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# **The Great Buddha**

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**Buddhism in Every Step 4**

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# The Great Buddha

Dear Venerables and Dharma Friends:

I believe that all of you seated here today are students of the Buddha. As sons and daughters, we must know our parents. As students of the Buddha, how can we not know about the Buddha? Perhaps some of you in the audience may say, “How can I not know the Buddha? Just look at the statues of the Buddha here.” Do we know the Buddha just because we see these statues? No, we certainly cannot. It is most regretful if we, as students of the Buddha, do not know about the Buddha. There is a verse that aptly describes a common feeling among students of the Buddha in this Period of Declining Dharma. It states,

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“When the Buddha came to this world, I was mired in depravity. Now that the Buddha has gone into parinirvana, I have come into this world. I regret that because of my many karmic hindrances, I have not been able to see the golden body of the Buddha.”

Over the last fifty years, I have learned a lot about the Buddha. I did a lot of research when I authored the book *The Life of Sakyamuni Buddha*, so one can say I have a little more knowledge about the Buddha. Today, I want to share with you what I know about the Buddha, and to introduce to all of you the real essence of the Buddha.

Some of you may think that the Buddha is an almighty immortal with all kinds of powers, who can come and go without a trace. If you think this is the Buddha I am going to share with you, you will be disappointed. You may think that the Buddha is full of loving-kindness, and will grant you whatever you ask for in your prayers. This is not the case, either. I believe most people prefer the Buddha that sits cross-legged on the altar—serene, peaceful, quiet, and still. If the Buddha spoke and instructed us now, “Don’t do this,” or “That’s not the case,” we might not like the Buddha as much. Perhaps because the

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Buddha is not critical of us, does not reproach us or argue with us, we are drawn to him. We willingly pay respect and prostrate to him.

Now, I will try to describe the Buddha through the following ten questions. Hopefully, we can learn the real essence of the Buddha through these questions.

## **I. Has the Buddha ever been angry?**

We often get mad; was this also true of the Buddha? Of course, the Buddha did! It is just that [the reasoning for] the Buddha's anger is different from ours.

We are incensed when others pick on us or get in our way. When our interests are compromised, we get irritated. This was not the case with the Buddha. The Buddha would not have minded if you were not nice to him; however, the Buddha became angry if you mistreated others. Let me illustrate this point with the following episode from a sutra.

Once, the Buddha was traveling with his group of bhiksus to preach the Dharma. Among these bhiksus, some were impatient and quick-tempered, while others had a calmer disposition. While on their way,

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way, they stopped at a temple to rest for the night. As soon as they settled down, the impatient bhiksus quickly claimed the available beds: “This one’s mine!” “That one’s mine!” In this fashion, all the available beds were taken in no time, and Sariputra, the Buddha’s chief disciple was left without a bed. As a result, he decided to practice walking meditation outdoors. When the Buddha saw Sariputra strolling outside, the Buddha went up to him and asked, “Sariputra, it’s quite late now. Why aren’t you in bed and still wandering about in the yard?” Sariputra then recounted to the Buddha all that had happened: “We have a lot of bhiksus and there aren’t enough beds to go around. Some of the new bhiksus wanted to find a bed to retire for the night, so I let them rest first.” When the Buddha heard this, he was really angry. He immediately called everyone to a meeting where he preached about the respect one should have for one’s elders.

When we do not respect our elders, the relationship between the elderly and the young is turned upside down, and society becomes disorderly. In the past, parents would guide and remind their children, “Why won’t you listen to your Mom and Dad?”

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Nowadays, children complain to their parents, “Mom and Dad, why you don’t listen to me?” Even very young children know how to bargain for what they want, “If you don’t buy this for me, I won’t study hard for your sake!” In the past, students would humbly accept what their teachers taught them. Now, it is fashionable for students to criticize their teachers, “Teacher so-and-so isn’t very nice. Every time I make a suggestion, he or she always turns me down.” In the past, employers gave instructions to employees on what to do. These days, employees make demands of their employers, “The food in the company cafeteria needs to improve,” or “You need to give me a raise of this much so I can make due.” In the military of the past, officers gave commands that their subordinates would have follow. Now, subordinates can openly criticize the officers. When there is no standard for our behavior, the fabric of society is weakened and social morality cannot be maintained. It is no wonder that disorderliness rules.

The Buddha would get angry with those who were only concerned about their own welfare and had no regard for others’ hardships. The Buddha would also become displeased when a prank, even that of a

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youngster, ended up hurting others. Let me illustrate with the following example. Before the Buddha renounced his life of a prince, he had a son by the name of Rahula. When Rahula was still a young child, he followed in his father's footsteps and renounced his household life to become a monk. Because he was still young, he was very mischievous and liked to tell little white lies. Once, someone asked Rahula, "Do you know where the Buddha is right now?" Although he knew that the Buddha was in the room to his left, he purposely pointed to the right and said, "The Buddha is over there." When the person came back empty-handed, Rahula was very pleased with himself. Later, the Buddha learned of this incident and called on Rahula to come before him. When Rahula saw the Buddha's stern expression, he did not dare say a word. Quietly, he went to fetch a basin of water for the Buddha to wash his feet in, so that the Buddha would soon start to preach. After the Buddha washed his feet, he told Rahula, "Take this basin of water and drink it!" Rahula was shocked at what he had just heard, and replied, "Honorable Buddha, the water used for washing feet is very filthy and isn't suitable for drinking!"

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The Buddha instructed, “When you tell lies, your mouth is as filthy as the dirty water in this basin. Nobody would want you, either!”

Rahula then went to discard the water. Afterwards, the Buddha told him, “Use this basin to hold your food!”

Rahula appeared very troubled and said, “Honorable Buddha, this basin used for washing feet is very dirty; I can’t put my food in it!”

The Buddha reproached him, “When your mouth tells lies often, it’s just as filthy as this basin. It can’t be used to store anything wholesome.”

As soon as he had spoken, the Buddha kicked the basin. The basin rolled noisily for some distance, and Rahula was frightened. The Buddha asked Rahula, “Are you worried that I may ruin the basin?”

“No, the basin is cheap. If it’s broken, I can buy a new one. It doesn’t matter!”

The Buddha again reprimanded Rahula, “Children who tell lies are just like this cheap basin; no one would feel bad even if it’s ruined.”

From this instance, we learn that the Buddha does not put up with those who lie to and deceive others. The manner the Buddha uses to teach Rahula

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stems from the high hopes parents have for their children, which is why we say, “When the love is deep, the reprimand is severe.” The Buddha’s anger arises from compassion, not hatred. The love parents have for their children is very much like the love of the Buddha!

## **II. Has the Buddha ever been sad, has he ever cried?**

Have you ever thought of the Buddha being so sad that he cried? In reality, there were times when the Buddha despaired and also times that he cried.

Mara (the evil one) once told the Buddha, “We don’t like how your Dharma has become so widely accepted; from now on, we’ll fight you every step of the way!”

Unperturbed, the Buddha replied, “I’m not afraid of your subversion.”

“Everywhere we go, we will criticize you, slander you.”

The Buddha said calmly, “I’m not afraid!”

“We’ll strike at you with clubs, knives, and guns!”

“Clubs, knives, and guns-they don’t frighten

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me!”

After this exchange, Mara thought to himself, “The Buddha isn’t afraid of anything.” He then called out, “Then we’ll become your disciples. We’ll wear the monastic robes, eat monastic food, but we will not walk your Path. When you talk about the three cultivation practices of precepts, concentration, and wisdom, we’ll practice the three defilements of greed, hatred, and ignorance. We’ll be diametrically opposed to the Buddhist Dharma; in this way, we will undermine you.”

At this point, the Buddha compassionately thought about all the catastrophes sentient beings of the Period of Declining Dharma would then have to face. He was moved to tears; finally the Buddha cried.

This is what is meant by the saying, “The worm not only lives on the body of the lion, it even feeds on its flesh.” Today, there are many people who claim to be disciples of the Buddha: they carry the Buddha’s banner and wear monastic robes, yet they are a disgrace to the good name of Buddhism. How could the Buddha not be heavyhearted? When children misbehave, the whole family suffers. Similarly, when his

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followers turned against him, the Buddha felt sad and tearful.

One way to handle these Buddhist imposters within the sangha is to give them the silent treatment and not pay them any attention. This, however, is a passive response. Imposters outside of the sangha are much harder to control. Thus, in Buddhism, it is important to implement sound organizational structures, education, and training as a means to maintain the integrity of the sangha.

### **III. Did the Buddha have any moments of joy?**

Most definitely. The Buddha lived in happiness and joy. There are two aspects of the Buddha's daily living: for the benefit of self and for the benefit of others.

Let me try to explain this simply. What we spend on our own clothing, food, housing, and transportation is for our own benefit. What we spend on charity to help those in need is for the benefit of others. In the Buddha's case, the Dharma joy of the Truth and the serenity of Chan meditation were for the benefit of self. The Buddha's preaching, his compassion, his

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majestic aura, and all the things he did for sentient beings were for the benefit of others. As students of Buddhism, each of us should learn how to practice Buddhism; we should understand which aspects of Buddhism are for the benefit of self and which are for the benefit of others. Paying respect to the Buddha, chanting, sitting meditation, practicing patience, applying the right effort, and upholding the precepts are for the benefit of self. When we compliment, help, come to the aid of, act compassionately towards, give charity to, and build good causal relationships with others, we are practicing Buddhism for the benefit of others.

The fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month is Ullambana Day, also called Sangha Day. On this day, the ever-present joy of the Buddha is most special, so this day is also called The Buddha's Joyous Day. Why was the Buddha especially joyous on this particular day? During the time of the Buddha, all the bhiksus would begin their summer retreat on the fifteenth day of the fourth lunar month. On the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month, they would have completed intense cultivation during the retreat. Devotees would often make offerings to the sangha on this occasion;

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the resulting merits could then be dedicated to their ancestors, so that they might share the blessings of the bhiksus' cultivation. It was truly a joyous occasion for both the human and celestial realms! As a result, the Buddha was especially joyous.

The reason I want to bring this up is to emphasize that we need to understand the Dharma. Buddhism is a religion that promotes happiness, and we should constantly try to develop a joyous character. Some people always look depressed and melancholic before long, they live their whole lives amidst sadness and grief. This is most unfortunate! There is a saying, "A face showing no anger is a true offering; a mouth speaking no anger emits wonderful fragrance. A heart with no anger is a priceless treasure. Truth as such is eternal and can never be destroyed." Not only should we learn to arrest our anger and not speak of it or show it in our face, we should learn to prevent anger from arising. This way, our hearts will not harbor any anger; peace and happiness will show through our face, and everything will turn out nicely.

We all have to remember that it does not matter that we might not have anything tangible to offer to others. What is most important is to offer happiness to

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others. Our days may be filled with problems and headaches, but when we sleep, we should leave them behind and not bring them to bed with us. When we eat, we should eat our meals happily rather than be consumed by our own sorrows. We should not carry unhappiness with us from one day to the next, and we should not constantly display our sadness so as to wear people down. Take me for example, although I have many students and devotees, they never come to me when they are happy. They seek me out only when they have problems and headaches. I ask them jokingly sometimes, “When I see all of you, I express my joy and share happy words with you every day. Why do you only give me your problems and headaches? It becomes unbearable for me to see worried faces all the time. In the future, why don’t you share your happiness rather than your sorrows with me? How does that sound to you?”

I have always maintained that we should greet others with three pleasantries, such as “You look great!” or “What a nice day!” or “Have a good day!” In other words, when we greet others with three pleasantries, we can make others feel comfortable.

Some people are very stingy with their words;

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this is why we encourage greeting others with these three pleasantries. But, when we fight, we should stop after one round. Let me give you an example. A wife slaves over the stove to prepare dinner for her husband. She sets the table and tells her husband, “Time for dinner.” The husband becomes annoyed and replies, “Alright, alright. Wait a minute!”

This is one round of exchange, and the wife should stop at this point. If the wife continues another round of exchange, “Every time I call you, you always say ‘Alright, alright.’ How many times do you want to be called before you actually come!”

Now the husband becomes really irritated and retorts, “Don’t you see how busy I am?”

The wife gets even by saying, “Busy, busy! You’re always busy. Don’t you realize I’m busy too?”

In this way, after two or three rounds of heated exchange, a fight erupts. So, please remember we should always stop after one round. In the old days, duels were often settled after one round. If the conflict were to continue, there would be no end to it! If we keep fighting, how can we lead happy lives?

As Buddhists, we should learn from the Buddha and give others happiness. As members of Fo Guang

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Shan, we should learn the real essence of the Buddha. We, as Fo Guang Buddhists, should abide by the following four objectives: to give others confidence, to give others happiness, to give others convenience, and to give others hope.

#### **IV. Was there any enjoyment in the Buddha's life?**

We all hope that we can enjoy a better life. Even in coming to this Dharma talk, we want to have a good seat where we can sit comfortably, or hope that the room is air-conditioned, the floor is carpeted, and the list goes on. This is the enjoyment of our daily living. People pursue fame and wealth to improve their living conditions, so that they can better enjoy life. In actuality, fame and wealth can bring forth its own set of problems. The enjoyment we gain from our senses is very limited. The eyes crave pleasing sights, the ears crave delightful sounds, and the body craves the feel of soft and luxurious clothes. But when these sensations pass, we soon feel empty and lonely again. This is no different from when a party ends, and dirty dishes and trash are left behind. The price we pay for worldly fame and wealth is just

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enormous. When we are controlled by the external environment, we cannot find inner peace. If we are not affected by what we see and hear, then there is nothing that binds us. The Dharma joy within us will begin to flow; this will bring us lasting enjoyment.

One of the Buddha's disciples was the former Prince Bhadrika. Once, while he was doing sitting meditation with the other bhiksus, he suddenly called out, "This is happiness! Happiness!" It so happened that the Buddha was passing by, so he asked, "Who yelled out 'happiness.' What brings such happiness? Why did he yell happiness?" Bhadrika replied, "In the past while I was still living in the palace, I was constantly surrounded by guards, yet I was afraid that others would harm or assassinate me. In the palace, the food was of the best quality and the bed was very comfortable, yet I didn't enjoy the food nor did I sleep soundly. Now that I've renounced the secular life, I can cultivate in the remote hills and woods. Now that I feel free, I'm not afraid of anything. I find the simple vegetables and carrots that I get from the alms rounds very delicious. When I sit here to meditate, I just feel cleansed and free from worries. I enjoy the path of cultivation so much that I can't control

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myself and must cry out with elation!” Is this not another form of enjoyment?

What kind of happiness does the Buddha enjoy? It is the happiness of nirvana. This happiness has four special characteristics: eternity, bliss, true nature, and purity. His happiness was to feel the duration of life, to feel the natural joy of life, to feel the existence of life, and to feel the simplicity of life. Nowadays, a lot of people are so busy that they forget about themselves. When they lose touch with themselves, they also lose touch with happiness.

Serene happiness is a characteristic of nirvana. If we truly understood Buddhism, we would know we can easily find serene happiness in our daily lives. We usually say, “Helping others is a source of happiness,” “To be content is to be happy,” and “With patience, comes peace.” We can enjoy happiness in contentment. We can even find happiness when we are truly remorseful. We can also find happiness by showing respect to others, having faith, and remaining calm and peaceful. We should not look for happiness from our senses; the source of happiness lies within our hearts. We will find happiness when we find our hearts. There is happiness in reciting the

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Buddha's name, in meditation, and in paying respect to the Buddha. Sometimes, when you do sitting meditation, you will discover that all your thoughts are calm and no desire is in sight; you want to stay in this peaceful Dharma joy forever. Is this not happiness? Or, we can be proactive by aiding those in need and helping repair roads and bridges—then we can also enjoy happiness. When we build good causal relationships with others, we will find support from all sides and be happy.

The Buddhism of the past had a tendency to equate cultivation with asceticism. Actually, this is quite misleading. Buddhism is a religion of happiness; it does not dictate suffering to its devotees. When it talks about “suffering,” it indicates that suffering abounds in life and that it is a phase that we have to go through to reach happiness. A butterfly has to come out of its cocoon before it can fly. A tree trunk has to be sawed down before it can be of any use. In Buddhism, we have to cross the sea of suffering before we can reach liberation. When others reprimand us, criticize us, or even slander us, we should not get angry but rather thank others for giving us the opportunity to rid ourselves of unwholesome karma.

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When others defraud us of our hard-earned money, we might become very frustrated if we lack an understanding of the Dharma; however, if we practice the Dharma, we would look at the situation as a way to pay off old debts. To be free of debt and worry, is this not cause for happiness? In this way, we can even find happiness in adversity. Like the Buddha, we would be able to enjoy the serene happiness of nirvana.

In this world, we are happy when good things happen. When we have the Dharma, we will be capable of handling misfortunes and disappointments with equal ease. As the saying goes, “When the mind is pure, the land is pure,” we can use our pure and calm mind to transform the world. Grief is bodhi, and affliction is happiness. If your mom and dad are very strict, you need not be distressed. You should think to yourself, “It’s good my parents are stern with me; they help me stay out of trouble.” With every situation in this world, as long as we can change our perspectives, we will always find happiness!

Let me share with you a secret of mine. For many years now, unless I am dining with guests, I always eat my dinner standing up. Usually there are no chairs

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in my living quarters, so I just stand up and eat. I doubt if any of you noticed. I lead a very simple life, yet I do not enjoy my meals any less.

The life of the Buddha might have been very simple and fraught with hardship, but because of the Buddha's prajna-wisdom, he always enjoyed the wondrous happiness of nirvana.

## **V. Did the Buddha have affection?**

Do you think the Buddha had affection? We Buddhists like to deify the Buddha and claim that the Buddha was different from other human beings. Because affection can be tainted and can bring us affliction, we believe the Buddha did not have affection. Yet, this is not so. The Buddha was rich in affection! The Buddha's affection, however, was to love all sentient beings equally. The Buddha's affection was the loving-kindness that was described in the saying, "Great loving-kindness without conditions, great compassion as we are all one." A step above love is loving-kindness, and above loving-kindness is "Great loving-kindness without conditions; great compassion as we are all one." It is difficult for us to understand the love and affection of the

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Buddha.

What is meant by “great loving-kindness without conditions”? If we examine our kindness, we will notice that it is limited. We are kind toward those we have a relationship with: our neighbors, our classmates, our colleagues, or our relatives. This type of kindness is conditional. The Buddha’s loving-kindness is to give happiness to all without conditions. When we can help a total stranger, when we can help just because the person needs our help, and when we can help without any strings attached, we are truly practicing “great loving-kindness without conditions.”

What is meant by “great compassion as we are all one”? It means that I feel your pain as though it were mine and I want to relieve your pain as much as I want to relieve my own. Often our compassion is given sparingly, and we get tired if we are called upon to be compassionate time and time again. The Buddha’s loving-kindness is not like this at all. Let me illustrate the point with this example. Suppose my hand has an infected wound with a repulsive stench. Because the hand is a part of my body, I take very good care of it. I will not get tired of it, but instead

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clean up the infection and dress the wound. When we can treat all sentient beings with the thought that, “We are all related; he is like a part of my body,” then we will have the compassion to treat others like we do ourselves. This is “great compassion as we are all one.” To practice “great loving-kindness without conditions, great compassion as we are all one,” we should do a little role reversal. If we can put ourselves in someone else’s shoes and project ourselves into his or her situation, then the spirit of practicing “great loving-kindness without conditions, great compassion as we are all one” will begin to bloom within us.

Let me give you another example. Do any of you have athlete’s foot? Although athlete’s foot can give off a really offensive smell, some people still like to give it a good scratch and may even put their fingers to their nose afterwards. Why? Because this foot, though smelly, is still one’s own foot, in which case even the stench may seem pleasant. Thus, if we can treat all sentient beings as we do ourselves, why would there ever be any complaints?

The Buddha went to the Trayastrimsas Heaven to preach the Dharma to his mother, and he was the pallbearer at his father’s funeral. Do you think the

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Buddha was sentimental? While I was writing *The Story of Sakyamuni Buddha*, I was most impressed by the way the Buddha showed his sentiments—purely, immaculately, and subtly.

The second year after the Buddha attained enlightenment, he returned home to preach to his father and cousins. Princess Yasodhara, the Buddha's wife before he renounced his household life, waited impatiently to see him. What was taking him so long? After a prolonged wait, the Buddha finally arrived. Princess Yasodhara thought to herself, "When I see him, I'm really going to give him a piece of my mind for being so ungrateful and heartless." When she finally saw him, she was moved by the compassionate and majestic aura of the Buddha and immediately fell to her knees. When I reached this point in my writing of the book, I wondered to myself: What will the Buddha do? By this time, the Buddha was a completely enlightened individual; he was no longer an ordinary person and no longer the husband of Princess Yasodhara. How would he face Princess Yasodhara? The great Buddha was remarkable. He looked at Princess Yasodhara and said to her, "Yasodhara, I apologize to you, but you should be happy

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happy for me. I fulfill my responsibility to all sentient beings. I have attained Buddhahood; I am now the Buddha.” With these words, the Buddha managed to put Yasodhara at ease, yet conveyed the point of view of the fully enlightened one. For most of us, although we may have the aspiration to cultivate, it is difficult for us to achieve perfection in both compassion and wisdom.

As I had not seen my own mother for a few decades, I really hoped I could reunite with her in Japan. When the opportunity finally came, I waited for her arrival at the airport. When I spotted her at a distance, I wondered, “Is that really Mother?” As she drew close, the emotions of reuniting with her son after so many years finally hit home, and tears began to well up in her eyes. So I said to her, “Don’t cry here. Come with me!” I could almost see her trying to draw her tears back into her eyes. My intention was this: Before we cry, we should at least consider where we are. Regardless of the kind of emotions and sentiments we experience, they should not consume us. We need to manage our emotions and sentiments so that they do not get out of control.

The Buddha is rich in affection. He served his

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sick disciples tea and water; he threaded needles to help his older disciples mend their clothing. This pure affection is what is meant by “compassion” in Buddhism.

## **VI. Would the Buddha lie?**

Would the Buddha lie? This is indeed a very serious question. How would we dare say that the Buddha would lie? The Five Precepts of abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants are very important precepts. Lying is a form of false speech! How could the Buddha lie? This is because the Dharma is dynamic. If the acts of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and taking intoxicants are committed out of greed, hatred, and ignorance, they are indeed very severe violations of these important precepts. If the violations are performed out of compassion, then they constitute another form of the bodhisattva way. Take the example of a sociopath who, wielding knives and guns, is on a rampage to kill many innocent people. What are we supposed to do? Do we just stand by and watch him destroy the lives of innocent people? Of course not. Sometimes, out of the compassion to save

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passion to save innocent victims, we may have to first kill the sociopath. This is markedly different from killing someone out of hatred. Let us say that I found out you were plotting to gun down another person, or harm them with poison, so I tried to conceal the gun or the poison. Would you say that as this constitutes stealing that I should not try to conceal the weapon and just let you commit murder? Under these circumstances, the Buddha would use his wisdom to handle the situations in different ways.

Once while the Buddha was meditating in the woods, a rabbit happened to be shot by a hunter. The rabbit ran to the Buddha and hid under his robe. The hunter who was chasing the rabbit stopped to ask the Buddha, “Did you see my rabbit?”

Of course, the Buddha saw the rabbit, but he could not tell the hunter where the rabbit was. So, the Buddha replied, “No, I haven’t.”

Is this a lie?

“You must be hiding it. That rabbit is my dinner. Please hand it over!”

“Oh, it was for dinner?” The Buddha then pulled out the knife he had with him and asked the hunter, “If I cut my arm off, will that be enough to compen-

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sate you for the rabbit? You can have my arm for dinner!”

In order to save a sentient being, the Buddha told a fib out of great, fearless compassion. This is not an everyday lie, but is in accordance with what is said in the *Diamond Sutra*, “The Tathagata is one who speaks of things as they are, as what is true, and in accordance with reality.”

Once when the Buddha was cultivating his practice in a past lifetime as a bodhisattva, he chanced upon a bandit who was about to rob and kill five hundred merchants who were passing by. When the Buddha found out about this, he killed the bandit without any hesitation. In the mind of the Buddha, he would rather accept the bad karma of taking a life than let five hundred innocent people lose their lives. The Buddha would not lie to deceive others, but he would also weigh the different sides of the issue before acting accordingly.

## **VII. Did the Buddha have a job?**

Do you think the Buddha had a job? Yes, he did. How do we know? Once the Buddha went to Devadaha for his alms round. The king of the city was

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King Suprabuddha, the Buddha's father-in-law before he renounced his secular life. When the King saw the Buddha, he was furious and had only these words for the Buddha, "You're a person who has forsaken your own country and wife. Your life doesn't serve any purpose, and you're of no benefit to the world. You don't have a job and don't produce anything useful. I forbid you to do alms rounds in my country." How did the Buddha respond? He replied, "King Suprabuddha, you're mistaken. Every day, I use the plough of compassion to till sentient beings' field of blessings. The seeds I sow are bodhi seeds. I work this hard each day; how can you say that I'm not productive?" Beginning with the Buddha, the job for teachers of Buddhism as the Buddha's bhiksus and bhiksunis has been to cultivate the practice and preach the Dharma. With their compassion and cultivation, they serve to elevate the moral standards of society and purify social trends. Is this not work?

When King Ajatasatru was about to attack Vriji, the Buddha resolved the conflict and war was averted. When King Virudhaka attacked Kapilavastu, the Buddha initiated a movement to protect the country. By getting the disrespectful daughter-in-law of Elder

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Sudatta to mend her ways, the Buddha helped build family harmony. The Buddha also guided Matanga to turn over a new leaf and advised Angulimala not to kill. The Buddha has liberated millions of people, opening the door of wisdom so that they may truly see themselves. His work is most noble and significant!

### **VIII. Did the Buddha have to deal with any adversity?**

In this world, we have to constantly deal with hardships and distress. Do we know if the Buddha also had to deal with any adversity? Since the Buddha was born into this world, and because no one can totally escape all adversity in this world of ours, the Buddha was no different. Just take the examples of aging, sickness, death, and suffering, who can be free of them? The Buddha had to deal with adversity on ten different occasions. When he was cultivating his practice, he survived on a sesame seed and a grain of wheat a day. This was a form of hardship. During years of famine, everyone was impoverished and hungry. When the Buddha went on his alms rounds, he could only find remains of horse feed to allay his

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hunger. Although the Buddha accepted the predicament, this was still a form of hardship. Devadatta attempted to assassinate the Buddha on several occasions. Once he wanted to crush the Buddha, and hired someone to push a huge boulder down a hill to where the Buddha was sitting. Another time, he let a drunken elephant charge at the Buddha. The Buddha, of course, was not hurt; but these were disasters nonetheless. Devadatta once wanted to start a fight with the Buddha. When the disciples of the Buddha learned of the plot, they quickly readied themselves with sticks and clubs to protect the Buddha. After the Buddha heard of this, he laughed and told Ananda, "Does one who has become the Buddha still need others to use sticks and clubs to protect him?" Before Uruvilva-Kasyapa took refuge in the Buddha, he tried to harm the Buddha with a poisonous snake. The snake became still as soon as it saw the Buddha. When Angulimala came to assassinate the Buddha, he fell to his knees and surrendered his weapons when he saw the Buddha. Like everyone else, the Buddha had to deal with adversity, but he used his magnanimity and virtues to overcome them. He did not have to rely on sticks and clubs to protect himself.

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According to the *Fo Shuo Xingchi Xing Sutra* (the sutra that describes the causes and conditions of the ten adversities of the Buddha), the Buddha endured the following ten different adversities during his life.

1. The Buddha was slandered by Sundari.
2. The Buddha suffered from headaches.
3. The Buddha suffered from joint pain.
4. The Buddha suffered from backaches.
5. The Buddha's feet were injured by a wooden spear.
6. The Buddha bled when injured by rocks tossed at him.
7. The Buddha was slandered by Cinca-manavika.
8. The Buddha lived on remains of horse feed.
9. The Buddha practiced asceticism.
10. The Buddha was slandered by Shemipa.

These ten different adversities were the residual karma from the Buddha's past lives. In the *Shi Su Gui Sutra*, the Buddha says that even when one becomes the Buddha, when one has eradicated all unwholesomeness and practiced all virtuous acts, one still has to live through the consequences of whatever residual

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karma one has. To a great noble person, these hardships have no impact. It is like the rainstorm that once passed will give way to the clear blue sky!

## **IX. Was the Buddha ever slandered by others?**

Was the Buddha ever slandered by others? Most definitely. Some of these slanders are mentioned in the last section; the Buddha faces slander even now. As is the case of any great person, to those who believe in him, he is a deity, a noble person, or a Buddha. To those who do not believe in him, he is a demon, a sinner, or a charlatan. There is a chasm of difference in perspectives between those who believe and those who do not. Thus, it is inevitable that there will be slanderous remarks from those who do not believe.

During the time of the Buddha, when someone renounced household life to join the sangha, others would criticize the Buddha, “You took our sons and daughters from us,” “you took my husband (or wife) from my family. My family is now broken.” “This Buddha does not have any regard for families, parents, spouses, and children. What good is he?” These types of remarks were inevitable. This was especially true

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when Buddhism began to take root and Buddhist followers multiplied in numbers, at the expense of other religions. There were ill feelings among those of other religions, which led to the following incident. A follower of another religion hired a prostitute to make a false accusation at the Buddha. While the Buddha was preaching, she stood up with her abdomen protruding and raised her voice at him, “Sakyamuni, though you talk a good game when you preach the Dharma, what are you going to do with your baby that I’m carrying?” The Buddha was the father to this child!? This caused quite a stir among the audience. How would the Buddha respond? The Buddha did not say a word. Among his disciples, Maudgalyayana was the foremost in supernormal powers. Upon examination, he realized that the protruding stomach of the woman was nothing more than a basin tied to her waist. Using his supernormal powers, Maudgalyayana severed the ropes holding the basin, which dropped to the ground. The Buddha continued in silence towards the woman and kept on preaching the Dharma.

During the Buddha’s lifetime, he preached the Dharma for forty-nine years and gave over three

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hundred Dharma talks. Because of us, he endured a lot of hardships and numerous accusations. He brought us limitless Dharma joy and boundless truth. As sentient beings, we are really indebted to the Buddha. But, in this world, how is there light without darkness? How do we see the beauty of virtue without the ugliness of vice? Without mud and dirt, how can the pure lotus bloom?

## **X. Did the Buddha feel helpless?**

We like to think that the Buddha is full of supernatural powers and can do everything. In reality, the Buddha felt helpless, too.

Once there was a man named Kantatuo; he was rotten to the core and did many horrible things while he was alive. He was, however, kind on one occasion. One day, while he was walking, he saw a spider and was about to step on it when it occurred to him that his step would no doubt kill the spider. At that time, a thought of kindness overcame him and he retracted his step. He finally stepped over the spider and spared its life. After Kantatuo died, he fell into the depths of hell. The spider, in the meantime, wanted to repay Kantatuo for his kindness. When the Buddha learned

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of the spider's intentions, he helped the spider drop its thread all the way into hell so Kantatuo could climb out of hell using the thread. When all the beings suffering in hell saw the spider thread, they pushed and shoved trying to grasp at it. At this time, hatred arose in Kantatuo's mind. He pushed everyone aside and said, "Go away, this is my spider thread. I'm the only one who can use it to climb out of here. Go away!" As he grabbed the spider thread, he applied too much force and the thread was broken. Kantatuo, together with all the others, fell back down. The Buddha, who saw the whole thing happen, sighed and said, "Oh, sentient beings are so selfish. There's nothing I can do."

If we are selfish, hateful, unwilling to share any benefits with others, if we are not compassionate toward others, do not form good causal relationships with others, then even the Buddha cannot help us save ourselves!

Once there was a young man climbing a mountain. Halfway up, he lost his footing and fell down the side. Luckily, he managed to grab a vine growing out of the side of the mountain. As he looked, he realized there was no solid ground for many feet beneath him,

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and above him was a steep cliff. In panic, he called out, “Buddha! Buddha, please save me!”

The Buddha then appeared to save him from his predicament. The Buddha said to him, “Young man, I want to save you, but I’m afraid that you won’t listen to me.”

The young man said, “In a moment like this, how could I not listen to you?”

“Really? Are you going to do exactly what I tell you to do, no matter what it is?”

The young man was very compliant and said, “Buddha, I’ll absolutely follow your instructions!”

Immediately, the Buddha said to the young man in a serious tone of voice, “That’s good. I want you to let go of what you’re holding onto.”

“Oh no!” the young man replied in shock. “You want me to let go with my hands? If I let go, won’t I break every bone in my body?”

The Buddha let out a sigh and said, “How can I save you if you won’t let go?”

In this world, whether we can be saved or not depends on whether we can see through all phenomena, and whether we can rise to the occasion and let go. If we want the Buddha to liberate us, we have

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to be willing to let go of the shackles within our everyday lives before we can enter into the world of the Buddha.

In our discussion today of “The Great Buddha,” I am afraid I did not do justice to the subject matter. I have not addressed the enlightened Dharma of the Buddha, nor have I covered the compassion and wisdom of the Buddha. Instead, our discussion revolves around the mundane aspects of the Buddha’s everyday life, his headaches, and his frustrations. I think all of you know that I promote Humanistic Buddhism, which is why I want to portray the Buddha in human terms. We have to build our faith upon the understanding of the Buddha who lived on this earth; from the faith of this understanding we can slowly rise up to know the Dharmakaya, the embodiment of the prajna-wisdom, and the real Buddha. It is not unlike one who has to start from elementary school, and then proceed through high school before one can enroll in college. The virtues and accomplishments of the Buddha are vast and limitless; they cannot be comprehended with a momentary deliberation or viewed with a single glance. They have to be understood through many gradual steps.

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When we can understand the Buddha who lived among us, then we can begin to understand the Buddha who lives within our hearts. When we can comprehend the Buddha who lives within our hearts, then we can finally perceive the Dharmakaya of the Buddha.

My students often say to me, “Master, you have not spoken with us in a long time; our faith begins to falter.” Inevitably, I would tell them, “I’ve studied Buddhism for over fifty years, and the Buddha has never spoken to me. Still, my faith remains strong and I try my utmost to spread the truth of the Dharma. Because the Buddha lives within my heart, he is with me every day. What need is there to talk to me?”