

14 妙慧童女會

Sumati's Questions

Thus have I heard. Once the Buddha was dwelling on Mount Gr̥dhrakūṭa near Rājagṛha, accompanied by twelve hundred fifty great monks and ten thousand Bodhisattva-Mahāsattvas.

At that time, an elder's daughter named Sumati, who was only eight years old, was living in the city of Rājagṛha. She had graceful features and was exquisitely beautiful. Because of her beauty and grace, she was adored by everyone who saw her. In her past lives, she had associated closely with innumerable Buddhas, had made offerings to them, and had planted good roots of every kind.

One day this young girl went to visit the Tathāgata. When she arrived, she paid homage to the Buddha by bowing down with her head at his feet and circumambulating him three times to the right. Then, kneeling with her palms joined, she spoke to the Buddha in verse:

"Unexcelled, Perfectly Enlightened One,
Great, brilliant light of the world,
Please listen to my questions
About the practices of a Bodhisattva."

The Buddha told Sumati, "Ask whatever questions you wish. I will explain the answers to you and resolve your doubts."

Then Sumati asked the Buddha in verse:

"How does one obtain graceful features,
Or great wealth and nobility?"

What causes one's rebirth
Among harmonious relatives and friends?

By what means may one be born ethereally,
Seated upon a thousand-petaled lotus,
To worship the Buddhas face to face?

How can one obtain a free command
Of superb, miraculous powers,
And thus journey to countless Buddha-lands
To pay homage to myriad Buddhas?

How can one be free from enmity
And cause others to believe one's words?
How may all hindrances to Dharma be removed
And evil deeds forever cast away?

At the end of one's life,
How may one see many Buddhas,
And then, free of pain,
Hear them preach the pure Dharma?

Most Compassionate, Supremely Honored One,
Please tell me all this."

The Buddha said to the young girl Sumati, "Excellent, excellent! It is good that you raise such profound questions. Now, listen carefully and think well about this. I will tell you."

Sumati said, "Yes, World-Honored One, I will listen with pleasure."

The Buddha said, "Sumati, if a Bodhisattva achieves four things, he will be endowed with a graceful appearance. What are the four?"

- (1) Not to be angry [even] with a bad friend;
- (2) to have great kindness;
- (3) to rejoice in the true Dharma; and
- (4) to make images of Buddhas."

The World-Honored One repeated this in verse:

"Harbor no hatred, which destroys good roots.
Rejoice in the Dharma, be kind,
And make images of Buddhas.
These will give you a well-formed body,
An ever-delightful sight to all."

The Buddha continued, "Furthermore, Sumati, if a Bodhisattva achieves four things, he will be endowed with wealth and nobility. What are the four?"

- (1) To give timely gifts;
- (2) to give without contempt or arrogance;
- (3) to give cheerfully; and
- (4) to expect no reward."

The World-Honored One repeated this in verse:

"To give timely gifts without contempt or arrogance,
To give gladly without expecting a reward—
One who diligently practices these
Will be reborn with wealth and nobility."

The Buddha continued, "Furthermore, Sumati, if a Bodhisattva achieves four things, he will have harmonious friends and kinsmen. What are the four?

- (1) To avoid using words that cause disagreement;
- (2) to help those with wrong views to have right view;
- (3) to protect the true Dharma from extinction, causing it to endure; and
- (4) to teach sentient beings to pursue the Buddha's enlightenment."

The World-Honored One repeated this in verse:

"Sow no discord, help uproot wrong views,
Protect the true Dharma from extinction,
And bring all beings within the secure embrace of bodhi.
For this you will have harmonious friends and kinsmen." . . .

The Buddha continued, "Furthermore, Sumati, if a Bodhisattva achieves four things, he will be able to live among people without enmity. What are the four?

- (1) To be close to virtuous friends without using flattery;
- (2) not to envy others' superiority;
- (3) to rejoice when someone wins a good reputation; and
- (4) not to slight or defame the practices of a Bodhisattva."

The World-Honored One repeated this in verse:

"If one does not win friends by flattery,
Is not jealous of others' superiority,
Always rejoices when others gain fame,
And never slanders a Bodhisattva,
He will be free of enmity."

The Buddha continued, "Furthermore, Sumati, a Bodhisattva's words will be trusted if he practices four things. What are the four?

- (1) To be consistent in word and deed;
- (2) not to conceal one's evil from friends;
- (3) never to find fault with the Dharma one hears; and
- (4) not to foster malice against a teacher of the Dharma."

The World-Honored One repeated this in verse:

"One who is consistent in word and deed,
And never hides misdeeds from friends,
Nor finds fault with a sūtra or its preacher
Will have his words believed."

The Buddha continued, "Furthermore, Sumati, if a Bodhisattva achieves four things, he will meet no obstacles to [his practice of] the Dharma and will quickly gain purity. What are the four?

- (1) To embrace the three rules of conduct¹ with deep joy;
- (2) not to disparage profound sūtras when hearing them;
- (3) to treat a newly avowed Bodhisattva as an All-Knowing One; and
- (4) to be equally kind toward all beings."

The World-Honored One repeated this in verse:

"If one, with deep joy, embraces rules of conduct;
Understands with faith the profound discourses;
Honors a novice as a Buddha;
And is equally kind toward all—
Then such a person's hindrances will vanish."

The Buddha continued, "Furthermore, Sumati, if a Bodhisattva achieves four things, he will be protected from demons. What are the four?

- (1) To understand that all dharmas are equal in nature;
- (2) to strive vigorously for progress;
- (3) to recollect the Buddha continually; and
- (4) to dedicate all good roots [to the universal attainment of enlightenment]."

The World-Honored One repeated this in verse:

"If one knows that all dharmas are equal in nature,
Constantly makes energetic progress,
Is ever mindful of the Buddha,
And dedicates all roots of virtue
[To the attainment of Buddhahood by all],
No demon can devise a way to attack him."

The Buddha continued, "Furthermore, Sumati, if a Bodhisattva achieves four things, Buddhas will appear to him at the time of his death. What are the four?

- (1) To satisfy those in need of charity;
- (2) to understand and deeply believe in virtuous practices;
- (3) to provide Bodhisattvas with adornments; and
- (4) to make frequent offerings to the Three Jewels."

The World-Honored One repeated this in verse:

"One who fulfills the needs of a seeker,
Understands and believes in the profound Dharma,
Furnishes Bodhisattvas with adornments,
And makes frequent offerings
To the Three Jewels, the fields of blessing,
Will see Buddhas when he dies." . . .

Then Mañjuśrī, the Dharma Prince, asked Sumati, "In what Dharma do you abide, that you are able to make such a sincere vow?"

Sumati replied, "Mañjuśrī, this is not a proper question. Why? Because there is no abiding in the dharmadhātu."

"What is bodhi?"

"Nondiscrimination is bodhi."²

"Who is a Bodhisattva?"

"One who knows that all dharmas have the same nature as empty space is a Bodhisattva."

"What are the enlightened deeds [of a Bodhisattva]?"

"Deeds that are like mirages and echoes are the enlightened deeds."

"Upon what esoteric teaching do you base your statement?"

"I do not see anything in this that is esoteric or otherwise."

"If that is the case, every ordinary person should be an Enlightened One."³

"Do you think an ordinary person is different from an Enlightened One?"⁴ Do not take such a view! Why? Because they both share the same nature, that of the dharmadhātu; there is nothing in either to grasp or abandon, to accomplish or destroy."

"How many people can understand this?"

"The illusory beings who understand this are equal in number to the illusory minds and mental functions."⁵

Mañjuśrī said, "Illusions do not exist; how can there be minds and mental functions?"

"They are like the dharmadhātu, which neither exists nor does not exist. The same is true of the Tathāgata." . . .

NOTES

1. The three rules of conduct may refer to the three rules for protecting one from evil, namely, discipline, meditation, and transcendental wisdom. They may also refer to the Bodhisattvas' precepts, which include three branches: the discipline of pure conduct (Prātimokṣa), the discipline of altruistic deeds, and the discipline of embracing all virtuous deeds.

2. Literally, "The Dharma of nondiscrimination is bodhi."

3. Literally, "every ordinary person should be bodhi."

4. An Enlightened One: literally, "bodhi."

5. The Chinese term 心所 is here rendered as 'mental functions', but it can also mean the qualities and conditions of mind.