

LOTUS SUTRA: CHAPTER 23  
THE FORMER DEEDS OF THE MEDICINE KING BODHISATTVA

AT THAT TIME THE Bodhisattva Constellation King Flower spoke to the Buddha, saying, “World Honored One, how is it that the Bodhisattva Medicine King roams throughout the Saha world? World Honored One, Medicine King Bodhisattva has undertaken so many hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of nayutas of bitter practices, so difficult to practice.

“It would be excellent, World Honored One, if you would please explain a bit. On hearing this, all the gods, dragons, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kinnaras, mahoragas, humans, nonhumans, and so forth, and the Bodhisattvas who have come from other lands, as well as the assembly of Hearers, will rejoice. “

The Buddha then told the Bodhisattva Constellation King Flower, “Once, as many eons ago as there are grains of sand in limitless Ganges Rivers, there was a Buddha by the name of Virtue Pure and Bright Like the Sun and Moon, Thus Come One, One Worthy of Offerings, One of Right and Universal Knowledge, One Perfect in Clarity and Conduct, Well Gone One Who Understands the World, Unsurpassed Lord, Regulating Hero, Teacher of Humans and Gods, Buddha, World Honored One. That Buddha had eighty kotis of great Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas and a great assembly of Hearers, equal in number to the sand grains in seventy-two Ganges Rivers. His life span as a Buddha was forty-two thousand eons. The life spans of the Bodhisattvas were the same. In his country there were no women, hell-beings, hungry ghosts, animals, or asuras, and so forth, and also no difficulties. The ground was as level as the palm of one’s hand, made of vaidurya, adorned with jeweled trees, covered with jeweled nets, and hung with beautiful banners. It was surrounded everywhere with precious vases and censers. There were terraces made of the seven gems, one terrace for each tree, the trees being separated from the terraces by a distance of an arrow’s flight. Beneath each tree sat Bodhisattvas and Hearers. Upon each of the terraces were hundreds of kotis of gods playing heavenly music and singing praises to the Buddha as an offering.”

At that time that Buddha, for the sake of the Bodhisattva All Beings Delight in Seeing, as well as for the host of Bodhisattvas and the host of Hearers, spoke the Dharma Flower Sutra.

The Bodhisattva All Beings Delight in Seeing enjoyed practicing ascetic practices. Within the Dharma of the Buddha Virtue Pure and Bright Like the Sun and Moon, he applied himself with vigor, single-mindedly seeking Buddhahood for a full twelve thousand years. He then obtained the samadhi of the manifestation of all physical forms.

Having obtained this samadhi, his heart rejoiced greatly and he immediately thought, “I have obtained the samadhi of the manifestation of all physical forms. This is through the power of having heard the Dharma Flower Sutra. I should now make an offering to the Buddha Virtue Pure and Bright Like the Sun and Moon, and to the Dharma Flower Sutra.”

He then entered that samadhi, and as an offering to the Buddha, he rained down mandarava flowers and mahamandarava flowers from space. Finely ground, hard, black chandana also filled the sky and descended like clouds. And there rained the incense of ‘this shore’ chandana, six karshas of which are worth the entire Saha world, as an offering to the Buddha.

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Having made this offering he arose from samadhi. He thought to himself, “Although by means of spiritual powers I have made this offering to the Buddha, it is not as good as offering my body.” He then swallowed incense of many kinds chandana, kunduruka, turushka, prikka, aloeswood, and resin incense. He also drank the oil of champaka and other flowers for a full twelve hundred years. He smeared himself with fragrant oil, and in the presence of the Buddha Virtue Pure and Bright Like the Sun and Moon, he wrapped himself in heavenly jeweled robes and poured fragrant oil over himself. Then by means of spiritual penetration power and vows, he burned his own body. The light shone everywhere throughout worlds in number to the grains of sand in eighty kotis of Ganges Rivers.

Within them all, the Buddhas simultaneously praised him, saying, “Good indeed! Good indeed! Good man, this is true vigor. This is called a true Dharma offering to the Thus Come One. Offerings of flowers, incense, beads, burning incense, ground incense, paste incense, heavenly cloth, banners, canopies, ‘this shore’ chandana incense, and all such offerings of various kinds cannot come up to it. If one gave away one’s countries, cities, wives, and children, that also could not match it. Good man, this is called foremost giving. Among all gifts, it is the most honored and most supreme, because it is an offering of Dharma to the Thus Come Ones.” Having uttered these words, they became silent.

His body burned for twelve hundred years, after which time it was consumed.

When the Bodhisattva All Beings Delight in Seeing had made this Dharma offering and his life had come to an end, he was born again. In the country of the Buddha Virtue Pure and Bright Like the Sun and Moon, in the household of the King Pure Virtue, he was born suddenly by transformation, seated in full lotus.

He immediately spoke this verse to his father:

Your Majesty, you should now know:  
I, cultivating in that place,  
All at once attained  
The samadhi of the manifestation of all forms.  
Diligently practicing great vigor,  
I renounced the body I cherished  
As an offering to the World Honored One,  
In order to seek supreme wisdom.

Having spoken this verse, he said to his father, “The Buddha Virtue Pure and Bright Like the Sun and Moon is still present from of old. Formerly, after making an offering to that Buddha, I gained the dharani of understanding the speech of all living beings. I further heard the Dharma Flower Sutra with its eight hundred thousand myriads of kotis of nayutas of kankaras, vivaras, akshobhyas, and so forth of verses. Great King, I should now return and make offerings to this Buddha.”

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Just then he sat on a platform made of the seven treasures, rose up into space to the height of seven tala trees, went into the Buddha's presence, bowed with his head at the Buddha's feet, placed his ten fingers together, and spoke this verse in praise of the Buddha:

How amazing and rare the countenance,  
With its light shining in ten directions!  
I formerly made offerings  
To you whom I now behold once again.

When the Bodhisattva All Beings Delight in Seeing had spoken this verse, he then spoke to the Buddha, saying, "World Honored One! World Honored One! You are still in the world!"

The Buddha Virtue Pure and Bright Like the Sun and Moon told the Bodhisattva All Beings Delight in Seeing, "Good man, the time of my Parinirvana has arrived. The time for my passing into stillness has arrived. You can arrange my couch, for tonight I shall enter Parinirvana."

He further commanded the Bodhisattva All Beings Delight in Seeing, saying, "Good man, I entrust you, all the Bodhisattvas and great disciples, with the Buddhadharma and also with the Dharma of anuttarasam yaksambodhi. I also entrust to you the worlds of the seven treasures throughout the three thousand great thousand world systems, with their jeweled trees, jeweled terraces, and gods-in-waiting. After my passing into stillness, I also entrust you with all my sharira. You should distribute them and vastly make offerings to them. You should build several thousand stupas."

In this way, the Buddha Virtue Pure and Bright Like the Sun and Moon, having commanded the Bodhisattva All Beings Delight in Seeing, in the last watch of the night entered Nirvana.

Seeing the Buddha pass into stillness, the Bodhisattva was sorely grieved and longed for the Buddha. He then built a pyre of 'this shore' chandana incense as an offering to that Buddha's body and set it on fire. When the fire had consumed itself, he collected the sharira; made eighty-four thousand jeweled urns; and built eighty-four thousand stupas, three worlds in height, adorned with poles from which hung banners, canopies, and many jeweled bells.

The Bodhisattva All Beings Delight in Seeing then further thought to himself, "Although I have made this offering, my heart is not yet satisfied. I should now make further offerings to the sharira." He then spoke to the dragons, the yakshas, and so forth in the great assembly, saying, "All of you pay attention and bring your thoughts to one, for I am now going to make offerings to the sharira of the Buddha Virtue Pure and Bright Like the Sun and Moon." Having said that, in front of the eighty-four thousand stupas, as an offering he burned his arms, with their adornments of a hundred blessings, for seventy-two thousand years, thereby causing countless multitudes of hosts seeking to be Hearers and limitless asamkhyeyas of people to bring forth the resolve for anuttarasam yaksambodhi, and enabling them to dwell in the samadhi of the manifestation of all physical forms.

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At that time all the Bodhisattvas, gods, humans, asuras, and so forth, seeing him without arms, were smitten with grief and said, “The Bodhisattva All Beings Delight in Seeing is our teacher. He has taught and transformed us, but now his arms are burned off and his body deformed.”

Then the Bodhisattva All Beings Delight in Seeing made this vow amidst the great assembly, saying, “Having renounced both of my arms, I should certainly attain the Buddha’s golden-colored body. If this is true and not false, both of my arms should now be restored to as they were before.”

After he had made this vow, his arms were spontaneously restored. This came about through the purity and depth of this Bodhisattva’s blessings, virtue, and wisdom.

The three thousand great thousand world system then quaked in six ways. The heavens rained down jeweled flowers, and all the humans and gods gained what they had never had before.

The Buddha told the Bodhisattva Constellation King Flower, “What do you think? Was the Bodhisattva All Beings Delight in Seeing anyone else? He was just the present Medicine King Bodhisattva. Gifts of his body, such as this one, number in the limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of nayutas.

“Constellation King Flower! If a person who brings forth the resolve desiring to obtain anuttarasam yaksambodhi can burn off a finger or a toe as an offering to a Buddha stupa, his offering will surpass that of one who uses as offerings countries, cities, wives, and children or even the three thousand great thousand worlds with their mountains, forests, rivers, ponds, and precious objects.

“If, further, a person filled the three thousand great thousand world system with the seven treasures and offered it to the Buddha, to the great Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas, and Arhats, the merit and virtue that person would obtain would not be equal to that of one who receives and upholds even a single four-line verse of the Dharma Flower Sutra, for the latter’s blessings are greater by far.

“Constellation King Flower! Just as, for example, among all the streams, rivers, and bodies of water, the ocean is foremost, so, too, among all the Sutras spoken by the Thus Come One, the Dharma Flower Sutra is the deepest and greatest.

“Further, just as among Earth Mountain, Black Mountain, the Lesser Iron Ring Mountain, the Greater Iron Ring Mountain, the Ten Jeweled Mountains, and the entire multitude of mountains, Mount Sumeru is foremost, so, too, among all the Sutras, the Dharma Flower Sutra is the most supreme.

“Further, just as among the stars, the Moon God is foremost, so, too, among the thousands of myriads of kotis of kinds of Sutra Dharmas, the Dharma Flower Sutra shines the brightest.

“Further, just as the Sun God can disperse all darkness, so, too, this Sutra can disperse all the darkness of unwholesomeness.

“Further, just as among the minor kings, the Wheel-Turning Sage King is foremost, so, too, among the Sutras, this Sutra is the most honored.

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“Further, just as in the Heaven of the Thirty-three, Lord Shakra is king, so, too, among the Sutras, this Sutra is king.

“Further, just as the great Brahma God is the father of all living beings, so, too, is this Sutra the father of all the worthy sages, those studying, those beyond study, as well as those who have brought forth the Bodhisattva mind.

“Further, just as among the common people, the Srotaapanna, Sakridagamin, Anagamin, Arhat, and Pratyekabuddha are foremost, so, too, among all Sutra Dharmas, whether spoken by the Thus Come Ones, by the Bodhisattvas, or by Hearers, this Sutra is foremost.

“One who can receive and uphold this Sutra, in the same way, is foremost among all living beings.

“Just as among all the Hearers and Pratyekabuddhas, the Bodhisattva is foremost, so, too, among all the Sutra Dharmas, this Sutra is foremost.

“Just as the Buddha is the king of all Dharmas, so, too, is this Sutra the king of all Sutras.

“Constellation King Flower! This Sutra can save all living beings. This Sutra can lead all living beings to separate from suffering and distress. This Sutra can greatly benefit all living beings, fulfilling their vows. Just as a clear, refreshing pool can quench the thirst of all; as a cold person finds fire; as a naked person finds clothing; as a merchant finds customers; as a child finds its mother; as a passenger finds a boat; as a sick person finds a doctor; as one in a dark place finds a lamp; as a poor person finds a jewel; as the people find a king; as a trader finds the sea; as a torch dispels darkness the Dharma Flower Sutra, in the same way, can cause living beings to leave all suffering and all sickness and pain; it can untie all the bonds of birth and death.

“If a person hears the Dharma Flower Sutra, writes it out himself, or employs others to write it out, the limits of the merit and virtue he shall obtain cannot be calculated even by means of the Buddha’s wisdom.

“If a person writes out this Sutra and makes offerings to it of flowers; incense; beads; burning incense; powdered incense; paste incense; banners and canopies; clothing; and lamps of various kinds such as butter lamps, oil lamps and fragrant oil lamps, lamps of champaka oil, lamps of sumana oil, lamps of patala oil, lamps of varshika oil, and lamps of navamalika oil, the merit and virtue obtained is also limitless.

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“At that time all the Buddhas will praise this person from afar saying, ‘Good indeed, good indeed, good man, that within the Dharma of Shakyamuni Buddha you can receive, uphold, read, recite, and ponder this Sutra, and speak it for others. The merit and virtue you obtain is limitless and boundless. Fire cannot burn it. Water cannot flood it. Your merit and virtue is such that if a thousand Buddhas spoke of it together, they could not exhaust it.

“‘You have already been able to destroy the thieves of Mara, to ruin the troops of birth and death, and to demolish all remaining enemies.

“‘Good man, a hundred thousand Buddhas, with their power of spiritual penetrations, all protect you. In all the world with its gods and humans, there is none like you, with the exception of the Thus Come One. The Hearers and Pratyekabuddhas, and even the Bodhisattvas, cannot equal you in wisdom and Dhyana concentration.’

“Constellation King Flower, such is the power of the merit and virtue and wisdom accomplished by this Bodhisattva.

“If a person hears this chapter, ‘The Past Deeds of Medicine King Bodhisattva,’ and rejoices in accord, praising its goodness, that person’s mouth in his present life will always emit the fragrance of a blue lotus. The pores of his body will always emit the perfume of oxhead chandana. The merit and virtue he obtains will be as described above.

“Therefore, Constellation King Flower, I entrust to you this chapter, ‘The Past Deeds of Medicine King Bodhisattva.’ After my passing, in the last five hundred years, propagate it extensively in Jambudvīpa. Do not let it become extinct, thereby allowing evil demons, demonic denizens, all the heavenly dragons, yakshas, kumbhandas, and so forth to get their way.

“Constellation King Flower, you should use the power of spiritual penetrations to protect this Sutra. Why? Because this Sutra is good medicine for the sicknesses of those in Jambudvīpa. If a sick person gets to hear this Sutra, his sickness will be cured immediately. He will not grow old or die.

“Constellation King Flower, if you see a person who receives and upholds this Sutra, you should scatter blue lotuses filled with powdered incense over him as an offering. Having done that, you should reflect: ‘Before long, this person will certainly lay out a grass mat, sit in the Way-place, vanquish the troops of Mara, blow the Dharma conch, strike the great Dharma drum, and save all living beings from the sea of old age, sickness, and death. therefore, when those who seek the Buddha Way see one who receives and upholds this Sutra, they should bring forth a reverent heart in this way.’”

When this chapter, ‘The Past Deeds of Medicine King Bodhisattva,’ was spoken, eighty-four thousand Bodhisattvas obtained the dharani of understanding the speech of all living beings.

From within the jeweled stupa, the Thus Come One Many Jewels praised Constellation King Flower Bodhisattva, saying, “Good indeed, good indeed, Constellation King Flower! You have accomplished such inconceivable merit and virtue that you are able to question Shakyamuni Buddha about matters such as these and to benefit limitless living beings.