

The Greater Pure Land Sutra

Sukhavativyuha Sutra

Part One

Thus have I heard. At one time the Blessed One was staying at the Vulture Peak at Rajagriha. At that time, the Buddha was attended by twelve thousand monks, all of them Arhats. Among them were the Buddha's first five disciples, the first Arhats, Ajnatakaundinya, Ashvajit, Bashpa, Mahanama, and Bhadrakṣita; the first lay disciples who had all subsequently ordained: Yashas and his four friends, Vimāla, Subhūti, Purna son of Maitriya, 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, Maudgalyāyana and Shariputra; the disciples Kapphina, Chunda, Aniruddha, Nandika, Kimpila, Subhūti, Revata, Khadiravanika, Vakkila, Svagata, Amogharaja, Parayanika, Pantha, Pantha the younger; the Buddha's half-brother Nanda, his son Rahula, and his cousin and closest disciple, Ananda. The Buddha was also attended by a great many Bodhisattva Mahasattvas with Maitreya at their head.

Then the reverend Ananda rose from his seat, uncovered his right shoulder, approached the Buddha, and knelt with his right knee touching the ground. He joined his palms in anjali and said: "The Blessed One's sense powers appear serene, the color 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 color, or as a skillfully made ornament of Jambu River gold displayed on a white cloth shows its purity, so the Blessed One appears radiant today.

"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 centered 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 Honored of the Gods possesses all the virtues of a Tathagata! The Buddhas of the three times contemplate one another. Could it be that you are now bringing to mind all 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?'"

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?"

Ananda replied: "It was not by the devas. Blessed One, it occurred to me through knowledge arising from my own reflection."

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 the many, out of compassion for the world, for the sake of the great multitude of humans, for the good, the happiness of devas and humans, that you have asked the Tathagata about this matter.

"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. Thus, the Tathagata takes pity on the threefold world with a great inexhaustible compassion.

“The Tathagata appears in the world 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* flower 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. Furthermore, noble Ananda, only the power of a Tathagata 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. So, now, Ananda, listen carefully, pay attention, and I shall explain.”

“Please do, Blessed Sir,” replied Ananda, and the Blessed One spoke: “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, the Tathagatas Pratapavat, Chandhanagandha, Sumurukalpa, Chandana, Vimalanana, Anupalipta, Vimalaprabha, Nagabhibu, Suryodana, Girirajaghosha, Merukuta, Suvarnaprabha, Jyotisprabha, Vaiduryanirbhasa, Brahmaghosha, Chandrabhibu, Turyaghosha, Mukta-kusuma-pratimandita-prabha, Shrikuta, Sagara-vara-buddhi-vikridita-bhijna, Varaprabha, Mahagandhararaja-prabhasa, Vyapa-gata-khila-mala-pratigha, Shurakuta, Ranan-jaha, Mahagunadhara-buddhi-prapta-bhijna, Chandrasurya-jihmi-karana, Uttapta-vaidurya-nirbhasa, Chittadhara-buddhi-sanku-sumita-bhyudgata, Pushpavativanaraja-samkusu-mitabhijna, Pushpakara, Udukachandra, Avidyandhakara-vidyamsanakara, Lokendra, Mukta-chatra-prava-dasadhrisha, Tishya, Dharma-mativinanda-ditaraja, Simha-sagara-kuta-vinanditaraja, Sagara-meru-chandra, Brahma-svarana-dabhinandita, Kusumasambhava, Praptasena, Chandrabhanu, Chandraprabha, Vimalanetra, Giri-rajaghosheshvara, Kusuma-prabha, Kusuma-vrishtyabhi-prakirna, Ratnachandra, Padma-vithyu-pashobhita, Chanda-nagandha, Tagaragandha, Ratna-nirbhasa, Nirmitta, Mahavyuha, Vyapagata-khila-dhosha, Brahmaghosha, Sapta-ratna-bhivrishta, Mahaghunadhara, Tamala-patra-chandana-kardama, Kusuma-bhijna, Ajnana-vidhvamsana, Kesharin, Muktachatra, Suvarnagarbha, Vaiduryagarbha, Mahaketu, Dharmaketu, Ratnaketu, Ratnashri, Lokendra, Narendra, Karunika, Lokasundara, Brahmaketu, Dharmamati, Simha, and Simhamati.

“And before Simhamati, long before him, there lived a Tathagata, Arhat, Samyak Sambuddha called Lokeshvararaja, a Sugata, Vidya-Karana-Samapana, Lokavid, Purusa-Damyasarati, Anuttaraya, Sasta-Deva-Manusyanam, a Buddha, a Bhagavat.

“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 monk with the name Dharmakara. He became a most superlative monk of pure conduct, discernment, vigor, nobility, and commitment.

The monk 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 poisons from the heart. You are like a lion, valiant and divinely pure. Great power! Deep wisdom! Awesome light!

“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 wisdom 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 Land 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.”

“Then, Ananda, after he had praised the blessed Tathagata in this way, the monk 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 realization. Blessed One, do now kindly teach me the Dharma that I may quickly awaken, that I may become a Tathagata, equal to the unequalled. Blessed One, tell now the characteristics of a Pure Land that I need to know so that I too may extend a wonderful, marvelous, Boundless Pure Land of my own. Please make me speedily realize perfect awakening in this life so that I can uproot the pains and hardships of the cycle of birth and death.’

“Then the Buddha Lokeshvararaja said to the monk Dharmakara, ‘You yourself will know how to follow the practice and adorn a Pure Land.’ The monk 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 realize these characteristics of a Pure Land one by one.

“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. Recognizing the good intentions and depth of aspiration of the monk, 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.’

“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.

“A deep and serene tranquility 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 function 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.

“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.’

“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 practice this Dharma and so fulfil innumerable great vows.’

“The monk replied: ‘I beg you, grant me your attention. I will fully proclaim my vows’

[The First Vow - No Lower Realms]

Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, my Pure Land should include infernal, ghostly, animal, or demonic realms.

[The Second Vow - No Unfortunate Rebirth]

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 and thereafter be reborn in infernal, ghostly, animal, or demonic realms.

[The Third Vow - No Color Discrimination]

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 color, the color of gold.

[The Fourth Vow - No Social Discrimination]

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 color, relative beauty, or other criteria, save the harmless kind of discernment that is necessary for naming and keeping count of things.

[The Fifth Vow - Recall of Previous Lives]

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 Sight]

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 sight that enables one to perceive myriad other Pure Lands.

[The Seventh Vow - Divine Hearing]

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 hearing 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]

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’s minds, the minds of all the vast multitude of different kinds of beings scattered through myriad worlds and circumstances.

[The Ninth Vow - Limitless Movement]

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]

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]

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]

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]

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 Disciples]

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

[The Fifteenth Vow - Deathlessness]

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]

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]

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 Eighteenth Vow - Birth by Recollection]

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 - Birth by Merit]

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 - Birth by Dedication]

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 Pure Land are not reborn there.

[The Twenty First Vow - Thirty-two Marks of the Bodhisattvas]

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 marks of a superior being.

[The Twenty Second Vow – The Bodhisattva Path]

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 armor 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 practice the Bodhisattva Way 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 Twenty Third Vow - Respect for Other Sanghas]

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 honor 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 Twenty Fourth Vow - Respect for the Ways of Other Sanghas]

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 Twenty Fifth Vow - Comprehensive Teaching]

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 Twenty Sixth Vow - Fortitude]

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 the supremely powerful.

[The Twenty Seventh Vow - Immeasurable Splendor]

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 Twenty Eighth Vow - Living in the Presence of the Tree of Life]

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 Twenty Ninth Vow - Eloquence]

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 learning, reciting, and expounding sutras.

[The Thirtieth Vow - Inspired Discourse]

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 Thirty First Vow - Mirror of All Buddha Lands]

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 Thirty Second Vow - Transformation by Delight]

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, marvelous, 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 Thirty Third Vow - Solace of Light]

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 Thirty Fourth Vow - Constancy]

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, unarisen and unceasing, the dharani-power, sufficient to sustain them to their ultimate spiritual goal.

[The Thirty Fifth Vow - Liberation of Women]

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 loathe the customs and statuses imposed upon them as women, shall not, on entering my Land, be liberated therefrom.

[The Thirty Sixth Vow - Merging of Bodhisattva and Renunciant Paths]

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 Thirty Seventh Vow - Faith Inspires Respect]

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 Thirty Eighth Vow - The Robes of Enlightenment]

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 robes of enlightenment, formless yet embracing every treasure, robes 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 Thirty Ninth Vow - Peace of Mind]

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 Fortieth Vow - To Know How to Create a Pure Land]

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 recognize 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 Forty First Vow - Spiritual Faculties]

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 Forty Second Vow - Samadhi of All Buddhas and Buddha Lands]

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 Forty Third Vow - Noble Rebirth]

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 Forty Fourth Vow - Spiritual Joy]

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, practice wholeheartedly, and correspondingly gain immense merit.

[The Forty Fifth Vow - Samadhi of Universal Equality]

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 Forty Sixth Vow - Spontaneous Access to the Dharma]

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 Forty Seventh Vow - Non-retrogression]

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 Forty Eighth Vow - Commitment to Ultimate Buddhahood]

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 nonretrogression in their commitment to seeking the qualities of a Buddha.

Then the Buddha said to Ananda: “Having pronounced his Forty-Eight Great Vows, the Bodhisattva Dharmakara then spoke these words: ‘I take great vows that are unsurpassed, so that the highest truth can be realized. Should these vows not be fulfilled, I shall not gain perfect enlightenment. Should I not for infinite eons 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 great light that brightens the whole world. I shall root out the darkness of illusions three and save those in suffering and despair. I shall open the spiritual eyes of wisdom and eradicate the darkness of ignorance. I shall close tight all evil paths and 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.’

Then the Buddha said to Ananda, “When the monk 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.’

“Ananda, the monk Dharmakara then practiced 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.

“Dharmakara practiced 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 marvelous. It was vast, incomparable, magnificent; omni-present, eternally reliable, and not subject to decay.

“He revered the Three Jewels and brought offerings to his teachers. 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.

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

“Renouncing kingdom and country, relinquishing wealth and sense pleasures, he was free from attachment, aversion, and indifference. He did not harbor 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.

“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.

“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 all Buddhas, making the four kinds of offerings¹ to them.

“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 marvelous.

“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 phenomena.”

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 practice and teach the Dharma?”

¹ Food and drink, clothing, monastic quarters, and medicine

The Blessed One said: “Ananda, this Tathagata is indeed fully realized 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 Amideva, Boundless Radiance.”

Part Two

The Blessed One said: “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.

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

Then Ananda asked the Buddha: “World Honored One, if there is no Mount Sumeru in that Land, where will the devas, the celestial guardian kings, and the devas of Indra’s heaven of the thirty-three dwell?”

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 Sumeru.”

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.”

The Buddha said to Ananda: “The majestic light of Amideva 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 Amideva illumines myriads of world systems, numerous as the sands of the Ganges, to the east, to the south, west, north, above, and below.

“Amideva is, therefore, called the Buddha of Boundless Light; 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.

“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.

“The brilliant light of Amideva 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, Disciples, Solitary Realizers, and Bodhisattvas are in unison in their praise of it.

“All beings that attend to the divinely virtuous light and give themselves over to its incessant praise day and night will, according to their resolve, attain rebirth in his Land, welcomed by the host of Disciples 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 Amideva. Were I to continue extolling the power of the majestic light of Amideva day and night a whole kalpa long, I could never exhaust its praise.”

The Buddha said to Ananda: “The life span of Amideva 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 Disciples and Solitary Realizers, 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 Disciples, Bodhisattvas, devas, and humans in that Land is similarly long and beyond the reach of any analogy or reckoning.

“The vast number of Disciples and Bodhisattvas in that Land is difficult to calculate. 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.

“The number of Disciples 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 Disciples and Bodhisattvas in the assembly of Amideva.

“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 Disciples and Bodhisattvas in the realm of Amideva.

“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. 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.

“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.

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

“And the tree beneath which Amideva 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 jeweled garlands wherein a hundred thousand colors mingle—an extraordinary delight. The tree itself is veiled with jewel nets, an intricate mosaic of ornaments, each corresponding to one’s wish.

“From this tree, the wafting breeze evokes the marvelous 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 nonretrogression, and until they attain the Buddha way will continue to hear it and be freed from affliction and sorrow. The eyes that see the colors of this tree, the ears that hear its sounds, the nose that has received its fragrance, the tongue that has tasted its savor, 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.

“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 the non-arising of self. All this comes from the majestic power of Amideva, the power of his primal vow, his fulfilled vow, his manifest vow, his established vow, his accomplished vow.”

The Buddha said to Ananda: “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 Amideva’s 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.

“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. 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.

“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 Disciples 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 crisscross the surface, never too slowly nor too fast, forming wonderful patterns and producing endless marvelous sounds.

“One can hear whatever sound one wishes: the sound “Buddha”, the sound “Dharma”, the sound “Sangha”, “tranquility”, “selfless emptiness”, “great compassion”, “paramita”, “ten powers”, “ten fearlessnesses” “eighteen Buddha qualities”, “super-normal powers”, “unconditioned”, “un arising unceasing”, “serene non-arising of phenomena” and so on up to “nectar anointment of Bodhisattvas:” sublime words of Dharma, truth, virtue, and spiritual elation spontaneously occurring. 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 Disciples and Bodhisattvas.”

“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.”

“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 materialize, amply filled with delicious food of a hundred flavors, all according to their wish. Although food is offered before them, it is not eaten. By merely thinking of eating they enjoy the flavor 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.”

“Pure and peaceful is that Buddha’s Land, full of splendor and joy, like the realm of nirvana the unconditioned. The Disciples 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.

“As a king to a pauper or as Indra to a minor spirit, are the inhabitants of that Land to other beings. The devas and humans in the Land of Amideva 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. Jeweled bells peal; perfumes pervade; and subtle hues charm the eye at every turn.”

“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 cessation. 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.

“Jewel lotuses fill that world, each with a hundred thousand million petals emanating light of countless colors: blue lotuses emitting blue light, white lotuses emitting white light, and likewise muted, yellow, red, purple, and other colored lights; light surpassing that of the sun and the moon. Each flower emits thirty-six hundred thousand million rays, and from each ray appear thirty-six hundred thousand million Buddhas. Each is the color 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.”

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 exist.

“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 Amideva. 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.”

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 this Land fall into three categories: those of the first and superior type live the life of renunciation. They renounce the household life and sense desires. Their hearts are set on awakening, and they completely keep faith in Amideva. They do great good deeds and expect to be born in this Land. When they are on the point of death, Amideva appears before them in all his host. They follow him and are reborn naturally and miraculously in the center of a seven-jewel lotus. Their state is irreversible. Wisdom, powers, courage, and mastery then come to them. Therefore, Ananda, all who now in this life desire to see Amideva should resolve to attain complete, perfect enlightenment, cultivate merit, and resolve to be born in that Land.

“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 a life of renunciation, nor cultivate much merit, but still single-mindedly resolve to attain complete, perfect enlightenment and they completely keep faith in Amideva. They do good deeds, and will observe eight precepts on special days, erect stupas, and shrines, support the ordained Sangha, and express their faith with banners, lights, flowers, and incense, dedicating the merit toward birth in that Land.

“When they are at the point of death, an image of Amideva 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 are less.”

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 complete, perfect enlightenment, but who generate little merit. They might have only experienced real faith in Amideva for as much as ten moments in all their lives. But if they even once or occasionally feel glad, feel heartened, or rejoice when they hear mention of the 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.”

The Buddha said to Ananda: “The splendor of Amideva is incomparable. There is not even one of the inconceivable billions of Buddha Tathagatas throughout the ten directions that does not praise him. 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 pay reverence to Amideva; they hear his Dharma and spread it far and wide for the guidance of all. Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Disciples of the southern, western and northern directions, the intermediate directions, above and below, all likewise come and do the same.

“The Buddhas of the eastern Lands, numerous as Ganges sands, admiring, come with joined hands in praise of that Awakened One, Boundless Amideva. Alike they come from every side, north, south, and west whence they abide, gathering a whelming tide in praise of that awakened one, Boundless Amideva. Each brings a gift of incense sweet, or offerings superbly mete —jewels, blossoms, garments at his feet— in praise of that awakened one, Boundless Amideva.

“Celestial sounds, a great array, heavenly harmonies they play until song fills all the night and day in praise of that awakened one, Boundless Amideva. And each revering, thrice circumambulating, bowing deep, declares: ‘Complete is your attainment of wisdom and power, the gate of the Dharma swings 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 everyone, 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 Amideva, 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 Avalokiteshvara, 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’s thunder rolling forth, declares: “A prophecy, I’ll give. Listen 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 realized that things are like dreams; their marvelous 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. Superiorly empowered you will be, even as you reach his Land, definitive prediction of Buddhahood to receive from the lips of Amideva.

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.

Disciples 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 is clear; to the other two, it is 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 to hear this Dharma. The Buddha way will then give me the means to save those drowning in the flood.”

The Buddha said to Ananda: “All the Bodhisattvas in the Land of Amideva 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.

“Ananda, disciples in Amideva’ Buddha Land have a halo of light of at least one fathom around their bodies. The light of the Bodhisattvas shines hundreds of leagues. That of the two most majestic Bodhisattvas reaches thousands of millions of miles, reaching everywhere.”

Ananda asked: “What are the names of those two Bodhisattvas?” The Buddha replied: “One is called Avalokiteshvara. The other is called Vajrapani. They both practiced as Bodhisattvas here in this my Buddha Land, and then were reborn by transformation into that Pure Land of Amideva Tathagata.

“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 serene acceptances². Those with superior capacity attain all three³ and understand the absence of origin.

“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, exceptionally, choose to be born in other realms or in corrupt ages appearing there as I have done here in this Saha World.”

The Buddha said to Ananda: “The Bodhisattvas of Amideva’ Land, moved by that Buddha’s majestic presence, go out into the innumerable regions of the cosmos, yet return in time for their meal. Everywhere they go, they make offerings to Buddhas, world Honored Ones: flowers, incense, music, canopies, banners, all appearing spontaneously, instantly, and precisely in response to their thought. These offerings are rare and marvelous, like nothing in this world, As these offerings are made, they remain suspended in space and turn into flowers —great canopies of blossoms, filling the sky. The colors 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, pay homage to all the Buddhas, and then return home before their meal.”

The Buddha said to Ananda: “When the Buddha Amideva teaches the Dharma, all the Bodhisattvas and Disciples gather in the seven jeweled lecture hall. There he explains the teaching in detail, and all are liberated, attaining supreme joy. 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 honor the Buddha and his great assembly of Bodhisattvas and disciples. These are times of great joy, one deva succeeding another in endless succession.”

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. 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 control; nothing displeasing occurs for them. 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.

² Acceptance of the Dharma in the letter and acceptance in the deed.

³ Acceptance of the non-arising of self.

“These are Bodhisattvas of limitless virtue, accomplished in all that a Bodhisattva should be. They tame their hearts by the Dharma of the Buddha, generating samadhi and siddhi, realizations and insights, and all the seven factors of enlightenment. 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.

“Thus, they strive toward the Buddhadharma and acquire its eloquence, freeing living beings from the afflictions of passion. Tathagata-born, Suchness attained, they indicate reality: “Thus!” The know 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. In their knowing, one thing is as peaceful as another, for they have ceased to ground themselves in the human body, and given up the passions that anchor one there.

“With Dharma in their ears, they are free from doubt and fears. Always they are Bodhisattvas. Their compassion deep and subtle, yet boundless and marvelous, is as embracing as the sky and sustaining as the earth. Endlessly they reach the Other Shore, the End of the Ekayana.

“Having broken out of the net of distrust, wisdom rises like a spring bubbling forth and all the principles framing the Buddha’s Dharma lie clear before them: 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 the Himalayas. 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 Empty Space, amidst all things, 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, showering Dharma for thirsty beings; like the Diamond Mountain, unshaken by Mara, unshaken by cynics; like Brahma, leading all beings in virtue and merit; like the Banyan Tree, sheltering all; like the Udumbara Flower, so rare in this world, difficult to encounter; like the Golden Garuda, majestic; like Migratory Birds, keeping no store; like the Monarch of the Herd, invincible; like the Elephant King, gentle and tame; like the Lion, free of fear; like Vast Space, their great compassion is the same always and universally.

“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 ignorance!

“They cultivate the six harmonious relations⁴ and the Dharma gift shows in all that they do. Strong and diligent, they do not 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.

⁴ Harmony as experienced regarding the physical, verbal, mental, ethical, conceptual, and property spheres.

“Destroying the three poisons , they exercise the power over causes and conditions; of guiding others; of vows; of skillful means; of perseverance; of goodness; of samadhi; of wisdom; of attentiveness to the Dharma; of the excellences: generosity, morality, effort, patience, concentration, and discernment; of right mindfulness; of tranquility and insight; of intuitive faculties and higher knowledge; and the power to tame and train others in the ways of the Dharma. They exercise all these, and others too.

“They are marked by all the physical characteristics of Buddhas: color, signs, merit, virtues, and eloquence. They have no equal. They have revered and made offerings to innumerable Buddhas; they have been praised by them; they have mastered the paramitas; they have practiced 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 Solitary Realizers and Disciples behind.

“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.”

Part Three

The Buddha said to Ananda: “Rise, arrange your robe, and with palms together pay homage to and revere Amideva. Buddha Tathagatas of the Lands of the ten directions constantly and with one accord praise that Buddha who is unhindered and unattached.”

Ananda stood up, arranged his robe, faced West, and with his palms joined in reverence, made prostrations to Amideva, his forehead touching the ground. Ananda said: “World Honored One, I want to see that Buddha and his Land of peace and bliss with all its Disciples and Bodhisattvas.”

No sooner was this said than Amideva 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 center a Mount Sumeru, and throughout its Land other mountains great and small. Basking in the light shed by Amideva, all these mountains glowed with the same wonderful golden color. 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 Amideva. The lights of Disciples and Bodhisattvas were completely eclipsed and only the Buddha’s light remained in solitary and all-encompassing glory.

Then Ananda saw the Buddha Amideva, 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 Dharma practitioners 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.

Then the Buddha said to Ananda and to the Bodhisattva Maitreya: “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.” “Have you also heard the great voice of Amideva, reaching everywhere, transforming all beings?” “Yes, I have.” “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 honor the Buddhas of the ten directions?” “Yes, I have.” “Have you also seen some inhabitants that are still in the embryonic state of their rebirth?” “Yes, I have. 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.”

Then the Bodhisattva Maitreya addressed the Buddha, asking: “World Honored One, what are the causes and conditions that make some of the inhabitants of that Land to be born in an embryonic state, while others are born by transformation?”

The Buddha replied to Maitreya: “There are beings who cultivate merit with a view to birth in that Land, yet harbor doubts about the Buddha’s inexhaustible wisdom, the Buddha’s inconceivable wisdom, the Buddha’s ineffable wisdom, the Buddha’s boundless wisdom, and the Buddha’s incomparable, unequalled, and unsurpassable supreme wisdom. They have doubts about these five; they have no faith. But they do believe in virtue and merit, and 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 teachings, and without seeing the great assembly of Disciples and Bodhisattvas. Thus, we talk about birth in an embryonic state.

“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-jewel⁵ lotus. They instantly acquire the same wonderful form, wisdom, and virtue as all Bodhisattvas there.

“Again, Maitreya, if Bodhisattvas from other Buddha Lands desire to see Amideva, revere, and make offerings to him and to the assemblies of Bodhisattvas and Disciples, then when those Bodhisattvas reach the end of their lives, they will be reborn in the Land of Amideva, spontaneously, directly, by transformation, in a seven-jewel lotus.

“Maitreya, the important thing to know is that those born by transformation are so through excellence of wisdom, 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 Disciples. Thus, they cannot make offerings, learn the discipline, or perform meritorious practices. You should know that it is because they lacked wisdom and harbored doubts during their previous lives.”

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 have incurred some offence, the king may have them ensconced there. 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.”

The Buddha said to Maitreya: “It is just so with the first group. Through doubt in Buddha’s wisdom, they are born in those palaces. They are not ill-treated, and nothing untoward happens to them. Nonetheless, for five hundred years they are separated from the Three Treasures, unable to honor 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.

“If they come to realize their fundamental error, experience contrition, and want to leave that place behind, they can immediately do so and go to where Amideva dwells. They can go and revere him with offerings, and they can go and visit countless other Tathagatas, and virtue can again be cultivated.

⁵ The seven factors of enlightenment: mindfulness, investigation, effort, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity

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.”

The Bodhisattva Maitreya asked the Buddha: “World Honored 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 koti⁶ of non-regressing Bodhisattvas will be born there from this world. Each has already revered 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. Not only the Bodhisattvas of my world will be born there, but also those from the Lands of other Buddhas from the ten directions.

“With the Buddha called Far Shining Light, a vast number of Bodhisattvas will be born into that Land of supreme bliss; with the Buddha called Treasure Store, a vast number will be born; with the Buddha called Immeasurable Sound, a vast number will be born; with the Buddha called Taste of Amrita, a vast number will be born; with the Buddha called Subduer of Dragons, a vast number will be born; with the Buddha called Power of Conquest, a vast number will be born; with the Buddha whose name is Lion, a vast number will be born; with the Buddha called Cathartic Light, a vast number will be born; with the Buddha called Pinnacle of Virtue, a vast number will be born; with the Buddha called Mountain of Excellent Virtue, a vast number will be born; with the Buddha called Lord of Humans, a vast number will be born; with the Buddha called Exquisite Blossom, there are innumerable Bodhisattvas all already in the state of non-retrogression, excellent in wisdom, who have revered 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; 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.

“Maitreya, these groups are just a miniscule sample. Bodhisattvas from innumerable Lands throughout the ten directions are born into the Land of Amideva. 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 born in that Land, it would be by no means enough. I have therefore just given a minute indication of them.”

The Buddha said to Maitreya: “Whoever, hearing the name of the Buddha Amideva, 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 teaching. 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 teaching, yet only a small portion who are able to do so. Anyone from among the whole throng of living beings who is able to hear this teaching will never fall back. Progress toward the highest enlightenment will be assured. Therefore, with singleness of heart and confidence without blemish, hold to this teaching, recite it, practice it and explain it to others.”

The Buddha said: “For the good of all have I expounded this teaching and enabled all to see the Buddha Amideva 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 Dharma will be lost and forgotten.

⁶ A koti = ten million (10,000,000); sixty-seven koti = 670,000,000.

Out of boundless compassion, I will preserve this teaching of the Pure Land, that it remain in the world one hundred years more. Those fortunate enough to encounter it will certainly attain the Way.”

The Buddha said to Maitreya: “Rare is it and hard 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 excellences of the Bodhisattvas; 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 teaching on the Pure Land, 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 practice as advised.”

When the World Honored One had completed his presentation of this teaching, 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 concerns 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.

As the Buddha concluded, the Bodhisattva Maitreya, all other Bodhisattvas, Ananda, all other Disciples, and everybody present —a huge assembly— having heard the Buddha’s words, rejoiced.