

A Parable

Chapter 3

Part One : Shariputra's predicament

Thereupon, Shariputra, with joyful enthusiasm, rose, placed his palms together, gazed reverently at the World Honored One's face and said to the Buddha, "Now, having heard this sound of Dharma from the World Honored One, my heart rejoices and I have obtained what I never had before."

"What is the reason? In the past, I heard a Dharma such as this from the Buddha, and saw the Bodhisattvas receive predictions of Buddhahood, but we had no part in this matter. I was deeply hurt that I had lost the limitless knowledge and vision of the Thus Come One."

"World Honored One, when I used to dwell alone in mountain forests, at the foot of trees, whether sitting or walking, I continually had this thought, "We all identically enter into the Dharma-nature, why has the Thus Come One shown us deliverance by means of the Small Vehicle Dharma? We are at fault, not the World Honored One."

"What is the reason? If we had waited for the lecture on the cause of realizing anuttarasamyaksambodhi, we would certainly have been delivered by means of the Great Vehicle Dharma. But we did not understand that expedient devices are spoken in accord with what is appropriate. Therefore, when we first

heard the Buddhadharma, upon encountering it,
we immediately believed, accepted, and
considered it, and attained realization.”

“World Honored One, from of old, I have, day and
night, continually reproached myself. Now, from
the Buddha, I have heard what I never heard
before, this Dharma which has never been
before, and all my doubts have been severed. My
body and mind are blissful, and I am at peace.”

“Today, indeed, I know that I am a true disciple of
the Buddha, born from the Buddha’s mouth,
transformed from the Dharma; I have obtained a
share of the Buddhadharma”

At that time, Shariputra, wishing to restate this
meaning, spoke verses, saying:

Hearing this Dharma sound,
I gained what I never had;
My heart is filled with great joy,
The net of doubts has been cast
aside .

From of old, favored with the
Buddha’s teaching,
I had never lost the Greater
Vehicle.
The Buddha’s sound is
extremely rare,
And can rid beings of their
woes.
I have already attained to the
end of outflows,
Yet hearing it my woes also are
dispelled.

As I dwelt in the mountain

valleys,
Sometimes at the foot of trees,
Whether sitting or walking,
I constantly thought upon this
topic:

“Ah,” I cried in bitter self-
reproach,
“Why have I deceived myself?
We, too, are the Buddha’s
disciples,
And equally enter the non-
outflow Dharma;
Yet, in the future, we shall not
be able
To proclaim the Unsurpassed
Path.

The Golden Color, the Thirty-
two,
The Ten Powers and all the
Liberations
Are together in a single
Dharma,
But I have not attained these
things.

The Eighty Wondrous
Hallmarks,
The Eighteen Unshared
Dharmas--
Such qualities of virtue--
I have missed them, every one.”

When I used to walk alone,
I would see the Buddha in the
Great Assembly,
His fame filling the ten
directions,

Vastly benefiting all beings.
I felt I had lost this benefit,
And had but cheated myself.

Constantly, both day and night,
I thought upon this matter,
And wished to ask the World
Honored One
Whether or not I had lost it.

I often saw the World Honored
One
Praising all the Bodhisattvas,
And so it was, by day and night,

I pondered on matters such as
these.

Now I hear the Buddha's sound,

Opportunely speaking that
Dharma
Which is without outflows--hard
to conceive of--
And leads living beings to the
Bodhimanda.

Once, I was attached to deviant
views,
And was a teacher of the
Brahmins.
The World Honored One knew
my heart,
Pulled out the deviant, and
taught me Nirvana.

I rid myself of deviant views,
And realized the Dharma of
emptiness.

Then, I said to myself
That I had arrived at
Quiescence.

But now, at last, I realize
It is not real Quiescence.
For when I become a Buddha,
Complete with the Thirty-two
Marks,
Revered by gods, humans, and
yaksha hordes,
Dragons, spirits, and others,
Only then will I be able to say,
“This is eternal Quiescence
without residue.”
The Buddha, in the Great
Assembly,
Has said, I shall become a
Buddha.
Hearing such a Dharma sound,
All my doubts have been
dispelled.

When I first heard the Buddha
speak,
My heart was filled with great
fear and doubt:
“Is this not Mara disguised as
the Buddha,
Come to disturb and confuse
my heart?”

The Buddha, by means of
various conditions,
Analogies, and ingenious
speech,
Makes one's heart as calm as
the sea.

Hearing him, the net of my
doubts was rent.

The Buddha says that in the
past,
The limitless Buddhas, now
extinct,
Dwelling in the use of
expedients,
Also spoke this Dharma--each
of them.

The Buddhas of the present and
future,
Their numbers without limit,
Also used expedients
To expound Dharma such as
this.
Just as now, the World Honored
One,
From birth until his leaving
home,
His attaining the Way and
turning the Dharma wheel,
Also speaks by means of
expedients.

The World Honored One speaks
of the real Path.
The evil one does no such
thing;
Hence, I know for certain
This is not the demon posing as
the Buddha.
Because I had fallen into a net
of doubts,
I said it was the doings of the
demon.

Hearing the Buddha's compliant
voice,
Profound, far-reaching, subtle
and fine
Proclaiming wide the clear, pure
Dharma,
Great is the joy within my heart.
My doubts are forever ended,
As in Real Wisdom I stand firm.

I am certain to become a
Buddha,
Revered by gods and humans.
I shall turn the Unsurpassed
Wheel of Dharma,
To teach and transform
Bodhisattvas.

Part Two : Shariputra's Prediction

At that time, the Buddha told Shariputra, “I, now, amidst the great assembly of gods, humans, Shramanas, Brahmins, and others, declare that in the distant past, in the presence of twenty thousand kotis of Buddhas, for the sake of the Unsurpassed Way, I have constantly taught and transformed you. You, throughout the long night, have followed me and received my instructions. I have used expedient devices to guide you to be born within my Dharma.”

“Shariputra, in the past, I taught you to resolve yourself on the Buddha Way, but you have completely forgotten this, and so you say of yourself that you have already attained quiescence.

“Now, again, wishing you to recall the path you have practiced according to your past vows, I, for

the sake of the Hearers, speak this Great Vehicle Sutra by the name of The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower, a Dharma for instructing Bodhisattvas of whom the Buddhas are protective and mindful.”

“Shariputra, in a future age, after limitless and boundless, inconceivable eons, having made offerings to some thousands of myriads of kotis of Buddhas, having reverently upheld the Proper Dharma, and having perfected the Path practiced by the Bodhisattvas, you shall become a Buddha by the name of Flower Light Thus Come One, One Worthy of Offerings, One of Proper and Universal Knowledge, One Whose Understanding and Conduct Are Complete, a Well-gone One Who Understands the World, an Unsurpassed Knight, a Taming and Regulating Hero, a Teacher of Gods and Humans, a Buddha, a World Honored One.”

“His country shall be called ‘Apart From Filth.’ Its ground will be level, pure and adorned, tranquil, and prosperous, and abounding with gods. It shall have lapis lazuli for soil and eight intersecting roads bordered with golden cords, and by which shall stand rows of trees made of the seven treasures constantly blooming and bearing fruit.”

“The Thus Come One Flower Light will also teach and transform living beings by means of the Three Vehicles. Shariputra, when this Buddha comes into the world, although it will not be an evil age, because of his past vows, he shall teach the Dharma of Three Vehicles.”

“That eon will be called ‘Adorned With Great Jewels.’ Why will it be called ‘Adorned With Great

Jewels'? Because in that land, Bodhisattvas will be considered great jewels."

"These Bodhisattvas will be limitless, boundless, and inconceivable in number, beyond the reach of calculation or analogy. Without the power of the Buddha's wisdom, no one could know their number."

"When they wish to walk, jeweled flowers will spring up beneath their feet. These Bodhisattvas will not be those who have just brought forth the resolve. They will have planted the roots of virtue for a long time, and in the presence of limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of Buddhas purely cultivated Brahman conduct, constantly receiving the Buddhas' praise, constantly cultivating the Buddha's wisdom, and complete with great spiritual penetrations, they will be well-versed in all the doors of Dharma, straightforward, ingenuous, and resolute. Bodhisattvas such as these will fill that country."

"Shariputra, the life span of the Buddha Flower Light will be twelve small eons, not counting the time during which, as a prince, he will not yet have become a Buddha. The life spans of the people in that country will be eight small eons."

"After twelve small eons, the Thus Come One Flower Light will confer upon the Bodhisattva Solid Fullness a prediction of anuttarasamyaksambodhi, and announce to the Bhikshus, 'The Bodhisattva Solid Fullness shall next become a Buddha by the name of Flowery Feet Peacefully Walking, Tathagata, Arhat, Samyaksambuddha. His Buddha-country will be of like character.'"

“Shariputra, when the Buddha Flower Light has passed into quiescence, the Proper Dharma Age shall dwell in the world for thirty-two small eons. The Dharma Image Age shall dwell in the world also for thirty-two small eons.”

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

Shariputra, in a future age,
Shall become a Buddha, honored and
all-wise,
By the name of Flower Light,
Who will save limitless multitudes.

Having made offerings to countless
Buddhas,
And having perfected the Bodhisattva
conduct,
The Ten Powers and other meritorious
qualities,
He shall certify to the Unsurpassed Way.

When limitless eons have passed,
There shall be an eon named “Adorned
with Great Jewels,”
And a world by name of “Apart from
Filth,”
Being pure and without flaw,
With lapis lazuli as its ground,
And its roads bordered with golden
cords,
With multicolored trees made of seven
treasures,
Which constantly bloom and bear fruit.

The Bodhisattvas in that land,
Will be always firm in mindfulness,
With spiritual penetrations and paramitas

,
All thoroughly perfected.
In the presence of countless Buddhas,
They will have well-learned the
Bodhisattva Way .

Great Knights such as these
Shall have been transformed by the
Buddha Flower Light .
That Buddha, when still a prince,
Shall renounce his land and worldly
glory,
And in his final body,
Leave home to realize the Buddha Way.

The Buddha Flower Light shall dwell in
the world
For a life span of twelve small eons.
The people of his land
Shall live for eight small eons.

When that Buddha has passed into
quiescence,
The Proper Dharma shall remain in the
world
For thirty-two small eons,
Widely saving living beings.

When the Proper Dharma has vanished,
The Dharma Image shall remain for
thirty-two.
The sharira shall be distributed widely,
For the offerings of gods and humans.

The deeds of the Buddha Flower Light,
Shall be such as these.
That Sagely Honored One, Twice
Complete,
Shall be supreme and beyond compare.

And he is just you, yourself!
It is fitting that you do rejoice.

Part Three : The Parable

At that time, the Four-fold Assembly of Bhikshus, Bhikshunis, Upasakas, and Upasikas, as well as the great multitude of yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kinnaras, mahoragas, and so forth, seeing Shariputra, in the presence of the Buddha, receive a prediction for anuttarasamyaksambodhi, greatly rejoiced in their hearts and leapt for unbounded joy.

Each removed his upper garment and presented it as an offering to the Buddha. Shakro Devanam Indrah and the Brahma Heaven King, together with countless gods, also made offerings to the Buddha of heavenly wonderful garments, heavenly mandarava flowers and mahamandarava flowers, and so forth.

The heavenly garments they tossed aloft remained in empty space and whirled around. Then, all at once, in empty space hundreds of thousands of myriads of kinds of heavenly music began to play, and there fell a rain of heavenly flowers.

As they uttered these words, “Long ago in Varanashi, the Buddha first turned the Wheel of Dharma. Now, he turns again that unsurpassed, magnificent Dharma -wheel.”

At that time, all the gods, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke the following verse:

Long ago in Varanashi,
You turned the Dharma-wheel of Four
Truths,
Discriminatingly speaking of the

Dharmas,
The production and extinction of Five
Heaps.

Now, again, you turn that wondrous,
Unsurpassed, great Wheel of Dharma.
This Dharma is deep and recondite,
And few are those who can believe it .

We from of old,
Have often heard the World Honored
One speak,
But never have we heard such Dharma,
So deep, wondrous, and supreme.

The World Honored One has spoken the
Dharma,
And we rejoice accordingly,
As the greatly wise Shariputra
Now receives the Honored One's
prediction.

We, too, are like this,
And will surely become Buddhas,
Throughout all the worlds,
Most honored and supreme.

The Buddha's Way is inconceivable,
Taught expediently according to what is
fitting.
May all of our blessed karma,
In this life and in lives gone by,
And the merit and virtue gained from
seeing the Buddha,
Be dedicated to the Buddha Way.

At that time, Shariputra spoke to the Buddha,
saying, "World Honored One, I now have no
further regret, having received from the Buddha a

prediction for Annutarasamyaksambodhi. But the twelve hundred whose hearts have attained self-mastery, and who formerly dwelt in the Stage of Study, were constantly taught by the Buddha who said, 'My Dharma can enable one to separate from birth, old age, sickness, and death and attain to Ultimate Nirvana.'

Both Those Who Study and Those Beyond Study alike have separated from the View of Self, the Views of Existence and Non-existence, and so forth, and claim that they have attained Nirvana. Yet now, hearing from the World Honored One that which they have never heard before, they have all fallen into doubt and delusion. Good indeed, World Honored One, I hope that you would, for the sake of the Four-fold Assembly, speak of these causes and conditions, to free them of their doubts and regrets."

At that time, the Buddha told Shariputra, "Have I not said before that all Buddhas, World Honored Ones, speak the Dharma by means of various causes and conditions, parables, phrases, and expedient devices, all for the sake of Anuttarasamyaksambodhi? All of these teachings are for the sake of transforming Bodhisattvas. However, Shariputra, I shall now again make use of a parable in order to further clarify the principle, for all those who are wise gain understanding through parables."

"Shariputra, suppose that in a country, a city, or a village, there is a great Elder, aged and worn, of limitless wealth, possessing many fields, houses, and servants."

"His house is spacious and large, having only one door but with a great many people--one

hundred, two hundred, even five hundred of them--dwelling within it."

"Its halls and chambers are decaying and old; its walls are crumbling. The pillars are rotting at their bases; the beams and ridgepoles are toppling dangerously."

"All at once, throughout the house, a fire breaks out, setting the house ablaze."

"The Elder's sons, ten, twenty, even thirty of them are inside the house."

"The Elder, seeing the fire arise from the four sides, is greatly alarmed and makes the following reflection: 'Although I have been able to escape safely through this burning doorway, all my children remain inside the burning house, happily attached to their amusement, unaware, unknowing, not alarmed and not afraid. The fire presses upon them and the pain will sear them, but at heart they do not mind it, nor have they any thought to escape.'"

"Shariputra, the Elder then reflects, 'My body and arms are strong. I might gather them into a cloth pouch or onto a table and take them from the house.' He further reflects, 'This house has only one door and it is narrow and small. My sons are young and immature and as yet know nothing. Attached to their place of play, they may fall and be burnt in the fire.'"

" 'I must tell them of this frightful matter, that the house has caught fire, and they must hurry and come out so as not to be burned.' So thinking, he speaks to his sons, saying, 'Come out, all of you quickly!' Although the father, in his pity, induces

them with good words, still all the sons are happily attached to their amusements and play and refuse to believe him. They are not frightened or afraid and have no intention of leaving. What is more, they do not know what is meant by fire, what is meant by house or what is meant by being lost. They merely run from east to west in play, staring at their father.”

“Then, the Elder has this thought, ‘The house is already ablaze with a great fire. If my sons and I do not get out in time, we certainly shall be burned. I shall now devise an expedient device so that my sons can avoid this disaster.’”

“The father, knowing both the predispositions of his sons and the preferences each has for various precious toys and unusual playthings to which they happily responded, speaks to them, saying, ‘The things you will love to play with are rare and hard to get. If you do not take them, you will certainly regret it later. Things such as these: a variety of sheep carts, deer carts, and ox carts, are now outside the door for you to play with. All of you should quickly come out of this burning house and I shall give you whatever you want.’”

“Then the children, hearing their father speak of these precious playthings which suited their wishes exactly, eagerly push and shove one another aside in a mad scramble, all fighting to get out of the burning house.”

“At that time, the Elder, seeing that all his sons had gotten out safely and were seated on the ground at the crossroads, is without further obstruction; his mind is at peace and he is filled with joy.”

“Then the children all speak to their father, saying, ‘Father, the fine playthings you promised us a while ago, the sheep carts, the deer carts, and the ox carts, please give them to us now.’”

“O Shariputra, at that time, the Elder gives to all of his sons equally great carts.”

“The cart is high and wide, adorned with a multitude of intertwining jewels, surrounded by railings, and hung with bells on its four sides. Further, it is covered with canopies, adorned with various rare and precious jewels, strung with jeweled cords and hung with flowered tassels. The cart is heaped with beautiful mats and set about with rosy cushions. It is yoked to an ox, plump and white and of fine appearance, of great muscular strength, that walks with even tread, as fleet as the wind, having also many servants who follow and guard it.”

“And why is this? That great Elder has limitless wealth and all manner of storehouses full to overflowing.”

“So he reflects thus: ‘My possessions are boundless. I should not give my children small or inferior carts. All of these youngsters are my children whom I love without partiality. Having such great carts made of the seven jewels, infinite in number, I should give them to each one equally. Why? If I gave them to an entire country, they would not run short; how much the less if I gave them to my children!’”

“Meanwhile, all of the children are riding around on the great carts, having gotten what they never expected to have, beyond their original hopes.”

“Shariputra, what do you think? When that Elder gives equally to all of his children the great jeweled carriages, is he guilty of falsehood or not?”

Shariputra replied, “No, World Honored One. The Elder is not guilty of falsehood, for he has only enabled his children to avoid the calamity of fire, and has thereby saved their lives. Why is this? In saving their lives, he has already given them a fine plaything. How much the more so his setting up of expedients to save them from the burning house.”

“World Honored One, if that Elder had not given them even so much as a single small cart, he still would not have been speaking falsely. Why? Because the Elder previously had this thought, ‘I will use expedients to lead my children out.’ For this reason, he is not guilty of falsehood. He is even less guilty since, knowing his own wealth to be limitless and wishing to benefit all his children, he gives to them equally great carts.”

The Buddha told Shariputra, “Good indeed, good indeed! It is just as you say.”

“Shariputra, the Thus Come One is also like this in that he is a father to all in the world. He has forever ended all fear, weakness, worry, ignorance and obscurity. He has completely realized the limitless Knowledge and Vision, Powers, and Fearlessnesses. He has great spiritual might and the power of wisdom. He has perfected the paramitas of expedients and wisdom.

He is greatly kind and compassionate. Never tiring, he ever seeks the good, benefiting all.

Thus he is born in the Three Realms which are like a burning house in order to save living beings from the fires of birth, old age, sickness, death, grief, misery, stupidity, dullness, and the three poisons. He teaches and transforms them, leading them to the attainment of Anuttarasamyaksambodhi.”

“He sees all living beings are scorched by birth, old age, sickness, death, grief, and misery. They undergo various sufferings, because of the Five Desires, wealth and profit. Further, because of their clinging and grasping, they presently undergo a mass of sufferings and in the future will undergo sufferings in the hells, among the animals, or hungry ghosts. If born in the heavens or among human beings, they will suffer poverty and distress, the suffering of being separated from what one loves, the suffering of being joined together with what one hates, and all the various sufferings such as these.

However, living beings sunk in morass, joyfully sport, unaware, unknowing, unalarmed and unafraid. They do not grow satiated nor do they seek liberation. In the burning house of the Three Realms, they run about from east to west. Although they encounter tremendous sufferings, they are not concerned.”

“Shariputra, having seen this, the Buddha further thinks, ‘I am the father of living beings. I should rescue them from these sufferings and difficulties, and give them the limitless and boundless joy of the Buddha-wisdom to play with.’”

“Shariputra, the Thus Come One further thinks, ‘If I merely use spiritual power and the power of

wisdom, and cast aside expedients, praising for all living beings the power of the Thus Come One's Knowledge and Vision, Powers, and Fearlessnesses, living beings will not be able to be saved in this way. Why is this? All of these living beings have not yet escaped birth, old age, sickness, death, grief and misery. They are being scorched in the burning house of the Three Realms. How could they understand the wisdom of the Buddha?"

"Shariputra, just as that Elder, although he had a powerful body and arms, did not use them, but merely applied expedients with diligence to save all the children from disaster in the burning house, and afterwards gave to each of them a great cart adorned with precious jewels, in the same way, the Thus Come One, although he has powers and fearlessnesses, does not use them."

"He merely uses wisdom and expedients to rescue living beings from the burning house of the Three Realms, speaking to them of Three Vehicles: those of Hearer, Pratyeka Buddha, and Buddha."

"And he says to them, 'All of you should take no pleasure in dwelling in the burning house of the Three Realms. Do not lust after vulgar and evil forms, sounds, smells, tastes and tangible objects. If you attach to them greedily and give rise to love for them, you will be burnt. You should quickly escape the Three Realms and attain the Three Vehicles: the Hearer, Pratyeka Buddha, and Buddha Vehicles.'"

"I now give my Pledge for this and it shall never be proved false. You need only diligently and vigorously cultivate. The Thus Come One using

these expedient means leads all living beings.”

“He further says, ‘You should all know that the Dharmas of the Three Vehicles have been praised by the sages. They will make you free, unbound, and self-reliant. Riding on these Three Vehicles, by means of non-outflow roots, powers, enlightenments, ways, dhyanas, concentrations, liberations, samadhis, and so on, you shall amuse yourselves and attain limitless peace and joy.’”

“Shariputra, if there are living beings who inwardly possess the wisdom-nature, and hearing the Dharma from the Buddha, the World Honored One, believed and accepted it, diligently making progress, wishing quickly to escape the Three Realms and seeking Nirvana for themselves, they are called those of the Hearer Vehicle. They are like the children who sought the sheep carts and thereby escaped from the burning house.”

“If there are living beings who hearing the Dharma from the Buddha, the World Honored One, believed and accepted it, diligently making progress, and who seek for themselves Spontaneous Wisdom, delighting in solitude and fond of stillness, deeply understanding the causal conditions of all dharmas; they are called those of the Pratyeka Buddha Vehicle. They are like the children who sought the deer carts and so escaped from the burning house.”

“If there are living beings who hearing the Dharma from the Buddha, the World Honored One, believed and accepted it, earnestly cultivating with vigor, seeking All-wisdom, Buddha-wisdom, Spontaneous Wisdom, Untutored Wisdom, the Knowledge and Vision of

the Thus Come One, his Powers and Fearlessnesses, pitying and comforting limitless living beings, benefiting gods and humans, saving all, they are called those of the Great Vehicle. Because the Bodhisattvas seek this vehicle, they are called Mahasattvas. They are like the children who sought the ox carts and so escaped from the burning house.”

“Shariputra, just as that Elder, seeing all his children safely escape the burning house to a place of fearlessness, and considering his own unlimited wealth, give to all of his children great carts.”

“The Thus Come One, in the same way, is the father of all living beings. When he sees limitless kotis of living beings using the gateway of the Buddha’s teaching to get off the fearsome and dangerous path of the sufferings of the Three Realms and attain the bliss of Nirvana, he has this thought, ‘I have limitless and boundless wisdom, powers, fearlessnesses and so on--the complete storehouse of the Buddhadharma.

All of these living beings are my children. I should give to all of them great carts, not allowing them to gain individual Quiescence, but crossing them over to Quiescence by means of the Thus Come One’s Quiescence. Having escaped the Three Realms, all these living beings are given as playthings the Buddha’s Dhyana Samadhis, Liberations, and so forth, all of one mark and one kind, praised by the sages and productive of pure, wondrous, and foremost bliss.”

“Shariputra, just as that Elder first having used the three carts to entice his children and then later having given them great carts adorned with

jewels and supremely comfortable, is not guilty of falsehood, just so is the Thus Come One likewise not guilty of falsehood in first speaking of the Three Vehicles to entice living beings and then afterwards delivering them only by means of the Great Vehicle. What is the reason?

The Thus Come One has limitless wisdom, powers and fearlessnesses, a storehouse of Dharmas, and is able to give to all living beings the Great Vehicle Dharma. Not all living beings, however, are able to accept it. Shariputra, because of these causes and conditions, you should know that the Buddhas, using the power of expedient devices, in the One Buddha Vehicle, discriminate and speak of three.”

The Buddha, wishing to restate his meaning, spoke verses, saying:

Suppose there was an Elder,
Who had a large house,
Which was very old,
And so was collapsing.

The halls were high and precarious,
The pillars rotting at their bases,
The beams and ridgepoles aslant,
The foundations and stairways crumbling.

The walls and partitions were cracked and ruined,
The plaster flaking and falling off.
The thatch was falling every which way,
And the rafters and eavepoles were coming loose,
The partitions on all sides were bent and misshapen;
It was filled with all kinds of filth.
There were five hundred people
Dwelling within it.

There were kites, owls, hawks, and vultures,
Crows, magpies, pigeons, and doves,

Black snakes, vipers and scorpions,
Centipedes and millipedes.

There were geckoes and myriapods,
Weasels, badgers, and mice--
All sorts of evil creatures,
Running back and forth.

There were places stinking of excrement and urine,
Oozing with filth,
With dung beetles
Clustered upon them.

There were foxes, wolves, and Yeh Kan,
Who nibbled at, trampled on,
And devoured corpses,
Scattering the bones and flesh.

Then packs of dogs
Came running to grab them,
Hungry, weak and terrified,
Seeking food everywhere,
Fighting and shoving,
Snarling, howling and barking.

The terrors in that house,
And the sights were such as these.
Li Mei and Wang Liang
Were everywhere.
Yakshas and evil ghosts
Were eating human flesh.

There were poisonous creatures of all kinds,
And evil birds and beasts,
Hatching their young,
Each protecting its own.

Yakshas raced to the spot
Fighting one another to eat them.
Having eaten their fill,

Their evil thoughts grew more inflamed.
The sound of their quarreling,
Was dreadful to the extreme.

Kumbhanda ghosts
Were squatting on high ground,
Sometimes leaving the ground
A foot or two,
As they wandered to and fro
Amusing themselves as they wished,
Grabbing dogs by two legs,
And striking them so they lost their bark,
Twisting their legs around their necks,
Frightening the dogs for their own pleasure.

Further there were ghosts,
Their bodies very tall and large,
Naked, black and thin,
Always dwelling therein,
Emitting loud and evil sounds,
Howling in search of food.

Further there were ghosts
With throats like needles.
Again there were ghosts
With heads like oxen,
Now eating human flesh,
And then devouring dogs.

Their hair was disheveled
They were harmful, cruel and dangerous,
Oppressed by hunger and thirst,
They ran about shouting and crying out.

There were yakshas, hungry ghosts,
And all sorts of evil birds and beasts,
Frantic with hunger, facing the four directions,
Peeking out the windows,
Such were the troubles

And terrors beyond measure there.

This old, decaying house
Belonged to a man
Who had gone but a short distance
When, before very long,
The rear rooms of the house
Suddenly caught fire.

All at once, all four sides
Were enveloped by raging flames,
The beams, ridgepoles, rafters, and pillars
Shook and split with the sound of explosion,
Snapped apart and fell,
As the walls and partitions collapsed and fell in.

All the ghosts and spirits
Screamed loudly,
While the hawks, vultures, and other birds,
The Kumbhandas, and so forth,
Ran about in a panic,
Unable to get themselves out.

Evil beasts and poisonous insects
Hid away in the holes and crevices,
While the pishacha ghosts
Also dwelt therein.

Their blessings and virtue scanty,
They were hard pressed by the fire;
They wrought harm on one another,
Drinking blood and eating flesh.

As the packs of Yeh Kan
Were already dead,
Monstrous evil beasts
Raced to devour them,
While billows of stinking smoke
Permeated all four sides.

Centipedes and millipedes,
And various kinds of poisonous snakes,
Burnt by the fire,
Fought to escape their holes.
Kumbhanda ghosts
Grabbed and ate them.

Further, all the hungry ghosts,
The tops of their heads aflame,
Tormented by hunger, thirst, and heat,
Ran about in terror and distress.

So it was in that house:
Terrifying to the extreme,
With dangers and conflagrations--
A host of troubles, not just one.

At that time the owner of the house
Was standing outside the door
When he heard someone say,
"All of your children
Awhile ago, in play,
Went into this house.
Being young and ignorant,
They delight in play and cling to amusements."
Having heard this, the Elder
Entered the burning house, in alarm.

Intending to save them
From being burned
He warned his children
Of the host of disasters:
"The evil ghosts, the poisonous insects
and the spreading conflagration,
A host of sufferings, in succession
Are continuous, without interruption.

The poisonous snakes and vipers

And all the yakshas,
And Kumbhanda ghosts,
Yeh Kan, foxes and dogs,
Hawks, vultures, kites and owls,
And varieties of centipedes
Are frantic with hunger and thirst,
And terrifying to the extreme.

There are so many sufferings and troubles,
So much increased by this great fire!"
But all the children, without knowledge,
Although they heard their father's warnings,
Still clung to their amusements
And sported without cease.

At that time, the Elder
Further had this thought:
"Being like this, my children
Add to my worry and distress;
Now, in this house, there is not
A single thing in which to take pleasure,
And yet all these children
Are intoxicated by their play.
Not heeding my instructions,
They will be injured in the fire."
Just then he thought
To devise expedients.

He said to the children,
I have all kinds
Of precious playthings:
Fine carriages, wonderful, bejeweled
Sheep carts and deer carts,
And great ox carts,
Now, right outside the door.
So come out, all of you,
For I have, just for you,
Had these carts made.
Just as you wish,

You can play with them.”

When the children heard him speak
Of carriages such as these,
They immediately raced
Out in a scramble,
To a clearing where
They were then safe from harm.

The Elder, seeing that his children
Had escaped the burning house,
And were standing at the crossroads,
Sat on his Lion’s throne
And rejoiced to himself, saying,
“Now, I am happy!
All of these children
Were hard to bring into the world and raise;
Stupid, young and without knowledge,
They went into this dangerous house,
Swarming with poisonous insects
And fearful Li Mei ghosts,
Ablaze with a great fire,
Raging on all sides.
But all these children
Still clung to their amusements.
I have now rescued them
And saved them from disaster.
Therefore, of all people,
I am the happiest!”

Then, all the children,
Knowing their father was sitting at ease,
All went before him
And addressed him saying,
“Please give to us
The three jeweled carts
That you promised to us, saying,
‘If you children come out
I will give you three carts

Just like you wanted.'
Now the time has come,
Please give them to us!"

The Elder, having great wealth,
And storehouses containing much
Gold, silver and lapis lazuli,
Mother-of-pearl and carnelian,
Used these precious things
To make several great carts.
They were decorated and adorned,
Surrounded by railings,
Hung with bells on all four sides,
With golden cords strung about them,
And gem-studded nets
Spread above them.

There were golden flowered tassels
Hanging from them everywhere,
And various multi-colored ornaments
Encircling them.

Soft silk and cotton
Made up the cushions,
And fine coverings,
Valued in the thousands of millions,
Pure white and sparkling clean
Were spread atop them.

Great white oxen,
Plump, strong and powerful,
Of fine appearance,
Were yoked to the precious carts.
They were surrounded by many footmen
Who were attending to them.
Such fine carriages as these
Were given equally to all the children.

Then all the children
Danced for joy;

They mounted their jeweled carts
And rode off into the four directions,
Happily amusing themselves
In unobstructed comfort.

I tell you, Shariputra,
I am like this, too,
The honored among many sages,
The father of the worlds.

All living beings
Are my children;
Deeply attached to worldly pleasures,
They have no wise thoughts at all.

In the three realms there is no peace;
They are like a burning house filled with many sufferings,
And frightening indeed.
Ever present are the woes
Of birth, old age, sickness, death,
Fires such as these,
Raging without cease.

The Thus Come One has already left
The three realms' burning house behind.
Quietly I dwell at ease,
In forest and field at peace.

And now it is, that the three realms,
Entirely belong to me,
And in them all the living beings
Are children of mine.

But now, this place
Is filled with calamities,
And I am the only one
Able to rescue them.

Although I instructed them,
They do not believe or accept,

Because of their deep attachment and greed
To all the defiling desires.

Using these expedients,
I speak to them of three vehicles,
Causing all living beings
To understand the pain of the three realms,
I reveal and extensively proclaim
The Way which transcends the world.
All of these children,
If they fix their minds,
Can perfect the three clarities
And the six spiritual powers.

Some shall become conditioned-enlightened ones,
And others irreversible Bodhisattvas.

Shariputra,
I, for living beings,
Speak this parable
Of the One Buddha Vehicle.

If all of you are able
To believe and accept these words,
You shall, in the future,
Realize the Buddha Way.

This vehicle is subtle and wonderful,
Pure and foremost.
In all the worlds
It is the most supreme.

The Buddhas rejoice in it,
And all living beings
Should praise it as well.
Make offerings and bow before it.

Limitless Thousands of Millions
Of powers and liberations,
Dhyana samadis and wisdom,
And the Buddhas' other Dharmas

Are obtained in a vehicle such as this.

I cause all my children,
Night and day for many aeons,
Ever to amuse themselves
In the company of the Bodhisattvas
And the host of Hearers,
Riding this precious vehicle
Straight to the field of the Way.

For these reasons,
Though they seek in the ten directions,
There is no other vehicle,
Except for the Buddhas' expedients.

I tell you, Shariputra,
That all of you
Are my children,
And I am your father.

For many aeons, you
Have been burned by many miseries,
And I have saved you all,
Leading you out of the triple realm.

Although earlier I said
That you had passed into Quiescence,
It was only an end to birth and death
And not real Quiescence.
What you should accomplish now,
Is nothing but the Buddhas' wisdom.

If there are Bodhisattvas
Within this assembly,
They can singlemindedly listen to
The Buddha's real Dharma.

Although the Buddhas, World Honored Ones,
Employ expedient devices,
The living beings they transform
All are Bodhisattvas.

If there are those of little wisdom,
Deeply attached to love and desire,
For their sakes
I teach the truth of suffering.

Living beings then rejoice
Gaining what they never had,
For the Buddha's Teaching of suffering's truth
is true, real and not false.

If there are living beings,
Who do not know the origin of suffering,
Who are deeply attached to the cause of suffering,
Unable to leave it for even a moment,
For their sakes
I expediently speak of the Way,
The cause of all suffering
Is rooted in desire.

If one extinguishes greed and desire,
Suffering has nothing to rest upon.
The extinction of all suffering
Is called the third truth.

For the sake of the truth of Quiescence,
One cultivates the Way;
Leaving all suffering's bonds
Is called the attainment of liberation.

From what is it
That these people have been liberated?
The mere separation from the false
Is called liberation.

In reality they have not yet
Attained total liberation.
The Buddha says that these people
Have not yet truly reached Quiescence,
Because they have not yet attained
The Unsurpassed Way.

It is not my wish
To lead them to Quiescence.
I am the Dharma King,
At ease within all the Dharmas.
I manifest within this world
To bring peace and tranquility to living beings.

Shariputra! This Dharma Seal of mine
Is spoken because I wish to benefit the world.
Wherever you roam, do not propagate it wrongly.

If there be those who hear it,
And rejoice, receiving it atop their crowns,
You should know that such people
Are Avaivartika.

Those who believe and accept
The Dharma of this Sutra,
These people have already seen
The Buddhas of the past,
Reverently making offerings,
And hearing this Dharma as well.

Those who are able
To believe what you say,
They then see me,
And they see you,
And also the Bhikshusangha,
As well as all the Bodhisattvas.

This Sutra of the Dharma Flower
Is spoken for those of profound wisdom;
When those of shallow understanding hear it,
Confused and deluded, they fail to understand it.

The Hearers, every one,
And the Pratyeka Buddhas,
Find the contents of this Sutra
Far beyond their powers.

You, Shariputra,
Gained entry to this Sutra
By means of faith.
How much the more so other Hearers.

Those Hearers,
Because of their faith in the Buddha's words,
Comply with this Sutra.
But it is beyond the range of their own wisdom.

Further, Shariputra
To the arrogant and lazy
And those who reckon the view of self,
Do not speak this Sutra.

Common folk of shallow understanding,
Deeply attached to the five desires,
Hearing it, will fail to understand;
Do not speak it to them, either.

If there be those who do not believe,
And who slander this Sutra,
They thereby sever all
Worldly Buddha seeds.

Or if, with a scowl,
They harbor doubts and delusions
You should listen now,
As I speak of their offense-retribution:
Whether a Buddha is in the world,
Or has entered into Quiescence.

If there be those who slander
A Sutra such as this one,
Who, seeing others read or recite it,
Copy it out or uphold it,
Scorn, despise, hate and envy them,
And harbor grudges against them,
As to their offense retribution,
Listen now, once again:
These people at life's end

Will enter the Avichi Hell
For an entire aeon.

At the aeon's end, born there again,
In this way they will revolve,
Through uncountable aeons.
When they escape from the hells,
They shall take the bodies of animals,
Such as dogs or Yeh Kan,
Tall and emaciated,
Mottled, black and scabbed,
Repulsive to others.

Further, by human beings,
They will be hated and scorned;
Always suffering from hunger and thirst,
Their bones and flesh will be withered up.

During their lives they will be pricked by poisonous thorns;
When dead they will be buried under tiles and stones.
They suffer this offense retribution,
Because they have severed their Buddha seeds.

They may become camels
Or they may be born among asses,
Always carrying heavy burdens
And beaten with sticks and whips,
Thinking only of water and grass,
And knowing nothing else.

They suffer retribution such as this
Because of slandering this Sutra.
Some may become Yeh Kan,
Entering villages,
Their bodies covered with scabs and sores,
And also missing an eye,
Beaten and stoned
By young children,
Undergoing all this pain,

Even to the point of death.

Having died in this manner
They are then reborn as huge serpents,
Their bodies as long
As five hundred yojanas.

Deaf and stupid, without feet,
They writhe about on their stomachs,
Stung and eaten
By many small insects.

Undergoing suffering day and night
Without respite,
They suffer such retribution
For having slandered this Sutra.

If they become humans,
All their faculties are dim and dull.
They are squat, ugly, palsied, lame,
Blind, deaf and hunchbacked.

Whatever they may say,
People will not believe them.
Their breath ever stinking,
They will be possessed by ghosts,
Poor and lowly,
The servants of others,
Always sick and emaciated,
With no one to rely upon.

Although they may draw near to others,
Others will never think of them.
If they should gain something
They will quickly forget and lose it.

Should they study the ways of medicine,
Following the prescription to cure illness,
They will only make other's illnesses worse.
Even to the point of death.

If they get sick themselves,
No one will try to save or cure them.
Although they take good medicine,
It will only increase their pains.

If they meet with rebellion,
They will be plundered and robbed.
People with such offenses,
Will perversely be subject to such misfortunes,
Offenders such as these
Will never see the Buddha,
The King among the sagely hosts,
Speaking the Dharma, teaching and transforming.

Offenders such as these
Will always be born in difficult circumstances.
Insane, deaf, with mind confused,
They will never hear the Dharma.

Throughout aeons as countless
As the Ganges river's sands,
They will be born deaf and dumb,
With all their faculties incomplete;
They will always dwell in the hells,
Roaming there as if in pleasure gardens,
Or born in the other evil paths,
Which they will take as their house and home.

Among camels, asses, pigs and dogs--
These are the places they will walk,
They undergo such retribution,
Because of slandering this Sutra.

If they become humans,
They will be deaf, blind and dumb,
Poor and decrepit,
Yet adorning themselves therewith.

Swollen with water, or else dehydrated,
With scabs and boils,
And other such illnesses,

They will clothe themselves.
Their bodies will always stink
Of filth and impurity.

Deeply attached to the view of self,
Their hatred shall only increase.
Ablaze with sexual desire,
They are no different than birds or beasts.
They will suffer such retribution
For having slandered this Sutra.

I tell you, Shariputra,
Were I to speak of the offenses
Of those who slander this Sutra,
I would not finish to the end of an aeon.
For these reasons,
I expressly tell you,
Do not speak this Sutra
Among those who have no wisdom.

If there are those with keen faculties,
And wisdom which clearly comprehends,
With much learning and a strong memory,
Who seek the Buddha's Path,
For people such as these,
You may speak it.

If there are those who have seen in the past
Hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhas,
Who have planted wholesome roots,
Who have deep and firm minds,
For people such as these,
You may speak it.

If there are those who are vigorous,
Ever cultivating minds of compassion,
Not sparing body or life,
For them you may speak it.

If there are those who are reverent,
Without any other thoughts,
Who have left the common stupid folk,
Who dwell alone in mountains and marshes,
For people such as these
You may speak it.

Further, Shariputra,
If you see people
Who have cast aside bad knowing advisors,
And draw near to good friends,
For people such as these,
You may speak it.

If you see disciples of the Buddha,
Holding precepts as purely,
As pure, bright jewels,
For people such as these,
You may speak it.

If there are those who have no hatred,
Who are straightforward and gentle,
Always merciful to all beings,
And reverent of all Buddhas,
For people such as these,
You may speak it.

Further, if there are Buddha's disciples,
Who in the great assembly,
With minds clear and pure,
Use various causal conditions,
Parables and phrases,
To speak the Dharma without obstruction,
For people such as these,
You may speak it.

If there are Bhikshus,
Who, for the sake of all-wisdom,

Seek the Dharma in the four directions,
With palms together, receiving it atop the crown,
Who delight only in receiving and upholding
The canon of Great Vehicle Sutras,
Refusing to accept so much
As a single line from another scripture,
For people such as these,
You may speak it.

If there be those who, with mind intent,
Seek the Buddha's sharira,
Or who likewise seek the Sutras,
And attaining them hold them atop their crowns,
Such people will never again
Resolve to seek other Sutras,
Nor ever have the thought
To seek the writings of outside ways,
For people such as these,
You may speak it.

I tell you, Shariputra,
Were I to speak of the characteristics
Of those who seek the Buddha's Path,
Exhausting aeons, I would not finish.
People such as these
Can believe and understand,
And for their sake you should speak
The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra.