

# Dharma Flower Sutra

with commentary of Tripitaka Master Hua

Translated into English by Bhikshuni Heng Yin

Reviewed by Bhikshuni Heng Ch'ih

Sutra: T.22c3

*Before that Buddha left home he had sixteen sons, the first of whom was named Accumulation of knowledge. Each of them had a variety of precious, unusual fine toys. When they heard that their father had realized anuttarasamyaksambodhi their all cast aside these things they valued and went before Buddha, escorted by their weeping mothers. Their grandfather, a wheel Turning Sage King, together with a hundred great ministers and with hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of citizens all surrounded them and accompanied them to the Bodhimanda, all wishing to draw near to the Thus-Come-One-Great-Penetrating-Wisdom-Victory, to make offerings to him, to honor, revere and praise him. When they arrived, they bowed with their head at his feet, and having circumambulated him, they singlemindedly joined their palms, respectfully gazed upward at the World Honored One, and uttered these verses:*

*World Honored One of great-awesome virtue,  
For the sake of crossing over Living beings  
After limitless millions of aeons,  
You accomplished Buddhahood,  
and perfected all your vows;  
Unsurpassed is our good fortune.  
Very rare you are, World Honored One,  
In one sitting, passing through ten minor aeons.  
With body, hands, and feet,  
Still, secure, and unmoving.  
Your mind, ever tranquil,  
Never knows distraction.  
Ultimate, your eternal extinction,  
As you dwell firmly in the non-outflow dharma.  
Now we see the World Honored One  
Serenely realize the The Buddha Path;  
We all gain good benefit  
And proclaim our delight and great joy.  
Living beings, ever tormented by suffering,  
Blind, and without a guide,  
Fail to recognize the path which ends that pain.  
And do not know to seek their liberation.  
During the long night the evil destinies increase.  
While the hosts of gods are reduced, in number;  
From darkness they proceed into darkness.  
Never hearing the Buddha's name.  
Now, the Buddha's gained the utmost;*

*Peace, rest, the non-outflow way;  
And we, and all the gods',  
To attain the greatest benefit  
Therefore bow our heads  
and return our lives to the Unsurpassed Honored One.*

#### COMMENTARY:

BEFORE THAT BUDDHA LEFT HOME, HE HAD SIXTEEN SONS, THE FIRST OF WHOM WAS NAMED ACCUMULATION OF KNOWLEDGE. They had accumulated all kinds of merit and virtue through their wisdom, and so they got to be children of the Buddha. EACH OF THEM HAD A VARIETY OF PRECIOUS, UNUSUAL, FINE TOYS. Their grandfather had been a wheel-turning sage king and had blessings as vast as all under heaven. So, the children had some very precious, unusual, expensive toys. "WHEN THEY HEARD THAT THEIR FATHER HAD REALIZED ANUTTARASAMYAKSAMBODHI, had become a Buddha, THEY ALL CAST ASIDE THESE THINGS THEY VALUED--they put their toys aside--AND WENT BEFORE THE BUDDHA, to the Bodhi tree, where the Buddha had attained enlightenment. ESCORTED BY THEIR WEEPING MOTHERS. Their mothers, crying and sniffing, took them there.

They had been the Buddha's wives before he left home; now, their only recourse was to cry. They cried over every little thing. The children wanted to go with their father; they didn't want to stay with their mothers

...THEIR GRANDFATHER, their father's father--WHEEL-TURNING SAGE KING, TOGETHER WITH A HUNDRED GREAT MINISTERS, who were very close to the Sage king, AND WITH HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF MYRIADS OF MILLIONS OF CITIZENS ALL SURROUNDED THEM AND ACCOMPANIED THEM TO THE BODHIMANDA, where the Buddha cultivated the Way. ALL WISHING TO DRAW NEAR TO THE THUS COME ONE GREAT-PENETRATING-WISDOM-VICTORY, TO MAKE OFFERINGS TO HIM, TO HONOR, REVERE, AND PRAISE HIM. WHEN THEY ARRIVED, THEY BOWED WITH THEIR HEADS AT THE BUDDHA'S FEET. This means that they made a full "five-point" prostration, that is, they bowed with their head, arms, and their two legs touching the ground. When they bowed down, they turned their palms upwards as if the Buddha might stand on the palms of their hands. This is called "bowing to receive the Buddha, AND, HAVING CIRCUMAMBULATED HIM, three times to the right, THEY SINGLEMINDEDLY JOINED THEIR PALMS, RESPECTFULLY GAZED UPWARD AT THE WORLD HONORED ONE, unblinkingly...

They gazed upward because he was sitting up very high; you remember his lion throne was one yojana tall.

Then the entire multitude UTTERED THESE VERSES:

WORLD HONORED ONE OF GREAT AND AWESOME VIRTUE/ The Buddha is honored both in and beyond the world. FOR THE SAKE OF CROSSING OVER LIVING BEINGS/Why did you decide to become a Buddha? Because you wanted to save living beings. AFTER LIMITLESS MILLIONS OF AEONS/ YOU ACCOMPLISHED BUDDHAHOOD/AND PERFECTED ALL YOUR VOWS/ So those who study the Buddhadharma must make vows. The best day to make vows

is on the anniversary of Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment, that is, on the eighth day of the twelfth month (lunar calendar).

The Buddhas realized Buddhahood by their vows. We want to cultivate; why is it we are unable to endure suffering and unable to be vigorous? We cultivate for two and a half days, but by the time the third day rolls around, we get lazy. The reason for this is because we haven't made vows. We insist on being selfish and seeking our own benefit. We tend towards the Small Vehicle and we think like Arhats. "I'm going to take care of myself, and that's it. If I make it, that's great, but I'm not going to worry about anybody else. I don't care if anybody else cultivates or not. Every move I make is for my own benefit, not for living beings." Very independent. Hah! This is because one hasn't made vows. So, I hope you do make vows.

Vows are very important. But, you can't make someone else's vows. You can't say, "I will make Kuan Yin Bodhisattva's Ten Vows, or Universal Worthy Bodhisattva's Ten Vows, Amitabha's Forty-eight vows, or Medicine Master's twelve vows." Those are their vows. You can't just copy them. You must make your own vows. You could make vows even greater than Amitabha Buddha or Kuan Yin Bodhisattva, but they must be your own. You aren't them!

"Well," you might argue, "suppose I am a transformation of Amitabha Buddha? What's wrong with making his vows then?"

Even if you are, you are still just a transformation; you aren't the original. You have to make new vows. It's like metal which was one thing and then got melted down into something else. Perhaps you were a metal sculpture of a turtle, and now you've turned into a train. You can't be a turtle again, not even if you want to. I won't argue with you about whether or not you are Amitabha Buddha's transformation body, but you still need to make brand new vows, not old ones. There are standard vows that every Bodhisattva makes, and that's all right;

I vow to save the boundless numbers of beings  
I vow to cut off the inexhaustible afflictions.  
I vow to study the endless Dharma doors.  
I vow to realize the supreme Buddha Way.

When Amitabha Buddha was on the causal ground, he was a Bhikshu by the name of Fa-tsang (Dharmakara). He made forty-eight vows which he used to cultivate with in every lifetime. He made these vows in every life for who knows how many great aeons before he became a Buddha and created the Land of Ultimate Bliss. One should make vows right at the beginning when you start cultivating. Even if you are an old-timer and have been cultivating for quite a while, you should make solid vows. Perhaps some of you have been planting Buddha-seeds throughout many lifetimes, many aeons, even, and now as a result you have encountered this opportunity. You are able to put all of your energy into practicing the Buddhadharma. So, write out your vows. You can write them just how you want them. Perhaps: #1: I vow to save all ants. #2: I vow to save all mosquitoes. #3: I vow to save all hopeless cases. Of course, I'm joking. But, one of my disciples did make a vow to become a Buddha in the northern continent of UttaraKuru. Why did he do this? Because, right now, there is no Buddha there. When he gets there, because there are no Buddhas, he will be worshipped exclusively for sure! Not much competition! I was quite pleased with this vow; it's very special, so I made a vow that I would guarantee that he fulfills that vow. Everything in the world

can change. There's nothing fixed. If someone makes a vow to go somewhere and become a Buddha, a Buddha will, in the future, appear in that place. No one ever made a vow to become a Buddha in Uttarakuru before, so there is no Buddhadharma there right now.

Once you have made the vow, then even if you would like to slack off on your cultivation, you won't dare, because you made a vow to cultivate! Vows are extremely important.

UNSURPASSED IS OUR GOOD FORTUNE/ VERY RARE YOU ARE WORLD HONORED ONE/  
IN ONE SITTING, PASSING THROUGH TEN MINOR AEONS/

WITH BODY, HANDS, AND FEET/ STILL, SECURE, AND UNMOVING/ This praises the Buddha's samadhi in its physical aspect. YOUR MIND, EVER TRANQUIL/ NEVER KNOWS DISTRACTION/ This praises the Buddha's samadhi in its mental aspect. His mind is free of defilements, and so he is always content and tranquil. ULTIMATE, YOUR ETERNAL EXTINCTION/ AS YOU DWELL FIRMLY IN THE NON-OUTFLOW DHARMA/ The Buddha has severed forever the very roots of delusion and ignorance and certified to the great extinction. NOW WE SEE THE WORLD HONORED ONE/ SERENELY REALIZED THE BUDDHA PATH/ WE ALL GAIN GOOD BENEFIT/ AND PROCLAIM OUR DELIGHT AND GREAT JOY/ LIVING BEINGS, EVER TORMENTED BY SUFFERING/ BLIND, AND WITHOUT A GUIDE/ FAIL TO RECOGNIZE THE PATH WHICH ENDS THAT PAIN AND DO NOT KNOW TO SEEK THEIR LIBERATION/ In their confusion, living beings become bound by suffering. They are as if blind and without a guide. They don't recognize the path which leads to the ultimate end of suffering. They don't know enough to seek to escape.

DURING THE LONG NIGHT, THE EVIL DESTINIES INCREASE/ WHILE THE HOSTS OF GODS ARE REDUCED IN NUMBER/ Beings fall and are reborn in lower destinies. FROM DARKNESS THEY PROCEED INTO DARKNESS/ NEVER HEARING THE BUDDHA'S NAME/ With their darkened minds, they create dark karma and receive retribution.

NOW THE BUDDHA'S GAINED THE UTMOST PEACE, REST, THE NON-OUTFLOW WAY/ Now the Buddha has attained the supreme, peaceful, quiescent, non-outflow Path of the Sages. AND WE, AND ALL THE GODS/ TO ATTAIN THE GREATEST BENEFIT/THEREFORE BOW OUR HEADS/ AND RETURN OUR LIVES TO THE UNSURPASSED HONORED ONE/

After you Take Refuge and start to cultivate the Way, you should get rid of your attachment to the mark of a self. If you don't you will have not just one kind of trouble, but many, many kinds. If you can get rid of the mark of a self, you will have no trouble at all. It's easy to say, "no self." It's very hard to do. So, you must give up your body, mind, and life itself to the Buddha in refuge. Life itself: that is the most important thing we each possess. If you give your life up to the Buddha, your own personal happiness or sorrow, or whatever, will cease to be important. We suffer because we are supposed to suffer, and we enjoy happiness as it is due. But don't hold on to the idea of a "self." This is very important in your cultivation.

*Sutra:T. 22c2s*

*When the sixteen sons had finished praising the Buddha, they then entreated him to turn the Dharma wheel, saying, "World Honored One, speak the Dharma and bring us peace, show us pity, and benefit both gods and humans." Then they spoke more verses saying:*

*"O Hero of the world, incomparable  
Adorned with a hundred blessings,  
And having attained unsurpassed wisdom,  
Pray speak for the sake of this world  
To cross over and liberate us and  
All classes of living beings as well.  
Demonstrate it: speak it in detail  
And lead us to attain that wisdom,  
For, if we can attain Buddhahood,  
Other living beings can do the same.  
The World Honored One knows the profound thoughts  
Within the minds of living beings;  
He knows the ways on which they walk  
And the strength of their wisdom,  
The pleasures and the blessings they have cultivated.  
And all the deeds done in former lives.  
The World honored One, knowing all of this,  
Should turn the unsurpassed wheel!"*

#### COMMENTARY:

WHEN THEY HAD FINISHED PRAISING THE BUDDHA, THEY THEN ENTREATED HIM TO TURN THE DHARMA WHEEL, SAYING... After they had praised the Great Penetration Victory Buddha, they asked him to speak the Dharma. The Buddha will not speak the Dharma unless requested to do so.

The Dharma doesn't arise of itself;  
It appears in response to the situation.  
The Way is not practiced in a vacuum;  
It responds in accord with conditions

Now, before the Dharma lecture, someone always requests the Dharma. If you can't speak the Dharma yourself, then you ask someone else to do so. In China, when a patron knows a certain Dharma Master is skilled at lecturing on the Dharma, he will request him to lecture on a Sutra and give him a lot of money. In this way, the patron participates in the merit and virtue generated from the lecturing of the Sutra.

You may wonder, if the Dharma Master is lecturing on the Sutra, how can the merit and virtue go to the patron? It is because of the patron's sincerity in requesting the Dharma. He requests it not just for himself, but for living beings, and so he gains much merit. Not only does he gain merit but he receives the reward of intelligence. If you want to be intelligent then read more Sutras, recite more Sutras, and

request that people lecture on the Sutras more often. People who are intelligent now did these things in the past. Those who request the Dharma each day will, in the future certainly be intelligent and give rise to Prajna wisdom. The sixteen sons asked the Buddha Great-Penetrating-Wisdom-Victory to turn the Dharma wheel.

What is meant by "turning the great Dharma wheel?" Lecturing on the Sutras and speaking the Dharma is turning the Dharma wheel. Any kind of work that you do within the Buddhadharma can be considered turning the great Dharma wheel. There are many different ways to turn the Dharma wheel. Protecting the Triple Jewel is one; praising the Triple Jewel is another; propagating the Dharma is another. Telling people of the benefits of believing in the Buddha is another.

Let's say a situation arose where some people were trying to ruin a Dharma Master's reputation. They are jealous of that Dharma Master and want to break up his Bodhimanda. In this case you should speak up and say, "That's wrong. These people are just creating rumors. They are the one's who are destroying the Triple Jewel."

Those people may make up stories and start rumors circulating, saying things like, "That Dharma Master eats meat," when they have never seen him eat meat at all. If they had seen him eating meat, that's one thing, but to fabricate stories is just being malicious. They may say, "He says he eats one meal a day, but he sneaks food all the time." You should speak up and protect the Triple Jewel and expose these people as gossip-mongers. That, too, is protecting the Triple Jewel. In general, translating Sutras, lecturing on the Sutras, printing Sutras, running the tape recorder, this is all turning the Dharma wheel.

"HERO OF THE WORLD, INCOMPARABLE ADORNED WITH A HUNDRED BLESSINGS/ The Buddha is a great hero in the world, an unsurpassed lord. There is no one who can compare to the Buddha. He is peerless. The Buddha cultivated blessings and wisdom for three great asamkhyeya aeons and for a hundred aeons he perfected the fine marks. AND HAVING ATTAINED UNSURPASSED WISDOM/ PRAY SPEAK FOR THE SAKE OF THIS WORLD/ The Buddha is the greatly enlightened one, one with supreme wisdom. PRAY SPEAK FOR THE SAKE OF THIS WORLD/ TO SAVE AND LIBERATE US AND/ so that we may leave suffering and attain bliss-- ALL CLASSES OF LIVING BEINGS AS WELL/ all the twelve categories of living beings-- DEMONSTRATE IT: SPEAK IT IN DETAIL/ AND LEAD US TO ATTAIN THAT WISDOM/ so all living beings can attain the Buddha's wisdom. For, if we can attain Buddhahood/ other living beings can do the same/ If we, now, can become Buddhas, then all living beings can become Buddhas. The World Honored One knows the profound thoughts/ Within the minds of living beings/ He knows what their hopes and wishes are. And the strength of their wisdom/ The scope of their intelligence. The pleasures and the blessings they have cultivated/ and all the deeds done in former lives/ the workings of cause and effect. The World Honored One, knowing all of this/ should turn the unsurpassed wheel!/ It is our fervent prayer that the World Honored One will turn the Dharma wheel and save living beings, so they may all realize the Buddha Way.

We are all gathered here to investigate the Buddhadharma, and we should put into practice the knowledge we gain. If you understand a principle, do not fail to apply it. If you know and don't practice, that is worse than not knowing in the first place. If you don't know about cultivating, and so you don't cultivate, that's one thing. Once you know about the Buddhadharma, you must cultivate it, you must practice very reliably and solidly.

The most important job of a cultivator is to benefit others, to help others. Don't worry about helping yourself. Forget yourself. That's cultivation. It is extremely important not to be jealous or obstructive. You must also sever affliction. If you don't cut off your afflictions, you won't be able to end birth and death. "Cutting off" afflictions really just means to transform them. Transform your afflictions into Bodhi. Turning them into Bodhi, you will always give rise to wisdom, and you won't be stupid. If you have affliction, then you are always stupid and without wisdom. Don't get afflicted over every little thing. Don't be jealous or obstructive. This is crucial. So, everyday we investigate the Buddhadharma, and everyday we must practice it.

You may speak wonderfully, speak just fine;  
But if you don't practice it, it's not the Way.

No matter how well you can talk, if you don't actually cultivate you won't be able to realize the Path. There are several people here who are just on the verge of getting enlightened. However, they must cultivate their hearts to benefit others and forget themselves. Someone is thinking, "Who are they?" Well, if you're wondering who they are, you can be sure they are not you. Besides, you shouldn't ask. You should ask yourself, "When am I going to get enlightened? When am I going to have great wisdom?" You shouldn't ask about the other people. I don't know who they are myself. I just said that to be saying it, I'm not enlightened myself, so how could I know something like that?

The only thing to do is go ahead and cultivate. First of all, be patient. Be patient in all circumstances. Bear up under poverty. Think: "The poorer I am, the better. It's cleaner that way. Cultivators should be poor. Once you get some money, then the problems arrive." Once you've got money, then you won't be able to cultivate. Bear with hunger, too. If there's nothing to eat today, don't worry about it. Something will turn up tomorrow. Be patient. If you have no clothing, if you are freezing, bear it. Bear the wind and bear the rain. Bear the hunger, bear the cold. That's your responsibility as a cultivator. You should fear nothing. No matter how hard it is, you must do it. "No matter how bitter it is, I must bear it. I will cultivate and fight against the bitterness and the hardships. I will break through all obstacles." Then, once you've gotten through that barrier, you can have success. Otherwise, you won't.

So, every one of you should understand: it is useless just to talk about it. You have to do it. Talking ten feet isn't as good as practicing one foot. I hope that all of you will really practice and that you won't indulge in intellectual Ch'an.

*-continued next issue*

## ***FORTHCOMING FROM BTTS:***

*ENTERING THE DHARMA REALM, VOLUME 5.* The diligent and virtuous Youth Good Wealth comes to meet the Good Advisors at the level of the Ten Bodhisattva Grounds. In each case, the Good Knowing Advisor is a night spirit. This volume covers the first five grounds. AVAILABLE LATE NOVEMBER.