

TWO PURELAND SUTRAS



THE SMALLER PURELAND SUTRA

also known as the Amida Sutra (Amda-kyo)

&

THE LARGER SUKHAVATIVYUHA SUTRA

The Pureland Manifestation Sutra

also known as The Sutra of Infinite Life

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The Smaller Pureland Sutra

Thus did I hear

Once the Buddha at Shravasti dwelt
In the Jeta Anathapindika garden
Together with a multitude of friars
One thousand two hundred and fifty
Who were arhats every one
As was recognised by all.

Amongst them...

Shariputra the elder, Great Maudgalyayana,
Maha-kashyapa,
Maha-katyayana, Maha-kausthila,
Revata, Shuddi-panthaka,
Nanda, Ananda, Rahula,
Gavampati, Pindola Bhara-dvaja,
Kalodayin, Maha-kapphina, Vakkula,
Aniruddha,
and many other disciples
each similarly great.

And, in addition, many bodhisattva
mahasattvas...
Manjushri, prince of the Dharma,
Ajita, Ganda-hastin, Nityo-dyukta,
Together with all such as these
Even unto Shakra the king of devas
With a vast assembly of celestials
Beyond reckoning.

At that time
Buddha said to Shariputra
“Millions of miles to the West from here,
There lies a land called Perfect Bliss
Where a Buddha, Amitayus by name
Is even now the Dharma displaying.

Oh Shariputra, why is that land
Given the name of Perfect Bliss?
It is without pain;
Only pleasure dwells there
That's why they call it Perfect Bliss.

Around the Land of Perfect Bliss
There are seven balustrades

Seven fine nets, seven rows of trees
All of jewels made, sparkling and fine;
That's why they call it Perfect Bliss

There are lakes of seven gems with
Water of eightfold merit filled
And beds of golden sand,
To which descend on all four sides
Gold, silver, beryl and crystal stairs.

Pavilions and terraces rise above
Gold, silver, beryl and crystal
White coral, red pearl and agate gleaming;
And in the lakes lotus flowers
Large as chariot wheels
Give forth their splendour

The blue ones radiate light so blue,
The yellow yellow,
Red red, white white and
All most exquisite and finely fragrant.

Oh Shariputra, the Land of Bliss
Like that is arrayed
With many good qualities
And fine adornments.

There is heavenly music
Spontaneously played
And all the ground is strewn with gold.
Blossoms fall six times a day
From mandarava,
The divinest of flowers

In the morning light,
Those who live in that land
Collect the blossoms
And offerings make
To millions of Buddhas in other regions;
At the lunchtime hour
They have their meal
And take a stroll.

Oh Shariputra, the Land of Bliss
Like that is arrayed

With many good qualities
And fine adornments.

There are wonderful birds
Of many colours:
Swans and peacocks, parrots,
Charis, kalavinkas
And even the bird with double lives.

Six times day and night they sing
Melodious songs of fivefold virtue,
Fivefold power,
Of the seven factors of spiritual light
And of the eightfold path.
Of all the divisions of Dharma
They sing.

Entranced by the songs
All the beings of that land
Quickly take refuge
In Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Those birds were not born as such
Through karmic retribution
For no evil realms
In that land are there.
Not even the names
Of such realms are found:
How much less
The evil realms themselves.

Shariputra, all those birds
Were by Amitayus expressly made
That the voice of Dharma
Melodiously spread.

When in that land
A gentle breeze blows
The precious trees and bejewelled nets
Emit a delicate enrapturing tune
Like an orchestra of myriad parts.
All who hear will naturally conceive
The thought of refuge
In Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Oh Shariputra, the Land of Bliss
Like that is arrayed

With many good qualities
And fine adornments.

So Shariputra, what do you think?
Why is that Buddha called Amitabha?
Why does he have the name Amitayus?
His light is boundless and unimpeded
It spreads over
All the lands of ten quarters
Therefore is he called Amitabha

The lives of that Buddha
And all of his people
Go on forever, endless and boundless
Therefore Amitayus is his name.

He has been a Buddha
More than ten kalpas
His disciples, all saints,
Are beyond calculation.
The great bodhisattvas
Who dwell in that land
Are also far too numerous to tell.

Oh Shariputra, the Land of Bliss
Like that is arrayed
With many good qualities
And fine adornments.

Nobody born there ever falls back
Those in the stage of
One more life only
Are immeasurably many
Beyond clear expression.

Shariputra, all who hear
Should long and pray to be born there
To share in the realm
Of such noble beings
For never by one's own
Roots of virtue alone
Could one hope to attain
Such a wonderful world.

Oh Shariputra
Suppose a good man or good woman
Hears tell of Amida

And grasps that Name
For a day, or two, or three,
Or four or five or six or seven
With a heart at one and not disordered
When their life draws to a close
Amida Buddha will appear before them
All with a holy multitude
And as death arrives
With mind undisturbed
They will go to birth in that
Buddha's Utmost Happiness Land.

Shariputra, seeing this benefit
I say these words;
Those who hear
Should make a prayer
To be born in that Land.

Shariputra, as I now praise Amida
Buddha's inconceivable excellence
So also in the Eastern worlds there are
Ashukubi, Akshobhaya, Meru-dvaja,
Maha-meru, Meru-prabhasa, Manju-
ghosha, and other Buddhas as many as
Ganges sands.

Each in his land
Puts forth long and wide his eloquent
tongue
And across three thousand millions worlds
Speaks forth these words,
“Protected by all Buddhas this sutra is,
Wherein inconceivable excellence is
praised,
May all beings trust it, hold to it and keep it
in mind”

Shariputra, in the Southern worlds there are
Chandra-surya-pradipa, Yashah-prabha,
Mah-arci-skandha, Meru-pradipa, Ananta-
virya and other Buddhas as many as Ganges
sands.

Each in his land
Puts forth long and wide his eloquent
tongue
And across three thousand millions worlds

Speaks forth these words,
“Protected by all Buddhas this sutra is,
Wherein inconceivable excellence is
praised,
May all beings trust it, hold to it and keep it
in mind”

Shariputra, in the Western worlds there are
Amitayus, Amitalakshana, Amita-dhvaja,
Maha-prabha, Maha-nirbhasha, Ratna-
lakshana, Shuddha-rashmi-prabha
and other Buddhas as many as Ganges
sands.

Each in his land
Puts forth long and wide his eloquent
tongue
And across three thousand millions worlds
Speaks forth these words,
“Protected by all Buddhas this sutra is,
Wherein inconceivable excellence is
praised,
May all beings trust it, hold to it and keep it
in mind”

Shariputra, in the Northern worlds there are
Archi-skandha, Vaishva-nara-nirghosha,
Dush-pra-darsha, Aditya-sambhava, Jalen-
i-prabha and other Buddhas as many as
Ganges sands.

Each in his land
Puts forth long and wide his eloquent
tongue
And across three thousand millions worlds
Speaks forth these words,
“Protected by all Buddhas this sutra is,
Wherein inconceivable excellence is
praised,
May all beings trust it, hold to it and keep it
in mind”

Shariputra, in the Nadir worlds there are
Simha, Yashas, Yasha-prabhasha,
Dharma, Dharma-dhvaja, Dharma-dhara
and other Buddhas as many as Ganges
sands.

Each in his land
Puts forth long and wide his eloquent
tongue
And across three thousand millions worlds
Speaks forth these words,
“Protected by all Buddhas this sutra is,
Wherein inconceivable excellence is
praised,
May all beings trust it, hold to it and keep it
in mind”

Shariputra, in the Zenith worlds there are
Brahma-ghosha, Nak-shatra-rajā,
Gandhottama, Gandha-prabhasa, Mah-arcī-
skandha, Ratna-kusuma-sam-pushpita-
gatra, Salendra-rajā, Ratnotpala-shrī,
Sarvatha-darsha, Sumuru-kalpa
and other Buddhas as many as Ganges
sands.

Each in his land
Puts forth long and wide his eloquent
tongue
And across three thousand millions worlds
Speaks forth these words,
“Protected by all Buddhas this sutra is,
Wherein inconceivable excellence is
praised,
May all beings trust it, hold to it and keep it
in mind”

Shariputra, What does this mean?
Why is this called the sutra that all Buddhas
keep in mind?

Shariputra, if good men or good women
Hear the Name that all Buddhas guard,
Keeping this sutra in mind,
They are all protected and kept in mind
By all the Buddhas together;
All obtain non-retrogression;
All go to anuttara samyak sambodhi.

Therefore trust and accept my words
And those that all the Buddhas preach.

Shariputra, if there are people who have

made a prayer, are making a prayer, or will
make a prayer,
To be born in Amida Buddha’s land,
Then they all in that land will
Anuttara samyak sambodhi attain
Whether they are already born there, are
being born there, or are yet to be born.

Therefore, Shariputra, good men and good
women
All should make prayers to be born in that
land.

Shariputra, just as I am now praising
The inconceivable excellence of all
Buddhas,
All these Buddhas are similarly declaring
My inconceivable excellence in these
words...

“Shakyamuni Buddha has ably
accomplished something extremely difficult
and rare:

In the saha world in the evil age
That is stained in five ways -
Kalpa-kashaya, the evil age
Drishti-kashaya, the stain of wrong views
Klesha-kashaya, the stain of wrong
passions
Sattva-kashaya, stain of spirit
Ayush-kashaya, the stain of short life.
Here in this very world
At anuttara samyak sambodhi
Shakyamuni arrived.

For the sake of all beings
He is preaching this Dharma
Which in the whole world
Is difficult to entrust to.

The Larger Pureland Sutra

Sukhavativyuha: Manifesting the Land of Bliss¹

[The Scene] *

1. Thus have I heard. At one time the Blessed One was staying at the Vulture Peak at Rajagriha².

2. At that time the Buddha was attended by twelve thousand monks, all of them arhats.³

3. Among them were

- the Buddha's first five disciples, the first arhats, Ajnatakaundinya, Ashvajit, Bashpa, Mahanama, and Bhadrajit;
- the first lay disciples who had all subsequently ordained: Yashas and his four friends, Vimala, Subahu, Purna son of Maitriyani, and Gavampati;
- the three Kashyapa brothers, Uruvilva Kashyapa, Gaya Kashyapa and Nadi Kashyapa, together with Kashyapa the younger and Kashyapa the great;
- the two friends, Maudgalyayana and Shariputra;
- the disciples Kapphina, Chunda, Aniruddha, Nandika, Kimpila, Subhuti, Revata, Khadiravanika, Vakkla, Svagata, Amogharaja, Parayanika, Pantha, Pantha the younger;
- the Buddha's half brother Nanda, his son Rahula, and his cousin and closest disciple Ananda;

4. The Buddha was also attended by a great many bodhisattva mahasattvas⁴ with Maitreya⁵ at their head.⁶

[Ananda's Enquiry] *

5. [23.] Then the reverend Ananda rose from his seat, uncovered his right shoulder, approached the Buddha, and knelt with his right knee touching the ground⁷. He joined his palms in anjali and said:

“The Blessed One's sense powers appear serene, the colour of his skin is pure, his countenance is cleansed, radiating with a golden glow. As the jujube fruit turns bright yellow in autumn, pure, cleansed, radiating a golden colour, or as a skilfully made ornament of Jambu River gold displayed on a white cloth shows its purity, so the Blessed One appears radiant today.

6. [24] “Oh Blessed One, I do not ever recall seeing the Tathagata so serene, purified, cleansed, and radiant as I do today. This thought occurs to me ‘Today the Tathagata dwells in the sphere of most rare Dharma! the sphere of Buddhas! Today, the One who is the Eye of the World is centred upon what must be done by a guide of the world! Today, the One who is pre-eminent in the world dwells in supreme bodhi! Today, the Honoured of the Gods possesses all the virtues of a Tathagata! The Buddhas of the three times contemplate one another⁸. Could it be that you are now bringing to mind all the other Buddhas? Are you gazing upon the tathagatas, arhats, Samyak Sambuddhas of the past, the future and the

present? Is that why your august presence shines with such a radiance today?”

7. [25] Then the Blessed One said to Ananda,
“You are right, Ananda, you are right. But did the devas reveal this to you or did you discern this yourself, with knowledge arising from your own reflection?”

8. [26] Ananda replied:
“It was not by the devas. Oh Blessed One, it occurred to me through knowledge arising from my own reflection.

9. [27] The Blessed One said:
“Well said, well said, Ananda. The way you express yourself is indeed noble, your reflection is propitious, your inspired speech auspicious. And you have inquired thus, Ananda, for the sake of many people. It is for the happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the sake of the great multitude of humans, for the good, the happiness of devas and humans⁹, that you have asked the Tathagata about this matter.

10. [28] “Ananda, although a tathagata shares his knowledge and vision with innumerable other tathagata arhat Samyak Sambuddhas, it is nowise diminished thereby. Why so? Because it issues from a cause inexhaustible. Thus, the Tathagata’s compassion never runs dry.

11. [29-30] Thus the Tathagata takes pity on the threefold world with a great inexhaustible compassion. The Tathagata appears in the world in order to reveal the teaching of the Way everywhere, so that the multitude of living beings all reap the benefit of the true Dharma. Even in a myriad kalpas it is difficult to encounter and see the Tathagata. It is like the udumbara tree that blooms only after a long interval of time. But now that you have asked this question, numerous blessings will be bestowed on all living beings celestial and human. They will be guided and transformed.

12. Furthermore, noble Ananda, only the power of a tathagata¹⁰ could move you to question the Tathagata in this way, thus benefitting bodhisattva mahasattvas. Such questions make manifest who can be teachers of all the world.

13. [31] “So, now, Ananda, listen carefully, pay attention and I shall explain”

14. “Please do, Blessed Sir,” replied Ananda, and the Blessed One spoke:

[The Story]

15. [32] “In a former age, Ananda, in the distant past, long, long ago, a tathagata, arhat, samyak sambuddha called Dipamkara appeared in the world.

And before that tathagata, Pratapavat.¹¹

And before that tathagata Chandhanagandha,

And before that tathagata Sumurukalpa.

And before that tathagata Chandana.

And before that tathagata Vimalanana.

And before that tathagata Anupalīpta.

And before that tathagata Vimalaprabha.

And before that tathagata Nagabhibu
And before that tathagata Suryodana
And before that tathagata Girirajaghosha
And before that tathagata Merukuta
And before that tathagata Suvarnaprabha
And before that tathagata Jyotisprabha
And before that tathagata Vaiduryanirbhasa
And before that tathagata Brahmaghosha
And before that tathagata Chandrabhibu
And before that tathagata Turyaghosha
And before that tathagata Mukta-kusuma-pratimandita-prabha
And before that tathagata Shrikuta
And before that tathagata Sagara-vara-buddhi-vikridita-bhijna
And before that tathagata Varaprabha
And before that tathagata Mahagandhararaja-prabhasa
And before that tathagata Vyapa-gata-khila-mala-pratigha
And before that tathagata Shurakuta
And before that tathagata Ranan-jaha
And before that tathagata Mahagunadhara-buddhi-prapta-bhijna
And before that tathagata Chandrasurya-jihmi-karana
And before that tathagata Uttapta-vaidurya-nirbhasa
And before that tathagata Chittadhara-buddhi-sanku-sumita-bhyudgata
And before that tathagata Pushpavativanaraja-samkusu-mitabhijna
And before that tathagata Pushpakara
And before that tathagata Udukachandra
And before that tathagata Avidyandhakara-vidyamsanakara
And before that tathagata Lokendra
And before that tathagata Mukta-chatra-prava-dasadhrisha
And before that tathagata Tishya
And before that tathagata Dharma-mativinanda-ditaraja
And before that tathagata Simha-sagara-kuta-vinanditaraja
And before that tathagata Sagara-meru-chandra
And before that tathagata Brahma-svarana-dabhinandita
And before that tathagata Kusumasambhava
And before that tathagata Praptasena
And before that tathagata Chandrabhanu
And before that tathagata Chandraprabha
And before that tathagata Vimalanetra
And before that tathagata Giri-rajaghosheshvara
And before that tathagata Kusuma-prabha
And before that tathagata Kusuma-brishtyabhi-prakirna
And before that tathagata Ratnachandra
And before that tathagata Padma-vithyu-pashobhita
And before that tathagata Chanda-nagandha
And before that tathagata Tagaragandha
And before that tathagata Ratna-nirbhasa
And before that tathagata Nirmita

And before that tathagata Mahavyuha
And before that tathagata Vyapagata-khila-dhosha
And before that tathagata Brahmaghosha
And before that tathagata Sapta-ratna-bhivrishta
And before that tathagata Mahaghunadhara
And before that tathagata Tamala-patra-chandana-kardama
And before that tathagata Kusuma-bhijna
And before that tathagata Ajnana-vidhvamsana
And before that tathagata Kesharin
And before that tathagata Muktachatra
And before that tathagata Suvarnagarbha
And before that tathagata Vaiduryagarbha
And before that tathagata Mahaketu
And before that tathagata Dharmaketu
And before that tathagata Ratnaketu
And before that tathagata Ratnashri
And before that tathagata Lokendra
And before that tathagata Narendra
And before that tathagata Karunika
And before that tathagata Lokasundara
And before that tathagata Brahmaketu
And before that tathagata Dharmamati
And before that tathagata Simha
And before that tathagata Simhamati

16. [34] “And before Simhamati, long before him, there lived a tathagata, arhat, samyak samBuddha called Lokeshvararaja, a sugata, vidya-karana-samapana, lokavid, purusa-damya-sarati, anuttaraya, sasta-deva-manusyanam, a Buddha, a bhagavat¹².

17. [35] “And at that time, Ananda, when Lokeshvararaja preached the Dharma, there was a ruler in the land who, upon hearing this Buddha teaching the Dharma felt a great joy in his heart and resolved to attain the unsurpassable, perfect, true Way. Abandoning his throne he became a shramana with the name Dharmakara. He became a most superlative monk of pure conduct, discernment, vigour, nobility and commitment.

[Dharmakara’s Song of Praise: Tan Butsu Ge] *

18. [36] “The shramana Dharmakara stood up in the assembly, put his robe over one shoulder, approached and prostrated before the Buddha and walked around him three times with the Buddha on his right. Then he knelt with hands in anjali and praised the Buddha, saying:

“Your radiant face,
Like a mountain peak
Catching the first burst
Of morning light
Has awesome and
Unequalled majesty.

Like black ink by comparison
Are the sun, the moon, or the "mani" treasure.
Tathagata,
Such is your incomparable face.
The melody of your enlightenment
Fills the world
Rare and precious
Are your precepts,
Learning, energy, meditation,
Wisdom and amazing virtue.
The oceanic Dharma
Of all Buddhas
Which you fathom
To its deepest depths
Dispels the 3 poisons
From the heart -
You are like a lion:
Valiant and divinely pure.

Great power!
Deep wisdom!
Awesome light!
Reverberation -
A prayer I make, a Buddha to become
Equal to you, my Dharma king,
To lead all beings to the other shore
Leaving none behind.
The six paramitas
To perfect
With prajna at their head.
Should I become Buddha:
I will fulfil
This prayer completely:
To everyone
I'll bring great peace.
To Buddhas countless
As sand grains
My offerings I make,
And do not flinch
From the trials
Of the incomparable Way,
Powerful,
Straight and true.

Though Buddha lands
And worldly realms
Be numberless

Like sand,
 By sheer power
 Of aspiration
 I'll fill them all
 With light.
 Let me become a Buddha
 And the multitude
 Of beings
 Will all enjoy
 My primordial
 Nirvana world.
 By indiscriminate compassion
 I will enlighten all.
 Reborn here from no matter where
 In my country their hearts
 Will lighten and be joyful,
 Happy and at ease.
 Oh you Buddha, witness my vow,
 My true aspiration,
 Establishing my vow on you
 Gives me the strength to fulfil it.
 Buddhas throughout space and time
 Of unimpeded wisdom
 Always witness
 My heart's practice.
 No matter the obstacles, the hardships,
 My practice will endure
 Through all,
 Without regret.

[Request for Instruction] *

19. [37] “Then, Ananda, after he had praised the blessed tathagata in this way, the shramana Dharmakara said, ‘Blessed One, I long to awaken to the fully complete unsurpassable awakening. So many times in the course of innumerable lives I have had this longing and long have I dedicated myself to its realisation. Oh, Blessed One, do now kindly teach me the Dharma that I may quickly awaken, that I may become a Tathagata, equal to the unequalled. Oh Blessed One, tell now the characteristics of a Pure Land that I need to know so that I too may extend a wonderful, marvellous, measureless Pure Land of my own. Please make me speedily realise perfect awakening in this life so that I can uproot the pains and hardships of the cycle of birth and death.’

20. [38] “Then the Buddha Lokeshvararaja said to the shramana Dharmakara, ‘You yourself will know how to follow the practice and adorn a Pure Land’

21. “The shramana then said to the Buddha, ‘Blessed One, I cannot do it on my own. You alone comprehend and can explain it. Explain to me how it is done, this wondrous array of amazing qualities apparent in the buddhakshetras of all the tathagatas. If I hear your

explanation, then I may be able to realise these characteristics of a Pure Land one by one.

22. [39] “Well, Ananda, Lokeshvararaja the tathagata, arhat, samyak samBuddha, full of boundless compassion for myriad beings, could be busy with expounding this matter for fully a million years. Recognising the well-meaningness and depth of aspiration of the shramana, he said to Dharmakara, ‘It is as if a man were to bail out the great ocean with a ladle. In principle one should be able to reach the bottom and find great treasure. If one has such unfaltering perseverance, surely there is nothing that should not be attainable.’¹³

23. [40-41] “Then, immediately, Lokeshvararaja described in detail the good and bad reserved for humans and devas in the vast number of buddhakshetras, and explained how some are gross and some subtle, and, as he did so, Dharmakara, because of the strength of his longing, was able to see them all appear before him. He saw the whole matter with unprecedented clarity and there arose in him a great singularity of purpose: a supreme vow.

24. [42] “A deep and serene tranquillity pervaded him and his determination was freed from all obscuring attachment. His state was unexcelled in all the worlds. Thus Dharmakara Bodhisattva took on the supreme function¹⁴ which is that of adorning a Pure Land in which, in his case, were condensed the qualities of many more than five kalpas of practice and reflection, qualities drawn from the Buddhakshetras of a myriad other Buddhas - the Buddhas of all the realms throughout time and space.¹⁵

25. [44] “Dharmakara Bodhisattva then approached the Buddha and prostrated before him, circumambulated three times and in great joy declared, ‘I now have the pure function of adorning a Pure Land.’

26. [45] “The Buddha Lokeshvararaja then said to him:
‘You should proclaim this. The Tathagata approves. You have permission. Now is the right time. Stir and delight the assembly. Roar the lion’s roar. Hearing this, other bodhisattvas will practise this Dharma and so fulfil innumerable great vows.’¹⁶

27. [46] “The shramana replied:
‘I beg you, grant me your attention. I will fully proclaim my vows’¹⁷

[The First Vow - No Lower Realms] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, my Pure Land should include hellish, bestial, tormented or warring realms.

[The Second Vow - No Unfortunate Rebirth] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings born into my Pure Land should be liable to die from there and thereafter be reborn in hellish, bestial, tormented or warring realms.

[The Third Vow - No Colour Discrimination] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings born in my land should not all be of one colour, the colour of gold.

[The Fourth Vow - No Social or Beauty Discrimination] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, there should, in my Pure Land, be any discrimination of regard or privilege between humans and devas or between different individuals on such grounds as colour, relative beauty or other criteria, save the harmless kind of discrimination that is necessary for naming and keeping count of things.

[The Fifth Vow - Recall of Previous Lives] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land do not have full recall of previous lives.

[The Sixth Vow - Divine Eye] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land should not have the divine eye that enables one to perceive myriad other Pure Lands.

[The Seventh Vow - Divine Ear] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land should not have the divine ear that enables one to hear the Dharma simultaneously being taught in a myriad ways by myriads of Buddhas in myriads of Pure Lands, and if they should not have the ability to retain and comprehend those great teachings.

[The Eighth Vow - Empathic Understanding - Divine Mind] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land should not have the ability to understand the workings of other people's minds, the minds of all the vast multitude of different kinds of people scattered through myriad worlds and circumstances.

[The Ninth Vow - Limitless Scope - Divine Feet] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land should lack limitless ability to put themselves in other vantage points and perspectives, to instantly stand in any Pure Land and even to travel beyond it.

[The Tenth Vow - Neither Acquisitiveness nor Craving] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land should have the least sense of property, even in regard to their own bodies or their very selves or if they should give rise to thoughts and feelings associated with craving

for objects of desire.

[The Eleventh Vow - Irreversibility]¹⁸ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land should not all be those for whom all is completely assured. They will definitely attain nirvana.

[The Twelfth Vow - Infinite Light]¹⁹ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, the radiance of light I display should have a limit and not be able to penetrate the myriad Pure Lands.

[The Thirteenth Vow - Infinite Lifespan]²⁰ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, my lifespan should have a limit.

[The Fourteenth Vow - Innumerable Shravakas]²¹ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, the number of shravakas in my Pure Land were not so numerous as to be beyond the fathoming of ordinary beings even were they all to become pratyekabuddhas.

[The Fifteenth Vow - The Deathless] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land should not have infinite lifespan except insofar as they choose to manifest in a mortal state in fulfilment of their holy vows.

[The sixteenth Vow - Unconditional Positive Regard] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my land should ever so much as hear the suggestion that someone is non-virtuous.

[The Seventeenth Vow - Hearing all Buddhas praise the Name] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, one cannot hear all the Buddhas throughout the cosmos praising and glorifying the Name.

[The Three Great Vows]²²

[The Eighteenth Vow - Naturalisation by Faith]²³ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, living beings inhabiting other worlds who conceive a longing for awakening,

who listen to my Name,
who set their heart upon being reborn in my Pure Land, and
who keep me in mind with settled faith,
are not assured of meeting me standing before them in full retinue and glory at the time of
their death, such death thus being completely free of anxiety.

[The Nineteenth Vow - Naturalisation by Merit]²⁴ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, living
beings inhabiting other worlds
who conceive a longing for awakening,
who cultivate all virtues,
who listen to my Name, and
who resolve single-mindedly to be born in my land,
are not assured of meeting me standing before them in full retinue and glory at the time of
their death. Excepted are those who have committed the five heinous offenses as well as those
who are obstructed by their own opposition to the Dharma.

[The Twentieth Vow - Naturalisation by Samadhi]²⁵ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, living
beings inhabiting other worlds
who listen to my Name,
who fix their minds upon my land, and
who, having cultivated all virtues, dedicate all the merit thereof to rebirth in my land
are not reborn in my Pure Land.

[The 21st Vow - Thirty two Marks of Bodhisattvas] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so,
bodhisattvas born in my Pure Land are not each endowed with the 32 marks of a superior
being.

[The 22nd Vow - Bodhisattva Path]²⁶ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, all those
reborn in my Pure Land are not only one more rebirth away from complete nirvana, except for
those who choose otherwise and adopt bodhisattva vows:
who don the armour of great vows for the welfare of the whole world,
who are single-mindedly devoted to the well-being of all,
who are dedicated to bringing all living beings to spiritual maturity,
who travel freely to practise the bodhisattva practice in all worlds,
who wish to serve and revere all Buddhas,
who instruct, lead and transform beings as numerous as sand grains in the Ganges, and
who cultivate the virtues of Samantabhadra.

[The 23rd Vow - Respect for Other Sanghas]²⁷ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, the bodhisattvas of my land, moved by the Buddha's power, cannot honour and revere all Buddhas everywhere in any part of the universe and do so in no more time than it takes to eat a morning meal.

[The 24th Vow - Respect for the Ways of Other Sanghas]²⁸ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, the bodhisattvas of my land should not manifest their roots of merit and offerings before other Buddhas in forms entirely conforming to what is acceptable and desirable to those Buddhas.

[The 25th Vow - Comprehensive Teaching]²⁹ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, the bodhisattvas of my land should not expound the Dharma with the same comprehensive knowledge as a fully awakened Buddha.

[The 26th Vow - Stamina] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, the bodhisattvas of my land should not all acquire the adamant body of Narayana.

[The 27th Vow - Unmeasurable Splendour] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, the devas and humans of my land should, even with the divine eye, be able to fathom and know, by name or number, all the vast extent and diversity of resplendent forms and appearances of objects in that land.

[The 28th Vow - Living in the Presence of the Tree of Life]³⁰ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of my land, even those of slight merit, should not be able always to see my bodhi tree standing radiant and many millions of miles high.

[The 29th Vow - Eloquence] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of my land should not have eloquence and wisdom in sutras, learning, reciting and expounding them.

[The 30th Vow - Inspired Discourse] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of my land should not have the capacity for limitlessly inspired, wise and eloquent speech.

[The 31st Vow - Mirror of All Buddha Lands]³¹ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, my land does not have mirror purity such that the lands of all other Buddhas, inconceivably countless, throughout the ten directions, are completely reflected in it.

[The 32nd Vow - Transformation by Delight] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, in my land, from the ground up to the heavens, the palaces, pavilions, ponds, streams and trees, and all the myriad things of my realm, are not all made of substances of exquisite quality, like gems and aromatic wood, marvellous, refined, fragrant and surpassing all things human and celestial, and from these delights there does not issue an emanation such that all the bodhisattvas who encounter it adopt thereby the conduct of Buddhas spreading this effect throughout limitless numbers of world systems.

[The 33rd Vow - Solace of Light]³² *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in all Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who are exposed to my light do not thereby experience a profound mental and bodily peace and replenishment, surpassing the pleasures of the heavens.

[The 34th Vow - Constancy] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in all Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my name do not thereby acquire the dharma of constancy, unarising and unceasing, the dharani-power, sufficient to sustain them to their ultimate spiritual goal.

[The 35th Vow - Liberation of Women]³³ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, it is not then the case that women in all Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my Name, have serene faith and aspire to awakening, and who hate the forms and statuses imposed upon them as women, shall not, on entering my land, be liberated therefrom.

[The 36th Vow - Merging of Bodhisattva and Renunciant Paths] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, assemblies of bodhisattvas in all Buddha lands throughout the ten directions that listen to my name shall not, in future lives, be empowered to live the pure renunciant life until full awakening.

[The 37th Vow - Faith Inspires Respect] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings

in all Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my name, prostrate in faith, rejoice and adopt the bodhisattva way shall not be respected by humans and devas throughout all worlds.

[The 38th Vow - The Clothes of Enlightenment] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings of my land do not all acquire the great and wondrous clothes of enlightenment, formless yet embracing every treasure, clothes that do not require to be sewn, washed, mended, bleached or dyed and that appear instantaneously in the twinkling of a thought, praised by the Buddha, endlessly unfolding his teaching.

[The 39th Vow - Peace of Mind] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings of my land do not experience the same peace and happiness of mind as that of an arhat, free from the fever of selfish desire.

[The 40th Vow - The Know How to Create a Pure Land]³⁴ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of my land shall not have the ability to recognise in detail, reflected in the jewel trees of my land, the good and bad reserved for humans and devas in billions of Buddha lands, gross and subtle alike, just as they might see their own reflection in a mirror

[The 41st Vow - Spiritual Faculties] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my name should, from that point on until arrival at complete awakening, suffer any deficiency in their spiritual faculties.

[The 42nd Vow - The Samadhi in which All Buddhas and Buddha Lands Stand Before One]³⁵ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my name should not be able to attain the auspicious samadhi in which all the Buddhas and Buddha lands stand before them and they experience themselves making offerings to them all.

[The 43rd Vow - Noble Rebirth]³⁶ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my Name should not in all their future lives be reborn in noble families.

[The 44th Vow - Spiritual Joy]³⁷ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my Name should not dance with joy and enthusiasm, practise wholeheartedly and correspondingly gain immense merit.

[The 45th Vow - Samadhi of Universal Equality] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my Name should not attain the Samadhi of Universal Equality, and, in that state, be conscious of the innumerable, inconceivable Tathagatas.

[The 46th Vow - Spontaneous Access to Dharma] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of my land cannot hear the Dharma spontaneously just as they wish.

[The 47th Vow - Non-retrogression]³⁸ *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my Name should not dwell in the state of non-retrogression.

[The 48th Vow - Commitment to Ultimate Buddhahood] *

Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, bodhisattvas of Buddha lands throughout the ten directions who listen to my Name should not immediately attain serene acceptance of the Dharma and cross a threshold of non-retrogression in their commitment to seeking the qualities of a Buddha.

[Confirmation of Great Vows] *

28. [47] Then the Buddha said to Ananda:

“Having pronounced his Forty Eight Great Vows, the bodhisattva Dharmakara then spoke these words in verse:

I take great vows that are unsurpassed
so that the highest truth can be realised
Should these vows not be fulfilled
I shall not gain perfect enlightenment
Should I not for infinite aeons
become one so great nor offer delight
To give and save all those in need,
I shall not gain perfect enlightenment
When I attain the highest bodhi
all worlds shall hear my name aright
Should there be anyone who hears it not

I shall not gain perfect enlightenment
 Refraining from greed, deep rooted in right thought,
 gaining wisdom pure, I shall pursue
 The way up to the highest enlightenment
 and become a master, guide of the world.
 From strength divine shall radiate forth
 a light great that brightens the whole world
 I shall root out the darkness of illusions three
 and save those in suffering and despair
 I shall try to open the spiritual eyes of wisdom
 and to eradicate the darkness of ignorance
 I shall try to close tight all evil paths
 and to lead all beings to the realm of good.
 When I obtain the highest merits
 my light shall shine boundless in all directions
 Even the sun and moon will seek the darkness
 and heavenly lights will be dimmed
 Now let us reveal the House of Dharma
 so that we shall share the Buddha's merits
 Among the people I will always
 expound the truth in a lion's roar.
 I will serve and praise all Buddhas
 on whom the virtues and merits are bestowed
 When I perfect my wisdom and complete my vows
 I shall become the king of the three worlds
 The wisdom of the Buddhas is boundless and free
 shining brightly with none to loath or shun
 I pray my power of wisdom may shine
 like as thine, Oh Buddha, the exalted one.
 When these vows are fulfilled
 the whole universe will tremble and rejoice
 The heavens will shower beautiful flowers,
 celestial lotus blossoms in full scent."

29. [48] Then the Buddha said to Ananda
 "When the shramana Dharmakara had pronounced these verses
 the earth quaked in six different ways;
 wonderful flowers fell all around
 spontaneous music filled the air
 and a voice on high proclaimed:
 'Without fail, the unsurpassable complete awakening will be yours.'

[Dharmakara's Virtue] *

30. [49-50] "Ananda, the shramana Dharmakara then practised those true, unfailing and unsurpassed vows, rare in all worlds and ages, that bring serenity and joy. Before the Buddha Lokeshvararaja and all the devas, Brahma, Mara and a host of celestials, he established his

resolve.

31. [51] “Dharmakara practised as he had promised and as he did so his Buddhakshetra grew in extent and magnificence. The purity and magnificence of his Buddha Land increased and increased. It was exquisite, unique, supreme and marvellous. It was vast, incomparable, magnificent; omni-present, eternally reliable and not subject to decay.

[55-57]

[Devotion]

32. He worshipped the Three Jewels and brought offerings to his teachers.

[Tenderness]

33. He was gentle, charming, cheerful, amiable, and pleasant to live with. His speech was honest, modest, mild, harmless and beneficial to all. His tender heart showed in the friendliness of his face. He knew beforehand when somebody wanted to ask him a question.

[Samadhi & Prajna]

34. His samadhi was calm. His wisdom was without impediment. He mastered the higher samadhis, realising the true significance of emptiness, signlessness and desirelessness and the meaning of non-arising.

[The Patience of an Arhat]

35. Renouncing kingdom and country, relinquishing wealth and sense pleasures. He was free from greed, anger and hostility. He did not harbour them and he did not allow ideas associated with them to arise. Through all obstacles and suffering the power of patience never deserted him. He had few wants and was easily satisfied. He did not crave for forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles or fantasies. He was free from corruption and anger and his faith never failed. He was courageous, persevering and of indefatigable resolve.

[Bodhisattva]

36. He was single minded, virtuous and had the altruism of a true bodhisattva, compassionately benefiting the multitude of living beings. He mastered the six paramitas and taught them to others. Ornamented with great virtue and possessed of great practice he brought virtue and merit to all, establishing them upon the great path of awakening in a manner that would be sustained. Wherever he was born an immense stock of treasure was at hand for him at will. He taught and assisted countless living beings, setting them on the path to the ultimate awakening.

37. [58] Sometimes he was born as a wealthy or noble householder, sometimes as a kshatriya, prince or wheel turning monarch, sometimes as one of the Lords of the six heavens of the desire realm or, even more lofty, a Brahma king of the gods. Still he revered and worshipped all Buddhas, making the four kinds of offerings to them.

38. [59] Such good qualities cannot be praised too much. Fragrance issued from his mouth like the scent of blue lotus; every pore of his body exuded perfume like that of sandalwood, permeating worlds without limit. His countenance was fine and in him the marks of a Buddha

were excellent and marvellous. Inexhaustible treasure flowed from him constantly: clothes, food, drink, rare and exquisite flowers, perfumes, parasols, banners, flags and other amazing manifestations. He surpassed the devas, yet he remained free in the midst of all dharmas.”

[Dharmakara became Amitabha Buddha] *

39. [60-61] Ananda said to the Buddha:

“This bodhisattva, mahasattva Dharmakara, has he experienced liberation, attained Buddhahood and passed into nirvana, or has he not yet awakened? And does he still exist? Is he still living and continuing to practise and teach the Dharma?”

The Blessed One said:

“Ananda, this tathagata is indeed fully realised and has not passed away. He dwells in the western regions of the universe away from here beyond a vast number of Buddha-fields. His Pure Land is called Peace and Bliss and he is called Amitabha, ‘measureless light’.”³⁹

[Amida’s Pure Land is Surpassingly Fine] *

40. [62] “His Pure Land is naturally composed of the seven jewels: gold, silver, coral, amber, agate, ruby and lapis lazuli. It spreads boundlessly in all directions so that it is impossible to know its limit. The jewel substances intermingle in many different ways, making myriad different effects. They are luminous resplendent, exquisite, rare, and pure. This land, made of fine gems like those of the sixth heaven, surpasses the lands of the ten directions.”⁴⁰

41. [63] “Furthermore this land has no fixed structure like a central Mount Sumeru and a ring of adamantine mountains, nor oceans, seas, rivers, valleys and ravines, nor fixed seasons nor hot or cold regions. Through the power of the Buddha, whatever one wants to see one will see. The climate is benign and mild, the weather always suitable, moderate, pleasant and agreeable, without seasonal extremes.

42. Furthermore, there are no hells, no realms of hungry ghosts, and no animal realm; in fact, no lower rebirth is possible there.”⁴¹

43. [64] Then Ananda asked the Buddha:

“World Honoured One, if there is no Mount Sumuru in that land, where will the devas dwell: the celestial guardian kings and the devas of Indra’s heaven of the thirty-three?”

The Buddha said to Ananda:

“So do you know where all the devas dwell in this world system? Like the Yama gods and all those other gods up to the highest levels of the realm of pure form?”

Ananda said:

“The consequences of karma are hard to conceive.”

The Buddha said to Ananda:

“Inconceivable indeed are the results of karma. Even more inconceivable are Buddha lands. Beings exist there by the force of their deeds without any need for a Mount Sumuru.”⁴²

Ananda said to the Buddha:

“I myself do not doubt this Dharma, but I ask for the sake of those seeking to banish doubt in generations to come.”

[Amida’s Light Remedies All Spiritual Ills]⁴³ *

44. [65] The Buddha said to Ananda:

“The majestic light of Amitayus is the most perfect and extensive of all. There is nothing like it. The light of all other Buddhas does not surpass this light. The light of Buddhas first extends a fathom, then a league, then two, three, four or five leagues, then a whole Buddha land. Some Buddhas illumine a hundred Buddha lands, some a thousand, but the light of Amitayus illumines myriads of world systems, numerous as the sands of the Ganges, to the east, to the south, west, north, above and below.

45. [66] Amitayus is, therefore, called
the Buddha of Measureless Light - Amitabha;
the Buddha of Boundless Light;
the Buddha of Unimpeded Light;
the Buddha of Incomparable Light;
the Buddha of the Light of the Monarch of Fires;
the Buddha of Pure Light;
the Buddha of the Light of Joy;
the Buddha of the Light of Wisdom;
the Buddha of Continuous Light;
the Buddha of Inconceivable Light;
the Buddha of Ineffable Light; and
the Buddha of Light Outshining the Sun and the Moon.⁴⁴

46. [67] This light touching beings makes the three poisons disappear as they feel tenderness, joy and enthusiasm. Naturally good thoughts arise. Even in any of the three lower realms or in the midst of affliction and travail, touched by this light they find repose and assuagement that fails not. At the end of their days they will all be led to liberation.⁴⁵

47. [68] The brilliant light of Amitayus shines in every Buddha land throughout the ten directions. There is no place where it cannot be known. Not only I, here and now, praise this light. All Buddhas, shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas are in unison in their praise of it.⁴⁶

48. [69] Any being that attends to the divinely virtuous light and gives him or herself over to its incessant praise day and night will, according to their resolve, attain rebirth in his land, welcomed by the host of shravakas and bodhisattvas there, all singing and rejoicing, and when they in turn enter the path of the Buddhas there, Buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout the ten quarters will praise them, just as I now praise Amitayus.”

49. [70] The Buddha continued:

“Were I to continue extolling the power of the majestic light of Amitayus day and night a whole kalpa long, I could never exhaust its praise.”

[Amida Buddha Enjoys Life Without End] *

50. [71-72] The Buddha said to Ananda:

“The life span of Amitayus is incalculably long. To give an idea of this, let us say that all the sentient beings in all the world systems of the ten directions were all suddenly transformed into shravakas and pratyekabuddhas and they all met in one place and with all their knowledge and power single mindedly attempted to fathom the length of the life span of this Buddha they could not succeed even if they continued counting for ten thousand kalpas. The life spans of shravakas, bodhisattvas, devas and humans in that land is similarly long and beyond the reach of any analogy or reckoning.”⁴⁷

[The Disciples of Amida are Incalculably Many] *

51 [73] “The vast number of shravakas and bodhisattvas in that land is difficult to compute. Nor can one put a bound upon the extent of their super-normal powers, knowledge and mastery. They hold the world in the palm of their hand.”⁴⁸

52. [74-75] The Buddha said to Ananda:

“The number of shravakas in that Buddha’s assembly is incalculable, and likewise the number of bodhisattvas. Even millions of persons, each equal in powers to Maudgalyayana, counting throughout their existence until nirvana could not reckon the number of shravakas and bodhisattvas in the assembly of Amitayus.

53. [76] Suppose one took a single hair and split it into ten strands and dipped one strand into a great ocean, extracting thereby a drop of water; can you imagine what proportion that drop is of the whole ocean?”

Ananda replied:

“Even astronomical numbers do not go far enough.”

The Buddha said:

“Just so are the numbers those millions of persons could count to the actual number of shravakas and bodhisattvas in the realm of Amitayus.”

[Amida’s Pure Land is Full of Jewel Forests] *

54. [77] Furthermore, throughout that land are trees made of the seven gems. There are trees of gold; trees of silver; trees of coral; trees of amber; trees of agate; trees of ruby; and trees of lapis lazuli. Then there are trees of two precious substances, trees of three, four, up to all seven.⁴⁹

[78] Some gold trees have silver leaves, flowers and fruits. Some silver trees have gold leaves, flowers and fruits. Some coral trees have leaves flowers and fruit of amber. Some

amber trees have leaves flowers and fruit of coral. Some agate trees have leaves, flowers and fruit of ruby. Some ruby trees have leaves, flowers and fruits of agate. Some lapis lazuli trees have leaves, flowers and fruit of all sorts of jewels.

[79] There are trees with red gold roots, white silver trunks, coral branches, amber twigs, agate leaves, ruby flowers and lapis lazuli fruits. There are trees with white silver roots, coral trunks, amber branches, agate twigs, ruby leaves, lapis lazuli flowers and red gold fruit. There are trees with coral roots, amber trunks, agate branches, ruby twigs, lapis lazuli leaves, red gold flowers and white silver fruit. There are trees with amber roots, agate trunks, ruby branches, lapis lazuli twigs, gold leaves, silver flowers and coral fruits. There are trees with agate roots, ruby trunks, lapis lazuli branches, gold twigs, silver leaves, coral flowers and amber fruit. There are trees with ruby roots, lapis lazuli trunks, gold branches, silver twigs, coral leaves, amber flowers and agate fruit. There are trees with lapis lazuli roots, gold trunks, silver branches, coral twigs, amber leaves, agate flowers and ruby fruits.

55. [80] The trees are evenly spaced making rows and avenues. Their branches form layers, their leaves symmetries, and the fruits cluster. The brilliant colours are so luxuriant that it is quite overwhelming. When a breeze blows through them it provokes exquisite sounds that mysteriously harmonise.

[The Tree of Life] *

56. [81] And the tree beneath which Amitayus sits is four million miles in height. Its root spread is five million leagues round and its branches span two million leagues. All the precious substances combine naturally in this tree. It is crowned with the monarchs of jewels: the moon-light mani gem and the ocean sustaining chakra gem. Between its richly ornamented boughs cluster jewelled garlands wherein a hundred thousand colours mingle: an extraordinary delight. The tree itself is veiled with jewel nets, an intricate mosaic of all ornaments each corresponding to one's wish.⁵⁰

57. [82] From this tree the wafting breeze evokes the marvellous sound of Dharma that then spreads far and wide, pervading all the Buddha lands of the ten directions. Those who hear will attain serene acceptance of the most profound Dharma, enter the stage of non-retrogression and until they attain the Buddha way will continue to hear it and be freed from affliction and sorrow. The eyes that see the colours of this tree, the ears that hear its sounds, the nose that has received its fragrance, the tongue that has tasted its savour, the body that has been touched by its light, and the mind that has cognized it, all attain serene acceptance of the most profound Dharma, dwell in the stage of non-retrogression, and continue as pure faculties, free from affliction and sorrow, until the Buddha way is accomplished.⁵¹

58. [83] Ananda, when humans and devas in that land see this tree, three degrees of serene acceptance of the most profound Dharma open to them:
first, acceptance of the Dharma in the letter;
second, acceptance in the deed; and
third, acceptance in the spirit of non-arising of self.⁵²

All this comes from the magestic power of Amitayus, the power of his primal vow, his

fulfilled vow, his manifest vow, his established vow, his accomplished vow.”

[Amida’s Land is a Realm of Utmost Joy] *

59. [84] The Buddha said to Ananda:

[Music] “An earthly monarch enjoys one hundred thousand kinds of music. From the realm of a wheel turning king up through each succeeding heaven the music of each higher realm is a hundred million times superior to that of the realm below. However the music of the highest heaven improved a hundred million times would not compare with a single sound produced by one of the jewel trees of Amitayus’ realm. Moreover, in that land, there are thousands of varieties of spontaneous music and every one is the sound of the Dharma: clear and soft or deep and resonant, they form the most exquisite music, foremost of all the sounds of the ten regions of the universe.

60. [85] [Pavilions] Moreover, the halls, viharas, palaces and pavilions are all adorned with the seven jewels. They appear miraculously. They are draped with curtains studded with pearl and moon bright mani gems.⁵³

61. [86] [Pools] Inside and out, right and left, are bathing pools, some ten leagues, some twenty, some thirty, and so on up to a hundred thousand leagues wide, deep and long, full to the brim with water of eight good qualities, clear, clean, fragrant and tasting like nectar.

There are golden pools with beds of silver sand; silver pools with beds of golden 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 red gold sand; red gold pools with beds of white jade sand; and many others composed of all combinations.

[87] On the banks are sandalwood trees whose leaves and pendant flowers diffuse perfumes. Heavenly lotus flowers, blue, pink, yellow and white, bloom profusely covering large areas of water.

If shravakas and bodhisattvas enter these pools and wish the water to rise to their ankles, it rises to their ankles; to rise to their knees, it rises to their knees; to rise to their waist, it rises to their waist; to rise to their neck, it rises to their neck; to pour over their body, it pours over their body; or to recede, it recedes. Its temperature is cool, warm or hot according to their wish. This water opens the mind, soothes the body, and purifies the heart. It is clear, pure and limpid - so pure it seems almost imperceptible. The jewel sands shine so brilliantly that even in great depth of water its radiance is apparent. Gentle waves criss-cross the surface never too slowly nor too fast, forming wonderful patterns and producing endless marvellous sounds.

62. [88] [Sounds] One can hear whatever sound one wishes: the sound “Buddha”, the sound “Dharma”, the sound “Sangha”, “tranquillity”, “selfless emptiness”, “mahakaruna”, “paramita”, “ten powers”, “ten fearlessnesses” “eighteen Buddha qualities”, “super normal powers”, “unconditioned”, “unarising unceasing”, “serene non-arising of dharmas” and so on up to “nectar anointment of bodhisattvas”: sublime words of Dharma, truth, virtue and spiritual elation spontaneously occurring.

63. [89] Hearing such truths one is filled with joy:
 the joy of purity,
 joy of liberation,
 joy of serenity,
 joy of truth,
 joy of the Three Treasures,
 joy of the Ten Powers,
 joy of the Ten Fearlessnesses,
 joy of the Eighteen Buddha Qualities,
 joy of the path of higher powers,
 joy of the life of shravakas and bodhisattvas.

64. [90] In that land not even the names of the three lower realms are to be found, but only the spontaneous sound of bliss. Therefore this land is called Peace and Bliss.⁵⁴

[The Beings in Amida's Land] *

65. [91] Ananda, the beings that are born into that Buddha's land have pure bodies, special powers, fine voices and extraordinary merits. The palaces they inhabit, the clothes they wear, the food and drink they consume, the flowers that adorn them, the perfumes and ornaments they use are all like those of the devas of the highest heaven, naturally appearing. If they wish to eat, plates made of the seven jewels - gold, silver, coral, amber, agate, ruby and lapis lazuli - and also of moon pearl, in plentiful quantity, spontaneously materialise amply filled with delicious food of a hundred flavours, all according with their wish. Although food is offered before them, it is not eaten. By merely thinking of eating they enjoy the flavour and relish the tastes and their hunger is completely satisfied. Body and mind relax and the taste does not cling. When the meal is done the vessels disappear, reappearing again whenever they are needed.⁵⁵

66. [92] Pure and peaceful is that Buddha's land, full of splendour and joy like the realm of nirvana the unconditioned.

67. [93] The shravakas and bodhisattvas, human and deva, of that land have elevated and lucid wisdom and remarkable powers. There is no difference among them in bodily form but the terms human and deva are used merely conventionally. They are handsome to look at with noble countenance and fine features, unequalled in the human and deva realms. They are endowed with bodies of Naturalness, Emptiness and Limitlessness. [94-98] As a king to a pauper or as Indra to a minor spirit are the inhabitants of that land to other beings.⁵⁶

68. [99] The devas and humans in the land of Amitayus have robes, food and drink, flowers, perfumes, jewels, parasols and banners. The wonderful sounds they hear and the surroundings they enjoy - their abodes, palaces and pavilions - are all proportionately responsive to their needs. Just as they wish they obtain one, two, any number of precious gems. Wonderful jewel studded tapestries carpet the ground where they walk and jewel nets hang in the air threaded with gold lace, pearl and a myriad rare and unique treasures. Delight is everywhere. Jewelled bells peal; perfumes pervade; and subtle hues charm the eye at every turn.⁵⁷

69. [100-101] A natural breeze of virtue gently blows refreshing to the senses, inducing the jewel trees to sing forth the incomparable sounds of Dharma and diffuse ten thousand fragrances. For those who hear, the dust of impurity and tribulation ceases to rise and they experience the bliss that a monk feels in the samadhi of nirodha⁵⁸. Those breezes scatter blossom all over the Buddha land. They fall in beautiful patterns and designs. Their hues are delicate, their fragrance rich. When one steps upon them the foot sinks four inches. When one lifts the foot the blossom returns to its former position. When these flowers have served their purpose they are swallowed by the earth and all is clean and pure without a trace. The breeze blows and flowers thus fall six times a day.⁵⁹

70. [102] Jewel lotuses fill that world, each with a hundred thousand million petals emanating light of countless colours: blue lotuses emitting blue light, white lotuses emitting white light, and likewise sombre, yellow, red, purple and other coloured lights; light surpassing that of the sun and the moon. Each flower emits thirty six hundred thousand million rays and from each ray appears thirty six hundred thousand million Buddhas. Each is the colour of red gold and each has the marks of a Buddha, superb and extraordinary. And from each of those Buddhas pours forth light in millions of rays filling the ten quarters, declaring the Dharma, subtle and sublime. Thus are innumerable beings set upon the Buddha way.⁶⁰

[Here ends the first scroll]

[Complete Assurance] *

71. [103] The Buddha said to Ananda:
“For living beings born in this land all is completely assured. They will be successful in the spiritual path. How so? In this land, the category of beings for whom nothing is assured and the category of beings who are lost do not exist⁶¹.”

[The Universality of True Religion] *

72. [104] All Buddhas, tathagatas, in the ten regions of the universe, numerous as the sands of the Ganges, are alike in praising the august and inconceivable presence and virtues of Amitayus.⁶²

[Apodicticity] *

73. [105] Any living being who hears the Name and genuinely and completely rejoices in serene trust, even if it is only for a moment, immediately gains entry. They will not fall back.⁶³

[There are Different Degrees of Faith]⁶⁴ *

74. [106] The Buddha said to Ananda:
“The devas and humans of all world systems throughout the ten directions that single-mindedly desire to be reborn in my land fall into three categories:

75. [107] Those of the first and superior type live the life of shramanas. They renounce the household life and sense desires. Their hearts are set on awakening, and they completely keep faith in Amitayus. They do great good deeds and expect to be born in this land. [108] When they are on the point of death, the real Amitayus appears before them in all his host. They follow him and are reborn naturally and miraculously in the centre of a seven jewel lotus. Their state is irreversible. Wisdom, powers, courage and mastery then come to them. [109] Therefore, Ananda, all who now in this life desire to see Amitayus should resolve to attain samyak sambodhi, cultivate merit, and resolve to be born in that land.

76. [110] Those of the middling category are ordinary humans and devas of the myriad worlds who set their heart on birth in that land. They do not manage to live their lives as shramanas, nor cultivate such merit, but still single-mindedly resolve to attain samyak sambodhi and they completely keep faith in Amitayus. [111] They do good deeds, and will be the sort who might observe eight precepts on special days, erect stupas and shrines, support the shramanas with food and so on, and express their faith with banners, lights, flowers and incense, dedicating the merit toward birth in that land. [112] When they are at the point of death, an image like Amitayus surrounded by all his host appears before them. It has all the major and minor marks and seems just like the Buddha himself. Following this image they go to rebirth in the land of bliss. They are also irreversibly on the path but their merit and wisdom is less.”

77. [113] The Buddha said to Ananda:

“There are also devas and humans scattered throughout the ten directions who also desire to be reborn in that land and attain samyak sambodhi but who generate no merit. They might have only experienced real faith in Amitayus for as much as ten moments in all their life. But if they are the sort who even once or once in a while feel glad, feel heartened, or rejoice when they hear mention of Dharma, and have at least the odd moment of sincere aspiration, then as they approach death, the Buddha may approach them in a dream and they will be reborn in his land, and they too will be irreversibly upon the path, notwithstanding their lesser merit.”⁶⁵

[Bodhisattvas from Other Fields Come to Praise Amitayus]⁶⁶ *

78. [114] The Buddha said to Ananda:

“The splendour of Amitayus is incomparable⁶⁷. There is not a single one of the inconceivable billions of Buddha tathagatas throughout the ten directions that does not praise him⁶⁸.

Unfathomable uncountable hosts of bodhisattvas, as numerous as sands of the Ganges, from the Buddha lands of the eastern direction, come to pay homage, give offerings and make worship to Amitayus; they hear his Dharma and spread it far and wide for the guidance of all. Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and shravakas⁶⁹ of the southern, western and northern directions, the intermediate directions, above and below, all likewise come and do the same.

79. [115] The Buddhas of the Eastern lands,
Numerous as Ganges sands,
Admiring come, with join-ed hands
In praise of that Awakened One
Measureless Amida.

Alike they come from every side,
North, south, and west whence they abide,
Gathering a whelming tide
In praise of that awakened one
Measureless Amida.

Each brings a gift of incense sweet,
Or offerings superbly mete:
Jewels, blossoms, garments at his feet
In praise of that awakened one
Measureless Amida.

Celestial sounds - a great array,
Heavenly harmonies they play
Til song fills all the night and day
In praise of that awakened one
Measureless Amida.

And each
revering,
thrice circumambulating,
bowing deep,
declares:
Complete is your attainment of wisdom and power,
The gate of the Dharma swings open wide;
In your hands you hold the merit tower,
Your surpassing wondrous wisdom abides
And shines on the world like the sun at noon hour
So, like dispersed clouds, birth and death cower.

And each
jubilant,
blossoms strewing in elation,
declares:
Adorned withal is this Pure Land:
Manifest now the land of bliss!
Inconceivably sublime its glory stands.
Thus empowered each one of us
Can in confidence resolve to turn our hand
To make a world the like of this.

From Amitayus, of tender care,
Breaks a warm and happy smile
And a trillion rays of light
Fill the billion Buddha fields.

The light returns

And circles round
And all the great celestial host
With enthusiastic joy are filled.

Then Quan Shi Yin, so great and kind,
Prostrates before that Buddha, saying thus:
“Why do you make this lovely smile:
What is the reason, what the cause?”

The Buddha’s voice,
Like Brahma thunder rolling forth declares
“A prophecy, I’ll give;
Listen now attentively.”

“From the ten quarters sincere people come
I clearly discern their pure intention,
Their wish to adorn a land of bliss.
Be assured, they will succeed.

“They have realised that things are like dreams;
Their marvellous vows will be fulfilled:
They will create
A land like mine.

“Like shadows, like a lightening flash, are things:
Thus released, the bodhisattva way is theirs,
Merit and assurance grow
That they will go to Buddhahood.

“Empty and without self-nature -
Thus they see things as they are;
So with unified intent
They will create a field like this.”

Then Buddhas all around implore
Those bodhisattvas gathered near
To pay respect and to revere
The Buddha of the Land of Peace

And listen to his Dharma pure
Rejoice, adopt it, make it yours,
For with that practice sure
You will all make your own Pure Lands.

Super-normally empowered you’ll be
Even as you reach his land
Definitive prediction to receive

From Amida of Buddhahood.

By the power of this Buddha's Vows
The Name is heard, longing found,
To be reborn in that Pure Land
And gain the irreversible.

Bodhisattvas all will vow:
"My land shall be the same as this
All beings I will ferry over
Everywhere will the Name be heard."

To myriad tathagatas
Their offerings they make
Bowing, rejoicing and returning to
The Land of Peace and Nurturance.

A person with no roots of good
This sutra simply will not hear
But those with precepts, those who are pure,
Will hear the Dharma in the end.

Those who once that Buddha saw
Can now put trust in all his words
With humble respect the practice they learn;
Exuberantly flows their joy.

Proud, and sly, and lazy minds,
Never can the truth discern
But those who saw the Buddha once
Return to Dharma readily.

Shravakas and bodhisattvas
Cannot fathom Buddha's mind
It is as impossible
As if the blind should lead the blind.

Tathagata's wisdom ocean deep
Is without limit, shore or bed
In the three vehicles, to Buddhas it's clear
To the other two, it's over their head.

Even if all beings
Entered the Way, knew its song,
Mastered emptiness
And meditated a million kalpas long,

Even if the Dharma they taught
And to life's exhaustion strove
They could not fathom Buddha's thought
For boundless is its purity and love.

Long life is rare,
And rare it is too, a Buddha to meet;
And how difficult it is indeed for humans to have wise faith.
If you hear of this path, follow with all speed.

Hear this Dharma, keep it in mind,
Revere it, rejoice and mend.
Resolved on this Way, following this Way,
We shall be such friends.

Let us in our hearts resolve:
"Were the world to be all on fire
I will pass through that blaze this Dharma to hear
The Buddha way will then give me the means
To save those drowning in the flood."

[The bodhisattvas of Amitayus] *

80. [116] The Buddha said to Ananda:
"All the bodhisattvas in the land of Amitayus will ultimately reach the stage of Once Returners, the only exception being those who have made and resolved upon the great and meritorious vow to return many times for the sake of sentient beings.

81. [117] "Ananda, each shravaka in Amitayus' Buddha Land has a halo of light of at least one fathom around his body. The light of the bodhisattvas shines hundreds of leagues. [118] That of the two most majestic bodhisattvas reaches thousands of millions of miles reaching everywhere."

82. Ananda asked:
"What are the names of those two bodhisattvas?"

The Buddha replied:
"One is called Quan Shi Yin. The other is called Tai Shih Chih. They both practised as bodhisattvas here in this my Buddha Land and then were reborn by transformation into that Buddha Land of Amida Tathagata.

83. [119] "Ananda, all the sentient beings born there possess all the marks of great beings as well as the great wisdom by which to penetrate the subtle and essential nature of all dharmas. Their physical senses are sharp and clear and their supermundane powers are unobstructed. Beings of lesser capacity attain the first two kshantis. Those with superior capacity attain all three⁷⁰ and understand anutpada.

84. [120] What is more, bodhisattvas born in this land will continue to Buddhahood and beyond without ever falling into the lower realms along the way. Their mastery of supernormal powers is perfect. They recall their past lives. Some, however, exceptionally⁷¹, choose to be born in other realms or in corrupt ages appearing there as I have done here in this Saha World.”

85. [121] The Buddha said to Ananda:

“The bodhisattvas of Amitayus’ land, moved by that Buddha’s majestic presence, go out into the innumerable regions of the cosmos, yet return in time for their meal⁷². Everywhere they go they make offerings to Buddhas, world Honoured Ones: flowers, incense, music, canopies, banners, all appearing as if by magic, instantly and precisely in response to their thought.

[122] These offerings are rare and marvellous, like nothing in this world, As these offerings are made they remain suspended in space and turn into flowers - great canopies of blossom filling the sky⁷³. The colours are dazzling and the fragrance pervades everywhere. Each flower is four hundred miles round. Hanging there they gradually expand until the universe of infinite worlds is completely covered. As new ones appear old ones disappear. The bodhisattvas, themselves also suspended in space, are all delighted, laugh, clap, play music, make wonderful sounds and praises, singing with their exquisite voices of all the superlative qualities of the Buddhas. They listen to the Dharma, worship all the Buddhas, and then return home before their meal.

86. [123] The Buddha said to Ananda:

“When the Buddha Amitayus teaches the Dharma, all the bodhisattvas and shravakas gather in the seven jewelled lecture hall⁷⁴. There he explains the teaching in detail and all are liberated, attaining supreme joy.

87. [124] Then a breeze springs up from each of the four quarters and makes the jewel trees resound with wonderful musical scales and causes exquisite flowers to fall and scatter everywhere. Thus spontaneous glory unfolds unceasingly. All the devas arrive, each with hundreds and thousands of kinds of flowers and perfumes and tens of thousands of musical sounds, all to worship the Buddha and his great assembly of bodhisattvas and disciples. These are times of great joy, one deva succeeding another in endless succession.”

88. [125] The Buddha said to Ananda:

“The bodhisattvas of that land expound the Dharma whenever it is appropriate to do so and so do with complete, unerring and enlightened wisdom.”

89. [126] Toward the ten thousand things in that land, they have no thought of attachment or possessiveness. Coming and going, advancing or retiring, they act without attachment. Their wishes and their reality are always coincident; they are free and in command; nothing displeasing occurs for them. [127] They do not think in terms of self and others and so have no sense of rivalry or competition. They have the heart of great compassion, the will to benefit all beings. They are tender and tame. They bear no resentment, no enmity. Being free of mental hindrances they are pure and reliable, unbiassed, noble, sincere and steady. In their hearts they revere, delight and rejoice in the Dharma. They extinguish the passions as they arise and so are free from all tendency to fall into the lower realms. [128] So these are bodhisattvas of limitless virtue, accomplished in all that a bodhisattva should be. They tame

their hearts by the Dharma of Buddha, generating samadhi and siddhi, realisations and insights, and all the seven factors of enlightenment.

90. [129] With the physical eye they see clearly, discriminating without error;
with the divine eye they reach everywhere;
with the Dharma eye they have insight and understand the ways of Buddhas and bodhisattvas;
with the wisdom eye they see Truth and so attain the Other Shore;
with the Buddha eye they see the true nature of all dharmas;
with unhindered wisdom they expound the Dharma to others;
with the eye of equality they see past, present and future empty and unreal.

91. [130] Thus they strive toward the Buddhadharma and acquire its eloquence freeing living beings from the afflictions of passion. Tathagata-born, tatha supremely attained, they indicate reality: “Tatha!”, knowing well the provisional nature of all notions of “practice”, “extinction” and the like. Having no delight in worldly speech, they prefer to research the roots of good and seek the Buddha’s lofty path.⁷⁵

92. [131] In their knowing, one thing is as peaceful as another, for they have ceased to reground themselves in the human body and given up the passions that anchor one there⁷⁶. With Dharma in their ears they are free from doubt and fears. Always they are bodhisattvas⁷⁷: their compassion deep and subtle, yet boundless and marvellous, is as embracing as the sky and sustaining as the earth. Endlessly they reach the Other Shore, the End of the Ekayana⁷⁸. Having broken out of the net of distrust, wisdom rises like a spring bubbling forth and all the principles framing Buddha’s Dharma lie clear before them⁷⁹:

93. [132] Wisdom like the ocean;
Samadhi like Sumeru;
Wisdom Light, bright and pure, outshining sun and moon;
Dharma undefiled, clear and brilliant as the snows of Himalaya.

94. [133] Like the Great Earth, free of discriminations of pure and impure, ugly and beautiful;
Like the Pure Waters, washing away the outflows of all the tainted travails of this world;
Like the King of Fires, burning away the fuel of all evil passions;
Like the Great Wind, passing unimpededly throughout all the worlds;
Like the Empty Space, that amidst all things is unattached to any;
Like the White Lotus, undefiled by the waters that surround it;
Like the Great Vehicle, carrying the multitude beyond the realm of life and death;
Like the Heavy Cloud, causing the thunder of Dharma to roar and the unenlightened to awaken;
Like the Rain Cloud, from which a rain of Dharma comes as nectar for the thirst of thirsty beings;
Like the Diamond Mountain, unshaken by Mara, unshaken by cynics;
Like the Brahma King, at the head of all beings in virtue and merit;
Like the Banyan Tree, that shelters all beings;
Like the Udumbara Flower, so rare in this world, so difficult to encounter;
Like the Golden Garuda, that is majestic;
Like the Migratory Birds, who keep no store;

Like the Monarch of the Herd, invincible;
Like the Elephant King, gentle and tame;
Like the Lion King, free of fear;
Like the Vast Space, their great compassion is the same always and to everyone.

95. [134] Their envy is gone: they do not feel ill when others are superior. Their joy is in seeking the Dharma, pursuit of which they never tire. They love to expound it, never wearying. Strike the Dharma Drum! Raise the Dharma Banner! Shine forth the Dharma Sun! Dispel the gloom of avidya!

96. They cultivate the six harmonious relations and the Dharma gift shows in all that they do. Strong and diligent they do no falter. They are a lamp to the world and a supreme field of merit, always acting as wise teachers, free of greed and hate, delighting only in finding the right path, unconcerned with anything else. They extract the thorn of passion and bring peace to the throng of beings. Their extraordinary virtue inspires the respect of all.

97. [135] Destroying the three poisons⁸⁰, they exercise such powers:
the power over causes and conditions;
the power of guiding others;
the power of vows;
the power of upaya⁸¹;
the power of unceasing;
the power of goodness;
the power of samadhi;
the power of wisdom;
the power of attentiveness to Dharma;
the power of the paramitas: dana, sila, virya, ksanti, dhyana and prajna;
the power of right mindfulness;
the power of tranquillity and insight;
the power of intuitive faculties and higher knowledge;
the power to tame and to train all in the ways of the Dharma.
They exercise all these and others too.

98. They are marked by all the physical characteristics of Buddhas: colour, signs, merit, virtues and eloquence. They have no equal.

99. They have revered, worshipped and made offerings to innumerable Buddhas;
They have been praised by them;
They have mastered the paramitas;
They have practised the samadhis of emptiness, signlessness and desirelessness;
They have entered the samadhi gate of non-arising and non-ceasing;
They have left the stages of pratyekabuddhas and shravakas behind.

100. [137] Ananda, the bodhisattvas of that land are endowed with such innumerable virtues as these. Yet my description of them is only a brief outline. A fuller account could fill a thousand million kalpas and still be incomplete.”⁸²

[Seeing the Pure Land] *

101. [206] The Buddha said to Ananda:

“Rise, arrange your robe, and with palms together pay homage to and worship Amitayus. Buddha Tathagatas of the lands of the ten directions constantly and with one accord praise that Buddha who is unhindered and unattached.”

[207] Ananda stood up, arranged his robe, faced West, and with his palms joined in anjali, made prostrations to Amitayus, his forehead touching the ground.

[208] Ananda said:

“World Honoured One, I want to see that Buddha and his land of peace and bliss with all its shravakas and bodhisattvas.”

No sooner was this said than Amitayus shed a great halo of light that illuminated all the realms of all the Buddhas in the universe. Each of those worlds has an encircling ring of diamond mountains, in the centre a Mount Sumeru, and throughout its land other mountains great and small⁸³. Basking in the light shed by Amitayus all these mountains glowed with the same wonderful golden colour. It was as it will be at the kalpa’s end when a great flood will submerge the myriad things and there will be nothing visible as far as the eye can see except a vast expanse of water, just so was the flood of light emanating from Amitayus. The lights of shravakas and bodhisattvas were completely eclipsed and only the Buddha’s light remained in solitary and all-encompassing glory.

102. [209] Then Ananda saw the Buddha Amitayus, majestic and sublime as Sumeru, the monarch of mountains, tower above all. His marks and signs all shone with clear light and there was nothing not illuminated by that light. The four assemblies of Buddhists here in this world also saw all of this at once. And those who were there in that other world likewise saw this world in exactly the same way.

103. [210] Then the Buddha said to Ananda and to the bodhisattva Maitreya⁸⁴:

“Have you seen that land, naturally subtle and full of all things majestic spontaneously produced? Have you seen it all, from the ground up to the Heavens of Pure Abodes?”

Ananda replied:

“Yes, I have.”

[211] “Have you also heard the great voice of Amitayus, reaching everywhere, transforming all beings?”

“Yes, I have.”

[212] “Have you also seen the beings living in that land, riding in flying seven jewel hundred thousand league long palaces, unimpededly transported to all parts of the universe to worship the Buddhas of the ten directions?”

“Yes, I have.”

[213] “Have you also seen some inhabitants that are still in the embryonic state of their rebirth?”

“Yes, I have. [214] Those in the embryonic state dwell in one hundred or five hundred league palaces where each and all experience all manner of pleasures that arrive spontaneously, just as in the heaven of the Thirty Three.”

[Maitreya’s Question] *

104. [215] Then the bodhisattva Maitreya addressed the Buddha asking:⁸⁵

“World Honoured One, what are the causes and conditions that cause some of the inhabitants of that land to be born in an embryonic state while others are born by transformation?”

105. [216] The Buddha replied to Maitreya:

“There are beings who cultivate merit with a view to birth in that land yet harbour doubts about the Buddha:

doubts about the Buddha’s inexhaustible wisdom;

doubts about the Buddha’s inconceivable wisdom;

doubts about the Buddha’s ineffable wisdom;

doubts about the Buddha’s boundless wisdom;

doubts about the Buddha’s incomparable, unequalled and unsurpassable supreme wisdom;

they have doubts about these five; they have no faith in them. But they do believe in sin and merit so they do cultivate roots of good with an intention of being born there. Such beings will be born in one of these palaces and pass five hundred years of their lifespan there without seeing the Buddha, without hearing the sutras and without seeing the great assembly of shravakas and bodhisattvas. Thus we talk about birth in an embryonic state.⁸⁶

106. [217] “At the same time, there are other beings who have pure faith in the Buddha’s wisdom right up to the most excellent wisdom, who do meritorious deeds and transfer the merit. Those beings will be born by transformation spontaneously, sitting cross legged in a seven jewel lotus. They instantly acquire the same wonderful form, wisdom and virtue as all bodhisattvas there.

107. [218] “Again, Maitreya, if bodhisattvas from other Buddha lands desire to see Amitayus revere and make offerings to him and to the assemblies of bodhisattvas and shravakas, then when those bodhisattvas reach the end of their lives, they will be reborn in the land of Amitayus, spontaneously, directly, by transformation, in a seven jewel lotus.⁸⁷

108. [219] “Maitreya, the important thing to know is that those born by transformation⁸⁸ are so through excellence of wisdom⁸⁹ whereas those in the embryonic state are not so wise and so pass five hundred years without seeing the Buddha, hearing his sutras or seeing his assembly of bodhisattvas and shravakas. Thus they cannot make offerings, learn the vinaya or perform meritorious practices⁹⁰. You should know that it is because they lacked wisdom and harboured doubts during their previous lives.⁹¹

109. [220] The Buddha said to Maitreya:

“It is as though a Wheel Turning Monarch were to keep a palace set aside adorned with the

seven jewels, luxurious with curtained furniture and silken banners. If minor princes are guilty of some offence, the king may have them shut up there or chained with golden chains. They are provided with good food, clothing and bedding, flowers, perfumes and music no less sumptuous than those he enjoys himself. What do you think? Will the princes be content to remain there or not?”

Maitreya replied:

“No, they will not. They will seek by every means to gain the power to obtain their freedom.”

[221] The Buddha said to Maitreya:

“It is just so with the first group. Through doubt in Buddha’ wisdom they are born in those palaces. They are not ill treated and nothing bad happens to them. Nonetheless, for five hundred years they are cut off from the Three Treasures, unable to worship the Buddha with offerings and unable to cultivate merit. This is distressing for them. Although there are other pleasures, they do not enjoy living there.⁹²

“If they came to realise their fundamental error, experienced contrition and wanted to leave that place behind they could immediately do so and go to where Amitayus dwells. They could go and revere him with offerings and they could go and visit countless other tathagatas and virtue could again be cultivated.⁹³

“Maitreya, the important point is that those who allow doubt to arise lose great benefit so one should have pure faith in the supreme wisdom of the Buddha.”

[Buddhas and Bodhisattvas from other Buddha Lands will enter Amitayus’ Land of Bliss] *

110. [222] The Bodhisattva Maitreya asked the Buddha:

“World Honoured One, how many bodhisattvas are there in this world who have reached the non-retrogressive state and are to be born in that land?”

The Buddha said to Maitreya:

“Sixty seven koti of non-regressing bodhisattvas will be born there from this world. Each has already worshipped with offerings innumerable Buddhas with a diligence next only to your own. Then there are innumerable other persons and lesser bodhisattvas who will all be reborn there.

111. [223] The Buddha said to Maitreya:

“Not only the bodhisattvas of my world will be born there, but also those from the lands of other Buddhas from all of the ten directions.

Firstly, with the Buddha called Far Shining Light a vast number⁹⁴ of bodhisattvas will be born into that land of supreme bliss;

secondly, with the Buddha called Treasure Store, a vast number will be born;

thirdly, with the Buddha called Immeasurable Sound, a vast number will be born;

fourthly, with the Buddha called Taste of Amrita, a vast number will be born;

fifthly, with the Buddha called Subduer of Dragons, a vast number will be born;

sixthly, with the Buddha called Power of Conquest, a vast number will be born;

seventhly, with the Buddha whose name is Lion, a vast number will be born;

eighthly, with the Buddha called Cathartic Light, a vast number will be born;
 ninthly, with the Buddha called Pinnacle of Virtue, a vast number will be born;
 tenthly, with the Buddha called Mountain of Excellent Virtue, a vast number will be born;
 eleventhly, with the Buddha called Lord of Humans, a vast number will be born;
 twelfthly, with the Buddha called Exquisite Blossom there are innumerable bodhisattvas all already in the state of non-retrogression, excellent in wisdom, who have worshipped innumerable Buddhas and are capable of mastering in a week what usually takes bodhisattva mahasattvas millions of kalpas: all of them will be born in that land;
 thirteenthly, with the Buddha of Fearlessness, there are a vast number of full bodhisattvas, an even greater number of less developed bodhisattvas and innumerable ordinary monastics, all of whom will be born in that land.

[224] “And, Maitreya, these fourteen groups are just a tiny sample. Bodhisattvas from innumerable lands throughout the ten directions are going to be born into the land of Amitayus. They are an uncountable multitude. Even if I were to spend day and night for a whole kalpa enumerating the names of the Buddhas of the ten directions and of their bodhisattvas and monastics who are going to be born in that land it would be by no means enough. I have therefore just given a tiny indication of them.”⁹⁵

[The Merit of this Sutra] *

112. [225] The Buddha said to Maitreya:

“Whoever, hearing the name of that Buddha, even momentarily, feels the kind of elation that makes one break into dance will be called blessed and be known as greatly benefited. Upon them is the supreme merit. For this reason, Maitreya, even though the thousand millionfold cosmic system were being consumed in a great conflagration, one should cross that fire to hear this sutra. With joy and faith uphold and recite it. Put its teaching into practice. Why? Because here are so many bodhisattvas who need to hear this sutra yet only a tiny portion who are able to do so. Anyone from among the whole throng of living beings who is able to hear this sutra will never fall back. Progress toward the highest enlightenment will be assured. Therefore, with singleness of heart and confidence without blemish, hold to this sutra, recite it, practise it and explain it to others.”

[The Promise that this Sutra will Remain One Hundred Years after the Decline of the Dharma] *

113. [226] The Buddha said:

“For the good of all have I expounded this sutra and enabled all to see the Buddha Amitayus and all that is in his land. Clear up all your doubts while I am with you. Do not leave occasion for uncertainty after I am gone. Days will come when the ways of the sutras will be lost and forgotten. Out of pity and compassion I will preserve this sutra that it remain in the world one hundred years more. Those fortunate enough to encounter it will certainly attain the Way just as they wish.”⁹⁶

[The Pinnacle of the Dharma] *

114. [227] The Buddha said to Maitreya:

“Rare is it and hard⁹⁷ to behold the coming of a Tathagata;
 rare is it and hard to hear and meet the Buddhadharma;
 rare is it and hard to hear the bodhisattva paramitas;
 rare is it and hard to meet a good teacher, receive instruction and put it into practice;
 but most rare and most hard of all is it to hear this sutra, rejoice, have faith and hold fast to it;
 nothing is more difficult than this.
 Nonetheless, such is my Dharma, just as it should be;
 such is my exposition, just as it should be;
 such is my teaching, just as it should be.
 Receive, have confidence and practise as prescribed.

[The Universe Rejoices] *

115. [228] When the World Honoured One had completed his presentation of this sutra the aspiration for the highest enlightenment awoke in innumerable beings. In beings in billions of Buddha lands, the Dharma eye opened, devas and humans attained the fruit of the state of a non-returner, monastics extinguished their issues and had their hearts liberated, bodhisattvas became non-retrogressive and adorned with vow-virtue became set on ultimate perfect enlightenment. The cosmos shook in six ways. A great light illuminated the ten directions. A hundred thousand kinds of music played spontaneously. Celestial flowers fell and the air was filled with fine perfume.

[229] As the Buddha concluded, the bodhisattva Maitreya and all the other bodhisattvas and the arhat Ananda and all the other shravakas and everybody present then - a huge assembly - having heard the Buddha’s words, rejoiced.

NOTES

1.

The Nature of a Sutra

This is a sutra. A sutra is a thread of teaching given by a Buddha. Sutras are made for chanting. Sutras are not compositions by an author with a self aggrandising motive. Long sutras are composed of arrangements of shorter sutras. The sutra system is thus like a set of lego bricks that can be put together in different ways. A sutra may thus have a composer who is not the author. The author is the Buddha who provided the original threads of teaching. The composer or arranger has arranged a suitable collection of short threads together to make a long thread. It is possible, therefore, to miss out some threads and still have a sutra and it

would be possible to add in other threads and have an even longer sutra.

Scholars sometimes get worried about whether a particular sequence or thread within a sutra belongs there or is an interpolation. In fact all sutras belong together. The only worthwhile question is whether a particular short thread is really a sutra or not - in other words, is it consistent with what Buddhas teach. If it is part of what Buddha's teach then it is sutra and so long as the order and juxtaposition of elements selected for recitation do not, by their arrangement, negate their intrinsic sense, then you can put together any number of longer sutras by permutation. There are several versions of this particular sutra. Some are longer than others. The longer ones contain passages that are omitted in the shorter ones.

The Language Issue

Another issue is interpretation. Sutras have been translated from language to language. This was the wish of Shakyamuni Buddha. He wanted the sutras to be spoken in local language. Some Buddhists have wanted to create a "holy" or exclusively Buddhist language - usually Pali or Sanskrit - but this is not what Buddhas want. Buddhas want the teaching to be known in local language. However, there is some utility in having a certain amount of material in a universal language because then Buddhists from many different parts of the world can meet and recite together, so the argument is not all one way. Anyway, translation is not a precise art and variations enter into a text as it is rendered from one language to another. The translator should try to achieve a text that will convey the Buddhas meaning to an audience in the new country. This project is fraught with obstacles. A technically correct translation may not achieve this because the culture of the new audience is different. To give the idea of vast extent, for instance, it may be necessary in one country to use a great quantity of hyperbole and extravagant language where in another land it may suffice to say "huge". So in one country it may take a long and complex sentence to convey what is achieved by four letters in another. Also, it is difficult to render tone and poetry from one language to another. All these and other problems mean that when a text is translated into English from Chinese and then another version of the same sutra is translated into English from, say, Sanskrit or Tibetan, the two English texts may vary considerably. To ask which is the real one may miss the point.

Embodying a Sutra

We have already said that sutras are for recitation. The Buddha gave a sutra and then the disciples learnt it off by heart. When a text is recited many times and part or all of it comes to be known by heart it exercises a special kind of influence upon the life of the person. This influence is different from that which comes from academic study of the meaning. Academic study supplements the effect, but recitation of a sutra is a different procedure from study of the text and, in Buddhist education, recitation is primary. In order to live the Dharma life it is necessary to get some Dharma inside you. This is a quite different approach from that of modern education where "knowledge about" something is what matters. Through sutra recitation we come to embody something and knowledge about it is a distinctly secondary function. When, in old writings, it says that such and such a person had the Dharma it meant that they knew and had ingested, as it were, some sutras and lived with them for some years.

Non-Infallibility

For the above reasons, there can be controversies about whether the text we have is an accurate reflection of what Buddha intended. To some extent this is an insoluble problem

inasmuch as whether it does the job is a function of the reader as much as of the text. Nonetheless, religions are made by people and people are fallible. Buddhism does not claim infallibility in texts, only in the Dharma itself which texts indicate but can never fully replicate. This is like a map and a territory.

The version arranged in this work

2. This sutra records events that took place at Vulture Peak in Rajagriha. This indicates that it took place late in the period of the Buddha's ministry. According to Pureland tradition this was the culmination and crowning point of Shakyamuni's mission on earth. In the early part of his mission he established an order of monks and an order of nuns to carry the Dharma message into the world. At that stage he taught the Agamas (Nikayas) and established the principles of Vinaya. The success of this phase led to the emergence of a growing lay movement. This had two consequences in the Buddha's teaching. For the monks and nuns he taught the Prajna Paramita Sutras and the Mahayana Samadhi Sutras. These enabled those living the renunciant life to deepen their spiritual practice and realise the full and uncompromising scale of the religious commitment. Then, as he got older, increasingly he aimed his teachings at the bodhisattvas who were the leaders of the lay movement. This led to the Lotus Sutra teachings and finally to the Larger Pureland Sutra. It was around this time also that the events described in the Contemplation Sutra took place. Vulture Peak was a spa. The Buddha probably came there to take the waters. Soon after this, the Buddha set out on his final journey, and the only major teachings that are later in his ministry than these are, therefore, the ones recorded in the Sutra on the Parinirvana of the Buddha in which he lectures to groups along the way and finally gives his last testament to his disciples.

3. If we consider that this sutra was delivered near to the end of the Buddha's life and that his teaching mission had been spread over the whole of at least northern India by an enthusiastic movement of disciples who each had their own following, the number 12,000 is by no means improbable.

4. The existence, identity and status of bodhisattvas at the time of Shakyamuni Buddha is a moot issue. It is possible that the bodhisattvas were in fact the most devout of the laity. The Buddha clearly taught the laity as well as the ordained. Many were not in a position to give up the householder life and become monks. Lay people must, however, have been exceedingly important to the movement and leading lay disciples must, therefore, have been correspondingly influential. They would have been the ones who actually carried the Buddha's message to the mass of people. While monks and nuns refined the spiritual life, bodhisattvas enacted the service of all sentient beings. The term bodhisattva could be translated "heros of the vision". The Buddha dispensed a vision - bodhi. Monks and nuns embodied it in their person. Bodhisattvas organised it in the world. While the Buddha yet lived this division of labour worked well and generated a vibrant movement that both inspired and organised. This was a phenomenally successful recipe. However, after he died tensions developed with differences of opinion about whether the monks or the bodhisattvas represented the real ideal. This led to fragmentation which hindered the movement. In a modern sangha we should strive to replicate this early style of organisation and reverse the obstacles so that the bodhi revolution may once again turn with its full potential unhampered.

5. Maitreya is often presented as the Buddha-to-be: the Buddha of the future. If there was a historical Maitreya who was the leader of the bodhisattvas this would make sense. If it was the role of the bodhisattvas to bring about the bodhi vision in society, then the leader of the bodhisattvas would indeed one day preside over a reformed world and, as we shall see, it is a perfect world that this sutra is centrally concerned with. In the Sutra the Buddha speaks to Ananda and then to Maiteya. These two emerge as the two key figures in Shakyamuni's project. They are the leaders of the two branches of his movement. Ananda is the leader of the monks and nuns and Maitreya is the leader of the lay bodhisattvas. The name Maitreya comes from the word Maitri which means loving kindness.

6. Some versions of the sutra text provide lists of names of the bodhisattvas present and it is clear that some, at least, are referred to as perfect or advanced laymen. They also provide descriptions of the bodhisattvas' virtues and attainments which constitute an idealised eulogy depicting each bodhisattva as a reflection of the Buddha himself.

7. These incidental details give us some impression of the custom of the time. The monks wore a robe that covered both shoulders, but practised the courtesy of baring the right shoulder when approaching the Buddha. This custom would have had its origins in the fact that the right arm is the sword arm and baring the shoulder would have been a way of demonstrating that one had no weapon in hand. Kneeling with one knee to the ground is not practised by Buddhists today, but is, interestingly, by Catholics. One can similarly see military origins in this custom. In Britain it is the pose adopted by those receiving knighthood.

8. The Buddhas can enter the nembutsu samadhi at will. This is one of the main distinguishing features of a Buddha. His mind is saturated with the vision of other Buddhas. As Zen Master Dogen says, the supreme state is "Only Buddhas together with Buddhas". In this sense, the Buddhist vision is thoroughly metaphysical. The Buddha's function is to be the "Eye of the World" in the sense that he clearly sees all the Buddhas of past, future and present. He is lokavid - seer of [all] worlds - this one and the world of Buddhas, as well as the worlds of devas, hell beings and so on. Buddhas enjoy the rapture of communing with Buddhas.

9. Even tho humans and devas cannot perceive what Buddha perceives, still they benefit by association. We worship and adore Shakyamuni and he, in turn, is in touch with innumerable Buddhas. We thus vicariously participate in the world of limitless light.

10. This is an indication of other-power (tariki). Although Ananda feels that he thought up his question himself, the Buddha indicates that it has been inspired by the Tathagata. The Tathagata is constantly at work in the world in the cause of the good and awakening of all beings, but it needs a vehicle. Ananda comes across in the texts as a person with a phenomenal memory but not as one always greatly endowed with intelligence or subtlety. Sometimes it is the simple soul that makes the best vehicle.

11. There is a marked inconsistency between the Chinese and the Sanskrit texts at this point. The lineage given here follws the Sanskrit. Also, in the Sanskrit, Dipamkara is the most recent of all the Buddhas in the line, the others all being prefaced by "and before him..." whereas in the Chinese Dipamkara is the earliest, the subsequent names being prefaced with

“and after him...” We are at present, therefore, not in a position to attribute any historical value to this passage. The general sense, however, conveys that the Buddha means us to understand that there have been many many Buddhas and that the events he is about to relate refer to a period long long ago in a realm presided over by one of them called Lokeshvararaja.

12. This is the formula used in many sutras to describe a Buddha.

sugata	bliss-ed
vidya-karana-samapana	accomplished in vision and conduct
lokavid	seer of worlds
purusa-damya-sarati	tamer of humans
anuttaraya	attainer of the uttermost
sasta-deva-manusyanam	teacher of gods and humans
Buddha	awakened
bhagavat	world-honoured / blessed one

13. The Buddha uses gentle irony to point out the pitfall of the self-power approach. Dharmakara is full of enthusiasm to go to an extreme of holiness so that he can save all sentient beings. Lokeshvararaja, however, is about to reveal a deeper truth.

14. The supreme function is the natural activity of Buddha Tathagatas which is that they generate Pure Lands or Buddhakshetras. A Buddha has a Buddha-field. The term practice is often used here, but function is better since it is the natural functioning of a Buddha to generate such a field, not some particular practice that Buddhas undertake. Having a Buddhakshetra is part of what constitutes being a Buddha. Buddha and kshetra are not separable. This is also what is meant by “effortless effort” in some texts. It is just what Buddhas naturally do.

15. At this point in the Chinese and Japanese version there is an additional verse in which Ananda asks the length of life of the Buddha in the Buddha land created by Dharmakara and this lifespan is then taken as the length of time Dharmakara spent creating such a land. This verse does not hold together logically, the story flows better without it, and it is not in the Sanskrit version, so it has the hallmarks of a later interpolation.

16. Although Dharmakara now has acquired the function of a Buddha, Lokeshvararaja further urges him to speak forth his mind. He has to share everything for the sake of all sentient beings. The declaring of the vows which follows should not, therefore, be seen as a means to creating a Pure Land but rather as part and parcel of the Pure Land itself. The vows are part of the force field of the Buddha. They are Buddha activity and we other sentient beings are magnified in turn by them. The Pure Land is not a static place but an active transformative function. It is not a place to be so much as something going on.

17. The vows declared by Dharmakara constitute a manifesto for a perfect land or field of social influence. There are five overlapping

groups of beneficiaries:

1. beings, who are all humans or devas, who inhabit his land
2. bodhisattvas of his land
3. beings inhabiting other Buddha lands who heed Amida's name or are touched by his light

4. bodhisattvas in other Buddha lands
5. beings desirous of entering his land.

It seems to be implied that these categories encompass all beings, but this is not totally clear. Buddhist cosmology generally allows the possibility of realms where there is no Buddha. This point, perhaps, is less important than might at first appear since clearly there is a shading off of Buddha realms into "border regions". A Buddha field is stronger near to its centre and attenuates as one gets further away from the Buddha.

Category two is a subset of category one and is a matter of choice. Similarly four of three. Category five is also a subset of three since we live in the Buddha land of Shakyamuni Buddha. This realm of samsara is, therefore, an incomplete Buddha land. Shakyamuni, in the Lotus Sutra and in the Amida Sutra declares what a difficult job he has on his hands turning this realm into a pure land, but, in the Lotus Sutra, also says that he has many bodhisattvas to help him. These are the bodhisattvas of the earth. The status of a person of faith in Amida is therefore that of dual citizenship. While still being a being of Shakyamuni's Buddha land, one already receives one's passport as a citizen of Sukhavati. At this point one has the bodhisattva choice. One can simply wait for death and admission to the Pure Land of Amida and there dwell in happiness until final nirvana, or one can commit to the bodhisattva path and use this time to assist Shakyamuni's project. It is quite clear that the latter course will have Amida's favour, so, in being a bodhisattva in this life one is actively expressing one's citizenship of both realms - the mundane and the spiritual - whereas by having faith and not opting for the bodhisattva path one is passively doing so. In either case, what we are talking about is a secret trust. Although there are ceremonies and worldly statuses that correspond with and are modelled upon such designations as person of faith or bodhisattva, it is what is truly planted in a person's heart that matters. Nothing is conferred by ordination except public recognition. If an ordained Buddhist minister is not really in their heart a bodhisattva then this simply means that the ordination was yet another example of the ubiquitous phenomenon of human mistakenness. At the same time, there may be and are many true bodhisattvas who are never recognised by worldly status. The real purpose of ordination is to assist a person in carrying out their good work by mobilising the support of the community. In the period of history when only men could claim such status, there were many secret bodhisattva women; but in the time when Shakyamuni was alive on this earth, women arhats were openly acknowledged.

Bodhisattvas are those who assist in a Buddha's work: who are inspired by the same vision and spirit as the Buddha, tho they perceive it less clearly. They thus rely upon a mix of clear seeing and faith in which faith has priority. Buddha shows the way. It follows that bodhisattvas should have in mind the same groups of benefits and beneficiaries as their Buddha, in this case Amida. Thus Dharmakara's manifesto becomes the platform for the amitarya party. It has in view not just other Pureland Buddhists - i.e. beings of Amida's realm, category one - but beings of all Buddha realms - i.e. all beings. It is practical, however, in not having exactly the same goals in each case.

The forty eight vows apply to the five categories as follows:

Category One: Beings of Amida's Land:

1. No lower realms

2. No unfortunate rebirth
3. No colour discrimination
4. No social discrimination
5. Recall of previous lives
6. Divine Eye - to perceive other Buddha lands
7. Divine Ear - to hear teachings in all situations
8. Empathic understanding
9. Limitless scope
10. Neither acquisitiveness nor craving
11. Irreversibility
12. Infinite Light
13. Infinite Lifespan
14. Innumerable companion disciples
15. Deathlessness save in fulfilment of bodhisattva vows
16. Unconditional positive regard
17. Hearing all Buddhas praise the Name
27. Unmeasurable splendour
31. Amida's land is a mirror of all other Buddha lands
35. Liberation of women
38. Clothes of enlightenment
39. Peace of mind

Category two: Bodhisattvas of Amida's Land

21. The 32 marks
22. The bodhisattva path
23. Respect for other sanghas
24. Respect for the ways of other sanghas
25. Comprehensive knowledge and teaching
26. Stamina
28. Living in the presence of the tree of life
29. Eloquence
30. Inspired discourse
32. Transformation by delight
36. Merging of bodhisattva and renunciant paths
40. Know how to create a pure land
46. Spontaneous access to Dharma

Category three: Beings of other Buddha lands who heed the Name or are touched by the light

33. Solace of light
34. Smriti power
35. Liberation of women

Category four: Bodhisattvas in other lands

36. Merging of bodhisattva and renunciant paths
37. Faith inspires respect
41. Spiritual faculties
42. The samadhi in which all Buddha stand before one

- 43. Noble rebirth
- 44. Spiritual joy
- 45. Samadhi of universal equality
- 47. Non-retrogression
- 48. Commitment to ultimate Buddhahood

Category Five: Beings desirous to enter his land

- 18. Naturalisation by faith
- 19. Naturalisation by virtue
- 20. Naturalisation by samadhi

18. Vow Eleven refers to a doctrine that discerns three categories of persons: those who are lost, those who are uncertain of spiritual progress and those whose progress is definitely assured. This shows that the sutra does not support the view that all are inevitably destined for Buddhahood as some Buddhists assert. Those who become citizens of Amida's land are assured. These are pre-eminently, as we shall see when we get to the Three Great Vows (Eighteen to Twenty), those who have faith, though the sutra does not exclude the self-power route - merely suggests that it is impracticably long and hazardous. The general picture that emerges is that the path of faith is assured, the path of self-power is uncertain and those on neither path are lost. This means that in Pureland Buddhism, there is no predestination. Assurance comes with faith (18th Vow) or with moral perfection (19th Vow) or with visionary confirmation (20th Vow) or may come by other means. The category of those on neither path is referred to as those who are lost, but nobody is doomed since faith may yet arise even in the lost. Nor is this really a matter of membership: there may be those who call themselves Pureland Buddhists who do not, in fact, have real faith, only affectation, and there may be those who have never heard of Pureland Buddhism as an institution, but who have faith in Amida under some other name or form, since there is nowhere in the universe that Amida's Light does not penetrate (12th Vow). Therefore, one should respect other faith communities (23rd Vow) - they may well be as good or better than one's own. The fact that they call the spiritual by other terminology means nothing in itself. It is the substance, not the label, that counts. The paths of other-power and the path of self-power and the position of the cynic are available the world over and not limited to one creedal group. See also the first paragraph of Part Two of the sutra, verse 70.

19. What this Twelfth Vow suggests, inter alia, is that the Light that we call the Light of Amida is the light that illumines and inspires all true religion whatever local name it may go under. Religions are human artefacts that try to understand, respond to, glorify, magnify, use or channel the Light. Great sages, messiahs, avatars and so on, insofar as they are genuine, are responding to the same light or spirit that we call Amida.

20. This suggests that Amida's Light, or what we may call the spiritual, has been at work throughout human history and will ever continue. Even if a particular transmission or creed or religion is lost, its essence can always still be recovered. Those who have deep spiritual experience will, of course, cloth it in local language, but what they are tuning into is universal and eternal. Those who think that it is particular and local have not grasped the full vastness

of what they have encountered. They are like those who encounter only one bit of the elephant.

21. This vow in effect elevates shravakas above pratyekabuddhas. Pratyekabuddhas are those who achieve a spiritual apotheosis on their own by their own effort without regard for others. They are enlightened, but are not of service. Shravakas are disciples. They are those who listen and hear. They hang on the teachings of a Buddha. Bodhisattvas are all shravakas. Some Buddhist texts implicitly disparage shravakas as inferior to bodhisattvas. It is true that a bodhisattva is a shravaka plus, but here there is a quite clear, and slightly ironic, implication that the shravakas have something that pratyekabuddhas would not understand, and certainly a boast that no pratyekabuddha could fathom the extent of the workings of Amida. Those who share discipleship together revel in the joy of communion which those who plough their own furrow spiritually never understand, appreciate or benefit from. Amida Buddha draws us into a sense of community that is an unquenchable fount of joy yielding times of exquisite bliss that pratyekabuddhas never know, even tho they may sometimes be more advanced in practice or doctrine. This vow thus positions Amida on the side of extolling sangha refuge and gently mocking go-it-alone spirituality, while recognising that such a go-it-alone approach is what commonly appeals to ordinary folk. The path of Amida involves a going into communion with others - formation of a sangha - which is what Shakyamuni Buddha did. By organising in faith even we bonbu, actively or passively, participate in the great work. A person can do very little on their own compared with what can be achieved when people with a common vision work together.

The vow also implies that as Dharmakara perfects his vow, it will act like a magnet drawing ever greater numbers of people into its influence. The Buddha field spreads naturally as more and more people get magnetised by it. Ordinary folk then wake up in astonishment to realise that something has been going on that they, locked up in their individualistic orientation, did not appreciate or rate as significant until the evidence was all around them and inescapable. This is how it often is with the growth of a true spiritual movement.

22. The Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Vows are generally regarded as the pivotal ones and they are sometimes, therefore, simply referred to as The Three Vows. They describe the three modes of salvation: by virtue, by samadhi and by faith. These three correspond to the sila, samadhi and prajna of the Agamas. The 19th Vow corresponds to sila, the 20th to samadhi and the 18th to prajna. In Pureland Buddhism, prajna corresponds to prasada, which means both faith and clarity. A person of faith is clear what they are doing with their life. Prajna is generally translated “wisdom” but the implication is really an ability to see below the surface of things. This means to see the spirit rather than mere manifestation. A person of prajna is a spiritual person - they live their life on the spiritual dimension.

A person who has clarity about life has the faith to go forward. The 19th and 20th Vows represent the stages that practitioners commonly pass through, beginning in a position where the only spiritual power they recognise is their own (19th Vow), progressing to a position where they recognise both their own and the Buddha’s power (20th Vow) and finally reaching the position of complete reliance upon other-power (18th Vow). The vows are in the order they are because the 18th is the main point while the other two are simply acknowledged as valid other positions.

I have used the term “naturalisation” to characterise these vows. This has a useful and appropriate double meaning in English and is in many ways preferable to the common “salvation”, tho there is nothing technically wrong with the latter term. The advantage of salvation is its implication that our lives are saved rather than wasted, but it tends to be taken in a theistic context by European and North American readers. Naturalisation means both (a) coming to naturalness, and (b) becoming a citizen of a new land. The metamorphosis offered by Amida has exactly these two implications.

23. As described in the 18th Vow, the path of faith has four components. First there is the longing for awakening. To have such a longing one must have a consciousness of one’s ignorance. Unless one realises that one is blind, one does not long to see. This comes through examination of one’s own life and its effects.

The second component is to “listen to the Name”. This is the primary feature of faith. Faith means listening to the Holy Name in all the vicissitudes of life. Formally this is expressed by saying the nembutsu. Each time one calls the nembutsu, it is as if one is reminding oneself: saying to oneself, “Oh, yes, Amida is calling me.” Whatever happens in life, “Amida is calling me.” “Amida is calling me” is the spirit of everything that happens. The person of faith makes this the foundation of life. They are one-pointed. It is not a matter of achieving many things. There is only one thing - Amida’s call - always going on.

Listening also includes all sense modalities. It may be broadened to mean “turning attention toward”. We have already seen how Dharmakara acquired the function of a Buddha by turning his attention to the existing Buddhas and Buddha Lands. Whether he saw, heard or smelt them is not the point. Turning one’s attention toward the sacred is the first part of the function of faith. The second part is that we thus become a channel through which the sacred enters the world and the field thus grows.

The third component is to long to be with the Buddha: to set one’s heart upon the Pure Land. This means that one considers oneself always to be one of Amida’s people. One is one of the company of Amida’s bodhisattvas who have a great work to do for the benefit of all sentient beings. One may not personally be particularly accomplished or virtuous, but one does one’s very best, out of love and loyalty to the sublime Buddha to whom one has pledged one’s heart. The main element here is love. Whether one is active or passive, a bodhisattva or an arahant, at a particular time is a function of circumstance.

Fourthly, the person on this path has settled faith. Faith carries them through the ups and downs. It gives a clear sense of direction.

The Chinese and Japanese versions of the Sutra include a caveat in this vow to the effect that those who have committed the five grave offenses are excluded. This has been the subject of much doctrinal speculation. However, in the Sanskrit version, this caveat is not included in the 18th but in the 19th Vow where it seems much more appropriately located.

The Vow says that those who have such a settled faith will meet Amida at the time of death. This will happen when the person physically dies and their death will, therefore, be completely free from anxiety. If a person has complete faith, then they no longer live on their

own account. They live for the Buddha and his cause. Death brings a sense of completion and settlement. By contrast, those who have wasted their lives or given them to unworthy causes die regretfully, anxious, and frustrated.

Attaining faith is, therefore, itself a kind of death. One's little story dies and one finds a part to play in the big story. Faith, therefore, also involves "dying before you die" and this spiritual death and rebirth also immediately calls forth Amida who will appear as one's guide. So Pureland faith enables us to transcend the anxieties of life and gives the highest possible meaning and purpose both here and hereafter.

We also see that Amida will appear before us. Amida does not enter into us. We do not become Amida and Amida does not empower us. We are not transformed. We remain bombu. Nonetheless, Amida takes us, just as we are. Ministry, in Pureland, is not empowerment in the sense of building personal power but in the sense of enabling us to become channels for the power of Amida just as he is a channel for the power of all the other Buddha fields revealed during his encounter with Lokeshvararaja. This latter form of empowerment is to awaken others to the presence and grace of Amida, the all acceptant, who calls everyone to the Pure Land, either to be bodhisattvas helping with the work, or simply to enjoy. Faith and joy come first. Work is a choice.

24. The 19th vow indicates naturalisation through the accumulation of merit through virtue. Most people think of salvation in this way, as a reward for goodness. They assume that to achieve salvation this way is easy in principle yet difficult of achievement. The common view is that spirituality is about living a more virtuous life and, logically, perfection of virtue should bring complete salvation and this is something to be done by one's own effort.

Here we see that Amida welcomes the virtuous. We also learn, however, that this path excludes those who commit serious offenses. Some will argue that we all commit such offenses, at least mentally and often by complicity, so the path of virtue may not be as practical or straight-forward as may at first appear to be the case. The Buddha seems to recognise that this is the door that most people would try to enter by, but that they may, in due course, penetrate more deeply into the spiritual life and realise both that there are insuperable pitfalls to going all the way on this path and also that there are superior ways. Salvation by virtue is the path of self-power. This is why it appeals to the neophyte. The ego desires the rewards of the spiritual life and wants to stay in control of the process whereby they are acquired and attained. Virtue seems to be something that is up to oneself to achieve and simply a matter of will-power. As insight develops we may discover that human nature is not as malleable as we might have thought and the consequent realisation that we have an indelible dark side to our being is a crushing blow to the ego. This leads, however, to a turning around in the core of our spiritual life since, once we realise "I can't do it on my own", we look for help and turn to faith for our salvation.

There is, however, a deeper way to understand this. The self-power approach implicitly assumes that virtue is a non-natural state to be achieved, against the grain, as it were, by effort. In fact this assumption, that comes so readily to the ordinary person, is false. Virtue is the natural state in the sense that when a person is genuinely virtuous their virtue is naturally quite stable. It then feels as something that comes naturally. Such a person does not struggle

to be generous - they are generous. They do not struggle to refrain from killing - they shrink from such an act quite spontaneously. When a person has been converted to the truth they naturalise. They then look back on their former life, like Angulimala, perhaps, and think, how could I have done such things? They are astonished at their former selves. This is what is meant by irreversibility. They think, "I could no more go back to my old ways than fly."

This is, perhaps, why this vow come after the 18th and not before it. Although commentators such as Shinran have rightly pointed out the common sequence from 19th to 20th to 18th, there is also a deep wisdom in the text as it stands. Once a person has found the true gateway offered by the 18th vow, then the 19th is experienced in a quite different way. A person who has already naturalised to Amida's land takes to virtue as a duck to water. While remaining a bombu, subject to all kinds of error, they nonetheless soften inwardly and become kind. Here, as in so many aspects of Pureland spirituality, we see that those things that the ordinary person takes as means toward a spiritual goal turn out to be outcomes of truly entering the spiritual way. The Buddhist precepts are not a straightjacket. They are simply a description of the life of a natural person. When we come to naturalness, that is what it looks like. A natural person does not harm himself except in those occasional instances when to do so is the only way of helping somebody else, and then he or she does so without demur. That is the preceptual life. Our daily difficulty with it is a function of aeons of immersion in fathomless blind passion and distorting karma, certainly, but is, at bottom, simply a failure of faith. Through faith in the 18th vow we are suddenly released and the evidence of this release is the ease with which the 19th vow then functions for us. One can tell whether a person has truly awakened faith because it shows in their life. This does not mean that they contrive to look virtuous; it means that faith fills us with joy, joy longs to be shared and that can hardly bear the afflictions of others: sickness, aging and death, failure, loss, defeat, disappointment and grief. Such joy naturally issues as care and concern for others because the heart opens.

The idea that people of faith "do not need to be virtuous" is a half truth because it is based on a wrong assumption, the assumption that virtue is unnatural. Virtue is natural to the person of faith, not because a person's fundamental nature is virtuous - it is not. The nature of the unawakened person is not virtuous. Virtue is natural to a person of faith because that person no longer relies upon their own fundamental nature for anything more than information about how the deluded world functions. They now rely upon Amida's nature. Old habits still function and we find them embarrassing.

Such a person is converted to Buddha nature, which is not their own. This is a much preferable way to understand the nature of the change required since it avoids the conceit of belief in self to which Shakyamuni offered so many reproofs. Awakened nature is not something that they had all along without realising - they did not have it. It is as tho one had got on the wrong train. One sits happily in one's seat speeding toward the wrong destination, oblivious. Then, perhaps, one starts to notice the stations one is passing though and one starts to feel uneasy. Anxiety rises. One then seeks advice. One comes out in a sweat as one realises the awful mistake. With some trouble one gets off at the next stop - it is easier if you do not have too much luggage - and finds one's way back to the correct point of departure which is the 18th vow. Then one catches the right train.

Even on the right train, however, it is not one's own nature that carries one in the right

direction. It is the train that does so.

Naturalisation is like that. Altho it is a “coming to naturalness” that does not mean it is a return to how we were. A person who naturalises as a citizen of France, say, was not a citizen of France before they did so. No more is a person who naturalises as a citizen of the Pure Land. Yet, by awakening to faith, everybody can enter. To do so they have to die.

This vow omits the reference to dying without anxiety. This is because if this vow is relied upon alone without the 18th, there is no certainty. We cannot assess clearly our own virtue nor know whether it will be sufficient. Those who rely upon merit are bound to exist in a condition of uncertainty. It is faith that brings peace of mind. Virtue that issues from faith is a joy in itself. Virtue that is intended as a substitute for faith is an unreliable friend. There is a very nice Chinese story about this. A man dies in this world and arrives at the first level of the heavens where he meets a panel of divine bureaucrats whose job it is to assess his virtue in order to allocate him to an appropriate realm in the afterlife. He feels rather confident of himself as he waits, listing all the good things he has done in his life. Then he is fetched from the waiting room and shown into a large hall in the centre of which is a huge set of scales. There is an arm on a pivot. At one end it has a fixed weight. At the other end is a basket. His virtues are to be weighed against the fixed weight. If the scale tips he will go to the higher realms. If it does not he will be sent to the fearful lower regions. Minor gods are hurrying about marshalling all the tokens of virtue that have built up in the heavenly records department during the man’s life. These are brought in in boxes that will be tipped into the basket. There seem to be a fair number of boxes so the man still feels fairly confident. They start to tip the boxes, one by one, into the basket. Then something awful happens. The man realises that the virtue tokens are slipping out through the interstices in the basket work. He feels himself start to shake and then boil with fear and indignation. None of his precious virtues is staying in the basket, all are slipping through and blowing away on a cold breeze. The basket is not shifting. The man’s anger and fear are giving way to sadness and despair. He sinks to his knees. The last box is emptied into the basket and the effect is just the same. The tokens slip out and blow away on the breeze. He has nothing left to offer. He looks the prospect of the hell realms in the face for the first time. He feels strangely empty. Suddenly, to everybody’s visible amazement, the scale tips. The basket slowly descends and the fixed weight rises into the air. Everybody runs to look at the basket. There at the bottom is a single nembutsu. The man suddenly remembers a brief time in his life when he had found faith. The dark hall fades away and he finds himself in a new hall full of light and grace.

Virtue is only virtuous when it is done without any selfish calculation or attachment. A virtuous act is something given away freely. It is not something one stores up or hangs onto. A truly virtuous person hardly notices the good they do and counts it as little. They are much more acutely aware of the benefits they receive and the hurts they may have caused. Yet, if a person has faith and remains aware of their bonbu nature, then, in fact, others will notice a change in them and find them easier to live with. In consequence, they will no longer live always in the hall of judgement, but will often find themselves in happier climes. This, of course, will only increase their consciousness of the benefits they receive and further occlude any consciousness they might otherwise have had of the small acts of goodness that others perceive in them.

Dying can be of two kinds. There is physical death and mystical death. Those who have faith will be met by Amida at the time of their physical death. Those who truly convert, however, die before they die. In that very moment, Amida will come. He will appear as your guide. When you give up your life, he will appear in your life. This is the great paradox of spirituality - we cannot make something of ourselves.

25. The twentieth vow corresponds to the teachings of the Contemplation Sutra. These represent a transition stage between self-power and other-power. In the Contemplation Sutra, Queen Vaidehi has a spontaneous opening in which Amida Buddha and his Pure Land and the pure lands of all other Buddhas suddenly reveal themselves before her. The Buddha then tells Ananda a technical method whereby individuals who have less faith and motivation than Vaidehi can, nonetheless, gain a vision of something approaching what she has seen and experienced. This method consists of a sequence of sixteen contemplations. The first thirteen of these fix the aspirant's mind upon Amida's Land, starting with a visualisation of the setting sun and building up to a contemplation of Amida and his attendant Bodhisattvas Quan Shi Yin and Tai Shih Chih at the centre of the Pure Land. The last three contemplations are focussed upon the myriads of living beings arranged in nine ranks according to their merit. This last section is open to alternative interpretations. It can be taken as indicating that the degree of proximity to the Tathagata of beings in the Pure Land after death is proportional to the merit of their virtues in this life or it can be taken as driving home the message that even the most sinful and morally afflicted beings, even those who have great difficulty seeing the Buddha, even they, if they have faith, will be accepted into the Pure Land.

There is thus a tradition of salvation by samadhi within the Pureland tradition and this is the basis of Shan Tao's teachings on intensive vision quest retreats and of Chih Yi's practice of ninety day continuous practice retreats. Such severe practices only work when driven by a desperate longing and deep sense of contrition. They parallel the efforts made by Shakyamuni himself at the end of his period of asceticism when he came face to face with Mara. These are self-power practices, but they are self-power used to drive oneself into a condition where one reaches the end of one's resources and finally has to surrender and allow the Buddha to reveal himself. This represents the strand of Buddhist tradition in which severely intensive practices are used to drive a person to the point where the ego gives up and faith is discovered at the point of maximum desperation. Such, for instance, are the methods of the Dhyana School (Zen) and Shan Tao was regarded as a Dhyana Master as well as as a Pureland one. For some people this may be the only way they will accept and a teacher will give different disciples different practices according to their nature, just as Shakyamuni did.

There is, however, a second way of understanding this vow, just as there was with the 19th. If the vows are taken in the order in which they appear in the sutra, then faith is established first. When faith is settled it has an effect on behaviour, as we saw in examining the 19th vow. It also has an effect on vision. A person of faith experiences the world differently. They encounter glimpses of the Pure Land in the midst of daily life and, from time to time, they may have more extensive openings.

Honen chose seven great teachers from Buddhist history as the ancestors of the Pureland tradition. He was strongly influenced in this selection by whether or not the teacher concerned had had a direct vision of the Pure Land of Amida. If they had not experienced the samadhi,

they might still be a great teacher, but to experience the samadhi fully is, as it were, the final seal, so it was these few that he chose. Honen himself experienced the samadhi near to the end of his life. Most practitioners do not have such a consummate vision, but almost all people of faith do experience a change in the way they physically experience the world around them. They do live in the light and as their faith grows the light increases. Growing faith, softening of heart and increasing light correspond together.

Faith comes first. When Shakyamuni was asked to list virtues, he generally had faith as first and prajna, wisdom, last. In the Pureland interpretation wisdom is simply matured faith. When he talked about the spiritual life he would begin by saying, “A man or woman leaves home...” or “A king gives up his throne...” This had both a literal and a figurative meaning. The figurative meaning is that we must leave the castle of the ego and enter into the open land of faith where there are no wall or boundaries.

?? asked ?? “Are you a monk of body or a monk of mind?”

The vow requires three things: that the person be attuned to Amida, that they enter the samadhi; and that they dedicate all merit. The first criterion means that they have faith; in other words, they accept the 18th vow. The second means that they experience the samadhi - the vision of the Pure Land - at least to some degree and that it become the guiding star of their life. The last criterion means that the samadhi method supercedes the merit method. Whatever merit one has accumulated through past lives or made in this existence, one would surely give all away to be with that enlightened one whose greater merit ensures to all pure heartedness without end.

So the three vows are a set and they are most meaningful in the order in which they appear, even tho this is inaccessible to the ordinary person who tends to try to begin at number 19, proceed to 20, and only later realise where he should have begun, which is with number 18. However, for the person who does begin with the 18th and sets out with pure faith, that is, in fact, all that is necessary. Even if virtues and vision never come, faith is enough. The rest is grace. It may be granted or not - that is the nature of grace. Those who simply have faith and say the nembutsu will be naturalised into Amida’s Pure Land. That is all you need. If you have the one thing that is needful, everything else will be given as appropriate.

26. Vow 22 is a kind of mini-manifesto within the greater manifesto of the 48 vow schema. It details what is involved in the bodhisattva path. Samantabhadra’s virtues are detailed in chapters of the Lotus and Avatamsaka Sutras. They include the group of teachings sometimes called “Preliminary Practices” -

- i. worshipping the Buddha with one’s body by making prostrations and so forth,
- ii. making offerings and practising all manner of generosity,
- iii. contrition
- iv. rejoicing in the good fortune, virtues and successes of others
- v. imploring the Buddhas to remain in the world for the sake of the unenlightened
- vi. requesting Buddhas to turn the Dharma Wheel - to carry out their functions of teaching and creating Pure Lands
- vii. transferring merit.

27. We can readily take “other Buddhas” to cover other religions. The picture that the Sutra conjures up is one in which Buddhas extend a field of influence that transforms others. This transforming function is what constitutes a Buddha kshetra or Pure Land. Some kshetras are further on than others. Some are more perfected or complete, some less so. All are fields of merit. A field of merit means something that repays investment of love and care. Love and care always repay, but the rate of return varies. If love and care is invested in corrupt endeavours, the return is small and slow. If the same love and care were invested in pure and virtuous endeavours then the return would be higher. A Buddha kshetra is the best endeavour and that of Amida Buddha best of all. Thus we see Shakyamuni inspired by the kshetra of Amida. In this sutra, Shakyamuni is telling Ananda the source of his own inspiration. This vow establishes the important principle of non-contention between religions while also asserting the value of Amida as a supreme example.

28. This is a call for upaya, skilful means. While the previous vow establishes the principle of non-contention between religious groups, it remains the case that some practices of some such groups are mistaken or harmful. Amidists will respect other faith communities but they are never going to join them in sacrificing a goat or a human being, for instance. At such times it is important to display the virtues of the Buddhas, but tact is needed. One needs to find a route that may conform to what is acceptable to the other group yet still enable them to perceive the better way.

29. This vow replicates what Dharmakara himself is doing. His making vows and declaring them is itself part of the expanding Buddha field of Lokeshvararaja. All those who serve Buddhas expand the field of those Buddhas. Even tho we ourselves are *guchi*, the wisdom of the Buddha himself shines through.

30. Amida’s bodhisattvas can always see the vast bodhi tree that is the axis of Amida’s Buddha land. The imagery here is remarkably close to that found in the biblical story of the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve are expelled from a garden of delight by eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They then have to wander the world. They are not allowed to enter into the sight of the tree of life, as an angel with a flaming sword bars the gate. This angel sounds, to Buddhist ears, very like Manjushri. Perhaps these ancient wisdoms are linked. In any case, during my first Zen sesshin, we did walking meditation in the precincts of Tewkesbury cathedral and I had an opening of the spirit when I came upon a depiction of this biblical scene. I had not, at that time, read this passage in the Larger Pureland Sutra. My insight was, however, approved by the master.

So Amida’s bodhisattvas are always able to perceive the bodhi tree - the fount of awakened vision, the tree of life - no matter where their bodhisattva mission may take them or what obstacles they may encounter. They will always be inspired and will always be able to orientate themselves spiritually.

31. It is a common experience that through understanding Buddhism in general and especially through understanding Pureland Buddhism, people obtain a deepened understanding of all other religions as well, and, not infrequently, experience a reconciliation with a faith that they had formerly rejected. Sometimes it is easier to see the sense of what had been taught when you see it clearly reflected in the mirror of Amida’s land than it was to understand it in the form and context in which it was originally presented to one.

All religions are human artefacts. All have imperfections. All, however, reach out toward something beyond themselves. They try to reflect the ultimate in a way that makes it meaningful and functional for ordinary humans. They are all attempts at mirrors for the sacred realm. A religion worthy of the name should not only itself work in this way, but it should be able to explain in its own terms how it is that other religions work. When the mirror is clear, not only does it illuminate the sacred, but it clarifies all the other attempts to do so. This is the real ground for inter-religious amity. Religions that do not see the value of other religions only thereby demonstrate that their mirror-constructing activity still has a way to go. Religious intolerance is simply a mark of irreligion.

Amida's people can see all the faiths reflected and clarified in their own faith and hope that those of other faiths can likewise see all others reflected in theirs. When this is the case all can be happy and co-operative together.

32. With this 33rd vow, or perhaps, to a degree, with vow 31, we begin upon those vows that extend benefits to beings outside of Amida's realm. This first vow of this kind says that Amida's light will be a solace to anybody, whether they specifically have faith in Amida or not. Amida and his community shall be a light in the world and that light shall be for the good and the benefit of the multitude of beings, without limit of discrimination.

33. The complete equality of women is a fundamental teaching. Amida accepts people just as they are, male or female. The fact is, however, that in the world as we find it, gender bias is widespread. One way of overcoming it is to enter the religious life. There, it makes no difference whether you are male or female.

As with all the major religions, Buddhism has had its problems with misogyny. At the time of Honen this was extreme. The greatest Buddhist centre in Japan was Mount Hiei and women were not allowed on the mountain at all. This, however, had a great deal more to do with the warlike culture of Japan than with Buddhism. Similar problems were experienced in China. Although the Buddha Shakyamuni recognised women arhats, after his death the position of women was gradually undermined. By the middle ages the best that supporters of women's position in Buddhism could achieve was to establish that virtuous women would be reborn as men in future lives. Otherwise they were simply regarded as lacking any spiritual worth or potential at all. Thus in the Lotus Sutra the Dragon King's Daughter confounds her critics by turning herself into a man at will. We should understand this as the medieval way of saying that women are as good as men. We should not understand it as meaning that women cannot be acceptable unless they become men. The latter reading has, however, been widespread.

Honen's teaching of nembutsu as the practice of all acceptance started several social revolutions, one of which was in the status of women. He had many female disciples and nuns. He recognised that they lived under a huge burden in society, but he taught that Amida accepts all according to their faith and sincerity, not according to their worldly status, advantages and disadvantages. As a result, we can now openly teach that women enter the Pure Land just as men do. It should not be underestimated what a struggle this has been historically, nor should one be complacent. The equality of women is not yet totally established in society and is not yet established in all schools of Buddhism.

You will, therefore, come across misinterpretations of this vow that take a misogynistic turn. In part these are based on anachronistic reading - rather as in English the third person pronoun “he” used to imply both genders so that old texts now read as inherently gender biased. It is likely, however, that medieval texts intentionally excluded women. The purpose of this special vow for women, however, is that women shall be acceptable to Amida notwithstanding any obstacles they labour under in society.

Zen Master Dogen in his essay Raihai Tokuzui writes as follows:

“There are some monks who refuse to prostrate to women monks that are teachers in possession of the Dharma or senior to them in their order or lineage. Because they are dense and cannot learn, such men are close to animals and remote from the teachers of the tradition. When a person is single minded and deeply devoted to the Buddhadharma, that person is always enfolded in compassion.... A person who has the Dharma is a true, singular, eternal Buddha here and now. We should not view them in terms of their history or social background. The encounter with such a person is something outstanding, unique and completely fresh. When we meet such a person it is an encounter in which we must come up to the present time. Even arhats, pratyekabuddhas and advanced stage bodhisattvas prostrate to a bhikshuni who transmits the Dharma eye and she receives these prostrations. Why should men be superior? Women and men are alike in being made of the four elements and in being subject to the five skandhas. They are similarly alike in attaining the truth. We should profoundly revere every single person who has attained the Dharma. Do not discuss man-woman as some kind of problem. This is a Dharma fundamental.”

It is also noteworthy that the vow does not promise liberation *in situ*. While women remain in the other land they are not liberated. They are only liberated on entry into Amida’s land. The Dharma principle is not that women have some right, power or status as women, nor that men have some right, power, or status as men. In Dharma it is Dharma that accords status and function. If a person has faith, that is what matters, not whether they happen to be a man or a woman, tall or short, high class or low class or even good or bad. A person of faith who has a bad character will get better. A person of virtue who lacks faith will get worse. A person who has virtue and faith is very fine, of course, but Amida has a special concern for the sinner. He also has a special concern for the person from the oppressed social group.

It is a sad fact that there are groups in the Buddhist world that discriminate against women and there are still substantial institutional obstacles to women in those schools that adhere to the traditional vinaya or to some medieval attitudes. In time, one assumes that since there is now choice in this matter, the problem may correct itself, but it remains surprising that these groups nonetheless continue to be supported by many female as well as male adherents. There is not Buddhist sangha that is not dependent upon support from women, so the remedy is not difficult to see. People, however, are perverse. Similar problems exist in many other faith communities.

In the Amida community such discrimination is excluded in the foundational documents of the Order and School and there is unity on this issue throughout the sangha. There is no difference in the procedures for ordination of men and women nor in the precepts that women and men follow. In our sangha, as in the Pure Land of Amida, there is only one unified assembly. Within it there are functions and roles and all these are equally open to women and

men alike.

34. The significance of the 40th vow is that bodhisattvas in Amida's Pure Land shall be granted the same insight that Dharmakara acquired when he met Lokeshvararaja Buddha. This enabled him to create his own Pure Land. Amida's bodhisattvas thus comprehend the qualities of all Buddha lands from just looking at any of the jewel trees in Amida's land, that is, in the land that they inhabit. This means that an Amida bodhisattva sees and gleans from every detail of the world around them, all the knowledge they need to understand the condition of all beings and to create, extend and adorn a suitable Buddha field.

35. This 42nd Vow corresponds to the Pratyutpanna Samadhi Sutra and extends the ability to enter the samadhi described in it to all bodhisattvas who attend to Amida's name irrespective of whether they dwell in Amida's Pure Land or not. The Pratyutpanna Samadhi Sutra was the first Pureland sutra to be translated into Chinese and it was used by the early masters such as Hui Yuan of Mount Lu who established the first Pureland White Lotus Society in China in the year 401. The Sutra describes the method of salvation by samadhi and so stands in parallel with the Contemplation Sutra. See also the Twentieth Vow and corresponding footnote above. The Pratyutpanna Samadhi Sutra does not especially single out Amida Buddha, but describes a state in which Buddhas as numerous as the stars of the night sky confront one throughout life.

36. This vow promises a noble rebirth to bodhisattvas anywhere who attend to the Name. Noble (Aryan), in Buddhism, means spiritual, as in the Noble Eightfold Path. Family can mean both blood relatives and spiritual relatives. One's spiritual family is one's brothers and sisters in the Dharma with whom one shares a spiritual lineage. Rebirth in a noble family, therefore, means that those who aspire to the bodhisattva way of life shall be born into circumstances that make it possible and provide the conditions and support wherein one can learn and practise the Dharma.

37. The path of Amida is joyful. Some paths within Buddhism are rather austere and practitioners can become somewhat dour and solemn as a result. Those who attend to Amida may suddenly discover spiritual joy and break out into dance and song, something frowned upon in some quarters as unbefitting serious Buddhist practitioners. The Pureland Way is, however, rapturous and includes much celebratory expression together.

38. Non-retrogression is an important topic in Buddhism and there have been numerous debates about its correct meaning and application. The implication is that there are some steps in the spiritual path that are irreversible. Once you have passed that point, you can never go back. Some experiences in life are such that you can never forget them nor undo their effect upon you. This vow asserts that listening to the Name is such an experience.

39. We can either take this as Shakyamuni indicating that Amitabha is a historical Buddha of extremely long lifespan now still dwelling in a concrete universe far distant from our own, or we can take the whole sutra allegorically as a description of what a Buddha is and does. In the latter case, Shakyamuni's utterance here affirms the universal relevance of this teaching - it applies to our own day as much as to any other time. In either sense, Amitabha is eternal.

Similarly, we can take the reference to Western regions in different ways. It could be taken as

literal in the context of a flat earth model of the cosmos. Or it can be taken as an allusion to the sunset direction, associated with death and endings. The Westward journey has come to refer to the Pureland path, the journey toward Amida. It is not a Chinese reference to India since the westward reference also occurs in the Sanskrit version.

The Chinese and Japanese versions have an extra step to this exchange between Ananda and Shakyamuni in which Ananda asks how long it is since Dharmakara attained enlightenment and Shakyamuni replies, “Ten kalpas”.

40. The Pure Land is made of celestial jewels because these reflect everything so that one can see “the universe in a grain of sand and eternity in an hour”, as Blake put it. This verse relates to vow 31. These are seven such jewels and this may be an allusion to the seven factors of enlightenment.

41. This is in fulfillment of vows one and two.

42. In this little exchange we see the interaction between the literalist and the allegorical interpretations of the teaching and indications that Shakyamuni is on the side of the later, or at least that he is not on the side of a completely concrete literalism. He is willing to go some distance with the literalists, speaking their language, but when Ananda asks questions based on a literalist perspective, we see them break down and a spiritual meaning appear.

43. From here on the description of the Buddha and his Pure Land becomes more literal, or, at least, the spiritual meaning and the literal description are more completely merged.

44. Restating and amplifying vow twelve. This list is used in various liturgies and poems as the twelve names of the Buddha of Infinite Light.

45. Amplifying vow 33.

46. There is an implication here that everybody has this light available to them, whether they live in Amida’s land or not or even whether they have faith or not. The implication, therefore, is that the function of faith is to enable one to see the light rather than to create it.

47. This restates vow 13, but here without the singling out of pratyekabuddhas.

48. Restating vow 14 and 26.

49. Restating vow 32.

50. The tree is veiled by the jewel nets and the jewel nets are a response to the desires of the observer so the more desire there is the more desire objects there will be and the less visible the actual tree will become. We remember from Vow 28 that bodhisattvas of that land can always see the tree. This is because they have few personal desires. Ordinary beings may only be very dimly aware of the tree itself. They see the decoration. The whole structure and substance of the Pure Land is a reflection of the mind state of the observer.

51. See vow 47.

52. See vow 41.

53. See vow 32.

54. See vow 16.

55. See vows 27 and 38.

56. Here vows 3 and 4 are fulfilled. This verse also establishes the three virtuous qualities of naturalness, emptiness and limitlessness. Naturalness does not refer to original nature but to spiritual ease. Emptiness means that the three poisons no longer have a hold either at the gross level of excesses of sensual greed, hate and delusion or, more particularly, at the sophisticated level of pride, opinionatedness and conceit. Limitlessness refers to unconditionality. Amida's people can go anywhere in their minds; that is, they can appreciate the perspectives of all beings.

57. As in vow 27.

58. See vow 39.

59. See vow 32. The Pure Land is like a beneficent dream in which all good things happen spontaneously and everything instructs and forms one in virtue and peace of mind so that one may awaken perfectly refreshed, spiritual invigorated and inspired.

60. The implication here is that it is the perception of the Pure Land that sets people upon the path of Buddhahood, i.e. constitutes full enlightenment.

61. See discussion of Vow Eleven above.

62. See also vow 17. This is a further assertion of the universality of true religion irrespective of local forms. Tathagatas are those who come to us from tathata which is the Buddhist name for the spiritual - "thusness", ultimate reality. The picture is of the ultimate as inconceivable but not as unintuitable. We sense its presence, but we cannot discern it directly. It gives meaning to our life, but it is not directly accessible. Sages therefore function as intermediaries. Giving up their little life identity, they entrust themselves to Tathata and so become emissaries, apostles of the Light.

63. This verse is the essence of the promise and theory of the whole sutra. A moment of true faith is apodictic and irreversible. It is a threshold one can never go back from, like losing one's virginity. Those who have had such a moment can never shed the effect it has upon them. Even tho their life may subsequently get into a mess, there is still always something working away in the background pulling them back to the Light. It is this notion that "a single moment does it" that is at the core of all Buddhism. It does not matter what your karma is or how great or small one's spiritual accomplishments may be.

The Chinese (and, therefore, Japanese) versions of the Suta have a caveat here excluding those who have committed any of the five grave offenses. This does not occur in the Sanskrit version of the sutra. At issue is the question whether this caveat belongs with the Eighteenth or with the Nineteenth Vow. This issue has been discussed above in the notes appended to the

Three Great Vows (18th to 20th).

64. Although this section gives descriptions of three degrees of faith, they are points on a spectrum and the import is that there are any number of degrees. The three described are readily recognisable. We know people like each of these. However, all the intermediate positions exist as well. The fact that there are three described should not lead us to try to draw a correspondence with the Three Great Vows as this spectrum of faith does not map onto them. Rather, this is an amplification of what faith looks like. People of great faith naturally give up conventional life and turn themselves over to following Amitayus completely if they can. Those of lesser merit may join the faithful but are not able to change their lives so radically. Then there are people set about by worldly cares who make no merit at all and whom you would, from all appearances, hardly know had any faith, but who, nonetheless, have a place in their heart for the Buddha.

All people of faith, irrespective of degrees of merit, are on the irreversible path. Once faith starts, it goes on. Eventually it works on people, even if, initially, ever so imperceptibly. The greater a person's faith the more likely they are to be blessed with spiritual experiences and those experiences are likely to be more vivid and real. Nonetheless, faith is faith and there is a place in Amitayus' scheme even for the rank sinner.

The relation of this section to the Three Great Vows is not in a correspondence between items, but in the fact that a person of the first type is a person who strongly fulfils the Eighteenth Vow and this section shows that such a person naturally goes on to fulfil the Nineteenth and Twentieth Vows as well. Such a person does change, does go forth, does do great good, and does, in due course have blessed encounters with Amitayus. Insofar as faith is more karmically impeded, so fulfilment of the 19th and 20th Vows is likely to be correspondingly less also. This section, therefore, adds weight to the interpretation that say that the Three Great Vows are not really alternatives, even though they initially seem so.

Faith is the root of real merit and samadhi. Merit and samadhi do not, however, ensure faith, merely good conditions for it. Where there is merit and faith both together then the first type of life may result, but there is the pitfall of pride or complacency that may hinder faith. The three types are grades, as also appears in the Contemplation Sutra, but the hierarchy amongst them is not as real as at first appears. The person in the third category, having more to contend with, may prove most faithful in the end.

65. Altho the third category is less in merit, the faith is no lesser. We see that faith is an independent variable from merit. Faith may give rise to meritorious action, but this effect may be defeated by circumstance. Circumstance results from karma, but faith may triumph over karma in the end. The fact that faith is independent of merit is of central importance in the teachings of Pureland, especially from the time of Shan Tao onward.

66. We may take "bodhisattvas from other fields" to broadly mean self-power practitioners. This section following directly on from the section on categories of the faithful indicates that self-power practitioners all ultimately come to sit at the feet of Amitayus - in other words, they all come to realise that it is faith that is the key.

67. In context, this means that the teaching just given, which is the essence of what Amitayus means, is what is incomparable.

68. In other words, faith is the fundamental principle of all true enlightenment.

69. Again pratyekabuddhas do not figure.

70. The doctrine of Three Kshantis is as follows. In Buddhist literature generally, kshanti refers to patience, forbearance or capacity. Here, however, it means receptivity.

The first kshanti (ghosanuga kshanti) is willingness to hear the Dharma with an open mind. The second kshanti (anulomiki kshanti) is the willingness to adopt the teachings and put them into practice.

The third kshanti (anutpattikadharma kshanti) is the willingness to open one's mind to the deepest teaching: that deepest teaching is anutpada.

The doctrine of Anutpada is the teaching that nothing arises, nothing comes to be. This has a double meaning. On the one hand, it means that the things of this world all come into existence in a condition of dependency. This is the corollary of the doctrine of Dependent Origination. All ordinary things (rupa) are dependent things. When something appears in this world it does so as an effect, dependent upon conditions that are themselves effects in an infinite regress. This doctrine is called Emptiness, shunyata. Acceptance of anutpada in this sense yields serenity and patience.

On the other hand, the Buddha's teaching of "Thou are not that" implies another reality beyond this one. In the realm of Pure Dharma there is no birth or death. The realm of Pure Dharma is everything perfect that this realm of becoming can never be. The Buddha invites us, therefore, to disidentify with this realm of imperfect things as transient and unsatisfactory. The real things are not that self. By such disidentification with ephemera, we enable the realm of eternals, the Light, to become an other power - to work in our lives - so that we become channels for it, or, rather, reflections of it, even though, in a very real sense, we can never touch it or become it. We are then like the moon that reflects the light of the sun. The moon is a dead world in itself - it belongs to Mara - but it reflects the light and so becomes inspiring. We too can reflect the Light and become mirrors of Eternal Life, even though we belong to Mara.

We can, therefore, construe the Buddha's dictum both as "Thou art not that" and "Thou art not That". In the former sense, one is not the things of this world. The Buddha takes this to a very thorough extreme. Not only are we not the material things of this world (rupa), we are not any of the other psychological processes (samskara) that go on. To identify with one's mind activity (vedana, samjna) or one's mentality (vijnana) are also mistaken. Such are the ways of ordinary people who have not understood anutpada. Utpada means the continual arising of features that we take for self. To be anutpada means not to be taken in by them.

At the same time, however, we are not That either. The realm of Pure Form remains something other. Spiritual life involves the appreciation of our alienation from That (tathata). This is the sense of the middle way. It is not monism and it is not dualism. Buddhism is

trinitarian and it is the spirit of the middle path that is truly holy, neither that nor That.

The person who awakens to anutpada is no longer *en-soi* nor *pour-soi*. They are *pour-autrui*. And this *pour-autrui* again has the same double sense. The *pour-autrui* is for the other and for the Other without being either. To be *pour-autrui* as for-other means to live for the sake of all sentient beings and to contribute to the creation of a Pure Land in this world. To be *pour-autrui* as for-Other means to live a life of devotion to the Pure Dharma, the Unborn to which the Buddha directs us, the Tathata from which the Tatha-agata comes and to which the Tatha-gata returns, endlessly renewing the vitality of the spiritual life that stands in tension between those poles.

71. “Exceptionally” means that the person of anutpada makes a *second turn*. The first turn is to turn away from the ordinary attachments of this world - the turn away from this and that. Many religions are content to regard this first turn as all there is to spirituality. However, Buddha enjoins a second turn. One must not only turn away from that and so toward That; one must then re-turn, embracing that while still remembering That. In this way, Buddha’s *smṛiti* co-incides with Plato’s (or Socrates’) *anamnesis*. It is the remembrance of That that fills the engagement with that with Light.

72. Allegorically, this passage elaborates the point made in note 71. The illustrious presence of Amitayus is That. The bodhisattvas go forth into the world of this and that, shining with the Light that is the presence or reflection of Eternal Life. Reflected light is still light present. Thus bodhisattvas make Light available simply by living in the Light themselves. The moon does not make special effort in order to deliver the sun’s radiance to the people of Earth. The bodhisattvas “travel” through the world of this and that, shedding Light, just as Tai Shih Chih leaves a wake of Pure Lands, or as celestial flowers fall. Yet though they pass through ten thousand million worlds, they are never late for their meal. The nourishment provided by their continual return to That is in no way impeded by their entry into the saha world.

73. The blessing brought by bodhisattvas never actually falls to earth. It remains suspended between that and That, enticing all beings to enter the middle realm.

74. When Eternal Life teaches us, we are in the seven jewelled lecture hall.

75. Practice is provisional since it pertains to the act of unhooking from that-ness. Reality is ultimate in being That-ness, Tathata. The bodhisattva points out “Tathata!” While practice seems progressive, pointing-out-wisdom is exclamatory. It is an outbreak of joy. The Roots of Good refers to the Pure Form of Good that resides in the realm of Thatness and that is remembered at the point of awakening. The state of *avidya* is thus likened to sleep or a state of forgetting.

76. Ceasing to reground oneself in the human body means to attain freedom from thatness. This corresponds to the “first turn” referred to in note 71 above. It is the essential key or doorway to the spiritual life. The beauty and attractions of this life are then like “dew touching the eye”, pleasing ephemera:

*Just-for-a-moments,
Where nothing has moment
As time slips this moment*

Away.

77. “Always they are bodhisattvas”, even when asleep. Thus we say that it does not matter in what state of mind the nembutsu is uttered. The Buddha Way is not a matter of perfecting a state of mind. It is not about constant alertness, for instance. Such a proposition would not be sustainable. Buddhas also sleep. They are not constantly alert. Faith is not alertness. If a person has faith then they are safe. When we are safe we can relax our guard. We can sleep in the presence of That because It will never harm us. This is not a matter of practice makes perfect. The bodhisattva is a foolish being, yet lives in the Perfect Light. Faith is a state of assurance, not one of anxiety.

78. Ekayana refers to the One Vehicle expounded in the Lotus Sutra. The term is cognate with ekagata which was a word the Buddha used to indicate the quality of a true disciple who cannot be thrown off course by external influences. His mind is devoid of “strangers” - internalised others that war over the soul of the ordinary unawakened person. Eka means “one” or “single”. The ideal Buddhist has the singleness to be always steady in and true to the Buddha way. This makes them both independent and good members of the sangha. In Buddhism, one becomes a true individual through participation in a true community and one becomes a complete community member through genuine (i.e. non-reactive) individuality. There is here an important distinction between true individuality and pseudo-individuality. The latter is merely reactivity. A person who is compulsively caught in trying to demonstrate that he or she is distinct is imprisoned by the influence of whatever they are reacting against whereas a person who has sufficient faith to unerringly follow Dharma is able to participate fully in community life without being corrupted by it.

79. This passage echoes the interaction between Dharmakara and Lokeshvararaja when, perceiving That-ness gloriously embodied in the Buddha before him, Dharmakara felt great vows bubbling up. The passage that follows is another ecstatic directing of our attention toward the realm of Pure Form that lifts us out of this ocean of trivia into the ecstasy of eternal life.

80. The Three Poisons are greed, hate and delusion.

81. Upaya are “skilful means” - one of the main topics of the Lotus Sutra.

82. At this point some of the Chinese and Japanese versions have a long passage in the form of a conversation between Shakyamuni and Manjushri. This conversation is about the evils of human beings and purports to account for them not seeking the Pure Land. Most scholars see this passage as a late addition added in China.

83. The myriad worlds each have their mountains to climb. Only Amida’s land is free from such obstacles.

84. Maitreya now appears. He is the Buddha of the future. The appearance of the Pure Land vision is a harbinger of things to come.

85. Here Maitreya appears somewhat as Dharmakara does in the early part of the Sutra, gathering the know-how for the generation of a Buddhakshetra and learning the distinctions

between a conventionally good and a truly spiritual life.

86. This verse reflects the theme of the Three Great Vows. The significance is that goodness is sufficient to earn a reward in heaven, but it is not enough on its own to bring one the bliss of communion with holy beings. One may do good in relation to this and that, but never really commune with That. There remains something sterile about goodness that is purely rational and not embedded in an emotional connection to the Buddha. Those who practise by self power may do good and this will, by the law of karma, bring its reward. When, however, this goodness is embedded in one's own calculation and opinion about what is and is not good, there is still an element of self at the core of one's goodness. The type of religion promoted by this sutra suggests that the really important spiritual work lies in the area of giving up the habit of making one's own judgement the measure of all things. The best way to achieve this is to have faith in the Buddha - or, we say, to take refuge. Those who do so are instantly transformed. They acquire the characteristics of bodhisattvas directly without any delay. Those who are "self-made" however, spend a long time on the path - or in the palace - doing good and enjoying fruits, yet still unable to see what it is really all about.

87. This verse reiterates the principle that we have encountered several times that this is not a religion of salvation by membership. Bodhisattvas of other lands indicates, *inter alia*, followers of other faiths. If they have the faith in Real Form and allow their lives to be infused with the influence of the Good, the True and the Beautiful, then they too will be born in the Land of Bliss. The Sutra enunciates universal principles.

88. Birth through transformation alludes to the nirmanakaya body of Buddha. The Buddha is not to be thought of as essentially a material being, but as a spiritual one. What matters is whether the spirit of Pure Form appears. Its transformations may be legion. Our birth in the Pure Land is also the Light being born upon us.

89. Excellence of wisdom means also maturity of faith. We should beware of the Western tendency to see faith and wisdom as mutually exclusive alternatives. Those who are wise are those with prajna. Prajna literally means the faith to see through the seductions of the world. It means to see through thatness to Thatness: to see Pure Form beyond ephemeral appearance, Dharma beyond rupa, samadhi beyond vedana, prajna beyond samjna, chanda (pure aspiration) beyond chetana (common intentionality), adhimoksha (liberating reverence) beyond manaskara (grasping attention), and thus, smriti (remembrance of Pure Form) beyond sparsha (thirst for common forms). Prajna is thus faith that is so faithful that one has completely naturalized into it. It is second nature. Buddha's descriptions of the spiritual path often begin with simple faith and end with prajna. Between the two are the spiritual graces that come from encounter with the challenges that faith must face in the course of life.

90. They cannot make offerings because they have not woken up to the spiritual reality beyond self, but remain trapped in their own flying palace that has its delights, but is enclosed and cut off from Dharma. They do not practise vinaya since vinaya is the "leading away". Perception of Pure Form leads us away from the ephemeral world. The Buddha taught Dharma-vinaya. This term is commonly translated "Dharma and Discipline" as though these are two different elements or dimensions of the teaching. However, Dharma-vinaya is a single concept. It is the quality of Dharma (Pure Form) to lead us away (vinaya). Buddha did not teach Dharma *and* vinaya, he taught the vinaya of Dharma. When we awake to Dharma we

will be vinaya-ed. Thirdly, they do not practice true merit for merit is really the happiness of mind that arises spontaneously when our life is illuminated by Dharma Light. Those who have not opened their lives to spiritual reality have no access to this Light. They may do some good in a utilitarian or rational fashion but are liable to remain confused by the detail of life and the constantly returning necessity to rely upon self as a guiding reference point, like somebody who must navigate the ocean without looking up to the stars of making reference to anything outside of his own boat.

91. Here again wisdom and faith are equated. It is wise to have faith. The highest wisdom is to place one's trust in the Buddha rather than in self. Even one's supposed "higher self" is as nothing compared with the Buddha. Lack of faith is, therefore, lack of wisdom. What is being criticised in passages like this is the pratyeka Buddha: the type of person who follows the spiritual path by relying upon their own cleverness rather than by just entrusting themselves to the Buddha. There are many people who want to follow a spiritual path who yet cannot let go of the idea that they themselves are the measure of all things and that all enlightenment and spiritual progress will come from within themselves.

92. This passage tells us something about the Buddhist attitude to reward and punishment. Those who doubt are not punished, but they do lose benefits. Doubt cuts one off from what trust brings. This is a natural consequence. It is not really something imposed by the Buddha. It is simply the way things are. There are many people who would like to have the benefits of life in a Buddhist community, but are unwilling to conform to what a Buddhist community is. It is not the case that the community punishes them - it is simply that they cannot reach these benefits without creating the appropriate conditions, just as one cannot produce the fruit without growing the tree it grows upon. The person who relies upon self-power simply does not see the Buddha. They only see self.

93. This paragraph confirms that the problem lies entirely in the attitude of the person concerned.

94. Both the Sanskrit and the Chinese versions of the sutra have specific numbers here, though these are in round figures such as 10 million or 18 thousand or 5 million trillion and so on. The figures in the Chinese version do not match those in the Sanskrit. Translators have difficulty knowing exactly what the numerals in the original languages mean. For these reasons it is impossible to get accuracy in the text at this point. Also, we do not, as far as I know, understand whether there is any doctrinal significance in these numbers as such. I have therefore settled for "a vast number" in each case. If further knowledge comes to light this may be improved upon.

The cosmological picture that emerges here is of many Buddha lands scattered throughout the cosmos. In a Buddha land a process is underway in which a realm of cruelty, greed and delusion is being transformed by the influence of a Buddha into a realm of kindness, generosity and wisdom. The realm of Amitabha is simply the most advanced of these projects. Our own realm of Shakyamuni has a very long way still to go. Ordinary beings such as ourselves can only transport from one realm to another at the time of death and rebirth, though by spiritual awakening and Buddha's power we may be enabled to see across the gulf that divides the worlds.

This schema can be taken quite literally or it can be taken as a metaphor for a purely spiritual condition or it can be taken semi-literally in which case the spiritual realm is conceived to be real but in another dimension, or, all three options may be inadequate.

95. This further elaborates the theme that the Pureland is not exclusive. Buddhism is a missionary religion in the sense that the bodhisattvas go forth and take the Light into all corners of the world. However, there is no necessity for all people to become card carrying Buddhists. The Light spreads in many ways and reaches far beyond the limits of the Buddhist community as such.

96. Much has been made by Pureland sages of the promise that this Sutra will survive a hundred years more. It is taken to mean that there will be a time in the Dharma-ending Age (Mappo) when only the path outlined in the Sutra will be available. Many have believed that such a time has arrived. The path of self-power, it is said, is true enough, but impractical for beings of this degenerate age. Certainly the verse implies that those who attend to the Dharma will encounter difficulties. The function of faith is not just to give access of eternal life, it is also to sustain in the midst of adversity.

97. See also verse 11. The discourse given by Shakyamuni in this Sutra commences with him saying that the Dharma is rare and precious and now as he draws to an end he returns to this theme.