

Sutra of the Eight Realizations of Great Beings 佛說八大人覺經

Sutra of the Eight Realizations of Great Beings (with Annotations)

(translated from Chinese by Buddha Gate Monastery)

Day and night, at all times,
Buddha's disciples should
Mindfully recite and contemplate
The eight realizations of Great Beings.

The First Realization:

All the world is impermanent.
The earth is fragile and perilous.
The four great elements inhere in suffering and emptiness.
In the five skandhas there is no self.
All that arise, change, and perish,
Are illusive, unreal, and without a master.
Mind is the root of evil;
Body a reservoir of sin.
Thus observing and contemplating,
One gradually breaks free from birth and death.

The Second Realization:

Excessive desire is suffering.
Birth, death, and weariness in life
All originate from greed and desires.

Desiring less, being wu-wei,
Body and mind are at ease and free.

The Third Realization:

The mind is insatiable,
Always seeking, thirsty for more,
Thus increasing our sins.
Bodhisattvas renounce such conduct.
Always remember to follow the way,
Be content and at peace with poverty,
With wisdom as the sole vocation.

The Fourth Realization:

Indolence leads to degradation.
Always practice with diligence,
Vanquish all vexations,
Subdue the four maras,
And escape the prison of the skandhas.

The Fifth Realization:

Ignorance leads to birth and death.
Bodhisattvas are always mindful
To study and learn extensively,
To increase their wisdom
And perfect their eloquence,
So they can teach and enlighten all beings,
And impart great joy to all.

The Sixth Realization:

Poverty and hardship breed resentment,
Creating harm and discord.
Bodhisattvas practice dana,
Beholding the friendly and hostile equally;
They neither harbor grudges
Nor despise malicious people.

The Seventh Realization:

The five desires are perilous.
Even as laity, be not sullied by worldly pleasures;
Think frequently of the three robes,
The tiled bowl, and instruments of Dharma;
Aspire to the monastic life
And cultivate the Way with purity;
Let your actions be noble and sublime,
Showering compassion on all.

The Eighth Realization:

Birth and death are like a blazing fire
Plagued with endless afflictions and suffering.
Vow to cultivate the Mahayana mind,
To bring relief to all;
To take on infinite sufferings for sentient beings,
And lead all to supreme joy.

These are the eight realizations of Great Beings,
Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

They practice the Way with diligence,

Develop compassion, and cultivate wisdom.
They sail the ship of dharmakaya
To the shore of nirvana,
Returning again to samsara to liberate sentient beings.
With these eight principles,
They point out the Way,
So that all beings may awaken
To the sufferings of life and death,
Relinquish the five desires, and
Cultivate the mind on the noble path.
If Buddha's disciples recite these eight realizations,
In thought after thought,
They will eradicate countless sins,
Advance on the bodhi path,
Promptly attain enlightenment,
Be forever freed from birth and death,
And always abide in joy.

Sutra of the Eight Realizations of Great Beings – Annotations

sutra佛經

A Buddhist scripture containing the dialogues or discourses of the Buddha.

Great Beings

Highly enlightened beings; beings with great virtue and deeds; bodhisattvas and buddhas.

Mindfully

Sincerely, with great concentration; whole-heartedly.

eight realizations

What one must understand and strive to become a Great Being such as the Buddha.

first realization

The foundation of the eight realizations; the teaching of impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and no-self.

four great elements 四大

Earth (solid or dry matter), water (liquid or wet matter), wind (air or motion), and fire (heat or energy). They comprise all matter.

inhere in suffering

All worldly things are impermanent, and prone to bring suffering.

emptiness 空

Both the self and all phenomena are without independent existence or inherent, fixed characteristics. They are

impermanent, mutable, and mutually dependent; their individuality is in appearance only.

five skandhas五蘊

Five aggregates—form, feeling, conception, volition, and consciousness (色受想行識). Form refers to our body or the physical world, the other four are of the mind. Ordinary beings see themselves as composed of these aggregates. When we analyze them deeper, we find no real substance.

no self無我

Emptiness of an independent, consistent self or self-identity. What we perceive as “self” is actually an illusive ego.

all that arise

All composite things are conditional, always changing, and perishable. One should see beyond their appearance. There is not a master-controller.

root of evil

All harmful actions come from deluded thoughts.

reservoir of sin

The body is both an instrument of sin and the outcome of past transgressions prone to suffering.

free from birth and death

To escape the endless rebirth cycle and attain nirvana.

birth, death

Where there is birth there is death, which is full of suffering. The endless rebirth cycle, known as samsara, is a result of desires arising from delusion.

empty of effort (wu-wei) 無為

Free from contrived effort; free from clinging and attachments; unconditioned; absolute. Being wu-wei also means inner peace obtained by having no desires. Also translated as “unconditioned Dharma” where appropriate.

Sin

Misdeeds, actions that lead to harm and suffering.

bodhisattvas 菩薩

One who, with infinite compassion, vows to become a buddha and to liberate countless sentient beings. A bodhisattva

practices all six paramitas (perfections), but it is the prajna paramita that ultimately brings true liberation.

Bodhi

enlightenment, to awaken.

Sattva

sentient beings, beings with consciousness.

at peace with poverty

The bodhisattva is not distressed by physical hardship; true poverty is poverty of virtue, not material comfort.

wisdom as sole vocation

“Wisdom” means the understanding of the truth. To acquire such wisdom is essential for the bodhisattva.

Indolence

Sloth or laziness easily leads to moral misconducts.

practice with diligence

To attain the Way requires diligent effort.

Vexations. Klesas 煩惱 (pronounced “kleshas”)

Greed, anger, and ignorance; causes of suffering; defilement of the mind; the chronic mental states that vex the mind and distress the body.

four maras

Maras are obstacles to cultivation. 1. Kleshas 煩惱魔, 2. skandhas 陰魔, 3. death 死魔, and 4. deva-mara 天魔, the celestial evil tempter.

Prison

The skandhas and realms are like a prison. The “realms” refer to the 18 spheres 十八界: six senses 六根 (eye, ear, etc.), six sense objects 六塵 (form, sound, etc.), and six consciousnesses 六識.

Ignorance

Ignorance of the true nature of the “self” and life. From ignorance comes desires and hatred, which in turn lead to samsara.

study and learn

Bodhisattvas need to learn many ways of liberation in order to help wide groups of people.

Eloquence

Ability to convey the teaching well and to answer difficult questions.

poverty and hardship

Easily lead to resentment, which in turn may produce otherwise undue and uncalled-for bad karma with many people.

dana 布施(檀那)

Charity. The first of the six paramitas (perfections) practiced by a bodhisattva. There are 3 types of generosity: giving of material, giving of solace (comfort, protection, removal of fear, etc.), and giving of Dharma.

Equal

Bodhisattva understands all beings are fundamentally equal; they have no hatred towards evil or malicious people.

five desires

Desire for sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch.
Alternatively, desire for wealth, lust, fame, food, and sleep.
They are harmful, not pleasurable.

These three are symbols of monastic life:

three robes

Traditionally Buddhist monks wear only three robes.

tiled bowl

Monk's begging bowl can be tiled or metal.

Instruments

Implements that are used in Buddhist services or daily life of a Buddhist monk.

Mahayana 大乘

The great (maha) vehicle (yana). It is the bodhisattva path which leads to Buddhahood. This involves devotion to the liberation of all beings and the perfection of wisdom.

Mahayana mind: the bodhi mind, the enlightened mind, the buddha nature within all of us. To cultivate the Mahayana mind means to commit to the buddha path.

take on sufferings

A bodhisattva is willing to self-sacrifice for others. But a true sacrifice is to eliminate the ego and help others to eliminate the ego and attain enlightenment.

sentient beings

All living beings with sentience; beings that have awareness. They include devas (gods or heavenly beings 天人), asuras (demi-gods 阿修羅), human beings, animals, hungry-ghosts, and hell-beings. Unlike buddhas and bodhisattvas, they are all trapped in samsara, but have the potential to become buddhas.

supreme joy

The joy of perfect enlightenment; the joy of nirvana.

Buddhas

“The enlightened one.” There are many buddhas in the past, present, and future; all sentient beings can become buddhas by practicing prajna paramita.

dharmakaya 法身

The Buddha has three bodies (kaya): dharma-kaya, the truth body, which is formless, unborn, our original nature; sambhogha-kāya 報身, the bliss body, which can only be seen by great bodhisattvas; and nirmana-kaya 化身, the

transformation body, which is the historical Buddha seen by ordinary beings.

nirvana 涅槃

The state free from all desires and suffering; ultimate bliss and tranquility.

samsara 生死、輪迴

The relentless cycle of birth and death in which unenlightened beings are deeply entangled. By extension it means this world of afflictions and suffering.

thought after thought

One deviant thought can lead to grave peril; one pure thought can eliminate great sin.

bodhi path 菩提道

The path to awakening, to becoming a buddha. Therein lies lasting joy. 為佛弟子，常於晝夜，至心誦念，八大人覺。

第一覺悟：世間無常，國土危脆；四大苦空，五陰無我；生滅變異，虛偽無主；心是惡源，形為罪藪。如是觀察，漸離生死。

第二覺知：多欲為苦；生死疲勞，從貪欲起；少欲無為，身心自在。

第三覺知：心無厭足，唯得多求，增長罪惡；菩薩不爾。常念知足，安貧守道，唯慧是業。

第四覺知：懈怠墜落。常行精進，破煩惱惡，摧伏四魔，出陰界獄。

第五覺悟：愚癡生死。菩薩常念：廣學多聞，增長智慧，成就辯才，教化一切，悉以大樂。

第六覺知：貧苦多怨，橫結惡緣。菩薩布施，等念冤親，不念舊惡，不憎惡人。

第七覺悟：五欲過患。雖為俗人，不染世樂；常念三衣，瓦鉢法器，志願出家，守道清白，梵行高遠，慈悲一切。

第八覺知：生死熾然，苦惱無量。發大乘心，普濟一切。願代眾生，受無量苦；令諸眾生，畢竟大樂。

如此八事，乃是諸佛菩薩大人之所覺悟；精進行道，慈悲修慧，乘法身船，至涅槃岸；復還生死，度脫眾生。以前八事，開導一切，令諸眾生，覺生死苦，捨離五欲，修心聖道。若佛弟子，誦此八事，於念念中，滅無量罪；進趣菩提，速登正覺，永斷生死，常住快樂。