

From Illusion to the Perfect Enlightenment

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Good morning! Welcome to the International Buddha Dharma Society for Cosmic Law to listen to today's Dharma talk. The reason we cultivate, give, hold precepts, endure, diligently practice, deepen Samadhi power is to activate our supreme wisdom; get rid of false thoughts discrimination and attachment so that we can return to our equipped Buddha-Nature and free our wonderful true heart.

In Chinese, there is a phrase, the **Golden Millet Dream**. And there is a story behind it.

In Tang Dynasty, there was a Scholar whose last name was Lu.

One year, on the way to the capital to take a national test of officials, he met a Taoist priest whose name was Wong Lv. Lu expressed his discontent to the priest. The priest took out a pillow and handed it to Lu and said, "You may take a nap on this pillow and everything you wish will come true."

At the time, the store owner just started to prepare Millet Rice as Lu began to take a rest on the pillow. Soon he felt asleep. In the dream, he returned to home and after several months, he was married to a beautiful girl. He became richer and happier. Not long after, he was promoted again and again and finally he became the prime minister. He had five sons and everyone became an official. Later, he had over ten grandsons and a huge and wealthy family. When he was in his 80s, he was very sick and was dying. At that moment, he woke up suddenly and the store owner was still cooking the Millet rice. Lu felt strange and asked, "Did I just have a dream?" The priest answered, "Isn't life just like this?"

Causes and conditions originally are illusion; all conditioned phenomena originally are illusion; the rising of thoughts originally are illusion; the five skandhas originally are illusion; fame and wealth originally are illusion; wine and lust originally are illusion; the five desires and the six objects originally are illusion; love and hatred originally are illusion; killing and combating originally are illusion. No matter how beautiful the dream is, it's ultimately just a dream; no matter how bitter the dream is, it's ultimately just a dream. Life is between breaths. The four elements are all empty. The Buddha said that the living beings have inverted view. Today, we will recite part of the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment.

This sutra contains twelve chapters. In the sutra, the Buddha answered questions from twelve Bodhisattvas and explained the wonderful epiphany and methods to the perfect enlightenment of the Buddha. Today, we will recite the first part of this sutra in which the Buddha answered questions from three Bodhisattvas and the Buddha talked about illusion and how to get out of illusion. Now, let's cross the time and space and respectfully listen to the Buddha.

Thus, I have heard. One time, the Bhagavan entered the supramundane great radiant bright repository, in the exactly attained *samādhi*, where all tathāgatas abide in radiant splendor. This is the ground of pure enlightenment of sentient beings, the equal original reality where body and mind are completely erased.

He completely filled the ten directions with the accordance with non-duality, and in this non-dual state manifested all pure lands.

He was with one hundred thousand great bodhisattva-mahasattvas. Those who served as leaders of the assembly were named Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, Universal Vision Bodhisattva, Vajragarbha Bodhisattva, Maitreya Bodhisattva, Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva, Power and Virtue Unhindered Bodhisattva, Voice of Discernment Bodhisattva, Purifier of All Karmic Hindrances Bodhisattva, Universal Enlightenment Bodhisattva, Perfect Enlightenment Bodhisattva and Most Excellent of Worthies Bodhisattva. With their retinues, all entered into the same *samādhi* as the Tathāgata at this assembly of the equal dharma.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva then arose from his seat in the great assembly. He bowed his head to the Buddha's feet and circumambulated him three times to the right.

He then knelt down with his hands clasped and addressed the Buddha, saying: "Greatly Compassionate World Honored One. Please, for all members of this assembly who have come for your dharma, teach us about the reality-[dharma] practice of the Tathāgata's originally arisen pure causal stage. Also, please teach the bodhisattvas to arise pure mind in the great vehicle and become distantly removed from all dis-eases, such that they can cause the future sentient beings of the degenerate age who seek the great vehicle not to fall into mistaken views." Having said this, he prostrated to the ground. He asked this question three times in succession.

Then the World Honored One, speaking to Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva said: "Excellent! Excellent! Good Son, you have skillfully asked on behalf of the bodhisattvas about the reality-practice of the causal stage of the Tathāgata, and have caused all the bodhisattvas to arouse the pure mind in the great vehicle. You have also caused all sentient beings of the degenerate age

who seek the great vehicle to gain correct abiding such that they do not fall into erroneous views. Now listen well, and I shall explain for you." Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva received the teaching with reverence and joy; all those in the great assembly became silent and listened.

"Good sons, the unsurpassed King of the dharma possesses the great *dhāraṇī*-entrance. It is called 'Perfect Enlightenment.' From it is manifested all purity, suchness, *bodhi*, nirvana and the *paramitas* which teach bodhisattvas. All tathāgatas in their originally-arisen causal stage rely on the perfect illumination of the attributes of pure enlightenment to permanently sever ignorance and directly accomplish the Buddha-Way."

What is ignorance? Good sons, all sentient beings fall into various inverted views without beginning. Just like a disoriented person who confuses the four directions, they mistakenly take the Four Elements as the attributes of their bodies and the conditioned shadows of the Six Objects as the attributes of their mind. It is just like when our eyes are diseased and we see flowers in the sky, or a second moon. Good sons, the sky actually has no flowers—they are the false attachment of the diseased person. And because of this false attachment, not only are we confused about the self-nature of the sky; we are also mixed up about the place where real flowers come from. From this there is the falsely existent transmigration through life and death. Therefore, it is called "ignorance."

"Good sons, this 'ignorance' actually lacks substance. It is like a man who is dreaming. At the time of the dream, there is no non-existence. But when he awakens he finds that there is nothing for him to hold on to. Similarly, when the sky-flowers disappear from the sky, you cannot say that there is a definite point of their disappearance. Why? Because there is no point from which they arose. All sentient beings falsely perceive arising and ceasing within the unarisen. Therefore, they say that there is 'transmigration through life-and-death.' "

"Good sons, in the practice of Perfect Enlightenment of the causal stage of the Tathāgata one understands these 'sky-flowers,' thus there is no transmigration, nor body/mind to undergo life-and-death. But they are not caused to be non-existent. It is because they lack original nature. Now, this [prior] awareness is in itself void, like empty space. Yet since this awareness that perceives it to be like empty space is none other than the appearance of sky-flowers, you also cannot say that there is no nature of awareness. Existence and non-existence both being dispelled is called 'according with pure enlightenment.' "

"Why? Because its nature is completely empty; because it is eternally changeless; because there is neither arising nor ceasing within the matrix of the Tathāgata, and because there are no fixed points of view. Like the nature of the reality-realm it is totally complete and perfect,

pervading the ten directions. Therefore, it is called the 'reality-practice of the causal stage.' Bodhisattvas, relying upon it arouse their pure mind within the Mahayana. Sentient beings of the degenerate age who practice relying on this will not fall into erroneous views."

Then, the World Honored One, wanting to restate the gist of this, spoke a verse. He said:

Mañjuśrī, you should know
All Tathāgatas
From their originally arisen causal stage
Penetrate ignorance
With enlightened wisdom.
Knowing it to be like sky-flowers
They are able to escape transmigration.
It is like the man in the dream
Who has nothing to grasp upon awakening.
Awareness is like space
Equal, changeless.
Enlightenment pervading the worlds of the ten directions
Is none other than the attainment of the Buddha-way.
All illusions cease at no-place
And in accomplishing the Way there is nothing attained.
That's because the original nature is complete, perfect.
In it, bodhisattvas
Are able to produce bodhicitta
All sentient beings of the degenerate age
Practicing this, will avoid erroneous views.

Then Samantabhadra Bodhisattva rose from his seat in the great assembly. He bowed to the Buddha's feet and circumambulated him three times to the right. He knelt down with his hands clasped, and said to the Buddha: "Greatly Compassionate World Honored One. I

would like to ask for all the bodhisattvas at this assembly and for the sentient beings of the degenerate age who are practicing Mahayana: Please reveal the expedient stages of practice and let them hear of this pure realm of perfect enlightenment. How should we practice?"

World Honored One, if these sentient beings know about "illusion," and that body and mind are also illusion, how can they remedy illusion using illusion? If all illusory natures are completely annihilated, then there is no mind. Who is going to carry out the practice? Moreover, based on this, how can you teach the practice of "illusion?" If all sentient beings originally do not practice, then they will remain forever trapped within the illusion of life and death. Not having penetrated the realm of the illusory, how will they liberate the mind that is trapped in false conceptualization?

"I implore you on behalf of all the bodhisattvas at this assembly, as well as for all sentient beings of the degenerate age, to teach the gradual practice of expedient means: what kind of expedient means of gradual practice should we introduce to cause sentient beings to be eternally free from all illusions?" Having said this, he prostrated fully to the ground. He asked this question three times in succession.

Then the World Honored One, speaking to Samantabhadra Bodhisattva said: "Excellent, excellent! Good son, you have well asked the Tathāgata on behalf of the bodhisattvas and the sentient beings of the degenerate age about the expedient stages of the practice of the bodhisattva's 'as-illusion-*samādhi*.' This practice enables all the sentient beings to gain freedom from illusion. Now listen well, and I shall explain it for you." Samantabhadra received this teaching with great joy and reverence; all in the great assembly became silent and listened.

"Good sons, all sentient beings' various illusions are born from the perfectly enlightened marvelous mind of the Tathāgata, just like the sky-flowers come to exist from the sky. But even though the illusory flowers vanish, the nature of the sky is indestructible. The illusory mind of sentient beings also vanishes based on illusion, and while all illusions are utterly erased, the enlightened mind is unchanged. The use of illusion to speak of enlightenment is also called illusion. If you say there is enlightenment, you are not yet free from illusion. If you say there is no enlightenment, this is the same thing. Therefore, the cessation of illusion is called 'unchanging.' "

"Good sons, all bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age should separate from all illusory and false realms. By firmly abiding in separation from thought, you also

separate from the thought of 'illusion.' You also separate from the illusion of 'separation.' You also separate from this separation from this illusion of separation. You will reach 'nothing to be separated from,' which is the removal of all illusion. It is like making a fire with two sticks. The fire blazes and the wood is consumed; the ashes fly away and the smoke vanishes. Using illusion to remedy illusion is exactly like this. Yet even though all illusions are extinguished, you do not enter into nothingness."

"Good sons, when you know illusion, you will immediately be free, without devising expedient means. Freedom from illusion is in itself enlightenment, and there are no stages. All Bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age who practice like this will be permanently free from all illusion."

Then the World Honored One, wanting to restate the gist of this, spoke a verse. He said:

Samantabhadra, you should know

The beginningless illusory ignorance

Of all sentient beings

Is all created from

The perfectly enlightened mind of all the Tathāgatas.

It is just like the sky-flowers

Which have their appearance in relation to the sky;

Though the sky-flowers vanish

The sky has never changed.

Illusion is born from enlightenment;

In the cessation of illusion enlightenment remains perfectly complete.

This is because the enlightened mind is changeless.

If these bodhisattvas

And sentient beings of the degenerate age

Always appropriately separate from illusion,

They will completely free themselves from it.

Like the flame that springs from wood:

The wood is consumed and the flame again disappears.

If you are enlightened, then there are no stages of practice

Nor is there such a thing as expedient means.

Then the bodhisattva Universal Vision arose from his seat in the great assembly. He bowed to the Buddha's feet and circumambulated him three times to the right. He knelt down with his hands clasped and addressed the Buddha, saying: "Greatly Compassionate World Honored One. I beg of you on behalf of the bodhisattvas of this assembly and the sentient beings of the degenerate age, to expound on the bodhisattvas' stages and practice. How should they think? How should they abide? For sentient beings who have not yet awakened, what kinds of expedient means should be devised to cause them all to awaken?"

"World Honored One, if these sentient beings lack the correct expedients and correct thought, then when they hear you explain this *samādhi*, confusion will arise in their minds and they will be unable to awaken and enter. Please arouse your compassion for us and for the sentient beings of the degenerate age, and provisionally explain these expedient methods." Having said this, he prostrated himself to the ground. He made this request three times in succession.

Then the World Honored One, addressing the bodhisattva Universal Vision, said: "Excellent, excellent! Good son, you have asked well for the bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age about the stages of the Tathāgata's practice; about his thought and abiding, and about the explanation of all the various expedient means. Now listen well, and I shall explain for you." Universal Vision Bodhisattva received this instruction with great joy. The great assembly became silent and listened.

"Good sons, these newly awakened bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age who yearn for the pure enlightened mind of the Tathāgata must correct their thoughts and rid themselves of all illusions, first relying on the Tathāgata's practice of *śamatha*. Firmly established in moral discipline and living in harmony with like-minded students, then practicing silent sitting in a quiet room, they should uninterruptedly be mindful of the following:"

"This present body is a synthesis of the Four Elements. Hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, bones, marrow, brains and pigment all return to Earth. Saliva, mucus, pus, blood, sputum, scum, phlegm, tears, semen, urine and feces all return to Water. Heat returns to Fire, and movement returns to Wind. When the Four Elements have been separated, where can the

false body exist? Now you know that this body ultimately has no substance. As a synthesis it appears, but in reality, it is like an illusion conjured by a magician."

"When these four factors temporarily combine, the Six Faculties falsely appear; through the internal and external matching of the Six Faculties and Four Elements, there is the deluded apprehension of conditioned energy. Within this conglomeration, there seem to be marks of this conditioned energy, which is provisionally called 'mind.' Good sons, if this false mind does not have its Six Objects, it cannot exist. If the Four Elements are separated, there are no objects to be experienced. At this point, the cognized objects each disperse and vanish, and ultimately there is no dependently arisen mind to be seen."

"Good sons, since the illusory body of this sentient being vanishes, the illusory mind also vanishes. Since the illusory mind vanishes, illusory objects also vanish. Since illusory objects vanish, illusory vanishing also vanishes. Since illusory vanishing vanishes, non-illusion does not vanish. It is like polishing a mirror: when the filth is gone its brightness naturally appears. Good sons, you should understand both body and mind to be illusory filth. When the defiled aspects are permanently extinguished, the entire universe becomes pure."

"Good sons, it is like a pure mani-pearl which reflects as all kinds of colors, depending upon its surroundings. The foolish see that pearl as really having these colors. Good sons, the pure nature of Perfect Enlightenment is disclosed in bodies and minds, according to each individual type. When these ignorant fellows say that pure Perfect Enlightenment really has body and mind, it is the same sort of error. It is only because these people are unable to free themselves from illusory appearances that I call body and mind 'illusory filth.' The one who opposes and removes illusory filth is named 'bodhisattva.' When filth is gone, its opposition is removed; then there is no opposition, no filth, nor anything to be named."

"Good sons, because these bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age fully witness all illusion and dispel all images, they immediately experience limitless purity."

"Good sons, enlightenment reveals limitless space. Since enlightenment is perfectly clear, the manifest mind is pure. Since the mind is pure, the objects of vision are pure. Since vision is pure, the eye faculty is pure. Since the eye faculty is pure, the visual consciousness is pure. Since this consciousness is pure, hearing is pure. Since hearing is pure, the ear faculty is pure. Since the faculty is pure, the auditory consciousness is pure. Since the consciousness is pure, all perception is pure, and so it is true for smell, taste, touch and conceptualization as well."

"Good sons, since the eye faculty is pure, the color spectrum is pure. Since color is pure, the field of sound is also pure. The same is true of the fields of smell, taste, touch and thought."

"Good sons, since the six objects are pure, the Earth element is pure. Since Earth is pure, Water is pure, and so are Fire and Wind. Good sons, since the Four Elements are pure, the Twelve Loci, the Eighteen Realms and the Twenty-Five Kinds of Existence are pure. Since these are pure, the Ten Powers, the Four Kinds of Fearlessness, the Four Types of Unobstructed Wisdom, the Buddha's Eighteen Distinctive Characteristics, and the Thirty-seven Aids to Enlightenment are pure, and so on up to the Eighty-four thousand *dhāraṇī*-entrances, everything is pure."

"Good sons, since all true marks are pure in their nature, one body is pure. Since one body is pure, many bodies are pure. Since many bodies are pure the same is true of all sentient beings in the ten directions, who are perfectly enlightened and pure. Good sons, since one world is pure, many worlds are pure. Since many worlds are pure, we can see that throughout all of space, completely including the three times, all things are equal, pure and changeless."

"Good sons, since space is equal and changeless, you should know that the nature of enlightenment is equal and changeless. Since the Four Elements are changeless, you should know that the nature of enlightenment is equal and changeless. The same holds true all the way up through the 84,000 *dhāraṇī*-entrances which are equal and changeless. Therefore, you should know that the nature of enlightenment is equal and changeless."

"Good sons, the unchanging purity of the nature of enlightenment completely pervades—it includes everything without restriction. Therefore, you should know that the six faculties completely pervade the realm of reality. Since the faculties completely pervade, you should know that the six sensory fields completely pervade the realm of reality. Since the sensory fields completely pervade, you should know that the Four Elements completely pervade the realm of reality. It is the same way with all things, including the *dhāraṇī*-entrances, which completely pervade the realm of reality."

"Good sons, since this marvelous nature of enlightenment completely pervades, there is neither conflict nor confusion between the natures of the faculties and their objects. Since the faculties and objects have no conflict, it is like this through all of existence, including in the *dhāraṇī*-entrances, which have neither conflict nor confusion. It is like one hundred thousand lamps shining in one room. Their light completely pervades without conflict or confusion."

"Good sons, since their enlightenment is fully perfected, you should know that bodhisattvas are not attached to the dharma, and do not seek liberation from the dharma. They do not hate *saṃsāra* and do not love nirvana. They do not venerate one for keeping the precepts, nor despise the person who breaks them. They are not in awe of the adept practitioner and do not look down on the beginner. Why? Because they are all enlightened. It is like vision seeing an object. The vision completely pervades without experiencing like or dislike. Why? Vision, in essence has no duality, therefore there is neither like nor dislike."

"Good sons, these bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age who cultivate this mind and are able to fully consummate it, have neither cultivation nor consummation. Their Perfect Enlightenment illuminates everywhere, and is perfectly still, without duality. Here, Buddha-worlds a quintillion times as many as the incalculable amount of grains of sand in the Ganges river haphazardly arise and cease like flowers in the sky. There is neither sameness nor difference, neither bondage nor freedom. Now you know for the first time that all sentient beings are originally perfect buddhas; that *saṃsāra* and nirvana are like last night's dream."

"Good sons, since they are like last night's dream, you should know that *saṃsāra* and nirvana have neither arising nor ceasing, neither coming nor going. In the actualization of this there is neither gain nor loss, neither grasping nor releasing. In the one who realizes, there is no 'naturalism,' 'stopping,' 'contrivance,' or 'annihilation.' In this actualization there is neither subject nor object, and ultimately neither actualization nor actualized one. The nature of all dharmas is equal and indestructible."

"Good sons, these bodhisattvas use this kind practice, gradually advance like this, think in this way, abide in this way, and awaken others using these kinds of expedient means. If you seek this kind of dharma, you will not again be vexed."

Then the World Honored One, wanting to restate the gist of this, spoke a verse. He said:

Universal Vision, you should know
The bodies and minds of all sentient beings
Are only illusion.
The body is composed of the Four Elements;
The mind depends upon the Six Objects.
When the Four Elements disperse,
Who will be there as a synthesis?

In this kind of gradient practice
All is completely pure,
Unchanging, pervading the realm of reality.
Without contrivance, stopping, naturalism or annihilation
And also without any subjective "releaser,"
All Buddha-worlds are
Just like sky-flowers.
The three times are all the same
Ultimately without coming or going.
Bodhisattvas who have recently arisen their minds
And sentient beings of the degenerate age
Who want to enter the Buddha Way
Should practice like this.

Amitabha! Delve into the Sutra Pitaka and swim in the Ocean of Wisdom. Pay homage to the Buddha! Thank you! See you next week!