

EIGHT AWAKENINGS OF GREAT BEINGS

All Buddhas are great beings. What great beings practice is called the eight awakenings. Practicing these awakenings is the basis for nirvana. This is the last teaching of our original teacher Shakyamuni Buddha, which he gave on the night he entered pari-nirvana.

[The Buddha's Pari-nirvana Admonition Outline Sutra (Buddha's Willed Teaching Sutra) says:]

The first awakening is to have few desires. To refrain from widely coveting the objects of the five-sense desires is called "few desires."

The Buddha said, "Monks, know that people who have many desires intensely seek fame and gain; therefore they suffer a great deal. Those who have few desires do not seek fame and gain and are free from them, so they are without such troubles. Having few desires is itself worthwhile. It is even more so because it creates various merits: Those who have few desires need not flatter to gain others' favor. Those who have few desires are not compelled by their sense organs; they have a serene mind and do not worry because they are satisfied with what they have and do not have a sense of lack. Those who have few desires experience nirvana. This is called 'few desires.'"

The second awakening is to know how much is enough. Even if you already have something, you set a limit for yourself for using it, so you should know how much is enough.

The Buddha said, "Monks, if you want to be free from suffering, you should contemplate knowing how much is enough. By knowing it, you are in the place of enjoyment and peacefulness. If you know how much is enough, you are content even when you sleep on the ground. If you don't know it, you are discontent even when you are in heaven. You can feel rich even if you are poor. You can feel poor even if you have much wealth. You may be constantly compelled by the five-sense desires and pitied by those who know how much is enough. This is called 'to know how much is enough.'"

The third awakening is to enjoy serenity. This is to be away from noise and confusion, and stay alone in a quiet place. Thus, it is called "to enjoy serenity in seclusion."

The Buddha said, "Monks, if you want to have the joy of serene non-doing, you should be away from the crowds and stay alone in a quiet place. A still place is what Indra and other devas revere. By leaving behind your relations as well as others', and by living in a quiet place, you may contemplate the conditions of suffering. If you are attached to the crowds, you will receive suffering, just like a tree that attracts a great many birds and gets killed by them. If you are bound

by worldly matters, you will drown in troubles, just like an old elephant who is stuck in a swamp and cannot get out. This is called ‘to enjoy serenity in seclusion.’”

The fourth awakening is diligent effort. It is to engage ceaselessly in wholesome practices. That is why it is called “diligent effort.” It is refinement without mixing in other activities. You keep going forward without turning back.

The Buddha said, “Monks, if you make diligent effort, nothing is too difficult. That is why you should do so. It is like a thread of water piercing through a rock by constantly dripping. If your mind continues to slacken, it is like taking a break from hitting stones before they spark; you can’t get fire that way. What I am speaking of is ‘diligent effort.’”

The fifth awakening is not neglecting mindfulness. It is also called maintaining right mindfulness. This helps you to guard the dharma so you won’t lose it. It is called “to maintain right mindfulness” or “not to neglect mindfulness.”

The Buddha said, “Monks, for seeking a good teacher and good protection, there is nothing like not neglecting mindfulness. If you practice this, robbers of desire cannot enter you. Therefore, you should always maintain mindfulness in yourself. If you lose it, you will lose all merits. When your mindfulness is solid, you will not be harmed even if you go into the midst of the robbers of the five-sense desires. It is like wearing armor and going into a battlefield, so there is nothing to be afraid of. It is called “not to neglect mindfulness.”

The sixth awakening is to practice meditation. To abide in dharma without being confused is called “stability in meditation.”

The Buddha said, “Monks, if you gather your mind, it will abide in stability. Then, you will understand the birth and death of all things in the world. You will continue to endeavor in practicing various aspects of meditation. When you have stability, your mind will not be scattered. It is like a house where water is used sparsely, or an embankment that holds water. You practitioners are like this. Because you have the water of wisdom, you practice stability and the water of wisdom is not wasted. This is called ‘stability in meditation.’”

The seventh awakening is “to cultivate wisdom.” It is to listen, contemplate, practice, and have realization.

The Buddha said, “Monks, if you have wisdom, you are free from greed. You will always reflect on yourself and avoid mistakes. Thus, you will attain liberation in the dharma I am speaking of. If you don’t have wisdom, you will be neither a follower of the way nor a lay supporter of it, and there will be no name to describe you. Indeed, wisdom is a reliable vessel to bring you across the ocean of old age, sickness, and death. It is a bright lamp that illuminates in the darkness of ignorance. It is an excellent medicine for all who are sick. It is a sharp ax to cut down the tree of delusion. Thus, you can deepen awakening through the wisdom of listening, contemplation, and

practice. If you are illuminated with wisdom, even if you use your physical eyes, you will have clear insight. This is called ‘to cultivate wisdom.’”

The eighth awakening is not to be engaged in hollow discussions. It is to experience realization and be free from discriminatory thinking, with the thorough understanding of the reality of all things. It is called “not to be engaged in hollow discussions.”

The Buddha said, “Monks, if you get into hollow discussions, your mind will be scattered. Then, you will be unable to attain liberation even if you have left the household. So, you should immediately leave behind a scattered mind and hollow discussions. If you wish to attain the joy of serenity, you need to cure the sickness of hollow discussions. This is called ‘not to be engaged in hollow discussions.’”

These are the eight awakenings. Each awakening contains all eight, thus there are sixty-four awakenings. When awakenings are practiced thoroughly, their number is countless. When they are practiced in summary, there are sixty-four.

These are the last words of the Great Teacher Shakyamuni Buddha, the ultimate admonition of the Mahayana teaching. He said at midnight of the fifteenth day of the second month, “Monks, always endeavor wholeheartedly to search for the way of liberation. All things in the world, whether they are in motion or not, are insecure and bound to decay. Now, all of you be still and do not speak. Time is passing and I am going to cross over. This is my last admonition to you.” Without expounding dharma any further, the Buddha entered pari-nirvana.

All disciples of the Buddha should study this teaching. Those who don’t learn or know about it are not his disciples. Indeed, this is the Tathagata’s treasury of the true dharma eye, the wondrous heart of nirvana. However, there are many who do not know about this teaching, as there are few who have studied it. Many may have been confused by demons, and those who have few wholesome conditions from the past do not have the opportunity to see or hear this teaching.

In the Ages of True Dharma and Imitation Dharma, all disciples of the Buddha knew about this teaching and practiced it. But nowadays, less than one or two out of a thousand monks seem to know about it. How regrettable! The world has declined since those times. While the true dharma prevails in the billion worlds and the Buddha’s pure teaching is still intact, you should immediately practice it without negligence.

It is rare to encounter the buddha dharma even in the span of countless eons. A human body is difficult to attain. A human body in the Three Continents of the world is preferable. A human body in the Southern Continent, Jambudvīpa, is particularly so, as it can have the chance to see the Buddha, hear the dharma, leave the household, and attain the way. But those who entered nirvana and died before the pari-nirvana of the Tathagata could not learn and practice these eight awakenings of great beings.

Now you can see, hear, and practice these awakenings because of the merit of your wholesome conditions from the past. By practicing and nurturing these awakenings birth after birth, you can certainly arrive at unsurpassable enlightenment and expound these eight awakenings to all beings, just as Shakyamuni Buddha did.

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