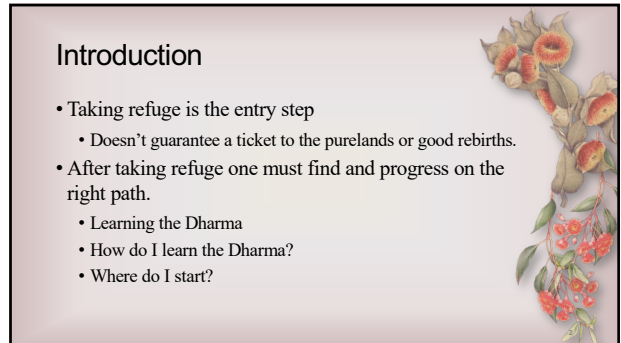
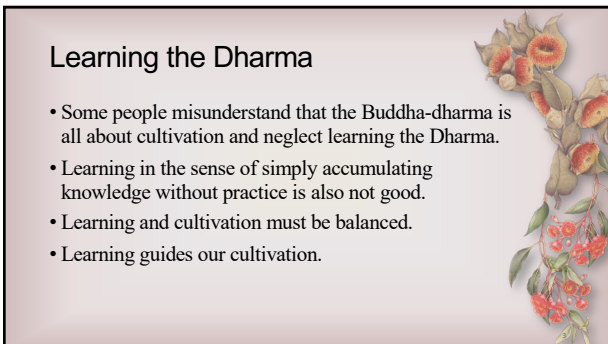


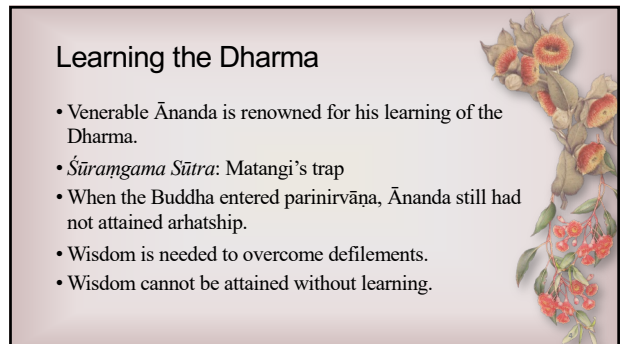
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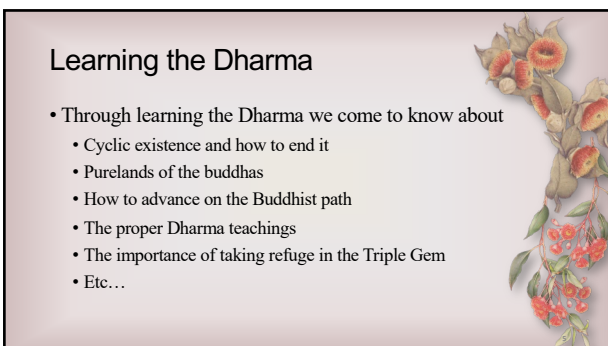
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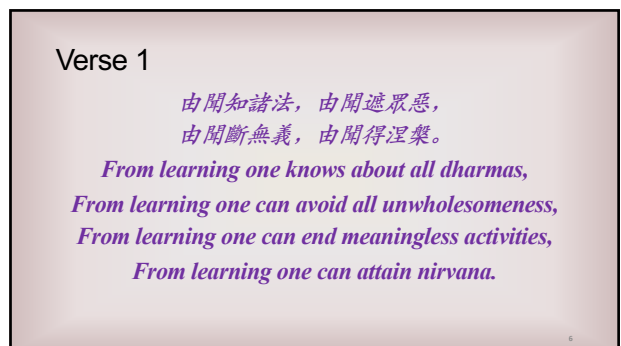
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4



5



6

Learning the Dharma

- Nāgārjuna says there are three sources of learning:
 - From the Buddha, from the Buddha's disciples, and from the scriptures.

In this land the true body of Dharma arises from listening to pure sounds.

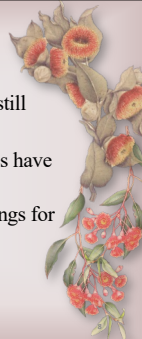
~Śūraṅgama Sūtra~



7

Learning the Dharma

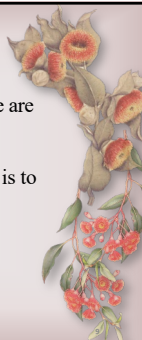
- Though the Buddha is no longer present, we can still learn from the disciples and extant scriptures.
- We should appreciate what the lineage of disciples have done for us in preserving the teachings.
- We can also do our bit to help preserve the teachings for future generations too.



8

Learning the Dharma

- According to Mahāyāna teachings, presently there are buddhas in the ten directions presenting Dharma teachings.
- Learning from the sūtras, treatises and other texts is to rely on the past masters.
- How would you answer the questions:
 - Why should I learn the Dharma?
 - What's in it for me?



9

Benefits of Learning the Dharma

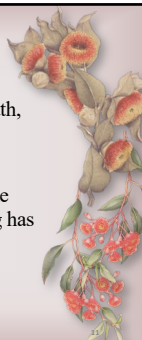
1. Know about all dharmas
 - Dharma: things or phenomena
 - Wholesome and unwholesome things
 - Conditioned and unconditioned phenomena
 - Karma, dependent co-arising...
 - Learn about things that affect our future and how to take control of our future.



10

Benefits of Learning the Dharma

- Dharma: wholesomeness that accords with the truth, transcendental paths and practices.
- Learning the Dharma is lifelong.
- One should become more and more humble. If one becomes more and more arrogant, then something has gone wrong with one's learning.



11

Benefits of Learning the Dharma


1. Know about all dharmas
2. Avoid all unwholesomeness
 - Unwholesomeness: visible and invisible behavior that does not accord with the truth and/or causes harm
 - Actions, speech and thoughts
 - Learn and uphold precepts to cease unwholesome behaviors



12

Benefits of Learning the Dharma

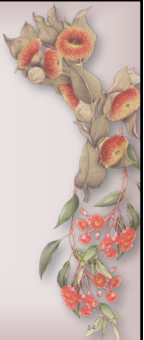
1. Know about all dharmas
2. Avoid all unwholesomeness
3. Tame/end all sorts of meaningless activities
 - Meaningless: not conducive to progression on the path
 - E.g. some extreme ascetic practices



13

Benefits of Learning the Dharma

1. Know about all dharmas
2. Avoid all unwholesomeness
3. Tame/end all sorts of meaningless activities
4. Attain nirvana



14

Verse 2



如器受於水，如地植於種，
應離三種失，諦聽善思念。
*Like a vessel that holds water,
Like sowing seeds in the earth,
One should avoid three faults, and
Listen attentively, contemplate properly, and bear in mind.*

15

15

Simile of a vessel

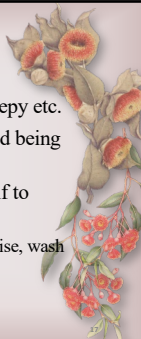

- Vessel that collects drinking water



16

Simile of a vessel

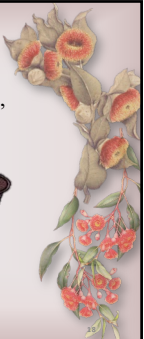

- Inverted refers to inattention, lacking in focus, sleepy etc.
 - Before a Dharma lesson, avoid being too busy, fatigued etc.
 - Find a way to prepare yourself to receive Dharma teachings.
 - Meditate, chanting, light exercise, wash you face, power nap...



17

Simile of a vessel

- Unclean refers to impurities of having biased views, doubts or erroneous attachments.
- Even if one pays attention to the lessons, having impurities will cause the wholesome teachings to become misinterpreted or misunderstood.



18

Simile of a vessel

- Cracked refers to a scattered/restless mind leading to forgetfulness.
- Strengthen our memory of the teachings
 - Reviewing the teachings regularly
 - Taking detailed notes
 - Drawing charts, tables, diagrams etc...



19

Simile of a vessel

One should **listen attentively** to the Dharma, **contemplate properly** on the Dharma, and **skilfully bear in mind** the Dharma teachings.

20

Simile of Sowing Seeds



21

Simile of Sowing Seeds



22

Learning the Dharma

- Cause: learning the Dharma, planting Dharma seed
- Result: experiencing good outcomes, harvesting fruit
- Approach learning properly, plant seeds properly if you want to harvest the final fruit.

23

Avoid These Faults



24

Verse 3

病想醫藥想，殷重療治想，
隨聞如說行，佛說法如鏡。

*View of being ill, seeking a doctor and taking medicine,
View of earnestly undergoing treatment for severe illness.
After listening to the Dharma, practice according to what
one hears,*

The Buddha says the Dharma is like a mirror.

25

Simile of Seeking Treatment

- Buddha says we have 3 kinds of physical and psychological illnesses.
 - Physical: aging, sickness, death
 - Psychological: greed, hatred, ignorance
- Buddha is the great doctor that can treat such illnesses.
- Dharma is the potent medicine
- Saṃgha members are the nurses

26

Simile of Seeking Treatment

- Approach listening to the Dharma like a patient seeking treatment.
- Four views
 - View of being ill
 - View of having a great doctor
 - View of taking medicine
 - View of earnestly undergoing treatment

27

Simile of Seeking Treatment

1. View of being ill

- Be honest with ourselves and look at our shortcomings.
- Our illnesses have caused us to experience endless suffering life after life.
- Our worries, pain, suffering are the symptoms of being sick.
- If we deny our illnesses or avoid treatment, we will not create affinity with the Buddha-dharma.

28

Simile of Seeking Treatment

2. View of having a great doctor

- The illness causing the suffering of life and death is not an illness that ordinary doctors can diagnose let alone treat successfully.
- Buddha and his disciples are the great doctors who can treat this severe illness that has infected everyone.

29

Simile of Seeking Treatment

3. View of taking medicine

- Finding a good doctor does not mean our illness is cured.
- The cure comes when we take the prescribed medicine and undergo the treatment.


30

Simile of Seeking Treatment

3. View of taking medicine

Though I have expounded this sublime wholesome Dharma, if you hear it but do not practice it, then it is like a sick person in possession of good medicine [but does not take it], in which case their illness will never be cured.

~King of Samādhi Sūtra~




31

Simile of Seeking Treatment

4. View of earnestly undergoing treatment

- View the great illness of life and death as severe and requires long-term treatment, no shortcuts or magic medicine.
- Prepare ourselves mentally and physically for an extended duration of treatment.
 - Results may not be immediate, but we must trust the doctor and follow the treatment plan—diligence and dedication.




32

Simile of Seeking Treatment

The Buddha says the Dharma is like a mirror.

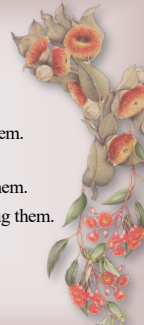
- After learning about what is good and bad, we reflect honestly to see if we have these good and bad traits.
- When we look into a mirror:
 - If we see blemishes—faults, we should repent.
 - If we see beauty—virtues, we can be happy.



33

Simile of Seeking Treatment


- Definition of diligence (Buddhist context)
 - Faults that have arisen, we must work to eliminate them.
 - Faults yet to arise, we must not let them arise.
 - Virtues yet to arise, we should work on developing them.
 - Virtues that have arisen, we should work on perfecting them.



34

Learning the Dharma

- Learning of the Dharma is like education and preparation for a career.
 - Beginners should focus on learning so they can get the fundamentals right.
 - Intermediates with a strong foundation can begin to focus on special topic areas and practices.
 - Advanced levels must not neglect the basics but can focus more on application.

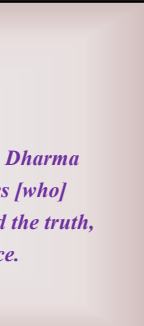


35

Verse 4

*趣入正法者，應親近善士，
證教達實性，悲愍巧為說。*

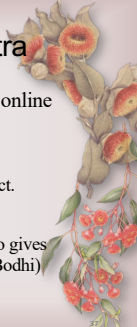
*One who wants to understand the righteous Dharma
Should associate with good spiritual guides [who]
Possess virtues, know the Dharma, penetrated the truth,
Have great compassion and eloquence.*



36

Good Spiritual Guides/Kalyāṇamitra

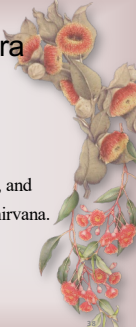
- Many self-learning options now: Youtube, books, online courses etc... BUT
- We still need engagement with a good teacher.
 - Check if our understanding and applications are correct.
- Associate with good wise people.
 - Kalyāṇamitra: a good friend, i.e. a spiritual friend who gives advice, guidance and encouragement (Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi)



37

Good Spiritual Guides/Kalyāṇamitra


- Four factors for entry into sagehood
 - (1) Associating with good spiritual guides,
 - (2) Learning the righteous Dharma,
 - (3) Contemplating the Dharma properly and thoroughly, and
 - (4) Practicing the Noble Eightfold Path for the sake of nirvana.
- What are the requirements to be a kalyāṇamitra?



38

Good Spiritual Guides/Kalyāṇamitra


- Five qualities of a kalyāṇamitra
 1. Accomplished in virtues (three studies)
 - Accomplished in the purification of precepts,
 - Attainment of meditative concentration, and
 - Developed insight wisdom.



39

Good Spiritual Guides/Kalyāṇamitra


- Five qualities of a kalyāṇamitra
 2. Possess the virtue of studying the Dharma
 - Extensive learning of the Dharma
 - Not just having knowledge, but also the ability to teach the Dharma and guide others onto the Mahāyāna using the Dharma.



40

Good Spiritual Guides/Kalyāṇamitra


- Five qualities of a kalyāṇamitra
 3. Penetrated the Truth
 - Accomplished through **wisdom of true realization**, or
 - Thoroughly understanding the doctrines via **wisdom of learning** and **wisdom of contemplation**.
 - Truth here means righteous Dharma



41

Good Spiritual Guides/Kalyāṇamitra

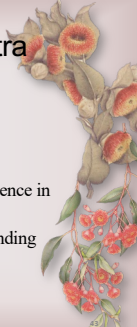
- Five qualities of a kalyāṇamitra
 4. Possession of great compassion
 - Cultivation of great compassion is for the sake of teaching the Dharma with pure motives.
 - Kalyāṇamitra learns the teaches the Dharma to benefit beings, not for fame or fortune.



42

Good Spiritual Guides/Kalyāṇamitra


- Five qualities of a kalyāṇamitra
- 5. Possession of eloquence
 - Have the skill of communication.
 - Able to explain the Dharma clearly and inspire confidence in the listener.
 - Able to skillfully teach learners so they gain understanding and benefits.



43

Good Spiritual Guides/Kalyāṇamitra


- Five qualities of a kalyāṇamitra
 1. Accomplished in virtues (three studies)
 2. Possess the virtue of studying the Dharma
 3. Penetrated the Truth (righteous Dharma)
 4. Possession of great compassion
 5. Possession of eloquence



44

Good Spiritual Guides/Kalyāṇamitra


- Five qualities of a kalyāṇamitra
 - Those with 1/8th of these qualities can still be someone worth associating with.
- **Mahāyāna Nirvana Sūtra**
 - Four types of persons we can rely on as our teacher.
 - Human bodhisattva and sages



45

Good Spiritual Guides/Kalyāṇamitra


- **Mahāyāna Nirvana Sūtra**
 1. Human bodhisattva
 - Still have some defilements BUT
 - Have made the bodhi vow
 - Developed confidence in the Mahāyāna
 - Have some understanding of the Dharma
 - Undertakes deeds that benefit others



46

Good Spiritual Guides/Kalyāṇamitra

- **Mahāyāna Nirvana Sūtra**
 1. Human bodhisattva
 2. Sages of the first or second fruition of arhatship
 3. Sages of the third fruition of arhatship
 4. Sages of the fourth fruition of arhatship




47

Good Spiritual Guides/Kalyāṇamitra

- Qualified kalyāṇamitra with all five qualities are hard to find in our time.
- Those who are more advanced on the path compared to ourselves can still help us progress on this path.

Confucian saying, “When travelling in a group of three, there will certainly be one who can be my teacher.”



48

Verse 5

觀德莫觀失，隨順莫違逆。
佛說滿梵行，學者應尊敬。

*Observe only virtues and not their shortcomings.
Follow them accordingly and do not defy instructions.
Buddha says they help us accomplish the whole path
And so practitioners should respect them.*

49

Associating with Kalyāṇamitra

Observe only virtues and not their shortcomings.

- Only buddhas are perfect.
- Kalyāṇamitra we meet will still have some imperfection.
- Learning is not limited to formal classes.
- Learn from their character: mannerism, how they interact with others, how they deal with matters etc.

50

Associating with Kalyāṇamitra

Observe only virtues and not their shortcomings.

- Focusing on a teacher's shortcomings is of no benefit to us.
- Be mindful of the purpose of associating with good spiritual guides.
- If we can see the virtues of others, then we encounter good teachers everywhere.

51

Associating with Kalyāṇamitra

Follow them accordingly and do not defy instructions.

- Follow the meaning behind the teacher's instructions.
- If you are unclear or have doubts, seek clarification.
 - Don't simply ignore and defy the teachings.
- If the teacher reprimands us, we should guard against developing anger/ill-will towards the teacher.

52

Associating with Kalyāṇamitra

- How do we be a good student and make Dharma teachers happy?
 - Offer dāna sincerely (with wisdom and compassion)
 - Offer assistance
 - Follow their guidance and teachings and practice diligently

Chinese saying,

Honor teachers and respect their doctrines.

53

Associating with Kalyāṇamitra

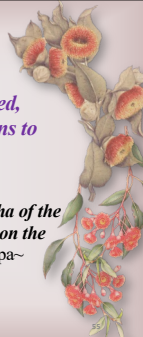
- What if a teacher tells us to do something illegal/immoral?
 - Use a tactful way to indicate that one cannot follow such instructions.
- A good student does not disregard morality.
- Buddhist practitioners should not follow blindly.

54

Associating with Kalyāṇamitra

If towards their teacher a student holds hatred, resentment or hostility, then they have no means to obtain any virtues.

~Sūtra on the Concentration Which Perceives the Buddha of the Present Face to Face, as quoted in *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* by Tsong-kha-pa~



55

Associating with Kalyāṇamitra

Ānanda commented:

A good spiritual guide is one who helps us reach halfway on the path of practice.

Buddha responded:

Do not say such a thing. A good spiritual guide is one who helps us complete the whole path of practice to purity.

Saṃyuktāgama, Sūtra 726

Saṃyutta Nikāya 45.2



56

Associating with Kalyāṇamitra

A Bodhisattva must make many great vows: to be filial to their parents and Dharma teachers, to meet good spiritual advisors, friends, and colleagues who will keep teaching them the Mahayana sūtras and moral codes as well as the Stages of Bodhisattva Practice. They should further vow to understand these teachings clearly so that they can practice according to the Dharma while resolutely keeping the precepts of the buddhas.

~ Brahma Net Sūtra, bodhisattva precept number 35 ~



57

Verse 6

離彼三途苦，不生長壽天，
佛世生中國，根具離邪見。

*Avoid the sufferings of the three evil realms,
Avoid rebirth in the longevity heavens,
Born in a time and place where the Buddha-dharma prevails,
Possess a complete body without erroneous views.*

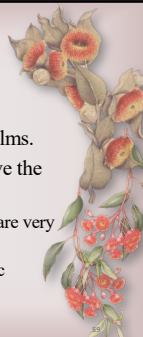
58

58

Eight Difficulties

Avoid the sufferings of the three evil realms,

- Three evil realms: hells, animal, hungry ghost realms.
- Generally, beings of these three realms do not have the conditions to hear the Dharma.
 - Ghost kings and naga kings who appear in the sūtras are very rare cases.
 - They cannot join the saṃgha and take up the monastic precepts.



59

Eight Difficulties

Avoid rebirth in the longevity heavens,

- **Form realm:** Heaven of Non-conceptualization
- **Formless realm:**
 - Heaven of Limitless Space,
 - Heaven of Limitless Consciousness,
 - Heaven of Nothingness,
 - Heaven of Neither Conceptualization Nor Non-conceptualization.
- **Ekottarikāgama:** Heavenly realm is called longevity heavens.

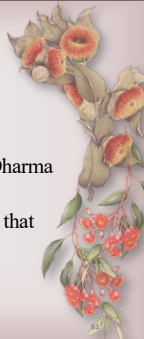


60

Eight Difficulties

*Avoid the sufferings of the three evil realms,
Avoid rebirth in the longevity heavens,*

- The only life form where one can encounter the Dharma and practice it is in the human realm.
- Within the human realm there are also difficulties that must be avoided.

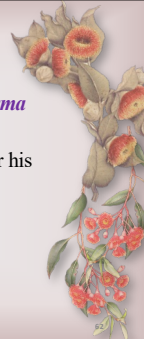


61

Eight Difficulties

Born in a time and place where the Buddha-dharma prevails,

- Must be a human in a **time** when a buddha and/or his Dharma is present.
- Must be living in a **central place**.
 - Central place: any location where there is Dharma.

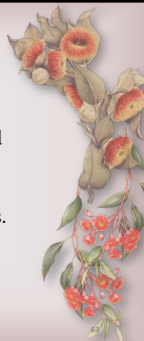


62

Eight Difficulties

Possess a complete body without erroneous views.

- Complete and healthy body is needed to learn and practice the Dharma.
- Avoid being born into a family of other beliefs, developing or possessing wrong or extreme views.
 - Habitual conditioning by wrong views weakens one's connection with the Dharma.



63

Eight Difficulties

- (1-3) Avoid the hell, animal, hungry ghost realms
- (4) Avoid the longevity heavens
- (5-6) Live in a time and place where the Dharma prevails
- (7-8) Possess complete healthy body and hold no wrong views
- We should not take learning the Dharma for granted.



64

Verse 7

*生死流轉中，人身最難得。
憶梵行勤勇，三事勝諸天。*

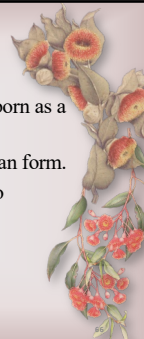
*As we cycle from one life to the next,
Being born as a human is hardest to come by.
Memory, moral conduct and determination,
These three qualities surpass even that of the heavenly beings.*

65

65

Superiority of the Human Form

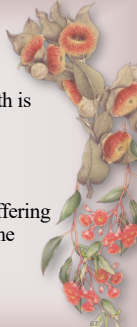
- Cycling from life to life in the six realms, being born as a human is the hardest to come by.
- We should not waste this life after gaining a human form.
- Value of the human form can be viewed from two aspects.



66

Superiority of the Human Form


1. Within the six realms, the chance of a human birth is rare.
 - Simile of soil caught in one's fingernail
 - Simile of tortoise surfacing for air
- Human life is not perfect. There are hardships, suffering and setbacks. But it is indeed very hard to attain the human form.



67

Superiority of the Human Form


2. Humans have three unique qualities
 - Memory, moral conduct and determination in humans are superior to that found in the beings of the other realms.
 - **Superiority of Memory:** remember past and preserve historical experience and so our contemplation and inference abilities are more advanced.



68

Superiority of the Human Form

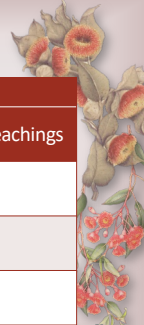
2. Humans have three unique qualities
 - **Superiority of Moral Conduct:** self-sacrifice, self-control to undertake moral conduct.
 - **Superiority of determination:** endurance and tolerance of hardships to achieve goals.



69

Superiority of the Human Form

Buddha's Virtues	Unique Human Qualities	
	Buddhist Teachings	Confucian Teachings
Prajñā	Memory	Knowledge
Great Compassion	Moral Conduct	Benevolence
Bodhi Vow	Determination	Courage

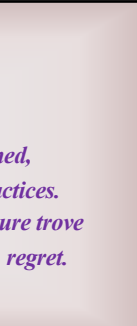


70

Verse 8

難得今已得，精勤修法行，
莫使入寶山，垂手歎空歸。


*What is hard to attain has been attained,
And so diligently undertake Dharma practices.
Do not waste time like one entering a treasure trove
Who leaves empty-handed and sighs with regret.*



71

Don't Waste This Life

- “*Life arises between each breath*”
- Diligently learn and practice the Dharma
 - Simile of entering a treasure trove and leaving empty-handed.
- Diligence must be balanced so you can walk the path for the long term.
 - Hare and tortoise race



72

Don't Waste This Life

- *The Way to Buddhahood*, Chapter 5
- Four practices of a bodhisattva for endurance
 - Confidence
 - Determination
 - Joy
 - **Rest**



73

Verse 9

聞法而發心，隨機成差別。

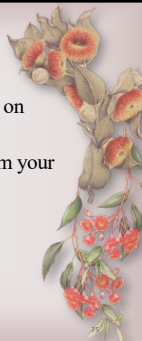
**After hearing the Dharma, one should make aspirations.
According to different capacities, different paths
manifest.**

74

74

Aspirations and Different Paths

- Aspirations are our guiding motivation to keep us on track.
- Makes you think about what you want to gain from your practice.
 - Different people can have different aspirations.
- Reflect on your aspirations regularly



75

Aspirations and Different Paths

- Aspirations are not random mental activities
 - Requires development of conviction and vow(s)
 - Like an athlete aiming for Olympic Gold needs to plan their course of training etc.

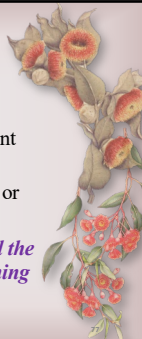


76

Aspirations and Different Paths

- Dharma is essentially one path.
- Manifestations of many paths is to cater to different spiritual capacities.
- Buddhas or great bodhisattvas will provide easier or more advanced teachings tailored to the listener.

The Buddha uses a universal voice to expound the Dharma while the audience receives the teaching that accords to their capacity.



77

Aspirations and Different Paths


- Buddhas and great bodhisattvas have the skill of universal voice.
- Ordinary Dharma teachers generally do not have this skill.
 - Their teachings may not suit everyone in the audience.



78

Aspirations and Different Paths

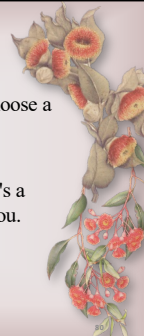
- Our aspirations and vows determine our spiritual capacity.
- Hence it is important to have aspirations and make vows.
- The teachings you hear may or may not be best suited to you, unless the teacher has the skill of universal voice.



79

Aspirations and Different Paths

- Reflect on your own aspirations and vows and choose a practice that is right for you.
- Don't adopt a practice just because it is popular.
- All of the methods in the Dharma are effective, it's a matter of finding which method is effective for you.



80

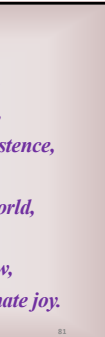
Verse 9-10

下求增上生，現樂後亦樂。中發出離心，
涅槃解脫樂。最上菩提心，悲智究竟樂。

*The lower-level practitioners seek a better future existence,
To attain the joys of present and future lives.*

*The middle-level practitioners seek to leave this world,
To attain nirvana and the bliss of liberation.*


*The upper-level practitioners seek the bodhi vow,
To attain great compassion, perfect wisdom and ultimate joy.*



81

Three Types of Aspirations

General Categories of Aspirations	General Types of Practitioners
Aspiration for a better future	Lower-level
Aspiration for liberation	Middle-level
Aspiration for the bodhi vow	Upper-level




82

Three Types of Aspirations

General Categories of Aspirations	General Types of Practitioners
Aspiration for a better future	Lower-level

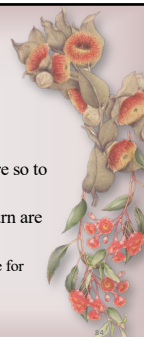
- Lower-level is in the context of aspiration. These people are quite noble compared to ordinary beings.
- Better future existence covers all aspects of existence.
- This is a noble aspiration, but we can aim higher.



83

Three Types of Aspirations

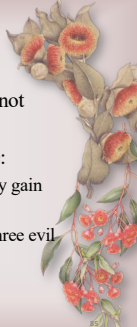
- Better future aims for human or heavenly form.
- Two sub-groups of aspirations for a better future
 1. Aim for happiness in this present life and even more so to gain happiness in future lives.
 2. Seek fortune and happiness in future lives and in turn are willing to bear more suffering in this present life.
- Some extreme teachings about trading suffering in this life for fortune in future lives are not proper Dharma teachings.



84

Three Types of Aspirations

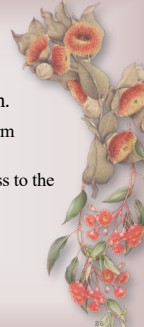
- Lower-level description refers to their aspiration, not their personal character.
- With the goal of a better future in cyclic existence:
 - If they practice the transcendental paths, they will only gain human or heavenly rebirths.
 - If they commit evil deeds, they can still fall into the three evil realms.



85

Three Types of Aspirations

- Lower-level aspiration will not result in liberation.
 - One can progress through the Desire realm to the Form heavens and Formless heavens with this goal.
 - Once all the good karma is exhausted, one will regress to the lower realms.




86

Three Types of Aspirations

General Categories of Aspirations	General Types of Practitioners
Aspiration for liberation	Middle-level


- Realizing the lower-level goal is not sufficient, some then aspire to the middle-level goal of liberation from cyclic existence.
- The goal of liberation is more thorough than a better future.



87

Three Types of Aspirations

- Middle-level aspiration has two types of practitioners.
 - Śrāvaka vehicle.
 - Pratyekabuddha vehicle
- Aspiration has an influence on results.
- BUT one's choice of teachings, practices and behavior must also accord with their aspirations.
 - Otherwise one can still regress.




88

Three Types of Aspirations

General Categories of Aspirations	General Types of Practitioners
Aspiration for the bodhi vow	Upper-level


- Bodhi means awaken
- Buddhahood is called unsurpassed supreme awakening/bodhi.
 - Awakening is the core but encompasses all other virtues.



89

Three Types of Aspirations


- Upper-level aspiration for bodhi and the middle-level aspiration for liberation are different.
 - Simile of rescuing people in the sea.
- The aspiration for unsurpassed supreme bodhi can only be achieved with a buddha's perfect wisdom, great compassion and strength.
- Aspiration for bodhi = aiming for Buddhahood



90

Three Types of Aspirations

- Upper-level aspiration for bodhi
 - Bodhi vow: seek Buddha's awakening and deliver sentient beings from suffering.
- Cultivate the bodhisattva practices
- Buddhahood includes the ultimate joy of great nirvana
 - This is the most thorough and ultimate aspiration.

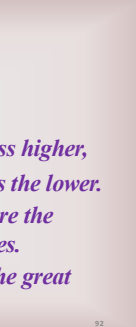


91

Verse 11

依下能起上，依上能攝下；
隨機五三異，歸極唯一大。

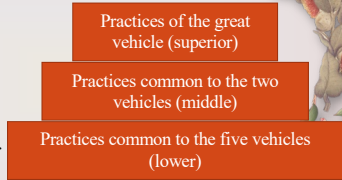
*Relying on the lower-level one can progress higher,
Relying on the upper-level one encompasses the lower.
Catering to spiritual capacities there are the
differences of five and three vehicles.
Reverting to the ultimate, there is only the great
vehicle.*



92

Relationship Between the Paths

- Lower and middle levels are the supports for the upper level.
- Higher levels encompass the lower levels.



93

Relationship Between the Paths

By achieving the aspiration for a better future existence one can gradually achieve the definitive superior state.

~Nāgārjuna~



Agama Sūtra: "Normal path of all the Buddha's."


94

Relationship Between the Paths

*First one should tame and end that which is not fortuitous,
then one breaks through attachment to "I",
lastly one ends ALL views,
understanding this is to possess skillfulness...*

The supremely awakened one taught this skillfulness, which is like a ladder.

~ Āryadeva bodhisattva ~



95

Relationship Between the Paths



- Mahāyāna: 500 yojanas
- Śrāvakayāna: 300 yojanas
- Mutual encompassment: higher level practices encompass the practices in the preceding levels.
- Lotus Sūtra simile of travelling a distance.



96

Relationship Between the Paths

The Way to Buddhahood	Ven Taixu	The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment
Lower-level	Practices common to the five vehicles	Stages of the path shared with persons of small capacity
Middle-level	Practices common to the three vehicles	Stages of the path shared with persons of medium capacity.
Upper-level	Practices unique to the bodhisattva vehicle	Stages of the path for persons of great capacity.

• gòng 共 = common / shared

97

Relationship Between the Paths

Spiritual Capacities	Two Paths	Five Vehicles
Lower-level	Worldly path	Human and heavenly vehicles
Middle-level	Transcendental path	Śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles
Upper-level	Transcendental path	Bodhisattva vehicle

Buddha's true intention: all Dharma practices are for the purpose of attaining Buddhahood.

98

Relationship Between the Paths

Different terms referring to the same thing	Context it is used
Mahāyāna	Comparison with the two vehicles
One vehicle	How all practices lead to Buddhahood
Bodhisattva vehicle	Emphasis on the causal stage
Buddha vehicle	Emphasis on the resultant stage

99

Verse 12

不滯於中下，亦不棄中下，
圓攝向佛乘，不謗於正法。

*Do not remain at the middle or lower levels,
Yet do not abandon the middle and lower levels.
Perfectly embrace all and head towards the Buddha vehicle.
Do not be overambitious and end up defaming the righteous Dharma.*

100

Keep Moving Forward

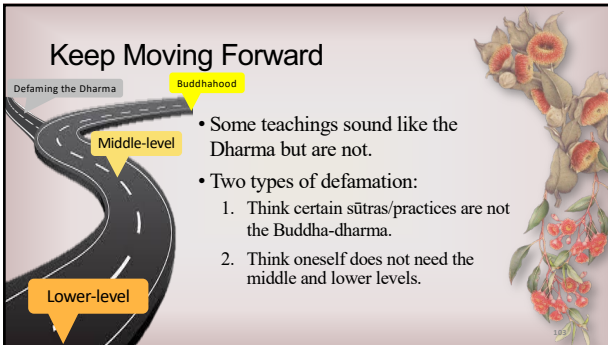
101

Keep Moving Forward

- Aspire for Buddhahood but do not abandon the earlier levels.
- Guard against being over ambitious or getting caught in superfluous talk or mysticism.
- Be honest and know your capacity and what practices are best for you now.

102

Keep Moving Forward



Defaming the Dharma

- Some teachings sound like the Dharma but are not.
- Two types of defamation:
 1. Think certain sūtras/practices are not the Buddha-dharma.
 2. Think oneself does not need the middle and lower levels.

103

Keep Moving Forward

Defaming the Dharma:

- Middle/lower levels do not apply to them
 - Reject the basic teachings on cause and effect, wholesome and evil karmic results etc.
- Only need one Mahāyāna sūtra/mantra/buddha...
- Just need to practice, no need to listen or contemplate the Dharma.

104

Keep Moving Forward

Defaming the Dharma:

- Some people's actions seem minor, but in terms of the Dharma's propagation such defamation creates obstacles for themselves and others.

Faith without wisdom nurtures ignorance.
~Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣā Śāstra~

105

Structure of Chapter 2

- Developing the mind that wants to learn the Dharma
 - Verses 1-3
- What is and how to rely on the 'Good Spiritual Guide'
 - Verses 4-5
- Encouragement to advance in the practice
 - Verses 6-8
- Different paths
 - Verse 9-12

106

Developing the Mind That Wants to Learn the Dharma

- Inspiring delight in the Dharma
 - Contemplation of the virtues/benefits gained.
- Discarding faults – vessel and planting seeds
- Determination to practice – doctor simile
- Developing diligence – Dharma is like a mirror

107

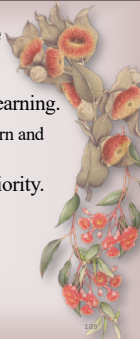
What is and how to rely on the Good Spiritual Guide

- Crucial factor for entering the righteous Dharma.
- Know the qualities a good spiritual guide should possess.
- Our attitude when learning from good spiritual guides.
- The good spiritual guide brings about the perfection of the whole path.

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Encouragement to Advance in the Practice

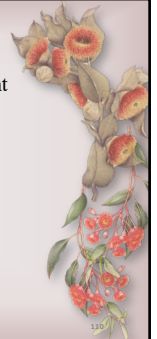
- Reflect on the eight difficulties that obstruct our learning.
 - Among the five realms, it is very rare to be able to learn and practice the Dharma.
- Reflect on the value of being human and its superiority.
 - Perfecting the human being is attaining Buddhahood.



109

Different Paths

- Differences in spiritual foundations yield different aspirations.
- Three general groupings/aspirations
- Harmony of the three levels
 - Mutually supporting and encompassing
 - Convergence to the one goal



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*Hope this year's material helps you find or
rekindle your motivation to learn the Dharma and
build a good foundation for your journey on this
spiritual path.*



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