

Commentary on
the Treatise on the Sutra of
the Buddha of Immeasurable Life with
the Verses of Aspiration for Birth in the Pure Land

Composed by Bodhisattva Vasubandhu

Annotated by Master Tanluan

Part One

1 Reverently contemplating the *Commentary on the Ten Bodhisattva Stages* of Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna:

I find there are two paths by which bodhisattvas seek the stage of nonretrogression: the path of difficult practice and the path of easy practice.

With the path of difficult practice, the difficulty is seeking nonretrogression in this world of five defilements at a time when there is no Buddha. This difficulty appears in many ways. I will indicate what is meant by roughly listing several of them.

1. People confuse the dharma of the bodhisattva with the apparent good practiced in nonbuddhist ways.
2. The sravaka's concentration on self-benefit interferes with the bodhisattva's practice of great compassion.
3. Evildoers lacking self-reflection subvert the excellent merits of others.
4. The good results caused by misguided thinking nullify the bodhisattva's pure practice for enlightenment.
5. The path of difficult practice is based only on self-power and lacks the support of Other Power.

Such problems as these, which may be seen everywhere, are examples of this difficulty. Thus the path of difficult practice may be compared in its hardship to journeying overland on foot.

In the path of easy practice, one aspires to be born in the Pure Land by solely entrusting oneself to the Buddha as the cause. Allowing oneself to be carried by the power of the Buddha's Vow, one duly attains birth in the Land of Purity. Supported by the Buddha's power, one immediately enters the group of the truly settled of the Mahayana. The stage of the truly settled is none other than the stage of nonretrogression. Thus the path of easy practice may be compared in its comfort to being carried over waterways in a sip.

This *Treatise on the Sutra of Immeasurable Life* indeed holds the ultimate of the Mahayana. It is the sail with which to catch the favorable wind forward nonretrogression.

2 'Immeasurable Life' is a specific name of Amida Buddha, the Tathagata of the Pure Land of Peace and Happiness. Śākyamuni Buddha, while residing at Rājagṛha and Śrāvastī, taught the assembly about the virtues that adorn the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. Thus, the Buddha's Name forms the

essence of those sutras. Later, the sage Bodhisattva Vasubandhu, reverently heeding Śākyamuni Tathagata's teaching of great compassion, composed the gatha of aspiration for birth in the Pure Land based on those sutras. He also composed a section in prose to further expound the gatha. Concerning the Sanskrit word 'upadeśa', in this country there is no word equivalent to it, but it may be understood as 'lun' 論 (lit. Treatise). The reason why there is no equivalent word is that a Buddha has never appeared in this country before. As to the writings in this country, we use 'jing' 經 for those by Confucius, and 'zi' 子 for those by others. Distinction is also made between 'guo-shi' 國史 (lit. official national history) and 'guo-ji' 國紀 (lit. Private state history). Among the twelve divisions of scriptures expounded by Śākyamuni Buddha, we find one called scripture of discussion, that is, 'upadeśa'. If any disciple of the Buddha develops an understanding of a sutra based on the intention of the Buddha, the writing can also be called 'upadeśa', for the exposition corresponds to the Buddha Dharma. In this country, if a writing is called 'lun' 論, it simply means 'lun-yi' 論義 (lit. Discussion). How can it be rightly translated? For example, a woman is called 'mother' in her relation to her children, and 'younger sister' in her relation to her older brother. In this way, different words are used according to the context. If only 'woman' is used in regard to a mother or a sister, although both indicate 'female', how can one know its position in regard to the upper and lower relationship? So it is with the term 'lun', and therefore a phonetic transcription 'yu-po-ti-she' 優婆提舍 is used for the Sanskrit 'upadeśa'.

3 This *Treatise* as a whole is divided into two: a summary section and an exposition section. The summary section is to the end of the five-character verses, and the exposition section is from "Now I will discuss" to the end of the prose portion.

Concerning the two divisions, we find two interpretations: the verses are for reciting and summarize the sutras, and the prose portion is for understanding the teaching through explaining the verses.

4 'Immeasurable Life' refers to the Tathagata of Immeasurable Life, whose lifespan is so long that it cannot be measured. 'Sutra' 經 means 'constant', that is to say, the virtues of purity that adorn the Buddha and bodhisattvas and those of the Buddha-land producing great benefit to sentient beings, and therefore it should be constantly known to people. This is the reason 'sutra' is used. 'Upadeśa' is the name for a Buddhist scripture for discussion. 'Aspiration' is to desire, and 'birth' means that Bodhisattva Vasubandhu aspires to be born in the pure lotus of the Tathagata in the Land of Peace and Bliss. This is why he expresses an aspiration for birth. 'Verse' (*gāthā*) means a certain number of stanzas. Here it is so-called because the teaching of the Buddha 仏經 is being summarized and recited in verses composed of five-character stanzas.

'Vasu' [of Vasubandhu] is to be translated as 'heaven', and 'bandhu' as 'close relation', and thus Vasubandhu is translated in Chinese as *Tianqin* 天親. His biography is found in the *Fu-fa-zang jing* 付法藏經. 'Pu-sa' 菩薩, if the Sanskrit original word is to be fully transcribed, is to be 'pu-ti-sa-duo' 菩提薩埵. 'Pu-ti' 菩提, or 'bodhi' is Buddhahood. 'Sa-duo' 薩埵 or *sattva* means 'a being' and also 'a brave person'. That is to say, since a person seeking after Buddhahood possesses a valiant resolution, he is called a 'bodhisattva'. Here, the translator simply used an abbreviated form 'pu-sa' 菩薩 for bodhisattva. 'Compose' 造 is to make.

The author's name is given so that the readers may respect the Dharma out of trust in the fact that his name is recorded. Hence, the title *The treatise on the Sutra of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life with the Verses of Aspiration for Birth in the Pure Land*. Here ends the interpretation of the title of the *Treatise*.

5 The verses are divided into the ‘five gates of mindfulness’ which is commented on in the following prose portion. The first stanza in four lines contains the three gates of mindfulness, that is, the gates of worship and praise in the first three lines, and the gate of aspiration in the last line. In the second stanza the author Vasubandhu states, “I myself compose this *Treatise* based on the sutras in accord with the teaching of the Buddha, and in so doing clarify its authoritative source”. In this way he justifies the use of the word ‘upadeśa’ for this *Treatise*. With the above-stated three gates, this stanza also leads to the latter two gates. They are thus explained, that is, the gate of contemplation from the third line to the end of the following twenty-one lines, the last line being the gate of directing virtue. This concludes the divisions within the verse section.

6 [The *Treatise* states:]

O World-honored One, with the mind that is single
 I take refuge in the Tathagata of Unhindered Light
 Filling the ten quarters
 And aspire to be born in the Land of Peace and Happiness.

‘World-honored One’ is a general epithet of all Buddhas. In regard to their wisdom, there is nothing that is beyond their understanding. When we speak of their power of severing passions, there is not even a trace of residue in them. Possessed of both wisdom and the power of severing passions, they benefit the world, and so they are revered by all people. This is why they are called ‘World-honored One’. The ‘World-honored One’ here refers to Tathagata Śākyamuni. How do we know it? It is because Vasubandhu states as ‘Relying on the sutras’ in the following stanza. Bodhisattva Vasubandhu, in the age of the semblance Dharma, followed the teaching of the sutra left by Śākyamuni. Thus he aspired to be born in the Pure Land, and his aspiration is based on the teaching expounded in the sutra. Therefore we can know that the word ‘World-honored One’ refers to Śākyamuni. If I take its implication, I find no problem in using ‘World-honored One’ for all Buddhas.

Generally, a bodhisattva takes refuge in a Buddha, just as filial children obey their parents and loyal retainers follow their rulers, with their behavior not self-centered and their acts always according with reason. Since the bodhisattva is aware of the Buddha’s benevolence and responds in gratitude to the Buddha’s virtue, he naturally addresses the Buddha first.

Moreover, Vasubandhu’s aspiration is not undertaken lightly. How could it ever be fulfilled without the support of the Tathagata’s majestic power? Here Vasubandhu entreats the Tathagata to lend his majestic power; hence he reverently addresses him, saying, “O World-honored One!”

The words, ‘with the mind that is single, I,’ are Bodhisattva Vasubandhu’s profession of personal commitment. They mean that in Vasubandhu’s thinking on the Tathagata of Unhindered Light and aspiring to be born in the Land of Peace and Happiness, his thoughts on the Buddha succeed one another without any other thoughts intermingling.

Question: In the Buddha Dharma, there is no ‘I’. Then, what is meant here by ‘I’ [in Vasubandhu’s address]?

Answer: There are three derivations for using the word 'I'. The first is the 'I' of a distorted view. The second is the 'I' of self-conceit. The third is the 'I' used in ordinary language. Here, Bodhisattva Vasubandhu is using 'I' as ordinary language to indicate himself. It is not that of a distorted view or self-conceit.

Concerning the words, "[I] take refuge in the Tathagata of Unhindered Light filling the ten quarters": 'take refuge' is itself the gate of worship, and 'Tathagata of Unhindered Light filling the ten quarters' is the gate of praise. We know that to take refuge is also to worship because Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna, in composing gathas to Amida Tathagata, sometimes states, "I bow in worship", sometimes, "I take refuge", and sometimes, "I take refuge and worship". Moreover, in the prose portion of the *Treatise* Bodhisattva Vasubandhu speaks of 'practicing the five gates of mindfulness', and worship is numbered as the first among these five gates. Since he indeed aspires for birth in Amida's Pure Land, is it not natural that he should worship the Buddha? For these reasons, we know that taking refuge is itself worship. Worship itself, however, is only to pay homage and does not necessarily imply taking refuge; rather, taking refuge manifests itself in worship. From this we can infer that taking refuge is central. In the gatha, Vasubandhu expresses his personal aspiration; thus it is natural for him to say, "[I] take refuge". In explaining the meaning of the gatha in the exposition, he generally uses the term 'worship'. The two terms, 'take refuge' and 'worship', complement each other, revealing the basic meaning all the more clearly.

How do we know that the 'Tathagata of Unhindered Light filling the ten quarters' expresses the gate of practice? It is stated later in the prose portion:

How does one 'praise'? One says the Name of the Tathagata in accord with the Tathagata's light, which is the embodiment of wisdom. One wishes to be in correspondence with the significance of the Name by practicing in accord with reality.

In the *Sutra on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* expounded in the city of Śrāvastī, the Buddha Śākyamuni clarified the meaning of the Name of Tathagata Amida, saying "Why is that Buddha called 'Amida'? It is because that Buddha's light is immeasurable and shines unhindered throughout the worlds of the ten quarters. That is why the Buddha is called Amida. Furthermore, the life of the Buddha and the people there lasts for immeasurable, unlimited, and uncountable kalpas. That is why the Buddha is called 'Amida'."

Question: If the light of the Tathagata of Unhindered Light is immeasurable and shines unhindered throughout the world of the ten quarters, why are there people in this world who are not illuminated by it? If there is somewhere the light does not reach, is it not that the light is being hindered by something?

Answer: Hindrance belongs to the sentient beings, and not to the light itself. For example, the sun shines universally upon everything all over the world, and yet a blind man does not see it. It is not that the sun's light does not extend everywhere and envelop him. Also it is like rain pouring down from dense clouds does not penetrate hard stone. It is not that the rain is not making the stone soaking wet.

The view that a Buddha dominates a triple-thousand great thousand world is stated worlds is stated in the discourses for sravakas. In Mahayana discourses, it is stated that all Buddhas preside over innumerable and boundless worlds in the ten quarters. Here Vasubandhu states, 'Tathagata of

Unhindered Light filling the ten quarters'. This is to offer praise in accord with the working of the Tathagata's light, which is the embodiment of wisdom, through the Tathagata's Name. Hence we know that these lines manifest the gate of praise.

The line, "[I] aspire to be born in the Land of Peace and Happiness", manifests the gate of aspiration and expresses Bodhisattva Vasubandhu's taking of refuge. Concerning the meaning of 'peace and happiness', it is stated later in the gate of contemplation.

Question: In the Mahayana sutras and treatises it is frequently taught that in the final analysis sentient beings are unborn, like empty space. Why does Bodhisattva Vasubandhu express an 'aspiration for birth'?

Answer: The statement, "Sentient beings are unborn, like empty space", is open to two interpretations. First, what ordinary people see, such as sentient beings, which they conceive as real, or the acts of being born and dying, which they view as real, is ultimately nonexistent, imaginary such as 'tortoise fur', or like empty space. Second, since all things are 'born' from causal conditions, they are actually unborn; that is, they are nonexistent, like empty space. The 'birth' to which Bodhisattva Vasubandhu aspires refers to being born through causal conditions. Hence it is provisionally termed 'birth'. This does not mean that there are real beings or that being born or dying is real, as ordinary people imagine.

Question: In what sense do you speak of birth in the Pure Land?

Answer: For the provisionally-called 'person' in this world who practices the five gates of mindfulness, the preceding moment of thought is the cause of the succeeding moment of thought. Just as the provisionally-called 'person' of this defiled world and the provisionally-called 'person' of the Pure Land cannot be definitely called the same or definitely called different, the same is true of the preceding moment of thought and the succeeding moment of thought. The reason is that if they were one and the same, then there would be no causality; if they were different, there would be no continuity. This principle is the gate of contemplating sameness and difference, and is discussed in detail in the treatises. Here ends the explanation of the three gates of mindfulness manifested in the first stanza.

7 Next, we find a stanza which warrants the title *upadeśa*, and it closes the preceding verses, leading up to the following stanza:

Relying on the sutras
Which manifest the true and real virtues,
I compose a summary, in the form of a gatha of aspiration,
That accords with the Buddha's teaching.

How does this stanza explain the word *upadeśa*, and how does it close the preceding three gates and lead up to the following two gates? The stanza states, "Relying on the sutras which manifest the true and real virtues, I compose a summary, in the form of a gatha of aspiration that accords with the Buddha's teaching". 'Sutra' is the word for the teachings of the Buddha. Thus what the stanza is saying is, "To discuss the meaning of the sutras of the Buddha, I conform to its spirit". It is because

it leads into what pertains to the Buddha Dharma, it is called *upadeśa*. This ends the clarification of *upadeśa*.

“Concluding the preceding three gates and leading up to the following two gates” evokes the following questions: What does he rely on? Why does he rely on it? How does he rely on it? What Vasubandhu relies on is the sutras. He relies on them because the Tathagata is the manifestation of true and real virtues. As to how he relies on them, he does so by being in accord with them through practicing the five gates of mindfulness. Thus concludes the preceding verses, leading up to the following stanza.

The word ‘sutra’ refers to the direct teaching among the twelve divisions of scripture. In addition to the four Āgamas of the Tripiṭaka, the Mahayana scriptures are also called sutras. The sutras whose words he relies on refer to the Mahayana sutras, which are neither included in the Tripiṭaka nor the Āgamas.

Concerning ‘the manifestation of true and real virtues’, there are two kinds. The first kind is produced from defiled minds and does not accord with dharma-nature. Whether with regard to their cause or to their fruition, the good acts of foolish human beings and devas and the recompense of those acts are all inverted, empty, and false. Hence, they are all called untrue virtue. The second kind arises from the wisdom and pure deeds of the bodhisattva and this performs the Buddha’s work. It is in accord with suchness and culminates in purity. It is not inverted or false; hence, it is termed true and real virtue. Why is it not inverted? Because it is in accord with suchness and in conformity with the twofold truth. Why is it not false? Because it takes in all beings and brings them into the ultimate purity.

“I compose a summary in the form of a gatha of aspiration, that accord with the Buddha’s teaching”: within the term ‘summary’ are the notions of ‘sustaining’ and ‘all’, where ‘sustaining’ means to keep the main content from being scattered or lost, and ‘all’ indicates expressing much using as few words as possible. A ‘gatha’ is made up of five-character verses. ‘Aspiration’ means to desire and wish for birth in the Pure Land. ‘Compose’ is to write verses and discourses. Taken together, the stanzas state that “I compose a gatha of aspiration for birth, through presenting a summary of the sutras that accords with the Buddha’s teaching”. ‘That accords with the Buddha’s teaching’ means the two fit together, like a box and its lid.

8 Contemplating that world in light of its features,
I see that it transcends the way things are in the three worlds.

Hereafter the stanzas of the gatha clarify the fourth gate of contemplation. It is divided into two. One is to contemplate the fulfillment of the adornments of the land and the other is to contemplate the fulfillment of the adornments of the beings therein. From this stanza to “I aspire to be born in the Buddha-land of Amida” signifies the contemplation of the fulfillment of the land. The contemplation on the land is divided into seventeen parts. Each of them will be named after its description.

The two lines quoted above indicate the first of the seventeen parts, that is, the contemplation of the ‘fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of purity’. ‘Purity’ is the universal feature. The reason why the Buddha wished to have this virtue of purity when he established his vow while at the stage of Bodhisattva Dharmākara is that he observed that the three worlds are characterized as falsity, transmigration, and endless repetition in samsara. This condition is like an inchworm moving in circles or a silkworm wrapping itself in a cocoon. How pitiful it is that they are bound to the three

worlds in their inversion and impurity! This is why the Bodhisattva wished to convey sentient beings to a land beyond falsity, transmigration, and endless repetition in samsara, that is, to a great pure land of ultimate peace and happiness. For this reason the Bodhisattva wished to adorn the Pure Land with the virtue of purity. 'Fulfillment' means that the purity of the land is never to be destroyed or defiled unlike the defiled and destructible characteristics of the three worlds.

'Contemplating' signifies to observe, and 'that world' indicates the Land of Peace and Happiness. 'The features of that world' indicates the pure aspect of the Land of Peace and Happiness, whose characteristics are described later. In the phrase "It transcends the way things are in the three worlds" the term 'the way things are' indicates a 'pathway'. Just as a certain cause leads to a certain effect, when there is a certain effect it is the outcome of a certain cause. Just as through the pathway of cause we arrive at its effect, through the pathway of effect we return to the cause. Thus it is called 'the way things are'.

'The three worlds' are, firstly, the realm of desire such as the six heavens of desire, the four continents with the realms of human beings, animals, hungry ghosts and hell; secondly, the realm of form such as the heavens of first, second, third and fourth meditation; and thirdly, the realm of formlessness such as the worlds of void, consciousness, having-nothing, and neither thought nor thoughtlessness. These three worlds are indeed the dark house of transmigration for ordinary beings caught in samsara. Although there is a slight difference in the pains and pleasures they receive and in the length of their lives, they are all, in final observation, not undefiled. Sometimes elated and sometimes depressed, they repeat this cycle endlessly. Receiving such a state of existence repeatedly, they are never freed of the four mistaken views. Whether this is the cause or the result, their existence is one delusional state after another.

The Land of Peace and Happiness was produced through Dharmākara Bodhisattva's compassion and right contemplation, and was established by Amida Tathagata's majestic power of the Primal Vow. Now the existence through birth from womb, or egg, or moisture ceases instantly and the long cord of karmic bondage is cut off forever. Just as an expert archer shoots one arrow after another, one who is born in Amida's Land never wastes time, and even without being urged by the Buddhas, humbly shares the virtues of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva for the sake of sentient beings.

The verse "it transcends all the way of the three worlds" is thus a succinct expression for the excellence of Amida's Land.

9 It is infinite like space,
Vast and boundless.

These two lines designate 'the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of the immeasurable'. The reason why the Buddha wished to have this virtue of the immeasurable when he established his vow is because when he observed the three worlds, they were small and limited having the debris of ruined castles, long and narrow gorges, mounds of dirt, and shores. Their palaces and towers cramped, their land and fields small and crowded, whenever people wished to go anywhere, the roads prevented them from doing so. The mountains and rivers were further obstacles. Moreover, the countries were divided by boundaries. Since there were such impossible hindrances, Bodhisattva Dharmākara made his vow of the virtue of the immeasurable, out of the wish to have his own land be vast and boundless like space. Here 'like space' indicates that even though many people come to be born here, it is as if there were none. 'Vast and boundless' characterizes the meaning of 'like space'. 'Fulfillment' indicates that, even though the sentient beings in the ten quarters who attain birth there, although they are already born, are about to be born, or will be born

there, are innumerable, the land is ultimately so vast and boundless like space that the land will never be filled. Hence:

It is infinite like space,
Vast and boundless.

Question: Since Vimalakīrti's ten-foot square chamber is said to have contained innumerable people and yet had room to spare, why does this land need to be called 'vast'?

Answer: Although the term 'vast' is used here, it is not like space that is measured in units of *kei* or *en*. It is just expressed as being 'like space'. Therefore, why is it necessary to compare it with the ten-foot chamber? Moreover, the chamber is expressed as small, and yet vast. Considered in terms of their results, is there anything that surpasses vastness of Amida's Pure Land?

10 [The Pure Land] is born from the great compassion of true enlightenment,
That is, supramundane roots of good.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of nature. Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? When he observed a certain land, he saw that it was through love and lust that the realm of desire came into existence. He also saw that it was through aversion and attraction as well as meditation that the realms of form and formlessness came into existence. These three worlds are all defiled and have come into being because of heretical views. The people there have been dreaming in a long sleep and do not wish to awake from the dream. That is why the Bodhisattva, out of great compassion, raised the vow: "When I attain Buddhahood, I will establish a land of purity out of the wisdom of the highest, perfect enlightenment and let beings be freed from the three worlds".

'Nature' has the meaning of essence. Since this Pure Land accords with dharma-nature, it does not conflict with dharma-essence. This has the same significance as the emergence of Tathagata's nature of the Jewel-king in the *Garland Sutra*. 'Nature' further signifies that it was fulfilled through repeated practice. It indicates what was fulfilled by Dharmākara Bodhisattva by accumulating all the paramitas and practicing them repeatedly.

Further, the term 'nature' refers to the seed-lineage of sages. At the beginning, Dharmākara Bodhisattva, in the presence of Lokeśvararāja Buddha, realized insight into the nonorigination of all existence. The stage the Bodhisattva attained at that time is called the seed-nature of sages. While abiding in this 'nature', he established the Forty-eight great Vows and gave rise to this land through performing the practices needed. Thus it is called the Pure Land of Peace and Happiness. This 'nature' is what the Bodhisattva realized at the causative stage and it was in the state of result that the Bodhisattva expounded the cause. This is termed 'nature'.

Further, the term 'nature' has the meaning of being necessary, as well as unchanging. It is the nature of the ocean to have one taste; when various streams enter the ocean, they necessarily become one in taste with it, without the ocean being induced to change its taste in any way.

Again, it is like the nature of the human body being impure. For this reason, although there are various things that are excellent in form and fragrance and lovely in taste, all of them become impure upon entering the human body. Those born in the Pure Land of Peace and Happiness have

no impure form, no impure mind, and in the end they all acquire the uncreated dharma-body of purity and equality, for the pure nature of the Land of Peace and Happiness has been fulfilled.

“[The Pure Land] is born from the great compassion of true enlightenment, that is supramundane roots of good” refers to the great enlightenment of equality. The enlightenment of equality is termed ‘true enlightenment’ because equality is the fundamental aspect of all things. Because of the equality of all things, awakening the mind [aspiring for enlightenment] is the same. Because awakening the mind is the same, the Way (*Tao*) is the same. Because the Way is the same, great compassion is the same. Because great compassion is the true cause of attaining the Buddha’s enlightenment, it is termed ‘the great compassion of true enlightenment’.

Concerning compassion there are three kinds: first, compassion generated by sentient beings—this is small compassion; second, compassion generated by the principle of truth-reality—this is medium compassion; and third, non-conditional compassion—this is great compassion. Great compassion is none other than the supramundane good. The Pure Land of Peace and Happiness arises from this great compassion; therefore this great compassion is said to be the root of the Pure Land, hence the phrase:

That is supramundane roots of good.

11 It is filled all over with pure light

Like a mirror or the sun and the moon.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of appearance. The reason why the Buddha wished to have this virtuous adornment is that when he observed the sun moving over the four continents one by one, the light did not shine on the other three continents. In the same way, when he observed the light of a bonfire in a garden, it did not reach beyond ten *jin* (seventy feet). For this reason he made a vow that his pure light would illuminate everywhere. Just as the light of the sun or the moon is perfected of itself, though the Land of Peace and Happiness is vast and boundless, there is nowhere that the pure light does not reach. Hence the phrase:

It is filled all over with pure light

Like a mirror or the sun and the moon.

12 It is composed of all kinds of precious treasures

And is adorned with wondrous ornaments.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of diversity. Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? When he observed a certain land, even the decorations of palaces were made of clay and the multi-storied pavilions were made of wood and stone. Although they were decorated with carved gold inlaid with jade, they were not satisfactory at all. If one wished to perfect hundreds and thousands of ornaments, it would require much painstaking work.

This is why the Buddha raised the great compassion, wishing “When I become a Buddha, my land will necessarily be furnished with precious jewels and be beautiful of itself, their very abundance making us forget they are there, and those born there will necessarily perfect the way to

Buddhahood.” Such adornments will never be produced even though Viśvakarman proud of his incomparable skill were to try to perfect them through repeated contemplation.

The ‘nature’ [of all kinds of precious treasures] signifies the essence of all existence. Since the Buddha’s wish is originally pure, how could the fruit be impure? Hence the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* states, “Because the [Vow] mind is pure, the Buddha-land is pure”. Hence the lines:

It is composed of all kinds of precious treasures
And is adorned with wondrous ornaments.

13 The pure light, blazing fiercely,
Shines brilliantly all over the world.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of magnificent illumination. Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? When he observed a certain land, he found that there were differences of quality in its inhabitants. Because there were such differences, some were valued as superior and others inferior. Because of such views, some were regarded as right and others as wrong. Once one entertains such discriminative views of right and wrong, one is destined to fall into the three worlds of delusion. For this reason the Buddha raised the Vow of absolute equality out of great compassion, declaring, “I wish my land to be incomparably excellent in its brilliance, just as nothing can surpass the brilliance of gold in the human and heavenly realms”.

How can one surpass the other? If a clear mirror is placed before a nugget of gold, its brilliance will be outshone. If a nugget of gold of today is placed before one from Śākyamuni Buddha’s time, its brilliance will be outshone. If a nugget of gold from the Buddha’s time is placed before a nugget of Jambūnada gold, its brilliance will be outshone. If a nugget of Jambūnada gold is placed before the gold dust from the path of Cakravartin King in the ocean, its brilliance will be outshone. If the gold dust from the path of Cakravartin King is placed before the Gold Mountains, its brilliance will be outshone. If a nugget of gold from the Gold Mountains is placed before a nugget from Mount Sumeru, its brilliance will be outshone. If a nugget of gold from Mount Sumeru is placed before a gold necklace of the gods of the Thirty-three Heavens, its brilliance will be outshone. If a gold necklace of the gods of the Thirty-three Heavens is placed before a nugget of gold from Yāma Heaven, its brilliance will be outshone. If a nugget of gold from Yāma Heaven is placed before a nugget of gold from Tuṣṭa Heaven, its brilliance will be outshone. If a nugget of gold from Tuṣṭa Heaven is placed before a nugget of gold from Nirmāranati Heaven, its brilliance will be outshone. If a nugget of gold from Nirmāranati Heaven is placed before a nugget of gold from Paranirmitavaśavartin Heaven, its brilliance will be outshone. If a nugget of gold from Paranirmitavaśavartin Heaven is placed amidst the light of the Land of Peace and Bliss, its brilliance will be outshone. The reason is that the golden light of that land is not produced from impure karma, and everything therein is produced out of the virtue of purity. The Pure Land of Peace and Happiness arises from the pure act of Bodhisattva Dharmākara who has attained the insight into the nonorigination of all existence. It is reigned over by the Dharma-king, Amida. Because it is produced by the decisive condition caused by Amida Tathagata, the two lines say:

The pure light, blazing fiercely,
Shines brilliantly all over the world.

‘Shines all over the world’ indicates that it illuminates both the world and the beings therein.

14 The jewel ornaments are soft and pliant
 Like grasses bending to the right and left.
 The pleasant sensation produced by touching them
 Surpasses that when one touches *kācilindika* grass.

What is described in these four lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of softness. Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? When he observed a certain land, though gold and jade were highly valued, he found that they were useless as clothing. Although bright mirrors were considered as precious, they were useless as carpets. In this way, what pleases the eye is not always what the body finds pleasant. The sense of touch and the sense of sight contradict each other. This is why the Buddha vowed, “the six sense organs of the humans and heavenly beings in my land be harmonious like water and milk, so that they be free of the animosity of the Chu and the Yue”.

Therefore, he wished that the seven jewels [in his Pure Land] be soft, pleasant to the eye and what the body finds pleasant.

Kācilindika is the name of a soft grass in India, which gives a pleasant feeling to anyone who touches it. It is, therefore used as a simile [for the pleasure of Amida’s Land]. The commentator [who is myself, Tanluan] says to himself: The soil, stones, grasses, and trees in this world each have their own set form. I wonder why the translator [Bodhiruci] likened the treasures [of Amida’s Land] to grass. It must be solely because they are pliant like grasses moving in every way in the wind. If I had participated in the translation [of the *Treatise*, I might have translated it in another way.

‘The pleasant sensation produced’ means that when one touches *kācilindika* grass, one becomes attached to its pleasant sensation, but in that Land one attains the pleasure of Dharma when one touches the soft jewels therein. The pleasure attained in this world and that in the Pure Land are different from each other. How can we compare the two kinds of sensation?

Hence the verse:

The jewel ornaments are soft and pliant
 Like grasses bending to the right and left.
 The pleasant sensation produced by touching them
 Surpasses that when one touches *kācilindika* grass.

15 Myriad varieties of jeweled flowers
 Are scattered over the ponds, streams, and fountains.
 When a soft breeze stirs the flowers and leaves,
 The lights emitted are intricately blended.

What is described in these four lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of water. Why did the Buddha wish to establish this vow? When he observed a certain land, he found that the thick spray from the surging waves on the rivers frightened people, and that the ice floes on the sea interfered with their lives and oppressed their hearts. In this way, they felt uneasy about what lay before them, and they were filled with fear with what lay behind them.

Observing such miseries, Bodhisattva [Dharmākara] raised his great compassion, resolving, “When I attain Buddhahood, may all the streams, fountains, ponds, and pools be in harmony with the palaces and may the myriad varieties of jeweled flowers be scattered over the waters. When soft breeze ripple over them, they emit patterns of light, pleasing the minds and comforting the bodies of people in all possible ways”. Hence the verse:

Myriad varieties of jeweled flowers
 Are scattered over the ponds, streams, and fountains.
 When a soft breeze stirs the flowers and leaves,
 The lights emitted are intricately blended.

16 The palaces and pavilions command a view of
 The worlds of the ten quarters without obstruction.
 Various kinds of trees radiate different colors
 And jeweled balustrades surround the entire land.

What is described in these four lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of earth. Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? When he observed a certain land, he found that there were high and steep mountains with withered trees on their ridges. He also found that thick shrubs and weeds filled the valleys and ravines of the high peaks. Its vast blue ocean looked like one endless river flowing on as far as the eye can see. No one had ever set foot in its broad fens lush with wild grasses.

Observing such scenery, Bodhisattva [Dharmākara] raised the vow of great compassion, resolving “I wish my land be flat like the palm of my hand, so that at a glance the palaces and towers are all like mirrors clearly reflecting everything there is around them in the ten directions—their reflections seemingly real yet having no substance in reality. May the jeweled trees and balustrades reflect each other, making for the brilliance of the land”. Hence the verse:

The palaces and pavilions command a view of
 The worlds of the ten quarters without obstruction.
 Various kinds of trees radiate different colors
 And jeweled balustrades surround the entire land.

17 Nets interwoven with countless treasures
 Are spread across the sky.
 All kinds of bells ring out,
 Producing the sound of the wondrous Dharma.

What is described in these four lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of space. Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? When he observed a certain land, he found the skies were filled with smoke, clouds, dust, and mist, with heavy rain and thunder pouring down from above. Ominous signs such as strange rainbows constantly appeared in the sky. As a result, people were so terrified that their hair stood on end.

Observing such a scene, Bodhisattva [Dharmākara] raised his great compassion, resolving “May the sky in my land be filled with nets interwoven with treasures, their large and small bells ringing the exquisite sounds of the five-note scale, in which *kung* and *shang* spontaneously harmonize,

proclaiming the Dharma leading to enlightenment. People will never grow weary of seeing such scenes, thus accumulating merits for the fulfillment of the Dharma. Hence the verse:

Nets interwoven with countless treasures
Are spread across the sky.
All kinds of bells ring out,
Producing the sound of the wondrous Dharma.

18 Adorned with flowers and robes raining down from above,
The land is filled with numerous kinds of fragrance.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of rain. Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? When he observed a certain land, he found that people spread offerings of clothes on the ground, hoping honorable sages would tread on them, or tried to express their reverence for them with incense, flowers, and precious treasures. Those who lack sufficient stock of good karma and so are unconcerned about it, however, were not able to accomplish it. This is why he raised his Vow of great compassion, resolving "I wish such offerings be constantly raining down in my land corresponding to people's wishes".

Why is 'rain' applied here? Concerning such a question, one who interprets this literally will probably say, "If flowers and robes are falling constantly, they will completely fill the land, reaching the sky. How can it be prevented?" This is why the metaphor of rain used. When rain falls at suitable intervals, there will be no fear of disaster or flood. Indeed, how could there be anything which causes anxiety in the Land of Peace and Happiness?

The sutras say, "Six times a day and night, it rains jeweled robes and jeweled flowers. The substance of jewels is soft, and when one steps on them, one sinks four inches. When one raises one's foot, the jewels spring back as they were. After they have been used as offerings, they are hidden beneath the ground just like water flows into a hole in the ground". Hence the verse:

Adorned with flowers and robes raining down from above,
The land is filled with numerous kinds of fragrance.

19 The Buddha's wisdom is bright and pure like the sun,
Dispersing the darkness of ignorance in the world.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of light. Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? When he observed a certain land, he found that although the aureole of its Buddha shines like the sun on the people, and yet it could not vanquish the darkness of their ignorance. This is why he raised his Vow, resolving "I wish the light in my land be dispelling people's darkness of ignorance, leading them to realize Buddha-wisdom, so that there should be no such meaningless affairs". It is further said that the light of the Land of Peace and Happiness well dispels the darkness of people, since it arises from the Tathagata's wisdom. A sutra states, "There is a Buddha-land, where the Buddha's work is performed by means of his light", and this is the case here. Hence the verse:

The Buddha's wisdom is bright and pure like the sun,
Dispersing the darkness of ignorance in the world.

20 Its pure sound deeply enlightens beings far and wide.
Subtle and wondrous, it is heard throughout the ten quarters.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of wondrous sound. Why did the Buddha wish to establish this vow? When he observed a certain land, he found that even if there were a right teaching, its fame did not reach far. And even if it reached far and widely, it is not subtle and wondrous enough and could not enlighten beings there. This is why he wished to have this adornment of the virtue of wondrous sound.

In India a sacred religious practice is called 'pure (brahma) act' and wondrous words are called 'pure (brahma) words'. In that country, since the god Brahmā is respected highly, the notion of 'pure (brahma)' is often used for praising something. Again, in that country [India] the laws are always conceived in relation to purity.

'Sound' indicates 'name', that is, the name of the Lord of Peace and Happiness. A sutra states, "If one only hears the name of the Land of Peace and Happiness and make the resolution to be born there, one will surely realize it as one has resolved". This sutra passage proves that the name enables one to attain enlightenment. In a commentary it is stated, "This Pure Land does not belong to the three worlds. Why is this so? It is not a realm of desire because it is free of desire. It is not a realm of form because it has a ground to stand on. Again neither is it a realm of formlessness, because it assumes a form. It is the world established by the [Dharmākara] Bodhisattva's special act". Transcending form and yet having form, it is termed 'subtle', and having the power to enlighten beings, it is termed 'wondrous'. Hence the verse:

Its pure sound deeply enlightens beings far and wide.
Subtle and wondrous, it is heard throughout the ten quarters.

21 Amida, the perfectly enlightened,
Who is its dharma-king, fully sustains it with his good.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of the lord. Why did the Buddha wish to establish this vow? When he observed a certain land where a rākṣasa was the ruler, he found that the people there were devouring each other. If, however, its cakravartin king returned and parked his treasure-chariot in front of the palace, all the misery was banished everywhere from the land. This is likened to the fields of grass bending to the wind. Indeed, nothing happens without a cause. For this reason the Buddha raised his Vow, resolving "May there be a Dharma-king in my land at all times, and may the land be abidingly sustained by the Dharma-king's power of good".

As to 'abides and sustains', we find an allegory of a crane that remained at the grave of Zian, and bringing him back to life, enabled him to live for a thousand more years. It also reminds us of another allegory of a mother-fish holding her eggs in mind so that they are not harmed during the dry season.

Likewise, the Land of Peace and Happiness is well sustained by the enlightenment of Amida Buddha. Indeed, there is nothing in Amida's Land that is not related to his enlightenment. Hence the verse:

Amida, the perfectly enlightened,
Who is its dharma-king, fully sustains it.

22 The beings of this Tathagata's pure lotus
Are born transformed from the lotus of perfect enlightenment.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of the fellow beings. Why did the Buddha wish to establish this vow? When he observed a certain land, whenever beings were born there, for some the receptacle of their body was their mother's womb and blood, and for others the source of their birth was feces and urine. In some cases, vile and despicable children were born to high-ranking noble families. In other cases, from lowly parentage a prodigy was born. Accordingly the parents of the vile children sometimes felt like they were holding fire in their bosom because of the revilement by others, and those of a prodigy sometimes felt like they were holding ice in their bosom because of the insults of others. This is why he raised his Vow, resolving "I wish all people in my land be born from within the Tathagata's pure lotus flower, and all of them be equal having no revilement by others". Hence the verse:

The beings of this Tathagata's pure lotus
Are born transformed from the lotus of perfect enlightenment.

23 Enjoying the taste of the Buddha Dharma,
They partake of meditation and samadhi as their food.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of enjoyment. Why did the Buddha wish to establish this vow? When he observed a certain land, he found that people robbed birds' nests and broke open the eggs to prepare sumptuous dishes. Or he also found that people pointed to a sand-bag hanging on the wall in order to console their hungry children during a famine. Oh how pitiful they are! This is why he raised his Vow of great compassion, resolving "I wish all people in my land partake of the Buddha Dharma, meditation, and samadhi for their food in order never to be troubled with finding other foods".

'Enjoying the taste of the Buddha Dharma' means, for instance, that when Candrasūryapradīpa Buddha expounded the *Lotus Sutra*, it lasted sixty small kalpas, and so the audience had to sit in one place for the entire time. Yet, however, they felt as if it only lasted the length of a meal, and so none of them became weary in body or mind.

"They partake of meditation and samadhi as their food" means that all the great bodhisattvas in the Pure Land are constantly in samadhi, and so they have no need for food. 'Samadhi' functions in such a way that when the humans and devas there desire food, an array of dishes of a hundred different flavors appears in front of them. Seeing their colors and smelling their flavors, they enjoy the pleasant sensations physically and spontaneously become satisfied. Once satisfied, the dishes disappear, and if they desire to enjoy more, the dishes appear again, as stated in the *Larger Sutra*. Hence the verse:

Enjoying the taste of the Buddha Dharma,
They partake of meditation and samadhi as their food.

24 Forever free from physical and mental afflictions,
They constantly enjoy pleasure without interruption.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of being free from all afflictions. Why did the Buddha wish to establish this vow? When he observed a certain land, he found that an official who stood high in his emperor's favor in the morning would be shaking in fear before the executioner's axe in the evening. He also found that a child who was abandoned in the wild grass would grow up to sit at the head of the ten-foot square banquet table spread with a sumptuous feast. He saw a person who sent off with much fanfare would return home dressed in mourning black. In this way, things may turn out differently from what one had expected, and one's fortune may be plundered. This is why he raised his vow, resolving "I wish that the peace and bliss in my land continue entirely without break".

'Physical afflictions' are hunger and thirst, cold and heat, to be killed or injured, and so forth. 'Mental afflictions' are to be troubled over right and wrong, or profit and loss, and to suffer because of the three poisons. Hence the verse:

Forever free from physical and mental afflictions,
They constantly enjoy pleasure without interruption.

25 In the world of the good of Mahayana, all beings are equal,
And not even the words of disparagement exist.
Nor is anyone born there as
A woman, or disabled, or one having the seeds of two vehicles.

What is described in these four lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of the gate of the great principle. The 'gate' indicates the entrance leading to the great principle, where the 'great principle' refers to the reason for the way of Mahayana. If one who intends to enter a castle finds its gate, one can enter it, and in the same way, if one is born in the Land of Peace and Happiness, one is led through that gate to the culmination of the Mahayana ideal.

Why did the Buddha wish to establish this vow? When he observed a certain land, he found that although there were Buddha-tathagatas and holy sages there, because of the defilements of the land, they discriminated the Dharma of one vehicle into the teaching of the three vehicles. Its people would slander women for flirting with men by arching their eyebrows. Or, again, people would ridicule a mute for using sign language. This is why he raised his Vow, resolving "I wish my land be that of the Mahayana having only the one taste of equality. There would be no seed lacking the potentiality for attaining Buddhahood, and also there would be no word for women or deformity". Hence the verse:

In the world of the good of Mahayana, all beings are equal,
And not even the words of disparagement exist.
Nor is anyone born there as
A woman, or disabled, or one having the seeds of two vehicles.

Question: When we refer to the *Sutra on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* expounded by Śākyamuni at Rājagṛha, it is stated in one of Bodhisattva Dharmākara's forty-eight Vows: "If, when I attain Buddhahood, the number of sravakas in my land could be counted and known, may I not

attain the perfect enlightenment.” This is the first testimony to there being sravakas in Amida’s Land. Further, in the *Commentary on the Ten Bodhisattva Stages*, Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna composed the praises of Amida’s virtue:

Having transcended the prison of the three worlds,
 One has eyes like lotus petals.
 There are innumerable such sravakas in that land,
 And so I bow my head and worship Amida Buddha.

This is the second testimony to there being sravakas there. Also in the *Discourse on the Mahayana*, it is stated: “Buddha-lands are not all the same, differing from each other. In some Buddha-lands there are sanghas that are exclusively sravakas. Or in other Buddha-lands there are sanghas that are exclusively bodhisattvas. There are also other Buddha-lands where sanghas are formed by bodhisattvas as well as sravakas, which is like those in Amida’s Land of Peace and Happiness”. This is the third testimony to there being sravakas there. In many sutras where the Land of Peace and Happiness is spoken of, they say that there are sravakas, but do not say that there are no sravakas. A sravaka is one of the two vehicles, and in the *Treatise on the Pure Land* we find a description that there are ‘no terms such as two vehicles’ in Amida’s Land. How is it possible to reconcile this difference?

Answer: Conjecturing on it, the two vehicles of sravakas and pratyekabuddhas should not exist in the Pure Land of Peace and Happiness. The reason why these texts speak of the existence of sravakas there is that where is sickness, there should be a medicine to cure it—this only stands to reason. In the *Lotus Sutra*, it is stated, “Since Tathagata Śākyamuni appeared in the world of the five defilements, he divided the teaching of one vehicle into three”, but since the Pure Land is originally not subject to the five defilements, it is evident that there is no need for the three vehicles there. The *Lotus Sutra* states: “From what sort of bondage are the sravakas liberated? ‘Liberation from delusion’ is what is here called liberation. Those people, however, have not attained complete liberation, because they have yet to realize the supreme enlightenment.” To clarify this point theoretically, since an arhat has yet to achieve perfect liberation, it is necessary for them to be born in some realm. On the other hand, they will never be reborn in the three worlds again. Since there is no place for them to be reborn in the three worlds again, there is no other place for them to be born except Amida’s Pure Land.

When the word ‘sravaka’ is used for those in the Pure Land, it merely refers to their original status in other worlds. This is just like the case of Śakra who had been called Kausika though later on, he became the king of the gods. The Buddha intentionally called him Kausika, when he was talking to Śakra, in order to let people know his original status. Thus, the word sravaka in the Pure Land is being used in the same way.

Further, in this *Treatise*, it is simply stated that “No one is born there as one having the seeds of two vehicles”. It means that in the Land of Peace and Happiness no seeds for the two vehicles are born, but why is it necessary to prevent those of the two vehicles from other lands from coming to be born there? It is just as we find oranges in the fruit shops in Luo yang though orange trees do not grow north of the Yang zi jian. Or again we might say that parrots do not migrate from Long xi, but we find them in cages in the kingdoms of Zhao and Wei, even though these two things do not grow there. So is it with the sravakas in Amida’s Pure Land. With this explanation we can reconcile the discrepancy between the sutra and the treatise.

Question: There is a word for everything. When there is a thing, there is a word. If there are no such things as the two vehicles, women, and disabled in the Land of Peace and Happiness, why then is it necessary to mention that there are no words for these three?

Answer: It is just as a weak-willed bodhisattva who cannot summon up courage is disparaged as a 'sravaka'. Again, it is just as a man who flatters others and is effeminate is disparaged as a 'woman'. Again, it is just as a man who has eyes to see and yet is ignorant of things is disparaged as 'blind'. Again, it is just as a man who has ears to hear and yet cannot grasp the meaning is disparaged as 'deaf'. Again, it is just as a man who has a tongue to speak and yet stutters is called 'dumb'. In this way, even though one's faculties are intact, one might still be 'disparaged'. This is why it is necessary to say that 'not even the words of disparagement exist'. In the Pure Land there are no such words of flattery or disparagement.

Question: Enquiring into the Primal Vow of Bodhisattva Dharmākara and the praise of Amida by Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna, Amida's Pure Land is praised as outstanding for there being so many sravakas. How can you reconcile it?

Answer: Since sravakas regard the reality-limit as the final enlightenment, presumably they do not produce the seed of aspiration for fulfilling the enlightenment of Buddhahood. The Buddha, however, through the inconceivable supernatural power of his Primal Vow, embraces such sravakas and enables them to be born in his land, where they are certainly made to give rise to the aspiration for the highest perfect enlightenment through its supernatural power. To take an illustration, if a *chin* bird enters water, all the fish and shellfish die, but they are all revived if a rhinoceros enters the water. In this way, sravakas awaken to the Mahayana aspiration for the highest perfect enlightenment. For this reason, it is outstanding. Of the five inconceivabilities taught in the sutras, the inconceivability of the power of the Buddha Dharma is supreme. The Buddha skillfully awakens sravakas to aspire for the highest perfect enlightenment. Truly, this is most inconceivable.

26 All that sentient beings desire
Are perfectly fulfilled in that land.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of all aspirations being fulfilled. Why did the Buddha wish to establish this vow? When he observed a certain land, he found that a high-ranking person of great repute could not live in seclusion, separated from society, or that an ordinary person of lowly birth could not find a way to raise himself to a high position. Or, further, some people found that they could not control the length of their lives due to their own past karma, which is like the case of the hermit Asita. In this way, blown about by the winds of karma, people cannot attain the freedom to live as they want. For this reason he raised the Vow, resolving "I wish that in my land all people would be able to have their aspirations fulfilled according to their wishes". Hence the verse:

All that sentient beings desire
Are perfectly fulfilled in that land.

27 For this reason I aspire to be born
In the Buddha-land of Amida.

These two lines summarize Bodhisattva Vasubandhu's reason for contemplating the fulfillment of the seventeen kinds of adornments of that land as the place where he wished to be born. His explanation of the purity of the land ends here.

28 Next is the contemplation of the purity of the beings in the Pure Land. This section is divided into two parts: first, the contemplation of the virtues that adorn Amida Tathagata, and second, the contemplation of the virtues that adorn the bodhisattvas. As to the contemplation of the virtues that adorn the Tathagata, there are eight kinds as indicated in their respective passages.

Question: Some commentators may interpret 'beings' to refer to those who undergo many births and deaths while transmigrating in the three worlds. Here, however, this term is being used as a noun for the Buddha and the bodhisattvas in the Pure Land. What does this mean?

Answer: A sutra states "Any one thing is bound to have innumerable names, and a name has innumerable meanings". The understanding that 'beings' are destined to undergo many births and deaths while transmigrating is a Hinayana version of the 'beings in the three worlds', and is not a Mahayana one. The meaning of 'beings' in Mahayana is akin to that described in the *Sutra on Neither Increasing nor Decreasing*: "Beings neither arise nor perish." Why is that so? If we say beings are born, it would mean they are destined to be born again and again in endless repetition. But if beings are neither born nor commit the error of being born again, then for this reason they are said to be nonarising. On the other hand, if beings were to arise, then they would necessarily have to perish. Since what exists in the Pure Land neither arises nor perishes, here the meaning of 'beings' refers to those who are endowed with his quality of nonarising and nonperishing. Therefore, it is stated in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sutra* that the five aggregates are the source of suffering, but are originally empty. The beings in the Pure Land are without the five aggregates and thus empty. This sutra is one example that explains it.

29 Innumerable great kings of jewels

Comprise the wondrous, pure lotus flower-throne of Amida.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of the seat. Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment of his seat? When he observed a bodhisattva, he found that the bodhisattva in the last stage spread grass on the ground and sat on it for attaining the supreme, perfect enlightenment. Men and gods who observed it, however, did not give rise to supreme conviction, supreme reverence, supreme aspiration, and supreme determination to seek for enlightenment. Hence he vowed, "When I become a Buddha, I wish the Buddha-throne would be a wondrous, pure lotus flower comprised of innumerable kings of jewels". 'Innumerable' indicates what is described in the *Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*:

On the seven-jeweled ground you will see the lotus throne comprised of great kings of jewels. Each petal of the lotus emanates the colors of a hundred kinds of jewels, and has eighty-four thousand veins; it is like a celestial painting, with each vein emitting eighty-four thousand rays of light. The smaller petals are two hundred and fifty yojanas in length and width. This lotus flower has eighty-four thousand petals, and between the petals, there are a hundred kotis of cinta-manis, king of gems, which serve as brilliant adornments. Each mani emits a thousand rays of light which are like canopies made of the seven kinds of jewels, and cover the entire surface of the ground. The throne of the lotus is made of Śakra's jewels, and is lavishly adorned with eighty thousand diamonds, kimsuka jewels, brahma mani-jewels, and exquisite pearl nets. On the throne there are naturally four columns with jeweled banners, and each jeweled banner appears as large as

eighty-four thousand kotis of Mount Sumerus. Above these bannered columns are jeweled curtains like those in the palace of Yāma Heaven, which five hundred kotis of exquisite and wonderful jewels that serve as brilliant adornments. Each jewel emits eighty-four thousand rays of light, and each ray of light glows with eighty-four thousand different shades of gold. Each ray of golden light suffuses the jeweled Land of Peace and Happiness and transforms itself everywhere into different forms, such as diamond thrones, nets of pearls, and clouds of various kinds of flowers. In all the ten directions, it freely transforms itself, performing the Buddha's work.

The adornments such as these are beyond count. Hence the verse:

Innumerable great kings of jewels
Comprise the wondrous, pure lotus flower-throne of Amida.

30 As soon as his aureole extends one fathom from his body,
His figure transcends that of all other beings.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of the bodily acts. Why did the Buddha wish to adorn his body in such a way? When he observed the body of a certain Buddha, it emitted an aura of light one *chang* long around himself. Such radiance was hardly superior to that of men, and was similar to that of a cakravartin king. It was also exactly like that of Devadatta who lacked one of the thirty-two major physical characteristics and, therefore, instigated Ajātaśatru to rebel. In the same way, Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta and the rest turned against Śākyamuni like mantises, which is an example of lacking this characteristic. This is why he fulfilled such adornment of the bodily acts.

According to the definition in this country, six *ch'ih* equals one fathom. The *Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* states that Amida Tathagata's height is six hundred thousand kotis of nayutas of yojanas multiplied by the number of the sands of the Ganges, and that that Buddha's aureole is as broad as a hundred kotis of the triple-thousand great thousand worlds. The translator (Bodhiruci) of the *Treatise* expressed it using the notion of fathom, but is that not dim? What is he suggesting? Provincial folk do not have an accurate grasp of length and width, and so when they want to measure it, they extend their arms and call it 'one fathom'. If we accept such a way of measuring, we can say that the translator must have applied the length of Amida Tathagata's outstretched arms as the standard. One fathom, therefore, is equal to the width of six hundred thousand kotis of nayutas of yojanas multiplied by the number of the sands of the Ganges. Hence the verse:

As soon as his aureole extends one fathom from his body,
His figure transcends that of all other beings.

Question: The *Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* states, "Every Buddha-tathagata, having the dharma-realm as their body, enters the minds of all beings. Therefore, when you visualize the Buddha in your mind, it is your mind itself that possesses the thirty-two major physical characteristics and the eighty minor marks of the Buddha's body. Thus, your mind produces the Buddha's image, and is itself the Buddha. The ocean of perfectly and universally enlightened Buddhas arises from your visualizing mind". What does this mean?

Answer: While the term 'body' refers to an aggregate of various elements, the term 'realm' refers to the differentiation of phenomena. The realm of sight, for instance, depends upon the five causes and conditions: the sight-organ [i.e., the eye], the sight-object [i.e., what is perceived by the eye], space, light, and the volition to see. This means that the eye 'sees' depending on its own cause and condition, and not that of others. This is because its function differs from the other realms of sense. The realms of hearing, smelling, and so on are also thus.

Concerning 'every Buddha-tathagata, having the dharma-realm as their body', the dharma-realm refers to the minds of sentient beings. Since the mind can produce all mundane and supramundane objects, it is called dharma-realm. As the dharma-realm, it [i.e., the mind] produces all the major characteristics and minor marks of the Tathagata just as the sight-object and other four elements make up the function of the eye. Thereby, since the Buddha's body is called the dharma-realm body, this body does not work as an object of other functions. Therefore, it is said that the Buddha 'enters the minds of all beings'.

Concerning 'when you visualize the Buddha in your mind, it is your mind itself that possesses the thirty-two major physical characteristics and the eighty minor marks of the Buddha's body', this means that when the Buddha is visualized in the minds of sentient beings, the Buddha's physical characteristics and minor marks appear in their minds. It is like a reflection of an image appearing on clear water, in which case the water and the image are neither different nor identical. Therefore, we can say that the Buddha's major characteristics and minor marks are nothing other than the contemplating mind.

Concerning 'your mind produces the Buddha's image', this means that the mind can produce the Buddha's image. 'The mind itself is the Buddha' means that there is no Buddha apart from the mind. It is as fire comes out of the wood it burns it, and yet cannot exist apart from the wood. Because it cannot exist apart from the wood, it is able to burn the wood. The wood is burned by the fire, and thus does the wood become the fire itself.

Concerning 'the ocean of perfectly and universally enlightened Buddhas arises from your visualizing mind', the words 'perfectly and universally enlightened' mean knowing truly and rightly the dharma-realm as such. Since the dharma-realm is formless, all Buddhas dwell in non-knowing. Because of non-knowing, they never fail to know all things. Non-knowing and yet knowing is the right, universal wisdom. Since such wisdom is deep and vast and boundless, it is likened to an ocean.

31 The Tathagata's voice is exquisite,
Its august tones resounding throughout the ten quarters.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of the verbal acts. Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? When he observed a certain Tathagata, he noticed that his name was not highly respected. It was like Śākyamuni being disparagingly called Gautama by the non-Buddhist philosophers. On the day when that Tathagata achieved enlightenment, his voice could only reach as far as Brahmā Heaven. For this reason the Buddha made a vow, resolving, "When I attain Buddhahood, my exquisite voice shall resound far and wide, making all those who hear it realize insight into nonorigination". Hence the vow:

The Tathagata's voice is exquisite,

Its august tones resounding throughout the ten quarters.

32 Just like earth, water, fire, wind, and space,
He has no thought of discrimination.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of the mental acts. Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? When he observed a certain Tathagata explaining the Dharma, he noticed that Tathagata distinguishing it into innumerable different classes and levels. That Tathagata would say such things as this is black, and this is white, but this is neither black nor white, as well as this Dharma is inferior, average, superior, or superb. With such innumerable differences of classes, he distinguished the Dharma into many levels. For this reason the Buddha made a vow resolving, "When I attain Buddhahood, I shall be like the earth that indiscriminately bears the light and heavy; like the water that equally nourishes the weeds and useful plants; like the fire that impartially produces fragrant and noxious odors; like the wind that invariably stirs over one, whether one is asleep or awake; like space that is indifferent to whether there is something there or not". Thus nourishing such a mind within, he imparted peace to all beings around him impartially. Namely, by going forth empty-handed, and returning fully matured, he thereby brought the process to completion. Hence the verse:

Just like earth, water, fire, wind, and space,
He has no thought of discrimination.

33 Devas and humans, the immovable ones,
Are born from the ocean of pure wisdom.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of the great assembly. Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? When he observed a certain Tathagata, the people of the assembly who gathered to listen to his discourse on Dharma were not all the same in their capacities, dispositions, and desires. As far as their ability to understand the Buddha's wisdom went, some of them fell away and others sank back. Since they were not all the same, the wisdom of the congregation was not pure and genuine. For this reason he made a vow, resolving, "When I become a Buddha, I wish all devas and humans would be born from the Tathagata's ocean of pure wisdom". 'Ocean' means that the Buddha's all-knowing wisdom is deep, vast, and without limit, and does not let the deceased forms of the middle and lower vehicles along with their sundry good acts dwell within. In this sense it is likened to the ocean. Hence:

Devas and humans, the immovable ones,
Are born from the ocean of pure wisdom.

'Immovable' refers to the fact that devas and humans in the Pure Land perfect the faculties of the Mahayana and never fall back from that state.

34 Like Sumeru, the king of mountains,
The Tathagata is supreme, wondrous, and unequalled.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of the leader. Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? When he observed a certain Tathagata,

in the assembly there were those who behaved disruptively like Devadatta. He also observed that a king of a country competed against the Buddha without yielding to him. Also there was a king, who, being attracted to another engagement, forgot he had invited the Buddha to the palace. In such a way, the majestic power of the ultimate leader, the Buddha, could not be fully displayed. For this reason Bodhisattva Dharmākara made a vow, resolving “When I become a Buddha, I shall never let any other beings stand on an equal footing with me, and as the Dharma-king, there shall be no secular king in my land”. Hence the vow:

Like Sumeru, the king of mountains,
The Tathagata is supreme, wondrous, and unequalled.

35 Devas and humans, the valiant ones,
Worship, circumambulate, and adore the Buddha.

What is described in these two lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of the lordship. Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? When he observed a certain Buddha-tathagata, in the assembly there were some who did not have a high regard for him. It is just like the story of the monk who said to Śākyamuni, “If you do not solve my fourteen problems, I will follow another say”. It is also like Kokālika who slandered Śāriputra and refused to accept the Buddha’s words of reprimand three times. It is also like a follower of the non-Buddhist ways who tentatively becomes the Buddha’s disciple and yet keeps searching for shortcomings in his teachings. Again, it is also like the demon-king of the Sixth Heaven who is always causing trouble for the Buddha. In this way, there might be many who are disrespectful of the Buddha in various ways. Hence he made a vow resolving, “When I become a Buddha, the devas, humans, and other disciples shall never tire of paying homage to me”. ‘Devas and humans’, however, means that in the Pure Land there are neither women nor the eight kinds of demon-gods. Hence the verse:

Devas and humans, the valiant ones,
Worship, circumambulate, and adore the Buddha.

36 Contemplating the power of the Buddha’s Primal Vow,
I see that no one who ever encounters it passes it by in vain.
It quickly brings to fullness and perfection
The great treasure ocean of virtues.

What is described in these four lines is termed the fulfillment of the adornment of the virtue of sustaining without any futility. Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? When he observed a certain Tathagata, he noticed that no one except the sravakas among his disciples sought after the Buddha’s path to enlightenment. Or there were some who happened to encounter a Buddha and yet could not escape from falling into the three evil realms, such as Sunakṣatra, Devadatta and Kokālika. In other cases, there were some who, having heard the name of a Buddha, raised an aspiration to attain the highest enlightenment, and yet fell back to the stages of sravaka and pratyekabuddha through encountering wrong conditions. There are such ones as these who pass their lives in vain or retrogress. This is why Dharmākara made a vow, resolving “When I become a Buddha, those who encounter me will surely gain the supreme great treasure”. Hence the verse:

Contemplating the power of the Buddha’s Primal Vow,

I see that no one who ever encounters it passes it by in vain.
It quickly brings to fullness and perfection
The great treasure ocean of virtues.

The meaning of 'sustaining' is as explained above. Here ends the contemplation of the eight kinds of virtue that adorn the Buddha.

37 The following is the contemplation of the great bodhisattvas' fulfillment of the four kinds of virtuous adornment of Amida's Land of Peace and Happiness.

Question: We have already contemplated the fulfillment of the virtues that adorn the Tathagata. Then what could be lacking in these contemplations, and why should we again contemplate the virtues of the bodhisattvas in that land?

Answer: Whenever there is a supreme sovereign, there are wise retainers attending him. The emperors of Yao and Shun who reigned peacefully without having to do anything special are good examples of this. In the same way, even for Amida Tathagata the Dharma-king, it is his retainers, the great bodhisattvas, who are the ones that fully provide the support to Amida's work of saving sentient beings. When the amount of firewood piled up is small, it will never make a bonfire.

According to the *Larger Sutra*, there are innumerable and unlimited number of great bodhisattvas in the Land of Amida Buddha. Among them are Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, who would attain the stage of succession to Buddhahood after one lifetime in some other land. If one calls their names, takes refuge in them, or contemplates them as the 'Chapter on the Universal Gate' of the *Lotus Sutra* states, "One's wishes will never go unfulfilled".

Further, bodhisattvas pursue virtues as unceasingly as the sea swallows the waters of rivers. It is also like an episode of Tathagata Śākyamuni, who heard a blind monk call out, "Whoever loves virtues, please thread this needle for me". Then the Tathagata, rising from meditation, came to the monk saying, "I love virtue", and threaded the needle for him. Hearing the Buddha's voice, the blind monk was startled and delighted, and said to him, "O World-honored One, is your virtue not yet fulfilled?" Then the Buddha replied, "My virtue is entirely fulfilled, and there is nothing that needs to be added. My Buddha-body is produced solely from the virtues I have accumulated. Since I realize the indebtedness that one incurs when accumulating virtues, for that reason I love it".

As your question indicates, contemplating Amida Buddha's virtues, no vow has been left unfulfilled. We will now consider the virtues of the bodhisattvas for the same reasons as stated above.

38 The Land of Peace and Happiness, pure and immaculate,
Is where the undefiled wheel of Dharma is turning constantly.
The transformed Buddhas and bodhisattvas there are like suns.
And abide immovable like Mount Sumeru.

Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? When he observed a certain Buddha-land, he noticed that There were only minor bodhisattvas who were unable to perform the Buddha's work universally in the worlds of the ten quarters. Or in other Buddha-lands, he found only sravakas, humans, or devas, whose powers to benefit others were restricted. For this reason he made a vow,

resolving “I wish there would be innumerable great bodhisattvas in my land. Without moving from their original place, they will reach the ten quarters, assuming various transformed bodies and practicing in accord with reality, and thus constantly performing the Buddha’s work”. It is just as the sun, while located in the sky, reflects itself in hundreds of rivers. Is the sun here on the ground, or there in the sky?

As the *Great Collection Sutra* says, “When a man always maintains the levee, he will not have to worry when it is time to release the water. Those bodhisattvas are like this. Since they maintain the levee by making offerings to all the Buddhas and teaching and guiding sentient beings, when they enter samadhi they do not have to move body or mind as they perform the Buddha’s work by practicing in accord with reality”. ‘Practicing in accord with reality’ means that while they practice always, in fact there is nothing that is practiced. Hence the verse:

The Land of Peace and Happiness, pure and immaculate,
Is where the undefiled wheel of Dharma is turning constantly.
The transformed Buddhas and bodhisattvas there are like suns.
And abide immovable like Mount Sumeru.

39 The undefiled adornment of light,
In one thought-moment and at the same time,
Illumines the assemblies of the Buddhas everywhere
And benefits all sentient beings.

Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? Observing the attendants of a certain tathagata, he noticed that whenever they wished to make offerings to Buddhas and guide innumerable sentient beings in innumerable other Buddha-lands in different directions, they had to first disappear from here and then reappear over there, or they had first go southward and later go northward. In short, in one thought-moment simultaneously they were unable to send out their light reaching everywhere and guide sentient beings in all the ten quarters. This is because they had to first go to one place, then to another later. For this reason, while in the stage of Dharmākara Bodhisattva, he made a vow resolving, “I wish all the great bodhisattvas in my Buddha-land would in the space of one thought-moment be able to reach all the ten quarters and perform various kinds of Buddha’s work”. Hence the verse:

The undefiled adornment of light,
In one thought-moment and at the same time,
Illumines the assemblies of the Buddhas everywhere
And benefits all sentient beings.

Question: In the previous section it is stated that without moving themselves they go everywhere in the ten quarters. Does this not mean that while immobile they were going everywhere simultaneously? What is the difference between the two?

Answer: If it were stated that they went everywhere without moving themselves, then there might be a before-and-after time lag. Here, however, there is no time lag at all, and so this is the difference. Also, if there were no time lag it would make them immobile. If they were not simultaneous, then there would have to be some sort of coming and going. If there is some sort of coming and going,

then it would mean they were not immobile. Thus, in order to accommodate the significance of their being immobile, they would have to be everywhere simultaneously.

40 Showering them with heavenly music, flowers, robes, and excellent fragrances,

They make offerings to the Buddhas

And praise their virtues

Without any discriminative thought among them.

Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? Observing a certain Buddha-land, he noticed that the bodhisattvas, humans, and devas there did not entertain great aspirations and therefore they could not consider the possibility of visiting the countless worlds in the ten quarters or making offerings to all the Buddha-tathagatas and their assemblies. Also he noticed that there were some who, because they were living in defiled worlds, had no desire to visit pure realms, while there were others who, because they were living in pure realms, despised the thought of defiled worlds. Due to such limited views, they could not make offerings to all the Buddha-tathagatas universally and activate their immense roots of good extensively. For this reason he made a vow, resolving, "When I become a Buddha, may all the great assembly of bodhisattvas, sravakas, devas, and humans in my land visit the gathering places of the Buddhas and praise their virtues in finely-honed phrases amidst a virtual downpour of heavenly music, flowers, robes, and fragrances".

The bodhisattvas of Amida's Pure Land praise the great compassion, humility, and patience of the tathagatas in defiled lands, and they never see any of the filth and squalor of those Buddhas' lands. They praise the countless adornments of the pure lands of other tathagatas, and they never see any of the clarity or purity there. Why is this so? It is because they recognize the equality of all dharmas that they see the equality of all tathagatas. It is for this reason that all Buddha-tathagatas are thus called 'equally-enlightened ones'.

If they were to give rise to thoughts of superiority or inferiority among the Buddha-lands, it would not amount to their worshipping in accordance with the Dharma, even though they might be worshipping the tathagatas there. Hence the verse:

Showering them with heavenly music, flowers, robes, and excellent fragrances,

They make offerings to the Buddhas

And praise their virtues

Without any discriminative thought among them.

41 In whatever world

Where the treasure of virtue of the Buddha Dharma does not exist,

My wish is for all to attain birth in the Pure Land,

And so I will deliver the Buddha Dharma to them like the Buddha.

Why did the Buddha wish to have this adornment? Observing weak-willed bodhisattvas in a certain land, he noticed that they wished to practice only in lands where there were Buddhas since they lacked a resolute heart of compassion themselves. For this reason he made a vow, resolving, "When I become a Buddha, may all the bodhisattvas in my land have the compassion, vigorous mind, and resolute aspiration to leave my Pure Land and go to other lands where the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are lacking. May they dwell in those lands and adorn them with the treasure of

the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, expounding them in the way that Buddhas are known to do, so as to ensure that the seeds of Buddhahood will never be cut off". Hence the verse:

In whatever world

Where the treasure of virtue of the Buddha Dharma does not exist,
My wish is for all to attain birth in the Pure Land,
And so I will deliver the Buddha Dharma to them like the Buddha.

Here ends the contemplation of the fulfillment of the four kinds of virtue of the bodhisattvas in Amida's Pure Land.

42 The following four lines are the gate of directing virtue:

On writing this treatise, I have composed these verses
In aspiration for seeing Amida Buddha,
And, together with all other sentient beings,
For being born in the Land of Peace and Happiness.

These four lines represent the author's desire to express the gate of directing virtue. 'Directing virtue' is to turn over the merits one has accumulated and direct them to all other sentient beings, and, by so doing, to see Amida Tathagata and be born in the Land of Peace and Happiness.

Concerning the words and passages of the sutras on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, I have expounded a summary of them in verse.

43 Question: In the section of the 'directing of virtue' of Bodhisattva Vasubandhu's *Treatise on the Pure Land*, it is stated that "Together with all other sentient beings, I aspire to be born in the Land of Peace and Happiness". In regard to this, what sort of 'sentient beings' is he indicating?

Answer: In the *Sutra on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* expounded at Rājagṛha, it is stated that the Buddha said to Ānanda, "The Buddha-tathagatas throughout the ten quarters, countless as the sands of the Ganges, are one in praising the majestic power of the virtues, inconceivably profound, of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. When sentient beings, upon hearing the Buddha's name, realize an entrusting heart in joy with even a single thought of the Buddha, direct their merits with sincere mind, and aspire to be born in that land, they then all attain birth in that land and dwell in the stage of nonretrogression. Excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses and those who slander the right Dharma".

Based on this statement as reference, all people, both non-believers and ordinary beings, can attain birth in Amida's Land.

Further, the *Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* mentions the nine grades of birth.

Those who attain birth in the lowest grade of the lowest rank are as follows: suppose there are sentient beings who commit such evils as the five grave offenses and the ten transgressions, thus burdened with all kinds of evil. Such a foolish person, because of his evil deeds, is destined to fall into evil realms, where he transmigrates for many kalpas and suffers agonies endlessly. When he is about to die, he may meet a true teacher who consoles him in various ways and, preaching the wondrous Dharma, advises him to be mindful of the Buddha. But he is too severely tormented by pain to do so. Then this good friend says to him, "If you cannot concentrate your thoughts on the

Buddha, you should simply recite the Name of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life”. Accordingly, he sincerely and continuously says this Name ten times. Because he recites the Name of the Buddha, with each recitation his evil karma binding him to birth-and-death for eighty kotis of kalpas is eliminated.

When he dies, he sees a golden lotus flower appear before him shining like the sun; at that instant he is born in the World of Perfect Bliss. After staying in the lotus flower for twelve great kalpas, it suddenly opens. (When it does, his evil karma of the five grave offenses has dissipated.) He hears Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta expound for him, in a voice of great compassion, the true reality of all existence and the teaching of eliminating karma. When he has heard this, he rejoices and at once awakens aspiration for enlightenment. Such a person is called one who attains birth in the lowest grade of the lowest rank.

With this sutra statement as testimony, it is evident that ordinary beings of the lowest grade can attain birth in the Pure Land through entrusting themselves to the Buddha, if they do not slander the right Dharma.

Question: The *Sutra on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* states, “Those who aspire for birth are all brought to attainment. Excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses and those who slander the right Dharma”. The *Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* states, “Those who have committed the five grave offenses and the ten transgressions, and who are possessed of various evils also attain birth”. How are these two sutra passages to be reconciled?

Answer: The first sutra speaks of committing two kinds of serious evil act: the five grave offenses and the slander of the right Dharma. Because of committing both these two kinds of evil act, a person is unable to attain birth. The other sutra speaks only of committing the evil of the ten transgressions and five grave offenses; nothing is said of slandering the right Dharma. Because a person has not slandered the right Dharma, he attain birth.

Question: Suppose a person has committed the five grave offenses but has not slandered the right Dharma. In the sutra, it is granted that such a person can attain birth. Further, suppose there is a person who has only slandered the right Dharma but is free of the five grave offenses and other evil acts. If he aspires for birth, will he attain it or not?

Answer: Although he has only slandered the right Dharma and has not committed other evil acts, he will definitely be unable to attain birth. How is this known? A sutra states that the person who has committed the five grave offenses falls into great Avīchi hell and fully undergoes their recompense for one kalpa. The person who slanders the right Dharma falls into great Avīchi hell, and when that kalpa has run out, he passes on into the great Avīchi hell of another quarter. In this way he passes through a hundred thousand great Avīchi hells one after another. The Buddha does not indicate any time when it is possible for him to emerge. This is because slandering the right Dharma is an evil act of extreme gravity.

Further, the right Dharma is the Buddha Dharma, and such a foolish person has already slandered it. How can it be reasonable to think that he would aspire to be born in the Buddha-land? Suppose the person aspires for birth because he craves only for the happiness of that land. This is like

seeking ice that is not water or fire without smoke. How can it be deemed reasonable that he attain it?

Question: What are the characteristics of slandering the right Dharma?

Answer: It is to say there is neither Buddha nor Buddha Dharma, neither bodhisattva nor bodhisattva-dharma. Arriving at such views, whether through interpreting it as such in one's own mind or receiving the notion from someone else, is called slandering the right Dharma.

Question: Taking such views only concerns the person himself. What pain and suffering does his act inflict on other sentient beings, that it should exceed the evil of the five grave offenses in seriousness?

Answer: If there were no Buddhas and bodhisattvas to expound the mundane and supramundane good paths and to teach and guide sentient beings, how could we know of the existence of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and sincerity? Such mundane good would all be cut off, and the sages of the supramundane would all perish. You know only of the seriousness of the five grave offenses, and not that the five grave offenses arise from the absence of the right Dharma on your part. For that reason, a person who slanders the right Dharma commits the gravest karmic evil.

Question: The sutras expounding the working of karma state that the working of karma is like a scale: the heavier side is drawn down first and foremost. The *Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* speaks of a person who has committed the five grave offenses and the ten transgressions and is possessed of all kinds of evils. He is about to fall into the evil courses and undergo incalculable pain for many kalpas. At the ending of life, he happens to meet a true teacher who instructs him to say *Namo-muryōju-butsu* [Namo Amida Butsu]. When, in this way, he gives voice to it, saying it ten times with a sincere mind without interruption, he attains birth in the Pure Land of Peace and Happiness, where he immediately enters the truly settled of the Mahayana and ultimately attains nonretrogression. He becomes free forever from all the pain of the three courses. How is this to be understood in terms of the principle of "the heavier side is drawn down first and foremost"? Further, these defiled dharmas that we have been generating from distant kalpas in the past have bound us to the three worlds. If, as you say, one immediately emerges from the three worlds by merely thinking on and saying the Name of Amida Buddha ten times, how are we to understand the meaning of 'binding karmic acts'?

Answer: If, giving weight to the five grave offenses, the ten transgressions, and other binding karmic acts, and considering the ten recitations of the Name by the person of the lowest grade of the lowest rank to be trivial, you say that drawn by karmic evil one should first and foremost fall into hell or be bound to the three worlds, then we must consider in terms of the principle of lightness and heaviness. This is a matter of the disposition of one's mind, of the disposition of one's situational condition, and the disposition of one's resoluteness. It is not a matter of length of time or of quantity. What is meant by 'the disposition of one's mind'? The person who commits such karmic evil does so based on his own false and inverted views. The ten recitations, however, arise when a true teacher, consoling him by various means, leads him to hear the Dharma that is true reality. The latter is real, the former is unreal. How can there be any comparison?

Suppose there is a room that has been dark for a thousand years. If light reaches it, however briefly, the room immediately becomes bright. How can the darkness say that, having occupied the room for a thousand years, it refuses to leave? This is termed 'the disposition of one's mind'.

What is meant by 'the disposition of one's situational condition'? When a person commits such evils, as would come out of their own deluded mind, they were produced by the web of blind passions and falsity of sentient beings. The ten recitations, as would arise from the supreme mind of faith, however, were produced by the true, real, pure, and immeasurable virtuous Name which is the adornment of the compassionate means of Amida Tathagata. Suppose there is a man who has been struck by a poison arrow. At the point of entry, the flesh is torn and the bone is broken. But if he hears a drum to which the dispelling elixir has been applied, the arrow will immediately be extracted and the poison expelled. (The *Sutra of the Samadhi of Heroic Advance* states: For example, there is a medicine called 'extractor'. If, in time of battle, it is applied to a drum, those who hear the sound of the drum will have their arrows extracted and the poison expelled. So it is with bodhisattva-mahasattvas. When they abide in the samadhi of heroic advance and hear its name, the arrow of the three poisons is naturally removed".) How can it be said that, because the arrow is deep and the poison virulent, even though the drumbeat is heard, it is impossible for the arrow to be withdrawn or the venom removed? This is termed 'the disposition of one's situational condition'.

What is meant by 'the disposition of one's resoluteness'? The person who would commit such wicked acts does so out of a mind caught in the thrall of life expecting there is yet more to come after this and is in a state of distraction interrupted by extraneous thoughts. The ten recitations arise at the last moments of life based on the mind that realizes there is nothing more to come after this and is in an uninterrupted state of concentration. This is termed 'resoluteness'.

When we consider these three dispositions, we see that the ten recitations carry weight. What is heavy is drawn down first and foremost, and this enables beings to depart from the three worlds of existence. Therefore, the two sutra passages have a single meaning.

Question: How much time is called 'one thought-moment'?

Answer: Although a moment is said to be made up of sixty instants and a hundred and one events may rise and fall in each instant, the 'one thought-moment' discussed herein should not be understood as the passage of time. It simply refers to a state of mindfulness of Amida Buddha. When the mind continues in this mode of contemplation for ten thought-moments without any other thoughts in one's mind, this is called the 'ten thought-moments', regardless of whether one is contemplating the entire body of Amida Buddha or one of its specific features. Simply saying the Name is also like this.

Question: If the mind beings thinking about something else, but realizes it and is brought back to thinking on Amida, one can know the number of thoughts. Such awareness of this repeated process, however, signifies that there is no uninterruptedness of mindfulness. If the mind is concentrated and one's thoughts are focused, by what means is it possible to keep track of the number of thoughts?

Answer: The term 'ten recitations' in the *Contemplation Sutra* is intended only to elucidate the completion of the act resulting in birth. We do not necessarily have to be concerned about the said

number. It is said, for example, that cicadas do not know of spring or autumn, so how can they know of summer, the season of the red sun? Only one who knows the seasons can speak of summer.

Likewise, the completion of the act of ten recitations resulting in birth can be spoken of only by one possessed of transcendent powers. When one simply recites the Name one time after another and continues in this mode without stopping to turn one's thoughts to other matters, what need is there to keep in mind the number of recitations? If it is absolutely necessary to know, however, there is a method, but it should only be communicated verbally, not set down in written form.

**Commentary on
the Treatise on the Sutra of
the Buddha of Immeasurable Life with
the Verses of Aspiration for Birth in the Pure Land
Part One**