**The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra**

**Chapter 25: The Universal Door of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva
(The Bodhisattva Who Contemplates the Sounds of the World)**

With Commentary by the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua

*T*he Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra has seven rolls and is divided into twenty-eight chapters. This is Chapter Twenty-five, the “Universal Door Chapter.” It deals with the spiritual powers and miraculous functions of the inconceivable state of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, the Bodhisattva who Contemplates the Sounds of the World.

There are ten causal conditions for the speaking of this chapter:

1. Person and Dharma. The person is Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. The Dharma is the manifestation of the Universal Door.

Guanshiyin Bodhisattva saves beings from the seven difficulties, counteracts the three poisons, and responds to the two kinds of seeking. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva is an inconceivable person. The manifestation of the Universal Door--the response to all seeking and the penetration of all responses--is an inconceivable Dharma. Since it is inconceivable, it is called Wonderful Dharma.

Due to the causes and conditions of the Wonderful Person and the Wonderful Dharma, the “Universal Door Chapter” is spoken.

2. Kindness and Compassion. The second causal condition is kindness and compassion. Because of compassion Guanshiyin Bodhisattva speaks the “Universal Door Chapter.”

What is kindness and compassion? Kindness bestows happiness; compassion relieves beings of suffering.

Guanshiyin Bodhisattva saves living beings from the seven difficulties, counteracts the three kinds of poison, and responds to two kinds of seeking of living beings. The seven difficulties are enumerated in the text itself. The three poisons are greed, hatred, and stupidity. The two seeking are seeking for a son and seeking for a daughter.

Living beings are all poisoned by greed, hatred, and stupidity. However, if a person who has much greed can always reverently recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, he can separate from greed. If he has a lot of hatred and can always reverently recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, he can separate from hatred. If he is very stupid and always reverently recites the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, he can leave his stupidity.

There are many forms of greed, and just as many, if not more, forms of hatred. Stupidity, however, takes neither too many nor too few forms. Stupidity means a lack of wisdom and a lack of deep understanding. It causes one to fail to perceive the principles underlying various events.

In China, the philosopher Wang Yangming defined stupidity as conduct that does not accord with one's knowledge. He said, "Why does one fail to do things? Because one does not understand. If one understood, one would act accordingly."

Some people say, "Well, it is possible for people to understand, but still not act accordingly." Wang Yangming would answer, "They do not really understand. If they did, they would act accordingly." His philosophy was "understanding and doing are one". If a person really understood, he would not do stupid things. Why do people do stupid things? Because they do not really understand.

There is a poem about stupid people that goes,

Why aren't the flowers always in bloom?
Why isn't the moon always full?
If only all the waters of the earth would turn to wine!
And the leaves of the trees turn to gold!

Someone says, "I wish my flowers would always bloom and never fade."

People who like the moon wish it would always be full and never wax or wane, "The full moon is so bright and pretty. And I do not need to light lamps, so I save money." Wouldn't you say that was stupid? Can the moon be full every night? No, that is impossible.

People who like to drink think, "Every day I have to go buy my bottle of whiskey or brandy, and it is very expensive. Wouldn't it be great if the lake turned into liquor? I could just go down to the lake and take a drink whenever I felt like it."

People who are greedy for money think, "I have to go to work to earn money. It is really painful. If all the leaves of the trees turned to money, wouldn't that be great?" But that is obviously impossible. It is just another form of wishful thinking.

Another stupid person might wish for a Ph.D. degree when he has not even gone to elementary school or high school. That, too, is stupid. Someone may want to win the horse races when he has not even bought a ticket.

Stupid as it is, most people fall prey to such types of thinking. So what is to be done? If you are prone to this type of thinking, you should change, that's all.

With great kindness, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva helps living beings leave suffering and attain bliss. The “Universal Door of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva Chapter” is spoken out of great kindness and great compassion.

3. Blessings and Wisdom. It is said that Guanshiyin Bodhisattva "follows the sounds to relieve beings from suffering."

He distinguishes all the different sounds in the world--good sounds, bad sounds, sounds of suffering, sounds of joy, sounds of what is right, and sounds of what is wrong. He does this with his wisdom. Where does his wisdom come from? It comes from the practice of giving. He gives the Dharma to living beings, and as a result, he gains boundless wisdom and blessings.

4. True Body and Response Bodies. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva uses the wonderful power of the true body to rescue living beings from the seven kinds of difficulties, to counteract the three poisons, and to fulfill the two kinds of seeking. He also manifests in thirty-two kinds of response bodies.

The “Universal Door Chapter” is spoken on the basis of the true body and the response bodies.

5. Medicine King Tree. What is the Medicine King Tree?

Long, long ago, there was a man who went into the mountains to gather firewood. Then he would take it to the market to sell.

One day, he met a doctor. The doctor saw something emitting light in the firewood, so he bought the wood and took it home. When the doctor opened the bundle, he found a Medicine King Tree. No matter what illness people had, all the doctor had to do was to swish the Medicine King Tree over the patients or gently tap them with it, and they would be cured. In this way, he saved many people.

What is the Wish-Fulfilling Pearl? "Wish-Fulfilling" means that you obtain what you wish, according to your heart's desire. If you want something nice to eat, something very delicious will manifest from inside the pearl for you. If you want some nice clothes, the outfit of your dreams will manifest from the Wish-Fulfilling Pearl. This pearl can manifest clothing, food, and even a place to live. You can say, "Tonight, I want to stay in the most beautiful house," and it will manifest for you. The next day, the house will go right back into the pearl.

The pearl can manifest exactly the right amount of food for you, never too much or too little. That is why it is called Wish-Fulfilling. As to your clothes, you would not need to hang them up in the closet, because when you are done wearing them, they will go right back into the pearl. How big is the pearl? It is pretty small. You can carry it with you. It is not heavy, and it does not take a lot of room. A man is thinking, "Can it get me a pretty wife?" Well, I do not know about that. A woman is thinking, "Can it get me a handsome husband?" Do not ask me; I really do not know.

In any case, then, the “Universal Door Chapter” is like a Medicine King Tree and a Wish-Fulfilling Pearl. It fulfills your wishes just as you desire. All you have to do is recite the “Universal Door Chapter,” and you will get what you wish for.

You cannot recite it today, however, and have a response tomorrow. You have to lay a good foundation first. It is like constructing a building. You have to lay the foundation first. Without the foundation, you cannot erect the building.

The “Universal Door Chapter” is like a Medicine King Tree and a Wish-Fulfilling Pearl. It is that magical, amazing, and inconceivable; but you first have to recite it. You should recite it every day until Guanyin Bodhisattva thinks that you have passed the test, that you are sincere enough. If you do not recite it regularly, you cannot obtain a response when you need one. You have to apply effort in your cultivation in an ordinary manner--then an inconceivable response has a chance to occur.

Someone says, "There are too many things to learn in Buddhism. There is the Shurangama Mantra, the Great Compassion Mantra, and now the ‘Universal Door Chapter.’ Where am I going to find the time for all these?" It does not take that much time. All you have to do is to skip an hour of sleep and do a little less chatting with people. If you have no aspirations, or no wishes that you would like to be fulfilled, then you do not need to recite. If you say, "I do not want anything. I am not greedy for anything. I am not hateful or stupid, so I do not need to recite this," then what is there to talk about? But if you feel that perhaps you might run into trouble and need Guanyin Bodhisattva's help in the future, then you should certainly study a bit more Buddhadharma. The Buddhadharma is like a great sea, and none of you have drunk even one drop of it yet. You will never be able to drink it all. But even though you cannot drink it all, you can drink your fill according to your capacity. The Buddhadharma is endless for the taking and inexhaustible in its function.

Thus, we study and recite the “Universal Door Chapter” because it is like the Medicine King Tree and the Wish-Fulfilling Pearl.

6. Manifest and Secret. When you recite the “Universal Door Chapter,” sometimes you will obtain a revealed or manifest response. At other times, you will obtain a secret or hidden response.

A manifest response is one that everyone can see and understand. The “Universal Door Chapter” says, "If he enters a great fire, the fire will not burn him." While this great fire blazes, if you single-mindedly believe in Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, and recite his name with true faith, the houses around may burn down, but your house would not. But this applies only if it is an accident. You cannot decide to try it out and light a fire to see if your house will burn. If you do that, your house is sure to burn down. Why? Because you are testing Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. This shows that you do not have adequate faith. That is like testing your friend to see if he is really a loyal friend. "I will just leave five hundred dollars here on the ground. If he is a good person, he would not take it. If he is a bad person, he will." But why do you want to test out your friend? Because you do not really recognize him. You do not truly know if he is a good friend.

If you do not believe the Sutra and you feel you have to test it out to see if the fire will burn you, you basically do not believe in Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. Since you do not believe in Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, he does not have the time to watch over your affairs. Go ahead and burn your house down if you like. If you want to commit suicide and jump into the ocean to see if the water will drown you so that you can test out Guanshiyin Bodhisattva's spiritual powers, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva is not going to pay any attention to you. Since you do not believe in him, he is not going to involve himself in your business. But if your house accidentally catches fire and you recite with true sincerity, you would not be burned. But it has to be accidental; it cannot be something that you try as an experiment.

"Well, ultimately I would not know if it is true or false if I do not test it out," you say.

If you know it is true, then what? If you do not know it is true, then what? Whether you know or do not know that it is true, you still have to eat and wear clothes in order to live. So isn’t it a superfluous question?

So the neighbor's house burns down, but yours does not. That is called a manifest response. Everybody knows about it.

There may also be a secret response. For example, perhaps you are due for some calamity--you were due to fall into the sea and drown--but Guanyin Bodhisattva secretly arranges it so that the calamity does not happen. Nobody knows about it. Even you do not know about it. You were supposed to undergo a calamity but it disappears. That is called a secret response. Say someone was supposed to be burned to death in a fire, but he believes in Guanyin Bodhisattva and his disaster vanishes. You could have been due to die in a plane crash, a train crash, or on the highway, but because you believe in Guanyin Bodhisattva and you sincerely recite the “Universal Door Chapter” and the Great Compassion Mantra, Guanyin Bodhisattva secretly and silently dispels calamities and turns your misfortune into good fortune. Everything is auspicious and as you wish.

Thus, the “Universal Door Chapter” was spoken because of the manifest and secret responses. Both the manifest and secret responses are perfectly interpenetrating, and so the merit and virtue of the “Universal Door Chapter” is inconceivable.

The Great Compassion Mantra functions in this inconceivable manner as well as the “Universal Door Chapter.”

Once in Manchuria, there was a farmer who was returning home with his friends from a business trip. When he was almost halfway home, he saw a band of robbers about a mile up ahead. What was he going to do? He could not run away because the robbers had caught sight of him, and so he was sure to be robbed. Just at that moment, he recited the Great Compassion Mantra. When he got to where the robbers were, one of them came forward and took the reins from the driver, saying, "I will drive." They drove right through the gang of bandits as if they were invisible. When they were safely through, the man gave the reins back to the driver. The farmer said, "You saved us from the robbers today. What is your name? Where do you live? I would like to send you a reward." The man said, "My name is E Shi Yun." Now, everyone knows the line E shi yun is from the Great Compassion Mantra, and that it is also the name of a Dharma Protector.

At that time, the farmer did not remember that E shi yun was a line from the Great Compassion Mantra. After the man left, he remembered, "He is a Dharma Protector in the Great Compassion Mantra!" This is an inconceivable state manifest from the Great Compassion Mantra. But if you recite it just to test it out, E Shi Yun is not going to show up. It is only if you recite and believe in the Mantra that unlucky circumstances can be turned into lucky ones. If you run into E Shi Yun, be sure to recognize him. Do not be like the farmer who did not remember who he was until he was gone.

7. Provisional and Real. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva uses the power of the Dharma body to secretly benefit living beings. This is called the real. He also uses the thirty-two response bodies to teach and transform living beings. This is the provisional.

Guanshiyin Bodhisattva provides living beings a temporary teaching to lead them to the real teaching. Because of the provisional and the real, the “Universal Door Chapter” was spoken.

8. Roots and Traces. With the Dharma body, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva saves all living beings. The Dharma body is the root. The response bodies used to teach and transform living beings are the traces. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva's Dharma body is like the moon; that is the root. The traces are like the moon's reflection in all the waters:

The moon lends its reflections to the waters of a thousand rivers.

The “Universal Door Chapter” is spoken because of the root and traces. With one Dharma body, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva manifests within the hearts of all living beings. He causes all living beings to change from evil and go toward the good, to leave suffering and attain bliss, and ultimately to become Buddhas.

Someone is thinking, "No wonder I have not changed for the better. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva has not manifested in my heart. That is why I do not wish to change my faults." Those who smoke, think, "Probably the reason I have not quit smoking is that Guanshiyin Bodhisattva is not helping me." Someone who likes to drink is thinking, "It is Guanshiyin Bodhisattva's fault that I have not quit drinking. He is not helping me." And suddenly he is upset with Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, "He is unfair! Why does he help other people but not me?" Now, that is stupidity added onto stupidity.

Why isn't Guanshiyin Bodhisattva helping you? Because you do not listen to his instructions. Hearing Guanshiyin Bodhisattva's name, you should reform yourself and go toward the good. You should calm your mind down and cool off. Let go of the past and concentrate on doing better in the future. For instance, if you take the precepts, you must keep them. If you know something is wrong but you still go ahead and do it anyway, then your offenses are doubled. It is a mistake to blame Guanshiyin Bodhisattva for not protecting you. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva wants to help you out, but you keep the door of your mind closed. You don't let him help! All that Guanshiyin Bodhisattva can do is sigh and say, "You are truly pitiful!" So do not blame Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.

9. Condition and Finality. "Condition" refers to causes and conditions. "Finality" means putting an end to the cause; it also means understanding the cause.

During this Summer Session, people get up very early in the morning and use every minute to study the Dharma. Those who live far away rise at four o’clock in the morning so they can come to meditate and study the Sutra. There are even students working on their Ph.D.’s, Master’s, and Bachelor’s degrees from the University of Washington in Seattle who have come to join the session. This shows that they recognize the importance of the Buddhadharma. Why have people come such great distances to hear the Dharma? Because they want to understand and put an end to the cause. Hearing the Sutra plants a seed for putting an end to the cause.

During the first ninety-six-day summer session [in 1968] people were so absorbed in their work that they did not taste their food or drink and did not know whether they were awake or asleep. What were they doing? They were singlemindedly studying the Shurangama Sutra. Every day from six in the morning till nine at night, they listened to four hours of lectures, meditated, did their personal practices, and took meals. The time passed swiftly, and although people had some afflictions, I believe they did not take them too seriously. The ninety-six days were soon up.

Realizing the importance of studying the Buddhadharma, over ten of these people moved from Seattle to San Francisco. They gave away most of their possessions and everything. Among them, the translator was the first one to move down. He was studying at the University of Washington and could have graduated much earlier. But since he has transferred to University of California at Berkeley, it will take him longer to graduate. This shows how these students all look upon the Buddhadharma as important, and so they have come from many miles away to study it. In the future when you have understood the Buddhadharma you will be able to teach it to your fellow Americans. Then I would not have to expend so much energy.

I explain the Sutra once and you do not understand, so I explain it again and you still do not understand. Why? Because I cannot speak English. Those who know Chinese can understand me, but those who do not cannot. For example, Guo You is very sincere, but when I lecture he just stares at me without any idea of what I am saying. So it is very difficult. Now that you are learning the Buddhadharma, you can explain it very naturally and eloquently without even thinking about it. This will make it much easier. Thus the “Universal Door Chapter” is spoken because of the condition and Finality.

10. Wisdom and Severing. Another reason is the pair of wisdom and severing. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva is adorned with both the virtue of wisdom and the virtue of severing. With the virtue of wisdom, he teaches and transforms living beings. With the virtue of severing, he cuts through and severs all forms of ignorance. The virtue of severing can also be called the virtue of blessings. Because the Bodhisattva has severed ignorance, he is truly adorned with blessings. The Buddha is complete with blessings and wisdom. Although a Bodhisattva, Guanshiyin is also adorned with blessings and wisdom.

Taken altogether these are the ten causal conditions for the speaking of the “Universal Door Chapter” of the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra.

Before we delve into the Sutra text, let us look into the meaning of the name Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, the Bodhisattva Who Contemplates the World's Sounds.

**Guan**, “contemplate,” is the wisdom which contemplates. **Shiyin,** “the world's sounds,” are the states he contemplates. No matter what the sound is, this Bodhisattva knows it. He knows all the sounds of living beings, every single sound. Why? Because he contemplates them all day long!

Sounds are basically heard, not seen. Why is it said he "contemplates" or "observes" them? Can you see sounds? No. But Guanshiyin Bodhisattva can see them! You cannot see them, but he can. He sees them as if they were on a radar screen. Every living being manifests as a blip on his radar screen. He can chart you every sound. That is one way to explain it.

There is another way, and that is that Guanshiyin Bodhisattva can see with his ears, and hear with his eyes. Even though we say he **observes** the sounds of the world, he can also **hear** with his eyes. Not only can he see with his eyes, he can hear with them as well. Why? Because he has the spiritual powers of the interpenetration of the six sense organs. Those who cultivate the Dharma Flower Sutra will obtain the purity of the six faculties. They can then use the six sense organs in mutual interpenetration. How much the more so can Guanshiyin Bodhisattva! Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, then, can speak with his ears, eat with his ears, listen with his eyes, and think with his eyes. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva gained the state of the mutual interpenetration of the six sense organs a long, long time ago and so he is able to contemplate the sounds of the world.

"Why does he want to look after so many things?" you ask, "observing sounds all day long. What use is that?"

Guanshiyin Bodhisattva does this because he cannot put down living beings--you, me, and others. He sees all living beings as his own children. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva is like a mother to all of us. He is always checking to see which child is crying, which child is laughing, and which child might be cold or hungry. He is busy all day long looking after all of us kids.

"Does that make him some kind of a baby-sitter?" you ask.

Pretty much, yes. But he does not get paid. Too bad! Because he cannot put living beings down, he wants to contemplate the sounds of the world. He looks to see what suffering living beings are undergoing, and he finds a way to help them. When he sees living beings involved in a disaster, he saves them from it.

Guanshiyin Bodhisattva "follows the sounds to rescue beings from suffering". If you are suffering, all you have to do is recite "Namo Guanshiyin Bodhisattva", and you will find your unlucky circumstances turn into good fortune. Everything will turn out just as you want it to. Most people do not know about this most wonderful Dharma and so when they are in greatest danger, it does not occur to them to recite Guanshiyin Bodhisattva's name.

If, in great danger, you can remember to recite Guanshiyin Bodhisattva's name, you will be okay. If you are in a fire, it would not burn you. If you are in the water, you will not drown. If you do not know how to swim, you will just find yourself in a shallow place. Such are the responses from Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. All you have to do when in great danger is recite Guanshiyin Bodhisattva's name. You are sure to gain a response and be rescued. But you must have faith. You cannot waver between faith and doubt.

Let us say you are in a fire and you are reciting Guanshiyin Bodhisattva's name but you are thinking, "This is not going to work. Nothing is that magical." With that one doubt, he would not be able to rescue you. Why not? Because you do not believe. You must believe single-mindedly. "I am reciting and Guanshiyin Bodhisattva will certainly come and save me."

Let us say a tiger is just about to swallow you up. You shut your eyes and recite, "Namo Guanshiyin Bodhisattva". Suddenly, the tiger would not be able to open his mouth! That is how powerful Guanshiyin Bodhisattva is.

**Bodhisattvas** are beings who enlighten other living beings. They are also called "living beings with great minds for the Way". They are "those who enlighten sentient beings". They can also be called "sentient beings who are enlightened".

**Sutra:**
 **At that time, Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva rose from his seat, uncovered his right shoulder, placed his palms together, and facing the Buddha, said, “World Honored One, for what reason is the Bodhisattva Guanshiyin called ‘Guanshiyin?’”**
Outline:

D2. “Universal Door” chapter.
E1. Questions and answers.
F1. Prose.
G1. First question.
H1. Question.
 **Commentary:**

“**At that time**” refers to the time when the chapter on the Bodhisattva Wondrous Sound was finished and the “Universal Door Chapter” was about to begin. This is the time when **Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva**, being present in the Dharma Flower assembly, asked the Buddha how Guanshiyin Bodhisattva got his name.

Inexhaustible Intention is the Bodhisattva's name. In general, there are three kinds of inexhaustibility.

1. The inexhaustibility of worlds like floating motes of dust. We should not think that the world consists simply of what our eyes can see or our ears can hear. There are limitless, boundless worlds--this world, that world, and an infinite number of worlds. These worlds are like floating specks of dust. Why "floating?" Because they are in a state of constant agitation and movement; they are never still. Another aspect of dust is that it is not clean; or world is filled with dust.

When the sun comes out and shines through a slightly opened window, you will see an infinite number of dust particles dancing, bobbing up and down. Where does all this dust come from? From the minds of living beings. Why? Because living beings' minds have too much idle thinking. Idle thinking is like floating dust. Take a look at how much idle thinking you are aware of. Try to imagine how much idle thinking you cannot perceive! In a single thought there are ninety kshanas. A kshana is the briefest instant of time. In one kshana, there are nine hundred births and deaths.

So where do all these worlds come from? They come from living beings' idle thoughts. Relying on the true, they give rise to the false. From a single false thought, the mountains, the rivers, the great earth, and all the buildings and vegetation are created.

2. The inexhaustibility of living beings, with their vast karma. Worlds are boundless, and boundless living beings are created out of these worlds. Living beings are born from a mass of causes and conditions. Some are born from womb, others from eggs, moisture, or transformation. These are discussed in detail in the Shurangama Sutra. Living beings are born from wombs because of the emotion of love. Other beings are born from eggs because of thought.

Where do living beings come from? They come from the Buddha nature.

We say, "All living beings have the Buddha-nature and all can become Buddhas." But this is not the same as saying, "Living beings are Buddhas." You cannot become a Buddha without cultivating. You have to cultivate, meditate, and study the Buddhadharma. Then you can return to the root and go back to the source and become a Buddha. You cannot say, "Living beings are Buddhas. We do not need to cultivate!" That is just deviant knowledge and deviant views. You must cultivate to become a Buddha.

3. The bottomlessness of the river of love, with its endless waves. Not just people, but also animals, are attached to love. They are not clear about principles, and their sexual desire is very strong. You should lessen your desires and purify your mind. Pare away your thoughts of desire. Then you would not be far from Buddhahood.

Why is this river of love bottomless? Because the more you fall, the more you tend to fall; the deeper you sink, the deeper you get mired. Thoughts of desire are like waves which never stop. Why are there waves on the sea? Because there are waves in our minds. The waves in our minds are made from the river of love which flows without stopping.

No matter how sharp a knife you may use to try to cut off your emotional love, it is still not easily severed. But it is said that, "The sword of wisdom can slice through emotion." With genuine wisdom, you can solve this problem and cut it off. Without wisdom, you fall into the bottomless river of love.

Because of these three kinds of inexhaustibility, Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva wishes to turn inexhaustible worlds into the Land of Ultimate Bliss, to cause inexhaustible living beings to become Buddhas, and to fill up the bottomless, inexhaustible river of love. That was why he is called Inexhaustible Intention.

Bodhisattva is a Sanskrit word which means "enlightened being." Bodhi is “the Way of enlightenment.” A sattva is “one with sentience.” A Bodhisattva uses the doctrines of awakening to the Way to enlighten all beings with sentience. The Bodhisattva resolves, "I am enlightened and I am going to find a way to cause all beings to become enlightened." This is to enlighten oneself and enlighten others.

Where do Bodhisattvas come from? They come from living beings. Bodhisattvas start off as living beings, just like you and me. However, they become enlightened living beings. We living beings are confused; they have awakened. If you wake up today, you are a Bodhisattva today. If you wake up tomorrow, you will be a Bodhisattva tomorrow.

Wake up to what? Wake up out of your ignorance. If you can know where your ignorance came from and break through it, you are awakened. If you cannot break through your ignorance, you are confused. When one breaks through ignorance, the Dharma-nature manifests. Ignorance disappears, and the river of love dries up. Once the river of love has dried up, your wisdom can manifest.

So, a Bodhisattva is a person who enlightens others--an enlightened one among living beings.

Bodhisattvas are also called "living beings with great minds for the Way." They are also called "Initiating Knights." They can open up living beings' stupidity in order to reveal the original Buddha-nature.

When the Dharma Flower Sutra was spoken, five thousand people in the assembly walked out. Who were they? They were those with overweening pride, the arrogant and naughty ones. When Shakyamuni Buddha started lecturing the Dharma Flower Sutra, he said, "I am now lecturing the real truth. I am not speaking provisionally." These five thousand people were unhappy with him and left in a huff.

Having heard the “Wondrous Sound Bodhisattva Chapter,” Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva then **rose from his seat.** In a large assembly, if you want to say something you have to stand up. You cannot just raise your hand. Not only did he stand up, but he **uncovered his right shoulder.** That was the custom to show respect in India, and so today our sashes do not cover the right shoulder.

In India and Southeast Asia, the monks do not have clasps on their sashes. They just wear them as clothes; they do not need a clasp. Since the robe is their main piece of clothing and is next to their skin, if it falls off they will know. In China, the monks wear clothing underneath their sashes. And so if their sashes fall off, it is not easy for them to detect it. That is why they attach a clasp to their sashes.

Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva uncovered his right shoulder as a gesture of respect, **placed his palms together, and facing the Buddha said, "World Honored One."**

“World Honored One” means that the Buddha is honored by those in and beyond the world. The narrative preceding the phrase “World Honored One” was added by Ananda at the time the Sutra was compiled. **For what reason is the Bodhisattva Guanshiyin called 'Guanshiyin?'"** With great compassion, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva rescues people from the seven difficulties, counteracts the three poisons, and responds to the two kinds of seeking. He has fourteen kinds of fearlessness and nineteen ways of speaking Dharma. For what reason is he called Guanshiyin Bodhisattva? What Dharma did he cultivate in the past that he is now called Guanshiyin?

**Sutra:**
 **The Buddha told Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva, “Good man, if any of the limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of living beings who are undergoing all kinds of suffering hear of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva and recite his name single-mindedly, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva will immediately hear their voices and rescue them.”**

Outline:

H2. Answer.
I1. General answer.

**Commentary:**

**The Buddha told Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva.** This is also a phrase of narrative spoken by the Sutra compiler, Ananda. **"Good Man,"** said Shakyamuni Buddha, **"if any of the limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of living beings..."** Let us assume that there are countless living beings from all the types of birth--egg, womb, moisture, transformation; with form, without form; with thought, without thought; not totally endowed with thought, and not totally lacking thought--**who are undergoing all kinds of suffering.**

There are many forms of suffering, but, in general, they can be said to fall into four categories:

1. One person may undergo one kind of suffering. This is like a mute experiencing suffering of which he alone is aware, since he cannot express his misery. Hence the saying, "like a mute tasting huanglian." Huanglian is the most bitter kind of Chinese herbal medicine.

2. One person may undergo many kinds of suffering. A single individual may run into natural disasters or man-made calamities, experiencing the entire gamut of suffering.

3. Many people may undergo one kind of suffering. For example, people in South Vietnam experience the agonies of war, bloodshed, or political upheavals. Or there may be epidemics that wipe out entire populations at one time.

4. Many people may undergo many kinds of suffering. Because there are many living beings, there are also many varieties of suffering. How many kinds of suffering are there? Basically, there is no way to count them all. In general, there are 84,000 kinds.

So what should people do when they have to undergo all these terrible kinds of suffering? When they **hear of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva,** they should **recite his name single-mindedly.** When you are suffering, do not forget Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.

Now, how many people in America have heard of the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva? Those who have heard of it are very few. Think it over. "Hearing" just means understanding and being able to learn about something. You have studied the Shurangama Sutra and you know of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva's perfect penetration of the ear organ and his thirty-two response bodies--all his inconceivable spiritual powers of self-mastery.

The most important requirement is single-mindedness. You should have one mind, not two or three. If you are scattered, the effect of your recitation is diminished. Unless you turn to one, it is not efficacious.

Now we have been working single-mindedly. Last week my disciples were setting up the Buddha-altar. This week they were dumping loads of garbage until Guo You said, “I am really tired, I do not want to work tomorrow.”

I said, “One gains merit and virtue doing work for the Buddhadharma.”

He said, “What does merit and virtue look like?”

I could not tell him what it looks like. So I said, “If you want to work, go ahead. If you do not, just forget it.”

Actually, work like this has priceless merit and virtue which is worth much more than any amount of gold, silver or jewels. You should not work and harbor doubts at the same time, thinking, “Is there any merit and virtue in this?” Just do the work and have faith. There is great merit and virtue in working for the Buddhadharma, but it is not something that can be seen. Why not? Because it is too real. If it were false, you could see it. If it could be seen, thieves could steal it! Since it is invisible, it can never be taken away from you. It remains forever in your account of merit and virtue. Therefore, stay single-minded; do not have two or three minds about things.

“Guan” means to contemplate, “shi” means world, and “yin” means sounds. This Bodhisattva contemplates the sounds of all living beings who hear of or recite his name in all the worlds, whatever the distance. **Guanshiyin Bodhisattva will immediately hear their voices and rescue them.** These desperate living beings will be rescued from all torment. They will be happy. They will obtain genuine freedom and be without restraints or hang-ups.

**Sutra:**
 **“If a person who upholds the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva enters a great fire, the fire will not burn him, all because of this Bodhisattva’s awesome spiritual power.”**
Outline:

I2. Specific answer.
J1. Response to mouth karma.
K1. The seven difficulties.
L1. The difficulty of fire.
 **Commentary:**

Guanshiyin Bodhisattva rescues living beings from the seven kinds of difficulties, the first of which is fire. Now another hypothetical case is presented, of **a person who upholds the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.** “Uphold” means to receive and maintain, and not to forget. In every thought one recollects the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, reciting "Namo Guanshiyin Bodhisattva." If such a person **enters a great fire, the fire will not burn him.** However, this means that one recites the Bodhisattva's name during ordinary times. One cannot wait until there is a disaster and then recite like crazy to make up for lost time.

There is a saying,

In your free time you never light incense,
But when there's an emergency, you are on your knees before the Buddha.

If you do not cultivate during ordinary circumstances but wait until an emergency to do so, it is not going to work.

"Sometimes there are cases when someone does not ordinarily recite, but Guanshiyin Bodhisattva does save them. How does that happen?" You ask.

Everyone has his or her own set of causes and effects. In former lives, perhaps this person recited vigorously and performed many kinds of meritorious deeds. In this life, even though he does not recite, the power of his good roots from reciting in previous lives carries through and he is saved. This is an example of a distance cause. However, if you think you can wait and rely on your good roots, there is no guarantee. If you recite well in this life, I guarantee that in the future you will be helped in an emergency. If you do not have the penetration of past lives, how do you know whether you recited in the past? If you have the Heavenly Eye or Heavenly Ear, you might know; but in order to be sure it is still better to recite now.

Once there was a man who wanted to go to Mount Putuo in Nanhai to bow to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. He became a vegetarian three years before going to Mount Putuo. But can you guess what happened? Just as he got on the boat, a neighbor came running up and said, "Our entire neighborhood is on fire." Then his relatives arrived and said, "Bad timing. Come back and save our home!"

"I have been preparing for this pilgrimage for three years, and now I am on the boat. If the house is supposed to burn, it will burn anyway, even if I get off the boat now. If Guanshiyin Bodhisattva protects me, then it would not burn and I do not need to get off the boat. I can go to the mountain. I would rather have my house burn down, than not go bow to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva."

He did not pay attention to anything after that. He went to Mount Putuo to bow to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, and when he returned to his own village, every house in his neighborhood had burned down except for his. Everyone said, "Why didn't your house burn?"

He replied, "I put everything down. I just went to bow to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. It was through the power of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva."

So if a person enters a great fire, the fire will not burn him, **all because of this Bodhisattva's awesome spiritual power.** That is why he would not be burned.

**Sutra:**

**“If a person being tossed about in the great sea calls out the Bodhisattva’s name, he will find a shallow place.”**
Outline:

L2. The difficulty of water.

**Commentary:**

**If a person** is **being tossed about in the great sea,** that is, if he is accidentally thrown into the ocean, he can be saved by reciting Guanshiyin Bodhisattva's name. Now, you cannot do this on purpose just to test it out. If you try to test Guanshiyin Bodhisattva to see if he is efficacious or not, he most certainly will not be. You will sink without a doubt. Why? Because you are testing him! You are not a teacher and he is not a student, so why do you want to test him? You do not believe Guanshiyin Bodhisattva has such spiritual powers, and so tested him out. It is as if you really did not have faith in a friend and so tested him out to see if he is truly loyal. You leave some money lying around to see if he will steal it. That is because you really do not know whether he is your good friend or not.

Why would you want to test Guanshiyin Bodhisattva? Because you do not really have faith in him. But in testing him, you may lose your own life. Do not experiment with your life.

If the person **calls out the Bodhisattva's name, he will find a shallow place.** You would not quite know how it happened, but suddenly you will be on the shore. It all happened due to the power of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.

**Sutra:**
 **“If the hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of beings who seek gold, silver, lapis lazuli, mother-of-pearl, carnelian, coral, amber, pearls, and so forth enter the great sea, an evil wind may toss their boats into the territory of the rakshasa ghosts. But if among them there is even one person who calls out the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, they will all be saved from the difficulty of the rakshasas. For this reason, he is called Guanshiyin.”**
Outline:

L3. The difficulty of the rakshasas.

**Commentary:**

Among the seven kinds of difficulties, this is the third, the difficulty of meeting with rakshasa ghosts. **If the hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of beings who seek gold, silver, lapis lazuli, mother-of-pearl, carnelian, coral, amber, pearls, and so forth.** People are greedy for these things because they think they are treasures. Actually these things are external to the body. Before you have understood the true treasures within your own nature, even if you greedily pursue external treasures, they would not be of any great use. They have nothing to do with your own nature. But most ordinary people seek these things.

Every country is greedy for gold and so most citizens think it is a rare and valuable thing. Day and night, they scheme to get gold. This goes on to the point that countries fight with other countries over gold. Why do people think gold is so valuable? Because there is not very much of it, so everybody is greedy for it. It is hard to obtain and so people even dream of it. Some go to Africa, some to America. The Chinese used to call America "Old Gold Mountain." Everyone ran here from China for the gold. Once they had got most of the gold from America, they ran off to Australia, to " New Gold Mountain."

People travel all over for the gold. We do not know how many people died on the high seas coming over here after the gold. A lot of them. But communications were not as advanced in those days, and the news did not get reported. A lot of people died and no one ever knew. That is because they met with the difficulty of the evil wind while searching for treasures. They had small boats, nothing like the big ones we have today. Some found gold, but most did not. Everyone knows about those who found the gold, but who knows about all those people who died at sea? There is no record of those who were lost. Many went to New Gold Mountain, to Australia.

People also went to find silver. Gold is first, and silver is second in value. Next comes lapis lazuli, which is translated as "blue gem." Mother-of-pearl has lines running through it that look like cart tracks, but its surface is actually very smooth.

Carnelian is called "horse brain," because there are thread-like lines running through it that resemble blood vessels. In the old days in China, those who smoked pipes had their long pipes made out of carnelian or jade. They were very expensive. Those people, having eaten their fill and having nothing else to do, wanted to be different, to show how unusual they were, and so they made extravagant pipes. They would compete to see who could have the most expensive pipes, to show off how rich they were.

Coral grows in the ocean in formations that look like trees. Some of them grow to be three feet tall. I have seen one that was one foot tall. There are small creatures in the ocean who leave their shells in these shapes that look like trees. Such trees are very expensive.

In China, a man called Shi Chong once competed with a certain relative of the Emperor to show off his wealth. The Emperor had given his relative a coral tree, probably about two feet tall, especially expensive. The person invited Shi Chong to dinner one night and showed him his coral tree. "See my expensive coral tree?" he asked.

Shi Chong picked it up and threw it on the ground, smashed it into pieces. The man was crushed. "That coral tree was given to me by the Emperor! Now what do I do?"

"Do not worry about it," said Shi Chong, "I will replace it. Come over to my house tomorrow and you can pick a coral tree out of my collection."

When the Emperor's relative went to Shi Chong's house the next day, he saw that the living room was filled with lovely coral trees all over three feet tall! The man realized he was nowhere near as wealthy as Shi Chong, even though he was the Emperor's relative, and so he took a coral tree and left.

Later, Shi Chong, however, was murdered for his money. It is said,

People die because of wealth;
Birds die because of food.

Amber is another kind of precious substance. Sometimes it is yellow in color and called golden amber. Pearls are obtained from oysters.

If people should **enter the great sea** to acquire such things, they may run into trouble. And suppose **an evil wind** comes up. This is hypothetically speaking, mind you. An evil wind is literally a "black wind." This is something everyone personally has.

What do I mean? This is what happens when your face gets all contorted with affliction and turns black. When you get angry, you have an evil wind. If you have no temper, you do not have an evil wind. The great sea is the sea of our own nature. The evil wind is ignorance. We speak about it in many ways, but it all comes back to the same thing--ignorance. Ignorance is also called affliction. If you have affliction, you have an evil wind. Without affliction, the sea of your own nature is calm and placid. To seek jewels is to enter your own nature to look for treasures. When you try to uncover the treasures within your own nature, you might run into demonic obstacles. Demonic obstacles arise because you do not have enough virtue. If you have not done enough virtuous deeds, your virtue is not complete, and so the evil wind--the demonic obstacle--starts blowing. If you possess great virtue, the evil wind will turn into auspicious clouds--fortunate energy.

In China we say,

When the Way is lofty, dragons and tigers are subdued.
When virtue is profound, ghosts and spirits are respectful.

When the Way is lofty, the dragons will coil up and the tigers will lie down when they see you. Dragons are basically very fierce, they can move mountains and turn over the seas with their spiritual penetrations. But if you have the Way, even though dragons have such spiritual powers, they do not dare use them on you. They have to coil up. Tigers are very mean, but if you have no anger, when they see you they will act like tame dogs--like house pets. They will wag their tails and welcome you like kitty cats. But you must have the Way--Tao. If you do not, the dragons would not coil up and the tigers would not crouch.

If your virtue is sufficiently profound, then when the ghosts and spirits see you they will bow. But you must have the virtue; otherwise, they would not. Therefore, developing virtue by doing virtuous deeds is most important.

The evil wind **may toss their boats into the territory of the rakshasa ghosts;** they will be in trouble. Rakshasa ghosts eat people's essence and energy. They are female. **But if among them**--the people on the boat--**there is even one person who calls out the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, they will all be saved**--all hundreds of myriads of millions of them--**from the difficulty of the rakshasas. For this reason, he is called Guanshiyin**--the Contemplator of the World's Sounds.

Virtue is something all people should consider the most important issue, because virtue is what differentiates people from animals. Without virtue, we are no different from animals.

Also, virtue must be put into action. If you do not “do” it, it is not there.

In Manchuria, I had a very good friend. He was my good friend because he was on the same Path as I was. I observed filial piety by my mother's grave, and he had done the same by his mother's grave. He was called Filial Son Yu. Before he began his filial practice, he had been a robber. He went everywhere plundering households and kidnapping people.

Once he was wounded in a fight. The wound festered and refused to heal for over half a year. At that time he woke up: "Probably I have been doing too many wrong things and so my wound would not heal." Then he made a vow, "If my wound heals, I will never rob again. I will observe filial piety at the graves of my parents." After he had this thought, his wound was well in a few days, and he went to start his practice. Many strange things happened to him then. There is not enough time to go into all of them in detail today.

Once, seeking to stop the rain to aid his village, he cut off his flesh as an offering to Heaven. While he was sitting beside his parents' graves, it started raining and the rain continued for days and days. He thought, "All the crops will be flooded," and so he began to pray for the rain to stop. As a token of his sincerity, he said, "If the rain stops within three days, I shall cut off my flesh as an offering to the Heaven and the Buddha." After he made this vow, oddly enough, in two and a half days or so, the rain stopped.

To carry out his vow, he stood before a Buddha image and cut off about one or two ounces of his flesh as an offering. Then he fainted from the shock and the pain. When he woke up again, the ground was covered with blood. The magistrate of Shuangcheng County happened to come by. Seeing Filial Son Yu lying in a pool of blood, the magistrate thought he was deranged. But when he found out the details of his offering, he said, "That was terrific!" and was very impressed.

Soon after this incident, a little bird came to visit Filial Son Yu. It chirped in a very strange way. It said, "Do more virtue! Do more virtue! Doing more virtue is good!" [In Chinese, Duo zuo de! Duo zuo de! Zuo de duo hao!] It was telling people to do more good things, the more the better.

That is why I am not afraid of working too hard. I work along with you all day and then I lecture at night. I do so because I want to do more giving of Dharma. In America, the Buddhadharma is extremely scarce and so I am not afraid of working hard to give you the Buddhadharma. No matter how hard it is, I am not going to go on strike. To say nothing of all of you, even if only one or two of you understand what I am saying, that will be enough. I will have found "those who know my sound."

Now there are so many of you who come every day to hear the Sutra. You are all my most understanding Dharma friends and so, even though it gets tiring--people get tired when they work--I go ahead and speak the Buddhadharma for all of you.

**Sutra:**
 **“Further, if a person who is about to be harmed calls out the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, the knives and staves of the attackers will break into pieces and he will be saved.”**
Outline:

L4. The difficulty of knives and staves.

**Commentary:**

This is the difficulty of knives and staves. **Further, if a person who is about to be harmed**--on the verge of being murdered--**calls out the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, the knives and staves of the attackers will break into pieces.** Just as they put the knife to your throat or the stick to your head, the weapon will split apart and be useless. Basically, a knife is stronger than your neck, but now your neck is stronger and the knive breaks.

Why does this happen? Because of the great awesome power of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. This power causes your neck to be stronger than iron, so the knife breaks. **And** in this way **he**--the person who is being attacked--**will be saved** from the difficulty of knives and staves. This is all because he recites the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.

"Is it that magical?" you say.

It is even more efficacious than that! All you have to do is sincerely and faithfully recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.

**Sutra:**
 **“If yakshas and rakshasas enough to fill the three thousand great thousand world system come to torment a person, if they hear him call out the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, all those evil ghosts will not even be able to stare at that person with their evil eyes, how much the less harm him.”**
Outline:

L5. The difficulty of ghosts.
 **Commentary:**

This is the difficulty of yakshas and rakshasas. **If yakshas and rakshasas enough to fill the three thousand great thousand world system come to torment a person.** Yakshas are "speedy ghosts." There are flying yakshas, space-travelling yakshas, and earth-bound yakshas. Yakshas are extremely fast. They can run faster than rockets. Rakshasas eat people's essence and energy.

Both these types of ghosts specialize in harming people. The more you try to bring forth the Bodhi resolve, the madder they get and the more they try to torment you. They think of all kinds of ways to obstruct you so you cannot cultivate. They cause you to retreat. You may bring forth the Bodhi resolve and be cultivating with great vigor and then they will come along and say, "What are you cultivating for? Why do you study the Buddhadharma? Do not do it. It is plain useless."

They can cause you to have doubts. They will bore into your mind, and say, "Do not study the Buddhadharma. Go somewhere else, where you can be free, where you can dance and listen to music whenever you want to. The Buddhadharma is just 'do not do this, do not do that, don't, don't, don't!' You cannot watch movies, cannot drink, cannot smoke. So many things that you cannot do! The more you study it, the more trouble you will have." The yakshas and rakshasas cause you to think like that.

You may want to leave the home-life and be a monk, but these ghosts will say, "That is too bitter. You have to work all day long. You never get enough sleep, enough clothes to wear, or enough food to eat. You have to work your head off, practically. Forget it! What bother?"

Someone else might want to be a Bhikshuni, but the yakshas and rakshasas come along and say, "Get married. You will have a husband to keep you company and you can do whatever you want." That is just the work of yakshas and rakshasas. They specialize in ruining your Bodhi resolve, your mind of cultivation.

**If they hear him call out the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, all those evil ghosts will not even be able to stare at that person with their evil eyes, how much the less harm him.** The yakshas and rakshasas will come along to torment you. But as soon as you recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, you will emit light. This light will make it impossible for them to open their eyes and look at you. If they cannot even open their eyes, how can they harm you? If you always recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, you will receive help and protection.

**Sutra:**
 **“If a person, whether guilty or not, who has been put in stocks or bound with chains calls out the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, his fetters will break apart and he will immediately be freed.”**
Outline:

L6. The difficulty of stocks and chains.

**Commentary:**

**If a person, whether guilty or not, who has been put in stocks or bound with chains calls out the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, his fetters will break apart.** This is the difficulty of stocks and chains. A person gets arrested and locked up; perhaps he is guilty or perhaps it is a case of mistaken identity or a frame-up. In any case, he is locked up. However, if he can recite "Homage to the Greatly Compassionate Guanshiyin Bodhisattva," very sincerely, the fetters will fall off. **And he will immediately be freed.** I have seen many such responses.

At Nanhua Monastery, there was a monk called Ti Hui. He was captured by the Japanese and locked up in jail, wearing handcuffs and chains. In jail, he recited Guanshiyin Bodhisattva's name all day long. Then one night, all of a sudden, all the chains and handcuffs fell off. The door opened up by itself, and he ran away. There are many, many other such incidents. And so I know this is really true.

**Sutra:**
 **“If bandits enough to fill the three thousand great thousand world system infest a dangerous road on which a merchant chief in charge of costly jewels is leading a group of merchants, but among the merchants there is even a single person who says, ‘Good men, do not be afraid! You should all single-mindedly recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. This Bodhisattva bestows fearlessness upon living beings. If you recite his name, you shall surely be saved from these robbers,’ and if upon hearing that, the merchants all cry out together, ‘Namo Guanshiyin Bodhisattva,’ then they will immediately be saved because they recited his name.”**
Outline:

L7. The difficulty of bandits.

**Commentary:**

**If bandits enough to fill the three thousand great thousand world system infest a dangerous road.** These are malicious and hateful robbers. Because they have grudges against people from former lives, in this life they become bandits and rob other people. Suppose these bandits lie await on a perilous road **on which a merchant chief in charge of costly jewels is leading a group of merchants.** Naturally, the bandits are going to want to rob their jewels. **But** if **among the merchants there is even a single person who says, 'Good men, do not be afraid!** Friends! Brothers! Colleagues! **You should all single-mindedly recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.'** Use one mind, not two minds, to recite Guanyin Bodhisattva's name. **This Bodhisattva bestows fearlessness upon living beings. If you recite his name, you shall surely be saved from these robbers. And if upon hearing that, the merchants all cry out together, 'Namo Guanshiyin Bodhisattva**—Homage to the Bodhisattva Who Contemplates the Sounds of the World--**then they will immediately be saved** from their predicament **because they recited his name.** This Dharma-door is especially efficacious. Everyone should believe in it. Do not have doubts.

**Sutra:**
 **“Inexhaustible Intention! The awesome spiritual power of the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Guanshiyin is as lofty and sublime as that!”**
Outline:

K2. Concluding praise.
 **Commentary:**

Shakyamuni Buddha, having explained the above doctrine, now calls out, **"Inexhaustible Intention! The awesome spiritual power of the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Guanshiyin is as lofty and sublime as that!"** The power of his awesome virtue and spiritual penetrations is great, supreme, and magnificent!

What are Mahasattvas? Mahasattvas are Bodhisattvas, and Bodhisattvas can be Mahasattvas. Regular Bodhisattvas refer to young Bodhisattvas, but Mahasattvas refer to old Bodhisattvas. They are the senior ones. By way of analogy, ordinary Bodhisattvas are like compact cars; they cannot carry too many people. Mahasattvas are like big vans that can carry a lot of people.

**Sutra:**
 **“If living beings who have much sexual desire constantly and reverently recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, they will be separated from desire.”

“If those who have much hatred constantly and reverently recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, they will be separated from hatred.”

“If those who are very stupid constantly and reverently recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, they will be separated from stupidity.”**
Outline:

J2. Response to mind karma.
K1. The three poisons.
 **Commentary:**

**If living beings who have much sexual desire.** Some people study Buddhadharma on one hand, and entertain lustful desire on the other. The more they study the Dharma, the stronger their desire is. They think about sex all day long, until their desire thoughts are like flowing water. This is the worst of thoughts and the worst kind of behavior, a very bad sign. What should they do? They do not have to get nervous or worry. They should just **constantly and reverently recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.** It is not good enough just to recite it; you must also be reverent. You should bow more to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.

Bowing to the Buddhas is just paying great reverence to the Buddhas. Most people do not understand what bowing to the Buddhas means. Adherents of other religions say it is just bowing to wooden idols. Blind people speak blindly. They do not have eyes, they cannot see the Buddhas' light, and so they say it is idol worship. But bowing to the Buddhas represents the reverence in our heart.

In order to respect the Triple Jewel, we must certainly bow to the Buddhas. Take care not to be arrogant and think, "I am so great. I am greater than the Buddhas. Why should I bow to them?" That is a mistake. If people always bow and recite Guanyin Bodhisattva's name, **they will be separated from desire.** It is gone!

You say, "But I like sexual desire. What am I going to do without it?"

If you like it, you do not have to recite Guanyin Bodhisattva's name. That's all. It is simple enough. If you do not want your sexual desire, you can get rid of it. If you want to keep it, you do not have to get rid of it. Either way, it is up to you.

**If** there are **those who have much hatred,** they should recite Guanyin Bodhisattva's name. Hatred manifests as overt angry. Anger is a kind of affliction, and affliction is just ignorance. Hatred is like fire.

It is said, "One spark of fire can burn up a forest of merit and virtue." Therefore, there is an ancient saying that,

The firewood gathered in a thousand days,
Goes up in a blaze started by a single spark.

You can gather firewood for a thousand days, a long time; but one little match can burn it all up. This describes how ordinarily we may try to do good and virtuous deeds. We may do this over a long period of time, but then we get mad and the fire of ignorance rises. All that merit and virtue is burned right off. If you have a big temper, you will produce ignorance whenever you open your mouth.

What kind of people like to get mad? Asuras! Everyone has come down a particular path. Some have come down the Buddha path. Some have come down the path of immortals. Others have come down the path of humans, asuras, animals, or ghosts.

Those who have come down the Buddha path are, for the most part, compassionate. Those who have come down the ghost path, for the most part, are cheap and lowly. They never take a loss. They are really sneaky and slimy--not reliable. Unreliable people are said to be ghostly. Those from the path of humans have affinities with everyone. Those from the animal path are insatiably greedy for everything. The more the better! Asuras like to get angry. Those from the immortals’ path like to be pure and carefree.

So now we are talking about asuras. Have you noticed how there are some people who are just miserable all the time? They are always on the verge of "blowing their tops." They are just asuras; they have asura-natures. Can they change? Yes. How? The Dharma Flower Sutra tells us in detail. All you have to do is **constantly and reverently recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.** This means reciting all the time, without ever stopping. Recite constantly and be reverent by going to temples and bowing to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. But you cannot just bow today and not tomorrow, or bow in the morning and not bow at night. If you have no work to do, then spend your time bowing and reciting. Gradually, **they will be separated from hatred.** Your temper will vanish.

You would not know quite how it happened, but strangely enough your temper will have disappeared. It is just that mysterious. You do not know about this, but I have had personal experience and I know. I used to have a terrible temper. I used to hit and scold people. When I was very young, twelve or so, I liked to fight with others. No matter how big a person was, he had to listen to my orders or I would clobber him until he submitted. That is just an asura-nature. Later, when I studied the Buddhadharma, I realized that anger was wrong and I changed. I always recited the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. So now, sometimes even when my own disciples bully me, I still do not get angry. My disciples may get mad at me, but I practice patience and endure it. I know that eventually they will understand that they are wrong. Before, I used to get mad at people; and now, my disciples get mad at me!

"Which ones?" you ask.

"You know who you are," I say.

Before, I got mad at others; now others get mad at me. This is just retribution. I have received these bad disciples who bully their good teacher. But the good teacher does not get angry anymore. I do not know where my temper went, but I am not going to look for it. If I find it again, it will be even worse!

**If those who are very stupid.** We have already discussed greed and hatred. Now we will discuss stupidity. These are the three poisons. They poison our Buddha-natures and put them to sleep. Why haven't we awakened yet? Why is it that we live as if drunk and die in a dream? It is all because of the three poisons.

The primary form of greed is sexual desire. Sexual desire is extremely harmful to people's natures. But most people think it is very enjoyable and so they engage in all kinds of impure conducts. Day by day, the original Buddha-nature becomes covered with filth so that its light does not manifest. This is all because of greed for sex.

Hatred is the same way. Now we are talking about stupidity. What is that? Stupidity just means that you feel that you are not stupid. That is stupid! A person may think he is intelligent and wise, but then you ask him, "Where did you come from? Where are you going to in the future?" and he cannot answer. He does not know where he came from or where he is going and yet he says he is intelligent. He would not admit that he is stupid.

In this world, everyone is concerned about such petty affairs as fame and profit. People toil for fame and profit all day long. They hurt each other, kill each other, and cause mayhem--all just for profit. If you put all the people in the world together, how many would there be? Two. One who seeks fame, and one who seeks profit.

Fame and profit turn people entirely upside down. They do not wake up. From birth to death, they fight and struggle. Some seek to get elected to office. Others seek to get rich. Some run after the opposite sex or some other kind of happiness. But this happiness fades, and at the time of death people have no idea where they are going. And yet they still think they are incredible geniuses with great wisdom! "I am the smartest. I have the most wisdom. I was first in my class every year. I am ahead of everyone in everything!" But how is it really? As long as you have not recognized your own original face, no matter how smart you are, yours is a false intelligence. People with genuine wisdom will not think that they are wise.

Will they think they are stupid, then?" you ask.

No, they would not think they are either stupid or wise. On the outside they appear to be pretty much the same as everyone else, but their thinking and attitudes will be clear. They are clear about the fact that everything is like an illusion; like a bubble, a shadow, a dew drop, or a flash of lightning. Knowing that everything is like a dream, they will not be greedy for glory, wealth, or position. Knowing that everything is an illusion, they will not be greedy for sex, power, or profit. It is all impermanent, all of it. And so the Vajra Sutra says, "All conditioned dharmas are like a dream, a bubble, or a shadow."

What are conditioned dharmas? They are all those things with marks, all the things we perceive. All are like illusions, dreams, or bubbles. Would you say a bubble in the ocean is real? If you say it is real, it will soon pop and disappear. If you say it is false, it is still there! But although it is there, it has no real substance. A shadow is also false. It is like dew in the morning. It is there, but as soon as the sun shines on it, it is gone. And a lightning flash appears for just an instant.

If you can look upon everything as being like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow, dew, or a lightning flash, then what attachments could there be? None. Without attachments, you will have genuine understanding. You will not let your thinking wander as it will to the north, east, south, or west. You will put down deluded thinking and involvement with the dust of the world. Having put it all down, you could not avoid becoming a Buddha if you tried! You would have wisdom whether you wanted it or not; you would be naturally wise.

When you do not have wisdom, you may think, "I am pretty wise." But once you have true wisdom, you will think, "Oh, originally, this was mine all the time. It did not come from the outside." At that time you would not be arrogant. You would not think, "See me? I am the smartest one around. I am the prettiest one around. I am the most talented, incredible, unusual person around." If you think like that, you are attached to appearances.

“Appearances” just mean your stinking skin-bag--the dream, illusion, bubble, shadow, dewdrop, and lightning flash. All day long you wear your nice clothes, eat your fancy food, live in your fine house, and enjoy your amusements. You do all of this for your body, but when the time comes to die, your body will pay no attention to you. It will not help you out at all.

Besides, in order to satisfy their stinking skin-bags, people are busy all day long smoking, drinking, stuffing themselves with food, and trying to fill that bottomless pit. You cannot fill a bottomless pit: it all keeps leaking right out! The more it leaks, the more you fill it; the more you fill it, the more it leaks. It certainly keeps you busy.

Why do I eat one meal a day? Because three meals a day are just too much trouble! Most people think that eating fine food is a real pleasure. I think it is a lot of trouble. If you over-eat, your stomach hurts. If you do not eat enough, your greed is not satisfied. You think, "That was good. I would like to have a little bit more!" If you do not eat such good food, you would not be so greedy; and it is a lot easier on your stomach.

It is just a lot of trouble and it all comes about because of stupidity. Being stupid, one seeks after pleasure, wealth, enjoyment, and fun with the opposite sex; it is all upside down. You can be as greedy as you want, and then what? When the time comes, you are still going to die. When the time comes to die, you will not have control over the situation at all. Isn't that stupid?

Now, being so stupid, what should we do? We should rely upon the method given in the Dharma Flower Sutra. If people **constantly and reverently recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, they will be separated from stupidity.** Recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva and your stupidity will disappear as your wisdom comes forth.

If you know that you are stupid, you have recognized yourself. You have to have some wisdom to be able to realize that you are stupid. People without wisdom would not have any idea that they are stupid. The farther they run, the farther off they stray. And as if being stupid was not bad enough, people insist on doubling their stupidity by thinking they are intelligent!

How do we get rid of our stupidity? We must constantly and reverently recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. This is the most wonderful and efficacious method. It is a money-back guarantee, wonderful beyond words.

Speaking of stupidity and wisdom, what is stupidity? What is wisdom? I will tell you something you will not believe. Stupidity is wisdom; wisdom is stupidity! Why do I say this?

Take a look at the Heart Sutra, "Form does not differ from emptiness; emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness; and emptiness itself is form."

True form comes from true emptiness. True emptiness comes from true form. They are two, and yet not two. If you know how to use it, it is wisdom; if you cannot use it, it is stupidity. Stupidity and wisdom are not two. It just depends on whether or not you can use it. If you can use it, stupidity turns to wisdom; if you cannot use it, wisdom turns to stupidity. They are two and yet not two. If you obtain genuine wisdom, you will know, "Oh, originally it was like this," and you will not be upside down.

**Sutra:**
 **“Inexhaustible Intention, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva has great awesome spiritual powers such as these and confers great benefits. Therefore living beings should always be mindful of him.”**
Outline:

K2. Concluding praise.

**Commentary:**

Shakyamuni Buddha calls out, **“Inexhaustible Intention, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva has great awesome spiritual powers such as these.** He is able to rescue us from the seven difficulties and the three poisons, **and** he **confers great benefits.”** There are many, many ways in which he benefits living beings with his spiritual powers. **Therefore living beings should always be mindful of him.** Living beings should always keep his name in mind. The text makes it very clear here. It is not good enough just to recite with your mouth. You must keep his name in your mind. Your mouth does not necessarily have to recite, but you must keep his name in your thoughts.

**Sutra:**
 **“If women who seek sons bow and make offerings to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, they will give birth to blessed, virtuous and wise sons. If they seek daughters, they will give birth to upright and handsome daughters who have planted roots of virtue in previous lives and who are regarded and respected by all.”**
Outline:

J3. Response to body karma.
K1. Answering the two requests.
 **Commentary:**

**If women who seek sons bow and make offerings** of fruits, flowers, and so forth **to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, they will give birth to blessed, virtuous and wise sons.** If they seek sons, they will have sons. **If they seek daughters, they will give birth to upright and handsome daughters.** Their noses will look like noses, their eyes will look like eyes, their ears will look like ears, and their lips will look like lips.

"Well, could somebody have eyes that do not look like eyes?" you ask.

Some people have triangular eyes. In China we say these eyes are Zhang Shigui eyes. Zhang Shigui was a treacherous official during the Tang dynasty in China. He had a very bad character and cheated everyone, and he had three-cornered eyes. Most people's eyes just go straight across, but his were triangular. So you should remember, if you become friends with such people, then you will have a hard time. Zhang Shigui eyes make a person very hard to get along with.

"Can a nose not look like a nose?" you ask.

Sometimes people have a nose that sticks in instead of out, or it looks as if someone had bit it off. Some people's ears look like a little mouse's ears, really tiny. Some have ears as long as rabbits'. Is that good-looking? If one's earlobes hang down like the Buddha's, they can be said to be good ears. But if one's ears are long in the other direction--that is, they stick way up in the air--then they do not even look like ears, except maybe rabbit ears. Some people's lips do not look like lips. Some people have their noses and mouths stuck right together with their ears. They do not even look human. Even dogs are not that ugly and weird. Some people like dogs and they want to look like dogs, too. But these people with their noses, mouths, and ears all grown together, do not even look as good as dogs. They may have hare-lips or be bow-legged. If a daughter looked like that, no one would like it because she would not be proper and attractive.

In general, women who are deformed have a hard time getting married, or even getting a boyfriend. Everyone is afraid of them. However, upright and handsome daughters are those **who have planted roots of virtue in previous lives.** Why are they upright and beautiful? Beautiful people in their former lives made offerings of flowers and other things to the Buddhas.

During the summer session, one of my disciples said, "No wonder all the women are making offerings of flowers to the Buddhas. They want to be beautiful!" These attractive daughters under discussion are ones **who are regarded and respected by all.** Everyone is fond of them.

**Sutra:**
 **“Inexhaustible Intention! Guanshiyin Bodhisattva has powers such as these. If there are living beings who reverently bow to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, they will be blessed and their efforts will not be in vain.”**
Outline:

K2. Concluding praise.

**Commentary:**

Having talked about the two kinds of seeking--seeking for a son and seeking for a daughter--and also having talked about the seven kinds of difficulties and the three poisons, the Buddha now calls out, **"Inexhaustible Intention! Guanshiyin Bodhisattva has powers such as these**--as just described above. **If there are living beings who reverently bow to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, they will be blessed and their efforts will not be in vain."** If they can very respectfully pay homage to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, their will certainly be rewarded with blessings.

**Sutra:**
 **“Therefore, living beings should all receive and uphold the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.”**
Outline:

I3. Encouragement to uphold the name.
J1. Encouragement to uphold.

**Commentary:**

**Therefore, living beings should all receive and uphold the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.** "Receive and uphold" means to recite, to keep the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva always in mind. If you can recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, there is inconceivable power there.

**Sutra:**
 **“Inexhaustible Intention! If a person were to receive and uphold the names of Bodhisattvas in number as the grains of sand in sixty-two kotis of Ganges Rivers, and in addition were to exhaustively make offerings to them of food, drink, clothing, bedding, and medicine, what do you think---would that good man’s or good woman’s merit and virtue be great or not?”

Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva replied, “Very great, World Honored One.”

The Buddha said, “If another person were to receive and uphold the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva and bow and make offerings but once, that person’s blessings would be equal to and not different from the other person’s. They could not be exhausted in hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of eons.”**
Outline:

J2. Comparison.
 **Commentary:**

**“Inexhaustible Intention! If a person were to receive and uphold the names of Bodhisattvas in number as the grains of sand in sixty-two kotis of Ganges Rivers.** Receive and uphold means reciting the name not of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, but of other Bodhisattvas, an incredible number of them. **And** not only that, if that person **in addition were exhaustively make offerings to them of food, drink, clothing, bedding, and medicine, what do you think?”** Suppose this person throughout his entire life presents those four kinds of offerings to the Triple Jewel. **Would that good man or good woman's merit and virtue be great or not?**

**Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva replied, "Very great, World Honored One."**
**The Buddha said, "If another person were to receive and uphold the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva and bow and make offerings but once**--he does not have to make offerings for his entire life, he only has to do it once, just for a moment--then **that person's blessings would be equal to and not different from the other person's.** His blessings would not differ from those gained by the first person who made offerings to Bodhisattvas as many as sands of sixty-two kotis of Ganges Rivers. **They could not be exhausted in hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of eons.**

**Sutra:**
 **“Inexhaustible Intention, one who receives and upholds the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva obtains the benefit of blessings and virtues as limitless and boundless as those.”**
Outline:

J3. Concluding praise.

**Commentary:**

**"Inexhaustible Intention,"** Shakyamuni Buddha continues, **"one who receives and upholds** and recites **the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva obtains the benefit of blessings and virtues as limitless and boundless as those**--countless and measureless."

**Sutra:**
 **Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, how does Guanshiyin Bodhisattva roam through this Saha world? How does he speak the Dharma for living beings? How does he carry out this work with the power of expedients?”**
Outline:

G2. Second question.
H1. Question.

**Commentary:**

**Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, how does Guanshiyin Bodhisattva roam through this Saha World?"**Saha is a Sanskrit word which means "worthy of being endured." We say "worthy" because although this world is filled with suffering, living beings find it worthy of being endured. It is not easy to bear this pain. There is so much suffering in the Saha World. How can Guanshiyin Bodhisattva teach and transform living beings here? **How does he speak the Dharma for living beings? How does he carry out this work with the power of expedients?**

**Sutra:**
 **The Buddha told Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva, “Good man, if living beings in this land must be saved by means of someone in the body of a Buddha, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva will manifest in the body of a Buddha and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Pratyekabuddha, he will manifest in the body of a Pratyekabuddha and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Hearer, he will manifest in the body of a Hearer and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Brahma King, he will manifest in the body of a Brahma King and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of Shakra, he will manifest in the body of Shakra and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of the God of Sovereignty, he will manifest in the body of the God of Sovereignty and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of the Great God of Sovereignty, he will manifest in the body of the Great God of Sovereignty and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of a great heavenly general, he will manifest in the body of a great heavenly general and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of Vaishravana, he will manifest in the body of Vaishravana and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of a minor king, he will manifest in the body of a minor king and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of an Elder, he will manifest in the body of an Elder and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of a layman, he will manifest in the body of a layman and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of a minister of state, he will manifest in the body of a minister of state and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Brahman, he will manifest in the body of a Brahman and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Bhikshu, Bhikshuni, Upasaka, or Upasika, he will manifest in the body of a Bhikshu, Bhikshuni, Upasaka, or Upasika and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of the wife of an Elder, of a layman, of a minister of state, or of a Brahman, he will manifest in a wife’s body and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of a pure youth or a pure maiden, he will manifest in the body of a pure youth or pure maiden and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of a heavenly dragon, yaksha, gandharva, asura, garuda, kinnara, mahoraga, human or non-human, and so forth, he will manifest in such a body and speak Dharma for them.”

“If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Vajra-wielding spirit, he will manifest in the body of a Vajra-wielding spirit and speak Dharma for them.”**
Outline:

H2. Answer.
I1. Specific answer.

**Commentary:**

**The Buddha told Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva, "Good Man, if living beings in this land**--in the three thousand great thousand world system--**must be saved by means of someone in the body of a Buddha, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva will manifest in the body of a Buddha and speak Dharma for them."**

"But Guanshiyin is a Bodhisattva; he is not a Buddha. How can he manifest as a Buddha? Isn't that just being an impostor?" you ask.

No, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva became a Buddha limitless eons ago. His Buddha name was Proper Dharma Brightness Thus Come One. After becoming a Buddha, he did not forget about living beings. He came back to the world again, hiding the great and manifesting the small. He hid away the Buddha body, and manifested a Bodhisattva body.

Arhats may go from the small to the great, but Guanshiyin Bodhisattva went from the great, from the Buddha position, back to the Bodhisattva position. This is called “putting the boat of compassion in reverse” in order to save living beings. It is similar to "putting the car in reverse."

Guanshiyin Bodhisattva went backwards from Buddhahood into Bodhisattvahood in order to guide living beings, and he hid the great and manifested the small.

**If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Pratyekabuddha, he will manifest in the body of a Pratyekabuddha and speak Dharma for them.** Pratyekabuddhas are Those Enlightened by Conditions. When the Buddha is in the world, they are called Those Enlightened by Conditions. When there is no Buddha in the world, they are called Solitarily Enlightened Ones.

When the Buddha is in the world, Pratyekabuddhas cultivate the Twelve Causes and Conditions and awake to the Way, and they realize that everything is suffering, impermanent, empty, and without self. Knowing this, they put everything down and gain enlightenment.

When there is no Buddha in the world, they also cultivate the Twelve Causes and Conditions. In the spring they watch the white flowers bloom. In the autumn they watch the yellow leaves fall. Observing the unceasing changes of nature, they wake up to the four marks of conditioned existence--production, dwelling, decay, and emptiness, all of which are impermanent--and they gain enlightenment.

Guanshiyin Bodhisattva observes the causal conditions of living beings. He has the Penetration of the Heavenly Eye and the Penetration of the Heavenly Ear. With the Heavenly Eye he sees afar, and with the Heavenly Ear he hears afar. If he sees a living being who should be saved by a Pratyekabuddha, he manifests as a Pratyekabuddha and speaks the Dharma of the Twelve Causes and Conditions for them.

"Don't you know where your ignorance comes from? It comes from a single thought of non-enlightenment. Your one thought of non-enlightenment produced ignorance in the Treasury of the Thus Come One. With ignorance, there was activity, ..." He speaks the Dharma to that living being.

Having heard the Dharma, this potential Pratyekabuddha quickly gets enlightened. Then Guanshiyin Bodhisattva causes him to bring forth the Bodhisattva resolve and go from the small towards the great.

**If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Hearer, he will manifest in the body of a Hearer and speak Dharma for them.** The Hearers are Arhats. Those Enlightened by Conditions and Hearers together make up the Two Vehicles. Hearers are those who awakened to the Way when they heard the sound of the Buddha's voice as he taught the Four Holy Truths. The Four Holy Truths are suffering, accumulation, extinction, and the Way.

Shakyamuni Buddha turned the Dharma-wheel of the Four Truths three times for the Five Bhikshus. After he gained enlightenment, the Buddha went to the Deer Park to speak the Dharma for the Five Bhikshus, including Ajnatakaundinya. Ajnatakaundinya and the others were not Bhikshus in the beginning. They only became Bhikshus after the Buddha spoke Dharma for them. The Buddha spoke the Four Truths in three ways.

The first turning is called the Demonstration Turning. He said,

1. “This is suffering. It is oppressive in nature. It is unbearable.”

There are three kinds of suffering: the suffering of suffering; the suffering of decay; and the suffering of process.

There are also the eight kinds of suffering: birth; old age; sickness; death; being separated from what you love; being joined to what you hate; not getting what you want; and the raging blaze of the five skandhas.

Suffering bears down on people to the point that they never know a moment's peace. It pushes people so hard that they cannot breathe. People are oppressed by all kinds of suffering.

2. “This is accumulation. Its nature is to beckon.” Accumulation refers to the amassing of afflictions. Where do afflictions come from? From suffering. One suffers to the point that one cannot stand it, and then one gets angry.

3. “This is extinction. Its nature is that it can be certified to.” One can be certified to the Bliss of Still Extinction, to the wonderful fruit of Nirvana.

4. “This is the Way. Its nature is that it can be cultivated.” Everyone can cultivate the Way. There is not a single person who is not qualified. Everyone can be certified to the principle-substance of Nirvana.

The second turning of the Four Truths is the Certification Turning:

1. This is suffering. I already know it.
2. This is accumulation. I have already cut it off.
3. This is extinction. I have already been certified to it.
4. This is the Way. I have already cultivated it.

Shakyamuni Buddha then spoke the third turning of the Wheel of Four Truths, the Exhortation Turning. He said,

1. This is suffering. You should know it.
2. This is accumulation. You should cut it off.
3. This is extinction. You should certify to it.
4. This is the Way. You should walk it.

He turned the Dharma-wheel of the Four Truths three times. When the Five Bhikshus heard it, they got enlightened. And since they were awakened by the Buddha's sound, they are called Hearers.

The Hearers and Those Enlightened by Conditions are called the Two Vehicles. Those of the Two Vehicles are just the Small Vehicle. What is small about them? What is great about the Great Vehicle?

Basically, nothing is small and nothing is great. Great and small are based on the discriminating thoughts of living beings. Some minds are small, and some are great. Originally, the mind extends to the ends of space and the Dharma Realm. We, however, are not able to use the original Thus Come One's Treasury Nature. Some can use a small part of it; others can use a little more; some can use the entire nature. Those who can use this entire nature are Buddhas. They have returned to the root and gone back to the source. Those who use a large part of it are the Bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas have great wisdom and so they can utilize more of the treasures of their original home. Those of the Small Vehicle know less, use less, and so are called the Small Vehicle.

If Guanshiyin Bodhisattva meets a living being with the potential of a Hearer, he manifests in the body of a Hearer and speaks the Dharma to save him.

**If they must be saved by someone in the body of the Brahma King, he will manifest in the body of the Brahma King and speak Dharma for them.** The Brahma King is king in the Great Brahma Heaven. Brahma means pure. He is very independent and free up there.

**If they must be saved by someone in the body of Shakra, he will manifest in the body of Shakra and speak Dharma for them.** In the Amitabha Sutra, Shakra is referred to as Shakra Devanam Indrah. There are actually many of them. Right now, we know about the Heaven of the Thirty-three here in our world, where our Lord Shakra resides. Most people call him God.

The twenty-seventh line of the Shurangama Mantra goes, "Na mo yin tuo la ye." That is Shakra. He is known and worshipped as Almighty God by most people. This heavenly lord possesses much authority and spiritual penetrations. However, he is still just a resident of heaven and his life will come to an end. Shakra rules all the gods up there and takes care of business in heaven.

Guanshiyin Bodhisattva will use the body of Shakra to save living beings who can be crossed over in that way. He speaks the Dharma to them in the body of Shakra.

It is easy to cross over living beings if you are the same as they are. They are then more likely to accept your teaching. It is easy to be friends with someone in your own line of work. Business people are friends with business people, students with students, Buddhists with Buddhists, gamblers with gamblers, and robbers with robbers. People seek out their own kind. Those of the same kind are called "friends." To teach and transform various people, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva will manifest the same as them.

For example, many of those who have come here to study the Buddhadharma once studied with a certain professor. Perhaps that person is Guanshiyin Bodhisattva appearing as a professor to speak Dharma for scholars. To start with, you did not want to study the Buddhadharma, but he gave you a taste of it and you pursued it. The more you pursued it, the more sense it made, but still you half believed and half did not. Then you came into contact with genuine Buddhism, got to meditate, listen to lectures, and attend the summer study session. Before you knew it, your “half belief and half disbelief” was reduced to mostly believing and a little bit of not believing. You took refuge with the Triple Jewel and took the precepts—some or all of the Five Precepts or maybe the Ten Major and Forty-eight Minor Bodhisattva Precepts. All this happened just because of a causal condition. Do not fail to believe this. Guanyin Bodhisattva manifests in many ways. Sometimes, yes, he just appears, speaks the Dharma, and vanishes. At other times, he might not necessarily use his spiritual powers and beam down a transformation body. He may be born in the world as a person, splitting off part of his soul to go to the world to be a person, study the Buddhadharma, and then teach and transform living beings. He just manifests in that body to teach people.

When someone believes in Guanshiyin Bodhisattva and makes offerings, and relies on the Bodhisattva's Dharma to cultivate, that person turns into Guanshiyin Bodhisattva and Guanshiyin Bodhisattva has just gained a transformation body. We say he has thousands of hundreds of kotis transformation bodies. You can imitate him and then become a transformation body of his.

There are no fixed Dharmas. You should not be attached to things being a certain way. If you want things to be certain, can you arrange to certainly not to have to die? If you can definitely not die, then you can have things fixed the way you like them. But if you cannot and you are sure to die, then nothing is fixed. Therefore, there are no fixed dharmas in the Buddhadharma.

There can be millions of transformation bodies. If a hundred people imitate you, they are your hundred transformation bodies. If a thousand people study with you, you have a thousand transformation bodies. If ten thousand people study with you, learn the doctrines you teach them, and then pass them on to others, who in turn accept and cultivate them, you have ten thousand transformation bodies.

It is not that hard to have a million transformation bodies. All you have to do is resolve to propagate the Buddhadharma, and then you will gain limitless transformation bodies.

That is speaking of it from the viewpoint of specifics. To speak of it from the viewpoint of principle, if you become a Buddha, you can really transform into a million bodies. So Guanshiyin Bodhisattva can manifest in the body of Shakra to speak the Dharma.

**If they must be saved by someone in the body of the God of Sovereignty, he will manifest in the body of the God of Sovereignty and speak Dharma for them.** The God Sovereignty refers to the heavenly demons and adherents to externalist ways. For example, some religions claim they alone are the highest, and they deny the existence of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Why? Because they are too happy and independent. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva does not blame them. When he sees their conditions are ripe, he manifests in the body of the God of Sovereignty and speaks the Buddhadharma to gather them in.

**If they must be saved by someone in the body of the Great God of Sovereignty, he will manifest in the body of the Great God of Sovereignty and speak Dharma for them.**
**If they must be saved by someone in the body of a great heavenly general, he will manifest in the body of a great heavenly general and speak Dharma for them.**
There are two ways to explain this. You could say this passage refers to a spirit in the heavens who is a great general. You could also say it refers to the gods who have just exhausted their heavenly blessings and are about to fall among human beings to become great generals.

Generals may have a lot of authority, but they may not understand the Buddhadharma. In that case, they may create a lot of karma and have to undergo various kinds of retribution. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva observes the causes and conditions and seeing how they can be saved, manifests as a great general and speaks the Dharma to them. They can then return from confusion and go toward enlightenment, put down all worldly happiness to seek transcendental, inexhaustible bliss.

**If they must be saved by someone in the body of Vaishravana, he will manifest in the body of Vaishravana and speak Dharma for them.** Vaishravana is one of the Four Heavenly Kings. He rules over the northern continent of Uttarakuru, and his name means "Much Learning."

**If they must be saved by someone in the body of a minor king, he will manifest in the body of a minor king and speak Dharma for them.** A minor king rules over only one country.

**If they must be saved by someone in the body of an Elder, he will manifest in the body of an Elder and speak Dharma for them.** Elders have respected names and are mature in years. They have virtue and reputation. Their superiors like them and their subordinates respect them.

Elders do not necessarily have to be old; however, they are usually wealthy and honored and have virtue and wisdom. Elders are very fair-minded and treat everyone with similar kindness. They like to help people. Since they like to help people, they become known as Elders.

If someone should be saved by the body of an Elder, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva will appear as a great wealthy Elder and speak the Dharma for that person. In the Great Compassion Mantra, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva appears as a great, awesome-looking Elder with a long beard.

**If they must be saved by someone in the body of a layman, he will manifest in the body of a layman and speak Dharma for them.** What is a layman? A layman is a person who lives at home and believes in the Buddhadharma. He keeps the Five Precepts and practices the Ten Good Deeds.

What are the Five Precepts? They are: no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying, and no taking of intoxicants. Now many of you have taken the Five Precepts and are lay people.

The Ten Good Deeds are the opposite of the Ten Evils. Of the Ten Evils, three involve the body: killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct; three involve the mind: greed, hatred, and stupidity; and four involve the mouth: frivolous speech, false speech, abusive speech, and back-biting.

Frivolous speech means talking improperly. Perhaps one talks about women or men, pouring out a lot of irresponsible, deviant, and improper talk. False speech is lying. Abusive speech means scolding and slandering people. Backbiting is when one person has two tongues! How can this happen? He talks one way to one person, and another way to another person. He gossips back and forth and creates schisms among people.

Taken altogether, these are Ten Evils. If you refrain from the Ten Evils, you are practicing the Ten Good Deeds: not killing, not stealing, not committing sexual misconduct; not being greedy, not being hateful, and not being stupid; not speaking in a frivolous manner, not indulging in abusive speech, false speech, or back-biting. Those are the Ten Good Deeds.

So laypeople should keep the Five Precepts and practice the Ten Good Deeds.

Here, there are many laypeople. The Buddhist Lay Society is a place for Buddhist laypeople to come together to investigate the Buddhadharma and protect and support Buddhism. It is the responsibility of laypeople to protect the Triple Jewel, to find ways to promote Buddhism so that it grows and flourishes every day.

Whereas left-home people have the responsibility of propagating the Buddhadharma, laypeople have the responsibility of supporting the Buddhadharma and the Triple Jewel.

This year in America people have taken the Five Precepts, the Eight Precepts, and the Ten Major and Forty-eight Minor Bodhisattva Precepts. The Shurangama Sutra has also been explained. These are all “firsts” for the West. Each one of you is the first to take precepts and hear the Sutras and the Dharma. This makes you founding members of western Buddhism. We are setting up the Buddhist Lay Society, and I hope it improves and attracts more people every day. Not only the people living in that particular house but all American laypeople can work together and investigate the Buddhadharma.

Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, seeing living beings who should be saved by the body of a layman, will manifest in a layman's body and speak Dharma for them.

**If they must be saved by someone in the body of a minister of state,** a high official, **he will manifest in the body of a minister of state and speak Dharma for them.

If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Brahman, he will manifest in the body of a Brahman and speak Dharma for them**. Brahmans are a class in India. They practice pure conduct.

**If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Bhikshu, Bhikshuni, Upasaka, or Upasika, he will manifest in the body of a Bhikshu, Bhikshuni, Upasaka, or Upasika and speak Dharma for them.** A Bhikshu is a man who has left the home-life. **Bhikshu** is a Sanskrit word which has three meanings: mendicant, frightener of Mara, and destroyer of evil. A Bhikshuni is a woman who has left the home-life, and the same three meanings apply.

An Upasaka is a layman. Upasaka means "close in work." Upasakas work very closely with the Triple Jewel, always bowing to the Buddha and listening to the Dharma. An Upasika is a laywoman who is close to the Triple Jewel. Upasakas and Upasikas serve and protect the Triple Jewel.

Guanshiyin Bodhisattva will manifest in any one of these four kinds of bodies to save these people, speaking Dharma for them.

**If they must be saved by someone in the body of the wife of an Elder, of a layman, of a minister of state, or of a Brahman, he will manifest in a wife's body and speak Dharma for them.** Guanyin Bodhisattva will manifest in the body of a woman and speak Dharma.

**If they must be saved by someone in the body of a pure youth or pure maiden, he will manifest in the body of a pure youth or a pure maiden and speak Dharma for them.** “Must” here means that the causes and conditions are such that as a young boy or girl, these living beings can understand the Buddhadharma and cultivate the Way. For example, Weituo Bodhisattva vowed that in every life he would manifest in the body of a pure youth. The Dragon Girl also made a vow to manifest in every life as a pure maiden and never marry.

“Youth” here means that they are still innocent and intact. Once one has sexual contact with the opposite sex, one's body is no longer "complete." In China they call this "ruining the body." Before one has sexual intercourse, one is a virgin.

In Chinese martial arts, there is a practice called "virgin skill." When this practice is accomplished, knives or spears cannot harm one. Inwardly, these practitioners smelt their energy which has not been ruined by intercourse, and they reach a level of skill whereby even knives or guns cannot harm them. Outwardly, they smelt their muscles, sinews, skin, and bones.

One of my disciples took refuge with me for the sole purpose of studying this skill. I taught him to meditate first, and he did. He had some Chan samadhi, but then he started looking into Taoism. He learned how to send a small child out the top of his head, but I do not know how far the small child could go. Lately, he has not been practicing. He said his mother wants him to go back to Hong Kong to get married. He has never even seen the girl before, but the official arrangements have already been made. I told him, "Okay, go and get married. But when you come back, you are not going to be able to study the virgin skill." He smiled!

In Buddhism, young boys and young girls are said to have clean bodies. Young boys belong to the trigram qian, which is yang. Young girls belong to the trigram kun, which is yin. One is pure yang and the other is pure yin. This is a very pure, undefiled state, in which it is possible for one to cultivate to succeed very quickly. If young children can meditate, they can quickly gain the Penetration of the Heavenly Eye, and open their Five Eyes. To "enter the Way as a virgin" is most valuable.

Guanshiyin Bodhisattva observes the causes and conditions, and if he sees someone who is to be crossed over by means of the body of a pure youth or pure maiden, he will manifest in such a body to speak Dharma for them. He will cause them to bring forth the Bodhi resolve, and quickly accomplish the Buddha Way.

**If they must be saved by someone in the body of a heavenly dragon, yaksha, gandharva, asura, garuda, kinnara, mahoraga, human or non-human, and so forth, he will manifest in such a body and speak Dharma for them.** There are many kinds of dragons. There are dragons in the heavens, dragons in the seas, and treasury-guarding dragons. Heavenly dragons are Dharma protectors in the heavens. Sea dragons live in the dragon palace and are the leaders among all the fish and marine life. There are also dragons who are in charge of making rain. There are dragons in charge of guarding treasuries of jewels that are buried in the earth. In the ancient days, there were many, many dragons. Nowadays people do not see them, so they think they do not exist. Actually, there are many of them.

When the Great Master Sixth Patriarch was at Nanhua Monastery, there was a poisonous dragon who used to spurt out poison. This poison made people sick and some even died from it. The present day Chan Hall at Nanhua Monastery was built over what used to be the pool of this poisonous dragon. The surface area of the pool was about one mou [about one-seventh acre]. Nobody knew how deep it was.

This dragon was not a good dragon; it was poisonous and hurt people. The left-home people at Nanhua Monastery all got sick from it. One time, it manifested spiritual penetrations for the Sixth Patriarch and appeared in a body so big that it filled up the entire pool. When the Sixth Patriarch saw this, he laughed. "Hah!" he said, "You can manifest in a large body, but I bet you cannot manifest in a small body! You are not that talented."

Hearing this challenge, the dragon suddenly hid away its large body and manifested in a small body, about one foot long, skipping on top of the water.

The Sixth Patriarch said, "Oh, you do have some talent. You can be big and small, but I bet you cannot jump into my bowl here!"

When the dragon heard this, it jumped right into the Sixth Patriarch's bowl. "You got in the bowl, but you will not get out!" said the Sixth Patriarch.

The dragon tried every trick it had, but it could not jump out of the bowl. What a dirty trick!

The Sixth Patriarch said, "Do not be so fiesty! How did you turn into a poisonous dragon? In former lives, you cultivated. You had good roots. You heard the Buddhadharma, but your hatred was too strong and your temper too big. This is called 'being quick with the vehicle but slow with the precepts.' You investigated the Buddhadharma very thoroughly but you did not keep the precepts, and so you have fallen into the body of a dragon. You should not think that you are so talented just because you can be big or small. Here you are in my bowl, and you cannot get out."

Hearing this, the dragon was subdued. The Sixth Patriarch then spoke Dharma for it. When it understood the Dharma, it cast off its dragon body. Its little skeleton was preserved at Nanhua Monastery for a long time, but then got lost during the warfare in that area. So that was how the Sixth Patriarch subdued the poisonous dragon.

During the Tang Dynasty there was a minister by the name of Wei Zeng. Although he was an official in human realm, he was also able to go up into the heavens to be a heavenly official. At that time there was a dragon whom everyone called "Little White Dragon." The people asked the dragon to please allow 1.3 inches of rain to fall, but it sent down 1.3 feet of rain and the crops were totally flooded. This was a violation of the heavenly laws, so they called on Wei Zeng to slay the Little White Dragon.

Little White Dragon knew that Wei Zeng was after it and so it appeared in a dream to the Tang Emperor Tai-Zong, and said, "You are a dragon and I am also a dragon. You should save me." [In imperial China, the dragon was the symbol of the emperor.]

The Emperor said, "Since we are both dragons, brother, I will certainly help you out. How can I save you?"

The dragon said, "I made a mistake with the rain and I let too much fall. Tomorrow I am due to receive my retribution and be killed by your Minister Wei Zeng."

"Well, that is easy enough to take care of," said the Emperor. "He is my minister. I will just tell him not to kill you. Do not worry."

The next day the Emperor called Wei Zeng in for a game of chess, thinking that if Wei Zeng was occupied playing chess, he would not be able to kill the dragon. They began their game and around eleven o'clock Wei Zeng fell asleep right in the middle of the game. The Emperor was delighted with this because now he certainly could not kill the dragon.

However, who could have guessed that when Wei Zeng was asleep, his spirit left him, went up to the heaven, grabbed his heavenly sword and killed the dragon! When the spirit came back, Wei Zeng woke up, and they continued their chess game.

Soon it was past noon, the time after which the dragon would be safe. The Emperor was very happy thinking he had saved his brother and probably created great merit and virtue for himself. Who would have guessed that on that very night, Little White Dragon would return to the Emperor, demanding the Emperor's life! "You said you were my brother and would save me. Why didn't you? Your minister killed me and now I want your life! It is just as if you killed me yourself."

When the Emperor woke up, he was petrified. He told Xu Mao Gong about it, and Xu Mao Gong said, "It is not important. There are two people who can stand up to the dragon. They are Qin Qiong, a yellow-faced Heavenly General, and Jing De, a black-faced Heavenly General. If you can get these two to watch the back door, Little White Dragon would not dare come in."

The Emperor then ordered the two of them to stand guard at the door, and sure enough, Little White Dragon did not show up that night. However, the two Great Generals could not watch the door at night forever; it was too exhausting. So pictures of them were painted and pasted outside the back door, and the dragon stayed away. At new years, Chinese people used to put up their pictures beside the doors to keep the demons and ghosts away.

Dragons became dragons because they were "quick with the vehicle and slow with the precepts." They cultivated and were very intelligent. They mastered the Buddhadharma right away. But they did not keep the precepts. Since they were quick with the vehicle, they have spiritual powers and can transform themselves. But because they did not keep the precepts, they have fallen into the bodies of animals. Dragons are animals, you know.

Yakshas are speedy ghosts. They can run faster than rockets.

Gandharvas are musicall spirits. They like to sniff incense and make music. When the Jade Emperor wishes to hear music, he burns some qielan incense or chandana incense and all the gandharvas gather to make music.

Asuras are the ugly ones who love to fight. One of my disciples knows his dog is an asura. Many dogs are asuras. Horses can be asuras, too. The feisty horses, or mavericks, who like to make trouble in the herd are asuras.

Bulls are asuras out front. Look at the horns on their heads, put there just to fight! Bulls are asuras who used to wear iron helmets. When they got reborn as animals, they remembered they had those weapons on their heads, and so they end up with two horns. Chickens and roosters can also be asuras. The roosters are always fighting with each other.

Some insects, such as crickets, who fight to death with each other are asuras. During the Song dynasty, it was very popular to stage cricket fights. People would bet on them. Any other animals who like to fight--such as snakes, mice, cats, and so forth--are asuras.

Asura is a Sanskrit word and means "ugly." Asuras are hideous. Their lips are as big as a pig's. Their noses are as long as an elephant's. They have eyes like oxen, and little ears like mice. They are ugly. Perhaps they have a person's body and a pig's head, or a person's body and an ox's head, or a horse's head, or a tiger's head. But, while the male asuras are very ugly, the female asuras are very beautiful.

As I have told you many times before, the asura king had a beautiful daughter named Shachi to whom the Jade Emperor became engaged. Why did he want to marry her? The Jade Emperor still has a body with thoughts of desire. Because he has not severed thoughts of sexual desire, he likes beautiful women. One day, catching sight of the beautiful asura girl, he became enamored of her and asked the asura king for his daughter's hand in marriage.

After they were married, the Jade Emperor liked to listen to an immortal speak Dharma. Because he went to the lectures every day, the asura girl soon grew suspicious. "He goes out every day and never gets home until late at night. Most likely he is out playing around with other women."

Finally, she confronted him, "Just where did you go every day? You would not be conducting some improper business on the side, would you?"

"No," said the Jade Emperor. "I go to the lectures on the Sutras every day and that is why I am always home late. You should not be suspicious."

The asura girl, not believing he was going to the Sutra lectures, decided he must certainly be up to no good. She asked to go along, but the Jade Emperor would not allow it. Now, she had a certain amount of spiritual power and was able to make herself invisible.

So, one day when as usual, the Jade Emperor got in his chariot and headed for the lecture, the asura girl made herself invisible and rode along. Upon arriving, the Jade Emperor got out of the chariot and so did the asura girl. Then, she materialized.

"What are you doing here?" asked the surprised Jade Emperor.

"I have come to see what you are up to. I don’t really believe you are coming to listen to Dharma?" she retorted.

The Jade Emperor, in a fury, picked up his cane and struck his wife. The asura girl let out a shriek, and guess what happened? The immortal, who had never heard the sound of a woman’s voice before, was so enchanted by the asura girl’s lovely voice that he gave rise to thoughts of desire and could not continue speaking Dharma.

The Jade Emperor was even more enraged, and he scolded his wife roundly. This so infuriated the asura girl that she went directly to her father.

Previously, when the Jade Emperor was about to be married, he had invited the asura king to a heavenly banquet. After the meal was over, as a gesture of respect to his new father-in-law, he sent out his generals and troops to see him off. However, the asura king felt intimidated and was displeased at the Jade Emperor's show of power. Now his daughter returned with the report that the Jade Emperor was not following the rules at all.

"Every day he goes out with other women," the asura girl said. "And today, when I tried to talk to him about it, he struck me!"

At this, the asura king became enraged. “No wonder he tried to intimidate me at the banquet. He really has no respect for me or my daughter.” Then he mobilized the asura troops against the Jade Emperor.

Strangely enough, the Jade Emperor lost battle after battle and could find no way to overcome the asura king. Finally, he had no recourse but to ask the Buddha for help. The Buddha told him to instruct his troops all to recite "Maha prajna paramita!" As they went into battle, they recited the phrase--"Maha prajna paramita!"—and the asuras lost battle after battle until they were completely vanquished. That was the story of the asuras and the heavenly troops.

Now, the asuras have come into the world, and so there is fighting and conflict everywhere. Anyone who has a bad temper can turn into an asura, or perhaps even be one right now. If you can change your temper and cultivate patience, you can stay out of the path of asuras.

Garudas are the great gold-winged peng birds who formerly ate dragons; but now, thanks to the Buddha, they are vegetarians. They have a wingspan of 360 great yojanas. With one flap of their wings, they can dry up the seas and expose the dragons at the bottom. When they had eaten nearly all of the dragons, the dragon king went to ask the Buddha for help. The Buddha gave the dragon king a piece of his Kashaya sash, and he distributed one thread of it to each dragon. Due to the inconceivable, wonder functioning of the sash, the dragons were safe from their predators, the gold-winged peng birds. But then the peng birds complained to the Buddha, “Buddha, you have saved the dragons, but what about us? We live on a diet of dragons, and if we cannot eat them we will starve.”

The Buddha told the peng birds that they had to keep the precept of not killing.

“Not killing is all very well and good, but if we do not eat dragons, we will starve.”

“Do not worry,” said the Buddha. Every day when my disciples eat, they will send out some food for you.” And so we now have the custom of reciting the offering mantra before lunch and sending out a bit of food to feed the peng birds. They keep the Five Precepts and are one of the eight divisions of Dharma protectors. The garuda bird is a Dharma protector for Shakyamuni Buddha. It is often depicted as perching on top of the Buddha’s head.

As to food and drink, in Buddhism, the morning is the time when the gods eat. The Buddha eats only at noontime. Animals eat in the afternoon, and ghosts eat at night.

Now, ghosts basically can never find food to eat. They watch people eating and they try to snatch some of the food. When they hear the clatter of plates and silverware, they come running to steal food. But when the food enters their mouths, it turns into fire. This happens because their karmic retribution is so heavy that they cannot eat food. They mistakenly think that people use some kind of magic on the food and make it turn into fire, and so they get angry at people and fight with them or make them sick. That is why left-home people do not eat at night.

Since the gods eat in the morning, when left-home people eat breakfast, they send out some food for the gods. They also send out food for the ghost mother and her children.

This rakshasa ghost mother used to eat human children. Why was she called "ghost mother?" Because she had one thousand ghost children. She always led her own children to places where they could steal children to eat. They specialized in eating newborn children. As soon as a child was born, the ghost mother and her ghost children would devour it. This circumstance brought the great grief of lost children for many families. The families then went to the Buddha and asked for help.

The Buddha knew that the ghost mother was eating all the newborn children. So he took the thousandth one of the ghost mother’s children, her youngest one, and kept it in his bowl.

Upon returning home, the ghost mother discovered that her littlest child was missing. She went everywhere looking for him, but to no avail. “Where did he go?” she wondered. When she passed by the Buddha's place, she listened and heard her child crying. She then figured out that her little baby ghost was stuck underneath the Buddha's bowl. Without hesitation, she tried to seize the bowl to save her child, but no matter how hard she had tried, she could not budge it. Finally, she went back and got her other nine hundred and ninety-nine children, and all of them tried to use their ghostly penetrations to move the bowl. But still it could not be budged.

Then they all went to negotiate with the Buddha. "Buddha, why have you taken my little baby away and put him under your bowl? You are not being very compassionate, are you?" the mother ghost cleverly said.

The Buddha asked, “How many children do you have?”

“I have one thousand children,” she replied.

The Buddha said, “Among your one thousand children, you are missing only one child. Why are you so worried?”

“But I cannot bear to lose even a single son!” she cried.

The Buddha said, “You have eaten so many human children. How do you explain that?”

“Basically, I do not want to eat children. But I have nothing to eat. If I do not steal human children to eat, my children and I will starve to death.”

The Buddha then told the ghost mother, “You are so frantic simply because I have put one of your sons under my bowl. How do you think the human mothers feel when you eat their children? From now on, you must not steal any more children to eat. You should take refuge with the Triple Jewel and uphold the Five Precepts.” The ghost mother relented and did as the Buddha said.

Then Shakyamuni Buddha told all his disciples to send out a portion of their food—maybe a few grains of rice—everyday for the ghost mother to eat, and to recite this verse:

To the great golden-winged peng bird,
The multitudes of ghosts and spirits in the desolate wilds,
And the rakshasa ghost mother and her children:
May you all be filled with sweet dew!

Sweet dew represents food that tastes very sweet and delicious. No matter how many beings there are, they can all get their fill. Thus the food offerings sent out in the morning and at noon are for the golden-winged peng bird, the multitudes of ghosts and spirits, and the ghost mother and her children.

Kinnaras are also musical spirits. They look like people except that they have single horn on their head and it is sometimes doubtful whether they are spirits or people. Kinnara means "doubtful spirit."

Mahoragas are big snakes. They are not skinny like most snakes; they are very fat. Natives of Guangdong Province eat the flesh of these snakes. But then again, sometimes the snakes eat people. People eat them, so they eat people.

During the time of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty, the Emperor's wife was called Madame Xi. Emperor Wu believed in Buddha and the Triple Jewel, but his wife was quite adamant in her disbelief, and she also had a vicious and jealous temperament. Because of her jealous nature and her disbelief in the Triple Jewel, after she died, she fell into the body of one of these snakes.

This snake could speak, and it addressed the Emperor, asking him to save it. "Do you know who I am? I am your wife. But because I did not believe in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, and because I did not revere the Triple Jewel, I fell into the body of a big snake."

Hearing this, the Emperor sent for Dhyana Master Zhi Gong to save her. While she was alive, the Emperor's wife could not get along with Dhyana Master Zhi Gong. But when he came to save her, she bowed to him and repented. Dhyana Master Zhi Gong then wrote the Repentance of the Emperor of Liang. He and other eminent monks bowed this repentance and crossed over the Emperor's wife. Because of it, the Emperor's wife cast off the snake body and was reborn in the heavens.

When the Buddha was in the world, the mahoragas took refuge with the Triple Jewel and so they are also Dharma protectors within the Buddhadharma.

“Non-human” refers to all kinds of animals.

If living beings must be saved in any one of the bodies mentioned above, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva will manifest in such a body and speak Dharma for them. He contemplates all the gods, dragons, and the eightfold division and manifests in the appropriate body to save them.

**If they must be saved by someone in the body of a Vajra-wielding spirit, he will manifest in the body of a Vajra-wielding spirit and speak Dharma for them.** The Vajra-weilding spirits are Dharma protectors.

Long ago, there was a wheel-turning sage king who had a thousand sons by his first wife. How could one woman have a thousand sons? She had a very long life. However, he was not satisfied with one thousand sons, and so he took another wife and had two sons by her.

The thousand sons made a vow, saying, "We are going to cultivate and become Buddhas. We do not even want to be wheel-turning kings. We will do it in order, and will draw straws." When they drew straw, Shakyamuni Buddha came up with number four, and so he was the fourth to become a Buddha. In the future there will be a fifth and a sixth Buddha. Now we are in the eon called "Worthy." The thousand princes from of old are to appear as the thousand Buddhas in this eon. Shakyamuni Buddha is the fourth Buddha in the Worthy Eon.

The two sons of the king's second wife also made vows. One of them vowed, "When each of our thousand older brothers becomes a Buddha, no matter in what order, I will be the first to go and request that he speak Dharma."

The second brother said, "You are going to request the Buddha to speak Dharma. I am going to make a vow to be a Dharma protector. Whenever one of my brothers becomes a Buddha, I shall go protect him." Thus, the Vajra-wielding spirit is just the son who made a vow to be a Dharma protector long, long ago, before the Worthy Eon.

**Sutra:**
 **“Inexhaustible Intention! Guanshiyin Bodhisattva has accomplished merit and virtue such as this and, in all manner of forms, roams throughout the land, saving and liberating living beings.”**
Outline:

I2. General answer.

**Commentary:**

Shakyamuni Buddha finished telling about the various transformation bodies of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva and said, **"Inexhaustible Intention! Guanshiyin Bodhisattva has accomplished merit and virtue such as this, and in all manner of forms,** as mentioned above, **roams throughout the land, saving and liberating living beings."**

**Sutra**
 **“Therefore you should all single-mindedly make offerings to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva Mahasattva can, in the midst of fear, crisis, and hardship, bestow fearlessness. That is why in this Saha world, all call him the “Bestower of Fearlessness.”**
Outline:

I3. Encouragement to make offerings.
J1. Encouragement.

**Commentary:**

**Therefore you should all single-mindedly make offerings to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.** Do not have "two minds," that is, do not have doubts. “One mind” means one mind of faith. If you have doubts, there is no merit and virtue, and no response. You should make offerings to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva with one heart. **Guanshiyin Bodhisattva Mahasattva can, in the midst of fear, crisis, and hardship, bestow fearlessness. That is why in this Saha world, all call him the "Bestower of Fearlessness."** He can remove all of your anxiety and distress.

The ninth day of the next month is one of Guanyin Bodhisattva’s anniversaries. He has three anniversaries each year: the anniversary of leaving the home-life, the anniversary of accomplishing the Way, and the anniversary of birth. On those days, everyone should create merit and virtue.

The entire Dharma Flower Sutra has seven rolls and over sixty thousand sentences. It is one of the most important Sutras in Buddhism. It is the Sutra for becoming a Buddha. You should contact all your relatives and friends and let them know about the lecture series. In America there are very, very few places where you can hear Sutras expounded according to the orthodox tradition. So we should pass the word around and write letters and generally let people know about the lecture series. By letting more people know about the Buddhadharma, you are protecting and supporting Buddhism. If you influence them to come to the lectures, you create the greatest merit and virtue. When they come and listen, they study the Buddhadharma and then have a chance to become Buddhas. When they become Buddhas, they will be Buddhas you “created.” If you can “create” Buddhas, you certainly do not have to worry about whether you will become a Buddha yourself.

**Sutra:**
 **Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, I shall now make an offering to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.” He then removed his necklace of pearls, its value in the hundreds of thousands of ounces of gold, and offered it to the Bodhisattva, saying, “Humane One, accept this Dharma offering, this necklace of precious pearls.”**
Outline:

J2. Receiving a command.
K1. The offering.

**Commentary:**

**Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, I shall now make an offering to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva."** Having heard the Buddha encourage all beings to make offerings to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva decided to do just that. Even though Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva himself had already become a Bodhisattva, on hearing about Guanshiyin Bodhisattva's great merit, virtue, and awesome spiritual power, he still wished to make an offering, so as to nurture his own blessings.

**He then removed his necklace of pearls, its value in the hundreds of thousands of ounces of gold, and offered it to the Bodhisattva** immediately, without thinking twice. The beads were made out of the most expensive gems.

Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva presented the necklace to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, **saying, "Humane One, accept this Dharma offering, this necklace of precious pearls."** "Humane One" is a title used among Bodhisattvas when speaking to each other.

Now, jewels basically are an offering of wealth. But why does Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva speak of it as an offering of Dharma? There are three kinds of giving: the giving of wealth, the giving of Dharma, and the giving of fearlessness. In making this offering, Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva did not consider his gift as worth a great deal of money. He just wanted to present the necklace to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.

Why does the text say that its value was in the hundreds of thousands of ounces of gold? This was added by Venerable Ananda when he compiled the Sutra. Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva himself certainly did not mention that the necklace was worth so much money. He wanted to make an offering to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva and this necklace was something he liked. He gave it away as a token of his respect, to show that there was no notion of personal wealth between the two Bodhisattvas. Thus, although the necklace would appear to be a gift of wealth, it was given in the spirit of a gift of Dharma. This was sealing the mind by means of the mind.

**Sutra:**

**Guanshiyin Bodhisattva refused to accept it.**
Outline:

K2. Refusal.

**Commentary:**

**Guanshiyin Bodhisattva refused to accept it.** Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva had offered a valuable necklace to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, but the latter refused to accept it. Why? Because Guanshiyin Bodhisattva had come to the Dharma Flower assembly to hear the Buddha speak the Dharma Flower Sutra, and as he had not received the Buddha's permission to accept offerings, he was polite and refused the offering.

Besides which, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva did not have any greed for such things. He would not say, "What a valuable necklace! I had better take it while I have the chance." To Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, there is no giver, nothing given, and no receiver. Offerings or no offerings, he sees them all as the same.

Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva had merit and virtue, but Guanshiyin Bodhisattva would not accept the gift.

**Sutra:**
 **Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva again said to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, “Humane One, out of pity for us, accept this necklace.”**
Outline:

K3. Repeating the offering.

**Commentary:**

Seeing Guanshiyin Bodhisattva refuse the offering, **Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva again said to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, "Humane One, out of pity for us, accept this necklace."** He was not half-hearted about it, like most people. Most people would just say, "Okay, if you do not want it, I will not insist. I will take it back."

No, instead, Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva got nervous and repeated his request. He said, "Greatly Compassionate and Humane Bodhisattva, please pity me, Inexhaustible Intention, and all the four assemblies of disciples. I want to make offerings to you, Humane One, on behalf of the fourfold assembly and all living beings. I am representing living beings in making this offering to you. I beg you to have pity on living beings and accept this offering."

**Sutra:**
 **The Buddha then told Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, “You should take pity on Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva and the fourfold assembly, as well as the gods, dragons, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kinnaras, mahoragas, humans, non-humans, and so forth, and accept this necklace.”**
Outline:

K4. The Buddha’s encouragement.

**Commentary:**

Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva had made it clear that he was determined to make his offering, and Guanshiyin Bodhisattva had made it clear that he was determined not to accept it. "I do not want such a nice thing. I do not have any virtue. You keep it," he said. Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva started bowing and begging him to accept it.

Well, just at this impasse, Shakyamuni Buddha stepped in to intervene and present a solution. He, **the Buddha, then told Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, "You should take pity on Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva, the fourfold assembly, as well as the gods, dragons, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kinnaras, mahoragas, humans, non-humans, and so forth and accept this necklace.** Since they have brought forth their true minds to present you with this gift, you should not refuse their offering."

**Sutra:**
 **Then, out of pity for the fourfold assembly, the gods, dragons, humans, non-humans, and so forth, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva accepted the necklace. He divided it into two parts: one part he offered to Shakyamuni Buddha and the other to the stupa of Many Jewels Buddha.**
Outline:

K5. Accepting it and giving it away.

**Commentary:**

**Then, out of pity for the fourfold assembly**--Bhikshus, Bhikshunis, Upasakas, Upasikas--**the gods, dragons, humans, non-humans, and so forth, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva accepted the necklace.** He accepted it, but then offered it up right away. **He divided it into two parts: one part he offered to Shakyamuni Buddha and the other to the stupa of Many Jewels Buddha.** No wonder Guanshiyin is a Bodhisattva. Such a valuable thing, and he did not want it. Ah! He accepted his offering and immediately transferred his gift to Shakyamuni Buddha and Many Jewels Buddha.

Many Jewels Buddha became a Buddha measureless eons ago. He vowed that after any person became a Buddha, and then spoke the Dharma Flower Sutra, he would rise up out of the earth into space and go to that place to certify the Dharma Flower Sutra as the most perfect of Sutras.

Shakyamuni Buddha spoke the Avatamsaka, Agama, Vaipulya, and Prajna teachings. When he was about to speak the Dharma Flower Sutra, Many Jewels Buddha emerged to certify it. Now, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva gives half of the necklace as an offering to Many Jewels Buddha.

**Sutra:**
 **“Inexhaustible Intention, such is the self-mastery and spiritual power of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, who roams throughout the Saha world.”**
Outline:

K6. Concluding praise.

**Commentary:**

**Inexhaustible Intention, such is the self-mastery and spiritual power of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, who roams throughout the Saha world**. Thus, everyone should recite his name, “Namo Guanshiyin Bodhisattva,” and make offerings to him and revere him.

**Sutra:**
 **At that time, Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva used verses to ask this question:**

 **“World Honored One, complete with wondrous marks, I now ask again, Why is this disciple of the Buddha Called Guanshiyin?”**

Outline:

F2. Verse.
G1. Question.

**Commentary:**

**At that time, Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva used verses to ask this question.** Verses are used to restate the doctrines of the previous prose passage so as to elaborate upon them. The verses to this chapter were not translated by Dharma Master Kumarajiva, the original translator, but were added later.

**World Honored One, complete with wondrous marks, I now ask again.** The Buddha has Thirty-two Marks and Eighty Subsidiary Characteristics. The Buddha's appearance is perfect and full. **Why is this disciple of the Buddha called Guanshiyin?** The Buddha is the Dharma King, and the Bodhisattvas are his disciples. Why is this disciple of the Buddha called "Contemplator of the World's Sounds"?
 **Sutra:**

**The Honored One of Perfect, Wondrous Marks, With verses answered Inexhaustible Intention: Listen to the practice of Guanyin, Who skillfully responds in all places.With vast vows, as deep as the sea, Throughout inconceivable eons, He has served many thousands of kotis of Buddhas, And has made great, pure vows.**

Outline:

G2. Answer.
H1. Verses to praise his conduct and vows in general.

**Commentary:**

**The Honored One of Perfect, Wondrous Marks, with verses answered Inexhaustible Intention.** "Perfect" means nothing lacking and nothing in excess. It also means perfect in both blessings and wisdom. But here we are not just talking about blessings and wisdom. We are talking about the perfection of the Thirty-two Marks and Eighty Subsidiary Characteristics of the Buddha. He is perfect in all respects.

Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva asked his question in verse, and so the Buddha answers him in verse.

**Listen to the practice of Guanyin, who skillfully responds in all places.** Guanyin Bodhisattva uses skillful expedients. He contemplates the potentials of living beings and dispenses the teaching. He manifests in the body of a Buddha, a Pratyekabuddha, and so forth, to speak the Dharma according to the needs of the living beings being taught. He skillfully responds to the needs of the person. A skillful method is not fixed; it varies with the needs of the person. For this reason, the Vajra Sutra says, "There is no fixed dharma called anuttarasamyaksambodhi."

To save people, you need to know a lot of worldly dharmas. Let's say you become a Dharma Master and you want to teach and transform people. You still have to understand a lot of doctrines. If you see a businessman, you might talk about business, "How is it going? Making money? How is the economy?" If you see a laborer, you might say, "How are working conditions? Are you really busy?" and talk about his work. When the person finds out that you care about him and his work, he will be happy. Once he is happy, you can speak a little Buddhadharma to him, and he will think, "Hey, that is pretty good!" If you see a student, you can ask him about his studies, "How is science or philosophy?" And so the saying goes,

Prescribe the medicine according to the illness;
Speak the Dharma in accord with the person.

This is to "skillfully respond" in all places. We also say,

With clever expedients we save living beings,
Skillfully turning the dust of the world into the Buddha's work.

All worldly affairs are turned, with ingenuity, into Buddhadharma.

**With vast vows, as deep as the sea, throughout inconceivable eons, he has served many thousands of kotis of Buddhas.** Guanshiyin Bodhisattva is in all respects subtle, wonderful, and inconceivable. He has served many, many millions of Buddhas. **And he has made great, pure vows** in every life—vows of great kindness and great compassion. The realm of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva is indeed lofty, deep, and unfathomable!

**Sutra:**

**I shall now tell you in brief, That for those who hear his name or see him,And who are mindful of his name unceasingly, He can extinguish the suffering of all realms of existence.**

Outline:

H2. Specific verses in answer.
I1. Answers to previous questions.
J1. General answer.

**Commentary:**

Guanshiyin Bodhisattva made pure vows. What are pure vows? "Pure" means that they are not made for one's own selfishness; they are public and unselfish. Guanyin Bodhisattva's vows are based on his compassionate wish to save living beings.

Shakyamuni Buddha said to Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva, **"I shall now tell you in brief, that for those who hear his name or see him."** To hear Guanyin Bodhisattva's name, you must have good roots. If you do not have good roots, you cannot even hear Guanshiyin Bodhisattva's name, let alone see him in person. Now we have all heard his name. To see him does not mean you necessarily have to see his physical body. It can also mean seeing a painting or a statue made of clay, copper, iron, silver, gold, wood, or mani. That is just the same as seeing him in person.

**And who are mindful of his name unceasingly.** This means that you keep his name in mind and do not let the time slip by idly. You recite without wasting your time. Time is the most precious thing, more precious than gold. Do not waste your precious time. Instead recite, "Namo Guanshiyin Bodhisattva."

What advantages does recitation of Guanyin Bodhisattva's name bring? **He can extinguish the suffering of all realms of existence.** All of existence refers to the twenty-five planes of existence in the Three Realms—the realms of desire, form, and formlessness.

**Sutra:**

**If someone is the victim of another’s harmful intent,And is pushed into a pit of fire, If he evokes the strength of Guanyin, The pit of fire will turn into a pool.**

Outline:

J2. Specific answers.
K1. The seven difficulties.
L1. The difficulty of fire.

**Commentary:**

**If someone is the victim of another's intent**. Let's say you go into business with someone and then the two of you take a trip together in the mountains. You are way up on a cliff, and your partner realizes, "If I push him off the cliff, I can have all the money!"

**And** if a person **is pushed into a pit of fire, if he evokes the strength of Guanyin, the pit of fire will turn into a pool.** Recitation of Guanyin Bodhisattva's name has great power and brings a great response. It is truly inconceivable.

Now that we can hear this chapter of the Dharma Flower Sutra and understand this doctrine, we should always and everywhere recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. If you recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, in the future he will protect you. Such incidents are too many to be spoken of in full.

**Sutra:**

**If someone is being tossed about in the great sea, And is surrounded by the dangers of dragons, fish, and ghosts, If he evokes the strength of Guanyin, The waves will not drown him.**

Outline:

L2. The difficulty of water.

**Commentary:**

**If someone is being tossed about in the great sea,** with no sign of the shore anywhere, **and is surrounded by the dangers of dragons, fish, and ghosts.** There are poisonous dragons and rakshasa ghosts in the sea. Big fish can eat people, too. But **if he evokes the strength of Guanyin, the waves will not drown him.** Somehow, he will find himself in shallow water, transported to the other shore, or he will be saved by a boat or something. But if you do not recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva or see Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, things can get very dangerous.

I remember when I was in Hong Kong, I had a very bad disciple. In what way was he bad? He had hurt people. His name was Zhang. His family owned a Western pharmacy, and they were very wealthy. He imported Western drugs into Hong Kong. This was right after the Japanese had surrendered. Since it was right after the war, there were a lot of sicknesses and epidemics on the mainland. When he was on a boat coming back with a cargo of drugs, he pushed his business partner overboard. The business partner did not know about reciting Guanshiyin Bodhisattva's name, and he drowned.

When Zhang returned, he made a lot of money. He also sold counterfeit drugs and made a fortune on them. He was incredibly rich. But, eventually, the retribution caught up with him, and he got cancer. Six of the most famous doctors in Hong Kong said that he would surely be dead within a hundred days; that there was no way to cure it. He advertised in the newspaper saying that if anyone could save his life, he would pay that person US$200,000, which was a considerable amount in those days. But no one could take him up on this offer, and so he came to Western Bliss Garden and asked me what to do.

I said, "You should do good deeds and make offerings to the Triple Jewel. The first thing you need to do is take refuge with the Triple Jewel. Next, make offerings. Then maybe you will get better."

And so, on the eighteenth day of the fifth month, he signed up to take refuge. I encouraged him to make offerings to the entire Triple Jewel by presenting a bolt of sturdy cloth to every member of the Sangha in Hong Kong. At that time, many Bhikshus and Bhikshunis had come from the mainland and they had no clothes to wear or places to stay. There were two or three thousand of them. I told him to give each of them HK$20 [US$15]. He agreed to do this.

Now, there were a lot of old Dharma Masters in Hong Kong who, hearing that Zhang Yujie had taken refuge with me, manifested their spiritual powers. What do I mean? They sent their friends and relatives to talk to Zhang to get him to go to their temples instead. The old Dharma Masters all got people to "climb on conditions," that is, to be opportunistic on their behalf. All the old and well-known Dharma Masters with status were after him. So Zhang went and did some merit at this temple and some virtue at that temple.

He had agreed to give each left-home person coming from the mainland HK$20 as I had told him to, but he did not do it. He gave them each a bolt of cloth, though not the good kind he had promised but a kind of inferior quality, and he only gave them $5 each. Since I had already told the left-home people about this offering, I had to make up the difference. I borrowed money and made up the extra $10. Now, not one of them knew I had done this. Today, they still do not know. Monks know that other monks do not like to give money away. They prefer to receive money. In fact, there is a saying, "Left-home people are not greedy for money? The more the better." Zhang wanted to spend his money on something else, so I did not say anything.

Anyway, one hundred days went by, and he did not die. All the Dharma Masters said, "We did it for you by bowing repentances." Each one of them claimed that he was responsible for saving Zhang's life. "I bowed to the Buddha every day for you. That did the trick." They all did their bit. I did not claim to have anything to do with it, and I had nothing to say to him about it.

Six years passed, and he had not died.

At that time, I was building Cixing Monastery at Dayu Mountain [on Lanto Island]. He heard I was building a temple, and since he was a disciple, he sent a servant to me with a small amount of money. The servant brought the money and said that Zhang wanted to help me build the temple. I did not even look at it. I just threw it out the door. I said, "His money is not clean. It did not come in the proper way. Give it back to him."

This scared Zhang nearly to death. He went to one of the groveling Dharma Masters, Dingxi by name, and tried to get him to give the money to me with some compliments. I said to Dingxi, "The work here is done. I do not need any money. He can do some other kinds of merit and virtue with his money. There are so many Dharma Masters and temples. Take it somewhere else." The old Dharma Master was a bit embarrassed.

Another two years went by. And then, in the first month of the year, I announced, "Zhang Yujie took refuge eight years ago. He said he was going to offer US$200,000 to build a temple. It has not happened yet, and I am not going to wait anymore for it to happen. However, after this, no matter what kind of a problem he has, I am not going to pay any attention to it. He can kneel in front of me until he dies, but I am not going to pay any attention to his business."

Less than six months later, his cancer returned. He sent his relatives to me because none of the other temples could bring him a response at that time. So he came to me, but I said, "I already announced in the first month of this year that I was no longer going to pay any attention to Zhang Yujie's affairs." I did not either, and he died of cancer a few days later. His younger brother had committed suicide earlier by jumping into the ocean. That was before Zhang took refuge with me.

Soon after that, Dharma Master Dingxi, who had taken advantage of Zhang Yujie, also got cancer and died about a year later. Probably Zhang’s ghost had gone to get him, saying “You said that I was cured because of the repentances you bowed, but I still died of cancer.” The laywoman who had convinced Zhang Yujie to go to Dingxi also died of cancer. The three of them were of one substance. They stuck together while alive and they all died of cancer together.

Zhang Yujie died because he had pushed his business partner into the ocean. His partner could not recite Guanyin's name, and so he became a vengeful ghost and caused Zhang to have cancer. Basically, since Zhang had taken refuge with the Triple Jewel, if he had truly brought forth faith, he would not have died. But his faith was not solid, and so even though he did not die after a hundred days, he died eight years later. His family is still very rich. But when he died, he could not take any of it with him. All the money he cheated out of everyone was useless. It all went to his other younger brother.

Why did his business partner drown? Because he did not recite Guanyin Bodhisattva's name.

**Sutra:**

**If someone is on the peak of Mount Sumeru, And another person tries to push him off, If he evokes the strength of Guanyin, He will stand firm as the sun in space.**

Outline:

L3. The difficulty of falling off Mount Sumeru.

**Commentary:**

**If someone is on the peak of Mount Sumeru, and another person tries to push him off.** Mount Sumeru is the name of the highest mountain. However, the text here does not mean just Mount Sumeru; it could be any high place. Sumeru is a Sanskrit word that means "wonderfully high." Being "on the peak of Mount Sumeru" here can also mean that people flatter you and praise you until your ego soars to lofty heights, and then they pull the carpet out from under you, leaving you with nothing to stand on. That is also like being pushed off Mount Sumeru.

**If he evokes the strength of Guanyin, he will stand firm as the sun in space.** The sun in space shines for ten thousand miles. Even if people put you on a pedestal and then let you fall, you will have samadhi power and will not be upset. This is as when,

In praise or blame,
His mind doesn't move.

**Sutra:**

**If someone is pursued by evil people, Who want to throw him off a Vajra Mountain, If he evokes the strength of Guanyin, Not a single hair on his body will be harmed.**

Outline:

L4. The difficulty of falling off Vajra Mountain.

**Commentary:**

**If someone is pursued by evil people, who want to throw him off a Vajra Mountain.** Who are evil people? Those who do not listen to reason. They specialize in murder and arson. "What is yours is mine, and what is mine is mine! Your money is mine. My money is mine even more so." Does that make any sense? Evil people are completely unreasonable. They use force to oppress others and have no respect for others' rights.

Suppose a person is pursuing someone else. He keeps his eyes on his victim all the time and waits for him to fall asleep, so that he can push him off a steep cliff and steal his money. However, **if he evokes the strength of Guanyin,** if the person who is being pursued is mindful of Guanyin, **not a single hair on his body will be harmed.** The Vajra Mountain represents a high and solid place. When meeting with a danger like this, if you do not forget to recite Guanyin Bodhisattva's name, you will certainly obtain a great response and the Bodhisattva will save you. This is called,

You meet with misfortune, it turns lucky;
You encounter disaster, it becomes auspicious.

The danger will no longer be dangerous. That is how efficacious this Dharma is!

Sutra:

**If someone is surrounded by vicious bandits, Who threaten him with knives, If he evokes the strength of Guanyin, The bandits will all give rise to compassion.**

Outline:

L5. The difficulty of bandits

**Commentary:**

Everything that people encounter has to do with former causes and latter effects. Now we meet up with bandits. Before it was evil people; they were not outright robbers. But robbers are just outright murderers, and they do all kinds of evil. They will do anything except what is good. Perhaps they are our enemies because in past lives we stole from them, killed them, or treated them badly. Thus, in this life, we meet them as enemies. It is said,

If you kill, you will pay with your life,
If you owe money, you will have to pay it back.

This is all the matter of cause and effect. Since this is so, if we encounter hateful enemies, we should not hate them in return. We should not curse the heavens or resent people.

Manjushri Bodhisattva once told this story: "In every life, life after life, I never stole anything from anyone. How can I prove it? I will take my most priceless jewel, put it right by the city's gate for three days without keeping my eye on it, and no one will take it. This will prove that I never stole or coveted other's goods."

Some people did not believe him, so they tried it out. They put the jewel right by the gate, where everyone walked. Three days went by, and no one touched it. Manjushri Bodhisattva was able to do this because he never stole.

Now we meet with hateful enemies, and this proves that we are receiving retribution for deeds done in former lives. And so, if you lose something or take some loss, you should not take it too hard and get all upset. You are just undergoing what you deserve.

**If someone is surrounded by vicious bandits, who threaten him with knives.** This reminds me of when I was at Nanhua Monastery for one year. The day before Guanyin Bodhisattva's anniversary, which was on the nineteenth day of the ninth month, some bandits showed up to rob Nanhua Monastery. The bandits knocked on the door and I refused to open it. Finally, they beat the door down, and suddenly I found myself surrounded by guns. It was a tight situation, but I did not feel afraid at all. I said, quite casually, "What are you pointing those guns at me for?"

"Why didn't you open the door?" they demanded.

"If you were me," I said, "would you have opened the door? No! I did not open the door because you are coming to steal from me, not to give me a present."

"Give us your money!" they demanded.

At that time I was wearing a rag robe. I said, "Take a look at this robe! Do I look like someone with money?"

"Then who has money?" they said.

I said, "I am a teacher here. These are my students. If I have no money, how could the students have any? If you do not believe me, you can take a look in my room. You can take anything you want, any treasure you find. Go right ahead."

At that time, I really did have two treasures in my room. They were "living" treasures. When the bandits came, they were so scared that they could not even walk. They crawled around saying, "What shall we do? We are scared!" I said, "Do not be afraid. You can hide under my bed." Hearing me tell the bandits that they could take whatever they wanted, these two "treasures" were terrified. They were so scared that their teeth were chattering. Well, the bandits did not go in.

Dharma Master Huaiyi saw me talking with the bandits in such an amicable manner, and so he came out of his room. The bandits turned around and pointed their guns at him, and he burst into tears. I said, "He does not have any money. Talk to me!" At that point they were surrounding him, and he led them to his room. They got about two hundred dollars from him, probably several years' worth of savings.

The next day it was announced to the two hundred monks that I was the only person who had not been afraid. I said to everyone, "I am not the only one who was not afraid. There were four of us. The first was the Sixth Patriarch. He sat there in samadhi, 'Thus, thus, unmoving! Take what you want, bandits. I am not paying any attention to you.' The second was the Patriarch Hanshan. He also sat in samadhi. The third was the Patriarch Dantian. He did not have quite the samadhi power, since he turned his head to look at the bandits. (I said that because his flesh body does lean forward a bit.) The fourth was I myself. I was only number four."

And so, if a person meets with bandits who threaten him with knives, **if he evokes the strength of Guanyin, the bandits will all give rise to compassion.** The bandits did not hit me or shoot me. No doubt that was because I recite Guanyin Bodhisattva's name. They started out very fierce, but eventually, they became subdued and kind. When they saw me in my rag robes they thought, "This monk is really pitiful."

**Sutra:**

**If someone is in trouble with the law, And on the verge of being executed, If he evokes the strength of Guanyin, The knives will break into pieces.**

Outline:

L6. The difficulty of knives and staves.

**Commentary:**

**If someone is in trouble with the law.** If you break the imperial law, there is no politeness about it; you have your head cut off. This happens sometimes by mistake, too. You get arrested and sentenced when you are actually innocent. And so the law has its advantages and disadvantages.

People may bear false witness against someone who is innocent. That happens a lot when lawyers get involved. The defendant may clearly be guilty, but if he gets a "good" lawyer to defend him, he can get off free. On the other hand, the lawyer can also "prove" someone broke the law, and that person gets executed when, in fact, he is innocent. Where are you ever going to find the truth in this world? You will have to look in the Buddhadharma. You will not find it in the world. The world is ruled by force, not by reason.

The text brings up the hypothetical case of a person who is in difficulty with the law, regardless of whether he is innocent or guilty, **and on the verge of being executed.** However, **if he evokes the strength of Guanyin, the knives will break into pieces.** At such a time, if you can remain calm and can remember to recite Guanyin Bodhisattva's name, the knife will just break into pieces. Your neck will become stronger than Vajra.

Now, you cannot try out these things as experiments. If you do, you will end up getting your head chopped off. In order for it to be efficacious, you must have faith. If you have no faith and decide to try it out, it will not work. That is because in trying it out, you show that you have no faith. If you really believed, you would not need to try it out. You should simply bring forth a genuine heart of faith in Guanyin Bodhisattva, then everything will be efficacious. Do not have doubts.

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

Everyone should cooperate to translate the Sutras. We are now starting to translate the Sutras, but not on the grand scale, certainly, that translation was carried out in China. In China the emperors supported the translation of Sutras. It was a national project, and all the monks got together to translate Sutras. Dharma Master Kumarajiva had eight hundred monks helping him translate the Sutras. Now, we are just beginning in America. Everyone should make whatever contribution they can to these pioneering efforts. We should forge ahead and put our effort into this work.

**Sutra:**

**If someone is imprisoned, shackled, or chained, Or if his hands and feet are in stocks, If he evokes the strength of Guanyin, His bonds will open and he will be free.**

Outline:

L7. The difficulty of stocks and chains.

**Commentary:**
**If someone is imprisoned, shackled, or chained, or if his hands and feet are in stocks.** The character for prison, qiu, is the image of a person, inside four walls.

Let's say you get put in jail, and then on top of that you are forced to wear handcuffs and chains, and your head is put in the stocks.

Those of you with families should hurry and wake up! Do not be imprisoned by the three big traps. One's parents are like a cangue around one's neck. Children are like handcuffs. And one's spouse is like the chains on one's legs.

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

Right now America needs left-home people. If anyone wishes to leave the home-life, no matter what they are like, I will approve them. Even if they misbehaved in the past, it will be fine as long as they will behave after they leave home. I want to do whatever I can to create Elders in America. If they grow old on their own, they do not lay a good foundation. I want to foster the elders of American Buddhism. In the future every one of you left-home people has a chance to become an Elder or even a Patriarch of American Buddhism.

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

**If he evokes the strength of Guanyin, his bonds will open and he will be free.** Long ago in China, there was a monk who was captured by one of the Yao tribe. The Yao people had their own language, which is completely different from Chinese, and they were very wild. When they took prisoners, they would kill and eat them. The monk was captured and locked in a cell. They were going to eat him!

The monk believed in Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, so even though he knew their intentions, he was not afraid. He just single-mindedly recited Guanshiyin Bodhisattva's name. The monk recited and recited until a tiger showed up and tore the cell apart, and so he was set free. In spite of the danger, he was not harmed.

Reciting the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva brings so many responses that you could never finish speaking of them.

**Sutra:**

**If someone is about to be harmed, By mantras, spells, or poison, If he evokes the strength of Guanyin, The harm will all return to the sender.**

Outline:

L8. The difficulty of mantras, spells, and poison.

**Commentary:**

**If someone is about to be harmed, by mantras, spells, or poison.** Spells are also mantras.

In the section on the twelve types of living beings, the Shurangama Sutra talks about the wasp, which steals caterpillars and transforms them into its own young. It puts the caterpillar in its mud nest and recites a mantra that says, "Be like me, be like me." At the end of that period, the change takes place, and the caterpillar becomes the offspring of the wasp.

There are all kinds of mantras. There are evil mantras that can kill people, but there are also efficacious mantras that help and benefit people. Here, in the Sutra text, we are talking about mantras that can harm people. When these mantras are recited, the victim gets all drowsy and befuddled.

Suppose a person is about to be harmed by mantras, spells, and poisons, **if he evokes the strength of Guanyin,** the harmful poisons and mantras cannot hurt him. Not only that, but **the harm will all return to the sender.** The poison or mantras will bounce back and harm the person who sent it out in the first place.

In China, long ago, there was a very accurate diviner, one who told fortunes with the Yi Jing [The Book of Changes]. The reason he was so effective was that he had a demon helping him out. Every year the demon had to eat a virgin boy and a virgin girl, which the diviner would offer to him.

One year, the young girl who was marked for the sacrifice recited Guanyin Bodhisattva's name in the room in which she was held captive. She was used to reciting Guanyin's name at home, and now she continued to do so. What do you think happened? The demon came for his meal. It looked in through the window and shone light out of its eyes onto the young girl. Suddenly, the girl's mouth emitted as she recited Guanyin's name, and she heard a loud noise as something fell down from the ceiling to the floor. Thinking that the demon had come to eat her, she screamed and attracted the attention of a policeman who was walking by. The policeman broke the door down, came into the room, and found a huge python, a mahoraga. It was dead.

The diviner was arrested by the police and questioned about locking the girl up. He said he had an immortal helping him do his divination, and the immortal demanded a young girl and a young boy to eat once a year. That was how he became such an accurate diviner and raked in so much money. They locked the diviner in jail. He told fortunes for others, but he never figured his own fortune would turn out so bleak! Therefore, harming others is just harming yourself.

The line "The harm will all return to the sender" was changed by the Song Dynasty poet, Su Dongpo. He said, "In Buddhism they teach compassion. This line does not sound very compassionate to me." And so he changed the line to "For both parties there will be no trouble." Neither the one who sent out the mantras nor the victim will be harmed.

He was wrong, though. Although in Buddhism killing is prohibited and the liberation of life is encouraged, still, evil people must be restrained from harming good people. Therefore, the victim who knows how to recite Guanyin Bodhisattva's name will not be harmed, but if there is "no trouble," the attacker will just go on to the next person, who may not know to recite. There are plenty of people who do not know how to recite.

So Su Dongpo's line does not work. "The harm will all return to the sender" is correct. It is fitting that the evil person should undergo such a retribution.

**Sutra:**

**If someone meets with evil rakshasas, Poisonous dragons, or ghosts, If he evokes the strength of Guanyin, They will then not dare to harm him.**

Outline:

L9. The difficulty of ghosts.

**Commentary:**

**If someone meets with evil rakshasas, poisonous dragons, or ghosts.Rakshasas** are extremely evil ghosts. They eat people!

Some dragons harm people. They hide out in a pond, a river, or a lake, and when you walk by, they spit poisonous vapors, which can kill you. They can even suck you right into their stomachs!

There are many kinds of ghosts. There are rich ghosts, poor ghosts, and penniless ghosts. Rich ghosts are the leaders of the ghosts. Poor ghosts are not too well off. Penniless ghosts have nothing at all.

"Do ghosts use money?" you ask.

Ghosts do not use money, but their bad habits cause them to act like people, and so they look for more money all day long. Basically, they do not need money for anything, but their attachment confuses them. Chinese people burn counterfeit paper money to pacify the ghosts. In the Shurangama Mantra, many different kinds of ghosts are mentioned. Here we are talking about ghosts in general.

When a person runs into evil ghosts, **if he evokes the strength of Guanyin, they will then not dare to harm him.** When you recite Guanyin's name, there is light. Since ghosts are afraid of the light, they would not be able to see you or harm you in any way.

**Sutra:**

**If someone is surrounded by vicious beasts, With fearsome fangs and claws, If he evokes the strength of Guanyin, The beasts will quickly run far away.**

Outline:

L10. The difficulty of vicious beasts.

**Commentary:**

**If someone is surrounded by vicious beasts.** "Vicious beasts" refers to wolves, panthers, tigers, bears, and all kinds of animals who eat people. There are no tigers in the mountains in America, but in China and India there are many tigers. Tigers will eat anything. When I was a child, I used to roam in the mountains for five or six days at a time, and I ran into all these beasts. I do not know why, but they never ate me.

If a person runs into evil beasts **with fearsome fangs and claws, if he evokes the strength of Guanyin, the beasts will quickly run far away.** Because of the magical response obtained through Guanyin Bodhisattva's intervention, the beasts will be afraid and run far, far away when they see you.

**Sutra:**

**Poisonous snakes and scorpions, Have blazing lethal vapors, But if one evokes the strength of Guanyin, At the sound of one’s voice, they will disperse.**

Outline:

L11. The difficulty of snakes and scorpions.

**Commentary:**

**Poisonous snakes and scorpions, have blazing lethal vapors.** The sting of certain scorpions can prove fatal. Some kinds of lizards, such as a certain species found in Thailand, also emit toxic vapors.

**But if one evokes the strength of Guanyin, at the sound of one's voice, they will disperse.** When the lethal creatures hear you recite the name of Guanyin Bodhisattva, they will run off, hide away, and make no further mischief.

**Sutra:**

**Clouds of roaring thunder and lightning May send down hail or great floods of rain, But if one evokes the strength of Guanyin, The clouds will immediately scatter.**

Outline:

L12. The difficulty of thunder and rain.

**Commentary:**

**Clouds of roaring thunder and lightning may send down hail or great floods of rain.** Sometimes hailstones can weigh several dozens of pounds. They can be so heavy that they can kill a cow, to say nothing of a person. **But if one evokes the strength of Guanyin, the clouds will immediately scatter.** You do not have to recite for very long, and the hailstones and storms will disperse.

**Sutra:**

**Living beings are beset with hardships, And oppressed by limitless sufferings. The power of Guanyin’s wondrous wisdom Can rescue the world from suffering.**

Outline:

K2. The three poisons and two requests.

**Commentary:**

**Living beings are beset with hardships.** Living beings are born because of a multitude of conditions. There are millions of different kinds of living beings.

In Chinese, the word for "living being" contains the word zhong, which is the character for four, si, with three people, ren, underneath it. It means "multitude."

Among living beings, humans are the most problematical. People have to wear clothes, eat, and go to work. It is a lot of trouble. However, human beings are also the wisest among living beings. Animals and other living beings do not have as many problems, but they are also stupid. Since they are stupid, they get pushed around by people. And so in China, there is a saying,

Among the myriad creatures, people are the most magical.

People are the most intelligent of all creatures. Although we say they are the most intelligent, they sometimes do stupid things. How is that? They like to give themselves trouble. They fight with themselves. How do they do this? "Hardships" arise. It is said,

Under heaven there's nothing happening;
Stupid people just like to stir things up.
Stupid people make trouble for themselves.

Now the text says that living beings are beset by hardships **and oppressed by limitless sufferings.** They create trouble for themselves, and so they undergo limitless forms of suffering. If people do not have food to eat, clothes to wear, or a place to live, they suffer. With so many conditions on their happiness, they are forced to toil all day long to get food to eat. They may even steal from each other to preserve their own lives. They do this because they are tormented by suffering.

**The power of Guanyin's wondrous wisdom can rescue the world from suffering.** Therefore, no matter what is bothering you, you should not worry. Just recite the name of Guanyin Bodhisattva, then gradually the problem will resolve itself. Guanyin Bodhisattva's wisdom is subtle, wonderful, and inconceivable. All you need is a sincere heart, and the Bodhisattva will help you.
**Sutra:**

**Complete with the power of spiritual penetrations, Vastly cultivating wisdom and expedient means, Going throughout countries in the ten directions, He manifests everywhere in all places.**

Outline:

I2. Answers to subsequent questions.
J1. Manifesting.
K1. Universal response with body karma.

**Commentary:**

**Complete with the power of spiritual penetrations.** What is meant by "the power of spiritual penetrations?" There are six types of spiritual penetrations.

1. The Penetration of the Heavenly Eye. With the Heavenly Eye, you can see at a glance what the gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-three are doing.

2. The Penetration of the Heavenly Ear. With the Heavenly Ear, you can hear all the sounds throughout the ten directions, in the heavens and below.

3. The Penetration of Other's Thoughts. You can know what other people are thinking.

4. The Penetration of Past Lives. You can know the cause and effect involved in former lives. You can know what kinds of beings people were in their former lives.

5. The Penetration of the Perfected Spirit, also called the Penetration of the Complete Spirit. With this penetration, you can fly and transform at will.

6. The Penetration of the Extinction of Outflows. This is the hardest one to obtain.

The ghosts and spirits all have the above mentioned five penetrations. But they do not possess the Penetration of the Extinction of Outflows. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva has all six of them.
 **Vastly cultivating wisdom and expedient means.** "Vastly" means that the Bodhisattvas did not cultivate just one Dharma-door, but that they cultivated all manner of Dharma-doors. For example, right now not only do we study the Sutras, we also learn Chinese and study the Shurangama Mantra and the Great Compassion Mantra. On top of that, we also want to learn the Great Compassion Repentance. Why? It is all a part of "vastly cultivating wisdom and expedient means."

**Going throughout countries in the ten directions, he manifests everywhere in all places.** There is not a single place where Guanyin Bodhisattva does not go. He has been everywhere.

All of us living beings have affinities with Guanyin Bodhisattva. Anyone who recites Guanyin Bodhisattva's name will receive the Bodhisattva's protection. But if you do not recite, Guanyin Bodhisattva would not pay any attention to you. Why not? Because you don't even care to get acquainted, and you don't even know or recollect the Bodhisattva's name.

If you want to be friends with Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, all you have to do is keep reciting, "Namo Guanshiyin Bodhisattva." When he hears you reciting, he will think, "Ah, hah! I have made another friend! Good, I will help my new friend." If you do not recite, the Bodhisattva will say, "He does not want to be friends. I am not going to pay any attention to his affairs."

Someone wants to know how to obtain the Penetration of the Heavenly Eye. There are many methods. First of all, you can single-mindedly recite the Shurangama Mantra. You can also study the Great Compassion Mantra and the Forty-two Hands. You can also give up sleeping to study the Buddhadharma. But trying to get the Heavenly Eye by giving up sleeping is very dangerous, and I hope that people would not use that method. Why not?

You probably remember the story about the Buddha's disciple Aniruddha, who used to sleep through the Buddha's lectures. The Buddha scolded him, saying,

Hey! Hey! How dare you sleep, like an oyster or a clam?
Sleep! Sleep for a thousand years, and you'll never hear the Buddha's name.

After the Buddha scolded him, he became very vigorous and refused to sleep for seven days. As a result, he went blind. The Buddha taught him the Vajra Illumining Bright Samadhi, and Aniruddha opened his Heavenly Eye. He was foremost of the Buddha's disciples in having the Heavenly Eye.

Aniruddha means "not poor." Limitless eons and countless lifetimes ago, Aniruddha was a poor farmer. He had to toil and sweat, and still he had no money. At that time he was a beginner in the Buddhadharma. Even though he was not a disciple of the Buddha, he did understand the principle of giving.

One day while the farmer was working, a cultivator happened by. The Bhikshu had been certified to the fruit and was a Pratyekabuddha, but the farmer did not know that at the time. The old Bhikshu was returning from his begging rounds. It was his practice to beg from only seven houses. Then, if he had not obtained any food, he would return to the mountain for another seven days before going out to beg again. At that particular time, he was returning with an empty bowl.

When the farmer saw the poor monk, he decided to offer up his lunch to him. He had no idea the old Bhikshu was a Pratyekabuddha. Now, the Pratyekabuddha had the Penetration of Other's Thoughts, so when he looked into the causes and conditions, he saw that this lunch, consisting of the poorest quality rice, constituted a most sincere offering. He praised the farmer and said, "So it is, so it is. Your offering is made with a true heart!" The Pratyekabuddha then returned to his mountain.

Later on, a rabbit hopped along and jumped on the farmer's back. The farmer ran home, but try as he might, he could not shake the rabbit off. Then he noticed it was made of gold. He cut off one of the golden rabbit's legs and exchanged it for money. The leg grew right back. After that, he had money in every life. Why? Because he made offerings with a true heart to a Pratyekabuddha, a sage who had been certified to the fruit. That was his reward. In every life he was "not poor."

In the Sutra in Forty-two Sections, the Buddha said,

Giving food to a hundred bad people does not equal giving food to a single good person.

Giving food to a thousand good people does not equal giving food to one person who holds the Five Precepts.

Giving food to ten thousand people who hold the Five Precepts does not equal giving food to a single Srotaapanna.

Giving food to a million Srotaapannas does not equal giving food to a single Sakridagamin.

Giving food to ten million Sakridagamins does not equal giving food to a single Anagamin.

Giving food to a hundred million Anagamins does not equal giving food to a single Arhat.

Giving food to a billion Arhats does not equal giving food to a single Pratyekabuddha.

Giving food to ten billion Pratyekabuddhas does not equal giving food to a Buddha of the three periods of time.

Giving food to a hundred billion Buddhas of the three periods of time does not equal giving food to a single one who is without thoughts, without dwelling, without cultivation, and without accomplishment.

Because Aniruddha made offerings to a Pratyekabuddha with a true heart, as a good retribution in every life he was extremely wealthy. If he was not a prince, then he was a wealthy and respected individual. And so, if you want to be "not poor," you too should make offerings to the Triple Jewel; then in the future you will have a chance to be wealthy.

It is said, "It is difficult to give when one is poor." The reason Aniruddha was so wealthy is that he was able to give when he was poor. He gave his own lunch to the Triple Jewel. With that single true thought, he gained the reward of wealth.

It is also said, "It is difficult to study the Way when one has wealth and a noble status." It is hard to convince a rich person to study the Way.

The doctrines in the Sutra in Forty-two Sections are extremely important. Everyone should take note of them.

**Sutra:**

**The various evil destinies, Those of the hells, ghosts, and animals, And the pain of birth, old age, sickness, and death Are all gradually wiped away.**

Outline:

K1. Universal response with body karma (continued).

**Commentary:**

**The various evil destinies.** "Various" means that there are a lot of them, not just one. In general, there are Four Evil Destinies. What are they? They are the asuras, the hell-beings, the ghosts, and the animals.

Asuras have been explained previously. They like to fight.

What are hell-beings? How are the hells created? The hells are a creation of people's karmic obstacles. According to the type of evil karma one creates, one will fall into the corresponding type of hell. There are many types of hells. They are explained in detail in the Earth Store Sutra, which says there are eighteen major hells and five hundred lesser ones. There are many hells.

Now, are the hells made in advance like the prisons in this world? No. The hells manifest through the evil karma of each person. If you create evil karma by killing people, you will fall into the "hell for killers." The same applies to other evil acts, such as setting fires. The type of hell depends on the type of karma. It is not fixed. When the karma is exhausted, the hell is then empty. Before it is ended, the hell is still there.

In Manchuria there was a man named Mr. Pig Foot Liu. His family name was Liu and he had a hoof instead of a foot. He was able to remember the events of his past three lives.

In one life he was born into a very wealthy family. When he was born, his father was in his forties. When the child Pig Foot Liu was thirteen, he was married to a wife who was two years his senior. Although the father was then in his fifties, his lust was still going strong, so he took a young wife who was about the same age as the son's wife. A couple years later, Pig Foot Liu had a son. The son was married when he was about thirteen, and the wife was also a couple years older than her husband.

At that time, Pig Foot Liu did not believe in Buddhism. His parents had both died, and only his father's young wife was left. Pig Foot Liu thought she was very beautiful, and he appropriated her for himself. Then Pig Foot Liu's son died, and attracted to his son's wife, he took her, too. So he was carrying on an affair with his stepmother and his daughter-in-law! He was in his mid-twenties at that time.

When Pig Foot Liu was in his forties, he woke up. "I have certainly amassed some terrible karma in this life!" he thought. "I took my stepmother and my daughter-in-law as wives." He started believing in Buddhism and took up recitation of the Vajra (Diamond) Sutra.

In his late forties, after reciting the Sutra for ten years, he died and went to meet King Yama, the cruel, black-faced Lord of the Dead.

"Since you created so much evil karma," King Yama said, "I am going to put you in the Hell of Boiling Oil where you will be fried." He charged two ghosts with the task of taking him off to the oil pot, but there was someone standing by who said, "You cannot do that."

"Why not?" asked King Yama.

"Because he has recited the Vajra Sutra, and he has still got it in his belly. He should first be reborn until he uses up all the Vajra Sutra, and then you can french fry him."

So he went to be reborn as a person, this time in a very poor household. His mother and father sold snacks for a living, and from a very early age he was fond of eating. He ate so much that soon he had a very big belly. When he was five years old, he died from a bloated stomach. After he died, his parents were curious to see what was in his big belly, so they cut him open. There they found a substance as solid as diamond. At that point, the ghosts standing by said, "Oh, it is time now. We can take him to the oil pot and fry him."

The ghosts then took him to King Yama who pronounced that he could be reborn as a pig. As a pig, he was fed until he was plump, and then slaughtered and eaten.

When he got back to King Yama again, King Yama was ready to send him through the frying punishment, but the offender spoke up and said, "You do not have to fry me. Let me go back as a person but give me one pig hoof as proof. I will urge people in the world not to commit offenses."

King Yama thought that was a good idea, and so that was what happened. His surname was Liu, and because of his hoof, most people called him Mr. Pig Foot Liu. I met the man personally and talked to him for a long time, so I am very clear about his circumstances. This is how the evil destinies get created. People create their own hells. Hells are very dangerous.

In Harbin, where I am from, there was a Dharma Master named Chengyi who was once so sick that he thought he had died. After he died, he went down a road to a place not too far away from his temple and was reborn there. What was he reborn as? As a pig! When he saw that he himself was a pig, he refused to suckle, and then he died of starvation. At that point, his spirit reentered the body of Dharma Master Chengyi.

He then woke up and told people around him about what he had just experienced. "I have recovered from my illness. I was just reborn as a pig. Let me take you to the spot, and we will have a look. There are seven piglets in the litter. I was reborn as one of them. I was the one who refused to take milk and starved."

Several Dharma Masters accompanied him to the spot, and sure enough, they found a litter of seven piglets, and one was dead. I also met that Dharma Master.

It is not at all easy to be reborn as a person. A human body is very difficult to obtain.

The Buddhadharma is not easy to get to hear. You figure it out. Of all the millions of people in America, how many come on any given night to listen to the Sutra lectures? Very, very few. It is difficult to meet a Good and Wise Advisor who really understands the Buddhadharma. Some who claim to be teachers are not clear about principles, so they say things to you that are unclear.

**Those of the hells, ghosts, and animals.** The destiny of hungry ghosts is also a result of karmic power. Hungry ghosts have bellies as big as drums and throats as thin as needles. The things we eat turn into fire when they enter the mouths of hungry ghosts. This happens because their karmic obstacles are so heavy. For instance, the gods see water as crystal. People see it as water, fish see it as their abode, and ghosts see it as fire. This shows the power of karma. It influences what one experiences. Beings see the same thing in different ways.

It is also very easy to get reborn as an animal, such as a pig, a chicken, or a horse. These kinds of animals were formerly people. What kind of people? People who were not filial to their parents and who did not respect their teachers and elders. People like that get caught up in the animal kingdom.

People who are fond of eating meat also create ties with the creatures whose flesh they consume. By eating a certain kind of flesh, they establish a close connection with that animal, and the future is then very dangerous for them.

"The various evil destinies" then, include the Four Evil Destinies of hells, hungry ghosts, animals, and asuras.

**And the pain of birth, old age, sickness, and death.** In human life, there are Three Sufferings:

1. The Suffering within Suffering
2. The Suffering of Decay
3. The Suffering of Process

An example of Suffering within Suffering is to be penniless and also without any food to eat or any place to live. This suffering is experienced by poor people. Lacking the very necessities of life, they cannot even find work. This kind of suffering is not easy to bear.

But wealthy people suffer even more. They experience the Suffering of Decay. Having money, they have to continuously calculate about it. "I will put this much in the bank. I will take this much out and put it into a business venture. I will take that much…" and on it goes like that all day long. They keep on counting their money until their hair turns white, their teeth fall out, their eyes stop working, and their ears go deaf. But then trouble comes. The robbers get their number. They break in at night and pick the safe clean.

People in poverty get accustomed to their suffering, but when the Suffering of Decay hits wealthy people, they cannot take it. It is very bitter.

Well, then, if you are neither rich nor poor, there is no suffering, right? There is still suffering; the Suffering of Process. Everyone goes through the process of aging. From youth, people pass into middle age, and then become old. Once they are old, they die. This process never stops. It continues with every passing thought. This is the Suffering of Process.

Then there are the Eight Sufferings; and even Eight Sufferings are not very many, because suffering does not stop with eight kinds. There are thousands upon millions of kinds of sufferings. You could never count how many sufferings there are.

Well, what is the greatest suffering? Being a person. It is much more pleasant to be an animal than to be a person. So what can you be that is not suffering? Well, being a Buddha is not suffering. Why do I say that it is more pleasant to be an animal than to be a person? Because, animals do not have to worry about clothes to wear, food to eat, or a place to live. Their lives happen very naturally, so they never worry about anything. But, when one is a person, there are just too much suffering.

Now, we are going to talk about the Eight Sufferings. They are:

1. The suffering of birth
2. The suffering of old age
3. The suffering of sickness
4. The suffering of death
5. The suffering of being apart from those you love
6. The suffering of being together with those you hate
7. The suffering of not getting what you seek
8. The suffering of the raging blaze of the Five Skandhas

And among these eight, which one is the worst? I believe the worst is the suffering of birth; because if you were not born, then the others would not happen. And you say, "Well, what's so much suffering about being born, anyway?" I know you have forgotten, so I am going to remind you.

How is it that you got born? Birth comes from the union of the father's essence and the mother's blood; and there also has to be what is called the "intermediate skandha body," which enters the womb.

Once you are in the womb, the first few weeks are simply the development of a jelly-like substance; but after the seventh week, feeling arises. And once the fetus develops a sense of feeling, then if the mother drinks something cold, it feels like it is standing on a mountain of ice—extremely uncomfortable. If the mother drinks something hot, then it is just as if the fetus is plunged into hot water and scalded. So even in the womb one experiences the two unpleasant sensations of cold and heat. If the mother stoops over, then the embryo feels as though it is being crushed by Mount Tai.

But the birth is the worst experience; it is like two mountains crashing together—like the Hell of Crashing Mountains. And so, of course, the first thing a child does after being born is scream, "Ku a, ku a!" [The Chinese character ku means “suffering,” and it sounds the same as another word ku that means “to cry”.]

And so it is said that human birth feels the same as when a live tortoise has its shell ripped off—it is that painful. But as you grow up, you forget the suffering of birth. You pass through your prime and get old without even realizing it. There is also tremendous suffering connected with old age. For instance, your hearing goes bad; you don't even know if people are scolding you. And your eyesight goes dim, so you cannot see things clearly anymore. The teeth fall out; the tongue does not, but the teeth do. You never heard of anyone losing his tongue, and the reason for that is that the tongue is yielding and supple.

One time I asked an old fellow about this, I said, "Teeth fall out when you get old, but have you ever met anyone who lost his tongue?"

He said, "Never. Have you?"

And I said, "Look, I am a lot younger than you—you are almost ninety—and since you have not ever seen it, how would you expect me to have ever seen it?"

Then I asked him, "Do you know why your tongue does not fall out, but your teeth do? It is because the teeth are too rigid, so they fall out. But the tongue is supple and yielding, so it does not fall out."

And he said, "Oh!"

And I said, "You are awfully old now, you had better be careful not to be too rigid. Take this lesson from your teeth."

Then you say, "What is so bad about having the teeth fall out?"

Well, you lose your appetite—nothing tastes good anymore. Something may look and smell good, but when you put it in your mouth and gum it around, you cannot even chew it up. You end up swallowing it whole, which makes it very hard to digest. So, do you think that is suffering, or not? And also your face gets all wrinkled. It is said that people come to have "skin like a chicken and hair like a crane." If you have ever seen a plucked chicken, you can see that its skin is all bumpy and wrinkled. And "hair like a crane" means that your hair turns totally white. But, of course, that does not apply to Westerners, because when infants are first born in the West, they are towheaded—they have flaxen hair at birth; they do not even wait until they get old to have white hair.

Another point of interest is that although Westerners may be born with flaxen hair, their hair does not turn black, and yet black hair can turn white. But then again, sometimes it does happen. For instance, when I was in Hong Kong, my hair turned totally white. Why? Because I was overseeing the construction of a temple. I erected three temples in Hong Kong, and it was such a strain on my body and mind that my hair turned totally white. Then I took a look and thought, "Oh, this is really something. I had better not tax my mind so much!" Then I just put everything down, and my hair turned black again. From this, you can see that nothing is fixed.

If do not believe that old age entails suffering, wait till you are eighty or ninety and nothing you eat tastes good anymore. Then you will remember, "When I was younger, I did not believe that Dharma Master when he talked about the suffering of old age. Now I know that it is really true." But by then, it will be too late to start cultivating the Way.

There are many kinds of sicknesses. You might get a headache, or your feet hurt, or sometimes your whole body aches. In general, if your heart, liver, kidneys, spleen, or lungs are ailing, it is a lot of suffering.

Another truly terrible suffering is death; in fact, it is the worst. It is easy to die, but once you are dead, the important question is where you will go. After you die, will you go to the hells? Will you become an animal? Will you be reborn as a person? No one can give you any insurance.

And so, that is birth, old age, sickness, and death—they are all suffering.

Why was it that Shakyamuni Buddha left home? It was because he came to realize that birth, old age, sickness, and death are not easy to endure.

When Prince Siddhartha was nineteen years old, he wanted to see the sights outside the palace. So one day he went to the city's east gate. There he saw a woman in the process of delivering a baby. The Prince asked his attendant, "What is happening?" He replied, "She is giving birth to a child." Looking at the woman who seemed to be enduring an extremely painful event and the newborn child crying loudly, the Prince returned home unhappily.

The next day, the Prince went to the city's southern gate. There he saw a very old man. His hair was totally white and his eyes were dim. His back was hunched and his legs were too weak to walk. The Prince asked in surprise, "What is wrong with that man? Why has he become that way?" His attendant answered, "This man is already old. He has too many years. That is why he is that way." Upon hearing this, the Prince became upset and quickly returned to his palace.

On the third day, the Prince went to the city's west gate. There he saw a sick person. Saddened, the Prince returned to the palace.

On the fourth day, the Prince went to the city's north gate. There lay a dead person. "What is the matter with that person?" asked the Prince. The attendant said, "This man already died." The Prince again felt extremely depressed.

The Prince had witnessed the suffering of birth, old age, sickness, and death for himself, and he realized this was the process that human beings have to pass through. He felt very sad and wanted to go back to the palace. Right at that moment, a left-home person appeared. The Prince asked his attendant, "Who is this person? What is he doing?" His attendant then went to talk to that cultivator. The cultivator said, "I am a left-home person. I investigate and study the Buddha Way in order to be liberated from the suffering of birth, old age, sickness, and death."

At that time the Prince had not yet become a Buddha. But when he heard that by cultivating the Way he could avoid birth, old age, sickness, and death, he said, "Can I cultivate in the same way you do?"

The monk replied, "Anybody can."

Then the Prince returned to the palace, and accompanied by one who was later known as Venerable Upali, he ran away.

Shakyamuni Buddha was totally disillusioned by birth, old age, sickness, and death. He did not know where he had come from at birth or where he would go when he died. And so he left the home-life and practiced the Way with the intent to end birth and death. He went into the mountains and cultivated for six years trying to avoid birth, old age, sickness, and death.

Nobody who gets born can avoid dying. Some deaths are good and some are terrible. Some people die from sickness; some people starve to death; some people die from the fatigue of toil; some people die from quarreling—they have a fight and kill each other; then there is war, and people die on the battlefield; others die in automobile accidents or get crushed in an avalanche.

There are many different kinds of deaths. Some people die from accidental poisoning; some people commit suicide by taking poison, or in other ways. Some people have no wish to die, but they die; some wish to die, but they cannot. Just death alone contains myriad distinctions.

As there are different kinds of death, so are there different retributions or rewards that follow death. How do they differ? For instance, if someone dies by accident—as in an automobile accident, or by drowning, or by being burned in a fire—he then turns into a ghost or a spirit, but he does not go before King Yama, because King Yama pays no attention to him. The other ghosts do not pay any attention to this kind of spirit, either.

You say, "In that case, they are really free!" But, they are just free ghosts, not free people. Of course, if people are free, often they just take advantage of situations and do not follow the rules. The same thing happens with a ghost who is free—he tends not to follow the rules. People who die in this way may try to catch some other persons to turn into ghosts to take their place. That is why oftentimes when there is an accident in a certain place, within three years after it, there will be another one. The reason is that the ghost that died by accident is just waiting for the opportunity to catch someone else to replace him, because he would not get a chance at rebirth until he can get someone to take his place. If he does not get another ghost to represent him, then he just remains there forever, ignored. That is another kind of death.

If you kill yourself, say for instance from taking poison, you go to the hells. And the punishments are terrible. If, for example, you took poison to die, then you will go to the hell where you have to drink molten iron. You burn up all your insides—your stomach, your intestines—and then you die. But then a "clever" wind blows and revives you and brings you back to life. Then you have to drink the molten iron again, and then you die again from the burns, and then the wind blows and you come back to life again. This process goes on unceasingly all day. It is unbearable. But, if you can recite the name of Guanyin Bodhisattva, the text says, the various kinds of sufferings **are all gradually wiped away.** Guanshiyin Bodhisattva can gradually eliminate and eradicate the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death.

We have already discussed four of the sufferings. Next we will talk about the suffering of being apart from those we love.

Everybody knows what love is. Some people love wealth; others love beautiful forms or fame. If people who love wealth are separated from it, that is known as the suffering of being apart from what one loves. How might this happen? Suppose someone is very wealthy—he has a flourishing business, but, suddenly, due to unforeseeable circumstances, he goes bankrupt. He loses everything. That is a case of being apart from what one loves. In his case, he loved money. He did not ever want to be separated from money, and then suddenly he is penniless.

Next, let's consider someone who loves beautiful forms. Men love the looks of women; women love the looks of men. Between them there is a mutual love. But if in their former lives the causes and effects were not planted correctly, then the love will not last. Something will happen, and they will have to part with each other. That is the kind of suffering that occurs between men and women when they must be apart from those they love.

Then there are those who love fame. Some people say that fame is one's second life. But sometimes your reputation gets ruined. You lose your fame. Basically, if you wanted to be well-known but then did something wrong and ruined your own reputation, that is a case of being apart from what you love—fame.

But then you say, "Well, there might be a couple who does not separate, and so they do not have to undergo the suffering of being apart from those they love."

But they might have a child who is both handsome and intelligent, and all of a sudden, unexpectedly, he dies. That is extremely hard to bear. Or suppose you are a person who is especially filial towards your parents, and then your parents die. That is another example of being apart from those you love. Or, maybe you have an excellent relationship with your spouse, and then suddenly he or she dies unexpectedly. That is also an example of being apart from those you love. The same thing applies to brothers, sisters, friends—in each case the suffering of being apart from those you love can arise.

Once you have experienced this kind of suffering, you should no longer be attached to love. You should not direct all your love towards one person. Instead, develop a kind regard for all living beings. Practice the Bodhisattva Path and save everybody. Don't only think of yourself. Think of all living beings, instead. Rescue and protect everybody. Then you will not experience the suffering of being apart from those you love.

Some people are masochists. They like to suffer. If there is no suffering, they look for it. For instance, a man gets married and then he starts worrying from morning to night that his wife will find a lover. Basically, there wasn't any suffering to begin with, but he created it. And if a woman marries a particularly handsome man, she may have the same concern, or create it. She never thinks about anything else but how her handsome husband is going to get a girlfriend. Wouldn't you say that is stupid?

Some people direct their love not at other people, but at their pets. In fact, there are people who love their cat or dog more than life itself. When the dog dies or the cat gets lost, they feel as if they had lost their very life. That is another example of being apart from those one loves.

The sixth kind of suffering is that of being together with those one hates. Of course, some people overreact and think, "Well, since love entails so much suffering, I am not going to love anybody—I will hate everybody!" So you detest everyone, and you don't love anything, including material objects. You feel that since loving is so much suffering, you do not want to love. But not loving also has its suffering. That is the suffering of being together with those you hate.

Maybe you find yourself in a circumstances in which you do not like where you are, or you do not like the people who are around you, and so you move. But then, who would have guessed that when you get to the new place, the people are all the same sort as in the place you just left, and things are just as despicable; in fact, it is even worse.

In general, the things that you most wish to avoid and the things that you detest the most are the very things that come around. It is strange how this happens. For instance, if you are afraid of cats, then from morning to night, there are cats hanging around. Suppose you hate dogs with a passion; then everywhere you go, you have dogs trailing you. Or, you hate women, but all day there are women wanting to see you. They chase after you, and you get totally fed up, so you move; but at your new place, there is another group of women just like them.

Well, how does this suffering arise? It comes from your own nature. Because your intrinsic nature does not have any samadhi, you find fault with whatever you see. Say you are in one place where you cannot get along with any of your neighbors, so you move to someplace else, and you still cannot get along with any of your new neighbors. Then that is not a question of the neighbors—it is probably a question of your lack of ability to get along. You just do not have any affinity with anyone, so nobody likes you.

You can see that the more you are attached to something, the more likely you will be separated from it. By the same token, the more you hate and wish to avoid something, the more you are going to get involved with it. These two—the suffering of love and the suffering of hate—come about because you do not truly understand the Middle Way. As soon as you go to an extreme, either of too much or of too little, you are going to suffer. If you could hold to the Middle Way, you would not suffer.

The seventh kind of suffering is that of not getting whatever one seeks. Some people work hard hoping to make a fortune, but they remain poor to the end of their lives. Some people spend their whole lives seeking for an official position, but in the end they never make it. Some people try to become famous, but they cannot make it either. Some people do not have any children, and no matter how much they try, they are never able to have a child. That is another example of not getting what one seeks.

In general, people spend their whole lives trying to get this or trying to get that, but in the end, they do not get what they want. Some people would like to get a Ph.D., but it is not their destiny to be students, because from of old they have not planted those kinds of causes. For example, there was Yao Lianghao, who became top scholar in China when he was eighty-two. But not long after he got the honor, he died. If you get something and then cannot enjoy it, that is just another version of the suffering connected with not getting what you seek.

Then there is the suffering of the raging blaze of the five skandhas: form, feeling, thought, formations, and consciousness. In the Heart Sutra, it is said,

Form does not differ from emptiness; emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness; emptiness itself is form.

The point is, if you can see things as empty, you would not have any suffering. But, if you cannot see things as empty, then you will be burned by the five skandhas. The five skandhas are a raging blaze, but although they are so much suffering, no one can bear to separate from them.

The first seven kinds of suffering are caused by external forms of defilement. This eighth suffering is innate; it is inherent in the five skandhas from birth. It never leaves you, and even if you want to part from it, you cannot get free. This has been a discussion on the eight kinds of sufferings.

**Sutra:**

**True Contemplator, Pure Contemplator, Contemplator with Vast, Great Wisdom, Compassionate Contemplator, Kind Contemplator, May we constantly behold you with reverence!**

Outline:

K2. Universal contemplation with mind karma.

**Commentary:**

**True Contemplator, Pure Contemplator.** True Contemplation is the Contemplation of True Emptiness. True Emptiness is no self, no others, no living beings, and no life span. There is no appearance of self, no appearance of others, no appearance of living beings, and no appearance of a life span. However, "no appearance" is not apart from appearance; this just means that right within the appearance itself, there is no appearance. Within the appearance of self, there is no appearance of self; within the appearance of others, there is no appearance of others; within the appearance of living beings, there is no appearance of living beings; within the appearance of a life span, there is no appearance of a life span.

There is a saying that goes,

The eyes see form, but inside there is nothing;
The ears hear defiling sounds, but the mind does not know.

It is perfectly clear that shape and form exist, and your eyes see them, so why do we say that inside there is nothing? It is because there is no attachment.

The Contemplation of True Emptiness is just likened to a great, perfect mirror. When things appear before a great and perfect mirror, they are reflected in it; when they leave, no trace is left. This is the Contemplation of True Emptiness practiced by Guanyin Bodhisattva.

Pure Contemplation is the Contemplation of Purity. Purity is the opposite of defilement. What is defilement? Anything you are attached to is a defiled thing. Anything that you have fond regard for is a defiled thing. Anything that you are greedy for is a defiled thing.

Within the Contemplation of Purity, there is no greed, hatred, or stupidity.

Take giving, for example. When most people give, they first have to think about it, "This person is related to me—as a friend, relative, or neighbor—so I will help him out by giving him something." You first figure it all out and decide to give only to the people who are closest to you, and you pay no regard to those with whom you are unfamiliar. This is called "taking care of one's relatives first, without having concern for any others; paying attention to those who are close and ignoring those who are distant."

In other words, you make distinctions. You are attached to appearances, and so your regard is not pure. But Guanyin Bodhisattva does not make distinctions between himself and others. He does not distinguish between relatives and those who are not related to him, or between those who are close and those who are distant. He simply gives.

There are three kinds of giving: the giving of wealth, the giving of Dharma, and the giving of fearlessness.

Of wealth, there are two kinds: inner wealth and outer wealth. It would probably be difficult for most people to figure out what is meant by "inner wealth," but most people would be able to figure out what is meant by "outer wealth." "Inner wealth" refers to things inside your body, and outer wealth refers to things outside your body.

The giving of outer wealth refers to the giving up of one's country, city, wife, or children. "This whole town belongs to me—I own it all—but I will give it away." In some cases, one is able to give away all one’s property and assets, or even one’s own wife and children. That is really putting everything down. That is true giving.

The giving of inner wealth means to give up one's body, nature, mind, and life to save living beings who are in need. The body refers to the entire physical body—head, eyes, brain, marrow, and so forth.

When Venerable Shariputra was trying to practice the Bodhisattva Path, someone came along and said that he really needed an eye to cure his ill mother. Shariputra then gouged out one of his eyes and gave it to that person. Who would have guessed that the person would say it was the wrong eye and then throw it on the ground? At that point, Shariputra retreated from the Bodhisattva Path—"It is too hard; I cannot do it." And so Shariputra was only able to relinquish half of his inner wealth; he could not quite part with the other half.

In general, the giving of inner wealth means giving up one's internal treasures—one's own wisdom and energy.

The giving of Dharma means to speak Dharma in order to teach and transform living beings. Of the three kinds of giving, this is the greatest. And so it is said,

Of all the kinds of giving, the greatest is the giving of Dharma.

Now, the Buddhist Lecture Hall here is not large, that is true; but then the power of the Dharma is not small, either. On Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, we have three different lectures speaking the Dharma. There probably isn’t any other Buddhist organization in America as busy as the Buddhist Lecture Hall, where people forget their very lives for the sake of the Dharma. During the day everyone has to work. Even I get involved in whatever work there is to be done, working to the point that my bones ache. But in the evening, no matter who is lecturing, you should all come and listen. First of all, this is supporting the Way-place. If a lot of people come to the lecture, then the atmosphere is good. So if you want to support the Buddhist Lecture Hall, you do not need to make a big donation; just come to the lectures! There are those who propagate the teachings by giving lectures on the Buddhadharma, those who do publicity for the lectures, and those who support the lectures and the Way-place. By supporting the Way-place and causing it to flourish, you are also supporting Buddhism and the Triple Jewel. This is everyone’s responsibility.

Up to now, most Westerners have had a pretty childish understanding of the Buddhadharma. They do not really understand it at all. For example, there are those in America who call themselves Elders, Dharma Masters, and priests. But if you ask them what Buddhism is all about, they do not know. You have studied the Shurangama Sutra for three months, and you understand quite a bit of Buddhism now. As to the giving of Dharma, you should take whatever Buddhadharma you understand and spread it among all people, to the point that you would not even mind going without food and sleep in order to speak Dharma. It was that way for me in the past. If someone wanted to study the Dharma, I would explain it to them even if that meant missing my lunch and sleep, until I could help them achieve a thorough understanding. I hope that all of you will be my transformation bodies and spread the Buddhadharma in this way—practice the giving of Dharma. There is much more value in spreading Dharma than in contributing any amount of money. So you should vigorously apply yourselves in studying the Dharma.

Now there are several of you who want to leave the home-life. This is very rare. You could say that we have begun something brand new in America—because for people to want to leave home to become Bhikshus and Bhikshunis is very unusual. We must establish a foundation, and each one of us should personally take responsibility for the future of Buddhism in the West. Don't just hang back and say, "Well, it has nothing to do with me. Buddhism is not my business, it is someone else's."

As far as I am concerned, as long as I have a single breath left, spreading the Buddhadharma is my personal responsibility. And if someone else wants to take responsibility for it, too—how wonderful! Do not shirk your responsibility; stand on your own, and take the task of propagating the Buddhadharma as your own. That is the first criterion for the process of giving Dharma.

The giving of fearlessness is the last one of the three kinds of giving. For instance, Guanyin Bodhisattva saves living beings from the seven difficulties, dispels the three poisons, and responds to the two kinds of seeking. That is an example of the giving of fearlessness. When people are in a terrifying situation and their very lives are at stake, if you appear in a fearless body to rescue them, then you are practicing the giving of fearlessness.

What does appearing in a fearless body mean? Well, suppose someone gets caught in a fire and is about to be burned to death; he has lost his sense of direction and cannot find his way out. And at that time, without any regard for your own physical well-being, you rush right into the blaze and pull him out. That is an extremely difficult thing to be able to do. That is an example of renouncing your own life in order to save the life of another, and that is an example of the giving of fearlessness.

Or perhaps someone falls into the sea and is just about to drown, and when you see this happening you are able to make a split-second decision without any regard for your own physical safety, and immediately jump into the sea in order to save that person’s life—that is also the giving of fearlessness. And you can extend this attitude to where you might find yourself in the midst of fighting armies and someone gets wounded in the front line—perhaps by gunfire, or by being hit by a shell—and he has right at the battlefront with his life hanging in the balance; if you can, with total disregard your own safety, without even thinking about whether or not you will live through it, go into the most dangerous spot imaginable in order to save that person’s life, that is also called the giving of fearlessness.

Or perhaps someone is persecuted by the government or is involved in some other kind of difficulty or circumstances where he is just about to be killed. If you can use any number of good and clever expedient means in order to save that person without any regard for the dangers involved, that is called “the practice of giving fearlessness.” In general, this means that whenever a person finds himself in a dangerous situation and you use courage, compassion, and heroic vigor to go in absolutely unafraid in order to save him, that is the giving of fearlessness.

You can also practice the giving of fearlessness in an indirect way, like Bodhisattva Guardian of the Earth. This Bodhisattva knew that people in a certain place needed a bridge in order to get across a river. If they tried to cross the river without a bridge, their lives would be in danger, and it would be a frightening experience for them. Since this happened in ancient times, he had to use primitive techniques. For instance, he could build a pontoon bridge of logs floating on the river with flat boards on top of them, so that people could cross the river without incurring any danger upon themselves. Of course, if there was a flood, their lives would still be endangered. However, they no longer suffered the fear of crossing that river.

When the Venerable Elder Master Hsu Yun came down from Jiuhua Mountain, remembering that there was a bridge at a particular spot on the river, he went to that place to cross the river. But the river was swollen, and the bridge had been destroyed by a flood. Since the bridge was no longer there, he accidentally fell into the river. He floated in the river for a day and a night—bobbing up and down for a total of twenty-four hours. Eventually, an old fisherman caught him in his net. Thinking that he had caught a giant fish, the old man started to pull the fish out. But on closer examination, he discovered that his "fish" was, in fact, a person wearing a monk’s robes!

Nearby there was a little temple, and so the fisherman went to alert the left-home people there. The monks recognized the Venerable Master immediately. They then set about applying artificial respiration and bringing him back to consciousness. At that point the Master truly gained a "second life."

Having escaped death after nearly drowning in the river, the Venerable Master proceeded to Gaomin Monastery. He went there to participate in a Chan session, but he was still very ill and weak from his recent ordeal. However, he did not breathe a single word about his mishap, and so nobody knew.

The Abbot then asked him to represent him as the head of the session; but the Master Hsu Yun, knowing himself that he was too sick, refused. Now, refusing to an appointment by the Abbot was considered a breach of monastic discipline. And for this, the Master was beaten with an incense board. Still, he never said a word.

The Venerable Master was the foremost monk, the loftiest good and wise advisor in all of China, but he underwent tremendous suffering at Gaomin Monastery, where everyone looked down on him. "He is just a burden to us," they said, "totally useless."

Now, back to the Bodhisattva Guardian of the Earth. He fixed the roads and bridges. When Elder Master Hsu Yun went to Yunnan, he met a monk who spent all his time fixing the roads, and this monk did not speak. That, indeed, was a transformation body of Guardian of the Earth Bodhisattva. This Bodhisattva spent all of his time guarding the earth. If there were rocks or rubble on the roads, he would remove them to one side so that people would not step on them and hurt their feet. He kept the roads in good repair. Who paid him for all his hard labor? Nobody. Now, wasn't he stupid? Wasn't he just working in vain? Well, his working in vain enabled him to become the Bodhisattva Guardian of the Earth. He cultivated to the point that he was irreversible in position, irreversible in thought, and irreversible in practice. He obtained these three kinds of irreversibility—the state of non-retreat.

If we were to discuss the giving of fearlessness we could go on and on, because the topic is very vast. In general, any time another person is afraid, you should practice this kind of giving.

Suppose a person has not eaten in a few days and is on the brink of starving to death, so that he feels he may have to steal, even though he knows that is against the law. And then, when this person is really down and out, you see him. You see that he is sallow and so think that he can hardly walk and you ask him, “What is wrong with you, are you sick?” And the person answers, “I have not eaten for days.” And you say, “Well, why don’t you come home with me and have a meal?”

Do not be like the people of Tianjin who ask you if you have eaten [a common way of greeting someone in China] and when you say you have not, they say, “Well, (let’s) go home and eat.” It is not clear whether they are asking you to go to their home or to your own home. So, even if you were positively starving, you would not dare assume that they were inviting you to their home, so you say, “Okay, I will go to my own home and eat.”

If you provide food to the starving, clothing to those who are cold, and shelter for those who are homeless, then you are practicing the giving of fearlessness. On the other hand, people should not rely on others to provide for them day after day. There is a saying,

You can give a person a meal,
But you can't feed him forever.

Every able-bodied person should work to support himself. You should not think, "When it is time for lunch, I will just go find someone who cultivates the Bodhisattva path and ask him to practice giving." If you are really going through hard times and have nothing to eat, then it is okay. But you should not make it a regular practice. As long as you have the strength, you should stand on your own two feet and make a contribution to the world. Do not just live off the world's resources. Helping the world means benefiting others, not hoping that others will benefit you. Be self-reliant; do not depend on other people.

**Contemplator with Vast, Great Wisdom.** Guanyin Bodhisattva uses the regard of great wisdom to cross over all living beings. **Compassionate Contemplator, Kind Contemplator.** The Bodhisattva also has universal compassionate regard for all living beings. The contemplation of compassion pulls living beings out of suffering; the contemplation of kindness gives living beings joy. This kind of joy is not temporary happiness, but an everlasting bliss that transcends the mundane. The Bodhisattva gives Dharma to living beings causing them to gain the true understanding of the Buddhadharma and thereby not do any more upside-down things. That is called the giving of happiness.

What is meant by upside-down things? Let me tell you truly and honestly—even though there are those who would not believe me. One such thing is getting drunk. People who are drunk think they have turned into gods. They stagger around bumping into things left and right and think it is great. It gets to the point that they are totally oblivious and cannot tell which direction is which. Wouldn’t you say that is upside-down? Under the influence of intoxicants, even a perfectly intelligent person can commit murder, arson, and all sorts of crimes.

When I was at the bus stop this morning, a drunkard came up to me and asked for money. When I smelled the reek of alcohol on his breath, I started walking away, but he followed me, determined to get some money. What for? To buy more alcohol. I guess he had not had enough yet. Isn’t that upside-down?

This reminds me of another incident that also happened at a bus stop. That time, a total stranger walked up to me and without saying a word, knelt down and kowtowed to me. Then he got up and walked off. Now, he was not bowing to me because he wanted money. I do not know why he did it. He did not know me, and I did not know him, yet among all those people he came and bowed to me. Who knows if he was a ghost or a spirit? It is really strange. He did not look drunk to me, so he must have been inspired somehow. Mostly it is ghosts and spirits who bow to me when they see me. But this person bowed to me very respectfully, and when he got up he kept his head lowered and did not dare look straight at my face. Perhaps there was a ghost on him who recognized me.

If drinking alcohol is upside-down, what about smoking? Smoking is even more so. Why? Your insides are clean to begin with. “Dharma Master, you are wrong. My insides are full of excrement and urine.” True, but that kind of uncleanliness is okay. If you smoke, you put smoke and tar in your body, and that is really unclean.

Have you seen the black stuff that coats the inside of a used pipe? When you inhale the smoke, your lungs get coated with that stuff too. You do not realize it because you cannot see it, but your lungs get coated with every puff you take, just like a mirror getting covered with layer upon layer of dust. Basically your insides are clean, but you want to cover them with filth. Isn’t that upside-down?

When people smoke opium, they feel so energetic and strong that they think they can ascend to the heavens right then and there. But after a while, they feel extremely uncomfortable all over, to the point that they want to crawl into the hells because they think the hells must be better than what they are going through. Wouldn’t you say that is upside-down?

There are many other upside-down things that people do. I hope people who smoke will quit smoking soon, and those who drink will quickly give up alcohol. Lazy people should learn to be a little more vigorous. Vigorous people, however, should not learn to be lazy. They should do more wholesome and virtuous deeds.

If you never do wholesome deeds, you would not accrue any virtue. Where does virtue come from? From good deeds. If you do as many good deeds as you can, you will naturally accumulate virtue and get rid of laziness. If you do not do good deeds, but you spend hard-earned money to go see plays or buy frivolous things, then that is called being upside-down.

If you spend your money on useful things, then you are not being upside-down. Wasting money on useless things is upside-down. So upside-downness takes many forms. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva points out your upside-down conduct and tells you not to be upside-down, causing you to obtain genuine and everlasting happiness. That is “kindness.” “Compassion” pulls living beings out of suffering. The Bodhisattva eradicates not only your present suffering, but your suffering in life after life throughout limitless eons. But you must have faith. If you have faith, Guanyin Bodhisattva will regard you with kindness and compassion. If you do not have faith, the Bodhisattva’s kindness and compassion cannot melt your cold stance. What is your cold stance? Just your lack of faith. If you have faith, you will unite with the kind regard and compassionate regard of Guanyin Bodhisattva. And when that happens, you can leave suffering and attain happiness.

What is real suffering? Affliction is. If you do not have any affliction, that is happiness. The reason you do not feel happy is because you have affliction. So Guanyin Bodhisattva can pull you out of your affliction and help you attain genuine happiness.

**May we constantly behold you with reverence!** You will continually gaze up at Guanyin Bodhisattva with respect. You wish to always look upon that virtuous and kind countenance. The more you look, the happier you become. For instance, bowing the Great Compassion Repentance is a ceremony to show your respect to Guanyin Bodhisattva.

It is said that Americans do not like to bow. They say, "Well, I believe in my own Buddha." Well, if you truly believed in your own Buddha, then there would not be any you—there would not be any "your own." It is just because you have not found your own Buddha that you cannot recognize an external Buddha when you see one. If you really believed in your own Buddha, it would not keep you from bowing.

Bowing—that is, kowtowing, a full bow to the floor—represents the most respectful of gestures. In Buddhism, this is a kind of formal courtesy. If you cannot even perform this kind of courtesy, how can you call yourself someone who believes in the Buddha?

There is a certain doctor who commanded respect from many people; but he himself told everyone not to bow to the Buddha. When others bowed to the Buddha, he would stand there like a wooden stick. That was because he had not really broken through the mark of his ego.

People refuse to bow to the Buddha because of arrogance. "Me? Why should I bow to the Buddha?" If you are self-satisfied and proud to the point that you cannot even bow, then how in the world do you expect to be able to study Buddhism?

**Sutra:**

**Undefiled pure light, The sun of wisdom that breaks through the darkness Is able to quell calamities of wind and fire As it shines on all worlds.**

**Commentary:**

These four lines of text are ineffably wonderful. They can cure eye sicknesses. If you have problems with your eyes and you constantly recite this four-line verse, your eye disease will be cured. However, although your eye disease may be cured, you still have to go ahead and bring forth wisdom in order to be totally cured. If you do not have wisdom, then even though you may temporarily get better, your illness could crop up again in the future.

In general, if you truly believe in the power of the Sutra text, then Guanyin Bodhisattva's awesome spiritual strength will aid you and bring about an efficacious effect. But if you do not believe, nothing special will happen. There would not be any effect. That is why it is said,

The Buddhadharma is like a great sea,
But only through faith can you enter.

The verse says, **Undefiled pure light.** Defilement refers to dust, dirt, and unclean things. Being without any defilement means that you do not have any random thinking. For every random thought that you strike up, you add another layer of dust upon your original pure nature. The more polluted thinking you have, the dustier it gets.

Therefore, you need to "understand the mind and see the nature." That is what people who investigate Chan aim to do. To "understand the mind" is to be "undefiled." To "see your nature" is to see the "pure light" mentioned here. Your original mind is your permanently-dwelling true mind, the Treasury of the Thus Come One. Understanding your mind and seeing your nature simply means understanding your inherent Treasury of the Thus Come One.

**The sun of wisdom that breaks through the darkness.** The wisdom-sun means that wisdom is like the sun. The kind of darkness referred to here is a lack of faith, a lack of wisdom, a lack of vows, and a lack of a resolve to truly practice.

Darkness also refers to not studying or upholding the precepts, not cultivating the power of samadhi, and not developing the power of wisdom. If you do not study precepts, samadhi, and wisdom, you are walking a dark path. If you do cultivate according to precepts, samadhi, and wisdom, then you are walking on a bright path.

We can also explain it in this way. Your desire to listen to the Buddhadharma is the light. But someone might think, "I have listened for so many days and it does not really have much meaning. The Dharma Master has been sitting up there on that platform talking and talking about the same old thing. I have heard it over and over. He says that people should get rid of greed, hatred, and stupidity and should cultivate precepts, samadhi, and wisdom. I am tired of listening." Some of you feel tired of listening? That is darkness.

However, there are those of you who do not grow weary of listening. The more you hear, the more you want to listen, even to the point that you just listen to the sound of the Dharma Master's voice and the subtle and incredible doctrines of the Sutra. And when you finish listening, it is as if the Dharma Master were still speaking in your ear." From morning till night, I can hear the voice of the Dharma Master beside my ear speaking Dharma to me." That is the light.

Right now, I suddenly remembered something that happened to me in Hong Kong. A certain laywoman came to see me, and after she saw me, what do you think happened? In everything she did, whether it was walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, she always saw me. What do you suppose she thought? She thought, "Oh, that Dharma Master is a demon! Otherwise, why would I see him all the time?" Here she was, able to hear a Dharma Master speaking Dharma at all times, and she thought he was a demon. I suppose that if she saw a demon, she would have thought it was a Buddha. So, she started slandering me and even wanted to strike me. Within a month, she contracted cancer and died. Basically, I wanted to save her, but she thought I was a demon. She refused my rescue. And that is the way people are; they think the true is false, and the false is true.

Guanyin Bodhisattva uses the Contemplation of True Emptiness to break through the delusion of views and thought.

The "delusion of views" is defined as "giving rise to greed when faced with a state." You get caught up with something that appears before you, and then give rise to greed and attachment.

The "delusion of thought" is defined as "giving rise to discrimination because one is confused about principle."

By means of the Contemplation of True Emptiness, Guanyin Bodhisattva breaks through the darkness of the delusion of views and thought. He brings forth the virtue of Prajna.

When Guanyin Bodhisattva cultivates the Contemplation of Purity, he breaks through the darkness of delusion like dust and sand, and is certified to the virtue of Liberation.

When Guanyin Bodhisattva cultivates the Contemplation of Wisdom, he breaks through the darkness of the delusion of ignorance, thus attaining the virtue of the Dharma-body.

When one is certified to the Secret Treasury of the Three Virtues, then Prajna, Liberation, and the Dharma-body will come about. One has to cultivate the Three Contemplations—the Contemplation of True Emptiness, the Contemplation of Purity, and the Contemplation of Wisdom—to be certified to the Three Virtues, and to cut off the delusion of views and thought, the delusion like dust and sand, and the delusion of ignorance. That was what is meant by "the sun of wisdom that breaks through all darkness." The wisdom here refers to these contemplations—the contemplations themselves are wisdom.

This wisdom sun **is able to quell calamities of wind and fire.** "Calamities" here refers to the three calamities of water, fire, and wind. Water floods the First Dhyana; fire burns through the Second Dhyana; wind destroys the Third Dhyana.

At the end of the kalpa [eon], the first of the three calamities appears. The heavens of the First Dhyana are flooded by water. One does not know where this water comes from—whether it comes from the stars, moon, heavenly rivers, or earth—but it rises up in massive waves, and not only does it drown humankind, it also drowns the gods of the First Dhyana Heavens.

Therefore, when the first calamity of water hits, almost everything is destroyed. Somehow a few people remain, and the population starts to multiply again. Eventually it gets overpopulated, people's offenses are redoubled, and things get very complicated.

Then the second calamity, that of fire, hits. This kalpic fire burns clear through the Second Dhyana Heavens. The gods in these heavens are burned by this fire. Why is it that fire can reach the Second Dhyana? It is because the gods in these heavens still have fire affliction, whereas the gods in the First Dhyana Heavens still have water affliction. The fire inside their intrinsic nature catches with the fire in the world, bringing about a huge conflagration. At that time seven suns appear in the sky. The mountains, rivers, and great earth all turn into burning coals, and people are charred to a crisp. Even the seas are all burned dry. The seas turn into dry land, and the land becomes high mountains. Then the high mountains become great seas. Many strange events occur between heaven and earth.

After the disaster of fire, a very long time passes, and those people who are left in the world propagate the species until once again the world becomes overpopulated. Then the third disaster, that of wind, hits. "Wind destroys the Third Dhyana." Not only does the wind rip through people's houses and buildings, but the mountains, rivers, and earth are all ripped to bits. In fact, the wind reaches up to the gods in the Third Dhyana Heavens. Even the gods cannot avoid this disaster. So there is a verse that goes:

In the Six Desire Heavens, there are the Five Signs of Decay;
The Third Dhyana has the disaster of wind.
Even if you cultivate clear to the Heaven of Neither Perception nor Non-perception,
It is not as good as going to the Western Land and coming back again.

Before I go on, I will explain what the five signs of decay are, because although some people have heard them, there are still others who have not. If you have heard them, it would not hurt to review them. If you have not, then listen closely.

The Five Marks of Decay of the Gods:

1. The flower garlands that adorn their heads wilt. The flowers that adorn the heads of the gods are not like the flowers grown in the human realm. These flowers grow quite naturally right on the heads of the gods—it is a natural adornment for them. But when the five signs of decay appear, the flowers wilt. Before these signs appear, the flowers are always fresh. So, when your flowers start to wilt, then you know you have just about had it.

2. Their clothes get dirty. The cloths of the gods are not like those of people. We have to wash our clothes once or twice a week, because we know that if we do not wash them, they will be dirty. The clothes of the gods never get dirty, because there isn’t anything to soil them in the heavens. But when the five signs of decay appear, their clothes get soiled. So, when you are up there and you see that your clothes get dirty, you know that you do not have long.

This is similar to when people are about to die, even before they stop breathing, various places on their body will start to grow worms. Ordinarily this would not happen, but when they are just about to die and stop breathing, many parts of their bodies start to grow worms. And that is the appearance of death here in the human realm. But, for the gods, the sign of death is that their clothes get dirty. This is a kind of karmic retribution.

The reason we have so much dirt here on earth is that we have too much false thinking. That is why there is such an awful lot of filth in the world. Our false thoughts are exactly the same as dirt. So the filth comes from false thoughts.

3. Their armpits perspire. The bodies of the gods are not like those of humans—they never perspire. But with the five signs of decay start to appear, their armpits sweat.

4. Their bodies smell bad. Basically the gods’ bodies always emit a fragrance, but certainly not because they use perfume or apply scented powders. Their bodies naturally exude this fragrance. But when the five signs of decay appear, they lose their fragrance and start to smell bad.

5. They cannot sit still. Basically, the gods are really comfortable. From morning to night they just sit there in meditation, investigating Chan. They do not have anything else to do. But when the five signs of decay appear, they can no longer sit still. They sit for awhile and then jump up; but once they stand up, they want to sit down again. And once they have settled down, they rise again. So they keep getting up and sitting down again. And the moment they lose consciousness, their life in the heaven ends, and they fall. So the first line of the poem says, “In the Six Desire Heavens, there are the Five Signs of Decay.”

But then in the First Dhyana there is the disaster of water, in the Second Dhyana there is the disaster of fire, and “the Third Dhyana has the disaster of wind.” That is because the gods of the Third Dhyana heavens still have the wind of affliction within their nature. When a hurricane or tornado occurs in the worldly realm, it connects with the wind in their nature, and so they are destroyed by the disaster of wind.

“Even if you cultivate clear to the Heaven of Neither Perception nor Non-perception,” where your heavenly life span is 80,000 great kalpas, nonetheless, when your heavenly reward ends, you still fall back into the human realm, or even worse, into the hells, among the hungry ghosts, or among the animals. So it is very dangerous.

The last line of the verse says that “It is not as good as going to the Western Land and coming back again.” Cultivating to any of those heavens is not as good as getting reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, becoming a boat of compassion like Guanyin Bodhisattva and coming back to teach and transform living beings. That is a safer path to take.

Fortunately, the light of the sun of Guanyin Bodhisattva’s wisdom can quell all disasters and break up all darkness **as it shines** a universal light **on all worlds.** The world that we common people live in now is called the Land in Which the Common and Sagely Live Together.

The great wisdom of Guanyin Bodhisattva also illumines the Land of Expedients with Residue. That is where those of the Two Vehicles live. "Expedients" refers to clever, provisional means. "With Residue" means that there is still something left, because the inhabitants of this world have not yet completely cut off all their afflictions.

Guanyin Bodhisattva dwells in the Adorned Land of Actual Reward, which is the land where all the Bodhisattvas dwell. The Buddhas dwell in the Pure Land of Eternally Stillness and Light.

With his great wisdom and great knowledge, Guanyin Bodhisattva universally illumines all of these lands, and so the text says his light "shines on all worlds."

**Sutra:**

**Compassionate substance: the thunder of precepts. Kind intent: a wondrous great cloud. He rains down sweet dew and Dharma rain, Which extinguish the flames of affliction.**

Outline:

K3. Universal speaking with mouth karma.

**Commentary:**

**Compassionate substance: the thunder of precepts.** Compassionate substance means that Guanyin Bodhisattva takes the substance of compassion as his Dharma substance. Where does this compassionate substance come from? It comes from precepts. When Guanyin Bodhisattva first began to cultivate, he held the precepts purely, and from this purity he brought forth vast kindness and compassion, the kindness that includes even those with whom one does not have affinities. This Dharma substance is like thunder—it emits a thunderous roar, and living beings are awakened by it. The blind can see it and even the deaf can hear the sound of this thunder. And so it says, "Compassionate substance: the thunder of precepts."

**Kind intent: a wondrous great cloud.** Guanyin Bodhisattva uses level and equal kindness and compassion to help living beings. The Sutra said, "His kind eyes watching living beings." With kindness and compassion, he bestows joy upon living beings in a level and equal way.

Acting like a wondrous, huge cloud, **he rains down sweet dew and Dharma rain.** Sweet dew is actually the water of immortality found in the heavens. Why are the heavenly gods immortal? Because they drink sweet dew. So you say, "Even the gods take their vitalizers. It is no wonder that these days people who want to get enlightened pop all sorts of pills." But the heavenly medicine is natural—it is not manufactured. When the gods imbibe this medicine, they never age. Now Guanyin Bodhisattva has a wonderful, great cloud that lets fall sweet dew, the elixir of immortality, **which extinguishes the flames of affliction** and puts an end to the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death.

People in this world have afflictions, and it is as though they were being scorched by flames. Why don’t you become a Buddha? Because you have afflictions. Why haven't you become enlightened? Because you have afflictions. Why aren't you truly free? Because you have afflictions.

Another name for afflictions is attachments. Where do attachments stem from? They come from selfishness. Why are you attached? Because you are selfish and you want to seek private gains. If you have only the common good in mind, if you are truly public-spirited, then what attachments could you possibly have?

If you are not selfish, you would not be attached; if you do not have attachments, you would not be afflicted; and if you do not have afflictions, you will be liberated. Once you are liberated, you are enlightened. To become enlightened is just to realize Buddhahood.

Afflictions are the very worst thing to have, yet people cannot stand to be apart from them. Whether moving or still, awake or asleep, they do not ever want to be apart from afflictions.

You say, "Well, I am happy all the time, and I do not have any afflictions." Well, if you have attained genuine bliss, then of course you are not afflicted. But if you have not attained genuine bliss and you fake it—you force yourself to believe that you are happy—then it is not true happiness. Inside, the affliction is still heavy. And one day it will turn up—it will explode. It is like smothering weeds with a large rock—so that the weeds would not be able to grow. But once you remove the rock, they will quickly flourish. If you have not attained true bliss, your afflictions will still remain.

Of the Four Vast Vows that the Bodhisattva makes, the first one is, "Living beings are boundless, I vow to save them all." Why does Guanyin Bodhisattva come to this world? Only because living beings are boundless, and he has vowed to save them all.

The second vast vow is, "Afflictions are endless, I vow to sever them all." Does Guanyin Bodhisattva have afflictions? No, he has cut them off, but he takes living beings' afflictions as his own. Seeing that living beings have not cut off their afflictions, he makes the vow: "Afflictions are endless, I vow to cut them off." Basically, afflictions are endless, like waves on water: The first wave subsides, and the next one rises. That wave subsides, and yet another wave rises up in its wake. This goes on continuously without cease. Afflictions are just like that—endless.

The third vast vow is, "Dharma-doors are limitless, I vow to study them all." Some people study one or two Sutras, and they become self-satisfied. They say they already understand Buddhism. But the Buddhism they understand is not as much as a single drop within the great sea of the Buddhadharma. These people who become self-satisfied are just like an ant who goes to the ocean to get a drink of water: He takes his fill and says that he has drunk up the entire sea. Actually the ant only filled up his own stomach—he has not even drunk a single drop of the great sea.

The last vast vow is "The Buddha Way is unsurpassed, I vow to realize it." There is nothing higher than the Buddha Way, so everyone should resolve to become a Buddha. Do not look down on yourself. Thinking of yourself as originally being a Buddha. However, that does not mean you are a Buddha now. Basically we were all completely endowed with the Buddha-nature. But now, because we do not know how to cultivate, we do not possess the Three Bodies of the Buddha, the Four Types of Wisdom, the Five Eyes, or the Six Spiritual Penetrations.

Guanshiyin Bodhisattva bases his teaching on the Four Vast Vows, and he uses the sweet dew of Dharma rain to cause all beings to become refreshed and content, so they would not have any more afflictions.

**Sutra:**

**In the midst of contention, when faced with lawsuits, Or when someone is terrified on the battlefield, If he evokes the strength of Guanyin, All his many enemies will scatter and leave.**

Outline:

J2. Revealing the response.

**Commentary:**

**In the midst of contention, when faced with lawsuits.** "Contention" means fighting. During the Dharma-Ending Age, contention is at its height.

When the Buddha dwells in the world, the period is called the Proper Dharma Age. During the Proper Dharma Age, Dhyana concentration is solid. At that time, everyone likes to investigate Dhyana and enter samadhi. The Proper Dharma Age lasts from the time the Buddha appears in the world until one thousand years following his passing into stillness. After that comes the Dharma Image Age.

During the Dharma Image Age, people are resolute in building temples. They erect stupas and make images, and they consider that to be the most important work. Everyone likes to build big temples. That was why in this world some countries have great temples as a vestige of the Dharma Image Age. The Dharma Image Age also lasts for one thousand years, and after that comes the Dharma-Ending Age.

The Dharma-Ending Age lasts for ten thousand years. "Ending" here also refers to the tip of the branch. At that time the Dharma has arrived at its termination. At present we are in the Dharma-Ending Age. During this time, people are neither resolute in Dhyana concentration nor in building temples. They are resolute in fighting. And that is what we are discussing now in this line of verse—contention. Countries fight with countries; families fight with families; people fight with people; animals fight with animals; ghosts fight with ghosts—there is fighting everywhere. Why? Because during the Dharma-Ending Age, it is the nature of people to like fighting.

However, right within the Dharma-Ending Age there is the Proper Dharma Age. And, in the Dharma Image Age, there is also the Proper Dharma Age. What does this mean? Even within the Dharma-Ending Age, there are still people who want to investigate Chan and sit in meditation. For example, many people here like to take time out in the morning or evening, or even in the midst of a busy day, to sit in meditation. Just this is being in the Proper Dharma Age. During the Dharma-Ending Age, these people make up only an extremely small percentage of the entire population.

The fact that we can still lecture the Sutras and speak Dharma, and that people vigorously cultivate according to the teachings, and that some still find time amidst their busy schedules to sit in meditation—even to the point that some do not eat or sleep in order to come to hear the Sutra lectures—means that the Proper Dharma Age is found right within the Dharma-Ending Age.

Now, if all of us come together to build great Way-places and temples, then we are in the Dharma Image Age that is found within the Dharma-Ending Age.

Furthermore, within the Dharma Image Age, there are also the Dharma-Ending Age and the Proper Dharma Age. For instance, during the Dharma Image Age, when people like to build temples, there are those who do not like to build temples and who do not even believe in the Buddha, and that is like having the Dharma-Ending Age within the Dharma Image Age. And again, if at that time people get together and vigorously cultivate, then that is the Proper Dharma Age within the Dharma Image Age.

Likewise, within the Proper Dharma Age, the Dharma-Ending Age and the Dharma Image Age are also found. During the Proper Dharma Age, if people like to build temples, then they are dwelling in the Dharma Image Age. There are also those who study the Buddhadharma just a bit and then stop—they do not investigate thoroughly—and that is like having the Dharma-Ending Age right within the Proper Dharma Age.

Although this age is generally recognized as the Dharma-Ending Age, there are those of us in the West who abide in and uphold the Proper Dharma, and who have made vows to propagate the Buddhadharma so that it will forever remain in the world; thus, we have the Proper Dharma Age within the Dharma-Ending Age.

Every day we recite and hold the Shurangama Mantra, and in this way we are helping the entire world. If there is not even a single person who recites the Shurangama Mantra in a world, then that world is about to be destroyed. At that time, all the ghosts, goblins, and demons, the li, mei, and wang liang ghosts will appear. Why is it that they do not dare to make a full-force descent upon the world right now? It is because in this world there are still people who hold the Shurangama Mantra and who cultivate the Great Compassion Mantra and the Forty-two Hands and Eyes. Because of this, the demons and goblins do not dare to come out.

Now the text mentions a time that is strong in fighting, so it says, "In the midst of contention, when faced with lawsuits." At such a time you have to go before a judge and argue things out. Then you have to hire an attorney. Some attorneys have the talent to make you appear totally unreasonable, even if you are on the right side of the law; conversely, the cases of people who are clearly on the wrong side can be made to look completely justifiable. This is distorting right and wrong—turning things upside down.

Several months ago there was a news item in the papers: a woman murdered her husband. Now this woman was really rich. And she promised her attorney a fat sum of money if he got her off. The attorney knew very well that she was a murderer, but somehow he was able to twist the truth at the trial, and defended her in such a way that that she got off with her life. So, tell me, is there any true principle around? If you have enough money, you can kill and still get off scot-free. This often happens in cases of contention. People go to court to argue principles, but somehow the lawyers twist the facts around so that even if you have principle, they make it appear as if you do not; and if you do not have principle, they make it appear as if you do. Isn’t this world full of darkness? If you go to court and argue your case, but you do not have a lot of money, then even if you have reason on your side, you still get convicted. Conversely, even if you do not have reason on your side, but are wealthy, you are freed. People are manipulated by money to the point that their consciences are completely destroyed.

**Or when someone is terrified on the battlefield.** This is when one becomes petrified amidst clashing armies on the battlefield. **If he evokes the strength of Guanyin, all his many enemies will scatter and leave.** If you can only recite "Namo Guanshiyin Bodhisattva," then your enemies will retreat and disperse; all the feuding will somehow disappear, and your enemies will disperse.

Who are your enemies? Say you have to go to court to argue a case against another person, or you fall before an adversary on the battlefield: The reason for this is the resentment piled up over many lifetimes. An animosity builds up over lifetimes to the point that the people involved come together to fight it out. Each person has to undergo his or her retribution. But if, at that time, you can be mindful of Guanyin Bodhisattva, this kind of retribution will be diminished—the heavy offenses will become lighter and the light ones will completely disappear. So the text says, "All his many enemies will scatter and leave." And so the power of Guanyin Bodhisattva is truly inconceivable and not something that most people can understand.

During World War II, a man by the name of Fei Fanjiu lived in Shanghai. He practiced reciting Guanyin Bodhisattva's name every day. During the Sino-Japanese war, Shanghai was constantly being shelled, and so he decided to move from his house to avoid the bombing. Right after he moved, his house was completely destroyed by a bomb. After staying four or five days at the new shelter, he got the notion that this place would not be safe, either. So he moved again. He moved to the "Concession Zone," an area that was loaned to foreigners. That was an area that the Westerners had leased from China to dwell in, and the Japanese did not dare bomb that area.

After living in the Concession Zone for a while, Fei Fanjiu thought that it was not safe either; but that area was surrounded by electric fencing and there was no way he could leave. Right at that time, when he was in a quandary as to what he should do, he saw a child. The child said, "You had better get out of here quickly; the Japanese army is on its way!" Suddenly he saw a place in the electric fence about two feet wide that was broken—just enough of a space to crawl through. He managed to get his mother, his wife, and his children out of the area through this hole in the fence. When they had all gotten out, the guards who had been on sentry duty were astonished; they could not figure out how those people had gotten through.

Fei Fanjiu then turned back to look for the child, but the child was nowhere to be seen. He looked back at the electric fence and the hole was not there. He was really puzzled. In this way he was saved from "the terror of the battlefield." From this incident we can see that the power of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva is truly inconceivable.

Now that we know Guanshiyin Bodhisattva protects those who recite his name, we should bring forth genuine faith and a sincere resolve to recite his name.

“Many enemies” does not refer to just one kind of enemy. I just related how countries fight with countries, families fight with families, people fight with people, ghost fight with ghosts, and animals fight with animals. Our ominous present-day situations are created by the power of living beings’ collective karma. There are many countries, in fact, where the population is not even composed of human beings! Sometimes a large group of mice might get reborn together as people in one place and make up a “country.” Or sometimes a population of frogs can be born together as humans in a particular country.

Last spring [1968] a lay disciple showed us an article in the newspaper which reported that in a certain country several tens of thousands of frogs all committed suicide together. Why did that happened? It is because the frog population was too large, so they all committed suicide in order to be reborn as humans. This shows that most of the people in that country were frogs before. If you check out their physiognomy in detail, they even look somewhat like frogs. Each nationality has its own characteristics, because in former lives they were a particular kind of animal. Now they have become people. Last spring I talked about this principle and someone asked me, “In America, what were people before?” I said, “They were all kinds of creatures.” There are a lot of immigrants from many different countries in America, and they used to be people, animals, and all kinds of beings. That is the truth!

If you look carefully, and if you have the Buddha Eye, the Wisdom Eye, or the Heavenly Eye, you will know that the “people” in the world are not necessarily people. There are many kinds of creatures in human form. How can you tell? If you have the Buddha Eye, or the Wisdom Eye, and you want to know what people were in their past lives, you look at the “shadow” behind them. If there is a human “shadow” behind them, then they were people in their last lives. If they were animals or some strange creatures, they will have those “shadows” behind them. But if you have not opened your Buddha Eye, Wisdom Eye, or Heavenly Eye, you would not be able to tell.

Do not think that everyone you meet is a person. For example, Lin Biao [Commander-in-Chief of Chinese Communist army, who was chosen by Mao Zedong to be his official successor] was a wolf in his last life. That was why so many people were afraid of him. Zhou Enlai was a human in his last life. How can you know? If you obtain the Heavenly Eye, you can know all about these things. Do not be impatient. Just keep working hard, and you will be able to know whatever you want to know. Now, in China—and I am not scolding Chinese people—there are a lot of people who used to be mice. But there are also many who used to be people, ghosts, or animals. In general, every country has people who used to be horses, cows, sheep, chicken, dogs, pigs, and so forth. Most people have come from the animal realm. This is a very subtle doctrine, however. Most people would not believe it if they have not experienced it. If you really want to know these things, you have to put your feet firmly on the ground and cultivate. When you obtain spiritual powers you will know: “The things that the Dharma Master said are really true! He told us really wonderful things!” Then you will know.

**Sutra:**

***Wondrous your sound, Contemplator of the World’s Sounds—
A pure sound, a sound like the sea tide,
A sound beyond all worldly sounds,
We shall always bear it in mind.***

Outline:

G3. Two exhortations.
H1. Exhortation to uphold the name.

I1. His state and wisdom are profound and wondrous, and so we should constantly uphold his name.

**Commentary:**

**Wondrous your sound, Contemplator of the World's Sounds.** Not only is the Bodhisattva's sound wondrous and subtle, it is also pure. **A pure sound, a sound like the sea tide.** The pure sound of Guanyin Bodhisattva is like the sound of the sea—the sea tide, which is reliable, ebbing and flowing. **A sound beyond all worldly sounds, we shall always bear it in mind.** Everyone should always recollect the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.

**Sutra:**

***In thought after thought we have no doubt.
Guanshiyin is pure and sagely.
In times of suffering, agony, danger, and death,
He is our refuge and protector.***

Outline:

I2. The response is hard to fathom, and so we should uphold the name without doubts.

**Commentary:**

**In thought after thought we have no doubt.** You should not think, "What use is it to recite the name of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva? Isn't that just meaningless, reciting it every day?" It is very important not to have doubts. You should not have doubts for even a moment. **Guanshiyin is pure and sagely. In times of suffering, agony, danger, and death, he is our refuge and protector.** You can turn your very life over to Guanshiyin Bodhisattva. He will certainly protect and help you.
**Sutra:**

***Complete with all merit and virtue,
His kind eyes watching living beings,
He is endowed with massive blessings, limitless as the sea.
Therefore we should reverently worship him.***

Outline:

H2. Exhortation to make offerings to him.

**Commentary:**

**Complete with all merit and virtue, his kind eyes watching living beings.** Guanyin Bodhisattva possesses inconceivable spiritual powers. Like a compassionate father, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, with the same kind eyes, looks upon all living beings to see whether they have committed offenses or not. **He is endowed with massive blessings, limitless as the sea.** His equal, great compassion saves all living beings. The blessed reward he has cultivated is as great and boundless as the sea. **Therefore we should reverently worship him.**
Today, we have finished the verse section. Tomorrow we will finish the “Universal Door Chapter.” On Sunday we will begin to lecture on the entire Sutra. [Note: The Venerable Master explained the “Universal Door Chapter” first, and after that he lectured on the *Lotus Sutra* from the beginning.]

To have an opportunity to hear the entire *Lotus Sutra* is rare. There is nowhere you can go to hear the entire *Lotus Sutra*. In Hong Kong and Taiwan there might be a chance, but it is very rare. Here in affluent America you can hear the Sutra. By listening to it, you are imperceptibly helping the entire world. We lecture the Sutra here, and the entire world receives the benefits of the Dharma assembly. The auspicious and lucky energy helps the world. Wherever the Sutras are lectured, the gods, dragons, and the eightfold division come to guard the Bodhimanda. By coming to listen to the lectures, you too protect the Bodhimanda. One must have great good roots to have a chance to listen to the Sutras. A person without good roots could not hear them even if he wanted to. One demonic obstacle after another would prevent him from attending the lectures. In general, he would not be able to make it. Now that you can hear the Sutras and the Dharma, be assured that you have great merit and virtue.

**Sutra:**
 **At that time the Bodhisattva Guardian of the Earth rose from his seat and said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, if there are those who hear this chapter of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, who learn about the self-mastery of his deeds and the power of his spiritual penetrations as shown in this Universal Door, you should know that the merit and virtue of such people will not be small.”**
Outline:

E2. The merit and virtue of hearing this chapter.
F1. Guardian of the Earth praises and certifies it.

**Commentary:**

**At that time,** after Shakyamuni Buddha had finished speaking the verses, **the Bodhisattva Guardian of the Earth.** This Bodhisattva is mentioned in the *Shurangama Sutra*. Limitless *eons* ago, this Bodhisattva was illiterate. Although he had never studied the Buddhadharma, his conduct was very near that of a Buddhist. He was very strong and powerful. He could lift and move things that no one else could. His worked in repairing roads and sometimes he repaired bridges. He would help people move their carts or carry their burdens, and he never took any payment for these services. He did this for a long time.

Once a Buddha named Vishvabhu came by and said to him, "Leveling the roads is just casting aside the roots to grasp at the branches. It is superficial work."

"Then what should I do?" said the Bodhisattva.

"If you want to level the roads, first you should level your mind-ground. Why are there mountains and valleys, hills and dales? Because people's minds are not level. People's minds go 'up and down,' and so we have mountains, rivers, and valleys of the great earth come into being. You should first level your mind-ground. If the mind-ground is level, all places are level."

Having heard these instructions, Guardian of the Earth Bodhisattva then cultivated the mind-ground Dharma-door. He leveled the ground of his mind and cultivated to accomplishment.

From among the assembly, Guardian of the Earth Bodhisattva **rose from his seat and said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, if there are those who hear this chapter of Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, who learn about the self-mastery of his deeds and the power of his spiritual penetrations as shown in this Universal Door**—those are his Thirty-two Response Bodies, Fourteen Kinds of Fearlessness, and Nineteen Ways of Speaking Dharma—**you should know that the merit and virtue of such people will not be small."** The merit from hearing this chapter on Guanyin Bodhisattva's Universal Door is not small by any means.

**Sutra:**
 **When the Buddha had spoken the “Universal Door Chapter,” eighty-four thousand living beings in the assembly all brought forth the resolve for *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*.**Outline:

F2. Narrator describes benefits.

**Commentary:**

**When the Buddha had spoken the "Universal Door Chapter," eighty-four thousand living beings in the assembly all brought forth the resolve for *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*,** the mind for the Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment.

"Eighty-four thousand living beings" also refers to the 84,000 kinds of afflictions we living beings have. The bodies of each one of us contain 84,000 germs. We people are "big germs," and all the little germs live inside of us, inside our blood, flesh, and internal organs. We are the life-support systems for the little germs, and the little germs help the big germs. Each one of the germs is actually a living being. You could never count them, there being so many, but in general we say "eighty-four thousand."

Outwardly, the world is filled with many, many more than 84,000 beings. "Eighty-four thousand beings" also refers to the thoughts which rise and pass away continually in the minds of living beings. Each thought is a living being, rising and passing away, undergoing birth and death. The 84,000 living beings are not separate from your own nature. The 84,000 living beings all bring forth, at the same time, the resolve for *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*.

*Anuttarasamyaksambodhi* is a Sanskrit word. *Anuttara* means "unsurpassed." *Samyak* means "proper and equal," and *sambodhi* means "right enlightenment." There is nothing higher than this enlightenment; it is equal to the enlightenment of the Buddha. Upon hearing this "Universal Door Chapter," all the 84,000 living beings brought forth the resolve for enlightenment. That was an especially rare occasion!

Now at the Buddhist Lecture Hall in San Francisco, we have lectured the "Universal Door Chapter," and over twenty people have heard it. All of these twenty people have 84,000 living beings inside of them. Ultimately, how many beings are there? And yet, did they all bring forth the mind of unsurpassed enlightenment? Even if not all of them did, the majority of them probably did. Those who attend the lectures on the *Dharma Flower Sutra* all have a share in becoming Buddhas in the future. That you have heard this chapter on Guanyin Bodhisattva means that in the past, for many lives and many *eons*, you have planted limitless, boundless good roots, and so now you have this causal condition to assemble together and study the Buddhadharma. This is a wonderful, inconceivable state.

*Anuttarasamyaksambodhi* is the highest position, the position of the Buddha's enlightenment, the Unsurpassed, Pervasive, Proper Enlightenment. Right Enlightenment is the enlightenment of the Arhats, those of the Two Vehicles. They have not, however, obtained the Proper and Equal Enlightenment. Who has obtained it? The Bodhisattvas—they have obtained both Right Enlightenment and Proper and Equal Enlightenment. Bodhisattvas are equal to the Buddha, in that sense. But they have not obtained the Unsurpassed Enlightenment.

Arhats have obtained Right Enlightenment; but they have not obtained Proper and Equal or Unsurpassed Enlightenment.

Bodhisattvas are said to be "Surpassed Knights" because they are surpassed by the Buddhas who are above them.

The Buddhas are called "Unsurpassed Knights," because none are higher than they are. They have obtained Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment, which is like the Perfect Bodhi that returns to Nonattainment. The Buddhas have attained the Perfection of the Three Kinds of Enlightenment and also the ten thousand virtues. There is nothing higher than Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment. This title applies only to the Buddhas, not to the Bodhisattvas or Arhats. Thus, it is the highest position.

From what position is this highest state reached? One might think it was realized from a high position, but that is not the case. The highest position is realized from the lowest position. Those who cultivate the Way should be very careful not to become arrogant, because the highest position can only be reached from the lowest position.

Lao Zi said, "The highest form of goodness is like water. Water skillfully benefits the ten thousand things but does not contend. Because it abides in places that people despise, it is close to the Way."

The ten thousand things include all creatures, flying, walking, and swimming, as well as all the plants and trees. All creatures need water, whether they are egg-born, womb-born, transformation-born, or moisture-born. But even though all creatures are nourished and supported by water, the water never thinks, "I am benefiting you, supporting your lives, and helping you out." Water does not fight either. It does not insist on taking credit for what it does, as people usually do. People all say, "I did this good deed, or that good deed. I built that temple. I built that bridge." They are always competing. Water never thinks like that. It is unselfish; it does not seek to benefit itself. Water does not fight for fame or profit. Water always flows to the bottom; it does not run upwards or fight to be on top.

"But rain falls down from the sky!" you say.

That is a very good point. The rain does fall down. But how does it get up there in the first place? It goes up from the lowest place. Then it falls down and flows into the rivers and the sea, and still recedes into the low-lying places. It just goes up into the sky temporarily. Water goes to places where no one else wants to go.

Why is it that cultivators do not like to live in fancy houses? They may even live in caves. The reason is they want to imitate water in dwelling in a lowly place. Because water goes to places people despise, it is close to the Way.

If you want to realize Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment, you, too, must begin from the lowest position. You do not begin at the top.

If you want to become a Buddha, you must first be a good living being. How do you do that? You should just do what is good. Do not do evil. Follow the good and change the evil. Go down the good road, and get off the bad road. Go forward and pursue what is in accord with the Way. Retreat from that which is not in accord with the Way. Then you will be able to obtain Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment.

Today we have finished this general explanation of the "Universal Door Chapter." The wonderful doctrine of the Universal Door is ineffable and endless. It is not something that can be completely explained in a short period of time. The *Dharma Flower Sutra* is ineffably wonderful. Its wonderful functions are infinite and endless. Today, I have explained the meaning in general. In the future, if there is an opportunity, we can go into it more deeply.

Saturday is Guanyin Bodhisattva’s anniversary. Now that we have heard this chapter, we have a general idea about the spiritual powers and wonderful functions of Guanyin Bodhisattva. Saturday we will recite Guanyin Bodhisattva’s name and bow the Great Compassion Repentance, and Guanyin Bodhisattva may manifest his inconceivable and wonderful functions. If there is anything on our mind, anything that you are seeking for, you should pray to Guanyin Bodhisattva. I believe that you will obtain what you seek.

The *Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra* is the Sutra for becoming a Buddha. Having heard the *Dharma Flower Sutra*, we each have a share in future Buddhahood. This is a very rare opportunity.

Those who know Chinese know what bowing repentance is all about. Those who cannot read Chinese, who can only pronounce the sounds, do not know what quelling disasters and increasing blessings and longevity is all about. If they understood, they could also bow very happily. During all the years I was in Hong Kong, people would bow the Medicine Master Repentance. They did not just bow, they also gave two dollars a month, HK$24 a year. Some people just gave money; others gave money and bowed as well. Why? Because they wished to increase their blessings and longevity.

The Medicine Master Repentance was very popular in Hong Kong. Most Buddhist temples liked to hold this repentance, because it would bring more people to the temple. They all wanted to quell disasters and obstacles lay in their future, so they all wanted to eradicate disasters and increase their blessings and longevity. That was the trend in China and Hong Kong. In America, the Buddhadharma is just beginning, and people are not that greedy yet. Why not? Because they do not know that this is something to be greedy for. When they find out, I bet they will be even greedier than the Chinese. When the time comes, it may get so that they will even skip eating in order to come and bow repentances.

When I was in Hong Kong, at Western Bliss Gardens Temple, people came to bow repentances all the time, not caring whether it was too cold or hot, or whether they were hungry or thirsty. Sometimes I would go and bow with them, but at other times I had other business to take care of and they would bow on their own. The more they bowed, the happier they were. Now that I have brought this up, some people are having false thinking. Some are thinking, “I would not be greedy,” and others are thinking, “I would like to try it out!”