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THE SUTRA OF FORTY-TWO SECTIONS SPOKEN BY THE BUDDHA

Jointly translated in the Later Han Dynasty by the monks
Kasyapa Matanga and Gobharana from Central India.

When the World Honored had become Enlightened, he reflected thus: "To abandon desire and rest in perfect quietude is the greatest of victories. To remain in a state of complete abstraction is to overcome the ways of all the evil ones." In the Royal Deer Park, he expounded the Doctrine of the Four Noble Truths, converting Kaundinya and four others, and thus manifesting the fruit of the Way. There were frequently monks who voiced their doubts and asked the Buddha to resolve them, so the World Honored taught and commanded them, until, one by one, they became Enlightened and, bringing their hands together in respectful agreement, prepared to follow the sacred commands.

1. The Buddha said: "Those who, taking leave of their families and adopting the homeless life, know the nature of their minds and reach to what is fundamental, thus breaking away (from the phenomenal and attaining to) the unphenomenal, are called Sramanas. They constantly observe the two hundred and fifty precepts, entering into and abiding in perfect quietude. By working their way through the four stages of progress, they become Arhans, who possess the powers of levitation and transformation, as well as the ability to prolong their lives for many aeons and to reside or move about anywhere in heaven or earth. Below them come the Anagamins, who at the end of a long life, ascend in spirit to the nineteen heavens and become Arhats. Then come the Sakridagamins who must ascend one step and be reborn once more before becoming Arhans. There are also the Srota-apanas who cannot become Arhans until they have passed through nine more rounds of birth and death [original Chinese text states seven, not nine]. One who has put an end to his longings and desires is like a man who, having no further use for his limbs (literal: having cut off his limbs), never uses them again."

2. The Sramana who, having left home, puts an end to his desires and drives away his longings, knowing the source of his own mind, penetrates to the profound principles of Buddhahood. He awakes to the non-phenomenal, clinging to nothing within and seeking for nothing from without. His mind is not shackled with dogmas, nor is he enmeshed by karma. Pondering nothing and doing nothing, practising nothing and manifesting nothing, without passing through all the successive stages, he (nevertheless) reaches the loftiest of all. This is what is meant by "The Way".

3. The Buddha said: "He who has shorn his locks and beard to

become a Sramana and has accepted the Doctrine of the Way, abandons everything of worldly value and is satisfied by the food he obtained by begging, eating but once a day. If there is a tree under which to rest, he desires nothing else. Longings and desires are what make men stupid and darken their minds.

4. The Buddha said: "There are ten things by which beings do good and ten by which they do evil. What are they? Three are performed with the body, four with the mouth, and three with the mind. The (evils) performed with the body are killing, stealing and unchaste deeds; those with the mouth are duplicity, slandering, lying, and idle talk; those with the mind are covetousness, anger, and foolishness. These ten are not in keeping with the holy Way and are called the ten evil practices. Putting a stop to all of them is called performing the ten virtuous practices."

5. The Buddha said: "If a man has all kinds of faults and does not regret them, in the space of a single heartbeat retribution will suddenly fall upon him and, as water returning to the sea, will gradually become deeper and wider. (But), if a man has faults and, becoming aware of them, changes for the better, retribution will melt away into nothingness of its own accord, as the danger of a fever gradually abates once perspiration has set in.

6. The Buddha said: "If an evil man, on hearing of what is good, comes and creates a disturbance, you should hold your peace. You must not angrily unbraid him; then he who has come to curse you will merely harm himself."

7. The Buddha said: "There was one who heard that I uphold the Way and practise great benevolence and compassion. On this account, he came to sold me, but I remained silent and did not retort. When he had finished scolding me, I said: "Sir, if you treat another with courtesy and he does not accept it, does not the courtesy and he does not accept it, does not the courtesy rebound to you?" He replied that it does and I continued: 'Now you have just cursed me and I did not accept your curses, so the evil which you yourself did has now returned and fallen upon you. For a sound accords with the noise that produced it and the reflection accords with the form. In the end there will be no escape, so take care lest you do what is evil."

8. The Buddha said: "An evil man may wish to injure the Virtuous Ones and, raising his head, spit towards heaven, but the spittle, far from reaching heaven, will return and descend upon himself. An unruly wind may raise the dust, but the dust does not go elsewhere; it remains to contaminate the wind. Virtue cannot be destroyed, while evil inevitably destroys itself."

9. The Buddha said: "Listen avidly to and cherish the Way. The Way will certainly be hard to reach. Maintain your desire to accept it humbly, for the Way is mighty indeed."

10. The Buddha said: "Observe those who bestow (knowledge of) the Way. To help them is a great joy and many blessings can thus be obtained." A Sramana asked: "Is there any limit to such blessings?" The Buddha replied: "They are like the fire of a torch from which hundreds and thousands of people light their own torches. The (resulting) light eats up the darkness and that torch is the origin of it all. Such is the nature of those blessings."

11. The Buddha said: "To bestow food on a hundred bad men is not equal to bestowing food on one good one. Bestowing food on a thousand good men is not equal to bestowing food on one who observes the five precepts. Bestowing food on ten thousand who observe the five precepts is not equal to bestowing food on one Srota-avana. Bestowing food on a million Srota-avanas is not equal to bestowing food on one Sakrdagamin. Bestowing food on ten million Sakrdagamins is not equal to bestowing food on one Anagamin. Bestowing food on a hundred million Anagamins is not equal to bestowing food on one Arhan. Bestowing food on a thousand million Arhans is not equal to bestowing food on one Pratyeka Buddha. Bestowing food on ten thousand million Pratyeka Buddhas is not equal to bestowing food on one of the Buddhas of the Triple World. Bestowing food on a hundred thousand million Buddhas of the Triple World is not equal to bestowing food on one who ponders nothing, does nothing, practices nothing, and manifest nothing."

12. The Buddha said: "There are twenty things which are hard for human beings:

"It is hard to practice charity when one is poor.

"It is hard to study the Way when occupying a position of great authority.

"It is hard to surrender life at the approach of inevitable death.

"It is hard to get an opportunity of reading the sutras

"It is hard to be born directly into Buddhist surroundings

"It is hard to bear lust and desire (without yielding to them).

"It is hard to see something attractive without desiring it.

"It is hard to hard to bear insult without making an angry reply.

"It is hard to have power and not to pay regard to it.

"It is hard to come into contact with things and yet remain unaffected by them

"It is hard to study widely and investigate everything thoroughly.

"It is hard to overcome selfishness and sloth.

"It is hard to avoid making light of not having studied (the Way) enough.

"It is hard to keep the mind evenly balanced.

"It is hard to refrain from defining things as being something or not being something.

"It is hard to come into contact with clear perception (of the Way).

"It is hard to perceive one's own nature and (through such perception) to study the Way.

"It is hard to help others towards Enlightenment according to their various deeds.

"It is hard to see the end (of the Way) without being moved.

"It is hard to discard successfully (the shackles that bind us to the wheel of life and death) as opportunities present themselves.

13. A Sramana asked the Buddha: "By what method can we attain the knowledge of how to put a stop to life (in the phenomenal sphere) and come in contact with the Way?" The Buddha answered: "By purifying the mind preserving the will (to struggle onwards) you can come in contact with the Way just as, when a mirror is wiped, the dust falls off and the brightness remains. By eliminating desires and seeking for nothing (else) you should be able to put a stop to life (in the phenomenal sphere)".

14. A Sramana asked the Buddha: "What is goodness and what is greatness?" The Buddha replied: "To follow the Way and hold to what is true is good. When the will is in conformity with the Way, that is greatness."

15. A Sramana asked the Buddha: "What is great power and what is the acme of brilliance?" The Buddha answered: "To be able to bear insult (without retort) implies great power. He that does not cherish cause for resentment, but remains calm and firm equally (under all circumstances), and who bears all things without indulging in abuse will certainly be honored by men. The acme of brilliance is reached when the mind is utterly purged of impurities and nothing false or foul remains (to besmirch) its purity. When there is nothing, from before the formation of heaven and earth until now or in any of the ten quarters of the universe which you have not seen, heard and understood; when you have attained to a knowledge of everything, that may be called brilliance."

16. Men who cherish longings and desires are those who have not perceived the Way. Just as, if clear water be stirred up with the hand, none of those looking into it will perceive their reflections, so men, in whose minds filth has been stirred up by longings and desires will not perceive the Way. You Sramanas must abandon longings and desires. When the filth of longing and desires has been entirely cleared away, then only will you be able to perceive the Way."

17. The Buddha said: "With those who have perceived the Way, it is thus. Just as, when one enters a dark house with a torch, the darkness is dissipated and only light remains, so, by studying the Way and perceiving the truth, ignorance is dissipated and insight remains forever."

18. The Buddha said: "My Doctrine implies thinking of that which is beyond thought, performing that which is beyond performance, speaking of that which is beyond words and practising that which is beyond practice. Those who can come up to this, progress, while the stupid regress. The way which can be express in words stops short; there is nothing which can be grasped. If you are wrong by so much as the thousandth part of a hair, you will lose (the Way) in a flash."

19. The Buddha said: "Regard heaven and earth and consider their impermanence. Regard the world and consider its impermanence. Regard the spiritual awakening as Bodhi. This sort of knowledge leads to speedy Enlightenment."

20. The Buddha said: "You should ponder on the fact that, though each of the four elements of which the body is made up has a name, none of them (constitute any part of) the real self. In fact, the self is non-existent, like a mirage."

21. The Buddha said: "There are people who, following the dictates of their feelings and desires, seek to make a name for themselves, but, by the time that name resounds, they are already dead. Those who hunger for a name that shall long be remembered in the world and who do not study the Way strive vainly and struggle for empty forms. Just as burning incense, though others perceive its pleasant smell, is itself being burnt up, so (desires) bring the danger of fire which can burn up your bodies in their train."

22. The Buddha said: "Wealth and beauty, to a man who will not relinquish them, are like a knife covered with honey which, even before he has had the pleasure of eating the honey, cuts the tongue of the child that licks it."

23. The Buddha said: "People who are tied to their wives, children, and homes are worse off than prisoners. A prisoner will be released sooner or later, but wives and children have no thought of betaking themselves off. Why fear to rid yourselves immediately of the longing for physical beauty? (Otherwise,) you are tamely submitting to the jaws of a tiger and deliberately allowing yourselves to drown in the quicksand into which you have fallen, thus meriting the name of 'simple fellows'. If you can reach the point (of abandoning such things), you will rise from the dust and become Arhans."

24. The Buddha said: "Of all longings and desires, there is none stronger than sex. Sex as a desire has no equal. Rely on the (universal) Oneness. No one under heaven is able to become a follower of the Way if he accepts dualism."

25. The Buddha said: "Those who (permit themselves) longings and desires are like a man who walks in the teeth of the wind carrying a torch. Inevitably, his hands will be burnt."

26. The gods bestowed the jade girl upon me, hoping to shake my determination. I said, 'O skin bag, full of every kind of filth! For what have you come here? Go! I do not need you.' Then the gods paid me profound reverence and, as they asked me to expound the Way, I enlightened them and they became Srota-apanas as a result."

27. The Buddha said: "Those who follow the Way are like a piece of wood in the water, which floats along, touching neither bank, and which is neither picked up by men, intercepted by the gods, hindered by floating scum, nor rots upon the way. I am prepared to undertake that such a piece of wood will certainly reach the sea. If those who study the Way are not misled by their feelings and desires, not disturbed by any sort of depravity, and, if they earnestly advance towards the unphenomenal, I am prepared to undertake that they will

certainly attain to the Way."

28. The Buddha said: "Be careful not to depend on your own intelligence-- it is not to be trusted. Take care not to come in contact with physical attractions-- such contacts result in calamities. Only when you have reached the stage of Arhan can you depend on your own intelligence."

29. The Buddha said: "Take care to avoid looking on the beauty of women and do not converse with them. If you do (have occasion to) converse with them, control the thoughts which run through your minds. When I was a Sramana and came in contact with the impure world, I was like the lotus which remains unsullied by the mud (from which it grows). Think of old women as of you mothers, of those older than yourselves as of your elder sisters, of those younger than yourselves as of your younger sisters, and of very young ones as your daughters. Dwell on thoughts of Enlightenment and banish all evil ones."

30. The Buddha said: "Those who follow the Way are like straw which must be preserved from fire. A follower of the Way who experience desire must put a distance between himself and (object of his) desire."

31. The Buddha said: "There was one who indulged his sexual passions unceasingly but who wished, of his own accord, to put an end to his evil actions, I said to him: "To put a stop to these evil actions will not be so good as to put a stop to (the root of the evil) in your mind. The mind is like Kung Ts'ao. If Kung Ts'ao desists, his followers will stop also. If mental depravities continues, what is the use of putting an end to evil actions?' I then repeated this verse for him: 'Desire springs from your thoughts. Thought springs from discernment (of matter). When the two minds are both stilled, there is neither form nor action.' I added that this verse was first spoken by Kasyapa Buddha".

32. The Buddha said: "The sorrows of men comes from their longings and desires. Fear comes from these sorrows. If freedom from desire is attained, what (cause for) grief and fear will remain?

33. The Buddha said: "Those who follow the Way are like one who has to fight ten thousand and who, putting on his armor, steps out of the gate. His thoughts may be timorous and his resolution weak, or he may (even) get halfway to the battle-ground and then turn around and flee. Again, he may join battle and be slain. On the other hand, he may gain the victory and return. The Sramana who studies the Way must have a resolute mind

and zealously build up his courage, fearing nothing that lies before him
and destroying all demons (of temptation that stand in his way), that he
may obtain the fruit (of diligently studying) the Way."

34. One night, a Sramana was intoning "The Sutra of Teachings Bequeathed by Kasyapa Buddha." The sound of his voice was mournful, for he reflected remorsefully on his wish to retreat in cultivation. The Buddha asked him: "What did you do before you became a monk?" "I used to like playing the lute," he replied. "What happened," said the Buddha, "when you loosened the strings?" "They made no sound." "And when you pulled them taut?" "The sounds were brief." "And how was it when they were neither taut nor loose?" "Then all the sounds were normal" replied the Sramana. To this the Buddha said, "It is the same with a Sramana studying the Way. If his mind is properly adjusted, he can attain to it, but if he forces himself towards it, his mind will become weary and, on account of the weariness of his mind, his thoughts will become irritable. With such irritable thoughts, his actions will retrogress. **If his mind becomes afflicted, then he will retreat from his practice. If he retreats from his practice, his offenses will certainly increase.** But if he studies quietly and happily, he will not lose the Way."

35. The Buddha said: "If a man smelts iron until all impurities have been eliminated (before proceeding to) make implements with it, the implements will be of fine quality. If one who studies the Way first purges his heart of all foul influences, his actions will then become pure."

36. The Buddha said:
"It is hard for one to leave the grosser forms of incarnation and be born a human being.
"It is hard for such a one to escape being a woman and be born a man.
"It is hard for such a one to be born with all his organs in perfect condition.
"It is hard for such a one to be born in China.
"It is hard for such a one to be born directly into Buddhist surroundings.
"It is hard for such a one to come in contact with the Way.
"It is hard for such a one to cultivate faith in his mind.
"It is hard for such a one to attain to the Bodhi-heart.
"It is hard for such a one to attain to (the state where) nothing is practised and nothing manifested."

37. The Buddha said: "A disciple living thousands of miles away from me will, if he constantly cherishes and ponders on my precepts, attain the fruit (of studying) the Way: but one who is in immediate contact with me, though he sees me constantly, will ultimately fail to do so if he does not follow my precepts."

38. The Buddha said to a Sramana: "How long is the span of a man's life?"
"It is but a few days," was the answer. The Buddha said: "You have not understood," and asked another Sramana, who replied: "It is (like) the time taken to eat(a single meal.)" To this the Buddha replied in the same way and asked a third: "How long is the span of a man's life?" "It is (like) the time taken by (single) breath," was the reply. "Excellent," said the Buddha, "You understand the Way."

39. The Buddha said: "Those who study the Way of the Buddha should believe and follow all that is said by the Buddha. Just as, when you eat honey (you find that), every drop of it sweet, so it is with my words."

40. The Buddha said: "A Sramana studying the Way should not be as an ox turning the millstone which though it performs the necessary actions with its body, does not concentrate on them with its mind. If the Way is followed in the mind, of what use are actions?"

41. The Buddha said: "Those who follow the Way are like an ox bearing a heavy load and walking through deep mud. It feels so weary that it does not dare to look to left or right and, only on emerging from the mud, can it revive itself by resting. A Sramana should regard feelings and desires more seriously than (the ox regards) the mud. Only by controlling his mind and thinking of the Way can he avoid sorrow."

42. The Buddha said: "I look upon the state of kings and princes as upon the dust which blows through a crack. I look upon ornaments of gold and jewels as upon rubble. I look upon garments of finest silk as upon worn-out rags. I look upon a major chiliocosm as upon a small nut. I look upon the Anavatapta as upon oil for smearing the feet. (On the other hand), I look upon expedient methods (leading to the truth) as upon spending heaps of jewels. I look upon the supreme vehicle as upon a dream of abundant wealth. I look upon the Buddha's Way as upon all the splendors which confront the eye. I look upon dhyana meditation as upon the pillar of Mount Sumeru. I look upon Nirvana as upon waking at daybreak from a night's sleep. I look upon heresy erected as upon six dragons dancing. I look upon the universal, impartial attitude (of a Buddha) as upon the Absolute Reality. I look upon

conversion (to the Way) as upon the changes undergone by a tree (due to the
the
action of the) four seasons."