

The Scripture in Forty-two Sections

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The Scripture in Forty-two Sections (*Sishi'er zhang jing*) is a short collection of aphorisms and pithy moralistic parables traditionally regarded as the first Indian Buddhist scripture to be translated into Chinese. There are, in fact, good reasons to question the purported Indian origins of this scripture—it may well have been compiled in Central Asia or even China. Moreover, all versions of the text that have come down to us show signs of later revision at the hands of medieval Chinese editors. Nevertheless, most scholars believe that the original *Scripture in Forty-two Sections*, whatever its origins, was indeed in circulation during the earliest period of Buddhism in China.

According to tradition, the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections* was translated at the behest of Emperor Ming of the Han dynasty (r. 58–75 C.E.). The earliest surviving account of the story runs as follows: One night Emperor Ming had a dream in which he saw a spirit flying around in front of his palace. The spirit had a golden body, and the top of his head emitted rays of light. The following day the emperor asked his ministers to identify the spirit. One minister replied that he had heard of a sage in India called “Buddha” who had attained the Way and was able to fly. It seemed that the spirit observed by the emperor must have been he. Thereupon the emperor dispatched a group of envoys led by Zhang Qian who journeyed to Yuezhi (Scythia?) and returned with a copy of the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections*. The text was later deposited in a temple.

There is considerable debate among scholars concerning the date of this legend. The brief account given above is found in an early preface to the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections* that may date to the middle of the third century C.E. The story was considerably embellished in time, and at least one glaring anachronism was removed. (Zhang Qian, the leader of the envoys, was in fact a historical figure who went to Bactria in the second century B.C.E., and thus his name is omitted in later renditions.) Sources disagree as to the date of the departure (given variously as 60, 61, 64, 68 and C.E.), the return date (64 to 75 C.E.), and the destination of the envoys (some versions mention India rather than Yuezhi). While the “Preface”

makes mention only of the scripture, a fifth-century source reports that the envoys managed to secure the famous Udayana image of the Buddha as well. (See chapter 19 in this volume.) In the fifth and sixth centuries we also begin to find mention of two Indian monks, Kāśyapa Mātanga and Dharmaratna, who return with the Chinese envoys, and by the medieval period these monks are regularly cited as cotranslators of the scripture. Finally of note is another relatively late tradition that has Emperor Ming build the first Chinese Buddhist temple—the Baimasi at Luoyang—as a residence for the two Indian translators. This temple became an important center for the translation of Buddhist texts for centuries to come.

Despite questions concerning the date and authenticity of the legend, scholars are generally agreed on two points: (1) Buddhism was introduced into China *prior* to the traditional dates given for the “dream of Emperor Ming,” and (2) some form of the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections* did in fact exist in the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 C.E.). Evidence for the first point comes from both art-historical remains and casual references in Han historical sources, while the second point can be deduced from a passage in a memorial presented to Emperor Huan by the scholar Xiang Kai in 166 C.E. In a long diatribe against the moral abuses of the court, Xiang Kai criticizes the emperor for venerating saints but failing to emulate them:

Moreover I have heard that altars have been established for Huanglao and the Buddha within the palace. Their Way is that of purity, emptiness, and reverence for nonaction. They value life and condemn killing. . . . Since your Majesty has deviated from this teaching, how can you hope to obtain its rewards? . . . The Buddha did not pass three nights under the [same] mulberry tree; he did not wish to remain there long, for this would give rise to attachment and desire. That was the perfection of his essence. A deity sent him a beautiful maiden but the Buddha said: “This is nothing but a leather sack filled with blood,” and he paid no further attention to her. His concentration was like this, and thus he was able to realize the Way.

Xiang Kai was likely referring to some early form of the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections*; compare the quote above with section 2 of the scripture: “Taking a single meal at midday, and lodging a single night under a tree, [a *śramaṇa*] takes care not to repeat either.” And the anecdote concerning the gift of the maiden to the Buddha may well have been derived from section 24: “A deity presented a woman of pleasure to the Buddha, wanting to test the Buddha’s will power and examine the Buddha’s Way. The Buddha said: ‘Why have you come here bearing this leather sack of filth? Do you think to deceive me? . . . Begone! I have no use for her.’ ”

In addition to evidence provided by Xiang Kai’s memorial, there are stylistic and linguistic features that mark this work as one of the earliest Buddhist texts in China (notably the archaic transliterations used throughout the work). Yet the text remains somewhat of a mystery: it bears none of the characteristics of a formal sūtra, and no Sanskrit, Tibetan, or Central Asian versions are known to exist. Indeed, it seems that it was not originally considered a sūtra in the formal sense

of the word at all: early Buddhist catalogues refer to it simply as "Forty-two Sections from Buddhist Scriptures," or "The Forty-two Sections of Emperor Xiao Ming." Such titles are in fact appropriate, as the text consists largely of snippets culled from longer Buddhist sūtras scattered throughout the Buddhist canon. (Parallel sections are found in the *Dīgha*, *Majjhima*, *Saṃyutta*, and *Aṅguttara Nikāyas*, as well as the *Mahāvagga*.) But while we can identify the source of many of the forty-two sections, scholars have yet to determine whether the collection was first assembled in India, Central Asia, or China.

We also know little about the role the scripture played in the propagation of early Buddhism. At first glance the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections* appears to be a sort of handbook or introduction to basic Buddhist terms and principles for the benefit of novices. Yet this view is not without its problems; one cannot help but notice, for example, the many technical terms and allusions that go unexplained in the text, such as the "nineteen heavens," the "three honored ones," the "three poisons," and the "five hindrances." This might suggest that it was intended for Buddhist adherents rather than for neophytes, or that it was meant to be used in conjunction with oral teachings (as was often the case with Chinese Buddhist texts).

In order to appreciate the place of the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections* within the Chinese Buddhist world, it might be useful to turn for a moment to the much better known Pāli compilation, the *Dhammapada* (*Verses on the Teachings*). Although considerably longer (423 verses), the *Dhammapada* is similar insofar as it provides a general and attractive overview of the ethical teachings of Buddhism. It too consists primarily of extracts culled from the most popular Pāli literature, and like the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections* it consists largely of short aphorisms and parables. The *Dhammapada* is widely employed as a handy summary and reminder of the Buddha's teachings, to which the pious may refer for inspiration or solace. It is also commonly used to provide themes for sermonizing. And even today, despite copious references to technical Buddhist doctrines, the *Dhammapada* is widely used as a vehicle for the dissemination of Buddhism into non-Buddhist cultures.

It is quite possible that the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections* was compiled in the early days of Chinese Buddhism with a similar range of functions in mind. In fact, it has been put to such use in this century. Shaku Sōen (1859–1919), the first Japanese Zen master to visit and teach in the West, used this scripture as the basis of a series of talks given during a tour of America in 1905–1906. And John Blofeld, a Western convert to the religion who devoted his energies to the transmission of Buddhism to the West, chose this scripture as the first to be translated in a series begun in 1947. Although the tenets of the scripture are not presented in any systematic way, the simplicity and brevity of the work make it suitable for use as an introductory text.

Whether initially compiled in India, Central Asia, or China, the version of the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections* disseminated in East Asia bears certain unmistakably

Chinese stylistic features. The most obvious Sinitic touch is the phrase “The Buddha said,” which is used to introduce most sections. This peculiarity, along with the decidedly moralistic tone of the work, is strongly reminiscent of certain Confucian classics, such as the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing*) and the *Analects* (*Lunyu*). Both texts are similarly comprised of short moralistic maxims and illustrative anecdotes, many of which are prefaced with the phrase “the Master said.”

Beyond this rather obvious stylistic adaptation there are a few passages that are most certainly interpolations by a Chinese editor. One obvious example is found in the earliest extant edition of the text, namely, that now found in the Korean Canon. The key passage is found at the end of section 9:

Feeding one billion saints is not as good as feeding one solitary buddha (*pratyeka-buddha*). Feeding ten billion solitary buddhas is not as good as liberating one's parents in this life by means of the teaching of the three honored ones. To teach one hundred billion parents is not as good as feeding one buddha, studying with the desire to attain buddhahood, and aspiring to liberate all beings. But the merit of feeding a good man is [still] very great. It is better for a common man to be filial to his parents than for him to serve the spirits of Heaven and Earth, for one's parents are the supreme spirits.

Recent work on Indian Buddhist inscriptions has shown that filial piety was not an exclusively East Asian concern, but played an important role in Indian Buddhism as well. But the phrasing and context of the references to filial piety in this passage marks it as a Chinese insertion.

Another interesting example of the “sinification” of the work is the regular use of the word *dao* (“way” or “path”) as a translation equivalent not only for *mārga*, for which it is a standard and appropriate semantic equivalent, but also for what one suspects would be *nirvāṇa* (“extinction”) or *dharma* (“teachings” or “truth”) in an Indic original. This is characteristic of early translations influenced by Daoist and “dark learning” (*xuanxue*) ideas, and it lends a distinctly Chinese “mystical” tone to what is otherwise a moralistic Hīnayānist work. I have translated *dao* as “Way” whenever possible to preserve some of the flavor of the Chinese.

One area in which this translation departs from the original Chinese is in the handling of Sanskrit terminology. In the interests of clarity I have translated most of the technical terms that are merely transliterated in the Chinese. (The one exception is the term *śramaṇa*—used throughout the text to refer to ascetics and ordained followers of the Buddha—where I have retained the Sanskrit.) While some of the terms, such as *śramaṇa*, *arhat*, and *śrotāpanna*, are briefly explained in the opening paragraphs of the text, others, including *upāsaka* and *pratyeka-buddha*, are not explained at all. It must be kept in mind that the transliteration of foreign terms is an awkward process in Chinese that often yields unwieldy and bizarre-looking polysyllabic compounds. The copious use of such transliterations, many of which go unexplained, would have lent the text a decidedly exotic character.

This translation of the *Sishi'er zhang jing* is based on the edition found in the Korean Tripiṭaka (K 778:19.865–67). The Korean text, which is reproduced with little alteration in the *Taishō daizōkyō* (T 784:17.722a–24a), is in turn based on the Shu Tripiṭaka published under the Northern Song. While the Korean version of the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections* represents an earlier recension than either the “Shousui” text compiled in the Song (the most popular version of the scripture, although it is also the most “corrupt”) or the “Zhenzong” edition (the edition reproduced in the *Nanzang* Tripiṭaka of the Ming and all subsequent Chinese collections), even the Korean text shows traces of later redaction when compared with early citations found in pre-Tang works. I have also consulted the commentary by Emperor Zhen Zong of the Song dynasty (r. 998–1022), the *Zhu sishi'er zhang jing* (T 1794:517a–522c), as well as the Japanese translation by Fukaura Masafumi in the *Kokuyaku issaikyō, kyōjūbu* 3, pp. 169–73. The excerpt in the introduction taken from Xiang Kai’s memorial is found in fascicle 60b of the *Houhan shu*.

Further Readings

Discussions in English of the dating and significance of the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections* can be found in T’ang Yung-t’ung, “The Editions of the Ssu-shih-erh-chang-ching,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 1 (1936): 147–55; E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), pp. 29–30; Kenneth Ch’en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1964), pp. 29–36; Henri Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, trans. Frank A. Kierman, Jr. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), pp. 400–404; and Tsukamoto Zenryū, *A History of Early Chinese Buddhism from Its Introduction to the Death of Hui-yūan*, trans. Leon Hurvitz (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1985), vol. 1, pp. 41–50. For English translations of later editions of this scripture, see Samuel Beal, *A Catena of Buddhist Scriptures from the Chinese* (London: Trübner and Company, 1871), pp. 188–203; D. T. Suzuki, *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1906), pp. 3–21; and John Blofeld, *The Sutra of 42 Sections and Two Other Scriptures of the Mahayana School* (London: The Buddhist Society, 1947), pp. 10–22.

The Scripture in Forty-two Sections

Translated in the Later Han dynasty by the *śramaṇas* Kāśyapa Mātāṅga and Dharmaratna of the Western Regions.

1. The Buddha said: “Those who leave their families and go forth from their homes to practice the Way are called *śramaṇas* (ascetics). Those who constantly

follow the 250 precepts in order to [realize] the four noble truths and progressively purify their intentions will become saints (*arhat*). A saint is able to fly and assume different forms; he lives a long life and can move Heaven and Earth. Next is the nonreturner (*anāgāmin*): at the end of his life the spirit of a nonreturner ascends the nineteen heavens and there attains sainthood. Next is the once-returner (*sakṛdāgāmin*): the once-returner ascends [to Heaven] once and returns once and then attains sainthood. Next is the stream-winner (*śrotāpanna*): the stream-winner dies and is reborn seven times and then attains sainthood. The severance of passion and desire is like the four limbs severed, they will never be used again."

2. The Buddha said: "Those who shave their heads and faces are *śramaṇas*. They receive the teaching, abandon worldly wealth and possessions, and beg, seeking only what is necessary. Taking a single meal at midday, and lodging a single night under a tree, they take care not to repeat either. That which makes men ignorant and derelict is passion and desire."

3. The Buddha said: "All beings consider ten things as good and ten things as evil. Three concern the body, four the mouth, and three the mind. The three [evil things] of the body are killing, stealing, and adultery. The four of the mouth are duplicity, slander, lying, and lewd speech. The three of the mind are envy, hatred, and delusion. He who lacks faith in the three honored ones [the Buddha, the teaching, and the community of monks], will mistake falsehood for truth. A lay disciple (*upāsaka*) who practices the five precepts [not to kill, to steal, to commit adultery, to speak falsely, or to drink alcohol], without becoming lax and backsliding, will arrive at the ten [good] things [i.e., the antitheses of the ten evil things] and will certainly attain the Way."

4. The Buddha said: "If a man commits multiple transgressions, yet does not repent and quickly quell the [evil] in his heart, his crimes will return to him as water returns to the sea, becoming ever deeper and wider. But should a man come to realize the error of his ways, correct his transgressions, and attain goodness, his days of wrongdoing will come to an end and in time he will attain the Way."

5. The Buddha said: "Should a man malign me and seek to do me harm, I counter with the four virtues of benevolence, [compassion, joy, and equanimity]. The more he approaches me with malice, the more I reach out with kindness. The forces (*qi*) of beneficent virtue lie always in this, while harmful forces and repeated misfortune will revert to the other."

6. Once a man heard that the Buddha's Way lies in persevering in benevolence and compassion, and meeting evil with goodness. He then came and cursed the Buddha. The Buddha, remaining silent, did not respond, but rather had pity for one whose ignorance and rage led to such an act. When his cursing abated the Buddha asked him: "If you offer a gift to someone who does not

accept it, what happens to the gift?" The man replied: "I would have to take it back." The Buddha said: "Now you have offered me curses but I do not accept them. They return to you, bringing harm to your own person. Like an echo responding to sound, or a shadow following an object, in the end there is no escaping it. Take heed of your evil ways."

7. The Buddha said: "An evil man trying to harm a worthy man is like looking toward Heaven and spitting; the spittle will not befoul Heaven but will return and befoul the one spitting. It is like throwing filth at someone while facing into the wind; the filth will not befoul anyone else but will return and befoul the one throwing. A worthy man cannot be harmed; a man's transgressions will surely destroy only himself."

8. The Buddha said: "The virtue of one who practices universal love, compassion, and generosity for the sake of the Way is not that of great generosity. But if he [further] guards his intentions and honors the Way, his merit is truly great. If you see someone practicing generosity and you joyfully assist him, you too will gain merit in return." Someone asked: "Would not the other person's merit be diminished thereby?" The Buddha said: "It is like the flame of a single torch that is approached by several hundred thousand men each bearing torches. Each lights his torch from the flame and departs, using it to cook food and dispel darkness, yet the original flame is ever the same. Merit is also like this."

9. The Buddha said: "Feeding one hundred common men is not as good as feeding one good man. Feeding one thousand good men is not as good as feeding one who observes the five precepts. Feeding ten thousand men who observe the five precepts is not as good as feeding one stream-winner. Feeding one million stream-winners is not as good as feeding one once-returner. Feeding ten million once-returners is not as good as feeding one nonreturner. Feeding one hundred million nonreturners is not as good as feeding one saint. Feeding one billion saints is not as good as feeding one solitary buddha (*pratyekabuddha*). Feeding ten billion solitary buddhas is not as good as liberating one's parents in this life by means of the teaching of the three honored ones. To teach one hundred billion parents is not as good as feeding one buddha, studying with the desire to attain buddhahood, and aspiring to liberate all beings. But the merit of feeding a good man is [still] very great. It is better for a common man to be filial to his parents than for him to serve the spirits of Heaven and Earth, for one's parents are the supreme spirits."

10. The Buddha said: "There are five difficult things under Heaven. It is difficult for the poor to give alms, it is difficult for the powerful and privileged to cultivate the Way, it is difficult to control fate and avoid death, it is difficult to attain a glimpse of the Buddha's scriptures, and it is difficult to be born at the time of a buddha."

11. There was a *śramaṇa* who asked the Buddha: "Through what causal factors does one attain the Way, and how does one come to know of one's previous lives?" The Buddha replied: "The Way is without form, and thus to know these things is of no benefit. What is important is to guard your intentions and actions. It is like polishing a mirror: as the dust is removed the underlying luminosity is revealed and you are able to see your own image. Eliminate desire and hold to emptiness and you will come to see the truth of the Way and know your past lives."

12. The Buddha said: "What is goodness? Goodness is the practice of the Way. What is supreme? A mind in accord with the Way is supreme. What has great power? Patience in the face of insult is strongest, for patience and the absence of anger is honored by all. What is supreme enlightenment? When mental impurities are uprooted, when evil conduct has ceased, when one is pure and free of blemish within, when there is nothing that is not known, seen, or heard—from the time when there was yet no Heaven and Earth down to the present day, including everything extant in the ten quarters as well as that which has yet to appear—when omniscience has been attained, this can indeed be called enlightenment."

13. The Buddha said: "A man who holds to passion and desire will not see the Way. It is as if one muddied water by throwing in five colored pigments and vigorously mixed them together. Many might approach the edge of the water, but they would be unable to see their own reflections on the surface. Passion and desire pollute the mind, leaving it murky, and thus the Way goes unseen. If the water is filtered and the filth removed, leaving it pure and free of dirt, one's own reflection will be seen. But if a kettle is placed over a hot flame bringing water to a rapid boil, or if water is covered with a cloth, then those who approach it will similarly not see their own reflections. The three fundamental poisons [of greed, hatred, and delusion] boil and bubble in the mind, while one is cloaked without by the five hindrances [of desire, hatred, sloth, agitation, and doubt]. In the end the Way goes unseen. When mental impurities are exhausted one knows whence the spirit comes and whither life and death go. The Way and its virtue are present in all buddha lands."

14. The Buddha said: "The practice of the Way is like holding a burning torch and entering a dark room: the darkness immediately vanishes and everything is illumined. Cultivate the Way and perceive the truth and evil and ignorance will both vanish, leaving nothing unseen."

15. The Buddha said: "What do I contemplate? I contemplate the Way. What do I practice? I practice the Way. Of what do I speak? I speak of the Way. I contemplate the true Way, never neglecting it for even an instant."

16. The Buddha said: "When gazing at Heaven and Earth contemplate their impermanence. When gazing at mountains and rivers contemplate their im-

permanence. When gazing at the tremendous variety of shapes and forms of the myriad things in the world contemplate their impermanence. If you keep your mind thus you will attain the Way in no time."

17. The Buddha said: "If for but a single day you continually contemplate and practice the Way you will attain the foundations of faith. Its blessings are incalculable."

18. The Buddha said: "Ardently contemplate the four primary elements that comprise the body. While each has a name, they are all devoid of self. The [sense of an] 'I' emerges from the aggregate, but it is not long lived and is really but an illusion."

19. The Buddha said: "For a person to follow his desires in search of fame is like putting fire to incense. Many may savor the smell of the incense, but the incense is all the while being consumed by the fire. The foolish, coveting worldly fame, hold not to the truth of the Way. Fame brings misfortune and harm, and one is sure to regret it later."

20. The Buddha said: "Riches and sex are to men what sweet honey on the blade of a knife is to a young child: before he has fully enjoyed a single bite he must suffer the pain of a cut tongue."

21. The Buddha said: "The misery of being shackled to wife, children, wealth, and home is greater than that of being shackled in chains and fetters and thrown in prison. In prison there is the possibility of pardon, but even though the desire for wife and children is as perilous as the mouth of a tiger, men throw themselves into it willingly. For this crime there is no pardon."

22. The Buddha said: "There is no desire more powerful than sex. Sexual desire looms so large that nothing stands outside of it. But luckily there is only one such desire, for were there yet another there would not be a single person in all the world capable of the Way."

23. The Buddha said: "Passion and desire are to man what a flaming torch is to one walking against the wind. Foolish ones who do not let go of the torch are sure to burn their hands. The poisons of craving and lust, anger and hatred, ignorance and delusion all reside in the body. He who does not quickly relinquish these perils by means of the Way will surely meet disaster, just as the foolish one who clings to his torch is sure to burn his hands."

24. A deity presented a woman of pleasure to the Buddha, wanting to test the Buddha's will and examine the Buddha's Way. The Buddha said: "Why have you come here bearing this leather sack of filth? Do you think to deceive me? It is difficult to stir [one possessed of] the six supernatural powers. Begone! I have no use for her." The deity, with increased respect for the Buddha, asked about the Way. The Buddha instructed him, whereupon he attained the stage of a stream-winner.

25. The Buddha said: "A man practicing the Way is like a piece of wood floating downstream with the current. As long as it avoids catching either the left or the right banks, as long as it is not picked up by someone or obstructed by some spirit, as long as it does not get stuck in a whirlpool or rot away, then I assure you it will eventually reach the sea. As long as a man practicing the Way is not deluded by passion or deceived by falsehood, as long as he energetically advances without doubt, then I assure you he will eventually attain the Way."

26. The Buddha told a *śramaṇa*: "Take care not to place faith in your own intentions. Ultimately intentions cannot be trusted. Take care not to wallow in sensuality, for wallowing in sensuality gives birth to misfortune. Only when you attain sainthood, can you place faith in your own intentions."

27. The Buddha told a *śramaṇa*: "Take care not to look at women. If you meet one, look not, and take care not to converse with her. If you must converse, admonish the mind to right conduct by saying to yourself: 'As a *śramaṇa* I must live in this befouled world like a lotus, unsullied by mud.' Treat an old lady as if she were your mother, an elder woman as your elder sister, a younger woman as your younger sister, and a young girl as your own daughter. Show respect for them through your propriety. Remember that you see only the outside, but if you could peer into the body—from head to foot—what then? It is brimming with foulness. By exposing the impure aggregates [that comprise the body] one can free oneself from [impure] thoughts."

28. The Buddha said: "A man practicing the Way must eliminate sentiment and desire. It must be like grass encountering fire; by the time the fire arrives the grass is already gone. In encountering passion and desire the man of the Way must immediately distance himself."

29. The Buddha said: "Once a man was tormented by feelings of lust that would not cease, so he squatted down on the blade of an ax in order to castrate himself. The Buddha said to him: 'Severing the genitals is not as good as severing the mind, for the mind is chief. Put a stop to the chief and all his followers will cease. But if you do not put a stop to your depraved mind, what good will castration do? It will surely result in death.'" The Buddha said: "The vulgar and topsy-turvy views of the world are like those of this foolish man."

30. There was an adulterous young lady who made a pact with another man, but when the scheduled time arrived she did not come. The man repented and said to himself: "Desire, I know you! The initial intent is born with thought. If I did not think of you, you would not come into being." The Buddha was passing by and heard him. He said to the *śramaṇa*: "I recognize those words! It is a verse once uttered by Kāśyapa Buddha as he passed through this profane world."

31. The Buddha said: "From passion and desire arises sorrow. From sorrow arises dread. Without passion there is no sorrow, and without sorrow there is no dread."

32. The Buddha said: "A man practicing the Way is like a lone man in combat against ten thousand. Bearing armor and brandishing weapons, he charges through the gate eager to do battle, but if he is weakhearted and cowardly he will withdraw and flee. Some get halfway down the road before they retreat; some reach the battle and die; some are victorious and return to their kingdoms triumphantly. If a man is able to keep a firm grip on his wits and advance resolutely, without becoming deluded by worldly or deranged talk, then desire will disappear and evil will vanish, and he is certain to attain the Way."

33. There was a *śramaṇa* who mournfully chanted the scriptures at night, his spirit full of remorse as if wanting to return [to lay life]. The Buddha summoned the *śramaṇa* and asked him: "When you were a householder what did you do?" He answered, "I regularly played the lute." The Buddha asked: "What happened when the strings were too loose?" He replied: "It did not sound." "And when the strings were too taut, what then?" [The *śramaṇa*] replied: "The sound was cut short." "And when it was neither too loose nor too taught, what then?" "Then the tones all came into sympathetic accord." The Buddha told the *śramaṇa*: "The cultivation of the Way is just like that; keep the mind in tune and you can attain the Way."

34. The Buddha said: "Practicing the Way is like forging iron: if you gradually but thoroughly cast out impurities, the vessel is sure to come out well. If you cultivate the Way by gradually but thoroughly removing the impurities of mind, your advance will be steady. But when you are too harsh with yourself, the body becomes fatigued, and when the body is fatigued, the mind becomes frustrated. If the mind is frustrated, one's practice will lapse, and when practice lapses, one falls into wrongdoing."

35. The Buddha said: "Whether or not you practice the way you will certainly suffer. From birth to old age, from old age to sickness, from sickness to death, the misery of man is immeasurable. The distressed mind accumulates misdeeds, and life and death know no surcease. Such misery is beyond description."

36. The Buddha said: "It is difficult to free oneself from the three evil realms [the hells, the realm of hungry ghosts, and the realm of animals], and attain human birth. Even if one attains human birth it is difficult to be born a man rather than a woman. Even if one is born a man it is difficult to be born perfect in all six sense faculties. Even if the six faculties are perfect it is difficult to be born in the Middle Kingdom. Even if one lives in the Middle Kingdom it is difficult to be born at a time when the Buddha's Way is honored. Even if born when the Buddha's Way is honored it is difficult to encounter a noble man of the Way. [Moreover,] it is difficult to be born in the family of bodhisattvas."

Even if born in the family of bodhisattvas it is difficult to encounter the Buddha's presence in the world with a mind of faith in the three honored ones."

37. The Buddha asked a group of *śramaṇas*: "How should one measure the span of a man's life?" [One] replied: "By the span of a few days." The Buddha said: "You are not yet able to practice the Way." He asked another *śramaṇa*: "How should one measure the span of a man's life?" [The *śramaṇa*] replied: "By the space of a single meal." The Buddha said: "You are not yet able to practice the Way." He asked another *śramaṇa*: "How should one measure the span of a man's life?" [The *śramaṇa*] replied: "By the space of a single breath." The Buddha said: "Excellent! You can be called one who practices the Way."

38. The Buddha said: "Should one of my disciples venture several thousand miles from me yet remain mindful of my precepts, he is certain to attain the Way. However, should he stand immediately to my left yet harbor depraved thoughts, in the end he will not attain the Way. The gist lies in one's practice. If one is close to me but does not practice, of what benefit are the myriad divisions [of the path]?"

39. The Buddha said: "Practicing the Way is like eating honey, which is sweet all the way through. My scriptures are also like this: they are all about happiness, and those who practice [in accord with them] will attain the Way."

40. The Buddha said: "A man practicing the Way must be able to pluck up the roots of passion and desire, just as one would pluck a bead from a necklace. One by one they are removed until they are no more. When evil is no more the Way is attained."

41. The Buddha said: "A *śramaṇa* following the Way must be like an ox bearing a heavy burden treading through deep mud, so exhausted that he dares not glance left or right, yearning only to get out of the mud quickly so as to catch his breath. The *śramaṇa* regards his emotions and passions as more formidable than that mud. Mindful of the Way with a one-pointed mind, one is able to escape from myriad sufferings."

42. The Buddha said: "I regard the status of lords as a passing stranger. I regard treasures of gold and jade as gravel. I regard the beauty of fine silks as worn rags."