

# *The Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra*

## *Chapter Sixteen, The Thus Come One's Life Span*

*with commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua*

### *Sutra:*

**Maitreya Bodhisattva and the others all said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, these world-systems would be limitless, boundless, beyond calculation, and beyond the power of the mind to know. All the Sound Hearers and Pratyeka Buddhas, using their non-outflow wisdom, could not conceive of them or know their limit or number.**

**"We now dwell on the ground of avaiivartika, but we cannot comprehend this matter, World Honored One, and so such world systems would be limitless and boundless."**

**At that time, the Buddha spoke to the great hosts of Bodhisattvas, saying, "Good men, I shall now explain this clearly for you. If all these world systems—whether a dust mote were deposited in them or not—were reduced to dust motes, and if each dust mote were an eon, the time which has passed since I became a Buddha would exceed even this by hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of nayutas of asamkhyeyas of eons.**

**"From that time on, I have always remained in the Saha world, speaking the Dharma, teaching and transforming beings. Also, in other places, in hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of nayutas of asamkhyeyas of lands, I have guided and benefited living beings."**

### *Commentary:*

**Maitreya Bodhisattva and the others—the great Bodhisattvas—all said to the Buddha. They simultaneously spoke to the Buddha. "World Honored One, these world-systems—that large number you just now described—would be limitless and boundless, beyond calculation. There would be no way to use numbers to calculate them. And they would be beyond the power of the mind to know. Nor is this something that the ordinary mind can comprehend. All the Sound Hearers and Pratyeka Buddhas—the Sound Hearers and Those Enlightened by Conditions—using their non-outflow wisdom, by means of their wisdom devoid of afflictions and outflows, still could not conceive of them. Although their wisdom is quite lofty, they have no way to know this number. They cannot know their limit or number. They can't know the reaches of this calculation. There is no certain number that can represent them. There is no way to know exactly how many they are.**

**"We now dwell on the ground of *avaivartika*.** We abide on the ground of no retreat. "*Avaivartika* is Sanskrit and is translated, "the ground of no-retreat" (不退地 *bu twei di*). No-retreat means:

1. Their position was irreversible (位不退 *wei bu twei*). They would not retreat to the Two Vehicles.
2. Their conduct was irreversible (行不退 *heng bu twei*). They would not retreat to the conduct of those of the Two Vehicles.
3. Their mindfulness was irreversible (念不退 *nyan bu twei*). They would not retreat to the thoughts of those of the Two Vehicles.

**But we cannot comprehend this matter.** We can't figure out this number. We can't understand this event. **World Honored One, such world systems would be limitless and boundless.** The World Honored One spoke of so many worlds. They have no bounds and no limit.

**At that time, the Buddha spoke to the great hosts of Bodhisattvas, saying:** Shakyamuni Buddha spoke to the multitude of great Bodhisattvas, saying, **Good men, I shall now explain this clearly for you.** Isn't it the case that you don't understand? Don't be nervous. Now at this time, I will clearly tell you. **If all these world systems,** which have no number, **whether a dust mote was deposited in them or not**—this includes all the worlds in which a dust particle was dropped, as well as the five hundreds of thousands of myriads of *nayutas of asamkhyeyas* of lands where a mote of dust was not dropped. Now, if all those many worlds—both those lands where a mote of dust was dropped in the land and those where one was not—were taken and ground together and **reduced to fine dust motes, and if each dust mote were counted as an eon,** a great kalpa, **the time which has passed since I became a Buddha,** from the time I realized the Buddha-Way to now, **would exceed even this.** That number is even more than the number I have just described, **by hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of nayutas of asamkhyeyas of eons.** The time since I became a Buddha is longer than this calculation of time by hundreds of thousands of myriads of *kotis of nayutas of asamkhyeyas* of eons. **From that time on to now, I have always remained** in the *Saha* world. I've always been in this *Saha* world speaking the **Dharma, teaching and transforming beings.** I have been speaking Dharma for living beings. Teaching and transforming all living beings. Not only have I been teaching and transforming living beings in this *Saha* world, but **also in other places.** I go elsewhere to speak the Dharma for living beings. **In hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of nayutas of asamkhyeyas of lands, I have guided and benefited living beings.** I use all kinds of methods, not fearing suffering, not fearing difficulty, to teach and transform living beings.

By "guided" the Buddha means that when he sees a living being, he assesses what that being likes, and then the Buddha speaks an appropriate Dharma for him. If he likes Great Vehicle Dharma, the Buddha speaks Great Vehicle Dharma. If he likes Small Vehicle Dharma, the Buddha speaks Small Vehicle Dharma for him. If he has the faculties of a Sound-hearer, the Buddha speaks the Dharma of the Four Truths for him. If he has the faculties of One Enlightened by Conditions, the Buddha will speak the Dharma of the

Twelve Causes and Conditions for him. For Bodhisattvas, he speaks the Dharma of the Six Paramitas and the myriad practices. Meeting with living beings with all different kinds of faculties, he speaks all different kinds of Dharmas for them. In general, "guided" means he directed and led them. "Benefited" means he did things to help them.

Shakyamuni Buddha, uncountable great kalpas ago, had already become a Buddha. Therefore, the Bodhisattva disciples he has taken across are so many. They fill up empty space throughout the three-thousand-great-thousand worlds. In the Dharma Flower Sutra, this is the "opening of the provisional to reveal the actual" (開權顯實 *kai chywan syan shr*). He tells when he actually became a Buddha. But the time was so long ago, there is no way to calculate it. This is spoken in the Dharma Flower Sutra.

The most wonderful and the longest sutra spoken by Shakyamuni Buddha is the Great Means Expansive Buddha Flower Adornment Sutra. That Sutra was requested from the Dragon Palace by Dragon Tree (Nagarjuna 龍樹) Bodhisattva. That is why we are now able to encounter that Sutra.

The Dharma Flower Sutra has been explained up to the Sixteenth Chapter. There are twelve chapters left. I believe the lecture series will be completed soon. After it is finished, if you are not afraid of its great length, and not afraid you will fail to understand it, we will explain the Flower Adornment Sutra. If you are afraid of its great length, then you don't have to listen. If you are afraid it will be too much for you, then don't listen. If you think "I only need to study a little Buddhadharma and that's enough," then you don't need to listen.

But, if you are not afraid of studying more Buddhadharma, then you can come to listen. I believe that at least one of my disciples will not fear its being too much. She has such a good memory, that if she gets a chance to remember more, that will be even better. If you are not afraid of there being too much, you can use your *prajna-brains*, your computer, to remember it. Don't fear it being too big or too extensive. And don't fear the length of time it will take. Consider how long it took Shakyamuni Buddha to become a Buddha--an incalculable amount of time. And he did not fear its being too long. I believe a big Bodhimanda is being prepared to be the Flower Adornment Way-place. There are very few places in the world where the Flower Adornment Sutra is taught. Those who explain the Flower Adornment Sutra are few, but the wonderful advantages of the Flower Adornment Sutra are many.

Today I spoke just a few sentences in praise of the Flower Adornment, and the translator got so upset, he broke out in a sweat. I'll tell you that I never heard the Flower Adornment Sutra lectured, because there are not many people who can explain it.

"Well, how can you lecture on it if you've never heard it lectured on?" you wonder. I can't not lecture it just because I haven't heard it. There are many things I haven't heard. If it's the case that such things can't be done by oneself, then one might just as well become a stone person. If you want to study the Buddhadharma, you must eat your fill of the Buddhadharma. In order to eat your fill, you must eat the Buddhadharma of the Flower

Adornment. If you don't investigate the Flower Adornment, then you won't know of the Buddha's true blessings and honor. The Buddha's true blessings and honor are the Flower Adornment Sutra. I'm now giving you this little bit of information. After the big Way-place is accomplished and I'm happy, I will transmit the big Dharma, the bountiful Dharma, to you.

I'll tell you a tale now. Although I have never heard the Flower Adornment Sutra lectured before, I myself have lectured it many times. But not in the present; I lectured it in the past. Why do I like to lecture on it? Because it's extremely well-written, especially the writings of National Master Ching Lyang; I really like them. I have tremendous affinities with those writings. I read them once and will never forget them. I can't forget them. That's because I don't want to be like a professor who lectures from his book, holding his book and copying things out. And so I am capable of explaining it to you.

I'll tell you another tale. If I forget, National Master Ching Lyang will remind me in a dream, saying, "That sentence goes like this...." He will say:

*Opening and disclosing the mysterious and subtle;  
Understanding and exposing the mind and its states.  
Fathoming the principle and exhausting the nature,  
Penetrating the result, which includes the cause.  
This is really wonderful! There's no way to explain it!*

**Sutra:**

**Good men, in that interval, I spoke of the Buddha Dipankara and others and further spoke of them as entering Nirvana. But these were just discriminations made expediently.**

**Good men, if a living being comes to me, where I am, I observe with my Buddha eye his faith and other qualities as well as the keenness or dullness of his faculties and take him across in an appropriate manner.**

**In place after place, although the names I refer to myself by are different, and my age may be older or younger, I also appear and announce that I am about to enter Nirvana. I also employ various expedient devices, speaking the subtle and wonderful Dharma and enabling living beings to bring forth happiness in their minds.**

**Commentary:**

**Good men:** The character *ju* (諸) here means many (多) — many good men. Very many good men means there were very few bad men. In fact we can say there weren't any, and so the reference is to many good men. That's one way to explain it. The character *ju* can also be used as an expletive or auxiliary participle. As such, it can refer to many or to one(—).

Someone says, "Dharma Master, you have explained this incorrectly. The character *ju* is always explained as many." No, you are hearing it explained as "*fe*" (否) and that should make it acceptable. If we explain this word as an expletive, then the text will read, "Good man." You, this good man. In that case, the one good man would refer to Maitreya Bodhisattva. Many good men would refer to all the good men, all the Bodhisattvas in the assembly. Now you should understand and from now on when you encounter the character *ju*, you should know it can be explained as "many" or as "one."

**In that interval:** In what interval? In the interval when the five hundred myriad *kotis* of *nayutas* of *asamkhyeyas* of countries were passed through and the one mote of dust was dropped. The five hundred myriad *kotis* of *nayutas* of *asamkhyeyas* of worlds were ground into fine dust, and then five hundred *kotis* of *nayutas* of *asamkhyeyas* of lands were passed through and a mote of dust was deposited until all the motes of dust were gone. Then all those lands that were passed through were further ground into fine dust. Each of those fine motes of dust was counted as a great kalpa. "In that interval" is that period of time. How long a time could that interval be? No human being could calculate it.

**I spoke of Dipankara Buddha and others.** In the midst of that I said, "At the time of Dipankara Buddha, I was known as Good Wisdom Bodhisattva." **And further spoke of them as entering Nirvana.** At the time of Dipankara Buddha, my name was Good Wisdom. When I met Dipankara Buddha, he bestowed a prediction upon me. He said, "In the future, you will become a Buddha called Shakyamuni." I also said that at such-and-such a time, Dipankara Buddha would enter Nirvana.

**But these were just discriminations made expediently.** The Dharmas I spoke of, I will now tell you. I will tell you the truth. What I said was expedient dharma. It was in accord with living beings' faculties that these causes and conditions were spoken. It was a matter of their basic foundation. It had to do with what they had "planted" in the cause ground. I spoke based on that. But these were just discriminations made expediently.

**Good men, if a living being comes to where I am,** he comes to the place where I, the Buddha, am, **I observe with my Buddha eye.** First I must look into it. What do I look with? I use the Buddha eye to investigate with. What do I look into? I regard **his faith and other qualities.** "And other qualities" refers to vigor, mindfulness, samadhi, and wisdom. 進, 念, 定, 慧。 Faith, vigor, mindfulness, samadhi, and wisdom are called the five roots(五根).

I look into and see if he has the root of faith. I look to see if he has the root of vigor. Does he have the root and power of being diligent and vigorous? Does he have the root and power of mindfulness? Is he mindful of the Buddhadharmas? Does he have the root and power of samadhi? In his study of the Buddhadharmas, does he learn the Buddhadharmas today and then tomorrow go to learn demonic dharmas? Does he study the Dharma of Bodhisattvas today and the dharmas of ghosts tomorrow?

What's meant by ghost-dharma? Don't you know? Maybe you haven't learned it before, and so you don't know the meaning of the term. It's whatever dharmas one does that one can't stand for others to know about. What are dharma-doors that one can't stand for others to know about? They are secret dharma-doors. Secret dharma-doors have within them spirits and ghosts. Be careful! If you don't listen to me, I will send a ghost to punish you. If you fear ghosts, then you have to do the bidding of their teacher.

But first I must state clearly to all of you. I don't have this talent. Don't be afraid of me. If you scold me, I won't send a ghost to make your lips swell up. And so if people scold me, they won't have to go through a retribution such as this. Don't be afraid. I don't have any ghost-dharmas!

*Samadhi and wisdom.* Wisdom also has its root. If you don't have the root of wisdom, you won't be able to bring forth the sprouts of wisdom. If you have the root of *prajna*, then you can *have prajna* sprouts. These five are called roots because they derive their meaning from coming forth and growing.

If you have *the root of faith*, as soon as you hear the Buddhadharma that the Dharma Master explains, you think, "Oh! The Buddhadharma is really good. I should believe it. People should follow the rules. They should not be lax in following the rules." You believe and then every day you follow the rules. Others eat one meal a day, and so you eat one meal a day. Even if someone told you to steal things to eat you wouldn't do it. Why should you follow the rules? Although you may say eating things is a small problem, do you really think it's a small problem? I think it's a big problem. If in eating you are unable to follow the rules, how much the less will you be able to follow other rules.

And so we start with the events of our daily life. In what you do each day you must have rules and regulations. You should have a standard, a goal in mind. "I definitely want to reach my goal. Whatever I have decided I should do, I will do it. I will reach my goal. "It's not that you come to the Buddhist Lecture Hall to listen to the Sutra lecture, but once the lecture is over, it's as if it had been so much wind passing by your ears. It passes by and is not retained, nor is it believed. You happen to have some friends who go there, so you just go along to see what it's like. Such people don't come to study the Dharma; they come to "take a look" at the Dharma. One must have faith.

Once one has faith, one must then be vigorous. If you only have faith, and you don't do anything, it's of no use. If you only have the root of faith, and you don't have *the root of vigor*, you don't have enough of what you need. You must be vigorous. "When I hear one sentence of Buddhadharma, I put that one sentence into practice. I hear ten sentences, and I put ten sentences into practice. I must be vigorous. I must go forward with vigor."

If you have *the root of vigor*, but you forget to apply it, you don't keep your mind on the fact that no matter what you are doing, you should be cultivating, then that's also of no use. "Today I will be vigorous. I won't eat, I won't sleep. I'll bow to the Buddha and be mindful of the Buddha." You do that for one day and one night and you feel very tired. "I need to rest." As soon as you rest, you sleep for three days straight. You were vigorous

for one day and then slept for three. Or maybe you sleep for five, saying, "I'm really tired. I think I'll sleep for a few more days." You must keep your mind on what you're doing. "Today I will be vigorous, tomorrow I will be vigorous, the day after, I will be vigorous." You should always be mindful of what you are doing and never forget. That's how it should be.

*The root of mindfulness:* When your mindfulness becomes long-abiding and irreversible, then you give rise to the root of samadhi. Once you have the root of samadhi, then you can have wisdom. Why is it that when things come up, you always don't understand, you are very confused. It's just because you don't have the power of samadhi or the power of wisdom. You have no root of samadhi or root of wisdom, and so you become confused.

When the Buddha sees living beings come, he looks into their five roots. Once there are five roots, they can turn into the five powers(五力). It's because they have a certain kind of strength that they are called the five powers. The Buddha looks into their causes and conditions, and he contemplates, "If I speak the Dharma for you, will you believe it? If you believe it, will you practice it? If you practice, will your practice be long-abiding? If it is long-abiding, will it be eternal? If it is eternal, will there be unmoving samadhi?"

He contemplates this. And so he says, "**as well as the keenness or dullness of his faculties**" — his faith and other faculties; the five roots of faith, vigor, mindfulness, samadhi, and wisdom. "Keen" means sharp, astute. It refers to intelligence. It refers to having the root of *prajna*. "Dull" means stupid. It means not sharp. Just as a knife, when it can be used to cut through something, is sharp, it's said to be "keen." But if you use the knife to try to cut through something and you can't, as if you were using a fan to try to cut through wood, then the knife is "dull." If you use a sharp knife, then with one slice you can cut through it. That's called "keen." This represents a person's intelligence. If you are intelligent, then no matter what kind of state you meet with, you will understand it. You will not be turned by the state; you will be able to turn the state. Bad states will turn into good states. Adverse states will turn into favorable ones. You need to have unobstructed eloquence.

"Dull" means stupid. A stupid person can do things to turn a good situation into a bad one. He can turn good matters into bad matters. Why? Because he is stupid. How does one get stupid? You should know. Stupidity comes from not having enough virtuous conduct. You are lacking in Way-virtue. That's why people are stupid. How can one become intelligent? By having Way-virtue, one becomes intelligent.

I am now going to tell you something I told you before. But I know you have all given it back to me already. That's because you are not greedy, and so you don't even want to retain the Buddhadharma. But even though you don't want to retain it, I can't fail to give it. You can be devoid of greed, but I can't renounce my resolve to give. Every day I am involved in giving. Every day, I speak the Buddhadharma for you, and so I am practicing the giving of Dharma.

*Of all the kinds of giving,  
The giving of Dharma is the greatest.*

I will slowly explain, and you can listen rapidly. Why do I say this? If I lecture too rapidly, you will not hear it clearly, and so I will explain slowly. Why should you listen rapidly? Because once you remember this word, if you don't quickly listen to the next word, you will forget the previous word. And so you need to listen rapidly, so that you do not forget the first word in trying to hear what follows. That's my advice to you.

As it is said:

*Intelligence is aided by hidden virtue.  
Hidden virtue leads one along the path of intelligence.  
Failing to do good deeds in secret, thinking yourself smart,  
You end up outsmarting yourself.*

Why are you intelligent? It's because perhaps in your previous lives you did good deeds. Printing Sutras is a hidden virtue; helping other people is a hidden virtue; making contributions to your country and to society is a hidden virtue; saving a person or rescuing an animal is a hidden virtue. An animal is about to die, and you use some medicine to save his life. A crippled pigeon would have starved to death, but you felt sorry for it, and so you gave it something to eat every day. After a while, it revived. Now if you tried to send it away, it probably wouldn't go. Why? There are things here for it to eat. If you didn't offer it food, then even if you wanted to keep it here, it wouldn't stay.

Those are examples of hidden virtue. "*Intelligence is aided by hidden virtue.*" If you are intelligent, it is hidden virtue that is aiding you. "Hidden virtue leads one along the path of intelligence." "Hidden virtue" is another name for virtuous conduct. It's described as "hidden" because you yourself know what merit and virtue you have done, but other people don't know. No one knows. It's said, "Doing good with the hope others will see it is not true good." When you do good, it's not necessary for others to know. If you want others to know, then that's not good. It's doing it in order to become known. It's "bartering for a name, and fishing for a reputation."

*"Hidden virtue leads one along the path of intelligence."* When one has hidden virtue, virtuous conduct, one is propelled along the path that leads to intelligence.

*"Failing to do good deeds in secret, thinking yourself smart..."* Now you do not do virtuous deeds, you do not do good deeds, you do not do things to help other people. Instead, you always want other people to help you. You use your intelligence on other people hoping to thereby gain petty advantages. You always try to get a bargain and can't stand to take a loss.

That's what's meant by "one does not do deeds based in hidden virtue, yet makes a display of intelligence." You use your intelligence to cheat others, even to the point that you cheat your own parents. You say, "Give me a little money, and I will go to school." Your parents believe you and give you a little money, thinking you will use it to go to school. They never guessed you would use it to go gambling or maybe use the money to buy drugs. Or maybe you use the money to go dancing and do other improper things.



Those are examples of not doing deeds based in hidden virtue, yet displaying one's intelligence.

*to be continued...*