**What is Huayen?**

The Huayen School of Chinese Buddhism takes its name from the scriptural text on which it is based, known in Chinese as the “Huayen Ching” and in Sanskrit as the “Avatamsaka Sutra”. (“Huayen” literally means “flower adornment” or “flower ornament”.) It was founded as a separate lineage in the seventh century and has continued down to the present day.

In fact, however, Huayen is not so much a “school” of Buddhism as a distinct “vehicle” (Yana) – a complete system of doctrine and practice. In the Huayen tradition itself, this system is called the Ekayana or the **“One Vehicle”**. The word **“one”** here implies **“universal”**, for Huayen claims to be a direct and complete revelation of the Dharma, of the ultimate nature of reality. It therefore includes, within its scope, not only the totality of Buddhist teachings, but also every authentic spiritual teaching and practice, wherever it might be found. The Avatamsaka Sutra expresses this universal accessibility by saying that there are buddhas teaching in every atom, and that the Dharma is being communicated in every single instant of time.

**Huayen teaches that the mind of every single being is identical with the mind of the Buddha, and that recognition of this truth is what constitutes Enlightenment.** In other words, all beings are primordially enlightened and their failure to perceive this is just a kind of illusion that needs to be dispelled. It follows that for Buddhist practice to be effective, it must be grounded in some degree of awareness of the enlightened mind that is already present within us. This is why Huayen says that the cause must be based on the result -- that the ethical and spiritual practices of Buddhism should be understood as having Enlightenment as their source rather than their goal.

Buddhist practice in Huayen, therefore, while not necessarily differing in form from the practices taught by other schools of Buddhism, is guided by a different understanding. **Practice in Huayen is not a way to achieve Enlightenment but a way to actualize Enlightenment, to make it manifest in the world through one’s own conduct.** In traditional Mahayana Buddhist terminology, this is referred to as **“adorning the Buddha-realm”**, or acting so as to transform this limited world of ignorance, ugliness and suffering into a limitless realm of wisdom, beauty and compassion.

For this reason, Huayen places great importance on awakening the aspiration to Enlightenment (bodhicitta). Perhaps the best-known saying in the Sutra itself is that **“the moment the aspiration to Enlightenment arises, perfect Buddhahood has already been attained”**. If we believe that Enlightenment is something separate from us, a distant goal to be aimed at, we will never achieve it. But if we can understand that Enlightenment is our own true nature, we will come to see that all our activities should be buddha-activities and that their sole purpose is to enable all other beings to realize this same enlightened nature. **This understanding is what bodhicitta really means, and it is only in its realization or manifestation in the world through practices grounded in wisdom and compassion that Enlightenment is to be found.**

~ “Huayen World” by Venerable Master Haiyun Jimeng