

The Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra

Chapter Fifteen, Welling up from the Earth

with commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua

SUTRA:

At that time, Maitreya Bodhisattva and the Bodhisattvas in the multitude numbering as many as the sands of eight thousand Ganges Rivers, all had this thought: "From of old, we have never seen or heard of these great Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas, who have welled up out of the earth and are standing before the World Honored One with palms joined, making offerings, bowing from the waist, and asking after him.

COMMENTARY:

At that time, Maitreya Bodhisattva: this is why the Buddha cannot casually praise the Bodhisattvas. It is all right for the Bodhisattvas to praise the Buddha, but it is not all right for the Buddha to praise the Bodhisattvas as he pleases. Here, as soon as the Buddha praises these Great Bodhisattvas, Maitreya Bodhisattva is the first to have a false thought. He gives rise to a doubt. What doubt does he have?

The Bodhisattva's name, Maitreya, is Sanskrit, and is translated as "Invincible" (無能勝). No one can be victorious over him. He is most victorious. Maitreya Bodhisattva and **the Bohdisattvas in the multitude numbering as many as the sands of eight thousand Ganges rivers, all had this thought:** How strange! They all had the same false thought at the same time. **"From of old, we have never seen or heard of these Great Bodhisattvas.** Where have they come from? There are so many of them and we don't recognize a single one. Maitreya Bodhisattva can fly and roam anywhere he wants to. He is a Great Master of the Dharma-body (法身大士), and so he roams in all lands, he has been everywhere, but he has never run into this great multitude of Bodhisattvas. Therefore he is quite astonished. "We've never seen them before. How can it be we have followed the Buddha for so long and have never seen all these Great Bodhisattvas? We don't recognize a single one of them. They have **welled up out of the earth and are standing before the World Honored One with joined palms, making offerings** to the World Honored One. They are **bowing from the waist and asking after him.** We have been with the Buddha a long time. Why haven't we ever seen them? They know the Buddha; do they recognize us? Why don't we recognize these Bodhisattvas?" They gave rise to those kinds of doubts.

SUTRA:

Then Maitreya Bodhisattva Mahasattva, knowing the thoughts in the minds of the Bodhisattvas, and so forth, numbering as many as the sands of eight thousand

Ganges Rivers, and wishing as well to resolve his own doubts, placed his palms together, faced the Buddha, and spoke verses.

COMMENTARY:

Then Maitreya Bodhisattva Mahasattva, a great Bodhisattva, knew the thoughts in the minds of the Bodhisattvas, and so forth, numbering as many as the sands of eight thousand Ganges Rivers....We needn't mention that Maitreya Bodhisattva had long since obtained the five eyes and six spiritual penetrations. And so as to what the Bodhisattvas **and so forth**, numbering as many as the sand grains in eight thousand Ganges Rivers, were thinking, the doubts they were having, Maitreya Bodhisattva knew. **As well as to resolve his own doubts:** He didn't understand either; he wanted to clear up his own questions. He **placed his palms together, faced the Buddha, and spoke verses.** They spoke verses in order to ask the Buddha what the reason for all this was.

SUTRA VERSES:

**These limitless thousands of myriads of kotis of Bodhisattvas are
forming a great host,
Such as we have never seen before.
We pray the doubly complete Honored One
Will tell us where they came from,
And why they are gathered here.
They have huge bodies, great spiritual penetrations,
And inconceivable wisdom;
They are solid in resolve and will,
And possess the great power of patience.
Living beings delight in seeing them,
But where did they come from?**

COMMENTARY:

These limitless thousands of myriads of kotis, so many Bodhisattvas! Such a vast host of great Bodhisattvas! Beyond count! Ultimately how many are there? Thousands of tens of thousands of millions of kotis—I can't figure out that number!

These **Bodhisattvas are forming a great host.** So many Bodhisattvas, **such as we have never seen before.** Although there are so many, I never met a single one of them in the past. I've been to many places, but I have never encountered any of these Great Bodhisattvas.

We pray the doubly complete Honored One will explain. We hope the Thus Come One, who is replete with both blessings and wisdom **will tell us where they came from.** These limitless boundless, thousands of myriads of kotis of Bodhisattvas are coming from what place? I've travelled to many places. I've gone on many vacations, but I've never

happened upon any of these Bodhisattvas. I've been all over the Dharma Realm, and I never encountered a one.

Why are they gathered here? What are the causes and conditions that bring them to assemble in this place? **They have huge bodies and great spiritual penetrations.** They are physically big—extremely tall. With such large bodies, their spiritual penetrations are also certainly not going to be small. They must have great spiritual penetrations. No doubt much greater by far than those possessed by Mahamaudgalyayana. **And** their's **inconceivable wisdom.** We can't fathom their wisdom. We have no way to comprehend the magnitude of their wisdom. Both their spiritual penetrations and their wisdom are vast. We can neither conceive of it with our minds nor express it in words.

They are solid in resolve and will. These great Bodhisattvas's determination is definitely firm and strong. Their three non-outflow studies of precepts, samadhi, and wisdom are certainly exceptionally solid. **They possess the great power of patience.** They possess the great power of giving, the great power of precepts, the great power of patience, the great power of vigor, the great power of samadhi, and the great power of prajna. **Living beings delight in seeing them.** Everyone likes to see these great Bodhisattvas. Everyone delights in hearing them speak the Dharma. **But where did they come from?** Will the World Honored One please tell us? We all want to hear about these causes and conditions.

Originally I was going to ask you to identify one of the Arhat disciples, whose accomplishment I mentioned yesterday. I had told you that if you couldn't answer, then I wouldn't lecture. But I forgot to ask prior to the lecture, and only remembered as I began to lecture. Once I thought of it, I said to myself, "I'd better just go ahead and lecture tonight and then ask at the end of the lecture. And if no one can answer the question, then I won't lecture tomorrow night. Because if I asked at the beginning of the lecture, right after I had ascended the Dharma seat, and then didn't lecture, that would disappoint everyone. But to ask now, at the end of the lecture, will prepare you in advance for the fact that I'm not going to lecture tomorrow night if no one knows the answer.

Question: And so, who is foremost in debate?

Answer: Mahakausthila.

All you need to do is remember this verse, and you'll be relatively well-informed about the Ten Foremost Disciples' abilities:

Shari is wisdom; Maudgal, penetrations.
Speaking the Dharma is Purna.
Subhuti is empty; Kausthila debates.
Kashyapa practices dhuta.
Ruddha has the heavenly eye,
Pali upholds the precepts,
Rejoicing (Ananda) has much erudition.
Practice in secret is Rahu.

SUTRA:

**Each and every Bodhisattva
Has brought a retinue,
Limitless in number
Like the Ganges sand grains.
Some of the Great Bodhisattvas
Lead retinues of beings as many as the sand grains in sixty thousand
Ganges Rivers.
Such are the Great Assemblies
Singlemindedly seeing the Buddha-path.
These Great Masters,
In number like the grains of sand in sixty thousand Ganges Rivers,
Have all come to make offerings to the Buddha
And to protect and uphold this Sutra.
Those with retinues comprised of as many as the sand grains in fifty
thousand Ganges Rivers
Are even more in number.
Those with retinues numbering forty, or thirty thousand,
Twenty down to ten thousand,
One thousand, one hundred,
And so forth down to the sand grains of a single Ganges river;
And those with a half, a third, or a quarter thereof,
Down to one ten-thousandth of a millionth thereof;
Or one-thousandth of a ten-thousandth of a nayuta thereof;
And the ones with tens of thousands of millions of disciples, on down
to half a million,
Are even more numerous.
There are also those with hundreds of tens of thousands,
Thousands, or hundreds,
Fifty, or ten,
Down to three, two, or one.
And those who come alone without a retinue,
Preferring isolation—
All these come before the Buddha
In numbers surpassing those just stated.
So large is the assembly,
That were one to count them
For aeons numbering more than
Ganges'sand grains,
Still one could not fully know them.**

COMMENTARY:

Each and every Bodhisattva. Maitreya Bodhisattva continues to question the Buddha about the Bodhisattvas who welled up out of the earth, not one of whom he has ever seen before.

Every one of those Bodhisattvas **has brought a retinue / limitless in number.** The actual count of all these Bodhisattvas would be extremely difficult to ascertain. They were limitless and boundless, **like the Ganges' sands. / Some of the Great Bodhisattvas / lead retinues** comprised of disciples who are **like the sand grains of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers.** They have that many disciples. **Such are the great assemblies / single-mindedly seeking the Buddha-path./**

These Great Masters, / in number like the sand grains in sixty thousand Ganges Rivers / have all come to make offerings to the Buddha. They all make offerings to the Buddha at the same time, **and they arrive to protect and uphold this Sutra.** They wish to make vows to protect and maintain the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra.

Those with retinues of disciples as many as the sands of fifty thousand Ganges Rivers / are even more in number. Perhaps there are those whose retinues surpass the number fifty thousand or are less than fifty thousand. There are **those with retinues numbering forty, or thirty thousand** disciples. Some bring **twenty, down to ten thousand, / one thousand, one hundred / and so forth down to the sands of a single Ganges River.** Or they bring disciples whose number was **a half, a third, or a quarter thereof, / down to one ten thousandth of a millionth thereof: / or one thousandth of a ten thousandth of a nayuta thereof;/ and the ones with tens of thousands of millions of disciples, on down to half a million disciples are even more numerous.** Maybe they bring more or less than the above numbers.

There are also those with hundreds of tens of thousands,/ thousands, or hundreds, in their retinues. Some bring **fifty, disciples or ten / disciples.** Some bring **down to three, two, or one** disciple. **And** there are **those who come alone without a retinue.** Maybe there are Bodhisattvas who come by themselves because they prefer not to take disciples, feeling that disciples often fail to heed instructions and make all kinds of trouble. **Preferring isolation,** some cultivators come all by themselves. But now even they—**all these come before the Buddha / Shakyamuni, in numbers surpassing those just stated.** There's really no way to calculate their number. **So large is the assembly / that were one to count them / for great aeons numbering more than Ganges'sands, / still one could not fully know them.** Never could their number be completely known.

SUTRA:

**Who spoke the Dharma for
All these of great awesome virtue—
This vigorous host of
Bodhisattvas—
Teaching, transforming, and bringing them to accomplishment?
Under whom did they first bring forth their resolve?**

**Whose Buddhadharma do they praise and proclaim?
Whose scriptures do they receive, uphold, and practice?
And which Buddha's Way do they cultivate?
Such are the Bodhisattvas' powers
Of spiritual penetrations and great wisdom,
That throughout the four directions,
The earth quakes and splits open.
And they rise up out of it.
World Honored One, from of old,
I have never seen such a thing.
Pray tell us the names
Of the countries they come from.
I am always roaming through the lands,
But I have never seen this assembly.
I do not recognize
A single one in this multitude.
Suddenly they have welled up out of the earth.
Pray explain the reason why.
Now, in this great assembly,
The limitless hundreds of thousands of millions
Of Bodhisattvas all
Wish to understand this event:
The causes and conditions, first to last,
Of this host of Bodhisattvas.
O World Honored One of limitless virtue.
We only pray you will resolve the assembly's doubts.**

COMMENTARY:

Who spoke the Dharma for / All these of great awesome virtue—these greatly virtuous Bodhisattvas, must certainly cultivate vigorous practices. They definitely must be extraordinarily vigorous. That must be why now they are endowed with such awesome virtue. **This vigorous host of Bodhisattvas**—they are a great multitude, and they vigorously cultivate the Bodhisattva Way. But now they have become great Bodhisattvas. Who spoke the Dharma for them in the beginning? Who did they study the Dharma with? Now we want to know this.

Who has been **teaching, transforming, and bringing them to accomplishment?** Who has been helping them accomplish their Bodhisattva deeds in the Way. Who taught and transformed them? We are wondering about these things. **Under whom did they first bring forth their resolve?** Which Dharma Master were they following when they brought forth their very first resolve? Under which Dharma Master did they leave home and cultivate the Way? Under whom did they first bring forth their resolve?

In cultivation, bringing forth the initial resolve is the most important event for a cultivator. You should never forget your initial resolve. Why did you first bring forth the

resolve to investigate the Buddhadharmas? Why after you investigated the Buddhadharmas did you want to leave home? Now that you have left the home life, how should you proceed? These are important matters. You shouldn't be all muddled, learn some confused Buddhadharmas, leave the home life in a confused way, and then become a confused monk who does confused things. That's what you should not do. Therefore, you must be vigorous. Never forget that one thought when you first brought forth the resolve. Why did you decide to leave the home life? There are so many other things you could have done with your life. And so the question is asked: under which Dharma Master did they make their initial resolve?

Whose Buddhadharmas do they praise and proclaim? Which Buddha's Dharma do they laud? What Buddhadharmas do they extol? **Whose scriptures do they receive, uphold, and practice?** What Sutras do they cultivate? Did they rely on the Store Teaching in their cultivation? Or did they rely on the Penetrating Teaching in their cultivation? Or did they rely on the Differentiating Teaching in their cultivation? Or do they rely on the Perfect Teaching in their cultivation? What teaching's principles do they use as the foundation for their cultivation? What Sutras do they follow in their cultivation? Do they rely on the Dharma Flower Sutra in their cultivation? Do they rely on the Shurangama Sutra in their cultivation? Do they rely on the Flower Adornment Sutra, with its endless, endless entrances into practice, in their cultivation?

Or do they cultivate the Pure Land Dharmas? Do they cultivate the Chan School? Do they cultivate the Secret School? Do they study and practice the Teaching School? Chan, Teaching, Vinaya, Secret, and Pure Land are the five teaching schools. Which ones did they use as their entrances into practice? What Buddha's way do they cultivate and practice. Do they hold precepts? Practice patience? Or do they practice giving? Do they cultivate vigor? Do they cultivate chan samadhi or prajna? These are the things we are not clear about.

Such are the Bodhisattvas' powers. There are so many Bodhisattvas you could never count them. Their **spiritual penetrations and great wisdom** are such. Their spiritual penetrations are great, and the power of their wisdom is great. Because their wisdom-power is great, their spiritual penetrations are great. Because they have great spiritual penetrations, they have great wisdom. **Throughout the four directions / the earth quakes and splits open.** Because their spiritual powers are great and their wisdom is great, the earth—north, south, east, and west—trembles and splits open **and they rise up out of it.** They issue forth, welling up out of the earth like a bubbling spring.

World Honored One, from of old—from the long distant past onwards—**I have never seen such a thing.** I have seen many inconceivable states, but this state I have never seen.

Just imagine, even Maitreya Bodhisattva has never seen such an event. I hope the World Honored One will be greatly compassionate and tell us where these Bodhisattvas have come from. **Pray tell us the names of the countries they come from.** What countries are they in and what are the names of those countries? Although I am a Bodhisattva, I don't know anything about these matters. **I am always roaming through the lands.**

Previously I told you that Maitreya Bodhisattva is always taking vacations—going on holidays—to all the different countries. Now he tells us that himself. No wonder Americans love to go on vacations. Even Bodhisattvas like to travel. **But I have never seen this assembly.** Although I have been to many lands—I've been everywhere—I have never met these Bodhisattvas. **I do not recognize / a single one in this multitude.** I don't have a single friend among them. I'm not acquainted with any of them.

Suddenly they have welled up out of the earth. / Pray explain the reason why. He is unclear about what is happening. Even Maitreya Bodhisattva is confused, because he doesn't know who they are. Not knowing is a kind of confusion. "Although I'm unclear, I'd like to get clear. Shakyamuni Buddha, please tell us about the causes and conditions of these Bodhisattvas. Let us hear about them. Will you do to it? Shakyamuni Buddha, I know you are very compassionate and surely you will tell us."

Now, in this assembly / the limitless hundreds of thousands of millions / of Bodhisattvas all, / not just I, Maitreya Bodhisattva, wish to understand this event: They are of the same mind as I. I want to know because I know that they want to know. And so now I am requesting on their behalf. What are **the causes and conditions, first to last, / of this host of Bodhisattvas?** Their very beginnings are their formative stages. I want to know their formative stages on through to the very end. I want to know their causes and conditions. We want to know their proximate causes and remote causes. I want to know their background. We want to know all about them. **O World Honored One of limitless virtue, / we only pray you will resolve the assembly's doubts.** World Honored One, you have limitless blessings, limitless wisdom, and limitless virtue. My only hope is that you will resolve the assembly's doubts so we can all understand the causes and conditions behind what is happening here.