**The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra**

Chapter 2: Expedient Devices
With Commentary by the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua

**Sutra:**
 **At that time the World Honored One arose serenely from samadhi and told Shariputra, “The wisdom of all the Buddhas is extremely profound and unlimited. The gateway to this wisdom is difficult to understand and difficult to enter. It cannot be known by any of the Hearers or Pratyekabuddhas.

What is the reason? The Buddhas have, in the past, drawn near to countless hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of Buddhas, exhaustively practicing the unlimited dharmas of the Way of those Buddhas. They are forging ahead with courage and vigor and their names are known everywhere.”**
Outline:

C2. The branches division of the Sutra.
D1. General explanation: opening the three and revealing the one.
E1. Generally opening and revealing.
F1. Lauding the Buddhas' Two Wisdoms.
G1. Prose.
H1. Praising the Two Wisdoms with words.
I1. Describing the provisional and actual wisdom of all Buddhas.
J1. Acclaiming both types of wisdom.
J2. Describing the foundation of both types of wisdom.

**Commentary:**

The previous prose and verse sections were an introduction to the Sutra, setting forth the Sutra's causes and conditions. Now that the causes and conditions have been related, we will proceed to explain the second chapter which is called **Chapter Two: Expedient Devices.**A device is a method, and expedient means effective. This type of method is a provisional dharma, not a real one. It is a provisional device designed for temporary use. Real means that it is forever unchanging, forever usable. However, if you begin by speaking the unchanging, real dharma, no one can understand it. That is why the Buddhas of the ten directions artfully set forth expedient Dharma-doors and “bestow the provisional for the sake of the real.” Later, they “open the provisional to reveal the real.”

“Bestowing the provisional for the sake of the real” means that, for the sake of realizing Buddhahood, the Hearer and Pratyekabuddha Vehicles are taught. After that, the Bodhisattva Vehicle is taught. The ultimate destination, however, is the Buddha Vehicle. The Buddha Vehicle is real. The Hearer and Pratyekabuddha Vehicles are provisional, taught for the sake of realizing Buddhahood. Small Vehicle Dharma is taught provisionally. Later, living beings are led to return to the Great Vehicle, the Buddha-fruition. That is what it means by “bestowing the provisional for the sake of the real.”

Next, let us consider what is meant by “opening the provisional to reveal the real.” At the very beginning, when the Buddha taught the Hearers and Pratyekabuddhas, he said, “This Dharma-door is the very best. It is incomparable Dharma. Nothing can compare with it.” The Small Vehicle people cultivated in accord and certified to the first, second, third, and fourth fruition of Sagehood. They were satisfied with just a little. They thought that was what the Buddhadharma was all about. They did not go forward or seek to advance. They stopped at a Transformed City. The analogy of the Transformed City will be discussed when we come to Chapter Seven. Those of the Two Vehicles felt that they had expended considerable energy in their cultivation. They had practiced all kinds of ascetic practices in order to certify to the attainment of the Sagely fruition. They didn't know that there was still the Buddha Way to be realized. Above, they did not seek the Buddha Way, and, below, they did not teach and transform living beings. They were “independent Arhats.” Having realized the Buddha Way themselves, they paid no attention to whether other living beings realized it.

For that reason, the Buddha began to “open” up the provisional dharma. He said, “The doctrines I previously explained to you were not the utmost Dharma-doors. Although you have certified to the Sagely fruition, it's not the ultimate position. You still have to return from the small and go towards the great. You must turn away from the Small Vehicle and go towards the Great Vehicle. You ought to walk the Bodhisattva path and cultivate the Six Paramitas and the Ten Thousand Conducts, the dharmas of the Great Vehicle.” Thus, the Buddha destroyed the provisional dharmas by making them obsolete, and he revealed the genuine doctrine.

**At that time**, when this chapter was spoken, **the World Honored One**, the Buddha, the one honored by gods and humans, both in and beyond the world, **arose serenely from samadhi.** Shakyamuni Buddha had entered the Samadhi of the Station of Limitless Principles. Now, he emerges from that concentration, and he does so serenely, which means peacefully and with self-mastery. He wasn't like those who, when finished meditating, immediately stretch out their painful legs and backs, roll their necks, and flex their shoulders. That's not being serene. It shows a lack of good manners, besides. Serene means calm, feeling one's entire body to be comfortable. It means no pain in the legs or in the back. The Buddha arose from samadhi and he was just about the same as before he had entered it. He didn't notice that his legs were uncomfortable.

**And told Shariputra:** He arose and, since no one asked him, the Buddha spoke without being requested to speak. Why did he speak to Shariputra? It was because among the assembly of Hearers, Shariputra was foremost in wisdom. He was the most intelligent. Within the space of a single week, Shariputra had completely penetrated the entire storehouse of Dharma. While still inside his mother's womb, Shariputra won debates with his uncle. Shariputra's uncle was a great debater. He was an excellent speaker who possessed unobstructed eloquence. However, when Shariputra's mother was pregnant with Shariputra, she borrowed Shariputra's wisdom and used it to defeat her older brother. Shakyamuni Buddha now addressed Shariputra, because he was so wise. Manjushri Bodhisattva, who spoke previously, is foremost in real wisdom, the wisdom of the Great Vehicle, whereas Shariputra is foremost in the wisdom of the provisional teaching, the wisdom of the Small Vehicle.

Shakyamuni Buddha now tells Shariputra**, The wisdom of all the Buddhas is extremely profound and unlimited**. It is extremely deep; it's bottomless and so you cannot know how deep it is. It is unlimited because it cannot be reckoned. It is at once profound and unlimited. It's a kind of wisdom that is so high and so deep that it cannot be fathomed or known by reckoning. It cannot be known through analogy. That's what the wisdom of all the Buddhas is like.

**The gateway to this wisdom is difficult to understand and difficult to enter.** Since the Buddha's wisdom is extremely profound and has no limit, how can one enter into it? How can one enter the wisdom of the Buddhas? The gate into the wisdom of Buddhas is hard to understand and to enter. It's not at all easy to be clear about it. It's difficult to certify to its attainment.

**It cannot be known by any of the Hearers or Pratyekabuddhas.** The assembly of Hearers and Pratyekabuddhas cannot understand it.

Hearers and Pratyekabuddhas belong to the Two Vehicles. Those who are born when a Buddha is in the world and who cultivate the Twelve Causes and Conditions are called Those Enlightened by Conditions. Those who are born when no Buddha is in the world and who cultivate on their own, seeing the flowers bloom in the spring and the yellow leaves fall in the autumn, and thus awaken to the Way, are called Pratyekabuddhas.

Hearers cultivate the Dharma of the Four Truths and certify to the fruition. The Four Truths are: the truth of suffering, the truth of origination, the truth of extinction, and the truth of the Way.

The Hearers and Pratyekabuddhas are the sages of the Small Vehicle. Although they have certified to the fruitions of sagehood, they cannot know the Buddha's wisdom; they don't understand it

**What is the reason?** Why can't they understand it? **The Buddhas have, in the past, drawn near to countless hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of Buddhas.** The reason the Buddhas became Buddhas was because, in the past, they drew near to all the Buddhas. They presented them with offerings and paid them homage, **exhaustively practicing the unlimited Dharmas of the Way of those Buddhas.** They cultivate the Way. They study the limitless Dharmas of the Way of all those millions of Buddhas. They cultivate according to the Buddhadharma. It is not known how many Dharma-doors they cultivate--a limitless, boundless number of them. So now we study a little bit of Dharma and think that we understand it. We read a single book on Buddhism and think we know it all. That is to be too shameless! It is to take the Buddhadharma too lightly, as too simple. There are even those who have never studied Sutras. That’s just to insult the audience. They are unable to benefit themselves and even less able to lecture in such a muddled fashion that, the more they talk, the less people understand. Some of them explain donkeys as horses and others explain ghosts as people. They cannot explain the word “ghost” correctly and they cannot even read the word “person.” Still, they go around lecturing. If you ask them a question, they might say, “I never read that book so I cannot comment on that.” They may strike up a conversation with you, perhaps using lines from the Chan School. They say they understand, but they really do not, and so they end up telling you to go figure it out for yourself.

You may wonder, “If those of the Two Vehicles did not understand the Great Vehicle, then how can common people understand it now?”

Those of the Two Vehicles went up step by step. Although we are common people, if we understand the doctrines of the Great Vehicle, we can immediately certify to the attainment of the fruit of the Great Vehicle. It’s like studying. Some people begin in elementary school and work their way up through high school and on to the university. Others may not have been to school, but they associate with those in elementary school and high school and find their studies very simple. They understand them as soon as they hear them, and so they can go directly to the university to study. Although we are common people, our affinities are such that we get to hear the Great Vehicle Buddhadharma in the beginning. Those of the Two Vehicles affinities were such that they did not get to hear the Great Vehicle until the very end, in the Dharma Flower Assembly. At that time, they turned away from the Small Vehicle and went towards the Great Vehicle Buddhadharma. Now, we have an excellent chance to study the Great Vehicle Buddhadharma, and to understand it directly and quickly.

**They are forging ahead with courage and vigor and their names are known everywhere.** They were courageous. They continued to go forward, no matter how tired they were. Vigor means that they did not rest. Because of their courage and vigor, they were well known. They were not like Seeker of Fame Bodhisattva who went around seeking fame everywhere. They cultivated vigorously, and, because they did not seek fame, fame came of itself. That is why their names were heard everywhere.

**Sutra:**
 **“They have accomplished the most profound Dharma, one which has never been before, and speak of it according to what is appropriate, but its purport is difficult to understand.”**
Outline:

J3. Conclusion

**Commentary:**

**They have accomplished the most profound Dharma, one which has never been before.** They have realized the supreme, profound dharma. Such a Dharma has never before existed. No one had ever obtained it before. **And speak of it according to what is appropriate**—They speak the Dharma according to the beings’ potential. They bestow the Teaching in accord with the people being taught. They speak the Dharma according to the individual’s needs. Like prescribing medicine for a specific illness.

**But its purport is difficult to understand.** Although they speak the Dharma in accord with what is appropriate, still the wisdom of the Buddhas is extremely deep and unlimited. Its purport is not easy to understand, Shariputra.

**Sutra:**
 **“Shariputra, from the time I realized Buddhahood, I have, by means of various causes and conditions and various analogies, extensively proclaimed the verbal teaching. With countless expedient devices, I have guided living beings, leading them to separate from all attachments.”

“Why is this? The Thus Come One has already perfected his expedient devices, his knowledge and vision, and the paramitas.”

“Shariputra, the knowledge and vision of the Thus Come One is vast, great, profound, and far-reaching. He has profoundly entered, without boundary, the unlimiteds, the unobstructeds, the powers, the fearlessnesses, the dhyana concentrations, and the samadhis of liberation, accomplishing all those dharmas never had before.”**
Outline:

I2. Describing the provisional and actual wisdom of Shakyamuni Buddha
J1. Acclaiming both types of wisdom
J2. Describing the foundation of both types of wisdom.
J3. Conclusion.

**Commentary:**

In the Dharma which the Buddha spoke, the wise see wisdom, and the humane see humaneness. The profound see profundity and the superficial see superficiality. It is said, “The Dharma is proclaimed with a single sound and each gains understanding according to his kind.” Although the Buddha spoke Dharma with a single sound, all living beings understood it. The humans understood it. The spirits understood it, too. The ghosts, the Bodhisattvas, the Hearers and the Conditioned Enlightened Ones all understood it. Each understood the doctrine on his own terms and none understood it completely. That is why the text says, “Its purport is difficult to understand.”

Some of them may have understood one aspect of its meaning, but not two aspects. Some may have understood two aspects, but not three. The Buddha spoke a single doctrine, but it included all of existence.

**“Shariputra!”** Shakyamuni Buddha calls out again, **“from the time I realized Buddhahood,”** what time was that? It was one night when he was sitting beneath the Bodhi Tree. He looked up, saw a bright star, and was enlightened to the Way. From that time until the present, **I have by means of various** kinds of **causes and conditions;** I have used various kinds of causes and conditions, not just one kind, but many different kinds, **and various analogies.** I have also used a limitless, countless number of analogies to explain the Buddhadharma. **Extensively proclaimed the verbal teaching.** “Extensively” means broadly; “proclaimed” means that he expounded and elaborated upon the principles. The “verbal teaching” means that the Buddha went everywhere lecturing on the Sutras and speaking the Dharma.

**With countless expedient devices.** It is not known how many expedients were used to teach and transform living beings. It is said,

“With good and clever expedients
He saves living beings;
He turns the dust of the world
Into the Buddha’s work.”

The Buddha uses ingenious methods to save all living beings. Ordinary things are turned into the Buddha’s work. While in the dust of the world, one cultivates and transcends the dust.

**I have guided living beings, leading them to separate from all attachments.** I have used many expedient devices to guide living beings. “Guide” means to induce. In Confucianism they say, “In an orderly fashion, one well-induces…” If you want to be a teacher, you must have a method to teach your students. If you have no method, the students will run away from you. They’ll be afraid of you. If you have a method, then this student will want to study with you and that student will want to study with you—all of them will like to study under you. If you have no teaching plan, however, they will sign up for your course today, and drop out tomorrow.

Teachers who know how to teach can bring in students from long distances and may have hundreds of students signed up for their classes. Other teachers, who are less skilled, may start out with a hundred and the following day, eighty will be left. The next day sixty will remain, and on the fourth day only forty. By the eighth day they will be totally alone! They may want to teach, but no one wants to learn from them. Why not? Because they do not know how to teach! If they did, they would say, “Work hard! I am going to give you a test, so you should pay special attention! If you are not lazy I will pass you whether or not your grades are good. I may give you a B or an A, but no one will get a C. If you do not study well, however, you won’t even get a D.” Hearing this, the students think, “He’ll certainly give me a B or an A,” and so they work hard.

The Buddhadharma works the same way. The Buddha is a good teacher. He uses all manner of Dharma-doors, saying, “Study the Four Truths. If you study them you can certify to the Sagely fruit, to the first fruit of Arhatship, or to the second, third, or even to the fourth fruit! If you cultivate the dharma of the Twelve Causes and Conditions, you can certify to the position of a Conditioned Enlightened One.” After that, he turns them from the small towards the great and tells them, “In the future you can all become Buddhas, but first you’ve got to practice the Bodhisattva Way. You must first cultivate the Six Perfections and the Ten Thousand Conducts.”

When those of the Two Vehicles hear this, they think, “So there was the Bodhisattva Vehicle all the time!” and they set the Small Vehicle aside to practice the Great Vehicle Dharma.

If the Buddha had started out saying, “You should cultivate the Great Vehicle Dharma,” and not first taught them the lesser vehicles, they would have thought, “In the Great Vehicle you’re supposed to give. How can I give my things away? That’s just not fair. I’m simply not going to do it.” If someone has just begun to study the Dharma and not yet obtained the slightest advantage, you cannot tell them that they have to give the moment they walk in the door. For example, if someone comes to listen to a lecture and you start talking to him before they have even crossed the threshold, saying, “Do you want to listen to the Sutra? Give me a hundred dollars!” They are going to think, “Oh! What’s this all about? A hundred dollars?” And off they will run. They do not get to hear the Sutra lecture. They do not give a hundred dollars, and you do not get any offerings.

But after they have heard the Sutra lectures for a while, they will come to understand that in order to practice the Bodhisattva Way, it is necessary to give. Then they may give a thousand or even ten thousand dollars—a lot more than the original one hundred. When they understand, they will give; if you tell them to give before they understand the principle, it will be harder for them than cutting off a piece of their own flesh. Even if it is very obvious that they should give, you cannot just tell them to give when they do not understand the Buddhadharma.

Since the Buddha understood this Dharma-door, he first told them to study the dharmas of the Two Vehicles. “Just do your own cultivation,” he said. “Know suffering, cut off origination, long for extinction and cultivate the Way. Cultivate that and certify to the fruit.”

They think about it, “Hmm…I don’t have to do anything but cultivate and gain accomplishment on my own,” and so they cultivate according to that Dharma-door.

Once they have cultivated and certified to the fruit of Arhatship, the Buddha “opens the provisional to reveal the real.” He does away with the provisional dharma in favor of the Great Vehicle. At that time, even though they may not want to cultivate it, they’ve got a taste of the Dharma and so they set the lesser dharmas aside and cultivate the Great Vehicle. When they cultivate the Great Vehicle, they have to give and hold the precepts. Giving and morality are the first two of the Six Perfections.

As to maintaining the precepts: Those who wish to maintain precepts are advised to do so themselves. They should pay attention to whether or not they, themselves, are keeping the precepts. They should not go around pestering other people about them saying things like, “Since you don’t understand, I’ll explain to you how to keep this precept here.”

Precepts are to be kept personally. You should not go around telling other people to keep them. Keep your own precepts. Don’t fail to keep them yourself and yet hound other people about keeping them. That is just like having filthy clothes yourself which you do not wash and yet helping others wash their clothes. It’s also called neglecting your own fields and weeding other people’s fields. You do not work in your own fields, but you go help other plant theirs. Your own go to ruin and you reap no harvest. So, in keeping the precepts, keep them yourself.

You must also practice the Perfections of Patience, Vigor, Dhyanasamadhi, and Prajna. You must cultivate all these various Dharma-doors.

So why did the Buddha not speak the Great Vehicle Dharma to begin with? It was because he feared that those of the Two Vehicles would not have it in their hearts to benefit others but would only care to benefit themselves. That is why he spoke the lesser dharmas first. Then later, when they had realized their own self-benefit, they could start to think about enlightening others. Thus, the Buddha used all manners of methods to teach living beings to leave their attachments. Living beings had to learn to part with the things they could not put down—their attachments.

At this point in the Sutra, everyone should return the light and reverse the illumination. Ask yourself, “Have I now separated from my attachments?”

If you have separated from your attachments, you should separate from them a bit further. If you have not separated from them, hurry up and do so. Do not be attached.

We should definitely believe in the Dharma which the Thus Come One has spoken. We should not merely listen without actually practicing. The most important thing is to separate from attachments.

**Why is this?** Why should one separate from all attachments?

**The Thus Come One has already perfected his expedient devices, his knowledge and vision, and the paramitas.** He has reached the other shore in all of these. He has penetrated the source of Dharma with his knowledge.

**Shariputra, the knowledge and vision of the Thus Come One is vast, great, profound, and far-reaching.** What is the knowledge of the Thus Come One? It refers to wisdom that plumbs the source of all Dharmas. The Thus Come One’s vision refers to comprehending the emptiness of all dharmas. The Buddha’s knowledge and vision is broad. There is nothing more vast, nothing greater. It cannot be spoken of in terms of numbers. It is so big there is nothing beyond it, and so small there is nothing inside it. It is so great that you could not find anything greater or more profound. It is extremely deep. Ultimately how deep is it? No one knows.

**He has profoundly entered, without boundary, the unlimiteds,** the Buddha has four unlimited minds: kindness, compassion, joy and giving. **The unobstructeds,** refers to the four types of unobstructed eloquence: unobstructed eloquence in Dharma, unobstructed eloquence in meaning, unobstructed eloquence in phrasing and unobstructed eloquence in delight in speaking.

**The powers** are the ten wisdom powers of the Buddha. **Fearlessnesses** refer to his four types of fearlessness.**Dhyana concentrations** refer to the Buddha’s samadhis. Dhyana is a Sanskrit word, which is interpreted as “thought cultivation ( 思惟修 --si wei xiu)” or as “stilling thought ( 靜慮 --jing lu).” Through the practice of dhyana meditation false thinking disappears.

No matter what one does, one should be concentrated. You can obtain samadhi in anything you do. Chopping wood, drawing water, serving guests—in all situations one can cultivate concentration.

Dhyana Master Yung Ming Shou, the Sixth Patriarch of the Pure Land School in China, recited the Buddha’s name one hundred thousand times a day—“Namo Amitabha Buddha, Namo Amitabha Buddha”—and yet he did not shirk any of his duties. He did all kinds of work, but while he was working he was in the Buddha-recitation samadhi. Each time he recited “Namo Amitabha Buddha” a transformation Buddha came out of his mouth. Who saw it? The people at the time who had the Buddha Eye could see it. Ordinary people could not. Everyone said that Dhyana Master Yung Ming Shou was a transformation body of Amitabha Buddha. He was always in the Buddha Recitation Samadhi.

So you see, no matter what kind of work you are involved in, all you have to do is have a persevering, unchanging mind and you can obtain concentration power.

**And the samadhis of liberation.** These states of samadhi were so high and so deep; they could not be fathomed. The Thus Come One has profoundly entered them, without boundary. There is no limit to them.

**Accomplishing all those Dharmas never had before.** He is able to accomplish those dharmas, which have never been before, the samadhis, which have never been before.

**Sutra:**
 **“Shariputra, the Thus Come One is able to make various discriminations, cleverly speaking all dharmas. His speech is gentle and delights the hearts of the multitudes.”

“Shariputra, essentially speaking, the Buddha has fully accomplished all of those unlimited, boundless dharmas which have never been before.”**
Outline:

H2. Praising the Two Wisdoms as being beyond description
I1. Basis for this praise
J1. Basis
J2. That which is beyond description

**Commentary:**

Shakyamuni Buddha calls out once again, **Shariputra, the Thus Come One is able to make various discriminations,** the Buddha, the World Honored One, is skilled at discriminating the Real Mark of all dharmas.

What is meant by “dharma?”

The dharma is a method. If you speak the method in an ingenious way, you can lead your listeners to accept your doctrines. That is “clever speech.” If you speak clumsily, you may talk them out of believing. Basically, it was something they enjoyed doing, but, by the time you are done talking about it, they no longer want to do it. That’s clumsy, awkward speech. If they did not want to do something, and you talked them into it, that would be clever speech.

The Sixth Patriarch, the Great Master Hui Neng, could not read but he was able to speak all dharmas ingeniously. Once there were two people who were arguing. One of them said that the wind was moving, and the other said the flag was moving. They argued back and forth for a long time. The Sixth Patriarch said to them, “the wind isn’t moving and the flag isn’t moving. Your minds are moving! When your minds move, the flag moves and the wind moves; but if your minds don’t move, then nothing moves.” That’s clever speech!

If you know how to cultivate the Way, you can do so in all your activities, and you will always be in samadhi. How did the Sixth Patriarch become enlightened? He was a firewood gatherer in the mountains. He took his bundles into town, sold them, and used the money to support his old mother. He did this out of a sense of filiality. He did not sit in meditation and investigate Dhyana. When he went to the monastery of the Fifth Patriarch, what do you think happened? The Fifth Patriarch ordered him to pound rice. He pounded rice all day long. He had no time to meditate or study the Buddhadharma. He did not recite a single sentence of a mantra or sit once in meditation. But he became enlightened.

How did he become enlightened?

In everything he did, he worked with a single mind. He did not strike up false thinking. Because he made his mind one-pointed, he gained genuine samadhi. No matter what people do, if they can make their minds one-pointed, they can obtain samadhi and become enlightened. You don’t necessarily have to sit in Dhyana meditation.

**His speech is gentle.** The Buddha speaks the Dharma with very gentle words. He does not put a lot of pressure on people, saying things like, “Hey! Do this! If you don’t do it, you’re in trouble!” He is not like me, this unfair teacher who has set down a very unfair law. I said that if any of you got angry, all parties involved had to kneel for twenty-four hours straight. Still, even though the law is unfair, I did not do it for selfish reasons. It is a kind of ingenious method to keep you from getting angry. If you do not understand this dharma, you might find it unfair. But if you understand it, you’ll know that it is a most wonderful dharma indeed.

**And delights the hearts of the multitudes.** The words the Buddha speaks are extremely gentle and harmonious. Everyone who hears them feels extremely happy. His speech seems to be very much in accord with their own way of seeing things. Thus, their hearts are delighted; they are all happy.

**Shariputra,** says the Buddha yet again, **essentially speaking,** to come right to the point, **the Buddha has fully accomplished all of those unlimited, boundless dharmas, which have never been before.** There are unlimited dharmas, which have never been before and the Buddha has accomplished every one of them. However, accomplishing is accomplishing, and that is one thing, but now he says:

**Sutra:**
 **“Stop.”**
Outline:

I2. The actual praise of stopping the explanation
J1. Stopping

**Commentary:**

Today we will stop at the word **Stop.** If the Buddha himself says, “stop,” how can I continue? So I will not speak either. Tomorrow though, we are going to discuss the most important part of the Sutra, the Ten Suchnesses.

Since it is such an important passage, I am not going to discuss it today. You can wait nervously for a night, and I’ll tell you tomorrow.

**Sutra:**

**“Shariputra, there is no need to speak further. Why is this? As to that foremost, rare, and hard-to-understand Dharma accomplished by the Buddha—only the Buddhas and the Buddha can exhaust the Real Mark of all dharmas. That is to say, with regard to all dharmas: the suchness of the marks, the suchness of the nature, the suchness of the substance, the suchness of the power, the suchness of the function, the suchness of the causes, the suchness of the conditions, the suchness of the effects, the suchness of the retributions, and the suchness of the ultimate equality from beginning to end.”**Outline:

J2. The reason for stopping.
 **Commentary:**

“Stop,” says Shakyamuni Buddha. “Cease.” This means that the Buddha did not want to speak The Dharma Flower Sutra.

Why not?

It was to be feared that, if he spoke it, people would not believe it. What is more, they might slander it and thereby create limitless bad karma. So the Buddha thought not to speak it. He said, “I’m not going to speak it.” **Shariputra,there is no need to speak further.** I don’t want to continue speaking the Sutra. **Why is this? As to that foremost, rare and hard-to-understand Dharma accomplished by the Buddha,** the foremost, number one dharma, which the Buddha cultivated and accomplished is the non-dual Dharma-door. The non-dual Dharma-door is “not two.” It transcends the relative. “Rare” means that it has appeared very, very rarely. Why is it “hard-to-understand?” It is because it is extremely profound. This Dharma is foremost, rare, and hard to understand.

**Only the Buddhas and the Buddha;** that is, only the Buddhas of the ten directions and Shakyamuni Buddha **can exhaust the real mark of all dharmas.** Only the Buddhas can be clear about the Real Mark of all dharmas. The Real Mark is unmarked and yet there is nothing not marked with it. **That is to say, with regard to all dharmas;** in general, all dharmas do not go beyond the Ten Suchnesses. To speak in terms of the Ten Dharma Realms, there are Ten Suchnesses in the realm of the Buddha, Ten Suchnesses in the realm of the Bodhisattvas, Ten Suchnesses in the realm of the Conditioned Enlightened Ones and Ten Suchnesses in the realm of the Hearers. There are Ten Suchnesses in the realm of the gods, Ten Suchnesses in the realm of humans, Ten Suchnesses in the realm of asuras, Ten Suchnesses in the realm of hungry ghosts, Ten Suchnesses in the realm of the hells and Ten Suchnesses in the realm of animals. Ten Suchnesses in each ten realms makes One Hundred Realms. In each of the Hundred Realms there are also Ten Suchnesses, making One Thousand Suchnesses. I am explaining this to you very generally because this is the first time you have heard it and so you probably will not understand it too well. But if you hear it once, then the second and third time you hear it you may be able to understand it. Why don’t you understand it? Because it is the first time you’ve heard the Sutra and you hear all these, “Suchness, suchness, such a lot of them.” You do not understand them. However, the essential meaning of The Dharma Flower Sutra is right here in the Ten Suchnesses. Although you cannot fully understand it, you should pay special attention to it.

Now, I will explain the Ten Suchnesses. The word suchness in Chinese is composed of two characters: 如 -ru (like) and 是 - shi (it is). Suchness means, “thus it is.” “Thus” is a word that points to the dharma. It means that we are speaking of these dharmas.

**The suchness of the mark.** What is a mark? It is very simple, very easy to understand. It is an appearance. But an appearance may be true or false. What is a true appearance? That is also very easy to understand. It is permanent and unchanging. The permanent is the true appearance. It is, as The Shurangama Sutra states, “the permanently abiding true heart, the bright substance of our pure nature.”

Permanent means that it does not change; it is unchanging and yet it accords with conditions; it accords with conditions and yet does not change. It is not produced, not destroyed, not defiled, not pure, not increased, and not decreased. If I say too much, it is of no use. I am just explaining it in terms that are readily understandable. It is simply the Real Mark of True Suchness, also called “the permanent.”

The Real Mark of True Suchness is not something everyone can understand and so the text says, “Only the Buddhas and the Buddha can exhaust the Real mark of all dharmas.” This refers to the suchness of the mark, the true mark. What is it? I think you can probably understand it somewhat.

There is also the false mark. That is something that you are also very familiar with. You all know your old friend. Who is it?

Ignorance! Do you recognize it? Do you understand the term? It is nothing new. I have been lecturing the Sutras for a long time, and I often bring it up. Ignorance is an important character. It is like the leading character in a play. No doubt you are all familiar with it.

Ignorance is just a false mark. It is not true, and so it is subject to production, extinction, increase, decrease, defilement, purity, and so on. Ignorance is empty and false. It has no real substance. It is only a name and corresponds to nothing in reality. It cannot be grasped or seen. It causes us to undergo birth, old age, sickness, and death, worry, grief and misery. In the fire of the three realms all living beings are burned. It’s like being burned in a fire or boiled in water—that difficult to undergo. The Thus Come One, Shakyamuni Buddha, had genuine wisdom, and he knew about these problems. He made no mistakes in teaching living beings. Not being mistaken is just the true and real, in accord with principle. In accord with principle, it is the true, real doctrine. It is most reasonable, and so it is termed the Suchness of the Mark. The Suchness of the Mark has the two aspects of true and false. Because the Buddha taught them, we are able to hear this wonderful Dharma. As a verse earlier in the text says, “The real meaning of all dharmas I have already expounded for all heroes …”

Now, to explain the **suchness of the nature.** The nature has the aspects of good and evil. There is good and evil karma, which is the manifestation of the good or evil of the nature. Karma does not arise by itself, however. How does it come into existence? It is produced from the nature. The nature may manifest as good or evil. In China there is a short work called The Three Character Classic. When children start school, it is the first thing they must learn to recite. It begins: “When people are born, their natures are basically good.” When we are born, our natures are good to begin with. That original nature is the Buddha nature. However, “The nature is near, but habits lead it afar.” The nature is basically very near the Buddha nature. Corrupted by evil habits, it grows far away from the Buddha nature. This means that within our hearts there are both good and evil.

How do they manifest?

At any given time, causes and conditions of different kinds will produce a good or evil nature. For example, bamboo and wood are both flammable. That is they possess the “nature of fire.” If you just let them sit there, however, they will not catch on fire. You have to add a condition, a drill and a stick, or may be a match, to get the fire started.

Wood and bamboo both possess the nature of fire, but if no one sets them on fire, they will not burn. Without the necessary causes and conditions, fire will not come forth. For example, before the time of the ruler Sui Ren Shi, people in China devoured animals raw and drank their blood, much the way tigers do. Whatever wild creatures they caught, they would bit, chew and eat raw, and then finish off the feast by drinking their blood. The reason they ate everything raw was that fire had not been discovered yet. It was not until the time of Sui Ren Shi that people learned how to drill wood to make fire and to cook their food.

In the same way, the good and evil karma that we create depends upon our nature to come forth. The coming forth of our nature may be for the sake of goodness, in which case it is called “wisdom-light.” When you do good deeds you shine with wisdom-light. Wisdom-light accomplishes all kinds of wholesome acts. When the nature comes forth for the sake of evil, it is called “poisonous-fire,” and accomplishments by means of it are what is meant by “false conditions.”

Our natures are basically empty and still, basically non-existent, like the nature of fire present in the bamboo or wood. They have to be set on fire. They will not burn by themselves. Our natures are basically empty and although good and evil are within them, they manifest only when conditions allow. It is much like the nature of fire as discussed in The Shurangama Sutra where it says, “The nature of fire has no self; it depends upon conditions.” The fire nature has no self. Fire arises only when the causes and conditions come together. That is the doctrine of the Suchness of the Nature.

**The suchness of the substance.** The substance refers to our bodies and all material objects. There are three categories of substance. The first is the substance of the common person and the Sage. Originally, they are completely equal; the substance is without the common or the Sagely. This is to take the principle as the substance, the principle meaning the inherent Buddha-nature.

Secondly, people may cultivate from the position of a common person and accomplish their Way karma. This is the non-outflow substance which those who have certified to the fruition possess. Thirdly, common people have the illusory shell of the five skandhas, which unites with the four elements to become the body, a substance that has outflows.

**The suchness of the power.** Power here refers to karma power. I told you before that I had a left-home Dharma brother who had studied the doctrines of lecturing on the Sutras. He was always giving lectures. What is more is that he liked to lecture on the eight consciousnesses. According to the Chinese custom, to celebrate the New Year, one writes characters on red paper and puts them up on the wall for good luck. The idea is that the letters written with the brush will keep the ghosts and demons away. That year I wrote some characters that said, “Wisdom like the sea.”

My Dharma brother watched me write the characters. I wrote them very quickly in cursive style and he liked them. He started saying, “Wisdom like the sea, wisdom like the sea, wisdom like the sea…” over and over again. I said, “It looks to me that your karma power is like the sea!”

He was outraged. “Hah!” he stormed. “What do you mean, my karma power is like the sea? Here it is New Year’s and you are insulting me.”

I said, “Now, don’t you get mad. I guarantee you’re going to like it. You’ll be happy.”

“You tell me that my karma power is like the sea and I’m supposed to like it?”

I said, “As to karma power, there is good karma and there is bad karma. If I said your good karma power was like the sea, how would that strike you?”

He stared at me. “What can I say?” he said and grasped my hand. He did not get angry either. So it only took the addition of one word, “good karma like the sea,” to make his anger completely disappear. One knows not where it went, but it was gone at once. Would you say this was wonderful or not? One word was all it took. Therefore, one word can be unspeakably wonderful. But you must know how to use it. If you know how to use it, it will be wonderful. If you do not know how to use it, you will run into trouble.

Therefore, “power” here refers to the power of karma. Karma has a substance. From that substance a power or force is derived which operates in the Ten Dharma Realms, creating the Dependent and Orthodox Retribution Worlds. What is the Dependent Retribution World? It is the mountains, rivers, the earth, houses, vegetation, and the myriad appearances. The Orthodox Retribution World is all living beings. Where do the two worlds come from? They are both created from karma power. So it says, “the Suchness of the Power.”

**The suchness of the function.** Function means to do, to make. To make what? To make karma. Making karma, one may make good or evil karma. Creating karma, one must undergo the retribution. If you plant a good cause, you will reap a good fruit. If you plant an evil cause, you will reap an evil fruit. If you do good deeds, you receive good retribution. If you do evil acts, you receive an evil retribution. Therefore, it is all what you make it:

Good and evil are two different roads.
You can cultivate or you can commit offenses.

“Cultivate” means to cultivate the good. “Commit” means to do evil. The Suchness of the Function refers to doing good and receiving blessings or doing evil and receiving misfortune.

**The suchness of the causes.** A cause refers to the minds of all living beings. The mind may be likened to a piece of ground. All good and evil are manifest only from the mind. They manifest from your mind and so previously we spoke of the cause as a seed. The seed is planted in your mind and so it is called the “mind ground.” All the grasses and trees are born from the earth, and all good and evil comes from the mind. All the seeds of good and evil planted in your mind are the causes.

**The suchness of the conditions.** There are two factors that go into making up the conditions. The first is the factor of time. The second is the factor of the situation. The condition itself is basically devoid of good or evil, but it must be present for a particular appearance to manifest. This may be compared to something which is withered and dry, and which ignites at the first spark. The spark is the aiding condition. It may also be likened to ice which melts when the sun shines on it. The colder it gets, the harder the ice freezes, but when the sun shines, the ice will melt.

When you plant a seed in the earth, if the conditions are not right, it will not come up. If you plant the seed on ice, it will not sprout. If you plant it in fire, it will not grow either. You have to plant it in the ground and then make sure the sun shines on it and there is moisture, say from the rain falling on it. These are all conditions. They come together and help the seed, the cause, grow.

**The suchness of the effects.** To start out on a course of action is called the cause. If you do something, at the very beginning it is a cause. When the matter has been successfully completed, the completed matter is the effect. The effect is also spoken of in terms of good and evil. Good and evil effects come from good and evil causes respectively. So it is said, “Carrying the cause, one realizes the effects.”

**The suchness of retributions.** Retribution is the complex of effects incurred as a result of the karma you have created. According to the type of karma you create, you undergo just that kind of retribution.

You may ask, “What is the difference, then, between the effect and the retribution?”

The effect takes place before the retribution is undergone. It is the immediate consequence. One undergoes retribution when the effects have been broken through and one receives recompense. If you planted an evil cause, you reap the effect. Later, you receive the retribution.

What is meant by the effect? If we create all kinds of evil karma and fall into hell, that is the attainment of the effect of hell. Once you are in the pot, you are undergoing retribution. Receiving the torments of hell is retribution. If you enlighten to the principle of retribution, you can certify to the positions of the Four Sagely Realms, the Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas, the Hearers and the Conditioned Enlightened Ones. If you have awakened, you can hope to attain the Four Sagely Positions. If you are confused, deluded, you will bring the retribution of the Common Realms down upon yourself, and end up among the gods, humans, asuras, hell-beings, hungry ghosts, or animals.

**The suchness of the ultimate equality from beginning to end.** In the above-mentioned Suchnesses there are the two paths of confusion and enlightenment. Whether you are confused or enlightened, from the beginning to the very end, the first through the ninth, when discussed in terms of cause and effect, they are non-dual and ultimately equal.

The Ten Suchnesses are present in the Buddha Realm, but they are very fine and special states. In the hells there are also Ten Suchnesses. But they are nothing at all like the Buddha Realm states. They are very bad. They are not superior and fine. In fact, they are terrible.

The Ten Suchnesses existing in each of the Ten Dharma Realms make One Hundred Realms. The Ten Suchnesses then existing in each of the Hundred Realms make One Thousand Suchnesses. This is known as the Hundred Realms and the Thousand Suchnesses.

The Hundred and the Thousand Suchnesses include all of the various situations in the Ten Dharma Realms. The Dharma Flower Sutra lists the Ten Suchnesses and, also I have explained them, I believe you probably do not understand them fully. If you truly wish to understand them, you will have to work harder in your investigation of the Buddhadharma. After you have investigated it for a long time, you will naturally be able to understand this doctrine.

**Sutra:**
 **At that time, the World Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke verses saying,**

**Illimitable are the heroes of the world.
All the gods and people in the world,
And all the classes of living beings
Cannot know the Buddhas.
The Buddhas’ powers, fearlessnesses,
Liberations and samadhis,
And other dharmas of the Buddhas
Can be fathomed by no one.
Formerly, following countless Buddhas,
I perfectly walked all the paths
Of the wonderful Dharma, subtle and deep,
Hard to see and hard to understand;
Through limitless millions of eons,I walked down all these paths.
In the Bodhimanda, I realized the fruit,
And have fully known and seen it all.**

Outline:

G2. Verse.
H1. Praising the Two Wisdoms.
I1. Praising both types of wisdom of all Buddhas and Shakyamuni Buddha.

**Commentary:

Illimitable are the heroes of the world.** The Buddhas possess great heroism, great strength, great kindness, and great compassion. No one can measure the states of the Buddhas.

**All the gods and people in the world, and all the classes of living beings cannot know the Buddhas.** There is not a single living being that can know the realm of the Buddhas, that can know the spiritual powers and wonderful functions of the Buddhas.

**The Buddhas’ powers, fearlessnesses, liberations and samadhis, and other dharmas of the Buddhas, can be fathomed by no one.** The Buddhas have Ten Wisdom Powers, Four Fearlessnesses, Eight Liberations and countless samadhis. There is not anyone who can fathom all the wonderful Dharmas of the Buddhas.

**Formerly, following countless Buddhas.** “Formerly” means in the causal ground, limitless eons ago. **Iperfectly walked all the paths.** I cultivated all the Dharma-doors **of the wonderful Dharma, subtle and deep.** The Dharma is extremely subtle and profound. How deep is it? No one knows. **Hard to see and hard to understand.** This Dharma is difficult to encounter in a hundred thousand eons. It is difficult to understand. And so the Four Vast Vows run:

Living beings are boundless,
I vow to save them.
Afflictions are endless,
I vow to sever them.
Dharma-doors are limitless,
I vow to master them.
The Buddha Way is supreme,
I vow to realize it.

In the causal ground, the Buddha made these Four Vast Vows in every life and cultivated the Way. The Dharma that he realized is not easy to understand.

**Through limitless millions of eons, I walked down all these paths.** I cultivated the Thirty-seven Limbs of Enlightenment. They are: the Five Roots, the Five Powers, the Four Applications of Mindfulness, the Four Right Efforts, the Four As-you-will Fulfillments, the Seven Bodhi Shares, and the Eightfold Path. That’s thirty-seven. You can also include the Four Truths, the Twelve Causes and Conditions, the Six Perfections and the Ten Thousand Conducts.

**In the Bodhimanda, I realized the fruit.** Because I cultivated all these Dharmas, in the Bodhimanda I realized Buddhahood. **And have fully known and seen it all.** I have seen all there is to see and I know all there is to know.

Sutra:

**The great effect and retribution,
The various natures, marks, and meanings,
Are such that I and the ten-direction Buddhas
Alone can understand these matters.**

Outline:

H2. Praising the Two Wisdoms as beyond description.
I1. Explaining that they are beyond description.

**Commentary:**
 **The great effect and retribution,** supreme, right enlightenment is the great effect. The perfect, full reward body is the great retribution. **The various natures, marks and meanings;** these refer to the doctrine of the Ten Suchnesses. **Are such that I and the ten-direction Buddhas alone can understand these matters.** Only the Buddhas can understand these matters.

**Sutra:**

**This Dharma can’t be demonstrated,
The mark of language being still and extinct;
Of all the kinds of living beings
There is none who can understand it.
Except the host of Bodhisattvas,
Firm in the power of faith.
The host of the Buddha’s disciples
Who’ve made offerings to the Buddhas
And who have exhausted all outflows,
And dwell in their final bodies—
The strength of people such as these
Also proves inadequate.
If the world were filled
With those like Shariputra,
Who together spent their thoughts to measure it,
They couldn’t fathom the Buddha’s wisdom.**

Outline:I2. Stopping the explanation.

**Commentary:**
 **This Dharma can’t be demonstrated.** You can not just casually speak this wonderful Dharma to people. Why not? It is because of **the mark of language being still and extinct;** this is the ultimate Real Mark Dharma-door where the path of word and language is cut off. It has already been severed. The place where the mind functions has been dispensed with.

The mouth wants to speak but words fail;
The mind wants to think but thoughts are lost.

The mind wants to climb on conditions and scheme, but the thoughts just are not there. The thoughts have died as well.

The path of words and language is cut off.
The place of the mind’s functioning is gone.

There is nothing to say. The true, wonderful Dharma is ineffable. It cannot be expressed in words because it is something within the self-nature. It is not found outside. In this wonderful Dharma, the marks of language are still and extinct.

**Of all the kinds of living beings, there is none who can understand it except the host of Bodhisattvas, firm in the power of faith.** Not one single kind of living being can understand this wonderful Dharma except for the Great Vehicle Bodhisattvas. It is because the Bodhisattvas have hearts full of faith. They can understand the Real Mark Dharma. People like Bodhisattva Manjushri can understand this Dharma. They may not understand it totally, but they believe in it.

**The host of the Buddha’s disciples who’ve made offerings to the Buddhas;** who have, in former lives, made offerings to all the Buddhas. **And who have exhausted all outflows.** They have obtained to non-outflows, certified to the attainment of Pratyekabuddhahood. **And dwell in their final bodies.** They now inhabittheir very last retribution bodies. They will undergo no further becoming after this. **The strength of persons such as these;** people like the Bodhisattvas and the Pratyekabuddhas **also proves inadequate.** They can not understand this Buddhadharma either.

**If the world were filled with those like Shariputra;** let us suppose the whole world was filled with people who had as much wisdom as Shariputra, the wisest of the Buddha’s disciples, **who together spent their thoughts to measure it,** if they exhausted their thoughts and the power of their wisdom trying to plumb the depths of the Buddha’s wisdom, they could not do it. They could never fathom the Buddha’s inconceivable, subtle, and wonderful Dharma. **They couldn’t fathom the Buddha’s wisdom.** They would be unable to comprehend the wisdom of the Buddha. **Sutra:**

**Truly, suppose the ten directions,
Were filled with those like Shariputra,
And that the remaining disciples filled
All the lands in the ten directions,
And that together they spent their thoughts to measure it,
They also could not know it.
If Pratyekabuddhas of sharp wisdom
Without outflows, in their final bodies,
Also filled the ten directions,
Their number like the bamboo in the forest,
And if they put their minds together,
Wishing to think about the Buddha’s real wisdom,
Throughout measureless millions eons,They could not know the smallest part of it.
Suppose newly resolved Bodhisattvas,
Who’ve made offerings to countless Buddhas,
Who understand the principle and the purport,
And are well able to speak the Dharma,
Whose numbers are like rice, hemp, bamboo, and reeds,
Filled the ten-direction lands,
And suppose with one mind and with wondrous wisdom,
Throughout eons like the Ganges’ sands,
They were all together to think it over,
Even they couldn’t know the Buddha’s wisdom.**

**Commentary:**
The Buddha has two types of wisdom, the provisional and the real. Provisional wisdom is used to speak the Dharma in accord with conditions and to use expedient devices to take living beings across. Real wisdom is genuine, Real Mark wisdom.

**Truly, suppose the ten directions.** Previously it just said “the world” meaning one world. Here it says “the ten directions” meaning all the worlds in the ten directions—the infinite, boundless worlds of the Three Thousand Great Thousand World System. **Were filled with those like Shariputra.** If living beings of the ten-direction worlds were all as intelligent as Shariputra. Shariputra’s wisdom, however, is provisional wisdom; it is not the Buddha’s real wisdom.

**And that the remaining disciples filled all the lands in the ten directions, and that together they spent their thoughts to measure it, they also could not know it.** If Shariputra and all the other disciples spent their thoughts, exhausted their brains, to calculate the Buddha’s wisdom, they could not know it. They could never fathom the Buddha’s real wisdom either.

**If Pratyekabuddhas of sharp wisdom.** The Hearers were spoken of previously. Here, we speak of the Pratyekabuddhas who are a bit higher in wisdom. **Without outflows, in their final bodies, also filled the ten directions.** They have already attained to the state of no-outflows, the Penetration of the Extinction of Outflows, and they dwell in their last retribution bodies. Once one has certified to the fruit of a Pratyekabuddha, who is considered the Middle Vehicle, one does not again receive a retribution body. So, this is their very last retribution body. **Their number like the bamboo in the forest.** If they numbered as many as the bamboo in the bamboo groves, **and if they put their minds together wishing to think about the Buddha’s real wisdom, throughout measureless millions eons, they could not know the smallest part of it.** To say nothing of understanding it completely, they could not even know the tiniest, most minute portion thereof.

**Suppose newly resolved Bodhisattvas,** Bodhisattvas who have just brought forth their hearts, **who’ve made offerings to countless Buddhas, who understand the principle and the purport, and are well able to speak the Dharma.** They have unimpeded comprehension of the Buddhadharma’s doctrines. Not only that, but they are well-qualified speakers of the Dharma and possess unobstructed eloquence. **Whose numbers are like rice, hemp, bamboo, and reeds, filled the ten-direction lands. And suppose with one mind and with wondrous wisdom,** if they combined their hearts into one and used that fine and subtle wisdom, **throughout eons like the Ganges’ sands, they were all together to think it over, even they couldn’t know the Buddha’s wisdom.** If they all got together to try to calculate the Buddha’s wisdom, they could not do it.

**Sutra:**

**Suppose that non-retreating Bodhisattvas,
Their number like the Ganges’ sands,
With one mind thought to seek that wisdom
They also could not know of it.
And what is more, Shariputra,
That inconceivable, non-outflow,
Most profound and subtle Dharma,
I have perfectly obtained,
And I alone know its mark,
Along with the ten-direction Buddhas.
Shariputra, you should know
The words of the Buddhas do not differ.
In the Dharma spoken by the Buddhas
You should place the power of great faith.
When the World Honored One’s Dharma’s at its end,
The true and real must be spoken.
I tell the assembly of Hearers
And those who seek the Conditioned Enlightened Vehicle,
That I will lead them to cast off suffering’s bond,
And arrive at Nirvana.
The Buddha uses the power of expedients,
Demonstrating the teaching of Three Vehicles,
So that living beings, attached in many places,
May be guided to escape.**

Outline:

I3. The realm beyond description.
F2. Generally opening and revealing so attachments are loosened and doubts
brought forth.
G1. Clarifying that all Buddhas reveal the one actual teaching.
G2. Clarifying that Shakyamuni Buddha divides the one and speaks of three.

**Commentary:**
 **Suppose that non-retreating Bodhisattvas.** The newly resolved Bodhisattvas, the Hearers, and the Conditioned Enlightened Ones were mentioned above. Sometimes newly resolved Bodhisattvas may retreat and lose their Bodhi-hearts. Hearers may become “fixed Hearers,” that is, fixed at the position of Hearer. Other Hearers are those who have retreated from the Great Vehicle; they brought forth the Bodhisattva heart, but then they retreated to the Hearer position. Some have brought forth the Bodhisattva heart, but do not as yet have any genuine samadhi power. Those are the newly resolved Bodhisattvas.

This passage of text mentions non-retreating Bodhisattvas. They will never retreat to the Two Vehicles. They cultivate the Great Vehicle Dharma-doors and will never again go back to the lesser vehicles. **Their number like the Ganges’ sands.** There were a great many non-retreating Bodhisattvas, let’s say…There are three levels of non-retreat:

1. Non-retreating position: This means that the Great Vehicle Bodhisattva will never go back to the position of either of the Two Vehicles.

2. Non-retreating conduct: This means that, in their cultivation, the Great Vehicle Bodhisattvas are always vigorous and never lazy; they advance with heroic vigor.

3. Non-retreating thought: Not only do they not retreat in their position or their cultivation, but they do not even have the thought of doing so.

**With one mind thought to seek that wisdom.** If they got together and investigated the Buddha’s wisdom, the real wisdom, **they also could not know of it.** Although they occupy a position from which they do not retreat, they still have not obtained the true, real wisdom. Their wisdom is merely provisional. They cannot understand the Buddha’s true, real wisdom.

**And what is more, Shariputra.** The Buddha further addresses Shariputra, **that inconceivable, non-outflow, most profound and subtle Dharma,** the real mark of all Dharmas, the true, real wisdom, the spiritual penetration of non-outflows is inconceivable. It can not be thought of with the mind or expressed in words. It is extremely deep, subtle, and wonderful. This Dharma is unsurpassed and also extremely deep, at once fine and subtle. It’s extremely wonderful and inconceivable. **I have perfectly obtained.** It is perfect, neither lacking nor in excess. **And I alone know its mark.** Only Shakyamuni Buddha can know the real wisdom, **along with the ten-direction Buddhas.** All those in the ten directions who have realized Buddhahood can know it. So it said above, “Only the Buddhas and the Buddha can exhaust the Real Mark of all dharmas…” The meaning is the same here.

**Shariputra, you should know the words of the Buddhas do not differ.** What all the Buddhas say is true, real speech; it is the same sound spoken with different mouths. The Thus Come One speaks the truth, speaks of what is, he speaks it truly and he never speaks falsely. The path of all the Buddhas is identical. Therefore the Dharma which the Buddhas speak is the same. The Buddha’s true, real wisdom can be known and understood only by the Buddhas and the Buddha.

**In the Dharma spoken by the Buddhas, you should place the power of great faith.** You should have no doubts, only faith. Faith is extremely powerful. Why do you need faith? It is said,

The Buddhadharma is like the great sea;
You can only enter it by means of faith.

If you do not have faith, you will not be able to understand the doctrines within the Buddhadharma.

Faith is the source of the Way,
And the mother of merit and virtue.
It nourishes all our good roots.

Faith will nourish your good roots. Without it, they cannot grow. Faith is extremely important. If you listen to the Sutras, you must believe what they say. If you do not believe them, it is just as if you had not heard them. We should believe in the Dharma the Buddha spoke. If we do not, it is just as if we never even heard it.

**When the World Honored One’s Dharma’s at its end.** After the World Honored One realized Buddhahood, he taught the Storehouse Teaching, also called the “Half-word Teaching.” This is the Small Vehicle Teaching aimed at the Hearers. “But now,” says the Buddha, “I have spoken the Dharma right up to the very final stage.” **The true and real must be spoken.** I should reveal it all, without reservation. I should speak the true, real Buddhadharma, to teach the real wisdom Bodhisattvas. It is not like before when I spoke the expedient dharmas. I am speaking the real truth now. Previously I said that if you have some small faults, it is all right. You can gradually get rid of them. They are not important. It is okay. But now, you have really, really got to cultivate. You are not allowed even the slightest fault. You must work hard and be diligent in your cultivation. You must bring forth the heart of a Great Vehicle Bodhisattva. You cannot be like you were before, stalling around and procrastinating, putting off today’s cultivation until tomorrow and tomorrow’s until the day after. That is being like the Venerable Ananda who thought, “I am Shakyamuni Buddha’s cousin. With a Buddha for a cousin, I do not need to cultivate. He can give me samadhi and spiritual powers.” That was a real mistake. In cultivation:

You eat your own food, you fill yourself.
You end your own birth and death.

To end birth and death, you must cultivate on your own. No one can do it for you. They may say that they want to help you, but that is just an expedient device to lead you to resolve to cultivate on your own. If you do not cultivate on your own, you will not end birth and death, just as if someone else eats, you do not get full. You must do it yourself. Put your feet firmly on the ground and walk forward, step by step.

**I tell the assembly of Hearers.** The Buddha previously taught the Dharma-door of the Four Holy Truths to the Hearers. **And those who seek the Conditioned Enlightened Vehicle.** The Buddha also taught the Dharma of the Twelve Causes and Conditions to the Conditioned Enlightened Ones. **That I will lead them to cast off suffering’s bond.** With his compassionate heart, the Buddha wants to cause all living beings to separate from suffering and attain bliss, to end birth and cast off death. They must understand that Impermanence comes quickly. If you do not cultivate, but insist, “Wait a minute. Slowly, slowly…” you had best be informed that the Ghost of Impermanence is not polite. When the time comes for him to take you to see King Yama, he will not show you the slightest bit of courtesy. If you try to buy him off, to keep away for awhile, and let you live for a few more years, you cannot do it. The Ghost of Impermanence does not take bribes. He’s not like a greedy politician. In the world, with money, you can do the impossible, If you break the law, but have the cash, then “You did not break the law.” But the Ghost of Impermanence has no greed in this regard. Money means nothing to him. **And arrive at Nirvana,** arrive at the position of no-production and no extinction. **The Buddha uses the power of expedients.** The Buddha uses the Dharma of the Three Vehicles, the Hearers, the Conditioned Enlightened Ones, and the Bodhisattvas.

**Demonstrating the Teaching of Three Vehicles.** He instructs in the Three Vehicles for the sake of the One Buddha Vehicle. So, at the very end, the Buddha speaks the Dharma of the One Buddha Vehicle, the Dharma-door of real wisdom. **So that living beings, attached in many places, may be guided to escape.** Living beings, wherever they happen to be, get attached in just that place. They get attached to whatever position they happen to be in. Fathers are attached: “I am the father,” they think, “and you are my children,” and they become attached. Older brothers try to control their younger brothers. Why? It is because they are attached. They think, “I am the older brother and you are the younger brother. You should listen to my order.” Husbands stand on a “husband platform,” and wives stand on a “wife platform.” Monks even stand on a “monk platform,” and novices stand on a “novice platform.” “Look at me,” they think, “I’ve left home and you haven’t!” That is an attachment.

People with learning are attached to learning. “I am a professor and you are students. I should be your teacher.” That’s also an attachment.

Students have student attachments. “I am a student and if I don’t know something, it’s no problem. However, since you are my teacher, if I ask you a question you had better be able to answer it.” However, in American universities if the student asks a question and the professor cannot answer it, he just let it go by; he has not broken any laws.

In general, however, you have an attachment to whatever you do. In the hells there are hellish attachments. Among the animals there are beastly attachments. Among people there are human attachments. Among ghosts there are ghostly attachments. That is why the text says, “attached in many places. “ No matter where you are, no matter what role you occupy, you will have precisely that attachment. In a family, the older and younger brothers and sisters, and the father and mother, and the grandparents all have their attachments. In the county government—“I am the mayor and I have to manage the officials. You have to listen to my orders. If you do not listen, I am going to make it hard for you. I will get in your way and give you a bad time.” These are all attachments.

The Buddhadharma was spoken just in order to break the attachments of living beings. Once their attachments have been destroyed, that is, if you have no attachments, then the Buddhadharma is also ended; it no longer exists. Why does the Buddhadharma exist? It is just because you are attached. Without attachments, there is no Buddhadharma. The Buddhadharma is for people with attachments. When living beings no longer have attachments, the Buddhadharma is no longer of any use. Looking at it that way, it would be best if living beings had a few more attachments! That way the Buddhadharma would be of some use. Otherwise, the Buddhadharma would “retire.”

The Buddha teaches living beings how to escape from their attachments, to become unattached. Without attachments, everyone would be happy and blissful.

**Sutra:**

**At that time in the assembly there were Hearers, Arhats with outflows extinguished, Ajnatakaundinya and others, twelve hundred persons, as well as Bhikshus, Bhikshunis, Upasakas, and Upasikas who had brought forth the resolve to become Hearers and Pratyekabuddhas. They all had the following thought:

“Why, now, does the World Honored One repeatedly praise the expedient devices saying, ‘the Dharma obtained by the Buddha is so extremely profound and difficult to understand and the purport of his speech is so difficult to know, that none of the Hearers or Pratyekabuddhas can grasp it.’ The Buddha has spoken of but one principle of liberation and we have already obtained this Dharma and arrived at Nirvana. Now, we do not understand his intention.”**
Outline:

E2. Questioning arises from the doubts.
F1. The doubts are presented.
G1. Passage added by Sutra compilers by way of introduction.

**Commentary:**
 **At that time in the assembly** means when Shakyamuni Buddha had finished speaking the verses. This passage of text was added when the Sutra was compiled by the Venerable Ananda. Ananda said, “At that time, in the assembly, **there were Hearers,** a vast number of those who had cultivated the Four Truths and awakened to the Way; they awoke to the Way upon hearing the Buddha’s voice, and so their vehicle is called that of Hearers. **Arhats with outflows extinguished.** Their outflows had been exhausted. The exhaustion of outflows is called the Penetration of the Exhaustion of Outflows. Obtaining this penetration is the state of non-outflow, which means the absence of ignorance and affliction, as well as the absence of all bad habits and faults.

The presence of outflows may be likened to a bottle with a hole in it. You can keep pouring water in it, but it all runs out. People’s bodies have many outflows. But now, their outflows have been exhausted; all outflows have been ended and the Penetration of the Exhaustion of outflows has been attained.

“Arhat” is a Sanskrit word that means “worthy of offerings,” “without birth,” and “slayer of thieves.”

At that time, among the Arhats, there was an elder by the name of **Ajnatakaundinya,** also Sanskrit, which means “understanding the basic limit,” or “the first to understand.” After Shakyamuni Buddha realized Buddhahood, he first went to the Deer Park to take Ajnatakaundinya across. In a former life, Ajnatakaundinya was the King of Kalinga. Shakyamuni Buddha made a vow that when he became a Buddha the first person he would save would be the one who had cut his flesh from every limb. Therefore, after he became a Buddha, he first went to the Deer Park to take the five Bhikshus across. That is why Ajnatakaundinya means, “the first to understand.” He was the first to certify to the fruit of Arhatship. “Understanding the original limit,” means that he understood his fundamental nature.

**And others, twelve hundred persons.** Ajnatakaundinya had twelve hundred people with him.

**As well as Bhikshus, Bhikshunis, Upasakas, and Upasikas who had brought forth the resolve to become Hearers and Pratyekabuddhas.** There was another group that had resolved to seek the Vehicle of the Hearers and Conditioned Enlightened Ones. As has been related many times before, the word Bhikshu has three meanings: “mendicant,” “frightener of Mara,” and “destroyer of evil.” A Bhikshuni is a woman who has left home and the same three meanings apply. An Upasaka is a man closely related in affairs to the Sangha and Upasika is a woman closely related in affairs to the Sangha. This means that they are lay people who draw near to the Triple Jewel.

**Who all had the following thought:** Each of them had this thought.

What did they think?

**“Why now,** at present, **does the World Honored One,** Shakyamuni Buddha**, repeatedly praise the expedient devices?”** He praises it again and again. The term here rendered “repeatedly” usually means “diligently.” Here, however, it means that the Buddha is not lazy in speaking the Sutra. He speaks it once and yet again, and praises it once and yet again. First he praises it in prose and then he repeats his praise in verse, and when he speaks the doctrine he takes it very seriously. He is not the least bit sloppy because it is very important and it is to be feared that people will not pay attention unless he very seriously praises the expedient devices and does so repeatedly.

**Saying, ‘The Dharma obtained by the Buddha,’** the Dharma which I, Shakyamuni Buddha, have obtained ‘**is so extremely profound and difficult to understand.’** No one knows how deep it is; thus it is extremely profound. No one can understand it; thus it is hard to understand. ‘**And the purport of his speech is so difficult to know.’** The meaning of what the Buddha says is not easy to understand. ‘**That none of the Hearers or Pratyekabuddhas can grasp it.’** Those of the Two Vehicles cannot understand this doctrine.

**The Buddha has spoken but one principle of liberation and we have already obtained this Dharma and reached Nirvana.** We of the Hearer Vehicle have completely attained the doctrine of the principle of liberation and rely on it to cultivate. We have already gained the bliss of Nirvana. **Now, we do not understand his intention.** The Buddha now says that his previous teaching was not ultimate, not final. It was not true and real. You have lectured us all into a daze and we do not know what this means. Ultimately, what is the principle? What is the Buddha’s intention? We have already got doubts. The Dharmas the Buddha spoke previously—were they incorrect? Then is what he is now saying correct? Even though they were incorrect, they still brought us advantages. We managed to certify to the first, second, third, and fourth stages of Arhatship. Now, if that is incorrect, then most likely the fruits we have certified to are false as well.

Everyone has doubts.
 **Sutra:**
 **At that time Shariputra, knowing the doubts in the minds of the fourfold assembly, and himself not yet fully understanding, addressed the Buddha saying: “For what reason has the World Honored One repeatedly praised the foremost expedient devices of the Buddhas and the extremely profound and wonderful Dharma which is difficult to understand? From the past onwards I have never heard the Buddha speak in such a way. Presently, the fourfold assembly all has doubts. I only pray that the World Honored One will expound upon this subject: Why has the World Honored One repeatedly praised the Dharma, which is extremely profound, subtle, and hard to understand?”**
Outline:

F2. Request for help in resolving doubts.
G1. The first request.
H1. Prose.
I1. The doubts are presented.
I2. Request.

**Commentary:**

**At the time,** when the fourfold assembly started to have doubts, the wisest of the Hearers, **Shariputra, knowing the doubts in the minds of the fourfold assembly.** He knew that all the disciples had doubts and that their minds were confused and muddled. But although he was so intelligent and wise, he did not understand the state of the Buddha either. So the text says, **and himself not yet fully understanding, headdressed the Buddha saying: “For what reason has the World Honored One repeatedly praised the foremost expedient devices of the Buddhas** in such a way repeatedly extolling and lauding them, praising the foremost expedient devices **and the extremely profound and wonderful Dharma which is so difficult to understand?”** It is so deep, so fine and subtle, so hard to understand, this wonderful Dharma of real wisdom.

**From the past onwards,** I have been following Shakyamuni Buddha now for over forty years. It took eight years to speak The Dharma Flower Sutra and one day and one night to speak The Mahaparinirvana Sutra. If you spread the palm leaves on which they were written out end to end, they would stretch across a distance of eight miles.

Shariputra had been with the Buddha for over forty years and he had doubts. When the Buddha was in the world, some of his disciples believed in him, but some had doubts. However, they all wanted to study the Buddhadharma. They listened to the Buddha speak the Sutras and they cultivated under him. They never left him. That is why the twelve hundred and fifty disciples are called his “constant retinue,” In every Dharma assembly, Shakyamuni Buddha always had at the very least twelve hundred and fifty people as an audience. Even if they did not understand the doctrines he was explaining, they still investigated the Buddhadharma and came to listen. So the text says, “From the past onwards.” The word “past” tells us that Shariputra had been with the Buddha and never left him. He listened to the Buddhadharma every day and studied it every day.

**I have never heard the Buddha speak in such a way.** When you spoke the Dharma before, you never said such important things, nor did you keep praising and extolling so sincerely like this. **Presently the fourfold assembly all has doubts.** The entire assembly of disciples has given rise to doubts. They do not know where their confusion came from and they do not know where it is going. They do not know where to begin, which Dharma-door to cultivate. This is a serious problem and so **I only pray that the World Honored One will expound upon this subject** and elucidate this matter in fine detail to clear up the doubts of those present here. Please do not leave us as it was, standing at the fork in the road not knowing which way to turn. **Why has the World Honored One repeatedly praised the Dharma, which is extremely profound, subtle, and hard to understand?** Why? We do not understand and so we ask the Buddha to be compassionate and instruct us. We respectfully await the holy instruction.
 **Sutra:**
 **At that time, Shariputra, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke verses saying,**

**Oh! Sun of Wisdom, Great Honored Sage,
Long have you waited to speak this Dharma;**

Outline:

H2. Verse.
I1. Doubts about the Two Wisdoms.

**Commentary:**
What is meant by the **Sun of Wisdom?** In this world, the light of the Buddha’s wisdom is like the light of the sun.

**Great Honored Sage:** The Buddha is the god among the gods, the sage among the sages. Thus, he is called the Great Honored Sage. Before the Buddha appeared in the world, the world was without the Buddhadharma. A world without the Buddhadharma is like a world without a sun. Without the sun, in the midst of night, we are in darkness. When the Buddha appeared in the world, it was as if the sun had ascended into space, dispersing all darkness with its light.

What does this mean?

Before the Buddha appeared in the world, the world was without true principle. It was not that true principle did not exist, but rather that no one understood it. True principle, of course, neither comes nor goes. However, if no one points it out, people who have been sunk in confusion for so long will not perceive it.

What is the confusion that people are sunk in?

The five desires: forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects. These are the objects of the senses, also called the five desires.

Form: No one is able to see through and break his or her attachment to forms. People are attached to forms. Anything with shape and appearance is considered form, but among such shapes and appearances people select the good ones. People do not like the bad. They pick beautiful forms. Because they enjoy them so much, they sink, drunk with the objects of form.

Sounds: People like to listen to music, to singing, and perhaps even to the chirping of birds and the sounds of people talking in pleasant tones. This is to sink and drown in the objects of sound, drunk on the defiling dust of sound.

Smells: people also covet smells. If you eat one kind of food, you might smell another kind of food cooking and decide that you want it instead. After eating the other kind for a while, another aromatic dish may catch your attention and you will want to eat that. It is like being drunk on wine, sunk in the confusion of the defiling objects of smell.

Tastes: Today you may want to eat fish, tomorrow chicken, duck or beef the day after. But when you are eating beef, you think that it is not as tasty as lamb. Whatever is hardest to come by is just what you think would be the very best. Things you have eaten, you are tired of. This is because of greed and desire. To be caught up in the desire for food and sink into the stupor created by objects of taste is like being caught in quicksand. You just get one leg out and the other sinks in deeper. You never get out of the quicksand. So it is with the object of taste.

Tangible objects: People like to come in contact with all manners of smooth surfaces. They like to wear silk and satin fabrics which not only protect their skin but are soft and warm as well. Men and women become attached to each other as objects of touch and so sink into the stupor caused by defiling tangible objects as if stuck in quicksand unable to get their legs free. They just get one leg out and the other leg sinks right in.

Thus, people are unable to extricate themselves from the realms of the five desires.

Those of outside ways use the five desires in their teachings, and they do not lead living beings to break free of their attachments. Therefore, they live in a dark night, sink in confusion, in a stupor, in a state of dream-like confusion, and the entire world is pitch black. When the Buddha appeared in the world, it was as though the sun had started to shine. People were taught not to attach to the five desires, the defiling objects of sense. So the text says, “Oh Sun of Wisdom, Great Honored Sage.”

**Long have you waited to speak this Dharma.** “Long” means that he never spoke it before. Shakyamuni Buddha had been speaking the Dharma for a long time, but it was always the provisional Dharma. It was provisional wisdom. He has never spoken the real wisdom. Now, at the very end, the genuine real wisdom is being spoken for everyone to hear.

**Sutra:**

**Speaking of your attainments of such
Powers, fearlessnesses, and samadhis,
Dhyanasamadhis and liberations,
And other inconceivable dharmas.**

**Commentary:**
Shakyamuni Buddha spoke the Dharma for forty-nine years in over three hundred assemblies and from the very beginning right through to the end, he never spoke the real; he only spoke the provisional. Here, in the Lotus Assembly, he finally speaks the real wisdom. **Speaking of your attainments of such powers, fearlessnesses, and samadhis,** there are Ten Powers and Four Fearlessnesses. **Dhyana samadhis and liberations:** there are Eight Liberations, also called “Eight Renunciations off the Back.” **And other inconceivable Dharmas,** these Dharmas cannot be thought about with the mind or expressed in words.

**Sutras:**

**Concerning the Dharma obtained in the Bodhimanda,
No one is able to raise a question.
I find its meaning hard to fathom,
And am also unable to ask about it.
So you speak unasked,
Praising the path you have walked
And that wisdom fine and subtle,
Attained by all the Buddhas.
All the Arhats, without outflows,
And those who seek Nirvana,
Have fallen into a net of doubts.
“Why has the Buddha said this?”
Those who seek Condition Enlightenment,
The Bhikshus, the Bhikshunis,
Gods, dragons, ghosts, and spirits,
Gandharvas and others,
Look at one another, perplexed,
And then gaze at the Doubly Complete Honored One.
“What is the meaning of this matter?”
“We pray that the Buddha will explain.”**

Outline:

I2. Doubts of those of the Three Vehicles and of those of the fourfold assembly.

**Commentary:**

**Concerning the Dharma obtained in the Bodhimanda,** the fine and subtle Dharma the Buddha obtained in the Bodhimanda, **no one is able to raise a question.** We do not know how to approach the subject because it is real wisdom, not the provisional wisdom of the Hearers. Those of the Three Vehicles cannot even ask about it. **I find its meaning hard to fathom and am also unable to ask about it.** Because no one understands it, no one is able to ask about it.

**So you speak unasked, praising the Path you have walked and that wisdom fine and subtle, attained by all the Buddhas.** You praise the true, real wisdom, the extremely profound wisdom, which is understood only by all the Buddhas in the ten directions and by Shakyamuni Buddha.

**All the Arhats, without outflows,** although they have ended outflows and are Fourth Stage Arharts, **and those who seek Nirvana** or they are Bodhisattvas of the Provisional Vehicle who seek Nirvana, or perhaps they are Pratyekabuddhas, **have fallen into a net of doubts.** Hearing the Buddha speak of the true, real wisdom, which is extremely profound, subtle, and wonderful, rare and foremost, everyone has doubts; they have fallen into a net of doubt. If one has doubts, one cannot cultivate the Way. As I have often said before,

Cultivators of the Way
Take care not to doubt.
Once doubt arises
It is easy to get lost.

If you have doubts, you will lose your way. So now, the Hearers, the Conditioned Enlightened Ones, and the Provisional Teaching Bodhisattvas—every last one of them—have fallen into the net of doubts.

**Why has the Buddha said this**? Why has he spoken such a frightening dharma? It has caused everyone to have fox-like doubts and to disbelieve, to be frightened and alarmed.

**Those who seek Conditioned Enlightenment, the Bhikshus, the Bhikshunis, Gods, dragons, ghosts and spirits, gandharvas and others, look at one another perplexed.** Everyone stares at everyone else. You look at me and I look at you and nobody understands what is going on. “Perplexed” means that they have doubts, which have not been resolved. In their hearts, they do not know what would be best. Should they go south or should they go north or should they go east or west? They have gotten to the intersection but they do not know which road to take. There they stand in the middle of the street, not knowing which way to go. They are perplexed. **And then gaze at the Doubly Complete Honored One**. They stare fixedly at the Buddha, not turning their gaze away for a moment. They stare up at him, because he is sitting high upon the Dharma-seat. They all tilt their heads back to gaze at him.

What is meant by the “Doubly Complete Honored One?” It means that the Buddha is complete in both blessings and wisdom. This is because he cultivated blessings and wisdom for three asankhyeya eons and perfected the fine marks for a hundred eons. There are eighty fine marks. An asankhyeya refers to an uncountable number. Here we are talking about not just one, but three uncountable numbers of great eons. How long is that? That time period cannot be calculated. How could you calculate an uncountable number?

One cultivates blessings by making offerings to the Triple Jewel, by drawing near to all the Buddhas, by making offerings to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, to the Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas, and Arhats. For three great uncountable eons, the Buddha vastly cultivated the practice of making offerings. He did not make offerings to just one Buddha, but to very many of them.

One cultivates wisdom, first of all, by holding the precepts. Why? If one holds the precepts, one can give rise to samadhi. From samadhi, comes wisdom. If you have samadhi power, you will have wisdom power.

What is samadhi power?

Samadhi power means not being turned by any external states. Neither good nor bad can move your mind. Whether the situation that arises is favorable or contrary, your heart does not move. If you can have an unmoving mind, you will have samadhi power. Once you have samadhi power, then you can have wisdom power.

Shakyamuni Buddha cultivated blessings and wisdom. One cultivates wisdom by studying the Sutras; the study of the Sutras augments one’s wisdom. If you do not study the Sutras, you will not be able to increase your wisdom. If your wisdom is not increasing, it is decreasing. Therefore, you must study all of the Sutras, Shastras, and the Vinaya. Study the Tripitaka diligently; that’s cultivating wisdom.

If you only cultivate blessings and do not cultivate wisdom, what kind of fruit will you reap?

One who cultivates blessings and not wisdom
Is like an elephant wearing a necklace.

In the future you will be a big elephant, tall and strong, wearing a fine necklace. You will look striking enough, but you will not have any wisdom or intelligence.

One who cultivates wisdom and not blessings,
Is like an Arhat with an empty bowl.

If you just study the Sutras but do not do good deeds nor plant good roots.

But how does one plant good roots? Just by doing good deeds!

By not doing any evil and doing many good deeds.

This is to plant and tend your good roots. If you merely study Sutras and never do good deeds or help other people, you will be like the Arhat with an empty begging bowl. You may certify to the fruit of Arhatship, but when you go out to beg no one will make offerings to you. “So you have certified to the fruit?” they will say, “so what?” No one will make offerings to you because you did not cultivate blessings in the causal ground and so you have no blessings now.

I often tell you these two sentences:

To endure suffering is to end suffering.
To enjoy blessing brings an end to blessings.

You suffer? Why do you suffer? It is because in previous lifetimes you did not cultivate blessings and so you must endure bitterness now. If you can endure your present suffering, it will pass. If you do not undergo that suffering which you deserve, it will remain latent. If you take what you deserve, it will disappear.

If you have a bit of blessed retribution and you just spend your days enjoying yourself. You live in a nice house, eat good food, buy fine furnishings, the latest model car, or even your own airplane so that you can fly around as you please. You do not take even the least bit of suffering. You use up your blessings. Once they have been used up, you will not have any more. Once you have enjoyed all your happiness, you will have to undergo suffering. Do you know how much happiness you have coming to you? If you enjoy it all, you will end up suffering again.

Shakyamuni Buddha cultivated both blessings and wisdom, and so he is called the Doubly Complete Honored One, complete in blessings and wisdom.

**What is the meaning of this matter**? They stare unblinking at the World Honored One, and in their hearts they hope that the Buddha will explain in detail the meaning of his praising the wonderful Dharma. **We pray that the Buddha will explain.** All of us ask the Buddha to tell us in detail the principles involved here, to tell us the meaning behind all of this.

**Of the host of Hearers
The Buddha has declared me foremost,
And yet now with my own wisdom
I cannot resolve by doubts.
Is this Dharma ultimate?
Or is it the path to be walked?
Disciples born from the Buddha’s mouth,
With joined palms wait, expectantly.
Pray put forth the subtle sound,
For it is time to tell it as it really is.
The gods, dragons, spirits, and others
Their numbers like the Ganges’ sands,
Bodhisattvas seeking Buddhahood,
Numbering a full eighty thousand,
And, from myriads of millions of lands,
Wheel-turning sage kings have come,
With joined palms and reverent minds
All wish to hear of the perfect way.**

Outline:

I3. Shariputra’s own doubts.
I4. Disciple’s doubts.
I5. Doubts shared by all and request.

**Commentary:**

**Of the host of Hearers,** in the assembly of Shravakas, **the Buddha has declared me foremost.** The World Honored One has said that I, Shariputra, am number one in wisdom. He says that I am the smartest. **And yet now with my own wisdom.** However, presently, I myself, thinking it over with my number one wisdom **I cannot resolve my doubts.** I am all confused. Although I am number one in wisdom, I am not living up to my position. Why? It is because I do not get it. That is why! I have given rise to doubts, and so as number one, I am all washed up.

**Is this Dharma ultimate?** Is this the ultimate, subtle, wonderful, extremely deep Dharma? **Or is it the path to be walked?** Or is it the perfect, subtle, and wonderful Way of Bodhi which the Thus Come One cultivated?

**Disciples born from the Buddha’s mouth,** all of the Bodhisattvas are disciples of the Dharma King. They are the Buddha’s true children. They are

Born from the Buddha’s mouth,
Transformed from the Dharma.

That is why the text says, “Disciples, born from the Buddha’s mouth.” **With joined palms wait, expectantly.** We place our palms together and gaze at the Buddha, waiting for him to speak this deep Dharma of real wisdom, this profound and wonderful Dharma.

**Pray put forth the subtle sound.** We all want the World Honored One to put forth the sound of Dharma **for it is time to tell it as it really is.** Explain the true, real doctrine.

**The gods, dragons, spirits and others,** all the gods in the heavens, and the dragons, and so on and the entire eightfold division, **their number like the Ganges’ sands.** So many of them! **Bodhisattvas seeking Buddhahood, numbering a fully eighty thousand, and, from myriads of millions of lands, Wheel-turning sage kings have come.** There are Gold Wheel-turning kings, Silver, Copper and Iron Wheel-turning kings—all four categories of Wheel-turning kings came. **With joined palms and reverent minds**. They have placed their palms together most respectfully because they **all wish to hear of the perfect Way.** They all want to hear about that wonderful Dharma-door the World Honored One cultivated and that perfect, complete Bodhi Way he attained.

**Sutra:**

**At that time the Buddha told Shariputra, “Stop! Stop! There is no need to speak further. If this matter were spoken of, the gods and humans in all the worlds would be frightened and led to doubts.”

Shariputra again addressed the Buddha saying, “World Honored One, I only pray that you will speak it. I only pray that you will speak it. What is the reason? In this assembly are countless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of asankhyeyas of living beings who have, in the past, seen the Buddhas. Their roots are keen and their wisdom bright. Hearing what the Buddha says they will be able to revere and believe it.”

At that time, Shariputra, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke the following verses:**

**Dharma King, Supremely Honored One,
Do but speak; pray have no worries,
For, with in the limitless multitudes,
Are those who can revere and believe it.**

Outline:

G2. The second refusal.
G3. The second request.

**Commentary:**

**At that time**, when Shariputra had requested the Buddha to speak the Dharma **the Buddha told Shariputra, “Stop!”** It cannot be spoken; it should not be spoken. It is ineffable, ineffable. **“Stop!”** He said it twice. “Do not talk about this Dharma.” Why not?

**There is no need to speak further.** Say…let us not talk about this Dharma. Just forget it, Okay? **If this matter were spoken of,** that is, if I spoke the Dharma of true reality, the real wisdom Dharma, the ultimate Dharma, **the gods and humans in all the worlds would be frightened and led to doubt.** Why? If you speak to them of expedient devices, the provisional dharmas, they can accept them. If you tell them the real Dharma, they will not believe it. People all have this quirk: When you lie to them, they usually believe you, but when you tell them the truth, they do not believe you. If you tell them, “You should not have desire. You should not entertain thoughts of sexual desire” they are bound to doubt you. “I do not know if that is really the case,” they will say. “I mean, really, what is the point of having no sexual desire?” They think such behavior is extremely blissful. “What do you mean that if you cultivate you cannot indulge in such activities?”

And so some people call themselves Buddhists, but they do not teach people to cut off their thoughts of sexual desire. They cheat themselves and they cheat others. If the Buddhadharma rests with people like this, then it has truly become extinct.

It is really pathetic. If you tell people the truth, they are afraid and they do not believe you. Not only do they disbelieve, they slander you as well. “Hah!” they say, “He does not understand the Buddhadharma. He just speaks confusedly.”

**Shariputra again addressed the Buddha saying** Shakyamuni Buddha had decided not to speak the Dharma; he was not going to expound The Dharma Flower Sutra. Shariputra begged him to speak, however.

Basically, before speaking the Sutras, the Dharma should be requested. But in a country where there is no Buddhadharma, you cannot really wait around for someone to ask. I waited for five or six years. The chance did not come until the summer of 1968 when all of you Americans came here to study the Buddhadharma. At that time I quit waiting and started speaking.

Now, the Buddha will not speak. He says, “Stop!” I am not going to speak. Stop! I am not going to talk.” On the other hand, I say, “Do not stop! I am going to speak. I am going to speak every day.” Recently I said to a Tibetan, who visited, “The students of the Dharma here have obtained a taste of the Dharma’s sweetness and so they do not want to quit.” I, myself, find it extremely bitter. Why? I have to lecture every day and, on top of that, I do not even get paid! Hah! In China when people lecture on the Sutras, say on The Dharma Flower Sutra, they make a lot of money. Of course, I am just joking.

**World Honored One, I only pray that you will speak it.** He calls out, “World Honored One, please, please will you speak it? **I only pray that you will speak it.**” This shows his extreme sincerity. He has now asked twice.

**What is the reason?** Why do I ask the Buddha to speak this Dharma? **In this assembly are countless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of asankhyeyas of living beings,** that is a lot! **Who have, in the past, seen the Buddhas.** In the past they saw the Buddhas and in the present they see the World Honored One. **Their roots are keen and their wisdom bright.** They are very intelligent because, in the past, they planted many good roots. **Hearing what the Buddha says, they will be able to revere and believe it.** When they hear Shakyamuni Buddha say it, they will believe it. Please, Buddha, be compassionate and expound this extremely deep, subtle and wonderful Dharma.

**At that time, Shariputra, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke the following verses:**
**Dharma King, Supremely Honored One,** in the world and beyond the world, there is no one higher than you. I again ask you to speak this wonderful Dharma. **Do but speak; pray have no worries.** Do not have any second thoughts. Do not be concerned that people might not believe what you say. **For, within the limitless multitudes, are those who can revere and believe it.** There most certainly be those who will respect and have faith in this Dharma and who will not become doubtful.

**Sutra:**
 **The Buddha again stopped Shariputra, “If this matter were spoken of, the gods, humans, and asuras in all the worlds would be frightened and led to doubt, and those Bhikshus of overweening pride would fall into a big pit.”

Then the World Honored One restated his meaning in verse, saying,**

**Stop, stop. It must not be spoken.
My Dharma is wonderful beyond conception,
And those of undue pride who heard it,
Surely would neither revere nor believe it.**

Outline:

G4. The third refusal.

**Commentary:**

**The Buddha again stopped Shariputra**, The Buddha had already said “Stop,” twice before. This is his third refusal. He said, “There is no need to speak about it. Why not? **If this matter were spoken of, the gods, humans, and asuras in all the worlds would be frightened and led to doubt, and those Bhikshus of overweening pride would fall into a big pit.** The Bhikshus are arrogant and self-satisfied. Why? It is because they have attachments. They are attached to the opinion that no one is equal to them, and so they are going to fall into a great big trap. They think they are clever and their intelligence and conduct far surpass everyone else’s.

Once people become slightly intelligent, not greatly wise, by any means, they tend to expose it wherever they go. They shine their light outwardly to show off that they are number one; they are unable to contain their light within themselves. If you have a lot of light, that means that you are intelligent but you do not display your intelligence. You keep it covered and hidden away.

“Well, isn’t that just being greedy?” you ask. No. It is wanting to avoid becoming arrogant and proud.

Arrogance is the attitude that “I am better than everyone else.” For example, “I am an Oriental and they are the very best. The yellow race is the most superior in the world.” That is arrogance. Someone else might think, “I am Caucasian, and the white race is the best. We are the most intelligent.” That is also arrogance.

One may be a Negro who thinks that the white and yellow races are inferior and that the black people are the most superior. That, too, is arrogance. Regardless of whether or not you are white, yellow, black, red, or green, no matter what race you are or what kind of person you are, you should not hold the view of arrogance. In China there is a saying,

Modest brings benefits,
But arrogance causes harm.

It is because of your arrogance that you keep hitting your head against the wall and are unable to study and learn from others. Arrogance is an obstacle to your learning. You cannot learn if your mind is filled with self-pride, because you think you already know everything. “What have I got to learn?” you think.

Those who study the Buddhadharma should not master one tiny bit of it and then think, “I know it all!”

What do you know? Those who have not studied the Buddhadharma have even less business being arrogant. It is really pathetic. They do not understand anything at all, but they become arrogant.

For example, last summer one of my disciples said that since he was a “special person” he did not have to study The Shurangama Mantra. When he left home I gave him seven days to learn it, and then extended the seven days to fourteen, but he still could not learn it. Now, he can probably recite it, I was very strict with him because he was fairly sincere. Why was he unable to learn it? It is because he was arrogant in thinking that he was special and did not need to study it. But just wait until the time comes when he needs to use it!

Arrogant people have a kind of power. They can read and remember Sutras at a fast rate. Whatever they do, they do very perfectly because they are smarter and quicker than others. Because of this, they get arrogant. They can do things better and faster than others. They study the Sutras fast, they study the Dharma fast, they cultivate and become Buddhas fast, they enter samadhi and give rise to wisdom fast. But take care not to become attached to a view of self and think that you are better than others. Do not put yourself on a pedestal.

The Bhikshus of overweening pride are in for a surprise. They are gong to fall into a big pit. They figure they know everything and so when they hear the real Dharma, they will not believe it. It is because they fail to believe. They will fall into the pit, a very low place. The “big pit” refers to the three evil paths, the hells, the animal realm, and the realm of the hungry ghosts.

**Then the World Honored One restated his meaning in verse, saying, “Stop, stop. It must not be spoken. My Dharma is wonderful beyond conception.** Because this Dharma is so subtle and wonderful, it is not easy to think about, not easy to talk about, not easy to believe. If the Buddha spoke this true, real Dharma, no one would believe it. **And those of undue pride who heard it,** the arrogant Bhikshus **surely would neither revere nor believe it.** They would not understand it. They would not believe it. They would not revere it.

**Sutra:**
 **At that time, Shariputra further addressed the Buddha, saying, “World Honored One, I only pray that you will speak it. I only pray that you will speak it. Presently, within this assembly are those who are my equal, hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of them. Life after life they have been transformed by the Buddha. People such as these will surely be able to revere and believe you. They will gain security and great benefit within the long night.”

At that time, Shariputra, wishing to restate his meaning, recited the following verses:**

**Supreme and Doubly Honored One.
Pray speak the foremost Dharma.
I, the Buddha’ eldest disciple,
Wish you will but speak it in detail.
The limitless host here assembled,
Can revere and believe this Dharma,
For the Buddha has, for life after life,
Taught and transformed such ones as these.
With one mind, with palms joined,
We all wish to hear the Buddha speak.
Twelve hundred of us there are,
And more, seeking Buddhahood.
Pray, for those assembled here,
Speak of it in detail;
Having heard this Dharma,
Great will our rejoicing be.**

Outline :

G5. The third request.

**Commentary:**

**At that time,** after Shariputra had heard the Buddha speak the previous verse, **Shariputra further addressed the Buddha, saying,** with great earnest faith, **I only pray that you will speak it; I only pray that you will speak it.** With firm faith I know that **presently, within this assembly are those who are my equal.** Like me, their faith is also firm and they wish the Buddha to speak this extremely deep and wonderful Dharma. “Those who are my equal” refers to those of the same rank, the Bhikshus, Bhikshunis, Upasakas, and Upasikas. **Hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of them. Life after life, they have been transformed by the Buddha.**

For a long time, these people have received the Buddha’s instruction and teaching. Those who have not received the teaching of the Buddha in the past will not believe the Buddhadharma when they hear it. If they have already received the teaching in the past, for many lives, then they will believe it right when they hear it and feel sure that it is something they can have faith in. The Buddha has many disciples because, life after life, he has taught and transformed sentient beings. The sentient beings also vowed, life after life, to follow the Buddha and study the Buddhadharma. When the Buddha was a Bhikshu, these people all took refuge with the Triple Jewel. When the Buddha gained the first stage of Arhatship, they left home. When the Buddha became a second stage Arhat, they followed him to cultivate the Way. Shakyamuni Buddha used the great compassion heart and many expedient devices to teach and transform his disciples. When the Buddha accomplished the fruit of Buddhahood, they all became Arhats because through successive lives they had received the Buddha’s teaching.

In this life, since Shakyamuni Buddha has already become a Buddha, we are becoming Bhikshus. Such causal affinities develop, life after life, we receive the merciful and compassionate instruction of the Buddha.

**People such as these will surely be able to revere and believe you.** No matter what doctrines the Buddha speaks, they will believe him. **They will gain security and great benefit within the long night** of time. We are dreaming and in our sleep know nothing. Shakyamuni Buddha, you speak the Dharma so we may gain great advantage.

When I was in Manchuria and Hong Kong, my disciples had great faith in me. No matter what I said, they believed it, and they had no doubts whatsoever. Even when I deliberately said something contrary to the doctrine, they still believed it. Those who had taken refuge for the first time did not have such firm faith. Those who had taken refuge for two, three, four, or five lifetimes did not have such firm faith; but others did. So, Shakyamuni Buddha had taught and transformed these people throughout many lives.

Shariputra has asked the Buddha to speak the wonderful doctrine and said that everyone would certainly be able to believe it. Even though he said that, still, later on, five thousand Bhikshus, Bhikshunis, Upasakas and Upasikas got up and walked out. Shakyamuni Buddha is just about to speak the wonderful Dharma, and he says that he will explain it in great detail and five thousand people walk out. This can be compared to threshing rice. When you toss the rice high into the air, the wind blows the chaff away, and the rice grains fall down. The five thousand who left are like the chaff.

**At that time, Shariputra, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke verses, saying, “Supreme and Doubly Honored One”.** “Supreme” means that there is no one higher. “Doubly Honored” means that the Buddha is complete in both blessings and wisdom. **Pray speak the foremost Dharma;** we wish you to speak the true, wonderful, real Dharma-door, which is number one, without a number two. **I, the Buddha’s eldest disciple,** Shariputra, am the Buddha’s eldest disciple, **wish you will but speak it in detail.** I hope the Buddha will be compassionate and speak this Dharma to me. **The limitless host here assembled, can revere and believe this Dharma.** Why are they able to believe it? **For the Buddha has, for life after life, taught and transformed such ones as these.** It is because they have received the compassionate teaching of the Buddha and the nourishment of the milk of Dharma, they revere and believe it. **With one mind, with palms joined, we all wish to hear the Buddha speak. Twelve hundred of us there are, and more, seeking Buddhahood.** There are Pratyekabuddhas and Provisional Teaching Bodhisattvas. **Pray, for those assembled here, speak of it in detail. Having heard this Dharma, great will our rejoicing be.** Please be compassionate and speak to us. We will certainly rejoice.

**Sutra:

Thereupon the World Honored One told Shariputra, “Since you have earnestly requested three times, how can I not speak? You should now listen attentively, think upon it well, and be mindful of it; I will explain it in detail for your sake.”

As he said these words, five thousand Bhikshus, Bhikshunis, Upasakas, and Upasikas in the assembly rose from their seats, made obeisance to the Buddha and left. What was the reason? The roots of their offenses were deep and grave and they were of such overweening pride that they claimed to have obtained what they had not yet obtained and to have certified to that to which they had not yet certified to. With faults such as these they could not stay. The World Honored One remained silent and did not restrain them.

The Buddha then told Shariputra, “My assembly has now been cleared of its branches and leaves and only the trunks remain. Shariputra, it is excellent that those of overweening pride have left. You should now listen well and I shall speak it for you.”

Shariputra said, “So be it, World Honored One. I wish joyfully to hear it.”**
Outline:

D2. Detailed discussion: opening the three and revealing the one to sever doubts and awaken faith.

E1. Direct speaking of the Dharma.
F1. Actual speaking of Dharma.
G1. Prose.
H1. Consenting to speak.
I1. Complying with the request.
I2. Exhortation.
I3. Winnowing the assembly.
H2. Receiving the Buddha’s instruction.

**Commentary:**

**Thereupon the World Honored One told Shariputra, “Since you have earnestly requested three times, how could I not speak?”** You have repeated your request three times; how could I refuse to speak this Dharma to you? **You should now listen attentively.** Pay close attention and listen well. You should not fail to pay attention to the Dharma I speak. **Think upon it well, and be mindful of it; I will explain it in detail for your sake.** I will now delineate the true, wonderful Dharma.

After Shakyamuni Buddha said this, what do you think happened?

**As he said these words, five thousand Bhikshus, Bhikshunis, Upasakas, and Upasikas in the assembly rose from their seats, made obeisance to the Buddha and left.** Although they were very arrogant, they still bowed to the Buddha before they left. **What was the reason? The roots of their offenses were deep and grave and they were of such overweening pride that they claimed to have obtained what they had not yet obtained and to have certified to that which they had not yet certified to.With faults such as these they could not stay.** They could not hear this wonderful Dharma. Such proud people had not attained the wonderful Dharma or certified to the fruits of Arhatship. Still, they claimed that they had done so. Although they had not yet become Buddhas, they said that they had done so. What they had not attained, they said that they had attained. They claimed to have wisdom they did not have. They said that they themselves were not bad at all. They said they were better than everyone else. These were the strange things they said. Consequently, they lost their chance to hear The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra.

**The World Honored One remained silent and did not restrain them.** He did not tell them not to go; he did not stop them. **The Buddha then told Shariputra, “My assembly has now been cleared of its branches and leaves and only the trunks remain.”** Here the analogy of the chaff and the grain may be applied. The grain has been separated from the chaff. The pure, real substance alone remains. All the extraneous matter is gone. Those people with offenses all have left; they are like the chaff, the twigs, and the leaves. Those people who remain all have blessings. They are the trunk, the basic true substance. They are the disciples who have faith. Those without faith are like the twigs and branches; they are insincere.

For example, one disciple here took the precepts and now has run off. He is like the five thousand who left. He studied the Buddhadharma for several months and figured that he and his brother had both become enlightened. He is just cheating the world.

**Shariputra, it is excellent that those of overweening pride have left,** because now they will not be able to exert their bad influence on others. **You should now listen well and I shall speak it for you.** Do not run off! I am now going to speak the Dharma for those of you who sincerely believe.

**Shariputra said, “so be it, World Honored One. I wish joyfully to hear it.”** We all wish happily and joyfully to hear the Buddha speak the Dharma, the true, real Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra.

**Sutra:**
 **The Buddha told Shariputra, “A wonderful Dharma such as this is spoken only occasionally by the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, just as the udumbara flower appears but once in a great while.”

“Shariputra, you should all believe that which the Buddha says, for his words are not vain or false. Shariputra, all the Buddhas speak the Dharma in accord with what is appropriate, but its purport is difficult to understand. What is the reason? I extensively speak all dharmas by means of countless expedient devices, various causes and conditions, analogies, and expressions. This Dharma cannot be understood through deliberation or discrimination. Only the Buddhas alone can know it. Why is this? All the Buddhas, the World Honored Ones, appear in the world only because of the causes and conditions of the great matter.”**
Outline:

H3. The instruction.

I1. Explanation regarding all Buddhas in general and the Buddhas of the three periods of time.

J1. General explanation of teaching methods of all Buddhas.
K1. Praising the rareness of the Dharma.
K2. Verifying the validity.
K3. Opening the provisional.
L1. Opening.
L2. Explanation.
L3. Conclusion.
K4. Revealing the actual.
L1. Supreme Beings and supreme Dharma.
L2. Tells why Buddhas enter the world.

**Commentary:**

Shakyamuni Buddha had just informed Shariputra that he was about to speak the Sutra. Why? It is because he requested it three times. It was clear that Shariputra was sincere, and so the Buddha agreed to speak it.

Now, **the Buddha told Shariputra, “A wonderful Dharma such as this is spoken only occasionally by the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones.”** “Such as this” is a phrase that points to the Dharma. The wonderful Dharma is “thus.” Were it not “thus” it would not be the wonderful Dharma. So, the wonderful Dharma is just like that. It is just the wonderful Dharma.

It is just like what?

Not like anything. Were it like something, it would turn into something that is marked. Not like anything, it is the unmarked Real Mark of all Dharmas. The unmarked Real Mark is the genuine, real, wonderful Dharma.

The wonderful Dharma is only spoken rarely, when the proper affinities have matured, **just as the udumbara flower appears but once in a great while.** Udumbara is a Sanskrit word, which means “auspicious portent ( 瑞 應 華 —rui ying hua).” This flower blooms but briefly once every three thousand years; therefore, it is most valuable and rare. The wonderful Dharma is like this flower.

**Shariputra, you should all believe that which the Buddha says, for his words are not vain or false.** All of you Hearers, Conditioned Enlightened Ones and others, ought to believe the speech of the Buddha. What the Buddha says contains nothing false, nothing unreal. It is all true and not false. Take care not to become doubtful.

**Shariputra, all the Buddhas speak the Dharma in accord with what is appropriate.** Although it is wonderful Dharma that opens the provisional to reveal the real, the Buddha manifests the provisional for the sake of the real. For the sake of the true, real Dharma, he employs clever expedient devices and speaks the Dharma in accord with what is appropriate. He takes a look at the potential and then dispenses the teaching, speaking Dharma suited to the person being taught.

**But its purport is difficult to understand.** In the Dharma the Buddha speaks, one meaning is complete with limitless meanings; one word is complete with the wonderful principles of limitless words. So, one meaning encompasses limitless meanings, limitless meanings revert back to one doctrine. Therefore, its purport is difficult to understand. The doctrines are not easy to assimilate.

**What is the reason?** Why can’t they be readily understood? **I extensively speak all Dharmas by means of countless expedient devices, various causes and conditions, analogies, and expressions.** From the time I realized Buddhahood, I have used a countless number of Dharma-doors of expedient devices, for the sake of the real manifesting the provisional. I also use all kinds of causes and conditions to teach living beings. I expound upon all the Dharmas.

**This Dharma cannot be understood through deliberation or discrimination.** Although various causes and conditions, analogies and expressions are used to expound all the Dharmas, the Dharma itself is not easy to understand. You cannot use your conscious mind to understand it. You cannot use your sixth (mind) consciousness, the discriminating consciousness, or the seventh consciousness, the deliberating consciousness, to try and figure out the doctrines of the Buddha.

**Only the Buddhas alone can know it.** Only the Buddhas and the Buddha can know this Dharma.

**Why is this?** What is the principle at work here?

**All the Buddhas, the World Honored Ones, appear in the world only because of the causes and conditions of the one great matter.**

What are the causes and conditions of the one great matter? Each of us should think it over. What matter is our “great matter?” Shakyamuni Buddha manifested in the world for the sake of the causes and conditions of the one great matter. What great matter is it?

What is it? I will tell you: The great matter is not a small matter. Were it a small matter it would not been called a great matter. Do you understand? That is a very simple explanation.

There is still another very profound explanation, but you will have to think it over and discover it yourselves.

It is extremely wonderful. Wonderful to what level? Wonderful to the level that it cannot be thought about. It is just inconceivable. Previously, it was already explained that it cannot be understood through deliberation or discrimination and so now in thinking about it we are completely wrong. We are discriminating and that is also a mistake. Not discriminating, not deliberating--that is just the wonderful Dharma. I asked you to answer the question, but the question does not need to be answered.

“Then why did you ask it?”

Why should not I have asked it? If you can answer me as to why I should not have asked it, then I will not ask. Why is there no answer? It is because Shakyamuni Buddha has now entered Nirvana, and really only Shakyamuni Buddha is qualified to judge and answer to that question. I am not qualified to do so. So, the best thing to do would be to forget it. I believe that you all cannot forget it. Why can’t you forget this question? It is because it deals with the causes and conditions of the great matter. If it were the causes and conditions of some small matter, you would be able to forget it. But how could you forget the causes and conditions of the great matter? You cannot forget it.

If you cannot forget it, what’s to be done? We should understand it. Although I talk about it back and forth I still have not told you what the causes and conditions of the great matter are. I will not stall around and keep you in suspense any longer. I will… Here, it is like… I hold up my closed fist and ask you: What do I have in my hand? Take a look! What is it?

You do not know? That, too, is a cause and a condition of the one great matter. See? What is in it? I open my hand—Nothing at all! The causes and conditions of the one great matter are also just like that.

The causes and conditions of the great matter are simply no matter at all. No matter, no affair, so Shakyamuni Buddha had to find something to occupy himself with. It was just for the sake of speaking The Dharma Flower Sutra that the Buddha mentions the causes and conditions of the one great matter.

And what is said in The Dharma Flower Sutra? It speaks of the wonderful Dharma. And what is the wonderful Dharma? Do not think! Once you think, it is no longer wonderful. In asking you about it, it becomes not wonderful. It can no longer be considered wonderful.

“Then what are we listening to the Sutras for,” you might ask. “Wouldn’t it be more wonderful not to listen to them?”

Who told you to listen? You do not have to listen if you do not want to. Go ahead. No one is forcing you to listen. You may want to quit listening, but you cannot. You say, “I can too! I have thought of a plan. I am going to take some drugs and get so high that I do not know anything at all. Then I will not be able to come and listen.

Hmm… that is a wonderful Dharma too. But there is another great matter that we should not forget. I just told you to forget it, and you could not, but this is something you should not forget. Since I have now encountered the causes and conditions of this one great matter, I cannot refrain from telling you. It is the great matter of everyone’s birth and death. Do you understand it or not? The problem of birth and death:

Do you know how it was you were born?

You do not know.

Do you know how it is you will die?

You do not know.

Such intelligent people, and yet you do not understand the question of birth and death.

Yesterday some tourists came and asked a very strange question. They said, “Why do you place oranges in front of the Buddha?” A lot of you did not hear it, but since it was a potentially useful question, I am repeating it again today. Who did they ask? They asked my tallest, and therefore highest, disciple. He stood there, taller than everyone else, so they asked him. But he messed up the answer; he was not clear. I was rather irked and said, “How come you cannot answer such simple question?” and I ran over to the Dharma-seat and stood up on the platform, higher than my high disciple. If I had not stood on the platform, I would have been shorter than he is. So I stood up and said quite loudly, “You ask why we put oranges in front of the Buddha? I will answer you. The Buddha likes to eat oranges!”

“Do you mean the Buddha can eat oranges?” they said.

Of course he can eat oranges. We people like to eat oranges, and the Buddha was a person who became a Buddha. Therefore, I believe that he likes to eat oranges. Besides I like to eat oranges. I give the things I like to eat as an offering to the Buddha. I give what I like to others. I know that what I like to eat, the Buddha also likes to eat. If I make offerings of oranges, he is certainly not going to get upset.

That is the general gist of what I said, although yesterday I did not mention the “getting upset” part. I said that he would not be displeased. Anyway, when they heard this it was a case of “seeing what they had never seen and hearing what they had never heard.” They had nothing to say.

The causes and conditions of the great matter refer to the great matter of birth and death. You should resolve this matter of birth and death quite clearly. Then you will have finished the great work.

There are the causes and conditions of the great matter, then, and there also remain a lot of small problems. If you want to understand the causes and conditions of the great matter, you must first understand the causes and conditions of the small matters. If you do not understand the causes and conditions of the small matters you will not be able to understand the causes and conditions of the great matter. Where do the causes and conditions of the small matters come from? They arise out of ignorance. Birth and death is the great matter. Why is there birth and death? It is because people are ignorant.

Once there is ignorance, then greed, hate, stupidity, arrogance, pride and doubt all pop out! If there is no ignorance, then all the little problems do not exist. If there is ignorance, then there are problems, there are birth and death. We should first become clear about the causes and conditions of the small matters. If you are clear about the small problems, you will be clear about the great ones. Just as small children grow up to become adults. The adults get old and die. If you do not understand the causes and conditions of the small matters, you will not be able to resolve the great matter. First of all, you must break through ignorance. When you have broken through ignorance, the causes and conditions of the great matter will automatically be ended.

**Sutra:**
 **“Shariputra, what is meant by ‘All Buddhas, World Honored Ones, appear in the world only because of the causes and conditions of the one great matter?’ The Buddhas, the World Honored Ones, appear in the world because they wish to lead living beings to open the knowledge and vision of the Buddhas and gain purity. They appear in the world because they wish to demonstrate to all living beings the knowledge and vision of the Buddhas. They appear in the world because they wish to lead living beings to awaken to the knowledge and vision of the Buddhas. They appear in the world because they wish to lead living beings to enter into the Path of the knowledge and vision of the Buddhas.”**
Outline:

L3. Rhetorical question.
L4. Actual explanation.
M1. The singularity of the noumenon.

**Commentary:**

Shakyamuni Buddha says, **Shariputra,** I will tell you something: **What is meant by ‘All Buddhas, World Honored Ones, appear in the world only because of the causes and conditions of the one great matter?’** What does this mean? I will tell you: All the Buddhas, the World Honored Ones come into this Saha world because of the great matter of the birth and death of all living beings and because of the various types of karmic retributions living beings must undergo. **The Buddhas, the World Honored Ones, appear in the world because they wish to lead living beings to open the knowledge and vision of the Buddha.** Their greatest wish is to lead living beings to attain the knowledge and vision of the Buddha. “Opening” the Buddha’s knowledge and vision is the opposite of “closing” the Buddha’s knowledge and vision. When was the door to the Buddha’s knowledge and vision shut? From the time of the first thought of ignorance. Ignorance shut the door to the Buddha’s knowledge and vision; now, we are opening it again.

What is the Buddha’s knowledge? The Buddha’s knowledge is the heart of every living being. The heart is complete with the Buddha’s wisdom and knowledge.

What is the Buddha’s vision? The Buddha’s vision is the Buddha Eye. If you open your Buddha Eye, you will clearly understand the Real Mark of all Dharmas.

**And gain purity.** Before we have opened our Buddha Eye, in all respects, we are impure and unclean. How are we unclean? Ignorance, affliction, coarse and subtle delusions, and various troubles cause our natures to become seemingly impure. It is as if we are impure, but basically we are pure. Because we have not opened the Buddha’s knowledge and vision, we have not yet rediscovered our fundamental purity. Shakyamuni Buddha wished to lead all living beings to return to the root and go back to the source, to open the knowledge and vision of the Buddha. That is why he appeared in the world. He appeared in the world and manifested the eight signs of accomplishing the Way:

1. He descended from the Tushita palace.
2. He entered his mother’s womb.
3. He dwelt in his mother’s womb.
4. He was born from his mother’s womb.
5. He left home.
6. He attained the Way.
7. He turned the Dharma-wheel.
8. He entered Nirvana.

**They appear in the world because they wish to demonstrate to living beings the knowledge and vision of the Buddhas.** The Buddha also wished to demonstrate the knowledge and vision of the Buddhas, to lead them to understand that the Buddha’s knowledge and vision is inherently their own. It is not gained from the outside. This is precisely the point where Buddhism differs from other religions. All living beings can become Buddhas. It is totally egalitarian in that regard. Anyone who cultivates can become a Buddha. If you do not cultivate, of course you will not become a Buddha. It is not to say, “I am the one and only Buddha. You are not Buddhas.” Nor is it to say, “You are a Buddha, and I am not.” All living beings have the Buddha-nature and all can become Buddhas. Those of other religions maintain that there is only one God, the Almighty. Well, in that case, where did God come from?

“He was always there,” they say. “You cannot ask that. It is a sin to ask where God came from.” How could such a question be a sin? Unless, of course, there was no God, in which case it would be a sin. If there was a God, it could not be a sin to ask. If you ask Him, he should clear the matter up for you. You cannot say that if you do not understand something and ask a question about it, you are committing a sin. That does not make any sense at all. It is unreasonable. And after all, God is just the ruler of the Heaven of the thirty-three Shakra.

Some religions say, “No, that is not out God. Our God is another one.”

If that is the case, then where are you going to fit the lord of the Heaven of the thirty-three? Unless you push him off the throne or persuade him to step down, he is still God. Actually, in Buddhism, god is a Dharma protector. But most people do not understand this doctrine. They also do not understand the doctrine of no beginning and no end. They merely know that which has a beginning and has no end. As they understand it, everything began with God. Heaven and earth were created by God. God is eternal; he has no end. He lives forever and never dies. This is just what they think, however.

As to the Buddha: In the heavens and below, only the Buddha is honored. But everyone can become a Buddha. It is not that just Shakyamuni could become a Buddha and no one else is allowed to do so. The Buddhas of the ten directions have the same path. They are all the same. They do not say, “I am the only one. Nobody else can be like me.” That is just being a dictator!

Now, the Buddha wants to demonstrate clearly that living beings are complete with the Buddha’s knowledge and vision. It is not only the Buddha who has realized Buddhahood and who possesses the knowledge and vision of the Buddha. All living beings have the Buddha’s knowledge and vision, but because they have not understood the principle or obtained the strength, the Buddha wants to demonstrate the Buddha’s knowledge and vision to them. That is why he has come into the Saha world.

**They appear in the world because they wish to lead living beings to awaken to the knowledge and vision of the Buddhas.** Once it has been demonstrated to you, you must awaken to it yourself. If you do not enlighten to it, but merely listen to others talk about it, it is of no use. The Buddha wants to cause all living beings to awaken to their inherent Buddha’s knowledge and vision.

**They appear in the world because they wish to lead living beings to enter into the path of the knowledge and vision of the Buddhas.** “Enter” means to certify to the attainment of the Buddha’s state. Having had it demonstrated to them, having genuinely awakened to it, they must now enter into the path of the Buddha’s knowledge and vision.

Opening, demonstrating, awakening and entering into the Buddha’s knowledge and vision, living beings will be able to end birth and death. They will have completed the great matter and have nothing more to do. That is why after the Buddha spoke this doctrine he entered Nirvana.

**Sutra:**

**“Shariputra, these are the causes and conditions of the one great matter for which all the Buddhas appear in the world.”

The Buddha told Sharipura, “All the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, teach and transform only Bodhisattvas. All their actions are always for the one matter, and that is only to demonstrate and enlighten living beings to the Buddha’s knowledge and vision. Shariputra, in speaking Dharma to living beings, the Thus Come Ones use only the Buddha Vehicle. There are no other vehicles, whether two or three. Shariputra, the Dharma of all the Buddhas of the ten directions is thus. Shariputra, the Buddhas of the past, by means of limitless, countless expedient devices, various causes and conditions, analogies and expressions, have proclaimed all the dharmas to living beings. These dharmas were all for the sake of the One Buddha Vehicle. All these living beings, hearing the Dharma from the Buddhas, ultimately attain the Wisdom of All Modes.”**
Outline:

M2. The singularity of the cultivators.
M3. The singularity of the practice.
M4. The singularity of the teaching.
L5. General conclusion.

J2. Explanation of the teaching methods of the Buddhas of the three periods of time.

K1. The Buddhas of the past.

**Commentary:**

**Shariputra,** the opening, demonstrating, awakening and entering into the knowledge and vision of the Buddhas which I previously mentioned, causes living beings to end birth and be released from death, to separate from suffering and attain bliss. **These are the causes and conditions of the one great matter for which all the Buddhas appear in the world.**

**The Buddha told Shariputra, “All the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, teach and transform only Bodhisattvas. All their actions are always for the one matter, and that is only to demonstrate and enlighten living beings to the Buddha’s knowledge and vision.Shariputra, in speaking Dharma to living beings, the Thus Come One uses only the Buddha Vehicle. There are no other vehicles, whether two or three.** Shariputra, you should understand that the Buddhas throughout the ten directions only use the Buddha Vehicle. There are no Great and Small Vehicles. There are no other different little vehicles. “Two” refers to the Great and Small Vehicles. “Three” refers to the Hearer Vehicle, the Conditioned Enlightened Vehicle, and the Bodhisattva Vehicle. There are not three vehicles either. What is left? Only the One Buddha Vehicle is left. There is only One Vehicle.

**Shariputra, the Dharma of all the Buddhas of the ten directions is thus.** They speak the Dharma in the same way. They also say that there is only the One Buddha Vehicle, and there are no other vehicles.

**Shariputra, the Buddhas of the past, by means of limitless, countless expedient devices, various causes and conditions,** all kinds of causes and conditions to teach living beings. They say, “If you plant good causes you will reap good fruit. If you plant evil causes you will reap evil fruit. Goodness brings good rewards; evil brings evil retribution. These various kinds of causes and conditions concerning the operations of cause and effect, along with **analogies and expressions,** were used to clarify the doctrine. The Buddhas **have proclaimed all the dharmas to living beings. These dharmas were all for the sake of the One Buddha Vehicle.** Although he spoke of the Great and Small Vehicles and of the Three Vehicles, the Buddha’s ultimate wish, his primary intention, was only to speak the Buddha Vehicle and guide living beings to the quick realization of the Buddha Path.

**All these living beings, hearing the Dharma from the Buddhas, ultimately attain the Wisdom of all Modes.** There are three types of wisdom: First, there is All Wisdom, which belongs to emptiness and which is the principle of emptiness to which those of the Two Vehicles certify. Secondly, there is the Wisdom in the Path to which the Bodhisattvas of the Provisional Vehicle certify. This type of wisdom belongs to existence. The existence meant here is a false, temporary existence, not true existence. Those of the Two Vehicles certify to the attainment of the “empty” while the Bodhisattvas of the Provisional Vehicle certify to the attainment of the “existent.”

Thirdly, there is the Wisdom of All Modes. This type of wisdom belongs to the Middle Way. It leans neither to the extreme of emptiness nor to the extreme of existence. It is the wisdom of the Middle Way to which the Buddhas certify.

**Sutra:**

**“Shariputra, when the Buddhas of the future shall come into the world, they will also by means of limitless, countless expedient devices, various causes and conditions, analogies and expressions, proclaim all the dharmas to living beings. These dharmas will all be for the sake of the One Buddha Vehicle. Hearing the Dharma from the Buddhas, all these living beings will ultimately attain to the Wisdom of all Modes.

Shariputra, presently, all the Buddhas, World Honored Ones, throughout the ten directions in limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of Buddhalands, greatly benefit living beings and bring them peace and happiness. These Buddhas also by means of limitless, countless expedient devices, various causes and conditions, analogies, and expressions, extensively proclaim all the dharmas to living beings. These dharmas are all for the sake of the One Buddha Vehicle. All these living beings, hearing the Dharma from the Buddhas, ultimately attain the Wisdom of All Modes.

Shariputra, all the Buddhas only teach and transform Bodhisattvas because they wish to demonstrate to living beings the Buddha’s knowledge and vision, because they wish to awaken living beings to the Buddha’s knowledge and vision, and because they wish to lead living beings to enter the Buddha’s knowledge and vision.”**
Outline:

K2. The Buddhas of the future.
K3. The Buddhas of the present.

**Commentary:**

**Shariputra,** the Buddhas of the past spoke the Dharma in this way. What about the Buddhas of the future? It is the same way. **When the Buddhas of the future shall come into the world, they will also by means of limitless, countless expedient devices, various causes and conditions, analogies and expressions, proclaim all the dharmas to living beings.** They will expound upon all manners of wonderful Dharmas for the sake of all living being. **These dhamas will all be for the sake of the One Buddha Vehicle.** There are no other vehicles. **Hearing this Dharma from the Buddhas, all of these living beings will ultimately attain the Wisdom of All Modes.** The final aim, the end goal, is to cause all living beings to gain the Wisdom of All Modes.

**Shariputra, presently, all the Buddhas, World Honored Ones, throughout the ten directions, in limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of Buddhalands, greatly benefit living beings and bring them peace and happiness.** They wish to benefit and profit all living beings and cause them to be serene and blissful. **These Buddhas also by means of limitless countless expedient devices, various causes and conditions, analogies and expressions, proclaim all the dharmas to living beings. These dharmas are all for the sake of the One Buddha Vehicle.** Regardless of whether they are of the past, present, or future, all of the Buddhas in the ten directions speak the Dharmas only for the sake of the One Buddha Vehicle. **All these living beings, hearing the Dharma from the Buddhas, ultimately attain the Wisdom of All Modes.** The ultimate goal is to lead living beings to gain the Wisdom of All Modes, to perfect Bodhi and to return to the state of non-attachment.

**Shariputra, all the Buddhas only teach and transform Bodhisattvas because they wish to demonstrate to living beings the Buddha’s knowledge and vision.** The Buddhas of the past, present, and future only wish to teach Bodhisattvas how to realize Buddhahood. **Because they wish to awaken living beings to the Buddha’s knowledge and vision, and because they wish to lead living beings to enter the Buddha’s knowledge and vision.** They want to instruct all living beings in the knowledge and vision of the Buddha, to cause them to awaken to that knowledge and vision, to cause them to enter into that knowledge and vision. Because of the causes and conditions of the great matter, the Buddhas enter the world. The Buddhas of the three periods of time, for the sake of the One Buddha Vehicle, first spoke the clever, ingenious Dharma-doors of expedient means. Their final aim was to cause all beings to attain the Buddha’s knowledge and vision, the Buddha’s wisdom, the position of Buddhahood.

**Sutra:**

**“Shariputra, I, now, too am also like this. Knowing that living beings have various desires to which their hearts are deeply attached, according to their basic dispositions, and by means of various causes and conditions, analogies, expressions, and the power of expedient devices, I speak the Dharma to them.”**
Outline:

I2. Explanation regarding Shakyamuni Buddha.
J1. Opening the provisional.

**Commentary:**

**Shariputra, I,** Shakyamuni Buddha **now, too, am also like this.** I now presently teach and transform beings in just the same way. I use various kinds of causes and conditions, analogies, and expressions to speak the Dharma to living beings. **Knowing that living beings have various desires to which their hearts are deeply attached, according to their basic dispositions, and by means of various causes and conditions, analogies, expressions, and the power of expedient devices.**Their thoughts of desire were not created through the habit patterns of one lifetime only. They have been created through patterns formed throughout limitless eons, in successive lifetimes. For this reason they are deeply implanted in the field of the eighth consciousness of living beings. Because they are firmly imbedded there, they are attached to them and cannot set them aside. The power of such attachments is extremely strong; it is not easy to gain release from one’s attachment. Knowing this, I follow along with the basic nature of each living being, with his habits, be they deep or shallow, and use the power of clever, expedient means. **I speak the Dharma to them** to set them free of their attachments.

**Sutra:**
 **“Shariputra, this is all done so that they may attain the One Buddha Vehicle and the Wisdom of All Modes.”

“Shariputra, in the worlds of the ten directions, there are not even two vehicles, how much the less three. Shariputra, all Buddhas appear in the world of the five evil turbidities, that is, the *kalpa* turbidity, the affliction turbidity, the living beings turbidity, the view turbidity, and the life turbidity. So, Shariputra, it is that in the time of the confusion of the *kalpa* turbidity, living beings are heavy-laden with impurities. Because they are stingy, greedy, envious, and jealous, they develop unwholesome roots. For this reason, all the Buddhas, by means of the power of expedient devices, within the One Buddha Vehicle, make discriminations and speak of three.

Shariputra, if a disciple of mine calls himself an Arhat or Pratyekabuddha, but does not hear or know of the fact that all the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, only teach and transform the Bodhisattvas, he is not a disciple of the Buddha nor is he an Arhat, nor is he a Pratyekabuddha.”**
Outline:

J2. Revealing the actual.

J3. Brings up the five turbidities to show the necessity for provisional teachings.

K1. States the truth.
K2. Lists the five turbidities.
K3. Conclusion.
J4. Dispensing with the false in order to build faith in the one actual teaching.
K1. Selecting the false from the true.
L1. Not knowing or hearing, they are not true disciples.

**Commentary:**

**Shariputra,** says Shakyamuni Buddha, **this is all done so that they may attain the One Buddha Vehicle.** The Buddhas of the past, present, and future spoke the Dharma for the same reason; it was all so that the One Buddha Vehicle might be attained.

**Shariputra, in the worlds of the ten directions there are not even two vehicles, how much the less three.** Throughout the Buddha-worlds of the ten directions there are not even Two Vehicles. You could say the Two Vehicles were the Great and Small Vehicles. You could also say that they were the two vehicles of the Storehouse Teaching and the Pervasive Teaching. How much the less are there three? Three would refer to the addition of the Separate Teaching. *The Avatamsaka Sutra* is the Sudden Teaching, a Dharma for teaching Bodhisattvas; however, it also contains the “non-sudden” teachings. Thus, the Avatamsaka Period was a Dharma for teaching Bodhisattvas. The Storehouse and Pervasive Teachings were for the Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas. The Separate Teaching was for those Hearers and Pratyekabuddhas who were about to turn from the Small and go towards the Great, to return to the Perfect Teaching. You could say the three referred to the Hearers, Pratyekabuddhas and the Bodhisattvas. You could also say it was the Storehouse, Pervasive, and Separate Teachings because *The Dharma Flower Sutra* is purely perfect and solitarily wonderful. “Purely perfect” means that it is only the Perfect Teaching. “Solitarily wonderful” means that only *The Dharma Flower Sutra* is completely wonderful. It is the teaching doctrine that is purely perfect and solitarily wonderful ( 純圓獨妙 --chun yuan du miao). The remaining teachings, the Storehouse, Pervasive, and Special, cannot compare to it. Only the Buddha Vehicle is called the Perfect Teaching. The Hearers, Pratyekabuddhas, and Bodhisattvas, those Three Vehicles, are all provisional teachings.

**Shariputra all Buddhas appear in the world of the five evil turbidities, that is, the kalpa turbidity, the affliction turbidity, the living beings turbidity, the view turbidity and the life turbidity.** The Buddhas of the ten directions appear in the world to save all living beings. They appear in the world that is evil and turbid in five ways. There are five evil turbidities.

1. The kalpa turbidity. What is a kalpa? It is a Sanskrit word interpreted as meaning “a division of time.” Basically, there is no such thing as time. The past, present, and future exist only because living beings discriminate. The kalpa is made turbid by the evil offenses of living beings.

2. The affliction turbidity. This refers to the Five Dull Servants: greed, hatred, stupidity, pride, and doubt. These five are the roots from which affliction is born.

3. The living beings turbidity. Living beings have all different kinds of good and evil causes and conditions as well as good and evil retributions. Everyone has his own special evil karma. Living beings are also turbid.

4. The view turbidity. The Five Sharp Servants belong here. They are: the view of a body, extreme views, deviant views, the view of prohibitive morality, and the view of grasping at views. They are also turbid.

5. The life turbidity. Living beings are allotted a certain amount of time in any given retribution body. This is called a life span. It is also turbid.

Our world is made impure by the turbidity of these five, like clear water is made murky by a handful of dirt. That’s why it’s known as the world of the five evil turbidities.

**So Shariputra, it is that in the time of the confusion of the kalpa turbidity, living beings are heavy-laden with impurities,** the filth of their offenses is extremely heavy. **Because they are stingy**…miserly. This means that they cannot part with their money. They hold on to a single penny so tightly that it turns into water. They cannot even let go of a single cent. They are unable to give. **Greedy**: One who is stingy is unable to give, but one who is greedy is not only unable to give, he covets others’ goods. Greed is insatiable. People who are stingy and greedy will receive the retribution of being extremely poor. Because they were stingy and never gave, they have no blessings, no blessed retribution. Greedy people not only refuse to give, but they are greedy for other people’s wealth. Such greedy hearts!

There’s a little story, which illustrates what can happen to people who are just too greedy. Once there was a very greedy person who died and went to King Yama. King Yama asked him, “You are very intelligent. In your lifetime you never took any losses to speak of. Next life, as a person, would you rather eat other people’s food or your own food?”

He thought it over. “If I eat my own food, that is not as economical as eating other people’s food and saving mine.” He said to King Yama, “I would like to eat other people’s food. I do not want to eat my own food.”

“Fine” said King Yama. “You can go be a pig. Pigs eat nothing but things other people give them. They do not have any food of their own.” The person with the greedy heart then realized that he was wrong to want to eat other people’s food, but it was too late. King Yama would not alter his sentence, and the man had to go off to be a pig and eat other people’s food all day long. That is what can happen when you are just too greedy!

**Envious**: Envy means that you are displeased if you see anyone who surpasses you. You are **jealous** of people with talent. When someone is more gifted than you are, you cannot stand it. This includes being covetous of members of the opposite sex. Jealous people eventually fall. If you are jealous of others you may be reborn as an animal. Many of the animals you see were once jealous people.

**They develop unwholesome roots.** Because they were greedy, stingy and jealous, their accomplishments are worthless. They do many bad things and consequently they grow unwholesome roots, evil roots.

**For this reason, all the Buddhas, by means of the power of expedient devices, within the One Buddha Vehicle, make discriminations and speak of three.** Originally, there is only the One Buddha Vehicle. There are no other vehicles. However, if you started right out by telling living beings to become Buddhas, none of them would believe you. That is why the Buddhas of the ten directions and Shakyamuni Buddha all first speak of the dharmas of the Small Vehicles to guide living beings from the small towards the great. They speak of the Hearer, the Pratyekabuddha, and the Bodhisattva Vehicles.

**Shariputra, if a disciple of mine calls himself an Arhat,** says that he has already attained the fruit of Arhatship. **Or a Pratyekabuddha, but does not hear or know of the fact that all the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, only teach and transform the Bodhisattvas, he is not a disciple of the Buddha, nor is he an Arhat, nor is he a Pratyekabuddha.** Why is he not? It is because, if he had attained any of those positions, he would certainly believe this wonderful Dharma which I speak. His basic disposition would form a solid foundation for that faith. If he does not believe then he has not certified to the fruit of Arhatship, Pratyekabuddhahood, or Provisional Vehicle Bodhisattvahood. He is nothing but a person of overweening pride.

**Sutra:**
 **“Furthermore, Shariputra, it should be known that those Bhikshus and Bhikshunis who claim to have attained Arhatship and to dwell in their final bodies before ultimate Nirvana, but who do not further resolve to seek *anuttarasamyaksambodi*, are people of overweening pride. Why is this? It is impossible that any Bhikshu who had actually attained Arhatship should not believe this Dharma, except in the case when the Buddha has passed into extinction and no Buddha is in existence. Why is this? After the Buddha has passed into extinction, those who accept, uphold, read, recite, and understand the meaning of Sutras such as this will be hard to find. If they encounter other Buddhas, they will then obtain thorough understanding of this Dharma.”

“Shariputra, all of you should, with one heart, believe, understand, accept and uphold the speech of the Buddha, for in the words of all the Buddhas there is nothing vain or false. There are no other vehicles; there is only the One Buddha Vehicle.”**
Outline:

L2. Hearing but not faithfully accepting, they are persons with overweening pride.

K2 . Stating the exception and resolving the doubts.
L1. The exception.
L2. Resolving the doubts.
J5. Verifying the validity.

**Commentary:**

**Furthermore, Shariputra,** continued Shakyamuni Buddha, **it should be known that those Bhikshus and Bhikshunis who say that they have already attained Arhatship, and to dwell in their final bodies before ultimate Nirvana.** They say that they are presently inhabiting their very last retribution bodies. After this, they will undergo no further becoming. They say that they have already attained the four virtues of Nirvana: permanence, bliss, purity, and true self. **But who do not further resolve to seek anuttarasamyaksambodhi.** They do not push upward, vowing to seek the position of unsurpassed proper and equal enlightenment. They **are all people of overweening pride.** They are all so intelligent that they have outsmarted themselves. They are proud, conceited, and self-satisfied; they have unmitigated arrogance, all of them.

**Why is this?** What is the reason for this? **It is impossible that any Bhikshu who had actually attained Arhatship should not believe in this Dharma.** There is simply no such thing as a Bhikshu who has already attained to Arhatship but who does not believe in *The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra.*

**Except in the case when the Buddha has passed into extinction and no Buddha is in existence.Why is this? After the Buddha has passed into extinction, those who accept, uphold, read, recite, and understand the meaning of Sutras such as this will be hard to find.** Those who can accept, uphold, read, recite and understand the doctrines of such Sutras as this will be rare indeed. It is by no means easy to find someone who can explain *The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra.* Since no one understands it, no one will be able to believe it.

**If they encounter other Buddhas** in other worlds, **they will then obtain a thorough understanding of this Dharma,** they will certainly comprehend this wonderful Dharma, the doctrine, which opens the provisional and reveals the real.

**Shariputra, all of you should, with one heart, believe, understand, accept, and uphold the speech of the Buddha.** All of you in the assembly, the Hearers and Bodhisattvas, should singlemindedly believe, understand, accept, and maintain this Sutra and Dharma spoken by the Buddha. **For in the words of the Buddhas there is nothing vain or false. There are no other vehicles; there is only the One Buddha Vehicle.** It was still to be feared that people would not believe and so he added, “Nothing the Buddha says is false; it is all true. There are not any other vehicles such as Two Vehicles or Three Vehicles. There is only the one, single Buddha Vehicle. So you should not have any doubts.

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

**Those Bhikshus and Bhikshunis,
Who harbor overweening pride.
The arrogant Upasakas,
Upasikas who do not believe,
In the fourfold host, such ones as these,
Numbering five thousand strong…**

Outline:

G2. Verse.
H1. Consenting to speak.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, the World Honored One, wishing to restate his meaning,** to clarify it, **spoke verses, saying, those Bhikshus and Bhikshunis,** men and women who had left home **who harbor overweening pride.** They were haughty and full of pride. When the Buddha was about to speak the Sutra, they all left.

Why did they leave?

They left because they were too proud, too self-satisfied. Now think this over. Some people come here and listen to one lecture and never return. Such people have overweening pride. Or they may listen to Sutras for a time and find it uninteresting and leave.

**The arrogant Upasakas,** laymen who are conceited and proud. **Upasikas who do not believe,** laywomen who do not believe in this wonderful Dharma, **in the fourfold host, such ones as these, numbering five thousand strong.** There were five thousand of them present at the Dharma meeting.

**Sutra:**

**Who do not see their own mistakes,
Deficient in morality,
And guarding imperfections,
Those of paltry wisdom have left;
The chaff within the multitude is gone,
Thanks to the Buddha’s awesome virtue.**

**Commentary:**

Five thousand of those present at the Dharma meeting got up and left. **Who do not see their own mistakes;** they did not see their own faults. **Deficient in morality and guarding imperfections, those of paltry wisdom have left. The chaff within the multitude is gone.** They were like the chaff which blows away when the grain is winnowed. They were so full of their own pride that they did not know that they had faults themselves. They saw the faults of others, not their own. They were like the blackbird who criticizes a pig for being black. The blackbird can see that the pig is black, but he does not realize that he is black, too. People of great pride will see the mistakes of others, but not their own. And when it came to morality, they had outflows; they did not hold the precepts perfectly.

Those who have taken the Bodhisattva precepts should keep them; those who have taken the Eight Precepts should keep them; those who have taken the Shramenera precepts should keep them. If you do not keep the precepts, then it is as if you had sprung a leak. You are like a bottle with a leak in the bottom. Everything you pour in runs right out. If you keep the precepts, it is like filling that bottle with precious gems. You should always take care to keep the precepts, to accept and maintain them. Do not regard them lightly.

These proud people guarded their imperfections. They held their faults dear. The word for “fault” in the Chinese text 瑕 -xia literally means “a flaw in a piece of jade.” Perhaps one side of the jade is a bit darker than the other, or contains some other flaw. A piece of jade with a flaw is not worth very much. If we do a lot incorrect things, it is as if we had such a flaw in our character. Breaking the precepts is like having a flaw in a piece of jade. Therefore, those who have taken the precepts must keep them.

Those who left were like the chaff, the outside husk on a grain. They are also like the dregs, you might say, like the grains the distiller has left over when he makes wine. Those who walked out of the Dharma Flower Assembly were like chaff or dregs—not much use.

**Thanks to the Buddha’s awesome virtue,** they have already gone. They will not come and hear the Buddhadharma. Those, whose good roots have ripened hear the Buddhadharma once and never want to leave. Those, whose good roots have not ripened hear it once and then wander off for a while. Then they think, “I am going to go listen some more.” All those who come to hear the Buddhadharma have good roots, but some of them have good roots which have ripened, and others have good roots which have not yet ripened. There were five thousands of the latter kind in the Lotus Assembly.
 **Sutra:**

**These people, lacking blessings and virtue,
Are unworthy of receiving this Dharma.
The assembly is free of branches and leaves;
The trunks alone remain intact.
Shariputra, listen well:
The Dharma obtained by the Buddhas,
Is spoken for living beings
Through the power of limitless expedients,
The thoughts in living being’s minds,
The various pathways they have walked,
The nature of their various desires,
Their karma, good or ill, from former lives,
The Buddha knows them all thoroughly.
Using conditions, analogies,
Expressions, and powerful expedients,
I cause them to rejoice.
I may speak the Sutras,
Gathas, or past events,
Of former lives, the unprecedented,
Causes and conditions,
Analogies or geyas,
Or the upadesha texts.
To dull-rooted ones who delight in lesser dharmas,
And who are greedily attached to birth and death,
Who, under limitless Buddhas,
Have not walked the deep and wondrous Path,
Oppressed by scores of sufferings,
For them I speak of Nirvana.
I have established these expedients
To cause them to enter the Buddha’s wisdom.
Never did I say, “All of you
Will realize the Buddha Way.”
I did not say as much because
The time to speak had not yet come.
The time, now, is exactly right,
To speak the Great Vehicle.
The nine division of my Dharma,
Are spoken to accord with living beings;
Intending to lead them into the Great Vehicle,
I therefore speak this Sutra text.
For the Buddha’s disciples, pure in heart,
Who are compliant and have keen faculties,
Who, under countless Buddhas,
Have walked the deep and wondrous Path,
I speak the Sutra of the Great Vehicle.
I predict that such people
In the future will realize the Buddha Way,
For with profound thoughts they recollect the Buddha,
Cultivate and uphold pure morality.
When they hear that they will become Buddhas
Great will their rejoicing be.
The Buddha knows their thoughts and conduct,
And speaks the Great Vehicle for them.
If Hearers or Bodhisattvas,
Hear this Dharma that I speak,
Be it but a single verse,
They will become Buddhas, without a doubt.**

Outline:

H2. Actual speaking.

I1. Explanation regarding Buddhas in general and the Buddhas of the three periods of time.

J1. All Buddhas.
K1. Opening the provisional.
K2. Revealing the actual.
L1. The singularity of the noumenon.
L2. The singularity of the cultivators.

**Commentary:**

**These people, lacking blessings and virtue.** “These people” refers to the five thousand who walked out. They had no blessings and no virtuous conduct. In other words, they had no good roots.

**Are unworthy of receiving this Dharma.** They cannot accept the wonderful Dharma of the Great Vehicle because their good roots are not big enough.

**The assembly is free of branches and leaves.** Among those now left in the assembly, the Bodhisattvas and the Arhats, there are no twigs or leaves, no miscellaneous brush. **The trunks alone remain intact,** only the trunks, the solid foundation, the Great Vehicle people with virtuous practice, remain. None of the Small Vehicle people are left. Only those with the disposition for Great Vehicle Bodhisattvahood remain.

**Shariputra, listen well.** Listen attentively to what I am about to say. **The Dharma obtained by the Buddhas.** The unsurpassed, extremely profound, subtle and wonderful Dharma obtained by the Buddhas of the ten directions, **is spoken for living beings, through the power of limitless expedients.** The power of limitless, boundless expedients leads living beings to set aside the small and head towards the great; to bring forth the Bodhi-heart and realize the position of Buddhahood. I use expedient devices in teaching the Three Vehicles. Originally, there are not Three Vehicles; they are only provisional.

**The thoughts in living being’s minds,** everything they are thinking, **the various pathways they have walked,** all the different modes of practice they have cultivated, **the nature of their various desires;** each living being has his own type of desires. Where do these desires come from? **Their Karma, good or ill, from former lives,** if they have good karma, the burden of their desires will be a bit lighter. If most of their karma is evil, they will bear a heavy burden of desire. So, you can figure it out for yourself. Ask yourself, “Are my thoughts of desire heavy or light? If they are light, then my good roots are deep and thick. If they are heavy, that means my good roots are weak and thin.”

What is meant by “thoughts of desire?” Thoughts of desire are just your afflictions. They are also just your ignorance. They are the things you cannot see through, you cannot break through. They are the things you cannot let go of.

**The Buddha knows them all thoroughly** using his Buddha Eye to observe them, the Buddha understands their dispositions completely. He knows all of the desires and all of the thoughts in the minds of living beings.

**Using conditions, analogies,** various causes and conditions, and various analogies, **expressions, and powerful expedients, I cause them to rejoice.** When living beings hear the Buddhadharma, they are extremely happy.

**I may speak the Sutras.** “Sutra,” a Sanskrit word, means a “tallying text.” Above, it tallies with the principles of all the Buddhas, and below it tallies with the living beings to be taught. Above, it is one with the Buddha nature. Below, it is one with the causes and conditions of living beings to be taught.

**Gathas,** “Gatha” is a Sanskrit word. Gathas are verses used to repeat the principles set forth in the prose passages. Some of them arise independently of the prose lives. An example would be the verse in The Vajra Sutra:

“All conditioned dharmas
Are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows,
Like dew drops or a lightning flash.
You should contemplate them thus.”

Gathas often express key principles, such as these lines, also from The Vajra Sutra:

“One who sees me in forms,
Or seeks me in sounds,
Practices a deviant way,
And will not see the Thus Come One.”

**Or past events,** this refers to stories of the events in the previous lives of disciples or Bodhisattvas.

**Of former lives,** this refers to events of the past lives of the Buddhas. **The unprecedented,** this refers to stories of the events in the past lives of the Buddhas.

**Causes and conditions, analogies or geyas.**Geyas are verses which repeat the meanings given in the preceding prose sections, such as the verses being discussed right now**. Or the Upadesha texts.** The Sanskrit word upadesha means a commentary, a discussion of the meaning.

**To dull-rooted ones who delight in lesser Dharmas,** the Small Vehicles people have dull roots. They prefer lesser dharmas and do not like the Great Vehicle Dharma. **And who are greedily attached to birth and death.** They are greedily attached to the revolving wheel of birth and death; they do not want to part with birth and death. **Who, under limitless Buddhas,** in the presence of limitless Buddhas of the past, **have not walked the deep and wondrous path.** They did not cultivate the Way, the Dharma, which is extremely profound, subtle, and miraculous. **Oppressed by scores of sufferings.** This refers to the eight sufferings: Birth, old age, sickness, death, being separated from what you love, meeting with what you hate, not getting what you seek, and the raging blaze of the five skandhas. There are also three sufferings: The suffering within suffering, the suffering of decay, and the suffering of the life process. They are torture by the three sufferings, the eight sufferings, and all the limitless sufferings. **For them I speak of Nirvana,** the doctrine of permanence, bliss, true self and purity.

**I have established these expedients,** I have devised expedient Dharma-doors **to cause them to enter the Buddha’s wisdom.** To cause all those people who like the Small Vehicle to obtain the Buddha’s wisdom. **Never did I say, “All of you will realize the Buddha way.”** I never said that the Small Vehicle people could also become Buddhas. Now, I am speaking the fine and subtle Great Vehicle Dharma. Everyone can become a Buddha. **I did not say as much because the time to speak had not yet come.** When the Buddha speaks the Dharma, he first observes the causes and conditions to see whether or not the time is right. Right now, it is exactly the right time to speak The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. **The time, now, is exactly right to speak the Great Vehicle.**

**The nine divisions of my Dharma are spoken to accord with living beings.** The nine divisions mentioned above are spoken in response to the needs of living beings. **Intending to lead them into the Great Vehicle, I therefore speak this Sutra text.** I first spoke the dharmas of the lesser vehicles. My aim was to lead them into the Great Vehicle and that is why I am speaking this Sutra now.

**For the Buddha’s disciples, pure in heart, who are compliant and have keen faculties.** They are gentle, mild, intelligent and wise. They have the seeds, the basic make-up, of the Great Vehicle. **Who, under countless Buddhas, have walked the deep and wondrous path.** Why are they compliant and intelligent? It is because in the past, in the presence of limitless Buddhas, they practiced the profound, subtle, and wonderful Dharma doors. **I speak the Sutra of the Great Vehicle,** I speak The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. **I predict that such people in the future will realize the Buddha way.** In a future life they will become Buddhas. **For, with profound thoughts, they recollect the Buddha, cultivate and uphold pure morality.** With hearts of the Great Vehicle, they cultivate and maintain the Buddhadharma, and uphold pure morality. **When they hear that they shall become Buddhas, great will their rejoicing be. The Buddha knows their thoughts and conduct and speaks the Great Vehicle for them.** Knowing the thoughts in the minds and knowing the deeds that they do, the Buddha teaches them the Great Vehicle Dharma.

**If Hearers or Bodhisattvas hear this Dharma that I speak, be it but a single verse,** if they hear so much as a single verse, **they will become Buddhas, without a doubt.** They can all realize Buddhahood. There is no doubt about it.

**Sutra:**

**In the Buddhalands of the ten directions,
There is only the Dharma of One Vehicle;
There are not two or three,
Except those spoken by the Buddhas as expedients,
And those are but false appellations
Used to induce living beings,
So that he may teach them the Buddha’s wisdom.
The Buddhas appear in the world
Only for the sake of this One Real Matter;
The other two are not the truth;
To the end they would not use the Small Vehicle
To rescue living beings.
The Buddha himself dwells in the Great Vehicle,
And in accord with the Dharmas he has gained,
Adorned with the power of samadhi and wisdom,
He uses these to save living beings.
Having certified to the supreme path, myself,
The Great Vehicle’s Dharma of equality,
Were I to teach by means of the Small Vehicle,
Even a single human being,
I would have fallen into stingy greed;
But such a thing could never be.**

Outline:

L3. The singularity of the teaching.
L4. The singularity of the practice.

**Commentary:**

**In the Buddhalands of the ten directions, there is only the Dharma of One Vehicle.** There is only one kind of teaching dharma. And what is that? It is the Great Vehicle. **There are not two or three.** The Two Vehicles and the Three Vehicles do not exist. Only the Buddha Vehicle is real. **Except those spoken by the Buddhas as expedients.** However, although it is said that there is only the Buddha Vehicle, and that the Two Vehicles and Three Vehicles do not exist, still, because he wishes to teach and transform living beings, the Buddha sets up expedient Dharma-doors. He speaks of the Small Vehicle and the Great Vehicle. He establishes the lesser vehicle to lead living beings towards the Great Vehicle. **And those are but false appellations.** They are just false names; they correspond to nothing in reality. **Used to induce living beings,** to teach and transform living beings and cause them to cultivate the easy first and then later to seek the Great Vehicle, the Buddha Vehicle. **So that he may teach them the Buddha’s wisdom.** Because he leads and guides living beings, they eventually attain the Buddha’s wisdom. **The Buddhas appear in the world, only for the sake of this One Real Matter.** It is always for the same reason. **The other two are not the truth.** The Two Vehicles and the Three Vehicles are not real. **To the end they would not use the Small Vehicle to rescue living beings.** The Buddhas would never, ever use the teaching doctrines of the Small Vehicle to teach living beings.

**The Buddha himself dwells in the Great Vehicle.** the Buddha himself abides in the Great Vehicle Dharma, that is, in the Buddha Vehicle. **And in accord with the Dharmas he has gained.** The Dharma he attained in the Bodhimanda is true, real, and is not a provisional device. **Adorned with the power of samadhi and wisdom.** The Buddha has Ten Powers. Previously, when I lectured the prose passage, I should have mentioned them, but I deliberately did not so that those of you who like to study the Buddhadharma could wait nervously for awhile until the verse section to have them explained.

The Buddha has Ten Powers, ten kinds of wisdom powers. They are:

1. The wisdom power of knowing points of enlightenment and non-enlightenment. That is, the Buddha is aware, enlightened to the point of what is enlightenment and what is not.

2. The wisdom power of knowing the karmic retributions of the three periods of time. That is, he knows the operations of karmic retributions as they work in the past, present, and future.

3. The wisdom power of knowing all the Dhyanas, liberations, and samadhis. That is, the Four Dhyanas and the Eight Samadhis, the first, second, third and fourth Dhyanas, plus the Station of Limitless Space, the Station of Limitless Consciousness, the Station of Nothing Whatsoever, and the Station of Neither Perception Nor Non-Perception. That is the Eight Samadhis.

There are Eight Liberations:

a) The liberation in which inside there is the mark of form, and outwardly form is contemplated.

b) The liberation in which inwardly there is no mark of form, and outwardly form is contemplated.

c) The liberation of the pure liberation body, wherein pure liberation has been attained.

d) The liberation of the Station of Limitless Space.

e) The liberation of the Station of Limitless Consciousness.

f) The liberation of the Station of Nothing Whatsoever,

g) The liberation of the Station of Neither Perception Nor Non-Perception.

h) The liberation of the samadhi of the extinction of the skandhas of reception and perception. These are also called the Eight Renunciations.

There are also Eight Victorious Places. When one renounces greed and desire, one attains a place of victory. They are: a) The victorious place in which inwardly there is the mark of form while outwardly a small amount of form is contemplated. b) The victorious place in which inwardly there is the mark of form while outwardly a large amount of form is contemplated. c) The victorious place in which inwardly there is no mark of form while outwardly a small amount of form is contemplated. d) The victorious place in which inwardly there is no mark of form while outwardly a large amount of form is contemplated. e) The victorious place of blue color. f) The victorious place of yellow color. g) The victorious place of red color. h) The victorious place of white color.

These are the Eight Victorious Places. This means that in cultivating these eight kinds of dharmas you can renounce, can turn your back on, thoughts of desire and attain a victorious and liberated wisdom. In the first of the Eight Victorious Places it is said that inwardly one has the mark of form and outwardly a small amount of form is contemplated. At this stage one’s samadhi power is not yet complete, and it is to be feared that if a large amount of form were contemplated, one’s samadhi power might become scattered. So, a small amount of form is contemplated. For example, one single corpse is contemplated, not a lot of them. You watch one corpse goes through its stages of decay—swelling, turning green, and so forth. In the second of the Eight Victorious Places, not one, but maybe a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand corpses are contemplated: Corpses, corpses, everywhere. They all go through changes—swell, rot, burst open, are eaten by worms, etc. Actually there are nine stages of a rotting corpse, known as the Nine Mark Contemplation.

To the Eight Victorious Places you add Emptiness and Consciousness to form the Ten All-Places. These three dharmas—the Eight Liberations, the Eight Victorious Places, and the Ten All-Places—should be known by all cultivators of the Dhyana School. So the third of the Buddha’s Ten Wisdom Powers is the knowledge of the dhyanas, liberations, and samadhis.

To continue the list of the Buddha’s Ten Powers:

4. The wisdom power of knowing the superiority or baseness of the roots of all living beings.

5. The wisdom power of knowing the various understandings.

6. The wisdom power of knowing the various realms.

7. The wisdom power of knowing where all paths lead.

8. The wisdom power of the knowledge of the unobstructed Heavenly Eye.

9. The wisdom power, without outflows, of knowing former lives.

10. The wisdom power of eternally severing all habitual energies.

The Buddha has these Ten Powers and so the Sutra text says, “Adorned with the power of samadhi and wisdom.”

**He uses these to save living beings.** He uses his powers to teach and transform living beings.

**Having certified to the supreme path myself, The Great Vehicles Dharma of equality, were I to teach by means of the Small Vehicle, even a single human being.** If I did not teach and transform beings by means of the Great Vehicle but instead used the doctrines of the lesser vehicles, crossing over even one living being **I would have fallen into stingy greed.** The Buddha speaks of himself saying, “If I used the Small Vehicle to teach even one single person, I would fall into a stingy, greedy, miserly attitude. I would be stingy with the Dharma, because I would not be able to part with the Great Vehicle Dharma.” **But such a thing could never be.** It would simply never happen.

By the way, I did not use a book just now when I explained the Ten Powers and Eight Liberations, and I did not prepare them ahead of time. I just remembered them.

**Sutra:**

**Should people rely, in faith, upon the Buddha,
The Thus Come One will not deceive them;
He has no thoughts of envy or greed,
And he has cut off all the evil in the dharmas.
Therefore, throughout the ten directions,
The Buddha alone has nothing to fear.
My body adorned with marks,
I brilliantly illumine the world.
Revered by countless multitudes
I speak the Seal of the Real Mark.
Shariputra, you should know,
That in the past I took a vow,
Wishing to lead the multitudes,
To be identical with me.
That vow, made long ago,
Now has been perfectly fulfilled,
For I have transformed all beings,
Leading them into the Buddha Path.”**

K3. Exhortation to believe.
L1. By means of the result.
L2. By means of the cause.

**Commentary:**

**Should people rely, in faith, upon the Buddha,** the Buddha spoke to Shariputra, saying, “If someone believes in the Buddhadharma and takes refuge in the Buddha Way, in the Triple Jewel, **The Thus Come One will not deceive them.**” The World Honored One speaks the truth, speaks of what is real. He does not speak falsely and he would never cheat the people of the world. **He has no thoughts of envy or greed.** He would never have thoughts of covetousness or jealousy. **And he has cut off all the evil in the dharmas.** All students of the Buddhadharma should genuinely understand cause and effect. You must put the principles of the Buddhadharma into practice. For example, everyone is basically greedy. Once you understand that greed is wrong, you should, bit by bit, get rid of it. Basically, we all have thoughts of hate. Once you have heard the Buddhadharma and know that hate is wrong, you should, bit by bit, reform your hateful mind.

The same is true for thoughts of stupidity and jealousy. If you have thoughts of jealousy, greed, hatred, and stupidity, these are what it is called the evil within the dharmas. They are evil habits that should be cut off. The Buddha says that he has cut off all the evil within the dharmas, but actually the Buddha has already certified to the position of great and perfect enlightenment, so how could evil within the dharmas possibly remain? Why does he say this? It is because he wants to instruct everyone else to sever the evil within the dharmas. For example, why are you so stupid? It is because, in former lives, you were jealous of those who had wisdom. When you saw that someone else was wise, you grew envious and so in your present life you are stupid. Why, in your present life are you very intelligent? The same principle applies in reverse. It is just because in former lives you were not jealous of intelligent people, you liked for other people to be intelligent, even to the point that, as people studied the Buddhadharma, the clearer they became about it, the more you rejoiced with them and praised them for it.

If someone studies and learns quickly you should rejoice and praise that person; you should not get jealous. Do not be afraid that others will surpass you. “When everyone is better than me, when everyone else becomes a Buddha, then afterwards I can become a Buddha, too!” That is the resolve of the Bodhisattva. Take a look at Earth Store Bodhisattva. He vowed to cross over all the hungry ghosts in hell and to take them all to Buddhahood. Ghosts are the epitome of evil, but he did not dislike them; he resolved to save them.

Someone wanted to know if it would be possible to make a vow to save all the beings on the five paths of existence at the same time, on the same day, in the same month, in the same year. The five paths are the path of gods, the path of humans, the path of animals, the path of the hells, and the path of hungry ghosts. Could you vow to cause them all to become Buddhas at the same time? This cannot be done. Why not? In order to become a Buddha it is absolutely necessary that one first be born in the human realm in order to cultivate the Way. You could not keep a vow to cause all the beings of the five paths to become Buddhas at the same time. Earth Store Bodhisattva saves the most evil beings. The Buddha has vowed to save all living beings so that they will become Buddhas, and he would certainly never be jealous and think, “Now I have become a Buddha, and I do not like the idea of you becoming a Buddha. Why not? If you become a Buddha, then nobody will light incense to me! No one will bow to me, see? So, how about if just I alone become a Buddha and you guys get lost, okay?” He is not jealous like that. He wants everyone to become a Buddha and be just like him. In fact, it would even be nice if everyone else became a Buddha before he did.

So, as you listen to the Sutras, whatever you do, do not be jealous. If you are jealous—I am warning you in advance—with jealous, greedy, hateful, and stupid thoughts, in the future if you do not fall into the hells, you will turn into a hungry ghost, or else become an animal. Would you say that was dangerous or not? If you are not afraid of falling into the three evil paths, then go right ahead and hold on to your greed, hatred, and stupidity. Go ahead and keep them.

If you think you would find the taste of the three evil paths not easy to take, then you should get rid of your greed, hatred, stupidity, jealousy and contrariness. Why? It is because these thoughts are the evil within the dharmas. Within the Buddhadharma they are evil elements. If you do not cut off the evil in the dharmas, you are going to fall into the three evil paths. If you cut off the evil in the dharmas, you will be born in the three wholesome paths. At the very least you will be born in the heavens. But those who study the Buddhadharma should not seek to be reborn in the heavens. If you do, you still can fall into the lower realms.

**Therefore, throughout the ten directions, the Buddha alone has nothing to fear.** He is not afraid. People say, “I am really scared!” Some people are afraid of the dark. During the day, they are afraid of thieves.

What can be done?

If there are a lot of people around at night they get jealous. “I was doing quite well living here,” they think, “until all you people showed up to pester me.” During the day when there are many people around, they find it too noisy.

What can be done?

When alone, they are afraid of the dark at night and afraid of thieves by day. If there are other people around, they cannot get along with them. Perhaps at work they feel that they carry more of the load and a lot of vexation arises. Just what can be done?

This all comes as a result of having evil in the dharmas. So you are afraid of this and afraid of that, afraid of too many people, afraid of too few, afraid of having people around, and afraid of being alone, afraid at night, afraid during the day. If something happens, it scares you; if nothing happens, it scares you even more. You are afraid of the wolves ahead of you and afraid of the tigers behind you. You feel like there are wolves up ahead and tigers on your heels. See how you are? You cannot stand still, and you cannot sit in one place because you are so nervous and excited. At night you have nothing but bad dreams. Why? I will tell you: It is because you have evil within the dharmas.

Why is the Buddha fearless? In the worlds of the ten directions, he fears nothing at all. He is not afraid to speak the Dharma. He is not afraid to teach and transform living beings. He is not afraid that living beings will be hard to subdue. He is not afraid of anything at all. He is utterly fearless. Therefore, he alone is without fear. Being fearless, he can succeed.

It is said, “If you are afraid, you will not attain your goal.” Today, one of my disciples said something very interesting. He said that when he took his tests he just wrote right off the top of his head. He knew his professor’s mind, what he liked. And what was that? Drunken talk! So he scribbled his test at random and it was exactly to his teacher’s taste. He got a very high mark. Other people take tests on tiptoe, as it were, as if standing at the edge of a deep abyss or walking on thin ice. They are scared to death and wind up getting very low marks. There is a very logical principle behind all of this. It was not actually because he knew his professor’s mind, but rather because he was not afraid. He also lectures fearlessly. Even when his teaching is standing right beside him, he dares to speak, and when his teacher leaves, he continues right on speaking. In general, he just keeps right on talking. He speaks not at all badly, too.

Others are not afraid either. When they hear their teacher say that they should lecture on the Sutras, they refuse to be afraid and go ahead. When they talk, however, it sounds like they were beating people to a pulp with a wooden club. It hurts a lot. They may not be afraid, but their listeners are! They talk everyone into being afraid to listen! This, too, is a problem. In everything you do, you should seek the Middle Way. The Middle Way means that you do not lean off to the left or to the right; you do not go too far, and you do not stop short. The Middle Way is without shape or form. It is the wonderful way. If you do not unite with the Middle Way, then it is the unwonderful way. The Buddha is not afraid, and he does not make others afraid either. His fearlessness does not mean that the Buddha is so fearless that when living beings see him they are afraid of him. No. When living beings see the Buddha, they are not afraid. The more they listen to the Buddha speak the Dharma, the more they like to listen. The more they like to listen, the more they want to listen. They listen to the Dharma for several decades without growing tired. The more they listen, the more they like it; the more they listen, the happier they get. That is the way the Buddha speaks the Dharma.

“Well,” you say, “then how was it that when The Dharma Flower Sutra was about to be lectured, five thousand people got up and walked out? If, as you say, the more they listened, the more they liked to listen, why did all those people leave?”

That is a good question. In fact, five thousand people did walk out; they ran away and did not stay to listen. Actually, it was not a case of their not wanting to listen, but rather that they did not have the virtuous conduct to listen. They were driven out by their karmic offenses. As soon as the Buddha announced his intention to speak the wonderful Dharma, their karmic obstacles showed up and they could not sit still. They left on their own. It was not a matter of being afraid or not being afraid to listen, of liking or not liking to listen. It was a question of their karmic offenses being too heavy. They may have wished to listen to the Buddhadharma, but their karmic obstacles revealed themselves, and they had to run away. They became possessed by demons; the demon-power overtook them. If the ones with offenses had not gone, they would have influenced the ones without offenses so that they would not have wanted to listen either. Perhaps, right when the Buddha was lecturing, they might have jumped up, or yelled wildly, or gone insane. It was really better that they left. That was the question involved. So do not ask questions about things that poses no questions.

So, the Buddha is fearless.

**My body adorned with marks.** Shakyamuni Buddha says, “Adorned with the marks of a hundred blessings,” **I brilliantly illumine the world.** My light shines throughout the world. **Revered by countless multitudes, I speak the Seal of the Real Mark.** I speak the Real Mark Dharma-door, the Dharma of real wisdom, The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. If you understand The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra, you will understand the Seal of the Real Mark. If you do not understand it, you cannot get “sealed.”

**Shariputra, you should know that in the past I took a vow, wishing to lead the multitudes to be identical with me.** I made a vow to cause all living beings to be just like me, non-dual, and non-different from me, and from all the Buddhas of the ten directions. So, whoever is more talented than I, whoever is more intelligent, whatever happens, I am never jealous of them. If someone can do a good job of lecturing on the Sutras, you should not be jealous. You should rejoice and praise them saying, “They lecture so well. I just love to listen to them!” No matter whether they lecture well or poorly, do not become annoyed with them or get upset. If you get upset with them, the Dharma will not get through to you even if they lecture well. If you do not get upset, no matter who speaks the Dharma, you will recognize their good qualities. If you listen carefully, you will understand the doctrines and gain the benefits of listening to the Dharma.

**That vow, made long ago, now has been perfectly fulfilled.** I have now accomplished Buddhahood; I have fulfilled my vow. I have saved those living beings I wanted to save. Some have certified to the fruit and others have brought forth the Bodhisattva resolve. **For I have transformed all beings, leading them into the Buddha path.** I have now led all beings to enter into the Path to Buddhahood.

**Sutra:**

**If, when I met with living beings,
I taught them just the Buddha Path,
Those lacking wisdom would be puzzled;
Confused, they would not accept the teaching.**

K4. Mentioning the five turbidities.
L1. General explanation of the obstacle of the five turbidities.

**Commentary:**

**If, when I met with living beings:** Previously it said, “…leading them into the Buddha Path.” The Buddha has led living beings to opening, demonstration, awakening, and entering of the Buddha’s knowledge and vision. In these lines the Buddha is talking about himself. He has rightly certified to the Eight Great Freedoms of the Self:

1. One body can manifest limitless bodies. That is, one Buddha can turn into countless numbers of Buddhas.

2. One body the size of a mote of dust can completely fill the great thousand world systems. Why? It is because it is free!

3. The Buddha-body can lightly float to distant places. For example, it can lightly float, just like a balloon, right up into space. The balloon can fly a long ways to distant places. The balloon, however, is just an analogy. Actually, this is just the free and wonderful functioning of the Buddha’s spiritual penetrations, which enable him to rise lightly in the air and travel to very distant regions.

4. He can manifest limitless kinds of living beings, which always dwell together in one land.

5. All the sense faculties may be used interchangeably. I explained this when I lectured The Shurangama Sutra. The eyes can eat and the ears can talk! The six sense organs—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—all function with the functions of the other five. Each organ can be used in six ways. The eyes can see and hear; they can also eat and taste. They all can be used interchangeably. Would you say this was wonderful or not?

6. He obtains the suchness of all dharmas, without the thought of dharmas. Dharmas are empty.

7. The meaning of one verse may be explained throughout limitless eons. The doctrines contained in a single verse may be explained for limitless, boundless great eons, and still the meaning will not have been spoken to the end.

8. The body pervades all places, like space. Although it fills all places, it is just like empty space. When I explained The Shurangama Sutra, I said that the Buddha was nowhere present and nowhere not present. Where would you say he is? He is everywhere. Where would you say he is not? He is nowhere at all.

We say that the Buddha is like empty space. What does this mean? Take a look at empty space: It has no shape or form. The Buddha’s body fills all places in the same way. We are all living in the substance of the Buddha’s spirit. The Buddha is like a big person who fills up the space between heaven and earth. We live on the Buddha’s body the way small bugs live on ours. Sometimes, when we do not bathe for long periods of time, we might get lice. In northern China, they have tiny lice and fleas. But the lice and fleas do not know what the people they live on are like. They cannot see the people, even through they are living right on their bodies. We dwell in the Buddha’s Dharma-body in the same way. We cannot see it. Why not? It is because we are right within it. In China, there is a saying,

Why cannot you see the face of Lu Mountain?
It is just because you are standing on Lu Mountain.

Lu Mountain in Jiang Xi, is one of China’s most famous scenic spots. It has a lovely view, verdant forests, and breathtaking waters. Why can’t you see Lu Mountain? It is because you are standing right on it! If you backed away from it, you would be able to see it.

And why can’t we see the Buddha’s Dharma-body? It is because we are contained within it. Basically, there is not any place that is outside the Buddha’s Dharma-body. That is why there is no way we can get outside of it.

Then how can we see the Buddha’s Dharma-body? We must apply effort in cultivating the Way. When we accomplish Buddhahood and are one, non-dual, with the Buddha, we will know what the realm of the Buddha’s Dharma-body is like.

The Buddha has attained the Eight Great Freedoms of the Self. He teaches and transforms living beings according to his intent, and, however he speaks the Dharma, he is correct.

**I taught them just the Buddha path.** So the Buddha uses the miraculous functioning of spiritual penetrations, the Eight Great Freedoms of the Self. **Those lacking wisdom would be puzzled.** Although the Buddha is compassionate in teaching and transforming living beings, those without wisdom, the stupid people, cannot understand him. If he taught them the One Vehicle, they would surely misunderstand him. Stupid people, no matter what you tell them, always waver between doubt and belief. Why do they waver? **Confused they would not accept the teaching.** They are too deeply submerged in their confusion. When you speak the Buddhadharma to them they are not able to accept it.

Everyone can know the events of his or her past lives. You can know what you did in the past. How can you know? Take stock of yourself; take a look at yourself the way you are now. If you have a great deal of compassion, then in former lives you did not kill many living beings. You did not violate the precept against taking life. Having a compassionate heart just means that you do not have a temper. You look upon everyone as you would your own blood relatives. You cherish others as you cherish yourself. If you have that kind of compassion, it means that in former lives you did not kill. If you do not have compassionate concern for living beings, then in past lives you did kill. It is like taking a look at yourself in the mirror to see what you look like. If you are extremely hateful, then in past lives, you killed living beings. Those who like to kill have big tempers and a great deal of fire-energy. From these two indications, you can figure out your own set of causes and effects. You can know what you did in previous lives by looking at what you are doing right now. So, a few days ago some soldiers came to visit and they asked, “Do you believe that people can become animals?”

I said, “If you act like an animal, you are an animal. If you act like a person, you are a person. You do not have to worry about what you will become in the future. If, in this present life, you do things that animals do, then you are an animal. If you do the deeds people do, then you are a person. If you do the deeds of a Bodhisattva, you are a Bodhisattva. If you observe the precepts of a Bodhisattva and practice the Bodhisattva Way, then you are a Bodhisattva. Although you are just a junior Bodhisattva, one who has newly brought forth the Bodhisattva resolve, if you do the acts of a Buddha, you are a Buddha. If you sneak around like a ghost, then you are a ghost. Just take a look at what you do. Everything is made from the mind alone—that is the principle at work here.

How is it that you are able to come here and listen to the Buddhadharma? It is because in former lives you believed in Buddhism and so now you like to hear the Sutras lectured. Those without good roots would hear the lectures and think, “What a lot of nonsense; how boring!” and run off. So you see, everyone can have the Penetration of the Knowledge of Past Lives.
 **Sutra:**

**I know that these living beings
Have never cultivated good roots.
They are firmly attached to the five desires,
And, out of stupidity and love, become afflicted.
Because of all their desires,
They fall into the three evil paths,
They turn on the wheel in the six destinies,
Suffering utter misery.
They take a tiny form in the womb;
Life after life, it continues to grow.
With scanty virtue and few blessings,
They are oppressed by scores of sufferings,
They enter the dense forest of deviant views,
Those of existence, non-existence, and the like.
They become dependent on those views—
Sixty-two of them in all.
Deeply attached to illusory dharmas,
They cling to them firmly and cannot let them go.
Arrogant, they brat of their loftiness;
They are flatterers, their hearts insincere.
Throughout ten billion eons,
They never hear the Buddha’s name,
Nor do they hear the proper Dharma.
Such people are difficult to save.**

L2. Specific description of the five obstacles.

**Commentary:**

**I know that these living beings, have never cultivated good roots.** Who are “these living beings”? They are those lacking in wisdom, those confused beings who refuse to be taught by the Buddha. In former lives, they did not cultivate good roots, and so they are stupid. Those people who have cultivated good roots are intelligent, not stupid.

“Do I have good roots or not?” you ask.

Do not ask whether or not you have good roots. Ask whether or not you choose to cultivate in accord with the Dharma. If you rely upon the Buddhadharma to cultivate, practice and uphold it, and keep the precepts, then even if you did not have good roots, you would develop them. If you do not cultivate according to Dharma, and, having taken the precepts, fail to observe them, and you do no good deeds, then you would soon have no good roots at all. There is a saying about selfishness:

If I could benefit all under heaven by pulling a single hair out of my head,
I would not do it.

Selfish people would not do a good deed the size of one single hair to benefit someone else. If they could benefit everyone in the whole world by pulling out just one hair from their heads, they would not do it. They think, “Well, if I pulled out one of my hairs it would hurt a lot and what difference does it make to me whether or not everyone under heaven gain benefits anyway? So what? What is in it for me? I am not going to do it.” If you are like that, if you do not cultivate in accord with the Dharma, then even if you had good roots, you soon would have none. If you cultivate in accord with the Dharma, then even if you do not have good roots, you will get them. Do not ask whether or not you have good roots.

I will tell you something even more profound: If you did not have good roots, there is absolutely no way that you would be able to come and hear the Buddhadharma. You would not have the necessary causes and conditions to study Buddhism. For example we, who are listening to the Buddhadharma now, especially to The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra, in past lives have all planted good roots. But you should not ask.

I am not going to answer your question, either. Why not? If I said you had good roots you would get arrogant and say, “Look at me! The Dharma Master says I have good roots, and no doubt my good roots are not small.” You would get stuck-up. On the other hand, if I said you had no good roots and that, in fact, in your last life you were a pig or something. This life you are a person and that is why you are so stupid. You would think, “Oh, last life I was a pig. Now I am a person, but it does not mean much. I think I will do a few rotten things and go back to being a pig.” Such people always feel like there is nothing going on. When they have eaten their fill, they go to sleep. So I cannot tell you whether or not you have good roots.

Instead of asking me, ask yourself whether or not you can cultivate in accord with Dharma. If you can, then even if you do not have good roots, you are getting them. If you do not cultivate in accord with Dharma, then, even if you have good roots, you are losing them.

The Buddha knew that these people had never in past lives planted good roots.

**They are firmly attached to the five desires.** They are stuck. They cannot break through their desire for forms, sound, smells, tastes, and tangible objects. There is another list of the five desires: Wealth, form, fame, food, and sleep. It is said:

Wealth, form, fame, food, and sleep
Are the five roots of the hells.

If you get attached to any one of the five desires, it can drag you right down into hell. So we say that they are the five roots of the hells. You could also call them five chains. They are like heavy chains that drag you into the hells.

Some people are greedy for wealth. They crave material possessions to the point that they would do anything at all, regardless or whether it was right or not, to get what they want. Basically, one should not covet wealth, which is not rightfully gained. But such people have no conscience in matters of material gain.

Form refers to beauty, especially the attractions of the opposite sex. This is the easiest matter in which people transgress. No matter who they are, when men and women meet, their first thought is to determine whether the other person is beautiful or ugly. Such questions are always foremost in people’s minds.

If people are not greedy for wealth or forms, they may be greedy for fame and get locked in the chains of fame. They enjoy nothing but running around promoting themselves in all kinds of ways, advertising themselves. A certain layman had a card printed saying that he was president of such and such organization, head of such and such a group, and so on. The entire card was covered with his titles. What for? When you take a look at his card and see all his fancy titles, you are supposed to be very impressed. That is the way fame is, really important to people.

There are others who do not care for wealth, form, or fame, but guess what? They love to eat! They do not eat their own food either, but specialize in cheating other people out of meals. When they hear there is a party, they crash the gate, sit down, and eat their fill—a fish eye concealed among the pearls. Because of this, everyone looks down on them as gluttons and they are objects of scorn wherever they go.

Those who are not greedy for wealth, form, fame, or food, may be greedy for sleep. They can go without eating, but they would not hear of missing their sleep. They sleep and sleep until their brains get all stuck together and they lose all their wisdom. They sleep themselves into stupidity. In Hong Kong and Taiwan people sometimes sleep to death! Why? It is because they like to sleep. They sleep to death feeling extremely happy. They are not aware of anything at all and die in their sleep, painlessly. That is the fifth root of the hells.

Therefore, once you understand the Buddhadharma, you should reform your bad habits. If you cannot reform all five of them immediately, you can do it slowly.

**And, out of stupidity and love, become afflicted.** Because they cling to the five desires, they give rise to stupidity and grow attached to them. Because of their craving for the five desires, they think up all kinds of ways to obtain them. When their efforts are frustrated, they give rise to affliction. Why does affliction arise? It is because they have no wisdom. They do not see their state clearly; they do not understand one should reflect upon the principle and, returning the light, awaken to the futility of one’s actions. Not only do they fail to wake up, they get afflicted.

**Because of all their desires, they fall into the three evil paths.** Greed for food, greed for sleep, greed for fame, scheming for wealth, and lusting after forms—all these various evil modes of behavior generate afflictions. Because they are afflicted, they grow stupid. Because they are stupid, they fall into the three evil paths: the hells, the animal realm, and the realm of hungry ghosts. They looked upon the five desires as too important. Unable to free themselves, they let the chains of the five desires drag them into the three evil paths.

**They turn on the wheel in the six destinies.** Around and around they go on the wheel in the six paths of rebirth. Suddenly they are in the heavens, suddenly they are on the earth; suddenly they are cows, and suddenly they turn into horses. Suddenly they are hungry ghosts, and suddenly they become asuras. They revolve around and around in the six paths because they planted the causes to revolve on the wheel. **Suffering utter misery.** Having planted the causes, they must suffer the retribution of turning on the wheel, all the misery and wretchedness of the six paths of rebirth.

**They take a tiny form in the womb.** They may be born from a womb. Perhaps they are born as a human being or perhaps they are born as a cow, a horse, a pig or—a mouse! See? Some people are afraid of mice. If you are afraid of mice, then do not do bad things. If you do bad things, you may just end up in the rat pile yourself as a friend of the mice. Look at mice: They are dirty, filthy. You would better be careful. Mice are also born from wombs, you know. **Life after life, it continues to grow.** Taking a womb to be reborn—in one life they take one kind of womb, and in the next life they take another kind of womb. From small creatures, they turn into large creatures. From large creatures they turn into old creatures. In general, their karmic obstacles continue to grow. The retribution of their evil karma increase, life after life; it does not decrease. It just keeps getting bigger and bigger. Finally, how large it gets, no one knows.

**Sutra:**

**Therefore, Shariputra,
I set forth expedients for them,|
Speak of the way to suffering’s end,
And demonstrate Nirvana.
Although I speak of Nirvana,
It is not true extinction.
All dharmas from their origin,
Are ever marked by still extinction.
When the Buddha’s disciples have walked the Path,
In a future age they will become Buddhas.
I possess the power of expedients,
And demonstrate the Dharma of Three Vehicles.
All the World Honored Ones,
Speak the Dharma of One Vehicle.
Now all of you assembled here,
Should cast your doubts aside.
The speech of all Buddhas is the same:
There is only One Vehicle, not two.**

Outline:

L3. Explains that Small Vehicle is spoken because of the five turbidities.
L4. Explains that Small Vehicle is spoken for sake of Great Vehicle.
K5. Verifying the validity.

**Commentary:**

**Therefore, Shariputra,** I Shakyamuni Buddha, say that people are all difficult to save. Why are they difficult to save? Simply because they are too stupid. They are so stupid that if you teach them the genuine Dharma, they do not understand it. They doubt it and wonder, “That is what you say, but I do not know if it is true or not. I do not know if that is the true Dharma.” **I set forth expedients for them.** I set up some provisional, expedient Dharma-doors, and **speak of the way to suffering’s end.** I speak the Three Storehouse Teaching so they may leave suffering. So it is said,

Know suffering,
Cut off origination,
Long for extinction, and
Cultivate the Way.

Everyone should know that everything in this world is suffering. Knowing suffering, you should end suffering. That is why I speak this Dharma-door of ending suffering. I speak the Dharma of the Four Holy Truths **and demonstrate Nirvana.** “Demonstrate” means that I instruct the Small Vehicle people in the method used to certify to the wonderful fruit of Nirvana: permanence, bliss, true self, and purity. **Although I speak of Nirvana,** I teach the wonderful Dharma of non-production and non-extinction. **It is not true extinction.** However, that dharma which I speak for those of the Two Vehicles is not the genuine, ultimate Dharma of still extinction. **All dharmas from their origin.** Why do I say that it is not the ultimate Dharma of still extinction? It is because all dharmas basically, from where they begin, from their origin **are ever marked by still extinction.** The basic substance of the Dharma is still and extinct. It is “thus, thus.”

**When the Buddha’s disciples have walked the Path.** I have spoken the Small Vehicle dharma for these people to cultivate. However, after they have cultivated the Small Vehicle dharmas to perfection, they must still return from the Small and go towards the Great, and walk the Bodhisattva Way in order to be genuine disciples of the Buddha. When they have cultivated the Bodhisattva Way to perfection, then **in a future age they will become Buddhas.** In a future life they will certify to the Buddha-fruit. If, in the very beginning, you tried to teach them to cultivate for the Buddha-fruit, to practice the Six Perfections and the Ten Thousand Conducts, they would be frightened. They would think such cultivation was too difficult**. I possess the power of expedients.** I set up provisional devices. After I spoke The Great Avatamsaka Sutra, seeing that those of the Two Vehicles could not understand it, I set up expedient devices. **And demonstrate the Dharma of Three Vehicles.** I demonstrate the Dharma-doors of the Vehicle of the Hearers, the Vehicle of the Conditioned Enlightened Ones, and the Vehicle of the Bodhisattvas.

**All the World Honored Ones,** although I teach the Three Vehicles, my ultimate aim, my final goal, is still to cause all living beings to become Buddhas. Not only do I speak the highest Buddha Vehicle, but all of the World Honored Ones throughout all the worlds in the ten directions, all the Buddhas, **speak the Dharma of One Vehicle.** They return the three to the one and open the provisional to reveal the real. They set aside the teaching of the Three Vehicles to reveal the One Vehicle, the real teaching.

**Now all of you assembled here,** Bodhisattvas, Arhats, Bhikshus, Bhikshunis, Upasakas, Upasikas, ghosts and spirits, all of the gods and dragons and the rest of the eightfold division, **should cast your doubts aside.** Get rid of your doubts; you should not harbor doubts concerning The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. Do not be like a fox who has doubts about everything. When foxes cross the river when it has frozen over, they take a step and then cock their ears, listening to hear if the ice creaks. Will it hold them, or will it crack and dump them into the river? They take a step, listen, take another step, and listen some more. Although they do not hear a sound, they still do not believe. With each step they have to listen again. Foxes are full of doubt. Those who believe in the Buddha, but who do not have good roots, will half believe and half disbelieve. Their faith is not real because they have not cast their doubts aside. Now, all present in the assembly are exhorted to cast their doubts aside.

To put it another way, why is it that some people half believe in the Buddhadharma and half disbelieve? It is because they are stupid. If they had prajna wisdom, they could not possible have doubts. But, because they lack prajna wisdom, even you speak the true Dharma for them they hear it as false dharma. If you speak the subtle Dharma for them, they hear it as coarse dharma. They do not have the Dharma-selecting eye. That is why they give rise to doubts.

**The speech of all Buddhas is the same. There is only one vehicle not two.** The Buddhas of the ten directions say the same things. Why is that? They speak only the One Vehicle, the Buddha Way, the One Buddha Vehicle and the true real wisdom. There are not two vehicles. There is no Hearer Vehicle, no Conditioned Enlightened Vehicle, and no Bodhisattva Vehicle. The Buddhas speak only the One Buddha Vehicle. They speak the Dharma-door of the Real Teaching; they do not speak the provisional teaching. This is called “opening the provisional to reveal the Real.” They put the provisional, clever expedient device Dharma-doors off to one side and speak only the wonderful doctrine of the Real Mark. So now, the Hearers and the Conditioned Enlightened Ones should return from the small and go towards the Great, to cultivate and practice real wisdom. If they do not put down the provisional wisdom, they will not be able to understand real wisdom. There is only one not two vehicles. There is only the Buddha Vehicle.

**Sutra:**

**Throughout countless eons in the past,
Innumerable extinct Buddhas,
Hundreds of thousand of myriads of millions of them,
A number beyond all calculation,
World Honored Ones such as these,
Used various conditions, analogies,
And the power of countless expedients,
To proclaim the marks of all dharmas.
All of those World Honored Ones,
Spoke the Dharma of One Vehicle,
Transforming beings without limit,
Leading them to the Buddha Path.**

Outline:

J2. The Buddhas of the past.
K1. General explanation: opening and revealing.

**Commentary:**

**Throughout countless eons in the past.** Limitless eons in the past, a countless number of them, and these eons were not small eons; they were great eons.

What is a great eon? Basically, there is no fixed way to measure time, as it is not real. But, because living beings make discriminations with their minds, the past, present, and future come into being. Time in itself basically is without a past, present, or future. These three come into being through the discriminations made in the minds of living beings. In The Vajra Sutra, the Buddha says very plainly that there is no such thing as time. He says, “Past thought cannot be got at; present thought cannot be got at; future thought cannot be got at.”

What is meant by, “Past thought cannot be got at?” It is because what is past is past. If you say, “This is past,” it has already gone by. You cannot get at it.

As to present thought, if you say, “This is present,” just as you say it, it goes by. The present does not stay. The past has already gone by and the present goes right on by, too. It does not stay in one place.

The future cannot be got at because it has not yet come. So why are you going out to welcome it? If it has not arrived, you need not go out to meet it. The future just has not got here yet. The present cannot be held in one place; therefore, it also does not exist. The past has gone; you should not go chasing after it. The three phases of thought ultimately cannot be got at.

Speaking of the three phases of thought as unobtainable, in Si Chuan there was a Dharma Master by the name of Zhou who specialized in explaining The Vajra Sutra. Not only did he excel at explaining it orally, but he also wrote a commentary on it. He titles his commentary: The Green Dragon Commentary and Notes. He heard that in the south, in Yangzhou, those who had left the home-life were investigating Chan and sitting in meditation and no one lectured on the Sutras or spoke the Dharma. He sighed and said, “These people are all the sons and grandsons of demons. In Buddhism, one should lecture on the Sutras and the Dharma. What is the use of sitting in meditation all day long?” so he put his Green Dragon Commentary and Notes in two baskets, fastened them to a pole, shouldered the pole, and set out on foot for Yangzhou. He planned to lecture on the Sutras there and teach and transform living beings.

Just as he was nearing Yangzhou he saw a pastry shop. An old woman was running the store. At that very moment he felt a pang of hunger and decided to buy a piece of pastry. He put down his pole and said, “I would like a pastry please.”

The old woman asked him, “Where are you from?”

“I have come from Si Chuan,” he replied.

“What are you carrying that load of paper for?” she asked. “Where do you plan on selling it?”

The Dharma Master said, “Ah! This is my commentary on The Vajra Sutra. It is certainly not for sale!”

“Really?” A commentary on The Vajra Sutra?” she said. “In The Vajra Sutra there are three sentences I would like you to explain for me.”

Hearing this, Vajra Zhou said, “For heaven’s sake, I wrote a commentary on the entire Sutra. I should hope I could answer your question. Ask away!”

She said, “Dharma Master, as you comment on the passage of the Sutra which says, ‘Past thought cannot be got at; present thought cannot be got at; future thought cannot be got at,’ I would ask you today, which pastry would you like to take?”

With that one question, Vajra Zhou’s mouth fell shut and he was speechless. He ultimately did not know which cake to take, that is, how to answer her. He realized that his theories did not hold water. Consequently, he put his commentary in storage and headed for Kao Min Monastery to do some work in the meditation hall. Eventually he became enlightened and then knew that the entire Dharma storehouse can be understood only through concentrated effort on real practice. If you do not work hard and only talk, you can talk coming and going, vertically and horizontally, and your words are nothing but the skin. You have not realized the genuine principles contained within the Sutras. In the Great Master Yung Chia’s Song of Certifying to the Way, he says,

With penetration of the sect,
And penetration of speech,
Samadhi and wisdom are perfect and clear,
And there is no attachment to emptiness.

“Penetration of the sect” means not only can he lecture on the Sutras and speak the Dharma, but he is also able to investigate dhyana and sit in meditation. “Penetration of speech” means that he can lecture on the Sutras and speak the Dharma. This is called “Penetration of both the sect and the speaking.” The “sect” refers to the Chan (Dhyana) School. He understand them both and therefore, “Samadhi and wisdom are perfect and clear,” Why has he penetrated the sect? It is because he has samadhi power and wisdom power. Samadhi power and wisdom power perfectly interpenetrates. Samadhi aids the wisdom, and wisdom aids the samadhi. To have samadhi but no wisdom is merely to penetrate the sect, and not to penetrate the teachings. To have wisdom but no samadhi is only to penetrate the teachings and not to penetrate the sect.

The verse says, “Samadhi and wisdom are perfect and clear. And there is no attachment to emptiness.” He does not have an attachment to Dharma, nor does he have an attachment to self. He has no attachment to self, no attachment to Dharma, and also no attachment to emptiness. He has no attachment to people, to self, or to emptiness. This is the perfect clarity of samadhi and wisdom, without attachment to emptiness.

You may ask, “In explaining the word ‘eon,’ since you said that there is no past, present, or future, then why do we still speak of the past, present, and future?”

Did I not just tell you? It is because, in their minds, living beings have these thoughts of discrimination. That is why we talk about the past, present, and future.

But just what is an “eon?” That is a complicated question and we really do not have enough “time” to go into it. Let‘s say that, “one increasing and one decreasing constitute an eon.”

What is meant by, “one increasing and one decreasing?”

“Decreasing” means that every hundred years, the human life span decreases by one year and the average height decreases by one inch. When human life expectancy has decreased to ten years, it again begins to increase. It increases in the same way, one year and one inch every one hundred years, until human life expectancy reaches eighty-four thousand years. At that point it begins to decrease again. When it has decreased again to eighty thousand years, Maitreya Bodhisattva will appear in the world as a Buddha. One cycle of increase and decrease is called an aeon.

One thousand of these eons is called a “small eon.” One thousand small eons is called a “middle-sized eon.” Four middle-sized eons make up a “great eon.”

Our world is divided into periods of becoming, dwelling, decay, and emptiness. The becoming (creation) of a world lasts for twenty small eons. The periods of decay and emptiness also last for twenty small eons. Therefore, within a great eon is contained the complete cycle of becoming, dwelling, decay, and emptiness. That is what is called a great eon

And here in the text, how many great eons are we speaking of? An uncountable number. Why do I say they are uncountable? It is because they are beyond all count; there is no way you could calculate their number.

**Innumerable extinct Buddhas.** Within these countless eons, an unlimited number of Buddhas became Buddhas and then entered Nirvana. This took a very long time. **Hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of them, a number beyond all calculation, World Honored Ones such as these, used various conditions and analogies,** expedient Dharma-doors **and the power of countless expedients to proclaim the marks of all dharmas.** They proclaim the real mark of all dharmas.

There are one hundred dharmas, and also a thousand dharmas, ten thousand dharmas, an unlimited number of dharmas. What are the hundred dharmas? There are eleven kinds of form dharmas, eight mind dharmas, fifty-one dharmas belonging to the mind, twenty-four dharmas not interacting with the mind, and six unconditioned dharmas. A verse about the hundred dharmas goes:

Form dharmas are of eleven different kinds,
Eight kinds of dharmas are of the mind.
Fifty-one belong, twenty-four do not interact,
Plus six unconditioned make one hundred in fact.

But all of these dharmas are spoken for the sake of the Real Mark Dharma.

**All of those World Honored Ones, spoke the Dharma of One Vehicle.** They all speak of the Buddha Vehicle, the real wisdom. They open the provisional to reveal the real. The Three Storehouse Teaching, which they set forth previously, was to manifest the provisional for the sake of the real. But their final destination is to speak the wonderful doctrine of the Real Mark, in other words the doctrines discussed in The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. **Transforming beings without limit,** they teach and transform an unlimited number of beings **leading them to the Buddha Path.**

**With scanty virtue and few blessings.** They have very little virtue; therefore, their blessed retribution is also very small. **They are oppressed by scores of sufferings.** They undergo all the different kinds of sufferings, the three sufferings, the eight sufferings, the limitless sufferings. **They enter into the dense forest of deviant views.** They run into the thickets of deviant views. So many of them! How can they ever find their way out again? **Those of existence, non-existence and the like.** “Existence” refers to the view of permanence and “non-existence” refers to the view of annihilationism. The dense forest of deviant views refers to the general list of sixty-two views. **They become dependent on those views—**they strike up a friendship with all these views and come to depend upon them. **Sixty-two of them in all.** There are a lot these views, but generally they can be listed under sixty-two categories.

And what are the sixty-two views? I have not explained them before, but now I will. You have all heard of the five skandhas: form, feelings, thought, activity, and consciousness. Those of outside religions think: “Form is large and I am small. Form pervades the Dharma Realm. I am very small and am within the form.” This is really stupid. How could they run inside of form? How in the heck! It is ridiculous and it does not make sense. But they make up this theory anyway and say, “Form is great and I am small. I am within form.” That is theory number one.

Another outside religion comes up with the theory, “Form is small and I am great. Form is within me.” This is the exact opposite of the first theory. Ultimately, what form is, they do not know, but form jumped right into them! That is theory number two.

Another outside religion has this deviant view: “Form is just me.” That makes three. Another outside religion says, “Form is apart from me.” They have nothing to base their deviant views on. But that makes four of them:

1. Form is great. I am small. I am within form.
2. Form is small. I am great. Form is within me.
3. Form is me.
4. Form is apart from me.

These four propositions apply to the remaining for skandhas as well. For example:

1. Feeling is great. I am small. I am within feeling.
2. Feeling is small. I am great. Feeling is within me.
3. Feeling itself is me.
4. What is apart from feeling is me.

The same four propositions apply to thinking, activity, and consciousness. The four propositions apply to the five skandhas make a total of twenty views.

These twenty views are of the present. The same twenty may also be applied to the past and to the future. Thus, the twenty views times the three periods of time make a total of sixty views.

What about the remaining two views?

They are simply the view of permanence and the view of annihilation. It is mentioned in the Sutra text as the view of existence and the view of non-existence.

These sixty-two views make no sense at all, really. Do not ask me how they arrived at them. They basically have no principle behind them. They are just set up as deviant views. If you look for some principle behind them, you will fall into deviant views yourself. There is no principle behind them, but we should know what they are. We should also know that they are based on no principle whatever.

**Deeply attached to illusory dharmas,** those of outside ways are deeply, profoundly attached to these illusory dharmas. And what are they? The sixty-two views.

**They hold them tightly and cannot let them go.** They insist that their views have principle. “That is the way it is,” they say. “I am great and form is small,” and so on. They are stubbornly attached and refuse to change. This is like certain people who are superstitiously attached to their own religions. They do not seek out true principle; they do not pay any attention to whether it is right or wrong. They hold tightly to their beliefs with solid faith, faith even stronger than faith in the Buddha or the Dharma Masters. If you tell him to change he says, “No way! These dogmas are revealed by our infallible patriarchs and they cannot be changed. If you change them you’ve committed a mortal sin. You are damned to hell and lightning might even strike you dead! I cannot change the dogmas. I must believe in this religion.”

I have something to tell all of you: Whoever does not believe in what I say may be reassured that you will not be struck dead by lightning. If you do not believe in the Buddha, you will not be struck by lightning either. Go ahead and refuse to believe. Later, when you have thought it over clearly, you will come back and believe. Now, if because you are confused, you believe in outside religions, that is all right, because when you finally wake up, you will come back to Buddhism. Why do I say this? It is because no matter what religion you believe in, it does not surpass Buddhism. All religions are contained within the Buddhadharma. However, there are long ways around, and there are short cuts. If you believe in other religions, you will have a longer walk. If you believe in Buddhism, you have got a head start. If you believe in Buddhism you will understand sooner, get enlightened faster, and become a Buddha first thing. So I have a lot of disciples who listen to the Sutra for a while and then run off. I do not pay any attention to them. If you want to run, then run. When you have run enough, you will come back. Before you have run enough, of course you are going to want to run. But it is no problem. It is just like the five thousand who walked out. It is also like eating. When people are full, they do not care to eat. Once they get hungry, they start thinking about food again. One’s attitude toward the Buddhadharma works the same way. If you think you do not need the Buddhadharma, if you are not hungry for it, you may run off. When you have run until you are hungry again, you will come back for some more.

Those of outside religions cling to their deviant views and cannot let them go.

**Arrogant, they brag of their loftiness.** They are haughty and self-satisfied. They are always up on a soapbox praising themselves. “Have you seen me? Me, me, me—hah! You cannot compare with me. Anything you can do I can do better!” That is to hold oneself in high esteem, to put oneself up on a pedestal. This is like a certain person who came here and said that he was extremely high-minded. This is just “bragging of one’s own loftiness.” What is the point of doing that anyway? If your heart is filled with pride, you are turning your back on the Way. Students of the Way should be respectful of others. At all times they should cultivate an attitude of humility.

**They are flatterers, their hearts insincere.** What is flattery? It is being a synchophant. When they see the Governor coming, they open the car-door for him, pour his tea, and light his cigarettes. They simply cannot do enough for him. They are not even that respectful towards the Buddha! When they see a high official coming, they invariably find a way to rub elbows with him. They are not sincere. They are not straightforward. For example, basically they may be out to borrow money from you because they know you have got it, but they do not come out directly and say, “I would like to borrow some money from you.” What do they say?

“Ah, today I need a little money. I think I will go ask so and so if I can borrow it from him.” They say this hoping that you will “volunteer” to help them out. Their tactics are round about, crooked, and devious.

**Throughout ten billion eons, they do not hear the Buddhas’s name, nor do they hear the Proper Dharma.** They do not hear the Buddha’s name and they do not have a chance to listen to the Sutras. Why not? They lack good roots.

Those of you who are able to listen to the lectures on the sutras all have good roots. People without good roots might come and sit for a minute, but they would soon feel like they were sitting on needles. “Ouch!” They would hurry and get up and run away. Why? It is because they have no good roots, and they cannot sit for even a second before running off.

Here in San Francisco we lecture the Sutras every evening. I ask you, are those who do not come here to listen to the Buddhadharma in the majority or are those who do come in the majority? This question is like the one the Buddha asked his disciples. He picked up a handful of earth and said, “Take a look. Is there more dirt in my hand or is there more on the ground?”

The disciples answered, saying, “Naturally there is more dirt on the ground and less in the Thus come One’s hand.”

The Buddha said, “Those who obtain a human body are like the dirt in my hand; those who lose the body of a human being are like the dirt on the earth.” Those who lose their human body and are unable to return in their next life as a person are as many as the vast amount of dirt on the Earth. Instead of being reborn in a human body, they fall instead into the three evil paths and become ghosts or animals.

Now, I can make an analogy, too. Those who come to listen to the Sutra lectures are like the dirt in my hand. Those who do not come to listen to the Sutras are like the dirt on the Earth. See how rare they are? Those who come to hear the Sutras are like gold. They all have good roots. Those who do not come are like dirt. You all have a very rare opportunity to listen to the Dharma. In all of America, you will not find another Buddha Hall where the Sutras are lectured every night. They may lecture once a week, but here we lecture every single night. This is really inconceivable. In the future you are all destined to become the pioneers of American Buddhism.

**Such people are difficult to save.** People like this, people without good roots, are especially hard to take across. In San Francisco, with its population of several hundred of thousands of people, only these twenty or so are really determined to listen to the Sutras. Rare indeed! Those without good roots are hard to save. You can teach them the clear, correct, principles of the Buddhadharma. They will listen and know that you are correct, but they will still oppose you. Would you say this was strange or not? Why does this happen? It happens because they have no good roots. If they had good roots, they would listen to the Buddhadharma and put it into practice.

In China, at Gold Mountain, there was one they called the “Living Buddha.” He listened to the Sutras, and no matter which Dharma Master was lecturing, he would kneel and place his palms together, reverently listening to every word. Would you say he was sincere or not?

They called him the “Living Buddha” because one time he jumped off the top of the Gold Pagoda and when he hit bottom, nothing happened—he did not die. He was able to cure people’s illnesses, too. He used “Paramita soup,” as medicine. Paramita soup was what he called the water he had just washed his feet in. He would add some fragrant ashes or some sawdust to it and give it to the sick person to drink. Once the sick person drank it, he would be cured.

In the West it is extremely rare to be able to attend a Dharma Assembly such as this one. Today, I spoke with my disciples about how important it is to lecture on the Sutras. In the future, in the Dharma-Ending Age, the Buddhist Sutras will disappear. The paper will remain, but the words will just fade away, and you will not be able to read them. The first Sutra to disappear will be The Shurangama Sutra. That is why, in coming to the West to spread the Dharma, I first lectured The Shurangama Sutra, the Sutra for developing wisdom. If you look into the doctrines discussed in the sutra you will find that they are truly much more wonderful than any theories propounded by modern day science or philosophy, as the doctrines in the Sutra are ultimate.

Now that I have finished lecturing The Shurangama Sutra, I am lecturing The Dharma Flower Sutra. When I have finished lecturing it, I intend to lecture The Avatamsaka Sutra for you. That is even more wonderful! The Dharma Flower Sutra is called the king of Sutras, but The Avatamsaka Sutra is really the king of the kings of Sutras. The Avatamsaka is like a Gold Wheel-turning sage king, and the Dharma Flower is like a Silver Wheel-turning sage king. The Shurangama is like a Copper Wheel-turning sage king. They are the three kings among the Sutras.

Where did The Avatamsaka Sutra come from? After the Buddha realized Buddhahood, the first thing he did was to speak this Sutra. When he spoke it, those of the Two Vehicles could not hear him. They could not even see him. It is said,

They had eyes, but could not see the Nishyanda Buddha.
They had ears, but could not hear the Perfect, Sudden Teaching.

The Buddha manifested a ten thousand feet high body to speak the Sutra, and although they had eyes, they could not see it. They had ears, but they could not hear the perfect, sudden teaching. Those of the Two Vehicles could not understand it, and only the Great Vehicle Bodhisattvas were clear about it. Later, it was taken by the Dragon King to the Dragon Palace and it disappeared from the human realm. Later, the Fourteenth Patriarch, Nagarjuna, “Dragon Tree,” Bodhisattva, who had mastered all worldly literature, used his spiritual penetrations to go down to the Dragon Palace to take a look at their Tripitaka. There he found the three volume set of The Great Avatamsaka Sutra. The first volume contained chapters in number equal to dust motes in ten great trichiliocosms. The second volume had twelve hundred chapters and four hundred and ninety-eight thousand eight hundred verses. The third volume contained forty-eight chapters and one hundred thousand verses. The standard Chinese edition translated during the Tang Dynasty by Tripitaka Master Shiksananda, contains thirty-nine chapters.

Since he had no way to remember all of it, he only memorized the last volume. When he came back, he wrote it out. He read it once and remembered it perfectly. His memory was extremely good. That is where The Avatamsaka Sutra came from.

So, when we have finished The Dharma Flower Sutra, we shall hear The Great Avatamsaka Sutra. Having heard the three kings of Sutras and understood them, you will then be able to understand all the other Sutras on you own, without having them explained to you. Here in the West, the Buddhadharma has just begun to flourish. It is fitting that the Great Vehicle Dharma be propagated in order to teach and transform the Great Vehicle Bodhisattvas. Do not see yourselves as insignificant. You are all ones who in the past made vows agreeing to come to America with me to help me propagate the Buddhadharma. That is why I have now met with you extremely intelligent Westerners who come here every day to study the Buddhadharma; this is because of a far-reaching affinity, a cause which goes way back, and which was planted long, long ago. I am telling you the truth; you should not disbelieve it.

**Sutra:**

**Further, all great Sagely Lords,
Know the deep desires in the hearts
Of all the gods, humans, and other beings
Within all the worlds.
Using different expedients,
Which help to reveal the foremost principle.
If there are living beings
Who have met with Buddhas in the past
Heard the Dharma, practiced giving,
Morality, patience, and vigor
Dhyanasamadhi, wisdom, and so on,
Cultivating blessings and wisdom,
Persons such as these
Have all realized the Buddha path.**

Outline:

K2. Extensive explanation: opening and revealing.
L1. Expedient devices shown as help to reveal the actual teaching.

L2. Showing the characteristics of opening the provisional and revealing the actual.

M1. Showing the virtues of planting aiding causes toward cultivatin of the ten thousand conducts.

N1. Explaining opening and revealing with regard to cultivation of the six paramitas.

**Commentary:**

**Further, all great Sagely Lords,** all the Buddhas, **know the deep desires in the hearts of all the gods, humans, and other beings within all the worlds.** There is the world of sentience and the material world. The world of sentience is also called the Orthodox Retribution World and the Dependent Retribution World. **Using different expedients which help to reveal the foremost principle.** Because they understand the thoughts of desire of living beings, they set forth provisional, clever, expedient device Dharma-doors to rescue living beings. The expedients include the Hearer Vehicle, the Conditioned-Enlightened Vehicle, and the Bodhisattva Vehicle.

**If there are living beings, who have met with Buddhas in the past,** in former lives, **heard the Dharma, practiced giving, morality, patience, and vigor, dhyana samadhi, wisdom, and so on.** If any of the different kinds of living beings listened to the Buddhadharma, to the teaching of the Six Perfections, then they may have decided to practice them. Giving is the first of the Six Perfections. There are three kinds of giving: the giving of wealth, the giving of the Dharma, and the giving of fearlessness. Giving cures one of stinginess. If you are a miser, you cannot practice giving. If you practice giving, you can reduce your miserliness.

Morality, the second of the Six Perfections, cures one of bad conduct.

Patience, the third Perfection, crosses over anger. Do you like to lose your temper? You should cultivate the Perfection of Patience and not get angry. Change your attitude; change your temperament. When people with quick tempers refrain from getting angry, that is patience.

Vigor is the fourth perfection; it takes laxness across. Are you lazy? Cultivate vigor!

Dhyana samadhi, the fifth, cures one of scatteredness. Do you lack samadhi power? Then you should cultivate it. If you do not cultivate it, you will never have it.

The last of the Six Perfections is that of wisdom. What does wisdom cross over? Stupidity. If you have wisdom, your stupidity will turn to wisdom; if you have no wisdom, your wisdom turns into stupidity. It is one thing but it goes by two names. The other five Perfections work the same way. Patience is simply the transformation of anger. Vigor is the transformation of laziness. Dhyana samadhi is the transformation of scatteredness. It is just a matter of making the transformation. If you break precepts, but then keep them, you have transformed your precept-breaking into morality.

Giving is the transformation of stinginess. So you cannot part with anything? It is just because you cannot let go that you cannot obtain anything. If you want to “get,” you first must give. If you do not give, you cannot receive.

Stinginess: You really do not want to part with that money, do you? Giving money is like cutting off your own flesh. To part with a penny brings a pain to your heart and a pain to your liver.

The Six Perfections must be cultivated in order to realize Buddhahood.

**Cultivating blessings and wisdom;** by practicing the Six Perfections, you cultivate blessings and wisdom. **Persons such as these, have all realized the Buddha path.** Figure it out. How long did it take them to practice the Six Perfections and the Ten Thousand Conducts in order to realize Buddhahood? In the beginning, they cultivated good on a small scale, but it continued to build up until it was a great amount of goodness. From one act of goodness, many acts of goodness grew. From the cultivation of one blessing, many blessings came to be cultivated. Then when both blessings and wisdom were perfected, they accomplished Buddhahood.

Now, we are beginning to cultivate. None of us knows how many lives we have cultivated previously. But no matter how many lifetimes one has been cultivating, whether one has, in fact, cultivated at all in the past, one should still cultivate. You cannot not cultivate. You cannot say, for example, “Since I did not cultivate in former lives, I might as well forget about doing it now.” That way, you will never have any blessings or wisdom. If you did not cultivate in former lives, you should start cultivating now. If you did cultivate in former lives, you should continue to cultivate. You should not worry about whether or not you planted blessings and wisdom in former lives. In this present life we have encountered the supreme Buddhadharma, and so we should certainly begin and be vigorous and brave right up until we become Buddhas, at which time we can consider our work finished.

**Sutra:**

**When those Buddhas have become extinct
If there are those with compliant hearts,
Beings such as these
Have attained the Buddha Way.
After the extinction of those Buddhas,
Those who have made offerings to their sharira,
Building millions of kinds of stupas,Made of gold, silver, or of crystal,
Mother-of-pearl, carnelian,
Rose quartz, lapis lazuli, and other gems,
Clear, pure and most ornate,
Worked to grace the stupas,Or should there be those who have built temples
Out of stone, chandana, or aloeswood,
Hovenia, or other timbers,
Bricks, clay, and the like,
Or those who, in the barren waste,
Have piled up earth into a Buddha-shrine,
Or even children who, at play,
Have piled up sand to make a stupa,
All persons such as these,
Have realized the Buddha Way.**

Outline:

N2. Explaining opening and revealing with regard to longing and sorrow.
N3. Explaining opening and revealing with regard to offerings made to sharira.
 **Commentary:**

**When those Buddhas have become extinct,** have entered Nirvana, **if there are those with compliant hearts,** if they have brought forth gentle hearts and are not head-strong, although at first glance it may not look like they have many good roots, gradually they will pile up merit and virtue. Eventually after a time **beings such as these, have attained the Buddha way.** They have already become Buddhas.

**After the extinction of those Buddhas, those who have made offerings to their sharira,** those who have built pagodas to contain the relics of the Buddhas so that offerings can be made to them. **Building millions of kinds of stupas;** stupas to hold the relics of the Buddhas should be thirteen stories high. Stupas for Pratyekabuddhas should be five stories high. Stupas for fourth Stage Arhats should be four stories high. Stupas for third stage Arhats should be three stories high. Stupas for second stage Arhats should be two stories high, and stupas for first stage Arhats should be one story.

What are the stupas made out of? **Made of gold, silver, or of crystal, mother-of-pearl, carnelian, rose quartz, lapis lazuli, and other gems, clear, pure and most ornate, worked to grace the stupas.** The gems are intertwined and hang in chains around the top of the stupas.

**Or should there be those who have built temples out of stone, chandana, or aloeswood, hovenia or other timbers, bricks, clay and the like; or those who, in the barren wastes have piled up earth into a Buddha-shrine; or even children who, at play have piled up sand to make a stupa, all persons such as these, have realized the Buddha way.** All of these different kinds of people have accumulated a vast amount of merit and virtue. They all become Buddhas.

Sutra:

**Those who, for the Buddhas,
Have erected images,
Carving all their myriads of marks,
Have realized the Buddha Way.
They may have used the seven gems,
Or bronze or copper, white or red,
Wax, lead, or tin,
Iron, wood, or clay,
Or, perhaps, lacquered cloth,
In making Buddha images;
Persons such as these
Have realized the Buddha Way.**

Outline:

N4. Explaining opening and revealing with regard to construction of Buddha images.

**Commentary:**

**Those who, for the Buddhas have erected images.** Those who, as an offering to the Buddhas, have made images, by **carving all their myriads of marks,** all of the fine characteristics of the Buddhas of the ten directions, **have realized the Buddha Way.** They have become Buddhas.

**They may have used the seven gems;** gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, mother-of-pearl, red pearls, or carnelian, **or bronze or copper, white, or red, wax lead, or tin, iron, wood, or clay, or, perhaps, lacquered cloth in making Buddha images. Persons such as these have realized the Buddha Way.** There are eleven kinds of meritorious virtues derived from making Buddha images:

1. In every life you will have clear vision.

2. You will not be born in evil places. Your friends and neighbors will all be good people. You will not meet up with evil people or evil beasts.

3. You will always be born in a noble family. You will be born into a household, which is wealthy and honored.

4. Your body will be purple-golden in color.
5. You will possess an abundance of wealth.
6. You will be born in a worthy and good family.

7. You can be born a king. Now, there is no Emperor, but you could be the President. It amounts to the same thing. Or, if you insist on being an Emperor, you can find a country with a monarchy and be born there.

8. You can be a Wheel-turning sage king. That is even higher than being President. As a Wheel-turning sage king, if you cultivate, you can become a Buddha.

9. You can be born in the Brahma heavens and live for an eon. You can be a king among the gods.

10. You will not fall into the evil paths. Those who make Buddha images will not fall into the hells, the animal realm, or the realm of hungry ghosts.

11. In future incarnations you will still be able to revere the Triple Jewel. You will be able to take refuge with the Triple Jewel. You will not fall.

Hearing these eleven meritorious virtues, if we have the strength, we should make more Buddha images. If you make Buddha images, your appearance will be perfect and full. Why is the Buddha’s appearance so perfect? It is because during the three great asankhyeya eons he cultivated the Way. He made countless Buddha images. During the first asankhyeya eon, he encountered 75,000 Buddhas. During the second, 76,000 and during the third, 77,000. If he met with that many Buddhas, of course he made more Buddha images than that. Who knows how many he made? That is why his appearance is so full and perfect. But, in making images, we should not think, “I will make a Buddha image and then I will be very handsome, and people will fall in love with me.” That is not a proper motive. We should cultivate blessings and wisdom so that in the future we can realize Buddhahood.

Persons who have made such images have all realized Buddhahood.

**Sutra:**

**Those who painted bright Buddha images,
Adorned with the marks of their hundreds of blessings,
Whether they did it themselves or employed others,
Have realized the Buddha Way.
Even children who, at play,
Who with a straw, a stick, or pen,
Or even with their fingernails,
Drew images of the Buddha,
People such as these,
Gradually accumulated merit and virtue,
Perfected the heart of great compassion,
And have realized the Buddha Way.
They teach only Bodhisattvas,
And rescue countless multitudes.**

Outline:

N5. Explaining opening and revealing with regard to painting of Buddha images.

**Commentary:**

Although previously the text said that one might make Buddha images out of lacquered cloth, the precepts discourage the use of lacquer, as it has an unpleasant odor.

The precepts also say that one is not allowed to sit in front of a standing Buddha image, or recline in front of a sitting Buddha image.

**Those who painted bright Buddha images, adorned with the marks of their hundreds of blessings.** The Buddha images are adorned with the many blessed marks of the Buddhas. **Whether they did it themselves or employed others, have realized the Buddha Way.** They have all become Buddhas.

**Even children who, at play, who with a straw, a stick, or pen.** Perhaps they draw a Buddha image with a straw, or with a stick of wood, or perhaps they draw one with a color crayon, **or even with their fingernails,** or perhaps, playing in the mud, they traced out a Buddha image with their fingernails. **Drew images of the Buddha.** Long ago, in Si Chuan, there was a person who recited The Vajra Sutra. As he recited it, he would write it out in empty space with his hand. He stood in the same place everyday and recited and “wrote it out” in this way. Later, when it rained, the rain did not fall in the spot where he had written out the Sutra. This happened every time it rained. Those who had opened their Buddha Eyes saw that, even though the man had written out the Sutra in empty space, the gods and dragons and the eightfold division were there protecting the Sutra and not allowing the rain to fall on that spot. Later a temple was built there. So you see, all he did was write it out in the air with his hand and he received such a great response. This really happened. It is recorded in a work entitled The Efficacious Events of the Vajra Sutra.

**People such as these,** mentioned above **gradually accumulated merit and virtue, perfected the heart of great compassion and have realized the Buddha Way.** They have realized supreme enlightenment. **They teach only Bodhisattvas and rescue countless multitudes.** The Buddha guides Bodhisattvas and Hearers to turn from the small towards the great and seek the Bodhisattva Dharma, and then to turn towards the Buddha Vehicle, liberating limitless and boundless living beings.

**Sutra:**

**Should persons, in stupas or in temples,
Make offerings with a reverent heart,
To jeweled or painted images,
With flowers, incense, banners, or canopies,
Or should they cause others to make music,
With drums, horns, or conches,
Pan-pipes, flutes, lutes or bamboo lyres,
Guitars, cymbals, or brass gongs,
With many wondrous sounds as these,
Played solely as offerings…**

Outline:

N6. Explaining opening and revealing with regard to offerings to the stupas and images.

**Commentary:**

**Should persons, in stupas or in temples, make offerings with a reverent heart to jeweled or painted images, with flowers, incense, banners, or canopies,** if holding thoughts of respect, they make offerings to Buddha images. Of incense, banners, canopies, or other articles such as beads, clothing, food and drink, or merely place their palms together.

**Or should they cause others to make music.** Perhaps they invite other people to make music **with drums, horns, or conches, pan-pipes, flutes, lutes or bamboo lyres, guitars, cymbals, or brass gongs;** all different kinds of musical instruments. Brass gongs are rather large. Perhaps you have never seen any.

When you are making music before the Buddha you should make proper music. You must not sing love songs, songs about men and women. Your music must be in praise of the Triple Jewel. Hitting the wooden fish and ringing small bells is a kind of music-making. Reciting Sutras and mantras is also a kind of musical offering.

**With many wondrous sounds as these, played solely as offerings.** All these subtle and wonderful sounds are offered to the Buddha.

**Sutra:**

**Or if, with happy hearts, with songs
And chants they praised the Buddha’s virtues,
With even just one small sound,
They have realized the Buddha Way.
If people with scattered minds
Have given but a single flower
As an offering to a painted image,
They shall gradually see numberless Buddhas.
If they bowed in worship,
Or merely placed their palms together,
Or even raised a single hand,
Or gave a slight nod of the head,
As an offering to the images,
They shall gradually see countless Buddhas,
And have, themselves, realized the Buddha Way.
They will rescue countless multitudes,
And enter Nirvana without residue,
As a fire goes out when the fuel has been consumed.**

**Commentary:**

**Or if, with happy hearts, with songs and chants they praised the Buddha’s virtues.** Chants are “Brahma” or pure sounds, like odes. They laud the virtues of the Buddha, praising his virtue in the Way. **With even just one small sound,** maybe they make only a tiny melody. **They have realized the Buddha way.** If, by means of a very small sound they accomplish the Buddha Path, they will accomplish the Path even quicker with more and bigger sounds!

**If people with scattered minds,** if there are people who have no samadhi power, and who are confused; **have given but a single flower as an offering to a painted image, they shall gradually see numberless Buddhas.** Because of the merit and virtue obtained by making such offerings, they will get to meet with an uncountable number of Buddhas.

**If they bowed in worship or merely placed their palms together** as a gesture of respect. **Or even raised a single hand, or gave a slight nod of the head as an offering to the images, they shall gradually see countless Buddhas.** From that first thought of respect, which inspires them to make even these very small gestures of worship, they will acquire merit and virtue **and have, themselves, realized the Buddha Way. They will rescue countless multitudes.** Not only will they accomplish the Buddha Path, they will save countless living beings. **And enter Nirvana without residue as a fire goes out when the fuel has been consumed.** When the firewood has all been burned, the fire goes out. The living beings with potential to be taught are like the fuel. The Response Body of the Buddha, which appears to rescue living beings, is like the fire. When the living beings have all been crossed over, the “response” fire goes out.

**Sutra:**

**If people with scattered minds,
Enter stupas or temples,
And say but once, “Namo Buddha,”
They have realized the Buddha Way.**

Outline:

N7. Explaining opening and revealing with regard to recitation of the Buddhas’ names.

**Commentary:**

**If people with scattered minds,** “scattered” means that they have no samadhi power, they are not at all concentrated. These lines describe a situation such as when the tourists come here to visit the temple and gaze around at the Buddha images. They do not have sincere hearts. What is more, they may look at the images but they do not know anything at all about the Buddha. You could say they were the scattered ones among the scattered ones.

**Enter stupas or temples.** If they go into Buddhist stupas or Buddhist temples, **and say but once, “Namo Buddha” they have realized the Buddha Way.** All they have to do is say one sentence, “Homage to the Buddha.” From that one recitation, they will ultimately realize Buddhahood.

Why is this? It is because “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” If you want to travel a thousand miles, where do you begin? You begin with the first step. Having taken that first step, you can travel a thousand miles. “The perfect interpenetration of the myriad virtues begins with the first thought.” If you wish to become a Buddha, it begins with that very first thought. In that first thought, you plant the Buddha seed; in the future, you reap the fruit of Buddhahood.

Reciting “Namo Buddha,” “Namo Amitabha Buddha,” or “Namo Shakyamuni Buddha,” or “Namo Medicine Master Buddha Who Dispels Calamities and Lengthens Life,” may seem very easy to do, but such an opportunity is not easy to meet up with. All of you know how to recite the Buddha’s name, but think it over. Of all the people in the world, are those who do not know how to recite the Buddha’s name in the majority or are those who do? You might say that those who know how to recite are as few as the moon and those who do not know how to recite are as many as the stars. Are there more stars or more moons? Those who can recite the Buddha’s name are able to do so because the good roots from their former lives have matured enabling them to encounter the Dharma-door of Buddha Recitation.

When the Buddha was in the world, he had a cousin named Devadatta. Devadatta was the Buddha’s enemy. He did nothing but oppose the Buddha. The Buddha taught his disciples to eat one meal a day, in the middle of the day, but Devadatta was determined to out-do him. “So you eat one meal a day?” he said, “I teach my disciples to eat one meal every hundred days!” Shakyamuni Buddha taught his disciples to be vegetarians and not to eat meat. Devadatta said, “Not only do I teach my disciples to refrain from eating meat, they do not even consume salt.” This was done merely to prove that no matter what Buddha did, Devadatta was always higher than the Buddha. But no matter how hard he tried, he never could recite the Buddha’s name. If you tried to teach him to recite, he would refuse to do it. All his life, all he ever did was commit offenses, continually opposing the Buddha. When his evil karma had finally reached the point of overflowing, he went to hell, alive. Going to hell alive means that, in his very body of flesh he went to hell. Just as he was about to go to hell; just as he was at the gates of hell; he thought of to recite the Buddha’s name. He wanted to recite it, but he could not get a sound out. All he could scream was “Namo!” He could not say the word “Buddha.” His karmic obstacles bound him up so tightly that he could not say the Buddha’s name. Shakyamuni Buddha saw him and said, “He is really pitiful, but do not look on him lightly. When he is finished with his punishment in the hells, he will become a Pratyekabuddha. His Buddha name will be simply “Namo.” It is because he recited “Namo” as he fell into hell. As a Pratyekabuddha, he will be called “Namo.”

So do not look on it as all so easy and think, “I can recite the Buddha’s name whenever I feel like it.” Right now, you are not block by your karmic obstacles. When they obstruct you, if you tried to recite it, you would not be able to do so.

There is another story about reciting the Buddha’s name: When the Buddha was in the world, there was a very poor, old man. He saw Shakyamuni Buddha, accompanied by his 1250 disciples going out every day to beg for food, and he thought it was not bad. Every day they went out with their bowls, begged for food, came back and ate, and that was all there was to it. “Very well,” he thought, “I will leave home.” He thought the Bhikshus were very comfortable and did not have to do any work, no bitterness and no bother, very pure and free. So he decided to leave home and went to the Jeta Grove to ask for permission to do so. But that day the Buddha had gone out to accept offerings of food for lunch. As for the Buddha’s disciples, some had opened their Buddha Eyes, some had opened their Wisdom Eyes, some had opened their Dharma Eyes and some had the Five Eyes, and the Six Spiritual Penetrations. Others had certified to the first, second, third, and fourth stages of Arhatship.

Now, to “open” the eyes is not to certify to the fruit. When people have opened their Buddha Eye, this is called “the penetration obtained from virtue.” This happens because in previous lives, one has cultivated the Forty-Two Hands and the Shurangama Mantra a great deal. These Dharma-doors bring about that reward. But this is definitely not the same as certifying to the first fruit, the second, third, or fourth fruit. Arhats who have certified to the fruit can see the operation of cause and effect throughout eighty thousand great eons. Those who have opened their Buddha Eye or their Wisdom Eye may be able to see as far as one life, two lives, three lives, five lives, ten lives, one hundred lives, a thousand lives, or ten thousand lives, but they cannot see as far as eighty thousand great eons.

Certified Arhats, however, can see all the causes and effects of eighty thousand great eons. When the poverty-stricken old man came to leave the home-life, the disciples, the Great Arhats, contemplated and observed his potential to see if he was fit to leave home. They saw that this person, in the last eighty thousand great eons, had never made an offering to the Buddha. He had never bowed to the Buddha, had never recited the Buddha’s name or uttered even a tiny sound of praise as an offering to the Buddha or a single flower, or even put his hands together, or waved his hand, or even nodded his head! Since he had no merit and virtue, how could he leave home? It is said:

Don’t say that leaving home is easy to do,
It is the result of planting the causes of Bodhi throughout many lives.

Those who leave home must have planted good roots in many lives and have brought forth the Bodhi-heart. It is not just a matter of thinking, “I would like to leave home,” and doing it. If you do not have the good roots, you might want to leave home, but obstacles will arise. You might leave home for one or two days and then return to lay life. You might leave home for one or two years, for three, five, or ten years, and then return to lay life and not leave home again. Such things do happen. So, do not think leaving home is very simple.

So that Arhats saw that he had not planted good roots in the last eighty great eons and therefore would not be able to leave home. They told him, “You cannot leave home. You are too old. You cannot cultivate. It would be best for you to go back to wherever you came from. Do not stay here.”

Hearing this, the old man was overcome with grief. On the one hand he walked, and on the other he thought, “I thought leaving home would be very simple. I never would have guessed that the Buddha’s disciples would refuse me. Probably they will not accept me because I am old and poor. Well, if they will not accept me, I will just go jump in the sea and drown and end it all!” Then, still walking and weeping, he made his way for the sea and suicide. But, just as he was about to jump, along came Shakyamuni Buddha, who said, “Old man, why are you throwing yourself in the sea?”

“I wanted to leave home,” the old man replied. “I went to the Jeta Grove to do so, but the Buddha was not there, and the Buddha’s disciples would not accept me. As far as I am concerned, there is really nothing joyful in human existence; I would rather just hurry up and end my life. My life is meaningless.”

Shakyamuni Buddha said, “So you want to leave home? That is no problem. Come back with me. I will allow you to leave home.”

The old man returned with the Buddha, left home, cultivated, and after just a few days, certified to the fruit of Arhatship. The Buddha’s disciples did not understand this at all. “How strange!” they thought. “This person has no good roots; how could he certify to Arhatship? He has not done a single good deed throughout the last eighty thousand great eons. How could the Buddha permit him to leave home?” They questioned the Buddha and the Buddha gave them this explanation:

“You Arhats can only see the causes and effects of the last eighty thousand great eons. What happened outside of that, you do not know. This old man, over eighty thousand eons ago, was a poor firewood gatherer in the mountains. One day, he met up with a tiger. Just as the tiger was about to bite him, in his great fear he screamed, “Namo Buddha!” That one recitation scared the tiger away, and so he was not eaten. The seed planted by his single recitation of “Namo Buddha” has now matured as the good roots, which have enabled him to leave home and certify to the fruit of Arhatship.

From the looks of this we can tell that it is not easy to leave home.

Also, in India there was a certain outside Way sect whose members made offerings to the image of a heavenly spirit. The heavenly spirit’s body was made of wood or clay, but the head was made of gold. Once a thief wanted to steal the head, but when he went to take it, the awesome virtue of the heavenly spirit made him afraid. In his fear, he thought to recite, “Namo Buddha!” The recitation dispelled his fears because it had stripped the heavenly spirit of its awesome virtue. Fearlessly, then, he stole off with the golden head. Later on everyone said, “Take a look at that heavenly spirit everyone believes in.” They said, “It is not the least bit efficacious. If it were, how could it have had its head stolen? It is useless to believe in it.” When they said this, the heavenly spirit came alone and took possession of a person’s body. Sometimes spirits give off an efficacious energy, and if it takes possession of someone, the victim will become senseless, as if they were drunk.

The spirit began to speak through the medium and said, “It is not that I am not efficacious. When the thief came, he was afraid to take my head. But when he recited “Namo Buddha” the whole area was flooded with Buddha-light and I could not even open my eyes. I was unable to protect my head. That is how he managed to steal it. It is certainly not the case that I am not efficacious, but the awesome virtue of the Buddha is even greater than mine, and so I had no way to protect my head.”

Hearing this, one may wonder, “Did the Buddha assist the thief in stealing the golden head of the heavenly spirit? Did he aid him in doing this evil karma?” No. The thief recited the Buddha’s name. The merit and virtue that comes from reciting the Buddha’s name is inconceivable. Whether a good person or an evil person recites, it has the same effect. It is not the case that when an evil person recites it, there is no merit and virtue, but when a good person recites, there is. The merit and virtue is the same. So even though he was a thief, he still called on the Buddha and his recitation enabled him to steal the heavenly spirit’s gold head. The Buddha certainly was not helping him be a thief. Rather, he was helping him perfect his good roots.

You say, “If he steals, how can he have good roots?”

Take a look at this line of The Dharma Flower Sutra:

“…and say but once, ‘Namo Buddha,’
They have realized the Buddha Way.”

Even though, at that time, he was a thief, he planted good roots through his recitation and so in the future he can certainly become a Buddha. This is called “vigor in opposition and in accord.” Even though he was a thief, he still recited the Buddha’s name. The Buddha did not help him steal the heavenly spirit’s head, but the Buddha does treat everyone equally. Those who recite be they good or evil obtain the same efficacious response.

Hearing this, you should not make the mistake of thinking, “If the thief recited the Buddha’s name and stole the heavenly spirit’s head, I will go recite the Buddha’s name and steal perhaps the earth spirit’s silver head, or maybe some valuable human head!” You cannot get away with this. The thief who stole the heavenly spirit’s head knew nothing about the Buddhadharma. Perhaps he had heard someone say in passing, “It is good to recite the Buddha’s name,” and so, when he was afraid, it occurred to him to recite it. He had certainly never studied the Buddhadharma. Students of the Buddhadharma should take care not to use the awesome virtue of Buddha-recitation or lean on the Buddha’s light to help them steal with impunity. You cannot do that. Once you have studied the Buddhadharma and know that stealing is against the law, if you go ahead and do it, your offense is doubled. This is something you should all understand clearly. Why do I bring this up? It is because there was once a monk, who, before leaving home had been in the army. Later, he studied the Buddhadharma and had great faith in Buddha-recitation. Before he left home he, himself, recited, and he led others in recitation. Five or six years after he left home he ran off to Dao Feng Mountain in Hong Kong, where they specialize in convincing those who have left home to return to lay life.

When the monk got there he took a job as a cook. Those who left home always went off their vegetarian diet when they went there. As cook, the monk thought that because he recited the Buddha’s name, he could save the living beings as he killed them. So, as he cut off chickens’ heads he would recite “Namo Amitabha Buddha.” He thought that by reciting he could cross the chickens over as he killed them, but in the end, when he had been there for a little over half a year, he went insane and died. So you cannot do this kind of thing. Everyone should be particularly clear about it. If you deliberately violate a precept, the offense is tripled. He had no authority to do such a thing. It is true that reciting the Buddha’s name will save living beings. If you have the power to see that, as you kill them, they are for sure being reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, that is one thing. But, if you cannot actually see it happen, if you do not have the power, you cannot. You cannot just say, “I am hoping that they will be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.” That is not good enough. Hearing this account, do not misunderstand it and think that as long as you recite the Buddha’s name, you can create offenses. Those who recite the Buddha’s name should not commit the smallest offense or make the slightest mistake.

I knew that monk personally. Later, he went insane. When he went insane, he wanted to see me. He knew that if he could see me, perhaps he would have some hope of eradicating his offense-karma. But he never did get to see me. He was called Hong Hui, and was a grand-disciple of the Venerable Hsu Yun.

**Sutra:**

**Be it from Buddhas of the past,
While existent, or after their extinction,
Those who have heard this Dharma,
Have realized the Buddha Way.
The World Honored Ones of the future,
Are limitless in number;
All of these Thus Come Ones,
Will also speak the Dharma of expedient devices.
All of the Thus Come Ones,
By means of limitless expedients,
Help all living beings
To enter the Buddha’s non-outflow wisdom.
Of those who have heard the Dharma,
None will fail to become Buddhas.**

Outline:

M2. Showing the virtues of the ultimate cause gained by hearing the Sutra.
J3. The Buddhas of the future.
K1. Dispensing the provisional.
K2. Revealing the actual.
L1. The singularity of the cultivators.

**Commentary:**

**Be it from Buddhas of the past, while existent or after their extinction.** Perhaps they were in the world or perhaps they had entered Nirvana. **Those who have heard this Dharma.** If there are those who have heard The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra, they **have already realized the Buddha Way.** Because all Buddhas of the past have spoken this Sutra, all Buddhas of the present are speaking this Sutra. And all Buddhas of the future will speak this Sutra. All those who have heard its wonderful Dharma have already accomplished the Buddha Path. They have all become Buddhas.

**The World Honored Ones of the future, are limitless in number.** They cannot be counted. **All of these Thus Come Ones will also speak the Dharma of expedient devices.** They will first speak the provisional teaching and later return to the real teaching. **All of the Thus Come Ones** in the ten directions **by means of limitless expedients,** employing countless Dharma-doors **help all living beings to enter the Buddha’s non-outflow wisdom.** They cause all living beings to obtain the non-outflow wisdom of the Buddha.

**Of those who have heard the Dharma.** “Hearing this Dharma” simply means hearing The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. **None will fail to become Buddhas.** Of those who have heard The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra, not one of them in the future, will not become a Buddha. So we are now able to hear this Sutra, and in the future each of us will have the opportunity to become Buddhas. Several thousand years ago Shakyamuni Buddha gave us all predictions of future Buddhahood. Therefore, we who had the opportunity to hear this Sutra should not take ourselves lightly. In the future you can become a Buddha. You should not think that reciting the Buddha’s name is such a simple thing to do. We recite the Buddha’s name once and do not find it difficult. And why is it not difficult? It is because out karmic offenses are not all that deep. People with karmic obstacles may want to recite the Buddha’s name, but they are unable to do so. They are obstructed by their karmic obstacles, so they cannot recite even if they want to. Take Devadatta, for example. He could only recite “Namo.” His karmic obstacles were so heavy he could not say the word “Buddha.”

An event in China also took place, which proves that those with heavy karmic obstacles are unable to recite the Buddha’s name. In China, during the Southern Song Dynasty, there was a great minister by the name of Qin Gui. He had a few good roots, and so he was very intelligent and placed first as a zhuang yuan, or a top scholar in the Imperial Examinations. But after he became an official, he grew envious of the worthy and jealous of the talented. In this way, he created a great deal of offense karma. One of his worst deeds was to have Yue Fei murdered. The offense karma he had created was extremely heavy. Because Earth Store Bodhisattva had a close affinity with him, he came to take him across. He made a plan in advance, “I will go there and if I can just get him to recite the word ‘Buddha’ I will release him of all of his offenses. Then Earth Store Bodhisattva turned himself into a Bhikshu and went to see Qin Gui.

Qin Gui was at the height of his political career, a Prime Minister to the Emperor. When he saw the monk approaching, he called to him and engaged him in a conversation. The monk exhorted him to recite the Buddha’s name, but he would not do it. He said, “You really should recite the Buddha’s name, a man in your high position…” but he refused to recite it.

“What use is recitation?” he said. He simply would not say the world “Buddha.” All Earth Store Bodhisattva wanted him to do was to say the word “Buddha” once and then he could free Qin Gui of his offenses, but Qin Gui refused to say it. Then Earth Store Bodhisattva manifested spiritual penetrations. He used his “whisk,”—in the forty-two hands there is one called the White Whisk Hand, isn’t there? Those who have left home carry them to brush away the mosquitoes—Anyway, Earth Store Bodhisattva brushed him with his whisk and Qin Gui was forced to kneel in front of him. He wanted to get up, but try as he might; he could not do it. Then Earth Store Bodhisattva held out his palm and said, “Tell me what word it is that I am writing on my palm,” as he wrote the word “Buddha.” All Qin Gui had to do was to say, “That is the word Buddha,” in order to be freed of all his offense karma. But what do you think Qin Gui did? His heavenly eloquence burst forth and he said, “When young, I was a top scholar. Now I am number one Imperial Scholar. Every piece of literature in the country must first be shown to me. If I could not even read that word, how could I have become the Prime Minister? I can read that word, all right, but I will not say it for you!” All he had to do was read it, but he would not do it. Seeing this, Earth Store Bodhisattva realized, “Ah, his offense karma is indeed heavy. There is really no way I can save him.” Later, Qin Gui fell into hell.

This proves that recitation of the Buddha’s name is no simple mater. Why should we ordinarily recite the Buddha’s name? In preparation for the time when our lives come to an end, and we will need to do so.

“If we will need to recite when out lives are coming to an end, why not just wait until then? Why do we have to recite now?” you ask.

Everything is a question of habits. If you do not do something as a rule, then when your life is drawing to a close, you will not remember how to recite the Buddha’s name. That is why, now, in ordinary times, we should learn how to recite and cultivate the Pure Land Dharma-door. Then, when our lives are over, we can be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

“Why should we be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss?” you ask.

It is because of the vows made by Amitabha Buddha in the causal ground when he was a Bhikshu named Fa Zang, “Dharma Treasury.” He made forty-eight vows and said, “After I have become a Buddha, of all the living beings in the ten directions, if there is one who calls my name, who recites my name as Amitabha Buddha, I shall certainly guide them to my land. They can come to my land and eventually realize Buddhahood. In my land the people will be transformationally born from lotus flowers and their bodies will be clear and pure.” Because of the vows made by Amitabha Buddha, all living beings now who cultivate the Dharma-door of Buddha recitation will find it the easiest of the Dharma-doors.

In the Sutras it is said, “Of those beings in the Dharma-Ending Age, not one in a million who cultivates will obtain the Way. Only through the practice of the recitation of the Buddha’s name will they be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss and thereby be saved. Now it is the Dharma-Ending Age, and it is appropriate for all of us to recite the Buddha’s name. In the West, however, it is not the Dharma-Ending Age. You could say it is the Proper-Dharma Age. This is because the Buddhadharma has just been transmitted to the West and is just beginning to flourish. Many Americans like to sit in dhyana meditation. This is a sign of the Proper Dharma Age.

But the Dharma-door of Buddha recitation can be cultivated in the Proper-Dharma Age, and it can be also be cultivated in the Dharma-Ending Age. The Dharma-door of Buddha recitation can be cultivated during any period at all. So, if you are not making progress with other methods of work, you can cultivate the Dharma-door of Buddha recitation.

Dhyana Master Yung Ming Shou said, “With dhyana and with the Pure Land, one is like a tiger with horns,” That is, if you investigate dhyana and recite the Buddha’s name, you are like a tiger with a pair of horns. “In this life, you are a teacher of people, and in the future you can be a Buddhist patriarch.” Therefore, genuine investigation of dhyana is the same as genuine investigation of the Pure Land. Those who genuinely recite the Buddha’s name are just genuine cultivators of dhyana.

To explain it at an even more basic level: Those who genuinely uphold the precepts are just genuine cultivators of dhyana. Those who genuinely investigate dhyana are just genuine upholders of the precepts. Those who genuinely lecture on Sutras and speak the Dharma may do nothing else, but they are nonetheless genuine investigators of dhyana. A few days ago I said,

“Penetration of the sect,
Penetration of speech,
Samadhi and wisdom are perfect and clear,
And there is no attachment to emptiness.”

To be able to investigate dhyana and also to lecture on the Sutras is called penetration of both the sect and speech, for one understands both the practice of meditation and the method of lecturing on the Sutras. To speak even more deeply: Those who genuinely investigate dhyana are just genuine holders of mantras. Those who are genuine holders of mantras, true cultivators of the Secret School, are just genuine cultivators of dhyana. The Five Schools of Buddhism, Dhyana, the Teachings, the Vinaya, the Secret, and the Pure land Schools, although they are said to be five, are fundamentally the same, ultimately one, non-dual. Not only are they one, but there is not even the “one.” If there is not even the “one” how could there be five? Those who truly study the Buddhadharma should understand this point. Some people say, “The Dharma-door of Buddha recitation is the highest and the Dharma-door of investigation dhyana is incorrect.” Others say the opposite. This shows that they do not understand the Buddhadharma. For those who truly understand the Buddhadharma, “all Dharmas are the Buddhadharma and none of them can be obtained.” There is not any Dharma that can be obtained. Therefore, why add a head on top of your head? Why look for trouble when there is not any? If you really understand the Dharma, there is no Dharma that can be obtained. But, if you tell people who do not understand the Buddhadharma, “There is not anything at all—nothing,” they will feel disappointed. That is why the Buddha spoke the provisional wisdom for the sake of the real wisdom, the provisional dharma for the sake of the real Dharma. But in the end, what is the real wisdom like? It is just “non-attachment;” it returns to the unobtainable. The Real Mark is unmarked, and yet there is nothing not marked by it. That is the true, real wisdom.

**Sutra:**

**All the Buddhas have made this vow
“As to the Buddha Way which I have walked,
I wish to lead all living beings
Alike to obtain this Path.”
And although the Buddhas of the future
Will speak a hundred thousand million,
Countless Dharma-doors,
They are, in fact, for the sake of One Vehicle.
All Buddhas, Doubly Perfect Honored Ones,
Know the Dharmas are eternally without a nature.
The Buddha-seed arises from conditions;
Thus they speak of the One Vehicle.
This Dharma abides in the Dharma’s position,
Dwelling forever in worldly marks.
Having understood this in the Bodhimanda,
The Guiding Master teaches it expediently.**

Outline:

L2. The singularity of the practice.
L3. The singularity of the teaching.
L4. The singularity of the noumenon.

**Commentary:**

The previous passage of text read, “All of the Thus Come Ones by means of limitless expedients help all living beings to enter the Buddha’s non-outflow wisdom. Of those who have heard this Dharma, none will fail to become Buddhas. This section of text falls under the heading of “the singularity of the cultivators.” The present section of text: “**All the Buddhas have made this vow, as to the Buddha Way which I have walked, I wish to lead all living beings alike to obtain this path**”/ falls under the outline heading of “the singularity of the practice.”

*The Dharma Flower Sutra* contains the Ten Wonders of the Root and the Ten Wonders of the Branches. Presently we are discussing 1) the singularity of the cultivators, 2) the singularity of the practice, 3) the singularity of the teaching, and 4) the singularity of the principle.

So the Buddhas all made a vow to lead living beings to obtain the Way that they themselves walked down. You may ask, “Since there is no Dharma which can be obtained, why does the text say ‘obtain the Way?’”

In *The Vajra Sutra*, Subhuti says, “While the Buddha was with Burning Lamp Buddha, there was no Dharma which he obtained as anuttarasamyaksambodhi.” Anuttarasamyaksambodhi is possessed by us inherently. It is not obtained from the outside. That is why in reality, there is nothing obtained.

We have it all along; it is just that we do not know that we do. Because we do not know we have it, it can be likened to a bright gem hidden in our clothing. We do not know that a shining gem has been sewn into our clothing. The gem is just the Buddha- nature. We are basically one with the Buddha-nature. Why haven’t we become Buddhas? It is because we have not found our inherent Buddha-nature within ourselves. We now want to become Buddhas, but this actually means getting back the valuables, which were ours to begin with, nothing more. The text says, “Alike to obtain this Path.” The Buddhas wish to lead all living beings to cultivate this Dharma-door. This shows the singularity of the practice.

**And although the Buddhas of the future,** all the Buddhas of the future **will speak a hundred thousand million countless Dharma-doors, they are in fact, for the sake of One Vehicle,** the Buddha Vehicle.

**All Buddhas, Doubly Perfect Honored Ones,** those perfect in blessings and in wisdom **know the Dharmas are eternally without a nature. The Buddha-seed arises from conditions; thus they speak of the One Vehicle.** The Buddha’s Dharma-doors arise from conditions. It is for the sake of the Buddha’s teaching of the One Vehicle that all of other teachings are spoken, that is, the Storehouse Teaching, the Pervasive Teaching, and the Separate Teaching. They are all really presented for the sake of the Buddha Vehicle. This is to show the singularity of the teaching. They are all for the sake of the One Buddha Vehicle; there are no other vehicles.

**This Dharma abides in the Dharma’s position.** “This Dharma” refers to *The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra*. And where is the Dharma’s position? **Dwelling forever in worldly marks.** The Dharma is found to dwell in worldly appearances, for in worldly dharmas themselves are transcendental Dharmas found. Transcendental Dharmas themselves are just worldly dharmas. So the Sixth Patriarch said,

“The Buddhadharma is in the world.
Enlightenment is not apart from the world.
To search for Bodhi apart from the world
Is like looking for a hare with horns.”

**Having understood this in the Bodhimanda;** Shakyamuni Buddha says, “I sat in the fields of enlightenment and, after I became a Buddha, I understood this doctrine. **The Guiding Master teaches it expediently.** The Guiding Master, the Buddha, uses all kinds of expedient devices to teach this Dharma. That is the singularity of the principle. The essential principle is one.

**Sutra:**

**Those who receive the offerings of gods and humans,
The Buddhas of the present in the ten directions,
Their number like the Ganges’ sands,
Manifest within the world
To bring peace and comfort to living beings,
And also speak Dharma such as this.
Knowing the foremost still extinction,
They use the power of expedients
To demonstrate the various paths,
In reality, for the sake of the Buddha Vehicle.
Knowing the conduct of living beings,
The thoughts deep within their minds,
Their habitual actions in the past,
The nature of their desire, the power of their vigor,
And their faculties, keen or dull,
They employ various causes and conditions,
Analogies and verbal expressions,
To teach them the appropriate expedients.**

Outline:

J4. The Buddhas of the present.

**Commentary:**

**Those who receive the offerings of gods and humans,** those who are worthy of the offering of the gods and of human beings. **The Buddhas of the present in the ten directions.** All the Buddhas currently in the ten directions. **Their number like the Ganges’ sands.** Their number is as many as the grains of sand in the Ganges River. **Manifest within the world,** they appear in the worlds of the ten directions **to bring peace and comfort to living beings.** They act out of the desire to bring peace and security to living beings. **And also speak Dharma such as this,** they also speak *The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra*. **Knowing the foremost still extinction,** knowing the number one Dharma of still extinction, the wonderful principle of the Real Mark, **they use the power of expedients.** If they started out by speaking the Real Mark, no one would understand, and so they use the power of various expedients and bestow the provisional for the sake of the real. **To demonstrate the various paths,** they set forth all manners of Dharma-doors and various expedient devices. **In reality, for the sake of the Buddha Vehicle,** they set them forth, in fact, for the sake of the One Vehicle. Their final aim, the ultimate goal, is to speak the Buddha Vehicle to cause living beings to become Buddhas.

**Knowing the conduct of living beings,** the actions of living beings, **the thoughts deep within their minds,** just what they are thinking. **Their habitual actions in the past.** The defilements habitually practiced in past lives now present as karmic retribution. **The nature of their desires, the power of their vigor.** They all have thoughts of desire and a different measure of vigor in their cultivation. **And their faculties, keen or dull;** some living beings have sharp dispositions and others are slow-witted. Those with keen faculties are intelligent. Those with dull faculties are stupid. **They employ various causes and conditions,** they use all types of causes and conditions, **analogies and verbal expressions,** parables and phrases **to teach them the appropriate expedients.** According to the basic natures of living beings, they respond to them and teach them the Dharma, using expedient devices. For example, to living beings who are very stubborn, they speak about compassion and in this way take them across. They explain prajna wisdom to stupid living beings so that they may give rise to wisdom. They teach scattered living beings how to cultivate dhyana samadhi. To those who are lax they teach vigor. Living beings who continually violate the precepts are instructed in morality. People heavily burdened with greed are taught to give. They employ various expedient devices to teach living beings. This is what is meant by, “To teach them the appropriate expedients.”

**Sutra:**

**Now I, too, am like them.
Using various Dharma-doors,
I proclaim the Buddha Way
To bring peace and comfort to living beings.
I use the power of my wisdom,
To know the nature of beings’ desires;
I speak all dharmas expediently,
To lead them all to happiness.
Shariputra, you should know,
As I regard them with my Buddha Eye,
I see living beings in the six paths,
Impoverished, lacking blessings and wisdom,
Entering the dangerous path of birth and death,
Where they suffer unremittingly.
They are deeply attached to the five desires,
Like a yak caring for its tail,
They smother themselves with greed and love,
Blind, and in darkness, seeing nothing.
They do not seek the mighty Buddha,
Or the Dharma which cuts off suffering,
But instead they deeply enter into deviant views;
With suffering, they wish to cast off suffering.
For the sake of these beings,
I give rise to the great compassion heart.**

Outline:

I2. Shakyamuni Buddha.
J1. General review of dispensing the provisional and revealing the actual.
K1. Revealing the actual.
K2. Dispensing the provisional.
J2. An extensive reiteration of the six points.
K1. The five turbidities as reason for the provisional teaching.

**Commentary:**

**Now I, too, am like them**/ now, at present, I, Shakyamuni Buddha, am also thus. I am like the Buddhas of the past, future and present. **Using various Dharma-doors/ I proclaim the Buddha Way/ To bring peace and comfort to living beings**/ I lead all living beings to gain security and happiness.

**I use the power of my wisdom,** the Buddha’s true, real wisdom, **to know the nature of beings’ desires.** All living beings have their own particular natural desires, the things they are fond of. I understand them all very clearly. **I speak all dharmas expediently.** Because I understand all living beings, I use expedient Dharmas to teach and transform living beings, teaching them all the dharmas. **To lead them all to happiness.** I lead all living beings to be filled with the true bliss of Dharma, to receive the Dharma’s moisture, as the water moistens things. I moisten living beings with the Dharma, to cause them to be filled with joy.

**Shariputra, you should know, as I regard them with my Buddha Eye, I see living beings in the six paths; impoverished, lacking blessings and wisdom.** They are confused and deluded. They do not know how to wake up. This is because they have no wisdom and no blessed retribution. Why not? It is because they are too poor. This is the poverty that results from not understanding the Buddhadharma. They are truly pitiful, truly poor. If they had blessings and wisdom, they would not be poor. But, because they have neither, they are.

What is true wealth? Understanding the Buddhadharma is true wealth. What is poverty? Not understanding the Buddhadharma is poverty. Poverty and wealth depend upon whether or not you have blessings and wisdom. If you have blessings or wisdom, you are wealthy. If you do not, you are poor.

Where do blessings and wisdom come from? They come through cultivation of the Way. Therefore, the living beings in the six paths are poor because thy have no blessings and no wisdom. **Entering the dangerous path of birth and death,** they enter the risky, evil road of birth and death. The road of birth and death is extremely dangerous. It is said,

Having lost this human body,
In ten thousand eons, it is hard to get another.

We are people at present, but do not think it is easy to be a human being. Did I not tell you earlier that when Shakyamuni Buddha was in the world he once picked up a handful of dirt and asked, “Is there more dirt on the earth or more dirt in my hand?”

The disciples all replied, “There is more dirt on the earth than in the Buddha’s hand.”

The Buddha then said, “Those who obtain a human body are like the dirt in my hand. Those who lose a human body are like the dirt on the ground.” So it is extremely dangerous to enter the risky road of birth and death.

**Where they suffer unremittingly;** their suffering continues from one life to the next. They may be a human being in their present life, but there is no guarantee that they will be one in their next life. Their suffering is continuous and uninterrupted. The causes of suffering, the result of suffering, the retribution of suffering—it simply never ends.

**They are deeply attached to the five desires.** Why is it that they are not able to end their suffering? It is because they are deeply enmeshed in the five desires, forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects, also called the five “dusts,” the five desires of the world. **Like a yak caring for its tail;** the yak is a kind of ox that places great importance on its tail. Because it thinks its tail is so important, it always watches out for it. As a result, since it thinks its tail is so important, people are always after it. Thus, out of its great desire to protect its tail, it ends up losing its very life. **They smother themselves with greed and love;** smothering themselves, they die, like the yak. **Blind, and in darkness, seeing nothing.** They are as if blind and in darkness, so of course they cannot see. **They do not seek the mighty Buddha.** They have no wisdom; they do not seek a teacher who understands. Therefore, those without wisdom are as if blind. If you have no teacher, you are in the dark. You cannot see anything at all. Not seeing the light means that you have no wisdom. The Buddha has great power and can rescue all living beings. **Or the Dharma which cuts off suffering.** They do not seek instruction from the Buddha in the methods for cutting off suffering. **But instead they deeply enter into deviant views;** because they do not seek wisdom, they are like blind men. They wander into deviant views.

People are very strange. If you teach them the Proper Dharma, you can teach until you are blue in the face, but they will not understand it. On the other hand, if you teach them a deviant dharma, they will catch on after just one lesson. Would you not say this was strange? If it is the Proper Dharma, you can try to teach them once, twice, three times, and they find it difficult to remember. If you teach them heretical “occult” dharmas, they remember them very easily. People believe the deviant dharmas. They may believe the Proper Dharma for a moment, but they soon lose faith in it. After awhile, as soon as your back is turned, they no longer believe. So they “deeply enter into deviant views.”

Why is it so hard for people to learn Proper Dharma, and so easy for them to learn deviant ones? It is because, life after life, we have been deeply enmeshed in deviant views. The deviant views are our old friends, as familiar as our own blood relatives. So it is easy to learn them. We have forgotten the Proper Dharma. Although we study it, it is hard for us to remember it. We learn it once, and then forget it, learn it again and forget it again. Why do we forget it? It is because we have become separated from it by too great a distance. We have grown farther and farther away from it, and soon forget it altogether.

**With suffering, they wish to cast off suffering.** With their misery, with the root of their suffering, they try to get rid of their suffering. This is difficult to manage.

What is the root of suffering? Ignorance. It is said,

Ignorance and its various aspects are the root of pain;
When the root of pain has been cast out, wholesome roots remain.
Merely rely on the wisdom sword’s awesome spiritual might,
To jump right off the spinning wheel and over the six-path gates.

種 種 無 明 是 苦 根
苦 根 去 盡 善 根 存
但 憑 慧 劍 威 神 力
跳 出 輪 迴 六 道 門

Ignorance is the root of suffering. When you cut off ignorance, you also cut off suffering at the root. If you wish to cut off ignorance, how are you going to do it? Merely make use of your wisdom sword. With the wisdom sword, you can cut off ignorance and jump right off the spinning wheel of rebirth. The most important thing is to have the wisdom sword. Without it, you will not be able to get out of the sea of suffering.

**For the sake of these beings,** because the Buddha sees living beings sunk in the sea of suffering. Being born and dying over and over again, never ending birth and death, the Buddha says, **I give rise to the great compassion heart.** The Buddha gives rise to a heart filled with compassion. How does the compassionate heart arise? The Buddha thinks, “Ah, these living beings are just like my own sons and daughters. How can a parent stand by and watch his children suffer?” He gives rise to a heart of great compassion to teach and transform living beings, to relieve them of their suffering and rescue them from the sea of misery.

**Sutra:**

**When first I sat in the Bodhimanda,
In contemplation, or walking about the tree,
For a full three times seven days,
I thought over matters such as these:
The wisdom which I have obtained,
Is subtle, wonderful, and foremost,
But living beings are dull-rooted,
Attached to pleasure, blinded by delusion;
Beings such as these,
How can they possibly be saved?
Just then the Brahma Heaven Kings,
As well as the God Shakra,
The Four World-Protecting God Kings,
The god of the Heaven of Great Comfort,
And the other heavenly multitudes,
With retinues numbering in the billions
Reverently placed their palms together,
And requested me to turn the Dharma-wheel.
I then thought to myself,
“Were I to praise only the Buddha Vehicle,
Beings sunk in suffering
Would be unable to believe this Dharma.
They would slander it out of disbelief,
And fall into the three evil paths.
It is better that I do not speak the Dharma,
But quickly enter into Nirvana.”**

Outline:

K2. Dispensing the provisional.
L1. Inclination to use the Great Vehicle and realizing it is not appropriate.
M1. The appropriateness of the Great Vehicle.
M2. Living beings lack the potential.
M3. The thought to stop teaching.

**Commentary:**

**When I first sat in the Bodhimanda;** Shakyamuni Buddha says, “When I had just become a Buddha and was sitting in the field of the Way…” The Buddha stayed beneath the Bodhi tree for forty-nine days. **In contemplation, or walking about the tree.** “After I became a Buddha, I contemplated the past causes and conditions and also the future causes and conditions. Sometimes I walked around the tree. On the one hand, this was good exercise, and on the other it served to bring the thoughts of the heart together so that it did not become scattered.”

“The Buddha’s heart is basically not scattered,” you ask, “so why did he need to walk about?” He did it as an example so other living beings could imitate him in their cultivation of the Way.

**For a full three times seven days;** for twenty-one days **I thought over matters such as these.** What matters? The matters concerned with teaching and transforming living beings. **The wisdom which I have obtained, is subtle, wonderful, and foremost, but living beings are dull-rooted.** My wisdom is superb, but the dispositions of living beings are exceedingly dull. They are quite stupid. **Attached to pleasure, blinded by delusion.** They are attached to and seduced by the happiness before their eyes and are blinded by their own stupidity. **Beings such as these** whose stupidity covers them completely, **how can they possibly be saved?** They are stupid because they have no wisdom. Their inherent wisdom has been smothered by their delusion and desire. Beings like this are as if blind. What can be done to save these stupid living beings, to make them understand? Just as he was thinking about these things…

**Just then the Brahma Heaven Kings,** the kings in the Brahma Heavens. **As well as the God Shakra,** Heavenly Lord in the heaven of the Thirty-three. **The Four World-Protecting God Kings; the god of the heaven of Great Comfort,** as well as the ruler of the Maheshvara Heaven; **and the other heavenly multitudes,** all the other gods. **With retinues numbering in the billions;** every heavenly king brought along a billion retainers and they **reverently placed their palms together and requested me to turn the Dharma-wheel.** The gods made obeisance to the Buddha because they wanted him to teach the wonderful Dharma.

**I then thought to myself,** since all the heavenly hosts had asked me to speak the Dharma, I thought it over once again. “**Were I to praise only the Buddha Vehicle** and not mention the other Three Vehicles, **beings sunk in suffering,** living beings would think, “The Buddhadharma is so lofty and difficult. It takes three great asankhyeya eons to become a Buddha. I could never do that.” They would “gaze at the great sea and heave a sigh.” They would not want to study the Dharma. “There is no way I could ever learn something as great and profound as the Buddhadharma,” they would think.

Those who have never heard the Sutras take one look at *The Dharma Flower Sutra* and think. “It is so big! Two thick volumes! When will we ever finish listening to it? Do I really have that much time?” And so they do not listen. But once you have got a bit of the flavor of the Buddhadharma, you will feel that the Dharma is the most important thing in your life. It will stand in the highest position. You will think, “Even if I do not have time to eat, wear clothes, or sleep, I will certainly study the Buddhadharma.” And whenever Sutras are being lectured you will go to listen. According to the rules in Buddhism, the lay people must go to Dharma assemblies being conducted within forty miles of their residence.

Living beings are sunk in suffering. They **would be unable to believe this Dharma.** Because living beings are so stupid, they would not believe you when you speak of the Buddha Vehicle. **They would slander it out of disbelief.** Their not believing themselves is not important, but then they would try to ruin the Dharma. They would slander the Dharma out of disbelief and thereby create limitless, boundless offenses. **And fall into the three evil paths.** One who slanders the wonderful Dharma of the Real Teaching creates unbounded offenses and ends up falling into the hells, into the animal realm, or into the realm of hungry ghosts. They will end up like the mother of the Brahman woman in *The Earth Store Bodhisattva Sutra*. They will fall into the great hells. Luckily, the Brahman woman was a former incarnation of Earth Store Bodhisattva and the daughter was able to rescue her mother and gain rebirth for her in the heavens. We should each ask ourselves, “Can we be sure that our son or daughter is Earth Store Bodhisattva or someone like him?” After we have died, will they come and rescue us? There is no guarantee, and so we should bring forth a heart of genuine faith in the Buddhadharma.

**It is better that I do not speak the Dharma.** The Buddha thought to himself, “Because living beings might slander the Dharma and fall into the three evil paths, it would be better not to speak *The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra*. **But quickly enter into Nirvana.** I will go to Nirvana. I will not remain in the world to turn the Dharma-wheel.

**Sutra:**

**Then I recalled that the Buddhas of the past
Practiced powerful expedients,
And as I now have obtained the Path,
It’s fitting that I also teach Three Vehicles.
When I had been thinking thus,
The Buddhas of the ten directions all appeared,
And with the Brahma sound encouraged me, saying,
“Good indeed, O Shakyamuni,
Foremost Guiding Master.
Having attained the supreme Dharma,
You follow the precedent of all Buddhas,
To employ the power of expedient devices.
We have all obtained as well,
That foremost Dharma, most wonderful.
For the various kinds of living beings,
We discriminate and teach Three Vehicles.
Those of little wisdom who delight in lesser dharmas,
Would not believe that they could become Buddhas.
That is why we use expedient means,
To discriminate and teach the various fruits.
Although Three Vehicles are taught,
It is only for the sake of teaching Bodhisattvas.”**

Outline:

L2. The idea to use the three vehicles in the way former Buddhas have done, to accord with what is appropriate.

M1. The teaching and attainment.
N1. Determining the appropriateness of the three vehicles.
N2. Small Vehicles potential.
O1. Being praised by all Buddhas.

**Commentary:**

**Then I recalled that the Buddhas of the past,** after a bit it occurred to me that all the Buddhas of the past had **practiced powerful expedients. And as I now have obtained the Path, it’s fitting that I also teach Three Vehicles.** I should also bestow the provisional teachings for the sake of the real teaching and speak of the doctrine of the Three Vehicles. **When I had been thinking thus, the Buddhas of the ten directions all appeared and with the Brahma sound encouraged me, saying;** they used the clear, pure Buddha-sound to encourage me. They chatted with me, saying, **good indeed, O Shakyamuni.** Very fine, very fine, Shakyamuni, **Foremost Guiding Master.** You are really the number one teacher in the world. **Having attained the supreme Dharma.** You have obtained the supreme and wonderful Dharma, and what is more **you follow the precedent of all Buddhas to employ the power of expedient devices.** You follow the example of the Buddhas of the ten directions in using provisional, expedient devices.

**We have all obtained as well, that foremost Dharma, most wonderful. For the various kinds of living beings,** however, **we discriminate and teach Three Vehicles.** Because living beings differ in their potential to receive the teachings, we establish various provisional devices, separately teaching the Great and Small Vehicles; teaching the Hearer Vehicle, the Conditioned Enlightened Vehicle, and the Bodhisattva Vehicle.

**Those of little wisdom who delight in lesser dharmas.** Stupid people have very little wisdom, and so they like the lesser dharmas. They do not have the disposition for the great Dharma. They are like children who can only play with small toys. If you give them something too big, they cannot play with it. You can only teach the Small Vehicle Dharma to Small Vehicle people. If you try to teach them the Great Vehicle, they just get all confused. They do not understand it. **Would not believe that they could become Buddhas.** Why do they delight in the lesser dharmas and fail to understand the great Dharma? It is because they do not believe that they can become Buddhas. **That is why we use expedient means,** provisional Dharma-doors, **to discriminate and teach the various fruits** speaking of the first, second, third, and fourth fruits of Arhatship. **Although Three Vehicles are taught, it is only for the sake of teaching Bodhisattvas.** In actuality, the Three Vehicles are only taught to teach and transform Bodhisattvas, to lead them to cultivate the Dharma-door of the One Buddha Vehicle.

**Sutra:**

**Shariputra, you should know,
That when I heard the Sagely Lions’
Deep, pure, and wondrous sound,
I called out “Homage to all Buddhas.”
And further had this thought,
“I have come into a turbid, evil world;
As the Buddhas speak,
I should follow in accord.”
Having thought upon this matter,
I went straightway to Varanasi.
Since the still and extinct mark of all dharmas,
Cannot be expressed in words,
I used the power of expedients,
To instruct the five Bhikshus.**

Outline:

O2. Shakyamuni Buddha praises them in turn and accords with their manner of teaching.

N3. Bestowal of the teaching.
 **Commentary:**

**Shariputra, you should know that when I heard the Sagely Lions’.** When I heard the Buddhas of the ten directions praising me in this way, saying that I was number one, great guiding master. **Deep, pure, and wondrous sound,** their sound was clear and fine. So **I called out “Homage to all Buddhas”.** The Buddhas having praised Shakyamuni Buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha then praised them. This is the Buddhas praising each other. **And further had this thought “I have come into a turbid, evil world.** I have now appeared in the Saha world, a world of five turbidities, an evil world. **As the Buddhas speak, I should follow in accord”.** Since I have come into this evil world, I should speak the Dharma in the same manner as all the Buddhas of the ten directions. I should employ the same methods.

**Having thought upon this matter,** when I was done thinking this thing over, **I went straightway to Varanasi.** Varanasi is the Deer Park. Why do they call it the “Deer Park?”

Once, there were two deer kings living there. One deer king was a former incarnation, many births and many eons ago, of Shakyamuni Buddha. He was the compassionate deer king. The other deer king was a former incarnation of Devadatta. At that time, the king of the country often went out to hunt deer. He took many people along with him, and killed many deer on every expedition. So many deer were killed that they were on the verge of becoming extinct altogether. The two deer kings had a meeting and decided that the deer king who was to become a Buddha would go present a petition to the king, begging him for clemency.

“What kind of petition shall we present?” asked the other deer king.

The compassionate deer king said, “We shall tell the king that everyday we will send him two deer for his food. Then our herds will not become extinct and the king will have fresh venison everyday. I am sure the king will agree to this. If he does not, pretty soon we will all be dead and he will not have any deer meat at all. Besides, he cannot possibly eat that much meat. I will bet he lets most of it rot.”

The deer king Devadatta said, “Okay, let us go ask him!” and the two of them went to the palace to present their request. When they arrived at the gate, they met the palace guard, who immediately drew his sword to slaughter them.

“Don’t kill us!” the two deer cried. “We have come today for an audience with the king. We want to present him with a petition.”

The guard was quite taken aback. “Weird,” he said, “talking deer!” and he ran to tell the king that two talking deer, for heaven’s sake, had come to see the king.

The king raised an eyebrow and looked at the guard, “Talking deer? Oh yes, well tell them to come in and we will see what kind of strange creatures they are.”

The two deer came in and politely spoke with the king. “You’ve been hunting our herds, Your Majesty, and many of our deer have been killed. You cannot possibly eat that much meat everyday, can you? If you keep it up we will disappear altogether and you will not have any meat to eat. So we have a petition to present to you. Everyday we will send two deer for you to eat. Then you will not have to go hunting but you will have meat to eat everyday.” At that time there were no refrigerators. “If you continue to kill us at the rate you have been, you will wipe us out.”

The king was already surprised to hear deer talking like people. He thought their request was logically very sound and agreed. “Everyday you can send us two deer,” he said. And that is just what they did.

One day, the deer king who was to become Shakyamuni Buddha appeared at the palace gate as food for the king. The king recognized the deer and said, “You’re the king of the deer. How can you offer yourself? Have all the other deer in your herd been eaten or what?

The compassionate deer king said, “Not only are there remain deer in our herds, but their numbers are increasing daily. We two deer kings each watch over five hundred deer. Of the five hundred, only one goes each day as an offering to Your Majesty. Everyday many fawns are born. So now, our retinues have redoubled several times over. But now, for a special reason, I myself have come as your daily offering.”

“But why?” asked the king.

“Today’s deer from my herd came with no problems, but in Devadatta’s herd there was trouble. The deer selected to go happened to be pregnant. Her baby was due in a day or two and she begged Devadatta to let her trade places with someone else, saying that when her baby was born she would gladly go to the king for food. But Devadatta would not hear of it. She came to me and asked me if a deer in my herd would trade with her. None of my deer wanted to go, of course, so I volunteered myself and here I am.”

When the king heard this he thought, “How strange. Basically, deer are living creatures, just like people. Why should I eat deer meat everyday? They have feelings just like people do.” Then he chanted a verse:

“You are a person with a deer’s head,” he cried.
And though I am a person I’m just a deer inside.
But from this day forward only vegetables I’ll eat;
I will never ever eat another living being’s meat.”

“You have the head of a deer,” he said, “but your heart is extremely kind and compassionate. Your heart is even bigger than that of most human beings. Now, I may have a person’s head, but my heart is not as good as that of a deer. From today on, I am not going to eat meat.” And so the king was moved to become a vegetarian. This is the reason that this particular place was called the Deer Park. It was a place of blue mountains and crystal streams. There were many cultivators there.

In the past, Shakyamuni Buddha had five fellow cultivators. Three were relatives on his father’s side and two were relatives on his mother’s side. They followed him when he left home and cultivated with him. However, three of them could not endure the suffering and ran away. Shakyamuni Buddha, while meditating in the Himalayas, ate only one sesame seed and one grain of rice a day. Three of them could not take it, and ran off to the Deer Park. Two remained with the Buddha. At that time, the Buddha was so thin that he looked like a heap of firewood. Then a shepherdess brought him an offering of rice gruel and milk. The Buddha was very pleased, and ate it. His two companions exclaimed, “He’s finished! He’s useless! He’ll never realize the Way. What a glutton! Someone gives him some milk and he drinks it! Cultivating means enduring suffering, and he can no longer endure it, obviously. We are not going to stick around with someone like that. Let’s go!” So the Buddha was left all by himself.

Later, he went to sit beneath the Bodhi tree. One night, he saw a bright star and awoke to the Way.

Shakyamuni Buddha endured a great deal of bitterness in his cultivation. And we run into a bit of difficulty and cannot stand it. How do we measure up to Shakyamuni Buddha?

**Since the still and extinct mark of all dharmas cannot be expressed in words.** When the Buddha went to the Deer Park to teach, he knew that all dharmas are marked with still extinction; they have no appearance. The mark of still extinction, however, is basically ineffable. That is, you cannot express it in words.

The path of language has come to an end,
The place of the mind’s activity has been cast out.

**I used the power of expedients to instruct the five Bhikshus.** He spoke the Dharma for the sake of Ajnatakaundinya and the others. The five Bhikshus were the first to receive the Buddha’s teaching when he went to the Deer Park after realizing the Way. They were the five who had accompanied him when he left home. Three of them ran off because they were afraid of suffering and two of them ran off because they were afraid of enjoying themselves. Then, after the Buddha realized the Way, he observed the causes and conditions and saw the five Bhikshus cultivating in the Deer Park. He decided that he should first go to the Deer Park and teach the five Bhikshus the three turnings of the Four Truths.

**Sutra:**

**This was called the turning of the Dharma-wheel.
Then came the sound of Nirvana,
As well as “Arhatship,”
“Dharma,” and the “Sangha,” various names.
From remote eons onward,
I have praised and shown Nirvana’s dharma,
As the final end of birth and death’s sufferings;
Always have I spoken thus.
Shariputra, you should know,
I see disciples of the Buddha,
Resolutely seeking the Buddha Way,
Limitless thousands of myriads of millions of them,
All with hearts of reverence,
All coming before the Buddha.
They had heard, from former Buddhas,
Expedient teachings of the Dharma.
This causes me to think,
“The reason why the Thus Come One appears,
Is to teach the wisdom of the Buddha,
And now the time is exactly right.”
Shariputra, you should know,
Those with dull faculties and slight wisdom,
Those attached to marks, the arrogant,
Cannot believe this Dharma.
I now rejoice and have no fear,
And among the Bodhisattvas,
I shall cast expedients aside and be straightforward,
Speaking only of the supreme Path.
When the Bodhisattvas have heard this Dharma,
The network of their doubts will be rent (destroyed);
Twelve hundred Arhats
Will all attain to Buddhahood.**

Outline:

N4. The receiving, the practice, the realization, and the entry into the teaching.
M2. Resolving doubts.
K3. Revealing the actual.

**Commentary:**

**This was called the turning of the Dharma-wheel.** What is meant by “the three turnings of the Four Truths?”

The Buddha expounded upon the Four Truths in three ways, called “three turnings.” In the first turning he said to the five Bhikshus:

1. This is suffering; its nature is oppressive.
2. This is origination; its nature is seductive.
3. This is extinction; its nature is that it can be certified to.
4. This is the Way; its nature is that it can be cultivated.

He said, “This is suffering. It is oppressive. This is origination. It has the nature of seduction. It comes through craving. You bring this affliction upon yourself. This is extinction. Extinction refers to the still extinction of Nirvana with its four virtues of permanence, bliss, true self, and purity. You can certify to extinction. This is the Way. You can cultivate it, and thereby certify to the Four Virtues of Nirvana.

In the second turning, he said,

1. This is suffering; I already know it.
2. This is origination; I have already severed it.
3. This is extinction; I have already certified to it.
4. This is the Way; I have already cultivated it.

I already know about suffering. I have already cut off afflictions. As to extinction, the Four Virtues of Nirvana, I have already certified to the attainment of that doctrine. As to the Way, I have already cultivated it with success. I have cultivated the Thirty-seven Wings of Enlightenment.

In the third turning, he said,

1. This is suffering; you should know it.
2. This is origination; you should cut it off.
3. This is extinction; you should certify to it.
4. This is the Way; you should cultivate it.

This is suffering and you also should understand it. This is origination. This affliction is the “guest dust.” It is not the host. It comes from outside and so it has the “nature of seduction.” In The Shurangama Sutra we read about the “guest dust.” It was because of those two words, “guest dust” that Ajnatakaundinya became enlightened. “A guest,” he said, “does not stay forever. In the future it is going to leave.” He became enlightened because of the two words “guest dust” and his name means, “the first to be released” or “understanding the original limit.” As to extinction, you should certify to it, too. And you should also cultivate the Way.

When the Buddha said these things to the five Bhikshus, Ajnatakaundinya understood and certified to the fruit. That was called the three turnings of the Four Holy Truths.

**Then came the sound of Nirvana.** Because he had turned the Dharma-wheel of the Four Truths, he had spoken of still, extinct Nirvana. **As well as “Arhatship”.** The term “Arhat” also came into use. There were first, second, third, and fourth stage Arhats. **“Dharma,” and the “Sangha,” various names.** The Dharma refers to the Dharma of the Four Truths. The Sangha refers to the Arhats.

**From remote eons onwards,** from the distant past, while cultivating the Dharma **I have praised and shown Nirvana’s dharma.** I have lauded the dharma of Nirvana. **As the final end of birth and death’s sufferings.** If you can certify to the happiness of Nirvana, to that wonderful doctrine, then you will have severed for all time the sufferings of birth and death. They will be gone forever. **Always have I spoken thus,** I have told you this over and over constantly. From distant eons onward in every life I have spoken this dharma for you.

**Shariputra, you should know,** you ought to know **I see disciples of the Buddha, resolutely seeking the Buddha Way, limitless thousands of myriads of millions of them, all with hearts of reverence, all coming before the Buddha.** They all come to see the Buddha. **They had heard, from former Buddhas** in past lives. They had heard the Dharma from the Buddhas, **expedient teachings of the Dharma. This causes me to think.** Just now, it occurs to me **the reason why the Thus Come One appears** in the world **is to teach the wisdom of the Buddha,** to teach the genuine, real Buddha-wisdom. **And now the time is exactly right. Shariputra, you should know those with dull-faculties and slight wisdom.** Stupid, dim-witted people with precious little wisdom. **Those attached to marks, the arrogant,** they are attached to marks. They are attached to everything, and what is more, they are arrogant and think that they are terribly important. **Cannot believe this Dharma,** they will not be able to hear The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. And, in fact, five thousand people did walk out.

**I now rejoice and have no fear,** all of those without good roots, all of the arrogant ones have left. I am now happy and fearless. I am not worried at all. **And among the Bodhisattvas I shall cast expedients aside and be straightforward, speaking only of the supreme Path.** I will not use expedient means. I will now open the gate, so you can see the mountain. I will frankly and straightforwardly explain the genuine wisdom. I am getting rid of the expedients. I will use them no more. I will only speak the Dharma-door of realizing Buddhahood.

The wonderful Dharma is hard to meet. What is more, it is hard to hear it. In a hundred million eons, it is not easy to encounter The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. Though one encounters it, it is even more difficult to be able to read and recite it. If you are able to read and recite it, then to understand the doctrines contained within it is hard to do in a million eons. Having encountered it, it is difficult to hear it explained. Now, in the entire world, there are very few places where one can hear this Sutra. Rare as it is, we are now explaining it. In the future, we will hear The Great Avatamsaka Sutra, which is even more difficult to encounter. In China during the past hundred years, it would be hard to find one occasion when The Avatamsaka Sutra was lectured.

**When the Bodhisattvas have heard this Dharma,**The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra, **the network of their doubts will be rent (destroyed).** All their doubts will vanish.

**Twelve hundred Arhats will all attain to Buddhahood.** In the future they will all become Buddhas. Here the Buddha gives all his disciples predictions of future Buddhahood. So, in the Dharma Flower Assembly there is not one who will not become a Buddha. Those who have attended the Dharma Flower Assembly will all become Buddhas.

The doctrines in The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra are ineffably wonderful. But the doctrines in The Great Avatamsaka Sutra are even more wonderful. In order to explain The Avatamsaka Sutra, one must have a solid foundation in learning. Otherwise, one would not be able to understand much less explain it. One passage says that those who cultivate dhyana samadhi will emerge from proper samadhi in the east and enter samadhi in the west. They will enter proper samadhi in the south and emerge from it in the north. It says they will enter samadhi through the nose, and emerge from samadhi through the tongue. What does that mean? What does it mean to enter proper samadhi from the nose and come out through the tongue? Within the six organs, you enter through one and emerge through another. Who is coming and who is leaving?

So, in the future, if there are those who like to study the Buddhadharma, and who wish to understand it, the opportunity will present itself. In the future, if you want to seek the Dhrarma you will not have to go all the way to India like China’s Xuan Zhuang did. He ran off to India to seek the Dharma and ran until his feet broke open. He wore himself out. Now, you can sit in your very own country and hear such wonderful Dharma. In the future, your opportunities will be even finer than those of Dharma Master Xuan Zhuang.

**Sutra:**

**As the Buddhas of the three periods of time
In such a manner spoke the Dharma,
So do I likewise now expound
The undiscriminated Dharma.
All Buddhas come into the world
But rarely, and are hard to meet;
And when they appear in the world,
It’s hard for them to speak the Dharma.
Throughout countless eons, too,
It’s difficult to hear this Dharma.
And those who can hear this Dharma—
Such people too, are rare,
Like the udumbara flower,
In which all take delight,
Which the gods and humans prize,
For it blooms but once in a long, long time
So one who hears this Dharma, gives joyful praise,
With even just a single word,
Has thereby made offerings,
To all the Buddhas of the three periods of time.
Such people are extremely rare,
Rarer than the udumbara flower.**

Outline:

K4. Lauding the rareness of the Dharma.

**Commentary:**

**As the Buddhas of the three periods of time, in such a manner spoke the Dharma.** Shakyamuni Buddha says, “I now speak the real Buddhadharma, the teaching of real wisdom, the Buddha Vehicle. I do so in the same manner as did all the Buddhas of the past, present, and future. **So do I likewise now expound, the undiscriminated Dharma.** I speak the most subtle and wonderful Dharma of the One Buddha Vehicle, the only Vehicle. There are no other vehicles. That is the undiscriminated Dharma, which cannot be understood with one’s ordinary conscious mind.

**All Buddhas come into the world but rarely, and are hard to meet.** To be able to meet with a Buddha is very rare. It happens but once in a long while. **And when they appear in the world, it’s hard for them to speak the Dharma.** Even if you should meet with a Buddha appearing in the world, it is extremely rare for the Buddha to speak The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. The Buddha taught the Storehouse Teaching, then the Agamas, and then the Vaipulya and Prajna Teachings. It was not until the very end that he spoke The Dharma Flower Sutra.

**Throughout countless eons, too, it’s difficult to hear this Dharma.** To be able to hear this Dharma is also difficult. Our present Dharma Flower Assembly is most rare.

**And those who can hear this Dharma, such people, too, are rare, like the udumbara flower** which blooms only once every three thousand years. Once it blooms, it quickly fades. **In which all take delight, which the gods and humans prize, for it blooms but once in a long, long time.** All prize it because it is so rare. It will not bloom until the time is right.

**So one who hears this Dharma, gives joyful praise, with even just a single word, has thereby made offerings, to all the Buddhas of the three periods of time.** One who hears The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra and who praises it. With even just a single word, saying, “This Sutra is really wonderful,” has made offerings to all the Buddhas. **Such people are extremely rare, rarer than the udumbara flower.** The Udumbara flower blooms once every three thousand years, but this person is even rarer. So you can see that it is difficult to hear the Dharma. Such causal affinities are hard to come by. This means that we should be very happy to hear it now. Throughout limitless ages, we have planted vast good roots, and today the good roots have ripened, enabling us to hear the Sutra. Without good roots, you would never have had the chance to hear it.

**Sutra:**

**All of you should have no doubts,
For I am the Dharma King;
I declare to the assembly:
I use only the path of One Vehicle,
To teach and transform Bodhisattvas.
There are no Hearer Disciples.
Shariputra, all of you,
The Hearers and Bodhisattvas,
Should know that this wondrous Dharma
Is the secret essence of all Buddhas.**

Outline:

K5. Verifying the validity.

**Commentary:**

**All of you should have no doubts,** Shakyamuni Buddha says, “Take care, all of you, not to doubt this Dharma I have spoken. Why? **For I am the Dharma King.** I am the king of all dharmas, having obtained the real, true wisdom**. I declare to the assembly.** I will now use my trustworthy, true words to tell all of you in the Dharma gathering as well as those assemblies of the future, that **I use only the path of One Vehicle.** I use only the path of the One Buddha Vehicle, the Vehicle of realizing Buddhahood **to teach and transform Bodhisattvas. There are no Hearer Disciples.** There is no Small Vehicle Dharma.

**Shariputra, all of you the Hearers and Bodhisattvas should know that this wondrous Dharma,** this Dharma of the Great Vehicle, **is the secret essence of all Buddhas.** You should return from the small and head towards the great. Do not continue to be satisfied with obtaining just a little. Do not draw the line for yourself in the middle of the road saying, “This is it; I am stopping here. I do not want to go any further.” You should know that this wonderful Dharma spoken by all the Buddhas in The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra, is the most esoteric, most important, and most wonderful Dharma. It is spoken by all the Buddhas in the ten directions and the three periods of time. Whatever you do, do not doubt it.

**Sutra:**

**In the evil world of five turbidities,
Beings who are blissfully attached
To pleasures and desires,
Will never seek the Buddha Way.
Evil people of the future,
Hearing the Buddha speak of One Vehicle,
In their delusion will not accept or believe it,
But will slander it and fall into the evil paths.
Still, those with shame and purity,
Who resolutely seek the Buddha Way,
For such ones as these I praise
The path of One Vehicle, extensively.**

Outline:

K6. Dispensing with the false to encourage the faithful.
L1. Dispensing with the false.

**Commentary:**

The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra is the secret essence of all the Buddhas. Shakyamuni Buddha waited a long time to speak it. He waited because it was too important. If this Dharma were spoken, living beings would not believe it. They would slander it and fall into the three evil paths.

**In the evil world of five turbidities;** the eon turbidity, the view turbidity, the affliction turbidity, the living beings turbidity, and the life turbidity. **Beings who are blissfully attached to pleasures and desires,** who crave sensual pleasures, and are greedy for the objects of their desires. **Will never seek the Buddha Way.** They are greedy for temporary happiness. Everyone is confused by these temporary pleasures. They are confused because they do not understand them. For example, people have various desires. Those greedy for wealth are confused by wealth. Those greedy for forms are confused by beauty. Those greedy for food are confused by food and drink. Those greedy for drugs are confused by drugs. They take some drugs and think, “Probably I did not take enough and that is why I did not get enlightened. There is some hope if I take a larger dose next time.” This is pathetic. It is totally impossible, but they try it anyway. The more confused they are, the more confused they get. Their confusion grows deeper and deeper. The deeper their confusion, the stronger their craving. Whatever you desire, you are confused by that desire. If you are confused by it, you cannot free yourself. You are caught in your desire as if you were caught in quicksand. You get one leg out, but the other is still caught. Then you get the other leg out and the first leg gets stuck again. The Buddha knew long ago that there would be such deluded people. It will never occur to them to seek the Buddha Way, to bring forth genuine wisdom, or to break through their confusion.

**Evil people of the future,** that is just right now. The Buddha knew long ago that there would be evil people who **hearing the Buddha speak of One Vehicle, in their delusion will not accept or believe it.** They will doubt The Dharma Flower Sutra. They will wonder, “What is he talking about? What does he mean ‘become a Buddha?’” **But will slander it and fall into the evil paths.** Not only will they refuse to believe it, but they will slander it. They will say, “He says that is the Buddhadharma, but there is no such thing.” In this way they will fall into the hells, into the realm of the animals or hungry ghosts.

**Still, those with shame and purity.** Those who know enough to be ashamed of their mistakes, and who resolve to reform themselves in the future, those who are pure in their cultivation. **Who resolutely seek the Buddha Way,** who are determined to become Buddhas, **for such ones as these I praise the path of One Vehicle, extensively.** I speak The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra, praising the Buddha Way of One Vehicle.

**Sutra:**

**Shariputra, you should know,
The Dharma of all Buddhas is like this:
By means of millions of expedients,
I speak Dharma in accord with what’s appropriate.
But those who do not study it,
Will never come to understand it.
Since all of you already know
All Buddhas, Masters of the World,
Work by means of appropriate expedients,
You should have no further doubts.
Let your hearts be filled with joy;
You know you will reach Buddhahood.**

Outline:
L2. Encouraging the faithful.

**Commentary:**

**Shariputra, you should know,** you and all the Bhikshus, Bhikshunis, Upasakas, Upasikas, the gods, dragons, and the rest of the eightfold division—you should all be informed that **the Dharma of all Buddhas is like this.** The Buddhas of the ten directions all have the same identical path. All the Buddhas are the same. So it is said,

All Buddhas of the three periods of time and the ten directions,
Have the same identical Dharma-body.

Their Dharma-body is one and their Dharma is “Thus.” The Dharma of all Buddhas is the same. It is like the wonderful Dharma of The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. The Buddhas observe the potentials of living beings and **by means of millions of expedients, I,** the Buddha, **speak Dharma in accord with what’s appropriate,** using millions of different methods to teach and transform living beings. When living beings need a particular dharma, the Buddha teaches it to them.

**But those who do not study it will never come to understand it.** Although the Buddha speaks the Dharma for them, if they do not study it and put it into practice, they will never be able to understand it. You must study and practice it before you can understand it. Since they do not understand the Buddhadharma, they will not, of course, be able to cultivate according to it. Unable to cultivate according to it, they will not be able to become Buddhas.

**Since all of you already know, all Buddhas, Master of the World.** Shariputra, you and all the great Arhats, great Bodhisattvas, great Bhikshus and others, already know the genuine, wonderful Dharma is set forth by the Buddhas, the Masters of the World. They **work by means of appropriate expedients.** The Buddhas use clever, expedient devices to teach living beings. Since you know this **you should have no further doubts. Let your hearts be filled with joy.** Hearing The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra, you should be very happy. You should remember that it is difficult to encounter. Such affinities are not easy to come by.

**You know you will reach Buddhahood.** Each one of you should know that you will certainly realize Buddhahood. So, in the Dharma Flower Assembly, all living beings are assured of their future Buddhahood. Shakyamuni Buddha has given them all predictions to that effect.

This concludes the second chapter and the first roll of The Dharma Flower Sutra. I will now explain the verse in praise that follows the end of this roll:

The World Honored One manifests portents;
Maitreya wondered about the auspicious signs.
Manjushri explained them extensively for the sake of those assembled.
The ancient Buddhas emitted the light from their hair mark
The Dharma was requested thrice,
To set forth the fragrance of the wonderful lotus.

Homage to the Dharma Flower Assembly of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (3x)

This verse sums up the first two chapters of the Sutra. **The World Honored One manifests portents.** The Buddha manifested six portents and so **Maitreya wondered about the auspicious signs.** Maitreya Bodhisattva did not understand why the Buddha manifested the portents, and so he requested Manjushri Bodhisattva to explain. **Manjushri explained them extensively for the sake of those assembled. The ancient Buddhas** of the ten directions **emitted light from their hair mark** to praise Shakyamuni Buddha. **The Dharma was requested thrice.** Shariputra requested the Buddha to speak the Dharma three times **to set forth the fragrance of the wonderful lotus,** to speak The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra.

**Homage to the Dharma Flower Assembly of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.** In just reciting this praise, you gain unlimited merit and virtue. So in Japan, people recite it over and over, thinking they will gain great benefit. If they did not have a job, they get one. If they do not have food, they get food. If they do not have tea to drink, they get tea to drink. If they do not have wine to drink, they get wine to drink. It is incredibly wonderful, so they think.

For now, however, I have food, so I do not need to recite it right now, just explain it.