

**APOCRYPHAL SCRIPTURES**

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**BDK English Tripiṭaka Series**

**APOCRYPHAL SCRIPTURES**

**The Bequeathed Teaching Sutra**

(Taishō Volume 12, Number 389)

Translated by J. C. Cleary

**The Ullambana Sutra**

(Taishō Volume 16, Number 685)

Translated by Shōjun Bandō

**The Sutra of Forty-two Sections**

(Taishō Volume 17, Number 784)

Translated by Heng-ching Shih

**The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment**

(Taishō Volume 17, Number 842)

Translated by Peter N. Gregory

**The Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love**

(Taishō Volume 85, Number 2887)

Translated by Keiyo Arai

**BDK America, Inc.**

**2005**

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## **A Message on the Publication of the English Tripiṭaka**

The Buddhist canon is said to contain eighty-four thousand different teachings. I believe that this is because the Buddha's basic approach was to prescribe a different treatment for every spiritual ailment, much as a doctor prescribes a different medicine for every medical ailment. Thus his teachings were always appropriate for the particular suffering individual and for the time at which the teaching was given, and over the ages not one of his prescriptions has failed to relieve the suffering to which it was addressed.

Ever since the Buddha's Great Demise over twenty-five hundred years ago, his message of wisdom and compassion has spread throughout the world. Yet no one has ever attempted to translate the entire Buddhist canon into English throughout the history of Japan. It is my greatest wish to see this done and to make the translations available to the many English-speaking people who have never had the opportunity to learn about the Buddha's teachings.

Of course, it would be impossible to translate all of the Buddha's eighty-four thousand teachings in a few years. I have, therefore, had one hundred thirty-nine of the scriptural texts in the prodigious Taishō edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon selected for inclusion in the First Series of this translation project.

It is in the nature of this undertaking that the results are bound to be criticized. Nonetheless, I am convinced that unless someone takes it upon himself or herself to initiate this project, it will never be done. At the same time, I hope that an improved, revised edition will appear in the future.

It is most gratifying that, thanks to the efforts of more than a hundred Buddhist scholars from the East and the West, this monumental project has finally gotten off the ground. May the rays of the Wisdom of the Compassionate One reach each and every person in the world.

August 7, 1991

NUMATA Yehan  
Founder of the English  
Tripiṭaka Project



## Editorial Foreword

In January 1982, Dr. NUMATA Yehan, the founder of the Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai (Society for the Promotion of Buddhism), decided to begin the monumental task of translating the complete Taishō edition of the Chinese Tripiṭaka (Buddhist canon) into the English language. Under his leadership, a special preparatory committee was organized in April 1982. By July of the same year, the Translation Committee of the English Tripiṭaka was officially convened.

The initial Committee consisted of the following members: (late) HANAYAMA Shōyū (Chairperson), (late) BANDŌ Shōjun, ISHIGAMI Zennō, (late) KAMATA Shigeo, KANAOKA Shūyū, MAYEDA Sengaku, NARA Yasuaki, (late) SAYEKI Shinkō, (late) SHIOIRI Ryōtatsu, TAMARU Noriyoshi, (late) TAMURA Kwansei, URYŪZU Ryūshin, and YUYAMA Akira. Assistant members of the Committee were as follows: KANAZAWA Atsushi, WATANABE Shōgo, Rolf Giebel of New Zealand, and Rudy Smet of Belgium.

After holding planning meetings on a monthly basis, the Committee selected one hundred thirty-nine texts for the First Series of translations, an estimated one hundred printed volumes in all. The texts selected are not necessarily limited to those originally written in India but also include works written or composed in China and Japan. While the publication of the First Series proceeds, the texts for the Second Series will be selected from among the remaining works; this process will continue until all the texts, in Japanese as well as in Chinese, have been published.

Frankly speaking, it will take perhaps one hundred years or more to accomplish the English translation of the complete Chinese and Japanese texts, for they consist of thousands of works. Nevertheless, as Dr. NUMATA wished, it is the sincere hope of the Committee that this project will continue unto completion, even after all its present members have passed away.

It must be mentioned here that the final object of this project is not academic fulfillment but the transmission of the teaching of the Buddha to the whole world in order to create harmony and peace among humankind. To that end, the translators

have been asked to minimize the use of explanatory notes of the kind that are indispensable in academic texts, so that the attention of general readers will not be unduly distracted from the primary text. Also, a glossary of selected terms is appended to aid in understanding the text.

To my great regret, however, Dr. NUMATA passed away on May 5, 1994, at the age of ninety-seven, entrusting his son, Mr. NUMATA Toshihide, with the continuation and completion of the Translation Project. The Committee also lost its able and devoted Chairperson, Professor HANAYAMA Shōyū, on June 16, 1995, at the age of sixty-three. After these severe blows, the Committee elected me, then Vice President of Musashino Women's College, to be the Chair in October 1995. The Committee has renewed its determination to carry out the noble intention of Dr. NUMATA, under the leadership of Mr. NUMATA Toshihide.

The present members of the Committee are MAYEDA Sengaku (Chairperson), ISHIGAMI Zennō, ICHISHIMA Shōshin, KANAOKA Shūyū, NARA Yasuaki, TAMARU Noriyoshi, URYŪZU Ryūshin, YUYAMA Akira, Kenneth K. Tanaka, WATANABE Shōgo, and assistant member YONEZAWA Yoshiyasu.

The Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research was established in November 1984, in Berkeley, California, U.S.A., to assist in the publication of the BDK English Tripiṭaka First Series. In December 1991, the Publication Committee was organized at the Numata Center, with Professor Philip Yampolsky as the Chairperson. To our sorrow, Professor Yampolsky passed away in July 1996. In February 1997, Dr. Kenneth K. Inada became Chair and served in that capacity until August 1999. The current Chair, Dr. Francis H. Cook, has been continuing the work since October 1999. All of the remaining texts will be published under the supervision of this Committee, in close cooperation with the Editorial Committee in Tokyo.

MAYEDA Sengaku  
Chairperson  
Editorial Committee of the  
BDK English Tripiṭaka

## Publisher's Foreword

The Publication Committee shares with the Editorial Committee the responsibility of realizing the vision of Dr. Yehan Numata, founder of Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai, the Society for the Promotion of Buddhism. This vision is no less than to make the Buddha's teaching better known throughout the world, through the translation and publication in English of the entire collection of Buddhist texts compiled in the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, published in Tokyo in the early part of the twentieth century. This huge task is expected to be carried out by several generations of translators and may take as long as a hundred years to complete. Ultimately, the entire canon will be available to anyone who can read English and who wishes to learn more about the teaching of the Buddha.

The present generation of staff members of the Publication Committee includes Marianne Dresser; Brian Nagata, president of the Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, Berkeley, California; Eisho Nasu; and Reverend Kiyoshi Yamashita. The Publication Committee is headquartered at the Numata Center and, working in close cooperation with the Editorial Committee, is responsible for the usual tasks associated with preparing translations for publication.

In October 1999, I became the third chairperson of the Publication Committee, on the retirement of its very capable former chair, Dr. Kenneth K. Inada. The Committee is devoted to the advancement of the Buddha's teaching through the publication of excellent translations of the thousands of texts that make up the Buddhist canon.

Francis H. Cook  
Chairperson  
Publication Committee



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## **THE BEQUEATHED TEACHING SUTRA**



## Translator's Introduction

This text, the *Bequeathed Teaching Sutra* (*Fochuibo niepan lüeshuo jiaojie jing*, or *Yijiao jing* for short), was translated into Chinese around 400 C.E. and became an influential text often cited and commented on among Chinese Buddhists in the Tang, Song, and Ming dynasties. In Chan (Zen) communities in particular, it was considered a basic reference, taught and studied through the ages.

The brief *Bequeathed Teaching Sutra* is a lesson on monastic discipline presented as Buddha's last teaching just before his demise. After his *parinirvāṇa*, the Buddha teaches, the monks should rely on thorough discipline to guide them. The technical term for this is *prātimokṣa*, literally "liberation in all respects," because thorough discipline frees the monks from all potential entanglements. The Buddha warns the monks not to seek wealth and property, social position, or political power, nor to play on the credulity of the people as fortune-tellers and healers. He teaches monks to avoid anger and pride, sophistry and trivial argument. Monks should reduce their desires and learn how to be satisfied with little. They should feel shame for their shortcomings and work diligently for enlightenment all the time. The Buddha teaches here from the perspective of cause and effect: pure discipline is a basic necessity because it allows good qualities to develop.



THE BEQUEATHED TEACHING SUTRA

(Also called the *Sutra of Admonitions Imparted in Brief*  
by the Buddha at His Final Decease)

Translated by Kumārajīva



When Śākyamuni Buddha first turned the wheel of the Dharma, he delivered Ājñāta-kaunḍinya. At the end [of his teaching career] he explained the Dharma to save Subhadra. Having already delivered those whom he should deliver, the Buddha was [reclining] between the twin *śāla* trees, about to enter nirvana. The time was the middle of the night, still and soundless. For the sake of his disciples, the Buddha gave a brief account of the essentials of the Dharma.

1110c17

[The Buddha said,] “You monks, after I am gone, you should honor and respect *prātimokṣa*, [the discipline that liberates,] as if you have found a light in the darkness, as if you were poor men finding a jewel. You must realize that this will be your great teacher. It will be no different than when I was in the world.

“Those who maintain pure discipline must not engage in commerce and trade. They must not own fields and houses, or keep slaves or domestic animals. They must stay far away from all forms of wealth and property, as if avoiding a fiery pit. They must not cut down plants or till the soil. They must not engage in compounding medicines or doing prognostication and augury. They must not engage in gazing at the constellations or plotting the movements [of the stars] through the sky.

“They should regulate their bodies and eat only at the prescribed time, so that they lead a pure and independent life. They must not get involved in worldly affairs or serve in government posts. They should not use spells or magic or drugs. They should not curry favor with high-ranking people or be on intimate terms with the dissolute and vain.

“[Those who maintain pure discipline] should seek salvation with a proper mentality and correct mindfulness. They should not hide their flaws, or come out with divergent views that confuse the people. Toward the four offerings they should know moderation and be satisfied. When they happen to receive offerings, they must not accumulate anything.

1111a

“This then is a brief account of the forms of maintaining discipline. Discipline is the basis of the liberation that comes from correct obedience [to the Dharma]. Thus it is called *prātimokṣa*, [complete liberation]. Based on this discipline (*śīla*), you can engender all forms of meditative concentration (*samādhi*) and the wisdom (*prajñā*) that ends suffering. Therefore, you monks should maintain pure spotless discipline and not let yourselves

break the precepts. If people are able to uphold pure discipline, then they will be capable of having good qualities. Without pure discipline, good qualities and virtues will not be born. Thus you must realize that discipline is the principal secure abode of virtuous qualities.

“All you monks are already capable of abiding in discipline. You must control the five senses. Do not let them stray into the five desires. It is like a person herding an ox—holding his staff, he watches over it and does not let it get away and trespass on other people’s crops. If you indulge the five senses, the five desires will become boundless and uncontrollable, like a bad horse which cannot be reined in but instead pulls the person down into a pit. If you are robbed and injured the pain is only for a lifetime, but if the five senses are rebellious the disaster reaches into many lifetimes. The harm done is very serious: you must be careful. This is why the wise control [the five senses] and do not follow them. They hold them fast like potential rebels and do not let them loose. If people do indulge them, they always meet with destruction before long.

“Mind is the ruler of these five senses. Therefore you must be good at controlling the mind properly. There is more to be feared from [misuse of] the mind than from poisonous snakes or wild beasts or vengeful rebels or great conflagrations or indulging in excess: no metaphor will suffice. Moving around back and forth, superficial and impulsive, it sees only the honey but not the deep pit. It is like a mad elephant without a [mahout’s] hook [to control it]. It is like a monkey in a tree leaping and frolicking about, impossible to curb or control. You must be quick to take control of it and not let it run loose. Those who indulge this mind lose all the good things of humanity. Those who control it in one place can accomplish all tasks. Therefore, you monks should work scrupulously and make progress in taming and subduing the mind.

“When you monks consume food and drink, it should be like taking medicine. Do not take more of what you like or less of what you dislike. Take [food and drink only] to support your physical existence and ward off hunger and thirst. As bees gather from flowers, taking only the flavor but not harming the color or scent, so should monks be. When they receive offerings from people, they accept them to remove affliction; they should not ask for a lot and damage their good state of mind. It is like an intelligent person who

calculates how much the strength of an ox will bear, and does not exhaust it by overloading it.

“During the day you monks should scrupulously cultivate good things and not let time slip away. Let there be no slacking off in the early evening or in the predawn hours. In the middle of the night recite sutras aloud to keep yourself alert. Do not let your whole life pass in vain without attainment on account of sleep. You should be mindful that the fire of impermanence burns through all worlds. Seek salvation soon—do not sleep. The thieves of affliction are always waiting to slaughter people; they are worse than enemies. How can you stay asleep and not alert and arouse yourselves? The poisonous snakes of affliction are sleeping in your mind. It is like a black cobra sleeping in your room—you must use the hook of discipline to get rid of it right away. Only when the sleeping snake has been removed can you rest secure. One who goes to sleep without removing the snake is a shameless person.

1111b

“Obedience to the sense of shame is number one among all the adornments. Shame is like an iron hook that can control a person’s transgressions against the Dharma. Therefore, you monks should feel shame at all times, without slacking off for a moment. If you lose your sense of shame, you have lost all the virtues. People with shame have good qualities. Those without shame are no different from animals.

“If someone comes along who is totally undisciplined, you monks must gather in your own minds and not let yourselves get angry; guard your mouths and do not utter any maledictions. If you indulge in feelings of anger you are blocking the Way for yourself and losing the advantages of your virtues. Forbearance (*kṣānti*) is a virtue that upholding discipline and practicing austerities cannot match.

“Only those who are capable of practicing forbearance can be called great and powerful people. If you cannot gladly bear the poison of insults as if you were sipping sweet dew, you cannot be called a person of wisdom who has entered the Way. Why? The harm done by anger can destroy all good qualities and ruin a good reputation, so that no one in the present or future will be happy to see you. You must realize that anger is worse than a raging fire. Guard against it always and do not let it enter. Of the thieves that carry off virtue, none is worse than anger. People in lay life are subject to desires and, not being people who practice the Way, they have no way to

control themselves, so their anger can still be forgiven. But for those who have left home to practice the Way and have no desires, to harbor anger is very wrong. It is like a flash of lightning from a pure cool cloud that ignites a fire. It is not something that should be.

“You monks should remind yourselves: You have already abandoned all finery and put on shabby clothes. You carry almsbowls and beg for a living. Seeing yourselves like this, if you feel any pride you must quickly do away with it. Even worldly conventional people do not think it proper to foster pride and arrogance. This is even more true for people who have left home to enter the Way. For the sake of liberation they subdue their minds and practice alms-begging. Monks, a devious flattering mentality is antithetical to the Way. Therefore you must make your minds honest and straightforward. You should realize that deceit and flattery are just deceptions and lies. Such behavior is impossible for people who have entered the Way. Therefore all of you must adjust your minds with honesty and straightforwardness as the basis.

1111c “You monks should realize that people with many desires seek much gratification, so that they also have many vexations. People with few desires are free from seeking and free from desire, so they do not have this trouble. You must still cultivate practice to lessen your desires. What’s more, lessening desire can engender the various virtues. People with few desires do not use flattery and deceit to seek other people’s favor. Nor are they dragged around by the senses. Those who practice the lessening of desires have minds that are calm and free from anxiety and fear. When they come in contact with things, there is more than enough—they are never unsatisfied. Where there is the lessening of desire, there is nirvana. This is called having few desires.

“You monks who want to escape from all the various afflictions must contemplate [what it means to] know satisfaction. The method of knowing satisfaction is the locus of prosperity, of bliss, of peace and security. Even if they are lying on the ground, the people who know satisfaction are happy and at peace. For the people who do not know satisfaction, it does not suit their fancy even if they are in heaven. The people who do not know satisfaction are poor even if they are rich. The people who do know satisfaction are rich even if they are poor. Those who do not know satisfaction are forever dragged around by the five desires and are pitied by those who do know satisfaction. This is called knowing satisfaction.

“If you seek the peaceful and still, secure bliss of non-action, you monks must distance yourselves from the hustle and bustle and dwell at ease wherever you are. People who dwell in peace are honored by Indra and all the *devas* (gods). Thus you must abandon your own group and all other groups and live alone in peace, contemplating the annihilation of the root of suffering. If you take joy in groups, you are subject to the afflictions of those groups. It is like a great tree: if too many birds gather in it, there is the danger that the tree will weaken and break. Worldly bonds and attachments sink you down into the multitude of sufferings. It is like an old elephant sinking into the mud, which cannot get itself out. This is called detachment.

“Nothing will be difficult for you monks if you work hard and make energetic progress. Therefore, you must work hard and make energetic progress. It is like a small stream flowing against a rock all the time, so that [eventually] it can bore through the rock. If the practitioner’s mind often slacks off, it is like drilling for fire but stopping before it gets hot. Even if you want to get fire, it is impossible. This is called energetic practice.

“You monks should seek out enlightened teachers and good protectors and aids, and do not forget to be mindful [of the Dharma]. If you do not forget this mindfulness, then the thieves of affliction cannot enter. Therefore, you must always gather in your attention on the mind. If you lose mindfulness, then you lose all virtues. If the power of your mindfulness is strong, even if you enter among the thieves of the five desires you will not be harmed by them. It is like wearing armor into battle—you have no fear. This is called not forgetting mindfulness.

“If you monks collect the mind, your mind is in meditative concentration (*samādhi*). Because your mind is in meditative concentration, you know all the characteristics of the worldly phenomena of birth and annihilation. Therefore all of you must always diligently cultivate and assemble all the various states of meditative concentration. If you attain meditative concentration, then your mind is not in confusion. It is like a family concerned with water control that takes good care of the dams. Practitioners are also like this. For the sake of the water of wisdom they constantly cultivate meditative concentration and do not let [the water of wisdom] leak away. This is called meditative concentration.

1112a

“If you monks have wisdom then you have no craving or attachment. You are constantly self-aware and do not allow any mistakes. If so, then you can achieve liberation by my teaching. If not, then you are not a person of the Way, nor are you a layperson; there is no name for you. Real wisdom is the solid and secure ship for crossing the sea of old age, sickness, and death. It is also the great bright lamp amid the darkness of ignorance, the good medicine for all diseases, the sharp axe that cuts down the trees of affliction. Therefore all of you should always use hearing [the Dharma], contemplating [the Dharma], cultivating [the Dharma], and the wisdom [of the Dharma] to increase the benefit. If people have the perception of wisdom, even without the eye of the *devas*, they are clear-eyed people. This is wisdom.

“If you monks engage in all kinds of sophistry and trivial argument, your minds will become confused. Even though you have left home you still will not be liberated. Therefore monks should quickly abandon the trivial arguments of confused minds. If you want to attain the bliss of nirvana you must know well how to put an end to this problem of sophistry and trivial argument. This is called not engaging in trivial argument.

“In regard to all the virtues, you monks must always abandon all indulgence, as you would shun a robber full of hate. The benefits propounded by [the Buddha,] the Great Compassionate World-honored One, are all in terms of the ultimate truth. You simply must work hard and practice what he taught. [Wherever you are], whether in the mountains or valleys or dwelling at ease in a quiet place under the trees, be mindful of the Dharma you have received and do not let yourselves forget it or lose it. You must always exert yourself to make energetic progress cultivating it. Do not bring upon yourselves the worries and regrets of dying in vain.

“I am like a good doctor who diagnoses the disease and prescribes the medicine. It is not the doctor’s fault if [the patient] does not take [the medicine and thus is not cured]. I am also like a good guide who gives people good directions. If the people hear but do not follow them, it is not the guide’s mistake. If you have any doubts about the Four Noble Truths, you should ask me about them quickly. Do not harbor doubts without seeking to get them resolved.”

Then the World-honored One called on [the monks] three times like this [to voice their doubts] but no one asked questions. Why? Because those in the assembly had no doubts.

At this time Aniruddha observed the minds of those assembled there and said to the Buddha, “World-honored One, the moon could become hot and the sun could become cold but the Four [Noble] Truths could never be any different. The Buddha taught the truth of suffering, and it really is suffering: it cannot be made into happiness. The accumulation [of ignorance and craving] is really the causal basis [of suffering], and there is no other causal basis. For suffering to be extinguished, the causal basis is extinguished—the cause is ended, so the result is ended. The path for the ending of suffering is the true path, there is no other path. O World-honored One, all these monks are certain of the Four [Noble] Truths and have no doubts about them.

“In this assembly, those who have not yet accomplished the work will have feelings of sadness when they see the Buddha die. Those who have newly entered the Dharma hear what the Buddha says and all find deliverance, but for them it is like seeing a flash of lightning in the night so that they may see the path. Those who have already accomplished the work and crossed over the ocean of suffering will think, ‘Alas! How quick was the World-honored One’s *parinirvāna!*’”

Though Aniruddha spoke like this, and all in the assembly did indeed completely comprehend the meaning of the Four Noble Truths, the World-honored One wanted to enable the whole congregation to find strength and solidity, so with the mind of great compassion, he again explained for them:

“You monks should not harbor worries and vexations within yourselves. Even if I were to stay in the world for an entire eon, our time together would still have to end. Being together without parting will always be unattainable. For benefiting self and others, the Dharma is fully equipped and sufficient. If I stayed longer there would be no further gain. Those whom I can and should deliver within the realm of *devas* and human beings have all already been delivered. Those who have not yet found deliverance have all already formed the causal conditions for finding deliverance. If after this my disciples continue to carry on [the teaching], then this will be the Tathāgata’s *dharma-kāya* (Dharma body) being present forever without end.

“Thus you must realize that all worldly things are impermanent. Every meeting must have a parting. Do not be anxious about this. This is a characteristic of worldly things. You should work hard, make energetic progress,

and seek liberation as soon as possible. Use the light of wisdom to put an end to the darkness of all forms of ignorance. The world really is perilous and fragile and insecure. Today I am dying—it is like getting rid of a noxious disease. This is an evil thing we must abandon, temporarily called the body, sunk in the great ocean of birth, old age, sickness, and death. What person with wisdom would not be glad to get rid of it, this deadly robber?

“You monks must constantly, singlemindedly, earnestly seek a way out. Everything in the world, moving or static, is marked by decay and insecurity. Stop for now; let’s have no more talk. Now I am about to go. I am about to die, to enter *parinirvāṇa*. This is the last lesson I will teach.”

## THE ULLAMBANA SUTRA



## Translator's Introduction

It has been widely accepted tradition that the *Ullambana Sutra* (*Yulanpen jing*) was translated into Chinese by the monk-scholar Dharmarakṣa between 266 and 313 C.E., during the Western Jin dynasty. Recent scholarship, however, generally acknowledges that this sutra was not originally composed in India but in China in the mid-sixth century. The Sanskrit term *ullambana*, which literally means “tray,” was known in China as early as the sixth century. The term, as reconstructed from the Chinese by the late Wogihara Unrai, has never been traced to any of the extant Sanskrit literature. It is now considered by some scholars to be derived from the Iranian *urvan*, meaning the soul of the deceased. Worship of the *urvan* was central in the Zoroastrian festival called Fravardigan. At this festival, celebrants burned pine twigs, believing the fragrance would attract the souls of their ancestors. The descendants would then urge their ancestors to return to their homes and receive offerings. This rite is similar to the Japanese *urabon* ceremony, which traces its roots to this sutra: both are occasions for showing reverence to one's ancestors. The earliest record of the *urabon* festival, better known as the *obon* or *bon* festival, is found in volume twenty-two of the *Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihonshoki*), dating from the fourteenth year of the Suiko era (606 C.E.). In the fifth year of the Tempyō era (733 C.E.), the *obon* festival was designated one of the official annual functions of the imperial household, and it is still widely celebrated in Japan.

The *Ullambana Sutra* tells of how the Buddha's disciple Mahāmaudgalyāyana, distressed about the fate of his mother, who had been reborn in a lower realm, questioned the Buddha on how he might liberate her. The Buddha advised him to make offerings of a variety of delicious foods on trays to the holy monks on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, at the completion of the three-month summer retreat. Through the merit of this offering Mahāmaudgalyāyana would liberate from unfortunate rebirth not only his just-deceased mother but all his ancestors going back seven generations.



THE ULLAMBANA SUTRA

Translated into Chinese by  
Zhu Fahu (Dharmarakṣa), Tripiṭaka Master  
from Gandhāra in the Western Jin Dynasty



Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was staying at Anāthapiṇḍika’s 779a28  
Jetavana Monastery in Śrāvastī, when Mahāmaudgalyāyana attained the six  
supernatural powers. He desired to deliver his deceased parents from an evil 779b  
realm of rebirth in order to repay his debt to them for raising and nurturing  
him. As he viewed the world of transmigration with his supernatural eyes,  
he discovered that his deceased mother had been reborn in the realm of hungry  
ghosts (*pretas*), and as there was nothing to eat there she had wasted away  
to skin and bones. Stricken with grief, Mahāmaudgalyāyana filled a bowl  
with rice and approached his mother to offer it. His mother held the bowl in  
her left hand and took some rice with her right hand, but before the rice  
reached her mouth it turned into a piece of burning charcoal, and she could  
not eat it at all. Crying loudly in anguish, Mahāmaudgalyāyana hurriedly  
returned to the presence of the Buddha and related to him in detail what had  
happened.

The Buddha said to him, “Your mother’s evil karma is so deep-rooted  
that it is beyond your individual power [to alleviate it]. Although you are  
filled with filial piety and your cries shake heaven and earth, even the gods  
of heaven and earth, evil spirits, brahmans, bodhisattvas, and the Four Gate  
Guardians can do nothing about it. But she can be delivered through the  
divine power of [all] the monks in the ten directions.

“Now I shall teach you the way of deliverance. I shall enable all suffering  
beings to be freed from pain and anxiety and from the consequences of their  
evil karma.”

The Buddha said to Mahāmaudgalyāyana, “On the fifteenth day of the  
seventh month, when the monks end the summer retreat, for the sake of your  
parents of the past seven generations and your present suffering parents, you  
should fill a tray with the world’s finest delicacies, together with foods of  
rich variety and taste and five kinds of greens and cereals, and offer it to the  
monks in the ten directions. You should also offer them ladles, kettles, basins,  
perfumed oil, lamps, carpets, and bedding.

“On this day the monks of great virtue may be those who contemplate  
on a mountain, or those who have attained the fourfold fruits, or those who  
engage in walking meditation under a tree, or those who freely instruct *śrā-  
vakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* with the six supernatural powers, or bodhisattvas

in the tenth stage (*bhūmi*) who have transformed themselves into *bhikṣus*. Those monks who [live] among people receive the meal offered after the retreat with the same mind. They all keep the pure precepts, and their virtues, worthy of enlightened ones, are profound and all-pervasive. Those who make offerings to the monks after the retreat will enable their present parents, their parents of the past seven generations, and their six close relatives (i.e., fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, wives, and children) to be delivered from the suffering of the three evil realms of rebirth (i.e., the realms of hell, hungry ghosts, and animals). Their relatives will in due course be liberated—food and clothing will be given to them spontaneously. If their parents are still alive, they will enjoy the blissful lifespan of one hundred years. If their parents are deceased, their parents of the past seven generations will be born in heaven. They will freely transform themselves to be born in the light of heavenly flowers and receive infinite pleasure.”

Then the Buddha enjoined the monks in the ten directions, “First of all, for the sake of the donors, you must pray for their parents of the past seven generations. You should practice contemplation and then, with a settled mind, receive the food. When you first receive the food, you should place it in front of a stupa. After you finish your prayers, you may help yourselves to the food.”

779c Thereupon, Bhikṣu Mahāmaudgalyāyana along with all the bodhisattvas in the great assembly greatly rejoiced, and his painful cries ceased once and for all. On that very day, Mahāmaudgalyāyana’s mother was freed from the suffering in the realm of hungry ghosts [in which she had been living] for a *kalpa*.

Then Mahāmaudgalyāyana again addressed the Buddha, “My parents who raised me have received the power of the virtues of the Three Jewels (i.e., Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha), thanks to the spiritual power of the monks. If all future disciples of the Buddha are filial to their parents and uphold this *Ullambana Sutra*, then they will be able to deliver their present parents and their parents of the past seven generations. Is this not so?”

The Buddha replied, “Very well, that is a good question. I will certainly speak on this, since you have now asked the question. O son of good family, if there are *bhikṣus*, *bhikṣuṇīs*, kings, crown princes, ministers, prime ministers, head officials, various civil servants, or tens of thousands of commoners who are filial to their present parents and their parents of the past seven generations, they should, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, a joyous day for the

Buddha and a day after the retreat, offer a meal of various tastes on a tray to the monks who participated in the retreat. They should then ask [the monks] to pray that their present parents will have a lifespan of one hundred years, free of illness and all kinds of suffering, and that their parents of the past seven generations may be free from the suffering of the realm of hungry ghosts and be born in the realm of heavenly beings (*devas*) which is accompanied by infinite happiness and pleasure.”

The Buddha enjoined men and women of good families, “Disciples of the Buddha who practice filial piety should constantly think of their parents and make offerings to their parents of the past seven generations. Every fifteenth day of the seventh month, out of filial piety recall your parents of the past seven generations and prepare a tray of offerings for the Buddha and the monks in order to repay your debt to your parents. All disciples of the Buddha should uphold this teaching.”

Upon hearing this discourse of the Buddha, Bhikṣu Mahāmaudgalyāyana and the four groups of followers (monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen) were delighted and paid reverence to him.



## **THE SUTRA OF FORTY-TWO SECTIONS**



## Translator's Introduction

The *Sutra of Forty-two Sections* (*Sishierzhang jing*) is considered the first sutra to have been translated into Chinese. According to tradition it was brought to China and translated by two monks from the Western Region (present-day India or Central Asia), Kāśyapa Mātāṅga and Gobharana, during the reign of Emperor Xiaoming of the Later Han dynasty (58–75 C.E.). According to the *Collection of Notes Concerning the Translation of the Tripiṭaka* (*Chusancangzhiji*), the sutra was translated at White Horse Monastery (Baimasi) in Luoyang, the first Buddhist monastery established in China.

Some modern scholars, however, such as Liang Qichao, Yin Shun, and Donald S. Lopez, have argued that the text is apocryphal in nature, pointing out that it is imbued with Mahayana and Daoist doctrines. And the resemblance between the *Sutra of Forty-two Sections* and the *Book of Filial Piety* (*Xiangjing*) have led other scholars to question whether it is a translation of a Sanskrit original or a Chinese compilation. However, according to the noted historian Tang Yong-tong, a careful study of the history of the various editions of the text show that the oldest edition does not contain Mahayana concepts or traces of Daoist thought. Since the text has undergone rewriting and revision at the hands of later copyists, compilers, and annotators who may have added their personal points of view, it is only natural that there exist variations among editions. Further scholarly evidence is needed to definitively prove that this text is apocryphal.

The various editions of the *Sutra of Forty-two Sections* can be divided into three categories. The first includes the Korean, Song, and Yuan editions, which are nearly identical. The second is the edition with a commentary by Zhenzong of the Song dynasty (r. 998–1023). This edition was adopted by Nancang of the Ming dynasty. The third is the edition with a commentary by Shousui, a Chan monk of the Caodong sect, which flourished in the early twelfth century. The Korean edition, an old text translated during the Han period, was used as the basis for this English translation. The Song edition by Zhenzong contains a few additions not found in the Korean edition, most obviously the completion of

the traditional three divisions of a sutra, i.e., introduction, main body, and application. The Yuan edition by Shousui contains the same introduction as Zhenzong's edition but lacks the section pertaining to application. More importantly, it contains various additions and views portraying Mahayana doctrine and Chan thought. For example, one may note the addition of such phrases as "neither practice nor realization," which is a distinctive Chan expression. The large number of additions and modifications can most likely be traced to the hands of Chan masters.

In addition to the commentaries by Zhenzong and Shousui, other commentaries include the *Explication of the Sutra of Forty-two Sections* (*Sishierzhangjingjie*) by the Ming monk Zhixu, the *Supplemental Commentary to the Sutra of Forty-two Sections* (*Sishierzhangjingbuzhu*) by Liaotong, and the *Commentary to the Sutra of Forty-two Sections* (*Sishierzhangjingsuchao*) by the Qing monk Xufa. All of these commentaries are based on Shousui's Yuan edition.

The *Sutra of Forty-two Sections* is of a purely ethical character and represents a compilation drawn from many Buddhist sutras. Consequently, various sections can be found in pertinent Pāli and Chinese Buddhist sutras, particularly in the Āgamas (canonical texts). This particular text is a short work consisting of brief, independent sections, each of which deals with an ethical teaching intended for practice by Buddhist followers. Because of its practical relevance to moral behavior, the sutra has been widely circulated among Chinese Buddhists and has remained a popular general text up to the present day.

THE SUTRA OF FORTY-TWO SECTIONS

Translated during the Later Han Dynasty by  
Śramaṇa Kāśyapa Mātāṅga and Śramaṇa Gobharana  
from the Western Region



## [Introduction]

In ancient times Emperor Xiaoming of the Later Han had a dream one night in which he saw a heavenly being with a golden body and a bright halo on its head fly into the palace. He was greatly delighted by this. The following day, the emperor asked his ministers, “Which heavenly being was that?” 722a13

Fuyi, a man of vast learning and experience, said, “I have heard that in India there was a person who had attained the Way, called ‘Buddha,’ who could fly easily. The heavenly being must be him.”

Being thus informed, the emperor immediately dispatched to the country of the Yuezhi a group of twelve, including the envoy Zhangjian, the Lieutenant General of the Palace Guards Qinjing, and Wangzun, a student of the scholars of the National University, and others. [They] copied and brought back the *Sutra of Forty-two Sections* and kept it in the fourteenth stone [book storage] chamber, where a stupa was built.

Thereafter, the Buddhist teachings spread widely and monasteries were built everywhere. The number of people from afar who accepted the Buddhist teachings and willingly became subjects [of the Han] was immeasurable. The whole country enjoyed peace and all sentient beings have received unceasing benefits from the teachings.

### [1]

The Buddha said, “One who takes leave of one’s family and renounces household life in order to follow the Way is called a *śramaṇa*. Such a person constantly observes the two hundred and fifty precepts. By practicing the Four Noble Truths and progressively aspiring after purity, one becomes an arhat (“worthy one”). Arhats can fly, transform themselves, live long lives, and move about everywhere in heaven and earth.

“Prior to that, one is a non-returner (*anāgāmin*). At the end of that life, the spirit of the non-returner ascends to the nineteenth heaven where one becomes an arhat.

“Prior to that, one is a once-returner (*sakṛdāgāmin*) who, after once more ascending [to heaven] and returning [to earth], becomes an arhat.

“Prior to that, one is a stream-enterer (*srota-āpanna*) who realizes arhatship after seven more rounds of birth and death. 722b

“Cutting off desire is like cutting off one’s four limbs—they won’t be used again.”

[2]

The Buddha said, “He who has shaved his beard and head to become a *śramaṇa* and has accepted the Buddhist teachings gives up worldly belongings. Satisfied with almsfood, he takes only one meal a day at noon and passes the night beneath the same tree only once, careful to curb his desires. What makes men foolish and wicked are craving and desire.”

[3]

The Buddha said, “There are ten virtuous actions and there are also ten non-virtuous actions. Three are performed with the body, four with speech, and three with mind. The three [non-virtues] performed with the body are killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct; the four [non-virtues] of speech are deceit, slander, lying, and idle talk; the three [non-virtues] of mind refer to jealousy, malice, and ignorance. Those who do not believe in the Three Jewels take evil as truth. If a layperson practices the five precepts without indolence, and then proceeds to perform the ten precepts, the Way will certainly be attained.”

[4]

The Buddha said, “If a person commits all kinds of offenses and does not regret them but puts them out of mind, the offenses become overwhelming, just as the sea broadens and deepens when water flows into it. On the other hand, if a person with faults becomes aware of them and changes for the better, negative consequences are eliminated day by day, and eventually the Way is attained.”

[5]

The Buddha said, “When someone confronts me with ill intention, I protect and benefit him with the four virtues [of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity]. Whenever non-virtues are perpetrated toward me, I repeatedly return them with goodness. Virtuous merits are always on my side, while harmful calamities befall the other.”

[6]

A person heard the Buddha teach that one should uphold great compassion and return good for evil. He purposefully came to reproach the Buddha. The Buddha remained silent without retort and felt pity for the man, for his foolishness and ignorance caused him to act that way. When the man ended his reproach, the Buddha asked him, “If you present a gift to someone but he does not accept it, what do you do?”

“I take it back.”

“Now you have given me a reproach but I do not accept it. So you will take it back upon yourself, and the harm is your own. It is like an echo following a sound or a shadow following an object—you cannot keep it away. Therefore, take care not to commit non-virtue.”

[7]

The Buddha said, “An evil man who tries to harm a virtuous one is like one who raises his head and spits toward heaven; the spittle does not stain heaven but returns to stain the spitter. When one throws dust against the wind toward another, the dust does not soil the other but returns to soil oneself. The virtuous cannot be harmed, while the evil inevitably destroy themselves.”

[8]

The Buddha said, “Anyone who follows the Way should have nondiscriminating love and compassion—to practice virtue is the greatest practice. The blessings of maintaining one’s aspirations on the Way are great. When you see someone practice the Way and help him joyously, you will also obtain blessings.”

[A person] asked, “Would the blessings not run out?”

The Buddha said, “It is like the fire of a torch, to which thousands of people can come to light their own torches. They can thus depart to cook food and eliminate darkness for themselves, while the light [of the original torch] remains the same. Blessings are also like that.”

[9]

The Buddha said, “Bestowing almsfood on one hundred ordinary people is 722c  
not as worthwhile as bestowing almsfood on one virtuous one.”

“Bestowing almsfood on one thousand virtuous people is not as worthwhile as bestowing almsfood on one observer of the five precepts.

“Bestowing almsfood on ten thousand observers of the five precepts is not as worthwhile as bestowing almsfood on one stream-enterer.

“Bestowing almsfood on one million stream-enterers is not as worthwhile as bestowing almsfood on one once-returner.

“Bestowing almsfood on ten million once-returners is not as worthwhile as bestowing almsfood on one non-returner.

“Bestowing almsfood on one hundred million non-returners is not as worthwhile as bestowing almsfood on one arhat.

“Bestowing almsfood on one billion arhats is not as worthwhile as bestowing almsfood on one *pratyekabuddha* (solitary enlightened one).

“Bestowing almsfood on ten billion *pratyekabuddhas* is not as worthwhile as converting one’s parents in this life to the teachings of the Three Jewels.

“Converting parents as many as one hundred billion is not as worthwhile as bestowing almsfood on a person who seeks buddhahood and helps other sentient beings (i.e., a bodhisattva).

“The blessings obtained from bestowing almsfood on virtuous people are the greatest. To worship heaven, earth, spirits, and gods is not as worthwhile as being filial to one’s own parents, for parents are most divine.”

## [10]

The Buddha said, “There are five things in this world that are difficult to do:

“It is difficult to practice giving when one is poor.

“It is difficult to train in the Way when one has wealth and power.

“It is difficult to achieve immortality.

“It is difficult to have the opportunity to read Buddhist sutras.

“It is difficult to be born during the time of a buddha.”

## [11]

A *śramaṇa* asked the Buddha, “What conditions are necessary to attain the Way? How does one gain knowledge of one’s previous lives?”

The Buddha replied, “The Way is without form and to know it is of no avail. One must maintain the aspiration to practice. It is like polishing a

mirror. When the tarnish is gone, the mirror shines, and one sees one's own form. [Similarly,] when one severs desires and maintains [their] emptiness, one sees the truth of the Way and knows all previous existences."

**[12]**

The Buddha said, "What is virtue? To follow the Way is virtue. What is greatness? When one's aspirations conform to the Way, that is greatness. What is great power? Patience and forbearance constitute great power. One who is patient harbors no grudge and is certain to be honored by all. What is the pinnacle of brilliance? This is when the impurities of the mind are eliminated, negative actions eradicated, and one inwardly becomes pure, without stain. When there is nothing in the ten directions, from before the formation of heaven and earth up until now, that is not seen, known, or heard, and when all knowing is obtained, that is called the pinnacle of brilliance."

723a

**[13]**

The Buddha said, "Those who cherish desires do not perceive the Way. Just as people cannot perceive their reflections in water that has been polluted by the [objects of] five colors and stirred vigorously, so the Way cannot be perceived by those whose minds are polluted by interwoven love and desire. However, when the water is allowed to settle and the filth is removed, so that the water becomes clean and pure, one sees one's form. If someone looks down at a cloth-covered kettle boiling over a raging fire, no reflection can be seen. [Similarly,] those who are boiling internally with the three poisons (greed, anger, and ignorance) and externally covered by the five hindrances will never perceive the Way. Only after the mire of the mind is cleared away will one come to know the source of consciousness, where birth and death lead to, and where the buddha lands are and what morality is."

**[14]**

The Buddha said, "A person who follows the Way is like one who enters a dark room with a torch. The darkness is immediately dispelled and only light remains. [Similarly,] by studying the Way and perceiving the truth, a person dispels ignorance and nothing is unknowable."

**[15]**

The Buddha said, “My awareness is awareness of the Way, my practice is practice of the Way, and my speech is speech of the Way. I am continually aware of the truth of the Way without even a single moment’s lapse.”

**[16]**

The Buddha said, “Be mindful of impermanence upon seeing heaven and earth. Be mindful of impermanence upon seeing rivers and mountains. Be mindful of impermanence upon seeing the abundant forms of myriad things. Being thus mindful, you can quickly attain the Way.”

**[17]**

The Buddha said, “If in daily activity, one constantly remembers and practices the Way, the root of faith will be attained. Its blessings are immeasurable.”

**[18]**

The Buddha said, “Be aware that though the four physical elements all have their own names, even they do not exist. The self is only conventionally existent, and such existence is not permanent. All things are like a mirage.”

**[19]**

The Buddha said, “Complying with their desires, people seek fame. It is like burning incense. Many people can smell its fragrance but the incense itself is consumed. Foolish beings crave worldly fame without adhering to the truth of the Way. Calamity attends such worldly fame, causing later regret.”

**[20]**

The Buddha said, “For men, wealth and lust are like a child’s attraction to honey on the blade of a knife. There is not even a meal’s worth, yet there is danger that the child will cut his tongue.”

**[21]**

The Buddha said, “The misfortune of attachment to wife, children, possessions, and home is worse than that of being shackled and chained in prison.

A prisoner may someday be pardoned but the longings for wife and children are as dangerous as the jaws of a tiger, and the fault of succumbing to them is unpardonable.”

[22]

The Buddha said, “Of all desires, there is none worse than lust. Of desires, lust has no equal. Fortunately, it is one of a kind. If there were another desire so strong, no one in the world could follow the Way.”

723b

[23]

The Buddha said, “People with strong desires are like those who walk against the wind carrying a torch. If they are foolish enough not to let go of the torch, their hands will inevitably be burned. The poisons of lust, anger, hatred, and ignorance are within human beings and, if not quickly eradicated with the help of the Way, will certainly cause harm. It is just like the fool who holds onto a torch even as his hand is being burned.”

[24]

A heavenly being (*deva*) offered the Buddha a beautiful girl in order to test the Buddha’s will and to observe his Way.

The Buddha said, “O skinbag, full of all kinds of filth! What have you come here for? You may be able to deceive the world but you cannot move one who has gained the six supernatural powers. Go away. I don’t need you.”

The heavenly being paid profound reverence to the Buddha and asked him the meaning of the Way. As soon as the Buddha explained it to him he immediately became a stream-enterer.

[25]

The Buddha said, “One who follows the Way is like a piece of wood floating down a river. If it does not touch the left or the right bank, is neither picked up by someone nor intercepted by the gods, is neither caught in whirlpools nor rots on the way, I guarantee it will reach the sea. If one follows the Way without being confused by lust or deceived by all kinds of depravity, but instead earnestly advances forward without doubts, I guarantee that he will attain his goal.”

**[26]**

The Buddha said to the *śramaṇas*, “Be careful not to trust your thoughts, for they are not trustworthy. Be careful not to come into contact with physical attractions, for contact with them brings calamity. Only when you have realized arhatship can you trust your own thoughts.”

**[27]**

The Buddha said to the *śramaṇas*, “Be careful not to look at women. If you happen to see them, do not look at them. Be careful not to talk with women, but if you should happen to talk to them, control your thoughts and behave properly, thinking ‘I am a *śramaṇa* living in this impure world. I should be like the lotus flower that is not defiled by mud. I should treat elderly women as my own mother, those older than myself as my older sisters, those younger than myself as my younger sisters, and the young ones as my daughters.’ You should respect them politely but reflect in your minds that their bodies, from head to foot, contain nothing but all sorts of filth and impurities. Thus, you can be rid of desire.”

**[28]**

The Buddha said, “Those who follow the Way should eradicate lust. It is like straw that must be kept from an oncoming fire. A follower of the Way should look upon desire as something that must be kept at a distance.”

**[29]**

723c

The Buddha said, “There was a man who was continually plagued by sexual desire and wished to castrate himself with a knife. I said to him, ‘To cut off your sex organ would not be as good as to cut off your thoughts, for thoughts are like the officer in charge. If the officer in charge is stopped, the followers will also be stopped. If a deviant thought persists, what is the use of severing the sex organ except to cause imminent death?’ I teach that people who hold perverted worldly views are just like that foolish man.”

**[30]**

A prostitute had an appointment with a man but he did not show up. She felt regret and said,

Lust! I know your origin!  
You spring from my own thoughts.  
If I do not allow such thoughts to arise,  
Thus you will not arise.

Passing by, the Buddha heard this verse and told the *śramaṇas*, “Remember! This verse was spoken by Kāśyapa Buddha and it is still circulating in the world.”

[31]

The Buddha said, “Human suffering arises from desire, and fear arises from suffering. Without desire there will be no suffering, and without suffering there will be no fear.”

[32]

The Buddha said, “Following the Way is like fighting alone against [an army of] ten thousand. While putting on armor and preparing to fight, one may become frightened and run away. Halfway to the battlefield, one may turn and flee. One may fight and be slain. One may gain victory and return to his country with honor. If a person maintains firm resolve and advances vigorously, not misled by vulgar and foolish words but instead destroying desire and negativity completely, the Way will certainly be attained.”

[33]

One night, a *śramaṇa* was reciting a sutra. He sounded very mournful, for he thought regretfully of retrogressing [to lay life]. The Buddha called to the *śramaṇa* and asked him, “When you were a householder, what did you do?”

“I used to play the lute,” he replied.

The Buddha said, “What happened when the strings were too slack?”

“They would not make a sound,” was the reply.

“What happened if the strings were too taut?” asked the Buddha.

“The sounds were sharp,” he answered.

“And how was it when the strings were neither too taut nor too slack?”

“The sounds were fine.”

The Buddha said to the *śramaṇa*, “It is the same with training in the Way. When the mind is properly adjusted, the Way is attained.”

[34]

The Buddha said, “Following the Way is like smelting iron. If iron is melted gradually to eliminate all impurities, it can be made into implements of fine quality. One who trains in the Way should also progress gradually to expel the defilements of the mind, while maintaining proper effort. If you force yourself abruptly on the Way, the body grows weary. When the body grows weary, your thoughts become disturbed. When thoughts become disturbed, your practice deteriorates. And when practice deteriorates, you accumulate non-virtue.”

[35]

The Buddha said, “Beings experience suffering whether or not they follow the Way. From birth to old age, old age to sickness, sickness to death, suffering is endless. With turbulent thoughts, beings accumulate non-virtues and, consequently, birth and death continue ceaselessly with their unutterable suffering.”

[36]

The Buddha said, “It is difficult for one to leave the three unfortunate transmigrations (i.e., rebirth in the three lower realms of hell, hungry ghosts, and animals) and to be born as a human being.

“Even if born as a human being, it is difficult for one to be born a man rather than a woman.

“Even if born as a man it is difficult to be born with all six sense organs intact.

“Even if born with the six sense organs intact, it is difficult to be born in a central country [where the Buddhist teachings flourish].

“Even if born in a central country, it is difficult to encounter and practice the Buddhist teachings.

“Even if one encounters and practices the Buddhist teachings, it is difficult to encounter a sagacious king.

[“Even if one encounters a sagacious king,] it is difficult to be born in the household of a bodhisattva.

“Even if born into the household of a bodhisattva, it is difficult to have faith in the Three Jewels and to live at the time of a buddha.”

[37]

The Buddha asked the *śramaṇas*, “How long is the lifespan of a human being?” 724a

“It is but a few days,” was the reply.

“You still have not understood the Way,” the Buddha replied. He asked another, “How long is the lifespan of a human being?”

“It is the time required for a single meal,” was the reply.

The Buddha said, “You have not yet understood the Way.” Again, he asked another, “How long is the lifespan of a human being?”

“It is the time taken to inhale and exhale a single breath,” was the answer.

The Buddha said, “Excellent! You are a follower of the Way.”

[38]

The Buddha said, “My disciples may be thousands of miles away from me, but if they are mindful of my precepts they will definitely attain the Way. But if those who are in close contact with me have non-virtuous thoughts, they will never attain the Way. The important thing is to practice. How can there be the slightest benefit from staying close to me if one does not practice?”

[39]

The Buddha said, “Following the Way is like tasting honey—it is sweet both within and on the surface. So are my teachings, the meaning of which is fine-edged. Those who practice them will attain the Way.”

[40]

The Buddha said, “Those who follow the Way can extirpate desires. Just as pearls can be removed from a string one by one until there are none left, one attains the Way when defilements have been eradicated.”

[41]

The Buddha said, “*Śramaṇas* practicing the Way should be like oxen carrying heavy loads through deep mud. Despite their extreme fatigue, they dare not glance to the left or right. They are eager to emerge from the mud in order to get some rest. *Śramaṇas* should regard desire as worse than the mud and be wholeheartedly mindful of the Way; thus will they be freed from suffering.”

**[42]**

The Buddha said, “I regard [those of] royal and official positions as I would passers-by. I regard treasuries of gold and jewels as I would rubble. I regard garments of fine silk as I would worn-out rags.”

# **THE SUTRA OF PERFECT ENLIGHTENMENT**



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## Translator's Introduction

The *Great Extensive Scripture of the Ultimate Meaning of the Perfect Enlightenment Sutra* (*Dafangguang yuanjue xiuduoluo liaoyi jing*), or *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* (*Yuanjue jing*) as it is known for short, is a major, if somewhat problematical, text within the East Asian Buddhist tradition. It was especially important in the Chan and Huayan traditions in China. The number of commentaries written on it during the Tang (618–907), Song (960–1279), Ming (1368–1644), and Qing (1644–1912) dynasties bears ample testimony to its continuing influence throughout the course of Chinese Buddhist history. Still studied today, it is one of the texts frequently chosen as a subject for lectures by modern Chinese masters. Chinese Buddhists prized the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* for offering a concise statement of some of their most deeply held convictions about the inherent nature of enlightenment and the course of practice for its realization. Despite its perduring importance, a shadow of controversy has always surrounded the text. Not only were there doubts about its authenticity as a sutra, but there was also a lingering uneasiness about the orthodoxy of its teaching.<sup>1</sup>

Although it purports to have been translated into Chinese by Buddhatrāta in 693, everything that we know about the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* indicates that it was not a translation of an Indic text but was rather an “apocryphal” work composed in China sometime around the end of the seventh or the beginning of the eighth century. Although it is impossible to determine precisely where or when the text was first composed, circumstantial evidence suggests that it was current in Chan circles in or around Luoyang during the reign of Empress Wu (690–705). This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that the first text to mention the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* is the *Annals of the Transmission of the Dharma Treasure* (*Chuanfabaoji*; most likely composed toward the end of the first decade of the eighth century), an early Chan record of the transmission of the Dharma down through Shenxiu (606–706), the famous “founder” of what came to be known as the Northern school of Chan. Indeed, the fabrication of

apocryphal texts like the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* played a crucial role in legitimating the teachings of the nascent Chan movement.

Three of the four eighth-century commentaries on the text, none of which survive, were written by figures affiliated with the Chan movement. Wei que, the most well-known of the group, was active in Luoyang during the end of Empress Wu's reign and seems to have had some connection with Shenxiu. The other three early commentators are more obscure figures. One, Daoshi, supposedly received the teaching of Heze Shenhui (684–758), the figure responsible for championing Huineng (638–713) as the true Sixth Patriarch and “founder” of the Southern school of Chan, and another, Jianzhi, was Daoshi's disciple. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the fourth figure, Daoquan.

It is notable that the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* attracted the attention of figures associated with both the Northern and the Southern schools of Chan. Its discussion of sudden and gradual approaches to practice and its use of the image of polishing a mirror to remove the dust that covers its luminous surface anticipated the terms in which the controversy between the two schools of Chan came to be classically framed by Shenhui in the 730s and by the *Platform Sutra* later in the eighth century. The great Chan and Huayan scholar, Zongmi (780–841), writing in the third decade of the ninth century, saw the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* as validating his position of sudden enlightenment followed by gradual cultivation.

The first catalogue to mention the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* is the *Record of Śākyamuni's Teachings Compiled during the Kaiyuan Era* (*Kaiyuanshi-jiaolu*), compiled in 730 by Zhisheng, which lists Buddhatrāta (Fotuoduolu; Juejiu) as the translator. It tells us that Buddhatrāta came from Kashmir (Jizong) and claims that he translated the scripture at the famous White Horse Monastery (Baimasi) in Luoyang. Zhisheng notes that even though the text “appeared recently,” its year of translation is not recorded. He goes on to conclude that the fact the date of translation is unknown does not necessarily mean that the text is not authentic. Buddhatrāta's brief biography in the *Biographies of Eminent Monks Compiled during the Song Dynasty* (*Songgaosengzhuan*) only slightly varies the wording of Zhisheng's account without adding any new information. Zongmi's discussion of the translation of the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* in his commentary to the text quotes the commentary by Daoquan (no longer extant), which says that the translation was completed by the Kashmiri (Jieshimiluo) Tripitaka

master Buddhatrāta at the White Horse Monastery on the eighth day of the fourth month of 693. Daoquan ends by cryptically commenting that the details of Buddhatrāta's life are recorded elsewhere. The fact that Buddhatrāta is not listed as the translator or author of any other text and that nothing is known of his life and activities in China are only the first of the many indications that the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* was apocryphal.

Apocryphal texts like the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* gave scriptural legitimacy to the growing body of doctrine in terms of which medieval Chinese Buddhists were forging their own uniquely "sinitic" approach to Buddhism. Its teaching was related to two other apocryphal works, the *Śūramgama Sutra* (*Shoulengyanjing*) and the *Awakening of Faith* (*Dashengqixinlun*). The *Awakening of Faith* played a crucial role in shaping these new doctrines by developing the Indian Buddhist teaching of an inherent potentiality for buddhahood (an idea referred to in technical terms as *tathāgatagarbha*, "womb or embryo of the Tathāgata") into a monistic ontology based on the mind as the ultimate ground of all experience. This absolute mind, moreover, was said to be intrinsically enlightened (*benjue*). Enlightenment is thus more than a potentiality inherent in all beings; it is their true nature and the fundamental ground of their existence. As such, it acts as a force animating and inspiring religious practice. The *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* even pushes this doctrine so far as to claim that "from the very beginning sentient beings have already attained buddhahood." The teaching of intrinsic enlightenment became a fundamental axiom on which uniquely East Asian forms of Buddhist belief and practice were developed.

This doctrine generated its own set of problems that did not come to the fore in Indian Buddhism and that parallel the problem of theodicy in Western monotheistic religions. In baldest terms, the underlying philosophical problem was: If all of reality is based on a single monistic principle that is intrinsically enlightened, how can the ignorance that causes beings to suffer in delusion be accounted for? Moreover, if all beings are intrinsically enlightened to begin with, what is the nature of practice and why is it necessary? These problems, raised but either not resolved or not addressed in the *Awakening of Faith*, form the central philosophical problematic that animates the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*.

The *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* therefore took as its point of departure problems raised by the *Awakening of Faith*'s idea of intrinsic enlightenment, which it referred to as the "marvelous mind of perfect enlightenment" (*yuanjuemiaoxin*).

The first chapter thus broaches the problem of ignorance. If ignorance is fundamentally an illusion, and hence has no more real existence than an “illusory flower in the sky,” as the Buddha answers, then any practice that is based on getting rid of an illusion must also be illusory. How, then, can illusion be used to get rid of illusion? The remainder of the text goes on to discuss the nature of the mind and illusion, how practice can be possible if ignorance is unreal and illusory, and the kinds of gradual practice appropriate to rid the mind of its illusory projections so that its perfectly enlightened nature can be realized in all its pristine purity. The penultimate chapter of the text provides scriptural justification for the kind of specialized ritual, devotional, and meditative practices that were becoming an important part of Chinese Buddhist monastic practice during the sixth and seventh centuries. The text’s concern with clarifying the implications of intrinsic enlightenment for meditation practice would have spoken directly to issues of vital moment for the early Chan community at the end of the seventh and beginning of the eighth centuries.

In addition to addressing problems raised in the *Awakening of Faith*, apocryphal sutras like the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* played a critical role in this process of sinification by lending scriptural authority to the new teachings found in the *Awakening of Faith*. Being a sutra, and hence claiming to represent the word of the Buddha, the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* bore an authority beyond that of the *Awakening of Faith*, which was only a *śāstra* (i.e., a scholastic treatise written by a later Buddhist exegete), and thereby provided a solid scriptural foundation for legitimating its teaching.

The teaching of an intrinsically enlightened, pure mind underlying all existence could also be seen to conflict with the cardinal Mahayana teaching of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), which undercut all attempts to posit an ontological absolute and held that the true nature of “reality” was beyond predication. The teaching of emptiness ultimately proscribed the ascription of any attributes, even that of emptiness, to reality. In the end, there was nothing at all that could be said. The silence of emptiness, however, left many Chinese Buddhists with a sense of affective void. They also worried that it undermined any basis on which belief and practice could be founded, and ideas like intrinsic enlightenment were developed in Chinese Buddhism to provide a solid foundation for belief and practice. In any case, there was an ongoing dialectical tension between the doctrine of intrinsic enlightenment and emptiness within Chinese Buddhism. By leaning to

one extreme, the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* was susceptible to the charge of having gone too far. But in its very evocation of this charge, it is especially valuable for bringing into focus a major tension that animated the tradition as a whole. This tension was an integral aspect of the controversy that surrounded the text in the Song period and has been raised anew more recently by a group of scholars under the banner of "Critical Buddhism," who have charged that the doctrines of *tathāgatagarbha* and intrinsic enlightenment are "not Buddhism."

The present translation of the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* is based on the version of the text that appears in the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, volume 17, number 842, the Buddhist canon published in Japan in the Taishō period. Like many Buddhist scriptures, Buddhist technical terms appear in the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* in both transliterated and translated forms. The present translation restores all transliterated terms to Sanskrit and, where called for, their meaning is explained in a footnote on their first occurrence. Many common Buddhist terms in their Sanskrit form are regularly found in English dictionaries and can thus be considered as having entered the English language as English words. Since many common Buddhist terms that were translated into Chinese (such as *fā*, Dharma, or *ye*, karma) have entered the English language, the present translation follows the generally practiced convention in Buddhist studies of rendering them in their better-known Sanskrit forms.



THE GREAT EXTENSIVE SCRIPTURE OF  
THE ULTIMATE MEANING OF THE  
PERFECT ENLIGHTENMENT SUTRA<sup>2</sup>

Translated by the Kashmiri Tripiṭaka<sup>3</sup> Master  
Buddhatrāta during the Tang Dynasty



## Prologue

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Bhagavat<sup>4</sup> entered into the *samādhi*<sup>5</sup> 913a27  
of the great effulgent treasury of spiritual penetration, the resplendent abode  
maintained by all Tathāgatas,<sup>6</sup> which is the ground of the pure enlightenment  
of all sentient beings, wherein their minds and bodies are utterly quiescent,  
in the original state of universal equality, perfectly pervade the ten directions,  
and accord with nonduality. From the sphere of nonduality, [the Buddha] 913b  
manifested various pure lands. He was accompanied by one hundred thousand  
bodhisattva *mahāsattvas*,<sup>7</sup> who were led by Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, Universal  
Worthy Bodhisattva, Universal Eyes Bodhisattva, Diamond Treasury Bodhi-  
sattva, Maitreya Bodhisattva, Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva, Mastery of Majestic  
Virtue Bodhisattva, Discerning Sound Bodhisattva, Purifying Karmic Obstruc-  
tions Bodhisattva, Universal Enlightenment Bodhisattva, Perfect Enlighten-  
ment Bodhisattva, and Foremost of Worthies Bodhisattva. Together with  
their attendants, they all entered *samādhi* and dwelled together with the Tathā-  
gata in the Dharma assembly<sup>8</sup> of universal equality.



## Chapter I

### Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva

Then Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva arose from his seat within the great assembly, bowed with his head at the feet of the Buddha, circumambulated him three times, knelt before him with hands clasped at his breast, and addressed the Buddha, saying, “Great Compassionate World-honored One, for the sake of all those who have come to this Dharma assembly, I pray that you will set forth the dharmic<sup>9</sup> practice based on the pure causal ground from which the Tathāgata originally arose, as well as set forth how, within the Great Vehicle, bodhisattvas should give rise to the pure mind in order to remove all illnesses so as to be able to cause future sentient beings during the final age to seek the Great Vehicle and not fall into errant views.” Having spoken these words, he prostrated himself fully. He made his request in this way three times in succession.

At that time the World-honored One addressed Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, saying, “Excellent! How excellent, son of good family, that, for the sake of the various bodhisattvas [gathered here], you are thus able to ask about the dharmic practice of the causal ground of the Tathāgata, as well as for the sake of all sentient beings seeking the Great Vehicle during the final age, you are thus able to cause them correctly to adhere to it and not fall into errant views. Now listen carefully to what I shall expound to you.” Then Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, delighted to receive the teaching, listened silently along with the great assembly.

“Son of good family, the supreme Dharma King<sup>10</sup> has a great *dhāraṇī*<sup>11</sup> gate called Perfect Enlightenment, from which flows all purity, suchness, enlightenment (*bodhi*), nirvana, and perfections (*pāramitās*) to instruct bodhisattvas. The causal ground from which all Tathāgatas originally arise is wholly based on perfectly illuminating the pure character of enlightenment, which is forever cut off from ignorance, and thereupon realizing the Buddha Way.

“What is ignorance?

“Son of good family, all sentient beings, from beginningless time, have been given over to all kinds of perverted views, like people who are lost without any sense of direction, delusively mistaking the four great elements as the attributes of their own body and the six types of sense objects as the attributes of their own mind. They are like people with an eye disease who, when they look at the sky, see a flower or a second moon.

“Son of good family, there is really no flower in the sky; the disease is delusive attachment. Because of delusive attachment, not only are beings deluded about the nature of empty space itself but they are also deluded about the place from which the flower really is born. Due to such delusive imputation, beings revolve within the cycle of birth and death. Hence [this condition] is referred to as ignorance.

913c “Son of good family, this ignorance has no real essence of its own but is like a person seen in a dream: even though he seems to be present during the dream, upon awakening he cannot be apprehended anywhere. Or it is like [illusory] flowers seen in the sky: although they disappear into empty space, it cannot be said that there is a definite place into which they disappear. Why? Because there is no place from which they are born. All sentient beings delusively perceive what is not born in terms of birth and extinction. Hence they are said to revolve within the cycle of birth and death.

“Son of good family, since those who cultivate perfect enlightenment based on the causal ground of the Tathāgata know that everything is like a flower seen in the sky, there is no revolving within the cycle; nor is there any body or mind to experience birth and death. It is not by our effort that birth and death do not exist; it is by their inherent nature that they do not exist. The awareness that perceives their unreality is also like empty space. Even the very understanding that everything is like empty space has the character of a flower seen in the sky. Still, one cannot say that there is no reality to that awareness. It transcends both existence and nonexistence. Therefore [such awareness] is said to accord with pure enlightenment. Why? Because it has the nature of empty space; because it is never disturbed; because there is no arising or perishing in the *tathāgatagarbha*;<sup>12</sup> because there is no perception; and because it is like the nature of the *dharmadhātu*,<sup>13</sup> which is utterly perfected and thoroughly pervades the ten directions. Therefore it is called the dharmic

practice of the causal ground. If bodhisattvas base themselves on this understanding, they will generate the pure mind within the Great Vehicle, and if sentient beings during the final age practice in accord with this understanding, they will not fall into errant views.”

At that time the World-honored One, wanting to restate his meaning, uttered this verse:

Mañjuśrī, you should know that  
 All Tathāgatas  
 From the original causal ground  
 Are awakened by wisdom  
 And thoroughly penetrate ignorance.  
 Understanding that [everything] is like a flower in the sky,  
 They are able to escape the ever-flowing cycle.  
 It is like someone seen in a dream:  
 Upon awakening he cannot be apprehended.  
 Enlightenment is like empty space—  
 Universally equal and undisturbed.  
 When enlightenment pervades the ten directions,  
 One has succeeded in realizing the Buddha Way,  
 And the various illusions vanish into nowhere.  
 In realizing the Way there is nothing that is attained.  
 Because its original nature is perfectly complete,  
 Within it bodhisattvas are able to generate the mind of *bodhi*,<sup>14</sup>  
 And sentient beings in the final age  
 Are able to avoid errant views by cultivating it.



## Chapter II

### Universal Worthy Bodhisattva

Then Universal Worthy Bodhisattva arose from his seat within the great assembly, bowed with his head at the feet of the Buddha, circumambulated him three times, knelt before him with hands clasped at his breast, and addressed the Buddha, saying, “Great Compassionate World-honored One, I pray that, for the sake of the bodhisattvas in this assembly as well as for all sentient beings who cultivate the Great Vehicle during the final age, you will explain how they should practice when they learn of the pure sphere of perfect enlightenment. World-honored One, if those sentient beings realize that everything is like an illusion and that their bodies and minds are also illusory, then how can they remedy illusion by means of illusion? When everything that has the nature of illusion is utterly extinguished, then there is no longer any mind—who, then, can engage in practice? How can you then talk about cultivating [the *samādhi* wherein everything is seen to be] like an illusion? Yet if sentient beings never engaged in practice but remained within their illusory projections within birth and death, never realizing the sphere where everything is seen to be like an illusion, then how could they ever free themselves from delusive thoughts? For the sake of all sentient beings during the final age, I pray that you will devise some expedients and gradual practices to enable them to cut off all illusions forever.” Having spoken these words, he prostrated himself fully. He made his request in this way three times in succession.

914a

At that time the World-honored One addressed Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, saying, “Excellent! How excellent, son of good family, that, for the sake of the bodhisattvas as well as sentient beings in the final age you are thus able to [inquire about] cultivating the bodhisattva *samādhi* wherein everything is seen to be like an illusion, so as to enable sentient beings to succeed in freeing themselves from illusions by gradually progressing through expedient methods. Now listen carefully to what I shall expound to you.” Then Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, delighted to receive the teaching, listened silently along with the great assembly.

“Son of good family, the various illusory projections of all sentient beings are all born from the perfectly enlightened marvelous mind of the Tathāgatas, just as flowers in the sky come into being out of emptiness. Even though the illusory flowers disappear, the nature of the sky is unimpaired. The illusory minds of sentient beings, however, are extinguished by recourse to illusion; when all illusions have been thoroughly extinguished, the enlightened mind is undisturbed. If enlightenment is explained by recourse to illusion, that is also said to be an illusion. If one claims that there is enlightenment, that [position] is still not yet free from illusion. To claim that there is no enlightenment is also an illusion. Therefore, the extinction of illusions is designated as being undisturbed.

“Son of good family, all bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age should transcend all illusory projections and unreal objects. Because they firmly cling to the awareness of transcending, [the awareness that] the mind is like an illusion should also be transcended. Even this transcending is illusory and must also be transcended. And even the transcending of the transcending of illusions must also be transcended. Only when there is nothing to transcend are illusions removed. Remedying illusion by means of an illusion is like rubbing sticks together to make fire: with the two sticks serving as cause to one another, flames burst forth, the sticks are consumed, their ashes fly away, and the smoke disappears, [leaving nothing behind]. Although all illusions are exhausted, nothing enters into extinction.

“Son of good family, since knowing illusion is transcending it, there is no need to devise expedients. Since freeing oneself from illusion is enlightenment, there is also no gradual progression. If all bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age practice in accord with this [teaching], they will be able to transcend all illusions forever.”

At that time the World-honored One, wanting to restate his meaning, uttered this verse:

Universal Worthy, you should know that  
The beginningless illusory ignorance  
Of all sentient beings  
Is established on the basis of the perfectly enlightened mind  
Of all Tathāgatas

Just as a flower in the sky  
Assumes form depending on the sky.  
When the flower in the sky disappears,  
The empty sky is fundamentally undisturbed.  
Illusion is born from enlightenment:  
Once illusions are extinguished, enlightenment is consummated,  
And the enlightened mind is undisturbed.  
Bodhisattvas  
As well as sentient beings in the final age  
Should always transcend illusion.  
Being utterly free of illusions  
Is like wood generating fire:  
When the wood is exhausted, the flames are then extinguished.  
In enlightenment there is thus no gradual progress,  
Nor are there any expedient methods.

914b



## Chapter III

### Universal Eyes Bodhisattva

Then Universal Eyes Bodhisattva arose from his seat within the great assembly, bowed with his head at the feet of the Buddha, circumambulated him three times, knelt before him with hands clasped at his breast, and addressed the Buddha, saying, “Great Compassionate World-honored One, I pray that for the sake of the bodhisattvas in this assembly as well as for all sentient beings in the final age you will explain the gradual course of the bodhisattva’s practice. How should they think about it? How should they uphold it? What expedient methods [of practice] have you devised for those sentient beings who are not yet enlightened so as to universally enable them to awaken their understanding? World-honored One, if those sentient beings lack the proper expedient methods and the proper way of thinking, when they hear the Buddha Tathāgata set forth this *samādhi*, their minds will give rise to delusion and distress, and they will not be able to enter enlightened understanding in regard to perfect enlightenment. I pray that you will bestow your compassion both on us and on sentient beings in the final age and provisionally set forth the expedient methods [of practice].” Having spoken these words, he prostrated himself fully. He made his request in this way three times in succession.

At that time the World-honored One addressed Universal Eyes Bodhisattva, saying, “Excellent! How excellent, son of good family, that for the sake of the bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age you are thus able to inquire about how one should think about and uphold the Tathāgata’s gradual course of practice, as well as ask me to provisionally explain the various expedient methods [of practice]. Now listen carefully to what I shall expound to you.” Then Universal Eyes Bodhisattva, delighted to receive the teaching, listened silently along with the great assembly.

“Son of good family, if those novice bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age want to seek the Tathāgata’s pure, perfectly enlightened mind, they must properly direct their thought and transcend all illusions. First, relying on

the Tathāgata's *samatha*<sup>15</sup> practice, they must firmly uphold the prohibitory precepts, peacefully abide within the assembly at large, and sit in meditation in a quiet room.

“They should constantly reflect: this present body of mine is a coming together of the four great elements. That is to say, hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, brains, and all such filthy matter derive from the element of earth; spittle, mucus, pus, blood, sweat, saliva, phlegm, tears, semen, excrement, and urine all derive from the element of water; bodily warmth derives from the element of fire; and bodily movement derives from the element of wind. Since the four great elements are independent of one another, where could the delusory body exist right now? Thus we know that in the end this body is without substance, a coming together [of various components] to take on form, and that in reality it is tantamount to an illusory projection.

“When the four elements provisionally combine, the six senses delusively appear. When the six senses and four great elements internally and externally combine together, cognized objects delusively appear. When they conglomerate within, a cognizing subject seems to exist, which is provisionally designated as mind.

914c “Son of good family, this unreal mind would not be able to exist were it not for the six types of sense objects. When the four great elements break up, there are no sense objects that can be apprehended. When the cognized objects among them return to their separate components, disperse, and disappear, then in the end there is no cognizing mind that can be perceived.

“Son of good family, because the illusory body of those sentient beings is extinguished, their illusory minds are also extinguished. Because their illusory minds are extinguished, illusory sense objects are also extinguished. Because illusory sense objects are extinguished, the extinction of illusion is also extinguished. Because the extinction of illusion is extinguished, that which is not illusory is not extinguished. It is like polishing a mirror: when the dust is removed, its luminosity is manifested.

“Son of good family, you should realize that the body and mind are altogether illusory dust, and that when the characteristic of dust is extinguished forever, all within the ten directions is pure.

“Son of good family, for example, a pure *maṇi*<sup>16</sup> jewel reflects the five colors as they appear before it, but the ignorant see the *maṇi* jewel as really having five colors.

“Son of good family, in the same way, the pure nature of perfect enlightenment manifests the body and mind [of sentient beings] according to their particular type, but the ignorant claim that pure, perfect enlightenment really has the inherent characteristic of such body and mind. Due to this [misapprehension], sentient beings are unable to transcend their illusory projections. For this reason I say that the body and mind are illusory dust. It is in terms of transcending dust that I define the bodhisattva. When the dust is removed and its corresponding cognition is eliminated, there is neither a counterpart to dust nor anything that can be defined.

“Son of good family, as soon as these bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age have realized that everything is an illusion and thus have extinguished all representations, they thereupon gain unbounded purity, and the emptiness of unlimited space is manifested throughout their awareness.

“Because enlightenment is perfectly radiant, the mind is pure. Because the mind is pure, visual objects are pure. Because visual objects are pure, the eyes are pure. Because the eyes are pure, visual consciousness is pure. Because consciousness is pure, auditory objects are pure. Because auditory objects are pure, the ears are pure. Because the ears are pure, auditory consciousness is pure. Because the consciousness is pure, tactile objects are pure. The same analysis also applies for nose, tongue, body, and consciousness.

“Son of good family, because the sense organs are pure, visual objects are pure. Because form is pure, auditory objects are pure. The same also holds for olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental objects. Son of good family, because the six types of sense objects are pure, the element of earth is pure. Because earth is pure, the element of water is pure. The same also holds for the elements of fire and wind. Son of good family, because the four elements are pure, the twelve sense spheres (*āyatanas*), eighteen sense elements (*dhātus*), and twenty-five modes of existence are pure. Because they are pure, the ten powers, four fearlessnesses, fourfold unobstructed wisdom, the Buddha’s eighteen uncommon *dharmas*, and the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment are pure, and this analysis extends all the way to the purity of all the eighty-four thousand *dhāraṇī* gates.

“Son of good family, because all reality is in its nature pure, the entire body is pure. Because the entire body is pure, multitudinous bodies are pure. Because multitudinous bodies are pure, everything is likewise pure, including

the perfect enlightenment of all sentient beings in the ten directions. Son of good family, because an entire world is pure, multitudinous worlds are pure. Because multitudinous worlds are pure, then, in the same way, everything  
915a fully encompassing the three worlds throughout all space is universally equal, pure, and undisturbed.

“Son of good family, since space is universally equal and undisturbed, you should know that the nature of enlightenment is universally equal and undisturbed. Because the four great elements are undisturbed, you should know that the nature of enlightenment is universally equal and undisturbed. In this way, since everything including the eighty-four thousand *dhāraṇī* gates is universally equal and undisturbed, you should know that the nature of enlightenment is universally equal and undisturbed.

“Son of good family, because the nature of enlightenment is all-pervading, pure, undisturbed, perfect, and without limit, you should know that the six senses pervade the entire *dharmadhātu*. Because the six senses are all-pervasive, you should know that the six types of sense objects pervade the entire *dharmadhātu*. Because the six types of sense objects are all-pervasive, you should know that the four great elements pervade the *dharmadhātu*. In the same way everything, including the eighty-four thousand *dhāraṇī* gates, pervades the entire *dharmadhātu*.

“Son of good family, because the nature of subtle enlightenment is also all-pervasive, the nature of the senses and the nature of their objects encounter no impairment and no adulteration. Because the senses and their objects are without impairment, in the same way nothing, including the eighty-four thousand *dhāraṇī* gates, impairs or adulterates anything else. It is like hundreds or thousands of lamps, whose light illuminates a single room: their light pervades everywhere without impairment and without adulteration.

“Son of good family, because their enlightenment is fully realized, you should know that the bodhisattva is neither bound by the Dharma nor seeks liberation from the Dharma. He neither loathes samsara<sup>17</sup> nor cherishes nirvana. He neither respects those who uphold the precepts nor despises those who violate the prohibitions. He neither values seasoned practitioners nor looks down on beginners. Why? Because all are enlightened. It is like the light of the eyes that apprehends the objects before them. The light is perfectly

pervasive and attains the condition of being without likes and dislikes. Why? Because the essence of the light, being nondual, is without likes and dislikes.

“Son of good family, as for those bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age who would cultivate this mind and attain full realization, there is neither cultivation nor full realization in regard to this teaching. Perfect enlightenment shines everywhere, is quiescence, and is nondual. Within it the hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of buddha lands, whose incalculable, inexpressible number is more numerous than the grains of sand in the Ganges River, randomly appear and disappear like illusory flowers in the sky, are neither identical to nor distinct from one another, and are neither bound nor liberated. When one first realizes that from the very beginning sentient beings have already attained buddhahood, samsara and nirvana seem like last night’s dream.

“Son of good family, because they are like last night’s dream, you should know that both samsara and nirvana neither arise nor perish, neither come nor go; that that which is realized has neither gain nor loss, neither acceptance nor rejection; and that the one who realizes this neither arises nor ceases, neither abides nor perishes. Since there is neither subject nor object in this realization, in the end there is neither realization nor realizer, and the entire Dharma-nature is universally equal and unimpaired.

“Son of good family, if those bodhisattvas practice like this, gradually advance like this, think like this, carry on like this, practice expedient methods like this, develop their enlightened understanding like this, and seek the Dharma like this, they will be without delusion or distress.”

At that time the World-honored One, wanting to restate his meaning, uttered this verse:

Universal Eyes, you should know that  
 The bodies and minds of all sentient beings  
 Are altogether like an illusion.  
 The attribute of the body belongs to the four great elements;  
 The nature of the mind derives from the six types of sense objects.  
 Since in essence the four great elements are distinct from one another,  
 Who could constitute the one who holds them together?  
 If one gradually practices in this way,

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The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment

Everything in its entirety will become pure,  
Undisturbed, and pervade the *dharmadhātu*.  
There will be no striving, going along with things, stopping, or  
extinguishing,  
Nor will there be anyone who realizes it.  
All buddha lands  
Are like illusory flowers in the sky.  
The three worlds are universally equal  
And in the end are without coming and going.  
If novice bodhisattvas  
And sentient beings in the final age  
Wish to seek entrance to the Buddha Way,  
They should train in this way.

## Chapter IV

### Diamond Treasury Bodhisattva

Then Diamond Treasury Bodhisattva arose from his seat within the great assembly, bowed with his head at the feet of the Buddha, circumambulated him three times, knelt before him with hands clasped at his breast, and addressed the Buddha, saying, “Great Compassionate World-honored One, well have you set forth for the assembly of all bodhisattvas the purity of the Tathāgata’s perfect enlightenment, the great *dhāraṇī*, the dharmic practice of the causal ground, and the gradual expedient methods, dispelling the darkness of all sentient beings. The Dharma assembly gathered here has received the Buddha’s compassionate instruction, the illusory film has been cleared away from its eyes, and its eye of wisdom is clear and pure.

“World-honored One, if all sentient beings have already attained buddhahood from the very beginning, how do they once again come to have all forms of ignorance? If sentient beings have ignorance from the very beginning, for what reason does the Tathāgata also say that they have already attained buddhahood from the beginning? If the diverse beings throughout the ten directions have already attained the Buddha Way from the very beginning and only later give rise to ignorance, then when will all the Tathāgatas once again give rise to all forms of defilement?

“I only pray that you will not abandon your unrestricted great compassion; and that, for the sake of the bodhisattvas, you will open up the secret treasury; and that, for the sake of all sentient beings in the final age, you will enable them to hear the Dharma gate of ultimate meaning like that of the teaching of this scripture so as to forever cut off doubts and regrets.” Having spoken these words, he prostrated himself fully. He made his request in this way three times in succession.

At that time the World-honored One addressed Diamond Treasury Bodhisattva, saying, “Excellent! How excellent, son of good family, that, for the

sake of bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age, you are thus able to ask about the Tathāgata's profound, secret, ultimate expedient, which is the bodhisattva's supreme instruction, the ultimate meaning of the Great Vehicle that is able to cause all bodhisattvas practicing throughout the ten directions, as well as all sentient beings in the final age, to attain resolute faith and cut off doubts and regrets. Now listen carefully to what I shall expound to you." Then Diamond Treasury Bodhisattva, delighted to receive the teaching, listened silently along with the great assembly.

915c "Son of good family, all worlds begin and end, are born and perish, have a before and after, come into existence and go out of existence, coalesce and disperse, arise and cease. Thoughts follow one another in succession, going and coming in a ceaseless cycle. The sundry forms of grasping and rejecting are all within cyclic existence. If one were to discern perfect enlightenment without having left cyclic existence, then the nature of perfect enlightenment would be the same as the ever-flowing cycle. If one were to escape from cyclic existence, then there would be no place where [perfect enlightenment] could exist.

"For example, it is like moving the eyes [back and forth rapidly,] thus making the calm [surface of] water appear to be stirred up [into waves]. Or it is like holding the eyes steady and whirling a flame around [so that it appears to form a ring]. It is also the same in the case of the moon seeming to move when clouds fly past it, or the shore seeming to shift [when seen] from a moving boat.

"Son of good family, as long as the movements [of thought] have not yet ceased, its objects cannot be made to stand still. How much less possible is it for the defiled mind revolving in the cycle of birth and death while it is still not yet pure to contemplate the perfect enlightenment of the Buddha and to not revolve again? Therefore you gave rise to your three doubts.

"Son of good family, take the example of an illusory film over the eyes that causes one delusively to perceive a flower in the sky. Once the illusory film has been removed, it is impossible to ask, 'Now that this film has been extinguished, when will it arise again?' Why? Because the two things, the film and flower, do not depend on one another.

"Again, it is like the flower in the sky: once it disappears into the sky it is impossible to ask, 'When will empty space give rise to flowers in the sky

again?’ Why? Because from the beginning the sky contains no flowers, and they are not subject to arising and disappearing. Samsara and nirvana are the same as arising and disappearing, and the perfect radiance of marvelous enlightenment is different from the flowers and films.

“Son of good family, you should realize that empty space is neither something that sometimes exists nor something that sometimes does not exist. How even more true is this in the case of the Tathāgata, whose according with perfect enlightenment constitutes the fundamental nature of the universal equality of empty space [that pervades everywhere].

“Son of good family, it is like the smelting of gold ore: the gold does not come into existence by smelting. Once the gold has been extracted, it does not again become ore. Even after an unimaginably long time has passed, the nature of the gold will not deteriorate. One should not say that it was not perfectly present from the very beginning. The perfect enlightenment of the Tathāgata is also like this.

“Son of good family, in the marvelous, perfectly enlightened mind of all Tathāgatas, from the very beginning there is neither *bodhi* nor nirvana, neither the attaining of buddhahood nor the not attaining of buddhahood, and neither the delusive cycle of existence nor the absence of cyclic existence.

“Son of good family, since the sphere perfected by the *śrāvakas*<sup>18</sup>—in which body, speech, and mind have been utterly eradicated—can never reach the nirvana that is revealed in personal realization, how much less could it use the thinking mind to comprehend the sphere of the Tathāgata’s perfect enlightenment?

“Just as if one were to use the glimmer of a firefly to try to light up Mount Sumeru, one would never be able to illuminate it, so if one uses the mind caught in cyclic existence and gives rise to views conceived in terms of cyclic existence to try to enter into the great quiescent sea of the Tathāgata, one would never be able to succeed. Therefore I say that all bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age must first cut off the root of the beginningless cycle of existence.

“Son of good family, the occurrence of such thoughts arises from mental activity. In all cases they belong to the six types of sense objects, that which is cognized by delusive thoughts, and are not the true mind itself. They are like flowers in the sky. Using such thinking to try to discern the sphere of

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buddhahood is no more possible than a flower in the sky forming a fruit in the sky. Proliferating delusive thoughts can never grasp it.

“Son of good family, the unreal volatile mind, being replete with specious views, is not able to consummate the expedients of perfect enlightenment. Discriminating in this manner is not the correct gate.”

At that time the World-honored One, wanting to restate his meaning, uttered this verse:

Diamond Treasury, you should know that  
The nature of the Tathāgata’s utter quiescence  
Has never had an end nor a beginning.  
If one uses the mind caught in cyclic existence  
To try to conceive of it, one only becomes further caught in the cycle,  
And one only reaches the limit of cyclic existence  
And cannot enter the ocean of buddhahood.  
For example, in smelting gold ore,  
The gold is not produced by smelting.  
Even though the gold exists from the very beginning,  
It is by smelting that it is refined.  
When the essence of true gold is made uniform,  
It does not again become ore.  
Samsara and nirvana,  
Ordinary people and buddhas,  
Share the same character as a flower in the sky.  
Since thinking is just an illusory projection,  
How could one ever hope to understand by fabricating a further  
unreality?  
If one is able to discern this mind,  
Only then can one seek perfect enlightenment.

## Chapter V

### Maitreya Bodhisattva

Then Maitreya Bodhisattva arose from his seat within the great assembly, bowed with his head at the feet of the Buddha, circumambulated him three times, knelt before him with hands clasped at his breast, and addressed the Buddha, saying, “Great Compassionate World-honored One, you have opened wide the secret treasury for bodhisattvas, enabling the great assembly to have a profound understanding of cyclic existence and to discriminate [between] errant and true. Well are you able to bestow the fearless eye of the Way on all sentient beings in the final age, so that they may generate resolute faith in great nirvana and may never again follow objects within the revolving cycle and give rise to endlessly revolving views.

“World-honored One, if bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age want to enjoy the freedom of the great sea of quiescence, how should they cut off the root of cyclic existence? How many different types of beings are there within cyclic existence? What are the different kinds of practice for cultivating the enlightenment (*bodhi*) of the Buddha? When entering back into the cycle of affliction, how many kinds of expedient teaching methods for liberating sentient beings should [the bodhisattva] set up?

“I only pray that you will not abandon your world-saving great compassion so as to enable all bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age who are engaged in religious practice to make their eye of wisdom majestically pure, illuminate the mirror of the mind, and be perfectly enlightened about the supreme understanding and vision of the Tathāgata.” Having spoken these words, he prostrated himself fully. He made his request in this way three times in succession.

At that time the World-honored One addressed Maitreya Bodhisattva, saying, “Excellent! How excellent, son of good family, that, for the sake of bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age, you are thus able to ask about the Tathāgata’s profound, secret, and subtle meaning so as to enable bodhisattvas to purify their eye of wisdom and to enable all sentient beings

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in the final age to cut off cyclic existence forever, have their minds be enlightened to true reality, and be fully endowed with the acceptance of the birthlessness [of all things] (*anutpattikadharmakṣānti*). Now listen carefully to what I shall expound to you.” Then Maitreya Bodhisattva, delighted to receive the teaching, listened silently along with the great assembly.

“Son of good family, from beginningless time all sentient beings experience cyclic existence because of craving and desire. All of the different forms of life in various worlds—whether born of egg, womb, moisture, or through transformation (i.e., the four modes of birth)—receive their proper life form through lustful desires. Thus you should realize that craving is the fundamental root of cyclic existence. The formation of desires augments the nature of craving, and thus is able to cause the uninterrupted continuation of birth and death. Desire is born from craving, life is born from desire, and sentient beings’ craving and life in turn are based on the root of desire. Craving and desire are the cause [of life], and craving and life are the result [of desire].

“Aversion and attraction arise from desiring objects. When objects oppose what the mind craves, hate and envy arise, which generate various actions, which in turn thus lead to birth in hell (*naraka*) or as a hungry ghost (*preta*). If one realizes that desires should be renounced, and one desires to renounce the paths [of birth] governed by karma, rejecting evil and delighting in good, one will appear as a heavenly being (*deva*) or as a human being. Again, if one forsakes craving and delights in renunciation because one realizes that craving should be loathed, one only nurtures the root of craving. Although one thereupon realizes the rewards of increasing meritorious conditioning, the sagely path is not completed because all [these rewards still] involve revolving within cyclic existence. Therefore sentient beings who desire to be liberated from birth and death and to escape from cyclic existence should first cut off desire and extirpate craving.

“Son of good family, the manifestation of bodhisattvas in the world through transformation is not rooted in craving. It is just out of compassion to cause [sentient beings] to abandon craving that they enter into birth and death by seeming to rely on desires. If all sentient beings in the final age are able to abandon desires, cast off likes and dislikes, cut off cyclic existence forever, and diligently seek the realm of the perfect enlightenment of the Tathāgatas, they will become enlightened to the intrinsic purity of their minds.

“Son of good family, all sentient beings, from taking desire as the root and so aggravating ignorance, manifest five natures, whose distinct qualities are not the same. Depending on the two obstructions, their [capacities] may appear deep or shallow. What are the two obstructions? The first is the obstruction of principle, which obstructs true knowing and seeing. The second is the obstruction of phenomena, which continues birth and death.

“What are the five natures?”

“Son of good family, the condition in which these two obstructions have not yet been thoroughly cut off is referred to as not yet having realized buddhahood. If sentient beings are to get rid of desires once and for all, they must first remove the obstruction of phenomena. Until they have cut off the obstruction of principle they can only realize the realms of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*<sup>19</sup> but not that of bodhisattvas.

“Son of good family, if all sentient beings in the final age want to enjoy the vast ocean of the Tathāgatas’ perfect enlightenment, they must first generate the vow to diligently strive to cut off the two obstructions. Once the two obstructions are subdued, they will be able to realize the realm of bodhisattvas. When the obstructions of principle and phenomena have finally been thoroughly cut off, they will then enter into the subtle perfect enlightenment of the Tathāgatas and completely realize *bodhi* and great nirvana.

“Son of good family, all sentient beings without exception will realize perfect enlightenment. When they meet a good friend (*kalyāṇamitra*) and rely on the dharmic practice of the causal ground taught by him, there will be sudden and gradual [aspects] in their approach to practice. If they encounter the path of the true practice of the unsurpassed enlightenment (*bodhi*) of the Tathāgata, all will attain buddhahood regardless of whether their capacities are great or small. If sentient beings encounter someone with errant views in their quest for a good friend, they will never attain true enlightenment—that is a case of what is referred to as heterodox nature. The errors of the false teacher are not the fault of sentient beings. These are referred to as the differences in the five natures of sentient beings.

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“Son of good family, just making use of expedients coming from their great compassion, bodhisattvas enter various worlds to enlighten those who do not understand. They even manifest themselves in sundry forms in adverse and favorable conditions, work together with [sentient beings], and through

their teaching enable [sentient beings] to realize buddhahood. All [these feats] are based on the power of their beginningless pure vows. If all sentient beings in the final age are to give rise to the supreme aspiration for great perfect enlightenment (*bodhicitta*), they must generate the pure great vow of the bodhisattva. They should say: ‘May I now abide with the perfect enlightenment of the Buddha, seek out good friends, and not associate with [followers] of heterodoxy and the two vehicles.’ Engaging in practice based on their vow, they will gradually cut off obstructions. When their obstructions are exhausted, their vow will be fulfilled, and they will ascend to the pure Dharma palace of liberation and realize the splendid citadel of great perfect enlightenment.”

At that time the World-honored One, wanting to restate his meaning, uttered this verse:

Maitreya, you should know that  
All sentient beings’  
Not having attained great liberation  
Is entirely because of desire;  
Thus they have fallen into birth and death.  
If they are able to cut off likes and dislikes,  
As well as greed, anger, and delusion,  
They will no longer be bound by their distinct natures,  
And will succeed in completing the Buddha Way.  
The two obstructions will then be eliminated forever.  
They should seek a teacher to gain true understanding,  
Follow their bodhisattva vow,  
And abide in great nirvana.  
All bodhisattvas in the ten directions  
In reliance on their great compassionate vow  
Manifest themselves within birth and death,  
Appearing before practitioners  
And sentient beings in the final age  
To encourage them to cut off views based on craving  
And to return to great perfect enlightenment.

## Chapter VI

### Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva

Then Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva arose from his seat within the great assembly, bowed with his head at the feet of the Buddha, circumambulated him three times, knelt before him with hands clasped at his breast, and addressed the Buddha, saying, “Great Compassionate World-honored One, you have amply set forth for us such inconceivable things that have never been seen or heard before. Having received the Buddha’s skillful guidance, our bodies and minds are now calm and composed, and we have gained great benefit. For the sake of the Dharma assembly that has come here, I pray that you will further expound the nature of the perfectly consummated enlightenment of the Dharma King. How are the realizations and attainments of all sentient beings, bodhisattvas, and World-honored Tathāgatas to be distinguished? [May your answer] cause sentient beings in the final age to hear this sagely teaching, to follow it, to awaken their understanding of it, and to gradually enter into it.” Having spoken these words, he prostrated himself fully. He made his request in this way three times in succession. 917a

At that time the World-honored One addressed Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva, saying, “Excellent! How excellent, son of good family, that, for the sake of bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age, you are thus able to inquire of the Tathāgata about the distinctions among the gradual stages. Now listen carefully to what I shall expound to you.” Then Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva, delighted to receive the teaching, listened silently along with the great assembly.

“Son of good family, the intrinsic nature of perfect enlightenment is not a [distinct] nature, and yet [each of] those [distinct] natures have it. It arises in accordance with various natures, but it can neither be gained nor realized. Within true reality there are really neither bodhisattvas nor sentient beings. Why? Because bodhisattvas and sentient beings are altogether illusory projections. When illusory projections are extinguished, there is no one to gain

or realize it. Just as the eye cannot see itself, so the nature is itself universally equal without there being anything that is universally equal.

“When sentient beings are deluded they are not yet able to extinguish all their illusory projections, and distinctions are then apparent among their delusive achievements in regard to whether they are extinguished or not yet extinguished. If they gain accordance with the Tathāgata’s utter quiescence, then there is really neither any quiescence nor anyone who is quiescent.

“Son of good family, due to their delusive conception of self and their self-love from beginningless time, all sentient beings have never themselves known that they appear and disappear moment of thought after moment of thought. Therefore they give rise to likes and dislikes and become indulgently attached to the five desires. If they meet a good friend, whose instruction causes them to awaken their understanding of the nature of pure, perfect enlightenment and generate understanding of their appearing and disappearing, they then know that the very nature of this birth consists of anxiety. If, again, there is someone who cuts off anxiety forever, he gains the purity of the *dharma-madhātu*. Because such an understanding of purity itself constitutes an obstacle, one is not free in regard to perfect enlightenment. This is what is meant by an ordinary person according with the nature of enlightenment.

“Son of good family, all bodhisattvas regard such understanding as an obstacle. Even though they cut off the obstacle of understanding, they still abide in that awareness. Their awareness of this obstacle is an obstacle, and they are not free. This is what is meant by bodhisattvas who have not yet entered into the higher stages (*bhūmis*) according with the nature of enlightenment.

“Son of good family, having illumination and having awareness are both called obstructions. Therefore, when the bodhisattva is always aware and does not abide anywhere, illumination and illuminator are simultaneously quiescent. Just as in the case of a person cutting off his own head, once it is cut off there is no one left to cut it off, so in the case of obstructions themselves being extinguished by the obstructed mind, once the obstructions are eliminated there is no longer anyone left to eliminate them. The teaching of the scriptures are like a finger pointing to the moon: once one sees the moon, one clearly knows that in the end the finger is not the moon. The multifarious teachings of all Tathāgatas in instructing bodhisattvas are also like this. This

is what is meant by the bodhisattva who has entered the higher stages according with the nature of enlightenment.

“Son of good family, all obstructions are identical with ultimate enlightenment. Whether one maintains concentration or loses it, there is nothing that is not liberated. Fulfilling the Dharma and violating the Dharma are both termed nirvana. Wisdom and delusion are permeated by *prajñā*.<sup>20</sup> The Dharma that is realized by bodhisattvas and the heterodox is equally *bodhi*. Ignorance and suchness do not belong to different realms. Cultivating the precepts (*śīla*), meditation (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*), as well as indulging in lust, anger, and foolishness, are altogether the practice of purity. Sentient beings and their lands are the same as the one Dharma-nature. The dungeons of hell and the palaces of heaven are wholly the Pure Land. Whether one has the nature or lacks the nature one equally realizes the Buddha Way. All defilements are in the end liberation. When the oceanlike wisdom of the *dharmadhātu* fully illumines the various characteristics, they are seen to be like empty space. This is what is meant by the Tathāgata’s according with the nature of enlightenment.

“Son of good family, bodhisattvas as well as sentient beings in the final age should never give rise to delusive thought. Nor should they put a stop to delusive mental activity. Abiding in the objects of delusive thought they do not increase their clear understanding, and without clear understanding they do not discern true reality. Sentient beings’ hearing this teaching, believing it, understanding it, and upholding it without generating alarm is what is meant by according with the nature of enlightenment.

“Son of good family, you should know that such sentient beings have already made offerings to hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of buddhas and bodhisattvas more numerous than the sands of the Ganges River and have planted virtuous roots. The Buddha explains that these people are said to have completely realized the wisdom embracing all modes.”<sup>21</sup>

At that time the World-honored One, wishing to restate his meaning, uttered this verse:

Pure Wisdom, you should know that  
The nature of perfectly consummated *bodhi*  
Has neither attainment nor realization,

The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment

Neither bodhisattvas nor sentient beings.  
Yet between enlightenment and non-enlightenment  
There are distinctions in the gradual stages.  
Sentient beings are obstructed by understanding,  
And bodhisattvas have not yet freed themselves from that awareness.  
Entering the higher stages, they are eternally quiescent  
And no longer abide in forms.  
The perfect consummation of great enlightenment  
Is called pervasive accordance.  
When sentient beings in the final age  
Do not give rise to unreality in their minds,  
The Buddha says that such people  
Appear in the world as bodhisattvas.  
Having made offerings to infinite buddhas,  
Their merit is perfectly consummated.  
Even though they employ many expedients,  
They are all said to accord with wisdom.

## Chapter VII

### Mastery of Majestic Virtue Bodhisattva

Then Mastery of Majestic Virtue Bodhisattva arose from his seat within the great assembly, bowed with his head at the feet of the Buddha, circumambulated him three times, knelt before him with hands clasped at his breast, and addressed the Buddha, saying, “Great Compassionate World-honored One, you have fully distinguished for us the ways in which the different natures accord with enlightenment, thus causing bodhisattvas, their enlightened minds effulgent, to receive the Buddha’s perfect voice and gain excellent benefit without depending on practice. World-honored One, just as one may approach a great walled city, with four gates on the outside, from different directions without being limited to a single road, so all bodhisattvas’ adornment of their buddha lands as well as their realization of *bodhi* is not restricted to a single method. World-honored One, I pray that you will fully expound for us the gradual stages of all of the expedient methods together with all the different types of practitioners, so that the bodhisattvas gathered here as well as those sentient beings seeking the Great Vehicle in the final age may quickly develop their understanding and disport themselves in the Tathāgata’s great ocean of utter quiescence.” Having spoken these words, he prostrated himself fully. He made his request in this way three times in succession. 917c

At that time the World-honored One addressed Mastery of Majestic Virtue Bodhisattva, saying, “Excellent! How excellent, son of good family, that, for the sake of bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age, you are thus able to inquire of the Tathāgata about such gradual stages. Now listen carefully to what I shall expound to you.” Then Mastery of Majestic Virtue Bodhisattva, delighted to receive the teaching, listened silently along with the great assembly.

“Son of good family, unsurpassed subtle enlightenment pervades all ten directions, produces Tathāgatas, and has the same essence as and is universally

equal with all *dharmas*. In reality there is no duality in regard to various practices, but in accordance with expediency their number is without limit. Fully encompassing the various inclinations of beings in accord with the distinctions in their natures, there are three general types.

[1] “Son of good family, if bodhisattvas have an insight into pure, perfect enlightenment and, with their purely enlightened minds, take calming as their practice, then, by letting their thoughts settle, they become aware of the agitation of consciousness. When wisdom born of calmness is produced, the objects of body and mind are accordingly extinguished forever, and then they are able internally to generate tranquility and composure. Because of this tranquility, the mind of the Tathāgatas throughout the ten directions is manifest within them as an image in a mirror. This expedient method is called *śamatha*.<sup>22</sup>

[2] “Son of good family, if bodhisattvas have an insight into pure, perfect enlightenment and, with their purely enlightened mind, understand that the nature of consciousness together with the senses and their objects are all caused by illusory projections, then they will generate illusions in order to remove what is illusory, and by transforming illusions they will enlighten illusory beings. Because they generate illusions they are able internally to develop great compassion and composure. All bodhisattvas will gradually advance by following this practice of generating illusions. Because the viewing of illusions is not the same as the illusions, and because the viewing of illusion is wholly an illusion, the characteristics of illusion are severed forever. The subtle practice brought to perfection by those bodhisattvas is like the earth germinating sprouts. This expedient method is called *samāpatti*.<sup>23</sup>

918a [3] “Son of good family, if bodhisattvas have an insight into pure, perfect enlightenment and, with their purely enlightened minds, neither grasp illusory projections nor the characteristic of calming, then they will clearly understand that the body and mind are both obstructions. The illumination that is without awareness does not depend on obstructions and attains forever the sphere that goes beyond obstructions and non-obstructions. Freely utilizing the world along with their body and mind, they dwell within the defiled world like the sound reverberating from within a bell. When the defilements and nirvana no longer impede one another, then they are able internally to develop utter quiescence and composure. Accordance with subtle enlightenment is the realm of utter quiescence, which cannot be reached by self and other,

body and mind; sentient beings and life are all floating thoughts. This expedient method is called *dhyāna*.<sup>24</sup>

“Son of good family, these three Dharma gates are all methods for drawing close to and according with perfect enlightenment. All Tathāgatas within the ten directions realize buddhahood by means of them, and the sundry expedient methods of the bodhisattvas within the ten directions, whatever their similarities and differences, all make use of these three kinds of effort. If you attain perfect realization, that is identical with my perfect enlightenment.

“Son of good family, if someone practices the sagely way and teaches the consummation of the hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of fruits of the arhat and *pratyekabuddha*, that is not as good as someone who hears this unobstructed Dharma gate of perfect enlightenment and in an instant accords with its practice.”

At that time the World-honored One, wanting to restate his meaning, uttered this verse:

[Mastery of] Majestic Virtue, you should know that  
 Although the supreme great enlightened mind  
 Is in its original state nondual,  
 The expedient methods for according with it  
 Are limitless in number,  
 But when the Tathāgata synoptically sets them forth,  
 There are three general types.  
 Tranquil *samatha*  
 Is like an image reflected in a mirror.  
*Samāpatti* wherein everything is seen to be like an illusion  
 Is like sprouts gradually growing.  
 The utter quiescence of *dhyāna*  
 Is like the sound reverberating from within a bell.  
 These three types of subtle Dharma gates  
 All accord with enlightenment.  
 The Tathāgatas of the ten directions  
 As well as the great bodhisattvas  
 Succeed in realizing the Way by relying on them.  
 The perfect realization of these three activities  
 Is referred to as ultimate nirvana.



## Chapter VIII

### Discerning Sound Bodhisattva

Then Discerning Sound Bodhisattva arose from his seat within the great assembly, bowed with his head at the feet of the Buddha, circumambulated him three times, knelt before him with hands clasped at his breast, and addressed the Buddha, saying, “Great Compassionate World-honored One, a Dharma gate such as this is exceedingly rare. World-honored One, how many of these expedient methods should bodhisattvas practice in regard to the gate of perfect enlightenment? I pray that for the sake of the great assembly as well as sentient beings in the final age you will expediently reveal them so as to cause them to understand true reality.” Having spoken these words, he prostrated himself fully. He made his request in this way three times in succession.

At that time the World-honored One addressed Discerning Sound Bodhisattva, saying, “Excellent! How excellent, son of good family, that, for the sake of the great assembly as well as sentient beings in the final age you asked the Tathāgata about such practices. Now listen carefully to what I shall expound to you.” Then Discerning Sound Bodhisattva, delighted to receive the teaching, listened silently along with the great assembly.

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“Son of good family, the perfect enlightenment of all Tathāgatas is pure, and from the beginning there is neither practice nor practitioner. However, since all bodhisattvas as well as sentient beings in the final age are not yet enlightened and practice under the sway of illusion, there are then twenty-five methods of the pure meditation.

[1] “If bodhisattvas just take up the practice of utmost calming and through the efficacy of calming forever cut off the defilements, fully consummate realization, and thereupon enter nirvana without arising from their seats, these bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *śamatha* solely.

[2] “If bodhisattvas just discern that everything is like an illusion, use the power of the Buddha to transform the world, fully practice the pure and

subtle practice of the bodhisattva in their manifold activities, and never lose their tranquil concentration and calm wisdom in regard to *dhāraṇīs*, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *samāpatti* solely.

[3] “If bodhisattvas just extinguish illusions, do not make use of their [transformative] activities, cut off defilements for themselves, and, once their defilements are completely cut off, realize true reality, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *dhyāna* solely.

[4] “If bodhisattvas first take up the practice of utmost calming, use their minds of calm wisdom to illuminate illusions, and thereupon give rise to bodhisattva practice, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *śamatha* first and to cultivate *samāpatti* afterward.

[5] “If bodhisattvas, by their calm wisdom, realize the nature of utmost calmness and thereupon cut off defilements and forever escape from birth and death, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *śamatha* first and to cultivate *dhyāna* afterward.

[6] “If bodhisattvas, by means of their calm wisdom, then manifest sundry transformations through the efficacy of illusion to liberate sentient beings, and finally cut off defilements and enter utter quiescence, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *śamatha* first, to cultivate *samāpatti* next, and to cultivate *dhyāna* afterward.

[7] “If bodhisattvas use the power of utmost calming to cut off defilements, and later generate the pure and subtle practices of the bodhisattva to liberate sentient beings, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *śamatha* first, to cultivate *dhyāna* next, and to cultivate *samāpatti* afterward.

[8] “If bodhisattvas use the efficacy of their utmost calming to cut off defilements in their minds and also to liberate sentient beings and to establish realms, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *śamatha* first and then to cultivate *samāpatti* and *dhyāna* together.

[9] “If bodhisattvas use the efficacy of their utmost calming supplemented by their generating transformations, and later cut off defilements, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *śamatha* and *samāpatti* together and to cultivate *dhyāna* afterward.

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[10] “If bodhisattvas use the efficacy of their utmost calming supplemented by utter quiescence, and later generate activities to transform the

world, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *śamatha* and *dhyāna* together and to cultivate *samāpatti* afterward.

[11] “If bodhisattvas use the efficacy of transformation in accord with sundry circumstances and then take up utmost calming, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *samāpatti* first and to cultivate *śamatha* afterward.

[12] “If bodhisattvas use the efficacy of their transformations in sundry realms and then take up utter quiescence, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *samāpatti* first and to cultivate *dhyāna* afterward.

[13] “If bodhisattvas use the efficacy of their transformations to carry out buddha deeds, abide in utmost calming, and then cut off defilements, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *samāpatti* first, to cultivate *śamatha* next, and to cultivate *dhyāna* afterward.

[14] “If bodhisattvas use the efficacy of their transformations to function without obstruction, and by cutting off defilements abide in utmost calming, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *samāpatti* first, to cultivate *dhyāna* next, and to cultivate *śamatha* afterward.

[15] “If bodhisattvas use the efficacy of their transformations to function expediently, and accord with utmost calming and utter quiescence together, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *samāpatti* first and then to cultivate *śamatha* and *dhyāna* together.

[16] “If bodhisattvas use the efficacy of their transformations to give rise to sundry functions supplemented by utmost calming, and later cut off defilements, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *samāpatti* and *śamatha* together and to cultivate *dhyāna* afterward.

[17] “If bodhisattvas use the efficacy of their transformations supplemented with utter quiescence, and later abide in purity without creating thoughts of calming, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *samāpatti* and *dhyāna* together and to cultivate *śamatha* afterward.

[18] “If bodhisattvas use the efficacy of their utter quiescence, and then give rise to utmost calming and abide in purity, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *dhyāna* first and to cultivate *śamatha* afterward.

[19] “If bodhisattvas use the efficacy of their utter quiescence, and then give rise to activities and accord with peaceful functioning in all spheres, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *dhyāna* first and to cultivate *samāpatti* afterward.

[20] “If bodhisattvas use the manifold nature of the efficacy of their utter quiescence itself, abide in calm reflection, and then give rise to transformations, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *dhyāna* first, to cultivate *śamatha* next, and to cultivate *samāpatti* afterward.

919a [21] “If bodhisattvas use the unconditioned nature of the efficacy of utter quiescence itself, give rise to the pure realm of activity, and then return to calm reflection, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *dhyāna* first, to cultivate *samāpatti* next, and to cultivate *śamatha* afterward.

[22] “If bodhisattvas use the manifold purity of the efficacy of utter quiescence, and then abide in calm reflection and give rise to transformations, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *dhyāna* first and then to cultivate *śamatha* and *samāpatti* together.

[23] “If bodhisattvas use the efficacy of their utter quiescence supplemented by utmost calming, and then give rise to transformations, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *dhyāna* and *śamatha* together and to cultivate *samāpatti* afterward.

[24] “If bodhisattvas use the efficacy of their utter quiescence supplemented by their transformations, and then give rise to the wisdom of the sphere of utmost calming and clear illumination, those bodhisattvas are said to cultivate *dhyāna* and *samāpatti* together and cultivate *śamatha* afterward.

[25] “If bodhisattvas use the wisdom of perfect enlightenment to completely embrace everything, and in their natures and characteristics there is nothing that is separate from the nature of enlightenment, those bodhisattvas are said to perfectly cultivate the nature of the three types of contemplation themselves and be in accord with purity.

“Son of good family, these are the names of the twenty-five methods of the bodhisattva; all bodhisattvas practice in this way. When bodhisattvas as well as sentient beings in the final age rely on these methods, they should maintain the practice of purity, concentrated stillness, and profound reflection. After beseeching the mercy [of the buddhas] and confessing and repenting their transgressions [before them] for three weeks, they should put a sign for each of the methods on twenty-five tallies, wholeheartedly implore [the buddhas for guidance,] and pick one at random. According to the instruction on their tally, they will then know whether [their practice] is sudden or gradual. If a

single thought of doubt or remorse occurs, then they will not fully realize the practice.”

At that time the World-honored One, wanting to restate his meaning, uttered this verse:

Discerning Sound, you should know that  
The unobstructed pure wisdom  
Of all bodhisattvas  
Entirely depends on the concentration that generates  
What are referred to as *śamatha*,  
*Samāpatti*, and *dhyāna*.  
In the sudden and gradual cultivation of these three *dharmas*  
There are twenty-five permutations.  
Among the Tathāgatas in the ten directions  
And practitioners in the three worlds  
There are none who do not base themselves on these *dharmas*  
To succeed in realizing *bodhi*,  
Except for those who are suddenly enlightened  
And those who do not accord with the Dharma.  
If all bodhisattvas  
As well as sentient beings in the final age  
Always maintain these methods,  
Accord with them, diligently practice them,  
And rely on the power of the great compassion of the Buddha,  
It will not be long before they realize nirvana.



## Chapter IX

### Purifying Karmic Obstructions Bodhisattva

Then Purifying Karmic Obstructions Bodhisattva arose from his seat within the great assembly, bowed with his head at the feet of the Buddha, circumambulated him three times, knelt before him with hands clasped at his breast, and addressed the Buddha, saying, “Great Compassionate World-honored One, you have fully set forth for us such inconceivable things as the characteristics of the causal practice of all Tathāgatas and have caused the great assembly to gain something that it had never had before. We have seen all the efforts of the charioteer (*puruṣadamyasārathi*; i.e., the Buddha) in the sphere of toilsome endeavor over the course of eons as innumerable as the sands in the Ganges River as if they were a moment of thought, and we bodhisattvas are profoundly consoled. World-honored One, if the enlightened mind is intrinsically pure by its very nature, how is it sullied so that sentient beings in their delusion and distress cannot enter into it? I pray that the Tathāgata will extensively awaken our understanding of the Dharma-nature and cause this assembly as well as sentient beings in the final age to generate the eye that sees the future.” Having spoken these words, he prostrated himself fully. He made his request in this way three times in succession. 919b

At that time the World-honored One addressed Purifying Karmic Obstructions Bodhisattva, saying, “Excellent! How excellent, son of good family, that, for the sake of the great assembly as well as sentient beings in the final age you have thus asked the Tathāgata about such expedients. Now listen carefully to what I shall expound to you.” Then Purifying Karmic Obstructions Bodhisattva, delighted to receive the teaching, listened silently along with the great assembly.

“Son of good family, from beginningless time all sentient beings through their delusive conceptualization grasp the self, person, sentient beings, and life as existing. Mistaking these four, they invertedly take them to constitute the substance of a real self. Consequently they generate the duality of like

and dislike, becoming further attached to unreality in regard to what is unreal in substance. These two delusions in dependence on one another generate the paths of delusive karma. Because of delusive karma, they delusively perceive the ever-flowing cycle. Repulsed by the ever-flowing cycle, they delusively perceive nirvana. Consequently there are those who cannot enter pure enlightenment. It is not that enlightenment prevents their being able to enter it; rather, it is that those who are able to enter it oppose their own entrance to enlightenment. Therefore activating thought and suppressing thought both lead to delusion and distress.

“Why? Because of the presence of the ignorance that primordially arises without beginning, they take the self as the controlling agent [in the activation and suppression of thought]. Hence all sentient beings are born without the eye of wisdom. The nature of their bodies and minds is entirely ignorance. For example, it is like someone not wanting to put an end to his own life. Therefore you should know that when things please the self, they accord with the self, and when things do not accord [with the self], resentment is born. Because the mentality of like and dislike fosters ignorance, they perpetuate each other, and beings do not succeed in their pursuit of the Way.

“Son of good family, what is the mark of self (*ātman*)? It refers to what is recognized by the mind of sentient beings. Son of good family, when a person’s body is in good health he naturally forgets about himself, but if his four limbs are sluggish and he applies some acupuncture or moxibustion to restore himself, then he knows that there is a self. Therefore, in that recognition and grasping the self is made to appear as substantial. Son of good family, everything from that state of mind to the recognition of pure nirvana as the final knowledge of the Tathāgata bears the mark of self.

919c “Son of good family, what is the mark of person (*pudgala*)? It refers to that which realizes what is recognized by the mind of sentient beings. Son of good family, one who realizes that there is a self does not further mistake [that which realizes that] as the self. What one realizes is not the self, and the same holds for that which realizes. The realization that goes beyond everything that is recognized is the mark of person. Son of good family, everything from that state of mind to the perfect realization of nirvana, if there remains the slightest realization in the mind, even if one has fully exhausted the principle of recognition, is referred to as the mark of person.

“Son of good family, what is the mark of sentient being (*sattva*)? It refers to that which is not reached by the self-recognition and realization in the mind of sentient beings. Son of good family, if there is someone who says that he is a sentient being, then we know that what he says is a sentient being is neither self nor other. Why is it not a self? If self were a sentient being, then it would not be the self. Why is it not another? Because, if self were a sentient being, then it would not be another self. Son of good family, it is just that what is clearly recognized and that which clearly realizes are self and person, and that what is not reached by the mark of self or person and yet remains as what is discerned is referred to as the mark of sentient being.

“Son of good family, what is the mark of life (*jīva*)? It refers to that which is aware of what is discerned by the luminous purity of the mind of sentient beings. The inability of all karmic knowledge to see itself is like the faculty of life. Son of good family, when the mind clearly sees, all that one is aware of is seen to be nothing but defilement, because that which is aware and what it is aware of are not separate from defilement. Just as when hot water melts ice and there is no ice left to know that it has melted, so there is no self left to be aware of itself.

“Son of good family, if sentient beings in the final age do not discern the four marks, then, even though they cultivate the Way by engaging in toilsome effort over numerous eons, [their practice] is still referred to as conditioned, and they will not be able to complete the fruits of sagehood. Therefore [this situation] is referred to as the final age of the True Dharma. Why? Because they mistake all [marks of] self as nirvana, and because they designate their recognition and realization as consummation. It is like when someone mistakes a thief as his son; his family’s wealth will not be preserved.

“Why? When there is love of self, there is also love of nirvana, and suppressing the root of self-love is taken as the mark of nirvana. When there is hating the self, there is also hating birth and death. Because beings do not understand that love [in all forms] is truly birth and death, separately hating birth and death is designated as not liberating.

“How can one know when the Dharma is not liberating? Son of good family, in the case of those sentient beings in the final age who, in their pursuit of *bodhi*, take their own slight recognition as being itself pure and are unable to exhaust the root of the mark of self, when someone praises their [attainment

of] Dharma, they become happy and want to save them, and when someone criticizes their attainment, they become angry and resentful. Know that such a case is a matter of their firm attachment to the mark of self, which, hidden within the store consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*), plays freely through their various faculties without interruption.

920a “Son of good family, because those practitioners of the Way have not eliminated the mark of self, they cannot enter pure enlightenment. Son of good family, if one knows that the self is empty, there is no one to destroy the self. If one expounds the Dharma while still holding to self, it is because he has not eliminated self. Son of good family, because sentient beings in the final age explain their illness as the Dharma, they are referred to as those who should be pitied. Even though they make strenuous efforts, they only increase their illness. Therefore they are not able to enter pure enlightenment.

“Son of good family, if sentient beings in the final age do not discern the four marks [of self], they will not succeed even if they take the Tathāgata’s understanding and conduct as their own practice. Or if there are sentient beings in the final age who have not yet attained what they claim to have attained or not yet realized what they claim to have realized, when they see others who have succeeded, their minds will become envious. Because they have not yet cut off the mark of self, they cannot enter pure enlightenment.

“Son of good family, if sentient beings in the final age set their hopes on completing the Way, they should not seek enlightenment by increasing their learning, which will only enhance their view of self. Rather they should ardently strive to overcome their defilements and arouse great courage to gain what they have not gained and to cut off what they have not cut off. When greed, anger, lust, pride, deceitfulness, and envy are not born in reaction to objects, all attraction to self and other will become utterly quiescent. The Buddha preaches that in the gradual perfection of such a person, he should seek a good friend so as not to fall into errant views, but that if he produces likes and dislikes in regard to what he seeks, then he will not be able to enter the ocean of pure enlightenment.”

At that time the World-honored One, wanting to restate his meaning, uttered this verse:

Purifying Karmic Obstructions, you should know that  
Because of their attachment to love of self

All sentient beings have  
Delusively revolved within the cycle from beginningless time.  
Without eliminating the four marks [of self]  
They cannot succeed in realizing *bodhi*.  
When likes and dislikes are born in the mind,  
Deceitfulness fills one's thoughts.  
Therefore they increase their delusion and distress  
And are unable to enter the citadel of enlightenment.  
If they are able to return to the realm of enlightenment,  
They must first abandon greed, anger, and delusion.  
When there is no craving for the Dharma in their mind,  
They will gradually succeed.  
Since self and body do not inherently exist,  
How could likes and dislikes be born?  
If these people seek a good friend,  
They will never fall into errant views.  
If, however, they specially produce thoughts in regard to what  
they seek,  
Then, in the end, they will not succeed.



## Chapter X

### Universal Enlightenment Bodhisattva

Then Universal Enlightenment Bodhisattva arose from his seat within the great assembly, bowed with his head at the feet of the Buddha, circumambulated him three times, knelt before him with hands clasped at his breast, and addressed the Buddha, saying, “Great Compassionate World-honored One, by incisively explaining the meditation illnesses you have caused sentient beings to gain something they have never had before, their minds have become unencumbered, and they have obtained great repose. World-honored One, in the final age sentient beings will have grown gradually ever more distant from the Buddha, worthies and sages will be hidden, and errant teachings will proliferate. What kind of people should we cause those sentient beings to seek, what kind of *dharma*s should we cause them to rely on, what kind of practices should we cause them to practice, what kind of illnesses should we cause them to eliminate, and what kind of aspirations should we cause them to raise, so that those blind ones will not fall into errant views?” Having spoken these words, he prostrated himself fully. He made his request in this way three times in succession. 920b

At that time the World-honored One addressed Universal Enlightenment Bodhisattva saying, “Excellent! How excellent, son of good family, that you are thus able to inquire of the Tathāgata about such practices so as to give all sentient beings in the final age the vision of the way of fearlessness and enable them to succeed in realizing the sagely way. Now listen carefully to what I shall expound to you.” Then Universal Enlightenment Bodhisattva, delighted to receive the teaching, listened silently along with the great assembly.

“Son of good family, sentient beings in the final age should generate a great aspiration and seek good friends. Those who want to practice should seek all who have true knowledge and vision, whose minds do not dwell in appearances, who are not attached to the spheres of *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s,

whose minds, even though they experience duress, remain constantly pure, and who point out various wrongs in order to extol the practice of purity so as not to cause sentient beings to breach disciplinary conduct. If they seek such people they will succeed in realizing *anuttarā samyaksambodhi*.<sup>25</sup>

“When sentient beings in the final age see such people, they should make offerings to them without sparing their lives, not to mention food, wealth, wives, children, and retinues.<sup>26</sup> Those good friends always manifest purity within all their activities. Even if they display various faults, their minds should remain without pride. If, son of good family, you do not generate evil thoughts in regard to those good friends, you will ultimately be able to consummate true enlightenment, and the flower of your mind will radiate light illuminating realms in the ten directions.

“Son of good family, the subtle Dharma realized by those good friends is separate from the four illnesses. What are the four illnesses?

“The first is the illness of striving. Suppose someone were to say: ‘I will seek perfect enlightenment by engaging in multitudinous practices in regard to my original mind.’ Since the nature of that perfect enlightenment is not attained by striving, this [approach] is designated as an illness.

“The second is the illness of going along with things as they are. Suppose someone else were to say: ‘I will now neither cut off samsara nor seek nirvana. Since nirvana and samsara are not subject to the arising and disappearing of thoughts, I will seek perfect enlightenment by going along with everything as it is and according with the nature of things.’ Since the nature of perfect enlightenment does not come about by going along with things as they are, this [approach] is designated as an illness.

“The third is the illness of stopping. Suppose someone else were to say: ‘I will now put a stop to thoughts in my mind. I will seek perfect enlightenment by gaining the utter quiescence and universal equality of the nature of all things.’ Since the nature of perfect enlightenment is not met by stopping, this [approach] is designated as an illness.

“The fourth is the illness of extinguishing. Suppose someone else were to say: ‘I will now cut off all defilements. Since the mind and body in the end are empty, they lack anything that can be had, not to mention the delusory sphere of the senses and their objects. I will seek perfect enlightenment in the

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eternal tranquility of everything.’ Since the nature of perfect enlightenment is not the mark of tranquility, this [approach] is designated as an illness.

“One who is apart from the four illnesses knows purity. Contemplating in this way is designated as true contemplation; contemplating the other way is designated as false contemplation.

“Son of good family, those sentient beings in the final age who want to practice should exhaust their lives making offerings to good friends and serving good friends. If those good friends are close to them, they should cut off their pride. If those good friends are distant from them, they should cut off their anger. The occurrence of states of attraction and aversion is like empty space. If one practices with the clear knowledge that in the end the body and mind are universally equal and share the same essence as sentient beings without any difference, one will then enter perfect enlightenment.

“Son of good family, if sentient beings in the final age do not succeed in realizing the Way, it is because of the existence of all of the seeds of like and dislike of self and other from without beginning that they are not yet liberated. If someone regards his enemies as if they were his own mother and father and has no duality in his mind, then he has removed his illnesses. The like and dislike of self and others in regard to all things is also like this.

“Son of good family, sentient beings in the final age who want to seek perfect enlightenment should generate such an aspiration, saying: ‘I will cause all sentient beings throughout space to enter ultimate perfect enlightenment. Since there is no one who gains enlightenment within perfect enlightenment, I will eliminate all marks of self and person.’ One who generates such an aspiration will not fall into errant views.”

At that time the World-honored One, wanting to restate his meaning, uttered this verse:

Universal Enlightenment, you should know that  
 Sentient beings in the final age  
 In seeking a good friend,  
 Must find one who is truly enlightened,  
 One whose mind is far from the two vehicles,  
 And who has eliminated the four illnesses in regard to the Dharma—  
 Striving, stopping, going along with things as they are, and  
 extinguishing.

## The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment

When they are close, they should feel no pride,  
And when they are distant, they should feel no anger.  
When they display various conditions,  
In their minds they should regard it as something exceedingly rare,  
As if a buddha were to appear in the world.  
If they do not violate the disciplinary rules  
And always maintain the purity of the root of the precepts,  
They will save all sentient beings,  
Ultimately causing them to enter perfect enlightenment.  
Without the mark of self or person,  
Constantly relying on wisdom,  
They will succeed in transcending errant views  
And realizing enlightenment and entering nirvana.

## Chapter XI

### Perfect Enlightenment Bodhisattva

Then Perfect Enlightenment Bodhisattva arose from his seat within the great assembly, bowed with his head at the feet of the Buddha, circumambulated him three times, knelt before him with hands clasped at his breast, and addressed the Buddha, saying, “Great Compassionate World-honored One, you have extensively expounded to us the various expedient methods [for the realization] of pure enlightenment so as to enable beings in the final age to gain great benefit. World-honored One, we here now have gained an enlightened understanding, but how should unenlightened beings in the final age after the Buddha has passed away dwell in retreat and cultivate the pure realm of perfect enlightenment? What [approaches] are foremost in [the practice of] the three kinds of pure contemplation within this [practice of] perfect enlightenment? Would the Great Compassionate One please confer abundant benefit on the great assembly and beings in the final age [by answering these questions]?” Having spoken these words, he prostrated himself fully. He made his request in this way three times in succession. 921a

At that time the World-honored One addressed Perfect Enlightenment Bodhisattva, saying, “Excellent! How excellent, son of good family, that you are thus able to ask the Tathāgata about such expedient methods to confer abundant benefit on beings. Now listen carefully to what I shall expound to you.” Then Perfect Enlightenment Bodhisattva, delighted to receive the teaching, listened silently along with the great assembly.

“Son of good family, when the Buddha dwells in the world, after the Buddha has passed away, or during the final age of the Dharma, there may be beings who are endowed with the potentiality for [realizing] the Great Vehicle, who have faith in the mind of great perfect enlightenment, the profound arcanum of the Buddha, and who wish to cultivate its practice. If they dwell in a monastery, have taken residence in the community, and are bound

by their responsibilities, they should meditate as much as circumstances permit in accordance with what I have already set forth. If, however, they are free of such involvements, they should set up a sanctuary and set aside a period of time for abiding in peace and dwelling in purity: one hundred and twenty days for a long period; one hundred days for a medium-length period; and eighty days for a short period.

“When the Buddha is present in the world, one may truly behold his form. After the Buddha has passed on, however, one must set up images of him; when his form is made present in the mind and pictured by the eye, true recollection is produced, and it will thereby be the same as if the Tathāgata were always alive. One should adorn [the altar] with banners and flowers and, for three weeks, prostrate oneself before the buddhas of the ten directions and call upon their names, beseech their mercy, and confess and repent one’s transgressions before them. One may thereby receive an auspicious sign, and one’s mind will be disburdened and put at ease. Even after the three weeks have passed, one should continue to maintain singleminded concentration.

“When the beginning of summer arrives and [it is the time for] the three-month retreat, you should stay with pure bodhisattvas, you should be removed from *śrāvakas* in your thoughts, and you should not rely on the community at large. When the day to begin the retreat comes, you should profess as follows before the Buddha:

“‘I, So-and-so, a *bhikṣu*, *bhikṣuṇī*, *upāsaka*, or *upāsikā*,<sup>27</sup> will enter the bodhisattva vehicle to cultivate the practice of utter quiescence. I will enter into purity together [with the other participants] to abide in true reality. I will take great perfect enlightenment as my monastery so that my body and mind may dwell peacefully in the wisdom of universal equality. Nirvana is by its very nature not bound by anything. Therefore I now sincerely request that I be allowed not to follow [the strictures for] *śrāvakas* so that I may dwell in peace for three months together with the buddhas of the ten directions and the great bodhisattvas. In order to cultivate the great causes and conditions for the supreme marvelous enlightenment of the bodhisattvas, I will not be involved in the community at large.’

“Son of good family, this is called the retreat of the manifestation of the bodhisattva. When the days of the three periods [set for the retreat] have been completed, [the participants] may go where they will without hindrance.

Son of good family, those beings who cultivate this practice in the final age and participate in the three periods to pursue the way of the bodhisattva should never grasp after any state that they have not heard about [from the Tathāgata here].

“Son of good family, any beings who would cultivate *samatha* should first secure utmost calmness and not give rise to thoughts. When they are completely still, they will then realize enlightenment. In this way the first [attainment of] stillness extends from one person throughout one world. Enlightenment is also like this. Son of good family, when enlightenment pervades an entire world, whenever a being in that world gives rise to a thought, they will always be able to know it thoroughly. It is also the same for hundreds or thousands of worlds. They should never grasp after any state that they have not heard about [from the Tathāgata here].

“Son of good family, any beings who would cultivate *samāpatti* should first recollect the buddhas of the ten directions and all the bodhisattvas in the worlds of the ten directions. Relying on various methods, they should cultivate their practice gradually, strive diligently after *samādhi*, and extensively make great vows, which perfume themselves to form [wholesome] seeds. They should never grasp after any state that they have not heard about [from the Tathāgata here].

“Son of good family, any beings who would cultivate *dhyāna* should first use the method of counting so as to become thoroughly aware of the number of the thoughts that arise, continue, and disappear in their minds. In this way if they extend [this practice] in everything [they do], discriminating the number of thoughts in the midst of the four modes of activity, then there will be none that are not known. They will gradually advance more and more until they are aware of everything, including even a drop of rain, in hundreds and thousands of worlds just as if their eyes were looking at something they held in hand. They should never grasp after any state that they have not heard about [from the Tathāgata here].

“These are called the foremost expedient methods of the three contemplations. If beings thoroughly cultivate these three types [of contemplation], diligently practicing and persevering, they will be called Tathāgatas appearing in the world.

“If beings of dull capacity in the final age desire in their hearts to pursue

the Way but cannot succeed in realizing it due to karmic obstructions from the past, they should ardently repent and always keep up their hope. They must first cut off likes and dislikes, envy, and deceitfulness and pursue the superior mind. They may practice any one of these three kinds of pure contemplation. If that contemplation does not succeed, they should then practice another contemplation. They should not become disheartened but should [continue to] pursue realization gradually.”

At that time the World-honored One, wanting to restate his meaning, uttered this verse:

Perfect Enlightenment, you should know that  
All sentient beings  
Who wish to practice the supreme Way  
Should first commit themselves to [one of] the three periods.  
After confessing and repenting their beginningless karma  
For three weeks  
They should truly reflect.  
They should never grasp after  
Any state they have not heard about [from the Tathāgata].  
The utmost calmness of *śamatha*,  
Maintaining the true recollection of *samāpatti*,  
And illuminating the numerous gates of *dhyāna*  
Are called the three pure contemplations.  
Those who are able to diligently practice them  
Are called buddhas appearing in the world.  
Those of dull capacity who have not yet realized it  
Should constantly with all their mind confess  
All their sins from beginningless time.  
When their obstructions are dissolved,  
The sphere of the Buddha will be manifest before them.

921c

## Chapter XII

### Foremost of Worthies Bodhisattva

Then Foremost of Worthies Bodhisattva arose from his seat within the great assembly, bowed with his head at the feet of the Buddha, circumambulated him three times, knelt before him with hands clasped at his breast, and addressed the Buddha, saying, “Great Compassionate World-honored One, for our sakes and that of sentient beings in the final age you have broadly awakened our understanding of such inconceivable things. World-honored One, what is this teaching of the Great Vehicle called? How is it to be maintained? What merits will sentient beings gain in putting it into practice? How should we protect those who are devoted to this scripture? Where should we go to propagate this teaching?” Having spoken these words, he prostrated himself fully. He made his request in this way three times in succession.

At that time the World-honored One addressed Foremost of Worthies Bodhisattva, saying, “Excellent! How excellent, son of good family, that, for the sake of the bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age, you are thus able to ask the Tathāgata about the teachings, merit, and names of this scripture. Now listen carefully to what I shall expound to you.” Then Foremost of Worthies Bodhisattva, delighted to receive the teaching, listened silently along with the great assembly.

“Son of good family, this scripture is preached by hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of buddhas as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges River, protected by the Tathāgatas of the three worlds, and taken as a refuge by bodhisattvas in the ten directions. It is the pure eye of the twelvefold canon. This scripture is called ‘The Great Extensive *Dhāraṇī* of Perfect Enlightenment.’ It is also called ‘The Scripture of Ultimate Meaning,’ ‘The Secret King *Samādhi*,’ ‘The Definitive Sphere of the Tathāgata,’ and ‘Distinctions in the Self-nature of the *Tathāgatagarbha*.’ You should reverently uphold it.

“Son of good family, this scripture just reveals the sphere of the Tathāgata. Only the Buddha Tathāgata is able to fully expound it. If bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the final age base their practice on it, they will gradually advance until they reach the stage (*bhūmi*) of buddhahood. Son of good family, this scripture is designated as the Great Vehicle of the sudden teaching, and sentient beings with sudden capacity will open their understanding through it. It also encompasses all the variety of beings who engage in gradual cultivation. It is like the vast ocean, into which all streams flow. All who drink its water, even mosquitoes and *asuras*, will gain complete satisfaction.

922a “Son of good family, if someone were to offer a gift entirely composed of the seven precious jewels filling a billion universes, [the merits of that deed] would not compare with someone hearing the title of this scripture or a single sentence from it. Son of good family, if someone were to teach hundreds of thousands of sentient beings as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges River to gain arhatship,<sup>28</sup> [the merits of that deed] would not compare with someone who expounded so much as half a verse of this scripture. Son of good family, moreover, if someone hears the name of this scripture and believes it with all his heart without doubt, know that such a person has come to hear the teachings of this scripture not merely by accumulating the merit and wisdom of one or two buddhas but rather by accumulating the good roots of all buddhas as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges River. You sons of good family, you should protect practitioners of this scripture in the final age and not let evil demons or heretics make them despair by assailing their bodies and minds.”

At that time Flaming-headed Vajra, Pulverizing Vajra, Blue-faced Vajra, and eighty thousand Vajra Guardians accompanied by their retinues arose from their seats within the assembly, bowed their heads at the feet of the Buddha, circumambulated him three times,<sup>29</sup> and addressed the Buddha, saying, “World-honored One, if later in the final age there are sentient beings who are able to maintain this teaching of the definitive Great Vehicle, we will guard them as we would our own eyes, and in the sanctuaries and places where they practice, we Vajra Guardians will ourselves exercise dominion over the monastic community and protect it day and night so that its members will not retrogress. We will also exercise dominion over the lay community so that its members will never suffer calamity, their ailments will be eradicated,

their wealth will increase in abundance, and they will never be reduced to penury.”

At that time the great Brahma king, the twenty-eight heavenly kings, together with the king of Mount Sumeru and the nation-protecting kings, arose from their seats, bowed their heads at the feet of the Buddha, circumambulated him three times, and addressed the Buddha, saying, “World-honored One, we too will protect those who uphold this scripture and will always keep them peaceful so that they will not retrogress in their aspiration.”

At that time a mighty demon king called Kumbhāṇḍa along with a hundred thousand demon kings arose from their seats, bowed their heads at the feet of the Buddha, circumambulated him three times, and addressed the Buddha, saying, “World-honored One, we too will protect people who uphold this scripture, guarding them day and night and not letting them despair. If there is a demon who infringes on the territory within a league of where they dwell, we will smash him to pieces.”

When the Buddha had finished preaching this scripture, all the bodhisattvas, gods, dragons, demons, and other types of heavenly beings and their eightfold retinue, as well as Brahma, the other heavenly kings, and all sentient beings, were greatly delighted to have heard what the Buddha preached, and they received it with faith and practiced it reverently.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The following discussion of the origin of the text draws in large part from my book, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), pp. 54–58, to which the reader is referred for further details.
- <sup>2</sup> It is odd that the word for sutra appears twice in the title, first in transliterated form as *xiuduoluo* and second in translation as *jing* (“scripture”).
- <sup>4</sup> Tripiṭaka, literally, the three (*tri*) “baskets” (*piṭaka*) into which the Buddhist canon is divided: Sutra (scriptures), Vinaya (monastic rules), and Abhidharma (scholastic texts).
- <sup>4</sup> Bhagavat (*pojiapo*): an epithet for the Buddha meaning “World-honored One.”
- <sup>5</sup> *Samādhi*: a state of meditative absorption. Note that the term for *samādhi* appears here both as transliteration (*sanmei*) and translation (*zhengshou*).
- <sup>6</sup> “Tathāgatha” is an epithet for the Buddha meaning “Thus Come One.”
- <sup>7</sup> *Mahāsattva*, “great being,” an honorific often used to gloss “bodhisattva.”
- <sup>8</sup> The Dharma assembly is the assembly gathered to hear the Dharma, the truth being taught by the Buddha.
- <sup>9</sup> “Dharmic practice” means that which is in accord with the Dharma, true.
- <sup>10</sup> I.e., the Buddha.
- <sup>11</sup> In a narrow sense *dhāraṇī* means “incantation” or “spell.” It is used here in a broader sense, where it is glossed as meaning “to contain” or “to prevent,” in the sense that *dhāraṇīs* are able both to hold various good *dharmas* together so that they are not lost (as a bowl contains water) and to prevent bad thoughts from arising in the mind so that evil actions are not done. Hence Zongmi comments that the essence of perfect enlightenment contains infinite excellent functions.
- <sup>12</sup> *Tathāgatagarbha*, literally, the “womb” or “embryo” (*garbha*) of the Tathāgata; the buddhahood that exists “embryonically” as an inherent potential within all sentient beings as well as the Tathāgata that is “enwomed” within the sentient condition. The *dharmakāya* (Dharma body) as it appears in its defiled guise.
- <sup>13</sup> *Dharmadhātu* is a term for the absolute, synonymous with the *tathāgatagarbha* in its true aspect, untainted by the defilements that appear to cover it over; literally, the

“Dharma-element” that inheres in all beings as the “cause” of their enlightenment, as well as the “essence of all *dharmas*” or the “realm of Dharma” that is realized in enlightenment.

- <sup>14</sup> *Puti* is a transliteration of *bodhi*, a term often translated as “enlightenment” or “awakening.” The phrase *faputixin* refers to the arousing of the aspiration for enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) that marks the beginning of the bodhisattva’s career. It has been rendered here as “to generate the mind of *bodhi*,” in keeping with the teaching that “from the very beginning sentient beings have already attained buddhahood” first mentioned at the end of Chapter III, p. 69.
- <sup>15</sup> *Śamatha* refers to the practice of calming the mind; see Chapter VII, p. 84, where this practice is defined.
- <sup>16</sup> The term *maṇi* means pure, unblemished; wish-fulfilling.
- <sup>17</sup> Although the term rendered here as *samsara* (*shengshi*) does not appear in transliterated form in the text, it has been rendered in Sanskrit form to maintain symmetry with *nirvana*. Where it appears alone, it is always translated as “birth and death.” The text also uses various synonyms for *samsara*, such as *zhuanhui* (“cyclic existence”), *lun-zhuan* (“revolving with the cycle,” “revolving cycle”), and *liuzhuan* (“ever-flowing cycle”).
- <sup>18</sup> *Śrāvakas* are disciples of the Buddha who heard his teaching and put it into practice; a code word for Hinayanists or followers of the Small Vehicle.
- <sup>19</sup> *Pratyekabuddhas* are those who attained buddhahood on their own without the benefit of a teacher but who (unlike the Buddha) do not remain in the world to teach others; paired with *śrāvakas*, the terms refer to the two Hinayana vehicles.
- <sup>20</sup> *Prajñā*: liberating wisdom.
- <sup>21</sup> That is, the wisdom of a buddha.
- <sup>22</sup> As the practice of calming, *śamatha* is often paired with the practice of insight, *vipāśyanā*, and together the two terms represent the two main poles of Buddhist meditation practice. Whereas *śamatha* leads to states of meditative absorption (*dhyāna*), *vipāśyanā* leads to insight or wisdom (*prajñā*). The linking of *śamatha* with *samāpatti* and *dhyāna* as is done by the text in this chapter, as well as in Chapter IX and Chapter XI, is idiosyncratic.
- <sup>23</sup> *Samāpatti* is typically used to refer to the four higher dhyānic states associated with the formless realm; its definition in this paragraph is highly unorthodox.
- <sup>24</sup> Often used in a broad and inclusive sense loosely meaning “meditation,” *dhyāna* also has a more narrow and specific sense in which it denotes a set of progressive states of concentrative absorption or trance, each level of which has a corresponding plane in Buddhist cosmology.
- <sup>25</sup> *Anuttarā samyaksambodhi*: the supreme, perfect enlightenment of a buddha.

- <sup>26</sup> In order to make sense of this passage, I have followed Kihwa's rearrangement of the text; see A. Charles Muller, *The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment: Korean Buddhism's Guide to Meditation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 221.
- <sup>27</sup> I.e., monk, nun, layman, and laywoman, the four groups of Buddhist followers.
- <sup>28</sup> I.e., nirvana. It is unlikely that the term carries any Mahayana polemical charge here.
- <sup>29</sup> Although this phrase is missing in the Taishō edition, it is found in the Ming edition, Zongmi's commentaries, and other editions of the text.



**THE SUTRA ON THE PROFUNDITY  
OF FILIAL LOVE**



## Translator's Introduction

*The Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love* (Ch.: *Fumu enzhong jing*; Jp.: *Bumoon-jūgyō* or *Fuhoonjūkyō*) is an apocryphal Buddhist text originating in China. Many apocryphal texts have appeared during the history of Buddhism, and among them the *Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love* is regarded as the most famous and is widely read in many Asian countries.

When Buddhism was first introduced into China from India in the first to second centuries C.E., it was regarded as being the teaching of a god or heavenly being who preached, among other things, how to protect people from evil, how to bring good luck, and how to achieve eternal life. The Chinese thus originally viewed Buddhism as a foreign doctrine that promised to bring people much worldly happiness.

As the “foreign doctrine” spread within China it encountered deeply rooted Chinese traditions such as Confucianism and Daoism. While Buddhism teaches that our lives pass through three stages (past, present, and future), these indigenous Chinese traditions focus on the happiness and contentment of one's present life. This is a major point of difference between traditional Chinese teachings and Buddhist ideas.

Buddhism also includes the concept of transmigration, or rebirth from lifetime to lifetime, determined by a person's actions in his or her previous life. The literal meaning of the Sanskrit term karma is “action.” The sum of all one's actions is collectively known as karma, and, according to Buddhism, life itself can be seen as a chain of karma. During a person's lifetime, the amount and type of karma he or she accumulates is directly correlated to his or her actions and behavior. The quality, whether good or bad, of the karma one has accumulated in one's present life determines their rebirth into one of six existences, or realms: hell, hungry ghosts (*pretas*), animals, *asuras* (demigods who are always in hostile conflict), human beings, and *devas* (gods).

Buddhism, in particular early Buddhist teachings, also held renunciation as a spiritual ideal. The serious follower is urged to renounce family ties and

worldly life in order to become a monastic. The aim of spiritual life is to attain enlightenment and free oneself from all attachment to worldly desires. Home, material wealth, social status, and so on are to be renounced, because they may be hindrances on the path toward enlightenment. In the Buddhist system, one should regard the home simply as the place where one lives and engages in relationships with relatives, friends, and other acquaintances. One should not become attached to worldly life.

By contrast, Chinese classical thought, especially Confucianism, teaches that every person's prime responsibility in life is to maintain their family lineage. One is expected to carry out the three supreme orders: holding services for the departed souls of one's ancestors, performing filial piety to one's present parents, and bringing children into the world who will then carry out these three supreme orders in the future. In China, one's home and family are regarded as the very center of life, to be maintained forever.

In the early stages of its adoption by China, Buddhism was thus in uneasy relationship to prevailing Chinese religious, social, and cultural norms. This was further complicated by the political aims of the leaders of the ruling dynasties of the time. In such conditions, where Confucian ideals were widely followed in Chinese daily life, it is intriguing to ponder how Buddhism managed to attract the general public, become a popular practice, and firmly establish itself in Chinese culture.

In fact, the *Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love* is an interesting and typical example that actually reveals the synthesis of some Confucian and Buddhist ideals. From this point of view, the text is very important. Yet due to its origins in China, it has always been regarded as a controversial text in Buddhist tradition and history.

The *Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love* is known as the Buddhist book of filial piety. It is well known that Confucianism has its own traditional text, the *Classic of Filial Piety (Xiaojing)*. The *Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love* is believed to have been produced by Chinese Buddhist monks in imitation of this Confucian text, in order to show that Buddhism also teaches the idea of filial piety, though it is to be based on the aspiration to attain enlightenment.

The main point of the text deals with our indebtedness to our parents. It teaches that as we grow up, we receive many different kinds of favors and help from our parents, which are compared to the sky's infinitude in their extent,

their value incalculable. The text preaches that we must return the favors granted us throughout our life by our parents—but how best to repay our filial debt presents a problem.

According to the *Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love*, the way to repay our debt to our parents is, first, to be kind to them; then, to practice the *ullambana* ceremony on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (the origins and practice of this ceremony are described in the *Ullambana Sutra*, pp. 21–23 in this volume); and finally, to copy the text of the *Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love*, recite it, and transmit it to others. By carrying out these practices, one may be emancipated from the five grave sins and quickly obtain liberation. Eventually one may gain freedom from the suffering of transmigration in the six realms of existence, attain enlightenment, and, in the end, achieve buddhahood—the ultimate goal of the Buddhist path.

The earliest record of this text is found in the catalogue of apocrypha in the *Zhou Dynasty Catalogue of the Sutras* (*Dazhoukandingzhongjingmulu*) edited in 695 C.E. during the reign of Queen Zetianwuhou. The record of the catalogue, however, appears only in one edition of the *Zhou Dynasty Catalogue*, i.e., the *Tripitaka Koreana* (*Gaolidazangjing*) edition, indicating that it was probably added later. At any rate, the apocryphal nature of the original text was clear from the beginning, and it was never regarded as a genuine Buddhist scripture originating in India. Another source, the *Record of Śākyamuni's Teachings Compiled during the Kaiyuan Era* (*Kaiyuanshijiaolu*), compiled in 730 during the Tang dynasty, also records the *Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love* as an apocryphal text produced in China, because of the passages in which appear the names of three Chinese dutiful sons, Dinglan, Dongan, and Guoju. However, once the text was acknowledged as apocrypha, it seems to have been revised, with the Chinese names removed.

There have since been several other revisions, including versions in which the content of the text was rewritten completely. A dramatic story in which Śākyamuni Buddha finds some human bones and worships them was introduced, and another story about the growth of an embryo in its mother's womb was added. The text in its various forms spread throughout Asia, and although the content differs in these variations, all versions of the text follow the same basic outline.

During the long history of Buddhism in China, the original text of the *Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love* that included the names of the Chinese dutiful

sons, the revised version without the names, and many other revisions of the text eventually disappeared. In mainland China, Taiwan, and the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia there is extant a revised text, the *Fumuenzhongnan-baojing* (*Sutra on the Difficulty of Repaying the Profundity of Filial Love*). In Korea there are two other versions, the *Dabaofumuenzhongjing* (*Sutra on Repaying the Profundity of Filial Love*) and the *Fumuenzhongtaigujing* (*Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love and the Process of Growth of an Embryo in Its Mother's Womb*). In Japan there exists not only the *Dabaofumuenzhongjing* but another revision of the *Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love* which includes some poetry at the end.

The original text of the *Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love* (including the names of the Chinese dutiful sons) and the first revised version (without the names) were both part of the huge library of texts found in cave number seventeen at Dunhuang, in the far west of China, by a Chinese Daoist priest in 1900, and brought to England by the well-known British explorer Sir Aurel Stein in 1907. This momentous discovery was a major event for Buddhists all over the world. In 1932, the abovementioned first revised text was published in Japan in the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*, which was the source used for this English translation. The original manuscript of this text is part of the collection of the British Museum in London (accession number S 2084).

THE SUTRA ON THE PROFUNDITY  
OF FILIAL LOVE



Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was staying at Vulture Peak in Rājagṛha, surrounded by a large gathering of bodhisattvas and *śrāvakas*, by monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen as well as by gods, dragons, and all kinds of deities. In one mind they listened to the Buddha preach the Dharma, gazing at the Buddha's face without blinking. 1403b23

The Buddha said, "Everyone born into this world has a father and mother for his parents. Without a father one cannot be born, without a mother one cannot grow up. First everyone grows in his mother's womb for ten months. When the time of birth arrives, he comes into the world, dropping onto the grass. Then father and mother bring him up, laying him in a crib and holding him in their arms. When the parents [croon at the child,] saying 'Hai, hai,' he smiles, saying nothing. As soon as he becomes hungry he needs to eat, and without his mother he is not fed. As soon as he becomes thirsty he needs to drink, and without his mother he cannot suckle. Even if the mother herself is hungry, she will nurse him, giving him all the sweet things while she herself eats untasty food. At bedtime, she places him in a dry spot while she herself lies in a wet place. Really, I assure you that [the child] is treated with love and brought up receiving manifold favors and care from his parents. Especially the mother fosters him with great affection, and she takes him out of his crib stained by his own filth and cleans him without paying any attention to the dirt under her fingernails which comes from his filth. 1403c

"I say firmly that the amount of milk a baby sucks from his mother comes to as much as eight *koku* (*hu*) and four *to* (*tou*) (i.e., approximately one thousand five hundred and twelve liters). This incomparable affection of the mother can be likened to the endlessness of the sky. Alas! How can we repay our mothers for bringing us up?"

Thereupon his disciple Ānanda asked the Buddha, "World-honored One! I sincerely ask you to preach on how one can repay one's parents' affection."

The Buddha said to Ānanda, "Listen attentively to my words and think them over carefully. I will explain it to you in great detail. As the parents' favors are like the vastness of the sky, how can we repay them? If a child full of affection and filial piety toward his parents accumulates pious acts, copies Buddhist sutras, produces an *ullambana* tray on the fifteenth day of the seventh month and offers it full of food and drink to the Buddha and his

disciples, then he can attain numerous merits and repay his parents' kindness. Moreover, if someone makes copies of this holy sutra, disseminates it among the people, at the same time keeps it for himself and recites it, then he is a person who repays his parents for their favors.

“You must know how to requite the favors of your parents. Every day, the parents go out to work. Usually the mother draws water from the well, cooks for and serves another family, works a mortar for hulling, and operates a stone mill. While doing all this, she constantly worries that perhaps her baby is crying or mewling back home, looking for her. When she returns home, the baby catches sight of his mother, waggles his head in joy in his crib or crawls on his belly while crying for his mother. Bending toward the baby she kneels down, stretches out her hands, and wipes the dust off the child. Then she kisses him and gives him the breast [to suckle]. Seeing her child, the mother is full of delight; seeing his mother, the baby is full of joy. Their mutual affection is merciful and compassionate, and nothing could be more precious than this affection.

“In due course, the child grows to be two or three years old. Now he is able to walk, going here and there according to his own will. He does not know when it is time to eat without his mother's attention. Occasionally the father and mother may be invited to dinner and entertained with [a meal] of biscuits and meat. The parents don't eat the food but bring it home and give it to their child. Nine times out of ten, the child is very pleased with the food his parents bring home to him. But it may sometimes happen that the parents return home without anything for the child, and then he cries and fusses because he has received no present. Such a troublesome baby is very unfilial and deserves the punishment for rebelliousness (i.e., having his body torn to pieces). On the other hand, a filial child does not cry and fuss upon not receiving a present. He is always obedient to his parents and of gentle nature.

“When later on the child grows up and begins to keep company with his own friends, his parents comb his hair and arrange it nicely. If he desires to wear good clothes, the parents will wear inferior clothes in order to furnish him with new and good items. When he finally begins to go out on his own, whether on private or public business, the parents think of him north to south, following him with their hearts east to west, inclining their heads to one side [in concern for him everywhere he goes and whatever he does].

“When the child reaches marriageable age, he marries a woman from another family. After marriage he is very happy with his wife, enjoying pleasures in their private room. While the daily life of the newlyweds is full of sweet talk, he treats his parents coldly. Though both his father and mother are now old and do not have much energy, he has no wish to see them all day long or have any intimate conversation [with them].

1404a

“In due time, one parent dies and [the other now] lives all alone. Lonely after the death of their spouse, the parent may now be compared to a traveler without kin who is staying in another person’s house. Having no warm clothes to protect himself against the cold in winter, he encounters numerous difficulties. In addition, an aged and depressed parent may become infected with lice and cannot sleep either day or night. At last he heaves a great sigh of disappointment with life, repines at his own misfortune, and says, ‘What actions in a past life have caused me to have such an unfilial child?’

“When the parents call on their child asking for a favor, he becomes furiously angry [with them]. Not only he but his wife and [their] children abuse his parents, laughing scornfully with their heads down. In this case the wife is unfilial as well, and [such an unfilial child] deserves the punishment of having his body torn to pieces again. Treating one’s aged parents in the way described here is equal to the five grave sins expounded in the Buddhist sutras.

“When some urgent problem arises and the parents call on the child for help, he will only respond one time out of ten. Thus he is constantly disobeying his parents, shouting out furiously and full of scorn, ‘You had better die soon! Why are you still in this world?’ Hearing such words from their child, the parents grieve and suffer intense agony. With eyes swollen from weeping, they cry, ‘As a baby you would have been lost without us, you could not have survived. We brought you into this world but perhaps it would have been better if we had never had a child.’”

Continuing his sermon, the Buddha told Ānanda, “If any good man or woman, for the sake of their own father and mother, keeps, chants, and copies even one passage or one verse from this sutra, which in its full title is called the ‘*Great Perfect Wisdom Great Vehicle Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love*,’ if only one passage or one verse reaches their ears and eyes, then the five rebellious sins will be erased completely. Nothing sinful will remain

forever. They will now see the buddhas, hear the Buddhist teachings, and soon be able to attain liberation.”

At this time, Ānanda rose from his seat. Wearing the upper robe over his left shoulder to show his respect, he knelt on his right knee, joined his palms, and said, “World-honored One, what is the title of this sutra? How should we receive and keep it?”

Thereupon the Buddha told Ānanda, “This sutra is entitled the ‘*Sutra on the Profundity of Filial Love*.’ Any sentient being can bring blessings to his parents. When he copies this sutra, offers incense, prays to the buddhas, worships them, and makes offerings to the Three Jewels, such as providing almsfood for the community of monks, then it may be known that he indeed repays the kindness of his father and mother.”

Having thus heard the Buddha preach this sutra, Indra, Brahma, the gods, human beings, and all other sentient beings present at that time were greatly pleased and awakened the aspiration for enlightenment (*bodhicitta*). Their joyful cries shook the earth and their tears streamed down like rain. Worshipping the Buddha, they fell prostrate on the ground and bowed to the Buddha’s feet. Thereafter they upheld the Buddha’s teaching and delightedly practiced it.

## Glossary

**Abhidharma:** A collection of treatises containing detailed analyses of the psychological and spiritual content of the early Buddhist teachings; one of the three divisions of the Tripiṭaka. *See also* Tripiṭaka.

**Āgamas:** A body of scriptures containing the early teachings of the Buddha.

**Ānanda:** A cousin of the Buddha who was his close disciple and personal attendant.

**arhat** (“one who is worthy”): A saint who has completely eradicated the passions and attained liberation from the cycle of birth and death (samsara); arhatship is the highest of the four stages of spiritual attainment in the Hinayana. *See also* fourfold fruits; Hinayana; samsara.

**asura:** A type of supernatural being, demigod; one of the six realms of samsaric existence. *See also* six realms.

**bodhi:** Enlightenment; the state of the highest perfection of wisdom; the state of undefiled purity and eternal bliss.

**bodhicitta:** Literally, “mind (*citta*) of enlightenment (*bodhi*),” the aspiration to attain enlightenment undertaken by a bodhisattva in order to help other sentient beings to liberation. *See also* bodhisattva.

**bodhisattva** (“enlightenment being”): One who has engendered the profound aspiration to achieve enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) on behalf of all sentient beings, through the practice of the perfections (*pāramitās*) and the eventual attainment of ten spiritual stages (*bhūmis*). The spiritual ideal of the Mahayana. *See also* *bodhicitta*; Mahayana; perfections; stage.

**buddhahood:** The state of becoming or being a buddha.

**buddha land:** A cosmic world or realm in which a particular buddha dwells.

**Chan** (Japan: Zen): A major Mahayana Buddhist school that emphasizes the practice of meditation as its soteriological path; the word *chan* is a transliteration of the Sanskrit *dhyāna* (meditation). *See also* *dhyāna*; Mahayana.

**dependent origination** (*pratīyasamutpāda*): The basic Buddhist doctrine that all phenomena (*dharmas*) arise in relation to causes and conditions and in turn are the causes and conditions for the arising of other phenomena. Nothing exists independently of its causes and conditions. *See also* *dharmas*; emptiness.

## Glossary

*deva*: A type of supernatural being; a god, a divine being; one of the six realms of samsaric existence. *See also* six realms.

*dhāraṇī*: Generally, a powerful verbal incantation or mantra; also, “to hold,” as a container for good spiritual qualities.

*dharma*: Any phenomenon, thing, or element; the elements that make up the perceived phenomenal world.

Dharma: The truth, law; the teachings of the Buddha.

Dharma body (*dharmakāya*): The manifestation of the Buddha as ultimate reality or suchness. *See also* suchness.

*dharmadhātu*: Literally, “realm (*dhātu*) of Dharma,” ultimate reality.

Dharma-nature: The essential nature of all that exists, same as true suchness and the Dharma body. *See also* Dharma body; suchness.

*dhyāna*: Meditation; a state of meditative concentration and absorption; also sometimes referred to as a trance.

emptiness (*śūnyatā*): The absence of substantiality or inherent existence of the self and all phenomena (*dharmas*); all *dharmas* arise only through dependent origination. Direct insight into emptiness is the attainment of *prajñā* (transcendental wisdom). *See also* dependent origination; *dharma*; *prajñā*.

enlightenment. *See* *bodhi*.

four elements: The four physical elements that constitute material things (*dharmas*)—earth, fire, water, and wind.

fourfold fruits: The four stages of spiritual attainment in the Hinayana—1) stream-enterer, 2) once-returner, 3) non-returner, and 4) arhat. *See also* arhat; Hinayana; non-returner; once-returner; stream-enterer.

Four Noble Truths: The basic doctrine of Buddhism: 1) the truth of suffering, 2) the truth of the cause of suffering, 3) the truth of the cessation of suffering, and 4) the truth of the path that leads to nirvana. *See also* nirvana.

hell (*naraka*): The lowest of the six realms of samsaric existence, where those who have committed grave offenses are reborn and suffer torment for many eons; along with the realms of animals and hungry ghosts, one of the three lower realms of samsaric existence. *See also* samsara; six realms.

Hinayana (“Small Vehicle”): A term applied by Mahayana Buddhists to various early schools of Buddhism whose primary soteriological aim is individual salvation. Hinayana followers are grouped into the two categories of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* and there are four stages of spiritual attainment collectively known as the fourfold fruits. *See also* arhat; fourfold fruits; Mahayana; *pratyekabuddha*; *śrāvaka*.

Huayan: An important Mahayana Buddhist school based on the teachings of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (*Flower Ornament Sutra*; *Huayanjing*), which developed in China in the sixth to eighth centuries.

hungry ghost (*preta*): Beings who suffer the torment of insatiable hunger; along with the realms of hell and animals, one of the three lower of the six realms of samsaric existence. *See also* samsara; six realms.

*kalpa*: An eon, an immensely long period of time.

Mahayana: (“Great Vehicle”): A form of Buddhism that developed in India around 100 B.C.E. and which exalts as its religious ideal the bodhisattva, great beings who aspire to enlightenment on behalf of all sentient beings. *See also* bodhisattva.

Maitreya: The future buddha, currently still a bodhisattva. *See also* bodhisattva.

Mañjuśrī: The bodhisattva who represents wisdom. *See also* bodhisattva.

Mount Sumeru: In Buddhist cosmology, the highest mountain rising from the center of the world.

nirvana: Liberation from samsara, a state in which all passions are extinguished and the highest wisdom attained; *bodhi*, enlightenment. *See also* *bodhi*; samsara.

non-returner (*anāgāmin*): The third of the four stages of spiritual attainment in the Hinayana; one who has attained this stage is no longer subject to rebirth in the world of desire. *See also* fourfold fruits; Hinayana; three worlds.

once-returner (*sakṛdāgāmin*): The second of the four stages of spiritual attainment in the Hinayana; one who has attained this state is subject to rebirth only once in each of the three worlds before attaining nirvana. *See also* fourfold fruits; Hinayana; nirvana; three worlds.

*pāramitā*. *See* perfections.

*parinirvāṇa*: Complete nirvana, commonly used to describe the death of the Buddha. *See also* nirvana.

perfections (*pāramitās*): Six qualities to be perfected by bodhisattvas on their way to complete enlightenment—1) giving (*dāna*), 2) moral conduct (*śīla*), 3) forbearance (*kṣānti*), 4) energy (*vīrya*), 5) meditation (*dhyāna*), and 6) wisdom (*prajñā*). *See also* bodhisattva.

*prajñā*: Transcendental, liberative wisdom; one of the perfections. *See also* perfections.

*prātimokṣa*: A part of the Vinaya which contains the disciplinary rules for monastics. *See also* Vinaya.

*pratyekabuddha* (“solitary enlightened one”): One of the two kinds of Hinayana sages, along with *śrāvakas*, who seek to reach the stage of arhat and attain nirvana. A *pratyekabuddha* attains liberation through direct observation and understanding of

## Glossary

- the principle of dependent origination without the guidance of a teacher, and does not teach others. *See also* arhat; dependent origination; Hinayana; nirvana; *śrāvaka*.
- Śākyamuni: The historical Buddha, who lived in India in the fifth century B.C.E. and whose life and teachings form the basis for Buddhism.
- samādhi*: A mental state of concentration, focusing the mind on one point; also a transcendent mental state attained by the repeated practice of concentration.
- samsara: The cycle of existence, the continuous round of birth and death through which beings transmigrate; the world of suffering, contrasted with the bliss of nirvana. *See also* nirvana.
- sense elements (*dhātus*): The six sense organs, their objects, and their resulting consciousnesses, totaling eighteen. *See also* sense objects; sense organs; senses.
- sense objects: The objects of perception associated with each of the six sense organs—1) form, 2) sound, 3) smell, 4) taste, 5) tangible objects, and 6) mental objects. *See also* sense organs.
- sense organs: The six sense organs of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. *See also* senses.
- senses: The sense perceptions that correspond to the six sense organs—visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental perceptions. *See also* sense organs.
- sense spheres (*āyatana*s): The six sense organs and their six corresponding objects, totaling twelve. *See also* sense objects; sense organs; senses.
- six realms: The six realms of samsaric existence—the three higher realms of *devas*, *asuras*, and human beings; and the three lower realms of animals, hungry ghosts, and hell. *See also* *asura*; *deva*; hell; hungry ghost; samsara.
- śrāvaka*: Literally, “word-hearer”; originally, a disciple of the Buddha, one of those who directly heard him expound the teachings; later, the term came to refer to one of the two kinds of Hinayana followers, along with *pratyekabuddhas*, to distinguish them from followers of the Mahayana. *See also* Hinayana; Mahayana; *pratyekabuddha*.
- stage (*bhūmi*): Ten stages of spiritual attainment to be accomplished by a bodhisattva on the way to perfect enlightenment. *See also* bodhisattva.
- stream-enterer (*srota-āpanna*): The first of the four stages of spiritual attainment in the Hinayana; one who has entered the stream of the Dharma by destroying various wrong views. *See also* fourfold fruits; Hinayana.
- stupa: A monument, usually in the form of a conical mound or structure, containing the relics of the Buddha or marking the site of an important event in the Buddha’s life and which serves as a site for worship and veneration.

- suchness: Ultimate reality; the state of things as they really are. Insight into the suchness of all phenomena, i.e., as empty of inherent self-existence, arising only through dependent origination, is perfect wisdom (*prajñā*). *See also* dependent origination; emptiness; *prajñā*.
- sutra: A Buddhist scripture, a discourse of the Buddha. Capitalized, the term refers to one of the three divisions of the Tripiṭaka. *See also* Tripiṭaka.
- Tathāgata: An epithet for a Buddha, meaning one who has gone to (*gata*) and come from (*āgata*) suchness (*tathā*), i.e., the embodiment of the truth of suchness. *See also* suchness.
- tathāgatagarbha*: Literally, the “womb (*garbha*) of the Tathāgata,” the inherent capacity for buddhahood within all sentient beings. *See also* buddhahood.
- three worlds: The three classifications of samsaric states of existence: the world of desire (*kāmadhātu*), i.e., the world of everyday consciousness accompanied by desires; the world of form (*rūpadhātu*), in which desires have been eliminated but the physical body remains; and the formless world (*ārūpyadhātu*), in which the physical body no longer exists. *See also* samsara.
- Tripiṭaka: The three divisions or “baskets” (*piṭakas*) of the Buddhist canon: the Sūtras, discourses and teachings of the Buddha; the Vinaya, codes of monastic discipline; and the Abhidharma, scholastic treatises on the Buddhist teachings.
- vehicle (*yāna*): The various Buddhist paths of practice. The Hinayana comprises the two vehicles of the *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, contrasted with the bodhisattva vehicle of the Mahayana. *See also* Hinayana; Mahayana; *pratyekabuddha*; *śrāvaka*.
- Vinaya: Precepts and rules of conduct for monastics; along with the Abhidharma and the Sūtras, one of the three divisions of the Tripiṭaka. *See also* Tripiṭaka.



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## BDK English Tripiṭaka (First Series)

### Abbreviations

<i>Ch.</i> :	Chinese
<i>Skt.</i> :	Sanskrit
<i>Jp.</i> :	Japanese
<i>Eng.</i> :	Published title

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Ch. Zhong ahan jing (中阿含經) Skt. Madhyamāgama	26
Ch. Dasheng bensheng xindi guan jing (大乘本生心地觀經)	159
Ch. Fo suoxing zan (佛所行讚) Skt. Buddhacarita	192
Ch. Zabao zang jing (雜寶藏經) Eng. <i>The Storehouse of Sundry Valuables</i> (1994)	203
Ch. Faju piyu jing (法句譬喻經) Eng. <i>The Scriptural Text: Verses of the Doctrine, with Parables</i> (1999)	211
Ch. Xiaopin banruo boluomi jing (小品般若波羅蜜經) Skt. Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra	227
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Ch. Daluo jingang bukong zhenshi sanmoye jing (大樂金剛不空眞實三麼耶經) Skt. Adhyardhaśatikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra	243
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