

## TOUCHING THE EARTH

### *Intimate conversation with the Buddha*

#### *35. How to Study*

Lord Buddha, we all like to study. But why do we study? Often it is because we are looking for some advantage such as attaining a privileged position in society rather than to open our mind and discover methods of practice that can help us transform our own suffering and that of society. Some people devote themselves to their studies because they want a diploma or they want to win debates and prove that they are someone who has studied widely. I may have met people who speak very fluently about the deep teachings in the sutras and the different schools of thought in Buddhism. They can give eloquent teachings on no-self, impermanence, compassion, loving kindness, and liberation but they continue to be prejudiced, angry, proud, and jealous. They do not know how to listen deeply and use loving speech. They are not able to transform the afflictions in their own mind and they make other people suffer.

Lord Buddha, I do not want to be that kind of student. The reason I want to listen to and learn the teachings of the Buddha is to realize liberation in myself, transform my afflictions, and produce understanding and love. Lord Buddha, in the Sutra on Knowing the Better Way to Catch a Snake you have taught that I should not study spiritual teachings with the aim of winning debates.<sup>25</sup> We should study with the aim of transforming our suffering and liberating ourselves.

I vow that whenever I study the sutras, especially the Mahayana sutras and commentaries, I shall always ask myself the question: "Do these deep and mystical teachings have anything to do with the suffering which is in me and which I experience in my everyday life? How can I study this sutra so that I can bring it into my daily life and use the words to transform my afflictions and resolve my present difficulties?"

#### *Touching the Earth*

I touch the Earth three times before the elders Subhuti, Ananda, and Rahula. [Bell]