

Contemplation Sutra

The Sūtra on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Infinite Life

Translated by the Trepitaka Kālayaśas of the Western Regions
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Thus have I heard:

At one time, the Buddha was dwelling on Vulture Peak in the city of Rājagṛha, together with a large assembly of twelve hundred and fifty bhikṣus and thirty-two thousand bodhisattvas, with Mañjuśrī, the Dharma Prince, being the chief among them.

At that time, in the great city of Rājagṛha, there was a certain crown-prince named Ajātaśatru. He was under the instruction of a wicked friend, Devadatta. After arresting and confining his father, the King Bimbisāra, shut away within a chamber of sevenfold walls. He commanded all the ministers that none were permitted to go to see him. The principal consort of the realm, whose name was Vaidehī, who was loyal to the Great King, bathed and purified herself. Mixing flour with ghee and honey, she applied it to her body. Filling her necklaces with grape juice, she secretly offered it to the king. At that time, the Great King ate the flour-paste and drank the juice, then asked for water to rinse his mouth. Having finished rinsing his mouth, he respectfully joined his palms. Facing Vulture Peak, he reverently paid homage to the Bhagavān and said, “The Great Maudgalyāyana is my kinsman and friend. May he, moved by compassion, grant me the eight precepts.

At that time, Maudgalyāyana, swift as a falcon, quickly arrived before the king. Day after day, he thus conferred the eight precepts upon the king. The Bhagavān likewise sent Pūrṇa to expound the Dharma for the king. Such a length of time as three weeks passed, and because the king ate the flour and honey and was able to hear the Dharma, his complexion became peaceful and content. Then the gatekeeper said, “Your Majesty! The queen spreads flour-paste on her body, fills her ornaments with juice, and offers them to the king. The monks Mahāmaudgalyāyana and Pūrṇa come here through the air to expound the Dharma to him. It is impossible to stop them.”

At that time, upon hearing these words, Ajātaśatru angrily shouted to his mother, “Mother! You are my enemy because you are an accomplice to my enemy! Those evil śrāmaṇas! What delusive magic do they have that enabled that wicked king to remain alive for these many days?”

Immediately, he drew his sharp sword, desiring to kill his mother. At that moment, a wise and intelligent great minister named Candraprabha, along with Jīvaka, bowed to the king. They spoke, saying, “Great king! Your ministers have heard that the Veda Treatise Sūtras says that since the beginning of the kalpa, there have been evil kings who, because they coveted the throne, killed their fathers, as many as eighteen thousand. But we never heard of any who were unrighteous as to harm their mothers. If the king now commits this act of killing his mother, it will defile the Kṣatriya caste. You ministers cannot bear to hear this! You would be a caṇḍāla. Thus, we should not remain here.”

Then the two ministers, after stating these words, grasped their swords, stepped backwards, and withdrew. At that moment, Ajātaśatru, startled and frightened, called out to Jīvaka, “Are you not my friend?”

Jīvaka replied, “Great king! Please restrain yourself and do not kill your mother!”

When the king heard these words, he repented and sought help, immediately cast aside his sword, and he gave up his intention of killing his mother. He ordered the guards of the inner court, “Lock her away in the deep palace, not allowing her to come out again!”

Then Vaidehī, being imprisoned, became emaciated with grief and despair. Facing Ḡḍhrakūṭa from afar, she bowed to the Buddha and spoke these words, “O Bhagavān, in the past the Tathāgata would always send Ānanda to greet and comfort me. Now I am distressed and sorrowful. O Bhagavān, you are majestic and exalted, and so in no way shall I be able to see you. I wish that you would send Maudgalyāyana and the venerable Ānanda to come and meet me.”

When she had said these words, weeping and shedding tears like a shower of rain, she bowed down to the Buddha from afar. Even before she raised her head, at that moment, the Bhagavān immediately ordered Mahāmaudgalyāyana and Ānanda to go to her through the air. The Buddha himself disappeared from Ḡḍhrakūṭa and appeared in the royal palace. Then, when Vaidehī raised her head after bowing, she saw before her the Bhagavān, Śākyamuni Buddha. His body was of purple-gold colour, seated on a hundred-jewelled flower. Maudgalyāyana attended on his left, and Ānanda was on his right. Śakra, Brahmā, and the World-Protecting Devas, and all the devas in the sky were scattering everywhere celestial flowers like rain as an offering.

At the moment Vaidehī saw the Bhagavān, she tore off her pearl necklaces, threw herself on the ground with her entire body and cried out to the Buddha. She said to the Buddha, “O Bhagavān! What past karma of mine caused me to give birth to this evil son? Bhagavān, what other causes and conditions are there that led you to become relatives with Devadatta? I only pray, Bhagavān, that you will extensively preach to me about a place free from misery, where I may be reborn, as I do not enjoy this defiled and wicked world of Jambudvīpa. This defiled and wicked place is overflowing and full of hells, hungry ghosts, and rebirth as an animal, and is mostly an assemblage of unwholesome karma. I pray that in the future, I shall not hear wicked sounds nor see wicked people. Now I turn to the Bhagavān, I prostrate with my five limbs, and seek mercy in repentance. I only pray, O Sun-like Buddha, that you would teach me how to visualise a place perfected by pure and undefiled acts.”

At that moment, the Bhagavān emitted a light from between his eyebrows that was golden in colour, universally illuminating the innumerable worlds of the ten directions. Then, it returned and remained at the Buddha’s crown, transforming into a golden dais resembling Mount Sumeru. The pure and marvellous buddha-lands of the ten directions all manifested therein. Some buddha-lands were formed by combining the seven treasures; others were purely lotus flowers; others

were like the palaces of the Heaven of Sovereignty; others were like crystal mirrors; the lands in the ten directions all appeared therein. There were these kinds of innumerable buddha-lands that were adorned, manifest, and worth beholding, and made visible and seen by Vaidehī. Then, Vaidehī said to the Buddha, “O Bhagavān! While these buddha-lands are pure, and all of them are radiant, I now wish to be born in Amida’s land of Utmost Bliss. I beseech you, Bhagavān! Teach me how to contemplate! Teach me how to attain right perception!”

At that moment, the Bhagavān immediately smiled, and five-coloured lights emanated from the Buddha’s mouth, each ray shining upon the crown of King Bimbisāra’s head. At that moment, although the Great King was in solitary confinement, his mind’s eye was unobstructed, and he distantly saw the Bhagavān and bowed his head. He spontaneously progressed and became an anāgāmin. At that moment, the Bhagavān addressed Vaidehī, “Do you know now? Amida Buddha is not far away from here. You should concentrate your mind and carefully observe those in that land who have accomplished pure conduct. I shall now, for your benefit, elaborate on this by using various similes. This will also allow those of future generations who wish to cultivate pure conduct to be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Those who wish to be born in the land should cultivate the three merits: First, have filial piety towards parents, serve your teachers and elders, cultivate a compassionate mind and refrain from killing, and cultivate the ten wholesome deeds. Second, take refuge in the triple gem, complete all the precepts, and do not violate deportment rules. Third, arouse bodhicitta, have deep faith in cause and effect, read and recite the Mahāyāna sūtras, and encourage others to advance in practice. These three matters are called pure karma.”

The Buddha told Vaidehī, “Do you understand now? These three kinds of karma are the true cause of the pure activity of all the buddhas of the three times of the past, future, and present.”

The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, “Listen attentively! Listen attentively! Consider this well. The Tathāgata now, for the sake of all beings in the future, who are harmed by the afflictions as robbers, will speak of pure acts. Excellent, Vaidehī! Your questions about this matter were excellent! Ānanda, you must take up and bear this teaching, and for the multitude, widely proclaim the Buddha’s words. I, the Tathāgata, shall now teach Vaidehī and all the beings of the future to contemplate the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Through the Buddha’s power, you will be able to see the pure land as if one were looking at one’s own face in a clear mirror. Seeing the most marvellous and pleasing things in that land, because the mind is joyful, you will immediately attain patience at the non-arising of dharmas.”

The Buddha said to Vaidehī, “You are merely an ordinary person. Your mind is weak. You have yet to acquire the divine eye, and you are unable to see far. The buddha tathāgatas have skilful means, by which you are enabled to see.”

Then Vaidehī said to the Buddha, “Bhagavān! I now, through the Buddha’s

power, see that land! After the Buddha passes into Nirvāṇa, when all sentient beings will be impure, evil, and unwholesome, oppressed by the five sufferings, how will they be able to see Amida Buddha's Land of Ultimate Bliss?"

The Buddha told Vaidehī, "You and all sentient beings should concentrate your mind, fix your minds on one point, and contemplate the Western direction. How should one visualise? In general, for those who visualise, all sentient beings with eyes, except for those born blind, having looked at the setting sun, should visualise the mind in determination, sit upright facing west, observe the sun minutely, making the mind firmly remain, and focus without wavering. See the sun about to set, shaped like a suspended drum. After seeing the sun, whether you close or open your eyes, you will still see it clearly. This is called the Contemplation of the Sun, the first contemplation. Those who practise this contemplation are said to have right contemplation. If one contemplates in another manner, it is called wrong contemplation."

The Buddha addressed Ānanda and Vaidehī: "Once the first contemplation is accomplished, next, visualise the water. You should visualise that everything in the Western direction is entirely the great element of water. See the water as clear and still, making it clear in your mind, without any scattered thoughts. Having seen the water, you should then cultivate the visualisation of ice. Seeing the ice shining and transparent, cultivate the visualisation of beryl. Once this visualisation is complete, you will see a ground of beryl, transparent and illuminating inside and out. Below, there are columns made of vajra and the seven jewels, with vajra and the seven treasures, supporting a beryl ground. Their banners extend in all eight directions, with eight fully formed corners. In each direction, they are made of a hundred treasures. Each jewelled pearl upon them has a thousand rays of light. Each ray of light has eighty-four thousand colours, reflecting the beryl ground like hundreds of millions of suns; it is impossible to see them fully. Above the beryl ground, golden ropes are mixed and interwoven. The seven jewels delimit them, and their partitions are quite distinct. In each and every jewel there are five hundred colours of light. These rays of light are like flowers, and also like stars and the moon, suspended in space, forming a platform of light. There are thousands and thousands of towers and pavilions, made by combining hundreds of treasures. On both sides of the platform, there are hundreds of millions of flower banners and countless musical instruments used for decoration. Eight pure breezes come out from the radiance, playing these musical instruments, explaining suffering, emptiness, impermanence and the sound of no-self. This is called the Contemplation of the Water, the second contemplation."

"When this contemplation is completed, visualise each contemplation, making them extremely clear. Whether the eyes are closed or open, do not let it be lost, except when you are eating your meal, constantly recalling its details. Those who practise this contemplation are said to have right contemplation. If one contemplates in another manner, it is called incorrect contemplation."

The Buddha told Ānanda and Vaidehī, "When the water contemplation is

completed, it is called a rough vision of the ground of the Land of Utmost Bliss. If one attains this samādhi and sees the ground of that land, it is perfectly clear and distinct, and it will be impossible to describe it in detail. This is called the Contemplation of the Ground, the third contemplation.”

The Buddha told Ānanda, ” You should bear these words of the Buddha for the sake of all beings in the future who wish to escape suffering. Expound this method of contemplating the ground. If one has visualised that ground, one will be free from the karmic transgressions of eighty million kalpas of birth and death. Having abandoned this body and been reborn, one will surely be born in the Pure Land. Do not doubt this! Having visualised in this way is called right contemplation. If one contemplates in another manner, it is called wrong contemplation.”

The Buddha told Ānanda and Vaidehī, “After the Contemplation of the Earth is completed, next is the Contemplation of the Jewelled Trees. In visualising the jewelled trees, visualise each one by one, creating an image of them in seven-fold rows. Each and every tree is eight thousand yojanas in measure. Those jewelled trees are fully endowed with flowers and leaves of the seven treasures. Each and every flower and leaf displays the colours of marvellous treasures. The beryl-colours emit a golden light; the crystal-colours emit a red light; agate-colours emit a sapphire light; the sapphire-colours a green pearl light. Coral, amber, and all the other treasures are so adorned. Splendid nets of pearls cover the trees. On each tree, there are seven layers of nets. Between each layer of nets, there are five hundred koṭis of wondrous flower palaces resembling the palace of Brahmā. Heavenly children naturally reside within them. Each child wears a garland made of five hundred koṭis of precious treasures, like those adorning Śakra’s crown. The light of these treasures shines for one hundred yojanas, as if it were the combined light of one hundred koṭis of suns and moons. These treasures cannot be fully named, but among all jewels, they have the most beautiful colours. These jewelled trees align perfectly, with their leaves touching one another. Among the dense foliage, various wondrous flowers blossom, and these flowers naturally bear fruits of seven jewels. Each leaf of the trees is precisely twenty-five yojanas in length and width. Each leaf displays a thousand colours and one hundred different images like a heavenly garland. They have many wondrous flowers which display the colour of Jambūnadā gold, which revolve like fire wheels, and gracefully spin among the leaves. Various fruits appear from them, and they have a great radiance that transforms into countless jewelled canopies, banners, and flags. Within these jewelled canopies, all the works of all the buddhas of the three thousand great thousand cosmoses appear illuminated. The buddha-lands of the ten directions are also seen in them. Having seen those trees, one should also contemplate them one by one. Contemplate and see the tree trunks, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits, making them all clear and distinct. This is called the Contemplation of the Trees, the fourth contemplation. Having visualised in this way is called right contemplation. If one contemplates in another manner, it is called wrong contemplation.

The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, “After completing the Contemplation of the Trees, next, visualise the water. If you wish to visualise the water, in the land of Ultimate Bliss, there are eight pools of water. Each pool is made of the seven jewels. These jewels are soft and originate from the wish-fulfilling king-maṇi-gem, and the water divides into fourteen streams. Each stream has the colour of the seven jewels. Their channels are made of gold, and beneath each channel, it has variegated vajra forms as its sandbed. In each stream of water, there are sixty million lotus flowers made of the seven jewels. Each lotus flower is perfectly round and precisely twelve yojanas in circumference. The jewelled water flows amidst the flowers, and it meanders between the trees. It produces exquisite sounds, proclaiming the doctrines of suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and no-self, as well as the pāramitās; moreover, it also praises the major and minor marks of the buddhas. The king of wish-fulfilling maṇi-gems gives rise to golden, subtle, and radiant light, which transforms into birds of a hundred jewelled colours, singing in harmonious, elegant, and plaintive tones, constantly praising the mindfulness of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. This is called the Contemplation of the Water with the Eight Attributes [i.e., jewelled ponds], the fifth contemplation. Those who practise this contemplation are said to have right contemplation. If one contemplates in another manner, it is called wrong contemplation.”

The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī: “In each aspect of the jewelled land, in each region, there are five hundred koṭīs of jewelled pavilions. Within these pavilions are countless devas who play heavenly music. Furthermore, there are musical instruments, suspended in empty space like heavenly jewelled banners, which play by themselves without being struck. From these various sounds, all proclaim the mindfulness of the Buddha, mindfulness of the Dharma, and mindfulness of the Bhikṣu Saṅgha. When this contemplation is accomplished, it is called a rough vision of the Land of Utmost Bliss’ jewelled trees, jewelled ground, and jewelled ponds. This is the contemplation of the overall appearance of the land, the sixth contemplation. Those who have seen this remove countless kalpas of extremely heavy negative karma. After death, they will certainly be born in that land. If one performs this contemplation, they are said to have right contemplation. If one contemplates in another manner, it is called wrong contemplation.”

The Buddha told Ānanda and Vaidehī, “Listen attentively! Listen attentively! Consider this well. I shall separately explain to you the Dharma that eliminates suffering and defilements. You should bear in mind, uphold this, and wisely explain it to the great assembly.”

At that time, when this was said, the Buddha of Immeasurable Life stood in the sky. The two great bodhisattvas, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, attended him, standing on his left and right, respectively. His radiant light was so blazing and intense that it could not be fully seen. Even to the golden colour of the sands of a hundred thousand Jambūnādās, it could not be compared. Then Vaidehī saw the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, touched his feet, and made

obeisance. She addressed the Buddha, saying, “O Bhagavān! Now, through the power of the Buddha, I am able to see the Buddha of Immeasurable Life and the two bodhisattvas. How should future sentient beings contemplate the Buddha of Immeasurable Life and the two bodhisattvas?”

The Buddha told Vaidehī, “If one wishes to contemplate that Buddha, one should generate the visualisation. Above the seven-jewelled ground, one should visualise the flowers; have the lotus flowers display the colours of hundreds of thousands of jewels. Each has eighty-four thousand veins, like celestial paintings. Each and every vein has eighty-four thousand rays of light, clearly and distinctly visible, allowing all to see them. The smaller flower petals measure two hundred and fifty yojanas in length and width. Such lotus flowers have eighty-four thousand large petals, and between each and every petal, there are hundreds of millions of king-maṇi-jewels which serve as adornments. Each and every maṇi jewel emits a thousand rays of light, and this light is like a canopy made of the seven jewels, which covers the entire ground. Śakrābhilagna maṇi jewels are used as the base. This lotus dais is adorned with eighty-thousand vajra kiṃśuka jewels, Brahmā maṇi jewels, and wondrous pearl nets as interweaving adornments. On that dais, there are spontaneously arising four-jewelled banner poles. Each and every jewelled banner pole is like hundreds of millions of Mount Sumerus. The jewelled veils on the banners are like those of the palace of Yama’s heaven, and are further adorned with five hundred billion, subtly, wondrous jewelled pearls. Each and every jewelled pearl has eighty-four thousand rays of light. Each and every ray of light produces eighty-four thousand different kinds of golden colours. Each and every golden colour pervades that jewelled land, transforming everywhere, and manifesting different appearances. Sometimes it is a vajra dais, sometimes a pearl net, sometimes a cloud of mixed flowers, freely manifesting transformations in the ten directions, and performing Buddha activities. This is the Contemplation of the Lotus Throne, the seventh contemplation.

The Buddha addressed Ānanda, “These wondrous flowers were originally formed by the Bhikṣu Dharmākara’s Vow power. Those who wish to see that Buddha should first practise this visualisation of the wondrous lotus throne. When engaging in this visualisation, one should not engaged in scattered visualisation; one should contemplate each and every aspect—each leaf, each jewel, each light, each platform, each canopy—making all of them distinct and clear, as if looking at your own reflection in a mirror. When this contemplation is accomplished, one will eradicate the karmic faults of birth and death for five hundred koṭis of kalpas, and will certainly be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. If one performs this contemplation in this way, one is said to have right contemplation. If one visualises otherwise than this, it is called wrong contemplation.

The Buddha addressed Ānanda, “Having seen this, next you should visualise the Buddha. Why is that? All buddha tathāgatas are the embodiment of the Dharma-realm, which for all sentient beings, pervades their thoughts in one’s mental visualisation. Therefore, when you visualise the Buddha in your minds, this mind is precisely the thirty-two major marks of a great man and the eighty

minor marks. This mind creates the Buddha; this mind is the Buddha. The ocean-like fact that all buddhas are truly omniscient derives its source from one's own mind and thought. Therefore, one should apply your thought with undivided attention, and carefully visualise that Buddha, Tathāgata, Arhat, Samyak-saṃbuddha. Visualise that Buddha! First, one should visualise the image of him. Whether your eyes are open or closed, you will see his jewelled image, the colour of Jambūnadā gold sitting on that lotus. When the image is placed on its seat, your mental vision will become clear. Then you will be able to see him clearly and distinctly: the adornment of the Land of Ultimate Bliss, adorned by the seven precious jewels; the jewelled ground, the jewelled ponds, the rows of jewelled trees; the jewelled canopies of the devas covering the trees; and the nets of various jewels filling the sky. In seeing these things, let them be clear and distinct, just as if you were looking at your palm. Having seen this, one should further create a large lotus flower on the left side of the Buddha, exactly equal in every way to the aforementioned lotus flower. Then, visualise another large lotus flower on the right side of the Buddha. Imagine an image of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara sitting on the jewelled lotus throne on the left, also emitting golden light exactly like that of the Buddha before. Then, imagine an image of Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta sitting on the jewelled lotus throne on the right. When this visualisation is accomplished, the images of the Buddha and the bodhisattvas will all emit wondrous light, the light, golden in colour, illuminating all the jewelled trees. Under each tree there are also three lotus flowers. On each lotus flower, there is an image of one Buddha and two bodhisattvas. These images fill that land everywhere. When this visualisation is accomplished, the practitioner should hear the sound of flowing water, light, and all the jewelled trees, ruddy shelducks, mandarin ducks, all proclaiming the wondrous Dharma. Whether exiting samādhi or entering samādhi, the practitioner constantly hears the wondrous Dharma. What the practitioner hears, upon emerging from samādhi, one must mindfully uphold without abandoning it. Make it accord with the sūtras. If it does not accord, it was a delusive conceptualisation. If it accords, then it was a perception of the Land of Ultimate Bliss. This is a coarse visualisation of seeing the Land of Utmost Bliss. This is the Contemplation of the Image, the eighth contemplation. If one performs this contemplation, one eradicates the karmic transgressions of birth and death from countless millions of kalpas, and in the present body, will attain the Nembutsu Samādhi. If one performs this contemplation in this way, one is said to have right contemplation. If one visualises otherwise than this, it is called wrong contemplation."

The Buddha told Ānanda and Vaidehī: "When this visualisation is accomplished, next you should further visualise the physical marks and light of the Buddha of Infinite Life. Ānanda, you should know that the body of the Buddha of Infinite Life is a hundred thousand million times superior to the Yama heavens' Jambūnadā rivers' golden colour. The Buddha's body is sixty koṭis of nayutas of yojanas tall, numbering more than the grains of sand in the Ganges River. Between his eyebrows, his white ūṇā spirals clockwise, like five Sumeru moun-

tains. The Buddha's eyes are pure, like the water of the four great oceans; they are clear and distinct. Brilliant light emanates from all the pores of his body, each ray being like Mount Sumeru. That Buddha's halo is also like one hundred billion cosmoses of three thousand great thousands worlds. Within the halo, there are a million koṭis of nayutas of transformation buddhas, as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges River. Each and every transformation buddha also has a multitude of countless transformation bodhisattvas as attendants. The Buddha of Infinite Life has eighty-four thousand marks. Each mark possesses eighty-four thousand minor marks of excellence. Each minor mark of excellence has eighty-four thousand rays of light. Each ray of light universally illuminates the worlds of the ten directions; embracing and not forsaking any beings who recollect the Buddha, without abandoning any of them. His light and major and minor marks, and the manifested buddhas, cannot be fully described. One should simply recollect them by focusing your thoughts and bringing them into clear focus. Those who see this thus, immediately see all the buddhas of the ten directions. Because of seeing all the buddhas, this is called the Nembutsu Samādhi. Those who practise this contemplation are called those who contemplate all buddha-bodies. Because of contemplating the Buddha-body, the Buddha-mind is also seen. The Buddha-mind is the great compassion, which, with unconditional kindness, embraces all sentient beings. Those who practise this contemplation, upon abandoning this body and rebirth, are born before all buddhas and obtain the patience at the non-arising of dharmas. Therefore, the wise should focus their minds and carefully contemplate the Buddha of Infinite Life. Those who contemplate the Buddha of Infinite Life begin with contemplating one fine characteristic, focusing only on the white ūṛṇā mark between his eyebrows, making it extremely clear. Those who see the mark of the white ūṛṇā between his eyebrows will naturally see the eighty-four thousand fine characteristics. Those who see the Buddha of Infinite Life, are in fact seeing the countless buddhas in the ten directions. Because one can see the countless buddhas, the buddhas will appear before one and one will receive a prediction here and now. This is the general visualisation of all his forms, the ninth contemplation. If one performs this contemplation in this way, one is said to have right contemplation. If one visualises otherwise than this, it is called wrong contemplation."

The Buddha addressed Ānanda and Vaidehī, "Having seen the Buddha of Immeasurable Life clearly and distinctly, next you should also contemplate the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. This Bodhisattva's height is eighty koṭis of nayutas of Ganges' sands of yojanas, his body is purple-gold in colour, he has an uṣṇīṣa on his head, a halo around his neck, and his face is one hundred thousand yojanas in each direction. Within his halo are five hundred transformation buddhas, like Śākyamuni. Each transformation buddha has five hundred bodhisattvas with countless devas serving as attendants. Within the light emanating from his entire body, the forms and appearances of beings in the five realms all manifest within it. His crown, of Śakrābhilagna vaidūryamaṇi jewels, has a standing transformation buddha within it, who is twenty-five yojanas in height.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's face is the colour of Jambūnādā gold. Between his eyebrows, his ūṣṇa possesses all the colours of the seven treasures, from which eighty-four thousand kinds of light emanate. Each ray of light contains innumerable, countless, hundreds of thousands of transformation buddhas. Each transformation buddha has countless transformed bodhisattvas as attendants. They freely manifest and fill the worlds of the ten directions. His arms are the colour of red lotuses. There are eighty koṭis of rays of light that adorn him as a garland. Within that garland, all kinds of ornaments are universally manifested." The palms of his hands appear as five hundred koṭis of lotuses of mixed colours. His hands have ten fingertips, and each fingertip has eighty-four thousand marks, like signet rings. Each mark has eighty-four thousand colours, and each colour has eighty-four thousand rays. This light is soft and pervades all things. With these precious hands, he welcomes and guides sentient beings. When he lifts one of his feet, beneath them appears the mark of a thousand-spoked wheel, which naturally transforms into five hundred billion platforms of light. When he places his feet down, vajra and maṇi flowers are scattered, without anywhere not being completely filled. His remaining physical marks are all complete with excellent characteristics, not different from the Buddha, except for his uṣṇīṣa on his head, and the mark of the invisible crown [of the Tathāgata], these are not equal to those of the Bhagavān. This is called the Contemplation of the True form of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, the tenth contemplation."

The Buddha told Ānanda, "If one wishes to contemplate the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, one should perform this contemplation. Those who practise this contemplation will not encounter any misfortune, will cleanse karmic obstructions, and remove the karmic transgressions of countless kalpas of birth and death. Merely by hearing the name of such a bodhisattva, one obtains innumerable merits, how much more so if one earnestly visualises him! If one wishes to contemplate Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, they should first contemplate the uṣṇīṣa on the top of his head, then contemplate his divine crown. The remaining marks should also be contemplated in order, making them clear and distinct, as if you were looking at your palm. If one performs this contemplation in this way, one is said to have right contemplation. If one visualises otherwise than this, it is called wrong contemplation."

The Buddha told Ānanda and Vaidehī, "Next, visualise Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva. This bodhisattva's height and size are also like those of Avalokiteśvara. The halo of light rays around his face is one hundred and twenty-five yojanas, and it shines for two hundred and fifty yojanas. The light from his entire body illuminates the lands of the ten directions, appearing as purple-gold in colour. Sentient beings who have affinity with him are all able to see him. Just by seeing the light from a single pore of this bodhisattva's hair, one immediately sees the pure and wondrous light of the innumerable buddhas of the ten directions. Therefore, this bodhisattva is known as "Boundless Light." Because he universally illuminates everything with the light of wisdom, and enables beings to be free from the three unfortunate realms and attain unsurpassed power, this bodhisattva is called "Attained of Great Strength" (Mahāsthāmaprāpta). This Bodhisattva's jewelled

divine crown has five hundred jewelled lotus flowers. Each jewelled flower has five hundred jewelled platforms. Within each platform, the vast and extensive forms of all the pure and wondrous buddha-lands of the ten directions all manifest within it. The uṣṇīṣa on the crown of his head is like a padma lotus flower. On his head, there is a jewelled vase filled with all kinds of light, which universally performs Buddha-activities. His remaining physical marks are like those of Avalokiteśvara, without any difference. When this bodhisattva walks, all the worlds of the ten directions shake, and wherever the earth shakes, five hundred koṭis of jewelled flowers appear. Each jewelled flower is splendid and dazzling, just like the Land of Ultimate Bliss. When this bodhisattva sits, the lands of seven jewels all shake at once. From the buddha-land of Golden Light below, to the buddha-land of the King of Light above, within the space between them, the innumerable dust-like multitudes of emanated Buddhas of Immeasurable Life, and emanated Avalokiteśvaras and Mahāsthāmaprāptas, all gather like clouds in the Land of Utmost Bliss. They fill the sky, seated on lotus thrones, preaching the wondrous Dharma to save suffering sentient beings. Those who perform this visualisation are said to have perceived Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva. This is the Contemplation of the Bodily Form of Mahāsthāmaprāpta, the eleventh contemplation. Those who contemplate this bodhisattva eliminate the karmic transgressions of birth and death accumulated over countless asaṃkhyeya kalpas. If one performs this contemplation, one will no longer dwell in the womb, but constantly wander through the pure and exquisite lands of the buddhas. When this contemplation is completed, it is called the complete contemplation of Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta. If one performs this contemplation in this way, one is said to have right contemplation. If one visualises otherwise than this, it is called wrong contemplation.”

The Buddha told Ānanda and Vaidehī, “When one has seen this, one should generate the thought in one’s mind that one is born in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, sitting in the lotus position on a lotus flower. Visualise the lotus flower closing, and visualise the lotus flower opening. When the lotus flower opens, imagine five hundred coloured rays of light shining upon your body. Visualise your eyes opening, seeing buddhas and bodhisattvas filling the entire sky; water, birds, tree groves, and all the buddhas. The sounds that emerge from them all preach the wondrous Dharma in accord with the twelve divisions of the scriptures. If, when you emerge from this meditative state, you retain this experience, and do not forget, then, having seen this, it is called seeing the Land of Ultimate Bliss of the Buddha of Infinite Life. This is the Universal Contemplation, the twelfth visualisation. The Buddha of Infinite Life’s innumerable transformation bodies, together with Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, will always come to where the practitioner is. If one performs this contemplation in this way, one is said to have right contemplation. If one visualises otherwise than this, it is called wrong contemplation.”

The Buddha told Ānanda and Vaidehī, “Those who sincerely desire to be born in the Western Direction, should first visualise a sixteen-foot tall figure upon the water of a pond. As previously stated, the body of the Buddha

of Immeasurable Life is immeasurable, beyond the mental ability of ordinary beings. However, that Tathāgata's power of past vows will ensure that those who contemplate him will certainly succeed. Just by visualising the Buddha's image brings innumerable blessings, how much more so contemplating all the complete physical characteristics of the Buddha? Amida Buddha, with supernormal powers and perfect mastery, sometimes manifests a large body filling the entire sky, sometimes a small body, sixteen or eight feet tall. The manifested forms are all the colour of true gold, with a halo of transformed buddhas and jewelled lotuses as described above. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and Mahāsthāmaprāpta are in all places together. Sentient beings, only by visualising the marks on their heads, will know it is Avalokiteśvara or know it is Mahāsthāmaprāpta. These two bodhisattvas assist Amida Buddha in universally transforming all. This is called the Miscellaneous Contemplation, the thirteenth contemplation. If one performs this contemplation in this way, one is said to have right contemplation. If one visualises otherwise than this, it is called wrong contemplation."

The Buddha told Ānanda and Vaidehī, "Generally, those who are born in the Western Land are of nine levels. As for those born in the Highest Level of the Highest Grade, if there are sentient beings who desire birth in that land, who cultivate three minds, they will attain rebirth. What are the three? The first is the Utmost Sincere Mind. The second is the Profound Mind. The third is the Mind of Merit-Transference and Vow-Arousal. Those who possess these three minds will certainly be born in that land. Furthermore, there are three kinds of sentient beings who will attain rebirth there. What are the three? First, those with a compassionate mind who do not kill, and are endowed with all precepts and conduct. Second, those who recite the Mahāyāna Vaipulya Sūtras. Third, those who cultivate the six recollections, dedicating merits and arousing a vow to be born in that land. Performing these meritorious deeds, from one day up to seven days, they will attain rebirth there. When that person is born in that land, because this person is intensely diligent and vigorous, Amida Tathāgata, with Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, together with countless transformation buddhas and hundreds of thousands of bhikṣus and a great śrāvaka assembly, uncountable devas, and seven-jewelled palaces, will arrive before the practitioner, with Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva holding a vajra dais together with Mahāsthāmaprāpta. Amida Buddha will emit a great radiance, illuminating the practitioner's body, and together with the bodhisattvas, he will extend his hands in welcome. Avalokiteśvara, Mahāsthāmaprāpta and countless bodhisattvas will praise the practitioner, and exhort and encourage their mind. Upon seeing this, the practitioner's mind will be filled with joy and elation. He will see himself riding upon the vajra dais, following behind the buddha. In the time it takes to snap one's fingers, one will be born in that land. After being born in that land, one sees the Buddha's form-body, endowed with all the marks, sees all the bodhisattvas endowed with their marks, and the radiant jewelled groves, and hears an exposition of the wondrous Dharma. Having heard it, one will immediately awaken to the patience at the non-arising of Dharmas. In an instant, one will serve all buddhas, perceive the worlds in the ten directions,

receive prophecies in order before all the buddhas, and then return to one's original land [in the West]. One will also obtain countless hundreds of thousands of dhāraṇī doors. This is called the Highest Level of the Highest Grade of birth.

“For those of the Middle Level of the Highest Grade, they need not necessarily uphold, recite, and study the Vaipulya sūtras. They are skilled in understanding their meaning and significance, and their minds are not disturbed by hearing the ultimate truth. They deeply believe in cause and effect and do not denigrate the Mahāyāna. With this merit, they dedicate their aspiration to be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. When a person who practices this is about to die, Amida Buddha, along with Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, surrounded by countless great assemblies and retinues, will hold a purple-golden dais before them, and praise them, saying, ‘O Son of the Dharma! You practise the Mahāyāna and understand the ultimate truth; therefore, I have now come to welcome you!’

“With thousands of transformed buddhas, they extend their hands, and the practitioner sees himself seated on the purple-gold dais, joining his palms and interlacing his fingers, praising and extolling all the buddhas. In a thought-moment, he is born in that land, in the pond of seven treasures. This purple golden dais is like a great jewelled flower, and it opens after one night. The practitioner's body becomes the colour of burnished purple gold, and beneath his feet are also seven-jewelled lotus flowers. The Buddha and the bodhisattvas together emit light, which brightly illuminates the practitioner's body, and their eyes immediately open and become clear. Due to their previous habitual tendencies, they universally hear all sounds, which purely speak of the profoundest ultimate truth. They immediately descend from the golden dais, bow to the Buddha with palms joined, and praise and extol the Bhagavān. After seven days, at the appropriate time, they immediately attain anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi, and attain non-retrogression. At the appropriate time, they can fly in the ten directions to serve all the buddhas and cultivate various samādhis in the presence of all the buddhas. After a minor kalpa, those on this level will attain the patience at the non-arising of dharmas, and [the buddhas] appear before them and give them prophecies. This is called the Middle Level of the Highest Grade of birth.”

“The Lowest Level of the Highest Grade are beings who also believe in cause and effect. They do not denigrate the Mahāyāna, but have merely generated the aspiration for the highest awakening. With this merit, they aspire to be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. When such an aspirant is about to die, Amida Buddha, Avalokiteśvara, and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, along with their retinue, holding lotus flowers, transform into five hundred transformation buddhas to welcome this person. The five hundred transformation buddhas simultaneously offer their hands and utter these words of praise, ‘O son of the Dharma! You are now pure, having generated the aspiration for the highest awakening. We have come to welcome you.’

“When they see this, they will immediately see themselves seated on a golden lotus flower. Once seated, the flower closes, and following behind the bhagavāns,

they will immediately be born in the seven-jewelled pond. After one day and one night, the lotus flower will open. Within seven days, they will be able to see the Buddha. Although they see the Buddha's body, their minds are not yet clear about his numerous excellent marks. After three weeks, they will be able to see them clearly. They will hear many sounds and voices, all proclaiming the wondrous Dharma. Travelling in all the ten directions, they will make offerings to all the buddhas. In the presence of all the buddhas, they will hear the profound Dharma, and after three minor kalpas, they will attain the hundred Dharma gates of illumination and abide in the Stage of Joy. This is called the Lowest Level of the Highest Grade of birth. This is called the Contemplation of the Highest Grade, the fourteenth contemplation. If one performs this contemplation in this way, one is said to have right contemplation. If one visualises otherwise than this, it is called wrong contemplation."

The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, the Highest Level of the Middle Grade of birth is as follows: If there are sentient beings who uphold the five precepts, maintain the eight precepts and observe fasts, cultivate various precepts, do not commit the five grave offences, and are without other transgressions, and they transfer the wholesome merits acquired to birth in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, when their life is about to end, Amida Buddha, together with many bhikṣus, surrounded by their retinue, emit golden light to where that person is, expounding on suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and no-self, and praising the renunciation of secular life as a means to be free from all suffering. Upon seeing this, the practitioner's mind will be filled with great joy. Seeing themselves seated on a lotus dais, they will kneel, place their palms together, and pay homage to the Buddha. Before even raising their head, they will attain rebirth in the Land of Utmost Bliss. The lotus flower immediately opens. When the flower opens, they will hear the voices of the assembly praising the Four Noble Truths. At that time, they will immediately attain arhatship, the three insights, the six supernormal powers, and possess the eight liberations. This is called the Highest Level of the Middle Grade of birth."

"The Middle Level of the Middle Grade of birth is as follows: If there are sentient beings who, for one day and night, maintain the eight precepts and fast, or for one day and night, maintain the śrāmaṇera precepts, or for one day and night, maintain the full precepts, without any deficiency in deportment, with this merit, they transfer it, aspiring to be born in the Land of Utmost Bliss. Perfumed by the virtue of upholding the precepts, such practitioners, when their life is about to end, will see Amida Buddha and his retinue emitting golden light, holding a seven-jewelled lotus flower, and coming before the practitioner. The practitioner will then hear a voice in the air praising them, saying, 'O son of good family! Because you are a virtuous person, having complied with the teachings of the buddhas of the three times, I have come to welcome you.'

"The practitioner will then see themselves seated on a lotus flower. The lotus flower will then close, and they will be born in the Land of Utmost Bliss in the Western Direction, in the jewelled pond. After seven days, the lotus flower

will then open. When the flower opens, they will open their eyes, place their palms together, and praise the Bhagavān. They hear the Dharma and rejoice and attain the state of a srota-āpanna. After half a kalpa, they will become an arhat. This is called the Middle Level of the Middle Grade of birth.

“The Lowest Level of the Middle Grade of birth is as follows: If a son of good family or daughter of good family is filial to their parents, and performs benevolent deeds for others, when this person’s life is about to end, they will encounter a good and virtuous friend who extensively explains the delights of Amida’s land, and also explains to them Bhikṣu Dharmākara’s great Forty-Eight Vows. Upon hearing this, when they reach the end of their life, just like a strong man contracting and extending his arm, they will immediately be born in the Western Land of Utmost Bliss. Seven days after their birth there, they encounter Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta. Having heard the Dharma, they will rejoice and attain the fruit of a srota-āpanna. Having passed one minor kalpa, they will become an arhat. This is called the Lowest Level of the Middle Grade of birth. This is called the Contemplation of the Middle Grade, the fifteenth contemplation. If one performs this contemplation in this way, one is said to have right contemplation. If one visualises otherwise than this, it is called wrong contemplation.”

The Buddha told Ānanda and Vaidehī, “The Highest Level of the Lowest Grade of birth is as follows: When such a sentient being engages in many evil deeds, although they do not slander the Vaipulya sūtras, such foolish people engage in many evil things and feel no sense of shame. When their life is about to end, they meet a good and virtuous friend who praises the titles of the scriptures of the Mahāyāna and twelve divisions. By hearing the names of these scriptures, they eliminate extremely grave evil karma from a thousand kalpas. The wise person then teaches them to join their palms and recite, ‘Namo Amida Buddha!’ By reciting the Buddha’s name, they eliminate the karmic transgressions of saṃsāra from fifty million kalpas. At that time, the Buddha immediately sends forth a transformation buddha, a transformation Avalokiteśvara, and a transformation Mahāsthāmaprāpta. They arrive before the practitioner and say in praise, ‘Excellent! O son of good family! Because you have recited the Buddha’s name, all your karmic transgressions are extinguished. We have come to welcome you.’

“Having said this, the practitioner immediately sees the light of the transformation buddha filling the entire room. Having seen this, they rejoice. When they reach the end of their life, they will see themselves riding a jewelled lotus flower, following behind the transformation buddha and being born in the jewelled pond. After seven weeks, the lotus flower then opens. When the flower opens, greatly compassionate Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva will emit great light, stand before that person, and expound the profound twelve divisions of scriptures. After ten minor kalpas, he will attain a hundred Dharma gates of illumination and enter the first ground. This is called the Highest Level of the Lowest Grade of birth. Upon hearing the Buddha’s name, the Dharma’s name, and the Saṅgha’s name—that is, the names of the Triple Gem—one will

attain rebirth.

The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, “The Middle Level of the Lowest Grade of birth is as follows: If there are sentient beings who destroy and violate the five precepts, the eight precepts, or the full precepts, or are such foolish people as those who steal monastic possessions, steal the property of the Saṅgha’s residence, give impure Dharma talks, have no sense of shame or remorse, and their own mind defiles themselves with various evils—such evil-doers, due to their unwholesome karma, will fall into hell. When their life is about to end, the fires of hell come upon them, but at the same time, they encounter a good and virtuous friend, with great compassion. This friend immediately praises and speaks of the ten powers and majestic virtue of Amida Buddha, extensively praises the radiant light and supernormal powers of that Buddha, and also possesses morality, concentration, wisdom, liberation, and the knowledge and vision of liberation. Having heard this, this person is freed from the karmic transgressions that would cause eighty million kalpas of birth and death [in hell]. The raging fires of hell transform into a cool breeze, which then wafts heavenly flowers. On each of these flowers, there will be transformed buddhas and bodhisattvas to welcome this person. In a single thought moment, in a lotus flower, this person will immediately attain rebirth, and in the seven-jewelled pond, after six kalpas, the lotus will open. When the lotus opens, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta will soothe and comfort that person with their Brahmā-like voices and expound the profound sūtras of the Mahāyāna. Upon hearing this Dharma teaching, they will immediately generate the aspiration for the highest awakening. This is called the Middle Level of the Lowest Grade of birth.”

The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, the Lowest Level of the Lowest Grade of birth is as follows: If there are sentient beings who create unwholesome karma, committing the five grave offences and the ten evils, fully possessing all kinds of unwholesome qualities, such foolish people, due to their unwholesome karma, are destined to fall into the unwholesome realms, experiencing many kalpas of endless suffering. When such a foolish person approaches the end of their lives, they may meet a virtuous teacher who will comfort them in various ways, teach them the wondrous Dharma, and instruct them to recollect the Buddha’s name. However, oppressed by suffering, these people will have no peace of mind to recollect the Buddha’s name. So, the good friend will say to them, ‘If you are unable to recollect that Buddha, you should recite “Homage to the Buddha of Immeasurable Life!”’

“After completing ten recitations of ‘Namo Amida Buddha,’ by uttering the name of that Buddha, each recitation extinguishes the karmic transgressions that would otherwise entail eighty million kalpas of birth and death. At the time of death, they will see a golden lotus flower, like the sun, appearing before them, and in an instant, they will attain birth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. In the jewelled flower, after twelve great kalpas they will remain. The lotus flower will then open. When the flower opens, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, with their voices of great compassion, will extensively explain the true nature of

reality for them and eliminate the karmic seeds of their transgressions. Having heard this, they will rejoice, and at that moment, they will arouse bodhicitta. This is called the Lowest Level of the Lowest Grade of birth. This is called the Contemplation on the Lower Grade, the sixteenth contemplation.”

When these words were spoken by the Bhagavān, Vaidehī and her five hundred maidservants, having heard what the Buddha said, at that time, they immediately saw the Land of Utmost Bliss in its appearance with its immeasurable length and breadth. Having seen the Buddha’s body and the two bodhisattvas, their hearts gave rise to joy, and they exclaimed, “This is unprecedented!”

They were suddenly greatly enlightened and attained patience at non-arising. The five hundred attendant maidens generated the aspiration for anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi, and vowed to be born in that Buddha-land. The Bhagavān predicted that they all would be reborn there. Having been born in that Buddha-land, they will attain the Samādhi of All Buddhas’ Presence. An immeasurable number of devas also aroused the aspiration for the highest awakening.

At that time, Ānanda immediately arose from his seat. Having risen from his seat, he addressed the Buddha, saying, “O Bhagavān! What should be the name of this sūtra? How should the essential points of this Dharma teaching be taken up and borne?”

The Buddha addressed Ānanda, “This sūtra is named the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, and Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta, in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. It is also called the Purification of Karmic Hindrances and Being Born in All Buddhas’ Presence. You must take up and bear it, not letting it be forgotten! One who cultivates this samādhi will be able to see the Buddha of Immeasurable Life and the two Mahāsattvas in this present life. Sons of good family or daughters of good family, merely by hearing the Buddha’s name and the names of the two bodhisattvas, can eliminate the karmic transgressions of birth and death from innumerable kalpas; how much more so one who recollects them? If one recollects the Buddha, it should be known that this person is a puṇḍarīka flower among humans. Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta are their excellent friends. They will sit on the bodhimāṇḍa and are born into the family of the buddhas.”

The Buddha told Ānanda, “You should bear these words well. To retain these words is to retain the name of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life.”

When the Buddha spoke these words, the Venerable Mahāmaudgalyāyana, the Venerable Ānanda, Vaidehī, and the others, having heard what the Buddha said, were all greatly elated.

At that time, the Bhagavān, walking through the sky, returned to Gṛdhrakūṭa.

At that time, Ānanda explained the aforementioned matters to the great saṅgha in great detail. Innumerable devas, humans, nāgas, deities, and yakṣas, having heard what the Buddha said, were all overjoyed, paid homage to the Buddha, and then departed.

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