**The Avatamsaka Sutra**

**CHAPTER1 – PART1**

Translated in the Tang Dynasty by the Tripitaka Master Srãmana Siksananda of Khotan

**Explanation by VM. Hua**

**The Wondrous Adornments of the Rulers of the Worlds**

**Commentary:**

We spoke of this sramana before during the Earth Store Sutra lectures. Some say that Khotan is in present-day Yunnan Province [China]. It could very well be true, because Patriarch Mahakäsyapa entered samadhi in Yunnan. There is a mountain there called Jizu (“Chicken Foot”), because it is shaped like the foot of a chicken. Patriarch Mahakäsyapa entered samadhi there in order to wait for the future Buddha, Venerable Maitreya, to come into the world, so that he can pass Sakyamuni Buddha’s robe and bowl to Maitreya Buddha. Thus, the area of Yunnan is considered sacred to Buddhism. People who have gone to Jizu Mountain know that every year three kinds of light—golden light, silver light, and Buddha light—are sighted there frequently. It is a holy place, and it could be the former Khotan. However, the names of regions have changed and can no longer be ascertained.

World refers to this world. Who are the rulers of the world? You are a world ruler, not me. Or perhaps I am a world ruler, not you. In general, somebody rules over this world. A ruler such as this not only rules in the world but also rules beyond the world. He can be considered both a worldly and a world-transcending ruler.

Someone may object, “Dharma Master, what you are saying is nonsense. A world ruler is just a world ruler, and a world-transcending ruler is a world-transcending ruler. How can he be both a world ruler and a world-transcending ruler? What exactly does he rule over?”

He is a ruler of the heavens, a ruler of the earth, and a ruler of people. Who is both a worldly and world-transcending ruler? The Buddha. The Buddha is a leader in the world and also beyond the world. Worldly rulers refer to the sovereigns and kings of countries, such as gold-wheel-turning kings, silver-wheel-turning kings, copper-wheel-turning kings, and iron-wheel-turning kings. These are world rulers and their domain does not exceed the mundane realm.

Wondrous refers to the sublime. It cannot be mentally conceived, or expressed in language. Adornments are decorations. But these adornments are not the ordinary decorations that most people can see. That’s why they are called wondrous. This chapter describes the subtly wonderful, inconceivable states of adornment of both worldly and world-transcending rulers, as well as their adorned countries and Buddhalands. Thus this chapter is called “Chapter One: The Wondrous Adornments of the Rulers of the Worlds.”

I. General Revelation of Having Heard

**Sutra:**

**Thus I have heard.**

**Commentary:**

Thus I have heard are four very important words. All Buddhist sutras begin with these words. How did these four words come about?

When Sãkyamuni Buddha was about to enter nirvana, the Venerable Ànanda had not yet realized sagehood; he still hadn’t cut off all his love and desire. Like a small child about to be separated from its mother, he was weeping so hard that his nose was running and his tears were streaming down. He completely forgot about everything except his grief. His heart sank into the depths of sorrow and his eyes were swollen to the size of peaches.

At that time the Venerable Aniruddha, who was foremost in the penetration of the heavenly eye, reminded Ànanda, “The Buddha transmitted the essentials of his Dharma to you. Since you are the compiler of the Buddha’s teachings, you should ask the Buddha about how to handle certain matters in the future.”

Ànanda said, “What business could there be in the future? The Buddha is going to die and enter nirvana. I won’t do anything anymore.”

“Don’t be childish,” said the Venerable One with the heavenly eye. “The responsibility of propagating the Dharma rests on you. You can’t indulge in grief and be so immature.”

“What? You mean we need to propagate the Buddha-dharma?” asked Ànanda. “What do I need to ask the Buddha then?” Ànanda was so devastated by the idea of the Buddha entering nirvana that his mind was a total blank.

The Venerable One foremost in the power of his heavenly eye said, “There are four important matters you need to ask the Buddha. First, while the Buddha has been in the world, we have dwelt with the Buddha. After the Buddha enters nirvana, with whom should we dwell? Second, while the Buddha has been in the world, we have taken the Buddha as our teacher. After the Buddha’s nirvana, whom should we regard as our teacher?”

“Oh yes,” exclaimed Ànanda. “It’s a good thing you reminded me. Where are we going to live? This is very important; it should be asked. The Buddha is our teacher now, but after the Buddha enters nirvana, we will still need a teacher. Without a teacher, how can we cultivate? That’s also an appropriate question.”

“Third,” continued the Venerable One, “while the Buddha has been in the world, he himself could discipline and subdue evil-natured Bhikshus. After the Buddha enters nirvana, how are we going to deal with them?”

“Right,” said Ànanda. “That’s a very good question. What else?”

“Don’t get excited,” said Venerable Aniruddha, “or you’ll forget what I’m telling you. The fourth question is: When the sutras are compiled, what words should be placed at the beginning of each sutra?”

The words “Thus I have heard” serve six purposes.

1. To distinguish Buddhist sutras from the writings of other religions. Writings of externalist ways begin with either the syllable “A” or the syllable “U”. “A” denotes “existence,” and “U” means “nonexistence.” That is to say, if all dharmas do not exist, then they are non-existent; if they are not non-existent, then they exist. That is why either “A” or “U” is used to begin their texts. The Buddhadharma is not like that. The Buddhadharma says that there is neither existence nor nonexistence; it doesn’t fall into either the extreme of emptiness or the extreme of existence. Therefore the words “Thus I have heard” are used to begin the Buddhist sutras.

“Thus” refers to the Dharma. “I have heard” refers to the reception of the Dharma. That which is “thus” is the Dharma, and that which is not “thus” is not the Dharma—the Dharma being the ultimate meaning of the Middle Way.

2. To put an end to debate and contention. “Contention” means arguing and fighting. There is a verse that goes:

Contention involves the thought of victory and defeat.
And as such contradicts the Way.
Giving rise to the mind of the Four Marks,
How can one obtain samadhi?

All  beings like to vie with one another to be number one. I have a young disciple who is just a child, and yet she still wants to be number one among the little ones. Those who are older struggle for top position among their peers. Everyone is involved in contention. For example, the newly-precepted people refuse to listen to those who are senior to them in precepts. They want to be number one among the new preceptees. Those who are intermediate in precepts won’t take orders from their seniors, but they do want to boss the new preceptees around. That is also contention. A human being is his or her own great sutra. Once you understand this great sutra about human nature, you’ll understand everything.

The phrase “Thus I have heard,” indicates that what Ànanda is saying is not his own words; it is what he heard from the Buddha. Since those words were spoken by the Buddha himself, there was nothing to contend about. Let’s take a current example. If you translate a sutra and your translation is correct, someone may still claim that it is not.

Of course, if your translation is incorrect, people are even more likely to say so. But if you say, “That’s how I heard the Master explain it,” people won’t know what to say and won’t dare to criticize you. The same principle is at work with the words “Thus I have heard.” They put to rest any contention and debate. That’s how peculiar the affairs of the world are.

3. To eliminate additions and deletions. After the phrase “Thus I have heard,” the sutra compiler goes on to specify where and when the Buddha was, how many people were in the assembly, what sutra was spoken, and so forth. With the circumstances stated in such a definitive manner, none of the disciples dared to edit or alter the facts, and in this way the sutras were all compiled without contention.

4. To quell the assembly’s doubts. Ànanda was one of the youngest members of the assembly. His virtue wasn’t sufficient to move people. However, the Buddha had entrusted the duty of compiling his Dharma treasury to Ànanda. When Ànanda ascended the Dharma seat, the assembly immediately gave rise to three kinds of doubts:

a. First, some thought, “Sãkyamuni Buddha hasn’t entered nirvana after all. He’s come back to speak Dharma for us!” That was because Ànanda had nearly all of the special hallmarks of the Buddha. He looked almost exactly like the Buddha, except that he was a little shorter.
b. Second, some disciples thought, “This must be a Buddha from another direction! One of the Buddhas of the ten directions must have come here to speak Dharma.”
c. Third, some people thought Ànanda himself had suddenly become a Buddha, because his adorned appearance seemed identical with that of a Buddha.

But when Ànanda announced, “Thus I have heard,” the great Arhats became clear and were no longer confused.

5. To bring about the arising of faith. The Dharma that is “thus” can be believed, whereas Dharma that is not “thus” cannot be believed. “Thus” refers to the Dharma, and “I have heard” means that having heard this Dharma, one accepts it in one’s heart.

6. To accord with the Buddhas of the three periods of time. All Buddhas begin their sutras with the words, “Thus I have heard.”

Of the four questions that Ànanda asked the Buddha before his nirvana, the second one was, “When the Buddha is in the world, we take the Buddha as our teacher. After the Buddha enters nirvana, whom should we regard as our teacher?” The implication was that a new teacher needed to be selected from among the great Bodhisattvas and great Arhats. A patriarch must be chosen to take the Buddha’s place. The Buddha, however, did not tell them to select a patriarch or a teacher. He gave a very wonderful answer. He said, “You should take the precepts as your teacher.” Precepts include the Five Lay Precepts, the Eight Lay Precepts, the Ten Major and Forty-eight Minor Bodhisattva Precepts, the 250 Bhikshu Precepts, and the 348 Bhikshuni Precepts.

“But the precepts are inanimate. How can they serve as our teacher?” you might ask.

“Although we recite the sutras that are described as being like paths to follow, they seem to have nothing to do with our daily lives. Sutras are insentient objects. How can they be teachers for sentient beings?” All of you can look into that. We all know that we’re supposed to take the precepts as our teacher. But what is the reason? Westerners always like to ask “why?” but as you haven’t asked why in this case, I’m telling you to do so.

Why did the Buddha tell his disciples to take the precepts as their teacher? Because the precepts enable one to bring forth goodness and eradicate evil. If you take the precepts as your teacher, you can give rise to goodness and get rid of evil. If you don’t understand something, you can look it up in the precepts, and they will tell you. That’s why we take the precepts as our teacher.

Study the Buddhadharma gradually. It cannot be understood overnight. I have taught you the Buddhadharma for six or seven years, and I know that you still don’t understand the principle of taking the precepts as your teacher, so I brought it up today.

The third question that Ànanda asked the Buddha was, “When the Buddha is in the world, he himself can discipline and subdue evil-natured Bhikshus, no matter how intractable or crazy they get. Even if there were monks who scolded or hit others, or caused all kinds of trouble, the Buddha had a way to deal with them.”

For example, several days ago—they weren’t evil-natured Bhikshus, but good-natured Bhikshus who were behaving like evil-natured ones—the Bhikshus who worked in the kitchen went on strike. The other Bhikshus still wanted to eat and sleep, but there was nothing to eat, and they were so hungry they couldn’t sleep. Finally, the managing Bhikshu came to me, bewailing, “I’m really inept. I can’t even take care of this petty matter. I don’t know what to do. The kitchen monks are on strike, and the monks who want to eat are mad. The ones who want to sleep are even more upset. What am I to do?” I paid no attention to the matter. After a while, the kitchen monks went back to work by themselves, and all the monks could eat and sleep in peace. Thus the problem was solved.

Ànanda’s question was, “What are we to do about evil-natured Bhikshus after the Buddha passes into stillness?”
To this the Buddha answered, “Simply be silent and they will go away. Don’t argue with or fight them. Just ignore them.” If no one speaks to them, they have no way to be evil.

Evil-natured Bhikshus may in reality be good-natured Bhikshus who are “fighting poison with poison” and “counteracting evil with evil.” That’s why they assume the manner of evil-natured Bhikshus. If any of you would like to be evil-natured Bhikshus, you can tell people, “My teacher says that evil-natured Bhikshus are not necessarily evil; they may just be putting on a front, pretending to be evil-natured and causing trouble for others.” Someone once asked, “Can we test other people?” If you deliberately test others to see if they have perfected their cultivation of the paramita of patience, it could be said that you are bringing forth a Bodhisattva resolve. You are acting like an evil-natured Bhikshu to see if others can be good-natured Bhikshus. However, this is not easy to do.

As one of my disciples said, “It’s very dangerous.” Of course it is. When I first resolved to cultivate, I dreamed that I was walking along a road gutted with holes and ditches. Of course it’s dangerous, but the danger makes you more cautious. If no hazards existed, you would become careless. Therefore, if you find ways to cultivate even in adverse situations, then you can cultivate anywhere. If, on the other hand, you don’t cultivate in favorable situations, then you won’t cultivate no matter where you are. You should take what is good and follow it, and change what is bad. If it’s the Way, advance along it. If it’s not the Way, retreat from it.

One of the four questions that Ànanda asked the Buddha was, “While the Buddha is in the world, we dwell with the Buddha. After the Buddha enters nirvana, where shall we dwell?”

Ànanda said, “Buddha! Buddha! Please don’t enter nirvana just yet. I have another question to ask. After I have asked it, you may enter nirvana.”

“What’s your question?” asked the Buddha.

“While the Buddha is in the world, we 1,250 disciples dwell with the Buddha. We constantly study with the Buddha, dwell with the Buddha, and make alms rounds. After the Buddha enters nirvana, where should all of us disciples dwell? Should we live in the mountains or in the city? How should we maintain our livelihoods? When the Buddha is in the world, we rely on offerings from donors. But after the Buddha leaves, what are we going to do?”

The Buddha told änanda, “After I enter nirvana, you should dwell in the Four Stations of Mindfulness: mindfulness regarding the body, feelings, thoughts, and dharmas.”

I will talk about mindfulness of the body first, because I know some people here don’t want to hear about it. Why not? They prize their bodies, thinking, “See what a beautiful body I have. It is neither too big nor too little, neither young nor old. My body is my best friend.” If you talk about the body being impure, people get upset. If people say their bodies are clean, you can ask them, “Then why do you have to rinse your mouth, wash your hands and face, and take a bath every day? That just goes to show that you aren’t all that clean.”

Consider the hippies, who neither take baths nor brush their teeth, preferring to live “naturally.” If you ask me, I think it would be best if they grazed on grass instead of eating regular food, because grass grows naturally, and they are into doing what’s natural. They want to eat natural [in Chinese, the word for “natural” also means “heavenly” foods], so they go to a natural food store. The products there are much more expensive than “earthly” food, but they insist on buying them. They think that earthly food is unclean and that if they eat it they will also become unclean, so they eat only natural “heavenly” food. But are they clean? No. They think they are, but they’re not. It’s just their own perception.

For example, I may think that I’m number one in the world, because there is no one else like me. My face, my voice, and everything about me is unique, so there is no second person like me. This applies to all of you, too. Each one of you can consider yourself number one in the world. It’s okay for us to have such an idea; it’s not against the law. But is it true? It can be true, and it can be false. How can it be true? If you consider yourself number one, you should behave accordingly, doing what others cannot do and eating what others cannot eat. Then you are number one. If you can cultivate what others cannot, you are number one. However, if you merely say you’re number one, but you behave like number two, what kind of number one is that? It’s a false number one.

If you want to be number one, you must race ahead in cultivation: “I want to be the first to achieve Buddhahood, the first to save  beings.” Strive to be first; don’t lag behind. If you hang back when it’s time to work, but rush to the front when it’s time to eat, then you’re number one in eating—what use is that? The point I’m trying to make is that we may think things are a certain way, but that doesn’t make them so. For example, I may say, “Not only am I number one in the world, I’m also number one in heaven. People believe in God who is in heaven, but I think God should believe in me. God doesn’t have to listen to anyone, but I’ll tell him to be my servant.” I may think like that, but it’s only false thinking. It’s what happens when conscious thought is involved is false thinking. What happens spontaneously, without premeditation, is a response.

Sãkyamuni Buddha told Ànanda, “After the Buddha enters nirvana, the fourfold assembly of disciples should dwell in the Four Stations of Mindfulness.”

**The Four Stations of Mindfulness**

1. Contemplate the body as impure. This is the station of mindfulness of the body.
2. Contemplate feelings as suffering. This is the station of mindfulness of feelings.
3. Contemplate thoughts as impermanent. This is the station of mindfulness of thoughts.
4. Contemplate dharmas as without self. This is the station of mindfulness of dharmas.

By relying on the Four Stations of Mindfulness in one’s cultivation, one can realize sagehood and liberate oneself from the cycle of rebirth. Why have we failed to escape the cycle of rebirth? Simply because we haven’t truly realized how impure the body is. Everyone is attached to a self. “This is mine; that is mine; this house is mine; this land is mine; these clothes are mine.” But when they breathe their last breath, nothing belongs to them. I often quote this verse:

Fish jump in the water.
People mill about in the marketplace.
Not knowing to do good deeds and create virtue,
They harden their hearts and create offenses.
Gold and silver piled up as high as a mountain
Are all gone when you close your eyes.
With empty hands you go before King Yama,
Regretful, as your tears fall.
Unfortunately, your regrets come too late.

The First Station of Mindfulness is to contemplate the body as impure. Why is the body said to be impure? If you go without bathing for a day, your body starts to smell of sweat. If you don’t bathe for two days, the smell gets worse. If you go three days without bathing, you will stink as badly as a toilet! This goes for people whose bodies are generally clean. There are also people whose body odors are so rank that no matter how often they wash and scrub, they can’t get rid of the smell. All it takes is to have one person with this problem and everyone in the room will gag. The odor can’t be covered up, no matter how much perfume and deodorant they put on. Perhaps you aren’t influenced by sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, or dharmas, so you don’t notice it. But if you pay attention, some people have body odor that smells worse than the strongest Camembert cheese! Why do they smell so bad? It’s because they like to eat strong-smelling cheese, steak, lamb chops, cow’s milk, goat’s milk, and onions.

Why are people unclean? It’s because they came about in a very impure way. You might think that the mouth is the cleanest place in your body. However, if you don’t brush your teeth for a few days, your breath stinks worse than a toilet.

Filth oozes constantly from the nine apertures. Tears and matter flow from the eyes. Wax accumulates in the ears. Mucus comes from the nose. Saliva and phlegm come from the mouth. Add to that excrement and urine, and that makes nine apertures from which impurities constantly flow forth. So, what part of the body would you consider attractive?

Even if you smear your body with perfume or adorn it with gold, you still won’t pass for a Buddha image. Such attempts at camouflage are like trying to ornament a toilet with brocade. No matter how beautiful you try to make it, the toilet still stinks. And no matter how delicious the food you ate was, after it passes through your intestines, you wouldn’t want to look at it again, much less eat it. Dogs, on the other hand, love to eat that stuff. Horses wouldn’t eat it. Someone is thinking, “Dogs that are raised as pets in America don’t eat excrement.” That’s because they aren’t hungry. If they were starving and didn’t have any dog food to eat, they would rush to eat it.

Therefore, you should contemplate the body as impure. If you awaken to the fact that the body is filthy, you won’t be so attached to it. Without attachment, you will become liberated and won’t be burdened by the body. Laozi grasped this principle when he said, “The only reason I am plagued with huge afflictions is because I have this body. If I didn’t have a body, what affliction could there be?” He understood the contemplation of the body as impure.

We have studied the Buddhadharma for a long time. Have we managed to see through our attachments to the body and contemplate it as impure? Or are we still slaving away for our “stinking skin bags”? We ought to think it over. If you haven’t grasped this principle, then you haven’t understood even the superficial aspects of Buddhism, not to mention its essential teachings. You can’t take it if you’re a little hungry, a little thirsty, or a little cold. All these afflictions arise because of the body. You have to go out to work, and then go home and eat. During the day, you busy yourself for the sake of the body. At night, you have to let it rest, or else it will break down. You protect it constantly out of fear that it will break down, but after a few decades it decides that being here is not much fun and leaves you. Although you found it hard to let your body go, it lets you go just like that. It forgets about you and returns to the soil—to filth. It was filthy when it came, and it returns to filth. Thus, you should contemplate the body as impure.

The  Second Station of Mindfulness is to contemplate feelings as suffering. Feelings are sensations that you experience, and they are suffering. There are many kinds of sufferings: the Three Sufferings, the Eight Sufferings, and all the limitless sufferings.

The Three Sufferings

1. The suffering within suffering
2. The suffering of decay
3. The suffering of process

1. The suffering within suffering. This refers to suffering on top of suffering. For example, a person may be so poor that he doesn’t have a house to live in. And then on top of that misery, he gets caught in a downpour. Or a person doesn’t even have any clothes to wear, and then the weather suddenly turns bitterly cold. Perhaps a person doesn’t have any food to eat, and as if that’s not enough, he gets sick. Being hungry when one is healthy is still bearable, but going without food when one is sick is truly suffering on top of suffering. Of course, if one doesn’t even have food to eat, one certainly doesn’t have money to go and see a doctor. So this is suffering within suffering.

Without money, it’s hard to do anything successfully. This kind of suffering within suffering is experienced by the poor. Rich people are not subject to this kind of suffering, but they have another kind of suffering, that of decay.

2. The suffering of decay. Someone may live in a beautiful mansion, but one day it burns down. A person may possess all kinds of valuable jewels, but one day thieves come and steal them. These are examples of the suffering of decay. Fires, theft, and all kinds of disasters may occur. Perhaps one has a fancy and expensive car, but ends up wrecking the car and injuring oneself in a collision. Perhaps one is riding in a plane that suddenly malfunctions and crashes, and many people get hurt. The rich are prone to the suffering of decay. Perhaps one doesn’t sustain any injuries oneself, but one’s son or daughter goes out swimming and gets hurt in an accident. That’s also the suffering of decay.

Rich people often have unexpected accidents like that happen to them. So, the poor have the suffering of poverty, and the rich have the suffering of decay.

“Well, I’m neither poor nor rich, so I don’t have any suffering,” you may say.
You may not have the suffering within suffering experienced by the poor or the suffering of decay experienced by the rich, but you do undergo the suffering of process.

3. The suffering of process. From birth we pass into the prime of life; from the prime of life we pass into old age; and then we go on to die. The ceaseless flow of thoughts characterizes the lifelong suffering of process. So, you may not experience the suffering of being poor or that of things going bad, but you do have the suffering of process. These are the Three Sufferings.

**The Eight Sufferings include:**

1. The suffering of birth.
2. The suffering of old age.
3. The suffering of sickness.
4. The suffering of death.

1. The suffering of birth. When an infant is born, it feels as if it is being crushed between two mountains. The pain is as terrible as that of a live turtle having its shell ripped off. That’s why babies always cry at the moment of birth. Although they don’t know how to speak, they cry, “Ku! Ku! Ku!” [“Ku” means “suffering” in Chinese.] Their meaning is, “Life is too much suffering!” After their initial period of crying, they are confused into thinking that maybe it’s okay to try out life in the world, so they stop crying.

2. The suffering of old age. After birth, people gradually age and get so old that their hair turns as white as crane feathers and their skin becomes as wrinkled and bumpy as a chicken’s—very unattractive. When they try to walk, their legs won’t cooperate. When they want to walk forward, their legs move backwards. They lose their independence. Their eyes grow blurry so they can’t see clearly. Their teeth fall out, and nothing they eat tastes good anymore. Their ears go deaf so they can’t hear clearly. At that point, they feel really miserable. That’s the suffering of old age.

3. The suffering of sickness. Old age alone is still no big deal, but then they get sick. They may be afflicted with headaches, toothaches, eye ailments, heart disease, liver disease, kidney ailments, spleen ailments, or lung ailments. The heart, liver, kidney, spleen, and lungs fail and develop diseases.

4. The suffering of death. After the suffering of sickness comes the worst one, that of death. The suffering of death can hardly be described. Such pain, comparable to that of a cow being flayed alive, is truly hard to endure. Although you may find it unendurable, you have to endure it. There is no way you can escape it. Such suffering could never be fully described.

The sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death have been explained. There are also:
5. The suffering of being separated from those one loves.
6. The suffering of being around those one hates.
7. The suffering of not getting what one wants.
8. The suffering of the raging blaze of the five skandhas.
5. The suffering of being separated from those one loves. Love is one of the greatest sources of offenses. If you can cut off love and desire, your karmic offenses will be light. If you have heavy emotional love and desire, your karmic offenses will be heavy.

As it is said,

With karma ended and emotions emptied,
One is a Buddha.
Burdened by karma and confused by emotion,
One is a common person.

Common people are confused by emotions and love and cannot see through them and put them down. Consequently, they go through a lot of suffering. Love is a huge attachment. It’s not easy to let go of. Thus there is the suffering of being separated from what one loves. People don’t want to be separated from those they love, but circumstances force them to. There is the pain of separation experienced by husbands and wives, as well as that experienced by children separated from their families, and also that experienced by friends who must part. In general, when loved ones are separated, they experience suffering.

Love involves suffering, but does hate entail suffering as well? Yes, namely:
6. The suffering of being around those one hates. For instance, you may loathe a certain person and want to get away from him, because being around him makes you miserable. You go to another place, but what do you suppose happens? You encounter another person just like the one you ran away from! Or you may even encounter the very person you were trying to avoid. The more you detest him, the more frequently you run into him. That’s the suffering of being around those one hates.

7. The suffering of not getting what one wants. Some people seek to be famous but never achieve fame. Others seek fortune but never become rich. Some people seek sons or daughters but remain childless. There are also those who wish to gain wealth and prestige, but never succeed. These are all cases of the suffering of not getting what one wants. When people cannot obtain what they seek, they have this kind of suffering. If they do obtain what they seek, they then suffer from the fear of losing it.

8. The suffering of the raging blaze of the five skandhas. The five skandhas are form, feelings, thought, formations, and consciousness. If they are not seen as empty, they also cause suffering. The five skandhas are like ropes that bind you or a mountain that presses down on you, so you are not free to do anything.

The Eight Sufferings have been explained in general. If we studied them in greater depth, we would find that each suffering actually contains limitless sufferings within it. The sufferings are infinite; to whom can you go for help?

The sea of suffering is boundless;
But if you turn around, you’re at the other shore.
If you can simply turn around, the suffering vanishes. If you don’t, the suffering is endless.

When you have advanced to a certain level in your cultivation, the demons will come to test you out, to see if you have any skill.

Demons come to polish the True Way;
Those on the True Way have to endure demons.
The more you’re polished, the brighter you become;
The brighter you get, the more you must be polished.
You’ll be polished until you’re like the autumn moon,
Illumining all the demon hordes from space.
When the demon hordes are scattered,
The original Buddha manifests.

Cultivators should not fear demons. Demons just come to test you to see if you have gongfu [spiritual skill]. Right now there are many demons coming to test all of you: heavenly demons, earthly demons, human demons, ghostly demons, and demons of sickness. They are testing you to see if you are genuine or phony. If you are phony, the demons will leave you alone. If you are genuine, the demons will be subdued and will also leave you alone. It’s only to be feared that you are partly genuine and partly phony. Then the demons will advance some and retreat some. They will get close to you, then draw away from you, then get close again, always hanging around you. Though they hang around, you need not be afraid. You can either become more genuine, or become more phony.

The Third Station of Mindfulness is to contemplate thoughts as impermanent. Thoughts of the past, present, and future cannot be got at. They are all fleeting and impermanent. Not only are thoughts of these three periods of time impermanent, all our thoughts are impermanent. I’m referring to thoughts of our ordinary human minds, not the True Mind. The True Mind is eternal, but the human mind is impermanent. Why? The human mind undergoes constant change. One thought perishes, and the next one arises. Thoughts arise and perish in endless succession, like waves on water. These infinite false thoughts are also like dust motes, bobbing up and down in the air with no fixed location. Such thoughts are impermanent. Our eternal True Mind, pure in nature and bright in substance, is permanent, constant, and unchanging.

The Fourth Station of Mindfulness is to contemplate dharmas as without self. If you think you have a self, then that is attachment to self. If you are attached to dharmas, then that is attachment to dharmas. You should contemplate both people and dharmas as being without self, thereby breaking both attachment to people and attachment to dharmas.
If you have a notion of self, then you have an attachment. With attachment, you can’t let go of things. Therefore, you must contemplate both people and dharmas as empty. Start by contemplating form dharmas.

1. Form dharmas. “Form” refers to anything that has appearance and substance. If you can’t see form as irrelevant and let go of your attachment to it, you will never attain ease. There is inner form and outer form. Outer forms have an appearance and a material substance. Since the external forms are there, you have internal impressions of them. These inner forms are the images in your own mind, which means your false thinking. Such false thinking prevents you from achieving a state of no self. You are enamored of form because you are attached to a self. If you are without a self, then you will have no attachments and therefore no impediments. That is called “seeing things as irrelevant and letting go of them.” If you can let go of things, you will feel comfortable and at ease.

2. Feeling dharmas. “Feeling” refers to reception of external stimuli and includes all sorts of experiences taken in by the sense faculties. If you have realized the non-existence of a self, you will not be caught up in feelings and will be free and  at ease. As long as you cling to a self, you cannot be at ease.

3. Thought dharmas. “Thought” refers to false thought. You cannot stop your false thoughts because you still have a self. When there is no self, what thoughts could you possibly have?

In ancient times, there was an old cultivator who became enlightened upon hearing the following words:

Tofu vendor Zhang and tofu vendor Li
Travel a thousand roads at night in their sleep;
But the next morning, they still have to sell tofu!

When Mr. Zhang and Mr. Li go to bed at night, they start fantasizing, “Tomorrow, I’m going to quit selling tofu. I’m going to start a big business. I can find ten investors who invest $10,000 each, making a total of $100,000. Then I’ll make a fortune and never have to sell tofu again!” At night, they are full of schemes and plans, but the next morning, they realize that those plans were just fantasies and off they go to sell their tofu.

An old cultivator heard that verse and became enlightened. Now we have all heard it. Has anyone gotten enlightened? If not, we still have to sell tofu. What did the cultivator awaken to? He realized how powerful our false thoughts can be, and after that, he no longer thought about anything. Since he had no thoughts, he attained samadhi and became enlightened. Why haven’t you become enlightened? You have too many false thoughts.

4. Formations dharmas. “Formations” refer to the ceaseless flow of our mental processes. These processes of shift and change continue on and on like a stream. When one sees the formations skandha as empty, there is no more sense of self.

5. Consciousness dharmas. In general, there are eight consciousnesses. The eighth consciousness is the watershed between true and false. When it is transformed, it turns into the Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom. But before it is transformed, it is simply the eighth consciousness. The eight consciousnesses can be turned into the Four Wisdoms. Then there is truly no self left.

The above has been an explanation of how to contemplate the dharmas of the five skandhas as without self.

People all think they have a self. But if you search from the top of your head to the soles of your feet, you’ll find that every part of the body has its own name, but no part is called the “self.” Nevertheless, people are all attached to a self. Where there is no self, they insist on coming up with a self and then refuse to relinquish it. They think, “I was born. I will die. I am eating. I am wearing clothes. I am walking. I am sleeping.” But they can’t find the “I.” Originally there was no “I”, so why do you insist on thinking there is? Therefore, you should contemplate dharmas as without self. Now, try to find the self of your own nature, your inherent, original self. If you find it, tell me tomorrow. If you don’t find it, keep looking.

The reason for the words “Thus I have heard” has already been explained in general. Now I shall give a more detailed explanation.

“Thus” is ru shi in Chinese. Ru has the meaning of constant and unchanging, and shi means absolutely without falseness. Ru corresponds to samadhi, shi to wisdom. Ru is stillness, shi movement. “Thus” refers to the Dharma. “I have heard” is Ànanda saying, “The Dharma which is thus is what I personally heard from the Buddha.”

What does the word “I” refer to? Ordinary people have a self of attachment. They are attached to everything being theirs. Those of externalist ways have a “spiritual self.” Arhats and Bodhisattvas have a “false self.” Since Ànanda had attained the principle of sagehood, he didn’t really have a self. However, he had to assume a false “self” and use the word “I.” Otherwise,  beings would become afraid and think, “Since there is no self, what’s the use of cultivating, anyway?” They would balk at the notion of there being no self. And so, in order to comply with the ways of the world, Ànanda said, “Thus I have heard.” Actually, it’s the ears that hear. How can “I” hear? Earlier, I mentioned that every part of the body has its own name. The head is called “head,” the hands are called “hands,” and the feet are called “feet.” You can look throughout all the different parts of the body, but you won’t find anything that is called “I”. Then why is the word “I” used here? It is a general name used to refer to the entire person.

The word “thus” fulfills the requirement of faith. Dharma that is thus may be believed. Dharma which is not thus cannot be believed.
The words “I have heard” fulfill the requirement of hearing. Ànanda is saying, “I personally heard this Dharma, cultivated in accord with it, and perfected my work in the Way.”

I. Description of Host, Time and PlaceSutra:

**At one time, the Buddha was in the country of Magadha.**

**Commentary:**

At one time means that there was such a time. This fulfills the requirement of time. What time does it refer to? It refers to the time when Ànanda heard the Dharma. What year, month, day, and hour was it? Since the calendar followed in India was different from the Chinese calendar, which in turn is not compatible with the Western calendar, the exact time and date are not given. If one were to pin the time down to a specific hour, day, month, or year in India, archaeologists in China would have to do a lot of research to calculate what that would correspond to on the Chinese calendar. It would take a lot of time to obtain such information, which would not in itself be all that useful. Therefore, instead of giving an exact time, the Sutras merely say that the Buddha spoke Dharma “at one time.” This fulfills the requirement of time, one of the Six Requirements.

The Buddha was in the country of Magadha. I’m sure there are others who can explain this sentence better than I, so now we will ask one of them to explain it.

Disciple: Fo is short for fo tuo ye, which is the Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit word Buddhaya. Buddha means “enlightened one,” literally, “one who’s woken up,” “one who is awake.” “Enlightened One” refers to the Buddha, the one who speaks the teaching, the Great Teacher, but it also refers to any  being who has managed to wake up, to achieve this state. The country of Magadha is in the eastern part of India, in about the center of the country, not too far from the Himalayas. This is the country where Sãkyamuni Buddha became enlightened—he woke up. This is where he found the Bodhi tree, which will be mentioned further on in the sutra. It’s also the country where the Buddha traveled and taught for most of his life.

Venerable Master: Do you think she lectured correctly or not? Everyone can bring up criticisms. If you know that what she said was right, you should say “right.” If you know it was wrong, you should say “wrong.” If you can talk but won’t, it’s to be feared you may become a mute in the future.

Another disciple: The word “Buddha” fulfills the requirement of a host. The words “country of Magadha” fulfill the requirement of a place. Everything in the world occurs in pairs, and among conditioned dharmas everything is dual. There is day and night, male and female, sun and moon, and so on. What is paired with beings? The Buddha. Since there are beings, there are Buddhas. If there were no beings, there’d be no Buddhas. The Buddhas are just enlightened beings. Beings are unenlightened Buddhas. Buddhas are created from beings.
 **There are Three Types of Enlightenment:**

1. Inherent enlightenment. This is the unrealized enlightenment that all sentient beings have.
2. Initial enlightenment. This is the enlightenment of one who has entered the Way and understands the methods of cultivation but has not yet accomplished the work. This is the enlightenment of Arhats and Bodhisattvas.
3. Complete enlightenment. This is the enlightenment of Buddhas, and it includes the former two.

**There is another list of Three kinds (Types) of Enlightenment:**

1. Self-enlightenment. This is the enlightenment of Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas, who cultivate for themselves and enlighten themselves, but do not pass on their share or teach others to achieve the same enlightenment.
2. Enlightenment of others. This is the work of Bodhisattvas, who teach others and bring them along the Path.
3. Complete enlightenment. This is the enlightenment of the Buddhas and encompasses the previous two.

Venerable Master: What is “Magadha”?

Disciple: The sutra is full of Sanskrit words. Magadha is a country in the central-eastern part of India. It is where the Buddha obtained enlightenment and spoke Dharma to enlighten sentient beings.

Another disciple: One meaning of Magadha is “pervasive intelligence and wisdom” and “without poison or harm.”

Venerable Master: What does the word “Srãvasti” mean? It’s been explained before.

Another disciple: Sravasti was a city in northern India at the time. It was wealthy in the objects of the Five Desires, wealthy in learning, and wealthy in “liberation,” which has been explained as being politically liberal. Wealthy in the objects of the Five Desires means they were wealthy in the objects of form and flesh to which sentient beings are attached, things that American big cities would be famous for, like San Francisco which has a lot of a nice parks, a lot of nice restaurants, and so forth, making it a nice place to live.

Sravasti was also wealthy in learning, because people were well-educated. The populace was generally more enlightened and civilized than the people of the rest of India.

This liberation is not liberation in the sense of Buddhist liberation from the bonds of defilement, but concerns a slightly more mundane aspect of the word. It meant they had a more democratic outlook on life. The city was not under tyrannical rule. The position of king was an elected office. The ruling class was elected too, as in the Greek city-states. The people had a certain amount of say in what went on. The government was a lot looser, similar to enlightened despotism. The people had more rights, so theirs was a freer society than that of typical despots of the history books.
Venerable Master: Fo is an abbreviation for Fo tuo ye, which is a transliteration of the Sanskrit word Buddhaya. Buddha sounds like bu da in Chinese, which means “not big.” He is also not small, not tall, not short, not right, not wrong. In any case, if you remember, then you won’t forget; if you forget, then you won’t remember. If you remember, then when asked you can answer. If you forget, then when asked you break into a sweat.

Buddha has three meanings: self-enlightened one, one who enlightens others, and one of complete enlightenment.

Perfect in the threefold enlightenment,
Replete with ten thousand virtues,
He is thus called the Buddha.

Self-enlightened, one is different from ordinary people. Although ordinary people are said to possess inherent enlightenment, they are still as yet unenlightened. They are still confused to the point that they think right is wrong and wrong is right. They fritter their time away chasing fame and fortune. Thus, self-enlightenment sets one apart from ordinary people.

Enlightenment of others makes one different from those of the Two Vehicles. Those of the Two Vehicles can only enlighten themselves, but not others. Bodhisattvas, however, enlighten themselves as well as others. However, their enlightenment is not complete.

The Buddha alone is complete in enlightenment and practice. How did he become that way? He cultivated blessings and wisdom for three countless eons and planted the causes for his hallmarks during a hundred great eons.

You cultivate for two and a half years and ask, “Why haven’t I become a Buddha?” What makes you think you have the virtuous conduct necessary to become a Buddha? Such an attitude is shameless. If you don’t cultivate, how can you become a Buddha? If you could become a Buddha after two and a half years of cultivation, then you’d surpass the Buddha. The Buddha had to cultivate for three great countless eons and plant the causes for his hallmarks for a hundred eons. You cultivate for two and a half years and wonder, “Why haven’t I attained the Five Eyes and Six Spiritual Powers?”

Why don’t you think, “Why do I have so many false thoughts? Why do I have so much desire? Why are my impure thoughts so prolific?” With impure thoughts, how can you become a Buddha? The Buddha realized Buddhahood because he has perfected the Threefold Enlightenment and is fully endowed with the ten thousand virtues.

The name in the sutra text is Magadha. I just asked you about Sãrvasti in order to test you. Magadha has the meaning “without poison or harm.” No one there harms or tries to poison people, because they know it’s wrong. That’s where the Buddha achieved Buddhahood.

**III. The Clarification of the Particular Time**

**Sutra:**
**[The Buddha was]...at the bodhi field of Áranya-dharma, upon initially realizing Proper Enlightenment.**

Commentary:

[The Buddha was]...at the bodhi field of Áranya-dharma. An Áranya is a place where cultivators of dhuta [ascetic] practices live. Can someone explain the word “Áranya” and the Twelve Ascetic Practices?

Disciple: An Áranya is a quiet, secluded place away from other people and distractions, not in the city, a place that’s especially good for cultivating. Dwelling in an Áranya is considered to be an ascetic practice because it’s hard to do. It’s difficult to dwell unceasingly without some kind of distraction from other people, for example.

**The Twelve Ascetic** Practices are: collecting alms for your food, collecting alms in succession, eating once a day, eating a fixed amount, eating in one sitting, not drinking anything after noon except water, dwelling in a charnel field, dwelling beneath a tree, dwelling unsheltered, possessing only three robes, wearing rag robes, and sitting up at night. I think this one means you enter samadhi and don’t go to sleep. But you do the best you can.

Venerable Master: Is his explanation correct?

Another disciple: In Sanskrit, Áranya (where the first a is long)  is a word derived from the word aranya (where the first a is short) which means “forest,” so it means, “pertaining to the forest.” Aranya, the word “forest,” can be explained in various ways, not as just meaning “forest.” The initial “a” can be interpreted as “not” or “without,” and ranya can be interpreted in four different ways:

1. The first meaning is “strife,” so Áranya can mean a place without strife; I would assume that would mean there’s no opposition to what you’re trying to do; there aren’t obstacles to your cultivation.
2. The second interpretation is “fighting” or “quarrels,” so it would mean a place without fighting or discord.
3. The third meaning comes from another root, ram, which means to enjoy or take pleasure, so Áranya would mean a place lacking this kind of pleasure or enjoyment.
4. The fourth meaning rana can be equivalent to another Sanskrit word klesa, which means “defilements,” so this would refer to a state that was free of defilement.

The Buddhist dictionary gives four meanings in Chinese, which are roughly comparable to these four in Sanskrit. The first one is wu zheng sheng “there’s no sound of discord.” Then there’s ji jing, “still and quiet.” And the third is yuan li “removed,” in the sense of being removed from obstructions and generally being in an uninhabited place. The fourth is kong ji “empty and still.”

There are said to be three types of inhabitants (and again, this is from the Buddhist dictionary). These inhabitants are called Áranyaka. There are dharma-Áranyaka, who live in accord with the order of things. Then there are matanga-Áranyaka, who live in areas where there are dead people. And there are dandaka-Áranyaka, who live in places such as deserts.

Venerable Master: Does anyone know the meaning of shi lin [Skt. sitavana]? What’s the definition?
Disciple: A charnel field, or cemetery. In India, after people died, they didn’t bury them. They just let the bodies decay.

Venerable Master: An Áranya is a “still and quiet place,” a place without distracting noise. It is a pure and serene place for cultivation situated perhaps in the mountain forests. Here the text speaks of “Áranya-dharma,” where dharma refers to a method, a way of cultivating stillness. Although I said it could be situated in the mountains or forests, it is also in the heart of every cultivator. If your mind is not tranquil, then although it helps to live in a quiet place, you will still have many false thoughts. If you live in the noisy city but your mind is tranquil, then you have understood the method of cultivation and everywhere you go is an Áranya. There’s a verse that says,

If you are deep in the mountains
But your mind is on mundane affairs,
Then your efforts are in vain and
You have wasted your energy.

Your efforts come to nothing. You have wasted your time and energy.

If you are active in the world
But your mind has transcended the world,
Then you are like a flower plucked from a well,
Undefiled by the mud.

If you can remain in a mundane environment but keep your mind detached from mundane affairs, just that is an Áranya, a “still and quiet place.” If while in the city, you can calm your mind and not entertain false thoughts, just that is an Áranya. If you live in the mountains but indulge in false thoughts, that still isn’t an Áranya.

Cultivating the Áranya-dharma means being able to affect the situation instead of having the situation affect one.

“At the bodhi field.” Bodhi is a Sanskrit word translated as “enlightened Way.” The bodhi field is the bodhimanda of enlightenment. Who becomes enlightened? Sentient beings. When sentient beings become Buddhas, they do so in the bodhimanda of enlightenment.

When enlightened, one is a Buddha.
When confused, one is a sentient being.

Before the Buddha became a Buddha, he was just a sentient being. After he became a Buddha, he was a sentient being who had perfected great enlightenment.

The Buddha cultivated in the mountains for six years, eating a single sesame seed and a single grain of wheat each day. Then he walked to the Bodhi tree and made a vow that he would not rise from that place until he attained Buddhahood. Thereupon he sat beneath the Bodhi tree for forty-nine days. And then one night, upon seeing a bright star in the sky, he enlightened to the Way.

The Buddha sat for forty-nine days. After he became enlightened, the Buddha sighed and said, “Strange indeed!” three times. “All sentient beings are endowed with the characteristics of the Thus Come One’s wisdom and virtue. It is only because of their false thinking and attachments that they cannot realize them.”

Will someone explain the words “upon initially realizing Proper Enlightenment”?
Disciple: This delineates the time further. Earlier the text said “at one time,” and this pinpoints the time further by saying it was the time when the Buddha initially realized enlightenment, initially woke up. It’s also the time when the Buddha appeared in the world. Before that he wasn’t a Buddha, but then when he realized enlightenment, this was the Great Teacher’s manifestation. The character zheng [“proper”] has two meanings in this case. One is “proper,” and the other is “foremost,” “chief,” or “principal”. One meaning is “correct enlightenment,” different from all deviant enlightenments of externalist paths. It’s also the foremost enlightenment, above and beyond all enlightenments of externalists.

This time of accomplishing the foremost enlightenment was the beginning or the basis of all later teachings. It contained all the vast store of teachings to come later. Since it contains all the later teachings, it’s the foremost teaching.

Another disciple: I think the Chinese characters zheng jiao (Proper Enlightenment) stand for a longer phrase, “Unsurpassed Proper and Equal Enlightenment,” corresponding to the Sanskrit anuttarasamYakshambodhi, which means that there’s nothing higher than this enlightenment. There are all kinds of enlightenment. When you understand a principle in the Buddhadharma that you didn’t before, you have had an enlightenment, so to speak. The enlightenment discussed here is an enlightenment that can’t be gone beyond. There’s no way that you would understand anything further because it’s all fully, completely understood.

Someone said “proper” would especially distinguish this kind of enlightenment from the enlightenment of externalist paths, which is not ultimate and which is based not on the nature but on cultivation of seeking outside. This would represent the supreme attainment.

Another disciple: The Buddha cultivated ascetic practices in the mountains for six years. But after six years, he still hadn’t become enlightened, so he went and sat beneath the Bodhi tree. He made a vow that he would not leave that place until he became enlightened. He sat there for forty-nine days and then attained Proper Enlightenment.

Another disciple: “Initially” means at the beginning, where there’s a change from the state of nonenlightenment to the state of enlightenment. To speak in terms of the Lesser Vehicle, “initially” means the time when the Buddha was sitting under the Bodhi tree, when he initially realized enlightenment and became a Buddha, and then he went to the Deer Park to speak the First Turning of the Four Truths. To speak in terms of the Great Vehicle, “initially” refers to the first two weeks after the Buddha had realized Buddhahood. During these first two weeks, the Buddha spoke at the first eight assemblies of the Flower Adornment Sutra. There are several ways to explain how this was done. Some say that during the first week, he considered what to do, and in the second week he spoke the Flower Adornment Sutra. That’s what Bodhiruci said, I believe. I’m not sure. There are others who say he spoke during the entire two weeks.

Another disciple: “Proper” means not heterodox. It means correct. Proper also refers to the stopping of all false thinking. A single thought not produced is called proper. Enlightenment is understanding. That is, when the Buddha first realized Buddhahood, he stopped all thought and thus became proper—correct—and understood—was enlightened. “Realized” may be explained in a number of ways. According to the Lesser Vehicle, the Buddha cultivated the Four Holy Truths. Proper Enlightenment refers to a Buddhahood that is defined by the Four Holy Truths and is pretty much synonymous with Arhatship. To speak in terms of the Great Vehicle, Proper Enlightenment is the perfection of the Dharma body, the perfection of all the fine hallmarks and characteristics of the Buddha, and the successful completion of innumerable practices. This is what is meant by “upon initially realizing Proper Enlightenment.”

Venerable Master: “Initially” refers to the very beginning, when the Buddha had just realized Buddhahood. Proper Enlightenment is simply another name for Buddhahood. Where did he realize Buddhahood? At the bodhi field, that is, beneath the Bodhi tree. “At one time” refers to when the sutra was spoken.

“Upon initially realizing Proper Enlightenment” refers to the time of the Buddha’s realization of Buddhahood. This Buddha is not the Buddha of the east, nor of the west, north, or south. He’s the Buddha of the Saha World, of the center. In the past, this Buddha cultivated blessings for three asamkhyeyas of eons, and planted the causes for fine hallmarks and characteristics for a hundred kalpas. Having perfected his causes and conditions, he became a Buddha. He cultivated the causes, likened to flowers, of the myriad practices, thereby realizing the virtues, likened to fruit, of Buddhahood. He is Sãkyamuni Buddha, the Teaching Host of the Saha World.

After becoming a Buddha, Sãkyamuni Buddha reflected how all Buddhas of the past first spoke the Flower Adornment Sutra upon their becoming Buddhas, all Buddhas of the present also speak this sutra first, and all Buddhas of the future will also do the same. The Flower Adornment Sutra must be spoken first, in order for the foundation for Great Dharma to be established. The Flower Adornment Sutra is the foundation of all Buddhadharmas.

And so, after his realization of Buddhahood, the Buddha spoke the Flower Adornment Sutra and completed it in twenty-one days. So, “at one time...upon initially realizing Proper Enlightenment” refers to the time of the speaking of this sutra. This fulfills the requirement of time. The word “Buddha” satisfies the requirement of a host. The phrase “in the country of Magadha, at the bodhi field of Áranya Dharma” fulfills the requirement of place.

**IV. Specific Revelations of the Adornments of the Place**

A. The Adornments of the Ground

**Sutra:**

**The ground was adamantine, firm, and solid, adorned with sublimely wonderful precious wheels, multitudes of jeweled flowers, and immaculate mani gems.**

Commentary:

The ground was adamantine, firm, and solid. When the Buddha realized Proper Enlightenment beneath the Bodhi tree in Magadha, the ground there became extremely solid. It was made up not of ordinary soil, but of vajra. Vajra is the hardest of substances. It has the three qualities of firmness, brilliance, and sharpness. Firmness represents the solidity of one’s resolve. Brilliance represents the light of wisdom. Sharpness represents relentless vigor, which is swift and sharp, like the blade of a sword.

The ground was adorned with sublimely wonderful and inconceivable precious wheels, great multitudes of jeweled flowers and necklaces, and immaculate mani gems. The precious wheels and jeweled flowers alone were beautiful already, but there were also precious mani gems on the ground and on the Bodhi tree, decorating the bodhimanda.

What is the meaning of the Sanskrit word mani?

Disciple: The meanings of mani are three. The first is that of “a precious pearl.” The second is that of “separation from defilement.” The third is “as-you-will.”

Venerable Master: So you didn’t study in vain. You still remember. What does everyone think of his explanation? Is it satisfactory?

Disciple [in Chinese]: Mani represents the purity and lack of defilement of the Six Sense Faculties. It is an adornment, and it adorns the Buddha’s enlightenment, which is undefiled.

Sutra:

**An ocean of various colors and forms appeared in boundless manifestations.**
Commentary:

Mani gems are extremely beautiful gems replete with all the hues and colors of a rainbow.

An ocean of various colors and forms appeared in boundless manifestations. The lovely colors and forms of mani are so numerous that they resemble a sea. These infinite manifestations adorned the bodhimanda.

Sutra:

**Banners made of mani gems constantly poured forth bright light and wondrous sounds.**

Commentary:

Banners, spiral-shaped canopies, made of mani gems constantly poured forth bright light. Each mani jewel radiated light. And not only that, but within the light, the banners always gave forth sublimely wondrous sounds that surpassed the sounds of all worldly and heavenly music. The bright light also surpassed the light of the sun, moon, and lamps. The mani banners emitted both light and sound.

Sutra:

**Jeweled nets and exquisitely fragrant flowers were garlanded all about. Regal mani gems wrought transformations with ease, endlessly raining down treasures and multitudes of wondrous flowers, which scattered and fell to the earth.**

Commentary:

These are the adornments decorating the bodhimanda and the Buddha’s Dharma body after he accomplished Buddhahood. These adornments represent the subtle, inconceivable realm of the Buddha. Jeweled nets and exquisitely fragrant flowers were garlanded all about. Nets interwoven with clusters of precious stones adorned the bodhimanda. The jeweled nets and jeweled trees gave forth wondrous fragrance, wondrous flowers, and wondrous strands of jewels. When sentient beings inhaled that wondrous perfume, or caught sight of these luxurious flowers strung into garlands, they were able to plant sublime causes for bodhi, and in the future would reap the wonderful fruit of Buddhahood. These flowers and floral garlands were draped about on all sides of the bodhimanda.

Regal mani gems wrought transformations with ease. These kings of mani gems are able to transform and conjure up things effortlessly, according to everyone’s wishes, endlessly raining down treasures and multitudes of wondrous flowers, which scattered and fell to the earth. The kings of mani gems made appear an infinite amount of precious articles and flowers, which fell everywhere within the bodhimanda.

**Sutra:**

**Jeweled trees were lined up neatly, their branches and foliage verdant and luxuriant. It was due to the Buddha’s spiritual power that all such adornments manifested within the bodhimanda.**

Commentary:

Jeweled trees were lined up neatly, their branches and foliage verdant and luxuriant. These jeweled trees were made up not only of the Seven Treasures, but of myriads of treasures. They were planted row after row, in a very orderly fashion. These rows were such that you could view them from any of the ten directions and they appeared arranged in precise rows. They had trunks made of gold and branches and leaves made of vaidurya, agate, silver and other precious stones in a myriad colors. The light streaming from these twigs and leaves was also of a myriad colors—red giving off red light, yellow giving off yellow light, green giving off green light, and white giving off white light. The foliage itself was fresh and full. Just looking at these jeweled trees and blossoms made one happy.

It was due to the Buddha’s spiritual power that all such adornments manifested within the bodhimanda. This arrangement of various adornments was created by the Buddha’s spiritual powers. Where does the Buddha’s spiritual power come from? All these jeweled trees, jeweled nets, and kings of mani gems adorned the bodhimanda because, when the Buddha was at the level of planting causes, he strictly upheld the precepts and was not in the least bit casual. He never committed the slightest transgression.

1. Not killing: Not only did the Buddha not take life with his own hands, he did not allow his mind to harbor a single thought of killing. He compassionately cherished all sentient beings.
2. Not stealing: Not only did he not steal with his body, he did not allow any thoughts of stealing to arise in his mind.
3. Not engaging in sexual misconduct: He never let his mind entertain a thought of lust.
4. Not lying: He never conceived a thought of lying.
5. Not taking intoxicants: He did not casually violate this precept either.

As a result of holding the precepts purely while he was on the level of planting causes, all these jeweled adornments—jeweled nets, jeweled trees, and jeweled flowers—appeared at the site where he accomplished Buddhahood.

The realization of Buddhahood is not a simple matter. The Buddha was able to do it because he strictly upheld the precepts. Because he did not commit the slightest transgression while on the level of planting causes, the place where he realized the Way was adorned with myriads of jewels. Thus the text says: “It was due to the Buddha’s spiritual power that all such adornments were manifested within the bodhimanda.” When the Buddha’s meritorious virtues were perfected, he used his spiritual powers to make all these adornments appear and to bring about such an inconceivable state in the bodhimanda.

B.  The Adornments of the Tree

Sutra:

**The Bodhi tree was tall, extraordinary, and rare. Its roots were made of vajra, its trunk of beryl, and its branches and twigs of an assortment of wondrous jewels. Its jeweled foliage created a thick arbor, providing shade like a bank of clouds.**

Commentary:

The Bodhi tree was tall, extraordinary, and rare. Since this was the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha accomplished enlightenment, it was very special and unique. Its roots were made of vajra, its trunk of beryl, and its branches and twigs of an assortment of wondrous jewels. Its jeweled foliage created a thick arbor, providing shade like a bank of clouds. The leaves were made of varieties of gems. They hung in patterns that displayed the spaces between them. They rustled in wave-like movements, like clouds in space.

Sutra:

**Multi-colored jeweled blossoms and their branches sprinkled shadows everywhere. Moreover, fruits made of mani gems blazing with dazzling light were interspersed among the blossoms. From all around the Bodhi tree, bright light poured forth. Within that light fell a rain of mani gems and within those mani jewels, Bodhisattvas profuse as clouds simultaneously appeared.**
Commentary:

Multi-colored jeweled blossoms and their branches sprinkled shadows everywhere. Those precious flowers came in hundreds of colors. The branches and the shadows they cast were also lovely. Moreover, fruits made of mani gems blazing with dazzling light, a flame-like radiance, were interspersed among the blossoms. From all around the Bodhi tree, bright light poured forth. Within that light fell a rain of mani gems and within those mani jewels, Bodhisattvas profuse as clouds simultaneously appeared. An infinite number of Bodhisattvas appeared.

**Sutra:**

**Moreover, due to the Thus Come One’s awesome spiritual power, the Bodhi tree issued constant and wondrous sounds, proclaiming Dharmas without end.**
**Commentary:**

All the various flowers, lights, and colors served to adorn the place and make the bodhimanda exceptionally ornate and sublime. Moreover, due to the Thus Come One’s awesome spiritual power, the Bodhi tree issued constant and wondrous sounds, proclaiming Dharmas without end. People who heard those sounds attained all kinds of samadhis. There was no time the sounds of Dharma would cease. At all times, to the end of the future, the Bodhi tree issued those wonderful sounds.

C.  The Adornments of the Palace

Sutra:

**In the palace of the Thus Come One, towers and pavilions that were vast, magnificent, and adorned pervaded the ten directions. Fashioned of mani gems, they were multi-hued and enhanced by various intertwining and jeweled blossoms. From all adornments therein, light poured forth like clouds, forming banners of overlapping reflections in the galleries of the palace. Innumerable Bodhisattvas and all the assemblies in their bodhimandas gathered there together, issuing the light of all Buddhas and inconceivable sounds.**
**Commentary:**

In the palace of the Thus Come One, when the Buddha realized Buddhahood beneath the Bodhi tree, he manifested the ten-thousand-foot reward body of Nisyanda. Hence his palace, in proportion, had to be at least thirty thousand feet high. All these states were conjured up by the Thus Come One’s spiritual power. There were towers and pavilions. “Towers” refers to multi-storied buildings. “Pavilions” refers to the structures erected on top of the towers. All of these were vast, magnificent, and adorned. These structures were not of the sort ever seen before in the human realm. They were so large they pervaded the ten directions. Fashioned of mani gems, they were multi-hued and enhanced by various intertwining and jeweled blossoms. The palace, towers, and pavilions were constructed from wish-fulfilling mani gems from the ten directions, and jeweled flowers decorated them on top. From all adornments therein, light poured forth like clouds, forming banners of overlapping reflections in the galleries of the palace. The light streaming forth resembled jeweled clouds.

After Sãkyamuni Buddha realized Proper Enlightenment, he adorned the bodhimanda with his awesome spiritual power and proclaimed the Flower Adornment Sutra. When most ordinary people hear the descriptions of these adornments, they consider them quite insignificant. Actually these adornments are all symbolic. They represent the manifold practices that the Buddha cultivated and all the ascetic discipline that he endured at the stage of planting causes, which made it possible for all these myriad adornments to appear when he became a Buddha.

The patterns made by the overlapping reflections in the open areas of the palace looked like jeweled banners. Within those exquisite banners, there appeared innumerable Bodhisattvas. And all the Bodhisattvas brought the sentient beings in the assemblies in their bodhimandas along to the bodhimanda of Sãkyamuni Buddha. They all gathered there together.

All the Bodhisattvas who had come to Sãkyamuni Buddha’s bodhimanda were issuing the light of all Buddhas that shone upon them all. And within the light, they could emit wonderful and inconceivable sounds.

Sutra:

**Regal mani gems accentuated lace-like nets. All these states appeared from within the bodhimanda due to the effortless spiritual power of the Thus Come One.**
Commentary:

Regal mani gems accentuated lace-like nets. All these states appeared from within the bodhimanda  due to the effortless spiritual power of the Thus Come One. The various wonderful sounds, the various jeweled nets, and myriad rays of light all appeared from within the bodhimanda due to the Buddha’s spiritual power. These states could neither be mentally conceived of nor verbally expressed.

You should watch over yourself at all times. When you are unable to do so, you should find someone else to guide you so you won’t go astray. If you don’t watch over yourself and you aren’t willing to listen to instructions from others, then you won’t amount to anything.

In my native area in Manchuria, there was a monk called Xiu Yuan. Although he was virtually illiterate, he wanted very much to become a monk. The only family he had was his mother, who was over fifty years old. Most mothers in that situation would not want their only son to leave the home life. But his mother not only gave him permission to become a monk, she urged him to do so as soon as possible. Thus he went to a monastery in Beijing to receive the precepts. Basically he didn’t know anything about monastic life, but when asked what he had come for, he said, “I came to leave home.” He was told to kneel. He knelt down but he kept staring up and down, right and left, looking at everything around him.

The guest prefect shouted at him, “Pull your eyes back!”
Xiu Yuan didn’t even understand what “pulling your eyes back” meant, so the prefect said, “Keep your eyes shut! Don’t stare around as if you wanted to steal an ox!”
Xiu Yuan obediently shut his eyes. “Do you have a teacher?” asked the prefect. He said no.
“If you don’t even have a teacher, how can you leave the home life and take the precepts?”
“I don’t know who’s supposed to be my teacher. Can you find me one?” Xiu Yuan asked.

The guest prefect, seeing that he was very naive and honest, found him a teacher so that he could leave the home life and receive the precepts.
After the ordination, he stayed at Hongluoshan [“Red Conch Mountain”] Monastery and practiced reciting the Buddha’s name in the Buddha-Recitation Hall there.

After he had been away from home for over one year, his mother started to get worried about him. Having no news from her son and being unsure of his whereabouts, she became so distraught from pining for her son that she went blind. One night she called out to him from her home. The distance from her village in Manchuria to Hongluoshan was over 700 miles, but Xiu Yuan heard his mother call him! And so he asked for a leave of absence from the monastery and set out for his hometown.

When he arrived home, he found that his mother had gone blind. He started to lick his mother’s eyes with his tongue. After he had done this for a week, his mother regained her sight. From this we can see that if people are sincere, they can obtain a response from the Bodhisattvas.

When she saw that her son was well and healthy, the old mother said, “Leaving home has been good for you,” and bade him to return to Hongluoshan. Xiu Yuan did this, and upon his return to the monastery he started to work in the kitchen. At Hongluoshan, cultivators recited the Buddha’s name and practiced chan meditation in the winter and studied the sutras in the summer. Everyone took turns practicing to lecture on the sutras. Xiu Yuan listened attentively to the sutra lectures and learned the Chinese characters one by one, since he was illiterate to begin with. Keeping up this course of study, he soon had committed the Amitabha Sutra to memory, and could recite by heart all the chants and praises of the morning and evening recitations.

All the monks took turns giving lectures on the sutras, and he would listen to their lectures. One day it came to be Xiu Yuan’s turn to lecture. When he spoke, all the Dharma Masters were astounded. He spoke extremely well, far better than anyone else. He spoke with great eloquence.

Xiu Yuan learned to lecture on the sutras, and he kept reciting the Buddha’s name. After nine years of practicing in this way, he became enlightened. Originally he was illiterate, and yet he learned to give lectures and even attained enlightenment. This shows that cultivation requires perseverance and a willingness to follow the rules. If you can be that way, you too can have some accomplishment. You can’t expect to have any success in just two-and-a-half days.

Sutra:

**Images of the dwelling places and abodes of all beings also appeared therein.**

Commentary:

Images of the dwelling places and abodes of all beings also appeared therein. The Thus Come One’s effortless spiritual power caused all kinds of inconceivable states to manifest. These states were crystal-clear and resembled space. Within space, the reflections of the dwelling places of all beings were clearly visible.

The Vajra Sutra says, “The Thus Come One completely knows and sees all the various thoughts in the minds of all beings.” No matter how many different thoughts there are in beings’ minds, they are fully known by the Thus Come One’s Four Types of Wisdom: the Wisdom of Wonderful Contemplation, the Wisdom of Accomplishment, the Wisdom of Equality, and the Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom.

“The dwelling places and abodes of all beings” refers both to their external houses and habitats as well as their physical bodies.

Sutra:

**Moreover, the aid from the spiritual powers of all the Buddhas encompassed the entire Dharma Realm within a single thought.**
Commentary:

Moreover, the inconceivable aid from the spiritual powers of all the Buddhas encompassed the entire Dharma Realm within a single thought. The Buddhas of the ten directions used their spiritual powers to aid the bodhimanda. This aid encompassed the entire Dharma Realm within a single thought.

D.  The Adornments of the Lion Throne

Sutra:

**The lion throne was tall, immense, and exquisite. The dais was made of mani gems; the nets, of lotus flowers. Pure and wondrous jewels formed the wheels, and multi-colored flowers were fashioned into garlands. The halls and pavilions, towers and alcoves, stairs and railings, doors and windows, all objects whatsoever, were completely bedecked.**

Commentary:

The lion throne on which the Buddha sat was tall, immense, and exquisite. The dais, the platform, was made of mani, “wish-fulfilling,” gems; the nets were woven of lotus flowers. Lotus blossoms of various colors such as blue, red, purple, white, and yellow were fashioned into floral nets.

Pure and wondrous jewels formed the wheels. These jewels are capable of casting out all filth. If we were to place one of them in our Buddha Hall, then in a wink all trace of dust would be wiped away. We wouldn’t need to sweep the floor, since it would be spotlessly clean! Wherever these purifying jewels are, no dust can be found. How do these jewels come about? They are a response from holding the precepts purely. The wheels of the dais were made from such jewels. And multi-colored flowers were fashioned into garlands resembling jeweled necklaces.

The large halls and pavilions were sometimes built right by the water’s edge, with trees all around. The towers and alcoves, stairs and railings, doors and windows, all objects whatsoever, were completely bedecked. All the objects were incredibly exquisite, causing people to bring forth the bodhi resolve and a pure mind when they saw them.

Why are the people of our world filled with defiled thoughts? This occurs because our karmic obstacles are very impure, and so we consequently perceive the world as impure. If our karma were pure, the states we perceive would be pure, too.

Sutra:

**The branches and fruit of the jeweled trees spread out symmetrically. Clouds of mani light shone one upon another. The Buddhas of the ten directions conjured up majestic pearls. All Bodhisattvas came, emitting dazzling light from the wonderful gems in their topknots. Moreover, aided by the awesome spiritual power of all the Buddhas, they proclaimed the Thus Come One’s vast, great state, their wonderful sounds far-reaching and eloquent, penetrating everywhere.**
Commentary:

The branches and fruit of the jeweled trees spread out symmetrically. The trees were adorned with the seven precious items—gold, silver, vaidurya, crystal, coral, red pearls, and carnelian. Their branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits formed an interlacing network that spread all around. Clouds of mani pearl light shone upon one another. The clouds of light radiating from the mani gems shone upon one another. The Buddhas of the ten directions conjured up majestic pearls by transformation. All the countlessly many Bodhisattvas from the ten directions came together, emitting dazzling light from the wonderful gems in their topknots. Each Bodhisattva had a precious pearl set into his jeweled cowl. They all came to the bodhimanda and emanated radiance, like many candles burning together.

Moreover, aided by the awesome spiritual power of all the Buddhas, they proclaimed the Thus Come One’s vast, great state. Relying on the spiritual power of the Buddhas of the ten directions, the Bodhisattvas expounded upon the incomparably vast realm of the Thus Come One. Their wonderful sounds were far-reaching and eloquent, penetrating everywhere in the ten directions. There wasn’t a single place where the wonderful Dharma sound wasn’t heard. There wasn’t a single dust mote where the Dharma wheel wasn’t being turned.

V. The Inconceivability of the Teaching Host

Sutra:

**At that time, the World Honored One, seated on this throne, had realized Utmost, Proper Enlightenment in regard to all dharmas. His wisdom entered the three periods of time as completely level and equal. His body filled all worlds. His sound reached each and every land of the ten directions, just as space contains all things, yet does not differentiate among them; or as space pervades everywhere, impartially entering all lands. His physical form, eternal and ubiquitous, was seated in all bodhimandas.**

Commentary:

At that time, Sãkyamuni Buddha, the World Honored One, seated on this lion throne, had realized Utmost, Proper Enlightenment in regard to all dharmas. The Buddha has achieved Utmost, Proper Enlightenment. Bodhisattvas can be said to have attained Proper Enlightenment, but not Utmost Proper Enlightenment. Those of the Two Vehicles have only attained enlightenment, but not Proper Enlightenment. Gods, demons, externalists, and ordinary people are unenlightened. They may think they are enlightened, but actually they are just steeped in deviant knowledge and perverse views. They are simply unenlightened, which is another way of saying that they are deluded and ignorant. They think what they do is correct and that nothing is out of order, and therefore they are said to be unenlightened.

But with the Buddha, his wisdom entered the three periods of time as completely level and equal. The Buddha can understand the past, present, and future; or you could say past lives, present life, and future lives.

Some people don’t believe in the three periods of time. They say, “I don’t even understand my present life very well. How can I believe that there are past and future lives?” They are right. If they don’t understand their present life, how could they possibly understand their past lives or future lives? No wonder they don’t believe in the concept of other lives.

It’s okay if you don’t want to believe that there are past, present, and future lives, but do you believe in a yesterday, today, and tomorrow? Probably you cannot remember everything that happened yesterday. And you don’t know what will happen tomorrow, since it hasn’t arrived yet. You’ve already forgotten what happened in the past, and you haven’t experienced what will happen in the future, so you don’t know about it. If you can’t even remember or know clearly all the events of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, just three days, how can you expect to be able to recall your past lives or know about your present and future lives? You are less likely to remember and be aware of these far-reaching things.

The Buddha’s wisdom, however, encompasses the three periods of time—past, present, and future. He knows what causes he planted in past lives, and how they account for the results he is reaping in this life. He also knows what causes he is planting in his present life, so he’s aware of what types of results to expect in his next life. Not only does the Buddha know this about himself, he knows this about all sentient beings. For example, he’ll know, “This sentient being planted the cause of killing in the past. Therefore, in this life that cause will bear fruit, and in his next life he will undergo the retribution for that killing.” Or, “This person stole in his last life, so in this life his goods are stolen from him. In his next life he will, in turn, steal from others.” This type of karma and retribution go on and on, in an endless cycle. The same principle applies to engaging in sexual misconduct, lying, and taking intoxicants. “Yesterday I lied to someone, and today someone lies to me. Tomorrow maybe someone will cheat me.” As you sow, so shall you reap. You harvest whatever you plant.

The periods of time are “completely level and equal.” The past is level and equal, the present is level and equal, and so is the future.

His body filled all worlds, the entire Dharma Realm. There is a verse that occurs later on in this chapter:

The Buddha’s body fills the entire Dharma Realm;
He appears before sentient beings everywhere.

His sound reached each and every land of the ten directions. The Buddha’s sound can be heard pervasively throughout the lands of the ten directions. The sutra brings up an analogy for this, which is that it is just as space contains all things, yet does not differentiate among them. The Buddha’s Dharma body is just like space; it contains everything and yet makes no discriminations among states. Or it is also just as space pervades everywhere, impartially entering all lands. No matter how large the land is, there is a corresponding amount of space to fill it. There is neither too little nor too much. His physical form, eternal and ubiquitous, was seated in all bodhimandas. The Buddha’s body constantly fills the Dharma Realm, and so he can be found seated in all bodhimandas.

Sutra:

**In the midst of the Bodhisattva multitudes, the Buddha emitted awesome, magnificent light, as when the rising sun illuminates the whole world. The great ocean of the multitudes of blessings cultivated in the three periods of time had already been purified, and yet he constantly manifested birth in all Buddhalands. His boundless physical marks were perfect and full. His radiance pervaded the Dharma Realm equally and without discrimination. His proclamation of all Dharmas resembled a great cloud spreading out. His every hair tip accommodated all worlds without obstruction. On each he manifested the power of measureless spiritual penetrations to teach, transform, tame, and subdue all sentient beings. His body filled the ten directions, neither coming nor going. His wisdom penetrated all phenomena and fathomed the emptiness and stillness of all dharmas. Every spiritual transformation of all Buddhas of the three periods of time without exception was visible within that light, and all adornments of the lands of all Buddhas throughout inconceivable eons were completely manifest therein.**

Commentary:

In the midst of the Bodhisattva multitudes, the Buddha emitted awesome, magnificent light, as when the rising sun illuminates the whole world. Within all those bodhimandas where countless Bodhisattvas were gathered, the Buddha’s awesome light was almost blinding, like that of the rising sun shining upon the world. The great ocean of the multitudes of blessings cultivated in the three periods of time—the past, present, and future—had already been purified. The blessings we have now are not the product of a single lifetime’s work, but rather, the fruit of many lives and eons’ hard work. If you cultivate blessings, in the future you will have blessings—so the text says, “the great ocean of the multitudes of blessings.” If you cultivate wisdom, in the future you will have wisdom.

Therefore,

Don’t fail to do a good deed,
No matter how small it may be.
Don’t do a single evil deed,
No matter how insignificant it may seem.

Even if a good act is minor, still, you should do it. Even if an evil act is really small, you still should not do it. You should cultivate blessings and wisdom at all times. Only then will you amass a “great ocean of the multitudes of blessings” which is completely pure. The blessings you cultivate may be pure blessings, or they may be impure blessings that are contaminated with defilement. The blessings that Buddhas cultivate are completely pure. The blessings cultivated by Bodhisattvas are also pure.

And yet he constantly manifested birth in all Buddhalands. Bodhisattvas continually manifest hundreds of millions of transformation bodies within all Buddhalands. His boundless physical marks, the special hallmarks and adornments, were perfect and full, making them virtually the same as the Buddhas’. His radiance pervaded the Dharma Realm equally and without discrimination. His light shone universally throughout the Dharma Realm, being the same everywhere without any differentiation. His proclamation of all Dharmas resembled a great cloud spreading out. Throughout the Dharma Realm, he proclaimed the wonderful Dharma, and it was as if a great cloud had formed in the air.

His every hair tip accommodated all worlds without obstruction. Buddhas and great Bodhisattvas are such that the tip of every one of their hairs contains all worlds. Although a hair tip is small, it can contain an entire world. Although a world is large, it does not exceed the circumference of the hair tip. Therefore, the Surangama Sutra says:

On the tip of a single hair,
They manifest the lands of the jeweled king.

Not only did the Buddha manifest the lands of the jeweled king on one hair tip, but he manifested them on every hair tip.

Seated in dust motes,
they turn the great Dharma wheel.

Seated inside a single mote of dust, they teach and transform sentient beings. “How can the tiny tip of a hair contain a world?” you ask. This kind of a state is inexplicable. There is no obstruction between the large and the small.

On each he manifested the power of measureless spiritual penetrations. How can the small possibly contain the great, and the great lie within the small? Is this logical? This is due to the spiritual powers of the Bodhisattva, whose aim is to teach, transform, tame, and subdue all sentient beings. He makes appear such an incredible state to cause sentient beings to get rid of their biased views and knowledge, and to study the Buddhadharma instead. For example, he may teach them to study Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese, English, or French. Sentient beings have huge egos. They say, “I don’t like to do this; I don’t want to do that.” Or, “I like sweet, not sour.” For example, when one of my disciples was kitchen manager she bought a lot of sweets, because she liked sweets. However, if you can eat less of what you like, and more of what you don’t like, just that is “taming and subduing.”

All beings should have a sense of shame and remorse. We shouldn’t be shameless. Suppose someone says, “The skin on your face is two and a half feet thick, thicker than a car tire,” and you say, “That’s right. My face is like rubber, and I’m not afraid of anything. I don’t care what people say about me.” If you are shameless like that, you are totally useless and will never have any accomplishment. You should always feel humble and remorseful.

Don’t be lazy. Laziness will not help you get enlightened. No one has ever become enlightened from being lazy. If someone tells you, “You don’t have to do anything, except wait to get enlightened,” he’s cheating you. You have to keep on studying. When you have studied the principles long enough, you will suddenly break through and experience a great enlightenment. The whole purpose of studying is to learn what you don’t know yet. Don’t be afraid of trouble. If you already understood everything, you wouldn’t have to study. Unfortunately, you don’t understand anything, so as soon as someone asks you something, you become totally disoriented. If you can’t even get your bearings, how can you stop studying? How can you stop studying before you’ve reached the level of “no study”?

Don’t think, “Oh, the Master said today that three people were about to realize the first fruit of Arhatship. I must be one of them.” Maybe you are, and maybe you aren’t. You can’t know for sure until you actually realize that fruition.

His body filled the ten directions, neither coming nor going. His wisdom penetrated and accorded with all phenomena and fathomed the original emptiness and stillness of all dharmas.

Every spiritual transformation of all Buddhas of the three periods of time without exception was visible within that light,  and all adornments of all the lands of all Buddhas throughout inconceivable eons were completely manifest therein. Throughout an inconceivably long period of time, the adornments of all Buddhas of the ten directions and the three periods of time were clearly visible to the Buddha. Why? Because “his wisdom penetrated all phenomena.”

VI. The Oceanic Multitudes Gather Like Clouds

A. The Bodhisattvas

**1. Their Names and Numbers**

Sutra:

**The Buddha was surrounded by Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas as many as dust motes in ten Buddhaworlds. Their names were: Bodhisattva Mahasattva Universal Worthy; Bodhisattva Mahasattva Supremely Luminous Lantern of Universal Virtue; Bodhisattva Mahasattva Lion Banner of Universal Light; Bodhisattva Mahasattva Splendid Light of Universal Jeweled Flames; Bodhisattva Mahasattva Universal Voice with Meritorious Virtue Like a Banner or Ocean; Bodhisattva Mahasattva Universal Wisdom-Light Illuminating the Thus Come One’s Realm; Bodhisattva Mahasattva Universal Jeweled Cowl and Flower Banner.**

Commentary:

The Buddha was surrounded by Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas as many as dust motes in ten Buddhaworlds. Bodhisattvas to the number of dust motes in ten Buddhalands all came and surrounded Sãkyamuni Buddha.

“His body filled the ten directions, neither coming nor going.” Since the Buddha’s body completely fills the ten directions, how can it come or go? In order for it to come or go somewhere, there has to be some place in the ten directions that is not already filled with the Buddha’s body. This is just like a bowl of water that is already filled to the brim—where else could you put more water in? Before it is filled, you can pour in water. That is “coming.” When you drink the water, that is “going.” If the water has reached the maximum level and nobody is drinking it or adding more water, then there is no coming and no going. It’s as simple as that. You don’t need to talk about Bodhisattvas and specifics and principles. It’s just that when the Buddha’s body is already present everywhere, there is nowhere for it to come or go. This is a function of the Buddha’s spiritual powers. If you realize that state of being, you will also have no coming or going.

To mention just some of the leaders among the innumerable, great Bodhisattvas surrounding Sãkyamuni Buddha on his lion throne, their names were as follows: The first one, the leader of the influential assembly, was Bodhisattva Mahasattva Universal Worthy. “Universal” refers to his virtues being all-pervasive. “Worthy” refers to his position neighboring that of utmost sagehood. His position is almost the same as that of the Buddha. The Buddha is one of Wonderful Enlightenment, whereas Universal Worthy Bodhisattva is one of Equal Enlightenment. He is a Mahasattva, a great Bodhisattva. The power of this Bodhisattva’s vows surpasses that of other Bodhisattvas, and so does the power of his practices. His kindness, compassion, and wisdom surpass theirs as well, and so he is called a great Bodhisattva.

Bodhisattva Mahasattva Supremely Luminous Lantern of Universal Virtue has meritorious virtues that are universally pervasive, like the surpassing illumination of a bright lamp.

Basically Bodhisattvas don’t have names; however, without names there is no way to communicate their virtuous conduct. Therefore, they are given names according to their vows and methods of practice.

The light of Bodhisattva Mahasattva Lion Banner of Universal Light shines everywhere and on everyone. His speaking of Dharma is like the roar of a lion and like a banner. That indicates how the sound of this Bodhisattva’s voice surpasses that of other Bodhisattvas.

There was also a great Bodhisattva among Bodhisattvas named Bodhisattva Mahasattva Splendid Light of Universal Jeweled Flames. His cultivation of the Bodhisattva Way is very vigorous and so his wisdom is like the wonderful light of jeweled flames.

There was another great Bodhisattva among the Bodhisattvas named Bodhisattva Mahasattva Universal Voice with Meritorious Virtue Like a Banner or Ocean. His subtle, wondrous sound fills the Dharma Realm and so his merit and virtue is like a vast sea and also like a jeweled banner. The next, another great Bodhisattva, is Bodhisattva Mahasattva Universal Wisdom-Light Illuminating the Thus Come One’s Realm. The light of his wisdom can illumine the Tathagata’s realm of being. The Thus Come One’s realm is not something that most Bodhisattvas can fathom, yet this Bodhisattva is able to clearly understand it. Bodhisattva Mahasattva Universal Jeweled Cowl and Flower Banner was another great Bodhisattva among Bodhisattvas.

**Sutra:**

**Bodhisattva Mahasattva Delightful Sounds that Bring Universal Enlightenment; Bodhisattva Mahasattva Universal Purity and Light of Infinite Blessings; Bodhisattva Mahasattva Universal Radiance of Characteristics.**

Commentary:

Bodhisattva Mahasattva Delightful Sounds that Bring Universal Enlightenment pervasively enlightens beings everywhere. All beings like this Bodhisattva and are delighted by the sound of his voice. He can emit sounds within sounds that proclaim and spread the doctrines of the Great Vehicle.

To review, Bodhisattva is a Sanskrit word meaning “one who enlightens beings” and “enlightened being.” He uses the truth of enlightenment to teach all beings to attain enlightenment as well. Moreover, he is a being who happens to be enlightened. A Mahasattva is a great Bodhisattva.

Bodhisattva Mahasattva Universal Purity and Light of Infinite Blessings, also a great being, is universally pure and is able to purify the Dharma Realm. He also has boundless blessings and virtue that emit bright light, hence his name.

From his marks and characteristics Bodhisattva Mahasattva Universal Radiance of Characteristics sends forth a radiance that pervades the Dharma Realm. He too is a leader among Bodhisattvas and so is called a Mahasattva. At the start of the proclamation of the Flower Adornment Sutra, these ten great Bodhisattvas just discussed led their limitless retinues to the bodhimanda to aid the Buddha in propagating the Buddhadharma.

Sutra:

**Bodhisattva Mahasattva Ocean Moonlight’s Great Radiance; Bodhisattva Mahasattva Immaculate Treasury of Rumbling Clouds and Shining Ocean; Bodhisattva Mahasattva Jeweled Cowl of Meritorious Virtues Born of Wisdom; Bodhisattva Mahasattva Bright Light of Meritorious Virtue and Majestic Freedom.**
Commentary:

There was another Bodhisattva called Bodhisattva Mahasattva  Ocean Moonlight’s Great Radiance. His light is vast like the ocean and bright like the moon. He too is a great Bodhisattva among Bodhisattvas.

Bodhisattva Mahasattva Immaculate Treasury of Rumbling Clouds and Shining Ocean sends forth a mighty clap from a thundercloud that resounds in space, rousing the deaf and startling the blind. Deaf people, upon hearing this sound, are no longer deaf. Sleeping people are startled into awakening. Who are the deaf? They are those who don’t want to listen to the Buddhadharma. Who are the blind? They are those who don’t want to look at the Buddhadharma. But once the mighty clap from this thundercloud hits, those who don’t want to listen have to listen, and those who don’t want to look have no choice but to look. “Shining Ocean” in this Bodhisattva’s name also refers to the emitting of light in the ocean-imprint samadhi to reveal all the myriad phenomena of the universe as when their images are imprinted on the ocean. “Immaculate Treasury” refers to his purity. He too was a great Bodhisattva among Bodhisattvas.

Bodhisattva Mahasattva Jeweled Cowl of Meritorious Virtues Born of Wisdom has immense meritorious virtues, like the jeweled cowl atop his head, which pours forth infinite treasuries of jewels. There was also a Bodhisattva called Bodhisattva Mahasattva Bright Light of Meritorious Virtue and Majestic Freedom. He had attained great meritorious virtue, great freedom, and great brilliance. He was also a great Bodhisattva among Bodhisattvas and a member of the influential assembly at the Dharma assembly.

When the Buddha speaks Dharma, there are ten types of assemblies within the Dharma assembly:

1. the influential assembly
2. the constantly following assembly
3. the Dharma-protecting assembly
4. the adorning assembly
5. the assembly that makes offerings
6. the assembly that brings forth the resolve
7. the assembly of those with current potentials
8. the assembly that represents the Dharma
9. the assembly that attains realization of the Dharma
10. the assembly that reveals the Dharma

1. The influential assembly refers to the great Bodhisattvas of the ten directions, who not only have already heard all the Dharma spoken by one Buddha, they have heard all the Dharma spoken by all Buddhas. Moreover, they completely understand and remember it, and so there’s basically no need for them to hear it again. Yet they still come to hear the Dharma when a Buddha appears in the world. Some Bodhisattvas well up from the ground, some descend from the skies, some come from the far reaches of space, while others arrive from lands as many as dust motes throughout the ten directions. They all come to hear the Buddha speak the Dharma, and they are called the influential assembly.

2. The constantly following assembly refers to the 1,250 disciples of the Buddha who followed the Buddha everywhere to hear him teach the Dharma. Wherever the Buddha went, they always followed along. When the Buddha first attained Buddhahood, the 1,250 had not all come together yet, but the Bodhisattvas of the ten directions came and acted as the constantly following assembly, never leaving the Flower Adornment Dharma assembly.

3. The Dharma-protecting assembly refers to those who come to protect the Buddha when he speaks the Dharma. Since the Buddha has all kinds of spiritual powers and miraculous abilities, why would he need any protection? Although the Buddha has spiritual powers, his Bodhisattva-disciples still want to fulfill their duties as Dharma protectors.

4. The adorning assembly refers to those who come to adorn the Dharma assembly.

5. The assembly that makes offerings refers to those who present gifts of offerings to the Dharma assembly, which are also necessary.

6. The assembly that brings forth the resolve refers to people who resolve to protect and support the Dharma assembly.

7. The assembly of those with current potentials refers to those who are ready for the teaching that the Buddha is delivering at that particular time, that is, those to whom he is especially speaking Dharma.

8. The assembly that represents the Dharma refers to those who exemplify the Dharma that is spoken.

9. The assembly that attains realization of the Dharma refers to those who, upon hearing the Buddha speak the Dharma, attain such fruitions as the first, second, third, or fourth fruitions of Arhatship and so forth.

10. The assembly that reveals the Dharma refers to those who display the Buddha’s Dharma so it is clearly manifest.

Those are the ten types of assemblies that come to lend support to the Buddha’s Dharma assembly. In general, the responsibility of left-home people is to propagate, practice, and uphold the Dharma. The duty of laypeople is to protect the Dharma. Every layperson should fulfill his or her duty. You shouldn’t come to the monastery to find fault with everything. If you do your best to protect the Dharma, you will earn merit and virtue. However, if you come to the monastery specifically to find fault, then you will create offenses instead of merit and virtue.

Sutra:

**Bodhisattva Mahasattva Lotus Headdress of Proficient Courage; Bodhisattva Mahasattva Universal Wisdom Resembling Banners of Clouds and Sun.**

Commentary:

[explanation by a disciple] Bodhisattva Mahasattva Lotus Headdress of Proficient Courage is extremely vigorous. He is never lazy in practicing the Bodhisattva conduct. Being vigorous, he has joined the Flower Adornment Assembly. And because of his great vigor, he has attained the great jewel of all Bodhisattvas, and so in his headdress there’s a great jewel resembling a lotus flower. The lotus flower is round and represents perfection, and the jewel atop the Bodhisattva’s head represents the manifestation of the Buddha jewel as it teaches in the world. This Bodhisattva, because of his great vigor, has attained the ability to display the Dharma in the world to teach sentient beings. And so he is not only a Bodhisattva but a great Bodhisattva, because he has reached a stage of being able to represent the Buddha in speaking the Dharma.

Bodhisattva Mahasattva Universal Wisdom Resembling Banners of Clouds and Sun. This Bodhisattva’s wisdom is not a small wisdom. It’s not the kind of wisdom acquired from reading books or from merely sitting in dhyana. This Bodhisattva’s wisdom is vast like a cloud and covers the Dharma Realm. His universal wisdom resembles a cloud because it covers sentient beings. And through the use of his wisdom, he covers and protects sentient beings, so that they may be taught. His universal wisdom is also like a great sun banner. A sun banner is like these banners in the Buddha Hall, but like the sun in that it radiates light throughout the Dharma Realm, so that his wisdom covers all sentient beings and also illumines them. It is likened to a banner because it hangs down from the position of a Bodhisattva, covering all realms of existence. And he is a Bodhisattva who wants to teach sentient beings; he is a great Bodhisattva of the Flower Adornment Assembly.

Sutra:

**Bodhisattva Mahasattva Adamantine Navel of Great Vigor; Bodhisattva Mahasattva Banner of Fragrant Blazing Light; Bodhisattva Mahasattva Resplendent Virtue and Beautiful Sound; and Bodhisattva Mahasattva Light of Great Blessings Born of Wisdom.**
Commentary:

[explanation by a disciple] Bodhisattva Mahasattva Adamantine Navel of Great Vigor. This kind of vigor does not refer to great heroism, but to energy, to working very hard. This Bodhisattva worked very hard in his cultivation, and so he attained an adamantine navel. Adamantine means vajra or “indestructible.” Why is he called “indestructible navel”? The navel is the source of life. Every womb-born being has a navel, which connected that being with its mother. In the same way this Bodhisattva is connected with the Buddha and the Dharma from which he was born. He is called Adamantine Navel because he is a non-retreating Bodhisattva, a great Bodhisattva of the assembly.

Bodhisattva Mahasattva Banner of Fragrant Blazing Light. Fragrance refers to the cultivation of precepts. Having cultivated the precepts a long time, he fills the Dharma Realm with fragrance that blazes with light because it’s so intense. And so he is called “Banner of Fragrant Blazing Light.” Banner represents his great heroism and also the fact that he is a Bodhisattva Mahasattva who teaches all sentient beings.

Bodhisattva Mahasattva Resplendent Virtue and Beautiful Sound has cultivated for an uncountable number of eons, and his virtue from all his practice and his benefiting of sentient beings radiates throughout the assembly with resplendence. What did this Bodhisattva practice? He practiced great compassion, and so he is known as Beautiful Sound Bodhisattva. Sound represents the teaching of sentient beings. The manifestation of teaching in the Saha World is by means of sound. Since he practiced for so long and his virtue is so great, his speaking of Dharma is profound and beautiful and makes all sentient beings really happy and joyous.

And there was Bodhisattva Mahasattva Light of Great Blessings Born of Wisdom. This great Bodhisattva, in his cultivation, has always protected the Dharma and sentient beings, and so as a result he has attained great blessings. His great blessings are like a brilliant light which sentient beings may look at as their model, and by seeing his blessings, know to cultivate blessings. If you don’t cultivate blessings, your cultivation will be very bitter. There would be no way to completely fulfill your work in the Way. He is called Born of Wisdom because he knew to cultivate great blessings. He practiced wisdom, and because of his wisdom, he was able to cultivate and attain to a brilliant light of great blessings. He was born of the wisdom which knew to cultivate great blessings. This was another great Bodhisattva of the assembly of the Flower Adornment Sutra.

This concludes the list of the leaders of the Bodhisattva assembly at the bodhimanda of Sãkyamuni Buddha when he first attained to the Utmost, Right, and Perfect Enlightenment. [End of disciple’s explanation.]

Venerable Master: The names of the Bodhisattvas can be explained however you wish to explain them. They do not have a fixed interpretation. Your explanation is generally satisfactory.

Sutra:

**These were some of the leaders, and they were as many as dust motes in ten Buddhaworlds.**

Commentary:

These were some of the leaders. The twenty Bodhisattvas whose names have been mentioned were all great leaders among the assembly, and they were as many as dust motes in ten Buddhaworlds. Those twenty were representatives of all the rest of the Bodhisattvas, which were as numerous as the dust motes in ten Buddhaworlds. Suppose each dust mote in one Buddhaworld became a world. How many worlds would there be? No one could reckon the amount. Even Bodhisattvas with the Buddha eye are not able to calculate how many that would be. Only the Buddhas know how many worlds that would be.

**2. The Perfection of Their Virtues**

Sutra:

**All these Bodhisattvas had amassed good roots and cultivated Bodhisattva practices in the past, together with the Thus Come One, Vairochana, and all of them were born from the ocean of the Thus Come One’s good roots.**
Commentary:

All these Bodhisattvas as numerous as the dust motes in ten Buddhaworlds had amassed good roots and cultivated Bodhisattva practices for measureless eons in the past, together with the Thus Come One, Vairochana, “Brightness Pervading Everywhere.” This does not mean that the Bodhisattvas put their good roots together with Vairochana Buddha’s. Everyone amassed his own good roots, but it was all done in the same Dharma assembly. They each cultivated the Six Perfections and Ten Thousand Practices on their own, thereby accumulating good roots. They diligently created merit and did good deeds, and put a stop to offenses and transgressions. That’s how they amassed good roots together.

All of us attending this sutra lecture could also be said to be amassing good roots together. You vigorously advance in your Dharma practice, and I also make progress in my cultivation. Each person cultivates the Dharma of his choice.

They accumulated those good roots by “cultivating Bodhisattva practices.” Bodhisattva practices consist of benefiting oneself and benefiting others, enlightening oneself and enlightening others, saving oneself and saving others. And all of them were born from the ocean of the Thus Come One’s good roots. Vairochana Thus Come One’s good roots are as vast as the sea. The Bodhisattvas’ good roots are like the streams, rivers, and lakes. Each Bodhisattva had amassed his or her own good roots, and all their good roots flowed into the great sea of the Buddhas’ teachings.

Sutra:

**They had completely perfected all paramitas.**

Commentary:

They had completely perfected all paramitas. “All paramitas” refers to many, many paramita. They had perfected them all, so that there was no deficiency. They had “taken them all to the other shore,” so to speak. Paramita is a Sanskrit word that translates as “arrived at the other shore”; it can also be interpreted as “having done what had to be done and not undergoing any further existence.” That’s paramita.

All paramita can refer to this very paramita. Which paramita? Whichever one you’re cultivating. If you cultivate giving, then it refers to the paramita of giving. If you cultivate the paramita of holding precepts, then it refers to having arrived at the other shore in holding precepts. If you cultivate the paramita of patience, then this line of text means that you have arrived at the other shore in patience. You’ve achieved perfection in that aspect. If you practice vigor, then this sentence means you have perfected your vigor. You’ve graduated; you’ve passed. If it’s not paramita, then it means you’ve flunked the test. If you cultivate chan samadhi, then this sentence means you’ve perfected your skill in chan samadhi and don’t have any problems; it’s all okay. If you cultivate prajña-paramita, then the sentence means you’ve realized the perfection of prajña.

In Chinese the word for “all” can also be treated as a particle, in which case only one paramita is being referred to. If it is taken to mean “all”, then it refers to a large number of paramita. In general there are six paramitas, but if discussed in detail, there are infinitely many of them.

Originally I was just going to give an overview, but some children happened to come to the lecture today. These children started to have internal struggles in their minds. One of them wondered, “What is meant by giving?” Another one said, “And what is holding precepts all about?” Someone else was thinking, “Hey, why should we be patient? Only wimps and cowards practice patience.” Yet another said, “Vigor is not such a good thing. I feel perfectly natural being lazy in my studies. It’s tedious to be vigorous.” “You talk about chan samadhi, but most people aren’t able to enter samadhi when they meditate.” Someone else said, “Paramita [sounds like “pineapple honey” in Chinese]? I want to have a taste.” Finally, someone thinks, “What is meant by prajña?”

With all these thoughts going on in people’s heads, although I hadn’t planned to explain the Six Paramitas, because you mentally asked me I have no choice but to explain them briefly. If I were to go into detail, then not to mention in two hours, I wouldn’t be able to finish speaking to the ends of time. “I don’t believe that,” you say. You don’t have to believe me. I’m just telling you, that’s all. Why would I want you to believe me? If you believed me, you’d be useless. I prefer that you not believe. That’s how wonderful it is. If you don’t believe me, then there’s something I can do. If you believed me, then I’d be out of work. Since you don’t believe, I can explain a little more. Once you believed, there wouldn’t be any need for me to explain things. This is very easy to figure out, even if you’ve never studied mathematics.

1. The paramita of giving: Giving means renouncing. In general, there are three kinds of giving. If spoken of in detail, there are hundreds, thousands, and even tens of thousands of kinds of giving. Actually, and I don’t mean to shock you, but there are 84,000 kinds of giving. In fact, every method of practice can be divided into 84,000 subcategories, if you want to analyze it. If you don’t, then there are just one, two, three. Since people wouldn’t remember if I explained too many kinds, I’ll just talk about three kinds.

The first is the giving of wealth. This is not easy to do. There’s a Chinese saying, “Giving wealth is like slicing off your own flesh.” It’s that painful. But just because it’s not easy to do, you must do it. If you give what’s easy to give, it doesn’t mean very much. But to be able to give what is not easy to give is true giving.

“Humaneness is hard at first, but is eventually acquired.” “Humaneness” here means giving, and it’s difficult. But if you can go through a hard training and survive, then it won’t be hard anymore. What is “eventually acquired” is merit and virtue.

The second kind is the giving of Dharma. This means to bestow the Buddhadharma upon sentient beings and tie up Dharma-affinities with them. Today all of you young friends—or maybe old fellow cultivators—have come here and I am explaining the paramita of giving to you. This is the giving of Dharma. “The two types of giving—that of wealth and Dharma—are equal and without distinction.” Giving away Dharma is like giving away wealth, but even harder. The saying goes:

Giving wealth is like slicing off your own flesh.
Giving Dharma is like losing your own life.

When you give Dharma, you have given something as important as your life. Dharma can rescue people’s wisdom-life, but when you have given it, you yourself have less in that you have given breath and energy, which is just the same as giving life. Speaking the Dharma requires a lot of energy. You need to bring across the meaning of every single word and phrase of Dharma so that it registers deeply in the listeners’ minds and does not escape. In this act of giving you are also giving your life. I could take some money out of my pocket and give it to you, and that would be simple. To prepare and deliver a sutra lecture is much more strenuous and exhausting. You young people don’t understand this. Once you grow older, you’ll know what I mean. I’m not bragging about my own hard work. In fact, if you would like to lecture in my stead, you would be most welcome.

The third kind is the giving of fearlessness. When sentient beings encounter any sort of accident or sudden calamity, such as a flood, fire, or robbery—any situation where they are frightened—you should comfort them by saying, “Don’t be afraid. The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will come to protect you.” Actually it is not that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas come to lend aid. If the frightened person can quiet his own mind, then naturally his own Buddha nature will be peaceful and secure. Just that is receiving the protection of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas don’t have to come flying through the air from limitless lands to where you are and recite some mantra to make you feel secure. If someone helps you, when you encounter a terrifying situation, not to be afraid, that is in itself protection provided by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Don’t seek for the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas outside and wonder, “How come I don’t see them?” What do you want to see? A ghost? Don’t be so foolish. Don’t be attached to what you see, because there are things that are beyond seeing. If you are attached, then you are simply a “a big, dumb egg,” as we say in Chinese—a  fool. I’m not scolding you. I’m just explaining the principle. That’s the giving of fearlessness, the third kind of giving.

“What does he mean by a ‘big, dumb egg’?” someone wonders. It’s an egg that can’t roll or move, like a dead thing.

How did you know what I was thinking about?” another person wonders. If you can think about it, why shouldn’t I know about it? I’m the same as you. When you have a thought, my radar picks up the signal. All of our minds are linked by radar. If you know how to read the radar, then you can see what everyone is thinking. I won’t talk about such illogical, unscientific things. Let’s talk about holding precepts.

2. The pramita of holding precepts: There are the Five Precepts and the Eight Precepts.

The Five Precepts:
a.   Do not kill.
b.   Do not steal.
c.   Do not engage in sexual misconduct.
d.   Do not speak falsely.
e.   Do not take intoxicants.

Further, there are the Eight Lay Precepts, the Ten Major and Forty-eight Minor Bodhisattva Precepts, the Ten Sramanera (Novice) Precepts, the 250 Bhikshu Precepts, and the 348 Bhikshuni Precepts.
Precepts are moral and ethical rules that guide the path of cultivation. It’s essential for people who cultivate to uphold the precepts. And even if you don’t want to cultivate, it’s better for you if you hold the precepts. Holding precepts is the second paramita.

3. The paramita of patience: Men may say, “People who practice patience are cowards. Patience is for women. A man has to be a great hero, a courageous leader—aggressive and commanding, not patient and yielding. What use are patience and forbearance?”

I ask you, of what use are you if you lack patience? As to your description of a hero, Mencius leveled this criticism a long time ago:

To grasp one’s sword and wield it aloft, to take one’s stance and meet one’s challenger face to face, is a petty man’s courage: it only works for one-to-one combat.

But if you can be patient under insult, you are “a match for ten thousand men.” No one will be able to conquer you. That’s because:

The soft can overpower the hard;
The weak can overcome the strong.

That’s genuine, great courage. If you want to be a genuine, unrivalled hero, you must be patient. You must bear what others cannot bear. For example, as a young man the general Han Xin in China underwent the humiliation of crawling between the legs of some vagrants and of begging for food from an old washer woman. Then he became a great commander-in-chief and, because of his ability to endure disgrace, managed to defeat the mighty Prince of Chu.

There are three kinds of patience:
a. Patience with arising
b. Patience with dharmas
c. Patience with the nonarising of dharmas

Patience with arising means being patient with all beings. Patience with dharmas means being patient with all dharmas. You should also be patient with the nonarising of dharmas. If you can further realize that not the slightest dharma comes into being and not the slightest dharma ceases to be, and you can bear that patiently in mind, then at that point, you attain the Middle Way. After you realize the emptiness of people and dharmas, you attain the ultimate meaning of the Middle Way.

4. The paramita of vigor. Vigor means not being lazy; it counteracts laziness. One can be physically vigorous and mentally vigorous. Physical vigor means being diligent day and night in cultivating the Way. Mental vigor means that in thought after thought one aspires toward the Unsurpassed Way. In thought after thought one cultivates, enlightens to, and realizes the Unsurpassed Way.

5. The paramita of dhyana samadhi: If you develop skill in dhyana samadhi, so that you are always absorbed in concentration no matter where you are, you can reach the other shore.

6.   The paramita of prajña: Prajña, a Sanskrit word, refers to wisdom. There are three kinds of prajña

The Three Kinds of Prajna
a.   Literary prajña
b.   Contemplative prajña
c.   Prajña of reality

Since prajña has many meanings and is an honored term, it is not translated.

This has been a discussion of the Six Paramitas that all the great Bodhisattvas had cultivated to perfection. They had perfected not just one, but all of them. They had reached the other shore.

Sutra:

**Their wisdom eye was clear and penetrating, and they contemplated the three periods of time as equal. They had reached total purity in all samadhi. Their ocean-like eloquence was infinite and vast. Replete with the meritorious virtues of a Buddha, they were venerable and dignified.**
Commentary:

Their wisdom eye was clear and penetrating. The wisdom eye is one of the Five Eyes. The others are the Buddha eye, the Dharma eye, the flesh eye, and the heavenly eye. “Clear” means that there is nothing the wisdom eye does not perceive. “Penetrating” means being able to see through, just as one can see clear through to the bottom of a pool of clear water, and thoroughly understand things. And since they had the wisdom eye, the Dharma eye, the heavenly eye, the Buddha eye, and the flesh eye, they contemplated the three periods of time as equal. When they contemplated time, they found that it is actually unreal. There is no past, present, or future. The three periods of time are equal. Although we speak of there being a past, a present, and a future, those are just false names. Contemplating the three periods of time as equal is like contemplating that yesterday and today are the same, and that today and tomorrow are the same. What is the advantage of contemplating them as all the same? It gets rid of mental discrimination. When there is no discrimination, not a single thought arises, and not a single thought arising is contemplating the three periods of time as being the same.

They had reached total purity in all samadhi. This means realizing to perfection whatever samadhi one is cultivating. If you are cultivating Chan, you will attain dhyana-samadhi. If you are cultivating patience, you will attain the samadhi of patience. If you cultivate mindfulness of the Buddha, you will attain the samadhi of mindfulness of the Buddha. Cultivating the contemplation of being single-minded, you will attain the samadhi of being single-minded. No matter which samadhi you cultivate, you will reach perfection and purity.

Their ocean-like eloquence was infinite and vast. Eloquence refers to skillful mastery of words and expressions. There are Four Kinds of Eloquence:

1.   The eloquence of nonobstruction of dharmas
2.   The eloquence of nonobstruction of meaning
3.   The eloquence of nonobstruction of phrasing
4.   The eloquence of nonobstruction of delight in speech

With eloquence, one is always victorious in any debate. Such eloquence is like the great sea, vast and boundless.

Replete with the meritorious virtues of a Buddha, they were venerable and dignified, inspiring reverence in all sentient beings. Sentient beings should be reverent towards the great sages, great Arhats, great Bodhisattvas, and the Buddhas of the ten directions.

Sutra:

**They knew the faculties of sentient beings, taming and transforming them accordingly. They had entered the treasury of the Dharma Realm by means of the wisdom of discrimination. They had realized the Buddha’s liberation, which was profound, extensive, and great. They could, through expedient means, enter a single ground.**

Commentary:

These great Bodhisattvas were replete with the Buddhas’ meritorious virtues and inspired reverence in all beings. Moreover, they knew the faculties of sentient beings, taming and transforming them accordingly. They knew which beings have sharp faculties and which have dull ones. For those with sharp faculties, they spoke of Dharma of Reality. For those with dull faculties they spoke expedient dharmas and analogies to enable them to understand and become enlightened. Since they understood the different propensities of beings, these Bodhisattvas knew how to transform and subdue these beings with the appropriate methods and also how to inspire awe and veneration in them.

They had entered the treasury of the Dharma Realm by means of the wisdom of nondiscrimination. That is, these Bodhisattvas were one and the same as the Dharma Realm. Having attained the wisdom of nondiscrimination, they had realized the Buddhas’ liberation, which means they had no attachments at all. Since they were without attachment to people, to self, or to dharmas, they could see people as empty, dharmas as empty, and emptiness as empty, too. Having let go of everything, they had entered that passage into liberation. By letting go, one becomes master of oneself, and that self-mastery is liberation.

The state of these Bodhisattvas was profound, extensive, and great. It was deep and profound like the ocean, vast and great like the Dharma Realm. The state of these Bodhisattvas was inconceivable. In the past, some of them had been teachers of Sakyamuni Buddha, but in this life they had come back to be the Buddha’s disciples and to help the Buddha propagate the teachings. That state of mind is expansive, unlike the attached minds of ordinary people. They had no attachments.

They could, through expedient means, enter a single ground. “A single ground” means the First Ground. Having entered the First Ground, they were then able to enter each and every ground. Expedient means are not easy to practice. They may look easy, but in fact, they aren’t that easy to practice. While Bodhisattvas practice them with ease, ordinary people find them quite unnatural and uncomfortable to use.

Sutra:

**Yet, supported by the ocean of all vows, they were constantly endowed with wisdom and would continue to be, to the end of time. They had completely fathomed the rare, vast, esoteric state of the Buddhas. They well knew the equality of all Buddhadharmas. They had already walked upon the Thus Come Ones’ ground of universal light. They had entered the door to the ocean of measureless samadhis.**
Commentary:

The preceding section said the Bodhisattvas could, through expedient means, enter one ground, yet they were supported by the ocean of all vows. When Bodhisattvas cultivate, they must make vows. If their vows are great, their practice will be true. If their vows are not great, sometimes they will think of retreating. Therefore, the three requisites of cultivation are faith, vows, and practice. You can’t do without any one of them.

First you must have faith. Then you make vows, and having made vows, you put them into practice. You cannot make just one or two vows, or three, four, or five vows, and be satisfied with that. You must make vows as vast as the ocean. Supported by the power of their vows, they were constantly endowed with wisdom. They were always wise and never deluded. With wisdom, one has right knowledge and right views. With delusion, one has wrong knowledge and views. Right knowledge and views guide one along the path to Buddhahood. Wrong knowledge and views take one toward the hells. If you don’t wish to fall into the hells, make sure you have right knowledge and views. If you don’t mind going to the hells, you can keep your wrong knowledge and views.

The Bodhisattvas are this way and would continue to be, to the end of time. They had completely fathomed the rare, vast, esoteric state of the Buddhas. They totally understood the state of the Buddhas, which is uncommonly rare, vast and great, and mysterious to the point of being inconceivable. They well knew the equality of all Buddhadharmas. They were able to understand that the Dharma which all Buddhas practice, and which all Buddhas attain and then teach, is one of equality. They had already walked upon the Thus Come Ones’ ground of universal light. They had already reached the place of universal brilliance where the Buddhas were. That is to say, they were truly practicing the wisdom of all Buddhas. The ground of universal light is the ground of wisdom. These great Bodhisattvas had attained that position.

Having obtained wisdom, they had entered the door to the ocean of measureless samadhis, and their concentration power was as vast as the ocean.

Sutra:

**In all places they manifested appropriate bodies. Complying with the ways of the world, they cooperated with and adapted themselves to those around them.**

Commentary:

In all places and at all times, they complied with the needs of sentient beings and manifested appropriate bodies. Complying with the ways of the world, they cooperated with and adapted themselves to those around them. These Bodhisattvas appeared before beings and did whatever kind of work those beings were doing. They used the Four Methods of Gathering Beings In—giving, kind words, beneficial deeds, and similar work.

1. Giving: When among sentient beings, they help them out and let them have the advantages.
2. Kind words: They use pleasant words that beings like to hear.
3. Beneficial deeds: They share their benefits with beings.
4. Similar work: They do the same things that beings do.

Sutra:

**They were able to unite and uphold limitless dharmas on a vast scale, amassing an ocean of dharmas. They turned the irreversible wheel with eloquence and skill-in-means.**
Commentary:

They were able to unite and uphold limitless dharmas on a vast scale. These Bodhisattvas were able to “unite all dharmas and hold limitless meanings” on an immense scale, amassing an ocean of dharmas. They gathered all the 84,000 dharma doors into a single body, and that single body could pervasively practice all 84,000 dharmas. They turned the irreversible Dharma wheel with eloquence and skill-in-means. They went forward in cultivation without ever turning back.

Sutra:

**They physically embodied the great ocean of meritorious virtues of all the Thus Come Ones. In accordance with their vows, they went to all lands where Buddhas were present. Throughout limitlessly many preceding eons they had made offerings to all Buddhas with tireless delight.**

Commentary:

They physically embodied the great ocean of meritorious virtues of all the Thus Come Ones. The ocean of all the Buddhas’ meritorious virtues were embodied by each of those Bodhisattvas. In accordance with their vows, they went to all lands in the ten directions where Buddhas were present. By the power of their vows, these Bodhisattvas were able to be reborn in whichever Buddhaland they wished. Throughout limitlessly many preceding eons they had made offerings to all Buddhas with tireless delight. Infinitely many eons ago, so many that they cannot be verbally expressed, these Bodhisattvas had joyfully made offerings to and praised the Buddhas without fatigue. They never said, “I’m tired of studying the Buddhadharma,” or became bored with it.

Sutra:

**They always dwelled in the bodhimandas of the Thus Come Ones, drawing near to them and never renouncing them. By means of the attainment of Universal Worthy’s ocean of vows, they constantly enabled all sentient beings to perfect the wisdom body. The Bodhisattvas had accomplished such measureless, meritorious virtues as these.**

Commentary:

They always dwelled in the bodhimandas of the Thus Come Ones, that is, the places where the Buddhas had become enlightened and had realized Buddhahood. These Bodhisattvas came to each and every Buddha’s place of enlightenment,  drawing near them and never renouncing them. They never left the Buddhas, but stayed to act as the influential assembly, as the assembly for whom the Buddha spoke the Dharma, as the Dharma protecting assembly, as the assembly that made offerings, as the assembly that requested Dharma, as the assembly that always followed the Buddha, as the assembly that represented the Dharma, as the assembly that realized the Dharma, and as the assembly that revealed the Dharma. By means of the attainment of Universal Worthy’s ocean of great practices and vows, they constantly enabled all sentient beings to perfect the wisdom body. The Bodhisattvas had accomplished such measureless, meritorious virtues as these.

**VI.2 The Oceanic Multitudes Gather Like Clouds

B. The Spirits

1. Vajra-wielding Spirits**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were Vajra-wielding Spirits as numerous as motes of dust in Buddhaworlds.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were Vajra-wielding Spirits as numerous as motes of dust in Buddhaworlds. There were countlessly many of these good Dharma-protecting spirits in the bodhimanda as well. They protected the bodhimanda and subdued demon armies. Lay Buddhists are also Dharma protectors. Their responsibility is to protect and support the Triple Jewel, to draw near and make offerings to it. As Dharma protectors, they must not destroy or slander the Triple Jewel. They cannot come to the bodhimanda and find fault with everything, causing trouble and spreading gossip in a place that was originally free of trouble and gossip.

Sutra:

**Specifically, they were: Vajra-wielding Spirit Wondrous Narayana Physique; Vajra-wielding Spirit Banner as Swift as the Sun.**
Commentary:

Specifically, they were: Vajra-wielding Spirit Wondrous Narayana Physique. Upon seeing how indestructible the Thirty-two Hallmarks and Eighty Subsidiary Characteristics of the Thus Come Ones are, this spirit also achieved that indestructibility himself. Therefore he is called “Narayana,” a Sanskrit word that means “solid and durable”—indestructible.

Vajra-wielding Spirit Banner as Swift as the Sun observed how the Buddha’s brilliance is like the sun. He swiftly achieved the adornment of a Dharma banner.

Sutra:

**Vajra-wielding Spirit Flower Light of Mount Sumeru; Vajra-wielding Spirit Pure Thundercloud; Vajra-wielding Spirit Splendid Faculties; Vajra-wielding Spirit Delightful Brightness; Vajra-wielding Spirit Great Tree Thunderclap; Vajra-wielding Spirit Brilliant Lion King; Vajra-wielding Spirit Covert Blazing Spectacular Eyes; and Vajra-wielding Spirit Radiant Lotus Jeweled Topknot. These and others acted as leaders, and they were as many as motes of dust in Buddhaworlds.**
Commentary:

Vajra-wielding Spirit Flower Light of Mount Sumeru. Sumeru is a Sanskrit word that means “wonderfully high.” Flower light refers to radiance emanated from lotus flowers.

Also present were Vajra-wielding Spirit Pure Thundercloud, and Vajra-wielding Spirit Splendid Faculties. This spirit’s eyes were particularly beautiful, his ears were attractive, his nose was handsome, his tongue was lovely, and his whole body was radiant and adorned with the special hallmarks. His eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body were all extremely fine, hence his name, Splendid Faculties.

There was another Dharma-protecting spirit named Vajra-wielding Spirit Delightful Brightness, who inspired delight in anyone who saw him and also emanated light. There was also Vajra-wielding Spirit Great Tree Thunderclap, who has a voice like booming thunder.

Another Vajra-wielding Spirit was named Brilliant Lion King. There was also another Vajra-wielding Spirit called Covert Blazing Spectacular Eyes. This spirit’s eyes were excellent. And there was another Vajra-wielding Spirit by the name of Radiant Lotus Jeweled Topknot. These and others acted as leaders among the Vajra-wielding Spirits. And if we were to talk about them in detail, they were as many as motes of dust in Buddhaworlds. There would be no way to finish discussing them all.

Sutra:

**They all had constantly made great vows throughout limitless eons in the past, vowing that they would always draw near to and make offerings to all Buddhas. They had practiced according to their vows and had already fulfilled them, arriving at the other shore.

They had amassed boundless, pure blessings through their deeds and had thoroughly fathomed the states of practice of all samadhis. They had attained spiritual powers and dwelt together with the Thus Come Ones.**

Commentary:

They all had constantly made great vows throughout limitless eons in the past, vowing that they would always draw near to and make offerings to all Buddhas. These Vajra-wielding Spirits wanted to be with the Buddhas all the time, and so they vowed that wherever the Buddhas went, they would also go and would draw near to them, study with them, and make offerings to them. Having made those great vows, they had practiced according to their vows and had already fulfilled them. They had perfected their cultivation based upon their many great vows, thereby arriving at the other shore.

They had amassed boundless, pure blessings through their deeds and had thoroughly fathomed the states of practice of all dhyana samadhis. They completely understood all the various states corresponding to each of the different types of samadhis without obstruction.

They had attained spiritual powers and dwelt together with the Thus Come Ones. They always stayed together with the Buddhas and protected and supported the Triple Jewel.

Sutra:

**They had entered a state of inconceivable liberation. Amidst the assembly, their awesome light was especially penetrating. They manifested appropriate bodies to tame all sentient beings.**
Commentary:

They had entered a state of inconceivable liberation. These Vajra-wielding Spirits who dwelt with the Buddhas had attained a state beyond conceptualization. Amidst the assembly, their awesome light was especially penetrating. Their awesome spiritual light was very unusual, not at all like that of ordinary Vajra-wielding Spirits. They manifested appropriate bodies to tame all sentient beings, taking them across. At the sight of these Vajra-wielding spirits, beings were inspired to seek enlightenment.

Sutra:

They appeared in all places that have been conjured up by the Buddhas, diligently guarding and protecting the dwellings of the Thus Come Ones.

Commentary:

They appeared in all places that have been conjured up by the Buddhas. Since those Vajra-wielding Spirits had made vows to protect the Dharma, they acted according to their vows and appeared by transformation in the lands created by all the Buddhas, diligently guarding and protecting the dwellings of the Thus Come Ones. These good Dharma-protecting spirits diligently protected the Buddhas at every moment.

**2. Multi-bodied Spirits**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were Multi-bodied Spirits as numerous as motes of dust in Buddhaworlds. Specifically, they were: Multi-bodied Spirit Cowl Adorned with Pure Flowers; Multi-bodied Spirit Light Illumining the ten directions; Multi-bodied Spirit Taming and Subduing with an Ocean-like Sound; Multi-bodied Spirit Cowl Adorned with Pure Flowers; Multi-bodied Spirit Limitless Aspects of Awesome Comportment; Multi-bodied Spirit Supreme Light Adornment; Multi-bodied Spirit Pure Light and Clouds of Fragrance; Multi-bodied Spirit Protecting and Gathering In; Multi-bodied Spirit Universally Manifesting to Gather In; and Multi-bodied Spirit Unmoving Radiance. These and others acted as leaders, and they were as numerous as motes of dust in Buddhaworlds. In the past, they all had fulfilled great vows to make offerings to and attend upon each and every Buddha.**
Commentary:

Moreover, there were Multi-bodied Spirits as numerous as motes of dust in limitless Buddhaworlds. Specifically, they were: Multi-bodied Spirit Cowl Adorned with Pure Flowers, who adorns her jeweled cowl with flowers. Multi-bodied Spirit Light Illumining the ten directions. “Multi-bodied Spirit” means there isn’t just one such spirit. Each one of them brought along measureless retinues to protect and support the Buddhas’ bodhimandas.

The sound of Multi-bodied Spirit Taming with an Ocean-like Sound is like that of the ocean at high tide; when sentient beings hear that sound, they change from being bad to being good, and resolve to seek enlightenment. Multi-bodied Spirit Cowl Adorned with Pure Flowers has a jeweled cowl adorned with pure lotus flowers. She has many other spirits of the same type in her retinue.

Multi-bodied Spirit Limitless Aspects of Awesome Comportment. Whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, this spirit has impeccable deportment and accords with the rules. There is another spirit named Multi-bodied Spirit Supreme Light Adornment. Multi-bodied Spirit Pure Light and Clouds of Fragrance is not only extremely pure, but also emanates light and auspicious clouds of fragrance. Multi-bodied Spirit Protecting and Gathering In is so named because she guards the bodhimanda and gathers in sentient beings, helping them to renounce evil and turn towards wholesomeness, to reform and renew themselves. Multi-bodied Spirit Universally Manifesting to Gather In appears before all beings and brings them into her fold, causing them to aspire to reach enlightenment. And Multi-bodied Spirit Unmoving Radiance has samadhi power, which enables her to be unmoving.

These and others acted as leaders. These ten Multi-bodied Spirits acted as the leaders among the Multi-bodied Spirits. And they were as numerous as motes of dust in Buddha-worlds. In the past, they all had made and fulfilled great vows to make offerings to and attend upon each and every Buddha. With utmost respect, they served all Buddhas.

**3. Spirits of Foot Travel**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were Spirits of Foot Travel as numerous as motes of dust in Buddhaworlds. Specifically, they were: Spirit of Foot Travel Jeweled Seal Hand; Spirit of Foot Travel Lotus Light; Spirit of Foot Travel Pure Floral Cowl; Spirit of Foot Travel Good Looks Gathering in All; Spirit of Foot Travel Star Banner of Wondrous Jewels; Spirit of Foot Travel Gladly Emitting Wondrous Sounds; Spirit of Foot Travel Radiant Candana Tree; Spirit of Foot Travel Lotus Brilliance; Spirit of Foot Travel Subtle Radiance; and Spirit of Foot Travel Amassing Wonderful Flowers. These and others acted as leaders, and they were as numerous as motes of dust in Buddhaworlds. All of them had drawn near to the Thus Come Ones and faithfully followed them during limitless eons in the past.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were Spirits of Foot Travel as numerous as motes of dust in Buddhaworlds. These spirits guard paths and walkways, and there were also a great many of them.

Specifically, they were: Spirit of Foot Travel Precious Seal Hand. In her hand, this Dharma-protecting spirit always holds a precious seal to protect sentient beings. Spirit of Foot Travel Lotus Light has a shining flower. Spirit of Foot Travel Pure Floral Cowl has a pure flower cowl. When sentient beings see Spirit of Foot Travel Good Looks Gathering in All, she can gather them in and lead them to make the resolve to seek enlightenment. There is another Spirit of Foot Travel named Star Banner of Wondrous Jewels. Spirit of Foot Travel Gladly Emitting Wondrous Sounds is so named because she is talented in singing. There were also spirits named Spirit of Foot Travel Radiant Candana Tree, Spirit of Foot Travel Lotus Brilliance, and Spirit of Foot Travel Subtle Radiance, whose light is subtle and inconceivable. And there was one Spirit of Foot Travel named Amassing Wonderful Flowers, who collected all kinds of wonderful blossoms. These and others acted as leaders among the Spirits of Foot Travel, and they were as numerous as motes of dust in Buddhaworlds. All of them had drawn near to the Thus Come Ones and faithfully followed them during limitless eons in the past. They drew near to and made offerings to all Buddhas. They cultivated under the Buddhas and never wished to leave them and go somewhere else.

**4. Bodhimanda Spirits**

Sutra:

Moreover, there were Bodhimanda Spirits as numerous as motes of dust in Buddhaworlds. Specifically, they were: Bodhimanda Spirit Banner of Pure Adornment; Bodhimanda Spirit Sumeru Jeweled Brilliance; Bodhimanda Spirit Thunderclap and Banner-like Characteristics; Bodhimanda Spirit Raining Down Flowers Wondrous Eyes; Bodhimanda Spirit Flower Garlands Bright Cowl; Bodhimanda Spirit Raining Down Jeweled Ornaments; Bodhimanda Spirit Heroic Fragrance and Vision; Bodhimanda Spirit Vajra-Colored Cloud; Bodhimanda Spirit Lotus Flower Brilliance; and Bodhimanda Spirit Dazzling Wondrous Light. These and others acted as leaders, and they were as numerous as motes of dust in Buddhaworlds. In the past, they all had met limitlessly many Buddhas and had fulfilled their vows to make vast offerings to them.

Commentary:

Moreover, there were Bodhimanda Spirits as numerous as motes of dust in Buddhaworlds. These spirits guard bodhimandas, or Áranyas, “still and quiet places” where people cultivate. These are benevolent spirits that protect the Dharma.

Specifically, they were: Bodhimanda Spirit Banner of Pure Adornment, who guards the bodhimanda so that it is pure and adorned. Bodhimanda Spirit Sumeru Jeweled Brilliance emits an extremely wonderful and precious light. Any bodhimanda under her protection always radiates a precious light. There was another Bodhimanda Spirit named Thunderclap and Banner-like Characteristics. Her voice sounds like booming thunder; her hallmarks and characteristics resemble a precious banner. There was also Bodhimanda Spirit Raining Down Flowers Wondrous Eyes, who regularly rains down cascades of jeweled flowers and has wonderful eyes. Another Bodhimanda Spirit named Flower Garlands Bright Cowl holds wreaths of flowers. Bodhimanda Spirit Raining Down Jeweled Ornaments constantly rains down the seven treasures to beautify the bodhimanda. Bodhimanda Spirit Heroic Fragrance and Vision is good at subduing demons. The Bodhimanda Spirit named Vajra-Colored Cloud also subdues demons. Another Bodhimanda Spirit by the name of Lotus Flower Brilliance often displays lotus blossoms and emits light. And there was also Bodhimanda Spirit Dazzling Wondrous Light, who constantly illuminates space with her beautiful light.

These ten Bodhimanda Spirits mentioned above and others acted as leaders of all the Bodhimanda Spirits. And they were as numerous as motes of dust in Buddhaworlds. In the past, they all had met limitlessly many Buddhas and had fulfilled their vows to make vast offerings to them. They had vowed to make offerings to the Buddhas of the ten directions. Those spirits were not just spirits, they were provisional manifestations of great Bodhisattvas. Therefore their spiritual powers were inconceivable, the power of their vows was inconceivable, and their ability to protect the Dharma was also inconceivable.

In the Flower Adornment Sutra, the spirits are always discussed in groups of ten. That is because ten tens are a hundred, ten hundreds are a thousand, ten thousands are ten thousand, ten ten thousands are a hundred thousand, all the way to millions and billions and so forth. Since it’s too cumbersome to enumerate millions and billions of spirits, the sutra simply gives ten representatives.

However, there are actually three versions of the Flower Adornment Sutra. We are now studying the third version, the shortest of the three. In the first version, ten thousand representatives are listed for each type of spirit, representing endlessly multi-layered infinity. Although I have not personally gone to the Dragon Palace where the first version of the sutra is stored, I’ve deduced that since the spirits are given in groups of ten in the last version, they must be given in groups of ten thousand in the first version—otherwise, how could the first version be as long as it is? Since we ordinary people cannot remember the names of that many spirits, only ten representatives of each type of spirit are given. Everyone should be aware of this.

**5. City-ruling Spirits**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were City-ruling Spirits as numerous as motes of dust in all Buddhaworlds. Specifically, they were: City-ruling Spirit Jeweled Peak Illumination; City-ruling Spirit Wondrously Adorning Palaces; City-ruling Spirit Pure Jewels of Joy; City-ruling Spirit Pure and Free from Worry; City-ruling Spirit Flower Lamps and Blazing Eyes; City-ruling Spirit Clear Manifestation of Blazing Banners; City-ruling Spirit Flourishing Blessings Brightness; City-ruling Spirit Pure Radiance; City-ruling Spirit Fragrant Cowl Adornment; and City-ruling Spirit Wondrous Jeweled Light. These and others acted as leaders, and they were as numerous as motes of dust in all Buddhaworlds. They all had adorned and purified the palaces in which the Thus Come Ones dwelt throughout limitlessly and inconceivably many eons.**
Commentary:

The preceding passages of the Sutra concerned Spirits of Foot Travel, Multi-bodied Spirits, and bodhimanda-protecting spirits. All of these spirits, in eons past, drew near to all the Buddhas, studied under them, and never left them. Although they are spirits in name, they are actually great Bodhisattvas manifesting as various types of spirits.

Moreover, there were City-ruling Spirits as numerous as motes of dust in all Buddhaworlds. City-ruling Spirits protect the walls and moats of cities, because many people with good roots dwell within the cities.

Specifically, they were: City-ruling Spirit Jeweled Peak Illumination. Through the miraculous functioning of his spiritual powers, he constantly emits a dazzling light. This spirit holds a very prominent position among the multitudes of spirits. There is another City-ruling Spirit named Wondrously Adorning Palaces. She can make all palaces especially adorned and wonderful. City-ruling Spirit Pure Jewels of Joy emits a pure light containing the colors of the seven treasures, and anyone who sees that light is filled with joy.

Another City-ruling Spirit is named Pure and Free from Worry. In the cities under this spirit’s protection, the citizens are free from worry, grief, suffering, and vexation and are able to attain purity. City-ruling Spirit Flower Lamps and Blazing Eyes stands with her feet on lotus daises, holds a lamp in her hands, and emits a flame-like blaze from her eyes. As a City-ruling Spirit, she watches over the inhabitants of cities, making sure they are peaceful and safe from calamities. That is the responsibility of a City-ruling Spirit.

City-ruling Spirit Clear Manifestation of Blazing Banners emits a fiery blaze from the top of her head, which is as clearly apparent as a jeweled banner and very bright. Therefore, as soon as the celestial demons and externalists see this City-ruling Spirit’s blazing light, they flee in terror.

City-ruling Spirit Flourishing Blessings Brightness. She has tremendous blessings and a constant radiance about her. Therefore, anyone who sees her gains blessings, wisdom, and longevity. City-ruling Spirit Pure Radiance always sends out pristine light that is completely undefiled. This is described in a verse in the [“Universal Door Chapter”](http://cttbusa.org/lotus/lotus25.asp) of the Dharma Flower Sutra:

Undefiled pure light,
The sun of wisdom that breaks through the darkness
Is able to quell calamities of wind and fire
As it universally shines on all worlds.

This type of clear, pure light of wisdom, comparable to the sun’s radiance, disperses all darkness. It overcomes all disasters and shines pervasively in all worlds. That is the meaning of the name of this City-ruling Spirit. The jeweled cowl of City-ruling Spirit Fragrant Cowl Adornment emits a fragrance. Sentient beings smell it and naturally become immune to disasters. And City-ruling Spirit Wondrous Jeweled Light. Her subtle and wonderful precious pearl sends forth light.

These and others acted as leaders. The above-mentioned spirits were the leaders of the City-ruling Spirits, and they were as numerous as motes of dust in all Buddhaworlds in the ten directions. They all had adorned and purified the palaces in which the Thus Come Ones dwelt throughout limitlessly and inconceivably many eons. The job of City-ruling Spirits is to make sure at all times that everything runs smoothly and that the palaces where the Thus Come Ones stay are particularly magnificent and pure. That is their work.

Some of us who cultivate and study the Buddhadharma may study for two-and-a-half, not even three days, and then get tired. We feel that the Buddhadharma does not have much meaning. That is a mistaken conclusion. Buddhism is not something that you can understand in two or three days. The Buddhadharma is as deep as the ocean. You can study for ten or twenty years, or even an entire lifetime, and you still won’t finish studying it. Sãkyamuni Buddha, in his quest for the Supreme Way, practiced for three great asamkhyeyas of eons before he realized Buddhahood. Therefore, we must be vigorous every day and not retreat.

6. Earth-ruling Spirits

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were Earth-ruling Spirits as numerous as motes of dust in all Buddhaworlds. Specifically, they were: Earth-ruling Spirit Pure Flower of Universal Virtue; Earth-ruling Spirit Solid Blessings and Adornment; Earth-ruling Spirit Wondrous Flowers Ornamenting Trees; Earth-ruling Spirit Universally Scattering the Myriad Gems; Earth-ruling Spirit Pure Eyes Contemplating Time; Earth-ruling Spirit Wondrous Forms and Supreme Eyes; Earth-ruling Spirit Fragrant Shining Hairs; Earth-ruling Spirit Delightful Sounds; Earth-ruling Spirit Topknot of Exquisite Flowers; and Earth-ruling Spirit Body Adorned with Vajra. These and others acted as leaders, and they were as numerous as motes of dust in all Buddhaworlds. They had all made deep, impressive vows to always draw near all Buddhas in order to cultivate blessings through their deeds.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were Earth-ruling Spirits as numerous as motes of dust in all Buddhaworlds. This section concerns Earth-ruling Spirits. Our world is inhabited by a great variety of spirits. Some people think that there is only one spirit, namely, God. They don’t realize that there are many spirits. They maintain that there is only one spirit, but they don’t know. If they really knew, they wouldn’t insist that there is only one spirit. Since they don’t know, they speculate and say, “There is only one God. There couldn’t be more. If there were more gods, they would fight over territory. And so God must be the one and only ruler of Heaven.” However, as we investigate the Flower Adornment Sutra, we find out that not only are there heavenly lords, there are also lords of the earth—Earth-ruling Spirits. And there is not only one Earth-ruling Spirit, they are as many as motes of dust.

Moreover, there were Earth-ruling Spirits as numerous as motes of dust in all Buddhaworlds throughout the ten directions. These spirits were limitless in number, but the text mentions ten of them, who acted as the leaders of their assemblies. Specifically, they were: Earth-ruling Spirit Pure Flower of Universal Virtue. This spirit has arrived at our mention of her name. She says, “I’m Earth-ruling Spirit Pure Flower of Universal Virtue. Do you recognize me?” Then she shines her light upon you to create affinities with you. Earth-ruling Spirit Solid Blessings and Adornment. Once you have seen this spirit, your blessings will be solid, indestructible, and adorned. Each of these spirits will show up as we mention their names.

The wondrous lotuses of Earth-ruling Spirit Wondrous Flowers Ornamenting Trees adorn the Bodhi tree. Earth-ruling Spirit Universally Scattering the Myriad Gems disperses the seven treasures—gold, silver, vaidurrya, crystal, mother-of-pearl,  red pearls, and carnelian—and a great many other precious substances. People in the world like to prospect and excavate gold, silver, and other precious metals and gems. These metals and gems come from this earth spirit. She scatters gems on the earth the way we scatter grain to feed little chicks. When the grain falls, all the little chicks gather around to eat it. In the same way, people are drawn to precious metals and proceed to mine them. The only difference in the analogy is that the little chicks can eat what they find directly, but people have to sell the metals and gems and get money to buy the things they consume—rice, noodles, meat, and wine. Only the method is different.

Earth-ruling Spirits hold our earth together so that earthquakes do not totally devastate it, and so that people and their property are not totally destroyed. Why, then, do some places have earthquakes? It is because the people there have such heavy karmic obstacles that the Earth-ruling Spirits’ spiritual powers are not sufficient to counteract them.

I often tell you that since we are lecturing on the sutras and speaking the Dharma, San Francisco certainly won’t have a major earthquake. I started saying this five or six years ago [in 1968], and it still holds true. That’s because when we lecture on the sutras, not one, but all the Earth-ruling Spirits come to protect the bodhimanda. They have all assembled here, and so the earth is as solid as vajra. If you want to prevent the occurrence of earthquakes, you should go everywhere explaining the Flower Adornment Sutra. Wherever the sutra is being lectured, the earth will be safe and secure. This is the absolute truth without the slightest bit of falseness.

Earth-ruling Spirit Pure Eyes Contemplating Time has pure, lotus-like eyes with which she contemplates the time, that is, the causes and conditions, in order to avert disasters. Earth-ruling Spirit Wondrous Forms and Supreme Eyes causes grass, plants, and trees to grow on the earth, making it beautiful so that everyone is delighted by the sight of the landscape.

Many varieties of scented grass and other plants that emit fragrance grow in the area overseen by Earth-ruling Spirit Fragrant Shining Hairs. This Earth-ruling Spirit can also emit light. The sounds that Earth-ruling Spirit Delightful Sounds makes are as enjoyable as the melodious sounds of the white cranes, peacocks, parrots, egrets, kalavinkas, and two-headed birds in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. People are delighted to hear these sounds, and they start to smile even if they felt like crying before.

“Sometimes I feel like crying. How come I’ve never heard these sounds that cause you to start smiling?” you may ask. Your causes and conditions aren’t ripe yet. When they ripen, you will hear these kinds of sounds. Don’t be impatient. If you have faith, you will be able to hear them sooner or later.

Earth-ruling Spirit Topknot of Exquisite Flowers has lovely lotus blossoms arranged in a circular fashion on top of her head forming a jeweled topknot. And Earth-ruling Spirit Body Adorned with Vajra is also known as the Earth Spirit Firm and Solid. She adorns her body with vajra, and no celestial demon or externalist can harm her. She’s a very tough Earth-ruling Spirit.

These and others acted as leaders. These ten Earth-ruling Spirits are the leaders of the infinite multitudes of Earth-ruling Spirits. And they were as numerous as motes of dust in all Buddhaworlds. They had all made deep, impressive vows. They vowed, “In the future we must protect the Triple Jewel, acting as Dharma-protecting good spirits for all the Buddhas. Wherever there are bodhimandas and disciples of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, or Arhats, we will protect all of them. We vow to do what others cannot do; we will endure what others cannot endure, and yield what others cannot yield. We will make deep and mighty vows such as those, so that there is nothing as solid and profound as these vows.”

Some of you have studied the Buddhadharma for many years, but you seem to have forgotten your resolve for the Way. In the beginning when you first heard the Buddhadharma, you were very sincere. You were extremely reverent in listening to the sutras. But as time passes, you are no longer sincere or enthusiastic. You say, “We study the same thing over and over again.” Well, what do you want to study? Because you haven’t yet understood this, you have to keep studying it. After you understand, you won’t have to study it anymore. But to think you understand when you don’t is very foolish. Before you have attained the fruition of sagehood, you must study the Buddhadharma. Before you have realized Buddhahood, you must cultivate. Cultivating means “diligently cultivating precepts, samadhi, and wisdom and putting an end to greed, anger, and delusion.” Every day you must look within and examine your own faults; don’t find fault with others. Don’t be like a mirror that only reflects externals, thinking, “This Bhikshu doesn’t cultivate; that Bhikshuni doesn’t practice either. Who knows what they do from morning to night?” You manage to wash the clothes of the Bhikshus and Bhikshunis until they are sparkling clean, but your own clothes are still dirty. You don’t know how to wash your own dirty laundry. You say, “But I want to practice the Bodhisattva path. I want to help others do their laundry, so I haven’t bothered to do my own.” Well, if you don’t pay attention to your own laundry, you’ll become filthy. You should first wash your own laundry—benefit yourself, and then you can proceed to help others do their laundry—benefit others. But if you only know how to benefit others and forget to benefit yourself, you are rather deluded. People like that are pitiful.

Having told you not to discuss the faults of the fourfold assembly, I now say: You should discuss the faults of the fourfold assembly. However, there’s a different way to go about it. How? You should be very frank and sincere, and your motive should be to exhort others to correct their faults and become good. Your attitude should be, “That person’s faults are just my own, and therefore I should tell him about his faults in a very candid, straightforward, and earnest way. I should say, ‘You’ve done such and such a thing wrong. In the future you should be more careful.’” That’s okay. But you shouldn’t speak about people’s faults behind their backs, causing discord. It would be wrong to tell A about B’s faults and then tell B about A’s faults, always trying to create factions where people listen to your words. If someone has faults, you should very kindly tell him to his face, exhorting him to change so that in the future he will get rid of those faults. You should not talk behind his back and complain, upsetting everyone. That would be disrupting the bodhimanda and creating schisms. Anyone who has this problem should change. Otherwise, you are headed for the hells—there is no other outcome.

These Earth-ruling Spirits had made deep and mighty vows to always draw near all Buddhas, Thus Come Ones, as well as to Bodhisattvas, Arhats, and sages, in order to cultivate blessings through their deeds. They wanted to cultivate blessings and wisdom. Cultivation of blessings brings about the adornment of marks and characteristics. Cultivation of wisdom gets rid of delusion. Why are we deluded? Because we haven’t cultivated blessings and wisdom. Why are we poor? Because we haven’t cultivated blessings and wisdom. I am using my true mind to speak true Dharma for you. If you can accept the true Dharma, you will truly be able to cultivate. Therefore, you must be sincere. Don’t engage in fault-finding. It is extremely foolish to always be finding faults in others.

Cultivators must be courageous and vigorous. Be true cultivators. Every day you should work harder and be more vigorous. Don’t engage in gossiping about rights and wrongs, so that day after day you grow more and more lax and retreat. That would be very dangerous.

**7. Mountain-ruling Spirits**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Mountain-ruling Spirits. Specifically, they were: Mountain-ruling Spirit Blooming Jeweled Peak; Mountain-ruling Spirit Flower Grove Wondrous Topknot; Mountain-ruling Spirit Lofty Banner Universally Shining; Mountain-ruling Spirit Immaculate Pure Topknot; Mountain-ruling Spirit Light Shining through the Ten Directions; Mountain-ruling Spirit Light of Great Strength; Mountain-ruling Spirit Universally Supreme, Awesome Brilliance; Mountain-ruling Spirit Orb of Subtle, Concentrated Light; Mountain-ruling Spirit Universal Eye Seeing the Manifest; and Mountain-ruling Spirit Secret Vajra Eyes. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Mountain-ruling Spirits, and they all had obtained the pure eye regarding all dharmas.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Mountain-ruling Spirits. Mountain-ruling Spirits rule in mountain areas. According to one legend, mountain spirits are actually tigers. The mountain spirits named here in the Sutra are not tigers. They are manifestations of great Bodhisattvas, who in turn watch over the tigers.

Specifically, they were: Mountain-ruling Spirit Blooming Jeweled Peak. It is as if a mountain peak made up of the seven jewels opened up in an exquisite lotus blossom. Due to this spirit’s cultivation of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, she is adorned with the seven treasures, which form a huge lotus blossom.

Mountain-ruling Spirit Flower Grove Wondrous Topknot. Flower Grove describes a forest of blooming lotuses. Her forest of merit and virtue is full and complete, and she is adorned with a beautiful topknot. The Bodhisattva Mountain-ruling Spirit Lofty Banner Universally Shining looms like a high, prominent jeweled banner, shining on all worlds, saving countless sentient beings. There was another Mountain-ruling Spirit named Mountain-ruling Spirit Immaculate Pure Topknot. All the sentient beings who bask in the light of Mountain-ruling Spirit Light Shining through the Ten Directions bring forth the bodhi resolve and have the opportunity to become Buddhas in the future. Mountain-ruling Spirit Light of Great Strength is the name of another spirit.

The majestic light of Mountain-ruling Spirit Universally Supreme, Awesome Brilliance surpasses that of all other Mountain-ruling Spirits. There were other spirits named Mountain-ruling Spirit Orb of Subtle, Concentrated Light, Mountain-ruling Spirit Universal Eye Seeing the Manifest, and Mountain-ruling Spirit Secret Vajra Eyes. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Mountain-ruling Spirits. There is no way to reckon the number of leaders and all their retinues. And they all had obtained the pure eye in regard to all dharmas. With the eye of purity, they discern and understand all dharmas. They had attained the pure Dharma-selecting eye and the pure wisdom eye. These Mountain-ruling Spirits were actually the inconceivable manifestations of great Bodhisattvas.

Back to our discussion of tigers. Tigers are considered the fiercest of beasts, but there are times when tigers do not bite people and are very kind. Yesterday I called upon the Chinese painter, Upasaka Chang Dai-chien. In the past, the elder brother of Upasaka Chang kept two tigers in his home. The tigers liked to eat meat, and he gave them raw pork. Then one of the tigers got ill and died, and only one tiger remained. This tiger never hurt or bit anybody. It was very tame and well-behaved.

At that time Dharma Master Yinguang was living at Baoguo Monastery in Suzhou. Layman Chang took the tiger to the monastery and asked Dharma Master Yinguang to give it the Three Refuges. The tiger knelt before the Dharma Master to receive the Refuges. Dharma Master Yinguang spoke Dharma to it for two hours, during which time the tiger knelt before him without budging an inch. Zhang Daqian thought this was very unusual. If the tiger did not possess the Buddha nature, how could it kneel there for two hours? Dharma Master Yinguang was a native of Shanxi Province and spoke with a Shanxi accent, which the tiger seemed to understand. Dharma Master Yinguang instructed the tiger’s owner to first feed it raw meat, then gradually change to half-cooked meat, and then feed it cooked meat, and then steamed buns and rice, thus weaning the tiger off meat and making it eat vegetarian food. It is not known whether the tiger liked being vegetarian.

Afterwards, the Japanese attacked China and occupied Suzhou. At that time, a nephew of Chang Dai-chien took care of the tiger. When the Japanese came, the nephew ran off either to Shanghai or to Lingyan Mountain. The tiger was kept in an iron cage that weighed about a ton. The nephew left thirty pounds of meat in the cage and then left, thinking that the meat would suffice to feed the tiger for three days, after which he planned to come back. However, he did not return after those three days. Eventually, this tiger who had taken refuge with the Triple Jewel starved to death in his cage. Its starvation was probably due to some heavy karmic offenses from the past. Layman Chang told me this story yesterday. Some people say that tigers are mountain spirits. This tiger, however, starved to death during the Japanese occupation.

**8. Forest-ruling Spirits**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there was an inconceivable number of Forest-ruling Spirits.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there was an inconceivable number of Forest-ruling Spirits. The previous passage listed Mountain-ruling Spirits. Mountains are not forests; forests, however, may be found on mountains. There are also forests and groves on level ground, as well as in valleys. If you plant many trees in a level area, a forest or grove can develop there. This is an analogy for the Bodhisattvas: There are so many Bodhisattvas that they are like a forest. Their number is inconceivable. Don’t even try to think about how many there are, because the number is beyond conception.

These spirits watch over forests and groves. Every forest has a spirit presiding over it. Why is that? Forests do not run away, so why should spirits watch over them? It’s because many ghosts inhabit the forests. Large trees are called “villages of ghosts and spirits.” Since there are ghosts, there have to be spirits who watch over the ghosts, making sure that they don’t trouble people by making them sick and so forth.

There are also fruits that grow in the forests. If the Fruit Monk [the nickname of Elder Master Guangqin] went into the forest and ate some of the fruit, and the ghosts had spat poison on the fruit, then the Fruit Monk would be poisoned. Therefore, spirits have to watch over the fruit. If any of the ghosts tried to spread some of their poison, the spirits would glare at them and say, “Don’t harm people!” And then the ghosts would behave themselves. Wouldn’t you say this was right? And so, although forests cannot run away, nonetheless, there still need to be spirits watching over them.

Sutra:

**Specifically, they were: Forest-ruling Spirit Spreading Flowers Like Clouds; Forest-ruling Spirit Helping Trunks Grow Tall and Pouring Forth Light; Forest-ruling Spirit Producing Sprouts and Emitting Radiance; Forest-ruling Spirit Auspicious Pure Leaves; Forest-ruling Spirit Overhanging Resplendent Treasury; Forest-ruling Spirit Pure Radiance; Forest-ruling Spirit Delightful Thunder Sound; Forest-ruling Spirit Pervasive Glow and Perfume; Forest-ruling Spirit Wondrous Light Unique and Sparkling; and Forest-ruling Spirit Luster and Flavor of Flowers and Fruits. These and others acted as leaders of an inconceivable number of Forest-ruling Spirits, and they all had limitless, delightful, bright light.**

Commentary:

Specifically, they were: Forest-ruling Spirit Spreading Flowers Like Clouds; Forest-ruling Spirit Helping Trunks Grow Tall and Pouring Forth Light; Forest-ruling Spirit Producing Sprouts and Emitting Radiance. Forest-ruling Spirit Auspicious Pure Leaves makes any forest she watches over auspicious. All the leaves are clean and pure, and there are no bugs in the trees. The atmosphere is auspicious at all times.

Forest-ruling Spirit Overhanging Resplendent Treasury. The trees in the forest under this spirit’s protection have foliage so thick that it hangs down like an umbrella. The trees glow brightly and look like blazing treasuries. The forest that Forest-ruling Spirit Pure Radiance watches over is immaculate and shines constantly. Sentient beings who see the forest that Forest-ruling Spirit Delightful Thunder Sound watches over are all delighted. Her awesome virtue and her voice resemble booming thunder. The glow and fragrance of Forest-ruling Spirit Pervasive Glow and Perfume pervade all places. The wondrous light of Forest-ruling Spirit Wondrous Light Unique and Sparkling is completely different from ordinary kinds of light. Her light illuminates the world. And Forest-ruling Spirit Luster and Flavor of Flowers and Fruits rules over all flowers and fruits; her fruits have a fragrant aroma. Anyone who enters her forest is struck by the pervasive rare fragrance and the abundance of fragrant flowers.

These ten Forest-ruling Spirits mentioned above and others acted as leaders of an inconceivable number of Forest-ruling Spirits, most of whom are not mentioned here, and they all had limitless, delightful, bright light. These were all great Bodhisattvas who had come to practice the Bodhisattva Way as Forest-ruling Spirits.

**9. Medicine-ruling Spirits**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Medicine-ruling Spirits. Specifically, they were: Medicine-ruling Spirit Auspicious; Medicine-ruling Spirit Candana Forest; Medicine-ruling Spirit Pristine Radiance; Medicine-ruling Spirit Universal Renown; Medicine-ruling Spirit Shining Pores; Medicine-ruling Spirit Pervasive Healing and Purifying; Medicine-ruling Spirit Roaring Loudly; Medicine-ruling Spirit Banner of Light Eclipsing the Sun; Medicine-ruling Spirit Clear Vision of the Ten Directions; and Medicine-ruling Spirit Replenishing Energy and Brightening the Eyes. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Medicine-ruling Spirits, and their natures were free from defilement. They graced all creatures with kindness.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Medicine-ruling Spirits. These spirits were lords over medicinal herbs. Herbs can cure illness, and there are spirits in charge of them. Each kind of herb can cure specific illnesses. How many kinds of herbs are there? There are infinitely many medicinal herbs in this world, and so there is an infinite number of Medicine-ruling Spirits. Specific herbs are used to treat specific illnesses.

Sicknesses related to heat should be treated with medicines with cooling properties. Sicknesses related to cold should be treated with medicines with warming properties. For sicknesses that are neither caused by heat nor by cold, a temperate medicine must be used. Natural medicines can be divided into the categories of cold, hot, temperate, and neutral. Doctors must know the properties of medicines; otherwise they will not be successful in curing illness.

In the medical treatise, “Properties of Natural Medicines” [Yaoxingfu], there are these lines:

“Among all the various medicines, these are endowed with the coldest property. Rhinoceros horn [xijiao] can alleviate heat in the heart. Antelope horn clears up the lungs and liver. Zhaixie is a diuretic, helping one to pass water and bolster the yin fluids. Haizhao can cure sores and hernia.”

Those are extremely cooling medicines. There are also many kinds of natural medicines with warming properties, as well as those that are temperate and neutral. Each of these medicines can cure different kinds of illness.

Specifically, they were: Medicine-ruling Spirit Auspicious. An example of auspicious medicine is licorice, which is a cure for all illnesses, especially those involving toxins. It’s said, “Licorice blends with all kinds of medicines and neutralizes the hundred kinds of poison.” It certainly could be considered auspicious. This Medicine-ruling Spirit is probably in charge of licorice and other related medicines.

Medicine-ruling Spirit Candana Forest. Candana is sandalwood, a fragrant type of wood. This type of sandalwood can cure pain in the heart. If you have heart pain and you take a little candana, the pain will be relieved.

There were also spirits named Medicine-ruling Spirit Pristine Radiance and Medicine-ruling Spirit Universal Renown. The latter spirit is very well-known. Ginseng is a well-known medicine, and this spirit is probably in charge of ginseng. You might not have seen the ginseng root before. It is called ginseng [renseng, literally, “human essence”] because the root resembles a child. Replete with arms and legs, nose and eyes, the ginseng root looks very much like the human body. Roots weighing up to a full seven Chinese ounces are called ginseng. Roots weighing eight Chinese ounces or more are called human gems, renbao. It’s said that those who eat these gems can gain immortality, for they revitalize one’s energy and prolong life. Universal Renown Medicine-ruling Spirit probably rules over ginseng. Medicine-ruling Spirit Shining Pores sends forth light from all her pores. Medicine-ruling Spirit Pervasive Healing and Purifying can cure the myriad illnesses. She purifies sick people’s bodies by dispelling heat and neutralizing poison.

Medicine-ruling Spirit Roaring Loudly gives awesome roars, like those of a lion. She can also cure insanity. Insane people howl and yell wildly, but when she lets out her mighty roar, whoever hears it gets cured of his or her illness.

Medicine-ruling Spirit Banner of Light Eclipsing the Sun is so named because her light surpasses even that of the sun and moon. Medicine-ruling Spirit Clear Vision of the Ten Directions has a translucent body. Medicine-ruling Spirit Replenishing Energy and Brightening the Eyes. Ginseng can replenish energy, and chrysanthemums can brighten the eyes and clear head colds. Chrysanthemums are considered a medicinal herb, and those grown in Hangzhou are known for being the most efficacious in curing illness. If you take Hangzhou chrysanthemums often, you will have bright eyes. Beiqi (also called huangqi) is an herb that bolsters the constitution and replenishes energy.

These ten Medicine-ruling Spirits mentioned above and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Medicine-ruling Spirits, and their natures were free from defilement. They had cultivated to the point where they had no more defilement. They were free of desire. They weren’t selfish and didn’t pursue personal advantage. They graced all creatures with kindness. These spirits are extremely kind and compassionate. They help, protect, and guard all sentient beings. In fact, they are all great Bodhisattvas.

People who cultivate and believe in Buddhism should get rid of the appearance of a self, the view of a self, and the attachment to a self. Don’t always cling to a sense of ego. If you have an ego, then it becomes as high as Mount Sumeru. However, if you get rid of your ego, then Mount Sumeru disappears as well. Whether or not you have the Way, you still eat and sleep. If you have the Way, when you eat you won’t talk; and when you sleep, you won’t engage in false thinking. When it’s time to eat you eat, and when it’s time to sleep you sleep. You don’t think of anything. But if you haven’t attained the Way, then when you eat you don’t get full, and when you go to bed you can’t fall asleep. Why is that? It’s because you engage in false thinking when you go to sleep, and you talk casually when you eat. These problems obstruct your cultivation. Now that I’ve told you, whether or not you believe is your business. However, if you fail to attain the Way, don’t blame me.

**10. Crop-ruling Spirits**

Sutra:

Moreover, there were countless Crop-ruling Spirits. Specifically, they were: Crop-ruling Spirit Tender and Delectable; Crop-ruling Spirit Pure Light of Seasonal Blooms; Crop-ruling Spirit Robust Strength; Crop-ruling Spirit Increasing Essence and Energy; Crop-ruling Spirit Universally Producing Roots and Fruits; Crop-ruling Spirit Wondrously Adorned Circular Cowl; Crop-ruling Spirit Moistening Pure Flowers; Crop-ruling Spirit Accomplishing Wonderful Fragrance; Crop-ruling Spirit Delighting the Beholder; and Crop-ruling Spirit Immaculate Pure Light. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Crop-ruling Spirits, and they all had realized great happiness.

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Crop-ruling Spirits. After the Medicine-ruling Spirits come the Crop-ruling Spirits, of which there is also a limitless and boundless number. These spirits rule over the five grains: rice, sorghum, millet, wheat, and legumes. Every kind of edible crop or grain grown by people is watched over by a separate spirit.

Specifically, they were: Crop-ruling Spirit Tender and Delectable. The grains that she tends are tender and have an outstanding and wonderful taste. The crops that Crop-ruling Spirit Pure Light of Seasonal Blooms takes care of bloom in season and give off a pure light. After people eat the crops that Crop-ruling Spirit Robust Strength tends, they gain a robust body and a strong constitution.

Although the grains and crops we eat help our bodies to be strong and healthy, we have to consume an incredible amount before it can produce a tiny amount of vital energy. The ratio is something like one portion of energy for every ten thousand portions of food, which is quite small. Even so, people carelessly squander and waste their precious energy and breath. What a pity! After people eat the grains over which Crop-ruling Spirit Increasing Essence and Energy presides, they never get sick again.

Crop-ruling Spirit Universally Producing Roots and Fruits. After people eat the grains grown under this spirit’s supervision, their good roots increase and they attain the fruition of Buddhahood. Another Crop-ruling Spirit has the name Wondrously Adorned Circular Cowl. After people eat the grains tended by Crop-ruling Spirit Moistening Pure Flowers, their skin becomes moist and soft, as beautiful as lotuses.

The grains grown under the care of Crop-ruling Spirit Accomplishing Wonderful Fragrance exude an exquisite aroma. People are delighted to see the crops grown under the supervision of Crop-ruling Spirit Delighting the Beholder. When they eat these grains, their bodies are bolstered tremendously.

And after people eat the grains supervised by Crop-ruling Spirit Immaculate Pure Light, their bodies become pure and their minds are no longer polluted by defiled thoughts. After eating this type of crop, you will be purified in body and mind. Someone says, “No wonder I have so many confused thoughts. The grains I eat are not the ones supervised by this Crop-ruling Spirit!” In that case, you should bow a few more times to Immaculate Pure Light Crop-ruling Spirit and ask her to bring you some of her grains, so you can eat them and be free from confused thinking. The spirit named Crop-ruling Spirit Pure and Undefiled is the same one as Crop-ruling Spirit Immaculate Pure Light.

Those ten Crop-ruling Spirits mentioned above and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Crop-ruling Spirits. If we were to take into account all their leaders and their retinues, the number is boundless. And they all had realized great happiness. For example, every year during the fall harvest, if there is an abundant yield of the five grains, the farmers are absolutely delighted. And that can be called the realization of great happiness.

Having heard this section of text, someone is having more confused thoughts: “Spirits are inconceivable and possess the wonderful functioning of spiritual powers. If the crops were really supervised by spirits, we wouldn’t need machines or human labor to plant the crops. The spirits themselves could see to the natural sprouting, growth, and ripening of the crops, and there would be no need for human labor. Since we still rely on human labor, I believe that the spirits are only false, made-up names. In reality, the crops are not supervised by spirits. If I could simply put seeds into the ground and the spirits would supervise the growth of the crops and produce an abundant harvest, then I would believe that spirits really existed.”

This person has raised a valid question. However, spirits do not want people to be without work; they do not want people to be lazy. There was a time in the past when people did not have to do any work for their crops to grow: “Weeds died, sprouts thrived, and the ground produced on its own.” Crops would grow spontaneously on their own. The people sat there, being extremely idle. The spirits took a look and saw that that would not do. They wanted people to do a bit of work to bring about a harvest. Eventually lazy people had nothing to eat, while diligent people enjoyed an abundant harvest. All in all it was a fair arrangement. Spirits used to help people to do the work. But when they saw that people were very lazy, the spirits also stopped working. And now people themselves have to do the work. This may not be a true principle, but I have told you what I have heard and you can take it as hearsay. But it’s a fact that we should not eat what others prepare for us without contributing any effort ourselves. Although there are spirits around, people still need to work.

**11. River-ruling Spirits**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless River-ruling Spirits. Specifically, they were: River-ruling Spirit Universally Initiating Swift Currents; River-ruling Spirit Universally Cleansing Springs and Torrents; River-ruling Spirit Pure Eyes Apart from Dust; River-ruling Spirit Howling All Throughout the Ten Directions; River-ruling Spirit Rescuing and Protecting Sentient Beings; River-ruling Spirit Clear Light Devoid of Heat; River-ruling Spirit Universally Inspiring Joy; River-ruling Spirit Supreme Banner of Vast Virtue; River-ruling Spirit Light Illuminating All Worlds; and River-ruling Spirit Radiant Ocean of Virtues. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of River-ruling Spirits, and they all diligently resolved to benefit sentient beings.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless River-ruling Spirits. The Yellow River in China was named for its yellowish water. The Ganges River in India is known for its very fine sand. Both  of these rivers have spirits presiding over them. In general, there are uncountable River-ruling Spirits.

Specifically, they were: River-ruling Spirit Universally Initiating Swift Currents, who causes rivers to flow very fast. River-ruling Spirit Universally Cleansing Springs and Torrents clears up springs and mountain streams so that the water becomes pure. River-ruling Spirit Pure Eyes Apart from Dust makes sure that the water in the rivers she watches over is very clean. River-ruling Spirit Howling All Throughout the Ten Directions makes the rushing water sound like the roar of beasts. In the past River-ruling Spirit Rescuing and Protecting Sentient Beings made vows to rescue sentient beings. If sentient beings fall into the river and are about to drown, she will rescue them.

River-ruling Spirit Clear Light Devoid of Heat is cool and clear. She has a cool, refreshing light. There is another spirit named River-ruling Spirit Universally Inspiring Joy, who causes sentient beings to become joyful. There is another spirit named River-ruling Spirit Supreme Banner of Vast Virtue. Her virtue is bounteous, like a jeweled banner. Another spirit called River-ruling Spirit Light Illuminating All Worlds has light that shines throughout all worlds. And there is another spirit called River-ruling Spirit Radiant Ocean of Virtues.

Those ten River-ruling Spirits mentioned above and others acted as leaders of a countless number of River-ruling Spirits, and they all diligently resolved to benefit sentient beings. They often made the resolve to bring benefit to sentient beings.

**12. Ocean-ruling Spirits**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Ocean-ruling Spirits. Specifically, they were: Ocean-ruling Spirit Manifesting Jeweled Lights; Ocean-ruling Spirit Accomplished Vajra Banner; Ocean-ruling Spirit Far Removed from Defilement; Ocean-ruling Spirit Palaces in All Waters; Ocean-ruling Spirit Auspicious Jeweled Moon; Ocean-ruling Spirit Wondrous Floral Dragon Cowl; Ocean-ruling Spirit Universally Maintaining Flavor and Light; Ocean-ruling Spirit Jeweled Blaze of Floral Light; Ocean-ruling Spirit Wondrous Vajra Cowl; and Ocean-ruling Spirit Thunderous Sound of Ocean Tides. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Ocean-ruling Spirits, and the Thus Come Ones’ ocean of merit and virtue filled all their bodies.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Ocean-ruling Spirits. The previous discussion of River-ruling Spirits is followed by a discussion of Ocean-ruling Spirits. Oceans are larger than rivers; they are infinite and boundless in scope. Therefore, there are countlessly many Ocean-ruling Spirits. Specifically, to mention some of the leaders, they were: Ocean-ruling Spirit Manifesting Jeweled Lights, who makes appear many rays of jeweled light, hence her name. The merit and virtue that Ocean-ruling Spirit Accomplished Vajra Banner achieves is like a vajra banner, from which she gets her name.

Ocean-ruling Spirit Far Removed from Defilement is apart from all dust and filth. Ocean-ruling Spirit Palaces in All Waters. Her palaces can be found in all waters. There is another spirit named Ocean-ruling Spirit Auspicious Jeweled Moon. Most ocean spirits are Dragon Kings, who rule over the ocean. Another spirit is called Ocean-ruling Spirit Wondrous Floral Dragon Cowl. Another one is named Ocean-ruling Spirit Universally Maintaining Flavor and Light. She sustains the oceans and exudes light and fragrance. Ocean-ruling Spirit Jeweled Blaze of Floral Light emits a floral brilliance that gives the appearance of jeweled flames.

Another spirit has the name Ocean-ruling Spirit Wondrous Vajra Cowl. And Ocean-ruling Spirit Thunderous Sound of Ocean Tides emits the sound of the sea tide, which is like a thunderous boom.

These ten Ocean-ruling Spirits mentioned above and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Ocean-ruling Spirits. There is an infinite number of these spirits. And the Thus Come Ones’ ocean of merit and virtue filled all their bodies. The Buddhas’ merit and virtue which is abundant as the ocean fills these spirits’ bodies.

13. Water-ruling Spirits

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Water-ruling Spirits. Specifically, they were: Water-ruling Spirit Creating Banners of Clouds Everywhere; Water-ruling Spirit Sea-Tide Cloud Sound; Water-ruling Spirit Wheel-like Cowl of Wondrous Colors; Water-ruling Spirit Whirlpools of Skilled Expedients; Water-ruling Spirit Immaculate Accumulation of Fragrance; Water-ruling Spirit Bridge to Blessings and Voice of Light; Water-ruling Spirit Comfortable Contentment; Water-ruling Spirit Kindly Sound of Pure Joy; Water-ruling Spirit Universally Manifesting Majestic Light; and Water-ruling Spirit Roaring Sound Pervading Seas. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Water-ruling Spirits, and they benefited all sentient beings, diligently saving and protecting them.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Water-ruling Spirits. Although the rivers and oceans mentioned earlier are all bodies of water, those spirits were not in charge of the water itself. Now these are spirits who rule over water. The relationship between the spirits ruling the rivers, oceans, and water is the same as that between Forest-ruling Spirits and Mountain-ruling Spirits. There was an infinite number of Water-ruling Spirits as well.

Specifically, they were: Water-ruling Spirit Creating Banners of Clouds Everywhere, who uses clouds to form jeweled banners. There was a spirit named Water-ruling Spirit Sea-Tide Cloud Sound, who emits the sounds of the sea tide. Another spirit has the name Water-ruling Spirit Wheel-like Cowl of Wondrous Colors, for she has an orb of wonderful colors. Water-ruling Spirit Whirlpools of Skilled Expedients has a clever way of making the water whirl and revolve constantly. Another spirit has the name Water-ruling Spirit Immaculate Accumulation of Fragrance. She is free from all defiling dharmas. Food that is prepared using her water is fragrant and flavorful.

In listening to the Flower Adornment Sutra, we learn of the existence of numerous spirits governing water. In ancient times, cultivators who lived up in the mountains used only half a catty—eight Chinese ounces—of water per day. They dared not use too much water, for fear they would lose their blessings. If they were so frugal with regard to water, you can imagine how frugal they were in using other things. Now, we take water for granted and use as much as we want, casually wasting it. But we have to be careful in all aspects of cultivation. We cannot afford to be sloppy about anything. The Water-ruling Spirits keep track of how much water we use each day. If we waste water, they will say, “Oh, you cultivators have wasted so much water; I’ll make you go to the toilet a few more times! Then you’ll have less time to cultivate.” If we reckon the time we lose each day because of this, in the long run it adds up to a lot of time wasted. Therefore, we must pay attention to even the minor details of cultivation. We cannot be the least bit sloppy.

There was another spirit named Water-ruling Spirit Bridge to Blessings and Voice of Light. She bestows all kinds of blessings upon sentient beings and increases their blessings, serving as a bridge. She also emits light to proclaim the Dharma. There was another spirit by the name of Water-ruling Spirit Comfortable Contentment. After people drink the water under her jurisdiction, they naturally become content, at ease, and comfortable, and no longer have confused thoughts.

Another spirit present was named Water-ruling Spirit Kindly Sound of Pure Joy. The water that she watches over is pure. Anyone who drinks it becomes happy. She also makes a benevolent sound. People become reverent when they see the majestic light of Water-ruling Spirit Universally Manifesting Majestic Light. The spirit named Water-ruling Spirit Roaring Sound Pervading Seas rules over water which constantly booms with a roaring sound that reverberates throughout the oceans and seas.

These ten Water-ruling Spirits mentioned above and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Water-ruling Spirits. There were countlessly many other Water-ruling Spirits. And they benefited all sentient beings, diligently saving and protecting them. They regarded the rescue of all sentient beings as their work and their responsibility. They conferred benefits upon sentient beings.

**14. Fire-ruling Spirits**
Sutra:

**Moreover, there were innumerable Fire-ruling Spirits. Specifically, they were: Fire-ruling Spirit Treasury of Universal Flames; Fire-ruling Spirit Banner of Universally Assembled Light; Fire-ruling Spirit Great Light Everywhere Shining; Fire-ruling Spirit Palaces of Multitudes of Wonders; Fire-ruling Spirit Cowl of Infinite Light; Fire-ruling Spirit All Kinds of Blazing Eyes; Fire-ruling Spirit Palaces Resembling Mount Sumeru in the Ten Directions; Fire-ruling Spirit Awesome Light of Self-Mastery; Fire-ruling Spirit Darkness-Destroying Brilliance; and Fire-ruling Spirit Thunder Sound and Lightning Flash. These and others acted as leaders of an inestimable number of Fire-ruling Spirits, and they all revealed various kinds of brilliance, dispelling the burning afflictions of sentient beings.**
Commentary:

Moreover, there were innumerable Fire-ruling Spirits. The Water-ruling Spirits are followed by Fire-ruling Spirits. Fire, too, is governed by spirits. Fire cannot do whatever it likes; it’s watched over by spirits. Specifically, they were: Fire-ruling Spirit Treasury of Universal Flames, who has an immense light which shines everywhere. Her treasury of blazing light is infinite. There was another Fire-ruling Spirit named Banner of Universally Assembled Light. Her light is shaped like a banner. There was another Fire-ruling Spirit called Great Light Everywhere Shining. Her light is tremendous and shines universally. Fire-ruling Spirit Palaces of Multitudes of Wonders adorns palaces with the myriad jewels.

Also present was Fire-ruling Spirit Cowl of Infinite Light, whose light is inexhaustible, streaming from the top of her head. Another Fire-ruling Spirit named All Kinds of Blazing Eyes has different kinds of blazing eyes. Yet another Fire-ruling Spirit has the name Palaces Resembling Mount Sumeru in the Ten Directions. She commands palaces throughout the ten directions, and the palaces are as lofty as Mount Sumeru. There is another spirit by the name of Fire-ruling Spirit Awesome Light of Self-Mastery. Another Fire-ruling Spirit is named Darkness-Destroying Brilliance, and another Fire-ruling Spirit has the name Thunder Sound and Lightning Flash. Those ten Fire-ruling Spirits mentioned above and others acted as leaders of an inestimable number of Fire-ruling Spirits. Aside from the leaders, there was an unreckonable number of other Fire-ruling Spirits. And they all revealed various kinds of brilliance. Since fire is bright to begin with and they are in charge of fire, they can manifest light as they wish, dispelling the burning afflictions of all sentient beings. Why is fire able to dispel afflictions? This is “fighting poison with poison,” or fighting fire with fire. People are plagued with the fire of ignorance.

The fire of ignorance, like a tiger spirit,
Comes from the roots of past lives’ offenses.

The fire of ignorance is fiercer than a tiger spirit—what does this mean? Sometimes, without knowing how, we give rise to wrong knowledge and views, or impure thoughts. We don’t know why, but we aren’t able to be masters of ourselves. We lose control. All of that can be traced to offenses made in past lives. The bad karma we created may be too profuse; the roots of our offenses may be too deep. Therefore, cultivation aims at pulling out the very roots of ignorance. Then we can dispel burning afflictions.

**15. Wind-ruling Spirits**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Wind-ruling Spirits. Specifically, they were: Wind-ruling Spirit Unobstructed Radiance; Wind-ruling Spirit Universally Manifesting Courageous Karma; Wind-ruling Spirit Drifting and Striking Cloud Banner; Wind-ruling Spirit Adornment with Pure Light; Wind-ruling Spirit Power to Dry Up Water; Wind-ruling Spirit Loud and Pervasive Howling; Wind-ruling Spirit Cowl of Trailing Branches; Wind-ruling Spirit Unimpeded Travel; Wind-ruling Spirit Manifold Palaces; and Wind-ruling Spirit Great Light Universally Shining. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Wind-ruling Spirits, and they all were diligent in eradicating thoughts of conceit.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Wind-ruling Spirits. There are many different kinds of wind: gales, tornadoes, hurricanes, typhoons, and so on. Winds have names, and so wind-ruling Spirits have names, too. Winds are [were at that time, now they are alternately male and female] considered maidens, and so they are named Miss So-and-So. This also implies that young ladies are like the wind. In Chinese, when the “sickness” radical is added to the word for “wind,” we have the word for “insanity.” The meaning here is that young ladies sometimes go insane for a while without knowing why. The real reason is ignorance—a lack of understanding.

Wind-ruling Spirits watch over winds, which is to say that they watch over young ladies, because young ladies tend to be a little unruly and need to be under the supervision of wind-ruling Spirits. Winds can do a lot of damage—uproot trees, knock down houses, and kill people.

Specifically, they were: Wind-ruling Spirit Unobstructed Radiance, whose light cannot be blocked. There is also Wind-ruling Spirit Universally Manifesting Courageous Karma. She is extremely brave, and her wind is quite fierce: It uproots trees and knocks down houses. Wind-ruling Spirit Drifting and Striking Cloud Banner is even fiercer than the previous spirit. When the houses fail to topple, she uses a blast of wind like a stone or a cannonball to knock them down for good. Another Wind-ruling Spirit is named Adornment with Pure Light. Another Wind-ruling Spirit named Power to Dry Up Water has so much power that her wind can dry up the waters of the oceans.

There is a Wind-ruling Spirit named Loud and Pervasive Howling. The tremendous sound of her wind when it blows is like a mighty roar startling the heavens and jolting the earth. Another Wind-ruling Spirit is called Cowl of Trailing Branches. Her cowl is shaped like a canopy of overhanging branches. The next Wind-ruling Spirit is named Unimpeded Travel. Wherever her wind blows, it is unimpeded; nothing can stop it. Another Wind-ruling Spirit has the name Manifold Palaces. She has a wide array of palaces. And there was also a Wind-ruling Spirit named Great Light Universally Shining.

These ten Wind-ruling Spirits and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Wind-ruling Spirits. It is not possible to mention all the Wind-ruling Spirits here, because they are too numerous. And they all, whether mentioned here or not, were diligent in eradicating thoughts of conceit. What these Wind-ruling Spirits are most intent on doing is eradicating their arrogant thoughts. What is arrogance? It is an overwhelming sense of pride, a bloated ego that causes a person to think he is better than everyone else. There are arrogant people in literary circles, for example, certain scholars and professors who think they are absolutely tops in their field. Then there are arrogant people in the business world, such as certain entrepreneurs who think they are more ingenious than anyone else. There are arrogant working people who think that the work they do is better than the work done by others. There are arrogant people in the circle of officials, for example, certain ministers or cabinet members, who think they govern and administrate better than everyone else. Even in the world of agriculture, there are farmers who think that they farm better than anyone else.

Some lay Buddhists think, “I have studied more than anyone else. I understand more than anyone else. No other layperson knows as much as I do.” Some left-home people also have this problem. They feel that among the members of the Sangha, they are supreme and no one measures up to them. They even think that they are on a par with the Patriarchs. They profess to be equal not just to the Patriarchs, but even to the Bodhisattvas. Not to mention being the equals of Bodhisattvas, they even say they are no different from the Buddhas. These are all manifestations of arrogance. But the Wind-ruling Spirits have eradicated all their arrogance.

Buddhists must take care not to have a sense of self. As long as we cannot relinquish our sense of self, we are going to have a problem with arrogance. We should not try to make people look up to us; that is a sign of arrogance. Well, should we want people to look down on us? We simply should not indulge in thoughts of whether people look up to us or look down on us. We should do our own cultivation and our own practice. Rather than being concerned about getting other people to look up to us, we should respect ourselves. We should examine our own mind: Do we have greed? Do we have anger? Do we have deluded thoughts? If we haven’t cut off these three poisons, we are nothing but a deluded being. How could we possibly be better than everyone else? People should direct their attention inward and take a look at themselves.

Have you been arrogant or self-satisfied at times? If you have, then quickly change. Seek within yourself. Be constantly alert and scrutinize yourself under the cold light of reason. If you have done good, that’s all the more reason to go forward. If you have done evil, then quickly reform. If you constantly examine yourself, you are not likely to become arrogant.

**16. Space-ruling Spirits**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Space-ruling Spirits. Specifically, they were: Space-ruling Spirit Pure Light Shining Everywhere; Space-ruling Spirit Universally Roaming Far and Wide; Space-ruling Spirit Producing Auspicious Wind; Space-ruling Spirit Dwelling Secure and Unhindered; Space-ruling Spirit Broad Stride and Wondrous Cowl; Space-ruling Spirit Unobstructed Blaze of Light; Space-ruling Spirit Unhindered Supreme Power; Space-ruling Spirit Immaculate Radiance; Space-ruling Spirit Far-Reaching Wondrous Sounds; and Space-ruling Spirit Light Pervading the Ten Directions. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Space-ruling Spirits, and their minds were free from defilement, being vast, bright, and cleansed.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Space-ruling Spirits. These spirits rule empty space, which itself has a name. In Sanskrit it is called sunyata, which means “emptiness” in English, and would be called by other names in other languages.

What is emptiness? It’s nothing whatsoever, and yet everything is there. What does this mean? Well, people are contained within emptiness, houses are contained within emptiness, and so is everything else. Emptiness is not empty, because it has wonderful existence. And existence is nonexistent, for it is really true emptiness. What thing would you say doesn’t exist within empty space? And what emptiness is there that isn’t included within existence? Our bodies, for instance, seem to take up a certain amount of space and thereby reduce the amount of emptiness, but in reality our bodies are also empty inside. Since they have a physical shape and appearance, we think that they exist. Actually, all that exists is itself emptiness, and emptiness is just existence. True emptiness does not obstruct wonderful existence, and wonderful existence does not obstruct true emptiness. True emptiness is not empty, and therefore it is called wonderful existence. Wonderful existence is nonexistent, and therefore it is called true emptiness.

Emptiness doesn’t have much use, since it’s empty. Yet all function, all usefulness, is born from emptiness. In meditation we contemplate emptiness as follows:

Internally, contemplate mind: there is no mind.
Externally, contemplate form: there is no form.
In the distance, contemplate objects: there are none.
Of these three, not one exists:
Inside, no body or mind; outside, no world.

What is there, then? There is just emptiness. And yet, although we call it emptiness, all of us sentient beings exist right within that emptiness. Therefore, if you say it’s empty, nonetheless it exists. If you say it exists, nonetheless it’s empty. Because emptiness is empty and boundless, there is no one in charge of it. That’s why these spirits have to watch over emptiness. “You have your space; I have mine. Your space cannot damage mine; my space does not intrude upon yours.” The individual spaces are mutually harmonious and non-interfering.

Specifically, they were: Space-ruling Spirit Pure Light Shining Everywhere; Space-ruling Spirit Universally Roaming Far and Wide; Space-ruling Spirit Producing Auspicious Wind, who brings about auspicious winds. Anyone who encounters this type of wind will be graced with good fortune. For example, you might step out of your house, stumble and fall, only to discover a gold brick lying on the road. Wouldn’t you consider that good luck?

There was another Space-ruling Spirit named Dwelling Secure and Unhindered. Since this spirit is free from obstacles, she abides securely on the Ground of Not Moving.

Emptiness can never be discussed completely, because it is empty. Therefore, we should not discuss it further. It’s simply emptiness.

The strides of Space-ruling Spirit Broad Stride and Wondrous Cowl are broad and swift. Why is her stride swift? Because she is empty. That makes her quicker than anything. The brilliance of Space-ruling Spirit Unobstructed Blaze of Light shines everywhere without hindrance; nothing can block it. The unimpeded strength of Space-ruling Spirit Unhindered Supreme Power surpasses all other kinds of power. No power can compare to the power of emptiness. There was another Space-ruling Spirit by the name of Immaculate Radiance. Since she is immaculate, she shines. Since she shines, she can be immaculate. The melodious sounds of Space-ruling Spirit Far-Reaching Wondrous Sounds can reach distant places.

And there was another Space-ruling Spirit named Light Pervading the Ten Directions. These ten Space-ruling Spirits and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Space-ruling Spirits. The actual number of Space-ruling Spirits is infinite. And their minds were free from defilement, being vast, bright, and cleansed. They had removed the filth from their minds, and so the measure of their minds became very broad and bright, and their thoughts were very pure.

**17. Direction-ruling Spirits**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Direction-ruling Spirits. Specifically, they were: Direction-ruling Spirit Pervasively Dwelling Everywhere; Direction-ruling Spirit Universally Displaying Brilliance; Direction-ruling Spirit Adorned with Luminous Practices; Direction-ruling Spirit Traveling Freely Everywhere; Direction-ruling Spirit Forever Severing Delusions; Direction-ruling Spirit Pervasively Roaming in the Pure Void; Direction-ruling Spirit Cloud-like Banner of Resonant Sound; Direction-ruling Spirit Unscattered Eyes of the Cowl; Direction-ruling Spirit Universally Observing the Karma of Worlds; and Direction-ruling Spirit Everywhere Touring. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Direction-ruling Spirits, and they used expedients to universally radiate bright light, shining eternally upon the ten directions.**
Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Direction-ruling Spirits. There are said to be ten directions, which can be further divided into hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of directions. How does that work? For example, east isn’t really fixed. You can call a certain place “east,” but if you walk east of it then it becomes west. That’s why there is no fixed place that is the center, and there are also no fixed directions. Although the directions are not fixed, in general there are five major directions: east, west, north, south, and center. The five directions correspond to the five elements. East corresponds to wood, south to fire, west to metal, north to water, and the center to earth.

In other words, wood thrives in the east, fire flourishes in the south, metal prevails in the west, water is strong in the north, and earth dominates in the center. Moreover, the four seasons are also related to the five elements. Wood thrives in the spring, fire thrives in the summer, metal thrives in the autumn, and water thrives in the winter. Earth thrives in all four seasons.

Moreover, the directions are related to the Ten Celestial Stems:

1. East (wood) is associated with jia yi [stems 1 and 2] and the color green, so the Direction-ruling Spirit who rules over the east is called the Green Emperor.
2. South (fire) is associated with bing ding [stems 3 and 4] and the color red, and so the spirit who rules over the south is called the Scarlet Emperor.
3. West (metal) is associated with geng xin [stems 7 and 8] and the color white, and so the Direction-ruling Spirit who rules over the west is called the White Emperor.
4. North (water) is associated with ren gui [stems 9 and 10] and the color black, and so the spirit who rules over the north is called the Black Emperor.
5. The center (earth) is associated with wu ji [stems 5 and 6] and the color yellow, and so the spirit who rules over the center is called the Yellow Emperor.
Those are the main spirits of the five directions, each presiding over her respective location. There are actually innumerable Direction-ruling Spirits.

Specifically, they were: Direction-ruling Spirit Pervasively Dwelling Everywhere. She has no fixed location, and so she dwells everywhere. Another Direction-ruling Spirit, named Universally Displaying Brilliance, can make bright light appear anywhere. There is another Direction-ruling Spirit by the name of Adorned with Luminous Practices. Her radiance as well as her practices serve as adornments. Another Direction-ruling Spirit called Traveling Freely Everywhere can go anywhere without obstruction. Although she is said to rule over a region, her region is so vast that it has no boundaries. The next Direction-ruling Spirit is named Forever Severing Delusions. People are deluded because they haven’t cut off their delusions. Once they sever their delusions, they won’t be confused anymore. This spirit helps people sever their delusions. She has also put an end to her own delusions.

The next Direction-ruling Spirit has the name Pervasively Roaming in the Pure Void. This spirit is able to travel anywhere at all throughout space. There was another Direction-ruling Spirit by the name of Cloud-like Banner of Resonant Sound, and another Direction-ruling Spirit called Unscattered Eyes of the Cowl. The Direction-ruling Spirit named Universally Observing the Karma of Worlds can observe the karma of beings in all worlds. And the final Direction-ruling Spirit is called Everywhere Touring. Since she rules over directions, she goes sightseeing everywhere and takes vacations.

These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Direction-ruling Spirits. There are many, many more of them. And they used expedients to universally radiate bright light, shining eternally upon the ten directions. They send forth brilliant light throughout the ten directions so that all darkness is chased away. This light shines on and on, never stopping or being cut off. The beams of light are sent out one after another, like successive waves. These are light waves. In our present atomic age, there is radar, which operates on the principle of light waves and sound waves. This light shines on without interruption throughout the ten directions.

**18. Night-ruling Spirits**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Night-ruling Spirits. Specifically, they were: Night-ruling Spirit Pure Light of Universal Virtue; Night-ruling Spirit Happy Eyes Observing the World; Night-ruling Spirit Protecting the World’s Essence and Energy; Night-ruling Spirit Sound of the Tranquil Sea; Night-ruling Spirit Universally Manifesting Good Auspices; Night-ruling Spirit Universally Blossoming Flowers of Trees; Night-ruling Spirit Impartially Protecting and Nurturing; Night-ruling Spirit Joy of Playful Roaming; Night-ruling Spirit Perpetually Blissful Faculties; and Night-ruling Spirit Displaying Pure Blessings. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Night-ruling Spirits, and they all cultivated diligently and took delight in the Dharma.**
Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Night-ruling Spirits. Their number is beyond reckoning. These spirits rule over the nighttime and they are known as the “yang within the yin.” Yin refers to darkness. Nighttime is dark, yet these spirits emit light in the darkness.

Specifically, they were: Night-ruling Spirit Pure Light of Universal Virtue. Her virtuous practices are all-pervasive, and so her light is pristine and pure. There is another Night-ruling Spirit named Happy Eyes Observing the World. She is always happy, and she makes sentient beings who see her happy as well. She views all the causes and conditions that occur in the world. There is another Night-ruling Spirit called Protecting the World’s Essence and Energy. She protects the energy and essence of all sentient beings in the world. Nighttime is dark, but these spirits bring light to the darkness.

There is another Night-ruling Spirit called Sound of the Tranquil Sea. Still tranquility is samadhi, and the sound of the sea is movement. Within both stillness and movement, this Night-ruling Spirit protects sentient beings and enables them to attain concentration power. Another Night-ruling Spirit has the name Universally Manifesting Good Auspices. Everywhere she goes, she makes appear auspicious states where everything happens the way one wishes. The Night-ruling Spirit named Universally Blossoming Flowers of Trees enables the trees that she watches over to blossom. Flowers have flower spirits and trees have tree spirits. All the various kinds of vegetation, large and small, have spirits who rule over them. Once the Empress Wu Zetian of the Tang Dynasty wanted to go to the imperial gardens to look at the flowers. But it was winter and there weren’t any flowers in bloom. Thereupon she issued an edict in the form of a poem.

Tomorrow I’m going to the Imperial Gardens.
The flowers should be immediately informed to blossom.
They should open their petals tonight
And not wait for the gentle breezes of tomorrow’s dawn.

She had the poetic edict delivered to the flower garden and just as she had ordered, the flowers opened during the night. They were very obedient. You can see that it was Empress Wu Zetian’s destiny to be endowed with the powers of an empress.

The next Night-ruling Spirit is named Impartially Protecting and Nurturing. She is impartial toward all sentient beings, making no discriminations between one being and another. She protects and teaches them so that they all obtain benefit. There is another Night-ruling Spirit named Joy of Playful Roaming. Not only does she herself like to roam and travel worry-free at night in happy playfulness, she also enjoys causing sentient beings to be carefree, full of joy, and free to roam.

The next Night-ruling Spirit is named Perpetually Blissful Faculties. Even more strange, this spirit’s six senses—her eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—are always laughing and beaming with joy. She is never worried, and so when sentient beings see her they become happy and worry-free as well. And finally there is a Night-ruling Spirit named Displaying Pure Blessings. This spirit helps sentient beings to obtain pure blessings.

These and others acted as leaders of a countless number. These ten Night-ruling Spirits are the leaders of an infinite array of Night-ruling Spirits, and they all cultivated diligently and took delight in the Dharma. They are extremely industrious, never slothful or remiss. They find great joy in cultivating the Buddhadharma and also cause sentient beings to obtain happiness from the Dharma.

**19. Day-ruling Spirits**

Sutra:

Moreover, there were countless Day-ruling Spirits. Specifically, they were: Day-ruling Spirit Making Palaces Appear; Day-ruling Spirit Exuding Fragrance of Wisdom; Day-ruling Spirit Adornment with Supreme Bliss; Day-ruling Spirit Fragrant Flowers’ Wondrous Light; Day-ruling Spirit Everywhere Collecting Wonderful Medicines; Day-ruling Spirit Happy Eyes Creating Joy; Day-ruling Spirit Universally Manifesting in All Directions; Day-ruling Spirit Great Compassion Light; Day-ruling Spirit Shining Light From Good Roots; and Day-ruling Spirit Lovely Flower Garlands. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Day-ruling Spirits, and they all brought forth faith and understanding of the wonderful Dharma. Together they constantly and vigorously adorned the palace.

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Day-ruling Spirits. The previous section listed Night-ruling Spirits. There are also infinitely many Day-ruling Spirits. Day spirits are called the “yang within the yang.” These spirits oversee the activities of sentient beings during the daytime.

Specifically, they were: Day-ruling Spirit Making Palaces Appear, who manifests all kinds of palaces; Day-ruling Spirit Exuding Fragrance of Wisdom, who produces the scent of wisdom; Day-ruling Spirit Adornment with Supreme Bliss, who happily adorns the dwelling places of all sentient beings; Day-ruling Spirit Fragrant Flowers’ Wondrous Light, who gives off a fragrance and a sublime radiance. Another Day-ruling Spirit named Everywhere Collecting Wonderful Medicines gathers many medicinal herbs to cure all sentient beings’ illnesses. Another Day-ruling Spirit named Happy Eyes Creating Joy likes to do things that make sentient beings happy. Another Day-ruling Spirit called Universally Manifesting in All Directions is able to go to all places. Another Day-ruling Spirit named Great Compassion Light has a great compassionate heart and constantly emits light to aid all sentient beings. Another Day-ruling Spirit by the name of Shining Light From Good Roots emits light to shine upon beings who have good roots. Beings who lack good roots are caused to plant them. The good roots of those who already have them are caused to mature. People whose roots have already matured are brought to liberation. And Day-ruling Spirit Lovely Flower Garlands fashions necklaces out of beautiful flowers.

These ten Day-ruling Spirits and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Day-ruling Spirits, and they all brought forth faith and understanding of the wonderful Dharma. Not only did they believe the Buddha’s wonderful Dharma, they deeply understood it and weren’t the least bit muddled. They also practiced it with great vigor and were not lazy at all. Together they constantly and vigorously adorned the palace.

Although people who study Buddhism are protected by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, still, you have to be careful yourself; you cannot merely rely on the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to protect you and not fear anything.

**VI.3 The Oceanic Multitudes Gather Like Clouds**
**C. The Eightfold Division**

**1. Asura Kings**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Asura Kings. Specifically, they were: Asura King Rahu; Asura King Vemacitra; Asura King Clever Illusions; Asura King Great Retinue; Asura King Mighty Strength; Asura King Pervasive Illumination; Asura King Solid Practice and Wondrous Adornment; Asura King Vast Wisdom Regarding Causes; Asura King Displaying Supreme Virtue; and Asura King Splendid Sound. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of asuras, and they all had diligently obliterated egoism as well as all other afflictions.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Asura Kings. Asura, a Sanskrit word, translates as “non-god,” “ugly,” and “no wine.” There are various Chinese transliterations of asura, since the dialects in the various provinces of China are different. One word can be pronounced in five different ways. Despite the differences in pronunciation, they all mean the same thing.

Asura is translated as “non-god” because some asuras have the blessings of the gods, but not the authority. Why don’t they have any authority in the heavens? Because in the past they liked to flatter others. That is, they dishonestly praised others to make them happy. They were fawning and crooked. They have the blessings of the gods, but not the virtue. Before the gods were born in the heavens, they were very honest people who never engaged in fawning and flattery. Since asuras specialize in flattery, they are called “non-gods.”

Asuras are also called “ugly,” because they are very ugly. Male asuras are grotesque, whereas female asuras are beautiful. Asuras like to fight. People in the world who have blessings, who are good at flattering others, and who are very competitive, are all asuras. In the future they will join the retinue of asuras. Therefore, asuras enjoy celestial blessings but not celestial authority. Asuras cannot have an audience with Lord Sakra, Lord God, because the asura king wants to become Lord God, who is also known as the Jade Emperor. Therefore the asuras are constantly engaged in battle with the Jade Emperor. Why are asuras not allowed to draw near to the Jade Emperor? Because in the past asuras liked to flatter, and the Jade Emperor loathes flatterers and doesn’t want to draw near them. Why doesn’t the Jade Emperor banish them from heaven? Because he is infatuated with the beautiful asura women, and so he allows the asuras to live in heaven. That’s the story of the asuras. They enjoy the blessings of the gods, but lack their virtue.

Some asuras dwell in the heavens, some in the animal realm, some in the realm of ghosts, and some in the human realm. No matter what realm they fall into, asuras always like to fight and bicker. They always want to come out on top. In the human realm, yang asuras become soldiers and military people; yin asuras become bandits and thugs. Asuras who dwell in the heavens are always going to war with the celestial troops. Since this story has been told many times, I won’t repeat it.

As for asuras in the animal realm, take, for instance, the Asura King Rahu. He is the son of a lion. Wild beasts who like to fight with other animals are asuras. Asuras in the realm of ghosts are the same way. They like to fight. In general, there are many kinds of asuras.

Specifically, they were: Asura King Rahu. Rahu is a Sanskrit word that means “Gathering in Vexation.” With his hands he can cover up the light of both sun and moon, as a joke, causing the gods to become vexed and angry. He likes making them angry. Since he often plays such practical jokes on the gods, he is called Asura King “Gathering in Vexation.”

Asura King Vemacitra. Vema translates as “silk,” and citra translates as “many kinds.” He has great conjuring talent. He can transform a single strand of silk into many different kinds of objects. He might blow on it and the strand of silk turns into a dragon, or perhaps he recites a mantra and the strand of silk turns into a snake, or an iron chain, or a palace. In general, he can transform it into many things, using various spiritual powers, like a magician. He can also swallow swords. But these are all just illusory tricks. Since he has these skills and spiritual powers, he is a king among asuras.

Asura King Clever Illusions. The previous Asura King could transform a strand of silk into various things, but he still had to use a strand of silk. This Asura King, by means of the clever art of illusion, can transform something into nothing and can turn nothing into something. For example, he might suddenly make a mountain appear, and then just as suddenly turn it into a sea. He can move mountains and turn the ocean over, causing the oceans to dry up and turn into mountains, or causing mountains to vanish and become oceans. He can make the sun and moon switch places. He can also change men into women and women into men, without the need for surgery or drugs. The changes are instantaneous. All he has to say to a woman is, “Quickly, turn into a man!” and she will. Or he will say to a man, “Quickly, turn into a woman,” and he will change into a woman. There’s no need for them to put on make-up either. Wouldn’t you say that was clever? Asura King Great Retinue is fond of having a big family, with asura sons, daughters, and grandchildren—an uncountable number of them—gathered together.

Asura King Mighty Strength is very strong. He can pick up any object, no matter how heavy. He can lift up Mount Sumeru with one hand and a great ocean with the other; he can play with the planet Earth like a ball. Asura King Pervasive Illumination has a radiance that shines throughout the ten directions. His light is even brighter than that of the sun and moon. There was also the Asura King Solid Practice and Wondrous Adornment. His conduct and vows are resolute and firm, and his adornments subtle and wonderful. There was another Asura King named Vast Wisdom Regarding Causes. At the level of planting causes, he cultivated vast, great wisdom. Also present was the Asura King Displaying Supreme Virtue. He has a special kind of virtue that is superior, and when sentient beings see him, they are all aware of his virtue. And Asura King Splendid Sound has an extremely fine and beautiful voice. Basically asuras are ugly and have unpleasant voices, but he has a pleasing sound.

These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of asuras. These ten are the leaders of the asuras, whose actual number is infinite. And they all had diligently obliterated egoism as well as all other afflictions. Asuras are all afflicted with arrogance. People who are very haughty and conceited are human asuras. Animals that are haughty are animal asuras. Arrogant gods are asuras in the heavens, and conceited ghosts are asuras in the ghost realm. Asuras are spread throughout the four types of birth; that is, there are womb-born asuras, egg-born asuras, moisture-born asuras, and transformationally born asuras.

However, the Asura Kings under discussion are very vigorous in practicing the Buddha Way. They have subdued their habitual arrogance, to the point that they have destroyed their ignorance. When their ignorance is gone, so too are all of their afflictions. Since they have subdued arrogance, they are also free from greed, anger, delusion, and other afflictions. These Asura Kings teach all asuras to subdue their arrogance and afflictions.

People who cultivate the Way should get rid of their self-conceit. They should be free of the view of self and the mark of self. It shouldn’t be that whenever anything comes up, the first thing they do is react with their self, feeling that others have offended them, or that everyone treats them badly, while at the same time feeling that they are better than everyone else. Because of this kind of wrong knowledge and wrong views, they plant wrong causes, which in the future will reap wrong results. The wrong result is that they become asuras. Asuras are always on the prowl, going everywhere looking for someone to fight with and always making trouble for others. This comes from not having seen through and emptied attachment to self, self-conceit, the view of self, and the mark of self, which leads to all kinds of ignorance and afflictions. That’s why it is so important for cultivators to smash through their self-conceit, the view of self, the mark of self, and attachment to self.

**2. Garuda Kings**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there was an inconceivable number of Garuda Kings.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there was an inconceivable number of Garuda Kings. Earlier asuras were described as beings who like to fight. The world we live in now is an asura world, because everyone likes to fight. People fight with people, countries fight with countries, and families fight with families.  There is no end to the strife and contention. That is the behavior of asuras. Although the asuras are fierce, they are not as fierce as the garudas.

Garuda, also a Sanskrit word, is translated as “golden-winged,” because it is the name of a species of bird that has golden-colored wings. The name also translates as “wonderful-winged,” because the wings of this bird are adorned with wonderful gems. Garuda also translates as “big gullet,” because when this bird eats, it keeps food in its gullet and slowly digests it, the way chickens do. Its gullet is very large and can hold a large amount of food.

Garuda birds are also known as great, golden-winged peng birds. How big are they? A peng bird is as big as a mountain—you might even mistake it for a mountain if you saw it. Its wing span is 330 large yojanas. A small yojana is 40 li, a medium yojana is 60 li, and a large yojana is 80 li [about 24 miles]. With a single flap of his wings, he can dry up the waters of the ocean so the dragons at the bottom of the sea are all exposed. Then the garu¤a bird swoops down and slurps up those dragons the way people slurp up noodles. However, he has to gobble up dragons by first swallowing their tails and then eating the rest of the body. He doesn’t swallow them head first—that’s one of the rules he follows in eating. Every day he needs to eat one big dragon—a Dragon King—as his main meal and five hundred small dragons as snacks. He stores them in his big gullet and slowly digests them.

What was the dragon population? There were infinitely many big dragons, and small dragons were as numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges River. However, with the garuda bird eating one big dragon and 500 small dragons a day, the dragon population kept diminishing until the species was nearly extinct.

The Dragon King was very worried. He went everywhere asking for help but no ghosts or spirits were as powerful as the garuda, so none of them could do anything about it. Finally the Dragon King went to Sakyamuni Buddha and asked the Buddha to compassionately protect him and his dragon sons and grandsons and the elderly dragons.

The Buddha said to the Dragon King, “If all you dragons can uphold the Eight Lay Precepts and eat vegetarian food, then I will find a method so that the golden-winged peng bird can no longer devour you.”

The Dragon King and his retinue all gladly came and took the Eight Lay Precepts. Some of you have taken the Eight Precepts. Then the Buddha gave them a piece of his kashäya [monk’s robe] and told them to each take a thread from it and wear it on his body. After the dragons did this, they became invisible and the peng bird could no longer find them.

Earlier I used the Chinese idiom, ai mo neng zhu, which means, “one cherishes them, but is unable to help them.”

One way to explain this is that, although you side with the dragons, you aren’t able to help them.

There is another way to explain it. Now, I will ask you a question. Do you like birds more, or do you like worms and reptiles more? Would you rather have a pet bird or a pet worm or reptile? You must answer honestly. You should not go along with what I’ve said, but you should answer based on your gut reaction. Birds have very pretty, colorful plumage. They can fly about and sing melodious songs. Worms and reptiles, on the other hand, can be very ugly. Take snakes, for example. When you see a snake, your hair stands on end and you wonder, “Will it bite?” If you ran into a snake at night, you’d be scared to death. There are other worms and reptiles that are so repulsive-looking that the sight of them almost makes you want to vomit. So, speak truthfully: Do you prefer worms and reptiles, or birds? Speak up; don’t enter samadhi.

Disciple: Except for honeybees, I like birds better than insects.

Venerable Master: Bees are considered flying creatures, and therefore are not grouped with worms. They are transformationally-born beings.

Originally, I used the expression, “one cherishes them, but is unable to help them” to mean that although one cherishes the golden-winged birds one is unable to help them. However, most of you think I explained it incorrectly. Therefore, I posed my question to you just now, in order to see what the common sentiment is. The golden-winged peng bird is the bird in question, and the dragons are the worms. It’s just that the golden-winged bird is a big bird, and the dragons are big worms. Whether big or small, they are the same. Big birds and little birds are both birds; big and little worms are still worms. Therefore I asked you the question about the birds and worms. If all of you should say that you like birds, then even if I explained the expression incorrectly, I’ll still have explained it correctly. Why is that? Because everyone loves birds—therefore they love the golden-winged peng bird too, and do not wish to help the dragons. That’s a case of wanting to help, but not being able to. That’s the point behind my question. But none of you dared to answer.

Someone thinks, “I won’t say that I like the birds, because he’ll say that I’m wrong. And if I say that I like worms, I’ll also be wrong. So I’m not going to say anything. I simply like to sleep!” Well, liking to sleep is not incorrect, but it’s a case of not being able to take a definite stand on the issue—you don’t know which way is right, because you’ve slept yourself muddled.

Someone else says, “I do not like either birds or worms. If I liked birds, I might turn into a bird. If I liked worms, I might become a worm in the future. I don’t want to turn into a bird or a worm in the future; I want to remain a human being. So I’m not going to like either of them.” That’s also correct. Now, you understand the meaning of the expression, “One cherishes them, but is unable to help them.” You could say that although you like the golden-winged bird, you aren’t able to help it out. Or, you could also say that although you cherish the dragons, you aren’t able to help them.

The Buddha loved neither the bird nor the dragons. Why is that? If he loved the bird, he would not have helped the dragons. If he loved the dragons, he would not have helped the bird.

The Buddha had helped the dragons by giving them the precepts and a piece of his kashaya. The golden-winged peng bird, finding himself without food, went to the Buddha to complain, “With such a big gullet as I have, I cannot get my fill unless I eat dragons. Now that there are no dragons to eat, I will starve to death. Buddha, you are compassionate. You have saved the dragons, but you should not make me starve.”

The Buddha told him, “Don’t worry. From now on I will tell my disciples to give you a share of vegetarian food every day before they take their noonday meal.” That is why, at temples now, during the noon meal offering, a portion of food is sent out to feed the great golden-winged peng birds.

When the food is taken outside to make the offering, some people see the peng bird come to eat. To some who see it, the peng bird looks as big as a pigeon; others see it as being as large as a turkey; some see it as being as large as a goose; and someone even saw it as being as large as a building of several stories—it was so large that he wasn’t even sure what it was. Why do people see it as appearing in different sizes? It has to do with the measure of their minds. If your mind is large, what you see is vast. If your mind is small, what you see is also small. Everything in the world is merely a manifestation of the mind.

Therefore the Buddha did not side with the dragons. Although he conferred the precepts on the dragons, he also instructed his disciples to feed the golden-winged bird. Thus both parties obtained help. As a result the dragon race did not become extinct, and the golden-winged peng bird did not starve to death. How many golden-winged peng birds are there? Also as many as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River—infinitely many. And so there was an infinite, boundless number of golden-winged peng birds trying to devour an infinite, boundless number of dragons, and they would very quickly eat them all up. But now, the dragons are not completely devoured, and the golden-winged birds did not starve.

You ask, “If there are so many golden-winged birds and dragons, how come I haven’t ever seen any?” Perhaps you’ve seen them but just didn’t recognize them. That’s because, although they are animals, they have spiritual powers. They have the ability to go through endless changes and transformations. Don’t get ideas about having a great, golden-winged peng bird or a dragon for a pet. You could never capture one.

The garudas and dragons are both divided into four kinds according to how they are born. For example, among birds there are womb-born birds, egg-born birds, moisture-born birds, and transformationally-born birds. Someone wonders, “I know that birds are born from eggs. How could there be such a thing as a womb-born bird?” Your knowledge may not be complete. What you’ve seen and heard may not be the entire picture. There are still things you haven’t seen, haven’t heard, and don’t know. Do you understand? Therefore, there are birds from all four categories of birth—womb, egg, moisture, and transformation. The same applies to dragons. There are dragons born from wombs, from eggs, from moisture, and by transformation. There is not just one kind of dragon, but many kinds. There are horse-dragons—horses can transform into dragons and also give birth to dragons; elephant-dragons—elephants can also turn into dragons and give birth to dragons; fish-dragons—fish can turn into dragons and give birth to them; toad-dragons—toads can also turn into dragons. The least intelligent are the egg-born; the smartest are the transformationally-born. Someone just now mentioned that snakes are the most intelligent. Snakes belong to the dragon family. However, an egg-born snake is very stupid. The same applies to birds. Transformationally-born birds are extremely intelligent.

An egg-born garuda is not able to eat a transformationally-born dragon. Nor can it eat moisture-born or womb-born dragons. It can only eat egg-born dragons. Transformationally-born garudas, on the other hand, are able to eat dragons from all four types of birth. A transformationally-born dragon cannot be eaten by an egg-born garuda, nor can it be eaten by a womb-born or moisture-born garuda. Why is that? Because these dragons are born by transformation and have greater spiritual powers. Only transformationally-born garudas are able to eat transformationally-born dragons. There are those four different categories of birth.

Now I will tell you how garudas meet their death. For example, some volcanic eruptions are instances of garudas dying. The fire comes from the bird’s body. There are many inconceivable states in the world. If you exhaustively investigate the Buddhadharma, you will understand everything.

The golden-winged bird lives on Vajra Mountain, a place where people can’t go, and its palace is made out of the seven precious things. It also eats the seven treasures—gold, silver, and various gems—but its favorite food is dragons. When it is about to die, however, it can no longer eat dragons. Why? It’s because dragons’ bodies contain poison. When the golden-winged bird is healthy, it does not fear the poison of the dragons. But when it is old and approaching death, the venemous vapors that the dragons spit out act like tear gas bombs, blinding the peng bird’s eyes. Before that time, the peng bird has protection—likened to a tear gas mask. But it loses it with age. You could say that once it becomes senile, it forgets to wear the gas mask. So when it swoops down to eat dragons, they release the tear gas and the old peng bird has to leave the sea.

On the verge of starvation, it then perches on an iron tree on the Vajra Mountain. But when it can no longer bear the hunger, it feels it has to fly into the sea again to look for dragons to eat. At that time, the dragons again emit poison from their bodies and drive the bird away.

Eventually, crazed by its need for dragons to eat, it dives into the water. But its dive is too deep and it goes clear down to the wind wheel that supports the world. Well, whatever you are, even a mighty peng bird, if you enter that place, you will never get through it. It is at the very bottom of the sea—even the dragon kings don’t go there. Maddened by its hunger for dragons, the peng bird overshoots its mark. Struck by the wind, it cannot take it and flies back to the iron tree on the Vajra Mountain. This happens seven times until finally the golden-winged bird, completely exhausted, dies from a case of dragon poisoning. All dragons have venom in them. At death, the golden-winged bird’s body catches fire. As I said earlier, volcanic eruptions are due to the deaths of garuÉas. The fire is so fierce that it demolishes everything, however hard or solid it may be. Even stones and the seven precious gems melt. When that happens, the Dragon King Nanda, afraid that this huge fire will destroy the jeweled mountain, quickly sends down rain. The rain drops are as large as carriage wheels (this refers to heavenly carriages wheels, which are forty yojanas in diameter), and they succeed in putting out the blaze. The golden-winged bird is completely reduced to ashes, yet its heart is not destroyed.

If a wheel-turning sage king obtains this heart, it becomes his wish-fulfilling pearl. If the Jade Emperor obtains it, he wears it on his head as a precious light-emitting pearl. If a dragon king obtains this pearl, he is protected from all disasters and suffering. He will never be eaten by any peng bird, because they fear his pearl.

That’s what happens when a garuda bird dies. In the Manifestations Chapter of the Flower Adornment Sutra, there is a verse that goes:

The Bodhisattva Garuda
Has the bases of psychic power as his solid feet,
Expedients and courage as his wings, and
Kindness and compassion as his pure eyes.
Perched upon the tree of All-Wisdom,
He contemplates the great sea of the three existences.
He snatches out dragons that are humans and gods,
And sets them securely on the other shore of nirvana.

From this verse in the sutra, we can see that the great golden-winged peng bird is also a transformation body manifested by a great Bodhisattva to cross over all sentient beings. So the verse says, “The Bodhisattva Garuda,” the Great Golden-Winged Peng Bird Bodhisattva, “has the bases of psychic power as his solid feet.” All is as he wishes, and he is very free and at ease, flying back and forth in space. His feet are very solid. He can devour huge elephants the way hawks eat small chickens. He can pick up one or even several dozen elephants in one claw, carry them to where he lives, and eat them one by one the way we eat peanuts. Since there are elephant-dragons, he also eats elephants. In fact, he eats just about everything, until he is about to die, when he can’t eat anything at all.

He has “expedients and courage as his wings.” His enormously powerful wings are formed of expedients and vigor. And yet he has “kindness and compassion as his pure eyes.” He appears to eat dragons, but in the same way Venerable Master Zhi Gong used to eat pigeons: after eating two of them, he would spit both out alive. Fish that had been cooked would come to life again in the Master’s belly and he’d spit them out. When this Great Golden-Winged Peng Bird Bodhisattva catches sight of humans, gods, or dragons, who are about to die anyway, he eats them, and when they enter his revolving wheel, they don’t suffer anymore and reach the other shore of nirvana. He appears to be eating them, but he’s actually teaching and transforming sentient beings. Therefore, this bird “perched upon the tree of All-Wisdom,” not the tree of stupidity, “contemplates the great ocean of the three existences”—the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm. He uses his claws and “snatches out dragons that are humans and gods,” dragons of either the human realm or heavenly realms, “setting them securely on the other shore of nirvana.”

We can talk about it, but this is an inconceivable state, not one that ordinary people can understand. People who haven’t attained to sagehood will not believe this principle; yet after they have realized sagehood, they will say, “Oh, that’s really the way it is.”

Great Master Han Shan also discussed the golden-winged peng bird in one of his verses:

When the golden-winged bird’s life ends,
His flesh and bones decompose and scatter.
Only his heart remains unharmed,
Perfect, clear, with a dazzling light.
If a dragon king obtains it, it becomes his pearl,
Which can destroy a thousand years’ darkness.
If a wheel-turning king obtains it,
It becomes his wish-fulfilling pearl
And can save him from every difficulty.
How is it that in the human realm,
People use it every day and never see it?

I explained this verse before at Gold Mountain Monastery [then located on 15th Street] in Chinatown, and I even asked you about it. But no one answered me then. So today I will explain it again.

When the golden-winged bird’s life ends, /His flesh and bones decompose and scatter. / Only his heart remains unharmed. No matter how much it burns, the heart will not disintegrate. Perfect, clear, with a dazzling light. It is round within the round, bright within the bright, endowed with a dazzling brilliance that resembles the sunlight. Just as the sunlight can be blinding, likewise this brilliant light is blindingly bright. If a Dragon King obtains it, it becomes his pearl, Á Which can destroy a thousand years’ darkness. It can dispel every kind of darkness.

If a wheel-turning king obtains it, it becomes his wish-fulfilling pearl. He can get whatever he wants from the pearl. If he thinks, “I want a fast, galloping steed,” then a fast steed will emerge from the pearl. If he thinks, “I want an airplane,” then an airplane will emerge from the pearl. In the case of the wheel-turning king, it is a flying-carriage. If the wheel-turning sage king would like to be entertained by a woman, an extremely beautiful maiden will emerge from the pearl. He doesn’t even have to engage in false-thinking. All he has to do is say, “Send a woman,” and a woman will appear—this is the maiden-jewel. If one woman is not enough, another one will appear, even more ravishing than the last. Since the wheel-turning king is insatiably greedy for women, as many of them will manifest from the pearl as he desires. And when he doesn’t want them anymore, they will all return to the pearl. And can save him from every difficulty. The pearl can rescue him from any calamity.

How is it that in the human realm, / People use it every day and never see it? Everyone has this wish-fulfilling pearl. It is just that people do not know how to make it work. They don’t know how to “recite this mantra.” Every day when we eat and talk and walk and put on clothes, we are actually experiencing the functions of the wish-fulfilling pearl, but we can’t see what’s really happening. That is because people are too deeply confused. They cannot find their wish-fulfilling pearl.

Sutra:

**Specifically, they were: Garuda King Swift and Powerful; Garuda King Indestructible Jeweled Crest; Garuda King Pure Swiftness; Garuda King Steadfast Resolve; Garuda King Great Ocean’s Power to Gather and Sustain; Garuda King Unwavering Pure Light; Garuda King Skillfully Adorned Crown Cowl; Garuda King Adroitly Appearing Everywhere; Garuda King Universally Contemplating the Oceans; and Garuda King Universal Voice and Immense Eyes. These and others acted as leaders of an inconceivable number of garudas, and they all accomplished the power of great expedients, and were universally able to rescue and gather in all sentient beings.**

Commentary:

Garuda Kings are great Bodhisattvas who manifest in that form in order to subdue sentient beings. Specifically, they were: Garuda  King Swift and Powerful. Not only is he bigger than other garudas, he is also faster. No other garuda can fly as swiftly as he can. His power and speed are like those of contemporary rockets launched into outer space. Perched upon an iron tree on Vajra Mountain, he gazes out at the sea. At times he may fly out over the sea and flap his wings, parting the waters. By the time he makes it back to the tree, the sea waters haven’t even closed up again. That is how fast he is.

The next Garuda King is called Indestructible Jeweled Crest. No one and nothing can destroy the jeweled crest of this Garuda King. Garuda King Pure Swiftness is both pure and swift. Garuda  King Steadfast Resolve has attained irreversibility with respect to the Dharma of anuttarasamYakshambodhi. He is non-retreating in position, in thought, and in conduct. Non-retreating in position means that having reached the position of a great Bodhisattva, he will not retreat to the position of an Arhat. Non-retreating in thought means that having brought forth the resolve of a Bodhisattva, he will not retreat to the way of thinking of the Two Vehicles or that of ordinary people. Non-retreating in conduct means that since merely thinking but not doing would be useless, he cultivates more and more vigorously and diligently day by day. So he is irreversible in position, thought, and conduct. He is unlike some of us who entertain thoughts of returning to lay life or getting married or engaging in activities that are not conducive to cultivation. That would be retreating. This Garuda King does not retreat.

The next Garuda King is named Great Ocean’s Power to Gather and Sustain. The waters of all the streams, rivers, and lakes flow into the great ocean, because the ocean has a power to draw them in. Just as the ocean gathers all waters, this garuda bird gathers in the dragons in the sea. He does not have to go into the sea to eat them. He has a power of attraction that draws the dragons out of the ocean and up into the air where he is. It is just like a magnet attracting iron filings. Would you say that he is powerful or not?

Garuda King Unwavering Pure Light is firm and solid, and has a pure radiance. Garuda King Skillfully Adorned Crown Cowl. The crown on his head is more magnificent and adorned than those of any other Garuda King. None of them can learn how to fashion such adorned crowns as their cowls. Garuda King Adroitly Appearing Everywhere can go wherever he wishes; he can appear in any place at all. When Garuda King Universally Contemplating the Oceans contemplates the oceans, he can see at once where the great and the small dragons are. Other garudas might be unable to locate dragons, but he sees them very clearly. With compassionate and pure eyes, he contemplates the oceans of the three existences, and can eat any of the dragons in them. And finally, there is Garuda King Universal Voice and Immense Eyes, whose sound is deafening. When the dragons in the sea hear his cry, they are scared out of their wits. They freeze and wait there to be eaten. This garuda has eyes that are broad and vast, bigger than ten eyes of ordinary garudas.

These and others acted as leaders of an inconceivable number of garudas. These ten Garuda Kings are the rulers of an incalculable number of garudas. And they all accomplished the power of great expedients, and were universally able to rescue and gather in all sentient beings. Most Bodhisattvas do not have such great expedient power as they. When these birds eat dragons, they cross over the dragons; when they eat fish, they save the fish; when they devour horses, they save the horses; when they swallow elephants, they rescue the elephants. When they eat any kind of creature, they are actually saving and teaching them in the process.  It looks as if they are eating sentient beings, but in reality they are saving them, gathering them in. Why? Because they only eat those creatures who are about to die anyway. If these creatures weren’t due to die, the garuÉa birds would not eat them.

Hearing that the great golden-winged peng bird can save creatures by eating them,” one of my young disciples is thinking, “When I eat this apple, I am saving the apple. The apple fell from the tree and is meant to be eaten, so I will eat it.”

Some other people are thinking, “If the great golden-winged peng bird, which is an animal, can save sentient beings by eating them, even though I’m not as big as it and can’t fly as high, still, as a person I’m smarter, so I should be able to save more beings than it does by eating them.” That’s fine, except that these golden-winged peng birds are manifestations of Bodhisattvas who have expedients and courage as their wings, and kindness and compassion as their pure eyes. Perched upon the tree of All-Wisdom, they contemplate the great sea of the three existences. They snatch out dragons that are humans and gods, and set them securely on the other shore of nirvana. Can you do that? If you can set them on nirvana’s shore, you can cross over sentient beings. Otherwise, you’ll be “crossed over” by sentient beings, and end up becoming whatever bird you eat. That is, since you incorporate with them—forming a limited corporation—you become the same as they are. Therefore, if you can’t cross them over to nirvana’s shore, don’t eat them. It’s far too dangerous.

3. Kinnara Kings

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Kinnara Kings.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Kinnara Kings. Asuras, garu¤a, and kinnaras are part of the eightfold division of ghosts and spirits. Kinnara is a Sanskrit word that translates as “non-human,” “questionable spirit,” and “doubtful spirit.” This type of spirit strongly resembles a human: his features are upright and yet a horn grows from his head, hence his name “nonhuman.” The horn on his head causes the beholder to question whether the spirit is human or not, so he is also called a “questionable spirit.”

Dharma Master Hsuan Tsang of the Tang Dynasty translated the name kinnara as “singing spirit,” because it is a music spirit in the court of the Jade Emperor [Lord Shakra]. Kinnara also means “incense-sniffing spirit” because it likes to smell incense. When the Jade Emperor wishes to hear music or there is some special celebration, he only needs to light a special kind of incense and many kinnara spirits will come.

These Kinnara Kings are also manifestations of Bodhisattvas. They appear to be ordinary sentient beings, but they are not; they are Bodhisattvas. These singing spirits go wherever there is a celebration and sing songs, causing sentient beings who hear them to awaken to the Way. No matter what Dharma you might cultivate, if you completely master it, you can become enlightened. But to only put on a pretense of studying, or only half understand or just grasp a little bit is useless. You will be successful only if you can master your field of study. Therefore, when songs and praises are sung well, they delight listeners and aid them in their cultivation.

Sutra:

**Specifically, they were: Kinnara King Bright Heaven of Kind Wisdom; Kinnara King Wonderful Floral Banner; Kinnara King Assorted Adornments; Kinnara King Delightful Roar; Kinnara King Brilliance of Bejeweled Trees; Kinnara King Delighting the Beholder; Kinnara King Adornment with Supreme Light; Kinnara King Exquisite Flower Banner; Kinnara King Earth-Shaking Power; and Kinnara King Gathering in and Subduing Evil Multitudes. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of kinnaras, and they all diligently and vigorously contemplated all dharmas. Their minds were always happy, playful and free.**

Commentary:

Specifically, they were: Kinnara King Bright Heaven of Kind Wisdom, who is skilled at crossing over sentient beings and causing them to unfold great wisdom.

Kinnara King Wonderful Floral Banner has a banner made out of beautiful lotuses. There was the Kinnara King Assorted Adornments, who uses an assortment of the seven treasures as adornments. Also present was the Kinnara King Delightful Roar, who delights listeners with his clear and resonant voice. There was the Kinnara King Brilliance of Bejeweled Trees. His jeweled Bodhi trees give off the light of Bodhi. There was another Kinnara King named Delighting the Beholder. His appearance is very kind, and all who see him are delighted. There was also the Kinnara King Adornment with Supreme Light, who uses a superior kind of light to do his adorning.

Also present was the Kinnara King Exquisite Flower Banner. He is very subtle and wonderful, like a banner of lotuses. The Kinnara King Earth-Shaking Power was also there. His every single move can shake the earth. And there was also the Kinnara King Gathering in and Subduing Evil Multitudes. He can tame and subdue all bad-natured sentient beings.

These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of kinnaras. These ten Kinnara Kings acted as the leaders of the infinite kinnara multitudes. and they all diligently and vigorously contemplated all dharmas. They were all very valiant and vigorous, not lax or lazy. They constantly contemplated and investigated all dharmas. Their minds were always happy no matter what dharma they contemplated.

People who investigate the Buddhadharma and who do not yet have firm samadhi power should not read improper books. Reading such books causes your mind to be swayed. When your mind is swayed, you run into problems and then you won’t be able to be happy all the time. In contemplating all dharmas, you should contemplate true dharmas, not false dharmas. If a book wasn’t handed down by a sage, don’t read it. Don’t read novels filled with love and romance, because such books make you confused to the point that you can’t sleep at night and you have no energy during the day. They cause you to fall asleep during the Sutra lectures, and indulge in fantasies when you’re not attending lectures. So, in contemplating dharmas, you must contemplate true dharmas, not false dharmas. People who have left the home-life should be especially careful to avoid reading improper books, such as romantic novels, because once you get caught in the maze of love, it’s not easy to get out.

Their minds were playful and free. Being “playful and free” here means understanding the Buddhadharma yourself and leading others to understand as well. It doesn’t mean playing around and doing as you please. That’s a mistake.

**4. Mahoraga Kings**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Mahoraga Kings.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Mahoraga Kings. Mahoraga is a Sanskrit term that translates as “great crawlers on their bellies.” They are great pythons. Actually they are great Bodhisattvas manifesting in the form of pythons. Bodhisattvas transform themselves into various forms in order to benefit others, without being attached to the act of benefiting others. Therefore, in this case, they manifest as mahoragas, who are also part of the eightfold division of ghosts and spirits.

Sutra:

**Specifically, they were: Mahoraga King Kind Wisdom; Mahoraga  King Clear, Majestic Voice; Mahoraga King Supreme Wisdom and Ornamented Topknot; Mahoraga King Lord Wondrous Eyes; Mahoraga King Lamp-Like Banner That the Multitudes Rely Upon; Mahoraga King Supreme Light Banner; Mahoraga King Lion Chest; Mahoraga King Sound of Many Wondrous Adornments; Mahoraga King Solid as Sumeru; and Mahoraga King Adorable Brightness. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of mahoragas, and they all diligently cultivated vast, great expedients, causing sentient beings to rend forever the net of delusion.**

Commentary:

Specifically, to list some of the leaders of the mahoragas, they were: First, Mahoraga King Kind Wisdom, who has great, benevolent wisdom. There was also Mahoraga King Clear, Majestic Voice, the sound of whose voice is very awesome, clear, and pure. There is another Mahoraga King named Supreme Wisdom and Ornamented Topknot. His wisdom is supreme, and his topknot is adorned with all kinds of exquisite gems. Mahoraga King Lord Wondrous Eyes has extremely beautiful eyes. The next Mahoraga King is named Lamp-Like Banner That the Multitudes Rely Upon. He constantly emits light that takes the form of a banner. His light also acts as a beacon of refuge for all sentient beings in that all beings look towards it.

Mahoraga King Supreme Light Banner has a banner made of the most sublime radiance. The Mahoraga King Lion Chest. The lion is the king of beasts. The lion’s chest refers to the lion’s stomach, which can digest the bones of all other animals. This Mahoraga King is like a lion in that he can digest what is indigestible. In other words, he is able to practice what is difficult to practice and endure what is difficult to endure. Encountering something that is unbearable, he wants to bear it all the more. Confronting the impossible, he is determined to do it. For these reasons, this Mahoraga King stands out from ordinary mahoragas. Mahoraga King Sound of Many Wondrous Adornments is adorned with all kinds of wondrous gems. His sound is very clear and resonant, surpassing the sounds of all other mahoragas. Mahoraga King Solid as Sumeru has a huge body that is exceptionally hardy and strong. And there is another Mahoraga King  named Adorable Brightness. Even though his external form—that of a great python—is ugly, people are all happy to see him. He has a radiance about him.

These ten mahoraga leaders and others acted as leaders of a countless number of mahoragas. There is no way to calculate their number and they all diligently cultivated vast, great expedients, causing sentient beings to rend forever the net of delusion. They cultivated all the time without ever resting. They employed the most vast and skillful means, manifesting in the form of “great crawlers on their bellies” to cause sentient beings to cut through the net of delusion so that they can escape.

**5. Yaksha Kings**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Yaksha Kings.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Yaksha Kings. Yaksha is yao cha in a section of the Shurangama Mantra that names various ghosts:

yao cha jie la he
la cha se jie la he
bi li duo jie la he
pi she zhe jie la he
bu duo jie la he
jiu pan cha jie la he

Their heads may emit huge flames that are several dozen feet tall. They are like blazing candles but with lots of flames instead of just one. Their eyes are of different shapes. Perhaps they have one round eye and one oblong eye. Would that be good-looking? Or they might have one triangular eye and one square eye. Would you say that’s attractive? Others may have one round eye paired with a crescent-shaped eye, so they are like the sun and moon. Would that be good-looking? One eye may grow on the crown of the head and the other on the chin. One nostril may face upwards while the other faces downwards. They may have two elephant trunks for noses, or their noses may be like antennae on a snail, which they can extend or retract at will. As for their ears, one may grow in front and the other in back, or else the ears may be right next to each other. Their eyes may also grow next to each other. Their appearance is bizarre, but the uglier they are, the more they like it. They like to look grotesque. Maybe in the past they suffered because they were good-looking, and so now they like to be ugly.

There are earth-traveling yakshas, space-traveling yakshas, and yakshas in the heavens. Space-traveling yakshas have wings and fly about in the sky, transforming themselves as they fly. Sometimes they turn black, then red, and then maybe yellow. But no matter what color they take on, there is always a dark energy beneath it all and their light is very dim. A yaksha may have a human body but the head of an animal such as a cat, an ox, or a horse. In general, yakshas assume horrifying shapes that scare you to death when you see them. And when you die of fright, they laugh and applaud and feel it’s a lot of fun. This type of ghost is fond of giving people trouble. yakshas do not like to help others; they like to give others trouble. yakshas are known as “speedy ghosts”; they are extremely swift.

Rakshasas are strange beings, too, and their name means “fearsome ghosts.” There are two kinds: rakshasas of love and rakshasas of views. For example, perhaps people started out planning to cultivate and have right knowledge and views. But they are too deeply confused, engulfed by the water of love. They are so ensnared by love that they may want to cultivate, but they simply can’t manage to do it. In one thought they want to cultivate, but in the next thought they want to get married. One thought arises and the other thought ceases. Since such people are too confused by love, they end up breaking the precepts and turning into rakshasas of love. However, it may still be possible for this type of ghost to cultivate.

The second type are rakshasas of views, who maintain wrong knowledge and views. They insist that things are right when they are clearly wrong, and they insist that there is no offense in breaking the precepts. They say, “What’s an offense, anyway? The term ‘offense’ is just a way of cheating people.” They hold wrong ideas of that sort. Or they won’t admit to having broken precepts, or say that breaking precepts is a very ordinary matter. The Surañgama Sutra mentions a certain Bhikshuni who maintained that lust was no offense and fell alive into the hells. Some of you may remember her name. Such people are not easy to cross over. They are raksasas of views; their wrong views are as fierce as raksasas. All of you who cultivate the Way should understand this situation.

Yakshas also means “sentient beings in misery.” Their lives are pitiful and filled with suffering. We see them as being evil, but actually we should pity them, for they are miserable.

**Sutra:**

**Specifically, they were: Yaksha King Vaisravana; Yaksha King Effortless Sound; Yaksha King Sternly Holding Weapons and Insignia; Yaksha King Great Wisdom; Yaksha King Lord Flaming Eyes; Yaksha King Vajra Eyes; Yaksha King Robust Arms; Yaksha King Bravely Opposing Great Armies; Yaksha King Abundant Resources and Wealth; and Yaksha King Power to Topple High Mountains. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of yakshas, and they all diligently guarded and protected all sentient beings.**
Commentary:

Specifically, they were: Yaksha King Vaiäravana. He is one of the Four Celestial Kings, namely, the Celestial King of the North, Vaisravana, “Much Learning.” Yakshas are ghosts, while their leader, Vaisravana, is a god. The yakshas are basically unruly and like to stir up trouble for people. But since Vaiäravana is their leader, he gets them to behave themselves and cultivate, even when they don’t want to.

These Yaksha Kings are also manifestations of Bodhisattvas. The Four Celestial Kings preside over the four continents.

1. Celestial King Dhrtarastra, “Governing Nations,” rules the East.
2. Celestial King Virëhaka, “Growth and Development,” rules the South.
3. Celestial King Virudhaka, “Broad Eyes,” rules the West.
4. Celestial King Vaisravana, “Wide Renown,” rules the North.

Yaksha King Effortless Sound was also present. He is free and at ease in the sounds he makes. He can make any type of sound at all, including all kinds of musical sounds, hence his name, “Effortless Sound.”

The next Yaksha King is named Sternly Holding Weapons and Insignia. He has a very dignified manner as he upholds such weapons as spears, daggers, and swords, as well as various insignia. For example, great ministers always have a pair of attendants who hold flags and canopies over them wherever they go. These are symbols of their high status. They may also have placards written with the words “Silence” or “Maintain Distance” to tell the crowd to stay out of their way. These are all insignia.

Yaksha King Great Wisdom was also present. Because he has great wisdom, he is able to know all the false thoughts that yakshas and raksasas have. He knows whether their thoughts are of cultivating or not, and so the yakshas all behave and don’t dare to indulge in false thinking. That means they cultivate. That’s how powerful Yaksha King Great Wisdom is. Yaksha King Lord Flaming Eyes has eyes that give off a fiery blaze of light. Yaksha King Vajra Eyes has diamond-like eyes glowing with resplendent light. Yaksha King Robust Arms has particularly powerful arms, and so he is able to move the mountains and turn over seas, displacing them as he pleases. Yaksha King Bravely Opposing Great Armies. No matter how many troops there are, the Yaksha King can defeat them. The great armies here refer to demonic armies. This particular Yaksha King watches over pëtanas. Pëtanas are fever ghosts. Sometimes people get sick and run incredibly high temperatures—far beyond what human beings can tolerate. It can be very fierce. Such fevers are caused by pëtanas, but this Yaksha King keeps them in line.

Yaksha King Abundant Resources and Wealth has a great deal of money and watches over the wealthy ghosts. There are wealthy ghosts and poor ghosts. Since all the wealthy ghosts make offerings to him, he is extremely rich. And there was the Yaksha King named Power to Topple High Mountains. He is so strong that he can split a mountain in half with a single blow of his fist so that the peak of the mountain topples into the sea.

These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of yakshas. These Yaksha Kings were the leaders of an infinite number of yakshas. And they all diligently guarded and protected all sentient beings. These Yaksha Kings don’t bother people. They give sentient beings protection, peace, and security.  Therefore, they are not the same as ordinary yakshas.

**6. Dragon Kings**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless great Dragon Kings. Specifically, they were: Dragon King Virupaksha; Dragon King Sagara; Dragon King Wondrous Banner of Cloud-like Sounds; Dragon King Mouth Aflame Lighting Up the Ocean; Dragon King Universal Banners of High Clouds. Dragon King Taksaka; Dragon King Boundless Stride; Dragon King Pure Color; Dragon King Booming Sound Carrying Everywhere; and Dragon King Free From Burning Afflictions. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of dragons, and none of them failed to diligently form clouds and shower rain to douse all sentient beings’ burning afflictions.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless great Dragon Kings. These are great, not small, dragons. Although dragons belong to the animal realm, they have spiritual powers and can make themselves big or small at will. When they are big, they can fill up the entire ocean. When they are small, they can hide away within a mote of dust. They can also appear or disappear at will. Since dragons have such ability to transform themselves in infinite ways, such great spiritual powers and majesty, they should be very happy. However, they also have their own misery. For example, there are myriads of little parasites that bite the dragons, eating their flesh and drinking their blood, making them feel miserable.

Some of you have heard me talk about dragons before. Why did dragons become dragons? Do you remember? In the past they diligently cultivated the Great Vehicle Dharma and practiced the Bodhisattva path, but they had huge tempers and heavy ignorance. They obtained a certain degree of wisdom in response to their cultivation. They were enlightened to a small extent. However, their knowledge and views were not quite proper, and they did not pay much attention to the precepts. They were “quick with the Vehicle and slow with the precepts.” They were more courageous and vigorous than anyone else in cultivating the Great Vehicle; however, they were very sloppy about holding the precepts. They said, “Oh, that’s no problem—no big deal. All I have to do is cultivate the Great Vehicle Dharma. Only those of the Lesser Vehicle hold precepts. I cultivate the Great Vehicle, which advocates ‘holding precepts without holding them.’ Although I may not hold the precepts, actually I have them!” This is like some laypeople who claim, “We are the same as those who have renounced the household life.”

As for dragons, when they were cultivating in their past lives, they felt they could get away with anything, that they were number one. Because they strove to be number one, because they were quick with the Vehicle but did not hold the precepts, they turned into dragons. Since they cultivated the Great Vehicle Dharma, they gained spiritual powers. But because they did not hold the precepts, they fell into the animal realm. Therefore, cultivators should not be sloppy. If you don’t follow the rules, in the future you might fall into the realm of dragons.

Specifically, they were: Dragon King Virupaksha. Virupa translates as “much,” “pervasive,” or “ugly.” Aksa can be translated as “form” or “faculty”—such as eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind. But the name of the Celestial King of the West, Virupaksha, is translated as “broad eyes,” not “ugly eyes” or any of the other translations.

There was Dragon King Sagara. Sagara is a Sanskrit word that means “sea,” because he is a sea dragon king and commands great respect and authority among the dragons in the sea. Whether their spiritual powers are great or small, dragons also have a Dragon King to watch over them. This Dragon King rules over all the dragons in the sea.

There was Dragon King Wondrous Banner of Cloud-like Sounds. The sounds he emits travel up into space and transform into precious clouds that appear in the form of wonderful banners.

The next Dragon King was named Mouth Aflame Lighting Up the Ocean. He spits fire from his mouth and gives off light in the sea. There was also the Dragon King Universal Banners of High Clouds. He manifests tall billowy clouds resembling precious banners. The Dragon King Taksaka has a Sanskrit name with two translations: “many tongues” and “able to harm whatever can be harmed.” He is called “many tongues” because he likes to talk endlessly among the dragons, in dragon language. It’s as if he has too many tongues, because he can’t stop talking. His name also means “able to harm whatever can be harmed,” because he does harm, and sentient beings are the victims of his harm. How does he harm beings? When this dragon gets angry, his very gaze can kill sentient beings. As soon as he sets eyes upon a being, whether a human or an animal, it dies. His breath can also kill people and animals. A dragon’s gaze and his breath are both poisonous. One bite from a dragon can poison you, because dragons are filled with the poison of greed, anger, and delusion.

Dragon King Boundless Stride is so named because there is no place that he cannot reach. There was also Dragon King Pure Color. Dragon King Booming Sound Carrying Everywhere has an extremely loud voice. And Dragon King Free From Burning Afflictions. Since this dragon has attained a refreshing purity, he is no longer afflicted.

These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of dragons. These ten are the leaders of an infinite host of dragons. And none of them failed to diligently form clouds and shower rain to douse all sentient beings’ burning afflictions. These Dragon Kings all vigorously studied the Buddhadharma. Their job is to make clouds and rain. They are also responsible for making fog and mist to cool sentient beings’ burning afflictions. Ordinary people cannot see this, but when there is fog around a mountain, it is being spat out by dragons. It can be a perfectly clear, sunny day, and all of a sudden a fog appears. That is the dragons using their spiritual powers. Those who have opened the Five Eyes can see them. If dragons meet a virtuous person, they will bow to that person. They may puff out some fog to let you know that they are coming. Dragons are magical creatures and can tell right away whether or not a person is virtuous. In fact, all the ghosts and spirits of the eightfold division can tell whether or not you have virtue, and if you do, they will protect you wherever you go. They will carry out your every wish. For instance, you might say to the Dragon King, “Don’t let it rain,” and it won’t rain. A certain person is able to control the Dragon Kings because he has sufficient virtue. The other day he told the Dragon Kings, “Don’t let it rain in the morning, but it’s okay if it rains in the afternoon.” And that’s what happened.

**7. Kumbhanda Kings**

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Kumbhanda Kings. Specifically, they were: Kumbhanda King Growth and Development; Kumbhanda King Dragon Ruler; Kumbhanda King Skilled at Adorning Banners; Kumbhanda King Universally Magnanimous Practice; Kumbhanda King Most Terrifying; Kumbhanda King Handsome with Beautiful Eyes; Kumbhanda King Wisdom Like a High Peak; Kumbhanda King Robust Arms; Kumbhanda King Eyes Resembling Flowers of Boundless Purity; and Kumbhanda King Asura Eyes and Visage Vast as Heaven. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of kumbhandas, and they all diligently cultivated the Dharma door of nonobstruction and emitted brilliant light.**
Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Kumbhanda Kings. Kumbhanda is a Sanskrit word with several translations. Some translate it as “white gourd ghost,” others as “barrel-shaped ghost.” A white gourd has a shape similar to a barrel. This kind of ghost is shaped like a gourd and a barrel, because it doesn’t have legs or a head. The Kumbhanda Kings are those who hold the most authority among the kumbhandas.

Specifically, they were: Kumbhanda King Growth and Development (Virudhaka). This Kumbhanda King is one of the Four Celestial Kings, and he presides over the ghosts and spirits of the South. The first type of ghost that he governs is the kumbhandas or nightmare ghosts, and the second type is the pretas, or bewitching ghosts. The kumbhandas and the pretas are good friends who band together to wreak havoc. They are partners in evildoing.

Also present was the Kumbhanda King Dragon Ruler. The Kumbhanda King named Skilled at Adorning Banners is good at adornment. There was also the Kumbhanda King Universally Magnanimous Practice. Ordinary kumbhandas  harm living beings, but this Kumbhanda King benefits all beings, for he is a Bodhisattva appearing by transformation in the realm of kumbhandas.

Every cultivator should think like this: Don’t be concerned with whether or not people are good to you. Instead, you should ask yourself whether or not you are good to others. “If I’m good to others and others aren’t good to me, it shouldn’t bother me. However, if I am not good to others and others are good to me, then I had better rectify my thinking and treat others well.” Everyone has to do his or her own laundry. Don’t be concerned with washing others’ clothes, thinking, “He’s not right,” or “She’s not right.” You shouldn’t think like that. Even if others aren’t good to you, you should think, “It’s not that people aren’t treating me well. Rather, I am just undergoing the retribution I deserve for not treating people well in the past.” If you think along those lines, you won’t have any trouble.

The next Kumbhanda King was named Most Terrifying. The sight of this Kumbhanda King frightens not only people, but other kumbhandas as well. He is extremely terrifying. Kumbhanda King Handsome with Beautiful Eyes has a very beautiful and attractive appearance. Kumbhanda King Wisdom Like a High Peak has lofty wisdom resembling the summit of a tall mountain.

Kumbhanda King Robust Arms has strong, stout arms. Even if he is hacked or stabbed with knives, spears, daggers, and so forth, he is not afraid. He will simply stick out his arms to ward them off, and the knives will be sent flying into space. That’s how powerful he is. There was another “white gourd” king called the Kumbhanda King Eyes Resembling Flowers of Boundless Purity. And Kumbhanda King Asura Eyes and Visage Vast as Heaven has a huge face and angry, glaring eyes like those of an asura. These ten barrel-shaped kumbhanda ghosts and others acted as leaders of a countless number of kumbhandas. And they all diligently cultivated the Dharma door of nonobstruction. Since these kumbhandas did not know how to be free of obstruction, they had to cultivate the Dharma door of nonobstruction. They also emitted brilliant light. Before, they were immersed in darkness, but now, having studied the Dharma door of nonobstruction, they are able to release bright light.

8. Gandharva Kings

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Gandharva Kings. Specifically, they were: Gandharva King Governing Nations; Gandharva King Light Resembling Trees; Gandharva King Pure Eyes; Gandharva King Floral Crown; Gandharva King Universal Sound; Gandharva King Happily Dancing Splendid Eyes; Gandharva King Lion Banner of Wonderful Sound; Gandharva King Universally Releasing Jeweled Brilliance; Gandharva King Banner of Vajra Trees’ Blossoms; and Gandharva King Joyfully Displaying Ornaments Everywhere. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of gandharvas, and they all deeply believed in and understood the Great Dharma, delighting in it, cherishing it, and diligently and tirelessly cultivating it.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Gandharva Kings. Gandharva is a Sanskrit word that means “searching for fragrance.” They don’t do anything productive. They just wait until people have finished preparing their meals, and then they go to people’s doors to smell the aroma of the food and to make music. Their music causes people to be happy and so people give them something to eat. Therefore, gandharvas are also called “music spirits.” They are also one of the types of spirits who play music for the Jade Emperor. These spirits can play any kind of music and they know how to use all the different musical instruments.

“King” indicates that they were the gandharvas with the most power and authority.

Specifically, they were: Gandharva King Governing Nations. “Governing Nations”—Dhrtarastra—is the name of the Celestial King in the East. He is one of the Four Celestial Kings—the one who protects and maintains his land, enabling all sentient beings to dwell in peace. “Governing Nations” is the king of the musical spirits.

Gandharva King Light Resembling Trees is also a king of the musical spirits, so named because he emits light that resembles a tree.

Gandharva King Pure Eyes has clear, pure eyes. Gandharva King Floral Crown wears a cap made of flowers. Gandharva King Universal Sound makes music that can be heard everywhere throughout the world. Gandharva King Happily Dancing Splendid Eyes likes to rock-and-roll and so he’s called “Happily Dancing.” On the one hand he makes music, and on the other hand he rocks and rolls. “Splendid Eyes”: His eyes are extremely beautiful. Because he rocks and rolls and because he has such magnificent eyes, many people like to listen to his music.

The next Gandharva King was named Lion Banner of Wonderful Sound. His music is exceptionally and exquisitely beautiful. Also present were Gandharva King Universally Releasing Jeweled Brilliance, Gandharva King Banner of Vajra Trees’ Blossoms, and Gandharva King Joyfully Displaying Ornaments Everywhere. He displays pervasive adornments. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of gandharvas. The ten Gandharva Kings just mentioned are the leaders, and the total number of gandharvas is infinite.

And they all deeply believed in and understood the Great Dharma—the Great Vehicle Buddhadharma. They believed in and understood it, delighting in it, cherishing it, and diligently and tirelessly cultivating it. Since their faith was deep, they cherished its importance. Since they cherished and valued the Great Vehicle Buddhadharma, they delighted in it and deeply believed in and understood it, and diligently cultivated it without weariness.

Celestial King Governing Nations is in charge of the gandharvas and also in charge of one other division: the pisäcas. Pisäca is a Sanskrit word that translates as “ghost who eats essence and energy.” This kind of ghost is really terrible. It devours people’s essence and energy and also the essence and energy of the five kinds of grains. The reason that the five grains do not have much flavor when people eat them is that the pisäca ghosts have already devoured them. They eat the essence and energy of people and of the five grains in order to sustain their life.

Celestial King Governing Nations watches over the gandharva spirits and the pisaca ghosts and causes them to diligently cultivate without weariness. They diligently cultivate the Great Vehicle Buddhadharma, which means they don’t just cultivate for a while and then feel tired and quit.

VI. The Oceanic Multitudes Gather Like Clouds

D. Celestial Beings

1. Celestial Princes of the Moon

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Celestial Princes of the Moon. Specifically, they were: Celestial Prince Moon; Celestial Prince Brilliance from King-of-Flowers-Cowl; Celestial Prince All Manner of Pure and Wonderful Radiance; Celestial Prince Instilling Peace and Joy in the Hearts of the World; Celestial Prince Bright Eyes of the King of Trees; Celestial Prince Manifesting Pure Light; Celestial Prince Universally Roaming Yet Unmoving Light; Celestial Prince Sovereign Constellation King; Celestial Prince Moon of Pure Enlightenment; and Celestial Prince Great Majestic Light. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Celestial Princes of the Moon, and they all diligently illuminated the treasures in the minds of sentient beings.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Celestial Princes of the Moon. Specifically, they were: Celestial Prince Moon; Celestial Prince Brilliance from King-of-Flowers-Cowl; Celestial Prince All Manner of Pure and Wonderful Radiance; Celestial Prince Instilling Peace and Joy in the Hearts of the World, who causes all sentient beings in the world to attain peace of mind.

Celestial Prince Bright Eyes of the King of Trees is also known as Great King of Trees, and his eyes glow. Celestial Prince Manifesting Pure Light causes a clear, pure light to appear throughout the world. Celestial Prince Universally Roaming Yet Unmoving Light roams throughout the worlds of the ten directions, yet does not move from his original place. Celestial Prince Sovereign Constellation King is the king among constellations, and he is free and at ease. Also present was Celestial Prince Moon of Pure Enlightenment. Pure, perfect enlightenment is like the moonlight. And Celestial Prince Great Majestic Light has extremely awesome virtue. These ten princes just mentioned and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Celestial Princes of the Moon, and they all diligently illuminated the treasures in the minds of sentient beings. They were constantly diligent in their cultivation and so were able to bring forth the treasures in the hearts of sentient beings.

The Buddha is like the pure, cool moon in space. Sentient beings who have purified the water of their minds will be able to reflect the moonlight there. And so it is said,

The Buddha is like the pure, cool moon,
Always traveling through space.
When the water of sentient beings’ minds is pure,
Bodhi is reflected within it.
The Buddha is always in the great void, roaming about. No matter who you are, if the water in your mind is pure, the Way of Enlightenment will appear there.

2. Celestial Princes of the Sun

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Celestial Princes of the Sun. Specifically, they were: Celestial Prince Sun; Celestial Prince Bright Flaming Eyes; Celestial Prince Sumeru-Light Awe---Inspiring Banner; Celestial Prince Immaculate Jewel Adornment; Celestial Prince Non-Retreating Courage; Celestial Prince Brilliance from Exquisite Flower Garlands; Celestial Prince Supreme Banner Light; Celestial Prince Jeweled Cowl Universal Light; Celestial Prince Bright Eyes; Celestial Prince Upholding Superior Virtue; and Celestial Prince Universal Radiance. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Celestial Princes of the Sun, and they all cultivated diligently in order to benefit sentient beings and increase their good roots.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Celestial Princes of the Sun.  Specifically, they were: Celestial Prince Sun. There was the Celestial Prince Bright Flaming Eyes. His eyes radiate light, which is why he is called “Bright Flaming Eyes.” Celestial Prince Sumeru-Light Awe-Inspiring Banner has light resembling that of Wonderfully High Mountain. He inspires awe and respect in everyone who sees him.

Celestial Prince Immaculate Jewel Adornment has a jewel called “Immaculate,” which enables him always to be pure. No defilement can taint him.

Celestial Prince Non-Retreating Courage only progresses; he never retreats. Celestial Prince Brilliance from Exquisite Flower Garlands has a wondrous necklace of flowers and also has a kind of light. The next Celestial Prince was named Supreme Banner Light. No one’s light is more spectacular than his. There is another Celestial Prince called Jeweled Cowl Universal Light. Celestial Prince Bright Eyes radiates light from his eyes. Celestial Prince Upholding Superior Virtue is absolutely superior in his virtuous practice. And finally there is Celestial Prince Universal Radiance, who emits a magnificent light everywhere.

These ten and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Celestial Princes of the Sun. There are an extremely great number of Celestial Princes of the Sun, and they all cultivated the Great Vehicle Buddhadharma diligently in order to benefit sentient beings and increase their good roots. They help sentient beings who have not yet planted good roots to plant them. They help sentient beings who have already planted good roots to increase them. They help sentient beings who have already increased their good roots to bring them to maturity. They help sentient beings whose good roots have already matured to attain liberation.

3. Kings of the Heavens of the Thirty-three

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Kings of the Heavens of the Thirty-three. Specifically, they were: Celestial King Sakra-Indra; Celestial King Universally Praised Full Voice; Celestial King Compassionate Eyes and Precious Cowl; Celestial King Jeweled Light Banner of Renown; Celestial King Inspiring Happiness Cowl; Celestial King Admirable Proper Mindfulness; Celestial King Sumeru Splendid Sound; Celestial King Fulfilling Intentions; Celestial King Delightful Pure Floral Light; Celestial King Eyes of Wisdom; and Celestial King Effortless Light of Awakening. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Kings of the Heavens of the Thirty-three, and they all diligently initiated great works in all worlds.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Kings of the Heavens of the Thirty-three. The Heaven of the Thirty-three is also called the Trayastrimsa Heaven. It is located at the summit of Mount Sumeru. The Heaven of the Four Kings is located halfway up Mount Sumeru. Trayastrimsa is Sanskrit and means “thirty-three.” The Trayastrimsa Heaven is basically one heaven, but within it there are eight heavens to the east, eight heavens to the west, eight heavens to the south, and eight heavens to the north. Four times eight makes thirty-two. Add to that the central heaven, and that makes thirty-three heavens, which is why this is called the Heaven of the Thirty-three, or Trayastrimsa.

Why does the text say there was “a countless number of kings from the Heaven of the Thirty-three”? This world is not the only world there is. In the Dharma Realm there are infinitely many worlds; it would be impossible to calculate their number. In this world today with its scientific advances, people have gone on explorations to the South and North Poles, but no matter how much they explore, there will always be more to explore. Even exploring the moon and the stars, they will never be able to completely discover the secrets of heaven and earth. When the secrets of the universe have all been discovered, this world will come to an end. When this world disappears, another world will come into being. One Mount Sumeru, one sun and one moon, and one set of the four continents makes one world. Since the number of Mount Sumerus is infinite and the number of worlds is infinite, the number of Celestial Kings from Heavens of the Thirty-three is also infinite.

The Lord in the Heaven of the Thirty-three was previously a woman. Because she came across a Buddha image whose gold was peeling and flaking off in a dilapidated temple, she resolved to collect enough funds to repair them and convinced thirty-two other women to help. Together they repaired the temple and regilt the image. Due to the merit and virtue she accumulated from renovating the temple, she was reborn in the heavens. Because she had adorned the Buddha image, she became the Lord of the Heaven of the Thirty-three. That is a brief account of the background of this Celestial King.

Specifically, they were: Celestial King Sãkra-devanam Indra. Sakra means “able.” Indra means “ruler.” And in between is the word devanam, which means “of the gods.” Therefore, this god is called “Sakra-devanam Indra” which means “Able Ruler of the Gods.” This is the same god referred to in the Amitabha Sutra as shi ti huan yin and in the Surangama Mantra in the phrase na mo yin tuo la ye. This Celestial King is the Lord of the Trayastrimsa Heaven. All sentient beings everywhere praise Celestial King Universally Praised Full Voice, and the sound of his voice fills heaven and earth. The eyes of Celestial King Compassionate Eyes and Precious Cowl are extremely kind, and he has a jeweled cowl. The name of Celestial King Jeweled Light Banner Renown is known everywhere. Sentient beings are delighted as soon as they see Celestial King Inspiring Happiness Cowl. Everyone has respectful regard for Celestial King Admirable Proper Mindfulness. Celestial King Sumeru Splendid Sound is called Wonderfully High Splendid Sound because the sound of his voice is quite supreme. Celestial King Fulfilling Intentions can bring whatever thoughts sentient beings are having to realization. However, he brings only good thoughts to realization, not evil ones. If you have a bad thought, he will not help you fulfill it. Why not? It’s because all the gods like people to do good and do not like for them to do evil. Celestial King Delightful Pure Floral Light is very compassionate, so whoever sees him becomes very happy. He is as pure and beautiful as a lotus blossom. There is another Celestial King named Celestial King Eyes of Wisdom. His wisdom is as radiant as the light of the sun. And Celestial King Effortless Light of Awakening is able to enlighten all sentient beings.

These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Kings of the Heavens of the Thirty-three. The Celestial Kings just named are the leaders in this heaven. Their number cannot be counted. And they all diligently initiated great works in all worlds. They are all extremely vigorous. The greatest work is cultivating and studying the Buddhadharma—planting causes for bodhi and reaping the fruit of bodhi. The greatest deed is to become a Buddha.

Why do the gods like people to do good? Lord Sakra sends a heavenly messenger down to the world to check up on everyone to determine whether there are more people doing good or more doing evil. If the number of people doing good in the world is greater, then when the gods battle with the asuras, Lord Sãkra will certainly defeat the asuras. But if the number of evil-doers is greater, the gods will lose to the asuras. That is why the gods exhort people to do good and punish them for doing evil. If there are more good people, the gods’ retinue increases. If there are more evil people, the retinue of the asuras increases. That is why the gods to want all sentient beings to diligently cultivate wholesome merit and virtue, and stop committing evil offenses. Therefore, the Celestial Kings employ their methods for teaching and transforming sentient beings.

4. Kings of the Suyama Heavens

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Kings of the Suyama Heavens. Specifically, they were: Celestial King Well-Divided Time; Celestial King Charming Light; Celestial King Infinite Wisdom and Banner of Meritorious Virtues; Celestial King Skillful at Transforming and Adorning; Celestial King Great Light of Uniting and Upholding; Celestial King Inconceivable Wisdom; Celestial King Hub-of-the-Wheel; Celestial King Blaze of Light; Celestial King Brightly Shining; and Celestial King Universally Contemplating Those With Great Renown. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Kings of the Suyama Heavens, and they all diligently cultivated vast, great, good roots, forever happy and content.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Kings of the Suyama Heavens. There are also infinitely many Suyama Heaven kings. Suyama translates as “well-divided time.” In this heaven, day and night are determined by the opening and closing of lotuses. When the red lotus opens, it is day; when the white lotus opens, it is night. There is no sun or moon. The lotus blossoms mark the distinction between day and night, and for that reason, this heaven is called “well-divided time.”

Specifically, they were: Celestial King Well-Divided Time. One of the gods is named “Well-Divided Time,” which means he is the god Suyama. There was another Celestial King called Charming Light, and another Celestial King called Infinite Wisdom and Banner of Meritorious Virtues. He has infinite wisdom, and his merit and virtue resemble a jeweled banner.  Celestial King Skillful at Transforming and Adorning is skilled at bringing about changes and transformations and also quite capable of adorning. Celestial King Great Light of Uniting and Upholding unites all dharmas and upholds limitless meanings. He also emits magnificent light. Celestial King Inconceivable Wisdom has inconceivable wisdom and an inconceivable state of being.

Students of the Buddhadharma must recognize the Dharma clearly. When you study a Sutra, you must deeply understand the meaning of that Sutra. If you study the Dharma Flower Sutra, you must understand the meaning of the Dharma Flower Sutra. If you investigate the Surangama Sutra, you must understand the principles of that Sutra. If you study the Flower Adornment Sutra, you must understand its infinite levels of meaning. Once you understand a Sutra, you will be able to explain it to others. If you can explain a Sutra, then you can apply the methods of that Sutra in your cultivation. Therefore, you cannot just listen to a Sutra and let it go at that, never investigating it any further. You must continually seek to refine and deepen your understanding. Only then can you deeply enter the Sutra Treasury. If you can deeply enter the Sutra Treasury, you can have wisdom like the sea.

Celestial King Hub-of-the-Wheel watches over sentient beings in the six paths of the wheel of rebirth—their births upon births and deaths upon deaths and all such problems.

The light of Celestial King Blaze of Light always has a fiery splendor that shines through darkness. The light of Celestial King Brightly Shining illuminates the entire world. And Celestial King Universally Contemplating Those With Great Renown regards all the world’s beings to see which ones have great renown, which ones are extremely kind and good, which ones are excellent cultivators, which ones have the most moral virtue, and which ones are the most filial to their parents. That is because filial people will have great renown, as will people of moral virtue and people who cultivate. People will revere them. Therefore, this Celestial King looks to see which people in the world have the most renown.

These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Kings of the Suyama Heavens. All the Celestial Kings just mentioned are the leaders. The number of Celestial Kings is infinite. And they all diligently cultivated vast, great, good roots, forever happy and content. These Celestial Kings are extremely vigorous, and sincere. They nurture their good roots and cultivate blessings and wisdom. They are always happy and content; they never worry. Since they know how to be content, they are happy. Since they are happy, they are content. They are never dissatisfied. Since they are satisfied, they are always delighted. Since they are patient, they are at peac

5. Kings of the Tusita Heavens

Sutra:

**Moreover, there was an inconceivable number of Kings of the Tusita Heavens. Specifically, they were: Celestial King Contentment; Celestial King Happiness Like an Ocean and a Cowl; Celestial King Banner of Supreme Merit and Virtue; Celestial King Quiescent Light; Celestial King Wonderfully Adorable Eyes; Celestial King Pure Moon at Jeweled Peak; Celestial King Supreme Courageous Strength; Celestial King Vajra Wonderful Brightness; Celestial King Star-Adorned Banner; and Celestial King Adorable and Adorned. These and others acted as leaders of an inconceivable number of Kings of the Tusita Heavens, and they were all diligently mindful of the names of all Buddhas.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there was an inconceivable number of Kings of the Tusita Heavens. There were also boundlessly, infinitely many Celestial Kings of Tusita Heavens. Tusita is a Sanskrit word that means “contentment.” This heaven is so named because Maitreya Bodhisattva cultivated the Compassionate Heart Samadhi and attained eternal happiness and contentment. Thereupon he created a heaven known as the Heaven of Contentment. The beings there are perpetually content. To be content is to be without greed. A greedy person cannot be content: No matter how much you have, you never feel it is enough. When you become content, you say, “I have enough!” and are no longer greedy. Therefore, contentment is the lack of greed. Without greed, there are no afflictions. Without afflictions, you are happy at all times. Therefore, the Celestial Kings of the Tusita Heaven are always blissful.

Specifically, they were: Celestial King Contentment, who is always happy. The happiness of Celestial King Happiness Like an Ocean and a Cowl is like a vast ocean and also like a precious cowl. The merit and virtue of Celestial King Banner of Supreme Merit and Virtue are exceptionally lofty, resembling a jeweled banner. Another Celestial King is called Celestial King Quiescent Light. His light is absolutely quiet. It doesn’t make a sound. It’s not like our electric lights that hum and buzz all the time. Our electric lights would be named “Noisy Light.” With quiescent light there is light, all right, but there is no sound at all. The eyes of Celestial King Wonderfully Adorable Eyes are extremely beautiful. Anyone who sees his eyes, even another god, adores them.

Celestial King Pure Moon at Jeweled Peak resembles a jeweled mountain peak and also the clear, pure moonlight. Celestial King Supreme Courageous Strength is exceptionally superior. His strength is extraordinary. When he battles with the asuras he always defeats them. Celestial King Vajra Wonderful Brightness is named Vajra, because he is very brave. He also emits a wondrous light. Celestial King Star-Adorned Banner uses the stars and the twenty-eight constellations as his adornments. He is like a jeweled banner. And there was Celestial King Adorable and Adorned, whom all people and all sentient beings like. He is also beautifully adorned. These and others acted as leaders of an inconceivable number of Kings of the Tuçita Heavens. These ten Celestial Kings just named are the leaders. The total number of other Celestial Kings cannot be conceived or expressed—it is so great. And they were all diligently mindful of the names of all Buddhas. They are always diligent, never lazy. They are mindful of the Buddhas and uphold their names. They keep in mind all the names of all the Buddhas of the ten directions and the three periods of time—the Buddhas of the past, present, and future. With ever-increasing diligence, they uphold the Buddhas’ names without forgetting them.

In a few days we will be holding a Buddha-recitation session, which is a very rare event. Buddhists should participate in such sessions with the resolve to attain some spiritual skill in this specific period of time—perhaps resolving to attain the Buddha-recitation Samadhi, or to see light or flowers and thereby have their karmic obstacles eradicated. It is not at all easy to have the chance to attend a Buddha-recitation session. As you can see, the Celestial Kings also are mindful of the Buddhas. If we in the human realm are not mindful of the Buddhas, won’t we end up falling even lower? All of you have a very rare opportunity now to participate in this Buddha-recitation session and be courageously vigorous during those seven days. I hope that no Buddhist will miss this chance.

6. Kings of the Heavens of Bliss from Transformations

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Kings of the Heavens of Bliss from Transformations. Specifically, they were: Celestial King Skilled at Transformations; Celestial King Silent Radiance; Celestial King Illumination of Powerful Transformations; Celestial King Lord of Adornment; Celestial King Light of Mindfulness; Celestial King Soaring Thundercloud; Celestial King Supreme Light Among the Multitudes of Wonders; Celestial King Wonderful Cowl Light; Celestial King Accomplishing Joyful Wisdom; Celestial King Flower Light Cowl; and Celestial King Universally Viewing the Ten Directions. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Kings of the Heavens of Bliss from Transformations, and they all diligently tamed all sentient beings, causing them to attain liberation.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Kings of the Heavens of Bliss from Transformations [Nirmana-rati]. There were also innumerable Celestial Kings who bring about changes that cause bliss to come into being.

Specifically, they were: Celestial King Skilled at Transformations, who is good at transforming. He transform-ationally creates the seven treasures to adorn his palace, and also conjures up all kinds of lotuses. His transformations delight all sentient beings. Celestial King Silent Radiance is virtually silent, and yet has a radiance about him. Celestial King Illumination of Powerful Transformations has inconceivable strength as well as light. Celestial King Lord of Adornment adorns all the palaces and all the gods. Celestial King Light of Mindfulness always recites the Buddha’s name and emits light from his mouth. There is another Celestial King called Soaring Thundercloud. The inconceivable state of Celestial King Supreme Light Among the Multitudes of Wonders is extremely sublime, and he also emits light. The exquisite jeweled cowl of Celestial King Wonderful Cowl Light shines continually. Celestial King Accomplishing Joyful Wisdom has achieved a joyful kind of wisdom. Celestial King Flower Light Cowl has a lotus flower light that resembles a jeweled cowl. And Celestial King Universally Viewing the Ten Directions can see all worlds throughout the ten directions from right where he is sitting.

These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Kings of the Transformation of Bliss Heavens. These ten kings of the Heaven of Transformation of Bliss were the leaders, but besides them, there were countless others. And they all diligently tamed all sentient beings, causing them to attain liberation. They are very vigorous in subduing beings, causing them to behave themselves and not violate the moral precepts. They cause all beings to attain Dharma doors to liberation, so that they no longer dwell among the three poisons.

7. Kings of the Heavens of Mastery Over Others’ Transformations

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were innumerable Kings of the Heavens of Mastery Over Others’ Transformations. Specifically, they were: Celestial King Attainment of Self-Mastery; Celestial King Lord Wondrous Eyes; Celestial King Wonderful Banner-like Crown; Celestial King Courageous Wisdom; Celestial King Phrases of Sublime Sounds; Celestial King Banner of Splendid Light; Celestial King Gate to the Realm of Quiescence; Celestial King Banner Embellished with Wonderful Wheels; Celestial King Ease and Comfort of Flower-Bud Wisdom; and Celestial King Power of Indra’s Wonderfully Adorned Brightness. These and others acted as leaders of innumerable Kings of the Heavens of Mastery Over Others’ Transformations, and they all diligently cultivated the vast, great Dharma door of unconstrained skillful means.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were innumerable Kings of the Heavens of Mastery Over Others’ Transformations [Paranirmitavävartin]. They are able to transform the bliss enjoyed by other gods into their own, and so they attain great freedom and ease. Specifically, they were: Celestial King Attainment of Self-Mastery, who has attained ease and comfort. Celestial King Lord Wondrous Eyes has extremely beautiful eyes. The headdress of Celestial King Wonderful Banner-like Crown is very beautiful. The wisdom of Celestial King Courageous Wisdom is fierce and brave. Celestial King Phrases of Sublime Sounds emits wonderful sounds and speaks wonderful words. Celestial King Banner of Splendid Light emits light resembling a jeweled banner. Celestial King Gate to the Realm of Quiescence remains unmoved no matter what situation he encounters. Quiescent means unmoving. Celestial King Banner Embellished with Wonderful Wheels is subtly wondrous and inconceivable, adorned like a splendid banner. Celestial King Ease and Comfort of Flower-Bud Wisdom. When a lotus is about to bloom but hasn’t opened yet, that’s a bud. This Celestial King has wisdom, and enjoys ease and comfort. Why does he enjoy ease and comfort? Because he has wisdom. If he didn’t have wisdom, he wouldn’t enjoy ease and comfort. And Celestial King Power of Indra’s Wonderfully Adorned Brightness. Indra is another name for Sakra, Lord God. Since this Celestial King is endowed with the power of Indra, he possesses the wonderfully adorned brightness of great wisdom.

These and others acted as leaders of innumerable Kings of the Heavens of Mastery Over Others’ Transformations. Those ten Celestial Kings are the leaders of all the Celestial Kings from the Heavens of Mastery Over Others’ Transformations, which are infinite in number. And they all diligently cultivated the vast, great Dharma door of unconstrained skillful means. Being unconstrained, they can practice skillful means. Through practicing skillful means, they attain freedom and ease.

8. Kings of the Great  Brahma Heavens

Sutra:

Moreover, there were uncountable Kings of the Great Brahma Heavens. Specifically, they were: Celestial King ãikhin; Celestial King Wisdom Light; Celestial King Light of Wholesome Wisdom; Celestial King Universal Cloud Sound; Celestial King Freely Contemplating the Sounds and Speech in the World; Celestial King Still and Quiet Bright Eyes; Celestial King Light Pervading the Ten Directions; Celestial King Transforming Sounds; Celestial King Dazzling Eyes; and Celestial King Pleasing, Ocean-like Sounds. These and others acted as leaders of uncountable Kings of the Great Brahma Heavens, and out of great kindness they sympathized with all sentient beings, universally shining light, delighting them all.

Commentary:

Moreover, there were uncountable Kings of the Great Brahma [Mahabrahma] Heavens. Brahma means “pure and clean.” The kings in this heaven are very comfortable. Specifically, they were: Celestial King ãikhin. The Sanskrit name Sikhin means “Upholding a Cowl.” Since this Great Brahma Heaven King cultivates pure practices, he has a flesh cowl on the top of his head. He feels very comfortable and at ease. He has three eyes and four arms, and looks like a pure youth—a child. Dressed in golden-hued clothing, his body is the color of silver. He feels very free and at ease. His name is also translated as “Conch Cowl” because his flesh cowl resembles a jeweled conch.

Celestial King Wisdom Light has radiant wisdom. Celestial King Light of Wholesome Wisdom has the radiance of skillful wisdom. Celestial King Universal Cloud Sound issues the sounds of cloud and thunder everywhere. Celestial King Freely Contemplating the Sounds and Speech in the World observes the languages and sounds of those in the world and remains free and at ease. Without leaving his place, he contemplates the sounds and language of beings in the world.

Since Celestial King Still and Quiet Bright Eyes likes to cultivate chan samadhi, he has these tranquil, bright eyes. The light of Celestial King Light Pervading the Ten Directions shines throughout the worlds of the ten directions. Celestial King Transforming Sounds is able to create and transform all kinds of sounds. When sentient beings hear those sounds, they are happy. The light of Celestial King Dazzling Eyes sparkles and shines. He enables beings to attain this light and become joyous. And the sounds of Celestial King Pleasing, Ocean-like Sounds evoke great joy in sentient beings.

These Celestial Kings just mentioned and others acted as leaders of uncountable Kings of the Great Brahma Heavens. The kings of the Great Brahma Heavens are infinitely many. And out of great kindness they sympathized with all sentient beings, universally shining light, illumining all those who are ready to be saved, delighting them all. They were sympathetic towards sentient beings who are immersed in extreme suffering, and wished to save them. How did they save sentient beings? They caused sentient beings to be filled with the joy of Dharma and to take Dhyana-bliss as their food.

9. Kings of the Voices-of-Light Heavens

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Kings of the Voices-of-Light Heavens. Specifically, they were: Celestial King Winsome Light; Celestial King Pure and Exquisite Light; Celestial King Comfortable Sound; Celestial King Wisdom of Supreme Intent; Celestial King Pleasing, Pure, and Wonderful Sounds; Celestial King Sound of Wholesome Reflection; Celestial King Universal Sound Pervasively Shining; Celestial King Most Profound Voice of Light; Celestial King Brightness of Immaculate Renown; and Celestial King Supreme Pure Light. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Kings of the Voices-of-Light Heavens, and they all abided in the unobstructed Dharma of vast, great, quiescent joy.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Kings of the Voices-of-Light  [Àbhasvara] Heavens. The gods in the Voices-of-Light Heaven use light as their language. They don’t speak, since they do not have language in the usual sense. They don’t have random thoughts either. They communicate by sending forth rays of light. Their light conveys various kinds of speech and words. And when they see the light, they understand what is being said.

Specifically, they were: Celestial King Winsome Light. All sentient beings adore this Celestial King since he shines his light upon them and makes them happy. Celestial King Pure and Exquisite Light has a pure and clear light, and when sentient beings attain this wonderful light, they also become pure and increase their wisdom day by day. Celestial King Comfortable Sound uses his comforting sound to bestow comfort and ease upon sentient beings. Celestial King Wisdom of Supreme Intent has the most supreme and perfect intent, enabling sentient beings to produce the wisdom of being mindful of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Without wisdom, one could not be mindful of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. But now since there is wisdom, one can produce the wisdom of being mindful of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The  Celestial King Pleasing, Pure, and Wonderful Sounds uses his sounds to delight sentient beings and free them from affliction. His mind and body are pure. His pure and wondrous sounds inspire sentient beings to bring forth the resolve for bodhi and produce the wisdom of enlightenment. Celestial King Sound of Wholesome Reflection causes all sentient beings to engage in wholesome reflection, which means reflecting on what is good, not on what is bad. One reflects on all kinds of wholesome Dharma doors. The wonderful sound of Celestial King Universal Sound Pervasively Shining universally shines upon sentient beings, causing them to attain light. Celestial King Most Profound Voice of Light deeply cherishes and protects all sentient beings, enabling them to attain most profound voices of light. Celestial King Brightness of Immaculate Renown shines his immaculate, undefiled light everywhere, so that each sentient being receives just the right amount of light. And the pure, clear light of Celestial King Supreme Pure Light is most sublime.

These ten aforementioned Celestial Kings and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Kings of the Voices-of-Light Heavens, and they all abided in the unobstructed Dharma of vast, great, quiescent joy. Since this Dharma door is vast and great, it is unobstructed. Because there is joy, one attains quiescence, which is a kind of samadhi. “Vast and great” refers to scatteredness. But whether one is scattered or concentrated, one is in samadhi. One does not renounce movement in favor of stillness, and so one’s state is vast and great. One does not become attached to the pleasurable feeling of Chan, and so one’s Dharma door is unobstructed. One abides in this state of nonobstruction.

10. Kings of the Heavens of Pervasive Purity

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Kings of the Heavens of Pervasive Purity. Specifically, they were: Celestial King Pure Renown; Celestial King Supreme Views; Celestial King Serene Virtue; Celestial King Sumeru Sound; Celestial King Eye of Pure Mindfulness; Celestial King Delightful, Sublime Illumination; Celestial King Sovereign World Ruler; Celestial King Comfortable Blazing Light; Celestial King Joyful Contemplation of the Transformations of Dharmas; Celestial King Transformation Banner; and Celestial King Wondrous Adornment of the Sounds of Constellations. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Kings of the Heavens of Pervasive Purity, and they all dwelt peacefully in vast, great Dharmas and diligently benefited beings in all worlds.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Kings of the Heavens of Pervasive Purity [Subhakrtsna].  Whereas in the previous section, the Celestial Kings still have voices of light and need to communicate by means of light, the present set of kings of the Heaven of Pervasive Purity do not need any of that.

Specifically, they were: Celestial King Pure Renown. He has already obtained pure wisdom and is no longer deluded. He has seen through and let go of defiled dharmas, and he enjoys a far-reaching reputation. Celestial King Supreme Views. Supreme can also mean “victorious.” The views of this Celestial King are the most intelligent, so he does not harbor wrong knowledge and views. He has only right knowledge and views. Wrong knowledge and views involve looking exclusively at others’ faults. Right knowledge and views consist of looking at your own faults. If you are always looking at others’ faults, you have wrong knowledge and views. If you look at your own faults, you have right knowledge and views. This Celestial King has transcended the issues of right and wrong between himself and others, and so is endowed with supreme views.

Celestial King Serene Virtue. “Serene” refers to samadhi. He has the virtue of samadhi—pure concentration. Being serene means not being noisy, not stirring up a ruckus. He quietly carries out his work without people noticing—that’s “serene virtue.” As the saying goes,

Good that is done hoping others will notice is not true good.
Evil you fear others will find out about is great evil.

True goodness is seldom seen by people; it’s not necessary for people to see or know about it. On the other hand, if you do evil and are afraid that others will find out, then that is great evil. Therefore, cultivators of the Way who truly understand the meaning of serene virtue will not apply effort for fame and profit. If you keep away from fame and profit, you will obtain serene virtue.

Sumeru means “Wonderfully High,” and so the sound of Celestial King Sumeru Sound is extremely wonderful and high. Sentient beings can easily hear his Dharma sound.

Having opened the Five Eyes, Celestial King Eye of Pure Mindfulness looks only at pure dharmas, not defiled dharmas. Therefore, those who have opened their Five Eyes should not look at other people’s mistakes. You shouldn’t think, “Well, I’ll check to see if so-and-so is stealing things.” You try to take a look, but you cannot see clearly. Why not? Because your motive is impure. Why would you want to see if they are stealing or not? Or, you may think, “I want to check and see if so-and-so has killed anybody.” That’s also an impure thought, and you won’t be able to see clearly. Or, you may think, “I want to see if so-and-so has lustful thoughts… Ah, yes, he has very strong thoughts of lust. In fact, he indulges in lustful thoughts from morning to night. I see so-and-so being involved with this man, or with that woman….” Actually, all of that is false and impure. If you weren’t impure, why would you bother to look into such things? Those are cases of not having obtained the eye of pure mindfulness. With the eye of pure mindfulness, you contemplate right dharmas, not wrong dharmas. You should recognize true things, not fake things. “I wonder if he is drinking? Ah, brandy, whiskey—over a hundred bottles!” That’s a false vision. Don’t think that everything you see is real. If you are intent on acting falsely and looking at improper things, you will enter a trap, and eventually you yourself might end up drinking. That’s the demons’ power of temptation. The demons want you to be impure. The eye of pure mindfulness contemplates only what is pure, so that the mind and eyes are both pure.

When people are illumined by the light of Celestial King Delightful, Sublime Illumination they experience pure delight. Celestial King Sovereign World Ruler causes sentient beings throughout the world to obtain self-mastery and peace. The light of Celestial King Comfortable Blazing Light is blazing and resembles flames, yet it is very comfortable, clear and cool. Celestial King Joyful Contemplation of the Transformations of Dharmas enjoys reflecting on dharmas and on how he can bring about dharmas through the process of transformation. He may think, “If I cultivate the Dharma of the wish-fulfilling pearl, I can bring about anything I wish. I can conjure up whatever I want.” The Wish-fulfilling Pearl Hand-and-Eye can bring about infinitely many miraculous changes and transformations. If you ask it to conjure up a god, it will create a god by transformation. If you ask it to conjure up an asura, the wish-fulfilling pearl will create an asura by transformation. If you want it to create a person, it will. The pearl can create any sentient being among the six paths of rebirth and the Ten Dharma Realms. It is infinitely esoteric and wonderful. This Celestial King reflects upon the wonders of these dharmas from morning to night. “Ah, this dharma is really fine…it’s inconceivable…” He enters the samadhi of delighting in the consideration of dharmas to the point that although he doesn’t eat, he doesn’t feel hungry; although he doesn’t drink, he doesn’t feel thirsty; and although he doesn’t sleep, he doesn’t feel tired. He revels in this samadhi, taking it as his food and drink. Celestial King Transformation Banner can create various kinds of jeweled banners by means of transformation. And there was Celestial King Wondrous Adornment of the Sounds of Constellations. The stars and the twenty-eight constellations emit sounds. This Celestial King has this very splendid adornment.

These ten Celestial Kings and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Kings of the Heavens of Pervasive Purity, and they all dwelt peacefully in vast, great, unobstructed Dharmas that pervade space and the Dharma Realm and diligently benefited beings in all worlds at all times.

Every night we have been bowing the Repentance before Ten Thousand Buddhas. The power of this Repentance is inconceivable, because the ten thousand Buddhas all come to support you and fulfill all of your wishes. If you seek great wisdom, you will attain great wisdom. If you seek to get rid of your offenses, your offense-karma will be eradicated. If you wish to increase your good roots, it will help your good roots to grow. The Repentance itself does not make your good roots grow; rather, all Buddhas of the ten directions come to aid you, dispelling all illnesses and offenses. Therefore, this Repentance is very important. The Buddhas of the past bowed the Repentance before Ten Thousand Buddhas, the Buddhas of the present bow it, and the Buddhas of the future will all realize Buddhahood through bowing this Repentance. The Venerable Master Hsu Yun himself also bowed this repentance.

Once I met a person from Fujian Province who had a very grave heart condition. He bowed to the Flower Adornment Sutra,  bowing to every single word of the Sutra, totaling over a thousand bows each day. And imperceptibly, his heart trouble disappeared. Therefore, if you are very sincere and earnest in cultivating the Buddhadharma, you will obtain a response.

11. Kings of the Heavens of Vast Fruition

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were countless Kings of the Heavens of Vast Fruition. Specifically, they were: Celestial King Bright Banner of Delight in the Dharma; Celestial King Ocean of Pure Adornments; Celestial King Supreme Wisdom-Light; Celestial King Banner of Carefree Wisdom; Celestial King Delight in Still Quiescence; Celestial King Universal Wisdom Eye; Celestial King Delight in Revolving Wisdom; Celestial King Adept at Nurturing Wisdom Light; Celestial King Immaculately Still and Serene Light; and Celestial King Vast, Pure Brightness. These and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Kings of the Heavens of Vast Fruition, and none of them failed to regard the Dharma of quiescence as their palace, and to dwell peacefully therein.**

Commentary:

Moreover, there were countless Kings of the Heavens of Vast Fruition [Brhatphala]. These heavens are explained in detail in the Earth Store Sutra. You can refer to that sutra for a detailed discussion. In studying the Buddhadharma, if you don’t understand one sutra you can refer to another Sutra for clarification.

Specifically, they were: Celestial King Bright Banner of Delight in the Dharma, who likes the Dharma more than anything else. His banner constantly emits light. Celestial King Ocean of Pure Adornments is adorned with pure light that is oceanic in extent. The wisdom of Celestial King Supreme Wisdom-Light is supreme and gives off light. The wisdom of Celestial King Banner of Carefree Wisdom is like a jeweled banner, very free and at ease. Celestial King Delight in Still Quiescence is fond of being quiet. He likes to enter dhyana samadhi. Celestial King Universal Wisdom Eye illumines the entire world with his wisdom-eye. Celestial King Delight in Revolving Wisdom always turns his light around to shine within and discover his inherent wisdom. Celestial King Adept at Nurturing Wisdom Light is skilled at planting seeds of the light of bodhi-wisdom. Celestial King Immaculately Still and Serene Light is undefiled and constantly abides in the quiescent light of samadhi. And Celestial King Vast, Pure Brightness has profuse, pure light.

These ten Celestial Kings and others acted as leaders of a countless number of Kings of the Heavens of Vast Fruition, and none of them failed to regard the Dharma of quiescence as their palace, and to dwell peacefully therein. The Dharma of quiescence is beyond speech and beyond thoughts. The Celestial Kings take this Dharma as their home and dwell within it as if dwelling in their palaces.

12. Kings of the Heavens of Great Self-Mastery

Sutra:

**Moreover, there were innumerable Kings of the Heavens of Great Self-Mastery. Specifically, they were: Celestial King Ocean of Wondrous Flames; Celestial King Radiant Freedom and Renown; Celestial King Eyes of Pure Merit and Virtue; Celestial King Delightful Great Wisdom; Celestial King Comfortable Unmoving Light; Celestial King Eyes of Wondrous Adornment; Celestial King Brilliance Derived from Wholesome Reflection; Celestial King Delightful Great Knowledge; Celestial King Glorious Banner of Universal Sounds; and Celestial King Renowned for Utmost Vigor. These and others acted as leaders of an inestimable number of Kings of the Heavens of Great Self-Mastery, and they all diligently contemplated the Dharma of marklessness, and were impartial in their practices.**

Commentary:

The kings of the Heavens of Vast Fruition take the Dharma of quiescence as their palace, dwelling within that Dharma. This means their minds do not seek outside, but instead abide within still quiescence. Moreover, there were innumerable Kings of the Heavens of Great Self-Mastery [Mahesvara]. The king of this heaven has three eyes and eight arms, and in each of his hands he carries a Dharma-jewel that can produce infinite changes and transformations. The king rides on his great white ox, carrying a whisk in his hand, and looks down on everyone. He feels that he is more lofty and free than anyone else. He looks down on all the kings of other heavens. Thus, he is called the King of Great Self-Mastery. There are infinite instances of such kings.

Specifically, they were: Celestial King Ocean of Wondrous Flames. The flaming light he puts forth is inconceivable, boundless and limitless like the ocean. Celestial King Radiant Freedom and Renown, comfortable and at ease, has a well-known reputation, and his light shines pervasively. Celestial King Eyes of Pure Merit and Virtue cultivates pure practices and thus obtains eyes of merit and virtue, which surpass the eyes of other Celestial Kings by a million times. There was another Celestial King by the name Delightful Great Wisdom. Forever abiding in samadhi, Celestial King Comfortable Unmoving Light always contemplates at ease. Adorned with wonderful eyes, Celestial King Eyes of Wondrous Adornment is replete with a thousand hands and a thousand eyes. He also adorns his wondrous eyes, hence his name. Not engaging in false thinking, Celestial King Brilliance Derived from Wholesome Reflection reflects only on bright light. Celestial King Delightful Great Knowledge has great prajña wisdom. The sound of Celestial King Glorious Banner of Universal Sounds is heard everywhere, like a splendid jeweled banner. And Celestial King Renowned for Utmost Vigor is most vigorous, and his renown is far-reaching.

These ten Celestial Kings just mentioned and others acted as leaders of an inestimable number of Kings of the Heavens of Great Self-Mastery. The ones who were not mentioned by name are infinitely many in number. And they all diligently contemplated the Dharma of marklessness. At all times they contemplate marklessness wherein both people and dharmas are empty. If you have not realized the emptiness of people, there is still a mark; if you have not seen dharmas as empty, there is still a mark. To have no marks means to have no mark of self, no mark of others, no mark of sentient beings, and no mark of life spans. They contemplated, reflected upon, and cultivated the Dharma of marklessness. When there is no mark of a self, the attachment to self is empty. When there is no mark of others, the attachment to others is empty. With no mark of sentient beings, the attachment to sentient beings is empty. With no mark of life spans, the attachment to life spans is also empty.

And they were impartial in their practices. Since there are no marks, there can’t possibly be any contention between self and others. And when there is no mutual contention, then everything each one practices is the impartial Dharma. There are no more views of self or others, or views of right or wrong. Such practice is level and equal.

We have discussed the heavens of the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Dhyanas. The kings in all those heavens are great beings making provisional appearances. Theirs are the states of Bodhisattvas, which are not easy for ordinary people to fathom or understand. The Heaven of Vast Fruition and the Heaven of Great Self-Mastery are where Seventh and Eighth Ground Bodhisattvas dwell. That is why those Celestial Kings are able to practice impartially to benefit the world. Each Celestial King has his own virtuous conduct and cultivation.

This section of text is called “Indicating the numbers and extolling the virtues.” The text states the numbers of beings from the various heavens and praises their virtuous conduct. A detailed explanation would reveal that the wondrous functioning of every single Celestial King’s spiritual powers is inconceivable. Right now, the text only mentions some of the more important virtues. Basically, the wondrous functionings of the Celestial Kings’ spiritual powers are mutually inclusive. However, based on the essential quality of each king’s method of cultivation or virtuous conduct, they have been given their names.

The Dharma of being impartial means having no greed, anger, or delusion. One transforms greed, anger, and delusion into precepts, samadhi, and wisdom. This is known as:

Diligently cultivating precepts, samadhi, and wisdom;
Putting to rest greed, anger, and delusion.

People may listen to the explanation of many Sutras, and yet still forget these essential Dharmas. One forgets to ask oneself, “Do I have any greed, anger, or delusion?” If you still have greed, you should counteract it. What method should you use? Use giving, because giving counteracts stinginess and greed. Take a look and see if you have any anger. If you do, counteract it with compassion. Reflect upon yourself again and ask if you are deluded. If you are, use prajña to counteract delusion. Prajña transforms delusion. If you can counteract the three poisons, then you reach impartiality.

Now someone asks, “Does being impartial mean we should have an equal amount of greed and giving? For example, should we have as many thoughts of giving as we have thoughts of greed, and in that way make them level each other out? Is that how it works? We make greed and giving equal, anger and compassion equal, and delusion and prajña equal, because right now they are unbalanced?”

That kind of impartiality becomes half yin and half yang. If, on the other hand, you are entirely yang, then your impartiality is yang. Therefore, you should not keep the greed, anger, and delusion. It is far better to change them into precepts, samadhi, and wisdom.

[Note: This concludes an explanation of the forty groups that assembled at the bodhimanda. There are 410 representatives in all. The volumes that follow will discuss the causes and conditions and Dharma doors of past cultivation.]