

## The Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering

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Good morning! Welcome to the International Buddha Dharma Society for Cosmic Law to listen to today's Dharma talk! Last week, we talked about the Noble Truth of Suffering. We introduced the suffering of humans, the suffering of ghosts and the suffering of the living beings in hell. In fact, the suffering of the living beings, cannot be completely described in all the time in the future. This week, we will introduce **the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering**, the reason of suffering. At the beginning of this month, when we introduced the Four Noble Truths, we said that the reason of suffering is craving. Craving is the reason of suffering. In the Mahasatipatthana Sutra, the Buddha said, "Bhikkhus, this is the noble truth of the cause of suffering. What causes living beings to be born is craving. It rises together with greed and joy. Craving is like a seed. Under different causes and conditions, it grows to be different annoyances (greed, anger, ignorance, pride, evil view, suspicion, heavy head, unsettled mind...), it causes living beings to create good karma and evil karma. Living beings do not know to cultivate to get liberated and they are stuck in the six realms and transmigrate according to karma. Today, I would like to share a story with you. Hope you can understand the cause of suffering more. The name of the story is **Stone Women**.

Now let's go back to 2500 years ago when Buddha lived in the world.

At that time, when King Prasenajit and the Queen went out, their sedan chair was carried by four strong stone women. One time, the King and the Queen went to the Vihara to listen to dharma talks from the Buddha. After they arrived, they went into the Vihara and the four stone women stayed outside taking care of their sedan chair. Somebody came and stole a Mani pearl from the sedan chair while the four stone women fell asleep. One guard came out from the Vihara and noticed the missing pearl. He was scared and so he was angry. He lashed the stone women with a whip. One stone woman escaped inside the Vihara and yelled for help. Everybody was puzzled and did not know what happened.

The Buddha told Ananda, "Go and tell the guard stop whipping those who did not do anything wrong. The four stone women were the Queen's teacher in her previous life. They did not do anything wrong. This will create evil karma for the future." The Queen heard what the Buddha

said, and she stood up, joined her palms and respectfully asked the Buddha, “World honored one, you said the four carriers were my teacher in previous life, I am confused. Please tell me why so we can understand.” The Buddha told the Queen, “let the stone women in and I will tell you.”

The four stone women came in and saw the Buddha, they bowed to the Buddha and cried, “We did not steal the pearl, why did he whip us?”

The Buddha said, “The causes of evil karma are done by oneself, not by the parents, not from nowhere. People do good and evil things, they will get good and evil retributions. Just like echo follows voice and shadow follows form. If one deceits for the immediate benefit, one will receive retribution of suffering in the following many lives. Wickedness arises from one’s mind, but it is one’s enemy. Just as the iron container rusts, it corrodes itself.”

King Prasenajit bowed to the Buddha and asked, “Everything in the world has front and rear causes. What are the causes of the four stone women. World honored one, please instruct us and benefit the public.”

The Buddha told King Prasenajit, “Listen carefully. In my teachings, there are some bhikkhus, what they say and what they do are not the same. They abandoned the worldly life and became bhikkhus for fame, wealth, food, or to escape from the system of servitude. They don’t have the will to pursue liberation, and they don’t have the vow to transform the people. They enjoy offerings from the believers with a filthy heart. And so, they will receive evil retribution in the future many lives to repay the debt. For this reason, I will have to let you know the causes of these stone women.”

The Buddha continued, “Many kalpas ago, in a big country, there was a woman named TiWei. She was a Brahman. After her husband died, she was alone. She was rich, but she had neither children nor parents. She had nobody to depend on. In the teachings of Brahminism, if something was wrong, people would burn themselves. At that time, some Brahmins often came to TiWei’s home and persuaded her, ‘All the suffering you are having right now is due to what you have done before. What is sin? Sin is not respecting and not making offerings to Brahminism; sin is not respectful of parents and husband; sin is not having compassion toward children. This is why you are alone and suffering. If you don’t cultivate merits and eliminate the crime, you will suffer more in the later lives. And you will regret when you fall into the hell.’

They also told TiWei, 'There are two ways to eliminate crimes. If the crimes are light, one should shave one's hair, take a bath, and go to the temple to repent. Invite 100 Brahmins for dinner and offer 100 cows to Brahmins. Why? Because the Brahmins take precepts, they don't drink wine, eat meat or the five spices, onions or garlicks. They only drink milk. If you offer cows to them, your crimes will be eliminated, and you will obtain blessings. Your karma is heavy now. You should offer all your treasure to 500 Brahmins and they will bless you, hold mantra and pray for you. You will be very rich in your future lives. If you want to exterminate crimes, you would need to go to the Ganges river and burn yourself. All the Brahmins will also pray for you and all your crimes will disappear and there would be no retribution of suffering in your later life. Your parents, husband, brothers, children will also live a long and happy life. So TiWei agreed and she decided to burn herself to exterminate all her crimes. She sent her servants to the mountains to collect wood for self-burning.

There was an enlightened person named BianCai. He held precepts and cultivated diligently. He always instructed people with a compassionate heart and made them to abandon the evil ways and do good deeds. After he heard that TiWei wanted to burn herself, out of compassion, he came to her place and asked her, 'What do you want to do with all the wood?' TiWei answered, 'I plan to burn myself to eliminate my sin.'

BianCai answered, 'Your sin exists with your spirit. It is not in your body. If you burn yourself, then you would suffer in vain, but you cannot eradicate your sin. Weal and woe rise from the mind. If the mind is kind, then the retribution is kind; if the mind is evil, then the retribution is evil; if the mind is sad or happy, so is the retribution. If a person dies of hanger, then he/she would be a hungry ghost; if a person dies of tormented affliction, then he/she would receive retribution of tormented affliction; if a person dies of joy, then he/she would receive retribution of joy; if a person dies of peace and happiness, then he/she would receive retribution of peace and happiness. How could you look to eradicate sin in tormented affliction and wish to receive good retribution? Don't ever think this way. It does not make sense.

Furthermore, for a person already tortured in pain, if someone with evil mind comes and scolds this patient, and tears his ears, do you think this patient would be happy? Don't you think that he will be full of resentment?'

TiWei answered, 'The patient who already in pain, normally is in anger even when nobody bothers him, let alone being torn by somebody else.'

BianCai said, 'It's the same for you now. The karma you created in your previous lives made you live alone and often feel distressed and sorrow. You want to burn yourself to get out of sorrow, which is just like the patient being scolded and your tormented affliction will increase hundreds of thousands of times. Furthermore, when burning yourself, when the fire rises, and when the body scorches, you still breathe and have consciousness. At that time, your body and mind are being burn, but your consciousness has not left the body yet. And so, you feel great pain and tormented. And you will be born in the hell after this life and in the hell, your affliction will increase hundreds of thousands of times. It's difficult for one to escape suffering, let alone to escape suffering by self-burning. It's just like a cow sick of the carriage that it is pulling. It tries to destroy the carriage so that it does not have to pull. However, if this carriage is destroyed, the next carriage will be waiting for it to pull. It's because the evil karma has not ended yet. It's the same for human. If this body is burned, karma still exists. Like a sinner in the Avici Hell, he would be burned to death eighty thousand times in a day, but he would come back to life eighty thousand times in a day to continue the suffering. You want to burn yourself one time to eradicate your sin, how could this be?'

After hearing these, TiWei understood and she changed her mind and decided not to burn herself. So, she asked BianCai how to exterminate her sin? BianCai answered, 'If one has evil mind, it's like the dark cloud covering the moon. If one has kind heart, it's like the torch lighting up the darkness. You have the will to eradicate your sin today, and I have skillful means to help you and not let you go through any pain or spend any penny. Furthermore, you will live happily and peacefully in this life and be born in a good place after this life. Everything will go well and as you wish.'

TiWei was very happy to hear that and she felt like being released from a jail. She bowed to BianCai and asked the servants to set up a jeweled seat, decorate the room, burn incense and light lamps. After all these had been done, she invited BianCai to sit. TiWei and her five hundred dependents and servants respectfully bowed to BianCai and then stood with palms joined.

TiWei said to BianCai, 'After hearing what you said, I am very happy. I still have some questions and please teach us the ways to eradicate our sin, so that we could follow them to do.'

BianCai answered, 'Sin comes from what the body does, what the mouth does and what the mind does. What the body does is killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. What the mouth does is lying, slander, abuse, and idle talk. What the mind does is covetousness, hatred, and ignorance. These are the ten evil deeds. When one does these evil deeds, one would get evil retribution. Now, you should concentrate and repent sincerely. Repent these ten kinds of karma that you have done in previous lives and in this life. Repent sincerely and then they will be eradicated. Also make the vow to hold these ten good deeds and not to commit them again.'

TiWei did accordingly. Also, she repented for her parents, husband, brothers... as well. She repented sincerely and she made the vow to correct evil deeds and cultivate the goodness; she made the vow to give all suffering living beings and help them to get out of suffering and obtain happiness; she made the vow to bear the karma of living beings; she made the vow to meet good masters and good knowledge in every life, be together with her parents and her husband and won't suffer like this life anymore.

At the end, BianCai told TiWei, 'To eradicate sin by repenting is like this.'

TiWei and her dependents bowed and said with palms joined, 'We carefully listened to your teaching and repented according to what you said. Please teach us other skillful means. We will follow your teachings and increase our merits.'

BianCai then said, 'Now sincerely say three times: I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. I will take the ten-good karma road. From now on, I will not kill, steal, or sexually misconduct; I will not lie, slander, abuse, or talk idly; I will not be jealous, angry, proud or having evil views. This is to take the ten good Dharma precepts.'

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Later one year, a great famine happened. Food was expensive, and people were hungry. There were five bhikkhus who were very lazy. They did not try to understand and follow the sutras, or diligently cultivate and hold the precepts. They were belittled by people and nobody would like to make offerings to them.

They were poor and hopeless. They discussed, 'To live needs to have a good impression. Life is precious and how can we wait to die?'

So, they went out to beg for some ropes and made rope beds. They cleaned up in wilderness and set up magnificent and stately banner. They took turns to sit to meditate. They seemed like deeply into meditation, but inside, they were having evil views and thoughts. People saw them and thought that they were saints. They fell over each other to make offerings, including various of food. The five bhikkhus then had more than enough to eat and drink.

TiWei also heard about the five bhikkhus. She came in magnificent carriage to worship the five bhikkhus. She bowed and made offerings and said to the five bhikkhus:

‘Venerable masters, your merits are heavy, and you are the supreme field of blessing. All living beings are protected because of you. You should not treat yourselves like this. I wish you could come to my home and allow me to show my sincerity. I only wish that you are compassionate so that all living beings could be saved. In my home there is a quiet forest. The flowing spring and bathing pool are also magnificent. I would like to offer these to you.’

TiWei and her dependents bowed three times to invite the five bhikkhus and the five bhikkhus knew their sincerity and accepted their offer.

TiWei was happy and she went home and sent people to come back to welcome the five bhikkhus home with a luxury horse carriage. TiWei’s family had a beautiful forest, not far from her home, about ten acres big. There were flowing springs, bathing pool, exotic flowers and rare herbs and chirping birds in it. It’s quiet, clean and wonderful. In the forest, houses were built and decorated with jewels. Inside the houses, various of good appliances were set up. It’s fragrant and tidily clean. The five bhikkhus then lived here. TiWei respectfully took care of them, offering them food, soups, medicines whenever needed.

The five bhikkhus were diligently cared by the owner and they lived happily and sighed, ‘We are so lucky. People in the world try all means to earn money and make a living. Though their dream could come true, they are still not like us. We don’t have to work, and everything is obtained easily.’

The five bhikkhus observed the owner and discussed, ‘Though the owner could make offerings all the time. With time going, she might become poor. When she could not give us, our rich life will end. We should think other ways to get wealth and prepare for the future.’

After the discussion, one of the five bhikkhus put on makeup and changed his appearance. He went to many places to say to people, 'There are four bhikkhus in a tranquil place. They hold precepts and don't drink wine, eat meat, onions or garlic. They have no desires; they cultivate samadhi; they have obtained non-leaking supernatural powers and soon they will obtain Arhatship. They are the best blessing field.' After people heard this, they all came with money and food to worship and make offerings.

After many years like this, TiWei believed in the five bhikkhus faithfully. She respectfully made offerings from the beginning to the end. Because of this, she died and was born into a heaven. While the five bhikkhus, because their actions were hypocritical and cunning, their minds were evil, after they consumed their blessings, they fell into the hell. In eight hundred billion kalpas, they received great suffering. From the hell, they were again born as hungry ghosts of various kinds, and stayed as hungry ghosts for another eight thousand kalpas. From hungry ghosts, they were born as animals to pay back to the people who made offerings to them. They had been camels, mules, cows, horses, and so on. While their owners enjoying their blessings, they paid them back by working for them. In this way, they were animals for eight thousand lives, and after that, they were born as humans, but with defects in their faculties. They do not have female roots, so they are called stone women. It has been another eight thousand lives of paying back with labor and it still has not ended yet."

The Buddha told King Prasenajit: TiWei of that time is the Queen. Venerable BianCai is Ven. Maudgalyayana. The five bhikkhus are the five carriers.

King Prasenajit asked, "There are only four carriers, where is the other one?"

The Buddha said, "The other one is in the palace cleaning the bathrooms and feces."

After the Queen heard the causes, she was terrified. She stood up, bowed to the Buddha and said, "As you explained, the five stone women were my teachers in previous lives. Now they are my servants. Am I doing something wrong? We all should respect our teachers, but now they are carrying me like cows and horses. This is terrifying. Please be compassionate and forgive me.

The Buddha answered, "You are enjoying your blessings and there is nothing wrong with it. All living beings have different causes and conditions and so they are receiving different retributions. Kind deeds bring blessings and evil deeds bring woes. At that time, your heart

was straight and clean, and you liked to cultivate blessings. After that, every life, you met great masters; you listened to proper Dharma; you did good deeds and so your blessings gradually increased.

In this life, you met me, due to what you have accumulated before, again you listen to proper Dharma and cultivate in the right way. So, you did not do anything wrong. For the five stone women, they had the evil views, they were greedy, they were hypocritical, they cheated, they did not have compassionate heart and accepted your offerings, so they are paying you back now.”

The Buddha then wanted to transform the stone women and so he asked kindly, “Are you all healthy and happy?”

The five women were angry to hear that. They answered, “Why did you ask this question? We worked diligently day and night and still were whipped and slaved with no time to rest. How could you ask us if we are happy?”

The Buddha said, “Your suffering in this life is because you were hypocritical, greedy and cunning in previous lives. You had evil mind while accepting others’ offerings. After many tossing lives, you are still paying back the karma you created. If you want to stop the suffering, you should sincerely repent of what you have done and correct your evil deeds and cultivate the goodness. In this way, your retribution of suffering will end.”

The stone women listened to what the Buddha said, they were even more angry. They turned their backs and did not want to listen. The Buddha, with his supernatural power, hallucinated another body and stood in front of them, persuading them to repent their evil karma. The five stone women turned their backs again to the east and the Buddha stood in front of them again. The five stone women turned again to the west and the Buddha stood in front of them again. At the end, the Buddha stood in every direction and the stone women yelled, “Now we are vulgar and abominable people already. Why are you forcing us like this?” The hallucinated buddhas disappeared and the Buddha restored to himself.

The Queen was sad to see that the stone women could not accept the Buddha’s teachings. She said to the five stone women, “From now on, we break off the previous causes and you are free now. You don’t have to worry now. The stone women knelt down and pleaded to the Queen, “We serve you well and did not do anything wrong. If there is something you are not



satisfied, please forgive us. We like to serve you like before.” The stone women did not want to leave.

The Buddha told the Queen, “Their evil debt has not been paid back yet. The entanglement of evil debt makes them stay. There is nothing you can do. Let them stay and continue their work here. When the previous debt is paid back, they will naturally leave and be free.”

The Buddha then said to King Prasenajit, “If one cultivates good karma, being modest, humble and respectful, and cultivates according to the Dharma, his merits and virtues would be limitless. Fire would not be able to burn him; water would not be able to cover him; no stealer would be able to get close to him. Like the Queen, she enjoys her blessings like the heavenly beings. If one’s mind is evil, if he is greedy of immediate interests, like these stone women, he will receive retribution of suffering in many kalpas. Though they had the chance to listen to dharma, but due to the hindrance of evil karma, instead, they were angry and jealous. When could they get out of the dark future?

Amitabha! A human body is rare to obtain, and Buddha Dharma is difficult to meet. Bring out the heart to Bodhi and cultivate the ten good deeds! Observe the mind. Be righteous, be honest, be kind, be pure. Protect well the body, the mouth and the mind! Bless you! Wish you all become a Buddha soon! See you next week!