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## THE DISCOURSE ON THE SIMILE SPOKEN BY THE BUDDHA

*Translated into Chinese by Imperial Order by the Tripiṭakācārya I-Ching in the T'ang Dynasty.*

Thus have I heard. At one time the Blessed One was at Srāvastī in the Jeta Grove of Anāthapindika's Park. At that time the World Honoured-One amidst a great assembly addressed the king Prasenajit saying:

"Great king, I will now briefly expound for you a simile illustrating the tribulations of clinging to the taste of birth and death in all the existences.

Oh king, do listen carefully, recollect and reflect on it well. There was then in the past immeasurable kalpas ago a man who was wandering in a vast wilderness. He was pursued by a wild elephant and he ran frightened without having a refuge. He saw an empty well by the side of which there was a root of a tree. He then went down following the root of the tree. In the well there were two mice a black and a white one gnawing together at the root of the tree. At the four sides of the well there were four poisonous snakes ready to bite the man. Beneath there was a poisonous dragon. He dreaded in his heart the dragon and the snakes and was afraid of the snapping of the root of the tree. On the tree were bees. Five drops of honey fell in his mouth. The tree moved, the bees dispersed and went down to sting the man. Again a wildfire came to burn the tree".

The king said: "Why did this man enduring such immeasurable suffering crave for his little flavour?"

At that time the World Honoured-One addressed him saying:

"Great king, the vast wilderness illustrates the vast distance of the long night of ignorance. Speaking about that man he illustrates the worldling. The elephant illustrates impermanence. The well illustrates the dangerous shore of birth and death. The root of the tree illustrates life. The two mice, the black and the white one illustrate day and night. The gnawing of the root illustrates the destruction that takes place from moment to moment. The four poisonous snakes illustrate the four great elements. The honey illustrates the five desires. The bees illustrate wrong thinking. The fire illustrates old age and disease. The poisonous dragon illustrates death. It is therefore, oh great king, that you ought to know that birth, old age, disease and death are very



dreadful. You ought to constantly reflect and recollect, do not be gulped up and compelled by the five desires".

At that time the World Honoured-One repeated it with a stanza saying:

"The vast wilderness is the ignorance of the road;  
the running of the man illustrates the worldling;  
the great elephant is compared to impermanence;  
the well illustrates the shore of birth and death;  
the root of the tree illustrates life;  
the two mice are the same as day and night;  
the gnawing of the root is the decay from moment to moment;  
the four snakes are the same as the four great elements;  
the drops of honey illustrate the five desires;  
the stinging of the bees is a comparison for wrong thinking;  
the fire equals old age and disease;  
the poisonous dragon is like the suffering of death.

The wise one contemplating on these things  
becomes quickly weary of mortality.

In the five desires to be with a mind free from clinging  
this is then called a liberated man.

Rather than staying firmly in the sea of ignorance  
and to be constantly driven by death and birth  
he knowing the hankering after sounds and forms  
and not delighting in them, he leaves behind the worldling".

At that time the great King Prasenajit hearing the Buddha expounding the tribulations of birth and death attained to what had not been there before and there arose a deep weariness. With folded hands he paid respect. With a one-pointed mind he looked up with reverence, he addressed the Buddha saying: "World Honoured-One, the Tathāgata has out of great loving-kindness expounded the meaning of such a marvellous dhamma. I will now carry it on the top of my head".

The Buddha said: "Well done, well done, oh great king, you ought to practise as it is taught. Do not be heedless". At that time the king Prasenajit and all the great assembly all rejoiced, received it with confidence and put it into practice.

**Taishō Tripitaka Edition No. 217**  
*Translated from the Chinese by Saddhāloka Bhikkhu*

#### Note

The name of the king "Prasenajit", in Pālī "Pāsenādi" has been translated according to its meaning by the Ven. I-Ching Tripitakācārya. It has been rendered as sheng<sup>4</sup> kuang<sup>1</sup> wang<sup>2</sup> which would be in English the "king of the excellent (or victorious) radiance".



THE DISCOURSE SPOKEN by THE BUDDHA ON  
**THE TWELVE KINDS OF BIRTH  
AND DEATH**

*Translated into Chinese by the Tripiṭakācārya Gunabhadra of the Liu-Sung Dynasty (420-477 A.D.)*

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha sojourned at Sravasti in the Jeta Grove of Anāthapiṇḍika's Vihāra. At that time the Buddha told the Bhikkhus: "I will preach a discourse for you". The Bhikkhus replied: "World-Honoured One we wish to be taught and instructed". The Buddha said: "There are twelve ways in which man dies. What are the twelve?"

- The first is the one who dies without residue that is the Arahāt who is without clinging.*
- The second is the one who transcends while dying that is the Anāgāmin who does not return again.*
- The third is the one who dies without residue that is the Sakadāgāmin who departs and still returns.*
- The fourth is the one who dies learning to transcend that is the Sotā-āpanna who realizes the path.*
- The fifth is the one who dies without being cheated those are the eight kinds of individuals.*
- The sixth is the one who dies rejoicing that is the (one who) practise (s) one-pointedness of mind.*
- The seventh is the one who dies frequently that is the man of bad moral conduct.*
- The eighth is the one who dies regretting that is the worldly commoner.*
- The ninth is the one who dies unnaturally that is solitary suffering.*
- The tenth is the one who is fettered and attached when dying that is the animal.*
- The eleventh is the one who dies burning and broiling that is hell.*
- The twelfth is the one who dies starving and thirsting that is the hungry ghost.*

A Bhikkhu ought to understand and know this and ought to train himself thus not to be heedless, not to give rise to lust, to leave far behind all perversions and with a pure mind achieve that which has not as yet been attained and realized. Why so? Frequent dying is suffering, regretting while dying is also suffering. Unnatural death is very unhappy. To be fettered and attached while dying is unhappy too. To die burning and broiling is very painful, to be starving and thirsting while dying is also painful. Thus a Bhikkhu ought to train and to practise dwelling alone in the forest under a tree practising meditation with a one-pointed mind. He should not be heedless and frivolous so as to have no regrets afterwards. This is the Buddhaddhamma taught by the Buddha". When the Buddha had spoken thus the Bhikkhus rejoiced, bowed down and withdrew.