

Rejoicing in Accord with Merit and Virtue

Chapter 18

At that time, Maitreya Bodhisattva Mahasattva spoke to the Buddha, saying, “World Honored One, if a good man or a good woman hears this Dharma Flower Sutra and rejoices in accord with it, how much blessedness will he or she attain?”

He then spoke this verse:

“After the World Honored One’s ultimate
quiescence,
If one hears this Sutra,
And can accordingly rejoice,
How much blessedness will he gain?”

The Buddha then told the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Maitreya, “Ajita! After the passing into Stillness of the Thus Come One, if a Bhikshu, Bhikshuni, Upasaka, Upasika, or any person with wisdom, whether young or old, having heard this Sutra and rejoiced accordingly, leaves the Dharma assembly and goes to another place, be it a Sangha dwelling or an uninhabited place, a city, a street, a town, or a village, and expounds it according to the best of his ability to his father, mother, relatives, good friends, and acquaintances, and if, having heard it, they then rejoice in accord with it and further transmit the teaching to others who, having heard it, rejoice in accord and likewise transmit it, and this process goes on reaching to fifty people—Ajita, I will now tell you about the merit and virtue of that fiftieth good man or good woman who rejoices in accord. Listen well!”

“Suppose in four million kotis of asamkhyeyas of worlds, among living beings in the six destinies

and of the four kinds of birth—egg-born, womb-born, moisture-born, and transformation-born—those with form, those without form, those with thought, those without thought, those with neither thought nor non-thought, those without legs, those with two legs, those with four legs, those with many legs, and so forth, there is a person seeking blessings who gives to them whatever enjoyable things they desire, giving each being an entire Jambudvipa full of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, mother-of-pearl, carnelian, coral, and amber, rare and precious gems, as well as elephants, horses, carriages, palaces, and pavilions made of the seven treasures.”

“This great almsgiver in this way bestows gifts for a full eighty years. Then he thinks, ‘I have already given living beings these enjoyable things in accord with their desires. However, these living beings are old and worn out, over eighty years old, with white hair and wrinkled faces. Their time of death is not far off. I should instruct and guide them with the Buddhadharma.’”

“He then gathers the beings together and expounds the Dharma to them to instruct them, bringing to them benefit and delight so that they all at once gain the path of Srotaapanna, the path of Sakridagamin, the path of Anagamin, and the path of Arhatship, exhausting all outflows, obtaining comfort in all of the deep Dhyana concentrations, and perfecting the eight liberations.”

“What do you think? Would the merit and virtue of this great almsgiver be great or not?”

Maitreya said to the Buddha, “World Honored

One, this person's merit and virtue would be extremely great, measureless, and unbounded. If the almsgiver had only given the beings all the playthings, his merit and virtue would be unlimited. How much the more so would it be if he enabled them to attain the fruit of Arhatship!"

The Buddha told Maitreya, "I will now tell you plainly: The merit and virtue obtained by this person, who gives playthings to living beings in the six paths in four million kotis of asamkhyeyas of worlds and who further causes them to obtain the fruit of Arhatship, does not equal the merit of the fiftieth person who hears but a single verse of the Dharma Flower Sutra and rejoices in accord with it. His merit does not equal a hundredth part, a thousandth part, a hundred thousand myriad millionth part, and so forth until it cannot be known by resort to calculation or analogy."

"Ajita! The merit and virtue of the fiftieth person who hears in his turn the Dharma Flower Sutra and who rejoices in accord with it is limitless, boundless, and uncountable. How much the more so is the merit and virtue of one who is among the first to hear it in the assembly and who rejoices in accord with it. That person's blessings are even more supreme, unlimited, unbounded, and uncountable beyond comparison."

"Further, Ajita, if a person for the sake of this Sutra goes to a Sangha dwelling and, whether sitting or standing, hears and accepts it for but an instant, by reason of that merit and virtue, in his next rebirth he will acquire the finest elephant and horse carriages and jeweled palanquins, and will even ride in heavenly palaces."

“Again, if a person is seated in a place where the Dharma is being lectured, and when another person comes along, he encourages that person to sit and listen to it or shares his seat with him, the former person will, through his merit and virtue, in his next rebirth gain the seat of Shakra, the seat of a Brahma King, or the seat of a wheel-turning sage king.”

“Ajita! If, further, a person says to another, ‘There is a Sutra by the name of Dharma Flower. Let’s go together and listen to it,’ and taking that person’s advice, the second person goes and hears it for but a moment, the former person’s merit and virtue will be such that in his next life he will be born in the same place as the Dharani Bodhisattva. He will have keen faculties and wisdom.”

“For one hundred thousand myriad lifetimes he will never be mute, his breath will not stink, his tongue will always be free from disease, and his mouth will also be free from disease. His teeth will not be dirty, black, yellow, or wide-spaced, not missing or falling out, not uneven or crooked. His lips will not be pendulous, twisted or pursed, rough, chapped, or covered with sores, or split. They will not be askew, thick or large, or black, and there will be nothing repulsive about them. His nose will not be flat, thin, crooked, or out of joint. His complexion will not be dark, thin, concave, or crooked, or in any way unpleasant.”

“His lips, tongue, and teeth will all be beautiful; his nose long, high, and straight. His face will be round and full, his eyebrows high and long, his forehead broad and even, his mark of manhood perfect.”

“In life after life, wherever he is born he will see the Buddhas, hear the Dharma, and believe and accept the teachings.”

“Ajita, look at this: If the merit and virtue gained from exhorting a single person to go listen to the Dharma is such as this, how much greater is that of one who single-mindedly listens to the teachings, reads and recites them, and in the great assembly explains them in detail to others, and cultivates accordingly.”

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

“Suppose a person in the Dharma
assembly
Gets to hear this Sutra,
Even just a single verse,
And rejoices in accord, and speaks it to
others,
And thus the teaching is passed on
Until it reaches the fiftieth hearer.
The blessings gained by this last person
I will now set forth in detail.

Suppose there is a great almsgiver
Who presents gifts to uncountable
multitudes,
Of all the things they desire,
For a full eighty years.

Seeing them old and worn,
With white hair and wrinkled faces,
Their teeth sparse, their bodies withered,

He thinks, “They will die before long.
I should now instruct them,
That they may obtain the Fruit of the
Path.”

Then he expediently explains to them
The true Dharma of Nirvana:

“The world is not a secure place.
It’s like foam, water bubbles, or a will-o’-
the-wisp.

All of you should quickly
Produce thoughts of revulsion for it.”

The people, on hearing the Dharma,
All attain Arhatship,
Perfect the Six Spiritual Penetrations,
The Three Clarities, and the Eight
Liberations.

The last, fiftieth, person,
Who has heard a single verse and
rejoiced in accord with it,
Gains blessedness which exceeds that
of the former,
Beyond the power of analogy to
express.

If the blessedness of the one who hears
it in turn
Is so unlimited,
How much greater is that of he who, in
the assembly,
Was the first to hear it and rejoice.

Suppose a person exhorts another
And leads him to listen to the Dharma
Flower,
Saying, “This Sutra is profound and
wonderful,
Hard to encounter in a thousand myriad
eons,”
And suppose that person, persuaded,
goes to listen,
And hears it for even just a moment.

Of the reward of blessings of the first
person,
I will now speak in detail.

Life after life, his mouth will have no
illness.
His teeth will not be wide-spaced, yellow,
or black.
His lips will not be thick, pursed, or split,
Nor will he have any repulsive marks.
His tongue will not be dry, black, or
short.
His nose will be prominent, long, and
straight.
His forehead will be broad and even,
His visage upright and splendid,
So that all will rejoice upon seeing him.
His breath will never stink,
But the fragrance of the utpala flower
Will always issue from his mouth.
If he goes to a Sangha dwelling
Wishing to hear the Dharma Flower
Sutra
And, hearing it for but a moment, then
rejoices,
I will now tell of his blessings.

He shall later be born among gods and
humans,
Acquire fine elephant and horse
carriages and
Precious, jeweled palanquins
And will even ride in heavenly palaces.
If, in a place where the Sutra is lectured,
He encourages another to sit down and
listen,
By virtue of his blessings, he will gain
The seat of Shakra, Brahma, or a wheel-

turning king.

How much greater will the blessings be
of one who single-mindedly listens
And explains the Sutra's meaning,
Cultivating it as he preaches—
His blessings shall know no limit.”