

## ***Sutra on the Contemplation of Buddha Amitayus***

A Classic Pure Land Buddhist Text

Paraphrase

(All boldfacing is mine)

### Part 1

1. I heard that the Buddha once lived in Rajagriha on Vulture Peak with the Dharma-Prince, Manjushri, heading an assembly composed of many bhikkhus, plus 32,000 bodhisattvas.
2. The heir-apparent to the throne in the city-state of Rajagriha, was Prince Ajatasatru. Upon the evil advice of Devadatta and other friends, he arrested his father, King Bimbisara, confining him alone in a room with seven walls. He instructed his courtiers to allow no-one to visit his father.

The one exception was the king's chief consort, Vaidehi, who remained faithful to him. After washing herself, she coated her body with honey and ghee mixed with cornflour and concealed grape-juice in the garlands she wore so that on her visits she might feed Bimbisara without being noticed by the prison warden.

Then he prayed to the Buddha ("the World-Honoured One"), asking that Mahamaudgalyana<sup>1</sup>, his friend and relative, might, out of compassion for Bimbisara, come to him and communicate the eight prohibitive precepts that had been taught by the Buddha. No sooner had he prayed than with the speed of a falcon or eagle Mahamaudgalyayana appeared before the king to answer his prayer.

Each day he visited the king. The Buddha also sent his disciple Purna to preach the Dharma to the king. After three weeks of this, added to his intake of honey and flour, the king was a happy and contented man.

3. Ajatasatru enquired from the warden whether his father was still alive. The warden explained how Vaidehi had fed the king and how Mahamaudgalyayana and Purna had approached the king through the sky to preach Dharma to him - something impossible to prevent.

Enraged the king cried out, "My mother is a rebel and Mahamaudgalyayana and Purna are evil, having delayed the evil king's death through the illusion and delusion created by their magic spells."

Suddenly, he brandished his sharp sword, intent on killing his mother. But a wise minister named Chandraprabha and a famous physician named Jiva remonstrated with him, "We understand that since the beginning of the vast world ages (kalpas) there have been around 18,000 evil kings who killed their own fathers to claim the throne. But we have never heard of a man killing his mother, even if he lacked all virtue. Oh, king, if you dare to commit such a deadly sin, you, who are from the lowest caste, the Chandala, will bring unendurable dishonour on Kshatriyas, the kingly caste, such that we would be forced to desert you."

The two men stepped back, but with hands on their swords. Now terrified, Ajatasatru asked Jiva, "Won't you be my friend?" Jiva replied, "Only if you give

up all intent to injure your mother." Ajatasartru then laid down his sword and begged their mercy. He did no harm to his mother, but he did order that she too be placed in solitary confinement in a hidden palace.

4. Vaidehi was overcome with sorrow and distress once placed in this state. She prayed to the Buddha in the direction of Vulture Peak, "In past days you constantly sent Ananda to me when I need help. I am now in sorrow and grief. You are so great I am not fit to see you personally, so please send Mahamaudgalyayana and Ananda to me."

She then began to weep copiously, but before she could even lift her head from prayer, the Buddha had seen what was in her mind, even though he was located on Vulture Peak. Instantly, he sent Mahamaudgalyayana and Ananda to her. Indeed, the Buddha himself instantly translated himself from the mountain to the palace, so that when the queen lifted her head, there she saw him, his body purple-gold in colour, seated on a lotus-flower composed of 100 jewels. On his left stood Mahamaudgalyayana and on his right Ananda. She was able to look into the sky and see there Sakra (Indra), Brahman and other gods that protect the world, all showering heavenly flowers by way of paying homage to the Buddha.

When Vaidehi saw the Buddha, she took off her garlands and prostrated herself before him, crying, "What sin have I committed to produce such an evil son? Also, what cause and circumstances explain your own relationship, by blood and religion, with your wicked cousin and former disciple, Devadatta?"

5. "My only prayer," she continued, is that you reveal to me in detail all the places where there is no sorrow or trouble, because I want to be reborn in such a place. For this world is full of depravity. Also Jambudvipa<sup>2</sup> is full of hells, hungry spirits and brute creatures. There are so many meetings of wicked people in this depraved world. Don't let me hear the voice of the wicked nor see any wicked person in the next life. I seek your mercy by confessing my sins. I only ask that you, the Sun-like Buddha, may teach me how to meditate on a world in which all actions are pure."

Instantly, the Buddha caused a golden ray of light to flash from between his eyebrows, a light that reached all the innumerable worlds of the ten quarters. When it reflected back it was transformed into a golden pillar on top of his head, looking like Mount Sumeru. In this golden pillar of light the pure and admirable countries of the Buddhas in the ten quarters all became clearly visible at one and the same time.

One country was made up of seven jewels, another was full of lotus flowers, another like the palace of the god Shiva, another like a mirror of crystal which reflected all of the countries. Indeed, there were countless countries like this, all resplendent, gorgeous and delightful to gaze upon and all for Vaidehi to see and choose from.

Vaidehi told the Buddha, "All of these Buddha countries are pure and radiant with light, but I would like to be reborn in the realm of Buddha Amitayus<sup>3</sup>, that is, the

world of the highest happiness, Sukhavati. Please teach me how to focus my thought so as to attain a clear vision of that country.”

6. As the Buddha gently smiled on her, rays of five colours streamed from his mouth, each one shining as far as King Bimbisara’s head. Instantly, even though he was in solitary confinement, Bimbisara could see the Buddha with perfect clarity. As he paid homage with his head and face, his wisdom advanced and he attained to the level of a “Once-Returner”<sup>4</sup>, the third of the four stages to *nirvana*.
7. The Buddha said, “Vaidehi, do you realize that Buddha Amitayus is not very far away? Completely apply your mind to deep meditation on those who have already perfected the pure actions that are pre-requisite for entering Amitayus’ country. I will fully explain these to you with many parables so as to enable ordinary people who want to cultivate these pure actions the same opportunity of being reborn in the Land of the Highest Happiness in the western quarter. Three sets of pure actions have to be cultivated:
  - (1) The first set involves acting filially towards one parents and supporting them; respecting one’s teachers and elders; developing a compassionate mind which keeps one from doing any injury to another; and cultivating the 10 virtuous actions.
  - (2) The second set involves taking and observing the vow of seeking refuge with the Three Jewels, fulfilling all moral precepts, not lowering one’s dignity nor neglecting any ceremonial observance.
  - (3) The third set involves devoting one’s entire mind to the attainment of perfect wisdom, profoundly believing in cause and effect, studying and reciting Mahayana doctrine, and persuading and encouraging others who are pursuing the same course.

The Buddha continued, “These three sets of pure actions are the effective cause of the pure actions taught by all Buddhas of the past, present and future.”

8. Now addressing both Ananda and Vaidehi, the Buddha said, “Listen very carefully! I am now declaring what pure actions are pre-requisites for being reborn in Amitayus’ Buddha land for the benefit of all beings subject to the misery inflicted on them by their enemy, the passions. Vaidehi, you have asked very appropriate questions. Ananda, remember what I now say and publicly declare them in many meetings. My teaching is aimed at helping Vaidehi and all beings after her how to meditate on the World of Highest Happiness.

Only by the power of a Buddha like myself can one see the Buddha’s pure land as clearly as one sees the image of one’s face reflected in a good mirror. Upon seeing the state of ultimate happiness in that Buddha land, one’s heart exults. Immediately, one attains a willingness to endure whatever it takes to achieve entry into this land.

Turning to Vaidehi, the Buddha said, “You are just an ordinary person, so the quality of your mind is weak and confused. You have yet to obtain the divine eye, so you can’t perceive what this Buddha land is like from a distance. But all the

Buddhas have various means at their disposal to enable you to see that Buddha land.”

Vaidehi answered, “People like me can now see that Buddha land by the power of the Buddha. But what about those who will come after your nirvana, people depraved and devoid of good qualities and harassed by the five worldly sufferings? How will they see the World of Highest Happiness of the Buddha Amitayus?”

## Part 2

9. The Buddha replied, “You and all other beings must make it your only aim, with concentrated thought, to achieve a perception of the western quarter. You wonder how such a perception can be formed. Let me explain. Unless they are blind from birth, all beings are able to see the setting sun. So sit down properly, look westwards and prepare your mind to meditate deeply on the sun. So focus your mind on it that your perception will be unwavering. In particular, gaze upon the sun just as it is about to set and looks like a suspended drum. Let this image remain clear and fixed, whether your eyes are open or shut. This is the First Meditation - the perception of the sun.”
10. He continued, “Next, develop the perception of water. Gaze on clear, pure water and then let that image remain clear and fixed, not allowing your thought to be scattered and lost. Then form a perception of ice. As you see shining, transparent ice, recall the image of lapis lazuli. The ground will then look to you like it is made of lapis lazuli, transparent and shining both within and without. Beneath this ground of lapis lazuli you will then see a golden banner with seven jewels, diamonds and other precious stones, supporting the ground. This banner stretches to all eight points of the compass, perfectly filling all eight corners of the ground. Every side of the eight quarters consists of 100 jewels, with each one radiating 1,000 rays and each ray composed of 84,000 colours, which, when reflected in the ground of lapis lazuli, look like one billion suns, though it is difficult to see each individual sun. Over the surface of that ground of lapis lazuli are stretched golden intertwined ropes, divided by strings of seven jewels, each radiating rays of 500 colours which look like flowers or like the moon and stars. High up in the open sky these rays form an immensely high tower of light, with tens of millions of storeys and galleries, built from 100 massive jewels. Both sides of this tower have 100,000,000 flowery banners furnished and decked with numberless musical instruments. From the brilliant rays eight kinds of cool breezes fan out. When the musical instruments are played there are emitted the following sounds: “suffering”, “non-existence”, “impermanence” and “non-self”. All this is involved in the Second Meditation - the perception of water.
11. He added, “Next meditate on the constituents of the water perception, one by one, making the images as clear and possible so that they will never be scattered and lost, whether your eyes are shut or open. These images should always be kept in one’s mind except when one is asleep. Upon attaining this level of perception one is said to have dimly seen the Land of the Highest Happiness. One who obtains the meditative state (*samadhi*) of supernatural calm will be able to see this Buddha land clearly and distinctly. This is the Third Meditation - the perception of the Buddha land.”

Ananda, remember these words and repeat them for the benefit of the great mass of people who in future times who want to be delivered from their sufferings. When one meditates on this Buddha land sins are expiated which otherwise would have bound him to face 80 million immense world ages (*kulpas*) of births and deaths. Such a person, once he has abandoned his present body, will most certainly be born in the Pure Land in his next life. So this kind of meditation is called the “right meditation”. Meditation of any other kind is “heretical meditation.”

12. The Buddha then addressed Ananda and Vaidehi, “When you have attained the perception of that Buddha land, meditate next on the jewel-trees of that country. Meditate on each by itself and form a perception of seven rows of trees, with each tree 800 yojanas<sup>5</sup> high. Each tree has flowers and leaves consisting of seven perfect jewels, with corresponding colours emanating different radiances - a golden radiance from lapis lazuli, saffron from a crystal, diamond from agate, blue pearls form diamond. Other ornaments used are corals, amber and other gems with seven sets nets of excellent pearls spread over the trees. Between each set of nets there are 500 million flower-palaces, like Lord Brahman’s palace, where all heavenly children reside, each festooned with a peerless garland composed of 500 million different gems, like those on Sakra’s (Indra’s) head, which shine over 100 yojanas with the brightness of 100 million fused suns and moons. The rows of jewel-trees and their leaves touch one another, with beautiful flowers blossoming among the dense foliage and the fruits of seven jewels on each flower. Each massive leaf is exactly 25 yoganas in length and breadth, with 1,000 colours. Many flowers turn gracefully between the leaves, with the colour of Jambunada gold and the appearance of moving fire-wheels. All fruits are produced as easily as if they flowed out of Indra’s own bucket. One magnificent ray of light transforms itself into countless jeweled canopies with banners and flags, within each being illuminated the works of all the Buddhas of the innumerable universes (chiliocosm) and the Buddha lands of the 10 quarters. Meditate on each of these trees one by one in order, distinctly and clearly focusing on the trees, trunks, branches, leaves, flowers and fruits. This is the Fourth Meditation - the perception of the trees of the Buddha land.”
  
13. The Buddha continued, “Next perceive the water of the Buddha land, which is like this: In this Land of Highest Happiness water is found in eight lakes, with each consisting of seven soft and pliable jewels. The source of each lake is the King of Jewels, who fulfils every wish. The water divides into 14 streams, with each bearing the colours of seven jewels, running through gold channels and over beds of the sand of variegated diamonds. In the middle of each lake are 60 million lotus flowers, each composed of seven jewels. Each flowers is perfectly circular and exactly 12 yojanas in circumference. The water of jewels flows between the flowers and rises and falls alongside the lotus-stalks. The streaming water produces melodious and pleasing sounds - all the perfect virtues (*paramitas*), “suffering”, “non-existence”, “impermanence” and “non-self”, plus the signs of perfection and the minor marks of excellence characterizing all Buddhas. Also emanating from the every wish-fulfilling King of Jewels are exceedingly beautiful golden rays whose radiance is transformed into multi-coloured birds singing delightfully harmonies, ever praising the remembrance of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. This is the Fifth Meditation - the perception of the water of eight good qualities.”

14. The Buddha continued, "Each section of that Buddha land consists of several jewels. There are 500 million jeweled storeys and galleries, within which are countless *devas* (gods) playing heavenly music. Some musical instruments, like jeweled heavenly banners, just hang from the open sky, emitting musical sounds without being played which evoke remembrance of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. One who has attained this perception, one can be said to have dimly seen the jewel-trees, jewel-ground and jewel-lakes of the World of Highest Happiness. This is the Sixth Meditation - the perception of meditating on the general features of this Land. By experiencing this one is guaranteed rebirth in the Buddha Land, having expiated the greatest sinful deeds which would otherwise lead one to transmigrate for countless millions of *kalpas*.
15. The Buddha urged, "Listen most carefully and think over what you have heard. I, Buddha, am about to explain in detail the law of delivering oneself from trouble and torment. Memorise this so you can explain it in detail to a great mass of people."

While Buddha was uttering these words, Buddha Amitayus stood in the sky, with bodhisattvas Mahasthama on his right and Avalokitesvara on his left. No one could see clearly, such was the dazzling radiance, 100,000 times brighter than Jambunada gold.

When Vaidehi saw Amitayus she venerated him, touching his feet and saying, "Exalted One! By the Buddha's power I now can see you with the two bodhisattvas. But how should all future beings meditate on you and the two bodhisattvas?"

16. The Buddha (Shakyamuni) explained, "All who wish to meditate on Amitayus need to direct their mind like this. Imagine a lotus flower on the ground, made of seven jewels, with each of its leaves radiating the colours of 100 jewels and having 84,000 veins, each of which radiates 84,000 clearly discernible rays. Every small leaf is 250 yojanas in length and breadth. Each lotus flower has 84,000 leaves, with each leaf ornamented with 100 million kingly pearls, with each pearl shooting out 1000 rays like bright canopies. The ground is entirely covered by a mix of seven jewels. A tower is constructed of gems, like those fastened on Indra's head and is inlaid with 80,000 diamonds, Kimusaka jewels, purest pearls (Brahma-mani) and the finest pearl nets. On the tower are miraculously found four posts with jeweled banners, with each banner resembling 100,000 million Sumeru mountains. Over each banner is a jeweled veil reminiscent of Yama's celestial palace, illuminated with 500 million jewels, each radiating 84,000 rays of 84,000 shades of gold, with each shade covering the whole jeweled soil, constantly changing in appearance, sometimes forming a diamond tower, sometimes a pearl net, or a cloud of mixed flowers, ever exhibiting the state of the Buddha in all 10 directions. This is the Seventh Meditation - the perception of the flowery throne."

The Buddha explained to Ananda, "These wonderful flowers were originally created by the power of Dharmakara's prayer, when he was a monk. Any who want to practise the remembrance of Buddha Dharmakara must first perceive that flowery throne, not in a vague manner, but with the mind fixed on each individual detail, with each leaf, jewel, ray, tower and banner clear and distinct, just as if one was looking at one's own face in a mirror. Upon attaining this perception one

will most certainly be reborn in the Buddha Land, having expiated sins which would otherwise produce births and deaths lasting 50,000 *kalpas*."

17. The Buddha continued, "Once you have perceived this, next perceive the Buddha himself. You might ask, "How?" Every Buddha Tathagata<sup>6</sup> has a spiritual body such as to allow him to enter the mind of any being. So when you have perceived Buddha your own mind will possess the same 32 signs of perfection and the same 80 minor marks of excellence which you see in a Buddha. **Then your mind becomes Buddha. No! It is your mind that is indeed Buddha! For the ocean of true and universal knowledge of all the Buddhas finds its source in one's own mind and thought.** So apply your mind with undivided attention to carefully meditating on the fully enlightened Buddha. Begin by perceiving the image of the Buddha. With eyes either open or shut see before you an image of finest gold sitting on the flower throne. Then your mental vision will become clear and you will find you can see, clearly and distinctly, all the beauty of the Buddha land. As you see these things, keep them clear and fixed in your mind, as if you were looking at the palms of your own hands. Having experienced this, next perceive a great lotus flower on the Buddha's left side, exactly equal to the Buddha lotus flower I've just described. Then perceive another lotus flower on the Buddha's right side. See seated on that left-hand flowery throne Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, emanating golden rays exactly like those of Buddha. Similarly see Bodhisattva Mahasthama sitting on the right-hand flowery throne. Upon attaining these perceptions these three enthroned images will emanate brilliant rays, clearly lighting up all jewel trees with golden light. Under every tree are three lotus flowers and on them the three images, so that the images of the Buddha and the bodhisattvas are found everywhere in that Buddha land. Upon gaining this perception, the devotee, whether meditating or having finished meditation, needs to listen to the Dharma preached by streams of water, rays of light, jewel trees, ducks, geese and swans, committing it to memory. It should agree with the Sutras and, if not, it is an illusory perception. If it does it is a rough perception of the World of Highest Happiness. This is the Eighth Meditation - the perception of the images. The one who has practised this meditation is freed from sins which would otherwise have led to births and deaths lasting innumerable million *kalpas*. Further, during this present life he reaches a high level of mental achievement (*Samadhi*) due to remembrance of Buddha."
18. The Buddha continued, "Once you have attained this perception, next meditate on the bodily marks and the light of Buddha Amitayus. Realise, Ananda, that the body of Buddha Amitayus is 100,000 million times brighter than the purest heavenly gold found in Yama's dwelling-place. The height of Amitayus is 600,000 nayutas of kotis of yojanas as innumerable as are the sands of the river Ganges. Between his eyebrows is a white twist of hair oriented towards the right side. It resembles the five Sumeru mountains. His eyes are like the water of four great oceans, with the blue and white very distinct. The roots of each hair on his body emit brilliant rays also reminiscent of the Sumeru mountains. His halo is like 100 million universes (chilicosms). Within his halo countless Buddhas are miraculously created, a million nayutas of kotis as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges. Each Buddha within the halo is attended by innumerable bodhisattvas, all similarly miraculously created. Amitayus has 84,000 signs of perfection; each sign is characterized by 84,000 minor marks of excellence; each mark radiates 84,000 rays; each ray shines

over the worlds of the ten quarters. In this way Amitayus embraces and protects all beings who think upon him, without excluding any. It is difficult to explain in detail his rays, signs, etc. But in simple meditation let the mind's eye fasten on them. After this experience you will simultaneously see all the Buddhas of the ten quarters. This level of attainment is called the Samadhi of the Remembrance of the Buddhas. Those who have practised this meditation have contemplated the bodies of all the Buddhas. Having meditated on Buddha's body they also see his mind. It is great compassion that is called Buddha's mind and it is by absolute compassion that he accepts all beings. Those who have practised this meditation will, upon death, be born in the presence of the Buddhas in another life. They also acquire a spirit of resignation which enables them to face all the consequences that will later eventuate. So wise people should direct their minds to careful meditation on Buddha Amitayus. Those who so meditate should commence with one single sign or mark, beginning with the twist of white hair between his eyebrows, which will lead to the manifestation before their eyes of the 84,000 signs and marks. Those who so see Amitayus will also see all the innumerable Buddhas of the 10 quarters, followed by reception of the prophecy of their future destiny to become Buddha in the presence of all these Buddhas. This is the Ninth Meditation - the perception gained by a complete meditation on all forms and bodies of Buddhas.

19. After distinctly seeing Buddha Amitayus, meditate upon Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, whose height is 800,000 nayutas of yojanas, with a purple-gold body, a turban with a halo behind it, and a face whose circumference is 100,000 yojanas. As per Shakyamuni, so too in Avalokitesvara's halo are 500 miraculously transformed Buddhas, attended by numberless gods. Within the circle of light emanating from his whole body appear illuminated the various forms and marks of all beings that live in the five paths of existence. He wears a heavenly crown like that on Indra's head, with a transformed Buddha standing in the crown, 25 yojanas high. His face is golden, with the soft hair between his eyebrows radiating all the colours of the seven jewels from which 84 kinds of rays shine out, each ray containing innumerable transformed Buddhas, each attended by numberless transformed Bodhisattvas and all freely changing their manifestations till they fill up the worlds of the 10 quarters. Their appearance is reminiscent of the colour of the red lotus-flower. Avalokitesvara wears a garland consisting of 84,000 rays, in which perfect beauty is fully reflected. The palm of his hand is multi-coloured, like 500 lotus-flowers. Each hand has 10 fingers, the tip of each showing 84,000 pictures, all like signet seals, with each picture having 84,000 colours and each colour 84,000 soft and mild rays shining over all things that exist. With his jeweled hands he draws and embraces all beings. When he lifts up his feet, upon his soles can be seen a wheel of 1,000 spokes which miraculously transform themselves into 500 million pillars of rays. When he sets his feet on the ground the flowers of diamonds and jewels are scattered about and all things are simply covered by them. All other signs of his body and the minor marks of excellence are perfect, not at all different from those of the Buddha Amitayus, except the signs of the turban on his head the top of his head being invisible, though these signs are inferior to those of Shakyamuni Buddha. This is the Tenth Meditation - the perception of the real form and body of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara."

The Buddha instructed Ananda, "Whoever wants to meditate on Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara must do so just as I have explained. Those who so meditate will suffer no calamity, will completely remove the obstacle imposed by karma and expiate sins which would otherwise condemn them to births and deaths in numberless kalpas. Just to hear the name of this bodhisattva will give one immeasurable joy. How much more then the diligent contemplation of Avalokitesvara. Meditation of him should begin with his turban and next his heavenly crown. Meditate on all other signs in order, seeing them as clearly as one sees the palms of one's own hands.

"Next meditate on Bodhisattva Mahasthama, who has the same bodily signs and height and size as Avalokitesvara. His halo has a circumference of 125 yojanas, shining as far as 250 yojanas. The purple-gold rays emanating from his whole body shine over the countries of the 10 quarters and can be seen by all beings in favourable circumstances. To see but a ray emanating from a single root of the hair of this bodhisattva will enable one simultaneously to see the pure and excellent rays of all the innumerable Buddhas of the 10 quarters. So he is called the Unlimited Light. With this light of wisdom he shines over all beings and causes them to be removed from the three paths of existence and obtain the highest power. So he is also called the Bodhisattva of Great Strength (Mahasthama). 500 jewel-flowers are set in his heavenly crown, with each jewel-flower having 500 jewel-towers, in each of which may be seen the pure and excellent features of the far-stretching Buddha countries in the 10 quarters. His turban is like a lotus-flower. A jeweled pitcher is on his turban, filled with various brilliant rays that fully manifest the state of Buddha. His other bodily signs are identical with those of Avalokitesvara. When he walks about, all regions in the 10 quarters tremble and quake. Wherever these earthquakes occur will appear 500 million jewel-flowers, each with such splendid dazzling beauty as to be like the World of Highest Happiness (Sukhavati). When he sits down all the countries of the seven jewels shake and tremble. Then all the incarnate, divided Amitayuses, as innumerable as the dust of the earth, plus all the incarnate Bodhisattvas (Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta), who dwell in the middlemost Buddha countries situated between the Buddha country of the lower region presided over by Buddha "Golden Light" and the country of the upper region presided over by Buddha "King of Light" - these all assemble in the World of Highest Happiness like gathering clouds. They sit on their lotus-flower thrones which fill the entire sky and preach the excellent Dharma to deliver all beings immersed in suffering. This is the Eleventh Meditation - the perception of the form and body of Bodhisattva Mahasthamaprapta. Those who practise this meditation are freed from sins what would otherwise trap them in births and deaths for innumerable asamkhya kalpas. All who have practised this mediation do not live in an embryonic state but receive free access to the excellent and admirable countries of the Buddhas. Those who have experienced this have perfectly meditated on these two Bodhisattvas.

20. Following this perception, imagine yourself to be born in the World of the Highest Happiness in the western quarter. See yourself seated, cross-legged on a lotus-flower, which encloses you, but then as it unfolds 500 coloured rays shine over your body. Then your eyes will be opened so as to see the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who fill the whole sky. You will hear the sounds of waters and trees, the songs of birds, and voices of many Buddhas preaching the Dharma, in accordance with the 12 divisions of the scriptures. After concluding this meditation never forget it. If you have experienced this you have seen the World of Highest

Happiness in the realm of Buddha Amitayus. This is the Twelfth Meditation - the perception attained by meditating on this Buddha country. The innumerable incarnate bodies of Amitayus, together with those of Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta, constantly come and appear before those who meditate."

21. Buddha next spoke to Ananda and Vaidehi: "Those who aspire, by means of serene thoughts, to be born in the Western Land, should first meditate on an image of the Buddha, who is 16 cubits high, seated on a lotus-flower on the lake. His real body and its measurement is unlimited, incomprehensible to the ordinary mind. But by the efficacy of his ancient prayer, those who think of him and remember him most certainly are capable of achieving their aim. Indeed, the mere perceiving of the image of that Buddha brings one immeasurable blessings. How much more when one meditates on the complete bodily signs of that Buddha! Amitays has supernatural power. With everything at his disposal he freely transforms himself in the regions of the 10 quarters. He may show himself with a magnificent body filling the entire sky. Or he may show himself with a small body, only 16-18 cubits high. But his body is always golden, his halo bright and containing transformed Buddhas and he has jeweled lotus-flowers as already mentioned. The bodies of the two bodhisattvas are always identical, but they can be distinguished by simply observing the marks of their heads. Both assist Amitays in his work of universal salvation. This is the Thirteenth Meditation - the meditation comprising the joint perception of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas.

### Part 3

22. The Buddha continued speaking with Ananda and Vaidehi, "Those beings who will born in the highest form of the highest grade (to Buddhahood) are those, whoever they may be, who wish to be born in that country and cherish the threefold thought by which they are at once destined to be born there. What is this threefold thought? (1) The True Thought; (2) The Deep Believing Thought; (3) The Desire to be born in that Pure Land by bringing one's own stock of merit to maturity. All who perfect this threefold thought will most certainly be born in that country.

There are three classes of beings who are capable of being born in that country. What are these three classes? (1) Those possessed of a compassionate mind, who do no injury to any beings and accomplish all virtuous actions in accord with the Buddha's precepts; (2) Those who study and recite Mahayana sutras, e.g. the Vaipulya sutras; (3) Those who practise the sixfold remembrance. These three classes of beings who out of their wish to be born in that country, practise any of these meritorious deeds for one day or even for seven days, will indeed become destined to be born there. When one who has practised such merits is about to be born in that country, Buddha Amitayus, with the two bodhisattvas, numberless created Buddhas, 100,000 bhikkhus and Sravakas, their whole retinue and innumerable goods, accompanied by the palaces of seven jewels, will appear before him, respecting his diligence and courage. The bodhisattvas will offer him a diamond seat. Amitayus himself will send magnificent rays of light to shine over the dying person's body. He and many bodhisattvas will offer their hands and welcome him. Avalokitesvara, Mahasthamaprapta and all other bodhisattvas, will praise the glory of the man who practised these meritorious deeds and communicate encouragement to his mind. The newcomer on seeing this will leap

with joy. He will see his own body seated on a diamond throne. As he follows the Buddhas he will be born into that country and immediately will see Buddha's form and body with every sign of perfection complete, and also the perfect forms and signs of all the bodhisattvas. He will also see brilliant rays and jewel forests, all propounding the excellent Dharma. He will instantly be conscious of a spirit of resignation accepting whatever consequences may arise. Soon he will serve every one of the Buddhas who live in the regions of the 10 quarters. In their presence he will receive a prophecy of his own future destiny. Upon returning to his own land, Sukhavati, in which he has just been born, he will receive hundreds of thousands of Dharanis (mantras). The above describes those reborn at the highest level of the highest grade leading to Buddhahood.

23. Consider now those who will be reborn at the middle level. They may not have learned, remembered, studied or recited the Vaipulya sutras, but they fully grasp the truth conveyed by them and so do not speak evil of Mahayana doctrine. They deeply believe in cause and effect. Bringing such good qualities to maturity they seek to be reborn in that Country of Highest Happiness. As such a person is about to die, Amitayus, accompanied by the bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta and an innumerable retinue, will approach him, bringing a seat of purple-gold and commending him, "O my son in the Dharma! You have practised the Mahayana doctrine. You have understood and believed the highest truth. So now I have come to meet and welcome you." He and the 1,000 created Buddhas simultaneously will extend their hands in commendation. Then, as the man concerned looks at his own body he will find himself to be seated on that purple-gold throne. He will stretch out his own folded hands to praise and eulogise all the Buddhas. Then, as quick as thought itself, he will be reborn in the lake of seven jewels in the Buddha land. His throne is like a marvelous jewel-flower which opens after night-time. His own body will become purple-gold in colour. Under his feet he will discover a lotus-flower composed of seven jewels. Buddha and the bodhisattvas will simultaneously radiate brilliant rays to shine over his body. His eyes will instantaneously open and become clear. He will hear every voice that is preaching primary truths of deepest importance. Descending from his seat he will praise and extol the World-Honoured Buddha. Seven days later he will attain forever the state of the highest perfect knowledge - anuttarasamyaksambodhi. He will then fly to all the ten regions and one-by-one serve all the Buddhas there, practising many a sublime meditational state (Samadhi) in their presence. When a lesser kalpa has elapsed he will possess a spirit of resignation, accepting whatever consequences may follow. He will also receive a prophecy of his future destiny in the presence of the Buddhas.
24. Consider now those who will be born in the lowest level. This class of beings also believes in the principle of cause and effect and do not slander Mahayana doctrine. They cherish the thought of achieving the highest state of enlightenment (*bodhi*). As they bring this good quality to maturity, they seek to be reborn in the Country of Highest Happiness. At death, Amitayus with the two bodhisattvas and their retinues, will offer such a person a golden lotus-flower. He will miraculously create 500 Buddhas to send to greet him and to commend him, saying, "O my son in the Dharma! You are now pure. We greet you because you cherished the thought of attaining to the highest state of enlightenment." Upon seeing them he will find himself seated on that golden lotus-flower, which will soon close over him.

Following the World-Honoured One he will go to be reborn in the lake of seven jewels. After a day and a night they lotus-flower will open. Within seven days he may be able to see Buddha's body, though his mind will not yet be lucid enough to perceive all the signs and marks of the Buddha. This will take three weeks. At that time he will hear many sounds and voices preaching the excellent Dharma. As he travels thought all the ten quarters he will worship all the Buddhas, from whom he will learn the deepest meaning of the Dharma. Following three lesser kalpas he will enter the knowledge of 100 divisions of nature and become settled in the first joyful stage of being a bodhisattva.

The perception of these three classes of beings is the Fourteenth Meditation - meditation upon the superior class of beings.

25. Consider the beings who will be born at the highest level of the middle grade. They observe the five prohibitive precepts, the eight prohibitive precepts, and fasting. They practise all the moral precepts. They do not commit the five deadly sins. They bring no blame or trouble upon any being. By bringing these qualities to maturity they seek to be born in the World of Highest Happiness in the western quarter. When such a person dies Amitayus, the bodhisattvas and retinue appear before him. Flashing forth golden rays they will preach the Dharma of suffering, non-existence, impermanence and non-self. This person will praise the virtue of homelessness that is able to liberate one from all sufferings. He will be ecstatic at the sight of Buddha, finding himself to be seated on a lotus-flower. Kneeling and stretching out his folded hands he will worship the Buddha. Before he can raise his head he will be reborn in that Country of Highest Happiness. When the lotus-flower opens he will hear sounds and voices exulting in the Four Noble Truths of suffering. Immediately, he will attain Arhatship, gain the threefold knowledge and the six supernatural faculties, plus complete the eightfold emancipation.
26. Consider the beings who will be reborn at the middle level of the middle grade. They observe the eight prohibitive precepts. For one day and one night they either fast or observe the prohibitive precept for Sramanera (a novice monk who lives according to the 10 precepts) or observe the perfect moral precepts, maintaining their dignity nor neglecting any ceremonial observance. Bringing their merits to maturity, they seek to be reborn in the Country of Highest Happiness. When he dies, such a believer, having cultivated throughout his life fragrant moral virtue, will see Amitayus and all his retinue, flashing forth golden rays. This Buddha will approach him and offer him a lotus-flower of seven jewels. Then he will hear a voice from the sky, praising him and saying, "Oh, son of a noble family. You are indeed an excellent man. I come to greet you because of your obedience to the teachings of all the Buddhas of the three worlds." Then the newcomer will find himself to be seated on that lotus-flower, which will soon fold around him, in which he will be reborn in the jewel-lake of the World of Highest Happiness in the western quarter. Seven days later the flower will unfold, he will open his eyes and praise the World-Honoured One. Upon hearing the Dharma he will rejoice and become a Srotapanna (one who has entered the stream leading to nirvana). After half a kalpa he will become an Arhat.
27. Consider those beings who will be reborn at the lowest level of the middle grade leading to Buddhahood. These are the sons and daughters of noble families who have fulfilled their filial obligations towards their parents, supporting them, while behaving with benevolence and compassion in the world. When he is about to

depart this life he will meet a good and learned teacher who will fully describe to them the state of happiness in Amitayus' Buddha Land. He will also explain the 48 prayers of the monk Dharmakara. As soon as he has heard this his life will end and briefly after he will be reborn in the World of Highest Happiness in the western quarter. Seven days later he will meet the two bodhisattvas from whom he will learn the Dharma and rejoice. When a lesser kalpa has elapsed he will become an Arhat. The perception of these three sorts of beings is the Fifteenth Meditation - the meditation of the middle class of beings.

28. Consider the beings who will be reborn at the highest level of the lowest grade. Take the person who commits many evil deeds, yet does not slander the Mahayana sutras. Though he is a very stupid man, without shame or regret for all the evil he has done, while he is dying he may meet a good and learned teacher who will reverently recite just the headings and titles of the 12 divisions of the Mahayana scriptures. Upon merely hearing the names of all these sutras this man will be freed from the greatest sins which otherwise would cause him to be reborn and die for 1,000 kalpas. A wise man will also teach him to worshipfully stretch out his folded hands and say, "Namo Amitabhaya Buddhaya (Namu Amida Butsu)." Upon uttering the name of the Buddha he will be freed from the sins which otherwise would have caused him to be reborn and die for 50 million kalpas. Then the Buddha will send to him a created Buddha along with the two created bodhisattvas who will commend him, saying, "Oh son of a noble family. Because you have uttered the name of Amitabha, all your sins have been destroyed and expiated. That's why we've come to greet you." The devotee will then see the rays of that created Buddha flooding his room with light. While rejoicing at this sight he will depart this life. Seated on a lotus-flower he will follow that Buddha to be reborn in the jewel-lake. Seven weeks later, when the lotus-flower unfolds, the two great compassionate bodhisattvas will stand before him, flashing forth magnificent rays and preaching to him the deepest meaning of the twelve divisions of the scriptures. Upon hearing this he will understand and believe it and cherish the thought of attaining the highest state of enlightenment. Within 10 lesser kalpas he will enter the knowledge of the 100 divisions of nature and be admitted to the first joyful stage of becoming a bodhisattva. Those who have had the opportunity to hear the name of the Buddha, the name of the Dharma and the name of the Sangha - the Three Jewels - can also be reborn in that country.
29. Buddha continued, "Consider the beings who will be reborn at the middle level of the lowest grade. Take a person who transgresses the five and the eight prohibitive precepts and all the perfect moral precepts. He is so stupid that he steals things that belong to the entire community or things that belong to a particular monk. He feels no shame or regret for his impure preaching of the Dharma, but exalts himself with many wicked deeds. Such a sinful person deserves to fall into hell. Yet at the time of his death, when the fires of hell approach him from all sides he will meet a good and learned teacher who, moved by great compassion, will preach about the power and virtue of the 10 faculties of Amitayus, fully explaining his supernatural powers and brilliant rays. He will also praise moral virtue, meditation, wisdom, emancipation and the thorough knowledge that follows emancipation. Having heard this he will be delivered from sins that otherwise would have caused him rebirths and deaths for 80 million kalpas. Instantly, the violent fires of hell which had threatened him will be transformed into a pure, cool

wind gently blowing round heavenly flowers. On each of these flowers will stand a created Buddha or bodhisattva to welcome him. Instantly, he will be reborn in a lotus-flower growing in the lake of seven jewels. After six kalpas the lotus-flower will open. Then the two bodhisattvas will soothe and encourage him with their Brahma voices and preach to him the Mahayana sutras of deepest importance. Upon hearing this Dharma he will instantaneously direct his thought towards attaining the highest level of enlightenment.

30. Finally, consider those beings who will be born at the lowest level of the lowest grade. Take the person who commits such evil deeds that he even completes the 10 wicked actions, the five deadly sins and such like. Being stupid and guilty of many crimes he deserves to fall into a miserable path of existence and suffer endless pains for many kalpas. Yet on the eve of death he will meet a good and learned teacher who, soothing and encouraging him in various ways, will preach to him the excellent Dharma, teaching him the remembrance of Buddha. However, being riddled with pain he will not be able to think of Buddha. But some good friend will tell him, "Even if you are unable to exercise the remembrance of Buddha you can at least utter his name: Buddha Amitayus." When he does this serenely with uninterrupted voice, continually thinking of Buddha till he has 10 times completed such thinking while repeating the formula Namah Amitabha Buddhayah (Namu Amida Butsu). The merit of uttering the Buddha's name means that during each repetition he will expiate the sins which otherwise would have led to rebirths and deaths for 80 million kalpas. Then, while dying, he will see a golden lotus-flower resembling the sun-disk, appearing before his eyes. Instantly, he will be reborn in the World of Highest Happiness. After 12 greater kalpas the lotus-flower will unfold. Then the two bodhisattvas, raising their voices in great compassion, will preach to him in detail about the real state of all the elements of nature and the law concerning the expiation of sins. On hearing them he will rejoice and immediately focus his mind on attaining enlightenment. These are the beings who will be reborn at the lowest level of the lowest grade leading to Buddhahood. The perception of these three classes is the Sixteenth Meditation - the meditation of the inferior class of beings.

#### Part 4

31. After Buddha had finished his speech, Vaidehi, with her 500 female attendants, was able to see, being guided by the Buddha's words, the scene of the extensive World of the Highest Happiness. She could also see the bodies of Buddha and of the two bodhisattvas. Ecstatically, she praised them, saying, "Never have I seen such a wonder!" Instantly, she became wholly and fully enlightened and attained a spirit of resignation, prepared to endure whatever consequences might follow. Her 500 female attendants also cherished the thought of attaining the highest perfect knowledge and being born in the Buddha land.
32. The World-Honoured One predicted that they would all be born in that Buddha land and be enabled to achieve the sublime state of meditation experienced in the presence of many Buddhas. All the innumerable devas (gods) also directed their thought toward attaining the highest state of enlightenment. Then Ananda approached the Buddha and said, "World-Honoured One. What should we call this sutra? How should we receive and remember it in the future?" The Buddha replied, "Ananda, this sutra should be called *The Meditation on the Land of Sukhavati and*

*Buddha Amitayus and on Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta or The sutra on the entire removal of the obstacle of karma and the means of being born in the realm of the Buddhas.* Take it. Hold it. Don't forget or lose it. Those who practise the sublime state of meditation taught by this sutra will be able to see in this present life the Buddha Amitayus and the two great bodhisattvas. Any son or daughter in a noble family who merely hear the names of the Buddha and the two bodhisattvas, will have sins expiated which otherwise would have led them to rebirths and deaths for innumerable kalpas. How much more effective will be the remembrance of that Buddha and the bodhisattvas! Realise that the one who remembers that Buddha is the white lotus among people whom the two bodhisattvas treat as an excellent friend. Such a person, sitting in the place of enlightenment (bodhi-mandala) will be reborn in the realm of the Buddhas." The Buddha further said to Ananda, "Carefully remember these words. To remember them is to remember the name of Buddha Amitayus." After the Buddha had finished speaking the worthy disciples Mahamaudgalyayana and Ananda, Vaidehi and the others were all enraptured with boundless joy.

33. The World-Honoured One then returned, walking through the open sky to Vulture Peak. Soon after this, Ananda addressed a great assembly speaking of all the occurrences stated above. Upon hearing this all the innumerable devas, nagas and yakshas (nature spirits who are custodians of the natural treasures hidden in the earth and tree roots) were ecstatic. Having worshipped the Buddha they went their way. So ends the *Sutra on the Meditation on Buddha Amitayus* as spoken by Buddha Shakyamuni.

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<sup>1</sup> Buddhists venerate Mahamaudgalyayana as one of the Buddha's greatest disciples, pre-eminent in spiritual powers.

<sup>2</sup> Puranic cosmography divides the earth into seven concentric island continents separated by seven encircling oceans, each double the size of the preceding one. The seven continents are Jambudvipa, Plaksadvipa, Salmalidvipa, Kushadvipa, Krounchadvipa, Shakadvipa, and Pushkaradvipa.

<sup>3</sup> The *Samboghakaya* (bliss or enjoyment body) form of Amitabha.

<sup>4</sup> One destined to be reborn in this world only once more.

<sup>5</sup> This Vedic measure is variously calculated between around 8-14 kilometres. This would mean that each tree was between 6,400-11,200 kms in height.

<sup>6</sup> Tathagata literally means "beyond all coming and going", describing the Buddha who has "arrived."