**The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra**

Chapter 7: The Analogy of the Transformed City
With Commentary by the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua

This is the seventh of the twenty-eight chapters of The Dharma Flower Sutra. What is meant by “Transformed”? It means to create something out of nothing, and to turn something back into nothing. Most people do not understand this doctrine. It is inconceivable and cannot be understood with the mind or expressed in words. “City” is a large town. People build cities to protect themselves from invaders, scoundrels, and unreasonable people.

Where does the transformation come from? It comes from the Buddha’s spiritual penetrations. That is how, out of nothing, something can appear. Originally, the City did not exist, but now it appears. Once it appears, it is given the name “ Transformed City”.

The first thing we should understand about the Transformed City is that there is no such thing! It is an unreal city, created through transformation. It is an unreal city, an expedient city, an expedient Dharma, as it were. It is all entirely unreal: the city, the people, and the Dharma are all unreal.

“What is the use of it all, if it is all unreal?” you ask.

If you do not understand what is unreal, you will be unable to find the true. The Transformed City is a place where the Treasure Trove is kept. The Transformed City is the Provisional while the Treasure Trove is the Real. Basically, the Transformed City does not exist at all. If it were real, it would not be called a “Transformed City”; it would just be called a city. The analogy contains those of the Two Vehicles: the Hearer Vehicle and the Conditioned Enlightened Vehicle. Are there really Two Vehicles? No. There are not Two Vehicles. Then why do you talk about Two Vehicles? Because they do not exist! If they did exist, we would not have to speak about them!

The Two Vehicles are an expedient Dharma. So the Transformed City is an analogy for the Nirvana of the Two Vehicles. Nirvana means “not produced and not destroyed”. Without production, there is no extinction; without extinction, there is no production. The Nirvana of the Two Vehicles is that taught by the Provisional Wisdom; it is an expedient. The Buddha used his expedient and provisional wisdom to set forth the Dharma of the Two Vehicles. Why did he do this? When you go to school, why do you start out in elementary school? Why don’t you just start out going to the University? You could have your Ph.D. by the time you are ten. Wouldn’t that be great? Skip elementary school and high school. Unfortunately, you cannot do this. You have to start with elementary school. The Bodhisattva Vehicle is like high school. The Buddha Vehicle is like the university.

So, when l was in Hong Kong, I did not teach elementary school. I taught only at the university level. In grade school you have to keep the kids interested by telling them stories, and so forth, for them to make any progress. You can teach some doctrine in High School, but it is not until they reach college that they can really learn something.

The Buddhadharma works in the same way. Originally, there were not Two Vehicles. The Buddha set them up; just like, originally, we did not need elementary school, except that kids are too young to understand what they need to know and so an elementary school is set up to take care of them. When people are older, they attend high school and enter college at the age of eighteen or twenty. Once they enter higher education, the university has various degrees available: the Bachelor’s, the Master’s and the Ph.D. There are a lot of distinctions there. And so, those of the Two Vehicles are like the elementary school. If you want to become a Buddha, you must start out in “elementary school”, then go to “high school”, and then to the “university”. “High school” is like the Bodhisattva Path, and the “university” is like Buddhahood. You will understand this analogy, because you have all been to school.

“Oh?” you think, “the Two Vehicles are just elementary school”. Do not get too attached to the idea. It is only an analogy, you know. In Buddhism, the most important thing is to become a Buddha. But most people, if you told them right off that they should cultivate and become a Buddha, would be scared stiff. “What is that? Why should I become a Buddha? Arghh!!” Since they do not understand, you set up an “elementary school”. Obviously, you cannot give a small child a Ph.D., because he would not even have the sense to know what it was, and he would not value it at all. So, the Transformed City represents the Nirvana of the Two Vehicles, a provisionally spoken expedient term. Basically, there is no such thing, but because of the power of the provisionally spoken expedient, something appears out of nothing.

Someone hears this and starts to retreat, thinking, “Oh, so the Buddha lies. There is nothing there, and he says there is something there!”

There was nothing there, and then something was transformed. This is not a lie. This is called Two Vehicles rather than the Great Vehicle or the Vehicle of the Buddhas. It is a provisional expedient. He uses the substance of the teaching to teach and transform living beings. Living beings are taught to guard against delusive thoughts. They are taught to cut off the delusions of desire and views. This is called the Nirvana which leans toward emptiness. It leans one way; it is not the Middle way.

There are four ways of explaining the Sutras: 1) according to causes and conditions, 2) according to the essentials of the teaching.

Here I shall use the first two to explain to concept of the Transformed City.

1) According to causes and conditions: The doctrine of one-sided emptiness causes living beings to “rest, to be led, and to enter.” To “rest” refers to the teaching of the Three Storehouses; it is the Small Vehicle concept of Nirvana as consisting of understanding and the cessation of affliction.

“To be led” refers to the two types of milk products which represent the Vaipulya (curdled milk) and Prajna (butter) Teachings. During these two teachings, one is being led.

“Enter” means to “enter the Buddha’s knowledge and vision.” We speak of opening, demonstrating, awakening to, and entering the Buddha’s wisdom. To “rest” refers to the opening of the Buddha’s wisdom. “To be led” refers to the demonstrating and awakening to the Buddha’s wisdom.

“Enter” means to enter the Buddha’s wisdom, to open the provisional and reveal the real, to speak of the Buddha Vehicle and no other vehicles.

Still, with “rest, to be led, and to enter” one has not yet arrived at the Ultimate Treasure Trove. That is why this extinction is called a “ Transformed City”. It is a provisionally set up expedient device. The Treasure Trove is the Real Teaching. The Nirvana of the Two Vehicles is merely a Transformed City. It is a provisional expedient device set up by the Buddha.

This is an explanation according to causes and conditions. Now, to explain it,

2) According to the essentials of the teaching: Those of the Three Storehouse Teaching, thought of Nirvana as peace and rest. They thought, “Going to Nirvana is the greatest! Ahhh!!! There is no trouble there at all. No affliction. No gossip.” So those of the Three Storehouse Teaching really liked the idea of Nirvana. They wished to cross over into extinction. They viewed the Three Realms and wanted to be Solitarily Enlightened Ones. This is like a certain type of person who feels that everyone else is wrong, and he alone is right. He wants to go off and live somewhere all by himself thinking that would be the most wonderful. He feels it is just too much trouble to be around people.

Bodhisattvas of the Separate Teaching are not like that. They think, “You are not very good? I will draw closer to you. I will not leave you. I specialize in crossing over those who do not believe in Buddhism. If you do not believe in Buddhism, I will influence you somehow to bring forth the Bodhi mind.” This is the state of a Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattvas and those of the Two Vehicles are direct opposites. Bodhisattvas are like fathers who are out looking for their children, traveling across a very dangerous road. Suddenly they come to a very dangerous city. One foot is inside the dangerous city, and the other is outside. They are well aware that it is a very dangerous city. V-e-r-y dangerous! But when they think of their children they forget the danger. They go right into the dangerous city after them. This is the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas making vows to come into the world to save living beings. The Bodhisattva, keeping a few of his old habits—not cutting them all off yet--goes into birth and death and does not certify to the doctrine of true emptiness.

The Separate Teaching is the Prajna Period. The Storehouse Teaching is the Agama Period. The Pervasive Teaching is the Vaipulya Period. The Perfect Teaching is the Lotus Flower-Nirvana Period. The Separate Teaching calls the City “The so-called City, which is Like an Illusion”. It is an unreal city used to guard against dangers. The city is used as an expedient to cut off the delusions of views and thought. Although the delusions of views and thought have been cut off, they do not claim this is the highest state. Therefore, they call it the “so-called City”.

They do not claim it is the ultimate state. Those of the Two Vehicles go ahead and claim that their Nirvana is the highest state when actually it is not at all ultimate. Bodhisattvas purify the Buddhalands, roam and play among human beings, teaching and transforming living beings. They realize it is not the ultimate Dharma. Those of the Perfect Teaching, the Lotus Flower-Nirvana Period, know that originally there are no thieves. Since there are no thieves, they do not want a city, so they call the city they have a “ Transformed City”, an unreal city. This chapter takes its title from the doctrine of the Perfect Teaching. Thus, it is called “The Analogy of the Transformed City”.

Those of the Three Storehouse and the Pervasive Teachings think that their Nirvana is ultimate. They do not think of it as a Transformed City. Those are the Two Vehicles for you. Those of the Separate Teaching would not say it is ultimate and they would not admit that it is just a transformation. That is the state of the Bodhisattva. Those of the Perfect Teaching, the state of the Buddha, say it is not ultimate; it is a transformed city.

One may also analyze it from the point of view of the Four Siddhantas, or Four Methods by which the Buddha bestowed the teaching, the first being: 1) Mundane, or ordinary methods of giving: originally, the Transformed City was not there. But, suddenly it appeared, and the people who saw it were happy. 2) Individual treatment: when certain individuals gained understanding and rest through the analogy. 3) Diagnosing and treating moral diseases: the City guards against thieves and invaders. 4) Primary truth: in the end, when they gain real extinction.

The Four Siddhantas explained according to the Buddha’s response body: 1) The Buddha used the provisional expedient Dharma to set up the City. This is the transforming of the mundane, or ordinary. 2) Living beings brought forth goodness in small measure and this is transforming through individual treatment. 3) Getting rid of the delusions of views and thought is transformation through diagnoses and treatment of moral diseases. 4) In the end, they attain the Great Vehicle and the Great Fruit. This is transformation according to the primary truth.

The Buddha scolded those of the Small Vehicle who held to their one-sided emptiness. He told those of the Small Vehicle that they were withered sprouts and sterile seeds, utterly useless. What is to be done? Then he praised the Great Vehicle. He said it was the most wonderful Buddhadharma. It is the unsurpassed, profound, subtle, wonderful Dharma. He praised the Perfect Teaching as the most wonderful, and he spoke The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. The doctrine set forth in this Sutra is all perfectly fused without obstruction. It is all inconceivable.

Someone might wonder why, if this Sutra is the Real Teaching, this chapter is not called “Former Causes and Conditions”, instead of “ Transformation City,” which is Provisional?

That is a good question. The first part of this chapter does discuss former causes and conditions from many eons back. Later in the chapter, the analogy of the Transformed City is raised. Bringing up the Transformed City is actually a revelation of the Real Teaching. Those of the Two Vehicles insisted on staying in samadhi all day and refused to move. They stayed in their Nirvana, thinking it very peaceful. They thought they had done what they had to do, finished their great work, and that they would undergo no further becoming. They got stuck in Nirvana and did not make progress in their cultivation. They were attached to Nirvana. Their provisional Dharma was revealed, and they were told it was not right to stay there. They should go forward. That was the purpose of the Transformed City.

At all times, in all places, once you have heard the Buddhadharma, you should not form an attachment to it. Get rid of your attachments.

**Sutra:**

**The Buddha told the Bhikshus, “long ago, past limitless, boundless, inconceivable, asamkheyaeons, there was a Buddha called Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory, Thus Come One, One Worthy of Offerings, One of Proper and Universal Knowledge, One Whose Understanding and Conduct are Complete, A Well-gone One, One Who Understands the World, Unsurpassed Lord, Taming and Regulating Hero, Teacher of Gods and Humans, Buddha, World Honored One. His country was named “ Good City,” and his eon was named “Great Mark”. O Bhikshus, it has been a great, long time since that Buddha passed into extinction.**Outline:

E3. The circuit of speaking the causes and conditions.
F1. Speaking proper of causes and conditions.
G1. Showing his far-reaching knowledge and vision.
H1. Prose.
I1. Visible phenomena.

**Commentary:**

**The Buddha told the Bhikshus,** Shakyamuni Buddha said to the Bhikshus. This sentence was added by Ananda when he compiled the Sutras. **Long ago, past limitless, boundless, inconceivable, asamkheyaeons, there was a Buddha called Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory.** He had great spiritual penetrations and his wisdom was victorious over all. So I have told you that where you go you must be victorious. **Thus Come One, One Worthy of Offerings** from gods and humans, **One of Proper and Universal Knowledge, One Whose Understanding and Conduct are Complete, A Well-gone One, One Who Understands the World.** He has gone to the best place. He is the smartest person in the world. **Unsurpassed Lord,** there is no one higher than he.

In the heavens and below, there is no one like the Buddha.
In the ten direction worlds, he is beyond compare.
Everything in the world--I have seen it all,
And there is nothing that can compare with the Buddha.

**Taming and Regulating Hero.** He can subdue all in the Three Realms. **Teacher of Gods and Humans, Buddha,** greatly enlightened one, **World Honored One**, revered by those in and those beyond the world. Those are the Buddha’s ten titles. **His country was named “ Good City”,** because all the citizens were good, not evil **and his eon was named “Great Mark”. O Bhikshus, it has been a great, long time since that Buddha passed into extinction.** How long has it been? He now gives us an analogy:

**Sutra:**

**Suppose someone were to grind all the earth in the three thousand great thousand worlds into ink powder and then suppose he passed through a thousand lands to the east and then dropped a particle the size of a mote of dust, and then passing through another thousand lands deposited another mote, and continued to do this until all the ink made of earth was exhausted. What do you think? Could a mathematician or his disciple ever reach the limit of the lands and know their number?

“No, World Honored One.”

“O Bhikshus, if the lands this person had passed through, whether or not he set down a particle in them, were all grounded into dust, and if each dust mote was equal to an eon, then the time since that Buddha passed into extinction would exceed their number by limitless, boundless, hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of asamkheya eons.”**

Outline:

I2. Showing how long it was.

**Commentary:**

**Suppose someone were to grind all the earth in the three thousand great thousand worlds into ink powder,** finer than flour, **and then suppose he passed through a thousand lands to the east and then dropped a particle the size of a mote of dust, and then passing through another thousand lands deposited another mote, and continued to do this until all the ink made of earth was exhausted. What do you think? Could a mathematician or his disciple ever reach the limit of the lands and know their number?**

**“No, World Honored One,”** all the Bhikshus answer.

**O Bhikshus, if the lands this person had passed through, whether or not he set down a particle in them, were all grounded into dust, and if each dust mote was equal to an eon, then the time since that Buddha passed into extinction would exceed their number by limitless, boundless, hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of asamkheya eons.**The text says, “Suppose someone were to grind all the earth in the three thousand worlds into ink powder.” Now, just by looking at the ink someone grinds, you can tell whether his mind is good or bad. If he rubs the stone at an angle, his mind is not straight, not good. If, when he writes, he makes a big mess, then his mind is “sick.” You can tell what a person is like by how they grind their ink. In China, they say, “Grind the ink lightly and hold the brush firmly.” That is the doctrine of grounding ink.

In the Tang Dynasty there was Li Tai Bai, a poet from Si Chuan. It is said that his grandfather is Li Ning. Historical texts say that there was a general during the Han Dynasty whose name was Li Ning. He had surrendered to the Huns, which are the present day Mongolians. He was very intelligent, but he made a lot of trouble with his gossip. He knew Gong-fu and swordsmanship by the time he was fifteen and was an accomplished writer by the time he was thirty. Before he was thirty he went up for the Imperial Examination.

There was a prominent official, He Zhi Zhang, who was very fond of him. He told Li Tai Bai, “You are sure to take first place. I will speak on your behalf.” Now, the heads of the examining board at that time were Yang Guo Zhong, the elder brother of Yang Gui Fei, and Gao Li Shi, an eunuch. He Zhi Zhang spoke to them saying, “Li Tai Bai really writes extremely well. He should get the top place.” When the two of them heard this, they were outraged. “You took money from Li Tai Bai as a bribe. We should get a cut! Then we will talk about who gets first place! A thousand or two pounds of gold…do you think you can come here and pull it off with just your eloquence? Ridiculous.” They thought that He Zhi Zhang had received a bribe and withheld their share. They were very upset. When it came time to draw straws for writing an article Li Tai Bai got to draw first. He felt sure that the top place was his and he felt great. When Yang Guo Zhong saw what he wrote he said, “With your talent, you are qualified only to grind ink for me! You are terrible.” When Gao Li Shi heard this, he said, “Grind ink? He is not good enough to help me put on my shoes!” Li Tai Bai was so enraged he just stammered, “All right, fine. See you later.” and walked away, without first place, needless to say. Feeling as if he had really been wronged, he started drinking. He would drink away his sorrows all day long.

Li Tai Bai wrote a hundred poems with one bottle of wine.
He slept in the wine shops of Chang An.
When the Emperor called, he would not get on the boat;
He said he was a wine immortal.

From this we can see that in this world, we should take care not to make anyone too angry at us. If you get someone too angry at you, you may have to undergo the retribution at any time. Having been insulted so deeply by Yang Guo Zhong and Gao Li Shi, Li Tai Bai vowed to get revenge when the chance came. But what chance would he ever get? He was not an official or anybody important. How would he get his revenge? A chance did come. Not long after the test, a letter came for the Emperor from Korea, which was written in Korean. Since there was little cultural exchange between countries at that time there were very few people in China who could read the new Korean language. There was not anybody, in fact! The Koreans did this on purpose, to show off to the great country of China that they could not even read that small country’s writing. This would give the Koreans a reason to look down upon the Chinese. This was a switch, because most countries played up to China. Anyway, when the Emperor got the letter he gave it to his officials for a translation but no one could read it. They all had their Ph.D. in this and that, but they could not read the letter. The Emperor made it known that anyone who could read the letter would be appointed to a high government position, but still, no one could read it. Li Tai Bai was still staying at He Zhi Zhang’s house. When He Zhi Zhang came home with his eyebrows knitted together in worry, Li Tai Bai asked his friend, “Why are you so worried?”

He Zhi Zhang said, “The Koreans have challenged China. They wrote us a letter which no one can read. It is in Korean. If we cannot even read it, we will really lose face.”

Li Tai Bai said, “Can I take a look at it?”

“You know Korean?”

“Sure,” smiled Li Tai Bai, “no problem.”

“I will tell the Emperor!” said He Zhi Zhang, and the next day he did.

Emperor Tai Zong of the Tang Dynasty said, “Well, bring him here! We are looking for just such a person! Why didn’t this person take part in the Imperial Examination?”

“He did,” said He Zhi Zhang, “but Yang Guo Zhong and Gao Li Shi refused to give him any recognition.”

Li Tai Bai came before the Emperor and agreed to read the letter and write a reply. “I have one condition, however,” said Li Tai Bai. “You must ask the Korean envoy to come in person and watch me read the letter and wait for the reply. That will prove to him that we, in China, have geniuses among us.”

“Of course,” the Emperor agreed. “And another thing,” said Li Tai Bai, “after the shabby treatment I got at the examination, I want a special favor.”

“Anything you want!” said the Emperor anxiously.

“While I am doing this, I want Yang Guo Zhong to grind my ink for me and Gao Li Shi to put my shoes on me. When the Koreans see this, they would not know what to think. They will assume I am a great talent, and they will thereby respect the country.”

“Fine! Fine! This is a special circumstance. That is a good idea,” said the Emperor, and he sent for the two officials. Yang Guo Zhong was the minister at the time. “Yang Guo Zhong,” he said, “this is our highest scholar here. You should grind some ink for him.” Yang Guo Zhong did not like the idea, but he had no choice. It was a command from the Emperor. He had said that Li Tai Bai was only good enough to grind his ink, and now he was being forced to grind ink for Li Tai Bai!

Gao Li Shi had just been ordered to remove Li Tai Bai’s shoes. Seeing this, the envoy thought, “How can Li Tai Bai use such a high official as a servant?” Li Tai Bai asked for some wine, and when he was done drinking, he read the letter and translated it into Chinese for the Emperor. The Korean envoy was amazed. “There are some real talents in China still,” he thought. “We better not look down on China.”

Li Tai Bai, by this time, roaring drunk, then wrote a reply and dismissed the envoy. So that is my story about grinding ink.

**Sutra:**
**Using the power of the Thus Come One’s knowledge and vision, I behold that time in the distant past as if it were today.**
Outline:

I3. Conclusion: Seeing into the past as if it were the present.
 **Commentary:**

**Using the power of the Thus Come One,** the Buddha’s, **knowledge and vision, I,** Shakyamuni Buddha, see into **that time in the distant past as if it were today.** It does not seem too long ago.

**Sutra:**

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

**“I recall that in a past age,Limitless, boundless eons ago, There was a Buddha, doubly honored,By the name of Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory.”**

Outline:
H2. Verse.
I1. Verses about phenomena seen.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, the World Honored One,** Shakyamuni Buddha, **wishing to restate his meaning, spoke verses, saying, I recall that in a past age,** I remember that in the past, **limitless, boundless eons ago.** How long ago? A very long time. **There was a Buddha, doubly honored.** He had both blessings and wisdom, thus he was doubly honored. **By the name of Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory.** He had great spiritual penetrations and great wisdom, which were supreme over all.

**Sutra:**

**Suppose a person groundAll of the earth that there was In three thousand great thousand lands Entirely into ink powder; And then suppose he passed through a thousand lands, And then let fall one particle of it, Continuing to drop particles in this way Until all the ink particles were gone.Suppose all of the countries he passed through,Whether he dropped particles in them or not,Again were completely grounded into dust motes, And each dust mote was an eon; These grains of dust would in numberBe exceeded by the number of eonsSince that Buddha has passed into extinction;It has been limitless eons such as this.**

Outline:

I2. Analogy to clarify the distant past.

**Commentary:**

**Suppose a person ground all of the earth that there was in three thousand great thousand lands entirely into ink powder; and then suppose he passed through a thousand lands, and then let fall one particle of it, continuing to drop particles in this way until all the ink particles were gone.** The person passes through a thousand lands and then drops one particle; then he passes through another thousand lands and drops yet another particle, and so on until all the ink is gone. **Suppose all of the countries he passed through, whether he dropped particles in them or not, again were completely grounded into dust motes, and each dust mote was an eon; these grains of dust would in number be exceeded by the number of eons since that Buddha has passed into extinction.** The number of eons since the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory entered extinction exceeds the number of dust motes. **It has been limitless eons such as this.**

**Sutra:**

**The Thus Come One, with unobstructed wisdom,Knows of that Buddha’s extinction,And of his Hearers and Bodhisattvas, As if seeing his extinction now.Bhikshus, you should know The Buddha’s wisdom is pure, subtle, and wondrous;Without outflows and without obstructions It penetrates limitless eons.**

Outline:

I3. Seeing the past as if the present.
 **Commentary:**

**The Thus Come One, with unobstructed wisdom, knows of that Buddha’s extinction,** of the extinction of the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory, **and of his Hearers and Bodhisattvas, as if seeing his extinction now.** Although it was so long ago, he can see it as if it were happening right now. **Bhikshus, you should know the Buddha’s wisdom is pure, subtle, and wondrous; without outflows and without obstructions, it penetrates limitless eons.** It penetrates through those limitless, boundless eons.

**Sutra:**

**The Buddha told the Bhikshus, “The Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory had a life span of five hundred forty myriads of millions of nayutas of eons.**
Outline:

G2. Past causes and conditions.
H1. Expanded narration.
I1. Source of conditions.
J1. Distant conditions.
K1. Great Penetrating Wisdom
L1. Vast length of Bodhisattva’s life span.

**Sutra:**

**When this Buddha was seated on the Bodhimanda, having destroyed the troops of Mara, although he was on the point of attaining anuttarasamyaksambodhi, still the Buddhadharma did not appear before him. So it was for one minor eon and then onwards to ten minor eons that he sat in the lotus posture, body and mind unmoving, and yet the Buddhadharma still did not appear before him.**

**Thereupon, the gods of the Triyastrimsha Heaven, spread out for the Buddha, under a Bodhi tree, a lion throne one yojana in height; on that throne the Buddha was to attain anuttarasamyaksambodhi. Just as he sat down upon that throne, the Kings of the Brahma Heavens rained down heavenly flowers over a distance of one hundred yojanas.**

**A fragrant wind from time to time swept away the withered flowers as fresh ones rained down. This continued without interruption for a full ten minor eons as an offering to the Buddha, the rain of these flowers continuing right up until his extinction. In the same way the gods of the four heavenly Kings constantly played heavenly drums as an offering to that Buddha and the other gods made heavenly instrumental music for a full ten minor eons, right up until his extinction.**
Outline:

L2. What happened before he realized the Way.

**Commentary:**

**When this Buddha was seated on the Bodhimanda, having destroyed the troops of Mara,** when he went to cultivate and destroy the hordes of demons. When people cultivate, right before they attain the Way, demons come to test them. Do you know how the Buddha became a Buddha? By passing his tests with demons. A demon manifested a bevy of beautiful women to test the Buddha. Ordinarily in cultivation one may not have much desire, but right before one accomplishes the Way the big test comes. The heavenly demons came to destroy the Buddha’s Way karma. If the Buddha had even a tiny bit of greed for sex, he would not have become a Buddha. Since he did not, he did. Basically, the women that the demon sent were very beautiful, but the Buddha said, “You may be beautiful now but in thirty, forty, or fifty years, you will be old, wrinkled, and ugly. You are just stinking skin bags filled with oozing filth! So much for all your beauty! Hah!” When the demon women heard this, they knew that they could not disturb his cultivation. They saw their faces change into the faces of old ladies with wrinkled skin bags under their eyes. It was horrible! How could such ugly creatures disturb the Buddha? So they ran off.

All Buddhas go through pretty much the same testing. So this Buddha, having destroyed the troops of Mara, **although he was on the point of attaining anuttarasamyaksambodhi,** enlightenment, **still the Buddhadharma did not appear before him** and he was not able to certify to the Buddha fruit. **So it was for one minor eon.** An eon is 396,000 years. A thousand of these is a minor eon. One of my disciples was complaining that she had been studying the Buddhadharma now for two years and still had not attained anything! In the larger scheme of things, two years is like one minute! It is not a long time. This Buddha sat for one minor aeon **and then onwards to ten minor eons that he sat in the lotus posture, body and mind unmoving.** He did not wriggle around. What is even more difficult, his mind did not even give rise to false thinking. **And yet the Buddhadharma still did not appear before him.** After ten minor eons, he still had not become enlightened and he still had not attained the fruit.

**Thereupon, the gods of the Triyastrimsha Heaven, spread out for the Buddha, under a Bodhi tree, a lion throne one yojana in height.** Let us say it was a small yojana, that is, forty miles high. **On that throne the Buddha was to attain anuttarasamyaksambodhi,** the Buddha-fruit. **Just as he sat down upon that throne, the Kings of the Brahma Heavens rained down heavenly flowers over a distance of one hundred yojanas,** four thousand miles. **A fragrant wind from time to time swept away the withered flowers as fresh ones rained down.** As soon as the petals withered, the breeze blew them away and then new ones rained down. **This continued without interruption for a full ten minor eons as an offering to the Buddha, the rain of these flowers continuing right up until his extinction. In the same way the gods of the four heavenly Kings constantly played heavenly drums as an offering to that Buddha and the other gods made heavenly instrumental music for a full ten minor eons, right up until his extinction.**

**Sutra:**

**Bhikshus, the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory passed through ten minor eons before the Buddhadharma finally manifested before him and he attained anuttarasamyaksambodhi.**
Outline:

L3. Realizing the Way.

**Commentary:**

Shakyamuni Buddha told all the great **Bhikshus, the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory passed through ten minor eons before the Buddhadharma finally manifested before him and he attained anuttarasamyaksambodhi.** The Buddhadharma here refers to enlightenment to the Way, to the attainment of Bodhi, and certifying to the fruit. This is the eleventh minor eon because there was one eon before he underwent the ten minor eons as the text stated.

**Sutra:**

**Before that Buddha left home he had sixteen sons, the first of whom was named Accumulation of Knowledge. Each of them had a variety of precious, unusual fine toys. When they heard that their father had realized anuttarasamyaksambodhi they all cast aside these things they valued and went before the Buddha, escorted by their weeping mothers. Their grandfather, a Wheel-Turning Sage King, together with a hundred great ministers and with hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of citizens all surrounded them and accompanied them to the Bodhimanda, all wishing to draw near to the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory, to make offerings to him, to honor, revere and praise him. When they arrived, they bowed with their head at his feet, and having circumambulated him, they singlemindedly joined their palms, respectfully gazed upward at the World Honored One, and uttered these verses:**

**“World Honored One of great and awesome virtue,For the sake of crossing over living beings After limitless millions of eons, You accomplished Buddhahood,And perfected all your vows;Unsurpassed is our good fortune.Very rare you are, World Honored One,In one sitting, passing through ten minor eons,With body, hands, and feet, Still, secure, and unmoving.Your mind, ever tranquil, Never knows distraction.Ultimate, your eternal extinction,As you dwell firmly in the non-outflow Dharma.Now we see the World Honored OneSerenely realize the Buddha Path; We all gain good benefitAnd proclaim our delight and great joy.Living beings, ever tormented by suffering,Blind, and without a guide,Fail to recognize the Path which ends that pain,And do not know to seek their liberation.During the long night the evil destinies increase,While the hosts of gods are reduced in number; From darkness they proceed into darkness,Never hearing the Buddha’s name.Now, the Buddha’s gained the utmost Peace, rest, the non-outflow way;And we, and all the gods,To attain the greatest benefitTherefore bow our heads And return our lives to the Unsurpassed Honored One.”**

Outline:

L4. Offerings made to him by his retinue after he realized the Way.

**Commentary:**

**Before that Buddha left home he had sixteen sons, the first of whom was named Accumulation of Knowledge.** They had accumulated all kinds of merit and virtue through their wisdom, and so they got to be children of the Buddha. **Each of them had a variety of precious, unusual fine toys.** Their grandfather had been a wheel-turning sage king and had blessings as vast as all under heaven. So, the children had some very precious, unusual, expensive toys. **When they heard that their father had realized anuttarasamyaksambodhi,** had become a Buddha, **they all cast aside these things they valued** --they put their toys aside--**and went before the Buddha,** to the Bodhi tree, where the Buddha had attained enlightenment. **Escorted by their weeping mothers.** Their mothers, crying and sniffling, took them there.

They had been the Buddha’s wives before he left home; now, their only recourse was to cry. They cried over every little thing. The children wanted to go with their father; they did not want to stay with their mothers.

**Their grandfather,** their father’s father--**a Wheel-Turning Sage King, together with a hundred great ministers,** who were very close to the Sage King, **and with hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of citizens all surrounded them and accompanied them to the Bodhimanda,** where the Buddha cultivated the Way, **all wishing to draw near to the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory, to make offerings to him, to honor, revere and praise him. When they arrived, they bowed with their head at his feet.** This means that they made a full “five-point” prostration, that is, they bowed with their head, their two arms, and their two legs touching the ground. When they bowed down they turned their palms upward as if the Buddha might stand on the palms of their hands. This is called “vowing to receive the Buddha **and having circumambulated him,** three times to the right, **they singlemindedly joined their palms, respectfully gazed upward at the World Honored One,** unblinkingly.

They gazed upward because he was sitting up very high; you remember his lion throne was one yojana tall.

Then the entire multitude **uttered these verses:

World Honored One of great and awesome virtue,** the Buddha is honored both in and beyond the world. **For the sake of crossing over living beings.** Why did you decide to become a Buddha? Because you wanted to save living beings. **After limitless millions of eons, you accomplished Buddhahood, and perfected all your vows.** So those who study the Buddhadharma must make vows. The best day to make vows is on the anniversary of Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment, that is, on the eighth day of the twelfth month (lunar calendar). The Buddhas realized Buddhahood through their vows. We want to cultivate; why is it we are unable to endure suffering and unable to be vigorous? We cultivate for two and a half days, but by the time the third day rolls around, we get lazy. The reason for this is because we have not made vows. We insist on being selfish and seeking our own benefit. We tend towards the Small Vehicle and we think like Arhats. “I am going to take care of myself, and that is it. If I make it, that is great, but I am not going to worry about anybody else. I do not care if anybody else cultivates or not. Every move I make is for my own benefit, not for living beings.” Very independent. Hah! This is because one has not made vows. So, I hope you do make vows.

Vows are very important. But, you cannot make someone else’s vows. You cannot say, “I will make Kuan Yin Bodhisattva’s ten vows, or Universal Worthy Bodhisattva’s Ten Vows, Amitabha’s Forty-eight vows, or Medicine Master’s twelve vows.” Those are their vows. You cannot just copy them. You must make your own vows. You could make vows even greater than Amitabha Buddha or Kuan Yin Bodhisattva, but they must be your own. You are not them!

“Well,” you might argue, “suppose I am a transformation of Amitabha Buddha? What is wrong with making his vows then?”

Even if you are, you are still just a transformation; you are not the original. You have to make new vows. It is something else. Perhaps you were railroad tracks, and now you have turned into a train. You cannot be railroad tracks again, not even if you want to. I would not argue with you about whether or not you are Amitabha Buddha’s transformation body, but you still need to make brand new vows, not old ones. There are some old vows which everyone can make; they are standard vows that every Bodhisattva makes, and that is all right:

I vow to save the boundless numbers of beings.
I vow to cut off the inexhaustible afflictions.
I vow to study the endless Dharma doors.
I vow to realize the supreme Buddha Way.

When Amitabha Buddha was on the causal ground, he was a Bhikshu by the name of Fa Zang (Dharmakara). He made forty-eight vows which he used to cultivate with in every lifetime. He made these vows in every life for who knows how many great eons before he became a Buddha and created the Land of Ultimate bliss. One should make vows right at the beginning when you start cultivating. Even if you are an old-timer and have been cultivating for quite a while, you should make solid vows. Perhaps some of you have been planting Buddha-seeds throughout many lifetimes, many eons, even, and now as a result you have encountered this opportunity. You are able to put all of your energy into practicing the Buddhadharma.

So, write out your vows. You can write them just how you want them. Perhaps; #1: I vow to save all ants. #2. I vow to save all mosquitoes. #3. I vow to save all hopeless cases. Of course, I am joking. But, one of my disciples did make a vow to become a Buddha in the northern continent of Uttarakuru. Why did he do this? Because there are no Buddhas there right now, he will be worshipped exclusively for sure! Not much competition! I was quite pleased with this vow; it is very special, so I made a vow that I would guarantee that he fulfills that vow. Everything in the world can change. There is nothing fixed. If someone makes a vow to go somewhere and become a Buddha, a Buddha will, in the future, appear in that place. No one ever made a vow to become a Buddha in Uttarakuru before, so there is no Buddhadharma there right now.

Once you have made the vow, then even if you would like to slack off on your cultivation, you would not dare, because you made a vow to cultivate! Vows are extremely important.

**Unsurpassed is our good fortune.** This is fortunate for us. How? Our good fortune is unsurpassed in that there is nothing more noble than the Buddha. The Buddha is unsurpassed and most lofty. **Very rare you are.** It is difficult to encounter the Buddha, **World Honored One, in one sitting, passing through ten minor eons, with body, hands, and feet, still, secure, and unmoving.** This praises the Buddha’s samadhi in its physical aspect. **Your mind, ever tranquil, never knows distraction.** This praises the Buddha’s samadhi in its mental aspect. His mind is free of defilement, and so he is always content and tranquil. **Ultimate, your eternal extinction, as you dwell firmly in the non-outflow Dharma.**

The Buddha has severed forever the very roots of delusion and ignorance and certified to the great extinction. **Now we see the World Honored One serenely realize the Buddha Path; we all gain good benefit and proclaim our delight and great joy. Living beings, ever tormented by suffering, blind, and without a guide, fail to recognize the Path which ends that pain, and do not know to seek their liberation.** In their confusion, living beings become bound by suffering. They are as if blind and without a guide. They do not recognize the path which leads to the ultimate end of suffering. They do not know enough to seek to escape.

**During the long night the evil destinies increase, while the hosts of gods are reduced in number.** Beings fall and are reborn in lower destinies. **From darkness they proceed into darkness, never hearing the Buddha’s name.** With their darkened minds, they create dark karma and receive retribution.

**Now, the Buddha’s gained the utmost peace, rest, the non-outflow way.** Now the Buddha has attained the supreme, peaceful, quiescent, non-outflow Path of the Sages. **And we, and all the gods, to attain the greatest benefit therefore bow our heads and return our lives to the Unsurpassed Honored One.**After you Take refuge and start to cultivate the Way, you should get rid of your attachment to the mark of a self. If you do not, you will have not just one kind of trouble, but many, many kinds. If you can get rid of the mark of a self, you will have no trouble at all. It is easy to say, “no self.” It’s very hard to do. So, you must give up your body, mind, and life itself to the Buddha in refuge. Life itself; that is the most important thing we each possess. If you give your life up to the Buddha, your own personal happiness or sorrow, or whatever, will cease to be important. We suffer because we are supposed to suffer, and we enjoy happiness as it is due. But do not hold on to the idea of a “self.” This is very important in your cultivation.

**Sutra:**

**When the sixteen sons had finished praising the Buddha, they then entreated him to turn the Dharma-wheel, saying, “World Honored One, speak the Dharma and bring us peace, show us pity, and benefit both gods and humans.” Then they spoke more verses saying:**

***“O Hero of the world, incomparable
Adorned with a hundred blessings,
And having attained unsurpassed wisdom,
Pray speak for the sake of this world
To cross over and liberate us and
All classes of living beings as well.
And lead us to attain that wisdom,
Demonstrate it: speak it in detail
For, if we can attain Buddhahood,
Other living beings can do the same.
The World Honored One knows the profound thoughts
Within the minds of living beings;
He knows the ways on which they walk
And the strength of their wisdom,
The pleasures and the blessings they have cultivated,
And all the deeds done in former lives.
The World Honored One, knowing all of this,
Should turn the unsurpassed wheel!”***

Outline:

L5. The request to turn the Dharma-wheel.

**Commentary:**

**When the sixteen sons had finished praising the Buddha, they then entreated him to turn the Dharma-wheel, saying. A**fter they had praised the Great Penetration Victory Buddha, they asked him to speak the Dharma. The Buddha will not speak the Dharma unless requested to do so.

The Dharma does not arise of itself;
It appears in response to the situation.
The Way is not practiced in a vacuum;
It responds in accord with conditions.

Now, before the Dharma lecture, someone always requests the Dharma. To request the Dharma is to save living beings. If you cannot speak the Dharma yourself, then you ask someone else to do so. In China, when a patron knows a certain Dharma Master is skilled at lecturing on the Dharma, he will request him to lecture on a Sutra and give him a lot of money. In this way, the patron participates in the merit and virtue generated from the lecturing of the Sutra.

You may wonder, if the Dharma Master is lecturing on the Sutra, how can the merit and virtue go to the patron? It is because of the patron’s sincerity in requesting the Dharma. He requests it not just for himself, but for living beings, and so he gains much merit. Not only does he gain merit but he receives the reward of intelligence. If you want to be intelligent then read more Sutras, recite more Sutras, and request that people lecture on the Sutras more often. People who are intelligent now did these things in the past. Those who request the Dharma each day will, in the future certainly be intelligent and give rise to Prajna wisdom. The sixteen sons asked the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory to turn the Dharma-wheel.

What is meant by “turning the great Dharma-wheel”? Lecturing on the Sutras and speaking the Dharma is turning the Dharma-wheel. Any kind of work that you do within Buddhism can be considered turning the great Dharma-wheel. There are many different ways to turn the Dharma-wheel. Protecting the Triple Jewel is one; praising the Triple Jewel is another; propagating the Dharma is another. Telling people of the benefits of believing in the Buddha is another.

Let us say a situation arose where some people were trying to ruin a Dharma Master’s reputation. They are jealous of that Dharma Master and want to break up his Bodhimanda. In this case you should speak up and say, “That is wrong. These people are just creating rumors. They are the ones who are destroying the Triple Jewel.”

Those people may make up stories and start rumors circulating, saying things like, “That Dharma Master eats meat,” when they have never seen him eat meat at all. If they had seen him eating meat, that is one thing, but to fabricate stories is just being malicious. They may say, “He says he eats one meal a day, but he sneaks food all the time. He is no vegetarian. When no one is around, he steals anything he can get, whether it is pork, beef, or lamb chops.” You should speak up and protect the Triple Jewel and expose these people as gossip-mongers. That, too, is protecting the Triple Jewel. In general, translating Sutras, lecturing on the Sutras, printing Sutras, running the tape recorder, all turn the Dharma-wheel.

They said, **“World Honored One, speak the Dharma and bring us peace, show us pity, and benefit both gods and humans.” Then they spoke more verses saying:**

**O Hero of the world, incomparable, adorned with a hundred blessings.** The Buddha is a great hero in the world, an unsurpassed lord. There is no one who can compare to the Buddha. He is peerless. The Buddha cultivated blessings and wisdom for three great asankheya eons, and for a hundred eons he perfected the fine marks. **And having attained unsurpassed wisdom.** The Buddha is the greatly enlightened one. The greatly enlightened one is someone with great intelligence, which is supreme wisdom. **Pray speak for the sake of this world to cross over and liberate us and** so that we may leave suffering and attain bliss--**all classes of living beings as well.** All the twelve categories of living beings--**demonstrate it: speak it in detail and lead us to attain that wisdom,** so all living beings can attain the Buddha’s wisdom. **For, if we can attain Buddhahood, other living beings can do the same.** If we, now, can become Buddhas, then all living beings can become Buddhas.

**The World Honored One knows the profound thoughts within the minds of living beings; he knows the ways on which they walk.** He knows what their hopes and wishes are. He knows the practices of living beings and Buddhas. **And the strength of their wisdom,** the scope of their intelligence and the power of the Buddha’s wisdom. **The pleasures and the blessings they have cultivated, and all the deeds done in former lives,** the workings of cause and effect. **The World Honored One, knowing all of this, should turn the unsurpassed wheel!** It is our fervent prayer that the World Honored One will turn the Dharma-wheel and save living beings, so they may all realize the Buddha Way.

We are all gathered here to investigate the Buddhadharma, and we should put into practice the knowledge that we gained. If you understand a principle, do not fail to apply it. If you know and do not practice, that is worse than not knowing in the first place. If you do not know about cultivating, and so you do not cultivate, that is one thing. Once you know about the Buddhadharma, you must cultivate it, you must practice very reliably and solidly.

The most important job of a cultivator is to benefit others, to help others. Do not worry about helping yourself. Forget yourself. That is cultivation. It is extremely important not to be jealous or obstructive. You must also sever affliction. If you do not cut off your afflictions, you would not be able to end birth and death. “Cutting off” afflictions really just means to transform them. Transform your afflictions into Bodhi. Turning them into Bodhi, you will always give rise to wisdom, and you would not be stupid. If you have affliction, then you are always stupid and without wisdom. Do not get afflicted over every little thing. Do not be jealous or obstructive. This is crucial. So, everyday we investigate the Buddhadharma, and everyday we must practice it.

You may speak wonderfully, speak just fine;
But if you do not practice it, it is not the Way.

No matter how well you can talk, if you do not actually cultivate you would not be able to realize the Path. There are several people here who are just on the verge of getting enlightened. However, they must cultivate their hearts to benefit others and forget about themselves. Someone is thinking, “Who are they?” Well, if you are wondering who they are, you can be sure they are not you. Besides, you should not ask. You should ask yourself, “When am I going to get enlightened? When am I going to have great wisdom?” You should not ask about other people. I do not know who they are myself. I just said that to be saying it! I am not enlightened myself, so how could I know something like that?

The only thing to do is go ahead and cultivate. First of all, be patient. Be patient in all circumstances. Bear up under poverty. Think: “The poorer I am, the better. It is cleaner that way. Cultivators should be poor. Once you get some money, then the problems arrive.” Once you have got money, then you would not be able to cultivate. Bear with hunger, too. If there is nothing to eat today, do not worry about it. Something will turn up tomorrow. Be patient. If you have no clothing, if you are freezing, bear it. Bear the wind and bear the rain. Bear the hunger, bear the cold. That is your responsibility as a cultivator. You should fear nothing. No matter how hard it is, you must do it. No matter how bitter it is, I must bear it. I will cultivate and fight against the bitterness and the hardships. I will break through all obstacles. Then, once you have gotten through that barrier, you can have success. Otherwise, you would not.

So, every one of you should understand: it is useless just to talk about it. You have to do it. Talking ten feet is not as good as practicing a foot. I hope that all of you will really practice and that you would not indulge in intellectual Chan.

**Sutra:**
**The Buddha, Shakyamuni, told the Bhikshus, “When the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory attained *anuttarasamyaksambodhi,* in each of the ten directions, five hundred myriads of millions of Buddha worlds quaked in six ways. The dark recesses between those lands, that the awesome light of the sun and moon could not illumine then, were brightly lit, and the living beings therein were able to see one another. They all said, “where have all these living beings come from?” Further, in those lands, all the heavenly palaces, up to the Brahma palaces, quaked in six ways. A great light shone everywhere, illumining the entire universe and surpassing the light of the heavens.**

Outline:

K2. Brahma Kings from ten directions request the Dharma.
L1. Awesome light shines and shakes the earth.

**Commentary:**

**The Buddha, Shakyamuni, told the Bhikshus, “When the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory attained *anuttarasamyaksambodhi,*** the utmost right and perfect enlightenment, **in each of the ten directions, five hundred myriads of millions of Buddha worlds quaked in six ways.** The six types of quakings are quaking, roaring, clashing, moving, surging, and rising. We have already talked about the six quakings earlier. **The dark recesses between those lands, that the awesome light of the sun and moon could not illumine then, were brightly lit, and the living beings therein were able to see one another.They all said, “where have all these living beings come from?”** Basically, there were not any living beings in these dark places. Why are there suddenly living beings there now? Actually, they thought there were not any living beings because it was dark, and they could not see them. Now it was light and so they were visible. **Further, in those lands, all the heavenly palaces, up to the Brahma palaces, quaked in six ways. A great light shone everywhere, illumining the entire universe and surpassing the light of the heavens.**

**Sutra:**

**At that time, in five hundred myriads of millions of lands to the east, the Brahma Heaven palaces shone with a light twice that of their usual brightness. Each of the Brahma Heaven Kings had this thought, “now the palaces are brighter than ever before. What is the reason for this manifestation?”**

Outline:

L2. Brahma Kings come to make their request.
M1. East.
N1. Startled by the portents.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, in five hundred myriads of millions of lands to the east, the Brahma Heaven palaces shone with a light twice that of their usual brightness.** All darkness was dispersed. Never had they seen such a dazzling display of light. **Each of the Brahma Heaven Kings had this thought, “now the palaces are brighter than ever before. What is the reason for this manifestation?”**

**Sutra:**

**Then, the Brahma Heaven Kings visited one another and discussed this matter. In the assembly there was one great Brahma Heaven King by the name of Rescuing All, who on behalf of the Brahma hosts spoke verses, saying,**

***“All of our palaces
Are bright as never before;
What is the reason for this?
Let us seek it together.
Is it because a great and virtuous god has been born?
Or because a Buddha has appeared in the world,
That this great light
Shines throughout the ten directions?”***

Outline:

N2. Talking it over among themselves.

**Commentary:**

**Then, the Brahma Heaven Kings visited one another and discussed this matter.** They had a meeting to investigate this question. **In the assembly there was one great Brahma Heaven King by the name of Rescuing All, who on behalf of the Brahma hosts spoke verses, saying, “All of our palaces are bright as never before; what is the reason for this? Let us seek it together.** Let us find out why. **Is it because a great and virtuous god has been born? Or because a Buddha has appeared in the world, that this great light shines throughout the ten directions?”** Such bright light must surely be an auspicious sign. What does it portend?

**Sutra:**

**At that time, the Brahma Heaven Kings from five hundred myriads of millions of lands, together with their palaces, each with sacks filled with heavenly flowers, went to the west to seek out this manifestation. They saw the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory seated on the lion throne beneath the Bodhi tree in the Bodhimanda, revered and circumambulated by gods, dragon kings, *gandharvas*, *kinnaras, mahoragas*, and beings both human and non-human. They saw as well the sixteen sons of the king requesting the Buddha to turn the Dharma-wheel.**
Outline:

N3. Following the light, they see the Buddha.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, the Brahma Heaven Kings from five hundred myriads of millions of lands, together with their palaces.** The gods do not ride, like we do, in buses or airplanes. They ride in their palaces. They can fly through the air, or travel on the ground. They are sort of like celestial Winnebagos, complete with every convenience. Riding in them, they can go everywhere they please. They are even more wonderful than our airplanes. So the great Brahma heaven kings came with their palaces that they lived in. **Each with sacks filled with heavenly flowers, went to the west to seek out this manifestation. They saw the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory seated on the lion throne beneath the Bodhi tree in the Bodhimanda, revered and circumambulated by gods, dragon kings, *gandharvas*, *kinnaras, mahoragas*, and beings both human and non-human.** The gods, dragons, and eightfold division--they were reverently walking around him. **They saw as well the sixteen sons of the king,** the Wheel-turning king, **requesting the Buddha** Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory **to turn the Dharma-wheel.**

**Sutra:**

**Then, the Brahma Heaven Kings bowed with their heads at the Buddha’s feet, circumambulated him a hundred thousand times, and scattered heavenly flowers upon him. The flowers were piled as high as Mount Sumeru, and they offered them as well to the Buddha’s Bodhi tree, which was ten *yojanas* in height. Having made offerings of flowers, each presented his palace to the Buddha, saying, “pray show us pity, and benefit us by accepting and occupying these palaces that we offer you!”

Then the Brahma Heaven Kings, in front of the Buddha, with a single mind and the same voice, spoke verses in praise, saying:**

***“World Honored One, you are very rare,
And difficult to encounter;
Complete with limitless meritorious virtues,
You are able to rescue and protect all creatures.
Great teacher of gods and humans,
You who pity all the world
All beings in the ten directions
Receive your beneficence.
We have come from
Five hundred myriads of millions of lands,
Setting aside the bliss of deep dhyana samadhi,
For the sake of making offerings to the Buddha.
Blessings we’ve gained in former lives
Well ornament our palaces,
Now we offer them to the World Honored One,
Only praying you will show mercy and accept them.”***

Outline:

N4. Offerings of the three karmas.

**Commentary:**

**Then, the Brahma Heaven Kings bowed with their heads at the Buddha’s feet,** in obeisance, **circumambulated him a hundred thousand times, and scattered heavenly flowers upon him;** the flowers they had brought were in cloth bags. **The flowers were piled as high as Mount Sumeru.** “Well,” you might wonder, “if the flowers were that many, how could they all fit in their bags?”

They could even fit Mount Sumeru into their bags. You know why? Because their bags are treasures. They might look like ordinary heavenly-flower carry-alls, but you could even fit the three thousand great thousand worlds into them if you needed to. They are “miraculous.” Our bags can only be stuffed just so full, but their bags always have room for more. That is because they are treasures. Probably, in former existence the bags were cultivators who were greedy for treasures and were always carting flowers and other treasures around, until finally, through the force of their greed, they turned into bags which could carry Mount Sumeru! You should not try to figure these things out with your ordinary, common understanding either, because this is an inconceivable type of state.

“If the Buddha was seated on a lion throne that was one yojana tall, and the flowers were as high as Mount Sumeru, which is many, many yojanas high, then did the flowers smother the Buddha so that he could not even move?” you wonder. “They are not heavy, but in such quantities, I would imagine they would weight quite a bit.”

You are too compassionate, really, worrying about the Buddha. The Buddha does not want you to worry. Mount Sumeru is Mount Sumeru, and the Buddha’s throne is the Buddha’s throne. They do not obstruct each other. All those flowers do not get in the way of the Buddha’s throne, and the Buddha’s throne does not obstruct Mount Sumeru. They have the capacity to accept one another without hindering one another. That is why we say it is wonderful. Do not try to figure it out with your ordinary mind.

**And they offered them as well to the Buddha’s Bodhi tree, which was ten *yojanas* in height.** Not only did they make offerings to the Buddha, but they offered their flowers to the Buddha’s Bodhi tree, as well. **Having made offerings of flowers, each presented his palace to the Buddha, saying, “pray show us pity, and benefit us by accepting and occupying these palaces that we offer you!”** Since they felt that their palaces were the most precious things in the world, and they loved them more than anything else, they gave them to the Buddha.

Sometimes people get very fond of their cars. They may even dream about them at night, dreaming that they give them gas or take care of them. The gods are extremely fond of their palaces. Their palaces can fly, and they can travel by land in them, they can sail through space and ride on the clouds. They are their most prized possessions. Now, having met the Buddha, they give up their most cherished palace-cars, and they say, “Buddha, please have mercy on us. Be compassionate and benefit us by accepting the palaces. Accept the palaces and occupy them.”

**Then the Brahma Heaven Kings, in front of the Buddha, with a single mind and the same voice, spoke verses in praise, saying:** as if singing in unison, they said,

**World Honored One, you are very rare, and difficult to encounter.** It is extremely hard to meet with a Buddha. It is extremely difficult to encounter the Dharma. It is extremely difficult to meet with the Sangha. Now we have met with the Triple Jewel, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, **complete with limitless meritorious virtues.** The Buddha is endowed with limitless virtues--that is how he became a Buddha. Living beings, also, must have limitless virtues to be able to meet the Buddha.

**You are able to rescue and protect all creatures. Great teacher of gods and humans,** a great guiding master among the gods and among people. **You who pity all the world.** You are most compassionate and merciful towards all living beings. **All beings in the ten directions receive your beneficence,** are all benefited by the Buddha.

**We have come from five hundred myriads of millions of lands, setting aside the bliss of deep dhyana Samadhi.** We saw the Buddha’s light, and so we left our attachment to our daily meditation--and it was very blissful, indeed.

Before you have attained the bliss of dhyana samadhi, your cultivation will have its “ups and downs.” And may be a bit haphazard. But once you have attained that bliss, nobody could keep you from cultivating! You are like a child eating candy. He eats a piece and then wants another--and another--and another. When he sees candy, he forgets everything and grabs for it. Cultivators who attain the bliss of dhyana samadhi will want to meditate everyday for sure. They will insist on it. It would not be okay to skip meditation anymore, because they like its flavor. They would rather go without eating than to go without meditating. Although this is not a good analogy, you might even say that it is like being addicted to drugs. If an addict does not get his fix, he starts going through withdrawal. If the cultivator does not get his fix, he does not like it one bit. Before you have gained this bliss, you would not care that much about meditating, but once you have gained it, you will think it is more blissful than absolutely anything else in the world. The gods sit there meditating all day long in dhyana samadhi without getting up. But now, seeing the light and not understanding where it came from, they all set aside the bliss of samadhi. Using their spiritual powers, they went sailing across millions of lands to find its source. **For the sake of making offerings to the Buddha.

Blessings we’ve gained in former lives, well ornament our palaces.** Because of blessings we cultivated in former lives, we now have such fine, beautiful, all-purpose palaces, exquisitely adorned and beautiful. **Now we offer them to the World Honored One,** our most prized possessions, **Only praying you will show mercy and accept them.”**

**Sutra:**

**At that time, the Brahma Heaven Kings, having praised the Buddha, said “We only pray that the World Honored One will turn the Dharma-wheel, crossing over living beings, opening up the way to Nirvana.” Then; all the Brahma Heaven Kings, with one mind and the same voice, proclaimed these verses:**

**“Hero of the world, doubly perfect honored one,We only pray that You will expound and proclaim the Dharma,And through the power of your great compassion and pityCross over suffering and tormented living beings.”**

Outline:

N5. Requesting the turning of the Dharma-wheel.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, the Brahma Heaven Kings, having praised the Buddha, said “We only pray that the World Honored One will turn the Dharma-wheel.”** The Buddha was thinking about taking a rest but living beings would not hear of it! They kept asking him to turn the Dharma-wheel, to go to work. Turning the Dharma-wheel is the Buddha’s work. **Crossing over living beings, opening up the way to Nirvana**, the path of non-production and non-extinction. **Then; all the Brahma Heaven Kings, with one mind and the same voice, proclaimed these verses:

Hero of the world, doubly perfect honored one.** Great hero, both in and beyond the world, you who are complete in both blessings and wisdom, **we only pray that you will expound and proclaim the Dharma, and through the power of your great compassion and pity cross over suffering and tormented living beings.** Through the power of your great kindness bestow happiness upon living beings, and through the power of your great compassion relieve them of their sufferings.

**Sutra:**

**Thereupon, the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory, assented by his silence.**
Outline:

N6. Thus Come One assents by silence.

**Commentary:**

**Thereupon, the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory, assented by his silence.** When the Brahma Heaven Kings came from the east and requested him to speak the Dharma, he assented by keeping silent. By not speaking, he indicated that he would speak Dharma.

**Sutra:**

**Furthermore, O Bhikshus, to the southeast the great Brahma Kings in five hundred myriads of millions of lands, seeing their palaces in dazzling brilliance as never before, jumped for joy, thinking it rare indeed.**
Outline:

M2. Southeast.
N1. Seeing the portents in surprise.

**Commentary:**

**Furthermore, O Bhikshus, to the southeast the great Brahma Kings in five hundred myriads of millions of lands, seeing their palaces in dazzling brilliance as never before, jumped for joy, thinking it rare indeed.** They saw their palaces lit up as never before. They were exceedingly happy. It was something they had never seen before.

**Sutra:**

**They visited one another and discussed this matter. Then, in the assembly, a Brahma Heaven King by the name of Great Compassion, on behalf of the Brahma hosts spoke these verses:**

**“What is the reason for this event?Why has this sign appeared?All of our palaces Are aglow as never before.Has a greatly virtuous god been born?Or has a Buddha appeared in the world?We have never seen such signs before.With one mind we should investigate it,Passing through a thousand myriads of millions of lands,Searching for the light, investigating it together.It must be that a Buddha has appearedTo take across the suffering living beings.”**

Outline:

N2. Talking it over among themselves.

**Commentary:**

**They visited one another and discussed this matter.** They got together and talked it over. **Then, in the assembly, a Brahma Heaven King by the name of Great Compassion, on behalf of the Brahma hosts spoke these verses:**

**What is the reason for this event? Why has this sign appeared? All of our palaces are aglow as never before.** We have never seen such light! **Has a greatly virtuous god been born? Or has a Buddha appeared in the world? We have never seen such signs before. With one mind we should investigate it.** We should concentrate our efforts to figure out where this light is coming from.

**Passing through a thousand myriads of millions of lands, searching for the light, investigating it together. It must be that a Buddha has appeared to take across the suffering living beings,** all suffering, miserable living beings.

**Sutra:**

**At that time, five hundred myriads of millions of Brahma Heaven Kings, together with their palaces, each with sacks filled with heavenly flowers, went to the northwest to seek out this manifestation. They saw the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory seated on the lion throne beneath the Bodhi tree in the Bodhimanda, revered and circumambulated by gods, dragon kings, gandharvas, kinnaras,mahoragas, and beings both human and non-human. They saw, as well, the sixteen sons of the king requesting the Buddha to turn the Dharma-wheel.**
Outline:

N3. Following the light, they see the Buddha.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, five hundred myriads of millions of Brahma Heaven Kings** from the southeast came to bow to the Buddha. It was the same for those from the southeast and the east. **Together with their palaces, each with sacks filled with heavenly flowers.** The gods are fond of flowers, and so they use them to make offerings to the Buddhas throughout the ten directions, putting them in their cloth flower bags. They **went to the northwest to seek out this manifestation. They saw the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory seated on the lion throne beneath the Bodhi tree in the Bodhimanda,** way up in the northwest. **Revered and circumambulated by gods, dragon kings, gandharvas, kinnaras,mahoragas, and beings both human and non-human.** Non-humans include the rest of the sentient beings. **They saw, as well, the sixteen sons of the king requesting the Buddha to turn the Dharma-wheel.**

**Sutra:**

**Then the Brahma Heaven Kings bowed with their heads at the Buddha’s feet, circumambulated him a hundred thousand times, then scattered heavenly flowers upon him. The flowers were piled as high as Mount Sumeru, and they offered them as well to the Buddha’s Bodhi tree. Having made offerings of flowers, each presented his palace to the Buddha saying, “Show us pity and benefit us by accepting and occupying these palaces that we offer you!” Then the Brahma Heaven Kings, before the Buddha, with a single mind and the same voice, spoke verses in praise, saying,**

**“Sagely Lord, king among gods, With the kalavinka sound,To you who pity living beings, We now reverently bow.The World Honored One is most rare,Appearing but once in long ages. One hundred and eighty eons have passedEmpty, without a Buddha.The three evil paths are full.The hosts of gods decrease. Now the Buddha has appeared in the world, To act as eyes for living beings,As a refuge for the world, Rescuing and protecting all creatures, A father for all beings,Pitying and benefiting them.Now, through blessings gained in former lives,We are enabled to meet the World Honored One.”**

Outline:

N4. Three karmas as an offering.

**Commentary:**

**Then** all **the Brahma Heaven Kings bowed** in full prostration, **with their heads at the Buddha’s feet, circumambulated** clockwise around **him a hundred thousand times.** After they stopped circumambulating, they **then scattered heavenly flowers** that they brought **upon him** as an offering. **The flowers were piled as high as Mount Sumeru, and they offered them as well to the Buddha’s Bodhi tree.** They not only made offerings to the Buddha, but also made offerings of flowers to the Bodhi tree. **Having made offerings of flowers, each presented his palace** which he brought along **to the Buddha** Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory **saying, “Show us pity.** We can only ask that the Buddha kindly take pity on us, **and benefit us by accepting and occupying these palaces that we offer you!** The palaces that we offer are our most precious palaces, will the Buddha please accept this offering and live in the palace.**”**

**Then** all **the Brahma Heaven Kings, before the Buddha, with a single mind and the same voice, spoke verses in praise** of the Buddha**, saying Sagely Lord, king among gods, with the kalavinka sound.** The Buddha is called the Sagely Lord, the Sage among Sages, the god among gods. He has the kalavinka sound. In the Amitabha Sutra we read about the kalavinka birds in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Kalavinka is a Sanskrit word that means “fine sounding bird.” Ultimately, how fine they sound you will know when you hear one. You still do not know how fine they sing. Once you get to the Land of Ultimate Bliss, then you will know. The Buddha speaks the Dharma with a sound even finer than that of the kalavinka bird, so the sound of his voice is described as the “kalavinka sound.” **To you who pity living beings.** The Buddha is most compassionate. **We now reverently bow.

The World Honored One is most rare, appearing but once in long ages. One hundred and eighty eons have passed empty, without a Buddha. The three evil paths are full.** The hells, the animal realm, and the realm of the ghosts get increasingly fuller, and **the hosts of gods decrease.** The three evil paths are doing great business! Everyone wants to live in them! On the other hand, the three good paths are going bankrupt.

**Now the Buddha has appeared in the world, to act as eyes for living beings.** Why did everyone end up in the three evil paths? Because they could not tell right from wrong, black from white, good from evil. They had no one to be their guide, “to act as eyes” for them. They were in darkness, running in confusion, running into the three evil paths. Now that the Buddha has appeared in the world, it is as if living beings had eyes. Now, the three evil paths can decrease and the three good paths increase. **As a refuge for the world.** All beings in the world return in refuge to the Buddha and head toward the good Bodhi path.

**Rescuing and protecting all creatures, a father for all beings.** The Buddha cherishes all beings. He is a compassionate father to them. Living beings are like the Buddha’s unfilial children. The more unfilial they are, the harder he works to save them. **Pitying and benefiting them.** He shows them mercy and benefits them through his great, enlightened compassion. **Now, through blessings gained in former lives, we are enabled to meet the World Honored One.** We gods, no doubt, in former lives created merit and virtue by doing good deeds, and so now we are lucky enough to meet with the Buddha. We are lucky enough to meet with the Buddha and listen to him speak the Dharma. This is because of good roots planted in former lives.

**Sutra:**

**At that time, the Brahma Heaven Gods, having praised the Buddha, said, “We only pray that the World Honored One will take pity on all beings and turn the Dharma-wheel to liberate living beings.”

Then, the Brahma Heaven Kings, with one mind and a single voice, spoke verses saying,**

**“Great Sage, turn the Dharma-wheel,To reveal the marks of all Dharmas,To cross over tormented living beings,So they may gain great joy.When living beings hear the Dharma,They may gain the way, or be reborn in the heavens;The evil paths will decreaseAnd those of patience and goodness will increase.”**

Outline:

N5. Requesting the turning of the Dharma-wheel.

**Commentary:**

**At that time,** five hundred myriads of millions of **the Brahma Heaven Gods** in the entire Southeast, **having praised the Buddha** in verses **said, “We only pray that the World Honored One will take pity on all beings** and rescue them. In order to rescue them, he must speak the Dharma **and turn the Dharma-wheel to liberate living beings,** teaching and transforming them. In this way they can leave suffering, attain bliss, and put an end to birth and death.

**Then, the Brahma Heaven Kings, with one mind and a single voice, spoke verses saying,**--they had different mouths, but they spoke in unison. **Great Sage, turn the Dharma-wheel, to reveal the marks of all Dharmas,** to instruct us in the real marks of all Dharmas, in the doctrine of the Dharma. **To cross over tormented living beings,** all the miserable living beings. **So they may gain great joy.

When living beings hear the Dharma,** that the Buddha speaks, they can leave suffering and attain bliss and end birth and death. **They may gain the way, or be reborn in the heavens.** Perhaps they certify to the fruition of sagehood, or perhaps they are born in the heavens. **The evil paths will decrease.** If they are born in the good paths, then the good paths increase in number and the evil paths decrease, **and those of patience and goodness will increase.** People who practice forbearance and who do the ten good deeds will increase in number.

**Sutra:**

**At that time, the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory assented by his silence.**
Outline:

N6. Thus Come One assents through silence.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory assented by his silence.** He did not say anything, and that means he agreed to speak.

**Sutra:**

**Furthermore, O Bhikshus, to the south, the great Brahma Kings in five hundred myriads of millions of Buddhalands, seeing their palaces in dazzling brilliance as never seen before, jumped for joy, thinking it rare indeed.**
Outline:

M3. South.
N1. Startled by the portents.

**Commentary:**

**Furthermore, O Bhikshus, to the south, the great Brahma Kings in five hundred myriads of millions of Buddhalands, seeing their palaces in dazzling brilliance as never seen before, jumped for joy,** seeing such light, they were very happy, **thinking it rare indeed,** very, very rare.

**Sutra:**

**Thereupon, they visited one another and discussed this matter, wondering, “Why do our palaces glow with the light?” Then, in the assembly a Brahma Heaven King called Wonderful Dharma, on behalf of the Brahma hosts, spoke these verses,**

**“All of our palacesShine with awesome brilliance;This cannot be for no reason;We should seek out this sign.In a hundred thousand eons,Such a sign has never been seen.Has a great and virtuous god been born?Or has a Buddha appeared in the world?”**

Outline:

N2. Talking it over among themselves.

**Commentary:**

**Thereupon, they visited one another and discussed this matter,** they had a meeting **wondering, “Why do our palaces glow with the light?” Then,** right **in the** middle of the **assembly a Brahma Heaven King called Wonderful Dharma,** who **on behalf of the Brahma hosts, spoke these verses.**
**All of our palaces** where we live, **shine with awesome brilliance;** such as we have never seen before. **This cannot be for no reason;** There must certainly be a special reason for this light. **We should seek out this sign.** We should not just let it go by; we should find out where it is coming from. **In a hundred thousand eons, such a sign has never been seen.** During the past hundred thousand eons, we have not seen such a sign. **Has a great and virtuous god been born? Or has a Buddha appeared in the world?** So they all set out to find the source of the light.

**Sutra:**

**At that time, five hundred myriads of millions of Brahma Heaven Kings, together with their palaces, each with sacks filled with heavenly flowers, went to the north to seek out this manifestation. They saw the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory seated on the lion throne beneath the Bodhi tree in the Bodhimanda, revered and circumambulated by gods, dragon kings, gandharvas, kinnaras, mahoragas, and beings both human and non-human. They saw, as well, the sixteen sons of the king requesting the Buddha to turn the Dharma-wheel.**
Outline:

N3. Following the light, they see the Buddha.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, five hundred myriads of millions of Brahma Heaven Kings,** having praised the Buddha. Brahma Kings have come from five hundred myriads of millions of lands to the east, from five hundred myriads of millions of lands to the southeast, and from five hundred myriads of millions of lands to the south. **Together with their palaces.** Wherever they went, they rode in their palaces. Although in the human realm we do not have houses that fly such as those celestial palaces, but we have buses that can take us everywhere. Of course, the buses are very small and inconvenient compared to these large palaces. We also have mobile homes that are cramped and inconvenient. They are not large and cannot fly the way those palaces can.

**Each with sacks filled with heavenly flowers.** The gods love the fragrance of the flowers and never travel without them. They adorn their palaces with them; the fragrance of the flowers appear as their rightful enjoyments, the rewards from their former good deeds. Wherever they go, they carry sacks full of flowers. They accept each other rather than block one another. They are inclusive rather than obstructive. They **went to the north to seek out this manifestation.** They hopped into their palaces and headed north to find the source of the light. **They saw the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory seated on the lion throne beneath the Bodhi tree in the Bodhimanda.** They saw that the light was coming from the Buddha. **Revered and circumambulated by gods, dragon kings** from the four seas**, gandharvas, kinnaras, mahoragas, and beings both human and non-human.**Gandharvas and kinnaras are music spirits in the court of the Jade Emperor. Gandharva means “incense inhalers” because they love the smell of incense. When the Jade Emperor wants some music, he just lights some incense, and the gandharvas come flying in. Once they get there, the Jade Emperor says, “You make great music. Why don’t you play a few tunes for me?” Since they love the incense, they obey the Jade Emperor and make music for him, sniffing the incense all the while.Kinnara means “doubtful spirit”, because they resemble human beings, except that they have a horn on their heads. When they play music and dance for the Jade Emperor, they shake their heads back and forth and around and around, to show off their beautiful horns. At least, they think they are beautiful. They sing, play music, dance, and shake their heads. This all just means that they have no samadhi power! Hah!

There are also asuras. Although the text only mentions mahoragas, kinnaras, etc., and not asuras, it really includes the eightfold division of gods and dragons. Asura is also a Sanskrit word that means ugly. In short, the eightfold division consists of all sorts of strange creatures, some with one leg.

The entire eightfold division is represented in this line of text. They are all very strange. Some have one leg, and some have three legs, and some, like the mahoragas, just crawl on their bellies. Some fly in the sky like the garudas and the musical spirits. The gandharvas and the kinnaras work out of the same union, and, if the Jade Emperor calls in the kinnaras, they will usually demand that the gandharvas be hired, as well, so they can jam together—bang, crash, bang--rocking out on the drums, the conch shells, and the gongs and bells. Why do we have these music groups and these kinds of musical instruments? It is because some people who had their (five) eyes opened took a look into the heavens and saw, “Oh, wow, look at those instruments! Let us make some like that!” and so the great treasury of musical science was opened, thanks to the kinnaras and the gandharvas. This is not too hard to figure out. People have pretty much imitated the way things are in heaven.

All the living beings were revering the Buddha, walking around him slowly, keeping him to the right. **They saw, as well, the sixteen sons of the king requesting the Buddha to turn the Dharma-wheel.** The sixteen sons of the Buddha were asking him to turn the Dharma-wheel. They were the sons of the Buddha not just in one lifetime. You might say that in every life they had received the Buddha’s teaching and been his Dharma protectors. This life, when the Buddha became a Buddha, they vowed to be his sons and ask him to turn the Dharma-wheel. They did this because of their vows. People’s relationships to each other work the same way. Each family has its own set of cause and effect. Each country has its own set of cause and effect. People’s relationships are based on their mutual cause and effect. In the distant past, the Buddha taught living beings; he taught them for a long time, life after life, being so good to them that they realized, “He is our great compassionate father.” They vowed in every life to follow that Buddha, saying, “When you become a Buddha, we will follow you and be your disciples. We will do this in every life. In every life, we will be the Buddha’s disciples.” They did this before he even became a Buddha. Now that Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory has become a Buddha, the sixteen sons, because of their former vows, naturally come and ask him to turn the great wheel of the Dharma.

**Sutra:**

**Then the Brahma Heaven Kings bowed with their heads at the Buddha’s feet, circumambulated him a hundred thousand times and scattered heavenly flowers upon him. The flowers were piled as high as Mount Sumeru, and they offered them, as well to the Buddha’s Bodhi tree. Having made offerings of flowers, each presented his palace to the Buddha, saying, “Show us pity and benefit us by accepting and occupying these palaces that we offer you.” Then the Brahma Heaven Kings, before the Buddha, with a single mind and the same voice, spoke verses in praise, saying.**

Outline:

N4. Three karmas as an offering.

**Commentary:**

**Then** all **the Brahma Heaven Kings** in the south, as many as five hundred myriads of millions, **bowed** in full prostration **with their heads at the Buddha’s feet.** They **circumambulated him a hundred thousand times.** When we circumambulate, it might take one or two minutes to walk around the Buddha just a few times. The gods, however, can walk around the Buddha a hundred thousand times in less than a minute. They use their spiritual powers. Do not worry about them, thinking, “If they go around the Buddha a hundred thousand times, how will they have time to listen to the lecture? The lecture takes two hours!” It takes them but a moment. This just shows you, you should not try to figure these things out with your ordinary intelligence.

**And scattered heavenly flowers upon him** like snow falling upon the Buddha. **The flowers were piled as high as Mount Sumeru,** the heap of flowers was that high. **And they offered them, as well to the Buddha’s Bodhi tree.** Not only did they make offerings to the Buddha, but also to his Bodhi Tree.

You are thinking, “These Brahma gods are too much. Why are they making offerings to a tree? I can see making offerings to the Buddha, but what is the use of making offerings to a tree?”

You should know that the Buddha realized Buddhahood under the Bodhi tree. It provided him with the space for becoming a Buddha and thereby gained great merit and virtue. The Great Brahma Kings are not doing this because they are stupid, you know, but because they want to thank the Bodhi tree for helping the Buddha realize Buddhahood. When the Buddha sat beneath that tree he was sheltered from the rain, he was cool in the shade, and, best of all, he became a Buddha. So they make offerings to the Bodhi tree.

**Having made offerings of flowers, each presented his palace to the Buddha.** They gave that thing they most cherished, that thing they could not put down. When they get born in the heavens they got to live in it. They were entitled to it as a reward for their past good deeds. It was inconceivably wonderful. Now they give away what they could not give away.

The gods do not have anything else to speak of. They are not like people who may accumulate a lot of land and other holdings. They simply possess their palaces and that’s it. There is no “land” in the heavens; there is no real estate. The heavens are up in empty space! Their palaces sit in space. And they do not have to use money. The gods are not like us, buying, selling, and huckstering. They do not have land or any possessions other than their palaces and their flowers. First, they offered their flowers, but then they thought that probably was not showing enough sincerity. “Now that we have met the Buddha, why not do it right and give him our palaces?” And so they did! Now they had no place to live. I do not know what they planned to do about that, where they were planning to immigrate to.

**Saying, “Show us pity and benefit us by accepting and occupying these palaces that we offer you.”** We are singleminded in our desire that the Buddha be compassionate towards us and accept these palaces we offer you. Do not stay there under the Bodhi tree. It is not nearly as luxurious as our palaces.”

**Then the Brahma Heaven Kings, before the Buddha, with a single mind and the same voice.** Now, that is not easy! Just look at translating Sutras, you want to translate it that way, he wants to translate it another way, and someone else has yet another idea about how it should be done. Even if you come to an agreement, there is still a lot of give and take involved, and you are not all of the “same mind.” The Great Brahma Heaven Kings all had the same mind, and, not only that, they said the same thing at exactly the same time and **spoke verses in praise** of the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory, **saying.**

**Sutra:**

**“The World Honored One is very hard to meet;He who breaks through all afflictions.Passing through a hundred and thirty aeons,Only now do we get to see him.May living beings, starving and thirsty,Be filled with the rain of Dharma.He, whom we have never seen before,One of unlimited wisdom,Rare as the Udumbara blossomToday, at last we have met.All of our palaces Receiving your light, are adorned.In your great compassion, World Honored OnePray accept and live with them.”**

**Commentary:**

With a single mind and the same sound, the Brahma Kings praised the Buddha. They had the same thought, the same wisdom, the same sound, and the same inconceivable state. That is why they said, **the World Honored One is very hard to meet.** It is extremely hard to meet up with the Buddha. Not only that, it is very rare even to see a Buddha image. For example, in America just a hundred years ago there were no Buddha images. **He who breaks through all afflictions.** The Buddha has already broken through all afflictions, and because he is greatly compassionate, he breaks through others’ afflictions for them. Not only does he break through his own, but he wishes to relieve all living beings of their troubles and afflictions. Someone is afraid, now, thinking, “My afflictions are so dear to me. I do not want to break through them,” and, they open the door and run out! They do not want to listen to the Sutra lectures and they do not want to break their afflictions. Hah! “If the Buddha broke through my afflictions, I would not know what to do with myself! That will never do.” They think their afflictions are more important than their daily bread.

**Passing through a hundred and thirty aeons.** The Brahma Kings from the southwest had passed through a hundred and eighty eons, but the Brahma Kings from the south had only passed through a hundred and thirty eons, before they got to see the Buddha. **Only now do we get to see him.**
**May living beings, starving and thirsty.** Living beings in the three evil ways are said to be hungry and thirsty. **Be filled with the rain of Dharma.** May the rain of Dharma all at once saturate these parched and hungry living beings. **He, whom we have never seen before.** They had never seen the Buddha, heard the Dharma, or met the Sangha. **One of unlimited wisdom.** The Buddha has limitless, boundless great wisdom and compassion. **Rare as the Udumbara blossom.** I have already told you about the udumbara flower. If you want to know what it is, look it up in your notes. I am not going to tell you now. Someone says, “Maybe you forgot!” Well, maybe I did, but you are going to have to remember it! Tomorrow I am going to ask you what it is, and if you cannot answer, then I am not going to lecture to you anymore. Did you hear me? The Buddha is as rare as the udumbara blossom. It is a very long while before one meets one.

**Today, at last we have met.** The Buddha is like the udumbara flower which blooms only once in a great, long while.

**All of our palaces,** our most prized possessions, our most beautiful possessions. The things we cannot put down! Our favorite things! Our palaces!!! Now, having met the Buddha, we are going to renounce that which we cannot renounce. **Receiving your light, are adorned.** In the Buddha’s light, the palaces appear especially ornate and beautiful. We give them to the Buddha now, and **in your great compassion, World Honored One, pray accept and live with them.** Accept our offering to you, so that we may plant blessings and grow in wisdom.

**Sutra:**

**At that time, the Brahma Heaven Kings, having praised the Buddha, said, “We only pray that the World Honored One will turn the Dharma-wheel, causing the entire world with its gods, maras, Brahmans, shramanas, all to become peaceful and calm and to attain liberation.” Then, the Brahma Heaven Kings, with a single mind and the same voice, spoke verses in praise, saying,**

**“Honored One among gods and humans,Pray turn the unsurpassed wheel of Dharma.Beat upon the Dharma drum,And blow the great Dharma conch, Let fall everywhere the great Dharma rain,To cross over limitless living beings.We all beseech you to expound and proclaimThe profound, far reaching sound.”**

Outline:

N5. Requesting the turning of the Dharma-wheel.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, the Brahma Heaven Kings, having praised the Buddha, said, “We only pray that the World Honored One will turn the Dharma-wheel,** the wonderful wheel of Dharma, **causing the entire world with its gods, maras, Brahmans, shramanas,** left-home people who diligently cultivate morality, samadhi, and wisdom and eradicate greed, hatred, and stupidity, **all to become peaceful and calm and to attain liberation.** To be delivered from the sufferings of the three evil paths. **Then, the Brahma Heaven Kings, with a single mind and the same voice, spoke verses in praise, saying.**

**Honored One among gods and humans, pray turn the unsurpassed wheel of Dharma.** The Buddha is honored in and beyond the world. We only pray that you will turn the unsurpassed great wheel of Dharma, **beat upon the Dharma drum, and blow the great Dharma conch.** Before the Dharma is spoken, before ceremonies, or before we start translating, we beat the drums and bells. Do not think they cannot hear it in the heavens. They do! They hear it and think, “Oh, they are going to work, there, in San Francisco; they are translating! And, unseen by ordinary people, they stop by to see how the work is going, “Hmm, are they translating correctly? Are they just goofing off?” So, do not think you can get away with anything!!

In the Forty-two Hands, there is a Jeweled Conch Hand. When you blow the jeweled conch, it fills the space and the Dharma Realm.

**Let fall everywhere the great Dharma rain.** Speaking the Dharma for the benefit of all beings, **to cross over limitless living beings.** There are a great many living beings. If I had been translating these two lines, I would have said,

Let fall everywhere the great Dharma rain,
And everywhere save great living beings!

But, the text, as it stands, is okay, too.

Why do I want to change the line to read, “And everywhere save great living beings?” Because living beings, in the future, all can become Buddhas. Everyone is really very great. If I had said, “And everywhere save insignificant living beings,” people would have assumed that they were very small and would not cultivate. Great living beings can, in the future, realize the great Buddha Way. That is the way I would have translated it, but it is already been done the other way, and it cannot be changed now!

**We all beseech you to expound and proclaim.** We take refuge with the Buddha and beg you to turn the Dharma-wheel, and proclaim **the profound, far reaching sound.** You simply must proclaim the profound, far-reaching sound. Would you say it was far reaching, or not? Shakyamuni Buddha is telling us about the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory. Wouldn’t you say his sound has reach far into the future?

**Sutra:**

**Thereupon, the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory assented by his silence.**
Outline:

N6. The Thus Come One assents by silence.

**Commentary:**

**Thereupon, the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory assented by his silence.** He had been asked to speak the Dharma. His silence indicated that he would do so.

**Sutra:**

**And so it was in all directions from the southwest to the lower direction.**
Outline:

M4. Including the other six directions.

**Commentary:**

**And so it was in all directions from the southwest to the lower direction.** This includes six directions not yet mentioned: the southwest, west, northwest, north, northeast, and the lower direction. There are a total of ten regions. “And so it was” that the ten regions include the four directions and represent the six other directions.

**Sutra:**

**Then, five hundred myriads of millions of great Brahma Kings in the upper directions, seeing the palaces they rested in shining with awesome brilliance, as never before, jumped for joy, thinking it rare indeed.**
Outline:

M5. Above.
N1. Startled by the portents.

**Commentary:**

**Then, five hundred myriads of millions of great Brahma Kings in the upper directions, seeing the palaces they rested in,** where they lived, **shining with awesome brilliance, as never before.** It was a state they had never experienced. They were startled, amazed! Why? They had never seen such a thing before. They **jumped for joy.** They were so happy. They were like children at their first puppet show; they danced with glee and forgot all about who they were and where they were and just jumped for joy, **thinking it rare indeed.** They thought, “since being born in heaven, we have seen many fine light shows, but this is the best one we have seen. And they were very happy.

**Sutra:**

**They visited one another and discussed this matter, wondering, “Why do our palaces shine with this bright light?”

Then, in the assembly, a Brahma Heaven King by the name of Shikhin, on behalf of the Brahma hosts, spoke verses, saying,**

**“Now, for what reason Do our palaces shineWith such an awesome lightAdorned as never before?Wondrous marks, such as these We have never seen beforeHas a great and virtuous god been born?Has a Buddha appeared in the world?”**

Outline:

N2. Talking it over among themselves.

**Commentary:**

**They visited one another and discussed this matter.** Because the light was so unusual, they wanted to find out where it was coming from. **Wondering, “Why do our palaces shine with this bright light?”**
They all got together for a meeting, asking one another, “Does your palace shine with that bright light, too?” “Yes! Does yours?” And they all asked one another. Thinking it weird, they decided to go find out.

**Then, in the assembly, a Brahma Heaven King by the name of Shikhin, on behalf of the Brahma hosts, spoke verses, saying, “Now, for what reason do our palaces shine with such an awesome light, adorned as never before? Wondrous marks, such as these, we have never seen before has a great and virtuous god been born? Has a Buddha appeared in the world?”

Sutra:**

**At that time, five hundred myriads of millions of Brahma Heaven Kings, together with their palaces, each with sacks filled with heavenly flowers, went to the lower direction to seek out this sign. They saw the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory seated on the lion throne beneath the Bodhi tree in the Bodhimanda, revered and circumambulated by gods, dragon kings, gandharvas, kinnaras, mahoragas, and beings both human and non-human. They saw, as well, the sixteen sons of the king requesting the Buddha to turn the Dharma-wheel.**

Outline:

N3. Following the light, they see the Buddha.

**Commentary:**

**At that time,** refers to the time when the **five hundred myriads of millions of Brahma Heaven Kings** from the upper region finished praising the Buddha with verses. **Together with their palaces.** These five hundred myriads of millions of Brahma Kings all got together in their palaces. Since their palaces can undergo limitless changes and transformations, “as you will”, it is possible to use them as cars, planes, and even boats. Land, sea, and air are all covered. The palaces are very much like our present-day cars, except that they are much bigger than cars. Each Brahma King brought his sack full of flowers. These sacks can hold Mount Sumeru! Mount Sumeru can fit in their sacks without even shrinking down in size. It is an inconceivable state. You cannot figure it out with your ordinary mind.

Scientists do their research and philosophers make their inquiries. They research and inquire coming and going, but they never get their questions all answered. Eventually they get old and their wits grow dull; their eyes go on strike, their ears refuse to help them out, and their teeth fall out. These signs are telling them that they should “know when to advance and when to retreat.” They should know that their time to die is drawing near, and that is why their six organs are all getting lazy. They say, “We have helped you out for so many years. What have you ever done for us, your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, huh?”

“Well, nothing, I guess,” you mutter.

“That is right. And now it is time to say fare-thee-well, because we are splitting!” Then, you cannot see, cannot hear, and your sense of smell starts failing. That reminds me, in Paris there are people who make their living smelling perfumes. They can tell you exactly what fragrances are combined to make any perfume. It may be made of hundreds of different ingredients but they can name them all. However, they are prone to developing lung disease. Their lungs give out, saying, “Knock it off, for heaven’s sake. We cannot stand inhaling all that perfume.” The tongue hangs in there however. No matter how old you are, you can still taste. The tongue may have a sense of loyalty, but your teeth do not. They run off.

“That is no problem,” you say. “I can get false teeth.”

You can, but they would not work as well.

I once had a conversation with an old man over eighty. “Sir,” I said, “you are advanced in years and have a great deal of experience. No doubt you have seen people lose their teeth.”

“I certainly have,” he replied.

“Well, have you ever run across anyone who had their tongue fall out?”

“No, indeed I have not,” he said, “have you?”

“Of course I have not!” I said. “If I had, I would not be asking you!”

“What are you asking me for?” he said.

“Since you do not understand, I will tell you. Why do people lose their teeth but never their tongue? It is because their teeth are too stiff and rigid. They insist on chewing on bones and other hard things. The tongue is not so stiff. It is very pliable. The teeth know when to advance, but the tongue knows when to retreat. Consequently, one’s tongue does not fall out while one’s teeth do. The teeth are like a knife made out of steel that is too rigid. When it hits a stone, it snaps in two. If the blade is just right, it will give a bit when it hits the stone and therefore not break.

When the body gets old, it falls apart. Once the body starts falling apart, the mind starts going, and soon it is time to die. Nobody can avoid this.
 **Each with sacks filled with heavenly flowers, went to the lower direction to seek out this sign.** The gods got in their palaces and went off with their sacks of flowers to seek out the light. **They saw the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory seated on the lion throne beneath the Bodhi tree in the Bodhimanda.** The Buddha of great spiritual penetrations, great wisdom, a great victor with great power in morality, samadhi, and wisdom. He was in the Bodhimanda beneath the Bodhi tree, the Tree of Enlightenment, seated on the Lion Throne.

He was being **revered and circumambulated by gods, dragon kings, gandharvas, kinnaras.** Why do the kinnaras have just one horn of their heads? Oxen have two horns, moose have horns with lots of forks on the top, but kinnaras have only one single horn atop their heads. Guo Hu said he saw a woman who had two horns on top of her head. She looked just like a woman except she had these horns. Hmm. How come oxen have horns and dogs do not? What is the reason for this? If you have been raised in a scientific society, you should be aware of these things. The oxen did not listen to what their parents said. Whenever their parents said anything, they would lose their heads, like an ox butting up against something. “Hey! Shut up!” they said, striking out at their parents, hitting them over the head with their words.

Kinnaras, now, they did not strike out at both parents, only at their mother. They would listen to their father, but not their mother. This was because they were afraid they would get clobbered by their father! Since they only struck out at one parent, they grew only one horn. They would not listen to their mother. They insisted on listening to music, running off to the movies or going dancing all the time. When they came back, their mother would entreat them: “Why don’t you do a little work around the house?” Hah! And then they would blast her. “What? Me, get a job? I have got a place to live and food to eat and my allowance. What in the heck do I want with a job?” They just did nothing but play and so they turned into musical spirits, kinnaras with one horn on their head. Since they like to play so much, they go play music for the Jade Emperor. The gandharvas love to smell incense, and when he Jade Emperor burns the incense, they run off to play music for him. They are incense addicts, sort of like present-day dope addicts. They get intoxicated on the incense and play music and jump around thinking it the greatest thing in the world.

Although asuras are not mentioned outright in this list, they are implied. I have lectured on them many times before, but ultimately, I do not know if you would recognize one if you saw one. In case you would not, I will introduce you again. Have you ever seen people who are just downright hostile? Who are always fighting? Who carry guns and knives? They are asuras in the home, in the country, among people, and who are themselves humans. Asuras in the home are people who just would not listen to each other. They prefer to fight and get all afflicted, thinking it more fun than entertaining guests. In fact, they would rather eat afflictions than food! The husband invites the wife to eat some afflictions, and the wife says, “Okay, I will return the invitation!” The two of them eat two helpings of afflictions but still are not satisfied. They want to share it with their children. They have a meeting and invite the kids to join in. When the kids have had their fill of afflictions, they run outside and treat their friends to some afflictions, too.

Their friends return home and invite their own parents to eat some afflictions. One may want to cut off afflictions, but it is not easy. They just keep rolling along. That is the realm of asuras--ever-widening circles of affliction. Constant fighting and lack of joy in the home all day long. Afflictions in the home all day long. They taste much better than pancakes. They are filling and do not cost anything. That is why they enjoy eating afflictions. Better than bread and butter! Now do you understand?

If you have afflictions, you are an asura. If I have afflictions, I am an asura. If he has afflictions, he is an asura, Afflictions just means getting angry, giving people a bad time. It means thinking, “Everyone is bad, I am the only good person there is. Where can I go to get away from these bad people?” You think about it all day long, but you never come up with anything. Why not? Because you are afflicted. If you had no afflictions, you would see everyone else as the Buddha. Just take me, for example. I look upon all of you disobedient disciples with such patience! I teach you to be filial to your parents, but you are not. I teach you not to get angry, and you insist on getting even angrier. I tell you not to have a temper, and you say, “How can I do that? I was born with this temper. It is my old friend. How can you expect me to break off with my old friend?” You do not listen to me, but I do not get angry. If you want to be asuras, it is up to you. When you have been asuras long enough, you will turn into something else.

Garudas, too, are included in the eightfold division. They are the great gold-winged Peng bird. No one has ever seen one. How big are they? Well, dragons are several thousand feet long, and the Peng birds eat them like we eat noodles! They grab them by the legs. Hold them upside down, and gulp them down, one after another. Now, if you want to see one, I will let you see one. But you must promise not to eat them. It is dangerous! If they see a person, they will want to eat him. He will take you for lazy worm and swallow you in one gulp. How big is the garuda? His wingspread is three hundred and sixty yojanas! Pretty big! With one flap of his wings he fans the ocean dry, and all the dragons in the sea are exposed. He gulps them all down, as he considers dragons his optimal diet.

Kinnaras are partners with the Gandharvas. **Mahoragas** are the big snakes. They are not like the snakes that we can see. They are so big that they wind around Mount Sumeru three times. And just how big is Mount Sumeru? You do not know? I do not know either! If you opened your Heavenly Eye, you would know though.

**And beings both human and non-human**. How do people get to be people? If you are filial to your parents, you can become a person. How does one get to be “non-human,” that is, an animal, a hell-being, or a hungry ghost? By not being filial to one’s parents. People differ from animals, in that people know to be filial to their parents, to repay their kindness, and to respond to their virtue. Some animals know how to do this, too, but most of them do not, because they do not have enough sense; they are too stupid. Stupid people do not even know if you are being good to them or not. Eventually, they become “non-human.” Reverently circumambulated--the gods, dragons, and eightfold division paid their respects to the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory.

**They saw, as well, the sixteen sons of the king requesting the Buddha to turn the Dharma-wheel,** to lecture on the Sutras, teach the Dharma, and transform living beings.

**Sutra:**

**Then, the Brahma Heaven Kings bowed with their heads at the Buddha’s feet, circumambulated him a hundred thousand times, and scattered heavenly flowers upon the Buddha. The flowers that they scattered were as high as Mount Sumeru, and they offered them as well to the Buddha’s Bodhi tree. Having made offerings of flowers, they each presented their palace as an offering to the Buddha, saying, “We only pray that you will show us pity and benefit us by accepting and occupying these palaces.” Then the Brahma Heaven Kings, before the Buddha, with one mind and a single voice, spoke these verses:**

**“It’s good indeed to see the Buddhas, Honored Sages who save the worldAnd who, from the prison of the triple realmCan effect escape for living beings,All-wise, revered by gods and humans,Pitying the flocks of beingsOpening the door of sweet dew,Vastly saving all beings.Limitless eons of yoreHave passed emptily, without a Buddha.Before the World Honored One emerged,The ten directions were ever in darkness,The three evil paths increased,And the asuras flourished,While the hosts of gods diminished,Most falling into evil paths at death. They did not hear the Dharma from the Buddha,But ever followed unwholesome paths.Their bodily strength and wisdom,Both decreased.Because of offense karmaThey lost joy and thoughts of joy.They dwelt in Dharmas of deviant views,Not knowing the rules of goodness.Failing to receive the Buddha’s transforming,They constantly fell into evil paths.The Buddha acts as eyes for all the world,And but once in a long while does appear. Out of pity for living beings,He manifests in the world,Transcends it and realizes right enlightenment.We rejoice exceedingly; We and all the other beings, Are happy as never before,And all or our palacesReceive the light and are adorned.We now offer them to the World Honored One.May he pity us and accept them.We vow that this merit and virtueMay extend to all living beings,So that we and all beings May together realize the Buddha Way.”**

Outline:

N4. Making offerings to the three karmas.

**Commentary:**

**Then, the Brahma Heaven Kings bowed** in full prostration, **with their heads at the Buddha’s feet, circumambulated him a hundred thousand times, and scattered heavenly flowers upon the Buddha. The flowers that they scattered were as high as Mount Sumeru, and they offered them as well to the Buddha’s Bodhi tree.** Although the flowers appeared to be piled as high as Mount Sumeru, when you reached out to touch them, there was nothing there. You could see them, but you could not touch them. It is sort of like watching a movie. You can watch a movie with your eyes, but you cannot shake hands with the characters in it. It is a wonderful and inconceivable state. When ordinary people look, however, there is nothing there. **Then the Brahma Heaven Kings, before the Buddha, with one mind and a single voice, spoke these verses:**

**Having made offerings of flowers, they each presented their palace as an offering to the Buddha.** The gods like their palaces more than anything else in the world because they are so comfortable. They sit in them and are perfectly at ease, thinking of nothing at all. They do not think about their father, and they do not think about their mothers, their sisters, or brothers. All they think about are their palaces, about how comfortable they are in them--better than lying on the sofa! They are attached to them all day long, and so, when they went looking for the light, they brought them along. However, as soon as they saw the Buddha, they got enlightened and wished to set their palaces aside.

**Saying, “We only pray that you will show us pity and benefit us by accepting and occupying these palaces.”** Allow us to make this offering to the Buddha and thereby plant blessings before the Triple Jewel. Please accept these palaces and live in them. **Then, the Brahma Heaven Kings**, the five hundred myriads of millions of them, **before the Buddha, with one mind and a single voice, spoke these verses.** There were many of them, but they all had one, common mind and one single sound to praise the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory Thus Come One.

I asked about udumbara flowers yesterday. If you think of it now, you may tell me about this type of flower. Udumbara is Sanskrit that means efficacious and auspicious. This type of flower only blooms once every three thousand years, therefore difficult to encounter. Buddhas are analogous to these flowers. It is a long, long time before a Buddha is in the world and for beings to encounter the Buddhadharma. You see! Just take a look at Westerners. It has been such a long time yet there are very few people who truly understand Buddhism. This is just the beginning.

Now let me say something that is superstitious and yet not superstitious. This group of you have all made vows in your past lives to the effect of, “Our master has made a vow to go to the United States to propagate the Buddhadharma in the future, so we disciples should make the vow to arrive there first.” That is why you are already here as citizens of this country and learning the Buddhadharma now. You came here riding on your vows. Do not forget your vows.

Unfortunately you have not yet forgotten your afflictions over food. Forget that affliction and do not eat too much. You will get sick if you eat too much.

The Buddhadharma is difficult to encounter. Yesterday I talked about that great Brahma Heaven King Shikhin. What does his name mean? If anyone knows, tell me. I know that none of you know. Why? It is because I did not tell you. I thought I would wait until today to ask you about it the same time that I question you about the udumbara flowers. I wanted to see if anyone knew though I did not explain it. Sometimes, students who really pay attention will research and try to find out on their own even though the Dharma Master did not discuss it. “Ah! What is this? I did not understand the explanation, let me go search for it in the Buddhist dictionary or research the parts with English translation.” Since none of you know now that I asked, the tallest disciple has gone searching for the word but still does not recognize it!

That is right, his name means cowl, not necessarily a flesh cowl, but could be a topknot as well. With the water of samadhi and wisdom, this great Brahma Heaven King transformed his fire of lust. This is Shikhin, cowl on the crown. Originally he had a tremendous amount of lust, but he used his water of wisdom to squelch his fire of lust so that it turned into the water of wisdom too. I had told you to use this water of prajna wisdom in my letter to you. I told you not to use the fire of ignorance. This is the same principle.

Shikhin, transliterated can also mean to abandon this dead body. How? The great Brahma Heaven King really liked his body so he was unwilling to give up this body of his. His body was the most gorgeous, the finest! Since it was the finest, he would cultivate so that it had no sexual desire, squelching the fire of ignorance completely with his water of wisdom.

Once, however, he met a very beautiful woman. For some reason unknown, his fire of ignorance flared up, his fire of sexual desire arose. Although he did not break any precepts, he thought, “This body really is a dangerous thing. I do not want it anymore!” So he discarded his body, he abandoned it and went to the heavens to be the Great Brahma Heaven King whose name is Shikhin.

Today I am very happy that my disciple’s parents have come to listen to the lecture. I know that the first time his parents came here to visit, they were afraid that he was in great danger, and they came prepared to bargain with me. But now this is their second visit, and they realize he is doing well; they are not afraid for him. What is more, they sat all through the lecture; that is quite inconceivable in itself! However, I believe that one’s parents are always concerned for their children’s welfare. Every move their children make is watched very carefully. It is like me. Wherever my disciples go, I find it very hard to put them down. I am always watching to see what they are up to. Have they broken any precepts? Have they been taken advantage of?

I want to announce something here at the Buddhist Lecture Hall. After this, whether you are a left-home person or a lay person, when your parents come here, they can do as they wish. If they want to stand, they can stand. If they want to sit down, they can sit down. If they want to bow to the Buddha, they can, and if they do not want to, they do not have to. One’s brothers and sisters, however, should follow along with our routine. Parents are older, and we at the Buddhist Lecture Hall want to practice filial behavior, and, therefore, we will not try to coerce them into believing in Buddhism. But, you can lean on your brothers and sisters a bit; it would not hurt. That is today’s announcement.

**It is good indeed to see the Buddhas.** We feel really good to see the Buddha. **Honored Sages who save the world.** We have met with a sage who can lead us from suffering to bliss. **And who, from the prison of the triple realm** from the prison of the realm of desire form, and formless **can effect escape for living beings,** help them to leave suffering and attain bliss, and end birth and death.

**All-wise, revered by gods and humans, pitying the flocks of beings.** The Buddha is the wisest and most universal guiding teacher for gods. He is the model for heavenly beings. He is greatly compassionate and merciful towards all the different kinds of living beings. This includes both sentient and insentient beings. It is said, “The sentient and insentient alike perfect the wisdom of all modes.”

**Opening the door of sweet dew.** “Sweet dew” is the heavenly elixir of immortality. The Buddha speaks Dharma, leading all living beings to end birth and death, and so his speaking of Dharma is called the “Door or Sweet Dew.” **Vastly saving all beings.** The Buddha does not just save one or two beings; he saves them all, without exception. **Limitless eons of yore. Have passed emptily, without a Buddha.** Way back into the past, through limitless eons, and upwards until now, the time has gone by emptily, for no Buddha has appeared. For some, it was one hundred and eighty eons, and for some it was one hundred and thirty eons. Here it is simply “limitless” eons. Living beings’ causes and effects all are different, and so they see different things.

**Before the World Honored One emerged,** into the world, **the ten directions were ever in darkness,** lacking light. **The three evil paths increased and the asuras flourished while the hosts of gods diminished** because they did evil deeds**. Most falling into evil paths at death.** The hells, the animal realm, and the path of ghosts gained in population. The asuras also grew in number. That makes Four Evil Destinies. We should all think upon this; we are ever in danger of falling into the three evil paths. We should always strive to be careful and avoid them.

**They did not hear the Dharma from the Buddha.** Since they did not meet up with the Buddha, they had no way to hear the Dharma. Because they did not hear the Dharma, they knew nothing about cultivation, **but ever followed unwholesome paths.** Because they did evil deeds, they fell into the three evil paths. If one does good deeds, one rises to the heavens or gains in good roots. They fell into the three evil paths, because they lacked good roots.

**Their bodily strength and wisdom both decreased.** They lost their health and their wisdom. Day-by-day, they decreased. **Because of offense karma, they lost joy and thoughts of joy.** They lost the happiness they were entitled to. They even lost the concept of happiness altogether. Since they had none of the proper knowledge and views, they ran toward deviant knowledge and views. **They dwelt in Dharmas of deviant views not knowing the rules of goodness.** They knew nothing about the rules of goodness. **Failing to receive the Buddha’s transforming.** Because their karmic obstacles were so great, they were unable to see the Buddha and unable to be taught by him. Therefore, **they constantly fell into evil paths.** Life after life, they fell into the Three Evil Paths.

**The Buddha acts as eyes for all the world and but once in a long while does appear.** The Buddha only appears at long, long intervals. **Out of pity for living beings, he manifests in the world, transcends it, and realizes right enlightenment.** The supreme, right, equal and proper enlightenment. **We rejoice exceedingly** at our good fortune. **We and all the other beings are happy as never before and all or our palaces receive the light and are adorned.** All the palaces we brought with us are shining in the Buddha’s light. They are more beautiful than they have ever been.

**We now offer them to the World Honored One. May he pity us and accept them,** mercifully accept our offering.

**We vow that this merit and virtue** gained by making this offering to the Buddha **may extend to all living beings so that we and all beings, may together realize the Buddha Way,** the Way of Buddhahood.

**Sutra:**

**At that time, the five hundred myriads of millions of Brahma Heaven Gods, having praised the Buddha in verse, addressed the Buddha, saying, “We only pray that the World Honored One will turn the Dharma-wheel to bring tranquility and liberation to many beings.” Then, the Brahma Heaven King spoke these verses of praise:**

**“World Honored One, turn the Dharma-wheelSound the sweet dew Dharma-drum,To cross over tormented living beings,Showing them Nirvana’s path.Pray, accept our request,And, with the great and subtle sound,Pity us, and set forth,Dharma gathered through countless eons.”**

Outline:

N5. Requesting the turning of the Dharma-Wheel.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, the five hundred myriads of millions of Brahma Heaven Gods,** actually, there were not just five hundred, but five thousand or more, myriads of millions of gods from the ten directions--**having praised the Buddha in verse,** each assembly of gods from the ten directions had spoken their verses, and then they **addressed the Buddha, saying, “We only pray that the World Honored One will turn the Dharma-wheel,** speak the Dharma to teach and transform living beings.” Before the Buddha speaks Dharma, someone must request it. **To bring tranquility and liberation to many beings** “happiness and salvation.” **Then, the Brahma Heaven King spoke these verses of praise.**
**World Honored One, turn the Dharma-wheel.** We Brahma Kings and all living beings wish that the Buddha would turn the great Dharma-wheel to teach us all. **Sound the sweet dew Dharma-drum** so we can end birth and death with the sweet dew of Dharma. **To cross over tormented living beings,** all beings suffer the agonies of the Three Evil Paths. **Showing them Nirvana’s path,** the pathway to non-production and non-extinction. Point it out clearly to us, so we can cultivate it. **Pray, accept our request** to turn the Dharma-wheel **and, with great and subtle sound,** the inconceivable sound, speak Dharma for us. **Pity us, and set forth.** Be compassionate to us, and speak **Dharma gathered through countless eons,** gathered through successful cultivation throughout limitless eons. Proclaim the wonderful Dharma for the sake of living beings.

The Great Brahma Heaven Kings have requested the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory to turn the Dharma-wheel. Here in the Buddhist Lecture Hall we speak the Dharma and teach the Sutras, and that is also turning the Dharma-wheel. We lecture here every day. The Wheel turns from morning ‘til night. The turners get very tired but they continue to turn the wheel. Not only does it turn here but it turns in Los Angeles as well. Next Friday we are going to Los Angeles to turn the Dharma-wheel there. Six people are going; they represent the Six Perfections: giving, morality, patience, vigor, concentration, and wisdom. Guo Li and Guo Shan have invited us to their parents’ home in Los Angeles to speak the Dharma. I hear a lot of people are coming to the Dharma Assembly.

In the Buddhist Lecture Hall, we have turned the Dharma-wheel every day until we are very tired. Probably, in Los Angeles we will be even more worn out. We might not even get to sleep at night! Whoever is afraid of over-exertion should back out now, when there is still time. If you do not chicken out, that means you are not afraid of fatigue. You are wearing your armor of vigor, working in the six periods of the day and night. You must act as a good model for the lay people in Los Angeles. Last time I went to Los Angeles with Guo Li for a Chan Session, he planted a Bodhi seed there and later took refuge. Now he has invited us there to turn the Dharma-wheel. This is a case of cause and effect which is quite inconceivable.

When I went last time, a lot of people wanted to take refuge, but the person I went with was a Chinese who was jealous of the Americans and did not want them to take refuge with me. He put himself in their way. But the seed, once planted, will come up sooner or later; you cannot obstruct it forever. When the time comes the Bodhi sprout will come up anyway, and no rocks can keep it down. It will sprout and grow and bear fruit naturally. If you are not afraid of suffering, you will be able to teach and transform a lot of people. If you are half asleep, people will think, “What is this cultivation? They are our guests, and they are sound asleep! As soon as I open my mouth to lecture, my five disciples fall asleep on cue: “Let us sleep. Let us not listen!” If you do that, no one will give rise to faith. So I hope you will sleep a bit less. Each of the five of you should prepare one lecture for each day. You can speak to them in English. Prepare something you would like to say for twenty minutes or so.

Last year, on the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, some of you made vows. Guo Yi and Guo Xiu wrote out their vows. Guo Ning also made ten vows, one of which was to save the insane and to save demons. Whoever is insane now has a chance to be saved and the demons also have a chance. I am sure that no one has ever made such “crazy” vows before. Guo Qian wrote his out and read them quite properly, but I never knew what they were because he did not write them in Chinese for me. I got the general gist of them, and they were not bad. Someone later told me that they were very good. Whoever else would like to make vows can do so on the tenth. We will also transmit the Bodhisattva precepts on that day and the Three Refuges. Taking refuge, taking precepts, and making vows: faith, vows, and practice. The sooner you make vows, the better. The sooner you take refuge, the better. The sooner you leave home, the better. Guo Qian left home first. Guo Xiu is actually the oldest but she left home last, so, as far as cultivation goes. She is the youngest. I hope she hurries up and gets enlightened so she can be an enlightened Bhikshuni. In all things, you should strive to go forward and never retreat. Go forward in taking refuge, making vows, and leaving home.

**Sutra:**

**At that time, the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory, having received the request of the Brahma Heaven Kings of the ten directions, as well as the sixteen princes.**

Outline:

J2. Nearby cause.
K1. Turning the Dharma-wheel of the half word teaching.
L1. Receiving the request.

**Commentary:**

**At that time,** right after the Great Brahma Kings from the ten directions had praised the Buddha, **the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory, having received the request of the Brahma Heaven Kings of the ten directions, as well as the sixteen princes.**

**Sutra:**

**Thereupon, three times turned the Dharma-wheel of twelve parts which cannot be turned by Shramanas, Brahmans, gods, maras, Brahmas, or other beings of the world. He said, “This is suffering. This is the origination of suffering. This is the extinction of suffering. This is the way to the extinction of suffering.**

Outline:

L2. Turning proper.
M1. The Four Truths.

**Commentary:**

**Thereupon, three times turned the Dharma-wheel,** there are three turnings of the Dharma-wheel **of twelve parts,** also called “the three turnings of the Four Truths”: the Demonstration Turning, the Exhortation Turning, and the Certification Turning. Everyone should know them.

The Four Truths are suffering, origination, extinction, and the Path. What is suffering? Happiness is suffering. Whatever you like is suffering. You like to get angry? That is suffering! You like to sleep? That is suffering. The things you like bring you suffering.

Right after each Buddha becomes a Buddha, he preaches the Four Truths, and then the Twelve Conditioned Causes, and after that, the Six Perfections. That is the order in which he rolls the Wheel of Dharma.

The First of the Three Turnings of the Dharma-wheel of Twelve Parts is the Demonstration Turning:

1. This is suffering, its nature is oppressive. If you get angry, your temper oppresses you so that you are uncomfortable walking, standing, sitting, and even lying down.

2. This is origination, its nature is seductive. It beckons you. You respond to the stimulus. This refers to the accumulation of afflictions, one on top of another. You did not want to get angry, but some situation triggered that response and you did. You were “seduced” into it.

3. This is extinction, its nature is that it can be certified to. This is the Path; its nature is that it can be cultivated.

That is the first turning. The second turning is called the Exhortation Turning:

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 Path, you should cultivate it.

This means that you should not only know about the Four Truths, but you should practice them: know suffering, cut off origination, long for extinction, and cultivate the Path.

Knowing suffering, you should put a stop to suffering. If you want to stop suffering, first of all you must get rid of affliction, that is, cut off origination. If you have afflictions, you will suffer. Without afflictions, there is no suffering. You must long for extinction and cultivate the Way. In this, the second turning, then, you are exhorted to do these things.

The third turning is the Certification Turning. The first turning tells you about this Dharma-door. The second turning exhorts you to cultivate. The third turning certifies that the Buddha has perfected it.

1. This is suffering. I already know it. I do not need to know it further.

2. This is origination. I have already cut it off. I do not need to certify to it further.

3. This is extinction. I have already certified to it. I do not need to certify to it further.

4. This is the Path. I have already cultivated it. I do not need to cultivate it further.

**Which cannot be turned by Shramanas**--those who diligently cultivate morality, samadhi, and wisdom and put to rest greed, hatred, and stupidity. Left-home people are all called Shramanas.

You say, “I know that as a Shramana it is my duty to cultivate morality, samadhi, and wisdom and put to rest greed, hatred, and stupidity. That is why, every day, I bow to the Buddha, recite Sutras, bow repentances, and bow to Sutras. I work real hard. Isn’t that diligently cultivating morality, samadhi, and wisdom?”

That is right! It is pretty easy, too, except that you get a bit tired after a while. Working so hard, you get tired and start thinking about taking a rest.

It may be easy to cultivate diligently morality, samadhi, and wisdom. But it is definitely not easy to put to rest greed, hatred, and stupidity. Greed: “Ahh, I am not greedy for money. I do not climb on conditions.” You may not be greedy for money, but sometimes you get greedy for sex. Or. If you are not greedy for sex, you may get hung up on food! Money is All-Powerful, you know. You can buy anything with it.

“If you are going to die, you cannot buy your life,” you say.

Sometimes you can! Let us say you have committed a capital crime and have been sentenced to death. If you offer the judge several million dollars, some judges might take the money and let you go. See? They say that money can get you through to the spirits.

“I do not care if it can. I am not going to be greedy for it,” you reply.

Well, perhaps you are not greedy for money, but you may then be greedy for sex. “Sex” does not just mean sexual relations; it refers to craving for material beauty of any sort--fine clothes, a trim figure, a new hat. It is all an expression of the libido.

And then, of course, there is food. You may deny that you are greedy for sex, but at lunch time you load up on the most nutritious foods and then take your vitamins. This is all greed, you know.

“Well what can I do?” you wonder.

When it comes to clothing, food, and shelter, you should be like this:

The eyes see forms outside, but inside there is nothing.
The ears hear mundane sound; but the mind does not know.

When it comes to eating:

You eat each day, but do not taste a grain of rice.

That is to be without greed.

“Sure,” you say, “I do not taste one grain of rice. I taste a lot of them. I am not Shakyamuni Buddha, sitting in Snow Mountain eating one grain of wheat and one sesame seed a day, you know.”

You certainly can count better than I can.

All day, you wear your clothes, but you do not put on a single thread.

“Of course I do not just wear one thread!” you say in surprise. “I wear a whole bunch of threads!”

That is not what I mean. When I say “not a single thread,” I mean not even one single thread.

“But you must be stretching the truth.”

When I say, “You eat each day but do not taste a grain of rice; all day, you wear your clothes, but you do not wear a single thread,” I mean that you are not preoccupied with food and clothing. You are not expending a lot of energy on eating and wearing clothes. You “eat without eating,” and “wear clothes without wearing them.”

“Not bad, you say, “Then can I go out and kill a few people, ‘killing without killing?’ Can I ‘steal without stealing?’”

If you have no mind, no thought, you are not committing an offense. But, if you have the thought, it is definitely an offense. Here, it is not that you do not eat, you do; you just are not attached to eating. You wear clothes and you are not oblivious to that fact, but you are not attached to wearing them. This is what The Vajra Sutra means by, “Producing that thought which is nowhere supported.” If you can produce that thought that is nowhere supported, then “You eat each day, but do not taste a grain of rice. All day, you wear your clothes, but you do not put on a single thread.”

“Dharma Master,” you say, “the more you try to explain it, the more puzzling it seems to get.”

Of course you do not understand it. If you understood it, you would be lecturing the Sutras.

“But I do lecture the Sutras.”

Maybe you do, but you still do not understand this principle. Wait until you understand it, and then you can explain it, too. In the Chan School, the principles taught are directed at separating you from all attachments.

Shramanas destroy greed, hatred, and stupidity. Hatred is not easy to overcome. You may make a vow not to get angry, to obey your teacher, and be filial, and then--who knows where or why--suddenly, you get mad. Your temper pops out like a mouse out of its mouse hole. The mouse of your temper hides in its invisible hole and shows itself unexpectedly. Stupidity. What is that? It is just doing dumb things, unintelligent things. You may clearly know that something is wrong, not in accord with Dharma, but insist on doing it anyway. That is stupidity.

Shramanas diligently cultivate morality, samadhi, and wisdom and put to rest greed, hatred, and stupidity.

**Brahmans** are an outside Way in India. They wear robes and do various things, but they do not cultivate according to Dharma. They look like Bhikshus, but they do not cultivate the practices of Bhikshus. The word Brahma means “pure will.” And they used to cultivate pure conduct. Now they do not even do that. They are all murky. With the passage of time, no matter what it is, there are bound to be false versions of it appearing. In China, the Taoists are the equivalent of Brahmans. In Taoism they talk about the three classes: the upper pure class, extreme pure ones, and the jade pure ones.

**Gods.** Those who cultivate the five precepts and the ten good deeds are born in the heavens and become gods. **Maras** are demons. They kill living beings. The Buddha saves and the demons kill. **Brahmas, or other beings of the world.** The Buddha, and only the Buddha, can turn the Dharma-wheel of the Four Truths. Shramanas, Brahmans, gods, demons, those of other religions--none of them can turn it.

He said, **“This is suffering. This is the origination of suffering.** This is suffering. **This is the extinction** of suffering. **This is the way to the extinction of suffering.”** The Dharma-door of the Four Truths includes the patience with suffering, wisdom of suffering, patience with accumulation, wisdom of accumulation, patience with cessation, wisdom of cessation, patience with the Way, and wisdom of the Way. These eight types of patience and wisdom turn into sixteen different states of mind. These are the Four Truths.

**Sutra:**

**And he extensively set forth the Dharma of the twelve causes and conditions: ignorance conditions dispositions. Dispositions condition consciousness. Consciousness conditions name and form. Name and form condition the six sense organs. The six sense organs condition contact. Contact conditions feeling. Feeling conditions craving. Craving conditions grasping. Grasping conditions becoming. Becoming conditions birth. Birth conditions old age and death, worry, grief, suffering and distress.**

**When ignorance is extinguished, dispositions are extinguished. When dispositions are extinguished, then consciousness is extinguished. When consciousness is extinguished, then name and form are extinguished. When name and form are extinguished, then the six sense organs are extinguished. When the six sense organs are extinguished, then contact is extinguished. When contact is extinguished, then feeling is extinguished. When feeling is extinguished, then craving is extinguished. When craving is extinguished, then grasping is extinguished. When grasping is extinguished, then becoming is extinguished. When becoming is extinguished, then birth is extinguished. When birth is extinguished, then old age and death, worry, grief, suffering and distress are extinguished.**

Outline:

M2. The twelve causes and conditions.

**Commentary:**

**He extensively set forth the Dharma of the twelve causes and conditions.** You have heard about them many times before. The list here is given twice. In the first list of twelve, they give rise to one another. This is called “the door of production.” In the second list of twelve, they are extinguished one after another in turn, and this is called “the door of returning to extinction.” This is the Dharma cultivated by the Conditioned Enlightened Ones. The Hearers cultivate the Four Truths. Right after the Buddha realized the Way, he first taught the Four Truths and then the Twelve Causes and Conditions.

You say, “I have heard about the Twelve Causes and Conditions so many times but I do not understand them at all. As quickly as you read them now, I further do not understand them.”

If you really do not understand though I have explained the Twelve Causes and Conditions so many times, then why should I bother talking about them? I present them to you so that you can become familiar with them and cultivate according to them. To really understand them, however, you must first certify to the Fourth Fruition of Arhatship. When you get enlightened, you will understand them. Before you become enlightened, you would not be able to understand them. So, do not worry about it. Just investigate it: ignorance conditions activity and so on. Keep looking into it until, suddenly, you understand.

**Sutra:**

**When the Buddha spoke this Dharma, amidst the great assembly of gods and humans, six hundred myriads of millions of nayutas of human beings, because they did not grasp at any dharma, had their minds liberated from all outflows. All attained profound and subtle Dhyana concentration, the Three Clarities, the Six Penetrations, and perfected the Eight Liberations. The second, third, and fourth times he set forth this Dharma, thousands of millions of nayutas of living beings, their numbers like the Ganges’ sands, also because they did not grasp at any dharma, had their minds liberated from outflows. From that time onwards, the assembly of Hearers was unlimited, boundless, and unreckonable.**
Outline:

L3. Attaining the Way upon hearing the Dharma.

**Commentary:**

Shakyamuni Buddha first explained the Dharma of the Four Truths for the five thousand myriads of millions of Great Brahma Heaven Kings, sixteen princes, and hundred thousand myriads of millions of living beings, then he turned the Dharma wheel of the Twelve Conducts thrice. Finally he spoke the Dharma of the Twelve Causes and Conditions for Those Enlightened to Conditions. **When the Buddha,** Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory, **spoke this Dharma,** turning the Dharma-wheel of the Four Truths and the Twelve Causes and Conditions, **amidst the great assembly of gods,** the vast assembly of Great Brahma Kings, who had requested the Buddha to speak the Dharma, **and humans,** the millions of living beings, **six hundred myriads of millions of nayutas of human beings, because they did not grasp at any dharma.**

At that time, the Thus Come One Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory spoke the Four Truths and the Twelve Causes and Conditions. As Shakyamuni Buddha explains this chapter on the Analogy of the Transformational City, he describes the causes in the distant past. There are six hundred myriads of millions of nayutas of humans in the great assembly too. What does that mean? If you do not grasp at any dharma, how can you understand all dharmas? Grasp here means “to take in,” “to receive.” It means that they did not accept any evil dharmas. It does not mean that they did not accept any good dharma.

You may remember that Shariputra’s uncle, One of Great Joy, in debating with the Buddha, took “non-accepting” as his viewpoint. Then the Buddha, asked him, “If you take “non-accepting” as your viewpoint, do you “accept” that viewpoint or not? Shariputra’s uncle was stumped. How could he “not accept” his own viewpoint? That would mean he did not even have a viewpoint. On the other hand, if he did accept it, then he was contradicting his first premise! He took it pretty hard, because before the debate he had made a bet with the Buddha, saying, “If I lose, I will cut off my head and give it to you. If you lose, Buddha, then you must return my nephew, Shariputra, to me, and I will take him home.” The Buddha defeated him with just one sentence, “Do you accept your viewpoint or not?” There was no way he could win! The Uncle had set up his argument, saying; “I would not accept anything you say, right or wrong, deviant or proper. “I will act like a deaf-mute. I would not even listen!” He thought this was extremely clever. If he did not listen to anything the Buddha said then he could not lose. The Buddha simply replied, “That is fine with me, your viewpoint of non-accepting. But, do you accept your viewpoint or not?”

So, he lost. He refused to admit that he had agreed to certain conditions. He was annulling the contract that he had signed. Scared stiff, he turned and ran. At that time there were no cars or trains, and he did not have a horse. He just hoofed it down the road. He took the “shoe-leather express.” His legs were obedient. They “accepted” his commands to run? He ran two or three miles. Until it occurred to him, “I am a man. I made an agreement with the Buddha to cut off my head if I lost. How can I run away like that? I am no sissy! I had better face up to things and go back.” Heroically, he ran back to the Buddha, saying, “Shakyamuni Buddha, I bow before you. I respect you a great deal. I admit that I lost, and now I must ask you to give me a knife.”

Shakyamuni Buddha said, “What do you want a knife for? Are you planning on killing the Buddha?”

“No!” he said. “I am going to kill myself!”

“What for?” asked the Buddha.

“I agreed that if I lost, I would give you my head. I lost, and, being a hero, I must keep my word.”

Shakyamuni Buddha said, “You are really stupid! You have studied the Four Vedas and the other treatises for eighteen years. How did you get so stupid?”

“S-s-s-stupid?” he stammered.

“I do not accept your agreement, and I do not want you to cut off your head. I do not want your old head!”

The uncle thought, “This Buddha sure is kind and compassionate! The Buddha really is different from ordinary people. Great! Since I get to keep my head, I might as well give my whole body to the Buddha.” Then he said, “Buddha, I will do whatever you tell me to do!” and he left home. He had gone to get his nephew back from the Sangha, but he ended up leaving home himself. All because he took non-accepting as his viewpoint.

Here the text says, “Because they did not grasp at any dharma.” This means that they did not accept any evil dharmas. It does not mean that they did not accept any good dharma. Because they did not accept any evil dharmas, then they **had their minds liberated from all outflows.** What are outflows? If you want to know what outflows are, you should first find out what outflows are not, or rather, what non-outflows are. I will give you an example: take a look at this teacup. Does it have any holes in it, any outflows? It has no outflows, of course, and so it can hold the tea. If it had outflows, it could not hold the tea.

Would you say that our bodies had outflows or not? Hah! Our bodies are bottomless pits. You fill your body up today, and tomorrow it all runs out. Then you fill it up again, and the next day it all flows out again. Obviously one’s excrement and urine are outflows. They flow out, and we have practically no control over it. Our bodies have nine orifices which constantly secrete impure substances: there is secretion of the eyes, wax in the ears, snot in the nose, saliva in the mouth, besides excrement and urine, but, these are very common, ordinary outflows and are not that important. The greatest outflows are the ones you are not even aware of: greed, hatred, stupidity, pride, and doubt.

Greed is an endless outflow. The more you get, the more you want. It is insatiable. If you obtain the object of your greed, then you just want more. If you cannot get it, you get afflicted, your ignorance arises, and you get stupid. Why do people do stupid things? Because of hatred, which comes from greed. Greed, hatred, and stupidity--these three poisons are everyone’s outflows. If you can be without greed, hatred, and stupidity, then you are without outflows.

If you have no afflictions and no ignorance, then you have no outflows. Those who have cultivated their dispositions will not get angry, even when scolded, even if you hit them, they would not get angry. It is not that they are incapable of anger; they simply do not indulge themselves in it. Everybody has a temper. Even the Bodhisattvas have tempers; the equal enlightenment Bodhisattvas still have one portion of temper, about as much as a hair. If they break through this hair-like particle of ignorance, then they can become Buddhas. But, because they have not broken through this ignorance, they have not become Buddhas.

We say, “break through” ignorance, but that has a negative connotation of destroying something. I lecture on this principle a bit differently from others: I say you do not have to break through it, you must transform it. Change ignorance into wisdom. Ignorance is the foundation to wisdom. Ignorance disappears once it is turned into wisdom. Ignorance is just your basic stupidity. If you change it into wisdom, it disappears. Prajna Wisdom is just that which is transformed out of ignorance. All outflows, refer to greed, hatred, and stupidity, but you could expand this list to include the eighty-four thousand outflows. In general, outflows are just our afflictions. If you have one portion of affliction, you have one portion of outflows. If you have ten portions of affliction, you have ten portions of outflows. If you have a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand portions of afflictions, you have that many outflows. Therefore, if you want to get rid of outflows, it is very simple: just do not get angry. Get rid of afflictions.

“But, that is very simple,” you say.

Simple it may be, but you cannot do it! If you can do it, it is easy. If you cannot do it, it is very difficult.

Affliction is obviously no good; everyone knows this. But everyone takes his afflictions as more important than food. If they do not get afflicted for even the space of a single day, they feel as if they had not eaten—they are starving! Once they give rise to afflictions, then they feel as if they had eaten their fill. They do not think of anything at all--perfectly satisfied. They do not worry about their family, they do not worry about their country, and they quit concerning themselves with their own bodies. So, I always say you take affliction as a meal and eat one helping after another. At home, you eat home-type afflictions; at school, you eat school-type afflictions; in society, you eat society-type afflictions; in the country; you eat national-afflictions; in the world, you eat international afflictions. Whatever you do you give rise to a corresponding affliction. Whatever afflictions you have, you cannot put them down. You cannot put them down; you cannot put them down. One year, you cannot put them down; ten years, you cannot put them down; but after a hundred years, you certainly must put them down. Hah! You will put down what you can put down, and you will also put down what you cannot put down. Hah! See? When it is all over, you will still be thinking, “I did not get my fill of afflictions--yet.” Wait until next life and I will eat some more. Then, in your next life you will once again take afflictions as your food and drink. That is outflow for you.

Had their minds liberated from all outflows. The text says that their minds were liberated, but it does not say that their bodies were liberated. They still have bodies, so how could you say they had been liberated from them? Their minds had been liberated. This means they had no minds at all. But it was not like Bi Gan whose heart was plucked out of his chest by the King of Chou. It means, rather, that their minds were free of all afflictions. The absence of affliction is the attainment of liberation. After all, what is liberation? It is just having no affliction.

When the Fourth Patriarch went to see the Third Patriarch, the Third Patriarch asked him, “What are you doing?”

The Fourth Patriarch answered, “I am seeking liberation. Will you help me attain liberation?

The Third Patriarch said, “Well, who has bound you up?”

As soon as the Fourth Patriarch heard this sentence, he suddenly became enlightened. “Ah! I am free. No one is tying me up. Why should I seek liberation?” Saying that their minds had been liberated just means that they had no more afflictions, no more greed, anger, and delusion.

“I cannot do it!” you say.

If you could, you would be liberated yourself! It is just because you cannot do it that you do not attain liberation. Your body cannot be liberated, nor can your mind.

**All attained profound and subtle Dhyana concentration.** Is that something you attain? How do you get it? The Heart Sutra says, “There is no wisdom and no gain.” Then, if there is wisdom, there is gain. Why does the text say, they “gained” it?” Because they did have wisdom. With wisdom, they gained these qualities. Then how did they get their wisdom? They got rid of their ignorance. Once rid of afflictions, they obtained wisdom.

You say, “Then I will throw my ignorance away and get some wisdom.”

If you throw away your ignorance, you will throw away your wisdom as well. Then you would not have either one! Affliction itself is wisdom. If you do not know how to use it, it is affliction. If you can use it, it is wisdom. So we say,

Affliction itself is Bodhi,
Birth and death, Nirvana.

If in the midst of affliction, you can wake up and turn that affliction into Bodhi, then, right in birth and death, you attain Nirvana. There is no Nirvana apart from birth and death, and there is no Bodhi apart from affliction. Before, when lecturing The Sixth Patriarch Sutra, I talked about Bodhidharma’s two disciples, Fo Tuo and Ye She . They said to the Venerable Yuan, “You see: The hand makes a fist and the fist makes a hand. Was that fast or not?”

The Venerable Yuan answered, “Very fast.”

They said, “Affliction is Bodhi; birth and death are Nirvana—it is just that fast.”

The Venerable Yuan was immediately enlightened. So, you should not think that affliction is eighty-four thousand miles away from Bodhi. And do not think that birth and death are eighty-four thousand miles away from Nirvana. They are immediately interchangeable.

To attain the profound and subtle Dhyana concentration referred to in the text you must cut off affliction. Turn affliction into wisdom. It is profound as in The Heart Sutra, “practicing the profound prajna-paramita.” It is subtle as in the verse we say, “Supreme, profound, subtle, and wonderful Dharma.” Proficiency in Dhyana samadhi is not gained externally. It comes from the awakening of one’s own self-nature. The self-nature takes itself across through a process of self-cultivation and self-understanding. You do not get it from outside. So do not seek it externally. It is the scenery of your nature land. Your original wisdom is within you. It is within your own self-nature. It is not external to it.

Dhyana is a Sanskrit word. It means “stilling thought.” It also means “cultivation of thought.” Dhyana samadhi is the attainment of the advantages of “stilling thought”, or “cultivating contemplation”. To gain skill in it you must actually practice it.

Attaining the profound and subtle Dhyana concentration, they perfected **the Three Clarities,** the clarity of the heavenly eye is also called the penetration of the heavenly eye. It is called a “clarity” because with it one can see all marks. The clarity of past lives refers to knowing what went on in the past not only in one lifetime, but through many lives into the past. It means knowing in which life you were a Bodhisattva. “Ah! I have practiced the Bodhisattva Way in the past. In such and such a place I taught and transformed living beings. I did this in the past. I should continue to do so now.” In the past you made a vow to teach living beings, and so now in the present you make that vow again. You sit there and see, “Oh, I left home during the time of Shakyamuni Buddha. Shariputra and I were brothers! My older brother leaves home in every life to be a Bhikshu and I should do the same. If he goes on ahead, I should not fall behind.” With the clarity of past lives you see, “In the past during the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, I went and bowed to him. At that time, I heard him speak the Sutras, and so now I am very intelligent and can understand all the Sutras as soon as I read them. In fact, if I do not understand something, I often have a dream and understand it through the dream. I dream,

The phoenix has not come,
And the river sends no map.
I am finished.

That is something I said myself in the past!! Gee! I said those words in the past, and so, hearing them now I am deeply impressed.”

“The phoenix has not come, and the river sends no map. I am finished.” Those lines were spoken by Confucius. The phoenix no longer shows up, mystic oracles no longer emerge out of the river. I am not going to work anymore. During the time of Fu Xi , a turtle rose out of the river with a chart on its back, giving him the idea for the eight trigrams of the Yi Jin g . I am not going to work anymore. I am going to retire.”

Or, they see, “In the past I was a thief. Now I am going to change and be good.” Such are the benefits gained from knowing past lives. Others see, “Oh, how strange! In the past I have been a pig, a cat--everything! When I was a cat, I could climb trees. When I was a dog, I guarded the door. When I was a pig, I just loved to eat. Gosh! That is really weird. Like Zhe Gong said, ‘Strange, strange, bizarre indeed!’”

One disciple made a vow to become an animal to teach animals. At first, I was surprised that he wants to be an animal, but then I thought, “I think everyone at one time or another has been an animal.” It is just that you have forgotten. Since you do not have the knowledge of past lives, you cannot see it, and so you think you are so outstanding. Actually, we are all about the same. There is not much difference, really.

The clarity of extinction of outflows means that all faults and habits are gone, outflows are ended. The most important thing is to have samadhi. With samadhi you can arrive at the stage of no-outflows. As long as you have outflows, the cause of the hells remains, as well as the cause of the hungry ghosts, and the cause of the animals. If you have extinguished outflows, then you have closed the doors to the hells, to the animal realm, and to the realm of the hungry ghosts. If you get rid of outflows, you are safe. If you have any outflows at all, then they will always be cropping up all over the place. The three evil paths will be waiting for you. The ghosts will be calling for you to come to them, and the animals will be waving frantically at you, saying, “Hey!! Come on over here!”

**The Six Penetrations,** six spiritual penetrations: the Penetration of the Heavenly Eye, the Penetration of the Heavenly Ear, the Penetration of Past Lives, the Penetration of Others’ Thought, the Penetration of the Extinction of Outflows, and the Penetration of the Complete Spirit. If you attain these Six Penetrations, you can make infinite transformations, as you will.

The Heavenly Eye is difficult to obtain. Most people would have to cultivate for five hundred great eons in order to attain the Six Spiritual Penetrations. If you have planted many good roots in former lives, you may meet a Good Knowing Advisor who will teach you a special Dharma-door. Then you would not have to pass through five hundred great eons to attain the Penetrations. Of all the people who cultivate the Way, why do so few obtain spiritual powers? It is because the merit and virtue they have accumulated through cultivation does not exceed the amount of offense-karma they have created. So, not only do people not attain the Six Spiritual Penetrations, but even if they do obtain them, they will lose them again.

Everyone can count up his daily score. During any given day, do you give rise to more proper thoughts or to more deviant thoughts? Do you have more false thinking or more thoughts of cultivation? You should be able to figure it out for yourself. If you have more false thinking than thoughts of proper cultivation, then you have created more offense-karma than merit and virtue. If all day long you do not have any false thinking, but just singlemindedly cultivate the Way, then you have more merit and virtue than offense karma. It is a very important point.

Some people cultivate and attain the Five Eyes and Six Penetrations because they have little false thinking and their thoughts of cultivation are firm and singleminded. In the Buddhist Lecture Hall now, there are many people who are just about to attain the Five Eyes. Why? Because they cultivate the Thousand-Hands, Thousand-Eyes Dharma of the Forty-two Hands. This Dharma will cause you to increase your eyes and hands. If you feel that your two eyes are not enough, you can grow some more. I am not joking! You can be meditating in one place, but you will know what is going on all around you outside.

“Isn’t that just false thinking?” you say.

On the part of ordinary folk, it is not false thinking. From the point of view of a Bodhisattva, yes, it is still just false thinking. It depends on where you are at. What for common people is false thinking, for ghosts is not. Ghosts do not have “false” thinking, they have “rotten thinking.” They just think about rotten things. When ordinary people meditate and are able to go outside, that is not considered false thinking. But, for Arhats, it is false thinking because Arhats should always be in samadhi. When you are in samadhi, you should not be running outside to mind other people’s business. Arhats have some leftover habits, habits going back many lifetimes and many eons, which they have not cut off. So, what is false thinking for common people is not false thinking for Arhats. What is not false thinking for Arhats is false thinking for Bodhisattvas.

You should not just think that false thinking is false thinking, and that is it. There are many different varieties of false thinking. What Bodhisattvas consider not to be false thinking is considered false thinking for a Buddha in his state. For example, I am teaching you to study the Buddhadharma, and you, for your part, do not consider this false thinking. But, from my point of view, it is false thinking. You guys think that I have probably got samadhi! When in reality, it is still false thinking. It is very difficult to pinpoint these things exactly unless you really understand what is going on.

With the Penetration of the Heavenly Eye, you can see all the activities of the gods; you can also see what is going on among people. With the Heavenly Eye, however, you can only see the gods moving around and stuff. You cannot hear what they are saying. If you have the Heavenly Ear you can hear them talking. They might be saying, “Hey, what a good kid, cultivating the Way. He can come up here to heaven with us pretty soon.” You can hear them praising you, “Oh, what a good boy. He has taken refuge with the Triple Jewel. He practices Dhyana meditation and is fairly sincere. He is so-and-so’s disciple.”

The Penetration of Past Lives means that you can know what people did in their former lives, what their former names were, and what they did. You might realize, “Oh, I met this person five hundred great eons ago. Hmm, I think he was my father then. And that person over there was my mother five hundred great eons ago. That one was my brother. That one was my sister.” You will know all those kinds of things. How far you can see into the past--five hundred years, five hundred centuries, five hundred eons--depends upon how much skill you have. Knowing that they were your relatives, friends, siblings, or spouse, you can think of some ways to cross them over. “They were my family and friends before, and so, no matter what, I am going to think of a way to save them in this life, to help them get enlightened.”

The Penetration of Other’s Thoughts is very strange. Before someone says something, you know what he is thinking. “Ah, that one is having such-and-such false thought. That one is thinking about her child, she really cannot put him down. That one is thinking about her mother who is sick. She is very worried about her. That one is thinking about her younger sister, “I really want to cross her over. Will she ever believe in the Buddha?” That one wants to save her mother. That one wants to save his father. See? Every living being has his own brand of false thinking. If you have this penetration, you can know what each one of them is thinking. But, you had better be careful not to tell them that you know what they are thinking. If you do that, they would not be able to face you again. Why? Because you know their secrets. They will be afraid that you know all about them. Do not blurt out, “Hey, I know just what you are false thinking about. You are false thinking about New York.” Do not tell them these wonderful things. You may know it, but just act like you do not know it. Pretend it is not even happening. Then you can know their false thoughts from then on. Do not think that you can go telling people that you know what they are thinking.

The Penetration of the Extinction of Outflows means that you have gotten rid of all your faults and bad habits.

The Penetration of the Complete Spirit refers to having all kinds of power of magical transformation. You can be sitting in one place and at the same time go off to New York to play. You can go take a look at things in L.A. It would not even take you one second to make your return trip either. You can make a round trip faster than a rocket. But you have to gain this penetration first. If you do not have it, forget it.

This has been a discussion of the miraculous uses of the Six Spiritual Penetrations. Some people who cultivate really want to attain the Six Spiritual Penetrations. Before you have attained them, you may think that they are a lot of fun. Once you get them, however, you will find that you run into a lot of trouble. Really! You will get them and see, “Oh, the time has come for me to save him.” If you fail to save him, you have blown it. On the other hand, if you do save him, you have a lot of work on your hands. Getting the six spiritual powers means you are going to have a lot of things to take care of. You will think, “I have so much to do, I do not even have time to meditate. Do this! Do that! My work is never done!” You may think you are busy now. Wait until you get the Six Penetrations. You will be even busier.

“In that case, forget it,” you say. “I do not want them.”

That is perfectly all right. However, it is a part of the Path of Cultivation, and eventually you must attain them in order to teach and transform living beings. Do not be afraid of too much work. The more work you do, the more merit and virtue you will have. If you just do a little work, you only gain a little merit. It is better to be busier than to take naps all the time. Those who cultivate must not be afraid of trouble; they should not be afraid of being too busy. Do not be afraid that living beings will be hard to save. The harder they are to save, the harder you must work to save them. If one does not listen to you, keep on instructing him until he does. Do not worry about the energy expended.

**And perfected the Eight Liberations.** In order to have the Eight Liberations, you must have samadhi power. Without samadhi power, you cannot be liberated. Unless you are liberated, you are tied up. Who ties you up? You tie yourself up!

The Eight Liberations are:

1. The liberation in which inside there is form; outward form is contemplated.

2. The liberation in which inside there is no form; outward form is contemplated.

Inside, there is no emotional love, no material attachment, and no desire. Outwardly, however, form is still seen, but inside it is empty. When an external state arises and things are no longer empty, then you do not have this liberation. Perhaps ordinarily you have not the slightest desire. You have no greed, no hate, no stupidity at all. That is called “inwardly there is no form.” Inside you are very pure, clear, and lucid. But that is only when no external state exists to upset you. Once an external circumstance arises, your samadhi power is not yet perfect.

When you see some external state, basically you should not let it affect you. But, now you see a state, and you get all excited! Say, a lot of people show up and you fear trouble. You think immediately about running off to the mountains to cultivate alone, eat when you are hungry, sleep when you are tired, meditate when you feel like it, and recite the Sutras when you want to. You feel that would be much better than having to be with all these people. But such thoughts indicate that you are not truly liberated. You are simply attached, turned by states. If you are not turned by states, then as the saying goes,

When you see affairs and are awake, you can transcend the world.
If you see affairs and are confused, you fall beneath the wheel.

If you see something and you wake up, then you are liberated. You qualify for the second of the Eight Liberations: Inside there is no mark of form, and outward form is contemplated. You are not turned by external states.

3. The pure body of liberation certifies to the perfect dwelling. At this time, there is no inside or outside. This state is arrived at through the cultivation of dhyana meditation at the level of the Fourth Dhyana.

4. The liberation of emptiness without limit. You realize that you cannot find the limit of space, that space is infinite. That is liberation.

5. The liberation of consciousness without limit. Consciousness is very subtle, and also boundless.

6. The liberation of nothing whatsoever.

7. The liberation of neither perception nor non-perception.

8. The liberation of the samadhi of the extinction of feeling and thought.

These Eight Bodies of Liberation are also called the Eight Great Sovereign Selves once you attain them. Consequently, you will receive the eight kinds of liberating wisdom. Let us talk about these gradually when the opportunities come up. I will explain more and more each time, rather than finishing everything at once. If I finish everything at once, I would be out of a job.

The first explanation is on the Dharma of the Four Truths. The second explanation is on the Dharma of the Twelve Causes and Conditions. The third explanation is on the Six Paramitas. The explanations during this first period is the Teaching of the Tripitaka, during the second period he explains the Agama, during the third period is Vaipulya, during the fourth is Prajna. The fifth is period of Dharma Flower Nirvana.

The Storehouse Teaching is called the “Half-word Teaching.” It was only “half.” When you get to the Prajna Period, it is the “Full-word Teaching”. Some understand the full teaching through the half-teaching. To speak the “Full-word Teaching” to those of the “Half-word Teaching”. This is the Vaipulya Period. hat is called clarifying the “Full-word Teaching” to the “Half-word Teaching.”

**The second, third, and fourth times he set forth this Dharma, thousands of myriads of millions of nayutas of living beings, their numbers like the Ganges sands, also because they did not grasp at any dharma, had their minds liberated from outflows. From that time onwards, the assembly of Hearers was unlimited, boundless, and unreckonable.**

**Sutra:**

**At that time the sixteen princes all left home as virgin youths and became Shramaneras. They all possessed sharp faculties and clear wisdom. They had already made offerings to hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of Buddhas, purely cultivating Brahman conduct, seeking anuttarasamyaksambodhi.**

Outline:

K2 . Turning the Dharma-wheel which gets rid of the “Half-word,” and clarifies the “Full-word.”

L1. All the kids leave home.

**Commentary:**

**At that time the sixteen princes all left home as virgin youths.** The Buddha’s sixteen sons left the home life. This is called entering the Way as a chaste virgin. **And became Shramaneras.They all possessed sharp faculties and clear wisdom.** “Sharp faculties” means that they had the six spiritual penetrations. Their eyes could talk! Their ears could hear!

“What do you mean, ‘Their eyes could talk?’ Mine certainly cannot,” you say.

Don’t you know that sometimes people can communicate very clearly with just a glance? Isn’t that like knowing other people’s thoughts, like talking with your eyes?

Sometimes, too, the eyes can eat. When the food is brought out, you just see it, and you are full.

“Oh, that is just false thinking,” you say.

You may think so, but when you attain that state, you really will be full right when you see the food. Your ears will be able to see, and your eyes will be able to hear.

And clear wisdom, they were extremely intelligent.

**They had already made offerings to hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of Buddhas, purely cultivating Brahman conduct, seeking anuttarasamyaksambodhi.** They cultivated Brahman conduct so diligently because they were interested in the Unsurpassed Proper, Equal, and Right Enlightenment.

**Sutra:**

**They all spoke to the Buddha, saying, “World Honored One, all these limitless thousands of myriads of millions of greatly virtuous Hearers already have reached accomplishment. World Honored One, you should, for our sakes, also, speak the Dharma of anuttarasamyaksambodhi. Having heard it, we will all cultivate and study it. World Honored One, we all aspire to the Thus Come One’s knowledge and vision. As to the thoughts deep within our minds, the Buddha himself knows.”**

Outline:

L2. Request for Dharma.

**Commentary:**

**They all spoke to the Buddha, saying, “World Honored One, all these limitless thousands of myriads of millions of greatly virtuous Hearers already have reached accomplishment.** “Now, in this Bodhimanda,” said the sixteen princes, “there are limitless millions of greatly virtuous Hearers. They have great virtue.” What is great virtue? This means that in past lives they did many, many good deeds. They practiced much virtue, so they are called greatly virtuous ones. They are called Hearers because they were enlightened to the Way when they heard the Buddha’s voice preaching the Four Holy Truths. Have already reached accomplishment. What have they accomplished? They have accomplished the fruition of being Hearers. But now they have a certain doubt about whether or not they have truly attained Nirvana. They have accomplished the Hearer’s fruit, but have begun to give rise to the mind of the Great Vehicle.

**World Honored One, you should, for our sakes, also speak the Dharma of anuttarasamyaksambodhi.** You who are honored both in and beyond the world, O Buddha, really should, for all of us living beings, teach the Dharma of the utmost right and Perfect Enlightenment. How do you cultivate this Dharma-door which is given the name ‘the fruition of Buddhahood?’ It is the position of Buddhahood, but there must be some method by which this position is cultivated and attained. If there is no way to attain it, and you just say, ‘anuttarasamyaksambodhi,’ or Proper, Equal, and Right Enlightenment, it does not mean a whole lot to us.

If no one explains it, we will never understand it, and we will never get there. The sixteen princes are seeking the Dharma for the sake of the entire assembly of humans and gods. Basically, when they heard The Avatamsaka Sutra, the sixteen princes already certified to the fruit and understood the Dharma of anuttarasamyaksambodhi. Although they understood, the others had not understood, and so they pretended that they did not understand, so they could request it for the sake of other living beings. It is not the case that the sixteen princes, the sixteen shramaneras, the sixteen Bodhisattvas, did not understand it. They did long ago.

Why do they ask the Buddha to speak this Dharma? They want to seek the Dharma on behalf of all living beings.

Here, in the Buddhist Lecture Hall, everyday someone requests the Dharma. The ones who request the Dharma do not necessarily not understand it. Some of them can explain it, too. In fact, some of them can explain it even more wonderfully than I can. Why do they ask me to speak it? Because, I speak Chinese. Most people do not understand Chinese, and so when they hear me speak, they think it is really wonderful Dharma. Then it is translated by these eloquent translators, and they translate it ten times better than I speak it. That way, everyone gets real excited about listening to the Dharma. That is why they ask me to speak Dharma every single day. Basically, I do not teach you anything you do not already know. You can all lecture better than I. But, since I am a foreigner, you think a lot of me.

There is a saying, “Monks from far away can really recite the Sutras.” The grass is always greener, you know. I, being as shameless as I am, just go ahead and speak it, rapping away senselessly. I may rap senselessly, but you do not listen senselessly. In fact, by the time it is translated into English, it is not senseless at all. Before it is translated, it sounds all confused. “What is he saying, anyway? The people who know Chinese are all laughing, so it must be funny. Hmm…” Anyway, the sixteen princes already understood the Dharma of anuttarasamyaksambodhi, but still they asked the Buddha to preach it.

Let us take a look at what the word means: Anuttara, means “unsurpassed” (無上 --wu shang). The Buddha’s position is supreme, there is nothing higher. Samyaksam means “right, equal, and proper” (正等正 --zheng deng zheng). It is “right,” in that it differs from the state of common folk who are unenlightened. Common folk are not enlightened. They do not wake up. If you tell them the truth about things, they think it is false. If you lie to them, they think you are telling them the truth. That is just the way they are. In fact, if you try to tell them the truth, they get afraid and refuse to listen. “I do not want to hear the truth! What would I do if I knew the truth?” They do not want the truth. They may stumble in here accidentally for a lecture, but they run out before it is finished. Why? Because they do not want the truth. I say that they do not want to hear the truth, but their rationale is that they do not want to hear what is false! Taking the true for the false, they wander around with their false ideas all day long, thinking they are true. Since they cannot let go of the false, they cannot understand the Dharma, and they are not awake.

When the Arhats hear the Dharma, they wake up. “Yes, that is the way it is, all right,” they say. “It is really true.” Since they know it is true, they pursue that truth in cultivation. One is taught to put everything down, and they do just that! They see through it all. They break all their attachments, put aside all their faults, and attain freedom and mastery. That freedom and mastery is just awakening. They have attained right enlightenment, enlightenment to what is right. They have not enlightened to what is wrong: i.e., they are not enlightened to the pleasures of the senses, dancing, and so forth. They are enlightened to what is right, “right enlightenment.” They have not, however, attained Equal Enlightenment.

Equal Enlightenment (正等 --zheng deng), means that they are the same as the Buddha, more or less. The Bodhisattvas have done this. Not only do they attain Right Enlightenment by enlightening themselves, but they also enlighten others. “I have come down this road, and I advise others to do likewise if they wish to become Buddhas. Other paths are not as direct and never get you to the position of Buddhahood. One might say, “All roads lead to Rome” (or to enlightenment), but some take longer than others. You could take one of those roads and go down it all your life and never get to Rome, see? Hah! This means that if you do not understand the Buddhadharma, but you want to become a Buddha, you can run around forever and never get there. Bodhisattvas can enlighten themselves and instruct others. “Do not go down that road.”

Take this one, come with me. You will certainly succeed.” They help others to wake up so that they, too, can attain the doctrine of enlightenment. “Oh? Not bad, hey. Right on!
I have been going down these crazy bypaths for so many years, getting absolutely nowhere. Boy, I am glad I got directions from that Bodhisattva.” Then, after they go down the right road for awhile, they become Bodhisattvas themselves and can be equal with the Bodhisattvas. They are equal with the Bodhisattvas, and, you might also say, they are equal with the Buddhas, too. They have, for all practical purposes, become Buddhas. There are two ways to explain the word “equal.” The ones who are already Bodhisattvas are said to be equal with the Buddhas, and the ones who are becoming Bodhisattvas are equal with the Bodhisattvas.

You ask, “Well, are the ones who are becoming Bodhisattvas equal to the Buddhas?”

Oh, more or less. Why make an issue out of it? It is really not that different. They may have right and equal enlightenment, but their enlightenment is not “unsurpassed,” like the Buddha’s. The Bodhisattvas are still Bodhisattvas. Their enlightenment is not supreme. The Buddha alone has the Unsurpassed Enlightenment. The Buddha is, therefore, called the Lord who is Unsurpassed, whereas the Bodhisattvas are called Lords who are Surpassed, that is, surpassed by the Buddha.

The sixteen princes, seeing the myriads of millions become Arhats, realized they could not stay at the level of Arhatship forever. They had to press on towards the Great Vehicle, to study the Buddhadharma. And, so they asked the Buddha to preach to them the Dharma of anuttarasamyaksambodhi.

**Having heard it, we will all cultivate and study it.** Once you have spoken this Dharma for us, we are not going to let it go in one ear and out the other, like a breeze just blowing by. No way. We are all going to cultivate and study it. Understanding the Dharma of Utmost Right, Perfect Enlightenment, we will definitely practice in accord with it. We will cultivate according to the method given us and will not be lazy. Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory Buddha, do not worry about us! We will certainly be vigorous in our cultivation. We certainly would not be lazy. We will forget even about food, we will be so vigorous. And we will be so happy, we will forget about worrying. We will be so happy with the Dharma that we will forget all our troubles!

**World Honored One, we all aspire to the Thus Come One’s knowledge and vision.** We here in the assembly have our hearts set on attaining the knowledge and vision of the Buddha. What is the knowledge and vision of the Buddha? The Dharma Flower Sutra talks about,

1. Opening the knowledge and vision of the Buddha.
2. Demonstrating the knowledge and vision of the Buddha.
3. Awakening to the knowledge and vision of the Buddha.
4. Entering into the knowledge and vision of the Buddha.

That is, opening, demonstrating, awakening, and entering the Buddha’s knowledge and vision. The Buddha first spoke The Avatamsaka Sutra. The next teaching was the Agama teaching, the Storehouse Teaching. Next, he taught the Vaipulya Teaching, or pervasive teaching. The next teaching was the Prajna, or Separate Teaching, and the final teaching was the Lotus-Nirvana, the Perfect Teaching. Now, all living beings want to hear The Dharma Flower Sutra; they want to “get rid of the Half-word Teaching and be clear about the Full-Word Teaching.” They do not want the Half-word Teaching. They want the Full-word Teaching. The Dharma Flower Sutra is the genuine, perfect, great teaching.

**As to the thoughts deep within our minds, the Buddha himself knows.** What is this? Are there deep and shallow thoughts in our minds or what? How deep are the deep ones? How shallow are the shallow ones? The deep thoughts are the ones that have been in there for a long, long time about asking for this Dharma. Which Dharma? The Dharma of becoming a Buddha, the utmost right and perfect enlightenment. Ultimately, how does one cultivate this Dharma? You need compassion, kindness, sympathetic joy, and giving--the Four Unlimited Minds of the Buddha. You also need the unconditioned mind and the undefiled mind. An undefiled mind is the most important. Take care not to have desire. If you have desire, you are defiled. If you are defiled, you would not obtain self-mastery.

One must also cultivate the Six Perfections and the Ten Thousand Conducts, the Twelve Causal Links, and the Four Truths--the Thirty-seven Wings of Enlightenment. These are all Dharmas for becoming a Buddha. But there is a quicker method, one which enables you to become a Buddha without having to pass through the usual three great asamkhyeya eons. What is it? The Surangama Mantra, which we recite every day. In the verse before the mantra, Ananda says,

“The wonderfully deep Dharani, unmoving honored one,
The foremost Shurangama is seldom seen in the world.
It melts away my eons worth of upside-down thinking,
So that I needn’t pass through asankheya eons to attain the Dharma body.
I wish now to obtain the fruit and become an honored King,
And return to save as many beings as there are sand grains in the Ganges river.”

One can become a Buddha quickly, without passing through those uncountable eons. What for? So that one can return and save other living beings. That is what Ananda said. If you can recite the Shurangama Mantra often, you will certainly become a Buddha very quickly.

You say, “But the mantra is so long. It takes at least twenty minutes to recite it once through.”

Yes, twenty minutes is a long time to say a mantra. But you take twenty minutes every day to eat lunch and you do not feel that is such a long time, do you? You do not complain about how long it takes to eat lunch and try to cut back on the time. Why complain about the mantra? Weird. You sleep for hours at a time and never complain about getting too much sleep. Why do you not object to sleeping and eating but object to saying the mantra? Hmm? I really do not understand your attitude towards studying the Buddhadharma. You do not even have twenty minutes to spare. And also, there is the Great Compassion Mantra and the Dharma of the Forty-two Hands. Those are the most wonderful Dharmas for becoming a Buddha. Those who cultivate these Dharmas can attain the Five Eyes and the Six Spiritual Penetrations very quickly. But you are afraid of all the trouble. You think if you get those powers you will have more work to do, but by the time you have got them, it will be too late for regret. Trouble or no trouble, you are going to have to take the trouble, that is all.

“Well, I’d be better off to stay just like I am, then,” you say.

Fine, if that is what you like. I never force people to do anything. It is up to each one of you to decide what you are going to do. Do what you like. Do not do what you do not want to do. But the methods for attaining the utmost right and perfect enlightenment are just the methods that I have taught you. Today, someone said to me. “You have taught us so many Dharmas, I do not even know where to start cultivating. I do not know which one is to do. I’d like to concentrate on one single Dharma and succeed very quickly, but you have given us so many!”

You may specialize in any of the Dharmas that I have taught you. It is like going to school. First you have to study all the materials assigned. Then when you take the test you may be asked one or two questions which are taken out of all the material. You must have studied all of it to be able to answer those few questions. And you cannot take open-book tests in the Buddhadharma. Among all the Dharmas I have taught you, there is certainly one which will get you to Buddhahood, but you are going to have to learn them all to get there. It is for sure you will make it. But if you start complaining about having too many Dharmas to study, well, why don’t you complain about having to eat everyday? You have plenty of time to eat. You are not afraid of sleeping too much, either. Quite inconceivably.

So, the text says, “We all aspire to the Thus Come One’s knowledge and vision. As to the thoughts deep within our minds, the Buddha himself knows.” The Buddha knows them quite well. They are asking the Buddha to speak The Dharma Flower Sutra. The Buddha knows their deepest thoughts. The Buddha knew long ago that this was what they wanted, but since they did not request the Dharma, the Buddha did not speak it. Now they are requesting the Dharma, hoping that he will compassionately receive their request, teach and transform them. After the sixteen princes asked for the Dharma, the Buddha was delighted, and he spoke the Dharma.

**Sutra:**

**Then, the multitudes, led by the Wheel-turning Sage King, eighty thousand million of them, upon seeing the sixteen princes leave home, also sought to leave home, and the king permitted them to do so.**
Outline:

L3. The followers also leave home.

**Commentary:**

**Then, the multitudes, led by the Wheel-turning Sage King,** that is, the father of the Buddha, Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory, and grandfather of the sixteen princes. He had millions of followers--**Eighty thousand million of them**, **upon seeing the sixteen princes leave home, also sought to leave home,** renounce all their wealth and property, their wives and concubines, and become Bhikshus. They all decided to leave home along with them and become Bhikshus, **and the king permitted them to do so.** He said, “Fine. Leave home. I will help you out, in fact. If any one of you need anything, I will give it to you.” So all eighty thousand million of them suddenly had a patron, someone to support them. They were not afraid, then, of starving, freezing, or dying of thirst or poverty, or anything else. They went right ahead and, with one heart, left home to cultivate the Way and become Bhikshus. In the future, they would all become Buddhas. A lot of them have already become Buddhas, and some are still cultivating and will do so in the future. Eighty thousand million of them limitless eons ago made vows to become Buddhas. Their patron was the Wheel-turning Sage King; he made it easy for them to cultivate the Way.

**Sutra:**

**At that time, the Buddha, having received the request of the sixteen Shramaneras, after twenty thousand eons, then at last, amidst the fourfold assembly, spoke the Great Vehicle Sutra by the name of the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower, a dharma for instructing Bodhisattvas of whom the Buddha is protective and mindful. After he spoke the Sutra, the sixteen Shramaneras, for the sake of anuttarasamyaksambodhi, all received, upheld and recited it and keenly penetrated its meaning.**
Outline:

L4. The Buddha receives the request.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, the Buddha, having received the request of the sixteen Shramaneras, after twenty thousand eons,** during which time he spoke the Vaipulya and Prajna Teachings. **Then at last, amidst the fourfold assembly**--Upasakas, Upasikas, Bhikshus, and Bhikshunes--**spoke the Great Vehicle Sutra by the name of the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower.** This Sutra is **a Dharma for instructing Bodhisattvas of whom the Buddha is protective and mindful.** The Buddha watches over and protects those who recite The Lotus Sutra.

**After he spoke the sutra, the sixteen Shramaneras, for the sake of anuttarasamyaksambodhi,** the Utmost Right and Perfect Enlightenment, the Buddha-fruit, **all received, upheld, and recited it and keenly penetrated its meaning.** They recited it until they could recite from the beginning to the end from memory! And they never forgot it; it stuck right in their eighth consciousnesses.

**Sutra:**

**When the sutra was spoken, the sixteen Bodhisattva-Shramaneras all received it with faith. Among the host of Hearers, too, there were those who had faith in it and understood it. The remaining thousands of myriads of millions of living beings, however, all gave rise to doubts.**
Outline:

L5. In the assembly, some understood and some did not.

**Commentary:**

**When the Sutra,** The Dharma Flower Sutra,**was spoken, the sixteen Bodhisattva-Shramaneras,** or, you could say “Shramanera Bodhisattvas.” This means that they had received the ten Shramanera Precepts, but they had not yet received the two-hundred fifty Bhikshu Precepts. How could they become Bodhisattvas if they had not even taken the Bhikshu precepts? It was because the sixteen Shramaneras cultivated with great vigor. They were so vigorous, in fact, they did not even have time to take the Bhikshu precepts! Too busy! Busy doing what? Lecturing on the Sutras, turning the great Dharma-wheel, and reciting The Lotus Sutra.

Basically, precepts are designed for those who need them, that is, people who might not observe the precepts. If, however, you are busy reciting The Lotus Sutra all day long, you would not have time to break any precepts because you will be keeping strict control over the three karmic vehicles: body, mouth, and mind. If you are reciting the Sutra with your mouth, your mouth would not commit the four evils of the mouth: lying, harsh speech, double-tongued speech, and frivolous speech. If you are kneeling there reciting it, you would not commit the three evils of the body: killing, stealing, or sexual misconduct. If you are keeping the meaning of the Sutra in your mind, you would not be committing the three evils of the mind: greed, hatred, and stupidity. That means you will be pure in the three karmas. If you are pure in this way, taking or not taking the precepts does not matter. That is why the sixteen Shramaneras were also Bodhisattvas.

What is more, these sixteen Shramaneras, although they were said to be shramaneras, they were actually “people who had come back again.” This means that they were born into that time and place in order to protect the Bodhimanda of Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory Buddha. In past lives they made deliberate vows, saying, “When this person becomes a Buddha, I am going to protect his Bodhimanda.” This is like Guo Hu, who made a vow that when I become Buddha, he will protect my Bodhimanda. I have not become a Buddha yet, and he is already protecting my Bodhimanda! He did not even wait for me to become a Buddha. That is a real vow for you!

Actually, when someone becomes a Buddha, he gains great spiritual powers and miraculous abilities, and it does not matter whether anyone protects his Bodhimanda or not. He can take care of himself. But, before one becomes a Buddha and gains spiritual powers, if you protect his Bodhimanda, then you are really protecting it. It is as if there were a wealthy person who ate the world’s finest food every single day, and you said, “Today I am going to treat you to a fine lunch,” he would not necessarily be too excited, because he gets terrific food at home all the time. But, if you offered to take a poor person, someone who does not eat too well, out to lunch, he would really appreciate it. So, after this, if you make vows to protect my Dharma, do not wait until I become a Buddha to protect it. At that time, there will be a lot of Dharma protectors. The time that you really need Dharma protectors is before you have become a Buddha.

They **all received it with faith**, accepted the wonderful Dharma spoken by the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory. **Among the host of hearers, too, there were those who had faith in it and understood it. The remaining thousands of myriads of millions of living beings, however, all gave rise to doubts.** They had doubts about that wonderful Dharma.

You say, “The Buddha has great spiritual powers. For example, when the Sutra began five thousand people rose and walked out. Perhaps the Buddha moved them to another land altogether so that they would not commit the offense of having doubts and perhaps slandering the Dharma.” Just having doubts would not mean that they would fall into lower realms, but if they went so far as to slander the Dharma, the Great Vehicle Scriptures, they would fall into the three evil paths. So, when Shakyamuni Buddha spoke The Dharma Flower Sutra, he forced the five thousand arrogant Bhikshus to leave. When the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory spoke the Dharma, thousands of myriads of millions of beings gave rise to doubts, so why didn’t he have them removed to other lands to avoid their doubts? He did not do this because he knew that, although they may have given rise to doubts, they would not slander the Dharma, so he did not need to have them relocated.

**Sutra:**

**The Buddha spoke this Sutra for eighty thousand eons without cessation.**
Outline:

L6. Period of time.

**Commentary:**

**The Buddha spoke this Sutra for eighty thousand eons without cessation,** he spoke without stopping, without interruption. That is a long time. Shakyamuni Buddha spoke The Dharma Flower Sutra in just eight years. Why did one Buddha take so long and the other take such a short time? Discriminations of short and long periods of time are done by living beings. Really, there is no such thing as “long and short” periods of time. “Long and short” are created by mental discriminations. The Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory spoke The Dharma Flower Sutra, the real mark Dharma-door, for eighty thousand eons and Shakyamuni Buddha spoke this real mark Dharma-door for only eight years, but there is no problem with the difference in time. The Buddha spoke for eighty-thousand eons without cessation. He did not rest at all. He did not ever take a break. He spoke the Sutra every single day. Every single day he spoke the Great Vehicle’s real mark Dharma. You should not think it unusual that we have lectures here in the Buddhist Lecture Hall every day. The Buddhas always lecture every day. Since we are the Buddha’s disciples, we should investigate the Sutra every day, too. And we should not take a rest.

**Sutra:**

**When he had finished speaking the Sutra, he entered a quiet room where he remained in Dhyana samadhi for eighty-four thousand eons.**
Outline:

L7. After speaking the Sutra, he enters samadhi.

**Commentary:**

**When he had finished speaking the Sutra**, when he was done, **he entered a quiet room,** his meditation room, **where he remained in Dhyana samadhi for eighty-four thousand eons.** When the Buddha was in samadhi, was no one lecturing on the Sutra?

**Sutra:**

**Then the sixteen Bodhisattva-Shramaneras, knowing that the Buddha had entered his room and was silently absorbed in Dhyana samadhi, each ascended the Dharma seat. For a period of eighty-four thousand eons, for the sake of the fourfold assembly, they spoke the WonderfulDharma Flower Sutra extensively and in detail. Each one of them crossed over six hundred myriads of millions of nayutas of Ganges’ sands of living beings, instructing them with the teaching, benefiting them, making them rejoice and causing them to bring forth the thought of anuttarasamyaksambodhi.**
Outline:

I2. Tying up conditions.
J1. Tying up conditions proper by speaking Dharma.
K1. Showing how they had tied conditions in distant past.
L1. Continuing the lectures for the benefit of beings.

**Commentary:**

**Then the sixteen Bodhisattva-Sharamaneras,** during the time the Buddha was in samadhi, **knowing that the Buddha had entered his room and was silently absorbed in Dhyana samadhi.** He was “thus, thus, unmoving, clear, lucid, and constantly bright” there in samadhi. They decided to keep on propagating the Dharma, and so **each ascended the Dharma seat.** Someone is wondering, “Did they all get up on the same seat, or what?” No! They took turns lecturing. And some went off into different directions--north, east, south, and west. Do not get to thinking that they all climbed up on the one Dharma seat. Do not be so attached.

**For a period of eighty-four thousand eons, for the sake of the four fold assembly, they spoke The Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra extensively,** broadly, **and in detail,** they expounded upon the doctrine. **Each one of them crossed over six hundred myriads of millions of nayutas of Ganges’ sands of living beings, instructing them with the teaching, benefiting them, making them rejoice, and causing them to bring forth the thought of anuttarasamyaksambodhi.** All those living beings together produced the mind to seek the Utmost Right and Perfect Enlightenment.

**Sutra:**

**After eighty-four thousand eons had passed, the Buddha, Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory arose from samadhi, approached the Dharma throne and serenely sat down upon it. He addressed the great assembly, saying, “these sixteen Bodhisattva-Shramaneras are very rare. All their faculties are keen and their wisdom is clear. They have in the past already made offerings to limitless thousands of myriads of millions of Buddhas. In the presence of those Buddhas, they constantly cultivated Brahman conduct, accepting and upholding the Buddha’s wisdom, instructing living beings and causing them to enter into it.**
Outline:

L2. The Buddha arises and praises them.
M1. Praise.

**Commentary:**

The Buddha had been in his quiet room in samadhi, and then **after eighty-four thousand eons had passed, the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory arose from samadhi, approached the Dharma throne,** he went to his Dharma seat, **and serenely sat down upon it. He addressed the great assembly,** all present in the Bodhimanda, **saying, “These sixteen Bodhisattva-Shramaneras are very rare. All their faculties are keen and their wisdom is clear.”** “Keen facilities” means that they could use their six sense organs interchangeably. Their Prajna wisdom manifested, so that they clearly understood all Dharmas. Why did they clearly understand all Dharmas? **They have in the past already made offerings to limitless thousands of myriads of millions of Buddhas. In the presence of those Buddhas, they constantly cultivated Brahman conduct,** they kept the precepts purely, **accepting and upholding the Buddha’s wisdom.** They always studied the wisdom of the Buddha**, instructing living beings and causing them to enter into it,** enter into the Buddha’s wisdom.

**Sutra:**

**“You should all make a point of drawing near to and making offerings to them. Why? Those Hearers, Pratyekabuddhas, or Bodhisattvas who can have faith in the Dharma of the Sutra spoken by these sixteen Bodhisattvas, accept and uphold it without defaming it, will all attain anuttarasamyaksambodhi, that is, the wisdom of the Thus Come One.”**
Outline:

M2. Exhortation.

**Commentary:**

**You should all make a point.** Making a point: means to be quick about it. **Drawing near to and making offerings to them.** Make a point of doing it, time and again. **Why?** Why do I say this? **Those Hearers, Pratyekabuddhas or Bodhisattvas who can have faith in the Dharma of the Sutra spoken by these sixteen Bodhisattvas,** deeply believing it, without any doubts, **accept and uphold it,** not forgetting it, and **without defaming it,** they **will all attain anuttarasamyaksambodhi,** the Hearers, Pratyekabuddhas, Bodhisattvas, or just living beings in general, they will all attain Supreme Enlightenment, **that is, the wisdom of The Thus Come One.**

**Sutra:**

**The Buddha told the bhikshus, “These sixteen Bodhisattvas always delight in speaking the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. Each Bodhisattvas has transformed six hundred myriads of millions of nayutas of Ganges’ sands of living beings who, life after life were born together with the Bodhisattvas and heard the Dharma from them, fully believing and understanding it. For this reason, they have met up with forty thousand millions of Buddhas, World Honored Ones and to this moment have not stopped doing so.”**
Outline:

K2. Still meeting Buddhas in the interim.

**Commentary:**

**The Buddha told the bhikshus, “These sixteen Bodhisattvas always delight in speaking The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra,** the thing they like to do best is to speak this Sutra. **Each Bodhisattvas has transformed six hundred myriads of millions of nayutas of Ganges’ sands of living beings who, life after life were born together with the Bodhisattvas.** Each of the sixteen Bodhisattvas has transformed and taught millions of living beings, who, life after life, were born together with the Bodhisattvas. The beings taught and transformed by the sixteen shramaneras made vows in every life to be born together with these sixteen. **And heard the Dharma from them,** hearing the sixteen shramaneras speak the Dharma, **fully believing and understanding it.** They understood it and had no doubts. **For this reason, they have met up with forty thousand millions of Buddhas, World Honored Ones, and to this moment, have not stopped doing so.”**

**Sutra:**

**“Bhikshus, I will tell you, those disciples of the Buddha, the sixteen Shramaneras, have all now attained anuttarasamyaksambodhi, and in the lands of the ten directions, are presently speaking the Dharma. They have as their retinues limitless hundreds of thousands of millions of Bodhisattvas and Hearers. Two have become Buddhas in the East. One is named Akshobhya, in the Land of Happiness. The other is named Sumeru Peak. Two have become Buddhas in the Southeast. One is named Lion Sound. The other is named Lion Sign. Two have become Buddhas in the South. One is named Space Dweller. The other is named Eternal Extinction. Two have become Buddhas in the Southwest. One is named Royal Sign. The other is named Brahma Sign. Two have become Buddhas in the West. One is named Amitayus. The other is named Savior of all Worlds from Suffering and Anguish. Two have become Buddhas in the Northwest. One is named Tamalapatrachandana Fragrance and Spiritual Penetrations. The other is named Sumeru Sign. Two have become Buddhas in the North. One is named Cloud Self-Mastery. The other is named King of Cloud Self-Mastery. In the Northeast there is a Buddha by the name of Destroyer of All Worldly Fear. The other Buddha, the sixteenth, is myself, Shakyamuni Buddha, here in the Saha World, where I have realized anuttarasamyaksambodhi.”**
Outline:

K3. Showing how Dharma Flower is still spoken to the present.
L1. Assembly present and past.
M1. Teachers present and past.

**Commentary:**

Shakyamuni Buddha says, “**Bhikshus**, all of you, those who have left home and those at home, as well, **I will tell you, those disciples of the Buddha,** the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory, **the sixteen Shramaneras,** the sixteen little novices, big novices, older novices, sixteen in all.” Now, after you have left home for a long while you can be called an “old novice.” If you have left home for neither too long nor too short, you are a big novice. If you have just left home, then you are called a “little novice.” These were probably “older novices,” because they had left home for a long time. Anyway, they **have all now attained anuttarasamyaksambodhi,** enlightenment, **and, in the lands of the ten directions, are presently speaking the Dharma,** right now they are speaking Dharma. **They have as their retinues limitless hundreds of thousands of millions of Bodhisattvas and Hearers.** The Buddha’s family is composed of Bodhisattvas, Arhats, and Hearer Disciples. They are like his children, his family. Since we are now studying the Buddhadharma, we, too, are like the Buddha’s sons and daughters, his disciples. So, you just be a filial child. We are all part of the Buddha’s retinue.

**Two have become Buddhas in the east: One is named Akshobhya.** “Akshobhya” is Sanskrit and means “Unmoving Honored One.” This is Medicine Master Crystal Light Thus Come One. In our Buddha House we have the three Buddhas, in the center is Shakyamuni. On his left is Medicine Master Buddha, holding the pagoda, and on the right is Amitabha, holding the Lotus Throne. So, you remember this, because when Americans see the Buddha images, they always ask, “Who is that?” They want an introduction. So everyone should know who they are, so when they are asked, they do not have to say, “I do not know,” leaving people thinking, “God, they live here, studying the Buddhadharma every day, and they do not even know who these Buddhas are!” That is pretty embarrassing. Not only for your disciples, but for the teacher, too. “What are they learning from that Teacher, anyway? They do not even know who those Buddhas are, you who are here all the time should pay attention to this detail. So, now I have introduced you to them.

So, the Unmoving Honored One, Akshobhya, is the Buddha in the east. **In the land of happiness,** that is, the Eastern Pure Crystal World. **The other is named Sumeru Peak;** the second shramanera became a Buddha in the east, by the name of Sumeru Peak; he is Akshobhya’s neighbor to the east.

**Two have become Buddhas in the southeast. One is named Lion Sound.** He is called Lion Sound because when the Buddha speaks Dharma it is like the roar of a lion, awesome and fierce. **The other is named Lion Sign.**

**Two have become Buddhas in the south. One is named Space-dweller.** This does not mean that he lives in empty space, just hanging there, for heaven’s sake. **The other is named Eternal Extinction;** he is always extinguishing the offense karma of living beings.

**Two have become Buddhas in the southwest. One is named Royal Sign.** He has the signs and characteristics of royalty, like the god Shakra. **The other is named Brahma Sign.** In the causal ground, he always cultivated Brahman conduct, and so his marks are very pure.

**Two have become Buddhas in the west. One is named Amitayus,** also known as Amitabha. Amitayus means limitless life. Amitabha, his other name, means limitless light. Here it is laid out very clearly that Amitabha was originally one of the sixteen royal sons of the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory. This Buddha’s life has limitless light, as the light of his wisdom is limitless. “Limitless life” refers to his blessedness, and “limitless life” refers to his wisdom.

**The other is named Savior of all Worlds from Suffering and Anguish.** The other shramanera became a Buddha by this name.

**Two have become Buddhas in the northwest. One is named Tamalapatrachandana Fragrance and Spiritual Penetrations.** Tamalapatra-chandana is, obviously, Sanskrit. Tamalapatra is interpreted as meaning, “worthy whose nature is without defilement.” This means that his self-nature is free of dust and filth. He is a worthy sage. Chandana is a kind of incense. **The other is named Sumeru Sign.** His wonderful and towering features are akin to Mt. Sumeru.

**Two have become Buddhas in the north. One is named Cloud Self-mastery;** he can travel at will through the clouds. **The other is named King of Cloud Self-mastery.**

**In the northeast there is a Buddha by the name of Destroyer of All Worldly Fear.** He can break through all the fearful situations. **The sixteenth, is myself, Shakyamuni,** which means “humane and silent,” **Buddha, here in the Saha World, where I have realized anuttarasamyaksambodhi,** the Buddha-fruit.

**Sutra:**

**“Bhikshus, we, as Shramaneras each taught and transformed limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of Ganges’ sands of living beings, who, hearing the Dharma from us, were set towards anuttarasamyaksambodhi.”**
Ouline:

M2. The disciples of past and present.
N1. Great affinities established in the past.

**Commentary:**

“**Bhikshus**,” Shakyamuni Buddha continues speaking to the Bhikshus, “**We, as Shramaneras,** novices, **each taught and transformed limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of Ganges’ sands of living beings, who;** each one of us taught quite a large number of living beings.” Here we are, Bhikshus, and we have not taught or transformed a single living being. Shame on us! **Hearing the Dharma from us,** studying the Buddhadharma under our tutelage, they **were set towards anuttarasamyaksambodhi**. Why did they study the Dharma? Because they wanted enlightenment.

**Sutra:**

**Of these living beings, there are those who dwell at the level of Hearers. I constantly instruct and transform them in anuttarasamyaksambodhi. All these people will, by means of this Dharma, gradually enter the Buddha Path. Why? The Thus Come One’s wisdom is hard to believe and hard to understand.**

Outline:

N2. Clearing up doubts of present Hearers.

**Commentary:**

**Of these living beings, there are those who** already **dwell at the level of Hearers. I constantly instruct and transform them in anuttarasamyaksambodhi,** teaching them the Dharma of Perfect Enlightenment. **All these people will, by means of this Dharma, gradually enter the Buddha Path. Why? The Thus Come One’s wisdom is hard to believe and hard to understand.** Because it is hard to believe, it is difficult to cultivate. Because it is hard to understand, it is difficult to attain the fruit.

**Sutra:**

**You were Bhikshus while I transformed living beings as limitless as Ganges sands who shall become disciples as Hearers after my extinction in the future.**
Outline:

N3. Past and present connections.

**Commentary:**

**You were Bhikshus,** they are all of you present here, **while I transformed living beings as limitless as Ganges sands who shall become disciples as Hearers after my extinction in the future.** Disciples of the Hearer Vehicle who will attain the fruits of Arhatship. They are those I taught before.

The Buddhadharma tells us about causes and conditions. If there are no causes, then there are no conditions. Without the cause, there is no effect. For example, before Shakyamuni Buddha became a Buddha, he taught and transformed limitless living beings. Every time, he appeared in the world, he became a Bhikshu and went about everywhere propagating the Buddhadharma. He lectured on the Sutras and spoke the Dharma, and all the living beings believed in him. They thought more of him than they did of their own parents. They felt closer to him than even to themselves!

Therefore, they were determined to follow their “Dharma-body parent.” Shakyamuni Buddha used his great and equal compassion to teach those living beings. Day by day, their numbers grew, and his position of fruition rose higher day by day as well, until he finally became a Buddha named Shakyamuni. All his students had tremendously deep affinities with him and came to protect the Dharma. Before he became a Buddha, he was also protected by those disciples throughout life after life. They helped him spread the Dharma in every life, right up to and including the lifetime in which he became a Buddha. When he became a Buddha, they all showed up to protect the Dharma. Some did not show up, however. But they are the ones referred to here in the text “who will be Hearer disciples in the future, after my extinction.” They certify to the fruition of Arhatship, then become Buddhas. Things depend on causes and conditions. So, the Buddha said,

“All dharmas arise from conditions;
All dharmas from conditions cease.
Our teacher, the Buddha, the great Shramana,
Always teaches it thus.”

**Sutra:**

**After my extinction, furthermore, there will be disciples who will not hear this Sutra, who will not know or be aware of the Bodhisattva conduct, but who will, through the attainment of their own merit and virtue give rise to the thought of extinction and who will enter Nirvana. I shall be a Buddha in another land, with another name. Although these people will have produced the thought of extinction and enter into Nirvana, they will, in those lands, seek the Buddha’s wisdom and get to hear this Sutra and that it is only by means of the Buddha Vehicle that extinction can be attained. There are no other vehicles, except for those expedient devices taught by other Thus Come Ones.”**
Outline:

N4. Disciples of the future.

**Commentary:**

**“After my extinction,”** says Shakyamuni Buddha, “when I have gone to Nirvana, **furthermore, there will be disciples,** who did not see me when I appeared in the world, **who will not hear this Sutra;** because they will cultivate the Dharmas of the Small Vehicle, they will not understand the wonderful principles of the Great Vehicle. Therefore, they will not hear The Dharma Flower Sutra. **Who will not know or be aware of the Bodhisattva conduct.** They would not know what it is to practice as a Bodhisattva, that is, what Bodhisattvas are supposed to do. **But who will, through the attainment of their own merit and virtue**--they may have sat in Dhyana meditation or attained some state, and so will **give rise to the thought of extinction and enter nirvana.”

I shall be a Buddha in another land, with another name.** I would not be in the Saha world; I will be in another world. I would not be called Shakyamuni Buddha, either. I will have another name. **Although these people will have produced the thought of extinction and enter into Nirvana**--although these disciples of the Buddha will have had the false thought that they have entered into Nirvana and attained the state of Nirvana, which is beyond production and extinction--**they will, in those lands, seek the Buddha’s wisdom and get to hear this Sutra and that it is only by means of the Buddha Vehicle,** the One Buddha Vehicle, **that extinction can be attained. There are no other vehicles, except for those expedient devices taught by other Thus Come Ones.** The one-sided emptiness of the Hearers does not count as true extinction. The Dharma Flower Sutra sets forth the One Buddha Vehicle, so that they can enter Nirvana. Sometimes the Buddha will use expedient devices suited for a particular period so he can become enlightened, but these are just expedient devices.

**Sutra:**

**“Bhikshus, when the Thus Come One knows of himself, that the time of his Nirvana has come, that the assembly is pure, that their faith and understanding are solid and firm, that they fully comprehend the Dharma of emptiness and have deeply entered into Dhyana samadhi, he will gather together the host of Bodhisattvas and Hearers and speak this Sutra for them, saying, “there are not two vehicles by which extinction is attained. There is only the one Buddha Vehicle by which extinction can be attained.”**
Outline:

L2. Still speaking the Dharma Flower.
M1. The time for speaking.

**Commentary:**

**Bhikshus, when the Thus Come One knows of himself that the time of his Nirvana has come, that the assembly is pure**--all his students have attained purity--and **that their faith and understanding are solid and firm**--they would not be moved; they would not waver--**that they fully comprehend the Dharma of emptiness**--they understand that all Dharmas are empty appearances--**and have deeply entered into Dhyana samadhi, he will gather together the host of Bodhisattvas and Hearers and speak this Sutra for them,**The Dharma Flower Sutra,**saying, “there are not two vehicles by which extinction is attained.** As far as methods of cultivation go, one can only gain extinction through the One Buddha Vehicle. The Two Vehicles may make claims to extinction, but their extinction is not ultimate. Those of the Two Vehicles do not attain extinction. **There is only the One Buddha Vehicle by which extinction can be attained.”** The position of extinction can be attained only through cultivating the One Buddha Vehicle. Other Vehicles will not get you there.

**Sutra:**

**Bhikshus, you should know, the expedients of the Thus Come One deeply enter the natures of living beings. Knowing that they aspire to and are content with lesser Dharmas and are deeply attached to the five desires, he speaks to them of Nirvana. When they hear him, then they immediately believe and accept it.**
Outline:

M2. Their intentions previously expressed.

**Commentary:**

**Bhikshus, you should know, the expedients of the Thus Come One deeply enter the natures of living beings.** If you started right out teaching living beings the real Dharma, living beings’ natures are such that they would not believe it. If you use expedient Dharma-doors, and teach them expediently, they will believe you. The expedient devices of the Buddha are in direct accord with the natures of living beings. Why does he use expedient devices to teach living beings? Because they have their own individual potentials. He speaks according to their individual dispositions.

**Knowing that they aspire to and are content with lesser Dharmas and are deeply attached to the five desires.** He knows that they cannot see far ahead. All they know are petty things, minor principles. If you spoke to them about the entire universe, they would not understand you. All they know are their own small problems. If you try to talk to them about the big picture, they would not understand you. They like to cultivate on a tiny pathway and are deeply attached to the five desires. They crave wealth, sex, fame, food, and sleep.

Wealth: In this world, money talks. You can get anything with it. Everyone clings to it madly. If you can view money as “empty” then you would not be attached to it. If you cannot see it as empty, you will have to fight for it. I have often told you about the word for money. In Chinese it is qian （錢）， a word composed of two swords （戔). On the left of the swords stands the radical for gold （金） . This means “You have a sword, and I have a sword, and the two of us fight over the gold.” If you have money, you have a lot of problems. If you have no money, you would not have so many problems.

But everyone wants money and they are not afraid of the trouble involved. If you know how to use your money, you can create blessings. If you do not know how to use it, you create offenses. With money you can create merit and virtue, or else you can create offenses. Money is really the worst thing there is! It is also the filthiest thing there is! Haven’t you noticed that whenever people count money, they spit on their fingers and then count up the bills? Who knows how many germs are on that money? Quite unsanitary, and yet no one minds. When it comes to money, no one is concerned about hygiene. The desire for money is one thing.

There is also the desire for sex, which includes the desire for beautiful things.

Everyone wants fame; everyone wants a good reputation. If someone says something bad about you, you feel as hurt as if someone had stuck a knife into your heart. Reputation is very important to people, But it is just one of the five desires.

Everybody likes to eat. If you eat one kind of food for a while, you will start feeling like you would like something else. You never quite satisfy your desire for food. If you eat one thing, you cannot eat another, and so you think about the first kind. If you eat both kinds at the same time, you cannot eat enough of either one to get full. In general, there is no way you can ever satisfy your desire for food. If you cultivate the Way, you must not look upon food and drink as so important. You should think of it as medicine that you use to keep your body from falling apart.

The fifth desire is sleep. If you sleep one hour, it is not enough. Two, three, four, five, six hours--you sleep for seven or eight hours and enjoy it immensely. These are the five desires which everyone thinks are so important. Everyone feels that they just cannot get along without wealth, sex, fame, food, and sleep.

Once a person asked me a question. He said, “You lecture on so many principles and set forth so many methods. Ultimately, do you know how many people there are in the world? If you know how many people there are in the world, then I will take refuge with you and you can be my teacher. But, if you have no exact figures…”

I said, “If you are thinking of taking refuge with me, basically, I cannot answer your questions. Why not? I do not take disciples with questions like that. If you have not taken refuge and you have so many questions, you will have even more once you take refuge. So, I do not want you for a disciple. However, I will tell you how many people there are in this world. In this world there are two people--one man and one woman. No matter where you go—it is just men and women. These two people also fit into two categories based on their behavior. The first seeks fame and the second seeks benefit. Those who seek fame try to think of ways to get famous. Haven’t you seen such people? There are those who have no fame and try to think of a way to get attention so they fake suicide! They may overdose on sleeping pills, not enough to finish them off, but enough to get the attention of the police and get their name and picture in the newspaper. “So-and-so tried suicide, is in serious condition in such-and-such a hospital…” Others, feeling that faking suicide is too dangerous, go out and try to kidnap someone. All for fame. There are many variations on the publicity game. Those who seek fame get “burned by the fire.” They are not immune to the flames. If you can be unattached to a good or bad reputation, then you can “enter the flames and emerge unburned.”

Those who seek benefit think up many plots. They may sell dope, or engage in various illegal activities. Those who seek benefit “drown in the water.” If you seek benefit too energetically, you will drown yourself. So, I answered him that in the world there are only two people. Can you find a third?

He agreed wholeheartedly with me and asked to take refuge. I said, “I would not accept you as a disciple.” I put him outside the door, as it were. That was a long time ago.

**He speaks to them of Nirvana.** To those of the Two Vehicles who delight in lesser Dharmas, he teaches the Four Truths and the Twelve Links, so they can attain their “Nirvana.” But, actually, it is an expedient device. Those of the Two Vehicles cannot attain Nirvana. **When they hear him, then they immediately believe and accept it.** People’s faith then grow. “This is not too bad. It does not take too much time and effort. Just cultivate the Four Truth and the Twelve Causes and Conditions and we will attain Nirvana.” Therefore they go and cultivate. In fact, they could only certify to the fruition of Arhatship through cultivating the Four Truths and Twelve Causes and Conditions. They could not acquire true Nirvana without residue.

**Sutra:**

“**It is as if, for example, there is a road, five hundred yojanas long, steep, dangerous and bad, an uninhabited and terrifying place. A large group of people wish to travel this road to reach a cache of precious jewels. Among them, there is a guide, intelligent, wise and clear-headed, who knows the road well, both its passable and impassable features**…”

Outline:

J2. The analogy.
K1. Setting up the analogy.
L1. Analogy of the guide.

**Commentary:**

**It is as if, for example, there is a road.** Shakyamuni Buddha says, “I will set up an analogy for you as to why one first teaches people expedient Dharmas and the doctrines of the Two Vehicles. **Five hundred yojanas long, steep, dangerous, and bad.** One yojana is about 27 miles. Ten yojanas is approximately 270 miles. One hundred yojanas is about 2700 miles. Therefore a road the length of five hundred yojanas is about 13,500 miles. There were thieves on the road, wolves and tigers, it was extremely dangerous. **An uninhabited and terrifying place.** Such a long ways, and not a person in sight! Really scary! And suppose **a large group of people wish to travel this road to reach a cache of precious jewels.** The five hundred yojanas symbolize the difficulty of our seeking the Way of the Buddha. The cache of precious jewels represents the highest fruition, that is, Buddhahood. Along the way is this Transformational City of the Two Vehicles. **Among them there is a guide, intelligent, wise, and clear-headed.** He is intelligent and smart. This guide is a metaphor for the Buddha. He knows the way. **Who knows the road well, both its passable and impassable features.** He knows which ways you can walk and which ways are blocked.

**Sutra:**

“…**and who wishes to lead the group through this hardship.”**

Outline:

L2. Wishing to guide the followers.
M1. Followers being led.

**Commentary:**

**And who wishes to lead the group through this hardship.** This represents the Buddha teaching those with whom he has affinities, but who have not yet attained liberation. Their past affinities remain, and so they are led by the guide.

**Sutra:**

**Midway, the group he is leading grows weary and wishes to turn back. They say to the guide, “we are exhausted and afraid. We cannot go forward. It’s too far. We want to turn back now.”**

Outline:

M2. Tiring midway and wishing to retreat.
N1. Retreating from Great Vehicle.

**Commentary:**

**Midway, the group he is leading grows weary and wishes to turn back.** For instance, when you start something but you quit halfway. That is to grow weary and turn back. If you cultivate and cultivate, then stop, you have become weary and retreat halfway. This group is weary and wish to turn back. **They say to the guide,** to the Buddha, **“We are exhausted and afraid,** we are extremely tired. **We cannot go forward. It’s too far. We want to turn back now.** We do not want to go forward. We want to turn back.”

**Sutra:**

**Their leader, who has many expedients, has this thought; “How pitiful they are. How can they renounce the great and precious treasure and wish to turn back?” Having had this thought, through the power of his expedient devices, he transforms a city in the center of the dangerous road, three hundred yojanas in extent, and says to them, “Do not be afraid. Do not turn back; Stay here now in this great city I have created just for you. If you go into this city, you will be happy and at peace. If you then wish to proceed to the jewel cache, you may do so.”**
Outline:

N2. Leading those of the Small Vehicle.
O1. Expedient set up.

**Commentary:**

**Their leader, who has many expedients, has this thought, “How pitiful they are. How can they renounce the great and precious treasure and wish to turn back?”** How can they let go of the great jewel of the Buddha fruit and return? **Having had this thought, through the power of his expedient devices, he transforms a city in the center of the dangerous road, three hundred yojanas in extent.** The dangerous road is the five paths of rebirth, the five destinies: Humans, gods, hungry ghosts, animals, and hell beings. Asuras are included in each of the other five. If you do not become a cow, you become a horse, or if you do not become a horse, you become a person. Or a ghost, or you fall into the hells. Or you enter the heavens. It is extremely dangerous! The fact that the city is three hundred yojanas in extent represents that they have traveled halfway through their journey.

**And says to them, “Do not be afraid. Do not turn back; stay here now, in this great city I have created just for you.** You may do whatever pleases you at this Transformational City. I have transformed it just for you, the position of the Two Vehicles. They are not ultimately real, however. Even though the Arhats say they have done what they had to do and will undergo no further becoming. Still, their position is not ultimate. **If you go into this city, you will be happy and at peace.** You will quickly attain serenity and great peace there**. If you then wish to proceed to the jewel cache**--if having attained Arhatship you wish to go ahead and cultivate for Buddhahood, you can attain the Buddha fruit--**you may do so.”**

**Sutra:**

**Then the exhausted group rejoiced greatly, having gained what they had never had. “We have now escaped this bad road and gained happiness and peace.” Then the group went forward and entered the transformed city; thinking that they had already been saved, they felt happy and at peace.**
Outline:

O2. Entering the city in their joy.

**Commentary:**

**Then the exhausted group rejoiced greatly, having gained what they had never had.** They were extremely tired, when, all of a sudden, a city appeared where they could stop and rest. After cultivating for a while, one may feel very tired. Now, hearing about the rest stop, their minds were filled with joy. They had never seen such a fine city before. The city represents the fruit of the Hearers. **We have now escaped this bad road,** we have escaped the paths of the gods, humans, animals, hell-beings, and hungry ghosts--the five evil paths in the Three Realms--**and gained happiness and peace. Then the group went forward and entered the transformed city; thinking that they had already been saved, they felt happy and at peace.** They felt they had reached a very high level.

**Sutra:**

**At that time, the guide, knowing that they were rested and no longer weary, made the city disappear, saying to them, “All of you, come, let us go. The jewel cache is near. The great city was merely something I created from transformation to give you a rest.”**
Outline:

M3. Making the city disappear to lead them to the jewel cache.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, the guide,** the Buddha, **knowing that they were rested and no longer weary**—they had had their rest and were full of energy again **made the city disappear, saying to them, “All of you, come, let us go. The jewel cache is near.** We are right near it.” Those of the Hearers who have certified to the Fourth Fruition of Arhatship should go ahead and cultivate the Great Vehicle. You are not too far away from Buddhahood. **The great city was merely something I created from transformation to give you a rest.** This city is not real, so do not take what is false for what is true.

**Sutra:**

**Bhikshus, the Thus Come One is also like this. He now acts as a great guide for all of you. He knows that living beings should leave and cross over the evil road of the torments of birth and death which is so steep, difficult and long. He shall respond to and save them.**
Outline:

K2. Making the analogy.
L1. Combining.
M1. Analogy of the guide.

**Commentary:**

“**Bhikshus,**” said Shakyamuni Buddha addressing the fourfold assembly, **“The Thus Come One,** the Buddha, **is also like this,** like the principle I spoke above. **He now acts as a great guide for all of you.** I am acting as a great leader for all of you, teaching and transforming you. **He knows that living beings should leave and cross over the evil road of the torments of birth and death;** if you are alive, you will have afflictions, troubles, and experience extreme danger. **Which is so steep, difficult and long.”** It is a long, hard road. One should get rid of afflictions and cross over birth and death. **He shall respond to and save them.** He will go and teach a particular type of living beings if he is meant to go to a particular place to teach that type of living beings.

**Sutra:**

**If living beings only hear of the One Buddha Vehicle, they will not wish to see the Buddha or to draw near to him. Instead, they will think, “The Buddha path is long and far; it can only be accomplished after much labor and suffering.” The Buddha knows their minds to be weak and lowly. When they reach the “Midway-Nirvana”, he uses the power of expedients to rest at the Midway and to speak of the two Nirvanas. If living beings dwell on these two levels, the Thus Come One then tells them, “You have not yet finished your job. The level you are dwelling at is near the Buddhas’ wisdom. You should observe and ponder this: the Nirvana you have attained is not the real one. The Thus Come One has but used the power of his expedients and, within the One Buddha Vehicle, discriminated and spoken of three.”**

Outline:

M2. Analogy of followers.

**Commentary:**

**If living beings only hear of the One Buddha Vehicle**--if I were to start right out speaking The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra, the Dharma-door of the One Buddha Vehicle**, they will not wish to see the Buddha.** The Dharma-door of the One Buddha Vehicle is difficult to believe in and difficult to understand. It is not easy to have faith in it or to comprehend it. So, if living beings heard it, they would not want to see the Buddha. They would think, “Cultivating the Buddha Path is entirely too hard.” **Or to draw near to him,** because they are afraid they will lose their grip on the false things they are grasping. If they were to lose the false and gain the true, what would they do? So, they would not want to get near the Buddha. **Instead, they will think, the Buddha path is long and far**--because cultivating the Buddhadharma to become a Buddha takes an incredibly long time. You must pass through three great asankheya eons! Such a long time. Good grief! That is too much. **It can only be accomplished after much labor and suffering.** Who knows how much hard work is involved, cultivating all the ascetic practices and so on?

**The Buddha knows their minds,** Shakyamuni Buddha and all the Buddhas know the thoughts passing through the minds of living beings. **To be weak and lowly.** They are weak and soft, not solid at all. As soon as they undergo a bit of opposition, they cannot stand it. Lowly means that they are base and stupid. **When they reach the “Midway-Nirvana”,** when they have travelled three hundred yojanas, **he uses the power of expedients,** clever expedient devices, **to rest at the Midway.** The midway of cultivating the Way is 300 yojanas. **And speak of the two Nirvanas.**

They were three hundred yojanas into their five hundred yojana trek. They still had two hundred yojanas to go. Transcending the desire heavens, they traveled one hundred yojanas. Transcending to the form realm heavens, they traveled two hundred yojanas. Transcending the formless realm, they traveled three hundred yojanas. Thus, they transcended the three realms. When Bodhisattvas who have transcended the three realms have subdued and destroyed the delusions of dust and sand, they are said to have arrived in the Land of Expedients With Residue. Having then traveled four hundred yojanas, if they then break through the delusions of ignorance, they arrive at the Adorned Land of Real Retribution. Then they have traveled five hundred yojanas. They have made it. So, the halfway point is the three hundred yojana mark. The Buddha spoke about the two Nirvanas to give them a rest.

The two Nirvanas are 1) with residue, and 2) without residue. Nirvana with residue means that there is something left. This is the Nirvana attained by Arhats who have certified to the fruit and cut off the delusions of views and thought. Their bodies still remain, however. They have not been able to get rid of both body and wisdom. Nirvana without residue means that you use the real fire of samadhi to annihilate the body as well. You can light your own fire from inside. This is called the annihilation of body and wisdom. But, both these Nirvanas belong to the state of the Two Vehicles.

**If living beings dwell on these two levels,** that of Nirvana with residue and Nirvana without residue**, the Thus Come One then tells them, “You have not yet finished your job.** Your cultivation of the Path is not yet finished. You are not done yet. You have quite a way to go. **The level you are dwelling at is near the Buddha’ wisdom. You should observe and ponder this:The Nirvana you have attained is not the real one.** Both Nirvana with residue and Nirvana without residue are not real; they are not genuine Nirvana. **The Thus Come One has but used the power of his expedients and,** using those clever devices, **within the One Buddha Vehicle, discriminated and spoken of three,** the Vehicle of the Hearers, the Vehicle of the Conditioned Enlightened Ones, and the Bodhisattva Vehicle.”

**Sutra:**

**He is like that guide, who, in order to give the travelers a rest, conjured up a great city. Then, when they had rested, he told them, “the place of the jewels is near. This city is not real, but merely something I have conjured up.”**
Outline:

L2. Drawing the analogy.

**Commentary:**

**He is like that guide;** the Buddha is like the guide who knows the way through the hazardous road. **Who, in order to give the travelers a rest,** knowing that they were weary, **conjured up a great city. Then, when they had rested, he told them, “The place of the jewels is near. This city is not real, but merely something I have conjured up.”**

**Sutra:**

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

**“The Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom VictorySat in the Bodhimanda for ten eons,Without the manifestation of the Buddhadharma,And he did not realize the Buddha Way.Heavenly spirits and dragon kings,And the host of asuras,Constantly rained down heavenly flowers,As an offering to that Buddha.The Gods beat upon their heavenly drumsAnd made all kinds of music; Fragrant breezes blew away the withered flowersAnd fine, new ones rained down.When ten eons had passed,He then realized the Buddha Way.All the gods and humans,Danced for the joy within their minds.The sixteen sons of that BuddhaAs well as their retinues,Thousands of millions surrounding them,All went before that Buddha.They bowed with their heads at his feetAnd asked him to turn the Dharma-wheel,“May the sagely lion’s Dharma rainFill us and everyone!”**

Outline:

H2. Verses.
I1. Source of conditions.
J1. Distant conditions.
K1. Verses about Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory becoming a Buddha.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, the World Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke verses saying.** The Buddha wanted to go into more detail, so he talked about the doctrines in verse.

**The Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory sat in the Bodhimanda for ten eons.** He sat there in full lotus in samadhi, but he did not certify to the fruit in ten eons. **Without the manifestation of the Buddhadharma and he did not realize the Buddha Way. Heavenly spirits and dragon kings and the host of asuras,** the ugly ones, **constantly rained down heavenly flowers as an offering to that Buddha** Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory.

**The gods beat upon their heavenly drums and made all kinds of music. Fragrant breezes blew away the withered flowers and fine, new ones rained down. When ten eons had passed, he then realized the Buddha Way.** The Buddhadharma manifested, and he realized anuttarasamyaksambodhi. **All the gods and humans danced for the joy within their minds.** They were all ecstatic. Never had they been so happy.

**The sixteen sons of that Buddha as well as their retinues thousands of millions surrounding them, all went before that Buddha. They bowed with their heads at his feet and asked him to turn the Dharma-wheel, “May the Sagely Lion’s Dharma Rain fill us and everyone!”** Fill us and all living beings.

**Sutra:**

**A World Honored One is very hard to encounter,Appearing but once in a long time.In order to awaken all creatures,He shakes all things.**

Outline:

K2. Ten direction Brahma kings request Dharma.
L1. His awesome light shines and shakes all things.

**Commentary:**

**A World Honored One is very hard to encounter.** As hard to encounter as he is, we have now encountered him. **Appearing but once in a long time.** The Buddha does not appear in every generation. Who knows how long one must have to wait before a Buddha manifests? **In order to awaken all creatures.** Why does the Buddha manifest in the world? To wake up all living beings. **He shakes all things.** The quaking occurs because they become enlightened very quickly, just as the sounds of drums and bells shake and awake you from your slumber.

**Sutra:**

**In five hundred myriads of millions of lands,In worlds in the eastern direction,Brahma palaces shone with a lightSuch as they never had before.The Brahmas, seeing these signs,Followed them to the Buddha.They scattered flowers as an offering,And offered up their palaces,Asking the Buddha to turn the Dharma-wheel,With verses in his praise.The Buddha knew the time had not yet comeAnd received their request seated in silence.From the other three directions, and four points in between,And, likewise, from above, and below,They scattered flowers and offered their palaces,Asking the Buddha to turn the Dharma-wheel:“The World Honored One is very hard to meet;We pray that through his great compassion and pityHe will open wide the sweet dew doorAnd turn the supreme Dharma-wheel.”**

Outline:

L2. Brahma Kings come to request the Dharma.

**Commentary:**

**In five hundred myriads of millions of lands, in worlds of the eastern direction, Brahma palaces shone with a light such as they never had before. The Brahmas, seeing these signs, followed them to the Buddha.** When the Great Brahma Kings saw these signs, they followed the light to the Buddha. Ordinarily their palaces shone with light and they would not think light was anything special. But this light was so bright they thought it quite unusual. “Something special is happening.” **They scattered flowers as an offering.** The ones they had brought in their flower sacks, very wonderful and fragrant. **And offered up their palaces, asking the Buddha to turn the Dharma-wheel, with verses in his praise.** They scattered heavenly flowers over the Buddha and presented him with their most prized possessions--their palaces. They did this because they wanted him to turn the Dharma-wheel, to speak the Dharma. Before he turned the Dharma-wheel, it was appropriate that they make offerings to him. They praised him with verses.

**The Buddha knew the time had not yet come.** The Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory knew it was not yet time to turn the Wheel. **And received their request seated in silence.** He did not say a thing. **From the other three directions, and four points in between.** From the east, south, west, and north and the four intermediate directions, **and, likewise, from above and below, they scattered flowers and offered their palaces, asking the Buddha to turn the Dharma-wheel.

The World Honored One is very hard to meet.** It is no simple matter to encounter a Buddha. **We pray that, through his great compassion and pity.** We hope that the Buddha will use his basic wisdom and compassion. **He will open wide the sweet dew door.** Open wide for all of us the door of sweet dew, the nectar of immortality, so that we may end birth and death. **And turn the supreme Dharma-wheel.**

**Sutra:**

**The World Honored One, having limitless wisdom,Received the multitude’s requestAnd proclaimed various Dharmas for their sakes.The Four Truths, the Twelve Conditions,From ignorance up to old age and death —All arise because of birth.In this way the host of calamities comes to be;You should all know this.When he expounded on this DharmaSix hundred myriads of millions of billionsExhausted the limits of all sufferingAnd all became Arhats.When he spoke the Dharma the second time,Hosts like the sands of a thousand myriads of Ganges riversTheir minds grasping no dharmas,Also attained Arhatship.After that, those who gained the Way,Were incalculable in number;Were one to count through myriads of millions of eonsOne could not reach their limit.**

Outline:

J2. Verses about that which is nearby.

K1. Verses concerning the turning of the Dharma-wheel of the “half-word” teaching.

**Commentary:**

**The World Honored One, having limitless wisdom.** The wisdom of the Buddha is boundless. No one’s wisdom is greater than that of the Buddha’s. That is why the Buddha is the One of Great Wisdom, the World Honored One, and the Honored One who Enter the World. **Received the multitudes’ request,** received the request of all the hundreds of myriads of millions of Brahma Kings and of the sixteen sons. **And proclaimed various Dharmas for their sakes.** He explained all the various Dharma-doors to them. **The Four Truths;** he began with the Dharma-door of the Four Holy Truths: Suffering, origination, stopping, and the path. **The twelve conditions.** Then he preached the Twelve Causal Links.

**From ignorance up to old age and death.** Ignorance is the first of the twelve, and old age and death comprise the last link. **All arise because of birth,** because of production. Without birth, none of the other twelve would exist. **In this way the host of calamities comes to be,** all the cares and worries of the world. **You should all know this.** You should all know suffering, cut off origination, long for extinction, and cultivate the Way. **When he expounded on this Dharma.** When the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory spoke the Four Truths and the Twelve Links, **six hundred myriads of millions of billions exhausted the limits of all suffering.** All their sufferings were over, **and all became Arhats.

When he spoke the Dharma the second time.** The first speaking here refers to the Agama Period of the Buddha’s teaching. The second speaking refers to the Vaipulya Period. **Hosts like the sands of a thousand myriads of Ganges rivers, their minds grasping no Dharmas.** This means that their minds took in no unwholesome dharmas, no dharmas of affliction, **also attained Arhatship.** They certified to the Fourth Fruit of Arhatship. **After that, those who gained the Way.** Those who went from Arhatship on to the Bodhisattva Path, **were incalculable in number.** You could not count them; no way. **Were one to count through myriads of millions of eons, one could not reach their limit.** This Buddha saved an uncountable number of beings. They could never be counted.

**Sutra:**

***At that time, the sixteen princes,
Left home and became Shramaneras.
Together they requested that the Buddha
Extensively proclaim the Dharma of the Great Vehicle:
“May we and our followers
All perfect the Buddha Way.
We wish to become like the World Honored One,
With the Wisdom Eye and foremost purity.”
The Buddha, knowing the intentions of the youths,
Their practices in former lives,
Used limitless causes and conditions
And various analogies,
To teach them the Six Paramitas,
As well as matters of spiritual penetrations.
He discriminated the real Dharma,
And the pathway walked by the Bodhisattvas.
He spoke the Dharma Flower Sutra
Its verses in numbers like Ganges’ sands.
After the Buddha had spoken the sutra
In a quiet room he entered Dhyana Samadhi
Singlemindedly sitting in one place,
For eighty-four thousand eons.***

Outline:

K2 . Verses concerning the turning of the Dharma-wheel which dispenses with the half-word teaching and clarifies the full-word teaching.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, the sixteen princes,** the sixteen sons of the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory, **left home and became Shramaneras.** A shramanera is a novice monk. Shramanera is Sanskrit word that means one who diligently cultivates precept, samadhi, and wisdom, and quells greed, hatred, and ignorance. Novices take ten precepts. **Together they requested that Buddha,** the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory, to **extensively proclaim the Dharma of the Great Vehicle,** to speak *The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra.* They said **“May we and our followers, all perfect the Buddha Way.** May we all become Buddhas. **We wish to become like the World Honored One.** We want to be exactly like the Buddha. **With the Wisdom Eye and foremost purity.”** The Buddha possesses the Eye of wisdom and is ultimately pure.

**The Buddha, knowing the intentions of the youths,** knowing the thoughts of his sixteen sons. A “youth” is a child who is still a virgin. **Their practices in former lives.** He knew what kind of practices they had previously engaged in. **Used limitless causes and conditions and various analogies to teach them the Six Paramitas;** giving, morality, patience, vigor, concentration, and wisdom. Paramita is a Sanskrit word which means “arrived at the other shore.”

**As well as matters of spiritual penetrations. He discriminated the real Dharma and the pathway walked by the Bodhisattvas.** He defined the real, genuine Buddhadharma and the Bodhisattva path.

**He spoke *The Dharma Flower Sutra*.** The Sutra of the Great Vehicle, *The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra.***Its verses in number like Ganges’ sands. After the Buddha had spoken the Sutra.** After the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory had spoken the Sutra, **in a quiet room, he entered Dhyana Samadhi.** He went to his room and entered samadhi. **Singlemindedly sitting in one place.** He meditated there **for eighty-four thousand eons.**

**Sutra:**

***All the Shramaneras,
Knowing the Buddha had not yet left Dhyana,
For the sake of the limitless millions assembled,
Spoke of the Buddha’s unsurpassed wisdom.
Each seated on his Dharma throne,
Spoke this Great Vehicle Sutra.
After the Buddha had become peacefully still,
They propagated and taught the Dharma.
Each one of the Shramaneras
Took across living beings
To the number of grains of sand
In six hundred myriads of Ganges rivers.***

Outline:

I2. Tying up conditions.
J1. Speaking of Dharma.
K1. Verses about their former affinities in common.

**Commentary:**

**All the Shramaneras,** the sixteen Shramaneras and the Arhats, **knowing the Buddha had not yet left Dhyana, for the sake of the limitless millions assembled,** for all the living beings, **spoke of the Buddha’s unsurpassed wisdom,** taught the supreme wisdom of the Buddha. **Each seated on his Dharma throne.** Each of the sixteen princes took their Dharma-seat and **spoke this Great Vehicle Sutra,** *The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra*. **After the Buddha had become peacefully still, they propagated and taught the Dharma.** They spread the teachings of the Buddha. **Each one of the Shramaneras,** the sixteen, **took across living beings to the number of grains of sand in six hundred myriads** of millions **of Ganges rivers.**Someone has heard the word Arhat and wondered what it means. Those who listen to Sutra lectures often will know, but those who are new would not. Arhat is a Sanskrit word which is interpreted in three ways, “Worthy of Offerings,” “Destroyer of Evil,” and “Killer of Thieves.” Arhats are worthy of receiving offerings from gods and humans. If no one makes offerings to them, they would not force people. They just return the light and say, “Probably in former lives I did not cultivate blessings. As a result, now my bowl is empty.” As “destroyers of evil” they have wiped out the evils of affliction. As “killers of thieves” they have killed the thief of ignorance. Ignorance is a thief who ruins one’s Way karma.

Why do people do confused things? They do them out of ignorance. Why do people do things that are upside-down? It is out of ignorance. Why is it that, when one has no attachments, one deliberately looks for attachments? It is all out of ignorance. In spite of the fact that it is in our power to end birth and death, why do we fail to do so? Because of ignorance. So, ignorance is just terrible! Arhats kill ignorance. While we say they “kill” ignorance, they have not killed it entirely. They have killed coarse ignorance, but a subtle ignorance remains. Ignorance could be likened to a virus. Perhaps you break out in a sore. When you put some medicine on it, it clears up. But, as soon as you quit applying the medicine, it breaks out again, and your skin itches like crazy.

The Arhats have the medicine and put it on the sore, but they have not gotten rid of the disease at its source. The only way to get rid of it entirely is to become a Buddha. I have told you many times before that even Bodhisattvas at the level of Equal Enlightenment still have one share of the mark of production, ignorance, which they have not severed. Arhats have ignorance, and so do the Bodhisattvas. They do not use their ignorance, that is all. Ignorance is stupidity. If the Equal Enlightenment Bodhisattvas break through that last remaining part of stupidity, they become Buddhas. Because the word Arhat encompasses all these meanings, we retain the Sanskrit word and do not translate it.

**Sutra:**

***After that Buddha had crossed over into extinction,
All those who heard the Dharma,
In whatever Buddhalands they might be,
Were reborn there together with their teachers.***

Outline:

K2. Meeting with one another during the time in between.

**Commentary:**

**After that Buddha had crossed over into extinction, all those who had heard the Dharma.** After the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory had gone to final Nirvana, all those who had heard the Dharma, **in whatever Buddhalands they might be were reborn there together with their teachers.** Those who had heard the Dharma from one of the sixteen Shramaneras were reborn together with their teacher in other Buddhalands.

**Sutra:**

***The sixteen Shramaneras
Perfectly practiced the Buddha Path.
Presently in the ten directions
Each has realized proper enlightenment.
Those who heard the Dharma then,
Are each in the presence of a Buddha;
Those who are Hearers,
Are gradually taught the Buddha Path.
I was one of the sixteen;
In the past, I taught all of you.
I therefore use expedients
To draw you into the Buddha’s wisdom.***

Outline:

K3. Dharma Flower is still being spoken.
L1. The Assembly past and present.

**Commentary:**

**The sixteen Shramaneras,** the sixteen sons of the Buddha Great Penetrating Wisdom Victory, **perfectly practiced the Buddha Path.** All those Shramaneras perfect the cultivation of the Buddha Path. **Presently in the ten directions.** Now, in the worlds of the ten directions, **each has realized proper enlightenment.** Through their cultivation of the Buddha Path they have realized the fruits of Buddhahood.

**Those who heard the Dharma then.** Those who heard the Dharma proclaimed at that time, **are each in the presence of a Buddha.** They have reappeared each in the place where his former teacher became a Buddha. They went along with their teachers, each one of them. **Those who are Hearers are gradually taught the Buddha Path.** Those lacking strength, who have settled for a position of Hearer, are gradually, bit-by-bit, instructed by means of the Buddha Path. They are led by degrees to the Supreme Buddha Vehicle.

**I was one of the sixteen.** I, myself, Shakyamuni Buddha, was one of the sixteen Shramaneras. **In the past, I taught all of you.** You assembled here now listening to me speak *The Dharma Flower Sutra*--you all listened to me speak it then, way back in the distant past.

**I therefore use expedients to draw you into the Buddha’s wisdom.** Because you delight in lesser dharmas, I employ expedient devices to lead you to the Buddha’s supreme wisdom.

**Sutra:**

***Through these former causal conditions,
I presently speak The Dharma Flower Sutra,
Leading you to enter the Buddha Path.
Take care not to become frightened.***

Outline:

L2. Certifying that he is now speaking the Dharma Flower.

**Commentary:**

**Through these former causal conditions.** It is by means of the former connection I just told you about that **I presently speak *The Dharma Flower Sutra.*Leading you to enter the Buddha Path. Take care not to become frightened.** You are about to hear the Great Vehicle, genuine Dharma. Do not become alarmed. Here, I will set forth an analogy to make it even clearer:

**Sutra:**

***Suppose there is a steep and bad road,
Remote and teeming with venomous beasts,
Lacking, as well, water or grass
--A place feared by all.
Countless thousands of myriads
Wish to traverse this dangerous road
With its pathways so distant,
Extending five hundred yojanas.
There is among them a guide,
Intelligent and wise,
Clear and resolute in mind,
Who can rescue them from their difficulty.***

Outline:

J1. Verses about parable.
K1. Setting up parable.
L1. Verses about the guide.

**Commentary:**

**Suppose there is a steep and bad road,** a very dangerous and evil road, What is this steep and bad road? It is the turning wheel of the six paths of rebirth. **Remote and teeming with venomous beasts.** It is remote. No one traverses it. There are many deadly beasts there, too. Evil beasts and venomous snakes. There are tigers, lions, wolves, and panthers, too. These snakes could poison people to death. **Lacking, as well, water or grass.** Not only was it dangerous, there was not even any water or any grass. Obviously, there was nothing to eat. **A place feared by all.** Everyone was scared of this road.

**Countless thousands of myriads wish to traverse this dangerous road,** people want to travel on this road, to cross the six paths of rebirth. **With its pathways so distant.** Living beings want to transcend the three realms, to get off the six paths of rebirth, to cultivate and become Buddhas. However, the road to Buddhahood is far indeed, very distant. **Extending five hundred yojanas**, approximately 13,500 miles. Such a long way one has to go to the Buddhaland! Transcending the realm of desire equals traveling one hundred *yojanas*. Transcending the world of form equals traveling two hundred *yojanas*. Transcending the formless world equals traveling three hundred *yojanas*. Then, breaking through the delusions like dust and sand equals traveling four hundred *yojanas.* Breaking through delusions of ignorance, the most subtle of delusions, equals traveling five hundred *yojanas*. With no one to guide you, it is hard indeed to travel this road.

**There is among them a guide.** Someone to lead them. **Intelligent and wise.** “Intelligent” here means that he had a good memory. He was not absent-minded. He is knowledgeable and remembers it always. He was wise as a result of his learning. **Clear and resolute in mind.** He knew what was going on. He had excellent, unfailing judgment. He would be able to lead them down the right road. He knows the proper and evil paths. He recognizes the right and wrong paths, the right and wrong dharmas. Hence, he is a Good Knowing Advisor. **Who can rescue them from their difficulty,** he can save all living beings from their sufferings on the hard road of birth and death.

**Sutra:**

***The group grows weary
And says to the guide,
“We are all exhausted, now
And want to turn back.”***

Outline:

L2. Verses about followers.
M1. Followers want to retreat halfway.
N1. The multitude retreats from the great.

**Commentary:**

**The group grows weary.** It is very difficult to cultivate on such a dangerous path. The aiding conditions are scarce and the opposing conditions are many. What are “aiding conditions?” For example, if you cultivate and do not have the strength to keep going, then your Good Knowing Advisor helps you. He tells you not to go down the wrong road. He advises you not to indulge in impure thinking. Then, you cultivate according to his advice and that is an aiding condition. Also, if you do not have the strength to complete a task in cultivation, the Dharma protectors may come to your aid.

What are opposing conditions? Say you want to cultivate, and you bring forth a very true Bodhi mind, but then someone comes along and uses all kinds of devious tricks to ruin your cultivation and cripple your Bodhi mind. Originally you had no lust, but this person inflames your lust. Originally, your Way-mind was very solid, but this person stunts its growth. These are opposing conditions. The Way is very difficult to cultivate. Sometimes one grows weary--sick and tired, you might say. You cultivate for one year--no success. You cultivate for two years, and still nothing is obtained. By the end of the third year, “God,” you say, “I have been wasting my time. Cultivation is impossible!” and you retreat, exhausted.

**And says to the guide,** to the Good Knowing Advisor, **“We are all exhausted now,** worn out. I have been cultivating and enduring all this pain, and I have not gotten a single thing out of it. I have gotten exactly nowhere, as a matter of fact **and want to turn back.** That does it; we quit!”

**Sutra:**

**The guide thinks to himself, “How very pitiful they are. How can they wish to turn backAnd lose the great and precious treasure?”Instantly he thinks of a device: Using the power of spiritual penetrations He conjures up a great city Adorned with houses, Surrounded by gardens and groves, Brooks and bathing ponds,Layered gates and tiered pavilions,Filled with men and women.After creating this, He pities them saying, “Do not be afraid.But go into this cityAnd enjoy yourselves as you wish.”**

Outline:

N2. Guide induces the small.
O1. The device is conjured up.

**Commentary:**

**The guide thinks to himself, “How very pitiful they are.”** They are to be pitied, really. Why? They cultivate and are exactly one hairsbreadth away from realization and then want to turn back. As soon as they retreat, they lose all their former work. **“How can they wish to turn back and lose the great and precious treasure?”** You retreat and in so doing lose all the wonderful treasure that was coming to you. **Instantly he thinks of a device: using the power of spiritual penetrations he conjures up a great city adorned with houses, surrounded by gardens and groves;** a lovely place indeed, with inner and outer walls, many fine buildings, lots of running brooks and ponds. **Brooks and bathing ponds, layered gates and tiered pavilions,** high and lofty buildings. **Filled with men and women,** a lot of people.

**After creating this, he pities them, saying, “Do not be afraid. But go into this city and enjoy yourselves as you wish.”** Do what you like. The transformation city represents the Nirvana with residue of the Two Vehicles. The Buddha used this device to draw in the Hearers, saying, “When you gain fourth stage Arhatship, you have ended birth and death, finished your work. No further becoming for you. That is true happiness.” Then once they had attained the fourth fruit, he told them they had to go further, to the treasure trove. The Transformation City is the place of the Two Vehicles. In the Dharma Flower Assembly the Buddha opens the provisional and reveals the real teaching, telling everyone the transformation city is not real. Before you reach the level of the transformation city, you cannot say it is not real. But, once you get there, then you know it is, and you must go on.

**Sutra:**

**When they had entered the city,They rejoiced greatly at heart Thinking they were safe and sound,And that they had been saved.**

Outline:

O2. They go forward joyfully and enter the City.

**Commentary:**

**When they had entered the city.** Those of the Small Vehicle liked the Small Vehicle Dharmas, so they went right into the transformed city. The transformed city represents the fruit positions of the Small Vehicle. **They rejoiced greatly at heart thinking they were safe and sound.** They felt happy and at ease, thinking that they had already ended birth and death and attained Nirvana. **And that they had been saved,** had been taken across the suffering sea of birth and death.

**Sutra:**

**The guide, knowing they were rested,Assembled them together and said,“You should all go forward,For this is nothing but a transformed city. Seeing that you were exhausted And wanted to turn back midway,I used the power of expedients,To transform provisionally this city.You should now be vigorous And proceed to the jewel cache.”**

Outline:

M2. He destroys the transformation to lead them to the jewel cache.

**Commentary:**

**The guide, knowing they were rested.** The guide, the great Good Knowing Advisor, in this case the Buddha, knowing that those of the Two Vehicles had reached their Small Vehicle destinations and that they were satisfied with that, **assembled them together and said “You should all go forward.** Now you have rested and you are no longer tired; you have certified to the position of the Two Vehicles. You are pretty happy about that, aren’t you? But you should not stay in the Two Vehicle Nirvana. You have to go forward. **For this is nothing but a transformed city.** It is not real. It is not the jewel cache. It is simply something I created.

**Seeing that you were exhausted.** You had been working very hard, **and wanted to turn back midway.** You felt you had undergone too much suffering. This is like when we cultivate for one, two days, it is not so bad. But, after a while, one feels as if one had not attained anything and gets discouraged and wants to retreat. They think, "I cultivated a whole year, two whole years, and I have not become a Buddha yet. Why? I have been here two years, and I have not been enlightened, I wonder if it is ever possible to get enlightened? Am I being cheated by this idea of enlightenment?” In this way, one’s mind becomes filled with doubts, and one quits cultivating. Everyone here eats one meal a day. Even if you wanted to steal food at other times, there is no place to steal it from! It is too bitter. So you want to turn back midway. Right? “If I had known it was so bitter, I would not have left home. I really got cheated. I did! What a bad teacher! What am I going to do?”

When the guide saw that they were so tired, he **used the power of expedients.** He said, “Do not get nervous. You will get enlightened tomorrow. Just work one more night.” So, they go ahead and cultivate one more night. Then he says, “You are off just a bit. Just a hair. Keep trying.” So, he keeps them cultivating bit-by-bit. All of a sudden, his life had come to an end. Although he did not get enlightened, he almost did. Probably, he will for sure in the next life. So next life, he studies the Buddhadharma again.

**To transform provisionally this city.** He used clever expedients to set up the Dharma-doors of the Two Vehicles.

**You should now be vigorous.** Now you have rested. You should be courageous and press on in your cultivation. **And proceed to the jewel cache.** I will go along with you to the Buddha fruit. You will certainly become Buddhas. If the Buddha had told the Two Vehicles to cultivate the Buddha fruit from the beginning, they would not have believed him. They would not have believed that they could become Buddhas.

**Sutra:**

**I, too, am like this, I am the guide of all;**

Outline:

K2. Drawing analogy to Dharma.
L1. Comparison.
M1. Guide.

**Commentary:**
Shakyamuni Buddha says**, I, too, am like this.** I am the same. **I am the guide of all.** I am a Guide Knowing Advisor for all living beings, I teach all living beings to hurry up and become Buddha.

**Sutra:**

**Seeing those who seek the way, Exhausted in mid-course Unable to cross the dangerous paths, Of birth, death and affliction,Therefore, I use the power of expedients,To speak of Nirvana and give them a rest, Saying, “Your sufferings are ended. You have done what you had to do. Then, knowing they have reached Nirvana,And had all become Arhats, I gather them together, To teach them the genuine Dharma. The Buddhas use the power of expedients, To discriminate and speak of three vehiclesBut there is only the One Buddha Vehicle.The other two were spoken as a resting place.What I am telling you now is the truth;What you have gained is not extinction. For the sake of the Buddha’s All Wisdom, You should exert yourselves with great vigor.When you have certified to All Wisdom, And have the Ten Powers and other BuddhadharmaAnd have perfected the thirty-two marks, Then that is genuine extinction.**

Outline:

M2. Followers.

**Commentary:**

**Seeing those who seek the way, exhausted in mid-course.** They cultivate, and when they are half-way there, they decide they cannot cultivate anymore. They cannot stand the suffering. They get tired and slack off, So it is said,

The first year you cultivate, the Buddha is right in front of you.
By the third year, he is eighty-thousand miles away.
By the tenth year, he is completely out of sight.

When you first decide to cultivate, you may be very sincere. If you could have held on to that kind of sincerity, you would have become a Buddha by now. However, you cannot keep it up for very long. Half way there you get lazy. This is like, here, some people should have already opened the Five Eyes and gained the Six Spiritual Penetrations. Why haven’t they done so? It is because they are lazy. Some people have opened the Five Eyes and gained the Six Penetrations, but have not developed any genuine wisdom. This is also because they are lazy and they have not purified themselves of desire. Some people have the Five Eyes and Six Spiritual Penetrations, but then they get lazy and fail to cultivate and lose their powers. These are all cases of turning back exhausted at the halfway point.

**Unable to cross the dangerous paths of birth, death, and affliction.** Unable to cross the sea of suffering, unable to cross the most dangerous road of affliction. **Therefore I use the power of expedients,** expedient Dharma-doors, **to speak of Nirvana and give them a rest.** To let the cultivators have a rest, he lets them have their Nirvana with residue. **Saying, “Your sufferings are ended.”** I say, “Your suffering is all gone. **You have done what you had to do.** Your job is done.” **Then, knowing they have reached Nirvana and had all become Arhats, I gather them together to teach them the genuine Dharma.** I open the provisional to reveal the real teaching, the real Dharma, The Dharma Flower Sutra. We are now hearing the Dharma of The Lotus Sutra, so we should put forth vigor. We should not linger in Transformation City.

**The Buddhas use the power of expedients.** The Buddhas of the ten directions and the three periods of time teach and transform living beings using expedient means. **To discriminate and speak of Three Vehicles.** The Buddhadharma, in reality, is only the One Buddha Vehicle. The Hearer, Conditioned Enlightened Ones, and the Bodhisattva Vehicles do not really exist. If at the beginning, the Buddha had talked about the Buddha Vehicle, living beings would have been afraid. So, the Buddhas set forth the provisional dharmas for the sake of the real. Although they speak provisional Dharmas, their ultimate destination is still the real Dharmas. So it says, ‘They discriminate and speak of Three Vehicles.” Fearing living beings would think the Buddha fruit was too far away and they could never cultivate it successfully, they decided to speak the Three Vehicles to lead living beings there gradually.

**But there is only the One Buddha Vehicle.** The Three Vehicles are just Transformation City. They are transformed by the Buddha’s spiritual power. In the future, living beings will attain the Buddha fruit, for there is only the One Real Buddha Vehicle. **The other two were spoken as a resting place.** The Buddha saw that living beings had been cultivating for such a long time that they were discouraged. Consequently, he magically created the city so they could rest up a bit. The Buddha spoke of the two kinds of Nirvana: with residue and without residue.

**What I am telling you now is the truth.** You should go beyond the Transformation City. I am telling you the real Dharma, the Buddha Vehicle. **What you have gained is not extinction.** The Nirvana with residue that you have attained, the Fourth Fruit of Arhatship, is not Buddhahood. It is not ultimate; it is not real extinction. You have not completely ended birth and death and attained the bliss of still extinction. You still have a way to go. As Fourth Stage Arhats, they have ended Share Section birth and death, but they have not yet ended Change birth and death.

Share Section birth and death refers to our physical existence, that is, every person has his own body which exists for a certain period of time. Change birth and death refers to the continual process of birth and death of thoughts in our minds.

**For the sake of the Buddhas’ All Wisdom,** the wisdom of real mark Prajna, **you should exert yourselves with great vigor.** You should be extremely vigorous and seek Prajna wisdom. Do not stop at Fourth Stage Arhatship and fail to go forward. **When you have certified to All Wisdom,** real wisdom **and have the Ten Powers and other Buddhadharma.** The Ten Powers have been explained before. I shall now elaborate on a few of them, not all ten.

First of all, the Buddha has the power of wisdom to know what is right and wrong. What is right? What is wrong? What is right is that which accords with principles and the Buddhadharma. This is what is right. What is considered wrong? What is wrong is that which does not accord with the Buddhadharma; it is unreasonable dharma that opposes and goes against the Buddhadharma. The Buddha has this kind of wisdom and power. He knows all the correct and incorrect dharmas at all times and all places.

The second is, the Buddha knows the karmic retribution of living beings in the three periods of time. For now, we would not talk about the three periods of time. We will talk about last year, this year, and next year. Or, we can talk about last month, this month, and next month, or we can talk about yesterday, today, and tomorrow. If you do not believe that there are future lives or past lives, you only believe in this life. So I will change the time period. Surely you will admit to the concept of last year, this year, and next year. You cannot disagree with that. If you cannot, then you cannot really object to the idea of past, present, and future lives. The Buddha knows the karmic retribution of living beings--that is, what karmic offenses or good deeds they did in past lives, and what their cause and effect is. They know currently what they are undergoing as retribution. They also know the fruits they will reap in the future.

The third is the power of wisdom to know the liberation of all Dhyanas. All the Dhyanas include the first Dhyana, second Dhyana, third Dhyana, fourth Dhyana, and the Four Stations of Emptiness: The Heaven of the Station of Boundless Emptiness, the Heaven of the Station of Boundless Consciousness, the Heaven of the Station of Nothing Whatsoever, and the Heaven of the Station of Neither Perception nor Non-perception, which is also called the Samadhi of Extinguishing Feeling and Thoughts. These are the nine successive Samadhis. Since there are many samadhis, nine in order, they are called “all Dhyanas”. The Samadhi of Liberation consists of Eight Liberations, we have already explained many times so we will not discuss them today. Samadhi is concentration, the skill from Dhyana concentration.

The fourth is that the Buddha knows the superiority or inferiority of living beings’ faculties. This means he knows which living beings have good roots and which do not. The Buddha knows at a glance. The Buddha knows, but he would not tell you. He would not blast a living being saying, “You are too rotten. Hurry up and get away from the Buddha!” he would not say that. He also would not say, “Oh, you have such fine, good roots. You should draw near to the Buddha.” He would not talk about these things. Why not? It is one thing to know about them; it is another thing to broadcast your knowledge. You cannot go around telling people all these things. You may know, but you cannot tell. If you tell living beings they have good roots, they will get arrogant, thinking it does not matter if they cultivate or not. Then you have harmed them. Those without good roots should not be told either, or they will get discouraged and refuse to cultivate. Thinking it meaningless, they will retreat. If they do not know whether or not they have good roots, they will go ahead and cultivate. If they know, they will be lazy and retreat from the Bodhi mind. The Buddha knows, but he does not tell people. He is not like common people who do not know, but press the issue and insist that they do know. The Buddha knows, but does not tell. We do not know and stupidly claim we do.

Genuinely intelligent people would never say, “See me? I am the most intelligent person there is!” People who say they are smart are already stupid to the extreme. If they were not stupid, they would not praise themselves as being wise. Some people affect very strange styles and ways of thinking. If you flatter them with even one sentence of praise, they feel it is as sweet as eating honey. If you say one thing unfavorable, they find it bitter as gall. Praise them, and they are delighted. If you do not praise them, they will praise themselves. No one else praises them, so they have to introduce themselves. They say, “I cultivate real hard. I have made a lot of progress. I have no false thinking.” How do you know you have no false thinking? If you know you have no false thinking, that itself is false thinking. If you had no false thinking, you would not have to introduce yourself and say, “I have no false thinking.” Why do you want everyone to know that you have no false thinking? Others cultivate and claim that they have no thoughts of sexual desire. As soon as you say you do not have desire, that means you do have it. If you really did not have any desire, you would not feel compelled to say that you did not. If you do not have any, why bring it up in the first place? If you bring it up, that means it is still there. You just want to give yourself a high hat to wear and to cheat people into thinking that you have no sexual desire. I will tell you, until you have reached Fourth Stage Arhatship, you cannot say that you have no sexual desire.

“Oh, in that case then I probably have certified to the fourth fruit, because I really do not have any. You just do not believe me, that is all.” If you really did not have any, why would you be worried about people believing that you did or did not? Hmm? If you do not, you do not. Why try to get people to believe you? Huh? If other people believe that you do not have any, that is not going to help them get rid of theirs! It does not work like that. So, what is the big deal?

There are a lot of people who speak out of both sides of their mouths. They say they do, and they say they do not. For example, they do not have the Buddha’s wisdom, but then they say that they do. They are not as pure as the Buddha, but they say that they are. Living beings all like to be number one. They even want to put the Buddha in the number two slot! So, the fourth wisdom power of the Buddha is knowing the superiority or inferiority of living beings’ dispositions.

The fifth wisdom power is to know the various capacities of understanding oneself, but one understands other living beings as well. If you only understand yourself and know how to lecture the Sutras, what good does that do to anyone else? If you can lecture the Sutras, but living beings cannot understand it, it is useless. You have to be aware of what living beings can understand, so that when you explain a certain principle, a certain living being can understand it, and if you explain another principle, that other living being can understand it. You cannot explain things too profoundly or too mysteriously so people cannot understand. If they do not understand, it may be very profound, but it is of no use. Right? The doctrines must be explained so that everyone can understand and accept them. That is one of the powers of the Buddha. He knows what living beings can understand, and he teaches them accordingly. You should not lecture on purpose so that people cannot understand you. It would be better not to lecture at all than to do that.

The sixth wisdom power is that the Buddha knows all the different states of living beings. Everyone has his own state of mind. If you do not understand the states of living beings, you cannot teach and transform living beings. You should understand that everyone has his likes and dislikes. Everyone has his fondness and his dislikes. Some living beings like to eat sweet things. Some do not. Some like bitter things, sour things, hot things. You teach and transform a living being with the flavor that he is fond of. There are many different religions in the world, too. There is Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam. They are like the different flavors. Everybody has his preference. If you look at it one way, there are many different religions. If you look at it another way, they are all included in Buddhism. No religion is outside of Buddhism.

Other religions claim that they are the truest, the most lofty. Buddhism does not claim to be lofty, or true, because all religions, true or false, high or low, large or small, square or round--all are included within Buddhism. None of them are outside of Buddhism. The true is Buddhism, and the false is Buddhism. They are all included within Buddhism. True and false, high and low, are discriminations made by living beings; there are no such discriminations within the religion itself. As The Vajra Sutra says, “This Dharma is level and equal, with nothing above or below it.” Where is this “True and false?” The true comes from the false, and the false comes from the true. It is just like day and night. When the day reaches its ultimate, night is falling. When night reaches its ultimate, dawn is breaking.

People are awake sometimes, and sometimes they are asleep. When they are asleep, they do not know anything at all. They become muddled. When they are awake, they are alert. When they sleep they dream. The dreams are false. Religions are a bit like this. It is not that religions are always alert and awake. Sometimes they are sleeping, too. When religions are asleep, they are false. Even though they are false, they cannot not sleep. If you do not sleep, you cannot take it.

Look at Aniruddha who did not sleep for a week and consequently went blind! So, the Buddhas know all the different states of mind of living beings. Each living being goes with its kind. In the Ten Dharma Realms living beings hang out with those in their own realm. Bodhisattvas do the deeds of Bodhisattvas. Arhats do Arhat’s work. Gods do the deeds of gods. People do people-type things. Asuras do asura things; that is, they fight all day long. Hungry ghosts do hungry ghost things, and animals do animal things. Hell-beings do hellish things. Each follows its own kind.

The seventh is that they know where all paths lead. If you cultivate the five precepts and ten good deeds, you can be born in the heavens. If you cultivate the Dhyanas, you can certify to the fruit. If you cultivate the Six Perfections and Ten Thousand Conducts, you can become a Buddha. If you create offenses, you can turn into a hungry ghost or fall into hell. Whatever cause you plant, you reap that fruit. If you plant a good cause, you reap a good fruit; if you plant a bad cause, you reap a bad fruit.

The eighth is the power of wisdom to know with the unobstructed Heavenly Eye. This is the power of wisdom that knows that the Heavenly Eye is unobstructed. The ninth is the power of wisdom to know past lives without outflow. The tenth is the power of wisdom to know how to forever sever all habits. This is a brief explanation of the ten powers.

There are ten powers, but they are inexhaustible, really. From ten you get a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million, and so on.

**And have perfected the thirty-two marks,** the thirty-two marks and eighty minor characteristics of a Buddha, **then that is genuine extinction.**

**Sutra:**

**The Buddhas, the guiding masters, Speak of Nirvana to give living beings rest,But once they know that they are rested,They lead them into the Buddhas’ wisdom.”**

Outline:

L2. Drawing the conclusion.

**Commentary:**

**The Buddhas, the guiding masters.** All the Buddhas are great leader of living beings. **Speak of Nirvana to give living beings a rest.** They speak of Hearer, Conditioned-Enlightened, and Bodhisattva Vehicles. They speak of Nirvana with residue. **But once they know that they are rested.** Once they know living beings have rested up in the Transformation City, **they lead them into the Buddhas’ wisdom.** They lead living beings to become Buddhas and attain the Buddhas’ wisdom.