

The Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra

Chapter Sixteen, The Thus Come One's Life Span

with commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua

Sutra:

"The father, hearing that his sons have been completely cured, then comes back, and they all see him.

Commentary:

"The father, who really hasn't died, hearing that his sons have been completely cured, then comes back, and they all see him. Before long, their father returns. All the children who previously were poisoned see their father.

Sutra:

"Good men, what do you think, could anyone say that this good physician committed the offense of false speech?"

"No, World Honored One."

Commentary:

Shakyamuni Buddha called out again, **"Good men."** He was addressing the Great Bodhisattvas, asking them: **"What do you think?"** Look into this. **"Could anyone say that this good physician committed the offense of false speech?"** Could anyone rightly say the good doctor had lied? Did he not tell the truth?

The Bodhisattva who had been questioning the Buddha replied, **"No, World Honored One."**

Sutra:

The Buddha said, "I, too, am like that. I realized Buddhahood limitless, boundless, hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of nayutas of asamkhyeyas of eons ago. For the sake of living beings, I employ the power of expedients and say that I am about to enter extinction. And there is no one who can, in accord with Dharma, say that I have committed an offense of false speech."

Commentary:

Shakyamuni **Buddha said, "I, too, am like that.** The Dharma I have spoken is that way as well: I spoke the Agamas, the Vaipulya teachings, the Prajna teachings, and then the Dharma Flower/Nirvana teachings in the same way as the good doctor. **I realized Buddha-hood limitless, boundless, hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of nayutas of asamkhyeyas of eons ago. For the sake of living beings, in order to teach and transform them, I employ the power of expedients and say that I am about to enter extinction.** I speak expediently, bestowing the provisional for the sake of the real, and say to living beings that I am about to enter Nirvana. This is like the doctor going to another country and then sending back the message that he has died. **And there is no one who can, in accord with the Dharma, say that I have committed an offense of false speech.**" No one can say that the Buddha lied.

Sutra:

At that time the World Honored One, wishing to restate his meaning, spoke verses saying,

*From the time I attained Buddhahood
The eons that have passed
Are limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads
Of kotis of asamkhyeyas in number.*

Commentary:

At that time, the World Honored One, wishing to restate his meaning, spoke verses saying: Shakyamuni Buddha said, "*From the time I attained Buddhahood / the eons that have passed / are limitless, hundreds of thousands of myriads / of kotis of asamkhyeyas in number.*" "Asamkhyeya" itself means "uncountable," so there is no way to know how many eons passed.

Sutra:

*I always speak the Dharma to teach and transform
Countless millions of living beings,
So they enter the Buddha-path.
And throughout these limitless eons,
In order to save living beings,
I expediently manifest Nirvana.*

Commentary:

I always speak the Dharma in different lands and countries *to teach and transform / countless millions of living beings / so they enter the Buddha-path.* I am teaching and transforming them and causing them to enter the Buddha-Way, and as a consequence, all the countless millions of Bodhisattvas well up out of the earth, as described in the previous chapter of "Welling up from the Earth."

And from time to time throughout these limitless eons, / in order to save living beings, / I expediently manifest Nirvana. This is like the doctor who went to another country and sent back a messenger to tell his children he was dead. He did this so his children would not rely upon their father, but would take the medicine instead. Thus, expediently, the Buddha said, "The Buddha is going to enter Nirvana. All of you should ask whatever questions you have. Hurry up! If there is something you don't understand, get it cleared up right away."

Sutra:

*But in truth I do not pass into extinction.
I remain here always speaking the Dharma.*

Commentary:

But in truth I do not pass into extinction. The Buddha does not really enter Nirvana. *I remain here always speaking the Dharma* in the Saha World on Vulture Peak, teaching and transforming living beings.

Sutra:

*I always stay right here
And, using the power of spiritual penetrations,
I cause inverted living beings,
Although near me, not to see me.*

Commentary:

I always stay right here on Vulture Peak in the Saha World. *And, using the power of spiritual penetrations, / I cause inverted living beings, / although near me, not to see me.* That means even before I enter Nirvana, I cause them not to have an opportunity to see me. Although they are right beside me, they do not see me, because they are upside-down.

Sutra:

*The multitudes see me as passing into extinction.
They extensively make offerings to my sharira.
All cherish ardent longing for me,
And their hearts look up to me in thirst.
Living beings, then faithful and subdued,
Straightforward, with compliant minds,
Single-mindedly wish to see the Buddha,
Caring not for their very lives.*

Commentary:

The multitudes see me as passing into extinction. The upside-down living beings are confused by ignorance. Although they are near me, they cannot see me. Everyone sees me as entering extinction. ***They extensively make offerings to my sharira. All cherish ardent longing for me.*** At this time, they all start thinking about how much they long for and admire me, ***and their hearts look up to me in thirst.*** They long to see the Buddha.

Living beings, then are faithful and subdued, / straightforward, with compliant minds. They are no longer stubborn; now they just ***single-mindedly wish to see the Buddha:*** "Now the Buddha has gone to Nirvana! Oh, if we could only see the Buddha once again!" They realize how rare he is and how difficult it is to meet up with him. ***Caring not for their very lives:*** if they had to give up their very lives, they would do it without regrets. When you seek the Buddha-Way and take the precepts, you burn some incense on your head. This represents that you are willing to give up your life for the sake of the Buddhadharma. If you still care for your own life, that burning will cause unbearable pain and you won't be able to go through with it. To burn the body as an offering to the Buddha represents that you are willing to give up your life for the sake of the Dharma.

Why does the Buddha say that he passes into extinction, when actually he doesn't? The principle works like this: for those who are enlightened, there is no extinction. Those who are unenlightened think that the Buddha enters extinction. If one is enlightened and has the Three Bodies, the Four Wisdoms, the Five Eyes, and the Six Spiritual Penetrations, then one is with the Buddha at all times. One is always right next to the Buddha. This is called "always seeing the Buddha." If you have not attained this state, then although the Buddha is actually right beside you, you cannot see him. The Buddha says he does not pass into extinction because he is always present for those who have been certified to the attainment of the Five Eyes. Those without the Five Eyes cannot see the Buddha, and they conclude that he has become extinct. Actually, the Buddha does not become extinct.

Sutra:

***At that time, the Sangha assembly and I
All appear together on the Magic Vulture Mountain,
Where I say to living beings
That I am always here and never extinct.
But using the power of expedient devices,
I manifest "extinction" and "non-extinction."***

Commentary:

When people get to the point where they do not even care about their own lives because they are so intent on seeking the Buddhadharma, ***at that time*** there is a response of the Way because of the extreme earnestness in the minds of these living beings. ***The Sangha assembly*** of Bhikshus and Bhikshunis ***and I***, Shakyamuni Buddha, ***appear together on Magic Vulture Mountain.*** Thus the Great Master Jr Je of the Tyan Tai School entered the Dharma Flower Samadhi when reciting the Dharma Flower Sutra and personally saw the Dharma assembly on Magic Vulture Mountain still taking place—it had not dispersed.

He obtained the Dharani of a Single Revolution. From this we can conclude that even now the Buddha is still present on Magic Vulture Mountain speaking the Dharma, teaching and transforming living beings.

Where I say to living beings / that I am always here and never extinct. / But using the power of clever expedient devices, / I manifest "extinction" and "non-extinction." I only manifest the appearance of extinction; I do not actually become extinct. This is the "extinction of non-extinction," the "production of non-production."

Sutra:

*For living beings in other lands,
Reverent, faithful and aspiring,
I speak the supreme Dharma;
But you who do not hear this
Think that I have passed into extinction.
I see living beings
Sunk in misery,
And I refrain from manifesting for them,
To cause them to look up in thirst.
Then, when their minds are filled with longing,
I emerge and speak the Dharma.*

Commentary:

For living beings in other lands / who are reverent, faithful and aspiring, / I speak the supreme Dharma. / But you who do not hear this / think that I have passed into extinction. All of you have not heard this doctrine, and you think I entered extinction. For me there is neither extinction nor non-extinction. For me there is no production or extinction, although I speak of it.

I see living beings / sunk in misery. They are drowning in the five desires: wealth, sex, fame, food, and sleep. The five desires are "misery." Since they are greedy for the five desires, *I refrain from manifesting for them.* I do not manifest and speak the Dharma for them, because I want *to cause them to look up in thirst. Then, when* living beings all appear very thirsty and *their minds are filled with longing, / I emerge and speak the Dharma.* I reappear and speak the Buddha-dharma for these living beings.

Sutra:

*With such powerful spiritual penetrations,
Throughout asamkhyeyas of eons,
I remain always on Magic Vulture Mountain,
Yet I also dwell in other places.
When beings see the kalpa ending
And ravaged by the great fire,*

*My land is peaceful and secure,
Always filled with gods and humans,
Gardens, groves, halls, pavilions,
And various precious adornments.
Jeweled trees with many flowers and fruits
Where living beings roam in delight.
The gods play celestial drums,
Always making various kinds of music,
While Mandarava flowers
Are scattered on the Buddha and the great assembly.
My Pure Land is not destroyed,
But the multitudes see it being burned entirely.
Worried, terrified, and miserable,
Such ones are everywhere.
All these beings with offenses,
Because of their evil karmic causes and conditions,
Pass through asamkhyeyas of eons,
Not hearing the name of the Triple Jewel.
All who have cultivated merit and virtue,
Who are compliant, harmonious, and straightforward:
They all see me
Here, speaking the Dharma.
Sometimes for this assembly
I speak of the Buddha's life span as limitless.
For those who see the Buddha only after long intervals,
I speak of the Buddha as being difficult to meet.*

Commentary:

With such powerful spiritual penetrations, / throughout asamkhyeyas of eons, / I remain always on Magic Vulture Mountain, / yet I also dwell in other places. Why is it that some living beings see the Buddha, and others do not? Why is it that the Buddha says he is entering extinction and then does not? These are all transformations worked by the power of the Buddha's spiritual penetrations. So we say, "There is production and yet no production; there is extinction and yet no extinction. Those who have affinities with the Buddha can see him any time; those lacking affinities never get to see him.

You say, "If I have no affinities with the Buddha and cannot see him, then what should I do?"

Plant good roots, create affinities with the Buddha by making offerings to the Triple Jewel—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. If you cultivate merit and virtue before the Triple Jewel, after a while you will naturally have affinities with the Buddha. If you do not plant good roots, you will never have affinities with the Buddha.

When beings see the kalpa ending / and ravaged by the great fire: this refers to the calamities of wind, water, and fire that arise at the close of the kalpa. The fiery hate in the minds of living beings brings about huge conflagrations. However, at this time, ***my land is peaceful and secure.*** Vulture Peak and all the other places where I am present are peaceful. They cannot be harmed by the three calamities but are ***always filled with gods and humans. / Gardens, groves, halls and pavilions / and various precious adornments*** — the seven jewels adorn the buildings. There are also ***jeweled trees with many flowers and fruits / where living beings roam in delight.*** "Jeweled trees" means Bodhi trees, the king of trees. "Many flowers" refers to good causes that are planted. The many good results that are reaped are what is meant by "many fruits." As to "living beings," there are living beings all around you, and there are also the living beings inside. The ones inside we call the living beings of the self-nature: these are your thoughts. Whether inner or outer, they are all living beings. We say the mind, the Buddha, and living beings are three; but they are not different.

In the adorned Bodhimanda of the Buddha, the beings happily wander. ***The gods play celestial drums, / always making various kinds of music.*** The heavenly beings throughout the Three Realms make the heavenly drum resound throughout space, ***while Mandarava flowers,*** flowers that accord with one's intent and make people extremely happy as soon as they are seen drifting down upon the multitude, ***are scattered on the Buddha and the great assembly.***

My Pure Land of Eternal Stillness is not destroyed, and light will never be destroyed. ***But the multitudes see it being burned entirely.*** Living beings, with their afflictions, see it as if completely burned and become ***worried, terrified, and miserable. / Such ones are everywhere.*** They are scattered to the extreme and miserable because of all their evil views.

All these beings with offenses, / because of their evil karmic causes and conditions, / pass through asamkhyeyas of eons, boundless, uncountable eons, ***not hearing the name of the Triple Jewel.*** Such beings never hear of the Buddha, the Dharma, or the Sangha.

Before the Buddha appeared in the world, no one knew about the Buddhadharma; no one had heard the words "Buddha," "Dharma," or "Sangha." When the Elder Sudatta heard the word "Buddha," all the hairs on his body stood straight up on end, although he did not know why. That was because he had never heard the names of the Triple Jewel before.

All who have cultivated merit and virtue, / who are compliant, harmonious, and straightforward; people who have practiced merit and virtue and planted good roots, who are not crooked: ***they all see me.*** Beings with offenses cannot see me. People with offenses cannot even see a Buddha image. If you can see a Buddha image, it will lessen your offense-karma. In order to see the Buddha, the Dharma, or the Sangha, you must have merit and virtue. ***Here, speaking the Dharma, / sometimes for this assembly / I speak of the Buddha's life span as limitless. For those who see the Buddha only after long intervals, / I speak of the Buddha as difficult to meet.*** For those who pass through

long, long periods of time before they get to see the Buddha, I speak about how the Buddha is difficult to encounter.

Sutra:

*The power of my wisdom—
The unlimited illumination of my wisdom—
Is such that my lifespan is one of countless eons
Attained through long cultivation and work.
Those of you with wisdom,
Should not have doubts about this.
Cut doubts off entirely and forever,
For the Buddha's words are real, not false.*

Commentary:

Such is *the power of my wisdom*. Those with good roots always see the Buddha. To these beings I speak of the length of the Buddha's life span. If it was not this way, how could they see me? *The unlimited illumination of my wisdom / is such that my life span is one of countless eons*. The Buddha's wisdom light shines throughout limitless worlds, and limitless living beings bring forth the Bodhi mind.

It is *attained through long cultivation and work*. The Buddha did the good work of liberating life. If you want to have a long life, you should liberate life. The more life you liberate, the longer your own life will be.

Those of you with wisdom / should not have doubts about this. Do not have doubts about what I have just said. *Cut doubts off entirely and forever*, get rid of them, *for the Buddha's words are real, not false*. Do not have doubts about the Buddhadharma.

Sutra:

*They are like the clever expedients of the physician
Who, to cure his insane children,
Is actually alive, yet says he's dead,
And none can say that he speaks falsely.*

Commentary:

They are like the clever expedients of the physician. This refers to the physician who is knowledgeable about the different kinds of medicines—cool, hot, warm, and neutral—and *who*, in order *to cure his insane children* who have been poisoned, *is actually alive yet says he's dead*. When the children think their father is dead, they finally take the medicine. The Dharma spoken by the Buddha is like good medicine. As long as the Buddha remained in the world, living beings thought they would take their time about studying the Dharma. They were not eager to study it.

When the Buddha entered Nirvana and they no longer had access to him, they decided to study the Buddhadharmas and lecture the Sutras. As long as the Buddha was in the world, they could just listen to the Buddha, but they did not care to give Sutra lectures. So the doctor is really alive, but he says he is dead. ***And none can say that he speaks falsely.*** No one can accuse this doctor, who is trying to save the lives of his children, or say that he has committed an offense.

Sutra:

***I, too, am like a father to the world,
Saving all from suffering and woe,
But to living beings, inverted as they are,
I speak of extinction, although I actually remain.
Otherwise, because they would often see me,
They would grow arrogant and lax.
Unruly and attached to the five desires,
They would tumble into the evil paths.
I am ever aware of living beings—
Those who practice the Way and those who do not.
I speak various Dharmas for their sakes,
To save them in the appropriate manner.
I am always thinking,
"How can I cause living beings
To enter the unsurpassed path
And quickly perfect the Buddha-body?"***

Commentary:

I, too, am like a father to the world. I am a father *saving all* in the world *from suffering and woe.* / ***But to living beings, inverted as they are, / I speak of extinction, although I actually remain.*** Living beings are upside-down. They insist that right is wrong, and wrong is right; white is black, and black is white. They will say that it's light at night and dark during the day. In the self-nature, the great storehouse of light pervades both day and night. If your self-nature is dark, you will think that light is dark. If your self-nature is light, then the darkness turns light. But living beings are confused about this. For these living beings, the Buddha appears to go to Nirvana. At the same time, the Buddha tells us, "Really, I am right here. To me there is no entering or non-entering of Nirvana. Living beings are upside-down: for that reason, I say I am entering Nirvana."

Otherwise, because they would often see me, / they would grow arrogant and lax. Why do I say I am going to enter Nirvana? It is because if living beings see me every day, they will grow sloppy and unruly, not cultivating according to the Dharma, and attached to the five desires of wealth, sex, fame, food, and sleep, or of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, and dharmas. They would tumble into the evil paths, the three "evil paths" of the animals, ghosts, and hell beings.

I am ever aware of living beings. I, Shakyamuni Buddha, keep track of all the thoughts in the minds of living beings. The Vajra Sutra says:

*The Thus Come One completely knows and sees
all the thoughts in the minds of living beings.*

I am always aware of the thoughts of living beings—***those who practice the Way and those who do not.***

And I speak various Dharmas for their sakes, / to save them in the appropriate manner.

If a person can be saved by means of a Buddha-body, I, the Buddha, take the body of a Buddha and speak Dharma for them. If a person can be saved by means of another kind of being, the Buddha will take the appropriate form and save him.

I am always thinking, / "How can I cause living beings / to enter the unsurpassed path—to be certified to the supreme Way and quickly perfect the Buddha-body, the Dharma-body?"