

The head told the tail, "I've always led the way. Why do you want to make the sudden change?"

When the head led the way, the tail twisted its way around a tree and refused to budge. And when the tail was allowed to lead, the snake fell into a fiery pit and was burned to death.

The same situation applies to teachers and students. The disciples insist that they should lead, since their teachers are too old. But these youths do not observe the precepts and commit many infractions of the rules. As a result they mutually drag each other to the hells.

#55 The King's Barber

Once there was a king's close attendant who risked his life to save the king at the battlefield. Delighted, the king promised the man anything he wanted. He asked him, "What would you like? All of your wishes will be granted."

The attendant said, "Please let me shave your head when you need a shave."

"If this agrees with you, I'll grant you your wish."

That foolish man became the laughing stock of the world. He could have asked for half the kingdom or the position of a minister or premier, but instead he opted for an inferior profession. Stupid people are this way, too. Until they became Buddhas, all Buddhas cultivated ascetic practices that were extremely difficult. It is very rare that we can encounter the Buddha or the bequest of his Dharma and attain a human body. It is as difficult as a blind turtle trying to find a hole in a log floating in the water.

Now that we have overcome both those difficulties, with inferior resolve we are content with holding just a few precepts and think it's enough. We do not seek the supreme wonderful Dharma of Nirvana. With no thoughts of making further progress, we are content with doing deviant deeds.

#56 To Ask For Nothing

Once there were two men walking together, and they saw another person straining in vain to pull his cart of sesame out of a rut in the road. The person pulling the cart said to the two men, "Please give me a hand, so as to get this cart out of the rut."

The two men asked, "What will you give us in return?"

The person said, "Nothing."

The two men managed to pull the cart out anyway, and then to the cart owner they demanded, "Now give us something."

He said, "I have nothing to give you."

The two men asked, "Give us 'nothing' then!"

Then one of the two men smiled and said, "He doesn't want to give us anything. There's no use getting upset."

The other man said, "He said he'd give us 'nothing'. But that 'nothing' must be something."

The word "nothing" that the first man spoke is a compound of two words that compose a false name. If common people of the world became attached to that "nothing", they would be born in the Realm of Nothing Whatsoever. The "nothing" spoken of by the second man refers to "no marks, nothing wished for, and nothing done".

#57 Putting His Foot In the Elder's Mouth

Once there was a very wealthy elder. His attendants tried to court his favor by paying him all manner of deference. Whenever the elder spat, his attendants would rub it with their feet. Among them was a foolish man, who could not catch up with the others in rubbing the spit, and so he said to himself, "Whenever he spits on the ground, others rub it with their feet. Next time he spits, I'll be the first one to do so."

So when the elder was coughed and was about to spit up, that foolish man thrust up his foot and kicked the elder's mouth, injuring the elder's lips and breaking his teeth.

The elder asked him, "Why did you do that?"

The foolish man answered, "Whenever your spit falls to the ground, those who fawn on you are quick to rub it with their feet. Although I wish to serve you, I've always fallen behind. Therefore, I thought that by raising my foot to your mouth when you were about to spit, I would be able to please you."

There is a right time for doing things. If the right time has not yet arrived, then even if people apply all their energy, they will only get into trouble. For this reason, people of the world should be aware of when is the right and wrong time.

#58 Two Sons Share Their Inheritance

At one time, in the country of Malaya, there lived a Kshatriya. He fell gravely ill, and knew his final hour was at hand. He ordered his two sons, "After my death, divide my wealth and possessions fairly between the two of you."

After his death, the two sons complied with their father's instructions and divided his wealth. But the elder brother complained that the younger brother had an unfair share of the inheritance.

A foolish old man said to him, "I will teach you how to divide evenly your father's wealth. Break each item into two parts. For instance, cut the garments into two parts. You can also break everything else—plates, bottles, bowls, dishes, money, and so forth—into two parts, and divide them equally between the two of you."

Others laughed at this method. This is like externalists who answer all questions with the one-sided approach of theories that split things into categories. There are four ways to answer questions:

- 1) Giving an absolute answer. For instance, "all beings are subject to death".
- 2) Answering by splitting things into categories. For instance, if asked whether those who die will be born again, the answer is split into categories, such as: "those who have ended love and desire will not be reborn; those who have love and desire will be reborn."
- 3) Answering by turning the question around. For instance, if someone asks, "Are human beings the most supreme?" you should turn the question around and ask, "Are you referring to the three evil paths or the realm of the gods? If you are referring to the three evil paths, then I would say that human beings are supreme. If you are referring to the realm of the gods, then I would say that human beings are not up to them."
- 4) Not answering the question. For instance, if someone asks one of the fourteen types of tricky questions, *such as whether the world has a limit or not, or whether human beings have a beginning and end or not.

Externalists are deluded, but are convinced they are wise. They break down the four ways of answering questions by only using the approach of splitting things up into categories. This is just like the stupid man who advised the two brothers to divide their fortune by breaking everything into two.

*The fourteen tricky questions of the externalists to which the Buddha gave no answer.