

## **Part Five:**

# **NĀGĀRJUNA'S STORIES ON MEDITATION**



# Māra's Daughters Confront the Buddha

## Nāgārjuna's Introduction

Dhyāna is the treasury for the retaining of wisdom  
And the field of merit for qualities which are worthy.  
Dhyāna serves as the waters which are pure.  
It is able to wash away the dusts of the desires.

Dhyāna is the armor made of adamant.  
It's able to ward off the arrows of affliction.  
Although one's not yet reached the [nirvāṇa] "without residue",  
A share in nirvāṇa nonetheless has been attained.

One acquires then the coursing in adamant samādhi,  
Smashes then and shatters the mountain of the fetters.  
One attains the power of six superknowledges,  
And is able to deliver a number of people beyond count.

Dust raised by tumult may obscure the sky and sun,  
Yet a heavy rain can soak it all away.  
The winds of ideation (*vitarka*) and deliberation (*vicāra*) scatter the  
mind,  
But dhyāna absorption can extinguish them.

Furthermore, dhyāna absorption is difficult to attain. Only if the practitioner single-mindedly and exclusively strives without stint will he attain it. Even the gods and spirits and rishis are unable to attain it, how much the less lazy-minded ordinary fellows.

## Story: Māra's Daughters Confront the Buddha

When the Buddha was sitting in dhyāna beneath the *nyagrodha* tree the three daughters of the King of the Māras set forth a question in verse, saying:

Sitting alone amongst the forest trees,  
The six fold faculties always still and quiet.  
It seems as if you've lost a precious jewel,  
But have no pain of worry or distress.

In all the World your visage has no peer,  
And yet you always sit with your eyes closed.  
The thoughts of each of us possess a doubt:  
"What do you seek by dwelling in this place?"

At that time the Bhagavān replied with a verse:

As I have found the flavor of nirvāṇa,  
I don't find pleasure dwelling in tainted love.

Within, without, the thieves have been expelled.  
Your father too: destroyed and sought retreat.

I have discovered the flavor of sweet dew (*amṛta*),  
In peace and bliss I sit within the forest.  
The many beings immersed in fondness and love—  
For all their sakes I raise compassionate thoughts.

At this time the three daughters felt ashamed and said to themselves, “This man has transcended desire and cannot be moved.” They then disappeared and showed themselves no more.

## The Mountain Spirit Tests the Traveling Layman

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble: On the Shortcomings of the Desires

As for these five desires, one obtains them and they become more severe. This is just as when one uses fire to cauterize an itch. Pursuing the five desires is a useless endeavor comparable to a dog's gnawing away at a bone. Pursuing the five desires increases disputation just as when birds fight with each other over carrion. The five desires burn people in the same way as happens when carrying a torch into an opposing wind. The five desires harm a person just as when one steps on a poisonous snake. The five desires are insubstantial like something obtained in a dream. [Satisfaction from] the five desires is short-lived and is as if borrowed [for only] an instant. Worldly people deludedly lust for and attach to the five desires, not forsaking them [even] unto death. On account of them, in later lives, they undergo immeasurable suffering.

This is analogous to a stupid person greedily attached to a type of fine fruit who climbs up the tree and feasts upon them, but cannot bring himself to descend in time. Someone then chops down the tree, causing the tree to tilt over whereupon he falls, his body and head are mangled, and he then dies an agonizing death.

Moreover, these five desires, when attained, are blissful [only] for a moment. When lost, there is great suffering. This is comparable to when a person licks away at a honey smeared blade. In his greed for the sweetness, he is unaware of injuring his tongue. The rituals involved in pursuing the five desires are held in common with animals. One who is wise is well aware of this and thus is naturally able to distance himself from them.

### Story: The Mountain Spirit Tests the Traveling Layman

This is illustrated by the tale told of an *upāsaka* who together with a group of traders traveled afar in the course of their business. At this time it was cold and snowy. Traveling at night he lost touch with his companions and took shelter in a stone cave. At that time a mountain spirit transformed into a maiden who came to him desiring to test him. She spoke this verse, saying:

The white snow covers the mountainous ground.  
The birds and beasts all hide themselves away.  
I alone have no one to indulge my needs.  
I pray only to experience your kindness in my plight.

The *upāsaka* covered his ears with his two hands and replied with a verse in which he said:

You shameless and base person.  
 You speak these impure words.  
 Would that water could rinse or fire burn them away.  
 I have no desire to further hear your voice.  
 I have a wife but my mind does not course in desire.  
 How much the less would I engage in sexual misconduct.  
 The bliss afforded by all desires is extremely shallow,  
 The calamity brought by its great suffering is extremely profound.  
 All the desires, once gained, then bring no satiation.  
 When one loses them, this makes for great suffering.  
 When not yet obtained, one prays that one might obtain them.  
 Once one's obtained them, one becomes tormented by them.  
 The bliss afforded by all of the desires is extremely slight.  
 The poison of distress and suffering is so very much.  
 For the sake of them, one may lose one's body and life.  
 Just like the moth which casts itself into the lantern fire.

When the mountain spirit had listened to this verse, she immediately lifted him up in her arms and transported him back into the midst of his companions.

### Concluding Exegesis Passage

This is a case of one with wisdom renouncing desires [and realizing that] they cannot be attached to.

As for the five desires, they refer to fine [visible] forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and touchables. All who desire to seek dhyāna absorptions should reject them. How does one reject forms? One contemplates the calamity inherent in [the pursuit of] form. If a person becomes attached to form, the fire of all the fetters blazes up furiously, burning and injuring his body.

This is just as when one uses fire to melt gold and silver or as when one brings hot honey to the boil. Although they possess [the normal] appearance and flavor, they burn the body and ruinously scald the mouth. Then one must immediately cast them aside. If a person has developed a defiling attachment to marvelous forms and fine flavors, the circumstance is just the same.

## **A Kinnara Maiden's Singing Disturbs the Rishis**

### **Nāgārjuna's Preamble: On Sound and Attachment Thereto**

Why must one renounce sounds? It is the characteristic of sounds that they do not abide. One hears them only momentarily and then they immediately disappear. Because foolish people do not understand a sound's characteristic of being impermanent and disappearing, they erroneously develop fondness for and pleasure in sounds. They retain in their minds sounds which have already passed and generate attachment to them.

### **Story: A Kinnara Maiden's Singing Disturbs the Rishis**

This is illustrated by the case of the five hundred rishis who dwelt in the mountains. The *kinnara* maiden was bathing in a pool in the Snow Mountains. When they heard the sound of her singing, they immediately lost their dhyāna absorptions. Their minds became drunken, crazed, and so unrestrained that they were unable to control themselves. It was as if a great wind had begun to blow through the trees in the forest. When they heard this subtle and marvelous singing voice so soft and pure, they began to think indecent thoughts. On account of this, without their even being aware of it, their minds became deranged.

Thus it is that one may lose one's meritorious qualities in the present life and even become bound in later lives to fall into the wretched destinies.

### **Concluding Exegesis Passage on Sound and Avoiding Attachment**

A person possessed of wisdom contemplates sounds and perceives that, in every new thought-moment, they are produced and destroyed, that the prior and latter sounds are not mutually inclusive, and that they do not even extend to reach each other. If one is able to develop such an understanding, then one does not develop defiling attachments [rooted in imputing meaning onto adjacent but unrelated sound vibrations]. Whoever becomes like this is unable to become disoriented even by the music of the gods, how much the less by the voices of humans.

## Fragrances Pull a Novice Away from the Path

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble: On Fragrance and Attachment Thereto

Why must one renounce fragrances? People are of the opinion that having an attachment to fragrances is but a minor offense. A defiling attachment to fragrances opens the door to the fetters. Although one may have accumulated a hundred years in the observance of the moral precepts, one is nonetheless able to ruin it all in a single moment.

### Story: Fragrances Pull a Novice Away from the Path

Take for instance the arhat who regularly entered the dragon palace. After eating, he took his bowl and gave it to his *śramaṇera* [attendant], ordering him to wash it. There were a few leftover grains of rice in the bowl. The *śramaṇera* smelled them, found them magnificently fragrant, and then ate them, finding them to be extremely delectable.

He then devised a clever technique through which he inserted himself in the under part of his master's rope-mesh [sedan] chair. By gripping the legs of the rope-mesh [sedan] chair with his two hands, when his master went forth, he entered the dragon palace right along with the rope-mesh [sedan] chair.

The Dragon asked him, "Why did you bring along this person who has not yet realized the Path?"

The Master said, "I was unaware [that he had come along with me]."

The *śramaṇera* obtained some of the rice and ate it. He also saw the daughter of the dragon whose body was beautiful and whose perfume was incomparably marvelous. His mind developed an immense defiling attachment [for her]. He then immediately made a vow, "I should create [enough] merit that I will be able to seize this dragon's dwelling and then live here myself."

The Dragon requested, "In the future, when you come here, do not bring this *śramaṇera* along with you."

After the *śramaṇera* had returned, he single-mindedly devoted himself to the practice of giving and to observance of the moral precepts. He sought exclusively to bring about that result which he had vowed to obtain. He wished to soon become a dragon. Then, whenever he performed his circumambulations in the monastery, water gushed forth from beneath his feet. He knew that he would certainly succeed in becoming a dragon.



He next went directly to the place alongside the great pond where his master had originally entered it. He then covered his head with his *kāṣāya* robe and plunged in. He immediately died and changed into a great dragon. Because his [accumulated] merit was so abundant, he [was able to] quickly slay the other dragon. At that point, the entire pond turned red in color.

Before the situation had come to this, all of his masters and the other members of the Sangha had scolded him. He had replied, "My mind has already become fixed on this and the characteristic features [of the desired result] have already begun to manifest in my mind."

At this time the Master led the Sangha assembly to the [edge of] the pool to observe this. Causal circumstances such as these may be brought about on account of an attachment to fragrances.

## A Spirit Criticizes a Bhikshu's Enjoyment of Flowers

Additionally, there was a bhikshu who was walking next to a lotus pool in the forest. When he smelled the fragrance of the lotus blossoms, his mind was pleased and so experienced a feeling of enjoyment. Having passed on by, his mind developed a fondness for it.

The pond spirit then spoke to him, saying, "Why is it that you have forsaken that spot beneath the trees where you sit purely in dhyāna meditation, preferring instead to come forth and steal these fragrances of mine? Through attachment to fragrances, dormant fetters may be influenced to arise again."

Then, yet another person came along. He went right into the pool and pulled up many of its flowers. He then started digging, pulling forth roots and stems, created a disorderly mess, and then left. The pond spirit remained silent, not saying anything at all.

The Bhikshu then said, "This person destroyed your pond and took your flowers. You didn't say anything at all to him. However, I merely passed by the bank of the pond whereupon I suffered your rebuke and a scolding in which you claimed I had stolen your fragrances."

The pond spirit said, "The evil people of the world constantly immerse their heads in the excrement of offense-related defilement. I do not even bother to speak to them. You, however, are a fine person who engages in the practice of dhyāna meditation. Thus, when you become attached to these fragrances, it destroys your fine endeavors. This is why I scolded you.

"This is analogous to a white cloth which is fresh and pure but then gets a spot where it has become stained by something black. Everyone observes it. In the case of those who are evil persons, it is comparable to an already-black robe becoming spotted with ink. It is such as people would not even notice. So, who would even bother to bring it up?"

## A Novice Falls Away through Attachment to Flavors

### Nāgārjuna's Introduction

Why must one renounce tastes? One ought to realize that, "Solely on account of desirous attachment to fine flavors, I may be bound to undergo a multitude of sufferings, may have molten copper poured down my throat, and may be forced to consume burning hot iron pellets."

If one fails to observe the Dharma in its applications to eating, and if one's thoughts of particular fondness become solidly attached, one may even fall down amongst the worms which abide in the midst of impurities.

### Story: A Novice Falls Away through Attachment to Flavors

Such a situation is exemplified by the case of a particular *śrāmaṇera* whose mind became obsessively fond of curds. Whenever the *dānapati* benefactors made an offering to the Sangha of curds, the portion which was left over would always be passed on to that *śrāmaṇera*. His thoughts became affectionately attached to its flavor, taking such pleasure and delight that he was unable to let go of it.

When his life came to an end, he was reborn in this vase which held the leftover curds. The guru of that *śrāmaṇera* had gained the way of arhatship. When the Sangha divided up the curds, he said to them, "Be careful, be careful. Don't injure the curd-loving *śrāmaṇera*."

Everyone said, "But this is just a worm. Why do you refer to it as 'the curd-loving *śrāmaṇera*'?"

He replied, "Originally, this worm was my *śrāmaṇera*. Because he only sat there immersed in a gluttonous affection for leftover curds, he came to be reborn in this vase. When the master received his share of the curds, the worm came along with it. The master said, "Curd-loving fellow. Why did you come here?" He then gave it the curds.

## A Prince's Fatal Attachment to Fine Flavors

This [issue of attachment to fine flavors] is also illustrated by the case of a king known as "Partial Moon King" (Candrabhāga). He had a son who was a prince affectionately attached to delectable flavors. Every day the royal gardener brought fine fruits. There was a large tree within the garden. Up in the top of the tree, there was a bird carrying on with raising its young. It often flew off into the Fragrant Mountains from which it brought back a type of fine, aromatic fruit as nourishment for its young. The clutch of young birds happened to struggle over one of them so much that a fruit came tumbling on down to the ground.

Early in the morning, the gardener noticed it, was amazed by how unusual it was, and so immediately took it to the King. The King valued this fruit for its unusual fragrance and appearance. The Prince noticed it and asked to have it. The King loved his son and so immediately gave it to him. The Prince ate the fruit, experienced its bouquet and flavor, and was overcome with tainted thoughts of profound attachment. Thus he sought to receive it again, day after day. The King immediately summoned the gardener and asked into its origins. The gardener said, "This fruit has no seed. It was obtained from off the ground. I do not know from whence it came." The Prince wailed and cried and stopped eating. The King forced upon the gardener the responsibility for this, saying, "We look to you to find more of it."

The gardener went to where he had found the fruit, saw there was a bird's nest, and realized the bird had carried it hence. He camouflaged himself up in the tree and waited with the intention of seizing one [of the fruits]. When the mother bird arrived, he immediately forcibly seized one of the fruits so as to deliver it forth.

This happened every day in the same way. The mother bird became furious at this and so returned with a poisonous fruit from the Fragrant Mountains which in fragrance, flavor, and appearance was identical to the earlier previously delivered variety. The gardener seized it and took it forth as tribute to the King. The King gave it to the Prince. Not long after [the prince] had eaten it, the flesh of his body rotted away and he died.

In just such a manner, attachment to tastes possesses the [potential] to precipitate the suffering of losing one's life. All sorts of causal circumstances such as these illustrate what is meant by renouncing the desire involved in attachment to tastes.

## Yaśodharā's Difficult Pregnancy

### Nāgārjuna's Preamble: On the Nature and Perils of Touch

Why must one renounce touch? This touch is the cause for the production of the fire of the fetters and is the root of the bondage of the mind. How is this so? The other four sense faculties each occupy their own particular area. This one, however, involves a consciousness which pervades the entire body. Because the area from which it may arise is extensive, it more commonly [serves as the basis for] generating defiled attachment.

This attachment is difficult to separate from. How does one know this? Take for example a person attached to [sensual] forms. [Ordinarily], if one contemplates the impurity of the thirty-six parts of the body, one develops a mind of renunciation. If, however, one has become attached to touch, even though one is aware of the impurity, one may continue to crave its [sensations of] subtle tenderness. At this point, contemplation of impurity may not provide any benefits. It is for this reason that it is difficult to relinquish.

Additionally, because it is so difficult to relinquish, one may continue on this account to regularly generate grave karmic transgressions. If one falls into the hells, those hells have two regions: The first is known as "cold ice." The second is known as "blazing fire." In both of these hells, [sensations associated with] physical touch are employed to cause one to undergo punishments inflicting a myriad forms of the poison of suffering. This "touch" is known as the place of the great darkness. It is a precipitous path attended by danger and difficulty.

### Story: Yaśodharā's Difficult Pregnancy

Then again, this is as described in the *Sutra on the Previous Lives of Rāhula's Mother*. As the Bodhisattva, Shakyamuni had two consorts. The first was named Gopiyā. The second was named Yaśodharā. Yaśodharā was the mother of Rāhula. Because Gopiyā was a barren woman, she did not become pregnant with child. It was on the night that the Bodhisattva left behind the home life that Yaśodharā realized that she was pregnant.

The Bodhisattva [Shakyamuni] engaged in ascetic practices for six years. For six full years, Yaśodharā remained pregnant without giving birth. All of the Shakyans inquired of her, "The Bodhisattva has left behind the home life. How is it that this could occur?"

Yaśodharā said, "I have committed no offenses with others. The

child with which I am pregnant is truly a scion of the Prince.”

The Shakyans said, “How is it then that it has now been so long and yet it still has not been born?”

She replied, “Not even I understand this matter.”

The Shakyans assembled and conferred on the matter. When she heard that the King wished to carry out a lawful punishment of offenses, Gopiyā addressed the King, “I pray that, out of sympathy for her, you will be lenient. I have dwelt together with Yaśodharā constantly. I can certify for her that I know she is free of transgressions. Wait for her child to be born. Then you will be able to know if it resembles the father or not. It would not be too late then to carry out punishments.”

The King then allowed leniency. When the Buddha’s six years of ascetic practices had been fulfilled, on the very night when he achieved buddhahood, she gave birth to Rāhula. The King observed that he resembled his father, felt affection and delight, and forgot his worries. He spoke to the group of ministers, saying, “Although my son has gone away, I have now gained his son. It is no different than if my son was here.”

Although Yaśodharā had avoided the punishment of being cast out, she had nonetheless acquired a bad reputation which spread throughout the country. Yaśodharā wished to get rid of the stain on her reputation.

After the Buddha had gained realization of the Path, he returned to Kapilavastu in an attempt to cross over the sons of the Shakyans to liberation. At that time the Pure Rice King and Yaśodharā regularly invited the Buddha to come to the palace for meals. At one such time Yaśodharā took a bowl of “hundred-flavored delightful dumplings,” handed it to Rāhula, and then directed him to take it up and offer them to the Buddha.

The Buddha then resorted to his spiritual powers to transform all five hundred arhats so that they all appeared identical to the Buddha, showing no differences at all. The seven-year-old Rāhula carried the delightful dumplings forward, went straight before the Buddha himself and offered them up to the Bhagavān .

[The Buddha] then withdrew his spiritual powers whereupon all of the bhikshus were restored to their original physical appearance. They were all sitting there with empty bowls. Only the Buddha’s bowl was full of delightful dumplings. Yaśodharā then addressed the King, saying, “Let this serve as verification that I have remained free of any transgressions.”

## The Origins of Yaśodharā's Difficult Pregnancy

Yaśodharā inquired of the Buddha, "What is the causal basis behind my remaining pregnant for a period of six years?"

The Buddha said, "Long ago, in a lifetime far off in the past, your son Rāhula was the king of a country. There was a rishi possessed of the five superknowledges who came at that time and entered that king's country. He spoke to the King, saying, "It is the royal law to punish thieves. I request that you punishing me for my offenses."

The King said, "But what offenses have you committed?"

He replied, "I entered the King's country and transgressed by taking what had not been given. I have repeatedly drunk the King's water and used the King's willow branches [as tooth brushes]."

The King said, "But I have already given those things [to the people]. What transgression could there be in this? When I first ascended to the position of king, I bestowed the use of both water and willow branches universally on everyone."

The Rishi said, "Although the King has already made a gift of them, my mind is nonetheless afflicted by doubts and regrets. Thus the offense is not yet expiated. I pray that I will now undergo corrective measures so as to prevent being subjected to [karmic] punishments later.

The King said, "If you must insist, wait a little bit for me to go on in and come back out again."

The King then entered the palace. Even after six days, he still had not emerged again. The Rishi stayed in the King's garden enduring hunger and thirst for those six days. The Rishi thought to himself, "This King is just now using this situation to punish me."

After six days had gone by, the King came out and released the Rishi, saying, "I completely forgot about this. Do not hold it against me." On account of this causal circumstance, he underwent five hundred lifetimes of punishment in the three wretched destinies and then for five hundred lifetimes always remained in his mother's womb for a period of six years. On account of this verifying evidence, [we should realize that] Yaśodharā was free of transgressions.

## Yaśodharā's Attempt to Bring Back the Buddha

At this time, after he had finished his meal, the World Honored one departed. Yaśodharā's thoughts were full of regret, "Such a fine man as this, rare in all the world—I succeeded in encountering him, but now have lost him forever."

When the World Honored one sat down, she gazed at him intently without even blinking. When the World Honored one departed, her gaze followed along after him so intently that only when he sank away on the horizon did she desist. Her thoughts were full of grief and regret. Every time she thought of it, she would collapse and go into a faint. Her attendants would sprinkle her with water. Only then did she revive and breath normally again.

She constantly remained alone, pondering, "Who in all the world is so good at the skill of casting spells that they might be able to turn his mind around and cause him to return to his original state of mind, thus allowing us to once again be just as delighted and happy as before?" She then placed the seven precious things and other rare jewels into a tray made of gold and, taking it up, went forth to enlist the services of someone [who could help her do this].

There was one brahmacarin who responded to her by saying, "I am able to cast a spell upon him which will cause his mind to turn back. You must make hundred-flavored delightful dumplings in which you mix together herbs. Use the phrases of the spell to capture him. His mind will then turn around and he will certainly come. Of this there is no doubt."

Yaśodharā followed his instructions and sent others to invite the Buddha, saying, "Pray may you, together with the assembly of Āryas, deign to bend down from your [heights of] awesome spirituality [and honor us with your presence]." The Buddha then came and entered into the King's palace. Yaśodharā immediately sent forth the hundred-flavored delightful dumplings and had them placed in the Buddha's bowl. When the Buddha had eaten them, Yaśodharā hoped that, in accordance with her wish, they would be able to share joy together again just as before. The Buddha ate them but appeared no different, his mind and eyes remaining clear and quiet.

Yaśodharā said, "That he does not now move is just because the power of the potion has not yet become active, that's all. Once the strength of the potion has taken effect, events will certainly turn out just as I have wished." When the Buddha had finished his meal and the spell had already been cast, he arose from his seat



and left. Yaśodharā hoped that the power of the potion would take effect in the late afternoon and that it would then become active, certainly causing him to return then to the palace. However, the Buddha remained then the same as ever, no different in either body or mind.

When it came time on the next day for the Bhikshus to take their meal, they put on their robes, took up their bowls, and then went forth into the city to seek alms. They all then heard of this event and were thus moved to increased reverence, thinking, “The powers of the Buddha are immeasurable. His spirit and mind are difficult to fathom. They are inconceivable and indescribable. The power of Yaśodharā’s delightful dumplings was extremely great and yet the Bhagavān ate them with no change being wrought on either his body or his mind.”

When the Bhikshus had finished eating and had gone forth from the city, they reported the entire matter to the Bhagavān.

## Buddha's Past Life as a One-horned Rishi

The Buddha told the Bhikshus, "As for this Yaśodharā, it is not just in this present life that she has used the delightful dumplings [in an attempt] to confuse me." The Bhagavān then described the past life causes and conditions behind this, saying, "In a time long ago and far off in the past, there was a rishi in the mountains of the state of Benares who, in the early spring was relieving himself into a basin when he observed a buck and a doe mating. Lustful thoughts suddenly arose in him, whereupon his semen flowed into the basin.

The doe happened to drink from that basin and became pregnant. When the months of pregnancy were complete, she gave birth to a fawn with the appearance of a man. There were only [the differences of] a single horn on the head and feet like those of a deer. When the deer was about to fawn, she went to a place alongside the rishi's hut and gave birth. She saw that her fawn was a person and so entrusted it to the rishi and left.

When the rishi came out, he saw this progeny of the deer, recalled to himself the original conditions, knew that it was his own son, and so took him and raised him. As [the son] grew to adulthood, he was diligent in instructing him in the topics of study so that he was able to penetrate the eighteen great classics. Additionally, he studied sitting in dhyāna meditation, practiced the four immeasurable minds, and then immediately gained the five superknowledges.

Once, he was climbing up the mountain and encountered a great rainstorm. The mud became slippery, causing him to lose his footing, fall to the ground, break his ewer, and injure his foot. He became greatly enraged. With a ewer full of water, he then cast a spell intended to cause all rains to cease. Due to the influence of the meritorious qualities possessed by this rishi, the dragons, ghosts, and spirits acted on his behalf to prevent any further rain.

Because it did not rain, the five types of grains and the five types of fruit all failed to grow. The populace became impoverished, destitute, and without any way whereby they might go on living. The king of the state of Benares was distressed, worried, and tormented by grief. He ordered all of the great officials to convene and discuss the rainfall situation.

One of the intelligent ones among them offered an opinion, saying, "I have heard it rumored that up in the Rishi Mountains there is a one-horned rishi who, on account of losing his footing, fell down as he ascended the mountain, injuring his foot. He cast a

hateful spell on these rains whereby he caused them to not fall for a period of twelve years.”

The King thought to himself, “If it goes twelve years without raining, my country will surely be finished. There will be no people left at all.” The King then issued an appeal, stating, “Could it be that there is someone who is able to cause a rishi to lose his five superknowledges who will instruct me in this for the sake of the population? I will divide the country so that we might each rule half.”

In this country of Benares, there was a courtesan by the name of Śāntā who was incomparably beautiful. She came in response to the King’s appeal and asked everyone there, “Is this a man or one who is not a man?”

Everyone replied, “He is a man, that’s all. He was born to a rishi.”

The courtesan said, “If he is a man, I will be able to destroy him.” After she had said this, she took up a tray made of gold filled up with fine and precious objects, and told the king of the country, “I will come back here mounted on the neck of this rishi.”

The courtesan then immediately sought to assemble five hundred carriages carrying five hundred beautiful maidens and five hundred deer-carts carrying all sorts of delightful morsels all of which had been admixed with many herbs. She used many different hues to color them so that they appeared like various kinds of fruits and then took all sorts of greatly powerful fine liquors which, in appearance and flavor, were identical to water.

They dressed in tree bark clothing and grass clothing and traveled into the forest, appearing thereby as if they were rishis themselves. They set up grass huts off to one side of the rishi’s hut and then took up residence there. The one-horned rishi was wandering about and observed them. The maidens all came out and welcomed him. They used beautiful flowers and fine incenses as offerings to the rishi. The rishi was greatly delighted.

All of the maidens used lovely words and respectful phrases in greeting the rishi. They took him on into their quarters and sat with him on fine bedding. They gave him fine clear liquor which he took to be pure water. They gave him delightful morsels which he took to be fruit. After he had feasted and drunk his fill, he told the maidens, “From the time of my birth on up to the present, this is a first. I have never yet had such fine fruit and such fine water.”

The maidens said, “It is because we have been single-minded in

our practice of goodness that the gods fulfill our wishes to obtain these fine fruits and fine water."

The rishi asked the maidens, "How is it that your complexions and bodies are so full and flourishing?"

They replied, saying, "It is because we eat these fine fruits and drink this marvelous water that our bodies are so full and flourishing as this." The maidens addressed the rishi, saying, "Why don't you come and live here among us?"

He replied, saying, "I, too, could abide here."

The maidens said, "We could even bathe together." He then assented to that as well. The hands of the maidens were soft and tender. When they touched him, his mind moved. He then continued to bathe together with the beautiful maidens. Desirous thoughts began to develop and consequently he engaged in sexual intercourse. He immediately lost his superknowledges, whereupon the heavens made a great downpour of rain which went on for seven days and seven nights allowing them the opportunity to devote themselves to the delights of food and drink.

After the seven days had passed, the liquor and fruit were all gone, whereupon they continued to supply their needs with the waters of the mountain and the fruits from the trees. However, their flavors were not so marvelous, and so he sought more of what they had before.

She replied to him, saying, "They are already used up. We must now go together to a place, not far from here, where they can be gotten."

The rishi said, "We can do as you wish." They then went off together. The courtesan knew when they had come to a spot not far off from the city. The maiden then lay down in the middle of the road and said, "I'm exhausted. I can't walk any further."

The rishi said, "If it's the case that you cannot walk, sit up on my shoulders and I will carry you forth."

The maiden had already sent along beforehand a letter to the King in which she told the King, "The King will be able to observe my intelligence and abilities."

The King ordered up his official carriage and went forth to observe them. He asked, "How did you manage to bring this about?"

The maiden addressed the King, saying, "It is on account of the power of skillful means that I have now already caused the situation to develop in this way. I have no abilities beyond this. Order him to live within the city. Make fine offerings to him and pay respects to him. Keep him satisfied with the five objects of desire."

The King honored him with the status of a great official. He had dwelt in the city for only a short span of days when his body became haggard and emaciated. He remembered the mental bliss of dhyāna absorptions and so grew disgusted with these worldly desires. The King asked the rishi, "How is it that you have become so unhappy that your body is now so haggard and emaciated?"

The rishi replied to the King, "Although I have gained the five desires, I constantly recall to mind the leisure and stillness in the forest, the wandering place of all the rishis. I cannot get it out of my mind."

The King thought to himself, "If I force him to go against his aspirations, such a going against one's aspirations is suffering. If the suffering reaches an extreme, then he will die. Originally, this was on account of seeking to get rid of the calamity of drought. Now I have already succeeded in that. Why should I continue to forcibly keep him from his aspirations?" He then released him.

After he had returned to the mountains, he had not applied himself vigorously for long before he regained the five superknowledges.

The Buddha told the Bhikshu, "The one-horned rishi was myself. The courtesan was Yaśodharā. At that time she deceived me with the delightful dumplings. I had not yet cut off the fetters and so was tricked by her. Now she again wished to use the delightful dumplings to trick me but was unable to succeed."

On account of this matter one knows that the dharma of subtle and tender touch is able to move even a rishi, how much the more would this be so of any foolish common person. All sorts of causes and conditions such as these illustrate what is meant by renouncing the desire for [sensations of] subtle smoothness. In this fashion one renounces the five desires.

## **The Buddha's Past Life as Śaṅkhācārya, the Rishi**

### **Nāgārjuna's Preamble**

Additionally, non-Buddhists, the Hearers, and the Bodhisattvas all achieve dhyāna absorption. However there are three sorts of calamities within the dhyāna of the non-Buddhists: In some cases, they are attached to its delectability. In some cases, they hold erroneous views. In some cases, they are afflicted with arrogance and pride. Within the dhyāna of the Hearers, loving-kindness and compassion are scant. They do not employ sharp wisdom to penetrate through to the true character of dharmas. They exclusively benefit their own persons and sever the lineage of the Buddhas. The dhyāna of the bodhisattva is free of such issues. Because they wish to accumulate the Dharma of all Buddhas, even in the midst of the dhyānas, they do not forget beings and constantly retain a lovingly-kind mindfulness for even the smallest insects.

### **Story: The Buddha's Past Life as Śaṅkhācārya, the Rishi**

This is illustrated by Shakyamuni Buddha who, in a previous life, was the conch-haired rishi by the name of Śaṅkhācārya who constantly cultivated the fourth dhyāna. His respiration had become cut off. He was sitting, erect and unmoving, beneath a tree. A bird saw him like this, took him to be a tree, and then laid its eggs in his hair. This bodhisattva came out of his dhyāna [absorption] and realized that there were bird's eggs laid on his head. He then thought to himself, "If I get up and move about, the mother bird will certainly not come back again. If the mother bird does not return, the bird's eggs will certainly be ruined." He then went back into dhyāna again. [He remained there] until the young birds had flown away. Then and only then did he get up [from his meditation spot].

## **The Downfall of Udraka, the Rishi**

### **Nāgārjuna's Preamble: The Bodhisattva's Contemplation**

Additionally, as the bodhisattva contemplates all dharmas, whether they be [dharmas associated with mental] scatteredness or whether they be [dharmas associated with] the absorptions, in every case [he realizes that] they are non-dual in character. Other persons apply themselves to getting rid of mental scatteredness and seeking the absorptions. Why is this? It is because, in the midst of dharmas associated with scatteredness, their thoughts are freighted with hatefulness whereas, in the midst of dharmas associated with the absorptions, they develop thoughts characterized by attachment.

### **Story: The Downfall of Udraka, the Rishi**

This is illustrated by the case of Udraka, the rishi. He had gained the five superknowledges. Every day he flew to the palace of the King where he took his meal.

[One day] according with the traditions of her country, the King's wife made obeisance to him, grasping his feet as she did so. When the wife's hands touched him, he immediately lost his spiritual powers. He [was forced to] seek a carriage from the King. He got into the carriage and left, returning to his original dwelling place.

He then went into the forest and again sought the five superknowledges, applying himself to the endeavor single-mindedly and exclusively. Just when he was about to gain them again, there was a bird up in a tree which started calling out urgently, thus causing his mind to become scattered.

He then left that tree behind and went to the shore of a body of a lake and sought absorption there. He then repeatedly heard the splashing sound of a fish jumping. This man was then unsuccessful in seeking to enter dhyāna and so became enraged, swearing "I ought to kill every one of the fish and the birds, too!"

Much later, this man's cultivation of contemplative thought resulted in his gaining the absorptions. He was reborn in the station of neither perception nor non-perception. When that lifetime came to an end, he fell down into rebirth as a flying fox which killed birds and fish thus creating an incalculable number of karmic offenses.

As a result, he fell into rebirth in the three wretched destinies.

This is a set of causal circumstances associated with a mind attached to the dhyāna absorptions.

## A Bhikshu Brought Down Over Pride in His Meditation

Among the disciples of the Buddha there was also a bhikshu who had gained the fourth dhyāna and had developed such extreme arrogance he assumed he had gained the four-fold path [of the arhats]. When he had gained the first dhyāna, he thought it was [the stage of] the *srota-āpanna*. When he gained the second dhyāna, he thought it was [the stage of] the *sakṛdāgāmin*. When he gained the third dhyāna, he thought it was [the stage of] the *anāgāmin*. When he gained the fourth dhyāna, he thought he had gained arhatship.

Based on this, he stopped applying himself and did not seek to advance any further. When his life was about to come to an end, he saw the signs of the arrival of the intermediary aggregates [bringing rebirth in] the fourth dhyāna [heavens]. He reacted to this with a wrong view whereby he thought, “There is no such thing as nirvāṇa. The Buddha has cheated me.” On account of generating this maliciously perverse idea, he lost the intermediary aggregates [leading to rebirth in] the fourth dhyāna [heavens] and next saw the signs of the arrival of the intermediary aggregates associated with the Avīci [hells]. [As a consequence], when his life came to an end, he was immediately reborn in the Avīci hells. The Bhikshus asked the Buddha, “When bhikshu so-and-so, the *araṇya* hermitage dweller died, where was he reborn?”

The Buddha said, “This man was reborn in the Avīci hells.”

The Bhikshus were all greatly startled and amazed, “This man sat in dhyāna meditation and upheld the precepts. Could this be the basis for such a circumstance?”

The Buddha said, “This man was extremely arrogant. This happened because when he gained the four dhyānas, he believed he had actually gained the four-fold path [of the arhats]. Then, when his life was coming to its end, he saw the signs of the fourth dhyāna intermediary aggregates and generated a wrong view, thinking, ‘There is no such thing as nirvāṇa. I am an arhat [and yet] I am now returning to be born yet again. The Buddha’s [teachings] are false and deceptive.’

“At this very time, he immediately saw the signs of the intermediary aggregates of the Avīci hells. When his life ended, he was immediately reborn in the Avīci hells.” The Buddha then uttered a verse, saying:



One may have much learning, uphold the precepts, and be adept at dhyāna,  
While not yet having gained the dharma beyond outflow-impurities.  
Although one may possess these meritorious qualities,  
This situation is one in which one cannot have faith.

### **Concluding Exegesis Discussion**

This bhikshu underwent this suffering in the wretched destinies. One may realize from this that if one grasps at the characteristic features of scatteredness, one may develop hate-filled thoughts and other such afflictions. If one seizes upon the characteristics associated with the absorptions, then one develop attachments based on this.

The bodhisattva does not seize upon the characteristics associated with mental scatteredness nor does he seize upon the characteristics associated with the dhyāna absorptions. This is because the characteristics of scatteredness and absorption are singular in character. It is this [realization] which qualifies as [concordant with] the *pāramitā* of dhyāna.