

# *The Flower Adornment Sutra*

## *Universal Worthy's Conduct and Vows Chapter 40*

The Youth Sudhana had fifty-three teachers, a matter which has caused complications in Chinese Buddhism. Disciples of the Buddha in China, wishing to practice along with the Youth Sudhana, would say, "The Youth Sudhana had fifty-three teachers, but I have only ten or twenty. That is not too many."

This is one of the most deluded and improper practices of Chinese Buddhists, one which I have always opposed vehemently. I am certainly not afraid that my disciples will take other Dharma Masters as their teachers; but nevertheless, I oppose this kind of custom because it is very detrimental.

Someone may ask, "Why do you feel that Chinese Buddhists who have ten or twenty teachers are very bad, while you consider the conduct of the Youth Good Wealth, who had fifty-three teachers, acceptable?"

Everything must be based on true principle. The Youth Good Wealth's first teacher told him to go on to his second teacher, and his second teacher told him to go on to his third teacher. That is the only reason he went to another teacher: he was told to do so. It is not the case that he heard about a particular person who was adept in cultivation, and so he stole away from his first teacher without advising him of his intentions to study with this new person. This is called "bowing to a new teacher, while turning your back on your old Master." If you want to treat your teacher well, why do you bow to a new teacher?"

For example, everyone has a father. One's second father could be Shakyamuni Buddha, but there is no need to look for a third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, or eighth father. Your teacher is the mother and father of your transcendental Dharma Body. What is the use of having so many teachers?

After the Youth Sudhana had studied all of the virtue, knowledge, and wonderful functions of the spiritual penetrations of his first teacher, this teacher told him to go south and take a particular person for his teacher. And so on he went to his next teacher. After he had learned all the skill of a teacher, then that teacher would tell Sudhana, "Go south and take as your master a particular worthy sage, Bodhisattva, or Bhikshu, because his conduct in the Way is superior to mine." So in each case, his previous teacher sent him off to a new teacher; he did not steal off to bow to another teacher. Each teacher instructed him to go on to the next, until he came to the fifty-third one. Because he had studied the spiritual penetrations of fifty-three teachers, he had the wonderful function of spiritual powers which are extremely great. You should not look upon him as being just a common child, because he is very capable.

Nevertheless, because he had so many teachers, Chinese Buddhists now go everywhere bowing to different teachers. This has come to be known as "recklessly bowing to teachers." You bow to one teacher, and then you bow to another teacher, sneaking from one to another to bow to different teachers. Someone like this is quite detrimental to Buddhism. When I was in China and Hong Kong, if people had already taken refuge with the Triple Jewel, I would not accept them as disciples. Why? Because I considered them to be the weak links in Buddhism: the worst kind of Buddhists. They were not told by their former teacher to take me as their master; they snuck off to study with me. This is called "turning your back on your good teacher."

Taking refuge can only be done once. You cannot take refuge again and again. You can take the precepts more than once: the Three Precepts, the Four Precepts, the Five Precepts, the Eight Precepts, or the Ten Major and Forty-Eight Minor Bodhisattva Precepts. Precepts can all be taken more than once. But you cannot take one teacher in the East, one in the South, one in the West, and one in the North. When you finally die, whose disciple will you be? There will be no place to go.

Basically, taking refuge many times is equivalent to not having taken refuge at all. You have had so many teachers, you end up having none. In Buddhism, we want to be true, but in China there are still elder Buddhists who run around taking refuge many times, perhaps even a few hundred times in one life. But if you ask them what it means to take refuge, their eyes become blank, and they do not know what to say. They do not know what it means. They have taken refuge hundreds of times, and they do not know what it means to take refuge. Is this not pitiful? They say, "All those who have left the home-life are my teachers." They have taken refuge with everyone who has left the home-life, and yet I believe that they do not even have one teacher. Why? Because they do not truly believe. They must believe to be rescued. If they do not believe, then they cannot be rescued.

In China, the Bhikshus quarreled over disciples. For example, the disciples of one Dharma Master would secretly run off to another Dharma Master, unaware they were doing wrong. This indicates that a Dharma Master has no virtue, because if he had virtue, why would his disciples leave for another teacher? Because of this, the two Dharma Masters involved would get into an argument. "You've snatched my disciples!"

They would fight over the Dharma like this, and as soon as they began arguing, their bad aspects would become apparent. The fire of ignorance would flare up. For example, in China, Dharma Master Tai Syü and Dharma Master Ywan Ying would fight over disciples just like the clashing of water and fire. They were often unkind to one another, all because their disciples ran away to take refuge; they were afraid of losing their disciples to one another. They went to extremes to prevent this.

Even though the Youth Good Wealth has a very important position in the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, he has, nevertheless, caused complications within Buddhism. Why do Dharma Masters accept disciples of other masters as their own disciples when they know that it is incorrect and not in accord with the Dharma? Now I will reveal their innermost intentions. It is because they wish to take advantage of the conditions. If they have more disciples, then they can get more red envelopes which they appreciate more than anything, because in China, these red envelopes always contain donations of money. So, if they do not accept disciples, they will be losing money.

As soon as they accept a disciple, the disciple thinks, "This is my teacher, and I should do my best to make offerings to him." So these Dharma Masters get money, which causes their hearts to move. Even though they clearly know they are incorrect, they still do this. Now, is this not a complication?

Why did this happen? First, it is because of the Youth, and second, it is because of Good "Wealth." Since he was wealthy, he moved everyone. Everyone is fond of wealth. The Youth was just a child, and this child was very wealthy. Almost all people feel that money is very flashy and nice to have, and so some cultivators are moved to such extremes that they do things they know are incorrect. This is one of the worst aspects of Buddhism, one which I hope will not arise in America. Do not take refuge with one teacher and then take refuge with another. If you find a good teacher, after you take refuge with him, do not rebel against him. Rebel means to renounce your religion, and turn your back on your teacher.

The Youth Good Wealth had fifty-three teachers, and caused many improper, confusing customs to evolve in China. Before American Buddhism spreads everywhere, we should prevent this custom from

taking root. For example, in Christianity, people are baptised only once. No one says, "You weren't baptised clean the first time, and so you should be baptised again," telling you that you have not been baptised and that you need to do it again and again.

Buddhism should also be the same. One does not need to take refuge again and again, each time making excuses, "Oh, the first time I took refuge the Buddha probably did not know, so I'll do it a second time." If the Buddha did not know the first time, then he would not know about your taking refuge the second time, either. How will he know about the third time up to the thousandth or ten thousandth time? Why? The Buddha does not sleep all the time, and he sees when you take refuge. The Buddha is the Greatly Enlightened One. All you have to do is sincerely think that you want to take refuge in Buddhism, and he knows. So it is said, "The link between the request and the response is inconceivable."

If you say the Buddha does not know about you, you do not really believe in Buddhism, and in actuality you have not taken refuge at all. Even if you have taken refuge hundreds of millions of times, it is of no use. When you take refuge with a Master, you should certainly respect him and honor the Way. You should be very respectful towards your teacher. I am not telling my disciples to respect me, because they already do; rather, I am just explaining this principle for you. I do not need to tell my disciples to be more respectful.

After one takes refuge, one absolutely must remember not to turn one's back on one's teacher, or to show disrespect to him. Those who are not respectful to their teachers may fall into a hell. Which hell? The Thousand Blades Hell which is explained in the *Earth Store Bodhisattva Sutra*. Disciples who are not filial to their teachers fall into this hell.

There are some people who do not follow the teachings of their teachers but who wish to strike out on their own. These people like to follow their own inclinations and do not like to hear their teachers' instructions. Not only that, but to compensate, they slander and scold their teachers. Do not think that this is a joke. There are all kinds of beings in this world. Some will poison their teachers and use various methods to harm them. To sit in the teacher's chair is a mistake, and to play with his bowl is a mistake. These acts are very dangerous, and only if your teacher tells you to use them is it permissible to do so. If you recklessly do these things, then it is a mistake. This relationship is very important, and you cannot do whatever you wish, because a disciple has no freedom when it comes to his teacher. You should never slander your teacher or talk about him behind his back. These kinds of actions are offenses created with the mouth.

SUTRA:

"GOOD MEN, IF ALL THE BUDDHAS OF THE TEN DIRECTIONS SPOKE CONTINUOUSLY OF THE THUS COME ONE'S MERIT AND VIRTUE FOR KALPAS AS MANY AS FINE MOTES OF DUST IN INEFFABLY INEFFABLE NUMBERS OF BUDDHA LANDS, THOSE VIRTUES COULD NOT FULLY BE DESCRIBED.

COMMENTARY:

This section of Sutra says that the merit and virtue of the Buddha can never be totally explained. The text says, "GOOD MEN, those of you who have taken refuge with the Triple Jewel, who have received the Five Precepts, and who cultivate the Ten Good Acts, I will now tell you about the Thus Come One, the Buddha's merit and virtue. IF ALL THE BUDDHAS OF THE TEN DIRECTIONS SPOKE CONTINUOUSLY OF THE THUS COME ONE'S MERIT AND VIRTUE FOR KALPAS AS MANY AS FINE MOTES OF DUST IN INEFFABLY INEFFABLE NUMBERS OF BUDDHA LANDS.

"Fine" means extremely small, as small as a dust mote which borders on emptiness. It is something that cannot be seen with the eyes, unlike the particles in a ray of sunlight, which can be seen. If a fine dust particle, which is visible, is divided into seven pieces, one of the pieces is called a dust mote bordering on emptiness, which cannot be seen. This kind of dust particle is called a fine mote of dust.

"If all the Buddhas of the ten directions spoke continuously" means, if they spoke without ceasing for as many kalpas as there are fine dust motes, perpetually speaking "of the Thus Come One's merit and virtue," THOSE VIRTUES COULD NOT FULLY BE DESCRIBED. There is no way to describe the merit and virtue of the Buddha.