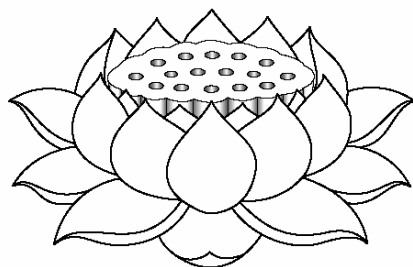


THE SUTRA ON IMPERMANENCE

佛說無常經



Translated by the Chung Tai Translation Committee

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From the Chinese translation by
Tripitaka Master Yi Jing, 8th Century

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Namo Fundamental Teacher Shakyamuni Buddha

南 無 本 師 釋 迦 牟 尼 佛

SUTRA OPENING GATHA

開 經 偈

The Dharma, infinitely profound and subtle,
Is rarely encountered even in a million kalpas.
Now we are able to hear, study, and follow it,
May we fully realize the Tathagata's true meaning.

無上甚深微妙法	百千萬劫難遭遇
我今見聞得受持	願解如來真實義

THE SUTRA ON IMPERMANENCE

I prostrate and take refuge in the Unsurpassed One
Who, with endless vows of great compassion,
Ferries sentient beings across the stream of birth and death,
To reach the safe haven of nirvana.
With great charity, morality, tolerance, and diligence,
One-mind, expedience, right wisdom, and power,
Having reached perfection in benefiting self and others,
He is called the Tamer, Teacher of Heavenly and Human
Beings.

I prostrate and take refuge in the wondrous Dharma treasury;
By the teaching of three “Fours” and two “Fives” being
perfect and clear,
And the “Seven” and “Eight” opening the gate to the Four Truths,
Cultivators reach the shore of the Unconditioned.
The Dharma clouds and Dharma rain imbue all beings,
Eliminating searing afflictions and illnesses,
Tempering and converting the obstinate,
Guiding everyone appropriately, not by force.

I prostrate and take refuge in the saints,
The superior beings of the eight stages,
Who can be freed from defilements.
With the vajra scepter of wisdom,
They shatter the mountain of delusion,
Forever severing the beginningless ties and fetters.

In the epoch from Deer Park to the Twin Trees,
They follow the Buddha in propagating the True Teaching.
According to individual vows and karma, they complete
Their missions, realize nonbirth, and abide in stillness
With body and knowledge extinguished.

I prostrate and venerate the Three Jewels,
The true source of liberation for all,
Leading those drowning in samsara
From foolish delusion to enlightenment.

All who are born will die,
All beauty will fade,
The strong are stricken by illness,
And no one can escape.
Even the great Mt. Sumeru
Will erode by the kalpa's end.
The vast and fathomless seas
Will eventually dry up.
The earth, sun, and moon
Will all perish in due time.
Not one thing in the world
Can escape impermanence.
From beings in the Neither Thought nor Non-Thought Heaven,
Down to the Wheel-Turning Kings
Accompanied by the seven treasures and
Surrounded by a thousand sons,
When their lives have ended,
Without a moment's delay,
They drift again in the sea of death,
And suffer according to their karma.

Transmigrating within the Triple Realm
Is like the turning of a well-bucket's wheel,
Or like a silkworm,
Spinning a cocoon to confine itself.
Even the unsurpassed buddhas,
Pratyekabuddhas, and shravakas,
Give up their impermanent bodies,
Why not ordinary beings!
Parents, spouses, and children,
Siblings and other relatives,
Witnessing the separation of life and death,
Don't they all lament and grieve?
Therefore everyone is urged
To heed the true Dharma,
Renounce what is impermanent,
And practice the Deathless Path.
Like sweet dew that cools and purifies,
The Dharma eradicates all afflictions.
So listen with one-mind!

Thus have I heard. Once, the Bhagavan was at the Jetavana Grove in Anathapindika Park in Shravasti. At that time the Buddha told the bhiksus: "In this world there are three things that are not likable, not lustrous, not desired, and not agreeable. What are the three? Aging, illness, and death. Bhiksus! Aging, illness, and death, of all things in this world, are truly not likable, not lustrous, not desired, and not agreeable. If there were no aging, illness, and death in the world, Tathagata, the Worthy and Completely Enlightened One, need not appear in this world, to speak to all sentient beings on how to cultivate and what can be attained.

“Therefore, you should know that aging, illness, and death, of all things in this world, are not likable, not lustrous, not desired, and not agreeable. Because of these three things, Tathagata, the Worthy and Completely Enlightened One, appears in the world, to speak to all sentient beings on how to cultivate and what can be attained.” Then the World Honored One reiterated this teaching in the following gatha:

All external splendor will perish,
Likewise the body will decay.
Only the incomparable Dharma will endure.
The wise should discern clearly.
Aging, illness, and death are resented by all;
Their appearance is dreadful and repulsive.
The countenance of youth is fleeting,
Soon it will wither and fade;
Even living to a hundred years, still,
One must give in to the force of impermanence.
The suffering of aging, illness, and death
Constantly afflicts all sentient beings.

When the World Honored One had spoken this sutra, the bhiksus, devas, dragons, yaksas, ghandaras, asuras and so forth were all filled with immense joy; they accepted and followed the teaching faithfully.

Always pursuing worldly desires
And not performing good deeds,
How can you maintain your body and life,
And not see the approach of death?
When the breath of life is ending,
Limbs and joints separate;

The agonies of death converge,
And you can only lament.
Eyes roll up, the blade of death
Strikes down with the force of karma.
The mind fills with fear and confusion,
And no one can save you.
Gasping, the chest heaves rapidly;
Shortened breaths parch the throat.
The king of death demands your life,
And relatives can only stand by.
All consciousness becomes hazy and dim,
As you enter the city of peril.
Friends and relatives forsake you,
As the rope drags you away
To the place of King Yama,
Where fate is determined by karma.
Virtuous deeds give rise to good destinies,
And bad karma plunges one into hell.
There is no vision clearer than wisdom,
And nothing darker than ignorance,
There is no sickness worse than hatred,
And no fear greater than death.
All that live must die;
Commit sins and the body suffers.
Be diligent in examining the three karmas,
Always cultivate merits and wisdom.
All your relatives will desert you,
All possessions will be gone;
You have only your virtues
As sustenance on this treacherous path.
Like those who rest by a roadside tree,
They will not linger long;

Wife, children, carriages, and horses
Will likewise soon be gone.
Like birds that gather at night,
Going their separate ways at dawn,
Death callously parts all relatives and friends.
Only buddha enlightenment is our true refuge.
I have spoken in brief according to the sutras,
The wise should reflect and take heed.

Devas, asuras, yaksas, and so forth who come,
Hear the Buddha's teaching with utmost sincerity!
Uphold the Dharma so it may endure,
Each of you should practice with diligence.
All sentient beings who come for the teaching,
Whether on land or in the air,
Always be kind-hearted in this world,
Abide in the Dharma day and night.
May all worlds be safe and peaceful;
May infinite blessings and wisdom benefit all beings.
May all sinful karma and suffering be removed;
May all enter perfect stillness.
Anoint the body with the fragrance of precepts,
And sustain it with the strength of samadhi;
Adorn the world with flowers of bodhi wisdom,
Dwell in peace and joy wherever you are.

THE SUTRA¹ ON IMPERMANENCE²

佛 說 無 常 經

I prostrate³ and take refuge⁴ in the Unsurpassed One⁵
Who, with endless vows of great compassion⁶,
Ferries sentient beings⁷ across the stream of birth and death⁸,
To reach the safe haven of nirvana⁹.
With great charity, morality, tolerance, and diligence¹⁰,
One-mind, expedience¹¹, right wisdom, and power¹²,
Having reached perfection in benefiting self and others,
He is called the Tamer¹³, Teacher of Heavenly and Human
Beings¹⁴.

稽首歸依無上士
為濟有情生死流
大捨防非忍無倦
自利利他悉圓滿

常起弘誓大悲心
令得涅槃安隱處
一心方便正慧力
故號調御天人師

¹ **sutra 佛經.** A Buddhist scripture containing the dialogues or discourses of the Buddha.

² **impermanence.** The Buddhist principle that everything is in a state of flux and nothing remains the same.

³ **prostrate.** To kneel with hands, knees, and forehead touching the ground in the traditional Buddhist gesture of the deepest respect to someone.

⁴ **take refuge.** To abide by and return to the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

⁵ **The Unsurpassed One.** One of the ten honorable titles (十號) of Shakyamuni and all other buddhas; "the enlightened one." The ten titles are:

- Tathagata (如來): Thus Come One (one who comes from the Truth); Thus Gone One; One who Neither Comes nor Goes
- Arhat (應供): One who is (1) worthy of offering, (2) killer of thieves – arhat has killed the thieves of afflictions and defilements, and (3) free of future rebirths

- Samyak-sambuddha(正遍知): Rightly and Complete Enlightened, one who knows the whole truth
- Vidya-carana-sampanna(明行足): Perfect in Wisdom and Action
- Sugata(善逝): Well-Gone (a good death)
- Lokavid(世間解): Knower of the World
- Anuttara(無上士): The Unsurpassed One
- Purusadamyasāratha(調御大夫): The Tamer
- Sasta devamanusyanam(天人師): Teacher of Heavenly and Human Beings
- Bhagavan(世尊 or 薄伽梵): World Honored One

⁶ **great compassion.** The resolve of buddhas and bodhisattvas to relieve the sufferings of all sentient beings.

⁷ **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.

⁸ **stream of birth and death.** Where there is birth there is death, which is full of suffering. The endless cycle of rebirth, known as samsara, is a result of desires arising from delusion.

⁹ **nirvana.** The state free from all desires and suffering; ultimate bliss and tranquility.

¹⁰ **charity, morality, tolerance, diligence, and one mind.** These five plus "wisdom" are the Six Perfections (called **paramitas** in Sanskrit) in Mahayana Buddhism that a practitioner on the way to Buddhahood should follow.

¹¹ **expedience.** Appropriate means that are suitable for different individuals according to their needs and dispositions.

¹² **expedience, right wisdom, and power.** These are three of the Ten Perfections. The other seven are the Six Perfections (see above) and "resolve."

¹³ **the Tamer.** One of the ten titles of a buddha. Like a tamer of elephants and lions, a buddha is able to help others bring their emotional distress under control so they may become the masters of their own minds. He is able to tame and convert even the most stubborn or evil beings with skillful means.

¹⁴ **Teacher of Heavenly and Human Beings.** One of the ten titles of a buddha. A buddha is able to teach heavenly beings (devas) and human beings (manusyas) the path of liberation.

I prostrate and take refuge in the wondrous Dharma
treasury¹⁵;
By the teaching of¹⁶ three “Fours”¹⁷ and two “Fives”¹⁸
being perfect and clear,
And the “Seven”¹⁹ and “Eight”²⁰ opening the gate to the
Four Truths²¹,
Cultivators reach the shore of the Unconditioned²².
The Dharma clouds and Dharma rain imbue all beings,
Eliminating searing afflictions and illnesses,
Tempering and converting the obstinate,
Guiding everyone appropriately, not by force.

稽首歸依妙法藏
七八能開四諦門
法雲法雨潤群生
難化之徒使調順

三四二五理圓明
修者咸到無為岸
能除熱惱蠲眾病
隨機引導非強力

¹⁵ **Dharma treasury.** The invaluable collection of the Buddhist teachings.

¹⁶ **the principle of three “Fours” ... “Seven” and “Eight.”** This section refers to the Thirty-seven Factors of Enlightenment that will help all sentient beings achieve nirvana. ($3 \times 4 + 2 \times 5 + 7 + 8 = 37$)

17 three “Fours” (3 x 4).

1) The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (四念處): contemplating the body as impure, contemplating all sensation (feeling) as suffering, contemplating the mind as impermanent, and contemplating all things (dharma) as empty of self.

2) The Four Right Efforts (四正勤): to put an end to existing unwholesome thoughts and actions, to prevent unwholesome thoughts from arising, to bring forth wholesome thoughts and actions, and to develop and increase existing wholesome thoughts and good deeds.

3) The Four Bases of Samadhi (四神足): these refer to the four bases of meditative power gained from strong aspiration to cultivate (欲), intense practice with diligence (進), mindfulness (念), and wisdom (慧).

18 two “Fives” (2 x 5).

1) The Five Roots (五根): Roots of faith (信), diligence (進), mindfulness (念), samadhi (定), and wisdom (慧). These five roots help anchor wholesome thoughts and deeds.

2) The Five Powers (五力): Powers of faith (信), diligence (進), mindfulness (念), samadhi (定), and wisdom (慧). These five powers banish doubt, laziness, forgetfulness, distraction, and delusion which are hindrances to cultivation.

19 “Seven.” The seven branches of Awakening (七覺支): mindfulness (念), discernment (擇), diligence (精進), joy (喜), serenity (輕安), samadhi (定), and equanimity (捨), which help eradicate defilements and bring forth awakening.

20 “Eight.” The Noble Eightfold Path: right understanding (正見), right thought (正思惟), right speech (正語), right action (正業), right livelihood (正命), right effort (正精進), right mindfulness (正念), and right samadhi (正定). These factors lead to the cessation of suffering where the state of nirvana is reached.

21 the Four Truths. Refers to The Four Noble Truths, the foundation of the Buddha's teaching. They are: (1) the truth of suffering, (2) the truth of the cause of suffering, (3) the truth of the cessation of suffering, and (4) the truth of the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

22 Unconditioned. The world as perceived by ordinary people are conditioned which leads to suffering. The enlightened beings are able to transcend the conditioned existence and arrive at the Unconditioned shore which is to attain nirvana.

I prostrate and take refuge in the saints,
The superior beings of the eight stages²³,
Who can be freed from defilements.
With the vajra scepter of wisdom²⁴,
They shatter the mountain of delusion,
Forever severing the beginningless ties and fetters.
In the epoch from Deer Park²⁵ to the Twin Trees²⁶,
They follow the Buddha in propagating the True
Teaching.
According to individual vows and karma²⁷, they complete
Their missions, realize nonbirth²⁸, and abide in stillness²⁹
With body and knowledge extinguished.

I prostrate and venerate the Three Jewels³⁰,
The true source of liberation for all,
Leading those drowning in samsara³¹
From foolish delusion to enlightenment³².

稽首歸依真聖眾
金剛智杵破邪山
始從鹿苑至雙林
各稱本緣行化已
稽首總敬三寶尊
生死迷愚鎮沈溺

八輩上人能離染
永斷無始相纏縛
隨佛一代弘真教
灰身滅智寂無生
是謂正因能普濟
咸令出離至菩提

- ²³ **eight stages 八章**. In Theravada Buddhism, this refers to the eight levels of progress toward nirvana, culminating in Arhatship. The four stages (fruits) of Arhatship (四果) are Stream-enterer, Once-returned, Non-returned, and Arhat. Each of them has a gestation stage (四向) : Pre-stream-enterer, Pre-once-returned, Pre-non-returned, and Pre-Arhat.
- ²⁴ **vajra scepter of wisdom**. "Vajra" is a Sanskrit word that literally means "a diamond"; the Vajra scepter is a metaphor of the indestructible nature of the Buddha's wisdom that can shatter delusion.
- ²⁵ **Deer Park**. The place where the Buddha delivered his first sermon to the Five Bhiksus. It is in Samath near Varanasi, long considered a Buddhist holy place in India.
- ²⁶ **the Twin Trees**. The Buddha gave his very last lecture in the Upavattana Sala Grove amidst four pairs of Sala Trees.
- ²⁷ **karma**. Karma means action which includes physical, verbal, and mental activities. By the law of causality, each action has its corresponding consequences. Action that benefits others brings blessings and happiness; action that harms others brings suffering. We are subject to the consequences of our own karma.
- ²⁸ **nonbirth**. The state of being free from the relentless cycle of birth and death (**samsara**: see below.) To realize nonbirth also means to understand that there is no inherent self in sentient beings and in all phenomena.
- ²⁹ **abide in stillness**. Here stillness refers to the state of arhat's mind that is free from all vexation and affliction.
- ³⁰ **the Three Jewels**. The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha; also known as the Triple Gem or the Three Treasures.
- ³¹ **samsara**. The relentless cycle of birth and death in which unenlightened beings are deeply entangled. By extension it means this world of afflictions and suffering.
- ³² **enlightenment**. Bodhi; awakening, being awakened to the truth. There are many levels of enlightenment, the highest being Buddhahood.

All who are born will die,
All beauty will fade,
The strong are stricken by illness,
And no one can escape.
Even the great Mt. Sumeru³³
Will erode by the kalpa's end³⁴.
The vast and fathomless seas
Will eventually dry up.
The earth, sun, and moon
Will all perish in due time.
Not one thing in the world
Can escape impermanence.
From beings in the Neither Thought nor Non-Thought
Heaven³⁵,
Down to the Wheel-Turning Kings³⁶
Accompanied by the seven treasures³⁷ and
Surrounded by a thousand sons,
When their lives have ended,
Without a moment's delay,
They drift again in the sea of death,
And suffer according to their karma.

生者皆歸死	容顏盡變衰	強力病所侵	無能免斯者
假使妙高山	劫盡皆壞散	大海深無底	亦復皆枯竭
大地及日月	時至皆歸盡	未曾有一事	不被無常吞
上至非想處	下至轉輪王	七寶鎮隨身	千子常圍繞
如其壽命盡	須臾不暫停	還漂死海中	隨緣受眾苦

- ³³ **Mt. Sumeru.** In Buddhist cosmology, Mt. Sumeru is the highest mountain in the Desire Realm though human eyes cannot see it. Even a mountain as high as Mt. Sumeru will perish in due time.
- ³⁴ **kalpa's end.** A kalpa is a very long period of time. Formally, a large kalpa is a cycle of the universe, which consists of four stages: birth (of the universe or a "buddha world"), stability, disintegration, and void. The universe is then recreated (and destroyed), over and over again, by our collective karma. At Kalpa's end, everything will be destroyed, even Mt. Sumeru.
- ³⁵ **Neither Thought nor Non-Thought Heaven.** This is the highest heaven in the Formless Realm of the Triple Realm (see below on **Triple Realm**).
- ³⁶ **Wheel-Turning Kings.** (Sanskrit: *Chakravartin*). In pre-Buddhist Indian tradition, Wheel-Turning Kings are the most powerful rulers in the world of humanity. They are blessed with seven treasures and a thousand sons.
- ³⁷ **Seven treasures.** They are the Flying Wheel which is a vehicle that carries the King to places where he wins over other countries by righteousness rather than force, elephant-treasure, horse-treasure, priceless jewelries, a beautiful and virtuous queen, a financial guru, and victorious general.

Transmigrating within the Triple Realm³⁸
Is like the turning of a well-bucket's wheel,
Or like a silkworm,
Spinning a cocoon to confine itself.
Even the unsurpassed buddhas,
Pratyekabuddhas³⁹, and shravakas⁴⁰,
Give up their impermanent bodies,
Why not ordinary beings!
Parents, spouses, and children,
Siblings and other relatives,
Witnessing the separation of life and death,
Don't they all lament and grieve?
Therefore everyone is urged
To heed the true Dharma,
Renounce what is impermanent,
And practice the Deathless Path⁴¹.
Like sweet dew that cools and purifies,
The Dharma eradicates all afflictions.
So listen with one-mind!

循環三界內	猶如汲井輪	亦如蠶作繭	吐絲還自纏
無上諸世尊	獨覺聲聞眾	尚捨無常身	何況於凡夫
父母及妻子	兄弟并眷屬	目觀生死隔	云何不愁歎
是故勸諸人	諦聽真實法	共捨無常處	當行不死門
佛法如甘露	除熱得清涼	一心應善聽	能滅諸煩惱

³⁸ **Triple Realm.**

1) The Realm of Desire, where beings such as humans and animals reside. They possess physical forms and have varying degrees of desires for wealth, lust, fame, food, and sleep.

2) The Realm of Form, where beings who have attained the four dhyana (deep mental concentration) stages reside. They have finer, uni-gender physical forms but not the desires of the lower realm.

3) The Realm of Formlessness, where beings, through more refined meditation, are reborn without physical forms and exist in various subtle consciousness states only. Beings of the Triple Realm are still subject to karma and rebirth, and therefore have not attained liberation.

³⁹ **pratyekabuddhas.** Persons who get enlightened and attain nirvana

(1) by meditating on the principle of causality specifically the twelve links of dependent origination; (2) by awakening to the truth through their own effort because they live in ages where there is no buddha or Buddhist teachings.

⁴⁰ **shravakas.** "Hearer" in Sanskrit; literally means those who have heard the Buddha's teaching of the Four Noble Truths and eventually become arhats.

⁴¹ **Deathless Path.** Study and practice of the Dharma leads to the realization of no birth and death.

Thus have I heard. Once, the Bhagavan was at the Jetavana Grove in Anathapindika Park⁴² in Shravasti. At that time the Buddha told the bhiksus⁴³: “In this world there are three things that are not likable, not lustrous, not desired, and not agreeable. What are the three? Aging, illness, and death. Bhiksus! Aging, illness, and death, of all things in this world, are truly not likable, not lustrous, not desired, and not agreeable. If there were no aging, illness, and death in the world, Tathagata⁴⁴, the Worthy and Completely Enlightened One⁴⁵, need not appear in this world, to speak to all sentient beings on how to cultivate and what can be attained. Therefore, you should know that aging, illness, and death, of all things in this world, are not likable, not lustrous, not desired, and not agreeable. Because of these three things, Tathagata, the Worthy and Completely Enlightened One, appears in the world, to speak to all sentient beings on how to cultivate and what can be attained.”

如是我聞：一時，薄伽梵在室羅伐城逝多林給孤獨園。爾時，佛告諸苾芻：「有三種法，於諸世間，是不可愛、是不光澤、是不可念、是不稱意。何者為三？謂老、病、死。汝諸苾芻，此老病死，於諸世間，實不可愛、實不光澤、實不可念、實不稱意。若老病死。世間無者，如來應正等覺，不出於世，為諸眾生，說所證法，及調伏事。是故應知，此老病死，於諸世間，是不可愛、是不光澤、是不可念、是不稱意。由此三事，如來應正等覺，出現於世，為諸眾生，說所證法，及調伏事。」

- ⁴² **Jetavana Grove in Anathapindika Park.** The place donated by Prince Jetavana and elderly Anathapindika. It is one of the most famous monastery where the Buddha delivered many important sermons such as the Diamond Sutra and this sutra.
- ⁴³ **bhiksus** (in Sanskrit). In Buddhism, ordained monks who leave behind the secular life, devote themselves to the practice of Buddhism, and observe the Bhiksu precepts defining the conduct of a monk.
- ⁴⁴ **Tathagata.** One of the ten titles of a buddha. "One who has thus come, one who has thus gone"; the term Shakyamuni Buddha often used to refer to himself, denoting the empty nature of "self", and that a buddha is one with the Truth ("suchness").
- ⁴⁵ **the Worthy and Completely Enlightened One.** Two of the ten titles of a buddha: One who is worthy of respect (arhat) and one who is rightly enlightened and knows the whole truth (Samyak-sambuddha).

Then the World Honored One reiterated this teaching in the following gatha⁴⁶:

All external splendor will perish,
Likewise the body will decay.
Only the incomparable Dharma will endure.
The wise should discern clearly.
Aging, illness, and death are resented by all;
Their appearance is dreadful and repulsive.
The countenance of youth is fleeting,
Soon it will wither and fade;
Even living to a hundred years, still,
One must give in to the force of impermanence.
The suffering of aging, illness, and death
Constantly afflicts all sentient beings.

When the World Honored One⁴⁷ had spoken this sutra, the bhiksus, devas, dragons, yaksas, ghandaras, asuras⁴⁸ and so forth were all filled with immense joy; they accepted and followed the teaching faithfully.

爾時，世尊重說頌曰：

外事莊彩咸歸壞	內身衰變亦同然
唯有勝法不滅亡	諸有智人應善察
此老病死皆共嫌	形儀醜惡極可厭
少年容貌暫時住	不久咸悉見枯羸
假使壽命滿百年	終歸不免無常逼
老病死苦常隨逐	恒與眾生作無利

爾時世尊。說是經已。諸苾芻眾。天龍 藥叉 捷闍婆 阿蘇羅等。皆大歡喜，信受奉行。

- ⁴⁶ **gatha.** A Sanskrit term for a religious verse or stanza.
- ⁴⁷ **World Honored One** (*Bhagavan* in Sanskrit). One of the ten titles of a buddha. The Buddha is awakened to the truth and is determined to liberate all sentient beings through his teachings. Because of his great compassion and wisdom, the Buddha is honored by all sentient beings in the world.
- ⁴⁸ **devas, dragons, yaksas, ghandaras and asuras.** These five plus garudas, kimnaras and mahoragas are the eight kinds of gods and various non-human beings that are regarded as protectors of the Buddhist Dharma and often appear as part of the audience at the Buddha's sermons.

Always pursuing worldly desires
And not performing good deeds,
How can you maintain your body and life
And not see the approach of death?
When the breath of life is ending,
Limbs and joints separate⁴⁹;
The agonies of death converge,
And you can only lament.
Eyes roll up, the blade of death
Strikes down with the force of karma.
The mind fills with fear and confusion,
And no one can save you.
Gasping, the chest heaves rapidly;
Shortened breaths parch the throat.
The king of death demands your life,
And relatives can only stand by.
All consciousness becomes hazy and dim,
As you enter the city of peril.
Friends and relatives forsake you,
As the rope drags you away
To the place of King Yama⁵⁰,
Where fate is determined by karma.
Virtuous deeds give rise to good destinies,
And bad karma plunges one into hell.

常求諸欲境	不行於善事	云何保形命	不見死來侵
命根氣欲盡	支節悉分離	眾苦與死俱	此時徒歎恨
兩目俱翻上	死刀隨業下	意想並悼惶	無能相救濟
長喘連胸急	短氣喉中乾	死王催伺命	親屬徒相守
諸識皆昏昧	行入險城中	親知咸棄捨	任彼繩牽去
將至琰魔王	隨業而受報	勝因生善道	惡業墮泥犁

- ⁴⁹ **limbs and joints separate.** The physical body is made up of four elements: Earth (solidity such as bones and ligaments), water (fluid such as blood and saliva), fire (warmth such as the body temperature) and wind (air such as breathing). When these four elements are in equilibrium, the body functions well as a whole. At the time of death, the elements become unbalanced and fall apart internally. Therefore a dying person will usually experience great pain as the body disintegrates.
- ⁵⁰ **King Yama.** The ruler of Buddhist purgatory who assigns punishments to beings according to their karmic misdeeds.

There is no vision clearer than wisdom,
And nothing darker than ignorance,
There is no sickness worse than hatred,
And no fear greater than death.
All that live must die;
Commit sins and the body suffers.
Be diligent in examining the three karmas⁵¹,
Always cultivate merits and wisdom.
All your relatives will desert you,
All possessions will be gone;
You have only your virtues
As sustenance on this treacherous path.
Like those who rest by a roadside tree,
They will not linger long;
Wife, children, carriages, and horses
Will likewise soon be gone.
Like birds that gather at night,
Going their separate ways at dawn,
Death callously parts all relatives and friends.
Only buddha enlightenment is our true refuge.
I have spoken in brief according to the sutras,
The wise should reflect and take heed.

明眼無過慧	黑闇不過癡	病不越怨家	大怖無過死
有生皆必死	造罪苦切身	當勤策三業	恒修於福智
眷屬皆捨去	財貨任他將	但持自善根	險道充糧食
譬如路傍樹	暫息非久停	車馬及妻兒	不久皆如是
譬如群宿鳥	夜聚旦隨飛	死去別親知	乖離亦如是
唯有佛菩提	是真歸仗處	依經我略說	智者善應思

- ⁵¹ **three karmas.** Refer to physical, verbal and mental activity. (See annotation of "**karma**" on page 13.)

Devas, asuras, yaksas and so forth who come,
Hear the Buddha's teaching with utmost sincerity!
Uphold the Dharma so it may endure,
Each of you should practice with diligence.
All sentient beings who come for the teaching,
Whether on land or in the air,
Always be kind-hearted in this world,
Abide in the Dharma day and night.
May all worlds be safe and peaceful;
May infinite blessings and wisdom benefit all beings.
May all sinful karma and suffering be removed;
May all enter perfect stillness.
Anoint the body with the fragrance of precepts⁵²,
And sustain it with the strength of samadhi⁵³;
Adorn the world with flowers of bodhi wisdom⁵⁴,
Dwell in peace and joy wherever you are.

天阿蘇羅藥叉等
擁護佛法使長存
諸有聽徒來至此
常於人世起慈心
願諸世界常安隱
所有罪業並消除
恒用戒香塗瑩體
菩提妙華遍莊嚴

來聽法者應至心
各各勤行世尊教
或在地上或居空
晝夜自身依法住
無邊福智益群生
遠離眾苦歸圓寂
常持定服以資身
隨所住處常安樂

- ⁵² **precepts.** Guidelines of moral discipline; regarded as the foundation of the Three Studies (precepts, samadhi, and wisdom) in the practice of Buddhism. Diligent observance of precepts promotes samadhi and wisdom, requisite to attaining enlightenment and realizing one's inherent buddha nature and bodhi mind.
- ⁵³ **strength of samadhi.** Samadhi is a highly concentrated state of mind achieved by meditation, characterized by a high degree of single-mindedness, lucidity and clarity, stillness, bliss, or all of the above. Deeper or more profound samadhi brings greater insight and power.
- ⁵⁴ **bodhi wisdom.** Wisdom from understanding the truth; wisdom of enlightenment that can overcome birth and death and all suffering.

THREE REFUGES

三 皈 依

I take refuge in the Buddha, may all sentient beings
Understand the Great Way profoundly, and bring forth the bodhi
mind.

I take refuge in the Dharma, may all sentient beings
Deeply enter the sutra treasury, and have wisdom vast as the sea.

I take refuge in the Sangha, may all sentient beings
Form together a great assembly, one and all in harmony.

自皈依佛	當願眾生	體解大道	發無上心
自皈依法	當願眾生	深入經藏	智慧如海
自皈依僧	當願眾生	統理大眾	一切無礙
和南聖眾			

FOUR GREAT VOWS

四 弘 誓 願

Countless are sentient beings, I vow to liberate;
Endless are afflictions, I vow to eradicate;
Measureless are the Dharmas, I vow to master;
Supreme is the Buddha Way, I vow to attain.

眾生無邊誓願度	煩惱無盡誓願斷
法門無量誓願學	佛道無上誓願成

REPENTANCE

懺悔偈

All the harm I have ever done, since time immemorial,
Are caused by greed, anger, and ignorance,
And produced through my body, speech, and will,
Now I confess and amend all.

往昔所造諸惡業 皆由無始貪瞋痴
從身語意之所生 一切罪障皆懺悔

DEDICATION OF MERITS

回向偈

May the merits of our deeds
Reach every part of the world.
Sentient beings large and small
All attain enlightenment.
Maha-Prajna-Paramita

願以此功德 普及於一切
我等與眾生 皆共成佛道
摩訶般若波羅蜜