AN 4.180 — The Four Great References

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Text

Numbered Discourses 4.180

18. Intention

The Four Great References

At one time the Buddha was staying near the Bhoga City, at the Ānanda Shrine.

There the Buddha addressed the mendicants, “Mendicants!”

“Venerable sir,” they replied.

The Buddha said this: “Mendicants, I will teach you the four great references. Listen and apply your mind well, I will speak.”

“Yes, sir,” they replied. The Buddha said this:

“Mendicants, what are the four great references?

Take a mendicant who says: ‘Reverend, I have heard and learned this in the presence of the Buddha: this is the teaching, this is the training, this is the Teacher’s instruction.’ You should neither approve nor reject that mendicant’s statement. Instead, having carefully memorized those words and phrases, you should make sure they fit in the discourse and are exhibited in the training. If they do not fit in the discourse and are not exhibited in the training, you should draw the conclusion: ‘Clearly this is not the word of the Blessed One, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. It has been incorrectly memorized by that mendicant.’ And so you should discard it.

Take another mendicant who says: ‘Reverend, I have heard and learned this in the presence of the Buddha: this is the teaching, this is the training, this is the Teacher’s instruction.’ You should neither approve nor reject that mendicant’s statement. Instead, having carefully memorized those words and phrases, you should make sure they fit in the discourse and are exhibited in the training. If they fit in the discourse and are exhibited in the training, you should draw the conclusion: ‘Clearly this is the word of the Blessed One, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. It has been correctly memorized by that mendicant.’ You should remember it. This is the first great reference.

Take another mendicant who says: ‘In such-and-such monastery lives a Saṅgha with seniors and leaders. I’ve heard and learned this in the presence of that Saṅgha: this is the teaching, this is the training, this is the Teacher’s instruction.’ You should neither approve nor reject that mendicant’s statement. Instead, having carefully memorized those words

and phrases, you should make sure they fit in the discourse and are exhibited in the training. If they do not fit in the discourse and are not exhibited in the training, you should draw the conclusion: 'Clearly this is not the word of the Blessed One, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. It has been incorrectly memorized by that Saṅgha.' And so you should discard it.

Take another mendicant who says: 'In such-and-such monastery lives a Saṅgha with seniors and leaders. I've heard and learned this in the presence of that Saṅgha: this is the teaching, this is the training, this is the Teacher's instruction.' You should neither approve nor reject that mendicant's statement. Instead, having carefully memorized those words and phrases, you should make sure they fit in the discourse and are exhibited in the training. If they fit in the discourse and are exhibited in the training, you should draw the conclusion: 'Clearly this is the word of the Blessed One, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. It has been correctly memorized by that Saṅgha.' You should remember it. This is the second great reference.

Take another mendicant who says: 'In such-and-such monastery there are several senior mendicants who are very learned, inheritors of the heritage, who remember the teachings, the monastic law, and the outlines. I've heard and learned this in the presence of those senior mendicants: this is the teaching, this is the training, this is the Teacher's instruction.' You should neither approve nor reject that mendicant's statement. Instead, having carefully memorized those words and phrases, you should make sure they fit in the discourse and are exhibited in the training. If they do not fit in the discourse and are not exhibited in the training, you should draw the conclusion: 'Clearly this is not the word of the Blessed One, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. It has been incorrectly memorized by those senior mendicants.' And so you should discard it.

Take another mendicant who says: 'In such-and-such monastery there are several senior mendicants who are very learned, inheritors of the heritage, who remember the teachings, the monastic law, and the outlines. I've heard and learned this in the presence of those senior mendicants: this is the teaching, this is the training, this is the Teacher's instruction.' You should neither approve nor reject that mendicant's statement. Instead, having carefully memorized those words and phrases, you should make sure they fit in the discourse and are exhibited in the training. If they fit in the discourse and are exhibited in the training, you should draw the conclusion: 'Clearly this is the word of the Blessed One, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. It has been correctly memorized by those senior mendicants.' You should remember it. This is the third great reference.

Take another mendicant who says: 'In such-and-such monastery there is a single senior mendicant who is very learned, an inheritor of the heritage, who has memorized the teachings, the monastic law, and the outlines. I've heard and learned this in the presence of that senior mendicant: this is the teaching, this is the training, this is the Teacher's instruction.' You should neither approve nor reject that mendicant's statement. Instead, having carefully memorized those words and phrases, you should make sure they fit in the discourse and are exhibited in the training. If they do not fit in the discourse and are not exhibited in the training, you should draw the conclusion: 'Clearly this is not the word of the Blessed One, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. It has been incorrectly

memorized by that senior mendicant.' And so you should discard it.

Take another mendicant who says: 'In such-and-such monastery there is a single senior mendicant who is very learned, an inheritor of the heritage, who has memorized the teachings, the monastic law, and the outlines. I've heard and learned this in the presence of that senior mendicant: this is the teaching, this is the training, this is the Teacher's instruction.' You should neither approve nor reject that mendicant's statement. Instead, having carefully memorized those words and phrases, you should make sure they fit in the discourse and are exhibited in the training. If they fit in the discourse and are exhibited in the training, you should draw the conclusion: 'Clearly this is the word of the Blessed One, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. It has been correctly memorized by that senior mendicant.' You should remember it. This is the fourth great reference.

These are the four great references."