**The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra**

**Chapter 15: Welling forth from the Earth**
With Commentary by the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua

This is the fifteenth chapter of the twenty-eight chapters in the Dharma Flower Sutra. There are thirteen chapters left to explain. Why is this chapter named **"Welling forth from the Earth"**? The title refers to the Great Bodhisattvas who rise up out of the earth. How many of them do this? A tremendous number of them; six hundred billion, or as many as the number of sand grains in eight Ganges Rivers. Each of those Bodhisattvas also brings along six hundred billion members of his retinue. All these beings are disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha whom he taught and transformed in past lives. And so this chapter, number fifteen, has the title "Welling forth from the Earth."

**Sutra:**

**At that time, in the great assembly, the Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas, who had come from other lands in numbers exceeding the grains of sand in eight Ganges Rivers, rose, placed their palms together, made obeisance, and said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, if you will allow us, after the Buddha’s Quiescence, here in this Saha world we will with ever-increasing vigor protect, maintain, read, recite, write out, and make offerings to this Sutra, and we will proclaim it far and wide throughout this land.”**
Outline:

B2. The fundamental door. Disclosing the near and revealing the far.
C1. Introductory narration.
D1. Welling up.
E1. Bodhisattvas from other lands ask to propagate the Sutra.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, in the great assembly, the Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas, who had come from other lands in numbers exceeding the grains of sand in eight Ganges Rivers, rose.** This multitude of Great Bodhisattvas came from other worlds and other lands to the Dharma assembly to see the Thus Come One Many Jewels and Shakyamuni Buddha. They **placed their palms together, made obeisance,** bowing to the Buddhas, and **said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, if you will allow us, after the Buddha’s Quiescence, here in this Saha world we will with ever-increasing vigor protect, maintain, read, recite, write out, and make offerings to this Sutra, and we will proclaim it far and wide throughout this land.”** They spoke to Shakyamuni Buddha, saying, “Please allow us to make this vow before the Buddhas. After the Buddha goes to Nirvana, we here in this Saha world will diligently increase our efforts in protecting those who are vigorous cultivators of the Way. We will protect the Bodhisattvas who read and recite the Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra and who write out the Dharma Flower Sutra. We will make offerings to the Bodhisattvas who bring forth the Bodhisattva resolve to read and recite this Sutra. We will use the power of our various spiritual penetrations to protect such people in the Saha world, enabling them to explain the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra for all living beings.

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The mother of one of my disciples was here today for the Ullambana festival. Recently she was walking in the mountains and ate some sort of wild herb, which made her sick. At the time, she remembered that her daughter had told her that when she had been sick, she recited the name of Amitabha Buddha and her sickness was alleviated very quickly. Her daughter had even written out the name of the Buddha on a slip of paper and given it to her mother. She looked in her purse, found the slip of paper, and began reciting “Namo Amitabha Buddha.” After just a few minutes, she felt better.

Do you believe this? Some people might not. Some people might say that the Chinese are always telling unbelievable stories. But now Americans have such things happen to them, too. Actually, events like this are very common. You will hear of more as the days go by. Often when they happen, people do not know what to think, because the events are inconceivable, wonderful states. They happen whether you believe them or not. This disciple's mother is very happy that her daughter is studying here and is very supportive of her interest in Buddhism. That is why she obtained such a response.

After this, whenever something unusual happens, you can bring it up and tell everyone in the assembly. We can examine it according to the methods of Western logic and find out what kind of logic is behind it.

I will tell you a wonderful secret in one sentence: Those who have faith are saved. There is nothing more to it than that. Those who believe are saved; those who do not are not.

In Christianity, they say the same thing: "Those who believe will be saved." Those who believe get to go to heaven and be with God. The only problem with that is that the heavens are still within the wheel of rebirth. To be "saved" in Buddhism means to transcend the wheel of rebirth—to end birth and death. The Christian version of salvation is only a temporary arrangement; it is not eternal. It is true that if you cultivate according to their teachings, you can be born in heaven, but when your heavenly blessings are used up, you fall back down again. If you are saved according to the Buddha's teachings, you will be saved forever; you would not fall again.

Although the Christians claim that life in heaven is bliss eternal, it is only a claim. No one can prove it. People with wisdom would not believe that one cannot fall from the heavens. The Buddhist Sutras clearly state that if you are born in the heavens, once your heavenly blessings are exhausted, you will fall. There is no need to argue the point, however. Suffice it to say that there are differences in the Christian and Buddhist concepts of salvation.

In America there are weird people who lump the Buddhas, the gods, the spirits, and Jesus together, and say they are all the same. Why? To confuse the issue so that people cannot understand. Their aim is to keep you from understanding. My method is different. I want you to understand.

**Sutra:**
 **The Buddha then told the host of Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas, “Stop! Good men, you do not need to protect and maintain this Sutra. Why not? Within my Saha world itself there are Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers, each of whom has a retinue equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers. After my Quiescence, all of them will protect, uphold, read, recite, and vastly proclaim this Sutra.”**
Outline:

E2. The Thus Come One refuses to grant permission.

**Commentary:**

**The Buddha** Shakyamuni **then told the host of Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas, "Stop!"** When he heard the Great Bodhisattvas, in number as many as the grains of sand in eight Ganges Rivers, express their wish to make a vow to read and recite the Dharma Flower Sutra after the Buddha's Quiescence, he said, "Stop! Do not make that vow! You do not need to protect and uphold my Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. **Good men, you do not need to protect and maintain this Sutra.** Why did he stop them? Probably Shakyamuni Buddha wanted his own disciples to amass more merit and virtue, and so he objected to these Bodhisattvas from outside coming to protect and maintain his Dharma Flower Sutra. If these Bodhisattvas from outside protected the Sutra, his own disciples, whom he was teaching and transforming, would not have any work to do. Therefore he quickly said, “Stop, do not make that vow. I already have someone for this job. It is not necessary for you to do it. I do not need you to make this vow to protect and uphold the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra.”

**Why not? Within my Saha world itself there are Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers, each of whom has a retinue equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers.** These are the ones I have taught and transformed. Each of these Bodhisattvas in turn has taught and transformed many other beings, who now make up their retinues. **After my quiescence, all of them will protect, uphold, read, recite, and vastly proclaim this Sutra.** They have already made this vow to protect and maintain the Dharma Flower Sutra, as well as to protect those who read the Sutra, recite the Sutra from memory, and who expansively explain this Sutra.

**Sutra:**
 **Just as the Buddha said this, the earth in the three thousand great thousand lands in the Saha world trembled and split open, and from its midst limitless thousands of tens of thousands of millions of Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas simultaneously welled forth.**
Outline:

E3. Welling up from below.
F1. Narrator’s observation.
G1. Welling up.

**Commentary:**

**Just as the Buddha** Shakyamuni **said this, the earth in the three thousand great thousand lands in the Saha world trembled and split open.** "Saha" refers to our world, which is "able to be endured." Within it there are three thousand great thousand lands. All of them quaked and split open. **And from its midst limitless thousands of tens of thousands of millions of Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas simultaneously welled forth.**

All at the same time, they rose from where the earth had split open. Would you say that was an amazing sight or not? Who were these Bodhisattvas? They were those whom Shakyamuni Buddha had taught and transformed in previous lives. That was why they all came to where Shakyamuni Buddha was speaking the Dharma Flower Sutra; they wanted to listen to the Dharma.

**Sutra:**
 **All of these Bodhisattvas possessed golden-hued bodies, the thirty-two marks, and limitless light.**
Outline:

G2. The appearance of their bodies.

Commentary:

**All of these Bodhisattvas** who rose up out of the earth **possessed golden-hued bodies.** Their bodies emitted purple-golden light, and they were replete with **the thirty-two marks and limitless light.**
 **Sutra:**
 **They had been dwelling beneath the Saha world in the space belonging to this world.**
Outline:

G3. Where they lived.

Commentary:

**They had been dwelling beneath the Saha world**—the world we live in—**in the space belonging to this world.** Below the Saha world, the World That Can Be Endured, is the wheel of space, and that is where they had been staying.

**Sutra:**
 **Upon hearing the sound of Shakyamuni Buddha’s voice, all the Bodhisattvas came up from below.**
Outline:

G4. Hearing the Buddha’s voice.

**Commentary:**

Even though they were quite far away from our world, they could still hear Shakyamuni Buddha's voice as he spoke the Dharma Flower Sutra. **Upon hearing the sound of Shakyamuni Buddha's voice, all the Bodhisattvas came up from below,** from the wheel of empty space beneath this Saha world.

**Sutra:**
 **Each one of the Bodhisattvas was a leader who instructed and guided a great multitude. Each had a retinue numbering as many as the sand grains of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers. Still others had retinues numbering as many as the sand grains of fifty thousand, forty thousand, thirty thousand, twenty thousand, or ten thousand Ganges Rivers. Others had retinues numbering as many as the sand grains of one Ganges River, one half a Ganges River, one fourth, and on down to one thousandth of a ten thousandth of a millionth of a nayuta of a Ganges River.

Other had retinues numbering in the billions of nayutas. Others had retinues numbering in the hundreds of millions. Others had retinues numbering in the tens of millions, the millions, and on down to the tens of thousands. Others had a thousand or a hundred and on down to ten. Others had five, four, three, or two disciples, down to one disciple. Still others came alone, preferring isolation. And so it was that their numbers were limitless and boundless, beyond the power of calculation or analogy to make known.**
Outline:

G5. Their retinues.

Commentary:

**Each one of the Bodhisattvas was a leader who instructed and guided a great multitude.** They were guiding masters who were teaching and transforming living beings. "Instructed" means they lectured on the Sutras and spoke the Dharma. "Guided" means they told beings what path to take, what method to use in their cultivation. These Bodhisattvas acted as eyes for living beings. And living beings looked to them to find out how to practice. **Each had a retinue numbering as many as the sand grains of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers.** Each of the Bodhisattvas, who were as numerous as the sand grains of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers, brought along retinues of disciples and students numbering as many as the sand grains in sixty thousand Ganges Rivers. They were like one Dharma family. We are one big family in the Dharma, regardless of where we came from. Those who have taken refuge with the Triple Jewel are all of one family. There were as many Bodhisattvas as the sand grains of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers, and each had as many disciples as the sand grains of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers. Can you count how many that would be?

**Still others had retinues numbering as many as the sand grains of fifty thousand** Ganges Rivers. Although it is said that each Bodhisattva had a retinue numbering as many as the sand grains in sixty thousand Ganges Rivers, some had less. Perhaps they had retinues numbering as many as the sand grains in **forty thousand, thirty thousand, twenty thousand, or ten thousand Ganges Rivers. Others had retinues numbering as many as the sand grains of one Ganges River, one half a Ganges River, one fourth, and on down to one thousandth of a ten thousandth of a millionth of a nayuta of a Ganges River.** That is a relatively small number.

**Others had retinues numbering in the billions of nayutas. Others had retinues numbering in the hundreds of millions. Others had retinues numbering in the tens of millions, the millions, and on down to the tens of thousands. Others had a thousand, or a hundred, and on down to ten. Others had five, four, three, or two disciples, down to one disciple.** If we explain these numbers as representing aspects of the Dharma, the "five" here could refer to the five skandhas; "four" to the four truths; "three" to the three non-outflow studies of precepts, samadhi, and wisdom; "two" to samadhi and wisdom; and "one" to the one true path.

**Still others came alone, preferring isolation.** There might have been a Bodhisattva who did not want to take disciples. "Too much trouble," he said. "They never do what you tell them to do!" Such a Bodhisattva might even have vowed not to take disciples. It is true! He might fear the trouble, because with disciples, one is laughing while another is crying, or one is crying while the other is laughing. Another one is getting angry, and yet another is crying. Then the one that was angry may start laughing and say, “I will think of a way to make you get angry, and that will prove that you do not have any samadhi either—that you are no better than I am.” Therefore the Bodhisattva may not want to take disciples. It is pretty nice, not having disciples.

These Bodhisattvas prefer isolation. They run off to the mountains to get away from everyone. Perhaps a man feels that women are just giving him a lot of trouble, so he runs to the mountains to get away from them. That is seeking isolation. But if you retire from the world, you should do it properly. Do not go into seclusion and then send a publicity package out, telling everyone to come and make offerings to you—the Great Hermit! If you do that, you will have even more company and more problems. People will flock to you seeking blessings, wisdom, and liberation, wishing for this and hoping for that, and you will be in a fine fix! Those who genuinely prefer isolation do not want others to know that they are isolating themselves. They are not concerned about whether or not other people know that they are cultivating. Cultivation is something you do yourself. Why tell other people about it?

Someone says, "But if no one knows, how can we teach and transform beings?"

You do not teach and transform beings in a single period of time or even a single lifetime. You have to practice the Bodhisattva Way life after life and time after time. Before you have realized the Way, your main responsibility is to cultivate the Way.

**And so it was that** trying to compare them in order to know their number could not be done. **Their numbers were limitless and boundless.** That was because the number was simply too large. Some numbered as many as the sand grains of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers, some as many as in five Ganges Rivers, four, three, or two Ganges Rivers, and if you tried to add them all together, how many Ganges Rivers' sand grains would that be? No one could know precisely what that number would be; it would be **beyond the power of calculation or analogy to make known.** It would have no limit, no end, no bounds, and you could not even make an analogy that would come close. The best mathematician could not count them. All you could say is that those Bodhisattvas were limitless.

A mathematician may not believe that they cannot be counted. "Any number, no matter how large, can be calculated," might be the protest. But even if you did get a count, it would not be one hundred percent accurate. It could only be an approximation. To say nothing of anything else, we cannot even count the number of beings here at the Buddhist Lecture Hall! We would also have to approximate that number.

I have always liked math. When I was a child I always wanted to figure out what the biggest number would be. I would write a "1" and then start adding zeros to make 10; 100; 1,000; 10,000; and so forth. I kept adding zeros, covering the floor, the ceiling, and everything in between, on and on until I had written zeros on everything between heaven and earth and filled up empty space as well. What do you think the total was? Could you figure it out? Essentially, that is what is happening here in the text. We just keep adding zeros, filling up all of space, heaven and earth, and the wheel of space beneath the world. Nobody knows what the total is. You could not even count the number of zeros, let alone what they represent! Numbers are endless. No matter how gifted you are in mathematics, you could not figure this one out.  **Sutra:**
 **Having welled forth from the earth, all the Bodhisattvas went to the Wonderful Stupa of Seven Jewels in space, where the Thus Come One Many Jewels and Shakyamuni Buddha were. Arriving there, they turned toward the two World Honored Ones and bowed with their heads at those Buddhas’ feet. They went on to where all the Buddhas were seated on lion thrones beneath jeweled trees, bowed to them, circumambulated them three times to the right, put their palms together respectfully, and praised them with various Bodhisattva praises. Then they withdrew to one side and gazed joyfully at the two World Honored Ones.**
Outline:

F2. Paying respects.
G1. Offerings representing the three karmas.
H1. The offerings proper.

**Commentary:**

**Having welled forth from the earth, all the Bodhisattvas,** the uncountable Great Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas, emerged from the ground and **went to the Wonderful Stupa of Seven Jewels in space, where the Thus Come One Many Jewels** was. Each Bodhisattva went up into space to the place where the stupa made of seven treasures was. They went to see Many Jewels Thus Come One **and Shakyamuni Buddha. Arriving there,** after they got to that place, **they turned toward the two World Honored Ones,** Many Jewels and Shakyamuni, and **bowed with their heads at those Buddhas' feet.** They made full prostrations with their five limbs on the ground. They were single-mindedly respectful, and they placed their palms together. They **went on to where all the Buddhas were seated on lion thrones beneath jeweled trees.** They went to the Buddhas who had come from the ten directions and who were seated on lion seats underneath jeweled trees. Each of those Buddhas from the ten directions was on a lion throne, and the Bodhisattvas went to where they were and **bowed to them.** They made obeisance to them and **circumambulated them three times to the right.** Walking to the right around them thrice was a gesture of particular respect. They **put their palms together respectfully.** Placing their palms together represents purity of mind karma. Their body karma was also pure, **and** they **praised them with various Bodhisattva praises.** They sang praises that Bodhisattvas use to mutually laud one another, as well as praises to Buddhas, such as the one that begins “Amitabha’s body is the color of gold.”

We, too, sing praises every day, such as the praise to Shakyamuni Buddha:

In the heavens above, and in all that is below,
Nothing compares to the Buddha.
Throughout the worlds of the ten directions,
He is beyond compare.
Of all I have seen in the world,
There is nothing at all like the Buddha.

We also recite the praise to Amitabha Buddha:

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

Those are praises to the Buddhas. Since we sing them every day, we should be conscious of what we are doing. Some people just do things by rote, and they do not really know what they are doing. They do not know that they are praising the Buddha. They get all caught up in the sound of the singer’s voice, and forget what the purpose of the chanting is. Some leaders of ceremonies recite so beautifully that the women who hear them become infatuated. They pursue the leader so they can listen to him recite the Sutras. This happens more often than you would think. It is hypnotic. When they are doing their secret ceremonies they say:

Nan ya hong!

Or:

Nan wa zi la hong,

They take money and run!

**Then they,** these Bodhisattvas, **withdrew to one side** after they had made obeisance **and** sung their praises to the Buddhas. They **gazed joyfully at the two World Honored Ones.** The Bodhisattvas were happy. They liked to look at Shakyamuni Buddha and the Thus Come One Many Jewels. You see, Bodhisattvas also have attachments: They like to see the Buddhas. There is a certain amount of attachment at whatever level you have reached. Getting rid of those attachments is what is meant by "You should produce that thought which is nowhere supported."

Someone is having a false thought: “Who does secret ceremonies like that?”

I will tell you: Me!

Someone else is thinking, "You talked about men who felt that women were giving them trouble, and so they ran off to the mountains. What about women? When they run off to the mountains, who is giving them trouble?"

Do you need to ask? Men, of course! You should be able to figure that one out for yourself.

**Sutra:**
 **From the time the Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas first welled forth from the earth, and while they praised the Buddhas with various Bodhisattva praises, a period of fifty small eons elapsed. During that time, Shakyamuni Buddha remained seated in silence, and the four assemblies were silent for fifty small eons as well.**
Outline:

H2. The amount of time elapsed.

**Commentary:**

**From the time the Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas first welled forth from the earth.** The Great Bodhisattvas had initially come out of the ground, **and while they praised the Buddhas**—Shakyamuni Buddha, Many Jewels Thus Come One, and the Buddhas of the Ten Directions—**with various Bodhisattva praises, a period of fifty small eons elapsed.** They praised the Buddhas for fifty small eons. **During that time, Shakyamuni Buddha remained seated in silence.** The Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas were singing praises to the Buddhas for fifty small eons. How long is that?

An eon is a period of "an increase and a decrease." During the rise of an eon, every one hundred years, people's life spans increase by one year and their heights increase by one inch. When people reach an average life span of 84,000 years, then a decline begins. Having started from an average life span of ten years and increased to an average life span of 84,000 years, a decline then sets in. Every one hundred years, the average life span decreases by one year and the average height by one inch. The decline continues until the average life span has decreased to ten years. One cycle of increase and decrease is considered "one small eon." The Buddha sat quietly for fifty such small eons and did not speak the Dharma.

Someone might start calculating and say, “What the Buddhist Sutras say is totally impossible. Shakyamuni Buddha was only in the world for about eighty years, and he lectured on the Dharma for forty-nine years in over three hundred Dharma assemblies, propounding the Dharma Flower Sutra for eight of those years. Why does the text of the Dharma Flower Sutra say that Shakyamuni Buddha spoke the Dharma Flower Sutra for fifty small eons? That is way off. There is no proof.”

Well, we would not talk about the fifty small eons. Let us talk about the Vimalakirti Sutra. The Elder Vimalakirti stayed in a ten-foot-square room. But that space was able to contain 32,000 lion thrones, each of which was 80,000 yojanas tall. How could his ten-foot-square room contain lion thrones 80,000 yojanas high? The thrones were so tall that the Hearers and Pratyekabuddhas found it impossible to climb up and sit on them. That is a case of:

The small manifests within the great;
The great manifests within the small.
The small does not obstruct the great;
The great does not obstruct the small.

This state of unobstructed interpenetration is not something that ordinary people comprehend. If you understand it, then fifty small eons is like a single thought. If you do not understand it, then one knows not how long fifty small eons will be. Therefore, the small can manifest within the great, and the great can manifest within the small. The near can manifest within the far, and the far can manifest within the near.

Thus, fifty small eons is not a long time, and the time it takes for a single thought is not a short time. One thought can take fifty small eons, and fifty small eons can be contained in a single thought.

There is a story that makes this point very clear: Dhyana Master Gao Fengmiao was a cultivator who sat on the inverted lotus precipice of Xitian Mu and meditated. Why did he go there to cultivate? It was a very dangerous ledge. Were he to doze off in meditation, he would fall thousands of feet into the valley and be smashed to pieces. Even a rock dropped from that height would be smashed to bits, to say nothing of a person.

Because he had a tendency to dose off during meditation, he vowed to go to that dangerous place and sit on that inverted lotus. "Let's see me fall asleep now!" he said, positioning himself near the edge. He sat there for about seven days without falling asleep; he did not dare! After all, his life was at stake. Therefore, no matter what, he simply would not fall asleep.

However, on the eighth day, he could no longer control himself. While sitting in meditation, he dozed off. As soon as he fell asleep, he slumped forward and tumbled right off the edge. Waking, he thought, "It is all over. I am certainly not going to come out of this alive."

Just then he gave up his body and mind. "If I must die, then I will die. I am not going to pay any attention; I will get ready for the big sleep."

When he had fallen halfway down the mountain, Weituo Bodhisattva manifested his spiritual powers. From right there in space, he dragged the Dhyana Master back up to the top of the mountain.

"Who is this protecting my Dharma?" the Master said.

"It is me, Dharma Protector Weituo!" came the reply.

The Dhyana Master suddenly became arrogant and had the thought, "You mean I moved Weituo Bodhisattva to protect my Dharma? Probably, in this world, there are very few cultivators who are as courageously vigorous as I am." And so he asked Weituo Bodhisattva, "How many cultivators are there in the world who work as hard as I do in their cultivation?"

"About as many as the hairs on a cow," said Weituo Bodhisattva dryly. "And since you are so arrogant, I am not going to protect your Dharma again for eighty thousand great eons!" So saying, he took his jeweled pestle, rose up into space, and disappeared.

Dhyana Master Gao Fengmiao really regretted what he had said. "Weituo Bodhisattva was protecting me, and I had to go and get arrogant. That was really a mistake," he lamented. Tears of remorse began to roll softly down his cheeks. He cried for quite a while before he gave rise to a renewed resolve: "I was cultivating before I knew that Weituo Bodhisattva was protecting me. Why should I quit cultivating now that I know he is not? I should cultivate whether he protects me or not!" Then with great determination, he took his seat on the ledge once again and continued to meditate.

A little while later, sure enough, he fell asleep and dropped over the edge again, plummeting down the mountain. "This time, I have really had it," he thought. "It is all over now!" Suddenly, he was hauled back up to the top again; he had been caught in midair when he was about halfway down. "Now, who saved me this time?" he asked.

"It is me, Dharma Protector Weituo, once again," came the reply.

This irritated Dhyana Master Gao Fengmiao. "Old Brother Wei, didn't you say that you were not going to protect my Dharma for eighty thousand great eons? Why did you save me again? Doesn't that make you a liar?"

Weituo Bodhisattva replied, "Your tears and shame were very genuine; they canceled out eighty thousand great eons worth of time. Therefore I was obliged to come to your aid. Your one thought of repentance took you across eighty thousand great eons!"

Why is this Sutra called the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra? Because it is extremely wonderful, inconceivable. It is a state you have no way to see. If you use a telescopic lens you can see things very far away, just as if they were right before you. Without the telescopic lens, you would have no way to see that far. This story about Dhyana Master Gao Fengmiao proves that one thought can transcend fifty small eons, or even eighty thousand great eons. This is the same principle as in looking at things through a telescope: What is long can become shortened; what is short can become lengthened.

Time is not fixed. According to mundane truth—speaking of it from the point of view of worldly dharmas—everything exists. But in terms of the real truth, everything is empty. Nothing is indestructible; nothing lasts forever. As to time, there is no past, present, or future. Past thought cannot be grasped; present thought cannot be grasped; and future thought cannot be grasped. Since the three periods of time cannot be grasped, even time is non-existent.

For fifty small eons, Shakyamuni Buddha remained seated in silence, **and the four assemblies**—the Bhikshus, the Bhikshunis, the Upasakas, and the Upasikas—**were silent for fifty small eons as well.**

**Sutra:**
 **Because of the Buddha’s spiritual power, all in the great assembly thought only half a day had passed. At that time the four assemblies were also able, because of the Buddha’s spiritual power, to see all the Bodhisattvas completely filling the space of limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of lands.**
Outline:

H3. The aid of the Buddha’s spiritual powers.

**Commentary:**

**Because of the Buddha's spiritual power,** the strength of his spiritual penetrations, **all in the great assembly thought only half a day had passed.** Although it seemed like half a day, more than fifty small eons had passed. Although it had been fifty small eons, it seemed like half a day's time. Most people had that impression.

**At that time the four assemblies** of Bhikshus, Bhikshunis, Upasakas, and Upasikas **were also able, because of the Buddha's spiritual power, to see all the Bodhisattvas completely filling the space.** How many were there? They filled up **limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of lands.** How many Bodhisattvas were there altogether? No one could know.

Speaking about the relativity of time, a day and a night in the Heaven of the Four Kings, the heaven we can see above us, is equal to fifty years in the human realm. The gods there live for five hundred years, so you can figure out how much time that is in human terms.

In the Heaven of the Thirty-three (Trayastrimsha Heaven), a day and a night is one hundred human years, and the gods there live for a thousand years.

When the Buddha was in the world, a follower of an externalist way once challenged his disciple Mahakatyayana, saying, "I do not believe in rebirth. If it is true that there is rebirth, then why hasn't anyone who has died ever sent a message back to tell us about it?"

Mahakatyayana said, "Let us take the example of a prisoner who has been put in jail. Is he free to send a letter home?"

"No," said the nonbeliever. “Fine, I grant that people in hell are not free to communicate, just like prisoners in jail. But what about the people in heaven? Why don’t they send a message back?”

The Venerable Mahakatyayana answered him, saying, "One day and night in the heavens equals fifty years on earth. Two days equal a hundred years in the human realm. Once they arrive there, first they want to rest. The second day they want to get settled in, unpack their bags, make the bed, and rearrange the furniture. By the third day in heaven, they might think about sending you a letter, but you will already be dead. That is because if they were to come back three days later, a hundred and fifty years in the human realm would have passed. How would you be able to see them?"

The externalist had no answer.

Therefore, time in the heavens and time on earth are experienced differently. A day and night on earth is equal to five hundred years in the hells. Do not be attached to time. Time is basically empty. People create their concept of time, but time itself does not exist. Its very substance is empty. Since it has no self-nature, no substance of its own, why be attached to there being any certainty about time?

**Sutra:**
 **Among the multitudes of Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas were four leaders. The first was named Superior Practice, the second was named Boundless Practice, the third was named Pure Practice, and the fourth was named Secure Practice. These four Bodhisattvas, among the assembly, were the foremost leaders, the spokesmen and guides. Before the great multitudes, they joined their palms together, contemplated Shakyamuni Buddha, made deep bows from the waist and said, “World Honored One, are you in good health and free from worry? Are you peaceful and happy in your practice? Are those who should be crossed over receptive to the teaching? They do not cause the World Honored One weariness, do they?”

The four Great Bodhisattvas then spoke verses, saying:**

**“Is the World Honored One happy and at peace,Free from worry and disease?In teaching and transforming beings,Is he free from weariness?And further, do living beings Receive transformation easily?They do not cause the World Honored One To become fatigued, do they?”**

Outline:

G2. Inquiring after the Buddha’s welfare.

**Commentary:**

**Among the multitudes**—the limitless, boundless, uncountable number **of** Great **Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas** filling up the space in hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of lands—**were four leaders.** They were guides and teachers for living beings and the other Bodhisattvas. The other Bodhisattvas studied from them; they were the senior-seated Bodhisattvas. **The first was named Superior Practice.** His cultivation, his practice, was the very highest. None was more lofty than his. **The second was named Boundless Practice.** The entrances into practice that he cultivated had no limit, no end. **The third was named Pure Practice.** His name indicates that he became a Bodhisattva by cultivating pure practices. **And the fourth** Bodhisattva leader **was named Secure Practice.** He was able to peacefully and happily establish his entrance into practice. **These four Bodhisattvas,** these leaders **among the assembly** in the space of limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of lands, among all those Bodhisattvas, **were the foremost leaders.** They were senior-seated Bodhisattvas.

As the leaders of the great assembly, **the spokesmen and guides,** they led everyone in singing praises. They were the leaders in doing everything, the **leaders before the great multitudes. They,** the four Bodhisattva leaders, **joined their palms together, contemplated Shakyamuni Buddha, made deep bows from the waist, and** inquired after the Buddha's welfare. They **said, "World Honored One, are you in good health and free from worry?** Hopefully, World Honored One, you have not been sick, and there is nothing troubling you, is there? **Are you peaceful and happy in your practice?** Are you well-established in the four modes of peaceful and happy conduct—body, mouth, mind, and vows? **Are those who should be crossed over receptive to the teaching?** Are they easy to teach and transform? **They do not cause the World Honored One weariness, do they?** They do not present obstacles, do they?

"With living beings easy to teach, the World Honored One will certainly be happy. He would not grow sick and tired from teaching them."

**The four Great Bodhisattvas then spoke verses** in praise of Shakyamuni Buddha and to inquire after his welfare, **saying, "Is the World Honored One happy and at peace?** You are very content and tranquil, **free from worry and disease,** are you not? Certainly you have no sickness and no affliction. **In teaching and transforming beings, is he free from weariness?** Certainly, the Buddha is not tired. **And further, do living beings receive transformation easily?** It is not too difficult, is it? **They do not cause the World Honored One to become fatigued, do they?** Since they easily accept being taught and transformed, the World Honored One will not feel tired. Right?"

**Sutra:**
 **The World Honored One then, in the midst of the great host of Bodhisattvas, said this: “So it is, so it is, good men. The Thus Come One is peaceful and happy, free from disease and worry. All the living beings are easy to transform and take across, and they do not cause me weariness. Why is this? All these living beings have, in lifetime after lifetime, have always received my teaching, and they have also paid reverence to and venerated the Buddhas of the past, thereby planting the roots of goodness. When these living beings first saw me and heard my teaching, all, except for those who had formerly cultivated and studied the Small Vehicle, immediately believed and accepted it and entered the Thus Come One’s wisdom. I now lead even such people as these to hear this Sutra and to enter the Buddha’s wisdom.”**
Outline:

G3. The Buddha replies that he is happy and at peace.

**Commentary:**

**The World Honored One, then…** "Then" is when the four guiding masters had finished speaking their verse on behalf of all the Great Bodhisattvas. **In the midst of the great host of Bodhisattvas,** the Buddha **said this.** This narrative sentence was added by the Venerable Ananda when he compiled the Sutras. "Then the World Honored One Shakyamuni, in the midst of Bodhisattvas who completely filled the space in limitless hundreds of thousands of millions of lands, such a great assembly as that, spoke." What did he say? He said, "**So it is, so it is, good men.** You asked how I am doing, and it is just as you stated. I am just fine. Good men, I, **the Thus Come One,** am **peaceful and happy, free from disease.** I am in good health **and** do not have cause to **worry.** I have no afflictions. **All the living beings are easy to transform and take across.** They are all very obedient, **and they do not cause me weariness.** Therefore, I do not feel tired. I am not at all displeased. **Why is this? All these living beings have, lifetime after lifetime, always received my teaching.** In live after live, at all times, they have been receiving my teaching. They have obtained my transforming instructions. **And they have also paid reverence to and venerated the Buddhas of the past.** Not only have they been taught by me, but in the presence of countless Buddhas of the past, they have been reverent and respectful, and have praised them. They have **thereby planted the roots of goodness,** planting many, many good roots; limitlessly, boundlessly many good roots.

**When these living beings** that I have been teaching **first saw me,** beheld my physical being, **and heard my teaching**—the Storehouse Teaching, the Connecting Teaching, and the Special Teaching—**all, except for those who had formerly cultivated and studied the Small Vehicle**—the people who previously studied the Small Vehicle are not included in this number—**immediately believed and accepted it.** They instantly give rise to faith. Some certified to the fruition of Arhatship; others certified to the fruition of Those Enlightened by Conditions. Still others certified to various stages of Bodhisattvahood **and entered the Thus Come One's wisdom,** passing through the Ten Dwellings, the Ten Practices, the Ten Transferences, the Ten Grounds, and on to the level of Equal Enlightenment. Having traversed altogether forty-one levels, they became Great Masters of the Dharma-body. Finally, they entered the Buddha's wisdom and obtained the fruition of Wonderful Enlightenment. **I now lead even such people as these to hear this Sutra.** Now I want them to listen to this Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra and cause them to turn from the small and go toward the great, to bring forth the resolve of a Bodhisattva, to cultivate the Bodhisattva Way, **and to enter the Buddha's wisdom.**

**Sutra:**

**At that time the Great Bodhisattvas spoke these verses:**

**“Good indeed, good indeed,Great Hero, World Honored One,That all the living beings Are easy to transform and save, That they can ask about the Buddha’s deep wisdomAnd, having heard it, believe and practice it. We all rejoice accordingly.”**

Outline:

G4. Verses of rejoicing in accord.

**Commentary:**

**At that time,** after Shakyamuni Buddha finished speaking, **the Great Bodhisattvas spoke these verses** to praise Shakyamuni Buddha: **Good indeed, good indeed.** That is very good, very good, **Great Hero, World Honored One.** The Buddha is the Great Hero who has transcended the world. He is heroic both in and beyond the world. **All the living beings** who should be taught and transformed **are easy to transform and save.** They very easily accept the Buddha's teaching and transforming. **They can ask about the Buddha's deep wisdom and, having heard it, believe and practice it.** After they listen, they believe, accept, and respectfully offer up their conduct. They practice according to the Dharma. **We all rejoice accordingly.** All of us, the Great Bodhisattvas, rejoice in this merit and virtue, and we wish to respectfully offer up our conduct and to rely upon the Buddha's teaching in our cultivation as well.

**Sutra:**
 **Then the World Honored One praised the leaders of all those Great Bodhisattvas: “Good indeed, good indeed, that you good men have brought forth a heart of rejoicing in accord with the Thus Come One.”**
Outline:

G5. The Buddha’s praise.

**Commentary:**

“**Then**” means at the time when all of the Great Bodhisattvas had finished praising Shakyamuni Buddha in verses. The Bodhisattvas praised the Buddha, and now the Buddha praises the Bodhisattvas. **The World Honored One praised the leaders of all those Great Bodhisattvas.** They mutually praised each other. "**Good indeed, good indeed.** You Great Bodhisattvas are really good. You are the best Bodhisattvas. **You good men** are capable and **have brought forth a heart of rejoicing in accord with the Thus Come One**. You have resolved to rejoice in the joy of the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra spoken by the Buddha and to praise it. You have been able to come to this Dharma Assembly to listen to the Dharma."

**Sutra:**
 **At that time Maitreya Bodhisattva and the Bodhisattvas in the multitudes, numbering as many as the sand grains in eight thousand Ganges Rivers, all had this thought: “From of old, we have never seen or heard of these Great Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas who have welled forth from the earth and who are standing before the World Honored One, joining their palms, making offerings, bowing from the waist, and inquiring after his welfare.”**
Outline:

D2. The doubts.
E1. Doubts of the Bodhisattvas in this land.
F1. Doubts expressed in prose.

**Commentary:**

**At that time Maitreya Bodhisattva.** This is why the Buddha cannot casually praise the Bodhisattvas. It is all right for the Bodhisattvas to praise the Buddha, but it is not all right for the Buddha to praise the Bodhisattvas as he pleases. Here, as soon as the Buddha praises these limitless Great Bodhisattvas, Maitreya Bodhisattva is the first to have a false thought. He gives rise to a doubt. What doubt does he has?

Maitreya Bodhisattva's other name, Ajita, is Sanskrit, and is translated as "Invincible." No one can be victorious over him; he is the most victorious. Maitreya Bodhisattva **and the Bodhisattvas in the multitudes, numbering as many as the sand grains in eight thousand Ganges Rivers, all had this thought.** How strange! They all had the same false thought at the same time. "**From of old, we have never seen or heard of these Great Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas.** Where have they come from? There are so many of them, and we do not recognize a single one." Maitreya Bodhisattva can fly and roam anywhere he wants to. He is a Great Master of the Dharma-body, and so he roams across all lands. He has been everywhere, but he has never encountered this great multitude of Bodhisattvas. Therefore, he is quite astonished. "We have never seen them before. How can it be that we have followed the Buddha for so long and have never seen all these Great Bodhisattvas? We do not recognize a single one of them. They **have welled forth from the earth and are standing before the World Honored One, joining their palms** and **making offerings** to the World Honored One. They are **bowing from the waist and inquiring after his welfare.** We have been with the Buddha a long time. Why haven't we ever seen them? Why are they so close to the Buddha? Why don't we recognize these Bodhisattvas?" They gave rise to those kinds of doubts.

**Sutra:**
 **Then Maitreya Bodhisattva Mahasattva, knowing the thoughts in the minds of the Bodhisattvas and others, numbering as many as the sand grains in eight thousand Ganges Rivers, and wishing as well to resolve his own doubts, placed his palms together, faced the Buddha, and spoke verses.**

**“These limitless thousands of myriads of kotis of Bodhisattvas form a great host, Such as we have never seen before. We pray the Doubly Complete Honored One Will tell us where they came from And why they are gathered here.They have huge bodies, great spiritual penetrations, And inconceivable wisdom. They are solid in resolve and will, And possess the great power of patience. Living beings delight in seeing them. But where did they come from?”**

Outline:

F2. Questions expressed in verses.
G1. Asking where the Bodhisattvas came from and why they have come.

**Commentary:**
**Then Maitreya Bodhisattva Mahasattva,** a Great Bodhisattva, knew **the thoughts in the minds of the Bodhisattvas and others, numbering as many as the sand grains in eight thousand Ganges Rivers.** We need not go into how Maitreya Bodhisattva long ago obtained the five eyes and the six spiritual penetrations. This is why he knew what the Bodhisattvas and others, numbering as many as the sand grains in eight thousand Ganges Rivers, were thinking and the doubts they were having. He was **wishing as well to resolve his own doubts.** He did not understand either; he wanted to clear up his own questions, so he **placed his palms together, faced the Buddha, and spoke verses.** He spoke verses in order to ask the Buddha what the reason for all this was.

**These limitless thousands of myriads of kotis,** so many Bodhisattvas! Such a vast host of Great Bodhisattvas! Beyond count! Ultimately how many are there? Thousands of tens of thousands of millions of kotis—I cannot calculate the number!

These **Bodhisattvas form a great host.** So many Bodhisattvas, **such as we have never seen before.** Although there are so many, I never met a single one of them in the past. I have been to many places, but I have never encountered any of these Great Bodhisattvas.

**We pray the Doubly Complete Honored One** will explain. We hope the Thus Come One, who is replete with both blessings and wisdom **will tell us where they came from.** From what place are these limitless, boundless, thousands of myriads of kotis of Bodhisattvas coming? I have traveled to many places. I have gone on many vacations, but I have never happened upon any of these Bodhisattvas. I have been all over the Dharma Realm, and I never encountered a single one.

**Why are they gathered here?** What are the causes and conditions that bring them to assemble in this place? **They have huge bodies and great spiritual penetrations.** They are physically big—extremely tall. With such large bodies, their spiritual penetrations are also certainly not going to be small. They must have great spiritual penetrations, no doubt much greater by far than those possessed by Venerable Mahamaudgalyayana. **And** their wisdom is **inconceivable wisdom.** We cannot fathom their wisdom. We have no way to comprehend the magnitude of their wisdom. Both their spiritual penetrations and their wisdom are vast. We can neither conceive of them with our minds nor express them in words.

**They are solid in resolve and will.** These Great Bodhisattvas' determination is definitely firm and strong. Their three kinds of learning to be without outflows—precepts, samadhi, and wisdom—are certainly exceptionally solid. They **possess the great power of patience.** They possess the great power of giving, the great power of precepts, the great power of patience, the great power of vigor, the great power of samadhi, and the great power of prajna. **Living beings delight in seeing them.** Everyone likes to see these Great Bodhisattvas. Everyone delights in hearing them speak the Dharma. **But where did they come from?** Will the World Honored One please tell us? We all want to hear about these causes and conditions.

Originally I was going to ask you to identify one of the Arhat disciples, whose accomplishment I mentioned yesterday. I had told you that if you could not answer, then I would not lecture. But before the lecture I forgot to ask, and only remembered as I began to lecture. Once I thought of it, I said to myself, "I'd better just go ahead and lecture tonight and then ask at the end of the lecture. And if no one can answer the question, then I would not lecture tomorrow night. Because if I asked at the beginning of the lecture, right after I had ascended the Dharma seat, and then did not lecture, that would disappoint everyone. But to ask now, at the end of the lecture, will prepare you in advance for the fact that I am not going to lecture tomorrow night if no one knows the answer.

Question: And so, who is foremost in debate?
Answer: Mahakatyayana.

All you need to do is remember this verse, and you will be relatively well-informed about the ten foremost disciples' abilities:

Shariputra is wisdom; Maudgalyayana, penetrations.
Speaking the Dharma is Purna.
Subhuti is empty; Katyayana debates.
Kashyapa practices dhuta.
Aniruddha has the heavenly eye,
Upali upholds the precepts,
Ananda has much erudition.
Rahula practices in secret.

**Sutra:**

**Each and every Bodhisattva Has brought a retinue Limitless in number, Like the Ganges sand grains.**

**Some of the Great Bodhisattvas Lead retinues of beings as many as The sand grains in sixty thousand Ganges Rivers. Such are the great assemblies Single-mindedly seeking the Buddha Way.**

**These Great Masters, In number like the sand grains in sixty thousand Ganges Rivers, Have all come to make offerings to the Buddha And to protect and uphold this Sutra.**

**Those with retinues comprised of as many as the sand grains in fifty thousand Ganges Rivers Are even more in number.Those with retinues numbering forty, or thirty thousand,Twenty down to ten thousand, One thousand, one hundred, And so forth, down to the sand grains of a single Ganges River, And those with a half, a third, or a quarter thereof, Down to one ten thousandth of a millionth thereof, Or one thousandth of a ten thousandth of a nayuta thereof, And the ones with tens of thousands of millions of disciples, on down to half a million,Are even more numerous.There are also those with hundreds of tens of thousands, or tens of thousands,Thousands or hundreds, Fifty, or ten, Down to three, two, or one, And those who come alone without a retinue, Preferring isolation— All these come before the Buddha In numbers surpassing those just stated.**

**So large is the assembly, That were one to count them For eons numbering more than Ganges sand grains, Still one could not fully know them.**

Outline:

G2. Giving the sizes of their retinues.

**Commentary:**

**Each and every Bodhisattva.** Maitreya Bodhisattva continues to question the Buddha about the Bodhisattvas who welled forth from the earth, not one of whom he has ever seen before.

Every one of those Bodhisattvas **has brought a retinue limitless in number.** The actual count of all these Bodhisattvas would be extremely difficult to ascertain. They were limitless and boundless**, like the Ganges sand grains. Some of the Great Bodhisattvas lead retinues** comprised **of beings,** disciples, who are **as many as the sand grains of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers.** They have that many disciples. **Such are the great assemblies single-mindedly seeking the Buddha Way.**

**These Great Masters, in number like the sand grains in sixty thousand Ganges Rivers have all come to make offerings to the Buddha.** These Great Bodhisattvas and Great Dharma Masters all make offerings to the Buddha at the same time, **and** they arrive **to protect and uphold this Sutra.** They wish to make vows to protect and maintain the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra.

**Those with retinues comprised of as many** disciples **as the sand grains in fifty thousand Ganges Rivers are** yet **even more in number.** Perhaps there are those whose retinues surpass the number fifty thousand or are less than fifty thousand. There are **those with retinues numbering forty or thirty thousand** disciples. Some bring **twenty, down to ten thousand, one thousand, one hundred, and so forth, down to the sand grains in a single Ganges River.** Those who bring disciples whose number was **a half, a third, or a quarter thereof, down to one ten thousandth of a millionth thereof, or one thousandth of a ten thousandth of a nayuta thereof,** on down to half a million disciples are more numerous. Maybe they bring more or less than the above numbers.

**And the ones with tens of thousands of millions of disciples, on down to half a million, are even more numerous. There are also those with hundreds of tens of thousands, or tens of thousands, thousands, or hundreds** in their retinues. Some bring **fifty** disciples **or ten** disciples. Some bring **down to three or two** disciples **or one** disciple. **And** there are **those who come alone without a retinue.** Maybe there are Bodhisattvas who come by themselves because they prefer not to take disciples, feeling that disciples often fail to heed instructions and make all kinds of trouble. **Preferring isolation,** some cultivators come all by themselves. But now even they, **all these, come before the Buddha** Shakyamuni, **in numbers surpassing those just stated.** There is really no way to calculate their number. **So large is the assembly that were one to count them for** great**eons numbering more than Ganges sand grains, still one could not fully know them.** Never could their number be completely known.

**Sutra:**

**Who spoke the Dharma for All these of great awesome virtue— This vigorous host of Bodhisattvas— Teaching, transforming, and bringing them to accomplishment?Under whom did they first bring forth their resolve? Whose Buddhadharma do they praise and proclaim? Whose sutras do they receive, uphold, and practice?And which Buddha’s Way do they cultivate?**

Outline:

G3. Asking who is their teacher.

**Commentary:**

**All these of great awesome virtue,** these greatly virtuous Bodhisattvas, must certainly cultivate vigorous practices. They definitely must be extraordinarily vigorous. That must be why now they are endowed with such awesome virtue. **This vigorous host of Bodhisattvas** form a great multitude, and they vigorously cultivate the Bodhisattva Way. Now they have become Great Bodhisattvas. **Who spoke the Dharma for** them in the beginning? Who did they study the Dharma with? Now we want to know this.

Who has been **teaching, transforming, and bringing them to accomplishment?** Who has been helping them to accomplish their Bodhisattva deeds in the Way. Who taught and transformed them? We are wondering about these things. **Under whom did they first bring forth their resolve?** Which Dharma Master were they following when they brought forth their very first resolve? Under which Dharma Master did they leave home and cultivate the Way? Which Dharma Master did they follow in cultivating the six perfections and practices? Under whom did they first bring forth their resolve?

In cultivation, bringing forth the initial resolve is the most important event for a cultivator. You should never forget your initial resolve. Why did you first bring forth the resolve to investigate the Buddhadharma? Why, after you investigated the Buddhadharma, did you want to leave home? Now that you have left the home-life, how should you proceed? These are important matters. You should not be all muddled, learn some confused Buddhadharma, leave the home-life in a confused way, and then become a confused monk who does confused things. That is what you should not do. Therefore, you must be vigorous. Never forget that one thought when you first brought forth the resolve. Why did you decide to leave the home-life? There are so many other things you could have done with your life. And so the question is asked: Under which Dharma Master did they make their initial resolve?

**Whose Buddhadharma do they praise and proclaim?** Which Buddha's Dharma do they laud? What Buddhadharmas do they extol? **Whose sutras do they receive, uphold, and practice?** What Sutras do they cultivate? Did they rely on the Store Teaching in their cultivation? Or did they rely on the Penetrating Teaching in their cultivation? Or did they rely on the Special Teaching in their cultivation? Or do they rely on the Perfect Teaching in their cultivation? What teaching's principles do they use as the foundation for their cultivation? What Sutras do they follow in their cultivation? Do they rely on the Dharma Flower Sutra in their cultivation? Do they rely on the Shurangama Sutra in their cultivation? Do they rely on the Flower Adornment Sutra, with its endless, endless entrances into practice, in their cultivation?

Or do they cultivate the Pure Land Dharmas? Do they cultivate the Chan School? Do they cultivate the Secret School? Do they cultivate the Vinaya School? Do they study and practice the Teaching School? Chan, Teaching, Vinaya, Secret, and Pure Land are the five teaching schools. Which ones did they use as their entrances into practice? **And which Buddha's Way do they cultivate** and practice? Do they hold precepts? Practice patience? Or do they practice giving? Do they cultivate vigor? Do they cultivate Chan samadhi or prajna? These are the things we are not clear about.

**Sutra:**

**Such are the Bodhisattvas’ powers Of spiritual penetrations and great wisdom,That throughout the four directions, The earth quakes and splits open,And they rise out of it.**

Outline:

G4. Conclusion of request to clear up doubts.
H1. Concluding praise.

**Commentary:**

**Such are the Bodhisattva's power.** There are so many Bodhisattvas; you could never count them. Their **spiritual penetrations and great wisdom** are such. Their spiritual penetrations are great, and the power of their wisdom is great. Because their wisdom power is great, their spiritual penetrations are great. Because they have great spiritual penetrations, they have great wisdom. **Throughout the four directions, the earth quakes and splits open.** Because of their great spiritual powers and great wisdom, the earth in the north, south, east, and west trembles and splits open, **and they rise out of it.** They issue forth, welling forth from the earth like a bubbling spring.

**Sutra:**

**World Honored One, from of old, I have never seen such a thing. Pray tell us the names Of the countries they come from.**

**I am always roaming through the lands, But I have never seen this assembly. I do not recognize A single one of them.**

Outline:

H2. Requesting to know where they came from.

**Commentary:**

**World Honored One, from of old**—from the long distant past onwards—**I have never seen such a thing.** I have seen many inconceivable states, but this state I have never seen. Just imagine, even Maitreya Bodhisattva has never seen such an event. I hope the World Honored One will be greatly compassionate and tell us where these Bodhisattvas have come from. **Pray tell us the names of the countries they come from.** What countries do they reside in and what are the names of those countries? Although I am a Bodhisattva, I do not know anything about these matters. **I am always roaming through the lands.** Previously I told you that Maitreya Bodhisattva is always taking vacations—going on holidays—to all the different countries. Now he tells us that himself. No wonder Americans love to go on vacations. Even Bodhisattvas like to travel. **But I have never seen this assembly.** Although I have been to many lands—I have been everywhere—I have never met these Bodhisattvas. **I do not recognize a single one of them.** I do not have a single friend among them. I am not acquainted with any of them.

**Sutra:**

**Suddenly they have welled forth out of the earth. Pray explain the reason why.**

Outline:

H3. Requesting to know why they came.

**Commentary:**

**Suddenly they have welled forth out of the earth. Pray explain the reason why.** He is unclear about what is happening. Even Maitreya Bodhisattva is confused, because he does not know who they are. Not knowing is a kind of confusion. "Although I am unclear, I would like to get clear. Shakyamuni Buddha, please tell us about the causes and conditions of these Bodhisattvas. Let us hear about them. Will you do it? Shakyamuni Buddha, I know you are very compassionate, and surely you will tell us."

**Sutra:**

**Now in this great assembly, The limitless hundreds of thousands of millions Of Bodhisattvas all Wish to understand this event: The causes and conditions, first to last, Of this host of Bodhisattvas. O World Honored One of limitless virtue, We only pray you will resolve the assembly’s doubts.**

Outline:

H4. The entire assembly wishes to know.

**Commentary:**

**Now in this great assembly, the limitless hundreds of thousands of millions of Bodhisattvas all**—not just me, Maitreya Bodhisattva—**wish to understand this event.** They are of the same mind as I am. I want to know because I know they want to know. And so now I am requesting on their behalf. What are **the causes and conditions, first to last, of this host of Bodhisattvas?** Their very beginnings are their formative stages. I want to know their formative stages on through to the very end. I want to know their causes and conditions. We want to know their immediate and remote causes. I want to know their background. We want to know all about them. **O World Honored One of limitless virtue, we only pray you will resolve the assembly's doubts.** World Honored One, you have limitless blessings, limitless wisdom, and limitless virtue. My only hope is that you will resolve the assembly's doubts, so we can all understand the causes and conditions behind what is happening here.

**Sutra:**
**At that time all the division bodies of Shakyamuni Buddha, who had come from limitless thousands of myriads of kotis of lands in other directions, sat in lotus posture on lion thrones beneath jeweled trees throughout the eight directions. The attendants of those Buddhas, seeing this great assembly of Bodhisattvas of the three thousand great thousand worlds welling forth from the earth in the four directions and dwelling in space, each said to his respective Buddha, “World Honored One, where have all the limitless boundless, asamkhyeyas of Bodhisattvas in this great host come from?”

Each of those Buddhas then told his attendants, “All of you good men, just wait one moment! There is a Bodhisattva Mahasattva named Maitreya, upon whom Shakyamuni Buddha has bestowed a prediction that he shall be the next Buddha. He has already asked about this matter, and the Buddha is about to answer him. For this reason, you may all hear about it.”**
Outline:

E2. Doubts of the Bodhisattvas in other lands.

**Commentary:**

In the previous verse section, Maitreya Bodhisattva expressed his doubts. Now the attendants that the Shakyamuni Buddhas have brought with them, their disciples, having seen this rare occurrence of the arrival of so many Great Bodhisattvas, have false thoughts and doubts, too: "Where did all these Bodhisattvas come from? Why have so many people come today? So many Bodhisattvas! Where could they have come from?"

**At that time all the division bodies,** whom **Shakyamuni Buddha had** sent to all the limitless lands, came here **from limitless thousands of myriads of kotis of lands in other directions. Beneath jeweled trees throughout the eight directions:** They dwell in the eight directions—east, south, west, north, southwest, southeast, northwest, and northeast. These are the four cardinal directions and four intermediate directions. They **sat in lotus posture on lion thrones.** Lotus posture is the most honored, most esteemed posture in Buddhism; so you students of the Buddhadharma should first know how to sit in the lotus position.

**Each of the attendants of those Buddhas** were **seeing this great assembly of Bodhisattvas.** Every attendant looked at these Great Bodhisattvas **of the three thousand great thousand worlds welling forth from the earth in the four directions.** In each of the cardinal directions, they issued forth from the ground **and** were **dwelling in space,** because the stupa of Many Jewels Buddha—the Thus Come One Many Jewels—and Shakyamuni Buddha were both in space. Each attendant **said to his respective Buddha, "World Honored One."** Here the title World Honored One here does not refer to Shakyamuni Buddha, but to all of his division-body World Honored Ones. There were **limitless, boundless asamkhyeyas of Bodhisattvas in this great host.** Asamkhyeya means a limitless number. There were limitless, boundless numbers of limitlessly, boundlessly many Bodhisattvas. **"Where have** they **all come from,** this great assembly of Great Bodhisattvas? How is it that we have never met them before? What place have all these Great Bodhisattvas come from?"

**Each of those Buddhas,** all those division bodies of Shakyamuni Buddha, **then told his attendants,** the disciples he had brought with him, **"All of you good men.** You youngsters! **Just wait one moment.** Do not make so much noise. You are not the least bit composed." Surely the Buddhas said, "Quiet! Do not make so much noise. Wait a minute. Do not be nervous. **There is a Bodhisattva Mahasattva**—there is already a Great Bodhisattva—**named Maitreya.** He is the one **upon whom Shakyamuni Buddha has bestowed a prediction that he shall be the next Buddha.** Maitreya Bodhisattva has been given a prediction and a name; he will follow Shakyamuni Buddha to become the next Buddha. After Shakyamuni Buddha enters Nirvana, then, in the future, Maitreya will be the next Buddha within the Buddhadharma."

In the world, there are proponents of externalist ways who claim to be Maitreya Buddha. This one says, "I am Maitreya Buddha; I have come. Do you recognize me?"

Another says, "Actually, I am the real Maitreya Bodhisattva."

That is the way it goes. One transmits a Way and another one transmits another Way. Each transmits a different teaching. There is "receiving perfection" and "reaping the fruition"—lots of kinds. In China alone, there are many phony Maitreya Bodhisattvas. People may say they are Maitreya Bodhisattva, but actually it is too early for Maitreya Bodhisattva to appear.

Maitreya Bodhisattva will come in the future. When will that be? I have talked about this before. Every hundred years the average human life span decreases by a year and the average height of people decreases by an inch. When the life span has decreased to the point that people live an average of ten years, it will begin to increase again at the same rate: every hundred years adds a year to the average life span and an inch to the average height.

When the average life span drops to ten years, people will be about the height of dogs. They would not grow very tall, and they will die by the time they are ten years old. People's life spans and heights will decrease each hundred years. But most people do not live to be a hundred, so we won't know how tall the people will be a hundred years from now. Also, you have to remember that this is an average, not a specific person's height and life span. You may want to argue that some people are taller than people used to be. But individuals do not count; we are referring to the average.

After the average human life span reaches ten years, it will begin to increase. Every hundred years, the life span will increase by one year and the average height by one inch; they will increase again. When the average life span has increased to eighty-four thousand years, it will begin to decrease again. When it has decreased to eighty thousand years, Maitreya Bodhisattva will come into the world. Therefore, these pretenders who say they are Maitreya Bodhisattva are mistaken. But you should also realize this: If you have conditions with Maitreya Bodhisattva, he can come now and teach and transform you; he can save you. There are no fixed Dharmas.

**He has already asked about this matter.** Maitreya Bodhisattva has already asked about what is going on here. **And the Buddha is about to answer him.** Shakyamuni Buddha is just about ready to reply to his question. **For this reason, you may all hear about it.** Do not make noise. Be quiet. Listen. Since Maitreya Bodhisattva has already asked and Shakyamuni Buddha is going to answer his question, if you listen, you will all understand as well. Do not be nervous, youngsters.

In the blink of an eye, the summer session has passed. Those of you who attended may feel it was very exhausting, and you may be tired. But you should know that although it may be invisible to you, your fatigue and weariness has actually created inconceivable merit and virtue for you within your inherent natures. Therefore, in these last few weeks you should certainly be heroic and vigorous. Do not relax as you did during the middle of the session. Be careful to speak less and to refrain from false thinking. Everyone should single-mindedly work hard at cultivating, investigating the Sutras, and sitting in Dhyana. Do this seriously. I noticed there was a period when you all slacked off in the middle of the session. If a single person indulges in a lot of talk, he disturbs everyone, making it impossible for others to cultivate. We should protect the group and not do things that cause people not to cultivate. If the great assembly does not cultivate, it then becomes your offense. Do you realize that?

I told one of my disciples not to look after money anymore. There was an important reason for doing this. It was not that he is muddled, and so I did not want him to deal with money. Although he may be muddled occasionally, sometimes he understands; he is not muddled every day. And although he sleeps all the time, sometimes he is awake; he is not sleeping all the time. And so why did I not want him to deal with money? It is because there is another more important responsibility than that of looking after money that I want him to take care of. Some people are thinking I want him to be the president. No, this time I want him to sit in Chan. That was because last year I thought that this disciple should become enlightened, but to date he has not done so and I have just let it go by. Basically I do not pay attention to these kinds of things. But recently I looked into the question of why he had not become enlightened. I found that it was because he had entered the money samadhi, and being in the money samadhi, he did not have any meditation skill. Because he had entered the money samadhi, there was no Chan samadhi. That was why he was not becoming enlightened.

I have instructed him that from now on he should practice sitting in Chan meditation; he should meditate every day. Every day he should develop his skill well, and he should become familiar with how to start and end the sitting periods. We have already announced the upcoming meditation session: a fourteen-week Chan session this winter. I want him to stay in the Chan Hall all the time and accompany all of you while you are working at your meditation skill. We are making several incense boards. If he does not apply effort himself, you can tap him. If you do not work, he can hit all of you, because he is so tall. If he does not work, you can hit him. This is called "striking up a Chan seven," [a Chan session], so you can strike each other.

And so his responsibility is to be the leader (weinuo) in the Chan Hall. He will not be allowed to leave the hall at any time. In a Chan session, we want to end birth and death. It is not something to take casually. It would not be like the summer session has been, with lectures on the Sutras, Dharma talks, and investigation of the Sutras. At that time, there will be "wordless speaking of Dharma," no one will talk. Perhaps there will be one or two instructional talks each day, but no more than that.

If I do not relieve him of his responsibilities involving money now, if I wait until it is nearly time to start the session, he certainly would not be able to stop his false thinking. That is why he has to start training now. From now on he should make a special effort. If he does not become enlightened this year during that session, I will not allow him to eat, only to drink water.

**Sutra:**

**Shakyamuni Buddha then said to Maitreya Bodhisattva, “Good indeed, good indeed, Ajita, that you can ask the Buddha about such a great matter.”**
Outline:

C2. The explanation proper.
D1. Assenting with a warning.
E1. Prose.
F1. Praise.

**Commentary:**

**Shakyamuni Buddha then said to Maitreya Bodhisattva, "Good indeed, good indeed, Ajita, that you can ask the Buddha about such a great matter."** The attendants that the Buddhas of the ten directions brought with them, those Bodhisattvas, also had doubts, and each went to ask the Buddha whom he accompanied. They asked, "Where have these Great Bodhisattvas come from? Why don't we recognize them?"

And so each of the Buddhas told his attendants: "Be patient. Listen. Just now, Maitreya Bodhisattva has already asked Shakyamuni World Honored One that question. Shakyamuni World Honored One is now going to answer. From their dialogue you will come to understand the causes and conditions."

"Then" refers to that time. Shakyamuni Buddha, the World Honored One, spoke to Maitreya Bodhisattva, saying, "Good indeed, good indeed, Maitreya Bodhisattva!"

"Good indeed, good indeed" has two meanings. The first "good indeed" means that Maitreya Bodhisattva's question was excellent. Why? Because he understood the Buddha's mind. Above, his question tallied with all the Buddhas' minds. The second "good indeed" means that his question was again excellent in that below it tallied with everyone's thoughts. It tallied below with living beings’ thoughts, with their minds. That was why "good indeed" was spoken twice.

Why is it said to be a "great matter"? Because it "discloses the traces in order to reveal the origin, and discloses the near to reveal the far. "Traces" are the imprints left by previous events. Revealing the origin means manifesting the way it basically was, manifesting the events of one's previous lives.

The Buddha also wants to disclose the near to reveal the far. In the past, this Dharma-door had never been spoken. This Dharma-door was not spoken during the Flower Adornment period, nor was this Dharma-door spoken during the Agama period. In the Vaipulya period, this Dharma-door was not spoken; and in the Prajna period, this Dharma-door was also not spoken. Only in the Lotus-Nirvana period was this Dharma-door finally spoken. It is only now, in the Lotus-Nirvana period, that the Dharma Flower is spoken. This is "disclosing the near to reveal the far," a subtle, wonderful, inconceivable Dharma-door. And, since it has never before been spoken out in such an open and obvious manner, this is a great matter. Furthermore, the "great matter" does not refer to the virtue of the nature, but to the virtue of cultivation. The virtue of cultivation through which one attains the level of fruition is extremely profound and far-reaching. This does not refer to the principle of the equality of the virtue of the nature. Therefore, this matter is a specific, not a principle. It is a great matter.

The Buddha therefore says, "Good indeed, good indeed, Ajita, that you have been able to ask the Buddha about this great matter."

**Sutra:**
 **“You should all single-mindedly don the armor of vigor and bring forth a firm resolve.”**
Outline:

F2. Exhortation.

**Commentary:**
 **You should all single-mindedly.** The word "should" is an exhortation, an admonishment. "Each of you in this great assembly should be single-minded. Do not allow your minds to be scattered," he warns them. "If you want to listen to me explain this Dharma, you must be single-minded. **Don the armor of vigor.** Put on vigor as your armor. Vigor implies that one should not be lazy. This is a warning to you not to be lazy. Go forward with vigor. **And bring forth a firm resolve;** do not retreat. You should bring forth a determined resolve not to retreat."

The Thus Come One's genuine wisdom was perfected long ago. Long, distant eons ago it was perfect. Since it was perfected so long ago, he is able to expediently appear and teach and transform living beings. For the sake of the real, he bestows the provisional. He uses provisional, clever, and expedient Dharma-doors to teach and transform living beings. He has done this work of teaching and transforming living beings in the past, and he is doing it in the present. And so it is said that his teaching reaches throughout the three periods of time and benefits creatures in the ten directions. Thus the Buddha teaches and transforms those in the ten directions and the three periods of time. This is a state that those below the level of a Bodhisattva of Equal Enlightenment can understand. Therefore it is said to be inconceivable.

The Buddha takes advantage of the Bodhisattva's question to exhort and warn the great assembly. He tells them what they should do and what they should refrain from doing: They should be single-minded and not let their minds be scattered; they should don the armor of vigor and not be lax; they should bring forth a firm resolve and not retreat. This is how hee told the multitude in the Dharma assembly to think.

**Sutra:**

**“The Thus Come One now wishes to disclose and proclaim the wisdom of all Buddhas, the power of all Buddhas’ sovereignty and spiritual penetrations, the power of all Buddhas’ lion sprint, and the power of all Buddhas’ awesome courage and mighty strength.”**Outline:

F3. Assenting.

**Commentary:**
**The Thus Come One now wishes to disclose and proclaim the wisdom of all Buddhas.** Shakyamuni Buddha said, "I, the Thus Come One, wish to disclose and proclaim the wisdom of all Buddhas."

What is the wisdom of all Buddhas? The Dharma Flower Sutra contains the wisdom of all Buddhas. It has the wisdom of accomplishing the Buddha Way. If you want to know the wisdom of all Buddhas, you should investigate the Dharma Flower Sutra. **The power of all Buddhas' sovereignty and spiritual penetrations.** He also wishes to disclose and proclaim, explain and reveal, the power of all Buddhas' sovereignty and spiritual penetrations. "All Buddhas' sovereignty " represents the virtue of true self—one of the Four Virtues of Nirvana. Spiritual penetrations represent the virtue of bliss on that same list. **The power of all Buddhas' lion sprint.** The Thus Come One wants to proclaim and disclose all Buddhas' power of the lion sprint. What is that power? Of the Four Virtues—eternity, bliss, true self, and purity—it represents the virtue of purity. The virtue of purity is the power of the lion sprint, because the lion sprint can expel defilement. Since it expels defilement, the lion sprint is the virtue of purity. **"The power of all Buddhas' awesome courage and mighty strength"** refers to all Buddhas' great power of awesome virtue and heroic courage. Shakyamuni Buddha also wants to proclaim and disclose all Buddhas' power of great awesome courage, which represents the virtue of eternity. Because they have perfected the Four Virtues, all Buddhas have the power to benefit living beings in the past, present, and future. Power refers to beneficent strength.

"Sovereignty and spiritual penetrations" means having entered the "ultimate dwelling place of compassion." The "power of the lion sprint" means "ascending to the ultimate throne of the emptiness of dharmas." "Awesome courage and mighty strength" represents the "ultimate clothing of patience." This is the same as "entering the Thus Come One's room, sitting on the Thus Come One's seat, and putting on the Thus Come One's clothes."
 **Sutra:**

**At that time, the World Honored One, wishing to restate these principles, spoke verses:**

**“ You should be vigorous and single-minded,For I wish to speak about this matter.Hold no doubts or regrets.”**

Outline:

E2. Verses.
F1. Verses of warning.

**Commentary:**

**At that time** Shakyamuni, the **World Honored One, wishing to restate these principles** in detail, **spoke verses;** he used verses to reiterate his meaning:

"**You should be vigorous and single-minded**," Shakyamuni Buddha said. "You in this great assembly and all the Great Bodhisattvas who have come from the ten directions, as well as Maitreya Bodhisattva, should be vigorous and single-minded. You should don the armor of vigor. Do nt be lax. Do not be lazy. Have undivided attention, become single-minded. Do not let your minds become scattered while you are listening to the Lotus Dharma I am about to explain for you. For now **I wish to speak about this matter.** Now I want to tell you about the causes and conditions of the great matter for which I appeared in the world. I want to tell you clearly about this matter. **Hold no doubts or regrets.** Do not give rise to doubts or fail to believe me.

**Sutra:**

**The wisdom of the Buddhas is inconceivable. Bring forth, now, the power of faith,And abide in patience and goodness,For the Dharma which from of old has never been heard,You are now about to hear.**

**I am comforting you now,So have no doubt or fear.The Buddhas never speak falsely,And their wisdom cannot be measured.**

**That foremost Dharma they have gainedIs extremely profound, beyond discerning.As such, it should now be explained,And you should single-mindedly listen.**

Outline:

F2. Verses of assenting.

**Commentary:**

**The wisdom of the Buddhas is inconceivable.** The Buddha said, "The wisdom of the Buddhas of the ten directions and of me, Shakyamuni Buddha, is inconceivable. You ordinary people cannot comprehend it. You cannot understand the wisdom of the Buddhas. **Bring forth, now, the power of faith.** All of you in the great assembly should get hold of the strength of your faith **and abide in patience and goodness.** You should concentrate on the paramita of patience and do the good deeds born of patience. Set your minds on patience.

**For the Dharma which from of old has never been heard.** You have never heard this Dharma before. It is only now that you will hear this Wonderful Dharma. **You are now about to hear it.** Earlier I spoke expedient, provisional Dharma-doors. I did not speak actual Dharma for you to hear. Now I want to speak the inconceivable, wonderful Dharma for you. You will all be able to hear it. **I am comforting you now.** I want to comfort all of you; you should become single-minded and vigorous. Bring forth a firm resolve to listen to this Dharma. **So have no doubt or fear.** Do not have doubts; do not become frightened. **The Buddhas never speak falsely.** The Dharma that the Buddhas speak is true, actual and not false. Now is the time to open up the provisional and reveal the actual, to disclose the near and reveal the far. I am going to speak the inconceivable Wonderful Dharma for you. The Buddhas never say anything that is not so. You should bring forth faith.

**And their wisdom cannot be measured.** The Buddhas speak true and actual words and their wisdom is incalculable. There is no way to express how much wisdom a Buddha has. **That foremost Dharma they have gained.** The Buddhas have obtained the most supreme Wonderful Dharma. This Wonderful Dharma for accomplishing Buddhahood **is extremely profound, beyond discerning.** It is especially deep, utterly profound. There is no way to determine how deep it is; it is beyond discerning. **As such, it should now be explained.** Although this inconceivable Wonderful Dharma cannot be discriminated, now is the time to explain it. **And you should single-mindedly listen.** All of you in the great assembly, including all of you Bodhisattvas, should become single-minded and listen to this Wonderful Dharma.

**Sutra:**

**The World Honored One, having recited those verses, then said to Maitreya Bodhisattva, “In this great assembly, I now make this announcement to all of you: Ajita! These incalculable asamkhyeyas of Great Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas, who have welled forth from the earth and whom you have never seen before, are those whom I taught, transformed, and guided in this Saha World after I attained anuttarasamyaksambodhi. I tamed and subdued the minds of these Bodhisattvas, causing them to bring forth the resolve for the Way.”**
Outline:

D2. The teaching proper.
E1. Opening the near to reveal the far.
F1. Generally opening and revealing to bring forth the question.
G1. General opening.
H1. Prose.
I1. Answering who their teacher is.

**Commentary:**

Then, Shakyamuni Buddha, **the World Honored One**, finished speaking those verses, and **having recited those verses, then said to Maitreya Bodhisattva,** "Maitreya Bodhisattva, I will now tell you. **In this great assembly, I now make this announcement to all of you** Great Bodhisattvas. **Ajita!** Pay attention to what I am about to tell you. **These Great Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas,** who issued forth from beneath the earth, are **incalculable asamkhyeyas**—one knows not how many—in number." "Asamkhyeya" is translated as "an incalculable number." Now there are incalculable numbers of Bodhisattvas **who have welled forth from the earth. You have never seen** so many Bodhisattvas as these **before**, right? Now I will tell you. "**In this Saha World**," refers to this world that we are "able to endure," the world "full of a myriad evils." It is also known as the world where the myriad sufferings merge together.

**After I attained anuttarasamyaksambodhi,** the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment, **I taught, transformed, and guided** these Bodhisattvas, and pointed out the Way to them, leading and guiding them. **I tamed and subdued the minds of these Bodhisattvas.** I caused those with afflictions to be without afflictions. I caused those with ignorance to be without ignorance. I caused those with delusions like dust and sand to get rid of their delusions like dust and sand. Those with view delusions and thought delusions also got rid of those view and thought delusions, the delusions like dust and sand, and ignorance. I tamed and subdued their minds, **causing them to bring forth the resolve for the Way.** I have caused them all to decide to cultivate the Way and to be resolved to practice the Bodhisattva Way. They have been brought to accomplishment through my previous teaching and transforming.

**Sutra:**
 **“All of these Bodhisattvas live in the space beneath the Saha World. They have read and recited all the Sutras until they have penetrated them thoroughly. They have pondered their meanings in detail and have been properly mindful of them.”**
Outline:

I2. Answering where they came from.
J1. Answer.

**Commentary:**

**All of these Bodhisattvas**, that is, the ones who have just now welled forth from the earth, **live in space beneath the Saha World.** Ordinary people cannot know of this state. If you obtain the Five Eyes and the Six Spiritual Penetrations, then the space you see will not be the same as the space that ordinary people see. You will see a profusion of the seven treasures pervading space. There are all kinds of palaces, all kinds of pavilions, and various Way-places; they are all adorned with the seven treasures. Within every palace, pavilion, and Way-place are Buddhas speaking the Dharma and Great Bodhisattvas listening to the Dharma and cultivating. That is what the Dharma Realm is like. The entirety of space is filled with the Buddhadharma.

The Bodhisattvas who have just now welled forth from the earth live in the space 168,000 yojanas beneath our Saha World. If you have not opened your Way-eyes, you will be unaware of this state. Once you open your Way-eyes, then when you want to recite a Sutra, there are Sutras everywhere for you to recite. When you want to cultivate a Dharma, there are Dharmas everywhere. When you want to cultivate the Bodhisattva Way, you can do it any time you want. And so this is a wonderful and inconceivable state. These Bodhisattvas reside in space. **They have read and recited all the Sutras.** They read and recite the Flower Adornment Sutra, the Shurangama Sutra, the Earth Store Sutra, the Vajra Sutra, and all the other Sutras in the Tripitaka. "Read" means to look at the book and read aloud. "Recite" means to recite from memory, without the book.

**They have penetrated them thoroughly.** Not one word do they read incorrectly. Not one sentence do they get wrong. Not one page would they forget. That is what is meant by "penetrated thoroughly": **They have pondered their meanings in detail.** In order to read a Sutra until one is familiar with it, one cannot stop at only reciting it. One must also reflect upon it and discern its meanings, ponder the wonderful meanings and principles in the Sutras. **And** they **have been properly mindful of them.** They are thoroughly attentive to the reading and reciting of the Dharma Flower Sutra. They are doing it right now. They are reading and reciting the Great Vehicle Sutras. At all times they have their minds on what they are doing; they do not forget the Sutras. They continually cultivate and study the doctrines in the Dharma Flower Sutra. And so these Great Bodhisattvas are those whom Shakyamuni Buddha in the past taught and transformed and brought to accomplishment.

**Sutra:**
 **“Ajita! All these good men take no delight in dwelling with the multitudes or in much talk. They always enjoy living in quiet places where they practice with diligence and vigor, never resting. They do not take up residence with humans or gods.”**
Outline:

J2. Explanation.
K1. Explaining their dwelling.

**Commentary:**

Shakyamuni Buddha called again, **"Ajita** Bodhisattva, **all these good men**, so many Great Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas, **take no delight in dwelling with the multitudes."** They do not like being in places where many people are gathered. What is meant by busy, crowded places? It refers to within and beyond the Triple Realm. Within and beyond the Triple Realm are the five skandhas, and it is these five skandhas that "the multitudes" refers to. These Bodhisattvas have all illumined and viewed the five skandhas as empty, and so they take no delight in being with the multitudes. Their five skandhas are already empty. Nor do they like **much talk.** Since they have already transcended the Triple Realm, they have thoroughly comprehended all dharmas as basically inexpressible. There is nothing that can be said about them, and so they take no delight in talking. **They always enjoy living in quiet places.** They always like to be quiet; they like tranquil places. "Quiet places" represents the Truth in the Primary Principle. They are always within the Dharma of the Truth in the Primary Principle, and so **they practice with diligence and vigor.** They all have comprehended the doctrine of the Truth in the Primary Principle—the Dharma-door of no speaking, of no words. They practice vigor. They are diligently vigorous and not the least bit lazy, **never resting.** They approach the Buddhadharma with diligent vigor and do not rest. They never rest. For the sake of the Dharma, they forget themselves. For the Buddhadharma, they will forget all else. **They do not take up residence with humans or gods.** They do not live among people, and they do not abide in the heavens. Then where do they live? In space.

**Sutra:**
 **“They always delight in deep wisdom and have no obstacles. They also always delight in the Dharmas of all Buddhas. With single-minded vigor they seek supreme wisdom.”**
Outline:

K2. Showing how they uphold and practice.

**Commentary:**

**They always delight in deep wisdom.** What they like is profound and far-reaching great wisdom **and** great knowledge. They **have no obstacles.** Why don't they have any obstacles? Because they have wisdom. Why do you, as a person, encounter situations that you cannot see through and cannot put down? Because you have obstacles. Among these are (1) the obstacle of afflictions, and (2) the obstacle of what is known. With the obstacle of what is known, you think, "I know more than you." That is an obstacle. "I understand more than you do." That is also an obstacle. The obstacle of what is known is the fiercest obstacle. The obstacle of afflictions is very obvious, and so people quite easily recognize it.

There is also (3) the obstacle of karma: When one's karmic obstacles overtake one, one cannot take care of oneself. Perhaps one goes insane, or some other unusual thing happens. That is one's karmic-obstacles propelling one, oppressing one, and causing all kinds of matters that are not in accord with the Dharma to occur. There is also (4) the obstacle of retribution, that is, the retributions one must undergo.

The obstacle of afflictions, the obstacle of karma, and the obstacle of retribution all hinder one, but the worst is the obstacle of what is known. Before you knew, there was no obstacle. As soon as you know a lot, obstacles arise. You become arrogant. For instance, before you began to study the Buddhadharma, you did not have this obstacle. But after studying the Buddhadharma for a few years, you think, "I know a lot more Buddhadharma than you do." With that, you give rise to an obstacle. To begin with, we study in order to become free of obstacles, but many who study end up getting this obstacle.

These Bodhisattvas have no obstacles. No obstacles at all. It is said, "In every situation one is at ease." Everything goes your way, everything makes you happy. "At ease" means you are very pleased. Whatever the causes and conditions, whatever the situation, you are always very happy. **They also always delight in the Dharmas of all Buddhas.** They always want to study and practice all Dharmas—all the Buddhas' Dharmas—**with single-minded vigor.** They do not think about anything else. They are single-minded. What is that mind about? Vigor. They want to be vigorous within the Buddhadharma, not lax or lazy. They advance with single-minded vigor. Both their bodies and minds are vigorous. Why are they so vigorous? **They seek supreme wisdom.** They want to obtain the highest, most supreme, most ultimate wisdom: the knowledge and wisdom of a Buddha. That is ultimate wisdom.

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

**“ Ajita, you should know,For countless eons, All these Great Bodhisattvas,Have cultivated and practiced the Buddhas’ wisdom.I taught them all, Causing them to bring forth the great resolve for the Way. They are all my disciples.**

Outline:

H2. Verse.
I1. Verses about the prose passage.
J1. Answering who their teacher is.

**Commentary:**

Then, **at that time,** Shakyamuni **World Honored One,** concerned that living beings might still not understand this principle or that they had not heard it clearly, **wishing to restate this meaning, spoke verses** to answer again the question asked by Ajita Bodhisattva. He says, "**Ajita**, 'Invincible,' **you should know, all these Great Bodhisattvas,** who are now welling forth from the earth, **for countless eons**—from uncountable great eons in the past to the present time—**have cultivated and practiced the Buddhas’ wisdom.** In every eon, in life after life, at all times, they have been developing the Buddhas' wisdom, seeking the unsurpassed wisdom of the Buddhas. **I taught them all.** Didn't you ask who's teaching and transforming them? From the time they brought forth the initial resolve until now, they have become Great Bodhisattvas. And it has been me who personally taught them, transformed them, **causing them to bring forth great resolve for the Way.** I caused them to bring forth the great Bodhi Way-mind. I caused them to bring forth the Bodhisattva Way-mind, the Way-mind to seek the unsurpassed Way. That was how I taught them."

You see how Shakyamuni Buddha taught and transformed these Bodhisattva disciples, so that in this life, when he is speaking the Dharma, they all well forth from the earth, follow along and rejoice in the Dharma assembly, and act as the influential assembly. They influence the great assembly to bring forth the Bodhi mind.

**They are all my disciples.** These Great Bodhisattvas are all my disciples, whom I have taught and transformed.

**Sutra:**

**Dwelling in this world system, Ever practicing the work of dhuta, They delight in quiet places. Renounce the bustle of crowds, And take no delight in much talk.**

**These disciples Study and practice the Dharma of my Way, Vigorous always, day and night, They seek the Buddha Way.**

**They dwell in the space Beneath this Saha world, Solid and powerful in resolve and will. They are ever diligent, seeking wisdom. They speak various wonderful Dharmas, With no fear in their hearts.**

Outline:

J2. Answering where they came from.

**Commentary:**

**Dwelling in this world system,** they reside beneath this world in space. **Ever practicing the work of dhuta**: They are always practicing asceticism.

There are twelve dhuta practices:

1. wearing rag robes
2. possessing only three robes
3. begging for food
4. consecutive begging
5. eating only one meal and only at midday
6. eating a fixed and moderate amount of food
7. not drinking juices after noon
8. dwelling in an aranya
9. dwelling beneath a tree
10. dwelling in the open
11. dwelling in a graveyard
12. always sitting and never lying down

They rely on the Dharma-door of dhuta in their cultivation.

**They delight in quiet places.** They prefer to dwell in tranquil, pure places, where there are no extraneous noises to disturb them. They **renounce the bustle of crowds.** They stay away from places where there are many people. They tend to avoid noisy and confusing places that are not quiet. "Renouncing the bustle of crowds" also means renouncing afflictions. They cast off the afflictions of view delusions, thought delusions, delusions like dust and sand, and delusions of ignorance.

**And take no delight in much talk.** They do not like to talk. And this does not mean not talking for one day, two days, three or five days, or for a week and then talking even more to make up for it. They never like to talk.

Why are all **these disciples** of the Buddha like that? Because they practice the teaching. Whatever Shakyamuni Buddha taught them, they cultivated in that way. Therefore the Buddha says, "They **study and practice the Dharma of my Way.** Because they study and practice what I taught them to cultivate, the Way I told them to practice and the Dharmas I taught them to cultivate, they are **vigorous always, day and night.**" They cultivate vigor during the day and vigor at night. Day and night they are vigorous. Both their bodies and minds are vigorous. For instance, they sit in meditation regularly. They constantly bow to the Buddhas. They are always mindful of the Buddhas day and night—in the six periods of the day and night—and their vigor means using the cultivation methods the Buddha taught them. At all times, they cultivate. They are vigorous in all aspects of the Buddhadharma.

For example, living beings with excessive greed may be greedy for beautiful forms, for wealth, for fame, for profit, and for other such problematic things. Living beings with excessive greed should contemplate impurity. They should cultivate the contemplation of impurity. Most people's biggest desire is for sex, and so they should cultivate the contemplation of impurity. They should contemplate that no matter how handsome or beautiful a person is, the body is just a stinking skin bag after all. It is just a pile of bones carrying around a bunch of flesh. If you cut open the skin anywhere, blood will flow out and after a while pus will be formed. These stinking skin bags really have nothing about them that we should be greedy for or wish to become involved with. Besides that, the nine apertures are constantly excreting impurities.

Living beings with excessive hatred should contemplate compassion. People who like to get angry should cultivate the contemplation of compassion. Compassion means not getting angry at anyone. You should look upon all living beings as your own sons and daughters. You give rise to compassion toward all living beings. Stupid living beings should cultivate the contemplation of causes and conditions. They should see them as false, see them as empty, and contemplate the Middle Way.

Living beings with excessive stupidity should contemplate causes and conditions. Yesterday, a Dharma Master explained how Shariputra cultivated the contemplation of causes and conditions. He also said that living beings with excessive stupidity should cultivate the contemplation of causes and conditions. But now we must add one sentence: Shariputra was definitely not stupid. And so why did he cultivate the contemplation of causes and conditions? He did it because that Dharma-door was very appropriate for him. And so although he was someone with wisdom, he also cultivated the contemplation of causes and conditions.

It is not a fixed principle that only stupid living beings can cultivate the contemplation of causes and conditions and that intelligent people cannot cultivate it. That is not the way it is. Nor is it the case that we say living beings with excessive greed should cultivate the contemplation of impurity, but that if a living being does not have excessive greed he cannot cultivate the contemplation of impurity. It is not like that. If you are not greedy, you can still cultivate the contemplation of impurity; it will work even better for you. Living beings who are stupid can cultivate the contemplation of causes and conditions and become enlightened, and so if living beings who are intelligent cultivate the contemplation of causes and conditions, they can become enlightened even faster. So there are no fixed Dharmas.

Living beings with excessive obstacles should cultivate the contemplation of mindfulness of the Buddha. If you are obstructed in your efforts, then recite the Buddha's name. When you recite the Buddha's name, you do not have to use any effort; there is no need to meditate or to contemplate emptiness, falseness, and the Middle Way. You do not need to do any of that. Just recite the Buddha's name: "Na-mo A-mi-to-fo." Simply recite like that, and you will succeed.

Living beings who are excessively scattered should cultivate the contemplation of counting the breaths. In the contemplation of counting the breaths, you can:

1. count the exhalations, or
2. count the inhalation.

Either method will do. But if you count the exhaled breaths, then do not count the inhaled ones; and if you count the inhaled ones, do not count the exhaled ones. You count from one to ten, and then start over, going again from one to ten. That is called the contemplation of counting the breaths. If at night you cannot go to sleep and you start having false thinking, that is a good time to cultivate the contemplation of counting the breaths.

Start counting, and after a few exhalations, you will be asleep. Or you can breathe in a few times, and you will fall asleep. It is quite miraculous. As soon as you pay attention to your inhalation, your false thoughts cease, and you can go to sleep very quickly. Why are you unable to fall asleep? Because you are having false thinking. You think about this and think about that, and it prevents you from falling asleep. If you cultivate this contemplation regularly for a long time, you will very naturally have it in hand.

They are vigorous day and night in **seeking the Buddha Way.** Because they want to seek the Buddha Way, **they dwell in the space beneath this Saha World.** They are **solid and powerful in resolve and will.** They are not lazy, nor do they retreat, nor are they scattered. They are single-minded in their cultivation. They don the armor of vigor and go forward to cultivate. They bring forth solid intent to cultivate and never retreat. They are not like we people are; we cultivate and use effort today, and then tomorrow we stop applying effort. They are not like that. The only exception would be if they were not cultivating a Dharma. If they decide to cultivate a certain Dharma, they will never retreat. **They are ever diligent in seeking wisdom.** They are always eager to seek wisdom. **They speak various wonderful Dharmas.** They speak all kinds of wonderful Dharma for living beings, **with no fear in their hearts.** In speaking the Dharma, they always send forth the lion's roar.
**Sutra:**

**In the City of Gaya,Sitting beneath the Bodhi tree,I realized the most proper enlightenmentAnd turned the supreme Dharma-wheel.**

**Only then did I teach and transform them,Causing them first to bring forth the resolve for the Way.Now they all dwell in irreversibility,And shall all become Buddhas.**

**I now speak the truth;You should believe it with a single mind.For endless eons,I have taught and transformed these multitudes.**

Outline:

I2. General explanation.

**Commentary:**

**In the City of Gaya.** Shakyamuni Buddha says, "When I was in Magadha, in the City of Gaya…" " Gaya" is a Sanskrit word which means "mountain city." The Jetavana Grove [where the Buddha later dwelt] is only a few miles away from it. "In a place outside of the city of Gaya, I was **sitting beneath the Bodhi tree** in meditation."

When he first sat down to meditate, Shakyamuni Buddha made a vow. What was his vow? He said, "Once I sit down beneath this Bodhi tree, if I do not become enlightened, I will sit here forever. I will not get up." He meant he would not go anywhere else. He would remain seated in meditation under the Bodhi tree.

**I realized the most proper enlightenment.** Beneath the Bodhi tree, he sat seven times seven days—forty nine days. And on the night of the forty-ninth day, he saw a bright star in the sky and awakened to the Way. At night he saw a bright star, awakened to the Way, and at that moment, he became a Buddha. What does it mean to become a Buddha? When one becomes a Buddha, one is still the same as living beings. Buddhas are living beings; living beings are Buddhas. But Buddhas have already become Buddhas, and living beings have not yet become Buddhas. Buddhas are living beings who have already become Buddhas, and living beings are living beings who have not yet become Buddhas. When Shakyamuni Buddha saw that bright star and became enlightened, he sighed. Why? He said, "Strange, indeed! Strange, indeed! Strange, indeed!" He said it three times. It was said he sighed three times, saying, "Strange, indeed!" His meaning was: "It is very remarkable! Extremely remarkable! Really extraordinary!" What was so extraordinary?

He said, "All living beings have the virtuous characteristics of the Thus Come Ones." He said that the wisdom and virtuous characteristics that Buddhas have, all living beings have, too. They all have the seed of Buddhahood. They have the wisdom of a Buddha, the virtuous conduct of a Buddha, and the opportunity to become a Buddha. And so why haven't they become Buddhas? There's the problem. It is only because of false thinking and attachments that they have not yet been able to certify to and attain Buddhahood.

Why haven't we become Buddhas? Because we have false thinking. Why haven't we people become Buddhas? Because we have attachments. It is because of false thinking and attachments that living beings who should become Buddhas are obstructed. What obstructs them? False thinking and attachments. These obstructions hinder them, just as when a person walking on a road comes upon a blockade and cannot go forward. An example would be the wall between East and West Berlin, which keeps the East Germans from going to West Berlin and the West Germans from going to East Berlin. So, too, we people who have not become Buddhas have a blockade hindering us. What is the blockade? False thinking and attachments. If you have false thinking and attachments, you cannot open the wisdom of the Buddhas. Since you cannot open the Buddhas’ wisdom, you cannot become a Buddha. You have to let go of false thinking and attachments, and then you can become a Buddha.

How did Shakyamuni Buddha become a Buddha? He put down his false thinking and attachments. In the beginning, he was in the royal palace surrounded by many pleasures. In the future he would have been the emperor; he would have been a wheel-turning sage king. But he put all that down. He did not want to be an emperor. He did not want to be a wheel-turning king. He renounced his lovely wife as well as the kingdom to which he was heir. He looked upon birth, old age, sickness and death as too much trouble, and so he resolved to leave the home-life, to cultivate the Way, and to end birth and death. Because he had cast out his attachments and false thinking, when he sat under the Bodhi tree for forty-nine days, he became enlightened. We people do not have that much endurance and patience. We are not that constant in our practice.

I often tell you to be firm, sincere, and constant, but you have not been able to do so yet. Without a constant mind, you have not been able to put down your attachments and false thinking. This is why we have not yet become Buddhas. Do you want to become a Buddha? If you do, then quickly put down your false thinking and attachments, and you will do fine.

“I realized the most proper enlightenment.” Beneath the Bodhi tree, the Buddha certified to Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment. There is nothing higher than this Proper and Equal Right Enlightenment. This is a Buddha's fruition. Having enlightened and become a Buddha, one is certified as having attained the fruition of Buddhahood. **And** then **he turned the supreme Dharma-wheel.** In the beginning he turned the Dharma-wheel of the Four Truths; later he turned the Dharma-wheel of the Twelve Causes and Conditions. After that, he turned the Dharma-wheel of the Six Paramitas and the myriad practices.

At the very beginning, he turned the great Dharma-wheel of the Flower Adornment. When he saw that ordinary people could not accept this great Dharma, he turned the Dharma-wheel of the Agamas. Then he turned the Dharma-wheel of the Vaipulya, and next the Dharma-wheel of Prajna. At the very last, he finally turned the Dharma-wheel of the Dharma Flower. The Wonderful Dharma-wheel—the wheel of the Wonderful Dharma, the Dharma Flower—is the basic aim of the Buddha. His original intent was to speak the Dharma Flower. But seeing that living beings' faculties were not mature enough, that it was not time yet, he first turned the Agama, Vaipulya, and Prajna Dharmas, and after that he turned the Dharma Flower. When he spoke the Dharma Flower, the time was right. The time had come, and so he turned the unsurpassed Dharma-wheel.

**Only then did I teach and transform them.** At that time, I taught and transformed all the Great Bodhisattvas, **causing them to first bring forth the resolve for the Way.** I enabled them to bring forth the unsurpassed Bodhi Way-mind. **Now they all dwell in irreversibility.** These limitless, limitless Bodhisattvas all abide at the level of irreversibility. They are irreversible in position, in thought, and in practice. They abide in those three kinds of irreversibility. **And all shall become Buddhas.**

**I now speak the truth;** the Dharma I taught you before was expedient. It was spoken to prepare you for the full truth, which I am now speaking to you. **You should believe it with a single mind.** You should turn your minds to become one in order to accept this true Dharma. **For endless eons, I have taught and transformed these multitudes.** It is not just now, in this life, in this Saha World, that I have become a Buddha. I became a Buddha limitless eons ago. The Buddha is said to "not be born, yet be born; not cease to be, yet cease." Although he was not born, he manifested birth. Basically, he did not cease to be, and yet he appeared to enter Nirvana. In the Brahma Net Sutra, the Buddha says, "I have come to this Saha World eight thousand times." If you obtain the Way eye—the penetration of the Heavenly Eye—and take a look into how many times Shakyamuni Buddha has come into this Saha World, you will see that it is not just eight thousand times. It is not even eighty thousand times, or eight hundred thousand times, but limitless, countless times. So the Buddha is telling the real truth here.

These limitless, countless Great Bodhisattvas filling up the space of three thousand great thousand worlds are all those whom I taught when I was on the causal ground during my former lives as a Buddha. You asked under which Buddha they resolved to cultivate the Way, who taught them, and by what methods. They cultivated the Dharma-door of the Dharma Flower. They recited the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. I am telling you now that I taught, transformed, and brought to accomplishment this great assembly.

**Sutra:**
 **At that time Maitreya Bodhisattva Mahasattva and the countless Bodhisattvas gave rise to doubts in their minds. Puzzling over this unprecedented occurrence, they thought, “How could the World Honored One, in such a short space of time, have taught and transformed such limitless, boundless, asamkhyeyas of Great Bodhisattvas and caused them to dwell in anuttarasamyaksambodhi?”**
Outline:

G2. Doubts and a request.
H1. Prose.
I1. Narrator describes doubts.

**Commentary:**

When Shakyamuni Buddha had finished speaking his verse, Maitreya Bodhisattva again asked a question. Maitreya Bodhisattva is the Bodhisattva with the huge belly. His stomach contains all of space. He did not get that way from eating good food, however. His belly is simply like space and includes all of existence within it. This big-bellied Bodhisattva basically knows all there is to know and has complete understanding of everything. He does not need to ask people to explain things to him. But now he is confused. What is he confused about? About the verse Shakyamuni Buddha just spoke. Maitreya Bodhisattva does not understand it.

"Absolutely impossible," he thought. "These Bodhisattvas are so old. Shakyamuni Buddha has only been alive for a few decades. He is in his seventies. You are so young and these Bodhisattvas are so old. How can they be your disciples? That would be like a young person, twenty-five years of age, encountering an old man of over one hundred years and saying to someone else, 'Do you know that he is my son? That hundred-year-old man is my son.'

"And the old man agrees and says, 'Right, he is my father.'

"How can that be? A twenty-five-year-old father and a hundred-year-old son—who ever heard of such a principle? I cannot believe such a thing could happen. In the same way, Shakyamuni Buddha is only a few decades old, and all these Bodhisattvas are tens of thousands of years old. How can he have such old disciples?" He could not believe it. "What is going on here?" Maitreya Bodhisattva is skeptical, and all the other Bodhisattvas are doubtful as well. But for now, we are not going to worry about that. Instead we are going to talk some more about attachments.

I just said that the reason people do not become Buddhas is that they have false thinking and attachments, and someone gave rise to a doubt, thinking, "That is wrong!" I do not have any false thinking. I am old and have not ever had a false thought. What is more, I do not have any attachments, either. I am not attached to money, or a house, or property, or food, or clothes or anything at all!"

Perhaps, but you have not put down not being attached to anything at all yet. It is just that very thing that has kept you from becoming a Buddha! If you know that you have some attachments, then there is hope for you. But if you have deluded yourself into thinking that you have not any, then there is nothing that can be done, because in fact you have simply too many attachments!

"Too many? What do you mean?" you ask.

For one, you are attached to your physical appearance. You feel that you are good-looking. As ugly as you are, you still think you are beautiful. However ugly a person may be, he would not think he is ugly. He always feels, "Although my nose is not very pretty, I have lovely eyes, don't I?" Maybe he does not have good eyes, he cannot see well, but his hearing is keen. In general, a person always feels that he is in some way better than the next person. Even stupid people manage to do this by thinking, "I am dumber than anyone!" At least they have an awareness of what they are actually like.

The smart ones think, "I am smarter than anyone. I memorized that Sutra right away. You have been studying it for so long, and you still cannot remember it!" People like that are attached to being smart.

Smart people are attached to being smart; stupid people are attached to being stupid; dirty people are attached to being dirty. "This is just the way I am—a long-haired hippie." Hippies are attached to not cutting their hair. Those who are not hippies are attached to not letting their hair grow long. "Long hair is not good. I would not let my hair grow." Letting your hair grow is an attachment, and not letting your hair grow is an attachment, too. So what have you put down? Nothing at all. And yet you say you have put everything down. If that is not stupid, what is? People like that may claim to be wise, but I certainly do not believe them. I had better not say any more. If I say too much, I will upset people.

Poor people have the attachments of poor people, and wealthy people have the attachments of wealthy people. Honored people have the attachments of honored people, and lowly people have the attachments of lowly people. Whatever position a person happens to be in, he will have the corresponding attachments. Left-home people have left-home attachments; laypeople have laypeople's attachments. You have your attachments, and I have mine. Put them down!

**At that time Maitreya Bodhisattva Mahasattva,** that Great Bodhisattva, **and the countless Bodhisattvas** beyond reckoning **gave rise to doubts in their minds.** They became skeptical, **puzzling over this unprecedented occurrence.** "This situation is entirely too strange. There is no such principle as this." **They thought, "How could the World Honored One, in such a short space of time, have taught and transformed such limitless, boundless, asamkhyeyas of Great Bodhisattvas?** How can this be? The World Honored One is so young, and these Bodhisattvas are so old. How could the Buddha, in such a short space of time, teach and transform so many Bodhisattvas—countless, boundless, asamkhyeyas of them. **And** how could the Buddha have **caused them to dwell in anuttarasamyaksambodhi,** to abide at that level of fruition? This is entirely too strange."

**Sutra:**
 **Just then they spoke to the Buddha, saying, “World Honored One, when the Thus Come One was a crown prince, he left the Shakya palace and went to a place not far from the city of Gaya where he sat in the Bodhimanda and realized anuttarasamyaksambodhi. From that time until now, only forty-some years have elapsed. How, in such a short space of time, could the World Honored One have done such great Buddha work—using the Buddha’s mighty power and the Buddha’s merit and virtue to teach and transform such limitless hosts of Great Bodhisattvas so that they can realize anuttarasamyaksambodhi?”**
Outline:

I2. Requesting resolution of the doubts.
J1. The doubts.
K1. Speaking of Dharma.
L1. Doubting the far based on the near.

**Commentary:**

**Just then they spoke to the Buddha, saying…** Because of their thoughts, they immediately discussed this with the Buddha. **“World Honored One, when the Thus Come One was a crown prince,** he was in the royal palace. **He left the Shakya palace.** He ran away **and went to a place not far from the city of Gaya.** It was close to Gaya**where he sat in the Bodhimanda.** He sat beneath the Bodhi tree, accomplished the Way, **and realized anuttarasamyaksambodhi,** the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment.

**From that time,** the time when the Buddha became a Buddha **until now…”** The Buddha was about thirty when he realized enlightenment. He had stayed in the Himalayas for six years, cultivating ascetic practices and eating only one grain of rice and one sesame seed a day. Five people had stayed with him. They were his parents' relatives, and they were cultivating there with him. But three of them could not stand the suffering. "We eat so little every day. How can we go on living?" And they ran away. Three left and two remained. These two felt that cultivation must entail suffering; there should be no enjoyment whatsoever. Feeling that suffering was mandatory, they did not fear the bitterness of cultivation.

Then a heavenly maiden came to offer a bowl of rice gruel with milk in it to the ascetic Shakyamuni, who was by that time nothing but skin and bones; he had no evident flesh or blood. Wouldn't such a person be pathetic-looking? On the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, the heavenly maiden brought him some milk gruel. We know that it is all right for Buddhist disciples to drink milk, because our founding father drank milk at that time. The Buddha accepted the offering and drank it. When the remaining two cultivators saw that, they gave him a look and said, "He is not cultivating anymore. He is eating such a good thing. It will prevent him from being able to cultivate. Let's leave." And the two of them left as well.

We are cultivating here now, and no one wants to run away. If anyone does want to, he or she can just run, because at our Way-places the door is always open. If you want to come here, come. If you want to go, go. We do not stop anyone from coming, and we do not pursue anyone after they leave. We do not say "Do not come here," if someone wants to come; and we do not say "Do not go," if someone wants to leave. There is none of that here. We do things very naturally.

The five relatives and fellow cultivators of the Buddha eventually all left, until only Shakyamuni Buddha himself remained. Then he thought, "I am leaving too." He wandered for five years and then returned to the Bodhi tree, saying, "I am not going anywhere else. I have seen it all, I am going to sit under this Bodhi tree and accomplish the Way." He sat there and thought, "If I do not get enlightened, I am not getting up from under this tree. He sat for forty-nine days and then became enlightened and accomplished Buddhahood. Not long after he became a Buddha, he took a look at causes and conditions to see whom he should save first. He saw that he should go cross over the five relatives who had been cultivating with him. He looked to see where they were, and found that they had gone to the Deer Park. Thereupon he went there to speak Dharma for the five who became Bhikshus. These five perceived that Shakyamuni Buddha had become a Buddha, and upon hearing him speak the Dharma they immediately became enlightened themselves. The first to become enlightened was Ajnatakaundinya.

From that time until the present—from the time the Buddha realized Buddhahood until this moment—**only forty-some years have elapsed.** It has been just forty years. The Buddha realized Buddhahood at the age of thirty, and he spoke Dharma for more than forty years. That is not very long, not a long time at all. **How could the World Honored One have done such great Buddha work in such a short space of time?** How could he save so many people, so many Bodhisattvas? Impossible!

He must have been **using the Buddha's mighty power and the Buddha's merit and virtue to teach and transform such limitless,** boundless multitudes of Bodhisattvas—a **host of Great Bodhisattvas,** so many of them—**so that they can realize anuttarasamyaksambodhi.** They should quickly have realized the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment. This is a case of "given the close, one doubts the distant." Basically, Shakyamuni Buddha accomplished Buddhahood not long ago. How has he been able to cross over so many older Bodhisattvas, Great Bodhisattvas?

**Sutra:**
 **“World Honored One, the multitudes of Great Bodhisattvas are such that if a person were to try to count them throughout thousands of myriads of millions of eons, he could not finish or reach their limit. For endless eons in the presence of limitless, boundless numbers of Buddhas, they have planted good roots and accomplished the Bodhisattva Way, always cultivating Brahma conduct.”**
Outline:

L2. Doubting the near based on the far.

**Commentary:**

**World Honored One, the multitudes of Great Bodhisattvas.** Maitreya Bodhisattva addresses the World Honored One again. He says, "Those in this assembly of Great Bodhisattvas **are such that if a person**—a mathematician, an expert in making calculations, someone exceptionally skilled in numbers—**were to try to count them…**Even if he were so proficient in calculating **throughout thousands of myriads of millions of eons,** perhaps throughout a thousand eons and so forth, recording to a billion eons, **he could not finish** counting them. He might use his most precise and complex knowledge of numbers and methods of calculation, but he could not count to **reach their limit,** the total number of Bodhisattvas. He would have no way to count to the end of all those Bodhisattvas. **For endless eons,** these Great Bodhisattvas were beyond numbering, beyond limit, so that even the very best mathematician would have no way to know their number. Passing through thousands of myriads of millions of eons, there would be no way to calculate their number.

**In the presence of limitless, boundless numbers of Buddhas,** these Bodhisattvas—definitely before limitless, boundless Buddhas—**have planted good roots.** They have planted many, many good roots **and accomplished the Bodhisattva Way.** That was why they have been able to accomplish the Bodhisattva Way and are **always cultivating Brahma conduct.** At all times they are vigorous in cultivating pure practices. At all times, they are not lazy.

**Sutra:**
 **“World Honored One, a matter such as this is hard for those in the world to believe.”**Outline:

L3. Conclusion: the difficulty of belief.

**Commentary:**

**"World Honored One,"** at this point Maitreya Bodhisattva again directly addresses the World Honored One, "a **matter such as this,** this kind of event, **is hard for those in the world to believe."** Worldly people are unable to believe this; in saying that it is difficult for worldly people to believe, he is making it imperative that the Buddha answer this question. It is not that I do not believe, it is that everyone in the world will be unable to believe it. Whether they are Bodhisattvas, ordinary people, or sages, they will all disbelieve this principle.

**Sutra:**

**“It is as if, by way of analogy, there were a handsome man, twenty-five years old and with shiny black hair, who pointed to hundred-year-old men and said, ‘These are my sons.’ Then suppose the hundred-year-old men pointed to that young man and said, ‘He is our father, the one who begot and reared us.’ Such a thing would be hard to believe.”**

Outline

K2. Setting up the analogy.

**Commentary:**

**It is as if, by way of analogy, there were a handsome man.** Now I will bring up an analogy that is going to be extremely hard for people to believe. What kind of analogy? This person is exceptionally good-looking and youthful. **And with shiny black hair.** He had no white hair; his hair was black. When one gets old, one's hair turns white; young people have black hair. That requires further explanation. Westerners may have flaxen hair when they are born; but that kind of blonde hair is not the white that comes with old age. But the Lotus Sutra was spoken in India, and an Indian's hair was most often black. When Indians became old, their hair turned white. Thus Maitreya Bodhisattva uses this description in his analogy. **Twenty-five years old.** A man like that would be about twenty-five. He—the man who was about twenty-five or twenty-six; let's not make it fixed—**pointed to hundred-year-old men.**

And the men he pointed to who were "a hundred years old" might have been one hundred and one years old, or maybe ninety-nine years old. This is also not fixed; let's not say it was exactly one hundred years. The twenty-five-year-old can be analogous to the twenty-five realms of existence in the triple world. The hundred-year-old can be analogous to the hundred dharmas. He pointed to the hundred-year-old **and said, "These are my sons."** He said, "Do you see how old I am? These hundred-year-old men are my sons." That was what he said. Can you believe it? The twenty-five-year-old youthful father has fathered hundred-year-old elderly sons. Could such an event occur in this world? You say it never could be? But **then suppose the hundred-year-old men pointed to that young man and said, "He is our father.** He is our youthful father, **the one who begot and reared us."** He says, "Although I am a hundred years old, nonetheless I was fathered by this young man." **Such a thing would be hard to believe.** How could you get anyone to believe such an event? It is impossible to believe.

I just said that at the Buddhist Lecture Hall we do not stop people from coming in and we do not prevent people from leaving. Now I will tell you that in some cases we prevent people from coming and we drag people out! How is that? If you come here to cultivate, you may come as you please, but if you come here to steal things, you are not welcome. If we do not turn away thieves, our most precious treasures will get stolen, even our Bhikshus and Bhikshunis might get stolen! So we do take some precautions. Thieves are neither welcomed or encouraged to stay. Those who come to cultivate are free to come here. Those who do not cultivate are welcome to leave. Thus, although we in general do not discourage or encourage people, there are instances in which we do encourage and discourage people depending on the circumstances. You should all understand this.

In our Way-place, loafers are not allowed to come in, but worthy ones are. Thieves are not allowed, cultivators of the Way are. A certain Elder Master at Gaomin Monastery in China once sent me a letter in a re-used envelope. Someone had written him a letter using that envelope; he turned it inside out and used it a second time to send a letter to me. The greatly virtuous monks of old were always very thrifty. They did not waste anything. They would not casually write a few words on a sheet of paper and then throw it away. That was why last time, when I wrote a verse on a sheet of paper and gave it to Guo Chyan, I asked him to cut it off and give the rest of the paper back. Why? It was not that I could not even bear to give up a sheet of paper. It is just that we should cherish the resources of this world. I hope no one will waste things. If you waste things, you would not have any merit and virtue, and you would not succeed at your cultivation. Therefore, cultivators should be careful in everything they do.

**Sutra:**
 **“The Buddha is also like this. It has really not been long since he attained the Way. On the other hand, the great hosts of Bodhisattvas have already, throughout limitless thousands of myriads of millions of eons, practiced with diligence and vigor for the sake of the Buddha Way. They are well able to enter, leave, and dwell in limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of samadhis. They have attained great spiritual powers and have long cultivated Brahma conduct. They are well able to practice in succession all wholesome dharmas, and their questions and answers are clever. They are jewels among humankind, extremely rare in the world. Yet, just now, the World Honored One said that only when the Buddha attained the Way did he cause them to first bring forth the resolve. By teaching, transforming, and guiding them, he led them toward anuttarasamyaksambodhi.”

“It has not been long since the World Honored One gained Buddhahood, and yet he has been able to do these great and meritorious deeds!”**
Outline:

K3. Correlation with the Dharma.

**Commentary:**

**The Buddha is also like this.** Above, the twenty-five-year-old young man was described as having hundred-year-old men for his sons. And the old men also admitted that the young man was their father. Maitreya Bodhisattva says that such a thing cannot happen. If you try to get people to believe this, no one will. Now he goes on to say that the Buddha is also like this; the Buddha is like the young man. **It has really not been long since he attained the Way.** From the time he attained the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment—the Buddha Way—until now **has really not been long.** At the most, it has been some forty years. That does not add up to a very long time.

**On the other hand, the great hosts of Bodhisattvas have already, throughout limitless thousands of myriads of millions of eons** in the past, **practiced with diligence and vigor.** They are extremely vigorous in both body and mind. They are never, never lazy. **For the sake of the Buddha Way**—seeking the path to Buddhahood. **They are well able to enter, leave, and dwell in limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of samadhis.** They are well able to enter, well able to leave, and well able to dwell in limitless billions of samadhis. What does "well able to enter" means? It means being about to enter the nine successive stages of samadhi. What does "well able to leave" means? It means being able to attain the Lion Sprint Samadhi. "To be well able to dwell in" means one further obtains the Transcendent Samadhi. This explanation is based on principles of the Storehouse Teaching and the Connecting Teaching.

In terms of the principles of the Special Teaching, what is meant by "well able to enter"? The Bodhisattva Grounds from the First Ground to the Tenth Ground are called "well able to enter samadhi." From the Tenth Ground one goes on and enters the Door to the Mysterious and Wonderful, and then turns the boat of compassion around and cultivate while doing the things that ordinary people do. Although one has certified to the level of a Tenth Ground Bodhisattva, one comes back and does the things ordinary people do. One manifests an appearance of being like ordinary people. That is called "well able to leave." When Wonderful Enlightenment is perfected, that is called "well able to dwell in samadhi."

If this is explained according to the principles of the Perfect Teaching, “well able to enter” refers to the Dharma Nature Samadhi. "Well able to leave" refers to the Foremost Shurangama Samadhi. "Well able to dwell in Samadhi” refers to the Kingly Samadhi.

The nine successive stages of samadhi are:

The Four Dhyanas:

1. the samadhi of the first Dhyana
2. the samadhi of the second Dhyana
3. the samadhi of the third Dhyana
4. the samadhi of the fourth Dhyana

The Four Samadhis of Emptiness:

5. the samadhi of emptiness
6. the samadhi of consciousness
7. the samadhi of nothing whatsoever
8. the samadhi of neither thought nor nonthought

Add to those (9) "the successive samadhi of the extinction of feeling and thought", and together they are called the nine successive stages of samadhi. They are cultivated to accomplishment little by little. If you can obtain the nine successive stages of samadhi, that is called "well able to enter Samadhi." If you can then obtain the Lion Sprint Samadhi, that is called “well able to leave.” Finally, if you can obtain the Transcendent Samadhi, the samadhi that transcends everything, that is called "well able to dwell in samadhi."

That is a very general explanation of "well able to enter, well able to leave, and well able to dwell in hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of samadhis" according to the Storehouse, Connecting, Special, and Perfect Teachings. There are many, many different kinds of samadhis—hundreds of thousands of billions of kinds. Samadhi is a Sanskrit word. Translated, it means "proper concentration"; it is also called "proper reception." "They are well able to enter, leave, and dwell in limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of samadhis" is explained like that.

**They have attained great spiritual powers.** They obtained great spiritual powers—not small ones. Small spiritual penetrations are the penetrations of Arhats. Great spiritual penetrations are the penetrations of Bodhisattvas. **And** they **have long cultivated Brahma conduct.** Already very long ago they were cultivating pure practices.

**They are well able to practice in succession all wholesome dharmas.** They are also well able, step by step, to proceed from the shallow to the deep in cultivating and learning all good Dharmas. **And their questions and answers are clever.** Whatever anyone asks, they are able to reply to the questions in wonderfully clever ways. **They are jewels among humankind.** These Great Bodhisattvas are the most valuable and rare among humankind. **Extremely rare in the world**—in all worlds—they are exceptionally unusual. **Yet, just now, the World Honored One said,** Shakyamuni World Honored One said, **that only when the Buddha attained the Way**—now that you have accomplished Buddhahood—**did he cause them to first bring forth the resolve.** You caused those Bodhisattvas to bring forth the resolve. **By teaching, transforming, and guiding them, he led them toward anuttarasamyaksambodhi.** He taught and transformed them, pointed out the Way, and instructed them and led them. He caused them to be able to walk along the Way to Buddhahood, to anuttarasamyaksambodhi.

**It has not been long since the World Honored One attained Buddhahood.** Shakyamuni Buddha realized Buddhahood not very long ago. **And yet he has been able to do these great and meritorious deeds!** He has not been a Buddha for long; the time span has been short. How can he has done such a tremendously virtuous deed?

**Sutra:**
 **“We believe that the Buddha speaks in accord with what is appropriate, that the Buddha has never spoken falsely, that the Buddha’s understanding is complete and penetrating.”**
Outline:

J2. Asking for an answer.
K1. Clarifying the question.
L1. For the sake of those of the present.

**Commentary:**
Maitreya Bodhisattva says, “**We** Bodhisattvas **believe** the Buddha. We very much believe the Dharma spoken by the Buddha and **that the Buddha speaks in accord with what is appropriate.** The Dharmas spoken by the Buddha accord with what is opportune for living beings. **The Buddha has never spoken falsely.** Not a single sentence of the Dharma that the Buddha speaks is false or untrue. **The Buddha's understanding is complete and penetrating.** We believe in what the Buddha has understood and has awakened to, the principles the Buddha uses to teach and transform living beings. Those Dharmas are totally penetrating, without obstruction; all are principles founded upon the utmost intelligence. They are principles absolutely replete with prajna wisdom. We believe them all; we have no doubts.”

**Sutra:**

**“However, when Bodhisattvas who have just brought forth the resolve hear these words after the Buddha’s Quiescence, they may not believe or accept them. On the contrary, they may give rise to the causes and conditions for the offense karma incurred in destroying the Dharma.”**
Outline:

L2. For the sake of those of the future.

**Commentary:**

**However, when the Bodhisattvas who have just brought forth the resolve…** Although we believe the Dharmas the Buddha speaks, there are Bodhisattvas of the initial resolve. **After the Buddha’s Quiescence**—when you, Shakyamuni Buddha, have entered stillness in the future—when those Bodhisattvas **hear these words**—if they hear these principles, these statements—**they may not believe or accept them.** Maybe they would not believe the principles the Buddha spoke. They would not believe that these old Bodhisattvas have been taught and transformed by that young Buddha. **On the contrary, they may give rise to the causes and conditions for the offense karma incurred in destroying the Dharma.** Since they do not believe, they will slander the Dharma. If they destroy the Buddhadharma, they will create offenses. It is said, "Giving rise to delusions, they create karma and must undergo retribution." Because they do not believe, they are skeptical. Once they are doubtful, they create karma that will destroy the Buddhadharma. In the future they will fall into the hells or turn into hungry ghosts or become animals. They will create those kinds of causes and conditions.

**Sutra:**
 **“This being the case, World Honored One, we hope that you will explain in order to dispel our doubts, and so that those good people of the future who hear of this matter also will not give rise to doubts.”**
Outline:

K2. The request proper.

**Commentary:**

**This being the case,** because that may happen, therefore we now want the Buddha to explain. **We hope that you will explain.** We very much wish that the **World Honored One** will explain this principle to us**, in order to dispel our doubts.** Get rid of the doubts of those of us in the great Dharma assembly—the Bodhisattvas, Arhats, Bhikshus, Bhikshunis, Upasakas, Upasikas—**so that** not only will you be able to dispel our doubts, but also **those of the future,** the doubts of **good people,** the good men and good women of the future, **who hear of this matter.** When they hear about this principle, they **also will not give rise to doubts because the Buddha will have explained this clearly.**

**Sutra:**
 **At that time, Maitreya Bodhisattva, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke verses, saying:**

**“In the past, the Buddha of the Shakyan lineLeft home and drew near the city of Gaya To sit beneath the Bodhi tree, And it has not been long since then.”**

Outline:

H2. Verses.
I1. Verses concerning doubts.
J1. Speaking of Dharma.
K1. Based on the near.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, Maitreya Bodhisattva,** the Bodhisattva with the big heart and the broad girth, **wishing to restate this meaning,** wanting to reiterate the meanings he had just expressed, **spoke verses, saying:**

**In the past, the Buddha of the Shakyan line.** Maitreya Bodhisattva says that the World Honored One, Shakyamuni, in the past was born into the Shakyan clan, **left home, and drew near the city of Gaya.** You left the home-life and became a Bhikshu. Then, near the “ Mountain City” of Gaya, you went **to sit beneath the Bodhi tree,** became enlightened, and attained Buddhahood. **And it has not been long since then.** From the time the World Honored One became a Buddha to the present has been a very short time, not long at all.

**Sutra:**

**All these disciples of the Buddha, Incalculable in their number, Have long practiced the Buddha WayAnd now dwell in the power of spiritual penetrations.**

**Well have they studied the Bodhisattva Way. Undefiled by worldly dharmas, Like a lotus flower floating on the water, They have welled forth from the earth. All give rise to reverent hearts, As they stand before the World Honored One.**

Outline:

K2. Based on the far.

**Commentary:**

**All these disciples of the Buddha,** all of these Great Bodhisattvas, disciples of the Dharma King, are **incalculable in their number.** Even using the wisdom of a Bodhisattva, there is no way to count how many there are. They **have long practiced the Buddha Way.** For a long, long time already, they have been practicing the Way of all Buddhas. **And** they **now dwell in the power of spiritual penetrations.** That is why they now have the strength of great spiritual powers. **Well have they studied the Bodhisattva Way.** They have excelled in their study and practice of the six perfections and myriad practices that Great Bodhisattvas cultivate.

**Undefiled by worldly dharmas,** they do not allow worldly dharmas to sully them. They cultivate world-transcending dharmas, pure dharmas, and they are not tainted by the defiling dharmas of this evil world of the five turbidities. **Like a lotus flower floating on the water,** they are like a lotus flower in a pool, growing up through the mud but remaining undefiled. Passing through the mud, it emerges pure and clean. **They have welled forth from the earth.** Now these Bodhisattvas have come from beneath the earth and welled up through its surface to abide in space. And they **all give rise to reverent hearts.** They are all very respectful of the World Honored One. **As they stand before the World Honored One,** abiding in mid air directly in front of the Buddha.

**Sutra:**

**Such a thing is hard to conceive of, How can it be believed? The Buddha only recently attained the Way, Yet his accomplishments are so very many. Please dispel the doubts of the assembly And tell us how this can actually be.**

Outline:

K3. Conclusion: the difficulty of belief.

**Commentary:**

**Such a thing is hard to conceive of.** Now these Great Bodhisattvas, uncountably many of them, are abiding there before the World Honored One. This event is inconceivable and ineffable; people cannot understand it. **How can it be believed?** What is the principle here? How can you expect people to believe something like this? **The Buddha only recently attained the Way.** Why can't anyone believe this? Because the Buddha attained the Way only a short time ago. He is very young in his Buddhahood, **yet his accomplishments are so very many.** The living beings he has taught and transformed have all become Great Bodhisattvas, and there are so many of them. **Please dispel the doubts of the assembly.** We all hope the Shakya World Honored One will get rid of the doubts that plague us in this assembly **and tell us how this can actually be.** Tell us in detail the reality of this event.

**Sutra:**

**It is as if a strong young man, Only twenty-five years of age, Pointed to hundred-year-old men With white hair and wrinkled facesAnd said, “These are my sons.”And the sons also said, “He is our father.”A father so young with sons so old Is a thing hard for the world to believe.**

Outline:

J2. Setting up the analogy.

**Commentary:**

**It is as if a strong young man.** Why can't we believe this matter at present? We will bring up an analogy: It is like a young man, **only twenty-five years of age,** with a handsome face, who displays his youth—his hair is black and there are no wrinkles on his face—a youth in his twenties. He **pointed to hundred-year-old men and said, "These are my sons."** He told some people "These hundred-year-old men are my sons." Ridiculous! These hundred-year-old men **with white hair and wrinkled faces** that he called his sons were not adopted or purchased for a price. They were begotten by him. **And the sons also said, "He is our father."** The hundred-year-old men admitted that the young man was their biological father. **A father so young with sons so old.** The father is very young and the sons are very old—this is **a thing hard for the world to believe.** Wherever you go in the whole world, no one will believe this principle.

**Sutra:**

**The World Honored One is also like this; He has only recently attained the Way And all these Bodhisattvas Of firm resolve, neither weak nor indecisive, Throughout limitless eons Have practiced the Bodhisattva Way.**

**Clever in answering difficult questions, They have no fear in their minds, Patient under insult, resolute in their thoughts.Resolute in their patience, They are upright and proper, possessing awesome virtue.**

**Praised by the Buddhas of the ten directions, Skilled in their ability to distinguish and explain, They take no delight in being with the multitudes, But always prefer Dhyana concentration. Because they seek the Buddha Way, They have been dwelling in the space below.**

Outline:

J3. Correlation with the Dharma.

**Commentary:**

Maitreya Bodhisattva says, **“The World Honored One is also like this.”** Now the World Honored One is being likened to a young father, and all the Bodhisattvas are being likened to old sons. Thus he says, "The World Honored One is also like this. **He has only recently attained the Way.** From the time the World Honored One became a Buddha to now was not a very long time. It has been a very short time. **And all these Bodhisattvas**—all these Great Bodhisattvas whose number is unreckonable—are **of firm resolve, neither weak nor indecisive.** Their resolve is firm. Their vows are exceptionally vast. Their cultivation is the six perfections and myriad practices. Their minds are not weak, and they are not afraid. They fear nothing. These Great Bodhisattvas have not cultivated the Bodhisattva Way during just this one short life span. They have been cultivating it from limitless eons past.

**Throughout limitless eons** they **have practiced the Bodhisattva Way. Clever in answering difficult questions.** They cultivate the Bodhisattva Way and open prajna wisdom. Therefore, no matter how difficult the problem, they can resolve it. Not only can they resolve it, they do so in a very astute and wonderful way. Their eloquence is without obstruction—they have the four kinds of unobstructed eloquence. Since they have unobstructed eloquence, they are able to answer any tough questions. **They have no fear in their minds.** Their minds do not experience fear.

They are **patient under insult** and **resolute in their thoughts.** Being patient is not easy. Without knowing why it is so, people like praise and dislike being scolded. It is very difficult to cultivate patience. You may be patient once, you may even be patient twice, but by the third time, you cannot take it. All of you who hear the Buddhadharma here every day should be able to make use of it. When the time comes, when a situation arises, you should recognize it. If you recognize it, you will not be turned by the state. If you do not recognize it, you will be turned by it. Not recognizing means not knowing. If you can recognize it, then you know it. That is why I say:

Everything is a test
To see what you will do.
If you do not recognize what is before you,
You will have to start anew.

A state comes up, and whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, you should recognize it. Do not consider encountering a favorable state to be as sweet as candy, and encountering an opposing state to be as bitter as huanglian. If you feel that favorable states are sweet and opposing states are bitter, then you are being turned by states. If in both favorable and unfavorable circumstances you can remain unmoved, so that not even your mind moves, then you can be said to have a bit of skill, of gongfu.

What is a favorable state? Suppose someone praises you, saying, "He really cultivates. He works hard! He is vigorous day and night. He never quits." Hearing this you think, "That is great. That is as sweet as honey." Your heart rejoices; you feel great. Now, let's suppose someone slanders you: "He is terrible! He is lazy, he is gluttonous, and he does not cultivate at all. He says he is a cultivator, but he never cultivates." You respond by thinking, "I do not want to hear this. How can he talk like that about me?" It is as bitter as huanglian. Huanglian, in case you do not know, is the most bitter of Chinese medicinal herbs. However, although it is bitter, if you have illnesses stemming from excessive fire and you take huanglian, it will get rid of your fire. It is an excellent medicinal herb, but it is very bitter.

You also have to consider where the state is coming from. For instance, if you are a cultivator, perhaps a left-home person, and you are scolded by your teacher, you think, "I would not argue or get angry or talk back. I will just act as if nothing were happening." That does not count as patience. Why not? Because where disciples are concerned, they should bear what should be borne and even bear the unbearable when it comes from their teacher. That cannot be classified as the cultivation of patience.

On the other hand, if, as a teacher, you can bear up when your disciples scold you, that means you have a little skill. If the disciples scold the teacher, and the more he is scolded the happier he gets, then he has some skill. Or suppose you are scolded by a beggar, and you feel as though it did not even happen, that can be counted as patience. But if a policeman scolds you, even if he is being totally unreasonable, even if it is unbearable, you still have to bear it. For example, you are out on the street looking around as if you might be about to steal something, and a policeman comes up and says, "Hey! What are you up to? Are you a thief? I am going to search you." You must be patient. Why? Because the policeman has authority, and you do not. And so you have to endure his questions. That does not count as patience. If an inferior bullies you and you can bear it, you have patience. At this point, I have thought of a story.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

**What Do You Think Happened?**

Long ago, Shakyamuni Buddha and his disciples were walking down the road in a particularly desolate place. For one hundred miles around, they had not come across a single person. The disciples asked the Buddha, "Why are there no people here?"

Shakyamuni Buddha sighed and said, "It is a very painful matter."

"What happened? Please tell us!" said the disciples.

Shakyamuni Buddha then told them how long ago, an old cultivator who had tremendous virtue in the Way lived in the area. He had been cultivating patience for one hundred years, and he had never gotten angry. It so happened that the king of the country lost faith in his prime minister and dismissed him, even though the minister had done nothing to deserve it. The prime minister was still attached to his desire for power and leadership: "What am I going to do? How can I get back my position as prime minister? Oh, I have an old friend who practices patience. He is a Patient Immortal. He will know a way! I will go ask him." Thereupon he went to see the old cultivator who was his friend. He told him the king had dismissed him from his position as prime minister, and asked if there was any method that would enable him to regain his position.

The Patient Immortal replied, "That is very easy. At present your destiny is inauspicious, but now you can take that inauspicious energy—that energy that has caused your downfall—and pass it on to me. Then you will be able to be prime minister again."

"How can I pass it on to you?" he asked.

"There is a method we can use. You take a clod of earth and throw it at my head. That will suffice to pass your inauspicious energy on to me. Then you will be able to continue as prime minister."

The former prime minister did as he was advised, and sure enough, on the very day that he returned, the king called for him and said, "Before I dismissed you as prime minister, but that was a mistake. Will you come back now and continue on as my prime minister?" Thus he was invited back, and he thought, "Oh, that cultivator is really capable! He really can make things happen." Thereupon he continued on as prime minister.

After a while the queen of the western palace was dismissed by the king. He removed her to the "cold palace," meaning she would not have the opportunity to see the king anymore. The queen of the western palace thought, "Before, the prime minister was dismissed, and he has regained his post. No doubt has a method. I will ask him." And so she called for the prime minister and asked him, "How did you go about getting your position back?"

"It was not my own doing," he said. "I went to an old cultivator I know, and he told me that I had unlucky energy. He said I should transfer that energy to him, and I would be back in office. So I did, and here I am."

"Do you think he would help me?" she asked.

"I will go ask him," said the prime minister. When he told the story to the old cultivator, the old cultivator said, "Fine, tell her to pour a cup of water over my head, and her unlucky energy will be transferred to me. Then the king will want her back again."

The queen of the western palace followed the instructions to the letter, and the king took her out of the "cold-palace" and invited her back. The Patient Immortal's method was most efficacious indeed!

Soon the country went to war but every time its troops engaged in battle, they lost. The king said to his first wife and to the prime minister, "We are losing every battle. What are we going to do?"

The prime minister said, "I know what we will do. I have an old friend who is a cultivator. We call him the Patient Immortal. He has a number of dharma tricks. He will know what to do."

Upon hearing of this situation, the Patient Immortal said, "I live in this country; I should help out. The country is losing its battles. Very well, we are going to take the unlucky energy of the country and transfer it to me." Then he told the king, "Get a huge pot of stinking, dirty water to represent the unlucky affairs of the entire country and pour it on me."

That left the old cultivator smelling pretty bad, but nonetheless, the king began to win all his battles and eventually won the war. The king said, "That old cultivator has tremendous virtue." Once that announcement was made in the palace, the whole country knew about it. Soon people were lined up for miles, waiting to spit, throw dirt, or otherwise transfer their messes to the old cultivator. They all expected him to be patient, didn't they? He should just let the spit dry, shouldn't he? Day after day, first ten people, then hundreds, then thousands, tens of thousands, and finally the entire populace converged on the Patient Immortal. The Patient Immortal simply could not respond to them all properly, so up popped a false thought: "I cannot stand it! Why don't all these people drop dead?" What do you think happened? They all did! That was how great his spiritual powers were. As soon as he produced the angry thought of wishing them all dead, they all dropped dead on the spot. So now, for several hundred miles around, there are no people in this area.

It is not easy to be patient. But although it is not easy, we are still going to cultivate patience. Instead of speaking of it as difficult, let us think of it as easy. But whatever you do, do not get angry and think, "I wish they would all drop dead!"

They are **resolute in their patience.** Their patience is decisive. They definitely would not take it casually. **They are upright and proper, possessing awesome virtue.** Their physiognomy is regular, and their awesomeness is magnificent. **Praised by the Buddhas of the ten directions,** these Great Bodhisattvas are **skilled in their ability to distinguish and explain.** They are well able to delineate and describe all dharmas.

**They take no delight in being with the multitudes.** They do not like living in noisy places. They like still and quiet places. They prefer the mountains, **but** most of all, they **always prefer Dhyana concentration.** What makes them happiest is dwelling in Dhyana samadhi. They cultivate the samadhi of Chan meditation. **Because they seek the Buddha Way, they have been dwelling in the space below.** Because they want to cultivate the Buddha's unsurpassed Bodhi Way, they are living in lower space where no one bothers them. Probably people did not fly planes into that area or send rockets there. Therefore they are very much at ease in space, tranquil and pure.

**Sutra:**

**Hearing this from the Buddha, We have no doubts about this matter, But we hope that the Buddha will, for those of the future, Give explanations to cause them to understand.**

**For if they were to give rise to doubts And fail to believe this Sutra, They would thereupon fall into the evil paths. Presently we have asked for this explanation**

**Of these limitless Bodhisattvas And how, in such a short space of time, You have taught and transformed them, Causing them to bring forth the resolve And to dwell on the Ground of Irreversibility.**

Outline:

I2. Requesting an answer.

**Commentary:**

**Hearing this from the Buddha, we have no doubts about this matter.** Maitreya Bodhisattva says, "All of us here in this Dharma assembly, we Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas, have personally heard the Buddha speak the Dharma of the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra. We have personally seen all the limitless Great Bodhisattvas well forth from the earth, and so we have no doubts about this matter. We heard Shakyamuni Buddha say that he personally taught and transformed these Bodhisattvas, and we knew it was really true, not made up. There was nothing to doubt in that analogy, **but we hope that the Buddha will, for those of the future,** speak. We do not doubt this, but living beings of the future, Bodhisattvas of initial resolve, whose roots of faith are not solid and whose good roots are not deep and thick, might fail to believe this. We now wish that the Buddha would explain this matter so that those of the future who have first brought forth the resolve will not doubt it. **Give explanations to cause them to understand.** Explain this principle to enable the Bodhisattvas of initial resolve to understand and be clear. **For if they were to give rise to doubts and fail to believe this Sutra**—if they do not understand and no one makes them aware, no one clarifies their thinking; if they were to fail to believe and had doubts—**they would thereupon fall into the evil paths.** If they do not believe in the Dharma Flower Sutra, in the future they will fall into the three evil paths—the hells, the animal realm, or the realm of hungry ghosts.

**Presently we have asked for this explanation.** We want Shakyamuni Buddha to bring forth great kindness and compassion, and for the sake of living beings of the future, speak of these causes and conditions. Tell the reason why **these limitless Bodhisattvas** have **in such a short space of time** been **taught and transformed** by you. How did the Buddha manage to teach all these Bodhisattvas in such a short space of time? How was he able to cause **them to bring forth the** Bodhi **resolve and to dwell on the Ground of Irreversibility?** By now, they have all obtained the three kinds of irreversibility:

1. Irreversible thought
2. Irreversible practice
3. Irreversible position