

The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra

commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua

Chapter Twelve: Devadatta

continued from Issue #190

Devadatta was the Buddha's cousin, but he opposed everything the Buddha ever did. Some people say that he was the Buddha's enemy, but this is not the case. Devadatta actually helped the Buddha accomplish Buddhahood. Not only did he help him in one life, but in life after life. However, he did so in a back-handed way. He "helped" Shakyamuni Buddha by "opposing" him. How does this work? Say for instance someone resolves to cultivate the Way, but another person gives him trouble all day long, by either scolding him or ridiculing him, or generally giving him a hard time. This opposition serves as a test of the cultivator's resolve. One of my disciples once asked, "Is it okay to give people tests to help them out?" I said, "No. If you have certified to the fruit and know that your testing them will help them realize the Way, then it's okay. If you haven't certified to the fruit, then don't test other people. If you test others, others will test you. If you test people and they fail, then they will fall. If people test you and you fail, then you will fall.

The situation with Devadatta was different, however. Devadatta's state was inconceivable. His spiritual powers were as great as those of the Buddha, and it was Devadatta's opposition that spurred the Buddha on to his attainment of the Way. This chapter tells us that in the past, Devadatta lectured on *The Dharma Flower Sutra* to Shakyamuni Buddha, thereby helping him to realize Buddhahood.

Devadatta is a Sanskrit name which means "fever of the gods." From the time of his birth, he specialized in "helping" people by opposing them. This would lead to some heated emotions on the part of the recipients of his generosity. This is an explanation of his name according to the method of "causes and conditions."

How did Devadatta come to be Shakyamuni Buddha's aide in realizing the Way? Let us look into the way it happened. Long ago there was a wealthy elder named Syu-tan, whose fortune in the seven gems was impressively abundant. His eldest son was called Syu-mo-ti. When his wife died, Syu-tan, although advanced in years, remarried and had another son, named Syiu-mo-ye. The elder passed on when his younger son was only about eighteen or twenty. The two sons proceeded to divide up their father's riches, but Syu-mo-ti, the elder brother, decided he didn't want to give his younger brother half. He took him up to Vulture Peak. When they got near the top, Syu-mo-ti pushed his brother right off the top! Then he threw rocks on top of him to bury him. He then went home and took possession of all of his father's wealth.

Syu-mo-ti, surprisingly enough, was Shakyamuni Buddha in a former life. You shouldn't think that Shakyamuni Buddha never did anything wrong. The younger brother was Devadatta in a former life, and the elder was King Ajatashatru, the one who locked his parents up in jail. Life after life, Shakyamuni Buddha was involved with these people in varying combinations of affinities, and so even after he became a Buddha, they still came and gave him trouble. This

chapter doesn't discuss these events, but does tell how Devadatta helped the Buddha accomplish Buddhahood.

You could say this was a case of "the suffering of being joined to what you hate," one of the eight sufferings. Actually, it would be more correct to call it "the happiness of being joined to what you hate!" How is this? The more Devadatta opposed him, the more the Buddha liked it. If they had truly hated one another, then as lifetimes passed, they would have been drawn farther and farther apart. So it wasn't really a case of dislike. Because of their affinities, they met in life after life and, in one way or another, aided each other in cultivating the Way.

SUTRA:

AT THAT TIME, THE BUDDHA TOLD THE BODHISATTVAS, GODS, HUMANS, AND THE FOUR ASSEMBLIES, "IN THE PAST, THROUGHOUT LIMITLESS AEONS, I SOUGHT THE DHARMA FLOWER SUTRA WITHOUT LAXNESS OR WEARINESS.

COMMENTARY:

AT THAT TIME, having finished speaking the Chapter on the Jeweled Stupa, THE BUDDHA TOLD THE BODHISATTVAS, GODS, HUMANS, AND THE FOUR ASSEMBLIES of Bhikshus, Bhikshunis, Upasakas, and Upasikas, IN THE PAST, THROUGHOUT LIMITLESS AEONS, I SOUGHT to understand the doctrines of THE DHARMA FLOWER SUTRA WITHOUT LAXNESS OR WEARINESS. I have never grown weary. I never took a break. Whenever *The Dharma Flower Sutra* was being lectured, I went to listen. I never missed an opportunity.

SUTRA:

"FOR MANY AEONS, I WAS A KING AND VOWED TO SEEK SUPREME BODHI WITH A NON-RETREATING MIND.

COMMENTARY:

FOR MANY AEONS throughout many, many lifetimes I WAS A KING, AND VOWED TO SEEK SUPREME BODHI WITH A NON-RETREATING MIND. I made the Great Vehicle vow to seek Unsurpassed Enlightenment without ever turning back or getting side-tracked.

SUTRA:

"WISHING TO PERFECT THE SIX PARAMITAS, I DILIGENTLY PRACTICED GIVING, MY MIND NOT BEGRUDGING ELEPHANTS, HORSES, THE SEVEN PRECIOUS THINGS, COUNTRIES, CITIES, WIVES, CHILDREN, SLAVES, SERVANTS, EVEN MY HEAD, EYES, MARROW, BRAINS, BODY, FLESH, HANDS, AND FEET--NOT SPARING EVEN LIFE ITSELF.

COMMENTARY:

WISHING TO PERFECT THE SIX PARAMITAS, I DILIGENTLY PRACTICED GIVING, MY MIND NOT BEGRUDGING ELEPHANTS, HORSES, and THE SEVEN PRECIOUS THINGS, gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, mother-of-pearl, red pearls, and carnelian. Sometimes I gave away COUNTRIES, CITIES--my entire kingdom altogether! But these are just material possessions. I also gave up WIVES, CHILDREN, SLAVES, and SERVANTS. As long as someone wanted them, I would give them away. But this is just the giving of outer wealth. I could give all these things away. I also gave away inner wealth: EVEN MY HEAD, EYES, MARROW, BRAINS, BODY, FLESH, HANDS, AND FEET--NOT SPARING EVEN LIFE ITSELF. I had no regard for my body and life. As long as someone needed them, I would give all these things away. Thus, I gave away both inner and outer wealth in my desire to perfect the practice of Dana-Paramita, the Perfection of Giving.

We see from the above that Shakyamuni Buddha, wishing to perfect the Six Paramitas, was able to give up both the proper and dependent retribution worlds, that is, give up himself and everything he owned. In giving up both the proper and dependent retribution worlds, he gave himself away entirely. This is true giving.

This is true Dana-Paramita, the perfection of giving, the first of the Six Paramitas.

The second paramita is that of morality. The Perfection of Morality means guarding against any of the seven offenses in deportment. Of the seven offenses, three are of the body—killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct--and four are in speech--loose speech, lying, harsh speech, and backbiting. Not committing these seven offenses is what is meant by morality.

The Third Paramita is that of Patience. What is patience? Patience means to bear up under insult. It means to take what you can't take. For example, if someone hits you or scolds you and you don't retaliate in any way, you are using patience. If someone hits you and you kick them right back, you can't call that patience, but if someone hits you in the face, and you turn the other cheek, you are practicing patience. Besides, if only one cheek gets slapped and not the other, the other cheek will get jealous! Not striking back is being patient.

Vigor is the fourth Paramita. This means that you finish everything you start. If you start things with great excitement, but then get tired and quit, you do not have vigor. Completing the job indicates vigor.

The fifth Paramita is that of Dhyana meditation. There are Four Dhyanas and Eight Samadhis. In the first Dhyana the pulse stops. In the second Dhyana, one's breath stops. One could be buried in the ground for two or three days and still not die--like a yogi! In the third Dhyana, thought stops as well. Then one is really not having polluted thinking. In the fourth Dhyana, thought stops, but it's not cut off. In the fifth Dhyana, thought is cut off altogether. The first Dhyana is called "The Joyous Ground of Leaving Production." In this state one leaves afflictions and gives rise to happiness. But this is not yet samadhi. The second Dhyana is called "The Joyous Ground of

Giving Rise to Samadhi." The third Dhyana is called "The Wonderful Ground of Leaving Joy." The fourth Dhyana is called "The Pure Ground of Leaving Thought."

The Eight Samadhis are the four Dhyanas plus the Samadhi of the Station of Limitless Emptiness, the Samadhi of the Station of Limitless Consciousness, the Samadhi of the Station of Nothing Whatever, and the Samadhi of the Station of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception.

The Sixth Paramita is Prajna. With this perfection, one no longer contends or fights. People fight because they lack genuine wisdom, genuine Prajna. If one has true wisdom, one won't fight or struggle. That is the doctrine of the Three Storehouses Teaching--the Small Vehicle. There are many, many different ways to explain the Six Paramitas. Each paramita has ten advantages.

The Six Perfections and the Ten Good Deeds

The first four of the Ten Good Deeds--not killing, not stealing, not committing sexual misconduct, and not lying--correspond to the first perfection, that of Giving.

The fifth of the Ten Good Deeds, not backbiting, corresponds to the perfection of Morality, the second perfection.

The sixth of Ten Good Deeds, not indulging in abusive speech, corresponds to the third perfection, Patience.

The seventh of the Ten Good Deeds, not indulging in loose speech, corresponds to the fourth perfection, Vigor.

The eighth and ninth of the Ten Good Deeds not being greedy or hateful, corresponds to the fifth perfection, Dhyana samadhi.

The tenth of the Ten Good Deeds, not having deviant views (not being stupid) corresponds to the sixth perfection, Prajna wisdom.

The Six Perfections in Terms of their Powers To Cure

- 1) Giving cures one of stinginess.
- 2) Morality cures one of the tendency to commit offenses.
- 3) Patience cures one of hatred.
- 4) Vigor cures one of laziness.
- 5) Dhyana samadhi cures one of scatteredness.
- 6) Prajna cures one of stupidity.

The Six Perfections and How They Interact

By giving, say giving up one's home and family, one is able to maintain morality. Meeting with insult, one is then patient. Having been patient, one can be vigorous. Having been vigorous, one can subdue the five senses: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, so they no longer play tricks. That is Dhyana samadhi. They follow your instructions instead of the other way around. When the five senses have been tamed, you can know the Dharma Realm. That is Prajna wisdom.

The Six Perfections in Terms of Rewards

- 1) Giving brings the reward of being wealthy.
- 2) Morality brings the reward of the perfection and refinement of the six senses. You won't be blind or deaf or otherwise incomplete.
- 3) Patience brings physical beauty. Why are people ugly? It's because in past lives they were impatient and couldn't bear with things.
- 4) Vigor brings the reward of having great power and authority.
- 5) Dhyana samadhi brings the reward of a long and healthy life. You can live as long as you like.
- 6) Prajna brings the reward of unobstructed eloquence.

The Ten Advantages of the Perfection of Giving

- 1) *One will be able to conquer the afflictions associated with stinginess.* Stinginess is a form of affliction which is difficult to overcome. With the practice of giving, one can overcome this fault.
- 2) *One will be able to maintain a continuous attitude of generosity.* Sometimes people's first thought is to give, but then in their next thought they retreat and get stingy. The second advantage of practicing true giving is that one is able to sustain an attitude of generosity.
- 3) *One will be able to share one's wealth with all living beings, without discrimination.*
- 4) *One will be born in a wealthy family.*
- 5) *In every life, one will always be generous and ready to give.*
- 6) *The Four Assemblies will take delight in one's presence.* They will like one because of one's generosity.
- 7) *One will not be intimidated by others.* No matter how much tough opposition one receives from other people--be it good or bad opposition--one will not be afraid.
- 8) *One will enjoy a wide reputation.* Everyone will know about one's practice of giving.
- 9) *One's hands and feet will be soft and supple.* They won't be coarse like sand-paper! The Buddha's hands are said to be as soft as cotton, and this is because in every life he practiced giving.
- 10) *One will find a genuine Good and Wise Advisor.* If one hasn't practiced giving, one will be unable to find a true spiritual teacher. But if one has, then one will meet a Good and Wise Advisor who will employ "relentless compassion" to help one give up all one's bad habits and faults..

If one can practice giving, one will obtain these ten advantages. Each of the Six Perfections has ten advantages, making sixty in all.

*to be continued next issue
translated, reviewed, and edited by members
of the Buddhist Text Translations Society*