



Dharma Flower Sutra

commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua

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SUTRA: T. 25a4

AND HE EXTENSIVELY SET FORTH THE DHARMA OF THE TWELVE CAUSES AND CONDITIONS: IGNORANCE CONDITIONS DISPOSITIONS. DISPOSITIONS CONDITION CONSCIOUSNESS. CONSCIOUSNESS CONDITIONS NAME AND FORM. NAME AND FORM CONDITION THE SIX SENSE ORGANS. THE SIX SENSE ORGANS CONDITION CONTACT. CONTACT CONDITIONS FEELING. FEELING CONDITIONS CRAVING. CRAVING CONDITIONS GRASPING. GRASPING CONDITIONS BECOMING. BECOMING CONDITIONS BIRTH. BIRTH CONDITIONS OLD AGE AND DEATH, WORRY, GRIEF, SUFFERING AND DISTRESS. WHEN IGNORANCE IS EXTINGUISHED, DISPOSITIONS ARE EXTINGUISHED. WHEN DISPOSITIONS ARE EXTINGUISHED, THEN CONSCIOUSNESS IS EXTINGUISHED. WHEN CONSCIOUSNESS IS EXTINGUISHED, THEN NAME AND FORM ARE EXTINGUISHED. WHEN NAME AND FORM ARE EXTINGUISHED, THEN THE SIX SENSE ORGANS ARE EXTINGUISHED. WHEN THE SIX SENSE ORGANS ARE EXTINGUISHED, THEN CONTACT IS EXTINGUISHED. WHEN CONTACT IS EXTINGUISHED, THEN FEELING IS EXTINGUISHED. WHEN FEELING IS EXTINGUISHED THEN CRAVING IS EXTINGUISHED. WHEN CRAVING IS EXTINGUISHED, THEN GRASPING IS EXTINGUISHED. WHEN GRASPING IS EXTINGUISHED, THEN BECOMING IS EXTINGUISHED. WHEN BECOMING IS EXTINGUISHED, THEN BIRTH IS EXTINGUISHED. WHEN BIRTH IS EXTINGUISHED, THEN OLD AGE AND DEATH, WORRY, GRIEF, SUFFERING AND DISTRESS ARE EXTINGUISHED.

COMMENTARY:

He extensively set forth the Dharma of the twelve causes and conditions. You have heard about them many times before. The list here is given twice. In the first list of twelve, they give rise to one another. This is called, "the door of production." In the second list of twelve, they are extinguished one after the other in turn, and this is called, "the door of returning to extinction." This is the Dharma cultivated by the Conditioned Enlightened Ones. The Sound Hearers cultivate the Four Truths. Right after the Buddha realized the Way, he first taught the Four Truths, and then the Twelve Causes and Conditions.

You say, "I have heard the Twelve Causes and Conditions listed many times, and I don't understand them at all."

I present them to you so that you can become familiar with them and cultivate according to them. To really understand them, however, you must first certify to the Fourth Fruition of Arhatship. When you get enlightened, you'll understand them. Before you've been enlightened, you won't be able to understand them. So, don't worry about it. Just investigate it: ignorance conditions activity...and so on. Keep looking into it until, suddenly, you'll understand.

SUTRA: T. 25a12

WHEN THE BUDDHA SPOKE THIS DHARMA, AMIDST THE GREAT ASSEMBLY OF GODS AND HUMANS, SIX HUNDRED MYRIADS OF MILLIONS OF NAYUTAS OF HUMAN BEINGS, BECAUSE THEY DID NOT GRASP AT ANY DHARMAS, HAD THEIR MINDS LIBERATED FROM ALL OUTFLOWS. ALL ATTAINED PROFOUND AND SUBTLE DHYANA CONCENTRATION, THE THREE CLARITIES, THE SIX PENETRATIONS, AND PERFECTED THE EIGHT LIBERATIONS. THE SECOND, THIRD, AND FOURTH TIMES HE SET FORTH THIS DHARMA, THOUSANDS OF MILLIONS OF NAYUTAS OF LIVING BEINGS, THEIR NUMBERS LIKE THE GANGES' SANDS, ALSO BECAUSE THEY DID NOT GRASP AT ANY DHARMAS, HAD THEIR MINDS LIBERATED FROM OUTFLOWS. FROM THAT TIME ONWARDS, THE ASSEMBLY OF SOUND HEARERS WAS UNLIMITED, BOUNDLESS, AND UNRECKONABLE.

COMMENTARY:

When the Buddha, Great-Penetrating-Wisdom-Victory, Spoke this Dharma, turning the Dharma Wheel of the Four Truths, and the Twelve Causes and Conditions, Amidst the Great Assembly of gods, the vast assembly of great Brahma Kings, who had requested the Buddha to speak the Dharma, And humans, the millions of living beings, Six hundred myriads of millions of nayutas of human beings, because they did not grasp at any Dharmas..." What does this mean? If you don't grasp at any dharmas, how can you understand all dharmas? Grasp here means, "to take in," "to receive." It means that they did not accept any evil dharmas. It doesn't mean that they didn't accept any good dharmas. You may remember that, Shariputra's uncle, in debating with the Buddha, took "non-accepting" as his viewpoint. Then the Buddha asked him, "If you take 'non-accepting' as your view--point, do you 'accept' that viewpoint, or not?" Shariputra's uncle, was stumped. How could he "not accept" his own viewpoint? That would mean he didn't even have a view-point. On the other hand, if he did accept it, then he was contradicting his first premise! He took it pretty hard, because before the debate he had made a bet with the Buddha, saying, "If I lose, I will cut off my head and give it to you. If you lose, Buddha, then you must return my nephew, Shariputra, to me, and I'll take him home." The Buddha defeated him with just one sentence, "Do you accept your viewpoint or not?" There was no way he could win! The Uncle had set up his argument, saying, "I won't accept anything you say, right or wrong, deviant or proper. I'll act like a deaf-mute. I won't even listen!" He thought this was extremely clever. If he didn't listen to anything the Buddha said, then he couldn't lose. The Buddha simply replied, "That's fine with me, your viewpoint of non-accepting. But, do you accept your view-point or not?"

So, he lost. Scared stiff, he turned and ran. At that time there were no cars or trains, and he didn't have a horse. He just hoofed it down the road. He took the "shoe-leather express." His legs were obedient. They "accepted" his commands to run. He ran two or three miles, until it occurred to him, "I am a human being. I made an agreement with the Buddha, to cut off my head if I lost. How can I run away

like that? I'd better face up to things and go back." Heroically, he ran back to the Buddha, saying, "Shakyamuni Buddha, I bow before you. I respect you a great deal. I admit that I lost, and now I must ask you to give me a knife."

Shakyamuni Buddha said, "What do you want a knife for? Are you planning on killing the Buddha?"

"No!" he said. "I'm going to kill myself!"

"What for?" asked the Buddha.

"I agreed that if I lost, I would give you my head. And being a hero, I must keep my word."

Shakyamuni Buddha said, "You are really stupid! You have studied the Four Vedas and the treatises for eighteen years. How did you get so stupid?"

"S-s-s-stupid?" he stammered.

"I don't accept your agreement, and I don't want you to cut off your head. I don't want your old head!"

The uncle thought, "The Buddha really is different from ordinary people. Great! Since I get to keep my head, I might as well give my whole body to the Buddha." Then he said, "Buddha, I'll do whatever you tell me to do!" and he left home. He had gone to get his nephew back from the Sangha, but he ended up leaving home himself. All because he took non-accepting, as his viewpoint.

Here the text says, "Because they did not grasp at any Dharmas." This means that they did not accept any evil dharmas. Because they did not accept any evil dharmas, then they had their minds liberated from all outflows. What are outflows? If you want to know what outflows are, you should first find out what outflows are not, or, rather, what non-outflows are. I will give you an example: take a look at this teacup. Does it have any holes in it, any outflows? It has no outflows, or course, and so it can hold the tea. If it had outflows, it couldn't hold the tea. Would you say our bodies have outflows or not? Hah! Our bodies are bottomless pits. You fill your body up today, and tomorrow it all runs out. Then you fill it up again, and the next day it all flows out again. Obviously, one's excrement and urine are outflows. They flow out, and we have practically no control over it. Our bodies have nine orifices which constantly secrete impure substances: there's matter in the eyes, wax in the ears, snot in the nose, saliva in the mouth, besides excrement and urine. But, these are very common, ordinary outflows, and aren't that important. The greatest outflows are the ones you aren't even aware of: greed, hatred, stupidity, pride, and doubt. Greed, is an endless outflow. The more you get, the more you want. It's insatiable. If you obtain the object of your greed, then you just want more. If you can't get it, you get afflicted, your ignorance arises, and you get stupid. Why do people do stupid things? Because of hatred, which comes from greed. Greed, hatred, and stupidity--these three poisons--are everyone's outflows. If you can be without greed, hatred, and stupidity, then you are without outflows. If you have no afflictions, and no ignorance, then you have no outflows. Those who have cultivated their dispositions will not get angry, even when scolded. Even if you hit them, they won't get angry. It's not that they are incapable of anger; they simply don't indulge themselves in it. Everybody has a temper. Even the Bodhisattvas have tempers; the equal enlightenment Bodhisattvas still have one portion of temper, about as much as a hair. If they break through this hair-like particle of ignorance, then they become Buddhas. But, because they haven't broken through this ignorance, they haven't become Buddhas.

We say, "break through" ignorance, but that has a negative connotation of destroying something. I lecture on this principle a bit differently from others: I say you don't have to break through it, you must transform it. Change ignorance into wisdom. Ignorance, is just your basic stupidity. If you change it into wisdom, it disappears. Prajna wisdom, is just that which is transformed out of ignorance. All outflows, refer to greed, hatred and stupidity, but you could expand this list to include the eighty-four thousand outflows. In general, outflows are just our afflictions. If you have one portion of affliction, you have one portion of outflows. If you have ten portions of affliction, you have ten portions of outflows. If you have a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand portions of afflictions, you have that many outflows. Therefore, if you want to get rid of outflows, it's very simple: just don't get angry. Get rid of afflictions!

"But, that's very simple," you say.

Simple it may be, but you can't do it! If you can do it, it's easy. If you can't do it, it's very difficult.

Affliction is obviously no good; everyone knows this. But, everyone takes their afflictions as more important than food. If they don't get afflicted for even the space of a single day, they feel as if they hadn't eaten--they're starving! Once they give rise to afflictions, then they feel as if they had eaten their fill. They don't think of anything at all--perfectly satisfied. They don't worry about the house, they don't worry about their country, and quit concerning themselves with their own bodies. So, I always say, you take affliction as a meal, and eat one helping after another. At home, you eat home-type afflictions; at school, you eat school-type afflictions; in society, you eat society-type afflictions; in the country, you eat national-type afflictions. Whatever you do, you give rise to a corresponding affliction. Whatever afflictions you have, you can't put them down. You can't put them down; you can't put them down. One year, you can't put them down; ten years, you can't put them down; but after a hundred years, you certainly must put them down! Hah! You'll have to put down, what you can't put down. You'll put down what you can put down, and you'll also put down what you can't put down. Hah! See? When it's all over, you'll still be thinking, "I didn't get my fill of afflictions--yet. Wait until next life, and I'll eat some more." Then, in your next life, you will once again take afflictions as your food and drink. That's outflows for you.

...Had their minds liberated from all outflows. The text says that their minds were liberated, but it doesn't say that their bodies were liberated. They still have bodies, so how could you say that they had been liberated from them? Their minds had been liberated. This means they had no minds at all. But, it wasn't like, Pi-kan, whose heart was plucked out of his chest by the King of Chou. It means, rather, that their minds were free of all affliction. The absence of affliction is the attainment of liberation. After all, what is liberated? It's just having no affliction.

When the Fourth Patriarch went to see the Third Patriarch, the Third Patriarch asked him, "What are you doing?"

The Fourth Patriarch, answered, "I am seeking liberation. Will you help me attain liberation?"

The Third Patriarch said, "Well, who has bound you up?"

As soon as the Fourth Patriarch heard this sentence, he suddenly became enlightened. "Ah! I am free. No one is tying me up. Why should I seek liberation?" Saying that their minds had been liberated just means that they had no more afflictions.

"I can't do it!" you say.

If you could, you would be liberated yourself! It's just because you can't do it, that you don't attain liberation. Your body can't be liberated, nor can your mind.

All attained profound and subtle Dhyana concentration. Is that something you attain? How do you get it? *THE HEART SUTRA* says, "There is no wisdom and no gain." Then, if there is wisdom, there is gain. Why does the text say, they "gained" it?" Because, they did have wisdom. With wisdom, they gained these qualities. Then how did they get their wisdom? They got rid of their ignorance. Once rid of afflictions, they obtained wisdom.

You say, "Then I'll throw my ignorance away, and get some wisdom."

If you throw away your ignorance, you will throw away your wisdom as well. Then you won't have either one! Affliction itself is wisdom. If you don't know how to use it, it's affliction. If you can use it, it's wisdom. So we say,

*Affliction itself is Bodhi,
Birth and death, Nirvana.*

If, in the midst of affliction, you can turn that affliction into Bodhi, then, right in birth and death, you attain Nirvana. There is no Nirvana apart from birth and death, and there is no Bodhi apart from affliction. Before, when lecturing *THE SIXTH PATRIARCH SUTRA*, I talked about Bodhidharma's two disciples, Fo-t'o and Ye-she. They said to the Venerable Yuan, "You see: The hand makes a fist and the fist makes a hand. Was that fast or not?"

The Venerable Yuan answered, "Very fast."

They said, "Affliction is Bodhi; birth and death are Nirvana--it's just that fast."

The Venerable Yuan was immediately enlightened. So, you shouldn't think that affliction is eighty-four thousand miles away from Bodhi. And don't think that birth and death are eighty-four thousand miles away from Nirvana. They are immediately interchangeable.

To attain the profound and subtle Dhyana concentration referred to in the text, you must cut off affliction. Turn affliction into wisdom. It is profound as in *THE HEART SUTRA*, "practicing the profound Prajna-paramita." It is subtle as in the verse we say, "Supreme, profound, subtle, and wonderful Dharma..." Proficiency in Dhyana samadhi is not gained externally. It comes from the awakening of one's own self-nature. The self-nature takes itself across through a process of self-cultivation and self-understanding. You don't get it from outside. So don't seek it externally.

-continued next issue.