

The Sūtra of the Dhāraṇī of the King of the Sound of Amitābha's Drum

Translator's Name Unknown; Liang Dynasty (502–57)

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Introduction

This short and somewhat idiosyncratic sūtra on Amitābha Buddha is included in section 12 of the Taishō Tripitaka, together with the other Sukhāvātī sūtras. In the Tibetan canon it is included among esoteric sūtras, presumably because it contains a dhāraṇī—though this is certainly a characteristic of general Mahāyāna and does not necessitate it being considered Vajrayāna.

Its unique character is particularly highlighted by the manner in which it gives an alternative name to Amitābha's buddha land at one point, the world of “Purity and Peace” (清泰) although the name Sukhāvātī is otherwise used throughout the sūtra. The world of “Purity and Peace” passage, moreover, is surrounded by references to Amitābha's parents and his child's name, as well as a paralleling of the names of his disciples to those of Śākyamuni Buddha. It has been used, therefore, to suggest that in addition to a Saṃbhogakāya form, in which Amitābha manifests Sukhāvātī, he also manifested as a Nirmāṇakāya analogous to Śākyamuni Buddha and manifested the world of “Purity and Peace.” The alternative theory, proposed by a disciple of Shandao, Huaigan, is that this refers to a life of Amitābha prior to his full attainment of Buddhahood. These possibilities are explored in a footnote to this translation.¹

For these and other reasons, the anonymously translated sūtra, which was probably translated into Chinese at the end of the Liang Dynasty (502–557), has been held by many, including scholars, to be either poorly or wrongly translated.² The sūtra title, moreover, in the Tibetan is given as *Āryāparimitāyurjñānahṛdayadhāraṇī*.³ The idea of a “drum” (Skt. *duṇḍubhi*) in relation to the Dharma in the Śrāvakayāna texts appears to be used to refer to the drum beaten in Trāyastriṃśa as a warning about impermanence and as a signal of lament at the Buddha's passing into Mahāparinirvāṇa. In the Mahāyāna, on the other hand, it is used to refer to the Buddha's preaching, an embodiment of his Dharmakāya, which of course is a signal of the Buddha's permanence beyond his parinirvāṇa. The sūtra does not specifically refer to a drum except for in the name of the dhāraṇī which is used as a tool for birth into Sukhāvātī, which could be taken as, itself, an embodiment of this eternal Dharma—a tool and key to the deathless state of parinirvāṇa. Keikyo Nakamikado therefore suggests that we could thus identify the portions of the sūtra that refer to Amitābha in

¹ For a study of various references and thoughts about this sūtra (none of which are necessarily distinctive) please see Nakamikado Keikyo, “Amidakoonseidaranikyō No Kenkyū <阿弥陀鼓音声陀羅尼經> の研究,” *Bukkyō Daigaku Sōgōkenkyūsho Kiyō* 佛教大学総合研究所紀要, 2006, 27–50.

² Keikyo, “Amidakoonseidaranikyō No Kenkyū,” 31–32.

³ Keikyo, “Amidakoonseidaranikyō No Kenkyū,” 34.

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the land of “Purity and Peace” as an impermanent *nirmāṇakāya* manifestation of Amitābha, and Amitābha in the land of *Sukhāvātī* as the permanent *saṃbhogakāya* manifestation of Amitābha.⁴ Moreover, he notes too that the time period at which this sūtra was translated coincides with a period where *dhāraṇī* sūtras were beginning to be actively translated.⁵

The following translation is entirely from the Chinese (T370) using the Creative Commons licensed NTI Reader reproduction as a base, which is given first in an annotated interlinear translation and then in English.⁶ Being from a translation often regarded as flawed, many editorial decisions must be made to make sense of it. These will be shown in the footnotes and square brackets where necessary. An ideal translation would also consult the Tibetan more thoroughly, which the current translator has only done in reference to a Japanese study of the Tibetan sūtra. All mistakes, thus, are entirely my own and any merits are to go entirely to the Triple Gem.

⁴ Keikyo, “Amidakoonseidaranikyō No Kenkyū,” 33.

⁵ Keikyo, “Amidakoonseidaranikyō No Kenkyū,” 33.

⁶ “Aparimitāyurjñānaḥṛdayadhāraṇī / Emituo Gu Yinsheng Wang Tuoluoni Jing 阿彌陀鼓音聲王陀羅尼經,” NTI Reader, June 15, 2016, https://ntireader.org/taisho/t0370_01.html.

Annotated English Translation

[0352b10] Thus have I heard:

如是我聞：

[0352b10] At one time the Buddha was dwelling in the great city of Campā, on the banks of Gargarā Pond,⁷ together with a great assembly of five hundred bhikṣus.

一時佛在瞻波大城伽伽靈池，與大比丘眾五百人俱。

[0352b11] At that time, the Bhagavān addressed the bhikṣus, “I must now declare to you: In the western direction there is the world Sukhāvātī, where there now dwells a buddha called Amitābha. If a member of the fourfold saṅgha⁸ can correctly uphold⁹ that buddha’s name, by the merits of that practice, at the time of death that person will go to join the great assembly of Amitābha and therefore be able to see him.¹⁰ Having seen him, they will at once give rise to joy and will further increase their merit. By these causes and conditions, having arisen there, they will forever be freed from a body of polluted desire and the womb, and will be born by spontaneous transformation on a clear, wonderful, jewelled lotus flower in that pure land and be endowed with the great supernatural powers and a radiant bright light.

爾時，世尊告諸比丘：「今當為汝演說，西方安樂世界今現有佛，號阿彌陀，若有四眾，能正受持彼佛名號，以此功德臨欲終時，阿彌陀即與大眾往此人所，令其得見。見已，尋生慶悅，倍增功德。以是因緣，所生之處，永離胞胎穢欲之形，純處鮮妙寶蓮花中，自然化生，具大神通，光明赫奕。

[0352b17] “At that time, buddhas as numerous as the grains of sand in the River Ganges in the ten directions will all praise the world Sukhāvātī, ‘It has an inconceivable Buddha-Dharma.

⁷ This pond was “excavated by Queen Gagarā. On its banks was a grove of campaka-trees, well known for the fragrance of their marvellous white flowers, and there, in the Buddha’s time, wandering teachers were wont to lodge. The buddha himself stayed there on several occasions... Sāriputta ... and Vangīsa ... are also said to have stayed there. The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta ... mentions Campā as one of the six important cities of India, its foundation ascribed to Mahāgovinda.... It lay at a distance of sixty yojanas from Ithilā.... In the Buddha’s time the people Campā owed allegiance to Bimbisāra as king of Magadha, and Bimbisāra had given a royal fief in Campā.” George Malalasekera, ed., *Buddhist Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, 1938, http://www.vipassana.info/dic_idx.html, “Campā.” Skt. *Gargarā-ṣuṣkarinī*. Keikyo, “Amidakoonseidaraniyō No Kenkyū,” 34.

⁸ 四眾. Skt. *catasrah paṣadaḥ*. Bhikṣus, bhikṣuṇīs, upāsakas and upāsikās.

⁹ 受持. This can have several connotations. At its most common level it is *dhārayati*, to bear, which can indicate bearing in memory, accepting, or holding it in one’s mind or all of these. As a translation of *upadhārayati* it can indicate simply keeping it in mind.

¹⁰ The Tibetan adds that no one is born there as a woman. Keikyo, “Amidakoonseidaraniyō No Kenkyū,” 36.

Its supernormal manifestations and various skilful means are also inconceivable. If someone can have faith in it, that person should be known as inconceivable, and they will also acquire inconceivable karmic reward.⁷

「爾時，十方恒沙諸佛，皆共讚彼安樂世界：『所有佛法不可思議；神通現化，種種方便不可思議；若有能信如是之事，當知是人不可思議；所得業報亦不可思議。』」

[0352b21] “¹¹Amitābha Buddha dwells together with śrāvakas in that Tathāgata, Arhat, Samyaksambuddha's land called “Purity and Peace.” As a sage king he abides there, in a walled city ten thousand yojanas in length and breadth, filled entirely with kṣatriyas. Amitābha, the Buddha, Tathāgata, Arhat, Samyaksambuddha has a father called Candrottara,¹² who is a wheel-turning sage king, a mother called Viśeṣamukhā,¹³ and a son called Candraprabha.¹⁴ His attendant student is called Vimalakīrti,¹⁵ his wisest student is called Bhadrārabha,¹⁶ and the one who

¹¹ The Fo Guang Dictionary explains that there have long been speculations about whether the land of Purity and Peace was a reward or transformation land, i.e., a result of his vows or a provisional manifestation for those not yet ready for Sukhāvātī. (1) Daocho suggests that Purity and Peace is Amitābha's *nirmāṇakāya* land (since he manifests being born of parents, etc.) and that Sukhāvātī is his *sambhogakāya* land. (2) Kuiji suggests that Purity and Peace is the same as Sukhāvātī but has two theories about its nature as reward (*sambhoga*) or transformation (*nirmāṇa*). One theory is that, just as the sūtra explains, Amitābha has parents and so forth, and that Sukhāvātī was transformed out of that land which was originally known just as Purity and Peace. The other theory is that he manifests having parents and so forth as a teaching device, but that they have no reality. Thus Sukhāvātī is only a reward land and not a transformation land (i.e. Purity and Peace are just illusions within Sukhāvātī, for certain students). (3) Huaigan has three theories, the prior two are the same as Kuiji's; his third is that Purity and Peace is an impure land and that Sukhāvātī is a pure land. Amitābha Buddha was born from a womb in Purity and Peace but reached perfect awakening in Sukhāvātī. Ciyi 慈怡 and Yongben 永本, eds., *Foguang Dacidian* 佛光大辭典, Revised Edition (Kaohsiung: Foguang Wenhua Shiye Youxianggongsi 佛光文化事業有限公司, 2014), 4664, https://www.fgs.org.tw/fgs_book/fgs_drser.aspx.

I largely agree with Huaigan's third theory, but without further indications, I would not translate this section in the past tense. The occurrence of the term 爾時 (at that time) in this paragraph seems to indicate a different time, or could simply be a poor word choice. Moreover, the discrepancy with the name of the land is the clearest sign that this is not intended to be the same place as Sukhāvātī, and without further indications in the text, the suggestion that these are both the same land is too convoluted to entertain—the idea that this is simply a translation mistake is possible, but why the text would make this mistake with just the name of the land once is not clear, when the translator is clearly aware that the name Sukhāvātī is rendered 安樂. If these are supposed to be the same land, this, moreover, would require reconciliation with the established and known facts about Amitābha from the other sūtras about him—including the fact that beings are not born there conventionally but arise by spontaneous transformation—thus why is that Amitābha arises from a womb? The fact that this text resumes using 安樂 Sukhāvātī after this paragraph, lending further credence to the possibility that this is a temporally removed aside. The text does not state that this was a time in which he was still a bodhisattva, but that would make sense. There is the possibility that this world is a *nirmāṇa* form and Sukhāvātī is the *sambhoga* form, but that might increase the level of convolution without further indications.

¹² Sanskrit names are, of course, conjectures. Meaning: Above the moon.

¹³ Beautiful Face.

¹⁴ Moonlight.

¹⁵ Undeified Fame. His equivalent of Ānanda.

¹⁶ Good Light. His equivalent of Śāriputra.

endeavours in supernormal powers there is called Mahānirmāṇa.¹⁷ At that time,¹⁸ the Māra king is called Aparājita¹⁹ and there is a Devadatta²⁰ called Viprasanna.²¹ Amitābha Buddha dwells there together with a great assembly of sixty thousand bhikṣus.²²

「阿彌陀佛與聲聞俱，如來、應、正遍知，其國號曰清泰。聖王所住，其城縱廣十千由旬，於中充滿剎利之種。阿彌陀佛如來、應、正遍知，父名月上，轉輪聖王；其母名曰殊勝妙顏；子名月明。奉事弟子，名無垢稱。智慧弟子，名曰賢光。神足精勤，名曰大化。爾時，魔王名曰無勝。有提婆達多，名曰寂靜。阿彌陀佛與大比丘六萬人俱。

[0352b28] “If one upholds that Buddha’s name with a firm mind and unwavering mindfulness for ten days and ten nights without distraction, and endeavours in cultivating the samādhi of mindfulness of that Buddha,²³ one will know that that Tathāgata always abides in the world Sukhāvātī. If one can recollect continuously without allowing any interruption, upholding and reciting the Great Dhāraṇī of the King of the Sound of [Amitābha’s] Drum, for ten days and ten nights, with six hours of single-minded thought, throwing five parts of one’s body onto the ground²⁴ in worship to that Buddha, with firm right mindfulness without any distraction, without interruption from thought to thought, then in ten days one will certainly see the Buddha Amitābha and also see the lands of the tathāgatas in the ten directions. With the exception of people with heavy [karmic] obstacles and dull faculties, and those who from their youth are unable to see, if someone transfers all good [karmic roots] and wishes to be born in the world Sukhāvātī, then at the time of one’s death Amitābha Buddha together with his great assembly will manifest in one’s presence, refresh one, and praise one’s good. That person will then, at once, give rise to immense joy. As a result of these causes and conditions they will thus, as they wish, immediately attain rebirth there.”

¹⁷ Great Transformation. His equivalent of Mahāmaudgalyāyana.

¹⁸ What time, precisely, is not indicated. If past, then this shows that this was a past period before Amitābha dwelt in Sukhāvātī. If present, then it shows that this is an alternative (and perhaps *sambhoga*) world to Sukhāvātī.

¹⁹ Undefeated. The equivalent of Pāpīyās.

²⁰ An equivalent to the challenging cousin of Śākyamuni Buddha. Might we then assume that this is Amitābha’s cousin in this account?

²¹ Quiescence. There are too many equivalents to the Chinese 寂靜 for this conjecture to be in any way definitive.

²² The name of the country is not given in the Tibetan—possibly the Chinese name of the land at this point (清泰) is entirely a mistranslation and it should still read Sukhāvātī. Sukhāvātī as a name is not given in Tibetan but this would put an end to part of the difficulties of this paragraph. The Tibetan, moreover, gives a name for his palace (‘khor dang bcas pa) and gives him a wife (by the name of rGyal rigs bZang skyong ma). Otherwise these sections appear to be largely similar. Keikyo, “Amidakoonseidaranikyō No Kenkyū,” 38.

²³ 念佛. In this case, in this case, it is cultivated by recitation of the Buddha’s name.

²⁴ Prostration with both knees, elbows, and head touching the ground.

「若有受持彼佛名號，堅固其心、憶念不忘，十日十夜除捨散亂，精勤修集念佛三昧，知彼如來常恒住於安樂世界，憶念相續勿令斷絕，受持讀誦此鼓音聲王大陀羅尼，十日十夜，六時專念，五體投地，禮敬彼佛，堅固正念悉除散亂；若能令心念念不絕，十日之中必得見彼阿彌陀佛，并見十方世界如來及所住處。唯除重障鈍根之人，於今少時所不能觀。一切諸善皆悉迴向，願得往生安樂世界，垂終之日，阿彌陀佛與諸大眾，現其人前安慰稱善，是人即時甚生慶悅。以是因緣，如其所願，尋得往生。」

[0352c11] The Buddha addressed the bhikṣus, “What is the Great Dhāraṇī of the King of the Sound of [Amitābha’s] Drum? I will now utter it; you should listen attentively.”

佛告諸比丘：「何等名為鼓音聲王大陀羅尼？吾今當說，汝等善聽。」

[0352c12] The [bhikṣus] replied, “Yes, we shall do as you instruct.”

「唯然受教。」

[0352c13] Thereupon, the Bhagavān uttered the dhāraṇī,²⁵ saying, 於時世尊即說呪曰：

[0352c14] ²⁶“Tad yathā bale²⁷ abale samabala nirdeśa nirjātane nirmukte nirmukhe jvaraprasādhane sukhāvātīnirdeśe amitāyurbale amitāya garbhanirhāre amitāya prasādhane nirbuddhe ākāśanirbuddha ākāśanirdeśa ākāśanirjāte ākāśakuśale ākāśadarśani ākāśadhiṣṭhāne ²⁸ rūpanirdeśa rūpaśānite ²⁹ catvāridharmaprasādhane catvāryāryasatyaprasādhane catvārimārgabhāvanāprasādhane balavīryaprasādhane dharmacintane kuśale kuśalanirdeśa kuśalapraṭiṣṭhāne buddhakuśale vibuddhaprabhāse³⁰ dharmakaraṇe nirjāte nirbuddhe vimale vi-
raja raja rase rasāgre rasāgrabale rasāgrādhiṣṭhāne kuśale³¹ pratikuśale vikuśale dānte sudāntacitte

²⁵ Here 呪 is used, which can also be translated simply as mantra or vidyā.

²⁶ This dhāraṇī is conjecture, but can be guessed based upon common transliterations. On another attempt at reconstructing this, see Richard K. Payne, “Aparimitāyus: ‘Tantra’ and ‘Pure Land’ in Medieval Indian Buddhism?,” *Pacific World*, Third Series, 9 (2007): 288. This differs in several respects from the Tibetan, not all of which will be noted here.

²⁷ Tibetan gives śabale. Keikyo, “Amidakoonseidaranikyō No Kenkyū,” 41.

²⁸ Here the Tibetan adds sukhāvatyadhiṣṭhāne. Keikyo, “Amidakoonseidaranikyō No Kenkyū,” 41.

²⁹ Excluded in Tibetan. Keikyo, “Amidakoonseidaranikyō No Kenkyū,” 41.

³⁰ Tibetan gives viśuddhaprabhāse. Keikyo, “Amidakoonseidaranikyō No Kenkyū,” 41.

³¹ Tibetan gives kule here and for next kuśales. Keikyo, “Amidakoonseidaranikyō No Kenkyū,” 41.

supraśāntacitte supraṭiṣṭhite śure sumukhe dharme dhadhate pale³² capale anucapale buddhākāśa-nirguṇe buddhākāśaḡuṇe ³³svāhā!”

「多狄他(一) 婆離(二) 阿婆離(三) 娑摩婆羅(四) 尼地奢(五) 呢闍多禰(六) 呢茂邸(七) 呢茂企(八) 闍羅婆羅車馱禰(九) 宿佉波啼呢地奢(十) 阿彌多由婆離(十一) 阿彌多蛇伽婆呢呵隸(十二) 阿彌多蛇波羅娑陀禰(十三) 涅浮提(十四) 阿迦舍呢浮陀(十五) 阿迦舍呢提奢(十六) 阿迦舍呢闍啼(十七) 阿迦舍久舍離(十八) 阿迦舍達奢尼(十九) 阿迦舍提咄禰(二十) 留波呢提奢(二十一) 嚕跋坦泥勢(二十二) 遮唾唎達摩波羅娑阿禰(二十三) 遮唾唎阿利蛇娑帝蛇波羅娑陀禰(二十四) 遮唾唎末伽婆那波羅娑陀禰(二十五) 婆羅毘梨耶波羅娑陀禰(二十六) 達摩呻他禰(二十七) 久舍離(二十八) 久舍羅呢提奢(二十九) 久奢羅波羅啼咄禰(三十) 佛陀久奢離(三十一) 毘佛陀波羅波斯(三十二) 達摩迦羅禰(三十三) 呢專啼(三十四) 呢浮提(三十五) 毘摩離(三十六) 毘羅闍(三十七) 羅闍(三十八) 羅斯(三十九) 羅娑岐(四十) 羅娑伽羅婆離(四十一) 羅娑伽羅阿地咄禰(四十二) 久舍離(四十三) 波羅啼久舍離(四十四) 毘久舍離(四十五) 咄啼(四十六) 修陀多至啼(四十七) 修波羅舍多至啼(四十八) 修波羅啼癡啼(四十九) 修離(五十) 修目企(五十一) 達咩(五十二) 達達啼(五十三) 離婆(五十四) 遮婆離(五十五) 阿窶舍婆離(五十六) 佛陀迦舍呢裘禰佛陀迦舍裘禰(五十七) 沙婆呵(五十八)

[0353a08] “This is the Dhāraṇī of the King of the Sound of Amitābha’s Drum. If any bhikṣu, bhikṣuṇī, man, or woman of pure faith should wish with perfect sincerity to uphold and recite it, they should practice as I instruct and then practice this Dharma. They should go to the wilderness, bathe their body, wear new clean clothes, eat and drink pure and simple fare, should not ingest alcohol, meat, or the five pungent roots,³⁴ and should practice constant chastity. Using good incense and flowers, they should make offerings to Amitābha Tathāgata and the great bodhi-sattva assembly at his bodhimaṇḍa. They should always, in this way, single-mindedly think that

³² These characters are were clearly mixed around, originally it would have read lepa.

³³ Tibetan has amṛtadundubhiḥ, could also be amitādundubhiḥ. Keikyo, “Amidakoonseidaranikyō No Kenkyū,” 41.

³⁴ 蔥, 薤, 韭, 蒜, 薑. Scallions, leeks, onions, garlic, and ginger.

they give rise to the aspiration to be born in the world Sukhāvātī and endeavour without idling until they fulfil the aspiration that they must be reborn in that buddha land.³⁵

「此是阿彌陀鼓音聲王大陀羅尼。若有比丘、比丘尼、清信士女，常應至誠受持讀誦，如說修行，行此持法。當處閑寂，洗浴其身，著新淨衣，飲食白素，不噉酒肉及以五辛，常修梵行。以好香花，供養阿彌陀如來，及佛道場大菩薩眾。常應如是專心繫念，發願求生安樂世界，精勤不怠如其所願，必得往生於彼佛世界。

[0353a15] “Now, Amitābha Buddha, together with his great assembly, sits on a jewelled lotus flower. On the ground [in his land] are forests with fresh and luscious flowers and fruits, beset with jewels and gloriously adorned. Moreover, when a fragrant wind blows, the king of trees [there] wafts fragrance and harmonious sounds emerge expounding the pure, unexcelled, and inconceivable Dharma. There is also a fragrant incense there called Prabhāsa,³⁶ and various other aromatic powders and precious scents.

「時，阿彌陀佛與諸大眾坐寶蓮花，其土叢林花果鮮敷，間錯嚴飾；復有樹王、香風、馥扇出和雅音，純說無上不思議法；復有妙香名曰光明，若干塗香亦是寶香。

[0353a18] “As Amitābha Buddha sits cross-legged on the great jewelled flower, there are two bodhisattvas [there]: the first is called Avalokiteśvara, the second is called Mahāsthāmaprāpta. These two bodhisattvas stand in attendance upon him to his left and right. They are surrounded by countless circumambulating bodhisattvas. If someone can have deep faith without doubt in that assembly, they will certainly be reborn in Amitābha's land. They will spontaneously arise in that land on a pure gold seven-jewelled lotus flower.³⁷

「阿彌陀佛於大寶花結加趺坐。有二菩薩：一名觀世音，二名大勢至，是二菩薩侍立左右，無數菩薩周匝圍遶。於此眾中，若能深信無狐疑者，必得往生阿彌陀國。其地真金，七寶蓮花自然踊出。

[0353a23] “If someone in the fourfold assembly upholds and recites that buddha's name, then they will not be afraid of water, fire, poisonous herbs, swords, and spears. Moreover, they will

³⁵ I.e., until they are born there.

³⁶ Radiance.

³⁷ Here the text is suggesting that deep faith alone is all that is required for one to be born there. We thus have reliance upon the dhāraṇī and the name of Amitābha (below) as two gates in addition to deep faith as a third gate.

not be afraid of yakṣas and so forth,³⁸ and, except for those with bad intentions and karmic hindrances from past grave crimes,³⁹ they will certainly realise the fruit of their aspirations in at least seven lifetimes.”⁴⁰

「若有四眾，受持讀誦彼佛名號，乃至無有水、火、毒藥、刀杖之怖；亦復無有夜叉等怖，除有過、去重罪、業障，極至七生必果所願。」

[0353a26] When the Buddha finished teaching about the Dhāraṇī of the King of the Sound of Amitābha’s Drum, countless sentient beings all gave rise to the aspiration to seek rebirth in that world Sukhāvātī. Thereupon the Bhagavān said, “Sādhu! Sādhu! As you have aspired, thus you shall certainly be born there.”

佛說是阿彌陀鼓音聲王陀羅尼時，無量眾生皆悉發願，志求生彼極樂世界。於時世尊讚言：「善哉，善哉！如汝所願，必得生彼。」

[0353a29] Having heard the Buddha’s teaching, the eight classes of devas and nāgas and so forth⁴¹ all rejoiced, made obeisance, and practiced with sincerity.

聞佛說已，天龍八部，歡喜踊躍，作禮奉行。

³⁸ The Tibetan adds yakṣīs.

³⁹ This probably refers to the five grave offences (*ānantarikakarma*): killing one’s father, killing one’s mother, killing an arhat, shedding the blood of a buddha, and creating a schism in the saṅgha.

⁴⁰ This does not explicitly make clear, but it appears that this is saying that these results are the consequence of upholding Amitābha Buddha’s name, rather than the dhāraṇī, whose benefits were given prior to the dhāraṇī. The only goal being referred to has been to birth in Sukhāvātī, thus it appears that it is suggesting that birth in the next life depends upon recitation of the dhāraṇī, but if one recites the name then one will be born there within seven lives. As noted above, prior to this, it states that simply having deep faith in Amitābha’s assembly would result in birth there. The text does not appear to reconcile these different consequences and they thus stand as different gates.

⁴¹ Devas, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kiṃnaras, and mahoragas.

English Translation

Introduction

Thus have I heard:

At one time the Buddha was dwelling in the great city of Campā, on the banks of Gargarā Pond, together with a great assembly of five hundred bhikṣus.

Amitābha and Sukhāvātī

At that time, the Bhagavān addressed the bhikṣus, “I must now declare to you: In the western direction there is the world Sukhāvātī, where there now dwells a buddha called Amitābha. If a member of the fourfold saṅgha can correctly uphold that buddha's name, by the merits of that practice, at the time of death that person will go to join the great assembly of Amitābha and therefore be able to see him. Having seen him, they will at once give rise to joy and will further increase their merit. By these causes and conditions, having arisen there, they will forever be freed from a body of polluted desire and the womb, and will be born by spontaneous transformation on a clear, wonderful, jewelled lotus flower in that pure land and be endowed with the great supernormal powers and a radiant bright light.

All Buddhas Praise Sukhāvātī and Faith makes one Inconceivable

“At that time, buddhas as numerous as the grains of sand in the River Ganges in the ten directions will all praise the world Sukhāvātī, ‘It has an inconceivable Buddha-Dharma. Its supernormal manifestations and various skilful means are also inconceivable. If someone can have faith in it, that person should be known as inconceivable, and they will also acquire inconceivable karmic reward.’

The Land of “Purity and Peace”

“Amitābha Buddha dwells together with śrāvakas in that Tathāgata, Arhat, Samyaksambuddha's land called “Purity and Peace.” As a sage king he abides there, in a walled city ten thousand yojanas in length and breadth, filled entirely with kṣatriyas. Amitābha, the Buddha, Tathāgata, Arhat, Samyaksambuddha has a father called Candrottara, who is a wheel-turning sage king, a mother called Viśeṣamukhā, and a son called Candraprabha. His attendant student is called Vimalakīrti, his wisest student is called Bhadrārabha, and the one who endeavours in supernormal powers

there is called Mahānirmāṇa. At that time, the Māra king is called Aparājita and there is a Devadatta called Viprasanna. Amitābha Buddha dwells there together with a great assembly of sixty thousand bhikṣus.

Reliance on the Name as Granting Knowledge of Amitābha

“If one upholds that Buddha’s name with a firm mind and unwavering mindfulness for ten days and ten nights without distraction, and endeavours in cultivating the samādhi of mindfulness of that Buddha, one will know that that Tathāgata always abides in the world Sukhāvātī.

Reliance upon the Dhāraṇī of the King of the Sound of Amitābha’s Drum as a Cause for Birth in Sukhāvātī

“If one can recollect continuously without allowing any interruption, upholding and reciting the Great Dhāraṇī of the King of the Sound of Amitābha’s Drum, for ten days and ten nights, with six hours of single-minded thought, throwing five parts of one’s body onto the ground in worship to that Buddha, with firm right mindfulness without any distraction, without interruption from thought to thought, then in ten days one will certainly see the Buddha Amitābha and also see the lands of the tathāgatas in the ten directions. With the exception of people with heavy karmic obstacles and dull faculties, and those who from their youth are unable to see, if someone transfers all good [karmic roots] and wishes to be born in the world Sukhāvātī, then at the time of one’s death Amitābha Buddha together with his great assembly will manifest in one’s presence, refresh one, and praise one’s good. That person will then, at once, give rise to immense joy. As a result of these causes and conditions they will thus, as they wish, immediately attain rebirth there.”

The Buddha Utters the Dhāraṇī

The Buddha addressed the bhikṣus, “What is the Great Dhāraṇī of the King of the Sound of Amitābha’s Drum? I will now utter it; you should listen attentively.”

The bhikṣus replied, “Yes, we shall do as you instruct.”

Thereupon, the Bhagavān uttered the dhāraṇī, saying, “Tad yathā bale abale samabala nirdeśa nirjātane nirmukte nirmukhe jvaraprasādhane sukhāvātīnirdeśe amitāyurbale amitāya garbhanirhāre amitāya prasādhane nirbuddhe ākāśanirbuddha ākāśanirdeśa ākāśanirjāte ākāśakuśale ākāśadarśani ākāśādhiṣṭhāne rūpanirdeśa rūpaśānite catvāridharmaprasādhane

catvāryāryasatyaprasādhane catvārimārgabhāvanāprasādhane balavīryaprasādhane dharmacin-
tane kuśale kuśalanirdeśa kuśalapraṭiṣṭhāne buddhakuśale vibuddhaprabhāse dharmakaraṇe
nirjāte nirbuddhe vimale viraja raja rase rasāgre rasāgrabale rasāgrādhiṣṭhāne kuśale pratikuśale
vikuśale dānte sudāntacitte supraśāntacitte supraṭiṣṭhite śure sumukhe dharme dhadhate pale ca-
pale anucapale buddhākāśanirguṇe buddhākāśaguṇe svāhā!”

How to Practice the Dhāraṇī with Strict Discipline

“This is the Dhāraṇī of the King of the Sound of Amitābha's Drum. If any bhikṣu, bhikṣuṇī, man, or woman of pure faith should wish with perfect sincerity to uphold and recite it, they should practice as I instruct and then practice this Dharma. They should go to the wilderness, bathe their body, wear new clean clothes, eat and drink pure and simple fare, should not ingest alcohol, meat, or the five pungent roots, and should practice constant chastity. Using good incense and flowers, they should make offerings to Amitābha Tathāgata and the great bodhisattva assembly at his bodhimaṇḍa. They should always, in this way, single-mindedly think that they give rise to the aspiration to be born in the world Sukhāvātī and endeavour without idling until they fulfil the aspiration that they must be reborn in that buddha land.

Amitābha Buddha's Land and its Adornments

“Now, Amitābha Buddha, together with his great assembly, sits on a jewelled lotus flower. On the ground [in his land] are forests with fresh and luscious flowers and fruits, beset with jewels and gloriously adorned. Moreover, when a fragrant wind blows, the king of trees [there] wafts fragrance and harmonious sounds emerge expounding the pure, unexcelled, and inconceivable Dharma. There is also a fragrant incense there called Prabhāsa, and various other aromatic powders and precious scents.

The Great Assembly of Bodhisattvas

“As Amitābha Buddha sits cross-legged on the great jewelled flower, there are two bodhisattvas there: the first is called Avalokiteśvara, the second is called Mahāsthāmaprāpta. These two bodhisattvas stand in attendance upon him to his left and right. They are surrounded by countless circumambulating bodhisattvas.

Deep Faith as a Cause for Birth in Sukhāvātī

“If someone can have deep faith without doubt in that assembly, they will certainly be reborn in Amitābha’s land. They will spontaneously arise in that land on a pure gold seven-jewelled lotus flower.

Recitation of Amitābha’s Name as a Cause for Birth within Seven Lifetimes

“If someone in the fourfold assembly upholds and recites that buddha’s name, then they will not be afraid of water, fire, poisonous herbs, swords, and spears. Moreover, they will not be afraid of yakṣas and so forth, and, except for those with bad intentions and karmic hindrances from past grave crimes, they will certainly realise the fruit of their aspirations in at least seven lifetimes.”

Rejoicing of the Assembly

When the Buddha finished teaching about the Dhāraṇī of the King of the Sound of Amitābha’s Drum, countless sentient beings all gave rise to the aspiration to seek rebirth in that world Sukhāvātī. Thereupon the Bhagavān said, “Sādhu! Sādhu! As you have aspired, thus you shall certainly be born there.”

Having heard the Buddha’s teaching, the eight classes of devas and nāgas and so forth all rejoiced, made obeisance, and practiced with sincerity.