

*The Sutra of the Teachings Left by the Buddha*  
Translated from Kumārajīva's Chinese  
by Rev. Philip Karl Eidmann

Editor's Note: Between the late 1960s and the early 1980s, Rev. Philip Karl Eidmann was one of the key faculty for the Institute of Buddhist Studies, serving during the administration of Rev. Haruyoshi Kusada. During the 1950s Eidmann had studied in Kyoto, where he gained his expertise in Pure Land Buddhism. It was during this time that he was asked by Ruikotsu Madani, President of the Chugai Nippo, a religious daily newspaper, to translate this short sutra. In a short appendix to the translation Mr. Koyata Yamamoto records that he was struck by the message of the teachings when he heard it recited as part of a memorial service for his son at Shisendo Temple in northern Kyoto. Following the service he requested and was given a copy of the sutra, which he then continued to read on his own.

The publication seems to have been motivated more by faith than by scholarship, and does not include any annotations or source information, which we have added here: The text is Taisho number 389. It is used as a liturgical text in both Taiwan and Japan, where it seems to be particularly associated with the Sōtō Zen sect. Indeed, Shisendo Jozanji, where Mr. Yamamoto encountered the text, is a Sōtō shū temple. The temple was founded in 1641 by Ishikawa Jozan (1583–1672), who had served as a samurai under Tokugawa Ieyasu. It was Ishikawa's retirement hermitage, and is still famous today for its gardens. It only became affiliated with Sōtō shū after his death, when it was occupied by the nun Zenrin Tairyō.

The full title of the text in Japanese pronunciation is "Butsu sui hatsu nehan ryaku setsu kyō kai kyō" and is more commonly known under its abbreviate form of "Butsu yui kyō kyō" (Ch. Fo jiao jing).

Rather than attempting to update the translation, we have chosen to honor Rev. Eidmann's style and spelling, retaining them as found in the original publication. Only a few corrections to obvious errors have been made.

The editor would like to thank Maciej Kanser, Chun-fang, Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Wakoh Shannon Hickey, and especially Taigen Dan Leighton for their assistance with identifying this text and providing additional background information.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Shakyamuni Buddha, when he first set in motion the wheel of righteousness, saved Kondanna, and in his last sermon he saved Subhadra. Those who were to be saved he has saved, and now he lay among the Sal trees, about to enter Nirvana. The time was the middle of the night, calm and noiseless. For the sake of all the disciples, he briefly spoke of the most important doctrines.

## II. ON THE CULTIVATION OF VIRTUE IN THIS WORLD

### 1. Admonishing on Bad Actions

“Ye brethren! After my death you must reverence and honor the commandments. They are like finding a light in the darkness, like a poor man finding a great treasure. You ought to know, therefore, they are indeed your great teacher. There should be no difference in these, from when I myself lived on earth. Those who would follow pure discipline ought not to buy, sell, nor exchange. They ought not covet fields and buildings, nor accumulate servants or attendants or animals. From all planting and all sorts of wealth ought they to run away like one would from a fire or a pit. You ought not cut trees and grass, plow the soil, hoe the fields, mix medicines, divine fortunes, study the stars’ positions, cast horoscopes by the waxing and waning of the moon, nor reckon days of good fortune. All these are things which are improper.

“Control your bodies. Eat at proper times. Conduct yourselves in purity. You should not concern yourselves with worldly matters nor mix potions, nor bind yourselves to eminent people in friendship nor become familiar with them that you can boast of it indecently. All these are not to be done! You ought, with fixed mind, in Right Contemplation (Sammāsati) aspire to salvation. You ought not conceal your faults, nor give rise to heresy, nor lead people astray. Of the four gifts, you know the limits; you know what is enough. When you have received a small offering, you must not hoard it. Here, therefore, I shall speak briefly about the forms for protecting the precepts. The precepts are the basis of the decision of release (moksa). Therefore they are called the pratimoksa rules. If you rely on the cause from the precepts, you will attain many stages of concentration and the knowledge of the extinction from suffering. For this reason, brethren, you ought always keep the precepts pure and never break them. If man can hold these precepts pure, this indeed will be good. If there are no pure precepts, no good merit can arise at all. You ought to know for this reason, that the merit of the place of perfect calm is acquired through the precepts.”

## 2. Admonishing on the Control of Body and Mind

“Ye brethren! If already you would be able to live the precepts, you must repress the five senses. Their five desires must not enter through your neglect. It is just like a cowherd, taking a stick and by showing it, stops the cows from entering another man’s field which is ripe for the harvest. So, if you indulge the five senses, not only will their desires not be stopped within bounds, but, like not controlling a bad horse by a bit, soon certainly the individual must fall in an abyss. Likewise you will be subject to pain through many kalpas: Your whole existence will be suffering. The evil of that robber (the five senses) extends through many lives, creating very great pain. Ye must control yourselves! For this reason, wise men control them and do not indulge in them. These desires should be kept like prisoners who may not wander about. However, even those who entertain them, all soon may extinguish them. As for these five senses the mind acts as their master. For this reason ye must always guard your mind well. Much more than a snake, wild beasts, or a hateful robber, ought the mind to fear unsatisfaction. It’s like, for example, a man who, carrying some honey, goes bouncing along his path looking only at the honey and fails to notice a deep hole. Or, again, it’s like a mad elephant which has no goad, or like a monkey who, getting to a tree, cannot, except with difficulty, be controlled. Hasten to deflect these desires. You must not let them be neglected. If you indulge this mind, you lose the good of being a man. If you limit these desires in one place there is nought you cannot accomplish. For this reason, brethren, you ought to strive diligently and subdue your minds.”

## 3. Admonishing on Many Wishes

“Ye brethren: In receiving all food and drink you ought to accept them as medicine. You must not accept or reject what you like or dislike: just support your bodies and avoid starvation and thirst. As the bee in gathering flowers, takes only the taste of them, but does not harm their color or scent, so, brethren, do ye! Accept just enough of people’s offerings to avoid distress! Don’t have many demands and thereby break their good hearts. A wise man, for example, having judged the amount of capacity of his ox’s strength, does not wear out his strength by overloading.”

## 4. Admonishing on Sleeping

“Ye brethren! With determination of mind practice the good Law by day. Don’t waste your time! In the early evening, nor even late night, do not cease your struggle. Even in the middle of the night you should inform

yourselves better by reading the sutras. You will gain nothing by passing your whole life in vain through sleep. You ought to think of the world as burning in a fire. You must desire to save yourself quickly. You must not sleep! The robber (depravities) is always stalking and killing man much more even than if he were in a house of hatred. How can you sleep without arousing yourselves? The depravities are a poison snake sleeping in your mind. They are, in fact, like a black cobra sleeping in your room. It can be quickly gotten rid of with the spear of keeping the precepts. Only when that dormant snake has fled can you sleep peacefully. If you sleep without the snake being gone, you are a rash man. The clothing of conscience, among all finery, is the very best. Conscience is like an iron goad which can control man's unrighteousness. Therefore, brethren, you must always be conscientious. You must not be able, even for a moment, to ignore it. If you depart from conscience, you lose all merit. He who has regrets has that which is good. He who has no regrets will not be different from birds or beasts."

#### 5. Admonishing on Anger

"Ye brethren! If there were a man who came and dismembered you joint by joint, you must not hate him, but rather include him in your heart. And you must guard your mind that no complaining word come out of it. If you give way to hateful thoughts, there is a barrier in your own way, and you lose the benefit of your merit. Patience is a virtue which the keeping of every precept or any other austerity cannot equal. He who can practice patience can truly be called the great and strong man. He who cannot endure abuse as he would drink ambrosia cannot be called an enterer of the way or a wise man. Why is this? Because the farm of hatefulness shatters all good and destroys your good name so that, in present or future generations, man will not wish to see it. You should realize that hatefulness. Those householders, dressed in white, who have desires and do not practice the way, are not in righteous control of themselves. Even hatred is understandable in them. But, just as lightning and thunder cannot appear in a white filmy cloud, it cannot be in the homeless ones who practice the way without desires and confine their hatefulness."

#### 6. Admonishing on Conceit

"Brethren! With your head in your hands you ought to look at yourself like this: 'I've already abandoned all ornamentation. I wear plain colors and have a bowl, to beg my living.' If arrogance and pride arise, you must rapidly extinguish them. The growth of arrogance and pride is not good even for those wearing white and living in the world, much less to say for the homeless ones who, having entered the way to achieve release, subdue their bodies and practice begging."

## 7. Admonishing on Flattery

“Ye brethren! A mind full of flattery is incompatible with the way. Therefore you must in simplicity correct such a mind. You must understand that flattery is only cheating. The man who has entered the way, therefore, has no use for it. So examine ye well, and with a correct mind base yourself on simplicity.”

### III. CHAPTER ON THE MERIT OF THE GREAT MEN WHO HAVE ENTERED HOMELESSNESS

#### 1. The Merit of Few Desires

“Ye brethren! You must understand that the man of many desires, by reason of his desire for reward, has much suffering too. The man of few desires neither desiring anything nor seeking anything, thereby does not have these sorrows. You ought to practice having only a few desires. But much more than this, is the merit of the practice of few desires. The man of few desires need not by flattery sway another’s mind, nor is he led by his passions. The man who entertains few desires has a contented mind, and he has no cause for sorrow and fear. The things he gets are enough. There is never an insufficiency. Therefrom, indeed, is Nirvana. Such is what is called desiring little.”

#### 2. Merit of Contentment

“Ye brethren! If you want to escape from all suffering, you must see what contentment is. The basis of contentment is, indeed, to obtain rich joy, calmness, and peace. The man of contentment, even though he lies on the ground, still is happy. He who is not contented, though he were in heavenly palaces, still would not be contented. He who is not contented, even though he be rich, he is poor. The man who is contented, even though he be poor, is rich. He who is not contented is pulled by the five desires and therefore he is pitied by the one who is contented. This is what is called contentment.”

#### 3. The Merit of Seclusion

“Ye brethren! If you desire quietude, inaction, and joy, always avoid confusion and noise, live alone in a quiet retreat. The man who lives in solitude is respectfully worshipped by Indra and all the gods. This is why you should leave your own and other communities to live alone in seclu-

sion, pondering the extinction of the origin of suffering. Those who rejoice in company have the pains of company, just as when many birds flock upon a great tree, it is in danger (of collapse). Attachment to the world drowns one in suffering of mankind, just as an old elephant drowning in the mud cannot get himself out. This is what is called seclusion."

#### 4. The Merit of Constantly Striving Energetically

"Ye brethren! If you strive energetically there is nothing that is hard. For example, a constant trickle of water will bore a hole in a rock. Therefore, ye must always strive energetically. If the mind of a disciple become in many ways idle and inattentive, it is just like making a fire by friction and you rest before it is hot: even if you desire fire, you cannot get a blaze. This is what is called striving energetically."

#### 5. The Merit of Not Forgetting

"Seek a personal teacher: Seek a good friend. There is nothing like not forgetting. If one does not forget, that robber, the depravities, cannot enter. For this reason ye must always have concentration present in your mind. If you lose concentration, you lose all merit thereby. If then your power of concentration is strong and hard, even though the five desires were to enter, they cannot do any harm, just as, if you have put on armour to enter the battle, there is nought to fear. This is what is called not forgetting."

#### 6. The Merit of Concentration

"Ye brethren! If you unify your mind, your mind is then in concentration. Because your mind is in concentration, you can know the basic nature of the appearance and disappearance of the world. For this reason ye must always strive diligently to practice various stages of concentration. If you gain concentration, the mind doesn't wander. Just as a house with little water carefully conserves that in its reservoir, so should the disciple also. For the sake of the water of knowledge you should practice concentration; do not let it leak away. This is what is called concentration."

#### 7. The Merit of Perfect Knowledge

"Ye brethren! If you have perfect knowledge, then you have no greed. Always examine yourself that you do not let yourself be in error. Thereby, then, from within subjectivity and objectivity, you can get release. If you do not do so, you already are not a follower of the way, nor are you a white clad layman either! There would be no name suitable for you. Perfect knowl-

edge is a strong ship which carries you across the sea of old age, sickness, and death. Again, it is a great brilliant light in deep darkness. It is a good medicine for all who are ill. It is a sharp ax which cuts the tree of evil. For this reason, you must, by listening, pondering, and practicing knowledge, make yourself progress. If a man has the clarity of perfect knowledge, tho' his organs be base, still he can clearly see into mankind. This is what perfect knowledge is."

#### 8. The Merit of the Goal

"Ye brethren! If you enter into many kinds of useless discussion, then your mind will be confused, and though you leave your homes, still you won't attain release. For this reason, brethren, you ought immediately to cease confused thinking and useless discussion. If ye want to attain the joy of calm, extinguish the illness of useless discussion. This is what is called no useless discussion."

### IV. CHAPTER SHOWING PROFOUND FINAL MERIT

"Yet brethren! In all kinds of virtue you must always wholeheartedly get rid of laxity, just as you would a hateful robber. That which the Lord of great compassion has preached for your benefit is now concluded. Yet ye must strive diligently to practice it. Whether you live in the mountains or in the lowlands, whether you live under a tree or in seclusion in a quiet room, ponder the doctrines which you have received. You must not let them become lost. You must always exert yourself to practice them energetically. If you do not do this and die vainly, afterwards it will be the occasion of much regret. I am like a good doctor, who recognizes the illness and prescribes a medicine: but whether it will actually be taken or not is not up to the doctor. Again, I am like a good guide who directs a man to the best path. If, not hearing that, he doesn't go on it, the fault is not with the guide."

### V. CHAPTER SHOWING THE ENTRANCE INTO A FIRM TESTIMONY

"Ye brethren! If you have any doubts regarding the Four Truths, you ought to ask about them immediately. You must not have concealed doubts without wishing to dispel them."

At that time, the Lord spoke thus three times, but there was not a man who questioned him. What was the reason why? Because the assembly had not doubts! At that time Aniruddha, seeing what was in the minds of

those assembled, said to the Buddha: "Lord! The moon might grow hot, and the sun might grow cool, but the four truths which Buddha taught cannot change. The truth of suffering, which Buddha taught, is of real suffering which cannot become joy. Accumulation of desires truly is its cause. If suffering is destroyed, it is when its cause had been destroyed. If the cause is destroyed, its result is destroyed. The way of destroying error is the path of truth, and there is no other path. Lord! All these brethren are firm and without doubts concerning the four truths."

#### VI. CHAPTER ON CUTTING OFF THE DOUBT BY DISCERNING THOSE WHO HAD NOT YET ENTERED AND THOSE WHO HAD ATTAINED ENLIGHTENMENT

"If, in this assembly there are those who have not finished their task, perhaps on seeing the passing of the Buddha they shall fall sad. If there are any who have just entered the way, on hearing what the Buddha is teaching, they all will attain salvation. As clearly as one sees lightning in the night, he then can see the way. If anyone has already finished his task and already has crossed the sea of suffering, they will think only this: "The Lord has passed on. Why was this done so rapidly?" Although Aniruddha had spoken these words, all in the assembly without exception clearly penetrated the meaning of the four holy truths, the Lord wished all in this great assembly might become stronger. With a mind of great compassion, he spoke for the benefit of the assembly.

"Ye brethren! Don't feel grieved! If I were to live in the world a whole kalpa, our association would still have to end. You cannot find any association which does not end. The doctrine of benefit to one and all has been completed. If I were to live longer, it would be of no benefit. Those who were to be saved in both heaven and earth, have all without exception been saved. Those who have not been saved, have all, again, created the cause of their attaining salvation. From now on, all my disciples, turning it over in their minds, must practice this; thereby this will be the Body of the Tathagata's Law, which will be forever without destruction. Therefore you must know the world is all transient, and meeting certainly implied separation. Don't feel grieved! Such is the nature of the world. You must strive diligently and seek immediate release. With the light of perfect knowledge, destroy all the darkness of ignorance. The world is dangerous and perishable, and there is nothing strong and enduring. Now I attain extinction: this is like getting rid of a bad sickness. This, which we call a body, is a criminal thing. It is sunk in the great ocean of birth and death. Is there a wise man who would not be glad to get rid of this, like one might kill a hateful robber?"



VII. CHAPTER ON SEPARATION FROM MANY KINDS OF  
SELFHOOD AND PURE SELFLESSNESS

“Ye brethren! Ye ought always aspire wholeheartedly to the way of release. The whole world of moving and non-moving forms is in appearance disquieting and not calm. Stop ye a moment! Speak not! Time is passing away. I am going to Nirvana. This is what I have taught at the last.”