

Chapter 2: Cunda

[611b] At that time there was in the assembly a layman worker from Kuśinagara whose name was Cunda. He was accompanied by fifteen other such workers. In order to cause a good effect for the world, they discarded their majestic deportment, rose from their seats, adjusted their robes, and kneeled upon their right knees. With their palms pressed together, they felt empathy for the Buddha. With tears flowing, they prostrated themselves at his feet and said, "Our only wish is for the World Honored One and the Saṅgha of monks to mercifully accept our very last offerings in order to save the measureless sentient beings. World Honored One, from this day forward we shall be without a master, without a companion, without aid, without protection, without refuge, and without advancement. Poor, impoverished, hungry, and distressed shall we be. We hope that the Tathāgata will seek another meal. Our only wish is for him to mercifully accept our fine gifts before his Nirvāṇa.

"World Honored One, it is just as when those of the warrior (kūatriya), priestly (brāhmaṇa), merchant (vaiśya), and the worker (śūdra) castes are impoverished and go to other countries to become laborers and farmers. They obtain well tamed oxen and some excellent farmland that is flat and devoid of sand, salt, weeds, or rubbish. Their only concern is for the rains from heaven. The aforementioned tame ox is a metaphor for the seven [good deeds] that are bodily and verbal. The excellent farmland that is flat is a metaphor for wisdom. And the absence of sand, salt, weeds, and rubbish is a metaphor for the removal of the afflictions.

"World Honored One, I myself now have a tame ox, excellent farmland, and have weeded out the myriad defilements. My only concern is whether the Tathāgata will rain down the sweet Dharma dew. Poor are those of the four castes, and so am I. Poor are they in the wealth of the unsurpassed Dharma. My only wish is for you to have mercy and root out our poverty, troubles, and distress. Remove, also, the measureless sufferings of the sentient beings. I now make these offerings. Although they are small and meager, I wish that they could fill up the Tathāgata's great congregation [grounds]. I am now without a master, without companion, and without refuge. My hope is that you will confer upon us your compassion, as you would on Rāhula."

At that time, the World Honored One with the knowledge of all modes, the unsurpassed tamer, addressed Cunda, "Excellent, excellent! I will now root out this poverty for you, rain down the unsurpassed Dharma rain upon your fields, and cause the Dharma to sprout and grow there. You now wish to seek my life span, form, powers, peace, joy, lack of obstruction, and talent in discourse. I shall give you that eternal life span, form, powers, peace, lack of obstruction, and ability of discourse. And why? Cunda, the giving of alms has two rewards [611c], which are not distinguished. What are the two? The first is accepted before the supremely unexcelled bodhi (anuttara-samyak-saṣbodhi) is attained. The second is accepted before entering into Nirvāṇa. I now accept your very last offerings in order to cause you to consummate the perfection of giving."

At that time, Cunda said to the Buddha, "The Buddha has said that these two rewards of giving are undistinguished. The meaning of this is not so. Why? Prior to accepting the gift, the afflictions have not yet ended, the knowledge of all modes has not yet been brought to fruition, and one is not yet able to lead sentient beings to consummate the perfection of giving. After accepting the gift, the afflictions are then ended, the knowledge of all modes is brought to fruition, and one is able to lead sentient beings to consummate the perfection of giving. Prior to the accepting the gift, one is like a sentient being; while after accepting the gift, one is a god among gods. Prior to accepting the gift, the body is a body of component parts, a body of afflictions, a body with boundaries, and an impermanent body. Yet, after accepting the gift, the body is devoid of

affliction, a body of adamantine (vajra-kāya), the essential body (dharma-kāya), the eternal body, and a limitless body. Why do you say that the two rewards of charity are undistinguished?

"Prior to accepting the gift, one is not yet able to consummate the perfection of giving through to the perfection of wisdom (prajñā-pāramitā). Merely having the eye of flesh, one has not yet attained the Buddha-eye through to the wisdom-eye. Yet, after accepting the gift, one has attained the consummation of the perfection of giving through to the perfection of wisdom. And one then consummates the Buddha-eye through to the wisdom-eye. Why do you say that the two rewards of charity are undistinguished?"

"World Honored One, prior to accepting the gift, once the alms are accepted, they enter the stomach and are digested. And then one acquires the life span, acquires the form, acquires the power, acquires the peace, and acquires the unobstructed discourse [of the Buddhas]. After accepting the gift, the meal is not taken, not digested, and there is none of these five rewards. Why do you say that the two rewards of charity are undistinguished?"

The Buddha replied, "Good son, for measureless and boundless asaṅkhyas of aeons the Tathāgata has not had a food body or a body of afflictions. His body is limitless, an eternal body, the essential body, and a body of adamantine. Good son, one who has not yet seen the Buddha's nature is said to have an afflicted body or a body of component parts. This is a bodhisattva with a limited body. At the time that this food and drink has been accepted, he then enters the adamantine samādhi (vajropamasamādhi). Once the meal is digested, he sees the Buddha's nature and attains the supremely unexcelled bodhi. This is why I have said that the two rewards of giving are undistinguished. The bodhisattva at that time obliterates the four māras. And upon entering Nirvāṇa, he then also defeats the four māras. This is why I have said that the two rewards of giving are undistinguished. The bodhisattva at that time, although he could not thoroughly explain the twelve divisions of the Sūtras, he penetrated through them beforehand. Once that he has entered Nirvāṇa, [612a] he can discern and thoroughly explain it for the expanse of sentient beings. This is why I have said that the two rewards of giving are undistinguished.

"Good son, for measureless asaṅkhyas of aeons, the body of the Tathāgata has not accepted any drink or food. It is for voice-hearers (śrāvaka) that it is said that he first accepted from Nanda and Nandapara a pasture with two cows that gave him milk and gruel, and then afterwards he attained the supremely unexcelled bodhi. In reality, I did not eat them. I now shall demonstrate it to all of the great assembly of congregations. This is why I have accepted your very last offerings. In reality, I will not eat them."

At that time, upon hearing that the Buddha, the World Honored One, would mercifully accept Cunda's very last offerings for the sake of the great assembly, the congregation was elated and danced joyfully. They sang praises in unison, saying, "Excellent, excellent is this most extraordinary Cunda! Your name shall be established to be a non-empty utterance. 'Cunda' is a name that means 'Free and Marvelous'. You are now the basis for such a great meaning. This is why it is in accord with reality that your name is established from this meaning. Therefore, you are named Cunda. In this present life, you have attained this great name, your blessed virtue and vows are fulfilled. Most exceptional is Cunda who has been born human and attained this difficult blessing that is unsurpassed.

"Excellent is this Cunda! He is a rarity in the world like the udumbara flower. The appearance of the Buddha in the world is also very rare. To meet with the birth of a Buddha and have faith in the Dharma one hears is again difficult. Being able to provide the very last offerings when the Buddha nears parinirvāṇa is also the rarest of events. Namaḥ Cunda, Namaḥ Cunda! You have now fulfilled the perfection of giving. Just as the Autumn moon is pure for a period of fifteen days and nights and is completely full without any clouds to obstruct its view, which none of the sentient beings can avoid looking at with reverence, you are also so. And we do look reverently upon the Buddha who has accepted your very last offerings and led you to consummate the perfection of giving. Namaḥ Cunda! This is why we say that you are like the moon at its peak fullness, which none of the sentient beings can avoid looking at with reverence. Namaḥ Cunda! Although you have received a human body, your mind is like the Buddha's mind. You, Cunda, are truly a Buddhist disciple, no different than Rāhula."

At that time, the great congregation proclaimed verses (gāthās), saying,

"Although you were born into the path of humans
 You have transcended even the sixth heaven.
 Because of this, we and all of the sentient beings
 Now prostrate ourselves and beseech you.

The most supremely honored among humans
 Now shall soon enter Nirvāṇa.
 You should commiserate with us.
 Our only wish is to make haste and beseech the Buddha

To remain in the world for a long time
 And bless the measureless multitudes
 With the thorough discourses of wisdom and praise
 Of the unsurpassed sweet Dharma dew.

[612b] If you do not beseech the Buddha,
 Our lives will not be complete.
 This is why it should be observed that
 We prostrate ourselves to the Lion Tamer."

At that time, Cunda was elated and danced joyfully. He was like someone whose father and mother's dead corpses had suddenly returned to life. Cunda's elation was also so. He again rose to pay his respects to the Buddha and proclaimed verses, saying,

"How delightful it is to obtain one's own reward!
 Skillfully attaining it in a human body
 By abolishing greed and anger,
 One forever parts with the three unpleasant paths.

How delightful it is to obtain one's own reward!
 Coming to attain piles of gold and gems
 And encountering the Lion Tamer,
 One does not fear falling in with animals.

The Buddha is like the udumbara flower.
 Encountering his birth faithfully is difficult.
 Having encountered him, one sows the good roots,
 Forever extinguishing the distress of the hungry ghosts.

And, again, one is able to censure and reduce
 The species of asuras.
 Like mustard seeds landing on a needle point,
 The Buddha's appearance is as rare as this.

By perfecting charity,
 I shall liberate both men and gods from birth and death.
 The Buddha is not defiled by worldly things (dharmas)
 Like the lotus flower in a pond

That skillfully breaks the water's surface. The top of its shoot is
 Forever is liberated from the currents of birth and death.
 Birth in the world as a human is difficult.
 And meeting the Buddha in the world is also difficult

Like a blind turtle in the great ocean
 Meeting a floating log with an opening in it,
 I now will hand over these alms,
 Vowing to attain the unsurpassed reward.

All of the bonds of afflictions
 Are destroyed, broken, without solidity.
 I, here and now,
 No longer seek the body of a god or human.

For the minds of those who attempt to obtain that
 Will not be sweetly delighted.
 Now that the Tathāgata has accepted my offerings
 There is no measure for my elation.

It is like the airāvaōa flower
 That produces the fragrance of sandalwood.
 My body is like that airāvaōa flower,
 Now that the Tathāgata has accepted my offerings

It is as if it produces that fragrance of sandalwood.
 This is why I am elated.
 Now I have attained the manifest reward
 Of this most excellent and marvelous place

Where the indra and brahma gods are present,
 All of whom have come bearing offerings. In myself
 And all those of the world
 There has arisen a great anguish

[612c] Because they know that the Buddha, the World Honored One,
 Now wishes to enter Nirvāṇa.
 In a high pitch they cry out, saying,
 'The world will be devoid of the [Lion] Tamer!'

You should not abandon the sentient beings.
 You should instead regard each of them like an only child.
 Tathāgata, remain here with the saṅgha
 And thoroughly expound the unsurpassed Dharma!

Like the jewel mountain of Sumeru
 Or a peaceful spot on the ocean,
 Is the Buddha's knowledge that is able to skillfully end
 The darkness of our ignorance.

Just as the clouds that arise in the empty sky
 Can be a cool refreshment,
 The Tathāgata is able to skillfully remove
 All of the afflictions.

It is as when the sun rises
 And removes the clouds. Its light then illuminates everything.
 The sentient beings'

Passionate yearning increases and they wail compassionately.

They all are subject to birth and death,
Drifting on its waters of distress.
This is why, World Honored One,
For the ancient sentient beings' faith, you should

End the distress of their birth and death.
Remain in the world for a long time!"

The Buddha addressed Cunda, "So it is, so it is. As you have said, the Buddha's appearance in the world is rare like that of the udumbara flower. Meeting the Buddha and giving rise to faith is also very rare. Giving the very last offerings as the Buddha's Nirvāṇa nears and so being able to consummate the perfection of giving is, again, very rare. Now, Cunda, you should not be greatly anguished or distressed. You should instead be elated by your profound fortune to have the opportunity to give the very last offerings to the Tathāgata and bringing to fruition the consummate perfection of giving. You should not ask the Buddha to remain in the world for a long time. Instead, you should consider the objective element of the Buddha to be impermanent. The nature of his actions and aspects are also so." Then the Buddha proclaimed verses for Cunda, saying,

"All that is born in the world
Will return to death.
While their life spans may be measureless
It is necessary that they have an end.

The prosperous man, too, must have his waning.
What comes together and assembles must break apart
And so it is not long before healthy years come to an end.
The prosperous form is transgressed by disease

And life is swallowed up by death.
There is nothing that lasts forever.
The kings who have attained sovereignty,
Whose power has no comparison,

All pass on and perish.
This life span is also so.
The wheel of myriad sufferings endlessly
Goes round without pause.

[613a] The three realms are all impermanent
And all existences are unhappy.
That which has paths, roots, natures, and aspects
All these are empty and non-existent.

Such destructible things cycle around
Always having sorrow, anxiety,
Fear, and advancing evils.
Old age, disease, and death are the decline into vexation.

They have no boundaries
And are transgressed by change, destruction, and bitterness.
The afflictions that bind them
Are just like the silkworm's cocoon.

Why would anyone who is wise
 Be happy in this place?
 This body is a collection of sorrows
 All of which are impure.

Stop the bonds and wounds,
 The roots of which are without meaning of benefit.
 Ascending to the deva body
 Is also again so.

The desires are all impermanent
 And that is why I do not covet attachments.
 Departing from desires, skillfully contemplating,
 And realizing the true Dharma;

One ultimately cuts off existence.
 Today I shall enter Nirvāṇa,
 Crossing over to that other shore
 And leaving behind all of the distress.

This is why on this day
 You should only feel a supreme and wondrous happiness."

At that time, Cunda said to the Buddha, "So it is, so it is. World Honored One, the sincere the Noble One (ārya) says, 'I am now in possession of the wisdom that is fine and straightforward.' Being like the mosquitoes, how can we conceive of the meaning of the Tathāgata's Nirvāṇa at its very core? World Honored One, I have now been with the great nāgas and elephants that are these bodhisattva-mahāsattvas, who have cut away the bonds of defilement, who are the likes of Mañjuśrī. World Honored One, I am like a youth who has just left the household, but who has not yet fulfilled the precepts and thereupon fails the saṅgha numerously. Because of the spiritual power of the Buddha and bodhisattvas, I have been present with such a number of great bodhisattvas, I now wish to cause the Tathāgata to remain in the world for a long time and not enter Nirvāṇa. Like a starved person who can no longer produce saliva, my only wish for the World Honored One is also so. Remain forever in the world and do not enter Nirvāṇa!"

At that time, the Dharma prince Mañjuśrī addressed Cunda, "Cunda, you should not now say that you wish the Tathāgata to remain in the world forever and not enter parinirvāṇa, or that you are like a starved person who can no longer produce saliva. You should now undertake the contemplation of the nature and aspects of his actions. Thus contemplating his actions, you will be endowed with the samādhi of emptiness. Wishing to seek the true Dharma, [613b] you should thus train yourself."

Cunda asked, "Mañjuśrī, the Tathāgata is the most honored and most supreme among the beings in the heavens above. How can such a Tathāgata be an action? If he is an performer of actions, that is something subject to birth and death. It is just like water bubbles, arising quickly and quickly perishing, coming and going, and spinning round like a cart wheel. All of his actions would also be so. I have heard that the life span of gods is extremely long. How could the life span of the World Honored One, who is a god among gods, be hurried and not even fill the span of a hundred years?"

"It is like a chief of a village whose power has reached sovereignty. And so with that sovereign power he is able to govern other people. After this person's merit is exhausted, he will become an impoverished person who is taken lightly by other leaders. And why is that? It is because he has lost his power. The World Honored One would also be so. The same it would be his actions and the same it would be with the one who performs actions. Therefore, he would not be praised as a god among gods. And why? It is because then his actions would be things

subject to birth and death. This is why, Mañjuśrī, that I do not contemplate the Tathāgata as equal to his actions.

"Furthermore, Mañjuśrī, by knowing and then speaking, or not knowing and then speaking [?], it is said that the Tathāgata is equal to his actions. If we suppose that the Tathāgata is equal to his actions, then he would not then be called the sovereign Dharma king, a god among the gods of the three realms. He would be like a human king who has great champions, whose power is a thousand-fold again [a single man's], and who none could defeat him. Therefore it is held that these champions cause a single person to be [equivalent] to a thousand. Thus, the king of the champions is fondly mindful of them. He is inclined to bestow noble titles and award fiefs to them, and so the champions themselves come to be held as the equals to a thousand. But because they have not yet needed the power to battle a thousand, they are only capable of a variety of physical arts. Though they could suppress a thousand others, they are said to be the equal of a thousand. The Tathāgata is also so. He has defeated the māra of afflictions, the māra of skandhas, the heavenly māras, and the māra of death. This is why the Tathāgata is called the Honored One of the three realms. Like that one warrior, who is equal to a thousand, he has become so through the causes and conditions of bringing to fruition the consummation of a variety of measureless and real virtues. Therefore, he is proclaimed the Tathāgata, the Worthy, the Completely Enlightened One.

"Mañjuśrī, you should not consider and discern the idea that the Tathāgata is equal to his actions. It is just as when a wealthy elder has a son and a fortuneteller divines that the child will have a short life. Upon hearing this the mother and father, knowing that he will be incapable of continuing the family line, do not again cherish or esteem him, regarding him as they would grass. Those of short life span do not become -ramaōas or brāhmaōas to whom men and women, young and old, are respectful. If it is the case that the Tathāgata is equal to his acts, then it also would be that he would not be respected by all the humans, gods, and sentient beings of the world. The Tathāgata has said that the Dharma of the unchanging and unvarying reality also is without a receiver. [613c] This is why, Mañjuśrī, you should not say that the Tathāgata is equal to all of his actions.

"Furthermore, Mañjuśrī, it is just like an impoverished woman who has no household in which to seek shelter for herself. She is subjected to repeated ailments, distress, hunger, and thirst. She goes about begging and stops at a guest house where she stays and gives birth to a child. The landlord of this guest house chases her out and, embracing the child, she decides to go to another country. On the way she encounters the distress of wickedness, winds, rains, and cold. Many were the hungry noises of the biting mosquitoes, horseflies, and venomous snakes. Passing through the Ganges river, she embraces her child and begins to ford it. Its waters are tumultuous and swift, but she does not let go. Both mother and child are drowned. Thus, having been compassionately mindful and virtuous, after the woman's death she is reborn in the brahma heavens.

"Mañjuśrī, if there is a good son who wishes to protect the true Dharma, he does not say that the Tathāgata is equal to his actions. He is not equal to his actions. It may only be so if he himself corrects me and says that I now am deluded and do not yet possess the wisdom-eye. The Tathāgata's true Dharma is inconceivable. This is why it should not be proclaimed that the Tathāgata is established to be conditioned, [but] that he is established to be unconditioned. Someone who has the correct view says that the Tathāgata is established to be unconditioned. And why? It is because he is able to give rise to the good Dharma for sentient beings, and because he gives rise to compassion, as that impoverished woman did in the Ganges river when she was willing to abandon her own life because of her loving mindfulness of her child. Good son, the bodhisattva who protects the Dharma also responds in this way. He would rather give up his life than say that the Tathāgata is equal to the conditioned. Instead, he will say that the Tathāgata is equal to the unconditioned. Because he says that the Tathāgata is unconditioned, he attains the supremely unexcelled bodhi, just as that woman attained rebirth in the brahma heaven. And why? It is because of his defense of the Dharma. How did he defend the Dharma? By that I mean his saying that the Tathāgata is equal to the unconditioned. Good son, such a person, while not seeking liberation, liberates himself, just as that impoverished woman did not seek rebirth in the brahma heavens but in fact was reborn there as a result.

"Mañjuśrī, it is like a person who travels a far distance on a road, grows tired, and needs to stop at another's house. There he lays down to sleep and then suddenly a large fire breaks out in the building. He awakens in a fright and thinking, 'I have no doubt that today I shall die.' Because he was full of remorse, he was ensnared by his clothing. Thereupon, his life ended and he was reborn into the Trayastrimśāḥ heaven. And from there, after fully eighty rebirths, he became a great brahma king. And after fully one hundred thousand rebirths, he was born among humans as a wheel turning king. This man was not reborn amidst the three unpleasant destinies, but was always born in consecutive places of peaceful happiness because of these conditions. Mañjuśrī, [614a] if a good son is remorseful, then he should not contemplate the Buddha as being equal to his actions.

"Mañjuśrī, those of the heretical paths with mistaken views may say that the Tathāgata is equal to the conditioned. But a precept-holding monk should not give rise to such conditioned thinking about the Tathāgata. If he were to say that the Tathāgata is something conditioned, then that is a deluded statement. It should be known that upon death this person will enter the hells as though they was his own home. Mañjuśrī, in reality the Tathāgata is an unconditioned thing and should not be said to be conditioned. From this day forward all in saṣsāra should abandon this lack of knowledge and seek the correct knowledge. They will know then that the Tathāgata is the unconditioned. If one can thus contemplate the Tathāgata, then on perfecting it, one will attain the thirty-two marks and swiftly realize the supremely unexcelled bodhi."

At that time, the Dharma prince Mañjuśrī praised Cunda, saying, "Excellent, good son, excellent! You have now created the causes and conditions for a long life span, for you are able to understand that the Tathāgata is eternally abiding, something unchanging and unconditioned. You have now well overturned the appearance of the Tathāgata being conditioned. You are like that person who was remorseful and because he was caught by his clothes was burned, who was born in the Trayastrimśāḥ heaven because of his good thought of repentance, and who further was born a brahma king and a wheel-turning king. He did not go to the unpleasant destinies and always experienced peaceful happiness. You are also so, since you have skillfully overturned the Tathāgata's appearance of being conditioned. In a future life, you surely will attain the thirty-two marks, the eighty excellencies, the eighteen special qualities, an infinite life span, not existing in saṣsāra and always experiencing peaceful happiness. It is not long now before you will become a Worthy, a Completely Enlightened One.

"Cunda, those who come after the Tathāgata's passing will widely say, 'Company of mine, together you must overturn the notion that the Tathāgata is conditioned, or conditioned by the unconditioned, and moreover all of you must stop having such views yourselves.' Following this day, you may make haste to give food and drink, for these gifts are the best among gifts. Whether it is monks, nuns, laymen, or laywomen, when they go on distant travels, grow weary, and need things, should they not bath the following day and be provided supplies? Thus, quickly giving it to them then is the consummation of the root seed of the perfection of charity. Cunda, so it is if someone makes the very last offerings to the Buddha and the saṣgha, whether the offerings are many or few, whether sufficient or insufficient, fitting and timely. The Tathāgata is truly so and shall enter parinirvāḁa."

Cunda replied, "Mañjuśrī, why do you now covet these alms and say 'many, few, sufficient, or insufficient' in order to lead me to give on this day. Mañjuśrī, the Tathāgata in the old days practiced asceticism for six years and honored only what his arms held. How could he on this day be in need for a moment? Mañjuśrī, do you really mean to say that the Tathāgata who is truly awakened has accepted these alms? Verily, I surely know that the body of the Tathāgata is the essential body and not an alms-eating body."

At that time, the Buddha addressed Mañjuśrī, saying, "It is so, it is so."

He likewise said to Cunda, "Excellent, Cunda! You have brought to fruition the marvelous and great knowledge and skillfully entered the most profound Mahāyāna scriptures."

Mañjuśrī said to Cunda, "You have stated that the Tathāgata is the unconditioned, that the body of the Tathāgata has a long life span. Have you come to the knowledge of the Buddha's bliss?"

Cunda replied, "The Tathāgata does not only bring bliss for me, but also for all sentient beings."

Mañjuśrī said, "The Tathāgata brings bliss for you and I as well as all other sentient beings?"

Cunda replied, "You should not say that the Tathāgata brings bliss. The blissful person is a mistaken idea. If there are mistaken ideas then there is birth and death. When there is birth and death, then there are conditioned things. This is why, Mañjuśrī, one does not say that the Tathāgata is conditioned. If we said that the Tathāgata is conditioned, I and the sages together would be practicing in delusion. Mañjuśrī, the Tathāgata does not have the idea of being compassionately mindful. One who is compassionately mindful is like the milk cow that is compassionately mindful of its calf. Although it may be hungry or thirsty, the cow goes in search of water and grass, whether it is sufficient or insufficient, and then immediately returns. The Buddhas, the World Honored Ones, have no such mindfulness, seeing all beings equally to be like Rāhula. Such mindfulness, then, is the perspective of the Buddhas' wisdom.

"Mañjuśrī, it is just like a country's king who tames a team of horses, wishing to have draft horses to draw his chariot where he orders but has no place for them. The sages and I are also so. We wish to go to the deep core of the Tathāgata's subtle secret, which has no location. Mañjuśrī, it is like a golden winged bird (garuḍa) that flies up into the sky and looks down at the ocean from measureless yojanas high. It sees the nature of the water and the species of fish, fresh-water turtles, sea turtles, and nāgas. And he sees his own shadow as though looking into a bright mirror and seeing a reflection. Ordinary men of little knowledge are unable to calculate such a perspective. The sages and I are also so, unable to calculate the wisdom of the Tathāgata."

Mañjuśrī said to Cunda, "So it is, so it is. It is as you have said. In this matter I also have not penetrated through to it. Instead, my desire is only to test you about matter of the bodhisattva."

At that time, the World Honored One emitted a variety of lights from his facial orifices. Those lights brilliantly lit Mañjuśrī's body. Encountering these lights, Mañjuśrī then knew of this event immediately and addressed Cunda, saying, "The Tathāgata now has manifested this auspicious sign. It will not be long before he must [614c] enter into Nirvāṇa. Now is the time to present the very last offerings you have prepared for the Buddha and the great congregation. Cunda, you should know, the Tathāgata's emission of this variety of lights is not without causes and conditions."

Cunda heard this and sadly moved away quietly.

The Buddha addressed Cunda, "Now is the proper time for you to present your gifts to the Buddha and the great congregation. It is true that the Tathāgata shall enter parinirvāḍa, and the second and third [statements] are also so."

At that time, having heard the Buddha say this, Cunda raised his voice in a cry of grief, saying, "The distress, the distress! The world is empty!" And to the great congregation he said, "We all now must throw our five members to the ground and with the same voice exhort the Buddha not to enter parinirvāḍa."

At that time, the World Honored One again addressed Cunda, "Do not cry out to them and confuse their minds! You should regard this body just like the banana plant when it is burned, frothing water, a conjured illusion, a gandharva city, a clay vessel, and like a lightning flash. It is also like a drawing made in water, a prisoner facing execution, burnt fruit, and like a lump of flesh. It is like the end of a woven thread and like a mallet going up and down. You should regard its actions to be like sundry poisonous foods. Its errors and anxieties are things that are conditioned."

From this, Cunda addressed the Buddha, "The Tathāgata does not wish to remain long in the world. How can I not cry aloud, 'The distress, the distress! The world is empty!?' My only wish is for the World Honored One to have mercy on us and the sentient beings. Remain long in the world and do not enter parinirvāḍa!"

The Buddha addressed Cunda, "You should not say now, 'Have mercy on me and remain long in the world.' I do have mercy for you and everyone. This is why today I wish to enter Nirvāṇa. And why? The Buddha's Dharma is so and the conditioned is also so. This is why the Buddhas proclaim this verse,

'Conditioned things
 Are by nature impermanent.
 Once born, they do not remain.
 The quiescent extinction is happiness.'

"Cunda, you should regard all types of actions to be things that are selfless, impermanent, and that do not remain. These bodies are numerous and have measureless errors and anxieties. They are just like water bubbles. This is why you should not cry aloud."

At that time, Cunda said to the Buddha, "So it is, so it is. Sincere is this honored teaching. Although I know that the Tathāgata expediently manifests the entry into Nirvāṇa, still I am incapable of not being anguished about it. It upsets my concentration, but I will give rise again to consolation and happiness."

The Buddha praised Cunda, "It is excellent! It is excellent that you are able to understand that the Tathāgata manifests equally the expedient of Nirvāṇa for sentient beings. Now, Cunda, you should listen closely. Like the sārāsa [615a] birds in the months of Spring, when they flock together at Lake Anavatapta, the Buddhas are also so. They all go to this dwelling place. Cunda, you now should not consider the Buddhas to have long life spans or short life spans. All things are like conjured appearances. While the Tathāgata is present, he uses the power of expedients nowhere in which is there attachments. And why? The Buddha's Dharma is so."

"Cunda, I will now accept your presentation of offerings in order to lead you to the liberation from the defilements of birth and death. If men and gods make the very last offerings to me, they all will attain the unmoving reward that is the constant experience of peaceful happiness. And why? It is because I am the sentient beings' excellent field of blessings. If you wish for the sentient beings to create a blessed field, then you should quickly prepare your gifts. It would not be proper to wait any longer."

In order for sentient beings to attain liberation, Cunda at that time bowed his head, choked on his tears, and said to the Buddha, "Excellent, World Honored One! If I had the capacity when working my field of blessings, I would be able to comprehend and know the Tathāgata's Nirvāṇa and non-Nirvāṇa. As it is now, our wisdom along with that of the voice hearers and pratyekabuddhas is like that of mosquitoes. We are, indeed, unable to fathom the Tathāgata's Nirvāṇa and non-Nirvāṇa."

At that time, Cunda and his retinue sorrowfully wept and encircled the Tathāgata, burning incense, scattering flowers, and with their last thought respectfully presenting offerings. And soon those with Mañjuśrī also rose from their seats and went to offer their alms and supplies.