**The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra**

**Chapter 13: Exhortation to Maintain**
With Commentary by the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua

**Sutra:**
 **At that time, all the Bodhisattvas in unison raised their voices to speak verses saying:**

**“Pray do not be concerned, For after the Buddha’s extinction, In the frightening evil age, We will vastly preach.**

Outline:

F2. Verse.
G1. Propagating the Sutra. (Putting on the Thus Come One’s robe)
H1. Discussion of evil age.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, all the Bodhisattvas in unison,** with the same sound **raised their voices to speak verses saying: Pray do not be concerned.** We only wish that the World Honored One will not worry that no one will propagate The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra, because we are making vows to do this. **For after the Buddha’s extinction,** entry into Nirvana, **in the frightening evil age,** the Dharma Ending Age, **we will vastly preach.** We eighty billion Bodhisattvas shall vastly speak The Dharma Flower Sutra for the sake of living beings.

**Sutra:**

**There are ignorant people with evil mouths will revile us, Or even beat us with knives or staves, But we will endure it all.**

Outline:

H2. Situations to be endured.
I1. Deviant people.

**Commentary:**

In the Dharma Ending Age there are **ignorant people,** stupid people **with evil mouths will revile us.** They are very coarse and speak harshly, scolding us. They never say anything positive or pleasant. They will have accomplished the dharmas of scolding people. If you scold someone, however, and that person refuses to be moved by your words, then the scolding comes back to you. If you give someone a present and he does not accept it, you have to take it back. It works the same with scolding. It is also like someone who looks up at the sky and spits at it. The spittle falls back onto his own face.

Remember Maitreya Bodhisattva said that if someone spits at him he just lets it dry and does not even bother to wipe it off. Intelligent people just ignore it when people scold them. If you do not scold them, and they scold you, just pretend you do not understand. “Is he speaking Japanese? I do not understand.” If someone calls you a rotten egg, and you do not understand what he is saying, it will not have any effect. Think of it as being as if he were singing a song or praising your intelligence.

Up to the time I became a teenager, I used to scold people a lot. Nobody was fiercer that I! But after that, I never scolded people. I do not even like to talk about such things. Pretend you do not understand; pretend they are praising you. Actually people who praise you are hurting you more than people who scold you. People who scold you are testing your skills. If you can ignore the scoldings and the beatings, then you have some measure of samadhi. So I often say that I am cheating you. Not only am I cheating you, I am cheating myself. My aim in doing so is to ensure that no matter what, I cannot go down the bad road. People who scold you are helping you in reverse.

**Or** it may be that people **even beat us with knives or staves, but we will endure it all.** See? It is not that easy to be a Bodhisattva. You cannot just say, “I am a Bodhisattva,” and then get angry when someone insults you. What kind of Bodhisattva is that? Bodhisattvas have to endure what others cannot endure, eat what others cannot eat and take what others cannot take. If you do not have that much patience, be careful not to put a high hat on yourself and say, “I am a Bodhisattva.” What are you—a nasty-tempered, uptight Bodhisattva?
 **Sutra:**

**Bhikshus in the evil age With deviant knowledge and flattering, crooked minds, Who claim to have gained what they have not, Have minds filled with arrogance.**

Outline:

I1. Arrogant ones at the door of the Way.

**Commentary:**

Not only will lay people harbor deviant knowledge and views, even **Bhikshus in the evil age will be with deviant knowledge and flattering, crooked minds.** They will think they are better than everyone else. “Deviant knowledge” means that they have no wisdom to think of good things to say. They cannot speak the Buddhadharma, but they are very eloquent in expounding the theories of drinking and gambling, teaching and transforming people to do evil things. “Crooked” means that they are deceitful.

They are the ones **who claim to have gained what they have not.** They will say they have certified to the fruit, when in fact they have not. That is a serious offense, and such people are certain to fall into the Tongue-Pulling Hell. They are not Buddhas, but claim that they are. They claim to be enlightened when they are not. They are actually weird creatures and deviant ghosts. If you meet people who say they are enlightened you can say, “What kind of enlightenment? A dog’s enlightenment? Dogs are smarter than you are! At least they can watch the door! You have no worth at all! You are just trying to pass off fish eyes as pearls, and to put out people’s eyes so they cannot tell the false from the true.” You can talk like that to them. They go about claiming to be Buddhas and saying they are enlightened because they want to cheat people into believing in them and making offerings to them.

They **have minds filled with arrogance.** They are totally stuffed with pride. Unless you were climbing on conditions, why would you want people to believe in you, to think you were enlightened or a Buddha? Why would you say you were a Bodhisattva? It is just because of arrogance that they do such things. Such people would not be satisfied with being Emperor—the time is not right. They do not say they are the presidents because the people would have to vote for them and they could not afford to buy all the votes. So they think, “I will be a Buddha and everyone will bow to me!”

This country is run as a democracy, and so we even have “democratic” false Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arhats, and Patriarchs—pretenders. Everyone wants to assume one of these fine titles. However, what is true is true, regardless of what you say about it, and the false is false no matter what one says. You can only cheat people for a short period of time. In the long run, you cannot cheat them. Devadatta declared himself the “new Buddha,” but eventually fell into the hells. Shakyamuni Buddha never said that he was a new or an old Buddha, and he did become a Buddha. This proves that the true is always true and the false is always false. The false can sometimes turn true, but the true cannot become false. How does the false become true? Devadatta fell into the hells, yes, but in the future he will become the Buddha King of Gods. We should be true in what we do, not false. We should strive to be truer and truer until we achieve success.

**Sutra:**

**Some may appear to be aranyakas, For they wear rags and dwell in the wilds. But although they claim to be on the true path, They scorn those who live among people. Coveting profit and offerings, They will speak Dharma to the white-robed And be held in reverence by the world As Arhats with the Six Penetrations. These people harbor evil thoughts, Always thinking of vulgar, worldly matters. Falsely calling themselves aranyakas, They will take delight in pointing out our faults, Saying things like, “All of these Bhikshus are greedy for profit and offerings,” And so they preach externalist doctrines. They have written the sutras themselves To deceive and confuse worldly people All for the sake of reputation. They will single out this Sutra And in the midst of the multitudes slander us Before the kings, ministers, Brahmans, and lay people And even to other Bhikshus. Attempting to defame us, they will say, “These are people of deviant views Who preach an externalist doctrine.”**

Outline:

I3. The arrogant ones who pretend to be sages.

**Commentary:**

**Some may appear to be aranyakas.** “Aranya” is a Sanskrit word, which means a still, quiet place, appropriate for meditation. An “Aranyaka” is a person who lives in such a place, that is, a cultivator. “Aranya” also means “no strife,” and “a place without distractions.” In such a place there are no distracting noises. It is very quiet and still. Some people may seem to be cultivators **for they wear rags and dwell in the wilds.** Cultivators do not like to wear nice clothes; they just keep patching rags together. Cultivators save and do not waste anything. They do not toss anything casually, so in the trash can, they will pick through garbage to find old rags and stitch them together to make clothes. They use “a thousand needles and 10,000 threads to repair their clothes.”

**But although they claim to be on the true path, they scorn those who live among people.** They may dwell in the mountains and they fast for long periods of time. That is fine, but they do not have to advertise it all over the place. If they tell everyone, “I am cultivating bitter practices here. I do not eat anything, except some fruit once in a while. And I never lie down to sleep!” They are not real cultivators. People who talk like that, who claim that they are rag-robed, fasting hermits, are not real cultivators. Real cultivators do not need to brag to lay people about how great their practice is hoping thereby that lay people will make offerings to them. But if they do not even eat, why do they need offerings? They would not need money or offerings. If they do not even eat, they certainly do not need to climb on conditions by advertising their practice to lay people. Real cultivators do not advertise.

Cultivators can advertise for other cultivators, but not for themselves. You can praise your fellow cultivators, but you should not praise yourself. You cannot say, “Do you know who I am? I live in the mountains. I cultivate bitter practices, too. I do not have anything to eat either. Most people cannot do what I do. I am a real cultivator. Real cultivators live in the mountains.” I have heard mountain-dwelling cultivators talk like this. I thought, I lived in the mountains for a number of years, but I never bragged about it to anyone, and I never complained about how difficult it was. I do not know where they learned this technique of living in the mountains for two and a half days and then coming to the city to advertise themselves as exceptional cultivators, looking down on everyone else as inept cultivators.

That is not the way I do things. It always seems to me that everyone else really cultivates and I am the only false cultivator! If you wish to draw near this false one, go ahead. If you do not, then so long! So, mountain dwelling cultivators have their quirks. Their commercialism brings them lots of visitors, too. Fancying themselves to be lofty and high, they look down upon those who lecture on The Dharma Flower Sutra for other people. Since everyone regards these “cultivators,” they believe this slander.

**Coveting profit and offerings, they will speak Dharma to the white-robed,** to lay people, **and be held in reverence by the world as Arhats with the Six Penetrations. These people harbor evil thoughts, always thinking of vulgar, worldly matters. Falsely calling themselves aranyakas, they will take delight in pointing out our faults.** They will not wear robes or sashes, but will dress very casually and talk to lay people out of both sides of their mouths. On the one hand they will say, “I am just like all of you. There is no distinction between lay people and left-home people.” But on the other hand they will say they are enlightened and that they have a lot of Way-virtue. Wealthy but stupid people will make offerings to them, thinking that they are Bodhisattvas or Arhats with Six Spiritual Penetrations! I am not afraid of calling these people at their game. I am not afraid of anyone. What do I have to be afraid of? If you believe in me, that is fine. If you do not believe in me, that is even better!

These people are always thinking about worldly things and busy climbing on conditions. They are not like me. I say:

Freezing to death, I do not climb on conditions.
Starving to death, I do not manipulate conditions.
Dying of poverty, I ask for nothing!

“Thinking of worldly matters” just means that they are always busy climbing on conditions and begging money from rich lay people, going after name and profit. How can you fight to be an aranyaka when the word aranyaka itself means “no fighting!” These false aranyakas are always talking about the faults of those who lecture upon The Dharma Flower Sutra. They may live in a quiet place, but their minds are not quiet. Since I do not want people fighting over things, as soon as I built Ci Xing Temple at Dayu Mountain, I gave it away!

They will go around **saying things like, “All of these Bhikshus are greedy for profit and offerings,” and so they preach externalist doctrines. They have written the sutras themselves to deceive and confuse worldly people all for the sake of reputation.** Because they are so greedy for fame and gain, they will say that The Dharma Flower Sutra was not spoken by the Buddha! They will say that it is an externalist scripture; they will say that those who lecture on The Dharma Flower Sutra are just doing it for fame and profit.

In China there was a Dharma Master who exclusively slandered the Great Vehicle Sutras. He did not believe in any of the Sutras except The Dharma Flower Sutra. He believed in The Dharma Flower Sutra, but with reservations. He said that only the material preceding the Expedient Device Chapter (Chapter two) was genuine, and all the rest of it was false.

He said The Amitabha Sutra was false, too. He quoted the Sutra saying, “Passing from here through hundreds of millions of Buddhalands to the west, is a world called Ultimate Bliss…” “Why one hundred million? Why not one hundred and one million or ninety-nine? What nonsense! Who was in charge of measuring the distance? That is proof it is a false text.” He would only lecture on the parts of the Sutra he considered real. You young Americans probably had no idea that such strange things take place in Buddhism, did you?

They say, “Those Bhikshus wrote The Dharma Flower Sutra! I could write one, too. I could write a thousand volumes, but I am not that kind! These people who lecture on The Dharma Flower Sutra are cheating everyone!” So yesterday I told you myself that I was cheating you. I do not need other people to call me false. Who cares anyway? A good name, a bad name—it is all the same. What counts is what is inside. If I give myself a bad name, then I save other people the trouble.

**They will single out this Sutra and in the midst of the multitudes, slander us before the kings, ministers, Brahmans, and lay people and even to other Bhikshus.** “Brahmans” are those who cultivate pure living. **Attempting to defame us, they will say, “These are people of deviant views who preach an externalist doctrine.”** The doctrines are not true. So it will be in the Dharma Ending Age. Those who speak the true Dharma will be slandered as externalists, while those who speak deviant Dharma will be regarded as true exponents of the Dharma. That is a primary characteristic of the Dharma Ending Age. People can no longer tell black from white, true from false. If you tell them something false, they will be happy. If you say something true, they will not want to listen. They will say, “I do not want to hear about that!”

The Dharma spoken at the Buddhist Lecture Hall is neither true nor false. Why do I say this? If you think it is true, then the false is true. If you think it is false, then the true becomes false. The genuine doctrine is beyond false and true. We do not talk very much here. We just meditate. Would you say that was true or false? I do not know either. If you gain something true, you will know yourself. If you gain something false, you will know, too. It is like drinking water—you know for yourself whether it is cold or warm. Do not ask me.

**Sutra:**

**Because we revere the Buddha, We will endure all of this evil. For this we will be mocked And people will flippantly say, “All of you are Buddhas.” All such words of ridicule We will patiently endure. In the turbid eon, in the evil age When there will be much to fear, Evil ghosts will possess others In order to slander and insult us. But revering and trusting the Buddha, We shall put on the armor of patience. In order to speak this Sutra, We shall endure all these difficulties. Not cherishing body or life itself, But caring only for the supreme path We in the ages to come, Will protect and uphold the Buddha’s entrustment. As the World Honored One himself knows, In the turbid age, evil Bhikshus, Not knowing of the Buddha’s expedients Whereby the Dharma is spoken appropriately, Will frown and speak ill of us, Repeatedly banishing us From stupas and temples. So will be the host of evils, And yet, recollecting the Buddha’s command, We shall bear up under these events.**

Outline:

H3. The meaning of “putting on the Thus Come One’s robes.”

**Commentary:**

**Because we revere the Buddha, we will endure all of this evil.** All of the Great Bodhisattvas, and the Bhikshus, and Bhikshunis made vows, saying, “We will patiently endure all this, because we all revere the Buddha and believe in him.” **For this we will be mocked and people will flippantly say, “All of you are Buddhas.”** People will insult us and tease us saying, “You folks are all Buddhas!” **All such words of ridicule, we will patiently endure.** They will hold us in contempt, but we will bear up under the insults.

**In the turbid eon, in the evil age when there will be much to fear, evil ghosts will possess others.** In the Dharma Ending Age, the demons will be strong and the Dharma will be weak. How do ghosts possess people? If people hold to improper thoughts, and deviant thoughts, it is easy for a ghost to enter them. When a ghost possesses one, one loses one’s awareness. One speaks, but one does not know what one is saying. The ghost confuses one’s mind so that one does not know anything. The ghost does the talking. The person is not aware of what is going on. When I lived on Sacramento Street, I met a woman who was possessed. She said she was a Bodhisattva. I said, “Bodhisattvas are supposed to know everything. How come you do not know anything?” she had no answer, and so she left. People possessed by evil ghosts may claim to be Bodhisattvas or Buddhas who have come here to teach people.

People get ghosts because their minds turn “ghostly.” They walk around looking like everyone else, but in their minds they hold on to ghosts. Since there are ghosts in their minds, they attract ghosts from the outside. The inner and outer ghosts get together and ghosts control the person.

In this case, the ghost takes over the person. **In order to slander and insult us**—cultivators of the Way. **But revering and trusting the Buddha, we shall put on the armor of patience.** Wearing the “armor of patience,” one can endure slander and abuse. If someone scolds you and you do not receive it, it returns to that person. When someone scolds you it is because his mind is evil. If you do not accept the scolding, the evil in the person’s mind makes him even more uncomfortable. “Why do you ignore my scolding?” he cries. So if someone scolds you, you should not think of it as a scolding. Think, “In a former life I must have scolded this person, and now I am undergoing the retribution. Scold me some more!”

**In order to speak this Sutra, we shall endure all these difficulties.** We will bear all these unbearable things. **Not cherishing body or life itself, but caring only for the supreme path, we in the ages to come, will protect and uphold the Buddha’s entrustment.** The only thing we will care about is protecting and maintaining The Dharma Flower Sutra, and cultivating according to its doctrines. We will carry out the Buddha’s orders in protecting and propagating the Buddhadharma.

**As the World Honored One himself knows, in the turbid age, evil Bhikshus**—left home people who slander other left home people--**not knowing of the Buddha’s expedients whereby the Dharma is spoken appropriately, will frown and speak ill of us.** They will screw up their faces into a frown and scold us. They will be intent upon **repeatedly banishing us from stupas and temples.** They will ostracize us and kick us out of the Way places. **So will be the host of evils. And yet, recollecting the Buddha’s command, we shall bear up under these events** and we will not get angry with such evil people.

**Sutra:**

**If there are those who seek the Dharma, In the villages, cities, and towns, We will go to those places To speak the Dharma entrusted To us by the Buddha.**

Outline:

G2. Propagating the Sutra. (Sitting on the Thus Come One’s throne)

**Commentary:**

**If there are those who seek the Dharma in the villages, cities, and towns, we will go to those places to speak the Dharma entrusted to us by the Buddha,** to speak The Dharma Flower Sutra.

**Sutra:**

**We are the Buddha’s attendants Dwelling fearlessly among the multitudes, We speak the Dharma skillfully, And hope the Buddha will remain at peace.**

Outline:

G3. Propagating the Sutra. (Entering the Thus Come One’s room)

**Commentary:**

**We are the Buddha’s attendants** and so we should do the Buddha’s work. **Dwelling fearlessly among the multitudes, we speak the Dharma skillfully.** In keeping with our vows, we will speak of the Real Mark of all Dharmas. **And hope the Buddha will remain at peace,** in the Land of Constant Stillness and Light, and not worry about the propagation of The Dharma Flower Sutra.

**Sutra:**

**We in the presence of the World Honored One, And before the Buddhas who have come from the ten directions, Make vows such as these,And the Buddha himself knows our thoughts.”**

Outline:

G4. Conclusion.

**Commentary:**

**We in the presence of the World Honored One, and before the Buddhas who have come from the ten directions,** we will **make vows such as these.** In the presence of Shakyamuni Buddha, Many Jewels Buddha, and all the other Buddhas who have come from the ten directions, we make these vows, **and the Buddha himself knows our thoughts.** The Buddha knew anyway. We did not have to tell him. Our minds are made up to protect and propagate The Dharma Flower Sutra. The entire assembly has this wish and hereby makes this vow.

In this chapter called Exhortation to Maintain, we are exhorted to recite, maintain, read and write out The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. It also exhorts all beings to come and listen to the lectures on this Dharma Flower Sutra. All Bodhisattvas, Bhikshus, and Bhikshunis should make the vow circulate this Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. That is why it is called the Exhortation to Maintain. It exhorts everyone to cultivate according to the Dharma Flower Sutra. You can only become a Buddha if you cultivate according to the Dharma Flower Sutra. And we should do just that!