

# *The Sutra In Forty-two Sections*

*With Commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua*

In India there was once a king who believed in a non-Buddhist religion which taught many kinds of bitter practices. Some followed the ways of cows and some the morality of dogs; some spread ashes on their bodies, and some slept on beds of nails. They cultivated all kinds of ascetic practices. Meanwhile, the bhikshus who cultivated the Buddhadharma had it "easy," because they didn't cultivate that way.

Now, the king of that country said to the Buddha's disciples, "It's my belief that the ascetic practices which these non-Buddhists cultivate still don't enable them to end their thoughts of sexual desire. How much the less must you bhikshus, who are so casual, be even less able to sever the affliction of your thoughts of sexual desire."

One of the Dharma Masters answered the king this way: "Suppose you take a man from jail who had been sentenced to execution, and you say to him, 'Take this bowl of oil and carry it in your two hands as you walk down the highway. If you spill a single drop of the oil, I'll have you executed. But if you don't spill a single drop, I'll release you when you return.' Then, suppose you send some beautiful women musicians out on the highway to sing and play their instruments where the sentenced man is walking with his bowl of oil. If he should spill any oil, of course, you'll execute him. But if he should come back without spilling a single drop, what do you suppose he will answer if you ask him what he's seen on the road?"

The king of the country did just that: he took a man destined to be executed and said to him, "Today you should be executed but I'm going to give you an opportunity to save your life. How? I'll give you a bowl of oil for you to carry in your two hands as you take a walk on the highway. If you can do it without spilling a single drop, when you return you won't be executed. But if you spill one drop, I'll execute you on schedule. Go try it out."

The sentenced man did as he was told. He went out on the highway with the oil, and when he returned he hadn't spilled one drop. Then the king asked him, "What did you see out on the highway?"

The sentenced man said, "I didn't see a single thing. All I did was watch the oil to keep it from spilling. I didn't see anything else or hear anything at all."

So, the king asked the Dharma Master, "Well, what is the principle here?"

The Dharma Master answered, "The sentenced man was like the shramana who has left the home-life. Both see the question of birth and death as too important to waste time on thoughts of sexual desire. Why can't the non-Buddhists sever their sexual desire? Because they don't understand birth and death. They don't realize how great the importance of this matter is."

Why don't people who cultivate cut off their sexual desire? Because they haven't truly recognized the immediacy of the impermanence of birth and death. If you realized the immediacy of the impermanence, you wouldn't have time to give rise to false thinking. You wouldn't have time for the affliction of sexual desire.

## *SECTION THIRTY-NINE*

### *INSTRUCTIONS THAT ARE WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION*

*TEXT:*

THE BUDDHA SAID: "ONE WHO STUDIES THE BUDDHA'S WAY SHOULD BELIEVE IN AND ACCORD WITH ALL THAT THE BUDDHA SAYS. WHEN YOU EAT HONEY, IT IS SWEET ON THE SURFACE AND SWEET IN THE CENTER: IT IS THE SAME WAY WITH MY SUTRAS."

*COMMENTARY:*

Section Thirty-nine says that you should believe and accept all the Buddha's sutras. You shouldn't distinguish between the Mahayana, the Theravada, the sudden, and the gradual, deciding which sutras are important and which sutras are not, making a lot of distinctions like that. All contain the provisional and actual teachings, because the provisional teaching is spoken in terms of the actual teaching, and if you speak the provisional teaching in detail, it leads to the actual. Provisional and actual are one. When I was in Los Angeles, I said to the bhikshus from Thailand, "The Buddhadharma doesn't have such distinctions as Mahayana and Theravada. It's just that certain disciples who were attached, and who didn't want to genuinely study the Buddhadharma, strayed from it and made distinctions between great and small, and became unfilial disciples of the Buddha." This is the principle discussed in this section.

THE BUDDHA SAID: ONE WHO STUDIES THE BUDDHA'S WAY SHOULD BELIEVE IN AND ACCORD WITH ALL THAT THE BUDDHA SAYS. Those of you who study the Way of the Buddha should believe all the Buddha's sutras and teachings. You shouldn't make any distinctions among them.

WHEN YOU EAT HONEY, IT IS SWEET ON THE SURFACE AND SWEET IN THE CENTER: IT IS THE SAME WITH MY SUTRAS. Honey is sweet on the surface and also in the center, and the sutras which the Buddha spoke are the same way. They establish the provisional for the sake of the actual. The provisional opens to reveal the actual and to teach and transform living beings so that all alike can succeed in realizing the Buddha Way.

## *SECTION FORTY*

### *PRACTICE OF THE WAY LIES IN THE MIND*

*TEXT:*

THE BUDDHA SAID: "A SHRAMANA WHO PRACTICES THE WAY SHOULD NOT BE LIKE AN OX TURNING A MILLSTONE. SUCH A ONE PRACTICES THE WAY WITH HIS BODY, BUT HIS MIND IS NOT ON THE WAY. IF THE MIND IS CONCENTRATED ON THE WAY, WHAT NEED IS THERE TO PRACTICE?"

*COMMENTARY:*

The fortieth section explains that cultivation of the Way is actually in the mind, not in the practice. If your mind isn't on the Way and you just do perfunctory work, you are like an ox on a millstone which just goes around and around on the millstone all day and never gets away from it.

THE BUDDHA SAID: A SHRAMANA WHO PRACTICES THE WAY SHOULD NOT BE LIKE AN OX TURNING A MILLSTONE. When a bhikshu cultivates the unsurpassed Way, he shouldn't be like an ox turning a millstone, just going back and forth and back and forth and never getting away.

SUCH A ONE PRACTICES THE WAY WITH HIS BODY, BUT HIS MIND IS NOT ON THE WAY. On the surface, you are bowing to the Buddha, reciting sutras, and holding mantras, but your mind isn't attentive to the work. Your mind is not on the Way.

IF THE MIND IS CONCENTRATED ON THE WAY, WHAT NEED IS THERE TO PRACTICE? If your mind can cultivate the Way and genuinely practice it--if you become single-minded in your cultivation and don't have any false thinking so that you are constantly in samadhi--then what need would there be to practice? Under those circumstances, it would be all right for you not to practice.

You have subdued your mind if you don't have thoughts of sexual desire. If you are continually having thoughts of sexual desire, then you may put on an impressive front, as if you were a very dependable person, but inside you will be very undependable, because all that goes on in your mind is false thinking about sex. No matter how good you look on the outside, you're useless.

In cultivation, then, the attention should be put on the mind. If you can tame your mind, you'll be able to attain the fruit very quickly. If you don't tame your mind, if you continually think about sex, then you are just like the ox who grinds and grinds on his millstone. It's very bitter work, but he will never become free.

