



SUKHAVATI



PURE LAND OF BUDDHA



BUDDHA LAND OF BLISS



WESTERN PURE LAND



HAVEN BEYOND HAVEN



TIAN WAI TIAN



WESTERN PARADISE

ALL GLORIES TO LORD AMITABHA BUDDHA OF SUKHAVATI !



NAMO AMITABHA

BUDDHAM SHARANAM GACHCHAMI !

DHARMAM SHARANAM GACHCHAMI !

SANGHAM SHARANAM GACHCHAMI !

DESCRIPTION OF SUKHAVATI

(SUKHA = HAPPINESS + VATI = HAVING)

< THE PURE LAND OF THE ULTIMATE BLISS >



FOUNDER & PRESIDING DEITY : AMITABHA BUDDHA, also known as,

AMITAYUS BUDDHA or AMIDA BUDDHA or DHARMAKARA

TO QUALIFY TO ENTER THIS SUBTLE, CELESTIAL & ETERNAL REALM IN THE UNIVERSE,

AN EARTHLY BEING SHOULD LIFE-LONG CHANT HEARTILY THE HOLY MANTRA :

OM NAMO AMITABHA BUDDHA

INTRODUCTION

THIS IS CALLED THE PURE LAND BUDDHIST PRACTICE. IT IS DIFFERENT FROM ZEN PRACTICE. IT HAS BEEN WIDELY POPULAR SINCE LAST 3,000 YEARS IN THE EAST AND THE WEST. IT IS A METHOD OF DEVOTION AND NOT MEDITATION. SUKHAVATI IS AN ETERNAL PLACE. SUKHAVATI HAS BEEN THERE SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL. LORD GAUTAM BUDDHA JUST INTRODUCED IT TO HIS DISCIPLES, WHILE HE WAS ON EARTH. HE BESTOWED THIS PRACTICE OUT OF COMPASSION FOR SENTIENT BEINGS. IT'S A SIMPLE, GOAL-ORIENTED & RESULT-ORIENTED PRACTICE AVAILABLE TO ANYONE. IT IS ALSO CALLED A HAVEN BEYOND HAVEN.

~ THE SMALL SUKHAVATI-VYUHA SUTRA ~

(17 VERSES)

1. *Thus have I heard* : Once Gautam Buddha was dwelling in the Anathapindada Garden of Jetavana in the country of Shravasti, in India, together with a large company of Bhikshus of 1250 members. They were all great Arhats (perfected people), well known among people, namely : Shariputra the elder, Mahamaudgalyayana, Mahakashyapa, Mahakatyayana, Mahakaushthila, Revata, Shuddhipanthaka, Nanda, Ananda, Rahula, Gavampati, Pindola-Bharadvaja, Kalodayin, Mahakapphina, Vakkula, Aniruddha, etc., all great Shravakas [*lit.* disciples]; and with many Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas, such as; Manjushri, Prince of the Lord of Truth, Bodhisattva Ajita, Bodhisattva Gandhahastin, Bodhisattva Nityodyukta, etc. and also with a large company of innumerable devas, such as, Shakrodevanam-Indra, etc.

2. Then Gautam Buddha addressed Shariputra, the elder and said, 'Beyond a hundred thousand kotis of Buddha-lands westwards from here, there is a world named Sukhavati. In that world there is a Buddha, Amitayus by name, now dwelling and preaching the law. Shariputra, why is that country named Sukhavati ? The living beings in that country have no pains, but receive pleasures only. Therefore, it is called Sukhavati.'

3. 'Again, Shariputra, in the land Sukhavati, there are seven rows of balustrades, seven rows of fine nets, and seven rows of arrayed trees; they are all of four gems and surround and enclose the land. For this reason the land is called Sukhavati.'

4, 'Again, Shariputra, in the land Sukhavati there are lakes of the seven gems, in which is filled water with the eight meritorious qualities. The lake-bases are strewn with golden sand, and the stairs of the four sides are made of gold, silver, beryl and crystal. On land, there are stories and galleries adorned with gold, silver, beryl, crystal, white coral, red pearl and diamond. The lotus-flowers in the lakes, large as chariot wheels, are blue-colored with blue splendor, yellow-colored with yellow splendor, red-colored with red splendor, white-colored with white splendor, and they are all the most exquisite and purely fragrant. Shariputra, the land Sukhavati is arrayed with such good qualities and adornments.'

5. 'Again, Shariputra, in that Buddha-land there are heavenly musical instruments always played on; gold is spread on the ground; and six times every day and night it showers Mandarava blossoms. Usually in the serene morning, all of those who live in that land, fill their plates with those wonderful blossoms, and go to make offering to a hundred thousand kotis of Buddhas of other regions; and at the time of the meal they come back to their own country, and take their meal and have a walk. Shariputra, the Sukhavati land is arrayed with such good qualities and adornments.'

6. 'And again, Shariputra, in that country there are always various wonderful birds of different colors like swan, peacock, parrot, Chari, Kalavinka and the bird of double-heads. Six times every day and night all those birds sing in melodious tune and that tune proclaims the Five Virtues, the Five powers, the Seven Bodhi-paths, the Eight Noble Truths, and other laws of such kind. The living beings in that land, having heard that singing, all invoke the Buddha, invoke the Dharma, and invoke the Sangha. Shariputra, you should not think that these birds are in fact born as punishment for sin. What is the reason? Because, in that Buddha-land there does not exist the Three Evil Realms. Shariputra, in that Buddha-land there are not to be heard even the names of the Three Evil Realms. How could there be the realms themselves ! All those birds are what Buddha Amitayus miraculously created with the desire to let them spread the voice of the Law. Shariputra, when in that Buddha-land, a gentle breeze happens to blow, the precious trees in rows and the bejeweled nets emit a delicate enrapturing tune, and it is just as if a hundred thousand musical instruments played at the same time. Everybody who hears that music naturally conceives the thought to invoke the Buddha, to invoke the Dharma, and to invoke the Sangha. Shariputra, that Buddha-land is arrayed with such good qualities and adornments.'

7. 'Shariputra, what do you think in your mind, for what reason that Buddha is called Amitabha ? Shariputra, the light of that Buddha is boundless and shining without impediments all over the countries of the ten quarters (10 directions). Therefore he is called Amitabha. Again, Shariputra, the life of that Buddha and of his people is endless and boundless in Asamkhyakalpas, so he is named Amitayus. Shariputra, since Buddha

Amitayus attained Buddhahood, it has passed now ten Kalpas. Again, Shariputra, that Buddha has numerous Shravakas or disciples, who are all Arhats and whose number cannot be known by (ordinary) calculation. The number of Bodhisattvas cannot be known also. Shariputra, that Buddha-land is arrayed with such good qualities and adornments.'

8. 'Again, Shariputra, the beings born in the land of Sukhavati are all Avinivartaniya. Among them is a multitude of beings bound to one birth only on the earth; and their number, being extremely large, cannot be expressed by (ordinary) calculation. Only can it be mentioned in boundless Asamkhya-kalpas. Shariputra, the sentient beings who hear this account ought to put up their prayer that they may be born into that country; for they will be able to be in the same place together with those noble personages. Shariputra, by means of small good works or virtues, no one can be born in that country.'

9. 'Shariputra, if there be a good man or a good woman, who, on hearing of Buddha Amitayus, keeps his name in mind, with thoughts undisturbed, for one day, two days, three days, four days, five days, six days or seven days, that person, when about to die, will see Amitayus Buddha, accompanied by his holy host, appear before him; and immediately after his death, he, with his mind undisturbed, can be born into the Sukhavati land of Buddha Amitayus. Shariputra, as I witness this benefit, I say these words; every being who listens to this preaching ought to offer up prayer with the desire to be born into that country.'

10. 'Shariputra, as I now glorify the inconceivable excellences of Amitayus Buddha, there are also in the *Eastern Quarters* Buddha Akshobhya, Buddha Merudhvaja, Buddha Mahameru, Buddha Meruprabhasa, Buddha Manjughosha, and Buddhas as many as the sands of the River Ganga, each of whom, in his own country stretching out his long broad tongue that covers three thousand greater worlds completely, proclaims these truthful words; All you sentient beings believe in this Sutra, which is approved and protected by all the Buddhas, and in which are glorified the inconceivable excellences of Buddha Amitayus.'

11. 'Shariputra, in the *Southern Quarters* there are Buddha Candrasuryapradipa, Buddha Yacahprabha, Buddha Maharciskandha, Buddha Merupradipa, Buddha Anantavirya, and Buddhas as many as the sands of the River Ganga, each of whom, in his own country stretching out his long broad tongue that covers three thousand greater worlds completely, proclaims these truthful words: All you sentient beings believe in this Sutra, which is approved and protected by all the Buddhas, and in which are glorified the inconceivable excellences of Buddha Amitayus.'

12. 'Shariputra, in the *Western Quarters* there are Buddha Amitayus, Buddha Amitalakshana, Buddha Amitadhvaja, Buddha Mahaprabha, Buddha Mahanirbhasa, Buddha Ratnala kshana, Buddha Shuddharashmiprabha, and Buddhas as many as the sands of the River Ganga, each of whom, in his own country stretching out his long broad tongue that covers three thousand greater worlds completely, proclaims these truthful words: All you sentient beings believe in this Sutra, which is approved and protected by all the Buddhas, and in which are glorified the inconceivable excellences of Buddha Amitayus.'

13. 'Shariputra, in the *Northern Quarters* there are Buddha Arciskandha, Buddha Vaishvanaranirghosha, Buddha Dushpradharsha, Buddha Adityasambhava, Buddha

Jaliniprabha, and Buddhas as many as the sands of the River Ganga, each of whom, in his own country stretching out his long broad tongue that covers three thousand greater worlds completely, proclaims these truthful words: All you sentient beings believe in this Sutra, which is approved and protected by all the Buddhas, and in which are glorified the inconceivable excellences of Buddha Amitayus.'

14. 'Shariputra, in the *Nadir Quarters* there are Buddha Simha, Buddha Yacas, Buddha Yashaprabhava, Buddha Dharma, Buddha Dharmadhvaja, Buddha Dharmadhara, and Buddhas as many as the sands of the River Ganga, each of whom, in his own country stretching out his long broad tongue that covers three thousand greater worlds completely, proclaims these truthful words: All you sentient beings believe in this Sutra, which is approved and protected by all the Buddhas, and in which are glorified the inconceivable excellences of Buddha Amitayus.'

15. 'Shariputra, in the *Zenith Quarters* there are Buddha Brahmaghosha, Buddha Nakshatraraja, Buddha Gandhottama, Buddha Gandhaprabhasa, Buddha Maharciskandha, Buddha Ratnakusumasampushpitagatra, Buddha Salendraraja, Buddha Ratnotpalashri, Buddha Sarvarthadarsha, Buddha Sumerukalpa, and Buddhas as many as the sands of the River Ganga, each of whom, in his own country stretching out his long broad tongue that covers three thousand greater worlds completely, proclaims these truthful words: All you sentient beings believe in this Sutra, which is approved and protected by all the Buddhas, and in which are glorified the inconceivable excellences of Buddha Amitayus.'

16. 'Shariputra, what do you think in your mind, why it is called the Sutra approved and protected by all the Buddhas ? Shariputra, if there be a good man or a good woman, who listens to those Buddhas' invocation of the name of Buddha Amitayus and the name of this Sutra, that good man or woman will be protected by all the Buddhas and never fail to attain Anuttara-samyaksambodhi (CONSUMMATION OF INCOMPARABLE ENLIGHTENMENT). For this reason, Shariputra, all of you should believe in my words and in what all the Buddhas proclaim. Shariputra, if there are men who have already made, are now making, or shall make prayer with the desire to be born in the land of Buddha Amitayus, they never fail to attain Anuttara-samyaksambodhi, and have been born, are now being born or shall be born in that country. Therefore, Shariputra, a good man or good woman who has the faith ought to offer up prayers to be born in that land.'

17. 'Shariputra, as I am now praising the inconceivable excellences of those Buddhas, so all those Buddhas are magnifying the inconceivable excellences of myself, saying these words: Shakyamuni, the Buddha, has successfully achieved a rare thing of extreme difficulty; he has attained Anuttara-samyaksambodhi in the Saha world (Samsara) in the evil period of five corruptions -- Corruption of Kalpa, Corruption of Belief, Corruption of Passions, Corruption of Living Beings, and Corruption of Life; and for the sake of all the sentient beings he is preaching the Law which is not easy to accept. Shariputra, you must see that in the midst of this evil world of five corruptions, I have achieved this difficult thing of attaining Anuttara-samyaksambodhi and for the benefit of all the beings I am preaching the Law, which is difficult to be accepted. This is how it is esteemed as a thing of extreme difficulty.'

Lord Gautam Buddha having preached this Sutra, Shariputra and bhikshus and devas, manavas, asuras etc., of all the worlds, who listened to his preaching, believed and accepted with joy, made worship and dispersed.

WHO IS AMITABHA BUDDHA OF SUKHAVATI ?

Once there was a King in the ultra ancient time. He was so deeply moved by the sufferings of beings in the world that he gave up his throne and became a monk, named Dharmakara. He was heavily influenced by 81st Buddha called Dipankara and vowed to become a Buddha himself, with the aim of creating a Buddha-land, free from all sufferings and full of all-round happiness. This happened before billions of years.

He meditated at length at other Buddha-lands and ultimately he achieved the final Enlightenment. He became Amitabha Buddha and he established his Buddha-land called Sukhavati, in six quarters (six divisions in six directions). He has been the ruler of Sukhavati.

People who sincerely call on Amitabha Buddha for help will be reborn in Sukhavati – where there are no distractions and where they can continue to work towards the final liberation (Nirvana) under the most favorable conditions. They then help other sentient beings to become liberated. Thus, this is a Mahayana practice, available to all types of genuine seekers.

This branch of Buddhist practice offers a way of Enlightenment for persons, who cannot handle the subtleties of meditation or endure rigorous rituals or carry out hard penance or just live especially elevated life. It is a method of simple devotion to Amitabha Buddha, by way of having faith in Him, having aspiration to be reborn in his realm called Sukhavati and chanting his holy name till one's death. That's all !

One of the great missions of Gautam Buddha in the human world was to usher people into Sukhavati in the 4th dimension, after their death, through this simple method. To this day, this practice is being done in the East & West, with some variations. Japan & China are leaders.

Sukhavati is a spiritual reality experienced by many sincere aspirants. Here the Mantra is the vehicle to reach the Promised Land of Buddhas. A host of eternal spiritual benefits await the successful aspirants upon being reborn in the subtle realm of Sukhavati, as described in the above Sutra. One can come to the Pure Land of Amitābha, if one visualizes at one's death Amitābha in the heaven over their head (western horizon), think of his name as a mantra and leave the body as a soul through the crown chakra.

Pure Mind leads to Pure Land. This is the basic tenet of this practice. The whole process is aimed at matching one's spiritual level to that of the Pure Land. Here, the rebirth happens as spontaneous generation in a chariot-wheel-size, bejeweled lotus flower and not in a womb. The man-woman relationship and materialistic activities are absent here. Only spiritual practices are going on here. It is an utopian world, indeed !





THE LARGER SUKHAVATI-VYUHA SUTRA

or

The Sutra on the Buddha of Eternal Life

(48 VERSES)

THE LARGER SUKHAVATI-VYUHA - DESCRIPTION OF SUKHAVATI - THE LAND OF BLISS

FOUNDED AND PRESIDED BY LORD AMITABHA BUDDHA



Om.

Adoration to the Three Treasures!

Om.

Adoration to all the glorious Buddhas and Bodhisattvas!

Adoration to all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Aryas, Sravakas, and Pratyekabuddhas, past, present, and to come, who dwell in the unlimited and endless world systems of the ten quarters (directions)!

Adoration to Amitabha!

Adoration to him whose soul is endowed with incomprehensible virtues!

Adoration to Amitabha, to the Jina, to thee, O Sage!

I go to Sukhavati through thy compassion also;

To Sukhavati, with its groves, resplendent with gold,

The delightful, adorned with the sons of Sugata,

I go to it, which is full of many jewels and treasures;

And the refuge of thee, the famous and wise.

LARGER SUKHAVATI-VYUHASUTRA

(RECITED BY LORD GAUTAM BUDDHA TO HIS DISCIPLE ANANDA)

Preface

[1] Thus have I heard. At one time Lord Gautam Buddha was staying on the Vulture Peak (Giridhikut) in Rajagriha (Bihar) with a large company of twelve thousand monks. They were all great sages who had already attained supernatural powers. Among them were the following: the Venerable Ajnata-kaundinya, the Venerable Ashvajit, the Venerable Vaspa, the Venerable Mahanama, the Venerable Bhadrajit, the Venerable Vimala, the Venerable Yashodeva, the Venerable Subahu, the Venerable Purnaka, the Venerable Gavampati, the Venerable Uruvilva-kashyapa, the Venerable Gaya-kashyapa, the Venerable Nadi-kashyapa, the Venerable Mahakashyapa, the Venerable Shariputra, the Venerable Mahamaudgalyayana, the Venerable Kapphina, the Venerable Mahakausthilya, the Venerable Mahakatyayana, the Venerable Mahacunda, the Venerable Purna-maitrayaniputra, the Venerable Aniruddha, the Venerable Revata, the Venerable Kimpila, the Venerable Amogha-rajā, the Venerable Parayanika, the Venerable Vakkula, the Venerable Nanda, the Venerable Svagata, the Venerable Rahula and the Venerable Ananda. All of these were Elders.

Mahayana bodhisattvas also accompanied the Buddha, including all those of this Auspicious Kalpa, such as the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, the Bodhisattva Manjushri and the Bodhisattva Maitreya. There were also the sixteen lay bodhisattvas, such as Bhadrāpala, as well as the Bodhisattva Profound Thought, the Bodhisattva Wisdom of Faith, the Bodhisattva Voidness, the Bodhisattva Bloom of Supernatural Power, the Bodhisattva Hero of Light, the Bodhisattva Superior wisdom, the Bodhisattva Banner of Wisdom, the Bodhisattva Tranquil Ability, the Bodhisattva Wisdom of Vows, the Bodhisattva Sweet-smelling Elephant, the Bodhisattva Hero of Treasures, the Bodhisattva Dwelling-in-the-Center, the Bodhisattva Practice of Restraint and the Bodhisattva Emancipation.

Virtues of the Bodhisattva Audience

[2] Each of these bodhisattvas, following the virtues of the Mahasattva Samantabhadra, is endowed with the immeasurable practices and vows of the Bodhisattva Path, and firmly dwells in all the meritorious deeds. He freely travels in all the ten quarters and employs skillful means of emancipation. He enters the treasury of the Dharma of the Buddhas, and reaches the Other Shore. Throughout the innumerable worlds he attains Enlightenment. First, dwelling in the Tusita Heaven, he proclaims the true Dharma. Having left the heavenly palace, he descends into his mother's womb. Soon after he is born from her right side, he takes seven steps. As he does so, an effulgence illuminates everywhere in the ten

quarters and innumerable Buddha-lands shake in six ways. Then he utters these words, "I will become the most honored one in the world."

Shankara and Brahma reverently attend him, and heavenly beings adore and worship him. He shows his ability in calculation, writing, archery and horsemanship. He is also conversant with the divine arts and well-read in many volumes. In the field outside the palace he trains himself in the martial arts, and at court shows that he also enjoys the pleasures of the senses.

When he first encounters old age, sickness and death, he realizes the impermanence of the world. He renounces his kingdom, wealth and throne, and goes into the mountains to practice the Way. After sending back the white horse that he has been riding, together with the jeweled crown and ornaments which he has been wearing, he takes off his magnificent clothes and puts on a Dharma robe. He cuts his hair and shaves his beard, sits upright under a tree and strives at ascetic practices for six years in accord with the traditional way. Since he has appeared in the world of the five defilements, he behaves as the multitude. And as his body appears dirty, he takes a bath in the Golden River. As a god bends a branch down towards him, he is able to climb up the river bank. A divine bird follows him closely to the seat of Enlightenment. A deva takes the form of a youth and, perceiving a favorable sign, respectfully presents him with the auspicious grass. The Bodhisattva compassionately accepts it, spreads it under the Bodhi-tree and sits upon it with his legs crossed. He emits a great flood of light to inform Mara of this. Mara and his army come to attack and tempt him, but he brings them under control with the power of wisdom and makes them all surrender. Then he attains the supreme Dharma and realizes the highest, perfect Enlightenment.

As Shankara and Brahma request him to turn the Wheel of the Dharma, the Buddha visits various places and preaches the Dharma in his thunderous voice. He beats the Dharma-drum, blows the Dharma-conch, brandishes the Dharma-sword, hoists the Dharma-banner, rolls the Dharma-thunder, hurls the Dharma-lightning, brings the Dharma-rain, and bestows the Dharma-gift. At all times, he awakens the world with the sound of the Dharma. His light illuminates countless Buddha-lands, causing the entire world to quake in six ways. It encompasses Mara's realm, shaking his palace, so that he and his host become frightened and surrender. The bodhisattva tears asunder the net of evil, destroys wrong views, removes afflictions, flushes the gutters of desire, protects the Dharma-castle, opens the Dharma-gate, washes off the grime of the passions, and reveals the pure white Dharma. He unifies everything in the Buddha Dharma, and thus proclaims the right teaching. He enters the town to beg alms; he accepts even rich food to enable the donors to accumulate merit and also to show that he is a field of virtue. Wishing to expound the Dharma, he smiles and so cures the three pains with various Dharma-medicines. He teaches that the aspiration for Enlightenment has immeasurable merit and, by giving predictions to bodhisattvas, he enables them to attain Buddhahood.

He demonstrates that he passes into Nirvana, but endlessly brings sentient beings to emancipation. In removing their defilements, planting various roots of

virtue and attaining excellent merit, he displays wonderful and inconceivable works.

Furthermore, each of the bodhisattvas in the assembly is able to visit various Buddha-lands and expound teachings of the Way. His manner of practice is pure and undefiled. Just as a magician with his perfect skill can create at will various illusions, including images of man or woman, at will, so the bodhisattva, having thoroughly learned all the methods of emancipation and attained serene awareness of reality, can freely teach and transform beings.

He manifests himself everywhere in innumerable Buddha-lands, performing acts of compassion for sentient beings tirelessly and with diligence. He has thus obtained complete mastery of such methods of emancipation. He is thoroughly conversant with the essentials of the sutras for bodhisattvas and, as his fame spreads everywhere, he guides sentient beings throughout the ten quarters. All Buddhas remember him and give him their protection. He has already dwelt in all the Buddha's abodes and performed all the deeds of the Great Sage.

He proclaims the Tathagata's teachings, acts as a great master for other bodhisattvas and, with profound samadhi and wisdom, guides multitudes of beings. With penetrating insight into the essential nature of dharmas, he discerns different aspects of living beings and closely watches over all the worlds. In making offerings to the Buddhas, he manifests transformed bodies like flashes of lightning.

Having well learned the extensive wisdom of fearless and having realized the illusory nature of dharmas, he destroys Mara's nets and unties all the bonds of passion. He rises above the stages of shravakas and pratyekabuddhas and attains the samadhis of emptiness, non-form, and non-desire. He skillfully provides expedient means and thus reveals three distinct teachings.

Then for those of the middle and lower stages, he demonstrates his passing into Nirvana. But, in reality, he is non-active and non-acquisitive, and, being aware that dharmas in themselves neither arise nor perish, he realizes that they are of absolute equality. He has attained innumerable dharanis, a hundred thousand samadhis and various kinds of spiritual faculties and wisdom. With the Meditation of Vast and Universal Tranquility, he enters deeply into the Dharma-treasury for bodhisattvas. After attaining the Buddha-garland Samadhi, he proclaims and expounds all the sutras. While dwelling deep in meditation, he visualizes all the innumerable Buddhas and in an instant visits every one of them.

By elucidating and teaching the ultimate truth to sentient beings, he delivers them from the state of extreme pains, from the conditions in which suffering is so great as to prevent people from finding time for Buddhist practices, and also from the conditions in which suffering is not so great as to prevent them from doing so. Having attained the Tathagata's thorough knowledge and eloquence, he has fluent command of languages, with which he enlightens all beings. He is above all worldly affairs and his mind, always serene, dwells on the path of emancipation; this gives him complete control over all dharmas.

Without being asked to do so, he becomes a good friend to each of the multitude of beings and carries their heavy karmic burdens on his back. He upholds the Tathagata's profound Dharma-treasury and protects the seeds of Buddhahood, so that they may continue to multiply. Having awakened great compassion for sentient beings, he kindly expounds the teaching, and endows them with the Dharma-eye. He blocks the paths to the three evil realms, opens the gate of virtue and, without waiting for their request, provides the beings with the Dharma. He does this for the multitude of beings just as a dutiful son loves and respects his parents. He indeed looks upon sentient beings as his own self.

With such roots of virtue, all the bodhisattvas in the assembly had reached the shore of emancipation. They had acquired the Buddha's immeasurable merit and attained the sacred, pure and inconceivable wisdom.

Innumerable bodhisattvas, mahasattvas, such as these assembled there all at once.

Glorious Features of the Buddha

[3] At that time all the senses of the World-Honored One radiated joy, his entire body appeared serene and glorious, and his august countenance looked most majestic. Having perceived the Buddha's holy intention, the **Venerable Ananda** rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, prostrated himself, and joining his palms in reverence, said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, today all your senses are radiant with joy, your body is serene and glorious, and your august countenance is as majestic as a clear mirror whose brightness radiates outward and inward. The magnificence of your dignified appearance is unsurpassed and beyond measure. I have never seen you look so superb and majestic as today. With respect, Great Sage, this thought has occurred to me: 'Today, the World-Honored One dwells in the rare and marvelous Dharma; today, the World-Hero dwells in the Buddha's abode; today, the World-Eye concentrates on the performance of the leader's duty; today, the World-Valiant One dwells in the supreme Bodhi; today, the One Most Honored in Heaven realizes the Tathagata's virtue. The Buddhas of the past, present and future contemplate each other. How can this present Buddha not contemplate all other Buddhas?' For what reason does his countenance look so majestic and brilliant?"

Then the World-Honored One said to Ananda, "Tell me, Ananda, whether some god urged you to put this question to the Buddha or whether you asked about his glorious countenance from your own wise observation.

"Ananda replied to the Buddha, "No god came to prompt me. I asked you about this matter of my own accord."

The Buddha said, "Well said, Ananda. I am very pleased with your question. You have shown profound wisdom and subtle insight in asking me this wise question out of compassion for sentient beings. As the Tathagata, I regard beings of the three worlds with boundless great compassion. The reason for my appearance in the world is to reveal teachings of the Way and save multitudes of beings by

endowing them with true benefits. Even in countless millions of kalpas it is difficult to come upon and meet a Tathagata. It is as difficult as seeing an udumbara flower, which blooms very rarely. Your question is of great benefit and will enlighten all heavenly and human beings. Ananda, you should realize that the Tathagata's perfectly enlightened wisdom is unfathomable, capable of leading innumerable beings to emancipation, and that his penetrating insight cannot be obstructed. With just one meal, he is able to live for a hundred thousand kotis of kalpas, or an incalculable and immeasurable length of time, or beyond. Even after that lapse of time, his senses will still be radiant with joy and show no signs of deterioration; his appearance will not change, and his august countenance will look just the same. The reason for this is that the Tathagata's meditation and wisdom are perfect and boundless and that he has attained unrestricted power over all dharmas. Ananda, listen carefully. I shall now expound the Dharma."

Ananda replied, "Yes, I will. With joy in my heart, I wish to hear the Dharma."

53 Past Buddhas

[4] The Buddha said to Ananda, "In the distant past -- innumerable, incalculable and inconceivable kalpas ago -- a Tathagata named Dipankara appeared in the world. Having taught and freed innumerable beings and led them all along the path of Enlightenment, he passed into Nirvana. Next appeared a Tathagata named Far-reaching Light. After him came Moonlight, and then Sandalwood-Incense, King of Beautiful Mountains, Crown of Mount Sumeru, Brilliant like Mount Sumeru, Color of the Moon, Right Recollection, Free of Defilement, Non-attachment, Dragon-deva, Nocturnal Light, Peaceful and Brilliant Peak, Immovable Ground, Exquisite Beryl Flower, Golden Beryl Luster, Gold-treasure, Flaming Light, Fiery Origin, Earth-shaking, Image of the Moon, Sound of the Sun, Flower of Freedom, Glorious Light, Miraculous Power of the Ocean of Enlightenment, Water Light, Great Fragrance, Free of Dust and Defilement, Abandoning Enmity, Flame of Jewels, Beautiful Peak, Heroic Stance, Merit-possessing Wisdom, Outshining the Sun and the Moon, Beryl Light of the Sun and the Moon, Supreme Beryl Light, Highest Peak, Flower of Enlightenment, Brightness of the Moon, Sunlight, King of the Colors of Flowers, Moonlight on the Water, Dispelling the Darkness of Ignorance, Practice of Removing Hindrances, Pure Faith, Storage of Good, Majestic Glory, Wisdom of the Dharma, Call of the Phoenix, Roar of the Lion, Voice of the Dragon and Dwelling-in-the-world. All these Buddhas have already passed into Nirvana.

Lokeshvararaja Buddha and his disciple Dharmakara

[5] "Then appeared a Buddha named Lokeshvararaja, the Tathagata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One, Possessed of Wisdom and Practice, Perfected One, Knower of the World, Unsurpassed One, Tamer of Men, Master of Gods and Men, Buddha and World-Honored One.

"At that time there was a king, who, having heard the Buddha's exposition of the Dharma, rejoiced in his heart and awakened aspiration for the highest, perfect Enlightenment. He renounced his kingdom and the throne, and became a monk

named Dharmakara. Having superior intelligence, courage and wisdom, he distinguished himself in the world. He went to see the Tathagata Lokeshvararaja, knelt down at his feet, walked round him three times keeping him always on his right, prostrated himself on the ground, and putting his palms together in worship, praised the Buddha with these verses:

Verses praising Lokeshvararaja Buddha

The shining face of the Buddha is glorious;
Boundless is his magnificence.
Radiant splendor such as his
Is beyond all comparison.
The sun, the moon and the mani-jewel,
Though shining with dazzling brightness,
Are completely dimmed and obscured
As if they were a pile of ink-sticks

The countenance of the Tathagata
Is beyond compare in the whole world.
The great voice of the Enlightened One
Resounds throughout the ten regions.
His morality, learning, endeavor,
Absorption in meditation, wisdom
And magnificent virtues have no equal;
They are wonderful and unsurpassed.

He meditates deeply and directly
On the oceanic Dharma of all the Buddhas.
He knows its depth and breadth
And penetrates to its farthest end.
Ignorance, greed and anger
Are forever absent in the World-Honored One.
He is the lion, the most valiant of all men;
His glorious virtue is unlimited.

His meritorious achievements are vast;
His wisdom is deep and sublime.
His light, with awe-inspiring glory,
Shakes the universe of a thousand million worlds.
I resolve to become a Buddha,
Equal in attainment to you, O holy king of the Dharma,
To save living beings from birth-and-death,
And to lead them all to emancipation.

My discipline in giving, mind-control,
Moral virtues, forbearance and effort,
And also in meditation and wisdom,
Shall be supreme and unsurpassed.
I vow that, when I have become a Buddha,
I shall carry out this promise everywhere;

And to all fear-ridden beings
Shall I give great peace.

Even though there are Buddhas,
A thousand million kotis in number,
And multitudes of great sages
Countless as the sands of the Ganges,
I shall make offerings
To all those Buddhas.
I shall seek the supreme Way
Resolutely and tirelessly.

Even though the Buddha-lands are as innumerable
As the sands of the Ganges,
And other regions and worlds
Are also without number,
My light shall shine everywhere,
Pervading all those lands.
Such being the result of my efforts,
My glorious power shall be immeasurable.

When I have become a Buddha,
My land shall be most exquisite,
And its people wonderful and unexcelled;
The seat of Enlightenment shall be supreme.
My land, being like Nirvana itself,
Shall be beyond comparison.
I take pity on living beings
And resolve to save them all.

Those who come from the ten quarters
Shall find joy and serenity of heart;
When they reach my land,
They shall dwell in peace and happiness.
I beg you, the Buddha, to become my witness
And to vouch for the truth of my aspiration.
Having now made my vows to you,
I will strive to fulfill them.

The World-Honored Ones in the ten quarters
Have unimpeded wisdom;
I call upon those Honored Ones
To bear witness to my intention.
Even though I must remain
In a state of extreme pain,
I will diligently practice,
Enduring all hardships with tireless vigor."

Dharmakara's resolution to become a Buddha

[6] The Buddha said to Ananda, "Having spoken these verses, the Bhiksu Dharmakara said to the Buddha Lokeshvararaja, 'Respectfully, World-Honored One, I announce that I have awakened aspiration for the highest, perfect Enlightenment. I beseech you to explain the Dharma to me fully, so that I can perform practices for the establishment of a pure Buddha-land adorned with infinite excellent qualities. So please teach me how to attain Enlightenment quickly and to remove the roots of afflictions of birth-and-death for all.'"

The Buddha said to Ananda, "At that time the Buddha Lokeshvararaja replied to the Bhiksu Dharmakara, 'You yourself should know by what practice you can establish a glorious Buddha-land.' The Bhiksu said to the Buddha, 'That is far too vast and deep for my comprehension. I sincerely beseech you, World-Honored One, to explain in detail the practices by which Buddhas, Tathagatas, established their pure lands. After I hear that, I wish to practice as instructed and so fulfill my aspirations.'

"At that time the Buddha Lokeshvararaja recognized the Bhiksu Dharmakara's noble and high aspirations, and taught him as follows: 'If, for example, one keeps on bailing water out of a great ocean with a pint-measure, one will be able to reach the bottom after many kalpas and then obtain rare treasures. Likewise, if one sincerely, diligently and unceasingly seeks the Way, one will be able to reach one's destination. What vow is there which cannot be fulfilled?'

"Then the Buddha Lokeshvararaja explained in detail the greater and lesser aspects of two hundred and ten kotis of Buddha-lands, together with the good and evil natures of heavenly and human beings living there. He revealed them all to the Bhiksu just as he had requested. Then the Bhiksu, having heard the Buddha's exposition of the glorious pure land and also having seen all of them, resolved upon his supreme, unsurpassed vows. His mind being serene and his aspirations free of attachment, he was unexcelled throughout the world. For five full kalpas he contemplated the vows, and then chose the pure practices for the establishment of his Buddha-land."

Ananda asked the Buddha, "How long was the life-span of beings in the land of the Buddha Lokeshvararaja?"

The Buddha replied, "The length of life of that Buddha was forty-two kalpas."

He continued, "After that Dharmakara Bodhisattva adopted the pure practices, which had led to the establishment of the excellent lands of two hundred and ten kotis of Buddhas. When he had finished this task, he went to the Lokeshvararaja Buddha, knelt down at his feet, walked round him three times, joined his palms in worship and sat down. He then said to the Buddha, 'I have adopted the pure practices for the establishment of a glorious Buddha-land.' The Buddha said to him, 'You should proclaim this. Know that now is the right time. Encourage and delight the entire assembly. Hearing this, other bodhisattvas will practice this Dharma and so fulfill their innumerable great vows.' The Bhiksu replied, 'I beg you to grant me your attention. Now I will fully proclaim my vows.'

Dharmakara's 48 Vows before his Master Lokeshvararaja

[7]

- (1) If, when I attain Buddhahood, there should be in my land a hell, a realm of hungry spirits or a realm of animals, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.
- (2) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should after death fall again into the three evil realms, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.
- (3) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should not all be the color of pure gold, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.
- (4) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should not all be of one appearance, and should there be any difference in beauty, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.
- (5) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should not remember all their previous lives, not knowing even the events which occurred during the previous hundred thousand kotis of nayutas of kalpas, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.
- (6) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should not possess the divine eye of seeing even a hundred thousand kotis of nayutas of Buddha-lands, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.
- (7) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should not possess the divine ear of hearing the teachings of at least a hundred thousand kotis of nayutas of Buddhas and should not remember all of them, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.
- (8) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should not possess the faculty of knowing the thoughts of others, at least those of all sentient beings living in a hundred thousand kotis of nayutas of Buddha-lands, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.
- (9) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should not possess the supernatural power of travelling anywhere in one instant, even beyond a hundred thousand kotis of nayutas of Buddha-lands, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.
- (10) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should give rise to thoughts of self-attachment, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.
- (11) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should not dwell in the Definitely Assured State and unfailingly reach Nirvana, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.
- (12) If, when I attain Buddhahood, my light should be limited, unable to illuminate at least a hundred thousand kotis of nayutas of Buddha-lands, may I not attain

perfect Enlightenment.

(13) If, when I attain Buddhahood, my life-span should be limited, even to the extent of a hundred thousand kotis of nayutas of kalpas, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(14) If, when I attain Buddhahood, the number of the shravakas in my land could be known, even if all the beings and pratyekabuddhas living in this universe of a thousand million worlds should count them during a hundred thousand kalpas, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(15) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should have limited life-spans, except when they wish to shorten them in accordance with their original vows, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(16) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should even hear of any wrongdoing, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(17) If, when I attain Buddhahood, innumerable Buddhas in the land of the ten quarters should not all praise and glorify my Name, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(18) If, when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings in the lands of the ten quarters who sincerely and joyfully entrust themselves to me, desire to be born in my land, and call my Name, even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment. Excluded, however, are those who commit the five gravest offences and abuse the right Dharma. (This is known as the Primal Vow)

(19) If, when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings in the lands of the ten quarters, who awaken aspiration for Enlightenment, do various meritorious deeds and sincerely desire to be born in my land, should not, at their death, see me appear before them surrounded by a multitude of sages, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(20) If, when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings in the lands of the ten quarters who, having heard my Name, concentrate their thoughts on my land, plant roots of virtue, and sincerely transfer their merits towards my land with a desire to be born there, should not eventually fulfill their aspiration, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(21) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should not all be endowed with the thirty-two physical characteristics of a Great Man, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(22) If, when I attain Buddhahood, bodhisattvas in the Buddha-lands of other quarters who visit my land should not ultimately and unfailingly reach the Stage of Becoming a Buddha after One More Life, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment. Excepted are those who wish to teach and guide sentient beings in accordance with their original vows. For they wear the armor of great vows, accumulate merits, deliver all beings from birth-and-death, visit Buddha-lands to

perform the bodhisattva practices, make offerings to Buddhas, Tathagatas, throughout the ten quarters, enlighten uncountable sentient beings as numerous as the sands of the River Ganges, and establish them in the highest, perfect Enlightenment. Such bodhisattvas transcend the course of practice of the ordinary bodhisattvas, manifest the practices of all the bodhisattva stages, and cultivate the virtues of Samantabhadra.

(23) If, when I attain Buddhahood, bodhisattvas in my land, in order to make offerings to Buddhas through my transcendent power, should not be able to reach immeasurable and innumerable kotis of nayutas of Buddha-lands in as short a time as it takes to eat a meal, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(24) If, when I attain Buddhahood, bodhisattvas in my land should not be able, as they wish, to perform meritorious acts of worshipping the Buddhas with the offerings of their choice, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(25) If, when I attain Buddhahood, bodhisattvas in my land should not be able to expound the Dharma with the all-knowing wisdom, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(26) If, when I attain Buddhahood, there should be any bodhisattva in my land not endowed with the body of the Vajra-god Narayana, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(27) If, when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings should be able, even with the divine eye, to distinguish by name calculate by number all the myriads of manifestations provided for the humans and devas in my land, which are glorious and resplendent and have exquisite details beyond description, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(28) If, when I attain Buddhahood, bodhisattvas in my land, even those with little store of merit, should not be able to see the Bodhi-tree which has countless colors and is four million yojana in height, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(29) If, when I attain Buddhahood, bodhisattvas in my land should not acquire eloquence and wisdom in upholding sutras and reciting and expounding them, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(30) If, when I attain Buddhahood, the wisdom and eloquence of bodhisattvas in my land should be limited, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(31) If, when I attain Buddhahood, my land should not be resplendent, revealing in its light all the immeasurable, innumerable and inconceivable Buddha-lands, like images reflected in a clear mirror, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(32) If, when I attain Buddhahood, all the myriads of manifestations in my land, from the ground to the sky, such as palaces, pavilions, ponds, streams and trees, should not be composed of both countless treasures, which surpass in supreme excellence anything in the worlds of humans and devas, and of a hundred thousand kinds of aromatic wood, whose fragrance pervades all the worlds of the

ten quarters, causing all bodhisattvas who sense it to perform Buddhist practices, then may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(33) If, when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings in the immeasurable and inconceivable Buddha-lands of the ten quarters, who have been touched by my light, should not feel peace and happiness in their bodies and minds surpassing those of humans and devas, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(34) If, when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings in the immeasurable and inconceivable Buddha-lands of the ten quarters, who have heard my Name, should not gain the bodhisattva's insight into the non-arising of all dharmas and should not acquire various profound dharanis, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(35) If, when I attain Buddhahood, women in the immeasurable and inconceivable Buddha-lands of the ten quarters who, having heard my Name, rejoice in faith, awaken aspiration for Enlightenment and wish to renounce womanhood, should after death be reborn again as women, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(36) If, when I attain Buddhahood, bodhisattvas in the immeasurable and inconceivable Buddha-lands of the ten quarters, who have heard my Name, should not, after the end of their lives, always perform sacred practices until they reach Buddhahood, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(37) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in the immeasurable and inconceivable Buddha-lands of the ten quarters, who having heard my Name, prostrate themselves on the ground to revere and worship me, rejoice in faith, and perform bodhisattva practices, should not be respected by all devas and people of the world, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(38) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should not obtain clothing, as soon as such a desire arises in their minds, and if the fine robes as prescribed and praised by the Buddhas should not be spontaneously provided for them to wear, and if these clothes should need sewing, bleaching, dyeing or washing, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(39) If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should not enjoy happiness and pleasure comparable to that of a monk who has exhausted all the passions, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(40) If, when I attain Buddhahood, the bodhisattvas in my land who wish to see the immeasurable glorious Buddha-lands of the ten quarters, should not be able to view all of them reflected in the jeweled trees, just as one sees one's face reflected in a clear mirror, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(41) If, when I attain Buddhahood, bodhisattvas in the lands of the other quarters who hear my Name should, at any time before becoming Buddhas, have impaired, inferior or incomplete sense organs, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(42) If, when I attain Buddhahood, bodhisattvas in the lands of the other quarters

who hear my Name should not all attain the samadhi called 'pure emancipation' and, while dwelling therein, without losing concentration, should not be able to make offerings in one instant to immeasurable and inconceivable Buddhas, World-Honored Ones, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(43) If, when I attain Buddhahood, bodhisattvas in the lands of the other quarters who hear my Name should not be reborn into noble families after their death, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(44) If, when I attain Buddhahood, bodhisattvas in the lands of the other quarters who hear my Name should not rejoice so greatly as to dance and perform the bodhisattva practices and should not acquire stores of merit, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(45) If, when I attain Buddhahood, bodhisattvas in the lands of the other quarters who hear my Name should not all attain the samadhi called 'universal equality' and, while dwelling therein, should not always be able to see all the immeasurable and inconceivable Tathagatas until those bodhisattvas, too, become Buddhas, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(46) If, when I attain Buddhahood, bodhisattvas in my land should not be able to hear spontaneously whatever teachings they may wish, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(47) If, when I attain Buddhahood, bodhisattvas in the lands of the other quarters who hear my Name should not instantly reach the Stage of Non-retrogression, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(48) If, when I attain Buddhahood, bodhisattvas in the lands of the other quarters who hear my Name should not instantly gain the first, second and third insights into the nature of dharmas and firmly abide in the truths realized by all the Buddhas, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment."

Verses confirming the 48 Vows

[8] The Buddha said to Ananda, "The Bhiksu Dharmakara, having thus proclaimed those vows, spoke the following verses:

I have made vows, unrivaled in all the world;
I will certainly reach the unsurpassed Way.
If these vows should not be fulfilled,
May I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

If I should not become a great benefactor
In lives to come for immeasurable kalpas
To save the poor and the afflicted everywhere,
May I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

When I attain Buddhahood,
My Name shall be heard throughout the ten quarters;

Should there be any place where it is not heard,
May I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

Free of greed and with deep, perfect mindfulness
And pure wisdom, I will perform the sacred practices;
I will seek to attain the unsurpassed Way
And become the teacher of devas and humans.

With my divine power I will display great light,
Illuminating the worlds without limit,
And dispel the darkness of the three defilements;
Thus I will deliver all beings from misery.

Having obtained the eye of wisdom,
I will remove the darkness of ignorance;
I will block all the evil paths
And open the gate to the good realms.

When merits and virtues are perfected,
My majestic light shall radiate in the ten quarters,
Outshining the sun and the moon
And surpassing the brilliance of the heavens.

I will open the Dharma-store for the multitudes
And endow them all with treasures of merit.
Being always among the multitudes,
I will proclaim the Dharma with the lion's roar.

I will make offerings to all the Buddhas,
Thereby acquiring roots of virtue.
When my vows are fulfilled and my wisdom perfected,
I shall be the sovereign of the three worlds.

Like your unhindered wisdom, O Buddha,
Mine shall reach everywhere, illuminating all;
May my supreme wisdom
Be like yours, Most Excellent Honored One.

If these vows are to be fulfilled,
Let this universe of a thousand million worlds shake in response
And let all the devas in heaven
Rain down rare and marvelous flowers."

Dharmakara's Practices of the Bodhisattva Path

[9] The Buddha said to Ananda, "As soon as the Bhiksu Dharmakara spoke those verses, the entire earth shook in six ways, and a rain of wonderful flowers fell from heaven, scattering everywhere. Spontaneous music was heard, and a voice in the sky said, 'Surely you will attain the highest, perfect Enlightenment. "Then

the Bhiksu Dharmakara kept all those great vows which were sincere, unflinching and unsurpassed in the whole world, and intensely aspired to attain Nirvana.

"Then, Ananda, after proclaiming and establishing those universal vows in the presence of the Buddha Lokeshvararaja before the multitude of beings, including the eight kinds of superhuman beings, such as devas and dragon-spirits, and also Mara and Brahma, the Bhiksu Dharmakara was solely intent on producing a glorious and exquisite land. The Buddha-land which he sought to establish was vast in extent, unsurpassed and supremely wonderful, always present and subject neither to decay nor change. During inconceivable and innumerable kalpas, he cultivated the immeasurable meritorious practices of the Bodhisattva Path.

"He did not harbor any thought of greed, hatred or cruelty; nor did he allow any ideas of greed, hatred or cruelty to arise. He was unattached to any form, sound, smell, taste, touch or idea. Possessed of the power to persevere, he did not avoid undergoing various afflictions. Having little desire for his own sake, he knew contentment. Without any impure thought, enmity or stupidity, he dwelt continually in tranquil samadhi. His wisdom was unobstructed, and his mind free of falsehood and deceitfulness. With an expression of tenderness in his face and with kindness in his speech, he spoke to others in consonance with their inner thoughts. Courageous and diligent, strong-willed and untiring, he devoted himself solely to the pursuit of the pure Dharma, thereby benefiting a multitude of beings. He revered the Three Treasures, respected his teachers and elders, and thus adorned his practices with a great store of merits. By so doing, he enabled sentient beings to partake of it.

"He dwelt in the realization that all dharmas are empty, devoid of distinctive features, and not to be sought after, and that they neither act nor arise; he thus realized that all dharmas are like magical creations. He avoided all wrong speech that would bring harm upon himself or others or both; he engaged in right speech that would bring benefit to himself or others or both. He abandoned his kingdom and renounced the throne, leaving behind wealth and sensuous pleasures. Practicing the Six Paramitas himself, he taught others to do the same. During innumerable kalpas, he accumulated merits and amassed virtues.

"Wherever he was born, an immeasurable stock of treasure spontaneously appeared as he wished. He taught countless sentient beings and guided them on the path of the highest, true Enlightenment. He was reborn as a rich man, a lay devotee, a member of the highest caste or of a noble family, a ksatriya king, a wheel-turning monarch, a king of one of the six heavens in the world of desire, or even higher, as a Brahma-king. He revered and worshipped all Buddhas by making the four kinds of offering to them. The merit he thus acquired was indescribably great. Fragrance issued from his mouth as from a blue lotus-flower, and every pore of his body emitted the scent of sandalwood, which permeated innumerable worlds. His appearance was majestic, and his physical characteristics and marks were truly wonderful. From his hands, inexhaustible treasures, clothes, food and drink, rare and exquisite flowers and incense, silken canopies, banners, and other ornaments were produced. In such manifestations

he was unrivaled among all heavenly and human beings. He thus attained the command of all dharmas."

Dharmakara's Attainment of Buddhahood

[10] Ananda asked the Buddha, "Has the Bodhisattva Dharmakara already attained Buddhahood and then passed into Nirvana? Or has he not yet attained Buddhahood? Or is he dwelling somewhere at present?" The Buddha replied to Ananda, "The Bodhisattva Dharmakara has already attained Buddhahood and is now dwelling in a western Buddha-land, called 'Peace and Bliss,' (Sukhavati) a hundred thousand kotis of lands away from here."

Ananda further asked the Buddha, "How much time has passed since he attained Buddhahood?" The Buddha replied, "Since he attained Buddhahood, about ten kalpas have passed."

He continued, "In that Buddha-land, the earth is composed of seven jewels -- namely, gold, silver, beryl, coral, amber, agate and ruby -- which have spontaneously appeared. The land itself is so vast, spreading boundlessly to the farthest extent, that it is impossible to know its limit. All the rays of light from those jewels intermingle and create manifold reflections, producing a dazzling illumination. Those pure, superb and exquisite adornments are unsurpassed in all the worlds of the ten quarters. They are the finest of all gems, and are like those of the Sixth Heaven. In that land, there are no mountains, such as Mount Sumeru and the Encircling Adamantine Mountains. Likewise, there are neither oceans nor seas, nor valleys nor gorges. But one can see those manifestations by the Buddha's power, if one so wishes. In that land there is no hell; neither are there realms of hungry spirits and animals nor other adverse conditions. Neither do the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter exist. It is always moderate and pleasant, never cold or hot".

Then, Ananda asked the Buddha, "If, World-Honored One, there is no Mount Sumeru in that land, what sustains the Heaven of the Four Kings and the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods?"

The Buddha said to Ananda, "What sustains Yama, which is the Third Heaven of the world of desire, and other heavens up to the Highest Heaven of the world of form?"

Ananda answered, "The consequences of karma are inconceivable." The Buddha said to Ananda, "Inconceivable indeed are the consequences of karma, and so are the worlds of the Buddhas. By the power of meritorious deeds, sentient beings in that land dwell on the ground of karmic reward. That is why those heavens exist without Mount Sumeru."

Ananda continued, "I do not doubt this myself but have asked you about it simply because I wished to remove such doubts for the benefit of sentient beings in the future."

Amida's Light

[11] The Buddha said to Ananda, "The majestic light of the Buddha Amitayus is the most exalted. No other Buddha's light can match his. The light of some Buddhas illuminates a hundred Buddha-lands, and that of others, a thousand Buddha-lands. Briefly, that of Amitayus illuminates the eastern Buddha-land, as numerous as the sands of the River Ganges. In the same way, it illuminates the Buddha-lands in the south, west and north, in each of the four intermediate quarters, above and below. Further, the light of some Buddhas extends seven feet; that of others, one yojana, or two, three, four or five yojanas; and the distance covered increases in this way until the light of some Buddhas illuminates one Buddha-land. "For this reason, Amitayus is called by the following names: the Buddha of Infinite Light, the Buddha of Boundless Light, the Buddha of Unhindered Light, the Buddha of Incomparable Light, the Buddha of the Light of the King of Flame, the Buddha of Pure Light, the Buddha of the Light of Joy, the Buddha of Light of Wisdom, the Buddha of Unceasing Light, the Buddha of Inconceivable Light, the Buddha of Ineffable Light, and the Buddha of the Light Outshining the Sun and the Moon.

"If, sentient beings encounter his light, their three defilements are removed; they feel tenderness, joy and pleasure; and good thoughts arise. If sentient beings in the three realms of suffering see his light, they will all be relieved and freed from affliction. At the end of their lives, they all reach emancipation.

"The light of Amitayus shines brilliantly, illuminating all the Buddha-lands of the ten quarters. There is no place, where it is not perceived. I am not the only one who now praises his light. All the Buddhas, shravakas, pratyekabuddhas and bodhisattvas praise and glorify it in the same way. If sentient beings, having heard of the majestic virtue of his light, glorify it continually, day and night, with sincerity of heart, they will be able to attain birth in his land, as they wish. Then the multitudes of bodhisattvas and shravakas will praise their excellent virtue. Later, when they attain Buddhahood, all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas in the ten quarters will praise their light, just as I now praise the light of Amitayus."

The Buddha continued, "The majestic glory of the light of Amitayus could not be exhaustively described even if I praised it continuously, day and night, for the period of one kalpa."

Amida's Life-span

[12] The Buddha said to Ananda, "The life of Amitayus is so long that it is impossible for anyone to calculate it. To give an illustration, let us suppose that all the innumerable sentient beings in the worlds of the ten quarters were reborn in human form and that every one became a shravaka or pratyekabuddha. Even if they assembled in one place, concentrated their thoughts, and exercised the power of their wisdom to the utmost to reckon the length of the Buddha's life, even after a thousand million kalpas they could still not reach its limit. So it is with the life-span of shravakas, bodhisattvas, heavenly beings and human beings in his land. Similarly, it is not to be encompassed by any means of reckoning or

by any metaphorical expression. Again, the number of the shravakas and bodhisattvas living there is incalculable. They are fully endowed with transcendent wisdom and free in their exercise of majestic power; they could hold the entire world in their hands."

The number of the audience at the first assembly

[13] The Buddha said to Ananda, "The number of shravakas at the first teaching assembly of that Buddha was incalculable; so was the number of the bodhisattvas. Even if an immeasurable and uncountable number of humans multiplied by millions of kotis should all become like Mahamaudgalyayana and together reckon their number during innumerable nayutas of kalpas, or even until they attain Nirvana, they could still not know that number. Let us suppose that there is a great ocean, infinitely deep and wide, and that one takes a drop of water out of it with a hundredth part of a split hair. How would you compare that drop of water with the rest of the ocean?" Ananda replied, "When the drop of water is compared with the great ocean, it is impossible even for one skilled in astronomy or mathematics to know the proportion, or for anyone to describe it by any rhetorical or metaphorical expressions."

The Buddha said to Ananda, "Even if people like Mahamaudgalyayana were to count for millions of kotis of kalpas, the number of the shravakas and bodhisattvas at the first teaching assembly who could be counted would be like a drop of water, and the number of sages yet to be counted would be like the rest of the ocean."

Jeweled Trees

[14] Again, seven-jeweled trees completely fill that land. There are some made of gold, some of silver, and others made of beryl, crystal, coral, ruby or agate. There are also trees made of two to seven kinds of jewels. "There are gold trees with leaves, flowers and fruits of silver; silver trees with leaves, flowers and fruits of gold; beryl trees with leaves, flowers and fruits of crystal; crystal trees with leaves, flowers and fruits of beryl; coral trees with leaves, flowers and fruits of ruby; ruby trees with leaves, flowers and fruits of beryl; agate trees with leaves, flowers and fruits made of various jewels. "Again, there are jeweled trees with purple-gold roots, white-silver trunks, beryl branches, crystal twigs, coral leaves, ruby flowers and agate fruits. There are jeweled trees with white-silver roots, beryl trunks, crystal branches, coral twigs, ruby leaves, agate flowers and purple-gold fruits. There are jeweled trees with beryl roots, crystal trunks, coral branches, ruby twigs, agate leaves, purple-gold flowers and white-silver fruits. There are jeweled trees with crystal roots, coral trunks, ruby branches, agate twigs, purple-gold leaves, white-silver flowers and beryl fruits. There are jeweled trees with coral roots, ruby trunks, agate branches, purple-gold twigs, white-silver leaves, beryl flowers and crystal fruits. There are jeweled trees with ruby roots, agate trunks, purple-gold branches, white-silver twigs, beryl leaves, crystal flowers and coral fruits. There are jeweled trees with agate roots, purple-gold trunks, white-silver branches, beryl twigs, crystal leaves, coral flowers and ruby fruits.

"These jeweled trees are in parallel rows, their trunks are evenly spaced, their branches are in level layers, their leaves are symmetrical, their flowers harmonize, and their fruits are well arranged. The brilliant colors of these trees are so luxuriant that it is impossible to see them all. When a pure breeze wafts through them, exquisite sounds of the pentatonic scales, such as kung and shang, spontaneously arise and make symphonic music.

The Bodhi-Tree

[15] "Again, the Bodhi-tree of the Buddha Amitayus is four million li in height and five thousand yojanas in circumference at its base. Its branches spread two hundred thousand li in each of the four directions. It is a natural cluster of all kinds of precious stones and is adorned with the kings of jewels, namely, moon-light mani gems and ocean-supporting wheel gems.

Everywhere between its twigs hang jeweled ornaments with a thousand million different colors intermingling in various ways, and their innumerable beams shine with the utmost brilliance. The Bodhi-tree itself is covered with nets of rare, excellent gems, and on it appear all kinds of ornaments in accordance with one's wishes.

"When a gentle breeze wafts through its branches and leaves, innumerable exquisite Dharma-sounds arise, which spread far and wide, pervading all the other Buddha-lands in the ten quarters. Those who hear the sounds attain penetrating insight into dharmas and dwell in the Stage of Non-retrogression. Until they attain Buddhahood, their senses of hearing will remain clear and sharp, and they will not suffer from any pain or sickness. Whether they hear the sounds of the Bodhi-tree, see its colors, smell its perfumes, taste its flavors, perceive its lights or conceive of the Dharma in their minds, they all attain profoundly penetrating insight into dharmas and dwell in the Stage of Non-retrogression. Until they attain Buddhahood, their six sense-organs will remain sharp and clear, and they will not suffer from any pain or disease.

"Ananda, when humans and devas of that land see the Bodhi-tree, they will attain three insights: first, insight into reality through hearing the sacred sounds; second, insight into reality by being in accord with it; and third, the insight into the non-arising of all dharmas. These benefits are all bestowed by the majestic power of Amitayus, the power of his primal vow, his perfectly fulfilled vow, his clear and manifest vow, his firm vow, and his accomplished vow."

The Buddha said to Ananda, "A king of this world possesses a hundred thousand kinds of music. From the realm ruled by a wheel-turning monarch up to the Sixth Heaven, the sounds of the music produced in each higher realm are ten million kotis of times superior to those of a lower one. The thousands of varieties of musical sound produced in the Sixth Heaven are a thousand kotis of times inferior to one sound produced from the seven-jeweled trees in the land of Amitayus. Again, in that land, there are thousands of varieties of natural music, which are all, without exception, sounds of the Dharma. They are clear and serene, full of depth and resonance, delicate and harmonious; they are the most excellent of sounds in all the worlds of the ten quarters.

Glorious Adornments

[16] "Again, the halls, monasteries, palaces and pavilions are spontaneous apparitions, all adorned with the seven jewels and hung with curtains of various other jewels, such as pearls and moon-bright mani gems. "Inside and out, to right and left, are bathing pools. Some of them are ten yojanas in length, breadth and depth; some are twenty yojanas, others, thirty, and so on, until we come to those measuring a hundred thousand yojanas in length, breadth and depth. They are brimful of the water of eight excellent qualities, clear fragrant and tasting like nectar.

"There are golden pools with beds of silver sand; silver pools with beds of golden sand; crystal pools with beds of beryl sand; beryl pools with beds of crystal sand; coral pools with beds of amber sand; amber pools with beds of coral sand; agate pools with beds of ruby sand; ruby pools with beds of agate sand; white-jade pools with beds of purple-gold sand; purple-gold pools with beds of white-jade sand. Others are composed of two to seven jewels.

"On the banks of these pools are sandalwood trees, whose flowers and leaves hang down and diffuse perfumes everywhere. Heavenly lotuses of blue, pink, yellow and white bloom profusely in various tints and tones, completely covering the surface of the water.

"If bodhisattvas and shravakas in that land enter the jewel-ponds and wish the water to rise to their ankles, it rises to their ankles. If they wish it to rise to their knees, it rises to their knees. If they wish it to rise to their waists, it rises to their waists. If they wish it to rise to their necks, it rises to their necks. If they wish it to pour over their bodies, it spontaneously pours over their bodies. If they wish it to recede, it recedes. Its temperature is moderate, cool or warm, according to their wishes. The water comforts the body and refreshes the mind, washing away their mental defilements. Clear and pure, the water is so transparent that it seems formless. The jewel-sand shines so brightly that even the depth of the water cannot prevent its brilliance from being seen. The rippling water forms meandering streams, which join and flow into each other. Their movement is peaceful and quiet, neither too fast nor too slow, and their ripples spontaneously produce innumerable wonderful sounds. One can hear whatever sound one wishes. For example, some hear the sound 'Buddha,' some hear the sound 'Dharma,' some 'Sangha,' others hear 'tranquility,' 'emptiness and non-self,' 'great compassion,' 'paramita,' 'ten powers,' 'fearlessness,' 'special qualities,' 'supernatural powers,' 'non-activity,' 'neither arising nor perishing,' 'insight into the non-arising of all dharmas,' and so on until the various sounds of the wonderful Dharma, such as 'the sprinkling of nectar upon the head of a bodhisattva,' are heard. As one hears those sounds, one attains immeasurable joy and accords with the principles of purity, absence of desires, extinction, and reality. One is in harmony with the Three Treasures, the Buddha's powers, fearlessness and special qualities, and also with supernatural powers and other methods of practice for bodhisattvas and shravakas. Not even the names of the three realms of suffering are heard there, but only Nirvanic sounds of bliss. For this reason, that land is called 'Peace and Bliss'."

Bodily appearance of the inhabitants and the pleasures they enjoy

[17] "Ananda, those born in that Buddha-land are endowed with such bodies of purity and provided with various exquisite sounds, supernatural powers and virtues. The palaces in which they dwell, their clothing, food and drink, the wonderful flowers, and the various kinds of incense and adornments are like those naturally provided in the Sixth Heaven of the world of desire.

"At mealtimes, plates made of the seven jewels -- namely, gold, silver, beryl, agate, ruby, coral, and amber, and also moon-bright pearl -- spontaneously appear, filled with food and drink of a hundred tastes, according to one's wishes. Although the food is offered, no one actually eats it. Once it has been seen and smelt, one naturally feels that it has been eaten, and so is satisfied; thus one feels relaxed in mind and body, free from attachment to the sense of taste. When the meal is over, everything disappears, but reappears at the next mealtime.

"That Buddha-land, like the realm of unconditioned Nirvana, is pure and serene, resplendent and blissful. The shravakas, bodhisattvas, heavenly beings and humans there have lofty and brilliant wisdom, and are masters of the supernatural powers. They are all of one form, without any differences, but are called 'heavenly beings' and 'humans' simply by analogy with the states of existence in other worlds. They are of noble and majestic countenance, unequalled in all the worlds, and their appearance is superb, unmatched by any being, heavenly or human. They are all endowed with bodies of Naturalness, Emptiness, and Infinity."

Karmic rewards of a beggar and a king

[18] The Buddha said to Ananda, "If a beggar in extreme poverty sits by the side of a king, how can their appearances be compared?"

Ananda replied, "If such a man sits by the side of a king, his emaciated, mean and ragged appearance cannot be compared with the king's. His appearance is a thousand million kotis or even incalculable times inferior to the king's. What is the reason for this? The conditions of a beggar in extreme poverty--being at the lowest social level, with barely enough clothes to cover his body, scarcely enough food to sustain his life, with hunger and cold always tormenting him, and having almost lost in human contact -- are all the result of his misdeeds in former lives. In the past he did not cultivate roots of virtue, but instead, accumulated riches without giving anything to others. He became more miserly as his wealth increased, desired to obtain more, insatiably hankered after further acquisitions and gave no thought to good actions. Thus he piled up a mountain of evil karma. When his life ended, all his wealth was gone, and what he had accumulated with great toil and worry was of no avail to him; all passed in vain into the possession of others. Having no stock of merit on which to depend and no virtue on which to rely, after death he fell into one of the evil realms, where he suffered pain for a long period. When his karmic retributions ended, he was able to escape, but was reborn into a lower class; being foolish, base and inferior, he barely maintains the appearance of a human being.

"The king of a country is the most Honored of all men. This is the reward for virtues accumulated in former lives, in which he, with a compassionate heart, gave generously to many, saved people from suffering through kindness and benevolence, performed good deeds with sincerity, and never disputed with others. When that life ended, he was rewarded by rebirth into a higher state. Born in a heavenly realm, he enjoyed bliss and happiness. His accumulated virtues produced such a surplus of goodness that, when he was reborn as a man in this life, his birth was, deservedly, into a royal family. Being naturally noble, his dignified and majestic demeanor commands the respect of his people, and superb clothes and sumptuous food are prepared and served to him as he pleases. All this is a reward for virtues from his past lives."

Comparison between Heavens and the Pure Land

[19] The Buddha said to Ananda, "What you say is true. Even though a king is the noblest of all men and has a regal countenance, if he is compared with a wheel-turning monarch, he will appear as base and inferior as a beggar beside a king. Likewise, however excellent and unrivaled the majestic appearance of such a monarch may be, if he is compared with the lord of the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods, he will also appear incomparably inferior, even ten thousands kotis of times more so. Again, if this heavenly lord is compared with the lord of the Sixth Heaven, he will appear a hundred thousand kotis of times inferior. If the lord of the Sixth Heaven is compared with a bodhisattva or a shravaka dwelling in the land of Amitayus, his countenance and appearance will be far from matching those of the bodhisattva or shravaka, being a thousand million kotis of times or even incalculable times inferior."

Pleasures in the Pure Land

[20] The Buddha said to Ananda, "Devas and humans in the land of Amitayus are each provided with robes, food and drink, flowers, perfume, ornaments, silken canopies and banners, and are surrounded by exquisite sounds. Their abodes, palaces, and pavilions are exactly in accordance with the size of their bodies. One, two or even innumerable jewels appear before them, as soon as they wish. In addition, beautiful jeweled fabric covers the ground where all the devas and humans walk. In that Buddha-land there are innumerable jeweled nets, all adorned with skeins of gold thread, pearls, and a hundred thousand kinds of rare and marvelous treasures. All around the nets hang jeweled bells of the utmost beauty, which shine brilliantly. When a natural breeze of virtue arises and gently blows, it is moderate in temperature, neither cold nor hot, refreshing and soft to the senses, and moves neither too slowly nor too quickly. When the breeze wafts over the nets and the various jeweled trees, countless excellent sounds of the Dharma are heard, and ten thousand kinds of delicate fragrances of virtue are diffused. If one smells those fragrances, one's impurities and passions spontaneously cease to arise. If touched by the breeze itself, one enjoys the same pleasure as a monk who has entered the Samadhi of Extinction.

Flowers and innumerable rays of light emitted from them

[21] "Again, as the breeze blows, flowers are scattered throughout the Buddha-land; they spontaneously divide into different colors, not mixed together. They are soft and pleasant to touch, glow brilliantly, and diffuse rich fragrances. When one's foot is placed on them, they sink down four inches, but when the foot is lifted, they rise to their former level. When the flowers have served their purpose, the earth opens up and they vanish, leaving the ground clean and without trace of them. At the right moment, six times a day, the breeze wafts, scattering the flowers in this way. Moreover, lotus-flowers of various jewels fill the land; each has a hundred thousand kotis of petals with lights of numerous colors -- blue lotuses glow with a blue light, white ones with a white light, and, likewise, dark blue, yellow, red, and purple lotuses glow with lights of their respective colors. The brilliance of these lights is so magnificent that it outshines the sun and the moon. Each flower emits thirty-six hundred thousand kotis of rays of light, each sending forth thirty-six hundred thousand kotis of Buddhas. The bodies of these Buddhas are purple-gold, and their physical characteristics and marks are superb beyond compare. Each Buddha emits a hundred thousand rays of light and expounds the wonderful Dharma to beings in the ten quarters, thus setting innumerable beings on the right Path of the Buddha.

Fulfillment of the 11th, 17th, and 18th Vows

[22] The Buddha said to Ananda, "Sentient beings who are born in that Buddha-land all reside among those assured of Nirvana. The reason is that in that land there are neither beings who are destined to adverse conditions nor those whose destinies are uncertain.

"All Buddhas, Tathagatas, in the ten quarters, as numerous as the sands of the River Ganges, together praise the inconceivable, supernal virtue of Amitayus. All sentient beings who, having heard his Name, rejoice in faith, remember him even once and sincerely transfer the merit of virtuous practices to that land, aspiring to be born there, will attain birth and dwell in the Stage of Non-retrogression. But excluded are those who have committed the five gravest offenses and abused the right Dharma."

Three grades of aspirants

(1. The higher grade)

[23] The Buddha said to Ananda, "Devas and humans in the worlds of the ten quarters who sincerely aspire to be born in that land can be classified into three grades. The higher grade of aspirants are those who leave their homes and abandon worldly desires to become monks. Having awakened aspiration for Enlightenment, they single-mindedly remember Amitayus and perform meritorious practices, aspiring to be born in his land. When they are about to die, Amitayus, together with a host of sages, will appear before them. Then they will follow him and attain birth in his land. At once they will be born by transformation spontaneously from within seven-jeweled lotus-flowers. They will dwell in the Stage of Non-retrogression, attain steadfast wisdom and be capable of freely exercising supernatural powers. For this reason, Ananda, sentient beings who

wish to see Amitayus while in this world should awaken aspiration for the highest Enlightenment, do meritorious deeds, and aspire to be born in his land."

(2. The middle grade)

[24] The Buddha said to Ananda, "The middle grade of aspirants are the devas and humans in the worlds of the ten quarters who sincerely desire to be born in that land. Although unable to become monks and cultivate much merit, they awaken aspiration for the highest Enlightenment, single-mindedly think on Amitayus, perform some good deeds, observe the precepts of abstinence, build stupas, donate Buddhist statues, give alms to mendicants, hang banners, light candles, scatter flowers, burn incense, and so forth. They transfer the merit of those practices to his land, aspiring to be born there. When they are about to die, Amitayus will manifest his transformed body, which is fully possessed of the same radiance and physical characteristics and marks as those of the real Buddha, and make it appear before them, together with a host of sages. Then they will follow this transformed Buddha and be born in the Pure Land, where they will dwell in the Stage of Non-retrogression. Their virtue and wisdom will be next to those of the higher grade of aspirants."

(3. The lower grade)

[25] The Buddha said to Ananda, "The lower grade of aspirants are the devas and humans in the worlds of the ten quarters, who sincerely desire to be born in that land. Although unable to do many meritorious deeds, they awaken aspiration for the highest Enlightenment and single-mindedly concentrate on Amitayus even ten times, desiring birth in his land. When they hear the profound Dharma, they joyfully accept it and do not entertain any doubt; and so, remembering the Buddha even once, they sincerely aspire to be born in that land. When they are about to die, they will see the Buddha in a dream. Those aspirants, too, will be born in the Pure Land. Their merit and wisdom will be next to those of the middle grade of aspirants."

Bodhisattvas' visit to the Pure Land from other lands

[26] The Buddha said to Ananda, "The majestic virtue of Amitayus is boundless. All the innumerable, uncountable and inconceivable Buddhas, Tathagatas, in the worlds of the ten quarters praise him. Innumerable and uncountable bodhisattvas in the Buddha-lands of the eastern quarter, as numerous as the sands of the River Ganges, all without exception, visit Amitayus in order to worship and make offerings to him and to the assembly of bodhisattvas and shravakas. Having heard the teaching, they expound it to lead people into the Path of the Buddha. As in the eastern quarter, so it is in the southern, western and northern, as well as in the four intermediate quarters, above (Zenith) and below (Nadir)."

Verses on Bodhisattvas' Visit

[27] Then the World-Honored One spoke the following verses:

In the eastern quarter there are Buddha-lands,
As numerous as the sands of the River Ganges;
Bodhisattvas dwelling in those lands
Go to pay homage to Amitayus, the Enlightened One.

So it is in the southern, western, and northern quarters,
The intermediate quarters, above and below;
Bodhisattvas dwelling in those lands
Go to pay homage to Amitayus, the Enlightened One.

All those bodhisattvas, taking with them
Exquisite heavenly flowers,
Precious incense and priceless robes,
Make offerings to Amitayus, the Enlightened One.

Playing heavenly music in concert,
Producing harmonious and delicate sounds,
They praise the Most Honored One with hymns
And make offerings to Amitayus, the Enlightened One:

'You have perfected supernatural powers and wisdom,
With which you freely enter the gates of the profound Dharma;
You also possess stocks of merit and virtue
And unparalleled supreme knowledge.

Illumining the world with the sun of wisdom,
You disperse the clouds of birth-and-death.'
Having reverently walked round him three times,
They pay homage to the Unsurpassed One.

Having seen the glorious Pure Land,
Wonderfully resplendent, [273a]
They are led to awaken supernal aspiration
And wish their lands to be like his.

Then Amitayus, the Enlightened One,
Changes his countenance and smiles;
From his mouth come forth innumerable rays of light,
Which illuminate the worlds in the ten quarters.

These rays of light return, encircle his body
Three times, and enter the crown of his head.
All devas and humans are delighted to see this
And are filled with great joy.

Avalokiteshvara, the Exalted Being, having respectfully arranged
His clothes and bowed his head,
Asked the Buddha, 'Why are you smiling?
Reverently I enquire. Please tell me why.'

The Buddha's majestic voice was like thunder,
Producing wonderful sounds in eight qualities of voice;
'Because I am about to give predictions to the bodhisattvas.
I now explain to you. Listen carefully!

I am fully aware of the vows of the bodhisattvas
Who come from the ten quarters;
They seek to glorify their pure lands.
After receiving my predictions, they will become Buddhas.

While realizing that all dharmas are like a dream,
An illusion or an echo,
They will fulfill their excellent vows
And surely establish pure lands such as this.

Knowing that dharmas are like a flash of lightning or a shadow,
They will pursue the Bodhisattva Path to its end
And amass a stock of merit. After receiving
My predictions, they will become Buddhas.

While thoroughly knowing that the nature of all dharmas
Is empty and without substance,
They will single-mindedly seek to produce their pure lands
And will surely establish lands such as this.'

The Buddhas tell the bodhisattvas to go and pay homage
To the Buddha of the Land of Peace and Provision.
'Listen to his teaching, joyfully receive and practice it,
And then quickly reach the Realm of Purity.

When you go to his glorious Pure Land,
You will instantly acquire supernatural powers.
Having, without fail, received predictions from Amitayus,
You will attain perfect Enlightenment.

By the power of that Buddha's Original Vows,
All who hear his Name and desire birth,
Will, without exception, be born in his land
And effortlessly enter the Stage of Non-retrogression.

Bodhisattvas, if you make vows
That your lands will be like this,
While aspiring to save all beings everywhere,
Your name will be renowned throughout the ten quarters.

In order to serve millions of Tathagatas,
You can assume various forms and fly to those lands;
After worshipping them with joyful hearts,
You will return to the Land of Peace and Provision.'

Without a stock of goodness from past lives,
One cannot hear this sutra;
But those who have strictly observed the precepts
Can hear the right Dharma. [273b]

One who has met a World-Honored One in the past
Can accept this teaching.
Such a person respectfully worships, hears
And upholds it, and rejoices so greatly as to dance.

Arrogant, corrupt and indolent people
Cannot readily accept this teaching.
But those who have met Buddhas in their past lives
Rejoice to hear it.

Neither shravakas nor bodhisattvas are able to know
The Sage's Mind exhaustively;
They are like those who are born blind
And yet wish to guide others.

The ocean of the Tathagata's wisdom
Is deep, vast and boundless.
Even sages of the Hinayana cannot fathom it;
Only the Buddha clearly knows it.

Let us suppose that all human beings,
Without exception, have attained Enlightenment
And, with pure wisdom, realized original emptiness.
Even if they pondered on the Buddha's wisdom for myriads of kalpas,

And expounded it with the utmost effort all through their lives,
They would not come to exhaustive knowledge of it.
The Buddha's wisdom is thus limitless
And pure to its depths.

To obtain human life is difficult in the extreme;
To meet a Buddha in this world is also difficult;
It is difficult, too, for a man to attain faith and wisdom.
Once you have heard the Dharma, strive to reach its heart.

If you have heard the Dharma and do not forget it,
But adore and revere it with great joy,
You are my good friend. For this reason,
You should awaken aspiration for Enlightenment.

Even if the whole world is on fire,
Be sure to pass through it to hear the Dharma;
Then you will surely attain the Buddha's Enlightenment.
And everywhere deliver beings from the river of birth-and-death.

Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land

[28] The Buddha said to Ananda, "All the bodhisattvas in the land of Amitayus will ultimately attain the Stage of Becoming a Buddha after one more life. Excepted are those who have made original vows for the sake of sentient beings, resolving to cultivate the merit of realizing their great vows to save all sentient beings. Ananda, each shravaka in the Buddha-land of Amitayus emits light for one fathom around his body. The light of a bodhisattva shines a hundred yojanas. There are two bodhisattvas who are the most dignified; their majestic light shines everywhere in the universe of a thousand million worlds."

Ananda asked, "What are the names of those two bodhisattvas?"

The Buddha replied, "One is called **Avalokiteshvara** and the other, **Mahasthamaprapta**. They had both performed Bodhisattva practices in this world, and, at the end of their lives, were born by transformation in that Buddha-land. Ananda, the sentient beings born there all fully possess the thirty-two physical characteristics of a Great Man as well as perfect wisdom, with which they penetrate deeply into the nature of all dharmas and reach their subtle essence. Their supernatural powers know no obstruction, and their physical senses are sharp and clear. The bodhisattvas of lesser capacities attain two insights. Those with superior capacities attain innumerable [merits by the] insights into the non-arising of all dharmas. Those bodhisattvas will not be subject to rebirth in evil realms before they become Buddhas. Excepted are those who seek birth in the worlds of other quarters during the turbulent period of the five defilements, manifesting their forms in the likeness of the beings there, as in this world. They can freely exercise supernatural powers and always remember their past lives."

The Buddha said to Ananda, "By the Buddha's power, bodhisattvas of that land go to innumerable worlds of the ten quarters, in as short a time as it takes to eat a meal, in order to pay homage and make offerings to the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones. If those bodhisattvas so wish, uncountable and innumerable offerings, such as flowers, incense, music, silken canopies and banners, spontaneously appear before them as soon as they are imagined. They are rare and marvelous, unlike anything in this world. They are, accordingly, offered to the assemblies of Buddhas, bodhisattvas and shravakas. The flowers remain in the sky and gather into canopies. Their brilliance is dazzling and their fragrance pervades everywhere. The flower-canopies range in size, from those of four hundred li in circumference up to those large enough to cover the universe of a thousand million worlds. As new flower-canopies appear, old ones disappear. These bodhisattvas all rejoice together, and, while poised in mid-air, play heavenly music and praise the virtues of the Buddhas with hymns accompanied by wonderful sounds. They listen to the Dharma and attain immeasurable joy. After thus worshipping the Buddhas, they quickly return home to the Pure Land before their meal."

Amida's preaching and exquisite sounds produced by the trees etc.

[29] The Buddha said to Ananda, "When Amitayus expounds the Dharma to shravakas and bodhisattvas, they all assemble in the seven-jeweled lecture-hall. There he fully expounds the teachings of the Way and proclaims the wonderful Dharma. The whole audience rejoices, comprehends, and attains Enlightenment. At that time a breeze spontaneously arises in each of the four directions and wafts over the jeweled trees, producing sounds of the pentatonic scales and causing innumerable exquisite flowers to fall like rain and scatter everywhere. Natural ways of glorification such as these are endlessly repeated. All the devas bring with them a hundred thousand flowers and pieces of aromatic wood and thousands of musical instruments to use as offerings to the Buddha and the assembly of bodhisattvas and shravakas; they scatter flowers, diffuse perfumes everywhere and play various kinds of music. They come and go in succession, giving way to each other. At such times their joy and happiness are beyond description."

Bodhisattvas' Virtues

[30] The Buddha said to Ananda, "The bodhisattvas born in that Buddha-land expound the right Dharma whenever appropriate and, because they are in accord with the wisdom of enlightenment, their expositions are infallible and free of error. In regard to the myriads of things in that land, they have no thought of possession or attachment. Whether going or coming, proceeding or remaining, their hearts are unattached, their acts are in accordance with their will and are unrestricted, and they have no thought of discrimination. In them there is no idea of self or others, no idea of competition or dispute. With the heart of great compassion to benefit all living beings and with tenderness and self-control, they bear no enmity or grudge against anyone. Free of mental hindrances, they are pure in mind and without indolence. Unbiased, noble-minded, sincere and tranquil, their hearts can revere, appreciate and enjoy the Dharma.

"Having extinguished all evil passions, they are free of those tendencies which cause one to fall into evil realms. They have accomplished all the duties of a bodhisattva and are fully endowed with immeasurable virtues. Having reached deep meditation and gained supernatural powers, transcendent knowledge and wisdom, they are established in the seven practices leading to Enlightenment and are devoted to the Buddha Dharma.

"With the physical eye they see clearly, discerning objects without error; the sight of their heavenly eye reaches everywhere without limit; with the Dharma-eye they observe and know thoroughly the teachings of the Way; with the wisdom-eye they see truth and attain the Other Shore; with the Buddha-eye they completely realize the nature of dharmas; and with unhindered wisdom they expound the Dharma to others.

"Although they observe with the eye of equality that the three worlds are empty and non-existent, they strive to learn the Buddha Dharma and acquire varied eloquence in order to rid living beings of affliction caused by evil passions. Since all dharmas have arisen from Suchness, the bodhisattvas see them as they really are and know skillful means of speech that will develop good habits and destroy

bad ones in living beings. They dislike secular talk, enjoying only right discourse on the Dharma.

"They cultivate roots of virtue, revere the Path of the Buddha, and know that all dharmas are completely tranquil and non-existent. Their samsaric bodies and evil passions have been extinguished together with their remaining karmic tendencies. When they hear the profound Dharma, their minds are free of doubt and fear. They are always able to cultivate great compassion which is deep and subtle, embracing everything like the sky and bearing all like the earth. Having reached the end of the Single Path, they have gone to the Other Shore. Having cut the net of doubt, wisdom arises in their minds. Within the Buddha Dharma there is nothing that they do not comprehend.

"Their wisdom is like the ocean, and their samadhi, like the king of mountains. The light of their wisdom, being brilliant and pure, outshines the sun and the moon. They are in complete possession of the pure, undefiled Dharma. They are like the Himalayas, because the brilliance of their virtues is reflected evenly and clearly. They are like the great earth, because they have no discriminative thoughts, such as pure or impure, beautiful or ugly. They are like pure water, because they wash away afflictions and defilements. They are like the king of fire, because they burn the firewood of all evil passions. They are like a great wind, because they travel throughout the worlds without hindrance. They are like the sky, because they have no attachments. They are like lotuses, because nothing in the world can defile them. They are like a great vehicle, because they carry the multitude of beings out of birth-and-death. They are like a heavy cloud, because they cause the great thunder of the Dharma to roar and awaken the unenlightened. They are like a great rain, because they cause the nectar of Dharma to fall like showers to nourish living beings. They are like the Adamantine Mountains, because demons and non-Buddhists cannot move them. They are like the king of the Brahma Heaven, because they are foremost in the performance of various good deeds. They are like the nyagrodha tree, because they offer shelter to all beings. They are like the udumbara flower, because they rarely appear in the world and are difficult to encounter. They are like the gold-winged garuda, because they subdue non-Buddhists. They are like a flock of playful birds, because they do not store things. They are like the king of bulls, because they are invincible. They are like the king of elephants, because they conquer adversaries. They are like the king of lions, because they fear nothing. They are like the vast sky, because their great compassion reaches everywhere without discrimination.

"They have destroyed envy by not being jealous of the superiority of others. With singleness of heart they seek the Dharma tirelessly. Always desiring to expound the doctrine, they never grow weary. Striking Dharma-drums and hoisting Dharma-banners, they cause the sun of wisdom to shine forth and dissipate the darkness of ignorance. They perform the six acts of accord and respect, and always provide others with the gift of the Dharma. Strong-willed and diligent, their determination never falters. Thus they become lamps to the world and fields of supreme merit; they always become teachers and harbor no thought of discrimination, aversion, or attachment. They seek only the right Path, finding neither joy nor sorrow in other matters. They extract thorns of passion and give peace of mind to multitudes of beings. Because of their supreme wisdom, there is

no one who does not revere them. "They have destroyed the hindrances of the three defilements and mastered the supernatural powers. They also possess the power of good karma from their past lives, the power of guiding others, of the will, of vowing, of employing skillful means, of continuous practice, of doing good, of meditation, of wisdom, of hearing the Dharma widely. They also possess the power of the Six Paramitas -- generosity, morality, patience, effort, meditation and wisdom -- and the power of right mindfulness, concentration, contemplation, the supernatural faculties, transcendent knowledge, and the power to tame and train living beings in the right way, as well as other powers.

"Fully possessed of all the physical characteristics and marks, virtues, and eloquence, they have no equals. They revere and worship innumerable Buddhas and are, in turn, always praised by them. They have completed the bodhisattva's course of Paramitas and practiced the samadhis of emptiness, non-form and non-desire, the samadhi of non-arising and non-ceasing and many other samadhis; they have gone far beyond the stages of shravakas and pratyekabuddhas.

"Ananda, bodhisattvas of that land have innumerable virtues such as these, of which I have given you only an outline. If I were to expound them in full detail, a thousand million kalapas would not be long enough to do so."

Three kinds of evil passions and their consequences

[31] The Buddha said to the Bodhisattva Maitreya and to devas and humans, "The virtue and wisdom of shravakas and bodhisattvas in the land of Amitayus are indescribable. That land is sublime, blissful, serene and pure. Why do you not diligently practice good, reflect on the naturalness of the Way and realize that it is above all discriminations and is boundlessly pervasive? You should each make a great effort to attain it. Strive to escape from Samsara and be born in the Land of Peace and Provision. Then, the causes of the five evil realms having been destroyed, they will naturally cease to be, and so you will progress unhindered in your pursuit of the Way. The Pure Land is easy to reach, but very few actually go there. It rejects nobody, but naturally and unfailingly attracts beings. Why do you not abandon worldly matters and strive to enter the Way? If you do, you will obtain an infinitely long life and one of limitless bliss.

"People of the world, being weak in virtue, engage in strife over matters which are not urgent. In the midst of abject wickedness and extreme afflictions they painstakingly toil for their living. Whether noble or corrupt, rich or poor, young or old, male or female, all people worry about wealth and property. In this there is no difference between the rich and the poor; both have their anxieties. Groaning in dejection and sorrow, they pile up thoughts of anguish or, [274c] driven by inner urges, they run wildly in all directions and they have no time for peace and rest.

"For example, if they own fields, they are concerned about them. If they have houses, they worry about them. They are also anxious about their six kinds of domestic animals, such as cows and horses, about their male and female servants, money, wealth, clothes, food and furnishings. With deepening troubles they sigh repeatedly, and anxiety increasingly torments and terrifies them. Sudden misfortune may befall them: all their possessions may be destroyed by

fire, swept away by floods, plundered by robbers, or seized by adversaries or creditors. Then gnawing grief afflicts them and incessantly troubles their hearts. Anger seizes their minds, keeps them in constant agitation, increasingly tightens its grip, hardens their hearts and never leaves them.

"When their lives end in such agonizing conditions, they must leave everybody and everything behind. Even nobles and men of wealth have these worries. With much anxiety and fear, they endure such tribulations. Breaking out in cold sweats or fevers, they suffer unremitting pain.

"The poor and the underprivileged are constantly destitute. If, for example, they have no fields, they are unhappy and want them. If they have no houses, they are unhappy and want them. If they have none of the six kinds of domestic animals, such as cows and horses, or if they have no male and female servants, or lack money, wealth, clothes, food, or furnishings, they are unhappy and want those as well. If they possess some of them, others may be lacking. If they have this, they do not have that, and so they wish to possess all. But, even if by some chance they come to possess everything, it will soon be destroyed or lost. Then, dejected and sorrowful, they strive to obtain such things again, but it may be impossible. Brooding over this is to no avail. Exhausted in mind and body, they become restless in all their doings, and anxieties follow on their heels. Such are the troubles they must endure. Breaking out in cold sweats or fevers, they suffer unremitting pain. Such conditions may result in the sudden end of their lives or an early death. Since they have not done any good in particular, nor followed the Way, nor acted virtuously, when they die, they will depart alone to an inferior world. Although they are destined to different states of existence, none of them understands the law of karma that sends them there.

"People of the world, parents and children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, and other family members and kinsmen, should respect and love each other, refraining from hatred and envy. They should share things with others, and not be greedy and miserly, always speak friendly words with a pleasing smile, and not hurt each other.

"If one disagrees with others and grows angry, however small one's grudge and enmity may be in this life, these will increase in the life to come until they grow into a mass of hostility. For, if people are engaged in tormenting and harming each other in this life, such conflict may not immediately end in mutual destruction. But persistent bitterness and raging fury are impressed upon the mind, and thus naturally leave indelible marks on consciousness, so that those involved will be reborn about the same time to take revenge on each other.

"Further, in the midst of worldly desires and attachments one comes and goes alone, is born alone and dies alone. After death, one goes to a painful or to a pleasant state of existence. Each receives his karmic consequences and nobody else can take his place. In accordance with different acts of good and evil, people are destined to realms of bliss or suffering. Unalterably bound by their karma, they depart for those realms all alone. Having reached the other world, they cannot see each other. The law of good and evil naturally pursues them, and wherever they may be reborn, distance and darkness always separate them.

Since their paths of karma are different, it is impossible to tell the time of their reunion, and so difficult to meet again. Can they ever see each other once more?

"Why do they not abandon all worldly involvements and strive, while they are strong and healthy, to pursue the good and diligently seek deliverance from Samsara? If they do, they will be able to attain infinite life. Why do they not seek the Way? What is there in this world that should be longed for? What pleasure is there that ought to be sought after?

"Thus people of the world do not believe in pursuing good and receiving reward or in practicing the Way and attaining Enlightenment; neither do they believe in transmigration and retribution for evil acts or reward for good ones, such as obtaining merit by helping others. Believing that these do not exist, they totally reject such a view.

"Further, by so doing, they cling to their own views more tenaciously. Later generations learn from previous ones to act likewise. Fathers, perpetuating their wrong views, pass them on to their children. Since parents and grandparents from the beginning did not do good deeds, were ignorant of the Way, committed foolish acts, and were benighted, insensitive and callous, their descendants are now unable to realize the truth of birth-and-death and the law of karma. There is no one to tell them about this. Nobody seeks to know the cause of fortune and misfortune, happiness and misery, although these states result from such acts.

"The reality of birth-and-death is such that the sorrow of parting is mutually felt by all generations. A father cries over the death of his children; children cry over the death of their father. Brothers, sisters, husbands and wives mourn each other's death. According to the basic law of impermanence, whether death will occur in order of seniority or in the reverse is unpredictable. All things must pass. Nothing stays forever. Few believe this, even if someone teaches and exhorts them. And so the stream of birth-and-death continues everlastingly.

"Because they are stupid and callous, such people do not accept the teachings of the Buddha; they lack forethought, and only wish to satisfy their own desires. They are deluded by their passionate attachments, unaware of the Way, misguided and trapped by anger and enmity, and intent on gaining wealth and gratifying their carnal desires like wolves. And so, unable to follow the Way, they are again subject to suffering in evil realms in an endless cycle of birth-and-death. How miserable and pitiable this is!

"In the same family, when one of the parents, children, brothers, sisters, husband or wife dies, those surviving mourn over the loss, and their attachment to the deceased persists. Deep sorrow fills their hearts and, grief-stricken, they mournfully think of the departed. Days pass and years go by, but their distress goes on. Even if someone teaches them the Way, their minds are not awakened. Brooding over fond memories of the dead, they cannot rid themselves of attachment. Being ignorant, inert, and illusion-bound, they are unable to think deeply, to keep their self-composure, to practice the Way with diligence, and to dissociate themselves from worldly matters. As they wander here and there, they come to their end and die before entering on the Way. Then what can be done for

them?

"Because they are spiritually defiled, deeply troubled and confused, people indulge their passions. Hence, many are ignorant of the Way, and few realize it. Everyone is restlessly busy, having nothing upon which to rely. Whether moral or corrupt, of high or low rank, rich or poor, noble or base, all are preoccupied with their own work. They entertain venomous thoughts, creating a widespread and dismal atmosphere of malevolence. Subversive activities are planned, contrary to the universal law and the wishes of the people.

"Injustice and vice inevitably follow and are allowed to run their course unchecked until evil karma accumulates to the limit. Before they expect their lives to end, people meet sudden death and fall into evil realms, where they will suffer excruciating torments for many lives. [275b] They will not be able to escape for many thousands of kotis of kalpas. How indescribably painful! How pitiable that is!"

Shakyamuni's encouragement to do good

[32] The Buddha said to the Bodhisattva Maitreya and to devas and humans, "I have told you the truth about people of the world. Such being their mode of life, they are unable to enter on the Way. Therefore, you should think deeply and try to avoid various evil acts; choose the good and diligently practice it. A life of addiction to desires or a life of pomp and vainglory cannot last long. All must part; there is nothing you can truly enjoy. Since you have encountered a Buddha in this world, you should assiduously practice the Way. Anyone who sincerely desires birth in the Land of Peace and Bliss is able to attain purity of wisdom and supremacy in virtue. You should not follow the urges of passions, break the precepts, or fall behind others in the practice of the Way. If you have doubts and are not clear about my teaching, ask me, the Buddha, about anything and I shall explain it to you."

The Bodhisattva Maitreya prostrated himself on the ground and said, "Your majestic glory, O Buddha, is awe-inspiring, and your exposition is most pleasing to me. Having heard your teaching, I feel deeply that people of the world are just as you have described. Your compassionate revelation of the Great Way has opened our eyes and ears, awakening us to emancipation. Those who have heard your teachings are all filled with joy. Devas, humans and lesser beings, including even those that crawl, have all been blessed by your compassionate guidance and have thereby attained deliverance from suffering and affliction.

"The Buddha's admonition is indeed profound and appropriate, and his wisdom clearly surveys things in the eight quarters, above and below, penetrating all in the past, present and future. Our emancipation in the present life is entirely due to the Buddha's perseverance and painstaking efforts in his former lives when he was seeking the Way. His benevolence covers the whole world, and the extent of his merit is majestic and glorious. His light penetrates to the utmost ends of space and guides people to Nirvana. He reveals the sutras, destroys wrong views and subdues demons. Thus his influence extends boundlessly in the ten quarters. The Buddha is the King of the Dharma; his virtue surpasses that of all

the sages. He is the Teacher of all devas and humans and enables them to enter on the Way according to their wishes. Having been able to meet you, O Buddha, and also to hear the Name of Amitayus, we have all attained joy and illumination."

Shakyamuni's admonition against evil acts

[33] The Buddha said to Maitreya, "What you say is true. Those who adore and revere a Buddha attain great merit. Buddhas very rarely appear in the world. Having become a Buddha in this life, I have taught the Dharma, expounded teachings of the Way, cleared people's doubts, eradicated the causes of lust and desire, and blocked the source of all evils. Visiting various places in the three worlds, I encounter no obstructions. The wisdom disclosed in the scriptures provides for all ways of life. It keeps essential principles together and clearly reveals the truth. I have explained the reality of the five realms, thereby freeing those who have not yet attained deliverance and distinguishing between the paths of Samsara and Nirvana.

"Maitreya, you should know that you have, for innumerable kalpas, been perfecting bodhisattva practices to save sentient beings. Incalculable indeed is the number of beings who under your guidance have attained the Way and reached Nirvana. From time immemorial, you and all the devas and humans in the ten quarters and the four groups of followers have been floundering in the five realms of Samsara, undergoing indescribable troubles and afflictions. Until you were born in this life, you, too, underwent endless cycles of birth-and-death. Now you have encountered a Buddha, listened to his expositions of the Dharma, and been able to learn about Amitayus. What pleasure and joy this is for you and for me to share. "It is time for all to seek deliverance from the pains of birth, death, old age, and sickness. Outflows of depravity and defilement are everywhere, and there is nothing in which you can find true joy. You should resolutely do worthy deeds with decorum, strive to do more good, control and purify yourselves, wash off the mind's defilements, be sincere in word and deed, and allow no contradiction between what you think and what you do. Seek your own emancipation and then turn to saving others; straightforwardly aspire to be born in the Pure Land and accumulate roots of virtue. However hard you may practice in this life, it can only be for a short while. In the life to come you will be born in the land of Amitayus and enjoy endless bliss there. Being forever in accord with the Way, you will no longer be subject to birth-and-death and be free of the afflictions caused by greed, anger and stupidity. If you wish your life to be as long as a kalpa, a hundred kalpas, or ten million kalpas, it will be just as you please. You will dwell in effortless spontaneity and attain Nirvana. You should each diligently seek to realize your aspiration. Do not entertain any doubt or give up your endeavor, lest as a result of that fault you should be born into the seven-jeweled palace in the border region of the Pure Land and be subject to various disadvantages for five hundred years."

Maitreya said to the Buddha, "Having received your considerate admonition, we will diligently practice the Way and follow your teaching. We will not allow any doubt to arise."

Admonition against five evils

[34] The Buddha said to Maitreya, "If here in this world you are upright in thought and will, and abstain from doing evil, then you will attain the utmost virtue, unsurpassed in all the lands throughout the ten quarters. Why is this so? Devas and humans in the Buddha-lands naturally do the good and rarely commit the evil, and so, it is easy to teach and train them. Having become a Buddha in this world, I now dwell in the midst of the five evils, the five sufferings, and the five burnings. This is extremely painful for me. I will teach multitudes of beings, making them abandon the five evils, avoid the five sufferings, and escape from the five burnings. I will train their minds and lead them to practice the five good deeds, so that they may acquire merit and virtue and attain emancipation, long life, and Nirvana."

"The Buddha continued, What are the five evils? What are the five sufferings? What are the five burnings? What is the way to extinguish the five evils and lead people to practice the five good deeds, so that they may acquire merit and virtue and attain emancipation, long life, and Nirvana?"

1) the first evil

[35] The Buddha said, "The first evil is this. Devas, humans and lesser beings, including even those that crawl, are bent on doing evil. There is no being that is not. The strong subdue the weak; all inflict serious injuries and kill each other, all devour their prey. Not knowing how to do good, they commit evil and do outrageous and unruly deeds. Later, they receive retribution, [276a] it is natural that they should be destined to evil realms. Demigods keep records of offenders' acts and make sure that they are punished. That is why some are poor and destitute, corrupt, beggarly, lonely, deaf, dumb, blind, stupid, wicked, physically handicapped, deranged, or subnormal. But others are honorable, noble, wealthy, intelligent, or clever. This is the result of good and meritorious acts of benevolence and the performance of their duties to their parents in past lives.

"In this world prisons are set up by the law, and those who are unafraid of them and commit offenses are sent there for punishment. However desperately they may wish to escape, it is impossible to do so. Such is retribution in this world, but in the lives to come, punishment is longer and more severe for such evildoers. The suffering of transmigration through dark and dismal realms is comparable to the severest and most painful punishment ever enforced by law.

"Thus, through the natural working of karma, they undergo immeasurable suffering in the three evil realms. In successive transmigrations they are reborn into different forms; their life-spans are sometimes long and sometimes short. Their transient selves, vital energy and consciousness transmigrate through the natural working of karma. Although each individual is reborn alone, those bound by common karma come to be born together and take revenge upon each other. So this condition persists endlessly and, until the effect of their evil karma is exhausted, there is no possibility of avoiding their enemies. Floundering in Samsara, they have no chance of escape or of attaining emancipation. The pain that they must undergo is indescribable. Since this law naturally obtains everywhere between heaven and earth, even if good or evil acts do not immediately bring about reward or retribution, they will certainly result sooner or

later. This I call the first great evil, the first suffering, and the first burning. Those afflictions are such that they are comparable to a huge fire burning people alive.

"If in the midst of this, one controls one's thoughts with single-mindedness, does worthy deeds with proper demeanor, commits no evil, and performs only good, then with the merit and virtue acquired one reaches emancipation and is able to escape from this world, be reborn in heavenly realms, and finally reach Nirvana. This is the first great good."

2) the second evil

[36] The Buddha continued, "The second evil is that people of the world -- parents, children, brothers and sisters, members of a family, husbands and wives -- all lack moral principles, break laws, conduct themselves arrogantly, commit licentious and unruly acts, pursue their own pleasures, enjoy themselves as they will, and deceive each other. What they think contradicts what they say; they speak without sincerity, flatter others with deceitful intention, fawn upon others with artful words, envy the reputation of sages, abuse the virtuous, and entrap people by dishonest means.

"Masters are unwise in appointing retainers, who, exploiting the situation, seek every opportunity for trickery and deceit. Rulers, being unrighteous, are deceived by ministers and foolishly remove loyal and faithful subjects. This is contrary to the will of Heaven. Ministers betray their rulers; children deceive their parents; brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, kinsmen and friends deceive each other. They harbor greed, anger, and stupidity and desiring many possessions, seek their own advantage. All people are the same at heart, whether they are men of high and honorable positions or of lower and despised classes. They bring their homes and themselves to ruin and recklessly destroy their kindred. Although there are family members, friends, villagers, townspeople, ignorant [276b] and vulgar groups working together, all seek to gain their own profit, thereby incurring the anger and enmity of others. When people grow rich, they become miserly and uncharitable. Greedily attached to their wealth, they toil with mind and body to retain it. When their end comes, they find nothing to rely on. Ultimately they are born and depart alone, with nobody to accompany them. Bliss or misery resulting from good or evil acts follows them in their future lives. Thus they are reborn in pleasant or painful states. Even if they later show regret, what good will that do?

"People of the world, being dark-hearted and lacking insight, hate and abuse good people and show them no respect. They are attached to wrongdoing and willfully commit unlawful acts. They always covet the wealth of others and harbor intentions of stealing. After spending and squandering what they have robbed from others, they seek to regain it. Because of their own hidden motives and dishonesty, they slyly study the reactions shown on the faces of others. Since they are unable to think far ahead, when things go wrong, they become despondent with chagrin.

"In this world there are prisons established by the law where offenders are sent to receive punishment according to their offenses. In their previous lives they

neither believed in the Way nor cultivated roots of virtue. In this life, too, if they commit evil, demigods know and keep records of their acts; when they die, they fall into evil realms. Thus, because of the natural working of karma, there are the three evil realms and innumerable sufferings through which evildoers must pass life after life, for many kalpas, with no end in sight. It is indeed difficult for them to attain release. The pain they must undergo is indescribable. This is called the second great evil, the second suffering, and the second burning. The afflictions are such that they are comparable to a huge fire burning people alive.

"If in the midst of this one controls one's thoughts with single-mindedness, does worthy deeds with proper demeanor, commits no evil, and performs only good, then with the merit and virtue acquired one reaches emancipation and is able to escape from this world, be reborn in heavenly realms and finally reach Nirvana. This is the second great good."

3) the third evil

[37] The Buddha continued, "The third evil is this. People of the world live together, inhabiting this realm between heaven and earth, with a limited life-span. On the one hand, among the higher levels there are wise, rich, honorable, noble, and wealthy people. On the other hand, among the lower levels there are people who are poor, debased, crude and foolish. Besides, there are evildoers who always harbor vicious thoughts and think only of self-gratification; they are full of worries, sunk in lust and attachment, are restless in their daily lives, greedy and miserly, and desirous of what they have no right to possess. They gloat over fair-skinned women, behave licentiously and commit obscene acts with them, hate their own wives, and secretly frequent brothels. Consequently, after squandering all their resources, they begin to break the law. They form bands, start riots, engage in fighting, unlawfully attack and kill people and plunder property.

"Some have evil designs on the possessions of others. Without working at their own occupations, they acquire things through theft. Driven by desire, they commit further offenses. Feverishly agitated, they intimidate and rob people to support their own wives and children with the goods thus acquired. Obeying only the dictates of their passions, they become addicted to wanton pleasures. They also disregard seniority in kinship, causing sorrow and anguish to other family members and relatives; furthermore, they take no account of the laws of the State.

"But such evils are known to others and also to demons. The Sun and the Moon recognize them and demigods [276c] keep records of their doings. Thus, because of the natural working of karma, there are three evil realms and innumerable sufferings through which evildoers must pass, life after life, for many kalpas, with no end in sight. It is indeed difficult for them to gain release. The pain they must undergo is indescribable. This is called the third great evil, the third suffering, and the third burning. The afflictions are such that they are comparable to a huge fire burning people alive.

"If in the midst of this one controls one's thoughts with single-mindedness, does worthy deeds with proper demeanor, commits no evil, and performs only good,

then with the merit and virtue acquired one reaches emancipation and is able to escape from this world, be reborn in heavenly realms and finally reach Nirvana. This is the third great good."

4) the fourth evil

[38] The Buddha continued, "The fourth evil is this. People of the world do not think of doing good. They incite each other to commit various kinds of evil -- uttering harsh and abusive words, telling lies, and engaging in idle talk. They slander others and cause contention. They hate and envy good men and ruin the wise, while they rejoice in watching this behind the scenes. They are neglectful of their parents, make light of their teachers and elders, fail to win the trust of their friends, and lack sincerity. Holding themselves in high esteem, they think that they are virtuous, but act waywardly in an overbearing manner and despise others. Unaware of their own evil, they never feel ashamed of themselves. Boastful of their physical strength, they demand respect and fear from others. Taking no heed of Heaven, Earth, demigods, or the Sun and the Moon, they disdain to do any good. So they are difficult to train and convert. Holding themselves in high esteem, they demand their own way. Arrogant and afraid of nothing, they always assume a haughty attitude. But demigods keep record of their evils. Perhaps there was some meritorious act in their past lives, and they can count on the effect of that small amount of good. But, since they commit evil again in this life, their stock of merit is soon exhausted; good divinities forsake them, leaving them alone and with no one on whom to depend. When their lives end, all their evil recoils upon them and forces them, through the natural working of karma, to descend to the evil realms. Again, as the exact record of their deeds in the hands of the demigods dictates, their karmic transgressions and offenses condemn them to hellish realm. Retribution for evil comes about naturally and nothing can stop it. They must go into the red-hot cauldrons, where their bodies are melted down with the utmost torment and anguish. Even if at that time they repent of their evil deeds, what good will that do? **The Way of Heaven takes its inevitable course without mistake.**

"Thus, because of the natural working of karma, there are the three evil realms and innumerable kinds of suffering through which evildoers must pass life after life, for many kalpas, with no end in sight. It is indeed difficult for them to gain release, and the pain they must undergo is indescribable. This is called the fourth great evil, the fourth suffering, and the fourth burning. The afflictions are such that they are comparable to a huge fire burning people alive.

"If, in the midst of this, one controls one's thoughts with single-mindedness, does worthy deeds with proper demeanor, commits no evil, and performs only good, then with the merit and virtue acquired one reaches emancipation and is able to escape from this world, be reborn in heavenly realms, and finally reach Nirvana. This is the fourth great good."

5) the fifth evil

[39] The Buddha continued, "The fifth evil is this. People of the world are indecisive and slothful, reluctant to do good, lacking in self-discipline and not

working hard at their occupations, so their families and dependents are left to suffer from hunger and cold. When reproached by their parents, they retort angrily with scornful looks. With such conflicts they are far from peaceful; they can be as violent and frenzied as enemies confronting each other, and, as a result, parents wish that they had no children.

"In dealing with others, they are licentious and wayward, causing trouble and annoyance to many. Even when they are morally obliged to others, they neglect their duties and have no intention of repaying their indebtedness. Destitute and driven to the most desperate ends, they have no way of regaining their wealth. Although eager to obtain much profit and appropriate the riches of others, they waste their money on wanton pleasures. As this becomes a habit, they grow accustomed to acquiring property illegally and to spending their ill-gained profits on personal luxuries; indulging in wine and sumptuous food, they eat and drink to excess. Profligate and contentious as they are, they engage in foolish quarrels. Unable to understand others, they forcibly impose their will upon them. "When they come upon people who are good, they hate and abuse them. Lacking ethics and decorum, they do not reflect on their conduct, and so are presumptuous and insistent, refusing to take the advice and admonitions of others. They are unconcerned if their kinsmen, from the closest to the sixth blood-relative, have no means of livelihood. They disregard their parents' benevolence, and do not fulfill obligations to their teachers and friends. They think only of doing evil; their mouths continuously speak malice; and with their bodies, they are forever committing evil. In their whole lives they have not done even one good deed.

"Furthermore, they neither believe in the ancient sages, nor the Buddhist teachings, nor the path of practice leading to emancipation. Neither do they believe that after death one is reborn into another state of existence, that good deeds bring about good rewards, or that evil acts bring about evil consequences. They plot to murder an arhat, to cause disruption in the Sangha, and even think of killing their parents, brothers, sisters or other relatives. For this reason, even their kinsmen, from the closest to the sixth blood-relative, hate them so much as to wish them dead.

"Such people of the world are all of the same mind. They are foolish and ignorant, lacking the wisdom to know whence they have come into life nor whither they are going after death. Neither humane toward others nor obedient to their elders, they revel against the whole world. Nevertheless, they expect good fortune and seek long lives, only to meet death in the end. Even if someone compassionately admonishes them, trying to lead them to thoughts of goodness, and teaches them that naturally there are good and evil realms of Samsara, they will not believe him. However hard one may try to persuade them, it is useless. Their minds are closed, and they refuse to listen to others or understand their teachings. When their lives are about to end, fear and revulsion arise in turn. Not having previously done any good, they are filled with remorse when they come to their end. But what good will that do then?

"Between heaven and earth, the five realms are clearly distinguishable. They are vast and deep, extending boundlessly. In return for good or evil deeds, bliss or misery ensues. The result of one's karma must be borne by oneself alone and no

one else can take one's place. This is the natural law. Misfortune follows evil deeds as their retribution, which is impossible to avoid. Good people do good deeds, and so enjoy pleasure after pleasure and proceed from light to greater light. Evildoers commit crimes, and so suffer pain after pain and wander from darkness to deeper darkness. No one, except the Buddha, knows this completely. Even though someone admonishes and teaches them, very few believe; and so the cycles of birth-and-death never cease and the evil paths continue endlessly. [277b] The karmic consequences for such worldly people are beyond description in detail.

"Thus, because of the natural working of karma, there are innumerable kinds of suffering in the three evil realms through which evil beings must pass, life after life, for many kalpas, with no end in sight. It is indeed difficult for them to gain release, and the pain they must undergo is indescribable. This is called the fifth great evil, the fifth suffering, and the fifth burning. The afflictions are such that they are comparable to a huge fire burning people alive.

"If in the midst of this, one controls one's thoughts with single-mindedness, does worthy deeds with proper demeanor, mindfully recollects, harmonizes words and deeds, acts with sincerity, utters true words, speaks from the heart, commits no evil, and performs only good, then with the merit and virtue acquired one reaches emancipation and is able to escape from this world, be reborn in heavenly realms, and finally reach Nirvana. This is the fifth great good."

Further admonition by the Buddha

[40] The Buddha said to Maitreya, "I shall explain further. Such are the afflictions of the five evils in this world. The five sufferings and the five burnings continue to arise from them. People commit nothing but evil and fail to cultivate roots of virtue, and so it is natural that they all go to evil realms. Even in this life they suffer from incurable illnesses. Longing for death, they cannot die; craving for life, they cannot live. Thus they are an example to others of what retribution for evil acts is like. After death, driven by their karma, they fall into the three evil realms, where they suffer countless tortures and are themselves consigned to the flames.

"After a long time they are reborn again in this world, only to foment hatred against each other. At first hatred is slight but finally develops into a major evil. All this is because of their greedy attachment to wealth and sensuous pleasures and of their refusal to share with others. Further, wayward thoughts arise from the desires born of stupidity. Their bondage to evil passions will never be severed. In the pursuit of selfish gain, there is no chance for them to reflect on their evils and turn to good. When wealthy and prosperous, they are happy and do not learn to be modest and virtuous. Consequently, their pomp and power are short-lived; when these are exhausted, they must undergo further afflictions. Their sufferings are bound to increase in time to come.

"The law of karma operates like a net stretched everywhere; in its meshes, it inevitably catches all offenders. The net woven of large and small ropes covers the whole world, from top to bottom, and those caught in it feel utterly helpless

and tremble in fear. This net has been in existence from of old. How painful and heart-rending!"

The Buddha said to Maitreya, "People of this world are as I have described. All the Buddhas pity them and with divine powers destroy their evils and lead them all to goodness. If you give up wrong views, hold fast to the scriptures and the precepts, and practice the Way without committing any fault, then you will finally be able to attain the path to emancipation and Nirvana."

The Buddha continued, "You and other devas and humans of the present and people of future generations, having received the Buddha's teachings, should reflect upon them and, while following them, should remain upright in thought and do virtuous deeds. Rulers should abide by morality, reign with beneficence and decree that everyone should maintain proper conduct, revere the sages, respect men of virtue, be benevolent and kind to others, and take care not to disregard the Buddha's teachings and admonitions. All should seek emancipation, cut the roots of Samsara and its various evils, and so aspire to escape from the paths of immeasurable sorrow, fear [277c] and pain in the three evil realms.

"In this world, you should extensively plant roots of virtue, be benevolent, give generously, abstain from breaking the precepts, be patient and diligent, teach people with sincerity and wisdom, do virtuous deeds, and practice good. If you strictly observe the precepts of abstinence with upright thought and mindfulness even for a day and a night, the merit acquired will surpass that of practicing good in the land of Amitayus for a hundred years. The reason is that in that Buddha-land of effortless spontaneity all the inhabitants do good without committing even a hair's breadth of evil. If in this world you do good for ten days and nights, the merit acquired will surpass that of practicing good in the Buddha-land of other quarters for a thousand years. The reason is that in the Buddha-land of other quarters many practice good and very few commit evil. They are lands where everything is naturally provided as a result of one's merit and virtue, and so no evil is done. But in this world much evil is committed, and few are provided for naturally; people must work hard to get what they want. Since they intend to deceive each other, their minds are troubled, their bodies exhausted, and they drink bitterness and eat hardship. In this way, they are preoccupied with their toil no have time for rest.

"Out of pity for you and other devas and humans, I have taken great pains in exhorting you to do good deeds. I have given you instructions appropriate to your capacities. You have, without fail, accepted my teachings and practiced them, and so have all entered on the Way as you wished.

"Wherever the Buddha comes to stay, there is no state, town or village which is not blessed by his virtues. The whole country reposes in peace and harmony. The sun and the moon shine with pure brilliance; wind rises and rain falls at the right time. There is no calamity or epidemic, and so the country becomes wealthy, and its people enjoy peace. Soldiers and weapons become useless; and people esteem virtue, practice benevolence and diligently cultivate courteous modesty."

The Buddha continued, "My concern for you, devas and humans, is greater than the care of parents for their children. I have become a Buddha in this world, destroyed the five evils, removed the five sufferings, and extinguished the five burnings. I have countered evil with good, eradicated the suffering of birth-and-death, and enabled people to acquire the five virtues and attain the peace of unconditioned Nirvana. But after I have departed from this world, my teaching will gradually decline and people will fall prey to flattery and deceit and commit various evils, resulting in the recurrence of the five sufferings and the five burnings. As time goes on, their sufferings will intensify. As it is impossible to describe this in detail, I have given you only a brief outline.

The Buddha said to Maitreya, "You should each ponder on this well, teach and admonish each other, and be on guard against disobeying the Buddha's instruction."

The Bodhisattva Maitreya, with his palms together, said, "O Buddha, how sincere and earnest your admonition is! People of the world are just as you have described. O Tathagata, you take pity on and care for us without discrimination and seek to deliver us all from suffering. Having accepted the Buddha's repeated exhortations, I will be careful not to disobey them."

Amida and the Pure Land shown to the Audience

[41] The Buddha said to Ananda, "Rise to your feet, rearrange your robes, put your palms together, and respectfully revere and worship Amitayus. Buddhas and Tathagatas in the lands of the ten quarters always praise with one accord that Buddha's virtues of non-attachment and unimpeded activity."

Ananda stood up, rearranged his robes, assumed the correct posture, faced westward, and, demonstrating his sincere reverence, joined his palms together, prostrated himself on the ground and worshipped Amitayus. Then he said [278a] to the Buddha Shakyamuni, "World-Honored One, I wish to see that Buddha, his Land of Peace and Bliss, and its hosts of bodhisattvas and shravakas."

As soon as he had said this, Amitayus emitted a great light, which illuminated all the Buddha-lands. The Encircling Adamantine Mountains, Mount Sumeru, together with large and small mountains, and everything else shone with the same (golden) color. That light was like the flood at the end of the period of cosmic change that fills the whole world, when myriads of things are submerged, and as far as the eye can see, there is nothing but a vast expanse of water. Even so was the flood of light emanating from Amitayus. All the lights of shravakas and bodhisattvas were outshone and surpassed, and only the Buddha's light remained shining bright and glorious. At that time Ananda saw the splendor and majesty of Amitayus resembling Mount Sumeru, which rises above the whole world. There was no place which was not illuminated by the light emanating from his body of glory. The four groups of followers of the Buddha in the assembly saw all this at the same time. Likewise, those of the Pure Land saw everything in this world.

Two kinds of birth in the Pure Land

[42] Then the Buddha said to Ananda and the Bodhisattva Maitreya, "Have you seen that land filled with excellent and glorious manifestations, all spontaneously produced, from the ground to the Heaven of Pure Abode,?"

Ananda replied, "Yes, I have."

The Buddha asked, "Have you also heard the great voice of Amitayus expound the Dharma to all the worlds, guiding sentient beings to the Way of the Buddha?" Ananda replied, "Yes, I have."

The Buddha further asked, "Have you also seen the inhabitants of that land move freely, riding in seven-jeweled airborne palaces as large as a hundred thousand yojanas, to worship the Buddhas of the lands in the ten quarters?"

"Yes, I have," replied Ananda.

"Have you also seen that some of the inhabitants are in the embryonic state?"

"Yes, I have. Those in the embryonic state dwell in palaces as high as a hundred yojanas or five hundred yojanas, where they spontaneously enjoy pleasures as do those in the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods."

The cause of the two kinds of birth

[43] Then the Bodhisattva Maitreya said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, for what reason are some of the inhabitants of that land in the embryonic state and the others born by transformation?" The Buddha replied, "Maitreya, if there are sentient beings who do various meritorious deeds aspiring for birth in that land while still entertaining doubt, such beings are unable to comprehend the Buddha-wisdom, inconceivable wisdom, ineffable wisdom, boundless Mahayana wisdom, and incomparable, unequaled, and unsurpassed supreme wisdom. Although they doubt these wisdoms, they still believe in retribution for evil and reward for virtue and so cultivate a stock of merits, aspiring for birth in that land. Such beings are born in a palace, where they dwell for five hundred years without being able to behold the Buddha, hear his exposition of the Dharma, or see the hosts of bodhisattvas and shravakas. For this reason, that type of birth in the Pure Land is called 'embryonic state.'

"If there are sentient beings who with resolute faith accept these kinds of wisdom, from the Buddha's wisdom to the supreme wisdom, do meritorious deeds and sincerely transfer the merit acquired (to that land), [278b] those beings will be born by transformation spontaneously, seated with legs crossed, in the seven-jeweled lotus-flowers, and instantly attain the same glorious forms, wisdom and virtue as those of other bodhisattvas there.

Shakyamuni's encouragement of faith

[44] "Further, Maitreya, if great bodhisattvas in the Buddha-lands of other quarters desire to see Amitayus, and revere and make offerings to him and the

hosts of bodhisattvas and shravakas, they will, after death, be born in the land of Amitayus. Spontaneously transformed they will be born from within the seven-jeweled lotus-flowers.

"Maitreya, you should know that those born by transformation are possessed of supreme wisdom, while those in the embryonic state lack that wisdom and must pass five hundred years without being able to see the Buddha, hear his teaching of the Dharma, see the hosts of bodhisattvas and shravakas, make offerings to the Buddha, learn the rules of conduct for bodhisattvas, or perform meritorious practices. You should know that this is because those beings harbored doubt and lacked wisdom in their previous lives."

Embryonic birth

[45] The Buddha said to Maitreya, "Let us suppose that a wheel-turning monarch has a special chamber which is adorned with seven jewels and provided with curtained couches and silken banners hanging from the ceiling. If princes have committed offense against the king, they are taken to that chamber and fettered with gold chains. There they are served with food and drink, provided with clothes, couches and cushions, flowers and incense, and can enjoy music. Being treated just like the wheel-turning monarch himself, they have no wants. Do you think that those princes would enjoy living there?"

"No they do not," replied Maitreya. "They would seek various means of approach to ask a man of power to help them escape." The Buddha said to Maitreya, "Those beings born within the lotus-buds are like that. Because of their doubt in the Buddha's wisdom, they have been born in palaces. Although they receive no punishment or ill treatment even for a single moment, they must pass five hundred years there without being able to see the Three Treasures, make offerings to the Buddha, or cultivate a stock of virtue. This is distressing to them. Though there are other pleasures, they do not enjoy living there."

"If those beings become aware of the faults committed in their former lives and deeply repent, they can, as they wish, leave and go to where Amitayus dwells. Then they can worship and make offerings to him; they can also visit innumerable and countless other Buddhas to perform various meritorious practices. Maitreya, you should know that the bodhisattvas who allow doubt to arise lose great benefits. For this reason, you should have resolute faith in the supreme wisdom of the Buddha."

Bodhisattvas' visits to the Pure Land from other Buddha-lands

[46] The Bodhisattva Maitreya said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, how many non-retrogressive bodhisattvas are there in this world, who will be born in that Buddha-land?"

The Buddha replied, "Sixty-seven kotis of non-retrogressive bodhisattvas from this world will be born there. Each of these bodhisattvas [278c] has previously made offerings to innumerable Buddhas with almost as much diligence as you

did, Maitreya. Furthermore, bodhisattvas of lesser practices and those who have performed small acts of merit, whose number is beyond calculation, will all be born there."

The Buddha said to Maitreya, "Not only those bodhisattvas from this world but also those from Buddha-lands in other quarters are born there. First, in the land of the Buddha named Far-reaching Illumination there are one hundred and eighty kotis of bodhisattvas, who all visit there. Second, in the land of the Buddha Jewel-storehouse there are ninety kotis of bodhisattvas, who all visit there. Third, in the land of the Buddha Immeasurable Sound there are two hundred and twenty kotis of bodhisattvas, who all visit there. Fourth, in the land of the Buddha Taste of Nectar there are two hundred and fifty kotis of bodhisattvas, who all visit there. Fifth, in the land of the Buddha Dragon-subduing there are fourteen kotis of bodhisattvas, who all visit there. Sixth, in the land of the Buddha Superior Power there are fourteen thousand bodhisattvas, who all visit there. Seventh, in the land of the Buddha Lion there are five hundred kotis of bodhisattvas, who all visit there. Eighth, in the land of the Buddha Undefined Light there are eighty kotis of bodhisattvas, who all visit there. Ninth, in the land of the Buddha Peak of Virtue there are sixty kotis of bodhisattvas, who all visit there. Tenth, in the land of the Buddha Mountain of Excellent Virtue there are sixty kotis of bodhisattvas, who all visit there. Eleventh, in the land of the Buddha King of Men there are ten kotis of bodhisattvas, who all visit there. Twelfth, in the land of the Buddha Splendid Flower there are innumerable and incalculable bodhisattvas who are all non-retrogressive and possessed of unrivaled wisdom, who have previously made offerings to countless Buddhas and are able to learn in seven days the adamantine teachings of the Dharma that can only be attained by mahasattvas after practicing for a hundred thousand kotis of kalpas. Those bodhisattvas all visit there. Thirteenth, in the land of the Buddha Fearlessness there are seven hundred and ninety kotis of great bodhisattvas and incalculable minor bodhisattvas and bhiksus, who all visit there."

The Buddha said to Maitreya, "Not only do the bodhisattvas from those fourteen Buddha-lands visit that land, but also bodhisattvas from innumerable Buddha-lands in the ten quarters, whose number is incalculable. Even if I were to give you only the names of the Buddhas in the ten quarters and the number of the bodhisattvas and bhiksus who visit that land, enumerating them continuously day and night for a kalpa, I would not be able to complete the list. This is why I have given you only a brief description." [279a]

Shakyamuni's encouragement to accept this sutra

[47] The Buddha said to Maitreya, "If there are people who hear the Name of that Buddha, rejoice so greatly as to dance, and remember him even once, then you should know that they have gained great benefit by receiving the unsurpassed virtue. For this reason, Maitreya, even if a great fire were to fill the universe of a thousand million worlds, you should pass through it to hear this sutra, to arouse joyful faith, to uphold and chant it, and to practice in accordance with its teachings. This is because there are many bodhisattvas who wish to hear this teaching but are still unable to do so. If there are sentient beings who have heard it, they will attain the Stage of Non-retrogression for realizing the highest

Enlightenment. This is why you should single-heartedly accept in faith, uphold and chant this sutra, and practice in accordance with its teaching."

The Buddha further said, "I have expounded this teaching for the sake of sentient beings and enabled you to see Amitayus and all in his land. Strive to do what you should. After I have passed into Nirvana, do not allow doubt to arise. In the future, the Buddhist scriptures and teachings will perish. But, out of pity and compassion, I will especially preserve this sutra and maintain it in the world for a hundred years more. Those beings who encounter it will attain deliverance in accord with their aspirations.

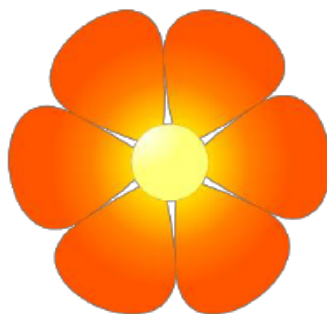
The Buddha said to Maitreya, "It is difficult to encounter and behold Tathagata when he is in this world. Difficult of access, difficult to hear are the Buddhas' teachings and scriptures. It is also difficult to hear the excellent teachings for bodhisattvas, the Paramitas. Difficult too is it to meet a good teacher, to hear the Dharma and perform the practices. But most difficult of all difficulties is to hear this sutra, have faith in it with joy and hold fast to it. Nothing is more difficult than this. Thus have I formed my Dharma, thus have I expounded my Dharma, and thus have I taught my Dharma. You must receive it and practice it by the method prescribed."

Epilogue

[48] When the World-Honored One had finished his exposition of this sutra, aspiration for the highest Enlightenment was awakened in innumerable sentient beings. Twelve thousand nayutas of human beings attained the pure Dharma-eye; twenty-two kotis of devas and humans attained the Stage of a Non-returner; eight hundred thousand bhiksus realized the wisdom of destroying defilements; forty kotis of bodhisattvas attained the Stage of Non-retrogression; and all, adorned with the virtue of the universal vows, will ultimately attain perfect Enlightenment.

At that time the entire universe of a thousand million worlds shook in six ways, and a great light illuminated all the lands in the ten quarters. A hundred thousand kinds of music played spontaneously, and innumerable marvelous flowers fell in profusion from the sky.

When the Buddha finished delivering this sutra, the Bodhisattva Maitreya and bodhisattvas from the lands in the ten quarters, together with the Elder Ananda, other great shravakas, and all those in the assembly, without exception, rejoiced at the Buddha's discourse.





OM NAMO AMITABH BUDDHA

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