

The Flower Adornment Sutra

Chapter Forty "Universal Worthy's Conduct and Vows "

with Commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua

SUTRA:

"MOREOVER, GOODMAN, TO FOLLOW ALONG WITH AND REJOICE IN MERIT AND VIRTUE IS EXPLAINED LIKE THIS: ALL THE BUDDHAS, THUS COME ONES, AS NUMEROUS AS THE FINE DUST MOTES IN ALL THE BUDDHALANDS OF THE TEN DIRECTIONS AND THE THREE PERIODS OF TIME THROUGHOUT THE DHARMA REALM AND THE REALM OF EMPTY SPACE, FROM THE TIME OF THEIR INITIAL RESOLVE FOR ALL WISDOM, DILIGENTLY CULTIVATED ACCUMULATION OF BLESSINGS WITHOUT REGARD FOR THEIR BODIES AND LIVES. THEY DID THIS THROUGHOUT KALPAS AS MANY AS FINE MOTES OF DUST IN INEFFABLY INEFFABLE BUDDHALANDS. DURING EACH KALPA THEY GAVE UP THEIR HEADS, EYES, HANDS, AND FEET AS MANY TIMES AS THERE ARE DUST MOTES IN INEFFABLY INEFFABLE BUDDHALANDS.

"IN THIS WAY THEY CULTIVATED ALL THE DIFFICULT ASCETIC PRACTICES AND PERFECTED THE GATES OF THE VARIOUS PARAMITAS. THEY ENTERED AND WERE CERTIFIED TO EACH OF THE BODHISATTVA GROUNDS OF WISDOM AND ACCOMPLISHED THE UNSURPASSED BODHI OF ALL BUDDHAS. UPON THEIR PARINIRVANA, THEIR SHARIRA WERE DIVIDED AND DISTRIBUTED. I COMPLETELY FOLLOW ALONG WITH AND REJOICE IN ALL OF THEIR GOOD ROOTS.

"MOREOVER, AS FOR ALL THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF BEINGS IN THE SIX PATHS AND THE FOUR KINDS OF BIRTH IN EVERY WORLD IN THE TEN DIRECTIONS, I FOLLOW ALONG WITH AND REJOICE IN THEIR MERIT AND VIRTUE AS WELL, EVEN IF IT IS AS SMALL AS A MOTE OF DUST. I COMPLETELY FOLLOW ALONG WITH AND REJOICE IN THE MERIT AND VIRTUE OF ALL THE SOUND HEARERS, PRATYEKA BUDDHAS, LEARNERS, AND THOSE BEYOND STUDY IN THE TEN DIRECTIONS AND THE THREE PERIODS OF TIME. I FOLLOW ALONG WITH AND REJOICE IN THE VAST AND GREAT MERIT AND VIRTUE OF ALL BODHISATTVAS, WHO IN THEIR QUEST FOR UNSURPASSED, RIGHT, EQUAL BODHI, CULTIVATE MEASURELESS DIFFICULT ASCETIC PRACTICES.

"SO IT IS THAT EVEN IF THE REALM OF EMPTY SPACE IS EXHAUSTED, THE REALMS OF LIVING BEINGS ARE EXHAUSTED, THE KARMA OF LIVING BEINGS IS EXHAUSTED, AND THE AFFLICTIONS OF LIVING BEINGS ARE EXHAUSTED, MY FOLLOWING AND REJOICING ARE ENDLESS. THEY CONTINUE IN THOUGHT AFTER THOUGHT WITHOUT CEASE. MY BODY, MOUTH, AND MIND NEVER WEARY OF THESE DEEDS."

COMMENTARY:

This is the fifth of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva's vows, to follow along with and rejoice in merit and virtue. Living beings' attitudes are many. Some follow but do not rejoice, some rejoice but do not follow, others follow and rejoice, and still others neither follow nor do they rejoice.

Following without rejoicing involves forcing someone to do deeds from which merit and virtue derive. Rejoicing without following refers to those who are happy about some idea, but do not actually do acts

of merit and virtue. These kinds of people can be forced to do meritorious acts, but will not do them on their own even though they may like a certain idea and say, "This is a good thing to do." But regardless of whether it is a good thing to do or not, they still do not do it. They tell others to do it, "Do it some more, it is the best thing you can do." This is rejoicing without following.

There are some who both follow and rejoice. They do meritorious and virtuous deeds and they like it. This is following and rejoicing in merit and virtue. Then there are those who neither follow nor rejoice. Basically they do not follow, and they are not happy about others doing it either. They do not like or do acts of merit and virtue.

"Merit" is the quality of something beneficial that is done, and "virtue" is the beneficial deed itself. Everyone can see merit, but sometimes virtue is not obvious. This vow involves following and rejoicing in merit and virtue.

"MOREOVER," Universal Worthy said to the Youth Good Wealth, "I will again explain for you GOOD MAN. The vow TO FOLLOW ALONG WITH AND REJOICE IN MERIT AND VIRTUE IS EXPLAINED LIKE THIS. Now I will tell you. ALL THE BUDDHAS, THUS COME ONES, AS NUMEROUS AS THE FINE DUST MOTES IN ALL THE BUDDHA LANDS OF THE TEN DIRECTIONS AND THE THREE PERIODS OF TIME: all the Buddhas, Thus Come Ones, are as numerous as fine motes of dust, THROUGHOUT THE DHARMA REALM AND THE REALM OF EMPTY SPACE, to the exhaustion of empty space. FROM THE TIME OF THEIR INITIAL RESOLVE FOR ALL WISDOM, DILIGENTLY CULTIVATED ACCUMULATION OF BLESSINGS. They were very diligent and never lazy in their cultivation of blessings and wisdom."

How does one accumulate blessings? From a number of actions, not just one. There is a saying, "Don't skip doing a good deed just because it is small, and don't do a bad deed just because you think it is insignificant." Do not decline to do something just because you think the merit and virtue of the action is small, because great merit and virtue is made up of an accumulation of small acts of merit and virtue. Moreover, you should not think that an evil deed is too small to matter. For example, you should not think that a little lie is of no major importance. If you tell a lot of little lies, they become a big lie. In the same way, you should not think that killing an ant is a small and unimportant matter, because if one day you kill a person, it will have begun with your killing this ant. You should pay attention to Little things and not follow your whims and wishes. To diligently cultivate the accumulation of blessings involves being very careful to do deeds that should be done, even if they accumulate only a small amount of merit and virtue. Gradually they will become an accumulation of great merit and virtue. Mount T'ai is made up of individual grains of dust, but even though dust motes are small, many of them gathered together make up a mountain. Creating blessings is the same.

WITHOUT REGARD FOR THEIR BODIES AND LIVES. All Buddhas, Thus Come Ones, gave up their lives to teach, transform, and rescue living beings. For example, Shakyamuni Buddha, during one of his past lives, cut off his flesh for an eagle.

At that time the eagle was preying on a small bird. The bird knew that a certain old cultivator was compassionate, so it flew under his arm to escape from the eagle. The eagle tried to snatch the bird to eat it, but Shakyamuni, who was cultivating on the causal ground to become a Buddha, protected it.

Then the eagle said, "You can protect the bird, but if it lives, then I will die. If I don't have something to eat, I will starve. If you save the bird but don't save me, you will lack fairness and compassion. If you can't save me, you shouldn't save the bird either."

Shakyamuni Buddha said, "Since you eat meat, will it suffice if I give you some meat to eat?"

The eagle replied, "Yes. Give me some meat to eat."

The Buddha then said, "I'll give you my own flesh to eat," and he cut a piece from his body and gave it to the eagle.

After the eagle had eaten it he said, "I'm still not full. Give me another piece." And again Shakyamuni Buddha cut some flesh from his body. After the eagle had eaten all his flesh, it still wasn't full.

Shakyamuni Buddha said, "If you aren't satisfied after eating all my flesh, then you can eat my bones. Whatever you find left to eat, go ahead and eat it."

The eagle replied, "You really are a cultivator of the Way. In the future you will certainly become a Buddha." After he said this he flew into the sky and changed into his original form, a god who had come to test Shakyamuni the cultivator.

It is not known how many times Shakyamuni Buddha gave up his life to teach and transform living beings. Therefore it is said that there is not a single dust mote in the entire world where all Buddhas of the ten directions and the three periods of time have not given up their bodies and lives. In the past Shakyamuni Buddha made sincere vows to give away a thousand bodies to rescue living beings. Are we of the present capable of making vows of this magnitude? Can we give up our bodies and lives to teach and transform living beings? If you can, then you are one who follows and rejoices in the merit and virtue of the Buddhas. If you cannot, then even though you may feel that Buddhas of the past are very special and even though you may respect them, because you cannot give up your body and life, you only rejoice but do not follow.

On the other hand, if you can think, "The Buddha was a living being, and he renounced his body; I too am a living being, so I too can make a vow to give up my body for the sake of rescuing living beings." If you renounce your body, you should do so by really solving the problem of birth and death for living beings and rescuing the wisdom life of their Dharma Body, not by giving up your life in a stupid, worthless way. When you renounce your life, there should be some value in it. This is to follow and rejoice,

When we hear about renouncing life, but consider it too difficult, we will think, "I can't do that; I won't agree with that kind of dharma, I can't give up my body and life, and I won't practice these ascetic practices." A person who thinks like this is called one who neither follows nor rejoices. You do not follow along, and you do not rejoice in what others do. If you do any meritorious deeds, they are forced. If originally you were not going to do something, but you do it because everyone else is doing it, or you do it for fame or to gain profit, or for any other insincere reason, then you are forcing it, and are following without rejoicing. For example, in a certain country there are monks who burn their bodies for political reasons. They renounce their bodies, but they are not happy about it. They are angry and wish to fight. This is called following without rejoicing.

THEY DID THIS THROUGHOUT KALPAS AS MANY AS FINE MOTES OF DUST IN INEFFABLY INEFFABLE BUDDHALANDS. Life after life they gave up their bodies and lives, passing through great eons so many that the number cannot be known, through eons as numerous as the dust motes in all the Buddhalands. DURING EACH KALPA THEY GAVE UP THEIR HEADS, EYES, HANDS, AND FEET, AS MANY TIMES AS THERE ARE DUST MOTES IN INEFFABLY INEFFABLE BUDDHALANDS, and they did this throughout eons that cannot be expressed or explained, which are as numerous as there are dust motes that are just barely bigger than nothingness. They gave that many heads and eyes; they renounced their hands, feet, brains, and marrow that many times. They gave their heads, hands, feet, brains, and marrow, their bodies, and their lives.

IN THIS WAY THEY CULTIVATED ALL THE DIFFICULT ASCETIC PRACTICES. They cultivated ascetic practices which people find impossible to do. For example, at present there are those who wish to give their eyes to the world after they die to be used in eye transplants so that others may see. Some people donate their hearts, and others donate their lungs, kidneys, livers, and stomachs. They give away their organs to others. We look at these people and they appear as people, but in actuality they are Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who have vowed to become people to do these things. So even now you can see all these Buddhas who have this kind of spirit of giving. This kind of spirit is especially great. But vowing to eat just a small amount is not the kind of ascetic practice discussed here. Here we are talking about the ascetic practices involved in giving one's body and life to all living beings in order to rescue them. These are the ascetic practices which are really difficult to practice.

PERFECTED THE GATES OF THE VARIOUS PARAMITAS. Those cultivating the Buddha Path are able to cultivate all the Paramitas, all those methods which "lead to the other shore," to perfection. They do not just cultivate one kind, but cultivate many Paramitas: giving, holding precepts, patience, vigor, dhyana samadhi, Prajna—the Six Paramitas—methods of cultivation which, along with the other Ten Thousand Practices, take people across to the other shore of enlightenment.

THEY ENTERED AND WERE CERTIFIED TO EACH OF THE BODHISATTVA GROUNDS OF WISDOM AND ACCOMPLISHED THE UNSURPASSED BODHI OF ALL BUDDHAS. On the causal ground of cultivation, all Buddhas obtained all the different kinds of Bodhisattva wisdom, and in the end, those people on the Bodhi Path were certainly able to perfect the unsurpassed Bodhi of all Buddhas and obtain the Buddha fruit. UPON THEIR PARINIRVANA, they obtained the great Parinirvana of the Buddha; they reached the other shore of 'the great extinction'; they obtained Nirvana's fruit of bliss. THEIR SHARIRA WERE DIVIDED AND DISTRIBUTED after their cremation." SHARIRA are the Buddhas' solid relics which come from cultivating morality, samadhi, wisdom, and all the many methods of practice.

I COMPLETELY FOLLOW ALONG WITH AND REJOICE IN ALL OF THEIR GOOD ROOTS. Universal Worthy Bodhisattva made a vow to follow and rejoice in the merit and virtue of all Buddhas, who give their heads, eyes, brains, and marrow, which means that he will do likewise.

MOREOVER, AS FOR ALL THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF BEINGS, it does not matter whether their merit and virtue is great or small, or whether they are beings in any of the Six Destinies, born from any of the Four Kinds of Birth, I will follow and rejoice in whatever merit and virtue they create. IN THE SIX PATHS AND THE FOUR KINDS OF BIRTH IN EVERY WORLD IN THE TEN DIRECTIONS: The Six Destinies are the realms of gods, humans, asuras, animals, hungry ghosts, and beings in the hells. These are the Six Destinies of the revolving wheel of birth and death. The Four Kinds of Birth are birth from a womb, from an egg, from moisture, and by transformation. I FOLLOW ALONG WITH AND REJOICE IN THEIR MERIT AND VIRTUE AS WELL, EVEN IF IT IS AS SMALL AS A MOTE OF DUST. Even if they are unable to accomplish great deeds, and their acts of merit and virtue are as small as tiny motes of dust, I will still delight and follow them in doing these deeds.

I COMPLETELY FOLLOW ALONG WITH AND REJOICE IN THE MERIT AND VIRTUE OF ALL THE SOUND HEARERS, PRATYEKA BUDDHAS, all the living beings of the Ten Directions and the Three Periods of Time who belong to the vehicle of the Sound Hearers and the vehicle of the Pratyeka Buddhas, those 'enlightened to conditions,' as well as LEARNERS AND THOSE BEYOND STUDY IN THE TEN DIRECTIONS AND THE THREE PERIODS OF TIME. "Learners are those of the first, second, and third stages of Arhatship. One who has reached the fourth stage of Arhatship is called one "beyond Study." I FOLLOW ALONG WITH AND REJOICE IN THE VAST AND GREAT MERIT AND VIRTUE, and will myself perform the meritorious deeds OF ALL BODHISATTVAS WHO IN THEIR QUEST FOR UNSURPASSED, RIGHT, EQUAL BODHI,

CULTIVATE MEASURELESS DIFFICULT ASCETIC PRACTICES. Their quest and their goal is the unsurpassed, right and equal, right enlightenment. On this path the merit and virtue created by all Bodhisattvas is vast and great, and Universal Worthy Bodhisattva says, "I follow along and rejoice in it."

SO IT IS THAT EVEN IF THE REALM OF EMPTY SPACE IS EXHAUSTED, THE REALMS OF LIVING BEINGS ARE EXHAUSTED, THE KARMA OF LIVING BEINGS IS EXHAUSTED, AND THE AFFLICTIONS OF LIVING BEINGS ARE EXHAUSTED, MY FOLLOWING AND REJOICING ARE ENDLESS—still my vow to follow and rejoice will be without end. THEY CONTINUE IN THOUGHT AFTER THOUGHT WITHOUT CEASE. In each thought I will unceasingly bring forth this vow. It can never be cut off, and MY BODY, MOUTH, AND MIND NEVER WEARY OF THESE DEEDS. I make this vow with my body, with my mouth, and with my mind; with the three karmas of body, mouth, and mind, I make this vow and there never is a time when I become tired, nor will there ever be a time when I feel I have completed this vow. I constantly make this vow and never get lazy. The more difficult it is, the more I have reason to wish to do it. This is the true vigor of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva.

