

Flower Adornment Sutra

The Second Ground

with commentary of Tripitaka Master Hua

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SUTRA:

HIS NATURE DOES NOT STEAL. THE BODHISATTVA IS ALWAYS CONTENT WITH HIS OWN POSSESSIONS. HE IS ALWAYS KIND AND FORGIVING TOWARDS OTHERS AND DOES NOT WISH TO ENCROACH UPON THEM. IF AN ITEM BELONGS TO SOMEONE ELSE, HE GIVES RISE TO THE THOUGHTS THAT IT IS SOMEONE ELSE'S ITEM AND WOULD NEVER CONSIDER STEALING IT, DOWN TO A BLADE OF GRASS OR A LEAF--IF NOT GIVEN, HE DOES NOT TAKE IT--HOW MUCH THE LESS ANY OTHER OF THE NECESSITIES OF LIFE.

COMMENTARY:

HIS NATURE DOES NOT STEAL. The Second Ground, the Ground of Leaving Filth, is also the Ground of the Purity of the Self-nature; and it is one's basic, undefiled self-nature. Within that kind of state, one's own nature is free from all defiled dharmas, to the point that every state of mind and every movement of thought is pure with no defilement. If you have one single defiled thought, you are impure.

The principles expounded in the Flower Adornment Sutra are all Dharma doors which are not separate from our daily activities and concerns. Not only are the principles of the Flower Adornment Sutra not separate from the daily round of our ordinary activities, but the other Sutras also are not apart from the principles which we require in our daily behavior. If the principles discussed in the Sutras had no relevance to our daily lives, the Buddha would not have spoken those Sutras. The Buddha spoke the Sutras to enable each of us to live good lives, proper and regulated lives, lives very much in accord with the rules. That is why he spoke all of the Dharma doors and lectured all the Sutras. Each Sutra is presenting us with a proper road along which to travel. However, we must go along it for the Sutra to be of use. If we only know the Sutras and do not rely upon the Sutras to cultivate, then we can listen to the Sutras for eighty thousand great aeons, but it will be equivalent to not having heard them at all. And so:

They had eyes but did not see Nishyanda Buddha.

They had ears but did not hear the perfect Sudden Teaching.

It could be explained this way: all who were listening to the Sutras listened for awhile and then fell asleep, and so they had eyes but did not see and had ears but did not hear. Therefore, the first requirement for all of you now listening to the Flower Adornment Sutra is not to fall asleep. If you fall asleep, then you, too, have eyes but do not see Nishyanda Buddha, have ears but do not hear the perfect Sudden Teaching. That's the first requirement.

The second requirement is not to dream. If you fall asleep, that is not so important, but dreaming is. A man has a dream and in his dream he sees his girlfriend come. A girl has a dream and in her dream she sees her boyfriend arrive. Wouldn't you say that was to kick the Flower Adornment Sutra right out beyond the ninth heaven? Then, when he wakes up, he keeps looking for his girlfriend. "She just came. Where can she have gone? Really! I saw her come." He has the dream, and then after waking from the dream he still wants to look for his girlfriend. Men look for girlfriends and women look for boyfriends, saying, "I saw my boyfriend. Now where had he gone?" If that's going on, then it does not matter whether I lecture the Flower Adornment Sutra or not, you won't understand it. But, if you are not asleep and not dreaming, then even if I don't lecture well, you can still completely savour its flavor, feel you are in your element, and understand more principle.

"His nature does not steal." Of the nature it is said:

People at first
Are basically good in nature.
They are close to the nature,
Yet learn to be distant.
If they are not taught,
Their nature then shifts.
The teaching of principles
Merits concentration.

That is a quote from the *Three Character Classic*. At one time in China every child could recite it, but it is not well known at all in America, so I shall explain it for you.

"People at first are basically good in nature." When people are first born their natures are good. Some claim that our natures are evil, but that theory won't stand because people's natures are good. "They are close to the nature." Their natures basically are close to the good. Their natures are just about the same as our original nature and are not distant from it. "Yet" they "learn to be distant. If they are not taught, their nature then shifts." Those who were good in nature become evil-natured, "The teaching of principles merits concentration." When you teach them, you should concentrate on principles.

The trend in America is to let children develop naturally" which had evolved to mean, let them do whatever they please. The way this turns out is that they are like trees with branches forking off to the north, south, east, and west, and points in between. That greatly decreases the uses to which the basic trunk of the tree can be put, so that it cannot become good-quality building material. As a result, a great many American children have become hippies. This is the fault of improper instruction.

"His nature does not steal." When the Bodhisattva holds the precept against stealing, not only does he not break the precept in a tangible way, but he also does not violate it in intangible ways. This means he does not violate the precept in ways that can be seen or known, and even when it could not be seen or found out, he still does not violate the precept in his nature. That is, there is no "yeast" of stealing in it. The analogy is that of making bread or biscuits. If you don't add yeast to your bread ingredients, it won't be easy to get the dough to rise. In the same way, if the "yeast" of stealing does not exist in the nature, then there will be no stealing in one's conduct.

THE BODHISATTVA IS ALWAYS CONTENT WITH HIS OWN POSSESSIONS. The Bodhisattva himself constantly knows how to be satisfied with his own possessions, his internal valuables of head, eyes, brains, and marrow, and his outer wealth of countries, cities, wives, and children.

If one knows how to be content, one is always happy.

Why do people steal? It is because they are not satisfied and are ceaselessly greedy.

If one knows how to be content,
Then one will not be humiliated.
If one knows when to stop
Then one will not get in trouble.

If you can always be content, then you will not break the law, nor will people look down on you, "You will not be humiliated" means that no one will degrade you. If you ordinarily have no greed, then there will be no dangers at all.

If you know how to be content,
Then you are always happy.
If you know how to be patient,
Then you are at peace with yourself.

What is meant by "Bodhisattva"? Bodhisattvas are the same as people except that their way of thinking and their behavior differ from ours. At all times and under all circumstances they wish to benefit living beings; at all times and under all circumstances they are teaching and transforming living beings. They are not selfish and self-seeking. They do not scheme for themselves. They are not concerned about themselves, saying, "What about me? What's in it for me? How am I going to stay alive day after day? In the future, how am I going to die? I certainly won't 'swallow poison and die!'" They're not that way. The Bodhisattvas live without living and die without dying. They simply take being of service to all humanity as their own responsibility and do whatever they can to help humankind. They never do anything which will harm human-kind.

Although Bodhisattvas may be endowed with spiritual penetrations as a natural response to their cultivation, they would never employ their spiritual penetrations to back up tyrannical and ruthless behavior, doing whatever they please. They would not be that way. Why is it that we have no spiritual penetrations? It's because if we did have them, we would use them as weapons, shouting, "I have spiritual penetrations! If you don't obey me, I'll make your head-ache!" Those are not spiritual penetrations, they are ghostly penetrations. Why? Don't you think you're going to have to undergo retribution in the future? Whether or not they obey the Bodhisattvas' instructions, the Bodhisattvas look upon living beings with eyes of compassion and would never punish them or cause them any kind of pain or suffering.

HE IS ALWAYS KIND AND FORGIVING TOWARDS OTHERS. The Bodhisattva is kind and compassionate towards all living beings. Kindness can bestow happiness. To be forgiving means to be merciful. No matter what beings do wrong, the Bodhisattvas think this way, "The offense is not yours, because it is due to my not having taught you any better. Therefore, although it is you who have committed the offense, basically the offense is mine." No matter what it is, the Bodhisattva

always looks for the fault in himself, returns the light and reverses the illumination. Living beings are always illumining outside, always saying, "You're wrong." Bodhisattvas say that they themselves are wrong.

The Bodhisattva DOES NOT WISH TO ENCROACH UPON THEM. A Bodhisattva does not encroach upon others in order to benefit himself. IF AN ITEM BELONGS TO SOMEONE ELSE, HE GIVES RISE TO THE THOUGHT THAT IT IS SOMEONE ELSE'S ITEM. He thinks, "Oh, that thing is his. I can't steal it. I can't encroach upon his benefits." AND he WOULD NEVER CONSIDER STEALING IT. No matter how expensive, valuable, or rare, even if they are Capital City-priced rare and precious gems, the Bodhisattva does not become greedy for them. He would never consider stealing them. If you have no greed, then you will not steal. Stealing is just greed. Because of insatiable greed, one thinks of stealing.

DOWN TO A BLADE OF GRASS OR A LEAF: IF NOT GIVEN, HE DOES NOT TAKE IT. Even if no one gives it to you, you may not take it, HOW MUCH THE LESS ANY OTHER OF THE NECESSITIES OF LIFE. If this is true even of a single blade of grass or a twig, how much the more so is it true of other, more valuable items?

So, don't imitate American children who in school specialize in being mice. Those of you who've been to school have probably experienced this and will understand without my telling you. In the school, there is a refrigerator. Whoever has things to eat puts them in the refrigerator. As soon as one person puts something in, another person comes along and 'steals' it, acts the mouse and steals it to eat. This happens because people don't know about the precept against stealing. They don't understand that:

A mustard seed not given to a person,
Is a mustard seed that may not be taken by that person.

There must be that kind of care and concern. When you're a kid in school, your attitude is, "What's yours is mine, and what's mine is mine, too." You don't make distinctions of self and others; however, "What's yours is mine." That's not in accord with precepts.

"Down to a blade of grass or a leaf: if not given, he does not take it." Do you all hear that? A single blade of grass or a twig, or one leaf--if not given he does not take it. If no one has given an item to me, I don't want it. For example, if this glass of juice had not been offered to me, I wouldn't drink it. Although it's a small matter, if you can't be clear about the small matters, then what can be said about the great matters? So, in cultivating the Way, we should pay attention to the areas which are subtle as motes of dust. When there are a great many fine motes of dust, they become a mountain. You should not say, "Oh, it's just a dustmote's worth. It doesn't matter. I can just sluff it off." It's precisely because you lack dust motes that you are unable to make a high and lofty mountain.

In holding precepts, you should have a spirit of holding them without holding them, and a practice of cultivating without cultivating. It may look as if you are not holding the precepts, but actually you are *truly* holding the precepts. It may look as if you are not cultivating, but actually you are *truly* cultivating. So, maybe those of you in Gold Mountain Monastery and the International Institute for the Translation of Buddhist Texts say, "Oh, I can't cultivate. All I do is strike up false thinking." No matter how much false thinking you strike up, it's far better than what worldly people do. In everything they do, worldly people are planting the seeds for stealing, and in the future they will reap

the fruit of stealing. Although in what we are doing here there are still faults and habits which we are not able to change immediately, still we have all drawn near the Buddha's Way Place, and every day are able to understand more than before.

"How much the less" would he steal "any other of the necessities of life." If one would not casually take or steal, even a blade of grass, a leaf, or a mustard seed, how much the less would one steal any other things, any other of the necessities of life?

to be continued