

The Sutra on the Buddha of

Immeasurable Life

Delivered by Śākyamuni Buddha

Part Two

Translated during the Ts'ao-Wei Dynasty

by the Tripitaka Master Saṃghavarman from India

22 The Buddha said to Ānanda, “The sentient beings born in that land all dwell among the truly settled, for in that Buddha-land there is not even one who is falsely settled or not settled.

“The Buddha-tathagatas throughout the ten quarters, countless as the sands of the Ganges, are one in praising the majestic power and 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.”

23 The Buddha said to Ānanda, “There are devas and humans throughout the ten quarters who, with sincere mind, aspire to be born in that land. They consist of three levels.

“Those of the highest level, abandoning their homes and discarding desires, become monks. Awakened the mind aspiring for enlightenment, they wholeheartedly think solely on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, perform various virtuous acts, and aspire to be born in that land. When these sentient beings are about to die, the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, together with a host of sages, appears before them.

“Then they follow the Buddha and are born in that land. They naturally attain transformative birth from within seven-jeweled lotus flowers and dwell in the stage of nonretrogression. Acquiring invincible wisdom, they exercise supernatural powers at will.

“Therefore, Ānanda, there are sentient beings who, while in this world, desire to behold the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. They awaken the mind aspiring for supreme enlightenment and practice virtuous acts in aspiration for birth in that land.”

24 The Buddha said to Ānanda, “Those of the middle level are devas and humans of the worlds throughout the ten quarters who, with sincere mind, aspire to be born in that land. Although they

are incapable of performing practices, becoming monks, and accomplishing great virtue, they still awaken the mind aspiring for supreme enlightenment and wholeheartedly think solely on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life.

“They perform some good, observe precepts of abstinence, erect stupas and statues, offer food to monks, hang temple banners, light lamps, scatter flowers, and burn incense. Directing the merit of these acts, they aspire to be born in that land.

“At the moment of their death, the Buddha of Immeasurable Life manifests himself in his transformed body. Its light and physical characteristics and marks are exactly like those of a real Buddha. Accompanied by a large assembly of sages, the Buddha appears before them. Then, following the transformed Buddha, they are born in that land and dwell in the stage of nonretrogression. Their virtue and wisdom are next to those of the highest level.

25 The Buddha said to Ānanda, “Those of the lowest level are devas and humans of the worlds throughout the ten quarters who, with sincere mind, desire to be born in that land. Even though they may not be able to do various virtuous acts, they awaken the mind aspiring for supreme enlightenment, think on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life wholeheartedly and with singleness of mind even ten times, and aspire to be born in that land.

“When they hear the profound Dharma, they rejoice and entrust themselves to it without giving rise to any doubt, and thinking of the Buddha even once, with sincere mind they aspire to be born in that land. When these people are about to die, they, seeing the Buddha as in a dream, also attain birth. In virtue and wisdom, they are next to those of the middle level.”

26 The Buddha said to Ānanda, “Boundless is the majestic power of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. This Buddha is praised by every one of the Buddha-tathagatas throughout the worlds in the ten quarters, whose number is countless, limitless, and inconceivable.

“Innumerable and countless bodhisattvas in the Buddha-lands of the eastern quarter, numerous as the sands of the Ganges, all go to visit the Buddha of Immeasurable Life in order to pay homage and make offerings to the Buddha as well as to the great assembly of bodhisattvas and sravakas. Listening to and accepting the teaching, they spread it in order to guide people to enlightenment. Bodhisattvas in the southern, western, northern, and four intermediate quarters, as well as above and below, all do the same.”

27 Then the World-honored One spoke the following verses:

“The Buddha-lands in the eastern quarter
Are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.
The bodhisattvas in those Buddha-lands
Go to pay reverence to the Infinitely Enlightened One.

The Buddha-lands in the southern, western, northern, and four intermediate quarters,
 As well as above and below, are also like this.
 The bodhisattvas in those Buddha-lands
 Go to pay reverence to the Infinitely Enlightened One.

All those bodhisattvas,
 Each bringing exquisite celestial flowers,
 Precious incense, and priceless cloth,
 Make offerings to the Infinitely Enlightened One.

Playing celestial music in concert
 And producing harmonious, elegant sounds,
 They praise the most excellent one with verses
 And make offerings to the Infinitely Enlightened One:

'You have fully acquired supernatural powers and wisdom,
 Freely entered the gates of the profound Dharma,
 And perfected the treasury of virtues;
 Peerless indeed is your excellent wisdom.

Your wisdom like the sun illuminates the world
 And disperses the clouds of birth-and-death.'
 Walking around him three times in reverence,
 They pay homage to the Supremely Honored One.

Having seen that land of glorious purity,
 Most wondrous and beyond conception,
 They thereby awaken the supreme mind
 And wish their land to be like this.

Then the Immeasurably Honored One
 Changes his expression and smiles with delight;
 From his mouth are emitted countless rays of light,
 Illuminating all the lands in the ten quarters.

These rays of light circle around him
 Three times and enter the crown of his head.
 All devas and humans
 Leap and dance with joy.

The Mahāsattva Avalokiteśvara,
 Rearranging his robes and bowing his head,
 Asks the Buddha, 'For what reason are you smiling?
 I humbly beseech you explain your intention.'

Then his august voice resonates like thunder;
 The eight kinds of exquisite tone resound, proclaiming,
 'I am now going to give predictions to the bodhisattvas.
 I will now explain. Listen closely!

The mahasattvas coming from the ten quarters,
 Made vows of which I am fully aware.
 They seek to establish lands adorned with purity;
 Receiving my predictions, they will surely become Buddhas.

While realizing that all things are
 Like dreams, illusions, or echoes,
 They will fulfill their excellent vows
 And without fail establish lands such as mine.

While knowing that things are like lightning flashes and mirages,
 They pursue the bodhisattva path to the utmost.
 Possessing all roots of virtue,
 Just as I predict, they will surely become Buddhas.

Although they thoroughly know the true nature of all things,
 That all is empty and has no substance,
 They will solely seek such pure Buddha-lands
 And without fail establish lands such as mine.'

The Buddhas tell the bodhisattvas
 To go to pay homage to the Buddha of Peace and Sustenance:
 'Listen to his teaching, joyfully accept it, and practice it
 So that you may swiftly reach the realm of purity.

Upon reaching the land adorned with purity,
 You will quickly acquire supernatural powers.
 Without fail, from the Immeasurably Honored One
 You will receive predictions and realize perfect enlightenment.

The Power of the Buddha's Primal Vow is such that

Those who, hearing the name, aspire for birth,
 All reach that land,
 And their attainment of nonretrogression comes about of itself.

The bodhisattvas make their excellent vows,
 Each wishing, "My land as well will not be different from this."
 They aspire to emancipate all beings everywhere
 And have their names known throughout the ten quarters.

In order to serve the millions of Tathagatas,
 They employ their miraculous powers to fly to all lands;
 After paying homage to them with joy, they take their leave
 And return to the Land of Peace.

People who lack roots of good
 Are not able to hear this sutra,
 But those who observe the precepts without fault
 Are able to hear the right Dharma.

Those who encountered the World-honored One in the past
 Are able to accept this teaching;
 Humbly receiving it and holding fast to it,
 They dance with great joy.

For those of arrogance, wrong views, and indolence,
 It is hard to accept this teaching.
 Those who have encountered Buddhas in their previous lives
 Will rejoice in hearing this teaching.

Sravakas and even bodhisattvas
 Are unable to know thoroughly the enlightened mind;
 They are like persons born without sight
 Desiring to guide others.

The ocean of the Tathagata's wisdom
 Is deep, vast, and without limit or bottom.
 It cannot be fathomed by those of the two vehicles;
 Only Buddhas alone can fully comprehend it.

Even if all human beings,

Without exception, fully attained the Way,
 Realized ultimate emptiness with pure wisdom,
 And pondered the Buddha's wisdom for myriads of kalpas,

And even if they expounded it with the greatest effort
 Throughout their lives, they still would not know it.
 The Buddha's wisdom thus has no bound,
 And it is pure to the utmost.

Hard it is to obtain human life
 And difficult it is to encounter a Buddha in this world.
 Even more difficult it is for one to attain faith and wisdom.
 Once you have heard the Dharma, endeavor to seek the Way.

The one who hears and never forgets the Dharma,
 Sees and reveres it and greatly rejoices in attaining it —
 That person is my true friend;
 Therefore, awaken aspiration for enlightenment.

Even if the whole world were filled with fire,
 Resolutely pass through it in your quest to hear the Dharma.
 You will unfailingly attain the enlightenment of Buddha
 And bring beings everywhere across the stream of birth-and-death.”

28 The Buddha said to Ānanda, “The bodhisattvas of that land all fulfill the attainment of Buddhahood after one lifetime, except those who, for the sake of sentient beings, have established their own original vows and, thus adorning themselves with the virtues of universal vows, seek to bring all to emancipation.

“Ānanda, while the sravakas in that Buddha-land have bodies that emit light for one fathom, the light of the bodhisattvas shines as far as a hundred yojanas. There are two bodhisattvas, however, who are the most revered ones, and have a majestic light that illuminates all the triple-thousand great thousand worlds.”

Ānanda asked the Buddha, “What are the names of the two bodhisattvas?”

The Buddha answered, “One is called Avalokiteśvara and the other, Mahāsthāmaprāpta. These two bodhisattvas once carried out the bodhisattva practices here in this world and, at the end of their lives, were born transformed in that Buddha-land.

“Ānanda, the sentient beings born in that land all possess the thirty-two major physical characteristics. Their wisdom having been completely perfected, they penetrate deeply into the

reality of all things and profoundly know their essence and subtlety. Their supernatural powers are unhindered and their physical faculties are sharp and clear. Those with lesser abilities attain the two kinds of insight. Those with superior abilities attain boundless insight into the nonorigination of all existence.

“Those bodhisattvas will not be reborn in the evil realms until they become Buddhas. With their unlimited supernatural powers, they will always remember their former lives. Excepted, however, are those who wish to be born in the worlds of the five defilements, manifesting the same forms as the people dwelling there just as I did in this world of mine.”

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “Bodhisattvas in that land, supported by the Buddha’s majestic powers, in as short a time as it takes to eat one meal, go to countless worlds in the ten quarters in order to pay homage and make offerings to the Buddhas, the World-honored Ones. In accordance with their thoughts, innumerable and countless offerings including flowers, incense, music, silken canopies, and banners, spontaneously appear just as they wish.

“They are rare, exquisite, excellent, and unlike those of this world. They are always offered to the great assembly of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and sravakas. The flowers in the sky turn into floral canopies. They emit brilliant colorful light like blazing fire and carry their fragrance everywhere. Some of the canopies are four hundred *li* in circumference. Others are larger, some even to the extent that they cover the triple-thousand great thousand worlds. They appear one after another and disappear in turn.

“The bodhisattvas rejoice together, play celestial music in the air, and sing songs with wondrous voices praising the virtues of the Buddhas. They hear and accept the teaching with great joy. After paying homage to the Buddhas in this way, they instantly return to their own land before their mealtime.”

29 The Buddha said to Ānanda, “When the Buddha of Immeasurable Life expounds the Dharma to all in the great assembly of sravakas and bodhisattvas, they gather in a hall of the seven kinds of jewels. As he extensively proclaims the teaching of the Way and presents the wondrous Dharma, without exception they all rejoice, comprehend, and attain enlightenment.

“At that time a breeze spontaneously arises from each of the four directions and wafts over the jeweled trees, producing the five notes of the scale and causing countless exquisite flowers to rain down. As it blows, the blowers scatter everywhere as natural offerings. This is repeated without cessation.

“All the devas make offerings of a hundred thousand kinds of heavenly flowers and incense and of ten thousand varieties of music to the Buddha and the assembly of bodhisattvas and sravakas. Spreading flowers and incense all around and playing various types of music, they

come and go one after another, each giving way to the next. The delight and pleasure of the assembly at that time are beyond expression.”

30 The Buddha said to Ānanda, “The bodhisattvas born in that Buddha-land always proclaim the right Dharma whenever appropriate. Since their expositions are in accordance with the wisdom of enlightenment, they have neither distortion nor error.

“With respect to the myriad things in that land, they harbor neither a sense of ‘mine’ nor any sense of attachment. Free and unrestricted, their minds are unattached in going and coming, proceeding and staying. They do not discriminate between those with whom they are close and those with whom they are not. They have no thought of self and other, nor of competition and dispute. For the sake of sentient beings, they have attained the benevolent mind of great compassion.

“They have the pliant and well-tempered mind free of anger, as well as the unhindered and pure mind free of indolence. They have the equal, excellent, deep, and tranquil mind, and also the mind cherishing, appreciating, and rejoicing in the Dharma. Having extinguished all blind passions, they are free from the mind causing them to fall into the evil realms.

“They have accomplished all the practices that bodhisattvas should perform and reached the perfection of immeasurable virtues. Having attained the deep concentration of mind, the supernatural powers, and transcendental wisdom, they let their minds sport in the seven practices leading to enlightenment, and are deeply devoted to the Buddha Dharma.

“Their physical eyes are clear and penetrating, unfailingly distinguishing one thing from another. Their divine eye sees limitlessly and boundlessly. Their Dharma-eye enables them to observe and ultimately realize the paths leading to enlightenment. Their wisdom eye beholds truth and enables them to reach the other shore. Their Buddha-eye enables them to completely realize the true nature of all things. With unhindered wisdom, they expound the teachings for the sake of all people.

“Observing with a sense of equality that the three worlds are empty and have no real substance, they seek the Buddha Dharma. Employing wisdom and skillful eloquence, they rid sentient beings of the afflictions of blind passions. Coming from suchness, they understand things as they really are and know well the skillful means of speech to make people cultivate good and eliminate evil. They do not relish worldly talk, seeking only right speech. They plant roots of good and aspire for the enlightenment of Buddha. They realize that all things are, without exception, tranquil and nonexistent. Their samsaric bodies and blind passions have been extinguished together with any of their karmic residue.

“As they hear the profound Dharma, their mind is free of doubt and fear, and they are always devoted to bodhisattva practices. Since their great compassion is deep and subtle, they

embrace all without discrimination. They pursue the teachings of the One Vehicle to the utmost and lead people to the other shore. Having torn apart the net of doubt, they induce wisdom to arise in the minds of people. They comprehend all the Buddha's teachings exhaustively.

"Their wisdom is like a great ocean, and their samadhi is like the king of mountains. The light of their wisdom, being brilliant and pure, exceeds that of the sun and the moon. The pure and undefiled Dharma is perfectly accomplished in them. Their wisdom is like the Himalayas, because it reflects all kinds of virtue evenly and clearly. It is like the great earth, because those bodhisattvas have no mind discriminating between pure and impure, favorable and unfavorable. "It is like pure water, because it washes away the dust and grime of blind passions. It is like the king of fire, because it consumes the firewood of all such passions. It is like a great wind, because it goes anywhere in all the worlds without hindrance. It is like empty space, because it has no attachment to any existing thing.

"It is like a lotus flower, because it is not defiled anywhere in all the worlds. It is like a great vehicle, because it carries the multitude of beings out of birth-and-death. It is like a thick cloud, because it roars with the great Dharma-thunder to awaken unenlightened beings. It is like a heavy rain, because it showers the nectar of Dharma to nourish sentient beings.

"It is like the Adamantine Mountains, because it cannot be moved by maras and those opposed to the Buddha's teachings. It is like the king of Brahmā Heaven, because it is foremost in accomplishing the good. It is like a nyagrodha tree, because it offers a shelter for all. It is like an udumbara flower, because it rarely appears and is difficult to encounter.

"It is like a garuda, because it subdues those who oppose Buddhism. It is like playing birds, because it store nothing. It is like the king of bulls, because it is invincible. It is like the king of elephants, because it brings others under its control. It is like the king of lions, because it fears nothing. It is vast like empty sky, because its great compassion extends equally to all.

"The bodhisattvas have vanquished jealousy from their minds, for they are free of envy toward those who are superior to them. Solely seeking the Dharma, their minds know no fatigue. Always desiring to expound the teachings, their will never grows weary. Beating the drum of Dharma and raising the banners of Dharma, they cause the sun of wisdom to shine forth and dispel the darkness of ignorance. Cultivating the six acts of accord and respect, they always engage in bestowing the gift of Dharma. Being steadfast and diligent, their resolution never falters.

"They become lanterns of light for the world and excellent fields of merit. They always become leaders and treat others equally without aversion or attachment. Seeking only the right path, they find no joy or sorrow in other matters. Extracting the thorns of passion, they bring peace to the multitudes of beings. Since their virtue and wisdom are superb, there is no one who does not revere them.

“Having destroyed the hindrance of the three defilements, they revel in using their supernatural abilities. They possess all the powers of cause, condition, will, vow, skilful means, continuity, good, meditation, intelligence, and attentive hearing; the powers of generosity, precepts, patience, effort, concentration, and wisdom; the powers of right-mindedness, right-contemplation, and supernatural faculties; and the powers to train and guide beings in accordance with the Dharma.

“Being perfectly adorned with glorious features of the body, excellent physical characteristics and marks, virtues, and the wisdom of eloquence, they have no equal. They revere and give offerings to countless Buddhas and are, in turn, always praised by them. They have pursued the bodhisattva’s paramitas to the utmost and gone far beyond the stages of sravakas and pratyekabuddhas through practicing various samadhi-gates including the samadhis of emptiness, formlessness, and nondesire as well as the samadhi of nonarising and nonceasing. “Ānanda, the bodhisattvas in that land have accomplished countless virtues such as these. I have only briefly explained them for your sake. If I were to expound them in full detail, I would not be able to describe them all even in hundreds of millions kalpas.”

31 The Buddha said to Bodhisattva Maitreya, the devas, humans, and others, “The virtue and wisdom of sravakas and bodhisattvas in the Land of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life are beyond verbal expression. Thus, that land is exquisite, blissful, and pure. Why do you not strive to practice the good, be mindful of the spontaneous working of the Way, and realize that all beings in that land attain without discrimination the boundless virtue of enlightenment? Each of you should be diligent and make every effort to seek it for yourself.

“Assuredly you will transcend and leave this world and attain birth in the Land of Peace. The bondage to the five evil courses is severed crosswise, and the evil courses close naturally. You ascend the path without limit. To go there is easy and yet no one is born there. The land not being at variance with the Way, you are drawn there by its spontaneous working. Why then do you not abandon worldly matters and make efforts to seek the virtue of the Way? You will thus be able to attain an infinitely long life and enjoy the life of limitless bliss.

“However, people in the world are so shallow and vulgar as to quarrel among themselves over matters of no urgency. In the midst of grave wickedness and extreme afflictions of the world, they busy themselves in leading their lives. Noble or base, poor or rich, young or old, and male or female, all they worry about is wealth and property. Whether or not they are possessed of fortune, they are all the same in having anxieties. They wander here and there in misery, accumulating worries and troubles. Driven by their own desire, they run about aimlessly and thus do not have a moment’s peace.

“If they have a field, they worry about the field. If they have a house, they worry about the house. In the same way, they worry about their six kinds of domestic animals such as cows and

horses, their menservants and maidservants, their money and wealth, clothes and food, and furnishings. Accumulating worries and compounding sighs, they live in constant anxiety and fear.

“Then without warning, a sudden flood or fire, robbers, adversaries, or creditors will deprive them of all their possessions by washing them away, burning them, or plundering them. When their possessions have thus disappeared, extreme torment keeps them in utter confusion and never leaves them. Their minds congeal with anger and they cannot free themselves from agitation. When their hearts and minds become hardened, it becomes impossible to free themselves.

“Furthermore, when their bodies perish and their lives end in the midst of these agonies, they are forced to discard all they have and leave this world with no one to accompany them. Even the noble and the wealthy have these worries; they are afflicted in this way by myriad anxieties and fears. They suffer chills and fevers, leading their lives with pain.

“The poor and the lowly are destitute and in constant want. If they have no fields, they become anxious and wish to possess them. If they have no house, they become anxious and wish to possess one. If they have none of the six kinds of domestic animals such as cows and horses, no menservants or maidservants, no money or wealth, no clothes or food or furnishings, they become anxious and wish to possess them.

“If they happen to have one thing, they feel that something else is lacking. If they have this, they feel they do not have that, and thus they wish they had as much as others. Even if, by chance, they come to possess everything they want, they will soon lose it. Then they again anxiously pursue it, but will not be able to reacquire it. Fretting over their losses in vain, they become exhausted in mind and body, and are restless whether sitting or standing. Anxieties following on their heels, they are afflicted in this way. Suffering chills and fevers, they lead their lives in pain.

“At times, this exhausts their bodies and shortens their lives. Since they have not done any good in particular, nor practiced the Way, nor performed virtuous deeds, when their lives come to an end and their bodies perish, they will depart this world alone and go far away. Although some destination awaits them, no one knows if they are bound for a good or evil realm.

“People in the world — parents and children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, other family members, or paternal and maternal relatives — should truly respect and love each other, refraining from hatred and envy. They should share things with others, refraining from greed and miserliness. They should always be friendly in speech and expression, refraining from quarrel and dispute.

“At times, people harbor a contentious mind and become angry. This enmity, however insignificant, may give rise to hatred and envy in this life, and in the coming life it will be

gradually aggravated and finally develop into a mass of hostility. The reason is this: people harm one another while engaged in worldly affairs; if such harm does not result in their immediate mutual destruction, they harbor hostility and accumulate anger that congeals and naturally imprints itself upon their minds, and they are unable to leave it behind. As a result, after being born in the next life, they are forced to be in conflict and take revenge on each other.

“In the midst of worldly desires and attachments, people are born alone and die alone, come alone and go alone. In accordance with their deeds, they go to a place of either pain or pleasure. They themselves receive their due consequences and no one can take their place. Their good or evil deeds bring them to places of happiness or suffering. A realm resulting from their previous lives inevitably awaits them, and thus they must definitely enter it by themselves. When they have gone to faraway realms, they will not see each other again.

“Their good and evil deeds inevitably bring them to be born in different realms which are dim and obscure, separating them from each other forever. Since the path each one takes is different, they cannot expect to meet again. How difficult it is indeed to come across each other again!

“Why do they not abandon all worldly matters? While they each are strong and healthy, they should strive to practice the good, as well as exercise diligence in aspiring to go beyond this world and attain an extremely long life. Why do they not seek the Way? What are they expecting in this world? What kind of pleasure are they seeking?

“Such people in the world do not believe that performing good deeds brings good results, or that seeking the Way leads them to attaining it. Neither do they believe that death is followed by rebirth, nor that by giving gifts to others they obtain merit. They do not believe in all these matters of good and evil, and saying that these are not the case, to the end they refuse to recognize them.

“Accordingly, people look upon themselves in the same way. Generation after generation, they share the same view. From one generation to the next, they hold on to these ideas inherited from their fathers. From the very beginning, their fathers and grandfathers neither performed good deeds nor were aware of the virtue of the Way. Thus they are filled with foolish desires and delusions. With their hearts oppressed and their minds closed, they cannot see for themselves the courses of birth-and-death, or the paths of good and evil, nor does anyone tell them about it. Although good luck and bad luck, fortune and misfortune, arise in succession, none of them wonders why this is so.

“The unchanging reality is that living and dying follow one after another without cease. At times, parents mourn the death of their children, and in turn, children mourn the death of their parents. Brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, cry over each other’s death. That death may occur in reverse order is the principle of impermanence. All things are subject to change and nothing

remains the same. Even if someone were to teach them this principle, very few would believe it. Consequently, they transmigrate within the realms of birth-and-death without cease.

“Such people, stricken with darkness and ignorance, do not believe the teaching of the sutras. With minds lacking any forethought, they only wish to gratify themselves. Deluded by lust and craving, they do not recognize the virtue of the Way. Lost and sinking in anger and rage, they pursue material wealth and carnal satisfaction like hungry wolves. Because of this, unable to attain the Way, they return to the suffering of the evil realms and repeat the cycle of birth-and-death endlessly. How pitiful and wretched they are!

“At times, when a family member, such as a parent, child, brother, sister, husband, or wife, dies and the other lives on, the one surviving mourns the other. Longing for the deceased, the other members of the family are overcome by grief at the loss. With heart and mind racked with pain, they mournfully recollect the deceased. Though days pass and years go by, they cannot be freed from this torment.

“Even if someone were to teach them the virtue of the Way, their minds would not become awakened. They think only of the favors they received from the deceased and cannot be freed from their feelings of attachment. Imprisoned in darkness and wrapped in ignorance and doubt, they are unable to think deeply and discern matters properly. Unable to maintain their composure, they can neither exclusively practice the Way with diligence, nor can they resolutely cut themselves off from worldly affairs. While wandering thus in this world, they meet their end. Their life will expire without attaining the Way, and there is nothing they can do about it.

“Invariably vile and corrupt, people are greedy for sensual pleasures. Many are confused about the Way and few can find it. People in the world rush about aimlessly with nothing to rely on. Whether well-born or not, high or low, rich or poor, noble or base, all toil ceaselessly at their work. Each of them harbors murderous and poisonous thoughts. With these malicious inner intents, they act recklessly. Acting contrary to the way of the world, they disregard the wishes of others.

“Their injustice and violation of the natural order result from their past acts, and they arbitrarily do what they desire until such evils are carried to their fullest extent. Instead of meeting their end naturally, their lives are suddenly snatched away and they fall into the evil realms where they undergo many cycles of suffering. Transmigrating through one life after another, they have no chance to escape for many thousands of kotis of kalpas. The pain they suffer is indescribable. How pitiful this is!”

32 The Buddha said to Bodhisattva Maitreya, the devas, humans, and others. “I have now told you about the way of the world. Such being the case, people remain in the world and do not attain the Way. You should think deeply on this, refrain from committing any evil, choose the good, and diligently perform it. Neither a life of lust and craving nor that of prosperity lasts

forever. All these must pass and nothing can give real delight. Since you live in the world where a Buddha is, you should be all the more diligent.

“The person who aspires with a sincere mind to be born in the Land of Happiness shall reach the full illumination of wisdom and acquire excellent virtues. Do not give in to your desires or disobey my admonitions; be careful not to lag behind others in practicing the Way. If you have any doubt about the teaching or do not understand it, you may ask me, the Buddha, about anything, and I will explain it to you.”

Bodhisattva Maitreya knelt down and said, “O Buddha, most majestic and venerable, what you have now expounded fills me with delight. Having heard your teaching, which penetrates my mind, I realize that people of the world are really as you have said. Now that, with your compassion, you have shown us the great Way, you have fully opened our ears and eyes and emancipated us once and for all.

“Having heard the Buddha’s exposition, we all rejoice. Having received your compassion, devas, humans, and all other beings down to crawling creatures are liberated from suffering and affliction.

“The Buddha’s teaching is most profound and excellent. With your wisdom you clearly observe all things in the eight quarters, the zenith and the nadir, as well as those in the past, future, and present, leaving nothing unseen.

“We have now attained emancipation because you devoted yourself to selfless efforts when you sought the Way in your former lives. The benevolence of your virtue encompasses all beings and your merit is majestic like a lofty mountain. Your light shines pervasively, penetrating to the boundless reaches of space. Opening the way for people to enter nirvana, you instruct them in the essentials of the scriptures and destroy wrong views by means of your majestic power, thus boundlessly inspiring all beings in the ten quarters.

“The Buddha is the Dharma-king whose virtue surpasses that of all other sages. As you are the teacher of all devas and humans, you enable them all to attain the Way in accordance with their aspirations. O Buddha, today we are able to meet you, and we all rejoice in hearing the voice of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. Thus we have attained clarity of mind.”

33 The Buddha said to Bodhisattva Maitreya, “What you have said is true. If you revere and adore a Buddha, you will attain great merit. A Buddha appears in this world after an exceedingly long time. I have now become a Buddha in this world. Expounding the Dharma, I spread the teaching of the Way, thereby severing all nets of doubt, pulling out the roots of lust and craving, and sealing off the sources of all evils. Nothing hinders me from traveling throughout the three worlds.

“The wisdom of the scriptures is essential for the various paths to enlightenment. It contains the fundamental principles of the teaching. It is clearly articulated and disclosed for beings in the five realms in order to emancipate those who are not yet emancipated, and clearly distinguishes between birth-and-death and the path to nirvana.

“Maitreya, you should know that you have performed the bodhisattva practices since innumerable kalpas ago, wishing for an eternally long time to emancipate sentient beings. The number of those who have followed you, attained the Way, and reached nirvana is beyond calculation.

“You, as well as all the devas and humans in the ten quarters and the four kinds of followers, have been transmigrating within the five realms for eternal kalpas, undergoing indescribable grief, fear, and afflictions. Birth-and-death has continued unceasingly until this present life. Now you have met the Buddha and heard his teaching. Furthermore, you have been able to hear about the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. How delightful and wonderful this is! It is my pleasure to share this joy with you.

“Now you should seek to abandon the pains of birth, death, aging, and sickness. Depravity as well as impurity being pervasive in this world, there is nothing that you can truly enjoy. You should resolutely maintain your composure, conduct yourself appropriately, strive to do more good, discipline yourself to keep your body pure, and wash away the filth of your heart. You should also be sincere in speech and conduct, and be inwardly and outwardly consistent. You should emancipate yourself, and in turn, save others. Sincerely seeking to fulfill your aspiration, accumulate roots of virtue for that purpose.

“No matter how much you may strive and suffer in this life, it will be only for a short time. After being born in the Land of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, you will enjoy limitless bliss. There you will be forever in accord with the virtue of the Way and have the roots of birth-and-death removed once and for all. There you will no longer be worried about the afflictions of greed, anger, and ignorance. If you wish your life to last for one kalpa, a hundred kalpas, or ten million kotis of kalpas, it will last just as long as you wish.

“The Buddha-land being uncreated, spontaneously manifested, and not apart from the enlightenment of nirvana, you should each be diligent in seeking to realize your aspiration. Do not entertain any doubt and do not give up your endeavor. If you commit offenses such as these, you will be born in the borderland, confined in a palace made of the seven kinds of jewels, where you will suffer all forms of adversity for five hundred years.”

Maitreya said to the Buddha, “Having received your sincere admonition, we will exclusively study and follow the teaching just as you have taught us. We will never entertain any doubt.”

34 The Buddha said to Maitreya, “If, here in this world, you maintain your composure, correctly control your mind, and refrain from doing evil, you will acquire the supreme virtue which is incomparable in all the worlds throughout the ten quarters. What is the reason? Since devas and humans in the Buddha-lands naturally do good and commit few evils, it is easy to teach and guide them.

“However, I have now become a Buddha in this world. It is extremely painful for me to live in this place of the five evils, the five pains, and the five burnings. I teach multitudes of beings, making them discard the five evils, leave behind the five pains, and avoid the five burnings. I subdue and cultivate their minds, making them practice the five good deeds and enabling them to gain merit and virtue, go beyond this world, acquire long life, and reach the enlightenment of nirvana.”

The Buddha said, “What are the five evils, the five pains, and the five burnings? What are the ways to extinguish the five evils and to make people practice the five good deeds, enabling them to gain merit and virtue, go beyond this world, acquire long life, and reach the enlightenment of nirvana?”

35 The Buddha said, “The first evil is as follows. Devas, humans, and all other beings down to crawling creatures are intent on committing evil, and there is none who is not so. The strong vanquish the weak, who in turn do injury to others. They harm and kill each other, like snakes and beasts swallowing and devouring their prey. Not knowing how to practice good deeds, they commit atrocious evils and immoral acts. They will later suffer retribution and be inevitably destined to the realm they deserve.

“The deities keep record and no offender goes unpunished. For that reason, some are born poor and destitute, base, beggarly, lonely, deaf, blind, mute, stupid, wicked, even humpbacked, insane, or abnormal. However, others are noble, prosperous, talented, or bright because in their previous lives they performed good and accumulated virtues with benevolence and filial piety.

“The reality of this world is that there are prisons established by the king’s law, but there are many who are unafraid of them and act without restraint. They commit evils and, having been found guilty, receive punishment. Even if they seek release, it is very hard to obtain. This is what we witness in this world. However, the retribution in the lives to come will be even more serious and severe. When they enter the dismal and dark realms, each receiving yet another samsaric body, they will undergo pains and afflictions as if the most extreme penalty of the king’s law were inflicted upon them.

“Thus, the countless afflictions of the three evil realms inevitably await them. While continuously transmigrating, they will receive different bodies and forms, and be subject to different realms. The life span they receive is sometimes long and sometimes short. Their soul or spirit goes to its appropriate destination. Although they go there alone, there are others who follow them and are

reborn in the same realm, and so there is no end to their vengeance on each other. Since the karmic relationship caused by their evil deeds has yet to expire, they cannot keep away from each other. Endlessly transmigrating within these realms, they have no chance of escape. It is impossible for them to attain release. Their pain is beyond words.

“Between heaven and earth, this is how things naturally are. Though their deeds, whether good or evil, may not immediately give rise to their results, they are inevitably subject to this karmic principle. This is the first great evil, the first pain, and the first burning. Suffering is like this — it is as if a great fire were burning a person alive.

“However, if in the midst of it, you control your mind intently, discipline and conduct yourself properly, exclusively do good, and do not commit evil deeds, then you yourself will gain liberation, acquire merit and virtue, go beyond this world, be reborn in a heavenly realm, and reach the enlightenment of nirvana. This is the first great good.

36 The Buddha said, “The second evil is as follows. People in the world, whether parents and children, brothers and sisters, other family members, or husbands and wives, all lack moral principles and disobey the laws. Being extravagant, lustful, arrogant, and self-indulgent, they each want to pursue their own desires. Giving themselves over to their whims, they deceive each other. What they think and what they say are different; their words and thoughts are insincere. Flattering and disloyal, they fawn over others with cunning words. Envy the wise, they slander the right-minded and cause others to fall into perversity.

“If an unwise ruler appoints ministers, some may freely take advantage of every chance to engage in trickery and deceit, while others will uphold the law and understand what takes place in society. When the ruler is not appropriate for the position, he is likely to be deceived and to recklessly ruin the loyal and virtuous. This is contrary to cosmic principles.

“Ministers betray their rulers, and sons betray their fathers. Brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, paternal and maternal relatives, and friends deceive each other. They each harbor greed, anger, and ignorance, and seek only to promote their own interests, craving to possess more than they already have. Whether they are well-born or not, high or low, they are all the same at heart. They ruin their homes and destroy themselves. They do not reflect on the past nor do they ponder the future. Consequently, their close and distant relatives are also brought to ruin.

“At times, when family members, friends villagers, townsfolk, and uneducated and vulgar people happen to work together, they are each so preoccupied with their own losses and gains that they consequently invite anger and enmity amongst themselves.

“Even if they are wealthy, they are stingy and not willing to give anything to others. Attached to their wealth and extremely greedy, they worry and suffer over it. Living in this way, when their lives come to an end, they find that they have nothing on which to rely. Each comes alone and

goes alone, and there is nothing they can take with them. Good or evil, fortune or misfortune, follows them wherever they may go. Some abide in delightful realms while others enter those of suffering and torment. Later, even if they feel regret, there is nothing they can do.

“People in the world are ignorant and lacking in wisdom. When they see others doing good, they despise and abuse them, and are unwilling to respect and emulate them. Only thinking of doing evil, they recklessly commit unlawful acts. Always intent on stealing, they covet the profit others make. When they have dissipated and squandered everything, they again seek to recover it. Since they have wicked and crooked minds, they fear the reactions on the faces of others. Since they never think ahead, they regret what they have done when something goes wrong.

“In this world there are prisons established by the king’s law where, in accordance with their offenses, they receive punishment. Since, in their previous lives, they did not believe in the virtue of the Way and did not practice the roots of good, they commit evil yet again in this world. Then heavenly deities, becoming aware of this, keep record of it. When their life ends and their spirit departs, they fall into the evil realms.

“Thus, the countless afflictions of the three evil realms inevitably await them. Endlessly transmigrating within these realms, life after life for many kalpas, they have no chance of escape. It is impossible for them to attain release. Their pain is beyond words. This is the second great evil, the second pain, and the second burning. Suffering is like this — it is as if a great fire were burning a person alive.

“However, if in the midst of it, you control your mind intently, discipline and conduct yourself properly, exclusively do good, and do not commit evil deeds, then you yourself will gain liberation, acquire merit and virtue, go beyond this world, be reborn in a heavenly realm, and reach the enlightenment of nirvana. This is the second great good.

37 The Buddha said, “The third evil is as follows. People in the world come together to live off of each other between heaven and earth. Their life span is limited. Above, there are people who are wise, rich, noble, and prosperous. Below, there are people who are poor, destitute, weak, and foolish. Among all of them, there are those that are evil who always harbor wicked thoughts. “With their minds filled with worries, they only seek to gratify their lust; agitated with carnal desires, they are restless whether sitting or standing. Greedy and miserly, they are bent on acquiring what they want. Leering at beautiful ladies, they freely indulge in indecent behavior. Despising and detesting their own wives, they frequently visit other women in secret. As a result, they squander all their wealth and eventually come to engage in criminal activities.

“They gather into bands, arm themselves, and fight with each other. Robbing and plundering, they viciously attack and kill people. They have evil schemes on the property of others and do not carry out their duties. When they obtain something by stealing, greed seizes them and makes them seek to acquire more. Fear-ridden, they intimidate and rob people in order to support their wives and children. Given to wanton desires, they go to the extreme in indulging

sensual pleasures. Further, they disregard seniority among family members and relatives. All of their kin, both paternal and maternal, worry and suffer because of such behavior.

“Again, they do not fear the prohibitions of the king’s law. Such evils as these become known by other people and spirits. The sun and the moon bring them to light and deities keep record of them.

“Thus, the countless afflictions of the three evil realms inevitably await them. Endlessly transmigrating within these realms, life after life for many kalpas, they have no chance of escape. It is impossible for them to attain release. Their pain is beyond words. This is the third great evil, the third pain, and the third burning. Suffering is like this — it is as if a great fire were burning a person alive.

“However, if in the midst of it, you control your mind intently, discipline and conduct yourself properly, exclusively do good, and do not commit evil deeds, then you yourself will gain liberation, acquire merit and virtue, go beyond this world, be reborn in a heavenly realm, and reach the enlightenment of nirvana. This is the third great good.”

38 The Buddha said, “The fourth evil is as follows. People in the world, never thinking of doing good, urge each other to commit various evil deeds. They slander and harm others and cause quarrels by deceitful and harsh words, lies, and flattery. Hating and envying good people, they entrap and ruin the bright and clever. They take delight in watching this happen from behind the scenes. Being undutiful to their parents, they despise their teachers and elders. Lacking the trust of their friends, they cannot expect them to be sincere.

“Being conceited and haughty, they think they are on the right path. Acting heedlessly in an overbearing manner, they treat others with contempt. Unable to know what they are doing, even when they commit evils, they feel no shame. Counting on their physical prowess, they force others to respect and fear them. Unafraid of the deities of heaven and earth as well as the sun and the moon, they refuse to do good, and so it is difficult to subdue and guide them. They are so self-indulgent that they think they can always remain as they are. There is nothing they fear, so they persist in their arrogance.

“Heavenly deities keep record of such evils as these. In their previous lives, they performed a few meritorious and virtuous deeds, and so the small good effects will assist, guard, and help them. However, since they commit evil deeds in this life, the effects of those meritorious and virtuous deeds are soon exhausted, and various good deities forsake them. Thus they stand alone without anything to rely on. As their lives come to an end, the results of their evil deeds inevitably send them to the destinations they deserve.

“Again, since their names are recorded and kept by the deities, their offenses and misdeeds lead them to their due destinations. As the retribution for their offenses takes an inevitable

course, they can neither throw it off nor escape from it. They have no choice but to go forward and enter the fiery cauldron, where their bodies and minds are broken into pieces and their spirits are made to suffer. Even if they, at this very moment, repent what they have done, nothing can help them. The cosmic principles proceed naturally and never stray from their courses.

“Thus, the countless afflictions of the three evil realms inevitably await them. Endlessly transmigrating within these realms, life after life for many kalpas, they have no chance of escape. It is impossible for them to attain release. Their pain is beyond words. This is the fourth great evil, the fourth pain, and the fourth burning. Suffering is like this — it is as if a great fire were burning a person alive.

“However, if in the midst of it, you control your mind intently, discipline and conduct yourself properly, exclusively do good, and do not commit evil deeds, then you yourself will gain liberation, acquire merit and virtue, go beyond this world, be reborn in a heavenly realm, and reach the enlightenment of nirvana. This is the fourth great good.

39 The Buddha said, “The fifth evil is as follows. People in the world are frivolous and idle. They are unwilling to do good deeds, to discipline themselves, or to work hard at their occupations. Consequently, their family members and relatives suffer from privations and the afflictions of hunger and cold. When their parents scold them, they retort with angry looks and disobey their parents’ admonitions. They rebel against them as if they were enemies. Thus, this makes their parents wish that they never had children.

“They lack moderation in their dealings with others, and so everyone worries over the troubles they cause. Ignoring their indebtedness to their parents and disregarding their obligations to others, they are unwilling to give anything in return. They become poorer and more destitute and cannot recover from it. Whatever profit they may make, they want to keep for themselves. Plundering the property of others, they squander it as they desire. While floundering between loss and gain, they live extravagantly. Indulging in drinking and feasting on delicacies, they never practice temperance. Led by their own desires and failing to reflect on their own foolishness, they come into conflict with others.

“Without giving any consideration to the feelings of others, they force their views upon them. When they see others doing good, they hate and envy them. Lacking righteousness and propriety, they have neither self-reflection nor modesty. They are so self-righteous that no one can advise or admonish them. They are unconcerned whether or not their six kinds of relatives and dependents have enough to live on. They neither acknowledge their indebtedness to their parents nor fulfill their moral obligations to their teachers and friends. In their minds they always think evil thoughts, in their speech they always utter evil words, and with their bodies they always commit evil deeds. Never have they done even a single good deed.

“They do not believe the teachings of ancient sages or those of Buddhas, nor do they believe that they will be able to go beyond this world through practicing the Way. Further, they do not believe that after death their spirit will be reborn into another world, that performing good deeds will bring good results, or that committing evil deeds will bring evil results. They harbor the intent to kill the true ones, to disrupt the Sangha, and to harm their father and mother, brothers and sisters, and dependents. Thus, their six kinds of relatives hate them so much that they wish them dead.

“In this way, such people in the world are all the same at heart. They are ignorant and foolish, and yet they think themselves wise. They do not know from where life comes or to where death leads. Neither merciful nor tolerant toward others, they act against the way of the world. However, in the midst of all this, they still yearn for sudden fortune. Although they desire a long life, the time will come when they must die.

“Even if someone compassionately admonishes them, guides them to think of good deeds, and explains to them that we are going through birth-and-death in the good and evil realms according to the natural law of karma, they will not believe this truth. No matter how painstakingly one may try to convince them, it is of no use. With their minds closed, they refuse even to try to understand. However, when their lives are about to end, remorse and fear arise in turn. Not having done any good deed before, at the very end of life they become filled with regret. What is the use of regretting this afterwards?

“Within the universe, there are five distinct realms. They are vast and deep, endless and boundless. A good or evil deed brings about its corresponding result, and accordingly one receives either fortune or misfortune. No one else can take one’s place. This is the consequence of the natural law of karma. In accordance with one’s evil deeds, retribution follows wherever one may go and no one can escape it.

“Good people do good deeds, moving from happiness to greater happiness, from light to brighter light. Evil people do evil deeds, moving from pain to greater pain, from darkness to deeper darkness. Who knows this? Only I, the Buddha, know. Even though I teach and reveal this to people, few believe it. Therefore, the cycles of birth-and-death never stop and transmigration through the evil realms continues without cease. It is hard to describe in detail such people in the world.

“Thus, the countless afflictions of the three evil realms inevitably await them. Endlessly transmigrating within these realms, life after life for many kalpas, they have no chance of escape. It is impossible for them to attain release. Their pain is beyond words. This is the fifth great evil, the fifth pain, and the fifth burning. Suffering is like this — it is as if a great fire were burning a person alive.

“However, if in the midst of it, you control your mind intently, discipline and conduct yourself properly, keep your speech and actions in accord, are sincere in your conduct, use words appropriately, harbor no contradiction between your mind and speech, exclusively do good, and do not commit evil deeds, then you yourself will gain liberation, acquire merit and virtue, go beyond this world, be reborn in a heavenly realm, and reach the enlightenment of nirvana. This is the fifth great good.”

40 The Buddha said to Maitreya, “As I have told you, the five evils in this world give rise to afflictions in this way, and the five pains and the five burnings arise one after another. Since people only commit evil deeds and do not cultivate the roots of good, they all inevitably enter the evil realms.

“Now in this world, even if those who suffer from incurable diseases want to die, they cannot, and even if they want to live, they cannot. Whatever their evil deeds have brought about is held up for others to see. After they die, in accordance with their deeds, they enter the three evil realms, where the suffering and torment they undergo is beyond measure. They burn themselves with the fire they have created.

“Reaching this world after a long period of time, they invite enmity among themselves, which arises at first as something insignificant, but eventually develops into a great evil. This is simply because they are so attached to wealth and sensual pleasures that they can never bring benefit to others. Driven by foolish covetousness, they selfishly think as they please and are bound by blind passions, which never dissolve and never cease.

“They scramble shamelessly for their own profit, never reflecting on their own conduct. Even if they become wealthy and prosperous, they do nothing but indulge themselves. They are unable to exercise restraint and are unwilling to do good deeds. Consequently, their powerful influence diminishes quickly and is exhausted. They remain in the midst of suffering, which becomes ever more harsh as time passes.

“The cosmic principles are like a net stretching everywhere, and unfailingly catch all offenders. This net of karmic law, made up of both coarse and fine mesh, operates consistently from top to bottom. Those caught in the net are helpless, filled with desolation and fear. This is the way it has been from the past up to the present day. How sad and heart-wrenching it is!”

The Buddha said to Maitreya, “People of the world are like this. All the Buddhas have pity on them and, using majestic and transcendent powers to extinguish all evil, guide them to do good deeds. If they abandon the thoughts they now possess, observe the precepts, and accept and practice the teachings unerringly, then they will finally be able to go beyond this world and reach the enlightenment of nirvana.”

The Buddha said, “You as well as the devas and humans of the present and the future, having received the teaching of the Buddha, should reflect on it, and discipline and conduct yourselves properly in the midst of this world. A sovereign ruler should perform good deeds and edify those under him. His edicts should be passed down from one to the other, so that they all may discipline themselves, revere the sages, respect good persons, and have compassion and benevolence toward others. You should not go against the instructions and admonitions of the Buddha. You should seek to go beyond this world and extract and sever the roots of evil binding you to birth-and-death. You must keep away from the path leading to the countless sorrows, fears, and afflictions of the three evil realms.

“You should extensively plant roots of virtue in this world, be kind and generous, and abstain from breaking the precepts. With forbearance, diligence, concentration, and wisdom, you should encourage one another in doing virtuous deeds and performing good. If you strictly observe the precepts of abstinence with right thought and proper mindfulness even for one day and one night, this will be superior to doing good deeds in the Land of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life for one hundred years.

“What is the reason? Since that Buddha-land is a realm of uncreatedness and spontaneity, all people there accumulate good merit without committing even a hair’s breadth of evil. If you perform good deeds for ten days and ten nights in this world, this will be superior to performing them for one thousand years in other Buddha-lands. Why is this so? It is because in other Buddha-lands many perform good deeds and few commit evils. Those lands, being full of merit and virtue by nature, are not the place for committing evils.

“However, in this realm of ours, evil abounds and there is no spontaneous arising of good. Striving to satisfy their desires, beings in this world deceive each other. With minds distressed and bodies exhausted, they swallow afflictions and consume poison. Toiling their lives away, they never have even a moment’s rest.

“Out of pity for all of you, devas and humans, I have taken pains in urging you to do good deeds. I have guided you in accordance with your capacities and have bestowed you with the teaching, and you have never failed to comply with it. You will all attain the Way as you wish.

“Wherever the Buddha travels, be it country, province, town, or village, there is no place which does not benefit from his virtue. Peace and harmony reign throughout the land. The sun and the moon shine brightly, the wind and rain are timely, and no disaster or disease ever occurs. The land is prosperous and the people live in peace, so there is no need to use soldiers and weapons. People respect virtue, cultivate benevolence, and diligently observe propriety and humility.”

The Buddha said, “The pity I have for all of you, devas and humans, is much greater than the concern that fathers and mothers have for their children. Having become a Buddha in this world,

I have subdued the five evils, eliminated the five pains, and extinguished the five burnings. With good I have vanquished evil and uprooted the suffering of birth-and-death, enabling people to attain the five virtues and reach the tranquility of the uncreated.

“However, after I leave this world, the teaching will gradually perish and people, engaging in flattery and deceit, will commit evil deeds again. Eventually they will suffer from the five pains and the five burnings as before. As time goes by, their sufferings will become ever more severe. It is impossible to describe this in detail. For your sake, I have only explained it in brief.”

The Buddha said to Maitreya, “You should each reflect on this and admonish one another to follow the Buddha’s teaching and not to disobey it.”

At this time, Bodhisattva Maitreya put his palms together and said, “How considerate the Buddha’s teaching is! People of the world are really as you have described. The Tathagata, out of compassion and pity for all, emancipates each one of them. Having accepted the Buddha’s sincere admonitions, we will never fail to follow them.”

41 The Buddha said to Ānanda, “Rise up and rearrange your robes. Put your palms together and respectfully pay homage to the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. For all the Buddha-tathagatas in the lands of the ten quarters, always and in one accord, praise that Buddha’s virtue of nonattachment and unhinderedness.”

Then, Ānanda stood up and rearranged his robes. Assuming the proper posture, he faced to the west and put his palms together to pay sincere homage. Prostrating his whole body to the ground, he worshipped the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. Then he said, “O World-honored One, I wish to see that Buddha, the Land of Peace and Happiness, and the whole assembly of the bodhisattvas and the sravakas therein.” No sooner had he uttered these words than the Buddha of Immeasurable Life emitted a great radiant light, which universally illuminated all the Buddha-worlds. The Encircling Adamantine Mountains, Mount Sumeru which is the king of mountains, all other great and small mountains, and everything else shone with the same golden color.

It was like the flood at the end of a cosmic age covering the whole world, when everything becomes submerged and disappears, leaving nothing but the vast expanse of water to be seen. The light of that Buddha was just like this. All the lights of the sravakas and bodhisattvas were completely outshone and obscured, and only that Buddha’s brilliant and glorious light could be seen.

At that time Ānanda saw the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, whose majesty was outstanding like Mount Sumeru, king of mountains, rising high above all the worlds. There was nothing that was not illuminated by the light radiating from the Buddha’s body. The entire audience, the assembly of the four kinds of followers, saw this at the same time. Similarly, those in that land saw all that happened in this land.

42 At that time, the Buddha said to Ānanda and Bodhisattva Maitreya, “When you observed the land, did you not see that everything there, from the ground up to the Heaven of Pure Abode, is most wondrous, adorned with purity, and that it comes into being spontaneously?”

Ānanda answered, “Yes, we did.”

“Did you not also hear the great voice of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life resounding throughout the whole world and guiding all sentient beings?”

Ānanda answered, “Yes, we did.”

“Did you not also see that the inhabitants in that land, aboard their seven-jeweled flying palaces measuring a hundred thousand yojanas, travel freely in all the directions of the ten quarters to make offerings to all the Buddhas?”

Ānanda replied, “Yes, we did.”

“Did you not also see that some of the inhabitants in that land had attained womb-like birth?”

Ānanda answered, “Yes, we did.”

“Those who attain womb-like birth dwell in palaces a hundred yojanas or five hundred yojanas in extent. Within, they each enjoy pleasures like those of Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, all of which arise naturally.”

43 Then Bodhisattva Maitreya said to the Buddha, “World-honored One, what causes and conditions lead to the distinction between womb-like birth and transformative birth among the inhabitants of that land?”

The Buddha said to Maitreya, “Suppose there are sentient beings who, with minds full of doubt, aspire to be born in that land through the practice of various meritorious acts. Unable to realize the Buddha-wisdom, the inconceivable wisdom, the ineffable wisdom, the all-encompassing wisdom of the Mahayana, and the unequaled, peerless, and supremely excellent wisdom, they doubt these kinds of wisdom and do not believe in them. Yet, believing in the recompense of evil and good, they aspire to be born in that land through cultivating the roots of good.

“Such sentient beings will be born in those palaces, where for five hundred years they will never see the Buddha, hear the teaching, or see the sacred host of bodhisattvas and sravakas. Hence, in that land this is known as womb-like birth.

“However, if there are sentient beings who resolutely believe in these kinds of wisdom, from the Buddha-wisdom to the supremely excellent wisdom, and perform meritorious acts, directing their merit with firm belief, then they will spontaneously attain the transformative birth within the seven-jeweled lotus flower, seated with their legs crossed. In an instant they will acquire the same physical features, radiant light, enlightened wisdom, and virtues as those of bodhisattvas.”

44 “Moreover, Maitreya, if great bodhisattvas in the Buddha-lands of other directions aspire to see the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, and revere and make offerings to the Buddha as well as the assembly of bodhisattvas and sravakas, then when their lives come to an end, they will attain birth in the Land of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, where they spontaneously receive transformative birth within the seven-jeweled lotus flower.

“Know, Maitreya, that this is because those of transformative birth are superior in wisdom. Those of womb-like birth lack wisdom, and for five hundred years, never seeing the Buddha, hearing the teaching, or seeing the sacred host of bodhisattvas and sravakas, they have no way of making offerings to the Buddha. Neither do they know the rules of conduct of bodhisattvas, nor can they perform meritorious acts. You should know that this is brought about by a lack of wisdom and the harboring of doubts in their former lives.”

45 The Buddha said to Maitreya, “Consider the case of a cakravartin king, who possesses a palace chamber made of the seven kinds of jewels. It is adorned in manifold ways, furnished with canopied beds, and hung with many silken banners. If young princes were to commit offenses against the king, they would be imprisoned there and fettered with gold chains.

“They would be provided with food and drink, clothes, bedding, flowers and incense, and music, no less than the cakravartin king is. What do you think of this? Would these princes enjoy being in such a state or not?”

Maitreya replied, “No. They would only try to use various means to seek out someone of great power in order to escape from there.”

The Buddha said to Maitreya, “These sentient beings are precisely like that. Since they doubt the Buddha’s wisdom, they will be born in those palaces. There they do not receive any punishment of experience even a moment of discomfort. However, for five hundred years, they will neither be able to see the Three Treasures, nor cultivate various roots of good through making offerings to Buddhas — this is distressing to them. Though all other pleasures are available to them, they do not enjoy staying there.

“If these sentient beings become aware of their past offenses and deeply repent with a desire to leave that place, then immediately as they wish, they will be able to go to the place of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, where they can worship and make offerings to the Buddha. In

addition, they will be able to visit all the other countless and innumerable Buddhas and cultivate various meritorious acts.

“Know, Maitreya, that if there are bodhisattvas who give rise to doubt, they will lose the great benefit. Therefore, you should definitely believe in the supreme wisdom of all the Buddhas.”

46 Bodhisattva Maitreya said to the Buddha, “World-honored One, how many bodhisattvas are there in this world who have attained the stage of nonretrogression and will be born in that Buddha-land?”

The Buddha said to Maitreya, “In this world there are sixty-seven kotis of bodhisattvas at the stage of nonretrogression, and they will all be born in that land. Every one of those bodhisattvas has already in the past made offerings to innumerable Buddhas as you, Maitreya, have done. Bodhisattvas of slight practice and practitioners of small virtues are numerous beyond calculation, but they will all be born in that land.”

The Buddha said to Maitreya, “Not only are the bodhisattvas in this world born in that land, but also those in other Buddha-lands are born there.

First, in the land of the Buddha called Far-reaching Light, there are one hundred and eighty kotis of bodhisattvas, all of whom will be born there.

Second, in the land of the Buddha called Treasure Storehouse, there are ninety kotis of bodhisattvas, all of whom will be born there.

Third, in the land of the Buddha called Immeasurable Sound, there are two hundred and twenty kotis of bodhisattvas, all of whom will be born there.

Fourth, in the land of the Buddha called Taste of Nectar, there are two hundred and fifty kotis of bodhisattvas, all of whom will be born there.

Fifth, in the land of the Buddha called Dragon Subduer, there are fourteen kotis of bodhisattvas, all of whom will be born there.

Sixth, in the land of the Buddha called Superior Power, there are fourteen thousand kotis of bodhisattvas, all of whom will be born there.

Seventh, in the land of the Buddha called Lion, there are five hundred kotis of bodhisattvas, all of whom will be born there.

Eighth, in the land of the Buddha called Light Free of Defilement, there are eighty kotis of bodhisattvas, all of whom will be born there.

Ninth, in the land of the Buddha called Peak of Virtue, there are sixty kotis of bodhisattvas, all of whom will be born there.

Tenth, in the land of the Buddha called Mountain of Wondrous Virtue, there are sixty kotis of bodhisattvas, all of whom will be born there.

Eleventh, in the land of the Buddha called King of Humans, there are ten kotis of bodhisattvas, all of whom will be born there.

Twelfth, in the land of the Buddha called Supreme Flower, there are innumerable and incalculable bodhisattvas, all of whom will dwell in the stage of nonretrogression and are

possessed of invincible wisdom. Having already made offerings to countless Buddhas, they can master within seven days the most steadfast Dharma that would require mahasattvas a hundred thousand kotis of kalpas to realize. These bodhisattvas will all be born there.

Thirteenth, in the land of the Buddha called No-Fear, there are seven hundred and ninety kotis of great bodhisattvas and incalculable minor bodhisattvas and bhiksus, all of whom will be born there.”

The Buddha said to Maitreya, “Not only will the bodhisattvas from these fourteen Buddha-lands be born there, but also those from innumerable Buddha-lands in the ten quarters will attain birth in the same way. Their number is so huge and countless that if I were try to name those Buddhas in the ten quarters and count the bodhisattvas and bhiksus who will be born there, it would be impossible even if I were to do so day and night for a kalpa. I have only briefly explained this for your sake.”

47 The Buddha said to Maitreya, “If there are persons who, having heard the name of that Buddha, leap and dance with joy and are mindful of the Buddha even once, know that they receive the great benefit; that is, they acquire the unexcelled virtues.

“For this reason, Maitreya, even if the triple-thousand great thousand worlds were filled with great flames, you must pass through them to hear the teaching of this sutra. Rejoicing in it with an entrusting heart, you should retain and recite it, and practice as prescribed. What is the reason? It is because there are many bodhisattvas who wish to hear this teaching but are unable to do so.

“If there are sentient beings who hear the teaching of this sutra, they will never retrogress on their way to supreme enlightenment. Therefore, you should wholeheartedly accept, retain, recite, expound, and put this sutra into practice.”

The Buddha said, “Now I have expounded this sutra for all sentient beings, and have enabled you to see the Buddha of Immeasurable Life and everything in his land. If you have questions about what to do, you should ask me now, so that you may not give rise to further doubt after I have entered nirvana.

“In the future, all the sutras will become extinct. However, out of compassion and pity, I will ensure that this sutra alone remains for a further one hundred years. Those sentient beings who encounter this sutra will attain emancipation in accordance with their aspiration.”

The Buddha said to Maitreya, “It is difficult to encounter and difficult to behold a Tathagata who has appeared in this world. It is difficult to meet and difficult to hear the teachings of the Buddhas. It is difficult to hear the excellent teachings of the bodhisattvas — the paramitas. It is also difficult to meet a true teacher, hear the teaching, and put it into practice.

“However, the most difficult of all difficulties is to hear this sutra and accept it with the entrusting heart: nothing surpasses this difficulty. Therefore, I have thus presented the Dharma, thus preached it, and thus taught it. You should accept it in trust and practice in accord with it.”

48 At that time, when the Buddha expounded this sutra, countless sentient beings awakened the mind of supreme, perfect enlightenment. Twelve thousand nayutas of people attained the pure Dharma-eye, twenty-two kotis of devas and humans obtained the fruit of nonreturner, eight hundred thousand bhiksus extinguished their defiled passions and liberated their minds, and forty kotis of bodhisattvas attained the stage of nonretrogression. Adorning themselves with the virtue of the universal vows, they will all surely realize the perfect enlightenment in the future.

At that time, the triple-thousand great thousand worlds shook with six kinds of tremors, and a great light universally illuminated the lands in the ten quarters. A hundred thousand kinds of music arose spontaneously, and countless wondrous flowers rained down profusely from the sky.

When the Buddha finished expounding this sutra, Bodhisattva Maitreya, the bodhisattvas from the ten quarters, the Elder Ānanda, all the great sravakas, and all those who were in the assembly, without exception, rejoiced upon hearing what the Buddha had taught.

The Sutra on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life

Delivered by Śākyamuni Buddha

Part Two