

The Sutra of Contemplation
on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life
Delivered by Śākyamuni Buddha

*Translated by Kālayaśas during
the Yüan-chia Era of the Sung Dynasty*

1 Thus I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying on Vulture Peak in Rājagṛha together with a great multitude of twelve hundred and fifty monks. There were also thirty-two thousand bodhisattvas led by the Dharma Prince Mañjuśrī.

2 At that time, in the great city of Rājagṛha, there was a prince named Ajātaśatru. Following the counsel of his wicked friend, Devadatta, he seized his father, King Bimbisāra, and confined him in a chamber with walls seven layers deep, forbidding all court officials from entering. The queen, Vaidehī, was loyal to the king. Having cleansed herself by bathing, she spread a paste of ghee and honey mixed with flour on her body, filled her ornaments with the juice of grapes, and secretly offered them to the king.

The king ate the flour-paste, drink the juice, and then asked for water to rinse his mouth. Having rinsed his mouth, he respectfully put his palms together, and facing Vulture Peak, he worshiped the World-honored One from afar and said, “Mahāmaudgalyāyana is my close friend. I beseech you, feel compassion towards me and send him here to initiate me in the eight precepts.”

Then, Mahāmaudgalyāyana flew as swift as a hawk or falcon to the king. Day after day in this manner, Mahāmaudgalyāyana initiated the king in the eight precepts. The World-honored One also sent the Venerable Pūrṇa to expound the Dharma to the king. Three weeks passed in this manner, and because the king was able to eat the flour-paste and hear the Dharma, his countenance was peaceful and content.

3 Then, Ajātaśatru questioned the guard, “Is my father still alive?” The guard replied, “Your Majesty, the queen spreads flour-paste on her body, fills her ornaments with juice, and offers them to the king. The monks Mahāmaudgalyāyana and Pūrṇa come here through the air to expound the Dharma to him. It is impossible to stop them.”

Upon hearing these words, Ajātaśatru became infuriated at his mother and shouted, “Mother, you are my enemy because you are an accomplice to my enemy. Those evil monks with their delusive magic have enabled that wicked king to remain alive for these many days.” Immediately, he drew his sharp sword, intending to kill her.

At that moment, a wise and intelligent minister named Candraprabha, along with Jīvaka, bowed to the king and said, “Your Majesty, we ministers have heard, as taught in the Vedic scriptures, that since the beginning of the cosmic period, there have been eighteen thousand wicked kings who have murdered their fathers out of lust to usurp the throne. Yet, never have we heard of anyone who has committed the outrage of killing his mother. Your Majesty, if you should dare commit such an outrageous act, you would bring disgrace upon the ksatriya class. As your ministers, we could not bear to hear of it for it would be an act of a candala and we could no longer remain here.” Then the two ministers, after stating these words, grasped their swords and stepped back.

Ajātaśatru, startled and frightened, called out to Jīvaka, “Are you not my friend?” Jīvaka replied, “Your Majesty, please restrain yourself and do not kill your mother.” Having heard these words, the king repented and begged for their mercy. So he discarded his sword and gave up his intention of killing his mother. Instead, he ordered the guards of the inner court to lock her up within the depths of the palace and not allow her to come out again.

4 Then Vaidehī, having been confined, became emaciated with grief and despair. Facing Vulture Peak from afar, she bowed to the Buddha and uttered the following words, “Tathagata, World-honored One, in the past you used to send Ānanda to come and console me. I am now filled with anguish. World-honored One, you are majestic and exalted, and so in no way shall I be able to see you. I beseech you, send Mahāmaudgalyāyana and the Venerable Ānanda to come to see me. When she had said these words, she wept in grief, shedding tears like a shower of rain. Then she bowed towards the Buddha in the distance. Even before she raised her head, the World-honored One, who was staying on Vulture Peak, having known the thoughts in Vaidehī’s mind, immediately ordered Mahāmaudgalyāyana and Ānanda to go to her through the air. The Buddha himself disappeared from Vulture Peak and appeared in the royal palace. When Vaidehī raised her head after bowing, she saw before her Śākyamuni Buddha, the World-honored One, whose body was the color of purple-gold, sitting upon a lotus flower made up of a hundred kinds of jewels. Attending him on his left was Mahāmaudgalyāyana, and on his right was Ānanda. Śakra, Brahmā, and the guardian devas of the world hovered in the air, scattering everywhere celestial flowers like rain as an offering.

When Vaidehī saw the Buddha, the World-honored One, she tore off her ornaments, prostrated herself on the ground, and cried bitterly before the Buddha. “World-honored One,” she said, “what evils did I commit in the past that I should have such a wicked son? Also, World-honored One, what karmic relations could have caused you to become a relative of Devadatta?”

5 “I beseech you, World-honored One, please explain to me in detail a place that is free of sorrows and afflictions. I wish to be born there. I do not wish to live in this defiled world of Jambudvīpa filled with beings in hell, hungry spirits, and animals, and where there are many vile beings. I wish that, henceforth, I may hear no evil words and may see no evil people. Now, World-honored One, I prostrate before you and beg you in repentance to take pity on me. For what I truly desire, Sun-like Buddha, is that you teach me how to visualize a place perfected by pure and undefiled acts.”

At that moment, the World-honored One sent forth a light from between his eyebrows. It was the color of gold and illuminated all the innumerable worlds of the ten quarters. Upon its return, the light settled on top of the Buddha’s head and transformed itself into a golden platform resembling Mount Sumeru. Therein appeared the pure and exquisite lands of the Buddhas of the ten quarters. Some of the lands were made of seven kinds of jewels, some solely of lotus flowers, some resembled the palace in the Heaven of Free Enjoyment, and some were like a crystal mirror in which all the lands of the ten quarters were reflected. Innumerable Buddha-lands such as these, glorious and magnificent, were made visible and seen by Vaidehī.

Then Vaidehī said to the Buddha, “World-honored One, these various Buddha-lands are pure and free of defilement, and all of them are radiant. I, however, wish to be born in the World of Perfect Bliss of Amida Buddha. I beseech you, World-honored One, teach me how to concentrate my thoughts and teach me how to attain right perception.”

6 At that moment, the World-honored One smiled, and from the Buddha's mouth emanated five-colored rays of light, each ray shining on Bimbisāra's head. Although the great king was in confinement, with his unhindered mind's eye, he could see the World-honored One in the distance. As he touched his forehead to the ground in homage, he spontaneously made progress and reached the stage of nonreturner.

7 Then the World-honored One said to Vaidehī, "Do you know that Amida Buddha is not very far from here? You should concentrate your thoughts and clearly visualize the one in that land who has already accomplished the pure acts. I shall now describe to you in detail various images of that land so that all ordinary people in the future who desire to perform the pure acts may attain birth in the Land of Perfect Bliss in the western quarter.

"Whoever wished to be born there should carry out the three types of meritorious conduct. First, they should dutifully attend to their parents, revere their teachers and elders, possess a heart of compassion and refrain from killing, and perform the ten good acts. Second, they should uphold the three refuges, observe the various precepts for monks or nuns, and not violate the rules of deportment. Third, they should awaken the aspiration for enlightenment, believe deeply in the law of cause-and-effect, recite the Mahayana sutras, and encourage others to follow the teachings. These three are called the pure acts."

The Buddha said to Vaidehī, "Do you know that these three types of conducts are nothing other than the pure acts performed by all the Buddhas of the past, present, and future as the true cause for enlightenment?"

8 The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, "Listen closely, listen closely. Consider this very carefully. I, the Tathagata, shall now explain to you in detail the pure acts for the sake of all beings in the future who will be afflicted by the enemy, blind passions. Very good, Vaidehī. You have done well to ask me this appropriate question. Ānanda, you must receive and uphold the Buddha's words and widely proclaim them to the multitude of beings. I, the Tathagata, shall now teach Vaidehī and the beings in the future how to visualize the World of Perfect Bliss in the western quarter.

"By the power of the Buddha, all will be able to see the land of purity as if one were looking at one's own face in a clear mirror. Seeing the utmost magnificence and bliss of that land, all will rejoice and immediately attain the insight into the nonorigination of all existence."

The Buddha said to Vaidehī, "You are merely an ordinary person. Since your mind is weak and inferior and you have yet to acquire divine sight, you are unable to see that which is distant. But all the Buddha-tathagatas have distinct means by which you are enabled to see far."

Then Vaidehī said to the Buddha, "World-honored One, through the power of the Buddha, even a person like me is now able to see that land. However, after the Buddha's passing, all people, being defiled and evil, will be tormented by the five kinds of suffering. How then will they be able to see Amida Buddha's World of Perfect Bliss?"

9 The Buddha said to Vaidehī, "You and other people should single-mindedly concentrate your thoughts on one place and visualize the western quarter. How is this done? Visualize in this way: you and all people, with the exception of those born blind, possessing the faculty of sight, should look at the setting sun. Prepare your mind to concentrate, and sit down properly, facing the

westward direction. Clearly contemplate on the sun with your mind firmly fixed on it. Not allowing your mind to wander, concentrate your thoughts on the sun which is about to set and looks like a suspended drum. After seeing the sun, you should then be able to visualize it clearly, whether your eyes are open or closed. This is the visualization of the sun and is called the first contemplation.”

10 “Next, you should practice the visualization of the water. Envision clean, pure water; picture it distinctly and clearly, and do not allow your thoughts to be distracted. After you have envisioned the waters, you should imagine them as becoming ice. When you have seen the brilliant and transparent ice, envision it turning into lapis lazuli.

“When you have accomplished this visualization, envision the lapis lazuli ground shining brilliantly throughout, inside and out. Supporting the lapis lazuli ground from below are columns, which are made of diamond and the seven kinds of jewels and hung with golden banners. These columns have eight sides and eight corners, each side consisting of one hundred kinds of jewels. Each jewel emits a thousand rays of light, and each ray has eighty-four thousand colors. As they are refracted onto the lapis lazuli ground, they look like a thousand kotis of suns, and it is impossible to see them all.

“On the surface of the lapis lazuli ground, there is an intricate network of golden cords. The land is clearly divided into areas by the seven kinds of jewels. Each jewel emits a flood of light in five hundred colors. The light appears like a flower or resembles the moon and stars. Suspended in the sky, they turn into a pedestal of bright lights, on which there are ten million pavilions made of one hundred kinds of jewels. Both sides of the pedestal are adorned with a hundred kotis of floral banners and innumerable musical instruments. As eight pure breezes arise from the light and play the musical instruments, they proclaim the sounds of ‘suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and no-self.’ This is the visualization of the water and is called the second contemplation.”

11 “When you have accomplished this visualization, contemplate on each object very clearly, one by one. Whether your eyes are open or closed, do not lose the images. Except when sleeping, you should always be mindful of these images. Visualizing them in this way is called the proximate vision of the ground of the World of Perfect Bliss. If you attain a state of samadhi, you will see the ground so clearly and distinctly that it is impossible to describe it all in detail. This is the visualization of the ground and is known as the third contemplation.”

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “Hold firmly to these words of the Buddha and expound this method of contemplating on the ground for the benefit of the multitude of beings in the future who desire to attain emancipation from suffering. If you have envisioned the ground, the evil karma binding you to birth-and-death for eighty kotis of kalpas will be eliminated, and so when you take leave of this life, you will assuredly be born in the Pure Land in the next life. Do not have any doubt in your mind about this. To practice in this way is called the right contemplation. To practice otherwise is called the wrong contemplation.”

12 The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, “When you have accomplished the visualization of the ground, next contemplate on the jeweled trees. In contemplating on the jeweled trees, envision them one by one and then visualize seven rows of these trees. Each tree is eight thousand yojanas high, and not a single jeweled tree lacks blossoms and leaves made of the seven kinds of jewels. Each blossom and leaf has the color of a different jewel. The lapis lazuli-colored blossoms and leaves emit a golden radiance; the crystal-colored emit a crimson radiance; carnelian-colored emit a

sapphire radiance; the sapphire-colored emit a green pearl radiance. Coral, amber, and all the other jewels serve as dazzling ornaments.

“Exquisite nets of pearls cover these trees, and each tree is veiled in seven layers of nets. Between each net there are five hundred kotis of palaces adorned with exquisite flowers. They are like the palace of King Brahmā, where naturally there are celestial children. Each of these children has ornaments made of five hundred kotis of Śakra’s jewels, which light up a hundred yojanas in all directions, like a hundred kotis of suns and moons shining together, and so it is impossible to describe them in detail. All the lights emitted by these jewels intermingle, producing the most beautiful colors.

“The rows of jeweled trees are evenly arranged, and their leaves are equally spread. From among the foliage appear exquisite blossoms, and from them, fruits made of the seven kinds of jewels appear spontaneously. Each leaf is twenty-five yojanas in length and width. Like the celestial ornaments, the leaves are of a thousand colors and a hundred different patterns. The many exquisite blossoms are the color of Jambūnada gold and sparkle like fire-wheels revolving among the foliage.

“From these blossoms appear various fruits as if from Śakra’s vase, and from the fruits issues forth magnificent light which transforms into banners and innumerable jeweled canopies. All the activities of the Buddhas throughout the triple-thousand great thousand worlds appear reflected within these jeweled canopies. The Buddha-lands of the ten quarters also appear within them.

“After you have seen these trees, you should contemplate on each detail again, one by one: the trunks, branches, leaves, blossoms, and fruits. Picture them distinctly. This is the visualization of the trees and is known as the fourth contemplation.”

13 “Next, you should visualize the water. There are pools of water possessing the eight excellent qualities in the Land of Perfect Bliss. Each pool is filled with water made of the seven kinds of jewels which are soft and pliable. The waters, deriving their source from a cinta-mani, king of gems, divide into fourteen streams. Each stream produces the color of the seven kinds of jewels. The channels are of gold and the beds are covered with sand of multicolored diamonds.

“In each stream, there are sixty kotis of lotus flowers made of the seven kinds of jewels. Each lotus flower is perfectly round and is twelve yojanas across. The waters from the mani meander among the flowers and flow back and forth amidst the trees, producing delicate and exquisite sounds, which proclaim the truths of ‘suffering, emptiness, impermanence, no-self, and the paramitas.’ They also praise the physical features of all the Buddhas.

“The cinta-mani, king of gems, emits a splendid golden light, which transforms itself into birds as colorful as one hundred jewels. Their singing is harmonious and elegant, constantly praising the virtue of mindfulness of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. This is the visualization of the water of the eight excellent qualities and is known as the fifth contemplation.”

14 “Every region of that jeweled land has five hundred kotis of jeweled pavilions in which there are innumerable devas playing celestial music. There are also musical instruments suspended in the sky, which, like those on the heavenly jeweled banners, emit sounds spontaneously without being played. The various sounds proclaim the virtue of mindfulness of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Accomplishing this visualization in this way is called the proximate vision of the jeweled

trees, jeweled ground, and jeweled pools in the World of Perfect Bliss. This is a composite contemplation and is known as the sixth contemplation.

“For those who are able to see this, the extremely heavy, evil karma binding you to birth-and-death for innumerable kalpas will be eliminated, and after death, you will assuredly be born in that land. To practice in this way is called the right contemplation. To practice otherwise is called the wrong contemplation.”

15 The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, “Listen closely, listen closely. Consider this very carefully. I, the Buddha, shall discern and explain for you the way to eliminate pain and affliction. You must uphold the Buddha’s words, discern them, and widely proclaim them to the multitude of beings.”

As these words were spoken, the Buddha of Immeasurable Life appeared, standing in the air, along with two Mahasattvas, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, attending him on his left and right. Their radiance was so brilliant that it was impossible to see them in detail. It could not be compared even to a hundred thousand times the brilliance of Jambūnada gold.

Then Vaidehī, having seen the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, touched her head to Śākyamuni Buddha’s feet in homage and said to him, “World-honored One, it is through your power that I have been able to see the Buddha of Immeasurable Life and the two bodhisattvas. But, how can beings in the future see the Buddha of Immeasurable Life and the two bodhisattvas?”

The Buddha said to Vaidehī, “Those who wish to see that Buddha should form an image of a lotus flower on the seven-jeweled ground. 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. Picture them all clearly and distinctly. 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 a hundred thousand million kotis of Mount Sumerus.

“Above these bannered columns are jeweled curtains like those in the palace of Yāma Heaven, which have 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 golden light suffuses this jeweled land 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 activities of the Buddha. This is the visualization of the Lotus-throne and is known as the seventh contemplation.”

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “These wondrous flowers were produced originally by the power of Bhikṣu Dharmākara’s Vow. Those who wish to contemplate on that Buddha should first perform this visualization of the lotus-throne. When performing this, do not do it in a disorganized manner.

Perceive each object one by one — each petal, each gem, each ray of light, each throne, and each banner. Picture each of them clearly, as if you were looking into a mirror at your own image.

“For those who accomplish this contemplation, the evil karma binding you to birth-and-death for fifty thousand kalpas will be eliminated, and you will most assuredly be born in the World of Perfect Bliss. To practice in this way is called the right contemplation. To practice otherwise is called the wrong contemplation.”

16 The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, “After you have seen this, next visualize the Buddha. Why? It is because 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. For this reason, you should single-heartedly concentrate and clearly contemplate on the Buddha, Tathagata, Arhat, and Perfectly Enlightened One.

“When you wish to visualize the Buddha, you should first envision his image. Whether your eyes are open or closed, you should be able to see a jeweled image of him, which is the color of Jambūnada gold, seated upon the lotus-throne. Upon envisioning his seated image, your mind’s eye will open and you will clearly and distinctly see seven-jeweled adornments of the World of Perfect Bliss, such as the jeweled ground, jeweled pools, and rows of jeweled trees; they are covered with heavenly jeweled curtains. You will also see jeweled nets completely filling the sky. Picture these things as clearly and distinctly as if you were looking at something in the palm of your hand.

“After you have seen these things, you should again visualize a large lotus flower on the Buddha’s left. This lotus should be exactly the same as the one described earlier. You should further visualize another large lotus flower on the Buddha’s right. Visualize an image of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara seated on the left lotus-throne. The image sends forth golden rays of light just like the Buddha image described earlier. Then visualize an image of Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta seated on the right lotus-throne.

“When you have accomplished this visualization, you will see the images of the Buddha and the bodhisattvas sending forth rays of light. The golden rays of light illuminate the jeweled trees. Under each tree, there are also three lotus flowers with images of the Buddha and the two bodhisattvas seated on them. Thus, these images completely fill that land.

“When you have accomplished this visualization, you, the practitioner, will hear the flowing water, the rays of light, the jeweled trees, ducks, geese, and male and female mandarin ducks expounding the wonderful Dharma. Whether in or out of meditation, you will at all times hear the wonderful Dharma. “Even after you are out of meditation, you should keep in mind and not forget what you have heard, then compare it with the sutras. If it is not in accord with the sutras, it is called an illusion. If it is in accord with the sutras, then it is known as the proximate visualization of the World of Perfect Bliss. This is the visualization of the Buddha’s image and is known as the eighth contemplation.

“For those who accomplish this contemplation, the evil karma binding you to birth-and-death for innumerable kotis of kalpas will be eliminated, and while in this life you will achieve the Buddha-mindfulness samadhi.”

17 The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, “When you have accomplished this visualization, next contemplate on the physical features and the light of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. Ānanda, you should know that the Buddha’s body is a thousand million kotis times as brilliant as the Jambūnada gold of Yāma Heaven and that his height is six hundred thousand kotis of nayutas of yojanas multiplied by the number of sands of the Ganges. The white tuft of hair curling to the right between his eyebrows is five times as big as Mount Sumeru. The Buddha’s eyes are as large as the four great oceans; their blue and white parts are clearly distinct. All the pores of his body emit rays of light, as magnificent as Mount Sumeru.

“The Buddha’s aureole is as broad as a hundred kotis of the triple-thousand great thousand worlds. Within this aureole there are transformed Buddhas as numerous as a million kotis of nayutas multiplied by the number of sands of the Ganges. Each of these Buddhas is attended by a great assembly of countless transformed bodhisattvas.

“The Buddha of Immeasurable Life possesses eighty-four thousand major physical characteristics, each having eighty-four thousand minor marks. Each mark again emits eighty-four thousand rays of light. Each ray of light shines over the worlds of the ten quarters, embracing and never abandoning those beings who are mindful of the Buddha.

“It is impossible to describe in detail these rays of light, the physical characteristics and marks, and the transformed Buddhas, but by performing concentration, you can see them clearly with your mind’s eye. Those who envision them see all the Buddhas of the ten quarters. Since you can see the Buddhas, this is called the Buddha-mindfulness samadhi.

“According this contemplation is called perceiving the bodies of all the Buddhas. Since you perceive the Buddhas’ body, you also see the Buddhas’ mind. The Buddhas’ mind is great compassion. It is with this unconditional compassion that they embrace all beings. Those who achieve this contemplation will, after death, be born in the presence of the Buddhas and acquire the insight into the nonorigination of all existence. For this reason, the wise should firmly fix their attention and concentrate on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life.

“In contemplating on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, begin with one of the physical features; namely contemplate on the white tuft of hair between the eyebrows until you see it clearly and distinctly. When you can see it, eighty-four thousand physical features will spontaneously appear. When you are able to see the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, you will also see the innumerable Buddhas of the ten quarters.

“Having envisioned them, you will receive from these Buddhas appearing in front of you a prediction of your future attainment of Buddhahood. This is the comprehensive visualization of all the physical features of the Buddha and is known as the ninth contemplation. To practice in this way is called the right contemplation. To practice otherwise is called the wrong contemplation.”

18 The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, “After you have clearly and distinctly seen the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, next contemplate on Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. This bodhisattva’s height is eight hundred thousand kotis of nayutas of yojanas. His body is the color of purple-gold. On the top of his head is a mound, and encircling behind it is an aureole with a diameter of one hundred thousand yojanas.

“Within this aureole, there are five hundred transformed Buddhas. Each transformed Buddha resembles Śākyamuni Buddha and is accompanied by five hundred transformed bodhisattvas and innumerable devas. Within the light emanating from his entire body, all the beings of the five realms of samsara appear in their different physical forms. On his head is a heavenly crown made of Śakra’s jewels, and within this heavenly crown stands a transformed Buddha, twenty-five yojanas tall.

“The face of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is the color of Jambūnada gold. The tuft of hair between his eyebrows possesses all the colors of the seven kinds of jewels and emits eighty-four thousand different rays of light. Within each ray of light there are innumerable and uncountable hundreds of thousands of transformed Buddhas. Each transformed Buddha is attended by countless transformed bodhisattvas. All manifest various forms at will, completely filling the worlds of the ten quarters, and they appear as brilliant as the color of red lotus flowers. Eighty kotis of rays of light make his ornaments, in which all the adornments of the land are fully shown.

“The palms of his hands are the color of five hundred kotis of various lotus flowers. Each of his ten fingertips has eighty-four thousand patterns like those produced by engraved seals. Each pattern has eighty-four thousand colors, and each color emits eighty-four thousand rays of light. Those rays of light are soft and delicate, illuminating all beings. With his exquisite hands, he takes in and guides all beings.

“When he raises one of his feet, the mark of a thousand-spoked wheel on the sole of his foot spontaneously changes into a throne made of five hundred kotis of rays of light. When he lowers his foot, flowers made of diamond and mani jewels scatter everywhere, leaving nothing uncovered. All the other physical characteristics and marks which he fully possesses are not different from the Buddha’s, with the exception of the two features, the mound on his head and its uppermost, imperceptible part, which are not equal to those of the World-honored One. This is the visualization of the true physical features of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and is known as the tenth contemplation.”

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “Those who desire to visualize Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara should perform this contemplation. Those who practice it will not encounter any misfortune, but will be cleansed of karmic hindrances and the evil karma binding you to birth-and-death for innumerable kalpas will be eliminated. Even by just hearing the name of this bodhisattva, you will obtain immeasurable merits. How much more so if you clearly visualize him! Those who desire to visualize Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara should first contemplate on the mound on his head, and next, his heavenly crown. Then, you should contemplate on the other characteristics in order, as clearly as if you were looking at something in the palm of your hand. To practice in this way is called the right contemplation. To practice otherwise is called the wrong contemplation.”

19 “Next contemplate on Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta. The measurements of this bodhisattva’s body are the same as those of Avalokiteśvara. His aureole is one hundred and twenty-five yojanas in diameter and shines as far as two hundred and fifty yojanas. The light emanating from his entire body illuminates the lands of the ten quarters, making them shine in the color of purple-gold. All beings who have had even the slightest relationship with this bodhisattva are able to see him.

“By seeing even a single ray of light emanating from a pore of this bodhisattva, you can envision the pure and exquisite rays of light of the innumerable Buddhas of the ten quarters. For this reason, this bodhisattva is called Boundless Light. He has great power to illuminate all beings with the light of

wisdom, enabling them to be free of the three evil realms. For this reason, this bodhisattva is called Mahāsthāmaprāpta.

“This bodhisattva’s heavenly crown has five hundred jeweled lotus flowers, and each flower has five hundred jeweled thrones. Within each throne appear the expansive and boundless features of the pure and exquisite lands of the various Buddhas of the ten quarters. The mount on his head is shaped like a padma flower and has a treasure vase on it, which is filled with various rays of light that reveal all the activities of the Buddha. His other physical characteristics are exactly like those of Avalokiteśvara without even the slightest difference.

“When this bodhisattva walks, all the worlds of the ten quarters tremble and quake. Wherever the earth trembles, five hundred kotis of jeweled flowers appear. Each flower’s elegance is magnificent like those in the World of Perfect Bliss. When this bodhisattva sits down, all the seven-jeweled lands, from that of the Buddha of Golden Light in the nadir to that of the Buddha of King of Light in the zenith, tremble and shake simultaneously.

“From between these, manifested bodies of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life together with manifested bodies of Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, as innumerable as particles of dust, all assemble like clouds in the Land of Perfect Bliss. Filling the whole sky, they sit on lotus-thrones, expounding the exquisite Dharma to save suffering beings. To practice in this way is called the right contemplation. To practice otherwise is called the wrong contemplation. To do this contemplation, envisioning Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta, is the visualization of his physical features and is known as the eleventh contemplation.

“For those who are visualized this bodhisattva, the evil karma binding you to birth-and-death for innumerable asamkhyā kalpas will be eliminated. Those who have accomplished this contemplation will be freed of birth from the womb and always able to visit the pure and exquisite Buddha-lands. The accomplishment of these contemplations is called the complete visualization of Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta.”

20 “When you have accomplished these contemplations, you should concentrate and form the following image: having been born in the World of Perfect Bliss in the western quarter, you are seated in a lotus flower with your legs fully crossed.

“Next, imagine that the lotus flower closes and then opens. When the lotus flower opens, the light of five hundred colors shines upon you. At that moment, your eyes are opened and perceive Buddhas and bodhisattvas filling the entire sky. You hear the sounds of water, songs of birds, rustling of trees, and voices of Buddhas all proclaiming the wondrous Dharma in accord with the twelve divisions of scriptures.

“When you come out of contemplation, keep all of this in mind and do not forget it. When this contemplation is finished, it is called the visualization of the World of Perfect Bliss of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. This is the total visualization, which is called the twelfth contemplation. The transformed bodies of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life are innumerable; they, together with Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, always come to the practitioners.”

21 The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, “Those who sincerely wish to be born in that western land should first visualize an image of the Buddha, which is sixteen feet high, on the surface of a pool. As described before, the physical measurements of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life are

boundless, and therefore beyond the imaginative capability of ordinary people. However, through the power of the Tathagata's Primal Vow, those who contemplate on the Buddha are unfailingly enabled to do so. Simply by visualizing an image of the Buddha, they gain immeasurable merits. How much more so if they visualize the complete physical features of the Buddha?

"Amida Buddha, exercising supernatural powers at will, freely manifests his transformed bodies in the lands of the ten quarters. At times he appears as a huge figure filling the whole sky, and at other times he appears as a small figure which is sixteen feet or eight feet high; all the figures he manifests are the color of genuine gold. The transformed Buddhas and jeweled lotus flowers within the aureole are as described above.

"The appearances of Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta are identical, wherever they may be. Sentient beings, only by looking at the features on their heads, can tell whether this is Avalokiteśvara or Mahāsthāmaprāpta. These two bodhisattvas assist Amida Buddha in leading all beings to the Buddhist way. This is the compound visualization and is known as the thirteenth contemplation."

22 The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, "Those who attain birth in the highest grade of the highest rank are as follows: suppose there are sentient beings who wish to be born in that land; they attain birth by awakening the three minds. What are the three? The first is sincere mind; the second, deep mind; the third, mind aspiring for birth by directing one's merits. Those who possess these three minds will unfailingly be born in that land.

"There are also three kinds of sentient beings who will assuredly be born there. What are the three? They are, first, people who possess a heart of compassion, refrain from killing, and observe the precepts; second, people who recite the Mahayana sutras of greater scope; third, people who practice the six forms of mindfulness. They aspire for birth by directing merits thus acquired; performing these meritorious acts for one to seven days, they will attain birth.

"When such person is about to be born in that land, because of his undaunted, diligent practices, Amida Tathagata comes to him with Avalokiteśvara, Mahāsthāmaprāpta, countless transformed Buddhas, a great assembly of a hundred thousand monks and sravakas, and innumerable devas, along with seven-jeweled palaces. Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, holding a pedestal made of diamond, comes before the practitioner with Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta.

"Then Amida Tathagata sends forth great rays of light to illuminate the practitioner's body and offers his hands in welcome together with many other bodhisattvas. Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, with countless other bodhisattvas, all praise and encourage the practitioner in his resolution. The practitioner, seeing all of this, leaps and dances out of joy, when he finds himself seated on the diamond pedestal, and following the Buddha, attains birth in that land as quickly as when one opens one's fingers.

"After being born in that land, he sees the Buddha's body complete with all the physical features, and also the bodhisattvas' bodies likewise. Hearing the brilliant jeweled trees expounding the wonderful Dharma, he immediately attains the insight into the nonorigination of all existence. In an instant, he visits and serves all the Buddhas in all the worlds of the ten quarters; from each of them, he receives the prediction of his future attainment of Buddhahood. When he returns to the Pure Land, he acquires innumerable hundreds of thousands of dharanis. Such a person is called one who attains birth in the highest grade of the highest rank."

23 “Those who attain birth in the middle grade of the highest rank are as follows: suppose there are people who do not necessarily hold fast to and recite the Mahayana sutras of greater scope, but understand the meaning of the teaching very well, with no confusion in their mind on hearing the highest truth. Having firm belief in the law of cause-and-effect, they do not slander the Mahayana teachings. They aspire to be born in the Land of Perfect Bliss by directing these merits.

“When a person who performs this practice is about to die, Amida Buddha comes to him surrounded by Avalokiteśvara, Mahāsthāmaprāpta, countless sages, and their attendants with a purple-gold pedestal. Praising the practitioner, the Buddha says, ‘Son of the Dharma, because you practice the Mahayana and understand the highest truth, I am now here to welcome you.’ He and a thousand transformed Buddhas offer their hands to the practitioner at the same time.

“Then the practitioner finds himself seated on a purple-gold pedestal. At the moment he puts his palms together and praises the Buddhas, he is instantly born on a seven-jeweled pool on that land. The purple-gold pedestal is like a great flower made of treasures, and it opens after one night. The practitioner’s body shines in purple-gold, and beneath his feet he again finds seven-jeweled lotus flowers.

“When the Buddha and bodhisattvas simultaneously emit light and illuminate the practitioner’s body, his eyes open and everything becomes clear. Due to the merits he accumulated in his previous life, he hears everywhere various kinds of sound all expounding the most profound, highest truth. Then descending the gold pedestal, he pays homage to the Buddha and praises him with his palms put together.

“After seven days, he immediately reaches the stage of nonretrogression for the supreme, perfect enlightenment. When it is proper, he flies throughout the ten quarters to serve all the Buddhas one after another, under whom he practices various samadhis. In a small kalpa, he attains the insight into the nonorigination of all existence and directly receives the prediction of his future attainment of Buddhahood. Such a person is called one who attains birth in the middle grade of the highest rank.”

24 “Those who attain birth in the lowest grade of the highest rank are as follows: suppose there are people who at times believe in the law of cause-and-effect, do not slander the Mahayana teachings, and awaken aspiration for the supreme enlightenment. They aspire to be born in the Land of Perfect Bliss by directing these merits.

“When the practitioner is about to die, Amida Buddha comes to welcome him together with Avalokiteśvara, Mahāsthāmaprāpta and all of their attendants, with a golden lotus flower, accompanied by five hundred thousand Buddhas whom Amida manifests. The five hundred transformed Buddhas offer their hands at the same time and praise him, saying, ‘Son of the Dharma, since you, with a purified mind, have awakened aspiration for the supreme enlightenment, we are now here to welcome you.’

“After seeing this, the practitioner finds himself seated on the golden lotus flower, which then closes. He then follows the World-honored One and immediately is born on the seven-jeweled pool. The lotus flower opens after a day and night, and he is able to see the Buddha in seven days. Although he sees the Buddha, he cannot clearly distinguish the physical characteristics and marks. After three weeks he finally sees them distinctly. and he also hears various sounds expounding the wonderful Dharma. He travels throughout the ten quarters to make offerings to all the Buddhas, and

in their presence hears the profound teachings from them. In three small kalpas, he acquires perfect comprehension of the one hundred teachings and dwells in the stage of joy. Such a person is called one who attains birth in the lowest grade of the highest rank. This is the visualization of those who attain birth in the highest rank, and is known as the fourteenth contemplation.”

25 The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, “Those who attain birth in the highest grade of the middle rank are as follows: suppose there are sentient beings who keep the five precepts, observe the eight abstinences, practice in accordance with various precepts and refrain from committing the five grave offenses and other wrongdoings. They aspire to be born in the World of Perfect Bliss in the western quarter by directing these merits.

“When the practicer is about to die, Amida Buddha comes to him surrounded by monks and attendants, emitting golden light. Expounding the truths of ‘suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and no-self,’ the Buddha praises renunciation of the world as the way for parting from various sufferings.

“Seeing this, the practicer greatly rejoices, and then finds himself seated on a lotus pedestal. He kneels down and pays homage to the Buddha with his palms put together. Before he raises his head, he is instantly born in the World of Perfect Bliss, and soon the lotus flower opens. When the flower opens, he hears various sounds praising the Four Noble Truths. Immediately he attains the enlightenment of an arhat, acquires the three kinds of wisdom and the six supernatural powers, and realizes the eight samadhis for emancipation. Such a person is called one who attains birth in the highest grade of the middle rank.”

26 “Those who attain birth in the middle grade of the middle rank are as follows: suppose there are sentient beings who observe the eight abstinences for a day and a night, observe the precepts for novices for a day and a night, or observe the precepts for monks or nuns for a day and a night, and do not violate the rules of deportment. They aspire to be born in the Land of Perfect Bliss by directing these merits.

“When the practicer, who is imbued with the fragrance of observing the precepts, is about to die, he sees Amida Buddha and his attendants coming to him, with a seven-jeweled lotus flower, emitting golden light. The practicer hears a voice in the air praising him, ‘Good man, since you are virtuous and have followed the teachings of the Buddhas of the past, present, and future, I am now here to welcome you.’

“At that moment the practicer finds himself seated on the lotus flower. Then the flower closes, and he is born on the jeweled pool of the World of Perfect Bliss in the western quarter. After seven days, the flower opens. Then he opens his eyes and, with his palms put together, praises the World honored One. Rejoicing at hearing the Dharma, he reaches the stage of a stream-winner, and becomes an arhat after half a kalpa. Such a person is called one who attains birth in the middle grade of the middle rank.”

27 “Those who attain birth in the lowest grade of the middle rank are as follows: suppose there are good men or good women who dutifully attend to their parents and provide generous care for others. When such a person is about to die, he encounters a true teacher who widely expounds for him the pleasures of the land of Amida Buddha and also the Forty-eight Vows of Bhikṣu

Dharmākara. When he dies after having heard this, he is born in the World of Perfect Bliss in the western quarter as quickly as a strong young man bends and stretches his arm.

“Seven days after he is born there, he meets Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta and rejoices at hearing the Dharma from them. In a small kalpa he becomes an arhat. Such a person is called one who attains birth in the lowest grade of the middle rank. This is visualization of those who attain birth in the middle rank, and is known as the fifteenth contemplation.”

28 The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, “Those who attain birth in the highest grade of the lowest rank are as follows: suppose there are sentient beings who commit various evils. Although these foolish people do not slander the Mahayana sutras of greater scope, they feel no shame about committing many kinds of evils. When such a person is about to die, he encounters a true teacher who praises the titles of the twelve divisions of the Mahayana scriptures. Because he hears the titles of the sutras, he is freed of extremely heavy, evil karma binding him for a thousand kalpas. The wise teacher further advises him to put his palms together and say ‘Namo Amida Butsu.’ Because he recites the name of the Buddha, his evil karma binding him to birth-and-death for fifty kotis of kalpas is eliminated.

“At that time the Buddha sends his transformed body and transformed Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta to the practicer; they praise him, saying, ‘Good man, because you recited the name of the Buddha, all of your evil karma has been extinguished, and so we are here to welcome you.’ When these words are spoken, the practicer sees the light of the transformed Buddha completely filling the room.

“Having seen this, he rejoices and dies. Then, riding a jeweled lotus flower, he follows the transformed Buddha and is born on the jeweled pool. After seven weeks the flower opens, when Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara of great compassion and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, emitting a great light, appear before him and expound for him the extremely profound teaching of the twelve divisions of scriptures.

“Having heard this, he acquires a clear understanding and awakens aspiration for the supreme enlightenment. In ten small kalpas, he acquired the perfect comprehension of the one hundred teachings and dwells in the first stage. Such a person is called one who attains birth in the highest grade of the lowest rank. Further, one attains birth by hearing the names of the Three Treasures — Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.”

29 The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, “Those who attain birth in the middle grade of the lowest rank are as follows: suppose there are sentient beings who violate the five precepts, the eight precepts, or the precepts for monks or nuns. Such a foolish person steals the property of the Sangha or pilfers possessions of monks and nuns. Preaching the Dharma for wrong purposes without any sense of shame, he defiles himself by committing many kinds of evil deeds. Such a person of evil karma, because of his evil deeds, is destined to fall into hell.

“When he is about to die, the roaring flames of hell all at once rush upon him. At that moment, he encounters a true teacher who compassionately expounds for him the ten majestic powers of Amida Buddha, extensively explains the transcendent powers of the light of that Buddha, and further praises the precepts, meditation, wisdom, emancipation, and the knowledge of emancipation which Amida has accomplished.

“When he has heard this, his evil karma binding him to birth-and-death for eighty kotis of kalpas is eliminated. The fierce flames of hell turn into cool and refreshing breezes which scatter heavenly flowers. On each flower is a transformed Buddha with transformed bodhisattvas to welcome him, and in a moment he attains birth within a lotus flower on the seven-jeweled pool. The flower opens after six kalpas, when Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta speak comforting words with their pure voice and expound for him the extremely profound Mahayana sutras. When he has heard the Dharma, he immediately awakens aspiration for the supreme enlightenment. Such a person is called one who attains birth in the middle grade of the lowest rank.”

30 The Buddha said to Ānanda and Vaidehī, “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 thought on the Buddha, you should simply recite the Name of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life.’ Accordingly, he sincerely and continuously says ‘Namo Amida Butsu’ 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 opens and 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 evil 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. This is visualization of those who attain birth in the lowest rank, and is known as the sixteenth contemplation.”

31 When the Buddha delivered this teaching, Vaidehī, listening to it with her five hundred female attendants, at once envisioned the boundless features of the World of Perfect Bliss. Seeing Amida Buddha and the two bodhisattvas, she rejoiced in mind and marveled at this wonder she had never experienced. With her mind completely emancipated, she attained insight into the nonorigination of all existence. Her five hundred female attendants, too, awakened aspiration for the supreme, perfect enlightenment and wished to be born in that land. The World-honored One predicted that they would all be born in that land and would attain the all Buddha-presence samadhi. Innumerable devas also awakened aspiration for the supreme enlightenment.

32 At that time, rising from his seat, Ānanda stepped forward and said to the Buddha, “World-honored One, what title should we give to this sutra, and how should we retain the essence of the teaching?”

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “This sutra should be entitled ‘Sutra of Visualization of the Land of Perfect Bliss, Buddha of Immeasurable Life, Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta.’ It should also be entitled ‘Purification and Elimination of Karmic Hindrances for the Attainment of

Birth in the Presence of All Buddhas.’ Hold fast to this sutra as such and never forget it. Those who practice this samadhi will be able to see, in their present life, the Buddha of Immeasurable Life and the two mahasattvas.

“Those good men and good women who simply hear the names of the Buddha and the two bodhisattvas will be freed of their evil karma binding them to birth-and-death for innumerable kalpas. How much more so if they contemplate on them!

“Know that those who are mindful of the Buddha are like a white lotus flower among people; Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta will become their good friends. They will sit in the place of enlightenment and be born in the house of all Buddhas.”

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “Hold firmly to these words. To hold to these words is to hold to the Name of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life.” When the Buddha had spoken these words, the Venerable Maudgalyāyana, the Venerable Ānanda, Vaidehī and all the others greatly rejoiced at hearing the Buddha’s teaching.

33 Then the World-honored One returned to the Vulture Peak walking in the air. After that, when Ānanda expounded to the whole assembly all that had happened, innumerable devas, nagas, yaksas, and others greatly rejoiced at hearing what the Buddha had taught, worshipped the Buddha, and departed.

The Sutra of Contemplation
on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life
Delivered by Śākyamuni Buddha