AN 8.29 — Lost Opportunities

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Text

Numbered Discourses 8.29

3. Householders

Lost Opportunities

“‘Now is the time! Now is the time!’ So says an unlearned ordinary person. But they don’t know whether it’s time or not. Mendicants, there are eight lost opportunities for spiritual practice. What eight?

Firstly, a Realized One has arisen in the world—perfected, a fully awakened Buddha, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, holy, knower of the world, supreme guide for those fit for training, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed. He teaches the Dhamma leading to peace, extinguishment, awakening, as proclaimed by the Holy One. But an individual has been reborn in hell. This is the first lost opportunity for spiritual practice.

Furthermore, a Realized One has arisen in the world … He teaches the Dhamma leading to peace, extinguishment, awakening, as proclaimed by the Holy One. But an individual has been reborn in the animal realm. This is the second lost opportunity …

Furthermore, a Realized One has arisen in the world … But an individual has been reborn in the ghost realm. This is the third lost opportunity …

Furthermore, a Realized One has arisen in the world … But an individual has been reborn in one of the long-lived orders of gods. This is the fourth lost opportunity …

Furthermore, a Realized One has arisen in the world … But an individual has been reborn in the borderlands, among uneducated foreigners, where monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen do not go. This is the fifth lost opportunity …

Furthermore, a Realized One has arisen in the world … And an individual is reborn in a central country. But they have wrong view and distorted perspective: ‘There’s no meaning in giving, sacrifice, or offerings. There’s no fruit or result of good and bad deeds. There’s no afterlife. There’s no such thing as mother and father, or beings that are reborn spontaneously. And there’s no ascetic or brahmin who is rightly comported and rightly practiced, and who describes the afterlife after realizing it with their own insight.’ This is the sixth lost opportunity …

Furthermore, a Realized One has arisen in the world … And an individual is reborn in a central country. But they’re witless, dull, idiotic, and unable to distinguish what is well said

from what is poorly said. This is the seventh lost opportunity for spiritual practice.

Furthermore, a Realized One has not arisen in the world … So he doesn't teach the Dhamma leading to peace, extinguishment, awakening, as proclaimed by the Holy One. And an individual is reborn in a central country. And they're wise, bright, clever, and able to distinguish what is well said from what is poorly said. This is the eighth lost opportunity for spiritual practice.

There are these eight lost opportunities for spiritual practice.

Mendicants, there is just one opportunity for spiritual practice. What is that one? It's when a Realized One has arisen in the world, perfected, a fully awakened Buddha, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, holy, knower of the world, supreme guide for those fit for training, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed. He teaches the Dhamma leading to peace, extinguishment, awakening, as proclaimed by the Holy One. And an individual is reborn in a central country. And they're wise, bright, clever, and able to distinguish what is well said from what is poorly said. This is the one opportunity for spiritual practice.

When you've gained the human state,

and the true teaching has been so well proclaimed,

those who don't seize the moment

are wasting their time.

For many wrong times are spoken of,

which obstruct the path.

Only on rare occasions

do Realized Ones arise.

If you find yourself in their presence,

so hard to find in the world,

and if you've gained a human birth,

and the teaching of the Dhamma;

that's enough to make an effort,

for a personage who desires self-knowledge.

How is the true teaching to be understood

so that the moment doesn't pass you by?

For if you miss your moment

you'll grieve when sent to hell.

If you fail to achieve
certainty regarding the true teaching
you'll regret it for a long time,
like the merchant in the story of the past.
A man shrouded by ignorance,
a failure in the true teaching,
will long undergo
transmigration through birth and death.
Those who've gained the human state
when the true teaching has been so well proclaimed,
and have completed what the Teacher taught—
or will do so, or are doing so now—
have realized the right time in the world
for the supreme spiritual life.
You should live guarded, ever mindful,
not festering with defilements,
among those restrained ones
who have practiced the path
proclaimed by the Realized One, the Clear-eyed One,
and taught by the Kinsman of the Sun.
Having cut off all underlying tendencies
that follow those drifting in Māra's dominion,
they're the ones in this world who've truly crossed over,
having reached the ending of defilements."