

Dharma Flower Sutra

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Sutra:

*THEY VISITED ONE ANOTHER AND DISCUSSED THIS MATTER, WONDERING,
"WHY DO OUR PALACES SHINE WITH THIS BRIGHT LIGHT?"*

*THEN, IN THE ASSEMBLY, A BRAHMA HEAVEN KING BY THE NAME OF
SHIKHIN, ON BEHALF OF THE BRAHMA HOSTS, SPOKE VERSES, SAYING,*

*NOW, FOR WHAT REASON
DO OUR PALACES SHINE
WITH SUCH AN AWESOME LIGHT
ADORNED AS NEVER BEFORE?
WONDROUS MARKS, SUCH AS THESE
WE HAVE NEVER SEEN BEFORE
HAS A GREAT AND VIRTUOUS GOD BEEN BORN?
HAS A BUDDHA APPEARED IN THE WORLD?*

Commentary:

They visited one another and discussed this matter. Because the light was so unusual, they wanted to find out where it was coming from. Wondering, "Why do our palaces shine with this bright light?" They all got together for a meeting, asking one another, "Does your palace shine with that bright light, too?" "Yes! Does yours?" And they all asked one another. Thinking it weird, they decided to go find out.

Then, in the assembly, a Brahma heaven King by the name of Shikhin, on behalf of the Brahma hosts, spoke verses, saying,

*Now, for what reason
Do our palaces shine
With such an awesome light
Adorned as never before?
Wondrous marks, such as these
We have never seen before
Has a great and virtuous god been born?
Has a Buddha appeared in the world?*

Sutra:

AT THAT TIME, FIVE HUNDRED MYRIADS OF MILLIONS OF BRAHMA HEAVEN KINGS, TOGETHER WITH THEIR PALACES, EACH WITH SACKS FILLED WITH HEAVENLY FLOWERS, WENT TO THE LOWER DIRECTION TO SEEK OUT THIS SIGN. THEY SAW THE THUS COME ONE GREAT PENETRATING WISDOM VICTORY SEATED ON THE LION THRONE BENEATH THE BODHI TREE IN THE BODHIMANDA, REVERED AND CIRCUMAMBULATED BY GODS, DRAGON KINGS, GANDHARVAS, KINNARAS, MAHORAGAS, AND BEINGS BOTH HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN. THEY SAW, AS WELL, THE SIXTEEN SONS OF THE KING REQUESTING THE BUDDHA TO TURN THE DHARMA WHEEL.

Commentary:

The Brahma Kings all got together in their palaces. Since their palaces can undergo limitless changes and transformations, "as you will," it is possible to use them as cars, planes, and even boats. The palaces are very much like our present-day cars, except that they are much bigger than cars. Each Brahma King brought his sack full of flowers. These sacks can hold Mount Sumeru! Mount Sumeru can fit in their sacks without even shrinking down in size. It's an inconceivable state. You can't figure it out with your ordinary mind. Scientists do their research and inquire coming and going, but they never get their questions all answered. Eventually they get old and their wits grow dull; their eyes go on strike, their ears refuse to help them out, and their teeth fall out. These signs are telling them that they should "know when to advance and when to retreat." They should know that their time to die is drawing near, and that is why their six organs are all getting lazy. They say, "We have helped you out for so many years. What have you ever done for us, your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, huh?"

"Well, nothing, I guess," you mutter.

"That's right. And now it's time to say fare-thee-well, because we are splitting!" Then, you can't see, can't hear, and your sense of smell starts failing. The tongue hangs in, however. No matter how old you are, you can still taste. The tongue may have a sense of loyalty, but your teeth don't. They run off.

"That's no problem," you say, "I can get false teeth."

You can, but they won't work as well.

I once had a conversation with an old man over eighty. "Sir," I said, "you are advanced in years and have a great deal of experience. No doubt you have seen people lose their teeth."

"I certainly have," he replied.

"Well, have you ever run across anyone who had their tongue fall out?"

"No, indeed, I haven't," he said, "have you?"

"Of course I haven't!" I said. "If I had, I wouldn't be asking you!"

"What are you asking me for?" he said. "Since you don't understand, I will tell you. Why do people lose their teeth but never their tongue? It's because their teeth are too stiff and rigid. They insist on chewing on bones and other hard things. The tongue isn't so stiff. It's very pliable. The teeth know when to advance, but the tongue knows when to retreat. Consequently, one's tongue doesn't fall out, while one's teeth do. The teeth are like a knife made out of steel that is too rigid. When it hits a stone, it snaps in two. If the blade is just right, it will give a bit when it hits the stone and therefore not break.

When the body gets old, it falls apart. Once the body starts falling apart, the mind starts going, and soon it's time to die. Nobody can avoid this.

At that time, five hundred myriads of millions of Brahma Heaven Kings, together with their palaces, each with sacks filled with heavenly flowers, went to the lower direction to seek out this sign. They saw the Thus Come One. Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory seated on the Lion Throne beneath the Bodhi Tree in the Bodhimanda. The gods got in their palaces and went off with their sacks of flowers to seek out the light. They found the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory, the Buddha of great spiritual penetrations, great wisdom, a great victor with great power in morality, samadhi, and wisdom. He was in the Bodhimanda beneath the Bodhi Tree, the Tree of Enlightenment, seated on the Lion Throne. He was being revered and circumambulated by gods, dragon kings, gandharvas, kinnaras... Why do kinnaras have just one horn on their heads? Oxen have two horns, moose have horns with lots of forks on the top, but kinnaras have only one single horn atop their heads, someone saw a woman who had two horns on top of her head. She looked just like a woman, except she had these horns. Hmm. How come oxen have horns and dogs don't? What's the reason for this? If you have been raised in a scientific society, you should be aware of these things. The oxen didn't listen to what their parents said. Whenever their parents said anything, they would lose their heads, like an ox butting up against something. "Hey! Shut up," they said, striking out at their parents, hitting them over the head with their words. Kinnaras didn't strike out at both parents, only at their mother. They would listen to their father, but not their mother. This was because they were afraid they would get clobbered by their father! Since they only struck out at one parent, they grew only one horn. They wouldn't listen to their mother. They insisted on listening to music, running off to the movies, or going dancing all the time. When they came back their mother would entreat them: "Why don't you do a little work around the house?" Hah! And then they'd blast her. "What? Me, get a job? I've got a place to live and food to eat and my allowance. What in the heck do I want with a job?" They just did nothing but play and so they turned into musical spirits, kinnaras with one horn on their head. Since they like to play so much, they go play music for the Jade Emperor. The gandharvas love to smell incense, and when the Jade Emperor burns the incense, they run off to play music for him. They are incense addicts, sort of like present-day dope addicts. They get intoxicated on the incense and play music and jump around thinking it the greatest thing in the world.

Although asuras aren't mentioned outright in this list, they are implied. I have lectured on them many times before, but ultimately, I don't know if you would recognize one if you saw one. In case you wouldn't, I'll introduce you again. Have you ever seen people who are just downright hostile? Who are always fighting? who carry guns and knives? They are asuras! There are household asuras, national asuras, and inter-personal asuras. In the home, they are people who just won't listen to each other. They prefer to fight and get all afflicted, thinking it more fun than entertaining guests. In fact, they would rather eat afflictions than food! The husband invites the wife to eat some afflictions, and the wife says, "Okay, I will return the invitation!" The two of them eat two helpings of afflictions but still aren't satisfied. They want to share it with their children. They have a meeting and invite the kids to join in. When the kids have had their fill of afflictions, they run outside and treat their friends to some afflictions, too. Their friends return home and invite their own parents to eat some afflictions. One may want to cut off afflictions, but it is not easy. They just keep rolling along. That's the realm of asuras--ever-widening circles of affliction. Afflictions in the home all day long. They're filling and don't cost anything. Better than bread and butter! Now do you understand? If you have afflictions, you are an asura. If I have afflictions, I am an asura. If he has afflictions, he is an asura. Afflictions just mean getting angry, giving people a bad time. It means thinking, "Everyone is bad, bad! I am the only good person there is. Where can I go to get away from these bad people?" You think about it all day long, but you never come up with anything. Why not? Because you are afflicted. If you had no afflictions, you would see everyone else as the Buddha. Just take me, for example. I look upon all of you disobedient disciples with such patience! I teach you to be filial to your parents, but you aren't. I teach you not to get angry, and you insist on getting even angrier. I tell you not to have a temper, and you say, "How can I do that? I was born with this temper. It's my old friend. How can you expect me to break off with my old friend?" You don't listen to me, but I don't get angry. If you want to be asuras, it's up to you. When you have been asuras long enough, you'll turn into something else.

Garudas, too, are included in the eight-fold division. They are the great gold-winged P'eng bird. No one has ever seen one. How big are they? Well, dragons are several thousand feet long, and the P'eng birds eat them like we eat noodles! They grab them by the legs, hold them upside down, and gulp them down, one after another. Now, if you want to see one, I'll let you see one. But you must promise not to eat them. It's dangerous! If they see a person, they will want to eat him. He will take you for a lazy worm and swallow you in one gulp. How big is the garuda? His wingspread is three hundred and sixty yojanas! Pretty big! With one flap of his wings he fans the ocean dry, and all the dragons in the sea are exposed. He gulps them all down, as he considers dragons his optimal diet.

Kinnaras are partners with the gandharvas. *mahoragas*, are the big snakes. They aren't like the snakes that we can see. They are so big that they wind around Mount Sumeru three times. And just how big is Mount Sumeru? You don't know? I don't know, either! If you opened your Heavenly Eye, you would know, though.

...and being both human and non-human. How do people get to be people? If you are filial to your parents, you can become a person. How does one get to be "non-human," that is, an animal, a hell-being, or a hungry ghost? By not being filial to one's parents. People differ from animals, in that people know to be filial to their parents, to repay their kindness, and to respond to their virtue. Some animals know how to do this, too, but most of them don't, because they don't have enough sense; they are too stupid. Stupid people don't even know if you are being good to them or not. Eventually, they become "non-human." "Reverently circumambulated"--the gods, dragons, and eight-fold division paid their respects to the Buddha Great-Penetrating Wisdom Victory.

...and saw the sixteen sons of the king requesting the Buddha to turn the Dhanma wheel, to lecture on the Sutras, teach the Dharma, and transform living beings.

Sutra:

THEN THE BRAHMA HEAVEN KINGS BOWED WITH THEIR HEADS AT THE BUDDHA'S FEET, CIRCUMAMBULATE HIM A HUNDRED THOUSAND TIMES, AND SCATTERED HEAVENLY FLOWERS UPON THE BUDDHA. THE FLOWERS THAT THEY SCATTERED WERE AS HIGH AS MOUNT SUMERU, AND THEY OFFERED THEM AS WELL TO THE BUDDHA'S BODHI TREE. HAVING MADE OFFERINGS OF FLOWERS, THEY EACH PRESENTED THEIR PALACE AS AN OFFERING TO THE BUDDHA, SAYING, "WE ONLY PRAY THAT YOU WILL SHOW US PITY AND BENEFIT US BY ACCEPTING AND OCCUPYING THESE PALACES." THEN THE BRAHMA HEAVEN KINGS, BEFORE THE BUDDHA, WITH ONE MIND AND A SINGLE VOICE, SPOKE THESE VERSES:

*"IT'S GOOD INDEED TO SEE THE BUDDHAS,
HONORED SAGES WHO SAVE THE WORLD
AND WHO, FROM THE PRISON OF THE TRIPLE REALM
CAN EFFECT ESCAPE FOR LIVING BEINGS.
ALL-WISE, REVERED BY GODS AND HUMANS,
PITYING THE FLOCKS OF BEINGS
OPENING THE DOOR OF SWEET VIEW,
VASTLY SAVING ALL BEINGS.
LIMITLESS AEONS OF YORE
HAVE PASSED EMPTILY, WITHOUT A BUDDHA.
BEFORE THE WORLD HONORED ONE EMERGED,
THE TEN DIRECTIONS WERE EVER IN DARKNESS,
THE THREE EVIL PATHS INCREASED,
AND THE ASURAS FLOURISHED,
WHILE THE HOSTS OF GODS DIMINISHED,
MOST FALLING INTO EVIL PATHS AT DEATH.
THEY DID NOT HEAR THE DHARMA FROM THE BUDDHA,
BUT EVER FOLLOWED UNWHOLESOME PATHS.
THEIR BODILY STRENGTH AND WISDOM,*

*BOTH DECREASED.
BECAUSE OF OFFENSE KARMA
THEY LOST JOY AND THOUGHTS OF JOY.
THEY DWELT IN DHARMAS OF DEVIANT VIEWS,
NOT KNOWING THE RULES OF GOODNESS.
FAILING TO RECEIVE THE BUDDHA'S TRANSFORMING,
THEY CONSTANTLY FELL INTO EVIL PATHS.
THE BUDDHA ACTS AS EYES FOR ALL THE WORLD,
AND BUT ONCE IN A LONG WHILE DOES APPEAR.
OUT OF PITY FOR LIVING BEINGS,
HE MANIFESTS IN THE WORLD,
TRANSCENDS IT AND REALIZES RIGHT ENLIGHTENMENT.
WE REJOICE EXCEEDINGLY;
WE AND ALL THE OTHER BEINGS,
ARE HAPPY AS NEVER BEFORE,
AND ALL OF OUR PALACES
RECEIVE THE LIGHT AND ARE ADORNED.
WE NOW OFFER THEM TO THE WORLD HONORED ONE.
WE VOW THAT THIS MERIT AND VIRTUE
MAY EXTEND TO ALL LIVING BEINGS,
SO THAT WE AND ALL BEINGS
MAY TOGETHER REALIZE THE BUDDHA WAY.*

Commentary:

Then the Brahma Heaven Kings bowed with their heads at the Buddha's feet, circumambulated him a hundred thousand times, and scattered heavenly flowers upon the Buddha. The flowers that they scattered were as high as Mount Sumeru, and they offered them as well to the Buddha's Bodhi tree. Although the flowers appeared to be piled as high as Mount Sumeru, when you reached out to touch them, there was nothing there. You could see them, but you couldn't touch them. It's sort of like watching a movie. You can watch a movie with your eyes, but you can't shake hands with the characters in it. It's a wonderful and inconceivable state. When ordinary people look, however, there is nothing there.

Having made offerings of Flowers, they each presented their palace as an offering to the Buddha. The gods like their palaces more than anything else in the world because they are so comfortable. They sit in them and are perfectly at ease, thinking of nothing at all. They don't think about their fathers, and they don't think about their mothers, their sisters, or brothers. All they think about are their palaces, about how great they are, about how neat they are and about how comfortable they are in them--better than lying on the sofa! They are attached to them all day long, and so, when they went looking for the light, they brought them along. However, as soon as they saw the Buddha, they got enlightened and wished to set their palaces aside.

Saying, "we only pray that you will show us pity and benefit us by accepting and occupying these palaces. Allow us to make this offering to the Buddha and thereby plant blessings before the Triple Jewel. Please accept these palaces and live in them." Then, the Brahma Heaven Kings, the five hundred myriads of millions of them, before the Buddha, with one mind and a single voice, spoke these verses. There were many of them, but they all had one, common mind and one single sound to praise the Buddha, Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory Thus Come One.

Today I am very happy that my disciple's parents have come to listen to the lecture. I know that the first time his parents came here to visit, they were afraid that he was in great danger, and they came prepared to bargain with me. But now, this is their second visit, and they realize he is doing well; they are not afraid for him. What is more, they sat all through the lecture; that's quite inconceivable in itself! However, I believe that one's parents are always concerned for their children's welfare. Every move their children make is watched very carefully. It's like me. Wherever my disciples go, I find it very hard to put them down. I am always watching to see what they are up to. Have they broken any precepts? Have they been taken advantage of?

I want to announce something here at the Buddhist Lecture Hall. After this, whether you are a left-home person or a lay person, when your parents come here, they can do as they wish. If they want to stand, they can stand. If they want to sit down, they can sit down. If they want to bow to the Buddha, they can, and if they don't want to, they don't have to. One's brothers and sisters, however, should follow along with our routine. Parents are older, and we at the Buddhist Lecture Hall want to practice filial behavior and therefore, we will not try to coerce them into believing in Buddhism. But, you can lean on your brothers and sisters a bit; it won't hurt. That's today's announcement.

It's good, indeed, to see the Buddhas/ We feel really good to see the Buddhas. Honored Sages who save the world/ We have met with a Sage who can lead us from suffering to bliss. And who, from the prison of the triple realm/ from the prison of the realm of desire, form, and formlessness. Can effect escape for living beings/ help them to leave suffering and attain bliss, and end birth and death.

All-wise, revered by gods and humans/ Pitying the flocks of beings/ He is greatly compassionate and merciful towards all the different kinds of living beings. This includes both sentient and insentient beings. It is said, "The sentient and insentient alike perfect the wisdom of all modes."

Opening the door of sweet dew/ "Sweet dew" is the heavenly elixir of immortality. The Buddha speaks Dharma, leading all living beings to end birth and death, and so his speaking of Dharma is called the "Door of Sweet Dew." Vastly saving all beings/ The Buddha doesn't just save one or two beings; he saves them all, without exception. Limitless aeons of yore/ Have passed emptily, without a Buddha/ Way back into the past, through limitless aeons, and upwards until now, the time has gone by emptily, for no Buddha has appeared. For some, it was one hundred and eighty aeons, and for some it

was one hundred and thirty aeons. Here it is simply "limitless" aeons. Living beings' causes and effects all are different, and so they see different things.

Before the World Honored One emerged/ into the world, The ten directions were ever in darkness/ lacking light, The three evil paths increased/ And the asuras flourished/ While the hosts of gods diminished/ Most falling into evil paths at death/ The hells, the animal realm, and the path of ghosts gained in population. The asuras also grew in number. That makes four evil destinies. "While the host of gods diminished." Because they did evil deeds, "Most falling into the evil paths at death." We should all think upon this; we are ever in danger of falling into the three evil paths. We should always strive to be careful and avoid them.

They did not hear the Dharma from the Buddha/ Since they didn't meet up with the Buddha, they had no way to hear the Dharma. Because they didn't hear the Dharma, they knew nothing about cultivation, *But ever followed unwholesome paths/* Because they did evil deeds, they fell into the three evil paths. If one does good deeds, one rises to the heavens or gains in good roots. They fell into the three evil paths, because they lacked good roots.

Their bodily strength and wisdom/ Both alike decreased/ They lost their health and their wisdom. Day-by-day, they decreased. *Because of offense karma/ They lost joy and thoughts of joy/* They lost the happiness they were entitled to. They even lost the concept of happiness altogether, *They dwelt in dharmas of deviant views/ Not knowing the rules of goodness/* They knew nothing about the rules of goodness. *Failing to receive the Buddha's transforming/* Because their karmic obstacles were so great, they were unable to see the Buddha and unable to be taught by him. Therefore, *they constantly fell into evil paths/* Life after life, they fell into the Three Evil Paths.

The Buddha acts as eyes for all the world/ And but once in a long while, does appear/ The Buddha only appears at long, long intervals. *Out of pity for living beings/ He manifests in the world/ Transcends it, and realizes right enlightenment/* The supreme, right, equal and proper enlightenment. *We rejoice, exceedingly/* at our good fortune. *We and all the other beings/ Are happy as never before/ And all of our palaces/ Receiving the light, are adorned/* All the palaces we brought with us are shining in the Buddha's light. They are more beautiful than they have ever been.

We now offer them to the World Honored One/ May he pity us and accept them/ Mercifully accept our offering.

We vow that this merit and virtue/ gained by making this offering to the Buddha *May extend to all living beings/ So that we and all beings/ May together realize the Buddha Way/* the Way of Buddhahood.