

A CONTEMPORARY TRANSLATION
OF A BUDDHIST CLASSIC

THE LOTUS SUTRA

TRANSLATION &
INTRODUCTION BY
Gene Reeves



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Preface

THIS NEW TRANSLATION of the Lotus Sutra is intended primarily for people who are interested in Buddhism but are not Buddhist scholars. My intention is to provide a highly readable English version of this important text. I want to make this text accessible to ordinary readers with little or no familiarity with technical Buddhist vocabulary. Several other translations are available, some better than others. For scholars interested in comparison of Sanskrit and Chinese versions, for example, the translation by the late Leon Hurvitz will be useful.

While I do my best to make the sutra accessible, I never deliberately compromise the meaning of what I find in it. There are passages in this text that I don't like and wish were not there. There are passages that are extremely difficult if not impossible to understand. There are a great many ambiguities, some intentional, some probably not. My purpose is not to eliminate or soften such passages or to settle the controversies to which they have given rise, but only to provide a version that reveals as much meaning in the sutra as possible.

My first exposure to this sutra was around 1980 when I was invited to participate in a workshop sponsored by the lay Buddhist organization Rissho Kosei-kai, which has its headquarters and the vast majority of its members in Japan. The workshop was designed to enhance interest in the Lotus Sutra among participants, but it had the opposite effect on me. I found a number of things in the text uncongenial. In succeeding years, however, I became increasingly fascinated by this sutra. And I came to

think that part of what discouraged me initially was the poor choice of terms in the translation I had read.

Nearly a decade later I decided to move to Japan to study the Lotus Sutra and improve my skills in Japanese and Chinese languages. I was encouraged both by Nikkyo Niwano, the founder and then president of Rissho Kosei-kai, and by Yoshiro Tamura, the foremost Japanese scholar of Tendai thought, who had recently retired from the University of Tokyo and was teaching at Rissho University.

Tamura died within a few months of my moving to Japan, so our several joint projects had to be abandoned. But Tamura's blend of passionate, personal interest in the Lotus Sutra, combined with his profound scholarship and academic rigor, is an inspiration to me still. Nikkyo Niwano, on the other hand, was entirely lacking in scholarly, academic credentials. But he had the same sensibility as Tamura, except that whereas Tamura was primarily an academic and secondarily a follower of the Lotus Sutra, Niwano was primarily a practitioner and devotee of the sutra and secondarily one who studied the scholarship about it. I regard both of these men as my great Dharma teachers, and feel more indebted to them than I can express.

As I became more familiar with Japanese and Chinese versions of this sutra, and despite the fact that some new translations had appeared in print, I became even more convinced that a version for ordinary English-language readers was needed, one that avoided Buddhist jargon and Sanskrit terms as much as possible.

I began dabbling with a translation of my own about a dozen years ago. The first privately printed version was in 2001. Since then there have been many revisions and a few revised versions. I'm sure there will be more. Translation of any large and complex Chinese text is not something one can ever expect to get right. All one can hope for is that it will become better.

When Kumarajiva or other translators felt that they could not translate a Sanskrit word into Chinese, they transliterated it; that is, they provided a phonetic equivalent to the Sanskrit. This is one of the reasons why many Sanskrit terms have become familiar in English, terms such as "buddha," "dharma," "stupa," and so on, they are basically transliterations of Sanskrit terms. The normal procedure when translating a Chinese Buddhist text into English is to translate into English what the transla-

tor into Chinese translated and use the Sanskrit term if it was only transliterated into Chinese. This works fine, of course, for scholars already familiar with many Sanskrit terms, but less well for others. What I have done in this translation, then, is to translate into English wherever I can; that is, wherever I think there is a reasonably good English equivalent for the term in question.

Sometimes such choices are relatively easy to make. For example, the Sanskrit term *kalpa*, often left untranslated, is here rendered as “eon.” Perhaps “age” would work just as well, but I can see no point in retaining the Sanskrit.

Some choices will be more controversial. The Sanskrit term *sangha* is often used in English, both in translations and in general use among English-speaking Buddhists, where it has come to mean just about any Buddhist community. For this translation, I have chosen to use “monks,” since it was often used to translate “sangha” into Chinese, and “monk(s)” is what the Chinese character in this sutra literally means. Originally in India and still today in many of the Buddhist worlds of Asia, “sangha” still refers exclusively to a community of monks. Thus, to use “sangha” where the text has “monks” could be confusing or misleading. Where the text intends a larger grouping that includes monks but is not limited to them, I use “assembly” or, as is often the case in this text, “great assembly.”

My decision to use the English (originally Greek or Roman) equivalents for most Indian mythological creatures will seem misguided to some. The great Buddhist and Sanskrit scholar Hajime Nakamura was the first to point out to me how closely related these imaginary creatures are. When I saw that Jean-Noël Robert used translations of these terms in his excellent translation of the Lotus Sutra into French, I decided to do the same. The Sanskrit equivalents can be found in the glossary of terms. The one exception to this practice is the term *asura*, which does not correspond very well with “titan” and appears in English-language works, translations, and dictionaries. In the case of Dharma I retain the Sanskrit, whereas others have chosen to translate it. Some translators have used “law.” While I understand that choice, I think it is unfortunate. Sometimes, especially in non-Buddhist Indian usage, “dharma” does mean something like a regulatory principle, the way things ought to be. In Buddhism generally, the term has several uses, sometimes quite

vague. Sometimes, especially in the Universal Sage Sutra translated here, it means something like “method.” But in the Lotus Sutra the much more fundamental meaning of “dharma” is “teachings,” in particular the teachings of the Buddha. Sometimes this same term refers to the fundamental truths that the Buddha realized and taught, as later interpreters have insisted. But even in such cases, the meaning of “teachings” is always retained or included. In this text, “dharma” is Buddha-dharma. Given this complexity, I think it is best to retain the Sanskrit term.

Making the situation more complicated, the term “dharma” in this and other texts has a quite different meaning, which I render as “things” and for which others have sometimes use “phenomena.” These “things” are a consequence of ordinary sense experience; they are what we experience. Such things, of course, are not necessarily physical objects but can be events or even ideas. Fortunately, this use of “dharma” is almost always readily distinguishable from its use as “teaching.”

In the course of doing this translation earlier versions of it have been used in classes in Tokyo, Beijing, and Chicago, and the International Buddhist Congregation of Rissho Kosei-kai has used them for study and recitation. Along the way I have received a great many comments and helpful suggestions. Two staff members of Rissho Kosei-kai—Michio Shinozaki, the president of Rissho Kosei-kai’s seminary, Gakurin, and Yukimasa Hagiwara, now head of Rissho Kosei-kai’s Dharma Missions department—read the entire manuscript and proposed many improvements.

A former student of mine, now a retired Unitarian Universalist minister, Robert Swain, worked carefully on an earlier version of the text of the Dharma Flower Sutra itself, making numerous improvements in my English expressions. Professor Brook Ziporyn of Northwestern University has reviewed and refined the translations of the opening and closing sutras, and made useful suggestions on parts of the Lotus Sutra as well. Min Yang has been very helpful in developing Pinyin versions of the dharanis in chapters 26 and 28. And three reviewers for Wisdom Publications offered many useful suggestions.

I have consulted various versions of Kumarajiva’s translation into Chinese along with two frequently used Japanese versions of his translation. But the main reference text for this translation has been the three-

volume version published by Iwanami Shoten with translations and extensive notes by Yukio Sakamoto and Yutaka Iwamoto. One of the great virtues of this version is that it includes on facing pages the Chinese text, a Japanese version of the Chinese, and a translation into Japanese from Sanskrit.

Despite the differences between this translation and earlier ones, I feel enormously indebted to previous translators. I have consulted and been informed by earlier translations at every point along the way. The earliest of these is the one still in use by Rissho Kosei-kai called *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, in which the translation of the Lotus Sutra itself was done by Bunnō Katō, based in part on work previously done by W.E. Soothill. While the present version is significantly different from Katō's, I remain enormously indebted to him for initially arousing my interest in the sutra and prompting me to try to improve on his translation.



Translator's Introduction

LOTUS SUTRA” does not correspond to anything in Chinese or Japanese. The full title in Chinese is 妙法蓮華經, pronounced *Miao-fa-lian-hua jing*, and *Myō-hō-enge-kyō* in Japanese. Literally these characters mean “wonderful Dharma lotus flower sutra.” Although just 法華 is sometimes found, the usual shortened title in the text itself is 法華經, pronounced *Fa-hua jing* in Chinese and *Hoke-kyō* in Japanese. In English this would be Dharma Flower Sutra. I’m uncertain about how or why this text came to be called the “Lotus Sutra” in English. I suspect it is because the first Western translation of it, in 1852 by Eugene Burnouf into French, was titled *Le lotus de la bonne loi*.

Often used as the base of statues of buddhas and bodhisattvas or held in the hands of bodhisattvas, the lotus flower may be the most common of Buddhist symbols. It is especially important in Mahayana Buddhism, where it symbolizes the bodhisattva as one who is firmly rooted in the mud of the earth and flowering toward the sky. It is a symbol of working in the world to help others to awaken while finding inspiration in a sense of the cosmos.

Thus the lotus flower and the lotus plant are important in the sutra. But more important than the plant itself, it seems to me, is its flowering. The sutra wants us to understand it as a blossoming of Buddha-dharma. Its own short title, “Dharma Flower Sutra,” or even “Dharma Flowering Sutra,” would thus be more appropriate than “Lotus Sutra” for the short title of this text, except, of course, for the fact that it is already well known as the “Lotus Sutra.”

THE TEXT

The sutra is thought to have been translated into Chinese at least six times, the first being by Dharmaraksha (竺法護) in 286 CE. He gave it the title *Zheng-fa-hua jing* (正法華經), or True Dharma Flower Sutra. While this translation has received some attention from scholars, it has had very little influence on East Asian Buddhism or culture, as it was surpassed by the translation of Kumarajiva (鳩摩羅什) in 406, to which the title *Miao-fa-lian-hua jing* (妙法蓮華經) was given. The only other existing translation is actually a revision of Kumarajiva's version. An additional three translations found in some catalogs are no longer known to exist.

Save for a translation from Sanskrit by H. Kern, originally published in 1884 as a volume of *The Sacred Books of the East*, edited by Max Müller, all East Asian and almost all Western versions of the sutra are based on the translation by Kumarajiva, as are almost all commentaries. In fact, existing Sanskrit manuscripts are much more recent than the Chinese translations. Unfortunately, as I think is true of all translations of Buddhist texts into Chinese, the Sanskrit versions from which they were translated are lost.

There are significant differences among the existing versions, summarized well by Yoshiro Tamura in his introduction to *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*. We do not know how to explain these differences. Perhaps Kumarajiva translated very freely or had a Sanskrit version quite different from those we now possess.

The Chinese versions are usually said to be translations from the Sanskrit Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra. But while many Sanskrit texts and especially fragments of texts of this sutra have been found all over the northern part of the Indian subcontinent, they are all much more recent than existing Chinese versions.

The version in this book, like virtually all contemporary Chinese and Japanese versions, has twenty-eight chapters, though Kumarajiva's version had only twenty-seven. Sometime, probably in the fifth or sixth century, the text of what is now the Devadatta chapter was moved from the end of chapter 11 to form a separate chapter 12.

Formation of the Lotus Sutra

Traditionally the Dharma Flower Sutra has been divided into two parts. In recent times some scholars have proposed a threefold division that compliments rather than supplants the traditional division. A change of focus after chapter 9, and the fact that making copies of the sutra becomes important after chapter 9 but is not mentioned at all in chapters 2–9, have led to the conclusion that chapters 2–9, with their focus on *shravakas*, constitute an earlier version of the text, and that chapters 10–21, focusing on bodhisattvas and the practice of the bodhisattva way, were added later. Chapter 1 is seen as having been created along with this second group as an introduction to the whole in an attempt to make the two groups coherent. Finally, the last six chapters are regarded as another group, stressing the practice of bodhisattvas. Some of the chapters in this group evidently were circulated as separate sutras, perhaps before the Lotus Sutra itself was created. Though we do not know how far back such practice extends, chapter 25, “Regarder of the Cries of the World” (the *Guanyin jing* or *Kannon-gyō*), is used as a separate sutra to this day. Some regard chapter 12 as part of this third group. Compilation of the sutra probably took place within the first century of the common era. In the *Mahāprajñāparamitā-upadeśa-śāstra*, attributed to Nāgārjuna and supposedly written around 200 CE, there are citations from Lotus Sutra chapters up to the last. If the dating of this text is correct, it would indicate that by the end of the second century the contents of the Lotus Sutra were pretty much what we have now.

This division of the sutra into three parts can also be understood doctrinally. The first part elucidates a unifying truth of the universe (the One Vehicle of the Wonderful Dharma); the second part sheds light on the everlasting personal life of the Buddha (Everlasting Original Buddha); and the third part emphasizes the actual activities of human beings (the bodhisattva way).

While the traditional division of the sutra into two halves is useful for understanding its teachings, the division into three groups of chapters is useful for understanding the historical development of the sutra and some of the various inconsistencies in it, both doctrinal and stylistic.

The Opening and Closing Sutras

For centuries the Lotus Sutra has been closely associated in East Asia with the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings and the Sutra of Contemplation on the Dharma Practice of Universal Sage Bodhisattva, typically referred to as the “opening” and “closing” sutras, the three together being referred to as the “three-part Dharma flower sutra” and published as *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*. In chapter 1 of the Dharma Flower Sutra it is said that for the sake of all bodhisattvas the Buddha taught the Great Vehicle sutra called Innumerable Meanings (無量義經 *Wuliangyi jing*). Tradition has it that a sutra with this name was received by the monk Hui-piao (慈表) from the translator Dharma-jātayaśas (曇摩伽陀耶舍) toward the end of the fifth century. It has been taken to be a translation from a Sanskrit Amitārtha Sutra, which has been lost. There may have been an earlier translation, also now lost. Although a passage in this sutra, mentioning a truth not yet revealed after more than forty years of teaching, has been taken to be a reference to the Lotus Sutra, in fact the Lotus Sutra is not explicitly mentioned in this sutra. Virtually nothing is known of its origins or connection to the Lotus Sutra. Some believe that it may have been originally composed in Chinese.

The existing Sutra of Contemplation on the Dharma Practice of Universal Sage Bodhisattva in Chinese, *Guan-puxian-pusa-xingfa jing* (觀普賢菩薩 行法經)—often shortened to *Puxian-guan jing* (普賢 觀經) and in Japan often termed the *Zange-kyō* (懺悔經), also pronounced *Sange-kyō*, “the repentance sutra”—is traditionally believed to have been translated by Dharmamitra (曇無蜜多) in the middle of the fifth century, following two earlier translations, including one by Kumarajiva, which are now lost. In it the Lotus Sutra is explicitly mentioned, clearly indicating an intended connection. In this case, too, no Sanskrit version has been found.

A Religious Inspirational Text

There are many ways to read any important text. The Lotus Sutra has been taken to be a polemical document reflecting a conflict between conservative, classical monks and Mahayana upstarts. Its purpose would be to assert the superiority of the Great Vehicle, the Mahayana, over more conservative traditions while disparaging the smaller vehicle.

While it certainly is possible to read the Lotus Sutra this way, we

know too little about the beginnings of Mahayana Buddhism and the formation of this sutra to speak confidently about that history. In any case, it certainly is not as a record of Indian Buddhist history that this sutra has been read over many centuries by the peoples of East Asia, where it has almost universally been regarded as a religious text, recited as a devotional practice, and esteemed as a source of protection from forces both natural and human, real and imagined, and where it has inspired a range of Buddhist and secular arts and served as a spiritual basis and resource for political rebellion or reform.

In short, this text has become one of the world's great religious scriptures and most influential books. It did not acquire that renown as a polemic against people or schools largely unknown to East Asian readers.

I believe we will understand this text better if we treat it as an inspirational text, rather than assuming its purpose was to give its readers ammunition against other Buddhists. Its main thrust is to encourage readers to understand themselves in certain ways. It seeks, in other words, to change human behavior by influencing the religious orientation and values of its auditors or readers.

It teaches, for example, that everyone without exception has the potential to be a buddha. This simple teaching would later develop into doctrines and theories about Buddha-nature. But in this text what we actually have is not so much a doctrine as a series of stories, narratives that appeal to the human imagination as well as to the rational mind. The story of Devadatta, for example, tells us nothing at all about the historical Devadatta, but it encourages us to understand that just as Devadatta, everywhere known to be evil, is told that he is to become a buddha, so we too, no matter how imperfect, have the potential to become a buddha. We also need to understand that this story teaches us that a buddha is one who sees the potential for good in others, even in enemies. It encourages us to realize our own capacity to be a buddha for someone else. Many other stories in this sutra are designed to move us to behave in accord with the sutra, primarily by helping others by sharing its teachings with them.

The Devadatta story is followed immediately by the very interesting story of the dragon princess, a little girl whom Manjushri Bodhisattva proclaims to be capable of becoming a buddha immediately. This story

was obviously intended to persuade monks, who would have been its only early auditors and readers, that women as well as men have the potential of being buddhas, common prejudice and informed opinion to the contrary. At the climax of the story, the girl tells her two male critics, a shravaka monk and a bodhisattva, that if they look—if they really look using their spiritual eyes—they too will see her as a buddha. In other words, this story is not designed merely to criticize male assumptions, though it does do that; it also affirms the positive potential to be a buddha in the very men it also criticizes. This also means, of course, that it affirms the positive potential of both its female and its male auditors or readers.

All readers of the Lotus Sutra would be well advised to ask what the story is saying about themselves.

The sutra certainly is, however, a Mahayana text, one that champions a Mahayana Buddhist understanding of Buddha-dharma. But its claim to superiority should not be seen as opposing or excluding anyone. Quite the opposite, it affirms the equality of everyone and seeks to provide an understanding of Buddha-dharma that excludes no one.

Though we can make conjectures based on what we find in the text, virtually nothing is known about the origins of the Dharma Flower Sutra in India, as we know very little about the early centuries of the Mahayana movement of which it was an important part. It's even quite likely that it is inappropriate to think of Sanskrit as the original language of this sutra. Sanskrit was a bit like the Latin language in medieval Europe: texts originally written in a vernacular were translated into Latin or Sanskrit to give them higher status and wider appeal. While it is possible that some of the Lotus Sutra was originally composed in Sanskrit, it is very unlikely that much of it was.

Thus while it is possible, even likely, that this sutra once existed in some other Indian language or languages, there is no hard evidence for this. It's also very likely that before being committed to any written form, most if not all of the text existed in oral versions. It also seems obvious that some parts of the sutra, especially the final six chapters, and possibly chapter 12 or at least the Devadatta and dragon princess stories in chapter 12, circulated separately at least in oral form. Chapter 25, the Guan-yin chapter, has circulated separately for several centuries down to the present and is sometimes confused with the whole sutra.

Historical Significance

While the Lotus Sutra has had a fair share of critics, ranging from those who regard it as nothing more than snake oil to those who consider its influence pernicious, there can be no doubt that it has been enormously influential in East Asia from the time of its translation by Kumarajiva down to the present. In recent times it has served as a foundation for numerous Buddhist reform movements, especially in Taiwan and Japan. Today, with a revival of Buddhism in China, the sutra is widely studied and recited there as well, both by monastics and by laypeople. In Japan, where Buddhism is more sectarian than in other East Asian countries, well over fifty new Buddhist religious organizations claim to be based on the Lotus Sutra, most notably Soka Gakkai, now one of the largest Buddhist organizations in the world; Rissho Kosei-kai, which has pioneered Japanese involvement in international interfaith encounter and cooperation; and Reiyu-kai, the mother of the vast majority of new Japanese Buddhist movements and organizations.

The influence of the Lotus Sutra has not been limited to religious organizations. For many centuries it has had a major impact on East Asian culture, especially on art and politics. In the Chinese section of any major art museum one will find that a great many images are based solely on the Lotus Sutra, images such as the two buddhas sitting side by side in the stupa of Abundant Treasures Buddha, or Universal Sage Bodhisattva mounted on a white elephant with six tusks, or the burning house from the parable in chapter 3 of the sutra.

After reading it at an early age in his father's study, Japan's greatest twentieth-century storyteller and poet, Kenji Miyazawa, became devoted to the Lotus Sutra, writing to his father on his own deathbed that all he ever wanted to do was share the teachings of this sutra with others. Yet in writings published during his lifetime Miyazawa seldom if ever mentions the Lotus Sutra. He sought, rather, to display or illuminate its teachings implicitly, without explicit reference to the sutra. He wanted to embody the sutra quietly, both in his writing and in his life. This was no secret, however, in his impoverished native Iwate prefecture in the northeastern region of Japan's main island, where he was widely known as "Kenji Bodhisattva."

Much of the influence of the Dharma Flower Sutra can be attributed to its being championed by the Tiantai/Tendai and Nichiren schools

and denominations. Founded by the monk Zhiyi in the sixth century, Tiantai attempted to order the huge variety of Buddhist sutras by treating the Lotus Sutra as the summation of the Buddha's teaching. This understanding of the sutra was enormously influential for many centuries, even after Tiantai as a school had largely died out. Brought to Japan among the earliest Buddhist texts to come from Korea and China, the Dharma Flower Sutra was soon established as the major spiritual protector of the nation, with monasteries and nunneries built in every province primarily for the purpose of reciting the Lotus Sutra. Mount Hiei, outside of Kyoto, soon became the headquarters of the growing Tendai denomination of Buddhism. There all the major figures in the development of new denominations of Buddhism studied the Lotus Sutra, including Dogen (1200–53), the much-revered founder of the Soto branch of Zen, who made extensive use of the Lotus Sutra in developing his own approach to Zen ideas and practice.

Among these founders of new streams of Buddhism was Nichiren (1222–82), founder of what has been called both the Dharma Flower School and the Nichiren School. Nichiren was fanatically devoted to the Lotus Sutra, at different times in his life urging study of it, extolling devotion to it, and even proclaiming the adequacy of reciting only its title. In Japan it is mainly Nichiren and related schools that carried the Lotus Sutra into modern times, giving it such a prominent place in twentieth-century Japanese culture and politics.

The sutra has also continued to attract devotees in countries of Chinese culture and language. In Taiwan, for example, it is the initial inspiration behind the nun Dharma Master Cheng Yen, the founder and head the Tsu-chi Foundation, the largest Buddhist charitable organization in the world. It is recited regularly at temples both in Taiwan and in Singapore. And in China itself it is now a prominent part of the resurgence of Buddhism, both monastic and lay. Although this sutra is not the main text for any organization, as it is for many in Japan, it is widely studied and recited regularly in temples and lay Buddhist organizations.

Though often unrecognized, the relation of the Lotus Sutra to popular East Asian devotion to Guan-yin (Kannon in Japanese pronunciation) is also an important part of this story. This bodhisattva, who embodies compassion, is easily the most popular and important Buddhist figure in East Asia, found not only in Buddhist temples of all kinds

and sizes but also in Daoist and popular Chinese temples, in Shinto shrines, in ordinary homes, and increasingly in mammoth outdoor statues. The Lotus Sutra is not the only sutra in which Guan-yin appears, but it is the oldest, and more than any other it has provided a textual basis for the remarkable growth of Guan-yin devotion in China beginning in the tenth century. Consistent with the Guan-yin chapter of the sutra, "The Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World," though certainly not always based on it, devotion to Guan-yin embodies fundamental themes of the sutra, particularly its emphasis on skillfully doing whatever is needed to help or save others, on breaking down sharp distinction between the buddha and bodhisattva ideals, on the importance of leadership by women, and especially on having Buddha-dharma infuse everyday life and popular culture, in part by fostering compassionate care for the poor.

The Fantasy Setting

Whatever else it may be, the Lotus Sutra is a storybook containing a great variety of parables and other stories, and stories-within-stories. Some of the characters are ordinary human beings, typically monks and nuns, some of them regarded as historical, such as Shariputra and his colleagues, some as fictional actors in a parable, typically a father figure, as is the physician-father who gets his dying children to take an antidote to a poison by leading them to believe he has died. Several major characters in these stories are human but not only human beings, such as the bodhisattvas Manjushri, Maitreya, and Medicine King. Other major figures who clearly are not only human also appear in these stories include Abundant Treasures Buddha and Universal Sage Bodhisattva. A large variety of gods, goddesses, and mythical creatures are also part of the setting for several stories.

The central figure in much of the text is the Buddha—Shakyamuni Buddha. Here he has supernatural powers; for example, he illuminates the infinite worlds of the universe with a light that emerges from a tuft of hair between his eyebrows. Yet the text frequently reminds the reader of the human, historical life of Shakyamuni, reminding us of key events in his life on earth: having a son and stepmother, becoming awakened under a tree, teaching ascetics at Varanasi, and so on.

Often these stories are given a vast, probably infinite cosmic setting.

Almost always in the background is the idea of vast reaches of time, divided into periods in which a buddha's teachings are alive and effective and periods in which they are merely formal, followed without enthusiasm to very little effect. Just as time is fantastically extended, so too is space. Shakyamuni lights up all the worlds on more than one occasion, in one case using that light to invite buddhas from all over the universe to come to this world to witness the presence of Abundant Treasures Buddha in his magnificent stupa, which has arrived from the distant past. Bodhisattvas travel to visit this world from other very distant worlds, and on such occasions extremely rare flowers rain down from the heavens, drums and other musical instruments make music by themselves, and the worlds, including this one, shake and tremble in the six ways that a world can shake and tremble.

To be sure, some of these fireworks have entertainment value, livening up stories. But that is not their only function.

In Kenji Miyazawa's most famous story, "The Night of the Milky Way Railroad," a young boy falls asleep and has a fantastic dream in which he and his best friend ride a very special train through the starry night, encountering a variety of strange and interesting characters and events. Eventually he realizes that the train is actually carrying souls of the dead to another world and discovers that he is the only one on the train with a round-trip ticket. He wakes up from the dream to learn that his best friend has drowned in the river that runs through their town, where a festival has been going on. And in that river he sees reflected the river that is the Milky Way, through which he has been traveling. It's a kind of epiphany, a moment in which the earthly river and the heavenly river, each with the stories of life and death associated with it, are envisioned as one. Then the boy finishes what he set out to do before falling asleep—going to the store to get some milk to take home to his mother.

That, in part, is what the Lotus Sutra tries to achieve though fantasy—moments of cosmic connectedness that enable us to carry milk home to our mothers. It seeks, in other words, to have us be inspired by a cosmic vision, one that puts our lives into a cosmic perspective and encourages us to live better, perhaps like the lotus plant itself whose roots sink deeply into the mud of the earth while its blossom is caressed by the sun.

KEY TEACHINGS

Traditionally, following Zhiyi, the sixth-century founder of the Chinese Tiantai School of Buddhism, the Dharma Flower Sutra was understood to be composed of two halves. The first, ending with chapter 14 and centered on chapter 2, the Skillful Means chapter, is called the opening half and has to do with the idea of the one vehicle of many skillful means. The second half, centered on chapter 16, the chapter on the length of the Buddha's life, has to do with how the Buddha is both everlasting and embodied in a great many forms. This twofold division is still a useful one, as it provides a convenient way of understanding key teachings of the sutra and unifying diverse parts of the text.

One Vehicle of Many Means

Often the model of the one vehicle of many means is the famous parable of the burning house found in chapter 3 of the Lotus Sutra. A father manages to get his children to abandon their play and escape from a burning house by telling them that the playthings they had long wanted—carriages drawn by goats, deer, and oxen—are waiting for them just outside the gate. But after everyone is safely outside, the father decides that he is rich enough to give each of the children a much larger and nicer carriage drawn by a great white ox. And this he does to the children's great delight.

The parable can be taken to indicate that there are four vehicles in all and that the three lesser ones are replaced by the great one. More commonly, however, the one vehicle is understood to be inclusive of the three. "Shariputra," the Buddha says in chapter 2, "with their powers of skillful means, the buddhas have distinguished three ways within the One Buddha-Vehicle." The three carriages represent three different approaches to practicing Buddha-dharma—the shravaka, the pratyekabuddha, and the bodhisattva ways. Very little is said about the second of these three, that of monks who pursue awakening by and for themselves deep in forests in isolation from others. The first, the shravaka way, is a portrayal of traditional monks who pursue awakening in monastic communities, primarily by listening. "Shravaka" means hearer. Quite often in the text these first two ways are assimilated into a single way, such that there is a contrast between this pair, exemplified by monks who pursue

the fundamentally negative goals of nirvana, putting out of passions, and such, and the third way, the way of the bodhisattva, which is basically understood to be the pursuit of awakening in interaction with others in the world.

Here there is also a basic contrast between the goal of the shravaka, which is to become an arhat, one who is worthy of offerings, and the goal of the bodhisattva, which is to become a buddha. Bodhisattvas are often called children of the Buddha because they are formed by the teachings of the Buddha. Who and what they are is more importantly a function of what they have learned from the Buddha than it is of their birth. In a sense, the Dharma they have inherited from the Buddha is more important than the genes and culture they have inherited from their parents. Much of the Lotus Sutra is a championing of this bodhisattva way, which is also the way to supreme or complete awakening. The goal of nirvana should, according to this text, be understood as a limited and inadequate goal, but nevertheless one that can lead to the bodhisattva way and thus to supreme awakening.

While the three ways can be understood as two, they can also be understood as representative of many ways. “Ever since I became a buddha,” Shakyamuni says at the beginning of chapter 2, “I have used a variety of causal explanations and a variety of parables to teach and preach, and countless skillful means to lead living beings.” The reason the Dharma is so difficult to understand and accept is that a great many teaching devices have been used, among them both the metaphor of the three vehicles and the reality underlying the metaphor, the three different approaches themselves. What makes everything clear, says the Buddha, is an understanding of the one vehicle of many skillful means now being revealed.

While the Lotus Sutra rejects the extreme of pure diversity and the consequent danger of nihilism through use of the one vehicle as the unity in purpose of the many skillful means, it also clearly rejects the opposite extreme of complete unity in which diversity disappears or is relegated to mere illusion. Here diversity is not lamented but regarded as a necessary consequence of the fact that living beings and their situations are diverse. And it is celebrated as the way in which a diversity of people can share the Dharma. Even when the sutra describes a future paradise, it includes shravakas as well as bodhisattvas; the diversity of approaches never disappears. In this sense, as in many others, this sutra

teaches a “middle way,” here a middle way between utter diversity and sheer unity.

The infinite variety of ways of teaching have the one purpose of leading all living beings to pursue the goal of becoming a buddha, a goal that everyone without exception can reach, though the time may be very long and the way far from smooth or easy. “Shariputra,” Sakyamuni says in chapter 2, “buddhas of the past, through an innumerable variety of skillful means, causal explanations, parables, and other kinds of expression, have preached the Dharma for the sake of living beings. These teachings have all been for the sake of the One Buddha–Vehicle, so that all living things, having heard the Dharma from a buddha, might finally gain complete wisdom.”

As in the case of the carriages in the parable of the burning house, the great vehicle can be understood as replacing the other vehicles, or as making skillful means unnecessary. There are passages in the sutra that suggest this interpretation. We might call this the narrow interpretation of the Lotus Sutra, a perspective taken by some followers of Nichiren. They insist that in the Lotus Sutra they have found the one truth in light of which all other claims, and all other forms of religion including all other forms of Buddhism, are to be rejected as false and misleading. Most of those who study the Lotus Sutra, however, understand the teaching of the one vehicle in a much more generous, inclusive way.

The one vehicle itself can be understood as nothing but skillful means. That is, without a great variety of skillful means there can be no one vehicle, since it is through skillful means that living beings are led toward the goal of being a buddha. Without skillful means the one vehicle would be an empty, useless vehicle. Furthermore, the one vehicle itself is a teaching device, a skillful means of teaching that the many means have a common purpose.

When speaking of skillful means, some contemporary interpreters of Buddhism choose to use phrases such as “mere skillful means” or “only skillful means” to indicate that teaching by skillful means is an inferior practice, something used only when one does not have something better. But this is never, I think, the perspective of the sutra itself. There, when some action is said to be a skillful means it is always taken to be something wonderful, a way by which someone, typically the Buddha or a stand-in for the Buddha, is able to save people, converting them into bodhisattvas.

Though I think this image of the one vehicle of many skillful means is the primary model for the reality of the one and the many, throughout the text a variety of other images express the theme of the reality and importance of the one and the many. On more than one occasion, for example, the many worlds of the universe are brought together into a unity. In a related image, Shakyamuni Buddha is said to have countless embodiments in other worlds, buddhas who are real in their own right yet closely tied to Shakyamuni Buddha. Similarly, buddhas of the past, present, and future are many and different, yet are somehow one in that they teach the same thing and their lives follow the pattern of Shakyamuni's. All of these images serve to affirm the inseparability of the one and the many.

One Buddha of Many Embodiments

The second half of the sutra, centering on chapter 16, can be understood as involving another one-and-many, the one Buddha of many embodiments. Throughout the sutra, but especially in the second half, there is an expressed concern over the question as to who is going to carry on Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings after his complete nirvana, his death. Various bodhisattvas promise to do so, often with an expectation that they will face strong opposition and humiliation. The most dramatic affirmation of the role of bodhisattvas in continuing to spread Buddha-dharma is the story in chapters 15 and 16. Some of the bodhisattvas who have come to this world along with their buddhas in order to see Abundant Treasures Buddha in his stupa offer to remain in this world to help Shakyamuni Buddha, the buddha of this world, in his especially difficult task of teaching and demonstrating the Dharma. Shakyamuni basically responds by saying, "Thanks, but no thanks. We already have plenty of bodhisattvas of our own." Then a great host of bodhisattvas springs out of the earth. Everyone is shocked and wants to know who could have led and taught such an incredibly large number of bodhisattvas. And Shakyamuni Buddha responds that he taught them all. How such a thing could be possible, when Shakyamuni had been alive and teaching for only a relatively few years, is taken up in chapter 16.

I agree with those who understand that this great hoard of bodhisattvas includes bodhisattvas of ages to come; that is, bodhisattvas who will carry on in place of the Buddha when he is no longer available, at

least no longer available as the historical Shakyamuni Buddha. Because the Buddha and his Dharma are alive in such bodhisattvas, he himself continues to be alive. The fantastically long life of the Buddha, in other words, is at least partly a function of and dependent on his being embodied in others. With the exception of the now deceased Abundant Treasures Buddha, while many different buddhas appear in the Lotus Sutra, not one is unaccompanied by bodhisattvas, suggesting that buddhas need bodhisattvas. Those who do the work of the Buddha are bodhisattvas, even when they don't know they are doing the work of the Buddha.

Thus the bodhisattvas found in the final chapters, including Guan-yin, can quite appropriately be regarded as buddhas. It is no accident that both Wonderful Voice Bodhisattva and Guan-yin, the Regarder of the Cries of the World Bodhisattva, can take on the form of a buddha when that is what is needed. Scholars may very well say that Guan-yin is not a buddha, but any devout Chinese layperson can tell you that Guan-yin is a fully awakened buddha who has chosen to continue to work in this world as a bodhisattva. Such a view is consistent with the Lotus Sutra.

Embodying the Buddha is not something limited to bodhisattvas, at least not to bodhisattvas who are recognized as such. In some ways chapter 10, "Teachers of the Dharma," is the most surprising and unconventional chapter in the sutra. There the Buddha points to a huge congregation, one that includes not only monks, nuns, laypeople, shravakas, and bodhisattvas but also a large assortment of nonhuman creatures, dragon kings, centaurs, and such, and he tells Medicine King Bodhisattva that if anyone asks what sorts of beings will become buddhas in ages to come, Medicine King should tell them that these are the ones who will do so. This chapter insists not only that all living beings have the potential to become buddhas eventually but that anyone can be a Dharma teacher now.

The idea in this sutra that everyone has the ability to become a buddha gave rise to the association of the sutra with the notion of Buddha-nature as found in somewhat later Mahayana sutras. The term "Buddha-nature" is another powerful expression of the reality and importance of the one Buddha in many embodiments. One's Buddha-nature is both the Buddha's and one's own. Consequently, anyone can develop an ability to see

the Buddha in others, their Buddha-nature. Thus, to awaken is to see, to see the Buddha, or as the text often says, to see countless buddhas.

It would be a great mistake, I think, to reify this notion, turning it into some sort of substantial reality underlying ordinary realities, something that is easy to do and is often done. In the text itself, it seems to me, Buddha-nature has no such ontological status. It is mainly a skillful way of indicating a potential, a potential with real power, to move in the direction of being a buddha by taking up the bodhisattva way.

It is also a very clever way to answer the question of how it is possible for one to overcome obstacles, however conceived, along the path of becoming a buddha. If ordinary human beings are completely under the sway of passions and delusions, by what power can they break through such a net of limitations? Some say that it is only by one's own strength; one can be saved only by oneself. Others say that it is only by the power of Amida Buddha or perhaps Guan-yin that one can be led to awakening. The Lotus Sutra says that it is by a power that is at once one's own and Shakyamuni Buddha's. The Buddha really is embodied in the lives of ordinary people. He himself is both a one and a many.

Wisdom, Compassion, and Practice

While the ideas of one vehicle of many skillful means and one Buddha of many embodiments can be seen as the central teachings of the two halves of the sutra, a great many other things are, of course, taught in the Lotus Sutra, some implicitly, some explicitly. There is, for example, the important notion that the Dharma rains on all equally, nourishing all in accord with their needs. Combined with the ideas that Buddha-nature can be found in all people, that anyone can be a Dharma teacher, that all are equally children of the Buddha, and that following the bodhisattva way is not limited to those identified as bodhisattvas, one finds a powerful counter to the prevailing Indian ideas of rank and status as purely a function of birth and stage of life.

In addition to the extremely important but relatively abstract notion of following the bodhisattva way, the Lotus Sutra frequently advocates concrete practices, which are often related to the sutra itself. They are often given as sets of four to six practices, but include receiving and embracing the sutra, hearing it, reading and reciting it, remembering it

correctly, copying it, explaining it, understanding its meaning, pondering it, proclaiming it, practicing as it teaches, honoring it, protecting it, making offerings to it, preaching it and teaching it to others, and leading others to do any of these things. The six transcendental practices taught especially for bodhisattvas also play a prominent and important role. But in the first chapter we find a story about a previous life of Maitreya Bodhisattva in which, as the disciple of another bodhisattva, he was called “Fame Seeker” because he was especially attracted to lucrative offerings. He read and memorized many sutras but forgot all of them and gained nothing from his reading. But, having “planted roots of goodness,” he was able to meet countless buddhas and later became Maitreya Bodhisattva, the future buddha. Even more influential is the story of Never Disrespectful Bodhisattva in chapter 20. This bodhisattva did not read and recite sutras but simply went around telling everyone he met that they would become buddhas. Often despised for this, he persisted in refusing to be disrespectful to anyone. Later, after hearing the Lotus Sutra from the sky, he was able to enjoy a large following and eventually became Shakyamuni Buddha. What’s most important, these stories seem to say, is not which religious practices you use but how you treat others. To do good, in other words, is to follow the bodhisattva way.

The Lotus Sutra itself ends with a chapter on the bodhisattva Universal Sage and is traditionally followed by a sutra on the contemplative methods of Universal Sage Bodhisattva. Universal Sage has widely been taken to symbolize Buddhist practice, putting Buddhist teachings to use in everyday life, making them a foundation of one’s life. Manjushri and Maitreya are the two bodhisattvas who appear repeatedly in the sutra. Manjushri symbolizes Buddhist wisdom: both practical wisdom, the wisdom that solves or overcomes problems through knowledge and rational analysis, and creative wisdom, the imaginative wisdom that leads to fresh solutions to practical problems—difficulties such as helping one’s son to overcome a depressing sense of inadequacy, or getting one’s children to take an antidote for poison. Maitreya, along with Guan-yin, symbolizes compassion—not as just a state of mind but as the energy and drive, the inner motivation, that make it possible to work for the benefit of others as well as oneself. Universal Sage can be said, then, to symbolize the coming together in everyday life of wisdom

and compassion, which can be taken perhaps as one way of expressing the heart of the Lotus Sutra.

Peace

Throughout the sutra many traditional Buddhist doctrines are mentioned and sometimes discussed, especially the four holy truths, the eightfold path, the twelve-link chain of causes and conditions, and the six transcendental practices. Thus it is possible to interpret the sutra as having the purpose of overcoming suffering. Such basically negative goals as overcoming suffering, getting rid of attachments, becoming free of faults, dispelling illusion, and so on are not to be disparaged. They do describe very important Buddhist goals. But at least for the Lotus Sutra they are not enough. Beyond them there is always a positive goal.

The positive goal of the Dharma Flower Sutra is described in several different ways. Here I have used the idea of becoming a buddha as the highest goal. Of course being a buddha is also called “supreme awakening,” often translated as “enlightenment.” So it might rightly be said to be the highest goal. Another very prominent term in the sutra is “joy.” Over and over we are told that a result of hearing even a small part of the sutra is joy. And we are allowed to witness the great joy that comes to Shariputra when he realizes that he too is a bodhisattva on the way to becoming a buddha. Joy can be said to be the goal of the Lotus Sutra. Another equally important term is “peace.” “It is not my intent,” the Buddha says in chapter 3, to lead people to extinction. “I am the king of the Dharma, free to teach the Dharma, appearing in the world to bring peace and comfort to all the living.” Peace can also be said to be the goal of the Lotus Sutra.

The goal of peace has inspired many people to work not just for inner peace but for peace in families, communities, nations, and the world. Peace is not the mere absence of conflict. It brings joy and happiness to living beings and gives them the strength to share their joy and happiness with others, so that all can work together to transform the world into a pure land of peace.



The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma

including the opening and closing sutras

The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings

and

The Sutra of Contemplation of the Dharma Practice
of Universal Sage Bodhisattva



The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings





I. Virtuous Conduct

This is what I heard.

AT ONE TIME the Buddha was staying at Rajagriha on Holy Eagle Peak with a large group of great monks, twelve thousand in all. Eighty thousand bodhisattva great ones were also there. There were gods, dragons, satyrs, centaurs, asuras, griffins, chimeras, and pythons, in addition to all the monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen. There were great wheel-turning kings, minor wheel-turning kings, golden wheel-turning kings, silver wheel-turning kings, and other wheel-turning kings. There were kings and princes, ministers and people, men and women, and great elders, each surrounded by followers numbering in the hundreds of thousands. They went up to the Buddha, worshiped at his feet, circled around him a hundred thousand times, burned incense and scattered flowers. After making various offerings, they withdrew and sat to one side.

The names of those bodhisattvas included Dharma Prince Manjushri, Dharma Prince Treasury of Great Majesty, Dharma Prince Treasury of Freedom from Anxiety, Dharma Prince Treasury of Great Orator, Maitreya Bodhisattva, Leader Bodhisattva, Medicine King Bodhisattva, Lord of Medicine Bodhisattva, Flower Banner Bodhisattva, Flower Light Banner Bodhisattva, King Incantation Freedom Bodhisattva, Regarder of the Cries of the World Bodhisattva, Great Power Obtained Bodhisattva, Constantly Persevering Bodhisattva, Leader in Valuable Signs Bodhisattva, Accumulated Jewels Bodhisattva, Valuable Cane Bodhisattva, Above the Threefold World Bodhisattva, Vimabhara

Bodhisattva, Fragrant Elephant Bodhisattva, Great Fragrant Elephant Bodhisattva, Lion's Roar King Bodhisattva, Lion at Play in the World Bodhisattva, Lion's Powerful Quickness Bodhisattva, Lion's Perseverance Bodhisattva, Courageous Power Bodhisattva, Ferocious Lion Bodhisattva, Adorned Bodhisattva, and Magnificently Adorned Bodhisattva. In all, eighty thousand such bodhisattva great ones were there.

Of these bodhisattvas there is none who is not a great leader who has attained the Dharma-body. They have attained the precepts, concentration, wisdom, liberation, and insight into liberation. Tranquil and meditative, and constantly in a state of concentration, they are calm and peaceful, not attached to actions or to desires. Completely free from perversity and distractions, their minds are calm and serene, free of bias and unrestricted. They have remained this way for billions and billions of eons, and all the innumerable gateways to the Dharma have appeared to them.

Having obtained the greatest wisdom, they can understand all things deeply, completely understanding the reality of the nature and characteristics of things, clearly distinguishing their ontological status and their relative strengths and weaknesses, and make clear the revelatory quality of reality.

Moreover, knowing well the abilities, natures, and desires of all, with incantations and unobstructed eloquence, they obediently and skillfully turn the Dharma wheel of the buddhas.

First, they have small drops of moisture fall to dampen the dust of desire, and by opening the gateway of nirvana, fanning the wind of liberation, and ridding themselves of the heat of worldly passions, they bring about the cooling quality of the Dharma.

Next, raining down the profound teaching of the twelve causes and conditions, pouring it on the ferocious, intense rays of suffering—ignorance, old age, illness, death, and so on—they pour out the unexcelled Great Vehicle, soak the good roots of all the living with it, scatter seeds of goodness over the field of blessings, and everywhere bring forth sprouts of awakening. With wisdom as bright as the sun and the moon, and timely use of skillful means, they make the enterprise of the Great Vehicle prosper and grow, and lead many to attain supreme awakening quickly. Always living in the blessedness of a reality that is fine and wonderful, with immeasurable great compassion, they save the living from suffering.

They are truly good friends of living beings, an excellent field of blessings for the living. Without having to be asked, they teach living beings. They are a place of tranquil happiness for living beings, a place of salvation, a place of protection, and a place of great reliance. For the sake of living beings everywhere they become excellent leaders and teachers, great leaders and teachers. They become eyes for the blind, and ears, noses, or tongue for those who are deaf, or have no nose, or cannot speak. They restore defective organs and turn the deranged to great and correct thinking.

As the captain or admiral of a ship, they carry masses of living beings across the river of life and death to the shore of nirvana.

As a king or emperor of medicine, they analyze diseases, know well the properties of medicines, give them to all the living according to the disease, and get them to take them.

As a trainer or master trainer, they are never undisciplined. Rather, they are like a trainer of elephants and horses who never fails to train well, or like a brave lion who has authority over all the beasts and is never overcome by them.

Advanced in and enjoying the various transcendental practices of bodhisattvas, they are firm and immovable in the land of the Tathagata. Dwelling at peace in the power of their vows, they purify buddha-lands everywhere. They will rapidly attain supreme awakening. All these bodhisattva great ones have such amazing blessings.

Those monks included Great Wisdom Shariputra, Divine Power Maudgalyayana, Wisdom Life Subhuti, Maha-Katyayana, Maitrayani's son Purna, Ajnata-Kaundinya, Divine Eye Aniruddha, Precept-Keeping Upali, Attendant Ananda, Buddha's son Rahula, Upananda, Revata, Kapphina, Vakkula, Acyuta, Svagata, Dhuta Maha-Kashyapa, Uruvilva-Kashyapa, Gaya-Kashyapa, and Nadi-Kashyapa. There were twelve thousand monks such as these. All were arhats, unconstrained by bondage or faults, free from attachments and truly liberated.

At that time Magnificently Adorned Bodhisattva, the great one, realizing that everyone in the group was sitting in concentration, got up from his seat, went up to the Buddha, and with the eighty thousand bodhisattva great ones in the assembly, prostrated himself at his feet, made processions around him a hundred thousand times, scattered heavenly flowers, burned heavenly incense, and presented the Buddha with

heavenly robes, garlands, and jewels of priceless value that came rolling down from the sky and gathered on all sides like clouds. Heavenly bins and bowls were filled with all sorts of heavenly delicacies, which satisfied people naturally just by their color and aroma. They placed heavenly banners, flags, canopies, and musical instruments everywhere, pleased the Buddha with heavenly music, then knelt with hands together before him and in one voice wholeheartedly praised him in verse, saying:

He is great, the great awakened one,
 The great holy Lord,
 In him there is no defilement,
 No contamination, no attachment.

Trainer of gods and men, elephants and horses,
 The breeze of his way
 And the fragrance of his virtue
 Permeate all.

Quiet is his wisdom,
 Calm his emotion,
 Serene and firm his reasoning.
 His will has departed.

His self-consciousness has been abolished,
 Making him serene.
 Long ago, he eradicated delusory thinking
 And overcame the elements, the aggregates,
 The senses, and the realms of thought.

His body is neither existing nor non-existing,
 Neither caused nor conditioned,
 Neither itself nor other,
 Neither square nor round,
 Neither short nor long.

It does not appear or disappear.
 It is not born and does not die.

It is neither constructed nor raised up,
Neither made nor produced.

It is neither sitting nor lying,
Neither walking nor standing still,
Neither moving nor turning over,
Neither at rest nor idle.

It does not advance or retreat,
Knows not safety or danger,
Neither right nor wrong.
It is neither virtuous nor improper.

It is neither this nor that,
Neither going nor coming.

It is neither blue nor yellow,
Neither red nor white;
Neither crimson nor purple,
Nor a variety of colors.

Born of precepts, concentration,
Wisdom, liberation, and insight,
He stems from contemplation,
The six powers, and the elements of the Way.

Springing from kindness and compassion,
The ten powers and courage,
He emerges from
The good actions of living beings.

He shows his body:

Sixteen feet tall,
Shining with purple gold,
Well proportioned,
Brilliant and very bright.

The tuft of curled hair is like the moon.
The light of the sun comes from the nape of his neck.
His curly hair is deep blue
And on the top of his head is a protuberance.

His pure eyes are like mirrors,
And work well in all directions.
His eyebrows are dark blue;
His mouth and cheeks well shaped.

His lips and tongue are a nice red,
Like a bright red flower.
His forty white teeth
Look like snowy jewels.

His forehead is broad,
His nose long and his face open.
His chest, marked with a swastika,
Is like the chest of a lion.

His hands and feet are soft,
Marked with the spokes of a wheel.
Their soles and palms are well rounded,
And the grip is firm.

His arms are long,
His fingers straight and slender.
His skin is delicate and soft
And his hair curls to the right.

His ankles and knees are exposed.
His male organ is concealed,
Like that of a horse.

His muscles are smooth.
His joints are strong.

His legs are tapered,
Like those of a deer.

His back is as resplendent as his front,
Pure and without blemish,
Untainted, like clear water,
Unspotted by any dirt.

His distinguishing thirty-two characteristics
And the eighty different attractive features seem to
be visible,
Yet in reality, his form is neither with nor without
features.
All visible features are transcended.

Without having features
His body has features.
This is also true of the features
Of the bodies of all living beings.

They incite joy and respect
In living beings,
Eliciting devotion, esteem,
And courtesy toward him.

By cutting off pride and arrogance,
He has acquired such a glorious body.

Now we, the assembly of eighty thousand,
Together make obeisance
To the one who has extinguished
Reflective thought and consciousness.

In the saint without attachments,
The trainer of elephants and horses,
We take refuge.

Making obeisance,
 We submit ourselves to the material body of the Dharma:
 Precepts, concentration,
 Wisdom, liberation, and insight.

Making obeisance,
 We submit ourselves to his wonderful, noble character.
 Making obeisance,
 We submit ourselves to the inconceivable.

His Brahma voice,
 Which resonates like the eight kinds of thunder,
 Fine, wonderful, and pure,
 Is very profound and far-reaching.

To living beings he spreads the four truths,
 The six practices
 And the twelve causes,
 According to their mental workings.

If one hears,
 One's mind is opened,
 Breaking the bonds
 Of innumerable chains of life and death.

Some who hear become stream-enterers,
 Once-returners, non-returners, arhats.
 Some reach the state of a faultless,
 Unconditioned pratyekabuddha.

Some reach the level of a bodhisattva
 Free from arising and extinction.
 Some obtain innumerable incantations,
 Make eloquent explanations without hindrance,

Recite profound and wonderful verses,
 Play and bathe in the pure pond of the Dharma,

Or display the divine power to soar and fly
And freely go in and out of water or fire.

Such are the characteristics
Of the Tathagata's Dharma wheel.
It is pure, unlimited, and inconceivable.

Making obeisance together,
We dedicate our lives
To the timely rolling
Of the Dharma wheel.

We make obeisance,
And submit ourselves to the Brahma voice.
We make obeisance and submit ourselves
To the causes, truths, and practices.

For uncountable past eons,
Through toil and suffering,
The World-Honored One has studied and practiced
All kinds of virtuous activities.

For the sake of human beings,
Heavenly beings, and dragon kings,
For all living beings everywhere,
He has given up all things hard to give up:

Goods and treasures,
Wife and child, country and palace.
Because of the Dharma
That is both for Buddhists and for non-Buddhists,

He was unsparing of himself and his possessions,
Giving his head, eyes,
Bones, and brain, everything,
As offerings to people.

He kept the buddhas'
Pure prohibitions
And never did any wrong,
Even at the cost of his own life.

Even though beaten
With swords or sticks,
Or cursed and insulted,
He never became angry.

Despite the abuse to his body for eons,
He never became weary or worn out.
He was at peace day and night,
And constantly meditating.

He studied all the ways of things,
With deep wisdom
Recognizing the capacities
Of living beings.

This is why,
Having obtained the power of freedom,
He became the Dharma king,
Free in the Dharma.

Again making obeisance all together,
We take refuge in the one
Who has done all difficult things.



2. Dharma Preaching

AT THAT TIME Magnificently Adorned Bodhisattva, the great one, with the eighty thousand bodhisattva great ones, finished praising the Buddha with this verse and said to him in unison: “World-Honored One, we, an assembly of eighty thousand bodhisattvas, now want to ask you about the Tathagata’s Dharma, but wonder whether the World-Honored One will hear us or not.”

The Buddha said to Magnificently Adorned Bodhisattva and the eighty thousand bodhisattvas: “Good, good! You have known well, good sons, that this is the time. What would you like to ask? Before long, the Tathagata will enter complete nirvana. After nirvana, no one will have any doubts. What is your question? I will answer it.”

Then Magnificently Adorned Bodhisattva with the eighty thousand bodhisattvas said to the Buddha in unison: “World-Honored One, if bodhisattva great ones want to attain supreme awakening quickly, what gateway to the Dharma should they use? What gateway to the Dharma leads bodhisattva great ones to attain supreme awakening quickly?”

The Buddha said to Magnificently Adorned Bodhisattva and the eighty thousand bodhisattvas: “Good sons, there is a unique gateway to the Dharma that leads bodhisattvas to attain supreme awakening quickly. If a bodhisattva learns this gateway to the Dharma, he will attain supreme awakening.”

“World-Honored One, what is this gateway to the Dharma called? What does it mean? How does a bodhisattva practice it?”

The Buddha replied: “Good sons, this unique gateway to the Dharma is called innumerable meanings. A bodhisattva who wants to practice

and study the gateway to the Dharma of innumerable meanings should observe that all things were originally, will be, and are in themselves empty and tranquil in nature and character; not large or small, not subject to arising or extinction, not fixed or movable, and neither advancing nor retreating. Like empty space, they are non-dualistic.

“All living beings, however, make delusory distinctions: weighing whether something is this or that; whether it is a gain or a loss. Bad thoughts come to them, producing a variety of evil actions. They transmigrate within the six states undergoing all kinds of suffering and harm, from which they cannot escape during innumerable billions of eons. Seeing this clearly, bodhisattva great ones cultivate sympathy and show great kindness and compassion in the desire to extricate others from suffering. What’s more, they penetrate deeply into all things.

“In accord with the character of Dharma, all things emerge. In accord with the character of Dharma, all things live. In accord with the character of Dharma, all things change. In accord with the character of Dharma, all things perish. In accord with the character of Dharma, bad things emerge. In accord with the character of Dharma, good things emerge, live, change, and perish. Bodhisattvas, observing these four modes and being thoroughly familiar with them from one end to the other, should next observe clearly that none of these things continues to live even for a moment, but emerges and perishes every moment, each emerging, living, changing, and perishing in an instant.

“After seeing this, the abilities, natures, and desires of living beings can be seen. As natures and desires are innumerable, sermons are innumerable, and as sermons are innumerable, meanings are innumerable. The innumerable meanings emerge from one Dharma. This one Dharma is characterless. Accordingly, this characterlessness manifests all characters. Neither having character nor being characterless is called true character.

“The compassion that bodhisattva great ones display after dwelling at peace in this true character of reality is clear and not in vain. They are truly capable of relieving living beings from suffering. Having given them relief from suffering, they teach the Dharma again, delighting all living beings.

“Good sons, if a bodhisattva practices well the gateway to the Dharma of innumerable meanings in this way, the bodhisattva will for certain attain supreme awakening soon.

“Good sons, such a profound and unexcelled Great Vehicle Sutra of Innumerable Meanings is truly correct in logic, unsurpassed in value, and protected by the buddhas of the past, present, and future. A host of demonic ways cannot damage it, nor can any wrong view of life and death defeat or destroy it.

“Therefore, good sons, bodhisattva great ones, if you want to attain unexcelled awakening quickly, you should practice and study the profound, unexcelled Great Vehicle Sutra of Innumerable Meanings.”

At that time Magnificently Adorned Bodhisattva spoke once again to the Buddha: “World-Honored One, the Dharma preached by the World-Honored One is inconceivable. The ability and nature of living beings is also inconceivable. And the gateway to the Dharma of emancipation is also inconceivable. Though we no longer have doubts about any of the Dharma preached by the Buddha, out of fear that various living beings will be perplexed, we repeatedly ask the World-Honored One about it.

“For the more than forty years since the Tathagata attained the Way, for the sake of the living you have continued to preach—the meaning of the four modes of all things, the meaning of suffering, the meaning of emptiness, of impermanence, of no enduring self, the absence of greatness, the absence of pettiness, non-arising, non-extinction, one character, absence of character, Dharma nature, Dharma character, being originally empty and quiet, non-coming, non-going, non-appearing, and non-disappearing.

“Those who have heard it have obtained the warm Dharma, the highest Dharma, the best Dharma in the world. They have obtained fruits of a stream-enterer, fruits of being a once-returner, fruits of being a non-returner, fruits of being an arhat, and the pratyekabuddha way. They have aspired to become awakened. They have ascended the first stage, the second stage, and the third stage, and reached the tenth stage.

“In what sense is what you preached in the past, the meaning of all the buddhas, different from what you preach today? One hears that if bodhisattvas practice only the profound and unexcelled Great Vehicle Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, without fail they will soon attain unexcelled awakening. Is that true? Please, World-Honored One, out of compassion and pity for all, analyze this for the sake of living beings everywhere, and leave no doubt in the minds of all those in the present and future who hear the Dharma.”

Then the Buddha said to Great Adornment Bodhisattva: “Good, good! Great and good son, you have raised good questions for the Tathagata about the subtle and wonderful meaning of the profound and unexcelled Great Vehicle. You should know that you will greatly enrich many, pleasing human and heavenly beings, and relieving living beings from suffering. This is the truth of great compassion, a truth that is not in vain. For this reason you will surely and quickly attain unexcelled awakening. You will also enable all living beings in the present and future to accomplish unexcelled awakening.

“Good sons, after sitting upright for six years under the bodhi tree at the place of the Way, I could attain supreme awakening. With the eyes of a buddha I could understand that not all the teachings could be proclaimed. Why was that? I knew that the natures and the desires of living beings were not the same. As their natures and their desires were not the same, I taught the Dharma in various ways. I used the power of skillful means to teach the Dharma in various ways. And after more than forty years the truth has not yet been revealed. This is why there are differences in the way living beings take the Way and why they do not attain unexcelled awakening quickly.

“Good sons, the Dharma is like water that washes away dirt. Just as the water in a well, a pond, a stream, a river, a valley, a ditch, or a great sea is equally effective in washing away all kinds of dirt, so Dharma water effectively washes away the filth that afflicts living beings.

“Good sons, the nature of water is the same, but a stream, a river, a well, a pond, a valley stream, a ditch, and a great sea are distinct and different from each other. The nature of the Dharma is like this. There is equal effectiveness and no differentiation in washing away the waste of afflictions, but the three teachings, the four fruits, and the two ways are not one and the same.

“Good sons, though the water washes equally well, a well is not a pond, a pond is not a stream or a river, and a valley stream or a ditch is not a sea. Just as the Tathagata, the world’s hero, is free in the Dharma, all of the teachings in his sermons are like this. Though early, middle, and late teachings equally wash away the delusions of living beings, the beginning is not the middle, and the middle is not the end. Teachings at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end are the same in expression but different in meaning.

“Good sons, after leaving the king of trees, when I turned the Dharma wheel of the four truths for the five men at Deer Park in Varanasi, Ajnata-Kaundinya and the others, I taught that all things are originally empty and calm, ceaselessly changing, arising and perishing in an instant.

“When I spoke in various places during the middle period, proclaiming the twelve causes and conditions and the six transcendental practices for monks and the group of bodhisattvas, I also taught that all things are originally empty and calm, ceaselessly changing, arising and perishing in an instant.

“Now, preaching the Great Vehicle Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, I also teach that all things are originally empty and calm, ceaselessly changing, arising and perishing in an instant.

“Good sons, this is why the teachings at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end are the same in expression but different in meaning. Since the meaning is different, so too the understandings of living beings differ. And since understandings differ, so too attainments of the Dharma, of its fruits, and of the Way differ.

“Good sons, at the beginning, though I taught the four truths for those who sought to be shravakas, eight million heavenly beings came down to hear the Dharma and aspired to become awakened. In the middle, though I preached the profound twelve causes and conditions in various places for those who sought to be pratyekabuddhas, innumerable living beings aspired to become awakened or continue as shravakas. Next, though I proclaimed over many eons the practice of bodhisattvas by teaching the equality of the twelve literary forms of the Great Wisdom Sutra, and the vast Flower Garland Sutra, hundreds of thousands of monks, tens of thousands of millions of human and heavenly beings, and innumerable other living beings could remain as stream-enterers, once-returners, non-returners, or arhats in the Dharma of causes and conditions appropriate for pratyekabuddhas.

“Good sons, for this reason, it is known that while the teaching is the same, the meanings differ. Since the meanings differ, so too the understandings of living beings differ. And since understandings differ, so too attainments of the Dharma, of its fruits, and of the Way differ. Thus, good sons, from when I attained the Way and stood to teach the Dharma for the first time until I proclaimed the Great Vehicle Sutra of

Innumerable Meanings today, I have never ceased preaching about suffering, emptiness, impermanence, no enduring self, the absence of greatness, the absence of pettiness, original non-arising, present non-extinction, one character, absence of character, Dharma character, Dharma nature, non-coming, non-going, and the four modes by which all the living are driven.

“Good sons, this is why all buddhas everywhere respond to the variety of voices without a forked tongue and with one sound. Though each has only one body, they show bodies as innumerable and numberless as the sands of hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of Ganges. In each body, they display a number of similar types, countless as the sands of hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of Ganges. And in each type, they show forms as countless as the sands of hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of Ganges.

“Good sons, accordingly, this is the inconceivable and profound sphere of all the buddhas. The two vehicles cannot comprehend it, and even bodhisattvas at the tenth stage cannot reach it. Only among buddhas can it be fathomed well.

“Good sons, this is why I teach that the wonderful, profound, and unexcelled Great Vehicle Sutra of Innumerable Meanings is truly correct in logic, unsurpassed in value, and protected by the buddhas of the past, present, and future. No demonic or non-Buddhist ways can damage it, nor can any wrong view of life and death defeat or destroy it.

“Therefore, bodhisattva great ones, if you want to attain unexcelled awakening quickly, you should practice and study the profound, unexcelled Great Vehicle Sutra of Innumerable Meanings.”

After the Buddha had finished teaching this, the three-thousand great thousandfold world trembled and shook in six ways, various kinds of heavenly flowers, such as the blue lotus, water lily, and white lotus, spontaneously rained down from the sky, and innumerable kinds of heavenly perfumes, robes, garlands, and priceless treasures also rained and came rolling down from the upper sky and were offered to the Buddha, the many bodhisattvas and shravakas, and to the great assembly. Heavenly trunks and bowls and other vessels filled with all sorts of heavenly delicacies and heavenly banners, flags, canopies, and musical instruments were everywhere, and heavenly music played in praise of the Buddha.

Also the Buddha-worlds in the eastern direction, as many as the sands of the Ganges, trembled and shook in the six ways. Heavenly flowers, incense, robes, garlands, and priceless treasures, heavenly trunks, bowls with all sorts of heavenly delicacies, heavenly banners, flags, canopies, and wonderful musical instruments rained down. And heavenly music was played in praise of those buddhas, those bodhisattvas and shravakas, and great assemblies. The same thing happened in the southern, western, and northern directions, in the four intermediate directions, and in the up and down directions.

At this time, thirty-two thousand bodhisattva great ones in the assembly reached the state of concentration of Innumerable Meanings. Thirty-four thousand bodhisattva great ones gained entrance through the gateway of countless and unquantifiable incantations and turned the never-retreating Dharma wheel of all of the buddhas of the three worlds.

When all the monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen, heavenly beings, dragons, satyrs, centaurs, asuras, griffins, chimeras, pythons, great wheel-turning kings, minor wheel-turning kings, kings of the silver wheel, the iron wheel, and other wheels, kings and princes, ministers and people, lords and ladies, great elders, and a hundred thousand kinds of followers together heard the Buddha Tathagata teach this sutra, they obtained the warm Dharma, the highest Dharma, the best Dharma in the world, the fruits of a stream-enterer, the fruits of a once-returner, the fruits of a non-returner, the fruits of an arhat, and the fruits of a pratyekabuddha. Furthermore, they attained a bodhisattva's stable state of non-arising, acquired one incantation, two incantations, three incantations, four incantations, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten incantations, a hundred thousand millions of billions of incantations, myriads of incantations as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges, and they all came to turn well the never-retreating Dharma wheel. Unquantifiable numbers of living beings aspired to supreme awakening.



3. Ten Blessings

AT THAT TIME the bodhisattva great one Magnificently Adorned said again to the Buddha: “World-Honored One, the World-Honored One has taught this fine and wonderful, profound and unsurpassed Great Vehicle Sutra of Innumerable Meanings. It is truly profound, profound, profound! Why? In this assembly, all the bodhisattva great ones, all the four groups, the heavenly beings, dragons, demons and spirits, kings and ordinary citizens, all living beings, hearing this profound and unexcelled Great Vehicle Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, never fail to obtain entrance to incantations, the three teachings, the four fruits, and the aspiration for awakening. It should be known that this Dharma is truly correct in logic, unsurpassed in value, and protected by the buddhas of the past, present, and future. A host of demonic ways cannot damage it, nor can any wrong view of life and death defeat or destroy it.

“Why is this? Because to hear it just once is to embrace all the teachings. If any living beings can hear this sutra, they will acquire great benefits.

“Why is this? If anyone practices it well, they will quickly and without fail attain unexcelled awakening. If living beings cannot hear it, you should know that they lose great benefits. Even after the passing of innumerable, unlimited, inconceivable, countless eons, they will never be able to reach unexcelled awakening.

“Why? Because they do not know the great direct way to awakening, their way will be steep and very difficult.

“World-Honored One, this sutra is inconceivable. Our only wish is that out of compassion and pity for all people you fully explain the profound

and inconceivable matters of this sutra. World-Honored One, from where does this sutra come? Where is it headed? Where will it live? Having such innumerable blessings and amazing powers, how does this sutra enable people to attain supreme awakening quickly?”

Then the World-Honored One spoke to Magnificently Adorned Bodhisattva, the great one: “Good, good, my good son! It is so, just as you say. Good son, this sutra that I teach is profound, profound, truly profound. Why? Because it enables people to attain unexcelled awakening quickly; because hearing it just once they retain all the teachings; because it brings great enrichment to all the living; because those who practice the great direct way do not encounter great difficulties.

“Good son, you ask where this sutra comes from, where is it headed, and where it will live. Now you should listen carefully. Good son, this sutra originally comes from the home of all the buddhas, goes toward the aspiration for awakening of all the living, and lives wherever bodhisattvas practice. Good son, this sutra comes like this, goes like this, and lives like this. Thus, having such innumerable blessings and amazing powers, this sutra enables people to attain unexcelled awakening quickly.

“Good son, would you rather hear how this sutra has ten amazing powers of blessing or not?”

Magnificently Adorned Bodhisattva said: “We want to hear!”

The Buddha said: “Good sons, first, this sutra leads a not-yet-awakened bodhisattva to aspire to awakening, leads one without human kindness to aspire to kindness, leads one with a murderous heart to aspire to great compassion, leads one who is jealous to aspire to respond with joy, leads one with attachments to aspire to impartiality, leads one who is greedy to aspire to generosity, leads one who is full of arrogance to aspire to be moral, leads one who is angry to aspire to patience, leads one who is lazy to aspire to perseverance, leads one who is distracted to aspire to meditation, leads one who is ignorant to aspire to wisdom, leads one who lacks concern for saving others to aspire to saving others, leads one who commits the ten evils to aspire to do ten good things, leads one who is willful to aspire to let things be, leads one who is prone to backsliding to aspire to never retreat, leads one who commits faulty acts to aspire to being faultless, and leads one who suffers from afflictions to aspire to detachment. Good sons, this is called the first amazing power of blessing of this sutra.

“Good sons, the second inconceivable power of blessing of this sutra is this: if living beings can hear this sutra even once, even only one verse or phrase, they will master a hundred thousand myriad meanings. Yet in an innumerable number of eons they will not be able to explain the Dharma they received and embraced. Why is this? It is because the meanings of this sutra are innumerable.

“Good sons, suppose that from one seed a hundred million seeds grow, and from each of those hundred million seeds another hundred million seeds grow, and this is repeated so that the seeds become innumerable. This sutra is like this. From one teaching a hundred thousand meanings grow, and from each of these hundred thousand meanings a hundred million meanings grow, and this is repeated so that the meanings become unlimited and innumerable. This being the case, this sutra is called Innumerable Meanings. Good sons, this is called the second amazing power of blessing of this sutra.

“Good sons, the third inconceivable power of blessing of this sutra is this: if living beings can hear this sutra even once, even only one verse or phrase, they will master a hundred thousand myriad meanings. Even though they still have afflictions, it will be as if they do not. Even though they move through birth and death, they will not know fear. They will have compassion and sympathy for all the living. They will be brave in following all the teachings.

“Just as a powerful man can easily shoulder and hold heavy things, the same is true of anyone who embraces this sutra. They can bear well the heavy treasure of unexcelled awakening and carry the living out of the way of birth and death on their backs. Even though they cannot yet save themselves, they will be able to save others. Just as the captain of a ferry who has to rest on this shore due to serious illness and inability to control his four limbs can cross over with a good solid ship that has everything needed to cross over to the other shore, one who embraces this sutra, though staying on this shore of ignorance, old age, and death due to the hundred and eight kinds of serious bodily illnesses with which he is afflicted in the five states of existence, can be saved from birth and death through practicing this powerful Great Vehicle Sutra of Innumerable Meanings as it is taught, saving living beings. Good sons, this is called the third amazing power of blessing of this sutra.

“Good sons, the fourth inconceivable power of blessing of this sutra is this: if living beings can hear this sutra even once, even only one verse or phrase, they will become brave, and, even though they cannot yet save themselves, they will save others. Together with bodhisattvas they will become part of the entourage of the buddha-tathagatas, who will always preach the Dharma to them. Hearing it, they will receive and embrace the Dharma in accord with their capacities and never oppose it. Moreover, they will teach it for people everywhere as occasion demands.

“Good sons, suppose a king and his wife have a new prince. After a day, two days, or seven days, or a month, two months, or seven months, or after he becomes a year old, or two, or seven years old, even though he would not yet manage national affairs, he would come to be revered by people and become a companion of the sons of great kings. With total affection, the king and his wife will always want to stay and talk with him. Why is this? It is because he is small and innocent. Good sons, one who embraces this sutra is also like this. The Buddha is the king; this sutra is his wife; their coming together results in the birth of their child, a bodhisattva.

“If a bodhisattva can hear this sutra, even one phrase or verse, once, twice, ten times, a hundred times, a thousand or ten thousand times, a million or ten million times, or an unquantifiable, innumerable number of times, like the number of sands of the Ganges, though not yet able to realize ultimate truth, or shake the three-thousand great thousandfold world, or turn the great Dharma wheel with a thunderous buddha-voice, this bodhisattva will be admired by all the four groups and the eight guardians of Buddhism, and great bodhisattvas will be in his entourage. Entering deeply into the secret Dharma of the buddhas, he will explain it without errors or mistakes. He will always be protected by the buddhas and especially showered with affection, because he is a beginner in learning. Good sons, this is called the fourth amazing power of blessing of this sutra.

“Good sons, the fifth inconceivable power of blessing of this sutra is this: if good sons or good daughters, either during the Buddha’s lifetime or after his extinction, receive and embrace, read, recite, and copy this profound and unexcelled Great Vehicle Sutra of Innumerable Meanings, even though they still have attachments and afflictions and have not distanced themselves from affairs of ordinary men, they will reveal the way of great bodhisattvas. Extending a day to a hundred eons or shortening

a hundred eons to a day, bringing joy to other living beings, they will convince them. Good sons, these good sons or good daughters are just like the son of a dragon who can make clouds appear and cause rain to fall seven days after he is born. Good sons, this is called the fifth amazing power of blessing of this sutra.

“Good sons, the sixth inconceivable power of blessing of this sutra is this: if good sons or good daughters, either during the Buddha’s lifetime or after his extinction, receive and embrace, read and recite this sutra, even though they still have afflictions, they will teach the Dharma to living beings, separating them from afflictions of life and death and enabling them to cut off all suffering. After hearing it, living beings will put it into practice, and become no different from the Buddha-Tathagata with respect to the blessings of the Dharma, the blessings of the fruit, and the blessings of the Way.

“Suppose a king, due to travel or being ill, leaves the management of the affairs of the country to a prince, though the prince is only a child. Then the prince, by order of the great king, will lead all the government officials according to the Dharma and propagate good policies, so that every citizen of the country follows his orders exactly, as if the king himself were governing.

“It is the same with good sons or good daughters embracing this sutra. During the Buddha’s lifetime or after his extinction, even though they themselves cannot yet live in the first stage of immobility, these good sons will teach and promulgate the Dharma as the Buddha did, and if living beings, hearing them, practice it wholeheartedly, they will cut off afflictions and attain the blessings of the Dharma, the blessings of the fruit, and the blessings of the Way. Good sons, this is called the sixth amazing power of blessing of this sutra.

“Good sons, the seventh inconceivable power of blessing of this sutra is this: if good sons or good daughters are able to hear this sutra either during the Buddha’s lifetime or after his extinction, and rejoice, have faith, and gain an unprecedented consciousness; if they receive and embrace, read, recite, copy, and explain the sutra, and practice it as it teaches; if they aspire to become awakened; if they cause all good roots to sprout, show great compassion, and want to relieve all living beings of suffering; though they will not yet be able to follow the six transcendental practices, these practices will come naturally to them and they

will attain acceptance of the non-arising of all things, life and death as afflictions will be instantly destroyed for them, and they will rise to the seventh level of bodhisattvas.

“Suppose a vigorous man tries to destroy an enemy for his king, and after the enemy has been destroyed, with great joy, the king gives him half the kingdom as a prize. Good sons or good daughters who embrace this sutra are like this. They are the most vigorous of all who practice the Dharma. They attain the Dharma-treasure of the six practices even though they are not consciously seeking it. The enemy of death and life will be destroyed naturally, and with the prize of an estate they will be made comfortable, realizing that the treasure of half a buddha-land is the assurance of no birth. Good sons, this is called the seventh amazing power of blessing of this sutra.

“Good sons, the eighth inconceivable power of blessing of this sutra is this: if good sons or good daughters, either during the Buddha’s lifetime or after his extinction, find anyone who has received this sutra, they will make them revere and believe it exactly as if they saw the body of the Buddha, cherish and enjoy it, receive and embrace, read and recite, copy, and honor this sutra, follow and practice it according to the Dharma, firmly observing morality and endurance. At the same time, they will practice generosity and be deeply compassionate. And they will everywhere teach this unexcelled Great Vehicle Sutra of Innumerable Meanings for the sake of people.

“If anyone for a long time does not at all recognize sin or blessedness, they will be shown this sutra, and with all sorts of skillful means be firmly led to have faith in it. Through the power of this sutra, their faith will be aroused and they will convert suddenly. After having their faith aroused, they will bravely persevere, acquiring the virtues and powers of this sutra, and attaining the Way and its fruit. In this way, through the blessing of having undergone transformation, these good sons or good daughters, in their male and female bodies, will attain acceptance of the non-arising of all things, reach the upper stage, and, with bodhisattvas as their attendants, lead living beings quickly to fulfillment, purify buddha-lands, and soon attain unexcelled awakening. Good sons, this is called the eighth amazing power of blessing of this sutra.

“Good sons, the ninth inconceivable power of blessing of this sutra is this: if good sons or good daughters, receiving this sutra either during the

Buddha's lifetime or after his extinction, dance for joy, attain the unprecedented, receive and embrace, read and recite, copy and make offerings to this sutra, and everywhere explain its meaning through analysis for the sake of living beings, they will instantly destroy the heavy hindrance of sins resulting from actions in the past and become purified. They will acquire great eloquence, gradually take on the marks of transcendental practices, attain various concentrations, including very courageous concentrations, enter the great gateway of incantations, and rise to the upper stage quickly through the power of diligent perseverance. They will be embodied everywhere in all the lands of the ten directions and will save and free all the living beings who suffer greatly in the twenty-five states of existence. Such power can be seen in this sutra. Good sons, this is called the ninth amazing power of blessing of this sutra.

“Good sons, the tenth inconceivable power of blessing of this sutra is this: if good sons or good daughters, receiving this sutra either during the Buddha's lifetime or after his extinction, greatly rejoice from experiencing such an unprecedented thing, receive and embrace, read and recite, copy, and make offerings to this sutra on their own accord, practice as it teaches, and also lead many monks and laypeople to receive and embrace, read and recite, copy, and make offerings to this sutra, explain it, and practice it in accord with the Dharma, because of their powers of leading others to the practice of this sutra and to attaining the Way and its fruits, done through the power of working good-heartedly to transform others, all these good sons or good daughters in their bodies will be able to pursue innumerable teachings about incantation. As common people, from the beginning they will naturally make innumerable countless great vows and oaths, and deeply aspire to fulfill them in order to save all living beings. They will realize great compassion, thoroughly relieve the suffering of living beings, gather many good roots, and abundantly benefit all. They will extend the abundance of the Dharma and give water to the withered and dehydrated. They will generously give living beings the medicine of the Dharma, setting them all at ease, gradually elevating their views to live at the stage of the Dharma cloud. They will spread benevolence widely, always being kind and leading the living who suffer into the track of the Way. These people will be able to attain supreme awakening before long. Good sons, this is called the tenth amazing power of blessing of this sutra.

“Good sons, such an unexcelled Great Vehicle Sutra of Innumerable Meanings has extremely great divine power and is unsurpassed in value. It leads all the common people to attain sacred fruit, and forever frees them from life and death. This is why this sutra is called Innumerable Meanings. It makes the tree of blessings grow, prosper, and flourish, and it leads all the living, while at the stage of common people, to have innumerable buds of the way of all the bodhisattvas. Therefore this sutra is called ‘the inconceivable power of blessings.’”

At that time the bodhisattva great one Magnificently Adorned, with the eighty thousand bodhisattva great ones, said to the Buddha in unison: “World-Honored One, the profound, wonderful, and unexcelled Great Vehicle Sutra of Innumerable Meanings preached by the Buddha is truly correct in logic, unsurpassed in value, and protected by the buddhas of the past, present, and future. It is not open to the whole swarm of demonic ways, nor can it be hurt by any of the mass of wrong views of life and death. This is why this sutra has ten such powers of amazing blessings. It is enormously beneficial for innumerable living beings, enabling all bodhisattva great ones to attain the contemplation of innumerable meanings, a million teachings about incantation, all the stages and forbearance of a bodhisattva, or to obtain evidence of the four fruits of the way of pratyekabuddhas and arhats. Out of compassion for us, the World-Honored One taught such a Dharma willingly, enabling us to obtain the great benefits of the Dharma. This is very unusual, unprecedented. It is difficult to repay the compassionate grace of the World-Honored One.”

With these words, the three-thousand great thousandfold world trembled and shook in the six ways, various kinds of heavenly flowers, such as the blue lotus, red lotus, water lily, and white lotus, rained down again from the upper sky, and innumerable kinds of heavenly perfumes, robes, garlands, and priceless treasures also rained and came rolling down from the upper sky and were offered to the Buddha, the many bodhisattvas and shravakas, and to the great assembly. Heavenly trunks and bowls and other vessels filled with all sorts of heavenly delicacies naturally satisfied anyone who saw them or smelled them. Heavenly banners, flags, canopies, and musical instruments were everywhere, and heavenly music played in praise of the Buddha.

The Buddha-worlds in the eastern direction, as many as the sands of the Ganges, trembled and shook in six ways. Heavenly flowers, incense, robes, garlands, and priceless treasures rained down. Heavenly trunks and bowls, with all sorts of heavenly delicacies, naturally satisfied anyone who saw them or smelled them. Heavenly banners, flags, canopies, and wonderful musical instruments were everywhere, and heavenly music played in praise of those buddhas, those bodhisattvas and shravakas, and great assemblies. The same thing happened in the southern, western, and northern regions, in the four intermediate directions, and in the up and down directions.

At that time, the Buddha spoke to the great one Magnificently Adorned Bodhisattva and the other eighty thousand bodhisattva great ones: “You should deeply respect this sutra, practice it as the Dharma, transform everyone everywhere with it, and continue to diligently promulgate it. You should protect it carefully day and night, enabling the living to obtain the benefits of the Dharma. This is truly great kindness and great compassion. Using the divine power of your vows, you should protect this sutra and not let anyone put doubts or other obstacles in its way. Then you should have it practiced widely in Jambudvīpa, and have all the living observe, read, recite, copy, and make offerings to it without fail. Because of this, you will be able to attain supreme awakening quickly.”

At this time Magnificently Adorned Bodhisattva, the great one, and the eighty thousand bodhisattva great ones rose from their seats, went up to the Buddha, prostrated themselves at his feet, circled around him a hundred thousand times, and then, kneeling before him, said to the Buddha with one voice: “World-Honored One, we are pleased to have received the World-Honored One’s compassion. This profound, wonderful, and unexcelled Great Vehicle Sutra of Innumerable Meanings has been taught for us. Respectfully following the Buddha’s instructions, after the Tathagata’s extinction we will promulgate this sutra everywhere, enabling all to receive and embrace, read and recite, copy, and make offerings to it. Please don’t be worried! By the power of our vow, we will enable all the living to see and hear, read and recite, copy, and make offerings to this sutra. They will acquire the powerful, divine happiness of this sutra.”



I. Introduction

This is what I heard.

AT ONE TIME the Buddha was staying at Rajagriha on Holy Eagle Peak with a large group of great monks, twelve thousand in all. All of them were arhats, without faults, free from afflictions, self-developed, emancipated from all bonds of existence, and mentally free.

They included Ajnata-Kaundinya, Maha-Kashyapa, Uruvilva-Kashyapa, Gaya-Kashyapa, Nadi-Kashyapa, Shariputra, Maha-Maudgalyayana, Maha-Katyayana, Aniruddha, Kapphina, Gavampati, Revata, Pilindavatsa, Bakkula, Maha-Kausthila, Nanda, Sundarananda, Purna son of Maitrayani, Subhuti, Ananda, and Rahula. Such great arhats are all well known to everyone. In addition there were two thousand others, some in training and some no longer in training.

The nun Mahaprajapati was there with six thousand followers, and the nun Yashodhara, the mother of Rahula, with her followers.

There were eighty thousand bodhisattvas, great ones, all free from backsliding in the pursuit of supreme awakening. All of them had mastered incantations, taught with delight and eloquence, had turned the irreversible Dharma wheel, made offerings to countless hundreds of thousands of buddhas, planted many roots of virtue, and were always being praised by buddhas. Having trained themselves in compassion, they could enter into Buddha-wisdom, deeply understand great wisdom, and reach the other shore. Their fame had spread to innumerable worlds. And they were able to liberate innumerable hundreds of thousands of living beings.

They included Manjushri Bodhisattva, Regarder of the Cries of the World Bodhisattva, Great Strength Bodhisattva, Constant Effort Bodhisattva, Never Resting Bodhisattva, Jeweled Palm Bodhisattva, Medicine King Bodhisattva, Bold Almsgiver Bodhisattva, Jeweled Moon Bodhisattva, Moon Light Bodhisattva, Full Moon Bodhisattva, Great Power Bodhisattva, Immeasurable Power Bodhisattva, Above the Threefold World Bodhisattva, Bhadrapala Bodhisattva, Maitreya Bodhisattva, Accumulated Jewels Bodhisattva, and Guidance Bodhisattva. In all, eighty thousand such bodhisattva great ones were there.

Also there at that time were Indra, king of the gods, with his following of twenty thousand children of heaven; plus the children of heaven Rare Moon, Universal Fragrance, and Jewel Light, and the four great kings of heaven with their following of ten thousand children of heaven. There were the children of heaven Freedom and Great Freedom, followed by thirty thousand children of heaven. Brahma, king of heaven and lord of this world, was there, as was Great Brahma Shikhin, Great Brahma Bright Radiance, and others, along with their following of twelve thousand children of heaven.

There also were the eight dragon kings: Nanda Dragon King, Upananda Dragon King, Sagara Dragon King, Vasuki Dragon King, Takshaka Dragon King, Anavatapta Dragon King, Manasvin Dragon King, and Utpalaka Dragon King, each with several hundred thousand followers.

There were four chimera kings: Dharma Chimera King, Wonderful Dharma Chimera King, Great Dharma Chimera King, and Upholding the Dharma Chimera King, each with several hundred thousand followers.

In addition there were four centaur kings: Pleasant Centaur King, Pleasant Sound Centaur King, Beautiful Centaur King, and Beautiful Sound Centaur King, each with several hundred thousand followers.

There were four asura kings: Balin Asura King, Kharaskandha Asura King, Vemacitrin Asura King, and Rahu Asura King, each with several hundred thousand followers.

Four griffin kings were also there: Great Dignity and Virtue Griffin King, Great Body Griffin King, Great Fullness Griffin King, and Thus Willed Griffin King, each with several hundred thousand followers.

And King Ajatashatru, son of Vaidehi, with several hundred thousand followers was there.

Each prostrated himself at the Buddha's feet, then withdrew and sat to one side.

At that time the World-Honored One, surrounded by the four groups, was given offerings, revered, honored, and praised. For the sake of all the bodhisattvas, he taught the Great Vehicle Sutra called Innumerable Meanings, the Dharma by which bodhisattvas are taught and which buddhas watch over and keep always in mind.

Having taught this sutra, sitting cross-legged, the Buddha entered the state of concentration called the place of innumerable meanings, in which his body and mind were completely motionless. Then mandarava, great mandarava, manjushaka, and great manjushaka flowers rained down from the sky on the Buddha and the entire assembly, while the whole Buddha-world trembled and shook in six ways.

Then the whole congregation—monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen, gods, dragons, satyrs, centaurs, asuras, griffins, chimeras, pythons, humans, and nonhumans, as well as minor kings and the wheel-turning saintly kings—astonished because this had never happened before, with palms together and with complete attention, joyously looked up at the Buddha.

From the tuft of white hair between his eyebrows, one of his characteristic features, the Buddha emitted a beam of light, illuminating eighteen thousand worlds in the east, so that there was nowhere that it did not reach, down to the lowest purgatory and up to Akanishtha, the highest heaven.

In those worlds, all the living beings in the six states could be seen. Likewise the buddhas existing at present in those lands could be seen, and the sutra teachings those buddhas were preaching could be heard. Monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen, who had attained the Way through practice, could also be seen. Further, one could see bodhisattvas, the great ones, walking the bodhisattva way due to various causes and conditions, with various degrees of faith and understanding, and in various forms. Likewise buddhas who had entered complete nirvana could be seen. And one could see there stupas made of the seven precious materials, stupas that had been built to hold the remains of these buddhas after they had entered complete nirvana.

Then Maitreya Bodhisattva thought: “Now the World-Honored One has displayed a marvelous sign. But what is the cause or reason for this auspicious sign? Now that the Buddha, the World-Honored One, has entered into concentration, whom can I ask about such inconceivable and unprecedented wonders? And who will be able to answer?” Then he thought: “Here is Manjushri, the son of the Dharma-king, who has been in close contact with, and made offerings to, innumerable buddhas in the past. Surely, he must already have witnessed such rare signs as these. I will ask him.”

Then the monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen, and all the gods, dragons, demon-gods, and others thought: “Whom shall we ask about this shining spiritual sign from the Buddha?”

Then Maitreya Bodhisattva, wanting to resolve his own doubts and seeing what was on the minds of the four groups of the assembly—the monks, and nuns, laymen and laywomen—as well as the gods, dragons, demon-gods, and others, asked Manjushri: “What is the reason for this auspicious and spiritual sign, emitting such a great, bright beam of light, illuminating the eighteen thousand eastern lands, revealing in detail the splendor of those Buddha-worlds?”

Then Maitreya Bodhisattva, wanting to say what he meant once again, asked in verse:

Manjushri,
 From the tuft of white hair between his eyebrows
 Why does our leader and teacher
 Radiate so great a light in all directions?

The rain of mandarava
 And manjushaka flowers
 And fragrant breezes of sandalwood
 Delight us all.

For this reason
 The earth became splendid and pure,
 And this whole world
 Trembled and shook in six different ways.

Male and female servants,
 Carriages and chariots,
 Hand-drawn carriages
 And palanquins adorned with jewels.

They give all these alms with joy,
 Turning toward the Buddha way,
 They seek to attain this vehicle,
 One supreme in the threefold world and praised by buddhas.

There are also bodhisattvas
 Who give precious four-horse carriages
 With railings and ornate canopies
 Adorning their sides and tops.

Also I see bodhisattvas
 Who give their own flesh, hands and feet,
 And their wives and children,
 In order to pursue the unexcelled way.

Further, I see bodhisattvas
 Who cheerfully and gladly give as alms
 Their own heads and eyes, bodies and limbs,
 In order to pursue the wisdom of the Buddha.

Manjushri,
 I see various kings
 Going to visit the buddhas
 To ask about the unexcelled way.

Then they abandon their pleasant lands,
 Palaces, ministers, and female servants,
 And, shaving their beards and heads,
 Put on the robes of the Dharma.

I also see bodhisattvas
 Who become monks

Living alone in quiet seclusion,
Enjoying the reciting of sutras.

And I see bodhisattvas
Who with perseverance and zeal
Go deep into the mountains
To ponder over the Buddha way.

I also see them renouncing desires,
Always living in empty, quiet places,
Profoundly cultivating meditation
And obtaining the five divine powers.

Further, I see bodhisattvas
Peacefully meditating with palms together,
With tens of millions of stanzas
Praising the king of the Dharma.

Again, I see bodhisattvas,
Profound in wisdom and firm in will,
Able to question the buddhas
And receive and retain everything they hear.

And I see children of the Buddha,
Perfect in meditation and wisdom,
With innumerable illustrations
Preaching the Dharma for the multitudes.

Teaching the Dharma with joy and delight,
They transform people into bodhisattvas,
Destroying the army of the devil,
And beating the Dharma drum.

I also see bodhisattvas
Who are calm and silent.
Though honored by gods and dragons,
They take no joy in that.

Again, I see bodhisattvas
Who dwell in forests and emit a light
That saves sufferers in purgatories
And enables them to enter the Buddha way.

I also see children of the Buddha
Who never sleep
Walking through forests,
Diligently seeking the Buddha way.

Further, I see observers of the precepts,
Without flaw in their conduct,
Pure as precious jewels,
Who in this way seek the Buddha way.

And I see children of the Buddha
Dwelling in the power of patient endurance.

Though men of the utmost arrogance
Hatefully abuse and beat them,
They are able to endure all of this
In order to seek the Buddha way.

I also see bodhisattvas
Who leave behind all play and laughter
And all foolish companions,
And seek association with the wise.

Single-mindedly removing distractions,
Concentrating their thoughts while in mountain forests,
For tens of thousands of millions of years,
They seek the Buddha way.

Or I see bodhisattvas
Who offer delicacies of food and drink,
And hundreds of kinds of herbal teas
To the Buddha and the monks.

Some give fine robes and superior garments
 Worth tens of millions of billions,
 Or utterly priceless robes,
 To the Buddha and the monks.

Some give ten million billion kinds
 Of precious buildings built of sandalwood,
 With all sorts of fine bedding,
 To the Buddha and the monks.

Some give pure, immaculate gardens
 Full of flowers and fruits,
 With flowing springs and bathing pools,
 To the Buddha and the monks.

Some give offerings like these,
 Wonderful in every way,
 Joyfully and without grudging,
 Seeking the unexcelled way.

Moreover, there are bodhisattvas
 Who teach the Dharma of nirvana,
 In various ways teaching
 Numberless living beings.

Also I see bodhisattvas
 Who observe that the nature of all things
 Is not dual,
 But like empty space.

Again, I see children of the Buddha
 With minds free from attachments,
 With this wonderful wisdom
 Seeking the unexcelled way.

Manjushri,
 There are also bodhisattvas

Who, after the Buddha's extinction,
Make offerings to his remains.

I see children of the Buddha
Who build stupas,
Innumerable as the sands of the Ganges,
Splendidly adorning all lands.

Lofty and most wonderful
Are these stupas,
Five thousand leagues high,
And two thousand leagues in length and width.

Each of these stupas
Bears thousands of banners and flags,
Curtains decorated with jewels,
And valuable bells ringing harmoniously.

Gods and dragon-gods,
Humans and nonhumans,
With incense, flowers, and good music,
Are always making offerings.

Manjushri!
All the Buddha's children,
In order to make offerings to the remains,
Adorn the stupas splendidly.

Thereby all the lands spontaneously
Become extraordinarily wonderful and fine,
Like the king of heavenly trees
In full bloom.

The Buddha has emitted a beam of light.
With all the assembly,
I see that these lands
Are extraordinarily wonderful.

“These eight princes were independently dignified and virtuous, each ruling over four great realms. All these princes, hearing that their father had left his home and attained supreme awakening, renounced their royal positions and, following him, left home. With their minds on the Great Vehicle and always observing noble practices, and having already planted roots of goodness under tens of millions of buddhas, all of them became Dharma teachers.

“At that time the Buddha Sun and Moon Light taught the Great Vehicle sutra called Innumerable Meanings, a Dharma by which bodhisattvas are taught and which buddhas watch over and keep in mind. As soon as he had taught this sutra, he sat cross-legged in the midst of the great assembly and entered the kind of concentration called the place of innumerable meanings, in which his body and mind were motionless. At this moment mandarava, great mandarava, manjushaka, and great manjushaka flowers rained down from the sky over the Buddha and the whole great assembly, while the whole Buddha-world trembled in six different ways.

“Then the congregation, the monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen, gods, dragons, satyrs, centaurs, asuras, griffins, chimeras, pythons, humans and nonhumans, as well as the minor kings and the wheel-turning saintly kings—all of this assembly—having obtained something that they had never had before, put their palms together in joy and in rapt attention looked up to the Buddha.

“Then, from the characteristic tuft of white hair between his brows, the Tathagata emitted a beam of light that illuminated eighteen thousand buddha-lands to the East, so that it extended throughout all of them, just like all these buddha-lands that we can see now.

“Maitreya, you should understand that in the congregation at that time there were two billion bodhisattvas who happily wanted to hear the Dharma. All these bodhisattvas, seeing this beam of light illuminating all those buddha-lands, and obtaining what they had never had before, wanted to know the causes and circumstances of that light.

“At that time there was a bodhisattva named Wonderful Light who had eight hundred disciples. When Sun and Moon Light Buddha arose from concentration, because of Wonderful Light Bodhisattva he taught the Great Vehicle sutra called the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, by which bodhisattvas are taught and which buddhas watch over and keep in mind. For sixty small eons he remained seated without

getting up. During those sixty small eons the listeners in that congregation also stayed seated in their places, motionless in body and mind, listening to the Buddha's preaching as if it took no longer than a meal. During that time no one in the congregation felt at all weary, either in body or in mind.

"Having taught this sutra for sixty small eons to Brahma, devils, mendicants, brahmins, human and heavenly beings, and asuras, Sun and Moon Light Buddha proclaimed: 'Tonight at midnight, the Tathagata will enter nirvana without residue.'

"At that time there was a bodhisattva named Good Treasury. Sun and Moon Light Buddha assured him that he would become a buddha, saying to all the monks: 'This Good Treasury Bodhisattva will become the next buddha. An arhat, fully awakened, his name will be Pure Body Tathagata.'

"Having assured him, at midnight the Buddha entered nirvana without residue.

"Following that buddha's extinction, Wonderful Light Bodhisattva, having embraced the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, taught it to others for a full eighty small eons. All eight sons of Sun and Moon Light Buddha took Wonderful Light as their teacher, and Wonderful Light helped them to strengthen their vow to attain supreme awakening. All these princes made offerings to innumerable hundreds of thousands of billions of buddhas and achieved the Buddha way. The last of them to become a buddha was named Burning Light.

"Wonderful Light had eight hundred disciples, one of whom was named Fame Seeker. He was greedily attached to lucrative offerings, and, though he read and memorized many sutras, he gained little from them and forgot almost all of them. That is why he was called Fame Seeker. But because he had planted roots of goodness, this man too was able to meet innumerable hundreds of thousands of billions of buddhas, make offerings to them, revere, honor, and praise them.

"You should know this, Maitreya. Was the Bodhisattva Wonderful Light of that time some other person? No, it was me. And the Bodhisattva Fame Seeker was you. You can see that this omen is no different from the previous one.

"Therefore I suppose that the Buddha will teach the Great Vehicle

sutra called the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, by which bodhisattvas are taught and which buddhas watch over and keep in mind.”

Then Manjushri, wanting to say what he meant once again, spoke to the great congregation in verse:

I remember that in a past age,
Unquantifiable, innumerable eons ago,
There was a buddha, the most honored of people,
Called Sun and Moon Light.

That World-Honored One preached the Dharma,
Saving innumerable living beings
And countless hundreds of millions of bodhisattvas,
Enabling them to enter the wisdom of the Buddha.

The eight princes born to that buddha
Before leaving home,
Seeing that this great sage had left his home,
Followed him in observing noble practices.

Among the great multitude of living beings,
That Buddha then preached from the Great Vehicle
The sutra called Innumerable Meanings
And extensively analyzed it for them.

When the Buddha had finished preaching the sutra
He sat cross-legged on the Dharma seat,
In the concentration called
The place of innumerable meanings.

Mandarava flowers rained down from the sky
While heavenly drums sounded by themselves,
And gods, dragons, demons, and spirits
Made offerings to the most honored of people.

All the buddha-lands
Trembled terribly at that moment.

From between his brows the Buddha emitted a beam of light
Revealing wonders rarely seen.

This beam of light illumined the eastern region
Of eighteen thousand buddha-lands,
Showing the extent to which the lives of every living being there
Was affected by their past actions.

By the Buddha's beam of light
Buddha-lands could be seen,
Adorned with many jewels
With the colors of lapis lazuli and crystal.

Also to be seen were human and heavenly beings,
Dragon-gods and satyrs,
Centaur and chimeras,
Each making offerings to their Buddha.

Tathagatas could also be seen
Naturally achieving
The Buddha way,
Their bodies like mountains of gold.

They were very fine
And wonderful in their majesty,
As when within pure lapis lazuli
A real statue of gold can be seen.

Thus world-honored ones
Laid out the meaning
Of the profound Dharma
For the great multitudes.

In each of these buddha-lands
There were innumerable shravakas.
By the Buddha's beam of light
All these great multitudes were completely visible.

In addition there were monks
Living in mountains and forests who persevered,
Observing the pure precepts
As if they were protecting bright jewels.

And bodhisattvas could be seen
As numerous as the sands of the Ganges,
Practicing charity and patience.
All this could be seen by the Buddha's light.

Also could be seen were bodhisattvas
Who had entered deeply into various states of meditation
And were at rest, motionless in body and mind,
Seeking the unexcelled way.

And bodhisattvas could be seen who,
Knowing the tranquilly extinct character of things,
Each in his own land
Taught the Dharma and pursued the Buddha way.

Then all four groups,
Seeing Sun and Moon Light Buddha
Display his power of great divine faculties,
Asked each other with joy in their hearts:
"Why is he doing this?"

The one honored by people and gods
Then rose from concentration
And praised Wonderful Light Bodhisattva:
"You are the eyes of the world,

"The storehouse of the Dharma
To whom all turn in faith.
You alone are able to bear witness
To the Dharma that I preach."

Wonderful Light, Dharma teacher,
 At that time had a disciple
 Who was always lazy,
 Greedily craving fame and gain.

Always seeking fame and gain,
 He often visited homes of noble families,
 Casting aside what he had repeated and memorized,
 Forgetting everything and gaining nothing from it.

Because of these things
 He was called Fame Seeker.
 Yet by doing good works
 He too was able to see innumerable buddhas.

He made offerings to buddhas,
 Followed them in walking the great way
 And carrying out the six transcendental practices.
 And now he has seen the Lion of the Shakyas.

Later he will become a buddha
 Whose name will be Maitreya.
 He will save
 Living beings everywhere.

The lazy one who lived after the extinction
 Of the other Buddha,
 That lazy one was you.
 And Wonderful Light, the Dharma teacher, was me.

Having seen Sun and Moon Light Buddha
 Long ago send forth an auspicious beam of light,
 I know that the present Buddha
 Wants to teach the Dharma Flower Sutra.

The present sign is like the previous auspicious occurrences;
 They are the buddhas' skillful means.

The present Buddha emits a beam of light
To help reveal the principle of the true character of things.

The time has come for people to understand.
With your palms together, wait single-mindedly!
The Buddha will pour the rain of the Dharma
To satisfy those who seek the Way.

If those who seek after the three vehicles
Have any doubts or regrets,
The Buddha will remove them
So that none whatever remain.



2. Skillful Means

AT THAT TIME the World-Honored One rose calmly from concentration and said to Shariputra: “The wisdom of buddhas is both profound and immeasurable, and the gateways to this wisdom are hard to understand and hard to enter. No shravaka or pratyekabuddha can apprehend it.

“Why is this? It is because every buddha has been closely associated with hundreds of thousands of billions of buddhas in the past, fully practicing the way of the immeasurable Dharma of all the buddhas. Boldly and diligently working, they have become famous everywhere, fulfilling the very profound, unprecedented Dharma and teaching it wherever opportunities arose. Yet their intention is difficult to grasp.

“Shariputra, ever since I became a buddha, I have used a variety of causal explanations and a variety of parables to teach and preach, and countless skillful means to lead living beings, enabling them to give up their attachments. Why? Because the Tathagata has attained full use of skillful means and practice of insight.

“Shariputra, the insight of the Tathagata is broad and great, profound and far-reaching, immeasurable and unobstructed. His powers, his courage, his meditation, his liberation, and his concentration have enabled him to enter into the boundless and to fulfill the unprecedented Dharma.

“By making a variety of distinctions, Shariputra, the Tathagata is able to teach with great skill, cheering the hearts of all with gentle words.

“In sum, Shariputra, the Buddha has fulfilled the whole Dharma—innumerable, unlimited, unprecedented teachings.

“But this is enough Shariputra. No more needs to be said. Why? Because what the Buddha has achieved is most rare and difficult to understand. Only among buddhas can the true character of all things be fathomed. This is because every existing thing has such characteristics, such a nature, such an embodiment, such powers, such actions, such causes, such conditions, such effects, such rewards and retributions, and yet such a complete fundamental coherence.”²

Then the World-Honored One, wanting to say what he meant once again, spoke in verse:

The world's heroes cannot be measured.
 Among all the heavenly beings and people of the world,
 Among all living beings,
 None can know a buddha.

The buddhas' power and courage,
 Liberation and states of concentration,
 And the buddhas' other attributes,
 Cannot be fathomed by anyone.

In the past I followed countless buddhas
 And fully tried their various ways,
 Their profound, fine, and wonderful teachings,
 Which are difficult to see and understand.

After innumerable hundreds of millions of eons
 Pursuing all those ways,
 And gaining the fruit of the place of the Way,
 I could fully understand.

Such great effects and such rewards and retributions,
 The meaning of various natures and characteristics—
 These things the buddhas of the ten directions and I
 Can now really understand.

This Dharma is indescribable.
 Words must fall silent.

Among other kinds of living beings,
 None can understand it,
 Except the bodhisattvas,
 Whose faith is strong and firm.

Even disciples of the Buddha
 Who have made offerings to buddhas,
 Gotten rid of all their faults,
 And now live in their final incarnation,
 Even such people as these,
 Don't have this much power.

Even a world
 Full of men like Shariputra,
 Using all of their mental powers together
 Could not fathom Buddha-wisdom.

Indeed, if all the worlds in the ten directions
 Were full of people like Shariputra
 Or any other disciples,
 Filling all the worlds,
 Using all of their mental powers together,
 None of these people could fathom it.

If very intelligent pratyekabuddhas,
 Faultless and in their final incarnations,
 As numerous as the bamboos in a grove,
 Filled all the worlds in the ten directions,

And single-mindedly came together
 For innumerable hundreds of millions of eons
 Wanting to think about the buddhas' real wisdom,
 They could not understand even a small part of it.

Even if bodhisattvas who have just taken up the Way—
 Who have given offerings to countless buddhas,