**The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra**

**Chapter 17: Discrimination of Merit and Virtue**

With Commentary by the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua

We speak of the **discrimination of merit and virtue** because merit and virtue can be great or small; there can be a lot or just a little. Here we will discuss these discriminations.   
  
What are "merit" and "virtue"? “Merit” is an external attribute and "virtue" is an internal one. Only if one establishes merit on the outside does one then have virtue inside. Merit is what one gains as a result of doing good deeds. Basically, one has a choice: One can do good deeds or not do them. If one chooses to do them, one gains merit. Once one has merit, one's self-nature will feel happy. That happiness is virtue. Merit and virtue are not accomplished through just a single deed. One has to do many, many good deeds and accumulate them in order to have great merit and much virtue.   
  
Merit is the gradual accumulation of many good deeds, created layer by layer. A few accumulate into many; the small grows to become the large. Just as a mountain is slowly formed from an accumulation of tiny dust particles day by day, merit grows from small to great. The mountain does not get that much higher in two, three, four, or five days. Yet it grows every day, every month, and year by year. This does not happen all at once, but rather over a long period of time. Merit is just like the mountain.   
  
As for virtue, it is like the sea. The sea is not created in a day, either. Who knows how many great eons were needed to create the sea? All waters flow into the sea, which is analogous to virtue. Merit and virtue accumulate in the same way that mountains and seas are formed. This is an analogy, though. You do not want to say that the Dharma Master defined mountains as being merit and seas as being virtue. It is an analogy, not the thing itself.   
  
External merit and internal virtue are accumulated bit by bit until the point is reached at which a great measure has been amassed. Then one accomplishes one's work in the Way. Shakyamuni Buddha became a Buddha due to his perfection of merit and virtue. This chapter is called "Discrimination of Merit and Virtue" because we are dealing with the different deeds that can be done in the process of accumulation before merit and virtue have been perfected.   
  
Hearing this chapter, we should set about doing deeds of merit and virtue. To simply listen and know about merit and virtue, but not to do any acts of merit and virtue, will bring no merit and virtue. If you hear about merit and virtue and then practice doing meritorious and virtuous deeds, your merit and virtue will grow daily, like the mountains and the seas. When they are perfected, you will become a Buddha.  **Sutra:**  
  
**At that time, when the assembly heard the Buddha describe the number of eons in the length of his life span, limitless, boundless asamkhyeyas of living beings gained great benefit.**  
Outline:  
  
E2. General conferring of predictions for the Dharma body.   
F1. The narrator's introduction.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**At that time, when the assembly heard the Buddha describe the number of eons in the** great **length of his life span,** in chapter sixteen, **limitless, boundless**—countless, numberless—**asamkhyeyas of living beings gained great benefit.**   
  
**Sutra:**  
 **The World Honored One then said to the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Maitreya, saying, “Ajita! When I spoke of the great length of the Thus Come One’s life span, living beings to the number of sand grains in six hundred and eighty myriads of kotis of nayutas of Ganges rivers gained Patience with the Non-production of Dharmas.”   
  
“Again, a thousand times that number of Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas gained the dharani-door of hearing and upholding.”   
  
“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in a single world system gained the unobstructed eloquence of delight in speech.”   
  
“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in a single world system gained the dharani of a hundred thousand myriad kotis of limitless revolutions.”   
  
“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in a great world system became capable of turning the irreversible Dharma-wheel.”   
  
“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in a middle-sized world system were enabled to turn the pure Dharma-wheel.”   
  
“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in a small world system were destined to gain anuttarasamyaksambodhi after eight lifetimes.”   
  
“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in four sets of four continents were destined to gain anuttarasamyaksambodhi after four lifetimes.”   
  
“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in three sets of four continents were destined to gain anuttarasamyaksambodhi after three lifetimes.”   
  
“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in two sets of four continents were destined to gain anuttarasamyaksambodhi after two lifetimes.”   
  
“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in one set of four continents were destined to gain anuttarasamyaksambodhi after a single lifetime.”   
  
“Again, living beings to the number of dust motes in eight world systems all brought forth the resolve for anuttarasamyaksambodhi.”**  
Outline:  
  
F2. The discriminations made by the Thus Come One.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**The World Honored One,** Shakyamuni Buddha, **then said to the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Maitreya, saying, "Ajita! When** in the previous chapter **I spoke of the great length of the Thus Come One's life span, living beings to the number of sand grains in six hundred and eighty myriads of kotis of nayutas of Ganges rivers gained Patience with the Non-production of Dharmas**" When they awakened to that patience, they no longer saw the minutest dharma produced or the minutes dharma destroyed. One must certify to the fourth fruit of Arhatship in order to gain Patience with the Non-production of Dharmas.   
  
**Again, a thousand times that number of Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas gained the dharani-door of hearing and upholding.** This means that after hearing, they accept and uphold the dharani. "Dharani" is a Sanskrit term which translates as "uniting and upholding." Dharanis unite all dharmas and uphold limitless meanings.   
  
**Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in a single world system gained the unobstructed eloquence of delight in speech.** They liked to speak the Dharma and had no obstructions. No matter who tried to debate with them, these Bodhisattvas were victorious.   
  
**Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in a single world system gained the dharani of a hundred thousand myriad kotis of limitless revolutions.** "Revolving" dharanis has the meaning of reciting, of being mindful, of being able to use the dharani. These Bodhisattvas could receive and uphold all these kinds of dharani-doors.   
  
**Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in a great world system became capable of turning the irreversible Dharma-wheel.** One "world system" comprises one Mount Sumeru, one sun, one moon, and one set of four continents. One "thousand" of these world systems form a small world system. One thousand small world systems form a middle-sized world system. One thousand middle-sized world systems form a great world system. [Literally the "three thousand great thousand world system." "Three" is used because it indicates a thousand cubed (a billion) worlds.] They can turn the irreversible Dharma-wheel. "Irreversible" describes that they go forward only. They do not retrogress, but are always vigorous and never lazy.   
  
Here in the Buddhist Lecture Hall we are turning the irreversible Dharma-wheel. So you should not retreat. If you retreat, you end up turning a reversible Dharma-wheel.   
  
Here, we stay busy in the ways that we can as ordinary people, turning the irreversible Dharma-wheel, while at the same time we learn from the Sutra how to turn the irreversible Dharma-wheel the way the Great Bodhisattvas do. We are not actually doing it professionally yet. You should understand this clearly.   
  
**Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in a middle-sized world system were enabled to turn the Pure Dharma-wheel.** "Middle-sized world system" means a thousand worlds squared, not cubed. The Pure Dharma-wheel is the Wonderful Dharma.   
  
**Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in a small world system** of a thousand worlds—meaning there are a thousand Mount Sumerus, a thousand suns and moons, and a thousand set of four continents—**were destined to gain anuttarasamyaksambodhi after eight lifetimes.** These are Bodhisattvas of the Second Ground who must wait eight lifetimes to reach Buddhahood.   
  
**Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in four sets of four continents were destined to gain anuttarasamyaksambodhi after four lifetimes.** These are Eighth Ground Bodhisattvas, as many as the dust motes in four sets of four continents, who must go through four lifetimes to attain the fruition level of the Buddha. "Four sets of four continents" would include four Mount Sumerus, four suns, four moons, and four sets of four continents—that is, four world systems.   
  
**Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in three sets of four continents were destined to gain anuttarasamyaksambodhi after three lifetimes.** Here the number is composed of the dust motes in three world systems, meaning three Mount Sumerus, three suns, three moons, and three sets of four continents. These great Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas of the Ninth Ground must go through three lifetimes before attaining the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment.   
  
**Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in two sets of four continents were destined to gain anuttarasamyaksambodhi after two lifetimes.** These are great Bodhisattvas of the Tenth Ground as many as the dust motes in two world systems, which would include two Mount Sumerus, two suns, two moons, and two sets of four continents.   
  
**Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in one set of four continents were destined to gain anuttarasamyaksambodhi after a single lifetime.** These are Bodhisattvas at the level of Equal Enlightenment who must go through one lifetime to attain the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment of the Buddhas.   
  
**Again, living beings to the number of dust motes in eight world systems all brought forth the resolve for anuttarasamyaksambodhi.** "Eight world systems" includes eight Mount Sumerus, eight suns, eight moons, and eight sets of four continents. These beings brought forth the resolve to attain Buddhahood. Those who study the Buddhadharma must first bring forth the resolve to attain Bodhi in order to eventually reap the Bodhi fruit. If you do not, you will not. You cannot just say, "Everybody is a Buddha." If you just say that and fail to bring forth the resolve to realize Buddhahood, you can say it forever but it will be just like speaking about food or counting others' money—it would not satisfy you. You can say, "Bread and butter and tofu and potatoes are delicious! Tomatoes are good, too." But if you just talk and do not eat, you would not get full. It is also like counting other people's money—it is not yours to use. You can count, "Ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, a hundred thousand, a million, a billion, a trillion," counting all day long, but it is someone else's money, not yours to use. That is like saying, "Oh, everybody is a Buddha," but not cultivating. And yet if someone says you are selfish, you cannot stand it. If someone says, "You have so much greed," you think, "How dare you scold me!" There is a saying:

You may count other people's money all day long,  
But not half a cent of it is yours.  
If you fail to cultivate the Dharma,  
You are making a similar mistake.

So if you do not cultivate, it is the same as counting other people's money for them.   
  
At this point, someone has a question, but does not dare to ask. Why is that? Because he does not have a proper reason for asking it. And what is the question? He is thinking, "There is only one world. How can there be small, middle-sized, and great world systems? I just see this one world here surrounded by stars. I have never seen any other suns, moons, and Mount Sumerus. In fact, I cannot even find a Mount Sumeru in this world! How can there be other worlds?"   
  
I would not address that question, but I will speak about something else. Let us talk about someone who lives way out in the countryside—a hick. He knows just his little area of countryside, and he sees the same people every day: his aunts and uncles and his parents' friends. He thinks there are only these people in this world, because he has never been out of his little town.   
  
Later, for some reason, he wanders away and walks into another town. Amazed, he thinks, "What is this big city doing here? So big! It is bigger than my home town!" Before, he did not believe that there were other cities, but now that he sees it, he believes. Then he travels across the country and learns that there are lots of cities, but he still does not know there are also several hundred other countries in this world as well. For instance, if he were French he would only be aware of France. Then suppose he does travel to other countries, such as Germany and England and other places. If he did not go, he would think those countries did not exist. Only after he goes himself does he come to know about the other countries.   
  
In the same way, there are many, many worlds. As of yet, you have not been to them, so you do not know about them. Once you go, I would not have to tell you about them, you will already understand. I could tell you about their existence now, but since you have not seen them yourself, and naturally you would not believe they exist. So for now, don't bring up this question. Keep it in mind for a while. When the time comes for you to travel to other worlds, you will naturally have your question answered.   
  
This passage of text refers to both the bestowing of predictions for the Dharma body and propagation. It also relates to the Ten Dwellings, Ten Conducts, Ten Transferences, and the First and Second of the Ten Grounds.   
  
The Bodhisattvas as many as the dust motes of a single world who obtained the dharani-door of Hearing and Upholding belong to the Ten Dwellings.   
  
The Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas as many as the dust motes of one world who gained the Unobstructed Eloquence of Delight in Speech belong to the Ten Conducts. Those who certify to the position of the Ten Conducts gain the Unobstructed Eloquence of Delight in Speech.  
  
The Bodhisattvas as many as the dust motes of one world who gained the dharani of a hundred thousand myriad kotis of limitless revolutions belong to the Ten Transferences. Once you certify to the position of the Ten Transferences; you obtain the revolving Dharani-door where the one is limitless, and the limitless is one.   
  
The Bodhisattvas who became capable of turning the irreversible Dharma-wheel were those Bodhisattvas who had attained the three irreversibilities of position, conduct, and mindfulness. They certified to the First of the Ten Grounds.   
  
The Bodhisattvas as many as the dust motes of two thousand middle lands who became capable of turning the pure Dharma-wheel were those who had certified to the Second of the Ten Grounds.   
  
The Bodhisattvas as many as dust motes in a thousand minor-sized lands who were to gain anuttarasamyaksambodhi after eight lives were those Bodhisattvas who went from the Second to the Third and completely certified to the Fourth Ground as defined by the Perfect Teaching. (The Fourth Ground of the Perfect Teaching is not the same as the Fourth Ground of the Special Teaching or the Penetrating Teaching. That is because each of these teachings describes a different kind of level of accomplishment.)   
  
This process of going from the Second to the Fourth Ground is called "increasing in the Way, decreasing in life." What does that mean? It means one increases one's wisdom of the Middle Way and decreases the amount of change birth and death that one still harbors. "Change birth and death" refers to the continual rising and cessation of thoughts in the mind. Those of the First and Second Ground do not have share and section birth and death, only change birth and death.   
  
When one goes from the Second Ground and obtains complete certification to the Fourth Ground, according to the Perfect Teaching, only eight of the last nine portions of very subtle ignorance remain. Thus the life one decreases is not the life of share and section birth and death, but rather the life of change birth and death.   
  
As one cuts off the categories, one advances through the Grounds. These are view delusions, thought delusions, and delusions stemming from ignorance. There are eighty-eight portions of view delusions and eighty-one portions of thought delusions. So by the Fourth Ground, only the last eight portions of delusions stemming from ignorance remain. These eight final portions of ignorance are very fine and subtle. When one gets rid of one portion of ignorance, one certifies to the next Ground. And so from the Fourth Ground, when the last eight portions are abolished, one attains the position of Wonderful Enlightenment.   
  
When there are just four portions left to cut off, the Bodhisattva has reached the Eighth Ground. The Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh grounds are not mentioned here. The level of a Bodhisattva at the Eighth Ground is distinct from the Bodhisattva at the Seventh Ground. If the Eighth Ground Bodhisattva wishes to come to our world to teach and transform living beings, he will be born "wearing clothes." That means he is born in a flesh caul, as was the Venerable Elder Master Hsü Yun. But this kind of Eighth Ground Bodhisattva very rarely enters the world.   
  
There is a saying:

Even Bodhisattvas are confused when they undergo rebirth;  
Even Arhats become muddled when they dwell in the womb.

Even Eighth Ground Bodhisattvas get confused by having to dwell in a womb and be born; thus they have to cultivate again when they get to this world. That is why the Venerable Elder Master Hsü Yun did not get enlightened until he was fifty-six years old. But when he did, his enlightenment was such that he went straight back to the original source and knew what he looked like before his parents gave birth to him.   
  
**Sutra:**  
 **As the Buddha proclaimed these great advantages in the Dharma that the Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas had attained, there rained from space mandarava flowers and mahamandarava flowers, which floated down and settled upon the Buddhas seated on lion thrones beneath limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of jeweled trees, as well as upon Shakyamuni Buddha and Many Jewels Thus Come One, who had entered Nirvana long ago, both of whom were seated on the lion throne within the stupa of seven treasures. The flowers also settled upon the great Bodhisattvas and the fourfold assembly.  
  
There also rained down finely ground chandana powder and aloeswood incense. Heavenly drums in space sounded of themselves, and their wonderful sounds reached far and wide. There also rained down thousands of kinds of heavenly garments strung with beads, as well as laces of real pearls, laces of mani pearls, and laces of As-You-Will pearls that covered the nine directions. Another offering to all in the great assembly was priceless incense burning in a multitude of precious censers, so that its scent naturally pervaded the great assembly and its surroundings.  
  
Above each Buddha were Bodhisattvas holding aloft banners and canopies in a procession that extended clear up to the Brahma Heavens. All the Bodhisattvas, with wonderful sounds, sang limitless chants in praise of all Buddhas.**  
Outline:  
  
F3. The perfect benefits manifested through portents.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
When you wish to ask questions about the Dharma, you should do so in a proper manner. Use your samadhi power. Do not joke or laugh. If you have samadhi power, then you can develop the power of wisdom. With the power of wisdom you can come to understand what you have not yet understand. If you do not use your samadhi power, you would not gain wisdom power and will never be able to understand. When seeking the Dharma you must be upright and proper and act always as if the Buddha were right in front of you, right behind you, and to the left and right of you. If you remember that the Buddha is always right there with you, you would not be silly and disrespectful.   
  
**As the Buddha proclaimed these great advantages in the Dharma that the Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas had attained,** and the benefit to Arhats and sages certified to the fruition and ordinary living beings as well, **there rained from space mandarava flowers,** white flowers "which accord with one's wish," **and** big, white **mahamandarava flowers.** These flowers **floated down and settled upon the Buddhas seated on lion thrones beneath limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of jeweled trees,** Bodhi trees, as an offering. They also settled as an offering on all the division body Buddhas of Shakyamuni Buddha, **as well as upon** both **Shakyamuni Buddha and Many Jewels Thus Come One, who had entered Nirvana long ago, both of whom were seated on the lion throne within the stupa of Seven Treasures. The flowers also settled** as an offering **upon the great Bodhisattvas,** the ones who had welled forth from the ground, **and the fourfold assembly** of Bhikshus, Bhikshunis, Upasakas, and Upasikas. This is the Portent of the Raining of Flowers.   
  
**There also rained down finely ground chandana powder and aloeswood incense.** The previous section was the Portent of the Raining of Flowers. This section is the Portent of the Raining of Incense, all portents of offerings. [The Chinese name for aloeswood is literally "sinks-in-water."] Basically, wood should float in water, but this kind of incense is so condensed it sinks in water. **Heavenly drums in space sounded of themselves, and their wonderful sounds reached far and wide.** This is the Portent of the Heavenly Drums. There are drums in the heavens that sound when the Buddha has a Dharma assembly. Unlike the drums in the human realm, they do not need to be played by someone in order to sound; they play all by themselves! The sound of heavenly drums, too, is not like the coarse sound of drums in the human realm; it is very subtle, wonderful, and penetrating.   
  
**There also rained down thousands of kinds of heavenly garments,** which beings in the heavens wear and which are **strung with beads.** This is the Portent of the Beaded Heavenly Garments. These rained down **as well as laces of real pearls, laces of mani pearls, and laces of As-You-Will pearls.** The "As-You-Will pearl" is a kind of dharani, “dharani” meaning "uniting and holding." There were these four kinds of beadwork **that covered the nine directions.** The Avatamsaka Sutra talks about the ten directions, but here there are nine directions. The nine directions are the ten directions minus the direction from which the adornments were falling—the zenith or upper direction. The nine directions represent the Nine Dharma Realms, that is, the Ten Dharma Realms minus the Dharma Realm of the Buddhas.   
  
**Another offering was priceless incense burning in a multitude of precious censers.** What incense is this? It is the highest-quality incense, which money cannot buy, the "heart-incense." It is the incense of the heart. The censer was the heart, and in it the heart incense was burned as an offering **to all in the great assembly, so that its scent naturally,** without thought or planning, and all by itself, **pervaded** everywhere in **the great assembly and its surroundings.** It is called heart incense because just as one thought can pervade everywhere in the Dharma Realm and as one dust particle can pervade the Dharma Realm, naturally permeating all places, so too, when you light the heart incense, it infuses and perfumes, so evil is dispelled and good is created. Your evil habits get smoked out and only the good ones remain. This goodness and sincerity is used as an offering to the great assembly.   
  
**Above each Buddha** from the ten directions, Shakyamuni Buddha's division bodies, **were Bodhisattvas holding aloft banners and canopies** studded with jewels **in a procession that extended clear up to the Brahma Heavens.** They formed orderly lines, one following another, as we do when we circumambulate and recite the Buddha's name.   
  
**All the Bodhisattvas, with wonderful sounds, sang** out **limitless chants in praise of all Buddhas.** They made up verses and sang them in praise of the Buddhas.

**Sutra:**  
 **At that time Maitreya Bodhisattva rose from his seat, uncovered his right shoulder, placed his palms together, and said to the Buddha:**

**“The Buddha speaks the rare Dharma,Such as we have never heard before.The World Honored One has great power,And his life span is without limit.Countless disciples of the Buddha,Hearing the World Honored One discriminate And tell of those who gain the Dharma’s benefit,Have been filled with joy.”**

Outline:  
  
E3. Maitreya’s verses.   
F1. The assembly gains understanding.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**At that time, Maitreya Bodhisattva,** or Ajita, the "Invincible" Bodhisattva, **rose from his seat,** stood up, **uncovered his right shoulder, placed his palms together,** faced the Buddha, **and** respectfully and sincerely **said** verses **to** praise **the Buddha:** "**The Buddha speaks the rare Dharma.** All the Dharma the Buddha speaks is rare, especially the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra; it is the rare within the rare, **such as we have never heard before. The World Honored One has great power.** He has the greatest powers of spiritual penetrations, **and his life span is without limit.** It cannot be counted. **Countless disciples of the Buddha,** countless sons of the Dharma King, **hearing the World Honored One discriminate** the principles of the Wonderful Dharma **and tell of those who gain the Dharma's benefit**, the many living beings who gained the benefit of the Dharma upon hearing the Buddha speak the chapter on the length of the Thus Come One's life, **have been filled with joy.**   
 **Sutra:**

**Some dwell on the irreversible ground.Some gain the dharanis.Others gain unobstructed delight in speech,Or myriads of millions of dharanis of revolution.**

**As many BodhisattvasAs dust motes in a great world systemAll gain the ability to turnThe irreversible Dharma-wheel.**

**Again, Bodhisattvas in numberTo the dust motes in a middle world systemAll gain the ability to turnThe pure Dharma-wheel.**

**Again, Bodhisattvas in numberTo the dust motes in a small world systemAre destined to gain the Buddha WayAfter eight more lifetimes.**

**Again, Bodhisattvas in number To the dust motes in four, three, or twoSets of four continents shall gainBuddhahood after a respective number of lives.**

**Further, Bodhisattvas in numberTo the dust motes in one set of four continentsShall accomplish All-WisdomAfter one more lifetime.**

**Living beings such as these,Hearing of the vast length of the Buddha’s life,Gain limitless, non-outflow,Pure reward as retribution.**

**Again living beings in numberAs the dust motes in eight worlds,Hearing the Buddha speak of his life span,All bring forth the supreme mind.**

Outline:  
  
F2. The discriminations made by the Thus Come One.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**Some dwell on the irreversible ground.** Hearing this Dharma-door, they now dwell on the non-retreating ground. **Some gain the dharanis**, the Dharma-door of hearing and upholding. **Others gain unobstructed delight in speech.** They gain the various kinds of eloquence:   
  
1. Unobstructed eloquence in phrasing   
2. Unobstructed eloquence in Dharma   
3. Unobstructed eloquence in meaning   
4. Unobstructed eloquence and delight in speech   
  
Or they gain **myriads of millions of dharanis of revolution.** They gain the dharani-door where the one is limitless and the limitless is one, mutually revolving. **As many Bodhisattvas as dust motes in a great world system, all gain the ability to turn the irreversible Dharma-wheel.** They attain irreversibility of position, thought, and conduct.   
  
**Again, Bodhisattvas in number to the dust motes in a middle world system, all gain the ability to turn the pure Dharma-wheel.** They certify to the Second of the Ten Grounds.   
  
**Again, Bodhisattvas in number to the dust motes in a small world system are destined to gain the Buddha Way after eight more lifetimes.** Cultivating from the Second Ground up to the certification to the Fourth of the Ten Grounds of the Perfect Teaching, they gain the position of the Fourth Ground. At that stage they still have eight parts of subtle ignorance remaining. As they cut off one part, they ascend one Ground. They cut off one part and reach the Fifth Ground; they cut off two parts and reach the Sixth Ground; they cut off three parts and reach the Seventh Ground. When they have cut off four parts, they reach the Eighth Ground. Then they have four parts of ignorance that remain to be cut off. When these four have been destroyed, they become Buddhas. As they increase one part of the Way, they decrease one part of ignorance, which is very subtle.   
  
**Again, Bodhisattvas in number to the dust motes in four, three, or two sets of four continents shall gain Buddhahood after a respective number of lives.** There are four sets of four continents, or three sets of four continents, or two sets of four continents. “Four sets of four continents” means that there are four Mount Sumerus, and four suns and moons; “three sets of four continents” means there are three Mount Sumerus, three moons, three suns, and so forth. “Bodhisattvas as many as the dust motes in four sets of four continents” refers to Eighth Ground Bodhisattvas who have four parts of subtle production-mark ignorance left to destroy. “Bodhisattvas as many as the dust motes in three sets of four continents” refers to Ninth Ground Bodhisattvas. They have three parts of subtle production-mark ignorance that they have not destroyed. When they have destroyed the three parts, they can become Buddhas. The two sets of four continents represent those with two parts of subtle production-mark ignorance that they have not destroyed. This is the Perfect Teaching's certification to the Tenth Ground. When they break through these two parts, they can become Buddhas.   
  
**Further, Bodhisattvas in number to the dust motes in one set of four continents shall accomplish All-Wisdom after one more lifetime.** This refers to Bodhisattvas as many as the dust motes of one set of four continents who are at the level of Equal Enlightenment and still have one part of production-mark ignorance left. When this one part is destroyed, they will accomplish the All-Wisdom of the Buddha, that is, Wonderful Enlightenment.   
  
**Living beings such as these, hearing of the vast length of the Buddha's life,** when they hear this chapter on the length of the Buddha's life, **gain limitless, non-outflow, pure reward as retribution.** They will obtain non-outflow wisdom and the pure fruition of Wonderful Enlightenment—Buddhahood.   
  
**Again living beings**—ordinary people of the vast earth—**in number as the dust motes in eight worlds**—eight Mount Sumerus, eight suns and moons, eight sets of the four continents—**hearing the Buddha speak of his life span, all bring forth the supreme mind.** They make the resolve to gain Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment.   
  
**Sutra:**

**The World Honored One speaks limitless, Inconceivable Dharmas, Bringing many benefits, As boundless as space itself.**

**Heavenly mandarava flowers And mahamandarava flowers rain down. From countless Buddhalands Come Shakras and Brahmas like the Ganges sands; Chandana and aloeswood incense Filter through the air, Falling in profusion Like flocks of birds flying down from the sky, Scattered as an offering to the Buddhas.**

**In empty space, heavenly drumsMake magnificent sounds by themselves,While thousands of tens of thousands of heavenly garments Come whirling and swirling down.**

**Wonderful censers studded with jewels Burn with priceless incense, Which naturally pervades the surroundings As an offering to the World Honored Ones.**

**The great assembly of BodhisattvasHold banners and canopies made of seven treasures,High and splendorous, of a million varieties,In a procession that reaches the Brahma heavens.**

**And before each BuddhaHang jeweled flags and banners of victory,As myriads upon myriads of verses are usedTo praise and laud the Thus Come Ones:All such things as theseAs never have been seen before.Hearing of the Buddha’s limitless life span,All are filled with joy.**

**The Buddha’s name pervades the ten directions.He vastly benefits living beings,All of whom perfect good rootsAnd are helped to bring forth the supreme mind.**

Outline:  
  
F3. The perfect benefits manifested through portents.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**The World Honored One speaks limitless, inconceivable** and wonderful **Dharmas, bringing many benefits, as boundless as space itself.** The World Honored One is Shakyamuni Buddha, who speaks countless, limitless, inconceivable wonderful Dharmas that benefit living beings. When Shakyamuni Buddha speaks the Dharma, many living beings gain great benefit. This benefit, like empty space, has no boundaries.   
  
**Heavenly mandarava flowers and mahamandarava flowers rain down.** Small and large white flowers rain down from above. And **from countless Buddhalands, come Shakras and Brahmas like the Ganges sands;** powdered **chandana** incense and powdered **aloeswood incense filter through the air, falling in profusion** like snow, **like flocks of birds flying down from the sky.** These flowers are **scattered as an offering to the Buddhas** of the ten directions.   
  
**In empty space, heavenly drums make magnificent sounds by themselves, while thousands of tens of thousands of heavenly garments come whirling and swirling down** to the assembly. The gods have tens of millions of kinds of clothing, which are not heavy like human clothing. Their clothes are extremely light. **Wonderful censers studded with jewels burn with priceless incense, which naturally pervades the surrounding** Dharma realm **as an offering to the World Honored Ones**: Shakyamuni Buddha, the Thus Come One Many Jewels, and the division body Buddhas of Shakyamuni Buddha.   
  
In the midst of the scattering of the small and large flowers, the myriads of priceless incense and clothing, come **the great assembly of Bodhisattvas** who have welled forth from the earth. They **hold banners and canopies made of seven treasures, high and splendorous, of a million varieties, in a procession that reaches the Brahma Heavens.** These banners and canopies are very high and also very wonderful, not something that human minds can conceive of. **And before each Buddha, hang jeweled flags and banners of victory** as offerings, **as myriads upon myriads of verses are used to praise and laud the Thus Come Ones.**  
  
**All such things as these**—wonderful and inconceivable as they are—**never have been seen before. Hearing of the Buddha's limitless life span,** such a long time, **all** living beings **are filled with joy.**  
  
**The Buddha's name pervades the ten directions.** All living beings of all the ten directions heard the Buddha's name. To hear the Buddha's name, however, you need good roots. If you have no good roots, you would not be able to hear his name. **He vastly benefits living beings, all of whom perfect** their **good roots.** Those who have not planted good roots, plant them. Those who have already planted them, nurture them. Those whose good roots have grown, ripen them. Those whose good roots have ripened, obtain liberation. **And** with their good roots planted, they **are helped to bring forth the supreme mind,** the resolve for anuttarasamyaksambodhi.   
  
**Sutra:**  
**At that time the Buddha told Maitreya Bodhisattva Mahasattva, “Ajita! If there are living beings who, on hearing that the Buddha’s life span is as long as this, can bring forth even a single thought of faith and understanding, the merit and virtue they will gain is measureless and limitless.”**  
Outline:  
  
C3. Propagation section.   
D1. Exhortation to propagate the Sutra.   
E1. Four types of faith in the present.   
F1. Thought of faith and understanding.   
G1. Prose.   
H1. The appearance.   
H2. Merit and virtue.  
I1. In general, it is limitless.  
  
**Commentary:**   
  
When Maitreya Bodhisattva had finished the previous verse, **at that time the Buddha told Maitreya,** "Invincible" **Bodhisattva Mahasattva, "Ajita! If there are living beings who, on hearing that the Buddha's life span is as long as this, can bring forth even a single thought of faith and understanding.** They do not have to believe it entirely, they just need to have one single thought of faith and understanding. **The merit and virtue they will gain is measureless and limitless.** There is no way it could be measured. Now I will make a comparison.   
  
**Sutra:**  
 **“If a good man or a good woman, for the sake of anuttarasamyaksambodhi, were to practice the five paramitas—dana-paramita, shila-paramita, kshanti-paramita, virya-paramita, and dhyana-paramita; all except prajna-paramita—throughout eighty myriads of millions of nayutas of eons…**Outline:I2. Comparison.   
J1. Comparing with the five paramitas.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**If a good man or a good woman,** who cultivates the five precepts and practices the ten good deeds, **were,** throughout eighty myriads of millions of nayutas of eons,**to practice the five paramitas…**Paramita is a Sanskrit word. It means "arrived at the other shore." One goes from this shore of birth and death, through the intermediate current of afflictions, to the other shore, which is Nirvana. **Dana-paramita**. Dana is Sanskrit and means "giving." There are three kinds of giving:   
  
1. The giving of wealth   
2. The giving of Dharma   
3. The giving of fearlessness   
  
As to the giving of wealth, there is inner wealth and outer wealth. Inner wealth refers to one's head, eyes, brains, and marrow. Outer wealth refers to one's country, cities, spouse, and children—all belongings and loved ones. You practice giving your country, house, land, and treasures; even your spouse can be given.   
  
An example of the giving of Dharma is the present lectures being given on the Dharma. The giving of fearlessness takes place when one helps those who are afraid, by comforting them and making them feel secure.   
  
**Shila-paramita**: Shila means "precepts." In Buddhism, the precepts are very important. In order to leave home to be a Bhikshu, one must take the precepts. If one has not taken the complete precepts, one cannot be called a Bhikshu. It is said,

When living beings take the Buddha's precepts,   
They enter the position of all the Buddhas.   
Their position is the same as that of the greatly Enlightened One.   
They may be called true disciples of the Buddha.

If one can receive the Buddha's precepts, then no matter what kind of living being one is, one has a chance to become a Buddha.   
  
"If one does not take the precepts, can one become a Buddha?" you ask.   
  
It is very difficult. The chances of it happening are very small. And so in Buddhism, great emphasis is placed on the precepts. On Zhongnan Mountain in China, the Vinaya Master Daoxuan held his precepts so purely that the gods were moved, and every day they brought him an offering of food. That was a result of his strict morality.   
  
Upon taking the Buddha's precepts, one gains the same position as the Buddha and may be called a real disciple of the Buddha. Now to study the Buddhadharma, one must take and keep the Buddha's precepts. Those who keep the precepts cannot be lax and just do whatever they feel like doing. Keeping the precepts simply means following the rules. The laypeople have the Five Precepts; they can also take the Eight Precepts or the Ten Major and Forty-eight Minor Bodhisattva Precepts. Those who have left home take the Ten Shramanera Precepts, the 250 Bhikshu Precepts, or the 348 Bhikshuni Precepts.   
  
The gods will revere a person who is pure in keeping the precepts. That was why the gods brought food to Vinaya Master Daoxuan. If you are strict about keeping the precepts, all the ghosts and spirits will bow and pay respect when they see you. Therefore, it is very important to keep the precepts. Precepts are just for the purpose of "stopping evil and preventing transgression." They insure that one does no evil but does all manner of good deeds.   
  
Once one has taken the precepts, however, one must keep them. You must not break the precepts. If you break the precepts, it is as if you have sprung a leak in your life raft—you are headed for the bottom of the sea. If you take the precepts but fail to keep them, you will fall into the three evil paths—hells, hungry ghosts, and animals. If you do not intend to break the precepts, but some other cause or condition causes you to do so unintentionally, then it is excusable.   
  
Precepts are discussed in terms of exceptions, restrictions, maintenance, and violation. Precepts may require one to refrain from certain actions or to actively engage in certain kinds of conduct. There are a lot of fine points to the precepts that everyone should look into in detail.   
  
**Kshanti-paramita**: Kshanti is Sanskrit for "patience." Patience means bearing what you cannot bear. If you bear the bearable, that is nothing special. It is pretty ordinary. If you bear something that you just cannot bear, that is the perfecting of patience, of kshanti-paramita.   
  
**Virya-paramita**: Virya is Sanskrit for "vigor." **And dhyana-paramita**: Dhyana means "cultivation of thought." Through the cultivation of thought, one gives rise to concentration power.   
  
Precepts are of primary importance in developing dhyana concentration. In order to keep the precepts, one must have merit and virtue. In order to gain merit and virtue, one practices giving. If you have no merit and virtue, you may take the precepts, but you would not be able to keep them. Therefore, first you must do various meritorious deeds and give, and then cultivate the precepts. Then you can give rise to samadhi power, the dhyana-paramita.   
  
**All except prajna-paramita.** Why isn't prajna-paramita mentioned here? Prajna is the mother of all the Buddhas. If you have prajna, you have the opportunity to realize Buddhahood. Here the text discusses merit and virtue, not the actualization of one's potential Buddhahood. Now, in this analogy, a person cultivates these five paramitas **throughout eighty myriads of millions of nayutas of eons.**   
  
**Sutra:**  
  
**…the merit and virtue he or she would derive if compared with that of the previous person’s would not come to a hundredth part, nor to a thousandth, nor to a hundred thousand myriad millionth part, nor could it be known by resort to calculation or analogy.”**  
Outline:  
  
J2. The great merit of faith and understanding.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**...the merit and virtue he or she would derive if compared with that of the previous person's would not come to a hundredth part, nor to a thousandth** part, **nor to a hundred thousand myriad millionth part.** The merit and virtue of that person who cultivated the five paramitas for such a long time throughout eighty myriads of millions of nayutas of eons cannot be compared to the merit and virtue of one who gives rise to but a single thought of faith and understanding on hearing of the great life span of the Thus Come One. It is quite a contrast.   
  
**Nor could it be known by resort to calculation** by the most talented mathematician **or** by **analogy.** No one could know, ultimately, how great that merit and virtue would be.

**Sutra:**  
 **“For a good man or a good woman possessing merit and virtue such as this, to retreat from anuttarasamyaksambodhi would be simply impossible.”**  
Outline:  
  
H3. Not retreating in position or practice.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**For a good man or a good woman possessing merit and virtue such as this,** having given rise to a single thought of faith and understanding upon hearing of the vast length of life of the Thus Come One, **to retreat from anuttarasamyaksambodhi would be simply impossible.** It would simply never, ever happen.

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

**“If someone wished to seek the Buddha’s wisdomThroughout eighty myriads of millionsOf nayutas of kalpas,Practicing the five paramitasThroughout all those eons,He would give by making offerings to the Buddhas,The Pratyekabuddha disciples, And to the hosts of Bodhisattvas.**

**His gifts might be rare and precious food and drink,Fine clothing and bedding.He might give pure abodes made of chandanaAnd adorned by gardens and groves.**

**Gifts such as these,Varied and fine,Throughout this number of eons,He would dedicate to the Buddha Way.**

**Further he might hold the prohibitive precepts purely,Without flaw or fault,Seeking the supreme path,Praised by all the Buddhas.**

**Again, he might practice patience,Dwelling on the Ground of Compliance,So that should evil befall him,His mind would not be disturbed.**

**Also if those who have gained the Dharma, But who harbor overweening pride,Ridicule and torment him,He would be able to bear it.**

**He might be diligent and vigorous, Ever solid in his resolve,Throughout limitless millions of eons, Single-minded and never lax.**

**And for countless eons he mightDwell in a tranquil place,Ever collecting his thoughts, avoiding sleep, While either sitting or walking.**

**Because of these causes and conditions,He would then give rise to dhyana concentration,So that for eighty millions of myriads of eons, His mind would be secure and unconfused.**

**Blessed with this single-mindedness, He would seek the unsurpassed path, saying,“May I gain All-WisdomAnd exhaust the limits of dhyana concentrations.”**

**This person, for hundreds of thousands Of tens of millions of eons,Might practice such meritorious virtuesAs told above.**

Outline:  
  
G2. Verses.   
H1. Merit and virtue.   
I1. Comparison.   
J1. Comparing with the five paramitas.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**At that time, the World Honored One,** Shakyamuni Buddha, **wishing to restate this meaning**, because he feared some people would be skeptical of the great merit and virtue that merely hearing of the vast length of the Buddha's life span could generate, **spoke verses saying,**  
  
**If someone wished to seek the Buddha's** supreme **wisdom, throughout eighty myriads of millions of nayutas of kalpas,** such a vast amount of time, **practicing the five paramitas throughout all those eons, he would give by making offerings to the Buddhas,** the Dharma, and the Sangha—**the Pratyekabuddha** and the Arhat **disciples, and to the hosts of Bodhisattvas. His gifts might be rare and precious food and drink.** The most expensive food and drink might be offered to the Triple Jewel, the Bodhisattvas, the Arhats, and the Pratyekabuddhas, as well as **fine clothing and bedding,** and medicines too. There are Four Types of Offerings:   
  
1. Food and drink   
2. Clothing   
3. Bedding   
4. Medicine   
  
**He might give pure abodes made of chandana and adorned by gardens and groves.** The pure abodes made of chandana wood and the gardens and groves that adorn the Bodhimanda are offered to the Triple Jewel. **Gifts such as these, varied and fine,** very beautiful, **throughout this number of eons, he would dedicate to the Buddha Way.**  
  
**Further, he might hold the prohibitive precepts,** which refers to the Vinaya, the moral code. "Prohibitive" means restricting one's activities. He might uphold them **purely without flaw or fault.** This person keeps the precepts as purely as the full moon, with no defects. He does this in his **sincere seeking of the supreme path.** By holding the precepts, he is **praised by all the Buddhas.**  
  
**Again, he might practice patience, dwelling on the Ground of Compliance,** being gentle and forbearing, **so that should evil befall him,** when adverse circumstances come up or when others come to hurt him, **his mind would not be disturbed.** The mind is not moved, but is full of patience.   
  
**Also if those who have gained the Dharma, but who harbor overweening pride,** should **ridicule and torment him, he would be able to bear it.** Those of "overweening pride" are Bhikshus or Bhikshunis who think that they have more virtue than anyone else, and so they are arrogant. Even though these arrogant people scorn and torment him, he would not be turned or upset by such states in his cultivation of patience.   
  
**He might be diligent and vigorous, ever solid in his resolve** and mindfulness, **throughout limitless millions of eons, single-minded and never lax.** If one who is cultivating the Paramita of Vigor is only vigorous but does not maintain solid resolve, then it is useless. One must have solid resolve and mindfulness to help the vigor, and never be lax. One must not rest.   
  
**And for countless eons he might dwell in a tranquil place,** in an aranya, a still and quiet place, **ever collecting his thoughts, avoiding sleep, while either sitting** in meditation or engaged in **walking** meditation. Why does one alternately walk and sit? One wants to avoid falling asleep while sitting. "Collecting his thoughts" means watching his mind so that it does not indulge in false thinking. **Because of these causes and conditions, he would then give rise to dhyana concentration.** Because he concentrates on walking and sitting, his mind is collected to one point. Then,

When the mind is gathered to one place,  
There is nothing that is not accomplished.

He would give rise to the power of dhyana samadhi, **so that for eighty millions of myriads of eons, his mind would be secure** in dhyana concentration, without false thoughts **and unconfused. Blessed with this single-mindedness, he would seek the unsurpassed path, saying, "May I gain All-Wisdom.** Cultivating the blessings of single-mindedness, the blessedness of dhyana concentration, by seeking the supreme path, one can obtain All-Wisdom. If one wants to gain All-Wisdom, one must first cultivate dhyana samadhi **and exhaust the limits of dhyana concentrations.** Cultivating dhyana concentration to the limit, one gains all the dhyana samadhis. **This person, for hundreds of thousands of tens of millions of eons, might practice such meritorious virtues as told above.** He amasses the merit and virtue of cultivating the five paramitas.   
  
**Sutra:**

**But should there be a good man or woman, Who, hearing me speak of my life span, Gives rise to even a single thought of faith, His or her blessings will exceed those of the person just described.**

Outline:  
  
J2. The great merit of faith and understanding.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**But should there be a good man or woman, who, hearing me speak of my life span, gives rise to even a single thought of faith, his or her blessings will exceed those of the person just described.** Someone else hears the chapter on the Buddha's life span and produces true faith and understanding. This person's blessings exceed the merit and virtue gained by the one who practices the five paramitas as discussed above.   
  
**Sutra:**

**Any person who can be completely free Of doubts and misgivings And, with deep thought, believe for but an instant, Will reap blessings such as those.**

Outline:  
  
I2. Showing the limitlessness of blessings.   
 **Commentary:**  
**Any person who can be completely free of doubts and misgivings and, with deep thought, believe for but an instant, will reap blessings such as those.** His blessings will exceed those of the person who cultivated the five paramitas of giving, morality, patience, vigor, and dhyana samadhi for limitless eons.   
  
**Sutra:**

**Should there be BodhisattvasWho have practiced the Way for limitless eonsAnd who hear me speak of my life span,They shall be able to believe and accept it.**

Outline:  
  
H2. Not retreating in position or practice.   
I1. Not easy to have faith and understanding.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**Should there be Bodhisattvas who have practiced the** Bodhi **Way for limitless eons and who hear me speak of my life span, they shall be able to believe and accept it.** Because they have practiced the Way for such a long time, when they hear me explain this chapter on the life span of the Thus Come One, they will be able to deeply believe and understand it.   
  
**Sutra:**

**Persons such as theseWill receive this Sutra atop their heads,Vowing, “May we in the futureGain long lives and save living beings.Just as today the World Honored One,King of the Shakyas,In the Bodhimanda puts forth the lion’s roar,Speaking the Dharma without fear,So may we in lives to comeBe revered by allAnd, while seated in the Bodhimanda,Speak of our life spans in the same way.**

Outline:

I2. Believing and understanding, one must make a vow in order to attain irreversibility.

**Commentary:**   
  
**Persons such as these,** great Bodhisattvas, **will receive this Sutra atop their heads.** They will most respectfully receive, uphold, and practice the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra.   
  
They will **vow, “May we in the future, gain long lives and save living beings.** We too wish to attain an immeasurable, limitless life span. **Just as today the World Honored One, King of the Shakyas** and King of the Dharma, **in the Bodhimanda puts forth the lion's roar, speaking the Dharma without fear, so may we** Bodhisattvas **in lives to come be revered by all and, while seated in the Bodhimanda** after we have realized Buddhahood, **speak of our life spans in the same way.** At that time, our life spans will be as long as the Buddha's.   
  
**Sutra:**

**Should there be those who deeply believe, Who are pure and straightforward,With much learning and dharanis,Who explain the Buddhas’ words according to the doctrine--Persons such as theseWill have no doubts about this matter.**

Outline:  
  
H3. The appearance.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**Should there be those who deeply believe, who are pure and straightforward,** single-minded, pure, and honest in their practice of the Way, **with much learning and dharanis, who explain the Buddhas' words according to the doctrine, persons such as these will have no doubts about this matter.** Receiving and upholding the Sutras, there will be those who gain the Samadhi of Much Learning and the Samadhi of Uniting and Upholding. They will explain the Sutras according to the Buddha's meaning. They will have no doubts about the Buddha's life span and no doubts about the doctrines contained in the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra.   
  
**Sutra:**

**“Further, Ajita, if anyone hears of the long duration of the Buddha’s life span and understands the import of these words, the merit and virtue such a one gains will be without boundary or limit, for it shall enable one to give rise to the supreme wisdom of the Thus Come One.”**  
Outline:  
  
F2. Understanding the import of the words.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
Shakyamuni Buddha calls out again, **“Further, Ajita, if anyone hears of the long duration of the Buddha's life span** as previously discussed **and understands the import of these words,** the implication of what is being said, **the merit and virtue such a one gains will be without boundary or limit.** There is no one who could calculate how much merit and virtue one will gain, **for it shall enable one to give rise to the supreme wisdom of the Thus Come One.** Merit and virtue such as this will enable one to give rise to the Buddha's supreme prajna wisdom.   
  
**Sutra:**  
 **“How much the more so will this be the case for one who can listen to this Sutra extensively; ask others to listen; uphold it oneself; ask others to uphold it; write it out oneself; ask others to write it out; or use flowers, incense, beads, banners, flags, silk canopies, fragrant oils, or butter lamps to make offerings to this Sutra. Such a person’s merit and virtue will be limitless and boundless, for it shall enable that person to give rise to Wisdom of All Modes.”**  
Outline:  
  
F3. Hearing, upholding, and making offerings.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**How much the more so will this be the case for one who can listen to this Sutra extensively,** who finishes listening to the whole Sutra; who can **ask others to listen**—when you listen to the Sutras, ask your friends and relatives to come with you to the Sutra lectures—**uphold it oneself,** reading or reciting the Dharma Flower Sutra on one's own; **ask others to uphold it; write it out oneself; ask others to write it out; or use** an assorted variety of **flowers, incense, beads, banners, flags, silk canopies, fragrant oils, or butter lamps to make offerings to this Sutra. Such a person's merit and virtue will be limitless and boundless, for it shall enable that person to give rise to Wisdom of All Modes.** With this measureless merit and virtue from making offerings and reading, reciting, and writing the Sutra, one can accomplish Wisdom of All Modes and arrive at the position of Buddhahood.   
 **Sutra:**  
 **“Ajita! If a good man or good woman hears of the long duration of the Buddha’s life span and, with a deep mind, believes and understands, he or she will then see the Buddha ever-present on Mount Gridhrakuta together with the great Bodhisattvas and the assembly of Hearers surrounding him as he speaks the Dharma. He or she will also see the Saha world’s soil become lapis lazuli. It will be flat and even, with eight major roads bordered with Jambunada gold and lined with jeweled trees. Adjacent to the roads will be pavilions and towers all made of jewels, wherein hosts of Bodhisattvas dwell. To behold in this way is indicative of deep faith and understanding.”**  
Outline:  
  
F4. The vision accomplished through deep faith.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
The Buddha continues, **“Ajita! If a good man or good woman,** one who cultivates good deeds, **hears** me speak **of the long duration of the Buddha's life span and, with a deep mind, believes** what I say about the Buddha's life span **and understands** the principles, **he or she will then see the Buddha.”** To be able to believe in the Sutras is to see the Buddha's Dharma body. Why? Because reading the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra is just the same as seeing the Buddha. The Dharma Flower Sutra is both the true body of the Buddha and the Dharma body of the Buddha; thus it is the same as seeing the Buddha. You should not think that since the Buddha has entered Nirvana, he is not speaking the Dharma. The Buddha is always speaking the Dharma Flower Sutra. In India, the Buddha spoke the Dharma Flower Sutra and the Nirvana Sutra for eight years. In India the Sutra was written out on palm leaves, which, if they were laid out end to end, would stretch for eight miles.   
  
The Buddha is **ever-present on Mount Gridhrakuta,** Magic Vulture Mountain, **together with the great Bodhisattvas and the assembly of Hearers** and Those Enlightened to Conditions **surrounding him as he speaks the Dharma.**  
  
**He or she,** the person who sees the Buddha, **will also see the Saha world's soil become lapis lazuli. It will be flat and even,** without deep seas or high mountains, but flat like the palm of the hand, **with eight major roads bordered with Jambunada gold.** Why is it that the earth appears to have high mountains and deep seas? It is because people's minds are not even. If people's minds were even, the ground would be even. The mountains and seas are seen as a result of the karma of living beings. If you certify to the fruit, although you are in this world, you are in a different state, so the situation is different. The earth is seen as it really is—"flat and even." It is said that in Jambudvipa there is the Jambu tree on the bank of a large river, and when the leaves of this tree fall into the water, they turn to gold—the finest gold in the world. This Jambunada gold is used to make golden cords to border the "eight major roads," which represent the Eightfold Path. The roads are **lined with** rows of beautiful **jeweled trees** of the seven treasures. They are wonderful and fine to behold. **Adjacent to the roads will be pavilions and towers all made of** seven **jewels, wherein hosts of Bodhisattvas dwell.** The Bodhisattvas live within the towers. **To behold in this way is indicative of deep faith and understanding.** If you recite, listen to, and contemplate the Dharma Flower Sutra this way, it means that you deeply believe in it.   
  
**Sutra:**  
 **“Further, after the passing into stillness of the Thus Come One, if a person hears this Sutra and does not defame it but instead rejoices over it, you should know that that indicates he already has deep faith and understanding.”**  
Outline:  
  
E2. The five kinds after passing into stillness.   
F1. Listing the five kinds and a general description the four latter kinds of merit.   
G1. Prose.   
H1. Rejoicing.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**Further, after the passing into stillness of the Thus Come One**—after the Buddha has entered Nirvana—**if a person hears this**Dharma Flower ***Sutra* and does not defame it but instead rejoices over it, you should know that that indicates he already has deep faith and understanding.** Those without faith would slander the Dharma Flower Sutra; those with faith would not defame the Sutra upon hearing it, but would rejoice in merit and virtue.   
  
**Sutra:**  
 **“How much the more so is this the case for one who reads, recites, receives, and upholds it.”**  
Outline:  
  
H2. Those who also uphold, read, and recite it.   
I1. The type of person.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**How much the more so is this the case for one who reads** from the text, **recites** from memory without looking at the text, **receives, and upholds it** always, cultivating in accord with the principles in the Dharma Flower Sutra.   
  
**Sutra:**  
 **“This person carries the Thus Come One on the top of his head.”   
  
“Ajita! This good man or good woman need not build stupas or temples for me, nor build Sangha dwellings, nor make the four kinds of offerings to the Sangha. Why not? This good man or good woman, in receiving, upholding, reading, and reciting this Sutra, has already built stupas, erected Sangha dwellings, and made offerings to the Sangha. He has built stupas of the seven treasures for the Buddha's sharira. The stupas are high and broad, tapering up to the Brahma Heavens, hung with banners and canopies. He has also offered many jeweled bells, flowers, incense, beads, ground incense, paste incense, and burning incense, as well as many drums, musical instruments, pipes, flutes, reeds, various dances, and praises sung with wonderful sounds. He has already made such offerings throughout limitless thousands of myriads of millions of eons.”**  
Outline:  
  
I2. Comparison of merits and virtues.   
 **Commentary:**   
  
**This person carries the Thus Come One on the top of his head.** This means that he holds the Buddha in utmost reverence, as if he had the Buddha on top of his head. **Ajita, this good man or good woman** who can read, recite, and write out this Sutra and uphold it **need not build stupas or temples for me.** Why? The Sutra itself is the Buddha's stupa, the Buddha's temple, a Bodhimanda.   
  
So we say that by reciting the Sutra we are building a temple. However, if one can, in addition to that, bring forth one's resolve to build stupas and monasteries though one do not need to, that is fine too. One does not have to take the Sutra so literally as to thinks it is not necessary to build stupas and temples. If you build a stupa, people will see it and recognize that the Triple Jewel is there, and they will be reverent. If you build a big monastery with many Buddhist images and books, a library and so on, and many adornments, people will want to go there. When they visit, they will give rise to faith and the Bodhi mind, and they will plant good roots. Even though the Sutra says it is not necessary to build them, you may, if you are able. There is nothing wrong with building a few stupas, temples, or Bodhimandas. **Nor** does such a person need to **build Sangha dwellings,** places for the Sangha to live, **nor make the four kinds of offerings to the Sangha.** The Buddha said one need not make the four kinds of offerings, but if one can, one should make offerings. If as a layperson one does not make offerings, one would not amass any merit and virtue. And if no one makes offerings to the Sangha, the members will have to go hungry. The Four Kinds of Offerings are:   
  
1. Food and drink   
2. Clothing   
3. Bedding   
4. Medicine   
  
But if you recite the Dharma Flower Sutra and are also able to make such offerings, then you may. But if you are unable, you do not have to.   
  
**Why not? This good man or good woman, in receiving, upholding, reading, and reciting this Sutra has already built stupas, erected Sangha dwellings, and made offerings to the Sangha. He has built stupas of the seven treasures for the Buddha's sharira. The stupas are high and broad.** He has already built a stupa by reciting the Sutra. By reciting this Sutra, one makes offerings to the Buddha Jewel, the Dharma Jewel, and the Sangha Jewel.   
  
He has also the same merit and virtue as making offerings to the Buddha's sharira, for the Dharma Flower Sutra is the Buddha's sharira. And when you recite, you build the stupas of the seven treasures. Such stupas reach vertically through the three periods of time and pervade horizontally in the ten directions. They are so tall that they go **tapering up to the Brahma heavens.** They taper up not because they are built that way, but because when you look at one from the ground, it goes up so high that it appears to taper up. They are **hung with banners and canopies. He has also offered many jeweled bells** made of the seven treasures, **flowers, incense, beads, ground incense, paste incense,** which is smeared on the body, **and burning incense**—by reciting the Sutra, you are making such offerings to the Buddha—**as well as many drums, musical instruments, pipes, flutes, reeds, various dances, and praises sung with wonderful sounds.** If you can read and recite the Dharma Flower Sutra, it is like singing such praises in beautiful voices. The recitation of the Dharma Flower Sutra is, in itself, a kind of music. **He has already made such offerings throughout limitless thousands of myriads of millions of eons.**

**Sutra:**  
 **“Ajita! If, after my passing into stillness, a person, hearing this Sutra, can receive and uphold it, write it out, or ask others to write it out…**Outline:  
  
H3. Also asking others.   
I1. The type of person.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**“Ajita,** Invincible One! **If, after my passing into stillness, a person, hearing this Sutra,** the Dharma Flower Sutra, **can receive and uphold it** himself, **write it out** himself, **or** else **ask others to write it out...”**   
  
**Sutra:**  
 **“…he will thereby have built Sangha dwellings and made thirty-two halls of red chandana, eight tala trees in height, high, broad, and adorned, with hundreds and thousands of Bhikshus dwelling within them, filled also with gardens, groves, bathing ponds, pathways, dhyana caves, clothing, food, drink, bedding, medicines, and musical instruments. Such Sangha dwellings, halls, and pavilions—uncountable hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of them—shall be uncountable in number and shall manifest as an offering before me and the Bhikshu Sangha. Therefore I say that after the Thus Come One’s entry into stillness, if a person receives, upholds, reads, recites, or explains this Sutra to others, if he writes it out, asks others to write it out, or makes offerings to this Sutra, he need not further build stupas, monasteries, or Sangha dwellings nor need he make offerings to the Sangha.”**  
Outline:  
  
I2. Comparison of merits and virtues.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**“...he will thereby have built Sangha dwellings and made thirty-two halls of red chandana.”** One who receives, upholds, reads, recites or writes out the Dharma Flower Sutra gains merit and virtue equal to that gained by building Sangha dwellings. Red chandana is a fragrant wood used for incense.   
  
"How can reciting Sutras be the same as building a Buddhahall?" you ask. Reciting Sutras adorns the Dharma body of your self-nature, the "hall" of your self-nature. "Thirty-two" represents the thirty-two marks of the Buddha. The Sangha dwellings will be **eight tala trees in height.** That is about fifty feet. They will be **high, broad, and adorned, with hundreds and thousands Bhikshus dwelling within them.** The hall that you build in your self-nature **will be filled also with gardens, groves, bathing ponds, pathways, dhyana caves** for sitting in meditation, **clothing, food, drink, bedding,** including sitting cloths, **medicines, and musical instruments.**  
  
**Such Sangha dwellings,** the adorned Sangha dwellings of the self-nature, **halls and pavilions—uncountable hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of them**—**shall be uncountable in number and shall manifest as an offering before me,** Shakyamuni Buddha, **and the Bhikshu Sangha. Therefore I say that after the Thus Come One's entry into stillness,** his entry into Nirvana, **if a person receives, upholds, reads, recites, or explains this Sutra to others, if he writes it out, asks others to write it out** because he does not know how to or does not have time to do it himself, **or makes offerings to this Sutra, he need not further build stupas, monasteries, or Sangha dwellings, nor need he make offerings to the Sangha.** If someone reads, recites, upholds, writes out or instructs others to write out the Dharma Flower Sutra, he or she does not need to build a stupa. The stupa is already built.

**Sutra:**  
 **“How much the more so does this apply to a person who can uphold this Sutra and at the same time practice giving, holding precepts, patience, vigor, single-mindedness, and wisdom.”**  
Outline:  
  
H4. Also practicing the six perfections.   
I1. The type of person.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**How much the more so does this apply to a person who can uphold this Sutra,** without forgetting it **and at the same time practice giving,** in all its forms, **holding precepts, patience, vigor, single-mindedness**—that is, dhyana meditation—**and wisdom.** These are the six perfections.   
  
In this passage of text, we are talking about adorning the Triple Jewel of the self-nature—the Buddha of the self-nature, the Dharma of the self-nature, and the Sangha of the self-nature. Reading, reciting, and writing out the Dharma Flower Sutra are ways of adorning the Triple Jewel of your self-nature. When you have perfectly adorned the Triple Jewel of your self-nature, the eternally dwelling Triple Jewel will manifest.  
  
**Sutra:**  
 **“His virtue shall be supreme, limitless, and unbounded. Just as space to the north, east, south, west, the intermediate points, the zenith, and the nadir is limitless and boundless, so too this person’s merit and virtue shall be limitless and boundless, and he shall speedily attain to the Wisdom of All Modes.”**  
Outline:  
  
I2. Comparison of merits and virtues.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**His virtue shall be supreme, limitless, and unbounded.** We are speaking of the limitless merit and virtue of one who can receive and uphold the Dharma Flower Sutra. His merit and virtue is supreme. It cannot be compared to ordinary merit and virtue. It is especially great. How great? Immeasurable, unlimited, unbounded. **Just as space to the north, east, south, west, the intermediate points, the zenith, and the nadir,** that makes ten directions in all, **is limitless and boundless, so too this person's merit and virtue shall be limitless and boundless, and he shall speedily attain to the Wisdom of All Modes.** Try to find the borders of space. You cannot. No one can know ultimately how great it is. Although presently there are astrophysicists who investigate these matters scientifically, they will admit that ultimately they do not know how big space is.   
  
There are Three Types of Wisdom:   
  
1. All-Wisdom.   
2. Wisdom of the Way.

3. Wisdom of All Modes. The Wisdom of All Modes is the Buddha's wisdom. One attains this kind of wisdom when one reaches the Buddha's position.

**Sutra:**  
 **“A person may read, recite, receive, and uphold this Sutra, explain it to others, write it out, or ask others to write it out, and he may further build stupas or Sangha dwellings. He may make offerings to and praise the Sangha of Hearers, and laud the merit and virtue of the Bodhisattvas in hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of ways. Further he may explain the meanings in the Dharma Flower Sutra to others while according with their various causes and conditions. In addition he may uphold the precepts purely, dwell in harmony with people, be patient and without anger, and be of solid resolve and mindfulness. He may always value sitting in dhyana, obtaining deep concentration. He may be vigorous and heroic, gathering in all good dharmas. He also may possess keen faculties and wisdom, and be skillful at answering questions.”**  
Outline:  
  
H5. Practicing the six perfections proper.   
I1. The type of person.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**A person may read, recite, receive, and uphold this Sutra.** He receives it with his mind and practices it with his body. He may **explain it to others, write it out, or ask others to write it out, and he may further build stupas,** monasteries, **or Sangha dwellings. He may make offerings to and praise the Sangha of Hearers,** praising the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, **and laud the merit and virtue of the Bodhisattvas in hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of ways. Further he may explain the meanings in the Dharma Flower Sutra to others while according with their various causes and conditions.**  
  
This reminds me of a story. Once there was a very high official who protected the Triple Jewel. He also studied the Dharma Flower Sutra. He was able to remember the first three and a half rolls very quickly, but no matter how hard he studied, he could not remember the last three and a half rolls. Thinking this strange, he asked a Good and Wise Advisor, one who had gained the penetration of the knowledge of past lives, about his erratic memory. Curious, he asked him, "I really like the Dharma Flower Sutra, and I am able to remember the first half of the Sutra very easily, but no matter how hard I try, I cannot remember the last half. Why is this?"   
  
The Good and Wise Advisor went into samadhi and took a look. Then he told the official, "Your causes and conditions are very special. In your last life, you were not a human being. You were an ox! Someone let you go in a liberating life ceremony and gave you to a monastery. In the middle of the summer, the monks would set the Sutras out in the sun to dry them so that worms would not eat them. As an ox, you happened to walk over to the Sutras and sniff the first half of the Lotus Sutra. You, as the ox, did not sniff the second half. Because you sniffed the first half, you can remember it very easily. But since you did not sniff the second half, you are not able to remember it clearly."   
  
The official was not very happy when he first heard the story. "How can you say I was an animal? An ox! What proof do you have?"   
  
"You want proof? Go look out behind the temple. There was a grave there where we buried an ox that died, the ox that we let go in a liberating life ceremony. The abbot at that time also had spiritual powers, and he knew where that ox would be reborn in the future, what its name would be, and so on. He wrote it on a piece of paper and buried it with the ox. So if you do not believe it, you can dig up the grave and check the piece of paper. It has got your name on it. You are an official now because of the merit you gained helping the monastery by plowing the fields."   
  
From this we can infer that people who help out in temples can be high officials in future lives, for even an ox who worked for a temple was able to do so. So it is important to support temples by doing meritorious deeds.  
  
**In addition he may uphold the precepts purely.** This means that he purifies his mind as well as his body. Purifying the mind means to harbor no affliction, hatred, or defilement in one’s mind nor any scattered thoughts. Purifying the body means refraining from impure acts, acts which are not in accord with Dharma. It means always following the rules. Following the rules is being pure. He may **dwell in harmony with people,** abiding in the cultivation of gentleness and forbearance, **be patient and without anger, and be of solid resolve and mindfulness.** This means not casually retreating, not studying the Buddhadharma for a few days and then quitting. **He may always value sitting in dhyana,** taking great delight in it and **obtaining deep concentration.** So during Chan sessions, you should not waste even a second. It is just in that second that you can get enlightened. If you waste time, then you would not get enlightened. Why not? Because you do not value sitting and think it is unimportant. He attains a deep samadhi, not a shallow one.   
  
**He may be vigorous and heroic.** In cultivation, you should not only be vigorous, but also heroic. If you think about being vigorous, but you are not actually vigorous with your body, then you are not being heroic. In order to be vigorous, you must be heroic. You must not fear any kind of suffering or difficulty. During the Chan session, several people have made vows not to speak. This is a good idea. If you speak, you will have more false thinking.   
  
"If I do not speak, will I have less false thinking?" you ask.   
  
No, you would not have less false thinking, but you can get a handle on it. You can maintain your original investment, as it were. If you do not speak, your energy would not get scattered. It is said,

When the mouth opens,   
One's spirit and energy scatter.   
When the tongue wags,   
Gossip arises.

People who cultivate should not gossip—discuss "rights and wrongs." But as soon as one opens one's mouth, gossip comes out.   
  
"Well, Dharma Master, isn't your lecturing of Sutras 'discussion of rights and wrongs'?" you ask.   
  
Yes, but there is a difference. This kind of "right and wrong" is spoken so that you will come to know the difference between the two. The gossip you do is done without your knowing the difference between them. Lecturing on the Sutras is not gossip. The Sutras are the Dharma spoken by the Buddha. So do not mistakenly think that lecturing on the Sutras is the same as gossiping. Lecturing is done to give you a method to use in your cultivation. If I did not explain the method of cultivation to you, you would not know how to go about cultivating. So it is okay to lecture on the Sutras. If you know how, you can lecture, too. I am really happy that people have vowed not to talk during the Chan session. That is being vigorous and heroic.   
  
**Gathering in all good Dharmas** means collecting one's thoughts and not indulging in false thinking. To indulge in false thinking is to collect evil dharmas. Good thoughts are good dharmas. If your thoughts are not good, then you have evil dharmas. **He also may possess keen faculties and wisdom,and** be very intelligent. He may **be skillful at answering** difficult **questions** that people pose. People are satisfied and happy with the answers he gives to their questions, because he resolves all their doubts.   
  
**Sutra:**  
 **“Ajita! If there is a good man or good woman who, after my passing into stillness, is able to receive, uphold, read, and recite this Sutra and who also is able to amass these other good deeds and meritorious virtues, such a person has already turned towards the Bodhimanda, has drawn near to anuttarasamyaksambodhi, and is seated beneath the tree of the Way. Ajita! Wherever such a good man or good woman is, whether he or she is sitting, standing, or walking, one should build a stupa at that place, and all gods and humans should make offerings to it as if it were a stupa of the Buddha.”**  
Outline:  
  
I2. Comparison of merits and virtues.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**Ajita! If there is a good man or good woman who, after my passing into stillness, is able to receive** in their minds, **uphold** with their bodies, **read, and recite this Sutra,** the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra, **and who also is able to amass these other good deeds and meritorious virtues,** you should know that **such a person has already turned towards the Bodhimanda,** which is under the Bodhi tree, **has drawn near to anuttarasamyaksambodhi,** the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment, the fruition of Buddhahood. The text refers to any and all such good men and women. When the Buddha spoke the Dharma Flower Sutra, he was speaking hypothetically of good men and women, but now that you are listening to the Sutra being explained, you yourselves are real instances of such good men and women. The Buddha's words have come true. **And** such a one **is seated beneath the tree of the Way,** turning the Dharma-wheel, teaching and transforming living beings.   
  
**"Ajita! Wherever such a good man or good woman is, whether he or she is sitting, standing, or walking, one should build a stupa at that place."** This could be any of you here listening to the Sutra as well. You should not think it is anyone else. One should build a jeweled stupa for such a person, **and all** the **gods and humans should make offerings to it as if it were a stupa of the Buddha.**   
  
**Sutra:**  
 **At that time the World Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke verses, saying,**

**“If a person, after my passing,Can reverently uphold this Sutra,His blessings shall be unlimited,As described above.**

**For he will have then completedAll manner of offerings,And built sharira-stupasAdorned with the seven treasures,With towers high and broad,Tapering up to the Brahma Heavens,Hung with millions and millions of jeweled bells,Making wonderful sounds in the wind.**

**And also, throughout limitless eons,He shall have made offerings to this stupaOf flowers, incense, beads,Heavenly garments, and all kinds of music.**

**He shall have burnt fragrant oil in butter lamps,Which shine brightly all around.In the evil age, during the Dharma’s demise,He who can uphold this Sutra,Will then, as mentioned above,Have perfectly made all these offerings.**

Outline:  
  
G2. Verses.   
H1. The second kind of merit.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**At that time the World Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke verses, saying, “If a person, after my passing, can reverently uphold this Sutra, his blessings shall be unlimited as described above.”** When Shakyamuni Buddha has taught and transformed those living beings he was supposed to teach and transform, he will enter Nirvana. By upholding the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra with the utmost respect, one gains limitless, boundless blessings. **For he will have then completed,** by upholding the Sutra, **all manner of offerings, and built sharira-stupas.** He will have created the same merit as if he had built stupas for sharira. **Adorned with the seven treasures, with towers high and broad.** Vertically, these stupas reach through the three periods of time and horizontally they pervade the ten directions, **tapering up to the Brahma Heavens.** "Tapering" represents the progression in cultivation from coarse to fine practice. One first cultivates on a "coarser" level the practice of giving. Within the practice of giving there are many fine points. The same applies to holding precepts. One first takes the precepts against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and taking intoxicants. Later, each breaks down into many fine interpretations. One cultivates the most obvious Dharmas and gradually penetrates into imperceptible, inconceivable Dharmas.   
  
These stupas will be **hung with millions and millions of jeweled bells making wonderful sounds in the wind.** They will make subtle and wonderful Dharma sounds. **And also, throughout limitless eons he shall have made offerings to this stupa of flowers, incense, beads** of all kinds, **heavenly garments, and all kinds of music. He shall have burnt fragrant oils in butter lamps, which shine brightly all around** illumining the Dharma Realm. **In the evil age,during the Dharma's demise**—in the Dharma-Ending Age—**he who can uphold this Sutra,** the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra, **will then, as mentioned above, have perfectly made all these offerings.**   
 **Sutra:**

**If a person can uphold this Sutra,It will be as if in the presence of the Buddha himselfHe used oxhead chandanaTo build Sangha dwellings as offerings to him.**

**These thirty-two halls,Eight tala trees in height,Replete with fine food, clothing,And bedding, whereinHundreds of thousands may dwell,Will be amply adorned with gardens, groves, bathing ponds,Pathways, and dhyana caves.**

Outline:  
  
H2. The third kind of merit.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**If a person can uphold,** read, and recite **this Sutra, it will be as if in the presence of the Buddha himself,** who always remains in the world, **he used oxhead chandana to build Sangha dwellings as offerings to him.** Oxhead chandana is the most expensive incense. Its fragrance permeates a distance of forty li [about thirteen miles] as an offering to the Sangha. **These thirty-two halls,** representing the thirty-two marks, **eight tala trees in height**—the eighty minor characteristics—**replete with fine food, clothing,** medicines, **and bedding** such as sleeping bags, **wherein hundreds of thousands** of left home people **may dwell, will be amply adorned with gardens, groves, bathing ponds, pathways and dhyana caves.**   
  
**Sutra:**

**He may, with faith and understanding,Receive, uphold, read, recite, and write,Or request others to write,And make offerings to this Sutra,Scattering flowers, incense, and scented powder,And constantly burning lamps with fragrant oils Made of sumana, champaka, and atimuktaka.He who makes such offeringsGains limitless merit and virtue.Just as empty space is boundless,So shall his blessings be.**

Outline:  
  
H3. The fourth kind of merit.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**He may, with faith in and understanding** of the Dharma Flower Sutra, **receive, uphold, read, recite, and write, or request others to write, and make offerings to this Sutra, scattering flowers, incense, and scented powder, and constantly burning lamps with fragrant oils made of sumana.** "Sumana" means "in accord with one's wishes." The flower is very delicate, but it has a penetrating fragrance. He may scatter **champaka**, a golden fragrant flower, **and atimuktaka,** which is sesame. This plant, which has red seeds and bluish-green leaves, produces oil. These fragrant flowers are made into oil for oil lamps. **He who makes such offerings gains limitless merit and virtue. Just as empty space is boundless, so shall his blessings be.**   
  
**Sutra:**

**How much greater is the merit Of he who upholds this Sutra,Who also gives, holds precepts, Who is patient and takes delight in dhyana samadhi,Who is never hateful or foul-mouthed,And who is reverent in stupas and temples,Humble towards the Bhikshus,Far-removed from arrogance,And ever-thinking on wisdom.**

**He may refrain from anger When asked difficult questionsBut be compliant in making explanations.He who can perform such practicesShall have limitless merit and virtue.**

**If one sees a Dharma MasterAccomplish virtues such as these,One should scatter heavenly flowers,Offer him heavenly garments,Bow with one’s head at his feet,And think of him as one would a Buddha.**

**One should further think,“Soon he will arrive at the Bodhimanda,Attain to no-outflows—the unconditioned—And broadly benefit gods and humans.”**

**Wherever such a person stays,Walks, sits, or reclines,Or speaks but a single verse,One should build a stupa,Wonderfully fine and adorned,And make all kinds of offerings to it.**

**The disciple of the Buddha, dwelling in this place,Enjoys it as would the Buddha,Always abiding therein,Walking, sitting, or reclining.”**

Outline:  
  
H4. The fifth kind of merit.   
  
**Commentary:**   
  
**How much greater is the merit of he who upholds this Sutra, who also gives, holds precepts, who is patient and takes delight in dhyana samadhi, who is never hateful or foul-mouthed** towards any living being, **and who is reverent in stupas and temples, humble towards the Bhikshus, far-removed from arrogance** or self-importance and pride, **and ever-thinking on wisdom.** He may ponder on wisdom and not be stupid. **He may refrain from anger when asked difficult questions.** Should someone come and ask him all kinds of difficult, impossible questions, he does not get mad, **but** is able to **be compliant in making explanations.** He accords with all living beings and explains these questions. **He who can perform such practices shall have limitless merit and virtue,** massive and incalculable. **If one sees a Dharma Master** who lectures on the Sutras and the Dharma practice the six perfections and the myriad conducts, and **accomplish virtues such as these, one should scatter heavenly flowers, offer him heavenly garments, bow with one's head at his feet,** making a full prostration, **and think of him as one would a Buddha. One should further think, "Soon he will arrive at the Bodhimanda, attain to** the Samadhi of **No-outflows** and the Wonderful Dharma of **the unconditioned, and broadly benefit gods and humans."**  
  
**Wherever such a person stays, walks, sits, or reclines, or speaks but a single verse, one should build a** jeweled **stupa, wonderfully fine and adorned,** beautiful and inconceivable with the seven treasures, **and make all kinds of offerings to it.** One should make offerings of food, drink, bedding, and medicines to the Dharma Master. **The disciple of the Buddha,** the son of the Dharma King, **dwelling in this place, enjoys it as would the Buddha, always abiding therein.** His state is the Buddha's state. Thus, the Buddha will be at this Bodhimanda, whether **walking, sitting, or reclining.**