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Excerpt from

Maha-parinibbana Sutta: Last Days of the Buddha
Digha Nikaya (Collection of Long Discourses) 16th Discourse

Part 2: The Journey to Vesali

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The Blessed One's Deadly Sickness

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31. And the Blessed One recovered from that illness; and soon after his recovery he came out from his dwelling place and sat down in the shade of the building, on a seat prepared for him. Then the Venerable Ananda approached the Blessed One, respectfully greeted him, and sitting down at one side, he spoke to the Blessed One, saying: "Fortunate it is for me, O Lord, to see the Blessed One at ease again! Fortunate it is for me, O Lord, to see the Blessed One recovered! For truly, Lord, when I saw the Blessed One's sickness it was as though my own body became weak as a creeper, every thing around became dim to me, and my senses failed me. Yet, Lord, I still had some little comfort in the thought that the Blessed One would not come to his final passing away until he had given some last instructions respecting the community of bhikkhus."

32. Thus spoke the Venerable Ananda, but the Blessed One answered him, saying: "What more does the community of bhikkhus expect from me, Ananda? I have set forth the Dhamma without making any distinction of esoteric and exoteric doctrine; there is nothing, Ananda, with regard to the teachings that the Tathagata holds to the last with the closed fist of a teacher who keeps some things back. Whosoever may think that it is he who should lead the community of bhikkhus, or that the community depends upon him, it is such a one that would have to give last instructions respecting them. **But, Ananda, the Tathagata has no such idea as that it is he who should lead the community of bhikkhus, or that the community depends upon him.** So what instructions should he have to give respecting the community of bhikkhus?"

"Now I am frail, Ananda, old, aged, far gone in years. This is my eightieth year, and my life is spent. Even as an old cart, Ananda, is held together with much difficulty, so the body of the Tathagata is kept going only with supports. It is, Ananda, only when the Tathagata, disregarding external objects, with the cessation of certain feelings, attains to and abides in the signless concentration of mind, [19] that his body is more comfortable.

33. "Therefore, Ananda, be islands unto yourselves, refuges unto yourselves, seeking no external refuge; with the Dhamma as your island, the Dhamma as your refuge, seeking no other refuge.

"And how, Ananda, is a bhikkhu an island unto himself, a refuge unto himself, seeking no external refuge; with the Dhamma as his island, the Dhamma as his refuge, seeking no other refuge?

34. "When he dwells contemplating the body in the body, earnestly, clearly comprehending, and mindfully, after having overcome desire and sorrow in regard to the world; when he dwells contemplating feelings in feelings, the mind in the mind, and mental objects in mental objects, earnestly, clearly comprehending, and mindfully, after having overcome desire and sorrow in regard to the world, then, truly, he is an island unto himself, a refuge unto himself, seeking no external refuge; having the Dhamma as his island, the Dhamma as his refuge, seeking no other refuge.

35. "Those bhikkhus of mine, Ananda, who now or after I am gone, abide as an island unto themselves, as a refuge unto themselves, seeking no other refuge; having the Dhamma as their island and refuge, seeking no other refuge: it is they who will become the highest, [20] if they have the desire to learn."