

# Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra

## Chapter Fourteen, "Happily-Dwelling Conduct"

with commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua

OUTLINE:

L2. Detailed Explanation.

SUTRA:

*...AS CHARACTERIZED BY ACTUALITY, AS NOT UPSIDE DOWN, AS NOT MOVING, AS NOT RETREATING, AS NOT TURNING, AS BEING LIKE EMPTY SPACE, AS WITHOUT A NATURE, AS HAVING THE PATH OF LANGUAGE CUT OFF, AS NOT COMING INTO BEING, AS NOT COMING FORTH, AS NOT ARISING, AS WITHOUT A NAME, AS WITHOUT AN APPEARANCE, AS IN REALITY NON-EXISTENT, AS LIMITLESS, AS BOUNDLESS, AS UNIMPEDED, AND AS UNOBSTRUCTED.*

COMMENTARY:

Bodhisattvas contemplate all dharmas AS being CHARACTERIZED BY ACTUALITY. Being characterized by actuality is the basis of all characteristics. The basis of all characteristics is no characteristics. If you try to find the basis of all characteristics within characteristics, you won't be able to find it. You must search for that basis of characteristics within what has no characteristics. Bodhisattvas contemplate all dharmas as being empty. They contemplate how all dharmas of the Ten Dharma Realms are empty--how those states are empty, and how they are characterized by actuality. Even though they are empty, within that emptiness there is existence. Within true emptiness, wonderful existence comes forth. True emptiness is not empty, because it can bring forth wonderful existence. Wonderful existence is non-existent, because it itself is true emptiness, which is another name for being characterized by actuality. When you are characterized by actuality, then outwardly you will not be greedy, and inwardly you will not seek. You will do no seeking either inside or outside. Inside and outside will be empty. Inwardly you empty the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, and outwardly you empty sights sounds, scents, flavors, objects of touch, and dharmas that are objects of the mind. In between, you empty the eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, and mind consciousness. When the six sense organs are empty, then the six sense objects will be empty, and the six consciousnesses will be empty in turn. When the six consciousnesses are empty, then the twelve locations and the eighteen realms will be empty.

Bodhisattvas contemplate all dharmas as characterized by emptiness. They are all empty, but does that mean they do not exist? No. They are characterized by actuality. They are like actuality, and what is subtle, wonderful, and inconceivable is right here. What is sitting in meditation every day? It is being characterized by actuality. When one sits daily in dhyana meditation and practices sitting, what is one doing? One is being characterized by actuality. Since you find it hard to understand what being characterized by actuality means, I am telling you that it means sitting in meditation every day. As soon as you investigate chan, inwardly the six sense organs become empty, outwardly the six sense objects become empty, and in between the six sense consciousnesses become empty. When the eighteen realms become empty, you reach the Station of Nothing whatsoever, and the Heaven of the Station of Neither Thought Nor Non-Thought. That is not to say one's soul goes out and is reborn in that heaven. If right here there is nothing whatsoever, that is the Heaven of Neither Thought Nor Non-Thought. You don't have to go up somewhere to that Heaven. It's right here. If you can be characterized by actuality, your state is that of the Heaven of Neither Thought Nor Non-thought.

When you cultivate the Way, you must have a persevering mind, a sincere mind, and a firm mind. A firm mind is one as strong as vajra, or a diamond, which cannot be broken, but which can cut through all things. Your resolve should be as solid as vajra. You should think, "I am going to study the Buddhadharma, no matter what kind of state comes along. I am not going to change my mind. I am absolutely going to be firm and have solid determination. Whatever the circumstances, I am determined to have that kind of solidity of mind, and study the Buddhadharma with a true mind." That's because for life after life, if we haven't been horses, we have been cows; if we haven't been pigs, we've been dogs. We've even been mice, and even filthier, dung beetles in latrines. You don't have to talk about bugs in toilets. Take a look inside yourself at how, within your belly, along with the excrement, there are one-doesn't-know-how-many bugs. Pigeons, for example, look like pigeons, but there are numerous bugs on their bodies biting them. Sometimes the pigeons are aware of them, and sometimes they are not. We people are the same. In our bodies we have one-doesn't-know-how-many-bacteria--bugs, which is just to say one-doesn't-know-how-many living beings. We say, "Living beings are boundless, I vow to save them all." Not to speak of there being boundlessly many living beings outside, right within our own bodies, how many living beings would you say there are? Can you count them? If you don't save those living beings, they will convert you. How will they do that? You will go along with them and, from being a big bug, you will become a small bug. The efficacious nature of tiny bugs is tiny, and so they are very stupid. They only know how to eat off people. They only know how to beg, and don't know how to give. You will be like them: eating people's flesh and drinking their blood--living in people's stomachs and stealing the food that people ingest first. Such bugs feel they are getting a bargain, but actually it is brought about by their own stinginess. If you want to save them, you should increase the *yang* light of your own nature day by day until *yang* energy prevails. *Yang* energy can be compared to sunlight, which can kill germs. Doctors now use ultraviolet rays to kill germs, and if you can use the *yang* light of your own nature, you can kill the germs on your own body.

"But isn't that breaking the precepts?" you may ask.

Such a question is just letting your intelligence run away with you. It's like one of my disciples who was planning to take the Bodhisattva precepts, but then asked me, "If I take the Bodhisattva precepts, when I drive my car, I squash lots of bugs. Won't I be breaking the precepts?"

He didn't think of how his losing his temper is a lot more violent than killing those living creatures. He forgot all about that, and thought about the other instead. I said to him, "That is an inadvertent error on your part. You haven't set out to kill them. It's due to the environment and the circumstances, and you haven't intended to kill them. You can recite the Buddha's name as you drive your car and transfer merit to the beings you kill. That's because you don't want to kill them. If you clearly knew it was wrong and yet deliberately did it anyway, and liked killing them, then that would be an offense."

It's like the case of a soldier I once knew who later studied Buddhism and took refuge with the Triple Jewel, and then left the home life. He saw others leaving home and doing well, and so he left home, too. After leaving the home life, he recited the Buddha's name, and he had been a vegetarian while he was still a layperson. He didn't take the life of living creatures. After he left home, he was a grand-disciple of Venerable Master Syu Yun, and his name was Hung Hwei. He took the precepts at Nan Hwa Monastery. He could speak very well. Later, when the government changed hands, he could no longer stay in Jyang Syi Province, and so he went to Hong Kong.

At that time, the situation in Hong Kong was very complicated. There was no Buddhist place for Buddhists to stay. It wasn't like right now when every monk has his own high-rise. Not to speak of a high-rise, they didn't even have small huts to live in. Hung Hwei lived in a single-floor shack on East Pu Tou, and he had no money. Probably he had used a lot of money for a long time, and so he felt it was very difficult to be without it. In Hong Kong There was a place called Dau Feng Temple. It

specialized in helping Buddhist monks and nuns return to laylife. If they did not want to remain in Buddhism, they could go there, and would be given a monthly allowance of perhaps thirty, fifty, or two hundred dollars. You could stay there and be a monk if you wanted, or not be a monk if that was what you preferred. You could be a vegetarian if you wanted, but if you didn't want to be one, they provided you with meat to eat. It was fine to remain a monk, but if you wanted to go back to laylife, they would find you a wife. It was the same for Bhikshunis. If you wanted to remain a nun, you could. If you wanted to be a layperson, you could, and if you wanted to get married, they would find you a husband--perhaps one of the monks.

Things were extremely expedient there. They claimed that what they were doing was suited to the times. They taught people to believe in Lord God and not to believe in monks or the Buddha. Yet they advertised themselves as a place that recited Buddhist Sutras and did morning and evening recitation. Actually, it was a case of hanging out a sheep's head but selling dog meat. They were trying to destroy Buddhism.

Hung Hwei had no money, and so he went to work as a cook at Dau Feng Mountain, and earned three hundred dollars a month. But the food was not vegetarian, and every day he had to kill chickens, ducks, and fish. "It doesn't matter," he would rationalize. As he wielded his knife and cut off the chicken's head, he recited, "Namo Amitabha Buddha. Be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Namo Amitabha Buddha. Be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss." This continued until he had killed about three hundred and sixty chickens. Then what do you suppose happened? His retribution came. He went insane and couldn't stay at Dau Feng Mountain anymore. He went back to where he had lived without money on East Pu-tou, and carried on crazily all day long. "Have you seen those chickens I killed? Did they reach the Land of Ultimate Bliss?" he would ask people. "Are those ducks in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, or are they ducks again? Are they going to come and kill me?" He talked crazy talk like that from morning to night.

He wanted to see me, because he knew that if he could see me, his sickness would be cured. But he never could get to see me, no matter how he tried. He thought that it would help to see me because he had seen many other people who had sicknesses similar to his get well after they saw me. He had brought many such people to see me, and they had all recovered. Now it was his turn. In his more lucid moments he would think, "I want to go visit Dharma Master So-and-so. Who will help me?" But just as soon as he was ready to start out to see me, he would go insane again and scream, "No! You can't do that! If you go to see him, what are we going to do? You have taken so many lives and, even though you knew better, you deliberately created those offenses. You are a monk, and yet you have killed so many ducks and chickens! How can you face him?" In less than half a year he stabbed him-self to death. And he was a monk. You see, cultivation is not easy.

Why did he receive such a severe retribution? First of all, I will tell you, he was a great Bodhisattva who appeared here to show living beings what can happen. "See? If you have left the home-life, you can't kill or you will undergo this kind of retribution?" He wasn't afraid of looking bad, or embarrassed to appear in such a way. He was like Devadatta. He let all the other monks know that left-home people cannot take life. That is the first interpretation—a positive one. I don't like to say that anyone is a bad monk, because I am the worst of all! The second interpretation is that he did not have a firm mind. After he left the home-life, he changed and didn't cultivate. First of all you must have a firm mind.

Second of all you must have a persevering mind. You can't approach the study of the Buddhadharma as if you were addicted to opium, so that if you don't have some of it you go into withdrawal, but if you do get some of it you become invigorated. The study of the Buddhadharma should not be up and down like that. You must steadily persevere. Study the Buddhadharma today, study tomorrow, study the next

day, study day after day. Study the Buddhadharmā this month, study next month, study month after month. Study the Buddhadharmā this year, study next year, study year after year.

"Shouldn't I ever do anything else?" you ask. When it comes time to die, are you going to be able to do something else? Are you aware of the fact that in the future you will definitely die? If you do not study the Buddhadharmā, you will have absolutely no control when you die. If you study the Buddhadharmā at ordinary times, then when you die, you will have no calamities, no sickness, and no pain.

Take for instance a certain person who took refuge with me. Why did he take refuge? It's because he thought that after he did, he could get rich. And so after he became a disciple, he vowed that he would get rich and once he was rich that he would build a Buddhist hospital. He also asked me to interpret his physiognomy and read his fortune. I answered him like this: "If your physiognomy indicates that you should be wealthy, but your mind is not good, then you still will not get rich. If your physiognomy indicates that you will not be a wealthy man, but your mind is good, then you still can get rich. Therefore, physiognomy is false; don't believe in it."

But he still wanted me to tell his fortune. He had read in my biography that I understood all the different methods of telling people's fortunes and so he asked me over and over. "Teacher, did you read my fortune yet?"

I replied, "Oh, I lost that piece of paper you gave me."

"It doesn't matter," he said, "I'll write it for you again."

He rewrote it and I said, "I don't have time right now. I'm too busy."

"Never mind," he said, "Wait until later." Another month passed and he asked, "Teacher, did you get my fortune done yet?"

I replied, "What? Read what?"

"You know," he said, "That information I gave you to read my fortune with."

"Oh that," I said, "They must have burned that paper when they cleaned my room." But he still didn't get the point and rewrote the information for me. He must have rewritten that information five or six times. I never read his fortune for him, because people who have left the home-life cannot do that kind of thing. They cannot read people's physiognomy, they cannot tell people's fortunes. To do such things is to "advertise your medicines" like tonic vendors. People who genuinely cultivate the Way do not get involved in that kind of thing.

Eventually that disciple said he was going to New York and he probably was about to ask me about reading his fortune again, but that time I was no longer polite. I said, "You have taken refuge with me, and now I am going to instruct you. When you get to New York, there will be many left-home people there. No matter what left-home person you meet, I forbid you to ask them to read your physiognomy or tell your fortune. If you have the physiognomy of a dog, then no matter what you do you won't be able to change it into the physiognomy of a tiger. If you have the physiognomy of a tiger, you won't be able to change it into the physiognomy of a dog. What do you keep thinking about that for? Why do you want your fortune read? If you are to be poor and I tell you in your fortune that you can get rich, you still won't get rich. If you are supposed to get rich, then even if I don't tell your fortune, you will still get rich. In particular, if you treat left-home people like that, asking them to read your fortune, it's just the same as insulting them. It's not polite to ask a left-home person such a thing. You really don't have any manners."

He protested, "But there are left-home people who read other people's fortunes and tell their physiognomy."

I said, "They are just tonic venders. Anyone who is a genuine cultivator does not do such things."

After that, he didn't dare ask me to tell his fortune again. He said, "I made a vow to build a Buddhist hospital, and it's been several years now and I still haven't made much money at all. I'll never fulfill my vow at this rate."

I said, "If your vow could be fulfilled just by making it, then anyone's vow could be fulfilled just because he made it, and the Buddhas would be incredibly busy. They don't have time to get involved in so many matters that don't concern them. Just take going to school as an example. From elementary school you go on to high school, and then to college before you can obtain a Ph.D.. How many years does it take? You want to get rich and figure that you can make a vow and in two and a half days it will be fulfilled. If things could happen as easily as that in this world, then everyone would have made such vows long ago, and it wouldn't come round to you."

He stammered, "Oh! Oh! Today I truly understand a little! Vows must be long-term and must be maintained for a long time. It's not the case that you can make a vow today and fulfill it tomorrow."

I said, "You should make your vow like this: 'I want to build a Buddhist hospital this life, but I don't have the money to do it, so I will do it next life. If next life I don't have the money to do it, then I will wait for the life after that. No matter what, I shall cultivate blessings and cultivate wisdom and when I have enough money, I will build a Buddhist hospital. I will make this vow life after life. That's how to do it.'"

He said, "All right, I will do it like that." He really did come to understand a little. You must be persevering in mind. It's not that you study the Buddhadharma for a little while and then stop studying it and go back to doing whatever you please. You must be persevering.

Third, you must have a sincere mind. No matter what kind of difficulty you meet with, you must remain sincere. For example, a friend may try to destroy your faith saying, "What are you doing studying the Buddhadharma? Those people you study with are really dumb. They are way behind the times and superstitious as well. You are an intelligent person; you shouldn't be studying that!"

He uses all kinds of methods to undermine you. But you are not moved by him.

He said, "That Dharma Master you are studying Buddhism with doesn't really understand Buddhism. Don't study with him!" He may use all kinds of methods to try to turn you against what you are doing and discourage you. If you remained unmoved by him, then you have a sincere mind.

You think, "I have my own eyes and I recognize the Buddhadharma. I am seeking the genuine Dharma. And I will not be discouraged by others." You have to have extreme sincerity. "Even if people wanted to kill me for it, I still would study the Buddhadharma." The biggest loss is that of one's life. But you resolve that even if you have to lose your life in the process, you are going to study the Buddhadharma. That's true sincerity.

Shakyamuni Buddha in past lives offered his body and life a thousand times. When he gave up his body and life those times, it's not for sure that it's what he wanted to do. Because of the circumstances, he was unable to do otherwise. Perhaps it was because he felt pity for living beings and thought, "Ah, that living being doesn't have anything to eat. I'll give him my body to eat so that he can sustain his life." That's the reason he gave up his life to feed a tiger and cut off his flesh to feed an eagle. The eagle

was so hungry it couldn't even fly. It wanted to eat a pigeon, but the pigeon ran to the Buddha for protection. The eagle said, "Sure, you can save the pigeon that way, but he lives and I die. What about that?"

Shakyamuni Buddha on the cause-ground thought, "That's right. If I save the pigeon, the eagle will starve to death," and so he said to the eagle, "You wanted to eat the pigeon? Well, I'll give you a piece of my flesh to eat instead." He cut off a piece, but the eagle said he still wasn't full. The Buddha cut off another piece of flesh, but the eagle still wasn't full. Eventually he cut all the flesh off his body, but the eagle still wasn't full. And so the Buddha said, "Fine, you take a look and wherever you see any flesh left on my body, you can pick it off and eat it."

At that point, the eagle flew up into the air and so did the pigeon. Originally they were gods who had come to test him. They weren't actually a pigeon and an eagle. And at that point, the flesh he had cut off returned to his body. You say, "According to scientific investigation, that is an impossibility."

I also will say it is an impossibility, but I don't know for what reason it was possible. If you have sincerity, you will have a response. It happened because of a response due to the Buddha's sincerity. We, too, should practice giving of that sort. It shouldn't be that if you give away two-and-a-half cents it pains your heart! That's really not having any backbone at all. What kind of Buddhadharma are you studying, anyway? Those who study the Buddhadharma are willing to give up their heads, bodies, and lives--eyes, brains, and marrow. Then it is true!

You say, "I'm starting to regret that I decided to follow this Dharma Master to study the Buddhadharma."

It's too late for regrets! Now that you have met this Dharma Master, you have no way to run away from him. That causes you to be really worried?!