

**HOMAGE AND OFFERINGS
TO THE SIXTEEN ELDERS**

Lecture Five

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More than 2,500 years ago, our root teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, through the span of his life, displayed the attainment of enlightenment, the turning of the Wheel of Dharma, and the final entering into parinirvana, to those disciples who had a close karmic connection to him. Afterwards, the Buddhadharma was preserved and upheld by noble beings of both the Mahayana and Theravada vehicles, mainly the Eight Great Bodhisattvas and the Sixteen Arhats, who were all accompanied by large retinues. In this way, the Dharma has been sustained and continues to thrive in our world up to the present day. Through the study of this prayer, we will learn how the Buddhadharma has been preserved and protected by sublime beings in different worlds, through their miraculous powers and samadhi.

People vary in their beliefs, attitudes and openness of mind, hence there are different reactions when they listen to the stories and teachings associated with this prayer. Some people readily accept these stories, without too much doubt. Even if they're not so familiar with the Dharma teachings, by virtue of their own insight, they can understand the meaning behind the stories and the lessons they contain. Other people, however, even though they may be highly intelligent and exceptionally knowledgeable about secular matters, seem to struggle when they study the Dharma. This is probably due to the fact that they have had little contact with

Dharma teachings in their past lives. Even if they try to remember one or two Buddhist stories or verses that they've heard, they seem to have forgotten all about them within a couple of days, as if anything to do with Buddhism gets wiped from their minds immediately, leaving nothing behind.

Such people need to purify their karmic obscurations and make an especially strong effort to study the Dharma. Even if they lack any connection to the Dharma from their previous lives, if they apply themselves, they can still make progress and transform their minds by making an effort now. This applies to older people too. Even though they are no longer young, if they exert themselves in Buddhist training, they will reap the rewards of all their hard work.

I'd like all of you, therefore, to apply yourselves as fully as possible to the continuous study and practice of the Dharma. This is crucial. Nowadays, many people seem to treat attending a Dharma teaching like going to watch a movie. They listen to one lecture and if they're interested, they might continue, but if they become bored, they'll soon leave. Dharma study, however, is not a short-term undertaking—you need to have an ongoing commitment to it, if you are to get anywhere. This is something that I'd like to stress to you.

Another point I'd like to emphasize is the value of collective study. Currently, since there's a major Dharma assembly taking place here at the Academy, you will need to attend the assembly during the day and listen to my lecture in the evening. This will make your days feel busier and you may become tired as a result. But please bear in mind that the whole purpose of the collective study and practice of the Dharma is to serve as a support and encouragement for you. If you engage in this for even just a short time, the merit can be immense. Without such support, you will find it difficult to motivate yourself since human nature is habitually inclined towards laziness. If we didn't schedule the teaching in the evening, many of you would probably spend that hour in a state of distraction. You can be your own judge as to whether you are a conscientious student or one who lacks mindfulness and easily falls into distraction. In general, without the supervision of a teacher, most students become sluggish and lazy. Therefore, please make an effort to attend the Dharma lectures every evening.



Elder Ksudrapanthaka

KSUDRAPANTHAKA

THE ELEVENTH ELDER

We pay homage to the elder Ksudrapanthaka,
Who dwells on Vulture Peak mountain,
Surrounded by one thousand nine hundred¹ arhats,
And makes the gesture of equanimity with his two hands:
Grant your blessings so that the life of the teacher may
 be secure,
And the teachings may flourish and spread!

¹ The English translation of the prayer states that there are one thousand nine hundred arhats who surround Ksudrapanthaka, however according to Khenpo Sodargye's Chinese translation of the prayer from the Tibetan original, the number is one thousand six hundred.

The eleventh elder is called Ksudrapanthaka, but is more commonly known by the name, Chulapanthaka. There are different pronunciations of his name. The latter one is more common and appears most frequently in the original Chinese Buddhist texts. Chulapanthaka resides on Vulture Peak Mountain where the Buddha turned the Second Wheel of Dharma. He is surrounded by 1,600 arhats and makes the gesture of equanimity with his two hands. According to the *Nandimitravadana*, Chulapanthaka resides in Isadhara Mountain or Plow Holder Mountain. We pray to him for the longevity of all Dharma teachers and the proliferation of the nectar-like Dharma in this world.

The Life Story of Chulapanthaka

Stories from the life of Chulapanthaka are quite well-known and popular. There are many stories about him in the Buddhist Canon, for example in the Vinaya, and some of them have even been made into animated films or other such media. But please keep in mind that I'm not sharing these stories with you just as some sort of entertainment! Nor am I exaggerating them to try and impress you, like parents who try to excite their children with fantastical tales.

In the same way that worldly people can learn a lot about ancient cultures and lifestyles by studying their traditional stories, we can

gain deep insights into the teachings when we study the original Buddhist source stories. Some of these stories might stretch our imagination and seem too fantastical to be true, from an ordinary point of view, however, the storylines and settings can often have a great relevance to the lives that we lead today. So when you listen to these stories, please try to discern the truths and profound meaning that lies behind them, rather than simply take them on face value.

1 Birth and Childhood

In Shravasti, during the time of Buddha Shakyamuni, there lived a brahmin couple whose children all died as soon as they were born. This was an immense source of suffering to the family.

The Brahmin's wife became pregnant once more and her husband became extremely worried that the child would not survive, just like the others before. When she heard about his concerns, his neighbor, an elderly lady, told him to call her when as soon as the child was born, as she knew how to keep the baby safe and well.

Later, when the child was born, the Brahmin called for the elderly lady. She wrapped the new-born baby in a piece of white cloth and told the maid to take the child to a busy road intersection—whenever she saw a shramana or brahmin pass by, she was to respectfully ask for their blessing and say, “The baby pays

homage at your sage feet." If no accident had occurred by sunset, the child's life would be safe and secure. The maid then carried the baby to a major road junction nearby.

Many shramanas and practitioners passed by, and the maid did exactly as she had been instructed by the old lady and requested blessings for the child. That day, the Buddha also happened to walk along that road. The maid prostrated to the Buddha and requested his blessing. The Buddha blessed the boy and said, "May the child live a long life free from illness and be protected by the gods. May all his parents' wishes be fulfilled." By sunset, the child had survived the day and was well and healthy. Because the boy received blessings by the roadside, he became known as Mahapanthaka, which means "Great Road".

Afterwards, the Brahmin's wife became pregnant again and gave birth to another boy. When the second child was born, the family followed the instructions that the old lady had given them just as before. The maid, however, was feeling tired this time, so she stood on a smaller junction that fewer people used. Still, shramanas, brahmins and other spiritual practitioners did walk along this road and, as instructed by the elderly lady, the maid asked each of them to bless the child so that he would live long and fulfill the wishes of his parents. They all gave their blessings as requested.

Since the boy received blessings on a minor road, he was named Chulapanthaka, which means “Little Road”.

When they grew up, the two Panthaka brothers developed in very different ways in terms of their intelligence and abilities. Both of them studied a number of different subjects with their teacher. The big brother was remarkably smart and could memorize everything that he read, even if he only glanced at it once. The little brother, however, was exceedingly dull and couldn't remember a single passage that he was taught. As soon as the teacher moved onto the next point, he had already forgotten the previous one.

The teacher lamented, “Mahapanthaka progresses in his learning and insight very quickly, even if I only teach him a little, but this younger son retains nothing—he forgets what I've taught him as soon as I move on to the next point. I can't teach him anything.” The father of the brothers then thought, “Not all Brahmins are learned, he will still be able to manage in life because at least he comes from the highest, Brahmin caste.” Because Chulapanthaka was so dull-witted, people also called him “Dumb Road”. Even though Chulapanthaka was slow-witted, his father loved him very much and brought him with him wherever he was invited.

2 Becoming a Monk

Years later, the Brahmin fell seriously ill and despite all the treatments that he received, he was unable to recover. Before he died, he said to Mahapanthaka, "I have no worries about you after I die. But Chulapanthaka is slow-witted, please do not look down on him. As his brother, you should always help him in times of need and danger. Please remember these, my final words." After the old Brahmin passed away, the two Panthaka brothers cried in grief and held a funeral for their father.

Later, Mahapanthaka met a bhikkhu who inspired him to follow the teachings of the Buddha. He developed strong faith in the teachings, left his home and became a monk. From that moment onwards, the two brothers became separated.

Mahapanthaka studied and practiced diligently and soon afterward attained arhathood. He then decided to travel to Shravasti to pay homage to the Buddha in person. Leading a retinue of five hundred disciples, Mahapanthaka set out on his journey.

On learning that Mahapanthaka and his retinue were coming, the people of Shravasti came out to welcome him. At that time, Chulapanthaka was homeless and forced to beg in order to sustain himself. He heard about Mahapanthaka's grand arrival and wanted

to greet him also. Upon meeting again, Mahapanthaka felt terrible about the plight of his little brother and how poor he had become.

Mahapanthaka said to Chulapanthaka, “Why don’t you think about becoming a monk?” Chulapanthaka replied, “Dull and slow-witted as I am, who would accept me as a student?” He would, of course, have been more than happy with any arrangement as long as there was a roof over his head. Mahapanthaka wondered whether Chulapanthaka had sufficient merit to take ordination, so he used his miraculous powers and insight to check. Mahapanthaka saw that his little brother did indeed have sufficient karma to take ordination and that he was the one who should ordain him. He therefore invited Chulapanthaka to join the sangha.

3 Attaining Arhathood

After accepting Chulapanthaka into the sangha, Mahapanthaka taught him the following verse and instructed him to recite it:

*Create no evil in body, speech, and mind,
Nor harm any beings in the world.
Be mindful that the object of desire is empty,
And stay away from meaningless austerity.*

Later it came time for the monastics to enter the annual summer retreat, which usually lasted for three months. There was a tradition

in the sangha that at the end of the summer retreat, each monastic was required to report on their progress in the practice to their preceptors. During those three months, however, Chulapanthaka was unable to memorize the verse that he had been taught, no matter how hard he tried. So, when the time came for the monks to report their progress, Chulapanthaka was unable to say anything.

Despite the fact that many people looked down upon him, Chulapanthaka still couldn't find any way to improve himself. As a last resort, he was encouraged to visit his brother and to ask for his help. Mahapanthaka contemplated how best he could help him—whether through gentle or harsh means. Through meditation, he observed that the only way he could help his little brother was by giving him a very strong scolding. Therefore, he seized Chulapanthaka by the neck, threw him outside the room, and yelled at him, "How stupid can you be that you can't even memorize a single verse of teaching within three months? You are a shame to the whole sangha!" Scolding his brother in this way, he asked him to leave.

Chulapanthaka was so heartbroken, he couldn't stop weeping. He thought, "I am neither a good monk nor can I support myself as a layman. Now that my brother has given up on me, what can I do with my life?" At that time, the Buddha passed by and asked him why he was crying. Chulapanthaka replied, "I am so dull

and slow-witted that my teacher has asked me to leave. Now, I don't know what to do with myself." The Buddha then said, "It is unreasonable for your teacher to dismiss you like this. He is not the one who obtained the holy Dharma after three asamkhya kalpas of training. It is I who obtained the holy teachings through kalpas of assiduous practice. Come with me and study as I advise."

So, the Buddha took Chulapanthaka away with him and assigned Ananda to first teach him how to read. Since Chulapanthaka was illiterate, Ananda started by teaching him the basics. But however hard Ananda tried, Chulapanthaka couldn't make any progress. After a while, Ananda could bear it no more and sent him back to the Buddha, asking the Buddha to assign other duties to him.

The Buddha then told Chulapanthaka to repeat just one phrase, "Remove the dust, remove the impurities." However, Chulapanthaka was unable to even remember this simple sentence and still couldn't find a way to improve his memory. Observing this, the Buddha realized that he was heavily obstructed by his past negative karma, which was very heavy, so in order to help him purify those obscurations, the Buddha asked him to polish the shoes of all the monks.

Even though Chulapanthaka was happy to serve the sangha and to do this task for them, many of the bhikkhus wouldn't allow him

to touch their shoes. The Buddha then said to the monks, “You should allow Chulapanthaka to serve you so that he can accumulate merit and purify his obscurations. While he polishes your shoes, you should also teach him that simple sentence.” Afterwards, the bhikkhus allowed Chulapanthaka to serve them and they all taught him the short phrase he was supposed to recite. Every day, Chulapanthaka would repeat this phrase while polishing their shoes.

Through this method, Chulapanthaka’s karmic obscurations were gradually diminished. As a result, he was able to remember this phrase and began to contemplate its inner and outer meaning. He realized that “outer impurities” refers to the dirt that requires physical cleaning, while “inner impurities” refers to the afflictive emotions that exist within the mind, the eradication of which is far more important. By following the Buddha’s teaching, and through subsequent contemplation and practice, Chulapanthaka uprooted all his mental afflictions and attained arhathood.

4 Instructing the Bhikkhunis

The fact that someone as dull-witted as Chulapanthaka was allowed to become a monk and remain in the sangha drew a lot of criticism and scorn from non-Buddhists of other schools. They said that if

the sangha allowed someone as incredibly stupid as Dumb Road to be ordained, the monastics must be full of unworthy types.

In order to counteract this slander and to reveal Chulapanthaka's true qualities, the Buddha asked Chulapanthaka to give teachings to the bhikkhunis. It was the custom that every two weeks, a renowned and respectable bhikkhu would be assigned to give a teaching to the assembly of bhikkhunis. On this occasion, the Buddha told Ananda to inform the nuns that Chulapanthaka would be giving them the next teaching.

When they heard this, many of the bhikkhunis felt insulted because they knew Chulapanthaka's reputation for being very stupid and how within three months, he had failed to memorize even a single verse of teaching. Furthermore, there were many exceptional scholars amongst them who excelled in the Tripitaka. It felt absurd to have someone as famously dumb as Chulapanthaka come and teach them. However, since Chulapanthaka had been assigned to teach them by the Buddha, they were scarcely in a position to refuse him.

Within the bhikkhuni sangha, there were twelve mischievous nuns who came together and made a secretive plan to humiliate Chulapanthaka. Six of them set up a Dharma seat in the temple and raised it to a very high level, without any steps for the Dharma

teacher to climb up onto. Another six went around to advertise the upcoming teaching, saying that a master of great repute would be coming. They wanted as many people as possible to come, to witness Chulapanthaka's embarrassment.

When the time arrived, the audience was far larger than usual. Chulapanthaka came into the hall and noticed the high seat that had been put out for him. Knowing that it had been set up that way in order to embarrass him, he miraculously stretched out his right hand until it reached the top of the seat and pressed down until it came to a normal height that he could comfortably sit on. After taking his seat, he declared to the audience, "In the past, I was unable to memorize so much as a single stanza of teaching even if I tried for three months. Now, if I am to expound upon the meaning of that one verse in detail, seven days and nights would still not be enough."

As Chulapanthaka began to teach, the bhikkhunis were amazed and developed true faith in him. Before his teaching finished, many of those present attained the state of stream-enterer, once-returner, non-returner, or arhathood, and some even generated the unsurpassable bodhicitta.

5 Displaying Miracles

We also find stories about Chulapanthaka in sutras such as the *Udanavarga* and the *Dhammapada*. Since Chulapanthaka was famous for being so dull-witted early on in his life, some people wouldn't recognize his realization and still looked down upon him even after he attained arhathood. At Larung Gar, some of our monastics are viewed in that same way too. Even though they might be well-respected Dharma teachers, their family members fail to honor them and even treat them with disdain. Ironically, the people most likely to look down on monastics are their own family members.

One day, Jivaka invited the Buddha and the sangha for lunch but didn't ask Chulapanthaka to join them. When they arrived at his home, Jivaka first offered the Buddha some water, but the Buddha refused to accept it. When Jivaka asked the Buddha why, he replied it was because Chulapanthaka hadn't been invited to come with them. Jivaka tried to excuse himself by saying that since Chulapanthaka was unable to memorize a single word of the teaching, even though he tried for several months, there really was no point to invite him. The Buddha, however, made it clear that he wouldn't accept so much as a sip of water unless Chulapanthaka was also present.

Jivaka ordered one of his servants, therefore, to find Chulapanthaka and invite him to lunch. Foreseeing this, Chulapanthaka multiplied himself into a thousand monks, all of whom looked completely identical. These “copies” filled the entire mango grove of Amrapali, each of them busy with a different task. When the servant called out for Chulapanthaka, they all answered together in unison. The servant was unable to discern who the real Chulapanthaka was and returned to his master dejectedly. The Buddha then asked the servant to return once more but this time to invite Chulapanthaka with true sincerity. He would then be able to find the real Chulapanthaka. The servant did as the Buddha instructed and returned with Chulapanthaka.

In order to make Jivaka aware of Chulapanthaka’s supreme qualities, the Buddha purposely created an opportunity for him to reveal his miraculous powers. The Buddha asked Ananda to give his alms bowl to Chulapanthaka, who sat far away at the other end, and then asked Chulapanthaka to pass it back to him without leaving his seat. Through his miraculous power, Chulapanthaka offered the bowl back to the Buddha without leaving his seat. When they saw this, the entire assembly, Jivaka included, were filled with awe and generated great faith in Chulapanthaka.

6 The Reason for Chulapanthaka's Dullness

Why was Chulapanthaka so dull-witted and lacking in intelligence before he became an arhat? In one of his former lives, Chulapanthaka was an erudite Tripitaka master who was very stingy when it came to sharing Dharma teachings with others. He wouldn't teach other people so much as a single verse of Dharma and this became one of the main reasons why he was so slow-witted in his later lives.

As we can see, the karmic consequence of being selfish with the Dharma is extremely grave. A selfish attitude is of course fairly common among worldly people. Some people are not generous with material things, while others are miserly when it comes to sharing knowledge. Someone might, for example, be expert in a specialized field of knowledge, but be unwilling to share what they know with other people because they are afraid they might eventually outshine them. We should be very mindful of this kind of attitude. Whatever knowledge we acquire, Dharma teachings especially, we should be willing to share with other people as much as we can. Otherwise, no matter how smart we might be now, it may not stay that way in our next life.

Drawing Inspiration from Chulapanthaka's Story

There are a lot of insights and lessons we can learn from studying Chulapanthaka's stories. Firstly, that we should never lose faith in our Dharma study. If we are slower than others in our Buddhist studies, we should not lose faith in ourselves. No matter how dull we might be, it is unlikely that we are unable to memorize a single verse of teaching within three months. Sure, we may have a terrible memory, and it may take us three days or three hours to memorize a stanza, but even so, we will still be doing a lot better than Chulapanthaka. And since even Chulapanthaka was able to attain arhathood in the end, there's no reason at all why we should lose heart.

Secondly, serving the monastic sangha is a very powerful way to purify negative karma. This is something we should all keep in mind. Most of us will not be able to become enlightened right away. If we fail to find inspiration in our practice of the Vajrayana or Mahayana teachings, especially in the early stages, or find that our practice has even regressed, no matter how hard we try, we should not feel downhearted. Instead, we should focus as much as possible on serving the monastic sangha in order to purify our negative obscurations. This is something that is clearly mentioned

in the tantras and is a point that H. H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche repeated to us many times.

If you are a Dharma teacher, for example, and feel that your spiritual practice is stuck and not developing, you should instead focus on serving the sangha, whether through physical work or other voluntary activity. Over time, as your karmic obscurations gradually diminish, your wisdom will naturally shine through and help your practice to progress. It is essential, therefore, to actively serve the sangha.

Thirdly, we should be mindful of our conduct so that we do not set a bad example and attract criticism. It is very important that Buddhists conduct themselves correctly and avoid bringing the sangha into disrepute. As we saw earlier, because Chulapanthaka was very dull-witted when he first joined the sangha, the sangha was mocked by outsiders, who accused the monastics of being full of all sorts of unworthy types.

This is one reason why Buddhism stresses the importance of monastics maintaining unimpaired sense faculties. If someone is born with impaired faculties, they are not permitted to be ordained. Some Buddhists, however, even though they have all their sense faculties intact, still invite criticism because of their bad behavior or sloppy appearance. In this respect, monastics from

the Chinese Buddhist tradition seem to do rather better. In any Chinese Buddhist temple that you go to, even though the sangha might be quite small, each one of the monastics will be mindful of their conduct and how they appear.

Some Han Buddhist practitioners who have spent time in the Tibetan regions for their monastic training, however, seem to have regressed. After staying with a lama or at a monastery in the Tibetan regions, they behave recklessly when they return to the Han regions, as if they are totally free of all attachments. They act as if they are an accomplished mahasiddha, like Master Ji Gong—they purposely keep poor hygiene, don't wash their face or hair, wear dirty clothes, and so on, thinking this is a sign of non-grasping. Clearly, they haven't understood what "freedom from attachment" really means.

We are not denying the fact that certain practitioners have acquired supernatural powers or realization and behave unconventionally in order to benefit beings. Nevertheless, most ordinary people like myself are very much influenced by first impressions. When I see a practitioner who is shabby and unkempt in their appearance, I think they must be a very messy person. While one's external appearance might not matter too much in the Tibetan regions where water and sanitary supplies are difficult to come by, when we are in other places, we should pay attention to this. In summary,

it is crucial for Buddhists, both monastics and lay people alike, to be mindful of their conduct and appearance, so that they fit in with local customs and are accepted by others.

Lastly, you should know that the attainment of supernatural powers is by no means the highest goal of our spiritual path. As we can see from Chulapanthaka's stories, people of his time were very much impressed by displays of miraculous power. Actually, people today are not so much different! When they see someone demonstrate a supernatural power, they are easily taken in and develop faith in them. The Buddha himself remarked in several texts how ordinary beings are easily impressed by supernatural powers.

Nonetheless, the Buddha discouraged and even prohibited the open display of miraculous power. Of course, there are exceptions. Accomplished masters such as arhats and bodhisattvas are permitted to use miraculous powers, if it is for the benefit of other beings. But apart from that, normal monks and nuns are not allowed to display their powers. So, when people ask me, "Why don't you Buddhists demonstrate your supernatural powers?" I always respond, "The Buddha prohibited it."

Of course, miraculous powers are difficult to achieve. Accomplished masters who do possess such powers will never easily demonstrate their abilities, such as knowing the minds of others,

unless under exceptional circumstances. In this way, many potential obstacles have been avoided. That's why the Buddha discourages his followers from demonstrating miraculous powers.

Furthermore, the display of supernatural power is not the ultimate means by which to liberate sentient beings. The Buddha said that the greatest supernatural power is the ability to guide people to realize the truth of all phenomena through teaching the Dharma. This is the supreme approach that the Buddha himself followed in order to benefit beings, so that they could all come to a personal realization of the true nature of phenomena.

Demonstrating supernatural powers, such as the ability to fly, easily impresses people and arouses their curiosity. But this is only a temporary reaction. They will just think that this person is amazing and remarkable. They will not, however, gain any real benefit from these miraculous displays, nor gain any miraculous powers themselves, just by witnessing them. So supernatural powers are not so important.

Many people nowadays talk about super-cognition and claim to know your thoughts or what will happen to you in the future, just like fortune-tellers. I'm not saying that divination and prediction have no use, but rather that we shouldn't overly depend on them, to the point that we become excessively anxious and feel our

lives are utterly doomed. As long as we act positively as much as possible, we don't need to worry about our future since the merit this will accumulate will surely lead us to happiness. If we commit negative acts, however, the resultant suffering will ripen upon us sooner or later. This is the natural law of cause and effect which is non-deceiving and inescapable.



Elder Pindolabharadvaja

PINDOLABHARADVAJA

THE TWELFTH ELDER

We pay homage to Pindolabharadvaja,
Who dwells on the eastern continent of Purvavideha,
Surrounded by a thousand arhats,
And holds a text and alms bowl:
Grant your blessings so that the life of the teacher may
 be secure,
And the teachings may flourish and spread!

The twelfth arhat is called Pindola Bharadvaja. Pindola practiced *dhutanga*, the thirteen austerities. He resides in the eastern continent of Purvavideha, or Aparagodaniya, according to the *Nandimitravadana*. He is surrounded by 1,000 arhats and holds a text and alms bowl in his hands. We pray for his blessing so that the Dharma teachers may live long and the Dharma may prosper.

Pindola appears frequently in Chinese Buddhist history. Many great masters, such as Master Daoxuan of the Song Dynasty, have met Pindola in person. In Han Buddhism, there is a tradition of offering alms to 1,000 monks; this practice is still observed in several monasteries at Mount Wutai and in other sacred sites. It is said that on such occasions, Pindola will always come to receive the offering, usually appearing as an old monk. According to the description we find in Chinese source texts, a distinct feature of the elder Pindola is his long eyebrows and white hair.

The Life Story of Pindola

Stories about Pindola can be found in the Vinaya texts as well as the Agama sutras. There, it is said that he was the son of a minister. From birth, he was surrounded by wealth and enjoyed a happy life. After growing up, Pindola recognized that worldly enjoyments such as wealth and so on are utterly pointless and like a dream or illusion. Mundane matters and pursuits were meaningless to

him. Therefore, he took ordination and practiced diligently. Soon enough, he achieved arhathood. Afterwards, Pindola gave Dharma teachings in many different places, upholding the thirteen ascetic practices. Nowadays, in countries like Thailand, there are still practitioners in secluded mountains who continue this lifestyle.

1 Why Does Pindola Remain in the World?

Why did Pindola remain in the world after the Buddha's parinirvana? One explanation is that it is to atone for his display of miraculous powers against the wishes of the Buddha. It is recorded in the Agama sutras that once, when the Buddha was in Shravasti, Anathapindika's daughter wished to make a grand offering to the Buddha and his retinue. She lived, however, in another country which was far away from Shravasti. Summoning her immense faith in the Buddha and his noble qualities, she faced the direction where the Buddha was staying and prayed sincerely that he would accept her invitation. The Buddha responded to her request and asked all the arhats with their miraculous powers to attend the offering the next day.

When the time came, the Buddha and the sangha flew to receive her offering. At that time, the elder Pindola was sewing his monastic robe and had forgotten all about the invitation. See, even arhats can be forgetful, let alone us ordinary people! So, we can be

forgiven if we forget things sometimes. Some people scold others saying, "How could you forget about it? You shouldn't!" Well, there's no such thing as "should" or "shouldn't" when you forget something!

When Pindola remembered the appointment, it was already late. He looked with his power of clairvoyance and saw that the Buddha had already arrived and was about to receive the offering. So he stuck the sewing needle into the ground, put on his robe, and began to fly in their direction. Since the thread from the robe was still attached to the needle, the entire mountain became uprooted and flew along behind him. This might sound like a fantastical myth to us, but this is exactly how it is recorded in the ancient Buddhist texts.

While Pindola was flying through the sky with the mountain following behind him, a pregnant lady looked up and saw the great spectacle. She became terrified that the mountain might fall on her and as a result, tragically, had a miscarriage and lost her baby.

When Pindola arrived, the Buddha reprimanded him severely, "Not only did you come late, but you've also committed the act of killing. You have committed a very grave fault. After I enter into nirvana, you will have to remain in this world to safeguard the

Dharma until Buddha Maitreya comes.” I guess the Buddha found a good reason to force him to stay in the world after he was gone, in order to protect and uphold the Dharma.

2 Pindola and King Udena

In the *Dharmagupta Vinaya*, there’s a story about Pindola and King Udena. At that time, Pindola was residing in the country of Kosambi. King Udena had a great deal of respect for Pindola and would often visit him. Even so, and since a long time, Pindola would never stand up to receive the king when he saw him coming. Finally, King Udena became fed up with his behavior and thought to himself, “I am the great king, but whenever I visit Pindola he remains seated rather than stand up to welcome me, as if he were the highest among us all. Tomorrow morning I’ll visit him again and if he still doesn’t rise to greet me, I’ll have him killed.”

The king was due the next day. The great arhat was well aware of his intentions and thought to himself, “If I stand up to greet the king, as an ordinary being, he is undeserving of such respect, and the negative karma this will create will cause him to lose his crown. However, if I don’t receive him with this formality, the king will commit the heinous act of killing an arhat, which will cause him to fall into the hell realms. Both will bring him great suffering.”

Thinking that it would be better for the king to lose his throne rather than to fall into the hell realms, as the king approached, Pindola climbed down from his seat and took seven steps towards him. Because of this, the king did not kill him. However, the karmic result of making a holy being greet an ordinary being in such a manner was by no means insignificant. Seven days later, while King Udena was out on an excursion, he was captured by another king and held prisoner for seven years. After this calamity, he regained the throne.

The Importance of Being Humble in the Presence of the Sangha

As we can see from this story, an ordinary person lacks the merit to be honored by a noble being, for example, to be ceremoniously greeted by a large number of monastics. That is why those who are cautious of karmic law always conduct themselves with humility when in the presence of the sangha.

In around 1988, a Geshe-la of the Gelug tradition from India visited Larung Gar. His Holiness praised this Geshe very highly and arranged a great assembly of the sangha to welcome him. A tulku accompanied the Geshe to Larung Gar and led the way. This tulku was very mindful of karmic law and took great care in discerning virtuous from non-virtuous actions. As soon as he saw His Holiness

and the sangha ahead, he quietly moved to the back and entered the Academy through another entrance. Later, we asked him, “We heard that you had come, but couldn’t find you anywhere. Why did you take a different way?” He said, “So many sangha members came today, how could I allow myself to be welcomed by so many monastics and sublime beings when I am such an undeserving man?”

When I travel to different places, I always feel concerned if a group of monastics comes to greet me. In particular, when I accompanied H. H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche on his trips, one of the things that made me most uncomfortable was to follow behind him when he was being welcomed by a large sangha. Thinking that there must be many noble beings among the crowd, I would become very worried. For someone as highly accomplished as His Holiness, a mutual exchange of homage between sublime beings is fine. But for anyone walking behind His Holiness, an ordinary person like me, we certainly didn’t deserve to be welcomed by a noble one.

But nowadays, many laypeople seem to enjoy being greeted ceremonially by the sangha. I heard that often, sponsors who make big donations to monasteries are welcomed by lines of monastics when they visit their temples. They feel proud and enjoy having khatas placed around their necks. This is wholly inappropriate. While it is admirable that laypeople cultivate merit through generosity, when

in the presence of monastics, laypeople should maintain a humble attitude and be respectful, because at the very least, monastics wear the Dharma robe and represent the Three Jewels. In a word, laypeople should always be respectful of the monastics.

On the other hand, monastics shouldn't be overly demanding, ordering laypeople to do their bidding. Some laypeople have developed a weariness or disgust towards the monastics, because of their experience with one or two examples. Why is this? I've heard instances, for example, when a monastic, soon after getting to know a layperson, immediately asks to borrow one of their homes and ends up staying there for a long time. Of course, you can always say this is due to their karmic connection. It is important, however, that monastics pay special attention to the feelings of laypeople when they associate with them. They should observe their facial expressions and reactions very closely, so as to avoid creating any problems for them in the future.



Elder Panthaka

PANTHAKA

THE THIRTEENTH ELDER

We pay homage to the noble elder Panthaka,
Who dwells in the heaven of Thirty-Three,
Surrounded by nine hundred great arhats,
And makes the gesture of teaching the Dharma while
 holding a text:
Grant your blessings so that the life of the teacher may
 be secure,
And the teachings may flourish and spread!

This elder, Panthaka, is the Mahapanthaka who appeared earlier, the elder brother of Chulapanthaka. He dwells in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three and is accompanied by nine hundred great arhats. With his hands, he makes the mudra of teaching the Dharma while holding a text. We pray for his blessing so that all the Dharma teachers in the world may have a long life and the Dharma may spread and thrive.

The Life Story of Panthaka

Panthaka was born into a Brahmin household and later grew to be a highly intelligent and talented Brahmin teacher. There were often 500 students following him. He taught his students the Brahmin teachings and traditions and was well respected by them.

One day, the residents of the city heard that Moggallana and Shariputra, two of the Buddha's foremost disciples, were due to arrive. They all rushed out to welcome them and hear their teachings. Panthaka inquired after their qualities, wondering why they attracted so much attention. He learned that both had been born as Brahmins, the highest caste, but had forsaken everything to become Buddhist monks. Panthaka was confused and couldn't make sense of their decision to give up their status and privileges in order to take monastic vows. One of his students held Buddhism in high esteem and said to Panthaka, "Moggallana and Shariputra

are exceptional teachers who have attained arhathood. You should go and listen to their teachings. You will definitely benefit from it.” So Panthaka had the idea to go to their teachings privately, in secret, and to listen to what they said.

Later, when Panthaka didn't have classes, he walked out of the city on his own to search for Dharma teachings. Although he didn't meet the two arhats, he ran into another bhikkhu who was practicing walking meditation under a tree. Impressed by the bhikkhu's deportment and speech, Panthaka asked the bhikkhu about the Buddha's teaching. In response to Panthaka's request, the bhikkhu introduced him to the ten virtuous and ten non-virtuous actions. After hearing this teaching, Panthaka felt a sense of conviction and told the bhikkhu that he would return once more before he left.

Later, Panthaka revisited the bhikkhu, and this time he was taught the twelve links of dependent origination. After this teaching, Panthaka realized that the reality of samsara was quite different from what he had been taught previously and that the Buddha offered an alternative view of the world, a truth that was both profound and highly analytical. He asked the bhikkhu if he could become a monk since he wished to join the sangha in order to actualize the Buddha's teaching. The bhikkhu agreed and gave him ordination.

The bhikkhu then taught Panthaka that, according to the guidance of the Buddha, there were two primary paths in Buddhism—one was to read and recite the sutras and the other was to meditate on the teachings. He asked Panthaka, “Which one would you like to follow?” Panthaka answered, “Both!” Panthaka thenceforth devoted himself to reciting sutras and practicing meditation. Some time later, he attained arhathood. He then sent for hundreds of his former disciples to come to see him and guided them to take refuge in Buddhism. Later, the Buddha instructed Panthaka to dwell in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three and to safeguard the Dharma through his miraculous power.

One of the inspirations we can draw from this story is what we should do after we become a Buddhist. Nowadays, Buddhists seem to be unclear about this. Every role—civil servant, doctor or any other—has its respective duties. So does a Buddhist. Once you begin practicing Buddhism, the first thing you need to do is listen to Dharma teachings and to reflect on what you hear. The second is to meditate and actualize those teachings. These are the two tasks that Buddhists need to accomplish.

Spiritual Treasure of Humanity

Modern-day Buddhists will probably have different views and opinions about these stories. Those who have a strong affinity to

Buddhism will readily accept them, others will remain neutral, while still others may react against or even feel offended by some of the views that are expressed. Buddhism itself accepts and includes everyone—all types of beings and all kinds of opinions. Concerning the latter two attitudes towards Buddhism, it is important that whoever feels this way should analyze their thoughts very carefully since we ordinary people are easily influenced by our subjective thoughts and feelings, many of which are utterly baseless.

Our thoughts, feelings and ideas are not reliable. What we consider to be pure, may well not be. We might think that something exists without ever changing, but the truth is opposite. For example, we saw a red pillar yesterday and think that it still exists in exactly the same way today, and will do so tomorrow. This is, however, our deluded perception which projects an idea of permanence on something—in truth, the pillar is impermanent and constantly changing. This being the case, whenever we hear a new story or idea, we should think about it rationally, before we jump to a quick conclusion based on our subjective feelings.

In Tibetan Buddhism, there was a great master called Gendun Chopel. He said that people's minds are constantly changing from their youth up to their old age, so any thought that they have now, at this moment in time, is unreliable. This is very true and applies to all of us. When we were little, we were attached to our

toys. Then as we grew up, we discarded those toys. When we are young, we are attached to certain people, but when we are more mature, their influence over us fades. In mid-life, we tend to cling to our careers and families. But as we grow older, we find that these things too, are ultimately pointless. Finally, when we examine all the things that we have grasped onto during our life, we find them to be devoid of any real meaning. It is just as the Buddha explained in the texts—everything in life is simply an illusory display, insubstantial and unreal. If we realize this point, it counts as a form of enlightenment or breakthrough.

The Buddha's teachings are indeed unexcelled and extremely profound. That is why Buddhists, as they go deeper and deeper, find the Dharma teachings to be so inspiring. If they were shallow and simplistic, we would soon tire of them and seek something else. The truth of the matter is, wise people in the past and those in the present have all come to the conclusion that the Buddhist teachings are a supreme and precious gift to humanity. My deepest wish is that every single being might understand something of the Buddhist teachings. We don't have to understand all the Buddhist teachings, but just to grasp any one aspect of them, would bring immense benefit to us in both our present and future lives.

Therefore, we pray to these sublime beings for their blessing, so that more and more Dharma teachers will appear in this world to

expound the truth and that they will live long for the welfare of beings. To constantly pray like this is itself an auspicious practice.

