Venerable Master Hua made this statement in the preface to *The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra* (Lotus Sutra): “I dare to say something real to you only now after I have finished lecturing on the *Shurangama Sutra.* You are now up to par. If you were not up to this level, I would scare you off with something true. You would never come back after the first lesson.”

Venerable Master Hua said, “Anyone who encounters the *Lotus Sutra* will become a future Buddha, without exception. Each of us has an opportunity to become a Buddha in the future, now that we have encountered the *Lotus Sutra.* Shakyamuni Buddha made such a prediction several thousand years ago. Any of us who has the opportunity to hear the *Lotus Sutra* should not look down on ourselves because we will become Buddhas in the future.” (Expedient Devices, Chapter Two of *A Simple Explanation of the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra.*)

These are not words meant to shock or win popularity. These are words of truth. People who study Buddhist teachings consider the words of the *Lotus Sutra* simple and easy to understand and wonder why the Buddha did not explain this sutra early on. In actuality, people may read these texts but are confused, remaining skeptical toward the Vehicle of the Buddhas. They do not really believe they can see their real nature and become Buddhas. This is precisely why the Buddha said that the *Lotus Sutra* is difficult to believe and understand. Perhaps people do not believe it or understand it for a time; but eventually, they will return to the Dharma Flower Assembly. This is just as how the 5,000 individuals who left the assembly will nevertheless become Buddhas, even though they lacked proper knowledge and views at the time. They merely delayed their time to Buddhahood. Why will everyone on the Dharma Flower Assembly become Buddhas?

The *Lotus Sutra* explains, “All the Buddhas, the World Honored Ones, appear in the world only because of the causes and conditions of the great matter.” The causes and conditions of the great matter revolve around
the speaking of the Lotus Sutra. This great matter leads all beings to unveil, manifest, awaken to, and enter the knowledge and views of Buddhas. The knowledge and views of Buddhas are: All beings have the Buddha nature and are replete with the wisdom of Buddhas. All can become Buddhas. This great matter is the great matter of transcending birth and death so that living beings may reach mahaparinirvana without ceasing or coming into being, which is Buddhahood ultimately. “We may understand a theory in a second, but it requires more to put it to practice.” Awakening to the knowledge and views of Buddhas is about being a Buddha in theory, but not yet a real Buddha. Living beings have not become Buddhas because of rambling thoughts and attachments. Led astray into secular knowledge and views, living beings may recite this sutra for a long time but still not understand it. They are just like ants that crawl about the skin of a watermelon, yet never taste the watermelon. This is not about any erroneous understanding of the principles, but rather a lack of real effort. We only enter the knowledge and views of Buddhas when we have realized that all dharmas are empty, when we maintain proper and wholesome thoughts at all times, and when we embody gentleness and patience, diligently practicing precepts, samadhi, and wisdom while eliminating greed, hatred, and delusion. Only then will we have a complete grasp of the Lotus Sutra. At that point, we understand quite naturally our inherent nature and realize Buddhahood.

In looking over the Buddha’s oral teachings during that 49-year period: he spoke with his Dharma Body the Great Means Expansive Flower Adornment Sutra for all the Bodhisattvas in the first 21 days; he spoke with his Response Body the various Agama sutras to elucidate the hardships of the world and guide living beings to the Way of freedom from suffering to nirvana; in gradual steps, he spoke the Vaipulya sutras so that living beings would in time develop blessings and virtues based on the Mahayana on a wide scale; next he went deeply into the various prajna teachings to inspire living beings to the wisdom of the Mahayana. Finally, the Buddha spent the last eight years of his life proclaiming the Lotus Sutra. He meant to make living beings understand that all three vehicles belong to one, making it clear for beings that all dharmas are empty so that living beings will awaken to their inherent Buddha. Living beings have not become Buddhas because of rambling thoughts and views of Buddhas is about being a Buddha in theory, but not yet a real Buddha. Living beings may reach the flower blossoms for the sake of the fruit. This is a metaphor for how we have a complete grasp of the Lotus Sutra. This is not about any erroneous understanding of the principles, but rather a lack of real effort. We only enter the knowledge and views of Buddhas when we have realized that all dharmas are empty, when we maintain proper and wholesome thoughts at all times, and when we embody gentleness and patience, diligently practicing precepts, samadhi, and wisdom while eliminating greed, hatred, and delusion. Only then will we have a complete grasp of the Lotus Sutra. At that point, we understand quite naturally our inherent nature and realize Buddhahood.

The wonderful lotus blooms and bears fruit simultaneously although the flower blossoms for the sake of the fruit. This is a metaphor for how all the teachings spoken of earlier are provisional. The provisional is given for the sake of the actual. At the Dharma Flower Assembly, however, the provisional is abolished and the actual is established; the provisional is unveiled to make appear the actual. In fact, the myriad dharmas go back to one. The provisional is the actual; the two are nondual.