

The Visualization Of the Buddha of Infinite Life Span Sūtra

(T365.12.340c-346b)

Translated into Chinese by Kālayaśas

Translated into English by Charles Patton

Guide to Pronouncing Sanskrit

Vowels

a
ā
u
ū
i
ī
ṛ
ṝ
e
ai
o
au

Sounds like —

but, **not** bat
harm, **not** hate
put, soot
boot, suit
pink, **not** pin
peep, seat, **not** slide
the slang pirty, not pretty
fell, **not** fly
eight, fair
aisle, pie
between corn and cone
down, hound

Consonants

k
kh
g
gh
ñ
c
ch
j
jh
ñ
ṭ/ṭh
ṭh/th
ḍ/ḍh
ḍh/dh
ṇ/ṇh
p
ph
b
bh
m
s
ṣ
ś

kiss, kiln, back
bunkhouse
good, give, bug
loghouse
sing, long, tongue
cello, chair, church
coachhorse
just, jolly, joy
hedgehog
enjoy, canyon, pinch
tub, tap, cart
anthill
day, dog, god
redhead
gentle, hand, gain
pick, pat, tap
uphill
be, cab, imbibe
clubhouse
amble, mumble
sip, source
short, shot
a harsher sh like the German *ich*

Translator's Preface

Before moving directly to the translation, I would like to address a few issues that will hopefully smooth the reader's process of understanding the text that follows. These are largely technical in nature.

The reader will notice immediately many transliterated Sanskrit terms and diacritics. These terms are usually personal or place names, but also include a few technical terms that are not easily translated. To aid the reader who is not familiar with many of these terms, I have provided a glossary of Sanskrit terms that is easily accessible at the end of the text. I have also incorporated many footnotes into the translation that attempt to explain difficult passages that assume the reader knows certain background information about Buddhist doctrine and the other two Pure Land Sūtras. I have also included a brief guide to the pronunciation of Sanskrit that appears as an insert prior to this preface. Hopefully, these three measures will make the Sanskrit less intrusive for the general reader.

This Sūtra was the most frequently commented upon of the three Pure Land Sūtras by the Chinese exegetes, probably because it leaves more to interpretation and because it details a tangible meditative practice. These two factors made the Sūtra a matter of controversy between Chinese commentators who diverged from one another significantly in how the Sūtra should be read. I hope in the future to compose a companion summary of the Chinese commentaries on this Sūtra. This would greatly expand the reader's awareness of this Sūtra's role in Chinese Buddhism, but at the present time I am unable to do this.

In the larger body of Buddhist Sūtras, this Sūtra is one instance of a group of visualization Sūtras which detail meditative practices that take some personage as a subject of visualization. Another prominent visualization Sūtra is the *Visualization of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra Sātra*, which presents itself as an epilogue to the *Lotus Sātra*. Thus, the reader should understand that this technique of visualization meditation is not particular to Pure Land teachings, but was popular enough among Buddhist circles outside of China to warrant the composition of many visualization Sūtras.

I would like to take a moment to express my thanks to Shih Ying-fa, Ardent Hollingsworth, my wife, Margie Hoyt, and the many scholars and monks who have preceded me, all of whose efforts have been indispensable to my producing this translation.

Namāḥ Amitàyus!

Charles Patton
May 1999

Introductory Verses

[340b] Homage to the Western world of Sukhāvatī¹!
 That world of the Buddha of Infinite Life Span² is extraordinary,
 Because it can eliminate the deeds (*karma*) of beginningless millions of aeons
 (*kalpas*)
 And cause the afflictions to be entirely nullified.

If a person is able with the subtle and wondrous mind
 To visualize the images of Sukhāvatī
 And extensively impart them so that other sentient beings might discern it,
 It will lift his vision up to see Amitāyus.

The Buddha's bodily form and marks display a luminance
 To which the gold of the Jambu river cannot be compared.
 His height is an incomparable number of *yojanas*,
 Some six sextillions³.

[340c] The white curl between his brows is the size of five Sumerus
 And the blue of his eyes is wide and clear like the four oceans.
 The light that is produced by his hair pores is such that
 Each hair holds a trichiliocosm⁴.

In each of those worlds there is a river
 Whose sands have eighty-four thousand characteristics
 And among each of those characteristics, it is again so.
 These will appear before the practitioner of these visualizations accordingly.

Through the visualization of the Buddha's body, he will see the Buddha's mind
 And sentient beings who visualize him will see the manifestations of the Buddha.
 From the marks [of that Buddha], he will enter the tolerance of the unarisen⁵.

¹ Sukhāvatī is translated in the Chinese to "Utmost Bliss", which is accurate. However, I have chosen to transliterate the original Sanskrit because it is a place name. For detailed explanations of other Sanskrit terms and names, please see the Glossary.

² One of the peculiarities of the Chinese text of this Sūtra is its vacillation regarding whether to transliterate or translate the Buddha Amitāyus' name. In order to reflect where the name is translated and where it is not, I have kept with the Chinese, translating and transliterating the name where the Chinese does. Amitāyus is the name used for the Buddha throughout the text. Amitābha does not occur.

³ For those not accustomed to such dizzyingly large numbers, a sextillion is 10²¹ or 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000. The text literally reads "sixty-thousand ten-millions of *nayutas*", where a *nayuta* is ten billion.

⁴ "Trichiliocosm". This is a term coined by previous translators for a Buddha world which consists of a billion smaller worlds.

And through concentration (*samādhi*), he will find boundless compassion.

The Buddha's body is measureless in extent and boundless,
Manifesting to guide with the power of his old vows⁶.
Those who have visualized him will attain the consummation
Of spiritual powers, filling space as they wish.

The sentient beings of three kinds who are endowed with the three minds
Advance bravely without reversal⁷
And so attain the touch of the Tathāgata's hand.
The seven-treasure palaces⁸ glow brilliantly

And they leap and dance on the diamond towers.
They follow after the Buddha and in a snap of the fingers
They can practice the Mahāyāna and understand the supreme meaning.
And so they are born among the seven-treasure lotus lakes.

The Buddha Amitāyus' great compassion,
Ten powers⁹, and majestic virtue are difficult to praise or describe.
To recite his name but once gives rise to a single recollection
And removes the misdeeds of eight hundred million of aeons!

By completely uprooting them, there is no end
And so because of this he is called 'Infinite Life Span'.
Formerly, the World Honored One had dwelt on Gr̥dhraḥkūṭa
With a great congregation and spoke of the wondrous circumstances

Of becoming free from the suffering of Jambudvīpa and
Transcending all the distressing destinations there.
He spoke of the pure and wondrous land that is the world of Sukhāvatī,
And the cultivation of the three merits that produce the *bodhicitta*.

One whose actions are mindful abides in a firm concentration.
Therefore, he explains the visualization of the Buddha of Infinite Life Span.
Thus are the virtues inexpressible.
One cannot express the wondrous brilliance,

The measureless purity, or equanimous charity.

⁵ This refers to a state of absolute detachment from phenomena, which are considered to be ultimately unarisen. This is not a retreat from contact from phenomena, but a state in which phenomena no longer bother the practitioner at all. Hence, he has learned to tolerate them.

⁶ This refers to the forty-eight vows of Dharmākara, the previous incarnation of the Buddha Amitāyus prior to his achieving Buddhahood. See a translation of the *Larger Pure Land Sātra* for a full recount of his practice as Dharmākara.

⁷ See the fourteenth visualization below.

⁸ I.e., the palaces are made of the seven treasures. The seven treasures are seven precious things, those being: 1. gold, 2. silver, 3. lapis lazuli, 4. crystal, 5. agate, 6. rubies, 7. carnelian.

⁹ The ten powers are common to all Buddhas. See the Glossary.

The sentient beings of the five *kaṭṭāyas* all become Buddhas
By ending all their deluded views,
Which is like throwing water into an ocean.

The wet natures when combined have no inequality.
Although there is the noble wisdom that is difficult to discern
People all are infinite in life span.
I prostrate myself and bow to the West.

Introduction

Thus have I heard. One time the Buddha was staying on Mount Gr̥dhrakūṭa near Rājagṛha [341a] with a great congregation of 1,250 monks (*bhikṣus*) and 32,000 *bodhisattvas*. The Dharma-prince Mañjuśrī was the foremost among them.

At that time, there was a prince of Rājagṛha named Ajātaśatru who followed the instructions of an evil friend and arrested his father, King Bimbisāra, detaining him in a seven-chambered building and forbidding any officials or ministers from going there. The queen, whose name was Vaidehī, respected the king. She bathed, anointed her body with an ointment of cream and honey mixed with roasted rice, and placed a container of grape juice in among her jewelry. She then secretly went up to the king.

At that time, the king ate the rice and drank the grape-juice, sought water to rinse his mouth, and, having rinsed his mouth completely, put his palms together and paid his respects to the World Honored One on Mount Gr̥dhrakūṭa by bowing [from his cell]. He said, “Maudgalyāyana, my friend and compatriot, I hope that you will have the compassion to confer onto me the eight precepts.”

Thereupon, Maudgalyāyana, like a swooping bird of prey, came to the king. Day by day, he thus conferred to the king the eight precepts. The World Honored One also dispatched the reverend Pūrṇamaitrāyaṇīputra, who delivered Dharma discourses and Sūtras to the king for a period of three weeks. Because the king had eaten roasted rice and honey as well as heard the Dharma, his countenance was at ease and pleasant.

Then Ajātaśatru came and asked a guard, “Is my father, the king, still alive?”

The guard replied, “Your majesty, the queen daily anoints her body with rice and honey and puts grape juice in among her jewelry. And the ÷*ramaḍas* Maudgalyāyana and Pūrṇa swoop down from the sky and deliver Dharma discourses to the king. It cannot be stopped.”

Hearing this, Ajātaśatru then became enraged with his mother and said, “My own mother is a criminal and with criminals does she associate! These evil ÷*ramaḍas*’ tricks, illusions, and magical incantations have caused this evil king to not have died after so many days as this!” At once, he took up his sword wanting to kill his mother.

And then there was a minister whose name was Moonlight, who was clever and knew many things, and he was with Jīva. They bowed to the king [Ajātaśatru] and said to him, “Your majesty, the ministers have heard it said in the Vedas that from the beginning of this aeon to the present there have been some eighteen thousand evil kings who have killed their own fathers because they coveted the sovereign’s throne. But we have never heard of any who had killed their mothers. If the king now does this act of rebellion, it will be a disgrace for the noble caste (*kṣatriya*) and the ministers will not bear to hear of such a murderous person (*caḍḍāla*). We will not stay here.” Having finished saying this, the two ministers then took their swords in hand, withdrew, and paced back and forth.

Ajātaśatru was surprised and remorseful, so he addressed Jīva, saying, “You are not going to support me?”

And Jīva replied, “Your majesty, take care not to kill your mother.”

The king heard this and was remorseful, so he sought help. Thereupon, [341b] he immediately put away his sword and did not kill his mother. Instead, he ordered that she be detained in her quarters and kept in the palace so that she could not leave again.

Having been detained, Vaidehī then was worried and haggard about being distant from Mount Gr̥dhrakūṭa. She prostrated herself towards the Buddha and said, “The Tathāgata, the World Honored One, had once stayed here and would always dispatch Ānanda to come with consolations and inquiries about me. Now I am so distressed and have no way to see the World Honored One’s majesty. I wish you would dispatch Maudgalyāyana and the reverend Ānanda to come and meet with me.” Having said this, she wept compassionate tears that fell as she bowed to the Buddha. She had yet to lift her head for a moment.

At that time, the World Honored One was staying on Mount Gr̥dhrakūṭa and became aware of the thoughts in Vaidehī’s mind. Thereupon he ordered Maudgalyāyana along with Ānanda to go to her from the sky. And the Buddha came down from Mount Gr̥dhrakūṭa and went to the royal palace himself.

Still bowing, Vaidehī then lifted her head and saw the World Honored One, the Buddha Śākyamuni. His body was purple gold in color and seated on a hundred jeweled lotus flower. Maudgalyāyana was on his left-hand side and Ānanda on his right-hand side. Indra and Brahma and the world’s protector gods were in the sky and everywhere they rained heavenly flowers that they had brought to use as offerings. When Vaidehī saw the Buddha, the World Honored One, she broke her jewel necklace, rose, and then threw herself to the ground. Crying out and weeping, she said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, what old deed of mine was it that was evil enough to cause the birth of this evil son of mine? World Honored One, again, what were the causes and conditions of his associating with Devadatta and his crowd? My only wish is for the World Honored One to extensively describe for me a place where I might be reborn that is without distress. For unhappy is Jambudvīpa in this evil *kaṭṭhā* era. This defiled and evil place is full of hell-dwellers, hungry ghosts, and beasts. Many are the unwholesome crowds. I hope that I in the future will not hear evil voices and not see evil people. Now my five limbs rest on the ground towards the World Honored One seeking his mercy. My only wish today is for the Buddha to teach me to visualize a place of pure actions.”

At that time, the World Honored One emitted light from between his brows and it was a golden color. It pervasively lit the measureless worlds in the ten directions¹⁰ and then returned to stay about the Buddha’s head, forming a gold tower like Mount Sumeru. In the ten directions the pure and wondrous worlds of the Buddhas were all revealed. Some had lands made of the seven treasures and others had lands consisting entirely of lotus flowers. Others had lands that were like Īśvara’s palace. Others had lands that were like a crystal mirror. All that was within the lands of the ten directions was revealed. Thus were the adornments of the measureless Buddha lands made observable to Vaidehī.

Thereupon, Vaidehī said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, these Buddha lands are again pure and brilliant, but I would prefer to be born in the world of Sukhāvatī where the Buddha Amitāyus resides. My only wish is for the World Honored One to instruct [341c] me about meditation and also instruct me about right perception.”

¹⁰ The ten directions are North, East, South, West, Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, Northwest, Up, and Down. In Buddhist cosmology, there are numerous worlds scattered through the universe in all directions from our own that have sentient (feeling) life similar to our own, though the spiritual conditions in other worlds are often radically different. Mahāyāna Sūtras often depict characters traveling from this world to others or vice versa through spiritual powers.

At that time, the World Honored One then subtly smiled and five colors of light emerged from the Buddha's mouth. Each of the lights lit the head of king Bimbisāra. At that time, although he was in his cell and despite the obstacle of distance, in his mind's eye the king saw the World Honored One and so he faced in that direction and bowed. He then spontaneously advanced to the achievement of the *anāgāmin*.

At that time, the World Honored One addressed Vaidehī, "Do you not know now that the Buddha Amitāyus is not far from here? You should fix your thoughts to the true visualization of that land that is made of pure actions. I will now extensively discuss it with many parables for you and also for the future generations of wives who desire to cultivate pure action and attain birth in the Western land of Sukhāvatī. Those who wish to be born in that land must cultivate three merits. The first is to be filial and support one's parents, to honor the work of teachers and elders, to be of compassionate mind and not kill, and to cultivate the ten good deeds¹¹. The second is to receive and keep the three refuges, to perfect the many precepts, and not to transgress the majestic deportment. The third is to produce the *bodhicitta*, to deeply believe in cause and effect, to read and recite the Mahāyāna [teachings], and to endeavor in their practice. To accord with these three things is called pure action."

The Buddha again addressed Vaidehī, "Do you now not know that these three kinds of deeds that extend to the past, future, and present, are the true cause of the Buddha's pure deeds in the three realms?"

The Buddha again addressed Vaidehī, "Listen closely, listen closely, and well think on this. The Tathāgata will now discuss pure action for the future generations of all sentient beings who are afflicted and killed by criminals. Excellent is this Vaidehī who is comfortable asking about this matter. Ānanda, it is you who receives and keeps extensively the numerous and myriad words that the Buddha speaks. The Tathāgata now will instruct this Vaidehī and all the sentient beings of future generations in visualizing the Western world of Sukhāvatī. Because of the Buddha's power, they will see that pure land as though holding a bright mirror and seeing the image of their own faces. Seeing that land is an event of an utmost and wondrous joy. Because of their mind's elation, they will then attain the tolerance of unarisen things."

First Visualization: The Setting Sun

The Buddha addressed Vaidehī, "You are an ordinary person whose mental capacities are feeble and weak. As you have yet to attain the *deva-eye*¹², you are unable to see very far. The Buddhas, the Tathāgatas, have a special means to allow you to see that far."

Then Vaidehī said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, as I now may be able to see that land because of the Buddha's power, still how will the sentient beings who come

¹¹ The ten good deeds are actually the abstention from ten evil deeds. The abstentions are: 1. not killing, 2. not stealing, 3. not committing adultery, 4. not lying, 5. not speaking harshly, 6. not speaking divisively, 7. not speaking idly, 8. not being greedy, 9. not being angry, and 10. not holding incorrect views.

¹² The *deva-eye* is the supernormal power of clairvoyance that is possessed naturally by gods (*devas*) and which can be attained by humans who achieve exceptional spiritual development.

after the Buddha's death be able to see the Buddha Amitāyus' world of Sukhāvatī when they are constrained by defilements, evil, unwholesomeness, and the five afflictions¹³?"

The Buddha addressed Vaidehī, "You and those sentient beings should concentrate your minds by fixing your thought to a single point, that being an image to the West. And what is that image? All the that multitudes of sentient beings [342a] who are not born blind, who have eyes, have see the sun set. You should bring up this image while properly sitting erect and facing to the West. Contemplatively examine the sun, wishing to be some place where it is setting, and cause the mind to firmly rest in the concentration on this image without moving from it. Seeing the sun and wishing for it to set, it should appear like a hanging drum before you. Once the sun is thus seen, then whether the eyes are shut or the eyes are open, it then can be clearly apprehended. This is the image of the sun and is called the first visualization.

Second Visualization: Water

"Next, imagine water. Seeing water that is clear leads to clear sight and then there is no scattering of the mind. Once this water has been seen, one should then bring up the image of ice. Seeing clearly through the ice, imagine lapis lazuli¹⁴ beneath it. When this image is completed, see this ground of lapis lazuli to be both internally and externally clear and transparent. Beneath it there is diamond, the seven treasures, and golden pillars which support the ground of lapis lazuli. Those pillars are octagonal and each of their eight sides is made of a hundred jewels. Each of those jewels are pearls that have a thousand rays of light. And each of those lights have eighty-four thousand different colors. They clearly pass through that ground of lapis lazuli like millions of thousands of suns that cannot be adequately seen. Above that ground of lapis lazuli are yellow gold ropes that hang about variously. They are studded with the seven treasures and are straight and bright. In each of the treasures there are five-hundred colored lights, and those lights resemble a flower. And they also look like stars or moons hanging at different points in space, making a tower of light. It's floors number a hundred thousand and each floor is made of a hundred jewels. On that tower, there are a pair of borders that each are adorned with a billion flower flags and immeasurable musical instruments. Eight types of pure winds are produced by the lights, causing the musical instruments to emit voices that speak about discomfort, emptiness, impermanence, and selflessness. This is the imagery of water and is called the second visualization.

Third Visualization: The Land

"When these images are complete, at the end of each of the visualizations they should be completely apprehended. Whether the eyes are shut or the eyes are open, they should not be scattered or lost and removed only at mealtimes. One continually considers these matters. Accordingly, these images are called the coarse visions of the land of Sukhāvatī. If one attains concentration, seeing that land completely and its

¹³ The five afflictions are: 1. the process of birth, aging, illness, and death; 2. parting with what is loved; 3. meeting with what is hated; 4. inability to obtain what is desired; and 5. the distresses arising from the body and mind (five *skandhas*).

¹⁴ A semiprecious stone that is usually a transparent azure color. This is one of the seven treasures.

components clearly, then it cannot be adequately described. This is the image of the land and is called the third visualization.”

The Buddha addressed Ānanda, “You are the keeper of the Buddha’s discourses for future generations and all the great assemblies who wish to be liberated from suffering. For them I proclaim the Dharma of visualizing that land. Those who visualize the land remove the misdeeds of eight hundred million of aeons. When they leave their bodies, those future generations will be born in the pure land and their minds will attain non-obstruction. The performance of this visualization is called the right visualization. If one uses another visualization, that is called a wrong visualization.”

Fourth Visualization: The Jewel Trees

The Buddha addressed Ānanda and Vaidehī, “Once these images are completed, the next visualization is of the jewel trees. Visualizing the jewel trees, one should visualize one by one the images of seven pathways that are lined with the trees. Each of the trees is eight thousand *yojanas* tall. The seven-treasure leaves and flowers of those jewel trees have no imperfections. Each of the flowers and leaves are made of exceptional jewels and colors. From within the lapis lazuli is produced a golden light. From within the rock crystal is produced a crimson light. From within the carnelian is produced an agate light. And from the agate is produced a light derived from a true pearl. Coral, amber, and all the other myriad jewels are used as bright decorations. Wondrous nets of real pearls completely cover the tops of the trees and each of the tree tops has seven layers of these nets. Each of the nets intermittently has five billion wondrous flowers and palace halls that resemble the palace of Lord Brahma. And within each of them god-princes freely reside. Each of these princes has a necklace of five billion noble wish-fulfilling jewels. Those *mañi* jewels glow brightly for a radius of a hundred *yojanas*, not unlike a constellation of a billion suns and moons. They cannot be adequately described. These myriad jewels are intermittently mixed in color above [the trees]. The rows of these jewel tree paths are properly arranged and their foliage is also arranged orderly. Scattered among their myriad leaves are wondrous flowers. And above the flowers is spontaneously manifested seven-treasure fruits. Each one of the tree’s flowers is twenty-five *yojanas* in diameter and their petals have a thousand colors and a hundred sorts of lines. Like the necklaces of the gods, there are myriad and wondrous flowers the color of the Jambu River’s gold sands and they look like revolving wheels of fire. They appear amidst the leaves, springing up and producing fruits like the vase of Śākya. There is a great light that conjures up banners, flags, and immeasurable and precious canopies. Inside the precious canopies appear reflections of the deeds of all the Buddhas of the trichilocosm. The Buddha lands of the ten directions also appear inside of them.

“Having seen these trees and properly visualized each one of them successively, including the visualization of the trees’ trunks, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits, this leads one to see them clearly. This is the imagery of the trees and is called the fourth visualization.

Fifth Visualization: The Bodies of Water

“Next, one should imagine the bodies of water. The land of Sukhāvatī has eight bodies of water, and each one of the lakes’ waters is made of the seven treasures. Their treasures are fluid as though created by a wish-fulfilling pearl. They are divided into fourteen branches and each of these branches is made of the seven treasures and is wondrous in color. The drain is a golden color. Under the drain are diamonds of various colors that are beneath the sands. In each of these bodies of water there are six hundred million seven-treasure lotus flowers. Each one of the lotus flowers is twelve *yojanas* in circumference. The *maḍi* waters flow between the flowers and cause the plants to bob up and down. The sound of this is a fine and [342c] wondrous explanation of discomfort, emptiness, impermanence, selflessness, and the perfections (*pàramitās*)¹⁵. And, again, there is also praise of the Buddhas’ marks and excellencies. Like wish-fulfilling pearls, they dance and produce a golden light that is subtle and wondrous. Constantly does it praise the mindfulness of the Buddha, the mindfulness of the Dharma, and the mindfulness of the Saṅgha. This is the visualization of the water’s eight virtues and it is called the fifth visualization.

Sixth Visualization: Sukhāvatī’s Trees, Land, and Lakes

“In each of the realms above the land of myriad treasures there are five billion treasure palaces. In those palaces there are measureless gods who make music with heavenly instruments. Further, there are musical instruments that hang in empty space like heavenly precious flags that do not flap but produce their own voice. In these myriad voices is discussed the mindfulness of the Buddha, the mindfulness of the Dharma, and the mindfulness of the Saṅgha of monks. This imagery being completed, it is called the coarse vision of Sukhāvatī’s jewel trees, treasure land, and treasure lakes. This is the entire visualization of those images and is called the sixth visualization.

“If one sees these, he removes the grave misdeeds of measureless tens of millions of aeons. After the end of his life span, he necessarily will be reborn in that land. The performance these visualizations is called the right visualization. If one uses another visualization, that is called wrong visualization.

Seventh Visualization: The Lotus Seat

The Buddha addressed Ānanda and Vaidehī, “Listen closely, listen closely, and think well on this, for the Buddha shall discern and explain for you the Dharma that removes suffering. You should consider, keep, and widely explain its discernment for the great assembly.” When he spoke these words, the Buddha of Infinite Life Span appeared sitting in the air with Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta flanking him to the left and to the right. Light blazed in such abundance that it was impossible to look at

¹⁵ The six perfections (*pàramitās*) are: 1. The perfection of giving (*dāna-pàramitā*), 2. the perfection of disciple (*śīla-pàramitā*), 3. the perfection of patience (*kūṇṭi-pàramitā*), 4. the perfection of vitality (*vīrya-pàramitā*), 5. the perfection of meditation (*dhyāna-pàramitā*), and 6. the perfection of wisdom (*prajñā-pàramitā*). There form the framework of the Mahāyāna practice that extends across the laity and celibate *saṅgha* members.

them. The golden hue of the sands of a hundred thousand Jambu rivers could not compare to it.

Once Vaidehī saw the Buddha of Infinite Life Span, she fell to her knees and bowed. Then she said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, I now have attained sight of the Buddha of Infinite Life Span and those two *bodhisattvas* because of the Buddha’s powers. How must future sentient beings visualize the Buddha of Infinite Life Span and those two *bodhisattvas*?”

The Buddha addressed Vaidehī, “One who wishes to visualize that Buddha must bring up this imagery. Upon the ground of the seven treasures imagine the image of a lotus flower and make each of the petals of that lotus flower be made of hundred-colored jewels. They have eighty-four thousand veins that are like veins painted by the gods and they also have eighty-four thousand different lights that are clearly visible. The small petals of that flower are two hundred and fifty *yojanas* in diameter. Thus that lotus flower is endowed with eighty-four thousand such petals. And it is ornamented between each of these petals with a billion royal *mañi*-pearls. Each of these *mañi*-pearls emits a thousand lights and those lights are like canopies made of the seven treasures, for they entirely cover the [343a] land. The cup of the lotus flower is made of noble wish-fulfilling jewels. This cup of the lotus flower is decorated with eighty thousand diamonds, *kiṣṭhika* jewels, and wondrous nets made of *brahma mañi*-pearls. Atop that cup there are four precious flags that spontaneously arise, each of which are like a hundred trillion Mount Sumerus. Atop the flags are precious banners that are like those of Yama’s palace. Again, they are decorated with five billion fine and wondrous precious pearls. Each of the precious pearls emit eighty-four thousand lights and each of those lights create eighty-four thousand different shades of gold. Each of those shades of gold pervade the treasure land, everywhere transforming themselves into different shapes. Some become diamond cups, some form true pearl nets, and others create a variety of flower clouds. On all ten sides, they transform according to one’s wishes, performing the acts of the Buddha’s work. This is the imagery of the lotus seat and is called the seventh visualization.”

The Buddha addressed Ānanda, “The likes of this wondrous flower are created by the power of the past vows of Dharmākara. If one wishes to be mindful of that Buddha, he should first visualize the imagery of the lotus seat. When visualizing this imagery, he should not stray into other visualizations. He should visualize each of its components: each of the pearls, each of the lights, each of the cups, and each of the flags. Each of these are to be made as clear as seeing one’s own face in a mirror. One who completes these images eliminates the misdeeds of fifty thousand aeons of births and deaths. Necessarily will he be born in the world of Sukhāvatī. Performing this visualization is called right visualization. If one performs another visualization, that is called wrong visualization.”

Eighth Visualization: The Three Sages

The Buddha addressed Ānanda and Vaidehī, “Once this is seen, next one should visualize the Buddha. And why is that? The Buddhas, the Tathāgatas, are the body of the universe (*dharmadhātu*) that enters into all of the sentient beings’ thoughts and minds. This is why when your mind imagines the Buddha, this mind then is the thirty-

two marks and eighty excellencies¹⁶. This mind that creates the Buddha is the mind that is the Buddha. The Buddhas' true and pervasive knowledge is an ocean from which the mind's thoughts and images arise. This is why one should with a singleness of mind tie himself to mindfully and contemplatively examining that Buddha, that Tathāgata, that Arhat, that Supremely Awakened One. One who imagines that Buddha first must imagine his form. When he sees this one precious form, whether his eyes are open or his eyes are closed, it is like the golden color of the Jambu river's sands, sitting atop the flower. Once he is seen sitting there, the mind's eye will be opened and one will clearly see Sukhāvatī's seven-treasure adornments, treasure land, treasure lakes, and paths lined with jewel trees, as well as the heavenly precious canopies that are everywhere draped overhead. The myriad precious nettings hold the entire sky. If one sees it according to this, it should be very clear like something sitting in the palm of one's hand.

"Once this has been seen, one should again make a great lotus flower on the left side of the one on which the Buddha sits [343b], this lotus flower being like the one described before without any difference. And again make a great lotus flower on the right side of the one on which the Buddha sits. Imagine a form of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara sitting on the left lotus flower and also make him a gold color as described before without any difference. Then imagine a form of the Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta sitting on the right lotus flower. When these images are complete, the Buddha and *bodhisattva* forms should emit light. Their light is a gold color and illuminates the jewel trees. Beneath each of the trees, there are also three lotus flowers, upon each sit the forms of one Buddha and two *bodhisattvas*. Everywhere do these forms fill that land. When this image is completed, the practitioner should hear the flowing waters that glow as well as the jewel trees, ducks, and geese which speak the wondrous Dharma. Entering into concentration or exiting from concentration, he constantly hears that wondrous Dharma. The practitioner who hears it, when he exits concentration will think about it, uphold it, and not forsake it. This causes him to be conjoined with this Sūtra. If he is not conjoined with it, then this is called a mistaken image. If he is conjoined with it, that is called seeing the world of Sukhāvatī by its coarse characteristics. This is the imagery of their forms and is called the eighth visualization. One who performs this visualization removes the misdeeds of an immeasurable number of aeons of birth and death. In his present body he will attain the concentration of recollecting the Buddha¹⁷."

Ninth Visualization: The Body of the Buddha of Infinite Life Span

The Buddha addressed Ānanda and Vaidehī, "When this imagery is completed, next one should further visualize the Buddha of Infinite Life Span's bodily marks and light. Ānanda, it should be known that the body of the Buddha of Infinite Life Span is like the gold of the sands of a trillion Jambu rivers in the Yama heaven. That Buddha's body is as tall as a number of *yojanas* equaling that of the sands of six sextillions of Ganges rivers. The white tuft of hair between his brows curls to the right and is the size of five Mount Sumerus. The Buddha's eye is like the waters of the four oceans and the blue and white of it should be clearly seen. The hairs of his body produce lights that are like

¹⁶ The thirty-two marks and eighty excellencies are mythically considered the universal attributes of all Buddhas. See the glossary for a recounting of these in detail.

¹⁷ The *fo-nien samādhi*.

Sumeru in size. That Buddha universally lights an area the size of a billion trichiliocosms. Within that pervasive light, there are conjured Buddhas whose number is equal to that of the sands of ten sextillions of Ganges rivers. Each one of those conjured Buddhas also has a myriad number of countless conjured *bodhisattvas* who are their attendants. The Buddha of Infinite Life Span has eighty-four thousand marks. And in each of those marks he has eighty-four thousand excellencies. And in each of those excellencies there are eighty-four thousand lights. Each of those lights pervasively illuminate the worlds of the ten directions. And the sentient beings who are mindful of the Buddha are gathered up, protected, and not forsaken. His light, marks, excellencies, and conjured Buddhas cannot be adequately described. It is only by the imagination that the mind is caused to clearly see them.

“Seeing these things, then one should see all the Buddhas of the ten directions. Because one sees the Buddhas, it is then called [343c] the concentration of recollecting the Buddha. Performing this visualization is called visualizing the body of all Buddhas. Because it is the visualization of the body of the Buddhas, this is also seeing the Buddha’s mind. The Buddha’s mind is great empathy and compassion and with unconditional empathy does it gather the sentient beings.

“When one who performs this visualization departs from his body, he will be born in other lives in the presence of Buddhas and with them attain the tolerance of the unarisen. This is why the wise should tie the mind to the contemplation of the Buddha of Infinite Life Span. One who visualizes the Buddha of Infinite Life Span, entering a single mark or excellence of his, or only visualizing the white tuft of hair between his brows, verily will he be caused to see clearly. Seeing the mark of the white tuft between the Buddha’s brows, he will then spontaneously see the eighty-four thousand marks and excellencies manifested. One who sees the Buddha of Infinite Life Span then sees the infinite Buddhas of the ten directions. Because he has attained sight of the infinite Buddhas, the Buddhas before him will confer prediction¹⁸ upon him. This is the pervasive visualization of the image of all form bodies [of the Buddha] and is called the ninth visualization. Performing this visualization is called right visualization. If one performs other visualizations, that is called wrong visualization.”

Tenth Visualization: Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara

The Buddha addressed Ānanda and Vaidehī, “Having seen clearly the Buddha of Infinite Life Span, next one should visualize Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. This *bodhisattva*’s body is eighty sextillions of *yojanas* long and is a purple gold color. On the top of his head is a fleshy knot and around his neck is a halo of light. His face and this halo are each a hundred thousand *yojanas* in radius. Within his halo of light there are five hundred conjured Buddhas that are like Śākyamuni. Each one of those conjured Buddhas have five hundred conjured *bodhisattvas* and a measureless number of gods who are their attendants. The sentient beings of the five paths¹⁹ are lifted in his body’s light with all their forms and marks therein made apparent. There are atop his head *māñi*-pearls that make up a heavenly crown. In his heavenly crown a conjured Buddha

¹⁸ I.e., prediction of the one being certain to attain enlightenment.

¹⁹ The five paths are the five destinies sentient beings cycle through in *saṣsāra*, excluding birth in the heavens which is the sixth. They are: 1. the hells, 2. hungry ghost, 3. animal, 4. human, and 5. heavens.

stands that is twenty-five *yojanas* tall. Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara's face is like the golden color of the Jambu river's sands. The white tuft between his brows is made of the colors of the seven treasures and streaming from it are eighty-four thousand kinds of light. Within each of those lights there are measureless and boundless hundreds of thousands of conjured Buddhas. Each of those conjured Buddhas have countless conjured *bodhisattvas* as their attendants. This changing display spontaneously fills the worlds of the ten directions. There are eight hundred million marvelous [344a] lights that resemble a red lotus flower.

"He has jewel bracelets and on those bracelets is displayed all manner of adornments. The palms of his hands are marked with five billion variously colored lotus flowers and his ten fingers have on each of their tips eighty-four thousand drawings like the illuminations of a text. Each of those drawings are in eighty-four thousand colors. Each of those colors have eighty-four thousand lights and they are pliant, soft, and illuminate everything everywhere. With these treasured hands, he receives and guides sentient beings. When he lifts his feet, there are beneath them thousand-spoked wheels that then spontaneously turn into five billion light towers. And when he puts his foot down, there are diamond and *mañi* flowers that are strewn about everywhere. His other bodily marks and myriad excellencies are exactly like the Buddha's without any difference, excepting the fleshy topknot on his head and his invisible forehead. Those are not comparable to the World Honored One. This is the visualization of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara's true bodily image and is called the tenth visualization."

The Buddha addressed Ānanda, "If there is one who wishes to visualize Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, he must do so with this visualization. Those who perform this visualization will not encounter misfortune, being purified by removing the obstructions of their deeds, and it will remove the misdeeds of countless aeons of birth and death. To hear the name of this *bodhisattva* just once has a measureless merit. What more so is it with truly visualizing him then? If there is one who wishes to visualize Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, he first visualizes the fleshy knot atop his head, then visualizes the heavenly crown, and then his remaining myriad characteristics also are successively visualized. All of them should be clearly seen as though resting in the palm of one's hand. The performance of this visualization is called the right visualization. If one uses another visualization, that is called the wrong visualization.

Eleventh Visualization: Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta

"The next visualization is that of Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta. The measurement of this *bodhisattva*'s body is as great or small as that of Avalokiteśvara. The halo of light and his face are each one hundred and twenty-five *yojanas* in radius and illuminates an area of two hundred and fifty *yojanas*. Rising from his body, the light illuminates the lands in the ten directions. He is a purple gold when sentient beings see him. If they see just the light from one of his pores, they then will see the measureless number of Buddhas in the ten directions and their pure and wondrous light. This is why an epithet of this *bodhisattva* is 'Boundless Light'. Everything is pervasively illuminated by the light of his wisdom, leading others to be free from the three poisons²⁰ and attain unsurpassed powers. This is why an epithet of this *bodhisattva* is 'Great Might that

²⁰ The three poisons are greed, hatred, and ignorance.

Extends Everywhere' (Mahāsthāmaprāpta). This *bodhisattva*'s heavenly crown is made of five hundred jewel flowers, and each one of the jewel flowers has five hundred towers. In each of the towers are conjured Buddhas from the ten directions and their pure and wondrous lands. All of them that appear inside the crown have at the top of their heads a fleshy topknot that is like a red lotus (*padma*) flower. And atop the fleshy topknot there is a jewel vase that contains lights that show the Buddha's deeds everywhere. The remaining bodily characteristics are like those of [344b] Avalokiteśvara without any difference.

"When this *bodhisattva* walks, the worlds in the ten directions all are shook and on the ground that moves there appear five billion jewel flowers. Each one of those flowers is adorned with an eminent appearance like that found in the world of Sukhāvatī. When this *bodhisattva* sits, the seven-treasure lands simultaneously quake. From the Buddha-world (*kūetra*) of Golden Light below to the Buddha-world of the Light King above, as well as those worlds in-between that number like the measureless atoms that make a person or that make the body of the Buddha of Infinite Life Span, they all then see Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta. They all flock together like clouds to that world of Sukhāvatī and in the surrounding areas out to the horizon they sit upon lotus flower seats to hear the widely proclaimed wondrous Dharma that liberates sentient beings from discomfort.

"The performance of this visualization is called the right visualization. If one uses another visualization, it is called the wrong visualization that sees Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta. This is the visualization of Mahāsthāmaprāpta's physical characteristics and is called the eleventh visualization. It removes the misdeeds of a countless number of aeons of infinite births and deaths. Those who perform this visualization do not dwell as embryos²¹ and will always frolic in the Buddha's pure and wondrous land.

Twelfth Visualization: The Buddha of Infinite Life Span's World of Sukhāvatī

"When that visualization is completed, it is called the perfection of the visualizations of Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta. When these things are seen, there will arise in one's mind the image of his birth in the Western world of Sukhāvatī sitting inside a lotus flower cross-legged. Then one should imagine the flower in its totality and then imagine the lotus flower opening. When the lotus flower opens, imagine that there are five hundred colored lights that emerge and illuminate one's body. Then imagine opening one's eyes and seeing the water, the birds, the trees, the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* filling the skies. And these Buddhas produce a voice that proclaims widely the wondrous Dharma and the totality of the twelve divisions of the Sūtras. And when this produces certainty, consider and keep them without error. Once this is seen, it is called seeing the Buddha of Infinite Life Span's world of Sukhāvatī. This is the universal visualization of its imagery and is called the twelfth visualization. The Buddha of Infinite Life Span will

²¹ This refers to the manner that rebirth into Sukhāvatī usually takes, which is to be born inside a lotus flower on the treasure lakes and remain therein as a sort of spiritual gestation before emerging. This passage would suggest that it is very rare person who can perform all of the preceding visualizations.

transform his body innumerable and he will always come with Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta to the practitioner's location."

Thirteenth Visualization: The Three Sages of the World of Sukhāvatī

The Buddha then addressed Ānanda and Vaidehī, "If one wishes with the utmost mind to be born in the West, first they must visualize a sixteen foot image resting above a pool of water as it has been previously described. The measure of the Buddha of Infinite Life Span's body is boundless and is something that the ordinary person's mind cannot fathom. Still, because of the power of that Tathāgata's vows, those who attempt to imagine it will necessarily succeed. Simply imagining the Buddha's image brings measureless merit, so how much more then would it be to visualize the Buddha's perfect bodily characteristics? [344c] The Buddha Amitāyus' spiritual powers are at his disposal and in the lands of the ten directions he transforms himself with self-mastery. Sometimes he appears with a great body that fills the sky. Sometimes he appears with a tiny body that is only sixteen or eighteen feet tall. The color of those appearances is of gold and completely lighted are these transformation Buddhas and their jeweled lotus flowers. As has been described above, the bodies of Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta in all places are the same. Sentient beings who simply visualize their heads know Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta. These two *bodhisattvas* aid the Buddha Amitāyus and pervasively transform everywhere. This is the visualization of sundry images and is called the thirteenth visualization."

Fourteenth Visualization: The Superior Rank of Those Who Are Reborn

The Buddha addressed Ānanda and Vaidehī, "First is the best of the superior rank of those who are reborn there. If there are sentient beings who vow to be born in that land and produce three kinds of mind, they thereupon will be reborn there. What are the three? First is the most sincere mind; second is the profound mind; and third is the dedication of the mind that produces the vow. Those who are endowed with those three minds will necessarily be born in that land.

"Again, there are three kinds of sentient beings who will be reborn there. What are the three? First are the compassionate ones who do not kill and are capable of practicing the precepts; second are those who read and recite the Mahāyāna Vaipulya Sūtras²²; and third are those who cultivate the practice of the six mindful dedications of the produced vows. Those who are endowed with these virtues will be born in that land. Between one day and seven days, they thereupon will be reborn there. When they are reborn in that land, it is because these people purely advanced with bravery. The Tathāgata Amitāyus will be there along with Avalokiteśvara, Mahāsthāmaprāpta, countless transformation Buddhas, a great congregation of a hundred thousand monk

²² The Vaipulya Sūtras (Lit., *vaipulya* means "huge" or "extensive") are the large Mahāyāna Sūtras such as the Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra, the Lotus Sūtra, and the Avataṃsaka Sūtra.

voice-hearers²³, measureless gods, and the seven-treasure palaces. Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara will be holding a diamond tower and Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta will walk up to the person. The Buddha Amitāyus will emit a great light that illuminates the practitioner's body and the *bodhisattvas* will take his hands and greet him. Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta will go with innumerable *bodhisattvas* and praise the practitioner's diligent mind. Once the practitioner has seen this, he will joyfully dance and frolic. He sees himself mounting the diamond tower that follows after the Buddha. In a snap of the fingers, he will be reborn in that land, and once there he will see the Buddha's physical body and the perfection of his myriad characteristics. He will also see [345a] the perfection of the *bodhisattvas'* physical characteristics. The light of the jewel forests will widely proclaim the wondrous Dharma and having heard it they will thereupon be awakened to the tolerance of unarisen things. Continuously in an moment they will move through the work of the Buddhas. Universally in the realms of the ten directions they will go before the Buddhas, successively receive their predictions, and then return to their native lands, having attained measureless hundreds of thousands of *dhāraṇī* gates. This is called those who are the best of the superior rank to be born there.

“Those who are the average of the superior rank to be born there do not necessarily keep, read, and recite the Vaipulya Sūtras, but well understand their meaning readily. Their minds are not surprised by the supreme meaning. They are profoundly faithful in cause and effect and do not slander the Mahāyāna. With these virtues, they dedicate vows and seek birth in the land of Sukhāvatī. Those who practice this practice at the time of their life's end will be met by Amitāyus, Avalokiteśvara, and Mahāsthāmaprāpta carrying purple gold rods with a measureless great congregation surrounding them. They then will praise him, saying, ‘Dharma disciple, you have practiced the Mahāyāna and understood the supreme meaning. For this reason, we now have come to greet you with a thousand transformation Buddhas who will simultaneously lend you their hands.’ The practitioner then will see himself seated on a purple gold tower and with his palms together and fingers interlaced he will praise the Buddhas. As though in a single thought, he then will be born in that land among the seven-treasure lakes. His purple gold tower is like a great jewel flower and he will dwell there until it opens. The practitioner's body then will be a purple gold color and under his feet there will be lotus flowers made of the seven treasures. The Buddha and *bodhisattvas* together will at that point emit light, illuminating the practitioner's body, and then his eyes will open clearly. Because of his previous dwelling, he will have often heard a variety of voices that purely proclaimed the profound truth of the supreme meaning. There under the gold tower he will bow to the Buddha with his palms together and praise the World Honored One continuously for a week. He should thereupon come upon the supremely unexcelled *bodhi*²⁴, attaining it without reversal. He should at that time be able to fly off to all places in the ten directions, pass by the deeds of the Buddhas, and with the Buddhas cultivate their concentrations continuously for a small aeon, attaining the tolerance of the unarisen and receiving predictions. This is called those who are the average of the superior rank of those to be born there.

²³ A translation of *÷rāvaka*, which means “auditor”, signifying someone who hears the Buddha but does not understand him yet.

²⁴ I.e., *anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi*.

“Those who are the least of the superior rank to be reborn there also believe in cause and effect and do not slander the Mahāyāna, but they only produce the unsurpassed thought of enlightenment²⁵. With these virtues they will dedicate vows and seek to be born in that land of Sukhāvātī. At the end of the practitioner’s life, the Buddha Amitāyus, Avalokiteśvara, and Mahāsthāmaprāpta accompanied by *bodhisattvas* will come to greet this person carrying golden lotus flowers that conjure forth five hundred Buddhas. The five hundred conjured Buddhas will simultaneously lend their hands to him and praise him, saying, ‘Dharma disciple, you now have purely produced the unsurpassed thought of enlightenment and so we now have come to greet you.’ Seeing this event, he thereupon will see himself seated on a gold lotus flower. Being seated in the flower completely, he will follow the World Honored One and thereupon be reborn among the seven-treasure lakes. In one day and one night, the lotus flower [345b] will then open and afterwards he will see perfectly. Having heard a variety of voices all widely proclaiming the wondrous Dharma, he will trek through the worlds to give offerings to the Buddhas. With those Buddhas he will hear the profound Dharma continuously for three small aeons, attain a hundred wisdom gates of the Dharma, and abide in the stage of joy. This is called the least of the superior rank to be reborn there and is called the fourteenth visualization.”

Fifteenth Visualization: The Average Rank of Those Who Are Reborn

The Buddha addressed Ānanda and Vaidehī, “Those who are the best of the average rank to be reborn there, whether they are sentient beings who have received and kept the five precepts²⁶, or kept the eight precepts²⁷, and cultivated the practice of the precepts and do not perform the five contrary acts²⁸, and have none of the myriad errors, then with these virtues they will dedicate vows and seek rebirth in that Western land of Sukhāvātī. When their life is at its end, the Buddha Amitāyus will be accompanied by a retinue of monks surrounding him and emit a golden light to those people’s location. They will widely proclaim discomfort, emptiness, impermanence, and selflessness, praising the renunciation of the household and becoming free of the myriad discomforts. Once the practitioner has seen this, his mind will be greatly elated. He will then see himself seated on a lotus tower. Kneeling for a long time with his palms together, he will bow to the Buddha and before he has lifted his head, he thereupon will be reborn in that world of Sukhāvātī and the lotus flower will soon open. When the flower has opened, he will hear a variety of voices praising the four truths. He would at that

²⁵ I.e., *bodhicitta*.

²⁶ These are the five basic precepts: 1. Not to kill, 2. not to steal, 3. not to commit adultery, 4. not to lie, and 5. not to become intoxicated. These constitute the precepts of a lay Buddhist who remains a householder but are also the core precepts of all Buddhists.

²⁷ The eight precepts include the five plus: 6. not to adorn oneself with cosmetics, jewelry, etc.; 7. not to sleep on fine beds; and 8. not to eat after noon. These eight constituted the precepts of a novice who had just entered the homeless *saṅgha*.

²⁸ The five contrary acts are variously defined, but the most common is: 1. killing one’s father, 2. killing one’s mother, 3. killing a Worthy (Arhat), 4. shedding the blood of a Buddha, and 5. destroying the harmony of the *saṅgha*.

point attain the enlightenment of a Worthy (Arhat), the three insights²⁹, six perfections, and have the eight liberations³⁰. This is called those who are the best of the average rank to be reborn there.

“Those who are the average of the average rank to be reborn there, whether they are sentient being who for one day and one night keep the eight precepts or for one day and one night keep the *÷rāmañña* precepts, or for one day and one night keep the perfect precepts, their majestic deportment lacking nothing; then with these virtues they will dedicate vows and seek rebirth in that land of Sukhāvatī. Their precepts will fragrance and perfume their cultivation of that practice. At the end of his life, such a person will see the Buddha Amitāyus and his retinue come before him emitting a golden light and holding lotus flowers made of the seven treasures. The practitioner will himself hear in the skies a voice praising him, saying, ‘Good son, as you are a good person, who has conformed to the teachings of the Buddhas in the three realms. We have come to greet you.’ The practitioner will see himself seated atop a lotus flower and that lotus flower thereupon will enclose him. He will be born in the Western land of Sukhāvatī and dwell among the treasure lakes continuously for a week before the lotus flower will open. Once the flower has opened, he will open his eyes and with his palms together he will praise the World Honored One. He will hear the Dharma and be elated to attain stream entry (*÷rota-āpanna*). This will be continuous for a half an aeon and then he will become a Worthy. This is called the average of the average rank to be [345c] reborn there.

“Those who are the least of the average rank to be reborn there, whether they are good sons or good daughters, who are filial to their parents and practice the worldly benevolence, such people at the end of their lives thereupon will encounter a good friend who will extensively discuss for them the delightful conditions of the Buddha Amitāyus’ land. He will also relate the forty-eight vows of the monk Dharmākara. Having heard these things, they soon will come to the end of their lives and in the time it takes for a strong man to flex his arm, they thereupon will be born in that Western world of Sukhāvatī. A week after that birth they will meet Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, hear the Dharma and be elated by the attainment of stream entry. Doing so continuously for a small aeon, they will become Worthies. This is called the least of the average rank of those to be reborn there. This is called the visualization of the average rank and is called the fifteenth visualization.”

Sixteenth Visualization: The Inferior Rank of Those Who Are Reborn

The Buddha addressed Ānanda and Vaidehī, “Of those who are the best of the inferior rank to be reborn there, some are sentient beings who commit myriad misdeeds, but they do not slander the Vaipulya Sūtras. As this deluded person has numerous

²⁹ The three insights are: 1. The insight into the mortal conditions of self and others in previous lives, 2. the insight into future mortal conditions, and 3. the insight into present conditions of suffering so as to overcome all passions and temptations.

³⁰ The eight liberations are: 1. From subjective desires that have arisen, 2. from the arising of no subjective desires during meditation, 3. the liberation by concentration upon the pure and gaining freedom from all desires, 4. liberation of realizing immateriality, 5. the liberation of realizing infinite knowledge, 6. liberation of realizing non-locality, 7. the liberation of the mind having neither thought nor absence of thought, and 8. the liberation of Nirvāṇa.

performed evil things and has no repentance, at the end of his life he will meet a good friend who will discuss for him the Mahāyāna, twelve divisions of the Sūtras, and the words of their titles. Because of having heard of such Sūtra names, he will have the very grave misdeeds of the past thousand aeons nullified. This sage again will teach him to press his palms together and interlace his fingers and recite, 'Namaḥ the Buddha Amitāyus'. Because he recites the Buddha's name, he removes the misdeeds of five hundred million aeons of birth and death. At that time, that Buddha then will dispatch a conjured Buddha, conjured Avalokiteśvara, and conjured Mahāsthāmaprāpta to go before that practitioner and praise him, saying, 'Good son, because you have recited the Buddha's name, your misdeeds are nullified. We have come to greet you.' Once that has been said, the practitioner thereupon will see the conjured Buddha's light universally fill his house. Having seen that, he will be elated and thereupon will soon die and be carried to a jewel lotus flower, following the conjured Buddha. And afterward he will be born among the treasure lakes. After a period of seven weeks the lotus flower will open. And when it opens, the greatly compassionate Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and the Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta will emit a great light and stay with this person, proclaiming the twelve divisions of the Sūtras. Having heard this, this person will believe and understand them and produce the unsurpassed thought of enlightenment. Doing so continuously for ten small aeons, he will be endowed with the hundred gates of Dharma wisdom and attain entry into the first stage. This is called the best of the inferior rank to be reborn there."

The Buddha addressed Ānanda and Vaidehī, "Of those who are the average of the inferior rank to be reborn there, some are sentient beings who transgress the five precepts, the eight precepts, and the perfect precepts. As these are deluded people, they steal from the *saṅgha*'s things or steal things presented to the *saṅgha*, and impurely discuss the Dharma without any repentance. They are adorned by [346a] those misdeeds. As these are wicked people, they should fall to the hells because of their misdeeds. At the end of their lives, the myriad fires of hell will simultaneously rise up to them. They will meet a good friend who with great compassion thereupon will discuss and praise the ten powers and majestic virtue of the Buddha Amitāyus. He will extensively proclaim the Buddha's light and spiritual power and also will praise the knowing of precepts, concentration, wisdom, and liberation. When these people have heard these things, it removes the misdeeds of eight hundred million aeons of birth and death. Hell's fierce flames are then transformed into a cool breeze that exhales heavenly flowers. Atop the flowers are conjured Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* who come to greet these people. In a single moment they thereupon are reborn among the seven-treasure lakes inside of a lotus flower, remaining there for six aeons before the lotus flower will open. Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta using the Brahma voice³¹ will pacify and console them, as well as proclaim for them the Mahāyāna's profound Sūtras. Having heard this Dharma, they will then produce the unsurpassed thought of enlightenment. This is called those who are the average of the inferior rank to be reborn there."

The Buddha addressed Ānanda and Vaidehī, "Of those who are the least of the inferior rank to be reborn there, some are sentient beings who perform unwholesome deeds, the five contrary acts, and the ten evil deeds³², being endowed with

³¹ I.e., a voice clear and pure like that of Brahma.

³² These are the acts prohibited by the ten good deeds.

unwholesomeness. As these are wicked people, they would fall to the unpleasant paths³³ because of their misdeeds, continuously passing through numerous aeons while undergoing discomfort without end. As this is a wicked person, when the end of his life comes, he will meet a good friend who variously pacifies and consoles him by discussing the wondrous Dharma and instructing him to be mindful of the Buddha. If that person is not urgent in his mindfulness of the Buddha, the good friend then will address him, saying, ‘If you are unable to be mindful of that Buddha, you should recite and take refuge in the [name] Buddha of Infinite Life Span.’ Thus, with the utmost mind he will be caused to pronounce it and not to stop, doing so for ten perfect mindful [thoughts, saying] ‘Namaḥ the Buddha Amitāyus!’. Because he recited the Buddha’s name, then among his thoughts will be removed the misdeeds of eight million of aeons of birth and death. When he dies, he will see a golden lotus flower just like the sun’s disc appear before him. In a single thought he thereupon will be reborn in the world of Sukhāvatī. He will remain in the lotus flower for twelve great aeons before it then will open. Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta using the Brahma voice will proclaim for him the reality of things, removing the wicked Dharmas. Having heard them, he will be elated and then will produce the unsurpassed thought of enlightenment. This is called those who are the least of the inferior rank to be reborn there. This is called the visualization of the inferior rank to be reborn there and is called the sixteenth visualization.”

Conclusion

When this discourse had been spoken, Vaidehī and her five hundred female attendants who heard the Buddha’s discourse thereupon saw the world of Sukhāvatī’s marks so huge. They also saw the Buddha and his two *bodhisattvas*. Their minds became joyous and they gave praise as never before. [346b] Their doubts were cleared and they were greatly awakened to the attainment of the tolerance of the unarisen. The five hundred female attendants produced the supreme unexcelled *bodhicitta* and vowed to be born in that land. The World Honored One predicted that all of them would be reborn there and that they would attain the concentrations of the Buddhas they go before once they had been reborn there. The measureless gods produced the unsurpassed thought of enlightenment.

At that time, Ānanda then rose from his seat and said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, what shall this Sūtra be named? What is the essential theme of this Dharma that we shall receive and keep?”

The Buddha addressed Ānanda, “This Sūtra’s name is the ‘Visualization of the World of Sukhāvatī, the Buddha of Infinite Life Span, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, and the Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta’. It is also called the ‘Removal of the Obstructions of Deeds to the Birth Before Buddhas’. You should accept and keep it without cause for confusion or error. Those who practice these concentrations will in the present body attain sight of the Buddha of Infinite Life Span and his two sages. If good sons and good daughters merely hear the name of this Buddha and these two *bodhisattvas*, it will remove the misdeeds of measureless aeons of birth and death. How much more then would it be if they are mindful and consider it? If one is mindful of the Buddha, it should be known that this person thereupon will be a lotus flower (*puṣṭāraka*) among humans.

³³ I.e., hell, hungry ghost, *asura*, or animal rebirths in *saṣsāra*.

Visualizing Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta, they will be his best friends and will be seated at the site of his enlightenment, and he will be born among the family of Buddhas.”

The Buddha addressed Ānanda, “You are excellent at keeping the discourses. You, the keeper of the discourses, then, should keep this name of the Buddha of Infinite Life Span.” When the Buddha said this, the Venerable Maudgalyāyana, the Venerable Ānanda, and Vaidehī who had heard the Buddha’s discourse were all greatly elated.

At that time, the World Honored One walked on air and returned to Mount Gr̥dhrakūṭa. Ānanda widely retold the above events to the great congregation and the measureless gods, *nāgas*, spirits, and demons who heard the Buddha’s discourse were all greatly elated, paid their respects, and then departed.

Glossary of Sanskrit Terms

Ajāta-atru. He was an infamous usurper of the throne of Magadha, killing his father, Bimbisāra, who had converted to the Buddha's teaching. He disliked the Buddha at first but was later converted and died a liberal king.

anāgāmin. Lit. "no more rebirths". The *anāgāmin* is the third of the four stages of awakening taught in the Nikāyas. The *anāgāmin* shall no more be reborn in the unpleasant paths of *saṣsāra*, but instead be reborn in the heavens and afterwards enter Nirvāṇa.

ānanda. Ānanda was the Buddha's personal attendant until Gautama entered Nirvāṇa. At the first council of arhats after the Buddha's death, Ānanda was instrumental in the codification of the oral traditions that preserved the lectures and teachings that he had witnessed as the Buddha's attendant.

Amitāyus. Lit. "Infinite Life Span". This is the primary name in this Sūtra of a Buddha commonly known also Amitābha. Amitāyus and the pure land Sukhāvatī which he created by the consummation of forty-eight vows is the subject of three Mahāyāna Sūtras, commonly known as the Pure Land Sūtras. They are the *Larger Buddha of Infinite Life Span Sātra*, the *Smaller Buddha of Infinite Life Span Sātra*, and the *Visualization of the Buddha of Infinite Life Span Sātra*.

arhat. Lit. "foe destroyer". This is the fourth and final stage of awakening in which the practitioner is enlightened, enters Nirvāṇa, and shall not be reborn again.

asura. Asuras are described as titans with a violent disposition, some of whom however are Buddhist protectors.

bodhi. Lit. "awakening" or "enlightenment". The term is often transliterated into Chinese and so I do so as well. This is a spiritual awakening to the underlying reality and involves a transformation such that one is no longer afflicted as before.

bodhicitta. Lit. "thought of enlightenment" or "awakened mind". *Bodhicitta* is usually used in reference to a brief glimpse of enlightenment that leads a person to set forth on the *bodhisattva* path. It also sometimes refer to the pure and enlightened mind.

bodhisattva. Lit. "awakened sentient being". The notion of the *bodhisattva* originates in the Pāli Nikāyas as the title given to the Buddha in the period before he attained full enlightenment. It refers to a being who is developed spiritually and well on the way to being born a Buddha in the future. This was further developed in the *jataka*, or rebirth, tales that recounted past lives of the Buddha Gautama. The stories were moralistic, like Aesop fables, and became quite popular as a body of literature. The Mahāyānists, when the movement arose, sought to redefine the goal of practice to go beyond just the attainment of enlightenment and make it being born a Buddha. They generalized the notion of the *bodhisattva* (which previously only referred to Gautama) to make it a general template of Mahāyāna practice and philosophy.

Buddha. Lit. "Awakened One". While it signifies a person who is fully enlightened, this title is reserved, however, for those who are born into the world that is devoid of awakened beings, attain full enlightenment, and proclaim the Dharma of liberation. As such they are akin to Hindu avatars, excepting that they are avatars of truth and

liberation rather than of deities. The most recent Buddha was the Buddha Gautama (also known by the epithet Śākyamuni).

Devadatta. Devadatta was infamous for having planned an attempted assassination of the Buddha Gautama.

Dharma. Dharma in Buddhist texts refers usually to either to a teaching of the Buddha or the underlying truth to which the Buddha was enlightenment. It can also be used in a more general manner that means lit. “that which exists” and is roughly equivalent to the English “thing”.

Gṛdhrakāṣa, Mount. This is one of several sites at which the Buddha and his monks spent the rainy seasons in India. The peak of Gṛdhrakūṭa was said to resemble a vulture’s head.

Īśvara. This is another name of Śiva who is the king of the gods.

Jambudvīpa. Jambudvīpa was the name the ancient Indians gave to the Asian continent. In the Buddhist cosmology, it was the continent situated to the South of Mount Sumeru.

kalpa. A *kalpa* is roughly equivalent to the English “aeon”, and it similarly used in Indian thought, representing geologic spans of time. There are numerous reckonings of just how long of a period a *kalpa* represents. A special type of *kalpa* is the *asaṁkhyā kalpa*, four of which delimit the lifetime of a world in Buddhist cosmology. These four *kalpas* are period of creation, development, decay, and destruction of the world respectively.

karma. Lit. “action”. This an intention act and usually refers to an act with some ethical significance. Buddhist doctrine holds that intentional acts of the past condition the present existence of a being and intentional acts of the present condition the future of a being. The effects associated with an act is properly called the effect of *karma*. Because the continual generation of the effects of *karma* keeps one in the conditioned existence of birth and death, it constrains him from escape from the distress and suffering that that entails. Thus, one of the goals of Buddhist practice is to abstain from evil acts and eventually to entirely stop generating ethically “charged” acts altogether.

kiśukā. The name of a tree with red blossoms and also of a particular red colored jewel, probably a variety of ruby.

kaṭāyā. The Chinese is lit. “defiled, turbid”. The five *kaṭāyā* periods are those of varying levels of decay in the world. The five periods are: 1. the period when there is a deterioration of the material world and its forms; 2. the period when there is a deterioration of views, during which people become exceedingly deluded and have great difficulty accepting the true; 3. the period when there is a deterioration of conditions, during which the afflictions, distress, and poisons of ignorance, hate, and anger increase; 4. the period when sentient beings deteriorate, during which their miseries increase steadily as a result of the previous three periods; and 5. the period when the human life span deteriorates, gradually shortening to only ten years. These periods occur over a very long time (tens of thousands of years).

koṭī. A *koṭī* is a numeral in Sanskrit equaling ten million. It is a thousand *lakṣhas* and one thousandth of a *naḥuta*.

Mahāyāna. Lit. “greater vehicle”. The Mahāyāna was a movement in India that sought to reform many doctrines and marked the beginning of a period of great literary and philosophical creativity among Buddhist authors. Mahāyānists often asserted the superiority of their teachings and Sūtras.

mañi. A jewel, crystal, often a pearl, that symbolizes purity and is often attributed powers such as granting wishes or appearing to have whatever colors or patterns a person thinks about.

Mañju-rā. This is a prominent *bodhisattva* in the Mahāyāna pantheon, often associated with the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras and doctrines. He is sometimes depicted as wielding a sword of wisdom that cuts through illusion.

naṃyuta. A *naṃyuta* is a Sanskrit numeral for ten billion. It is a thousand *koṭis*.

Rājagṛha. The capitol of the kingdom of Magadha, Southwest of modern Bihār.

saṃsāra. Lit. the “round of birth and death”. This is the realm of affliction and distress in which sentient beings who are ignorant of reality and deluded by illusions continuously are reborn unless that escape by awakening and entering into Nirvāṇa.

Sanskrit. Sanskrit is written and spoken language that became predominant in India some time after Gautama’s Nirvāṇa. Most texts composed or compiled by Mahāyānists were in Sanskrit.

skandhas. Lit. “heaps”. The five *skandhas* are the components that combine and — functioning in concert — form a human being. They are: 1. material, 2. sensations, 3. conception, 4. volition, and 5. consciousness.

÷ramañña. This is a title given to a pure monk.

Sumeru, Mount. This mountain is akin to Mount Olympus in function, being a huge mountain at the center of the world that holds up the heavens in which the gods dwell. In Buddhist cosmology, all worlds have a Mount Sumeru. Because of its size, it is often used in parables or metaphors.

Sātra. A scripture purported to relate a teaching given by the Buddha or by an agent of the Buddha’s (such as a close disciple).

Tathāgata. “Thus Come One” in Chinese renderings, though there is some controversy about whether it should be “Thus Come One” or “Thus Gone One”. It would appear that Tathāgata was sometimes a contraction of another term meaning Thus Come One and hence the Chinese translation. In any case, this is one of the ten epithets of a Buddha.

śākyaṃuni. Lit. “sage of the Śākya clan”. This is an epithet that Gautama is alternatively called.

Vedas. These are the ancient hymns brought as an oral tradition by the Āryans when they migrated into India. They became the basis of the Brahmin traditions and the later Hindu religion that developed.

yojana. A measurement of distance described anciently as one days’ march. It’s exact value varies a great deal, probably due to differences in local standards. It is given the values of thirty-three, fifteen, or five and a half miles by Eitel.