

## Return to the Original Source

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Good morning! Welcome to the International Buddha Dharma Society for Cosmic Law to listen to today's Dharma talk! As stated in the Diamond Sutra, "All conditioned phenomena are like dreamy illusions and empty bubbles, like morning dew and lightning. Everything should be observed like this." In the universe everything goes through the process of birth, living, declining and extinction. There is no existence of 'I'. The Cosmic Law and Natural Principle dominates all. Everything is in the Cosmic Law. All movements are impermanent. As stated in the Lotus Face Sutra, "Everything born in the world is conditioned phenomena and will return to impermanence. To keep it unchanging and undeclining is just impossible."

"All phenomena are born under certain causes and conditions and disappear under certain causes and conditions. Our Buddha, the Great Samana often says this!"

Today, we will look back the birth, the living and the declining of the Buddha Dharma, which is called the Proper Dharma Period, the Like-Dharma Period, the Dharma Ending Period. About the length of the three periods, different sutras might have different sayings. In general, the Proper Dharma Period refers to the five hundred or one thousand years after the Buddha entered Nirvana. The Like-Dharma Period refers to the one thousand or five hundred years after the Proper Dharma Period and the Dharma Ending Period refers to the ten thousand years after the Like-Dharma Period.

During the Proper Dharma Period, people pursued Wisdom and they were good at Meditation. During the Like-Dharma Period, people started to pursue outside and they were good at building towers and temples. People built towers and temples for gaining merits, virtues and blessings. They gradually abandoned the foundation and the essence of the Buddha Dharma. During the Dharma Ending Period, people are away from meditation, and they tend to fight with each other. The Dharma Ending Period is also called the Demon's Period. Of course, there was the Demon's Dharma during the Proper Dharma Period and there is Proper Dharma during the Dharma Ending Period. "Avoid all evil deeds and respectively do all good deeds; purify the mind and this is Buddhism!"

On January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017, our trip to the East America arrived at Savannah, Georgia. Savannah is a city of garden. The lawn was freshly green. On the sides of the parks and roads were oak trees covered with Spanish moss. After many many years of growth, their branches crisscrossed in air and cooled the pedestrians walking under. People in the city were very kind and the atmosphere was natural and harmonious. We walked in the city and then came to the Forsyth Park. The sun shone out of the clouds and one ray of sunlight shot to the statue in the middle of a spray spring. It seemed that the city of Savannah just experienced something.

Walking on the lawn, Osifu squatted down and picked up a little acorn and said, “What is the difference between this acorn and this tree?” After a moment of silence, he said, “When the Buddha Dharma started in India, it was just a seed, no form but with limitless possibilities and that was Buddha Dharma. When it came to China, it grew to be a tree. There were written sutras, rituals, dominations, forms. When it propagated to Japan and Korea, it became a kind of life style. It caters the needs of living beings. The monks can marry somebody, have their children and eat meat. Buddha Dharma became flowers, far away from the original Buddha Dharma. Stepping on the acorns on the ground, Osifu continued, “The original Buddha Dharma has been stepped under the feet and this is why we need to return to the original source.”

It's been over 2500 years since the Buddha Dharma was born. According to sutras, what is the Buddha Dharma like during this Dharma aging period? Now, we will recite The Buddha Speaks the Ultimate Extinction of the Dharma Sutra.

### **The Buddha Speaks the Ultimate Extinction of the Dharma Sutra**

Thus I have heard. At one time the Buddha was in the state of Kushinagara. The Tathagata was to enter nirvana within three months and the bhikshus and Bodhisattvas as well as the great multitude of beings had come to pay homage to the Buddha and to bow in reverence. The World Honored One was tranquil and silent. He spoke not a word and his light did not appear. Worthy Ananda bowed and asked the Buddha,

“O Bhagavan, heretofore whenever you spoke the Dharma, awesome light would naturally appear. Yet today among this great assembly there is no such radiance. There must be a good cause for this and we wish to hear the Bhagavan's explanation.”

The Buddha remained silent and did not answer until the request had been repeated three times. He then told Ananda,

“After I enter nirvana, when the Dharma is about to perish, during the evil age of the five turbidities, the way of demons will flourish. Demonic beings will become shramanas; they will pervert and destroy my teachings. Monastics will wear the garb of laypersons and will prefer handsome clothes. Their precept sashes will be made of multi-colored cloth. They will use intoxicants, eat meat, kill other beings and they will indulge in their desire for flavorful food. They will lack compassion and they will bear hatred and exhibit jealousy even among themselves.

“Even then Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas, and Arhats will reverently and diligently cultivate immaculate virtue. They will be respected by all people and their teachings will be fair and egalitarian. These cultivators of the Way will take pity on the poor, they will be mindful of the aged, and they will save and give counsel to those people they find in difficult circumstances. They will always exhort others to worship and to protect sutras and images of the Buddha. They will do meritorious deeds, be resolute and kind, and never harm others. They will make physical sacrifices for others’ benefit. They will hold no great regard for themselves but will be patient, yielding, humane, and peaceful.

“As long as such people exist, the hordes of demonic bhikshus will be jealous of them. The demons will harass them, slander and defame them, expel them from their midst and degrade them. They will ostracize the good monks from the monastic community. Thereafter these demons derive no virtue from their practice. Their monastic buildings will be vacant and overgrown with weeds. For want of care and maintenance their Way-places will drift into ruin and oblivion. The demonic bhikshus will increase their greed for wealth and will amass great heaps of goods. They will refuse to distribute any of it or to use it to gain blessings and virtue.

“At this time, the evil monks will buy and sell slaves to till their fields and to slash and burn the mountain forests. They will do harm to living creatures and they will feel not the least bit of compassion. These slaves will themselves become bhikshus and maidservants will become bhikshunis. Totally lacking in Way-virtue, these people will run amok, indulging in licentious

behavior. In their turbid confusion they will fail to separate the men from the women in the monastic communities.

From this generation on, the Way will be weakened. Fugitives from the law will seek refuge in my Way, wishing to be shramanas but failing to observe the moral regulations. Monastics will continue to recite the precepts twice a month, but in name alone. Being lazy and lax, no one will want to listen any longer. These evil shramanas will be unwilling to recite the sutras in their entirety and they will make abbreviations at the beginning and at the end of the texts as they please. Soon the practice of reciting sutras will stop altogether. Even if there are people who recite texts, they will be unlettered, unqualified people who will insist, nonetheless, that they are correct. Bumptious, arrogant, and vain, these people will seek fame and glory. They will put on airs in the hope of attracting offerings from other people.

“When the lives of these demonic bhikshus come to an end their essential spirits will fall into the Avichi Hell. Having committed the five evil deeds, they will suffer successive rebirths as hungry ghosts and as animals. They will know all such states of woe as they pass on through eons as numerous as sands in the Ganges River. When their offenses are accounted for they will be reborn in a border land where the Triple Jewel is unknown.

“When the Dharma is about to disappear, women will become vigorous and will at all times do deeds of virtue. Men will grow lax and will no longer speak the Dharma. Those who are genuine shramanas will be looked upon as dung and no one will have faith in them. When the Dharma is about to perish, all the gods will begin to weep. Rivers will dry up and the five grains will not ripen. Pestilences will frequently take millions of lives. The masses will toil and suffer while the local officials will plot and scheme. No one will adhere to principles. Instead, the human race will multiply, becoming like the sands of the ocean-bed. Good persons will be hard to find; at most there will be one or two. As the eon comes to a close, the revolutions of the sun and the moon will grow short and the lifespan of people will decrease. Their hair will turn white by the time they are forty. Because of excessive licentious behavior they will quickly exhaust their seminal fluids and will die at a young age, usually before sixty years. As the lifespan of males decreases, that of females will increase to seventy, eighty, ninety, or one hundred years.

“The mighty rivers will flood and lose harmony with their natural cycles, yet people will not take

notice or feel concern. Extremes of climate will soon be taken for granted. Beings of all races will mix together at random, without regard for the noble and the mean. Their births and rebirths will cause them to sink and float, like feeding aquatic creatures.

“Even then Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas, and Arhats will gather together in an unprecedented assembly because they will all have been harried and pursued by the hordes of demons. They will no longer dwell in the assemblies but the Three Vehicles will retreat to the wilderness. In a tranquil place they will find shelter, happiness, and long life. Gods will protect them and the moon will shine down upon them. The Three Vehicles will have an opportunity to meet together and the Way will flourish. However, within fifty-two years the Shurangama Sutra and the Pratyutpanna [Standing Buddha] Samadhi, will be the first to change and then to disappear. The twelve divisions of the canon will gradually follow until they vanish completely, never to appear again. Its words and texts will be totally unknown ever after. The precept sashes of shramanas will turn white of themselves. When my Dharma disappears, it will be just like an oil lamp that flares brightly for an instant just before it goes out. So too, will the Dharma flare and die. After this time it is difficult to speak with certainty of what will follow.

“A period of ten million years will follow before the time when Maitreya is about to appear in the world to become the next Buddha. At that time the planet will be entirely peaceful. Evil vapors will have dissipated, rain will be ample and regular, and crops will grow abundantly. Trees will grow to a great height and people will grow to be eighty feet tall. The average lifespan will extend to 84,000 years. It will be impossible to count all the beings who will be taken across to liberation.”

Worthy Ananda addressed the Buddha, “What should we call this Sutra and how shall we uphold it?”

The Buddha said, “Ananda, this sutra is called The Ultimate Extinction of the Dharma. Tell everyone to propagate it widely; the merit of your actions will be measureless, beyond reckoning.”

When the four-fold assembly of disciples heard this sutra they grieved and wept. Each of them

resolved to attain the true path of the Supreme Sage. Then bowing to the Buddha, they withdrew.

Then how do we practice the Proper Way in the Dharma aging period? Now, we will recite the sutra of Eight Realizations of the Great Beings.

### **Eight Realizations of the Great Beings**

Wholeheartedly, day and night, disciples of the Awakened One should recite and meditate on the Eight Realizations discovered by the Great Beings.

#### **The First Realization is the awareness that the world is impermanent.**

Political regimes are subject to fall. Things composed of the four elements are empty, containing within them the seeds of suffering. Human beings are composed of Five Aggregates and are without a separate self. They are always in the process of change – constantly being born and constantly dying. They are empty of self and without a separate existence. The mind is the source of all confusion, and the body the forest of all unwholesome actions. Meditating on this, you can be released from the round of birth and death.

#### **The Second Realization is the awareness that more desire brings more suffering.**

All hardships in daily life arise from greed and desire. Those with little desire and ambition are able to relax, their body and mind free from entanglement.

#### **The Third Realization is the awareness that the human mind is always searching outside itself and never feels fulfilled.**

This brings about unwholesome activity. Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, know the value of having few desires. They live simply and peacefully, so they can devote themselves to practicing the Way. They regard the realization of perfect understanding to be their only career.

#### **The Fourth Realization is the awareness that indolence is an obstacle to practice.**

You must practice diligently to transform unwholesome mental states that bind you, and you must conquer the four kinds of Mara in order to free yourself from the prisons of the Five Aggregates and the Three Worlds.

#### **The Fifth Realization is the awareness that ignorance is the cause of the endless round of birth and death.**

Bodhisattvas always listen to and learn from others so their understanding and skillful means can develop, and so they can teach living beings and bring them great joy.

**The Sixth Realization is the awareness that poverty creates hatred and anger**, which creates a vicious cycle of negative thoughts and actions. When practicing generosity, bodhisattvas consider everyone – friends and enemies alike – to be equal. They do not condemn anyone's past wrongdoings or hate even those presently causing harm.

**The Seventh Realization is the awareness that the five categories of sensual desire – money, sex, fame, overeating and oversleeping – lead to problems.**

Although you are in the world, try not to be caught in worldly matters. A monk, for example, has in his possession only three robes and one bowl. He lives simply in order to practice the Way. His precepts keep him free from attachment to worldly things, and he treats everyone equally and with compassion.

**The Eighth Realization is the awareness that the fire of birth and death is raging, causing endless suffering everywhere.**

Take the Great Vow to help all beings, to suffer with all beings, and to guide all beings to the Realm of Great Joy.

These Eight Realizations are the discoveries of great beings, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who have practiced diligently the way of understanding and love. They have sailed the Dharmakaya boat to the shore of nirvana, and have then returned to the ordinary world, free of the five sensual desires, their minds and hearts directed toward the Noble Way.

Using these Eight Realizations, they help all beings recognize the suffering in the world.

If disciples of the Buddha recite and meditate on these Eight Realizations, they will put an end to countless misunderstandings and difficulties and progress toward enlightenment, leaving behind the world of birth and death, dwelling forever in peace.

Amitabha! Pay homage to Buddha Shakyamuni! All movements are impermanent; all leakages bring bitterness; all phenomena are non-self; Nirvana is tranquil and the ultimate bliss! Thank you! See you next week!