



# Universal Enlightenment

*An Introduction to the Teachings and Practices  
of Huayen Buddhism*

# UNIVERSAL ENLIGHTENMENT

An introduction to the teachings and practices of  
Huayen Buddhism



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Embodiment of wisdom, Lord Manjushri,  
Extend your compassion to me.  
From my dim and blinkered sight  
Cleanse the obscurity  
Of self, that I may see the light  
The Buddha saw so long ago  
And know  
The wrong path from the right.  
Enter my heart and be my guide,  
In all my trials walk by my side  
Till I am free.

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## Preface

The purpose of this book is to provide an overview of the teachings and practices of Huayen Buddhism. Huayen is regarded as one of the six major schools of Chinese Buddhism and has exerted a strong influence on the Chan (Kor. Seon, Jap. Zen) School in particular. It is based on the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, the greatest sutra in the Chinese Buddhist Canon in both size and scope, and teaches that Enlightenment can be found within the mind of every sentient being and in every particle of the physical universe.

The principal sources consulted for the book are the writings of Fa Zang [法藏, 643-712] and Li Tungxuan [李通玄, 646-740], and of course the *Avataṃsaka* or *Flower Adornment Sutra* itself. All references to "the Sutra" (with a capital "S") are to the 80-fascicle translation of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*. "Ch." followed by a number indicates a particular chapter in the same text; and "Commentary" refers to a commentary on the Sutra written by either Fa Zang or Li Tungxuan, according to the context. More information about the contents of the Sutra can be found in Chapter 13.

The romanization used for Chinese is the standard Hanyu Pinyin but modified slightly to make it more phonetically consistent and easier to pronounce correctly. The changes are as follows:

<i>yan/-ian</i>	➔	<i>yen/-ien</i>	(vowel as in English 'pen')
<i>yong/-iong</i>	➔	<i>yung/-iung</i>	(vowel as in English 'put')
<i>-ui</i>	➔	<i>-uei</i>	(diphthong as in English 'pay')

In general, diacritics have been added to Sanskrit and Chinese words in italics but not to those in plain text. When Sanskrit words appear without diacritics, 'ś' and 'ṣ' are both shown as 'sh'.

I would like to express my gratitude to a number of people who have helped or inspired me to write this book. First and foremost, my thanks go to Ven. Haiyun Jimeng, who has done so much to revive and spread the Huayen teachings in Taiwan and abroad. Without his inspiration and help this book would not have been written or published.

I am also deeply grateful to the members of the Huayen Community, in Taiwan, Australia, and North America, for their friendship and support over the years. I would especially like to thank the members of the Community in Taiwan for the hospitality

and great generosity they have always shown me during my visits there.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to two other Huayen masters: to Ven. Cheng Yi [1914-2011] of the Huayen Lotus Society [華嚴蓮社], for long-standing friendship, reliable assistance, and a generous gift of books; and to Ven. Kuen Il of Buseok-sa for hospitality, advice and insight during a brief visit to Korea. Thanks also to Gillianne for arranging the Korean trip, to Rumay Lai for her invaluable help in preparing the first edition of this book for publication, to Albert for practical support, and to Judy for being an unfailing source of encouragement and advice.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this book to the memory of Ven. Lung Feng [隆豐法師, 1939-2002], who shortly before his untimely death brought the words 'bodhisattva' and 'Samantabhadra practitioner' to life for me.

You are the teacher who gave to me	聖者為我師
The Dharma that is unsurpassed;	與我無上法
Such kindness can never be repaid	無量無數劫
However long the aeons last.	不能報其恩

(*Avatamsaka Sūtra*, Ch. 39)

TP 2014, 2020







## 1. Vairocana

*I am the eye with which the universe  
Beholds itself and knows itself divine.*

(Shelley, "Hymn of Apollo")

### The Huayen Trinity

It seems to be natural to the human mind to conceive of sacred truths or realities as manifesting in triune form. So Christianity has its Holy Trinity, and sets of three principal deities can be found in both Hinduism and Daoism. The practice of Buddhism also begins with taking refuge in the Triple Gem, and the concept of the Trikaya or Three Bodies of the Buddha plays a central role in most forms of Mahayana Buddhism.

Huayen is no exception to this general rule. Although the Trikaya doctrine does not form part of the Huayen teachings, the Huayen School has its own trinity of sacred figures, called the Three Saints or Three Holy Ones [三聖], namely, the buddha Vairocana and the two bodhisattvas Manjushri and Samantabhadra. These three may be said to correspond, respectively, to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha of the Triple Gem and to the Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya of the Trikaya doctrine.

### Vairocana

In the Huayen teachings, then, the Buddha is represented above all by the figure of Vairocana. The Sanskrit word *vairocana* means "solar", and is derived from the verb *virocate*, "to shine, be bright or radiant" like the sun. In the early Buddhist texts Shakyamuni Buddha is sometimes referred to by the epithet "kinsman of the sun" [*ādityabandhu*], *āditya* being another word for the sun. In later Buddhist literature also the Buddha is often compared to the sun dispelling the darkness of primordial ignorance by the light of his wisdom. In the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, for example, we read that "just as the sun benefits countless beings in this world by

dispelling the darkness and creating light [and so on], so too the light of the Tathagata's wisdom benefits beings everywhere in countless ways".<sup>1</sup> [Ch. 37]

What, then, is the difference between Vairocana and Shakyamuni? In reality there is no difference at all and the Sutra uses the two names interchangeably. But because of our ignorance and emotional confusion we exist in the limited realm of conventional truth [*samvṛti-satya*], a realm in which, as William Blake [1757-1827] puts it, "reality was forgot and the vanities of time and space only remembered and called reality".<sup>2</sup> So from our conventional point of view we could say that Vairocana is the enlightened awareness that is at the heart of all things and is the true nature of our own mind, while Shakyamuni is that same awareness fully manifested in the form of an individual human being who appeared at a certain time and place in our history. The Sutra tells us that in fact all the buddhas and great bodhisattvas appear to sentient beings in the forms that they can most easily relate to. We can say, therefore, that Shakyamuni is the historical form in which Vairocana appeared to human beings on this planet Earth, or the world Endurance [*sahāloka*] as the Buddhist scriptures call it.

So for us, as human beings in this world, Shakyamuni Buddha is our link to the omnipresent Enlightenment that is Vairocana. But how are we to understand the nature of this Enlightenment? One way is to look at the exemplary life of the Buddha himself. As every Buddhist knows, Siddhartha Gautama was inspired to set out on his quest for Enlightenment by the unexpected shock of encountering the three fundamental forms of suffering that sentient beings experience: old age, sickness and death. We generally shy away from contemplating these unpleasant realities but, paradoxically, that is precisely why we continue to suffer from them. In fact, as Siddhartha immediately understood, "the secret of life is suffering. It is what is hidden behind everything".<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, as he tells us in the "Ariyapariyesana Sutta" of the Pali Canon [*Majjhima Nikāya*, No. 26], "So then, monks, after some time, while I was still young, my hair as black as a boy's, possessed of youth and health, at the beginning of my life – although my unwilling parents wept and wailed – I removed my hair and beard, put on brown robes, and went forth from home into homelessness."

But why did he feel it necessary to take such a drastic step? Was it because his sudden awareness of suffering had led him to despair of the world altogether? On the contrary, his real motive was not despair but hope, for he had glimpsed in his own shocked reaction to suffering a deeper truth: that suffering was not an unavoidable affliction that could only be endured but rather a problem that could be solved, an obstacle that could be overcome. Somewhere in the depths of his mind he knew that there had to be another way of living and relating to the world, another realm of experience that transcended the relentless cycle of suffering, and he set out to find it.

In another famous passage from the Pali Canon he sums up this basic insight as follows:

There is something that is unborn, not become, not created, un-compounded; for if there were not, it would not be possible to find a way of escape from what is born, become, created and compounded. But since there is that which is unborn, not become, not created, un-compounded, we know that a way of escape from what is born, become, created and compounded is possible. [*Udāna*, VIII.3]

Eventually the Buddha found the unborn reality of Nirvana beneath the Bodhi-tree, simply by looking into his own mind and perceiving its true nature. The Christian writer known as St. Hesychios the Priest, who lived in the 8th or 9th century, says in his notes *On Watchfulness and Holiness* [Section 108] that "just as he who looks at the sun cannot but fill his eyes with light, so he who always gazes intently into his heart cannot fail to be illumined"<sup>4</sup>. In the same way Shakyamuni Buddha, by gazing intently into his own heart, discovered the illuminating sun of Vairocana's wisdom and was able to make it available to all beings through his teaching.

Vairocana, then, is the Buddha within us, our buddha-nature. As Li Tungxuan says, "The essential nature of consciousness is nothing but True Wisdom, just as the waves created by a cataract are not separate from their essential nature as water."<sup>5</sup> [Commentary]. We ordinary worldlings [*prthagjana*] are not yet able to see this clearly, for as the Sutra points out in a well-known passage, "The wisdom of the Tathagata is also like this. It is unimpeded and beyond all measure, and can benefit all beings everywhere. It is present in its entirety within the body of every being, but ordinary people are ignorant and cling to their delusions, so they are not aware of its presence and derive no benefit from it."<sup>6</sup> [Ch. 37]

Nevertheless, as Huayen practitioners we should have faith in the reality of our buddha-nature and always try to be mindful of it, for Huayen practice is primarily based on this. There is a saying that only buddhas can become buddhas, and unless we ground our practice in awareness of our innate Enlightenment, in our knowledge of the ultimate identity of our own minds with the mind of Vairocana, our practice will bear only karmic fruit within the cycle of birth and death, and Shakyamuni's final illumination will continue to elude us.

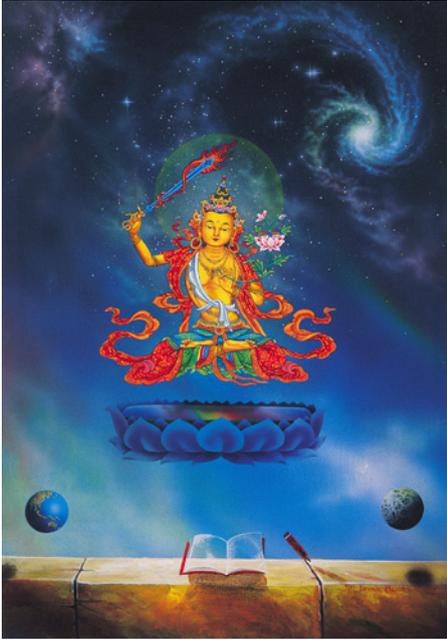
But there is another thing that needs to be borne in mind as well. For Huayen the opposition that our dualistic thinking creates between self and world, between subject and object, is also an illusion. Vairocana is therefore as much the ultimate reality of the physical universe in which we live as he is the essential nature of our own minds:

The Dharmakaya of the Tathagata is inconceivable :  
 It is formless, without attributes, incomparable,  
 And yet manifests forms and attributes for the sake of living beings,  
 Appearing everywhere throughout the universe.  
 In all the atoms of all buddharealms  
 Vairocana displays his sovereign power.<sup>7</sup>

[Du Shun, *Meditation According to the Fivefold Doctrine of Huayen*]

The Sutra itself repeatedly claims that there are buddhas teaching within every atom, and Fa Zang also points out that "Vairocana pervades worlds as numerous as motes of dust, responding to beings according to their capacities everywhere throughout the universe".<sup>8</sup> [Commentary]

We could say, then, that Vairocana is equally the gap between our thoughts and the gap between electron shells, the radiant space in which both subconscious and quantum events occur. If Enlightenment often seems impossibly difficult to achieve, Huayen practitioners can at least take comfort in the assurance that it is constantly present and accessible in its fullness, both within our own minds and in the world around us. All we have to do is open our eyes, the eye of Apollo that we have always been endowed with, and then we will discover our true nature as Vairocana.



## 2. Manjushri

According to the Huayen teachings, the enlightened awareness of the Buddha is fully present within us and our own mind is of the same nature as the mind of Vairocana. When we look into our minds however most of us can see only the whirl of samsaric thoughts and traces of buddha-wisdom are not so easy to find. As the Korean master Myeonghyo [明晷, 7th~8th century] says:

Nirvana is close by but remains unrecognized;  
Enlightenment is near to us but difficult to see.<sup>9</sup>

How then can we gain access to this elusive wisdom? Where is the path that will bring us face to face with Vairocana? For Huayen the answer is that we must rely on the bodhisattva Manjushri.<sup>10</sup>

Who is Manjushri? Mahayana Buddhist tradition tells us that he is a tenth-level bodhisattva of such great wisdom that he has served throughout the ages as instructor to the buddhas themselves, so he appears as the principal teacher in many sutras, including the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*. He is usually depicted in Buddhist art as riding a lion, a traditional symbol of the proclamation of the Dharma, and as holding the sword of wisdom in one hand and a sutra in the other. In the *Flower Adornment Sutra* a set of four chapters (Nos. 7~11) is directly taught by him and, as will be seen below, he is the first and final guru of the young pilgrim Sudhana whose story makes up the last part of the Sutra. He is also credited with compiling the original text of the Sutra. So Fa Zang says: "According to the *Great Treatise on Transcendental Wisdom*, many Mahayana sutras were compiled by Manjushri, and this Sutra in particular."<sup>11</sup> Finally, Manjushri has an especially close connection with China, and the belief that he could be found on Mt. Wutai in what is now Shanxi Province was so widespread that for centuries pious pilgrims came to China from all over the Buddhist world to pay their respects to the great bodhisattva there and perhaps even encounter him, in person or in a vision. Fa Zang confirms this belief: "At the present time the holy Manjushri lives in this sacred place [Mt. Wutai], where according to a number of different traditions he is always to be found expounding the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*."<sup>12</sup>

But what is Manjushri's significance for the individual practitioner? How can

he help us to recognize our buddha-nature, to see the 'original face' of our innate Enlightenment in the mirror of our mind?

Manjushri is a symbol of wisdom for many Buddhists, but in the Huayen teachings he also represents one kind of wisdom in particular, namely, the wisdom of equality [*samatā-jñāna*] or fundamental wisdom. This is the wisdom which gives insight into emptiness [*śūnyatā*]. Emptiness, the absence of any intrinsic substance or essence [*svabhāva-śūnyatā*], is the real nature and single common characteristic of all things, the "single flavour of all phenomena", as the Sutra puts it [Ch. 38].<sup>13</sup> At this level of understanding, therefore, all phenomena are equal and identical and their apparent diversity, their continual appearances and disappearances, are illusions created by our dualistic consciousness. So the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana* [大乘起信論] says that "phenomena appear to be different from one another simply because of our deluded thinking".<sup>14</sup>

It is this fundamental wisdom, then, that allows us to see past our fascination with the superficial appearance of things and perceive the universal, indeterminate reality that is their true nature. This aspect of phenomena is what Huayen calls the Dharmarealm of Reality [理法界] and those who have been able to enter into it are already destined to achieve complete Enlightenment. The wisdom of equality is already present within us but in most cases it is dormant, and study, faith and cultivation are necessary to activate it. Accordingly Manjushri also represents the impulse to undertake spiritual practices so that we can bring our innate wisdom into manifestation and achieve Enlightenment.

Once the Dharma has been encountered, in one form or another, the first of the five powers [*pañca-balāni*] or faculties [*pañc'endriyāṇi*] that we need to develop is faith [*śraddhā*]. The reason for this is that, although the ultimate truth [*paramārthasatya*] is that we have never ceased to be enlightened, in the ordinary world of conventional experience [*samvṛti-satya*] we have for a very long time been in the habit of directing our attention away from Enlightenment and towards the strengthening of our sense of self and the satisfaction of our desires. To overcome such deeply entrenched habits requires considerable effort and cannot be accomplished merely by reasoning, by wishful thinking or by half-hearted attempts at spiritual cultivation. Faith however can provide us with the energy that we need. So the Sutra says that "Faith is the source of Enlightenment and of all good qualities" [Ch.12].<sup>15</sup> If we have no faith in the reality of the goal we are seeking or in our capacity to reach it, we are never likely to succeed. But if we are convinced that we really can achieve Enlightenment, our ultimate success becomes not only more likely but, according to the Huayen teachings, inevitable. This is why it is sometimes

said that only buddhas can become buddhas. As long as we think of ourselves as ignorant sentient beings we will remain so, but if we have faith in our innate buddhahood we will one day become in fact what we have always been in reality. According to Fa Zang a "sentient being" can be defined as "the Dharmakaya transmigrating in the five realms of existence" [Commentary].<sup>16</sup>

Manjushri is therefore the inspirer of faith. According to Li Tungxuan, in his work *The Resolution of Doubts*, "In this Sutra the primary article of faith is that the Ten Worlds of Form and the Ten Wisdom Tathagatas always exist within one's own mind, while Manjushri is one's own sublime wisdom, and is the mind that is capable of such faith."<sup>17</sup> But in the Huayen teaching, faith is inseparably connected with *bodhicitta*, the Aspiration to Enlightenment, and here again Manjushri plays a central role. According to Cheng Guan, in an essay on the unity of the Three Holy Ones, the *Sutra on the Buddha's Names* [佛名經] claims that "all the buddhas have aspired to achieve Enlightenment because of Manjushri".<sup>18</sup> At the beginning of the story of Sudhana, Manjushri is described as leaving the Buddha's assembly near the Seat of Enlightenment and travelling south with a retinue of bodhisattvas, monastics and attendant deities. Halting at a temple outside a town called Dhanyākara, he expounds *The Sutra of the Dharmarealm of Universal Illumination* [普照法界修多羅], perhaps another name for the *Flower Adornment Sutra* itself. Among the numerous laypeople who come from the town to listen to him is a young man called Sudhana. Manjushri, aware of Sudhana's potential to achieve Enlightenment, directs his teaching to him in particular: "Then Manjushri expounded this teaching to Sudhana and rest of the gathering, encouraging and advising them earnestly to make greater efforts, gladdening them so that they might aspire to achieve unsurpassed, complete and perfect Enlightenment [*anuttara-saṃyak-sambodhi*]."<sup>19</sup> Sudhana understands the message as intended: "Thereupon Sudhana, having heard Manjushri speak of all the Buddha's virtues, aspired with all his heart to seek unsurpassed, complete and perfect Enlightenment."<sup>20</sup> He approaches Manjushri and, in a long verse passage, asks for further guidance:

...Please give me your instructions  
Great guide of merit and wisdom  
That I may seek Enlightenment  
For the benefit of beings.  
Grant me your protection  
That, clad in the armour of patience  
And wielding the sword of wisdom,  
I may vanquish Mara's army....<sup>21</sup>

Manjushri urges Sudhana to seek out other teachers and practise the Dharma

diligently: "It is good, it is very good, young man, that you have aspired to unsurpassed, complete and perfect Enlightenment. You should seek our spiritual friends [*kalyāṇa-mitrāṇi*] and ask them how to cultivate the conduct of a bodhisattva and how to follow the bodhisattva path".<sup>22</sup> Then he replies to Sudhana's request with verses of his own, predicting the ultimate fulfilment of Sudhana's aspiration:

...In worlds without number  
Throughout endless ages  
You will follow Samantabhadra's practice  
And so accomplish your great vows....<sup>23</sup>

The Sutra intends Sudhana to be a model for all Huayen practitioners. Like Sudhana, therefore, we should listen attentively to the voice of Manjushri, be inspired by him to set our hearts on Enlightenment and have faith that we can attain it, then follow his guidance in seeking out teachers who can show us how to undertake the training of a bodhisattva and eventually achieve Buddhahood. Manjushri thus functions as both inspirer and teacher. He fills us with the desire to realize Enlightenment and then points out the path of practice that we must follow in order to reach our goal. Looked at from this point of view, the entire Sutra can be seen as the teaching of Manjushri and of all our Dharma teachers acting on his behalf. This is made clear at the conclusion of Sudhana's quest when the bodhisattva Maitreya, who has just revealed to him a vision of the complete Enlightenment that he has been seeking, tells him that he must now return to Manjushri to have his vision confirmed, saying:

So young man, you should seek tirelessly for the whereabouts of Manjushri, for he will explain all good qualities to you. Why? Because all the teachers you have met, all those who have taught you the practices of a bodhisattva, shown you the way to Deliverance, and helped you to fulfil your vows, have done so through the spiritual power of Manjushri.<sup>24</sup>

It is Manjushri, then, who inspires us to set out on our own quest for Enlightenment and provides us with the necessary guidance for our spiritual journey. But in order to hear his voice (the other common form of his name, Manjughosha [妙音], literally means 'sweet-voiced') we don't have to travel to Dhanyakara or visit Mt. Wutai – as Linji Yixuan [臨濟義玄, d. 867] also emphasized to his disciples when he said bluntly that "There is no Manjushri on Mt. Wutai".<sup>25</sup> We can always hear the voice of Manjushri if we listen carefully enough, for deep within us there is a restlessness that prevents us from remaining satisfied with the circumstances created by our habitual patterns of behaviour and that continually urges us towards some

higher fulfilment. If Vairocana is the hidden sun of our buddha-nature, Manjushri is the light and warmth of that same sun suffusing our minds and stimulating the growth of our potential to develop authentic wisdom and compassion. To receive the benefit of this inner light, therefore, all we have to do is open our minds to it, as Sudhana did when he first allowed the words of Manjushri to penetrate his understanding and so transform his life.



### 3. Samantabhadra

According to Huayen, the path to Enlightenment is embodied above all in two principal bodhisattvas: Manjushri and Samantabhadra. In ancient India too the great poet and scholar Shantideva [7th~8th century], who quotes from the *Gaṇḍavyūha* and *Daśabhūmika* sutras several times in

his *Compendium of Training* [*Śikṣāsamuccaya*], also took these bodhisattvas as the focus of his devotion:

Trembling with fear, I give myself to Samantabhadra,  
And likewise to Manjushri also, of my own free will.  
[*Bodhicaryāvatāra* II.49]

Samantabhadra represents the Dharma as realized in practice, the compassionate activities of a bodhisattva, and it is partly for this reason that followers of Huayen are called Samantabhadra practitioners. Whereas Manjushri stands for the Dharma as truth or reality, Samantabhadra stands for the Sangha, for the visible presence of Enlightenment in the world. Both bodhisattvas are symbols of wisdom as well as compassion, but Manjushri's wisdom is the fundamental wisdom of equality, which gives insight into the essential nature of all phenomena, whereas Samantabhadra's wisdom is the wisdom of discrimination:

Through Manjushri we accomplish the fundamental wisdom of the Dharmakaya, and through Samantabhadra the virtuous practices of the wisdom of discrimination. All the buddhas are able to achieve the ultimate fruit of great Enlightenment by relying on these two bodhisattvas and following their example.<sup>26</sup>

[Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

It is this discriminative wisdom which allows bodhisattvas to work effectively for the welfare of all sentient beings by employing whatever methods are most appropriate to the situation:

Bodhisattvas employ all skilful means  
In accord with the ways of the world to liberate beings.<sup>27</sup>  
[Ch. 12]

These great bodhisattvas, in order to benefit sentient beings, undertake the study of all kinds of worldly arts,... So they display every kind of worldly ability that is not harmful but beneficial to sentient beings, and in this way they gradually establish beings in the supreme Teaching of the buddhas.<sup>28</sup> [Ch. 26]

All bodhisattvas, as the Sutra constantly reminds us, are motivated by their compassion to provide both material and spiritual help to those who are trapped in the cycle of ignorance and suffering. So Vasanti, for example, the first of the eight goddesses of the night who instruct Sudhana on the proper conduct of a bodhisattva, says:

All those who are burdened by sickness or overcome by old age, those who are suffering from poverty or experiencing hardships, who have fallen foul of the king's law and are awaiting punishment, those who are helpless and filled with fear -- to all these I provide help and comfort, vowing to gather them in and free them from distress, from birth, old age, sickness and death, from grief, sorrow, pain and despair....<sup>29</sup>

But whereas Manjushri's compassion is expressed through the spiritual guidance he offers to the individual practitioner, Samantabhadra's role is to embody compassion through his ceaseless and universal activities:

Then the youth Sudhana beheld in every feature, every part and every pore of Samantabhadra's body untold oceans of buddha-realms... He also saw Samantabhadra in every one of those worlds, manifesting in as many buddha-forms as there were atoms in all the buddha-realms, and these buddhas appeared in all the worlds in every direction, teaching beings and leading them towards unsurpassed, complete and perfect Enlightenment.<sup>30</sup>

Samantabhadra's activities are also closely connected with the idea of vows or commitments [*praṇidhāna*], and the phrase "the practices and vows of Samantabhadra" [普賢行願] appears frequently in the Huayen literature. Putting the Buddhadharma into practice requires effort in order to overcome long-established habits, for we must continually strive to overcome our existing circumstances and

personal limitations. This is why effort or energy [*vyayāma*, *vīrya*] is both the sixth step in the Eightfold Path and the fourth of the *pāramitās*, the perfections or transcendental virtues of the Mahayana. Traditionally there are said to be four kinds of effort: the effort to get rid of existing bad habits, to prevent new bad habits from arising, to strengthen existing good habits, and to cultivate new good habits. Making vows is therefore a way of strengthening our resolve. By declaring publicly, or privately in the visualized presence of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, that from now on we intend to behave in a certain kind of way, we are creating the conditions that will make it possible to do so. Thus vows and actions, commitments and conduct, become closely interconnected, two aspects of the same process, and this process is embodied in the person of Samantabhadra.

In Buddhist art Samantabhadra is depicted as riding on an elephant, a symbol of stability and quiet strength. He generally holds a wish-fulfilling gem or sceptre in one hand while his other hand displays the gesture of teaching the Dharma or of generosity. He appears much less frequently in Buddhist literature and art than Manjushri, however, for he is more specifically associated with the Huayen teachings. His importance for Huayen derives in the first place from his role as a symbol of the actual practice of the teachings, but the true significance of this lies in the fact that, for Huayen, practice is indistinguishable from Enlightenment itself. So Li Tungxuan says that

the practices are themselves Enlightenment, .... If you cultivate with a view to attaining an Enlightenment beyond the practices, it will be the Enlightenment of the Disciples [*śrāvaka*], of the Solitary Buddhas [*pratyekabuddha*] or of the bodhisattvas who contemplate emptiness, not the sovereign Enlightenment of the Ekayana, the true wisdom of Manjushri or the compassionate activities and vows of Samantabhadra. ...<sup>31</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

The *Heart Sutra* tells us that there is no difference between form and emptiness, and Nagarjuna also says that "Samsara differs in no way from Nirvana, nor does Nirvana differ in any way from Samsara" [*Madhyamaka-śāstra*, XXV.19]. How then could there be an Enlightenment that is separate from our everyday lives or from the world in which we live? So while Manjushri represents the causal stage [因地], the teachings and practices that are to be understood and cultivated if one is to achieve Enlightenment, Samantabhadra is the actual result [果地], Enlightenment itself as realized and manifested in the world. The ultimate aim of the Huayen practitioner, therefore, is to become Samantabhadra, as Sudhana does at the

culmination of his quest when, having seen how the entire universe is contained within the body of Samantabhadra and how it is filled with his activities, he "also saw himself teaching and guiding beings in all the worlds in every direction that were within the body of Samantabhadra".<sup>32</sup>

This is also the message of the ten ox-herding pictures [十牛圖] of Chinese Buddhism. The eighth picture is an empty circle in which the distinction between man and ox has vanished, because all phenomena are now perceived as identical in their emptiness. This is the realm of Manjushri. In the final, tenth, picture however we see the herdsman, now transformed into a buddha, re-entering the market-place of the world with open hands to awaken others to their innate buddha-nature. This is the realm of Samantabhadra, in which everyday events are no different from the ultimate reality of the Dharmarealm [*dharmadhātu*]. There is no need for the display of extraordinary abilities because ordinary objects and occurrences can now effortlessly reveal the constant miracle of Enlightenment:

He has no need for secret knowledge or supernormal powers:  
Through him the withered trees burst into flower by themselves.<sup>33</sup>

It is true that for Huayen the idea of universal Enlightenment is represented above all by the figure of the Buddha Vairocana, as Fa Zang points out in his commentary on the Sutra:

Vairocana Buddha appears to beings everywhere, preaching the true Dharma....<sup>34</sup>

Vairocana pervades worlds as numerous as atoms throughout the universe, responding to beings everywhere according to their capacities<sup>35</sup>

But as ordinary beings who are not yet enlightened, we still inhabit a dualistic realm where one thing is always opposed to another: this to that, subject to object, cause to effect, ignorance to Enlightenment and so on. Hence we need both of these bodhisattvas, Manjushri and Samantabhadra, if we are to achieve the single, universal Enlightenment of Vairocana and all the buddhas – Manjushri to point out the ultimate truth and Samantabhadra to demonstrate that no realization is complete until it is put into practice.

For most sentient beings, with all their ignorance and their attachments, the world of birth and death is full of suffering. We are reluctant to face this fact, however, and shy away from its implications, which is why Shakyamuni Buddha based all his teachings on the Four Truths of suffering, its origin, its cessation, and

the way leading to its cessation. But according to the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, for those who have awakened to the ultimate truth and can see things as they really are, the world appears as a field of Enlightenment where "countless buddhas are present within every single atom"<sup>36</sup> [Ch. 37] and in which the bodhisattva Samantabhadra is tirelessly active. This is the true Dharmarealm and it can be difficult even for other bodhisattvas to perceive:

Then the bodhisattva Samantanetra emerged from samadhi and said to the Buddha, "Lord, I have entered ten thousand infinite samadhis and looked for Samantabhadra but have been unable to find him. I cannot see his body, speech or mind, or his physical, verbal and mental activities, his seat or his dwelling-place."

The Buddha said, "So it is young man. You should know that such is the power of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra's inconceivable Liberation.... Why is this? Because the realm of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra is profound, immeasurable, incalculable. In brief, Samantabhadra's a damantine wisdom pervades the entire Dharmarealm without moving or abiding in any world whatsoever..."<sup>37</sup> [Ch. 27]

But despite his exalted nature, Samantabhadra's omnipresence means that he is always accessible, and the Sutra assures us that no-one who aspires to see him or to follow his example will be disappointed:

Young man, those who get to see the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, or do his work, who hear his name, think of him, remember him, have faith in him, ardently contemplate him, turn towards him, or seek him diligently, those who make vows and maintain their commitments unbroken -- all these will benefit accordingly; nothing will prove to have been in vain.<sup>38</sup> [Ch. 27]

With the realization of this final "inconceivable Liberation" the Dharma-wheel has come full circle: from the enlightened awareness of Vairocana, through the enlightened wisdom of Manjushri to the enlightened activity of Samantabhadra. So the Huayen tradition claims that the entire Buddhist path is contained within these three figures, and Fa Zang says that

ultimately there are no followers of the Two Vehicles who will not become bodhisattvas of the Common (Huayen) Teaching, and none of those bodhisattvas who will not enter on this Dharma of Samantabhadra.<sup>39</sup>

## 4. The Sutra

The sutra on which the Huayen School is based is generally referred to as the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (Ch. *Huáyén Jīng*). The word *avataṃsaka* here seems to mean something like a large number or collection of some kind, and corresponds to the word *phalpo-che*, which may mean 'crowd' or 'host', in the Tibetan title of the Sutra. It could perhaps also be derived from *avataṃsa*, which refers to a ring-shaped ornament or a garland of flowers, and this would bring it closer to the meaning of the Chinese *huá-yén*, literally "flower adornment".

Fa Zang, however, tells us that the Sanskrit equivalent of *huáyén* is in fact the word *gaṇḍavyūha*,<sup>40</sup> and that the word *gaṇḍa* means "flowers" while *vyūha* means "adornment" [Commentary]. He adds that according to his informant, a learned monk from central India called Divākara, *vyūha* can also refer specifically to a kind of elaborate ritual offering consisting of six tiers adorned with flowers, jewels and buddha-images.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, while *vyūha* does commonly indicate a splendid display of some kind, Sanskrit dictionaries do not recognize "flower(s)" as a possible meaning for *gaṇḍa*. To make the situation even more confusing, *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* is also the title of the still surviving Sanskrit text that corresponds to the final chapter, "Entering the Dharmarealm", of the Chinese *Flower Adornment Sutra*. Furthermore, when this final chapter was subsequently re-translated into Chinese as a separate text in the 8th century, it was still called the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, that is, it was given the same title as the previous two translations of which it formed only the final section.

Given all this linguistic ambiguity and uncertainty, modern scholars have generally adopted the convention of keeping the term "Gandavyuha Sutra" for the story of Sudhana considered as a separate text, while referring to the 'complete' *Flower Adornment Sutra* as the "Avatamsaka Sutra". From a practical point of view, this would seem to be the simplest solution.

In addition to the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, or the chapter "Entering the Dharmarealm", which tells the story of Sudhana's pilgrimage, there is one other chapter of the Sutra which still survives in the original Sanskrit. This is the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*, the sutra, or chapter, which deals with the ten stages [*daśa-bhūmi*] of the bodhisattva's career. The *Daśabhūmika* was an extremely influential text and helped to shape the concept of the bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism generally. Apart from these two works, the original Sanskrit of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* now only survives in short passages quoted by Indian Buddhist authors, notably

Shantideva, who in his *Compendium of Training* [*Śikṣāsamuccaya*] quotes from the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* six times and from the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* eleven times.

The complete *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* therefore exists now only in translation. There is a Tibetan translation done by Jinamitra and others at the end of the 9th century, but the Huayen School is of course based on the Chinese translations, of which there are said to be three, done in the 5th, 7th and 8th centuries respectively.

The Sutra was first translated into Chinese by Buddhahadra, a monk originally from Kapilavastu, in sixty fascicles between 418 and 422. Two hundred years passed before a second translation appeared, in this case by a Khotanese monk called Shikshananda [*Śikṣānanda*]. This translation also took four years, from 695 to 699, and was in eighty fascicles. It was subsequently re-edited and slightly expanded by Fa Zang and others with the help of Divākara. The original manuscripts for both translations, like Shikshananda himself, came from the region of Khotan, a city on the Central Asian trade routes that for a long time played a very active role in the development and propagation of Mahayana Buddhism.

The manuscript for the third translation, however, came from Udra in eastern India. But although this translation, in forty fascicles, was also given the title "Flower Adornment Sutra" [*Huáyén Jīng*], it contains in fact only the chapter dealing with Sudhana's "Entry Into the Dharmarealm", corresponding to the Sanskrit *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*. It was completed between 796 and 798 by the monk Prajña, who also appended to it a short text on the vows of Samantabhadra, the *Bhadracarīpraṇidhāna*. (The word *bhadra* here could be taken either to refer to Samantabhadra specifically, or simply as an adjective meaning "auspicious"; *carīpraṇidhāna* means "conduct and vows".) The *Bhadracarīpraṇidhāna* was well known to Buddhists in India at the time, as it is still to Mahayana Buddhists everywhere, and nowadays it is commonly printed as an extra "chapter" at the end of the Shikshananda translation as well.

It is difficult to fix a time for the composition of any Mahayana sutra because they have generally grown organically, like plants developing from seed to full flowering, over a long period of time. In the case of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* the question is particularly complicated because different chapters have circulated separately as independent texts at various times, while other chapters only appear as part of the complete text. Some modern scholars suggest that the text as we have it is the result of a process which may have taken 300 years or so, from the first or second to the fourth century C.E.

As for the Sutra's geographical origins, Khotan would seem to be the most

plausible candidate for the place where the text was finally edited into a coherent whole, and some scholars have indeed claimed to detect traces of Central Asian influence in the style or contents of the Sutra. On the other hand, the story of Sudhana's pilgrimage is mostly set in southern India and contains frequent references to the ocean. Another sign of its southern connections may perhaps be seen in the detailed depiction of the story by the beautiful stone relief sculptures of the great stupa of Borobodur in Java.

But for the Huayen School the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* is not just a historical text -- it is also a direct and complete manifestation of the Buddha's Enlightenment. Huayen tradition therefore accounts for the Sutra's origins by using a symbolic or mythical language quite different from the factual narratives of modern historians:

According to the *Great Treatise on Transcendental Wisdom*, most of the Mahayana sutras were compiled by Manjushri, and this Sutra in particular. But after the passing away of the Buddha, the saints hid them... and for more than six hundred years they remained in the palace of the Naga King in the sea, unknown to the world. Then the bodhisattva Nagarjuna entered the palace of the Nagas, where he spent a day studying these profound texts and managed to learn them by heart.<sup>42</sup> [Fa Zang, *The Transmission of the Avatamsaka Sūtra*]

In other words, these texts contained a depth of wisdom that the world was not yet capable of comprehending, so they were kept in the realm of the Nagas, beings with special powers who take the form of serpents or dragons, until someone appeared who would be able to grasp their true significance. Fa Zang also points out that the text of the Sutra as we have it represents only one small facet of the whole, accommodated to our sense-bound imagination, and that the real Sutra is coextensive with the entire universe:

In Western countries it is said that Nagarjuna entered the palace of the Nagas and there saw the *Adornment Sutra of Great and Inconceivable Liberation* [*Avatamsaka-mahācintyāvīmokṣa Sūtra*]. There were three versions. The longest version contained as many verses as there are atoms in ten three-thousandfold world systems and as many chapters as there are atoms in a world of four continents. The medium-sized version consisted of 498,800 stanzas and 1,200 chapters. The short version consisted of 100,000 stanzas and 48 chapters, and ... it is this version that is currently circulating in India.<sup>43</sup> [*The Transmission of the Avatamsaka Sutra*]

Our ability to perceive the true nature of the Sutra is limited because our senses are limited. So "the visions of Eternity, by reason of narrowed perceptions, / Are become weak visions of time and space" [William Blake, *Jerusalem*]. But the enlightened, those who have purified their minds and senses sufficiently, can see the real aspect of things more clearly, for "if the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite" [Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*]. Fa Zang calls this infinite aspect of the Sutra the Eternal Version:

First there is the Eternal Version.... This is constantly and incessantly being preached at every moment and in the tip of every hair throughout all the various world-systems. It is not something that can be gathered into a written text, nor is there any limit to the number of its chapters and verses.<sup>44</sup> [Commentary]

That is, just as our buddha-nature, the "wisdom of the Tathagata" that is "present in its entirety within the body of every being"<sup>45</sup> [*Avatamsaka Sūtra*, Ch. 37], is our own true nature, so the 'Eternal Version' of the Sutra is the true nature of the entire physical universe. This is made explicit in the famous metaphor of the sutra in the atom:

It is as though there were a great sutra, equivalent in size to a thousand million worlds, in which were written all the things that have happened in those thousand million worlds. ... And this great sutra, although equivalent in size to a thousand million worlds, is contained in its entirety within a single atom; and as it is with one atom, so is it with all atoms. Then at a certain time there appears a person of wisdom and perspicacity. He is perfectly endowed with pure celestial vision, and he sees the Sutra in the atom. He knows that it would be of great benefit to beings, so he thinks, "I will use my strength to break this atom open and take the Sutra out, so that it may bring benefit to all beings." When this thought occurs to him, he employs skilful means to break the atom open. Then he takes the Sutra out and bestows its benefits on beings everywhere.<sup>46</sup> [Ch. 37]

Here the "great sutra" is of course the *Flower Adornment Sutra* itself and the Buddha is the "person of wisdom and perspicacity" who perceives the truth hidden in the very fabric of the material world and reveals it to all beings.

A similar idea can be found in other traditions also, as for example in the writings of Maximus the Confessor [580?-662], for whom, according to Andrew

Louth<sup>1</sup>, "The cosmos is like a book, and the Bible is like the cosmos: both consist of words, *logoi*, which, though diverse, when read with understanding form a single harmonious whole, the meaning of which is the mind of God himself."<sup>47</sup> So for Huayen too "the cosmos is like a book" but its real significance is to be found within the pages of the Sutra. This is why Huayen insists that Enlightenment [*bodhi*] is the ultimate nature, not only of our minds, but also of the physical phenomena that make up the world in which we live. Li Tungxuan, for example, says that "the preaching of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* takes place at the Seat of Enlightenment in the kingdom of Magadha, in all the worlds, and within every atom"<sup>48</sup> [Commentary]; while Fa Zang points out that "all phenomena contain the essence of the Teaching, ... for there is nothing that cannot be the cause of Enlightenment".<sup>49</sup> [Commentary]

For the Huayen School the words of the Sutra itself are of course the principal "cause of Enlightenment", and in this respect Huayen stands apart from most other forms of Buddhism. Buddhist tradition in general tends to regard language with suspicion, as a product of our dualistic consciousness and a perpetuator of delusion, and it insists that the ultimate truth can never be defined or expressed in words. Huayen however is always rigorously nondualistic and, while acknowledging that "all dharmas are merely created by language"<sup>50</sup> [Ch. 38], at the same time also claims that "all dharmas are ultimately real"<sup>51</sup> [*ibid.*]. This is in accord with the basic Madhyamika principle that Samsara and Nirvana are ultimately one and the same:

Samsara differs in no way from Nirvana, nor does Nirvana differ in any way from Samsara. [*Madhyamaka-śāstra*, XXV.19]

Form is emptiness and that same emptiness is form; form is no different from emptiness and emptiness is no different from form; whatever is emptiness is also form and whatever is form is also emptiness. [*Heart Sutra*]

From this point of view, therefore, it is possible to see "all words and sounds as the sound of the Dharma"<sup>52</sup> [Ch. 26]; and that is why it is also possible for bodhisattvas to "know that all dharmas are unborn" and yet to be "constantly turning the Wheel of Dharma"<sup>53</sup> for the sake of sentient beings [Ch. 27], using words to convey a truth beyond words:

Everything is beyond words, but wordlessness itself has no real existence either, so the holy Teaching is also devoid of teaching.<sup>54</sup>  
[Fa Zang, Commentary]

By means of such soundless sounds, nameless names and unspoken speech, they instruct all insubstantial sentient beings, enabling them to break free of their karma and attain to the fundamental ground of being.<sup>55</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

The text of the Sutra is traditionally divided into "chapters" and "assemblies". Each assembly, which may consist of a number of chapters or just a single chapter, begins with a change of scene. In Shikshananda's translation there are thirty-nine chapters altogether, divided into nine assemblies, making the text as a whole the largest single sutra in the Chinese Buddhist Canon [*Tripitaka*]. Despite the Sutra's size and complexity however, the Huayen School has always regarded it as teaching a specific and coherent message about the nature of Buddhahood and the means to its attainment. According to one common interpretation, the text of the Sutra can be divided into four sequential parts which guide the practitioner step by step through the stages of faith, understanding and cultivation to ultimate realization. The Sutra therefore begins by presenting a vision of Enlightenment which is intended to awaken faith in the heart of its readers and inspire them with the desire to achieve this Enlightenment themselves. The following chapters then deepen the readers' understanding of the nature of Enlightenment and go on to explain in detail the practices that bodhisattvas must undertake if they are to develop their wisdom and compassion to the point where they will be able to fulfil the vows and emulate the conduct of Samantabhadra, liberating beings everywhere from their delusions and opening their eyes to the ultimate truth. Finally, in the story of Sudhana, the Sutra provides the concrete example of a practitioner who followed the bodhisattva path from beginning to end, from the first Aspiration to Enlightenment [*bodhicittotpāda*] through a long period of training under many teachers until the achievement of final realization.

When seen in this light, the Sutra itself becomes a guru, a spiritual teacher, and for the Huayen School this is one of the qualities that make this particular text unique. Other Buddhist sutras, no matter how profound and authoritative they may be, are still venerated simply and primarily as records of the Buddha's teaching. The *Avatamsaka Sūtra* however is much more than this, for it is also a direct manifestation of the Buddha's Enlightenment. That is to say, it is not just a text but also a *nirmāṇakāya*, an embodiment of the all-embracing awareness of Buddhahood in the form of paper and ink. The Huayen tradition affirms that those who have faith in this Sutra, listen carefully to what it has to say and open their hearts to its inner

meaning will, like Sudhana, be infallibly guided by the wisdom of Manjushri through the commitments and practices of Samantabhadra to the state of complete Enlightenment that is Vairocana.

## 5. The Lineage

### The Lineage

Buddhism begins, in our present historical cycle, with the Enlightenment of the Buddha Shakyamuni, but Buddhism as an institution did not yet exist until that same Enlightenment had been communicated to others. Enlightenment [*bodhi*] in itself transcends time and space and is the realm of Manjushri, but in becoming manifest within the ever-changing stream of events that are our experience of historical reality, it enters the realm of Samantabhadra.

Buddhism is thus a historical phenomenon created by the transmission of the Buddha's original Enlightenment from mind to mind and from age to age. To outsiders the development of Buddhism during the past two and a half millennia appears to be a process by which a particular social institution underwent a dramatic geographical expansion and created different schools of thought as it adapted to different cultures and to shifting historical circumstances. For Buddhists, however, all the varied forms which Buddhism has assumed are merely branches, shaped by people's capacities, interests and emotional tendencies, of a single lineage of Enlightenment.

The lines by which Enlightenment has been transmitted across borders and through time are not just the threads from which the historical fabric of Buddhism has been woven, they also provide the ultimate guarantee of the validity of the Buddha's teachings, for they make it clear to us that dedicated practitioners, at all times and in every country to which those teachings have spread, continue to experience for themselves the same truth that Shakyamuni Buddha realized beneath the Bodhi-tree in north-eastern India so many centuries ago. This is the real significance of lineage for Buddhism. In the Sutra it is most often called the "seed" or lineage of Buddhahood [*buddhagotra/buddhavamsa*] and the vital importance of preserving it intact is constantly emphasized. "Your teachers are like kind-hearted mothers," the children Shrisambhava and Shrisambhavi tell Sudhana, "for they give birth to the lineage of Enlightenment."<sup>56</sup> Similarly, the Sutra tells us that bodhisattvas "never abandon their deep commitment to ensuring that the buddhas' lineage of Enlightenment is preserved unbroken"<sup>57</sup> [Ch. 38], and that they "fulfil all the vows and practices of Samantabhadra... and ensure that the lineage of all the buddhas remains unbroken"<sup>58</sup> [*Ibid.*]. Li Tungxuan emphasizes the important role that the Sutra plays in preserving this lineage:

The message of the Sutra is entrusted to worldlings so that they may become enlightened and come to understand this teaching. They will then be born into the Buddha's family and transmit the Doctrine, so that the seed of Enlightenment will not be cut off. If the Sutra had been entrusted to the great bodhisattvas, worldlings would have no share in it and the sages would become enlightened by themselves. If there were no worldlings studying and practising it, the seed of Enlightenment would disappear from worldly life and the Sutra itself would become scattered and lost.<sup>59</sup>

[Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

The lineage of Enlightenment appears in this world as the Buddhist Sangha or Community. The word *saṅgha* has two common meanings in Buddhism. At one level it is the Aryasangha, the Noble or Holy Community, which consists of all those who have achieved at least some degree of Enlightenment and who together form the third of the Three Jewels, or the third aspect of the Triple Gem, in which all Buddhists take refuge. At the mundane level it usually refers to the monastic community, to the world-wide community of Buddhist monks and nuns, who by their distinctive dress and mode of life, and through their teaching of the Dharma, continually remind lay followers of the ultimate goal of Buddhism and function as a concrete symbol of the enlightened Aryasangha.

It was the compassionate urge to make the Buddha's Enlightenment accessible to all beings that led to the creation and dissemination of Buddhism. The monastic community came into existence when Shakyamuni Buddha ordained his first disciples, and the Aryasangha appeared in this world when those same disciples achieved Nirvana. But Buddhism as a social and historical phenomenon was only born when the Buddha sent his disciples out to preach, with the following words:

Go forth, monks, for the welfare and happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare and happiness of gods and men. Let no two of you go by the same way. Teach the Dharma that is good at the beginning, good in the middle and good at the end.

[Pali *Vinaya*, 1.21]

From that moment on, Buddhist missionaries gradually spread out through the length and breadth of India, instructing, guiding and enlightening the people. In the course of time, following established trade routes, they also took the Buddhadharma to Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia and Central Asia, and by the turn of the millennium Buddhism

had begun to establish itself in China. The earliest reference to Buddhism in Chinese history is contained in an official statement issued by the reigning emperor Ming of the Han [漢明帝] to thank his half-brother Liu Ying [劉英], Prince of the state of Chu, for a large gift of silk. In his statement the Emperor alludes to his brother's devotion to both Daoism and Buddhism, and demonstrates his own knowledge of the new religion by mentioning the bloodless nature of its rituals and by including a couple of Sanskrit terms, namely, *upāsaka* [伊蒲塞] and *śramaṇa* [桑門] — that is, lay and monastic Buddhist practitioners respectively. The fact that Buddhism, its customs, and even some of its technical terms could be regarded as well-known in court circles by the time this imperial thank-you note was composed in 62/3 C.E. suggests that it must have first entered China at a much earlier date, but there is no way of knowing for certain when that might have been.

As far as we can tell from surviving texts, Chinese religion before the Han Dynasty had taken three principal forms. On the one hand there was the communal religion of the peasantry, which was based on the worship of local deities and the forces of nature, and on the celebration of seasonal festivals and of rites connected with the harvest, with family life and so on. The aristocracy also had similar cults, but these were performed with greater pomp and solemnity (and at much greater cost), for the superior status of the ruling class was believed to be reflected in the greater influence their ceremonies had on the hierarchy of divine and natural powers. The ancestors of the dominant clan in particular were elevated to the level of the highest divinities and were worshipped with elaborate rituals in the clan's temples, and their advice was constantly sought on important matters of state. The word *dì* 帝 (in modern pronunciation) seems to have referred originally to these divinized ancestors, or perhaps to their first progenitor, but came in later usage to denote both the Emperor and the highest God. The concept of the Emperor as a kind of high priest mediating between Heaven and Earth was to remain of fundamental importance throughout Chinese history.

But in addition to these communal cults, there was a third type of religion that was widespread in ancient China, and indeed throughout the whole of eastern Asia, and that has survived down to the present day. This was what is usually called shamanism. In pre-Han China, that is, before the second century B.C.E., shamans were usually women [巫, *wū*], although male shamans [覡, *xí*] also existed, and they were respected and consulted at every level of society, from the villages to the royal courts. Shamans had the ability to enter a state of trance in which their chosen deity would take possession of them and act or speak through them. In this way they could provide practical or spiritual advice that came directly from supernatural sources, or bring blessings to a community by allowing the god or goddess to become manifest

in the midst of the people. By making direct communication with the divine possible, they also opened the way to a more personal or individual spirituality than the communal rituals permitted. It was from this strand of early Chinese religion that Daoism subsequently emerged.

With the founding of the Han Dynasty, China entered on a period of steady growth and prosperity that lasted for almost four hundred years. The territories conquered by the Han armies extended to what are now North Korea and North Vietnam in the north and south, and along the northwestern trade routes as far as Dunhuang in the Central Asian region. To the people who lived in China during these centuries it must have seemed as though an empire had been established that would last for ever, and even now the Chinese language can still be referred to as “the language of the Han” [漢語, *hànyǔ*] and those who are ethnically Chinese as “the people of the Han” [漢族, *hànzú*].

As intellectual support for this sense of all-encompassing stability, Han Dynasty scholars and philosophers developed an ideology that linked human affairs with cosmic processes in an elaborate system of correspondences. For administrative purposes the Han government relied on a mixture of Confucian ethics and the authoritarian legal system they had inherited from the previous, short-lived Qin Dynasty. But human society was also believed to be closely linked to the functioning of the physical universe, so that political disorder was likely to upset the balance of nature and be reflected in the occurrence of floods, droughts and other disasters. This intimate relationship between the human and natural worlds was explained by associating political and social institutions, such as branches of government, with the fundamental constituents of the material world as understood by the ancient Chinese: the five agents or elements (earth, metal, water, wood and fire), the five colours, the five flavours, the notes of the pentatonic scale and so on. In this way a vast network of symbolic correspondences could be built up in which the Han empire would appear to be an integral and permanent part of the cosmic order.

But no samsaric phenomenon is permanent, and eventually even the great Han Dynasty collapsed and vanished. With its fall, the imposing official ideology which had held sway over people’s minds for so long also lost its relevance and many people began to search for alternative ways of understanding the world they now found themselves living in.

During the Han Dynasty, Daoism had also grown and developed into a coherent religion with its own communal rituals and methods of meditation based on ancient shamanic practices. It also had a distinctive cosmology and ontology which taught that the world had emerged from a primordial void and evolved through the interplay of the negative and positive forces of yin and yang, under the constant guidance of

the ineffable Dao, or Way, of the natural universe. As Buddhism became better known in Chinese society, it was at first taken to be a new and exotic form of Daoism, and the earliest translations of Buddhist texts tended to use Daoist words and phrases as equivalents for Buddhist technical terms. The confusion and misunderstanding that this type of translation often created, even among Buddhist practitioners, was only gradually corrected as Buddhist books and missionaries continued to make their way to China from India and Central Asia.

The collapse of the Han Dynasty created conditions that favoured the expansion of Buddhism. Now that the Han imperial ideology had been discredited, people became more receptive to new and even foreign ways of thinking, while the political and military turbulence that was engulfing China impelled them to search for more personal and spiritual solutions to the problems of the age. At a time when North China was the scene of continual warfare between competing Turkic, Tungusic, Mongolian and Tibetan armies, and South China, while flourishing culturally and economically, remained politically weak and unstable, Buddhism's assurance that one could achieve unshakeable freedom of mind [*akopya cetovimukti*] in the midst of suffering and impermanence began to attract increasing numbers of people at every level of society.

During the third and fourth centuries the study and practice of Buddhism continued to develop as more texts from the 'West' (as India and Central Asia were called) became available. The Prajnaparamita literature and the teachings concerning emptiness [*śūnyatā*] aroused a great deal of interest throughout this period, but a correct understanding of them was still hampered by the lack of standardized terminology and by a tendency to confuse Buddhist emptiness with the Daoist concept of a primordial void.

In the year 401 the learned Central Asian monk Kumarajiva arrived in the capital, Chang'an, having already mastered Chinese during the sixteen or seventeen years he had been kept under house arrest by the ruler of Liangzhou, about halfway between Dunhuang and Chang'an. Over the next ten years Kumarajiva and his translation team produced a large number of important Mahayana sutras and other texts in translations which for the first time managed to combine accuracy and consistency with a graceful literary style. Many of Kumarajiva's translations have remained the standard versions in Chinese Buddhism right down to the present day.

In addition to his competence as a translator, Kumarajiva was also an expert in the Madhyamika teachings. He was therefore able to provide Chinese Buddhists with the precise and authoritative explanation of the doctrine of emptiness that they had long been seeking. So now that scholars and practitioners had access to reliable translations of the sutras, and were also able to arrive at a clear understanding of the

vitally important concepts of no-self [*nairātmya*] and emptiness, it became possible for Chinese Buddhism to achieve a new level of maturity which would be both authentically Buddhist and genuinely Chinese. Before the end of the next century the first native schools of Chinese Buddhism had begun to appear.

One important text that Kumarajiva and his team did not translate was the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, but in 408 the monk Buddhahadra arrived in Chang'an. Originally from Kapilavastu, in what is now Nepal, Buddhahadra had travelled to China by ship, preserved from the perils of the voyage, according to his biography, by his precognitive powers. In Chang'an he seems to have acquired a copy of the Sutra, which had been brought to China from Khotan, but in 413 he was caught up in a political dispute among the Buddhist establishment there and fled to South China. Here, in 418, he began to translate the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, a task he completed in 422. Once again, we are told, he had supernatural help:

Buddhabhadra translated the Sutra at the Bodhimaṇḍa [道場] Monastery... where there is still an Avatamsaka Hall.... When he began to translate the Sutra, two figures dressed in green emerged from the pond in front of the hall to offer incense and flowers. Everyone present saw these beings, together with the deities and guardian spirits that accompanied them.<sup>60</sup>

[Fa Zang, *The Transmission of the Avatamsaka Sūtra*]

Although some chapters of the present Sutra circulated for a while as independent texts, Buddhahadra's translation was for nearly three hundred years the only complete version of the Sutra available to Chinese readers.

Some people must surely have studied and meditated on the Sutra during the fifth and sixth centuries, but there is little surviving evidence of any serious attempt to come to grips with its fundamental message. Even if not fully understood, however, the Sutra won general respect for its length, splendour and apparent profundity, and devout recitation of the text was believed to have great spiritual and even magical efficacy. A typical story, though from a later date, is related by Fa Zang, who says he heard it personally from the monk concerned. This monk, whose name was Tan Xun [曇訓], told Fa Zang that he and his teacher were travelling in the mountains one day when they encountered a Buddhist nun who seemed to be living there by herself. She pointed out to them a stone hut on the other side of the valley where they could spend the night. That evening the two monks heard the nun reciting the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, and when they looked across the valley they could see light being emitted from her mouth. As the recitation continued throughout the night, the light steadily increased till it "lit the

whole valley up as though it were broad daylight”<sup>61</sup>. Then it gradually contracted again, finally vanishing as the nun concluded her chanting. When the monks went to pay their respects to her the next day, they could find no trace of her. [Fa Zang, *ibid.*]

An identifiable Huayen lineage, however, does not begin to appear in the historical records until the seventh century. The first important name to be mentioned is that of the charismatic monk Fa Shun [法順], who for some reason is generally known by his lay surname as Du Shun [杜順, 556-640]. Du Shun’s contemporary reputation was based on his saintly life and his ability to perform miracles, but his importance for Huayen comes from his supposed authorship of two seminal texts, *Contemplation of the Dharmarealm* [法界觀門] and *Meditation and Contemplation According to the Five Teachings* [五教止觀]. Whether he actually wrote these works or not is uncertain, but their ascription to him, together with the fact that he gave monastic ordination to Zhi Yen [智儼], who laid the real foundations of what was to become the Huayen School, proved sufficient to gain him the title of First Patriarch in the official Huayen lineage. (The word *zǔ* [祖], usually translated in Buddhist contexts as “patriarch”, originally referred to the earliest male ancestor of a Chinese clan. Eventually all the major schools of Chinese Buddhism, starting with the Chan School, came to see their lineages as having been initially established by a series of enlightened spiritual ‘ancestors’ for whom the same term was used.)

It was the so-called Second Patriarch, Zhi Yen [602-688] who might more properly be identified as the founder of the Huayen School, as it was he who first set down most of the school’s essential doctrines in the twenty or so works on Huayen that he composed. Only half a dozen of these works survive today, including his brief commentary on Buddhahadra’s translation of the Sutra. Zhi Yen originally turned to Huayen as the result of a spiritual crisis which impelled him to seek guidance by opening the Sutra at random and meditating on whatever he found there. The passage his eyes fell on dealt with the six aspects of all phenomena: whole and part, identity and difference, and integration and disintegration. Its significance eluded him at first but was later resolved for him by a “foreign monk”, who advised him to meditate on the Six Aspects [六相] for a month or two. After less than a month’s diligent meditation, Zhi Yen’s mind became perfectly clear and he immediately gained a thorough understanding of the teachings. Thereafter he lived a quiet life in a monastery in Chang’an, but his commitment to Huayen was deepened by his opposition to the general enthusiasm for the type of Buddhism currently being taught by the great pilgrim and translator Xuan Zang [玄奘, 596/602-664]. Xuan Zang, faithfully transmitting the Yogacara

teachings of his Indian guru Shilabhadra [Śīlabhadra], taught that some beings would never attain Enlightenment, but Zhi Yen believed in the truth of what the Sutra taught: that Enlightenment was the essential nature of all beings and that its ultimate realization was inevitable.

Two of Zhi Yen's pupils were to play a vital role in transmitting the Huayen teachings to later generations and so making it possible for them to continue in an unbroken line down to the 21st century. These two were Uisang [義湘, 625-702], who subsequently returned to his native Korea and established the Huayen (Kor. Hwaeom) lineage there, and Fa Zang [法藏, 643-712], who promoted his master's teachings so effectively that Huayen became recognized as one of the six major schools of Chinese Buddhism, with Fa Zang himself as its principal exponent.

Fa Tzang was born in 643 into a well-to-do family of Sogdian origin, originally from Samarkand in Central Asia. (The Sogdians were a people akin to the present-day Iranians and Kurds.) He himself however was born and brought up as a native Chinese speaker in Changan. He was a devout Buddhist and at the age of fifteen or sixteen he withdrew to the mountains for several years of study and meditation. Eventually he returned to Chang'an because his parents were ill, and it was then that he met Zhi Yen, who was preaching in the capital at the time. Zhi Yen greeted him as the disciple he had long been waiting for, and when he was dying in 668, he named Fa Tzang, who was still only a 25-year old layman, as his Dharma heir. At the same time he extracted a promise from Fa Zang that he would become a monk, a promise that the latter fulfilled three years later, in 671.

During his lifetime Fa Zang was preceptor to five rulers of China, including his first royal patron, Empress Wu. In 690 he persuaded the Empress to have a new manuscript of the Sutra brought to China from Khotan, and he himself was one of those who assisted Shikshananda in the work of translation. He was sometimes called on to provide supernatural aid to the state, and on these occasions he made use of tantric (esoteric) rituals. In 697 he is said to have conjured up a vision of the eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara that routed an invading foreign army. In 708 he brought rain, and in 711 snow, after prolonged periods of drought.

He expounded the entire Sutra more than thirty times in the course of his life and wrote a detailed commentary on the Buddhahadra translation. The teachings of the Sutra, he said, were to be heard "even in the midst of the great ocean or in the fire that consumes the world"<sup>62</sup>, adding that "all beings without exception will eventually follow this teaching"<sup>63</sup> for it is something "that they are all endowed with"<sup>64</sup> and apart from it "there is no other way to achieve Enlightenment"<sup>65</sup> [Fa Zang, Commentary]. In addition to this commentary, he

wrote more than forty other books and essays, two thirds of which still survive. He is traditionally regarded as the Third Patriarch but also as the real creator of the Huayen School. To his contemporaries he was often known simply as ‘Ven. Huayen’ [華嚴法師].

Fa Zang’s chief disciple, Hwei Yuan [慧苑, 673-743], developed ideas that were significantly different from his master’s, so he stands somewhat apart from the main Huayen lineage. A more important and influential figure was the scholar-hermit Li Tungxuan [李通玄]. The details of Li’s life are obscure and the dates given for his birth and death range from 635 to 659 for the former and from 730 to 754 for the latter. It is clear from his writings however that he had a deep interest in the *Book of Changes* [*Yi Jing*] and he appears to have fully committed himself to Buddhism only when he was in his forties. He then came across a copy of the new translation of the Sutra by Shikshananda and soon grasped the profound significance of its teachings. “The preaching of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*,” he was later to write, “takes place at the Seat of Enlightenment in the kingdom of Magadha, in every world and within every atom”<sup>66</sup>, and “any being that enters this Sutra through faith will at once take on the qualities of the Tathagata’s ocean of truth and wisdom”<sup>67</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]. Thereafter he devoted the rest of his life to studying and explaining the Huayen teachings. He retired to the mountains to write a complete commentary on the new translation of the Sutra, assisted, it is said, by a tiger who carried his books and led him to a suitable spot. In addition to this commentary, which places particular emphasis on realization of the Sutra’s teachings through practice, he also composed a number of essays on Huayen, some of which are still extant.

The last figure of major importance for the formation of the Huayen School was Cheng Guan [澄觀, 738-840]. He was born in what is now Zhejiang Province and began his formal study of Buddhism at the age of eight or nine. He was ordained as a novice three years later and received the full bhikshu ordination in 757. He also took the Bodhisattva Precepts, to which he added ten personal vows of his own, one of them being “to always expound the great *Avatamsaka Sūtra*”<sup>68</sup>.

From an early age Cheng Guan acquired an extensive knowledge of all forms of Buddhism and he was widely read in many fields of secular learning as well. For some time he travelled throughout China and studied with many famous teachers, but in the end he settled on Wutai Shan [五臺山, ‘Fivepeak Mountain’] and devoted himself wholly to Huayen. He remained there for five years composing a detailed commentary and subcommentary on the Shikshananda translation of the Sutra which has retained its authority down to the present day. He also wrote a great many other influential works on Huayen, and it was he who

first devised the formula of the Four Dharmarealms [四法界] which became the best-known summary of the Huayen view of the nature of reality. So great was Cheng Guan's contribution to Huayen that he is regarded as Fa Zang's legitimate successor, even though he was born twenty-six years after the latter's death, and as the fourth Huayen patriarch. In the preface to his great Commentary, Cheng Guan wrote:

To lay bare the subtlest mysteries, shed revealing light on the mind and its objects, fully explain the true nature of things, comprehend the workings of cause and effect, and encompass everything in a vast synthesis: only the *Mahā-vaipulya-buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra* is able to do this.<sup>69</sup>

Cheng Guan is said to have had a hundred disciples, but one was pre-eminent and came to be regarded as the fifth and last of the Huayen patriarchs. This was Zung Mi [宗密, 780-841]. Tzung Mi received a traditional Confucian education but in 807 he encountered the Chan master Dao Yuan [道圓] and promptly became his disciple. He soon took ordination and, while still a novice, experienced a great awakening on reading the *Sutra of Complete Enlightenment* [圓覺經]. When he subsequently also read Cheng Guan's commentary on the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, he felt that his experience of Enlightenment had been confirmed. He then became Cheng Guan's disciple and, eventually, his official successor in the Huayen patriarchal lineage. Because of this dual inheritance, Zung Mi has the unusual distinction of being a lineage holder in both Chan and Huayen. In addition to his many essays and commentaries on Huayen and on other Buddhist texts, he is also well known for his important and influential compilation, *A Comprehensive Sourcebook of Chan Teachings* [禪源諸詮集].

Zung Mi was a creative thinker who developed ideas of his own about the nature of the process by which ignorance is transformed into Enlightenment, and about the relationship between Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian teachings. In this respect he has played a significant role in the history of Chinese and East Asian Buddhism. Throughout his life, however, he emphasized the fundamental truth that he had learnt from the *Sutra of Complete Enlightenment*, that Buddhahood is innate in all beings:

All beings possess the nature of Enlightenment, which is as bright, clear and tranquil in them as it is in the buddhas themselves. But for beginningless aeons beings have failed to understand this, so they have clung blindly to the body as the self and have consequently fallen prey to desire, aversion and all the passions. Thus they have continued to be caught up in the cycle of birth, old age, sickness and death for long periods of time. Yet within the body there remains the nature of Enlightenment which has never been subject to birth and death. It is as though we were to dream of being sent on a journey while in fact our sleeping body never moves at all. Once we become aware of this nature within us, we realize that it is the Dharmakaya and that it has never been controlled by or dependent on anything.<sup>70</sup>

[From *The Sublime World of the Huayen Teachings*]

From the tenth century on, although the Sutra and the Huayen teachings were widely known and respected throughout Chinese Buddhism, the Huayen School itself had relatively few adherents. The lineage continued unbroken however, and now in the 21st century there is a growing awareness that these teachings are especially suited to the complex age of cultural exchange and global communication in which we are living. At the present time the principal centre of Huayen study and practice is Taiwan, where two organizations have been especially active in spreading the teachings: the Huayen Lotus Society [華嚴蓮社] and the Huayen World Community [大華嚴寺].

The lineage of the Huayen Lotus Society derives from Zhejiang Province and was taken to Taiwan in 1949 by Ven. Nan Ting [南亭] and his disciple Cheng Yi [成一]. The main temple, of which Ven. Cheng Yi became the senior abbot -- a position he held until shortly before his death in 2011 at the age of 97 -- is in Taipei, and there is also a branch temple in California. The Society publishes a great deal of Huayen literature, runs a number of educational institutions, and teaches Huayen in Taiwan, China and elsewhere. “In the realm of Huayen,” Ven. Cheng Yi says, “one is all and all are one”<sup>71</sup>, and “the chattering of a mountain stream is the voice of the Buddha preaching the Dharma.”<sup>72</sup> “A comprehensive truth like this is not easily met with in many lifetimes or in many aeons”<sup>73</sup>, so “when we have read or listened to the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, we should repay our spiritual debt to these sublime teachings by putting them into practice according to the Sutra’s instructions.”<sup>74</sup> [*All Ways* magazine Nos. 242, 239]

The Huayen World Community is an organization that was founded more recently by Ven. Hai Yun [海雲, b.1951], also known as Ji Meng [繼夢], the only ordained disciple of Ven. Meng Can [夢參, b. 1915], a Huayen master from north

China. Ven. Hai Yun sees Huayen as an ideal means for communicating the profound message of the Buddhadharma to the modern world, and he has travelled widely for this purpose to China, Malaysia, Singapore, North America, Australia and New Zealand. His teachings are also spread through books, audiotapes, CDs and DVDs. According to Ven. Hai Yun

The practice of Huayen rests on three basic premises:

- that you yourself and all beings are fully endowed with the Buddha-nature and will certainly achieve Buddhahood
- that every plant and tree, every grain of sand and mote of dust in the world in which we live is the realm of Samantabhadra
- that all your actions of body and mind, all your deeds and thoughts are the sublime practices of Samantabhadra.<sup>75</sup>

[*The Sublime Worlds of Huayen*, Taipei 2003]

In 2008, in a solemn ceremony in Taipei, Ven. Qin Yin [欽因], the 41st lineage holder in the northern Huayen line, officially transmitted the lineage to Ven. Hai Yun, who thereby became the 42nd in the Huayen line of succession.

The Huayen lineage of Enlightenment thus stretches back through time to Shakyamuni's original experience underneath the Bodhi Tree. Although it has been transmitted in different ways at different times and places by different individuals, the truth transmitted remains in every case the same, and the same motive has inspired all its transmitters, namely, the wish, as Fa Zang puts it

That I may open this secret treasury  
 And bring great benefit to myself and others;  
 That the Dharma may long remain in the world,  
 To transmit its light and requite the Buddha's kindness.<sup>76</sup>  
 [Fa Zang, Commentary]

“I have read through the ancient authorities,” he writes elsewhere, “and studied the old commentaries in detail, taking full account of the profound texts of the Tripitaka and relying on the sublime message of the Five Vehicles... It is my hope that all alike will turn back from the paths of delusion and share in the light of the dawning sun.”<sup>77</sup>  
 [Fa Zang, *Return to the Source*]

## 6. Space and Time

### Suffering

The universe we inhabit is one in which things exist and events take place within a dimensional framework of space and time. The appearance of this universe, as we perceive it, is shaped by the limitations of our minds and sense organs. It is also a field of Enlightenment in which space opens up a doorway to ontological emptiness, and temporal phenomena point to a truth that lies beyond all temporality. But in order to see these underlying realities we must first look more deeply into the flawed nature of the world we have created.

In his very first sermon the Buddha declared to the five ascetics who had been his disciples that it was through his understanding of four fundamental truths about the nature of suffering that he had become enlightened:

Once my insight into these Four Holy Truths as they really are ... had become completely purified ... I was able to claim that I had achieved supreme and perfect Enlightenment .... [SN 56.11]

Throughout Buddhist history these same four truths, of suffering, its cause, its elimination, and the way to eliminate it, have continued to be regarded as the very heart of the Buddha's message. Of course it is not necessary to be a fully enlightened buddha to see how suffering pervades all our experience in this world:

... out of sorrow have the worlds been built, and at the birth of a child or a star there is pain. [Oscar Wilde, "De Profundis"]

The word 'suffering' in the Buddhist sense however is not limited to the sense of physical and mental pain, nor is it meant to deny the obvious fact that we also enjoy moments of pleasure and feelings of happiness. The real problem is that eventually even pleasures vanish and happiness fades, and then all that we are left with a melancholy sense of the impermanence of everything:

The flower that smiles today  
 Tomorrow dies;  
 All that we wish to stay  
 Tempts and then flies.  
 What is this world's delight?  
 Lightning that mocks the night,  
 Brief, even as bright.

[Shelley, "Mutability" ]

When we become aware of this universal impermanence and notice how all that we love and value eventually slips through our fingers and disappears, we feel a pang of loss that is also a kind of suffering. But according to Buddhist teachings there is a still deeper level of awareness at which all phenomena are seen to be contingent and insubstantial by nature. If we are able to perceive this, we will realize that all our suffering comes from attachment to unrealities, and then we will truly begin to turn away from the endless cycle of birth and death and set our feet on the path to Enlightenment.

Huayen is no different from other forms of Buddhism in giving a central place to the Four Truths, and the Sutra devotes an entire chapter to the subject. This chapter, the eighth in the Shikshananda translation, does not expound the significance of the Four Truths, however, taking this knowledge for granted. Instead it simply lists the various names by which the Four Truths are known in other worlds throughout the universe. This is meant to demonstrate that these truths are indeed universal in their scope, and that their real meaning lies in their deeper content and not in the specific verbal formulas by which we know them. In other words, suffering, or *duḥkha* (as we call it in this world) is not a doctrine taught by Shakyamuni Buddha alone or confined to this particular planet, but is a reality inherent in the very nature of existence and common to all sentient beings, however they may perceive themselves or their surroundings.

## Emptiness

But for Mahayana Buddhism – and Huayen is no exception – it is just as important to examine the nature of our physical surroundings as it is to examine the self, for the two reflect one another as twin aspects of a single reality, a duality created by our fundamental ignorance. If, then, we look for the ultimate source of suffering in the external world, we will see that it comes from the impermanent and conditioned nature of all things. But why is everything in constant flux, why does

nothing ever remain as it is, unchanging? The answer of the texts to such questions can be summed up in a single word: emptiness [*śūnyatā*]. Because we cling to the world so persistently, it seems to us to be something real and solid, but in fact it is only a shifting pattern of appearances and has no real substance at all. As the Sutra says [Ch. 21] :

All dharmas are empty, false, unreal; they arise and vanish in swift succession, lacking all stability; they are like dreams, like shadows, like illusions, like magical displays, but they bewilder and deceive the foolish.<sup>78</sup>

The Buddha's great insight, however, was that the solution to the problem of suffering lies in the problem itself. He set out to discover an "unborn, unarisen, uncreated, un compounded" reality that transcended the suffering of the conditioned world around him, but after years of searching in vain for it in some realm beyond everyday experience, he finally realized that it could only be found within the very suffering that he had been trying to escape from. If we try to avoid suffering, as we inevitably do, we will continue to be enmeshed in it. It is only when we turn to face it and make the effort to understand its nature and its causes that we will be able to overcome it and enter the peace and perfect freedom of Enlightenment.

The same is true of emptiness: it is only by perceiving the ultimate unreality of all phenomena that we can arrive at an understanding of the ultimate reality that lies behind them. It is only when we know for certain that we are asleep and that all our experiences are "like dreams" that we can finally say that we have become fully awake [*buddha*]:

When we dream we are not aware that we are dreaming, and we may even try to interpret what we are dreaming about. Only after we have woken up do we know that it was just a dream. And then there is the great Awakening, after which we know that all this has been a great dream. But the foolish imagine that they are already awake.<sup>79</sup>

[Zhuangzi, "The Equality of Things"]

When we dream we are usually unaware that we are dreaming, and everything we experience within the dream, including our dreaming 'self', appears to us at the time to be vividly real. But once we have woken up, we realize that the whole dreamworld had been a creation of our own minds and not as 'real' as we had thought

it was. According to Buddhist teachings our waking life is similar to this: our life and death, and the world of physical objects in time and space that we inhabit appears to us to be unquestionably real; and yet there is another level of awareness compared to which the experiences of our normal waking life are no less insubstantial and illusory than events in a dream. Attainment of this third level of awareness, Zhuangzi's "great Awakening", is referred to in Buddhism also as an "Awakening" [*bodhi*], and the essential unreality of all that we suppose to be real is indicated by describing it as 'empty' [*śūnya*], that is, devoid of substantial reality or 'self-existence' [*svabhāva*].

But just as freedom from suffering is only to be found by investigating the nature of suffering itself, so too it is only by perceiving the 'empty' and insubstantial nature of all things that we can become aware of their ultimate reality. Because of our ingrained habits, however, we assume that the way things appear to us is the way they really are, while their empty nature, which is in fact their only true reality, seems to us to be nothing at all. For this reason Buddhist texts often compare emptiness to space. Space is not something – or some 'thing' – that we can perceive directly. We are unable to see it, hear it, touch it, taste it or smell it. It seems not to exist at all, and yet nothing could exist without it. So too with emptiness: it is a quality which is a non-quality, so it is difficult for us to recognize it even when we see it; but without it, as Nagarjuna points out, nothing in the universe would be able to function:

Where emptiness is valid, everything works,  
But if emptiness is not valid, nothing will work.      [MMK 24.14]

For example, if things were not empty of essential or substantial reality, they would not be impermanent, and if nothing ever changed, the world could not have come into existence in the first place. Without physical space things would have nowhere to exist, and without the inner space of their essential emptiness they would not be able to exist at all in any way that we could understand.

## Space

To understand emptiness is to understand the ultimate reality of all things, so the Sutra frequently compares the Buddha and his wisdom to the all-encompassing purity of empty space:

The Buddha's body is like empty space,  
Unhindered and undifferentiated....<sup>80</sup>

The Buddha's body is as inexhaustible as space,  
Without qualities, unhindered, all-pervasive....<sup>81</sup>

The Buddha is like empty space, without inherent existence,  
But appears in the world to benefit all beings....<sup>82</sup>

The Sugata is intrinsically pure, like space,  
And everywhere teaches the world the true Path....<sup>83</sup>

[Ch. 1]

Space here is used metaphorically to indicate Buddhahood's lack of inherent existence [*svabhāva*] and the purity and all-pervasive scope of the Buddha's wisdom. But from the Huayen point of view there is in addition the deeper implication that space is also quite literally the physical equivalent of emptiness in the Buddhist sense, for ultimately there can be no real distinction between the way phenomena appear to us and their fundamental nature, between conventional truth and ultimate truth, or between Samsara and Nirvana. This is equally true of the infinite expanse of outer space, which contains all the world-systems in the visible universe, and of the inner space of the atoms that all those worlds are comprised of. For the material objects that we see around us and that appear so solid to our senses consist mostly of empty space in which subatomic particles that we are unable to perceive directly move about at speeds beyond our comprehension. Even the nature of those particles themselves appears to become more intangible, more elusive to our sense-based imagination, the more closely it is investigated. It would seem therefore that the nature of matter may ultimately be indefinable, except in purely mathematical terms, and that there will never really be anything there for our minds to cling to -- which is precisely the lesson the Mahayana concept of emptiness is meant to teach us.

## Nonduality

Of course this doesn't mean that Buddhism and physics are pointing to the same conclusions. Physics is by definition an investigation of the nature of material phenomena and it aims at a purely intellectual understanding, whereas Buddhism is primarily concerned with the mind and its goal is the liberation of each individual from the bonds of suffering. Nevertheless it is not difficult to find significant parallels and a degree of convergence between Buddhism and modern physics. From the

Huayen point of view such convergence is not surprising, for practitioners of both physics and Buddhism are engaged, in their different ways and separate fields, in a sincere and assiduous search for truth; and truth, wherever we seek it, whether in mind or in matter, will always turn out to be the undifferentiated ground or field that Huayen calls the Dharmarealm [*dharmadhātu*]. Because of our mental and perceptual limitations, reality always appears to us as a set of dualities – subject and object, mind and matter, experimenter and experiment – and so on. But according to the Huayen teachings this way of seeing things is deluded and the true nature of reality is nondual [*advaya*]. Like space, the ultimate truth is all-pervasive, empty [*śūnya*] of qualities and everywhere the same [*sama*]. Du Shun, in *Meditation According to the Five Doctrines*, illustrates the point with the traditional analogy of water and waves:

Take water for example: the rising and falling motion is the waves while the uniform quality of wetness is the water. The waves are none other than the water, so it is through the waves that the water becomes apparent to us; but the water is also identical with the waves, and it is from the water that the waves are formed. So the sameness of waves and water in no way impedes their distinctness, and their distinctness is no obstacle to their unity.... Therefore the Sutra says that ‘the Tathagata sees neither Samsara nor Nirvana, for there is no difference between them at all’.<sup>84</sup>

For buddhas, the nonduality of appearance and reality is a simple fact, but for ordinary unenlightened beings the two obstruct one another, so that we can perceive either appearance or reality but never both at the same time:

When we perceive the outward appearance of something, its actual nature is hidden from us – the phenomenon is manifested but the underlying reality is concealed. ... Manifestation can only occur when there is also concealment and vice versa; the two exist in dependence on one another.<sup>85</sup> [Fa Zang, *A Hundred Approaches to the Ocean of Truth*]

This troublesome duality has also created difficulties for modern physics. Experiments have shown that light, for example, can manifest as either waves or particles, depending on the way the experiment is designed, while the nondual reality that lies behind these mutually exclusive appearances remains elusive. Confirmation that the root of the problem lies in the dualistic mind of the observer is provided by a further refinement of the same experiment which seems to indicate that measurements decided on subsequently can alter the nature of an event that has already occurred. Clearly this makes no sense, so the only rational conclusion would seem to be that the event cannot really be said to 'occur' at all

until the decision to observe it has been made.

Similarly, the principle of quantum uncertainty or indeterminacy tells us that precise knowledge of one aspect of a phenomenon, such as the momentum of a particle, makes it impossible to have exact knowledge of a contrary aspect, such as the same particle's position. In Huayen terminology, these two aspects 'conceal' or 'obstruct' one another. So as long as the particle's momentum is known, the particle cannot be said to 'be' in any particular place at all, and its location can only be approximately indicated by a range of possibilities, a probability wave, that will not 'collapse' into a concrete fact until an actual measurement is taken.

## Indra's Net

What these findings show is that observed facts cannot be separated from the observer and that the experimenter is always an integral part of the experiment. In other words, the notion of a completely 'objective' truth is, in the last analysis, just another illusion. While the world as we experience it, the macrocosmic world of Newtonian space and time, can only be dealt with in dualistic terms, if we probe more deeply into the nature of reality, whether through Buddhism or quantum mechanics, we will find that our dualistic assumptions are no longer valid. Truth at this deeper level can only be described, in the case of physics, by abstruse mathematical formulas that resist translation into ordinary language, and can only really be comprehended, according to Buddhism, by transcending the fundamental limitations of our samsaric mind.

Einstein saw clearly that the implications of quantum mechanics undermined the concept of an objective physical reality and he argued strenuously against them for many years. There were two fundamental assumptions, he said, without which "physical thought in the sense familiar to us would not be possible": that things had a "real existence" in an objective "space-time continuum" and that they existed at different locations within that continuum. But in the end quantum mechanics showed conclusively that neither of these assumptions could be sustained. Things can be said to be objectively real in Einstein's sense only after a measurement has been taken; until then, their nature remains indeterminate and they 'exist' only as potentialities or as a range of probabilities. In Buddhist terminology one might say that they are empty of inherent existence and only take on the appearance of objective realities when perceived as such by the dualistic mind of an observer.

Furthermore, with regard to physical location, other experiments have repeatedly demonstrated that it is possible for connections to exist between

particles which are too far apart for any kind of physical communication to take place. In other words, an event that affects one particle will affect the other particle instantaneously, regardless of their location in space. Physicists are still struggling to understand the nature and implications of this strange phenomenon of ‘quantum entanglement’ or ‘nonlocality’, but to a Buddhist it is likely to suggest two things. One is that space also lacks inherent existence and is ultimately no more ‘real’ than the objects it contains. The other is that the things we perceive as self-existing objects separated by space are in fact all interconnected at the very deepest level and are no more than transient points or nodes in an infinite and invisible network of relationships. In Huayen this cosmic network is referred to, by way of a metaphor drawn from ancient Indian mythology, as Indra’s Net.

According to the Huayen interpretation of this myth, the god Indra lives in a palace on top of Sumeru, the great mountain at the centre of our world-system. Above the palace, magically suspended in the sky, there is a huge net consisting of jewels which all reflect one another, so that the multiple reflections extend to infinity in every direction. Fa Zang describes it as follows:

It is like Indra's Net, which is made entirely of jewels. Because of their brightness and transparency, the jewels reflect one another, so that in a single jewel there appear the images of all the rest. . . Thus they are multiplied to infinity, and all these infinite images appear with vivid clarity in every single jewel. <sup>86</sup>

*[A Survey of the Dharmarealm According to Huayen]*

In normal Indian usage, “Indra’s Net” came to be little more than a synonym for some kind of magical spell or illusion, but the Chinese Huayen masters saw it as an apt metaphor for the nature of samsara, the endless cycle of birth and death. From the Buddhist point of view, all the objects and activities that fill the universe are ultimately nothing more than insubstantial images which are constantly repeating and reflecting one another. To us they seem vividly real because they have cast a spell over our senses, but once we have awoken from our trance we will realize that for all their beauty and infinite variety, they lack the objective solidity that we have projected onto them and that Einstein so desperately wanted to believe in. So far from being entities that exist independently in their own right, they are only points of intersection in a limitless network of causal relationships that extends throughout all of time and space.

In the terminology of the Yogacara school of Mahayana Buddhism, this relational view of reality is called *paratantra-svabhāva*, the “interdependent nature” of things. This is one of the three modes of existence [*svabhāva*] or levels of reality,

the other two being the discriminated nature [*parikalpita-svabhāva*] and the true or ultimate nature [*pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*]. The discriminated nature is the universe of objects separated in space and time that we normally perceive, and the ultimate nature is the emptiness of all these phenomena, their lack of inherent existence. The same three ways of perceiving the world around us were recognized even earlier by the Daoist writer Zhuang Zhou (Zhuangzi):

The ancients attained to the ultimate knowledge. And what was that? It was that nothing had ever existed. This is the ultimate, this is the absolute truth; nothing can be added to it. Then people came to believe that things did exist but that there had never been any boundaries between them. Then they started to believe in boundaries but didn't discriminate between true and false or right and wrong. But when the distinction between true and false appeared, the Way became impaired, and attachments developed. <sup>87</sup> [Zhuangzi, "The Equality of Things"]

For Huayen these three levels are all covered by the principle of *apratighāta* [無礙], "unobstructedness", meaning that there is no real boundary between one thing and another and that they are therefore in constant and unimpeded communication with each other. Although we perceive things as existing independently and separately, this is just a misunderstanding created by the limitations of our minds and senses. In reality all these apparently separate phenomena are merely distinctions we have chosen to make in an endless and seamless web of relationships that is ultimately as insubstantial as a rainbow or a mirage. As for physics, whatever picture of reality may finally emerge from the investigation of subatomic particles and the findings of quantum mechanics, it is now clear that the idea of spatial separation between real physical objects that Einstein was so attached to will have to be abandoned. But in addition to the three dimensions of space, Einstein also spoke of a fourth dimension – that of time. Modern physics has not yet come to any firm conclusions concerning the nature of time, but the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and the Chinese Huayen masters insist that our perception of time is no less illusory and subjective than our perception of physical space.

## Time

Einstein proved that time is relative to motion, but many questions remain. Is time just another word for change or are they two separate things? Is time travel possible at all? Why does time appear to move or flow in one direction only? Scientists have proposed various theories to answer these and other such questions, but there is still no general agreement, and while some physicists believe that time exists as an objective dimension like space, others<sup>88</sup> will go so far as to argue that

time as we understand it is an illusion and doesn't really exist at all.

Huayen for its part also sees time as a subjective illusion, for "all worldly phenomena are created by the transformations of one's own mind"<sup>89</sup> [Fa Zang, Commentary] and have no objective existence apart from the mind that perceives them. The Huayen texts speak of ten periods of time, because each moment in the past, present and future has its own past, present and future relative to that particular moment; and in addition to these nine periods there is also a tenth, which is their ultimate nature as emptiness. The number ten, as used in Huayen literature, is also a symbol of infinity; so the implication here is that it is possible to make an endless number of distinctions in time as well as in space. Ultimately however all such distinctions are only the illusory products of dualistic thinking. As Li Tungxuan says:

Past and present are a single moment, for there is no past, present or future. The buddhas of old have not vanished nor have the buddhas of the present appeared only now, for in primordial wisdom a single truth unites appearance and reality, and phenomena are identical with this truth.<sup>90</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

The Sutra itself makes the same point succinctly, in a well-known sentence [Ch. 16]:

The past has vanished, the future has not yet arrived, and the present is empty and still.<sup>91</sup>

The present moment is a dimensionless point dividing past and future. In itself it is nothing at all, so it is said to be empty; and because it neither comes nor goes, it is said to be still. But this very emptiness and stillness is the ultimate nature of all things, and just as each point of space, according to the Huayen teachings, is equivalent to all other such points and can encompass the entire universe, so too every moment of time that we experience contains the whole of time:

One should understand that past and future are identical with the present moment.<sup>92</sup> [Fa Zang, Commentary]

The ten periods of time, past and present, beginning and end, never move away from the present moment, which is so vast that it can encompass all of space, and so tiny that it can fit inside an atom and vanish without trace.<sup>93</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

Shakyamuni Buddha himself described the Dharma he had realized at the moment of Enlightenment as timeless [*akālika*], for it is only in the empty, dimensionless present moment that the Dharma becomes accessible in all its fullness:

The Buddha in every single moment of time  
Pours down the vast and boundless Dharma rain.<sup>94</sup> [Ch. 1]

So Huayen refers to itself as a complete or universal teaching, but also as a path of 'sudden' Enlightenment, for

... all the buddhas of the ten directions have achieved Buddhahood by transcending the concepts of past and present. Enlightenment is realized in a single instant, and then there is no longer any notion of past or present at all.<sup>95</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

Thus movement in space and time are equally illusory. At the same time however, and precisely because of their empty or illusory nature, the ten directions of space and the ten periods of time are also buddhafi elds in which Enlightenment is forever present and can be realized at any moment:

'Greatness of meaning' signifies that what is taught pervades the boundless Dharmarealm in its entirety, just as a single atom can contain all the worlds in the ten directions of space or a single instant can encompass the nine periods of time.<sup>96</sup> [Fa Zang, Commentary]

If one can respond to the truth in a single instant, one will attain Buddhahood that very instant. If one can do so in the course of a day, one will attain Buddhahood that same day. Why should it have to take aeons of gradual cultivation, piling up practices for age after age till three incalculable aeons have passed before one achieves the final result? This attachment of the mind to periods of time will produce countless obstacles. The teachings of the buddhas have nothing to do with time at all. Those who work out timetables and calculate aeons are not practising according to the Buddhayāna.<sup>97</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

## 7. The Realm of Enlightenment

The realm of space and time is also the realm of suffering, of birth and death, where everything is impermanent, insubstantial and governed by causes and conditions. In contrast to this stands the realm of Enlightenment, of the changeless wisdom of the buddhas. This latter realm is often referred to as the Dharmarealm [*dharmadhātu*], the realm (or element) of truth or reality. According to Huayen however these two realms are ultimately one and the same.

### Dharmadhatu

The Sanskrit word *dhātu* means an element, constituent or layer. As a Buddhist technical term, it is used to refer to the eighteen 'components' of the physical world as we perceive it: the six sense organs and their corresponding objects and consciousnesses. The term *dharmadhātu* thus indicates the 'element of reality' that is at the heart of all such physical phenomena and of our own minds. The scholar and calligrapher Pei Xiu [裴休, 791-864, or 797-870], who studied Huayen with Zung Mi, defines it as follows:

The Dharmarealm is the essential nature of the body and mind of all beings. From the beginning it has always been a boundless, lucid and unobstructed awareness, vast, empty and tranquil, the sole realm of reality. It has no form but embraces the entire universe; it has no boundaries and yet all things are contained within it.<sup>98</sup>  
[Preface to Zung Mi's *Annotations to Contemplation of the Dharmarealm According to Huayen*]

Fa Zang also emphasizes the Dharmarealm's all-pervasive and nondual nature:

The Dharmarealm, as cause and as result, exists and appears vividly before us.... It transcends all that we can see and hear, and yet constantly pervades our sight and hearing; it lies beyond the scope of thought, but in no way impedes our speech or our thinking.<sup>99</sup> [Fa Zang, Commentary]

But according to the Huayen teachings, this element or realm of reality is ultimately no different from the illusory appearances that it simultaneously pervades and transcends, just as the waves that appear on the surface of the ocean are no different from the ocean itself. In Huayen usage, therefore, the term *dharmadhātu* can also refer to the entire material universe that we seem to be

living in – to all the worlds that modern astronomy and traditional Buddhist cosmology alike describe as scattered throughout the infinite expanse of space in every direction. The Dharmarealm is thus the entire realm of reality, of enlightened wisdom, that exists everywhere within us and outside us and that only our habitual ignorance and self-absorption prevent us from recognizing.

## The Four Dharmarealms

According to Cheng Guan, four different types of Dharmarealm can be distinguished: the Dharmarealm of Appearances [事法界], of Reality [理法界], of the Nonduality of Appearances and Reality [理事無礙法界], and of the Nonduality of Appearances [事事無礙法界]. These four Dharmarealms have often been cited as a convenient summary of basic Huayen teachings. They can also be interpreted as representing four stages in the journey of the Samantabhadra practitioner from ignorance to Enlightenment.

The Realm of Appearances (in Chinese, *shì* 事 [also spelt *shìh*], literally ‘events’ or ‘occurrences’) is the one in which we normally live. It is a world of ‘things’ separated by time and space that seem to exist outside us. In fact however these apparently independent objects are only perceptual events that have no significance or reality apart from the mind that perceives them. As Schopenhauer explains with admirable clarity in the opening paragraph of his masterwork, *The World as Will and Representation* [*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*]:

The world is my representation: this is a truth which applies to every being that has life and awareness, although only human beings can formulate and reflect on it as an abstract idea. Once they actually do so, however, philosophical discernment awakens in them; then it becomes absolutely clear that they never know a sun or an earth but only an eye that sees the sun and a hand that feels the earth... No truth is as certain, as independent of all others, or less in need of proof than this: that everything which exists for knowledge, and thus the entire world, can be object only in relation to a subject, the perception of a perceiver, and so is, in short, a concept or representation.

Once this truth has been glimpsed, and we begin to realize that the external objects we perceive exist for us only as our own perceptions, we may start to wonder, as the Buddha did, whether there is any substratum of reality behind the ever-changing display of appearances. “All worldly phenomena,” Fa Zang says in his commentary on the Sutra, “are created by the transformations of one’s own mind.”<sup>100</sup> But in that case, we may wonder, what is the nature of the mind that creates them? “Everything that exists,” he says in his introduction to the same

commentary, “is nothing but deluded thoughts; the true nature of dharmas is beyond words.”<sup>101</sup> But if that is true, how can we learn to recognize this wordless truth? When we ask ourselves this question, we have already set out on the path to Enlightenment and are beginning to move from the Dharmarealm of Appearances to the Dharmarealm of Reality.

The notion of a deeper level of reality is represented here by the Chinese word *lǐ* 理, which indicates some kind of underlying law or principle. In Buddhist contexts it may be taken as equivalent to emptiness [*śūnyatā*] or suchness [*tathatā*], and in Huayen usage it is explicitly contrasted with *shì*(*h*) [appearances, events, phenomena]. The realm of appearances is thus the realm of ignorance, of Samsara, while the realm of reality is the realm of Enlightenment, of Nirvana, for as the Sutra says, “Suchness is the realm of the Buddha”<sup>102</sup> [Ch. 25].

Entry into the Dharmarealm of Reality will reveal the “unborn, unarisen, uncreated, uncompounded” truth that has been concealed from us by our infatuation with the transient phenomena of the cycle of birth and death. At this level of understanding, however, the practitioner’s awareness remains dualistic, for appearances and reality, Samsara and Nirvana are still seen as opposed to one another. True understanding, according to Huayen, only begins with the next of the Four Dharmarealms, which is that of the nonduality of appearances and reality.

The principle of nonduality is indicated in this case, not by its literal equivalent in Sanskrit, *advaya*, but by the common Huayen term *apratighāta*, “non-obstruction”, which is used to signify that the barriers or boundaries that we think of as dividing one thing from another are in fact infinitely permeable, so that everything is in constant and unimpeded communication with everything else, like the jewels in Indra’s Net.

At this level of understanding “one is all and all are one”<sup>103</sup> [Fa Zang, *Treatise on the Five Doctrines*]. That is, the apparent duality of reality and appearances is just another illusion, for the one reality is ultimately identical with the multiplicity of appearances, and the appearances are nothing other than the one reality. In his famous essay on the golden statue of a lion that stood in Empress Wu’s throne room, Fa Zang compares the gold the statue is made of to the underlying reality and the details of the image to the world of appearances: “Although the lion is absolutely empty, this does not obstruct the illusion of its vivid existence.”<sup>104</sup> In other words, the uniform nature of the gold and the elaborate image of the lion can coexist without any contradiction whatsoever, as with the ocean and the waves in Du Shun’s analogy. When both these aspects are perceived simultaneously in nondual awareness, the Dharmarealm of the

Nonduality of Reality and Appearances has been realized.

But according to the Complete Teaching [圓教, *yúan jiào*] of the Ekayana, the Universal Vehicle, of Huayen, even this is not yet the ultimate level of Enlightenment, for there is still a subtle trace of duality, in that there are still two things that are perceived to be nondual, namely, reality and appearances. The last of the Four Dharmarealms is therefore that of the nonduality of the appearances themselves. Here every single phenomenon is seen to be identical with every other and so with the totality of appearances, beyond any need for reference to a separate, unifying reality at all. This is the true realm of Samantabhadra, in which there are buddhas teaching the Dharma within every atom and “every single hair” in the golden statue “contains an infinite number of lions”.<sup>105</sup>

The journey to Enlightenment can thus be seen as a sequence of four stages, from a world of things that exist as separate objects in time and space to a realm in which every single thing reflects the nature of everything else and is in itself a complete manifestation of the enlightened wisdom of Vairocana. Ultimately however there is no real journey to undertake, for the enlightened awareness we are constantly seeking is already present in all its fullness within us.

Enlightenment is not something that we must strive to attain or that our ignorance has deprived us of. The truth is that we have never ceased to be enlightened and all we need to do is recognize this. At present we are dreaming that we are beings with limited awareness experiencing the events of this or that particular lifetime, but once this illusion vanishes we will realize that we have in fact always been *buddha* – awake.

## Cause and Effect

The Huayen path is said to be based on the result rather than the cause. What this implies is that in most other schools of Buddhism cultivation of the Dharma is regarded as a cause which will purify the mind, purging it of its ignorance, until the final result of Enlightenment has been attained. For Huayen, on the other hand, Dharma practice is itself the result of a prior cause, which is our buddha-nature or innate Enlightenment. In other words, the fullness of Enlightenment, the mind of all the buddhas, is already present within us, and it is this that gives rise to the impulse to practise Dharma in the first place. Seen in this light, Dharma practice becomes the result of a prior cause. It then functions in turn as a cause to produce a second result, essentially identical with the first, by making manifest an Enlightenment that we have always possessed. For this reason the attainment of Enlightenment is often described in Huayen tradition as returning to the source or to our original home.

In the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana* [大乘起信論], a short text which for the Huayen School is second in importance only to the *Avatamsaka Sutra* itself, two aspects of Enlightenment are distinguished, namely, fundamental or primordial Enlightenment [本覺, *běn jǔe*] and actualized Enlightenment [始覺, *shǐ jǔe*], literally, “Enlightenment that has a beginning (in space and time)”. The first is our buddha-nature, the enlightened awareness of Vairocana that is the essential nature of the mind of every sentient being. As the *Awakening of Faith* says:

Enlightenment is the essential nature of the mind when it is free from thoughts... As all-pervasive as space, it is the unvarying Dharmakaya of the tathagatas and is therefore called Fundamental Enlightenment.<sup>106</sup>

This primordial awareness is always with us but it is concealed from us by our dualistic beliefs and the emotional turbulence that comes from dividing the world into self and others. Eventually however we will all be compelled by our suffering to search for our innate Enlightenment and proceed to regulate our conduct and tame our wild minds until the truth of who we really are finally dawns on us. Once this has been accomplished, it becomes possible to speak of actualized Enlightenment:

Fundamental Enlightenment gives rise to the possibility of non-Enlightenment, and then we must speak also of actualized Enlightenment.<sup>107</sup> [*Ibid.*]

Fundamental Enlightenment is, like everything else, empty [*śūnya*] of inherent existence. It therefore comprises all possibilities, including that of non-emptiness or fundamental ignorance. Because of this fundamental ignorance we appear to be trapped in an endless cycle of birth and death, individual entities that are doomed to remain forever separate from the spatio-temporal universe which surrounds and confines us. The basic falsity of this perception, however, and the suffering that it produces, will eventually force us to look for a better way to understand our situation, one that will liberate us from the cage of concepts that confines us and causes us so much frustration and unhappiness. In this way it is our inner Enlightenment itself that impels us to set out on the quest for its realization.

## **Buddha-nature**

Huayen teaches that our mind and the mind of the Buddha are one and the same, and that this is true of every sentient being. The difference is simply that the

Buddha is fully aware of this and we are not. When we first start to gain some awareness of the real nature of our own mind, it seems that there are two layers to the mind: a surface layer consisting of the thoughts, perceptions, emotions and impressions that make up the substance of our daily lives, and a deeper layer of clarity and tranquillity that is mostly hidden from us. This deeper layer is our buddha-nature [Ch. 佛性 *fóxìng*, Skt. *buddhadhātu*] and is the primordial Enlightenment of all the buddhas which we imagine we have lost but which has in fact always been present within us. The *Awakening of Faith* calls these two aspects of the mind “the mind as Suchness [*tathatā*]” and “the mind as birth and death”:

This single mind has two aspects, namely, the mind as Suchness and the mind as birth and death. Each of these two can encompass all things. Why? Because they are inseparable from one another.<sup>108</sup>

The nature of Suchness is “everywhere the same, neither increasing nor decreasing”<sup>109</sup> [*ibid.*], but when spoken of in relation to birth and death it is often referred to as the *tathāgatagarbha*, meaning the 'womb' or 'embryo' of the Tathagata, that is, the source or seed of Enlightenment. Therefore it is said that “the mind as birth and death exists because of the Tathagatagarbha”<sup>110</sup> [*ibid.*].

It seems that within Indian Mahayana Buddhism there was in fact a distinct Tathagatagarbha School that emphasized the idea of innate Enlightenment. Less widespread at the time than the better-known Madhyamika and Yogacara schools, it nevertheless came to exert a strong influence on Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism. Huayen regards it as the ‘final teaching’ [終教] of the Mahayana, in contrast to the ‘preliminary teaching’ [始教] of the other two schools. According to this Final Teaching, the essential nature of our mind is identical with the enlightened mind of the Buddha. This is what the *Awakening of Faith* calls ‘the mind as Suchness’, our buddha-nature. It is similar to empty space, as the Sutra often points out, in that it is pure, uniform and all-pervasive, transcending all our habitual notions of time and place. In relation to sentient beings caught up in the cycle of birth and death, however, it appears as the embryo of Enlightenment, “the Tathagatagarbha replete with limitless virtues”<sup>111</sup> [*ibid.*].

But whatever name it is known by, it is this fundamental Enlightenment at the core of our being which impels us to seek its outward realization in the world around us and so leads us to cultivation of the Dharma: to the observance of ethical rules of conduct, to the practice of mindfulness and meditation, and to the cultivation of insights which will eventually bring about final Liberation and the transformation of our primordial Enlightenment into actualized Enlightenment. What is true of human beings applies to every other type of sentient being as well,

for mind or consciousness tends by its very nature to seek to expand its scope. This tendency can be observed in all conscious entities, constantly driving their evolution forward, moving them gradually towards the perfect comprehension of Buddhahood.

## Bodhicitta

When the impulse to achieve Enlightenment rises to the surface of our human consciousness, it finds expression as *bodhicitta*, the ‘buddhahood-mind’; that is, the unshakeable aspiration to realize complete Enlightenment within the realm of birth and death so as to become capable of liberating all beings from their ignorance and suffering. This aspiration is given an especially prominent place in the Sutra. Chapter 17, for example, “The Merit of Awakening the Aspiration to Enlightenment” is wholly devoted to it, and Chapter 25, “The Ten Dedications”, one of the longest in the entire Sutra, is concerned with the closely related topic of the dedication or transferral of merit [*pariṇāmana*] to the ultimate goal of Enlightenment.

*Bodhicitta* is the principal theme in the final chapter also. Sudhana’s story begins when Manjushri’s sermon inspires him to dedicate his life to the quest for Enlightenment:

Then Sudhana, having heard from Manjushri of the Buddha’s manifold virtues, longed with all his heart to seek supreme and perfect Enlightenment.<sup>112</sup>

And throughout the long pilgrimage that follows, Sudhana greets each new teacher with more or less the same reference to *bodhicitta* (the verbal formula varies only slightly from encounter to encounter), for example:

Thereupon Sudhana prostrated himself at [the guru’s] feet. Then he stood with palms pressed together and spoke as follows: “Reverend master, I have already aspired to the attainment of supreme and perfect Enlightenment, but I do not yet know what practices a bodhisattva should cultivate or how to follow the bodhisattva path.”<sup>113</sup>

Bodhicitta, then, is a manifestation of the fundamental Enlightenment that is always present as the essential nature of our own minds. In terms of the Four Dharmarealms, it is the Dharmarealm of Reality beginning to shine through the Dharmarealm of Appearances that we have hitherto taken at face value. Once this aspiration has inspired us to commit ourselves wholeheartedly to living in accordance with the Dharma, we have embarked on the process of integrating the

two realms into that of the Nonduality of Reality and Appearances. And finally, when our innate awareness has become a realized fact through our attainment of complete Enlightenment at a particular time and place, the Dharmarealm of the Nonduality of Appearances will be established. This is the realm that is realized by all the buddhas. It is also the realm of Samantabhadra, in which every phenomenon and every thought and action reveals the all-encompassing awareness of Vairocana.

## Adorning the World

For the Samantabhadra practitioner, Huayen nondualism implies that no distinction should be made between inner and outer, between spiritual discipline and worldly activities. Our individuality is shaped by the circumstances in which we find ourselves and those same circumstances are also a reflection of our own state of mind. The Sutra therefore urges us to purify our mind and cultivate detachment from the world while at the same time emphasizing the importance of ‘adorning’ the world by making the wisdom of the Buddha manifest within it through our conduct. So bodhisattvas continually “adorn the world as an offering to the Buddha”<sup>114</sup> [Ch. 12]:

They know that all the worlds are like empty space but are able to adorn them with their pure and sublime conduct and so transform them into buddha-realms.<sup>115</sup> [Ch. 26]

In this way bodhisattvas transform the outward appearance of the world into something more closely resembling its true nature, for “the authentic Huayen teaching is that this world Endurance [*sahāloka*] is stainless and perfectly pure”<sup>116</sup>. [Li Tungxuan, Commentary], and “throughout the worlds that extend to infinity like Indra’s Net, in every single instant of the past, present and future, buddhas are continually attaining Enlightenment”<sup>117</sup>. [Fa Zang, Commentary] This is possible because just as our minds, with all their perceptual limitations, intellectual confusion and conflicting emotions, have always been identical with the changeless wisdom of Vairocana, so too the world we see around us that is so full of pain and suffering is in reality a realm of Enlightenment, the true nature of which is concealed from us by our ignorance:

Every single thing is unreal, for it lacks a nature of its own, but this absence of nature means that it is indistinguishable from the ultimate truth. Thus when we contemplate the absence of self-existence in any given thing, we will see that it encompasses the Suchness of the entire Dharmarealm... the whole of reality, but in doing so it does not impede in any way the existence of all other phenomena.<sup>118</sup> [Fa Zang, Commentary]

Thus “all things are the essence of the Teaching.... for there is nothing that cannot be the cause of Enlightenment”<sup>119</sup> [*ibid.*].

## 8. Practice

The basic principle of Huayen practice is that it should be ‘grounded in ultimate reality’ [稱性起修] or, as Li Tungxuan puts it in his Commentary, that “discriminative wisdom should arise from fundamental wisdom”<sup>120</sup>, for:

If one applies the teachings in accordance with reality, the ultimate truth will be seen to spontaneously encompass all things. This is not the same as the tranquil Nirvana of the Two Vehicles.<sup>121</sup> [*Ibid.*]

In other words, practitioners should first develop awareness of their own buddha-nature and of the emptiness or suchness of all things and then allow Dharma practice to flow naturally from this basic awareness. This is in keeping with the Huayen understanding of practice as a way of making Enlightenment manifest in the world rather than as a means to the achievement of Enlightenment. So the Sutra says that “all the practices one cultivates should spring from the Dharmarealm”<sup>122</sup> [Ch. 27], and Fa Zang asks rhetorically: “Where is there a practice that adorns the Truth and does not spring from the Truth?”<sup>123</sup> [“Return to the Source”] Li Tungxuan therefore sums up the stages of Huayen practice as follows:

In this Teaching one is inspired by faith to awaken the great Aspiration to Enlightenment [*bodhicitta*]. Thus, at the very beginning of the Ten Stations one directly perceives the arising of the true wisdom of the Dharmakaya Buddha and authentic Enlightenment is achieved. Then, on the basis of this wisdom of ultimate truth, one cultivates the Dharma in order to be able to teach sentient beings and lead them to maturity. In this way Buddhahood is realized and both Enlightenment and practice find perfect fulfilment. This is not the same as the Provisional Teaching, in which one begins by cultivating the practices of the Bodhisattva Path.<sup>124</sup> [Commentary]

### The Basis

The starting point for practice, therefore, is recognition of the Enlightenment that is already present within us:

The wisdom of the Tathagata is ... present in its entirety within the body of every being, but ordinary people are ... not aware of its presence and derive no benefit from it.<sup>125</sup> [Ch. 37]

This is a fundamental truth which has also been alluded to by some non-Buddhist teachers, such as Jesus for example:

Now when he was asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God would come, he answered them and said, "...The Kingdom of God is within you."<sup>126</sup> [Gospel of Luke, 17.20-21]

In fact we would never be able to discover the 'Kingdom of God', or the Dharmarealm [*dharmadhātu*], if it were not already present within us :

If I may not find its secret within myself, I shall never find it: if I have not got it already, it will never come to me. [Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*]

There are also many myths and folk tales that tell of people setting out in search of a treasure that turns out in the end to have been concealed in their own home all along. In Buddhism this hidden treasure is called one's 'buddha-nature' or 'fundamental Enlightenment', and in Huayen it is said to be the essential nature of the mind of every sentient being:

One should know that the nature of the mind is fundamentally pure.<sup>127</sup> [Ch. 27]

The nature of the mind is awareness.<sup>128</sup> [Fa Zang, Commentary]

The nature of the mind is never born and never dies. It is only because of distracted thinking that we discriminate between all kinds of phenomena.<sup>129</sup> [*Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*]

But though this enlightened awareness is always within us and is in fact the essential nature of our own mind, it is concealed from us by the constant activity of what the *Awakening of Faith* calls 'distracted thinking'— the ceaseless torrent of thoughts, memories, images, concepts, hopes and fears that flow through our minds every day. But beneath and beyond all this there remains the simple and all-encompassing wisdom of Vairocana:

When the mind stirs, it is delusion; when it does not, it is  
Buddhahood.<sup>130</sup> [Fa Zang, Commentary]

The first task of Buddhist practice, according to Huayen, is therefore to bring this underlying awareness into consciousness and allow it to determine the course of our life:

It is not a matter of achieving Enlightenment or attaining Buddhahood.  
Rather, you yourself become aware that your own mind has always  
been fully enlightened.<sup>131</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

Unfortunately this is not something that can be accomplished by mechanically following some step-by-step program. It is more a matter of developing mindfulness in an attempt to resolve the paradox of trying to acquire something that we already have, or to become something that we already are:

It is not possible to cultivate one's real nature through practice, or for  
the mind to realize the Truth, because the mind itself *is* one's real  
nature, and so there can be no distinction at all between subject and  
object.<sup>132</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

Our difficulty in recognizing this, as Li Tungxuan indicates here, comes mainly from our dualistic thinking, from our ingrained habit of dividing the world into a series of opposites: this and that, subject and object, mind and matter, self and others, sentient beings and buddhas, Samsara and Nirvana and so on. The emotional root of dualism and the ultimate source of all our suffering is our sense of self, but the idea of a separate self to which we cling so tenaciously has no objective basis:

When fear and suffering distress  
Myself and others equally,  
What is so special about this self  
That I should protect it and not another?  
[Shantideva, *Compendium of Training*, Stanza 1]

Having created this primary distinction between self and others, however, we end up projecting it onto everybody and everything around us. So we become caught up in the endless cycle of birth and death. But if, on the other hand, we can manage to break through this cycle by perceiving the empty nature of all these false distinctions, we will at once be set free:

When the mind is no longer able to find  
 Any trace of being or nonbeing,  
 Then, with no possibility left  
 To cling to, it will be at peace.

[Shantideva, *Setting out on the Path to Enlightenment*, 9.35]

Or as Zhuangzi puts it:

Do ‘this’ and ‘that’ really exist? Or do they in fact not exist? When neither ‘this’ nor ‘that’ finds its counterpart, you will arrive at what is called the Hub of the Way. Those who attain to this central point will be able to respond freely to everything around them.<sup>133</sup>

[Chapter 2, “The Equality of Things”]

So too Seng Can [僧燦, d. 606]:

Enlightenment is a simple matter:  
 Just refrain from picking and choosing.  
 Once you have given up loving and hating,  
 Everything will be perfectly clear.<sup>134</sup>

[*Faith in Mind*]

## Faith

Seng Can's advice does indeed sound simple, but if we try to put it onto practice we are likely to find that Enlightenment is not so easy to realize at all. In that case what are we to do? The Huayen answer is that we should first try to cultivate faith in what we are doing. The Sutra says that:

Faith is the source of Enlightenment; the begetter  
 Of virtues, it fosters all good qualities.  
 Breaking through doubt, it frees from the floods of desire,  
 And opens up the peerless Path to Nirvana.<sup>135</sup>

[Ch. 12]

Because of bad habits accumulated over long periods of time, our efforts to achieve Enlightenment are obstructed by the deeply rooted attachments and turbulent emotions we have acquired. This is why Dharma practice is very difficult; and if we have no faith in our goal, or no confidence that we are moving in the right direction, we may never find what we are seeking. Firm faith in the goal and in the practice, however, will provide us with the energy that we need to overcome all obstacles and cultivate the insight that will enable us to perceive the real truth of our situation. It was just such faith that gave Shakyamuni Buddha

himself the strength to persist through the long years of arduous struggle in his quest for the “unborn, unarisen, uncreated” reality that he was convinced must lie behind and beyond the phenomena of the impermanent and suffering world that he could see all around him.

Faith is therefore a source of strength and, ultimately, a cause for the realization of Enlightenment. For this reason it is seen by Huayen tradition as tantamount to Enlightenment itself, when rightly understood; for cause and effect are just different aspects of a single process and the passage of time by which we distinguish one from the other is merely an illusion created by our limited, egocentric point of view. So Fa Zang says that:

When the ten degrees of faith are complete, all the virtues will be manifested and the goal will have been accomplished, for the result is no different from its cause.<sup>136</sup> [Fa Zang, Commentary]

He further explains that:

According to the Three Vehicles [*triyāna*], the realm of Buddhahood is entered when the Ten Levels [*bhūmi*] of the bodhisattva path have been completed; but according to the Ekayana, the realm of Buddhahood is entered as soon as the ten degrees of faith are complete.<sup>137</sup> [Fa Zang, Commentary]

If we lack faith in the path our journey will be difficult, for we will never reach our goal as long as we doubt its reality or its importance. In Buddhist tradition the primary objects of such faith are the Three Jewels: the teacher (Buddha), the teaching (Dharma), and the community of enlightened practitioners (Sangha). For Huayen practitioners these three are represented above all by Vairocana, who is the enlightened nature of our own mind, Manjushri, who is the innate wisdom that guides us on the path, and Samantabhadra, who is the ultimate significance of every forward step that we take:

In this Sutra the primary articles of faith are that the ten worlds of form and the ten wisdom tathagatas always exist within one's own mind; and that Manjushri is one's own sublime wisdom, and is the mind that is capable of such faith.<sup>138</sup>  
[Li Tungxuan, *The Resolution of Doubts Concerning the Stages of the Path*]

And of course faith in the source of all these teachings, in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, is also essential:

Those who have deep faith in this teaching have no need to read other sutras. Having acquired a profound understanding of both substance and function, they will quickly attain Enlightenment with only a little effort.<sup>139</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

But above all, Samantabhadra practitioners are sustained by faith in the enlightened nature of their own mind, in their own buddha-nature. So the Sutra says that:

Bodhisattvas should know that within their own minds there are buddhas achieving Enlightenment at every moment.<sup>140</sup> [Ch. 37]

Therefore:

Great-hearted beings who are able to read this Sutra and have faith in it will see for themselves that their own minds are identical with the great wisdom-jewel of the Buddha's knowledge and understanding.<sup>141</sup>  
[Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

For "the essential nature of our body and mind is no different from the Buddha"<sup>142</sup>, and according to the Huayen teachings, the true meaning of faith is to have confidence that this is how things really are:

This body is buddha, this mind is buddha: those who perceive a buddha outside the mind cannot be said to have faith at all.<sup>143</sup> [*Ibid.*]

## Nonattachment

Once faith has been firmly established in the heart, practitioners can begin to turn their thoughts from the transient realm of appearances, with all its distractions and inevitable suffering, to the enduring values of the realm of reality. To this end one should learn to

contemplate... all phenomena as being like an illusion or a mirage, like the moon in the water, like a dream, a shadow, an echo or a reflection, like a drawing in the air, like a wheel of fire, like the colours of the rainbow.<sup>144</sup> [Ch. 38]

Attachment to appearances destabilizes the mind and leaves us prey to all sorts of conflicting emotions that prevent us from seeing things as they really are. The remedy for this, according to both the Sutra and Buddhist tradition, is to cultivate awareness of the illusory nature of the world until we can see that there is not really anything there to become attached to:

All the various things in the world  
 Are only illusions and nothing more.  
 Nothing will disturb the mind  
 Of those who know the truth of this.<sup>145</sup>

[Ch. 29]

Ultimately the source of our attachments, and of all our suffering, is the ego, the sense of self:

I am the vortex of the word made mind.  
 I am the nucleus of the unquiet universe.  
 I am the ego. I am the "I".

[Lex Banning, "Anthropologos"]

All sentient beings have this feeling, whether they are able to express it in words or not, and it is the primary motivation for all their behaviour. But overestimating the value and importance of the self in this way only sets up a world of conflict and suffering, as we constantly struggle in vain to protect this illusory self against a host of equally imaginary dangers. So Shelley argues that Keats, who had recently died, is more to be envied than mourned, for he is now free from the illusions that torment the living:

He hath awakened from the dream of life --  
 'Tis we who, lost in stormy visions, keep  
 With phantoms an unprofitable strife,  
 And in mad trance, strike with our spirit's knife  
 Invulnerable nothings. [Shelley, "Adonais"]

According to the Buddhadharma the antidote to this futile battle against "invulnerable nothings" is to cultivate awareness of the impermanent and insubstantial nature of the self and all its experiences:

All that we experience  
 Will turn into a memory;  
 Like the experience of a dream,  
 Once gone, it is never seen again.  
 [Shantideva, *Setting out on the Path to Enlightenment* 2.37]

When this unpalatable truth has finally been accepted and taken to heart, our burden of suffering will be eased and we can develop a more detached and tranquil attitude. Ultimately we will see that all the things that have been troubling us have no more reality than the images in a mirror, and that our own mind is the

mirror in which they appear:

It is like a clear mirror which, because of the purity of its substance, can contain all kinds of images without differentiating between them, for they exist without really existing at all. In the same way the objects that our mind perceives are inseparable from their substance, which is pure, uncontrived wisdom.<sup>146</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

So the *Zhuangzi*, in Chapter 7 (“Divine Kingship”), also says:

The enlightened use their mind like a mirror, neither welcoming nor seeing off, responding but not retaining.<sup>147</sup>

In other words, we should respond spontaneously to things as they happen in the present moment, without anticipating them before they arrive or clinging to the memory of them after they have gone. Above all we must learn to look with detachment on our own thoughts, for by clinging to them, becoming obsessed with them and taking them for realities, we only create an imaginary world of suffering that we can find no escape from. So the Sutra advises: “Don’t be attached to your thoughts or to what arises from them.”<sup>148</sup> [Ch. 25]

If we see only the waves (to use the traditional metaphor), we will never be able to see the ocean. But once we understand that the waves have no existence of their own but are only short-lived disturbances of the ocean’s surface, we will start to become aware of the realm of reality that lies behind the appearances that have been keeping us in thrall. Eventually it will become clear to us that “the created world”, as Thomas Browne [1605-82] puts it, “is but a small parenthesis in eternity.” [*Christian Morals*, 3.29] Or in the words of Herder’s well-known poem:

The life we live here in this world  
Is just a dream.  
Like shadows on the waves we rise  
And pass away,  
And measure all our weary steps  
By space and time  
And are (and know it not) amid  
Eternity.<sup>149</sup>

What Christians call ‘eternity’ or ‘the kingdom of God’, Buddhists call ‘emptiness’ [*śūnyatā*], ‘suchness’ [*tathatā*] or ‘the Dharmarealm’ [*dharmadhātu*]. This is the reality which will naturally become manifest within our mind once it has begun to disengage itself from the realm of appearances in which we habitually live.

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness or recollection [*smṛti*] is the basis for all mind training in Buddhism and was described by Shakyamuni Buddha himself as “the only way” [*ekāyano mārgaḥ*] to Enlightenment. But in fact there are a great many ways of being mindful and many things that one can be mindful of. In the Huayen tradition the principal way of practising mindfulness is by cultivating recollection of the Buddha, or of Buddhahood. This also has a number of different aspects.

It is possible, for example, to focus on the idea of the Buddha as teacher. Those who have achieved complete Enlightenment serve as teachers, models, and inspiration for all Buddhists, and Samantabhadra practitioners are also urged to be constantly mindful of them:

They vow to be always mindful  
Of the buddhas of the three times  
And to think of them as being  
Constantly present before them.<sup>150</sup>

[Ch. 25]

In this way,

They are constantly mindful of the Buddha  
As object of their meditation.<sup>151</sup>

[Ch. 24]

But the Buddha’s outward form is merely the way he appears to our senses, so that Enlightenment can be made accessible to us as human beings. In reality he transcends all our limited conceptions of him. When Shakyamuni paid a compassionate visit to a dying monk who had asked to see the Master with his own eyes for the first and last time, he also gently rebuked the sick man, saying:

What is there in this foul body? Who sees the Dharma sees me; who  
sees me sees the Dharma.<sup>152</sup>

In other words the real Buddha is to be found, not in his physical appearance but in his enlightened mind, his Buddhahood. As the *Diamond Sutra* [*Vajracchedika-prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*] says:

Those who saw me in my form  
And those who sought me in my voice  
Were all mistaken in their efforts:  
They will never be able to see me.<sup>153</sup>

Buddhahood, as the first chapter of the Sutra frequently reminds us, is “like empty space” [如虛空], or, as the 14th chapter puts it: “The absence of self-existence is Buddhahood.”<sup>154</sup> The “space” or “absence” that the Sutra refers to here is a quality of openness that is insubstantial and indefinable, but is at the same time free from all limitations and filled with the light of unobstructed awareness. Although nothing in itself, it is nevertheless the true nature of all phenomena, both mental and physical. So practitioners who want to move from the dimension of mere appearances to the realm of reality must be constantly mindful of the pervasive presence of Buddhahood and should “never lose sight of the realm of the Tathagata”<sup>155</sup> [Ch. 27].

The natural starting point, the first place to look for this all-pervasive Buddhahood, is within one’s own mind, for:

The ocean of the Buddha’s wisdom is poured into the mind of every sentient being, and those who take this as their object of contemplation and cultivate the Dharma accordingly will be able to perceive it clearly.<sup>156</sup> [Ch. 37]

But the Sutra’s qualification here (“those who...”) is not to be taken lightly, for although the Buddha’s wisdom is so close to us and is in fact the essential nature of our own mind, we have been lost in our own thoughts and fantasies for so long that developing the ability to perceive the subtle reality from which they arise is far from easy. It may be as common as the air that we breathe, but it is also as rare as the pearl of great price for which the merchant sold all that he had [*Gospel of Matthew*, 13.45-6], and if we are to acquire it, we must be prepared to pay the price of total commitment, constant mindfulness, and the renunciation of all our attachments. So the Sutra advises us:

Give up your craving for wealth and comfort;  
Find your pleasure in Enlightenment.  
Seek the Buddha's wisdom with all your heart;  
Gather your strength and think only of this.<sup>157</sup>

[Ch. 26]

Ultimately however there are no boundaries between ignorance and Enlightenment or appearances and reality. Nor in fact are there any boundaries between mind and matter, for the Huayen teachings emphasize that Enlightenment is to be found, not only within our minds, but also within every particle of the material universe. Thus there are also countless buddhas present in the physical structure of our bodies:

In every single pore of one's body there may be seen buddhas as numerous as the atoms in an inconceivable number of buddha-realms.<sup>158</sup>  
[Ch. 27]

Similarly, buddhas can be found teaching the Dharma in every atom throughout the universe:

As you see the Buddha in this assembly,  
So it is in every atom....  
In every atom the buddhas display  
Their vast and boundless spiritual power.<sup>159</sup>  
[Ch. 1]

In other words, the enlightened awareness of Vairocana is omnipresent, as visible in the material world as it is in the mind for those who know how to cleanse the “doors of perception”:

If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.  
[William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*]

Or as the Sutra describes the process:

Wherever you direct your mind let there be no obstruction.<sup>160</sup> [Ch. 26]

For if there are no longer any obstructions or impediments between the mind and its objects, the luminous dimension of emptiness will become fully apparent and the all-encompassing awareness of the buddhas will have been realized.

What applies to space applies equally to time, for in the Huayen view “the ten periods of time, past and present, never move from this very moment”.<sup>161</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary] And in this present moment, inapprehensible yet containing the whole of time, the Buddha is continually expounding the Dharma:

In every single instant the Buddha  
Pours down the Dharma's boundless rain.<sup>162</sup>  
[Ch. 1]

Blake also writes of the transformative power of this dimensionless and universal moment:

There is a moment in each day that Satan cannot find  
 Nor can his watch fiends find it, but the industrious find  
 This moment and it multiply. And when it once is found  
 It renovates every moment of the day if rightly placed.

[Milton, pl. 39]

Satan here corresponds to the Mara of the Buddhist scriptures. The moment of Enlightenment will always elude him and his followers, for their understanding is limited to the rigid world of material form and chronological time.

Samantabhadra practitioners therefore try to always be mindful of the the realm of Enlightenment that they know is present within them and all around them. If they practise on this basis, they will eventually be able to make that same Enlightenment clearly apparent within in the world so that others can gain access to it. The bodhisattva Bhadrashri, in the Sutra's 12th chapter, sums this process up as follows:

If you can keep your mind fixed on the Buddha,  
 Countless buddhas will always appear before you.  
 If countless buddhas always appear before you,  
 You will see that Buddhahood is always present.  
 If you see that Buddhahood is always present,  
 You will know that the Dharma never perishes.  
 If you know that the Dharma never perishes,  
 You will gain unimpeded eloquence.<sup>163</sup>

[Ch. 12]

Bodhisattvas need such eloquence if they are to work effectively for the Enlightenment of all beings and so fulfil the commitment they made when they first awakened the Aspiration to Enlightenment [*bodhicitta*], which for Huayen is the point at which the path of practice really begins.

## **Bodhicitta**

According to Mahayana Buddhism *bodhicitta* can be simply defined as the aspiration to achieve Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and a practitioner in whom this Aspiration has awakened has truly embarked on the path of a bodhisattva. Bodhicitta is therefore the foundation of all Mahayana Buddhist practice.

In the Huayen teachings also Bodhicitta plays a pre-eminent role. It is the subject of two important chapters of the Sutra, and is the constant theme of

Sudhana's quest throughout the long, final chapter. When Sudhana encounters the great bodhisattva Maitreya at the end of his journey, Maitreya emphasizes once again the great spiritual power of this Aspiration and the supreme importance of arousing it, and he reinforces the message with a string of over a hundred similes:

Bodhicitta is like a seed,  
for all the qualities of Buddhahood grow from it.  
Bodhicitta is like a fertile field,  
for it produces good conduct in sentient beings.  
Bodhicitta is like the earth,  
for it sustains all the worlds.  
Bodhicitta is like pure water,  
for it washes away all the defilements....<sup>164</sup>

The comprehensive manual of Dharma practice that forms the second-last and third-longest chapter of the Sutra, "Disengagement From the World" [離世間品], places the Aspiration to Enlightenment at the very beginning of its series of instructions:

There are ten things that bodhisattvas rely on? What are these ten? They rely on Bodhicitta, never forgetting or neglecting it....<sup>165</sup>

Similarly, Bodhicitta stands at the head of the Huayen School's fifty-eight Samantabhadra Precepts, the first four of which are as follows:

1. Never abandon the Aspiration to Enlightenment.
2. Dedicate all your good deeds to the attainment of Enlightenment.
3. Protect the purity of your Aspiration to Enlightenment.
4. Seek to strengthen your Aspiration to Enlightenment.<sup>166</sup>

The nature of Bodhicitta itself is understood by Huayen in much the same way as in other Mahayana texts. Samantabhadra himself, for example, sums it up as follows:

I will liberate all sentient beings  
 Who burn with the fires of greed, anger and ignorance,  
 And will extinguish the sufferings of the evil paths of existence.  
 I will hold firmly to this vow without flinching or turning back  
 Till I have gained the ten unhindered powers of Buddhahood.<sup>167</sup>

[Ch. 36]

But Huayen's understanding of the relationship between Enlightenment and the initial aspiration to achieve it is somewhat different from that of other schools of Buddhism. Perhaps the best-known saying in the entire *Avatamsaka Sūtra* is the paradoxical assertion that "Supreme and perfect Enlightenment [*anuttara-saṃyaksambodhi*] is achieved the moment one first aspires to it"<sup>168</sup> [Ch. 16]. Clearly what is intended here is something more than just a hopeful intention or a pious wish. The Sutra is in fact indicating a radical transformation of our consciousness, a permanent shift in our intentions that will endure from this moment on throughout all future lifetimes, turning us away from preoccupation with our personal affairs in this world and towards the attainment of Enlightenment and the welfare of all sentient beings.

But how can Enlightenment be achieved simply by aspiring to it? One answer lies in the unbreakable link between a commitment as profound as this and its inevitable fulfilment. So the Sutra says that:

Those who are endowed with sufficient wisdom  
 To aspire for an instant to Enlightenment,  
 Will infallibly accomplish Buddhahood;  
 Of this there cannot be the slightest doubt.<sup>169</sup> [Ch. 24]

Huayen also claims that the 'arrow of time' is ultimately just another subjective illusion and that in reality "there is no past, present or future"<sup>170</sup>, for "past and present never move from this present moment"<sup>171</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]. It follows that an unshakeable aspiration to achieve Enlightenment made in the present moment will immediately also include its 'future' realization.

In short Huayen claims that no real distinction can be made between the initial commitment, its expression in practice and its final realization. These appear to us to be three distinct phases, but in fact they are just three 'unobstructed' aspects of a single process, for the barriers of time and place that appear to separate them have no objective reality. Bodhicitta thus becomes indistinguishable from Enlightenment itself:

One should know that the mind is the same as Enlightenment, and Enlightenment is the same as the mind.<sup>172</sup> [Ch. 38]

If one arouses the Aspiration for a single moment, subject and object will immediately cease to exist.<sup>173</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

In the same way Dharma practice is also a manifestation of Bodhicitta, or of the buddha-nature from which the initial Aspiration itself arises:

It is only when one follows the path of a bodhisattva and cultivates the practices of a bodhisattva that it becomes possible to speak of perfect Enlightenment being achieved the moment one first aspires to it.<sup>174</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

In other words, cultivation of the Dharma, understood as Samantabhadra practice, is already Enlightenment in action, and there is no other goal that needs to be sought for or attained:

Once the initial Aspiration has been established, on the basis of uncontrived Bodhicitta in which there is nothing to cultivate or practise, one proceeds to cultivate all the inexhaustible practices of Samantabhadra.<sup>175</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

## The Stages of the Path

Of the various formulations of the path of practice in the Huayen School, the most common is a division into seven sections comprising fifty-two steps: i.e., ten degrees of faith, ten stations, ten practices, ten transferrals of merit, ten stages [*bhūmi*], virtual Enlightenment, and supreme Enlightenment. This scheme more or less neatly correlates some important chapters of the Sutra with the number of Sudhana's teachers. In fact, however, there are many more stages and grades of practice than this in the Sutra, but the essential teaching with regard to the Huayen path of practice is always nondual, and it is, therefore, both a sudden path to Enlightenment and a gradual path of practice:

One stage is all stages, one practice is all practices.... Beginning and end are ultimately the same, and the ten bodies of Buddhahood are accomplished with the completion of each stage of the practice.<sup>176</sup> [Fa Zang, Commentary]

All the stages of the path are identical with Buddhahood itself...; that is to say, Buddhahood is realized at every single stage.<sup>177</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

According to Fa Zang this is one of the characteristics that mark Huayen out as a ‘vehicle’ [*yāna*] -- a comprehensive system of Buddhist teaching and practice leading to complete Enlightenment -- and not just another school of Buddhist doctrine:

Each stage on the path wholly includes the qualities of all the other stages. This is the Complete Teaching of the Ekayana and is not to be found in the Three Vehicles.<sup>178</sup> [Fa Zang, Commentary]

The Universal Vehicle [*ekayāna*], or Buddha Vehicle [*buddhayāna*], of Huayen can therefore accommodate all practices, for each and every practice will open a door to complete Enlightenment:

Even those who merely glimpse their true nature will enter the Buddhayana. It is like the ocean: a single drop of water from it, or any number of such drops, will be one with the ocean itself. So it is too with the five divisions of the Bodhisattva Path, for at every stage and level within them the fruits of Buddhahood are realized.<sup>179</sup>

[Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

## Practice as Enlightenment

When seen in this light, the practices of the Bodhisattva Path become no different from Buddhahood itself. As the Sutra says:

Bodhisattva practice is identical with the nature of the Tathagata, and the nature of the Tathagata is identical with bodhisattva practice.<sup>180</sup>

[Ch. 37]

It follows that to conceive of Enlightenment as the final result of practice, or as something separate from the practices themselves, is to chase after an illusion. Li Tungxuan explains:

If you cultivate with a view to attaining an Enlightenment beyond the practices, it will be the Enlightenment of the Disciples, of the Solitary Buddhas, or of the bodhisattvas who contemplate emptiness, not the sovereign Enlightenment of the Ekayana, the true wisdom of Manjushri or the compassionate activities and vows of Samantabhadra... Therefore one simply seeks to follow the Bodhisattva Path, for there is no other Enlightenment.<sup>181</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

According to the Huayen teachings, the enlightened wisdom of the Buddha, the luminous emptiness of the Dharmarealm of Reality, is the essential nature of all mental and physical phenomena. Dharma practice must therefore also be a manifestation of the same underlying reality. In other words, Huayen practice is supposed to be in perfect agreement with the true nature of things, and this is why it is said to be ‘easy’, ‘effortless’, or ‘uncontrived’:

One should know the provisional but follow the real, thereby entering the gate of the Dharmarealm. Contrived teachings are hard to accomplish, but uncontrived teaching that accords with conditions is easy to realize. The contrived is laborious and achieves nothing, while the uncontrived that accords with conditions accomplishes itself. Achievement that is not [consciously] achieved is never lost, while achievements that are achieved [through conscious effort ] are always impermanent. [In the latter case,] aeons of practice will in the end come to nothing, but a single instant of the conditioned arising of the Unborn will transcend all the views of the provisional teachings of the Three Vehicles.<sup>182</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

In Huayen, Enlightenment is therefore not regarded as something to be aimed at or striven for. The real purpose of Dharma practice is simply to clear away obstacles so that the fundamental Enlightenment which is inherent in every living being will be able to emerge spontaneously:

Primordial wisdom is made manifest through meditation; cultivation does not create it or bring it into being. If one simply follows the Bodhisattva Path and learns the bodhisattva practices, primordial wisdom will shine forth of itself.... So long as one has not attained to the essence of true Enlightenment, all one's practices will be subject to impermanence, and will remain the fruit of the samsaric karma of human beings and gods.<sup>183</sup>

[Li Tungxuan, *The Resolution of Doubts*]

When ignorance comes to an end and karmic obstacles are no more, the Nirvana of one's own nature will appear spontaneously.<sup>184</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

At this point all barriers between appearances and reality, between Samsara and Nirvana, will have vanished, and all activities without exception will become the practices of Samantabhadra:

According to the [teaching of the] Arising of Ultimate Reality, such actions as looking up and looking down, advancing and retreating, bending and stretching, bowing and yielding – all these are bodhisattva activities.<sup>185</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

## 9. The Environment

Huayen, as a rigorously nondual teaching, sees no need to distinguish between private and public practice. There should therefore be no barrier or obstacle [Skt. *apratighāta*; Ch. *wúài* 無礙] between lightening the burden of suffering in our own minds and lives and acting to relieve the suffering that exists in the world around us. The characteristic emphasis of the Huayen teachings on the interconnectedness of all things also makes it clear that individuals cannot be separated from their environment and that the two are completely interdependent.

Huayen practitioners therefore work towards creating a world which will faithfully reflect the true nature of their environment as a continuous, and continuously changing, network of phenomena that are ultimately insubstantial [*śūnya*] but exist in a state of unqualified interdependence [*pratītyasamutpāda*]. In the case of human beings, this implies that we should construct no false barriers between ourselves and the natural world of which we are an integral part, or between individuals within the societies that we create.

### The Individual and the Environment

According to traditional Buddhist doctrine, the world in which we appear to live is created or shaped by our minds – by our desires, our concepts, our habits, and the nature of our senses. In an often-quoted passage from the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, the Buddha compares the mind to a painter:

The mind is like a skilful painter  
 Depicting an image of all the worlds.  
 Thus the five aggregates come into being;  
 All things are created in this way.<sup>186</sup> [Ch. 20]

In cosmological terms our environment is also described by the Buddhist texts as a ‘receptacle’ or ‘material’ world [*bhājana-loka*, 器世間] and is explained as the result of collective karma, or in other words, as a kind of mass delusion:

The physical forms of beings differ  
 Because of distinctions made by the mind.  
 Thus all the phenomena of the world  
 Come from the working of karma alone.<sup>187</sup>  
 [Ch. 5]

But the material world and the world of sentient beings [*sattva-loka*] are interdependent and define one another: sentient entities are those entities which are not regarded as insentient, and the purely material is anything that is not classed as sentient. The same is true of the painter and the painting, for a painter is defined as someone who creates paintings, and paintings are whatever a painter happens to create. So the individual and the environment can never be separated from each other, for the boundary that divides them is relative, impermanent, and ultimately illusory. Materially speaking, all life begins with the formation of a membrane that insulates the individual entity from its environment and marks it off as an autonomous and self-sustaining system; and this physical barrier finds a psychological counterpart in the sense of self that is possessed by all living things down to the simplest bacteria. But these boundaries between the self and the world are ultimately a false imposition on the undivided, nondual reality that Huayen calls the Dharmarealm [*dharmadhātu*], as can be seen from their contingency and eventual disintegration:

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
Stains the white radiance of Eternity  
Until Death tramples it to fragments.

[Shelley, “Adonais”]

For Huayen, therefore, wisdom is the recognition that all such boundaries and barriers are ultimately unreal, even though they may appear to exist as concrete entities. It is neither necessary nor possible to abolish them. All that is required is to understand that they are empty [*sūnya*]; then their true nature will become apparent and the realm of Enlightenment will arise spontaneously. Accordingly, there is no real distinction that can be established between Samsara and Nirvana or between spiritual cultivation and worldly activities:

Samsara and Nirvana are not separate locations;  
The passions and Enlightenment are essentially nondual.<sup>188</sup>

[Myeonghyo, *The Ocean Seal [sāgaramudrā] Samadhi*]

In the opening chapter of the Sutra, the “lords of the world” assemble to recite verses in praise of the Buddha’s Enlightenment. Taking first place in the assembly are the great bodhisattvas led by Samantabhadra, and at the end of the list come the deities of ancient Indian and Buddhist cosmology. In between these two groups appear deities that preside over various aspects of the human world and the world of nature: deities of towns, districts and crops; of mountains, rivers and forests; of water, fire and wind; of day and night, and so on. In this way, by depicting these deities as

joining in the celebration of Buddhahood, the Sutra is informing us that our physical environment also contains the potential for Enlightenment and inclines naturally towards it. Sometimes it illustrates the point literally:

When great bodhisattvas take their place at the Seat of Enlightenment,  
all the plants, trees, and forests in the world bow down towards them.<sup>189</sup>  
[Ch. 38]

But more often it simply speaks of Enlightenment as being present in all its fullness in every part of the physical universe, repeatedly affirming that buddhas are to be found teaching the Dharma in the countless worlds that exist within each atom:

When bodhisattvas reach this stage of understanding  
They will see within each and every atom  
Seats of Enlightenment in countless worlds  
Complete with sentient beings and cycles of time.<sup>190</sup>  
[Ch. 39]

The buddhas can reveal worlds within a single atom....where they  
constantly turn the sublime Wheel of the Dharma in order to lead beings  
to Enlightenment.<sup>191</sup>  
[Ch. 33]

But if one assumes that every particle of matter is ultimately a manifestation of the enlightened awareness of the buddhas, it will no longer be possible to regard the environment as just a collection of objects to be used as we wish. On the contrary this point of view implies that we should see everything around us as a buddharealm to be treated with as much respect as we are capable of. That the same principle applies in the social realm is suggested in a different way by the story of Sudhana. Among his fifty-two teachers, in addition to Buddhist monks and nuns, brahmins, bodhisattvas and deities of various kinds, there are also a number of people engaged in worldly occupations – kings and businessmen, a courtesan, a student, a perfumer, a goldsmith and so on. This shows that for Huayen, conventional distinctions between sacred and secular have no ultimate validity. Enlightenment can be found in every sphere of human life, even in apparently unenlightened individuals, just as it can in every part of the physical universe. Everybody has a particular role to play in society, but all are interconnected and no real barrier separates them from one another or from the Enlightenment that is their essential nature:

[Bodhisattvas] see all beings as pure in their basic nature, see all phenomena as one with Nirvana, see all worlds as identical with empty space.<sup>192</sup> [Ch. 38]

Therefore Samantabhadra practitioners, while cultivating inner detachment from their worldly environment, continue to engage with it outwardly in order to make Enlightenment available to all and so fulfil their commitment to liberate beings from the cycle of ignorance and suffering:

These bodhisattvas ... go into all the villages, towns, cities and communities, or wherever beings live, and respond to their needs in all kinds of ways through physical forms, modes of conduct, sounds, explanations and dwelling places, engaging in the practices of a bodhisattva in worlds like Indra's Net.<sup>193</sup>

[Ch. 39]

## The Web of Life

The metaphor of Indra's Net is an extension of the central Buddhist teaching of Interdependent Origination [*pratītyasamutpāda*]. In Huayen usage it signifies that the barriers or boundaries which appear to us to divide one thing from another are not ultimately real, that phenomena are 'unobstructed' [*apratighāta*], and that everything therefore exists as part of a continuous network in which each node, or phenomenon, is inextricably connected with all the rest, so that whatever affects a single part will simultaneously affect the whole. In the realm of inanimate matter the recently discovered principles of nonlocality and quantum entanglement seem to provide some support for the Huayen point of view, and these findings have led some physicists to conclude that the entire universe consists of a vast network of particles in constant communication with each other, so that individual phenomena cannot be understood in isolation but only in the light of the network as a whole.<sup>194</sup>

What is true of inanimate things is equally true of living organisms. Sentient beings come into existence by distinguishing themselves from their environment; but while this appears to define them as autonomous entities, they can only continue to maintain their existence by interacting constantly with their environment and with one another. At its oldest and simplest level, life on this planet takes the form of bacteria, which in the biological realm could be said to correspond roughly to the fundamental particles of physics, for all larger forms of life have evolved from and mostly consist of complex bacterial structures. Considered from this point of view, therefore, all life on Earth can be seen as a single entity, a planet-wide network, damage to any part of which is bound to affect the whole to a greater or lesser degree.

At the present time the implications of this interdependence and interconnectedness are becoming increasingly apparent. Human beings have foolishly imagined that they exist in a space that is somehow separate from the web of life of which they are in fact an integral part. This ignorance has led in the end to unbridled greed and reckless exploitation of the natural world, the consequences of which have become manifest as social and political alienation, economic inequality, dangerous levels of chemical pollution, and disruption of ecosystems and the global climate. Thus we are now experiencing collectively the inevitable sequence of cause and effect that Shakyamuni Buddha discovered long ago: self-centred ignorance leads to greed and aggression, which in the end can produce only suffering [*duḥkha*].

## Deep Ecology

But according to the Four Truths of Buddhism, if environmental degradation can be seen as a form of suffering, there must also be a solution – a path of practice that will lead to the cessation of this suffering [*duḥkha-nirodha*]. In 1973 the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess [1912-2009] coined the term ‘deep ecology’ to indicate that if the wounds inflicted on the world’s ecosystems were to be healed, it would be necessary to look more deeply than usual into the relationship between human beings and their natural environment. In order to clarify this, Naess drew up a platform of eight basic principles, the number eight apparently being a deliberate allusion to the Eightfold Path of Buddhism. In the Buddhist formulation, the path to Enlightenment begins with the abandonment of false beliefs and the acquisition of valid insight [*samyag-dr̥ṣṭi*] into the true nature of the self and the world. Similarly, the Deep Ecology platform begins with the assertion of a fundamental principle from which the remaining seven can be derived:

The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has intrinsic value. The value of non-human life forms is independent of the usefulness these may have for narrow human purposes.

This is the essential point for Huayen also. All sentient beings, human and non-human, are endowed with buddha-nature, with the potential to achieve Enlightenment. All beings should therefore be treated with the respect that this potential entitles them to. To regard them simply as objects that may or may not be of use “for narrow human purposes” would be to abandon our human responsibilities towards other beings and to lapse into a self-centredness that will only be productive of further suffering – as can be seen already from our wanton despoliation of the environment, the consequences of which are now beginning to threaten the survival

of the human race itself. A correct understanding of the web of life and of our own place in it is therefore an essential first step towards healing the wounds of the planet. Only then will it be possible to start building a world that will be a healthier and happier place for all its inhabitants.

But for Huayen, as we have seen, the enlightened awareness of Vairocana is the essential nature, not just of sentient beings, but of everything that exists:

Here one does not speak of a distinction between animate and inanimate, for what the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* reveals is the fundamental Dharma, which is different from the provisional teachings of the Three Vehicles. Therefore the inanimate is animate, and arising is also ceasing.<sup>195</sup> [Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

*The Collected Sayings of Chan Master Wu Ben of Dungshan* also contains the following dialogue:

A monk asked, “What was the mind of the buddhas of old like?” The Master replied, “Walls and rubble.” The monk said, “Aren’t such things insentient?” The Master said, “That’s right.” The monk said, “But they can still expound the Dharmna?” The Master replied, “They do so constantly, fervently, incessantly.”... The monk said, “On the basis of what canonical text do you claim that insentient things can expound the Dharmna?” The Master replied, “... Haven’t you seen where it says in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* that ‘the physical realm expounds it, living beings expound it, everything in the three periods of time expounds it’?”<sup>196</sup>

Insentient things are able to expound the Dharma because their essential nature is the same luminous emptiness that is the essential nature of Enlightenment itself. This is also why the Sutra claims repeatedly that there are countless buddhas teaching the Dharma within every single atom. If we understand this point clearly, we will not be able to treat any part of our environment wantonly or with disrespect. Indra’s Net can be seen not only in the intricate web of life that covers our planet but also in the networks of atoms and molecules that make up the inanimate matter from which all the elements of our physical environment are formed. According to the Huayen teachings, earth, air, fire and water, minerals, mountains, rivers and seas, are all manifestations of Enlightenment if we can only learn to perceive them with the eye of wisdom. By training ourselves to see the world in this light, we can become aware that our mundane environment is also a buddha-realm; then we will truly be able to ‘adorn the world’ by our conduct and so open up a path to Liberation for all beings.

## The Human World

But at this point in human history most people live in an environment that is more artificial than natural. So large, complex and all-embracing have our towns and cities become that most of their inhabitants are now effectively isolated, physically and mentally, from the natural surroundings which they have so ruthlessly exploited and on which their survival ultimately depends. From the Buddhist point of view, this illusory separateness can be seen as a manifestation of primordial ignorance [*avidyā*, *moha*] operating at the social level, as a kind of collective ego which produces greed [*lobha*] and aggression [*dveṣa*] and so perpetuates the cycle of suffering [*duḥkha*]. The solution therefore is to strive for a clearer understanding [*samyag-dṛṣṭi*] of our actual circumstances, and that must begin with recognition of the reality of the suffering that currently exists in our world. While those who live on an adequate income in economically developed countries are able to enjoy a level of comfort and convenience that was only available to the aristocracy in earlier times, abundant evidence of human suffering in other countries, and even in one's own country, can easily be found in newspapers and magazines, on television, and on the internet. Homelessness, poverty, illness, oppression and brutal violence are still pervasive and entrenched in our human environment.

Of all the forms of suffering that afflict human society, warfare is the most destructive. In 2018 total military expenditure worldwide rose to \$1,822,000,000,000,<sup>197</sup> and towards the middle of 2020, even in the midst of a global pandemic, the equivalent of nearly US \$5,000,000,000 was still being spent on armaments.<sup>198</sup>

Another widespread and increasingly prominent cause of suffering in the modern world is economic inequality both between and within nations. A comparison of GDP per capita shows that out of more than 180 nations, thirty or so enjoy a per capita income that is the equivalent of US \$40,000 or more, while in the poorest ten, people must survive on less than \$1,500 per annum<sup>199</sup>.

If we turn to financial inequality within societies, the same pattern emerges. In some countries the richest 20% of the population own more than 60% of the nation's wealth, and even in the relatively prosperous and democratic countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) income inequality is said to be increasing steadily, and those "at the lower part of the income distribution are the ones that are losing the most"<sup>200</sup>. But in fact everywhere throughout the world the income gap between rich and poor appears to be growing larger year by year, and according to a recent Oxfam report, it has now become so extreme that it is possible for 2,153 of the world's richest people to possess more wealth than 4,600,000,000 other members of the human race.<sup>201</sup>

From the Buddhist point of view, all these and other such manifestations of suffering at the collective or social level are ultimately produced by the same causes that create the suffering experienced by individuals; for all suffering has its origin in the human mind, and it is only in the mind that the way to overcome it can be found.

## Self and Society

It is said that every jewel in Indra's Net reflects the entire network and that the network thus consists of multiple reflections of each individual jewel. Human societies are also like this: each person's mind reflects the collective understanding of all the other members of society, and society as a whole reflects the minds of all the individuals who compose it. Just as with the natural world, of which we are a part and which is also part of us, it is not possible to separate self from others or the individual from the environment. So if the minds of most members of a society are dominated by self-centred desires, the entire structure of that society will take a form that is oriented towards maximizing and gratifying those desires, and as a result social conflict and individual suffering will tend to increase. But if on the other hand the majority of people have a more enlightened view of themselves and their world and understand the need for moderation and self-control, their social environment will reflect that wisdom and will be relatively peaceful and prosperous.

Given the extent of misery, violence and callousness in the world today, it would seem that most people are motivated by largely negative feelings and attitudes, and that they have little understanding of the nature of their own minds or of the environment in which they are living. But to change this situation, and 'adorn' the world with wisdom and compassion as the Sutra recommends, it is not enough to simply improve the attitude of individuals without also attending to the social structures that they have created and that continue to affect their patterns of thought and behaviour. The nondual approach of Huayen implies that while changes in society can be brought about by changing individuals, it is also necessary to change society as a whole in order to bring about the desired changes in individuals. The Buddha's remedy for suffering, as set out in the formula of the Four Truths, must be applied at the collective as well as the individual level.

## Poisons

According to Buddhist tradition, suffering in general has three fundamental causes called in Sanskrit unwholesome roots, or roots of ill [*akuśala-mūlāni*]. In Chinese and Tibetan they are usually referred to as the three poisons. They are generally said to be greed [*lobha*], hatred [*dveṣa*] and delusion [*moha*], but each of

these three terms covers a wide range of emotions and attitudes. 'Greed' and 'hatred' here stand for any kind of strong attraction or aversion, and 'delusion' is a synonym for the primordial ignorance from which they both spring: the sense of self and the consequent division of the world into subject and object that govern the lives and actions of most sentient beings and are the ultimate source of all their suffering.

In the case of human beings, with their capacity for language and reflective thought, this deluded belief in the overriding importance of the self finds explicit expression in religious and philosophical doctrines, and is the unacknowledged basis of many of our social structures and institutions. As human societies have increased in size and complexity, so the poisons of greed, hatred and delusion have found ever greater scope for their activity in the realms of politics and economics. As a result we have now, at the beginning of the 21st century, arrived at the stage where vast sums of money are being spent every day on killing people instead of helping them, animals are being systematically tortured and slaughtered on an unprecedented scale for human pleasure and profit, the steady impoverishment of the many for the enrichment of a few is regarded as sound policy, deceit has become an accepted mode of discourse in political and commercial circles, and it seems that the only way for people to be happy is to accumulate money so that they can continue to buy more things than they actually need.

This situation arises because the three poisons have become embedded in social institutions which then extend their noxious influence by spreading them more widely throughout the populace in a kind of negative feedback loop. Thus individual greed, for example, expands into the desire of corporations and national governments to continually increase their territory, wealth and influence. The results of this process can be seen in the ruthless exploitation of poorer countries by richer ones, in the destruction of the natural environment for profit, and in the pursuit of endlessly rising levels of consumption. Similarly, hatred becomes manifest at the social level in the form of ethnic, political and religious conflict, wars and invasions, and in restrictions on the free movement of people and the circulation of new ideas. Behind all this suffering is the fundamental delusion of the ego that everything can be subjected to control from the centre and that the boundaries which define the collective self can somehow be made immutable and secure from the ever-present threat of impermanence.

## Antidotes

But impermanence [*anityatā*] is part of the nature of all phenomena, and no unchanging self or centre can be found anywhere [*nairātmya, śūnyatā*]. According to the Huayen teachings, the universe is an infinite network of insubstantial phenomena – Indra’s Net. All these phenomena are endlessly diverse, but in their essential nature they are identical [*sama*]; and because the boundaries that appear to separate them from one another are not ultimately real, phenomena are in constant communication and interaction with one another. The entire universe thus forms a single entity, a fluid web of relationships that has local hubs but no permanent centre, apparent existence but no fixed reality.

A similar picture emerges from the findings of modern physics, and some scientists have suggested that the universe can be seen as a “vast web of particles” in simultaneous contact with one another, or as a “web of relationships” in which nothing exists separately in isolation from the whole.<sup>202</sup> Biological systems also follow the same pattern, tending to evolve as open-ended, interactive networks so long as nothing happens to interrupt their natural development. Our own human bodies consist of an vast and complex web of bacteria, cells and chemical particles, all interacting with one another at lightning speed; and the same basic method of organization can be found everywhere, at different levels of size and complexity, throughout the living world. The whole of life on earth can therefore be described as “a nested fractal network of interdependent beings”.<sup>203</sup>

The growth of social systems, in animals, plants and humans, again tends to follow the same structural principle. An experiment in 2010, for example, showed that slime moulds will naturally expand along lines that closely resemble existing railway networks.<sup>204</sup> Similarly, the apparently random interactions of individuals in communities of ants, bees and human beings can generate a fluid but stable network of communication that operates efficiently for the maximum benefit of the society as a whole. The most striking example of this process at work in the human world today is the internet, which has grown without central direction into a global network capable in principle of connecting every individual on the planet to everybody else, just as each individual jewel in Indra’s Net reflects all the others. The internet has hubs – large nodes or portals with multiple connections to other nodes – but no centre. In the Buddhist sense, it is ‘empty’ [*śūnya*], for it has no ‘self’ [*nairātmya*], and yet it is capable of embracing all human beings, allowing free and unimpeded [*apratihata*] communication between them.

In Huayen the concept of a decentralized and dynamic structure that encompasses all phenomena in a universal network of causal relationships is summed up in a list of ten ‘profound doctrines’ or ‘subtle teachings’ [*xuán mén 玄門*]. This set

of teachings was first devised by Zhi Yen to illustrate ten ways in which the universe can be interpreted from the point of view of nonobstruction [*apratighāta*] – the ultimate unreality of the spatiotemporal barriers that appear to us to separate things from one another. Fa Zang at first kept all ten items as he had received them from his guru, although he rearranged them in what seemed to him to be a more appropriate order. Subsequently he published a revised list with more substantial changes. In a couple of cases there were only slight changes in the wording, but one item was completely rephrased, and Zhi Yen’s final principle, “creation through the transformations of mind alone”<sup>205</sup>, was replaced by a completely different one: “the complete illumination of all qualities by principal and subordinate”<sup>206</sup>.

The Ten Profound Doctrines thus exist in three different forms, but each list begins with the same basic principle that sums up all the rest: “simultaneous and complete inter-responsiveness”<sup>207</sup>. As with the last of the Four Dharmarealms, the realm of the nonduality of appearances with one another, this principle affirms that all things reflect one another and interact freely in the timeless dimension of Enlightenment.

Fa Zang’s final item, which concerns the complementary nature of ‘principal’ and ‘subordinate’, also has important social and environmental implications. The Chinese terms [*zhǔ* 主 and *bàn* 伴] used here could also refer to ‘host’ and ‘guest’, ‘leader’ and ‘follower’ and so on, but the essential point is that all such roles are both complementary and also relative and interchangeable. If we think of them as fixed and separate, we will only see half the picture; but if we understand that they represent complementary aspects of a nondual totality, then the “complete illumination of all qualities” will be within our grasp. So Fa Zang says in *The Real Meaning of the Avatamsaka Sūtra* that “in the Complete Teaching of this Sutra, all things function as principal and subordinate to one another”<sup>208</sup>. “If,” he explains elsewhere, “one location is regarded as principal, other locations in the ten directions will become subordinate to it, and the same can be said of any other location. In that case principal and subordinate will occupy fixed positions and will be quite distinct from one another. But if subordinate can also be principal, and principal can be subordinate, all qualities will be completely illuminated.”<sup>209</sup> [Commentary]

Another way to understand Fa Zang’s argument here might be to consider the relationship between the centre and periphery of a circle. If a particular point is taken as the centre (‘principal’), all the points on the periphery will become ‘subordinate’ to it. But if some point on the periphery is then taken as the centre of a new circle with the same radius, that peripheral point will become the ‘principal’ of the new circle, while the former ‘principal’ point will now be in a ‘subordinate’ position. In other words, all such hierarchical relationships, while necessary to provide a coherent

structure to the whole, are essentially relative and impermanent, contingent on changing circumstances and point of view.

Generally, however, we tend to think of these relationships as something fixed and immutable. In particular we cling to the notion that the self and its welfare are of paramount importance, something to which everything else must take second place. That is why we feel able to exploit the natural environment and oppress other sentient beings so casually and with such reckless disregard for the consequences. It is also why we create social institutions which reflect and strengthen this egocentric point of view, institutions in which the positions of principal and subordinate, superior and inferior, are clearly demarcated and resistant to change. As a result, the collective energies of ignorance, greed and hatred are given free play, and we create a world characterized by lack of self-awareness and a callous disregard for the sufferings of others.

## **The Pyramid and the Web**

In this human world at the beginning of the 21st century, the two dominant socio-political institutions are the national state and the business corporation. Both of these institutions are constructed on the model of a pyramid, with a small number of people at the top exercising control over increasingly larger numbers of people towards the bottom. The pyramid is a rigid structure which corresponds precisely to the nature and habits of the self or ego, for the self, which wants to believe in its own immortality, is nevertheless subconsciously aware of its essential unreality and seeks to deny, or at least postpone, its inevitable death by achieving absolute control over its surroundings. This obsession with controlling the uncontrollable leads to a society in which relationships between individuals and between human beings and their natural environment are perceived in terms of power and exploitation. It creates social and political structures which strenuously resist change, in which the many are subordinate to the few, and in which power and influence flow only downwards, from the top to the bottom. A society which embodies the ego's fantasies of omnipotence in this way will generate much destructive energy and produce a great deal of suffering.

But according to Huayen teachings, the natural structure of the phenomenal world is not that of a pyramid but has the form of a web or network; and so "the realm (or in Fa Zang's final version, "the Dharmarealm") of Indra's Net" is included as one of the Ten Profound Doctrines which are meant to illustrate the relative and interconnected nature of everything in the perceived universe. In an open network all nodes are connected to and responsive to one another, and any given node can serve as a central reference point (the 'principal') to the rest (the 'subordinate') at any time, depending on circumstances. In such a universal network there can therefore be no

permanent centre of control, no ‘self’ or ‘ego’, only local hubs which may function as temporary centres of communication or coordination, as in the case of the nuclei of living cells and certain portals or large websites on the internet.

An egoless society constructed on the model of Indra’s Net would thus be in accord with the nature of physical and biological reality as well as with the principles of the Buddhadharmā. In the absence of the huge, power-based institutions that embody the collective sense of self in present-day societies, overt manifestations of greed and hatred at the collective level would also be correspondingly reduced, allowing human beings to enjoy more rational and harmonious relationships with one another and with the natural world around them. An ideal society of this type may be difficult and perhaps impossible to achieve, but practical steps towards it can certainly be taken if there is the will to do so. Egotism and greed, for example, could be weakened by a gradual decentralization of political, economic and financial power throughout society, by ensuring that each member of commercial and political organizations enjoys the same rights and privileges as every other member, by abandoning the desire for endless growth and individual wealth and aiming instead at a sufficiency for all, and so on.

Similarly, more open borders and freer movement of people and ideas within and between nations would foster a sense of common humanity, leaving less scope for collective hatreds and making wars less likely. Another possibility was demonstrated by Costa Rica in 1939, when it officially abolished its armed forces and its citizens were thereafter able to lead more peaceful and prosperous lives than most of their neighbours. So far no other countries seem to have been inspired to follow this sensible example, but the universal law of impermanence assures us that nothing remains as it is forever, and that changes for the better are no less possible than changes for the worse. The *Avatamsaka Sūtra* therefore constantly urges bodhisattvas to work tirelessly for the welfare of the world, fulfilling the needs of all beings and striving to guide them away from the darkness of ignorance and towards the tranquil realm of Enlightenment.

## Enlightening the World

The Sutra speaks often of the bodhisattva’s obligation to ‘adorn the world’ [莊嚴國土]. Bodhisattvas accomplish this through their conduct. By demonstrating their own commitment to the Buddhadharmā and by explaining its significance to others, they are able to raise the societies in which they live to a higher level of material and spiritual well-being, as the goddess of the Lumbini Grove tells Sudhana:

So they can display many kinds of adornment within a single adornment, and in this way they adorn all lands, ceaselessly guiding and enlightening all sentient beings throughout endless future ages.<sup>210</sup>

In working towards this goal, they are always motivated by great compassion, thinking of suffering sentient beings as though they were their own children, as Sudhana observes:

Suppose a person were to suddenly see their much adored only child being hacked to pieces – imagine the unbearable anguish they would feel. So it is with bodhisattvas. When they see how sentient beings are driven by their passions to commit deeds which cause them to be born in lower realms where they experience all kinds of suffering, their hearts are filled with grief.... Bodhisattvas do not seek omniscience for their own sake... but because they see beings enduring boundless suffering in all the realms of existence. Then they feel great compassion and vow to take these beings under their protection; and motivated by this compassionate vow, they cultivate the practices of a bodhisattva in order to eliminate the destructive passions of all sentient beings... and to adorn the vast number of lands in which they live.<sup>211</sup>

The path of Samantabhadra that is taught by the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* and the Huayen School is nondualistic and all-inclusive. For Samantabhadra practitioners there can be no real distinction between personal Enlightenment and Enlightenment of the world around them, for ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘individual’ and ‘environment’ are complementary and inseparable concepts. Inner disengagement from the world and outward commitment to the welfare of the world must therefore go hand in hand. So the monk Saradhvaja tells Sudhana that the bodhisattva's purpose is to “become free from all obstacles [*apratihata*] so as to transcend, adorn and heal all the worlds”<sup>212</sup>.

But although the ultimate aim is universal Enlightenment, the physical needs of sentient beings still trapped in Samsara must not be neglected either. In one of the Sutra’s many stories, a prince who would eventually become Shakyamuni Buddha declares that:

Throughout all future ages I shall abandon everything I possess, cultivate the perfection of giving [*dāna-pāramitā*], and ensure that all beings are adequately clothed and fed.<sup>213</sup> [Ch. 39]

Even so, the deepest causes of physical suffering remain spiritual. Unhappy minds

create unhappy societies and damaged environments; poverty and hunger are the end result of collective human greed and ignorance. In seeking to “heal all the worlds”, therefore, bodhisattvas constantly try to eliminate the roots of suffering by communicating an understanding of the Dharma to all those around them and guiding as many beings as possible towards the perfect freedom of Enlightenment:

If a sentient being sees a bodhisattva cultivating the practices that lead to Enlightenment, regardless of whether they doubt or have faith, that bodhisattva will gather them in by all means, mundane and supramundane, looking on them as disciples and ensuring that they never turn back from complete and perfect Enlightenment [*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*]<sup>214</sup>

[Ch. 39]

## 10. The Ekayana

*For God's sake gentlemen let us take off the veil  
That so obscures and confuses our sight.<sup>215</sup>*

One of the Buddha's best known parables – so well known that most people are not even aware that it comes from the Buddha at all – is the story of the blind men and the elephant. According to the version in the *Udāna* of the Pali Canon<sup>216</sup>, the king of Shravasti is said to have gathered all the men in the city who were blind from birth and taken them to an elephant. They were then told, “This is an elephant”, and each of them felt the part of the animal that was closest. When the king subsequently asked them what an elephant was like, those who had felt an ear said it was like a winnowing basket, those who had felt a leg claimed that it resembled a pillar, those who had felt the tip of the tail insisted that an elephant was like a broom, and so on. Then they started quarreling furiously with one another, to the amusement of the king.

So it was, the Buddha said, with the brahmans and wandering philosophers that were constantly disputing with one another about metaphysical problems without ever being able to come to an agreement. Each had glimpsed a portion of the truth and mistaken it for the whole truth. They then insisted that they alone were right and all those who had a different perception were in the wrong. But in fact, as the Buddha pointed out elsewhere,

Truth is one – there is no second  
And the wise find nothing to dispute.<sup>217</sup>

This story implies that there is a single, all-encompassing truth which the Buddha himself has fully understood. Other teachers have indeed grasped part of this truth, and to that extent their opinions are correct. Where they err however is in supposing that the partial understanding they have gained represents the whole truth – that the part of the elephant they have been able to perceive is characteristic of the entire animal. The Buddha on the other hand can see the whole elephant for what it really is, for he possesses a faculty that the others lack: the faculty of perfect insight, or true wisdom.

Huayen claims that the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* depicts the world as seen through the Buddha's eye of wisdom, and that the Huayen teachings themselves are a complete expression of the Buddha's view of reality, a reality of which other Buddhist

teachings and other religious traditions can offer only partial glimpses. For this reason Huayen refers to itself as a ‘complete’ or ‘perfect’ teaching [*yuán jiào* 圓教]. But this Complete Teaching is also said to have two aspects: the ‘separate’ or ‘special teaching’ [*bié jiào* 別教] and the ‘common’ teaching [*tóng jiào* 同教, or *gòng jiào* 共教]. As Fa Zang says:

The doctrines of the Universal Vehicle are divided into two categories:  
(a) those of the Special Teaching, and (b) those of the Common Teaching.<sup>218</sup>

The former term refers to the distinctive teachings of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* and the Huayen School, while the latter refers to the teachings of other schools of Buddhism, and of other religions and philosophies, understood in this case as more or less limited expressions of the same truths that are fully explained in the Complete Teaching.

Huayen therefore claims to be more than just a teaching or a school of Buddhism, and asserts that it is in fact a separate ‘vehicle’ [*yāna*] – the Ekayana, or Universal Vehicle.

## Ekayana

In Buddhism, the word ‘vehicle’ [*yāna*] signifies a complete system of doctrine and practice that can convey its followers from the world of illusion to the realm of Enlightenment. Mahayanist texts commonly distinguish three such vehicles: the Shrivakayana [*Śrāvākayāna*] or Vehicle of the Disciples, the Pratyekabuddhayana or Vehicle of the Solitary Buddhas, and the Mahayana or Great Vehicle (sometimes also called the Bodhisattvayana or Vehicle of the Bodhisattvas). The first of these corresponds historically to such early schools of Buddhism as the Sarvastivada or the Sthaviravada (Theravada); the second is chosen by those who prefer to achieve Enlightenment through their own efforts without any guidance from a teacher; and the third is for those who have committed themselves to achieving complete Enlightenment, or Buddhahood, in order to free all beings from their suffering. These three are known collectively as the Triyana, the ‘three vehicles’. In addition, there is the Vajrayana, the Adamantine Vehicle, also occasionally referred to as the Mantrayana, which is based on the Buddhist tantras as well as on the sutras.

It is in contrast to the Triyana that the term Ekayana is used, for the word *eka* literally means ‘one’. The Ekayana is thus the ‘One Vehicle’, but ‘one’ is being used here in an inclusive and not an exclusive sense; for the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*

and the Huayen teachings include within their scope all the other sutras and teachings, just as the whole body of the elephant in the Buddha's parable includes all the various parts that the blind men were able to perceive. It would be more accurate, therefore, to call the Ekayana a 'Universal Vehicle'. Sometimes the term Buddhayana, the 'Vehicle of the Buddhas', or even Ekabuddhayana, the 'Universal Vehicle of the Buddhas', is used instead.

As the Huayen teachings began to take shape during the Tang Dynasty, the term 'Ekayana' came to be understood with specific reference to another famous Buddhist parable -- the Parable of the Burning House in the *Lotus Sutra* [*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*]. According to this story, a wealthy man owned a large but dilapidated mansion that caught fire. His children were playing elsewhere in the house, so he called out to them, warning them of their danger and urging them to get out of the house as quickly as possible, but they remained absorbed in their games and paid no attention to their father's warning. He therefore decided to try a different stratagem. Knowing how fond they were of toys, he promised the children that if they left their games and ran outside, he would give each of them a cart drawn by an animal of their choice: a goat, a deer, or an ox. When they emerged from the house, however, he gave every child an identical cart, one that was splendidly adorned and drawn by a large white ox.

The man in the parable is of course the Buddha, and the house is the vast realm of Samsara, which is perpetually ablaze with the fire of suffering:

Everything, monks, is on fire. ... On fire with what? With desire, hatred and delusion, with birth, old age and death, with grief, lamentation, pain, misery and despair.<sup>219</sup>

The children represent all sentient beings, their games and toys are the fleeting pleasures of this world, the father's warnings are the basic Buddhist teachings about suffering and impermanence, and his promise of the carts symbolizes the use of skilful means [*upāyakauśalya*] in teaching the Dharma.

The three types of cart in the story are supposed to stand for the three 'vehicles' of Buddhism [*triyāna*], but the ox cart all the children finally receive has given rise to some controversy. Apart from the question of whether the father is morally justified in deceiving the children in this way, there is the ambiguity of the ox cart itself. Are the carts waiting outside the house meant to be the same as the ox carts promised by the father, or are they a different kind of vehicle altogether? Some commentators have argued that it is the Mahayana that is intended in both cases, but for Huayen the two are quite distinct: one stands for the Mahayana, and the other for the Ekayana. Fa Zang makes this quite clear:

The three carts which are said in the *Lotus Sutra* to be outside the house, in order to encourage the children to escape, are the teachings of the Three Vehicles, while the ox carts they are given on the open ground outside are the teachings of the Universal Vehicle.<sup>220</sup>

[*Doctrines of the Universal Vehicle*]

In the last analysis, however, the three and the one are identical, for everything that the Three Vehicles teach is in fact the Ekayana itself in the form of the Common Teaching:

The Three Vehicles and all the rest ultimately teach the same truths as the Universal Vehicle.<sup>221</sup>

[Fa Zang, *Doctrines of the Universal Vehicle*]

That is, the Universal Vehicle, as the complete expression of the Buddha's wisdom, is the ultimate source of all other teachings:

All that is taught as the Dharma of the Three Vehicles arises from the inexhaustible teachings of the Universal Vehicle.... Therefore all their practices return to the Ekayana.<sup>222</sup>

[Fa Zang, *Doctrines of the Universal Vehicle*]

## Dharmakaya and Rupakaya

The traditional teachings of other forms of Buddhism, as represented in the parable by the father's words to the children inside the burning house, are therefore regarded by Huayen as expressions of the Common Teaching, while the ox carts that are waiting outside the house are taken to symbolize the complete or Special Teaching of the Ekayana.

This fundamental distinction is related to the Huayen understanding of the nature of Buddhahood. Mahayana Buddhism generally distinguishes three 'bodies' [*kāya*] of the Buddha, or three aspects of Buddhahood: the Dharmabody [*dharmakāya*], the Fruition Body [*sambhogakāya*], and the Transformation Body [*nirmāṇakāya*]. The *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, however, speaks only of two such bodies: the Dharmabody and the Form Body [*rūpakāya*]:

Some can see the Buddha's Dharmabody,  
 Incomparable, unhindered, all-pervasive,  
 Comprehending perfectly  
 The nature of all things everywhere.  
 Others behold his sublime form bodies,  
 Appearing in radiant shapes that beings  
 Perceive according to their understanding  
 In worlds throughout the universe.<sup>223</sup>

[Ch. 1]

The first of these is Buddhahood or Enlightenment itself, and the second is its manifestation in the form of enlightened teachers, in this world and in many others. According to the Sutra, the Dharmakaya is as formless, boundless and all-pervasive as empty space, while the Rupakaya appears to beings in whatever form is appropriate to their needs and capacities. As William Blake once pointed out,

The sun's light when he unfolds it  
 Depends on the organ that beholds it.

[Blake, *The Gates of Paradise*]

Or as the Sutra puts it:

The Tathagata has as many forms as there are sentient beings  
 And appears to them in accordance with their wishes and desires.<sup>224</sup>

[Ch. 1]

The light therefore is one, the Buddha's wisdom is uniform and unchanging, but what it reveals and how it is interpreted will depend on the senses and the mental or spiritual capacities of those who perceive it.

Huayen claims to represent the perfect wisdom of the Dharmakaya, and it sees the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* as the complete expression of the Buddha's Enlightenment. This is the Special Teaching of the Ekayana. Other texts and schools therefore express the wisdom of the Rupakaya and are referred to as the Common Teaching of the Ekayana.

It is on the basis of this distinction between the two levels of teaching that the Huayen masters are able to assert that:

Apart from this universal Teaching, there is no other way to achieve  
 Enlightenment ....<sup>225</sup>

[Fa Zang, Commentary]

And that:

Ultimately there are no followers of the Two Vehicles who will not become bodhisattvas of the Common Teaching, and none of those bodhisattvas who will not enter on this Dharma of Samantabhadra.<sup>226</sup>

[*Ibid.*]

## Religion

But if the path of Samantabhadra is the only way to Enlightenment, it follows that all those who sincerely aspire to Enlightenment must in fact be practising according to the same Universal Vehicle. The scope of the Ekayana can thus be seen as extending beyond the bounds of Buddhism itself to embrace the spiritual aspirations of all sentient beings:

One should know that all beings without exception will eventually follow this Teaching, for it is a universal teaching that they are all endowed with. So the Sutra says, “The bodhisattva knows that the Enlightenment of the Tathagata is present in the body of every sentient being.”<sup>227</sup> [Fa Zang, Commentary]

The great bodhisattvas therefore

appear to ascetics in the form of an ascetic, to brahmins as a brahmin, to kshatriyas as a kshatriya, and similarly with vaishyas, shudras, lay followers, deities of the four quarters, of the realm of the Thirty-three, of the realm of Yama..... [etc.] To each class of being they appear in the appropriate form.<sup>228</sup> [Ch. 26]

They may also appear as teachers of other religions, such as Jainism:

They may be non-Buddhist ascetics, who practise  
Austerities in mountains and forests,  
Or discard their clothing and go about naked  
To serve as teachers to the people.<sup>229</sup>

[Ch. 12]

Bodhisattvas such as these are communicating the truth of the Ekayana to beings in the form of the Common Teaching. That is to say, they are making the wisdom of Vairocana, which is fully explained in the Special Teaching, accessible to them in a way that will allow them to assimilate it, put it into practice, and so make progress towards Enlightenment – even if the concept of Enlightenment, as Buddhists understand it, finds no place in their belief system. For since “beings believe in all sorts of deities”<sup>230</sup> and “vary so much in what they want and what pleases them”<sup>231</sup>, the bodhisattva will “adapt to their state of mind and practise as they do, explaining the Dharma to them in a way that will make it possible for them to have faith in the

Buddha's teachings"<sup>232</sup>. [Fa Zang, Commentary] This is the Common Teaching of the Ekayana.

## God

It seems to have been Zarathushtra, some time between 1400 and 1200 B.C.E., who first conceived the idea of a supreme, eternal God, superior to all the other deities that were worshipped at the time. This idea corresponded well to the hierarchical nature of contemporary society, in which kings stood above and apart from the rest of the population, issuing commands through their ministers to the subjects over whom they ruled. Zarathushtra's theology therefore came to be adopted by his people and eventually became the official religion of the Persian empire. The Persians passed the idea of one supreme God on to the ancient Jewish people, and the Jews then interpreted and developed it in terms of their own culture, subsequently transmitting it to the Christians and Muslims, who have now spread this type of monotheism throughout the world.

The Iranian monotheism also made its way into India, where it led to certain deities, especially Shiva and Vishnu, being elevated to the status of supreme God [*īśvara*]. In due course this new idea attracted the attention of the Mahayana Buddhists, who argued against it on both ethical and logical grounds. On the one hand, they said, given the amount of suffering in the world, an all-powerful God cannot also be morally good. And on the other hand, they pointed out, it is illogical to suppose that an eternal and unchanging God could be the cause of the ephemeral and constantly changing universe in which we live, for there must be some affinity between cause and effect in order for the former to produce the latter.

From the Buddhist point of view, then, is God just a delusion? For Huayen, this is not necessarily the case, for belief in a single, universal God can be seen to reflect an intuitive awareness of the luminous emptiness [*śūnyatā*] which is the essential nature of all phenomena. The capacity for this awareness is innate in all beings but may be conceptualized in different ways, including those of monotheistic theology. What Muslims call the unity [*tawḥīd*] of God could then be equivalent to the Buddhist concept of sameness or equality [*samatā*]. According to the Ekayana, it is the identical reality that is being perceived in each case, but the way it is interpreted by the mind will be determined by the attitude and circumstances of the perceiver, just as in the Buddha's parable of the blind men and the elephant.

But as far as Buddhism is concerned, how beliefs are put into practice is more important than the belief systems themselves. This was made clear by the Buddha in another famous parable, the Parable of the Raft, and is implicit in the use of the word

*yāna* (vehicle), for a vehicle is something that is intended to convey people from one place to another – in this case, from ignorance to Enlightenment, from spiritual bondage to Liberation. Hindus who follow the path of devotion [*bhakti*] to God, and Christians or Muslims who seek to be constantly in the presence of God, may differ in their understanding of what they are doing from Buddhists who take to heart the Sutra’s advice to

Take the Buddha as your object of contemplation;  
And focus all your thoughts on him.<sup>233</sup>

[Ch. 24]

Nevertheless, the practitioners of these various faiths may also be seen as ultimately following the same path, or travelling in the same vehicle, in so far as they are all striving to lessen their attachment to the transient phenomena of this world in order to focus their minds on a deeper and more enduring reality. In Huayen terms, that is, it can be said that they are all in the process of becoming what Fa Zang calls “bodhisattvas of the Common Teaching” [共教菩薩].

The Sutra therefore speaks repeatedly of the way in which the buddhas and bodhisattvas use skilful means [*upāya*] to adapt their teachings to the specific needs and desires of sentient beings. Though the Qur’ān claims that “wherever you turn, there is the face of God” [Sūra 2.115], and the Sutra asserts that “The Buddhadharma is vast and limitless/ And appears in all worlds throughout the universe”<sup>234</sup> [Ch. 1], or that there are buddhas teaching the Dharma within every atom, the real meaning that underlies these different modes of expression is ultimately the same, for truth is nondual [*advaya*] and transcends all doctrinal formulations. Polytheists may speak of the realm of the gods, monotheists of God, Jains of the Soul [*jīva*], and Daoists of the Dao, but all these concepts are different ways of expressing, in terms of what Huayen calls the Common Teaching, the same fundamental awareness of an enduring reality that lies beyond and within the changing phenomena of ordinary perception. So while in the Special Teaching of the Ekayana, one uses different words and concepts and speaks instead of the Dharmarealm [*dharmadhātu*], of the Dharmabody [*dharmakāya*], of Suchness [*tathatā*] and so on, the truth being indicated is essentially the same as in the Common Teaching. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Blake says that he once dined with the prophets Isaiah and Ezekeiel and that he asked them about God. “Isaiah”, he says, “answered, ‘I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite, organical perception; but my senses discovered the infinite in everything.’” To discover “the infinite in everything” is the purpose of Huayen, and any teaching or practice that will lead to this discovery can be regarded as part of the Common Teaching of the Universal Vehicle.

## Truth and Falsity

But are not some teachings true and others false? For Buddhism this question is unanswerable as it stands, for teachings can be true in one sense but false in another. The blind men's claim to have perceived the elephant, for example, was quite true, but their understanding was false. The concepts 'true' and 'false' are themselves ultimately false in so far as they embody a dualistic mode of thinking that is incapable of grasping the nondual truth that is at the heart of everything. Truth, as Zhuangzi said, exists only at the central point where "neither 'this' nor 'that' finds its counterpart"<sup>235</sup>.

Our languages reflect the perceptions of our ordinary samsaric consciousness, and they are based on a system of contrasts or dualities. This is how we make sense of the world. "Without contraries," Blake says, "is no progression. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate, are necessary to human existence."<sup>236</sup> But for the same reason, language does not have the capacity to express the actual, nondual nature of reality. Words can only point to the truth, like fingers pointing to the moon, but they cannot contain the truth, any more than the physical moon can be fitted into a sentence.

This fundamental Buddhist idea was further elaborated by the Madhyamika School of Mahayana Buddhism. According to Nagarjuna [2nd-3rd century C.E.], the concept of emptiness [*śūnyatā*] implies that the real nature of things is beyond verbal expression, and that all religious and philosophical doctrines, including Buddhist ones, are therefore ultimately false. This was made clear by Shakyamuni Buddha himself in the Parable of the Raft, where he compared his teachings to a raft used to cross over from one shore of a river (the realm of birth and death) to the other (the realm of Enlightenment). Doctrines, like the raft, are simply a means to an end. Once the river has been crossed – once Enlightenment has been achieved – raft and doctrines no longer serve any purpose and can be discarded. The enlightened have passed beyond the illusions of duality, and for them "there is neither this shore, nor the other shore, neither 'this' nor 'the other'"<sup>237</sup>.

But if truth is nondual and language is intrinsically dualistic, it follows that any statements we make, any concepts we formulate, will necessarily be false from the point of view of ultimate truth. So in fact, as Ibn 'Arabi [Muhyī al-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī, 1165-1240] points out, "No one has ever seen anything except his own belief"<sup>238</sup>. On the other hand, if truth is all-pervasive (as must be the case if it is truly nondual), it makes just as much sense to say that all statements are equally true as it does to say that they are equally false. That is, every statement about the nature of reality, whether it be called God or emptiness, is false as a statement but true as an expression of the same reality that it is struggling in vain to describe. This is why so

many enlightened teachers are obliged to resort to paradox when trying to communicate their understanding. God, says Ibn ‘Arabi, exists within every concept and also within its exact opposite.<sup>239</sup> Similarly, the sutras on transcendental wisdom [*prajñāpāramitā*] often follow a statement based on conventional truth [*saṃvṛtisatya*] with its exact opposite according to ultimate truth [*paramārthasatya*]:

I must lead all beings to Nirvana, but when all beings have thus attained Nirvana, no being at all has attained Nirvana.<sup>240</sup>

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* William Blake states the case simply and precisely: “Every thing possible to be believed is an image of truth.” In other words, if people believe deeply in something, it must be because they are aware of some genuine truth within it; but at the same time what they believe can never be more than an “image of truth” – a mental picture that corresponds to the truth in some way but can never actually *be* the truth, because the truth itself cannot be captured in our sense-bound concepts or dualistic language. In the traditional Buddhist metaphor, the truth is the moon in the sky and the mind’s concepts of the truth are like the moon’s reflections in the water.

Ultimate truth is therefore a matter of perception rather than language. It cannot be described in words or arrived at by argument, but only perceived through direct awareness. Once it has been realized, however, it becomes visible everywhere, even in the conventionally false. So the Sutra says that

If you can understand falsity  
As it really is, without distortion,  
You will know that the false is true in itself  
And see clearly the nature of Buddhahood.<sup>241</sup>

[Ch. 14]

Or, as Li Tungxuan puts it:

If one sees with the eye of Dharmā, there is nothing worldly that is not ultimately true; and if one sees with the mundane physical eye, there is no ultimate truth that is not [merely] worldly.<sup>242</sup>

[Li Tungxuan, Commentary]

Fa Zang makes the same point:

The deluded claim that the false is true, but they fail to see the truth in the falsity; the enlightened see that the false is not true, and so they are able to see the truth in falsity.<sup>243</sup>

[Fa Zang, Commentary]

So the enlightened can “see” the Buddha clearly, and because they behold things with “the eye of Dharma”, they are able to “see” the ultimate truth even in things that appear to be false. The deluded, however, like the blind men of the Buddha’s parable, lack this power of clear vision, and are reduced to making dogmatic statements (for they can only “claim” that the false is true) based on their own limited perception. But where does this capacity for clear vision come from, or how does one develop it? According to Huayen it comes from within the mind of every sentient being and is the essential nature of consciousness itself.

## Awareness

To be alive is to be conscious.<sup>244</sup> Every living thing has some degree of consciousness, and just as light radiates naturally from its source, so it is in the nature of consciousness to expand the scope of its awareness, to seek more knowledge. At first this is a simple matter of survival: the more an organism knows about its environment, about the location of food sources and potential enemies, the better its chances of prolonging its existence. But in time, this primitive impulse to survive leads to the evolution of more complex physical forms which serve as the basis for more sophisticated levels of consciousness. Eventually some sentient beings develop self-awareness, and this in turn opens the way to the ultimate flowering of consciousness in the ‘omniscience’ [*sarvajñatā*] – the all-embracing awareness – of the buddhas. With the realization of complete Enlightenment, the mind’s Dharma-eye is fully open at last and the whole truth can be seen even in an atom, or a flower:

Flower in the crannied wall,...  
 ... if I could understand  
 What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
 I should know what God and man is.  
 [Tennyson, “Flower in the crannied wall”]

For the buddhas it is truly possible

To see a world in a grain of sand  
 And a heaven in a wild flower,  
 Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
 And eternity in an hour.  
 [Blake, “Auguries of Innocence”]

But whether it manifests as a microbe’s search for food or a bodhisattva’s striving for Enlightenment, the essential nature of this awareness never changes. A dewdrop may be very different from an ocean in size and complexity, but water

always has the same atomic structure and the same quality of wetness is present in both. So too with consciousness: even when its scope is restricted to the simple struggle for survival in a microscopic realm, it already possesses the same essential capacity for awareness as the mind of a buddha.

This intrinsic awareness is sometimes referred to in Huayen and other texts as the womb or embryo of the Tathagata [*tathāgatagarbha* 如來藏], but the term most frequently used in Chinese Buddhism is buddha-nature [*fóxìng* 佛性; Skt. *buddhadhātu*]. According to Fa Zang there are two types or aspects of buddha-nature. One, which he calls the ‘intrinsic nature’ [*lǐxìng* 理性], is the principle of awareness itself and is the common heritage of all sentient beings, from the smallest animals up to the fully enlightened buddhas. The other, which he calls the ‘cultivated nature’ [*xíngxìng* 行性], is the potential for Enlightenment which can be developed through spiritual aspiration and practice, and this takes different forms in different beings. The former is “like gold embedded in ore”<sup>245</sup>, whereas the second “is like gold that has been extracted from the ore”<sup>246</sup> [Fa Zang, Commentary]. When properly cultivated, buddha-nature becomes *bodhicitta*, the Aspiration to Enlightenment, which “must then be further refined and purified”<sup>247</sup> [*ibid.*] through Dharma practice until Enlightenment has been achieved.

The urge to seek Enlightenment is thus implicit in even the most rudimentary forms of consciousness, but it is only when consciousness has developed to the level of self-awareness that this impulse can be fully understood and find expression as a deliberate quest, as in the case of Shakyamuni Buddha or Sudhana. Once human beings have become truly aware of themselves as individuals, they start to look for meaning in their lives. No longer content to merely satisfy their material needs, they may begin to wonder who they really are, what they should be doing with their lives, and why they are alive in the first place. Often this quest takes destructive forms, as when people try to affirm the significance of their own existence through over-stimulation of the senses, through the constant accumulation of wealth, through the pursuit of power over others, or by inflicting pain or death on other sentient beings. Those who are less aggressive may busy themselves instead with the many distractions that everyday life provides, in the hope of evading troubling questions about the brevity and meaning of their existence. Still others, however, more conscious of the pressing need to find genuine answers to such questions, may turn in search of them to science, art or religion.

But according to Huayen, all these courses of action, whether good or bad, wise or foolish, are ultimately driven by the same fundamental need: to discover the capacity for Enlightenment that is present in the mind of every sentient being. It is because all its teachings are based on this idea of innate Enlightenment that Huayen

can claim to be a Universal Vehicle [*ekayāna*] which will eventually convey all beings to the realm of Buddhahood. As Fa Zang says, it is "a universal teaching" based on the wisdom of the buddhas that is "present in the body of every sentient being" and that all beings are therefore "endowed with" [Commentary].

So he adds that,

In short, there is only a single teaching, which is the inexhaustible truth of the Mahayana.<sup>248</sup> [*Ibid.*]

This 'single' and 'universal teaching' is the Ekayana, and the 'inexhaustible truth' that it is based on is often referred to as the Dharmarealm [*dharmadhātu*], a term which covers both the entire physical universe and the underlying principle that pervades and unifies it all. As Huayen practice is also based on this same fundamental and all-encompassing reality, it has a similar claim to universality:

Because the essential nature of the Dharmarealm is continuous and indivisible, the results of [practice based on] the Dharmarealm include the entire Dharmarealm in their scope.<sup>249</sup> [*Ibid.*]

## Imagination

But regardless of whether one speaks of the Dharmarealm, Buddha-nature or something else, all these terms point to the fact that it is in the nature of consciousness to keep expanding the range of its awareness until everything has been fully understood, that is, until the state of complete Enlightenment has been attained. This irrepressible desire to know the truth is at the heart of the Ekayana, and it takes many different forms in human society, shaping myths and symbols, inspiring the creations of the artist, and motivating the scientist's search for knowledge. Such activities may also be included within what Huayen calls the Common Teaching.

This same universal impulse has found expression in many myths and stories throughout human history, particularly those which involve a quest of some kind. The world's oldest recorded story (3rd millennium B.C.E.), for example, tells of the Sumerian king Gilgamesh's search for the herb of immortality which grows at the bottom of the sea; that is, in Buddhist terms, for the deathless [*amṛta*] state of Enlightenment concealed in the depths of every human psyche. More often the object sought in such myths is some sort of treasure, or a person. The Sumerian goddess Inanna, for example, descended into the underworld to rescue (in some versions of the story) her husband Dumuzi from the realm of the goddess of death, Ereshkigal. More or less the same story, with the roles of the sexes reversed, was told in ancient

Greece of the divine musician Orpheus and his wife Euridyce. In the fairy tale of the Sleeping Beauty, and in the story of Brynhild in the *Volsunga Saga*, the treasure the hero seeks is again a beautiful woman, or goddess, only now she is imprisoned in a deathlike sleep rather than in the actual land of the dead beneath the earth. But wherever they may be, or whatever spell they may be under, such figures represent the primordial wisdom that sleeps in the darkness of our mundane consciousness, and the perils and difficulties the heroes must overcome in order to be united with their beloved reflect the treacherous and unruly emotions that lie in wait for us on the path to Enlightenment.

In other tales the object sought is a magical or supremely precious object, as in the ancient Greek story of the Golden Fleece, in which fifty heroes set out on a voyage to a distant land to steal the golden fleece of a divine ram from the dragon that protects it. Gold, being both valuable and incorruptible, can be a symbol for immortality – or for the spiritual riches of Enlightenment. In later narratives the spiritual implications of the heroic quest may become more explicit and be more consciously emphasized. There are a number of folk tales, for example, in which the protagonist is told, perhaps in a dream, that by travelling to some remote place they will discover a great treasure; but when, after many hardships, they reach their destination, they find only a clue that directs them back to their own house, where the treasure is concealed under the floorboards or in the garden. Clearly the lesson in such stories is that the Enlightenment we are always seeking has been present in our own consciousness from the very beginning, but it will only be after we have searched everywhere else for it in vain that the real truth will finally be revealed to us.

Elsewhere this innate Enlightenment may be represented by the idea of a paradise that has been lost or that can be reached only in visions or after death, such as the green and fruitful gardens described in the Jewish and Islamic scriptures, the jewelled splendours of the heavenly Jerusalem in Christian literature, or the equally bejewelled pure lands of traditional Buddhist cosmology. Ancient Chinese mythology also had such paradises, of which the best known are the gardens of the goddess called the Queen of the West [西王母] in the Kunlun Mountains [崑崙山], where the peaches of immortality grow; and the floating islands of Penglai, Fangzhang and Yingzhou [蓬萊，方丈，瀛洲] in the gulf of Bohai [渤海], which are inhabited solely by immortals. Perhaps inspired by such stories, the great poet Tao Yuanming [陶淵明, 365-427] wrote his famous *Account of the Peach Blossom Stream* [桃花源記], in which he tells of a fisherman who found a hidden valley where people had been living a peaceful life for centuries, completely cut off from the outside world. There is no hint of the supernatural in Tao's story, apart from the fisherman's never being able to find the valley again, but in its later retelling by another great poet, the

Buddhist Wang Wei [王維, 701-761], the inhabitants of the valley become Daoist practitioners intent on a spiritual quest:

At first they came here to escape the outside world,  
 But then, seeking immortality, they never returned.  
 In the valley nothing is known of human affairs,  
 While the world sees only distant clouds and hills.<sup>250</sup>

[Wang Wei, “The Ballad of Peach Blossom Stream”]

All such stories tell of a quest for something that has great worldly value but is, from the Huayen point of view, ultimately a symbol for something of much deeper and more spiritual significance. For Huayen, all these tales foreshadow Sudhana’s quest for Enlightenment, which is the universal search of consciousness for its source, its own true nature – its ‘original face’[本來面目], as the Chan texts put it. Like the mythical heroes of the past, Sudhana has to endure many difficulties in his tireless search for wisdom, until he finds the treasure he has been seeking in Vairocana’s tower, although, as Maitreya points out to him, it has been concealed in his own mind all along.

Thus the Special Teaching of the Sutra makes explicit [*nītārtha*] what is only implicit [*neyārtha*] in the Common Teaching of the ancient myths and folktales. Eventually, the Sutra assures us, all such heroes will embark on the Universal Vehicle of Samantabhadra, which will take them to the secret source in the heart where they will find the inexhaustible riches of Enlightenment that have been concealed there from the beginning of time.

## Inspiration

But not every spiritual quest takes an overtly mythical or religious form. Keats, for example, famously described it as a search for truth and beauty:

Beauty is truth, truth beauty -- that is all  
 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.<sup>251</sup>

It is the desire to give lasting form to this “truth” or “beauty” that motivates the artist. For many it is sufficient to create something that is pleasing to the senses and the mind, but other artists, like Keats, seek to find and express a deeper beauty which will transcend the fleeting phenomena of the everyday world, a beauty that is identical with truth itself. It is said that Haydn was last seen in public at a performance of his great oratorio *The Creation* [*Die Schöpfung*] shortly before his death, and when he heard once again the huge, swelling C major chord from the orchestra that evokes God’s creation of light, he pointed a trembling hand upwards and exclaimed, “Not

me, not me; it comes from above!”

Artists in all cultures have spoken of this feeling of being inspired by some higher, external power when creating their best works. The word ‘inspiration’ itself literally means ‘breathing in’ and originally referred to possession by the ‘spirit’ of a deity. Although this literal meaning loses its force outside polytheistic cultures, the idea that artists have the power to gain access to a level of reality beyond the everyday has remained widely accepted. “There is another heaven and earth,” the poet Li Bai [李白, 701-762] said, “which is not this human world.”<sup>252</sup> And Wordsworth speaks of

... a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean, and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;  
A motion and a spirit that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.<sup>253</sup>

At moments like this the poet catches a glimpse of

The light that never was on sea or land,  
The consecration, and the Poet's dream.<sup>254</sup>

Then “the everlasting universe of things” [Shelley, “Mont Blanc”] becomes transparent to the artist’s eye and the inner nature of all phenomena is revealed. Shelley himself, in “Adonais”, refers to this light as “the white radiance of Eternity”, and as

That Light whose smile kindles the universe,  
That Beauty in which all things work and move,  
That Benediction which the eclipsing curse  
Of birth can quench not....

The Special Teaching of the Ekayana, however, describes it as the radiant emptiness [*śūnyatā*] of the wisdom-mind of Vairocana that shines through all the changing phenomena of this world and illuminates both their suffering and their beauty, their illusory appearances and their inner truth. So the Sutra describes the mind as the ultimate artist:

It is like the painted images  
 That a master painter can create:  
 Just so, the artistry of the mind  
 Is that which fashions all the worlds,  
 And from the mind's discriminations  
 Come various kinds of sentient being.<sup>255</sup>

[Ch. 5]

According to this teaching, the artist's insights and visions do not in fact come from outside the mind; they do come, however, from a level of the mind beyond the limitations of the artist's ordinary personality. "Even when the poet seems most himself," Yeats said, "... he is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast."<sup>256</sup>

To achieve this state of heightened awareness, the artist must enter a kind of meditative state, whether spontaneously or by deliberate cultivation, in which the boundaries of the self fall away and the true nature of the world as a buddha-realm is revealed. In the works of Western and other poets, of course, the situation is described rather differently. To Keats, for example, it would seem as though the whole world had been transformed into poetry:

But there are times, when those that love the bay,  
 Fly from all sorrowing far away;  
 A sudden glow comes on them, naught they see  
 In water, earth, or air but poesy.

[Keats, "To My Brother George"]

Wordsworth, on the other hand, puts it in terms that would not seem out of place in a manual of Buddhist meditation, when he writes of

... that blessed mood....  
 In which the heavy and the weary weight  
 Of all this unintelligible world  
 Is lightened....  
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame  
 And even the motion of our human blood  
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
 In body, and become a living soul:  
 While with an eye made quiet by the power  
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
 We see into the life of things.

[Wordsworth, "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey"]

Even so, the English poets generally see in such moments only a spontaneous

“mood” or “sudden glow”. In China, however, with its traditions of Buddhist and Daoist meditation, these moods were more often regarded as something that could and should be cultivated through some type of mental discipline. Liu Xie [劉勰, ca. 465- ca. 520], for example, the author of the first book of systematic literary criticism in Chinese and himself a practising Buddhist, makes the connection with meditation quite clear:

Therefore in giving literary shape to one’s thoughts, it is emptiness and inner stillness that are important.<sup>257</sup>

Therefore in composing literature it is necessary to be both restrained and fluent in expression; one should keep the mind clear and calm, so as to allow free movement to its energy.<sup>258</sup>

In this way it becomes possible to gain access to the primordial Enlightenment concealed within the mind. “Sometimes,” Liu Xie says, “truth is within the space of the heart and yet we travel beyond the world in search of it.”<sup>259</sup> Once it has been discovered, the power of the artist’s imagination can then make this truth available to others by giving it aesthetic form:

When readers are exposed to the text, they enter into the feelings that lie behind it, tracing the waves back to their source; then what was hidden from them will be revealed.<sup>260</sup>

The “waves” here are both the writer’s words and the external world those words describe. Once the “source” within the mind has been reached, the real nature of the phenomena perceived by the senses also becomes apparent. Then, as Lu Ji [陸機, 261-303] says of the writer in his “Ode on Literature”:

His spirit speeds to the eight limits of the world, his mind roams far away.  
...He beholds past and present in a single instant, and touches the four seas in the blink of an eye.<sup>261</sup>

Finally, in the nondualistic vision of Wang Wei [699-761], who was deeply influenced by both Huayen and Chan, the origin of all space and time can be perceived in the ordinary phenomena of the natural world, in such simple things as clouds and flowing water:

I walk upstream to where the water ends,  
Sit and observe the time when the clouds arise<sup>262</sup>  
[Wang Wei, “My Estate in the Zhungnan Mountains”]

## Knowledge

The Ekayana sees the quest for Enlightenment reflected in myths and fairy tales, and in works of art. Any disinterested search for truth, whatever form it may take, is an expression of the same inner impulse. This truth is already present within us, and is in fact the true nature of our ordinary consciousness, but as Liu Xie observes, our ignorance impels us to seek it first in the world around us, until frustration, suffering, or spiritual guidance opens our eyes to the fact that we possessed it from the very beginning. In spite of this, the Sutra and the Huayen teachings tell us that Enlightenment can indeed be found in the external world, as well as within our own minds, if we look deeply enough, and the development of modern science provides striking confirmation of this.

Beginning with John Dalton's atomic theory of matter, published in the first decade of the 19th century, physicists gradually proved that what appears to our senses as solid matter actually consists almost entirely of empty space in which a few minute particles move about at inconceivable speeds. In Buddhist terms, this could be said to correspond to the Abhidharma phase of Buddhist intellectual and spiritual history, in which the objects of everyday experience are analyzed into countless shortlived elements called *dharmas*. Further investigation has shown that the subatomic particles themselves appear to have no solid reality; and more recently still, scientists have been increasingly obliged to take the role of the observer into account when describing the nature and behaviour of physical phenomena.

Once Einstein's theory of Special Relativity had demonstrated that the measurement of time and space was relative to the speed of the observer, it was no longer possible to consider a phenomenon in isolation from other phenomena, as classical physics had always done. From now on the emphasis was on what David Bohm calls "*undivided wholeness*, in which the observing instrument is not separable from what is observed"<sup>263</sup>. So Niels Bohr, when discussing epistemological problems with Einstein, suggested that the word 'phenomenon' itself should now be defined as referring only to "observations obtained under specified circumstances, including an account of the whole experimental arrangement"<sup>264</sup>. And Einstein himself, in an article which appeared in the *New York Post* in 1972, referred to the feeling of being separate from the rest of the universe as "a kind of optical illusion" of consciousness, and as "a kind of prison for us"<sup>265</sup>. In the Ekayana the metaphor of Indra's Net illustrates the empty or indeterminate nature of all things, and this is intimately connected with the universal compassion of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Einstein too was well aware of the spiritual implications of his discovery, and he argued that, in the light of it, "our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its

beauty”<sup>266</sup>.

Nevertheless, Einstein was not happy with the picture of an indeterminate universe governed by rules of probability that was emerging from the new field of quantum mechanics, and for many years he argued strenuously against it. Despite his efforts, however, he eventually lost the argument as quantum theories were experimentally verified over and over again. Werner Heisenberg [1901-1976] demonstrated that it was not possible to determine both the speed and the position of a particle at the same time, and that this uncertainty was not merely a practical difficulty but was implicit in the phenomenon itself. Erwin Schrödinger [1887-1961] further illustrated the nature of this paradox with his famous thought experiment of a cat concealed in a box with a cyanide capsule. He proceeded to show that until an observer opened the box (and leaving aside the fact that the unfortunate cat, as a sentient being, could also be considered an observer), quantum mechanics regarded the cat as “not either alive or dead but both alive and dead at the same time”<sup>267</sup>. In other words, the cat exists in a state of quantum indeterminacy until it is actually perceived by an observer.

Indeterminacy at the quantum level can therefore only be resolved by the act of observation. Up until that point, phenomena are only waves of probability, but observation or measurement precipitates a ‘collapse of the wave function’ as all the various probabilities ‘collapse’ into a single, definite object or situation. So far there is still no generally accepted explanation as to “how or even whether the collapse of a probability wave really happens”<sup>268</sup>, but pondering these matters has led some physicists to speculate about the relationship between mind and matter at this level of reality. Already relativity theory had implied that to some extent “space and time are in the eye of the beholder”<sup>269</sup>, and in 1932 John Von Neumann proposed a theory of quantum measurement according to which the collapse of the wave function occurred “in the consciousness of human beings”<sup>270</sup>. It would seem therefore that there is no longer any “basis in the scientific description of nature for believing in the radical Cartesian division between mind and world sanctioned by classical physics”<sup>271</sup>.

Although there remain many unresolved problems in this area, it is significant that rigorous and systematic study of the physical world has led scientists to discover the empty and indeterminate nature of matter itself, as this is precisely what the Buddhist term *śūnyatā* implies. Nor are they able any more to ignore the role of the mind – the artist that paints all the worlds, as the Sutra describes it – in determining the kind of universe we live in. From the point of view of the Ekayana, these parallels are not surprising, and are indeed inevitable. “We are all, each in our own way,” the physicist Brian Greene says, “seekers of the truth and we each long for an answer to why we are here.”<sup>272</sup> According to the Huayen teachings, the truth that Greene speaks

of is nondual and so is accessible to all determined seekers, whatever their methods or their starting point. The Sutra urges us to

Seek the Buddha's wisdom with all your heart;  
Gather your strength and think of nothing else.<sup>273</sup>

[Ch. 26]

And scientists have been equally single-minded in their commitment to the pursuit of knowledge, often neglecting food and sleep in a quest as resolute as that of any ancient hero or Buddhist hermit. According to the Ekayana all these pursuits are so many different forms of the universal quest for Enlightenment. Therefore even a search for the truth about the material world will lead in the end to an understanding of the nonduality of mind and matter, and this will in turn open yet another door to the complete realization in time and space of the buddha-wisdom which is the essential nature of consciousness itself.

## Conclusion

The Ekayana is a universal teaching because its purpose is the complete realization of an enlightened awareness that is present in the mind-stream of every sentient being. Impelled to continually expand its scope, this awareness develops naturally through the evolution of physical forms and structures which open up ever-increasing possibilities for its manifestation within the worlds of space and time. Eventually the mind becomes self-aware, and at this point it also becomes capable of embarking on a conscious quest for fulfilment, a quest that can be seen reflected in the myths, religious systems, arts and sciences of human civilization. The various forms which this quest takes are what Huayen calls the Common Teaching of the Ekayana, and they are, in Mahayana Buddhist terms, *neyārtha*; that is to say, they have a deeper meaning which is not apparent on the surface but needs to be 'drawn out'.

In the Special Teaching of the Ekayana, the true nature of the quest is made explicit [*nītārtha*] through the symbolic language of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. In the Huayen texts all beings are said to be endowed with buddha-nature, with the primordial awareness of Vairocana, but they fail to recognize this because of their limited understanding [*jñeyāvaraṇa*] and the disturbing emotions [*kleśāvaraṇa*] that cloud their judgement. Sooner or later, however, their experiences will awaken their innate wisdom, which is represented by the bodhisattva Manjushri, and guided by this wisdom, they will begin to seek the fulfilment of the potential for Enlightenment that they now know they possess. With the help of Manjushri and the other teachers [*kalyāṇa-mitrāṇi*] that they encounter, they will finally enter the path of

Samantabhadra, realize within the spatio-temporal universe the wisdom that is the ultimate source of their own consciousness, and go on to ‘adorn the worlds’ by making the Enlightenment of Vairocana, the wisdom of Manjushri and the compassion of Samantabhadra available to all beings through their own enlightened and enlightening conduct.

According to Huayen, all beings must eventually follow this Universal Vehicle, for it represents the final flowering of the sentience that defines their existence. In the Sutra, this is illustrated by the story of Sudhana, who is first inspired to awaken the aspiration to Enlightenment [*bodhicittotpāda*] by encountering Manjushri. He then deepens his understanding by faithfully following the instructions he receives from his numerous teachers, until at last he meets the bodhisattva Maitreya, who shows him the interior of Vairocana’s tower:

Then the bodhisattva Maitreya led him to the tower and snapped his fingers. The door opened and he told Sudhana to enter. Filled with joy, Sudhana did so. The door then closed behind him and he saw that the interior was an infinite expanse like empty space....<sup>274</sup>

Observing the endless adornments within the tower, Sudhana is made aware of the wealth of Enlightenment that had been concealed within the depths of his own mind:

Then the great bodhisattva Maitreya withdrew his spiritual power. Entering the tower, he snapped his fingers again and said, “Wake up, young man! This is how things are .... Such is their nature. They are like illusions, like dreams, like shadows, like reflections – nothing is real....” Sudhana asked, “Where have all those adornments gone?”, and Maitreya replied, “To where they came from.” “And where is that?”, he asked; and Maitreya said, “They have come from the spiritual power of the bodhisattvas’ wisdom, and that is what sustains them. They go nowhere and abide nowhere.”<sup>275</sup>

Maitreya then sends Sudhana back to his original teacher, Manjushri, to have his Enlightenment confirmed, and Manjushri shows him the vision which is the culmination of his quest, as he sees Samantabhadra tirelessly active in all the worlds, relieving beings of their burden of suffering and guiding them towards Enlightenment.

In the well-known series of Ten Ox-herding Pictures [十牛圖] ascribed to a Sung Dynasty monk called Shiyuan of Kuon [廓庵師遠], the eighth picture consists of nothing but an empty circle, depicting a state of Enlightenment in which “Whip and rope, man and ox have all returned to emptiness”<sup>276</sup>. This is the Dharmarealm of Reality in which all differentiation has vanished in the emptiness [*sūnyatā*] which is

the essential nature of every phenomenon. The ninth picture, however, called “Returning to the Source”<sup>277</sup>, depicts a stream and a flowering branch, for now the practitioner has proceeded to enter the Dharmarealm of the Nonduality of Reality and Appearances, in which form and emptiness can no longer be distinguished from one another:

Inside his hermitage, he sees nothing of the world outside;  
The streams flow on and the red flowers bloom by themselves.<sup>278</sup>

The final, tenth, picture illustrates the realm of the Nonduality of All Appearances, corresponding to Sudhana’s vision of Samantabhadra at the end of the Sutra. Now there is not even the slightest trace of a separate realm of Enlightenment, and the world, just as it is, has become a buddha-field. So this picture depicts a shabbily dressed but cheerful monk, or even a buddha perhaps, re-entering the world and bestowing the gift of wisdom on all that he encounters:

*Entering the Marketplace with Open Hands*

Bare-chested and barefoot he enters the marketplace,  
Brushing off dust and dirt, wreathed in smiles.  
He needs no secret formulas or powers,  
But withered trees will flower at his command.<sup>279</sup>

In the same way, Sudhana, who represents every Dharma practitioner, discovers at last that the miracle of Enlightenment, having been recovered through the nondual wisdom of Manjushri, must be brought back into the marketplace of birth and death so that it can be made freely available to all beings through the compassionate activities of Samantabhadra:

He saw countless rays of light streaming from every pore of  
Samantabhadra’s body and spreading to all the worlds that populate  
space throughout the universe, dispelling the pain and suffering of all  
beings....<sup>280</sup>

Then Sudhana saw himself within the body of Samantabhadra, teaching  
sentient beings in all the worlds throughout the ten directions....<sup>281</sup>

And now Sudhana continued to acquire all the practices and  
commitments of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra till he had achieved  
equality with Samantabhadra himself and become one with all the  
buddhas.<sup>282</sup>



# Part Two

**普照十方炽然宝光明世界种**

世界名妙宝焰	佛号福德相光相
世界名清净光普照	佛号普照法界虚空光
世界名离尘	佛号无量方便最胜幢
世界名宝庄严	佛号无碍智光明遍照十方
世界名清净光遍照	佛号清净王功德幢
世界名众妙光明灯	佛号不可摧伏力普照幢
世界名寂静离尘光	佛号遍法界胜音
我们的世界名安住	佛号是毗卢遮那如来世界
世界名光明照耀	佛号超胜幢
世界名恒出欢喜宝光明	佛号无量功德法
世界名舍离幢	佛号一切法海最胜王
世界名出妙音声	佛号清淨月光明相无能摧伏
世界名出生威力地	佛号广名称智海幢
世界名众华焰庄严	佛号欢喜海功德名称自在光
世界名净妙光明	佛号慧光自在幢
世界名微妙妙华光	佛号极光力海
世界名种种光明庄严	佛号金剛光明无量精进力普出现
世界名一切宝庄严普照光	佛号净光智胜幢
世界名种种幢	佛号狮子光胜照
世界名最胜光遍照	佛号净琉璃宝灯



一切香摩尼王庄严大莲华  
无边妙华光香水海

## Introduction

The *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* can be said to be the largest single sutra in the Chinese Buddhist Canon, for the text known as the *Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra*, which is somewhat longer, is really a collection of separate texts; whereas the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, even though many of its chapters have circulated as independent sutras, remains a single work expounding a coherent vision of Buddhahood and of the path to its realization.

Chinese commentators have sought to clarify the underlying structure of the Sutra by dividing it into a number of different parts or stages. The simplest of these divisions is a three-part one, in which the initial vision of Buddhahood presented in the first assembly, comprising the first six chapters, is followed by an exposition of the path of practice in the subsequent seven assemblies (chapters 7 to 38); the Sutra then concludes with the story of a single, ideal practitioner who diligently cultivates all the practices he has been taught until he achieves complete Enlightenment. This story, which is told in the last, and longest, 39th chapter of the Sutra, is that of Sudhana's pilgrimage. Sudhana has already been mentioned several times in the preceding chapters of this book, and the following chapter, "Sudhana's Pilgrimage", therefore presents a more detailed description of his spiritual journey.

In this way the Sutra's basic structure can also be said to reflect the Huayen understanding of the progression from primordial ignorance to complete Enlightenment as a causal cycle in which the latent result (our innate Enlightenment or buddha-nature) gives rise to the cause (diligent practice of the Dharma), which eventually makes possible the manifest result (i.e. the realization in time and space of the timeless Enlightenment that has been present as the essential nature of our mind from the very beginning). The process could therefore be represented schematically as follows: **result<sup>1</sup> → cause → result<sup>2</sup>**.<sup>283</sup>

In the course of his travels Sudhana encounters a great many gurus, male and female, monastic and lay, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, human and non-human. (See the complete list at the end of chapter 11 below.) Each of these teachers cultivates a particular practice which is suited to their own individual character or reflects their own understanding of the Buddhadharma. Sudhana thus learns that anyone can be a unique source of wisdom, and that there are as many ways to practise as there are individual sentient beings. But it is also repeatedly impressed on him that it is only through the 'good friend' [*kalyāṇamitra*] or spiritual guide that Enlightenment can be achieved, and that he must never tire of seeking out such gurus and asking them how he should practise in order to make progress on the path.

As he travels on, therefore, from each guru to the next, Sudhana ponders the significance of what he has just learnt and attempts to put into practice the particular *samādhi* he has been taught. In this way he acquires the three types of wisdom necessary for Enlightenment: through hearing [*śruta-maya-prajñā*], pondering [*cintā-maya-prajñā*], and cultivating [*bhāvana-maya-prajñā*], or in other words, learning, thinking, and meditating. (It is worth bearing in mind that in Sudhana's India there were few, if any, books, and that the only way of acquiring knowledge was by listening to a teacher. Nowadays of course the first type of wisdom can also be gathered from many other sources, such as books, websites, DVDs and so on. The closest English equivalent to the Sanskrit *bahu-śruta*, which literally means 'someone who has heard a lot', would be 'well-read'.)

Apart from the essential role of the guru, the other topic that Sudhana's teachers emphasize over and over again, is the importance of arousing *bodhicitta*, the Aspiration to Enlightenment. Sudhana has in fact already accomplished this at the outset of his quest, so unlike the hero of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, he begins his pilgrimage at a high spiritual level. The reason for the repeated emphasis on *bodhicitta* throughout the Sutra is simply because it is regarded as the only valid foundation for Dharma practice and as ultimately indistinguishable from Buddhahood itself. So as was mentioned above, the Sutra's chapter on "Spiritual Conduct" [梵行品] declares, in a famous phrase, that "perfect Enlightenment is achieved the moment one aspires to it" [初發心時便成正覺].<sup>284</sup> Nevertheless, despite Sudhana's initial insight, he still has many things to learn and much practice to complete before the fundamental Enlightenment he has already become aware of can be fully actualized in the world around him. This is of course true of all those who seek Enlightenment, and that is why the Sutra presents Sudhana as a role model. If, like him, we listen carefully to Manjushri, we too can become aware of our innate buddha-nature, the potential for Enlightenment within us. And if we follow his example, the Sutra tells us, learning patiently from our spiritual guides, practising diligently, and remaining constantly mindful of *bodhicitta*, eventually we too will be able to enter Vairocana's tower, break free of our limitations and, like Samantabhadra, endlessly adorn the world around us with our conduct.



The 12th chapter below, "Vāsantī", is a translation of a single episode from the story of Sudhana's pilgrimage. At this point in the story, Sudhana has returned from the south of India to the *bodhimāṇḍa*, the seat of the Buddha's Enlightenment in what is now Bodhgaya, where he has been told to ask the earth goddess Sthāvarā for

instruction. This signifies that Sudhana is himself now close to the realization of complete Enlightenment; for according to tradition, when Māra, the god of death, challenged the right of the bodhisattva Siddhārtha Gautama to pass beyond his realm into the awakened state of Nirvana, Siddhārtha called the earth itself to witness and her voice was heard speaking of the wisdom the bodhisattva had cultivated, and the selfless compassion he had displayed, during countless past lifetimes. Māra then admitted defeat, and Siddhartha, now the Buddha Shakyamuni, achieved the final Awakening he had been seeking for so long.

The teaching that Sudhana receives from Sthāvarā therefore indicates that he is now qualified to proceed to the ultimate stage of Buddhahood. But his training is not yet concluded, for he still requires further instruction in order to bring the wisdom he has acquired to complete maturity. Sthāvarā accordingly sends him to a goddess of the night called Vāsantī,<sup>285</sup> the first of a series of eight such goddesses. The teachings that he receives from these eight night goddesses, taken together, make up the longest passage of continuous instruction in the Sutra.

Vāsantī and her sister goddesses represent the light of wisdom that shines in the darkness of ignorance, giving solace to weary wanderers in the realms of birth and death, guiding those who have gone astray back to the right path, and leading those who are in danger to a place of safety. In this initial encounter Vāsantī expounds the Dharma to Sudhana with an eloquent mixture of doctrine, story and exhortation. Her discourse is steeped in the spirit of wisdom and compassion that is the essence of the bodhisattva path, and she herself embodies the same Vehicle of Samantabhadra that she extols, as Sudhana recognizes when he is moved to praise the universality of her spiritual power in verse:

If there are any sentient beings  
Who hear your name or see your form,  
They will acquire sufficient merit  
To accomplish Perfect Enlightenment.

The translation here is from the Chinese of Shikshananda. The extant Sanskrit text has only been consulted for proper names and for clarification of a couple of ambiguous passages. Sanskrit technical terms are given in standard dictionary form, regardless of their grammatical function in the sentence. The background on the title page is from the painting "The Pleiades" by the Peruvian artist Miguel Araoz Cartagena.<sup>286</sup> The narrative in this chapter begins with Sudhana's parting from the earth goddess Sthāvarā.



As mentioned above, many commentators have sought to find the essential unity of the disparate chapters of the Sutra in an underlying doctrinal or spiritual structure. The text itself also provides a kind of unifying device by correlating the Buddha's successive appearances at progressively higher planes of existence within our world-system with the emission of light from progressively higher parts of his body. Other devices that the Sutra uses to link its various chapters and assemblies together are the frequent repetition of certain images, and of phrases and motifs that reflect or encapsulate specific aspects of the teachings. But most important of all, perhaps, is the doctrinal consistency of the text, which runs like a thread through all the Sutra's chapters, binding them into a whole.

At the purely formal level, however, the Sutra is presented as a series of 'assemblies' [huèi, 會], each of which takes place in a specific location, is presided over by a particular bodhisattva (or in one case by the Buddha himself), and is regarded as dealing with a distinct topic or doctrinal category, as can be seen from the table below:

<b>Assembly</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Source of Light</b>	<b>Bodhisattva</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Chapters</b>
I	Bodhimaṇḍa	Teeth and ūṛṇā	Samantabhadra	Buddhahood	1-6
II	Hall of Universal Light	Wheels on soles of feet	Mañjuśrī	10 types of faith	7-12
III	Indra's Palace	Toes	Dharmamati	10 Abodes	13-18
IV	Yama's Palace	Insteps	Guṇavana	10 Practices	19-22
V	Tuṣita Palace	Knees	Vajradhvaja	10 Transferrals of Merit	23-25
VI	Paranirmita-vaśavartin Palace	Ūṛṇā	Vajragarbha	10 Stages	26
VII	Hall of Universal Light	Ūṛṇā and mouth	Śākyamuni/ Vairocana	Virtual & Sublime Enlightenment	27-37
VIII	Hall of Universal Light	(none)	Samantabhadra	2,000 Ways to Enlightenment	38
IX	Jetavana	Ūṛṇā	Sudhana's teachers	Entering the Dharmarealm	39

The final chapter of this book, "Blueprint for Enlightenment" offers brief descriptions of all the various chapters and assemblies in the Sutra. In addition to being useful for reference, it is hoped that these summaries will give some idea of the vast scope and imaginative richness of its contents. Although the best way to appreciate the grandeur of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* and the depth of its message is to read it through attentively from beginning to end, perhaps the simple outline presented here will help to shed some light on what Fa Zang sees as the Sutra's true significance:

This Sutra was taught by the innumerable manifestations of the Buddha Vairocana in worlds throughout this Lotus Pool universe, while he was absorbed in the *sāgaramudrā samādhi*,<sup>287</sup> for the benefit of Samantabhadra and the host of other great bodhisattvas. Every single word, concept, chapter and assembly of the Sutra pervades all the worlds throughout the ten directions of space, right down to the worlds contained in every atom and in the tip of every hair within those worlds. In all these worlds, stretched out like Indra's Net through all past and future ages, and in every instant of time, which itself encompasses endless ages, this Sutra is always being expounded, everywhere and without cease.<sup>288</sup>

[Fa Zang, *The Transmission of the Avatamsaka Sūtra*]



## 11. Sudhana's Pilgrimage

The *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* still survives in Sanskrit as an independent work under this title. It also forms the last chapter, or section, of the Chinese translation of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, where it is called "Entering the Dharmarealm" [入法界品]. It tells the story of a pilgrimage – the quest of a young man called Sudhana for Enlightenment. After hearing the bodhisattva Manjushri expound the Dharma, Sudhana is moved to aspire to perfect Enlightenment, and *bodhicitta*, the "Enlightenment mind", arises in him. In the words of the Sutra:

Then the youth Sudhana, having heard from Manjushri about the Buddha's manifold virtues, aspired with all his heart to unsurpassed, perfect Enlightenment [*anuttarasamyaksambodhi*].

Accordingly, In the course of a long hymn of praise, he implores Manjushri's guidance:

... Pure orb of compassion  
Illuminating all with the bright rays of wisdom,  
Sun that has risen to dry up the sea of passions,  
Shed your light on me....

Manjushri directs him for further instruction to a monk called Meghaśrī who lives on a mountain some distance to the south. Sudhana duly visits Meghaśrī, who communicates his own personal insights and then directs him in turn to another monk, Sāgaramegha, living by the sea still further to the south. Sudhana continues in this way through a series of twenty-nine teachers, always travelling southwards. These teachers include not only monks, but also a nun, a princess, a queen, a courtesan, kings, perfumers, a sailor, and various other lay practitioners, including a boy and girl, as well as a brahmin and a non-Buddhist ascetic.

This series of gurus concludes with Avalokiteshvara, another bodhisattva called Ananyagāmin, and lastly the god Mahādeva (Shiva). Mahādeva then sends Sudhana back to the north, to the earth goddess, Sthāvarā, at the site of the Buddha's Enlightenment in what is now Bodhgaya. He receives teachings from her, and then, in

a long section amounting to nearly a quarter of the entire text, he is given further instruction by a series of eight night goddesses. He is next sent to Gopā, the Buddha Śākyamuni's wife, and then to Māyādevī, the Buddha's mother, There follows a short series of brief encounters with various teachers, until finally a pair of children who claim to have fully understood the illusory nature of all things send Sudhana south once more, to the bodhisattva Maitreya, his fifty-first guru (or his fifty-second, if Manjuśrī is counted as the first). Maitreya admits him to a great tower called Matrix of the Splendours of the Display of Vairocana. On entering the tower, Sudhana discovers that the interior is infinite and contains an infinite number of such towers, in each of which he sees himself. This represents the central vision of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, in which every phenomenon and every atom, is said to be like a mirror reflecting all the other phenomena. in the universe.

This is not the end of Sudhana's story, however. Maitreya now tells him to seek out his original guru, Manjushri, in order to have his Enlightenment confirmed. Accordingly, he sets off again, travelling through "more than a hundred and ten towns", longing to see Manjushri once more. Finally Manjushri comes to meet him, approves his understanding, and takes him to the bodhisattva Samantabhadra who, after further teaching, reveals his cosmic body, which Sudhana now sees to be coextensive with the universe itself:

Then the young man Sudhana also saw himself within the body of Samantabhadra, teaching and maturing beings in all the worlds of the ten directions.... All the oceans of buddharealms he had entered, from his first aspiration to Enlightenment till his encounter with the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, now appeared in a single one of Samantabhadra's pores.... Sudhana gradually perfected all the vows and practices of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra and so achieved equality with Samantabhadra and with all the buddhas....

Finally Samantabhadra recites a long series of verses "explaining a single drop from the ocean of the Buddha's virtues", and the Sutras (both the Gaṇḍavyūha and the Avatamsaka) conclude as follows :

The Tathāgata has no form, nor is formless;  
 He appears where needed but abides nowhere.  
 'Space', 'Suchness', 'True Reality',  
 'Nirvana', 'Real Nature', 'Perfect Stillness' –  
 Only such terms as these can express  
 The essential truth of the Tathāgata.  
 One could perhaps count atoms or thoughts,  
 Or drink all the water in the sea,  
 Set limits to space, or restrain the wind,  
 But no one can count all the Buddha's virtues.  
 If any should hear of this ocean of virtues  
 With joy, with faith, and with understanding,  
 They will gain all that has been extolled here:  
 Let no one doubt the truth of this.

With these words<sup>289</sup> the entire vast text ends as it had begun, for the first chapter of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* was also a long paean in praise of Buddhahood. T.S. Eliot's famous lines might well apply to Sudhana's quest here, and to the Sutra as a whole:

We shall not cease from exploration  
 And the end of all our exploring  
 Will be to arrive where we started  
 And know the place for the first time.<sup>290</sup>

This echo of the first chapter of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* also points to the fact that Sudhana's story is an epitome of the entire Sutra. Just as in that first chapter Vairocana Buddha was praised by all the attendant deities representing the elements of the physical universe, so too, at the beginning of the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, we find Manjushri attended by the same deities. Manjushri here is therefore a symbol of Enlightenment, of the Buddhahood of Vairocana, but at the same time, as a bodhisattva, he represents Enlightenment in action, that is, the initial commitment to and actual practice of the Path. (It should also be remembered that from the nondualistic standpoint of the Sutra, practice is in itself a manifestation of Buddhahood as well as being, from a different point of view, a cause leading to its ultimate realization.) Similarly, the vision unfolded and the teachings expounded in the preceding chapters of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* are illustrated in a concrete and specific manner through the story of Sudhana's quest.

The Quest, and the Vision which inspires it, form one of the most common themes in all literature. From ancient times, there are the stories of Gilgamesh, of the Pāṇḍavas and so on; from the medieval period, we have tales such as those of Beowulf or of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; and in the 20th century, the sagas of

The *Lord of the Rings* and of the Star Wars films gained worldwide popularity. A particularly relevant example here which has its origins in Buddhism is the Chinese novel *Journey to the West* [西遊記], where the monk Xuan Zang's historical quest for Buddhist scriptures in India has been fictionalized and turned into a story about the fantastic adventures of the monkey king Sun Wukong (whose name literally means 'one who understands [wù 悟] emptiness' [*śūnyatā*; *kūng* 空]).

In all these tales the quest is to a greater or lesser extent spiritual in nature, but there are also quest stories composed from a more explicitly religious point of view, such as Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, or Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* belongs in this latter category. The purpose of Sudhana's quest, somewhat like Dante's, is to achieve Enlightenment, and most of the Sutra consists of the instructions he receives from his gurus. Sudhana is also meant to be a model: he is Everyman and represents all of us – not as we usually appear to be, but as we can and ought to be and, in the deepest sense, as we actually are in reality.

From the Buddhist point of view, life itself is a kind of pilgrimage: once we have been born, we travel through life, whether aimlessly or with a conscious purpose. If we fail to find the true Path, we die to be reborn and start our individual journeys again. Sudhana, then, is an example of someone who has discovered what the true goal of all our restless wandering and searching is, for the Aspiration to Enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) was awakened in him at the very beginning of his quest.

In the Sutra, this initial awakening occurs through the inspiration of Manjushri, who represents innate wisdom. As such, he provides not only the inspiration to practise but is also a constant and essential guide on the Path. So the bodhisattva Maitreya tells Sudhana:

Manjushri is the eternal begetter of countless billions of buddhas, the eternal teacher of countless billions of bodhisattvas. He instructs all beings and guides them to perfection.... Young man, Manjushri is your spiritual friend [*kalyāṇa-mitra*], who causes you to be born into the Tathagata's family.... All the gurus you have met, the bodhisattva practices you have learnt, the deliverances you have made your own, the great vows you have fulfilled – all this has been through the power of Manjushri.

It is Manjushri, too, who leads Sudhana to the final vision of Samantabhadra. If Manjushri represents wisdom, it is Samantabhadra who personifies the complete commitment to and fulfilment of the Bodhisattva Path, and the phrase "the vows and practices of Samantabhadra" runs like a leitmotif through the entire *Avatamsaka*

*Sūtra*. Just as Sudhana is presented as a model for the ordinary unenlightened individual, so Samantabhadra is the model for Sudhana himself. He is the archetypal bodhisattva, tireless and indefatigable in his compassionate activities throughout the universe.

So according to the Sutra, the Path begins with a vision of Enlightenment and its significance, communicated through the instructions of Manjushri. This vision inspires the commitment necessary to sustain the unremitting practice that will lead the pilgrim to the goal, qualities that are embodied in the figure of Samantabhadra. And finally there appears the culminating vision of ultimate reality, the realization of complete Enlightenment. (This is represented in the text by Maitreya's initiation of Sudhana, for as the next buddha in the current world-cycle, Maitreya symbolizes the last stage before final Enlightenment.) Manjushri's subsequent confirmation of the vision that Sudhana has experienced in Vairocana's tower shows that his final realization is in fact identical with the primordial Enlightenment that was present in his mind from the beginning. Immediately thereafter comes Sudhana's final vision of Samantabhadra's universal body, which demonstrates that Enlightenment is not a static condition to be achieved once and for all, but a mode of being that finds spontaneous expression in effortless and ceaseless activity on behalf of all sentient beings.

This, in outline, is the pattern of the quest as presented in the Sutra, but there are many aspects of it that are worth reflecting on further. One might note, for example, that while Sudhana's own Aspiration is awakened by hearing the Dharma, in other cases the mere sight of a fully awakened buddha achieves the same effect. So the third of the night goddesses, for example, tells Sudhana how in a previous life as the consort of a king a great many aeons ago she was woken from sleep one night by the light of the Buddha:

Then I awoke from my sleep  
 And beheld a clear, bright light.  
 Looking to see where it came from  
 I saw the Buddha beneath  
 The Tree of Enlightenment,  
 His body, adorned with marks,  
 Seemed like a mountain of jewels,  
 And streams of brilliant light  
 Flowed from each pore of his skin.  
 When I saw him my heart sang for joy  
 And then the thought came to me  
 That I too would become a buddha.

A glimpse of the goal inspires the commitment to practise, and the first step,

as Sudhana's example shows, is to seek out teachers and receive instructions from them. The importance of the guru, of the 'good friend' [*kalyāṇa-mitra*] is strongly emphasized throughout the Sutra. So Manjushri, for example, says to Sudhana:

It is very good, young man, that you should aspire to unsurpassed, complete Enlightenment.... Approaching and honouring spiritual friends is the first step towards achieving Omniscience, so you should be indefatigable in this.... If you wish to achieve Omniscience, it is essential that you seek out spiritual friends,... receive their guidance, and follow their instructions, trusting implicitly in the skilful means they employ.

Similarly, the two children, Śrīsambhava. and Śrīmati, who direct Sudhana to Maitreya advise him that he should be

... tireless in seeking out spiritual friends; you should never grow weary of meeting them; you should never be reluctant to question them or shrink from approaching them.... Why? Because it is through them that a bodhisattva gets to learn all the bodhisattva practices, to perfect all the virtues of a bodhisattva, and to commit to all the bodhisattva's great vows.... In short, all the practices of a bodhisattva, all the *pāramitās*, all the stages of the bodhisattva path, ...all the bodhisattva's vows, and the perfection of all the qualities of Buddhahood – all these are achieved through the influence of spiritual friends.

The great variety of Sudhana's many gurus is meant to show that the wisdom the bodhisattva needs to acquire is not only to be learnt from those who teach 'Buddhism' in the conventional sense, and is not confined to 'religious' doctrines or 'spiritual' practices alone. Many of Sudhana's teachers have in fact applied themselves diligently to all kinds of secular studies. The youth Indriyeśvara, for example, has "studied writing and mathematics with Manjushri .. and in this way mastered all the arts and crafts", while Śilpābhijña speaks of bodhisattvas who

are competent in all the worldly and transcendental arts, ... have acquired a profound understanding of writing and mathematics, are skilled in curing illnesses with medicines or incantations; ... are well-informed about minerals and precious stones; ... about villages, camps, country districts, cities, palaces, and parks; ...about astronomy and geography, physiognomy, divination, and the cries of birds and beasts; about meteorology, agronomy, and the security of the realm.

One reason for the pursuit of this kind of secular knowledge has to do with the bodhisattva's skill in means [*upāya-kauśalya*]. Since beings, events and situations are infinitely various, any type of knowledge that a bodhisattva might acquire is bound to prove helpful to some sentient being at some time or place. In other words, the more the bodhisattva knows the better his or her chances of assisting others and helping to relieve them of their suffering. Ultimately, however, there is no difference between the sacred and the secular. As the Sutra repeatedly points out, there are countless buddhas present in every atom. In other words, the entire material universe is a manifestation of Enlightenment, and every kind of knowledge is in the last analysis inseparable from the ground of all knowledge, which is the enlightened awareness of the buddhas and of the mind of Vairocana.

Sudhana's teachers therefore come from all walks of life. They include not only the monks, nuns, and bodhisattvas that one might expect, but also lay practitioners, both male and female, deities, even children and explicitly non-Buddhist figures such as brahmins and wandering ascetics. In this way the Sutra emphasizes the universality of the Dharma and the importance of abandoning preconceptions concerning the nature of Enlightenment and those who have realized it. When Sudhana inquires about the whereabouts of the courtesan Vasumitrā, for example, some of those he meets with are shocked and try to warn this apparently respectable young man against the wiles of prostitutes and their sexual temptations; but others, "who already knew of this woman's wisdom", assure him that she will teach him to "extract the barbs of passion from all beings".

Sudhana's earlier encounter with the ascetic Jayoṣmāyatana is another lesson in being careful not to judge by appearances. When Jayoṣmāyatana bids him jump into a great fire, Sudhana hesitates, suspecting that this yogi may be a false teacher intent on deceiving him. But then thousands of deities appear in the sky above him and sing Jayoṣmāyatana's praises, so he enters the fire and finds it harmless. At the same time he attains to a profound level of concentration and is therefore obliged to apologize to the ascetic for his suspicions. Nevertheless, when he subsequently encounters king Anala, he is horrified to find him apparently inflicting cruel punishments on numerous criminals, and once again he has to be reassured by the same deities. He then goes to the king for instruction and learns that the 'criminals' he saw being killed, maimed, and tortured were only an illusion intended to frighten the violent people over whom Anala was ruling and persuade them to keep their own criminal tendencies in check. By the time he reached Vasumitrā, therefore, Sudhana had already learnt his lesson, and did not hesitate to seek her out.

So in this way the Sutra points out that true gurus can be found in many forms, and warns us not to be too quick to judge by appearances or first impressions. Even

teachers of non-Buddhist doctrines, as Sudhana discovers, can also be enlightened bodhisattvas, for many beings who are capable of making progress on the path to Enlightenment might nevertheless be unable to understand or assimilate the Buddhadharma in its pure form. In such cases, the bodhisattva may be moved by compassion to expound the teachings to them in a way that will be better suited to their inclinations or faculties, or that will seem more familiar to them. This is the same bodhisattva principle of skill in means that was succinctly expressed by the Christian apostle Paul when he said "I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some"<sup>291</sup>. As the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*<sup>292</sup> explains:

These bodhisattvas (of the Eighth Stage) appear in different physical forms to many beings in all those buddharealms, according to their physical differences, their minds, beliefs, and powers of understanding. Therefore they appear as wandering ascetics to groups of wandering ascetics, as brahmins to groups of brahmins, ... as Disciples [*śrāvakas*] to those who can be liberated by Disciples,...as bodhisattvas to those who can be liberated by bodhisattvas ... They have completely transcended all thoughts of discrimination with regard to physical forms, and so they abide in the awareness of absolute equality.

But there is also a deeper level of significance to this. According to the Sutra – and according to the Mahayana teachings in general – the ultimate truth [*paramārthasatya*] is beyond all concepts and doctrinal categories. From this point of view, all teachings, Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike, are equally false, for they are based on false premises that are the result of dualistic thinking. If a teacher is genuinely enlightened, therefore, his or her teaching will only be a skilful device intended to lead the pupil in the direction of ultimate truth, and the outward form of the teaching, whether Buddhist or not, will be of lesser importance. In the Huayen School this is called the teaching of the 'Common Vehicle', that is, the universal truth of the Ekayana as conveyed through the teachings of other religions or other forms of Buddhism.

Another striking thing about Sudhana's gurus is the unusually large number of female figures among them. Not only do women (or goddesses) make up about a third of the total number of teachers, they also provide nearly two thirds of the teachings the Sutra contains. Why this preponderance of the feminine? One reason may be that while the Enlightenment that Sudhana is seeking is traditionally represented by male figures, such as Manjushri, Samantabhadra, and of course the Buddha himself, the wisdom that they have developed is commonly depicted in Buddhist iconography as a female figure, for the most common Sanskrit word used for 'wisdom' in Buddhist literature, *prajñā*, is a feminine noun. So Prajñāpāramitā

(Transcendental Wisdom), like the Greek Sophia, is grammatically feminine in gender and is often depicted in Buddhist art as a goddess. The underlying implication is perhaps that Wisdom also 'gives birth' to Enlightenment, just as Māyādevī is said to have given birth to Siddhārtha Gautama, who was to become the Buddha Shakyamuni. Therefore Sudhana's female teachers are often presented more or less explicitly as manifestations of Prajñāpāramitā. Of the first of these, Āśā, for example, we are told that those who saw her "were freed from all illness and suffering, cleansed of the defilement of the passions; with the thorns of [dogmatic] beliefs removed.... they entered the realm of unimpeded purity". The symbolism is clearest, perhaps, in the case of Māyādevī herself. So Sudhana sees her as

displaying to all beings a pure physical form, that is, a form that transcended the threefold world<sup>293</sup>, for she had already passed beyond all the realms of existence, and possessed a physical form that was unstained by all the worlds, ...which neither went ... nor came, ... was unborn... unarisen,...unceasing,... beyond words,... neither real... nor unreal.

And as she explains to Sudhana:

Just as I have been the mother of the Blessed One in this age, so have I been the mother of all the countless buddhas of the past.... And when in future the bodhisattva Maitreya descends from the Tushita Heaven... at that time also I will be his mother.

Finally, there are two other symbolic features of the narrative that might require some elucidation: the direction of Sudhana's journey, and the importance of the goddesses of the night. Until he encounters Mahādeva (Shiva), Sudhana journeys steadily towards the south. Li Tungxuan's explanation – that this indicates a journey towards the light – relies on traditional Chinese symbolism, which equates the south with the sun, the element fire, and the trigram *lí* 離 (☲). Indian directional symbolism, however, supposes a posture facing the east, the direction of the sunrise. The south is then on one's right hand, which is considered the auspicious side, so in this way the Sutra indicates that Sudhana is 'on the right track', as it were. The site of the Buddha's Enlightenment, the *bodhimaṇḍa*, however, which is traditionally regarded in Buddhism as the centre of the world, is in northern India. Accordingly, when Sudhana, in the course of his spiritual quest, is drawing near to his goal, he is sent back to the Seat of Enlightenment in the north for his final instructions.

Here he will soon be taught, first by the goddess of the Lumbinī Grove, who had presided over the birth of the Buddha, then by the Buddha's wife, Gopā, and then

by his mother – three different figures personifying the same wisdom that gives birth to Enlightenment. Before that, however, he receives instruction from eight different goddesses of the night. The number eight here may be intended to suggest the Eightfold Path, or perhaps the eight spatial directions, but the goddesses themselves represent the light of wisdom that illumines the 'long night' of suffering in Samsara<sup>294</sup>. So when the first of them, Vāsantī, appears to Sudhana in the early evening sky "dressed in a red robe, her hair bound up like an ascetic's, her body brilliantly adorned with all the stars and constellations", she tells him: "I have attained the liberation of the Light of Dharma by which the bodhisattva dispels the darkness that shrouds all beings in the stupor of ignorance." By providing light to those lost in the darkness of the night, the goddesses also prefigure the dawn, possibly alluded to also by the red garments that Vāsantī wears, when the sun of Enlightenment will rise to dispel the shadows of ignorance and delusion.

Sudhana's subsequent encounters with Gopā and Māyādevī are meant to imply that the same Enlightenment that the Buddha realized will soon be born within his own mind too, a symbolic prediction that is confirmed when the bodhisattva Maitreya, who will be the next fully enlightened buddha to appear in this world, reveals to him the final vision that is the culmination of his quest. But although Sudhana's pilgrimage has come to an end at this point, his Enlightenment will not be complete until he has also encountered the great bodhisattva Samantabhadra, who represents both the quest and the goal, both practice and realization. Once Sudhana has seen himself multiplied countless times within Samantabhadra's body, however, and realizes that he has himself now become Samantabhadra, he finally understands that his initial aspiration, his persistent search, and his final revelation have all been part of the endless story of Samantabhadra's compassionate activities, and that the Enlightenment he sought was present within him from the very beginning.

In this way Sudhana resolves the dilemma he had been struggling with throughout his long journey. As he had previously explained to Gopā:

I have already awakened the aspiration to unsurpassed, perfect Enlightenment, but I do not yet know how bodhisattvas remain in the cycle of births and deaths without being affected by its ills,... how they perfect the qualities of a buddha while maintaining the practices of a bodhisattva,... how they realize the Body of Truth [*dharmakāya*] while manifesting countless physical forms,... how they know the Dharma is beyond words and yet continue to teach all beings everywhere, how they know that beings are devoid of reality [*śūnya*] and yet never abandon the task of instructing them....

How can reality be found in illusion, meaning in meaninglessness, bliss in

suffering, changeless truth in transient phenomena? According to the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* every quest is really a search for the answer to this question, and through the example of Sudhana it shows how it can be found by firm commitment, persistent inquiry, and diligent practice. So Maitreya, praising Sudhana in verse, says:

Contemplate this young man here  
 Who has approached so many spiritual guides  
 And learn how to practise like Sudhana....  
 Because of all his past good deeds,  
 Manjushri awoke his Aspiration  
 And he followed the instructions he was given.  
 He practised with diligence, never tiring.  
 Family and relatives, palaces, property –  
 All these he was able to renounce  
 And humbly sought wise teachers out.  
 Having acted like this with pure intent  
 He will shed his worldly form forever  
 To be reborn in the buddharealms  
 And reap the sublime fruit of his deeds ...  
 Sudhana's practice has been flawless,  
 And if you are moved to respect or admire him,  
 Then you should do as he has done.

<i>Appendix: Sudhana's Gurus</i>		
<i>No.</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Vocation</i>
1	Mañjuśrī	Bodhisattva
2	Meghaśrī	Monk
3	Sāgaramegha	Monk
4	Supratiṣṭhita	Monk
5	Megha	Grammarian
6	Muktaka	Businessman (śreṣṭhin)
7	Sāradhvaja	Monk
8	Āśā	Upāsikā
9	Bhīṣmottaranirghoṣa	Forest Sage (ṛṣi)
10	Jayoṣmāyatana	Brahmin
11	Maitrāyaṇī	Maiden (kanyā)
12	Sudarśana	Monk
13	Indriyeśvara	Boy (dāraka)
14	Prabhūtā	Upāsikā
15	Vidvān	Householder (gṛhapati)
16	Ratnacūḍa	Philanthropist (dharmaśreṣṭhin)
17	Samantanetra	Perfumer (gāndhika)
18	Anala	King (rājā)

19	Mahāprabha	King
20	Acalā	Upāsikā
21	Sarvagāmī	Mendicant (parivrājaka)
22	Uṭpalabhūti	Perfumer (gandhikaśreṣṭhin)
23	Vaira	Mariner
24	Jayottama	Businessman
25	Simhaviṅgmbhitā	Nun
26	Vasumitrā	Courtesan (bhagavatī)
27	Veṣṭhila	Householder
28	Avalokiteśvara	Bodhisattva
29	Ananyagāmī	Bodhisattva
30	Mahādeva	God
31	Sthāvarā	Earth Goddess
32	Vāsantī	Night Goddess
33	Samantagambhīraśrīvimalaprabhā	Night Goddess
34	Pramuditānayanajagadvirocanā	Night Goddess
35	Samantasattvatrāṇojāḥśrī	Night Goddess
36	Praśāntarutasāgaravatī	Night Goddess
37	Sarvanagararakṣāsambhavatejāḥśrī	Night Goddess
38	Sarvavṛkṣapraphullanasukhasamivāsā	Night Goddess
39	Sarvajagadrakṣāpraṇidhāna- vīryaprabha	Night Goddess
40	Sutejomaṇḍalaratiśrī	Goddess of the Lumbinī Grove
41	Gopā	Śākya Maiden
42	Māyādevī	Mother of the Bodhisattva
43	Surendrābha	Young Goddess (devakanyā)
44	Viśvamiṭra	Young Teacher (dāraśākārya)
45	Śilpābhijña	Young Scholar (śreṣṭhidāraka)
46	Bhadrottama	Upāsikā
47	Muktāsāra	Goldsmith
48	Sucandra	Householder
49	Ajitasena	Householder
50	Śivarāgra	Brahmin
51	Śrīsambhava / Śrīsambhavī	Boy and Girl
52	Maitreya	Bodhisattva
53	Mañjuśrī	Bodhisattva



## 12. Vāsantī

".....Young man, the only Dharma teaching I know is this Matrix of Indestructible Wisdom<sup>1</sup>. As to great bodhisattvas who always follow the buddhas and uphold all their teachings, who enter fully into the profoundest wisdom of the buddhas and at every moment fill the universe with physical forms resembling those of the tathagatas<sup>2</sup> themselves, who are of one mind with the buddhas, who are endowed with all the buddhas' qualities, and accomplish all the activities of the buddhas – how could I know or speak of their merit or their conduct?"

Young man, in the city of Kapilavastu, in the kingdom of Magadha here in Jambudvīpa<sup>3</sup>, there is a night goddess called Vāsantī. Go to her and ask her how to acquire the conduct of a bodhisattva and how to cultivate the bodhisattva path."

Thereupon Sudhana prostrated at the feet of the earth goddess, circumambulated her countless times, gazing at her with reverence and devotion. Then he took his leave and went on his way.

Sudhana continued to think deeply on all that the goddess Sthāvarā had taught him, pondering the nature of the liberation<sup>4</sup> obtained through the bodhisattva's Matrix of Indestructible Wisdom. He cultivated the appropriate samadhis, mastered the relevant techniques, and contemplated the perfect freedom they made possible. Exploring these subtleties, he grasped the wisdom they conferred. So he attained to a state of absolute equality [*samatā*]<sup>5</sup>, profound and limitless.

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1. Jñānaduryodhanagarbha. Ch. 不可沮壞智藏.

2. Tathāgata is another word for a fully awakened buddha.

3. Jambudvīpa ('Jambu-tree Island') is the continent we live on according to traditional Buddhist cosmology. In modern terms it corresponds more or less to India.

4. The word 'liberation' or 'deliverance' [*vimokṣa*, *vimukti*] is used frequently in the Sutra to refer to a particular practice by which the practitioner has acquired liberating insight into the nature of reality.

5. All things are ultimately identical or the same [*sama*] in that they are empty [*śūnya*] or devoid of self-existence [*svabhāva-śūnya*].

Proceeding in this manner, he came to the city and entered in by the eastern gate. Here he stood for a long time watching the sun go down. Longing to see the night goddess, he thought only of following the bodhisattvas' instructions. It seemed to him that one's gurus [*kalyāṇa-mitra*]<sup>6</sup> were like the buddhas themselves, for they could grant the all-seeing eye that reveals all the worlds in the ten directions. From them one could obtain a comprehensive understanding of all the ramifications of cause and effect, samadhis that would make it possible to contemplate all the teachings of the Buddhadharma, and the eye of wisdom that can illuminate world-systems everywhere throughout the universe.

As he was thinking these thoughts, he saw the night goddess in the sky above him. She was seated on a lion throne within a jewelled hall in a pool of fragrant lotuses. Her body was the colour of pure gold and her eyes and hair shone with a dark purple lustre. Her posture was graceful and dignified, such that it was a joy to behold her. She wore a red robe and was adorned with a necklace of jewels. Her hair was piled up on her head like an ascetic's and her body glittered with stars and constellations.

In every pore of her skin could be seen how she was providing guidance to countless beings who were destined for an evil rebirth, in order to help them avoid the dangerous consequences of their actions. Some of them were reborn as human beings and others as gods [*deva*]<sup>7</sup>, some sought Enlightenment according to the teachings of the Two Vehicles, while others cultivated the path to Omniscience<sup>8</sup>.

In her pores were also visible the various means she used for the instruction and guidance of beings. To some of them she showed her physical form, to others she taught the Dharma; to some she revealed the Vehicle of the Disciples [*śrāvakayāna*]<sup>9</sup>, to others the Vehicle of the Solitary Buddhas [*pratyekabuddhayāna*]<sup>10</sup>, while to others again she taught the conduct and practices of a bodhisattva. The courage of a bodhisattva, the meditative states [*samādhi*] of a bodhisattva, the spiritual freedom of a bodhisattva, the dwellings of a bodhisattva, the contemplations of a bodhisattva, the

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6. Literally 'good friend', i.e. a spiritual guide or teacher.

7. The devas were the immortal gods of early Brahmanism, but for the Buddha they were entities subject to birth and death like human beings, although their lives are much longer than ours.

8. The "Two Vehicles" are identified in the next paragraph. The word 'omniscience' [*sarvajñatā*] is used in the Mahayana to indicate the limitless knowledge that characterizes the buddhas, who are said, for example, to have complete knowledge of the true nature of all phenomena, of their own past lives, of the past and future lives of other beings, of the minds and capacities of all beings, and of the right time, place and method for communicating the Dharma to others.

9. The 'Disciples' (literally 'listeners' or 'hearers') achieve Enlightenment as a result of hearing the Dharma taught by the buddhas. The term is commonly used by the Mahayana to refer to followers of the early schools of Buddhism.

10. The 'Solitary Buddhas' achieve Enlightenment through their own insight into the nature of cause and effect, but they only teach if asked to do so by others.

lion's yawn<sup>11</sup> of a bodhisattva, the pleasures enjoyed by a bodhisattva – all these things she taught in order to bring them to spiritual maturity.

When Sudhana saw and heard all this, his heart was filled with delight. He prostrated himself at the feet of the goddess and circumambulated her countless times. Then he stood before her with his palms pressed together and said, "Holy One, I have already awakened the Aspiration to Perfect and Complete Enlightenment [*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi-citta*]. I hope from the bottom of my heart that with the help of the gurus I will be able to obtain the Dharma treasury of all the Tathagata's qualities. I beg of you only that you will show me the path to Omniscience; then I will practise accordingly until I have acquired the Ten Powers<sup>12</sup> of Buddhahood."

Thereupon the night goddess said to Sudhana, "It is good, it is excellent young man that you have such profound respect for your teachers, and that you take such pleasure in hearing what they have to say and in putting their teachings into practice, for it is through practice that one will certainly attain to Perfect and Complete Enlightenment."

"Young man, I have obtained a deliverance called the Light of the Dharma by Which the Bodhisattva Dispels the Darkness of Delusion in All Beings<sup>13</sup>. In evil-minded beings I inspire feelings of kindness. In those who commit evil deeds I arouse thoughts of great compassion. I fill the minds of those who do good deeds with happiness. To those who vacillate between good and evil I teach nonduality. Those who are on a false path I guide in the right direction. I broaden the understanding of those whose intelligence is weak. I encourage those who delight in Samsara to abandon the endless cycle of rebirths. The minds of those who follow the Two Vehicles I direct towards Omniscience.

"Young man, the deliverance I have obtained is always conjoined with these intentions. On dark nights when most people are asleep but ghosts, spirits, bandits, thieves and other such evil creatures are abroad, there are travellers who go enveloped in dense mist and fog, buffeted by violent winds and heavy rain. On such nights, when sun, moon and stars are all obscured and nothing can be clearly perceived, I may see someone about to put out to sea, or set out on a journey overland, obliged to pass through mountains, forests, or other perilous wildernesses. Perhaps they will encounter thieves or bandits, run short of supplies, or mistake their direction and become completely lost. Then they grow flustered, anxious and afraid,

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11. This cryptic term [*simha-vijrmbhita*] appears to refer to the gaping jaws of a lion charging its prey. The metaphor is perhaps intended to suggest the courage and power of the bodhisattvas in attacking and scattering the negative forces that impede the realization of Enlightenment.

12. These are ten aspects of the comprehensive knowledge or 'omniscience' of the buddhas.

13. *Sarvasattva-tamovikiraṇa-dharmāvabhāsa-jagad-vinayamukha*. [Ch.菩薩破一切眾生癡暗法光明解脫]

and can see no escape from their plight. On such occasions I use various means to rescue them.

'For those who are in difficulty at sea, I become a ship's captain, or a giant fish, a horse, turtle, or elephant, or an asura<sup>14</sup> king, or a sea spirit. Then I stop the wind and rain, and calm the waves for those people, showing them the right course and guiding them to dry land. In this way I free them from their fear and restore them to peace and safety. Then I dedicate this good deed to the welfare of all beings, praying that they may become free from every kind of suffering.

"To all those beings on land who encounter fearful things in the darkness of the night I show the light of the sun, the moon or the stars, or of the clouds at dawn, or of lightning in the night. For some I create a house and for others a group of people, so as to relieve them of their fears. Then I dedicate this good deed to all sentient beings so that the darkness of their passions may dissipate.

"Some people cling to life, others are attached to reputation. Some crave wealth, while others value social status. Some are drawn to sexual pleasures, and others are devoted to their wives and concubines. If the hopes they cherish are not realized, they become anxious and depressed. All these people too I help to free from their suffering.

"There are those who run into difficulties while crossing mountain passes, and for them I appear as a helpful deity to befriend them, or as a beautiful bird to comfort them with the sweetness of my song; or else I conjure up healing herbs or soft lights that will illumine their path, show them fruit trees and wells, and direct them to the right path, one that will lead them to level ground. In this way I am able to free them from all danger and distress.

"There are some too who follow paths through wildernesses or dense forests, impeded by vines and creepers, who are blinded by mist and fog and full of fear. I help these people to escape their predicament and show them the way forward, while at the same time praying that all beings may cut down the forest of views and break through the net of craving; that they may escape from the wilderness of birth and death and dispel the blinding darkness of their passions; and that they may find the level ground of Omniscience, reaching a place where no fear can touch them, and attaining to unalloyed happiness.

"If there are any who are devoted to their native land and suffer distress because of that, I find a way to instil a sense of disengagement in them, praying that all beings may view the aggregates [*skandha*] with detachment and learn to dwell in the buddhas' realm of Omniscience. As for those who love to dwell in towns and villages and are passionately fond of their own homes, but are living in constant

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14. The asuras were the antagonists of the devas in early Brahmanic mythology.

spiritual darkness and experiencing all kinds of suffering, to them I teach the Dharma, so that they will become detached from such things, find satisfaction in the Dharma, and make that their dwelling-place instead. Then I pray that all beings will cease to take pleasure in the village of the six senses, that they will quickly leave the realm of birth and death, and will make their home at last in the city of Omniscience.

"There are some who travel at night and lose all sense of direction, mistaking level paths for perilous ones and perilous paths for level ones, thinking that ascending tracks are descending ones and vice versa. Then their minds become confused and they suffer great distress. For these travellers I contrive a soft light that will show a way out to those who want to escape, or a road to those who want to continue travelling. To those who need to cross a ditch, I show a bridge; to those who want to cross a river or sea, I show a raft or a boat. If they hope for a wider view of the terrain in order to get their bearings, I show them an easily accessible vantage point. If they long for rest, I show them a town, a city, a tree or a river bank. And then I think: just as I have lighted their path through the darkness of the night, so may the nature of all worldly affairs be laid bare. I pray that the light of wisdom may illuminate all beings wandering everywhere in the long night of Samsara, lost in the darkness of their ignorance.

"All these beings lack the eye of wisdom and are blinded by their perverse ideas, for they believe that the impermanent is permanent, that there is happiness where no happiness is to be found, that the impure is pure, and that a self exists where there is no self. They cling stubbornly to a belief in self and others where there are only the aggregates [*skandhas*], the senses, sense-objects and cognition. They are confused about the relationship between cause and effect and cannot tell good from bad. They kill or injure other beings and end up following false ideologies. They are ungrateful to their parents and show no respect to ascetics and brahmins. They are unable to see bad people for what they are and they fail to recognize good people when they encounter them. They are eager to commit evil deeds and feel comfortable with false teachings. They slander the Tathagata and damage the transmission of the Dharma. They insult bodhisattvas or physically attack them, disparaging the Mahayana and blocking any possibility of aspiring to Enlightenment. Such people attack or kill those to whom they should feel grateful, and are constantly resentful of those from whom they have received no favours. They slander the wise, keep bad company, plunder stupas and monasteries, and commit the five cardinal crimes. Before long they will fall into the three evil destinies.

"I pray that I may swiftly dispel the darkness of these people's ignorance with the light of great wisdom, and that they may soon aspire to supreme and perfect Enlightenment. Once they have done so, I will reveal to them the Vehicle of Samantabhadra and open the way to the ten powers of Buddhahood. I will also reveal to them the kingdom of the Tathagata and the city of Omniscience of all the buddhas, as well as the conduct of the buddhas, the spiritual freedom of the buddhas, the accomplishments of the buddhas, the *dhāraṇīs*<sup>15</sup> of the buddhas, and the unique body shared by all the buddhas. In this way I will establish them in the absolute equality of Buddhahood.

"Young man, all those beings who are afflicted by illness or the ravages of old age, who are suffering from poverty or have encountered some disaster, who are about to be punished for infringing the laws of the king, or who are full of fear and have no one to depend on – all these beings I rescue and lead to peace and tranquillity. Then I reflect as follows: I pray that I may gather in all beings everywhere and, by means of the Dharma, liberate them from all their passions, from birth, old age, sickness and death, from grief, sorrow, pain and distress. May they encounter wise teachers, constantly practise generosity, diligently cultivate good deeds, and swiftly attain to Buddhahood, purifying the Dharmakaya and abiding in the ultimate state beyond all change.

"Sentient beings are lost amid the dense forest of views and opinions. They keep to mistaken paths and falsely discriminate between external objects. They constantly err in committing evil deeds of body, speech and mind, deeds that will only bring suffering on them, imagining that false perceptions are true and true perceptions false. They are recruited by corrupt teachers who instil wrong beliefs in them and cause them to fall into unhappy states of existence.

"I use various means to rescue these beings and establish them in the correct view [*samyagdr̥ṣṭi*]<sup>16</sup>, so that they will be reborn among human beings or devas. Then I think that, just as I have saved these beings from the unhappy forms of rebirth that were in store for them, so may I liberate all beings everywhere from their suffering and establish them in the *pāramitās*<sup>17</sup>. May they set out on the path to Enlightenment, not turning back until they have fulfilled all the commitments of Samantabhadra and achieved Omniscience. May they never abandon the conduct of a bodhisattva but always devote themselves to the spiritual guidance of all sentient beings."

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15. A *dhāraṇī* is a verbal formula which sums up a teaching in a condensed form, thereby making it easier to remember.

16. Authentic insight into the nature of suffering [*duḥkha*], the first step on the Eightfold Path.

17. The 'perfect' [*parama*] or 'transcendental' [*pāram-ita*] virtues cultivated by all bodhisattvas.

Then the night goddess Vasanti, inspired by the spiritual power of the buddhas and wishing to proclaim this liberating teaching once more, gazed around in the ten directions and addressed Sudhana in verse as follows:

The path to Liberation that I have practised  
Gives birth to the Dharma's pure and radiant light  
Which dissipates the darkness of delusion.  
Please listen patiently while I explain.

Once, a countless number of aeons ago,  
I diligently cultivated kindness [*mahāmaitrī*],  
Extending it to cover all the worlds.  
Those who follow the Buddha should practise this.

From stillness, tranquillity and great compassion  
All buddhas, past, present and future, are born.  
If you would free all beings from their suffering  
This is the practice you should undertake.

In order to live happily in this world  
And also experience supramundane joy,  
So that your mind becomes suffused with bliss,  
This is the practice you should undertake.

Discard the peril of conditioned things,  
Avoid the fruits of lesser vehicles,  
And cultivate the powers of Buddhahood.  
This is the practice you should undertake.

My eyesight is extremely clear and pure:  
I can see all worlds throughout the universe  
And all the buddhas wherever they appear  
Seated beneath the Tree of Enlightenment.

I see the auspicious marks that adorn their bodies,  
The countless devotees that gather round,  
And the multicoloured rays of light that shine  
From every single pore in the buddhas' skin.

I see the hosts of different sentient beings  
Dying here and being reborn elsewhere,

Revolving in the fivefold round of existence<sup>18</sup>,  
Constantly suffering in countless ways.

My hearing is also very sharp and clear:  
There is nothing anywhere I cannot hear.  
Words in every language that exists  
I can understand and keep in memory.

The Dharma Wheel<sup>19</sup> that all the buddhas turn,  
Those words of incomparable sublimity,  
No matter the script that they are written in,  
I can read them all and keep them in memory.

My sense of smell is very keen and clear  
And nothing impedes its sensitivity.  
In all things I enjoy unhindered freedom.  
You too should learn to practise in this way.

The range of my tongue is vast in its extent.  
It is capable of the purest eloquence,  
Teaching the Dharma to those who have need of it.  
You too should learn to practise in this way.

My body is flawless in its purity,  
Changeless through the three phases of time<sup>20</sup>.  
I appear to sentient beings everywhere  
In whatever form will gratify their minds.

My mind is pure and without impediment.  
Like space, it can accommodate all things.  
I am mindful of the tathagatas everywhere,  
And yet I see no distinction between them at all.

I have perfect knowledge of multitudinous worlds,  
And the minds of those who dwell there are known to me.  
I know their desires and their capabilities  
And yet I see no distinction between them at all.

With the supernormal powers that I possess

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18. I.e. the realms of devas, hell-beings, ghosts, animals, and human beings.

19. A symbol of the Buddha's teaching. The metaphor comes from the ancient myth of a 'wheel-turning' [*cakravartin*] or universal monarch.

20. Past, present and future

I can shake those worlds and set them all atremble.  
 Everywhere I appear in physical forms  
 That will calm those beings that are hard to tame.

The merit I have acquired is very great,  
 As inexhaustible as space itself,  
 The result of offerings I have made to the buddhas  
 In order to benefit all sentient beings.

The wisdom I have acquired is clear and vast;  
 I have flawless understanding of all things,  
 And can dispel the doubts of sentient beings.  
 You too should learn to practise in this way.

I know the buddhas of past, present and future;  
 I am familiar with all that they have taught as well.  
 I also know the skilful means they use:  
 This supreme practice is all-encompassing.

In every single atom I can see  
 All the worlds of the three phases of time  
 Together with the buddhas teaching there:  
 Such is the power of this universal path.

Within the atoms of all worlds everywhere  
 I see the Buddha Vairocana  
 Seated beneath the Tree of Enlightenment  
 Fully awakened and teaching the holy Dharma.

Then Sudhana said to the night goddess, "How long has it been since you first aspired to supreme and perfect Enlightenment? Has it been long since since you obtained this deliverance and became able to benefit sentient beings in this manner?" The goddess replied, "Young man, it was long, long ago, as many aeons ago as there are atoms in Mount Sumeru. At that time there was an aeon called Praśāntaprabhā<sup>21</sup> and a world-system called Ratnaśrīsambhava<sup>22</sup> in which millions of buddhas appeared. Within this world-system there was a world of four continents called Ratnacandrapradīpaprabhā<sup>23</sup>, and in this world there was a city called Padmaprabhā<sup>24</sup>.

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21. Light of tranquillity.

22. Source of splendid jewels.

23. Light of the precious lamp of the moon.

24. Lotus light.

The king was called Sudharmatīrtha<sup>25</sup>, for he instructed his people in the Dharma. He possessed the Seven Gems of a universal monarch [*cakravartin*] and ruled over all four continents. This king had a queen who was called Dharmaraticandrā<sup>26</sup>."

"East of the city there was a great forest called Śamathaśrīsambhava<sup>27</sup>, and in the forest there was a huge bodhi tree called Sarvabuddhavikurvitaprabhava<sup>28</sup>. At the time there was a buddha called Sarvadharmānigarjitarājā<sup>29</sup> who had just realized Complete Enlightenment beneath this tree, and the multicoloured lights that emanated from his body spread far and wide until they illuminated the entire Ratnaśrīsambhava world-system.

In the city of Padmaprabhā there was a night goddess called Suviśuddhacandrābhā<sup>30</sup>. She went to where Queen Dharmaraticandrā lay fast asleep, for it was late at night, and she shook the queen's necklace in order to wake her up. Then she said to her, 'Your Majesty should know that the tathagata Sarvadharmānigarjitarājā has just realized unsurpassed Enlightenment in the forest of Śamathaśrīsambhava. He is currently expounding to a large audience the sovereign powers and virtues of the buddhas, and all the commitments and practices of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra.' These words awoke the aspiration to Supreme and Perfect Enlightenment in the queen's mind, and she went to make offerings to the Buddha and to the monastic gatherings of bodhisattvas and disciples [*śrāvaka*]."

"Young man, she who was Queen Dharmaraticandrā at that time was none other than myself. The merit I acquired through aspiring to Enlightenment in the presence of that Buddha was such that for as many aeons as there are atoms in Mount Sumeru I was not reborn in the hells or among ghosts or animals, nor was I born into a poor human family. My faculties were always unimpaired and I was relatively free from suffering. Among the devas I was blessed with outstanding qualities and never fell into an unhappy rebirth. At no time was I ever separated from the buddhas and bodhisattvas or from great spiritual teachers. In this way I continued to cultivate good deeds for as many aeons as there are atoms in eighty Mount Sumerus, always enjoying peace and happiness. And yet I still had not completed all the requirements of the bodhisattva path."

"After all these ages had passed, there came a further ten thousand aeons. Before the present auspicious aeon, there was an aeon called Aśokavirajas<sup>31</sup>. During

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25. Righteous instructor.

26. Moon of delight in the Dharma.

27. Splendid source of Tranquillity.

28. Miraculous power of all the buddhas.

29. King of the thunderous sound of the Dharma.

30. Pure light of the moon.

31. Untouched by passion and grief.

this period there was a world called Rajovimalatejaḥśrī<sup>32</sup>, which was a hybrid world with both good and bad qualities. Five hundred buddhas appeared in this world, of which the first was called Sumerudhvajāyatana-śāntanetraśrī<sup>33</sup>. At the time I was the daughter of a prominent citizen, a graceful and cultivated young woman called Prajñāvabhāsaśrī<sup>34</sup>. Meanwhile the night goddess Suviśuddhacandrābhā, because of a previous vow, had been born as a senior night goddess called Viśuddhanetrābhā<sup>35</sup> in the royal city of Vicitradvaja<sup>36</sup> in one of the continents of the world Rajovimalatejaḥśrī."

"Late one night, when I was sleeping next to my parents, Viśuddhanetrābhā came to our house and shook the building. Then she revealed her form, which shone with a great light, and she praised the Buddha, saying, 'The tathagata Sumerudhvajāyatana-śāntanetraśrī is now sitting beneath the Bodhi Tree, having achieved complete Enlightenment!' She urged my parents and me to gather a retinue together and go quickly to see the Buddha. Then she guided us to him and we made many offerings. As soon as I saw the Buddha, I obtained a samadhi called Mandala of the Light of Wisdom of the Three Phases of Time<sup>37</sup>. Having obtained this samadhi, I was able to recall as many past aeons as there are atoms in Mount Sumeru. I could also see the buddhas who had appeared during those ages and was able to receive the holy Dharma from them. Because I had heard these teachings, I acquired this deliverance, the Light of the Dharma by Which the Bodhisattva Dispels the Darkness of Delusion in All Beings."

"Having obtained this deliverance, I saw myself travelling to worlds as numerous as the atoms in a buddhafield<sup>38</sup> [*buddhakṣetra*]. I saw the buddhas in all those worlds, and saw myself also present there. I saw the beings that inhabited those worlds, and understood their language. I was aware of their spiritual capacities, and knew what guidance they had received from spiritual teachers in the past. I had become able to reveal myself to them in whatever form would be most pleasing to them and make them happy."

"As I continued to cultivate the deliverance I had received, my mind went on expanding until I was able to travel to as many worlds as there are atoms in a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand buddhafields. At every moment the scope of my awareness increased until it took in as many worlds as there are atoms in a

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32. Splendour of pure dispassion.

33. Sumeru banner abode of tranquil vision.

34. Bright manifestation of wisdom.

35. Light of pure vision.

36. Multicoloured banner.

37. Tryadvatalajñānāvabhāsamaṇḍala

38. A buddhafield is the total area of a buddha's activity and may include many worlds where the buddha becomes manifest in different forms.

countless, inconceivable number of buddhafi elds. In all those worlds I saw the tathagatas, and I saw myself present among them. I heard them teach the sublime Dharma, and remembered all that I heard. In my contemplations I saw and understood everything: the previous lives of all those buddhas, the vastness of their vows and commitments, and how they adorned and purified their buddhafi elds. I also became capable of adorning and purifying worlds, revealing my form to the beings who lived there in a way that would answer their needs, guiding and instructing them as necessary. So I continued to cultivate this deliverance moment by moment until my awareness filled the entire universe."

"Young man, I know only this deliverance of the Light of the Dharma that Dispels the Darkness of Delusion In All Beings. As to how great bodhisattvas accomplish the boundless deeds and commitments of Samantabhadra, entering into all worlds everywhere, obtaining the untramm eled samadhi of a bodhisattva's adamant ine wisdom, making great commitments and sustaining the lineage of Enlightenment, acquiring a vast amount of merit at every moment, adorning and purifying all the worlds, using their unimpeded wisdom to teach all beings and bring them to spiritual maturity, dissipating the encumbering darkness of all worlds with the sun of their awareness, rousing all beings from befuddlement by their unflinching insight, resolving the doubts of beings with the bright moon of their wisdom, breaking the attachments of all beings with the pure clarity of their voice, displaying their unrestricted powers in every atom of all the worlds throughout the universe, looking equally on past, present and future with the clear eye of wisdom – how could I know anything of the sublime conduct of such bodhisattvas?"

"At the Site of Enlightenment here in Magadha, in the land of Jambudvîpa there is a night goddess called Samantagambhêras; rê-vimalaprabha<sup>39</sup>. It was she who first awakened the Aspiration to Enlightenment in my mind and she has continued to enlighten me with the sublime Dharma ever since. You should go and ask her how bodhisattvas cultivate their practices and how one should follow the bodhisattva path."

Then Sudhana addressed Vasanti in verse, saying:

When I see your immaculate physical form  
Whose beauty transcends all worldly things,  
You seem like Manjushri himself,  
Resembling a mountain of precious gems.  
In the purity of your Dharmabody  
Past, present and future are as one.  
All the worlds appear therein,

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39. Omnipresent light of profound purity

In unimpeded growth and decay.  
 When I contemplate the realms of rebirth,  
 I always see your image there,  
 With constellations of stars and moons  
 In every single pore of your skin.  
 The comprehensive range of your mind,  
 Like space, pervades the universe.  
 All the buddhas appear therein,  
 Pure and without discrimination.  
 From every single pore of your skin  
 Countless coloured lights emerge  
 And shower down precious offerings  
 In all the worlds where buddhas appear.  
 In every single pore of your skin  
 Countless bodies materialize  
 And in worlds throughout the whole of space  
 They liberate beings in skilful ways.  
 In every single pore of your skin  
 An infinite number of worlds is revealed  
 Which you purify in various ways  
 In accordance with those beings' desires.  
 If there are any sentient beings  
 Who hear your name or see your form,  
 They will acquire sufficient merit  
 To accomplish Perfect Enlightenment.  
 After many aeons of misspent lives  
 At last I see you and hear your name,  
 And now I am overjoyed to receive  
 The teachings by which all passions are quelled.  
 If I were to spend many millions of aeons  
 In praising a fraction of your virtues,  
 The sum of those aeons would come to an end  
 Before I had spoken of all your qualities.

Having uttered these verses, Sudhana prostrated at the feet of the goddess,  
 circumambulated her countless times, gazing at her with longing and devotion. Then  
 he took his leave of her and continued on his way.



## 13. Blueprint for Enlightenment

### The Chapters of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*

*With skill, heede, and judgement, this worke must be read,  
For else to the Reader it standes in small stead.*

– Arthur Golding

The *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* is the largest single sutra in the Chinese Buddhist Canon and is the foundation on which the teachings of the Huayen School are built. It exists in two translations: one in 60 fascicles by Buddhahadra [359-429] and one in 80 fascicles by Shikshananda [652-710]. For the Huayen School, however, the *Avataṃsaka* is more than just a sacred text, a book made of paper and ink. Ultimately, in the form of what Fa Zang [643-712] in his commentary on the Sutra calls the Sutra's 'eternal version', it is a direct physical manifestation of the wisdom of the buddhas and as such is implicit in every particle of the physical universe:

This is constantly being preached at every moment and ... throughout all the various world-systems. It is not something that can be gathered into a written text, nor is there any limit to the number of its chapters and verses.

Similarly, in his own commentary on the Sutra, Li Tungxuan [636-730 or 646-740] claims that:

The preaching of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* takes place at the Seat of Enlightenment in the kingdom of Magadha, in all the worlds, and within every atom. ... Great-hearted beings who encounter this Sutra and have faith in it will behold the true nature of their own minds, and their knowledge and vision will be the same as those of the Buddha.

The brief chapter summaries provided below are intended as a basic guide to the structure and contents of the Sutra, and are based on the 80-fascicle translation by Śikṣānanda. The division of the text into a number of 'Assemblies' (Ch. *huèi*) follows Huayen commentarial tradition, which is based on indications in the Sutra itself.

## The First Assembly

The first assembly introduces the theme of Buddhahood – the ultimate source of all the teachings of the Huayen School and of the Sutra itself – explaining its indeterminate but all-encompassing nature and situating it in the world of time and space that we inhabit. The principal teacher here is the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, who represents the realization of Buddhahood in practice.

### Chapter 1: The Sublime Adornments of the Lords of the World (世主妙嚴品)

The main topic of the first chapter is the nature of Buddhahood – the perfect Enlightenment of the buddhas. It provides an introductory overview of the basic teachings of the Sutra which will be recapitulated in more concrete form in the final chapter, through the story of Sudhana's quest for Enlightenment.

The Buddha is depicted as seated under the Bodhi-tree. On one level this is the historical Bodhi-tree in northeastern India, but it is also described as situated in a vast palace that is elaborately adorned and shining with multicoloured lights and jewels. In this way the Sutra indicates at the outset that there is a dual aspect to perceived reality: transient phenomena as they appear to us in our everyday existence, and a deeper reality that lies behind them and can be directly perceived only by the enlightened. This apparent duality is ultimately an illusion, however, and it is only our ignorance that divides one from the other. With the overcoming of this division in our mind, the nondual nature of reality will become clear to us, suffering will be overcome, and Enlightenment will have been attained.

The audience consists of innumerable bodhisattvas and deities of all kinds who proceed to recite verses in praise of the Buddha's Enlightenment. The deities represent the entire natural and human world, and their eulogies of the Buddha signify that the impulse towards Enlightenment is present in every sentient being and in every part of the physical universe.

### Chapter 2: The Display of the Tathagata's Qualities (如來現相品)

The assembled bodhisattvas ask a series of questions about the nature and attributes of the buddhas. In response the Buddha emits light, first from his teeth and

then from between his eyebrows. Bodhisattvas appear from worlds in all ten directions and recite verses about various aspects of Buddhahood and of the buddhas' wisdom and teachings. This chapter thus continues the theme of the universality of Enlightenment and the all-pervasive nature of the Buddha's wisdom. The lights emitted<sup>295</sup> symbolize the wisdom of the Buddha's mind (the point between the eyebrows) and speech (the mouth).

### **Chapter 3: Samantabhadra's Samadhi (普賢三昧品)**

The bodhisattva Samantabhadra enters samadhi in the presence of the Buddha, an act that is seen to be repeated endlessly throughout the universe and within every atom. (This motif of infinite repetition or reflection is commonly used throughout the Sutra and Huayen literature to indicate both the universal nature of Enlightenment and the interconnection of all things in an endless web of causal relationships.) The prominence of Samantabhadra here is the first sign of the central place he occupies in the Sutra's teachings. The buddhas all praise Samantabhadra and bestow many kinds of knowledge on him. The assembled bodhisattvas also recite verses in praise of Samantabhadra and ask him to explain to them the nature of time and space.

### **Chapter 4: The Formation of the Worlds (世界成就品)**

In verse and prose, Samantabhadra describes the structure of the physical universe, and the number, variety and beauty of the infinite worlds it contains. He explains how these worlds are adorned and sustained by the spiritual practices and achievements of those who inhabit them, and concludes with an account of their evolution through time in accordance with the karma of their inhabitants. In this way he makes it clear that the the whole universe is a vast buddhfield and that its ultimate purpose is the manifestation of the Enlightenment that was implicit in it from the beginning.

### **Chapter 5: The Lotus Universe (華藏世界品)**

Within the universe as a whole there are said to be countless world-systems or island universes, more or less comparable to the modern idea of a galaxy. In this chapter Samantabhadra gives a detailed account of one such island universe, which is said to resemble a gigantic lotus pond, and which includes among its many worlds the

one that is occupied by human beings. After describing over two hundred of these worlds and giving the names of many others, Samantabhadra emphasizes once more that all the worlds are created by the minds and the karma of the beings that inhabit them. Thus the Sutra begins to focus on our own part of the cosmos, reminding us that the purpose of our existence is to help sustain the universal impulse of all beings towards the realization of Enlightenment.

## Chapter 6: Vairocana (毘盧遮那品)

Samantabhadra now turns his attention to one particular world and relates the history of a crown prince in the far distant past who was to become the buddha Vairocana. After making offerings to a buddha who had appeared in the world at that time, the prince vows to achieve complete Enlightenment himself, and the buddha predicts his ultimate success. Thus we learn that the enlightened awareness of the buddhas which pervades and shapes the entire universe is also to be realized by individual beings at particular times and places. The same lesson is taught by the story of Sudhana's pilgrimage in the final chapter.

## The Second Assembly

Now that the cosmic and spiritual context has been established, the bodhisattva Manjushri, who represents the wisdom of fundamental equality and the communication of the Dharma, comes forward to take Samantabhadra's place as principal instructor. The following chapters explain various basic doctrines and practices, and the final chapter concludes the assembly with a poetic summary of the entire bodhisattva path.

## Chapter 7: The Names of the Tathagata (如來名號品)

This chapter marks a new Assembly and a change of scene: the Buddha is still in Magadha immediately after his Enlightenment, but is now seated in a building called the Hall of Universal Light, signifying that the dissemination of his wisdom in the form of the Dharma is about to begin. As usual throughout the Sutra, however, the Buddha does not teach directly but empowers one of the bodhisattvas to speak on his

behalf.

Manjushri and countless other bodhisattvas now arrive from countless worlds in all ten directions. Manjushri praises the Buddha's qualities and proceeds to list the names by which the Buddha is known in all those worlds. In this way the Sutra indicates that Buddhahood is universal but that buddhas may be perceived and named differently in different worlds, according to the predilections and capacities of the beings who live there.

## **Chapter 8: The Four Holy Truths (四聖諦品)**

This chapter is similar to the preceding one, but Manjushri now speaks of the Four Truths of suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation. Once again he provides a list of names, in this case the various names by which the Four Truths are known in the worlds in all ten directions, thereby demonstrating that while the Four Truths are the basis of the Buddha's teaching and are universal in their scope, their message may be understood and formulated differently by other beings in different worlds.

## **Chapter 9: Awakening by Light (光明覺品)**

Light now radiates from the wheelmarks on the soles of the Buddha's feet, illuminating worlds in all ten directions. As each direction is lit up, the scene in the Hall of Universal Light is multiplied endlessly, and countless Manjushris recite verses in praise of the Buddha's qualities. In this chapter light, as usual, represents the Buddha's wisdom, and its expansion throughout the cosmos indicates that the whole universe is pervaded and sustained by the impulse towards Enlightenment.

## **Chapter 10: Bodhisattvas Ask for Clarification (菩薩問明品)**

Manjushri asks nine of the bodhisattvas in the gathering a series of questions about the Dharma: Why do beings differ from one another when their basic nature is the same? How can they have different qualities when they have no self? Why are their delusions not dispelled as soon as they hear the Buddhadharma? How is it that the buddhas' teachings and activities vary, when they all follow the same path to

Enlightenment? And so on. Finally the bodhisattvas ask Manjushri about the realm of Buddhahood. In each case replies are given in verse. Again Manjushri's role as principal instructor in the Dharma is emphasized.

## Chapter 11: Pure Conduct (淨行品)

In this chapter Manjushri, in response to a series of questions, explains how to use one's mind skilfully in everyday situations. Listing in sequential order over a hundred situations and events that might occur in lay life, during monastic ordination, and in the course of monastic life, he explains how each one can be interpreted symbolically, or otherwise used to strengthen one's commitment to the path of practice and to the ultimate realization of Enlightenment. If these instructions are followed, the Dharma will always be present to us and the whole world then becomes a field of practice.

## Chapter 12: Bhadraśrī (賢首品)

Now Manjushri in turn asks the bodhisattva Bhadraśrī about the significance of the aspiration to Enlightenment [*bodhicitta*] and about the bodhisattva's path of practice. Bhadraśrī's lengthy reply in verse makes up the rest of the chapter. Beginning with the importance of awakening the aspiration to Enlightenment [*bodhicittotpāda*], the text goes on to discuss the role of faith, the cultivation of merit, the training of the mind through Dharma practice, and transcendence of the cycle of birth and death. Bodhisattvas are described as appearing in various forms and radiating lights that produce offerings to the buddhas and benefit sentient beings in many ways. The chapter concludes with a eulogy of the bodhisattvas' powers as superior to those of the gods. In ancient India the melodious verses of this text and the incantatory effect of its repeated phrases led to its being classed as a *dhāraṇī* (a mantra or verbal formula encapsulating doctrinal truths), and it was known to Shantideva as the *Dharani of the Jewelled Comet* [*Ratnolkadhāraṇī*].

## The Third Assembly

In this and the following two assemblies the Buddha's wisdom is seen to spread to higher levels of the cosmos: first to the peak of Mount Sumeru, the highest point in the world that human beings inhabit, where the god Shakra has his palace; then to the realm of the god Yama, situated at a vast distance above the world of Shakra; and finally to the realm of the deities called Tushita [*Tuṣita*] – 'those who live in delight' – at a distance twice as far again. In each case the same pattern is followed. The Buddha arrives and is welcomed by the presiding deity with verses recalling visits by the ten previous buddhas; countless bodhisattvas arrive, the buddha emits light from a part of his body, and the bodhisattvas recite verses in praise of Buddhahood; finally, one of the bodhisattvas provides a detailed explanation of some aspect or aspects of the Dharma. The Buddha's physical ascent (always without leaving his position beneath the Bodhi-tree in our world) and the emanation of light from progressively higher points in his body indicate that it is essentially the same teaching that is being given in each case but at progressively higher levels of understanding in accordance with the capacities of the new audience.

### Chapter 13: Ascent to the Summit of Mt. Sumeru (昇須彌山頂品)

Without leaving the Bodhi-tree beneath which he is seated in all the worlds, the Buddha ascends to the summit of Mt. Sumeru, where the palace of the god Shakra (Indra) is located. He is welcomed by Shakra with verses praising the previous ten buddhas who visited his palace. This makes it clear that the Buddha's visit repeats a universal pattern which recurs every time someone attains perfect Enlightenment in the world 'below', as the effects of his realization become manifest at successively higher levels of existence within this Realm of Desire [*kāmadhātu/kāmaloka*].

### Chapter 14: The Eulogies on Mt. Sumeru (須彌頂上偈讚品)

Bodhisattvas now arrive at Śakra's palace from all ten directions, and the Buddha emits light from his toes, illuminating the entire universe. Ten representative

bodhisattvas then chant stanzas in praise of the Buddha and his wisdom, speaking of the empty [*śūnya*] and inapprehensible nature of the Buddha and of all phenomena, and celebrating the great benefits that the buddhas and bodhisattvas bestow on the world.

## Chapter 15: The Ten Abodes (十住品)

Dharmamati, one of the bodhisattvas who arrived in the previous chapter, now begins a detailed exposition of the path of Samantabhadra, from the initial aspiration to the final realization of Buddhahood. Here he explains the path as a series of stages called the Ten Abodes, which are: (1) Awakening the Aspiration to Enlightenment; (2) Preparing the Ground; (3) Cultivating the Practices; (4) Noble Birth (i.e. into the family of the buddhas); (5) Perfection of Skilful Means; (6) Rectification of the Mind; (7) Nonregression; (8) Childlike Simplicity; (9) Crown Prince of the Dharma; and (10) Consecration.

In the symbolic language of the Sutra and the Huayen School, the number ten signifies completeness, and these Ten Abodes will be subsequently reflected at a higher level of spiritual accomplishment in the Ten Stages [*daśabhūmi*] of the 26th chapter. The motif of repetition is itself constantly repeated throughout the Sutra to indicate the empty, interdependent and interpermeable nature of all the interconnected phenomena that make up our universe. On the bodhisattva path, this implies that "One stage is all stages, one practice is all practices.... Beginning and end are ultimately the same, and the ten bodies of Buddhahood are accomplished with the completion of each stage of practice." [Fa Zang, Commentary]

## Chapter 16: Spiritual Conduct (梵行品)

Dharmamati is now asked what kind of spiritual conduct will take a bodhisattva to the stage of Enlightenment. In his reply Dharmamati recommends analytical inquiry as the appropriate starting point. The bodhisattva, he says, should seek to discover if spiritual conduct can be identified with the body, speech or mind, with the Buddha, Dharma or Sangha, with the observance of ethical precepts, etc. Persistence in this line of inquiry is said to lead eventually to a "nondual understanding of all things", in which everything will be seen to be "one with the nature of your own mind".

## Chapter 17: The Merit of Awakening the Aspiration to Enlightenment (初發心功德品)

The Sutra next turns to the primary foundation of the Huayen path of practice, namely, the arousing of the aspiration to Enlightenment [*bodhicittotpāda*]. Dharmamati emphasizes its importance by a series of extravagant comparisons, in which he describes the vast amount of merit that can be acquired by making offerings to the buddhas, undertaking Dharma practices, and so on for numerous aeons. But however vast such merit may be, he concludes in each case, it will be infinitely exceeded by the merit of awakening the aspiration to Enlightenment. (This section will subsequently be echoed by Maitreya's long series of metaphors in praise of bodhicitta towards the end of the Sutra's final chapter, thus reminding the reader that in this teaching Enlightenment [*bodhi*] is both the beginning and end of the path.) The chapter then closes with further praise of bodhicitta, its spiritual power, and its central role in the career of the bodhisattva.

## Chapter 18: Clarifying the Dharma (明法品)

In this chapter Dharmamati proceeds to list the fundamental practices that bodhisattvas should cultivate in order to proceed towards the realization of Enlightenment: heedfulness [*apramāda*], the *pāramitās* (perfections, or transcendental virtues – explained in detail in Chapter 26), the ten 'inexhaustible treasuries' (the topic of the 22nd chapter), and so on. He concludes by explaining how the cultivation of these practices will ensure the continuous presence of the Triple Gem (the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) in the world and will eventually endow the bodhisattva with all the wisdom of the buddhas.

## The Fourth Assembly

This assembly contains detailed expositions of two more sets of ten practices. Like the Ten Abodes of Chapter 15 and the Ten Dedications in the following assembly, these sets all trace, in different ways, the entire path from the initial commitment and preliminary stages of practice to realization of the all-embracing awareness of the buddhas, in accordance with Fa Zang's assertion that "one stage is all stages, one

practice is all practices". The four sets will be followed and completed by the Ten Stages of the 26th chapter, which for Mahayana Buddhism was to become the definitive formulation of the bodhisattva's gradual ascent from first awakening to perfect Enlightenment.

## Chapter 19: Ascent to Yama's Realm (昇夜摩天宮品)

The Buddha now ascends to Yama's realm, once again "without leaving the foot of the Bodhi-tree or the peak of Mt. Sumeru". Yama welcomes him with ten stanzas similar to those of Śakra in chapter 13.

## Chapter 20: The Eulogies in Yama's Palace (夜摩宮偈讚品)

This chapter is similar to chapter 14. Bodhisattvas arrive from all ten directions; light radiates from the Buddha's insteps; then the ten chief bodhisattvas each recite ten stanzas praising the Buddha and describing the emptiness and essential equality [*samatā*] of all things. They also speak of the power and illusory nature of karma, and of the mind, which is said to be like a painter creating the elaborate picture of the self and the world perceived by the senses that we take for reality.

## Chapter 21: The Ten Practices (十行品)

Following on from the Ten Abodes described in chapter 15, this chapter presents ten fundamental types of practice which correspond roughly to the ten *pāramitās* (transcendental virtues or perfections) of Mahayana Buddhism.

One of the bodhisattvas, called Guṇavana, enters samadhi, and is blessed by countless buddhas, all of whom are also called Guṇavana. He then emerges from samadhi and expounds the Ten Practices, which are as follows: (1) Giving Delight; (2) Bestowing Benefits; (3) Nonresentment; (4) Inexhaustible Practice; (5) Transcending Ignorance and Confusion; (6) Skilful Manifestation; (7) Nonattachment; (8) Veneration; (9) Cultivation of Good Qualities; (10) Cultivation of the Truth.

The first four of these correspond to the first four *pāramitās*: *dāna* (giving), *śīla* (ethics), *kṣānti* (patience) and *vīrya* (effort). The fifth is similar to the standard fifth *pāramitā* (concerned with *dhyāna* or meditation) but places more emphasis on the practice of mindfulness, and the sixth corresponds to the seventh *pāramitā* (*upāya* or skill in means) in the standard list. The seventh practice emphasizes the bodhisattvas' complete freedom from attachment, the eighth deals with the merit they acquire as a result of their tireless beneficence (motivated by their vows or commitments [*praṇidhāna*] – the focus of the eighth *pāramitā*), and the ninth describes their ability to communicate the Dharma effectively to all beings. The final practice, more or less equivalent to the last *pāramitā* of *jñāna* or gnosis, sees the bodhisattvas becoming equal to all the buddhas in their wisdom and their teaching activities.

After a detailed exposition of these ten virtues, there follows another long verse passage, in which the preceding teachings are summarized, and finally, Guṇavana praises the buddhas and bodhisattvas for the universality of their wisdom and their skilful communication of the message of Enlightenment to all beings.

## Chapter 22: The Ten Inexhaustible Treasuries (十無盡藏品)

In this chapter Guṇavana continues his exposition by describing the 10 Inexhaustible Treasuries, which are also to be cultivated by bodhisattvas. These ten qualities are said to be: (1) Faith; (2) Ethical conduct; (3) Repentance; (4) Shame (with regard to past wrongdoing); (5) Acquiring Knowledge (of the Dharma); (6) Generosity; (7) Wisdom; (8) Mindfulness; (9) Retention (of what has been learnt); and (10) Eloquence (in teaching the Dharma).

This list once again sums up the entire path from a slightly different point of view. Faith, as Bhadrāsī states in Chapter 12, "is the source of Enlightenment and of all good qualities" and is the very first step on the path of practice. Repentance and a sense of shame are necessary to clear away past karmic and present psychological obstacles. Acquiring knowledge is the next essential step, for the Dharma cannot be effectively practised without a sound knowledge of its nature and purpose. Giving or generosity, implying abandonment of all attachments and of the sense of self, is the first of the *pāramitās* and the point at which the path of the bodhisattva really begins. Wisdom is the ultimate goal and also (as the enlightened awareness that is innate in all beings) the primary motive of the bodhisattva's quest for complete Enlightenment. Mindfulness is the foundation for all training of the mind. Retention is another aspect of mindfulness, for they are both forms of memory or recollection, and it ensures that

the practices will be continued unbroken until final realization. And lastly, eloquence signifies the ability to teach the Dharma skilfully to all beings in a language that they can understand. This kind of eloquence is the natural fruit of Buddhahood and is the culmination of the path of Samantabhadra.

## **The Fifth Assembly: Tushita**

This assembly follows the same basic pattern as the previous two, except that this time, after the Buddha's ascent and the bodhisattvas' verses of praise, there is only a single chapter of detailed exposition, indicating that the foundations of practice have already been established and that the focus from now on will be specifically on the career of the bodhisattva and, finally, on the archetypal career of the great bodhisattva Samantabhadra. Chapter 25 accordingly gives an ardent and elaborate account of the bodhisattva's fundamental motive: the complete renunciation of self and wholehearted dedication to the material welfare and ultimate Enlightenment of all sentient beings.

### **Chapter 23: Ascent to the Tushita Heaven (昇兜率天宮品)**

The next two chapters again parallel chapters 13-15 and 19-21. This time the Buddha, "without leaving the foot of the Bodhi-tree or Yama's palace", also appears in the realm of the Tushita deities, where he is welcomed with offerings of flowers, jewels, and so on. The Buddha then radiates light from all the pores of his body, the deities praise his wisdom and spiritual power, and the visits of ten previous buddhas are recalled in verses like those of chapters 13 and 19.

### **Chapter 24: The Tushita Eulogies (兜率天宮偈讚品)**

As in chapters 14 and 20, bodhisattvas assemble from the ten directions. Light now radiates from the Buddha's knees, illuminating the universe. Finally the ten principal bodhisattvas recite verses celebrating the Buddha's manifestations and the true nature of Enlightenment, which, "like space, is unborn and imperishable".

## Chapter 25: The Ten Transferrals of Merit (十迴向品)

This chapter, the second longest in the entire Sutra, was known to Śāntideva as the *Vajradhvaja Sūtra* or *Vajradhvaja Dhāraṇī*. It describes how the bodhisattva Vajradhaja enters into samadhi, and is blessed by 100,000 buddhas, all of whom are also called Vajradhvaja. Having emerged from samadhi, Vajradhvaja then proceeds to expound the ten transferrals or dedications of merit to which the rest of the chapter is devoted. The transferral [*pariṇāmana*] of merit consists in mentally renouncing any personal claim to the merit that may accrue from good deeds or from cultivation of the Dharma, and offering it instead as a gift to the buddhas and bodhisattvas or dedicating it to the welfare of other sentient beings.

The ten types or aspects of transferral and their significance are said in this chapter to be as follows:

- (1) Protecting all beings without perceiving any such thing as a 'being' – this emphasizes the selfless nature of the bodhisattva's compassion.
- (2) Indestructible Dedication – the power of the bodhisattva's faith in the Triple Gem [*triratna*] and in the unborn nature of all phenomena.
- (3) Equality with All the Buddhas – the joy that springs from nonattachment and nondiscrimination.
- (4) Omnipresent Dedication – the universal compassion of the buddhas and bodhisattvas and their ability to appear to all beings everywhere.
- (5) Inexhaustible Store of Merit – the adornment of all worlds through the power of the bodhisattva's compassion.
- (6) Good Deeds in Accordance with the Equality of All Things – the bodhisattvas' complete freedom from attachment to self and their joy in giving to others.
- (7) Contemplating All Beings in the Light of Equality – the awakening of *bodhicitta* and the bodhisattvas' dedication to the material and spiritual welfare of all beings.
- (8) Suchness [*tathatā*] – the bodhisattvas' cultivation of the Dharma and their understanding of the essential nature of all things.
- (9) Liberation Beyond Bondage and Attachment – fulfilment of the path of Samantabhadra and the bodhisattva's understanding of time, space and all sentient beings.
- (10) Inexhaustibility of the Dharmarealm – the significance of the transferral of merit in the light of the Dharmarealm [*dharmadhātu*], of the fundamental equality [*samata*] of all things, and of the adornment of the worlds by the selfless conduct and great

merit of the bodhisattvas.

After these teachings have been expounded, they are validated by a host of bodhisattvas, all of whom are also called Vajradhvaja, and Vajradhava himself then concludes by summarizing the teachings in verse.

## The Sixth Assembly: the Paranirmitavaśavartin Palace

In this assembly the two preliminary chapters are dispensed with and the entire assembly is devoted to a single chapter expounding a topic that was to become the best-known and most influential part of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*: the ten stages [*daśabhūmi*] of the bodhisattva path. This text, under the title *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*, was widely studied and commented on in ancient India, and came to be regarded as the standard formulation of the stages of the bodhisattva's spiritual progress. Śāntideva quotes from it five or six times in his *Śikṣāsamuccaya* and commentaries were composed on it by such eminent writers as Vasubandhu [ca. 330-400], in his *Daśabhūmikabhāṣya*, and Candrakīrti [600-ca. 650], in his *Madhyamakāvatāra*.

### Chapter 26: The Ten Stages (十地品)

The scene is the principal palace in the Paranirmitavaśavartin realm, the sixth of the traditional Buddhist heavens and the highest in the World of Pure Form [*rūpaloka*]. The chief of the assembled bodhisattvas, Vajragarbha, enters samadhi and is blessed by innumerable bodhisattvas, who are all called Vajragarbha. Light from the *ūrṇā* between the Buddha's eyebrows illuminates the universe, and Vajragarbha, having emerged from samadhi, expounds the Ten Stages, which are as follows:

(1) The Joyful [*pramuditā*] – At this point practitioners truly enter on the bodhisattva path and rejoice at their freedom from fear and uncertainty. Filled with faith in the Triple Gem and infinite compassion for sentient beings, they continue to cultivate generosity [*dāna*], to make offerings to all the buddhas, and to seek out teachers in order to further deepen their understanding.

(2) The Immaculate [*vimalā*] – At this level bodhisattvas concentrate principally on cultivating the moral conduct that constitutes the second of the perfections or transcendental virtues [*pāramitā*], scrupulously avoiding unwholesome actions and striving to help all those who are caught up in the cycle of suffering caused by such

actions.

(3) The Brilliant [*prabhākarī*] – This level corresponds to patience [*kṣānti*], the third of the perfections. Bodhisattvas now master all the various types of meditation and acquire all the powers that the mind then has at its disposal. Moved to deep compassion by the suffering that all beings experience, they strengthen their determination to achieve Enlightenment.

(4) The Blazing [*arciṣmatī*] – Bodhisattvas at this level devote special attention to the cultivation of diligence [*vīrya*], the fourth of the perfections. Striving to free themselves from all sense of self, they develop their understanding by diligently cultivating all the contemplations and disciplines of the Buddhist path.

(5) The Unconquerable [*sudurjayā*] – With a view to helping beings to understand how to free themselves from their suffering, bodhisattvas now further deepen their understanding of reality as expressed in such formulations as the Four Truths, the Two Truths (relative and ultimate) and so on. They also master all the worldly arts and sciences that will allow them to assist and instruct other beings more effectively.

(6) The Manifest [*abhimukhī*] – Bodhisattvas at this stage gain a complete understanding of the cycle of interdependent origination [*pratītyasamutpāda*] and are able to perceive directly the empty and indeterminate nature of all things. But although they can now see for themselves that sentient beings have no real existence, they nevertheless resolve, out of selfless compassion, to remain in samsara indefinitely so as to liberate all beings from their illusions and their suffering. This understanding and commitment signal the transition to the last four stages of the path.

(7) The Far-reaching [*dūraṅgamā*] – From this point on bodhisattvas transcend the limitations of the Two Vehicles (Śrāvakayāna and Pratyekabuddhayāna) and enter the nondual realm that is accessible only to bodhisattvas of the seventh *bhūmi* and beyond. Abiding permanently in Nirvana while continuing to act within samsara, they freely traverse all the worlds, sharing the experiences of beings everywhere and helping them to rise above their pain and unhappiness.

(8) The Imperturbable [*acalā*] – Bodhisattvas at this level receive wisdom from the buddhas and have completely awoken to the dreamlike nature of all perceived reality. They fully understand the nature of the physical universe, both its spatial extent and its physical structure, and have the power to read beings' minds and appear to them in whatever form will be most effective for communicating with them.

(9) True Wisdom [*sādhumatī*] – There are now no limits to the bodhisattvas' knowledge of sentient beings, to their understanding of the Dharma in all its aspects, to their mental and spiritual powers, or to their ability to teach beings of every kind in

all the worlds they encounter.

(10) The Dharma Cloud [*dharmameghā*] – The metaphor of the cloud that, as the Sutra says elsewhere, "everywhere rains down the universal rain of the Dharma" [Ch. 1], is taken from the life-giving monsoon rains in India. At this final level the bodhisattvas' wisdom becomes equal to that of the buddhas. They have the capacity to acquire and recall an infinite number of teachings instantaneously, and their mastery of all the types and levels of meditation gives them the ability to perform miracles in order to demonstrate the wondrous power of the Dharma.

After this exposition, Vajragarbhā enters samādhi again and displays entire universes within his body. After going on to explain how the knowledge and powers of the buddhas exceed even those of the tenth-level bodhisattvas, he then concludes the teachings with a summary in verse.

## The Seventh Assembly: The Hall of Universal Light

The Seventh Assembly consists of a mixture of long and short chapters concerned principally with the nature of Buddhahood and the path of Samantabhadra. Thus the first chapter (No. 27) reveals the true significance of Samantabhadra and his activities, while the last (No. 37) explains the effects and implications of a buddha's appearance in the world. These two chapters, which are of approximately equal length, frame a series of much shorter chapters exploring different aspects of the same two themes.

### Chapter 27: The Ten Concentrations (十定品)

In this chapter, which is lacking in the earlier translation of the Sutra by Buddhābhadrā, Samantabhadra appears for the first time as the supreme embodiment of enlightened and compassionate activity, and he will remain the principal teacher of the other bodhisattvas throughout this assembly and the next. The scene is once again the Hall of Universal Light, in which one of the bodhisattvas present asks the Buddha about meditative concentration [*samādhi*]. The Buddha directs him to Samantabhadra, who, he says, has perfect mastery of all forms of one-pointed concentration. The bodhisattvas search for Samantabhadra but are unable to find him, and the Buddha explains that even though Samantabhadra is among them at that

moment, they are unable to perceive him because his powers so far exceed theirs. Filled with faith, they prostrate themselves in homage to the buddhas and to Samantabhadra, vowing to follow the same path of practice as Samantabhadra himself. Samantabhadra then appears to them and his detailed explanation of the ten types of concentration makes up the rest of the chapter.

The main concern of Samantabhadra's exposition is with the powers that mastery of the samadhis will bestow on the bodhisattva, because only by acquiring such powers will bodhisattvas be able to liberate all beings from their ignorance by teaching them in ways that they can understand. Accordingly the text speaks of the bodhisattvas' ability to visit the realms of all the buddhas, travelling freely through time and space. There is no longer any limit or impediment to their knowledge of the Dharma or of the minds of sentient beings, and they can teach in all worlds and languages with unparalleled eloquence, assuming whatever physical form is appropriate. Such powers and many others are gained through their deep understanding of the illusory nature of all perceived reality. By the time bodhisattvas have reached the tenth level of concentration on the path of Samantabhadra, their wisdom and accomplishments are equivalent to those of the buddhas, from whom they differ only in their commitment to remain indefinitely in samsara in order to provide inspiration and assistance to all those who are those who are still caught up in the cycle of illusion and suffering.

## Chapter 28: The Ten Supernormal Powers (十通品)

This chapter and the next contain brief summaries of the kind of powers that were described at such length in Chapter 27. Of the the ten supernormal powers [*abhijñā*] listed, four (telepathy, the ability to see and hear at a distance, and recollection of past lives) are commonly mentioned in the early Buddhist texts, and one ("complete knowledge of all future ages") is another such ability reformulated to fit in with the infinite universe depicted in the Sutra and with the requirements of bodhisattvas on the path of Samantabhadra. The remaining five are all skills that are needed by the bodhisattvas: travelling freely to the worlds where buddhas are teaching, being able to speak all languages and appear in different physical forms, understanding the true nature of all phenomena, and being able to continue acting for the benefit of sentient beings while being fully aware that such beings and activities have no real existence at all.

## Chapter 29: The Ten Types of Patience (十忍品)

Here Samantabhadra explains ten types of patience or forbearance. These refer not simply to the patient endurance of suffering that is usually mentioned in discussions of the third *pāramitā*, for example, but rather to the patient acceptance of the Buddhadharma and its teachings concerning the unreality of everything that we normally consider to be real.

The first two types of patience are calm and trusting acceptance of the teachings themselves and of the need to live and act in accordance with them. The third is the fundamental Mahayana doctrine called 'acceptance of the truth that all phenomena are unarisen' [*anutpattikadharmakṣānti*], and the remainder are all metaphorical variations on this: accepting that all things are like an illusion, a mirage, a dream, an echo, a reflection, a conjuring trick, and empty space.

## Chapter 30: The Incalculable (阿僧祇品)

This chapter is spoken directly by the Buddha and introduces the Sutra's concept of infinity by means of a mathematical progression from calculable to incalculable [*asaṅkhyeya*] numbers. Starting with a *koṭi*, defined as 100 lakhs and equivalent to 10,000,000, the sequence proceeds in the form  $a^2 = b$ ,  $b^2 = c$ ,  $c^2 = d$ ... etc. until it reaches the realm of truly incalculable numbers indicated by such fanciful terms as "a selflessness", "an inconceivability" and "an indescribability". After concluding this abstract sequence, the Buddha proceeds to apply the lesson to various aspects of the physical universe, describing in verse the countless worlds, beings, buddhas, Samantabhadras and so on that it contains, all of which are said to be beyond the power of language to define.

## Chapter 31: The Life-spans of the Tathagatas (壽量品)

The next two short chapters deal with time and space. In this chapter the bodhisattva Cittaraja illustrates the relativity of perceptions of time by pointing out that an entire aeon [*kalpa*] in some buddhafi elds amounts to no more than a single day and night in others.

## Chapter 32: The Abodes of the Bodhisattvas (諸菩薩住處品)

In this chapter Cittaraja turns his attention to space, listing the places in this world where great bodhisattvas are constantly dwelling and teaching their retinues. Just as the previous chapter subverted conventional notions of time by emphasizing its subjective nature and finding significance only in its connection with the activities of the buddhas, so this chapter sees secular geography as having value only in so far as it provides a space within which the bodhisattvas can carry out their enlightening activities on behalf of others.

## Chapter 33: The Inconceivable Qualities of Buddhahood (佛不思議法品)

The topic of this and the next two short chapters is the nature of buddhahood as seen in the qualities and manifestations of the buddhas themselves. In the present chapter the assembled bodhisattvas begin to wonder about the buddhas' powers and activities, and one of their number is inspired by the Buddha to describe, in sets of ten, over three hundred types of wisdom, virtue, purity, freedom, spiritual accomplishment and so on that are possessed by all the buddhas.

## Chapter 34: The Limitless Attributes of the Ten Bodies of the Tathagata (如來十身相海品)

The previous chapter dealt with the qualities of a buddha's mind, and Samantabhadra himself now provides a complementary description of the physical attributes of the 'ten' bodies of the Buddha. (The number ten, as usual in the Sutra, implies completeness or, as in this case, an infinite number.)

According to Buddhist tradition, the great merit accumulated by a buddha in the course of countless lifetimes as a bodhisattva is reflected in a distinctive physical form, a kind of spiritual body, which is perceptible only to those whose minds are sufficiently developed to be able to recognize it. This is the form depicted in most Buddhist art. In the early texts it is referred to as the body of a 'great man' [*mahāpuruṣa*], with thirty-two distinctive characteristics, and in the Mahayana this becomes the basis for the concept of the 'fruition body' [*sambhogakāya*]. In this chapter Samantabhadra lists nearly a hundred such attributes.

## Chapter 35: The Merit of the Radiant Minor Attributes (如來隨好光明功德品)

This chapter concludes the brief discussion of Buddhahood begun in Chapter 33 and is spoken by the Buddha himself. Although the title alludes to certain secondary physical characteristics of the buddhas, the actual topic is the manifestation of Buddhahood in the world – a topic to be given much more elaborate treatment in Chapter 37 – with the career of Shakyamuni Buddha as example. After mentioning a couple of the minor attributes by name, the Buddha goes on to speak of his birth in the realm of the Tushita devas as the bodhisattva Vairocana. (In the Sutra the names 'Shakyamuni' and 'Vairocana' are generally treated as interchangeable.) When he subsequently descends to take birth in this world as the son of Shuddhodana, a drum in one of the devas' palaces begins to speak, announcing the Bodhisattva's descent and delivering a discourse on the Dharma. The drum explains the importance of cultivating *bodhicitta* and the real nature of repentance. Repentance, in the Buddhist context, is part of the process of freeing oneself from the karmic cycle of cause and effect, a necessary condition for the realization of Buddhahood. The drum goes on to point out that true repentance consists in understanding the illusory nature of all karmic activities; the devas are then moved to aspire to Enlightenment themselves.

## Chapter 36: The Conduct of Samantabhadra (普賢行品)

The three previous chapters on the nature of Buddhahood are now followed by another short chapter introducing the path of Samantabhadra as the path to Enlightenment, a topic that will be treated at far greater length in Chapter 38.

Samantabhadra first speaks of emotional obstacles that bodhisattvas need to overcome, such as anger and so on. He then lists fifty qualities that should be cultivated, for "great bodhisattvas who persist in these practices will achieve supreme and perfect Enlightenment with very little effort". Finally he recites a series of verses which make up the rest of the chapter, explaining the importance of *bodhicitta*, the presence of all worlds within a single atom and of all periods of time within a single moment, and the creation of the various worlds by the thought processes of sentient beings.

## Chapter 37: The Manifestation of the Tathagata (如來出現品)

The brief introduction to the goal (Buddhahood) and the path (the conduct of Samantabhadra) in the previous four chapters is now followed by a detailed account of the same two topics in the three long chapters which form the climax and conclusion of the entire Sutra.

The first of these deals with the manifestation of Buddhahood in the world. This is expounded by Samantabhadra in ten sections, each one consisting of an explanation in prose followed by a verse summary. The ten aspects of Buddhahood described in these sections are:

- (1) The causes for the appearance of a buddha in the world.
- (2) The nature and qualities of a buddha's physical form.
- (3) The nature and qualities of a buddha's voice.
- (4) The nature and qualities of a buddha's mind.
- (5) The scope of a buddha's Enlightenment.
- (6) The nature of a buddha's conduct.
- (7) The nature of a buddha's Enlightenment.
- (8) The nature of a buddha's teaching (i.e. the Buddhadharma).
- (9) The nature of a buddha's final passing away [*anupādiśeṣa-nirvāṇa*].
- (10) The great merit of seeing or hearing a buddha.

This chapter also includes the parable of the Sutra in the atom,<sup>296</sup> which tells us that the enlightened awareness of the buddhas is implicit in every particle of the physical universe – just as it is in the body and mind of all sentient beings; and that "the wisdom of the Tathagata ... is present in its entirety within the body of every being, but ordinary beings in their ignorance cling to their delusions, so they are unaware of its presence and fail to derive any benefit from it."

## The Eighth Assembly: The Hall of Universal Light

This assembly consists of a single chapter, the third-longest in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. It is essentially a much more elaborate discussion of the topic dealt with briefly in Chapter 36. The location is the same as that of the previous assembly, and the theme is the Buddhist path – specifically the path of the bodhisattva, as a

process of inner disengagement from the world. As long as we continue to engage with the world around us at the intellectual and emotional level, getting caught up in the thoughts and feelings it provokes in us, we will be unable to see it as it really is [*yathābhūtam*], for our actions will all spring from our sense of self and our views will be distorted by subjective emotions. Consequently, whatever good we do will not be able to produce any lasting benefit. The great bodhisattvas, on the other hand, have no sense of self and therefore no attachment to anything whatsoever. This is why they are able to move through the world with perfect freedom and work so effectively within it for the welfare of all sentient beings. As the Sutra says elsewhere:

If you are able within this world  
 To be free from attachments of every kind,  
 Your heart, unimpeded and filled with joy,  
 Will awaken to the ultimate truth of things. [Ch. 24]

Bodhisattvas dwelling in the world  
 Are attached to nothing, either within or without,  
 And their minds are unobstructed like the wind  
 That moves in perfect freedom through the sky. [Ch. 22]

## Chapter 38: Disengagement from the World (離世間品)

Despite its great length, the structure of this chapter is very simple. Samantabhadra enters the Avatamsaka Samadhi and in response to a series of two hundred questions about the conduct and career of a bodhisattva, he provides ten answers to each question. Thus the chapter contains descriptions of some two thousand practices or qualities to be cultivated, covering all aspects of the Bodhisattva Path: ten types of spiritual teacher, ten kinds of effort, ten sources of contentment, ten ways of bringing sentient beings to maturity, ten kinds of moral discipline and so on. This comprehensive manual of Buddhist training is meant to demonstrate the all-inclusive nature of the way of Samantabhadra as a universal path to Buddhahood, as well as the thoroughness of its spiritual disciplines.

The chapter concludes with a long section in verse in which Samantabhadra

praises the greatness of the bodhisattvas and the sublime nature of their tireless work for the welfare of sentient beings throughout the universe.

## The Ninth Assembly: The Jeta Grove

The Sutra's final chapter is also its longest, and it too constitutes an entire assembly. Its purpose is to sum up the teachings of the previous 38 chapters in the form of a story and thereby to demonstrate that the teachings are meant to be put into practice, that in fact the teachings and their realization in practice are merely two aspects of the same path – the path of Samantabhadra.

### Chapter 39: Entering the Dharmarealm (入法界品)

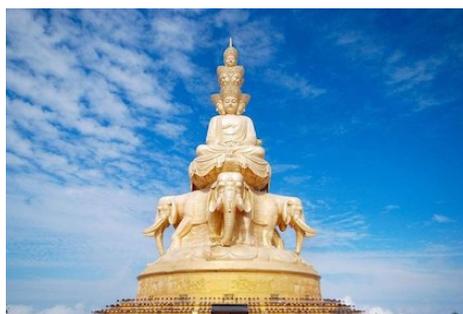
The hero of the story, as has been seen above, is a young man called Sudhana who hears Manjushri expounding the Dharma and is inspired to seek out teachers who can show him the way to Enlightenment. Manjushri himself directs Sudhana to his first guru, the first directs him to the second, and so on. In this way Sudhana travels the length of India for many years, from north to south and back to the north again. The teachers he encounters are of all ages and both sexes and come from all walks of life. They include monastic and lay practitioners, kings, students, merchants, brahmins, ascetics and so on. A number of them are deities, or great bodhisattvas like Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara. In each case Sudhana tells them that he has already awakened the Aspiration to Enlightenment [*bodhicitta*] but doesn't yet know how to follow the bodhisattva path or cultivate the practices of a bodhisattva. In response, each teacher imparts to Sudhana the particular practice that he or she has cultivated and the realization they have achieved through it. So Sudhana proceeds from guru to guru, acquiring practices and deepening his understanding, until he eventually encounters Maitreya, who tells him that he is now close to final realization. With a snap of his fingers, Maitreya opens the door of a great tower [*mahākūṭāgāra*] called Matrix Adorned with the Splendours of Vairocana [*vairocana-vyūhālāṅkāra-garbha*]. On entering the tower Sudhana finds himself in a magical space filled with an infinite number of worlds. In each of these worlds he sees Maitreya tirelessly active, everywhere guiding beings towards Enlightenment. He also sees countless buddhas teaching the Dharma to assemblies in each of which he himself is present. This vision

represents the climax of Sudhana's quest, and we are told that "all that he saw **he** remembered with perfect clarity and unimpeded understanding".

Maitreya then snaps his fingers once more and the vision vanishes. After giving Sudhana further instruction, he sends him to seek out his primary guru, Manjushri, to have his experience confirmed. After another long journey, Sudhana finally manages to locate Manjushri and receive the necessary confirmation. He is now filled with the desire to behold Samantabhadra himself, and the bodhisattva immediately appears before him. Samantabhadra blesses Sudhana by placing his hand on his head:

Then Sudhana beheld in every feature, every part and every pore of Samantabhadra's body untold oceans of buddha-realms... He also saw Samantabhadra in every one of those worlds, ... teaching beings and leading them towards Unsurpassed, Complete and Perfect Enlightenment [*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*].

Sudhana himself also appears "within Samantabhadra's body, teaching and guiding beings in all the worlds throughout the ten directions". With this final revelation Sudhana's quest is at last complete, for he has now "achieved perfect equality with Samantabhadra himself and become one with all the buddhas".



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 譬如日出於閻浮提，無量眾生皆得饒益，所謂破闇作明…如來智日亦復如是，以無量事普益眾生…《如來出現品》

<sup>2</sup> Blake, *A Vision of the Last Judgment*

<sup>3</sup> Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), *De Profundis*

<sup>4</sup> *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, ed. Palmer, Sherrard and Ware, Vol. One, p.108

<sup>5</sup> 識體本為真智…如彼瀑流不離水體而生波浪。

<sup>6</sup> 如來智慧亦復如是，無量無礙，普能利益一切眾生，具足在於眾生身中，但諸凡愚妄想執著，不知不覺，不得利益。《如來出現品》

<sup>7</sup> 如來法身不思義，無色無相無倫匹，示現色相為眾生，十方受化靡不現，一切佛刹微塵中，盧遮那現自在力。 杜順，《華嚴五教止觀》

<sup>8</sup> 盧舍那周遍塵方，普應法界一切群機

<sup>9</sup> 涅槃親而無人識，菩提近而甚難見 《海印三昧論》

<sup>10</sup> The image of Manjushri used here is by the Tibetan-Australian artist Karma Phuntsok (<https://www.karmaart.com/>).

<sup>11</sup> 依智度論，諸大乘經，多事文殊師利之所結集，此經則是文殊所結。《華嚴經傳記》

<sup>12</sup> 文殊師利菩薩常於彼講華嚴經—《華嚴經傳記》

<sup>13</sup> 一切諸法一味—《離世間品》

<sup>14</sup> 一切諸法唯依妄念而有差別

<sup>15</sup> 信為道元功德母 《賢首品》

<sup>16</sup> 經曰，法身流轉五道名曰眾生 《探玄記》

<sup>17</sup> 於此經中初信之首，以十色世界十智如來為自心中本有，文殊師利為自妙慧，為能信之心。—決疑論

<sup>18</sup> 一切諸佛皆因文殊而發心 《三聖圓融觀門》

<sup>19</sup> 爾時文殊師利童子。為善財童子及諸大眾。說此法已。慇懃勸諭。增長勢力。令其歡喜。發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提心。

<sup>20</sup> 爾時善財童子。從文殊師利所。聞佛如是種種功德。一心勤求阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。

<sup>21</sup> 願垂教救我，福智大商主，勇猛求菩提，普利諸群生，願垂守護我，身被忍辱甲，手提智慧劍，自在降魔軍

<sup>22</sup> 善哉善哉。善男子。汝已發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提心。復欲親近諸善知識。問菩薩行。修菩薩道。

<sup>23</sup> 汝於無量刹，無邊諸劫海，修行普賢行，成滿諸大願

<sup>24</sup> 是故善男子汝應往詣文殊之所，莫生疲厭，文殊師利當為汝說一切功德。何以故。汝先所見諸善知識，聞菩薩行，入解脫門，滿足大願，皆是文殊威神之力。

<sup>25</sup> 五臺山無文殊—臨濟錄15

<sup>26</sup> 文殊成讚法身本智，普賢成其差別智之行德。一切諸佛皆依此二尊者以為師範，而能成就大菩提之極果。《新華嚴經論》

<sup>27</sup> 菩薩種種方便門，隨順世法度眾生。《賢首品》

<sup>28</sup> 佛子，此菩薩摩訶薩為利益眾生故，世間技藝靡不該習。…一切世間之事，但於眾生不為損惱，為利益故，咸悉開示，漸令安住無上佛法。《十地品》

<sup>29</sup> 一切眾生。或病所纏。或老所侵。或苦貧窮。或遭禍難。或犯王法。臨當受刑。無所依怙。生大怖畏。我皆救濟。使得安隱。復作是念。願我以法。普攝眾生。令其解脫一切煩惱。生老病死。憂悲苦患。

<sup>30</sup> 爾時善財童子。觀普賢菩薩身。相好肢節。一一毛孔中。皆有不可說不可說佛刹海。一一刹海。…又見普賢於一一世界海中。出一切佛刹微塵數佛化身雲。周遍十方一切世界。教化眾生。令向阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。

- 31 諸行即菩提，…。若於行外別修菩提，即聲聞緣覺及空觀菩薩菩提，非一乘文殊普賢理智萬行悲願自在菩提。《新華嚴經論》
- 32 時善財童子又見自身，在普賢身內，十方一切諸世界中，教化眾生。
- 33 不用神仙真秘訣，直教枯木放花開。See also below, pp. 115-116
- 34 彼一切處盧舍那佛，於眾海中演說正法。
- 35 盧舍那周遍塵方，普應法界一切群機
- 36 一一塵中現無數佛 《如來出現品》
- 37 時普眼菩薩從三昧起。白佛言。世尊。我已入十千阿僧祇三昧。求見普賢而竟不得。不見其身及身業。語及語業。意及意業。座及住處。悉皆不見。佛言。如是如是。善男子。當知皆以普賢菩薩。住不思議解脫之力。…何以故。普賢菩薩境界甚深。不可思議。無有量已過量。舉要言之。普賢菩薩。以金剛慧普入法界。於一切世界無所行。無所住。《十定品》
- 38 善男子。若有得見普賢菩薩。若得承事。若得聞名。若有思惟。若有憶念。若生信解。若勤觀察。若始趣向。若正求覓。若興誓願。相續不絕。皆獲利益。無空過者。《十定品》
- 39 依究竟說，無有二乘而不迴入共教菩薩，無彼菩薩而不入此普賢之法。《探玄記》
- 40 華嚴之稱，梵語名為健拏驃訶一探玄記
- 41 其狀六重，下闊上狹，飾以華寶，一一重內皆安佛像 《探玄記》
- 42 依智度論，諸大乘經多是文殊師利之所結集。此經則是文殊所結。佛初去後賢聖隨隱。…在海龍天宮，六百餘年未傳於世。龍樹菩薩入龍宮，日見此淵俯，誦之在心。《華嚴經傳記》
- 43 西域傳記說，龍樹菩薩往龍宮，見此華嚴大不思義解脫經。有三本。上本有十三千大千世界微塵數偈，四天下微塵數品。中本有四十九萬八千八百偈一千二百品。下本有十萬偈四十八品。…下本見流天竺。《華嚴經傳記》
- 44 初恆本者。…此通樹形等異類世界，各毛端處，念念常說，無有休息。此非可結集。不可限其品類多少。《探玄記》
- 45 如來智慧…具足在於眾生身中 《如來出現品》
- 46 譬如有大經卷，量等三千大千世界，書寫三千大千世界中事，一切皆盡。…此大經卷，雖復量等大千世界，而全住在一微塵中。如一微塵，一切微塵皆亦如是。時有一人智慧明達，具足成就清淨天眼，見此經卷在微塵內，於諸眾生無少利益，即作是念：我當以精進力破彼微塵，出此經卷，令得饒益一切眾生。作是念已，即起方便，破彼微塵，出此經卷，令諸眾生普得饒益。《如來出現品》
- 47 Andrew Louth, "Light, Vision, and Religious Experience in Byzantium", in Matthew Kapstein, ed., *The Presence of Light*, University of Chicago Press 2004, p.94.
- 48 說華嚴經在摩竭國菩提場中及一切世界及一切塵中說。《新華嚴經論》
- 49 一切諸法悉為教體…以無不能令生開覺故。《探玄記》
- 50 一切法但為文字所作 《離世間品》
- 51 一切法實際 *ibid.*
- 52 一切言音皆作法音 《十地品》
- 53 雖知法無生，而常轉法輪 《十定品》
- 54 一切無言，無言亦無故；是故聖教即是無教之教一探玄記
- 55 以此無聲之聲，無名之名，無說之說，教化一切無性眾生，令其破業，至其本地《新華嚴經論》
- 56 善知識者如慈母，出生佛種故。
- 57 不捨不斷一切諸佛種性深大心《離世間品》
- 58 皆悉成就普賢行願。…不斷一切諸佛種性。《離世間品》
- 59 此經義者付囑凡夫，令覺悟入此法門故令生佛家，使其轉教佛種不斷，即令凡夫得入真境。若囑累諸大菩薩，凡夫無緣，諸聖自明。無凡夫修學者，凡夫道中佛種即斷此經散滅。《新華嚴經論》
- 60 於道場寺譯出。…故道場寺猶有華嚴堂焉。…初譯經時。堂前池內。每有二青衣。從池中出。奉以香華。舉眾皆見。亦有神祇。營衛左右。《華嚴經傳記》

61 光遍山谷如晝日 《華嚴經傳記》

62 於大海及劫盡火中 《探玄記》

63 一切眾生究竟無不皆入此法

64 眾生具有

65 更無餘路得成佛

66 說華嚴經，在摩竭國菩提場中，及一切塵中說

67 此經亦爾：若有眾生能生信入者，即同如來性海智海果德

68 長講華嚴大經

69 剖裂玄微，昭廓心境，窮理盡性，徹果該因，汪洋沖融，廣大悉備者，其唯大方廣佛華嚴經焉。

70 一切眾生莫不具有覺性，靈明空寂，與佛無殊，但以無始劫來未曾了悟，妄執身為我相，故生愛憎等情，生老病死長劫輪迴，然身中覺性未曾生死；如夢被驅役，身實未動。若悟此性即是法身，本自無主，何有依託 《華藏妙海》

Quoted from *The Sublime Worlds of Huayen*, Kongting Publishing company 2003.

71 華嚴的境界就是一即一切、一切即一 《萬行》No. 242

72 在山間那嘩嘩的流水聲就是佛說法的聲音

73 這是多生多劫很不容易遇到的大法 《萬行》No. 239

74 聽看了華嚴經後，要以華嚴經的方法去修，那才不辜負華嚴經圓滿無上妙理

75 學華嚴有三個基本條件：（一）信自己具足佛性，信一切眾生都有佛性。（二）信自己一定成佛，信一切眾生皆當成佛。（三）確信我們所處的世界中，不管任何境界，即使是一草一木、一沙一塵通通都是普賢境界…。確信自己的一舉一動、起心動念、思想行為都是普賢大行。《華藏妙海》

76 開此密奧藏，廣益於自他，願令法久住，傳燈報佛恩。《探玄記》

77 軌以旋披往誥，緬覲舊章，備三藏之玄文，憑五乘之妙旨…冀返迷方，情同曉日。《還源觀》

78 一切諸法。虛妄不實。速起速滅。無有堅固。如夢如影。如幻如化。誑惑愚夫。《十行品》

79 方其夢也，不知其夢也。夢之中又占其夢焉，覺而後知其夢也。且有大覺而後知其大夢也，而愚者自以為覺。〔莊子，齊物論〕

80 佛身同虛空，無礙無差別 《世主妙嚴品》

81 佛身如空不可盡，無相無礙遍十方

82 佛如虛空無自性，為利眾生現世間

83 善逝如空性清淨，普為世間開正道

84 其猶水波為喻。高下相形是波。濕性平等是水。波無異水之波。即波以明水。水無異波之水。即水以成波。波水一而不礙殊。水波殊而不礙一。…又經云。如來不見生死不見涅槃。生死涅槃等無差別。〔杜順，華嚴五教止觀〕

85 若觀塵相不可得時。即相盡而空現。由見相時不即於理。是故事顯而理隱。…由顯時全隱而成顯。隱時全顯而成隱。相由成立。〔法藏，華嚴義海百門〕

86 其猶因陀羅網皆以寶成。由寶明徹影遞相現。於一珠中現餘影盡。…如是重重無有邊際。即此重重無邊際之影皆在此一珠中炳然遞現。〔華嚴遊心法界記〕

87 古之人，其知有所至矣。惡乎至？有以為未始有物者，至矣，盡矣，不可以加矣！其次以為有物矣，而未始有封也。其次以為有封焉，而未始有是非也。是非之彰也，道之所以虧也。道之所以虧，愛之所以成。〔莊子，齊物論〕

88 Such as Julian Barbour, for example, in his book *The End of Time*. See:

[www.platonica.com/books.html](http://www.platonica.com/books.html)

89 一切世間法唯是自心變異所作。〔探玄記〕

90 古今一際。非三世故。舊佛非過去。今佛非新出。為根本智性相齊理事不異故。〔新華嚴經論〕

91 過去以滅，未來未至，現在空寂 〔梵行品〕

92 知過未等於現在 〔探玄記〕

93 十世古今。始終不移於當念。其為廣也以虛空而為量。其為小也。處極微而無跡。〔新華嚴經論〕

94 佛於一一剎那中，普雨無邊大法雨 〔世主妙嚴品〕

- 95 十方諸佛以無古今性成大菩提。一念見道古今見盡。〔新華嚴經論〕
- 96 義大，謂所詮皆盡無邊法界，如一塵含十方，一念包九世
- 97 故一念相應一念成佛。一日相應一日成佛。何須劫數漸漸而修。多劫積修三祇至果。心緣劫量見障何休。諸佛法門本非時攝。計時立劫非是佛乘。〔新華嚴經論〕
- 98 法界者一切眾生身心之本體也。從本以來靈明廓徹，廣大虛寂，唯一真境而已。無有形貌而森羅大千，無有邊際而含容萬有。〔注華嚴法界觀門序〕
- 99 因果法界具存現前，爛然可見也。…超視聽之法，恆通見聞，絕思議之法，不礙言念也。〔探玄記〕
- 100 一切世間法唯是自心變異所作〔探玄記〕
- 101 一切所有唯是妄想；一切法實唯是絕言
- 102 真如是佛境界〔十迴向品〕
- 103 一即一切，一切即一〔華嚴五教章〕
- 104 雖復徹底唯空，不礙幻有宛然〔華嚴金獅子章〕
- 105 一一毛中皆有無邊獅子
- 106 所言覺義者謂心體離念，…等虛空界，無所不遍，…即是如來平等法身，依此法身，說為本覺。
- 107 依本覺故而不覺，依不覺故說有始覺。
- 108 依一心法，有二種門。云何為二？一者、心真如門，二者、心生滅門。是二種門，皆各總攝一切法。此義云何？以是二門不相離故。
- 109 真如平等不增減
- 110 修多羅說依如來藏故有生死
- 111 如來藏具足無量性功德
- 112 爾時善財童子。從文殊師利所。聞佛如是種種功德。一心勤求阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。
- 113 時善財童子。頂禮其足。合掌而立。作如是言。聖者。我已先發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提心。而未知菩薩云何學菩薩行。云何修菩薩道。
- 114 莊嚴國土供養佛
- 115 雖知一切國土猶如虛空，而能以清淨妙行莊嚴佛土。
- 116 華嚴實教法門。則此娑婆世界清淨無垢。
- 117 遍一切因陀羅網無邊世界，念念之中皆初成佛〔探玄記〕
- 118 謂一事是不實以無性故。無性真理既無分限。是故於一事上觀無性時。無不圓盡法界真如。
- 119 一切諸法悉為教體…以無不能令生開覺故。
- 120 根本智起差別智〔新華嚴經論〕
- 121 稱理而用，性自遍周，非同二乘作寂滅證也。Ibid.
- 122 所修諸行從法界生〔十定品〕
- 123 何有飾真之行，不從真起？〔還源觀〕
- 124 於此法中起信發大菩提心，十住初首便即見性，起法身佛智慧，便成正覺。然始即從性起智慧之位，行諸行相，教化眾生，即覺行圓滿佛。不同權教，先行菩薩行。〔新華嚴經論〕
- 125 如來智慧…具足在於眾生身中，但諸凡愚…不知不覺，不得利益。〔如來出現品〕
- 126 It is also possible to take the last phrase to mean ‘among you’ rather than ‘within you’, but a similar passage in the *Gospel of Thomas* supports the reading ‘within’.
- 127 知心性本淨〔十定品〕
- 128 心以覺知為性〔探玄記〕
- 129 心念性不生不滅，一切諸法唯依妄念而有差別。〔大乘起信論〕
- 130 生心即妄。不生即佛。〔探玄記〕
- 131 自覺自心本來是佛。不成正覺不證菩提。〔新華嚴經論〕
- 132 是故行不可以修其性。心不可以證其理。為心則性，更無能所故。〔新華嚴經論〕
- 133 果且有彼是乎哉？果且無彼是乎哉？彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞。樞始得其環中，以應無窮。〔莊子，齊物論〕

- 134 至道無難，唯嫌揀擇，但莫憎愛，洞然明白 [信心銘]
- 135 信為道元功德母，長養一切諸善根，斷除疑網出愛流，開士涅槃無上道。 [賢首品]
- 136 十信道圓普德顯。而成果。果無異因之果。 [探玄記]
- 137 若三乘十地滿後是佛境界也。若一乘十信滿後是佛境界也。 [探玄記]
- 138 於此經中初信之首，以十色世界十智如來為自心中本有，文殊師利為自妙慧，為能信之心。 [略釋新華嚴經修行次第決疑論]
- 139 於此法門深生信心，不讀餘經，深明體用，以少方便疾得菩提。 [新華嚴經論]
- 140 菩薩摩訶薩應知自心念念常有佛成正覺。 [出現品]
- 141 大心眾生。能見此經而生信入。自見自心同佛知見大智之寶。 [新華嚴經論]
- 142 身心性相與佛無異。 *Ibid.*
- 143 是身作佛，是心作佛：心外見佛不名信心。 *Ibid.*
- 144 觀察…一切諸法如幻如燄，如水中月，如夢如影，如響如像，如空中畫，如旋火輪，如虹霓色。 [離世間品]
- 145 世間種種法，一切皆如幻，若能如是知，其心無所動。 [十忍品]
- 146 又如明鏡依彼淨體無所分別含多影像。不礙有而常無故。如是自心所見識相。不離本體無作淨智。 [李通玄, 新華嚴經論]
- 147 至人之用心若鏡，不將不迎，應而不藏。 [莊子, 應帝王]
- 148 不著於思及思所起。 [十迴向品]
- 149 Johann Gottfried Herder, 1744 - 1803:  
Ein Traum, ein Traum ist unser Leben  
Auf Erden hier.  
Wie Schatten auf den Wogen schweben  
Und schwinden wir.  
Und messen unsre trägen Tritte  
Nach Raum und Zeit;  
Und sind (und wissen's nicht) in Mitte  
Der Ewigkeit.
- 150 願常正念三世諸佛。諦想如來常現在前。 [十迴向品]
- 151 以佛為境界，專念而不息 [兜率宮中偈讚品]
- 152 See, for example, *Saṃyutta Nikāya* III.22.
- 153 若以色見我，以音聲求我，是人行邪道，不能見如來 [金剛般若波羅蜜經]
- 154 性空即是佛 [須彌偈讚品]
- 155 不忘失如來境界 [十定品]
- 156 佛智海水…流入一切眾生心中。若諸眾生。觀察境界。修習法門。則得智慧清淨明了。 [如來出現品]
- 157 不貪於利養，唯樂佛菩提，一心求佛智，專精無異念。 [十地品]
- 158 於自身一一毛孔中。悉見不可說不可說佛剎微塵數諸佛如來。 [十定品]
- 159 如於此會見佛坐，一切塵中悉如是…佛於一切微塵中，示現無邊大神力。 [世主妙嚴品]
- 160 令心所向皆無礙 [十地品]
- 161 十世古今。始終不移於當念。 [新華嚴經論]
- 162 佛於一一剎那中，普雨無邊大法雨。 [世主妙嚴品]
- 163 若能念佛心不動，則常睹見無量佛，若常睹見無量佛，則見如來體常住，若見如來體常住，則能知法永不滅，若能知法永不滅，則得辯才無障礙。 [賢首品]
- 164 菩提心者猶如種子。能生一切諸佛法故。菩提心者猶如良田。能長眾生白淨法故。菩提心者猶如大地。能持一切諸世間故。菩提心者猶如淨水。能洗一切煩惱垢故。… [入法界品]

- 165 菩薩摩訶薩。有十種依。何等為十。所謂以菩提心為依。恒不忘失故。…〔離世間品〕
- 166 一，不捨菩提心戒。二，以一切善根迴向菩提戒。三，守護菩提心清淨戒。四，長養菩提心戒。
- 167 一切諸眾生，貪恚癡熾然，我當悉救脫，令滅惡道苦，發如是誓願，堅固不退轉，具修菩薩行，獲十無礙力。〔普賢行品〕
- 168 初發心時即得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。〔梵行品〕
- 169 若有智慧人，一念發道心，必成無上尊，慎莫生疑惑。〔兜率宮中偈讚品〕
- 170 古今一際。非三世故。〔新華嚴經論〕
- 171 古今始終不移於當念 *Ibid.*
- 172 知心與菩提等。知菩提與心等。〔離世間品〕
- 173 一念發心。頓無能所。〔新華嚴經論〕
- 174 但求菩薩道，學菩薩行故，始得名初發心時便成正覺。〔新華嚴經論〕
- 175 從初發心住，皆以菩提心無作用、無所修、無所行為體，而求修學普賢一切無盡行門。〔新華嚴經論〕
- 176 一位即一切為，一行即一切行…始終皆齊，一一位滿即成十佛。〔探玄記〕
- 177 以諸位即佛，佛即諸位，明位位中有佛果故。〔新華嚴經論〕
- 178 在於一地，普攝一切諸地功德。是此一乘圓教法也，三乘中則不得如此。〔探玄記〕
- 179 若小見性者亦得佛乘。如大海中一毫之滯乃至多滯。一一滯中皆得大海。如是菩薩五位之中十住十地。一一位內皆有佛果。〔新華嚴經論〕
- 180 菩薩行即如來性，如來性即菩薩行。〔如來出現品〕
- 181 若於行外別修菩提，聲聞緣覺及空觀菩薩菩提；非一乘文殊、普賢理智萬行悲願自在菩提。…是故但求菩薩道無別菩提也。〔新華嚴經論〕
- 182 識權就實。遷入法界之門。有作之法難成隨緣。無作易辦。作者勞而無功。不作隨緣自就。無功之功。功不虛棄。有功之功。功皆無常。多劫積修終歸敗壞。不如一念緣起無生。超彼三乘權學等見。〔新華嚴經論〕
- 183 根本智。以定顯得。無作無修。但修菩薩道。學菩薩行。根本智自明自顯。…若不得正覺之體諸行並是無常。皆是人天有生死業報也。〔華嚴經決疑論〕
- 184 無明總盡。障業皆無。自性涅槃自然顯著。〔新華嚴經論〕
- 185 稱性緣起，俯仰進退屈身謙敬皆菩薩行。〔新華嚴經論〕
- 186 心如工畫師，能畫諸世間，五蘊悉從生，無法而不造 《兜率宮中偈讚品》
- 187 眾生身各異，隨心分別起，如是剎種種，莫不皆由業 《華藏世界品》
- 188 生死涅槃非異處，煩惱菩提體無二。《明晶，海印三昧論》
- 189 菩薩摩訶薩。坐道場時。一切世界。草木叢林。諸無情物。皆曲身低影。歸向道場。《離世間品》
- 190 佛子住於此，見一微塵中，無量剎道場，眾生及諸劫 《入法界品》
- 191 一切諸佛皆悉能於一微塵中示現眾剎。…恆於其中轉妙法輪，教化眾生。《佛不思議法品》
- 192 見一切眾生本性清淨，見一切法皆悉寂滅，見一切剎同於虛空。《離世間品》
- 193 此諸菩薩。…往詣一切村營城邑。王都聚落。諸眾生所。隨其所應。以種種形相。種種威儀。種種音聲。種種言論。種種住處。於一切世間。猶如帝網。行菩薩行。《入法界品》
- 194 See for example *The Non-local Universe* by Robert Nadeau and Menas Kafatos, Oxford University Press 1999, pp. 81, 196, 213.
- 195 不說情與無情二見差別。以華嚴經為彰本法，異三乘權學教故。是無情是有情，有生有滅故。〔新華嚴經論〕
- 196 僧問。如何是古佛心。國師曰。牆壁瓦礫是。僧云。牆壁瓦礫豈不是無情。國師曰是。僧云。還解說法否。國師曰。常說熾然。說無間歇。…僧云。無情說法據何典教。國師曰。灼然。…汝豈不見。華嚴經云。剎說眾生說三世一切說。〔筠州洞山悟本禪師語錄〕

- 197 <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2019/world-military-expenditure-grows-18-trillion-2018>
- 198 <https://www.worldometers.info/military/>
- 199 See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_countries\\_by\\_GDP\\_\(PPP\)\\_per\\_capita](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(PPP)_per_capita)
- 200 <https://www.wirtschaftsdienst.eu/inhalt/jahr/2016/heft/13/beitrag/income-and-wealth-inequality-in-oecd-countries.html>
- 201 <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/time-care>
- 202 See Robert Nadeau and Menas Kafatos, *The Non-local Universe*, Oxford University Press 1999, pp. 81, 196.
- 203 Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, *What Is Life?*, University of California Press 2000, p.90.
- 204 See [www.physorg.com/news183304062.html](http://www.physorg.com/news183304062.html).
- 205 唯心回轉善成門
- 206 主伴圓明具德門
- 207 同時具足相應門
- 208 此經圓教所有之法。皆互為主伴
- 209 又如一方為主十方為伴餘方亦爾。是故主主伴伴各不相見。主伴伴主圓明具德。  
〔探玄記〕
- 210 則能於一莊嚴中。現種種莊嚴。如是莊嚴一切國土。開導示悟一切眾生。盡未來劫  
無有休息。〔入法界品〕
- 211 譬如有人唯有一子。愛念情至。忽見被人割截肢體。其心痛切不能自安。菩薩摩訶  
薩。亦復如是。見諸眾生以煩惱業。墮三惡趣受種種苦。心大憂惱。…菩薩不自  
為故求一切智。…但見眾生。於諸有中。具受無量種種諸苦。起大悲心。以大願  
力而普攝取。悲願力故。修菩薩行。為斷一切眾生煩惱。…為嚴淨一切廣大國  
土。〔入法界品〕
- 212 超過一切世界。無所障礙。莊嚴一切世界。無所障礙。修治一切世界。無所障礙。  
〔入法界品〕
- 213 當捨一切物盡未來際行。檀波羅蜜。令一切眾生普得滿足衣服飲食。  
〔入法界品〕
- 214 若有眾生。得見菩薩修菩提行。若疑若信。菩薩皆以世出世間種種方便。而攝取  
之。以為眷屬。令於阿耨多羅三藐三菩提得不退轉 〔入法界品〕
- 215 From Ferrant Sanchez Calavera (14th-15th c.), "On the Vanities of the World":  
Por Dios, señores, quitemos el velo  
que turba y ciega así nuestra vista....  
["Dezir de las vanidades del mundo"]
- 216 *Udāna* 6.4
- 217 *Cūḷaviyūha Sutta*, *Suttanipāta* 4.12/ 884
- 218 此一乘教義分齊，開為二門：一別教，二同教。 〔華嚴一乘教義分齊章〕
- 219 *Ādittapariyāya Sutta*: SN IV.19; Vin. I.35
- 220 如法華中宅內所指門外三車誘引諸子令得出者。是三乘教也。界外露地所授牛車  
是一乘教也。 〔華嚴一乘教義分齊章〕
- 221 一切三乘等。本來悉是彼一乘法。 〔華嚴一乘教義分齊章〕
- 222 一切三乘之法皆依一乘無盡教起。…是故諸有所修。皆迴向一乘。
- 223 或有能見佛法身，無等無礙普周遍，所有無邊諸法性，悉入其身無不盡，或有見佛  
妙色身，無邊色相光熾然，隨諸眾生解不同，種種變現十方中 〔世主妙嚴品〕
- 224 如來色相等眾生，隨其樂欲皆令見 〔世主妙嚴品〕
- 225 離此普法更無餘路得成佛故。 〔探玄記〕
- 226 依究竟說無有二乘而不迴入共教菩薩。無彼菩薩而不入此普賢之法。 〔探玄  
記〕

- 227 是故當知。一切眾生究竟無不皆入此法。以此普法眾生具有故。下文云。菩薩知一切眾生身中有如來菩提等。〔探玄記〕
- 228 十於沙門眾中。示沙門形。婆羅門眾中。示婆羅門形。剎利眾中。示剎利形。如是。毘舍眾。首陀眾。居士眾。四天王眾。三十三天眾。夜摩天眾。…各隨其類而為現形。〔十地品〕
- 229 或作外道出家人，或在山林自勤苦，或露形體無衣服，而於彼眾作師長〔賢首品〕
- 230 有眾生信種種天者〔探玄記〕
- 231 眾生欲樂差別
- 232 身隨彼心同彼行。說法令其信入佛法故
- 233 以佛為境界，專念而不息〔兜率宮中偈讚品〕
- 234 佛法廣大無涯際，一切剎海於中現〔世主妙嚴品〕
- 235 彼是莫得其偶〔莊子，齊物論〕
- 236 William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
- 237 *Udānavarga* 33.24; *Dhammapada* 26.3
- 238 William Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, State University of New York Press, 1994, p.150
- 239 Chittick, *op. cit.*, p. 151
- 240 *Diamond Sutra* [*Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*]. 我應滅度一切眾生，滅度一切眾生已，而無有一眾生實滅度者。〔金剛經〕
- 241 若能了邪法，如實不顛倒，知妄本自真，見佛則清淨〔須彌偈贊品〕
- 242 若以法眼觀。無俗不真。若以世間肉眼觀。無真不俗〔新華嚴經論〕
- 243 迷人謂妄為實不見妄實。悟人見妄無實即見妄實。〔探玄記〕
- 244 Cp. the famous statement attributed to George Berkeley that "to exist is to be perceived" [*esse est percipi*].
- 245 如金在礦〔探玄記〕
- 246 如金出礦〔探玄記〕
- 247 更須火煉令其清淨〔探玄記〕
- 248 今合之總為一教。此既未盡大乘法理。〔探玄記〕
- 249 由法界性融不可分故。即法界之果統攝法界無不皆盡。〔探玄記〕
- 250 初因避地去人間，更問神仙遂不還，峽裡誰知有人事，世中遙望空雲山。〔桃源行〕
- 251 John Keats, 1795-1821, "Ode on a Grecian Urn"
- 252 "Question and Answer in the Mountains": 別有天地非人間〔山中問答〕
- 253 William Wordsworth, 1770-1850, "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey"
- 254 Wordsworth, "Lines Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle in a Storm"
- 255 譬如眾續像 畫師之所作，如是一切剎，心畫師所成，眾生身各異〔華藏世界品〕
- 256 W.B. Yeats, 1865-1939, "A General Introduction to My Work"
- 257 Liu Xie, *The Art of Literature and the Writer's Craft*, Ch. 26, "On Imagination": 是以陶鈞文思，貴在虛靜〔文心雕龍，神思〕
- 258 *Ibid.*, Ch. 42, "On the Cultivation of Vitality": 是以納文藝，務在節宣，清和其心，調暢其氣〔養氣〕
- 259 *Ibid.*, Ch. 26, "On Imagination": 或理在方寸而求之域表〔神思〕
- 260 *Ibid.*, Ch. 48, "On Literary Criticism": 見文者披文以入情，沿波討源；雖幽必顯。〔知音〕
- 261 精驚八極，心游萬仞…觀古今於須臾，撫四海於一瞬〔陸機，文賦〕
- 262 行到水窮處，坐看雲起時〔王維，終南別業〕
- 263 David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, Ark Paperbacks 1983, p. 134

<sup>264</sup> Cited in Vic Mansfield, *Tibetan Buddhism and Modern Physics*, Templeton Foundation Press 2008, p. 89

<sup>265</sup> Cited in Robert Nadeau and Menas Kafatos, *The Non-local Universe*, Oxford University Press 1999, p. 179

<sup>266</sup> [*Ibid.*]

<sup>267</sup> John Briggs and David Peat, *Looking Glass Universe*, Fontana Paperbacks 1985, p. 87

<sup>268</sup> See Brian Greene, *The Fabric of the Cosmos*, Penguin Books 2004, p. 119

<sup>269</sup> [*Ibid.*, p. 47]

<sup>270</sup> Nadeau and Kafatos, *op. cit.*, p.46

<sup>271</sup> [*Ibid.*, p.198]

<sup>272</sup> Brian Greene, *The Elegant Universe*, Vintage Books 2005, p. 387

<sup>273</sup> 一心求佛智，專精無異念 [十地品]

<sup>274</sup> 時彌勒菩薩。前詣樓閣。彈指出聲。其門即開。命善財入。善財心喜。入已還閉。見其樓閣。廣博無量。同於虛空。

<sup>275</sup> 爾時彌勒菩薩摩訶薩。即攝神力。入樓閣中。彈指作聲。告善財言。善男子起。法性如是。…如是自性。如幻如夢。如影如像。悉不成就。…善財問言。此莊嚴事。何處去耶。彌勒答言。於來處去。曰從何處來。曰從菩薩智慧神力中來。依菩薩智慧神力而住。無有去處。亦無住處。

<sup>276</sup> 鞭索人牛盡屬空

<sup>277</sup> 返本還源

<sup>278</sup> 庵中不見庵前物，水自茫茫花自紅。

<sup>279</sup> 入塵垂手：露胸跣足入塵來，抹土塗灰笑滿腮，不用神仙真秘訣，直教枯木放花開。 See also above, p. 20.

<sup>280</sup> 見普賢身一一毛孔。出一切世界微塵數光明雲。遍法界虛空界一切世界。除滅一切眾生苦患。…

<sup>281</sup> 時善財童子。又見自身。在普賢身內。十方一切諸世界中。教化眾生。…

<sup>282</sup> 當是之時。善財童子。則次第得普賢菩薩諸行願海。與普賢等。與諸佛等。

<sup>283</sup> See also Ch. 7 above, pp. 56-7.

<sup>284</sup> Cp. above, p. 75. The Chinese phrase quoted here is from the Buddhābhadrā translation of the Sutra, in which "Spiritual Conduct" is the 12th chapter; in the Śikṣānanda translation it is the 16th.

<sup>285</sup> Or Vāsavayantī, 婆珊婆演底, in the Chinese translation.

<sup>286</sup> <http://www.miguelaraoz.com/> According to the artist's note (<http://www.miguelaraoz.com/workpainting.php?pid=7>), the Incas believed that the Pleiades cluster was "the mother of all the stars".

<sup>287</sup> *Sāgaramudrā* literally means "ocean seal" – 'seal' [*mudrā*] in the sense of a stamp or impression. The metaphor behind the phrase is the idea that when the ocean that surrounds the world in traditional Buddhist cosmology is perfectly calm, it acts as a mirror reflecting images of everything that is happening in the universe.

<sup>288</sup> 此經是毘盧遮那佛法界身雲。在蓮華藏莊嚴世界海。於海印三昧內。與普賢等海會聖眾。為大菩薩之所說也。凡一言一義。一品一會。皆遍十方虛空法界及一一微塵毛端剎土。盡因陀羅網微細世界。窮前後際一切劫海。及一念具無邊劫。常說普說無有休息。 《法藏：華嚴經傳記》

<sup>289</sup> Those who are familiar with Thomas Cleary's translation of the Sutra might like to note that he omits this long verse conclusion and substitutes instead a shorter verse passage from a different text.

<sup>290</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, "Little Gidding"

- <sup>291</sup> 1 Corinthians 9.22. Bodhisattvas are of course more ambitious and vow that they will use all means to save all sentient beings.
- <sup>292</sup> The 'Sutra on the Ten Stages' [of the Bodhisattva Path], which survives as a separate text in Sanskrit and also as Chapter 26 of Śikṣānanda's translation of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*.
- <sup>293</sup> The worlds of sensual desire [*kāmaloka*], of pure form [*rūpaloka*], and of formlessness [*arūpaloka*]
- <sup>294</sup> A common metaphor in Buddhism, e.g. *Dhammapada* 60: "Long is the night to the sleepless, and long the journey to the weary/ Long is Samsara to the foolish, who know not the truth of the Dharma."
- <sup>295</sup> See table above, p. 124.
- <sup>296</sup> See above, p. 26

## About the author

Tony Prince graduated with B.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Chinese Studies from the University of Sydney, Australia. After spending five years in Taiwan and Japan, he returned to Australia to take up a post at the University of Sydney, where he taught Chinese language, literature and history until his retirement in 2000. He has been studying Huayen Buddhism for more than thirty years and was the first president of the Huayen Buddhist Community of Australia. He currently lives in Sri Lanka and can be contacted at *huayenbuddhism@mail.com*.