

Prologue to the Flower Adornment Sutra

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commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua

The Fifth Door: The Progressive Depth of the Substance of the Teaching

The section below of FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA PROLOGUE follows the end of the PROLOGUE that appears in "Vajra Bodhi Sea" Issue 190. It was inadvertently omitted.

PROLOGUE:

IN THAT EXPLANATION, WHEN THE WORD "ALL" IS PRONOUNCED, THE TWO MENTAL FACTORS OF INITIATION AND INVESTIGATION ARE INVOLVED. HOWEVER, SINCE IT IS NOT YET DECISIVELY KNOWN TO WHAT THE WORD "ALL" PERTAINS, THE MENTAL FACTOR OF DETERMINATION IS NOT YET PRESENT. NEXT, THE WORD "ACTIVITIES" IS PRONOUNCED. DUE TO A CARRYING OVER OF WHAT CAME PREVIOUSLY, LINKED UNDERSTANDING IS PRODUCED, AND THREE MENTAL FACTORS, NAMELY INITIATION, INVESTIGATION, AND DETERMINATION ALL ARISE.

COMMENTARY:

There are many ways to explain how mental factors group together to cause the fourteen characteristics of the statement "All activities are impermanent" to enter the consciousness of the hearer. We will consider one explanation of how this happens. IN THAT EXPLANATION, WHEN THE WORD "ALL" IS PRONOUNCED, THE TWO MENTAL FACTORS OF INITIATION AND INVESTIGATION ARE INVOLVED. "Initiation" refers to the most crude representation without any deliberation entering into the picture—no investigation. It refers to how, when "all" is pronounced, there is immediate, crude knowledge of it. One has an initial recognition of it. "Investigation" means examining the one word "all" in terms of your knowledge of it: its definitions as "many" or "total," and so forth; its potential function as a part of speech--a pronoun or descriptive adjective--and so forth. Hearing the word "all" can call these two kinds of mental factors into play.

HOWEVER, SINCE IT IS NOT YET DECISIVELY KNOWN TO WHAT THE WORD "ALL" PERTAINS, THE MENTAL FACTOR OF DETERMINATION IS NOT YET PRESENT. There are too many possibilities: "all living beings," "all people," "all dogs," "all heavens," "all earths." One does not have enough information to determine "all" what. NEXT, THE WORD "ACTIVITIES" IS PRONOUNCED. DUE TO A CARRYING OVER OF WHAT CAME PREVIOUSLY, LINKED UNDERSTANDING IS PRODUCED, AND THREE MENTAL FACTORS, NAMELY INITIATION, INVESTIGATION, AND DETERMINATION ALL ARISE. Upon hearing the word "activities," one realizes that the "all" was referring to the "activities," thus determining its relationship and function.

PROLOGUE:

WHEN THE WORDS "ALL ACTIVITIES" ARE HEARD, ALTHOUGH THE NATURE OF EACH WORD IS KNOWN, NONETHELESS THEIR MEANING IS NOT YET KNOWN. IN ORDER TO MAKE THEIR MEANING KNOWN, THE WORD "ARE" IS THEN PRONOUNCED. ONLY TWO MENTAL FACTORS, NAMELY INITIATION AND INVESTIGATION ARE INVOLVED.

DETERMINATION IS NOT YET PRESENT, FOR IT IS NOT YET DECISIVELY KNOWN TO WHAT THE WORD "ARE" PERTAINS.

COMMENTARY:

WHEN THE WORDS "ALL ACTIVITIES" ARE HEARD, ALTHOUGH THE NATURE OF EACH WORD IS KNOWN, NONETHELESS THEIR MEANING IS NOT YET KNOWN. As discussed above, two mental factors are involved when the word "all" is heard, and three are involved when the words "all activities" are heard. IN ORDER TO MAKE THEIR MEANING KNOWN in the consciousness of the hearer, THE WORD "ARE" IS THEN PRONOUNCED. ONLY TWO MENTAL FACTORS, NAMELY INITIATION AND INVESTIGATION, ARE INVOLVED. DETERMINATION IS NOT YET PRESENT, FOR IT IS NOT YET DECISIVELY KNOWN TO WHAT THE WORD "ARE" PERTAINS in context.

PROLOGUE:

AFTERWARDS, WHEN THE WORD "IMPERMANENT" IS PRONOUNCED, DUE TO A CARRYING OVER OF AND RECIPROCITY WITH THE PREVIOUS WORDS, A FORCE IS PRODUCED IN CONNECTION WITH THE FINAL WORD, AND ALL FIVE MENTAL FACTORS ARISE, NAMELY INITIATION, INVESTIGATION, DETERMINATION, DEFILEMENT AND PURITY, AND CONTINUITY. WHEN THE VERY LAST WORD IS PRONOUNCED, THE FOUR WORDS FORM A COMPLETE SENTENCE, AND THEN THE MEANING CAN BE UNDERSTOOD. THERE ARE TWELVE MENTAL FACTORS IN ALL: FIRST TWO, THEN THREE, THEN TWO, AND FINALLY FIVE. FROM THAT THERE COME TO BE FOURTEEN CHARACTERISTICS AS DISCUSSED IN THIS EXPLANATION. FURTHER EXPLANATIONS MAY BE FOUND IN DIFFERENT TREATISES.

COMMENTARY:

When the three words "all activities are" have been pronounced, the meaning is still not complete, and so only two mental factors arise upon hearing the word "are". AFTERWARDS, WHEN THE WORD "IMPERMANENT" IS PRONOUNCED, DUE TO A CARRYING OVER OF AND RECIPROCITY WITH THE PREVIOUS WORDS, A FORCE IS PRODUCED IN CONNECTION WITH THE FINAL WORD, AND ALL FIVE MENTAL FACTORS ARISE. Until one hears the word "impermanent," one does not know what "all activities are". They could be "without a self," or "without others," or "without living beings," or "without lifespans". The mental factor of investigation is active, but a determination cannot be made until one hears the word "impermanent". That final word combines with the others through carry over and reciprocity. The final word, in completing the sentence, has special force in the hearer's consciousness. Now it is known what all activities are, and all five mental factors arise, NAMELY INITIATION, INVESTIGATION, DETERMINATION, DEFILEMENT AND PURITY, AND CONTINUITY. One understands, "All activities are impermanent. There is no activity that is everlasting." The fourteen characteristics mentioned previously consisted of four sets of sounds, four words, four parts of speech, one sentence, and a meaning conveyed. Now there are also fourteen characteristics, but they are arrived at in a different way.

THERE ARE TWELVE MENTAL FACTORS IN ALL: FIRST TWO, THEN THREE, THEN TWO, AND FINALLY FIVE. The first word "all" involves two; adding the second word to make "all activities" involves three; adding the third word to make "all activities are" gives rise to two; and when the last word is added to make "All activities are impermanent," then all five mental factors arise. FROM THAT THERE COME TO BE FOURTEEN CHARACTERISTICS AS DISCUSSED IN THIS EXPLANATION. In addition to the above-mentioned twelve characteristics, the four words making

one sentence is the thirteenth, and the meaning conveyed is the fourteenth. FURTHER EXPLANATIONS MAY BE FOUND IN DIFFERENT TREATISES.

PROLOGUE:

THREE, ONLY REFLECTIONS WITHOUT A BASIS, THAT IS, THE ACTUAL TEACHING OF THE GREAT VEHICLE. THE FORMS AND SOUNDS THAT ARE THE MERITORIOUS QUALITIES OF THE BUDDHA-FRUITION DO NOT EXIST APART FROM THE MINDS OF LIVING BEINGS. APART FROM THE MINDS OF LIVING BEINGS, THERE IS ONLY THUSNESS AND THE WISDOM OF THUSNESS. GREAT COMPASSION AND GREAT WISDOM FORM THE AUGMENTING CONDITIONS, SO THAT THE FORMS AND SOUNDS OF ALL BUDDHAS SPEAKING DHARMA APPEAR IN THE MINDS OF LIVING BEINGS WHOSE FACULTIES ARE RIPE FOR BEING TRANSFORMED. THEREFORE, THE SAGELY TEACHINGS ARE ONLY REFLECTIONS IN THE MINDS OF LIVING BEINGS. THE *SUYAMA VERSES* SAY: "ALL BUDDHAS ARE WITHOUT ANY DHARMAS, AND SO WHAT WOULD THE BUDDHAS SAY? IT IS SIMPLY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE MINDS OF OTHERS THAT APPROPRIATE DHARMA IS SPOKEN FOR THEM." "DRAGON ARMY," "SOLID WISDOM," AND OTHER SHASTRA MASTERS ALL HAVE ESTABLISHED THIS PRINCIPLE.

COMMENTARY:

This passage discusses the third of the four aspects involved in contrasting bases with reflections. THREE, ONLY REFLECTIONS WITHOUT A BASIS, THAT IS, THE ACTUAL TEACHING OF THE GREAT VEHICLE. "Without a basis" means there is no Dharma that can be spoken. That is the principle of the Actual Teaching: there are no living beings, there are no minds, and there is no fruition which is Buddhahood. One is free of all such things. All dharmas are emptied and all marks are left behind.

THE FORMS AND SOUNDS THAT ARE THE MERITORIOUS QUALITIES OF THE BUDDHA-FRUITION DO NOT EXIST APART FROM THE MINDS OF LIVING BEINGS. APART FROM THE MINDS OF LIVING BEINGS, THERE IS ONLY THUSNESS AND THE WISDOM OF THUSNESS. Aside from the principle of thusness meshing with the wisdom of thusness, there isn't anything at all.

GREAT COMPASSION AND GREAT WISDOM FORM THE AUGMENTING CONDITIONS, SO THAT THE FORMS AND SOUNDS OF THE BUDDHAS SPEAKING DHARMA APPEAR IN THE MINDS OF LIVING BEINGS WHOSE FACULTIES ARE RIPE FOR BEING TRANSFORMED. If the person's faculties are not ripe, the person does not perceive the teaching. When the person's faculties are ripe, there are said to be only reflections without a basis. THEREFORE, THE SAGELY TEACHINGS ARE ONLY REFLECTIONS IN THE MINDS OF LIVING BEINGS. THE *SUYAMA VERSES* SAY: "ALL BUDDHAS ARE WITHOUT ANY DHARMAS, AND SO WHAT WOULD THE BUDDHAS SAY?" Since the Buddhas are absolutely without any Buddhadharmas, what Dharma could there be for the Buddhas to speak? There is no Dharma that can be spoken. IT IS SIMPLY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE MINDS OF OTHERS THAT APPROPRIATE DHARMA IS SPOKEN FOR THEM. The "minds of others" refer to those whose faculties are ripe for the teaching. Appropriate Dharma is spoken for such beings. "DRAGON ARMY" (*Nagasena* 龍軍) and "SOLID WISDOM" (*Sthiramati* 堅慧) are the names of Shastra Masters. They and other SHASTRA MASTERS ALL HAVE ESTABLISHED THIS PRINCIPLE—this third aspect, that there are only reflections without a basis.

PROLOGUE:

FOUR, NEITHER A BASIS NOR REFLECTIONS, THAT IS, THE SUDDEN SCHOOL. THERE ARE NO FORMS OR SOUNDS OF BUDDHAS OUTSIDE OF THE STRAIGHTFORWARD MIND, AND THE REFLECTIONS INSIDE THE MINDS OF LIVING BEINGS ARE ALSO EMPTY. SINCE THE NATURE IS BASICALLY FREE OF ALL OF THAT, WORDS PERISH AND CONSIDERATION IS CUT OFF, WHICH IS JUST THE TEACHING OF NO TEACHING. THE SUMERU VERSES SAY: "THE DHARMA NATURE IS BASICALLY EMPTY AND STILL. IT CANNOT BE GRASPED; IT CANNOT BE SEEN. THE EMPTINESS OF EVEN THAT NATURE IS THE BUDDHA, UNOBTAINABLE THROUGH THOUGHT." THE *VIMALAKIRTI SUTRA* SAYS: "ON THE PART OF THE SPEAKER OF DHARMA, THERE IS NO SPEAKING AND NO DISCLOSING, AND ON THE PART OF THE LISTENER TO DHARMA, THERE IS NOTHING HEARD AND NOTHING OBTAINED." MANY SCHOOLS, SUCH AS THAT OF "DRAGON TREE" AND OTHERS ESTABLISH THIS PRINCIPLE.

COMMENTARY:

The last aspect pertains to the Sudden Teaching and states that there is neither a basis nor reflections. Whatever is spoken perishes as it is spoken. All dharmas are swept away; all marks are left behind.

FOUR, NEITHER THE BASIS NOR REFLECTIONS, THAT IS, THE SUDDEN SCHOOL, which states that THERE ARE NO FORMS OR SOUNDS OF BUDDHAS OUTSIDE OF THE STRAIGHTFORWARD MIND, AND THE REFLECTIONS INSIDE THE MINDS OF LIVING BEINGS ARE ALSO EMPTY. SINCE THE NATURE IS BASICALLY FREE OF ALL OF THAT - whereas the third aspect maintains that there are only reflections in living beings' minds, here even reflections inside the minds of living beings are empty. The Buddha nature is free of all attachments, and so what further Dharma could there be? What reflections or what basis could there be? WORDS PERISH AND CONSIDERATION IS CUT OFF. There is nothing that can be said and nothing that can be thought over. Such Dharma IS THE TEACHING OF NO TEACHING. The Way of effortlessness.

THE SUMERU VERSES SAY: "THE DHARMA NATURE IS BASICALLY EMPTY AND STILL. IT CANNOT BE GRASPED; IT CANNOT BE SEEN by any method you might employ. If you truly reach the level of the nature being empty, you reach the true face of the Buddha. THE EMPTINESS OF EVEN THAT NATURE IS THE BUDDHA, UNOBTAINABLE THROUGH THOUGHT. That kind of state is not something you can know of by trying to take its measure using the thought processes of an ordinary person.

THE *VIMALAKIRTI SUTRA* (T. 474 *Vimalakirtinirdesha Sutra* 維摩詰經, and T. 475 as translated by Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva) SAYS: "ON THE PART OF THE SPEAKER OF DHARMA, THERE IS NO SPEAKING AND NO DISCLOSING, AND ON THE PART OF THE LISTENER TO DHARMA, THERE IS NOTHING HEARD AND NOTHING OBTAINED." MANY SCHOOLS, SUCH AS THAT OF "DRAGON TREE" (Nagarjuna 龍樹) Bodhisattva AND OTHERS ESTABLISH THIS PRINCIPLE.

PROLOGUE:

THESE FOUR ASPECTS OF WHAT IS SPOKEN, WHEN TAKEN TOGETHER, ARE INTERPENETRATING AND WITHOUT OBSTRUCTION, FOR, BY PROCEEDING FROM THE SHALLOW TO THE DEEP, THEY GATHER IN LIVING BEINGS.

COMMENTARY:

THESE FOUR ASPECTS OF WHAT IS SPOKEN, WHEN TAKEN TOGETHER, ARE INTERPENETRATING AND WITHOUT OBSTRUCTION. The four aspects are:

- 1) only a basis without reflections;
- 2) both a basis and reflections;
- 3) only reflections without a basis;
- 4) neither a basis nor reflections.

PROCEEDING FROM THE SHALLOW TO THE DEEP, from the near to the far, from the small to the great, and from the coarse to the fine, THEY are all Dharma doors which GATHER IN LIVING BEINGS.

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