

# *The Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra*

## *Chapter Fifteen, Welling up from the Earth*

*with commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua*

### **SUTRA:**

**Having welled up out of the earth, all the Bodhisattvas went to the Wonderful Stupa of Seven Jewels in empty space, where the Thus Come One Many Jewels and Shakyamuni Buddha were. Arriving there, they turned towards the two World Honored Ones, and bowed with their heads at those Buddhas' feet. They went on to the places of all the Buddhas on lion's thrones beneath jeweled trees, circumambulated them three times to the right, put their palms together respectfully, and praised them with various Bodhisattva praises, then they withdrew to one side and gazed joyfully at the two World Honored Ones.**

### **COMMENTARY:**

**Having welled up out of the earth, all the Bodhisattvas**, the uncountable great Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas, emerged from the ground and **went to the Wonderful Stupa of Seven Jewels, in empty space, where the Thus Come One Many Jewels** was. Each Bodhisattva went up into space to the place where the stupa made of seven gems was. They went to see Many Jewels Thus Come One **and Shakyamuni Buddha. Arriving there**, after they got to that place, **they turned towards the two World Honored Ones**, Many Jewels and Shakyamuni, and **bowed with their heads at those Buddhas' feet**. They made full prostrations with their five limbs on the ground. They were singlemindedly respectful and placed their palms together. They **went on to the places of all the Buddhas on lion thrones beneath jeweled trees**. They went to the Buddhas who were seated on lion seats, underneath precious trees, and who had come from the ten directions. Each of those Buddhas who had come from the ten directions was on a lion throne, and the Bodhisattvas went to where they were and bowed to them. They made obeisance to them, and **circumambulated them three times to the right**. Walking to the right around them thrice was a gesture of particular respect. They **put their palms together respectfully**. Placing their palms together represents purity of mind karma. Their body karma was also pure, **and they praised them with various Bodhisattva praises**. They sang praises that Bodhisattvas use to mutually laud one another as well as praises to Buddhas, such as the **one** that begins "Amitabha's body is the color of gold."

We, too, sing praises every day, such as the praise to Shakyamuni Buddha:

In the heavens above, and in all that is below,  
Nothing compares to the Buddha.  
Throughout the worlds of the ten directions,  
He is beyond compare.  
Of all I have seen in the world,  
There is nothing at all like the Buddha.

We also recite the praise to Amitabha Buddha:

Amitabha's body is the color of gold;  
The splendor of his hallmarks has no peer.  
The light of his brows shines round a hundred worlds;  
Wide as the seas are his eyes pure and clear.  
Shining in his brilliance by transformation,  
Are countless Bodhisattvas and infinite Buddhas.  
His forty-eight vows will be our liberation;  
In nine lotus-stages we reach the farthest shore.

Those are praises to the Buddhas. Since we sing them every day, we should know when we sing them that we are using praises to laud the Buddhas. Don't sing them through and then when you're done wonder what you've been doing. Don't let it be that you only know how to sing but don't know the meaning behind what you are singing day after day, thinking, "Oh, this is really good to listen to," and not have any idea why you are singing. Don't say that the Dharma is praising the Buddha.

Many who study Buddhism favor certain people who lead the ceremony and sing particularly well. Some leaders of ceremonies recite so beautifully that the women who hear them become confused by it. They pursue the leader so they can listen to him recite the Sutras. Some who can do the Ceremony for Those With Flaming Mouths (yen ko 焰口) recite: NAN WA DZ LA NAN CHA YA HUNG, and those listening are moved: "Oh, he recites well." But they don't know what he is saying. If you ask them, "What is he reciting?" they reply, "How should I know?" They just listen to the sound of the recitation and if it is sung well, they become confused. Many, many people are like that. That's what's meant by being superstitious (迷信 mi syin, literally "confused faith"). In China there's a saying about the people who are doing the Ceremony for Those With Flaming Mouths that refers to what they are really chanting: WA DZ LA, NA CHYAN YA HUNG, KAN KAN JI DYAN JUNG. They say, "It's not early. Watch the time. Recite faster!" Originally, the line should be: NA CHA YA HUNG. But they say, NA CHYAN (拿錢), "take the money YA HUNG." Now that I've taught you this, you can all recite this way when you do the Ceremony for Those With Flaming Mouths, especially here in America where the language is English, not Chinese. Everyone will be awed and say, "Oh, they are reciting mantras!"

These Bodhisattvas withdrew to one side after they had made obeisance and sung their praises to all the Buddhas. They **gazed joyfully at the two World Honored Ones**. The Bodhisattvas were happy. They liked to look at Shakyamuni Buddha and the Thus Come One Many Jewels. You see, Bodhisattvas also have attachments: they like to see the Buddhas. There is a certain amount of attachment at whatever level you are. Getting rid of those attachments is what is meant by, "You should produce that thought which is nowhere supported (應無所住而生其心).

Someone is having a false thought: "Who does the Ceremony for Those With Flaming Mouths that way?"

I'll tell you: Me!

Someone else is thinking: "You talked about men who felt that women were giving them trouble, and so they ran off to the mountains. What about women? When they run off to the mountains, who is giving them trouble?"

Do you need to ask? Men, of course! You should be able to figure that one out for yourself.

#### **SUTRA:**

**From the time the Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas first welled up out of the earth, and while they praised the Buddhas with various Bodhisattva praises, a period of fifty small eons elapsed. During this time, Shakyamuni Buddha remained seated in silence, and the four assemblies were silent for fifty small eons as well.**

#### **COMMENTARY:**

**From the time the Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas first welled up out of the earth,** the Great Bodhisattvas had initially come out of the ground, **and while they praised the Buddhas**—Shakyamuni Buddha, Many Jewels Thus Come One, and the Buddhas of the Ten Directions, **with various Bodhisattva praises, a period of fifty small eons elapsed.** They praised the Buddhas for fifty small eons. **During this time, Shakyamuni Buddha remained seated in silence.** The Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas were singing praises to the Buddhas for fifty small kalpas. How long is that?

Each eon goes through "one increase and one decrease." During the rise of an eon, every one hundred years, people's lifespans increase by one year and their heights increase by one inch. When people reach an average lifespan of 84,000 years, then a decline begins. Having started from an average lifespan of ten years, and increased to an average lifespan of 84,000 years, a decline then sets in. Every one hundred years, the average lifespan decreases by one year, and the height by one inch. When it has decreased until the average lifespan reaches ten years, people are only ten inches tall. One cycle of increase and decrease is considered "one small eon." The Buddha sat quietly for fifty such small eons and did not speak the Dharma.

Someone might start calculating and say, "It's true the Buddhist Sutras are certainly boundless, but Shakyamuni Buddha was only in the world for about eighty years, and he lectured on the Dharma for forty-nine years in over three hundred Dharma assemblies, propounding the Dharma Flower Sutra for eight of those years. Why does the text of the Dharma Flower Sutra say that Shakyamuni Buddha spoke the Dharma Flower Sutra for fifty small eons? That's way off. There's no proof. Well, we won't talk about the fifty small eons. Let's talk about the Vimalakirti Sutra. The Elder Vimalakirti stayed in a ten-foot square room. But that space was able to contain thirty-two thousand lions' thrones, each of which was eighty thousand yojanas tall. How could his ten-foot square room

contain lions' thrones eighty thousand yojanas high? The thrones were so tall that the Sound Hearers found it impossible to climb up and sit on them. That's a case of,

The small manifests within the great;  
The great manifests within the small.  
The small does not obstruct the great;  
The great does not obstruct the small.  
This state of unobstructed interpenetration is not one which ordinary people comprehend.

If you understand it, then "fifty small eons" is like a single thought. If you don't understand it, then one knows not how long fifty small eons will be. Therefore, the small can manifest in the great, and the great can manifest within the small. The near can manifest within the far, and the far can manifest within the near.

Thus, fifty small eons is not a long time, and the time it takes for a single thought is not a short time. One thought can take fifty small eons, and fifty small eons can be contained in a single thought.

There is a story which makes this point very clear: Dhyana Master Miao Kau Feng was a cultivator who sat on the inverted lotus precipice of Hsi-tien Mu and meditated. Why did he go there to cultivate? It was a very dangerous meditation ledge. Were he to doze off in meditation, he would fall thousands of feet into the valley and be smashed to smithereens. Even a rock dropped from that height would be smashed to bits, to say nothing of a person.

He liked very much to sit in meditation, which he did quite often. In order to urge himself on in his cultivation, he vowed to go to that dangerous place. "Let's see me fall asleep now!" he said, positioning himself near the edge. He sat there for about seven days without falling asleep; he didn't dare! After all, his life was at stake. Therefore, no matter what, he simply would not fall asleep.

However, on the eighth day, he could no longer control himself. While sitting in meditation, he dozed off. As soon as he fell asleep, he slumped forward and tumbled right off the edge. Waking, he thought, "It's all over. I'm certainly not going to come out of this alive."

Just then, he put down his body and mind. "If I must die, then I will die. I'm not going to pay any attention; I'll get ready for the big sleep."

When he had fallen halfway down the mountain, Wei Tou Bodhisattva manifested his spiritual powers, and from right there in empty space, he dragged the Dhyana Master back up to the top of the mountain.

"Who is this protecting my Dharma?" the Master said.

"It is I, Dharma Protector Wei Tou!" came the reply.

The Dhyana Master suddenly became arrogant and had the thought: "You mean I moved Wei Tou Bodhisattva to protect my Dharma? Probably, in this world, the number of cultivators who are as courageously vigorous as I am is very small." And so he asked Wei Tou Bodhisattva, "How many cultivators are there in the world who work as hard as I do in their cultivation?"

"About as many as the hairs on a cow," said Wei Tou Bodhisattva dryly. "And since you are so arrogant, I'm not going to protect your Dharma again for eighty thousand great eons!" So saying, he took his jeweled pestle, rose up into empty space, and disappeared.

Dhyana Master Myau of Kau Feng really regretted what he had said. "Wei Tou Bodhisattva was protecting me, and I had to go and get arrogant. That was really a mistake," he lamented. Tears of remorse began to roll softly down his cheeks. He cried for quite a while before he gave rise to a renewed resolve: "I was cultivating before I knew that Wei Tou Bodhisattva was protecting me. Why should I quit cultivating now that I know he isn't? I should cultivate whether he protects me or not!" Then, with great determination, he took his seat on the ledge once again and commenced to meditate.

A little while later, sure enough, he fell asleep and dropped over the edge again, plummeting down the mountain.

"This time, I've really had it," he thought, "It's all over now!"

Suddenly, he was hauled back up to the top again. He was caught in midair when he was about halfway down. "Now who saved me this time?" he asked.

"It is I, Dharma Protector Wei Tou, once again," came the reply.

This irritated Dhyana Master Myau. "Old Brother Wei, didn't you say that you weren't going to protect my Dharma for eighty thousand great eons? Why did you save me again? Doesn't that make you a liar?"

Wei Tou Bodhisattva replied, "Your tears and shame were very genuine; they cancelled out eighty thousand great eons worth of time. Therefore, I was obliged to come to your aid. Your one thought of repentance took you across eighty thousand great eons!"

Why is this Sutra called the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra? It is because it is extremely wonderful, inconceivable. It's a state you have no way to see. If you use a telescope lens you can see things very far away, just as if they were right before you. Without the telescopic lens, you would have no way to see that far. The above story about Dhyana Master Kau Feng Myau proves that one thought can transcend fifty small eons, or even eighty thousand great eons. This is the same principle as looking at things through a telescope: what is long can become short; what is short can become long.

Time is not fixed. According to mundane truth (syu di 俗諦), speaking of it from the point of view of worldly dharmas, everything exists. But in terms of the real truth (jen di 真諦), everything is empty. Nothing is indestructible; nothing lasts forever. As to time, there is no past, present, or future. Past thought cannot be grasped; present thought cannot be grasped; and future thought cannot be grasped. Since the three periods of time cannot be grasped, time is also non-existent.

For fifty small eons, Shakyamuni Buddha remained seated in silence, **and the four assemblies:** the Bhikshus, the Bhikshunis, the Upasakas, and the Upasikas **were silent for fifty small eons as well.**