



Fa Zang's Dedication Prayer

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There are four important commentaries on the *Flower Adornment Sutra* (*Avatamsaka Sutra*, 華嚴經), two on the earlier translation by Buddhahadra (359-429), and two on the later translation by Shikshananda (652-710). *An Inquiry into Profundity* (搜玄記) by Zhi Yen 智儼 (602-668) is a schematic analysis of the Sutra based on the Buddhahadra translation, and it was followed by *An Investigation of Profundity* (探玄記), a much more detailed commentary on the same text by Zhi Yen's chief disciple, Fa Zang 法藏 (643-712).

Fa Zang's younger contemporary, the lay practitioner and hermit Li Tungxuan 李通玄 (635-730, or 646-740), subsequently produced a commentary on the recently published Shikshananda translation, which he called *A Commentary on the New Flower Adornment Sutra* (新華嚴經論). In size and detail it is comparable with Fa Zang's work, but it places somewhat more emphasis on the actual practice of Huayen and also reveals something of Tungxuan's personal interest in the *Book of Changes* (*Yi Jing* 易經).

The last major commentary on the Sutra is a detailed explanation of the Shikshananda text by Cheng Guan 澄觀 (738-839). It is called *A Commentary and Subcommentary on the Flower Adornment Sutra* (華嚴經疏抄), and as the title indicates, combines two works in one. Of massive size and encyclopaedic in scope, it has had no successors.

Despite the traditional status of Du Shun 杜順, or Fa Shun 法順, (557-640) as the 'First Patriarch' of the Huayen School, it was really Zhi Yen who laid the foundations of Huayen doctrine. His work was completed by Fa Zang, who wrote more than thirty books and essays elucidating every aspect of the Huayen teachings, among them the commentary mentioned above. As was the custom when composing such works, Fa Zang preceded his commentary with a short poem in which he takes refuge in the Triple Gem, affirms his commitment to practice of the Dharma, and dedicates any merit he may have acquired by writing the commentary to the cause of Enlightenment and the welfare of all beings. In fact this beautiful prayer manages to summarize the entire Huayen path in less than twenty lines and is worth examining carefully. The complete text reads as follows:

**I take refuge in the ocean of great wisdom
In Vairocana of the ten bodies
Who fills the entire Dharmarealm
With unsurpassed benevolence;
And in the vast and stainless Dharma
The wheel of perfect Liberation;
In Samantabhadra, Manjushri
And all the host of bodhisattvas.
Pinned as I am in this world of bondage,
I cherish the Dharma in my heart.
I pray that insight and compassion
Increase my mindfulness and wisdom,
That I may reveal this hidden treasure
For the benefit of self and others;
I pray that the Dharma may long endure,
That I may serve to transmit its light
And so repay the Buddha's kindness.**

歸依大智海，十身盧遮那，充滿諸法界，無上大慈尊，
方廣離垢法，圓滿解脫輪，普賢文殊等，海會大菩薩，
我在具縛地，希心大法門，唯願見加哀，令增念智力，
開此密奧藏，廣益於自他，願令法久住，傳燈報佛恩。

Fa Zang begins, as all Buddhists must, by taking refuge in the Buddha:

**I take refuge in the ocean of great wisdom
In Vairocana of the ten bodies
Who fills the entire Dharmarealm
With unsurpassed benevolence**

For most other schools of Buddhism, the Buddha here would be Shakyamuni, but in Huayen the primary refuge is Vairocana. This by no means excludes Shakyamuni however, and in fact the two names are used interchangeably in the *Flower Adornment Sutra*. But who is Vairocana? Fa Zang describes him here as an “ocean of great wisdom” who “fills the entire Dharmarealm”, that is, the entire universe seen as a field or realm in which the Dharma is manifested. Vairocana then is the wisdom of Enlightenment itself, which pervades the whole physical universe, where, as the Sutra frequently reminds us, buddhas can be found teaching within every atom. Vairocana also pervades our own hearts: he is the buddhahood that exists in all its fullness within us, and is our own true nature, our buddha-nature.

To take refuge in Vairocana therefore is to place our trust in the impulse to Enlightenment that is always present in our hearts, prompting us to seek the truth and to do good. Without this confidence, without this reliance on our inner wisdom, our attempts to develop spiritually will always remain fluctuating and uncertain. This is why the Buddha should be our primary refuge and why mindfulness of the Buddha is the foundation of Huayen practice. The Sutra says that “If you can focus your mind unwaveringly on the Buddha, / You will always see countless buddhas before you” (若能念佛心不動，則常睹見無量佛 — 賢首品), and that “the thought of the buddhas should never leave your mind even for a moment” (常念諸佛心無暫捨 — 明法品). If we are continually mindful of the Buddha as the embodiment of enlightened wisdom in this way, we will be inspired to emulate him and will gain confidence in our ability to do so. This is the beginning of the path of practice.

But for Mahayana Buddhism there is more to the Buddha than his wisdom: his compassionate activity is equally important. So Fa Zang tells us that Vairocana also has “ten bodies” and that he fills the

universe, not only with wisdom, but also with “unsurpassed benevolence”. As usual in Huayen, ten here stands for an infinite number. So Vairocana's wisdom is inseparable from his compassion, and as a result he “pervades worlds as numerous as motes of dust, responding to beings according to their capacities everywhere throughout the universe” (周遍塵方，普應法界一切群機 — 探玄記), appearing not only as enlightened human guides like our 'original teacher' (本師) Shakyamuni Buddha, but even as the natural phenomena of the physical world, for “all phenomena are gateways to the Dharma” (諸事即法門 — 探玄記).

And in the vast and stainless Dharma The wheel of perfect Liberation

Once we have taken refuge in the Buddha, inspired by faith in his wisdom and in our own, we become receptive to the Dharma. According to the Huayen teachings, the Dharma, like the Buddha, is all-pervasive. So Fa Zang describes it as “vast”, and says elsewhere that “the infinite universe is a vast Dharmawheel that is constantly revolving” (無盡法界為大法輪海，常轉無休息 — 探玄記). We are all caught up in the endless cycle of birth and death and its inevitable suffering, but the Buddha's teaching is a wheel that spins in the opposite direction, a wheel of peace and clarity that will eventually free us from all our suffering. It is “stainless” because it is unaffected by the pain and emotional distress that attend life in samsara, and it is “perfect” because it liberates us from all our limitations and blemishes, and makes us one with the changeless realm of Enlightenment.

In Samantabhadra, Manjushri And all the host of bodhisattvas

But even after we have taken refuge in the Buddha and the Dharma, we may still doubt our ability to practise such an exalted teaching, or may hesitate to aspire to the lofty state of a buddha. For that reason it is important also to take refuge in the Sangha, in the community of enlightened practitioners. If we know that others have put the teachings into practice sincerely and effectively and have developed their innate wisdom to the point of Enlightenment, then we can have confidence in our own ability to follow in their footsteps and eventually reach the level that they have attained.

The Sangha is represented here by “the host of bodhisattvas”, two of whom are mentioned by name as being of special importance. Li Tungxuan explains that “according to this Sutra the bodhisattvas Manjushri and Samantabhadra appear everywhere, for the essential truth of one and the ceaseless activities of the other fill the entire universe” (此經有一切處文殊師利，一切處普賢菩薩，體用相徹，充滿法界 — 新華嚴經論), and together with Vairocana, they make up a Huayen trinity known as the “Three Saints” or “Three Holy Ones” (三聖). The importance of these two bodhisattvas for practitioners lies in the fact that Manjushri represents the wisdom that is innate in us, inspiring us to seek Enlightenment (發菩提心) and guiding us on the path, while Samantabhadra embodies the actual Enlightenment we are seeking and provides the pattern of enlightened conduct that we strive to realize in practice. When we take refuge in Manjushri and Samantabhadra, then, it means that we have committed ourselves to the Huayen path of practice, confident that we will be able to receive support and encouragement from these two bodhisattvas and from “all the host of bodhisattvas” in the vast Huayen assembly of buddhas and bodhisattvas (華嚴海會佛菩薩).

So in theory we have now committed ourselves to the quest for Enlightenment, but when we look at the world around us we find that in fact we are still trapped in samsara, in the cycle of birth and death, with all its emotional and intellectual confusion. So what should we do next, how do we start to practise? Fa Zang gives us a simple answer:

**Penned as I am in this world of bondage,
I cherish the Dharma in my heart.**

We begin by acknowledging the reality of our situation, and by accepting that we are imprisoned in a cycle of suffering that we have ourselves created by our own foolish choices. But if the ultimate cause of our plight lies within us, so too does the solution, and we can begin to look for it by changing our values. Instead of assuming, as we usually do, that material goods, social status and so on represent all that is real and important in our lives, we can try to understand that they are just transient phenomena that will bring us no lasting happiness, and that the Buddhadharma is not some kind of abstraction that we happen to believe in but is in fact our most precious possession and the only thing that we can really rely on. Once we can grasp the true significance of this, we will start to “cherish the Dharma” in our hearts, and this shift in values will soften the rigidity of our attachments and give Manjushri the chance to guide us onto the path of practice.

The Buddhadharma can be as complex or as simple as we wish. There are said to be countless Buddhist teachings (法門無量), and yet Shakyamuni Buddha once declared that all he had to teach was suffering and its cessation. So too the methods of practice listed and described in the *Flower Adornment Sutra* fill hundreds of pages, but Fa Zang sums them up here in just two lines:

**I pray that insight and compassion
Increase my mindfulness and wisdom**

All Buddhist cultivation begins with insight, and if we can learn to perceive the true worth of the Dharma and cherish it in our hearts, insight will develop naturally in us and this in turn will inspire us to practise. But in Mahayana Buddhism insight alone is not sufficient, for understanding that fails to lead to a deeper sense of compassion cannot be authentic. If we only perceive the nature of our own suffering we have not seen the true nature of suffering at all, for our perception is still limited by the sense of self which is the principal cause of our suffering in the first place. So Shantideva says:

Since fear and suffering are as painful
To others as they are to me,
What is so special about myself
That I should protect it and not another?

This is especially true for Huayen, for no other sutra places as much importance on awakening the aspiration to Enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) for the sake of all beings, or devotes as much space to praising it, as does the *Adornment Sutra*.

Authentic insight, then, weakens attachment to self and will naturally lead to greater compassion for others. With the growth of such insight and compassion, real practice of the Dharma can begin. Passing over the details of the path of practice, which in any case will be different for each individual, Fa Zang speaks in the second line only of its basis in mindfulness and its outcome as wisdom. Mindfulness is the least glamorous and most important of all Buddhist practices. It is very simple and can be applied under any circumstances, but it has no fixed structure that we can easily follow and keep in mind, and because it seems a bit boring we quickly lose interest in cultivating it. But without the awareness of our own behaviour and motives that only mindfulness will give us, we wouldn't be able to lead any kind of moral or spiritual life at all, while meditation in all its various forms requires a degree of mental focus and stability that only prior cultivation of mindfulness can make possible. Even Enlightenment itself can be seen as the achievement of a complete and all-inclusive state of mindfulness. This is why the Buddha once described mindfulness as “the only way” (*ekayano margah*) to deliverance from suffering and the cycle of birth and death.

The wisdom that opens our eyes to the truth and enables us to free ourselves and others from suffering is of course the ultimate goal of all Buddhist practice. But why are we seeking this goal, what exactly is our motive? This is something we should also ask ourselves, and in the next two lines Fa Zang provides his own answer. He is seeking Enlightenment, he says,

**That I may reveal this hidden treasure
For the benefit of self and others.**

From one point of view the “treasure” that he speaks of here is simply Enlightenment itself, which is indeed already present within our minds but “hidden” from us by our own ignorance. The fact that Fa Zang composed this prayer as a preface to his commentary on the Sutra, however, indicates that this “hidden treasure” is also the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. It is a treasure because it contains all the spiritual riches of the Buddhadharma, but the world in general is not aware of the vast scope and depth of this scripture, and so it can be said to be a hidden or secret teaching. There is also an allusion here to the famous parable of the sutra in the atom as told in the Sutra's 37th chapter (如來出現品) – or in the case of the translation that Fa Zang was working with, the 32nd chapter (寶王如來性起品):

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

The Sutra in this parable is on the one hand “the wisdom of the Tathagata” which, as the text goes on to point out “is present in its entirety within the body of every being”, even though deluded beings “are not aware of its presence and derive no benefit from it”. But on the other hand it is also the text itself, the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, which is the complete expression of the Tathagata's wisdom in written form, and it is the hidden wealth of this Sutra that Fa Zang proposes to reveal to the world by writing his commentary.

But once again the question of motivation becomes important. If we are communicating the Dharma to others, are we doing so just to earn a living, to show off our own cleverness, or to gain a reputation in the world? If we are, our activities will do little good to anybody. As far as Mahayana Buddhism is concerned, the only acceptable motive for teaching is non-discriminating compassion: we should teach, as we should do everything else, solely out of concern for our own welfare and the welfare of all other beings. Then we will be in accord with the teachings of the Sutra and our activities will be truly beneficial.

Fa Zang ends his prayer on a more personal note, expressing the hope that by writing his commentary he will be able to help transmit the Buddha's wisdom and the Huayen teachings to future generations:

**I pray that the Dharma may long endure,
That I may serve to transmit its light
And so repay the Buddha's kindness.**

Throughout human history there have been people who have achieved some degree of Enlightenment, in one way or another, but not all of them have been willing to teach others. The English poet Thomas Hardy was a kind-hearted man but his sensitivity to suffering and his keen awareness of human folly led him to despair of the possibility of imparting wisdom to anybody:

...And if my vision range beyond
The blinkered sight of souls in bond,
By truth made free,
I'll let all be
And show to no man what I see.

So some enlightened beings have felt compelled by their circumstances to keep their wisdom to themselves, while others have taught only a small group of close disciples, who may or may not have passed their

understanding on to subsequent generations. Shakyamuni Buddha however was different. Although, like Hardy, he feared at first that it would be a waste of time trying to enlighten a world that was so sunk in the darkness of ignorance, his initial hesitation was swiftly overcome by his great compassion. Accordingly he declared that the doors to the deathless state of Nirvana were now open for all to enter if they would, and he went on to devote the rest of his life to teaching, organizing and training his community. He also sent his disciples out to spread the truth about suffering and the way to its cessation far and wide.

Over a thousand years later his teachings were flourishing in China, and Fa Zang, aware that this was only made possible by the Buddha's great compassion, knew that he could best repay him by imitating his example and transmitting the light of his wisdom to the next generation. For Fa Zang that meant expounding the Huayen teachings that had been entrusted to his care and revealing the "hidden treasure" of the *Flower Adornment Sutra*. The Sutra itself often speaks of the importance of maintaining continuity of transmission and of not allowing the seeds of Buddha-wisdom to perish. So Li Tungxuan says:

The message of the Sutra is entrusted to worldly beings so that they will be enlightened by its teachings and come to understand its message. They will then be born into the Buddha's family and will transmit the teachings, so that the lineage of Enlightenment will not die out. (此經義者付囑凡夫，令覺悟入此法門故令生佛家，使其轉教，佛種不斷—新華嚴經論)

Buddhism has now spread peacefully throughout the world, thanks to "the Buddha's kindness", and those of us who have been fortunate enough to encounter the *Avatamsaka Sutra* have an obligation, like Fa Zang and Li Tungxuan, to try to "understand its message" and "transmit its light" to those who come after us. In this way we too will be able to repay the great debt we owe to the Buddha by making the "hidden treasure" of Huayen available to the world and ensuring that the light of wisdom will continue to shine for those who have eyes to see it.

Haiyun HeShang's Dharma Words:

Authentic Living

We all want to live authentic lives.

Authentic living is the essence of the "Huayen Sutra."

Buddha Dharma is inseparable from our daily lives;

Buddha Dharma guides us on how to live
more joyfully and splendidly.

海雲和上法語：認真生活

我們都在生活，也都認真地生活，

「認真生活」的本身就是一部《華嚴經》。

佛法離不開生活，離開生活就沒有佛法，

佛法是在生活中指導我們，讓我們的生活更快樂，更幸福。

