

Dharma Flower Sutra

with commentary of Tripitaka Master Hua

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SUTRA: T.26c19

AFTER THAT BUDDHA HAD CROSSED OVER INTO EXTINCTION
ALL THOSE WHO HEARD THE DHARMA,
WERE REBORN TOGETHER WITH THEIR TEACHERS
IN WHATEVER BUDDHALAND THEY WERE.

K2 Meeting with one another during the time in between.

COMMENTARY:

AFTER THAT BUDDHA HAD CROSSED OVER INTO EXTINCTION/ ALL THOSE WHO HEARD THE DHARMA/ WERE REBORN TOGETHER WITH THEIR TEACHERS/ IN WHATEVER BUDDHALAND THEY WERE/. After the Buddha Great-Penetrating-Wisdom-Victory had gone to final Nirvana, all those who heard his Dharma from one of the sixteen Shramaneras were reborn together with their teachers in other Buddhalands.

SUTRA: T.26c21

THE SIXTEEN SHRAMANERAS
PERFECTED THEIR PRACTICE OF THE BUDDHA PATH,
SO THAT NOW IN THE TEN DIRECTIONS,
EACH HAS REALIZED PROPER ENLIGHTENMENT.
THOSE WHO HEARD THE DHARMA THEN,
ARE NOW EACH IN THE PRESENCE OF A BUDDHA;
THOSE WHO ARE SOUND HEARERS NOW,
ARE GRADUALLY BEING TAUGHT THE BUDDHA PATH.
I WAS ONE OF THE SIXTEEN;
IN THE PAST I TAUGHT ALL OF YOU.
I THEREFORE USE EXPEDIENTS
TO DRAW YOU INTO THE BUDDHA'S WISDOM.

K3 The *Dharma Flower* is still being spoken.

L1 The assembly past and present.

COMMENTARY:

THE SIXTEEN SHRAMANERAS PERFECTED THEIR PRACTICE OF THE BUDDHA PATH/ SO THAT NOW IN THE TEN DIRECTIONS/ EACH HAS REALIZED PROPER ENLIGHTENMENT/. The sixteen sons of the Buddha Great-Penetrating-Wisdom-Victory, as Shramaneras, perfected their cultivation of the Buddha Way. Now, in the worlds of the ten directions, through their efforts in cultivation, they have come to realize the fruits of Buddhahood.

THOSE WHO HEARD THE DHARMA THEN ARE NOW EACH IN THE PRESENCE OF A BUDDHA/ THOSE WHO ARE SOUND HEARERS NOW /ARE GRADUALLY BEING TAUGHT THE BUDDHA PATH/. Those who heard the Dharma proclaimed by the sixteen sons of that Buddha, have reappeared in the places where their teachers have now gone. Each of them accompanies the teacher of his choice. Those lacking in Great Vehicle resolve have settled for a position of Sound Hearer, but they are gradually, bit-by-bit, being instructed to progress by means of the Buddha Path. They are led by degrees to the supreme Buddha Vehicle.

I WAS ONE OF THE SIXTEEN/ IN THE PAST I TAUGHT ALL OF YOU/. I THEREFORE USE EXPEDIENTS/ TO DRAW YOU INTO THE BUDDHA'S WISDOM/. I, myself, says Shakyamuni Buddha, was one of the sixteen Shramaneras. You who are now assembled here with me, listening to me speak the *DHARMA FLOWER SUTRA*, all listened to me speak it then, way back in the distant past. But because you still lack sufficient strength and have settled for a lesser position because you delight in lesser dharmas, I continue to employ expedient devices to lead you to the Buddha's supreme wisdom.

SUTRA: T.26c27

THROUGH THESE FORMER CAUSAL CONDITIONS,
I PRESENTLY SPEAK THE DHARMA FLOWER SUTRA,
LEADING YOU TO ENTER THE BUDDHA PATH.
TAKE CARE NOT TO BECOME FRIGHTENED.

L2. Certifying that he is now speaking *The Dharma Flower*.

COMMENTARY:

THROUGH THESE FORMER CAUSAL CONDITIONS I PRESENTLY SPEAK THE *DHARMA FLOWER SUTRA*/. It is because of the past causes as I've just described them, that I now come to this point of speaking the Great Vehicle Dharma for you, LEADING YOU TO ENTER THE BUDDHA PATH/. TAKE CARE NOT TO BECOME FRIGHTENED/. You are about to hear the Great Vehicle, genuine Dharma. Do not become alarmed. Here, I will set forth an analogy to make it even clearer.

SUPPOSE THERE IS A STEEP AND TREACHEROUS ROAD,
REMOTE AND TEEMING WITH VENOMOUS BEASTS,
LACKING, AS WELL, WATER OR GRASS--A PLACE FEARED BY ALL.
A MULTITUDE OF COUNTLESS THOUSANDS
WISHES TO TRAVERSE THIS DANGEROUS ROAD
WITH ITS PATHWAYS SO DISTANT,
EXTENDING FIVE HUNDRED YOJANAS.
HOWEVER, THERE IS AMONG THEM
A GUIDE, INTELLIGENT AND WISE,
CLEAR AND RESOLUTE IN MIND,
WHO CAN RESCUE THEM FROM ANY DIFFICULTY.

- Jl. Verses about the parable.
- Kl. Setting up the parable.
- Ll. Verses about the guide.

COMMENTARY:

SUPPOSE THERE IS A STEEP AND TREACHEROUS ROAD/. The Buddha brings up the particulars of the parable by describing a very dangerous and evil path. What does this road represent? It is analogous to the turning wheel of the six paths of rebirth. REMOTE AND TEEMING WITH VENOMOUS BEASTS/ LACKING, AS WELL, WATER OR GRASS, it is A PLACE FEARED BY ALL/. No one dares traverse this path. There are many deadly beasts in the area, as well as venomous snakes. Tigers, lions, wolves, and panthers abound. Not only is this road dangerous, it is also barren. There isn't any water or any vegetation. That means, obviously, there isn't anything to eat that can be found along this way. Therefore, everyone is scared of this road.

A MULTITUDE OF COUNTLESS THOUSANDS WISHES TO TRAVERSE THIS DANGEROUS ROAD/ WITH ITS PATHWAYS SO DISTANT/, EXTENDING FIVE HUNDRED YOJANAS/. Many people want to travel this road--to cross out of the six paths of rebirth. Myriad living beings want to transcend the three realms and get off the turning wheel. They want to know how to cultivate to become Buddhas. However, the road to Buddhahood is very far indeed. Transcending the realm of desire represents traveling one hundred yojanas. Transcending the world of form equals traveling two hundred yojanas. Transcending the world of formlessness represents traveling three hundred yojanas. Breaking delusions like dust and sand equals traveling four hundred yojanas. Breaking through the delusion of ignorance--the subtlest of all delusions--represents traveling five hundred yojanas. With no one to guide you, it is indeed difficult to travel this road.

HOWEVER, THERE IS AMONG THEM A GUIDE/ INTELLIGENT AND WISE/ CLEAR AND RESOLUTE IN MIND/ WHO CAN RESCUE THEM FROM ANY DIFFICULTY/. Living beings have someone to lead them. "Intelligent" here means that he has a good memory. He isn't absent-minded. He is knowledgeable and his wisdom came as a result of his learning. He knows what is going on. He has excellent, unflinching judgement. He will be able to lead them down the right road. He can save living beings from their sufferings on the hard road of birth and death.

SUTRA: T.27a6

THE GROUP GROWS WEARY
AND SAYS TO THE GUIDE,
"WE ARE ALL EXHAUSTED NOW
AND WANT TO TURN BACK."

L2. Verses about followers.

M1. Followers want to retreat halfway.

N1. The multitude retreats from the Great.

COMMENTARY:

THE GROUP GROWS WEARY/. It is very difficult to cultivate on such a path, they feel. There are few conditions that aid the Way and many conditions which oppose it. What are "aiding conditions"? One example is when you are cultivating and feel you don't have the strength to go on, your Good Knowing Advisor can help you. He will tell you not to go down the wrong road. He will advise you not to indulge in impure thinking. If you can then cultivate according to his advice, then you have been given an aiding condition. Also, sometimes when you don't have the strength to complete a task, the Dharma Protectors will come and aid you.

What are "opposing conditions"? You may want to cultivate and bring forth the Bodhi Mind, but then someone comes along and uses all kinds of devious tricks to ruin your cultivation and deter your resolve. Originally you may have had your lust under control, but then this person inflames it again. Originally your Way Mind may have been very solid, but this person causes you to waver. These are examples of opposing conditions.

The Way is not easy to cultivate. Sometimes one may grow weary. One may cultivate for one year and not notice any progress. One may cultivate for two years and still feel one has not "obtained" anything. By the end of the third year, one may simply give up entirely and retreat.

The group is having that kind of problem in the parable the Buddha is presenting. The group SAYS, "WE ARE ALL EXHAUSTED NOW/ AND WANT TO TURN

BACK."/ They had lost faith and gotten tired of the difficulties. So they complained to the guide--the Good Knowing Advisor.

SUTRA: T.27a8

THE GUIDE THINKS TO HIMSELF,
"HOW VERY PITIFUL THEY ARE.
HOW CAN THEY WISH TO TURN BACK
AND LOSE THE GREAT AND PRECIOUS TREASURE?"
INSTANTLY HE THINKS OF A DEVICE:
USING THE POWER OF SPIRITUAL PENETRATIONS,
HE CONJURES UP A GREAT CITY
ADORNED WITH HOUSES,
SURROUNDED BY GARDENS AND GROVES,
BROOKS AND BATHING PONDS,
LAYERED GATES AND TIERED PAVILIONS,
FILLED WITH MEN AND WOMEN.
AFTER CREATING THIS,
HE PITIES THEM SAYING, "DO NOT BE AFRAID.
BUT GO INTO THIS CITY
AND ENJOY YOURSELVES AS YOU WISH."

N2. The guide induces the Small.

O1. The device is conjured up.

COMMENTARY:

THE GUIDE THINKS TO HIMSELF/ "HOW VERY PITIFUL THEY ARE."/ They are pathetic. Why? They have cultivated and are exactly one hair's breadth away from realization and then they want to turn back. As soon as they retreat, they will lose all their previous work. "HOW CAN THEY WISH TO TURN BACK AND LOSE THE GREAT AND PRECIOUS TREASURE?"/ In retreating they will lose the wonderful treasure which is rightfully theirs.

INSTANTLY HE THINKS OF A DEVICE: USING THE POWER OF SPIRITUAL PENETRATIONS, HE CONJURES UP A GREAT CITY ADORNED WITH HOUSES, and SURROUNDED BY GARDENS AND GROVES./ It is a lovely place, indeed, with inner and outer walls, many fine buildings, and lots of swift-flowing brooks and clear ponds. Besides these BROOKS AND BATHING PONDS, there are LAYERED GATES AND TIERED PAVILIONS--high and lofty buildings. The beautiful city is FILLED WITH MEN AND WOMEN--a lot of people roam its ample streets.

AFTER CREATING THIS, HE PITIES THEM--the weary travelers who wish to retreat--SAYING, "DO NOT BE AFRAID/ BUT GO INTO THIS CITY/ AND ENJOY YOURSELVES AS YOU WISH./ Do what you like," the Buddha encourages. The transformed city represents the Nirvana with Residue which those of the Two Vehicles certify to. The Buddha used the device of the conjured city to draw in the Sound Hearers, saying, "When you gain fourth stage Arhatship, you have ended birth and death--finished your work. No further becoming will be necessary for you. That is true happiness." Then, once they had attained the fourth fruition, he told them they had to go a bit further on--to the treasure trove. The Transformed City is the place of those of the Two Vehicles. In the Dharma Flower Assembly the Buddha opens the provisional and reveals the real teaching, telling everyone the transformed city is not real. Before you reach the level of the transformed city, you can't say it is not real, however. But once you have gotten there, then you know it is and that you must go on.

SUTRA: T.27a6

WHEN THEY HAD ENTERED THE CITY,
THEY REJOICED GREATLY AT HEART,
THINKING THEY WERE SAFE AND SOUND
AND THAT THEY HAD BEEN SAVED.

O2. They go forward joyfully and enter the city.

COMMENTARY:

WHEN THEY HAD ENTERED THE CITY, THEY REJOICED GREATLY AT HEART./ Those of the Small Vehicle like the Small Vehicle dharmas, so they went right into the transformed city. They were lighthearted, THINKING THEY WERE SAFE AND SOUND AND THAT THEY HAD BEEN SAVED./ They felt happy and at ease, thinking that they had already ended birth and death and attained Nirvana. They thought they had been taken across the bitter sea of birth and death.

SUTRA: T.27a8

THE GUIDE, KNOWING THEY WERE RESTED,
ASSEMBLED THEM TOGETHER AND SAID,
"YOU SHOULD ALL GO FORWARD,
FOR THIS IS NOTHING BUT A TRANSFORMED CITY.
SEEING THAT YOU WERE EXHAUSTED
AND WANTED TO TURN BACK MIDWAY,
I USED THE POWER OF EXPEDIENTS,

TO TRANSFORM PROVISIONALLY THIS CITY.
YOU SHOULD NOW BE VIGOROUS
AND PROCEED TO THE JEWEL CACHE."

M2. He destroys the transformation to lead them to the jewel cache.

COMMENTARY:

THE GUIDE, KNOWING THEY WERE RESTED,/ ASSEMBLED THEM TOGETHER AND SAID,/ "YOU SHOULD ALL GO FORWARD."/ The guide--the Great Good Knowing Advisor--is in this case the Buddha. He knows that those of the Two Vehicles were satisfied with their Small Vehicle destination. So he told them, THIS IS NOTHING BUT A TRANSFORMED CITY./ Now that you have rested and are no longer tired, you should go forth again and advance. You have certified to the position of the Two Vehicles, and you are pretty happy about that, right? But you shouldn't stop at Nirvana with Residue. It's not real. It's not the jewel cache. It's simply something I have created.

"SEEING THAT YOU WERE EXHAUSTED AND WANTED

TO TURN BACK MIDWAY, I USED THE POWER OF EXPEDIENTS TO TRANSFORM PROVISIONALLY THIS CITY. You had been working so hard and you began to feel like you were undergoing more suffering than you could bear."

The situation of these Arhats is similar to yours. You cultivate for two and a half days and then get discouraged because you haven't "obtained" anything. You give rise to thoughts of retreat like, "I have cultivated for a whole year and I haven't become a Buddha yet." Or, "I've been here for two years and I haven't gotten enlightened. I wonder if it's ever possible to get enlightened. Am I being cheated by this idea of enlightenment?" When doubts like that arise in your mind, they make you want to retreat.

A good guide will use expedients to keep you from being convinced to retreat by your own doubts. He'll continually encourage you, saying, "Don't get nervous. You'll get enlightened. Just work one more night." That keeps you going for a while and then when you begin to doubt again he'll say "You're off by just a bit. Just a hair. Keep trying." In that way he keeps you cultivating bit by bit.

In this case he uses clever expedients to establish an entire city--that is, he sets up the Dharma-doors of the Two Vehicles. But now he tells them, "YOU SHOULD BE VIGOROUS/ AND PROCEED TO THE JEWEL CACHE."/ Now that you have rested, you should be courageous and press on in your cultivation. I will go along with you to the Buddha fruition. You will certainly become Buddhas." If the Buddha had told those of the Two Vehicles to cultivate the Buddha fruition from the beginning, they wouldn't have believed him. They would not have believed that they could become Buddhas.

-continued next issue