

# One Thought — Ten Dharma Realms

Verses composed and explained by  
Venerable Master Hsuan Hua

“The Ten Dharma Realms are Not Beyond a Single Thought”  
Chinese calligraphy by Venerable Master Hsuan Hua

十法界不離一念心

*One Thought—Ten Dharma Realms*

English translation by Buddhist Text Translation Society

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[www.buddhisttexts.org](http://www.buddhisttexts.org)  
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First English edition 1972

First bilingual Chinese/English edition 1998

Second English edition 2019

ISBN 978-1-60103-081-8 (second edition paperback)

ISBN 978-1-60103-082-5 (second edition ebook)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Hsüan Hua, 1918-1995, author. | Buddhist Text Translation Society, translator.

Title: One thought-ten dharma realms : verses composed and explained by Venerable Master Hua / English translation by the Buddhist Text Translation Society.

Other titles: Shi fa jie bu li yi nian xin. English.

Description: Second English edition. | Ukiah, California : Buddhist Text Translation Society, [2019]

Identifiers: LCCN 2015043090 (print) | LCCN 2015046715 (ebook) | ISBN 9781601030825 | ISBN 9781601030818 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Buddhist cosmology.

Classification: LCC BQ4570.C6 (ebook) | LCC BQ4570.C6 H7613 2019 (print) |

DDC 294.3/424--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2015043090>

Printed in Taiwan

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# Editorial Note

“One Thought” refers to each thought that we have; the “Ten Dharma Realms”<sup>1</sup> encompasses the totality of the Buddha’s description of reality. This small book *One Thought—Ten Dharma Realms*<sup>2</sup> shows how the ten Dharma Realms are not apart from each of our thoughts.

As a travel guide for the Buddhist spiritual journey to awakening, these talks open our minds to various possible realms of existence in the Buddha’s teachings, describe their psychological landscapes, and explain how we literally create these realities thought by thought. All of us, in fact every living being, are empowered to forge our own destinies beginning with this present moment.

Spoken in San Francisco in 1972 to a group consisting of mostly young adventurous Westerners, Master Hua delivers these talks with a great deal of energy and humor. The audience would often be laughing at a play on words or a back-and-forth dialogue Master Hua would have with himself—playing both the inquisitive disciple and

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- 1 Dharma Realm (Skt. *dharmā-dhātu*, Ch. *fajie* 法界) has at least three meanings: a realm of existence either as one of the four spheres or six kinds of ordinary beings, the entire universe ad infinitum, or reality as it is. This text mostly refers to the first meaning.
  - 2 The original title of this series is *The Ten Dharma Realms are Not Beyond A Single Thought*, which is a literal translation of the Chinese: *shi fajie buli yinian xin* 十法界不離一念心. The new title *One Thought—Ten Dharma Realms* attempts to capture how all possible states of existence, i.e. the ten Dharma Realms, are found in each of our thoughts. Based on the kind of thoughts we have, we experience the ten Dharma Realms in the present. At the same time, these thoughts are the seeds of our future existence.

the learned teacher. He often spoke in “matching couplets”—a poetic Chinese form in which two sentences balance each other to form a complete whole:

A person can become a Buddha.

A Buddha is an awakened person.

The presentation is not just stylistic, but presents the Dharma in a way that gives a balanced view of a principle. These teachings become seeds for awakening that are planted in our minds, and if we nurture these seeds by putting the Dharma into practice, these seeds sprout, mature, and bear fruit.

Master Hua also directly engaged the audience by asking rhetorical questions that model a process of self-inquiry. Often the questions he asks are just as important as the answers he gives. These questions serve as pointers for our investigation of the Dharma. The ultimate aim is to see the Dharma for ourselves. At this point, we embody the teachings effortlessly; our daily actions of body, mouth, and mind are naturally in harmony with the way things are.

Therefore, studying the Dharma is ultimately a realization of our highest potential. How much we can absorb and receive relies on how open our hearts and minds can be. There is no rush—read one Dharma Realm at a time and then reflect on it. Each passage in the commentary is filled with principles to contemplate. “How can I apply this to my life?” is a good question to ask. True wisdom is being able to take one principle and apply it in all of our activities throughout the day.

This translation tries to bring Master Hua’s teachings to life by capturing as much of the energy of the original talk as possible without being distracting. In these talks, he is quite playful and



relaxed. There seems to be a gentle smile behind his words.<sup>3</sup>

The layout of the text tries to bring out the energetic and dialogical nature of Master Hua's speaking style. He often asks rhetorical questions, then answers them, followed by more questioning. In order to make this structure apparent, the text is laid out as follows:

- Lines of Master Hua's verses are in bold.
- His tone of voice and audience reactions are italicized in brackets.
- Matching sentences and parallelism of speech are put alongside each other in consecutive lines.
- When Master Hua plays the role of a questioning disciple, the text is italicized appropriately so that we can easily see the dynamic back-and-forth of Master Hua's inner conversation.

Footnotes are also added to provide context and information on Buddhist concepts that may not be familiar to new readers. Where possible, these footnotes are given in three parts: a concise definition with Sanskrit (Skt.) and Chinese (Ch.) equivalents for easy reference, a concrete example, and an application of the concept in everyday life. The hope is that this will give the reader not simply an intellectual understanding, but a means for directly knowing the Dharma for oneself.

—Bhikshu Jin Chuan  
December, 2018

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3 The recordings for these talks can be found at: [www.drba.org/ten-dharma-realms](http://www.drba.org/ten-dharma-realms).



# Preface

In September, 1972, when the Master first recited the Ten Dharma Realms poem, he told those gathered around him that he had composed it at 1:30 in the morning after his customary three-hour recitation of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* that follows his nightly lectures on the sutra. It took him about half an hour to complete the stanzas, after which he did not sleep but sat unmoving in meditation until morning—a schedule which displays how vigorously the Master puts the principles of cultivation into practice, in spite of his advanced years.

After the Master transmitted the poem, he was formally requested to explain the principles contained therein, because his disciples knew that an understanding of the ten Dharma Realms is basic to the study of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the sutra of the Dharma Realm. Not only was the request made on their own behalf, however, but also for the sake of all living beings, for even those with no prior study of the Buddhadharma can benefit from this teaching. The Master consented, and for one week he set aside the *Avatamsaka* text proper in order to speak the principles of the Dharma Realm as contained in the poem. The lectures were given in Chinese and translated on the spot into English. Later, the tape of those lectures was used to make the translation that forms the content of this book. It is hoped that this English translation of the Master's lectures expresses clearly the principles expounded and that the translation of the poem retains the dynamics of the original.<sup>4</sup>

—Bhikshuni Heng Chih  
Nagarjuna Bodhisattva's birthday, 1973

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4 The current translation is an update of the previous translation (1976) to which this preface refers.

# Verses

## 十法界不離一念心

## One Thought—Ten Dharma Realms

若人欲了知  
三世一切佛  
應觀法界性  
如來唯心造

If you want to understand,  
All Buddhas of all times,  
Observe the nature of the Dharma Realm:  
Tathagatas are made only from the mind.

## 佛法界

## The Dharma Realm of Buddhas

不大不小  
非去非來  
微塵世界  
交映蓮臺

Buddhas are not big or small,  
They neither come nor go,  
In worlds many as specks of dust,  
Reflecting mirror-like on lotus thrones.

## 菩薩法界

## The Dharma Realm of Bodhisattvas

有情覺悟  
跳出塵埃  
六度萬行  
時刻培栽

Living beings, once awake,  
Leap beyond the world of dust;  
The six perfections and myriad practices,  
They nurture at all times.

**緣覺法界**

緣覺聖賢

孤峰獨眠

春花秋謝

十二連環

**The Dharma Realm of Solitary Sages**

Sages mindful of causation,

Sleep alone on mountain peaks;

They see spring's blooms decay in fall;

They know the twelve dependent links.

**聲聞法界**

聲聞眾僧

不論女男

四諦觀行

隱實示權

**The Dharma Realm of Voice Hearers**

The Noble Sangha of Voice Hearers,

Both women and men alike,

Observe and practice the Four Truths;

Disguised, they teach to suit each time.

**天法界**

六欲梵天

五戒十善

種有漏根

輪迴難斷

**The Dharma Realm of Devas**

Six Desire Heavens and the Brahma Realm,

Come from five precepts and ten good deeds;

There, devas plant seeds, but still outflow,

So samsara's rounds do not cease.

### 阿修羅法界

修羅性暴  
有福無權  
好勇鬥狠  
浮沉業牽

### The Dharma Realm of Asuras

Asuras have violent natures;  
Possessed of blessings, but powerless,  
Daring and fierce, they love to fight.  
Their karma drags them up and down.

### 人法界

人道和合  
功罪相間  
德升孽降  
豈有他焉

### The Dharma Realm of Humans

Humanity's path is harmony,  
Our merits and offenses mixed up together;  
On good deeds we rise, evil make us fall,  
There is no one else to blame at all.

### 畜生法界

畜生好貪  
多而無厭  
將黑作白  
是非莫辨

### The Dharma Realm of Animals

Animals feed greedily,  
Never knowing when to stop;  
Without concern for black or white,  
They don't distinguish wrong from right.

**餓鬼法界**

鬼類喜瞋  
昧果迷因  
無明顛倒  
日積月深

**The Dharma Realm of Ghosts**

The realm of ghosts thrives on anger,  
Confusing causes, blind to results;  
Their ignorance and delusion  
Grow deeper every day.

**地獄法界**

地獄憂苦  
無門自鑽  
起惑造業  
受報循環

**The Dharma Realm of the Hells**

The hells are filled with misery and pain;  
There are no doors, yet we drill on in;  
Deluded, we create karma,  
And results follow in accord.

**十界一心**

十界一心  
不離當念  
能覺此念  
立登彼岸

**Ten Realms—A Single Thought**

Ten Dharma Realms in a single thought,  
We find them only here and now;  
Awaken to this very thought:  
Just then we reach the other shore.



若人欲了知  
三世一切佛  
應觀法界性  
如來唯心造





# One Thought Ten Dharma Realms

*If you want to understand,  
All Buddhas of all times,  
Observe the nature of the Dharma Realm:  
Tathagatas are made only from the mind.*

*[Master Hua slowly recites the verse:]*

**If you want to understand,  
All people of all times,  
Observe the nature of the Dharma Realm:  
Tathagatas are made only from the mind.**

*[Laughter from audience]*

Why do you laugh? Do you think I read this passage incorrectly?  
Do you think the passage should be read:

“All *Buddhas* of all times”?

Why did I recite:

“All *people* of all times”?

The reason is that people are just Buddhas.  
A person can be called a Buddha; a Buddha, a person.  
Either way is all right.

A person can become a Buddha.  
A Buddha is an awakened person.

If we say “Buddha,” no one understands. “What is a Buddha?” they ask. No one really understands. But when we say “people,” everyone understands. With that mutual understanding, we have a place to start from.

You ask:

*Who are these people?*  
They are just Buddhas.

*Am I a Buddha?*  
Yes, you are.

*Is he a Buddha?*  
Yes, he is.

*Are you a Buddha?*

Yes, I am also a Buddha.

But we are all unrealized Buddhas. After we realize Buddhahood, then we are real Buddhas. Right now, we are fake Buddhas.

Fake Buddhas can become real Buddhas.

Real Buddhas can become fake Buddhas.

**If you want to understand,**

The verse starts with the word “if” to indicate that this is only a hypothetical situation; don’t be attached and bound by it. Don’t take it too seriously.

**All Buddhas of all times,**

All Buddhas of the past, present, and future are just people who have realized Buddhahood.

**Observe the nature of the Dharma Realm:**

Take a look at the nature of the Dharma Realm.

Now I do not mean for you to contemplate the Dharma Realm’s nature. What nature does the Dharma Realm have? If it had a nature, how could it be called the Dharma Realm?

Actually this phrase refers to the nature of the living beings in the Dharma Realm. Every living being of the Dharma Realm has its own nature. You have your nature, and I have mine.

What do I mean by this *nature*?

Your temper is a bit bigger than mine.

My temper is more deep-seated than yours.

Do you agree?

In this way, our natures are different.  
Living beings in the Dharma Realm have their own nature.  
Pigs have the nature of pigs; horses have the nature of horses.  
Men have the nature of men; women have the nature of women.  
Each has his or her own nature.

Those who like to eat sweet food have a sweet nature;  
those who like to eat sour food have a sour nature;  
those who like hot, spicy food have a hot and spicy nature;  
those who like bitter food, like all of us here, we have a bitter nature.<sup>5</sup>

Do you agree?

We practice bitter ascetic practices. Cultivation is an ascetic practice, and even going to the dining hall to eat is part of the ascetic practice. However, in this ascetic practice of eating, none of you want to be at the end; all of you race toward the front.<sup>6</sup>

*[Master Hua laughing:]*

Do you agree?

When we look into it, we find that everything has its own nature:  
trees have the nature of trees;  
flowers have the nature of flowers;  
grass has the nature of grass.

So “the nature of the Dharma Realm” refers to the nature of each living being in the Dharma Realm and not the Dharma Realm’s nature.

Do you understand now?

---

5 Master Hua makes a pun on the Chinese character for ‘bitter’ (*ku*), which is the same as the word for ‘ascetic.’

6 At Gold Mountain Monastery, the monastics ate one meal a day as an ascetic practice (Skt. *dhutanga*, Ch. *kuxing* 苦行) that the Buddha himself maintained. This practice encourages contentment with little and non-attachment to food. Master Hua, however, humorously points out that everyone competes to be first in line for the “ascetic practice of eating.”

In the past, you thought that it was the Dharma Realm that had its own nature. Now, you know that it is the living beings in the Dharma Realm who have their own nature.

That is why it is said, “Observe the nature of the Dharma Realm.”

**Tathagatas are made only from the mind.**

The original verse from the *Avatamsaka Sutra* says:

If you want to understand,  
All Buddhas of all times,  
Observe the nature of the Dharma Realm:  
Everything is made only from the mind.

Since I changed the second line to “All *people* of all times,” I also changed the last line to “*Tathagatas*<sup>7</sup> are made only from the mind.” I did this because Buddhas are created from just your mind.

If you walk the Buddha Path, you will become a Buddha. If you like Bodhisattvas and walk the Bodhisattva Path, you will become a Bodhisattva. If you wish to fall into the hells, you can go in that direction and end up in the hells.

Starting from today, we will begin a series of lectures on the ten Dharma Realms. Whatever I think of, I’ll say. Whatever I forget, I won’t say. These lectures are an overview of the ten Dharma Realms.

Really what are the ten Dharma Realms like?

I don’t know either!

---

7 *Tathagata* (Ch. *ru lai* 如來) is another title of the Buddha. In Sanskrit, *Tathagata* has two potential meanings, “Thus Come One” or “Thus Gone One,” i.e., *tatha* (thus) + *agata* (come) or *tatha* + *gata* (gone). In Master Hua’s verse on the Dharma Realm of Buddhas, he explains how the Buddhas “neither come nor go.” They are beyond duality.



不大不小  
非去非来  
微塵世界  
交映蓮台



# The Dharma Realm of Buddhas

*Buddhas are not big or small,  
They neither come nor go,  
In worlds many as specks of dust,  
Reflecting mirror-like on lotus thrones.*

This first Dharma Realm is that of Buddhas.

I once gave a lecture in Redwood City on the Buddha, and I said, “In English, we say, ‘Buddha, Buddha, Buddha.’ Since I’m quite foolish and a bit deaf, I heard *bu da!*”<sup>8</sup>

What is *not big*?

The Buddha.

One Buddhist professor liked this explanation so much that afterwards, he put his palms together to me and said, “*Bu da!*”

*Not big* just means not being arrogant. A Buddha is neither arrogant nor haughty. He doesn’t have an arrogant attitude, always saying:

*[Master Hua humorously imitates a proud person shouting I-ya!]*

“I—ya!, I—ya!, I—ya!”

The Buddha doesn’t have this “I—ya!”

However, an arrogant person is always saying, “I! I! I!”—everything is this “I!” Everything to the right, left, front, back, above, below, and throughout the six directions is this “I!” There are too many I’s, and so the self becomes big.

A Buddha has no *I*, no self.

Therefore the Buddha is *bu da*—*not big*.

What do you think?

*Then is he small?*

No, he’s not small either.

If by not being big, he was small,  
then he also wouldn’t be the Buddha.

---

8 “Bu da” (不大) means “not big” in Chinese.



In conclusion, the verse starts:

**Buddhas are not big or small,  
They neither come nor go,**

A Buddha “comes and yet does not come, goes and yet is not gone.”

Why?

Because his Dharma-body<sup>9</sup> extends beyond the bounds of space and pervades the Dharma Realm. He is neither absent nor present.

*You say he goes, but to where does he go?*

*You say he comes, but from where does he come?*

Ultimately the Buddha’s Dharma-body is everywhere, so there is neither coming nor going.

*Is his Dharma-body present only in our world?*

No, not only is he in our world, but he is also present throughout the whole Dharma Realm. The Dharma Realm includes as many worlds as there are particles of dust—innumerable, infinite worlds—all of which are the Buddha’s Dharma-body.

**In worlds many as specks of dust,  
Reflecting mirror-like on lotus thrones.**

The Buddha in this realm shines his light upon the Buddha of another

---

9 Dharma-body (Skt. *dharmakaya*, Ch. *fa shen* 法身) is the true body of the Buddhas that pervades everything, yet is still and unmoving. It is not limited by the dualities of movement and stillness, big and small.

The Buddha has three bodies: 1) the Dharma-body is shared by all Buddhas and is often synonymous with ultimate reality; 2) the reward-body is a magnificent spiritual body that is seen by those who have removed some of the obscurations from their vision; 3) the myriad transformation bodies are the physical bodies that the Buddha appears in to teach ordinary beings in *samsara*.

realm, and the light of the Buddha in that realm illumines this realm. Sitting on lotus thrones, the Buddhas shine their light on each other and shake the earth. Light shines from their ears, eyes, noses, tongues, and teeth.

Not only do their six sense-faculties shine light and shake the earth, but every pore of their skin shines light and shakes the earth. In every pore, worlds as numerous as motes of dust appear, each containing incalculable numbers of Buddhas who shine their lights in the same way.<sup>10</sup>

Yet all these lights, like lamps, do not clash with each other. They do not say, “You can’t give off so much light because my light has nowhere to go. You can’t do that!” The lights don’t end up in a conflict; rather, they complement each other in harmony. In Buddhism, we unite our lights. Just as lights do not fight with one another, so too we people should not fight with each other.

We should allow our lights to shine on one another. Your light shines on me; my light shines on you. Our lights complement and reflect

---

10 Throughout the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (and many other Buddhist sutras), the Buddha shines light and shakes the earth as a Dharma teaching for those beings who are able to receive it. For instance, in our world, some beings communicate with light (e.g. fireflies flickering), some with sound (e.g. birds singing), and some by literally shaking the earth (e.g. elephants stomping the earth). In terms of spiritual practice, we can be aware of the limitations of our senses and have an open mind to other modes of communication. Many Buddhist texts (as well as reports from spiritual practitioners throughout the millennia) describe that with single-minded practice, we can remove the limitations of our senses so that we literally see the shining light of the Buddhas.

each other; we are all interconnected just like the interstices of the infinitely-layered net of the King of the Great Brahma Heaven.<sup>11</sup> This is what is meant by “reflecting mirror-like on lotus thrones.”

That’s the Dharma Realm of Buddhas.

---

11 Brahma’s Net (also known as Indra’s Net) is described as an infinite net that has a shining, reflective pearl at each of its interstices. Each pearl reflects all the other pearls on the net. At the same time, that pearl’s reflection simultaneously appears in all of the other pearls as well. Like two mirrors facing one another, the reflections go on ad infinitum. This metaphor is used to explain how all phenomena interpenetrate and are interconnected.

A simple example would be a flower. A flower requires an infinite number of conditions to bring it about: the sun that shines on it, the earth that it grows from, the water that nurtures it, the air that sustains it, and so on. In each of those phenomena are infinitely many more conditions.

If we reflect in this way, then ultimately there is no conflict with others—simply mutual support and harmony. We are all interconnected at a fundamental level.



有情覺悟  
跳出塵埃  
六度萬行  
時刻培養



# The Dharma Realm of Bodhisattvas

*Living beings, once awake,  
Leap beyond the world of dust;  
The six perfections and myriad practices,  
They nurture at all times.*

The second Dharma Realm is that of Bodhisattvas.

Bodhisattva is a Sanskrit word that translates as an “awakened sentient being.”<sup>12</sup>

What is an “awakened sentient being”?

There are two meanings:

1. One who leads sentient beings to awakening.
2. One who is awake among sentient beings.

And we are all included in both of these meanings.

*How are we included?*

We can all become Bodhisattvas!

As sentient beings, we can wake up and teach all other beings to wake up as well. Being a Bodhisattva is pretty good. You and I are both included. We not only have the potential to become Bodhisattvas, but Buddhas as well.

You say:

*I don't get it.*

*Earlier you said that a Buddha is just an awakened person.*

*Well, why haven't we become Buddhas?*

Let's not talk about people becoming Buddhas.

Consider little Guo Fang here.

He's a child now, but will he grow up?

Will he become an adult and grow old?

There is just a chance that this might happen.

Don't you agree?

---

<sup>12</sup> In Sanskrit, Bodhisattva (Ch. *pusa* 菩薩) has two parts: *bodhi*, “awakened,” and *sattva*, “sentient being.”

This is an analogy for us. We are just like children, while the Buddha is an adult. When we grow up, we will become Buddhas. If we don't grow up, then we are still children. All of us are still little children in Buddhism.

Every day children drink milk for nourishment.

Every day we need to listen to the Dharma for nourishment.<sup>13</sup>

Listening to the Dharma is an especially good way to nurture our roots of goodness and activate our inherent wisdom.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, an opportunity to listen to the Dharma is more valuable than any amount of money you could earn.

So today I'm going to make a rule! What rule? I hope that from now on, all of you will not take so many holidays and go on so many trips.

Take the study of the Dharma as your holiday.

Take the study of Dharma as your trip.

Why? Because holiday travel is very dangerous.

Think it over—every holiday season, there is definitely more than one person who dies on a trip. So if you travel, you open up this possibility.

Therefore, we want to change the customs of this country. People in this country like to play and travel, but we as Buddhist disciples want to change this custom. We do not want to take so many vacations;

---

13 Master Hua made a vow that as long as he had one breath left, he would lecture and speak the Dharma. He wished to give everyone an opportunity to study the Dharma every day.

14 Roots of goodness (Skt. *kushala-mula*, Ch. *shan gen* 善根) are good and virtuous deeds done with the body, mouth, and mind that serve as the foundation for spiritual growth. These roots serve as the causal seeds that bring wholesome results that ultimately lead to awakening. In life, they manifest as a peaceful, happy, and contented mind as well as an inclination for spiritual practice.

Being able to meet the Dharma in itself requires roots of goodness because we must have done good deeds in the past to meet the Dharma now. Studying the Dharma now nurtures those roots of goodness so that they grow and multiply.

instead, we can use this time to study the Dharma—just think how wonderful that would be!

We can chant sutras, recite mantras, and bow to the Buddhas! There is infinite merit and virtue in bowing to the Buddhas.

Before the Buddhas, make one bow;  
Ganges' sands offenses disappear right now.

If you bow to the Buddhas, you can eradicate as many offenses as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River.

Another Buddhist saying goes:

When you give one cent away,  
Many blessings come your way.

But I'm certainly not asking you to give me money. You can make contributions to other monasteries and earn great blessings that way.

Here we all are ordinary people with many afflictions and sufferings, so we don't have the blessings to receive offerings. If we accept too many offerings, we just might die. If no one makes offerings, maybe we can live a few days more.

*[Master Hua with a small laugh:]*

Take a look! Even though life is so tough here, we still want to live a little longer—we don't want to die just yet.

Therefore if you wish to donate money, you can give it to other places. I fully support this. There are plenty of places where you can plant blessings; you don't have to do it at Gold Mountain Monastery because Gold Mountain Monastery only has people with many afflictions and few blessings. If you seek blessings here, you'll be disappointed.

*[With a laugh:]*

But don't worry, we won't starve to death!



**Living beings, once awake,**

Bodhisattvas are sentient beings.

Among sentient beings, they are awakened.

Among awakened beings, they understand.

Among those who understand, they cultivate.

Among cultivators, they embody the practice.

Therefore Bodhisattvas—

**Leap beyond the world of dust;**

If Bodhisattvas did not have understanding, they would not be able to get out of the world of dust.<sup>15</sup> The accumulated dust would be too thick. But if they can awaken, then the dust thins out and disappears, and they can jump out.

You ask:

*After Bodhisattvas leap out of the dust, what do they do?*

*Do they just sleep and eat?*

Now that's a good question!

Bodhisattvas still have to sleep; they still need to eat; they still wear clothes; however, that's not all they do. Before, they made a living in order to have food to eat, clothes to wear, and a house to live in. But after leaping out of the dust, they no longer work for these three things.

*Then what do they live for?*

They live for practicing the six perfections.

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<sup>15</sup> Dust is a metaphor for sense-objects (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, and objects of mind) that living beings seek and attach to. Their wisdom thereby gets obscured and covered over, and they become confused. Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, do not attach to the dust; therefore, their wisdom can function unimpeded.

## The six perfections and myriad practices, They nurture at all times.

The six perfections<sup>16</sup> are giving, precepts,<sup>17</sup> patience, vigor, meditative stillness, and wisdom.

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16 The six perfections (Sk. *paramita*, Ch. *boluomi* 波羅蜜) are considered the hallmark practices of the Bodhisattva. The etymology of the Sanskrit word *paramita* consists of *para* “other shore” + *mita* “arrived,” which literally means “arrived at the other shore.” Namely, the Bodhisattva cultivates each of these qualities until they arrive at the shore of awakening, Buddhahood. The Buddha Shakyamuni’s cultivation of the *paramitas* is recounted in the *Jataka Tales*, a collection of past life stories of the Buddha.

These six perfections—giving (Sk. *dana*, Ch. *bushi* 布施), precepts (Sk. *shila*, Ch. *chijie* 持戒), patience (Sk. *kshanti*, Ch. *renru* 忍辱), vigor (Sk. *virya*, Ch. *jingjin* 精進), meditative stillness (Sk. *dhyana*, Ch. *chanding* 禪定), and wisdom (Sk. *prajna*, Ch. *bore* 般若)—serve as antidotes for various afflictions such as stinginess, immorality, anger, laziness, scatteredness, and ignorance respectively.

17 The second perfection, precepts (Sk. *shila*, Ch. *jie* 戒) is often translated as virtue, morality, ethics, or discipline. There are many sets of precepts: the five and the eight precepts for laity, the Bodhisattva precepts, the ten precepts of a novice monastic, the 250 precepts for monks, and the 348 precepts for nuns. The Buddha gave these precepts as a way to help living beings avoid suffering, for themselves or others. These “external” precepts ultimately arise from a wisdom of clearly seeing the nature of reality, an inner attunement or ethical sensibility that knows what truly brings happiness or harm. Breaking the precepts leads to anxiety and remorse; observing the precepts brings balance and harmony. Holding the precepts is naturally conducive to meditative stillness and the development of insight. Clear seeing then supports the holding of precepts in a virtuous cycle of spiritual growth.

The perfection of holding precepts culminates in a life that effortlessly and skillfully responds to all situations without any attachment. The Buddha also warns against holding precepts in a way that disparages others or develops a judgmental mind as this is just feeding our arrogance or ego. Instead, the precepts are taken based on our own aspirations to walk the spiritual path leading to a heart of generosity and humility.

In the *Abhisanda Sutta*, the Buddha says that the five precepts (not killing, not stealing, not committing sexual misconduct, not lying, and not taking intoxicants) are great gifts to limitless beings: gifts of freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression. In return, someone who maintains these precepts receives a share of this freedom from danger as well (*Anguttara-Nikaya* 8.39).

You say:

*I know, the perfection of giving means having people give to me!*

Wrong. The perfection of giving means we have to give to others!

Money is something we want to distance ourselves from.

We don't want it. Money is actually one of the dirtiest things.

If we spend too much time with it, then we get dirty, too.

We get covered in dust.<sup>18</sup>

*What is this 'dust'?*

Money is just the dust.

If you can have no desire for money, then you are truly pure and you can go "beyond the dusty world."

Now some of you have gone "beyond the dusty world" because you are holding the precept of not accepting money, but be sure not let yourself get infected by it again in the future.<sup>19</sup>

We should nurture the myriad practices all the time.<sup>20</sup>

We should not think:

I cultivate today, but not tomorrow.

I cultivate this year, but not next year.

I cultivate this month, but take a break next month.

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18 Master Hua often explains how paper money is quite dirty because it passes through many people's hands and some people even lick their fingers before counting it. At a psychological level, money can become an obsession that takes over the mind. To contemplate money as "dirty" serves as an antidote for the greed for money, which is one of the major obstacles in spiritual practice.

19 The precept of not accepting money is contained in the Buddhist monastic code. By holding this precept, Buddhist monks and nuns do not get involved with the world of business and finance and can then spend their time studying, practicing, and teaching the Dharma.

20 The myriad practices (Ch. *wan heng* 萬行; literal translation: "ten thousand practices") refers to all the practices of a Bodhisattva that lead to Buddhahood. The Chinese word for ten thousand, *wan* 萬, has the additional meanings of completeness and totality.

I cultivate this life, but not next life!  
I cultivate right now, but later I go to sleep.  
This won't work.

We should cultivate the six perfections and ten thousand practices  
moment after moment, in life after life.

If you can practice like this, then you are a Bodhisattva.

You say:

*That's not easy!*

Did you think that being a Bodhisattva would be easy? Not only is it  
not easy to be a Bodhisattva, it's also not easy to be a Solitary Sage or  
a Voice Hearer.<sup>21</sup>

*Then what's easy?*

Becoming a ghost! That's really easy. Falling into the hells, that's easy.  
Becoming an animal, that's easy. If you want things to be easy, then  
you can just behave accordingly.

But if you want to be a Bodhisattva, then it's not going to be easy.  
“Not easy” just means being a Bodhisattva.

You say:

*It's very difficult.*

“Difficult” also just means being a Bodhisattva.

Therefore, Bodhisattvas must do what others cannot do;  
they must endure what others find difficult to endure.

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21 The Solitary Sage (Skt. *pratyeka-buddha*) and Voice Hearer (Skt. *shravaka*) are also awakened  
beings that Master Hua will explain in subsequent sections.

*[Master Hua says with strength:]*

Other people think this is difficult?

No problem! We'll go and do it!

We want to be like this.

Don't say:

*[with a feeble and dejected voice:]*

Oh, this is too difficult—I can't do it.

If you don't dare to do what is hard, then you are not a Bodhisattva.

*[with energy:]*

Go forth with vigor!

Be vigorous, vigorous, vigorous!

That is what a Bodhisattva is like; there is no other special technique.

If you can do what others cannot do, then you are a Bodhisattva.

If others cannot do it, yet you can get it done, then you are a Bodhisattva.



賢覺聖  
眠獨  
謝秋  
環連  
緣孤  
峯花  
春  
十二



# The Dharma Realm of Solitary Sages

*Sages mindful of causation*

*Sleep alone on mountain peaks;*

*They see spring's blooms decay in fall;*

*They know the twelve dependent links.*

## Now we are going to talk about Solitary Sages.<sup>22</sup>

Why do I ask you so many questions?<sup>23</sup>

It is simply because these Solitary Sages don't like questions. They are hermits who don't like to be around other people. However, today I am here with all of you to discuss topics of shared interest, so let's not be Solitary Sages.

These Solitary Sages have two different titles:<sup>24</sup>

1. Sages Awakened to Causation: they wake up when a Buddha is present in the world.
2. Solitary Sages: they wake up when no Buddha is present in the world; instead, they wake up on their own.

What do they like to do?

They like to “live alone on secluded peaks.”

### Sages mindful of causation

#### Sleep alone on mountain peaks;

Not only do these sages awaken to causation,

But we also must awaken to causation.

These sages are *masters of* these twelve links,

But we are *mastered by* these twelve links.

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22 Solitary Sage comes from the Sanskrit *pratyeka-buddha*. *Pratyeka* means “singly” or “one at a time” while *buddha* means “awakened one.” These sages awaken themselves, but unlike the Buddhas, they do not make a vow to liberate all beings.

23 Master Hua would often ask his students, “Does anyone have any questions? If you don't have any questions, then I have questions for you!” He wanted everyone to engage the Dharma directly for themselves and have it come alive.

24 In Chinese there are two terms that translate the same Sanskrit word *pratyeka-buddhas*: 1) Sages Awakened to Causation, *yuanjue* 緣覺 and 2) Solitary Sages, *dujue* 獨覺. Therefore, these two terms are often used interchangeably with a subtle distinction that Master Hua explains.



The first of the twelve links of dependent origination is *ignorance*.<sup>25</sup>

These sages investigate the nature of ignorance:

Where does ignorance come from?

How strange! How can there be ignorance?

They reflect: “ignorance conditions formations.”<sup>26</sup>

Where there is ignorance, there are formations.

*Formations* are just subtle activities.

With these activities, then there is consciousness.

*Consciousness* is just making distinctions.

Formations are conditioned phenomena.

However, at the moment of ignorance, the duality of conditioned and unconditioned does not exist. That moment is between the conditioned and the unconditioned. After that point, there are distinctions.

What is the cause of there being distinctions?

It is because there are conditioned dharmas.

With conditioned dharmas, then there is the discriminating mind.

With the discriminating mind, all the troubles begin!

What are these troubles?

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25 The twelve links of dependent origination (Skt. *pratitya-samutpada*, Ch. *shier yinyuan* 十二因緣) has been translated into English in many different ways, such as “interdependent co-arising,” “conditioned causation,” and “dependent arising.” All phenomena arise and cease in dependence on other phenomena. In other words, nothing can exist on its own, separate from everything else.

26 Formations (Skt. *samskara*, Ch. *xing* 行) refer to karmic predispositions or activities that form the basis of consciousness while at the same time being formed by consciousness. A metaphor is given for this process where formations are likened to a river bed and consciousness to water. The river bed directs the water while simultaneously the water constantly reshapes the banks of the river. Our deep habitual way of seeing forms the way we engage the world, while at the same time the deeds we do shape the way we see the world.

They are *name and form*.<sup>27</sup>

Name and form are just trouble!

*Name* brings the trouble of name.

*Form* brings the trouble of form.

Trouble is just name and form.

Name and form is just trouble.

To explain this is even more troublesome. If I didn't explain it, then there would be no problems, but once I bring it up, the trouble begins.

*[Master Hua happily says:]*

You ask:

*Really? How are name and form trouble? I don't understand!*

You don't understand?! Well, now you have the added trouble of "not understanding." Before I spoke, you did not have this trouble of "not understanding."

Isn't that right?

Before I spoke, you had no idea what you did not know, so there was a lot less trouble. Now that I have said it, you don't get it, so you have this new problem. With this new problem, you want to understand.

This wish to understand results in the *six sense faculties*.

Take a look for yourself! These six faculties come from your wanting to understand, to clarify. Have you heard this principle before?<sup>28</sup>

*[Master Hua laughs]*

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27 Name and form (Skt. *nama-rupa*, Ch. *ming se* 名色) has two parts: "name" refers to the mental functions of feeling, perception, volition, contact, and attention that help us "name" or designate objects. "Form" refers to the physical aspects of existence, internal and external.

28 The Buddha Shakyamuni explains how the world of illusion comes into being from adding understanding to understanding. See part 4 in *The Śūraṅgama Sutra: A New Translation*, trans. BTTS (Ukiah, CA: BTTS, 2009), 141-150.

You think:

*No one else has explained this principle this way.*

Well, now someone has. These six senses just come from your wanting to understand.

When you want to understand, then the six sense faculties come into being. They are the eye-faculty, ear-faculty, nose-faculty, tongue-faculty, body-faculty, and mind-faculty.

But what do you know—  
the more you want to understand, the more confused you get;  
the more confused you get, the more you don't understand.

So these are the six sense entryways, and you use them to *enter*.  
Take a look! When you don't understand, you want to go and touch things.

This touching is just contact.

*[with energy:]*

You go around trying to touch everything:  
north, south, east, west, up, and down,  
just like a fly madly bouncing off the walls.

Why is it bouncing around?  
Because it wants to understand.

You haven't heard anyone explain it like this before, right? There is no fixed way of explaining the Dharma. If the explanation makes sense, then I explain it that way.

*Contact* is just touching.

We go around bumping and crashing into things, wanting to understand, and what do you know, we have a sensation of pain.

With contact, there is *feeling*.

“Ow, that hurts!” or “Ahh, I’m so free of worries. I didn’t smash into anything, so I’m really comfortable.” The moment you crash into something, you are no longer comfortable.

“No one said anything bad about me, so I’m really happy. Someone criticized me, I’m no longer happy.”

Take a look! Feeling is right here; not someplace outside. Don’t go looking for it outside.

Once there is feeling, then *craving* comes into being.

When there is a pleasant sensation or  
the situation goes your way, you crave more of it.

When there is an unpleasant sensation or  
the situation goes against you, you hate it.

And when you hate it, you get upset!

Why is there happiness? Why is there unhappiness?

It is just because there is craving and hatred. Hatred is just something you don’t like, something you despise, and so your troubles grow day by day.

**They see spring’s blooms decay in fall;**

**They know the twelve dependent links.**

In spring, everything grows and prospers. At this time, the Solitary Sages contemplate:

In spring, observe how the myriad flowers bloom.

In autumn, watch how the yellow leaves decay.

The Solitary Sage realizes that everything undergoes a natural process of birth and death; that’s how he contemplates the twelve links of dependent origination.

Why are people not peaceful?

The reason is craving.

Once there is craving, there is aversion—the things we detest.

With craving, *grasping* comes into being.

What is meant by grasping?

It means wanting to get hold of something. Because we have craving, we then want to obtain those objects in order to fulfill our desires.

Why do we want to fulfill our desires?

Because we want to possess something.

Therefore, with grasping, there is *becoming*.

This becoming is just taking something as “mine.”

With this “mine,” then there is *birth*.

With birth, then there is *old age and death*.

These are the twelve links of dependent origination that the Solitary Sages observe.



聲聞衆僧  
不論男女  
四諦觀行  
隱實示權



# The Dharma Realm of Voice Hearers

*The Noble Sangha of Voice Hearers,  
Both women and men alike,  
Observe and practice the Four Truths;  
Disguised, they teach to suit each time.*

## The Noble Sangha of Voice Hearers,

There are Voice Hearers<sup>29</sup> of the first, second, third, and fourth stages.<sup>30</sup> These stages are further divided into those on the path to realization and those who have already realized it, thus making eight:

1. those on the path to the first stage;
2. those who have realized the first stage;
3. those on the path to the second stage;
4. those who have realized the second stage;
5. those on the path to the third stage;
6. those who have realized the third stage;
7. those on the path to the fourth stage;
8. those who have realized the fourth stage.

Voice Hearers are also called Arhats.<sup>31</sup> They have many spiritual powers, such as flying and the ability to transform. But those who realize a stage of awakening do not go around saying: “Do you know who has realized a stage of awakening? I have, I am an Arhat!”

This is simply not done.<sup>32</sup>

When sages who have realized a stage of awakening walk, their feet do not touch the ground. They might appear to be walking on the ground, but in fact, they are walking on air, so that when they walk through mud, their shoes remain clean.

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29 Voice Hearers (Skt. *shravaka*, Ch. *shengwen* 聲聞) refers to the Buddha’s disciples who had an awakening after hearing the Buddha’s teachings.

30 These four stages are often referred to as 1) Stream-enterer (Skt. *srotapanna*), 2) Once-returner (Skt. *sakridagamin*), 3) Non-returner (Skt. *anagamin*), and 4) Arhat.

31 Arhat is used differently in different contexts. Sometimes it refers to all the four stages of realization, while in other contexts it exclusively refers to the fourth stage.

32 The teaching that awakened beings do not claim to be awakened is an extremely important principle. A truly awakened teacher would not advertise himself or herself, but only lets others know of their awakening at the end of their lives in private. See *The Sūraṅgama Sutra: A New Translation*, trans. BTTS (Ukiah, CA: BTTS, 2009), 275.



For example, Great Master Fashun was a sage.<sup>33</sup> Once when he was crossing the Yellow River, the river parted and the current stopped. He walked across the river without his shoes getting the least bit dirty. This ability to walk on air is one sign of an awakened being. It is not a matter of claiming, “I have attained a stage of awakening.”

*[Master Hua says with humor:]*

One of my disciples is quite clever. I asked him, “Has your practice produced any fruit of awakening?”

“I have realized a *water-fruit!*” he said.<sup>34</sup>

“So you realized the *fruition of water*, then you must be able to walk on water and have absolutely no fear of water right?”

Voice Hearers of the first stage have ended delusions based on views.<sup>35</sup> Those of the second stage have ended a portion of the delusions based on thought.<sup>36</sup> Those of the third have ended a larger portion of these

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33 Great Master Fashun (557–640), also known as Great Master Dushun, was the founder of the Avatamsaka School (*huayan zong* 華嚴宗) in China and considered a transformation of Manjushri Bodhisattva. See “Bodhi Seal of the Patriarchs,” *Vajra Bodhi Sea*, no. 32 (November 1972).

34 The disciple is making a pun on the Chinese word for *fruit* which also is used to denote the stages of an Arhat; hence, sometimes the stages are translated as the first, second, third, and fourth fruition. “Water-fruit” is the word-for-word translation of the Chinese *shuiguo* 水果, which simply means “fruit.” The pun in English might go like this. Master Hua asks: “Are you awake?” Disciple: “Yes, I woke up this morning.”

35 The first stage Arhat or stream-enterer has a penetrating moment of insight into the Four Noble Truths, so that they “enter the stream of the sages.” Because of this vision, they remove the *delusions based on views*, which have ten aspects: greed, hatred, delusion, arrogance, doubt, and five wrong views. These ten are also further classified into eighty-eight delusions based on views. See entry “eighty-eight deluded viewpoints,” in *Buddhism A to Z*, compiled by Ronald B. Epstein (Burlingame, CA: BTTS, 2003), 69. The stream-enterer will also realize the fourth stage of Arhatship within seven lives and not fall into the three lower realms of animals, ghosts, and hell-beings.

36 The second stage Arhat has removed the *delusions based on thought*, which are subtle habitual mental activities that develop from birth based on wrong view.

delusions. Those of the fourth stage have ended all the delusions based on thought.

But they have not ended the delusions that are like fine particles and grains of sand, which are removed by Bodhisattvas. Even Bodhisattvas at the stage of Equal Enlightenment still have the subtle ignorance regarding arising phenomena, which keeps them from realizing Buddhahood. Only when all ignorance is removed does one become a Buddha.

What do Voice Hearers at each of the four stages cultivate?

They cultivate the Four Noble Truths:

1. suffering,
2. the cause of suffering,
3. the cessation of suffering, and
4. the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

After realizing Buddhahood, Buddha Shakyamuni went to Deer Park to teach the people who were to become the first five Bhikshus: Venerable Ajnatakaundinya, Venerable Ashvajit, Venerable Bhadraka, Venerable Vashpa, and Venerable Mahanaman. These five Bhikshus were, in fact, the Buddha's relatives who had followed him to cultivate the path to awakening.

But some of them could not endure the hardship. While practicing in the Himalayas, Buddha Shakyamuni became as thin as a stick because he ate only one sesame seed and one grain of wheat each day. Three of his followers found this unbearable and fled in hunger, and only two remained.

Later on the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, a maiden from the heavens offered some milk porridge to Buddha Shakyamuni, and he accepted it. At that point, the two remaining followers left as well, not because they couldn't stand the hardship, but because they felt that the Buddha did not know how to cultivate. They said, "You are

supposed to be practicing asceticism, yet you ate milk porridge. Clearly you cannot endure difficulty and are not ascetic!” So they left as well. All five of them ended up in Deer Park.

After Shakyamuni became a Buddha, he first spoke the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. However, ordinary people could not hear it. Hence he taught the provisional teachings as a skillful way to access the real teachings. These are collected in the *Agamas*.<sup>37</sup>

The Buddha thought, “Who should I teach?” Then he recalled, “Previously I had five fellow practitioners who supported my Dharma practice. I should teach them first because in the past I vowed that when I became a Buddha, I would first teach those who had slandered me, killed me, or treated me badly.”

Who treated the Buddha the worst?

If you’ve read the *Vajra Sutra*, you’ll know about King Kali. In the formative stage of his practice, when Buddha Shakyamuni was an ascetic master cultivating patience, King Kali had chopped off his limbs.

Why did King Kali do this?

In that life, Buddha Shakyamuni was an old cultivator who lived in the mountains, practicing asceticism. His body was covered with a

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37 In China, the Buddha’s teachings are classified by five different teaching periods: 1) Avatamsaka Period, 2) Agama Period, 3) Vaipulya Period, 4) Prajna Period, and 5) Lotus-Nirvana Period. The *Agama* teachings correspond to many of the suttas found in the Pali Canon. These teachings are also seen as preparing a practitioner for the teachings of the other periods.

The *Avatamsaka* teaching describes the various Bodhisattva stages, as well as reality based on the Buddha’s vision. The *Agama* teachings contain the instructions for the Solitary Sages and Voice Hearers. The *Agamas* are then expanded into the *Vaipulya* teachings, which are followed by the *Prajna* teachings on wisdom and emptiness. In the *Lotus-Nirvana* teachings, near the end of his life, the Buddha revealed that his intent all along was to guide all beings to realize Buddhahood.

thick layer of dust and dirt.

One day, King Kali took his wives and concubines along with him on a deer hunt. Although the women accompanied the king into the mountains, they had no interest in hunting. Instead, they were more interested in having a good time, so they went sightseeing on their own. As they were strolling around, they saw a strange creature that they had never seen before.

What did they see?

The creature had eyebrows that were three inches long and hair that was two feet long. Its face seemed to have never been washed, for the dirt caked on it was extremely thick. The dirt on its clothing was also at least an inch thick. When these women saw it, they could not figure out what it was.

They screamed, “Aah! It’s a monster! It’s a monster! Escape! Escape!”

“You don’t have to leave. I’m not a monster,” the cultivator replied.

“It can speak!” they gasped.

One of the braver ones asked him, “What are you doing here?”

“I’m cultivating.”

“What do you mean by ‘cultivating’?”

“I’m cultivating in order to become a Buddha.”

Then he taught them the Dharma, and they grew friendlier and expressed their concern: “Oh, you endure so much hardship here. What do you eat?”

“I eat whatever there is—grass roots and tree leaves. I don’t leave the mountain to look for food.”

The women's fears vanished with time. One of them reached out to touch his eyebrows; another touched his hands; and yet a third patted his face. It was like they had met a cherished item and so they all wanted to be close to him.

Meanwhile King Kali had finished hunting and was looking for his wives. After searching around, he saw them gathered around something. He thought, "What are these women up to?" So he walked lightly and slowly toward them, not making a sound.

When he was close enough, he saw his wives and concubines talking to a very strange man. What's more, one was touching his hands and another was patting his feet! Seeing them acting so friendly, the king immediately grew jealous and eavesdropped on their conversation.

When he realized that the man was talking about cultivating the Way, the king bellowed in a rage, "You! Stop lying to my women! What kind of Way are you cultivating?!"

"I'm cultivating patience," the cultivator replied.

"Oh, and just what do you mean by *patience*?!"

"I will not have a thought of ill will toward anyone, even if they scold me or hit me."

"Sure, you can lie to my women if you wish. They believe you. But I don't believe your lies! So you say you can be patient?"

"Of course, that's the truth!"

"Oh, that's the truth?! Then let me give you a test!" The king then drew his sword and chopped off the old cultivator's hand. "I've just chopped off your hand. Do you hate me?"

"No, no anger at all."

“Bah! You don’t hate me? Then you really are some great practitioner! I don’t believe your lies! You harbor hatred in your heart, while you say you don’t hate me. Liar! I’m smarter than that—you think you can fool me?!” King Kali continued, “All right, since you claim you can be patient and have no hatred, then let’s see what happens when I chop off your other hand!”

After chopping off the cultivator’s other hand, the king asked, “Now do you hate me?”

“No, I still do not have any anger,” replied the cultivator.

The king then chopped off the cultivator’s feet as well, so that all of the cultivator’s four limbs were dismembered. He screamed at the cultivator, “Do you hate me now?!”

“No, I still do not have a thought of anger,” the cultivator said peacefully. “In fact, not only do I not hate you, but when I realize Buddhahood, I vow to save you first.”

These were the circumstances that caused the Buddha to make this vow to save the king.

At that time, the *devas*, dragons, and the rest of the eightfold spiritual pantheon,<sup>38</sup> as well as the good spirits that protect the Dharma got angry and caused a massive storm with a heavy downpour.

The cultivator continued, “I truly do not hate you. What proof do I have? If I hate you at all, my four limbs, which you chopped off, will

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38 The eightfold spiritual pantheon consists of 1) *devas* (gods), 2) *nagas* (dragons), 3) *yakshas* (speedy ghosts), 4) *gandharvas* (incense spirits), 5) *asuras*, 6) *garudas* (huge golden-winged birds), 7) *kinraras* (musical spirits), and 8) *mahoragas* (great snake-spirits).

The Buddha describes these spiritual beings as part of everyday existence; however, due to craving and attachment, we obstruct our natural ability to perceive them. The Buddha cautions practitioners not to seek after or be afraid of spiritual abilities. Otherwise, we can get attached and then these abilities becomes an obstructions to the spiritual path. The teaching is to take the extraordinary as ordinary.

not be restored just as they were before. If I do not harbor any hatred in my heart, then my hands and feet will be restored. If my hands and feet are restored, then that is proof that I do not have any hatred. If I have any hatred at all, then this will not happen.”

Whereupon the old cultivator became whole again.

Having witnessed King Kali cutting off the cultivator’s hands and feet in such a cruel manner, the spirits that protect the Dharma used their spiritual powers to pelt the king with hailstones. Seeing the great spiritual powers of the old cultivator, the king then realized he had made a grave mistake, and he knelt and repented before the cultivator.

In response, the cultivator repeated his vow, “If I do not become a Buddha, then there is nothing to be said. But if one day I do, I will save you first. If you do not wake up and become a Buddha, I will not become a Buddha either.”

In this story, the Buddha Shakyamuni was just this old cultivator, and Ajnatakaundinya was King Kali. Because of his past vow to save the person who treated him the worst, the Buddha went to Deer Park to teach Ajnatakaundinya first.

After hearing this story, we should all vow that after becoming Buddhas, we will first save those who treated us badly. We shouldn’t think, “You’ve been so mean to me, I’m going to send you to the hells after I become a Buddha.” Don’t make this kind of vow.

When the Buddha went to Deer Park and taught the Four Noble Truths, he turned the Dharma Wheel<sup>39</sup> three times for the five Bhikshus.

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39 The Dharma Wheel (Skt. *dharmachakra*, Ch. *falun* 法輪) symbolizes the teachings of the Buddha and is often depicted with eight spokes to represent the Noble Eightfold Path, the path leading to the cessation of suffering. This teaching can be found in the sutra titled: *Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma* (Skt: *Dharmachakrapravartana*).

At the first turning, he said:

This is suffering; its nature is oppressive.

This is the cause of suffering; its nature is provoking.

This is the cessation of suffering; it can be realized.

This is the path leading to the cessation of suffering;  
it can be cultivated.<sup>40</sup>

At the second turning, he said:

This is suffering; you should know it.

This is the cause of suffering; you should end it.

This is the cessation of suffering; you should realize it.

This is the path leading to the cessation of suffering;  
you should cultivate it.

At the third turning, he said:

This is suffering; I know it for myself and need not know it again.

This is the cause of suffering;

I have ended it and need not end it again.

This is the cessation of suffering;

I have realized it and need not realize it again.

This is the path leading to the cessation of suffering;

I have cultivated it and need not cultivate it again.

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40 The Four Noble Truths are the Buddha's diagnosis and prescription for the illnesses of the human condition. The first truth is the diagnosis that there is stress, suffering, or dissatisfaction. In the second noble truth, the Buddha gives a key insight where he identifies the cause of suffering as craving. Suffering and dissatisfaction do not come from "not getting what we want," but rather from the "want" itself. True freedom is the Buddha's third noble truth: suffering can come to an end by letting go of craving. Finally, in the fourth noble truth, the Buddha's prescription is to practice the Noble Eightfold Path: 1) right understanding, 2) right aspiration, 3) right speech, 4) right action, 5) right livelihood, 6) right effort, 7) right mindfulness, and 8) right concentration.



After the Buddha turned the Dharma Wheel of the Four Noble Truths three times,<sup>41</sup> he said to Ajnatakaundinya, “Since you are troubled by afflictions that are like ‘visitors’ and ‘dust,’ you have not realized liberation.” When Ajnatakaundinya heard the words “visitor” and “dust,” he became enlightened.

What is the “visitor”? The visitor is simply not the host.

What is the “dust”? The dust is just all that is not pure.

Our inherent nature is the host. Our inherent nature is pure.

Through insight into this teaching, Ajnatakaundinya awoke and received the name Ajnata, which means “one who understands the fundamental truth.”

If we investigate the Four Noble Truths, we will find them to be infinite and inexhaustible.

**The Noble Sangha of Voice Hearers,  
Both women and men alike,**

The noble disciples of Voice Hearers consist of both women and men. Enlightenment is not only limited to men; women are included as well. They can all become Voice Hearers and Arhats. An example of a female Voice Hearer would be Dharma Master Kumarajiva’s mother, who became a third stage Arhat.

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41 The Buddha’s first turning of the Four Noble Truths is descriptive (i.e., these truths are simply describing things as they are), the second turning is exhortative (i.e., these truths should be realized for oneself), and the third turning is confirmative (i.e., these truths are known directly and not just taken on faith). The three turnings of the Four Noble Truths are sometimes referred to as the truths in their twelve aspects.

The three turnings present the Four Noble Truths not as an abstract principle or dogma, but as a dynamic process of cultivation. The Buddha did not want his teaching to be purely intellectual; rather, conceptual understanding informs practice, which culminates in a direct knowing for oneself.

## Observe and practice the Four Truths;

Voice Hearers contemplate and cultivate the Four Noble Truths: suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering. They are aware of suffering, know the cause of suffering, aim for the cessation of suffering, and cultivate the path. They practice according to the Four Noble Truths.

## Disguised, they teach to suit each time.

You see them as Voice Hearers, but in reality some of them are great Bodhisattvas who appear in disguise as Voice Hearers to teach the provisional, expedient teaching.<sup>42</sup>

“Disguised” means that they disguise their real merit and virtue.

“Teach to suit each time” means that they use skillful methods to teach living beings appropriately.

You should not look down on Voice Hearers, thinking that they are Small Vehicle practitioners.<sup>43</sup> Some of them are Great Vehicle<sup>44</sup>

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42 After his awakening, the Buddha realized that in order to teach living beings he needed to use *skillful* or *expedient means* (Skt. *upaya*, Ch. *fang bian* 方便) because they would not otherwise understand the true essence of his awakening. Instead of immediately teaching the *complete teachings* (Ch. *yuan jiao* 圓教), he taught the *provisional teachings* (Ch. *quan jiao* 權教), which were given based on the potentials and aspirations of the student.

43 Small Vehicle (Skt. *Hinayana*, Ch. *xiao cheng* 小乘) refers to the Solitary Sage and Voice Hearer Vehicles mentioned here and in the previous Dharma Realm. These sages make the resolve to end their suffering in *samsara*. However, they do not make the resolve to become a Buddha. This vehicle is considered small because the focus is on self-liberation rather than the liberation of all beings.

44 Great Vehicle (Skt. *Mahayana*, Ch. *da cheng* 大乘) refers to the Bodhisattvas who make the resolve to become Buddhas. The vehicle is great because it carries all living beings to awakening. The Bodhisattvas, as explained by Master Hua before, must perfect the six perfections and the myriad practices of a Bodhisattva. The Buddha Shakyamuni was one who walked the Bodhisattva path to become a Buddha.

*The Dharma Realm of Voice Hearers*

Bodhisattvas who appear among those who practice the Small Vehicle in order to urge them to turn from the small and go toward the great. “Disguised, they teach to suit each time.”

This is the Dharma Realm of Voice Hearers.



天梵欲六  
善十戒五  
因漏有種  
斷難迴輪

# The Dharma Realm of Devas

*Six Desire Heavens and the Brahma Realm  
Come from five precepts and ten good deeds;  
There, devas plant seeds, but still outflow,  
So samsara's rounds do not cease.*

## Six Desire Heavens and the Brahma Realm

First of all there are the Six Desire Heavens, which are the heavens of the Desire Realm. There are heavens in the Desire Realm, the Form Realm, and the Formless Realm—in each of the Three Realms. The Six Desire Heavens consists of the Heaven of the Four Kings, the Trayastrimsha Heaven, the Suyama Heaven, the Tushita Heaven, the Heaven of Delight in Their Own Creations, and the Heaven of Delight in Others' Creations.

Our world is located under the first of the six heavens of the Desire Realm, the Heaven of the Four Kings. This heaven, which is directly above us, is governed by these celestial kings. It is situated halfway up Mount Sumeru, which means that half of Mount Sumeru is within the human realm, while the other half is above the Heaven of Four Kings.

Why are they called the Four Kings?

There is one king for each direction of Mount Sumeru: east, west, north, and south. They govern the four continents that make up our world: Purvavideha to the east, Jambudvipa to the south, Aparagodaniya to the west, and Uttarakuru to the north. If we were to go into detail, this discussion would never end.

How long is the lifespan of the *devas* in this heaven?

They have a life span of 500 years, but that's not the same as 500 years on Earth. One day and night in that heaven is equal to fifty years on Earth. Figure it out, how many years on Earth is 500 years in the Heaven of the Four Kings? One of their days is fifty human years. How many human years is 365 of their days? If you know math, you can figure it out.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The lifespan of these *devas* would be 9,125,000 human years.

(500 *deva* years × 365 *deva* days / 1 *deva* year × 50 human years / 1 *deva* day)

The second heaven in the Desire Realm is the Trayastrimsha Heaven, which is a Sanskrit word that means “thirty-three.”

Why is it called the Heaven of the Thirty-Three?

There is a central heaven where Shakra resides, which is surrounded by eight heavens in each direction—north, south, east, and west, making thirty-three heavens in all.

Shakra, also known as Indra, is mentioned in the Shurangama Mantra line that contains *yin tuo la ye*. He is also the God who is revered in Christianity, as well as the Jade Emperor who is honored by the Chinese. The *Classic of History*<sup>46</sup> refers to him as the Supreme Lord and says:

Observe the rites of purity and wash clean the body  
In order to worship the Supreme Lord.

In ancient China no one knew about the Buddha; they knew only about the Supreme Lord.

In the Shang Dynasty, in the annual sacrificial offering to Heaven, the Emperor Tang named Lu used a black bull as an offering to the Supreme Lord and said:

I, Lu, an insignificant person, presume to use this black bull  
In venturing to make known to the exalted Supreme Lord:  
If I have offenses, they are not the people's, and  
If the people have offenses, the offenses rest with me.

The ancient sages reproached themselves in this way, unlike people of today who clearly know that they are in the wrong but say, “Don’t

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<sup>46</sup> *The Classic of History*, or the *shu jing* 書經, is one of the Five Classics of ancient Chinese literature. It documents ancient Chinese history (~2100–621 BCE) and contains various emperors’ speeches and activities. This text has greatly influenced Chinese culture on the qualities of a good ruler and a good person.

look at me! It's his fault! How can you blame me?" or "God is unjust. Why does he give wealth to others and make me so poor? Why does he bestow honor on some and leave me so pitiful?" They curse heaven and blame people, looking for faults in others instead of admitting what they had done wrong. In contrast, the ancient sages always acknowledged their own mistakes.

The third heaven is the Suyama Heaven. Suyama is a Sanskrit word which means "time period." In this heaven, the *devas* are so happy that they sing songs about their bliss day and night. They sing, "How happy I am! I'm so happy!" They are joyful throughout the six periods of the day and night. Hence the name of this heaven is translated as "periods of time."

The fourth heaven is the Tushita Heaven, which means "joyful contentment." Since they are always content, they are constantly happy. So from morning until night, they are completely free of worries and afflictions.

The fifth heaven is Heaven of Delight in Their Own Creations.<sup>47</sup> These *devas* delight in the objects they create for themselves. Whatever they like, they can make appear or transform from something else. They are also always happy and content, even in unhappy situations. Their creative powers can bring them happiness regardless of the situation.

The sixth of the Desire Heavens is the Heaven of Delight in Others' Creations.<sup>48</sup> The *devas* of this heaven have no happiness of their own. However, they can steal the happiness from *devas* in the other heavens for their own enjoyment. Many demons live in this heaven along with their followers.

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47 Skt. *nirṇāṇarati*, Ch. *hua le tian* 化樂天.

48 Skt. *paranirmitavashavartin*, Ch. *tahua zizai tian* 他化自在天.



Why do they steal others' happiness?

Because they are unreasonable. They are just like the thieves in our world of which many come from this heaven. When these *devas* become people, they become robbers that still have the habit of stealing money from others. So in this heaven, the *devas* simply take others' things for their own enjoyment.

The Brahma Heavens are in the Form Realm. These include the Heaven of Great Brahma, the Heaven of Brahma's Ministers, and the Heaven of Brahma's Followers.<sup>49</sup>

*Devas of the Six Desire and Brahma Heavens*

### **Come from five precepts and ten good deeds.**

Because these *devas* cultivated the five precepts<sup>50</sup> and the ten good deeds,<sup>51</sup> they obtained the blessings and rewards of the heavens. But these good deeds still have outflows,<sup>52</sup> so the verse says:

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49 Skt. *mahabrahma*, *brahmapurohita*, and *brahmakayika*; Ch. *dafan tian* 大梵天, *fanfu tian* 梵輔天, and *fanzhong tian* 梵眾天. These heavens correspond to various states of meditative concentration. See *Buddhism A to Z* for more details.

50 The five precepts consist of 1) not killing, 2) not stealing, 3) not committing sexual misconduct, 4) not lying, and 5) not taking intoxicants. Buddhist practitioners can request to receive these precepts formally as a vow that they then uphold. These precepts are the foundation for spiritual practice. (See footnote 17 for a detailed discussion on the perfection of precepts.)

51 The ten good deeds are 1) no killing, 2) no stealing, 3) no sexual misconduct, 4) no lying, 5) no divisive speech, 6) no harsh speech, 7) no frivolous speech, 8) no greed, 9) no hatred, and 10) no delusion.

52 Outflow (Skt. *asrava*, Ch. *you lou* 有漏) literally means a “leak” or “flowing out” that an awakened being puts an end to. There are usually three outflows: 1) outflow of sensuality, 2) outflow of existence, and 3) outflow of ignorance. Doing good deeds with outflows is like trying to put water in a leaky bucket. No matter how much water we put into it, the bucket never gets full. For example, if we practice giving with an expectation to be rewarded in the future, then our practice of giving has outflows. The ideal is to give without any attachments or expectations, which ultimately allows us to become free of the conditioned realm.

**There, devas plant seeds, but still outflow,**

Or in other words, they plant the causes for future results that have outflows.

*[Master Hua recites the last line of verse for the Dharma Realm of Humans]*

“There’s no one else to blame at all.”

The seeds we plant have nothing to do with anyone else but ourselves. We are ultimately responsible for our future destinations.

It’s really not easy to explain the Dharma and sutras. Right now I am speaking directly without taking time to think.

Therefore, some of you are thinking:

*Our teacher recited the wrong line of the verse!*

Although you do not say it out loud, you have this thought in your mind. But strangely enough, I received your telegram as soon as you had that thought.

So I’ll correct the last line; it should be:

**So samsara’s rounds do not cease.**<sup>53</sup>

Am I right this time? Did you think to yourselves that I said it wrong?

*[Disciple: “Yes.”]*

*[Master Hua laughs]*

More than one of you had that thought. Be honest. Who else had this thought? If you aren’t straightforward and honest, then you will never realize the Way.

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<sup>53</sup> *Samsara* (Ch. *lun hui* 輪迴) refers to the cycle of death and rebirth. Existence in the heavens, although long by human standards, is still temporary. After the *devas* use up their blessings from doing good deeds with outflows, they are reborn into the other realms of existence. Unlike the sages, they have not left the cycle of death and rebirth.





修羅性暴  
有福無權  
好勇鬥狠  
浮沉業牽



# The Dharma Realm of Asuras

*Asuras have violent natures;  
Possessed of blessings, but powerless,  
Daring and fierce, they love to fight.  
Their karma drags them up and down.*

*Asura* is a Sanskrit word that means “ugly.” Male *asuras* are extremely ugly, while the females are quite beautiful. It is the nature of the male *asuras* to initiate fights. The female *asuras* also like to fight, but they wage covert wars, unlike the overt physical battles of the males.

How do the female *asuras* fight?

They use weapons of the mind, such as jealousy, interference, ignorance, and affliction.

Sometimes this realm is included as one of the three good realms: *devas*, humans, and *asuras*. At other times it is listed as one of the four lower realms: hell-beings, hungry ghosts, animals, and *asuras*.

There are *asuras* in the realms of heavens, humans, animals, and hungry ghosts. *Asuras* are their own Dharma Realm, while at the same time they appear in the other ordinary realms as well. In general, no matter what realm they are in, they like to pick fights. They have bad tempers and want to have the final say. They like to be the boss giving orders, but they can’t stand taking orders. Although they want to control others, they don’t want to be controlled.

These are the characteristics of *asuras*.

If you haven’t noticed the *asuras* around us, I can tell you who they are. There are good and bad *asuras*. The good *asuras* include military officers and soldiers. Bad *asuras* are bandits, thieves, robbers, terrorists, murderers, and the like. We can see these types of people in the human realm.

There are also *asuras* in the heavens who constantly wage war against the armies of Shakra.<sup>54</sup> From morning till night, they strategize on how to defeat Shakra and take control of the throne in order to rule in his place. But no matter what tactics they use, they are always defeated

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54 These *asuras* in the heavens are sometimes translated as “titans,” alluding to Greek mythology where the Titans fought with the Olympian *devas* for Mt. Olympus.

because although they have the blessings to be in the heavens, they lack the authority of the *devas*.

Are there *asuras* in the animal realm?

Yes. Tigers, lions, and wolves are *asuras* among the animals. They oppress other animals and kill other animals for food. They prey on other animals because they have the nature of *asuras*. Snakes and eagles are also *asuras*. In general, *asuras* are impossible to reason with and have huge tempers. They are constantly blowing their tops.

*[Master Hua says with force in English:]*

Too much temper!

There are also *asuras* in the realm of hungry ghosts who go around oppressing the other ghosts. There are good ghosts and evil ghosts. The evil ghosts are utterly unreasonable. Ghosts are already intractable to begin with, but these evil *asura* ghosts are even worse. So the verse says:

**Asuras have violent natures;**

They have explosive tempers.

**Possessed of blessings, but powerless,**

They have the blessings of the heavens but lack the authority of the *devas*. They fight for power and dominance but fail to obtain them.

**Daring and fierce, they love to fight.**

They love to fight and wage wars. The modern world is actually a world of *asuras*—everyone is fighting and competing, trying to knock each other down and get the advantage.

*Asuras* are so belligerent that they can keep on fighting for one hundred, two hundred, three hundred, five hundred, or even a thousand years without getting tired.

With so much fighting and contention in the world now, we are in the Age of the Dharma's Ending.<sup>55</sup>

Even so, we must make vows:

We do not want the Dharma to end!

We want the Right Dharma to flourish!

Wherever we go, we want to transform our surroundings so that it becomes the Age of the Right Dharma!

If we make these vows, wherever we go will be a place of the Right Dharma. If everybody makes and fulfills these vows, then this Age of the Dharma's Ending will become the Age of the Right Dharma.

We can turn the situation around.

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55 There are Three Ages of Dharma in Buddhism: Right Dharma, Semblance Dharma, and Dharma's Ending.

1. The Age of the Right Dharma was the first 1,000 years after the Buddha's passing when his disciples were diligent in their practice and awakened to the Dharma.
2. The Age of the Semblance Dharma was the second period of time lasting 1,000 years. People are devoted to the external signs of the Dharma but not many have direct knowledge of the Dharma.
3. The Age of the Dharma's Ending is the third period of 10,000 years, when the Dharma is about to disappear and people like to fight and compete rather than cultivate. We are currently in this age.

Although the Three Ages are described in time periods, another way of understanding them is in the present moment. A thought of fighting is the Age of the Dharma's Ending; a thought of true practice is the Age of the Right Dharma. Similar to the ten Dharma Realms, the Three Ages are also not beyond a single thought in the mind.



**Their karma drags them up and down.**

*Asuras* may be born in the heavens, in the human realm, or in the realms of animals and hungry ghosts.

Dragged by the force of their karma,  
they become deluded and confused,  
create more karma, undergo the results of their actions,  
and then are born again due to the force of their karma.<sup>56</sup>

As cultivators, we must not be contentious, aggressive, or have a violent temper. Then we will be free of the *asura* realm.

If we study *asuras* in detail, we find that five of the nine Dharma Realms have *asuras*. In the animal realm, there are *asuras* among creatures that fly in the air, those on the land, and those in the water. Crocodiles are an instance of *asuras* in the water. Wild, aggressive stallions are *asuras* among horses. They bring trouble and disturbance to the herd. Most bulls are *asuras*. They butt their two horns against things to show their tough *asura* disposition. Dogs have even more of an *asura* nature. So those of you who own dogs are in close association with *asuras*. Being with *asuras* is dangerous because you might end up becoming an *asura* yourself!

Take care and do not end up going to the realm of *asuras*!

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<sup>56</sup> Karma is defined as intentional action of body, speech, and mind. Therefore, the force of karma is simply the habitual patterns that push us along into our next moment of existence. If the scope of time is expanded, then the power of karma is in our deep-seated habits that push us on from life to life. However, despite our conditioning, at every moment we have the opportunity to choose what karmic action to take. The Buddha's teachings give us the tools to take that opportunity rather than just be slaves to our habits.

It is also important to note that karma is not only negative, but can be classified as good, bad, mixed, and neither good nor bad. Good karma leads to a good rebirth, while bad karma leads to a bad rebirth. Mixed karma, a combination of good and bad actions leads to good and bad results. Finally, karma that is neither good nor bad comes from cultivating precepts, meditative stillness, and wisdom. This final type of karma has no outflows and leads to awakening.



人道和合  
功罪相間  
德升孽降  
豈有他焉



# The Dharma Realm of Humans

*Humanity's path is harmony,  
Our merits and offenses mixed up together;  
On good deeds we rise, evil make us fall,  
There is no one else to blame at all.*

The realm of *asuras* is dangerous, but what about the realm of people? The human realm is a mixture of good and bad.

**Humanity's path is harmony,**

Humans have a harmonious disposition and are capable of getting along with others.

**Our merits and offenses mixed up together;**

Those who become human beings are neither completely good nor completely bad. Those who are completely good are reborn in the heavens, while those who are thoroughly bad become animals, hungry ghosts, or fall into the hells.

We all have both merits and offenses. Either we have a great deal of merit and few offenses, or we have little merit and many offenses.

When we have a great deal of merit and few offenses,  
then we will be born into a rich and prominent family.

When we have little merit and many offenses,  
then we will be born into a poor and lowly family.

Between these two extremes are many different gradations.

Therefore, the verse says: "Our merits and offenses mixed up together."  
We have a bit of merit, and we have a few offenses.

Another way of describing merit and offenses is *yin* and *yang*, so we are not totally *yin* or totally *yang*.

Pure *yin*: we would be reborn as ghosts and not as human beings.

Pure *yang*: we would be reborn as *devas* and also not as human beings.

So, we as humans can ascend to the heavens or fall into the hells.

**On good deeds we rise, evil make us fall,**

If we do good and create merit, we rise.

If we do evil and commit offenses, then we fall.

**There is no one else to blame at all.**

Other people cannot force you to fall into the hells, make you a hungry ghost, or cause you to become an animal. It is entirely up to what you do. You reap what you sow. You yourself must endure the consequences of your own actions.

This is the human realm.



畜生好貪  
多而無厭  
將黑作白  
是非莫辨



# The Dharma Realm of Animals

*Animals feed greedily,  
Never knowing when to stop;  
Without concern for black or white,  
They don't distinguish wrong from right.*

The seven Dharma Realms discussed above are the better ones. If you like, you can try them out, but you shouldn't play around with these three remaining Dharma Realms. If you try these out, you may not be able to escape.

There is a Buddhist saying:

Once lost the human body is difficult to regain,  
Eons pass by before we escape the realms of pain.

Once you lose your human body, then perhaps even in ten thousand great eons you cannot become a human again. Therefore, losing your human body is very dangerous.

You cannot treat life casually as a game and just play around like you are just taking part in a show. Some people like to say, "Life is just a play," when they have not truly learned how to act in this play. Pretending that going to these realms of suffering is just a play is simply not seeing clearly—a delusion.

When we consider the Dharma Realm of animals, there are billions of animals of many varieties—flying, walking, crawling, or swimming—in the sky, on land, or in the water. The various birds and flying animals alone number in the millions, and land animals are not any less. There are millions of land animals ranging from small rodents to cows, horses, deer, and bears, to mighty elephants. In the water there are seals, water buffalo, and sea pigs—an immense variety of aquatic creatures.

We can never completely understand all the various species of animals. Even specialists who have doctorates in the areas of physics, chemistry, zoology, biology, and other fields have no way of knowing all the animal species in the world. If they know a thousand species, there may be a hundred more that they do not know. And if they already know eleven hundred, there may be another hundred that they do not know.



Although someone might claim to know them all, how can he or she be certain that there aren't more species not yet identified? It's impossible to be sure. We will never know all the species of animals. Even the number of all the different kinds of insects is hard to determine.

Seen in this way, wouldn't you say that this world is  
multifaceted and infinite,  
infinite and multifaceted?

Now where do all of these animals come from?

They come from just one word: greed!

**Animals feed greedily,**

Animals are very greedy. No matter what it is, the more the better, a little is not enough.

**Never knowing when to stop;**

No matter how much, they are never sated; they are blinded by their insatiable greed.

**Without concern for black or white,**

They can't tell that black is black. They say, "Oh, this is white!" They take what is black to be white. They have lost their ability to reason and just want to get more. It does not matter what it is, they want more of it. Some are even greedy for excrement, like dogs. The more excrement a dog eats, the more it likes it. People wonder how it can eat such filth, but the dog finds it more savory with every mouthful.

That's how they are—never satisfied, no matter how much they already have! This is an example of having no concern for black or white—they delight in something that is basically filthy. Greed can

extend even to the desire for more sickness. One sickness is not enough; they want two. When taking medicine, they want to take a little more—this is all just greed.

**They don't distinguish wrong from right.**

Animals can't distinguish between right and wrong because they lack the ability to reason.

How did they get that way?

Simply through greed. They become muddled, and ignorance envelops them so that they do not understand things clearly.

Therefore, we people do not want to be greedy. Monks and nuns should not be greedy for money.

But some say, "The more money the better!"

Such greed puts you in grave danger, and it is easy to become an animal as a result.

You say:

*Monks and nuns can't fall.*

Really, monastics can't fall? In fact, monastics who don't cultivate according to the Buddha's precepts fall even faster.

The ancients had a saying:

Many Buddhist and Daoist monastics wait  
At the entrance of hell's gate.

They are all waiting outside hoping to get in. The greedy Daoist priests and Buddhist monks and nuns are all at the gates of hell.

They say:

Quick! Send me to the hells!

Hurry up and let me come in!

It's a lot of fun inside!

They think the hells will provide good entertainment, so they go there.

But once they arrive, they realize it is not a fun place at all.



鬼類喜瞋  
昧果迷因  
無明顛倒  
日積月深



# The Dharma Realm of Ghosts

*The realm of ghosts thrives on anger,  
Confusing causes, blind to results;  
Their ignorance and delusion  
Grow deeper every day.*

Almost everyone has heard of ghosts, but not everyone believes in them. Even some Buddhists do not believe that there are ghosts.

You ask:

*What are ghosts?*

Ghosts are masses of *yin* energy.

Sometimes they appear

as a shadow with no form or

as a form with no shadow.

Perhaps you have seen a dark shadow, but when you looked closer it disappeared. Perhaps you have seen what looked like a person, but then that form vanished in the blink of an eye. These phenomena are not easy to understand.

Ghosts are another realm in the ten Dharma Realms. There are as many different kinds of ghosts as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River. Some ghosts are affluent and powerful and reign as kings over the ghost realms. However, some are poverty-stricken and devoid of authority—it is often the poor ghosts who bother people and go about causing trouble. If you want to know how many kinds of ghosts there are, work hard on your cultivation, open the five eyes, and develop the six spiritual powers, and then you'll know.

As for people who say there are no ghosts, I tell them that if there are no ghosts, then there are also no Buddhas, people, or animals, because animals are transformed from ghosts, and so are people, *asuras*, and so forth. The same applies to *devas*, Arhats, Solitary Sages, Bodhisattvas, and Buddhas.

Why is this?

The ten Dharma Realms are not beyond a single thought.

A single thought creates the ten Dharma Realms.

By conducting yourself like a ghost,  
you fall into the realm of ghosts.

Acting like a person,  
you come to the realm of humans.

Behaving like an asura,  
you join the ranks of the *asuras*.

Assuming the practice of an Arhat,  
you enter the realm of Arhats.

Behaving like a Solitary Sage,  
you become a Solitary Sage.

Doing the deeds of a Bodhisattva,  
you join the followers of Bodhisattvas.

Performing the work of a Buddha,  
you realize Buddhahood.

If you commit hellish offenses,  
you fall into the hells.

All of this is brought about by the one thought that is presently in your mind. Therefore we say that the ten Dharma Realms are within a single thought.

**The realm of ghosts thrives on anger,**

Ghosts explode into a fiery rage easily and like to harbor hatred. When they are mistreated, they get angry, and even when treated well, they still get angry.

What do they like best?

Giving others trouble.

If you treat them well, they bring you trouble.

If you treat them badly, they also give you trouble.

There is a Chinese folk saying:

You burn incense to invoke the ghosts.

People light incense to worship the ghosts. Before you've worshipped the ghosts, they don't bother you, but once you make their acquaintance, the ghosts become a problem. They make you sick or give you some other trouble.

Confucius said:

Respect the ghosts and spirits, but keep them at a distance.

It is wise to be respectful to the ghosts and spirits, but you do not want to get too close to them. Keep them at a distance.

**Confusing causes, blind to results;**

Ghosts don't understand cause and effect. As a result, they can't tell good from bad.

If you plant a good cause, you will reap a good result;

if you plant a bad cause, you will reap a bad result.

Plant melons and you get melons;

plant beans and you'll get beans.

Ghosts don't understand this. They plant eggplant and anticipate eating hot peppers, or they plant hot peppers and think they will harvest cucumbers. Since they have no comprehension of cause and effect, they act recklessly and create chaos.

**Their ignorance and delusion**

**Grow deeper every day.**

They accumulate a lot of confused karma every day.

The more bad karma they create, the deeper their ignorance grows.

The deeper their ignorance grows, the more bad karma they create.

Therefore as time passes, their ignorance and delusion gradually grow deeper day by day.







地獄憂苦  
無門自鑽  
起惑造業  
受報循環



# The Dharma Realm of the Hells

*The hells are filled with misery and pain;*

*There are no doors, yet we drill on in;*

*Deluded, we create karma,*

*And results follow in accord.*

The last Dharma Realm is the hells.

**The hells are filled with misery and pain;**

This is a miserable place. But if there is anyone who would like to take a trip to the hells, I can guarantee that you'll get there in no time.

How?

By being worried and depressed, you then go for a vacation in the hells. It is said:

Worry more and more—to the hells for a tour.  
Full of happiness and joy—even when old, still a boy.  
Cry and yell—make your gloomy room in hell.

If you get worried, you plant a seed in the hells. If you smile, you plant a seed in the heavens. There is another ancient saying:

Daoist immortals over the course of history,  
Came only from being happy and free of worry.

If you are depressed and worried all the time, you are actually traveling to the hells. But if you are happy and smile, you'll look young even if you are old. Crying and weeping is also quite a lot of trouble.

All in all, there is no happiness in the hells. They are full of suffering and distress.

**There are no doors, yet we drill on in;**

There are no doors to hell, yet you make a door for yourself into the hells. You just keep boring in. These hells are not like the jails that are built by people for holding criminals. If someone commits a crime, they are put into jail. However, the hells are not like this; you yourself force your way in.

If you have created the karmic results for the hells, then when you arrive at the hells, you will find yourself boring in where there is no entrance.

**Deluded, we create karma,**

Why do you end up in the hells?

Ignorance and afflictions make you deluded and confused. Lacking understanding, you create bad karma instead of good.

**And results follow in accord.**

When you create bad karma, you fall into the hells to undergo its results. These results have no beginning or end—an ongoing cycle. You receive the results for whatever karma you create; it is extremely precise, not the slightest bit off. This is known as the cycle of cause and results.



一心 十界  
念當 不離  
此念 能覺  
彼岸 立登



# Ten Realms

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## A Single Thought

*Ten Dharma Realms in a single thought,  
We find them only here and now;  
Awaken to this very thought:  
Just then we reach the other shore.*

Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Solitary Sages, and Voice Hearers are the four Dharma Realms of Sages.

*Devas*, humans, *asuras*, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell-beings are the six Dharma Realms of ordinary beings.

Together, they make up the ten Dharma Realms.

**Ten Dharma Realms in a single thought,  
We find them only here and now;**

Where do the ten Dharma Realms come from?  
They come from the present thought in our minds.

Right now, we are all humans in this world;  
however, this might not always be the case.

If we do good deeds, then we can continue as humans in the future.  
If we do bad deeds, then we cannot continue on in a human body.

Good deeds bring about good conditions.  
Bad deeds bring about bad conditions.

The good and bad conditions of our lives are completely up to the actions we take.

The ancients said:

Two paths: good and bad.  
Cultivation is good;  
Doing wrong is bad.

Cultivation is simply cultivating the Way. Doing wrong is just creating bad karma. They are metaphorically described as two roads you can walk on. You choose which path you want to take.



If you walk on the good path, then you will have good karma.  
If you walk on the bad path, then you will have bad karma.  
Right here are the good and bad seeds, the causes.

When you have good results, everything goes your way.  
When you have bad retribution, nothing goes your way.  
Right here are the good and bad fruits, the results.

Therefore, the ten Dharma Realms are not outside of your experience  
but are in this immediate thought.

**Awaken to this very thought:  
Just then we reach the other shore.**

What is the other shore?

Awakening—you are simply no longer confused.  
All your ignorance is gone—your Dharma-body appears.  
You immediately arrive at the other shore.  
This is simply *Maha Prajna Paramita*!

Therefore, as a human, if you choose to be a Buddha, you will become a Buddha; if you choose to be a human, you will be a human; if you choose to be a ghost, you will become a ghost; and if you choose to be an animal, you will become an animal. It is all a matter of which path you decide to take.

Don't look lightly on these verses: *The Ten Dharma Realms are Not Beyond a Single Thought*. One thousand years from now, many people may wake up simply by reading them. But this is in the future. Right now it remains to be seen if any of us will wake up.

We just don't know.



# Biographical Sketch of the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua



The Venerable Master Hsuan Hua (1918–1995), founder of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, was born into a poor family in a small village in Manchuria. He attended school for only two years before he had to return home to take care of his ailing mother. At home, he opened a free school for both children and adults who had even less opportunity than he did. Also as a young boy, he had his first encounter with death

and became aware of the impermanence of life. Upon learning that Buddhism had a method for ending the cycle of death and rebirth, he resolved to become a monk.

Although his mother supported his aspirations for becoming a monk, she asked him to stay at home until she passed away. Master Hua, as a filial son, took care of her until her passing when he was nineteen. Thereupon he entered monastic life under Venerable Master Chang Zhi at Three Conditions Monastery in Harbin. He then spent three years in solitary meditation beside his mother's grave.

Seeing firsthand the hungry and impoverished, he began to practice eating one meal a day, wishing that the food he did not eat would go to feed others. He also diligently studied the Buddhist scriptures, while maintaining a vigorous practice. He felt that both were needed to gain a balanced understanding of Buddhism. In 1948, he went to pay his respects to Chan Master Xuyun, who transmitted the Weiyang lineage of the Chan School to Master Hua.

In 1962, Master Hua came to the United States, and by 1968 he had established the Buddhist Lecture Hall in San Francisco, where he taught many young Americans. In 1969, five Americans resolved to become monastics and began the Buddhist monastic tradition in America. During the subsequent years, the Master trained and oversaw the ordination of hundreds of monks and nuns who came from all over the world to study with him.

Believing in the importance for Buddhists to ground themselves in the Buddha's teachings, Master Hua gave straightforward and practical commentaries on the sutras. He founded the Buddhist Text Translation Society in order to translate these texts into the various languages of the world.

Master Hua also had a lifelong commitment to education. He established a number of schools and exhorted educators and students to think of school not only as a place to learn a skill but as a place to develop virtue and character. He considered every place a classroom and every moment was an opportunity to learn and grow.

With an open heart, the Master welcomed people of diverse religious faiths and backgrounds. He once asked the exiled Roman Catholic leader Paul Cardinal Yubin if he would be “a Buddhist among the Catholics,” adding, “and I’ll be a Catholic among the Buddhists. If we work together we can bring peace among our religions.” Cardinal Yubin subsequently helped the Master found the Institute for World Religions. As a guest speaker at interfaith gatherings, the Master exhorted people to be true followers of their religious founder’s vision and not fight amongst themselves.

Master Hua was a wonderful storyteller with a great sense of humor, a kind father figure who gave encouragement when times were hard, and a strict teacher who held his disciples to high standards. Throughout his life, he hoped to serve as a bridge for others to walk on, so that they could go from confusion and suffering to wisdom and happiness.



# The Eight Guidelines of the Buddhist Text Translation Society

The Buddhist Text Translation Society (BTTS) is dedicated to making the Buddha's teachings available to Western readers in a form that can be directly applied to practice. In order to ensure that the translation process itself is done in the spirit of self-cultivation, Master Hua established Eight Guidelines for BTTS translators and volunteers.

1. A volunteer must free himself or herself from the motives of personal fame and profit.
2. A volunteer must cultivate a respectful and sincere attitude free from arrogance and conceit.
3. A volunteer must refrain from aggrandizing his or her work and denigrating that of others.
4. A volunteer must not establish himself or herself as the standard of correctness and suppress the work of others with his or her faultfinding.
5. A volunteer must take the Buddha-mind as his or her own mind.
6. A volunteer must use the wisdom of Dharma-Selecting Vision to determine true principles.
7. A volunteer must request Virtuous Elders in the ten directions to certify his or her translations.
8. A volunteer must endeavor to propagate the teachings by printing and distributing sutras, *shastras*, and *vinaya* texts when the translations are certified as being correct.





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# Dedication of Merit

May the merit from this practice  
Adorn all the Buddhas' Lands,  
Repay the kindness from above  
And rescue those in paths below.  
May all who see or hear of this  
Resolve upon Awakening,  
And when this body meets its end,  
Be born together in the Land of Bliss.

*One Thought—Ten Dharma Realms* is set in Gentium,  
a face designed by Victor Gaultney.  
The sans serif is Open Sans designed by Steve Matteson.  
The Chinese characters are set in Adobe Kaiti Std.