

The Great-Light Luminous King Bringing Forth the Bodhī Mind

(Chapter 3 of the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish* (Damamūka-nidāna-sūtra))

Once the Tathāgata expounded at a Buddhist assembly in the world. The people at the assembly thought: “What were the causes and conditions for the Tathāgata to generate the bodhi mind and finally be able to manifest the attainment of Buddhahood in the human world?” Ananda knew the question everyone was thinking of. Thus, he straightened his clothes and approached the Buddha to ask the question.

The Buddha said: “In the past, countless incalculable eons before, there was a king called the Great-Light Luminous King. One day, a neighboring country sent him a magnificent big white elephant. This big white elephant was very young, healthy, and strong. Thus, the Great-Light Luminous King sent this big white elephant to an elephant trainer to be trained. As this big white elephant had already been tamed to be very obedient, the king gathered all of his people and then valiantly and vigorously rode on this big white elephant himself; he stepped out of the city gate, riding slowly towards the countryside; everyone enjoyed watching this.

Because this big white elephant happened to be at the age in which it was full of youthful vigor and lust, when it suddenly saw a lot of female elephants eating near a lotus pond, it started to wildly run after them. Very soon the big white elephant was going to run into the forest; the crown, clothes, and some

jewelry decorations of the king had been lost or even smashed to pieces; his hair was scattered and tangled together. Hence, the king said: "I am going to die! What is happening?" Then he loudly asked the elephant trainer: "What should I do next?" The trainer reported to the king: "Your majesty! Wait until the big white elephant run into the forest. When there is a big tree near you, do your best to hold onto its branches for as long as possible. Do not let go of them. Then you can leave this big elephant." Then the king saw a branch directly ahead of him; he bravely jumped, held onto the branch, and so was able to escape the situation; the trainer caught up with the king at a place not too far ahead.

After coming back, the king looked very lonely and was laden with grief. Thus, the trainer thought that the king might be worried about this big white elephant; he approached and comforted the king: "Your majesty! You need not worry about that big elephant. It will certainly not get used to the food outside. After its lust subsides, it will no longer long for those female elephants. Then it will return to the palace. At that time, if we feed it with good food, it will be able to comfortably stay here." However, the king said: "I no longer need you nor this big elephant. I almost lost my life. Why do I still wonder if that big elephant will come back?" At that moment, the trainer did not know what to say; he thought: "Well, I'll wait until that big elephant comes back to bring up this issue!"

As expected, this big white elephant was not used to the food outside; in addition, its lust quickly subsided. Consequently, it started to miss the delicious food it had as it was kept in the palace. After thinking of the food, it immediately returned to the palace. After the trainer saw the elephant again,

he happily went to report to the king: “Your majesty! This big white elephant has come back. I hope your majesty can go and take a look. I have taken care of it; it is still very healthy.” Yet, the king coldly replied: “I have already told you that I don’t need you nor this big elephant!” The trainer said: “Your majesty! If so, would you mind taking a look at the way I tame and take care of this big white elephant?” The king then said: “Okay! I’ll see how you tame this big elephant.”

The citizens heard that the elephant trainer was going to demonstrate how to tame a big elephant, so they flocked to the meeting place that day to see what would happen. After the king sat down, the elephant trainer led this big white elephant to the meeting place and ordered an iron smith next to him to make seven big iron balls and burn them until they were hot and red. These iron balls were the tools to tame elephants; in other words, if any elephant failed to do what it was told, these iron balls would be the tools used to punish it.

Nevertheless, at that moment, the elephant trainer was thinking if he should plead for this big white elephant again because if this big white elephant swallowed these seven big iron balls, it would certainly die and the king would definitely regret it. Hence, he again reported to the king: “Your majesty! This big white elephant is a treasure that can only be owned by a Wheel-Turning King. Today would you consider the fact that it just made this small mistake and therefore forgive it and not abandon it because it is a rare treasure!” However, the king had already made up his mind, so he said: “At first you should not have asked me to ride it because you had not tamed it. If it had already been tamed, how could that happen? I almost lost my life. From

now on, I do not need you nor this big elephant. You do not need to say anything more!”

The trainer continued to say: “Your majesty! It does not matter that you do not need me. However, it is a pity to abandon this big elephant because this big elephant is still an awfully rare ...” Before the trainer finished his words, the king had already been angry and reprimanded loudly: “Get out of my way!” Hence, the trainer could only stand up with tears flowing down immediately. He knew that deep inside his beloved king’s mind there was hatred towards this big white elephant as well as himself. Therefore, the king did not care for his relationship with his loyal servants or animals, and this big white elephant would lose its life soon.

Those participated in the meeting originally were happy to watch how the elephant trainer tame the big elephant; nevertheless, in the end, the king wanted to kill it! Thus, everybody inevitably felt grief; they looked at the big elephant and looked to the trainer to see what he would do next. At this moment, the trainer used gestures to tell the elephant: “Just swallow this iron ball! The king would not forgive you. If you don’t swallow it, I will use an iron hook to rip your brain apart.” Although the big elephant did not understand human language, it knew the intention of the trainer; thus, it just thought: “I can only swallow this hot iron ball because I really cannot endure it if my brain is ripped apart by an iron hook.” There was a notion flashing in its mind that it wanted to ask the king for a favor. Hence, it kneeled down with its two front legs while tears were running down to beg the king to spare its life.

However, the king was furious. After looking at the big elephant for a second only, he quickly turned his head away. The trainer noticed that the king's decision was set in stone, so he reprimanded the elephant: "Why do you still not swallow the iron ball?" The big elephant again looked at the people around; it thought: "Now really nobody can save me." As it was shivering with fear, it used its nose to pick up a hot iron ball and swallowed it. In a short while, the iron ball ran down the abdomen of the elephant, which was directly burned and rotten, and then the iron ball fell to the ground.

After watching such a tragedy, all of the people present inevitably felt grief. At this moment, the king's face really turned pale with fright and he immediately felt regret. He thought: "How did that happen?" Thus, he summoned the trainer to come over and asked: "How come this big elephant was so obedient and well-trained that it did whatever you ordered it to do? Then at that time when it ran into the forest, why was it completely out of control? What is going on?"

Now, the heavenly beings in the Heaven of Pure Abode knew that it should be the good opportunity for the Great-Light Luminous King to activate the unsurpassed bodhi mind. Hence, they applied supernatural power to have the trainer kneel down and reply: "I can only subdue an elephant's physical body but cannot completely subdue its mind." The king asked: "Then is there anyone in the world who is able to subdue the physical body as well as the mind?" The trainer then replied: "Yes, a World Honored Buddha can subdue the physical body and the mind as well."

When the king heard the name of Buddha, he was so frightened that all his body hair stood up. He asked: “What kind of lineage in the world is the Buddha you mentioned from? Why don’t I know about it at all?” The trainer replied: “A Buddha is from two kinds of lineage: one is Great Wisdom, and the other is Great Compassion, which is the mind of great compassion. He diligently learns and practices the six perfections [*paramitas*] and is able to cross over the sea of births-and-deaths. After perfecting wisdom and virtues, He becomes a Buddha. After becoming a Buddha, He can subdue his own body and mind as well as help subdue the body and mind of all sentient beings in the world.” After hearing this dharma, the king felt both surprised and happy! The seed of Buddhahood he had been gradually cultivating from time without beginning finally matured at this moment.

Consequently, he quickly entered the palace, bathed himself with fragrant water, put on new clothes, stepped onto the pavilion, prostrated himself to the four directions, and generated the mind of great compassion for sentient beings. Then he burned incense and made great vows: “I vow to transfer all kinds of virtues I cultivate to my accomplishing Buddhahood in the future; when I become a Buddha in the future, I will be able to tame the mind of myself and help all sentient beings subdue theirs. If there is any sentient being who needs me to accompany him to the hell to suffer for one eon and then I can benefit him, I would directly go to hell without any hesitation; even if I must suffer all kinds of countless and boundless pain in hell, I would not give up the great and unsurpassed bodhi mind that I brought forth here today.” After the king finished vowing, there were six kinds of shaking of the earth, hundreds of musical instruments were played in the sky, and innumerable

heavenly beings appeared in the sky and then praised: “Your majesty! Because of what you have done, you will certainly achieve the way to Buddhahood very soon. After you become a Buddha, we hope you can come to save us and help us to attain this pure dharma as well so that we can have the opportunity to attain Buddhahood as well.”

Therefore, our Fundamental Teacher, Buddha Sakyamuni, said: “The stage of Tathāgata that I can attain today was due to the cause and condition of this big white elephant, which allowed me to know to subdue not only the physical body but also the mind; consequently, I generated great vows as well as an earnest desire for the Path to Buddhahood.” After the people participating in the assembly heard the Buddha speak about the historical event of how He made vows in the past life, some people thereby realized *arhat* fruition, some generated an unsurpassed aspiration for enlightenment, and some made a vow to become monastic practitioners.

This story tells us that we only need to decide how to approach the Path of Buddhahood, we do not have to worry whether there will be many causes and conditions or environmental factors to hinder us, and if we want to achieve the Path to Buddhahood, we must start from generating the bodhi mind. Generating the bodhi mind should not be compared with making offerings to all sentient beings in the countless and boundless worlds in the ten directions for a great eon or teaching all sentient beings in the countless and boundless worlds in the ten directions to practice the Five Precepts or ten virtuous actions. In the *Flower Garland Sutra* [Avataṃsaka-sūtra], Bodhisattva Dharma-Wisdom already said: “Even if one can spend a long time teaching countless and boundless sentient beings to practice the Five Precepts or ten

virtuous actions that will allow them to be able to attain good karmic rewards in the future; even teaching them to learn and practice the four concentrations, the four immeasurable states of mind, and the four formless absorptions; or even helping them to realize the first, second, third, and fourth fruitions of sound hearers and even the fruition of solitary realizers; it cannot be compared with generating such unsurpassed bodhi mind.”

When all Buddhas generate the bodhi mind, they generate the mind not only to help sentient beings to enter the way of human beings or devas or the way of sound hearers or solitary realizers but also to help to keep the lineage of Tathāgata forever so that everyone can attain ultimate Buddhahood with ultimate happiness. The above is the true meaning of generating the bodhi mind!

