



# Becoming Samantabhadra: Part II

## Manjushri

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

Nirvana is close to us but we fail to recognize it;

Enlightenment is near at hand but difficult to see.

[涅槃親而無人識，菩提近而甚難見—《海印三昧論》]

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

Who is Manjushri? Mahayana Buddhist tradition tells us that he is a tenth-level bodhisattva of such great wisdom that he has served throughout the ages as instructor to the buddhas themselves. So he appears as the principal teacher in many sutras, including the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, and is usually depicted in Buddhist art as riding a lion, a traditional symbol of the proclamation of the Dharma, and as holding the sword of wisdom in one hand and a sutra in the other. In the *Flower Adornment Sutra* a set of four chapters (Nos. 7~11) is directly taught by him and, as will be seen below, he is the first and final guru of the young pilgrim Sudhana [善財童子] whose story makes up the last part of the Sutra. He is also credited with compiling the original text of the Sutra. So Fa Zang says: "According to the *Great Treatise on Transcendental Wisdom* a great many Mahayana sutras were compiled by Manjushri, and this Sutra in particular." [依智道論，諸大乘經，多是文殊師利之所結集，此經則是文殊所結。—《華嚴經傳記》] Finally, Manjushri has an especially close connection with China, and the belief that he could be found on Mt. Wutai [五臺山] in what is now Shanxi Province was so widespread that for centuries pious pilgrims came to China from all over the Buddhist world to pay their respects to the great bodhisattva there and perhaps even encounter him, in person or in a vision. Fa Zang confirms this belief: "At the present time the holy Manjushri lives in this sacred place [Mt. Wutai], where according to a number of different traditions he is always to be found expounding the *Avatamsaka Sutra*." [文殊師利常於彼講華嚴經—《華嚴經傳記》]

But what is Manjushri's significance for the individual practitioner? How can he help us to recognize our buddha-nature, to see the 'original face' of our innate Enlightenment in the mirror of our mind?

Manjushri is a symbol of wisdom for many Buddhists, but in the Huayen teachings he also represents one kind of wisdom in particular, namely, the wisdom of equality [*samatajnana*, 平等智] or fundamental wisdom [根本智]. This is the wisdom which gives insight into emptiness [*shunyata*, 真空]. Emptiness, the absence of any intrinsic substance or essence [*svabhavashunyata*, 自性空], is the real nature and single common characteristic of all things, the "single flavour of all phenomena" [一切諸法一味—《離世間品》], as the Sutra puts it. At this level of understanding, therefore, all phenomena are equal and identical and their apparent diversity, their continual appearances and disappearances, are illusions created by our dualistic consciousness. So the *Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana* [《大乘起信論》] says that "phenomena appear to be different from one another simply because of our deluded thinking" [一切諸法唯依妄念而有差別].

It is this fundamental wisdom, then, that allows us to see past our fascination with the superficial appearance of things and perceive the universal, indeterminate reality that is their true nature. This aspect of

phenomena is what Huayen calls the Dharmarealm of Reality [理法界] and those who have been able to enter into it are already destined to achieve complete Enlightenment. The wisdom of equality is already present within us but in most cases it is dormant, and study, faith and cultivation are necessary to activate it. Accordingly Manjushri also represents the impulse to undertake spiritual practices so that we can bring our innate wisdom into manifestation and achieve Enlightenment.

Once the Dharma has been encountered, in one form or another, the first of the five powers (*pancabalani*, 五力) or faculties (*pancendriyani*, 五根) that we need to develop is faith (*shraddha*, 信). The reason for this is that, although the ultimate truth (*paramarthasatya*, 真諦) is that we have never ceased to be enlightened, in the ordinary world of conventional experience (*samvrtisatya*, 俗諦) we have for a very long time been in the habit of directing our attention away from Enlightenment and towards the strengthening of our sense of self and the satisfaction of our desires. To overcome such deeply entrenched habits requires considerable effort and can't be accomplished merely by reasoning, by wishful thinking or by half-hearted attempts at spiritual cultivation. Faith however can provide us with the energy that we need. So the Sutra says that "Faith is the source of Enlightenment and the mother of virtues; it fosters and strengthens all good qualities" [信為道源功德母，長養一切諸善根—《賢首品》]. If we have no faith in the reality of the goal we are seeking or in our capacity to reach it, we are never likely to succeed. But if we are convinced that we really can achieve Enlightenment, our ultimate success becomes not only more likely but, according to the Huayen teachings, inevitable. This is why it is sometimes said that only buddhas can become buddhas. As long as we think of ourselves as ignorant sentient beings we will remain so, but if we have faith in our innate buddhahood we will one day become in fact what we have always been in reality. According to Fa Zang a "sentient being" can be defined as "the Dharmakaya transmigrating in the five realms of existence" [經曰，法身流轉五道名曰眾生—《探玄記》].

Manjushri is therefore the inspirer of faith. According to Li Tungxuan, "In this Sutra the primary article of faith is that the Ten Worlds of Form and the Ten Wisdom Tathagatas always exist within one's own mind, while Manjushri is one's own sublime wisdom, and is the mind that is capable of such faith." [於此經中初信之首，以十色世界十智如來為自心中本有，文殊師利為自妙慧，為能信之心。—《決疑論》] But in the Huayen teaching, faith is inseparably connected with *bodhicitta* [菩提心], the Aspiration to Enlightenment, and here again Manjushri plays a central role. According to Cheng Guan, the *Sutra on the Buddha's Names* [《佛名經》] claims that "all the buddhas have aspired to achieve Enlightenment because of Manjushri" [一切諸佛皆於文殊而發心—《三聖圓融觀門》]. At the beginning of the story of Sudhana, Manjushri is described as leaving the Buddha's assembly near the Seat of Enlightenment and travelling south with a retinue of bodhisattvas, monastics and attendant deities. Halting at a temple outside a town called Dhanyakara [福城], he expounds *The Dharmarealm of Universal Illumination Sutra* [《普照法界修多羅》], perhaps another name for the *Flower Adornment Sutra* itself. Among the numerous laypeople who come from the town to listen to him is a young man called Sudhana. Manjushri, aware of Sudhana's potential to achieve Enlightenment, directs his teaching to him in particular: "Then Manjushri expounded this teaching to Sudhana and rest of the gathering, encouraging and advising them earnestly to make greater efforts, gladdening them so that they might aspire to achieve unsurpassed, complete and perfect Enlightenment [*anuttarasamyaksambodhi*] [爾時文殊師利童子。為善財童子及諸大眾。說此法已。慇懃勸諭。增長勢力。令其歡喜。發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。]" Sudhana understands the message as intended: "Thereupon Sudhana, having heard Manjushri speak of all the Buddha's virtues, aspired with all his heart to seek unsurpassed, complete and perfect Enlightenment." [爾時善財童子。從文殊師利所。聞佛如是種種功德。一心勤求阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。] He approaches Manjushri and, in a long verse passage, asks for further guidance:

...Please give me your instructions  
Great guide of merit and wisdom  
That I may strive to seek Enlightenment  
For the benefit of all beings.  
Grant me your protection





That clad in the armour of patience  
And wielding the sword of wisdom,  
I may vanquish the forces of Mara....

[願垂教敕我，福智大商主，勇猛求菩提，普利諸群生。  
願垂守護我，身被忍辱甲，手提智慧劍，自在降魔軍]

Manjushri urges Sudhana to seek out other teachers and practise the Dharma diligently: "It is good, it is very good, young man, that you have aspired to unsurpassed, complete and perfect Enlightenment. You should seek our spiritual friends [*kalyanamitrani*] and ask them how to cultivate the conduct of a bodhisattva and how to follow the bodhisattva path" [善哉善哉。善男子。汝已發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提心。復欲親近諸善知識。問菩薩行。修菩薩道。]. Then he replies to Sudhana's request with verses of his own, predicting the ultimate fulfillment of Sudhana's aspiration:

...In worlds without number  
Throughout endless ages  
You will practise as Samantabhadra does  
And fulfill your great vows....



[汝於無量剎，無邊諸劫海，修行普賢行，成滿諸大願]

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

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

[是故善男子汝應往詣文殊之所，莫生疲厭，文殊師利當為汝說一切功德。何以故。汝先所見諸善知識，聞菩薩行，入解脫門，滿足大願，皆是文殊威神之力。]

It is Manjushri, then, who inspires us to set out on our own quest for Enlightenment and provides us with the necessary guidance for our spiritual journey. But in order to hear his voice (and the other common form of his name, Manjughosa [妙音], literally means "sweet-voiced") we don't have to travel to Dhanyakara or visit Mt. Wutai -- as Linji Yixuan [臨濟義玄 d. 867] also emphasized to his disciples when he said bluntly that "There is no Manjushri on Mt. Wutai" [五臺山無文殊—臨濟錄15]. We can always hear the voice of Manjushri if we listen carefully enough, for deep within us there is a restlessness that prevents us from remaining satisfied with the circumstances created by our habitual patterns of behaviour and that continually urges us towards some higher fulfillment. If Vairocana is the hidden sun of our buddha-nature, Manjushri is the light and warmth of that same sun suffusing our minds and stimulating the growth of our potential for authentic wisdom and compassion. To receive the benefit of this inner light, therefore, all we have to do is open our minds to it, as Sudhana did when he first allowed the words of Manjushri to penetrate his understanding and transform his life.

(Next: Samantabhadra- to be published in the next issue)