

The Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra

Chapter Sixteen, The Thus Come One's Life Span

with commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua

Correction: The beginning of Chapter Sixteen was accidentally left out of Issue #243. It is included here.

Now we have explained the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra as far as this chapter, the sixteenth, which is The Thus Come One's Life Span. Thus Come One is one of the Ten Titles of a Buddha. Some people who do not understand the Buddhadharma say, "Oh, that's the Thus Come One, the Buddha-Patriarch" (如来佛祖).

They think that "Thus Come One, Buddha-Patriarch" is the name for one particular Buddha. Actually, Thus Come One is a title given to all Buddhas. All the Buddhas of the ten directions and three periods of time—no matter which ones—are called "Thus Come One;" they are all called "One Worthy of Offerings" (應供); they are all called "One of Proper and Universal Knowledge" (正徧知), "One Who is Perfect in Understanding and Conduct" (明行足); "Skillful in Leaving the World Through Liberation" (善逝世間解);

"Unsurpassed Knight" (無上士) ; "Taming Hero" (調御丈夫); "Teacher of Gods and People" (天人師); "Buddha" (佛); "World Honored One" (世尊). They all have those ten titles.

Now we'll discuss the first title: Thus Come One. What is meant by Thus Come One? The Vajra Sutra says: "The Thus Come One doesn't come from anywhere and doesn't go anywhere. Therefore, he is called the Thus Come One." (如来者無所從來亦無所去故名如来)

Another explanation says: "He rides on the Way that is actually thus and comes to realize Proper Enlightenment (乘如實之道來成正覺) . "Thus" refers to the wisdom on which he rides (如如的智). "Come" refers to the state of thusness (如如的境). He uses the wisdom of thusness to contemplate the state of thusness. When the state and the wisdom are both thus, then there is no state and there is no wisdom. That state and the wisdom unite into one. The Way is the cause. Enlightenment is the fruition. This is called the perfection of the cause and fulfillment of the fruition (因圓果滿). Because the cause is perfected, the fruition is fulfilled, and so he is called a Thus Come One. Thus Come One is one of the titles of the Buddhas.

There are also two Buddhas (二佛) and three Buddhas (三佛). There is also the fundamental Buddha(本佛), and the discernible Buddha(迹佛). What are the two

Buddhas? They are the true body Buddhas (真身佛) and the response-body Buddhas (應身佛).

"True" means unmoving true thusness: (真如不變), not moving and yet according with conditions (不變隨緣). This is setting forth the name based on the substance (從體立名). It's a substance. As to the response bodies: although they accord with conditions, they do not move; although they do not move, they accord with conditions.

Let's use an example to illustrate more clearly. The true body is like the bright moon in space. The response body is like the moonlight on water. Because there is truly the light of the moon, there is a reflection of moonlight on water. Although there is moonlight on the water, the moon does not come to that place, and the bright moon in space does not indicate that the moon has gone there. This is described as:

In a thousand pools of water are (千潭有水)
a thousand pools' moons. (千潭月)

If a thousand pools have water in them and the water is pure, there will be a thousand moonlights. The thousand moonlights are certainly not a thousand moons that have come down into the water of those pools. But although the moonlight is not the basic substance of the moon, nonetheless, there is moonlight in the pools. Although the moonlight is in the pools, it's not that the moon itself came down into the pools. Thus it is said:

In a thousand pools of water are a thousand pools' moons.
(千潭有水) (千潭月)
Ten thousand miles devoid of clouds is ten thousand miles of sky.
(萬里無雲) (萬里天)

When there are no clouds for ten thousand miles, there will be ten thousand miles of clear sky. The Thus Come One is also like that.

That is, Shakyamuni Buddha came into this world and manifested being born. Although he manifested being born, he did not go through birth. Although he manifested passing into extinction, he didn't pass into extinction. Why? His basic substance did not move.

When Shakyamuni Buddha came into this world it was:

Without undergoing birth, he manifested being born. (無生示生)
Without passing into extinction, he manifested extinction. (不滅示滅)

His basic substance, his Dharma body, the true body Buddha, did not move. Therefore, you do not want to think that the Buddha is the same as us living beings. The Buddha's coming into the world is not the same as the way we have come into the world. Shakyamuni Buddha, while still in his mother's womb, was already speaking Dharma for

the gods, dragons and others of the eight divisions of ghosts and spirits. He spoke the Dharma for gods and humans.

Now we shall explain "The Thus Come One's Life Span" chapter. "Life" (壽) can be explained with the homonym "feeling" (受), which is one of the five skandhas. Life refers to feeling (壽者受也). "Span" refers to its accumulation in numbers of years. How long is the span of the Thus Come One's life? It is incalculable; uncountably many years long. This, then, is the "Thus Come One's Life Span" chapter.

The meaning of Thus Come One is indeed vast. If we were to only explain the word "Thus" and the word "Come" in detail, it would take several years. The meaning of "Thus" is similar to the meaning of "wonderful." One who is not "Thus" is not "wonderful." One who is not "wonderful" is not "Thus." The Thus Come One, then, is also the Wonderfully Come One. To be Wonderfully Come is not to have come in the way that we people have. We people do not know how we were born. We don't know how we will die. A Thus Come One knows how he was born, and he knows beforehand when he will enter Nirvana.

Now to speak of the Thus Come One, with his vast virtue. As the Flower Adornment Sutra Preface says:

He is wealthy with ten thousand virtues, and cleansed without the finest dust.

National Master Ching Lyang praised the Buddha this way:

*Therefore, our World Honored One (故我世尊)
The ten bodies just fulfilled, (十身初滿)
Proper Enlightenment first perfected, (正覺始成)
Rides vows and conduct all-pervasive. (乘願行以彌綸)
He unites with empty space in substance and nature, (混虛空為體性)
Is wealthy with ten thousand virtues, (富有萬德)
And cleansed, without the finest dust. (蕩無纖塵)
The pellucid waves of his deep, sea-like wisdom, (湛智海之澄波)
Are empty, yet hold a myriad reflections. . (虛含萬象)
The full moon of his glistening, space-like nature, (皎性空之滿月)
At once scatters into one hundred streams. (頓滿百川)*

This is praising the Thus Come One:

*Without rising from beneath the King of Trees, (不起樹王)
He extends to seven places in the Dharma Realm. (羅七處於法界)
He sat beneath the Bodhi tree and spoke the Flower Adornment Sutra.
Unhindered by the bounds of afterwards, (無違後際)
He pervades the nine assemblies, as he first succeeds. (暢九會於初成)*

Therefore, the state of the Thus Come One can never be completely expressed.

We have already discussed the meaning of the two Buddhas. There are also three Buddhas, Thus Come Ones, also called Three Bodies of a Thus Come One. The Three Buddhas are: the Buddhas of the past, the Buddhas of the present, and the Buddhas of the future. The past refers to those who have already become Buddhas; the present refers to those who are about to become Buddhas now; the future refers to those who have not yet become Buddhas. And so, even those who have not yet become Buddhas are counted here as Buddhas.

The three bodies of a Thus Come One are: the Pure Dharma Body; the Perfect Reward Body; and the millions of transformation Buddha pervades all places. There is no place he is and no place he is not. There is no place where he exists and yet there is no place that he doesn't exist. Well, ultimately does he exist or doesn't he? He both exists and does not exist.

You say, "The Pure Dharma Body Vairochana Buddha, I know must certainly not exist in unclean places. That's because he's pure. Impure places definitely wouldn't house his Dharma Body."

That's not the way it is. Purity and impurity are discriminations made on the part of people. From the point of view of a Buddha, impurity is also pure. Purity is even more pure. Don't you remember in the *Dharma Flower Sutra*, when there were three transformations of heaven and earth (三變土天). That's an example of purifying the impure places. To repeat, the first is the pure Dharma Body, Vairochana Buddha.

The Perfect Reward Body, Nishyanda Buddha. Translated, Nishyanda means "pure and full" (淨滿). This body is also pure. As Shakyamuni Buddha was speaking the *Great Means Expansive Buddha Flower Adornment Sutra*, he manifested the ten-thousand-foot Nishyanda Buddha-body. But those of the Two Vehicles could not see him nor hear him. Those of the Two Vehicles saw the Buddha as a six-foot-tall Bhikshu. But the Great Knights of the Dharma Body (法身大士), the Great Bodhisattvas, saw Shakyamuni Buddha as the ten-thousand-foot-tall Nishyanda Buddha, speaking the *Flower Adornment Sutra*. That is why it is said,

They had eyes but could not see Nishyanda Buddha.
(有眼不見盧舍那)

Those of the Two Vehicles have eyes, all right; some may have even opened the Heavenly Eye. But they still could not see the ten-thousand-foot-tall-body of Nishyanda Buddha.

They had ears but could not hear the Perfect, Sudden Teaching.
(有耳不聞圓頓教)

They had ears, but couldn't hear Shakyamuni Buddha speaking the Flower Adornment Sutra.

Once one of my disciples asked me, "Those of the Two Vehicles cannot see the ten-thousand-foot body of Nishyanda Buddha. We aren't even up to the level of the Two Vehicles; we haven't become enlightened or reached the state of those of the Two Vehicles. How is it we are able to read the *Flower Adornment Sutra*?"

That question has much principle. Those of the Two Vehicles' conditions had not yet become mature. That is why they were unable to see and hear the Great Vehicle Buddhadharma. They could neither see nor hear how the *Flower Adornment Sutra* was spoken.

Five hundred years after Shakyamuni Buddha entered Nirvana, Dragon Tree(龍樹) Bodhisattva had learned all the languages of the world. He had mastered them all. And he had already read all the books in the world. Thereupon he went to the Dragon Palace, where he secured the Flower Adornment Sutra, and took it back with him. To get to the Dragon Palace, he certainly did not ride in a submarine. He went by way of the state of a sage certified to the fruition. Although he was submerged in the water, the water did not drown him. When a certified sage enters into the water, the waters will naturally part, opening a path for him, and will not drown him. The state of a certified sage is just that wonderful; it's even more dependable than using a submarine.

When he got to the Dragon Palace, he read the Flower Adornment Sutra, and committed it to memory. That was how he brought it back to the world. And so now we are able to see the Flower Adornment Sutra, because our conditions have become mature. Thus, the Reward-body Thus Come One spoke the Flower Adornment Sutra.

There are also millions of transformation-body Shakyamuni Buddhas. Transformation-bodies are sometimes called Response-bodies. To review:

The Two Bodies are—

- 1) the true body, that is, the Dharma Body, and
- 2) the Reward Body.

The Three Bodies are—

- 1) the Dharma Body;
- 2) the Reward Body, and
- 3) the transformation bodies.

Someone who heard me say that Dragon Tree Bodhisattva went to the Dragon Palace to get the Flower Adornment Sutra had this thought, "I can't believe something like that really happened. How could a person, without the use of a submarine, go to the Dragon Palace?"

A child of three has no way to know the state of a child of thirteen. A thirteen-year-old child can't know the state of a young adult of twenty-three. A young person of twenty-three can't know the state of a mature person of forty-three. A forty-three-year-old mature individual can't know the state of a person of eighty.

Therefore since you don't have the requisite level of scholarship, and you do not have this kind of wisdom, of course you will not be able to believe an event like this. Not only do you not believe; many, many children cannot believe the things that adults do. And while you are still at the stage of disbelief, I have no way to make you believe. You are still too young.

Children don't realize they are children. Once they grow up, they think back, "Oh, that time of life I really had a lot of fun. How could I have put mud in my mouth and eaten it?" And yet they know they certainly must have done that when they were children. That's because young children put whatever they find into their mouths first. It doesn't matter to them what it is. They pay no attention to whether it is clean or unclean. Children only know how to eat, aside from that they understand very little principle.

If you want to understand, you should investigate the Buddhadharma. After you understand the Buddhadharma, you will come to understand what you now don't understand. Without my telling you, you will understand. Before you have at least investigated the Buddhadharma, you have no basis for belief or disbelief. If you believe, I gain no advantage from it. If you don't believe, I don't suffer any disadvantage. I am propagating the Buddhadharma and you want to investigate the Buddhadharma. We set aside some time to investigate it together. Investigating it to the point of understanding, there is no need for belief or disbelief.

When you grow up, you don't have the same kind of thinking you had as a child.

"Who are you talking to?" someone wonders.

If you think it's being said to you, then it's being said to you. If it didn't even occur to you to wonder who it's being spoken for, then it's being spoken for someone other than you. That other person has nothing to do with you, so you don't need to protest, "I'm not a child."

You are an adult. Adult shouldn't lack understanding of the things they ought to understand.

Sutra:

At that time the Buddha spoke to the Bodhisattvas and the entire great assembly, saying, "Good Men, you should believe and understand the sincere and truthful words of the Thus Come One.

Once again he told the Great Assembly, "You should believe and understand the sincere and truthful words of the Thus Come One."

He again told the Great Assembly, "You should believe and understand the sincere and truthful words of the Thus Come One."

Then the Great Assembly of Bodhisattvas, with Maitreya as the leader, placed their palms together and spoke to the Buddha, saying "World Honored One, we only pray that you will speak for us. We shall believe and accept the Buddha's words."

They again said, "We only pray that you will speak for us. We shall believe and accept the Buddha's words."

A third time they said, "We only hope that you will speak for us. We shall believe and accept the Buddha's words."

Commentary:

At that time, after speaking the chapter "Welling up from the Earth," the Buddha was ready to speak the chapter, "The Thus Come One's Life Span." This chapter tells about how long the life of the Thus Come One is. This is the Sixteenth Chapter.

At that time, the Buddha spoke to the Bodhisattvas and the entire Great Assembly. The Buddha addressed all the great Bodhisattvas in the Dharma Assembly and all the rest of the Great Assembly, including the Bhikshus, the Bhikshunis, the upasakas and the upasikas, the gods, dragons, those of the eight divisions of ghosts and spirits, and all the good men and good women.

He said, **Good men.** There are so many of you good young people. **You should believe and understand the sincere and truthful words of the Thus Come One.** You should now purify your minds, gather in and guard your minds. In other words, I'm telling you not to have false thinking. Don't become weary. When listening to the Sutras you should give rise to reverence and respect. Don't have false thoughts. During the time you are listening to the Sutras, you must certainly make your minds clear and pure. Most importantly, you must believe. You should understand the Thus Come One's sincere and truthful words. Whatever the Thus Come One says is true and actual, with not a trace of falseness whatsoever.

After the Buddha said this to everyone, he probably saw that some people's minds were still giving rise to false thinking. Their false thoughts might have been chased away temporarily, but now they had come back and so those people hadn't heard what he said. What kind of false thinking were they having? Maybe they were wondering when the Buddha would begin to speak. And so now the Buddha was speaking, but they were involved in their false thoughts and so even though the Buddha was now speaking, they

weren't hearing him. But they definitely weren't deaf. It was only because they were engaged in false thinking that they weren't hearing.

The Buddha saw they were having false thoughts, and so he repeated himself. **He again told the great assembly, "You should believe and understand the sincere and truthful words of the Thus Come One."**

All of you should pay especially close attention to the words the Buddha wants to say to you. Every word is true, actual and not false. The Buddha is one whose words are true, real, appropriate and not false. What the Buddha tells you is the truth. He told them again. But probably among them were still some who were not listening attentively. They certainly weren't deaf. But they hadn't heard. It's just because they weren't being attentive.

And so the Buddha says it again, **Once again, he told the Great Assembly, "You should believe and understand the sincere and truthful words of the Thus Come One."** All of you in the Great Assembly should be particularly attentive. Believe the Dharma the Thus Come One speaks. Before I spoke provisional and expedient Dharmas in order to teach and transform you. Now I am opening the provisional to reveal the actual (開權顯實). I'm not using expedient Dharmas anymore. I'm speaking true and actual, not false, Dharma to you. What I am saying now is the truth.

Then the Great Assembly of Bodhisattvas, with Maitreya as the leader—at that time, among the great Bodhisattvas, Maitreya Bodhisattva was the head, the leader. He was the senior-seated one(上座), the foremost-seated one(首座). He sat in the first position. They **placed their palms together and spoke to the Buddha**. Acting as the leader of the Bodhisattvas, he placed his palms together and said to the Buddha, **"World Honored One, we only hope that you will speak for us."** He said, World Honored One, now our one and only wish is that you will quickly speak for us. **"We shall believe and accept the Buddha's words."** We Bodhisattvas in this Dharma Assembly should believe and accept the words spoken by the Buddha. We definitely will have no doubts. Whatever Dharma the Buddha speaks, we will believe. We absolutely will not doubt it at all. We will have no further doubts. Please speak for us right away, World Honored One. **They spoke in this way three times.** That's because when they spoke the first time, the Buddha did not respond. So they asked again. This showed that they were ever more sincere, ever more serious in their request. But after the second request, the Buddha still did not speak; he sat there silently. And so they asked a third time. This is called a three-fold *karmavachana* (三番羯摩), three requests. They asked for the Dharma three times. These requests for the Dharma represented their sincerity.

They said again, "We only hope that you will speak for us." After the three requests, they spoke again. Once more they asked. They made their request four times. They said, **"We shall believe and accept the Buddha's words."** We in the Great Assembly will definitely believe and accept the Dharma that the Buddha speaks.

Sutra:

At that time, the World Honored One, knowing the Bodhisattvas would not stop with three requests, spoke to them saying, "You should listen attentively! The power of the secret spiritual penetrations of the Thus Come One is acknowledged by all the gods, humans and asuras in the world who say that Shakyamuni Buddha, now having left the palace of the Shakyen clan and gone to a place not far from the city of Gaya to sit in the Bodhimanda, has attained *Anuttarasamyaksambodhi*. However, good men, I actually realized Buddhahood limitless, boundless, hundreds of thousands of myriads of *kotis* of *nayutas* of eons ago.

"By way of analogy, suppose a person were to grind into fine motes of dust five hundred thousand myriads of *kotis* of *nayutas* of *asamkhyeyas* of three-thousand-great-thousand world systems. Then suppose he were to travel to the east across five hundred thousand myriads of *kotis* of *nayutas* of *asamkhyeyas* of lands where he deposited one mote of dust. Suppose he continued in this way, traveling to the east, until all the motes of dust were gone.

"Good men, what do you think? Could the number of worlds he passed through be reckoned or counted?"

Commentary:

Maitreya Bodhisattva and the other Bodhisattvas in the Dharma Assembly beseeched Shakyamuni Buddha to speak the Dharma. **At that time, the World Honored One, Shakyamuni Buddha, knowing all the great Bodhisattvas would not stop with three requests**, they requested the Dharma three times and did not stop; they went on to ask a fourth time. He **spoke to them saying**—he said to all the Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas, **"You should listen attentively."** All of you Bodhisattvas, listen well! Pay attention. **The power of the secret spiritual penetrations of the Thus Come One**, the Buddha's secret practices, secret spiritual powers and entrances into the strength of his secret states **is acknowledged by all the gods, humans and asuras in the world**. All the people and so forth in the world, the gods and the asuras, the heavenly dragons and others of the eight divisions, say this.

What do they say? They say **that Shakyamuni Buddha now, having left the palace of the Shakyen clan**, the palace of the Pure Rice King—he left there and went **to a place not far from the city of Gaya**. It was about five miles from the mountain city. There he sat **in the Bodhimanda**. He sat beneath the Bodhi Tree and cultivated and attained *Anuttarasamyaksambodhi*. He became a Buddha there. He sat there for forty-nine days and became a Buddha there. He sat there for forty-nine days and became a Buddha. But actually that's not the way it is. How is it?

However, good men. I'm going to tell you how it really is. Good men, **I actually realized Buddhahood**—if you want to talk about when I actually became a Buddha, the time from then until now cannot be reckoned. It was an uncountable number of kalpas

ago, **limitless, boundless** great eons ago, **hundreds of thousands of myriads of *kotis of nayutas of eons ago***, a hundred *nayutas*, a thousand *nayutas*, ten thousand *nayutas*, a *koti of nayutas of kalpas* ago. It's impossible to say how long ago it was. The time has been too long. I can't give an accurate figure. All I can do is bring up an analogy. I can use an analogy to tell you. What's it like? **By way of analogy**, take **five hundred thousand myriads of *kotis of nayutas of asamkhyeyas of three thousand great thousand world systems***—that many lands; not only one three-thousand-great-thousand world system. This is to say that the time is so long, there is no way to calculate it. So what about all those worlds?

Suppose a person were to grind them into fine motes of dust. He takes so many three-thousand-great-thousand world systems—countlessly many of them—and grinds them, just like grinding rice into flour. He grinds them into dust. Those entire worlds are ground into dust. **Then, suppose he were to travel to the east, across five hundred thousand myriads of *kotis of nayutas of asamkhyeyas of lands***—he passes through that many lands—and then drops one mote of dust. **He deposits one mote of dust. Suppose he continued in this way, traveling east.** In the same way, he passes through five hundred thousand myriads of *kotis of nayutas of asamkhyeyas of lands* and puts down another mote of dust. Then he proceeds again for that same long distance and deposits another mote of dust, **until all the motes of dust were gone.** He deposits every last mote of dust in this way. **Good men**, all of you Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas, **what do you think?** Would you say that number was big or not?

Could the number of worlds he passed through be reckoned or counted? Could you use your thought to reckon them? Could you use the most clever mathematician to calculate them? Is there any way to know that number?