

# *Prologue to the Flower Adornment Sutra*

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with commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua

## *The Fourth Door: The Potentials Covered by the Teaching*

### PROLOGUE:

THE FIFTH ARE NOT VESSELS BECAUSE THEY CLING TO THE PROVISIONAL. THEY ARE BODHISATTVAS OF THE TEACHING COMMON TO THE THREE VEHICLES, FOR ACCORDING TO THEIR SCHOOL, THEY CULTIVATE SUCCESSIVE POSITIONS, AND DO NOT BELIEVE IN THE DHARMA OF PERFECT FUSION ENDOWED WITH ALL VIRTUES. LATER ON THE SUTRA SAYS:

"BODHISATTVAS WHO, FOR LIMITLESS KOTIS OF NAYUTAS OF AEONS, CULTIVATE THE SIX PARAMITAS, BUT IF THEY HAVE NOT HEARD THIS SUTRA, OR IF HAVING AT TIMES HEARD IT, DO NOT BELIEVE IT, DO NOT ACCORD WITH AND ENTER IT, THEN THEY CANNOT BE CALLED TRUE BODHISATTVAS."

### COMMENTARY:

THE FIFTH category ARE NOT VESSELS BECAUSE THEY CLING TO THE PROVISIONAL Teaching instead of the actual Teaching. Bodhisattvas of the provisional Teaching cultivate the Six Paramitas on the level of specifics, rather than principle. THEY ARE BODHISATTVAS OF THE TEACHING COMMON TO THE THREE VEHICLES, FOR ACCORDING TO THEIR SCHOOL, THEY CULTIVATE SUCCESSIVE POSITIONS. These Bodhisattvas place themselves together with the Two Vehicles because they use Dharma doors of step-by-step practice. They DO NOT BELIEVE IN THE DHARMA OF PERFECT FUSION which is unobstructed and ENDOWED WITH ALL VIRTUES, whereby cultivation of one is cultivation of all and certification to one is certification to all. They don't believe in the Dharma door of passing through asamkhyeyas of kalpas to attain the Dharma Body, or the Dharma door of Sudden Enlightenment in which all virtues interfuse. For that reason, LATER ON in THE SUTRA text it SAYS: "THERE MAY BE BODHISATTVAS as these WHO FOR LIMITLESS KOTIS OF NAYUTAS OF AEONS CULTIVATE THE Dharma doors of the SIX PARAMITAS, of crossing over to the other shore, of Giving, Holding Precepts, Patience, Vigor, Dhyana Samadhi, and Prajna Wisdom. BUT IF THEY HAVE NOT ever HEARD THIS *Great Means Expansive Buddha Flower Adornment* SUTRA, OR IF HAVING AT TIMES HEARD IT DO NOT BELIEVE IT, DO NOT ACCORD WITH, cultivate, AND ENTER this Dharma door of the Dharma Realm of non-obstruction, THEN THEY CANNOT BE CALLED TRUE, actual Great Vehicle BODHISATTVAS. They would just be little Bodhisattvas, not Mahasattvas. They could not really be considered to be true Bodhisattvas.

## II. REVEALING THOSE FOR WHOM IT IS INTENDED

## A. THOSE FOR WHOM IT IS DIRECTLY INTENDED

### PROLOGUE:

WITHIN THE LAST FIVE, WHICH REVEAL THOSE FOR WHOM THE TEACHING WAS INTENDED, THE FIRST ARE THOSE FOR WHOM IT IS DIRECTLY INTENDED. THIS REFERS TO THOSE WHO ARE PERFECT POTENTIALS FOR THE ONE VEHICLE. THE CHAPTER ON APPEARANCES SAYS: "THIS SUTRA WAS NOT SPOKEN FOR OTHER LIVING BEINGS." THAT REFERS TO THE PREVIOUS FIVE AS A GROUP. "IT WAS ONLY SPOKEN FOR BODHISATTVAS WHO ARE MOUNTED UPON THE INCONCEIVABLE VEHICLE." THAT REFERS TO THE POTENTIALS FOR WHOM IT WAS DIRECTLY INTENDED. "THAT IS, WHEN ONE IS CONVEYED, ALL ARE CONVEYED, SO THERE IS PERFECT FUSION OF POSITIONS OF PRACTICE." THAT REFERS TO THE INCONCEIVABILITY OF ITS DEPTH. "AND ONE IS FURTHERMORE ABLE TO PERVASIVELY PENETRATE ALL TEACHINGS." THAT REFERS TO THE INCONCEIVABILITY OF ITS BREADTH. THE TEXT THEREFORE SAYS: "THIS IS NOT KNOWN BY THOSE OF OTHER STATES OF BEING. ONLY BEINGS WITH UNIVERSAL WORTHY'S CONDUCT ATTAIN ENTRY INTO IT, AND SO FORTH."

### COMMENTARY:

We've finished discussing the Five Categories of those who are not vessels; now we will discuss THE LAST FIVE categories WHICH describe THOSE living beings FOR WHOM THE TEACHING WAS INTENDED.

THE FIRST ARE THOSE FOR WHOM IT IS DIRECTLY INTENDED. Who are they? They are THOSE WHO ARE PERFECT POTENTIALS FOR THE ONE VEHICLE. They are the Bodhisattvas who have mounted the inconceivable vehicle. The "One Vehicle" is not the same as the Three Vehicles mentioned previously. It is different from any one of them. A section in THE CHAPTER ON APPEARANCES SAYS: "THIS SUTRA WAS NOT SPOKEN FOR OTHER LIVING BEINGS." It was exclusively spoken for living beings with natures suited to the Buddha Vehicle. THAT REFERS TO all of THE PREVIOUS FIVE categories of people who are not vessels AS A GROUP.

The Teaching WAS ONLY SPOKEN FOR BODHISATTVAS WHO ARE MOUNTED UPON THE INCONCEIVABLE Buddha VEHICLE and who cultivate the Six inconceivable Paramitas and ten thousand conducts." THAT REFERS TO THE POTENTIALS FOR WHOM IT WAS DIRECTLY INTENDED.

"THAT IS, WHEN ONE IS CONVEYED, ALL ARE CONVEYED, SO THERE IS PERFECT FUSION OF POSITIONS OF PRACTICE." "When one is conveyed" means when a living being is conveyed from the ground of an ordinary person to the Buddha ground. Then "all are conveyed" means that at the same time the one living being is conveyed, all living beings are able to go there too. This describes the total and inconceivable interfusion of positions of practice in cultivation.

THE TEXT THEREFORE SAYS: "THIS IS NOT something that can be KNOWN BY THOSE OF the

first five categories who have OTHER STATES OF BEING than this. ONLY BEINGS WITH UNIVERSAL WORTHY'S CONDUCT ATTAIN ENTRY INTO IT." It is only those who cultivate like Universal Worthy, the Bodhisattva of Great Conduct, who are able to enter this Prajna door of inconceivable liberation.

## B. THOSE FOR WHOM IT IS INCIDENTALY INTENDED

### PROLOGUE:

THE SECOND ARE THOSE FOR WHOM IT IS INCIDENTALY INTENDED. ALTHOUGH SUCH BEINGS AT THE TIME DO NOT IMMEDIATELY ENLIGHTEN TO AND ENTER IT, NONETHELESS THEIR ABILITY TO BELIEVE AND MAKE TRANSFERENCE TO IT FORMS A SEED, AS IN THE CHAPTER ON APPEARANCES' ANALOGY OF EATING VAJRA. THEREFORE, THE GODS FROM THE HELLS SUDDENLY TRANSCEND TO THE TEN GROUNDS, AND THE GREAT OCEAN OF FIRE AT THE END OF A KALPA IS NO OBSTRUCTION. INASMUCH AS THEY DO NOT IMMEDIATELY ENLIGHTEN TO AND ENTER IT, THEY ARE THEREFORE CALLED THOSE FOR WHOM IT IS INCIDENTALY INTENDED.

### COMMENTARY:

THE SECOND ARE THOSE FOR WHOM IT IS only INCIDENTALY, not primarily INTENDED. This Dharma primarily teaches Bodhisattvas, and secondarily instructs those of the Two Vehicles. The Bodhisattvas are crossed over with it, as are Sound Hearers and Those Enlightened by Conditions. Previously we talked about Bodhisattvas who cultivate the Six Paramitas for limitless aeons, but never hear the *Flower Adornment Sutra*; or who might hear it now and then, but not believe it. Living beings like that are not easy to cross over.

Here the text talks about beings who hear the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, but don't understand it. But even though they don't believe it, they also don't disbelieve it. This is like eating a piece of vajra: it can never be digested and will always remain intact. It is the same way for these living beings when they listen to the Great Vehicle Buddhadharma. ALTHOUGH SUCH BEINGS AT THE TIME don't bring forth the resolve for Bodhi, in the future they are certain to do so. They have planted seeds for the Great Vehicle, and later they will reap the fruit of Bodhi.

Even though those of this second category of potentials hear the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, they DO NOT IMMEDIATELY ENLIGHTEN TO AND ENTER IT. They don't completely understand it and yet they do not slander it. They would never say, "There isn't any such Dharma; it's all made up out of thin air--a lot of untrue esoteric marvels." We here are now in just this same situation of not fully understanding, yet not slandering the Sutra. We don't totally comprehend it, but NONETHELESS THEIR ABILITY TO BELIEVE AND MAKE TRANSFERENCE TO IT FORMS A SEED. This is a Vajra seed for Bodhi which will never digest and will eventually emerge, AS IN THE CHAPTER ON APPEARANCES' ANALOGY OF EATING VAJRA. THEREFORE, in the Chapter on the Minor Characteristics, THE GODS FROM THE HELLS SUDDENLY TRANSCEND TO THE TEN GROUNDS. AND in the Ten Grounds Chapter it talks about how even THE GREAT OCEAN OF FIRE AT THE END OF A KALPA IS NO OBSTRUCTION.

Right now people can go to the moon in spaceships, and in the future people will be able to make suns and

moons. However, when the disaster of fire occurs at the end of a kalpa, seven suns will appear in the sky, all the water in the great seas will dry up, and all the dragons will die. Believing in the Great Vehicle Buddhadharmas of the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, however, plants a seed for the Great Vehicle which even the fire at the end of an aeon cannot destroy; it cannot obstruct your cultivation of the Way. That is why the section on the First Ground says:

Though one may dwell in blazes  
Of kalpas like the sea,  
If able to accept them,  
One doubtless hears these Dharmas.

INASMUCH AS these living beings DO NOT IMMEDIATELY ENLIGHTEN TO AND deeply ENTER the Treasury of the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, THEY ARE THEREFORE CALLED THOSE FOR WHOM this Sutra is INCIDENTALLY INTENDED when spoken.

### C. THOSE FOR WHOM IT IS A GUIDE

#### PROLOGUE:

THE THIRD ARE THOSE FOR WHOM IT IS A GUIDE. THIS REFERS TO THE PREVIOUS BODHISATTVAS OF THE PROVISIONAL TEACHING. THEY DID NOT ACCEPT THE DHARMA OF PERFECT FUSION. BECAUSE OF THAT, THERE ARE THOSE FROM AMONG THE TEN GROUNDS WHO SOJOURN IN POSITIONS TO REVEAL WHAT IS MOST SUPREME. IN DOING THIS, THE NAMES OF THE SUCCESSIVE GRADATIONS OF THE THREE VEHICLES ARE BORROWED, SO AT FIRST THEY ARE DECLARED TO BE IDENTICAL WITH THOSE VERY DHARMAS. BUT AFTERWARDS, WHEN THESE BEINGS BECOME PERMEATED, THEY COME TO BELIEVE AND ENTER INTO PERFECT FUSION. THAT IS BECAUSE APART FROM THIS UNIVERSAL DHARMA, THERE IS NO PLACE OF REFUGE, AND BECAUSE THE ULTIMATE FRUITION OF THE PROVISIONAL TEACHING HAS NO ACTUALITY.

#### COMMENTARY:

It talked before about the five categories which are not vessels, five types of beings who are not capable of containing the Dharma and who cannot cultivate the Way. There are five categories after that which describe those who are vessels of the Way. So far we have discussed the first two, those beings for whom the Mahayana Dharma is directly intended, and those for whom it is incidentally spoken.

Now, THE THIRD category IS THOSE FOR WHOM IT IS A GUIDE. This refers to those who have the potential to be influenced by it and led towards it. This could also refer to those who influence others to come to it. It is a guide both for those who guide and those who are being guided. THIS REFERS TO THE PREVIOUS BODHISATTVAS OF THE PROVISIONAL TEACHING. THEY DID NOT ACCEPT THE DHARMA OF PERFECT FUSION. They did not believe in the Dharma door of unobstructed interpenetration and total interfusion. Those same Bodhisattvas were not vessels because they fell into the category of those who cling to the provisional. So why are they listed here as being those for whom the teaching was intended as a guide?

They turn up here because while they are not yet vessels of the Way, they only need to be guided to become vessels of the Way and be able to cultivate according to this Teaching. They have to be guided to turn away from the small and turn towards the great, to bring forth the great resolve for Bodhi,

and to no longer be the way they used to be.

Initially, they disbelieve and say, "This Dharma of perfect fusion is too mysterious and incredible. How can enlightenment to one be enlightenment to all, or penetration of one be penetration of all? How can the conveying of one be the conveying of all, and certification to one be certification to all? How can that work? How can there be any such thing?" In their minds they don't believe in that kind of Dharma to begin with.

What is this like? We can make a simple analogy to how prior to the scientific age, most people would never have believed it possible for human beings to travel to the moon. If you had told people three hundred years ago that in the future human beings would fly through space in airplanes and rockets, they wouldn't have been able to believe it. To imagine the distance around our planet becoming no more than a hop, skip, and a jump, and that even the infinite reaches of empty space and the Dharma Realm would not seem all that big, would have been impossible for most people of previous generations.

Bodhisattvas who don't believe the Dharma of perfect fusion are like those people who would not have believed in space travel. They don't know what the Buddha is talking about when he tries to tell them and they wonder, "What's interpenetration, anyway?"

BECAUSE OF THAT, their doubt and disbelief, THERE ARE THOSE FROM AMONG THE TEN GROUNDS WHO SOJOURN IN the POSITIONS of the Bodhisattvas of the Provisional Teaching. This refers to the Great Bodhisattvas of the Actual Teaching who appear within the expedient positions of the Provisional Teaching in order TO REVEAL WHAT IS MOST SUPREME. They show how the Dharma of perfect fusion is especially supreme and totally complete.

IN DOING THIS, THE NAMES OF THE SUCCESSIVE GRADATIONS OF THE THREE VEHICLES ARE BORROWED. The practices of the Sound Hearers, Those Enlightened to Conditions, and Bodhisattvas are ranked in successive order by name. SO AT FIRST THEY ARE DECLARED TO BE IDENTICAL WITH THOSE VERY DHARMAS.

They say, "We're already cultivating the Dharma door of unobstructed interpenetration and perfect fusion. How can there be some other Dharma of total interfusion? Isn't that just putting a head on top of a head? It's too mixed up. We shouldn't believe it. It's already total and complete to be cultivating as Sound Hearers, Those Enlightened to Conditions, and Bodhisattvas, isn't it?" They say the Dharma of unobstructed interpenetration and total fusion is just what they are in the process of cultivating.

And so they start out appearing not to believe. BUT AFTERWARDS, WHEN THESE BEINGS BECOME PERMEATED, THEY COME TO BELIEVE AND TO ENTER INTO PERFECT FUSION from having been together with it so long. This is as when sandalwood incense is constantly lit in the Buddhahall, the entire hall eventually comes to be permeated with the fragrance of sandalwood. The people in question have been cultivating the Sound Hearer Vehicle, the Conditioned-Enlightened Vehicle, and the Bodhisattva Vehicle, and not cultivating the perfect Buddha Vehicle. But through long-term association with the Buddha Vehicle, they become permeated with it, the way those who draw near the rouge become red, and those who draw near the ink become black. If you are around something long enough, without being aware of it, you take on the same coloring, due to permeation. If people of the Small Vehicle stay with Great Vehicle Bodhisattvas for a long time, eventually they become Great

Vehicle Bodhisattvas themselves by permeation.

After sufficient exposure they become permeated, give rise to belief, and enter the Dharma door of perfect fusion. They merge with the Perfect Teachings' principle of interfused endowment with all virtues. When they come to believe in the Perfect Teaching, they leave behind the ordinary Dharma of Sound Hearers, Those Enlightened to Conditions, and Bodhisattvas that they used to believe in. THAT IS BECAUSE APART FROM THIS UNIVERSAL DHARMA, the Dharma of universality of total interfusion, THERE IS NO PLACE OF REFUGE. If they don't leave behind such ordinary dharmas, they have no place of refuge and can't become Buddhas. It is also BECAUSE THE ULTIMATE FRUITION and highest outcome OF cultivating according to the principles of THE PROVISIONAL TEACHING, HAS NO ACTUALITY. The Bodhisattvas of the Provisional Teaching cultivate the Six Paramitas on the phenomenal level, which doesn't lead to any actual fruition.

Cultivators may be Bodhisattvas of the Provisional Teaching or of the Actual Teaching. The ancients said,

Fish eggs, the amra  
And Bodhisattvas of initial resolve:  
Those three are many on the causal ground,  
But few when time to reap the fruit.

Fish deposit a great many eggs, but few of them become fish. The amra blossoms prolifically, but produces little fruit. Many Bodhisattvas bring forth the resolve, but very few of them are able to achieve the standing of Great Bodhisattvas and certify to the Way. All three of these start out as many and end up as few.

*translated and edited by members of the Buddhist Text Translation Society  
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