

Why Is It Important to Entreat?

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Na Mo Sakyamuni Buddha! Na Mo Sakyamuni Buddha! Na Mo Sakyamuni Buddha!

Good morning! Welcome to the International Buddha Dharma Society for Cosmic Law to listen to today's Dharma talk! Today is Feb 2ed, 2019. Our February subject is "Entreaty". What is entreaty? Entreaty is to ask someone earnestly or anxiously to do something. Why is it important to entreat? Today, I will share two stories for you to contemplate on.

The first story happened right after the Buddha was enlightened. Some kind gods or heavenly beings asked the Buddha to stay in the world to open the living beings' wisdom.

Having attained perfect enlightenment, the Buddha rose from beneath the bodhi tree. He thought of how to liberate all living beings from the suffering of birth, aging, illness and death. The Buddha saw that liberation was only possible through the practice of what would come to be called the Noble Eightfold Path: By properly understanding the true nature of reality, called "right view", by observing reality correctly, called "right thought", by abstaining from lies and harsh or critical speech, called "right speech", by refraining from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct, called "right action", by living through proper means, called "right livelihood", by being diligent in one's spiritual progress, called "right effort", by single-mindedly focusing on the spiritual progress, called "right mindfulness", and by gathering the mind in deep concentration, called "right meditative concentration". Upholding these eight path factors make the mind clear and one's actions proper. They eliminate the attachment of "I" and "mine" and extinguish the raging fires of ignorance. These eight path factors lead to liberation, and are the sublime, unsurpassable truth.

After enlightenment, the Buddha recalled his great vow to liberate all sentient beings. When he remembered how all beings were suffering, he naturally felt great sympathy for them. He thought, "I have fulfilled my vow, attained enlightenment, and realized the truth. However, I cannot liberate other beings. The Dharma I have come to realize goes against the worldly, deluded view of ordinary beings. If I were to explain the Dharma to them, they would slander and ridicule it. While I would not be affected, their ridicule would cause them to suffer greatly, and be reborn in the lower realms. Many beings are sunk deep in the abyss of greed, anger, and ignorant views, how could they understand the deep wondrous truth of liberation? It would be better for me to enter final nirvana, so that none could slander the Dharma and cause themselves harm."

The Buddha felt compassion and sincere care for all sentient beings, but if the world did not receive the light of the Buddha's enlightenment, it would be shrouded in darkness forever. Without the sweet rain of the Dharma from the Buddha, those who sought liberation would be doomed to grope in the darkness, never finding the gateway to freedom and liberation. With these thoughts in mind, many heavenly beings appeared before the Buddha and spoke, "Most honorable, most precious Buddha, we heavenly beings have assembled with utmost reverence and sincerity to pay homage to you. We wish to formally honor you for realizing the liberation of perfect enlightenment. You have gone beyond birth and death. This is true

happiness, and a great honor for all beings in this world. You are like a lamp of wisdom, and this world, shrouded as it is in darkness, needs your light. Do not worry that ignorant beings will slander the Dharma and commit offenses. That is their own doing! Please uphold your vow and teach the Dharma with your blessed voice. Lead those lost sheep home swiftly, so that they may quickly reach the shore of enlightenment. We pray that you will extend your kindness, unconditionally bestow your compassion, and serve as this world's great liberation."

When he heard the sincere request of these heavenly gods, the Buddha was delighted. He immediately departed from underneath the bodhi tree on Mount Gaya. Bearing in his compassionate heart the wish to liberate all sentient beings, he prepared himself to journey to the city of Kasi.

It's also said that right after the Buddha was enlightened, Mara came and requested the Buddha to enter nirvana. And then Lord Brahma appeared and pleaded the Buddha to stay and lighten the world. From the above story, you would understand that without request from the Brahma King or heavenly beings, the Buddha may enter nirvana right away by following the Mara's request. To request is the cause. The Buddha has no ego and no discrimination, and the Buddha follows the causes and conditions. So, you see how important it is to entreat the Buddha to stay.

And there is another story which happened before the Buddha entered nirvana from **Maha-parinibbana Sutta: Last Days of the Buddha.**

The Buddha stayed in Vesali for the summer retreat. There, he demonstrated illness and was painful head to toe. One day, the Buddha stayed with Ananda and he said to Ananda, "Whosoever, Ananda, has developed, practiced, employed, strengthened, maintained, scrutinized, and brought to perfection the four constituents of psychic power could, if he so desired, remain throughout a world-period or until the end of it. The Tathagata, Ananda, has done so. Therefore, the Tathagata could, if he so desired, remain throughout a world-period or until the end of it."

But the Venerable Ananda was unable to grasp the plain suggestion, the significant prompting, given by the Blessed One. As though his mind was influenced by Mara, he did not beseech the Blessed One, "May the Blessed One remain, O Lord! May the Happy One remain, O Lord, throughout the world-period, for the welfare and happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, well-being, and happiness of gods and men!"

And when for a second and a third time the Blessed One repeated his words, the Venerable Ananda remained silent.

Then the Blessed One said to the Venerable Ananda, "Go now, Ananda, and do as seems fit to you."

"Even so, O Lord." And the Venerable Ananda, rising from his seat, respectfully saluted the Blessed One, and keeping his right side towards him, took his seat under a tree some distance away.

And when the Venerable Ananda had gone away, Mara, the Evil One, approached the Blessed One. And standing at one side he spoke to the Blessed One, saying, "Now, O Lord, let

the Blessed One come to his final passing away; let the Happy One utterly pass away! The time has come for the Parinibbana of the Lord.

"For the Blessed One, O Lord, spoke these words to me, 'I shall not come to my final passing away, Evil One, until my bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, laymen and laywomen, have come to be true disciples — wise, well disciplined, apt and learned, preservers of the Dhamma, living according to the Dhamma, abiding by the appropriate conduct, and having learned the Master's word, are able to expound it, preach it, proclaim it, establish it, reveal it, explain it in detail, and make it clear; until, when adverse opinions arise, they shall be able to refute them thoroughly and well, and to preach this convincing and liberating Dhamma.'

"And now, O Lord, bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, laymen and laywomen, have become the Blessed One's disciples in just this way. So, O Lord, let the Blessed One come to his final passing away! The time has come for the Parinibbana of the Lord.

"For the Blessed One, O Lord, spoke these words to me, 'I shall not come to my final passing away, Evil One, until this holy life taught by me has become successful, prosperous, far-renowned, popular, and widespread, until it is well proclaimed among gods and men.' And this too has come to pass in just this way. So, O Lord, let the Blessed One come to his final passing away, let the Happy One utterly pass away! The time has come for the Parinibbana of the Lord."

When this was said, the Blessed One spoke to Mara, the Evil One, saying, "Do not trouble yourself, Evil One. Before long the Parinibbana of the Tathagata will come about. Three months hence the Tathagata will utterly pass away."

And at the Capala shrine the Blessed One thus mindfully and clearly comprehending renounced his will to live on. And upon the Lord's renouncing his will to live on, there came a tremendous earthquake, dreadful and astonishing, and thunder rolled across the heavens. And the Blessed One beheld it with understanding, and made this solemn utterance:

What causes life, unbounded or confined —
His process of becoming — this the Sage
Renounces. With inward calm and joy he breaks,
As though a coat of mail, his own life's cause.

Then it came to the mind of the Venerable Ananda, "Marvelous it is indeed, and most wonderful! The earth shakes mightily, tremendously! Dreadful and astonishing it is, how the thunders roll across the heavens! What could be the reason, what the cause, that so mighty an earthquake should arise?"

And the Venerable Ananda approached the Blessed One, and respectfully greeting him, sat down at one side. Then he spoke to the Blessed One, saying, "Marvelous it is indeed, and most wonderful! The earth shakes mightily, tremendously! Dreadful and astonishing it is how the thunders roll across the heavens! What could be the reason, what the cause, that so mighty an earthquake should arise?"

Then the Blessed One said, "There are eight reasons, Ananda, eight causes for a mighty earthquake to arise. What are those eight?"

"This great earth, Ananda, is established upon liquid, the liquid upon the atmosphere, and the atmosphere upon space. And when, Ananda, mighty atmospheric disturbances take place, the liquid is agitated. And with the agitation of the liquid, tremors of the earth arise. This is the first reason, the first cause for the arising of mighty earthquakes.

"Again, Ananda, when an ascetic or holy man of great power, one who has gained mastery of his mind, or a deity who is mighty and potent, develops intense concentration on the delimited aspect of the earth element, and to a boundless degree on the liquid element, he, too, causes the earth to tremble, quiver, and shake. This is the second reason, the second cause for the arising of mighty earthquakes.

"Again, Ananda, when the Bodhisatta departs from the Tusita realm and descends into his mother's womb, mindfully and clearly comprehending; and when the Bodhisatta comes out from his mother's womb, mindfully and clearly comprehending; and when the Tathagata becomes fully enlightened in unsurpassed, supreme Enlightenment; when the Tathagata sets rolling the excellent Wheel of the Dhamma; when the Tathagata renounces his will to live on; and when the Tathagata comes to pass away into the state of Nibbana in which no element of clinging remains — then, too, Ananda, this great earth trembles, quivers, and shakes.

"These, Ananda, are the eight reasons, the eight causes for a great earthquake to arise.

"Now there are eight kinds of assemblies, Ananda, that is to say, assemblies of nobles, brahmans, householders, ascetics, of the Four Great Kings, of the Thirty-three gods, of Maras, and of Brahmas.

"And I recall, Ananda, how I have attended each of these eight kinds of assemblies, amounting to hundreds. And before seating myself and starting the conversation or the discussion, I made my appearance resemble theirs, my voice resemble theirs. And so I taught them the Dhamma, and roused, edified, and gladdened them. Yet while I was speaking to them thus, they did not know me, and they would enquire of one another, asking: 'Who is he that speaks to us? Is it a man or a god?'

"Then having taught them the Dhamma, and roused, edified, and gladdened them, I would straightaway vanish. And when I had vanished, too, they did not know me, and they would enquire of one another, asking, 'Who is he that has vanished? Is it a man or a god?'

"And such, Ananda, are the eight kinds of assemblies.

"Now there are eight fields of mastery, Ananda. What are those eight?"

"When one, perceiving forms subjectively, sees small forms, beautiful or ugly, external to himself, and mastering them, is aware that he perceives and knows them as they are — this is the first field of mastery.

"When one, perceiving forms subjectively, sees large forms, beautiful or ugly, external to himself, and mastering them, is aware that he perceives and knows them as they are — this is the second field of mastery.

"When one, not perceiving forms subjectively, sees small forms, beautiful or ugly, external to himself, and mastering them, is aware that he perceives and knows them as they are — this is the third field of mastery.

"When one, not perceiving forms subjectively, sees large forms, beautiful or ugly, external to himself, and mastering them, is aware that he perceives and knows them as they are — this is the fourth field of mastery.

"When one, not perceiving forms subjectively, sees forms external to himself that are blue, blue in color, of a blue luster like the blossoms of flax, or like fine Benares muslin which, burnished on both sides, is blue, blue in color, of a blue luster — when such a one sees forms external to himself that are blue, and mastering them, is aware that he perceives and knows them as they are — this is the fifth field of mastery.

"When one, not perceiving forms subjectively, sees forms external to himself that are yellow, yellow in color, of a yellow luster like the Kanikara blossom, or like fine Benares muslin which, burnished on both sides, is yellow, yellow in color, of a yellow luster — when such a one sees forms external to himself that are yellow, and mastering them, is aware that he perceives and knows them as they are — this is the sixth field of mastery.

"When one, not perceiving forms subjectively, sees forms external to himself that are red, red in color, of a red luster like the Bandhujivaka blossom, or like fine Benares muslin which, burnished on both sides, is red, red in color, of a red luster — when such a one sees forms external to himself that are red, and mastering them, is aware that he perceives and knows them as they are — this is the seventh field of mastery.

"When one, not perceiving forms subjectively, sees forms external to himself that are white, white in color, of a white luster like the morning star, or like fine Benares muslin which, burnished on both sides, is white, white in color, of a white luster — when such a one sees forms external to himself that are white, and mastering them, is aware that he perceives and knows them as they are — this is the eighth field of mastery.

"These, Ananda, are the eight fields of mastery.

"Now there are eight liberations, Ananda. What are those eight?"

"Oneself having form, one perceives forms; this is the first liberation.

"Being unaware of one's own form, one perceives forms external to oneself; this is the second liberation.

"Experiencing loveliness, one is intent upon it; this is the third liberation.

"By utterly transcending the perceptions of matter, by the disappearance of the perceptions of sense-reaction, and by giving no attention to diversity-perceptions, one becomes aware of, attains to, and abides in the sphere of infinite space; this is the fourth liberation.

"By utterly transcending the sphere of infinite space, one becomes aware of, attains to, and abides in the sphere of infinite consciousness; this is the fifth liberation.

"By utterly transcending the sphere of infinite consciousness, one becomes aware of, attains to, and abides in the sphere of nothingness; this is the sixth liberation.

"By utterly transcending the sphere of nothingness, one attains to and abides in the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; this is the seventh liberation.

"By utterly transcending the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, one attains to and abides in the cessation of perception and sensation; this is the eighth liberation.

"These, Ananda, are the eight liberations.

"There was a time, Ananda, when I dwelt at Uruvela, on the bank of the Nerañjara River, at the foot of the goatherds' banyan-tree, soon after my supreme Enlightenment. And Mara, the Evil One, approached me, saying: 'Now, O Lord, let the Blessed One come to his final passing away! Let the Happy One utterly pass away! The time has come for the Parinibbana of the Lord.'

"Then, Ananda, I answered Mara, the Evil One, saying, 'I shall not come to my final passing away, Evil One, until my bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, laymen and laywomen, have come to be true disciples — wise, well disciplined, apt and learned, preservers of the Dhamma, living according to the Dhamma, abiding by appropriate conduct and, having learned the Master's word, are able to expound it, preach it, proclaim it, establish it, reveal it, explain it in detail, and make it clear; until, when adverse opinions arise, they shall be able to refute them thoroughly and well, and to preach this convincing and liberating Dhamma.

"I shall not come to my final passing away, Evil One, until this holy life taught by me has become successful, prosperous, far-renowned, popular, and widespread, until it is well proclaimed among gods and men.'

"And again today, Ananda, at the Capala shrine, Mara, the Evil One, approached me, saying: 'Now, O Lord, bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, laymen and laywomen, have come to be true disciples of the Blessed One — wise, well disciplined, apt and learned, preservers of the Dhamma, living according to the Dhamma, abiding in the appropriate conduct, and having learned the Master's word, are able to expound it, preach it, proclaim it, establish it, reveal it, explain it in detail, and make it clear; and when adverse opinions arise, they are now able to refute them thoroughly and well, and to preach this convincing and liberating Dhamma.

"And now, O Lord, this holy life taught by the Blessed One has become successful, prosperous, far-renowned, popular and widespread, and it is well proclaimed among gods and men. Therefore, O Lord, let the Blessed One come to his final passing away! Let the Happy One utterly pass away! The time has come for the Parinibbana of the Lord.'

"And then, Ananda, I answered Mara, the Evil One, saying, 'Do not trouble yourself, Evil One. Before long the Parinibbana of the Tathagata will come about. Three months hence the Tathagata will utterly pass away.'

"And in this way, Ananda, today at the Capala shrine the Tathagata has renounced his will to live on."

At these words the Venerable Ananda spoke to the Blessed One, saying, "May the Blessed One remain, O Lord! May the Happy One remain, O Lord, throughout the world-period, for the welfare and happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, well being, and happiness of gods and men!"

And the Blessed One answered, saying, "Enough, Ananda. Do not entreat the Tathagata, for the time is past, Ananda, for such an entreaty."

But for a second and a third time, the Venerable Ananda said to the Blessed One, "May the Blessed One remain, O Lord! May the Happy One remain, O Lord, throughout the world-period, for the welfare and happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, well being, and happiness of gods and men!"

Then the Blessed One said: "Do you have faith, Ananda, in the Enlightenment of the Tathagata?" And the Venerable Ananda replied, "Yes, O Lord, I do."

"Then how, Ananda, can you persist against the Tathagata even up to the third time?"

Then the Venerable Ananda said, "This, O Lord, I have heard and learned from the Blessed One himself when the Blessed One said to me: 'Whosoever, Ananda, has developed, practiced, employed, strengthened, maintained, scrutinized, and brought to perfection the four constituents of psychic power could, if he so desired, remain throughout a world-period or until the end of it. The Tathagata, Ananda, has done so. Therefore, the Tathagata could, if he so desired, remain throughout a world-period or until the end of it.'"

"And did you believe it, Ananda?"

"Yes, O Lord, I did."

"Then, Ananda, the fault is yours. Herein have you failed, inasmuch as you were unable to grasp the plain suggestion, the significant prompting given by the Tathagata, and you did not then entreat the Tathagata to remain. For if you had done so, Ananda, twice the Tathagata might have declined, but the third time he would have consented. Therefore, Ananda, the fault is yours; herein have you failed.

"At Rajagaha, Ananda, when dwelling at Vultures' Peak, I spoke to you, saying: 'Pleasant, Ananda, is Rajagaha; pleasant is Vultures' Peak. Whosoever, Ananda, has developed... Therefore, the Tathagata could, if he so desired, remain throughout a world-period or until the end of it.'

"So also at the Banyan Grove, at Robbers' Cliff, at the Sattapanni Cave on the Vebhara Mountain, at the Black Rock of Isigili, at the Serpents' Pool in the Cool Forest, at the Tapoda Grove, at the Bamboo Grove in the Squirrels' Feeding-ground, at Jivaka's Mango Grove, and at Small Nook in the Deer Park I spoke to you in the same words, saying, 'Pleasant, Ananda, is Rajagaha, pleasant are these places. Whosoever, Ananda, has developed... Therefore, the Tathagata could, if he so desired, remain throughout a world-period or until the end of it.'

"But you, Ananda, were unable to grasp the plain suggestion, the significant prompting given you by the Tathagata, and you did not entreat the Tathagata to remain. For if you had done so, Ananda, twice the Tathagata might have declined, but the third time he would have consented. Therefore, Ananda, the fault is yours; herein you have failed.

"So also at Vesali, Ananda, at different times the Tathagata has spoken to you, saying: 'Pleasant, Ananda, is Vesali; pleasant are the shrines of Udena, Gotamaka, Sattambaka, Bahuputta, Sarandada, and Capala. Whosoever, Ananda, has developed... Therefore the Tathagata could, if he so desired, remain throughout a world-period or until the end of it.'

"But you, Ananda, were unable to grasp the plain suggestion, the significant prompting, given you by the Tathagata, and you did not entreat the Tathagata to remain. For if you had done so,

Ananda, twice the Tathagata might have declined, but the third time he would have consented. Therefore, Ananda, the fault is yours; herein you have failed.

"Yet, Ananda, have I not taught from the very beginning that with all that is dear and beloved there must be change, separation, and severance? Of that which is born, come into being, is compounded and subject to decay, how can one say, 'May it not come to dissolution!' There can be no such state of things. And of that, Ananda, which the Tathagata has finished with, that which he has relinquished, given up, abandoned, and rejected — his will to live on — the Tathagata's word has been spoken once for all: 'Before long the Parinibbana of the Tathagata will come about. Three months hence the Tathagata will utterly pass away.' And that the Tathagata should withdraw his words for the sake of living on — this is an impossibility.

From the above two stories, you should have understood why it is so important to entreat.

The Buddha preached forty-nine years and left us Tripitaka and the twelve divisions. In all the sutras, there was always someone pleading the Buddha to expound something except the Amitabha Sutra in which the Buddha proclaimed himself without someone asking for it. It's also because nobody knew Amitabha yet. The universe has the Law of Respect and you ask and then you get answered. Where there is a cause, there is a result. Entreating earnestly and you will get answered. If one time is not enough, then request two times, three times...

Entreaty is also a convenient method. In daily practice, when we chant the name of the Buddha, recite sutras, hold mantra, or meditate, we would ask the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to bless us and purify us. Entreat with honesty and respect. Everything is in our heart.

When we say Na Mo Amitabha, we are entreating;
When we say Na Mo Guan Yin Bodhisattva, we are entreating;
When we invite the eight Vajras, we are entreating;
When we invite the four Bodhisattvas, we are entreating;
The Sutra Opening Verse is entreating;
When we say Na Mo Buddha, Na Mo Dharma, Na Mo Sangha, we are entreating.

Amitabha! We all should learn to entreat and get used to it. To Entreat is one of the important cultivation methods! Thank you! See you next week!

Verse of Transference

May the merit and virtue accrued from this work,
Adorn the Buddhas' Pure Lands,
Repaying four kinds of kindness above,
And aiding those suffering in the paths below.

May those who see and hear of this,
All bring forth the resolve for Bodhi.
And when this retribution body is over,
Be born together in ultimate bliss.