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The Last Utterances of the Buddha

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In this last talk—the last of a series—it is fitting to consider the last utterances of the Buddha.

The Buddha must be pictured now as reclining on his death-bed, calm and self-possessed, in his characteristic “lion-pose” with his body turned to the right side and with one foot resting on the other. It will be remembered that his birth as well as his enlightenment took place not under a roof but under the open sky.

It is fitting, therefore, that he chose to breathe his last also under the open sky—beneath two twin sal-trees in the sal-grove at Kusinara, a small town in India.

Sal flowers blooming out of season, heavenly mandara flowers and heavenly sandal-wood powder dropped down sprinkling and scattering themselves all over the body of the Buddha.

Heavenly music and heavenly songs wafted from the skies.

Thereupon the Buddha lying on his death-bed seized the opportunity to preach a homily to Ánanda and his other disciples who had gathered round his death-bed.

Said the Buddha—“All these incidents have taken place, Ánanda, out of honour, respect, and veneration for the Tathágata. But, Ánanda, it is not thus that the Tathágata could be rightly honoured, respected and venerated. The Bhikkhu or Bhikkhuni, the pious

devout man or woman who continually fulfills the greater and lesser duties, who is correct in life, living according to the precepts, it is he who rightly honours, respects and venerates the Tathágata. Such an offering is the highest offering for the Tathágata. Therefore be ye constant in the fulfillment of greater and lesser, duties, and be correct in life, living according to the precepts.”

Shortly thereafter, Ánanda, his favourite disciple who attends on him with devotion was found some distance away leaning against the lintel of a door and weeping. He was weeping at the thought that his Master was passing away and was aggrieved that he was still. a learner who has not as yet attained to Arahantship.

He was faced with the dread situation that alone and unaided he would have to work out his own spiritual development and perfection.

The Buddha sent for Ánanda and on his appearance consoled him and advised him thus:-

“Do not, Ánanda, weep. Do not grieve. Have I not on former occasions explained to you that it is in the very nature of all things most near and near to us, that we must leave them, separate ourselves from them, sever ourselves from them?

How then, Ánanda, can you thus grieve when anything whatsoever that is born, brought into being, and organized contains within itself the inherent necessity of dissolution ?”

Having consoled him the Buddha gave him this assurance: “For a long time, Ánanda, you have been very near to me by acts of love that never varies. You have done well, Ánanda. Be earnest in effort, and you too shall soon attain to Arahantship.”

The Buddha thereafter addressing his other disciples extolled the virtues of Ánanda thus:

”Through the long ages of the past the Buddhas also had servitors just as devoted to them as Ánanda has been to me. Ánanda knows when it is the right time for others to see me, for the brothers and sisters of the Order, or for devout men and women or for a King or King’s ministers to see me.”

Later, one Subhadda mentioning a number of founders of various schools of doctrine inquired from the Buddha whether they all have attained the highest wisdom or only some of them. The Buddha advised him not to worry himself about this matter as it is something which will not help him.

Instead, the Buddha wanted him to realize that in whatsoever doctrine or discipline the Noble Eightfold Path is not found, there is also not be found there the possibility of becoming a true saint. Void are those doctrine—void of true saints. And then he added, “If Bhikkhus lead the perfect life, the world would not be bereft of Arahants.”

Addressing Ánanda, some time later, the Buddha said, “It may be, Ánanda, that in some of you the thought may arise that the word of the Master is ended and that you no more have a teacher. That is not so, Ánanda. The Dhamma and the Vinaya that I have set forth and laid down will be the teacher to you after I am gone.”

The Buddha then asked his disciples whether they had any doubts regarding the doctrine that need be cleared. They were silent. The Buddha then asked them the same question twice over remarking “Do not have to reproach yourselves afterwards with the thought that

when your teacher was face to face with you, you did not bring yourselves to ask questions from him and clear your doubts”. They still were silent and the Buddha knew that they had no doubts to be cleared.

The Buddha was now quickly reaching his end. Then, before breathing his last, he made this final exhortation to all his disciples. We may well regard this as applicable to all of us as well: -

“Behold now, O Bhikkhus, I exhort you. Decay is inherent in all