

# *The Flower Adornment Sutra*

## *Chapter Forty "Universal Worthy's Conduct and Vows"*

*with commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua*

SUTRA:

"I BURN ALL KINDS OF LAMPS, BUTTER LAMPS, OIL LAMPS, AND LAMPS OF MANY FRAGRANT OILS. THE WICK OF EACH LAMP IS AS TALL AS MOUNT SUMERU; THE QUANTITY OF OIL IN EACH LAMP IS EQUAL IN VOLUME TO THE WATERS OF THE GREAT SEA. WITH ALL MANNER OF GIFTS SUCH AS THESE, I CONSTANTLY MAKE OFFERINGS.

"GOOD MAN, OF ALL OFFERINGS, THE GIFT OF DHARMA IS SUPREME. THAT IS TO SAY , THE OFFERING OF CULTIVATING ACCORDING TO THE TEACHINGS, THE OFFERING OF BENEFITING ALL LIVING BEINGS, THE OFFERING WHICH GATHERS IN ALL LIVING BEINGS, THE OFFERING OF STANDING IN FOR ALL BEINGS TO UNDERGO THEIR SUFFERING, THE OFFERING OF DILIGENTLY CULTIVATING GOOD ROOTS, THE OFFERING OF NOT FORSAKING THE DEEDS OF THE BODHISATTVA, AND THE OFFERING OF NOT RENOUNCING THE BODHI MIND.

COMMENTARY:

The offerings made by Universal Worthy Bodhisattva are described by comparing them to the size of Sumeru, but how big is Mount Sumeru? *Sumeru* is Sanskrit and means "wonderfully high." "Wonderfully" here means "inconceivably high." This mountain is surrounded by seven rings of seas and the Four Great Continents, Purvavideha in the East, Jambudvipa in the South, Aparagodaniya in the West, and Uttarakuru in the North. Sumeru is 84,000 *yojanas* high, and the sun and moon are located half way up its slope, as are the Heavens of the Four Kings. Therefore, Mount Sumeru is taller than the Heavens of the Four Kings. If the dimensions of your offerings are as large as Mount Sumeru, they are inconceivable.

I BURN ALL KINDS OF LAMPS. To "burn" means to "light." What benefit is there in burning all kinds of lamps? If you light lamps before the Buddha, keen eyesight is the reward you will obtain from giving this offering. If you do not have keen eyesight, it is because you did not offer lamps. If you cause the space before the Buddha to be bright, then your eyes will be bright.

There are many kinds of lamps, not just one: BUTTER LAMPS which burn butter made from cows' milk, and OIL LAMPS, which burn common oil. In the Secret School, there is a Dharma called *Hu Mo* in which the Vajra Master lights a fire in front of himself and recites mantras. He may burn butter in the fire, common oil, clothing, or other articles as offerings to the Buddha. The more valuable the offerings, the more the merit and virtue derived. If one burns gold in the fire, the offering is especially great.

In actuality, it is not the value of the items burned that determines the amount of merit and virtue derived. For example, if you burn gold, it does not necessarily mean that your merit and virtue is great, or if you burn dirt, that your merit and virtue is small. The determining factor is your sincerity. If you can offer most valuable objects with a mind of extreme sincerity, this shows that your mind is true. If you have an honest mind, then there is merit and virtue, but you do not have to burn gold to gain it.

If, on the other hand, you offer up valuables but think, "What benefit is derived from burning these things, since in the end they are destroyed?" this shows you do not have a true mind, and the merit and virtue derived is considerably less. If your mind is true, you can give up anything to the fire. The merit and virtue derived depends upon the sincerity of your renunciation. This is the *Hu Mo* Dharma and several lamps like this are used in the practice of the Secret School.

In addition to these oil lamps, there are LAMPS OF MANY FRAGRANT OILS including sesame oil lamps. THE WICK OF EACH LAMP IS AS TALL AS MOUNT SUMERU; THE QUANTITY OF OIL IN EACH LAMP IS EQUAL IN VOLUME TO THE WATERS OF THE GREAT SEA. Whoever can give offerings with the dimensions of Mount Sumeru and give fragrant oils in quantities equal to the waters of the great sea, according to the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, has made offerings that are of the dimensions of the Dharma Realm. What does this mean? If you have an honest and true mind when you give offerings, then the quantity of your offerings will equal the size of Mount Sumeru and the waters of the great sea. It is not necessary to use as much oil as there is water in the great sea to burn lamps, for if your mind is true, then the quantity will be vast. If your mind is honest, then the quantity will equal a number of worlds equal to the number of sand grains in the Ganges River.

WITH ALL MANNER OF GIFTS SUCH AS THESE, I CONSTANTLY MAKE OFFERINGS. Using many different kinds of gifts in such vast quantities, I will constantly make offerings.

In the past in China, there was a very poor person who bought a catty of oil to offer to the Triple Jewel. He prepared to go to Gold Mountain Monastery the next day to burn lamps before the Buddha. At that time the Abbot of Gold Mountain, a "bright-eyed one" who had opened the Five Eyes, told the guest prefect, "Tomorrow open the main gate. A great Dharma protector will arrive around ten in the morning to make offerings to the Buddha, and after he has made his offerings, invite him to eat with the Abbot. You should be very polite to this Dharma protector, but don't let him go away."

The next day the grounds were swept, the great mountain gate was opened, and the Abbot put on his long ceremonial robe to greet the Dharma protector. When he came to bow to the Buddha, the Abbot personally welcomed him, and invited him to eat in the Abbot's quarters.

What kind of person was this Dharma protector? He was so very poor that he could only afford one catty of oil to offer to the Buddha. Why did the Abbot treat a person who

made such a small offering so well? Because he had used every cent of his life's savings to purchase the oil.

While this was going on, a rich person who had arrived at the monastery at the same time watched these proceedings and thought, "The Abbot is certainly treating him well." The next day the rich man bought 1000 catties of oil and gave them to the monastery to be burned in lamps, too. He thought that if an offering of just one catty of oil could occasion such good treatment, certainly with an offering of 1000 catties, one would be treated royally indeed.

Before the rich man sent his offerings the Abbot declared, "Tomorrow, open the side door; a Dharma protector is sending oil to burn in the lamps. Ask him to eat in the guest hall. He doesn't have to eat in the Abbot's room."

The guest prefect did not understand why he was doing this, and after the rich man had paid his visit, he asked the Abbot, "How is it that you opened the main gate for the person who gave only one catty of oil and invited him to eat in the Abbot's quarters, while you didn't open the main gate or even greet the person who offered 1000 catties of oil, and had him eat in the guest hall?"

The Abbot replied, "The one who gave 1000 catties was very rich, and he could have easily given 100,000,000 catties of oil, and so there was no need for me to receive him." Then the guest prefect understood.

So in regard to making offerings, it does not matter how much you give, but you should give with a sincere mind. If your mind is extremely honest, you will obtain merit and virtue, but if your mind is not honest and sincere, even if you give much, you will have very little merit and virtue.

Offerings the size of Sumeru, King of Mountains, are not really as large as Mount Sumeru. It is the mind you produce that is as large as Mount Sumeru; thus your offering will be of equal dimensions. But if you bring forth a small mind, then the merit and virtue from your offerings will be small.

Universal Worthy again said, "GOOD MAN, OF ALL OFFERINGS, THE GIFT OF DHARMA IS SUPREME." The greatest offering is given by lecturing Sutras and explaining the Dharma. The *Brahma Net Sutra* says, "For every day you lecture Sutras and speak the Dharma, you can eat three ounces of gold." Your offerings of Dharma entitles you to eat food worth three ounces of gold for every day you teach. But we do not want to take this for granted and not feel repentant and go buy rich food to eat if we receive three ounces of gold as an offering. Although justification can be found in the Sutra, you do not want to say with conceit, "It is permissible for me to buy food with three ounces of gold you give me every day as an offering for explaining Sutras and speaking Dharma to buy food." You should not be so conceited.

In the *Vajra Sutra* it says that if you offer the Seven Jewels in Three Thousand World, this offering is not equal to explaining a four line verse from the Sutra. So of all the kinds of offerings, the gift of Dharma is supreme. The offering of Dharma is the greatest.

Now every day I explain the Sutras so that you can hear the Dharma. This is giving Dharma. Turning the Dharma wheel and explaining Sutras is using the Dharma as an offering to the Buddhas. It is an offering that encourages others to cultivate according to the teachings.

THAT IS TO SAY, THE OFFERING OF CULTIVATING ACCORDING TO THE TEACHINGS. An offering of cultivating according to the teachings is, for example, the teaching of the Paramita of giving, teaching others to give by one's words and actions. Others teach the Paramita of maintaining precepts by cultivating the Paramita of holding precepts. Someone may explain the Paramita of patience and not get angry. They cultivate patience to the point that there are no people, no self, no living beings, and no life span.

When some hear of the Paramita of vigor, throughout the day and night, they become constantly vigorous, and always cultivate according to the Dharma. When some hear the Paramita of Dhyana Samadhi explained, how one can obtain the Four Dhyanas and the Eight Samadhis, how one can produce all the immeasurable kinds of merit and virtue and perfect all kinds of liberations, they base their cultivation on the Paramita of Dhyana Samadhi. When some hear of the Prajna Paramita, they cultivate wisdom and do not give rise to stupid thoughts.

When some hear an explanation of the Four Noble Truths—suffering, accumulation, extinction, and the Way, and are told to know suffering, cut off accumulation, long for extinction, and cultivate the Way, they rely on the Dharma of the Four Truths to cultivate. When some hear about the Twelve Links of Conditioned Causation, they rely on this Dharma to cultivate. Others hear an explanation of the Four Unlimited Minds, kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and renunciation, and they bring forth the mind to rely on the Four Unlimited Minds to cultivate.

To sum it all up, whatever Dharma door you hear, that is the Dharma door you cultivate. These are examples of offerings which enable others to cultivate according to the teachings. Of all offerings, these gifts of Dharma are supreme. How important are they? When Shakyamuni Buddha was on the causal ground, he gave up his life for half a gatha; not for an entire gatha, but for just two lines. A *gatha* is a poem of four lines, and he gave up his life for half of it. One day he heard a rakshasa ghost say,

All practices are impermanent;  
This is the Dharma of production and extinction.

When Shakyamuni Buddha heard this he said, "You've spoken some verses of Dharma, but you've only spoken one half. Will you speak the second half for me?"

The rakshasa ghost replied, "That's right, I did speak this Buddhadharma, but I am incredibly hungry. I've got to find a person to eat, and then I can explain this Dharma. Right now since I'm hungry, I have no energy to speak."

Shakyamuni Buddha said, "Is it all right if you speak first, and then eat me?"

The rakshasa ghost said, "You'll let me eat you?"

Shakyamuni Buddha replied, "Yes, but you must give me this Dharma first. After I understand, then I'll be happy to let you eat me."

The rakshasa ghost said, "All right," and then he recited the remainder of the gatha. He said,

After production and extinction have been extinguished.  
Still extinction is bliss.

Then he said, "I've finished speaking this Dharma. Now I can eat you."

Shakyamuni Buddha said, "Wait a minute before you eat me."

The rakshasa said, "Are you backing down? Now don't you want to pay your debt? I've already answered you, but now do you want out? Is that how you keep an agreement?"

Shakyamuni Buddha replied, "No. But since you have spoken these four verses of Buddhadharma, and since most people have not heard the Buddhadharma, I want to carve these lines into a tree. Afterwards, you may eat me. Will you agree to this?"

The rakshasa ghost thought a while and said, "All right, go ahead and carve it into a tree." Then Shakyamuni Buddha carved the four-line gatha into the base of a tree with a knife.

But then he thought, "Trees are not that solid, but the rakshasa ghost is again eager to eat me." Then the Buddha said aloud, "Wait! Because I want everyone to know about the Buddhadharma, I want to chisel this four-line gatha into a rock. Then you can eat me. You should agree, because I'm not doing this for myself, but because I wish all living beings to understand the Buddhadharma."

The rakshasa ghost thought it over and said, "Well, you know I'm famished, but if you will hurry, I'll agree. Begin your work and don't waste time." So Shakyamuni Buddha carved this four-line gatha into a rock. When he had finished, he invited the rakshasa ghost to eat him.

Then the rakshasa said, "Oh, you are really going to let me eat you?"

Shakyamuni Buddha replied, "Of course. I don't lie. What do you mean, 'Really let me eat you?' Please begin your supper."

The rakshasa ghost then said, "You really are a cultivator of the Way; you are a true cultivator. Now that I know you are truly cultivating, I'll see you later." After saying this, the rakshasa ghost flew up into space, appearing in the body of the Bodhisattva Who Observes the Sounds of the World, who had manifested to test him.

In cultivating the Way, you must have an honest mind and not do things for yourself, but for the sake of the Dharma. You should be able to give your life away for the sake of the Dharma. Therefore, of all the kinds of offerings, the gift of Dharma is supreme. There are other kinds of offerings such as:

THE OFFERING OF BENEFITTING ALL living beings. Those who cultivate the Bodhisattva Way speak Dharma for the benefit of living beings. This is "the offering of benefitting."

THE OFFERING WHICH GATHERS IN ALL LIVING BEINGS. "To gather in" means to see all living beings as one's son and daughters. You should be without discrimination and compassionately gather in living beings. This is the offering which gathers in all living beings.

THE OFFERING OF STANDING IN FOR ALL BEINGS TO UNDERGO THEIR SUFFERING. Those who cultivate the Bodhisattva Way vow to undergo suffering for the sake of living beings. They constantly make vows before the Buddha, saying, "May all living beings avoid the many different kinds of disasters including those of knives, sickness, floods, fire, epidemics and so forth. I wish that I myself might undergo the suffering that all living beings should undergo, and further, that no living being undergoes the suffering which I should undergo." This describes the resolve of a Bodhisattva.

THE OFFERING OF DILIGENTLY CULTIVATING GOOD ROOTS. The Bodhisattva diligently cultivates his own good roots and exhorts all living beings to diligently cultivate good roots as well. This is also a kind of offering.

THE OFFERING OF NOT FORSAKING THE DEEDS OF THE BODHISATTVA. What are "the deeds of a Bodhisattva?" They are the Six Perfections and the Ten Thousand Practices. To constantly cultivate them is to cultivate the Bodhisattva Way, and is called "the offering of not forsaking the deeds of the Bodhisattva."

AND there is also THE OFFERING OF NOT RENOUNCING THE BODHI MIND. One eternally resolves his mind on Bodhi as an offering to living beings and never renounces the Bodhi mind, even for an instant. He does only those things which benefit living beings. Not only does he not leave the Bodhi mind, he also exhorts all living beings to never forsake the Bodhi mind. He exhorts them to eternally and truly resolve their minds on enlightenment.