

The Flower Adornment Sutra

Chapter Forty "Universal Worthy's Conduct and Vows "

with Commentary by Tripitaka Master Hua

What does "respect" mean? It means "to act in accord with the rules of propriety governing the circumstances of the situation at hand." To always act according to proper etiquette shows respect, whereas to disregard proper etiquette is disrespectful. For example, if you respect someone, you will act in accordance with the proper rules when you are in his presence. If you do not wish to act respectfully towards a person, then you will be very lax in his presence, doing whatever you want.

Now we wish to worship and respect all Buddhas. "All Buddhas" refers to all the Buddhas of the ten directions and the three periods of time. "Buddha" means "greatly enlightened, "a person who is greatly enlightened. Common people are born in a stupor and die in a dream. Without the understanding that the Three Realms are suffering, they do not wish to transcend them. This is called being unenlightened. Among common people, there are some who are considered to be enlightened. Called "Those of the Two Vehicles," they have awakened to the fact that birth and death are impermanent and very dangerous, and so they cultivate and achieve understanding based on the principle of emptiness--a one-sided prejudice for emptiness. By virtue of understanding this principle, they enlighten to the Dharmas of the Twelve Links of Causes and Conditions and the Four Noble Truths. They are called Arhats and Those Enlightened by Conditions and can be considered as enlightened ones, when speaking from the point of view of common people. Their enlightenment, however, is one-sided and incomplete because they only know how to benefit themselves, and cannot benefit others; they are only capable of enlightening themselves, and cannot guide others to the realization of enlightenment.

Bodhisattvas are different from Arhats in as much as they are not only able to enlighten themselves, but they can also enlighten others, benefitting both themselves and others. Buddhas are different from Bodhisattvas. Although Bodhisattvas are able to enlighten themselves and others, their enlightenment is imperfect. The enlightenment and practices of the Buddha, however, are perfect, since the Buddha has perfected his enlightenment, the enlightenment of others, and enlightenment and practices. Only a Buddha is called a Greatly Enlightened One, having perfected these three aspects of enlightenment. When a person has perfected the 10,000 kinds of merit and virtue, he becomes a Buddha.

Small Vehicle Buddhism only recognizes one Buddha, Shakyamuni, and does not acknowledge other Buddhas in the world systems of the other directions. The Dharma of the Small Vehicle was taught in the Deer Park for the Five Bhikshus, and as a consequence, those of the Small Vehicle only know of Shakyamuni Buddha becoming a Buddha, and know nothing about all the immeasurable Buddhas in the other world systems. Because of this, they say that there are no Buddhas throughout the ten directions and the three periods of time other than Shakyamuni.

Now is it true that there are no other Buddhas, since they say that there are no others? No. If they recognize the other Buddhas throughout the ten directions, then those Buddhas exist, but if they do not recognize those Buddhas, those Buddhas, nonetheless, still exist. The Buddhas of the ten directions are one with Shakyamuni Buddha, and so it is said, "The Buddhas of the ten directions and the three periods of time share one Dharma Body in common."

Universal Worthy Bodhisattva made these ten far-reaching vows which are so extremely great that they are inconceivable. There is no way one can know how great they are. It is because of this that Universal Worthy Bodhisattva is called the King of Vows.

The first vow is to worship and respect all Buddhas. To worship and respect all Buddhas does not mean to worship only Shakyamuni Buddha or Amitabha Buddha.

Worshiping one is worshiping all;
One Buddha is all Buddhas.

Worshiping all Buddhas without becoming attached to all Buddhas, and worshiping one Buddha without becoming attached to one Buddha, is the practice of the "true mark of impartial bowing." Although you bow to the Buddha in worship, regardless of whether it is one Buddha or all Buddhas, you should not become attached to the mark of worship. For example, you do not want to say, "My merit and virtue is great indeed since I bow to so many Buddhas. No one else can match such practice as mine." Do not become attached to marks in this way, or any other way, and then you will truly be able to practice the first vow, to worship and respect all Buddhas.

THE SECOND IS TO PRAISE THE THUS COME ONES. When we worship and respect all Buddhas, do we do so because they want the respect of others? Regardless of whether we worship the Buddhas, or not, they are still Buddhas. If we worship the Buddhas, they do not obtain more benefit, or get larger, and if we do not worship the Buddhas, they do not lose any benefit, or get smaller. When we worship the Buddhas, it vitalizes our hearts and spirits, but it does not affect the Buddhas. So when you worship the Buddhas, do not become attached to any mark.

Why should we praise the Thus Come Ones? They do not need our praise. They are not like us; when we are praised we become so happy our eyes and nose wrinkle up with laughter. But if we are not praised, our eyes, nose and ears get angry. If the Buddhas were like this, this would be no different from common people. So it is not necessary to praise or worship them. Moreover, if they were the same as common people, what value would there be in worshiping and praising them? On the other hand, since Buddhas do not need our praise, then why praise them? Is this not a contradiction?

It certainly is not a contradiction. When we praise the Buddhas, we obtain merit and virtue for our self-nature. How can this merit and virtue be described? Every person's self-nature has light, and when you praise the Buddhas, your Yang light radiates and shines through the darkness of your ignorance. The merit and virtue which comes from praising the Buddhas is invisible and is brought about because you commit no offenses. To obtain this merit and virtue, you cannot indulge in false thinking, and the fewer false thoughts you have, the more the light of your wisdom flows forth. Cultivators of the Way fear having false thoughts because false thoughts defile the self-nature with darkness. If you are without false thoughts, the light of your self-nature shines through brighter and brighter. When you praise the Buddhas, you cherish the Buddhas, and when you cherish the Buddhas, you unite with the wisdom light of the Buddhas. Then the light of your self-nature spills forth.

What does it mean to praise the Thus Come Ones? You can say:

In the heavens above, and the earth below,
There is no one like the Buddha.
In the world of the ten directions he is beyond compare.
Of everything I have seen in the world,
Nothing compares with the Buddha.

This is an example of praising the Thus Come Ones. In the heavens, in the earth, and in between, no one is like the Buddha.

There are no spirits, Bodhisattvas, Arhats or Pratyekabuddhas who compare with the Buddha, so the verse reads, "In the heavens above and the earth below, there is no one like the Buddha." No one can compare with the Buddha. Not a single being in all the world systems of the ten directions compares with him. Not only is there no one found in the heavens above and the earth below who can compare with the Buddha, the same is true throughout the worlds of the ten directions.

Our world has five continents*: Africa, the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Australia. Although it is made up of these five, it is still just one world. Beyond this world there are still an immeasurable and boundless number of worlds throughout the ten directions. Now we send people to the moon in rockets. The moon may be considered one of those other worlds, but it is just one minute world among an infinity of other worlds. None of the great number of people and creatures in all the worlds throughout the ten directions compares with the Buddha. "Of everything I have seen in the world," within it all, "nothing compares with the Buddha." This is what is meant by "praising the Thus Come Ones."

Another example of praise of the Thus Come One is the hymn in praise of Amitabha Buddha:

Amitabha's body is the color of gold,
The splendor of his hallmarks has no peer.
The light of his brow shines round a hundred worlds,
Wide as the seas are his eyes pure and clear.
Shining in his brilliance by transformation
Are countless Bodhisattvas and infinite Buddhas.
His forty-eight vows will be our liberation,
In nine lotus-stages we reach the other shore.

"Amitabha's body is the color of gold." Amita Buddha, who created the Land of Ultimate Bliss, has a golden body. "The splendor of his hallmarks has no peer." The light shining from Thirty-two Marks and Eighty Subtle Characteristics illumines the universe and is everywhere without equal. "The light of his brow shines round a hundred worlds." See how vast is the fragrant light which radiates from the white hair tuft between Amita Buddha's eyebrows! And how big are Amita Buddha's eyes? "Wide as the seas are his eyes pure and clear." His purple colored eyes are clear and as large as the world's great oceans.

"Shining in his brilliance by transformation/are countless Bodhisattvas and infinite Buddhas." Amita Buddha makes immeasurable and boundless numbers of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas appear in his light. He does not just manifest Buddhas, but he also manifests Bodhisattvas. Not only that, he further manifests Sound Hearers and Those Enlightened to Conditions. Nor does he only manifest Sound Hearers and Those Enlightened to Conditions, but he also manifests immeasurable and boundless numbers of beings in the Six Paths of rebirth.

"His forty-eight vows will be our liberation." Amita Buddha made forty-eight great vows to rescue living beings. "In nine lotus-stages we reach the other shore." The lotus flowers of Amitabha's land are divided into nine grades, each one of which is again divided into nine grades for a total of eighty-one grades. These eighty-one grades enable everyone to reach the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Now I have explained one aspect of praising the Thus Come Ones. Universal Worthy Bodhisattva's second vow is to cultivate the merit and virtue of praising the Thus Come Ones.

The *Vajra (Diamond) Sutra* says, "The Thus Come One does not come from anywhere, and does not go anywhere; therefore he is called the Thus Come One." "Thus" is stillness, and "come" is movement. Thus Come One can also be explained as "like one who has come, yet his basic nature has not moved." This is the Thus Come One.

"Come" refers to the fact that there is no place from which he comes, and "go" refers to the fact that there is no place to which he goes. "Thus" is the noumenon (principle), and "Come" is phenomena (specifics), an expression of the unobstructed state of the interpenetration of noumenon and phenomena found in this Sutra. This Sutra discusses the Dharma Realms of noumenon, of phenomena, of the unobstructed state of interpenetration of phenomena and phenomena. The Thus Come One is just the Dharma Realm of the unobstructed state of the interpenetration of noumenon and phenomena. The Thus Come One is also one of the ten names of the Buddha. This is also an aspect of praising the Thus Come One.

THE THIRD vow of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva IS TO EXTENSIVELY CULTIVATE MAKING OFFERINGS. "Extensively" means "on a vast scale," and "cultivate" means "to improve and develop;" that is, one develops the ability and improves the quality of making offerings without limit.

There are many kinds of offerings. One might give his body as an offering; another might give his mind as an offering. What does "giving one's body as an offering" mean? There are two kinds of disciples who give their bodies as offerings to all Buddhas. The first leave the home-life and use their bodies to do the Buddha's work: to cultivate the Buddhadharma. The second are laypeople who are not able to leave the home-life, but who take time out of their busy schedules to come to the monastery, light incense, and bow to the Buddha. This is giving the body as an offering. If you are busy, or for some other reason cannot go to a temple, then you may daily, with a pure and clean mind, light incense and contemplate the Buddha in your home. Perhaps you are in a remote place or in some other unusual circumstance, in which case you can still give your mind or body as an offering, by giving offerings of incense and flowers, or by lighting lamps before the Buddha, or by buying fruit or new clothing as an offering, or by offering lighted candles to the Buddha. One can also give his mind as an offering by cultivating the Buddhadharma with a true mind, daily bowing to the Buddhas, worshiping and reciting Sutras, always being mindful, and always doing wholesome things for the sake of the Buddhadharma. These are doing various kinds of offerings.

Originally there were ten different kinds of offerings, but in time the ten became one hundred, and the one hundred has finally become 10,000. When we make offerings to one Buddha, in our minds we contemplate making offerings to uncountable and unlimited numbers of Buddhas everywhere throughout the Dharma Realm, and in this way we make offerings before each one of these Buddhas. If you contemplate in this manner, you are doing what is called "making offerings throughout the Dharma Realm." By making offerings throughout the Dharma Realm, you accumulate the merit and virtue of the Dharma Realm and obtain the wisdom of the Dharma Realm. By obtaining this wisdom, you totally perfect the resultant position of the Dharma Realm. Therefore we should extensively cultivate making offerings.

"Extensively cultivate making offerings," means exhausting your strength to make offerings using whatever strength you have to make offerings to the Triple Jewel--the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Universal Worthy Bodhisattva extensively cultivates the practice of making offerings as his third vow.

The Bodhisattva's FOURTH VOW IS TO REPENT OF KARMIC OBSTACLES AND REFORM. "Repent" means to "regret previous offenses, to be contrite and self-reproachful." "To reform" means "to correct oneself so that the same offense is not committed again." To repent means that one wishes to change one's previous offenses, and to have reformed means that one does not again make such

mistakes. This means that evil acts that have already been done will not be done again, and that the potential for evil acts that have not yet been done is totally eradicated. It also means to cut off the continuing effect of evil acts which have already been done.

To reform means to increase one's good deeds and to do the good deeds which have not been done. You can also say it means to continuously do the kinds of good deeds that one has already done, and to cause the kinds of good deeds that have not yet been done to be done and continuously increase.

There are many kinds of karmic obstacles, and karmic obstacles are one of the three fundamental kinds of obstacles, which are: karmic obstacles, retribution obstacles, and the obstacles stemming from afflictions. Now we are discussing how to repent of karmic obstacles and reform involves repenting of one's retribution obstacles and reforming the obstacles that come from afflictions.

In general, there are three kinds of karmic obstacles which are simply the karmas of body, mouth, and mind. The body creates three kinds of karma--killing karma, stealing karma, and the karma of sexual misconduct. When you discuss "killing" in terms of its broader aspects, it refers to killing larger animals, but in terms of its subtler aspects, killing refers to the killing of even the smallest creatures, like ants, mosquitoes, and flies. This broadly describes killing in its grosser and subtler forms, but there are also thoughts of killing. Although one does not actually kill, having the thought to kill is an offense in the realm of one's self-nature. To have the thought to kill breaks the Bodhisattva Precepts. The cause of killing, the conditions of killing, the dharma of killing, and the karma of killing all break the precept against killing.

When we discuss "stealing" in its broadest sense, it means to steal a person's country; on a smaller scale, it refers to stealing a person's livelihood; and on a fine scale, it involves pilfering nothing more than a needle, a thread, a sliver of wood, or a blade of grass. In general, if you obtain something which is not given to you, you are stealing.

"Sexual misconduct" also has its grosser and finer aspects. Even a thought of sexual desire in your mind causes your self-nature to be impure and breaks the Bodhisattva Precepts.

The previous discussion is a general description of the karmic obstacles of the body: killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct.

There are also the three karmic obstacles created by the mind: the evil acts of greed, hatred, and stupidity. Karma is created from thoughts of greed, karma is created from thoughts of hatred, and karma is created from thoughts of stupidity.

Finally there are four evil acts of the mouth; the mouth creates karmic obstacles by irresponsible speech, false speech, harsh speech, and duplicity.

There are many ways in which one may create offense karma, and so now we should resolve to repent, because we do not want to allow new mistakes to arise. This is the meaning of repenting of karmic obstacles and reforming.

How does one repent? Before the Buddha, one may feel deep sorrow, a pain for past mistakes so deep that one cries before the Buddha in a sincere wish to repent and reform. If you earnestly repent, your karmic obstacles will be spontaneously destroyed. This describes the fourth of Universal Worthy's vast vows, "to repent of karmic obstacles and reform."

THE FIFTH of his vows IS TO FOLLOW ALONG WITH AND REJOICE IN MERIT AND VIRTUE. "To follow along with" means "to accord with" and "to comply." "To rejoice" means "to be happy."

"Merit" is what one establishes by benefiting others, and "Virtue" is the result of the wholesome good deeds one does. One both accords with and rejoices in one's own merit and virtue, and one also accords with and rejoices in the merit and virtue done by others.

If you wish to repent of karmic obstacles and reform, then you must follow along and rejoice in merit and virtue by doing many kinds of meritorious and virtuous acts. In fact, doing meritorious and virtuous acts is just repenting of one's karmic obstacles and reforming. Therefore it is said, "To follow and rejoice in merit and virtue is to repent of karmic obstacles and reform. And to repent of karmic obstacles and reform is to follow and rejoice in merit and virtue."

If this is the case, then are not the fourth and fifth vows redundant, and if they are, then why do we have this fifth vow?

The fourth vow instructs us to repent of karmic obstacles and reform, and if one wishes to repent of karmic obstacles and reform, one should also fulfill the fifth vow and follow and rejoice in merit and virtue. But in fact there are two separate and distinct things that one must do to practice these vows.

To follow and rejoice in merit and virtue includes doing all kinds of good deeds, and not crimes or evil acts. To follow and rejoice in merit and virtue, one may do something which benefits others, and this action is called a good deed. Merit is established by doing things for everyone, by acting for the general good.

For example, the Chinese character which means "merit," *kung* (功), is made up of the character which means "work," *kung* (工), and the character which means "strength," *li* (力). You should use your strength when doing acts of merit and virtue, and be sure that you are working for everyone. Presently, the government takes care of most public projects, but in earlier times, governments were not involved in projects like fixing bridges, and so those who did this work established merit. This is an example of how to establish merit; whatever you do that is for the general good is called merit.

Meritorious acts are readily apparent to everyone. They have obvious characteristics, and everyone knows who did a meritorious deed. For example, schools have people's names carved into plaques to show who helped make the building possible. This describes establishing merit. By practicing what is good, one improves oneself. This is "virtue." Whatever good you do that delights your mind is called virtue. Most people will not necessarily know about a person's virtuous acts, but establishing merit is something everyone knows about. There are two kinds of virtue: apparent and hidden. Apparent virtue is known by all and causes everyone to be happy, and hidden virtue is done to benefit everyone, but rarely is anyone aware of it. For example, spiritual powers can help all living beings in an invisible way, but no one is aware of them. This is an example of hidden virtue.

When one follows and rejoices in merit and virtue, one should reveal one's good deeds and cause others to do similar acts, so that they too can follow and rejoice in merit and virtue of others.

Not only does this vow involve following and rejoicing in the merit and virtue of oneself and others, but it also includes following and rejoicing in the merit and virtue of all good deeds that bring joy to all living beings of the Dharma Realm. You follow them and rejoice by helping them do their joyful and wholesome acts. You can also follow and rejoice in the merit and virtue of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and the Sound Hearers, and of Those Enlightened to Conditions, as well as the merit and virtue created by all living beings.

What does it mean to follow and rejoice in the merit and virtue of the Buddhas? To explain Sutras and speak Dharma and to teach and transform living beings is to follow and rejoice in the merit and virtue of the Buddhas. If you teach people to practice the Six Perfections and the 10,000 Practices, and to

cultivate the Bodhisattva Way, then you are following and rejoicing in the merit and virtue of Bodhisattvas. When you teach people to cultivate the Twelve Links of Causes and Conditions, then you follow and rejoice in the merit and virtue of Those Enlightened to Conditions. To cause others to become aware of the Four Noble Truths is to follow and rejoice in the merit and virtue of the Sound Hearers. To follow and rejoice in the merit and virtue of gods and humans you must teach the practices of the Five Precepts and the Ten Wholesome Acts. This has been a general explanation of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva's vow to follow and rejoice in merit and virtue; in actuality, the possible explanations are inexhaustible in number.

The Bodhisattva's SIXTH great vow is to REQUEST THE TURNING OF THE DHARMA WHEEL. What is the "Dharma wheel?" Wheels roll over things, and the Dharma wheel rolls over gods, demons, to exist eternally. After Shakyamuni became a Buddha, he turned the Dharma wheel of the Four Truths three times and crossed over the Five Bhikshus. This is an example of turning the Dharma wheel, which basically means to "explain the Dharma." To request the turning of the Dharma wheel means to respectfully and sincerely ask the Buddha to speak Dharma, or to ask various Dharma Masters to explain the Buddha's teachings. All of these exemplify Universal Worthy's vow to request the turning of the Dharma wheel. For example, we explain Sutras here every day, and each time the Dharma assembly convenes, lay people or Dharma Masters who request the Dharma are fulfilling one of the vows and performing one of the practices of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva.

What value does requesting the turning of the Dharma wheel have? We need to have people turning the Dharma wheel in this world so that the demon kings will not dare emerge. If no one explains the Dharma, then the demon kings will come out. A second reason is that when you request the turning of the Dharma wheel, the merit and virtue created by this wholesome act arises because of you, and is obtained by you, and you thereby follow and rejoice in merit and virtue. Furthermore, if you request the turning of the Dharma wheel, you will expand your wisdom, but this brings benefit not just to you, because your request is that a Dharma Master speak the Dharma for everyone, and so it benefits everyone. This is also following and rejoicing in merit and virtue.

So you can see that these ten great vows are all related. When you repent of all karmic obstacles and reform, you also rejoice in merit and virtue. If you wish to follow and rejoice in merit and virtue, you may request the turning of the Dharma wheel, for this is the greatest way to rejoice in merit and virtue.

Turning the Dharma wheel is not limited to lecturing on Sutras and speaking the Dharma. Any activity you do for Buddhism is called turning the Dharma wheel. For example, recording the lectures, translating them, and then printing them is turning the Dharma wheel. Taking notes of the explanations of the Sutras is done with the intent of turning the Dharma wheel. First you take notes, then you memorize them, and then you speak them for others. So now you are preparing to turn the Dharma wheel. Reciting Sutras, reading Sutras, and bowing to Sutras also are all forms of requesting that the Dharma wheel be turned.

Therefore, turning the Dharma wheel is not just one special kind of activity. In fact, anything you do which is of benefit to Buddhism is called turning the Dharma wheel. Writing the instructive verses on the front door, participating in the evening lectures, and attending the daytime meditation periods are all considered turning the Dharma wheel. What we do here is to request the turning of the Dharma wheel; if you understand, then in your daily activities you are requesting the turning of the Dharma wheel, but if you do not understand, and just do the work, then all this is just tiresome suffering, and only makes you afraid to turn the Dharma wheel.

*In Western geography there are seven continents

