

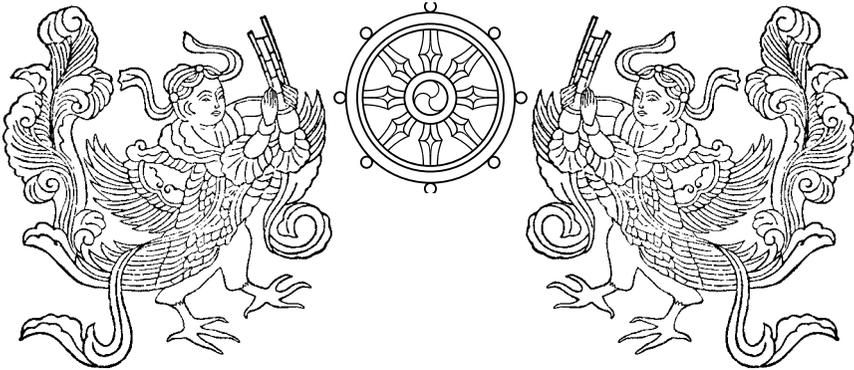
THE FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA

*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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Avataṃsaka Sūtra or 'The Great Expansive Buddha's Flower Adornment Sutra'

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Vol. 10, no. 279). It consists of 39 chapters that introduce an interpenetrating,

infinitely expansive, and majestically grand multiverse of countless buddha

worlds while explaining in great detail the cultivation of the bodhisattva path

to buddhahood, most notably the ten highest levels of bodhisattva practice

known as 'the ten bodhisattva grounds.' To date, this is the first and only

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CHAPTER 16

The Brahman Conduct

At that time, Right Mindfulness Devaputra addressed Dharma Wisdom Bodhisattva, saying, “In all worlds, those in the community of bodhisattvas, relying on the teachings of the Tathāgata, don the dyed robe and leave the home life. How are they able to attain purity in the brahman conduct²⁵² and proceed from the position of a bodhisattva to the attainment of the path of unsurpassed bodhi?”

Dharma Wisdom Bodhisattva replied:

Son of the Buddha, when the bodhisattva-mahāsattva practices the brahman conduct, he should take ten dharmas as the object of his attention in meditative contemplation. They are: the body, physical actions, speech, verbal actions, the mind, mental actions, the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, and the moral precepts. He should contemplate them in this way, asking, “Is the body itself the brahman conduct?” and so forth up to, “Is it the moral precepts that are the brahman conduct?”

If the body itself were the brahman conduct, one should realize that the brahman conduct would then be something which is not good. It would be non-Dharma. It would be turbid. It would be bad-smelling and repulsive. It would be impure. It would be disgusting. It would be intractable. It would be defiled. It would be a corpse. And it would be a mass of worms.²⁵³

If physical actions were the brahman conduct, then the brahman conduct would be walking, standing, sitting, lying down, looking to the left and right, retracting and extending [of the limbs], looking down, and looking up.

If speech were the brahman conduct, then the brahman conduct would be sound, the breath, [the movement of] the chest, tongue, throat, and lips, exhaling and inhaling, holding and releasing, high and low pitch, and clarity and roughness [of enunciation].

If verbal actions were the brahman conduct, then the brahman conduct would be salutations and greetings, abbreviated speech or extensive speech, metaphorical speech or direct speech, laudatory speech or deprecatory speech, conventionally establishing speech,²⁵⁴ speech adapted to the mundane, or explanatory speech.

If the mind were the brahman conduct, then the brahman conduct would be ideation and mental discursion, would be an instance of discrimination and all kinds of different discriminations, would be an instance of recollection and all kinds of different recollections, would be an instance of reasoning and all kinds of different reasoning, and would be conjurations and dreams.

If mental actions were the brahman conduct, then the brahman conduct would be thinking or [the perception of feeling] hot or cold, hungry or thirsty, miserable or happy, or worried or joyful.

If the Buddha were the brahman conduct, is form the Buddha? Is feeling the Buddha? Is perception the Buddha? Are karmic formative factors the Buddha? Is consciousness the Buddha? Are the major marks the Buddha? Are the subsidiary signs the Buddha? Are the spiritual superknowledges the Buddha? Are his karmic deeds the Buddha? Or are his karmic rewards the Buddha?

If the Dharma were the brahman conduct, is quiescence the Dharma? Is nirvāṇa the Dharma? Is non-production the Dharma? Is non-arising the Dharma? Is ineffability the Dharma? Is being free of discriminations the Dharma? Is having nothing which is done the Dharma? Or is not being a composite aggregation the Dharma?²⁵⁵

If the Sangha were the brahman conduct, is one at the stage preliminary to becoming a stream-winner the Sangha? Is one possessed of the fruition of a stream-winner the Sangha? Is one at the stage preliminary to becoming a once-returner the Sangha? Is one possessed of the fruition of a once-returner the Sangha? Is one at the stage preliminary to becoming a never-returner the Sangha? Is one possessed of the fruition of a never-returner the Sangha? Is one at the stage preliminary to becoming an arhat the Sangha? Is one possessed of the fruition of the arhat the Sangha? Are those with the three clarities²⁵⁶ the Sangha? Or are those with the six spiritual superknowledges²⁵⁷ the Sangha?

If the moral precepts were the brahman conduct, is the ordination platform the moral precepts? Is the interrogation into one's purity the moral precepts? Is the teaching of the awesome deportment the moral precepts? Is the three-fold statement of the *karmadāna* the moral precepts? Is the role of the *upādhyāya* the moral precepts? Is the role of the *ācārya* the moral precepts? Is the tonsure itself the moral precepts? Is the donning of the *kāṣāya* robe the moral precepts? Is the obtaining of sustenance on the alms round the moral precepts? Or is right livelihood the moral precepts?

Once one has carried out contemplations such as these, one becomes free of any seizing on the body, becomes free of any

attachment to cultivation, becomes free of any abiding in dharmas, perceives the past as already extinguished, the future as not yet arrived, and the present as mere empty quiescence, realizes that there is no agent of karmic actions and no one who undergoes karmic retributions, sees that this period of time does not move at all, and sees that the other periods of time do not undergo change.²⁵⁸

Which dharma among all of these constitutes the brahman conduct? Where does the brahman conduct come from? Who is it that possesses it? What is its essential substance? Who performs it? Does it exist or is it nonexistent? Is it form or non-form? Is it feeling or non-feeling? Is it perception or non-perception? Is it a karmic formative factor or not a karmic formative factor? Is it consciousness or non-consciousness? One carries on one's analytic contemplations in this way:

Because the dharma of the brahman conduct is inapprehensible;
 Because the dharmas of the three periods of time are all empty
 and quiescent;
 Because the mind has nothing to which it attaches;
 Because the mind has no obstacles;
 Because one's practice is non-dual;
 Because one acquires sovereign mastery of skillful means;
 Because one accepts the dharma of signlessness;
 Because one contemplates the dharma of signlessness;
 Because one realizes the equality of all Buddha dharmas; and
 Because one is fulfilling all dharmas of the Buddha.

Factors such as these constitute the bases of the pure brahman conduct.

One should also cultivate ten dharmas. What are these ten? They are:

The knowledge that knows what can and cannot be;
 The knowledge that knows karmic retributions as they are related
 to past, present, and future;
 The knowledge that knows the *dhyānas*, the liberations, and the
 samādhis;
 The knowledge that knows the relative supremacy and inferiority
 of all faculties;
 The knowledge that knows all the different capacities for under-
 standing;
 The knowledge that knows all the different realms;
 The knowledge that knows the end points to which all paths lead;
 The knowledge of the unimpeded vision of the heavenly eye;

The knowledge that is unimpeded in knowing previous lifetimes;
 and
 The knowledge of the complete severance of habitual karmic propensities.

As one contemplates each of these ten powers of the Tathāgata, one finds that each of these powers subsumes a countless number of meanings into all of which one should inquire. Having heard about them, one should then bring forth the mind of great kindness and compassion to closely contemplate beings and then never abandon them. One should reflect on all dharmas incessantly, should engage in unexcelled karmic deeds but not seek any karmic reward, and should completely realize that objective spheres are like a conjuration, like a dream, like reflections, like echoes, and also like spiritual transformations.

If bodhisattvas are able to carry on contemplations consistent with contemplations such as these, they will not develop any duality-based understandings of any dharma and all dharmas of the Buddha will soon manifest directly before them, whereupon, when they make their initial resolve, they will then immediately attain *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*. They will realize that all dharmas are identical to the very nature of the mind, they will perfect the wisdom body, and their own awakening will not arise in dependence on others.

The End of Chapter Sixteen

the text at the beginning of the chapter (84a26–84b01) which initially introduces and explains the first of the ten abodes, “the abode of initial generation of the resolve.”

250. “Rings of mountains” is a reference to the all-encircling ring-like ranges of mountains at the periphery of each world.
251. The BB translation of this quatrain seems clearer: “They are well able to completely comprehend the abode of the Dharma Kings and accord with the Dharma Kings’ protocols for the awesome deportment. They know well how to become established in and enter the position of the Dharma Kings and they know well how to distinguish the realms of the Dharma Kings.” (善能了達法王處，隨順法王威儀法，善知安入法王位，善知分別法王界。T09n0278_p0448c05 – 06)
252. “Brahman conduct” (梵行) or “*brahmacarya*” is usually a reference to pure spiritual practice in general and celibacy in particular.
253. If “mass of worms” (蟲聚) seems unintuitive, this actually follows very logically from the previous item (“a corpse”). The immediately proximate association may well have arisen from what one sees when doing the nine or ten standard “unloveliness” (*aśubha*) contemplations of the human body as a corpse, a practice which was usually done in a charnel ground where, before too long, the dead bodies inevitably become full of maggots, etc. Moreover, the concept of the body as a home for countless bacteria, etc. was already well-known to the Buddha and the monastic community.
254. QL clarifies the meaning of this “establishing speech” (安立說) as meaning “conventionally established” (假施設 / *prajñapti*).
255. HH follows QL in adding: “Is it non-compliance that is the Dharma? Or is it having nothing that is apprehensible that is the Dharma?” (不隨順是法耶無所得是法耶。) QL’s rationale for this addition is basically that, since all of these sets of questions are ten-fold and only this one set of questions is eight-fold, these two questions must have been accidentally dropped at some point from the Sanskrit text. It is unclear where QL sourced his emendations. There is nothing in the BB translation to support them.
256. The “three clarities” (三明) or *trividya* are the heavenly eye, cognition of past lives, and cessation of the contaminants.
257. The “six spiritual superknowledges” (六通 or 六神通) refers to unimpeded bodily action, the heavenly eye, the heavenly ear, cognition of others’ thoughts, recall of the previous lives of self and others, and cessation of the contaminants.
258. As SA translates it, one could as easily think it was saying: “This world does not move and those worlds do not change.” (此世不移動，彼世不改

- 變。 / T10n0279_p0088c12 – 13), and in fact that is how HH explained it in his HYQS. However, both QL and BB make it clear that this is referring instead to time. BB's translation is: "This period of time does not go to that period of time and that period of time does not go to this period of time." (此世不至彼世, 彼世不至此世。 / T09n0278_p0449b23)
259. Although It is not immediately clear from the Chinese text of either the SA or BB translations precisely what is meant by "to pervade all worlds," I follow HH who explains that it is "to enable the Dharma of the Buddha to fill up all worlds." (為令佛法充滿所有一切世界的緣故。 HYQS)
260. QL equates this somewhat obscure "non-kalpa" with "the noumenon" (理) which in the Sino-philosophical terminology of the Huayan hermeneutic tradition is simply a reference to "emptiness." So, in effect this is saying that all kalpas are synonymous with emptiness and emptiness is synonymous with all kalpas. Perhaps the BB translation is at least slightly less refractory to easy understanding: "To know all kalpas enter the nonexistence of a kalpa and the nonexistence of a kalpa enters all kalpas." (知一切劫入無劫, 知無劫入一切劫。 / T09n0278_p0451a21 – 22)
261. I use "right and fixed position" here to render *zhengwei* (正位), the usual Sanskrit antecedent for which is *samyaktoa-niyāma* which in turn correlates to a position of irreversibility in relation to eventually reaching the endpoint of the path.
262. "Inclinations" (欲樂) is one of SA's standard translations for the Sanskrit *āśaya* which has a range of meanings not so easily captured in a single English translation. In its various occurrences in this and related scriptures, it seems to best be rendered into English as "intentions," "aspirations," "dispositions," or "inclinations."
263. The intent of the Chinese (心) is ambiguous as to whether this is referring to beings' "minds" or beings' "thoughts." Here I translate this as "thoughts" following HH who, in his HYQS, twice specifies "thoughts in the minds" (心念) of beings." QL agrees, noting that this refers specifically to the power to have "the knowledge of others' thoughts." (知心義兼王所即他心智。 / L130n1557_0028a13)
264. As explained by HH and as is standard in all primary Buddhist traditions, "the hindrances" refers to the five hindrances interfering with success in the practice of meditation which consist of sensual desire, ill will, dullness and drowsiness, agitation and regretfulness, and afflicted doubtfulness.
265. As explained by HH, "the obstacles" refers to either two obstacles (affliction obstacles and obstacles to knowledge) or three obstacles (affliction obstacles, karmic obstacles, and retribution obstacles).