

The Sutra In Forty-two Sections

With Commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua

SUTRA:

THE SUTRA IN FORTY-TWO SECTIONS, SPOKEN BY THE BUDDHA.

COMMENTARY:

THE SUTRA IN FORTY-TWO SECTIONS, SPOKEN BY THE BUDDHA. These words express the general and specific names of the sutra. The word "sutra" is the general name. The specific name, which accompanies the word "sutra" in every sutra title, is the particular name of that sutra, which distinguishes it from other sutras. The word "sutra" is like the word "human," which is used to describe all people. "Human" is the general name, while each person has his own specific name: one is named Smith and another is named Chang. The sutras the Buddha spoke are the same way. "Forty-two Sections, Spoken by the Buddha" is the specific name of this sutra. Examining the words of the specific name, we find that the title of this sutra is established on the basis of a person and a dharma. "The Buddha" is the person, and "Forty-two Sections" is the dharma.



Venerable Kasyapa Matanga, Translator

This sutra is a collection of sayings of the Buddha, and was divided into its forty-two sections by the Buddha's disciples at the time the Sutra Treasury was being compiled.

Buddha is a Sanskrit word. Transliterated into Jungwen (Chinese) it is *Fwo Two* ye; the English translation of the word is "One who is enlightened." There are three kinds of enlightenment: self-enlightenment, enlightenment of others, and the perfection of enlightenment and practice.

- 1) Self-enlightenment. One who is self-enlightened is different from ordinary people. Ordinary people are not enlightened. Those of the Two Vehicles, the Shravakas and Pratyekabuddha's, can enlighten themselves, but they do not enlighten others.
- 2) Enlightenment of others. One who can enlighten others is different from those of the Two Vehicles and is called a Bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas can enlighten themselves and can enlighten others. They see all living beings as equal. They themselves are enlightened, and they want all living beings to become enlightened, too.

- 3) The perfection of enlightenment and practice. Although Bodhisattvas can enlighten others, they still have not done so completely themselves. Buddhas can enlighten themselves, can enlighten others, and perfect their enlightenment and practice; they have perfected the three kinds of enlightenment.

The word "sutra" is also a Sanskrit word, and embraces four meanings: to string together, to gather in, constant, and a method.

- 1) To string together. Just as a string of recitation beads is strung together, the doctrines of the sutra are strung together word by word, connecting the meanings which are elucidated.
- 2) To gather in means to gather in those who are ready for the teaching--the living beings who can be taught.
- 3) Constant means that from ancient times to the present, the sutra has not changed. In the past it did not change, at the present it does not change, and in the future it will not change.
- 4) A method, the Dharma, refers to what is venerated by those of the three periods of time--past, present, and future. They venerate this Dharma and use it as a method for cultivation.

The word "sutra" has many other meanings as well, such as: it is like a bubbling spring; it is like a carpenter's chalk line; and because sutras teach people methods for cultivation, the word also means a path of cultivation.

SUTRA:

CO-TRANSLATED BY KASHYAPA MATANGA AND GOBHARANA OF THE LATER HAN DYNASTY.

COMMENTARY:

Kashyapa Matanga and Gobharana were two Dharma Masters from India who co-translated this sutra in the later Han Dynasty. The Han Dynasty was divided into the Eastern Han and the Western Han, and the period referred to here is the Eastern Han. In the Eastern Han, the third year of the Yung Ping reign period (62 A.D.), Emperor Ming had a dream. He dreamt of a golden man who had a halo of light which shone forth from the crown of his head and streamed out through space into the palace where the emperor was sitting. The next day he questioned his officials about the dream, and an astrologer name Fu-yi said to the emperor, "I have heard that in India there was a Holy One whom people called 'Buddha'. Your dream, Your Majesty, certainly was of the Buddha."

A scholar named Wang-dzun also spoke to the emperor. "In the Jou Dynasty, there was a book written, which was called *Records of Strange Events*. In that book it was stated:

The Buddha was born in the Jou Dynasty, during the twenty-sixth year of the reign of King Jau (c. 1025 B.C.). At that time, the creeks and rivers overflowed their banks, the entire Earth quaked, and a five-colored light pierced the heavens."

At that time, there was an astrologer, also a diviner, named Su-yu. He consulted the *yi-jing* and got the hexagram *jyan* (䷗), nine in the fifth place, "flying dragon in the heavens," and he knew that it meant a great sage had been born in the West, in India. That sage would transmit a teaching which, after a thousand years, would be transmitted to China. That is what the astrologer Su-yu divined.

At that time, King Jau of Jou ordered that the details of the event be carved in stone as a record and then buried at a certain spot south of the city to await the predicted event--that a thousand years hence the Buddhadharma would actually be transmitted to China.

Later, in the Jou Dynasty, during the reign of King Mu, there was a massive earthquake that moved heaven and earth. A white rainbow with twelve rays arched through the sun. At that time, there was another astrologer, by the name of Hu-to, who also used the *Yi-jing* for divination, and he announced that "A great sage from the West has entered still quiescence. In India, during the Jou Dynasty of Junggwo, in the twenty-sixth year of the reign of King Jau, this great sage came into the world, and now he has entered Nirvana." And so, although the Buddha entered the world and went off to extinction at a place very far from Junggwo, the people of Junggwo knew about those events. The Buddha's appearance in the world was not a chance occurrence.

From the time of King Jau of Jou to the time of Emperor Ming of the later Han Dynasty was about a thousand years, and so when the Emperor Ming of Han had the dream about the Buddha, he commanded Tzai-yin, Chin-jing, Wang-dzun, and others to go to India to seek the Buddhadharma. In India, they met Kashyapa Matanga and Gobharana, and these two gentlemen returned to China with Tzai-yin, Chin-jing, and Wang-dzun, arriving in Loyang in the tenth year of the Yung Ping reign period (69 A.D.). They came on white horses, carrying with them the sutras. Thereupon, the Emperor of Han established White Horse Monastery. There they translated *The Sutra of Forty-two Sections*, Spoken by the Buddha, making it the first Sutra transmitted to China.

At that time Dauism flourished in China. When Buddhism arrived in China, the Dauist masters became jealous. By the fourteenth year of the Yung Ping reign period they had had enough. On New Year's Day they met with the emperor and told him that Buddhism was false, that it was a barbarian religion, not of Junggwo, and therefore it should not be permitted to spread through China. "You should abolish Buddhism," they urged. "If you will not abolish it, then you should at least have a contest in order to compare Buddhism with Dauism." How did they suggest the contest be held? They suggested that the texts spoken by the Buddha and those written by the Dauists be put together in a pile and burned. Whichever texts did not burn would be the true ones.

On the fifteenth day of the new year, Dauist Master and leader Chu Shan-syin and five hundred other Dauist Masters assembled at the southern gate of White Horse Monastery. They put the

Dauist texts and the Buddhist texts together and then prayed to the Old Man of Mount Tai, saying, "Divine Lord, Virtuous One of the Way, please grant us an efficacious response to insure that our Dauist texts will not burn and that the Buddhist sutras will."

At that time, there were many Dauist Masters with spiritual penetrations. They could "mount the fog and ride the clouds." They could fly through the heavens and hide in the earth. They could vanish into thin air. They used the charms and spells of the Dauist religion to gain spiritual powers. But when the fire was lit, guess what happened. The Buddhist sutras did not burn. Instead, they emitted light. The shariras of the Buddha emitted a five-colored light as bright as the sun, illumining the whole world. The light shone into empty space and formed a great canopy, which covered over everyone in the great assembly. As soon as the Dauist texts were set on fire, they burned. And those who had been able to "mount the clouds and ride the fog" were no longer able to do so. They had lost their spiritual penetrations. Those who had been able to fly could no longer fly. Those who had been able to hide in the earth could no longer hide in the earth. Those who had been able to vanish could no longer vanish. And at that time, when they spoke their charms, the charms were no longer efficacious. There wasn't any response. The Dauist texts burned to a crisp and the Dauist Masters, Chu Shan-syin and Fei Jeng-ching, just about died of rage. In the midst of the fury of the Dauist masters, two or three hundred of their disciples shaved their heads on the spot and became Buddhist monks.

And so, the first time Dauism and Buddhism came to grips, the Dauists were defeated. After the book burning, the two venerable ones, Kashyapa Matanga and Gobharana, ascended into space and manifested the eighteen transformations of an Arhat. The upper parts of their bodies emitted water, the lower parts of their bodies emitted fire; the upper parts of their bodies emitted fire, and the lower parts of their bodies emitted water; they walked about in space; they lay down and went to sleep in space, and so on. Because of those manifestations, the emperor and the people all came to believe in Buddhism.

And so, this sutra, *The Sutra in Forty-two Sections, Spoken by the Buddha*, was the first sutra to be translated when Buddhism was transmitted to China.

*Translated, reviewed, and edited by members
of the Buddhist Text Translation Society*