

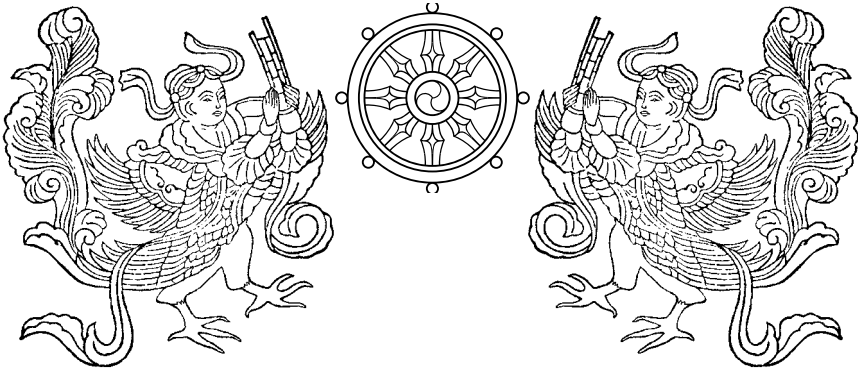
# THE FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA

*The Great Expansive  
Buddha's Flower Adornment Sutra*

An Annotated Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra  
By Bhikshu Dharmamitra

WITH A COMMENTARIAL SYNOPSIS  
OF THE FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA

## VOLUME ONE



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## CHAPTER 20

### Praise Verses in the Suyāma Heaven Palace

At that time, due to the Buddha's spiritual powers, from worlds beyond lands as numerous as the atoms in ten myriads of buddha *kṣetras*, there came from within the worlds in each of the ten directions a great bodhisattva, each attended by bodhisattvas as numerous as the atoms in a buddha *kṣetra*, all of whom came and gathered together there.

Their names were Forest of Meritorious Qualities Bodhisattva, Forest of Wisdom Bodhisattva, Forest of Supremacy Bodhisattva, Forest of Fearlessness Bodhisattva, Forest of a Sense of Shame and Dread of Blame Bodhisattva, Forest of Vigor Bodhisattva, Forest of Powers Bodhisattva, Forest of Practices Bodhisattva, Forest of Enlightenment Bodhisattva, and Forest of Knowledge Bodhisattva.

The lands from which these bodhisattvas came were Familial Wisdom World, Banner Wisdom World, Jeweled Wisdom World, Supreme Wisdom World, Lamp-like Wisdom World, Vajra Wisdom World, Blissful Wisdom World, Solar Wisdom World, Pure Wisdom World, and Brahman Wisdom World.

Each of these bodhisattvas had purely cultivated the brahman conduct in the presence of buddhas. They were Eternally Dwelling Eye Buddha, Invincible Eye Buddha, Non-abiding Eye Buddha, Unmoving Eye Buddha, Heavenly Eye Buddha, Liberation Eye Buddha, Truth-Examining Eye Buddha, Understanding Signs Eye Buddha, Supreme Eye Buddha, and Blue Eye Buddha.

After these bodhisattvas had arrived in the presence of the Buddha, they bowed down their heads in reverence at the Buddha's feet and then each transformationally created a *maṇi* jewel dais lion throne off in the respective direction from which he had come and sat down on it in the lotus posture. And just as those bodhisattvas came and gathered in the Suyāma Heaven in this world, so too did they do so in all those other worlds as well. All the names of those bodhisattvas, the names of their worlds, and the names of their *tathāgatas* were all identical and no different.

Then, the Bhagavat emanated from the top of his two feet a hundred thousand *koṭīs* of marvelously colored light rays which, in all

those worlds of the ten directions, everywhere illuminated the buddhas together with their great assemblies within the Suyāma Heaven Palaces, doing so in such a way that none of them failed to fully appear.

At that time, assisted by the awesome spiritual powers of the Buddha, Forest of Meritorious Qualities Bodhisattva surveyed the ten directions and then spoke these verses:

The Buddha has emanated great rays of light  
everywhere illuminating the ten directions.  
Everyone sees the one most revered among devas and men  
with penetrating and unimpeded vision.

The Buddha sits here in the Suyāma Heaven Palace  
even as he is present everywhere in the worlds of the ten directions.  
This circumstance is of the most extraordinary sort,  
rarely ever encountered in the world.

The Suyāma Heaven king  
has uttered verses in praise of ten *tathāgatas*.  
Just as this was seen here in this assembly,  
so too was it just so in all those other places as well.

All of those other assembled bodhisattvas  
share the same identical names as ours  
and also proclaim the unexcelled Dharma  
in all places throughout the ten directions.

The worlds from which they come  
have names that also are no different.  
Each of them has purely cultivated the brahman conduct  
in those places where their buddhas dwell.

The names of all those *tathāgatas*  
are all also just the same.  
Their lands are all bounteous and happy  
and they all possess sovereign mastery of the spiritual powers.

In all those places throughout the ten directions,  
they all say, "The Buddha is dwelling here."  
Some see him dwelling among the people  
and some see him dwelling in a heavenly palace.

The Tathāgata is dwelling peacefully everywhere  
throughout all lands  
even as we now see the Buddha  
dwelling here in this heavenly palace.

In the past, he made the vow to attain bodhi  
which extended to all worlds of the ten directions.

Therefore the Buddha's awesome power  
is inconceivable in its complete pervasiveness.

He has left the desires of those in the world far behind  
and has completely fulfilled boundless virtues.  
He has therefore acquired powers of the spiritual superknowledges  
that no beings fail to see.

He roams to the worlds throughout the ten directions,  
like space, utterly unimpeded.  
Whether in a single body or countless bodies,  
his signs are inapprehensible.

The meritorious qualities of the Buddha are boundless.  
How could one even fathom them?  
He neither stays nor goes,  
and yet he everywhere enters the Dharma realm.

At that time, assisted by the awesome spiritual powers of the Buddha,  
Forest of Wisdom Bodhisattva surveyed the ten directions and then  
spoke these verses:

The great guide of the world,  
the unexcelled Bhagavat who has abandoned the defilements,  
is one rarely encountered  
even in an inconceivable number of kalpas.

The Buddha emanates great radiance  
which no one in the world does not see.  
He extensively expounds for the sake of the multitude  
and thus benefits the many kinds of beings.

The Tathāgata comes forth into the world  
to dispel the darkness of ignorance for the sake of the world.  
A lamp for the world such as this  
is rare and difficult to ever be able to behold.

He has already cultivated giving, moral virtue, patience,  
vigor, and the *dhyāna* absorptions  
as well as the *prajñā-pāramitā*,  
and uses these to illuminate the world.

The Tathāgata has no peer.  
If one sought his match, no one such as he could ever be found.  
Without comprehending the reality with regard to dharmas,  
no one would be able to see him.

The bodies and spiritual superknowledges of the Buddha  
have such sovereign mastery, they are inconceivable.  
He neither goes nor comes,  
and yet he teaches the Dharma and liberates beings.

If there be anyone who is able to see or hear  
the pure teacher of gods and men,  
he shall forever escape the wretched destinies  
and leave behind all sufferings.

For measureless and numberless kalpas,  
he cultivated the practices leading to bodhi.  
Whoever is unable to know the meaning of this  
remains unable to realize buddhahood.

Though someone might have made offerings to countless buddhas  
throughout an inconceivable number of kalpas,  
if one were instead to know the meaning of this,  
the merit thereby acquired would then exceed even that.

Though one might have bestowed upon buddhas  
precious jewels enough to fill up countless *kṣetras*,  
if one were still unable to know the meaning of this,  
one could still never succeed in realizing bodhi.

At that time, assisted by the awesome spiritual powers of the Buddha,  
Forest of Supremacy Bodhisattva surveyed the ten directions and  
then spoke these verses:

It is just as when, in the first month of summer,  
in a clear and cloudless sky,  
the brilliant sunlight's shining  
has none of the ten directions it does not fill.

His radiance is so beyond measure  
that there is no one who could fathom it.  
If this would be true even for those who have eyes,  
how much the more so it would be for those who are blind.

So too it is with the buddhas  
whose meritorious qualities are so boundless that,  
even if they tried for inconceivably many kalpas,  
no one could ever discern and know them all.

All dharmas have no place from which they come  
and also have no one who could create them.  
They have nothing from which they are born  
and they cannot be discriminated.

All dharmas have no coming forth.  
Therefore there is nothing that is produced.  
Because their production has no existence,  
their extinction cannot be apprehended either.

All dharmas are unproduced  
and also are not extinguished.

If one is able to understand them in this manner,  
this person is one who sees the Tathāgata.

Because all dharmas are unproduced,  
they have no inherently existent nature.

If one distinguishes and knows them in this way,  
this person has a penetrating comprehension of the deep meaning.

Because dharmas have no nature at all,  
there is no one who is able to completely know them.

If one understands dharmas in this manner,  
then there is ultimately nothing at all which is understood.

That which is said to be produced  
is that by which all lands appear to exist.

If one is able to comprehend the nature of those lands,  
then one's mind will not be subject to confusion or delusion.

One contemplates in accordance with reality  
the nature of the world and all of its lands.

If one is able to know this,  
then one can skillfully explain the meaning of all things.

At that time, assisted by the awesome spiritual powers of the Buddha,  
Forest of Fearlessness Bodhisattva surveyed the ten directions and  
then spoke these verses:

The vast body of the Tathāgata  
reaches to the very end of the Dharma realm.  
Without even leaving this throne,  
he still pervades all places.

If on hearing Dharma such as this,  
one feels reverence and resolute faith,  
one will forever escape the three wretched destinies  
and all the other sufferings and difficulties.

Even if one were to travel  
to all the countless and innumerable worlds,  
single-mindedly wishing to hear  
of the Tathāgata's sovereign powers,  
because such dharmas of the buddhas as these  
constitute the unexcelled bodhi,  
even if one wished to hear of them for but a moment,  
there is no one who could succeed in this.

Wherever there were those who in the past  
had faith in dharmas of the Buddha such as these,  
they already become one of the most revered of two-legged beings  
and then became lamps for the world.

Wherever there are those who in the future will hear  
of the sovereign powers of the Tathāgata,  
and having heard of them will then be able to have faith in them,  
they too will be bound to realize buddhahood.

Wherever there are any in the present  
who are able to have faith in this Dharma of the Buddha,  
they too are bound to realize right enlightenment  
and then expound the Dharma fearlessly.

This Dharma is extremely difficult to encounter  
even in countless and numberless kalpas.  
If there any who are able to obtain a hearing of it,  
one should realize this is due to the power of their original vows.

If there is someone who is able to accept and uphold  
dharmas of all buddhas such as these and then,  
having upheld them, can then extensively proclaim and explain them,  
this person is bound to realize buddhahood.

How much the more so is this true of one who is diligently vigorous  
and who never relinquishes his steadfast resolve.  
One should realize that a person such as this  
is definitely bound to realize bodhi.

At that time, assisted by the awesome spiritual powers of the Buddha,  
Forest of a Sense of Shame and Dread of Blame Bodhisattva surveyed  
the ten directions and then spoke these verses:

If someone succeeds in hearing this  
rare dharma of sovereign mastery  
and is then able to arouse thoughts of joyous delight,  
he will swiftly do away with the net of doubts and delusions.

He who is possessed of all knowledge and vision  
uttered such words himself.  
There is nothing not known by the Tathāgata.  
He is therefore inconceivable.

There is no one who, from a state of no wisdom,  
could then simply bring forth wisdom.  
Those in the world are forever immersed in darkness.  
Therefore there is no one able to produce it.

Just as form and non-form  
are twofold and thus are not one,  
so too it is with wisdom and non-wisdom,  
for their substance in each case is different.

Just as what has signs and what is signless  
as well as *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*



when distinguished, are each different,  
so too it is with wisdom and the absence of wisdom.

Just as it is with worlds which, when first being established,  
have no signs of their destruction,  
so too it is with wisdom and the absence of wisdom,  
for those two characteristics are not both present at one time.

Just as, when the bodhisattva first arouses the resolve,  
he is not just then possessed of the mind he acquires only later,  
so too it is with wisdom and the absence of wisdom,  
for those two states of mind do not occur at the same time.

Just as in the body possessed of its consciousnesses,  
there is no joining of any one of them with any other,  
so too it is with wisdom and the absence of wisdom,  
for they ultimately have no circumstance in which they unite.

Just as the medicine known as *agada*  
is able to destroy every sort of poison,  
so too it is with wisdom  
which is able to extinguish the absence of wisdom.

The Tathāgata is one who is unexcelled  
and is also one who has no peer.  
No one can even compare to him.  
He is therefore but rarely encountered.

At that time, assisted by the awesome spiritual powers of the Buddha,  
Forest of Vigor Bodhisattva surveyed the ten directions and then  
spoke these verses:

All dharmas have no distinctions  
and there is no one able to know them.  
Only a buddha and another buddha would understand this  
because their wisdom is ultimate.

This is just as with gold and the color of gold  
for which it is their nature to be indistinguishable.  
So too it is with the Dharma and non-Dharma  
which, in their essential nature, have no difference.

Beings and non-beings  
are both devoid of any reality.  
The nature of dharmas such as these is that  
the reality of them both is non-existent.

Just as it is so of the future  
that it has none of the signs of the past,  
so too it is with all dharmas  
which are themselves devoid of any signs at all.

Just as it is with the marks of production and extinction  
that in all their varieties are unreal,  
so too it is with all dharmas  
in which an inherent nature does not exist at all.

Though nirvāṇa cannot be seized upon,  
when spoken of, it is of two kinds.  
So too it is with all dharmas,  
for it is through discriminations that differences exist.

Just as it is in reliance on those things which are counted  
that there exists that which is able to keep their count.<sup>312</sup>  
Their respective natures are entirely nonexistent.  
Just so does one completely understand dharmas.

This is analogous to the method of counting  
that increases from one to the measureless.  
The method of counting is devoid of any essential nature.  
It is by resort to intelligence that such distinctions are made.

Just as it is with all worlds  
that, with the burning of the kalpa, they come to an end,  
yet empty space remains unruined,  
so too it is with the wisdom of the Buddha.

Just as the beings throughout the ten directions  
each seize on signs in what is but empty space,  
So too it is that, in regard to the Buddha,  
those in the world make false discriminations.

At that time, assisted by the awesome spiritual powers of the Buddha,  
Forest of Powers Bodhisattva surveyed the ten directions and then  
spoke these verses:

All realms of beings  
dwell within the three periods of time,  
and all beings of the three periods of time  
dwell within the five aggregates.

For the aggregates, it is karmic actions that are their root.  
For karmic actions, it is the mind that is their root.  
Mind dharmas are like mere conjurations.  
So too it is with the world.

The world is not self-created  
nor is it created by something other.  
Nonetheless it succeeds in having a creation  
and also succeeds in having a destruction.

Although the world has a creation  
and although the world has a destruction,

for those with a complete comprehension of the world,  
these two should not even be mentioned.

What is it that constitutes the world?  
And what is it that is not the world?  
What is the world and what is not the world  
are merely distinctions in name.

It is the dharmas of the three times and the five aggregates  
that are said to constitute the world.  
Their extinction is what is not the world.  
Matters such as these are merely artificial designations.

How is it that one speaks of the aggregates?  
What nature do the aggregates possess?  
The nature of the aggregates cannot be extinguished.  
Therefore one speaks of their being unproduced.

When distinguishing these aggregates,  
their nature is found to be empty and quiescent.  
Because they are empty, they cannot be destroyed.  
This is the meaning of being unproduced.

Since beings are like this,  
all buddhas are also just this same way.  
The buddhas and the dharmas of all buddhas—  
they are devoid of any inherently existent nature.

If there be anyone who is able to know these dharmas  
in a way that accords with reality and is free of inverted views,  
then the person possessed of all knowledge and vision  
will always be seen directly before him.

At that time, assisted by the awesome spiritual powers of the Buddha,  
Forest of Practices Bodhisattva surveyed the ten directions and then  
spoke these verses:

Just as elemental earth  
as it exists in all worlds of the ten directions  
is entirely devoid of any inherently existent nature,  
and yet there is no place that it is not pervasively present,  
so too it is with the body of the Buddha  
which everywhere pervades all worlds.  
All its many different forms and characteristics  
have no subjective agent and no place from which they come.  
It is only on the basis of karmic actions  
that one speaks of the existence of any being.  
And it is also not apart from beings  
that there is any karmic action at all that can be found.

The nature of karmic actions is fundamentally empty and quiescent.  
yet they are that upon which beings depend.

They everywhere create the many forms and characteristics  
which themselves also have no place from which they come.

All such forms and characteristics as these  
arise from the inconceivable power of karma.

If one completely comprehends their root,  
then one has nothing at all that one sees within them.

So too it is with the body of the Buddha,  
for that is inconceivable.

All of its many different forms and characteristics  
appear throughout the *kṣetras* of the ten directions.

The body itself is not the Buddha.

The Buddha himself is not the body.

It is only the Dharma which constitutes his body  
and which completely comprehends all dharmas.

If one is able to see the body of the Buddha  
as pure and like the nature of dharmas,  
this person will become free of all doubts and delusions  
with respect to the Dharma of the Buddha.

If one sees all dharmas  
as having an original nature like nirvāṇa,  
this then is to see the Tathāgata  
as ultimately having no place in which he dwells.

If one cultivates right mindfulness  
and sees with complete clarity the Rightly Enlightened One  
as signless and without any basis for discriminations,  
this one qualifies as a son of the Dharma King.

At that time, assisted by the awesome spiritual powers of the Buddha,  
Forest of Enlightenment Bodhisattva surveyed the ten directions and  
then spoke these verses:

It is analogous to a master painter<sup>313</sup>  
who is spreading forth his colors  
as he falsely seizes on differentiating signs  
even though the great elements have no such distinctions.

The great elements themselves have no such coloration  
and within those colors, there are none of the great elements.  
Still, it is not apart from the great elements  
that there are then these colors which can be found.

There are no colored paintings in the mind,  
nor is there any mind within a colored painting.

Still, it is not apart from the mind,  
that there is then a colored painting which can be found.

That mind never stops [creating its paintings]  
which are so countless as to be inconceivable.  
They manifest all colors,  
and yet they each remain unaware of the others.

Just as a master painter  
is unable to know his own mind,  
yet paints because of the mind,  
so too, the nature of all dharmas is just like this.

The mind is like a master painter  
who is able to paint all worlds.  
All of the five aggregates arise from it  
and there is no dharma it does not create.

Just as it is with the mind, so too it is with the Buddha.  
Just as it is with the Buddha, so too it is with beings.  
One should realize that the Buddha and the mind  
both have an essential nature that is endless.

If a person knows that it is the actions of the mind  
that everywhere create all worlds,  
then this person thereby sees the Buddha  
and completely understands the Buddha's true nature.

The mind does not abide in the body,  
nor does the body abide in the mind,  
and yet they are able to do the Buddha's works  
with unprecedented sovereign mastery.

If one wishes to completely know  
all buddhas of the three periods of time,  
then he should contemplate the nature of the Dharma realm  
as being entirely created by the mind alone.

At that time, assisted by the awesome spiritual powers of the Buddha,  
Forest of Knowledge Bodhisattva surveyed the ten directions and  
then spoke these verses:

That which one grasps is ungraspable.  
That which one sees is invisible.  
That which one hears cannot be heard.  
The one mind is inconceivable.

The measurable and the immeasurable  
are both ungraspable.  
If there is anyone who wishes to grasp them,  
they will ultimately have nothing they apprehend.

When what one should not speak of, one nonetheless speaks of,  
this amounts to deceiving oneself.

When one has not completed one's own work,  
one fails to cause the multitudes to be happy.

If one wished to praise the Tathāgata's  
boundless body of wondrous form,  
even exhausting countless kalpas in doing so,  
no one would be able to completely describe it.

Just as a wish-fulfilling jewel  
is able to manifest all forms,  
manifesting forms from what is formless,  
so too it is with all the buddhas.

This is also analogous to pure empty space  
which is formless and invisible.  
Although it manifests all forms,  
there is still no one able to see empty space itself.

So too it is with all the buddhas  
who everywhere manifest countless forms.  
This is not a place where thought can function  
and it is something that no one can see.

Although one hears the voice of the Tathāgata,  
that voice is not the Tathāgata.  
Still, it is not apart from that voice  
that one can know the One of Right and Perfect Enlightenment.

Bodhi has no coming or going.  
It goes beyond all discriminations.  
How then could one claim of oneself  
that he is able to succeed in seeing it?

The buddhas have no dharmas at all.  
What then could the Buddha speak of?  
It is only in accordance with one's own mind  
that one supposes he speaks dharmas such as these.

### **The End of Chapter Twenty**

- 'others' and 'self' are of a single substance." (令修慈悲觀，行平等法，人我一體。 / HYQS)
308. Of the two most fundamental, essential, and interdependent aspects of all systems of Buddhist meditation practice (*śamatha*, "calm abiding," and *vipāśyanā*, "insight meditation"), *vipāśyanā* is that non-discursive insight-generating contemplation of phenomena which leads to wisdom and realizations.
309. The "six dharmas of harmony and respect" (六和敬法) are six points of common identity formulated by the Buddha as essential standards within the monastic Sangha. They refer to cultivation of the same moral precepts, sharing a common understanding of the same views, abiding in the same sorts of physical dwelling circumstances, maintenance of mutual non-contentiousness in verbal actions, maintaining mutually-pleasing mental behaviors, and maintaining universal equality in the distribution of benefits provided to the Sangha.
310. In Sanskrit, *sudarśana*.
311. Again, "difficulties" here is clearly a reference to the eight difficulties.
312. Although it would be possible to construe this line as referring to that which is counted and the person who counts, QL clarifies that this is referring to whatever is counted on the one hand and the numbers used to keep track of them on the other: "Apart from the things which are counted, there is no number able to count them." (離所數物無能數數。 / L130n1557\_0118a10)
313. QL specifies: "The first line of the first verse is a general analogy to the one mind." (初偈初句總喻一心 / L130n1557\_0126a14)
314. The BB translation's slightly more specific phrasing says: "This is because the bodhisattva-mahāsattva trains in the dharmas practiced by all buddhas of the three periods of time." (菩薩摩訶薩學三世諸佛所行法故。 / T09n0278\_p0466b25-6)
315. As for what I translate here as "perception of a composite being" (種種想), QL clarifies that this refers to the concept of a being consisting of "the causes and conditions of the aggregates, sense realms, sense bases, and so forth." (陰界入等諸因緣 / L130n1557\_0150a11)
316. Per MW, *māṇavaka* refers to "a youth, lad, fellow; a pupil, scholar, religious student," etc.
317. QL explains this as referring to "failing to cherish one's roots of goodness." (不惜善根 / L130n1557\_0163b14)
318. "Right and definite position" (正位 / *samyaktva-niyāma*) is a technical term referring to a level of realization from which one cannot fall