



*Buddha Preaching*, China, painting from Dunhuang Cave, early 8<sup>th</sup> c. C.E., ink and colors on silk.

## ***Buddhism in China***

### *Selections from Three Mahāyāna Sūtras*

#### **I. Tiantai Buddhism**

A selection from  
*The Lotus Sūtra*  
(*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-Sūtra*)  
(*Sūtra on the Lotus of the True Dharma*)

[Certainly one of the most important and revered scriptures in all of East Asia, the Lotus Sūtra is most famous for its doctrine of *ekayāna*, the “One Vehicle,” which became the distinctive teaching of the Tiantai School of Buddhism as it developed in China (Tendai in Japan). Bewildered by the wide diversity of Indian Buddhist scriptures, and attempting to reconcile the seeming contradictions in the Buddha’s Dharma that arose as a result of the three vehicles of Indian Buddhism, the *Hīnayāna*, *Mahāyāna*, and *Vajrayāna*, the teachers of the Tiantai emphasized that there is really only one vehicle as taught in the Lotus Sūtra. While on the lower levels of knowledge and truth there are different vehicles and different paths, on the highest third level of knowledge and truth there is only one path, one vehicle. All the various teachings found in the different scriptures are merely strategies, or ‘expedient means’ (*upāya*), by which the Buddha adapted his teachings to suit the needs of particular individuals in their own particular situation. This notion of ‘skill-in-means’ emphasized in the Lotus Sūtra is one of the key concepts of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

In Chapter Five the famous parable of the medicinal herbs is used to explain the notion of ‘expedient means’ (*upāya*). Just as there are many different medicinal herbs from a multitude of different plants to treat all the various sicknesses of human beings, the Buddha’s teachings, or Dharma, takes many forms to treat each individual according to his or her needs.]

*The Parable of the Medicinal Herbs*

At that time the World-Honored One said to Mahakashyapa and the other major disciples: "Excellent, excellent, Kashyapa. You have given an excellent description of the true blessings of the Thus Come One. It is just as you have said. The Thus Come One indeed has immeasurable, boundless, asamkhyas of blessings, and though you and the others were to spend immeasurable millions of kalpas in the effort, you could never finish describing them.

"Kashyapa, you should understand this. The Thus Come One is king of the doctrines. In what he preaches, there is nothing that is vain. With regard to all the various doctrines, he employs wisdom as an expedient means (*upāya*) in expounding them. Therefore the doctrines that he expounds all extends to the point where there is comprehensive wisdom. The Thus Come One observes and understands the end to which all doctrines tend. And he also understands the workings of the deepest mind of all living beings, penetrating them completely and without hindrance. And with regard to the doctrines he is thoroughly enlightened, and he reveals to living beings the totality of wisdom.

"Kashyapa, it is like the plants and trees, thickets and groves, and the medicinal herbs, widely ranging in variety, each with its own name and hue, that grow in the hills and streams, the valleys and different soils of the thousand-millionfold world. Dense clouds spread over them, covering the entire thousand-millionfold world and in one moment saturating it all. The moisture penetrates to all the plants, trees, thickets and groves, and medicinal herbs equally, to their big roots, big stems, big limbs and big leaves. Each of the trees, big and small, depending upon whether it is superior, middling or inferior in nature, receives its allotment. The rain falling from one blanket of clouds accords with each particular species and nature, causing it to sprout and mature, to blossom and bear fruit. Though all these plants and trees grow in the same earth and moistened by the same rain, each has its differences and particulars.

"Kashyapa, you should understand that the Thus Come One is like this. He appears in the world like a great cloud rising up. With a loud voice he penetrates to all the heavenly and human beings and the asuras of the entire world, like a great cloud spreading over the thousand-millionfold lands. And in the midst of the great assembly, he addresses these words, saying: "I am the Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, of right and universal knowledge, perfect clarity and conduct, well gone, understanding the world, unexcelled worthy, trainer of people, teacher of heavenly and human beings, Buddha, World-Honored One. Those who have not yet crossed over I will cause to cross over, those not yet freed I will free, those not yet at rest I will put to rest, those not yet in nirvana I will cause to attain nirvana. Of this existence and future existences I understand the true circumstances. I am one who knows all things, sees all things, understands the way, opens up the way, preaches the way. You heavenly and human beings, asuras and others, you must all come here so that I may let you hear the Dharma!"

"At that time living beings of countless thousands, ten thousands, millions of species come to the place where the Buddha is, to listen to the Dharma. The Thus Come One then observes whether they are diligent in their efforts or lazy. And in accordance with each is capable of hearing, he preaches the Law for them in an immeasurable variety of ways so that all of them are delighted and are able to gain excellent benefits there-from.

"Once these living beings have heard the Law, they will enjoy peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences, when they will receive joy through the way and again be able to hear the Law. And having heard the Law, they will escape from obstacles and hindrances, and with regard to the various doctrines will be able to exercise their powers to the fullest, so that gradually they can enter into the way. It is like the rain falling from that great cloud upon all the plants and trees, thickets and groves, and medicinal herbs. Each, depending upon its species and nature, receives its full share of moistening and is enabled to sprout and grow.

"The Law preached by the Thus Come One is of one form, one flavor, namely, the form of emancipation, the form of separation, the form of extinction, which in the end comes down to a wisdom embracing all species. When the living beings hear the law of the Thus Come One, though they may embrace, read and recite it, and practice it as it dictates, they themselves do not realize or understand the blessings they are gaining thereby. Why is this? Because only the Thus Come One understands the species, the form, the substance, the nature of these living beings, he knows what things they dwell on, what things they ponder, that things they practice. He knows what Law they dwell on, what Law they ponder, what Law they practice, through what Law they attain what Law.

"Living beings exist in a variety of environments, but only the Thus Come One sees the true circumstances and fully understands them without hindrance. It is like those plants and trees, thickets and groves, and medicinal herbs which

do not themselves know whether they are superior, middling or inferior in nature. But the Thus Come One knows that this is the Law of one form, one flavor, namely, the form of emancipation, the form of separation, the form of extinction, the form of ultimate nirvana, of constant tranquility and emptiness. The Buddha understands all this. But because he can see the desires that are in the minds of living beings, he guides and protects them, and for this reason does not immediately preach to them the wisdom that embraces all species.

"You and the others, Kashyapa, have done a very rare thing, for you can understand how the Thus Come One preaches the Law in accordance with what is appropriate, you can have faith in it, you can accept it. Why do I say this? Because the fact that the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, preach the Law in accordance with what is appropriate is hard to comprehend, hard to understand."

At that time the World-Honored One, wishing to state his meaning once more, spoke in verse form, saying:

The Dharma King, destroyer of being,  
when he appears in the world  
accords with the desires of living beings,  
preaching the Law in a variety of ways.  
The Thus Come One, worthy of honor and reverence,  
is profound and far-reaching in wisdom.  
For long he remained silent regarding the essential,  
in no hurry to speak at once.  
If those who are wise hear of it  
they can believe and understand it,  
but those without wisdom will have doubts and regrets  
and for all time will remain in error.  
For this reason, Kashyapa,  
he adjusts to the person to gain a correct view.  
Kashyapa, you should understand  
that it is like a great cloud  
that rises up in the world  
and covers it all over.

This beneficent cloud is laden with moisture,  
the lightning gleams and flashes,  
and the sound of thunder reverberates afar,  
causing the multitude to rejoice.  
The sun's rays are veiled and hidden,  
a clear coolness comes over the land;  
masses of darkness descend and spread—  
you can almost touch them.  
The rain falls everywhere,  
coming down on all four sides,  
its flow and saturation are measureless,  
reaching to every area of the earth,  
to the ravines and valleys of the mountains and streams,  
to the remote and secluded places where grow  
plants, bushes, medicinal herbs,  
trees large and small,  
a hundred grains, rice seedlings,  
sugar cane, grape vines.  
The rain moistens them all,

none ails to receive its full share,  
the parched ground is everywhere watered,  
herbs and trees alike grow lush.  
What falls from the cloud  
is water of a single flavor,  
but the plants and trees, thickets and groves,  
each accept the moisture that is appropriate to its portion.  
All the various trees,  
whether superior, middling or inferior,  
take that is fitting for large or small  
and each is enabled to sprout and grow.  
Root, stem, limb, leaf,  
the glow and hue of flower and fruit—  
one rain extends to them  
and all are able to become fresh and glossy,  
whether their allotment  
of substance, form and nature is large or small,  
the moistening they receive is one,  
but each grows and flourishes in its own way.

The Buddha is like this  
when he appears in the world,  
comparable to a great cloud  
that covers all things everywhere,  
Having appeared in the world,  
for the sake of living beings  
he makes distinctions in expounding  
the truth regarding phenomena.  
The great sage, the World-Honored One,  
to heavenly and human beings,  
in the midst of all beings,  
pronounces these words:  
I am the Thus Come One,  
most honored of two-legged beings.  
I appear in the world  
like a great cloud  
that showers moisture upon  
all the dry and withered living beings,  
so that all are able to escape suffering,  
gain the joy of peace and security,  
the joys of this world  
and the joy of nirvana.  
All you heavenly and human beings of this assembly,  
listen carefully and with one mind!  
All of you should gather around  
and observe the one of unexcelled honor.  
A am the World-Honored One,  
none can rival me.  
In order to bring peace and security to living beings

I have appeared in the world  
and for the sake of this great assembly  
I preach the sweet dew of the pure Law.  
This Law is of a single flavor,  
that of emancipation, nirvana.  
With a single wonderful sound  
I expound and unfold its meaning;  
constantly for the sake of the Great Vehicle  
I create causes and conditions.

I look upon all things  
as being universally equal,  
I have no mind to favor this or that,  
to love one or hate another.  
I am without greed or attachment  
and without limitation or hindrance.  
At all times, for all things  
I preach the Law equally;  
as I would for a single person,  
that same way I do for numerous persons,  
constantly I expound and preach the Law,  
never have I done anything else,  
coming, going, sitting, standing,  
never to the end growing weary or disheartened.  
I bring fullness and satisfaction to the world,  
like rain that spreads its moisture everywhere,  
Eminent and lowly, superior and inferior,  
observers of precepts, violators of precepts,  
those fully endowed with proper demeanor,  
those not fully endowed,  
those of correct views, of erroneous views,  
of keen capacity, of dull capacity—  
I cause the Dharma rain on all equally,  
never lax or neglectful.  
When all the various living beings  
hear my Law,  
they receive it according to their power,  
dwelling in their different environments.  
Some inhabit the realm of human and heavenly beings,  
of wheel-turning sage kings,  
Shakra, Brahma are the other kings—  
these are the inferior medicinal herbs.  
Some understand the Law of no outflows,  
are able to attain nirvana,  
to acquire the six transcendental powers  
and gain in particular the three understandings,  
or live alone in mountain forests,  
constantly practicing meditation  
and gaining the enlightenment of pratyekabuddhas—

these are the middling medicinal herbs.  
Still others seek the place of the World-Honored One,  
convinced that they can become Buddhas,  
putting forth diligent effort and practicing meditation—  
these are the superior medicinal herbs.

Again there are sons of the Buddha  
who devote their minds solely to the Buddha way,  
constantly practicing mercy and compassion,  
knowing that they themselves will attain Buddhahood,  
certain of it and never doubting—  
these I call small trees.

Those who abide in peace in their transcendental powers,  
turning the wheel of non-regression,  
saving innumerable millions  
of hundreds of thousands of living beings—  
bodhisattvas such as these  
I call large trees.

The equality of the Buddha's preaching  
is like a rain of a single flavor,  
but depending upon the nature of the living being,  
the way in which it is received is not uniform,  
just as the various plants and trees  
each receive the moisture in a different manner.

The Buddha employs this parable  
as an excellent means to open up and reveal the matter,  
using various kinds of words and phrases  
and expounding the single Law,  
but in terms of the Buddha wisdom  
this is no more than one drop of the ocean.

I rain down the Dharma rain,  
filling the whole world,  
and this single-flavored Dharma  
is practiced by each according to the individual's power.  
It is like those thickets and groves,  
medicinal herbs and trees  
which, according to whether they are large or small,  
bit by bit grow lush and beautiful.

The Law of the Buddhas  
is constantly of a single flavor,  
causing the many worlds  
to attain full satisfaction everywhere;  
by practicing gradually and stage by stage,  
all beings can gain the fruits of the way.  
The voice-hearers and pratyekabuddhas  
inhabit the mountain forests,  
dwelling in their final existence,  
hearing the Law and gaining its fruits—  
we may call them medicinal herbs

that grow and mature each in its own way,  
if there are Bodhisattvas  
who are steadfast and firm in wisdom,  
who fully comprehend the threefold world  
and seek the supreme vehicle,  
these we call the small trees  
that achieve growth and maturity.  
Again there are those who dwell in meditation,  
who have gained the strength of transcendental powers,  
have heard of the emptiness of all phenomena,  
greatly rejoice in it in their minds  
and emit countless rays of light  
to save living beings—  
these we call large trees  
that have gained growth and maturity  
In this way, Kashyapa,  
the Law preached by the Buddha  
is comparable to a great cloud  
which, with a single-flavored rain,  
moistens human flowers  
so that each is able to bear fruit.  
Kashyapa, you should understand  
that through various causes and conditions,  
various kinds of simile and parable,  
I open up and reveal the Buddha way.  
This is an expedient means I employ  
and the same is true of the other Buddhas.

Now for you and the others  
I preach the utmost truth:  
none in the Multitude of voice-hearers  
has entered the stage of extinction.  
What you are practicing  
is the bodhisattva way,  
and as you gradually advance in practice and learning  
you are all certain to attain Buddhahood.

Burton Watson, trans. *The Lotus Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

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## II. Hua-Yen Buddhism

*A selection from the  
The Flower Garland Sutra  
(Avataṃśaka Sūtra)*

[The Flower Garland Sutra is most known for the notion of the mutual interrelationship of all things which is the distinctive teaching of the Hua-yen school of Chinese Buddhism. The teaching is expressed through the metaphor of jeweled net of Indra: "Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net that has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in each 'eye' of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in all dimensions, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring."<sup>1</sup> The sutra opens with a description of the Buddha's site of enlightenment as consisting of a net of jewels, exquisitely scented by garlands of flowers.]

### Book 1

#### *The Wonderful Adornments of the Leaders of the Worlds*

THUS HAVE I HEARD. At one time the Buddha was in the land of Magadha, in a state of purity, at the site of enlightenment, having just realized true awareness. The ground was solid and firm, made of diamond, adorned with exquisite jewel discs and myriad precious flowers, with pure dear crystals. The ocean of characteristics of the various colors appeared over an infinite extent; There were banners of precious stones, constantly emitting shining light and producing beautiful sounds. Nets of myriad gems and garlands of exquisitely scented flowers hung all around. The finest jewels appeared spontaneously, raining inexhaustible quantities of gems and beautiful flowers all over the earth. There were rows of jewel trees, their branches and foliage lustrous and luxuriant. By the Buddha's spiritual power, he caused all the adornments of this enlightenment site to be reflected therein.

The tree of enlightenment was tall and outstanding. Its trunk was diamond, its main boughs were lapis lazuli, its branches and twigs were of various precious elements. The leaves, spreading in all directions, provided shade, like clouds. The precious blossoms were of various colors, the branching twigs spread out their shadows. Also the fruits were jewels containing a blazing radiance. They were together with the flowers in great arrays. The entire circumference of the tree emanated light; within the light there rained precious stones, and within each gem were enlightening beings, in great hosts like clouds, simultaneously appearing.

Also, by virtue of the awesome spiritual power of the Buddha, the tree of enlightenment constantly gave forth sublime sounds speaking various truths without end.

The palace chamber in which the Buddha was situated was spacious and beautifully adorned. It extended throughout the ten directions. It was made of jewels of various colors and was decorated with all kinds of precious flowers. The various adornments emanated lights like clouds; the masses of their reflections from within the palace formed banners.

A boundless host of enlightening beings (*bodhisattvas*), the congregation at the site of enlightenment, were all gathered there: by means of the ability to manifest the lights and inconceivable sounds of the Buddhas, they fashioned nets of the finest jewels, from which came forth all the realms of action of the spiritual powers of the Buddhas, and in which were reflected images of the abodes of all beings.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis H. Cook, *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), p.2.

Also, by virtue of the aid of the spiritual power of the Buddha, they embraced the entire cosmos in a single thought.

Their lion seats were high, wide, and beautiful. The bases were made of jewels, their nets of lotus blossoms, their tableaus of pure, exquisite gemstones. They were adorned with various flowers of all colors. Their roofs, chambers, steps, and doors were adorned by the images of all things. The branches and fruits of jewel trees surrounded them, arrayed at intervals.

Clouds of radiance of jewels reflected each other: the Buddhas of the ten directions conjured regal pearls, and the exquisite jewels in the topknots of all the enlightening beings all emanated light, which came and illuminated them.

Furthermore, sustained by the spiritual power of all Buddhas, they expounded the vast perspective of the Enlightened Ones, their subtle tones extending afar, there being no place they did not reach.

At that time, the Buddha, the World Honored One, in this setting, attained to supreme, correct awareness of all things. His knowledge entered into all times with complete equanimity; his body filled all worlds; his voice universally accorded with all lands in the ten directions. Like space, which contains all forms, he made no discrimination among all objects. And, as space extends everywhere, he entered all lands with equanimity. His body forever sat omnipresent in all sites of enlightenment. Among the host of enlightening beings, his awesome light shone clearly, like the sun emerging, illumining the world. The ocean of myriad virtues which he practiced in all times was thoroughly pure, and he constantly demonstrated the production of all the buddha-lands, their boundless forms and spheres of light extending throughout the entire cosmos, equally and impartially.

He expounded all truths, like spreading great clouds. Each of his hairtips was able to contain all worlds without interference, in each manifesting immeasurable spiritual powers, teaching and civilizing all sentient beings. His body extended throughout the ten directions, yet without coming or going. His knowledge entered into all forms and realized the emptiness of things. All the miraculous displays of the Buddhas of past, present, and future, were all seen in his light, and all the adornments of inconceivable eons were revealed. . . .

[*What follows is a long series of discourses by various bodhisattvas describing the Buddhas and all their miraculous displays. Now towards the end of the book the central metaphor of the text, the net of jewels, returns in the following discourse.*]

Then the great enlightening being Bold Intelligence of the Sun of Knowledge, empowered by the Buddha, looked over all the multitudes assembled on the scene and said in verse,

Buddha sits in the hall of truth with steady gaze,  
Brilliantly lighting up the palace.  
In accordance with the dispositions of all beings  
His body appears throughout all lands.

The Buddha's palace is beyond conception,  
Adorned with stores of precious jewels,  
Each decoration shining with light;  
Sitting there, the Buddha is most conspicuous of all.

With pillars of jewels of various hues,  
Chimes of real gold hanging like clouds,  
Jewel stairways in rows on four sides,  
The gates open in every direction.

Arrays of banners of flowery silk,  
Jewel trees with decorated branches and boughs,  
Garlands of pearls draped on all sides;  
The Ocean of Wisdom sits calmly therein.

Nets of jewels, exquisite fragrant banners,  
Brilliant lamps hung like clouds;  
Covered with various decorations,  
The world-transcending true knower sits within.

Everywhere he manifests clouds of mystic displays,  
Those clouds teaching throughout the world,  
Harmonizing and calming down all sentient beings:  
All this appears from the Buddha's palace.

Trees of gems bloom with fine flowers  
Having no peer in all the world;  
The embellishments of the lands of all times  
Reveal their reflections therein.

Everywhere there are heaps of jewels;  
Their light blazes in countless hues.  
Gates and doors open at intervals all around;  
The beams and ceiling are especially beautiful.

The Buddha's palace is inconceivable;  
Its pure radiance contains every form—

In it appear all palaces  
A Buddha sitting in each,

The Buddha's palace is boundless;  
The Naturally Awakened One abides therein.  
All the masses from all ten directions  
Come gather around the Buddha.

*[The Avataṃsaka Sūtra comes to a close with the vows of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra (the Universally Good) in which reference is made again to the interpenetration or interrelationship of all things.]*

Then the great enlightening being (*bodhisattva*) Universally Good, thus explaining courses of eons, as many eons as atoms in the untold buddha-lands in the succession of worlds, went on to make a vow:

As many buddhas as there may be in any world  
Throughout the ten directions, throughout past, present, and future,  
I honor them all, without exception,  
Pure in body, speech, and mind.

With as many bodies as atoms in all lands  
I bow to all buddhas,  
With a mind directed to all buddhas,  
By the power of the vow of the practice of good.

In a single atom, buddhas as many as atoms  
Sit in the midst of enlightening beings;  
So it is of all things in the cosmos  
I realize all are filled with buddhas.

I laud all the buddhas therein,  
Expounding in all languages  
The qualities of all buddhas,  
With endless oceans of manifestations.

With the finest flowers, garlands,  
Musical instruments, perfumes and parasols,  
The finest lamps and incenses,  
I make offerings to those buddhas.

With the finest clothes, fragrances,  
And mountainous baskets of aromatic powders,  
With the finest of all kinds of adornments  
I make offerings to those buddhas.

Whatever be the best of offerings,  
I produce them for all buddhas';  
By the power of devotion to the practice of good,  
I honor and serve all buddhas.

Whatever evil I may commit  
Under the sway of passion, hatred, or folly,  
Bodily, verbally, or mentally,  
I confess it all.

And whatever the virtue of beings everywhere,  
Hearers, saints, self-conquerors,  
Enlightening beings and buddhas,  
In all that I do rejoice.

And all the Lamps of the Worlds in the ten directions  
Who have realized enlightenment and attain nonobstruction  
I seek as guides, that they may turn  
The supreme wheel of teaching.

And those who wish to manifest extinction  
I petition respectfully to remain  
For eons as many as atoms in the land  
For the welfare and happiness of all beings.

By honor, service, and direction,  
By appreciating, seeking, and requesting teachings,  
Whatever good I have accumulated,  
I dedicate it all to enlightenment.

May the buddhas of the past be honored,  
As well as those now in the worlds of the ten directions,  
And may those of the future be at ease,  
Filled with joy, having realized enlightenment.

May all the lands of the ten directions  
Be purified, supreme, and filled  
With buddhas and enlightening beings  
At the tree of enlightenment.

May all beings in the ten directions  
Be happy and well;  
May all beings' righteous aim be successful,  
May their hope be realized.

As I am carrying out enlightenment practice,  
May I recall my lives in all states;  
In every lifetime, as I die and am reborn,  
May I always transcend the mundane.

Learning from all buddhas,  
Fulfilling the practice of good,  
I will practice pure conduct,  
Always free from defect.

I will expound the Teaching  
In the languages of gods and dragons,  
In the languages of demons and humans,  
And of all living beings.

May those engaged in the ways of transcendence  
Not stray from enlightenment;  
And may all evils to be inhibited  
Be thoroughly extinguished.

I will traverse the paths of the world  
Free from compulsion, affliction, and delusion,  
Like a lotus unstained by water,  
Like the sun and moon unattached in the sky.

Extinguishing all the miseries of bad states  
And bringing all beings to happiness,  
I will act for the welfare of all beings  
In all lands everywhere.

According with the conduct of sentient beings  
While fulfilling the practice of enlightenment,  
And cultivating the practice of good,

Thus will I act throughout future eons.

May I always be in communion  
With those who share my practice;  
Physically, verbally, and mentally,  
I will carry out vows as one practice.

And may I always be with my benefactors,  
Who teach me the practice of good;  
May I never displease them.

May I always see the buddhas face to face,  
Surrounded by enlightening beings;  
I will make fine offerings to them  
Forever, unwearied.

Preserving the true teaching of buddhas,  
Illumining the practice of enlightenment,  
And purifying the practice of good,  
I will practice for all future eons.

Migrating through all states of being,  
Having acquired inexhaustible virtue and knowledge,  
May I become an inexhaustible treasury of wisdom and means,  
Concentration, liberation, and all virtues.

As I carry on the practice of enlightenment,  
May I see the inconceivable buddhas sitting among enlightening beings  
In the lands as numerous as atoms  
That are in each atom.

Thus may I perceive the oceans  
Of buddhas and lands of all times  
In each point in the ten directions  
As I practice for myriad eons.

May I ever penetrate the eloquence of buddhas,  
The voices of all buddhas which adapt to mentalities,  
The purity of articulation of all buddhas,  
By the sounds of the ocean of tones in a single utterance.

Into those infinite voices  
Of all buddhas of all times  
May I enter by buddha-power,  
Turning the wheel of teaching.

May I enter all eons  
Of the future instantly,  
And may I act in all eons

Of all times within an instant.

May I see all buddhas of all times  
In one instant  
And always enter their sphere  
By the magical power of liberation.

May I produce the arrays of all lands  
Of all times in an atom,  
May I thus perceive all the arrays  
Of buddha-lands in all the ten directions.

Learning the teachings of  
The Lamps of the Worlds to come,  
I visit all the Guides  
Who have passed away to eternal rest.

By occult powers, swift in all ways,  
By the power of knowledge, all-sided,  
By the power of practice, with all virtues,  
By the power of universal love,  
By the power of goodness, all pure,  
By the power of knowledge, unobstructed,  
Gathering the power of enlightenment,  
Clearing away the power of acts,  
Destroying the power of afflictions,  
Vitiating the power of demons,  
May I fulfill all powers  
Of the practice of good.

Purifying oceans of lands,  
Liberating oceans of beings,  
Observing oceans of truths,  
Plumbing oceans of knowledge,  
Perfecting oceans of practices,  
Fulfilling oceans of vows,  
Serving oceans of buddhas,  
May I practice, untiring, for oceans of eons.

The lofty vows of enlightenment practice  
Of the buddhas of past, present, and future  
May I fulfill completely,  
Practice what is good, and realize enlightenment.

All who share in the practice  
Of the sage of Universal Good,  
The foremost offspring of all buddhas,  
I name them good.

Pure in body, speech, and mind,  
Pure in conduct, with a pure land,  
As the sage is named Good,  
May I become thus equally.

May I carry out the vow of Manjushri  
To totally purify the practice of good;  
Tireless through all future ages,  
May I fulfill all those tasks.

May there be no limits to practice,  
And no limit to virtues;  
Persisting in infinite practices,  
I know all their miraculous creations.

As long as the earth exists,  
As long as all beings exist,  
As long as acts and afflictions exist,  
So long will my vow remain.

Let me give the buddhas all worlds  
In the ten directions adorned with jewels,  
Let me give celestials and humans supreme happiness  
For eons as many as atoms.

Those who develop respect and devotion  
On hearing this supreme dedication,  
Seeking supreme enlightenment,  
Will be most blessed.

They will have abandoned all evils  
And all bad associates  
And will quickly see Infinite Light,  
If they have this vow of enlightening practice.

Great is their gain, worthwhile their life,  
Auspicious their birth as humans;  
They will soon be like  
The universally good enlightening being.

Those who have committed hellish crimes  
Under the sway of ignorance  
Will quickly put an end to them all  
When this practice of good is expounded.

Endowed with knowledge, distinction, and nobility,  
Invulnerable to false teachers and demons,  
They will be honored  
By all in the triple world.

They will quickly go to the  
Tree of enlightenment  
And sit there for the benefit  
Of all living beings;  
They will realize enlightenment,  
Turn the wheel of teaching,  
And conquer the devil  
And all its cohorts.

Buddha knows those who hold this vow to practice good,  
Who cause it to be told of and taught;  
The fruit of this is supreme enlightenment  
Do not entertain any doubt.

As the hero Manjushri knows, so too does Universal Good;  
As I learn from them I dedicate all this virtue.  
By the supreme dedication praised by the buddhas of all times  
I dedicate all this virtue to the practice of highest good.

Acting in accord with the time, may I remove all obstructions,  
May I see Infinite Light face to face and go to the land of bliss.  
There, may all these vows be complete;  
Having fulfilled them, I will work for the weal of all beings in the world.

Let me abide in the circle of that buddha, born in a beautiful lotus,  
And receive the prophecy of buddhahood there in the presence of the buddha of Infinite Light.

Having received the prophecy there, with millions of emanations  
I will work for the weal of beings everywhere, by the power of Buddha.

By whatever virtue I accumulate, having invoked the vow to practice good,  
May the pure aspiration of the world be at once all fulfilled.

By the endless surpassing blessing realized from dedication  
To the practice of good,  
May worldlings submerged in the torrent of passion  
Go to the higher realm of Infinite Light.

The Buddha said, "Sudhana, those enlightening beings led by Manjushri, the monks developed by Manjushri, Maitreya, and all the enlightening beings of the age of virtue, the great enlightening beings gathered in various worlds, as numerous as atoms, led by Universally Good, appointed inheritors of spiritual sovereignty, the great disciples led by Shariputra and Maudgalyayana and their circle, as well as celestial and human beings, were elated and they applauded what the blessed enlightening being Universally Good had said."

Thomas Cleary, *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra* (Boston & London: Shambhala Publications, 1984).

### III. Pure Land Buddhism

*The Land of Bliss Sutra*

(*The Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra*)

The Shorter Discourse

otherwise known as

*The Sutra of Amita Buddha*

A translation of Kumarajiva's Chinese Version  
(the *Amito-jing*)

[*The two Land of Bliss Sutras, known to Western students of Buddhism as the “Smaller” and “Larger” Sukhāvativyūha Sūtras, are foundational texts for Pure Land Buddhism. The two texts depict an ideal world, a “Land of Bliss” that lies to the west of our own, imperfect world. This distant world is the wondrous paradise of the Buddha Amitabha (Amitābha), the Buddha of Infinite Light. The two texts explain the conditions that lead to rebirth in that land and the manner in which human beings are reborn there. The following selection is a translation of Kumarajiva’s (344-413) Chinese translation of the original Sanskrit shorter discourse.*]

#### **Preamble: The Setting and the Audience**

§1. This I have heard. At one time, the Buddha was staying in the royal capital city of Shravasti, in Prince Jeta's grove. He was staying in the cloistered park that the generous Anathapindada gave to the Buddhist Order in Prince Jeta's grove.

§2. At that time the Buddha was surrounded by a large assembly of monks—one thousand two hundred fifty of them. These monks were all great arhats, highly respected among the people for their holiness.

§3. Among them were the elders Shariputra and Maha-Maudgalyayana, and Maha-Kashyapa, Maha-Katyayana, Maha-Kaushthila, Revata, Chula-Panthaka, Nanda, Ananda, Rahula, Gavampati, Pindola Bharadvaja, Kalodayin, Maha-Kapphina, Vakkula, Anuruddha—and other great disciples like these.

§4. And he was also accompanied by an assembly of bodhisattvas mahasattvas; present were the bodhisattva Manjushri, the Prince of Dharma, as well as the future Buddha, the bodhisattva Maitreya, also known as Bodhisattva Ajita. The bodhisattva Gandhastin, and the bodhisattva Nityodyukta were also there, with other great bodhisattvas like these.

§5. And the Buddha was likewise accompanied by a large crowd of countless gods, Shakra, known as Indra, the King of the gods, and many others.

#### **The Main Discourse**

##### **The Land of Supreme Bliss**

§6. Then, the Buddha spoke to the Venerable Shariputra: “West of here, a hundred billion buddha-fields away, there is a world system called ‘Supreme Bliss.’ In that field there is a buddha named ‘Amita.’ At this very moment he dwells in that faraway land, preaching the Dharma.

§7. “Shariputra, why is that field called ‘Supreme Bliss’? Because the living beings in that realm are free from all forms of suffering and they only experience all forms of happiness. Therefore, it is called ‘Supreme Bliss.’

§8. “Furthermore, Shariputra, all around this Land of Supreme Bliss, there are seven tiers of railings, seven rows of netting, and seven rows of trees. They are all made of the four precious substances. All around, they encircle the perimeter of this land. Therefore, that land is called ‘Supreme Bliss.’

§9. “Furthermore, Shariputra, in the Land of Supreme Bliss there are bathing pools made of the seven precious substances. They are filled with the best water, endowed with eight good qualities: their water is always limpid, cool, sweet-tasting, light, soft, placid, healthy, and thirst-quenching. The bottom of these pools is completely covered with golden sand. In each of their four sides, they have steps made of gold, silver, lapis-lazuli, and crystal.

“Above, there are towered pavilions, adorned with gold, silver, lapis-lazuli, crystal, coral, red pearls, and agate. On the surface of the pools, there are lotus blossoms as large as cart wheels. These are blue colored, with a blue sheen; yellow colored, with a yellow sheen; red colored, with a red sheen; white colored, with a white sheen; they are delicate and fragrant.

“Shariputra, in the Land of Supreme Bliss, good qualities and ornaments like these are brought to perfection.

§10. “Furthermore, Shariputra, in this buddha-field celestial music is constantly heard. And the ground is made of gold. Four times a day, exactly on the hour, day and night, mandara flowers rain down from heaven. Early every morning, each living being in this land picks some of those exquisite flowers, places them in the hem of his robe, and travels to worship with these flowers a hundred billion buddhas in other worlds in the other regions of the universe. Immediately thereafter, each of these persons returns, in time for his forenoon meal, to this, his own world, and takes his meal and afternoon stroll.

“Shariputra, in the Land of Supreme Bliss, good qualities and ornaments like these are brought to perfection.

§11. “Moreover, Shariputra, in that land you will always see many flocks of rare and exquisite birds of many colors—white egrets, peacocks, parrots, shari and kalavinka birds, and those birds called ‘Living-Together.’ Doves of these birds gather to sing with soothing, exquisite voices four times a day, exactly on the hour, day and night. Their voices proclaim the tenets of the Buddha’s teaching—for instance, they sing of the five spiritual faculties, of the five spiritual powers, of the seven aspects of awakening, of the Eightfold Path that is followed by those of spiritual nobility, and of many other aspects of the Buddha’s Dharma. When the living beings in that buddha-field hear such song, they all immediately enjoy thoughts of the Buddha, of his Dharma, and of his Order, and keep these three in mind incessantly.

§12. “Shariputra, you should not say that these birds are actually born here as a result of their past evil deeds. Why not? Because the three undesirable courses of rebirth are not found in this buddha-field. Moreover, Shariputra, in this buddha-land even the names of the three undesirable paths of rebirth are not to be found. How then could they exist in fact? The birds that sing in this buddha-field have all been created by the Buddha Amita himself, by means of his miraculous power, because he wanted to have them broadcast the sound of the Dharma.

§13. “Shariputra, in that buddha-land, a subtle breeze blows, swaying the rows of jeweled trees and the jeweled nets, so that they emit an exquisite sound, like that of hundreds of thousands of diverse kinds of musical instruments playing together at the same time. All those who hear this sound enjoy spontaneously and immediately thoughts of the Buddha, of his Dharma, and of his Order, and keep these three in mind incessantly, bringing to mind the Buddha, bringing to mind his Dharma, bringing to mind his Order.

“Shariputra, in that buddha-land, good qualities and ornaments like these are brought to perfection.

#### **The Buddha Presiding Over the Land of Supreme Bliss**

§14. “What do you think, Shariputra? Why is this Buddha called ‘Amita’—‘measureless’? Shariputra, this Buddha’s beaming light is measureless. It shines without obstruction into buddha-fields in the ten directions. Therefore, he is called ‘Amita.’

§15. “Furthermore, Shariputra, this Buddha’s life-span, and the life-span of the human beings in his buddha-field as well, has a duration of measureless, boundless, countless, cosmic ages. For this reason too he is called ‘measureless,’ Amita.’

“Shariputra, ten cosmic ages have now passed since the Buddha Amita attained buddhahood.

#### **The Inhabitants of the Land of Supreme Bliss**

§16. “Furthermore, Shariputra, this Buddha has measureless, inestimable numbers of disciples that are auditors, all of them arhats. Their number cannot be grasped. The same is true also of the community of bodhisattvas in that land.

“Shariputra, in that buddha-land, good qualities and ornaments like these are brought to perfection.

§17. “Furthermore, Shariputra, all living beings born in the Land of Supreme Bliss will progress irreversibly in the path. Many among them are only one more birth away from the full awakening of a buddha. Their numbers are vast. Their numbers cannot be grasped. One can only speak of their spiritual careers in terms of measureless, boundless, incalculable, cosmic ages.

#### **Exhortation**

§18. “Shariputra, living beings who hear this should generate an earnest desire, wishing to be reborn in that land. Why? Because in that land one will be able to meet in one place persons of such high virtue as the many living beings I have described here. Shariputra, one cannot be reborn in that buddha-field, if one depends on the merit of only a few roots of goodness.

§19. “Shariputra, if good men or good women hear this explanation of the qualities of the Buddha Amita, and embrace his name, and keep it in mind single-mindedly and without distraction, be it for one day, or for two, for three, for four, for five, for six, or for seven days, then, when their lives come to an end, the Buddha Amita, together with his holy entourage, will appear before them. At the time of their death, their minds free of any distorted views, they will be able to be reborn forthwith in Amita Buddha’s Land of Supreme Bliss.

§20. “Shariputra, I have seen the benefit of this. Therefore, I say this to you: A living being who hears this discourse should aspire to be reborn in that land.

#### **Confirmation: All Buddhas Praise Their Lands**

§21. “Shariputra, in the same way that I now praise the inconceivable merits of the Buddha Amita, other buddhas, in the eastern regions of the universe, praise him—buddhas as many as the number of grains of sand in the Ganges. Each one of these buddhas—buddhas like the Buddha Akshobhya, the Buddha Sumeru’s Emblem, the Buddha Great Sumeru, the Buddha Sumeru’s Light, the Buddha Exquisite Voice, and others—each in his own land extends his broad and long tongue, encompassing all the worlds in their three thousandfold, great thousandfold, world systems. Then, each of these buddhas makes a solemn declaration, proclaiming these true words: ‘O living beings, you should believe in this discourse, which praises inconceivable virtues—the discourse called Receiving the Protection of All Buddhas.’

§22. “Shariputra, in the same way that I now praise the inconceivable merits of the Buddha Amita, other buddhas, in the southern regions of the universe, praise him—buddhas as many as the number of grains of sand in the Ganges. Each one of these buddhas—buddhas like the Buddha Beacon of the Sun and Moon, the Buddha Splendor of Fame, the Buddha Great Heap of Flames, the Buddha Sumeru’s Beacon, the Buddha Inestimable Vigor, and others—each in his own land extends his broad and long tongue, encompassing all the worlds in three thousandfold, great thousandfold, world systems. Then, each of these buddhas makes a solemn declaration, proclaiming these true words: ‘O living beings, you should believe in this discourse, which praises inconceivable virtues—the discourse called Receiving the Protection of All Buddhas.’

§23. “Shariputra, in the same way that I now praise the inconceivable merits of the Buddha Amita, other buddhas, in the western regions of the universe, praise him—buddhas as many as the number of grains of sand in the Ganges. Each one of these buddhas—buddhas like the Buddha Measureless Life-Span, the Buddha Measureless Banner, the Buddha Measureless Pennant, the Buddha Magnificent Sunlight, the Buddha Magnificent Moonlight, the Buddha Jewel Pennant, the Buddha Pure Beaming Light, and others—each in his own land extends his broad and long tongue encompassing all the worlds in three thousandfold, great thousandfold, world systems. Then, each of these buddhas makes a solemn declaration, proclaiming these true words: ‘O living beings, you should believe in this discourse, which praises inconceivable virtues—the discourse called Receiving the Protection of All Buddhas.’

§24. “Shariputra, in the same way that I now praise the inconceivable merits of the Buddha Amita, other buddhas, in the northern regions of the universe, praise him—buddhas as many as the number of grains of sand in the Ganges. Each one of these buddhas—buddhas like the Buddha Heap of Flames, the Buddha Voice of the Invincible, the Buddha Unconquerable, the Buddha Descended from the Sun, the Buddha Netting Moonbeams, and others—each in his own land extends his broad and long tongue, encompassing all the worlds in three thousandfold, great thousandfold, world systems. Then, each of these buddhas makes a solemn declaration, proclaiming these true words: ‘O living beings, you should believe in this discourse, which praises inconceivable virtues—the discourse called Receiving the Protection of All Buddhas.’

§25. “Shariputra, in the same way that I now praise the inconceivable merits of the Buddha Amita, other buddhas, in the regions in the lower regions of the universe, praise him—buddhas as many as the number of grains of sand in the Ganges. Each one of these buddhas—buddhas like the Buddha Lion, the Buddha Fame, the Buddha Beaming Light of Fame, the Buddha Dharma, the Buddha Banner of Dharma, the Buddha Upholder of Dharma, and others—each in his own land extends his broad and long tongue, encompassing all the worlds in three thousandfold, great thousandfold, world systems. Then, each of these buddhas makes a solemn declaration, proclaiming these true words: ‘O living beings, you should believe in this discourse, which praises inconceivable virtues—the discourse called Receiving the Protection of All Buddhas.’

§26. “Shariputra, in the same way that I now praise the inconceivable merits of the Buddha Amita, other buddhas, in the regions in the higher regions of the universe, praise him—buddhas as many as the number of grains of sand in the Ganges. Each one of these buddhas—buddhas like the Buddha Voice of Brahma, the Buddha King of the Zodiac, the Buddha Incomparable Fragrance, the Buddha Fragrant Light, the Buddha Heap of Flames, the Buddha Lovely Color of a Jeweled Lotus, the Buddha Jeweled Lotus Virtue, the Buddha Discerning All Meanings, the Buddha Sumeru’s Grandeur, and others—each in his own land extends his broad and long tongue, encompassing all the worlds in three thousandfold, great thousandfold, world systems. Then, each of these buddhas makes a solemn declaration, proclaiming these true words: ‘O living beings, you should believe in this discourse, which praises inconceivable virtues—the discourse called Receiving the Protection of All Buddhas.’

### **Trust, Commitment, Embracing**

#### **Exhortation by Shakyamuni**

§27. “Shariputra, what do you think? Why is this discourse called The Discourse of Receiving the Protection of All Buddhas? Shariputra, if good men or good women hear this discourse and keep it in mind, or hear the name of all buddhas, these good men and good women will all be protected and remembered by all buddhas, they will all become irreversible in their progress toward unsurpassable, complete awakening. Therefore, Shariputra, all of you should accept with faith these, my words, and the words pronounced by all buddhas.

#### **Benefits of the Vow**

§28. “Shariputra, those who have made the vow, are now making the vow, or will make the vow, and with it resolve to be reborn in the land of Amita Buddha, they all alike will not fall back from unsurpassable, complete awakening. They

are already born, they are being born, or they will be born in that land. Therefore, Shariputra, good men or good women who believe in this should make a vow to be reborn in that land.

**Exhortation by All the Buddhas: The Buddha's Task**

§29. "Shariputra, in the same way that I now praise the inconceivable virtues of all buddhas, all buddhas praise my inconceivable virtues, saying: 'Shakyamuni Buddha has been able to accomplish this most difficult and marvelous task. In this Saha World, during this evil age plagued by the five corruptions—the corruption of the evil cosmic age, the corruption of views, the corruption of the afflictions, the corruption of living beings, and the corruption of the life span—he has attained unsurpassable, perfect awakening, and has preached, for the sake of living beings, this Dharma that the whole world finds so difficult to believe in.'

§30. "Shariputra, you should know that during this evil age plagued by the five corruptions I have carried out this difficult task. I have attained unsurpassable, perfect awakening, and I have, for the sake of living beings, preached this Dharma that is so difficult to believe in. This was a most difficult task."

**Coda**

31. As the Buddha finished delivering this discourse, Shariputra, with all the monks, and the gods, humans, asuras, and all the other living beings in the whole world, having heard these words of the Buddha, rejoiced with his words and accepted them with faith. They then paid homage to the Buddha, and went their way.

Luis O Gómez, trans. *The Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light: Sanskrit and Chinese versions of the Sukhāvāṭṭvyūha sūtras* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996).