

The Flower Adornment Sutra

Chapter Forty Universal Worthy's Conduct and Vows

with commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua

Sutra:

*With bad advisors forever left behind,
From paths of evil one departs for eternity.
Soon to see the Thus Come One's limitless light
And perfect Samantabhadra's supreme vows.
Easily obtaining the blessings of long life,
Assured of rebirth in the human realm,
Before long he'll perfect and complete
The practices of Universal Worthy.
In the past, because of a lack of wisdom power,
The five unintermittent offenses of extreme evil I have done.
In one thought, they can all be wiped away.
By reciting the great kings of vows of Universal Worthy.*

Commentary:

With bad advisors forever left behind. It is said,

*When people are close to crimson, they become red;
When we are close to black ink, we become black;
If we contact brown, we become brown;
And if we touch yellow, we become yellow.*

You end up like the people with whom you associate. In China the saying, "The mother of Mencius chose her neighbors," concerns the same concept.

Mencius' family first lived next to a cemetery, which had a mortuary where corpses were prepared for burial and put into caskets. At that time, Mencius was very young and, like other children, he imitated his surroundings. What he saw taking place in the cemetery, he began to mimic in his play. The children made corpses and coffins out of mud and buried them in the ground, and they made pigs and goats, which they bowed to.

When his mother saw this, she said, "What good is it for my child to study these kinds of things? What future is there in this?" With that, she moved to another neighborhood.

This time Mencius' family found itself next to a butcher shop where pigs and sheep and other animals were killed. When Mencius began to study this kind of behavior, his mother would not stand for it, and so she moved again.

This time they moved next door to a school where a scholar named Tse Ssu taught students who came to study during the day, but who went home to eat and sleep. When his students entered the school, they bowed to the memorial plaque of Confucius and bowed again when they left the school, thus performing the proper etiquette for entering and leaving school.

When Mencius observed the students, he began to imitate their propriety. When his mother saw this she said, "It is right to live in a place like this; we should live here," and she enrolled Mencius in the school.

As a student, Mencius studied a new subject for a few days and then lost interest. His mother often wove at home on a loom. One day, when Mencius told her that he was not going to study anymore, his mother did not say a word, but she took out a knife and cut the thread in the cloth she was making.

When Mencius saw what she had done, he knew it was a mistake, and he knelt before his mother and said, "Why have you gotten angry? Did I do something wrong? Please tell me."

Mencius' mother replied, "Your not studying is just like my cutting the threads of this cloth. If you don't study, you will not accomplish anything in the future." Mencius thought, "If that's the way things are, then I had better continue to study."

Later he became, after Confucius, one of China's greatest sages. How was he able to become a sage? He became a sage because his mother emphasized education, moving three times until she moved to a place where Mencius would have a chance to study. If his mother had not moved in the beginning when they were living next to a cemetery, then Mencius would have grown up to be a mortician and would have taken care of corpses and graves. If they had remained next to the butcher shop, Mencius would have grown up to kill sheep and pigs. As a result of their moving next to a school, however, Mencius was able to perfect his studies and become a famous scholar.

The story of Mencius' education is an example of what is meant by being far away from bad advisors and drawing near to good advisors. This is the meaning of the saying,

*When people are close to crimson, they become red;
When we are close to black ink, we become black;
If we contact brown, we become brown;
And if we touch yellow, we become yellow.*

So it all depends on what you are near. When you draw near good advisors, the same principle applies; you become good like them. If you meet with bad advisors, however, they will teach you wrong methods. If you stay near them, you will become like them as they go everywhere disrupting people, being jealous, and obstructing others. That's one kind of bad advisor. Don't get close to such people, stay far away. If ever you should meet one, you should quickly get away from him. Therefore, the text reads, "With bad

advisors forever left behind." Why leave them behind? Because they don't teach you to cultivate good methods, only bad ones.

From paths of evil one departs for eternity. If you stay far away from bad advisors, you can eternally leave all evil realms. If you do not keep far away from bad advisors, however, you can easily fall into the three evil paths. The three evil paths are the hells, hungry ghosts and animals. Asuras are also sometimes included in the evil paths, and then they are called the four evil paths. The beings in these paths undergo the most extreme forms of suffering.

Why does a person undergo extreme suffering? Suffering comes from having learned all kinds of evil knowledge from bad advisors. Studying evil knowledge, you create evil offenses, and having created evil offenses, you fall into evil paths. Therefore, when you are apart from bad advisors, you can be far away from evil paths.

Soon to see the Thus Come One's limitless light. When you leave all evil paths, you can go to all the good paths. That's the way things work. Extinguishing evil in itself is good; the absence of evil is good. If you do good, you will have good karma and receive a wholesome retribution. What is wholesome retribution? To quickly be able to see the Buddha. So there is a saying, "Quickly see the Thus Come One Limitless Light." You will quickly be able to draw near and see Amita Buddha of the Land of Ultimate Bliss, the Buddha of Limitless Light, who is also known as the Buddha of Limitless Life.

And perfect Samantabhadra's Supreme Vows. When you reach the Land of Ultimate Bliss of Amita Buddha, you will be able to perfect the most supreme kings of vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, ***easily obtaining the blessings of long life.*** A person like this will quickly obtain a superior life span, which means that he will have a long life.

Buddhism speaks about not having the mark of a life span, but now the text mentions a long life span. Is this not the mark of a life span? This mark of a life span is not that which such a person seeks after, but comes about because he stays far away from all evil advisors, eternally leaves all evil paths and sees Amita Buddha. Although one does not seek for a long life, nonetheless one obtains the reward of a long life.

Not having the mark of a life span does not mean that if we want a long life, we cannot have a long life, or if we want happiness, we cannot get real happiness. When you leave for the Land of Ultimate Bliss, your life span becomes limitless, and your light becomes limitless. Amita Buddha has a limitless life span, and we can have one, too. Amita Buddha's light is limitless, and if we are born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, our light will be limitless as well. Therefore, the text says such a person will easily obtain the blessings of long life. He obtains it easily because of his good karma, not because of his attachments.

Assured of rebirth in the human realm. If this person wishes to teach and transform living beings, if he wants to return and be born among people, then everything he does will be perfect. This is called "wishing to return." If he does not want to return, he does

not need to, but if he wants to return, he comes very naturally. This is true freedom to come and go as you please.

Before long he'll perfect and complete / the practices of Universal Worthy. He will perfect the ten great kings of vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva and all their merit and virtue. The practices he perfects are the same as those perfected by Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, and since the strength of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva's practices is the greatest, your methods of practice as well can be perfected to be identical to his.

In the past, because of a lack of wisdom power. "In the past" means long ago in the distant past. Earlier the text reads,

*For all the evil deeds I have done in the past,
Created by my body, mouth and mind,
From beginningless greed, anger and delusion,
I now know shame and of them all repent.*

"For all the evil deeds I have done in the past, / created by my body, mouth and mind, / from beginningless greed, anger and delusion." Why do we have greed, anger and delusion? Because we do not have wisdom, and we are without the strength of prajna. Why do we do evil? Because we do not have any wisdom. Therefore, we create all kinds of evil karma. One with true wisdom would not create evil karma. So the text reads, "In the past, because of a lack of wisdom power, ***the five unintermittent offenses of extreme evil I have done.***" The "extreme evil I have done" refers to the bad karma which people create.

Who can create things? Who does not practice good dharmas but practices evil dharmas instead? It is the doer, the person who does things. If you have a doer, a creator, karma is created. Therefore, there is the doer and what is done. When karma is created, then the creator who made it must undergo the results of what he has done. Therefore, the text reads, *"the evil I have done."*

What is evil? There are five actions that are classified as extremely evil:

1. killing one's father
2. killing one's mother
3. killing an Arhat
4. disrupting the harmonious Sangha
5. spilling the Buddha's blood

People are inherently incapable of killing their parents, but there is a type of person who can commit this unthinkable crime. This type of person can commit the ten extremely evil acts and also the five rebellious acts.

There are some people who have killed their fathers, but very few have killed their mothers. Nevertheless, it still happens.

Killing an arhat means to kill one who has been certified to the fruition of Arhatship. This is also one of the five rebellious acts. Another of the five rebellious acts is disrupting the harmonious Sangha. The Sangha are always referred to as a harmonious assembly. The Sangha are made up of four or more people who have taken the complete precepts.

The Sangha are harmonious in six ways:

1. *Harmonious in body, they dwell together.* The Sangha do not fight or argue among themselves.

2. *With harmonious speech, there is no contention.* They are also harmonious in speech. When the Sangha are together, they do not argue about what is right and wrong, and they do not gossip about others or themselves. The Vajra Sutra discusses the Samadhi of Non-Contention. When those who have left the home-life live together, they should not contend. They should have the Samadhi of Non-Contention. As soon as you contend, the marks of self and others arise. When there are self and others, there is right and wrong. If there is right and wrong, then there is victory and defeat. Because of victory and defeat, there is the mark of living beings; and from the mark of living beings, there comes the mark of a life span. If you have these kinds of thoughts, you cannot obtain true samadhi, and so it is important to be harmonious in speech, without contention.

3. *With blissful minds, they are happy together.* The mind should also be harmonious. You should not think that you have your individual thoughts, and I have mine; my thoughts need not be harmonious with yours, and yours need not be harmonious with mine. Everyone should have harmonious minds and be happy together.

4. *Being harmonious with respect to benefits, each gets his share.* When there are good things, one shares them. It is not that one person gets everything. Everyone gets his share. Everyone is treated equally; you get some and I get some.

5. *Harmonious in views, each has the same understanding.* When studying the Buddhadharmā, everyone should agree and have similar views. Their views must be harmonious.

6. *Harmonious in the discipline, they cultivate together.* Everyone cultivates the precepts together.

These are the six kinds of harmony in the Sangha. When these six kinds of harmony prevail, the Sangha are called the harmonious Sangha. If you create factions and gossip in the Sangha and prevent the members of the Sangha from living in harmony, so that they are not satisfied with one another, so that they are jealous and obstructive of one another, you have done what is called disrupting the harmonious Sangha.

To spill the Buddha's blood is another of the five rebellious acts. Some people say that since we have been born after the time of the Buddha, we cannot spill the Buddha's blood. In fact, however, if what you do to Buddhism is harmful, it is considered spilling the

Buddha's blood. If you harm the Buddha jewel, that is spilling the Buddha's blood. You harm the Buddha jewel if you damage a Buddha image. Although it is an image, it is still spilling the Buddha's blood. All the Sutras are the wisdom life of the Buddha's Dharma body. Wherever there are Sutras, there is the Buddha—the Buddha's Dharma body. Therefore, if you burn or ruin Sutras, you spill the Buddha's blood. Further, if you burn a photograph of the Buddha, that too is considered spilling the Buddha's blood.

Members of the Sangha cultivate according to the Buddha's teachings so that in the future they will become Buddhas. To prevent the Sangha from being harmonious is also called spilling the Buddha's blood. It is not necessarily the case, then, that a Buddha must be in the world for you to spill the Buddha's blood. The Buddha has already entered Nirvana, but if you do not protect Buddhism, but rather you disrupt it or disturb one who has left the home-life, then you have spilled the Buddha's blood all the same. These are all classified under the five rebellious acts and are all considered to be extremely evil.

"Extremely evil" means that there is not a more severe evil act. The retribution for doing extremely evil acts is the Avici Hell. *Avici* is a Sanskrit word that means "unintermittent time" and "unintermittent *kalpa*." *Kalpa* is also a Sanskrit word which means "a division of time." There are five meanings of "unintermittent." The first is "unintermittent time." Once one enters the unintermittent hell, there is not a single moment when the suffering ceases from the first day one is there to the very last. This kind of suffering continues in time without interruption and so it is said that the time is unintermittent.

Avici also means "unintermittent form," referring to bodily form. When one falls into this hell, one sees oneself filling up the entire hell. Even if there are many people in the hell, one still fills up the entire hell, as do the others, without obstructing one another. You have your hell and I have mine, and everyone sees himself filling up his own hell. This is the meaning of unintermittent form.

The third meaning of *avici* is "unintermittent suffering." This refers to the suffering undergone when you fall into this hell. In this hell there is the hell of the mountain of knives, the hell of the pot of boiling oil, the hell of the iron trident, the hell of the iron stick, the saw hell, the iron net hell, the iron stove hell, the iron rope hell, the iron horse hell and so forth. All these different hells cause one to suffer, and because this suffering never stops, it is called "unintermittent suffering."

The fourth meaning of *avici* is "unintermittent retribution." It does not make any difference whether you are Chinese, American or any other nationality. When you go to this hell, you must undergo the retribution of that hell without cease. This is called "unintermittent retribution."

The fifth is "unintermittent life." When you fall into the Avici Hell, you undergo thousands of births and thousands of deaths in a single day and night. How is it that each day and night you are born a few thousand times, and you die a few thousand times? In this hell you undergo your retribution to such an extreme that you die. After you die, a stimulating wind, called the "clever wind," blows on you, and you spring to life again

only to immediately begin suffering. This process happens again and again. Therefore, in a night and a day you die and are born thousands of times. This is "unintermittent life."

In one thought, they can all be wiped away, / by reciting the great Kings of Vows of Universal Worthy. If you are able to recite this Chapter on the Conduct and Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, then in one thought, very quickly, you can destroy all your offenses, including all of the five unintermittent offenses.

Sutra:

***His clan, race and color, marks and characteristics
With his wisdom are all perfected and complete;
Demons and externalists will have no way to harm him,
And he's worthy to receive the offerings of the three realms.
To the regal Bodhi Tree he will quickly go,
And seated there subdue a horde of demons.
Right and equally enlightened, he'll turn the Dharma Wheel,
To benefit the host of living beings.***

Commentary:

His clan, race and color, marks and characteristics. "Clan" refers to your relatives, to your surname. "Race" means the race of people to which you belong, and "color" refers to whether you are yellow, black, red or white. "Marks and characteristics" refer to the thirty-two marks and eighty minor characteristics. ***With his wisdom are all perfected and complete.*** Your physical characteristics will be adorned, beautiful and complete, and your wisdom will be great. Therefore, the text reads, "perfected and complete."

to be continued...