**The Avatamsaka Sutra**

**CHAPTER1 – PART2**

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

**Explanation by VM. Hua**

**VII. Acclamation of virtues
A. General description of their awesome deportment**

**Sutra:**

**At that time, the oceanic multitudes at the Bodhimanda of the Thus Come One had all gathered like clouds.**

**Commentary:**

At that time, when all the gods from the Heavens of the Thirty-three; the heavens of the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Dhyanas; and so forth had been discussed, the oceanic multitudes at the bodhimanda of the Thus Come One… “Thus Come One” is one of the Buddha’s ten titles. Bodhimanda refers to the site beneath the bodhi tree where the Buddha first realized the Way, spoke the Dharma, and taught and transformed sentient beings. It is a place for the cultivation of the Way. The “oceanic multitudes” refers to all the gods, dragons, ghosts, and spirits of the eightfold division, as well as Bodhisattvas and worthy sages. The congregation of those great multitudes is likened to an ocean. They had all completely gathered like clouds. They came together, just like clouds gathering.

**Sutra:**

**Beings of boundless types and species surrounded and filled the bodhimanda, each unique in form and retinue. From every direction, they followed and drew near the World Honored One to admire him with one heart.**

**Commentary:**

Beings of boundless types and species surrounded and filled the bodhimanda. In the oceanic multitudes that gathered like clouds, there was an infinite array of types and categories of beings. From the Buddhas down to sentient beings, their kinds were boundless. This includes all sentient beings of the ten dharma realms. The area surrounding the Buddha’s Way-place was packed with layers upon layers of many species of beings who came from everywhere throughout space and the Dharma Realm. There was not a single speck of dust that was not filled with these cloud-like multitudes.

Each was unique in form and retinue. Each group had its individual physical characteristics, and each had its own set of retinues and companions. Every leading Bodhisattva had with him a boundless retinue, as did every asura leader, garuda leader, kinnara leader, and mahoraga leader. These divisions each had their own appearance and their own following. Although there were so many groups, they were all distinct and different from one another. The retinue of each specific division followed its own division in a very orderly fashion. Although there were so many different divisions, they did not intermingle or break formation.

From every direction, wherever they happened to come from, they followed and drew near the World Honored One to listen to the Buddha speak Dharma and to admire him with one heart. They were single-minded, not of two minds. They looked up longingly at the golden visage of the ten-thousand-foot Nisyanda Buddha.

**B. General revelation of virtuous deeds and causal conditions**

**Sutra:**

**Already, this congregation had abandoned the various afflictions, mental impurities, and their residual habits. Having smashed a mountain of heavy obstacles, they saw the Buddha freely.**

**Commentary:**

Already, this congregation refers to all those various categories of beings and their retinues, with their different forms and shapes, who were in the Dharma assembly. They had abandoned the various afflictions. They had cast out afflictions and had been far removed from them for a long time. What are afflictions? They are the attachments to self and to dharmas. From attachment to self, there arise the afflictions of greed, anger, and delusion; the afflictions of ignorance; and afflictions like dust and sand. In general, there are many, many afflictions. From attachment to dharmas comes the affliction of being obstructed by what one knows. Whatever dharma you know becomes an obstruction for you. The dharma itself does not obstruct you; your attachment to that dharma does. You say, “Ah, I know this dharma, and I know that dharma…” Basically, you should have known those dharmas all along. It shouldn’t be that you don’t know them. But you didn’t know them, and now you do. This is like having a pearl hidden in the seams of your clothing. Previously when you didn’t know of the pearl, it was there, nonetheless. Now that you know of the pearl, it is still there. All along you should have known that the bright pearl lay hidden inside your clothing, but you didn’t. Now that you have discovered this bright pearl which was yours to begin with, what is there to become arrogant or conceited about? Don’t be arrogant. If you are, you are obstructed by what you know.

Mental impurities refers to defiled dharmas within the mind—impure thoughts. If you entertain defiled thoughts, you have filth in your mind. Now, these beings have left behind that filth and their residual habits. Residual habits are habits developed over many lifetimes, especially impure habits. They can be likened to the soot that gathers inside a chimney. Basically, the smoke goes out the chimney, but black soot gathers inside the chimney. You aren’t aware of how much soot gathers, but as time goes on, a lot of it piles up. That’s like our residual habits. The chimney was clean to begin with. But as smoked passed through it, deposits of black soot were left behind.

Where do residual habits come from? They come from greed, anger, and delusion; they come from afflictions. If you are greedy, you have the residual habit of greed. If you like to get angry, you have the residual habit of anger. If you are deluded, you have the residual habit of delusion. Impure thoughts concerning defiled dharmas are all residual habits.

Having smashed a mountain of heavy obstacles, they saw the Buddha freely. The heavy obstacles refer to ignorance. Our ignorance is a heavy obstruction, like a mountain. Since these beings had separated from afflictions and defilements of the mind, had put an end to their residual habits, and had destroyed the mountain of heavy obstacles, they had an unimpeded view of the Buddha. Since they had no obstructions, they could see the Buddha. And, having seen the Buddha, there was even less of a possibility for them to become obstructed.

**Sutra:**

**These beings were those whom the Thus Come One Vairochana, as he cultivated the Bodhisattva conduct throughout oceans of eons, had gathered in using the Four Methods of Gathering Beings In. Various expedient means had been used to skillfully gather in, teach, and maturate these beings as they planted good roots in the presence of each Buddha, so that they became securely established on the Path to All-Wisdom.**

**Commentary:**

These beings where those whom the Thus Come One Vairochana, the pure Dharma body Buddha, as he cultivated the Bodhisattva conduct throughout oceans of eons, infinite, inexpressibly many great eons in the past, had gathered in. This refers to those in the ocean-wide assembly of beings who had come together like clouds. Vairochana Buddha had practiced the Bodhisattva Path and had gathered in the beings of this Dharma assembly using the Four Methods of Gathering Beings In, which are giving, kind words, beneficial conduct, and similar work.

Various expedient means had been used to skillfully gather in, teach, and maturate these beings as they planted good roots in the presence of each Buddha. Vairochana Buddha used different expedients to teach and transform these beings and bring them to maturity, so that they became securely established on the Path to All-Wisdom. They attained the Wisdom of the Modes of the Way.

**Sutra:**

**They had cultivated limitless goodness and reaped multitudes of copious blessings. They had all entered a sea of expedients and vows.**

**Commentary:**

The multitudes of gods, dragons, ghosts, and spirits mentioned above had, throughout infinite oceans of eons in the past, drawn near to the Buddha Vairochana. Within that Buddha’s Dharma assembly, they had planted many good roots and had become securely established on the Path to All-Wisdom. The path of wisdom consists of planting all the causes of Buddhas, and reaping all the fruits of Buddhahood. They had cultivated limitless goodness by cultivating blessings and wisdom throughout limitless eons. And now they reaped multitudes of copious—infinite and boundless—blessings. They had all entered a sea of expedients and vows. In cultivation one must make vows. There are three requisites. First, you must have faith, and firmly believe that in the future you will become a Buddha. Second, you must have vows. You should vow that in the future you will most certainly become a Buddha and that, after realizing Buddhahood, you will extensively save beings. Third, you must have practice. To have faith and vows alone is not enough; you must actually do the work of cultivation. “Expedients” are provisional dharmas, of which there are many kinds, not just one. With expedients, one guides beings. Here, they had expedients and vows that were vast like a sea.

**Sutra:**

**Their practices were pure and complete. They skillfully gained transcendence by means of the path of escape. Always, they beheld the Buddhas with distinct clarity. With the power of supreme understanding, they thus entered the great ocean of meritorious virtues of the Thus Come Ones. They gained the passages into liberation of all Buddhas, and roamed playfully, using their spiritual powers.**

**Commentary:**

Having entered a sea of boundless expedients and vows, they actually cultivated various practices, and their practices were pure and clean and entirely complete. They skillfully gained transcendence by means of the path of escape. What were they transcending? The Three Realms.

The Three Realms are without peace, like a burning house.

They escaped from the burning house of the Three Realms. Basically, it’s not easy to transcend the Three Realms, but since these beings were able to escape, they are said to have “skillfully transcended.” Since they did something that was difficult to do, they were “skillful.”

Always, they beheld the Buddhas. These multitudes of sages were able to see the Buddhas all the time, because they had skillfully gained transcendence. There is nowhere the Buddha isn’t found. That being the case, why is it that some people can see the Buddha, while others cannot? Those with pure thoughts can see the Buddha. Those whose thoughts aren’t pure aren’t able to see the Buddha. These beings saw with distinct clarity. Some people can see the Buddhas, but not clearly; other people may see the Buddha very clearly, but not all the time. These beings, however, can always see the Buddha, and very clearly.

With the power of supreme understanding, that is, with great wisdom, they thus entered the great ocean of meritorious virtues of the Thus Come Ones. Although it was difficult to enter the Thus Come Ones’ great ocean of meritorious virtues, they had done so, and so their merit and virtue was equal to that of the Buddhas. Having entered the Thus Come Ones’ great ocean of meritorious virtues, they obtained, they gained the passages into liberation of all Buddhas. That is, they were unobstructed. They had attained true freedom and liberation, and were without worry and constraints. True liberation is free from afflictions.

And they roamed playfully, using their spiritual powers. Playful roaming means manifesting the false within the true, and the true within the false. True and false are nondual and fundamentally empty. With spiritual powers one can bring about unfathomable changes and transformations–suddenly appearing or disappearing; suddenly becoming big or small; suddenly ascending or descending. The multitudes of sages all attained the ability to freely use their spiritual powers

C. Individual explanations of the dharmas attained and praises of the Buddha

1. Celestial beings
a. Heavens of the Form Realm
1) Heavens of Great Self-Mastery

Sutra:

Specifically, Celestial King Ocean of Wondrous Flames from the Heaven of Great Self-Mastery gained a passage into liberation of using the power of quiescence and expedients throughout the Dharma Realm and space. Celestial King Radiant Freedom and Renown gained a passage into liberation of universally contemplating all dharmas with complete ease. Celestial King Eyes of Pure Merit and Virtue gained a passage into liberation of knowing through effortless practice that all dharmas do not come into being or cease to be, and neither come nor go.

Commentary:

Specifically, Celestial King Ocean of Wondrous Flames from the Heaven of Great Self-Mastery, gained a passage into liberation of using the power of quiescence and expedients throughout the Dharma Realm and space. Among the kings of the Heaven of Great Self-Mastery mentioned earlier, there was one named Ocean of Wondrous Flames. What is the Dharma Realm? “The Dharma Realm is not beyond a single thought. A single thought can encompass the Dharma Realm.” What is space? It is our inherent nature. In this passage into liberation, “quiescence” refers to concentration, and “expedients” refers to movement. In both motion and stillness, this king has obtained liberation. Motion does not impede stillness, and stillness does not impede motion. Motion and stillness are one suchness.

Celestial King Radiant Freedom and Renown gained a passage into liberation of universally contemplating all dharmas with complete ease. He universally contemplates all dharma doors: form dharmas, mind dharmas, and all other dharmas, and is extremely free and at ease.

Celestial King Eyes of Pure Merit and Virtue gained a passage into liberation of knowing through effortless practice that all dharmas do not come into being or cease to be, and neither come nor go.This Celestial King’s purity and light pervade all of space and the Dharma Realm. He understands that all dharmas do not come into being or cease to be, and neither come nor go. This is effortless effort, functioning without a function. There is no contrivance or use of force in reaching this kind of liberation, and so the text says, “effortless practice.”

Since dharmas do not come into being, they also do not cease to be. Since they neither come into being nor cease to be, they neither come nor go. Also, since they neither come nor go, they neither come into being nor cease to be. Experiencing this passage into liberation is effortless and leaves one very much at ease.

**Sutra:**

**Celestial King Delightful Great Wisdom gained a passage into liberation of using oceanic wisdom in beholding the Character of Reality of all dharmas in the present moment. Celestial King Comfortable Unmoving Light gained a passage into liberation that allowed him to enter the Samadhi of Great Expedients, and thereby bestow boundless peace and joy upon sentient beings. Celestial King Magnificent Eyes gained a passage into liberation of enabling beings to observe quiescent dharmas so as to dispel their dark delusion and terror. Celestial King Brilliance Derived from Wholesome Reflection gained a passage into liberation of pondering all of existence by proficiently entering infinite realms without creating any karma.**

**Commentary:**

Celestial King Delightful Great Wisdom gained a passage into liberation of using oceanic wisdom in beholding the Character of Reality of all dharmas in the present moment. Right at this moment, he can perceive the Character of Reality. He can observe the ultimate reality of all things. The Character of Reality is devoid of character, and yet there is nothing that is not characterized by it. With this passage into liberation, his wisdom is as profuse as the ocean.

The Celestial King named Comfortable Unmoving Light gained a passage into liberation that allowed him to enter the Samadhi of Great Expedients, and thereby bestow boundless peace and joy upon sentient beings. He can bestow boundless peace and joy upon sentient beings, freeing them from afflictions and hindrances. Since they experience no hindrances, they are happy and peaceful. He enters this Samadhi of Great Expedients, within which he causes all beings to attain boundless peace and joy.

Celestial King Magnificent Eyes gained a passage into liberation of enabling beings to observe quiescent dharmas so as to dispel their dark delusion and terror. By leading sentient beings to contemplate still and quiescent dharmas, he destroys their dark delusions and ends all their fears. He attained that passage into liberation. Celestial King Brilliance Derived from Wholesome Reflection gained a passage into liberation of pondering all of existence by proficiently entering infinite realms without creating any karma. He is skilled at entering boundlessly many states, and yet does not create any mental karma while reflecting upon beings in the Three Realms of Existence. The Three Realms of Existence include the Twenty-five Levels of Existence in the Desire Realm, the Form Realm, and the Formless Realm.

As for the principles discussed in the Flower Adornment Sutra, those who have not listened to the sutras may feel there’s a lot of repetition—the same thing is said over and over again. Actually, it is not mere repetition. There is a meaning behind repetition, anyway. After you’ve listened longer, you will understand.

**Sutra:**

**Celestial King Delightful Great Knowledge gained a passage into liberation of traveling everywhere throughout the ten directions to speak Dharma, while neither moving nor relying on anything.**

**Commentary:**

Celestial King Delightful Great Knowledge gained a passage into liberation of traveling everywhere throughout the ten directions to speak Dharma, while neither moving nor relying on anything. He can go everywhere throughout the ten directions, and yet he hasn’t gone anywhere. His body pervades the ten directions, and yet he hasn’t gone anywhere. He remains unmoving; he hasn’t come back from anywhere. He has no coming and no going. He is his own master; he doesn’t rely on people or dharmas. Since he is independent of all things, he gained this passage into liberation, literally, “liberation door.” Don’t think there is an actual door or passage. This is a metaphor. There really isn’t a door. If there were a door, there wouldn’t be any liberation. Don’t take the text literally, thinking there is a door through which one can enter or exit. Actually there is none. If there were a door and liberation were inside it, then there could be no liberation outside it. Or, if liberation were outside the door, then there could be no liberation inside it. And if you said that liberation is both within and without, then what would be the purpose of having a door, anyway? Therefore, door is simply a metaphor for the attainment of self-mastery and liberation. Don’t go looking for an actual door. Although the text refers to a passage, literally a door, don’t become attached to the notion of a door, thinking that you have to find a door through which to enter. If that were the case, then, through which door should you exit? If there is still entering and exiting, how could that count as liberation? Be sure to understand the meaning of a passage into liberation.

In listening to the sutras, you shouldn’t think, “I’ve listened to an entire lecture, and I haven’t gained anything.” To hear even one important line would be enough. If you know how to listen to the sutras, you will listen for the underlying meaning. If you don’t know how to listen, you will only listen for a literal interpretation of the words. In everything people do, there are those who know how to go about it, and those who don’t. Listening to the sutras is no exception. Some people, upon hearing a sutra lecture, feel as if they’ve tasted the flavor of sweet dew or as if they’ve gained a precious treasure. To people who don’t know how to listen to the sutras, it seems that the Dharma Master keeps talking and talking and still they cannot quite understand what he’s saying. The more they listen, the more they want to go to sleep. The more they want to sleep, the less they are able to stay awake. They doze off for the entire lecture, and that’s a great shame.

**Sutra:**

**Celestial King All-Pervasive Voice Resembling a Glorious Banner gained a passage into liberation of entering the Buddha’s tranquil state and universally displaying bright light. Celestial King Brilliant Renown Derived from Wholesome Vigor gained a passage into liberation of abiding in his own enlightenment while embracing the conditions of great, vast, and boundless states.**
**Commentary:**

Celestial King All-Pervasive Voice Resembling a Glorious Banner gained a passage into liberation of entering the Buddha’s tranquil state and universally displaying bright light. He has realized the Buddha’s samadhi and wisdom, the tranquil state that is the Buddha’s state. Since he has attained the Buddha’s samadhi and wisdom, he can universally display bright light and gain this passage into liberation.

Celestial King Brilliant Renown Derived from Wholesome Vigor gained a passage into liberation of abiding in his own enlightenment while embracing the conditions of great, vast, and boundless states. Since he has enlightened to boundless, vast, and great states, these states serve as the causes and conditions for his cultivation. He investigates vast and great states of being.

**Sutra:**

**At that time Celestial King Ocean of Wondrous Flames received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, universally contemplated the multitudes of the Heavens of Great Self-Mastery, and spoke the following verse:

The Buddha’s body pervades all great assemblies everywhere,
Filling the infinite reaches of the Dharma Realm.
Still and quiet, ungraspable, devoid of nature,
He yet appears in order to save the world.**
**Commentary:**

**There are four kinds of verse:**

1. Anustubh: whether it is prose or verse, any four-line verse with eight words to a line, comprising thirty-two words, is called an anustubh.

2. Gatha is translated as “verse for chanting,” because it can be chanted; or “solitary verse,” because it arises on its own, apart from others. It is also called “direct verse,” because it directly speaks the Dharma in verse form. Gatha has those three meanings.

3. Geya is translated as “fitting verse,” meaning it is proper and fitting for a verse to be spoken.

4. Udana is a type of verse that uses few words to encompass many meanings.

**There are eight reasons for using verses in Sutras:**

1. To express many meanings with a few words.

2. To praise the Buddhas. The praises of the sages and worthies of the ten directions, as well as the Buddhas, are usually written in verse form. We also write verses in praise of the Patriarchs, one per week.

3. To reiterate the meaning for beings with dull faculties, that is, for beings who are not as quick to grasp the meaning.

4. To reiterate the meaning for people of the future, that is, people who were not present at the assembly but who will come later, such as ourselves in this present time.

5. To speak in the way one likes to speak. According to how one feels inspired, one can enter that kind of samadhi and speak verses.

6. To facilitate remembering and maintaining, to make it easier to remember the principles.

7. To further clarify what has been spoken before, that is, to shed more light on the previous sutra text.

8. To express in verse form that which was not previously expressed in the prose section.

At that time Celestial King Ocean of Wondrous Flames received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power. Why doesn’t the sutra say that the Celestial King Ocean of Wondrous Flames himself spoke those verses? Why does it say that he “received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power”? This is an act of honoring the Dharma-speaking host. In an earlier lecture I said that these beings are not arrogant, and so they rely on the Buddha’s awesome power. None of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas has thoughts of arrogance. The Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and all the sages are never arrogant or conceited. They weren’t arrogant to begin with. It’s not that they are simply putting on a show of not being arrogant. If they were arrogant to begin with, but acted like they weren’t, they would be hypocrites. But as they basically don’t have egos, how could they be arrogant or self-conceited? These beings achieved the wonderful functioning of spiritual powers by means of the Dharma of the Buddhas of the ten directions. The Dharma of all Buddhas nurtured them and helped them complete their work in the Way and become “disciples of Buddhas.” By means of the Buddhadharma, they understood the principles and cultivated, so their achievements are due to the Buddha’s awesome power. If it were not for the Buddha’s awesome power, they wouldn’t know how to cultivate, nor would they attain the wondrous functioning of spiritual powers and transformations. They wouldn’t attain any of those powers. These beings were all born from the Buddhadharma; they have grown up within the Buddhadharma and have achieved realization within the Buddhadharma. That’s why the text says, “receiving the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power.” That refers not only to the awesome power of Sãkyamuni Buddha, or Vairochana Buddha, or Nisyanda Buddha, but rather to the power of the Buddhas of the ten directions reaching to the ends of space throughout the Dharma Realm.

Celestial King Ocean of Wondrous Flames universally contemplated the causes and conditions of all the boundless multitudes of the Heavens of Great Self-Mastery, and spoke the following verse. These verses were not spoken for just one god of the Heaven of Great Self-Mastery; they were spoken for the sake of all the gods in that heaven. Not only that, the verses were spoken in praise of all Buddhas of the past, present, and future. They were spoken so that all sentient beings of the past, present, and future would hear them and thereby understand the profundity of the Buddhadharma and rely on the Dharma to cultivate, eventually realizing the Buddha Way. It was for those reasons that Celestial King Ocean of Wondrous Flames spoke the following four-line verse.

Our present time is the “future” of the time when the verses were spoken. Therefore, these verses were also spoken for us. You could think these verses were spoken especially for you, and I could think they were spoken especially for me. Since these verses were spoken for every single being, would you say they were important or not? The first verse begins:

The Buddha’s body pervades all great assemblies everywhere. This refers to Sãkyamuni Buddha’s body, which is nowhere and everywhere at the same time. There isn’t a place even as small as a mote of dust where the Buddha cannot be found. “All great assemblies” refers to the gatherings where all Buddhas speak Dharma. Since all Buddhas share the same Way, when one Buddha speaks the Dharma, other Buddhas will come to support the Dharma assembly. Therefore, the Buddha’s body pervades all assemblies, filling the infinite reaches of the Dharma Realm. All of space to the ends of the Dharma Realm is filled with the Buddha’s bodies. It fills this world and other worlds. This world, that world, infinitely many worlds; this land, that land, countlessly many lands are all filled with the Buddhas’ bodies, without end. Once some empty space appears, the Buddha’s body also appears therein. Or, if a country appears, the Buddha’s body also appears therein.

He is still and quiet, ungraspable, devoid of nature. Although the Buddha’s body pervades all assemblies and fills the Dharma Realm, he is still and quiet, without a nature, and intangible. The Buddha’s body cannot be grasped, nor can it be rejected. If you try to take hold of it, you won’t be able to grasp anything. You may try to reject it, but you won’t be able to, either. The Buddha is quiescent in nature, without shape or form, and yet completely embodies the principle of reality. Whether you grasp or reject him, you are actually dealing with nothing. Originally there is nothing to begin with, so what is there to grasp or reject?

He yet appears in order to save the world. All dharmas are originally quiescent in nature. If the Buddha didn’t want to appear in the world, that would be possible. However, there would be no one to save sentient beings. Sentient beings would sink and drown in the sea of love and emotion, not knowing to escape.

The Buddha appeared in the world to save sentient beings, but sentient beings refuse to heed the Buddha’s instructions. They remain muddled, unable to awaken from their sleep. They don’t want to leave this world of suffering and vexation. They might wish to leave the Saha world in one thought, but in the next thought, they don’t wish to leave it anymore. They vacillate back and forth, advancing and then retreating, and never manage to get out of the Saha world. They don’t wish to get out. The Buddha has been waiting for sentient beings, but sentient beings still do not know to return to their origin. Finally, the Buddha can wait no longer; he runs out of patience. And so he says, “I might as well go into the world and find some work to do, even where there is nothing to be done.” So he comes to the Saha world to teach and transform sentient beings. He says, “You’d better quickly wake up from your dreams! You’d better return to your original home. Don’t be so muddled and confused that you forget your roots.”

The Buddha appears in order to save the world. He comes to the world wishing to rescue you and me, us beings laden with deep offenses. If it weren’t for you and me, who are so lost that we don’t know how to return to purity, the Buddha wouldn’t need to come here. Therefore, we should contemplate this and feel very ashamed. Ah! We have taxed the Buddha’s energy, making him come and look for us. Today some of us want to return to lay life; tomorrow someone else wants to go out and find a job; and the day after that, we want to be doing something else. Our idle daydreams are countless in number. We really are shameless!

We have been lecturing on the Flower Adornment Sutra for over a year. Every day we lecture and speak. People come here and listen every day. Having heard a lot, you may have had an awakening (悟 wu). Hopefully, a great awakening, not a small one. However, in Chinese, “awakening” sounds like another word wu (誤) meaning “to have misconceptions.” In what ways may people have been misled? They might think, “Ah, the Flower Adornment Sutra talks about nonobstruction. That means I can do whatever I please. Such acts as killing, stealing, lusting, lying, taking intoxicants and drugs must all be unobstructed. This dharma isn’t bad at all!” That’s the extent of their misconceptions. Since there is nonobstruction, they think they can engage in all evil and not cultivate any good. “If there’s no obstruction, why should I do good?” they think, and want to do evil.

What kind of evil are we referring to? On a large scale, killing and committing arson are evil; on a smaller scale, even scolding and slandering others is evil. These people say, “No problem. Our Dharma Master talks about nonobstruction, so it’s probably all unobstructed. We should be able to beat people up or scold them without any obstruction.”

I say to them, “Well, if you want to practice nonobstruction, why don’t you be unobstructed in showing respect for others? Why do you have to hit and scold them? Why don’t you respect them instead? If you were to bow to people when you see them, you would be without obstruction, too. Since you can do evil without obstruction, why don’t you do good without obstruction, and put an end to all evil?”

 “But,” they protest, “cultivating good dharmas means one still has an attachment and hasn’t reached a state of nonobstruction.”

My reply is, “If you say there’s attachment involved in cultivating good dharmas, why aren’t you afraid of having attachments when you casually commit evil? Don’t you have attachment when you do evil?” Their views are terribly wrong, and anyone who holds to such views and does such evil is involved in unforgivably evil deeds. People who harbor such misconceptions should quickly reflect upon themselves.

**Sutra:**

**The Thus Come One, King of Dharma, appears among us,
Lighting up the world with the lantern of  wondrous Dharma.
Boundless and infinite are the states that emerge.
Thus is the realization of Freedom and Renown.**
**Commentary:**

The Thus Come One, King of Dharma, appears among us.The Thus Come One is the Dharma King, and the Dharma King is the Thus Come One. Why does the sutra mention both titles? “Thus Come One” is one of the ten titles of a Buddha, while “Dharma King” is a general term. Although we say that the Thus Come One is the Dharma King and vice versa, nonetheless, these are different names referring to the same enlightened being.

“Thus” refers to stillness, “come” to movement. Since a Buddha comes from nowhere, he does not move. Since he goes nowhere, he is not still. “Neither moving nor still” is the meaning of “Thus Come One.” If one rejects movement in favor of stillness, then one limits this state. If one rejects stillness in favor of movement, one also sets a boundary. The Thus Come One, however, comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. Since he comes from nowhere, the place from which he comes is unattainable; and since he goes nowhere, the place to which he goes is unattainable. The Thus Come One’s Dharma body is present everywhere throughout space and the Dharma Realm.

Therefore, where could he come from? He comes without coming. Where could he go? He goes without going. “Without moving from the Way-place, he pervades the entire Dharma Realm,” and so he’s called the Thus Come One.

“King of Dharma.” How many dharmas are there? There are innumerably many dharmas, as many as the grains of sand in the Ganges River. To sum it up, we say there are 84,000 dharma doors. Those 84,000 dharma doors can further be classified into five kinds of dharmas: form dharmas, mind dharmas, dharmas belonging to the mind, dharmas not interactive with the mind, and unconditioned dharmas. All dharmas boil down to these five categories.

Anybody can proclaim Dharma—gods, Arhats, Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas, and Buddhas. But only Buddhas can be called Dharma Kings. The others are called speakers of Dharma.

Why does the Buddha appear in the world? He wishes to eradicate sentient beings’ ignorance. He sees that the world is engulfed in darkness, and so he appears in the world.

The Buddha is intent upon lighting up the world with the lantern of wondrous Dharma. How does he light up worlds? He does it with the wonderful lamp of Dharma that pervasively shines on them. The Buddhadharma resembles a bright lamp. Before the Buddha appeared, the world was dark, because there was no Buddhadharma in it. When a Buddha is born into the world, he illumines it with wonderful, inconceivable Dharma. He teaches sentient beings to abandon confusion and return to enlightenment, to renounce the wrong and return to the right, to go back to the source, and to attain true freedom and ease.

If we wish to return to the source, we must first end our own birth and death. If we don’t end birth and death, we won’t be able to return to the source. If we wish to end birth and death, the very first thing to do is to put an end to thoughts of lust. If we don’t put an end to lust, we won’t be able to end birth and death or get out of the Three Realms. The Surangama Sutra clearly states, “If one does not get rid of lust, one cannot transcend the world.” To not get rid of lustful thoughts and still wish to realize the Way is like cooking sand hoping to get rice. How could anyone cook sand and expect it to turn into rice? That’s impossible. Not to cast out lustful thoughts and still wish to transcend the Three Realms and end birth and death exemplifies the same principle. That is what the Surangama Sutra says. People who have heard the Surangama Sutra, who have lectured on it, and who have investigated it should pay close attention to this point. Neither monastics nor laypeople should forget this principle. Why do people have false thoughts? It happens because they have forgotten this very principle. They may pay lip service to it, but subsequent to that they lapse into idle thinking. The Buddha spoke the Dharma to teach us not to indulge in idle thoughts. Without idle thoughts, the darkness is gone, and our thinking clears up and becomes pure. Pure thoughts are the Pure Land. This is the dharma for returning to the source.

It shouldn’t be that having listened to many Sutras, people forget the most important principles, turn their backs on enlightenment, and become immersed in the dust of mundane defilements. Then they won’t be able to abandon defilement and unite with enlightenment. Therefore, the Buddha lights the wonderful Dharma lamp that illumines the world. This is an analogy.

Boundless and infinite are the states that emerge. The Buddha’s state of mind is without bounds and without end. It is multi-layered and inexhaustible, perfectly interpenetrating and unobstructed. It is an inconceivably wonderful state. Thus is the realization of Freedom and Renown. Celestial King Radiant Freedom and Renown realized this state, so this four-line verse was spoken about him.

**Sutra:**

**How inconceivable the Buddha is; he defies description.
He realizes that no form actually exists in the ten directions.**

**For those in the world he extensively reveals paths to purity.
Pure Eyes is able to observe thus.**
**Commentary:**

How inconceivable the Buddha is; he defies description. Buddha or Buddhaya is Sanskrit and means “the Awakened/Enlightened One.” What did he awaken to? He awoke to that which sentient beings do not understand, that which sentient beings are confused about and attached to, that which they cannot let go of. The Buddha has:

Perfected the Three Kinds of Enlightenment
And is replete with the myriad virtues.

That is why he is called a Buddha. The Three Kinds of Enlightenment are self-enlightenment, enlightenment of others, and the perfection of enlightenment through practices.

1. One who is self-enlightened differs from common people. Ordinary people may think they are enlightened, but in fact they suffer from confusion within confusion. They feel that among confused people they are enlightened, but in truth, not only are they not enlightened, they are doubly confused. Why do I say that? They do not recognize what enlightenment is. If they did recognize it, they would know that they themselves aren’t enlightened, even though they now think they are. And so, not only do they fail to recognize enlightenment, they don’t even recognize confusion. Not to be enlightened is to be confused. They think they are not confused. Such beings are pitiful. One who is self-enlightened is different from ordinary people.

2. One who enlightens others differs from followers of the Two Vehicles, who are able to enlighten themselves, but not others. They don’t want to enlighten others; they only look after themselves.

3. One who has perfected his enlightened practices differs from Bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas are able to enlighten themselves and to enlighten others, but they have not perfected their enlightened practices. They haven’t reached the state of utmost perfection. The Buddha not only is able to enlighten himself and others, but has also perfected his enlightened practices, and so he is called a Buddha.

The Buddha’s realm is inconceivable. The Buddha’s wonderful modes of transformation cannot be pinned down; there’s no way to fathom his realm of being. It is inconceivable and beyond discriminations. You cannot use your conscious mind to discriminate the Buddha’s state. Later on in this sutra, there is a phrase, “If one wishes to understand the Buddha’s state, one should make one’s mind as pure as space.” You should clear your mind and intellect so that it resembles the void. If you don’t become like space, you won’t be able to understand the Buddha’s state. But if you can make your mind as pure and clear as the void, and be without attachment, you might understand a bit of the Buddha’s state. Space is free from discriminations. Although it is empty, it contains all the wonderful phenomena that exist.

He realizes that no form actually exists in the ten directions. The Buddha’s form is without form, yet it characterizes all form. This doesn’t mean that he has no form. Rather, the Buddha’s form pervades space and the Dharma Realm. There is no way we can see or understand the Buddha’s form, because we are right within it. Therefore we do not know how large the Buddha’s form is. And so in the ten directions his form is like space: present and yet empty.

For those in the world he extensively reveals paths to purity.The Buddha employs many expedient dharma doors to teach and transform beings, and to open up the path to purity for them. Purity means having no defilement. The Buddha teaches us to cultivate dharmas that are undefiled, so we can transcend the dust. Pure Eyes is able to observe thus. Celestial King Eyes of Pure Merit and Virtue can observe and understand this dharma door of the Buddha’s formlessness.

Just now in explaining the first line of the verse, I said that “the Buddha’s wonderful modes of transformation cannot be pinned down.” You could also explain it this way: There is no dharma that is not a method employed by the Buddha, because he has so many methods. There is no method that isn’t used by him in his wonderful transformations. Or, you could say that “wonderful modes of transformation” means going beyond all methods used by people, being finished with all those methods. No method at all is used because they’re all done with. This is “a great square that has no corners.” Such wonderful transformations cannot be pinned down to a specific method, because they’re too wonderful. If they could be pinned down, they wouldn’t be wonderful.

Along the same lines, we say, “Great talent takes long to mature.” A verse in the Three Character Classic says:

Yao Lianghao was eighty-two
When he took the exam in the imperial hall
And came out first among all the scholars.

Yao Lianghao was eighty-two when he became the zhuangyuan—the top-ranking imperial scholar. When he answered the questions in the oral exam that was administered in the imperial court, the young scholars and professors around him couldn’t even understand what he was saying. That was because Mr. Yao had plenty of experience at his advanced age. When Mr. Yao was answering the emperor’s questions, the young professors became subdued and quiet. This was “great talent that took long to mature.” He wasn’t successful until he was eighty-two.

“A great note is hard to hear.” [Laozi Daodejing, No. 41] The greatest sounds are silent. And, “Great skill seems awkward.” [Laozi Daodejing, No. 45] People who are extremely skillful may appear rather clumsy, but from what they do, you see that they are actually quite ingenious. A case in point is Sir Winston Churchill, who, though he appeared rather dull, was exceptionally intelligent. One time the Germans launched an air raid. With a few remaining airplanes, Churchill was able to fool the Germans. The Germans were fed misinformation indicating that the British still had many airplanes. If it were not for that scheme, England would have been defeated by the Germans during World War II. Churchill might have looked foolish, but he was extremely smart. That’s “great skill that seems awkward.”

“Great eloquence seems tongue-tied.” People gifted with true eloquence do not engage in excessive meaningless talk. They don’t say much, maybe just one sentence, but they will manage to defeat you in debate. Someone who is gifted in debate may look like he doesn’t know how to talk. These examples are all part of the meaning of “wonderful modes of transformation that cannot be pinned down.”

During the Three Kingdoms Period [222-265 c.e.], there was a scholar named Zuo Ci who was skilled in debate. Nobody could out-talk him. Cao Cao [the prime minister] happened to have some men in his court who were skilled in debate, but none of them could beat Zuo Ci. One time, when Zuo Ci was expected at Cao Cao’s court, the debaters made a pact among themselves, “Today when Zuo Ci comes here, let’s all ignore him. Let’s not pay any attention to him. We won’t talk to him or look at him and see what he does then!”

They were all prepared when Zuo Ci appeared. The debaters sat there like clay figures and wooden statues. Some had their eyes wide-open, staring as if unseeing. Others had their eyes closed, as if trying to be invisible. As soon as Zuo Ci stepped in the door, he broke out in tears and wept loudly. Shocked, the debaters reacted and asked him, “Why are you crying?” He said, “I’ve come upon a bunch of dead people. How could I not cry?”

**Sutra:**

**The Thus Come One’s wisdom is without bounds.
No one in the world could possibly fathom it.
He dispels sentient beings’ dark delusions forever.
Great Wisdom enters this and abides in profound peace.**

**Commentary:**

The Thus Come One’s wisdom is without bounds. “Thus Come One” is one of the Buddha’s ten titles. His wisdom is without limits or boundaries. The teachings of Buddhism are boundless and all-encompassing. Both Buddhists and non-Buddhists are included within Buddhism. Whether or not you believe is only a matter of time; whether you become a Buddha or not is also a matter of time. Why do we say that Buddhism is boundless? Sentient beings’ minds are also boundless. However vast sentient beings’ minds are, that’s how vast Buddhism is.

Whether or not you believe in Buddhism, you are included within it. You have not been left out of the scope of Buddhism, because Buddhism pervades space and the Dharma Realm. It has no limits. Therefore, “Sentient and nonsentient beings together perfect the Wisdom of Modes.” Sentient beings are beings endowed with blood and breath. Nonsentient beings include all plants, metals, and minerals, which have no sentience. Although they are insentient, they are still endowed with the Buddha nature. Buddhism is totally egalitarian. “All beings are endowed with the Buddha nature; all can become Buddhas.” Wouldn’t you say Buddhist principles are vast and all-encompassing? Buddhism differs from certain religions that set boundaries and limit their scope, maintaining that those who believe in them are their disciples, and those who don’t aren’t. In Buddhism, regardless of whether or not you believe, you are still considered a disciple. You may not believe now, but in the future you will. You have not become Buddhas yet, but in the future you will. Therefore, the text says, “The Thus Come One’s wisdom is without bounds.”

No one in the world could possibly fathom it. No one can fathom or understand the Buddha’s wisdom, because it is without bounds. He dispels sentient beings’ dark delusions forever. Buddhism teaches sentient beings to renounce confusion and return to enlightenment. Deluded individuals can become wise. The dark delusion of sentient beings is destroyed forever. Why do I say that I won’t allow anyone I meet to remain deluded? Buddhism can destroy beings’ darkness and delusions. You should understand this point. The Buddha teaches people to cease being deluded and become wise. Great Wisdom enters this and abides in profound peace. Celestial King Delightful Great Wisdom understands and abides in this deep samadhi, which brings a realization that the Buddha’s wisdom is boundless.

**Sutra:**

**The Thus Come One’s meritorious virtues are inconceivable.
When sentient beings see him their afflictions cease.
He enables everyone in the world to experience peace and joy.
The god Comfortable Unmoving Light observes thus.**

**Commentary:**

The Thus Come One’s meritorious virtues are inconceivable. “Thus Come One” is the first of the ten titles of a Buddha. How did the Thus Come One become a Thus Come One? He did it by means of merit and virtue. Ordinary people’s merit and virtue cannot compare with the Buddha’s merit and virtue, which is beyond conception and impossible to describe. The Buddha’s merit and virtue is boundless and infinite.

Thoughts as many as dust motes in lands might still be counted;
The waters of the great seas might still be drunk dry;
Space might be measured; the wind might be tied;
But the meritorious virtues of the Buddhas
can never be described.

The Thus Come One completely perceives all the thoughts of sentient beings in the Saha world. Not only that, but the Thus Come One also completely perceives the merit and virtue of all sentient beings in worlds as numerous as dust motes or as grains of sand in the Ganges River. The Buddha knows all the thoughts and meritorious qualities of sentient beings, but do sentient beings know about the Buddha’s merit and virtue?

No. Therefore, “Thoughts as many as motes of dust in lands might still be counted.” The Buddha is completely aware of every stirring of thought in the minds of sentient beings in all those lands. However, no one is able to fathom the Buddha’s merit and virtue.

“The waters of the great seas might still be drunk dry / Space might be measured; the wind might be tied.” Basically, space has no finite size, but let’s say that you could measure its scope. The wind basically cannot be tied down, but let’s say you are able to tie it down. The water in the ocean cannot be completely drunk, but let’s say you are able to drink it all up. Thoughts as many as dust motes in lands cannot be known, but let’s suppose you are able to do that. Even then, you could not know the Buddha’s merit and virtue. No one can understand it. Therefore the last line says, “But the meritorious virtues of the Buddhas can never be described.” They cannot be mentally conceived of or verbally discussed, because they are measureless and boundless.

When sentient beings see him their afflictions cease. How does that happen? The Buddha is compassionate and happy with all sentient beings. Therefore, when sentient beings see the Buddha, they also become happy and forget their afflictions. This is a response brought about by the Buddha’s merit and virtue, which inspires joy in sentient beings when they see him.

He enables everyone in the world to experience peace and joy. The Buddha causes them to attain true peace and comfort. The god Comfortable Unmoving Light observes thus. That Celestial King perceives that aspect of the Buddha.

Sutra:

**Beings are constantly occluded by darkness and delusion.**
**The Thus Come One tells them about the method for gaining tranquility,**
**Describing it as a lamp of wisdom that shines on the world.**
**Wondrous Eyes understands this skillful means.**

Commentary:

How do we define beings? They are “those born from a confluence of many conditions.” Well, what does that mean? Let’s use plants as an example. The first condition necessary is land. There has to be a good piece of soil where crops can grow. Another condition is seasonal weather. The weather needs to be hot when it’s time to be hot, and cold when it’s time to be cold. An additional condition is clear division of the four seasons. In spring, one sows the seeds. In summer, one plants and weeds. In fall, one harvests, and in winter, one stores the crops. The seasons correspond to the cycle of coming into being, dwelling, declining, and disappearing. Sowing the seeds is the stage of coming into being. Growth of the crops corresponds to the stage of dwelling. Harvesting is the stage of declining, and the storing of the crops in winter is the stage of disappearing. If land is available, but there is no rain, the crops will not grow. If there is rain, but no manpower, the crops will not survive, either. There has to be confluence of many different conditions for there to be beings, literally “those born of many (conditions).”

Consider the case of birds. When a mother bird wishes to have little birds, first she has to build a nest, then lay her eggs and sit on them until the baby birds hatch. That’s a case of several conditions having to be satisfied before birth can take place. People are also born as a result of the converging of several conditions. “Beings” in the text here refers not only to people, but to beings from all four kinds of birth: those born from wombs, eggs, moisture, and transformation. An in-depth discussion would reveal that there are actually many categories and species of beings. However, by and large beings are deluded. That’s why the text says: Beings are constantly occluded by darkness and delusion. They are constantly deluded and shrouded in darkness. Darkness and delusion refer to affliction and ignorance. On a coarse level, there is affliction; on a subtler level, there is ignorance.

The Thus Come One tells them about the method for gaining tranquility.Since sentient beings are constantly confused and unreceptive to the Buddha’s teaching, the Buddha bases himself in the Four Unlimited Aspects of Mind, which are kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity, in speaking Dharma for sentient beings. The Buddha teaches them the method for gaining tranquility, which is the investigation of chan meditation. A few days ago we held a chan session, and that was the method for gaining tranquility. The Buddha teaches beings to cultivate tranquility, describing it as a lamp of wisdom that shines on the world. The method of gaining tranquility is a lamp of great wisdom that illumines the world. Wondrous Eyes understands this skillful means. Celestial King Wondrous Eyes understands this method.

Sutra:

**The Thus Come One’s pure, wonderful physical body**
**Universally manifests in the ten directions, defying comparison.**
**This body has no nature or place of reliance.**
**The god Wholesome Reflection observes thus.**

Commentary:

The Thus Come One’s pure, wonderful physical body is one aspect of the Buddha. The Buddha’s Dharma body is pure, as is his reward body. The Buddha also has a pure, bright, inconceivably wonderful physical body that universally manifests in all Buddha worlds throughout the ten directions, defying comparison. Nothing in the worlds of the ten directions can compare with the pure and bright body of the Buddha. This body has no nature or place of reliance.

The Buddha’s pure, wonderful physical body has no nature of its own and nothing that it relies on. It is extremely free and at ease. The god Wholesome Reflection observes thus. Celestial King Wholesome Reflection sees this aspect of the Buddha’s state of being.

Sutra:

**The Thus Come One’s voice transcends bounds
     and impediments.
No one who is ready to be taught will fail to hear it.
And yet the Buddha remains still, forever unmoving.
The god Delightful Knowledge is liberated thus.**

Commentary:

The Thus Come One’s voice transcends bounds and impediments. Once, the Venerable Maudgalyayana, using his spiritual powers, traveled a great distance to the east. He traversed countless hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhalands until he was very far away, and yet the Buddha’s voice was still as clear as if Maudgalyayana were in the presence of the Buddha, hearing his voice directly.  He could hear the Buddha’s voice very clearly. Therefore, the Buddha’s voice transcends bounds and impediments.

No one who is ready to be taught will fail to hear it. If beings are ready to be taught and they have affinities with the Buddha, then they will, without exception, be able to hear the Buddha’s sound. And yet the Buddha remains still, forever unmoving. Beings in lands throughout the ten directions can hear the Buddha speak Dharma, and yet those beings have not come to where the Buddha is, nor has the Buddha gone to where they are. The Buddha stays seated in quiet meditation, cultivating the virtues of eternity, bliss, true self, and purity. But the Buddha’s voice extends everywhere. The god Delightful Knowledge is liberated thus. This verse expresses the principles of liberation that Celestial King Delightful Knowledge attained.

Sutra:

**The lord of humans and gods, one of still and quiet liberation,
Appears everywhere throughout the ten directions.
His dazzling light fills the world.
Glorious Banner of Unimpeded Dharma thus perceives.**

Commentary:

The lord of humans and gods, one of still and quiet liberation...“Still and quiet” describes a place without din and bustle, a serene and placid place where one can attain liberation. Upon attaining liberation, one is truly still and quiet. Only the Buddha deserves this name. He is the teacher of both gods and humans, who appears everywhere throughout the ten directions. Throughout the ten directions, there is no place where the Buddha’s Dharma body is not found.

The Buddha’s Dharma body is nowhere and yet everywhere. His dazzling light fills the world. The Buddha’s brilliance illumines the trichiliocosm with universal light. Glorious Banner of Unimpeded Dharma thus perceives. Celestial King Glorious Banner of Unimpeded Dharma sees and understands this dharma door.

Sutra:

**Throughout boundless seas of great eons, the Buddha
Sought bodhi in order to help sentient beings.
With many different spiritual powers he transforms all.
The god Brilliant Renown awakens to this dharma.**

Commentary:

Throughout boundless seas of great eons, the Buddha / sought bodhi in order to help sentient beings. The Buddha “cultivated blessings and wisdom for three asamkhyeyas, and perfected the hallmarks and characteristics for a hundred eons.” An asamkhyeya means “an uncountable number.” Three asamkhyeyas means three of those “uncountable numbers” of eons. Because so many eons are involved, they are likened to a sea, vast and deep beyond fathoming. Throughout those seas of great eons, the Buddha cultivated the Buddha Way so as to teach and transform beings so that they can all realize Buddhahood. He did not cultivate only for himself. He made the resolve to seek bodhi so that he could save beings and cause them to all attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

With myriad spiritual powers he transforms all. The Buddha uses all kinds of spiritual powers and meritorious virtues to teach and transform beings. The god Brilliant Renown awakens to this dharma. Celestial King Brilliant Renown understands this dharma door.

Time passes very quickly. The sun and moon move back and forth like a shuttle, never stopping for an instant. People progress from youth to their prime, and from their prime onwards to old age. And those who are old are fast approaching death. They go through their lives muddled and confused. When they’re born, they don’t understand; when they die, they still don’t understand. This lack of understanding is ignorance. They are fettered by their ignorance, so they cannot attain liberation. If they understood, they would be liberated. In the past there was an old cultivator who went to request the Dharma from a wise teacher. He asked, “Please tell me: how can I attain liberation?”

The good teacher didn’t tell him how he could attain liberation. Instead, he came back with a question: “Who tied you up?”

Instantaneously, that old cultivator became enlightened: “Oh! I’ve been tying myself up. Nobody else tied me up. If I don’t tie myself up, I can be liberated.”

The old cultivator became enlightened upon asking his teacher that question. Right now we can also ask ourselves the same question. No one knows who will become enlightened and who will remain unenlightened.

2) Heavens of the Fourth Dhyāna

Sutra:

**Moreover, Celestial King Bright Banner of Delight in the Dharma gained a passage into liberation of comprehensively observing the faculties of all sentient beings so as to speak Dharma for them and dissolve their doubts.**

Commentary:

Moreover indicates that the principle in the previous section has not been discussed completely. The Celestial King named Bright Banner of Delight in the Dharma is extremely fond of the Dharma, and his wisdom is vast like a bright jeweled banner. He gained a passage into liberation of comprehensively observing the faculties of all sentient beings so as to speak Dharma for them and dissolve their doubts. He has attained a kind of samadhi called “observing all sentient beings’ faculties.” Sentient beings have their individual faculties. Take people, for instance. Everyone’s disposition is different. Although we say that all beings share an identical Buddha nature, within that sameness there are many differences. Every person has his or her individual nature. The same applies to other beings as well.

Among people, there are those with dull and sharp faculties. Those with dull faculties are deluded. They will not understand the Dharma after you explain it to them once. Even if you explain it twice, they still don’t understand. In fact, the more they ask about it, they more muddled they become. The more muddled they are, the more they want to ask questions. As for those with sharp faculties, upon hearing one principle they will understand ten; they can infer many principles from one principle. Then there are those of average faculties; that is, they are neither dull nor sharp, but mediocre. In general, people are endowed with different dispositions. Some are very compassionate by nature, while others have very little compassion. But bit by bit they can change their own thinking and increase their compassion. Although our faculties differ, we are all studying the same thing—the Buddhadharma.

This Celestial King understands beings’ faculties as well as their desires. He knows what every type of being likes. There are many people in this country, yet not that many of them like to cultivate Buddhism, especially in a place where cultivation of the Buddhadharma is taken very seriously. Even fewer people are interested in a place like that. We can see from this that sentient beings are not easy to save. In this country, people didn’t truly understand the Buddhadharma before, so it’s not easy to teach them to cultivate. You are studying Buddhism now, so that in the future you can go throughout the world to propagate the Buddhadharma. If you want to propagate the Buddhadharma worldwide, first you have to understand beings’ faculties and desires—the things they like. My lecturing of this sutra for you now is like clearing an overgrown piece of land and planting seeds. In the future it’s up to you to cultivate the vast fields of Buddhism and sow bodhi seeds. From now on, every one of you should be independent. Don’t rely on others. Don’t be like Ànanda who, when Sãkyamuni Buddha was about to enter nirvana, broke out in tears because he was too dependent on the Buddha.

Don’t be dependent. When I am here, you should act as if I weren’t. When I’m not here, you should act as if I were. If you don’t learn to be self-sufficient, what will you do if an accident occurs one day, if an earthquake sends me into the ocean? If you do not rely too much on your teacher from the start, then no matter what happens, there will be no problems. Someone is wondering, “What is the meaning behind the Master’s words today? Is he going to enter the stillness?” Don’t be over-sensitive, like the man of Qi who worried that the sky would cave in. He thought, “The sky is going to fall, and that will be the end of us!” Don’t think like that.

Each sentient being has a different disposition. Some like to eat sour food, some like to eat sweet food, others like to eat hot, or bitter food. I like bitter food, but I am not fond of sweet stuff, because it’s too sweet. One of my disciples likes to eat sweets, but doesn’t like bitter things. See, I know your dispositions. Another disciple likes cottage cheese. Such are the faculties of sentient beings. Another disciple does not like others to watch over him, but he’s clumsy and foolish.

This Celestial King has “gained the passage into liberation of comprehensively observing the faculties of all sentient beings so as to speak Dharma for them and dissolve their doubts.” He speaks Dharma appropriate to each being’s disposition. For example, there are beings who are stingy and greedy. Such a person would squeeze a penny in his hand until it melts, rather than let go of it. He won’t spend that penny. That’s how stingy he is. He would rather squeeze that penny until it turns to fluid than to release his grasp and buy something with it. To a person who is greedy and stingy, you should speak the dharma of giving and tell him about the merits of giving. Giving cures stinginess and greed.

When you meet people who violate the precepts, you should teach them about the merits and benefits associated with holding the precepts. To people who have big tempers, you talk about patience and urge them to emulate Maitreya Bodhisattva, who has a big belly that can hold everything. Patience is the antidote for hatred and anger. When you encounter lazy people, you urge them to be vigorous. Vigor cures one of laziness. When you meet people whose minds are scattered, who are flighty and hyperactive, speak the dharma of dhyana-samadhi for them. Dhyana-samadhi is the antidote for scatteredness. When you run into deluded people, speak to them about prajña, so their wisdom will unfold. Prajña cures delusion. This is a general explanation of the Six Paramitas. If we were to go into detail, sentient beings have 84,000 kinds of dispositions, and 84,000 dharma doors are used to counteract their problems. That’s why I often say: Of the 84,000 dharma doors, there isn’t a number one or number two. Any dharma door, as long as it works for you, is number one. There are 84,000 number ones. As for the 83,999 that are not appropriate for you, they are all number two. The dharma door that meets your needs is number one.

If you know how to speak the Dharma, you will inspire people to resolve to follow the Way. If you don’t know how to speak the Dharma, you will cause people to retreat from their resolve for the Way. When speaking the Dharma, you have to observe the potentials and dispense the teaching. Observe people’s faculties and aspirations. Try to figure out the kinds of roots they have. For example, if a being’s good roots have ripened, you can encourage him to leave the home life. If he doesn’t have good roots, you can encourage him to plant them. Think of ways to exhort him to plant good roots. You should help those who have already planted good roots to increase their good roots. You should help those whose roots have increased to bring those good roots to maturity. You should help those whose good roots have already matured to attain liberation. That’s the unobstructed passage into liberation of “observing all sentient beings’ faculties and speaking Dharma to sever their doubts” and inspire faith.

Once you have learned something, you can decide whether or not to use it. However, you cannot use it if you never learned it in the first place. When it comes time to use a skill and you don’t have it, you have trouble on your hands. In Chinese, we have two lines:

When it’s time to use your book learning,
you lament you know too little.
Unless you’ve actually gone through the experience,
you won’t realize the difficulties involved.

When it comes time to utilize your book learning, you regret that you studied so little in the past. You don’t know many characters, you cannot produce essays, and you don’t know how to write anything. When it’s time for you to put that knowledge to practical use, you realize you know too little. No matter what it is, if you have not actually been through it and experienced it, you won’t understand the difficulties involved. I’ve had lots of experience. In the past I traveled from one place to another, and so I am well aware of those hardships. Many of you Westerners have abundant blessings. You casually waste resources and material things. As soon as you squander them, more come your way. Why does this happen? It is because many of you have blessings. Many Westerners are gods who have come to the human realm after having lived in the heavens, and therefore they have abundant blessings.

But there are also many people who have emerged from the hells. Don’t think that all the people in this country have come from the heavens. There are also many hell-beings here. Rich ghosts come here to enjoy themselves, too. Each one of you should work hard for the sake of Buddhism, and not for yourself. You should accumulate your capital for the future when you propagate the Buddhadharma, just as when a person goes into business, he needs some capital to start with. If he doesn’t have capital, his business will not succeed. This is a very simple, but important, principle.

Sutra:

**Celestial King Ocean of Pure Adornments gained a passage into liberation of enabling all sentient beings to see the Buddha upon recollecting him.**

Commentary:

Celestial King Ocean of Pure Adornments. This Celestial King has attained pure adornments. “Ocean” is a descriptive word, meaning vast and broad. He pervasively adorns all Buddhalands. He has gained a state of samadhi, a passage into liberation of enabling all sentient beings to see the Buddha upon recollecting him. As soon as you think of the Buddha, you will be able to see him. This Celestial King has himself attained this samadhi, this liberation of seeing the Buddhas as soon as he recollects them, and he also enables all beings to attain this dharma door of liberation. If you don’t recollect, then of course you will forget; but if you recollect the Buddha, you will see him.

Great Strength Bodhisattva, in the [*Surangama Sutra*](http://cttbusa.org/shurangama/shurangama_contents.asp), likened the dharma door of reciting the Buddha’s name to the relationship between mother and son. A person recollecting the Buddha is like the son; the Buddha is like the mother. The mother and son used to live together, but the son likes to go out and play. He is naughty and mischievous. He refuses to live together with his mother any more. He runs away. Now, if he had left the home life and become a monk, that wouldn’t be bad. However, the son hasn’t run off to become a monk. Instead he roams around aimlessly, without a proper job. The mother thinks about her son every day. She thinks about him day after day without stopping. But the son doesn’t think about his mother. In his wanderings he has forgotten about going home. Although there are times when he has no food to eat, still, he prefers to be loafing around outside.

After a few years, the son starts to think about his mother at home. And his mother thinks about him. There is a telepathic connection between their minds, like an electric impulse, and the son returns home. This is, as the Surangama Sutra says, “When beings recollect and are mindful of the Buddha, now and in the future, they will be sure to see the Buddha.” Once the son starts to recollect his mother, right at that moment he can go home. Likewise, once we recite Amitabha Buddha’s name, Amitabha Buddha welcomes us back. We have been drifting about outside, not knowing to go home.

Celestial King Ocean of Pure Adornments has attained the samadhi of seeing the Buddhas. “Upon recollecting them” means that at any time and in any place, as soon as you recall and are mindful of the Buddhas, now or in the future, you will see them. Some people recite the Buddha’s name, but don’t see the Buddha. They wonder, “It doesn’t work like the sutra says. Was the Buddha lying?” No, the Dharma that the Buddha speaks is perfect and unobstructed. You may see the Buddha now, or you may see him in the future. It might be in your next life or the life after that. The Dharma is spoken in a most perfect and unobstructed way. You may see the Buddha now, but just in case you don’t get to see him now, the Buddha added this line, “In the future you will be sure to see the Buddha.”

By reciting the Buddha’s name, you will also realize Buddhahood. “I recite the Buddha’s name. Why haven’t I become a Buddha?” you ask. In the future you will. Since you haven’t perfected your skill, you cannot immediately become a Buddha. If your skill is already perfected, you can see the Buddha right now and in the future you will surely become a Buddha. This Celestial King has attained this dharma, this benefit, of “seeing the Buddhas upon recollecting them.”

Sutra:

**Celestial King Supreme Wisdom-Light gained a passage into liberation of the body being adorned with the Dharma nature of equality and independence.**

Commentary:

The Dharma nature is equal to begin with, so why does the text say he “gained” such a state? It means that when someone becomes a Buddha, the Dharma nature is equal. But as sentient beings, we cannot yet speak of the Dharma nature as being equal. Celestial King Supreme Wisdom Light has the most sublime wisdom, which is why he has infinite light and has gained a passage into liberation of the body being adorned with the Dharma nature of equality and independence.  With the unfolding of great wisdom, he realized the equality of the Dharma nature. “Equality” means neither excessive nor deficient. There is neither too much nor too little, but just the right amount.

Although we say that among sentient beings the Dharma nature is not equal, nonetheless, from a deeper viewpoint, the Dharma nature is equal, even among sentient beings. Why? There is no less Dharma nature among sentient beings, nor more among Buddhas. It is fundamentally equal. And being equal, it is not dependent upon anything. Why not? There is no attachment, no sense of self, no concept of right and wrong, and no place of reliance. It is completely equal and independent. If there were still something it depended upon, it wouldn’t be equal. But since it relies upon nothing, there is true equality. All attachments are gone. You don’t think, “I believe in this dharma, but I don’t believe in that dharma.” Whether you believe or not, in either case there is attachment.

People are strange creatures; no need to go anywhere else looking for strange creatures. That would be adding a head on top of your head. People themselves are strange creatures. In what ways are they strange? Let’s not talk about past lives and future lives, but just about today, yesterday, and tomorrow. Yesterday some people said, “Today we’ll eat dumplings,” but today they change their minds and say, “Dumplings don’t taste good. Let’s have noodles instead.” Take a look: The strange creature of yesterday is not the same as the strange creature of today. And tomorrow, they will say, “Let’s have rice.”

I bring up food to illustrate the point, since everybody relates to eating. The point is: yesterday, today, and tomorrow—those three days—are different in terms of the food you want to eat. Belief in Buddhism works the same way. In a former lifetime, a person might have said, “The practice of reciting the Buddha’s name is not bad. I must cultivate it and seek rebirth in the Pure Land. I must attain the samadhi of reciting the Buddha’s name.” But just when he was about to attain the Buddha-recitation samadhi, he had a doubt: “Is this really true? I don’t know whether this practice really works or not,” and then the person died. Since that doubt undermined his faith, he couldn’t get reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Now, in this life, that person is completely skeptical. He says, “Reciting the Buddha’s name is useless. How could such a doctrine be true? It’s just cheating people. Only old ladies recite the Buddha’s name. I’m not an old lady; I’m a great hero. I’m not going to recite the Buddha’s name.”

Take a look. In his past life he recited the Buddha’s name, but at the last moment he had a doubt, and as a result in this life he doesn’t believe in reciting the Buddha’s name at all.

Someone else might have practiced chan meditation in a past life. He meditated intensively and was on the verge of enlightenment. But right at that moment, he decided to give up. He thought, “I’ve been meditating my whole life and I’m about to die, and I still haven’t gotten enlightened. I’ve been cheated by this Dharma spoken by Sãkyamuni Buddha. Well, reciting the Buddha’s name looks promising. I think I’ll give that a try.” As a result, he didn’t succeed in chan, nor did he attain samadhi through reciting the Buddha’s name. And in this life, such a person believes in reciting the Buddha’s name and cultivates the Pure Land practice.

That’s another case of how someone changed his mind in the middle of doing something in his past life. In this life, he will change even more. The same applies to studying the teachings, holding the precepts, cultivating the secret practices, and so forth. Since people aren’t able to persist to the end, but change their minds halfway through, their situation becomes very mixed up and confused. And in this life they have to start all over again. That’s why we say:

Everything’s a test
To see what you will do.
If you don’t recognize what’s before you,
You’ll have to start anew.

You have to start all over again in this life. That being the case in this life, how do you know it won’t be the same way in your future lives?

So, wouldn’t you say people are strange creatures? We brought this up because people have forgotten their original face. They have forgotten what they are supposed to be doing. In previous lifetimes, they made vows saying, “Master, in the future when you go to America to propagate the Buddhadharma, we will protect your Dharma. We will do such and such things.” Everyone made vows. Some people vowed that they would come and help lecture on the sutras; others vowed they would come and help recite sutras; others vowed they would come and help eat; others vowed they would come and cultivate ascetic practices, which just means eating. Still others vowed they would cultivate and become Patriarchs. Others vowed they would come here to take a look.

Even Bodhisattvas become confused when they are in between bodies.
And Arhats become muddled when they dwell in the womb.

Now that you have come to America, you have forgotten the vows you made. You don’t remember all the promises you made in the past. Your teacher said, “When we get there, it won’t work because I won’t know English.”

And you said, “Don’t worry. We’ll go there first and we’ll all know English. It won’t be a problem if our teacher doesn’t know English. We will already have been born there with English as our native tongue.” Take a look: to a greater or lesser degree, many of you who have come to study Buddhism have the looks of Asian people. Maybe your ears resemble those of Asians, or your nose, or your eyes. Maybe you have Asian-looking eyes, but not Asian irises, because your irises are a different color than those of Asian people. Maybe some of you look thoroughly Asian. Isn’t this strange? All of you are strange creatures.

I’ve brought this up because San Francisco is an international place where Buddhists from all over the world come and go. Buddhists come here from various countries, and you must recognize them for who they are. You should understand the situation in their countries, as well as their behavior outside of their own countries. If you don’t understand these things, you may go astray. Therefore, I hope you will emulate their good points, but avoid learning their shortcomings. Base yourselves on our Three Great Principles:

Freezing, we do not scheme.
Starving, we do not beg.
Dying of poverty, we ask for nothing.
According with conditions, we do not change.
Not changing, we accord with conditions.
We adhere to our Three Great Principles.

Don’t look lightly on those principles. Right now, Buddhism is guilty of just these very faults. The Buddhists of all countries have these shortcomings. Basically, it’s okay for left-home people to ask for alms, but they’ve gone overboard, and so we have to counteract that problem. The Buddha did allow left-home people to seek alms and vegetarian food. However, if people leave the home life exclusively for the purpose of asking for money, and do not cultivate, then they’re making a mistake!

Therefore, we want to leave the home life exclusively for the purpose of cultivating, and not for the purpose of scheming, begging, or asking for offerings. Pay special attention to this point. Since this is a critical issue, we have investigated it together.

Sutra:

**Celestial King Banner of Carefree Wisdom gained a passage into liberation of comprehending all mundane dharmas and creating inconceivable oceans of adornments within a single thought.**Commentary:

There are countlessly many heavens. Every heaven has a king presiding over it, and each king has his own name. Each name has its own meaning, which indicates or implies the dharma door cultivated by that king. This is Celestial King Banner of Carefree Wisdom. “Carefree” means being without the attachments to self and to dharmas. Without attachment to a self, the identity of self is empty. Without attachment to dharmas, the identity of dharmas is empty. Attachments to both self and dharmas are empty, so one is free and at ease. If you still have attachment to a self and cling to an ego, you won’t be carefree. If you haven’t emptied your attachment to dharmas and you still cling to dharmas, you won’t be carefree either. People who are attached to their egos feel at all times that they are number one, that they are the greatest and the best, the highest and most honored. They feel that everyone else should respect, bow to, and believe them. They put their ego out in front of everything. Their ego is millions of times larger than Mount Sumeru. Mount Sumeru is huge, but their ego is even bigger. Such people won’t be able to attain ease and comfort.

People who are attached to dharmas are the same way. They insist, “This dharma is the most wonderful. That dharma is most rare. Another dharma is even more unique. Yet another dharma is inconceivable and extremely wonderful, truly difficult to encounter.” They engage in false thinking about dharmas from morning to night, twenty-four hours non-stop, never resting. They continue false thinking even in their sleep. They think, “Today I went dancing with someone. It wasn’t bad.” Another person thinks, “Today I spoke some inconceivable Dharma. It was wonderful. It was an unprecedented event.” Or, they say, “Ah, I’ve never seen anything as good as this,” praising some movie or play.

People with attachment to either self or dharmas cannot obtain ease and comfort. “Banner of Carefree Wisdom.” Wisdom does away with delusion. Deluded people think along these lines: “This flower is so lovely. What scientific method can I find to make it remain ever-fresh, so it never wilts?” They rack their brains, but never manage to come up with such a technique. There’s a verse that goes:

If only those lovely flowers would bloom every day!
And why can’t the bright moon be full every night?
If only the bubbling springs could turn to wine,
And the trees in the forest all grow money!

They want the moon to be full every night. They wonder, “Why does the moon wax and wane? Heaven and earth have it all wrong. The sun doesn’t know how to be a sun, and the moon doesn’t know how to be a moon. If the moon could remain full and round every night, wouldn’t that be fine? And although the sun remains round every day, it gets too hot sometimes, and it doesn’t help me out during cold weather. They really don’t function very well.” And so such a person foolishly wonders why the moon can’t stay full.

People who like to drink think, “If only the springs on earth could turn to wine, then when I feel like having a drink, I won’t have to buy wine. All I have to do is go to the springs and take a drink. That would be fine!”

People who crave riches have this false thought, “May the trees in the forest all grow money!” They want money to grow on trees, so that all they have to do is shake the trees and the money will fall down. Would you say this kind of thinking was smart or dumb?

“If only those lovely flowers would bloom every day!” This line refers to lust. “And why can’t the bright moon be full every night?” This line refers to temper.

“If only the springs on earth could turn to wine” refers to wine. “And the trees in the forest all grow money!” This line talks about wealth.

Those four things—wine, sex, wealth, and temper—are like four walls that enclose foolish people within them, so they cannot get out. Such people are deluded and lack wisdom. There’s another kind of fool who doesn’t cultivate, yet wants to get enlightened and become a Buddha. Some people don’t study and yet want to get Ph.D.s or become professors. They don’t plant the fields, but they want a harvest in the fall. They haven’t planted anything, so how can they expect to get a harvest? That’s impossible. And, even more ridiculous is someone who, without placing any bets, expects to win in the lottery. The prizes in lotteries are high: a million, $50,000, or $20,000. Such a person has not bought a lottery ticket, but he expects to win first prize. Wouldn’t you say he was deluded?

What’s wisdom, then?  Say you want to become a Buddha. In that case, you must cultivate. If you want a harvest in the fall, then you must plant the fields in the spring. If you want to obtain a Ph.D. or become a professor, you must go through the required schooling and do things according to the rules. You cannot expect a reward without having put in the work. People with wisdom think along these lines. They don’t act like foolish people. Fools, on the other hand, don’t behave like wise people. Truly deluded people don’t believe in cause and effect, whereas truly wise people do.

The Celestial King named Banner of Carefree Wisdom has lofty wisdom that resembles a jeweled banner which adorns the Buddhas’ pure lands. This Celestial King watches over the gods in the Heaven of Self-Mastery. The gods there live a very happy existence, but because they are so exuberant, they don’t follow the rules. They are like many Americans who jump up and down all the time, dancing from morning to night. However, this Celestial King is very wise, and he teaches and transforms these foolish gods, who are only into dancing. He tells them, “Don’t think that dancing every day is the Dharma. That won’t do. Don’t jump around all day.” This Celestial King has gained a passage into liberation of comprehending all mundane dharmas—worldly, not transcendental, dharmas. However, once you really understand mundane dharmas, they are just transcendental dharmas. As the Sixth Patriarch put it,

The Buddhadharma is here in the world.
Enlightenment is not apart from the world.
To search for bodhi apart from the world
Is like looking for a hare with horns.

And having understood that mundane dharmas are just transcendental dharmas, he is capable of creating inconceivable oceans of adornments within a single thought. He adorns the dharma realms of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Hearers, Sages Enlightened by Conditions, and all sentient beings. He has attained a passage into liberation that is an inconceivable samadhi.
Sutra:

**Celestial King Delight in Still Quiescence gained a passage into liberation of inclusively and compatibly manifesting inconceivably many Buddhalands in a single pore.**

Commentary:

Celestial King Delight in Still Quiescence is so named because he likes to be quiet. He has gained a passage into liberation of inclusively and compatibly manifesting inconceivably many Buddhalands in a single pore. Basically, a single pore is extremely minute, whereas inconceivably many Buddhalands take up an immense amount of space. This is “manifesting the great within the small.” Within a single pore, he is able to make an inconceivable number of lands appear. The number of lands cannot be conceived of with the mind or expressed in words. There’s no way to know how many Buddhalands are made to appear. And within those lands, the Buddhas teach and transform sentient beings, and sentient beings cultivate and realize Buddhahood and go on to teach other beings. The great can manifest within the small, and yet the small doesn’t become great, nor does the great become small.

You wonder, “Since all those Buddhalands are within a single pore, they must have shrunk in order to fit in there. It must be as when you photograph someone. The photo is a mini-version of the actual person.” That’s not how it works here. The pore hasn’t expanded, and the Buddhalands haven’t shrunk. They are mutually compatible. The small manifesting the great within it shows that the small doesn’t obstruct the great. The great manifesting within the small means that the great doesn’t obstruct the small. They are mutually inclusive and compatible.

Neither one has become greater or smaller. And yet, right within a tiny pore, inconceivable Buddhalands can appear. And within those lands are sentient beings, and these sentient beings in turn have pores within which Buddhalands appear. There is reciprocal manifestation and mutual inclusion. This is not like how things are among ordinary people. When many people crowd into a room, the room appears to become smaller. But in the state of the Buddhas, the small can contain the great without its smallness having to expand, and the great can enter the small without its greatness being reduced. That’s why this is called an inconceivable passage into liberation of inclusion and compatibility.

Previously we lectured on the Sutra passage that begins, “breaking open a mote of dust and taking the Sutra from it.” How many of you are still able to recite that passage from memory? It’s been three to five months. That passage occurs later on in the Sutra. We’ll get to it eventually.

Sutra:

**Celestial King Universal Wisdom Eye gained a passage into liberation whereby he entered an aspect of universality that allowed him to contemplate the Dharma Realm.**Commentary:

Celestial King Universal Wisdom Eye. There is a sutra called the Universal Eye Sutra, which is even longer than the Flower Adornment Sutra. With his wisdom eye, this Celestial King can contemplate everywhere. He gained a passage into liberation whereby he entered an aspect of universality that allowed him to contemplate the Dharma Realm. This “aspect of universality” leads everywhere. He can contemplate all locations with his universal wisdom eye. Ordinary people have a pair of flesh eyes that can see material things but not the immaterial realm.

The previous passage mentioned “inclusively and compatibly manifesting inconceivably many Buddhalands in a single pore.” One must attain the true wisdom-eye in order to see this kind of state. Where does the eye of wisdom come from? It comes from studying the sutras. If you study the sutras, especially the Surangama Sutra, you will develop great wisdom. That sutra is for unfolding great wisdom. The [*Dharma Flower Sutra*](http://cttbusa.org/lotus/lotus_contents.asp) is for realizing Buddhahood. The Flower Adornment Sutra is for developing wisdom and realizing Buddhahood; it has both functions. Having developed wisdom, you become replete with wisdom. If you realize Buddhahood, you become replete with blessings. Thus, wisdom and blessings are both perfected.

Describing the eye of universal wisdom more clearly, this passage also means that the entire body of this Celestial King is covered with eyes. There is one eye after another, all over his body. He has eyes in his every pore. Right within each pore are many eyes. “A pore is so small, how could it have eyes in it, and since those eyes are so small, what can they see?” you wonder.

Didn’t you hear me explain this principle in the previous section? Although a pore is tiny, it can encompass inconceivably many Buddhalands, how much more eyes. In every pore are countless eyes. The eyes are mutually inclusive and compatible. This eye looks to the south; that eye looks to the north. Right on that person’s body are eyes that can look ahead, back, left, right, in the four intermediary directions, above and below. He has eyes that can look everywhere. Don’t think that because he has his eyes closed he can’t see anything. Although his eyes may be closed, he can see everything. Why? This Celestial King has the eye of universal wisdom.

He has “gained a passage into liberation whereby he entered an aspect of universality that allowed him to contemplate the Dharma Realm.” He pervasively enters sentient beings’ minds and contemplates the nature of the Dharma Realm. How big is the Dharma Realm? It is boundlessly large, and yet it is not apart from each being’s present thought. Although the Dharma Realm is immense, it is adorned and brought into being by our present thoughts. This Celestial King has attained this kind of samadhi, a right concentration, of contemplating the Dharma Realm.

Sutra:

**Celestial King Delight in Revolving Wisdom gained a passage into liberation of constantly appearing before sentient beings in various manifestations throughout boundless eons.**

Commentary:

Celestial King Delight in Revolving Wisdom is so-named because he likes to gather back in his wisdom. “Revolving” means turning it around, reversing the light to illumine within, and seeking everything within himself. He doesn’t seek outside. This is the dharma door he cultivated at the level of planting causes. He has gained a passage into liberation of constantly appearing before sentient beings, which includes those born from the womb, from an egg, from moisture, or by transformation, in various manifestations. He manifests before sentient beings in different bodies and shapes in order to teach and transform those beings. He has been doing this throughout boundless eons. He never renounces a single being, but always appears before sentient beings with whom he has affinities, leading them to bring forth the bodhi resolve. He has attained that passage into liberation.

Sutra:

**Celestial King Adept at Nurturing Wisdom Light gained a passage into liberation of contemplating all mundane states and entering the inconceivable Dharma.**

Commentary:

Celestial King Adept at Nurturing Wisdom Light is skilled at developing his own wisdom. At all times he investigates the Great Prajña Sutra and plants seeds of prajña wisdom. From this wisdom comes light. He gained a passage into liberation of contemplating all mundane states and entering the inconceivable Dharma. He observes how worldly states are just inconceivable dharmas; mundane dharmas are just transcendental dharmas. World-transcending dharmas are not found apart from worldly dharmas. Take the analogy of a hand. The back of the hand cannot do much, but the palm can hold on to things. Worldly and transcendental dharmas work the same way. Turn it over one way, and it’s a transcendental dharma; turn it over the other way, and it’s a mundane dharma. It’s as easy as turning over one’s hand. Therefore, don’t “add a head on top of a head” and go looking for some other kinds of transcendental dharmas. If you are able to let go, then those mundane dharmas will become transcendental dharmas. If you have no attachments, then you will perceive transcendental dharmas. This Celestial King observes all worldly states, and right within those states, he enters the inconceivable Dharma. He attained this passage into liberation.

Sutra:

**Celestial King Immaculately Still and Serene Light gained a passage into liberation of revealing to all sentient beings the essential dharma of transcendence.**

Commentary:

Celestial King Immaculately Still and Serene Light. “Immaculate” means being without defiled dharmas. Defiled dharmas refer to the love and emotions of worldly life. If you have defiled dharmas, you won’t be able to attain still and serene light. If you are free of defiled dharmas, you will attain still and serene light.

Defiled thoughts arise easily.
Pure virtue is difficult to achieve.

This Celestial King is free of defilement, and so he has attained true serenity and the undefiled light of wisdom. As a result, he has gained a passage into liberation of revealing to all sentient beings the essential dharma of transcendence. What is transcended, and what is entered? “Transcendence” refers to transcending the world. One enters the world and at the same time transcends it. The essential method of transcendence is to have wisdom. Use the sword of wisdom to sever the demons of love and emotion, to hack through the demons of afflictions, and to slice through the demons of greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, conceit, and ignorance. All of this is part of the essential dharma of transcendence. Only by attaining this essential dharma can you transcend the world and gain liberation.

Sutra:

**Celestial King Vast, Pure Brightness gained a passage into liberation of observing all sentient beings who are ready to be transformed and leading them to enter the Buddhadharma.**

Commentary:

Celestial King Vast, Pure Brightness. “Vast” implies that there are no boundaries and no fixed locations. With boundaries, there couldn’t be vastness; and with limitation to a specific location, there couldn’t be vastness, either. “Pure” means undefiled, devoid of ignorance. With no ignorance, there is no fire. This Celestial King has gained a samadhi, a passage into liberation, of observing all sentient beings who are ready to be transformed and leading them to enter the Buddhadharma. He identifies those beings whose affinities are mature and teaches them. He waits to teach those beings whose affinities have yet to mature.

Whether sentient beings believe in Buddhism depends upon their causes and results. When their causes are mature, when they reap the results of the causes they planted, when their potentials are realized, they will believe in Buddhism. If their affinities have not matured, then even if they were right next to the Buddha, they wouldn’t have faith. This Celestial King looks to see which beings are ready to be taught, and then he teaches them, causing them to enter Buddhism. He gained this passage into liberation.

Some advocates of a certain religion maintain that Buddhism is the devil’s teaching. Reflecting on their accusation that the Buddha is the devil, we can see that those people have strong feelings of hatred. Why don’t they say that they themselves follow the devil, instead of alleging that Buddhism is the devil’s teaching? It’s because they want to cover up their own ugliness. But the more they try to cover it up, the more apparent their ugliness becomes. Other non-Buddhists say that Buddhism isn’t ultimate and that their own religion is the ultimate truth. But those statements are empty slogans; their claims are not backed up by any evidence.

Buddhism does not work like that. Buddhism is not pinned down to any specific religion. It is the religion of sentient beings. Why do we say that? The Buddha is the same as sentient beings. Sentient beings are not smaller than the Buddha, and the Buddha is not greater than sentient beings. There is no great or small, and no inside or outside. Nor is there any high or low. As the Vajra Sutra says, “This Dharma is equal, without high or low.” It is also said, “All beings have the Buddha nature and can become Buddhas.” Buddhism says that all beings can become Buddhas. Other religions don’t say that. Buddhism is an egalitarian religion. Teacher and disciple are on an equal basis, but the disciple studies under the teacher. People who don’t understand think that the teacher is the teacher, and the disciple is the disciple. That’s right. Sometimes it’s like that. But at other times, the teacher becomes the disciple, and the disciple becomes the teacher.

Take, for instance, Dharma Master Kumarajiva. His previous Lesser Vehicle teacher later bowed to Kumarajiva, his disciple, and considered him to be his Great Vehicle teacher. The Bodhisattvas Vasubandhu and Asanga, who were brothers, used to believe in different Vehicles. The younger brother was a Lesser Vehicle Dharma Master, and the elder brother was a Great Vehicle Dharma Master. The younger brother did his best to undermine the Great Vehicle Dharma that his elder brother believed in. He constantly found fault with that teaching, insisting there was no such thing as the Great Vehicle, that it was false. In the end, his elder brother employed an expedient method. He told his younger brother that he was sick and on the verge of death, and that he wanted to see his brother one last time. The younger brother thought, “My elder brother has been muddled all his life. Now, since he is on his deathbed, I should go and see him.”

When Vasubandhu got there, his elder brother Asanga said to him, “I’ve never asked you to do anything special for me. Now that I am dying, could you recite the Flower Adornment Sutra, a Great Vehicle sutra, for me?”

The younger brother thought, “That’s no big deal. Okay, I will recite it for you.” Thereupon he started reciting. But the more he recited, the more scared he got. The more scared he became, the more he wanted to keep on reciting. Why was he scared? He thought to himself, “Ah, the principles of the Great Vehicle are so wonderful and inconceivable. In the past I didn’t understand any of it, and yet I slandered the Great Vehicle. What a fool I’ve been!”

As he continued reciting, he felt his offenses were immense. Previously he had written five hundred treatises, all of which slandered the Great Vehicle. He thought, “I have spoken such treatises with my tongue. My
tongue deserves to be cut off.” He asked his brother for a sword. His elder brother asked him, “What do you want it for?”

He said, “In the past I slandered the Great Vehicle. Now I realize that my offenses are boundless. I want to cut off my tongue.” He did not want to cut off his arm, because that would still leave him free to speak. The Second Patriarch [Great Master Huike] chopped off his own arm for the sake of the Dharma. Now Vasubandhu wanted to cut off his own tongue.

His elder brother told him, “Previously you used your tongue to slander the Great Vehicle. Now you can use the same tongue to praise the Great Vehicle. Why do you want to cut it off? If you have fallen on the ground, you should use the ground to support you as you pick yourself up. What’s the use of cutting off your tongue?”

Vasubandhu thought it over and agreed. Thereupon he renounced the Lesser Vehicle and started to compose Great Vehicle treatises. He wrote a treatise of five hundred volumes in praise of the Flower Adornment Sutra. You see? Right within Buddhism, between the Great and Lesser Vehicles, between blood brothers, there was unending strife. How much the more is that likely to happen between other people? There are enough problems within Buddhism itself right now. How much more compounded those problems become when other religions are involved! Basically, Buddhism is the same as other religions. Not only is it the same, it encompasses all other religions. Why? Buddhism talks about how there are no limits or edges to the nature of the Dharma Realm. Buddhism concerns itself with the great functioning of the entire substance. Therefore, Buddhism does not reject a single being. Every being has the Buddha nature and can become a Buddha. Even celestial demons and followers of other religions can become Buddhas. Therefore we say that Buddhism is the most egalitarian teaching. Everyone can become a Buddha. That is like saying everybody has a chance of being the President. Buddhism is true democracy and equality.

Sutra:

**At that time, Celestial King Bright Banner of Delight in the Dharma received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, universally contemplated the multitudes of the Heavens of Lesser Vastness, the Heavens of Limitless Vastness, and the Heavens of Vast Fruition, and spoke the following verse:**

Commentary:

At that time, Celestial King Bright Banner of Delight in the Dharma from the Four Dhyana Heavens in the Form Realm received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power. He universally and extensively contemplated all the multitudes of gods of the Heavens of Lesser Vastness, the Heavens of Limitless Vastness, and the Heavens of Vast Fruition, and spoke the following verse to praise the Buddha’s meritorious virtues, deepen the faith of sentient beings, and help beings understand the principle involved here.

Sutra:

**This state of the Buddha is inconceivable,
Unfathomable by any ordinary beings.
He pervasively inspires faith and understanding.
His profuse and joyous aspirations are unending.**

Commentary:

This state of the Buddhas is inconceivable. This Celestial King praises the Buddha. “The” can also be translated as “all”, which would then refer to the Buddhas of the ten directions. “The” refers to our Original Teacher, Sakyamuni Buddha. When we explain it as the Buddhas of the ten directions, we are speaking in terms of the “many.” When we explain it as Sãkyamuni Buddha, we are speaking in terms of the “one.” The word “all” can be explained as “many” or as “one.”

Someone protests, “Dharma Master, you’re mistaken in lecturing this way. Everyone explains the word “all” as referring to all Buddhas of the ten directions. But you’ve explained it as meaning only one Buddha.” That’s right. You can explain it in terms of “many,” and I will explain it in terms of “one.” You talk about your “many,” and I’ll talk about my “one.” Why do we want to talk about so many? One isn’t too few, so why bother to talk about so many? But, if we were to modify the idea of the one, even one is gone. What you are translating as “all” can also be translated as an article, such as “a,” “an,” or “the.” “The” describes one Buddha. Which Buddha? No Buddha. Although there’s no Buddha, he’s just this Buddha. This Buddha hasn’t gone to the ten directions, nor has he come into a mote of dust. He’s just this Buddha. You say, “But there’s no such Buddha!” If there isn’t this Buddha, how could there be any other Buddhas? Think it over. This Buddha is the mother of all Buddhas, the most honored among all sages, the god among gods, the sage among sages. He’s just this Buddha. Therefore, the text says, “This state of the Buddha is inconceivable.” In what ways is it inconceivable? Think it over. Once you think it over, it becomes conceivable. If you cannot think about it, it’s inconceivable. It cannot be conceived by the mind, nor expressed in words. What is inconceivable about this state? This is a state of there being no states. Originally it was this way; originally it was not more or less, not great or small. What kind of state could there be? If you insist that there is a state, you are being attached to marks. “Inconceivable” means there is no state whatsoever. The Buddhas have transcended states. The Buddhas are basically identical to us. Don’t “put a head atop a head,” thinking, “Oh, all Buddhas…” Don’t go looking outside. All Buddhas are found within our own nature.

“The more this Dharma Master speaks, the farther off he gets. He doesn’t know how to explain the word “all.” Then he said there is no state. If there is no state, why does the Sutra talk about a state?”

Well, where is this state, anyway? Show me. The last words of this line say very clearly, it is “inconceivable.” If there were a state, it would be conceivable. Because there is no state, it is inconceivable. “All dharmas are characterized by emptiness.” That is the state of all Buddhas. If all dharmas are empty, what state could there be? I’d better not talk so much. The more I talk, the less we are able to find the boundaries. Therefore, I’ll come back to the text.

The Buddha’s state is unfathomable by any ordinary beings. Not only are you and I unable to fathom this kind of state, none of the sentient beings in the nine dharma realms, from the Bodhisattvas down to hell-beings, hungry ghosts, and animals, can know the Buddha’s state.

Another verse in the Flower Adornment Sutra says:
Anyone who wishes to know the Buddha’s state
Should make his mind as pure as space.

If you want to understand the Buddha’s state, you should purify your mind. It has to be very clean, without the slightest speck of dust. If you can be like empty space, you will know the Buddha’s state. The Buddha’s state is emptiness. But that emptiness goes beyond emptiness to the point that even that which is empty is gone. That is the Buddha’s state. For that reason I said there’s nothing. How can you say that I have spoken incorrectly? There is a basis for my argument. I wasn’t making groundless claims. Now you realize that I haven’t spoken incorrectly; it was you who was engaging in so much false thinking. You don’t understand the principle of all dharmas being characterized by emptiness.

No one is able to understand this state. He pervasively inspires faith and understanding. In all places, the Buddha causes sentient beings to understand and bring forth faith. His profuse and joyous aspirations are unending. The Celestial King with profuse aspirations understands that the Buddha’s state is inconceivable and yet unending. Although there’s nothing to this kind of state, nonetheless it is boundless and inexhaustible. This kind of state is far-reaching and all-encompassing. Every possible kind of state in this world is included, such as blowing wind, flowing water, chiming bells, booming drums, and on to subtle things like droning mosquitoes. All such states are the Buddha’s state. If you understand, all of them are the Buddha’s state. If you don’t understand, all of them are the states of sentient beings.

Sutra: **If sentient beings are able to accept the Dharma,
The Buddha’s awesome spiritual strength will guide them,
Letting them constantly behold the Buddhas before them.
Celestial King Ocean of Adornments thus perceives.**
Commentary:

If sentient beings are able to accept the Dharma. This verse begins with a hypothetical phrase, because when this verse was spoken, it may not have been evident if there were such beings who would be able to accept the Dharma or not. It wasn’t for sure they were ready right then, but they were probably just about ready to accept the Buddha’s Dharma. Then the Buddha’s awesome spiritual strength will guide them. The Buddha uses his great spiritual power to guide them, enabling them to advance step by step on the path of Buddhadharma. He guides them skillfully and gradually. This means the Buddha tries to teach them with one expedient means, and if sentient beings are not receptive to it, he switches to another expedient means to see if they will be receptive to that. The Buddha uses all kinds of expedient means to teach and guide sentient beings, so that they can progress from delusion to wisdom, and from wisdom to enlightenment.

The Buddha guides sentient beings, letting them constantly behold the Buddhas before them. When their eyes are open, they get to see the Buddhas. When their eyes are closed, they get to see the Buddhas. When their eyes are neither open nor closed, they still see the Buddha. They constantly get to see the Buddhas, even when they don’t want to see them. The old woman from the eastern part of the city was a case in point. What she feared most was seeing the Buddha. However, when she had her eyes open, she saw the Buddha before her. She quickly closed her eyes, but she still saw the Buddha before her. She ran to a corner and faced the wall, thinking there would be no way the Buddha could appear before her. But still the Buddha was right in front of her. She ran everywhere trying to hide from the Buddha, not wishing to see him, but no matter where she ran she couldn’t avoid him. The Buddha appeared before her wherever she ran. Someone like her has affinities with the Buddha. Even though she didn’t want the Buddha to save her, it was impossible to avoid it. There was no way to run away.

Celestial King Ocean of Adornments thus perceives. He sees this kind of state. The awesome spiritual strength of the Buddha is inconceivable, and sentient beings have no way of understanding it. We are all sentient beings. Although we beings are not able to understand the Buddha, the Buddha can understand us. No matter who you are, the Buddha can understand all the thoughts in your mind. The Vajra Sutra says, “The Thus Come One completely knows and sees all the different kinds of thoughts in sentient beings’ minds.” The Buddha thoroughly understands and sees what you are thinking and what you like. Since Celestial King Ocean of Adornments understood that state, he spoke the above verse.

Sutra:
 **The nature of all dharmas is without reliance.
The Buddhas’ appearances in the world are like that too.
They go to all realms of existence and yet rely on nothing.
Supreme Wisdom contemplates this meaning.**

Commentary:

The nature of all dharmas is without reliance. The nature of all dharmas is emptiness. There is nothing at all. Since it is empty, there is no need to rely on anything. What would emptiness rely on? There is no place it relies on. The Buddhas’ appearances in the world are like that too. The Buddhas’ appearing in the world is like the Dharma nature, also empty. The Buddhas make all of existence empty. Since there is no existence, how could there be emptiness? Therefore, the Buddhas empty all of existence.

They go to all realms of existence and yet rely on nothing. The Buddha doesn’t rely on existence, because he is devoid of marks. The Buddha teaches beings to be without a mark of self, of others, of beings, and of life spans. When we separate from marks, we can become enlightened. If the Buddha himself still retained those marks, wouldn’t that be a great contradiction? Therefore, the Buddha empties all marks.

Supreme Wisdom contemplates this meaning. Celestial King Supreme Wisdom is able to perceive and understand this meaning.

General statements and detailed explanations
All express truth in the primary sense.

General statements don’t pin down specific meanings, whereas detailed explanations express subtleties. Yet both of these can express the ultimate truth. In the past when I listened to lectures on the sutras, I especially listened to those who didn’t know how to explain them. The less they knew about explaining the sutras, the more I wanted to listen to them. I didn’t listen to those who spoke well. I particularly wanted to listen to those who couldn’t speak well. Why was that? I believed that right within what was not so good, if I could find good points, then that would be the Way.

I remember when I was thirteen or fourteen, lectures were being given on the Earth Store Sutra at a place five li [about 1.7 miles] from my house, and I attended them every day. I didn’t ride in a car; I walked there. It took one hour to walk there, and one hour to walk back. The Dharma Master who was lecturing was illiterate, and so he mispronounced certain words, just like the Dharma Master today, who mispronounced a character. Someone wrote on the board taifeng xi gang [a typhoon hit Hong Kong], and he mispronounced the character xi as long [dragon] because it had a “dragon” radical on top of it. However, I found a lot of meaning in that. Why? I remembered that the Book of Changes [Yijing] says, “Clouds are associated with dragons, and the wind is associated with tigers.” A typhoon is accompanied by clouds, and with clouds there are bound to be dragons.

The Dharma Flower Sutra has the following lines, about Dharma Masters who are Bodhisattvas: “Born from the Buddha’s mouth, born by transformation from the Dharma, they obtain a share of the Buddha’s Dharma.” Last night the Dharma Master remembered the quote and dared to lecture on it, and considering the kind of person he is, that’s not bad. We should learn from everyone. How should we learn?

We can model ourselves after those who are good.
We can guard ourselves from following those who
are unwholesome.

If we think someone is right, we can follow his example. If we think someone is wrong, we should not follow the path he is taking. That’s important. We should investigate together. If you have an opinion, bring it up and we will discuss it in public.

Sutra:
 **Whatever sentient beings’ hearts desire
Can be realized by the Buddha’s spiritual might,
Despite how incredibly different individuals are.
This is the sea of liberation of King Banner of Wisdom.**

Commentary:

Whatever sentient beings’ hearts desire means whatever their preferences might be. Therefore, we speak of “constantly according with sentient beings,” which is one of the Ten Magnificent Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva: **1. To respectfully bow to all Buddhas;
2. To praise the Thus Come Ones;
3. To extensively cultivate the making of offerings;
4. To repent of karmic hindrances and reform;
5. To follow along with and rejoice in merit and virtue;
6. To request the turning of the Dharma wheel;
7. To request that the Buddhas dwell in the world;
8. To always follow the Buddhas in study;
9. To constantly accord with beings;
10. To universally make transferences.**

1. *To respectfully bow to all Buddhas.* There are seven kinds of bowing. One kind is arrogant bowing. If one is arrogant, it would be better if one didn’t bow at all. What does that mean? Bowing as fast as a rocket is one example. When we bow like that, our mind can’t engage in contemplation. Our bodies are simply going through the motions. Someone who bows like that doesn’t have time to make the contemplation, “Right now I am bowing to the Buddhas, the Dharma, and the Sangha of the ten directions.” She rushes through the motions as if she were astride a rocket. Her head doesn’t even touch the bowing cushion before she springs up again to make another bow. She bows so hastily that it appears she is in a mad rush to go some place else. It’s as if she can’t wait.

Another kind is bowing where body and mind are respectful. Your mind contemplates that you are in fact bowing to the Buddhas, and your body bows in a very proper and orderly manner. You bow in a natural, relaxed way, without haste. You aren’t in a race. Bowing is not a foot race to see who can run faster. I see that some of you are able to squeeze three bows in the time it takes most people to make one bow. You don’t bow in accord with the meaning of the verse of contemplation. I don’t know who taught you to bow like that.

Your body and mind should be reverent. It’s the same act of bowing, but whereas some people gain merit from doing it, you don’t gain any merit when you do it. Your bowing is done in vain. Moreover, there is bowing to the Dharma Realm, that is, to all Buddhas throughout the Dharma Realm. That’s the idea behind Universal Worthy Bodhisattva’s vow to respectfully bow to all Buddhas. Beginning students in Buddhism should look up the seven kinds of bowing and study them. I don’t have time to discuss all of them today. If you would like to know about them, you should study them yourself. If you don’t want to understand them, then you can go on being muddled.

The other vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva are:

2. *To praise the Thus Come Ones.* This means extolling the Thus Comes Ones of the ten directions.

3. *To extensively cultivate the making of offerings.* He makes offerings on a vast, extensive scale.

4. *To repent of karmic hindrances and reform.* He repents of his own karmic obstacles.

5. *To follow along with and rejoice in merit and virtue.* He rejoices in the merit and virtue of all Buddhas.

6. *To request the turning of the Dharma wheel.* He requests the Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas, the Arhats, and the worthy sages of the Sangha to turn the Dharma wheel.

7. *To request that the Buddhas dwell in the world.* He asks all Buddhas to long abide in the world.

8. *To always follow the Buddhas in study.* He constantly learns with the Buddhas.

9. *To constantly accord with beings.* He always complies with sentient beings’ wishes.

10. *To universally make transferences.* He dedicates all of his merit and virtue to sentient beings throughout the ten directions, not wanting to keep any of it for himself.

Now the sutra text says, “Whatever sentient beings’ hearts desire,” whatever sentient beings like and wish for, can be realized by the Buddha’s spiritual might. The Buddha is able to fulfill all beings’ wishes. Whatever they want, the Buddha will make appear, despite how incredibly different individuals are. Sentient beings’ minds are all different. Each has his or her own way of thinking. This dissimilarity is inconceivable, and there’s no way to understand it. This is the sea of liberation of King Banner of Wisdom. Celestial King Wisdom Banner has attained this dharma door of the sea of liberation.

Take a look at sentient beings’ minds. Some have faith in Buddhism, while others do not. Some half believe and half doubt. Isn’t it strange? Some people, having listened to the principles in the sutras, are inspired, have faith, and investigate the Buddhadharma. For others, the Dharma goes in one ear and out the other; they don’t retain any of it. Some people think about eating good food when they are listening to the sutras. Some feel that listening to sutras is not as pleasant as drinking wine. Some feel that listening to sutras is not as enjoyable as drinking coffee. Others think, “I’d much rather be dancing than listening to this lecture.” Some people think, “Watching a movie is far superior to listening to the sutra.” They all have different thoughts. Some people listen to the sutra and think, “Ah, I’ve come to understand many principles today.” They feel as if they have obtained a precious gem. But others find the entire lecture boring and meaningless. Some people would rather go on a date with their friend. They think, “Listening to the sutras is not as much fun as dating.

You have to sit still, and it’s so cold.” Take a look at all the different thoughts going through the minds of the people listening to the lecture right now. Some people’s fantasies have taken them all the way to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Others’ daydreams have taken them to the Eastern Land of Vaidurya Light. Other people have reached the Southern World of Creation of Jewels in their false thinking. And still others have idle thoughts that have gone off to the Northern World of Accomplishment. Since everyone’s thoughts are different, the sutra says, “despite how incredibly different individuals are.” The range of their individual differences is hard to imagine.

Sutra:

**All lands that ever existed in the past
Appear within a single pore on a person’s body.
This is due to the great spiritual powers of all Buddhas.
Delight in Still Quiescence proclaims thus.**

Commentary:

All lands that ever existed in the past. Although the text says “past,” there is actually no past, no present, and no future. The Vajra Sutra says, “The three aspects of thought cannot be attained. Thoughts of the past cannot be attained. Thoughts of the present cannot be attained. Thoughts of the future cannot be attained.” Why can’t thoughts of the past be apprehended? The past is already gone; it no longer exists. You talk about the present, but the present is never still. By the time you say, “This is the present,” the present has moved on. Then you say, “This is the present,” but as soon as you say that, the present is gone again. It doesn’t stay around. Hence, thoughts of the present cannot be grasped. As for the future, it has not yet come and therefore cannot be got at. You may search for the three aspects of thought, but they are unattainable.

When the three thoughts are not put to rest,
even water is hard to digest.
When the Five Contemplations are understood,
you can digest even gold.

If you retain thoughts of past, present, and future, you won’t be able to accept even a single cup of water offered to you by a donor. There will be no way for you to digest this offering. However, it will be different if you understand the Five Contemplations. “The Buddha told the Bhikshus: while eating, observe the Five Contemplations.” If you understand those, you can digest even gold. When left-home people eat, they engage in the Three Recollections and the Five Contemplations.

**The Three Recollections:**

1.    I vow to cut off all evil.
2.    I vow to cultivate all good.
3.    I vow to save all beings.

**The Five Contemplations**

1. Consider the amount of work involved to bring the food to where it is eaten.

2. Consider whether or not one’s virtuous conduct is sufficient to enable one to accept the offering.

3. Guard the mind from transgression, of which greed and so forth are the principal cause.

4. Properly taken, the food is like medicine to keep the body from wasting away.

5. This food is accepted only in order to realize the Way.

If you understand the Five Contemplations, you will be able to digest even gold [i.e. the finest and most expensive delicacies], not to mention water! And so, if you have done away with the three thoughts of past, present, and future, you will have no problem in receiving offerings. But if you haven’t gotten rid of those three thoughts, then even an offering of a cup of water is difficult to accept.

All the infinitely many Buddhalands that existed in the past appear within a single pore on a person’s body. When you hear about how all Buddhalands manifest within a single pore, you think, “How can such a state be possible?” But once you gain the Five Eyes and the Six Spiritual Powers, you will find this very ordinary and not strange at all.

This is due to the great spiritual powers of all Buddhas. This kind of state is due to the great spiritual power of the Buddhas of the ten directions. The Buddha doesn’t claim to be higher or lower than anyone. All religions are encompassed within Buddhism, because Buddhism takes the Dharma Realm as its nature. Who can run outside of the Dharma Realm? Nobody can. Therefore, Buddhism takes the Dharma Realm as its principle. The wonder of the Flower Adornment Sutra in particular lies in the fact that it takes the Dharma Realm as its principle. That is why it is so wonderful. The Buddha said, “All beings have the Buddha nature and can become Buddhas.” A few days ago, a visiting layperson remarked that Dogen said those words. But he is misinformed. Dogen wouldn’t have been able to utter those words. The Buddha said them a long time ago.

The Celestial King named Delight in Still Quiescence proclaims this principle thus.

Sutra:

**The inexhaustible sea of all dharma doors
Comes together as a single dharma in the Way-place.
This is the Dharma nature of which the Buddhas speak.
Wisdom Eye understands this expedient device.**

Commentary:

The inexhaustible sea of all dharma doors. There are 84,000 dharma doors, each of which further divides into 84,000 dharma doors, and this state keeps on multiplying layer upon layer, until there are boundlessly many dharma doors. There is an inexhaustible sea of dharma doors—ineffably, ineffably many of them. This sea of all these dharma doors comes together as a single dharma in the Way-place. They converge, connect, and become one. Infinitely many dharma doors converge to become one dharma door; a single dharma door unfolds into infinitely many dharma doors. This is the Dharma nature of which the Buddhas speak. One is many; many are one. The one, the many, and the limitless: this is the Dharma that ãÁkyamuni Buddha proclaims.

Wisdom Eye understands this expedient device. Celestial King Wisdom Eye has attained this passage into liberation, a samadhi of the inexhaustible sea of dharma doors. Therefore, he understands this expedient device.

Sutra:

**He abides in every land of the ten directions,
And speaks Dharma in each of them.
Yet physically, the Buddha neither comes nor goes.
Thus is the state of Delight in Revolving Wisdom.**

Commentary:

He abides in every land of the ten directions. Our world is not the only world there is. There are infinitely many worlds throughout the ten directions. There is this world, that world, infinitely many worlds; this land, that land, infinitely many lands. Mentioning them in general, the text refers to “every land of the ten directions.” In all those Buddhalands, we see the Buddha speaking Dharma. And he speaks Dharma in each of them. Since there is a Buddha speaking Dharma in each of those lands, has the Buddha gone to each of those lands? He hasn’t. Yet physically, the Buddha neither comes nor goes. The Vajra Sutra explains the meaning of the Thus Come One, saying, “There is no place from which he comes, and no place to which he goes. Therefore, he is called the Thus Come One.” Thus is the state of Delight in Revolving Wisdom. Celestial King Delight in Revolving Wisdom understands this state.

Sutra:

**The Buddha contemplates worldly dharmas as reflections,
And enters into their profoundly mysterious aspects.
He speaks of the eternally still nature of all dharmas.
Adept at Nurturing considers and perceives thus.**

Commentary:

The Buddha contemplates worldly dharmas as reflections. He regards mundane phenomena as being like illusions and transformations. This is as the Vajra Sutra says:

All conditioned dharmas
Are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows;
Like dew and like a lightning flash.
You should contemplate them thus.

The Buddha looks upon the world as a lightning flash or as a reflected image, both of which are ephemeral and therefore unreal. But right within worldly dharmas, the Buddha is able to propagate the Buddhadharma, and enters into their profoundly mysterious aspects. He reaches the most inconceivable state, so mysterious and wonderful that people cannot see it. He speaks of the eternally still nature of all dharmas. The inherent nature of all dharmas is still and quiet.

The still quiescence of dharmas
Cannot be conveyed through words.

All dharmas are quiescent; they cannot be expressed in words. That which cannot be spoken is the quiescent nature of dharmas. Adept at Nurturing considers and perceives thus. Celestial King Adept at Nurturing understands this state.

Sutra:

**The Buddha is proficient in understanding every state.
According to sentient beings’ faculties, he lets fall a rain of Dharma.
He shows them the inconceivable, essential door of transcendence.
The god Still and Serene enlightens and enters thus.**

Commentary:

The Buddha is proficient in understanding every state. There is nothing that the Buddha doesn’t know, understand, and penetrate. There is no feat of which he is incapable.  He is skilled in understanding all states and all sentient beings’ dispositions. According to sentient beings’ faculties, he lets fall a rain of Dharma. Sentient beings are like flowers, grass, and trees. Trees with large roots are able to take in a lot of rain, while the grass takes in less rain. Likewise, sentient beings with deep and thick roots of goodness are able to take in more Dharma rain, while sentient beings with shallow roots take in less Dharma rain.

He shows them the inconceivable, essential door of transcendence. The Buddha reveals to them the inconceivably wonderful, most essential dharma door of transcending the world. The god Still and Serene enlightens and enters thus. Such is the state that this Celestial King comprehends.

Sutra:

**With great kindness and compassion, the World Honored One
Appears among us so as to benefit sentient beings.
He evenly sprinkles the rain of Dharma to fill each vessel.
The god Pure Brightness proclaims thus.**

Commentary:

With great kindness and compassion, the World Honored One. The Buddha is honored within and beyond the world. He constantly uses a heart of great compassion to teach and transform sentient beings. The Buddha forgives them and doesn’t hold their faults against them. Buddhism is unlike other religions that claim, “If you believe in me, then even if you commit offenses you will be born in heaven. If you don’t believe in me, then even if you do meritorious deeds you will still fall into hell.” That kind of reasoning is totally illogical. It is a kind of “bandits’ law” in that it is unreasonable.

The Buddha’s approach is that even if beings slander or insult the Buddha, he still pardons them. However, those who slander the Buddha create their own offenses. The Buddha does not slap offenses on them. They create their own. With great kindness and compassion, the World Honored One constantly appears among us in the world so as to benefit sentient beings. / He evenly sprinkles the rain of Dharma to fill each vessel. The Buddha is most egalitarian. When he speaks Dharma, sentient beings individually obtain the benefits that are due them. Bodhisattvas obtain the benefits befitting Bodhisattvas; Arhats obtain the benefits befitting Arhats; Bhikshus and Bhikshunis obtain the benefits befitting Bhikshus and Bhikshunis; upasakas and upasikas obtain the benefits befitting Upasakas and Upasikas. Each obtains his or her benefits. It’s as if they have vessels that get filled up with Dharma rain. Big vessels can contain more rain; small vessels hold less rain. The god Pure Brightness proclaims thus. That Celestial King can expound on this state.

When we study the Buddhadharma, we must have some patience. Every day we learn a little bit. After a long period of study, great wisdom will unfold and you will understand the Buddhadharma. The Buddhadharma is like the waters of the ocean. When your wisdom unfolds, it is expansive and boundless like the ocean. That’s why we say:

To the Buddhas I return and rely, vowing that all beings understand the Great Way profoundly, and bring forth the bodhi mind.

To the Dharma I return and rely, vowing that all beings deeply enter the sutra treasury, and have wisdom like the sea.

To the Sangha I return and rely, vowing that all beings
form a great assembly, one and all in harmony.

Unless you study Buddhism over a long period of time, you won’t understand the Buddhadharma.

3) Heavens of the Third Dhyāna

Sutra:

**Moreover, the Celestial King Pure Wisdom’s Renown gained a passage into liberation of comprehending the skillful means of the path that leads to the emancipation of all sentient beings.**
Commentary:

Moreover, since the previous section hasn’t completely covered the sutra’s meaning, the text continues to explain it further. Celestial King Pure Wisdom’s Renown has pure wisdom and also enjoys a fine reputation among Celestial Kings. He gained a samadhi that was a passage into liberation of comprehending the skillful means of the path that leads to the emancipation of all sentient beings. He understands all beings of the nine dharma realms. For example, Bodhisattvas are beings who are resolved upon the Way. Bodhisattvas are also counted as beings. There are ten dharma realms in all:

**The Four Dharma Realms of Sages**

1.    The Dharma Realm of Buddhas
2.    The Dharma Realm of Bodhisattvas
3.    The Dharma Realm of Sages Enlightened by Conditions
4.    The Dharma Realm of Hearers

**The Six Common Dharma Realms**

1.    The Dharma Realm of gods
2.    The Dharma Realm of humans
3.    The Dharma Realm of asuras
4.    The Dharma Realm of hell-beings
5.    The Dharma Realm of hungry ghosts
6.    The Dharma Realm of animals

Bodhisattvas are beings whose minds are strongly intent upon the Way. Sages Enlightened by Conditions are beings whose minds are less intent upon the Way. Hearers are beings whose minds are least intent upon the Way. The Six Common Dharma Realms are divided into three good paths and three evil paths. Gods, humans, and asuras are the three good paths, and the hell-beings, hungry ghosts, and animals are the three evil paths. Each of them has its own causes and effects.

If you plant good causes, you’ll reap good results.
If you plant evil causes, you’ll reap evil results.
If you plant melons, you get melons.
If you plant beans, you get beans.

Therefore we say,

If people wish to understand
The Buddhas of the three periods of time,
They should contemplate the nature of the Dharma Realm:
Everything is made from the mind.

A verse describes the Chinese character for “mind” (xin):

Three dots spread out like stars,
A hook resembles the crescent moon:
Fur-clad creatures come from this;
Buddhas also begin from here.

The character for “mind” has three dots like stars in the sky. Below is a hook that resembles a crescent moon on the third of the lunar month. It also looks like an ivory tusk. Fur-clad creatures such as horses and cows all come from the mind. Buddhas are also created from the mind. When you cultivate and realize Buddhahood, you do so by means of the mind. That’s why we say, “The Ten Dharma Realms are not beyond a single thought.” You wind up wherever you want to go. Our minds are suddenly up in the heavens, suddenly on earth, suddenly in a Buddha’s land, suddenly back in the human realm. The mind is like a tiny dustmote bobbing up and down in the air.

Mencius remarked, “When people’s chickens or dogs stray off, they realize that they should look for them. But when their mind strays off, they do not even realize that they should look for it. How sad!” Aren’t people pathetic? If they lose their chickens or dogs, they go everywhere looking for them. But when their mind wanders off, they don’t know to retrieve their lost mind. Wouldn’t you say they are pitiable? Confucius also said of the mind:

“If you keep it under control, it stays with you.
But once you let it go, then it’s lost.
It comes and goes at random.
Who knows where it wanders?”

If you have a firm grasp over your mind, and you watch over and guard it, then it’s there. If you constantly look into, “Who’s mindful of the Buddha?” then your mind won’t run away. It will stay put. But once you let it go, once you forget to ask, “Who’s mindful of the Buddha?” it runs away. It will think, “Hmm…I wonder what movie is showing at the movie theater.” Or, “Today there were riots in the streets.” Or, “Today there were many accidents on the highway.” The mind gets involved in all kinds of trivial, idle thoughts; it has run off. Once you relax your hold over it, the mind runs off like a horse on loose reins. On the other hand, if you pull in the reins, then the horse won’t run off.

 “It comes and goes at random.” You never know when the mind will run off or come back. It doesn’t say goodbye when it runs off, and it doesn’t report when it returns. It doesn’t keep a record of its wanderings. Someone says, “Hey, that’s just the way I am!” In that case, you are the mind. “Who knows where it wanders?” No one knows where it’s headed.

Celestial King Pure Wisdom’s Renown understands all beings’ minds and the path that leads to liberation. He knows how to bring them to liberation and understanding. He uses various skill-in-means to help them attain the liberation of transcending the world.

**Sutra:**

**Celestial King Supreme Views gained a passage into liberation of universally manifesting like light and shadows in a way that delights all the celestial multitudes.**

**Commentary:**

The Celestial King named Supreme Views has sharp and keen insight and is extremely intelligent. He gained a passage into liberation of universally manifesting like light and shadows in a way that delights all the celestial multitudes. All the gods delight in bliss and happiness. He complies with what they like and appears everywhere like light and shadows. Where there is light, there are shadows; where there are shadows, there is light. If there are no shadows, then there can be no light. Light is bright; shadows are dark. Light is considered yang; shadows are considered yin. Light is insubstantial and immaterial. Shadows and reflections may appear to be solid, but in fact they too are insubstantial. They seem to have substance and form, but in fact they do not. For instance, take the reflection of the moon in water. The moon is light; the moon in the water is a reflected image. Although the actual moon has not gone into the water and the water has not gone to the moon, the two are able to produce a reflection. This is also like an image reflected in a mirror. When objects are put before a mirror, their image is reflected in it. The presence of light causes the reflected image to appear. “Universally manifesting like light and shadows” is like the moon being reflected in a thousand streams.

In a thousand pools of water appear a thousand moons. There is basically only one moon, but if there are a thousand pools, whether large or small, the moon’s reflection will appear in all of them. The moon has not gone into the water, and the water has not gone to the moon, yet instantaneously the moon’s reflection appears in the water. The relationship between the Buddha and sentient beings works the same way. The Buddha is like the moonlight, and sentient beings are like the water.

The Buddha, like a clear, cool moon,
Forever courses in the space.
When the water in sentient beings’ minds is clear,
Bodhi appears within it.

The Buddha resembles a clear, cool moon, forever roaming in the void. When the water in beings’ minds clears up, then bodhi—enlightenment—appears in their minds. The Buddha’s light—the Buddha’s reflection—illumines your mind.

“Well, that’s just a reflected image,” you say. Yes, but if you cultivate, that reflection becomes the Buddha’s light.
This Celestial King has attained the passage into liberation of “universally manifesting like light and shadows.”

One of the Bhikshunis heard someone say that there will be an earthquake tomorrow. I told her that it wouldn’t happen, and so she wasn’t afraid anymore. I don’t think there will be an earthquake in San Francisco, because there are many people who are seriously studying Buddhism here. Although everyone still has ignorance to a certain degree, all of you want to smash through it. Ignorance is the underlying cause for earthquakes. Without ignorance, there are no problems whatsoever. The most important thing is to smash through ignorance.

Once ignorance is destroyed, the Dharma nature manifests. The most essential thing is that you don’t get tired of studying Buddhism. Don’t think, “I’ve studied for four years. Why haven’t I become a Buddha? Studying Buddhism is quite meaningless. I’d be better off studying some other religion.” Once you entertain those thoughts, even if you study for forty years, not to mention four, you still won’t achieve anything because you are not sincere.

When the mind is sincere, things can happen.
When vows are vast, the fruition can be attained.
When your thoughts are genuine, the things you do will become true and actual. If you make vast vows, you will quickly achieve the fruition. This is very important.

**Sutra:**

**Celestial King Serene Virtue gained a passage into liberation of employing the great expedient that universally adorns and purifies the states of all Buddhas.**

**Commentary:**

Celestial King Serene Virtue has the virtue of calm serenity. That is, he has skill in dhyana-samadhi. By means of his dhyana-samadhi, he enables sentient beings who see him to attain samÁdhi. He influences beings to develop their skill in the stillness of dhyana-samadhi, so that they eventually acquire the virtue of calm serenity. Therefore, his name is Serene Virtue. He gained a samadhi called a passage into liberation of employing the great expedient that universally adorns and purifies the states of all Buddhas. What’s meant by “universally adorning and purifying”? In a single thought he can adorn the Buddhalands of the ten directions, embellishing all those lands with supreme, wonderfully fine adornments. He can make appear the wonderful states produced by the Buddhas’ spiritual powers. This is the greatest expedient. What is a “great expedient”? It is the kind of expedient used when things aren’t really expedient. Basically, such expedients cannot be used yet he is able to use them. He has attained this samadhi, this passage into liberation, of inconceivable skill-in-means.

**Sutra:**

**Celestial King Sumeru Sound gained a passage into liberation of helping out sentient beings who keep drifting forever upon the ocean of birth and death.**

**Commentary:**

The next Celestial King is named Sumeru Sound. Sumeru, which means “wonderfully high,” implies that his voice is extremely subtle and wonderful and can be heard all the way up to the Heaven of the Thirty-three. He has gained a passage into liberation of helping out sentient beings who keep drifting forever upon the ocean of birth and death. Whatever sentient beings like, he fulfills their wishes. Each sentient being has different wishes and desires. Some desire to become Buddhas. Some desire to be Bodhisattvas. Others wish to be Sages Enlightened by Conditions or Solitarily Enlightened Ones. Some beings are satisfied with being Arhats. Their attitude is:

Mahasattvas don’t pay attention to others.
Amitabha—each one for himself!

“I only want to end my own birth and death. I don’t care whether other beings are suffering or not. Their suffering is their own business.” Hearers have no interest in saving other sentient beings. That’s the scope of their wishes.

Gods think like this, “It’s enough if I get to enjoy my blessings in the heavens.” When they think of clothes, clothes appear. When they think of food, food materializes. Once they wish for clothes, they are immediately clothed in the most beautiful garb. Once they wish for good food, good food appears before them. Sometimes there is a little too much or not quite enough, unlike in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, where the amount is always just perfect. There, you also get to eat whatever you happen to think of. Food will appear right before you, but it won’t be too much or too little; it will be just the right amount. In the heavens, the portions may be a fraction too much or too little. If there’s too much food, the gods may decide to eat it anyway, but they may not feel so good after stuffing themselves. Sometimes there isn’t enough food and they don’t get their fill, even though the food may be delicious. This is a matter of karmic rewards. Even though the gods enjoy such bliss, their blessings are not a hundred percent perfect, unlike in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, where things are not only splendid, but perfect and complete. There, things appear in just the right amounts, and are neither too big nor too small.

Asuras also have desires. They think, “Since the gods enjoy so much bliss in the heavens, I am determined to drive them down to earth so I can be in charge up there.” Asuras desire to be leaders. They want to rule over the gods. Even in the human world, people who have the desire for leadership are asuras. What’s meant by the desire for leadership? They want to be number one and won’t settle for being number two. They must come out on top.

Many people desire wealth, honor, high position, and fame. They want to get rich and be appointed to a high government post. They crave fame and profit. The desires for wealth, honor, fame, and profit are almost universal among people. You can travel the world over, but you will find that most people fall into two categories. One type pursues fame, and the other pursues fortune.

Although the gods enjoy great bliss in the heavens, when they use up their heavenly blessings they experience the Five Signs of Decay:

1. Their floral crowns wilt. The floral crowns that the gods wear on their heads never wilt; the flowers remain ever-fresh. Day after day, the blossoms become more fresh and beautiful. But when the Five Signs of Decay set in, the flowers wither and fall, and the crown is gone. That’s the first sign of decay, an indication that the life span of a god is about to end.

2. Their clothes become soiled. The clothes of the gods are immaculate, because there is no filth in the heavens. It is not like in the human world, where we have to do a massive clean-up once a week. The gods are not bothered with such troublesome matters. They have no filth to begin with. Their homes and their clothes never get dirty. However, when the Five Signs of Decay set in, their clothes start to get soiled. Where does the dirt come from? It appears as a sign of the god’s karmic obstructions. Since his karmic reward is exhausted, his clothes get soiled. Whereas people have to wash their clothes, the gods do not. They do not need detergents or other chemical agents. Their clothes naturally remain free from filth.

3. Their armpits sweat. Gods naturally smell good. “Oh, I know why. The gods always put on perfume, such as Evening in Paris, so they won’t perspire,” someone says. No, that’s not the case. The gods normally do not perspire, but when the Five Signs of Decay set in, their armpits start to sweat, and this is a sign that they are about to die. The gods do not dust themselves with scented powders. Rather, their fragrance comes as a response to their cultivation of the Five Precepts and the Ten Good Deeds. If you hold the precepts, your body will have a fragrance about it; it will not smell bad. If you don’t hold the precepts, your body will stink. This is the case not only in the heavens but in the human realm.

4. Their bodies start to stink. Originally, the gods don’t have body odor, but when the Five Signs of Decay occur, a stench manifests. None of the other gods want to be near the god who stinks. They hold their noses when they pass a god who is experiencing the Five Signs of Decay. That’s the way people react when they see a corpse. As a corpse decays, blood and fluids pour out of it, and it festers with maggots. People hold their noses and walk away as quickly as possible to escape the stench. In the same way, when a god starts to stink, all the other gods run away as soon as they see him.

5. They cannot sit still. The god being discussed, seeing that everyone is avoiding him, starts to panic. “I’m about finished. I’ll die soon. My life is coming to an end.” Basically gods are always seated, but now this god cannot bear to sit down any longer. He jumps up and then thinks, “Well, this isn’t right. I should be sitting.” He tries to sit down, but he cannot stay put and leaps up in an instant. After sitting down and jumping up a few times, he’s really finished. He dies. This is a description of the Five Signs of Decay. Don’t think that the gods are always calm and collected. When they are on the verge of death, they look quite funny, jumping up and down. When they get reborn in the human realm, they continue jumping up and down, because that’s what they were doing in their last moments as gods.

**Sutra:**

**Celestial King Eye of Pure Mindfulness gained a passage into liberation of recollecting the Thus Come One and thereby being able to regulate and subdue the activities of sentient beings.**

**Commentary:**

The Celestial King Eye of Pure Mindfulness is mindful of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. He has obtained the pure eye of Dharma. He gained a samadhi that is a passage into liberation of recollecting the Thus Come One. “Recollecting” means not forgetting. Not forgetting whom? Not forgetting the Thus Come One. One has to cast out false thoughts and keep the true mind—that’s recollecting the Thus Come One. If, out of yearning for the Buddhas’ lands you resolve to be reborn in those lands, you are also “recollecting.” One is mindful of the Buddha’s Dharma body and the states brought about by the Buddha’s transformation. From being mindful of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, one can thereby regulate and subdue sentient beings’ activities.

The sentient beings of this Saha world are the very hardest to regulate and subdue. For that reason, the Earth Store Sutra says, “The beings of Jambudvipa have stubborn and obstinate natures, difficult to tame, difficult to subdue.” Beings of every category are attached to their view of self, their mark of self, and their self-conceit. Since they are arrogant, they are difficult to tame and subdue. They refuse to humbly accept the teachings. Even if good teachers and wholesome friends exhort them with skillful means to benefit themselves and benefit others, they refuse to listen to those well-intentioned exhortations. For this reason, sentient beings forever remain sentient beings. They don’t wish to end birth and death and transcend the cycle of transmigration. They have no desire to leave suffering and attain bliss.

But now this Celestial King is able to regulate and subdue sentient beings’ activities. To “regulate” is similar to pouring water and milk together and stirring the mixture with a spoon until the two become so perfectly blended that you cannot tell them apart. It’s also like seasoning the food that you cook. You have to understand how to combine different vegetables and season them. Take today’s dish of turnips and carrots. That would have been a good combination, except that it had no seasoning, and so the dish was bland and tasteless. If a little oil, salt, soy sauce, and vinegar had been added, then everyone would have liked it. It’s the same dish: if it is seasoned, then everyone likes it; if it’s unseasoned, then even if people don’t say so up front, internally they will have second thoughts about it. That’s “regulating.”

The second infinitive is to “subdue.” Consider a tiger, for instance, that wants to bite every person and devour every creature it sees. It sees all sentient beings as potential food. If you have the spiritual powers to influence the tiger to give up meat and become vegetarian, you will have subdued it. If the tiger no longer bites people, it has been subdued. And thereby being able to regulate and subdue the activities of sentient beings includes taming tigers as well.

A few days ago we were holding a chan session in which many people worked hard investigating chan and cultivating the Way together. At that time, dragons had to coil up and tigers had to lie down. That was a case of “regulating and subduing.” When sentient beings are unruly and you can influence them to follow the rules, and if you are able to make them obey instructions when before they had refused to do so, then you are regulating and subduing sentient beings’ activities. You have obtained that kind of passage into liberation.

**Sutra:**

**Celestial King Delightful Universal Illumination gained a passage into liberation of flowing forth from the Universal Door’s ocean of dharanis.**

**Commentary:**

The next Celestial King is named Delightful Universal Illumination. When gods and humans see this Celestial King, they cherish and adore him. Since his light shines everywhere, all beings have affinities with him. He gained a samadhi, a dharma, a passage into liberation of flowing forth from the Universal Door’s ocean of dharanis. “Universal Door” means one door giving rise to countless doors, and those countless doors returning to one door. One is infinitely many, and infinitely many are one. The one and the many are mutually inclusive, perfectly interpenetrating without obstruction. That’s what’s meant by the Universal Door. This dharma door which pervades the Dharma Realm is called an “ocean of dharanis.”

The Sanskrit word dharani means “uniting and upholding” because it unites all dharmas and upholds countless meanings. In other words, it unites the three pure karmas of body, mouth, and mind, and upholds the three perfect and bright studies of precepts, samadhi, and wisdom. From one dharani door there flow forth countless, infinitely many, layer upon layer, inexpressibly inexpressible dharani doors. For that reason it is called an “ocean of dharanis.” The ocean is used as an analogy to describe the multiplicity and voluminousness of dharanis. There is no way to reckon the amount by resorting to numbers or analogies, and therefore it is called an “ocean of dharanis.”

From this ocean of dharanis there flow forth immeasurable, ineffable, inexpressible oceans of dharanis. Therefore the text says, “flowing forth.” Although there are so many oceans of dharanis, the person immersed in them is not attached. It is a state of perfect, unobstructed unity. This is unlike us ordinary people who, if there is one thing, become attached to that one thing. If there are two things, we become attached to the two. If there are three things, we become attached to the three, and so on until if there are infinitely many, we become attached to the infinitely many. Now, since there is liberation, the many are gone, and the few have vanished. One is detached from all appearances, and even the ocean of dharanis is gone. One must even be detached from this very liberation itself. Otherwise, one will become attached to marks: “Oh, there are so many…What should I do?” That would be like gazing out at the ocean and heaving a sigh, “Ah…there is so much water in the ocean. When will I ever drink it all up?” By getting so worried over it, you may just end up outsmarting yourself.

**Sutra:**

**Celestial King Sovereign World Ruler gained a passage into liberation of enabling sentient beings to meet the Buddha and bring forth a treasury of faith.**

**Commentary:**

Celestial King Sovereign World Ruler is the God whom most people believe in. Not satisfied with being just a Celestial King, he comes to the world and acts as Sovereign World Ruler, attracting greedy, angry, and deluded worldly beings to worship and believe in him. He sets up a religion that claims: “The faithful will gain salvation, but the faithless will not.” Greedy beings hear that and think, “It’s important that I get saved!” Thereupon they believe in this religion. Angry beings hear this and think, “I’ve committed so many offenses with my bad temper. I’d better have faith in God. Then he will pardon all my past offenses, and I’ll be saved.” Of course, deluded beings also believe in him. They say, “That’s the best. The faithful gain salvation. I’ll believe whatever they say, even if they claim that eggs grow on trees!” Why do they believe? Because they are deluded, that’s why.

Thereupon the Sovereign World Ruler has a field day, exhorting all the people on earth to believe in God. But then he realized his mistake. He gained a passage into liberation of enabling sentient beings to meet the Buddha. He repents, saying, “I don’t make the grade. You’d better go look for my boss.” He exhorts sentient beings to meet the Buddha, saying, “Formerly I told you that you would be saved if you believed in me. Now I’m telling you that I cannot be relied on. If you meet the Buddha, you’ll find a way.” He leads sentient beings to meet the Buddha and bring forth a treasury of faith. This “treasury” is the same as in the name Earth Treasury [Earth Store]; it refers to an underground cache for storing things. God says, “If you have believed in me, now I’ll introduce you to the Buddha. Believe in the Buddha. In the heavens and below, there is no one like the Buddha. No spirit, sage, or person in the heavens or below is as lofty as the Buddha.”

In the heavens and below, there is no one like the Buddha.
Throughout the worlds of the ten directions,
no one can compare with him.
I’ve seen everything in the world:
There’s nothing like the Buddha.

No one in the entire world has wisdom as great as the Buddha’s. This Celestial King enables sentient beings to meet the Buddha and bring forth faith. Since he gained this passage into liberation, he guides them to true salvation!

Previously we talked about the Five Signs of Decay, which apply to gods in the Six Desire Realm Heavens. The following disasters occur in the Dhyana Heavens in the Form Realm:

Fire burns up the First Dhyana.
Water floods the Second Dhyana.
Wind sweeps through the Third Dhyana.

There’s a verse that says:

Gods in the Six Desire Heavens experience the Five Signs of Decay.
The Third Dhyana Heavens suffer the disaster of wind.
Even if you cultivate and reach the Heaven of Neither Thought nor Non-Thought,
It’s not as good as going to the Western Land and then coming back.

The three disasters that occur in the Heavens of the First Dhyana are not like mere earthquakes that affect a local area. The disaster of fire is so devastating that it will burn up everyone in the world and dry up all the oceans. Seven suns will appear in the sky—perhaps six of them will be manmade. All the people and creatures on earth, up to the gods in the First Dhyana Heavens, will be burned to death. Therefore, even if you reach the First Dhyana Heavens in your cultivation, you have not ended birth and death.

The disaster of water reaches the Second Dhyana Heavens. After the disaster of fire abates, a huge flood comes in its wake. The water will rise up to the sky. Everything in the world will be gone; everything, having been burnt to a crisp by fire, will turn into water. Water, coming after the fire, will put out the flames. However, this great deluge will reach all the way up to the Second Dhyana Heavens, drowning all the gods in those heavens. They have cultivated millions of years in order to be born in the Second Dhyana Heavens, but at this time they will all be finished.

This is a very general explanation. If we discussed it in depth, we would find many causes and conditions behind such disasters.

The disaster of water is followed by the disaster of wind. Water had extinguished the fire, but then turned into a disaster itself. Now the wind blows the water dry, but in the process everything in the world is ripped to shreds and blown to utter destruction. Even the Third Dhyana Heavens are destroyed and all the gods living there are killed and blown about like balloons.

“Even if you cultivate till you reach the Heaven of Neither Thought nor Non-Thought…” That’s the highest of the Four Stations of Emptiness in the Formless Realm.

The Four Stations of Emptiness are:

1. The Heaven of the Station of Boundless Emptiness
2. The Heaven of the Station of Boundless Consciousness
3. The Heaven of the Station of Nothing Whatsoever
4. The Heaven of the Station of Neither Thought nor Non-Thought

In the Heaven of the Station of Boundless Consciousness, only consciousness remains. In the Heaven of the Station of Nothing Whatsoever, consciousness disappears, but one still engages in some form of thinking. But in the Heaven of the Station of Neither Thought nor Non-Thought, even thought is gone. Among all the heavens, that is the highest place. The gods there enjoy a life span of blessings that lasts for 80,000 great eons. However, when their lives come to an end after those 80,000 great eons, they will fall all the same, perhaps down to the realms of hell-beings, hungry ghosts, or animals. It’s not for sure. Therefore, the verse says, “Even if you cultivate till you reach the Heaven of Neither Thought nor Non-Thought, / It’s not as good as going to the Western Land and then coming back.” It would be better to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss and then return. You will have better control over things that way.

**Sutra:**

**Celestial King Comfortable Blazing Light gained a passage into liberation of enabling all sentient beings to become joyously faithful upon hearing the Dharma, hence gaining transcendence.**

**Commentary:**

The next Celestial King is named Comfortable Blazing Light. Blazing Light refers to the brightness of flames and means that this Celestial King has great wisdom. He gained a passage into liberation of enabling all sentient beings of the nine dharma realms to become joyously faithful upon hearing the Dharma, hence gaining transcendence. Although it may be easy to obtain a body, it is not easy to obtain a human body. Among all living creatures, people are the most intelligent. It’s not easy to be born a human.

It’s hard to obtain a human body.
It’s hard to get to hear the Buddhadharma.
It’s hard to get to be born in America.

America is rich in resources, and its citizens are intelligent. People who are born here have abundant blessings, without which they wouldn’t have been able to be born here. Now that Buddhism has come to America, everyone in this country will be graced by the Buddha’s light and get to hear the Buddhadharma. A human body is hard to obtain, but now we have attained a human body. The Buddhadharma is hard to get to hear, but we have heard it. It is hard to get born in America, but now we have been born in America. We have resolved these three difficulties.

Having heard the Dharma, you must believe in it. If you don’t have faith, the Dharma won’t be of any use to you. If you don’t believe what you hear, you are pathetic. If, on the other hand, you can bring forth faith and delight, you can transcend the Three Realms.

From morning to night you know no shame. You think, “Oh, I was born beautiful.” Actually, no matter how good-looking you are, there are only putrid and filthy things beneath your skin. For this reason, the Venerable Elder Master Hsu Yun wrote the “Song of the Skin Bag.” We are just skin bags. What is stored inside the skin bag? Excrement and urine. And yet you take these things as treasures. But now you must transcend the Three Realms, leap off the turning wheel, and get out of the Evil World of the Five Turbidities. The Celestial King has attained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:**

**Celestial King Joyful Contemplation of the Transformations of Dharmas gained a passage into liberation of entry into all Bodhisattvas’ taming practices, which are as boundless and infinite as space.**

**Commentary:**

Celestial King Joyful Contemplation of the Transformations of Dharmas likes to engage in the cultivation of thought, that is, dhyana-samadhi. He understands the nonobstruction of dharmas and their various transformations. He has understood and gained a passage into liberation of entry into all Bodhisattvas’ states, being able to enter deeply into them. He also understands the state of taming practices for taming sentient beings. He knows how to subdue and regulate each kind of sentient being. Moreover, he knows their inherent natures, which are as boundless and infinite as space. Being without boundaries, they are the greatest. Being infinite and without end, they are everlasting. He attained this passage into liberation.

Sutra:

**Celestial King Transformation Banner gained a passage into liberation of using universal compassion and wisdom to contemplate the countless afflictions of sentient beings.**

Commentary:

The next Celestial King is named Transformation Banner. How many transformations is this banner capable of? Infinitely many. It can become big or small, many or few, and it can become ornamented with the seven precious things. He gained a passage into liberation of using universal compassion and wisdom to contemplate the countless afflictions of sentient beings. Afflictions arise from ignorance. Ignorance creates greed, anger, and delusion, which in turn generate countless afflictions. Sentient beings have the obstacle of afflictions and the obstacle of what is known. The obstacle of afflictions stems from excessive attachment to self. The obstacle of what is known comes from excessive attachment to dharmas. Those two obstacles cause us to transmigrate in the six paths so we cannot become free. Every sentient being has his own kind of affliction. Members of the noble class are prone to arrogance. Poor people suffer from inferiority complexes. Everyone has his own brand of affliction, which comes from not being content with one’s lot. If you are content, you won’t have afflictions.

“Universal compassion and wisdom” is pervasive. Kindness can relieve beings’ suffering, and compassion can bestow happiness upon them. With a heart of great compassion, one regards beings equally. With the wisdom of universal compassion, one vows to save beings. Celestial King Transformation Banner attained this passage into liberation.

Every day we lecture on Celestial Kings, of which there are many, not just one. Most of us are aware of the Four Great Celestial Kings, but there are infinitely many Celestial Kings among the heavens of the Three Realms. The Dharma Flower Sutra does not discuss the Celestial Kings so extensively, but the Flower Adornment Sutra brings up many of them. If you don’t read or listen to the Flower Adornment Sutra, you won’t be aware of the Buddha’s true wealth and nobility. In this country, how many people are studying and investigating the Buddhadharma? If you ask them to lecture on a certain sutra, they stare at you blankly and wonder, “How does one lecture on a sutra?” They don’t know. All they know is zen, zen [which sounds like “salty” in Chinese]. Actually, they cannot tell the salty from the bland, either. Muddled, they die, and become a zen [salty] master the next time around. But if they don’t encounter the Buddhadharma in their next life, they still remain muddled.

Arriving in a muddle, leaving in confusion,
You’ve come to the world in vain.
It’s better to neither come nor go.
Then you won’t be muddled or confused.

Another version goes like this:

Arriving in happiness, leaving in sorrow,
You’ve come to the world in vain.
It’s better to neither come nor go.
Then you won’t be happy or sad.

“Arriving in happiness; leaving in sorrow.” When a baby is born, everyone rejoices for the parents. They offer their best wishes, saying, “Congratulations! You’ve got a newborn son or daughter.” This custom is particularly prevalent among the Chinese. When the infant is one month old, the parents give a banquet in which meat and liquor are served. One friend gives a hundred dollars, another gives a thousand, and yet another gives ten thousand. The parents of the baby make a lot of money. So, there is happiness when one comes into the world. But when it’s time to die, to go, there is sadness. People cry. “You’ve come to the world in vain.” What meritorious deeds have you done? Have you been of any help to the world? No, none at all. In that case, you’ve come to the world in vain—it’s been a lost cause. “It’s better to neither come nor go.” If there is no coming into being and no ceasing to be, “then you won’t be happy or sad.”

Sutra:

**Celestial King Wondrous Adornment of the Sounds of Constellations gained a passage into liberation of emitting light and manifesting the Buddhas’ three wheels to gather in and transform beings.**

Commentary:

Celestial King Wondrous Adornment of the Sounds of Constellations emits light and manifests auspicious portents. His light, like that of the stars, adorns Buddhalands in a wondrous way. He gained a passage into liberation of emitting immeasurably bright light like that of the stars and constellations, which pervasively illumines and adorns the Dharma Realm, and of manifesting the Buddhas’ three wheels to gather in and transform beings. “Buddha” can refer to Sãkyamuni Buddha or to the Buddhas of the ten directions. What are the Buddhas’ three wheels?

The three wheels refer to the body, mouth, and mind. The Buddha’s three wheels, the Bodhisattvas’ three wheels, and sentient beings’ three wheels are all different. The Buddhas’ three wheels can be said to be one wheel. One wheel can become three wheels, and three wheels can become nine wheels. What does that mean? Every wheel contains the function of all three wheels. For example, not only can the mouth act as the wheel of speaking Dharma, it can also function as the wheel of formulating intent and the wheel of spiritual travel. Likewise, the mind can act as the wheel of speaking Dharma, the wheel of formulating intent, and the wheel of spiritual travel. The body also functions as the wheel of speaking Dharma, the wheel of formulating intent, and the wheel of spiritual travel. Each wheel contains the functions of all three. The wheels keep turning without cease, turning the Great Dharma wheel. For this reason, the Buddha’s three wheels differ from the three wheels of sentient beings. With sentient beings, the mouth is the mouth, the body is the body, and the mind is the mind. With the Buddha, the three wheels function interchangeably without obstruction.

The Buddha’s three wheels take the Four Methods of Gathering Beings In as their basis, and so the text says “gather in and transform beings.”

To gather in means to attract them to you. A person may be in Hong Kong, but you can gather him in and draw him to America. Or, someone may be in New York, but if you take out your magnet, you can draw an iron filing from New York. That’s gathering in. Gathering in can be visible or invisible. You may write a letter, send a cable, or make a phone call. When people read your letter or cable, or talk to you on the phone, or read an announcement in the newspapers, they come. Those are visible forms of gathering in. Invisible forms of gathering in occur on a psychological or spiritual level. “Is it like hypnosis?” you wonder. No, it’s different. For hypnosis to work, the cooperation of the two people involved is required. In this case, however, you use the power of spiritual travel to gather a person in. You may never have met the person before, and yet, perhaps when he is sitting or sleeping, or in his dreams, you can appear before him and influence him to come here. That’s an invisible form of gathering in. The Buddha constantly gathers in and transforms beings both visibly and invisibly. He uses his spiritual powers, as well as his kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity to gather in and transform sentient beings.

In general, there are Four Methods of Gathering Beings In:

1.    Giving
2     Kind words
3.    Beneficial deeds
4.    Similar work

1. Giving. There is the giving of wealth, the giving of Dharma, and the giving of fearlessness. When you see people in dire straits and help them out by giving them some money, they will be moved, and then you will have gathered in and transformed them. If people don’t know the Buddhadharma, you can teach them the Dharma and explain the sutras to them, causing their wisdom to unfold. They will be moved by your gift of Dharma, and you will have gathered them in. If people are panicked and you can comfort them and alleviate their fears, you are giving them fearlessness.

Someone may say, “I’m terrified of ghosts. The ghosts are coming to get me. What should I do?”

At this time, you say, “Don’t worry. I’m an expert at catching ghosts. You say a ghost is coming after you? Don’t fear. I’ll catch it.” When he hears that, his fear subsides. In general, if you allay people’s fears in any kind of frightening situation, you are giving fearlessness.

2. Kind words. This doesn’t mean saying things like, “I love you, I love you.” Rather, it means talking to sentient beings the way a parent would talk to his or her child, gathering the child in with kindness and compassion.

3. Beneficial deeds. This means sharing benefits with everyone equally. You don’t keep all the benefits to yourself.

4. Similar work. For example, if a Bodhisattva wishes to teach and transform people in the business world, he may appear as a businessman and do business with them, teaching and transforming them in the process. If a Bodhisattva wishes to teach government officials, he may appear as an official. When a Bodhisattva wishes to teach scholars, he manifests as a scholar. In general, one engages in the same kind of work as the people whom one wishes to teach and influence. Those are the Four Methods of Gathering Beings In.

The Buddha uses the Four Unlimited Aspects of Mind, which are kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity, as well as the Four Methods of Gathering Beings In, to teach and transform beings. The Celestial King gained this passage to liberation.

Sutra:

**At that time, Celestial King Pure Wisdom’s Renown received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, universally contemplated the multitudes of the Heavens of Lesser Purity, the Heavens of Limitless Purity, and the Heavens of Pervasive Purity, and spoke the following verse:**

Commentary:

At the time, after it had been stated that Celestial King Wondrous Adornment of the Sounds of Constellations gained a passage into liberation of emitting light and manifesting the Buddhas’ three wheels to gather in and transform beings, Celestial King Pure Wisdom’s Renown received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power. All the multitudes in this Dharma assembly relied on the Buddha’s awesome power. They didn’t claim it was their own power, but rather, acknowledged that they were relying on the Buddha’s power.

This Celestial King universally contemplated the multitudes of the Heavens of Lesser Purity, the Heavens of Limitless Purity, and the Heavens of Pervasive Purity. There was not only one set of these heavens; there were countless sets of Lesser Purity Heavens, Limitless Purity Heavens, and Pervasive Purity Heavens. He contemplated the beings in these heavens and spoke the following verse in praise of the Buddhas.

Sutra:

**The one who understands that the nature of dharmas is unobstructed
Appears everywhere in countless lands of the ten directions.
He explains the inconceivable realm of the Buddhas,
Bringing all beings back to the ocean of liberation.**

Commentary:

The one who understands that the nature of dharmas is unobstructed. Who would that be? A Buddha. Only a Buddha can understand all worldly and world-transcending dharmas. He knows that the nature of all dharmas is perfectly fused without obstruction.

The Buddha appears everywhere in countless lands of the ten directions. Having understood himself, the Buddha also wishes for all beings to understand the nature of dharmas as being perfectly fused without obstruction. And so he appears in all lands throughout the ten directions. People tend to assume that there is only one Buddha who appears in this world. Actually, Buddhas appear simultaneously in infinitely many worlds throughout the ten directions.

He explains the inconceivable realm of the Buddhas. The Buddha teaches the Dharma to help sentient beings understand the Buddha’s inconceivable state, bringing all beings of the ten directions back to the ocean of liberation. He wants all beings to gain the same enlightenment that he himself gained. That enlightenment is an ocean of liberation.

Sutra:

**The Thus Come One abides independently in the world,
Like a reflection of light, manifesting in many countries.
Dharmas ultimately do not come into being.
King Supreme Views enters this passage.**

Commentary:

The Thus Come One is one of the ten titles of the Buddha and is another name for the Buddha. Thus Come One refers to the Buddha. Some people say, “Thus Come One Buddha,” but they don’t know which Buddha that is. Actually, all Buddhas of the ten directions are called Thus Come Ones. He abides independently in the world. There is no fixed place, no fixed country in which he stays to teach and transform beings. Why is that? The Buddha teaches and transforms beings in all the lands throughout the ten directions. In the Brahma Net Sutra the Buddha says, “I have come to this Saha world eight thousand times to teach and transform beings.”

Some unorthodox sects say this is the tenth time Sãkyamuni Buddha has come to this world. That’s an ignorant claim. There’s no evidence to back it up.

“Well, is there any evidence for saying that the Buddha has come here 8,000 times?” Actually, it’s not necessary to furnish any evidence. Why do I say that? The Buddha never lies. The Buddha only utters true and factual words. Those unorthodox teachers who claim that this is the tenth time the Buddha has come into the world are telling a big lie. Their claim is totally groundless. The masters of unorthodox sects spout theories without caring whether or not there is any basis for such theories. Sãkyamuni Buddha has come to just this one world, the Saha world, eight thousand times.

He is like a reflection of light, manifesting in many countries. The Buddha is independent and has no particular country to which he is attached. He is like a reflected image that appears universally in all lands. The principle of light and reflection has been discussed in previous sections, so we won’t go into it again now.

Dharmas ultimately do not come into being. Dharmas, in the ultimate sense of their fundamental nature, neither come into being nor cease to be, are neither pure nor defiled, and neither increase nor decrease. King Supreme Views enters this passage. Celestial King Supreme Views understands this dharma door.

The Celestial Kings each have their own understanding, and so the verses they speak in praise either of one Buddha or the Buddhas of the ten directions are different. Each of the Celestial Kings has his own viewpoint, his own special enlightenment, and his own attainment. Now, based upon the dharma they have attained and enlightened to, they speak verses in praise of the Buddhas. If Celestial Kings praise the Buddhas, how much the more should we people! But some nonbelievers, not taking good stock of themselves, dare to slander the Buddha. They are like someone who spits upwards at the sky; eventually the spittle will fall back on his own face. They end up disgracing themselves.

Sutra:

**For countless oceans of eons he has cultivated skillful means,
That have purified lands everywhere in the ten directions.
The Dharma Realm abides in Thusness, forever unmoving.
The god Serene Virtue awakened thus.**

Commentary:

For countless oceans of eons he has cultivated skillful means. The Buddha did not become a Buddha by cultivating for just a single lifetime. In fact, for countless great eons, oceanic in extent, he cultivated various skillful means.

For three asamkhyeyas he cultivated blessings and wisdom;
For a hundred eons he perfected his hallmarks and characteristics.

Asamkhyeya means “countless number.” It is impossible to reckon just how many eons are equal to three of those great countless numbers, so the text says, “countless oceans of eons.” During that incredibly long period of time, the Buddha cultivated various expedient means, the Six Perfections and the myriad practices. He could renounce what was difficult to renounce, endure what was difficult to endure, and yield what was difficult to yield. What is hard to renounce? Our life is the most difficult thing to renounce. In practicing the path of a Bodhisattva, he renounced his head, eyes, brain, and marrow; his country, city, wife, and children. These are the most difficult things to part with, and that’s why one should renounce them. One should also endure what is difficult to endure, and accept what is difficult to accept. For example, King Kali once chopped off the four limbs of the Buddha and asked him whether he could endure it. The Buddha said he could. King Kali said, “What proof do you have that you can endure this? You’re simply saying that you can bear it.”

The Buddha, who at that time was the Patient Immortal, said, “If I’m not able to endure this, then these four limbs that have been chopped off will remain the way they are. However, if I’m truly able to endure this, may my four limbs grow back again!” Right after he spoke those words, his hands and feet grew back. That was proof that the Buddha could endure that experience.

When he was cultivating at the level of planting causes, the Buddha renounced his body to feed a tiger. Tigers are the fiercest of beasts, but the Buddha was able to give up his body to feed a tiger. Most beings would think, “Since the tiger is so ferocious, it ought to starve to death, and then there would be one disaster, one wild beast, less in the world. The sooner it starves, the better.” The Buddha didn’t think that way. He thought, “This tiger is about to starve to death. I ought to offer it my body in order to create affinities with it.”

Once, when the Buddha was cultivating in a previous incarnation, he also cut off his flesh to feed an eagle that wanted to eat a bird. The bird went and hid by the Buddha. The eagle protested, “You have saved the bird, but now I will starve. How can you do that?” The Buddha then cut off his own flesh and fed it to the eagle. That kind of ascetic practice—doing what is hard to do—is known as “skillful means.”

“Throughout countless seas of eons he has cultivated skillful means” that have purified lands everywhere in the ten directions. The Buddha adorned and purified Buddhalands. Purifying and adorning are basically the same thing. The Dharma Realm abides in Thusness, forever unmoving. “Abiding in Thusness” means not moving, not changing or vacillating. The god Serene Virtue awakened thus. Celestial King Serene Virtue understands the Buddha’s state in this way.

Sutra:

**Sentient beings, occluded by delusion,
Blindly remain in the throes of birth and death.
The Thus Come One shows them the path to purity.
Sumeru Sound is emancipated thus.**

Commentary:

Sentient beings refers to you, me, and all other beings, who are born from a multiplicity of causes and conditions coming together. Sentient beings are dull and deluded. If they were intelligent, they would walk on the proper path. But since they are deluded, they walk on improper, crooked paths. If you explain the Proper Dharma to them, they don’t believe you. If you introduce them to deviant dharmas, they believe you. Why is that? They are occluded by delusion. Why are beings dull and deluded? They don’t study the Buddhadharma, and as a result they become more and more ignorant as the days go by. If you study the Buddhadharma, you will become more intelligent day after day. If you are intelligent, you aren’t occluded. If you are dull and deluded, then you are occluded. Occluded means being covered over and obstructed. What is covering and obstructing these sentient beings? Their ignorance and their karmic offenses do that. Since they are covered over by their karmic offenses, it’s not easy for them to become liberated.

There are many kinds of occlusion and obstruction. Now we will bring up an example by way of illustration. Let’s talk about Sãkyamuni Buddha’s son, Rahula. Rahula made a vow that he would become the son of every Buddha who appeared in the world. However, he had heavy obstructions. He stayed in his mother’s womb for six years. Most people stay in the womb for approximately ten [lunar] months, but Rahula remained in his mother’s womb for six years. Rahula’s name, a Sanskrit term, means “obstruction.” Why did he have this particular kind of obstruction? In a past life when he was a child, he was very naughty. Once he saw a mouse run into a mouse hole, and he stopped up the mouse hole with a piece of wood, and then added bricks on the outside. He kept the mouse hole blocked up for six days. Then he thought, “I might as well open up the mouse hole to see if the mouse has starved to death.” When he opened the hole, the mouse ran out. Since he was guilty of such a karmic offense, of having imprisoned a mouse in a mouse hole for six days, in this life he had to remain in his mother’s womb for six years. He experienced that kind of obstruction.

Having created such karma, he had to undergo the corresponding retribution. On top of that, he also obstructed his mother.

Sãkyamuni Buddha [when he was still a prince] was married to Yashodhara. When Yashodhara asked for a son, the Prince pointed his finger at her abdomen, whereupon she conceived a child. Then the Prince left home and went to live in the Himalayas for six years. When Rahula was born, most members of the Sãkya clan said that Yashodhara was not a virtuous woman: how could she have given birth to a son when her husband wasn’t around? The Buddha had been gone for six years; how could she have gotten pregnant during that time? They insisted that she had been unfaithful and wanted to throw her into a pit of fire. At that time, Yashodhara made a vow, “If I have been faithful, then when I leap into the flames, may the flames turn into a lotus flower. If I have been unfaithful, then I deserve to be burned.”

The members of the Sãkya clan dug a huge pit and lit a big fire inside, with the intent of burning Yashodhara and Rahula to death. Carrying Rahula in her arms, Yashodhara leapt into the flames. Instantaneously the flames turned into a lotus blossom. That proved that Yashodhara had been a faithful wife and had not been promiscuous. Although she had been obstructed in the beginning, she managed to overcome the obstruction.

Sentient beings are like blind people, immersed in darkness. Not only are they blind, they are also deaf. They cannot see or hear, and they blindly remain in the throes of birth and death. Why are we said to be like blind people? When we are born, we don’t know which family name we have, whether we are from the Zhang, Li, Wang, or Zhao family. We are born muddled and die in a stupor. That’s called “being blind and in the dark.” Sentient beings forever remain in birth and death. Not understanding birth and death, they are blind and in the dark. The Thus Come One shows them the path to purity. The Buddha points out a path of pure cultivation. Sumeru Sound is emancipated thus. This is the dharma door that this Celestial King attained.

Sutra:

**The unsurpassed path tread by all Buddhas
Cannot be fathomed by any sentient being.
They are shown various kinds of expedient doors.
Pure Eye understands this through careful observation.**

Commentary:

The unsurpassed path tread by all Buddhas of the ten directions, the fruition of the path of their cultivation, cannot be fathomed by any sentient being. No sentient being can speculate on the Buddha’s state or the unsurpassed path that he cultivates. Why aren’t they able to fathom it? Ordinary beings are ignorant and lack wisdom. Since they cannot fathom the Buddha’s state, they are shown various kinds of expedient doors. The Buddha compassionately reveals to sentient beings the path they should cultivate. He uses various skillful means to help them understand the Buddha’s unsurpassed path.

Pure Eye completely understands this through careful observation. Celestial King Pure Eye observes and investigates this principle and understands this state.

Sutra:

**The Thus Come One constantly uses methods of
uniting and upholding,
Profuse as dust motes in oceans of lands,
To instruct and teach sentient beings everywhere.
Celestial King Universal Illumination enters thus.**

Commentary:

This verse expresses the state of understanding of Celestial King Universal Illumination. The Thus Come One constantly uses methods, dharma doors, of uniting and upholding to teach beings. One method of uniting and upholding branches out into infinite methods of uniting and upholding. The Sanskrit term for “uniting and upholding” is dharani.

He generates great dharani doors that are as profuse as motes of dust in oceans of lands / To instruct and teach sentient beings everywhere throughout all Buddhalands, enabling them to each obtain the dharma door that is appropriate for their needs.

Celestial King Universal Illumination enters thus. Who has understood this state? Celestial King Universal Illumination gained this passage into liberation.

Sutra:

**A Thus Come One’s advent in the world is not easy to meet with.
It may happen only once in an ocean of uncountable eons.
Buddhas can inspire faith and understanding in beings.
The god Sovereign attains this realization.**

Commentary:

Celestial King Sovereign [World Ruler] describes his state of attainment in a verse. A Thus Come One’s advent in the world is not easy to meet with.

The unsurpassed, most profound Dharma
Is hard to encounter in a hundred million eons.
I now see and hear it, receive and maintain it,
And I vow to understand the Thus Come One’s true meaning.

This verse praises the Dharma. The Buddha is unsurpassed and most honored, having realized the fruition of wonderful enlightenment. Sentient beings may encounter a Buddha, but it may happen only once in an ocean of uncountable eons. The verse in praise of Dharma said that it’s hard to meet the Dharma in “a hundred million eons.” This line says that it’s hard to meet a Buddha “in an ocean of uncountable eons,” which is an even longer time. Maybe once, during that long period of time, we might get to meet a Buddha. We don’t get to meet Buddhas all the time.

Buddhas can inspire faith and understanding in beings. When a Buddha appears in the world, he enables beings to give rise to faith and understanding, so that they can cultivate in accordance with the Dharma. The god Sovereign attains this realization. That Celestial King understands this aspect of the Buddha’s state.

Not only is it hard to get to meet the Buddha, it is just as hard to get to meet the Dharma. In a hundred million eons it is not easy to meet the Dharma. And it is even hard to get to meet the Sangha. If there is no Buddhadharma, there will be no Sangha, and if there is no Sangha, there will be no Dharma. And without the Dharma, there will be no Buddha. Therefore, all Three Jewels are essential. Each of these jewels is extremely hard to encounter.

It is also hard to come upon a Dharma assembly where sutras are lectured. Think it over. In the past, did anybody in this country lecture on an entire sutra all the way from “Thus I have heard,” to the very end, “they believed, received, and put it into practice”? In several thousand years, no one has ever given a full lecture series in this part of the world. Only in recent years have people begun lecturing on the sutras and speaking Dharma. If you think this over, you will realize that the Buddhadharma is indeed hard to encounter. Not only that, it is also difficult to understand. You might be speaking Dharma with the utmost sincerity, and yet those who don’t understand your language might think you were singing a song. They fail to understand the meaning. Therefore, it may have to be translated into the appropriate language. Wouldn’t you say that was difficult? And yet, if you don’t do what is difficult, you will never be able to extensively propagate the Buddhadharma. Therefore, right in the midst of toil and hardship, we have to go against all odds and try out best to do what is difficult. It is difficult to encounter, listen to, and explain the Dharma in the sutras.

Right now in this country people have begun lecturing on the sutras and speaking Dharma, and yet those who don’t understand it say, “What are they doing? Are they play acting?”Unfortunately, such people don’t even know anything about how to put on a play. Isn’t that pathetic? Such people don’t understand the Buddhadharma, and yet they slander the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. There are plenty of people like that, which makes things difficult, wouldn’t you say? It’s not easy to have a Dharma assembly where sutras are lectured. Not only in this country, but all over the world there are very, very few places where sutras are lectured in the proper way.

Sutra:

**The Buddha says that the nature of dharmas isn’t a nature at all,
And yet they are profound, vast, great, and inconceivable.
Thus he inspires pure faith in sentient beings everywhere.
Celestial King Blazing Light understands this well.**

Commentary:

What Celestial King Blazing Light understands of the Buddha’s state differs from the perception of the previous Celestial King Sovereign. The Buddha says that the nature of dharmas isn’t a nature at all. Dharmas don’t have a nature of their own. Does this imply annihilationism? Does it mean that dharmas don’t exist? No. And yet they are profound, vast, great, and inconceivable. Speaking of the profound, there is nothing more profound than the Dharma; speaking of the vast and great, there is nothing vaster and greater than the Dharma. On top of that, it is inconceivable—you cannot conceive of it mentally or express it verbally. And yet, the Buddha uses his great wisdom and awesome spiritual strength, and thus he inspires pure faith in sentient beings everywhere. He causes beings everywhere to purify their minds and have proper belief. Celestial King Blazing Light understands this state of liberation well.

Sutra:

**Thus Come Ones of the three times perfect meritorious virtues.
They transform the realms of sentient beings in incredible ways.
Reflection upon this brings exultant joy.
Thus proclaims Joy in Dharma.**

Commentary:

The Thus Come Ones of the three periods refers to the Buddhas of the past, present, and future, in the long span of time. Or “three periods” could be explained as the past being last year, the present being this year, and the future being next year. To shrink the time frame even more, we could consider last month as the past, this month as the present, and next month as the future.

We could also say that yesterday is the past, today is the present, and tomorrow is the future. Those three days can serve as an analogy for the three periods of time. By shortening the time interval, people may find this concept easier to understand. If you speak of a protracted period of time, people find it hard to understand. For example, children only know about candy. Give them one piece, and they will ask for more.

The Thus Come Ones of the three periods of time perfect meritorious virtues. How can we perfect our merit and virtue? We have to cultivate blessings and wisdom constantly and everywhere. By not upsetting people, we cultivate blessings and wisdom. When we make others afflicted, we lose blessings and wisdom as well as merit and virtue.

For instance, working in the kitchen is a form of practicing the Bodhisattva Path and cultivating blessings and wisdom. However, if we waste things and don’t cherish them, spilling flour and rice all over the floor so that the mice come to share in the vegetarian meal, we will have no merit and virtue. Instead, we lose our blessings and wisdom, because we don’t cherish the temple’s property and we ruin things. Not only do we have no blessings or wisdom, we create offenses.

Another mistake is that people don’t make a point of knowing what food is in the kitchen. They leave the food there until it grows moldy, and then they remember, “Ah, we haven’t eaten that food.” By then the food has spoiled and is inedible. Perhaps someone doesn’t feel like cooking anymore, so he thinks of a way to get out of it. He simply makes a mess of the food, and then everyone is displeased and his job gets taken away from him. These are all ways of losing blessings and wisdom. The Buddhas of the three periods of time have perfected their merit and virtue. How did they do that? They didn’t waste even the least bit of blessings, and they insisted on cultivating every little bit of wisdom, however tiny.

They transform the realms of sentient beings in incredible ways. The Buddhas use various expedients to teach and transform sentient beings. Why do they do that? As long as our blessings and wisdom are not yet perfected, we have to teach and transform beings. Well, after the Buddhas perfect their blessings and wisdom, do they still teach and transform beings? Yes, they continue to do so, because the Buddhas aren’t afraid of having too many blessings or too much wisdom. In fact, the more, the better.

Reflection upon this brings exultant joy. No matter what sentient beings are thinking about, the Buddhas avoid making them afflicted, and instead make them exultant and joyful. They are very happy. “How wonderful that I have met the Buddhadharma!” Thus proclaims Joy in Dharma. Celestial King Joy in Dharma understands this state.

Sutra:

**Sentient beings are drowning in an ocean of afflictions.
Their delusion and turbid views are alarming indeed.
Out of sympathy, the Great Teacher helps them leave all that forever.
King Transformation Banner observes this state.**

Commentary:

The first two lines refer to the Five Turbidities. “Sentient beings” refers to the turbidity of beings; “drowning” refers to the turbidity of time; an ocean of afflictions” refers to the turbidity of afflictions; “delusion” refers to the turbidity of life span; “turbid views” refers to the turbidity of views. Those are the Five Turbidities of this evil world, and they are quite terrifying.

Sentient beings are drowning in an ocean of afflictions. There are 84,000 kinds of afflictions, which can be summed up in the Three Poisons of greed, anger, and delusion, or more simply, as ignorance. Afflictions are infinite; they are as profuse as an ocean. Therefore we continually make the following vows.

“I vow to save the boundless beings.” Since the turbidity of beings is boundless, we vow to save all those beings. “I vow to cut off the endless afflictions.” Afflictions are inexhaustible, yet we vow to sever them. “I vow to study the limitless dharma doors.” There are countless ways to enter the Buddhadharma, and we vow to learn them all. “I vow to attain the supreme Buddha Way.” There is nothing higher than Buddhahood, and we vow to achieve it. These are the Four Magnanimous Vows of a Bodhisattva, and they are an excellent method for saving beings in the Evil World of the Five Turbidities.

Their delusion and turbid views are alarming indeed. “Delusion” refers to the life turbidity. Being born deluded has to do with one’s life and fate. “Turbid views” are views that aren’t proper and pure. Such views are very frightening.

Out of sympathy for all beings, the Great Teacher, the Buddha, the Teacher of Gods and People, helps them leave all that forever. They get out of this evil world of the Five Turbidities. Celestial King Transformation Banner observes this state. He knows this state.

Sutra:

**The Thus Come One’s light is forever bright.
Countless Buddhas appear in each and every ray.
One and all, they manifest and work at transforming sentient beings.
The god Wondrous Sounds enters this passage.**

Commentary:

Celestial King Wondrous Sounds perceives how the Thus Come One’s light is forever bright, pervading the Dharma Realm. There are countless Buddhas who appear in each and every ray. Infinitely many Buddhas appear in the midst of the light. Every Buddha emits hundreds of millions of rays of light, and within each light there appear infinitely many Buddhas.

What are the Buddhas doing? One and all, they manifest and work at transforming sentient beings. They appear transformationally to teach beings, enabling them to hear the Dharma, cultivate, attain the Way, and realize Buddhahood. That is the work of every Buddha. The god, Celestial King Wondrous Sounds, enters this passage into liberation.

4) Heavens of the Second Dhyāna

Sutra:

**Moreover, Celestial King Winsome Light gained a passage into liberation of forever enjoying the bliss of quiescence, and yet being able to descend into the world and eradicate beings’ suffering.**

Commentary:

Moreover, since the meaning had not been completely explained in the previous section, the text continues to discuss it now. Celestial King Winsome Light attained this state and gained a passage into liberation of forever enjoying the bliss of quiescence, and yet being able to descend into the world and eradicate beings’ suffering. Forever abiding in concentration, he “takes dhyana bliss as food and is filled with the joy of Dharma.” He derives true bliss from samadhi. Further, he can subdue celestial demons and restrain those of externalist ways. He can manifest many bodies and use his spiritual powers and transformations to dispel the woes of the world. That is the passage into liberation that Celestial King gained.

Sutra:

**Celestial King Pure and Exquisite Light gained a passage into liberation of using an ocean of responses issuing from the heart of great compassion to bestow a treasury of happiness upon all sentient beings.**

Commentary:

Celestial King Pure and Exquisite Light gained a passage into liberation of using an ocean of responses issuing from the heart of great compassion. The heart of great compassion is the resolve to universally save beings, enabling them to all realize the Buddha Way. If there is a single being who hasn’t become a Buddha, then we won’t become Buddhas, either. That’s the heart of great compassion. Regardless of whether or not we have affinities with beings, we still gather them in with the heart of great compassion. When great compassion is developed to the utmost, it resembles an ocean. That’s why the text says, “ocean of responses,” meaning that our mind becomes as expansive as an ocean. Since we cultivate the heart of great compassion and conduct ourselves with great compassion, universally saving beings, we are able to bestow a treasury of happiness upon all sentient beings. All beings are happy and delighted, and no other happiness can compare with this happiness. Having understood the greatly compassionate heart of all Buddhas and having perfected his own heart of great compassion, this Celestial King gained this passage into liberation and attained this samadhi of liberation.

Sutra:

**Celestial King Comfortable Sound gained a passage into liberation of universally manifesting, within a single thought, the power of blessings and virtue of all sentient beings throughout boundless eons.**

Commentary:

The Celestial King named Comfortable Sound attained a state and gained a passage into liberation of universally manifesting, within a single thought, the power of blessings and virtue of all sentient beings throughout boundless eons of the past, present, and future. The past can manifest as the present, the present can manifest as the future, and the future can manifest as the past. Past, present, and future all manifest within a single thought.

Infinite eons can be gathered into a single thought.
A single thought can unfold into infinite eons.

Within those infinite eons, innumerable beings cultivate blessings and wisdom, developing the power of blessings and of wisdom. The perfection of blessings and wisdom results in virtue, or morality. With blessings and wisdom perfected, one achieves power; and having achieved power, one isn’t far from Buddhahood. This Celestial King has understood this state and attained this samadhi of liberation.

Every evening we bow the [Repentance before Ten Thousand Buddhas](http://cttbusa.org/10000bowing/10000bowing.asp). The merit and virtue of this ceremony cannot be fully described. Some people may have been destined to live only a short time, but by bowing the Repentance before Ten Thousand Buddhas, they can prolong their life span. Some people are chronically ill. If they sincerely bow the Repentance before Ten Thousand Buddhas, their illnesses will be cured. Some people haven’t enjoyed much good fortune in their lives; everything has been unlucky for them. If, however, they can sincerely bow the Repentance before Ten Thousand Buddhas, everything will become auspicious and will turn out as they wish. The merit and virtue from bowing this repentance is inconceivable. In cultivating the Way, if you constantly bow the Repentance before Ten Thousand Buddhas, you can quickly become enlightened. For instance, a Dharma Master I once knew in Hong Kong didn’t talk very well and was not very literate. Then he went to Canada. Since he didn’t have much to do, he bowed the Repentance before Ten Thousand Buddhas every day. Bowing by himself for five years, he went through the repentance twenty-six times. He now appears to be much more intelligent than before.

The Venerable Master Hsu Yun also bowed the Ten Thousand Buddhas’ Repentance. People who don’t like to bow don’t realize the merit and virtue derived from bowing. If we bow this repentance with the utmost sincerity, we can recover from whatever illness we might have. Without even realizing it, we will be cured. To this day, that Dharma Master I mentioned still bows Repentance before Ten Thousand Buddhas daily at Hongfu (Vast Blessings) Monastery. An Upasaka is bowing along with him. A few days ago, the two of them bowed the Repentance of the Emperor of Liang, and now they are bowing the Repentance before Ten Thousand Buddhas.

Offenses large enough to fill the skies
Are eradicated with a single thought of repentance.
If you can repent and reform, your offenses will be dispelled and your good roots will increase.

Sutra:

**Celestial King Wisdom of Supreme Intent gained a passage into liberation of universally causing worlds undergoing the process of formation, dwelling, and decay to all become pure like space.**

Commentary:

The Celestial King named Wisdom of Supreme Intent gained a passage into liberation of universally causing worlds undergoing the process of formation, dwelling, and decay to all become pure like space. Formation, dwelling, decay, and emptiness are the four eons that worlds go through. In this world, a period of increase and a period of decrease constitute a small eon. During the period of increase, every hundred years the average human life span increases by one year and the average human height increases by one inch. From ten years, the average life span increases until it reaches a maximum of 84,000 years. Then the life span starts to decrease, until it returns to ten years. Such a period of increase and decrease comprises one small eon. Twenty small eons comprise a middle-sized eon. Four middle-sized eons make up one great eon.

The world undergoes formation for twenty small eons, dwells for twenty small eons, decays for twenty small eons, and is empty for twenty small eons. Four of these sets of twenty small eons—four middle-sized eons—make up one great eon.

Celestial King Wisdom of Supreme Intent can universally cause worlds in the eons of formation, dwelling, and decay to all become pure and clear like a world in the eon of emptiness. This Celestial King has attained the Buddha’s state whereby the stages of formation, dwelling, and decay all become as pure as the eon of emptiness.

Sutra:

**Celestial King Pleasing, Pure, and Wonderful Sounds gained a passage into liberation of joyously and faithfully accepting all Sages’ Dharmas.**
Commentary:

The next Celestial King is named Pleasing, Pure, and Wonderful Sounds. Sentient beings adore this Celestial King and like to hear him speak the Dharma as he teaches and transforms them. He gained a passage into liberation of joyously and faithfully accepting all Sages’ Dharmas. He causes beings to happily believe in and accept the Dharmas of all Sages, that is, the Dharmas of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Sages Enlightened by Conditions, and Hearers. The dharmas that those in the Four Dharma Realms of Sages cultivate and proclaim to teach and transform beings are all called “Sages’ Dharmas.” This Celestial King has attained this samadhi of liberation.

Sutra:

**Celestial King Sound of Wholesome Reflection gained a passage into liberation of proclaiming for the duration of eons the meaning of all grounds and skillful means.**
Commentary:

The next Celestial King is named Sound of Wholesome Reflection. He has attained the sound of wholesome reflection, the sound of quieting the thoughts. He reverses the hearing to hear his own nature, and with that nature realizes the unsurpassed Way. He has become enlightened through sounds, hence his name, “Sound of Wholesome Reflection.” He gained a passage into liberation of proclaiming for the duration of eons. He abides in samadhi for countless eons. From within samadhi, he can speak Dharma and teach and transform beings.

Without rising from his seat, he travels to the ten directions to teach beings. He proclaims the meaning of all grounds. Speaking from various points of view, speaking in terms of motes of dust and in terms of lands, speaking of what is near and what is far away, he employs countless analogies to proclaim the meaning of all grounds, including the Ten Grounds, the Buddha Ground, the Bodhisattva Ground, the Ground of Hearers and Sages Enlightened by Conditions, the ground of ordinary people, the ground of sages, and so forth.

He expounds upon the principles of all those grounds and skillful means, all the various expedient dharma doors. He has attained this passage into liberation.

Sutra:

**Celestial King Proclaiming with Splendid Sound gained a passage into liberation of expediently making extensive offerings to all Bodhisattvas when they descend from the Tushita Heaven Palace to be born.**

Commentary:

The next Celestial King is named Proclaiming with Splendid Sound because of the exquisite sound of his proclamation. He gained a passage into liberation of expediently making extensive offerings to all. When Bodhisattvas are about to become Buddhas, they dwell in the Tuçita Heaven for a period of time, awaiting their turn to become the next Buddha. This Celestial King waits for all Bodhisattvas when they descend from the Tushita Heaven Palace to be born in the human realm. This is one of the Eight Marks of Realizing the Way, which are:

1.    Descending from the Tushita Heaven
2.    Dwelling in the womb
3.    Leaving the womb
4.    Leaving the home life
5.    Subduing demons
6.    Realizing Proper Enlightenment
7.    Turning the Dharma wheel
8.    Entering nirvana

When a Buddha descends from the Tushita Heaven, extensive offerings are made to all the countless Buddhas of the ten directions. This Celestial King also teaches and transforms ghosts and spirits with expedient means. This is the passage into liberation of expediently making extensive offerings. This Celestial King has gained this passage to unobstructed liberation.

Sutra: **Celestial King Most Profound Voice of Light gained a passage into liberation of contemplating the ocean of infinite spiritual powers and wisdom.**

Commentary:
The Celestial King named Most Profound Voice of Light communicates with light, using light to form all kinds of  sounds. He gained a passage into liberation of wisely contemplating the ocean of infinite spiritual powers and wisdom. He observes the Thus Come One’s infinite realm of being. The Thus Come One’s wisdom power and his spiritual powers are infinite, like an ocean. This Celestial King has attained this samadhi of liberation.

Sutra:

**Celestial King Vast Renown gained a passage into liberation of observing how the fulfillment of oceanic merit and virtue allows Buddhas to appear in the world and employ the power of expedients.**
Commentary:

The Celestial King named Vast Renown gained a passage into liberation of observing how the fulfillment of oceanic merit and virtue allows Buddhas to appear in the world and employ the power of expedients. Since the merit and virtue cultivated by the Buddhas of the ten directions is boundless and limitless beyond reckoning, it is described as oceanic.

When his ocean of merit and virtue is full and complete, a Buddha appears in the world. Thereupon he employs various expedients to teach and transform beings, enabling all those beings to fulfill their oceans of merit and virtue and become Buddhas, and then return to teach and transform other beings with expedient means. This Celestial King attained this passage into liberation.

Sutra:

**Celestial King Supreme Pure Light gained a passage into liberation of giving rise to a treasury of profound faith and delight in the powerful past vows of Thus Come Ones.**

**At that time, Celestial King Winsome Light received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, universally contemplated the multitudes of the Heavens of Lesser Light, the Heavens of Limitless Light, and the Heavens of Utmost Light, and spoke the following verse:**

Commentary:

The Celestial King named Supreme Pure Light gained a passage into liberation of giving rise to a treasury of profound faith and delight in the powerful past vows of Thus Come Ones. This Celestial King has understood the power of the vows the Thus Come Ones made while on the level of planting causes, and this has evoked deep faith and interest in him. He has deep, unswerving faith in the Thus Come Ones’ state. He feels great joy and delight toward the Dharma treasury and this kind of state. He has attained this passage into liberation.

At that time, Celestial King Winsome Light received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, the inconceivable, awesome strength of his spiritual powers, universally contemplated the multitudes of the Heavens of Lesser Light, the Heavens of Limitless Light, and the Heavens of Utmost Light, and spoke the following verse. He spoke verses to reiterate the meaning, to enable beings to deeply understand the principles involved.

Sutra:
 **I recall the past practices of the Thus Come One,
How he served and made offerings to innumerable Buddhas.
Relying on the Buddha’s awesome strength, I now perceive
All the pure karma stemming from his fundamental faith.**
Commentary:

Celestial King Winsome Light says: I recall the past practices of the Thus Come One. I recollect the practices cultivated by the Thus Come One in the past, how he served and made offerings to innumerable Buddhas. He attended upon all those Buddhas, acting as their servant, undertaking all kinds of duties. He also extensively made offerings to countless Buddhas in the ten directions. Relying on the Buddha’s awesome strength, I now perceive / All the pure karma stemming from his fundamental faith. Based upon his faith, the Buddha cultivated pure, undefiled karma. I now see and understand this state.

Sutra:

**The Buddha’s body, devoid of form, is free of any defilement.
He dwells forever on the ground of compassion and pity,
Casting out all the woes of the world.
This is the liberation of Exquisite Light.**
Commentary:

The Buddha’s body, devoid of form, is free of any defilement. The Buddha’s Dharma body pervades the Dharma Realm, and yet he is without form or appearance. Since he is devoid of form, he can pervade the Dharma Realm. If he had a fixed form, his body would have a limit and he would be restricted. Being formless, his body cannot be defiled by filth. If it had form, it would get defiled. Since it is without form, it naturally leaves all defilement behind. “Defilement” refers to ignorance and afflictions; it means false thinking. An impure mind and improper thoughts are defiled. The Buddha has no mark of self, others, beings, or life span. Having emptied the four marks, one could not become defiled, even if one might want to. Therefore, the Buddha leaves behind all filth, all defiled dharmas.

He dwells forever on the ground of compassion and pity. He constantly dwells on the ground of great kindness, great compassion, and pity for all beings. He takes great kindness and compassion as his dwelling; it is the house he lives in. The Buddha always pities beings and vows to save them all. He helps them to leave suffering and attain bliss. Beings become adept at casting out all the woes of the world. All the worries and hardships of the world are normally overwhelming. Because of them, beings remain submerged in the sea of suffering, confused and unable to wake up. But the Buddha with his compassion and pity dispels their woes and hardships, causing them to vanish.

This is the liberation of Celestial King Exquisite Light. This is the state he has been enlightened to and the samadhi of liberation he has attained.

Sutra:

**The Buddhadharma is vast and boundless;
The oceans of all lands appear within it.
The stages of formation and decay of each are different.
Such is the power of liberation of the god Comfortable Sound.**
Commentary:

Celestial King Exquisite Light understood the state of the Buddha’s body being formless and free from defilement. Celestial King Comfortable Sound observes a different state. He understands that the Buddhadharma is vast and boundless. The Buddha spoke the 84,000 dharma doors to counteract the 84,000 afflictions of beings. For however many afflictions exist, that many methods to cure them also exist. Each method is used to counteract a specific affliction. There is nothing vaster, greater, or loftier than the Buddhadharma. It has no boundaries or limits. The oceans of all lands appear within it. Lands as numerous as motes of dust appear within the Dharma. Or, you could say that all dharmas appear in the midst of the ocean of lands for the purpose of teaching and transforming beings.

The stages of formation and decay of each are different. Every world goes through the four stages of formation, dwelling, decay, and emptiness. Each of them lasts twenty small eons, making a total of eighty small eons, or four middle-sized eons. Twenty small eons comprise a middle-sized eon, and four middle-sized eons comprise one great eon. Each great eon contains those four stages of formation, dwelling, decay, and emptiness. After this world decays, another world comes into being. After that world decays, yet another world comes into being. This world, that world, and countless worlds exist. This land, that land, and countless lands can be found. Lands are also infinite in number. The four stages that worlds go through are equivalent to their birth and death. Worlds also undergo birth and death. The formation of a world is its birth; its decay and emptiness are its death. The planet dies. But when this planet dies, another planet is born, and on it many beings are born at the same time. When a planet dies, the beings on it also perish. Therefore, the text says, “The stages of formation and decay of each are different.” Each world goes through its individual formation, dwelling, decay, and emptiness. When one world comes into being, another world decays. There are infinitely many worlds and lands in space. The worlds mutually differ from one another, and so do the lands. Just take a look at our world, where there are well over a hundred countries and many different languages and forms of writing.

Such is the power of liberation of the god Comfortable Sound. Celestial King Comfortable Sound has attained this state of liberation.

Sutra:
 **The Buddha, with his unequalled spiritual powers,
Appears everywhere in the vast lands of the ten directions,
Causing those lands to manifest eternally, adorned and pure.
Such is the expedient emancipation of Supreme Intent.**

Commentary:

The Buddha is a greatly enlightened one. Whoever is truly enlightened is a Buddha; whoever is truly muddled is a ghost. The difference between a Buddha and a ghost is the difference between enlightenment and confusion. Confused, one is a sentient being; enlightened, one is a Buddha. The Sixth Patriarch said,

The Dharma is inherently neither sudden nor gradual,
But awakening from confusion may be fast or slow.

There is no such thing as sudden dharmas or gradual dharmas. Sudden dharmas come about from gradual dharmas, and gradual dharmas come about from sudden dharmas. Awakening from confusion is a matter of time. Some people awaken more quickly than others.

The Buddha, with his unequalled spiritual powers. What are the Buddha’s spiritual powers? The Buddha has three types of bodies, four kinds of wisdom, five eyes, and six spiritual powers.
 **The Three Types of Bodies**

1.    Dharma body
2.    reward body
3.    Transformation bodies

**The Four Kinds of Wisdom**

1.    Perfect mirror-like wisdom
2.    Equal wisdom
3.    Wonderful contemplative wisdom
4.    Wisdom of accomplishment

**The Five Eyes**

1.    Buddha eye
2.    Dharma eye
3.    Wisdom eye
4.    Heavenly eye
5.    Flesh eye

**The Six Spiritual Powers**

1.    Power of the heavenly eye
2.    Power of the heavenly ear
3.    Power of knowing others’ thoughts
4.    Power of knowing past lives
5.    Powers derived from a spiritual basis
6.    Ending of outflows

The strength of the Buddha’s spiritual powers is inconceivable; therefore they are “unequaled.” Nothing can compare with them. No other sage can match the Buddha. He appears everywhere in the vast lands of the ten directions. In a single thought, the Buddha can appear in lands throughout the ten directions, teaching and transforming the beings there and causing those lands to manifest eternally, adorned and pure. He causes all Buddhalands to be extremely beautiful and immaculate, and to be that way constantly.

Such is the expedient emancipation of Supreme Intent. This is the expedient dharma door attained by Celestial King Supreme Intent.

Sutra:

**He rendered homage to all Thus Come Ones,
Numerous as dust motes in oceans of lands.
He lost no opportunity to hear the Dharma and leave defilement.
The dharma door of the god Wonderful Sounds functions thus.**
Commentary:

“Losing no opportunity” means not casually mishandling even the tiniest thing so that it is lost, such as not wasting even a speck of flour. Not to mention a grain of rice, which is bigger, you don’t want to waste even a speck of flour.

He rendered homage to all Thus Come Ones / Numerous as dust motes in oceans of lands. When he was cultivating at the level of planting causes, Sãkyamuni Buddha made offerings and paid homage to Buddhas as many as dust motes in lands. He lost no opportunity to hear the Dharma and leave defilement. This line describes Sãkyamuni Buddha while he was on the level of planting causes, not when he had already realized Buddhahood. Having heard the Dharma, he was freed from all ignorance and defilement—from greed, anger, and delusion. This is what he did while planting causes. Don’t mistakenly assume that the Buddha has to listen to Dharma. What Dharma would the Buddha need to hear? The Buddha is already adorned with the ten thousand virtues. He only speaks the Dharma; he doesn’t have to listen to the Dharma. This line of verse is referring to how the Buddha heard the Dharma before he became a Buddha, while at the level of planting causes. He left all defiled dharmas. He did not pass up the opportunity to study any Dharma. He paid close attention to even the slightest bit of Dharma and relied on the Dharma to cultivate, and thus he was able to free himself from defilement. He wouldn’t casually forget even the tiniest bit of Dharma.

The dharma door of the god Wonderful Sounds functions thus. Who understands this state? Celestial King Wonderful Sounds understands the great functioning of this dharma door.

The disciple who explained this passage should develop a sharper sense of judgment so he can distinguish the Dharma from what is not the Dharma. You shouldn’t confuse the Buddha with sentient beings, saying that the Buddha and sentient beings both listen to the Dharma, but that they are slightly different. Exactly how are they different? You haven’t recognized the issue clearly. Why would the Buddha need to hear the Dharma? The Buddha doesn’t need to hear the Dharma. The Buddha is the Dharma King who has attained self-mastery in the Dharma. Sentient beings need to hear the Dharma. This passage refers to how Sãkyamuni Buddha, at the level of planting causes, before he became a Buddha, heard the Dharma and left defilement. He didn’t overlook even the tiniest bit of Dharma. All of you think it over. Is my disciple’s explanation correct or is mine? My explanation was not nearly as long as my disciple’s.

Sutra:

**The Buddha, throughout measureless oceans of great eons,
Expounded the grounds with peerless skill-in-means.
What he said remains infinite and unending.
The god Sound of Wholesome Reflection understands this meaning.**
Commentary:

The Buddha continued throughout measureless oceans of great eons. In the past, while at the level of planting causes, Sãkyamuni Buddha passed through innumerable great eons, which were as vast as an ocean. There’s no way to discuss them with numbers or analogies, so they are likened to an ocean. It is impossible to fathom how deep, wide, and vast the ocean is. The measureless eons during which the Buddha cultivated resemble an ocean.

During that time, he expounded upon the grounds with peerless skill-in-means. “Ground” carries the meaning of production and growth, since the myriad things grow from the earth. Here, it means starting from the ground of common people and reaching all the way to the ground of sages. It takes a long period of time to arrive at the position of sagehood. The Buddha used various skillful means to explain the meaning of the grounds, and his exposition was peerless: None of the Bodhisattvas, Sages Enlightened by Conditions, Hearers, or gods could match it.

What he said remains infinite and unending. The expedient dharmas that he spoke are boundless and without end. Speaking from various points of view, in terms of dust motes and in terms of lands, there is no way to exhaustively discuss them all. The god Sound of Wholesome Reflection understands this meaning. Celestial King Sound of Wholesome Reflection understands this state and principle.

Sutra:

**The Thus Come One’s spiritual transformations open infinite doors.
In a single thought he can appear in all places.
His spirit descended, and he realized the Way, enacting a great expedient.
Splendid Sound is liberated thus.**
Commentary:

The Thus Come One’s spiritual transformations open infinite doors. The transformations wrought by his spiritual powers are infinite, boundless, and measureless. Unlike Arhats who have only Eighteen Transformations and Bodhisattvas who have millions of transformations and spiritual powers, the Buddhas’ spiritual transformations are infinite. “Spiritual” means mysterious and unfathomable, beyond imagination and reckoning. It refers to that which the mind cannot think about and words cannot describe. These changes are infinite. One door gives rise to countless doors; countless doors return to the one door. One is many; many are one. One and many are nondual; one and many are measureless.

In a single thought he can appear in all places. Without leaving the Way-place, he pervades the Dharma Realm. The Buddha is seated in samÁdhi, and yet, throughout space and the Dharma Realm, there is no place where he doesn’t manifest.

His spirit descended from the Tushita Heaven, which is where every Bodhisattva undergoing his last rebirth waits for his turn to become a Buddha. Seated on the Dharma seat in that heaven, he waits to succeed to the Buddha’s position. Right now Maitreya Bodhisattva is in that heaven, waiting to come down to earth to become the next Buddha. For how long must he wait? Those of externalist sects claim that Maitreya Bodhisattva is due here soon. They say, “Our teacher is Maitreya Bodhisattva. This will be his ninth time coming to the world, and on the tenth round he will become a Buddha.” That is wrong. Maitreya Bodhisattva isn’t due to become a Buddha that soon. When will he become a Buddha?

Right now we are in a period of decrease in this eon. Every hundred years, the average human life span decreases by one year, and the average height decreases by one inch. Right now the average human life span is around sixty years. It will keep decreasing down to ten years. That’s an average. Of course there will be those who live to be twenty, and those who only live one or two months, but we are talking about the average age. This will be followed by a period of increase. Every hundred years, our life span will increase by one year and our height by one inch. This increase continues until our life span reaches a maximum of 84,000 years, at which point it will start to decrease again. When the human life span reaches 80,000 years, Maitreya Bodhisattva will appear in the world. He will teach and transform beings very quickly. In one day and night, he will finish teaching all the beings he is supposed to teach. He is unlike Sãkyamuni Buddha, who spoke the Dharma for forty-nine years in over three hundred assemblies.

When Maitreya Bodhisattva appears in the world, human blood won’t be red in color; it will be white. But that’s a matter of the future, and so we won’t delve into it now. If we bring it up, some people will be skeptical.

Anyway, every Bodhisattva who is about to become a Buddha must first wait in the Tushita Heaven. Sãkyamuni Buddha also waited in that heaven, and then descended to earth. He entered his mother’s womb and dwelt in the womb, left the womb, realized the Way, taught and transformed sentient beings by turning the Dharma wheel, and entered nirvana. At that point, the Buddha completed his work.

His spirit descended, and he realized the Way, enacting a great expedient. He flung the door of expedients open wide to teach and transform beings and to liberate them. He taught all the beings he was meant to teach, and left the rest to Maitreya Bodhisattva. Beings who have affinities with Maitreya Bodhisattva will encounter him in the Three Convenings of the Dragon Flower Assembly Splendid Sound is liberated thus. Celestial King Proclaiming with Splendid Sound understands this passage into liberation.

Sutra:

**Sustained by awesome strength, he can discuss
And manifest incidents involving the Buddhas’ spiritual powers.
Beings are purified according to their faculties and desires.
This is the passage into liberation of the god Voice of Light.**
Commentary:

The Buddha achieved his awesome strength through cultivating virtue for many eons, and so we speak of his “awesome virtue” or “awesome strength.” Sustained by this awesome strength, he can bring peace to a world that was fated to perish. Moreover, he can discuss various wholesome dharmas and expedient methods to teach and transform beings, making them realize that, “The sea of suffering is boundless; a turn of the head is the other shore.”

And he can manifest incidents involving the miraculous use of all Buddhas’ spiritual powers. / Beings are purified according to their faculties and desires, their dispositions and propensities. Some beings have many good roots from the past, but due to the mixture of good and evil in the seeds or causes that they planted, in this life they do evil instead of good. Why have they not suffered the consequences of that evil in this life? Since they have good roots from the past, in this life they are enjoying their rewards from their past good deeds, whereas the retribution for their bad deeds has not yet ripened. When that retribution ripens in the future, they will have to suffer the consequences of their evildoing. Other beings planted many seeds of evil in the past, but in this life they do a lot of good deeds, and so their evil seeds have not borne fruit and they have not suffered the retribution yet.

Since beings are endowed with different faculties, they have different experiences. Each being has different aspirations. Some aspire to own airplanes; some like ships; some like trains; others like cars. Almost everyone likes cars. Some people desire to be high officials; others want to strike it rich; some wish to have fancy houses; others like to wear pretty clothes. In short, there are many kinds of desires. But materialistic desires bind people up. People are bound up by their inherited personalities and covered by their desire for material things. Their wisdom is smothered, and their inborn character hampers them. The Buddha teaches and transforms them in accordance with their faculties and aspirations, enabling them to plant good roots and purify themselves of desires. Thus the text says, “Beings are purified.”

This is the passage into liberation of the god Voice of Light. That Celestial King understands this state of the Buddha and attained this passage into liberation.

Sutra:

**The Thus Come One’s wisdom is boundless.
In the world he is peerless and without attachment.
Responding with a kind heart, he appears before all beings.
The god Vast Renown awakens to this truth.**
Commentary:

The Thus Come One’s wisdom is boundless. The Thus Come One is one of great enlightenment and great wisdom. Yet you shouldn’t look upon the Buddha as being too lofty. He is the same as sentient beings, except that he has great understanding. There is nothing he doesn’t know and understand. His wisdom has no limit or boundaries. It pervades all of space throughout the Dharma Realm.

In the world he is peerless and without attachment. No one in the world has wisdom as great as the Buddha’s. Even the Bodhisattvas’ wisdom cannot compare with the Buddha’s. Not only is he peerless in the world, he is also peerless in the heavens. No one can compare with the Buddha. Although the Buddha has great wisdom, he is not attached to it. He is not attached to anything at all, and in that way is unlike ordinary people. When they see someone who excels at something, they compare themselves to him, saying, “I’m just the same as he!” When they see someone else who is the best in something, they say, “I’m also the same as he.” Yet, when they see a dog, these people never think, “I’m just the same as that dog.” When they see a cat, they never think, “I’m just the same as that cat.” Even if they look just like a dog or a cat, they would never compare themselves to a dog or a cat. Why, then, do they compare themselves to someone lofty? They are attached. They want to avail themselves of the other person’s excellence to mask their own inadequacy.

For example, some of you may remember the elderly man in San Francisco who used to go around advertising on my behalf, saying, “Such and such a person is enlightened, and I’m just like him!” He was pathetic. Responding with a kind heart, he appears before all beings.

Endowed with great wisdom and great kindness and compassion, the Buddha uses that compassion to teach beings. He universally responds to their varying potentials. The Buddha will save anyone who has affinities with him. He appears before all beings. The god Vast Renown awakens to this truth. Celestial King Vast Renown understands this principle.

Sutra:
 **In the past the Buddha practiced in quest of bodhi,
Making offerings to all Buddhas in the ten directions.
Before each and every Buddha, he made vows.
Upon hearing this, Supreme Light experiences great joy.**
Commentary:

In the past when the Buddha Sãkyamuni was on the level of planting causes, he practiced in quest of bodhi, practicing the Bodhisattva Path, making offerings of his body and life to all Buddhas in the ten directions.
As he cultivated the Bodhisattva Path in quest of the supreme fruit of Buddhahood, he gave up his own life without hesitation, how much more external wealth. When it was necessary to renounce his own body, mind, and life, he would do so. Therefore, over the entire earth, there is not a single mote of dust where the Buddhas of the past, the present, and the future have not given up their lives. Every single spot on earth is a place where the Buddhas have given up their lives.

The Buddha made offerings to all Buddhas of the ten directions. It wasn’t that he made offerings to the Buddhas of the east, but not to those of the west; or to the Buddhas of the south, but not to those of the north; or to the Buddhas above, but not to those below. It wasn’t like that. He made offerings to the Way-places of all Buddhas. Before each and every Buddha, he made vows. At all those Way-places, he made countless great vows to present offerings to the Buddhas of the ten directions. Upon hearing this, Supreme Light experiences great joy. Having understood this state, Celestial King Supreme Light is extremely happy.

5) Heavens of the First Dhyana (Great Brahmā Kings, etc.)

Sutra:

**Moreover, Brahma King Sikhin gained a passage into liberation of universally dwelling in the bodhimandas of the ten directions, speaking Dharma there, and being pure and untainted in his actions.**
Commentary:

Moreover, Brahma King Sikhin, whose name translates as “cowl,” is a pure Celestial King who gained a passage into liberation of universally dwelling throughout the Dharma Realm, in the bodhimandas of the ten directions. People who have listened to the sutras before will know what the ten directions are, but those who haven’t listened won’t. The ten directions are above, below, the four cardinal directions [north, south, east, west], and the four intermediary directions [northeast, northwest, southeast, southwest].

When Buddhas appear in the world, they establish bodhimandas or Way-places, that is, places for cultivating the Way. For instance, we have a Way-place here. Places where people apply effort on the Way are called Way-places. They are places for cultivating the Way and speaking Dharma there to teach and transform beings so that they can turn away from confusion and return to enlightenment, leave defilement and attain purity. And being pure and untainted in his actions. He speaks Dharma and personally practices pure dharmas, which are devoid of defiled attachments. Purity refers to the absence of defiled attachments. One with defiled attachments is not pure.

This Celestial King practices the dharma of “being pure and free of defiled attachments.” Defiled attachments include being selfish, seeking personal advantage, and being jealous and obstructive. If you are free of these faults and of greed, anger, and delusion, then you have no defiled attachments. Being free of defiled attachments, you can gain this passage into liberation, this dharma door of non-obstruction.

Sutra:

**Brahma King Wisdom Light gained a passage into liberation of enabling all sentient beings to enter dhyana and remain in samadhi.**
Commentary:

Brahma King Wisdom Light gained a passage into liberation of enabling all sentient beings to enter dhyana and remain in samadhi. This Brahma King has the light of wisdom. He can cause sentient beings to enter and remain in a state of dhyana samadhi. They take dhyana as their food and drink, and dwell constantly in samadhi. That’s the passage into liberation this Brahma King attained.

Sutra:

**Brahma King Light of Wholesome Reflective Wisdom gained a passage into liberation of universally entering all inconceivable dharmas.**

Commentary:

The next Brahma King is named Light of Wholesome Reflective Wisdom. There are three types of wisdom: wisdom derived from hearing, wisdom derived from reflection, and wisdom derived from cultivation. This King attained a radiant wisdom derived from reflection. He gained a passage into liberation of universally entering all inconceivable dharmas. Inconceivable dharmas are wonderful dharmas. Wonderful dharmas are inconceivable. If they could be conceived of, they wouldn’t be wonderful dharmas.

Those who attain this state know it themselves; there is no way to talk about it. “It’s just as when a person drinks water, he himself knows whether it is cold or warm.” Knowing and yet being unable to talk about it describes the patience with the nonarising of dharmas. This god attained this passage into liberation. Inconceivable dharmas are perfectly interpenetrating without obstruction. They are ineffably wonderful.

Sutra:

**Brahma King Universal Cloud Sound gained a passage into liberation of entering all Buddhas’ oceans of sounds.**

Commentary:

Every person has his own unique enlightenment and attainment to the Dharma. Each Brahma King also has his own state of enlightenment. The next Brahma King is named Universal Cloud Sound. He has attained the oceans of the Buddhas’ sounds, and his name is “Universal Cloud Sound” because he pervasively emits sounds like thunderclouds. He gained a passage into liberation of entering all the ten directions’ Buddhas’ oceans of sounds. We might know how to speak a human language, but we don’t know how to speak the language of dogs. We know how to speak English, but we might not know how to speak Japanese. And even if we master Japanese, we might not know German. In short, it’s not easy to master all languages. However, the Buddha’s speaking of Dharma covers all the oceans of languages. Every kind of being can understand the Buddha’s speech. People understand, and so do animals. Even bugs understand, because the Buddha enters the ocean of the languages of all beings.

This Brahma King has attained the samadhi of entering the oceans of sounds of all Buddhas. He has gained this passage into liberation and this state of nonobstruction.

Sutra:

**Brahma King Freely Contemplating the Sounds and Speech in the World gained a passage into liberation of recollecting how the Bodhisattvas teach and transform all sentient beings with expedients.**
Commentary:

The next Brahma King is named Freely Contemplating the Sounds and Speech in the World. He attained freedom and ease through observing all the languages and sounds of the world. Having attained the samadhi of languages and sounds, he gained a passage into liberation of recollecting. Recollecting is the opposite of forgetting. He recollects all dharmas. He recalls how the Bodhisattvas teach and transform all sentient beings with expedients. What are expedients? They are provisional, clever methods used on a temporary basis, not on a permanent, unchanging basis. Expedients may be appropriate at a certain time, but not at other times. Expedient dharmas must be applied according to the situation, just as medicine is dispensed according to the sickness. One speaks the Dharma according to each individual’s needs.

For example, people who are sick may be given arsenic. In Chinese, arsenic is also called “stone of credibility” and “people’s words.” Arsenic can poison people lethally. In tiny amounts, however, it is not fatal. If people take more than one qian [one-tenth of a Chinese ounce], they might die from it. But if they take less than one qian, it’s an extremely effective cure for many illnesses. Arsenic is basically poisonous, but if used in small amounts it can cure poisonous diseases.

That’s an example of an expedient method. It is basically harmful, but at the same time essential for curing certain illnesses. It must be used sparingly, however.

Expedients work that way. A certain method should basically not be used, but under certain circumstances, one must resort to that method. For instance, when the Buddha used his empty fist to save a child’s life, he was using an expedient method. When the Buddha was in the world, one day he saw an infant crawling toward a well and realized that the child was about to fall into it. At that point, if you tried to stop the child from crawling toward the well, the child would want to head toward it even more. And so the Buddha didn’t try to grab the child, but instead said, “Here, lad! I have some candy in my hand!” The child immediately stopped crawled toward the well and turned around. He wanted the candy. Did the Buddha have candy in his hand? No, but it wouldn’t have been too late if he had gotten some candy for the child after he turned back. Was the Buddha lying to the child when he said he had candy in his hand when he actually didn’t? No. The Buddha was trying to save the child’s life, but he knew the child only cared about candy. You have to treat sentient beings in the same way. Give them whatever they like, and then gradually speak Dharma for them. That’s an expedient method.

Sutra:

**Brahma King Still and Quiet Bright Eyes gained a passage into liberation of manifesting the different aspects of worldly karmic retributions.**

Commentary:

The next Brahma King is named Still and Quiet Bright Eyes. He has gained a passage into liberation of manifesting the different aspects of worldly karmic retributions. What is meant by worldly karmic retributions? People in the world reap the results of whatever causes they create. If they plant good causes, they reap good results. If they plant evil causes, they reap evil results. Good causes and good results can lead people all the way up to the Four Dharma Realms of Sages, to become Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Sages Enlightened by Conditions, and Hearers. They can also be born in the heavens or the human realm, which is the reward of gods and people. On the other hand, evil causes lead to evil results, such as falling into the hells, turning into hungry ghosts, or becoming animals. Rewards and retributions are never off by a hair.

If you wish to know the causes you created in past lives,
Observe what you are undergoing in this life.
If you wish to know what results you’ll reap in the future,
Contemplate what you are doing in this life.

If you do many meritorious deeds, your future lives will be pleasant. If you create many offenses, however, then you may be reborn as a cow or a horse. If you do nothing but cheat people, you will be reborn as a chicken. Chickens become chickens because of their habit of lying. When hens lay eggs, they cry out, “Too big! Too big! My eggs are bigger than everyone else’s.” Or, this could mean, “They are the biggest!” [In Chinese, “too big” (guo da 過大) can be interpreted as meaning “big offenses,” and “the biggest” (zui da 最大) sounds the same as “massive transgressions.”] The hen doesn’t understand this, so she clucks to brag about her eggs, but when we hear her, we understand, “Ah, the chicken’s offenses are too big! Her transgressions are massive!” It’s the same when the Buddha sees sentient beings doing deluded things, and he thinks, “Ah, that’s how they are.”

That’s how the principle of cause and effect works in the world. For whatever karma you create, you will undergo the exact retribution, and it won’t be off by a hair. Each person’s karmic retribution has its own aspects. Every being also carries the mark of his own unique karmic retribution. For instance, pigs have the special appearance of their own karmic retribution, as do horses, and cows. If pigs are born among Muslims, they won’t be eaten.

The Hindu religion forbids the slaughtering of cows. Americans eat beef, but those of the Hindu religion consider cows to be sacred and don’t kill cattle. Those are examples of the different aspects of beings’ karmic retribution. There used to be many wild buffalo in America, but the European settlers exploited them, to the point that the native Americans could no longer find buffalo to eat. Now, if cattle are born in India, nobody will slaughter them for food. And so, although cattle in America and cattle in India may belong to the same species, the characteristics of their karmic retribution are different.

Some people are very wealthy, but childless. For instance, President Johnson didn’t have a son. Nixon was also President, but had no son. That’s a case of having an honored position, but no son. Other people have sons, but not honored positions. They don’t get to be president. Kennedy was the President, but he was assassinated. Such are the different causes and conditions of sentient beings. Every person has his own unique environment and circumstances. This Celestial King attained this samadhi of liberation.

Sutra:

**Brahma King Pervasive Light gained a passage into liberation of appearing before the different categories of sentient beings accordingly, so as to tame and subdue them.**

Commentary:

Brahma King Pervasive Light gained a passage into liberation of appearing before the different categories of sentient beings. There are various species of beings, all different from one another, and yet this Celestial King is capable of appearing before them all accordingly, so as to tame and subdue them. When he meets a tiger, he can appear as a tiger to tame and subdue tigers. When he meets dragons, he can appear as a dragon to tame and subdue dragons. When he encounters birds, he appears as a bird to teach them. He appears among different species of beings, assuming the same form as them, and guides them to make the resolve for bodhi and cultivate the Unsurpassed Way. He attained this passage into liberation.

Sutra:

**Brahma King Transforming Sounds gained a passage into liberation of residing in the purity of all dharmas and the state of quiescent practice.**

Commentary:

Brahma King Transforming Sounds can effect millions of changes and transformations in his voice and sounds. He gained a passage into liberation of residing in the purity of all dharmas. He takes dharmas as his abode, and he has attained the pure, bright quality of dharmas and the state of quiescent practice. That’s a state of doing nothing and yet doing everything, a still and quiet state of effortless practice. He dwells in the dharma of nonobstruction and the state of quiescence.

Sutra:

**Brahma King Dazzling Eyes gained a passage into liberation of being unattached to anything, boundless, independent, and always manifesting with diligence.**

Commentary:

The next Brahma King is named Dazzling Eyes, because his light illumines sentient beings, enabling them to attain the Dharma-selecting eye and to distinguish the Dharma from what is not the Dharma. He gained a passage into liberation of being unattached to anything, boundless, independent. Having understood that the Buddha’s body resembles space, he is not attached to either existence or emptiness. Emptiness is nothing whatsoever, and existence means something exists. He is not attached to either of the extremes of emptiness and existence. The Buddha’s Dharma body resembles space; it is boundless and independent. It is like space, and space depends on nothing whatsoever.

This Brahma King is always manifesting with diligence. Although the Buddha resembles space, he constantly appears in the world. His resembling space does not imply that he is idle. Rather, the Buddha keeps appearing in the world. Why? Because sentient beings haven’t ended birth and death. Since they haven’t understood the matter of birth and death, the Buddha constantly appears in the world to teach and transform them, leading them from confusion to enlightenment, from suffering to joy. Brahma King Dazzling Eyes had such an awakening and attained such a samÁdhi of liberation.

Sutra:

**Brahma King Pleasing, Ocean-like Sounds gained a passage into liberation of constantly reflecting upon and contemplating inexhaustible dharmas.**
Commentary:

The next Brahma King is named Pleasing, Ocean-like Sounds. Beings are delighted to see him. When he teaches beings the Dharma, his mighty voice resembles the pure sound of the ocean tide. He gained a passage into liberation of constantly reflecting upon and contemplating inexhaustible dharmas. “Reflecting” refers to chan, or in Sanskrit, dhyana, which means “cultivation of reflection.” This Brahma King has acquired the reflective skill of dhyana-samadhi. He universally contemplates all worldly and world-transcending dharmas, which are unending and inconceivably wonderful. From within samadhi, he develops great wisdom and understands the true nature of all dharmas and the inconceivably wonderful principle underlying the inexhaustible treasury of Dharma. He gained this passage into liberation.

Sutra:

**At that time, Great Brahma King Shikhinreceived the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, universally contemplated the multitudes of the Brahma Heavens—the Heavens of Brahma Ministers, the Heavens of Brahma Multitudes, and the Great Brahma Heavens—and spoke the following verse:**

Commentary:

At that time, right after the Brahma King Pleasing, Ocean-like Sounds had understood his dharma door of constantly reflecting on and contemplating inexhaustible dharmas, Great Brahma King Shikhinreceived the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, universally contemplated with his wisdom the multitudes of the Brahma Heavens—the Heavens of Brahma Ministers, the Heavens of Brahma Multitudes, and the Great Brahma Heavens. There were endless multitudes of gods from limitlessly many of these heavens. The Brahma King contemplated them and spoke the following verse to elucidate the true meaning of the Dharma.

Sutra:

**The Buddha’s body is pure and ever quiescent.
His radiance shines on everyone in all worlds.
Without form, without action, and without any image or reflection,
Like a cloud in the sky: Perceive him thus.**

Commentary:

This, the first of ten verses, is spoken by the Brahma Heaven King Sikhin. The Buddha’s body is pure and ever quiescent. Although it is pure and quiet, his radiance shines on everyone in all worlds, reaching all worlds. Does the Buddha’s body have form and appearance? No. It is without form, without action, without traces, and without any image or reflection. Then what is it like? Like a cloud in the sky: Perceive him thus. Although beings see clouds in the sky, the clouds do not remain unchanging. Momentarily they appear; then they are gone. Likewise, when the Buddha uses his light to illuminate the world, beings who are ready will receive the light. Those whose conditions are not yet mature won’t be aware of the Buddha’s light. The Buddha’s body is pure and quiescent, without form or action, like a cloud in the sky.

Sutra:

**The state of concentration of the Buddha’s body,
Unfathomable by any sentient being,
Is revealed to them through inconceivable expedient methods.
King Wisdom Light enlightens thus.**

Commentary:

As to the state of concentration of the Buddha’s body, it is simply thus, constantly abiding in great samadhi. The Buddha does not enter or leave concentration. There is neither motion nor stillness within this state of concentration. The Buddha never leaves his state of concentration. He remains in samadhi at all times, and his state is unfathomable by any sentient being. No one can understand or measure this state. It is revealed to them through inconceivable expedient methods.  He reveals this inconceivable expedient dharma door to beings, inspiring them to bring forth a great bodhi resolve and quickly realize Proper Enlightenment. Brahma King Wisdom Light enlightens thus. He understands this state.

Sutra:

**Oceans of dharma doors, as many as motes of dust in Buddhalands,
Can be proclaimed completely in a single sentence.
Yet oceans of eons would not be time enough to describe them all.
Light of Wholesome Reflective Wisdom is liberated thus.**

Commentary:

Oceans of dharma doors are as many as motes of dust in Buddhalands. This refers not just to one Buddhaland, but to the Buddhalands of the ten directions. How many lands are there? As many as there are dust motes. And that means not just motes of dust in one world, but all the dust motes in space throughout the Dharma Realm. There are that many of what? There are that many oceans of dharma doors. Each dust mote can become an ocean, and each ocean contains countless oceans of dharma doors. Just how many are there? It would be an infinite number. There are so many dharma doors that they are unending, layer upon layer, and there is no way to describe them exhaustively. And yet, if we were to sum them up, they can be proclaimed completely in a single sentence. What is this single sentence? It is the Character of Reality. The Character of Reality is without character, and yet there is nothing that is uncharacterized by it. That sums them up in one statement. The Character of Reality includes all dharma doors. You could also call it “True Suchness” or “Buddha nature,” because all dharma doors flow forth from the Buddha nature. One sentence alone can encompass all the infinitely many dharma doors.

Yet, although one sentence can sum them up, oceans of eons would not be time enough to describe them all. Since dharma doors are as numerous as dust motes, even if one were to expound them to the ends of time, still one couldn’t finish talking about them. This is speaking in terms of expedients. Whereas the preceding line refers to the Character of Reality, of which nothing can be said, this line refers to the provisional teaching. These dharma doors can be expounded endlessly throughout oceans of eons in the past, the present, and the future.

The preceding line says that everything can be proclaimed in a single sentence, and yet this line says that there is no way to finish speaking. Isn’t that a contradiction? No. The preceding line speaks in terms of the Character of Reality, and so everything can be said in one sentence. This following line speaks in terms of the provisional teaching, and so there are endless things to say. The former line refers to the general principle, which can be summed up in a sentence; the latter line refers to the specific instances, which could never be fully described. Also, we could say that the former line refers to the Apparent Teaching, which can be described in one sentence. But the Secret Teaching encompasses limitless meanings, which could never be completely discussed.

There are various ways to explain this passage. Someone also brought up this point: Before entering nirvana, the Buddha declared that he had not spoken a single sentence in his entire life. You could explain it that way. However, the Flower Adornment Sutra was spoken when the Buddha first realized the Way, long before he entered nirvana.

Light of Wholesome Reflective Wisdom is liberated thus. This Brahma King spoke this verse because he understood this state. Each of you who are studying the Buddhadharma might write a verse in praise of a certain sutra, a certain Buddha, a certain Bodhisattva, or a certain good advisor. You may all praise the same Buddha, Bodhisattva, or good advisor, but your viewpoints will all be different.

Maybe one person will praise Guanshiyin Bodhisattva for rescuing beings from seven types of difficulty, responding to their two requests, and having fourteen kinds of fearlessnesses, nineteen ways of speaking Dharma, thirty-two response bodies, and so on. Another person may laud other aspects of the Bodhisattva. Each person praises the Bodhisattva from a different angle. Your verses may be different, yet your principles are all correct. Each person has his or her own principle and insight. This illustrates the point in terms of us common people. Brahma Kings, however, are sages manifesting as gods, and they see inconceivable states of the Buddhas.

This four-line verse extols the inconceivability of the Dharma. This Brahma King is skilled in reflection. Since he reflects on wonderful states, the verses he utters are inconceivable. Moreover, since he possesses wisdom-light, the Dharma he speaks is not easy to understand.

He says, “Take a look. The Buddhadharma is as expansive as oceans of dust motes. If each dust mote were to become an ocean, how many oceans would there be? Although there are that many oceans, a single sentence can completely encompass all dharma doors.” How could that be possible? But he says it is so.

Then he says: If you were to expound the Dharma to the ends of time, you would still not be able to finish expounding it all. This confounds you even more. His purpose is to confound you and cause you to wonder.

Sutra:

**The Buddhas’ perfect voice reaches equally to all in the world.
Each being attains insight according to its kind,
And yet the sound causes no discriminations.
Brahma King Universal Sound awakens thus.**
Commentary:

The Buddhas’ perfect voice reaches equally to all in the world. The Buddhas have a perfect, full sound. No matter which kind of being hears that sound, he will invariably awaken to the Way and end birth and death. Each being attains insight according to its kind. When beings of the nine Dharma Realms hear the sound of the Buddha’s voice, they can increase their good roots, leave confusion and return to enlightenment, and awaken to the Way.

Beings of every kind, upon hearing the Buddha’s voice, feel that the Buddha is speaking directly to them. They hear the Dharma and become enlightened. And yet the sound causes no discriminations. When they hear the Buddha’s voice, their minds naturally believe and accept what they hear, and they have no doubts or discriminations. Brahma King Universal Sound awakens thus. He understands this principle.

Sutra:

**All Thus Come Ones in the three periods of time
Progress towards bodhi through expedient practices.
Everything culminates with the realization of Buddhahood.
The god Freedom with Sounds is liberated thus.**

Commentary:

All the infinitely many Thus Come Ones in the three periods of time—the past, present, and future—progress towards bodhi through expedient practices. At the outset of their cultivation of the path of enlightenment, they adopt various expedient means and in the end, they finally become Buddhas. The ultimate goal of their cultivation is to become Buddhas. Everything culminates with the realization of Buddhahood. They finally attain the ultimate, perfect enlightenment. The god Freedom with Sounds is liberated thus. Brahma King Freely Contemplating the Sounds and Speech in the World attained this passage into liberation.

Sutra:

**Sentient beings all have their own distinct karma.
According to their causes, various results occur.
The Buddhas make clear that this is the nature of the world.
The god Still and Quiet Brightness awakens thus.**

Commentary:

Sentient beings all have their own distinct karma. Sentient beings’ karmic retributions are each different. According to their causes, various results occur. Beings reap the results of whatever causes they create. “If you kill someone’s father, someone will kill your father. If you kill someone’s brother, someone will kill your brother.” If you break the precept against killing and engage in the karma of killing, in the future, you will be killed. If you engage in excessive killing, you will suffer much illness and be killed in retribution. The same principle applies to stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and taking intoxicants. You will undergo the consequences of whatever karma you create. Each being’s karmic retributions are unique.

The Buddhas make clear that this is the nature of the world. That’s how the karmic retribution of the world is. The cause determines the result. The karma has its corresponding retribution. The Buddhas make these kinds of states appear to counteract the karmic retributions of sentient beings. When sentient beings see such states, they awaken and resolve to seek the unsurpassed Way. The god Still and Quiet Brightness awakens thus. He understands this state and the principle behind it.

Sutra:

**At ease with countless dharma doors,
He tames sentient beings throughout the ten directions,
Without discriminating among them.
Such is the state of Pervasive Light.**

Commentary:

He is at ease with countless dharma doors. Having attained countless dharma doors, Brahma King Pervasive Light is able to freely speak Dharma in ease and comfort. He employs the two methods of subduing and gathering in beings. Beings, fearing his awesome virtue, are tamed and subdued. That’s the method of subduing. Gathering in means influencing people through the use of kindness, compassion, and virtue, and drawing them in.

He uses these dharma doors and tames sentient beings throughout the ten directions, / Without discriminating among them. He teaches and transforms beings without discriminating among them. He doesn’t think, “This being is good, so I will save him. That being is evil, so I won’t save him. This being has affinities with me, so I will save him. That one has no affinities with me, so I won’t save him.” He doesn’t make such discriminations. He treats them equally with kindness and compassion. He does not discriminate among the various categories of beings. Such is the state of Brahma King Pervasive Light.

Sutra:

**The Buddha’s body is as infinite as the void.
Formless and unobstructed, it pervades the ten directions.
All his manifestations resemble illusions.
King Transforming Sounds enlightens to this path.**
Commentary:

If people wish to know the Buddha’s state,
They should make their minds pure like space.

These are two lines from the sutra. Now, this verse says: The Buddha’s body is as infinite as the void. The Buddha’s body resembles space, yet it is inexhaustible. Space is empty and has nothing in it. The Buddha’s body, though it resembles space, is not a total void. And yet, the Buddha’s body is formless. It has no appearance, and therefore it is unobstructed. If the Buddha’s body had form and appearance, it would be obstructed. But since it is without form—since the mind has been subdued and forms are left behind—there is no obstruction. Although it is formless, it pervades the ten directions; although it pervades the ten directions, it has no form.

All his manifestations resemble illusions. All of the Buddha’s manifestations are illusory transformations, like the reflection of the moon in a thousand streams.

King Transforming Sounds enlightens to this path. This Brahma Heaven King understands this principle.

Sutra:

**The Thus Come One’s physical form is boundless.
So, too, are his wisdom and the sound of his voice.
Abiding in the world and displaying his form, he has no attachments.

Celestial King Dazzling Light enters this passage.**

Commentary:

Brahma Heaven King Dazzling Eyes spoke this verse: The Thus Come One’s physical form is boundless. The Thus Come One’s body pervades space and the Dharma Realm. It has no boundaries and no place of reliance. It is attached neither to existence nor to emptiness. Apart from both existence and emptiness, it reveals the Middle Way. So, too, are his wisdom and the sound of his voice. Not only is the Thus Come One’s physical form boundless, his wisdom and his sounds are boundless, too.

One time, Mahamaudgalyayana traveled east by means of his spiritual powers, passing through countlessly many Buddhalands, trying to find where the sound of the Buddha’s voice would come to an end. But he could find no such place. No matter how far he traveled, he could still hear the Buddha’s sound, as if the Buddha were right before him. The Thus Come Ones are also without boundaries.

Abiding in the world and displaying his form, he has no attachments. The Buddha appears in the world and speaks Dharma to teach and transform beings. But he is not attached. He has left all attachments behind. It’s only because the Buddha has separated from attachments that he is a Buddha. Otherwise he could not have become a Buddha. Celestial King Dazzling Light enters this passage. He has understood this passage into liberation.

Sutra:

**The Dharma King settles in the Wondrous Dharma Palace.
The light of his Dharma body shines on all.
The Dharma nature is incomparable and devoid of form.
This is the liberation of King Ocean-like Sounds.**
Commentary:

This verse was spoken by Brahma King Pleasing, Ocean-like Sounds, who has attained the passage into liberation of constantly reflecting on and contemplating inexhaustible dharmas. What does he reflect on? He reflects on the Buddha, the Dharma King who has attained self-mastery with regard to the Dharma. The Dharma King settles in the Wondrous Dharma Palace. The Dharma King, the Buddha, lives in the palace of wonderful Dharma. The light of his Dharma body shines on all. The light from the Buddha’s Dharma body pervasively illumines all Buddhalands. The Dharma nature is incomparable. Nothing can match it, and it is devoid of form. Dharma nature is merely a name; it has no appearance. Although it is a name, the Dharma nature fills the Dharma Realm. No other state can compare with it. This is the liberation of King Ocean-like Sounds. Brahma King Pleasing, Ocean-like Sounds gained understanding through this passage into liberation.

b. Heavens of the Desire Realm
1) Heavens of Mastery Over Others’ Transformations

Sutra:

**Moreover, Celestial King Self-Mastery gained a passage into liberation of making use of a treasure trove of freedom and ease in appearing before countless sentient beings and bringing them to maturation.**
Commentary:

Moreover is just moreover. Let’s not say anything more. Celestial King Self-Mastery is very much at ease, without worries or afflictions. He doesn’t contend with anyone, and so he is at ease. If you fight with others, you won’t be at ease. If you have worries and afflictions, you won’t be at ease, either. If you cry, you won’t be at ease; if you laugh, you are even less at ease. If you neither cry nor laugh, then you’ll be at ease. That’s how it is. Is it good? “Self-mastery” means things are really fine, not bad. This Celestial King feels fine.

He gained a passage into liberation of making use of a treasure trove of freedom and ease inappearing before countless sentient beings and bringing them to maturation. He can appear before beings and bring them to maturity. Since he himself is at ease, he  causes all beings to be at ease. Beings get to hear the Dharma, become enlightened, and gain this passage into liberation of having a treasure trove of freedom and ease. This Celestial King has limitless kindness and compassion and is a great Dharma protector in Buddhism.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Lord Good Eyes gained a passage into liberation of contemplating the joys of all sentient beings and then helping them to experience the joy found in the realm of sages.

Commentary:**

What does Celestial King Lord Good Eyes’ name mean? Some people’s eyes are not wholesome. One look at their eyes lets you know they’re not good, and causes fear to well up in you. This Celestial King is also called Lord Wondrous Eyes, Lord Wondrous Adornment, and also Lord Supreme Eyes, since his eyes surpass everyone else’s. How did he get his name? He regards all beings with eyes of kindness.

He gained a passage into liberation of contemplating the joys of all sentient beings and then helping them to experience the joy found in the realm of sages. He contemplates their joys, not their suffering. Since he himself does not suffer, he is unaware of the suffering of beings. What kinds of things give beings joy? Fame brings joy, and so does profit. When beings get everything they want and their wishes are fulfilled, they are happy. Happiness comes from having one’s prayers for a son or daughter answered. Happiness also comes from obtaining the wealth and honor that one seeks. No one wants to be poor and lowly.

This Celestial King observes to see what beings like and what gives them joy. “Oh, he likes that kind of happiness. He’s fond of music!” Then he makes some music or sings a song for that person. The person is impressed with the music and asks, “Where did you learn that fine song?” And the Celestial King answers, “I learned it through Buddhism. I met a good teacher and learned it from him.” The person says, “I’d also like to learn that song.” Thereupon he takes refuge with the Triple Jewel.

In general, no matter what beings like, this Celestial King will comply with their wishes and give them whatever brings them happiness. It’s said, “If you wish to lead beings to the Buddha’s wisdom, first bait the hook with something they like.” If you want beings to understand the Buddhadharma, first you should fulfill their wishes. This discussion could go on and on. In general, this Celestial King gives beings whatever makes them happy and then leads them into a supreme state—that of the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Sages Enlightened by Conditions, and Hearers—the state of sages, which is true bliss. What kind of bliss is true bliss? It is the bliss that is one of the four virtues of nirvana: eternity, bliss, true self, and purity. He enables all beings to attain that ultimate kind of joy. The joys of the world contain the seeds of suffering. Transcendental bliss is the only true bliss. Why are the joys of the world an underlying cause for suffering? Think it over. For most people, getting rich is the greatest happiness.

However, if you were to pay attention to every penny, nickel, and dime, you would exhaust your energy. You tax your brain with calculations. You can’t finish calculating in the daytime, so you continue at night, but you still can’t finish. You toss and turn all night, flipping back and forth like a flapjack, and don’t get any sleep. Would you say that was happiness or suffering?

Another thing that makes people happy is being a government official. However, there are many vicissitudes in the world of politics. Suddenly you are promoted, and suddenly you get demoted. And sometimes you even lose your life in the process—you might be executed.

Nothing makes people happier than wearing beautiful clothes. However, when you dress up in an extravagant outfit, it’s as if you have put on chains and shackles. You don’t dare to casually sit or stand anywhere, fearing your clothing might get smudged. Isn’t that like being in chains and shackles? And if you are a little careless and spill some soup or oil on your clothing, then you start berating yourself, “How could I be so careless? Such an expensive dress, and I’ve dirtied it!” You might even say to yourself, “Oh, you really deserve a beating!” And you smack yourself across the face. You slap your left cheek twice, and the right cheek says, “That won’t do. You only slapped the left cheek. I’m jealous!” And so you slap your right cheek as well. All for the sake of putting on some new clothes, you end up slapping yourself. Would you say that was happiness or suffering?

We could go on speaking at great length about this. The joys of the world contain the seeds of suffering. Transcendental bliss, on the other hand, is true bliss. Eternity, bliss, true self, and purity are the qualities of genuine joy. This Celestial King helps beings to attain ultimate happiness. This is a passage into liberation that brings ultimate ease.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Crown like a Banner of Wonderful Jewels gained a passage into liberation of rousing sentient beings to action by complying with their various desires and understandings.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Crown like a Banner of Wonderful Jewels wears a jeweled crown adorned with wondrous gems arranged like a glowing banner. He gained a passage into liberation of rousing sentient beings to action by complying with their various desires and understandings. He complies with sentient beings’ desiresby speaking wonderful Dharma that delights them and causes them to practice the Dharma.

He motivates them to cultivate the teaching so they can realize Buddhahood soon. He gained that passage into liberation.

Sutra: **Celestial King Courageous Wisdom gained a passage into liberation of universally gathering in all sentient beings and explaining principles to them.

Commentary:**
Celestial King Courageous Wisdom gained a passage into liberation of universally gathering in all sentient beings and explaining principles to them. He uses his heroic, matchless, mighty wisdom to gather in and offer support to sentient beings everywhere. He is like a magnet that draws those with sharp roots and dull roots alike into the Buddhadharma. Once they are there, he explains the true principles of the Thus Come One. For those with sharp roots, he explicates the truth, meaning the doctrine of the Middle Way that discusses True Emptiness and Wonderful Existence. For those with dull roots, he uses provisional teaching, first explaining the principle of emptiness and then the principle of existence and then gradually leading them into the truth of the teaching.

Sutra: **Celestial King Phrases of Sublime Sounds gained a passage into liberation of advancing in his own practice by recollecting the Thus Come Ones’ vast kindness. Celestial King Banner of Splendid Light gained a passage into liberation of revealing the gate of great compassion that can subjugate the arrogance of some beings, who wear it like a banner.Celestial King Realm of Quiescence gained a passage into liberation of subduing all hatred and malice among beings in the world. Celestial King Banner Embellished with Wonderful Wheels gained a passage into liberation of being able, by remembering countless Buddhas of the ten directions, tohave them come to where he is.

Commentary:**
Celestial King Phrases of Sublime Sounds. From his name, we can know that this Celestial King is skilled in speaking Dharma. With sublime and inconceivable sounds, he speaks sublime and inconceivable phrases. He gained a passage into liberation of advancing in his own practice by recollecting the Thus Come Ones’ vast kindness. “Recollecting” means never forgetting. In thought after thought he reflects on the Buddha’s vast kindness, which is infinite like space. Not to mention ordinary people or those of externalist sects, even sages cannot match the Buddha’s kindness and compassion. Even sages who have realized levels of fruition cannot measure up to the vastness of the Buddha’s kindness and compassion.

“Advancing in your own practice” means being more vigorous in your cultivation with each passing day. If you are vigorous, you will have some success. If you are lazy and let the time pass in vain without getting anything done, you won’t advance in your practice. To advance in your practice, you must increase your vigor, and then you will come to success with your cultivation. This is the state of liberation attained by this Celestial King.

The next Celestial King is named Banner of Splendid Light. He gained a passage into liberation of revealing the gate of great compassion. “Gained” can mean that this Celestial King attained the ability to manifest the gate of great compassion. It can also mean that he understands the Buddha’s ability to manifest the gate of great compassion. Compassion can eradicate suffering. Great compassion is able to eradicate the suffering of all beings, so that they will naturally be happy. They will leave suffering, attain happiness, turn away from confusion and return to enlightenment. That’s the gate of great compassion. That gate can subjugate the arrogance of some beings, who wear it like a banner*.*

Students of the Buddhadharma must put away the banner of arrogance. We should avoid pride and arrogance. We ought to cherish others as we would ourselves, instead of being mean to others and nice to ourselves. We must not harm others so as to benefit ourselves. Instead, we should be impartial, showing kindness to those with whom we have no affinity, and being compassionate to everyone by regarding them as one with ourselves. When we see someone going hungry, it should be just as if we ourselves had no food to eat. If we see someone who has no clothes to wear, it should be just as if we ourselves had no clothes to wear. When we see someone suffering, it should be just as if we ourselves were suffering. We should develop great kindness, which includes those with whom we have no affinities; and great compassion, which regards everyone as being the same as ourselves. We shouldn’t be arrogant and look down on others, thinking, “You are poor. You lack good roots. You are bad. I don’t want to draw near you.” Let us avoid such discriminations and treat all beings equally instead.

People often ask me, “What’s meant by equality?” This is how I answer them. “Next to someone of the highest status, you don’t feel inferior. Next to someone of the lowest rank, you don’t feel superior. That’s equality.”

Others ask me this question: “How old are you?” This is how I answer them, “When I see a hundred-year-old, I’m 101 years old. When I see a one-month old infant, I’m 29 days old.” Among seniors, I’m a little older than they; among youth, I am a little younger than they. That’s also equality. Basically, I’m not really older or younger than anyone, because I have my own age. However, we can practice impartial compassion by making that kind of contemplation. That is a passage into liberation of subjugating arrogance.

The next Celestial King is named Realm of Quiescence. His name refers to a state of *samadhi*. He abides in a constant state of unmoving *samadhi*. He gained a passage into liberation of subduing all hatred and malice among beings in the world. “Subduing” means transforming hatred into compassion.

“Hatred” refers to repressed rage. You are upset with someone, but you don’t let it show. Instead you hold your hate and resentment inside. Since you harbor hatred, you start having malicious thoughts of hurting that person. This Celestial King is able to subdue hatred and malice. Hatred is associated with *asuras*, belligerent beings who like to make war. *Asuras* are prone to hatred. They are always contending with others to see who will be the winner. There are *asuras* both in the heavens and in the human realm. There are yang *asuras* and yin *asuras*. For example, soldiers and military people are yang *asuras*, and bandits and bullies are yin *asuras*. These two kinds of asuras spar constantly with each other. There are *asuras* among animals. For example, why do horned creatures, such as bulls, have horns? In their past reincarnations as humans, they used to contend with others, as if colliding with or butting into them, and so now when they are reborn as animals, they use their horns to do battle. Their horns are weapons of war. Those are the *asuras* among animals. There are also asuras among ghosts, and they battle with other ghosts. To subdue hatred and malice means to transform them—to transform hatred into kindness and compassion, and malice into thoughts of not killing. That is this passage into liberation of subduing all hatred and malice among beings in the world.

The Celestial King named Banner Embellished with Wonderful Wheels gained a passage into liberation of being able, by remembering countless Buddhas of the ten directions, tohave them come to where he is.  The ten directions were explained previously. “Countless Buddhas” refers to a number of Buddhas far beyond reckoning. When this Celestial King recollects the Buddhas of the ten directions, they emit light and arrive at the Way-place. He gained that passage into liberation.

The *Surangama Sutra* says, “If one recollects and is mindful of the Buddha, then now or in the future, one is bound to see the Buddha.” If you recollect the Buddhas of the ten directions, the Buddhas of the ten directions will recollect you. If you don’t recollect the Buddhas, do they recollect you? Yes, they do.

However, such communication would be a one-sided. The Buddhas are always mindful of sentient beings and have vowed to save them. If they didn’t recollect beings, they wouldn’t vow to save them. In our recollection of the Buddhas, we should make offerings, revere, and draw near to the Buddhas. “When the strength of the mutual recollection is deep, there will be a response.” One will receive the Buddha’s light. Therefore, the Buddhas will “come to where he is.” Whenever someone recollects the Buddhas, the Buddhas arrive in his mind. Celestial King Banner Embellished with Wonderful Wheels gained that passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Flower Light Wisdom gained a passage into liberation of universally manifesting the realization of Proper Enlightenment according to the thoughts of sentient beings.

Commentary:**

The Celestial King named Flower Light Wisdom accords with beings’ thoughts. “The Thus Come One completely knows and sees all the various thoughts of beings.” He gained a passage into liberation of universally manifesting the realization of Proper Enlightenment according to the thoughts of sentient beings. “Manifesting” means making something appear that wasn’t there originally. This Celestial King makes the state of all Buddhas’ cultivation of ascetic practices, their realization of Proper Enlightenment, and their teaching and transforming of sentient beings appear everywhere. Celestial King Flower Light Wisdom gained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Indra’s Wonderful Brightness gained a passage into liberation of entering all worlds by means of great awesome strength and masterful methods.**

**Commentary:**
Celestial King Indra’s Wonderful Brightness. Indra is a Sanskrit word and means “able to be the Celestial Lord.” In the [*Amitabha Sutra*](http://cttbusa.org/amitabha/amitabha.htm) he is referred to as Sakra, and in the Surangama Mantra he is referred to in the line, “*Na mo yin tuo la ye*.” He gained a passage into liberation of entering all worlds by means of great awesome strength and masterful methods. By means of his awesome virtue and spiritual powers, he enters profoundly into all worlds everywhere. He also uses methods based on his freedom and ease. When the Buddha speaks Dharma, he neither comes nor goes. It’s not that the Buddha comes to where you are to speak Dharma for you, and that he leaves after he finishes speaking. Rather, the Buddha neither comes nor goes, and yet universally and profoundly enters all worlds. With great awesome strength, he can subdue all celestial demons and externalist sects, and all stubborn beings. “Masterful” means the Buddha neither comes nor goes while speaking the measureless and boundless Dharma. This Celestial King has attained that state of freedom and mastery.

**Sutra:

At that time, Celestial King Self-Mastery received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, universally contemplated the multitudes of the Heavens of Self-Mastery, and spoke the following verse:

Commentary:**

At that time, Celestial King Self-Mastery received the Buddha’s awesome virtue and mighty spiritual power, universally contemplated the multitudes of the Heavens of Self-Mastery, and spoke the following verse to reiterate the meaning of the prose section.

Every year we celebrate two Happy New Years: the Western New Year and the Chinese New Year.

As the saying goes,

The plans of a lifetime are based on diligence.
One must be diligent and not lazy in making and carrying out one’s life plans.
The plans of the year are made in the springtime.

Springtime refers especially to the first day of the first lunar month. If we bow to the Buddhas on this day, everything will go smoothly for us throughout the year. Cantonese people have a saying for this occasion, “achievement in the east and success in the west,” and “everything is as you wish and auspicious.” Therefore, we should bow to the Buddhas on New Year’s day.

The plans of a day are made in the early morning.
We should plan our day early in the morning.

Sutra:

**The Buddha’s body is pervasive and equal to the Dharma Realm.**
**Universally responding to beings, he appears before them all,**
**Offering various ways to enter the teachings as he transforms and guides them,**
**So that they will attain ease in the Dharma and reach enlightenment.**

Commentary:

Celestial King Self-Mastery speaks a verse similar to the verses spoken by the other Celestial Kings. The Buddha’s body is pervasive and equal to the Dharma Realm. It is identical to the Dharma Realm. No matter how large the Dharma Realm is, the Buddha’s body is just that large. No matter how small the Dharma Realm is, the Buddha’s body is just that small. Large as it is, the Dharma Realm is not larger than the Buddha’s body. Therefore, the Buddha’s body is equal to the Dharma Realm. If you can understand the Dharma Realm, then you will understand the Buddha’s body as well.

Universally responding to beings, he appears before them all. Every being is illumined by the Buddha’s light. The Buddha’s body appears before every being. He everywhere responds to beings’ thoughts and appears before them. The Buddha’s body resembles a mirror, and all beings are reflected in that mirror. Offering various ways to enter the teachings, the Buddha did not set up just one entry into the teachings, but many ways to enter into the teachings. These include Buddhism, as well as non-Buddhist religions. All religions are included within Buddhism. “Various ways to enter the teachings” includes all religions, not just one. You might not have believed it when I told you this before. But now if you read the *Flower Adornment Sutra*, you will know that what I have spoken is true. Why else would the sutra talk about “various ways to enter the teachings”? That just means various religions. Not only Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, and Taoism are included; even unorthodox beliefs and cults are included. They constitute a tiny part of Buddhism.

He transforms and guides them, causing beings to make a commitment to *bodhi*, seek the Unsurpassed Way, and attain the unsurpassed fruit of enlightenment, so that they will attain ease in the Dharma and reach enlightenment. He enables beings to attain ease and comfort in the Dharma, to attain liberation, and to become enlightened. Since beings attain ease in the Dharma, they become enlightened. Since they are enlightened, they are at ease. They attain the benefits of enlightenment and ease.

**Sutra:**

**Among the different joys in the world,**
**The quiescent bliss of the sages is the most supreme.**
**Abiding in the profuse vastness of the Dharma nature,**
**Celestial King Wondrous Eyes perceives thus.**

**Commentary:**

What things are included among the different joys in the world? Those who are fond of drinking consider it to be a great pleasure. When they get drunk, they go into a daze and assume they have reached the Heaven of Neither Thought nor Non-Thought. They feel that kind of state is not bad. In a single thought, they reach the Heaven of Neither Thought nor Non-Thought. But when they awaken from their drunken stupor, they experience a hangover and feel uncomfortable all over. Their bones ache, their heads ache; they feel uncomfortable all over. When they are drunk, they feel great, but when they wake up, they are not at ease. Would you say that was joy or suffering?

For some people, gambling is the greatest pleasure. They take a bus ride to Reno. The bus fare is $12, but they get reimbursed $13, which means not only do they not have to spend money on the bus ride, they make an extra dollar. When they get there, they immediately dive into the slot machines, which they find a lot of fun. They put in one dollar, and maybe five dollars come out. They put in the five dollars, pushing in the tokens one by one, but this time nothing comes out. Like stones sinking into the depths of the ocean, the money never comes out again. Then these people put out another ten dollars, trading them for tokens, which they push into the slot machine. This time, again, the coins disappear like clay cows sinking into the ocean. Formerly, it was stones sinking into the ocean, never to be seen again. This time, the clay cows also vanish without a trace after entering the sea. And so, from morning to night and from night to the next morning, these people pass through a long time without eating or sleeping. Their lips become parched; their tongues are dry. They have lost their appetite. Is that joy or suffering?

Some people like to play sports such as football, basketball, or tennis. They enjoy themselves during the game, but afterwards they are exhausted. Is that joy or suffering?

All the other pleasures of the world are the same way. Joy is invariably followed by suffering. That’s why I say that worldly joy is the cause for suffering.

The quiescent bliss of the sages is the most supreme. The quiescent bliss of sages is world-transcending bliss, making it the greatest joy, the most supreme kind of joy. Abiding in the profuse vastness of the Dharma nature, one dwells in the vast, great, boundless Dharma nature. Celestial King Wondrous Eyes perceives thus. He gained this passage into liberation and achieved this state himself.

**Sutra:**

**The Thus Come One appears throughout the ten directions.**
**He speaks Dharma by universally responding to the  hearts of the masses.**
**All doubts are vanquished and severed:**
**This is the passage into liberation of Wonderful Banner-like Crown.**

**Commentary:**

The Thus Come One appears throughout the ten directions. The Buddha does not appear in only one place. He appears pervasively in the ten directions of space and the Dharma Realm. He speaks Dharma by universally responding to the hearts of the masses. Responding to the potentials of beings everywhere, he speaks Dharma for them. When beings should be saved by the provisional teaching, the Buddha proclaims the provisional teaching for them. When they should be saved by the actual teaching, the Buddha speaks the actual teaching for them. When beings are suited for the Great Vehicle, the Buddha speaks the Great Vehicle Dharma for them. When they are suited for the Lesser Vehicle, the Buddha speaks Lesser Vehicle Dharma for them. To beings who have not yet planted good roots, the Buddha speaks the Dharma for planting good roots. To those who have already planted good roots, the Buddha speaks the Dharma for increasing those good roots. To those who have already increased their good roots, the Buddha speaks the Dharma for bringing those good roots to maturity. To those whose good roots are already mature, the Buddha speaks the Dharma of liberation. Observing beings’ faculties and dispositions, the Buddha speaks the appropriate Dharma for each of them.

All doubts are vanquished and severed. If beings have doubts, the Buddha speaks Dharma for them to dispel their doubts and disbelief, enabling them to give rise to faith.

This is the passage into liberation of Wonderful Banner-like Crown. Celestial King Wonderful Banner-like Crown attains this state.

**Sutra:**

**Buddhas throughout all worlds communicate with wondrous sounds.**
**The Dharma spoken throughout countless eons**
**Can be wholly expressed in a single sentence.**
**Courageous Wisdom god is liberated thus.**

**Commentary:**

Buddhas of the ten directions throughout all worlds communicate with wondrous sounds. These sounds are not necessarily confined to language and words, as in our human realm. Rather, the wondrous sounds of the Buddhas pervade space and the Dharma Realm. What has sound or is soundless, what has form or is formless, what is proclaimed or not proclaimed—all of these are the wondrous sounds of the Buddhas. Hence an ancient poet [Su Dongpo] once said:

The sounds from the gurgling brooks
are the vast, long tongue.
The colors of the mountains
are none other than the pure, clear body.

The sounds of the flowing streams are the Buddha’s vast, long tongue speaking Dharma. And the colors of the mountains are the Buddha’s pure Dharma body. The poet Su Dongpo said those lines. Not only are the sounds of the gurgling brooks part of the vast, long tongue, in fact, all the sounds in the world are part of the Buddha’s vast, long tongue. And everything that has shape and form is part of the Buddha’s pure Dharma body. The Dharma body is nowhere and yet everywhere; the Buddha’s wondrous sounds are not proclaimed, and yet proclaimed in all. For this reason these are “wondrous sounds.” If you can understand these wondrous sounds and forms when you hear and see them, you will become enlightened. If you are confused by these states and fail to understand them, you will remain unenlightened. The difference between enlightenment and nonenlightenment lies in a single thought.

The Dharma spoken throughout countless eons / Can be wholly expressed in a single sentence. For countless eons until now, the Buddha has constantly spoken the Dharma without a break. Day after day, hour after hour, minute after minute, the Buddha speaks the Dharma. There isn’t a single day, hour, or minute when the Buddha is not speaking the wonderful Dharma for beings.

Although the Buddha has been speaking for countless eons, nonetheless, this Dharma can be completely expressed in a single phrase. The Buddha employed provisional skill-in-means throughout eons to speak the Dharma. If he were to say everything in a single sentence, most beings would not be able to understand. For example, after I wrote the [*Standless Verse Commentary to the Heart Sutra*](http://cttbusa.org/heartsutra/hs.htm), one of my disciples said the title was not understandable. She wanted to add an explanatory note that said, “The bright mirror is not a stand.” [A famous line from the [*Sixth Patriarch’s Sutra*](http://cttbusa.org/6patriarch/6patriarch_contents.asp).] Basically, according to the Actual Teaching, there is no Dharma that can be spoken. However, if no Dharma were spoken, beings wouldn’t get to hear anything. Therefore, the Buddha uses expedient, provisional means to speak Dharma in order to skillfully guide beings step by step.

Courageous Wisdom god is liberated thus. That Celestial King has attained this state of liberation.

Sutra:

**The immense kindness of all those in the world**
**Does not measure up to the tiniest fraction of the Thus Come One’s kindness.**
**Like space, the Buddha’s kindness is inexhaustible.**
**This is the achievement of the god Sublime Sounds.**

**Commentary:**

The immense kindness of all those in the world...Kindness motivates one to make others happy. There is no greater kindness than the affectionate concern parents have for their children. In raising her child, a mother is afraid that it will go hungry, or get cold, or get sick, or not get enough sleep. Good food that she begrudges eating herself, she will give willingly to her child. Clothes she begrudges using herself, she will give to her child. She is willing to put herself out in the cold so her child can stay warm. In all aspects, she protects her child with all her strength and energy. If the child is in some sort of accident, the mother is overcome with distress to the point that she breaks out in a cold sweat. She will ask the Buddha to protect her child and also ask the Bodhisattvas to help. She will do anything to save her child from disaster. That is the kindness parents have for their children.

I will illustrate the genuine, earnest affection parents have for their children with the following example. A set of parents might take their child, an intelligent individual, on a boat for fishing or a trip out at sea. However, the child will not be aware of how high the sky is, how thick the earth is, and how deep the waters of the ocean are and that he could drown in there. The child is having a lot of fun. He climbs to the edge of the boat and falls into the ocean. At that time, what do you think happens? Both the father and mother will without hesitation jump into the water to save their child. If they know how to swim, it’s not a big deal. But even if they don’t know how to swim, they will still jump into the ocean in an attempt to save their son or daughter. They will not begrudge their own lives in order to save their child. That is an expression of true kindness and affection. The extremely genuine and earnest love parents have for their children could be called “immense kindness.”

If, on the other hand, the father or mother falls into the ocean, a child on the boat might stick out a hook and try to retrieve his father or mother, or maybe stretch out his arm in an attempt to save them. However, if the child did not know how to swim, he most certainly would *not* jump into the waves to try and save his parent. Why not? A child does not have as great a love for his parents as parents do for their children. Someone says, “I would do it. If my parents fell into the ocean, I would jump in and save them!” You might say that now, but if you actually found yourself in such a situation, you might have second thoughts. “Well, will I get drowned in the process?” Once you have that thought, even if your initial urge was to jump into the water to save your parents, you will not have the courage to do so.

Why are parents able to muster such courage to save their children? Parents will forget everything else. They do not think, “Will I drown if I try to save my child?” They have no time to consider such things.  This point alone attests to the greatness of parental love.

However, such parental kindness does not come up to one hair’s worth of the Buddha’s kindness. One hair’s worth of the Buddha’s tremendous kindness for beings far surpasses the great kindness parents have for their children, which includes being willing to lay down their lives for their children.

Someone says, “I don’t buy that. Parental kindness to the point of self-sacrifice is already ultimate, even extreme, and nothing can exceed it. There is no greater kindness than that. How could the Buddha’s kindness be greater?”

Of course the Buddha’s kindness is greater, for not only is the Buddha willing to sacrifice his life to save his own children, he extends that spirit of sacrifice to saving all beings. That makes his kindness millions of times broader in scope than the kindness of parents in saving their children.

The Buddha will lay down his own life to save any and every being. Earth Store Bodhisattva is like that, too. He made this vow:

Until the hells are empty, I will not become a Buddha.
Only after all beings are saved will I realize *bodhi*.

Earth Store Bodhisattva, in practicing the Bodhisattva Path, keeps making this vow. The Buddhas of the ten directions, in life after life for countless eons, all keep making vows like that. Seen in this light, how could the great kindness of parents come up to the great kindness the Buddha has for all beings? Certain causes and conditions have led to your having these particular parents in this lifetime. The Buddha, however, treats all beings with compassion and gives up his own life to save, teach, and transform beings in life after life and in every eon.

Suppose someone says, “I’m thinking of studying Buddhism, but I haven’t seen any evidence that you really wish to save me. If you really wish to save me, you should prove it. How? The most difficult thing to give up is life. If you can chop off your own head to win my faith, then I will believe.” At that point, one who practices the Bodhisattva Path will happily chop off his own head, thus influencing the other person to believe the Buddhadharma. All the Buddhas of the past met challenges like that, which helped bring them to realization. The greatness of such kindness and compassion cannot be measured. That’s why the text says that worldly kindness does not measure up to the tiniest fraction of the Thus Come One’s kindness, not even one hair’s worth. If it does not come up to even one hair’s worth, how much less many hairs’ worth.

Like space, the Buddha’s kindness is inexhaustible. How great is the Buddha’s kindness? It is as great as space; there is no end to it. Who said this? This is the achievement of the god Sublime Sounds. He understands this state. He knows that the Buddha is truly compassionate to beings. Actually, there is no way to finish talking about it. However, if we don’t talk about it, then we are finished. And this is where I will stop in explaining this four-line verse.

Someone is thinking, “I don’t believe what the Dharma Master brought up about parents’ kindness towards their children.  I don’t believe that if a child falls into the ocean, his parents will leap in after him. That’s not reasonable.”

You certainly are intelligent. There is no way I can trick you. Let me give you another example. A few months ago I read in the newspapers that in the Philippines, a tiger caught a four- or five-year-old girl in its mouth and was about to bite into her. What do you suppose the girl’s mother did? She kicked the tiger, hit it with her fists, and even bit it with her teeth, thereby managing to drive it away. She saved her daughter. If the mother had thought, “How can I fight such a fierce tiger?” then her child would certainly have been eaten by the tiger. That was a true story carried in the newspaper. So, if you insist that parents won’t jump into the ocean after their child, we will let it go at that. However, when a tiger comes, they are not afraid of the tiger, and that’s a fact. That’s an incident that happened in the human realm.

Not only are human parents that compassionate towards their children, even animals will protect their offspring. Among animals, chickens are rather small creatures. Imagine the mother hen leading her brood of chicks, maybe ten or twenty of them. Mother hen says, “Goo, goo, goo,” which means, “Follow me!” and the chicks reply, “Goo, goo, goo,” which means, “Yes, we’re coming along!”

A hawk flying above hears this, and thinks, “Oh, you should follow me instead!” And he dives like a helicopter and tries to make off with one of the chicks. When the mother hen sees this, she becomes fierce, spreading out her wings and launching a battle with the hawk, in an attempt to protect her chicks. Now, is the mother hen an equal match for the hawk? Basically not. However, because she wants to save her little chicks, she is determined to fight the hawk.

Now that happens to be a fact. Do you believe it or not? You were skeptical about the story of parents jumping into the ocean,  but perhaps you will find this example of the hen and the hawk, which is a situation that happens on land, more credible. A mother hen will disregard her own life in protecting her chicks, and that is an expression of her kindness. And so, not only do human parents have great kindness for their children, even animals have great kindness for their offspring. But when this is compared to the kindness of the Buddha, then it does not come up to even one-half, not to mention one, hair’s worth of the Buddha’s kindness.

We have been rambling on and speaking only on a theoretical basis, since most people have never witnessed such things. Even if people have witnessed such events, they will consider them coincidences. People who have never seen such things will say that my examples are purely hypothetical. Now I want to tell you a true story that happened right here at a few months ago. It’s about one of my disciples, a wee tot who only knows how to eat. When this incident happened, she did not even know how to talk yet; she couldn’t even manage to say “yes” or “no.” But she liked to eat candy. Since I am very fond of this little disciple, I gave her some candy. The candy was about the size of a nickel, but round instead of flat. I hadn’t expected the child to be so greedy. I thought she would suck on the candy, but instead she swallowed it whole. Since her throat and esophagus were small, it was not a lot of fun for her to have swallowed such a big piece of candy. She couldn’t make a sound even though she tried to cry. Her face began to turn green. Her parents got scared and came running to tell me that her daughter was choking. They were in a panic. Fortunately the Bodhisattvas at Gold Mountain Monastery did not stand by with their eyes closed. They were wide awake and quickly found a method to dissolve the candy into the child’s stomach. After the candy dissolved, the child recovered. That is another example of the great concern and kindness parents have for their children. Those parents were on the verge of tears. However, this kind of parental kindness does not come up to even a fraction of the Buddha’s kindness.

Sutra:

**The arrogance of sentient beings, towering as a mountain,**
**Is completely vanquished without residue by the**
**Ten Powers.**
**This function of the Thus Come One’s great compassion**
**Is the way practiced by the King Banner of Splendid Light.**

Commentary:

The arrogance of sentient beings, towering as a mountain, / Is completely vanquished without residue by the Ten Powers. Sentient beings are all prone to  conceit and arrogance. The Thus Come One’s Ten Powers are able to level the high mountains of sentient beings’ arrogance. This function of the Thus Come One’s great compassion—compassion that enables one to give others happiness—is the way practiced by the King Banner of Splendid Light. This is the principle that Celestial King understood.

Sutra:

**Pure light of wisdom fills beings in all worlds.**
**Those who see it cast out ignorance and darkness,**
**Which enables them to leave all evil paths.**
**Celestial King Quiescence awakens to this Dharma.**

Commentary:

This verse is spoken by Celestial King Quiescence. Pure light of wisdom fills beings in all  worlds. The Buddha’s wisdom light is pure and undefiled, filling all worlds. Those who see it cast out their ignorance and darkness. Beings who have the affinities will see this wisdom-light, and their foolishness and darkness will disappear. Darkness denotes lack of understanding; ignorance denotes lack of wisdom. When we see the Buddha’s wisdom-light, our ignorance and darkness will vanish. Those who see it cast out their delusion and darkness, their ignorance and afflictions, which enables them to leave all evil paths.The Buddha guides beings to cultivate this dharma door so they can stay out of the evil paths. Evil paths are paths that lead one to evil, or you could say they are the Three Evil Paths of hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. You want to be far removed from them. Celestial King Quiescence awakens to this Dharma.He understands the principle set forth in these verses.

Sutra:

**The light streaming from the Buddhas’ pores proclaims**
**Names of Buddhas as many as the number of beings.**
**Sentient beings may hear whatever they enjoy hearing.**
**Banner with Wonderful Wheels is liberated thus.**

Commentary:

The light streaming from pores proclaims. The Buddhas of the ten directions can emit light from the pores of their bodies, cause the earth to quake, turn the great Dharma wheel, and save countless beings. Light issues forth from every pore of the Buddhas’ bodies. Not only do these pores release light, they also proclaim wonderful Dharma, including names of Buddhas as many as the number of beings. For as many beings there are, there is an equal number of Buddhas. Sentient beings may hear whatever they enjoy hearing.Beings, according to their faculties, get to hear the Buddhas’ wonderful Dharma. Celestial King Banner with Wonderful Wheels is liberated thus. He attained that passage into liberation.

Sutra:

**The Thus Come One’s freedom and ease cannot be measured.**
**It entirely fills space and the Dharma Realm.**
**The myriad assemblies behold it clearly:**
**Flower Wisdom enters this passage to liberation.**

Commentary:

The Thus Come One’s freedom and ease cannot be measured. The power of the Buddha’s great spiritual penetrations is immeasurable and inconceivable. It is more wonderful than words can tell. It entirely fills space and the Dharma Realm. This great spiritual power fills the Dharma Realm and space. The myriad assemblies behold it clearly. Beings in all the various Dharma assemblies throughout the worlds of the ten directions can see the Buddha’s free and comfortable spiritual powers very clearly, without impediment. Flower Wisdom enters this passage into liberation. Celestial King Flower Wisdom has attained this passage into liberation.

Sutra:

**Throughout oceans of countless, boundless great eons,**
**Buddhas manifest everywhere in the ten directions to speak the Dharma,**
**Yet no one ever sees them come or go.**
**The god Wonderful Brightness enlightens to this.**

Commentary:

Throughout oceans of countless, boundless great eons, / Buddhas manifest everywhere in the ten directions to speak the Dharma, / Yet no one ever sees them come or go.We don’t see the Buddhas traveling out in the ten directions, and we don’t see them returning here from ten directions. What does this mean? It is like the moon’s reflection appearing in all bodies of water. Those reflections of the moon all derive from the moon in the sky. Although the moon is reflected in the bodies of water, the original moon has not moved from the sky. The moonlight in the water is reflected from the original moon, but the moon itself has not gone to the water. The Buddha is like the moon, in that he shines everywhere throughout the ten directions and yet neither comes nor goes. The Buddha manifests in the ten directions to speak Dharma, and yet he neither comes nor goes. The god Wonderful Brightness enlightens to this. The god Indra’s Wonderful Brightness attained this passage into liberation.

2) Heavens of Bliss from Transformations

**Sutra:

Moreover, Celestial King Skilled at Transformations gained a passage into liberation of explaining the transformational power of all karma.

Commentary:**
Moreover, Celestial King Skilled at Transformations elaborates further on the principles. He is skilled at teaching and transforming beings, guiding them to return from confusion to enlightenment; to leave suffering and find bliss; to smash ignorance and reveal their Dharma nature. Beings live in ignorance, which means they do not understand the way things are. In their confused delusion, they create karma. They create karma when they are confused, but do they also create karma when they understand things? Yes, they create good karma.

Karma may be good, evil, or a mixture of both. For example, if we cultivate the Six Perfections (giving, morality, patience, vigor, Dhyana-samadhi, and wisdom) and the Ten Thousand Practices to benefit beings, we are creating good karma. If we do not practice giving, morality, patience, vigor, Dhyana-samadhi, and wisdom, but instead engage in all kinds of evil, we create evil karma. With good karma we ascend; with evil karma we descend. With karma that is a mixture of good and evil, we stay in the middle, perhaps being born in the human realm. There are many kinds of karma. If we abstain from all evil, we put an end to evil karma; and if we further practice all good, then we increase our good karma.

I have told the following story about good and evil karma before, but since some people have never heard it, I will tell it again.

This is when I was still a novice. I was quite mischievous. During Chinese New Year’s, we had a custom of writing out matched couplets. I wrote a line that said, “Wisdom like the sea.” Another novice liked my grass (cursive) script, and he also liked to recite the line, “Wisdom like the sea, wisdom like the sea, wisdom like the sea...” He recited the line over and over again, many times. Then I teased him: “It seems to me that your karma is like the sea!” The novice immediately flew into a rage and cried out, “How could you say that my karma is like the sea!”

I replied, “Of course, your karma is like the sea. But you haven’t heard me explain. Do you know what kind of karma I was referring to?”

“No, what kind of karma is like the sea?”

“Your good karma is like the sea.” After I said that, his anger subsided. A single word made all the difference: one word caused him to fly into a rage; another word caused his anger to subside. That shows that “Everything is made from the mind alone.” Sentient beings are attached to names. Change one word, and they are happy. If you don’t add just that one word, they become confused and upset—they fall into delusion. Once deluded, if they go on to scold others, they create karma. And having created karma, they will have to undergo retribution.

Now this Celestial King Skilled at Transformations gained the state of a passage into liberation of explaining the transformational power of all karma. “Explaining” means verbally expounding the principles. Karma may be good or evil. The power of transformation refers to how good and evil karma interchange and transform into each other. If our good karma has some evil in it, our retribution will be a mixture of good and bad. If our evil karma has some good in it, our retribution will also be a mixture of suffering and joy. That is the power stemming from mutual transformation. We receive the consequences of whatever causes we create. When we create a good cause, we get a good result. When we create an evil cause, and we experience the result of that evil. Celestial King Skilled at Transformations attained that passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Silent Radiance gained a passage into liberation of renouncing all opportunistic tendencies.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Silent Radiance gained a passage into liberation of renouncing all opportunistic tendencies. Sentient beings often try to exploit the circumstances. Such opportunistic tendencies come in many varieties, and so the text says “all.” For example, out of a desire for profit, we resort to all kinds of tactics to take advantage of opportunities to gain profit. Others seeking fame devise many ways to exploit the circumstances so they can get famous. There are only two kinds of people in the world: one kind exploits opportunities for the sake of fame, and the other kind exploits opportunities for the sake of profit.

Those who seek fame die on account of fame; that is, they will die in fire. Those who seek profit will die on account of profit; that is, they will drown in water. Profit is associated with water, and fame is associated with fire. People who strive for fame and profit will either be burned or drowned; therefore, taking advantage of circumstances leads to very bad consequences. If you don’t seek fame, you won’t die in a fire; if you don’t seek profit, you won’t drown.

Celestial King Silent Radiance has left behind all opportunistic tendencies. Having renounced them, he has attained ease and comfort. The hardest thing for cultivators to subdue is this tendency to exploit situations. True cultivators are free of that tendency. If we like to exploit situations, we won’t be able to cultivate. Such exploitative thoughts obstruct the Way and hinder our practice. Cultivation becomes impossible as soon as we entertain a thought such as, “A certain layperson is very wealthy, and he can help us.” We must give up all thoughts of exploiting situations before we will be able to cultivate the Way.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Illumination of Powerful Transformations gained a passage into liberation of universally eradicating the dark and deluded thoughts of sentient beings, thus enabling them to perfect their wisdom.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Illumination of Powerful Transformations gained a passage into liberation of universally eradicating the dark and deluded thoughts of sentient beings, thus enabling them to perfect their wisdom. He can dispel the foolish and dark thoughts of sentient beings. How does he do that? He enables them to perfect their wisdom. The reason we have foolish and dark thoughts is that we lack wisdom. Without wisdom, we become more and more dark and deluded every day. This Celestial King urges beings to cultivate prajña wisdom, so that as their prajña increases day by day, their delusion and dullness decrease accordingly. He causes them to perfect their wisdom, which means they become enlightened and naturally attain liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Lord of Adornment gained a passage into liberation of bringing forth boundless, delightful sounds. Celestial King Light of Mindfulness gained a passage into liberation of understanding all Buddhas’ infinite attributes of blessings and virtue.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Lord of Adornment gained a passage into liberation of bringing forth boundless, delightful sounds. Since he awakened to the Way by means of sounds, he pleases beings with the sounds he makes. These sounds not only delight beings, they also enable beings to attain liberation. They have that kind of power.

Celestial King Light of Mindfulness gained a passage into liberation of understanding all Buddhas’—the Buddhas of the ten directions and three periods of time—infinite attributes of blessings and virtue. Every Buddha has Thirty-two Hallmarks and Eighty Subsidiary Characteristics, which he cultivated bit by bit while on the level of planting causes. Little by little the Buddha accumulated his merit until he finally achieved infinite blessings and infinite merit and virtue, and obtained the Thirty-two Hallmarks and Eighty Subsidiary Characteristics that adorn his person. Celestial King Light of Mindfulness gained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Tremendous Thundercloud gained a passage into liberation of universally knowing the formation and decay of all past eons as well as their sequence. Celestial King Supreme Light gained a passage into liberation of awakening the wisdom of all sentient beings.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Tremendous Thundercloud gained a passage into liberation of universally knowing—this means there is nothing he does not know. He knows the formation and decay of all past eons as well as their sequence. Countless eons have gone by, and each of them went through the four stages of formation, decay, dwelling, and emptiness. Each eon has its successive stages of development. Some eons come before others. For instance, our present eon is called the Worthy Eon, because many sages and worthy ones will appear in the world during this time.

The eon preceding this one was called the Eon of Adornment, and the eon following ours will be called Eon of Constellations. This Celestial King discerns very clearly which eon comes first and which comes later. He gained this passage into liberation.

Celestial King Supreme Light, so named because his brilliance excels all other light, gained a passage into liberation of awakening the wisdom of all sentient beings. An alternate interpretation of this phrase would be “awakening All-Wisdom (i.e. omniscience) in sentient beings.” “Awakening” includes opening the Buddhas’ knowledge and vision; revealing the Buddhas’ knowledge and vision; enlightening to the Buddhas’ knowledge and vision; and entering the Buddhas’ knowledge and vision as discussed in the Dharma Flower Sutra. Awakening sentient beings’ wisdom means enlightening them to the Buddhas’ knowledge and vision, and so the text says “All-Wisdom,” which means the Buddhas’ wisdom. This Celestial King gained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Wonderful Cowl gained a passage into liberation of releasing light that quickly fills the ten directions of space. Celestial King Joyful Wisdom gained a passage into liberation of maintaining a powerful vigor that makes it impossible to destroy his accomplishments.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Wonderful Cowl gained a passage into liberation of releasing light that quickly fills the ten directions of space. Very rapidly, this light illumines space throughout the ten directions of the Dharma Realm.

Celestial King Joyful Wisdom—he wants to have great wisdom—gained a passage into liberation of maintaining a powerful vigor that makes it impossible to destroy his accomplishments. Nothing can destroy his wholesome deeds. Nobody can destroy any of the merit and virtue he has created, and no one can destroy the practices he cultivates. He has the power of vigor. The more he cultivates, the more resolved he is in his vigor. The more good deeds he practices, the happier he is in practicing them. The more he creates merit and virtue, the happier he is in doing so. At all times, he has the power of vigor. He gained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Flower Light Cowl gained a passage into liberation of knowing the retributions undergone by all sentient beings due to their karma. Celestial King Universally Viewing the Ten Directions gained a passage into liberation of manifesting the different shapes of inconceivably many kinds of sentient beings.

Commentary:**
Celestial King Flower Light Cowl gained a passage into liberation of knowing the retributions undergone by all sentient beings due to their karma. He observes how beings receive the exact retribution for whatever karma they create. Killers undergo the retribution of being killed; thieves undergo the retribution of being robbed; those who are promiscuous undergo retributions involving sexual misconduct; and liars undergo the retribution for lying. This Celestial King gained the passage into liberation of knowing the retributions undergone by sentient beings for the karma they have done.

Celestial King Universally Viewing the Ten Directions gained a passage into liberation of manifesting the different shapes of inconceivably many kinds of sentient beings. Every kind of being has its own unique appearance. This Celestial King gained that passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

At that time, Celestial King Skilled at Transformations received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, universally contemplated the multitudes of the Heavens of Skillful Transformation, and spoke the following verse:

The nature of karma of those in the world is unthinkable.
To the confused multitudes, the Buddha makes a thorough revelation.
He skillfully explains the true meaning underlying causes and conditions
As well as how karma differs with each and every being.

Commentary:**

At that time, Celestial King Skilled at Transformations received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, universally contemplated the multitudes of the Heavens of Skillful Transformation, and spoke the following verse.

The nature of karma of those in the world is unthinkable. It is extremely subtle and wonderful. To the confused multitudes, the Buddha makes a thorough revelation. For the masses of confused beings, the Buddha explains the inconceivable causes and conditions of karma’s nature. He skillfully explains the true meaning underlying causes and conditions. He uses expedient skill-in-means to explain the principle of causes and conditions, which says that one will reap the results of the causes one has created. The causes and conditions determine the results and retributions. This is a definite, unerring principle. The Buddha explains this, as well as how karma differs with each and every being. Each and every being falls into delusion, creates karma, and suffers the retribution in a unique way. The process is different for different beings.

**Sutra:

They try to visualize the Buddha in many ways, but to no avail.
They seek him throughout the ten directions, but cannot find him.
The Dharma body manifests, but is not real and actual;
Silent Sound perceives this dharma.

Commentary:**

They try to visualize the Buddha in many ways. They wish to contemplate and see the Buddha’s body, but to no avail. Although they make many attempts to see the Buddha, they always fail. Does that mean there is no Buddha? No. For instance, we cannot see space, because space has no shape or form. We may keep trying to see space, but we cannot do so. If it could be seen, it would not be space. The Buddha’s Dharma body is the same way. Although we cannot see space, we cannot deny its existence. Likewise, just because we cannot see the Buddha’s Dharma body, we cannot allege there is no Buddha. They seek him throughout the ten directions, looking everywhere for the Buddha, but cannot find him.

The Chinese character for “seek” (mi 覓) is composed of the words, “not see” (bu jian 不見). They seek throughout the ten directions, but cannot see the Buddha. Why? The Dharma body manifests, but is not real and actual. The Buddha’s Dharma body manifests, but it is nowhere and yet everywhere, just like space. Wherever there is space, the Buddha’s Dharma body is present. Yet the Dharma body has no reality. Celestial King Silent Sound perceives this dharma. He gained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Throughout oceans of eons, the Buddha cultivated many practices,
Wishing to destroy the foolish and dark delusions in the world.
Therefore, his purity shines most brightly.
Powerful Illumination is enlightened thus.

Commentary:**

Throughout oceans of eons, the Buddha cultivated many practices. Every Buddha achieved Buddhahood only after cultivating for infinite oceans of eons. Who has the greatest patience? The Buddha. Who is foremost in giving? The Buddha. Who is number one in holding the precepts? The Buddha. Who is the most vigorous? The Buddha. Who is the one who can constantly remain seated in samadhi? The Buddha, who constantly cultivates dhyana-samadhi. Who has the greatest wisdom? The Buddha. How did the Buddha attain such all-around excellence? He has the greatest patience. He can endure whatever situation comes along. He endures what others cannot endure. He can yield under all circumstances, yielding what others cannot yield. He can accept whatever situation comes his way, bearing what others cannot bear. The Buddha cultivated many practices in that way. The Buddha did not cultivate just one practice, but many kinds, and he perfected them all. From his cultivation of many practices, the Buddha acquired great patience, great ability to yield, great vigor, great giving, great morality, great dhyana-samadhi, and great wisdom.

Why did the Buddha cultivate all those practices? He was wishing to destroy the foolish and dark delusions in the world. “Delusions” means ignorance, which makes people foolish and therefore dark. If the delusions of foolishness and darkness are destroyed, what remains is bright and perfect wisdom. Therefore, his purity shines most brightly. The Buddha’s wisdom is foremost, and he enables all beings to attain foremost wisdom. His wisdom is pure and of the brightest clarity, causing beings to renounce foolish and dark delusions and gain the light of wisdom. Powerful Illumination is enlightened thus. Celestial King Illumination of Powerful Transformations realized the principle of this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

All the exquisite sounds in the world
Cannot rival the Thus Come One’s sound.
The Buddha fills the ten directions with a single sound.
Lord of Adornment enters this liberation.

Commentary:**
All the exquisite sounds in the world...There are many sounds in the world, some of them very splendid and delightful to hear. Such sounds delude people.

As it is said,

The five colors blind the eye.
The five tones deafen the ear.
The five flavors give people a jaded palate.

The five colors are green, yellow, red, white, and black. When these colors work together, they confuse our eyes and have a blinding effect. The five tones of the Chinese scale are: gong, shang, jiao, zhi, yu. People who listen to these tones get so carried away that they can no longer hear clearly and become as if deaf. When people hear an exquisite piece of music played or a beautiful song sung, they may be mesmerized to the point of losing their wisdom and forgetting themselves.

The five flavors are sour, sweet, bitter, hot, and salty, and they give people a jaded palate. People like to eat food seasoned with the five flavors, but such delicious food can confuse people and make them lose their wisdom.

Throughout the world, no matter how exquisite a piece of music or a song may be, still it cannot rival the Thus Come One’s sound. None of the world’s most sublime, wonderful sounds can compare with the Thus Come One’s sound. The Thus Come One’s sound is the most sublimely wonderful. The Buddha fills the ten directions with a single sound. Beings in the worlds of the ten directions can all hear this wonderful sound. Lord of Adornment enters this liberation. Celestial King Lord of Adornment attained this state.

**Sutra:

The power of blessings amassed by those in the world
Cannot match even a single attribute of the Thus Come One.
The Thus Come One’s blessings and virtue are identical with space.
The god Light of Mindfulness perceives thus.

Commentary:**
The power of blessings amassed by those in the world...Why do we people undergo suffering? We have failed to cultivate blessings. Why doesn’t the Buddha experience suffering? He cultivated blessings. “To endure suffering is to end suffering. To enjoy blessings is to use up blessings.” Blessings and virtue are accumulated bit by bit. If we constantly benefit others, we are cultivating blessings. If we always help others, we are cultivating blessings. If we are never selfish and never seek personal advantage, we are also cultivating blessings. In other words, at all times we should be cultivating various kinds of blessings.

However, worldly blessings cannot match even a single attribute of the Thus Come One. The power of worldly blessings cannot compare with even one of the Thirty-two Hallmarks of the Buddha. The Thus Come One’s blessings and virtue are identical with space. How immense are the Thus Come One’s blessings and virtue? They are as vast and limitless as space. The god Light of Mindfulness perceives thus. Celestial King Light of Mindfulness attained this state.

**Sutra:

Countless eons throughout the three periods of time,
As well as the different features related to their formation and decay,
Are completely displayed in a single pore of the Buddha.
Tremendous Thundercloud knows this state.**

**Commentary:**

Countless eons throughout the three periods of time...In the past, present and future, there are countless great eons, as well as the different features related to their formation and decay. Every eon goes through the stages of formation, decay, dwelling and emptiness, and each stage has its specific features. All of these are completely displayed in a single pore of the Buddha. All four stages can be seen within a single one of the Buddha’s pores. The past can be moved to the present; the future can be moved to the past, and the present can be moved to the past or the future. There are mutual changes and transformations, appearing right in the midst of the Buddha’s pore. Celestial King Tremendous Thundercloud knows and understands this state.

**Sutra:

The volume of space throughout the ten directions can be known,
But the scope of the Buddha’s pores cannot be measured.
This inconceivable state of nonobstruction
Is understood by Celestial King Wonderful Cowl.

Commentary:**

The volume of space throughout the ten directions can be known. Basically space cannot be measured, since it is so vast. However, let us suppose we can know its volume. But the scope of the Buddha’s pores cannot be measured. The number of the Buddha’s pores cannot be known or understood. This is an inconceivable state of nonobstruction. The scope of the Buddha’s pores cannot be known, and yet space and those pores are mutually nonobstructive. Although the scope of space can be measured, the scope of the Buddha’s pores cannot be known. This is because every one of the Buddha’s pores encompasses space throughout the ten directions. All of space is contained within one of the Buddha’s pores. That state is perfectly interpenetrating, unobstructed, and inconceivable. Who understands this state? This is understood by Celestial King Wonderful Cowl.

**Sutra:

Throughout immeasurable eons in worlds long past,
The Buddha thoroughly cultivated vast, great paramitas,
Tirelessly practicing with ever-diligent vigor.
Joyful Wisdom knows this dharma door.

Commentary:**

Throughout an immeasurable eons in worlds long past...The Buddha did not become a Buddha so easily. Over a period of limitless eons in the past, the Buddha thoroughly and perfectly cultivated vast, great paramitas. Those vast, great paramitas started out as small paramitas. Little by little they accumulated. When small paramitas add up, they become vast, great paramitas. It’s not the case that he started cultivating great paramitas, not small ones, lofty but not humble dharmas. The Buddha cultivated all of these paramitas—“dharmas for arriving at the other shore”—regardless of whether they were great or small, lofty or humble. The Six Paramitas are the most important. And the Buddha cultivated even the tiniest, most insignificant dharmas among these. He did not reject a good dharma as being too trivial, nor did he cultivate a bad dharma just because it was minor. He did not say, “This evil dharma is insignificant. It won’t matter if I engage in it a little bit.” No, he did not allow himself to do the slightest evil, nor did he refrain from the slightest good. And as time went on, the Buddha thoroughly perfected his cultivation of the paramitas, tirelessly practicing with ever-diligent vigor. The Buddha was never lazy for even a moment. He was always vigorous, and he never rested or felt tired. Once you become tired, your cultivation starts to seem meaningless. Celestial King Joyful Wisdom knows this dharma door.

**Sutra:

The causes and conditions that result in karma are hard to fathom,
Yet the Buddha explains them for everyone in the world.
The Dharma nature is fundamentally pure and undefiled.
This is the place of entry for Flower Light.

Commentary:**

The causes and conditions that result in karma—karmic retribution—are hard to fathom. The nature of karma is basically empty; there’s nothing to it. However, sentient beings’ ignorance causes them to become deluded and create karma. When they are clear-headed, they create good karma. When they are muddled, they create evil karma. Good karma involves good causes and conditions; evil karma involves evil causes and conditions. But there’s nothing fixed, and so it is “hard to fathom.” Yet the Buddha explains them for everyone in the world. He constantly expounds the causes and conditions of karma for beings. The Dharma nature is fundamentally pure and undefiled. It is free from defilement. This is the place of entry for Flower Light. That Celestial King entered and enlightened to this state and gained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

You should contemplate a single pore of the Buddha,
For all beings are found within it.
Yet they neither come nor go.
King Universally Viewing understands thus.

Commentary:**

You should use some method to contemplate a single pore of the Buddha. You will see that all beings are found within it. Yet they neither come nor go. Beings have not come into the pore, nor has the Buddha gone to where those beings are. Nonetheless, all beings appear within the Buddha’s pores. The Buddha and beings have not come, and they have not gone, either. And yet this state appears. Celestial King Universally Viewing the Ten Directions, named thus because he can see everywhere in the ten directions, understands thus. He attained this inconceivable state.

3) Heavens of Contentment (Tushita Heavens)

**Sutra:

Moreover, Celestial King Contentment gained a passage into liberation of encountering the turning of the wheel of Perfect Teaching each time a Buddha appears in the world.

Commentary:**

Moreover, the next Celestial King is named Contentment. If people are content, they will always be happy. If they aren’t content, they will always be miserable. Maitreya Bodhisattva is content at all times, and so he is always happy and never worried. This Celestial King is the same way. What does being content involve? It means ridding ourselves of the thoughts of greed, anger, and delusion. If we are greedy, we won’t be content. For instance, if someone originally did not even have a single dollar, but now he has a million, he ought to be content. However, he’s not satisfied.  He thinks, “Wait till I get ten million, then I will be satisfied.” When he makes ten million, he still feels it’s not enough. He aims for a hundred million. By the time he gets a hundred million, he aims for two hundred million. And when he gets that, he wants three hundred million. He is never content. Without contentment, we will never be happy.

With contentment, we will be happy. People who know how to be content will be happy even if they are poor. People who are not content will be miserable even if they are rich and honored. This Celestial King gained a passage into liberation of encountering the turning of the wheel of the Perfect Teaching each time a Buddha appears in the world—of the past, present, and future. The Buddhas of the three periods of time and the ten directions appear in the world and turn the Dharma wheel of the Perfect Teaching. What is the Perfect Teaching? (The two major schools of the Teachings School in China have slightly different designations):

**The Five Teachings According to the Xianshou School**

1.    Small Teaching
2.    Initial Teaching
3.    Final Teaching
4.    Sudden Teaching
5.    Perfect Teaching

The Small, Initial, and Final Teachings are called “half-word” teachings. The Sudden  and Perfect Teachings are called “full-word” teachings.

**The Eight Teachings According to the Tiantai School**

1.    Storehouse Teaching
2.    Connective Teaching
3.    Separate Teaching
4.    Perfect Teaching
5.    Sudden Teaching
6.    Gradual Teaching
7.    Secret Teaching
8.    Unfixed Teaching

There are eight teachings in the Tiantai School. In the first set of four, the Storehouse, Connective, and Separate Teachings are “half-word” teachings. The Separate Teaching clarifies the “full-word” for the “half-word” teachings. The fourth, the Perfect Teaching, is a full-word teaching. The next set of four—Sudden, Gradual, Secret, and Unfixed Teachings—do not belong to the Perfect Teaching.

Now the text is referring to the Perfect Teaching. The Buddha is turning the wheel of the Perfect Teaching; he is expounding Great Vehicle sutras such as the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra, the Surangama Sutra, the Amitabha Sutra, the Vajra Sutra, and so forth. Those are all Great Vehicle sutras. Since this Celestial King is content, he has attained a perfect dharma door called Wheel of the Perfect Teaching.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Happiness Like an Ocean and a Cowl gained a passage into liberation of obtaining the pure bright body that pervades space.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Happiness Like an Ocean and a Cowl gained a passage into liberation of obtaining the pure bright body that pervades the entirety of space. “Pure” refers to the Buddha’s basic nature, and “bright” refers to his wisdom. This Celestial King has obtained such a state. He understands the basic substance of the Buddha’s Dharma body, thus gaining passage into the liberation of the pure, bright body.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Banner of Supreme Merit and Virtue gained a passage into liberation of making an ocean of pure vows that dispels the world’s sufferings.**

**Commentary:**

Celestial King Banner of Supreme Merit and Virtue is so named because his lofty merit and virtue is like a jeweled banner. He gained a passage into liberation of making an ocean of pure vows that dispels the world’s sufferings. It’s not easy to dispel the world’s sufferings. Most people think the world is a happy place, and so they do not wish to go anywhere else. They mistake suffering for bliss. There are hundreds of millions of sufferings in the world, and there is no way to exhaustively discuss them. In general, there are three sufferings, which further expand into eight sufferings. And to discuss them in further detail, there are limitlessly many sufferings.

**The Three Sufferings**

1. The suffering within suffering: Basically, suffering is hard to take, but here, suffering is added upon suffering. For example, some people are poor to start with, and yet they still have a little shack that shelters them from the wind and rain. But they do not get enough to eat and are miserable. When, on top of that, their little shack gets burned down in a fire, then they experience suffering within suffering, suffering that stems from suffering.

2. The suffering of ruin: Originally, these people are not in suffering. They are rich and honored, endowed with wealth and status, and respected by everyone. However, in a series of unfortunate circumstances, they lose their official position, or their wealth. They are ruined. As their wealth and honor deteriorate, they experience the suffering of ruin.

3. The suffering of process: Although some people do not   have to experience the suffering within suffering undergone by poor people, or the suffering of ruin endured by rich people, nonetheless, they progress from youth to their prime, from their prime to old age, and from old age to death. Thought after thought, their life continues flowing and shifting
without stop. They are unable to control this process. They may want to always enjoy the prime of their lives; nonetheless, sickness and old age come upon them. And then death arrives. They have to experience the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death.

**The Eight Sufferings**

1. The suffering of birth: Being born is like what a live turtle feels when its shell is ripped off: an anguishing experience.

2. The suffering of old age: This is also very painful. Our eyesight fails and we cannot see clearly. Our ears do not help out, and so our hearing fades. Our ears want to resign and take retirement pension; they refuse to listen to anything anymore. If we say good things, our ears refuse to listen; if we say bad things, our ears refuse to listen; and even if we say things that are neither good nor bad, our ears still refuse to listen. They say, “Since we are getting our pension, we are not going to be bothered with any of this.”

Our teeth make our lot even worse. When they fall out, nothing we eat tastes good any more. Food that we eat becomes flavorless. Moreover, we can’t bite into hard food. Our hands also refuse to cooperate. We try to pick up a pair of chopsticks, but our hands do not obey orders. We want them to do as they are told, but they refuse by saying, “We won’t take refuge with you.” Your legs follow suit, saying, “Since the hands are not cooperating with you, we legs will also not help you out. If you want to take a step forward, we will take a step backward.” Would you say that was suffering or not? At that time, we will not be in control of our own body. The suffering of old age is very hard to take. Even if you aren’t able to take it, still, you have to take it. You have no other choice. Even if you have a doctor, he cannot cure your sickness of old age. He has no such remedy. He will say to you, “Not only can I not cure you, I can’t even help myself. I also wish to not grow old, but I have no remedy for that. How could I help keep you from aging?”

3. The suffering of sickness: From old age, sickness comes forth. Whereas before, in aging, our four limbs refused to cooperate, now, we actually get sick. Our head aches so badly that we can’t even get into the car or hop on an airplane to go somewhere.

4. The suffering of death: After sickness, comes death, which is like what a live cow feels when being flayed. When a cow is skinned alive, can you imagine the suffering it undergoes? When caught in the crossfire of these eight sufferings, people lose control. At usual times we may recite the Buddha’s name, but at the time of death, many people even forget how to recite. At usual times we may recite sutras, but when on the brink of death, many people forget how to recite the sutras. We need not speak of holding mantras!

**The remaining four sufferings are:**

5. The suffering of being apart from those you love.
6. The suffering of being together with those you hate.
7. The suffering of not getting what you want.
8. The suffering of the raging blaze of the five skandhas.

Those are the eight sufferings. And, if we were to speak of these in greater detail, there are actually innumerable sufferings. Right at the moment of a child’s birth, it starts to cry, saying, “Ku! Ku!” [Note: The words for “suffering” and “crying” have similar sounds in Chinese]. Right at the moment of birth, an infant is already aware of suffering. The Saha world is burning with a myriad sufferings and filled with a myriad evils.

However this Celestial King is able to dispel all the suffering of the world, and he is able to bring forth pure vows that are as profuse as the ocean. The Buddha is able to dispel worldly suffering. At the level of planting causes, he brought forth pure vows. Celestial King Banner of Supreme Merit and Virtue gained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Quiescent Light gained a passage into liberation of manifesting a body everywhere to speak the Dharma. Celestial King Good Eyes gained a passage into liberation of universally purifying the realms of all sentient beings.

Commentary:**

The next Celestial King is named Quiescent Light. “Quiescent” means concentration. From within this concentration he releases the light of wisdom. He gained a passage into liberation of manifesting a body everywhere to speak the Dharma. He understands how the Buddha appears in all places to speak the Dharma for beings. He has understood this state and gained this passage into liberation.

Celestial King Good Eyes regards beings with kind eyes, and so beings have many affinities with him. He gained a passage into liberation of understanding how the Thus Come One works at universally purifying the realms of all sentient beings. From defilement, sentient beings are led to purity; they transform their delusion into wisdom, their arrogance into humility and courtesy, and their greed and anger into kindness and compassion. Sentient beings turn all their defiled dharmas into pure dharmas. He universally purifies sentient beings, enabling them to turn away from confusion, return to enlightenment, leave suffering and attain bliss. This Celestial King gained this passage into liberation.

Sutra:

Celestial King Moon at Jeweled Peak gained a passage into liberation of having access to an inexhaustible treasury used in universally transforming those in the world by appearing before them often. Celestial King Courageous Strength gained a passage into liberation of revealing the state of all Buddhas’ Proper Enlightenment.

**Commentary:**

Celestial King Moon at Jeweled Peak gained a passage into liberation of having access to an inexhaustible treasury used in universally transforming those in the world by appearing before them often. This Celestial King understands how the Buddha teaches and transforms inexhaustibly many sentient beings by means of the dharma door of the inexhaustible treasury. This Celestial King attained this passage into liberation.

Celestial King Courageous Strength is very brave, robust, and strong, able to subdue all celestial demons and adherents of externalist ways. He gained a passage into liberation of revealing the state of all Buddhas’ Proper Enlightenment. When a certain Buddha realized Proper Enlightenment, what kind of state appeared? What kind of practice does a Buddha cultivate to reach Proper Enlightenment? This Celestial King understands this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Vajra Wonderful Brightness gained a passage into liberation of making firm all sentient beings’ resolve for bodhi, rendering it indestructible.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Vajra Wonderful Brightness’s bodhi resolve is as adamantine as vajra. He never retreats from this resolve. This vajra wonderful brilliance is a light of wisdom. He gained a passage into liberation of being like the Buddhas in making firm all sentient beings’ resolve for bodhi, causing them to never retreat from it and rendering it indestructible. The bodhi resolve is never extinguished. One brings forth the bodhi resolve at all times. It is as solid as vajra and there is no way to destroy it. This Celestial King attained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Banner of Stars gained a passage into liberation of drawing near to all Buddhas during their time in the world and observing the skill-in-means they use to tame and subdue sentient beings.

Commentary:**

The Celestial King named Banner of Stars gained a passage into liberation of drawing near to all Buddhas during their time in the world and observing the Dharma they speak, cultivating all practices taught by the Buddhas and seeing how the various skill-in-means they use to tame and subdue sentient beings. Although sentient beings are hard to tame and subdue, being so stubborn, the Buddhas manage to tame and subdue them by means of various skill-in-means. This Celestial King attained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Wonderful Adornment gained a passage into liberation of fully knowing sentient beings’ thoughts in a single thought and manifesting according to their potentials.

At the time Celestial King Contentment received the Buddha’s awesome might, contemplated the multitudes of the Heavens of Contentment, and spoke the following verse.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Wonderful Adornment has the finest and most wondrous adornment. He gained a passage into liberation of understanding that all Buddhas have the power of fully knowing sentient beings’ thoughts in a single thought and manifesting according to their potentials.

Complying with sentient beings’ potentials and what they like, the Buddhas appear at the opportune time to speak Dharma and teach and transform them. He attained this passage into liberation.

At that time, Celestial King Contentment, the King of the Tushita Heaven, received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, and contemplated the multitudes of the Heavens of Contentment. Since he knew it was fitting to teach them with verses, he spoke the following verse.

**Sutra:

The Thus Come One, vast and great, pervades the Dharma Realm.
Towards all sentient beings he is completely equal and level.
Everywhere responding to the multitudes, he expounds doors of wonder,
Causing them to enter inconceivable, pure dharmas.

Commentary:**

The Thus Come One’s Dharma body, vast and great, pervades the Dharma Realm. Towards all sentient beings he is completely equal and level in his compassion, teaching and transforming them. Everywhere responding to the multitudes, to the potential of all sentient beings, he expounds doors of wonder, clearly explaining subtly wonderful, inconceivable dharma doors, thus causing them to enter inconceivable, pure dharmas. He enables sentient beings to attain pure, wondrous dharmas, unsurpassed bliss and perfect, great enlightenment. That is the original intent of all Buddhas. The Sutra says, “inconceivable” pure dharmas. They cannot be conceived of with the mind.

**Sutra:

The Buddha’s body appears everywhere in the ten directions.
Without attachment, without obstructions, it cannot be grasped.Those in the world can see his various physical features.
Thus enters the god Happiness Like a Cowl.

Commentary:**

The Buddhas’ body appears everywhere in the ten directions. The Buddha’s Dharma body manifests in lands throughout the ten directions, teaching and transforming all sentient beings, causing them to bring forth the unsurpassed resolve for bodhi and accomplish bodhi’s fruition.

However, it is not the case that the Buddha deliberately displays his spiritual powers so as to impress upon sentient beings that his spiritual powers are the greatest. No, that’s not case. Rather, the Buddha teaches and transforms sentient beings so they can quickly accomplish the Buddha Way. It’s for that reason the Buddha manifests the wondrous functioning of spiritual powers. Yet, although the Buddha manifests the wondrous functioning of spiritual powers, he is not attached to them. Without attachment means not being attached to true emptiness; and without obstructions means not being attached to wonderful existence. Because the Buddha is not attached to true emptiness, there is wonderful existence. And because wonderful existence is not obstructed, there is true emptiness.  It cannot be grasped or attached to. You can neither grasp nor reject true emptiness and wonderful existence. Grasping, you won’t attain them; and you cannot reject them, either. They can neither be grasped nor be rejected. That is the state of true emptiness and wonderful existence. And because there is wonderful existence, those in the world can see his various physical features. Those in the world are able to see the Buddha’s various marks, his thirty-two marks and eighty subsidiary characteristics. Thus enters the god Happiness Like a Cowl. That Celestial King attained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

In the past, the Thus Come Ones cultivated numerous practices.
Their pure, tremendous vows were deep like the ocean.
All Buddhadharmas were brought to perfection.
Supreme Virtue knows this skill-in-means.

Commentary:**

In the past, the Thus Come Ones cultivated numerous practices while at the level of planting causes. This includes the Six Perfections and the myriad practices of the Bodhisattva Path. While at the level of planting causes, in his quest for the Dharma, the Buddha gave away his own body, life, wealth, country, city, wife, and children. He gave away all of his external wealth as well as his internal wealth. For example, if someone was sick and needed blood, the Buddha donated his blood to help that sick person. If someone needed an eye to cure his sickness, the Buddha gave away his eye. If someone needed bones or marrow to cure his sickness, the Buddha gave away his bones and marrow. At the level of planting causes, the Buddha cultivated many practices to benefit sentient beings. Their numerous pure, tremendous vows were deep like the ocean. These vows were devoid of any defilement. The Buddha cast out desire and severed love. “Pure” means being without desire and defilement, without the fetters of love. If one is fettered by love, pulled along by emotion, and encumbered by material things, then one is not pure. The Buddha made vows to the effect that in life after life he would leave the home-life, cultivate the Way, hold the precepts, cultivate samÁdhi and wisdom, and free himself from all defiled dharmas. Not only did he vow to do this in one lifetime, but he would do this every lifetime, all the way till he reached Buddhahood. He would cultivate pure practices of removing himself from filth. He brought forth those pure, great vows that were deep as the sea and as high as Mount Sumeru. These vows were so deep that you cannot fathom their source, and so lofty you cannot see their summit. These great pure vows were loftier than the mountains and deeper than the ocean.

All Buddhadharmas were brought to perfection, filling the world, so as to teach and transform all sentient beings. The Buddha, having perfected Buddhadharmas himself, also enabled all sentient beings to obtain perfect Buddhadharmas. Supreme Virtue knows this skill-in-means. The Celestial King Banner of Supreme Merit and Virtue knows this expedient dharma door, this inconceivable state.

**Sutra:

The Thus Come One’s Dharma body defies conceptualization,
Casting reflections throughout the Dharma Realm.
Everywhere he elucidates all dharmas.
The god Quiescent Light gained this liberation.

Commentary:**
The Thus Come One’s Dharma body defies conceptualization. It cannot be conceived of with the mind or described with language. The Dharma body pervades all places, casting reflections throughout the Dharma Realm. The Buddha’s Dharma body is everywhere. It is nowhere, and yet everywhere. There is no place where it is, and no place where it isn’t. What kind of state do you think this is? Though you may try to think about it, you won’t be able to know precisely. Everywhere he clearly elucidates all dharmas. The Buddha’s Dharma body reaches every corner, for what purpose? He is unlike we people who when we go places, check out if that place is fun or not, determining whether there are amusing sights and sounds. We might visit famous sites; however, the Buddha is not like that. The reason why the Buddhas go to all places is to clearly elucidate all dharmas, so that sentient beings can understand. The god Quiescent Light gained this liberation. That Celestial King attained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Sentient beings are fettered and covered over by karma and delusion.
Prompted by pride, arrogance, and indulgence, their minds drift and wander.
The Thus Come One speaks still and quiescent dharmas for them.
Good Eyes knows this from reflecting, and his heart rejoices.

Commentary:**

Sentient beings become deluded, create karma, and undergo the retribution. They are fettered, as if bound up by ropes so they cannot move, and covered over, as if they are placed in a large crock with the lid shut tight. They cannot move about freely. They are unable to get out of the large crock and are in constant darkness. In this country, everyone advocates freedom; however, they misunderstand freedom. People do not discipline their children, insisting that lack of discipline is freedom. After their children do bad things, even if their parents want to discipline them, the children refuse to be disciplined. That is all part of being fettered and covered over by their karma and delusion.

Prompted by pride, arrogance, and indulgence...Pride means looking down on everyone else. Arrogance means being bloated with a sense of ego and being impolite and rude to people. As for indulgence, many Americans like this one. Indulgence means not following the rules. If you tell them they should follow the rules, they will oppose you, saying, “What rules do you mean? You follow your own rules; don’t try to make me follow the rules.” Some go so far as to persuade others to not follow the rules.

Their minds drift and wander. That means they don’t follow the rules. The Thus Come One speaks still and quiescent dharmas for them. Don’t get nervous or go berserk. The Thus Come One is speaking still and quiet dharmas for you, and so you should keep quiet. Good Eyes knows this from reflecting, and his heart rejoices. This Celestial King understands this state, and his heart is happy.

**Sutra:

The True Teacher of all those in any world
Manifests to rescue beings and bring them back
To a serene haven universally revealed.
Moon at the Peak enters this in depth.

Commentary:**

The True Teacher of all those in any world...This does not mean just one world, but all worlds. And these worlds further divide into three kinds of worlds:

1. the world of Proper Enlightenment
2. the environmental world
3. the world of sentient beings

When the Buddha abides in a world, he is in the world of proper enlightenment. The environmental world is depended-upon retribution, which includes the mountains, rivers, and the great earth. And the world of sentient beings is “primary retribution.”

Another way to explain this is: this world, that world, measurelessly many worlds; this realm, that realm, measurelessly many realms; the land, that land, measurelessly many lands. All of that is implied in the words, “all those in any world.” The Buddha is a true teacher for all beings in those worlds, someone who truly understands the truth. A true teacher is different from teachers of deviant sects or externalist ways, who usually are selfish and aiming for their own benefit; who often laud themselves and deprecate others. The Buddha, being a genuinely great teacher, is selfless and has no thoughts of benefiting himself. He is completely fair and unbiased, greatly compassionate and egalitarian. He teaches all sentient beings, whether they are good or evil. He causes good sentient beings to increase and further their good roots. He influences evil beings to change their evil ways and head towards the good. The Buddhadharma does not reject even a single sentient being. The Buddha is a true guiding master within and beyond the world. He is able to lead us from the path of darkness onto a bright path; he can teach us to change our ignorance and affliction into wisdom and Bodhi, turn away from confusion and return to enlightenment, renounce the deviant and follow the proper. That is a true teacher.

Why does a Buddha appear in the world? He wishes to help sentient beings to leave suffering and attain bliss, and end birth and death. He manifests in the world to rescue beings and bring them back to Proper Enlightenment from the path of confusion. The Dharma Flower Sutra says, “The Buddha appears in the world for the sake of one great matter.” What is that great matter? It is the great matter of sentient beings’ birth and death. He brings beings back to a serene haven universally revealed. He universally reveals this to sentient beings. It’s not the case that the Buddha teaches only good sentient beings and does not care about evil sentient beings. He guides both good and evil beings, causing them to turn away from confusion and return to enlightenment, renounce the deviant and follow the proper so they can arrive at a place of comfort and joy. What kind of a place is that? It means being without greed, anger, and delusion. Just that is comfort and joy. If you are without afflictions, greed, anger, and delusion, naturally you will arrive at a place of comfort and joy. You have to bring forth the mind of precepts, samadhi, and wisdom. If you can hold the precepts, then you will be in a place of comfort and joy. If you can cultivate Dhyana-samadhi, then you can reach a place of comfort and joy. If you can cultivate prajña wisdom, then you will come to know a place of comfort and joy. After you understand and no longer have distress and vexation, then you arrive at a place of comfort and joy. When you are confused and are fraught with affliction, then you aren’t in a place of comfort and joy. Celestial King Moon at the Jeweled Peak enters and understand this liberation in depth.

**Sutra:

Inconceivable is the state of each Buddha.
Pervading all dharma realms,
They enter all dharmas and reach the other shore.
Courageous Wisdom sees thus and rejoices.

Commentary:**

Inconceivable is the state of each Buddha of the ten directions. That is a general way of explaining this line. Or, “each Buddha” can refer specifically to Śākyamuni Buddha.

“But that won’t work,” someone protests. “Each refers to each and every Buddha, so it cannot be restricted to Śākyamuni Buddha alone. That would be incorrect.”

You may insist it is incorrect; however, I insist this is a correct way of speaking. Why? The demonstrative pronoun translated as “each” can variously mean “all” or “one.”  Since we are lecturing on the Flower Adornment Sutra, which was spoken by Śākyamuni Buddha, it is fitting to say that the sutra is right now referring to Śākyamuni Buddha. Śākyamuni Buddha can represent the Buddhas of the ten directions. The Buddhas of the ten directions are identical with Śākyamuni Buddha; Śākyamuni Buddha is identical with the Buddhas of the ten directions. Do not have a great attachment, recognizing only Śākyamuni Buddha but not the Buddhas of the ten directions. On the other hand, do not have a small attachment, recognizing only the Buddhas of the ten directions, but not Śākyamuni Buddha. You should be without the notion of great or small and cast out all attachment, because each Buddha shares an identical path. A reference to one Buddha includes each Buddha; a reference to each Buddha includes one Buddha.

And what are we discussing about each Buddha? We are discussing each Buddha’s state. It is an inconceivable, wonderful state, not something that ordinary people’s minds can understand. It cannot be conceived of with the mind or described with language. It is like space. Can you conceive of space? No, you can’t. However, although you cannot conceive of it, it does not go beyond your single present thought. Your single present thought is also like space in that it is without boundaries.

Pervading all dharma realms...The Dharma Realm is extremely vast, so vast that there is nothing outside it. The Dharma Realm is also extremely small, to the point that there is nothing inside it. What does “all” dharma realms mean? It means all sentient beings. All sentient beings are all dharma realms. The mind of every sentient being is illumined by each Buddha’s light. They enter all dharmas and reach the other shore. This causes sentient beings to enter and understand all dharmas, and cultivate according to all dharmas. Mere understanding does not count. We have to rely on the dharmas to cultivate, and then we can arrive at the other shore. Progressing from stupidity to wisdom, we will arrive at the other shore of wisdom.

By changing our greed and stinginess and being able to give, we can arrive at the other shore of giving. If we did not uphold the precepts before, we can now uphold the precepts, and by doing so, arrive at the other shore of morality. If we were afflicted with hatred and a huge temper, but now we understand the Dharma, then we are able to be patient. Once our hatred is dispelled, we will arrive at the other shore of patience. Originally we may have been lazy, but having understood the Buddhadharma, we become vigorous and can arrive at the other shore of vigor. Originally we may not have liked sitting in chan, but having entered all dharmas, we cultivate dhyana-samadhi and will be able to arrive at the shore of dhyana-samadhi. We were stupid to begin with, but now we cultivate prajña and will be able to arrive at the other shore of wisdom. In every aspect, we can arrive at the other shore.

Celestial King Courageous Wisdom sees thus and rejoices. Having understood this state, he is very happy.

In a previous section, the sutra text brought up “a place of comfort and joy.” Someone has a question in his mind. “The Western Pure Land is a place of comfort and joy. But is it really the case that just by getting rid of greed, anger, and delusion, we can arrive at that place of comfort and joy?”

That’s right. The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is indeed a place of comfort and joy. However, it is too far away from us, being hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhalands away and so it is not easy to get there. But, if we can be without greed, anger, and delusion, right then and there we can be in that place of comfort and joy. Why bother to run so far away to find a place of comfort and joy? I will now speak a couple lines for you, to help you understand that the place of comfort and joy is right before you. What are these lines?

When our nature is settled and the demons are subdued, every day we are happy.
When discursive thoughts do not arise, everywhere is peaceful.

If our nature is settled and we have the power of concentration, all demons are subdued, and every day we will be happy. If we do not indulge in false thoughts, at all places we will be happy and at ease. Isn’t that just a place of comfort and joy? Cultivators of the Way must find that place of comfort and joy within themselves. Do not go outside looking for it. A place of comfort and joy outside is not our own. Our own place of comfort and joy is the genuine place of comfort and joy.

Someone else says, “Although the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddha lands away, if we recite Namo Amitabha Buddha, we can arrive at that land of bliss.”

I say that if we can recite Amitabha’s name, we will find the land of bliss right here. We don’t have to go to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. If we really are mindful of Amitabha Buddha, would we still be having thoughts based in greed, anger and delusion? The absence of those thoughts is the Land of Ultimate Bliss. It’s a shame that our mindfulness has not reached that level. However, if we are able to recite, then we will arrive at that place of comfort and joy.

**Sutra:

Sentient beings ready for transformation
Head towards bodhi upon hearing of the Buddha’s meritorious virtue.
He causes them to abide in the ocean of blessings, forever pure.
Wonderful Brightness contemplates thus.

Commentary:**

Let us suppose sentient beings are ready for transformation. Originally these sentient beings were not fit to be transformed, but now even they have to be transformed by the Buddha. They head towards bodhi upon hearing of the Buddha’s meritorious virtue. Basically, these sentient beings do not deserve to be taught, having engaged in the ten evils and the five rebellious acts, They violate the Five Precepts, engaging in killing, theft, lust, false speech, and taking intoxicants.
They also perform the ten evil deeds:

three evils of the body: killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct;
three evils of the mind: greed, anger, and delusion;
four evils of the mouth: harsh speech, duplicity, irresponsible speech, and lying.

However, if you can turn the ten evils around, they become the Ten Good Deeds. If you do not turn them around, they remain the ten evils. The five rebellious acts are: patricide, matricide, shedding the Buddhas’s blood, killing an Arhat, and disrupting the harmony of the Sangha. Basically, sentient beings who are guilty of those faults cannot be taught and transformed. But now, upon hearing about the Buddha’s merit and virtue, they make the resolve to attain bodhi. He, the Buddha, causes them to abide in the ocean of blessings, forever pure. The Buddha helps them so their bodhi resolve is never destroyed. They live in a sea of blessings and virtue and remain forever pure. Celestial King Vajra Wonderful Brightness contemplates this state, understands it thus, and attains liberation.

**Sutra:

In oceans of lands numerous as motes of dust in the ten directions,
All beings flock to the Buddhas and congregate
To pay respects, make offerings, and hear the Dharma.
Adorned Banner perceives thus.

Commentary:**

In oceans of lands numerous as motes of dust in the ten directions. Those who have heard the sutra will know what the ten directions are, but those who haven’t will not. The ten directions are: east, west, south, north, above, and below—that makes the six directions. Then add the four intermediate points: southeast, southwest, northeast, northwest. Together they make up the ten directions. Now there are seas of Buddhalands in the ten directions, as many as there are motes of dust. Our world is only one among many worlds, as numerous as motes of dust. Most ordinary people are not aware of this.

All beings flock to the Buddhas and congregate. This refers to lands and worlds as many as motes of dust. In every world there is a Buddha teaching and transforming sentient beings. And every sentient being can in the future bring to realization a Buddha’s land. All Buddhas’ places include the places of Buddhas of the past, present and future, throughout the ten directions. All sentient beings assemble at those places; they arrive to hear the Buddhas talk about the dharmas of not being upside down. Whereas all sentient beings only know upside down dharmas, the Buddhas teach them how not to be upside down. This means calming their mad thoughts and smashing their ignorance. Why are people upside down? Because they have ignorance. From ignorance sentient beings gives rise to delusion, create karma, and undergo various kinds of retribution. Great Master Hanshan spoke a set of verses and brought the point across very well:

In a single thought, the mad mind comes to a stop.
The Surangama Sutra says the same thing:
“When the mad mind stops, with that stopping is bodhi.”

Sense faculties and defiling objects, inside and out, are clear and penetrating. The six sense faculties inside—the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind; and the six defiling objects outside--form, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, and dharmas, all of these emit great light.

Turn around and smash through empty space.
Flipping around, he is able to smash right through empty space.
The myriad phenomena arise and vanish on their own.
The myriad phenomena: mountains, rivers, and the great earth;
all the houses and buildings and so forth, are allowed to come into being and disappear on their own.

Great Master Hanshan composed this verse right after his enlightenment, describing his vision after his awakening.

They flock to all Buddhas’ places to pay respects, make offerings to the Buddhas, and hear the Dharma at those Buddhas’ Dharma assemblies. Adorned Banner perceives thus. That Celestial King has obtained this inconceivable state and gained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Inconceivable is the ocean of sentient beings’ thoughts.
Without dwelling, movement, or a place to rely.
In a single thought, the Buddha sees it with total clarity.
The god Wonderful Adornment understands this well.

Commentary:**

Sentient beings are “born from a confluence of many conditions.” There are many categories of sentient beings, and those in each category are born because of their individual causes and conditions. The thoughts of sentient beings are like an ocean. Although the Dharma Realm is vast, it does not go beyond sentient beings’ thoughts. Although you may feel that sentient beings’ minds are small, nonetheless, they include the Dharma Realm. For this reason we say, “The Buddhadharma, the dharma of sentient beings, and the dharma of the mind—these three dharmas are not different.” The Dharma Realm is great, and so is the scope of sentient beings’ minds, and so is the Buddha’s nature.

Inconceivable is the ocean of sentient beings’ thoughts. There is no way to think about it or describe it with words. “The wonderful Path lies on the tip of a hair.” Because it is too wonderful, it cannot be conceived.

It is without dwelling. The mind of sentient beings is unattached. Therefore the Vajra Sutra says, “Bring forth the mind that dwells nowhere.” It is also without movement. It is thus, thus unmoving, always clear, bright, and understanding. Prajña wisdom manifests. And it is without a place to rely. Where would you say your mind is? When the First Chan Patriarch Bodhidharma first arrived in China, most Chinese people did not like him, an Indian. They refused to talk to him, especially Cantonese people. Patriarch Bodhidharma’s Chinese probably was not very clear, and the Cantonese people asked him, “What are you talking about?” in their dialect, which was unintelligible to Patriarch Bodhidharma. Since he could not make any sense talking with the adults, he tried talking to the children. When the children saw this person with a full beard and huge eyes, they were so scared that they ran away crying. Then the mother of the child came out of the house and said, “Oh, it’s a ghost!” She called Patriarch Bodhidharma a ghost. Would you say that was a false accusation or not?

Patriarch Bodhidharma said, “Alright, I’ll go to Nanjing.”

In Nanjing, Dharma Master Shenguang was lecturing on the sutras. He lectured so well that blossoms fell from the heavens and golden lotuses welled up from the earth. Patriarch Bodhidharma asked Master Shenguang, “What are you doing here?”

“I’m lecturing on the Sutras,” replied Master Shenguang.

“Why are you lecturing on the Sutras?”

“To teach sentient beings how to end birth and death!”

“Oh, you’re teaching sentient beings how to end birth and death,” said Patriarch Bodhidharma. “The words are black; the paper is white. With what are you enabling sentient beings to end birth and death?”

At that time, Master Shenguang was not aware that Patriarch Bodhidharma was a Chan Patriarch. The Patriarch did not come wearing a sign around his neck that said, “I am the First Patriarch Bodhidharma. Do you recognize me?”

He did not put up a sign, and so Master Shenguang failed to recognize him. He said, “You Indian monk! You are slandering the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha!” Thereupon he took out his iron recitation beads. Each bead was as big as an egg, and the whole string of beads reached all the way to the ground. Unlike my recitation beads that are made of star-moon Bodhi seeds, Master Shenguang’s beads were cast in iron. He brandished those beads and struck Patriarch Bodhidharma across the face. The Patriarch did not have time to dodge the attack, and two of his teeth were knocked out. He did not dare spit his teeth out. Why? It’s said that if the teeth of a sage fall to the ground, it won’t rain in that place for three years. There’s actually no scientific evidence for that legend. But since Patriarch Bodhidharma did not want sentient beings to suffer on his account, he swallowed his own teeth. From this incident we have a saying in Chinese, “After your teeth have been knocked out, you swallow them into your stomach.”

Having swallowed his teeth, Patriarch Bodhidharma thought, “You can lecture the sutras and teach people to end birth and death, but I’m leaving.” Can you imagine a Patriarch getting his teeth knocked out and then swallowing them? He resumed his journey and left Nanjing. On his way he came upon a parrot in a cage. The parrot asked him,

“Mind from the West, mind from the West,
Teach me a way to get out of this cage!”

Since the Patriarch found someone who recognized him, who knew his sound, he said to the parrot:

“To get out of the cage, to get out of the cage,
Stick out your legs, and close both eyes!
That’s the way to get out of the cage!”

The parrot said, “Okay!” Thereupon Patriarch Bodhidharma left. When the parrot’s owner came home, the parrot stretched out its two legs and lay there with eyes closed. The owner thought, “How could my parrot have died?” He opened the door of the cage, reached in, and took the parrot out. He held the parrot in his palm and examined it. “Strange, there doesn’t seem to be any injury…How could it have died?” The owner could still feel the warmth from the parrot’s body—was it the case that the parrot had not completely died? He opened up his hand, and right at that moment, the parrot sprang up and flew away! The trick to get out of the cage worked. The parrot was free.

After Patriarch Bodhidharma left, Master Shenguang ran into trouble. He had just finished lecturing his sutra, when a messenger from King Yama came. The ghost of impermanence said, “Dharma Master, King Yama is throwing a party and invites you to settle your accounts with him. We have to figure out how many sutras you have lectured and recited, how many sutras you still haven’t lectured or recited, and what will happen to you in the future.”

Master Shenguang was taken by surprise. “Oh, King Yama wants me? Is it all right if I don’t go?”

 “Absolutely not,” said the ghost. “No matter how slippery you are, you won’t be able to slip through King Yama’s hands. Even if you become a slippery ghost, we’ll still be able to track you down.”

“Isn’t there someone whom King Yama can’t control, who has ended his birth and death?”

The ghost told him, “Yes, that black-faced, bearded monk whose teeth you just knocked out—King Yama cannot do anything to him. He is a Sage who has realized the fruition.”

Master Shenguang then pleaded with the ghost of impermanence, “Please do me a favor. In the future, I’ll treat you to tea.”

The ghost said, “There’s no need to treat me to tea. You can treat me to some snacks.”

“Well, in that case, we can see each other in the future,” said Master Shenguang, “but now I have to go look for the black-faced monk.”

Master Shenguang was in such a hurry that he only managed to put on one shoe. He carried the other shoe in his hand and ran down the road. He followed Patriarch Bodhidharma all the way to Shaolin Monastery at Bear’s Ear Mountain. The Patriarch sat facing a stone wall for nine years, and Master Shenguang knelt by his side for nine years. Think it over. You are also seeking the Buddhadharma, but have you knelt for nine years? Have you knelt for nine months? Or nine days? Or, for that matter, nine hours? If you haven’t, you are way behind Patriarch Shenguang. And if you wish to become a Patriarch, you have to put in more work and make progress.

Someone says, “This is the nuclear age. Even if one wishes to be a Patriarch, one doesn’t have to kneel for nine years. Nine seconds should be enough.”

Well, if you can manage to do it so quickly, you’re much better off than Master Shenguang. He knelt for nine years. One day, it was snowing outside. Master Shenguang nagged Patriarch Bodhidharma again, “Patriarch, please transmit the Dharma to me. I’ve knelt here nine years, which amply shows my sincerity.”

Patriarch Bodhidharma said, “Hah! You knocked off two of my teeth, and now you seek the Dharma from me. Okay, what’s happening outside?”

“It’s snowing,” replied Master Shenguang.

“What color is the snow?”

“It’s white.”

“When red snow starts coming down, I’ll transmit the Dharma to you,” said Patriarch Bodhidharma. “But you won’t stand a chance if red snow doesn’t fall. To the end of time, I won’t transmit the Dharma to you!”

It was not the case that Patriarch Bodhidharma was still angry because Master Shenguang had knocked off his teeth. Rather, he was just testing Master Shenguang to see what he would do.

At that moment, Master Shenguang had a sudden flash of insight. Seeing a knife hanging on the wall, he took it down. If there had been someone beside him, this person would have wondered, “Is he going to kill Patriarch Bodhidharma?” But the Patriarch still sat facing the wall, paying no attention to any of this. “If you want to kill me, go ahead,” was his attitude.

Master Shenguang went outside with the knife and chopped off his own arm. The way I look at it, Master Shenguang had a great temper! If he didn’t have a fiery temper, why did he have to chop off an entire arm? He could just as easily have cut off a small piece of his own flesh, and enough blood would have flowed out and dyed the snow red. Since he had a furious temper, he said, “All right, I’ll show you!” and he chopped off his arm. The blood gushed out and turned the snow crimson. He took some of the blood-stained snow into the cave and showed it to Bodhidharma, “Look, the snow from the sky is red!”

Patriarch Bodhidharma saw that Master Shenguang was truly sincere, and so he said to him, “I haven’t come to China in vain. I will transmit the Dharma to you.” Thereupon he transmitted the Dharma to Master Shenguang. But Master Shenguang did not feel that was enough. He had a problem. What problem? He said, “Patriarch, although I have obtained the Dharma, my mind is in great pain.”

Patriarch Bodhidharma said, “Fine, bring me your mind and I’ll make the pain go away.”

Master Shenguang looked for his mind above and below, in the four quarters and the ten directions throughout the entire Dharma Realm, but he could not locate his mind. His mind was not inside, not outside, and not in the middle. Thereupon he said to Patriarch Bodhidharma, “Although I search for my mind, I can’t find it.”

The Patriarch replied, “Then I have helped you settle your mind.”

It was very strange. Right after that, Master Shenguang felt the pain in his mind go away. That was the dharma door of “the mind sealing the mind.” At this point, everyone should ask himself or herself, “Do I want to be like the parrot and escape from my cage so I can go out and play?” If you aren’t even aware that you are imprisoned in a cage, there’s nothing to be said. However, if you are aware that you are trapped in a cage and not free, then you should hurry and look up Patriarch Bodhidharma!

In a single thought, the Buddha sees it with total clarity. Our mind is nowhere and yet everywhere. In a single thought, the Buddha is able to clearly know all the thoughts in sentient beings’ minds. He can perceive them all clearly. The god Wonderful Adornment understands this well. That Celestial King is especially good at understanding this Dharma.

Remember: Whenever there are people in the hall, our own people should move forward and take up the bowing cushions in front. It’s not the case that Bhikshus have to stand at the place for Bhikshus, or Bhikshunis have to stand at the place for Bhikshunis, or the male and female novices have to take up another row. If the laypeople see that there is room up front, you should move up. Don’t leave empty bowing cushions in front, while people have to kneel on the floor at the back. That’s not good. The floor is cool. People could catch cold from the moisture on the floor. Although people can show their extra sincerity by kneeling on the ground, right now it is not necessary for them to do so. In the future, if they wish to kneel on stone, or iron, or diamond, they can do as they please. That is, after they have gained true understanding. As of right now, they still haven’t reached that level of skill. It’s not yet time. Some people still experience pain in their legs, even when they kneeling on the bowing cushions. They would feel even more pain if they had to kneel on the ground. In the future, after they truly understand the Buddhadharma, things can change. But since they haven’t completely understood the Dharma right now, it’s not necessary to make them undertake too many ascetic practices.

4) Heavens of Time-Division (Suyama Heavens)

**Sutra:

Moreover, Celestial King Time-Division gained a passage into liberation of helping all sentient beings’ good roots grow, forever delivering them from worry and distress.

Commentary:**

Moreover, Celestial King Time-Division gained a passage into liberation of helping all sentient beings’ good roots grow. This means finding ways to help develop the good roots of sentient beings. Originally, these beings did not have good roots, but then they meet this Celestial King, who is able to use ingenious spiritual powers to bring about a change, thus endowing those beings with good roots. For example, demon kings are basically extremely evil. But one is able to employ the Dharma in a way that changes their evil minds into good minds, so that the demon kings no longer disturb the Way-place and become Dharma protectors instead. That is a dharma door of causing sentient beings to bring forth good roots. We speak of subduing demons from the heavens.

Basically, demons from the heavens also have good roots. If they did not have good roots, they would not encounter the Triple Jewel. Although they start out opposing the Triple Jewel, after putting up opposition for a time they find themselves believing in the Triple Jewel and revering and making offerings to the Triple Jewel. That is a case of “helping all sentient beings’ good roots grow.” In the beginning these beings are evil, but then the Celestial King brings about a change in them so they bring forth good roots, forever delivering them from worry and distress. What do sentient beings worry about? For instance, a demon king might fret, “Oh no, my retinue is diminishing. The smaller my retinue becomes, the less power I have. What can I do to increase my power as demon king?” His worries make him distressed, and then he gets angry. “I will go to war with the celestial troops and generals. If I win, my power will increase.” For this reason, the demon king always wants to fight and compete with others. This attitude of fighting to win brings about worry and distress. But now this Celestial King influences these kinds of beings to renounce the deviant and return to the proper, renounce the evil and go towards the good, turn away from confusion and return to enlightenment. That way they will leave worry and distress behind forever. Celestial King Time-Division attained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:**

**Celestial King Charming Light gained a passage into liberation of universally entering all states.

Commentary:**

The Celestial King named Charming Light gained a passage into liberation of universally entering all states and expedient dharma doors in the lands of the ten directions. He has attained an entrance into liberation of understanding all Buddhas’ states and all sentient beings’ states. Not only can he understand them, he can deeply enter those states. He remains clear-headed right in the midst of these states and is not confused by them.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Infinite Wisdom and Banner of Meritorious Virtues gained a passage into liberation of eradicating all misfortune by means of the wheel of great compassion.

Commentary:**

The Celestial King named Infinite Wisdom and Banner of Meritorious Virtues has wisdom that is inexhaustible and meritorious virtues that resemble a jeweled banner. He gained a passage into liberation of eradicating all misfortune, all disasters and difficulties, such as a chronic sickness from which one never recovers and which causes worry and unhappiness in one’s mind. That’s the misfortune of sickness. There are also the misfortunes of being burned by fire, being drowned in water, or being in a car accident. In general, this refers to circumstances that cause apprehension and distress to the mind. The word “misfortune” in Chinese is made up of two characters for “middle” strung together, with a “mind” radical beneath them. This implies tribulation that brings worry to the mind. People worry over worldly gains and losses. Before they get something, they worry about how to get it; after they get it, they worry over losing it. Here, “all misfortune” includes the misfortunes of sickness, difficulties, and calamities. For example, if you don’t have a car, it’s less likely that you will get into an auto crash. If you do have a car, you have to be careful every day about not crashing it into something. If you get on an airplane, you worry about getting into a plane crash. Or, you may worry about food: “I have to eat every day. Will there be a day when I won’t have any food to eat?” Perhaps you worry over clothes: “Will I always get enough clothes to wear?” People have lots of worries—about clothes, shelter, food, and so on.

But now this Celestial King is able to eradicate all those worries. How does he do it? By means of the wheel of great compassion. He uses the wheel of great compassion. Compassion can pull beings out of suffering. This wheel of great compassion pervades all places of adversity. Wherever there is trouble and misfortune, this Celestial King goes there and runs his wheel of compassion over that place and manages to dispel all those unfortunate circumstances. This means using a greatly compassionate mind to eradicate the sufferings of all sentient beings. He has obtained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Well Able to Transform and Adorn gained a passage into liberation of comprehending the minds of all sentient beings in the three periods of time.**

**Commentary:**

The Celestial King named Well Able to Transform and Adorn is dignified and serious. His gaze does not wander, his ears do not try to eavesdrop on other people’s conversations, and his bearing is proper and erect as he sits. He is proficient in teaching beings with clever, expedient means. He regulates himself sternly, yet is tolerant and forgiving of others. That’s the way of this Celestial King, who is skilled at teaching and transforming sentient beings. When sentient beings see this Celestial King, they are awed by his majesty and admire his virtue.

He gained a passage into liberation of comprehending the minds of all sentient beings in the three periods of time. Some sentient beings have black minds, some have white minds, some have red minds, some have yellow minds, and some have green minds. Their minds are of different colors: green, yellow, red, white, and black. Some beings have evil minds, while others have good minds. Some beings have wise minds; others have foolish minds. Let’s just consider the mind that uses wisdom and the mind that indulges in foolishness. A foolish person thinks in this way: “How fine it would be if the moon could always stay in my house! And if the sun belonged to me, I could demand rent from anyone who was illumined by the sunlight and make a fortune!

I could say, ‘Do you want the sun to shine on you? Then you must pay me rent.’” Would you say such a person was wise or foolish?

There’s another kind of fool that thinks, “If the gold in the world could turn into golden oxen, golden horses, and golden pigs and come to my house on their own, I would have an endless supply of gold.” Now wouldn’t you say that was a fool’s fantasy? There are so many ridiculous, foolish fantasies. People who have entered the monastic life might think, “Maybe I should try out what it’s like to return to laylife.” They entertain that kind of false thought. Others may think, “What can I do to become number one?” Those are foolish thoughts. To give a more overt example, a girl might want to find a boyfriend, and so from morning to night she directs her thoughts in that direction; a boy might seek a girlfriend and think about that all day long. Sometimes they succeed and their fantasies are fulfilled. However, if they do not succeed, their foolish fantasies remain fantasies. In general, there are many kinds of foolish fantasies.

As for thoughts based in wisdom, someone might look at a situation and immediately understand, “Ah, this is not something I should do. I should not indulge in this kind of fantasy,” at which point he puts a stop to it. The thoughts of all sentient beings include good thoughts, bad thoughts, wholesome thoughts, evil thoughts, thoughts of right, thoughts of wrong, thoughts of something, thoughts of nothing, big thoughts, small thoughts—there are many, many of them. However, this Celestial King is able to understand them all. Not only does he know the thoughts of sentient beings of one lifetime, he knows the thoughts of sentient beings of the past, present, and future. And then he proclaims, “The mind of the past is thus; the mind of the present is thus, and the mind of the future is thus.” To realize those three kinds of thusness is to understand and know completely.

You may wonder, “What does it mean to be ‘thus’? How come I don’t understand?” Of course you don’t understand. If you understood, you would be the same as this Celestial King! If you wish to understand, you can bow to the Celestial King Stern and Well Able to Transform as your teacher, and then you will succeed in understanding.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Great Light of Uniting and Upholding gained a passage into liberation of access to the illumination of the gate of dharani, by which he firmly recollects all dharmas without forgetting them.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Great Light of Uniting and Upholding. Uniting and upholding means “uniting all dharmas and upholding limitless meanings.” Great Light means he has great wisdom. Because of his wisdom, he has light. Through uniting all dharmas and upholding limitless meanings, this Celestial King produces great wisdom and emits great light, hence his name. He gained a passage into liberation of access to the illumination of the gate of dharani. Dharani is Sanskrit and means “uniting and upholding.” He has accessed this gate of dharani that enables him to emit bright light by which he firmly recollects all dharmas. He doesn’t have to force himself to remember dharmas. He naturally remembers them and never forgets them, just as if he were holding them in his hand. What does he recollect? He recollects all dharmas: form dharmas, mind dharmas, sentient beings’ dharmas, dharmas interactive with the mind, dharmas non-interactive with the mind, and unconditioned dharmas, without forgetting them. He won’t forget them or get them jumbled up. For example, he won’t think, “National Master Qingliang made ten great vows. What was the first vow? Ahhh…I forgot. It doesn’t come to mind.” That’s forgetting.

But, if you recollect, then you say, “Yes, the first vow: his body would not renounce the appearance of a Srämana; the second vow: his mind would not oppose the Thus Come One’s regulations…” If you remember them very clearly, then you have gained a passage into liberation of not forgetting dharmas. The Celestial King has obtained this kind of retention and wisdom.

If you wish to obtain this kind of wisdom, what should you do? You have to read more sutras and investigate the Buddhadharma.

After you have investigated a lot of Buddhadharma, you will naturally develop great wisdom. If, on top of that, you can develop extensive and perfect understanding, you will discover that the sutras spoken by the Buddhas mesh with what you yourself say. “Aha! If I became a Buddha and spoke the Dharma, what I said would be exactly the same as what is spoken in the sutras: “Thus I have heard. At one time the Buddha was on 15th Street, San Francisco, America, emitting great light…”

If you take the Buddha’s body as your own body, the Buddha’s mind as your own mind, and the sutras spoken by the Buddha as sutras spoken by yourself, how can you possibly forget anything? Not only will you not forget, you won’t even have to make an effort in remembering. All you have to do is start reciting, and the words will flow out spontaneously. Then you will have gained this passage into liberation of not forgetting dharmas.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Inconceivable Wisdom gained a passage into liberation of using the inconceivable expedients of the inherent nature to skillfully enter all karma.

Commentary:**
Celestial King Inconceivable Wisdom has inconceivable wisdom himself, and he also teaches sentient beings to obtain this inconceivable wisdom, hence his name. He gained the samadhi of a passage into liberation of using the inconceivable expedients of the inherent nature to skillfully enter all karma. This means teaching and transforming sentient beings with various expedient dharma doors, causing them to all bring forth the bodhi resolve, cultivate the Bodhisattva practice, and attain good karma. He causes them to skillfully enter all good karma and separate from all evil karma.

“Inconceivable expedients of the inherent nature” means that from within his own nature, wonderful skill-in-means come forth, with which he teaches and transforms sentient beings. Since he understands this state of the Buddha, the Celestial King Inconceivable Wisdom gained this passage into liberation of using inconceivable expedients to teach sentient beings.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Cakra-Navel gained a passage into liberation of expediently bringing beings to maturity by turning the Dharma wheel.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Circular Navel gained a passage into liberation of expediently bringing beings to maturity by turning the Dharma wheel. He understands how the Buddha turns the Dharma wheel to teach sentient beings. Ultimately, what is meant by turning the Dharma wheel? Any work done for Buddhism is part of turning the Dharma wheel. For instance, translating the Sutras is turning the Dharma wheel. Lecturing on the sutras and speaking the Dharma is turning the Dharma wheel. Typing, reciting mantras, and so forth, are all ways of turning the Dharma wheel. However, if you sit there and go on strike, refusing to do anything, then you are not turning the Dharma wheel. At our monasteries, we turn the Dharma wheel every day. Everyone turns the Dharma wheel. If you get angry and say, “I don’t want to turn the Dharma wheel,” then you are going on strike. If you say, “It’s too tough. I want to take a rest,” then you are not turning the Dharma wheel. Turning the Dharma wheel to teach and transform sentient beings means you have to be vigorous at all times. Even if you yourself don’t turn the Dharma wheel, you can still help others to do so.

If you yourself know how to do so, then you should turn the Dharma wheel. If you don’t know how, you can help others push the Dharma wheel and get it rolling. Give them a hand. Therefore, typing is turning the Dharma wheel, and so is working on our Buddhist monthly journal. Do not fail to recognize your own work. When you are about to get angry, when you wish to go on strike, when you want to goof off, ask yourself, “Shouldn’t I be turning the Dharma wheel? If I am supposed to turn the Dharma wheel, then I shouldn’t rest.” Why? Because the Dharma wheel has to be turned at all times and on an extensive basis. What is this for? It is “the expedient of bringing sentient beings to maturity,” enabling them to accomplish Buddhahood and accomplish Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment. If you wish to cause sentient beings to attain Unsurpassed, Proper and Equal, Right Enlightenment, first you should employ expedient means to teach them. Celestial King Hub-of-the-Wheel understands this state and this principle. He understands how the Buddha universally saves all sentient beings with kindness and compassion, causing them to turn away from confusion and return to enlightenment, and how one should first use clever, expedient methods to teach sentient beings, enabling them to all at once attain liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Blaze of Light gained a passage into liberation of everywhere observing sentient beings with vast, great eyes and then going to tame and subdue them.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Blaze of Light has a flaming brilliance that springs from his wisdom. He has attained vast, great eyes of wisdom. Where can these vast, great eyes of wisdom be found? Right within every one of his pores are countless vast, great eyes, with which he universally observes sentient beings. When he sees sentient beings whose causes and conditions are mature, he goes there to tame and subdue, teach and transform them, causing them to bring forth the bodhi resolve. When he sees sentient beings who are ready to be saved, he goes to where they are to save them. He manifests the appropriate kind of form to speak Dharma for sentient beings. If they should be saved by one in the form of a Buddha, he will manifest in a Buddha’s body to speak Dharma for them. If they should be saved by one in the form of a Pratyekabuddha, he will manifest the form of a Pratyekabuddha and speak Dharma for them. If they should be saved by one in the form of a Brahma King, he will assume the form of a Brahma King and speak Dharma for them. If they should be saved by one in the form of a king, an official, an elder, a layman, a man, a woman, a pure youth, or a maiden, he will manifest all those various kinds of forms and speak Dharma for sentient beings. He contemplates the potential and dispenses the teaching, speaking Dharma according to the person.

Let me illustrate this with a simple analogy. This Celestial King is like a horticulturist who plants fruit trees. When he sees that certain fruits are ripe, he will pick them. By the same token, when this Celestial King sees that certain sentient beings are ripe, he picks their fruits. He may plant the fruit from an evil tree into wholesome soil, in which case such a sentient being will bring forth the bodhi resolve and bear the bodhi fruit. Sentient beings who are mature and ready to be taught are like fruit that has ripened. At that time, this Celestial King goes there to tame and subdue them, using various expedients to guide sentient beings away from the deviant and back to the proper. He understands the Buddha’s state and has gained a passage into liberation of everywhere observing sentient beings with vast, great eyes and then going to tame and subdue them.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Brightly Shining gained a passage into liberation of transcending all karmic obstacles and abjuring the deeds of demons.

Commentary:**

Why doesn’t this Celestial King follow the deeds of demons? Because he is brightly shining. Demons are dark, and his bright illumination is light.  Since this Celestial King has great wisdom, he can emit tremendous light that illumines the entire trichiliocosm, hence his name, Celestial King Brightly Shining. He gained a passage into liberation of transcending all karmic obstacles. There are many such obstacles, but in general, there are: karmic obstacles, the obstacles of retribution, and the obstacles of affliction.

Karmic obstacles come about from all the evil karma we have created and obstruct our resolve for cultivating the Way. Obstacles of retribution refer to the retribution we have to undergo for the deeds we have done. This retribution can also obstruct our cultivation. For instance, if we were to fall and become animals, it would not be easy for us to listen to the sutras and Dharma and cultivate the Way. If we were to become a hungry ghost, it will be even harder. If we were to fall into the hells, it will also be difficult for us to cultivate the Way. As for obstacles of afflictions, they will also obstruct our cultivation. Afflictions obstruct the Way.

Now this Celestial King has transcended all karmic obstacles, obstacles of retribution, and obstacles of affliction and is abjuring the deeds of demons. These obstacles are closely related to the demon king. Because this god has brightly shining wisdom, he does not follow the deeds of demons. He is not turned by the demon king. If the demon king wants us to be deluded, we can remain determined to not be deluded. The demon king does not want us to cultivate, we can remain determined to cultivate. The demon king may want to convince us to not turn the Dharma wheel, but we can remain determined to turn it. The demon king will try to persuade us to take it easy, but we can insist on being vigorous. The demon king may urge us to have a bigger temper, but we can remain determined to practice patience. The demon king will exhort us not to hold the precepts, but we can remain determined to hold them. In every situation, if we are not swayed by demons, then we will not be following the deeds of demons. Celestial King Brightly Shining obtained this passage into liberation and understood this state of the Buddha.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Universally Contemplating Those with Great Renown gained a passage into liberation of deftly enticing and instructing the celestial multitudes, encouraging them to purify their minds through practice.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Universally Contemplating Those with Great Renown observes beings of the three periods of time. And all of them know of this Celestial King’s great repute. He gained a passage into liberation of deftly enticing and instructing the celestial multitudes. Some gods enjoy so much bliss that they forget to cultivate. But this Celestial King uses many expedient means to entice and teach all the gods to understand the Buddhadharma, encouraging them to purify their minds through practice. He enables them to develop pure minds through their cultivation. That is his passage into  liberation.

**Sutra:

At that time, Celestial King Time-Division received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, universally contemplated the multitudes of the Time-Division Heavens, and spoke the following verse:

The Buddha, throughout measureless eons in the distant past,
Has drained the ocean of worry and distress in the world.
He extensively blazes a path free of dust, one of purity,
And acts as a wisdom-lamp that forever shines upon
sentient beings.

Commentary:**

At that time, the Celestial King Time-Division received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual might, contemplated the multitudes of the Time-Division Heavens, and spoke the following four-line verses.

The Buddha, throughout measureless great eons in the distant past, / Has drained the sea of worry and distress of the world. He has exhausted the sea of worry and distress, so that there is no more worry or distress. He extensively blazes and opens up a path free of dust, one of purity / And acts as a wisdom-lamp that forever shines upon sentient beings. This is a wisdom-lamp that always illumines sentient beings’ minds.

**Sutra:

The Thus Come One’s Dharma body is colossal.
To the limits of the ten directions, it cannot be apprehended.
His expedients are limitless and measureless:
The god Charming Light enters this with his wisdom.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Charming Light says: The Thus Come One’s Dharma body is colossal. It is nowhere and yet everywhere. To the limits of the ten directions, it cannot be apprehended. Even if you were to go to the limits of the ten directions looking for the Thus Come One’s Dharma body, you would not find it. It transcends the confines of the ten directions. His expedients are limitless and measureless. His expedient dharma doors are countless. The god Charming Light enters this with his wisdom. This Celestial King has the wisdom to understand this state of the Thus Come One.

**Sutra:

The woes of birth, old age, sickness, death, worry, and grief
Oppress those in the world without respite.
The Great Master, out of pity, vows to dispel them.
Infinite Wisdom Light enlightens thus and understands.

Commentary:**

Because the Buddha saw the woes of birth, old age, sickness, death, worry, and grief, he left home to cultivate. Most people in the world, however, have not realized that birth, old age, sickness, and death entail suffering. Instead, they are confused by these things and do not wake up. We are born muddled, not knowing where we came from. And then we die muddled, being just as unclear when we leave. Muddled we come, muddled we go, and nobody wants to wake up and end birth and death. For countlessly many eons, the Buddha cultivated various practices for the sake of ending birth and death.

From birth, we progress to our youth, our prime, and to old age. From childhood we move on to adulthood. The period of our prime does not last long, and soon old age comes upon us. Old age is very uncomfortable. Our teeth fall out and we cannot enjoy the flavor of our food. Our ears go deaf and we cannot hear clearly. Our vision dims and we cannot see clearly. Our legs refuse to cooperate with us when we walk. When we eat, our hands refuse to help out. That is suffering as it is. Now, if people are not plagued with sickness in their old age, they can get along all right. However, old people tend to suffer various ailments, such as headaches, eye problems, toothaches, and earaches. All kinds of pains can occur just on the head. They may also experience aches and pains in the backs and legs. They may suffer bloated stomachs or ailments of the legs and feet. Sickness is suffering. No matter who we are, we will suffer if we get sick. If we become seriously ill, we may even die. Death is also extremely painful. Worry and grief are also fraught with suffering.

These sufferings oppress those in the world without respite. There is no break to this suffering that oppresses sentient beings. These sufferings are extremely active. They work day and night, invading all people and making it intolerable for them. The Great Master, the Buddha, out of pity for all sentient beings, vows to dispel this suffering. Infinite Wisdom Light enlightens thus and understands. The Celestial King Infinite Wisdom and Banner of Meritorious Virtues understands this state.

**Sutra:

Unimpeded, like an illusion, the Buddha’s wisdom
Fathoms all dharmas of the three periods of time,
Universally penetrating the mental activities of sentient beings:
This is the state of the god Well Able to Transform.

Commentary:**

Unimpeded, like an illusion, the Buddha’s wisdom. An illusion is unreal; however, “like an illusion” means although it appears to be unreal, it is in fact real. Although the Buddha’s wisdom seems unreal, it is true wisdom, and it is unimpeded. Nothing can obstruct it. It clearly discerns the thoughts of all sentient beings and the true reality of all phenomena. It clearly fathoms the karma, retribution, and afflictions of all sentient beings.

It fathoms all dharmas spoken by the Buddhas of the three periods of time—the past, present, and future. One is able to deeply understand these dharmas without obstruction. Universally penetrating the mental activities of sentient beings. With his wisdom and samadhi that are like illusions, the Buddha universally understands all the activities and thoughts in sentient beings’ minds. The Buddha enables all sentient beings to bring forth the bodhi resolve and quickly accomplish the Buddha Path.

This is the state of the god Well Able to Transform. The Celestial King who is skilled at transforming sentient beings understands this principle.

**Sutra:

The boundaries of uniting and upholding cannot be obtained.
His vast ocean of eloquence also is without end.
He may turn the pure, wonderful Dharma wheel.
This is the liberation of Celestial King Great Light.

Commentary:**

“Uniting and upholding” means uniting the three karmas of body, mouth, and mind in purity; and upholding the three non-outflow studies of precepts, samadhi, and wisdom. Whereas “uniting” refers to the general meaning of all dharmas, “upholding” means the practice of all dharmas. Actually, the term “uniting and upholding” has infinite meanings. For this reason, the text says: The boundaries of uniting and upholding cannot be obtained.

His vast ocean of eloquence also is without end. The Four Kinds of Unobstructed Eloquence of the Buddha resemble an ocean that is endless and inexhaustible. He may turn the pure, wonderful Dharma wheel. He forever turns this pure Dharma wheel and smashes through the defiled thoughts of sentient beings. This is an inconceivable Dharma wheel. This is the liberation of Celestial King Great Light. Celestial King Great Light of Uniting and Upholding understands this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Although the nature of karma is vast, great, and inexhaustible.
Enlightened by wisdom, the Buddha deftly reveals and expounds upon it.
His expedients defy conceptualization.
The god Wisdom enters thus.

Commentary:**

Although the nature of karma is vast, great, and inexhaustible. The karma of sentient beings is without end, vast, great, and boundless. Karma is without shape or form. If it had shape or appearance, it would have filled all of empty space long ago. Not to mention the karma of all people, even the karma of a single person can fill all of empty space. Enlightened by wisdom, the Buddha deftly reveals and expounds upon it. The Buddha has great wisdom and understands all. Therefore, he is skilled at revealing principles to all sentient beings.

His expedients defy conceptualization. / The god Wisdom enters thus. Celestial King Wisdom obtained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Turning the inconceivable, wonderful Dharma wheel,
Displaying the cultivation of the bodhi path,
Forever destroying the sufferings of sentient beings:
This is the Ground of Skillful Means of Cakra-Navel.

Commentary:**

Turning the inconceivable, wonderful Dharma wheel. The Buddha often turns the Dharma wheel to teach and transform sentient beings. He sets in motion the inconceivable, wonderful Dharma. “Inconceivable” means it goes beyond the realm of thought and language. Displaying the cultivation of the Bodhi Path. The Buddha very clearly points out to sentient beings how to cultivate and apply effort so as to attain the path of enlightenment. If you do not cultivate, you will not attain the path of enlightenment. At all times you have to actually cultivate, and then you will attain the principle of enlightenment. Well, what use is it to attain enlightenment? It’s very useful. One becomes capable of forever destroying the sufferings of sentient beings. Why do people experience suffering? It’s because they are not enlightened. Prompted by ignorance, they create different kinds of karma and undergo various retributions. If you can smash through ignorance and become enlightened, you will be able to forever destroy sentient beings’ sufferings. This is the Ground of Skillful Means of Hub-of-the-Navel. Celestial King Hub-of-the-Navel attained this expedient dharma door.

**Sutra:

The Thus Come One’s true body is fundamentally nondual.
Responding to beings, according with their forms, it fills the world.
Each being sees the Buddha appear before him.
This is the state of the god Blaze of Light.**

**Commentary:**
The Thus Come One’s true body is fundamentally nondual. Not only is it nondual, “not two,” it is not even one. Why? Because the Thus Come One’s true body is without marks. It is without marks, and yet there is nothing unmarked by it. It is nowhere, and yet it is everywhere. Responding to beings, to sentient beings’ potentials, according with their forms, their dispositions, he teaches and transforms them. He observes the conditions and teaches accordingly, speaking the appropriate Dharma for each person and dispensing medicine according to the illness. It, the Buddha’s true body, fills the world.

Each being sees the Buddha appear before him, speaking Dharma. This is the state of the god Blaze of Light. Celestial King Blaze of Light can understand this state.

**Sutra:

If sentient beings see the Buddha but once,
They may surely purge themselves of all karmic obstacles
And forever abandon all demonic karma, so none remains.
Celestial King Brightly Shining walks this path.

Commentary:**

If there are sentient beings…Basically there are none, but let us suppose there is a sentient being, or many sentient beings, who get to see the reward body of the Buddha but once. They may surely purge themselves of all karmic obstacles. When sentient beings see the Buddha, the obstacles of their karma, retribution, and afflictions will be completely cleansed and cast out. When karmic obstacles are made pure, they no longer exist, and so they are cast out. It’s only when we are impure that we have karmic obstacles. Once we are pure, we will not have karmic obstacles. There are many kinds of karmic obstacles, which obstruct our cultivation of the Path. Sometimes people are bothered by karma involving demons. They may want to cultivate, but the demons obstruct them. They may want to study the Buddhadharma, but the demons influence them to be lazy and not be vigorous. Demons have great power. Now, sentient beings can forever abandon all demonic karma, so none remains. The demon king will have no way to bother us, since we will have separated from demon karma forever. Celestial King Brightly Shining walks this path. This is the state he understands and the principle he cultivates.

**Sutra:

Among all in the extensive, ocean-wide assembly,
The Buddha is the most awesome and dazzling.
He sprinkles Dharma rain everywhere to nourish sentient beings.
Renown enters this passage into liberation.

Commentary:**

In every world, the Buddha has a Dharma assembly attended by countless Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Hearers, Sages Enlightened by Conditions, and sentient beings. Among all in the extensive, ocean-wide assembly/ The Buddha is the most awesome and dazzling. Each assembly resembles an ocean in its vastness; no one can fathom its scope or depth. In every Dharma assembly, the Buddha has the most majestic and radiant presence. He sprinkles Dharma rain everywhere to nourish sentient beings. He pervasively speaks the Dharma, like heaven sending down rain that moistens all the plants and trees according to their needs. The larger plants and trees obtain more rain; the smaller flowers and grasses obtain less. Each, according to its own kind, its own nature, obtains the appropriate amount of rain. In the same way, the Buddha’s Dharma rain nourishes all sentient beings. Renown enters this passage into liberation. Celestial King Universally Contemplating Those with Great Renown has deeply understood this state.

5) Heavens of the Thirty-three

**Sutra:

Moreover, Celestial King Sãkra-Indra gained a passage into liberation of experiencing great happiness of recollecting the appearance of Buddhas of the three periods and clearly seeing everything including the formation and decay of their lands.

Commentary:**

Moreover, the text will now elaborate upon the principles brought up previously that have not been fully discussed. Celestial King Sãkra-Indra is Sãkro-devanam Indra. Sãkra means “Able” and Indra means “Celestial Lord.” Therefore he is “Able to be Celestial Lord.” He gained a passage into liberation of experiencing great happiness of recollecting the appearance of Buddhas of the three periods of time in a single thought, so that a single thought is replete with the three periods of time, and clearly seeing everything including the formation and decay of their lands. He can in a single thought recall how the Buddhas of the past appeared in the world, and how their lands went through the stages of formation and decay. He is able to see all of this distinctly, not only for Buddhas of the past, but also for Buddhas of the present and future. Since he is able to see all of this clearly and understand these states, he is extremely happy. He obtained this passage into liberation.

Basically, we have discussed Sakra, “Able to Be Celestial Lord” many times, and I do not wish to repeat my explanation again at this time. However, a couple of people are wondering, “What’s meant by ‘Able to Be Celestial Lord’? What’s meant by ‘Unable to Be Celestial Lord’?” They are having many doubts. Therefore, I will tell you very briefly the story behind “Able to Be Celestial Lord.” Those who have heard this explained before can listen to it one more time. Those who have not should pay special attention.

Most people know him as Heavenly Lord, or Lord God, but they do not realize how he became Lord God, and so they claim, “Lord God is the one and only true God. He is almighty, ultimate, and perfect.” However, those are claims made by human beings. Lord God did not take you by the ear and tell you, “I am Lord God. I am the true God, the ultimate Lord, the perfect spirit.” He wouldn’t do that. Not to mention Lord God, even people who have high status, wisdom, and knowledge will not toot their own horns, introducing themselves in this way: “Do you know who I am? I am a great Professor.” Even if he were a great professor, he would not say he was one. By the same token, why would the true God proclaim that he is the true God? For example, a Dharma Master would not introduce himself by saying, “I am great Dharma Master so-and-so, and all the others are little Dharma Masters.” He would not be that conceited. Even people would not be that smug, so how could an intelligent god or spirit be so full of himself? Therefore, those claims came from the imaginings of people. They said, “This is the true God, the ultimate God, the perfect God.” Actually, those were just words of flattery, spoken by those who knew no shame and didn’t take good stock of themselves.

Now we are discussing this true God. Countlessly many eons ago—it’s not known how long ago—this god was a poor, unmarried woman. One time, she came upon a broken-down temple. Nobody had taken the initiative to repair it. She said to herself, “The roof of this temple has caved in, and I must repair it. Otherwise, the Buddha images will be ruined by the rain, and that would not be right.” Thereupon she rounded up her friends so they could repair the roof of the temple together. How many friends did she manage to round up? Thirty-two women.  Then, including herself, these thirty-three women pooled their savings and repaired the roof, so that the Buddha images would no longer be exposed to the winds and the rain. Having completed their work, they became the lords of thirty-three heavens. The leader of the group became the lord of the central heaven overseeing thirty-two other heavens: eight in the east, eight in the west, eight in the south, and eight in the north. The other thirty-two women each became the lord of one of those thirty-two heavens. Well, is that all the Celestial Kings there are? No, there are many heavens and many Celestial Kings. But, the specific Heavenly Lord Sãkra under discussion was formerly a woman who had led thirty-two other women in repairing a temple. People who do not know the past causes and conditions of Lord Sãkra talk nonsense, insisting that he is the one and only God who existed right from the start. Why do they make such a claim? It’s because they are only aware of the events that have happened in recent decades. They have no idea of events that occurred hundreds or thousands or millions of years in the past. And since they do not know, they create their own theory of a true god, an ultimate god, a perfect god. Since nobody contested their claim or took the case to court, the mistake has been perpetuated up to the present time. Everyone should deeply understand this principle.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Universally Praised Full Voice gained a passage into liberation of being able to realize how the Buddha’s physical body comes to be the most pure, vast, and peerless in the world.**

**Commentary:**

Having heard the story told just now, someone again has doubts and is thinking, “I don’t agree with that theory.” If you don’t agree, you can study deluded theories, if you wish. There’s no problem.

The next Celestial King is named Universally Praised Full Voice. His sound is praised for filling the Dharma Realm. He gained a passage into liberation of being able to realize how the Buddha’s physical body comes to be the most pure, vast, great, and peerless in the world. Each Buddha has three kinds of bodies: a Dharma body, a reward body, and transformation bodies. His reward body is his physical body, which is the most pure and undefiled, unlike the physical bodies of ordinary people, which are defiled and unclean. Each Buddha’s physical body is replete with Thirty-two Hallmarks and Eighty Subtle Characteristics. Every mark and characteristic is pure, vast, and great. A Buddha’s reward body appears in countless worlds to teach and transform sentient beings, and it is peerless in the world. In the world, a wheel-turning sage king is endowed with the most characteristics of virtue, yet he only possesses thirty hallmarks and so cannot compare with a Buddha. No one in the world, albeit honored and noble, can rival the light and hallmarks of a Buddha. Celestial King Universally Praised Full Voice attained this passage into liberation.
 **Sutra:

Celestial King Compassionate Eyes and Precious Cowl gained a passage into liberation of having cloud of kindness cover all.

Commentary:**
The Celestial King named Compassionate Eyes and Precious Cowl always regards sentient beings with compassionate eyes. His eyes release a light-cloud of kindness, and on his head is a jeweled cowl, which is replete with many jewels constantly flowing forth. He forever bestows the many jewels upon sentient beings. He has understood as aspect of the Buddha’s state and gained a passage into liberation of having a cloud of kindness cover all. This is an analogy. He is like a cloud of kindness that spreads out over sentient beings, causing them to bring forth a mind of compassion so they will not kill; a mind of giving so they will not steal; a mind of holding precepts so they will not engage in lust; a mind of patience so they will not be stubborn and obstinate; a mind of vigor so they will not be lazy; a mind of dhyana-samadhi so they will not be scattered; and a mind of prajña wisdom so they will not be stupid. This cloud of kindness spreads out everywhere over sentient beings, enabling them to cross from this shore of birth and death over to the other shore of nirvana. This Celestial King attained this passage into liberation and understood this aspect of the Buddha’s state.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Jeweled Light Banner of Renown gained a passage into liberation of constantly seeing the Buddhas and manifesting awe-inspiring bodies of various shapes and forms before all rulers of the worlds.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Jeweled Light Banner of Renown gained a passage into liberation of constantly seeing the Buddhas and manifesting awe-inspiring bodies of various shapes and forms before all rulers of the worlds, kings and so forth. Before world rulers, the Buddha appears in various forms. His majestic presence inspires awe, and his virtue inspires respect. That is the state of liberation attained by this Celestial King.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Inspiring Happiness Cowl gained a passage into liberation of knowing the karma of blessings that produces the cities, villages, and palaces of all sentient beings.**

**Commentary:**

Celestial King Inspiring Happiness Cowl gained a passage into liberation of knowing the karma of blessings that produces the cities, villages, and palaces of all sentient beings. This Celestial King knows why certain sentient beings have wealth such as palaces, cities, and villages. He knows where those rewards of blessings come from. If you can diligently cultivate precepts, samadhi, and wisdom and extinguish greed, anger, and delusion, you will achieve the reward of cities, villages, and palaces. However, if you exclusively commit offenses and crimes and fail to cultivate good works, merit and virtue, you will not obtain such blessings. These blessings come from doing good. This Celestial King has obtained such a passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Proper Mindfulness gained a passage into liberation of revealing the deeds of all Buddhas that bring sentient beings to maturity.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Proper Mindfulness has proper thoughts. He gained a passage into liberation of revealing the Buddhas’ deeds. Originally the case was closed, so to speak, but now he opens it up and points out the deeds that bring sentient beings to maturity carried out by the Buddhas of the ten directions. Deeds of bringing sentient beings to maturity are just deeds of bringing Buddhas to maturity. When sentient beings mature, they become Buddhas. Their Buddha fruit ripens. Those who have not planted good roots are caused to plant good roots; those who have planted good roots are caused to have those good roots increase and grow; those whose good roots have already increased and grown are caused to have them ripen; those whose good roots are ripened are led to liberation. In this case, bringing sentient beings to maturity means effecting their liberation. This Celestial King obtained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Lofty Splendid Sound gained a passage into liberation of knowing the changing characteristics of the eons of formation and decay in all worlds.

Commentary:**
Celestial King Lofty Splendid Sound gained a passage into liberation of knowing the changing characteristics of the eons of formation, dwelling, and decay and emptiness in all worlds. He knows how many eons it takes for a world system to undergo the stages of formation, dwelling, decay, and emptiness. He knows this all clearly. When a world system progresses from the stage of formation to the stage of dwelling, from dwelling to decay, and from decay to emptiness, there are changing characteristics involved. He knows the features of those changes and the periods of time required for those changes to take place. This Celestial King has understood this state.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Fulfilling Intentions gained a passage into liberation of pondering future Bodhisattvas’ practice of taming sentient beings.

Commentary:**

The Celestial King named Fulfilling Intentions gained a passage into liberation of pondering—this means always remembering and never forgetting—future Bodhisattvas’ practice of taming sentient beings. He recalls how future Bodhisattvas will tame and subdue sentient beings, causing sentient beings to turn from the small to the great and change their evil ways and go towards the good. He attained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Pure Floral Light gained a passage into liberation of apprehending the causes underlying the joy of all the gods.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Pure Floral Light gained a passage into liberation of apprehending the causes underlying the joy of all the gods. Gods experience great joy. What causes did they plant so as to reap their present rewards of joy? This Celestial King is very clear with regard to those causes. Because the gods cultivated the Five Precepts and the Ten Good Deeds as their causes, they obtain the reward of joy. That is the passage into liberation of this Celestial King.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Eyes of Wisdom’s Sun gained a passage into liberation of revealing to all gods the good roots by which they attained rebirth, freeing them from delusion.

Commentary:**
The Celestial King named Eyes of Wisdom’s Sun won the liberation door of revealing to all gods in the heavens the good roots by which they attained rebirth, freeing them from delusion. The gods can then get rid of their foolish delusions and doubts. This Celestial King attained such a passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial King Effortless Light gained a passage into liberation of enlightening all the celestial multitudes, forever severing their myriad doubts.**

**Commentary:**

The Celestial King named Effortless Light gained a passage into liberation of enlightening and instructing all the celestial multitudes to awaken to and enter the Buddha’s state, forever severing their myriad doubts. He causes all the gods to forever cut off their doubts and bring forth proper faith. That is his liberation.

**Sutra:

At that time Celestial King Sãkra-Indra received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, universally contemplated the multitudes of the Heavens of the Thirty-three, and spoke the following verse:

Commentary:**

At that time, Celestial King Sãkra-Indra, Able to Be Celestial Lord, received the Buddha’s great awesome spiritual power, universally contemplated the multitudes of the Heavens of the Thirty-three, and spoke the following verse in praise of the Buddhas.

**Sutra:

I reflect upon the Buddhas of the three periods of time,
How all their states are level and equal.
The decay and formation of their lands
The Buddha’s awesome spirit makes visible to all.

Commentary:**

Celestial King Sãkra-Indra says: I reflect upon the Buddhas of the three periods of time—past, present, and future, how all their states are level and equal. The states of the Buddhas of the three periods of time are level, without high or low. The decay and formation of their lands./ The Buddha’s awesome spirit makes visible to all how those Buddha lands go through the stages of decay and formation. All sentient beings can see the Buddhas and understand this state by means of the Buddha’s great awesome spirit.

**Sutra:

The Buddha’s body, vast and great, pervades the ten directions.
His wondrous, unrivaled form benefits all beings.
His brilliance bedazzles all and everywhere.
Universally Praised contemplates and sees this path.

Commentary:**

The Buddha’s body, vast and great, pervades the ten directions. The Buddha’s Dharma body is vast, great, and boundless. It pervades all places throughout the ten directions. To the ends of space and the Dharma Realm, in every bit of empty space, the Dharma body abides. His wondrous, unrivaled form benefits all beings. The Buddha’s wondrous form is incomparable and can benefit all sentient and insentient beings. His brilliance bedazzles all and everywhere. The Buddha’s pure light can shine on all beings. No sentient being fails to be bathed in that compassionate brilliance. His light is equal, making no distinctions between those with good roots and those will dull roots. All are blessed by this dazzling light. Universally Praised contemplates and sees this path. This principle is contemplated by the Celestial Lord Universally Praised Full Voice; he can see this state.

**Sutra:

The Thus Come One’s expedients emanate from his ocean of great kindness.
In ages past, his cultivation was extremely pure
As he transformed and guided boundless sentient beings.
Celestial King Precious Cowl enlightens thus.**

**Commentary:**
The Thus Come One’s expedients emanate from his ocean of great kindness. “Thus Come One” is one of the Buddha’s ten titles. “Expedients” refers to “ocean of great compassion.” And “ocean of great compassion” is “expedients.” Because of expedients, the Buddha’s great compassion is revealed; and out of great compassion, the Buddha employs expedients. The Buddha’s compassion is oceanlike. In ages past, his cultivation was extremely pure. In past eons, the Buddha cultivated many practices and achieved a pure Dharma body, and was able to use expedient, great compassion. Because the Buddha cultivated, he obtained purity. Purity is proof of cultivation. Without cultivation, there is no purity. Purity attests to true cultivation.

As he transformed and guided boundless sentient beings. The Buddha teaches, transforms, and guides sentient beings with expedient great compassion, causing them to sever afflictions, smash their ignorance, and achieve the Dharma body. The dharma door of expedient great compassion is without boundaries. It is like a cloud of kindness that overspreads everywhere. Celestial King Precious Cowl enlightens thus to this state and gains this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

As I recall the Dharma King’s sea of meritorious virtue,
Supreme and unequaled in all the world,
Immense happiness swells in my heart:
This is the liberation of the god Jeweled Light.

Commentary:**
The Celestial King Jeweled Light Renown says: As I recall the Dharma King’s, the Buddha’s, sea of merit and virtue, which is boundless, supreme and unequalled in the world. There is nothing more lofty than the Buddha’s merit and virtue. It is peerless. When I recall this kind of state, immense happiness that exhausts empty space and pervades the Dharma Realm swells in my heart: / This is the liberation of the god Jeweled Light. He has obtained this state, this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

The Buddha knows sentient beings’ ocean of good karma
The various supreme causes leading to bounteous blessings.
All are revealed, without remainder.
The god Cowl of Happiness sees thus.

Commentary:**

The Buddha knows sentient beings’ ocean of good karma / The various supreme causes, all their good deeds, leading to bounteous blessings and rewards. All are revealed, without remainder. All of those good causes are made apparent, with nothing left out. Those who plant small good causes will reap small rewards of blessings. Those who plant great good causes will reap great rewards of blessings. It is not off by a hair. The god Cowl of Happiness sees thus. Celestial King Cowl of Happiness sees this state.

**Sutra:

The Buddhas appear throughout the ten directions,
Everywhere pervading all worlds.
Observing the minds of sentient beings, they manifest to tame them.
Celestial King Proper Mindfulness enlightens to this path.

Commentary:**

The Buddhas appear throughout the ten directions and the three periods of time, everywhere pervading all worlds, filling empty space and the Dharma Realm. Observing the minds of sentient beings, they manifest to regulate and tame them. The Buddhas of the ten directions and three periods of time observe sentient beings’ minds and demonstrate dharma doors of taming and regulating. They teach sentient beings with much greed to cultivate the contemplation of impurity; they advise sentient beings with much hatred to cultivate the contemplation of compassion; and they remind foolish sentient beings to cultivate the contemplation of causes and conditions. Observing the faculties of sentient beings, the Buddhas employ various expedient dharma doors to teach and transform, regulate and tame them.

However, in doing this, the Buddhas are not attached to marks. Therefore, the Vajra Sutra says, “The Buddha takes across all sentient beings to still quiescence, and yet there is not a single sentient being whom he has taken across to still quiescence.” Why is this? The Buddha does not grasp at marks. He saves sentient beings, but he does not retain a mark of sentient beings. He is not attached to saving sentient beings, unlike we ordinary people who become attached to whatever we do. “I have given a bowl of rice to someone, and so I’ve performed a good act.” Or, “I’ve given a cup of water to someone, and so I’ve been of benefit to sentient beings.” As for greater benefits, we become even more attached to these. But the Buddha benefits all sentient beings without retaining the mark of benefiting sentient beings. That is how the Buddha differs from ordinary people. Celestial King Proper Mindfulness enlightens to this path. He understands the principle of this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Wide, enormous eyes on the Thus Come One’s wisdom body
See all the motes of dust in all worlds without exception,
Universally pervading the ten directions.
This is the liberation of the god Cloud-Sound.

Commentary:**

Wide, enormous eyes on the Thus Come One’s wisdom body, a bright body of wisdom light that illumines the whole world. Because the Buddha has wisdom, his light universally shines. These eyes see all the motes of dust in all worlds throughout the ten directions without exception. All the myriad phenomena and sentient beings in the world are completely seen and known by the Thus Come One. That’s why the text says, “without exception.” Universally pervading the ten directions. The vast, great eyes of the Thus Come One’s wisdom body see all the motes of dust in worlds, and this state pervades the worlds of the ten directions. This is the liberation of the god Cloud-Sound. Celestial King Lofty Splendid Cloud-Sound understands this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

The bodhi practices of all disciples of the Buddha
Fully appear in the pores of the Thus Come One
In all their measureless perfection.
Celestial King Intentions perceives this with clarity.

Commentary:**
The bodhi practices of all disciples of the Buddha. This refers to the Bodhisattvas undergoing their last rebirth who live in the Inner Courtyard of the Tusita Heaven. They are the Buddha’s disciples. The practices of the enlightened Way that they cultivate fully appear in the pores of the Thus Come One. From the moment of their initial resolve to cultivate the Bodhisattva Path, all the way until they are Bodhisattvas undergoing their last rebirth, their practices of cultivation are completely manifest in the Thus Come One’s pores in all their measureless perfection:

Celestial King Fulfilling Intentions perceives this with clarity. This is the state that he understands, the passage into liberation that he has attained.

**Sutra:

All peaceful, happy events in the world
Arise because of the Buddha.
Supreme and unparalleled is the Thus Come One’s meritorious virtue.
Floral King enters this place of liberation.**

**Commentary:**
All the peaceful, happy events in the world. The “world” includes both the human and heavenly realms. All these happy causes arise because of the Buddha. They come about from the Buddha’s aid, because the Buddhadharma enables sentient beings who lack good roots to plant good roots. It helps those who have planted good roots to make them increase and grow. It helps those whose good roots have increased and grown to bring them to maturity. And it helps those whose good roots have matured to attain liberation. From the beginning to the very end, as sentient beings practice various Dharma doors, they are nourished by the Buddhadharma so that they can achieve the Buddha Way. For this reason, the sutra says, “All the peaceful, happy events in the world / Arise because of the Buddha.”

Supreme and unparalleled is the Thus Come One’s meritorious virtue. For three asamkhyeyas of eons, the Buddha cultivated blessings and wisdom, and for a hundred eons he planted the marks and characteristics. Nothing can compare with the supreme merit and virtue of the Buddha. Floral King enters this place of liberation. Celestial King Pure Floral Light can understand this principle.

Just now the text brought up how all the happy events in the world arise because of the Buddha. Since some people have not yet understood the principle involved, I will try to explain it by way of a simple analogy. The Buddha is our greatly compassionate father. Long ago, he made arrangements for the happy events in our lives, whether in the heavens or in the human realm. The Buddha has already made arrangements for the delightful experiences we will go through. This is like parents who buy many toys for their children. When the children see those toys, they are delighted. This kind of happy event comes about from the parents. All the sentient beings in the heavens and the human world are the Buddha’s children and grandchildren, and so the Buddha bestows happiness upon us. For this reason, we say that all happy events arise because of the Buddha. If you think of it like that, you will be able to believe this principle.

**Sutra:

If one recalls an iota of the Thus Come One’s meritorious virtue,
Or produces even one thought of devoted admiration,
The terrors of all evil paths will forever be dispelled.
Eyes of Wisdom awakens profoundly thus.

Commentary:**

If one recalls an iota of the Thus Come One’s meritorious virtue. “An iota” is used to describe the magnitude of the Thus Come One’s merit and virtue. Not to talk about a lot, suppose one recalls a very small fraction, as small as a dust mote’s worth, of the Buddha’s merit and virtue, or produces even one thought of devoted admiration. Or, maybe it’s a single thought of admiration for the Buddha, without mixing in random thoughts. If you can recall even the smallest fraction of the Buddha’s merit and virtue, or bring forth a single thought of respect for the Buddha, then the terrors of all evil paths will forever be dispelled. The fears, suffering, and offenses of the three evil paths—hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals—will completely be dispelled. They will never occur again. Eyes of Wisdom awakens profoundly thus. Celestial King Eye of Wisdom-Sun has deeply enlightened to and understood this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Within quiescent dharmas, great spiritual powers
Respond to the minds of all beings everywhere.
All doubts and delusions are severed.
This is the attainment of King Bright Light.

Commentary:**

Within quiescent dharmas, great spiritual powers. The quiescent characteristics of all dharmas cannot be proclaimed with words. Still and quiet dharmas are not spoken and not transmitted: That is how you should contemplate them. From the beginning, all dharmas are characterized by still quiescence. All dharmas are still and quiet to begin with, and yet within them, the Buddha manifests great spiritual powers to teach, transform and instruct sentient beings, helping them cast out their doubt and delusions. While still and unmoving in the Way-place, the Buddha displays various spiritual powers that respond to the minds of all beings everywhere. The response and the Way are intertwined. The Buddha is in universal communication with all sentient beings. There is not a single sentient being that does not obtain the response and aid of the Buddha. All doubts and delusions are severed. Sentient beings’ doubts are cut off, and they give rise to faith. This is the attainment of King Bright Light. Celestial King Effortless Light has attained the state of this passage into liberation.

6) Celestial Princes of the Sun

**Sutra:

Moreover, Celestial Prince Sun gained a passage into liberation of universally radiating pure light on sentient beings of the ten directions, constantly benefiting them to the ends of time.

Commentary:**

Moreover indicates that there is more to explain beyond the meanings in the previous passage. Celestial Prince Sun is the name of this god. This does not necessarily mean he is the sun, however, he universally shines on the world like the sun. He gained a passage into liberation of universally radiating pure, clear light on sentient beings of the ten directions, constantly benefiting them to the ends of time—this means reaching to distant eons in the future. Just as the sunlight shines on sentient beings, affording them warmth and helping them grow, Bodhisattvas always bring forth the resolve to benefit sentient beings. It’s because we have been aided and benefited by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that we can survive. That’s the resolve of Bodhisattvas: They want to benefit sentient beings. They do not care whether or not sentient beings benefit them, but they are determined to benefit sentient beings. For instance, when sentient beings are sick, Bodhisattvas turn into medicinal herbs to help cure their sickness. When sentient beings are hungry, Bodhisattvas turn into grains and crops to relieve their hunger. When sentient beings are cold, Bodhisattvas turn into clothes to shield them from the cold. Therefore, all the provisions we use in our daily affairs are provided for by the Bodhisattvas. The Celestial Prince Sun constantly benefits sentient beings, and he has attained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial Prince Bright Flaming Eyes gained a passage into liberation of, by means of a body according with all categories, awakening sentient beings, causing them to enter the ocean of wisdom.

Commentary:**

Celestial Prince Bright Flaming Eyes is like the Celestial Prince Sun. Anyone who sees his fire-like light will find it hard to open his eyes since the light is so dazzling. This god gained a passage into liberation of, by means of manifesting a body according with all categories of sentient beings. If he encounters a cat, he transforms himself into a cat to take it across. If he sees a dog, he transforms himself into a dog to take it across. According with the species of the sentient being he encounters, he manifests a body of the same species to save him or her. For example, if he meets a person, he will assume a human form to take that person across. This is a method for awakening sentient beings, causing them to go from confusion to enlightenment, from stupidity to wisdom, and causing them to enter the great ocean of wisdom. That way, they will never be stupid again. This god has obtained this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial Prince Sumeru-Light Banner of Happiness gained a passage into liberation of acting as lord of all sentient beings, causing them to diligently cultivate boundless, pure merit and virtue.

Commentary:**
Celestial Prince Sumeru-Light—“Wonderfully High Light”—Banner of Happiness gained a passage into liberation of acting as lord of all sentient beings, causing them to diligently cultivate boundless, pure merit and virtue. He influences sentient beings to be vigorous and not be lazy, and to cultivate measureless, boundless pure merit and virtue. That is his liberation.

**Sutra:

Celestial Prince Immaculate Jeweled Moon gained a passage into liberation of rejoicing profoundly from cultivating all ascetic practices. Celestial Prince Non-Retreating Courage gained a passage into liberation of universally radiating unobstructed light, causing all sentient beings to increase their vigor and energy. Celestial Prince Brilliance from Exquisite Flower Garlands gained a passage into liberation of universally shining pure light upon sentient beings’ bodies, engendering an ocean of happiness, faith, and understanding.

Commentary:**

Celestial Prince Immaculate Jeweled Moon gained a passage into liberation of rejoicing profoundly from cultivating all ascetic practices. From the depths of his heart he delights in cultivating ascetic practices. That is his passage into liberation.

Celestial Prince Non-Retreating Courage gained a passage into liberation of universally radiating unobstructed light, causing all sentient beings to increase their vigor and energy. This light increases the vigor and joy of sentient beings. He obtained this liberation.

Celestial Prince Brilliance from Exquisite Flower Garlands gained a passage into liberation of universally shining pure light upon sentient beings’ bodies, engendering an ocean of great happiness, great faith, and great understanding and liberation. From faith, understanding arises, and all of this is like a great sea.

**Sutra:

Celestial Prince Supreme Banner Light gained a passage into liberation of universally shining light on beings in the world, so that they successfully complete all kinds of wonderful, meritorious deeds. Celestial Prince Jeweled Cowl Universal Light gained a passage into liberation of the ocean of great compassion from which he manifests boundless states involving gems of various shapes and forms. Celestial Prince Bright Eyes gained a passage into liberation of cleansing and healing the eyes of all sentient beings, enabling them to see the treasury of the Dharma Realm.

Commentary:**

Celestial Prince Supreme Banner Light gained a passage into liberation of universally shining light on beings in the world, so that they successfully complete all kinds of wonderful, meritorious deeds. He uses his light to illumine everyone, to speak Dharma, and to teach and transform sentient beings. He can bring to success the wishes of those in the world. Various kinds of inconceivable and wonderful merit and virtue are brought to accomplishment. That is his passage into liberation.

The Celestial Prince named Jeweled Cowl Universal Light gained a passage into liberation of the ocean of great compassion, because he is able to bestow all sorts of happiness upon sentient beings. The sea of great compassion fulfills sentient beings’ wishes. If sentient beings want gold, he gives them gold; if they want silver, he gives them silver. If they seek crystal, he gives them crystal. If they seek rubies, he makes appear rubies. If they seek agate, he makes appear agate. If they seek carnelian, he makes appear carnelian. This is a sea of great compassion from which he manifests boundless states involving gems of various shapes and forms. Since sentient beings are fond of gems and treasures, this god makes appear different gems so as to fulfill the wishes of sentient beings. That is his passage into liberation.

Celestial Prince Bright Eyes has bright eyes and far-reaching vision. He does not need a magnifying glass, a microscope, or a telescope. His vision is even more penetrating and clear than those instruments. He gained a passage into liberation of cleansing and healing the eyes of all sentient beings. Not only does he himself have far-reaching vision and inconceivable power, he can also purify and cure the ailments of sentient beings’ eyes, thus enabling them to see the treasury of the Dharma Realm. Sentient beings can then perceive the state of the Dharma Realm. That is the liberation of this god.

**Sutra:

Celestial Prince Upholding Virtue gained a passage into liberation of bringing forth a pure, continuous mind, which is never ravaged or lost. Celestial Prince Universal Revolving Radiance gained a passage into liberation whereby solar palaces orbit everywhere, shining on all sentient beings of the ten directions, so that they successfully complete their work.

At that time, Celestial Prince Sun received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, universally contemplated the multitudes of Celestial Princes of the Sun, and spoke the following verse:

Commentary:**
The Celestial Prince named Upholding Virtue cultivates blessings and virtue, as well as the marks and characteristics. He gained a passage into liberation  of bringing forth a pure, continuous mind, which is never ravaged or lost. He causes sentient beings to bring forth a pure mind that is never cut off, lost, or destroyed. This resolve is continuous and uninterrupted, never cut off.

Celestial Prince Universal Revolving Radiance is always making the light of the sun and moon revolve and turn. He gained a passage into liberation whereby solar palaces orbit everywhere, suns revolve, shining on all sentient beings of the ten directions, so that they successfully complete their work. This refers to the good karma they create from their cultivation, not their bad karma. This god has obtained that passage into liberation.

At that time, Celestial Prince Sun received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, universally contemplated the multitudes of Celestial Princes of the Sun, and spoke the following verse:

**Sutra:

The Thus Come One’s tremendous light of wisdom
Universally illumines the lands of the ten directions.
All sentient beings see the Buddha.
Variously, and by the use of numerous expedient means, they are tamed.**

The Thus Come One’s physical form is boundless.
He manifests a body commensurate with the likes of sentient beings,
Opening everywhere the ocean of wisdom for all in the world:
Flaming Eyes contemplates the Buddha in this way.

The Buddha’s body is peerless and beyond compare.
His resplendent light floods the ten directions,
Surpassing everything, the most supreme:
This Dharma door is attained by Happiness.

**Commentary:**

The Thus Come One’s tremendous light of wisdom / Universally illumines the lands of the Buddhas of the ten directions. / All sentient beings in those Buddha lands see the Buddha. / Variously, and by the use of numerous expedient means, they are tamed. Upon seeing the Buddha, they reform and renew themselves, change from the evil and go towards the good. The Buddha uses many expedient dharma doors to regulate and tame sentient beings. There are many such expedients.

The Thus Come One’s physical form is boundless. The Thus Come One’s form body is boundless. He manifests a body commensurate with the likes of sentient beings, in order to speak Dharma for them, Opening everywhere the ocean of wisdom for all in the world. The Buddha reveals the sea of wisdom for sentient beings in the world. Flaming Eyes contemplates the Buddha in this way. Celestial Prince Flaming Bright Eyes contemplated the Buddha like that.

The Buddha’s body is peerless and beyond compare. There is nothing like the Buddha’s body. No one can compare with the Buddha. His resplendent light floods the ten directions. The Buddha’s light pervades the ten directions, like the sun, surpassing everything, including the brilliance of the sun, moon, and stars, and is the most supreme. There is no other light that is as bright as the Buddha’s light.

This dharma door and this state of liberation are achieved by Celestial Prince Happiness.

**Sutra:

To benefit the world, he cultivates ascetic practices,
Traversing all realms of existence across measureless eons.
Pure and pervasive as space is his radiance.
Jeweled Moon knows this skill-in-means.**

Unobstructed, the Buddha’s concert of wonderful sounds
Pervades all lands of the ten directions.
With the flavor of Dharma, he benefits all creatures.
Courage knows this expedient device.

He releases an inconceivable net of light,
Universally purifying all sentient beings,
Inspiring profound faith and understanding in everyone:
The god Flower Garlands enters this door.

**All the lights in the world
Do not equal the light within a single pore of the Buddha.
The Buddha’s light is just this inconceivable:
This is the liberation of Supreme Banner Light.

Commentary:**

To benefit the world, he cultivates ascetic practices. The Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and the Celestial Prince Jeweled Moon, wishing to benefit sentient beings of the world, undertook ascetic practices. They were willing to undergo the suffering themselves so as to alleviate the suffering of sentient beings. They were traversing all realms of existence—revolving in the Twenty-five Levels of Existence in the Three Realms, coming back and forth—across measureless eons. They cultivate ascetic practices over a long period of time. Pure and pervasive as space is his radiance. The Buddha’s light pervasively shines and purifies, like empty space. Celestial Prince Jeweled Moon knows this skill-in-means.

Unobstructed, the Buddha’s concert of wonderful sounds. The Buddha’s sound is not blocked. You can hear it in distant places as if it were close by, and of course you can hear the Buddha’s sound even more clearly in places that are near. The Buddha proclaims wonderful sounds that are unobstructed. The sound pervades all lands of the ten directions. If the Buddha speaks Dharma in a single country, those in countries throughout the ten directions can also hear it. Pervades all lands of the ten directions. The Buddha nourishes sentient beings by means of the flavor of Dharma. Celestial Prince Courage knows this expedient device.

He releases an inconceivable net of light. The Buddha releases the light of the teaching, universally purifying all sentient beings. Everywhere he saves sentient beings so they become pure. Sentient beings are those endowed with breath, blood, and the eight consciousnesses. Inspiring profound faith and understanding in everyone.

Even crawling and wriggling creatures that are dumb, and yet possessed of some awareness; those which crawl, fly, or wriggle, such as mosquitoes and other tiny organisms—all of them are caused to bring forth deep faith and understanding. The god Flower Garlands enters this door. That Celestial Prince understands this passage into liberation.

All the lights in the world—such as the light of the sun, moon, stars, and lamps do not equal the light within a single pore of the Buddha. All of those lights cannot compare with the light in one of the Buddha’s pores. The Buddha’s light is just this inconceivable: You cannot exhaustively praise the Buddha’s light, nor can you finish describing this inconceivable state. This is the liberation of Celestial Prince Supreme Banner Light. He has attained this state and liberation door.

**Sutra:

The Dharma of all Buddhas is thus:
They sit beneath the Bodhi, king of trees,
Causing those who stray to abide in the path.
Jeweled Cowl Light sees thus.

Commentary:**

All Buddhas’ Dharmas are thus. “All Buddhas” refers to the Buddhas of the three periods of time. Their Dharmas are all like this: They sit beneath the Bodhi, king of trees. When the Buddhas of the ten directions and three periods of time are about to accomplish Proper Enlightenment, they sit beneath the bodhi tree, become enlightened, and achieve Buddhahood. The bodhi tree is king among trees. Causing those who stray, that is, those who do not accord with the Path, such as realms of the hells, hungry ghosts, and animals. These beings do not accord with good paths; however, they do accord with evil paths. Here, “path” means good paths, and so that which does not accord with the path is referring to evil paths. Now, sentient beings of the evil paths are removed from evil paths and are born into the good paths. They are caused to abide in the good path. Celestial Prince Jeweled Cowl Light sees thus. He has attained this state, this passage into liberation.

**Sutra:

Sentient beings are blind, dark, and trapped in woeful ignorance.
The Buddha bids them to open their eyes of purity.
Therefore he lights the wisdom-lamp for their sakes.
Good Eyes contemplates this profoundly.

Commentary:**

When fish are in the water, they do not notice the water. When people are in the air, they are not aware of the air. And when they are in the midst of suffering, they are not aware of the suffering. So the text says: Sentient beings are blind, dark, and trapped in woeful ignorance. Sentient beings are “blind,” as if they do not have eyes; they are “dark,” as if they cannot hear. They are foolish and in the throes of suffering. What is meant by being “blind”? It means being ignorant. When we are ignorant, we are as if blind. What is meant by “dark”? It means being afflicted. When afflictions arise, we lose our wisdom, and become dark. What is meant by “ignorance”? It means being attached. If we are not ignorant, we will not have attachments. Therefore, ignorance, afflictions, and attachment create a great deal of suffering. However, very few ever awaken to this kind of suffering. No ordinary being understands, “This is suffering.” Instead, they take suffering as bliss.

The Buddha bids them to open their eyes of purity. He wants sentient beings to discover their eyes of great wisdom so they can smash their ignorance, transform their afflictions, and empty out their attachments.

Therefore he lights the wisdom-lamp for their sakes. Wishing to help sentient beings break through the suffering of darkness and stupidity, he lights the lamp of wisdom and teaches sentient beings to turn away from confusion and return to enlightenment, renounce the deviant and return to the proper, reject the dark and go towards the bright. Once the lamp of wisdom is lit, all their darkness will be dispelled. Good Eyes contemplates this profoundly. Celestial Prince Good Eyes deeply understands this state and has attained this passage into liberation.

Sutra:

Liberated, expedient, Honored One of ease and comfort.
If sentient beings but see him once and make offerings
to him,
They are caused to cultivate unto fruition:
This is the god Virtue’s power of expedients.

Commentary:

Liberated means being without any attachment. When that happens,  we truly obtain freedom. We are free of constraints or limitations; we have no hangups, worry or anxiety, no happiness and no anger. We are not hampered by inherited character flaws, nor are we covered over by desire for material things. We have leapt out of the three realms and are no longer within the confines of the five elements. We are liberated, at which point we attain ease and comfort with regard to everything. However, in order to be liberated, first we must cultivate various expedients. From cultivating expedients, we can attain ease and comfort; and from ease and comfort, we can be liberated.

True liberation does not mean just thinking, “I’m liberated!” What liberation have you attained? If you are truly liberated, you won’t even have the notion that you are liberated. If you are aware that you are liberated, then you are not yet liberated. If you are indeed liberated, why talk about liberation? If from the start you are liberated, why do you have to say, “I have attained liberation.” Have you ever lost this liberation?

Most people who do not follow the rules think they are liberated. They think that to follow the rules means one is not liberated. Therefore, they do not pay attention to others, and they do not want others to watch over them. They say, “Don’t watch over me, and I won’t watch over you.”

The Mahasattva does not mind others’ business.
Each one for himself—Amitabha Buddha!

They each want to be a self-saving Arhat, doing whatever they please. They do not want to listen to what others tell them to do. When they wish to go up to heaven, they climb on a ladder that reaches to heaven. They say, “Now I’ve climbed one rung of this ladder, and then two rungs, three rungs,...” But they get to the point where they cannot go any higher. Their ladder falls short of reaching heaven. That’s not liberation. A truly liberated person doesn’t have anything to say about liberation. A truly liberated person does not even retain the appearance or nature of liberation. Who is this liberated, expedient, Honored One of ease and comfort? He is a Buddha.

If sentient beings but see him once and make offerings to him. If people see the Buddha and resolve to make offerings to the Buddha, they are all caused to cultivate unto fruition. The Buddha influences them completely to cultivate the Way, to cultivate causes and realize the fruition. These sentient beings will cultivate various dharma doors and accomplish the Buddha fruition. This is the power of expedients of the god Virtue. This is the expedient dharma door of liberation understood by this Celestial Prince.

Sutra:

Measureless doors within a single dharma door
Through measureless thousands of eons are extolled.
The dharma doors so proclaimed–prolific in meaning
Are understood by the god Universal Revolving Radiance.

Commentary:

Within the Dharma spoken by the Buddha,
One is measureless; the measureless are one.
One root divides into ten thousand branches;
Ten thousand branches return to the one root.

Measureless dharma doors are spoken within a single dharma-door, and those measureless dharma doors return to one dharma door. This is a state that is infinitely multi-leveled, layer upon layer without end. Throughout measureless hundreds of thousands of eons they are extolled. And yet there is no time when the Buddha finishes speaking the Dharma. The dharma doors so proclaimed–prolific in meaning. The dharma-doors proclaimed are measureless and boundless, and so their meanings are also vast, great, and inexhaustible. These principles are understood by the god Universal Revolving Radiance. He comprehends this state, this passage into liberation.

7) Celestial Princes of the Moon

Sutra:

Moreover, Celestial Prince Moon gained a passage into liberation of universally radiating pristine light throughout the Dharma Realm, gathering in and transforming sentient beings. Celestial Prince King-of-Flowers-Cowl gained a passage into liberation of observing the realms of all sentient beings, causing them to universally enter boundless dharmas.

Commentary:

Moreover indicates that the topic under discussion will continue to be explained.  Celestial Prince Moon gained a passage into liberation of universally radiating pristine light throughout the Dharma Realm. He shines the pure light of the Buddha’s wisdom everywhere throughout the Dharma Realm, gathering in and transforming sentient beings, enabling them all to quickly attain Buddhahood.

Celestial Prince named King-of-Flowers-Cowl gained a passage into liberation of observing the realms of all sentient beings, causing them, these measureless, boundless sentient beings, to universally enter and understand boundless dharmas and boundless doors of liberation and wisdom. This Celestial Prince has attained this state and entered this passage into liberation.

Sutra:

Celestial Prince All Manner of Pure and Wonderful Radiance gained a passage into liberation of understanding the ocean of sentient beings’ minds and the various ways in which they are influenced by opportunism. Celestial Prince Instilling Peace and Joy in the Hearts of the World gained a passage into liberation of bestowing inconceivable bliss upon all sentient beings, so that they jump for joy.

Commentary:

The Celestial Prince named Prince All Manner of Pure and Wonderful Radiance gained a passage into liberation of understanding the ocean of all sentient beings’ minds. The minds of sentient beings resemble an ocean, and their thoughts of taking advantage of situations resemble waves on the ocean. There are various ways in which they are influenced by opportunism. “Influenced” implies that this exploitation of situations resembles waves, and there is not only one kind, but many kinds. Since there are many different kinds of people in society, there are many different opportunistic techniques, which people are led to employ. These are like waves in the ocean when the wind arises. When there is strong wind, the waves are large; when there is a light breeze, the waves are small. And if you do not have opportunistic thoughts, then there are no waves. For this reason, the motto for Gold Mountain Monastery reads:

Freezing, we do not scheme.

The greatest fear people have is that of dying, and freezing to death is very hard to take. However, even if we freeze to death, we will not be opportunistic and exploit situations.

Starving, we do not beg.

Most Buddhist monks go out and ask for donations. But even if we die of starvation, we will not ask people for money. Why not? Because this is the greatest problem in the Buddhist world today: asking for money. Originally the Buddha allowed his monks to go on almsrounds, but that was asking for food, not money. But now, monks do not ask for food. Instead, they ask for gold, silver, vaidurya, crystal, red pearls, agate, and carnelian. They desire the seven precious things. Since monks have renounced the secular life, why do they crave the seven precious things? I really do not understand this. We can only manage to understand small principles, not the great ones.

Dying of poverty, we ask for nothing.
These are our three great principles.

This Celestial Prince understands how sentient beings give rise to thought-waves of opportunism and how they are influenced by those waves. He has understood this state.

The next Celestial Prince is named Instilling Peace and Joy in the Hearts of the World. If anyone does not feel peaceful and happy, he will comfort that person’s heart and make him feel peaceful and happy. If you already feel peaceful and happy, then you will have no need for his help. Not to talk about asking this god to help you, if you do not feel peaceful and happy inside, you can bring your heart to me and I can also make it feel peaceful and happy. He has bestowing inconceivable bliss upon all sentient beings, so that they jump for joy. When sentient beings feel peaceful and happy, they jump with great joy. Their joy starts from the pores of the soles of their feet and reaches all the way up to the crowns of their heads. Thus they jump up in their exuberance. Some people feel this is a strange way to explain this line. Actually it makes perfect sense. If these sentient beings did not feel joy from the soles of their feet, how could they leap up? You figure that out. It must be the case that the joy emanates from the bottom of their feet, and so they bounce up, like a ball. The great exuberance stems from their soles and goes all the way up to the crowns of their heads.

If you do not believe this, just ask Guo Fang’s mother. When Guo Fang is given a piece of candy, she jumps up and down, registering joy from the soles of her feet reaching up to her head.

Sutra:

Celestial Prince Bright Eyes of the King of Trees gained a passage into liberation of at all times protecting the work of farmers, such as the growth of seeds, sprouts, stems, and so forth, causing them to thrive.

Commentary:

The next Celestial Prince is named Bright Eyes of the King of Trees. The King of Trees is the Bodhi Tree. “Eyes” means he acts as eyes for sentient beings. Why? Because if sentient beings do not have eyes, they are immersed in the darkness of night. And now, not only are there eyes, there is also light which enables the eyes to see. If there are only eyes but no light, people are still unable to see in dark places. “Light” represents wisdom; “darkness” means ignorance. If we are covered over by ignorance, even if we have eyes, we will not be able to see. We won’t be able to clearly distinguish between right and wrong, deviant and proper. This Celestial Prince, Bright Eyes of the King of Trees, has great wisdom that can dispel the darkness. He gained a samÁdhi, a passage into liberation of at all times protecting the work of farmers, such as the growth of seeds, sprouts, stems, and so forth. When farmers work, first they sow seeds. Then the seeds sprout, roots develop, and stems, leaves and so forth spring up, after which there is a harvest. At all times farmers have to protect and guard the crops, causing them to thrive, that is, to ripen. First, the crops ripen, and then the farmers are liberated. This god has obtained this passage into liberation.

The way this works in Buddhism is that a bodhi seed is planted in the field of Buddhas. Bit by bit the bodhi seed will sprout and grow into a bodhi tree, which will bear the bodhi fruit. Step by step there will be achievements. However, we have to guard and protect the plant with constant mindfulness. If it is lacking in water, we have to give it water. If it is lacking in fertilizer, add some fertilizer. What is water in this case? The water of virtuous practices can nourish our sprouts of wisdom. What is fertilizer in this case? Carrying out the Six Perfections and myriad practices, cultivating blessings and wisdom, is adding fertilizer to the bodhi plant. And at all times we have to protect and guard the plant until it matures, so we can obtain liberation.

Sutra:

Celestial Prince Manifesting Pure Light gained a passage into liberation of saving and protecting all sentient beings with kindness and compassion, enabling them to witness experiences of suffering and joy.

Celestial Prince Universally Roaming Yet Unmoving Light gained a passage into liberation of universally appearing in the ten directions holding the pure moon. Celestial Prince Sovereign Constellation King gained a passage into liberation of revealing all dharmas to be illusory, resembling space, lacking characteristics and an inherent nature.

Commentary:

Celestial Prince Manifesting Pure Light gained a samadhi, a passage into liberation of saving and protecting all sentient beings with kindness and compassion. Kindness can bestow joy, and compassion can eradicate suffering. With a compassionate mind, he rescues and protects all sentient beings, enabling them to witness experiences of suffering and joy. Right before them, at the present moment, he manifests undergoing experiences of suffering and joy, and experiences that are neither suffering nor joy. He has attained this kind of liberation.

The next Celestial Prince is named Universally Roaming throughout the ten directions Yet Unmoving Light. He remains in the Way-place of still, quiet light. Without moving from the Way-place, he universally roams throughout the ten directions. Roaming throughout the ten directions, he does not move from the Way-place. Most people cannot understand this kind of state; it is a state of dhyana-samadhi. Within dhyana-samadhi, one can roam throughout the ten directions and pervade the Dharma Realm. And yet one does not move from one’s Chan seat.

Celestial Prince Universally Roaming and Yet Unmoving Light gained a passage into liberation of universally appearing in the ten directions holding the pure moon. He is like a pure moon universally appearing in the ten directions. When you gaze up at the moon, it appears to be above your head. If someone else looks up at the moon, it appears to be above his head. Sentient beings throughout the ten directions all feel the moon is right before them. That is the passage into liberation of the pure moon universally appearing in the ten directions.

Celestial Prince Sovereign Constellation King, king of all stars, enjoys tremendous ease and comfort. He gained a passage into liberation of revealing all dharmas to be illusory, not actual or real, resembling space, lacking characteristics and an inherent nature. What is like this? The Thus Come One’s Dharma body is like an illusion and like empty space, without marks and without a nature of its own. This Celestial Prince attained that kind of liberation.

Sutra:

Celestial Prince Moon of Pure Enlightenment gained a passage into liberation of giving rise to great deeds and functioning for the sake of all sentient beings. Celestial Prince Great Majestic Light gained a passage into liberation of everywhere severing all doubts and delusions.

At that time, Celestial Prince Moon received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, universally contemplated the celestial multitudes in all the moon palaces, and spoke the following verse:

Commentary:

The Celestial Prince named Moon of Pure Enlightenment gained a passage into liberation of giving rise to great deeds and functioning for the sake of all sentient beings. What does that mean? He causes all sentient beings to bring forth a great bodhi resolve, bear a great bodhi fruit, cultivate great deeds of bodhi, and give rise to the great functioning of bodhi. And then their bodhi fruit will be perfected. They will end their karma of birth and death, and their karma of bodhi—the path of enlightenment—will be accomplished. That is what is meant by giving rise to great deeds and functioning. This Celestial Prince attained this passage into liberation.

Celestial Prince Great Majestic Light.  When sentient beings see him, they feel great respect and awe. Feeling respect, they want to draw near him. Feeling awe, they fear him. His awesome presence inspires fear. And why do they respect him? He has virtue that merits respect.

Some of us experience the fear of the awesome virtue of the great assembly. When some people lecture on the sutras in front of a handful of people, they speakin a very eloquent, coherent fashion. However, when they have to talk before a large audience, they lose track of their topic and their presentation becomes disorganized. They do not know where to begin to talk. A little rabbit has run into their heart, where it jumps up and down. This person wants to talk, but the little rabbit runs all the way up to his mouth and bites his tongue, so the person cannot say anything. What is this? This is fear of the awesome virtue of the great assembly. The awesome virtue of the great assembly intimidates such a person until the tone of his voice changes. A man’s voice might change so that he sounds like a woman. A woman’s voice might change and assume an unexpected tone of some other sort. That comes about due to a fear of the awesome virtue of the great assembly. Now, Celestial Prince Great Majestic Light has that kind of awesome virtue. He gained a passage into liberation of everywhere severing all doubts and delusions. Upon seeing him, anyone who has doubts or delusions will have those doubts resolved. Once he explains the issues for them, their doubts disappear. He has obtained this liberation.

At that time, Celestial Prince Moon Palace received the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, universally contemplated the celestial multitudes in all the moon palaces, and spoke the following verse.

Sutra:

The Buddha emits light pervading the whole world,
Illumining lands of the ten directions,
Proclaiming inconceivable, vast, great dharmas,
Destroying forever the darkness of sentient beings’ delusion.

His states are boundless and without end.
Throughout measureless eons, constantly he teaches and guides,
Transforming all sentient beings with various modes of self-mastery.
Flower Cowl contemplates the Buddha in this way.

Commentary:

The Buddha emits measureless light pervading the whole world, / Illumining lands of the ten directions. The Buddhalands of the ten directions are all bathed in this great light. Proclaiming inconceivable vast, great dharmas: The Buddha expounds vast, boundless Dharma, which cannot be conceived of by the mind or expressed with words, turning the Great Dharma Wheel, destroying forever the darkness of sentient beings’ delusion. The Buddha smashes the ignorance, afflictions, stupidity, darkness, and delusions of sentient beings.

His states are boundless and without end. The Buddha’s states have no boundaries and no end. Throughout measureless eons, constantly he teaches and guides. Since measureless eons in the past, the Buddha has been speaking Dharma to teach sentient beings, transforming all sentient beings with various modes of self-mastery and miraculous spiritual powers. Celestial Prince Flower Cowl contemplates the Buddha in this way, just as was described in the text.

Sutra:

The ocean of sentient beings’ minds varies in every thought.
The Buddha’s extensive, profuse wisdom knows this all.
Everywhere, he speaks Dharma, bestowing happiness:
This is the liberation of Wonderful Radiance.

Commentary:

The ocean of sentient beings’ minds varies in every thought. There is shifting and flowing in thought after thought, change in every passing thought. Once the former thought is extinguished, another thought arises. After this thought is extinguished, still another thought arises. These thoughts upon thoughts resemble waves in the ocean. The Buddha’s extensive, profuse wisdom knows this all. The Buddha’s wisdom is vast and great to the utmost, and it also perceives the finest, subtlest details. All the thoughts of sentient beings are completely known and completely seen by the Thus Come One. Everywhere he speaks Dharma for sentient beings, bestowing great happiness. / This is the liberation of Wonderful Radiance.  Celestial Prince Wonderful Radiance has achieved this state, this passage into liberation.

Sutra:

Sentient beings, lacking the joyful serenity of sages
And mired and confused on evil paths, endure all miseries.
The Thus Come One shows them the door of the Dharma nature.
Peace and Joy beholds and reflects upon this.

Commentary:

Sentient beings, lacking the joyful serenity of sages. The peace and comfort enjoyed by sentient beings is worldly peace and comfort. Although they may feel this is peace and comfort, actually it is not true peace and comfort. On the other hand, the joyful serenity of sages is devoid of any suffering and consists only of bliss. It is without worry or distress. Sentient beings mired and confused on evil paths, in the six paths, endure all miseries. Among the six paths, there are three wholesome paths—those of gods, humans and asuras—and the beings in them are a little better off. However, here, the text is referring to the evil paths: those of hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. And those paths are filled with suffering.

The Thus Come One shows them the door of the Dharma nature. The Buddha points out to sentient beings the dharma door that is not apart from the inherent nature, thus causing all sentient beings to attain the peace and comfort of sages. Celestial Prince Peace and Joy beholds and reflects upon this. He ponders over this and attains this liberation, this kind of vision.

Sutra:

Rare is the Thus Come One’s great kindness and compassion.
To benefit sentient beings, he enters all realms of existence.
Speaking Dharma, he exhorts them to goodness, helps them succeed:
This is what the god Bright Eyes understands.

The World Honored One expounds the Dharma’s brightness,
Differentiating the nature of all karma in the world.
Good and evil deeds are never destroyed.
Upon seeing this, Pure Light rejoices.

Commentary:

Rare is the Thus Come One’s great kindness and compassion. Among all the kinds of kindness and compassion in the world, the Buddha’s kindness and compassion is the greatest. It is rare and unique. To benefit sentient beings, he enters all realms of existence. Wishing to benefit sentient beings by alleviating their sufferings, wishing to teach and transform them, the Buddha enters the Twenty-five Levels of Existence in the Three Realms: the Desire Realm, the Form Realm, and the Formless Realm. Included within the Twenty-five Levels of Existence are the realms of hells, hungry ghosts, and animals. Wishing to save sentient beings from suffering, the Buddha willingly undergoes suffering on their behalf so that they do not have to experience suffering. Such are the Buddha’s vows. Speaking Dharma, he exhorts them to goodness, helps them succeed: The Buddha expounds various dharma doors, exhorts sentient beings to practice many good acts, and causes them to accomplish the fruit of enlightenment This passage into liberation is what the god Bright Eyes understands.

The World Honored One expounds the Dharma’s brightness, shedding great light on the world. Differentiating the nature of all karma in the world: good karma, evil karma, karma that is neither good nor evil, and the natures of various kinds of karma. If you create good karma, in the future you will reap a good result. If you create evil karma, in the future you will reap an evil result. Good and evil deeds are never destroyed. Nothing is lost. It will not be the case that having done good deeds, you fail to receive a good result; or that having done evil deeds, you fail to reap an evil result. That will not happen. Upon seeing this, Pure Light rejoices. Celestial Prince Pure Light is extremely pleased and interested in this dharma door.

Sutra:

The Buddha is the mainstay of all blessings,
Just like the great earth upholding palaces.
Cleverly he reveals a path of security and peace, free from anxiety:
The Unmoving One knows this expedient means.

The brilliant blaze of the Buddha’s wisdom-fire
pervades the Dharma Realm.
He manifests countless bodies, equal to all sentient beings.
Everywhere, for one and all, he opens up the true and actual.
The god Constellation King awakens to this path.

Commentary:

The Buddha is the mainstay of all blessings. The Buddha is replete with wisdom and blessings, having perfected them both. Therefore he is one in whom the blessings of all sentient beings are grounded. The Buddha is a fertile field of blessings for sentient beings, just like the great earth upholding palaces. He is like the great earth, on which all the houses and buildings are grounded. The earth symbolizes the Buddha’s blessings, upon which all sentient beings rely. All things are carried and sustained by the earth. And the Buddha’s blessings are like the earth. Cleverly he reveals a path of security and peace, free from anxiety: The Buddha uses many provisional, clever means to speak Dharma for sentient beings, pointing out to them a path that leads them out of anxiety and suffering and which leads to peace and comfort. The Unmoving One knows this expedient means. He is aware of the various expedient dharma doors with which the Buddha teaches and transforms sentient beings.

The brilliant blaze of the Buddha’s wisdom-fire pervades the Dharma Realm. The blaze of the Buddha’s wisdom-fire extensively shines throughout the Dharma Realm so that the entire Dharma Realm is bathed in this light. He manifests countless bodies, equal to all sentient beings. The Buddha manifests hundreds of thousands of millions of bodies, according with the categories of sentient beings so as to teach and transform them. Everywhere, for one and all, he opens up the true and actual. Universally he reveals the true and actual dharma door for sentient beings. The god Constellation King awakens to this path. That Celestial Prince understands this principle.

Sutra:

The Buddha, like empty space, has no intrinsic nature.
Wishing to benefit sentient beings, he appears in the world,
Adorned with fine marks and characteristics–a reflection.
Celestial King Pure Enlightenment perceives thus.

From all the pores on the Buddha’s body issue universal sounds.
His Dharma cloud blankets the entire world.
Those who hear also delight in it without exception.
The god Light has awakened to this liberation.

Commentary:

The Buddha, like empty space, has no intrinsic nature. The Buddha takes the Dharma Realm and space as his substance. He also takes sentient beings as his substance. If you wish to recognize the Buddha, first make a point of recognizing empty space. If you know what empty space is like, you will recognize the Buddha. If you wish to recognize the Buddha, then first recognize the Dharma Realm, after which you will recognize the Buddha. If you wish to recognize the Buddha, first recognize all sentient beings. After you have recognized all sentient beings, you will understand Buddha. Why is that? Because the Buddha is without an intrinsic nature; he doesn’t have a substance or mark of himself. He takes the mark of sentient beings as his own mark.

Wishing to benefit sentient beings, he appears in the world. Why does the Buddha appear in the world? Because he feels he does not have much work to do, and so he wishes to benefit sentient beings and bring them advantages. In actuality, it’s a case of the Buddha having no work and looking for some work to do, not having a job and finding himself a job. Basically the Buddha can stay in the Land of Eternal Still Light and remain thus, thus unmoving, with clear and constant understanding. He does not have to bother with whether or not sentient beings are being saved. But because the Buddha has such great compassion, he wishes to benefit sentient beings, and so he appears in the world. Adorned with fine marks and characteristics–a reflection. Although the Buddha has the Thirty-two Hallmarks and Eighty Subtle Characteristics that are quite splendid, the Buddha’s appearance is like an image or a reflection, not real or actual. Celestial King Pure Enlightenment perceives thus. This is how he understands the state of the Buddha’s appearance.

From all the pores on the Buddha’s body issue universal sounds. Every pore on the Buddha’s body speaks Dharma for sentient beings. His Dharma cloud blankets the entire world. The Dharma that the Buddha speaks is like a cloud that shelters all worlds, with nothing left out. Everything is protected by this Dharma cloud. Those who hear also delight in it without exception. Those who hear the Buddha’s sound and see the Buddha’s visage are all delighted. The god Light has awakened to this liberation. Celestial King Majestic Light has enlightened to this state, this passage into liberation.

[Editor’s Note: That concludes the seven groups of the Desire Realm. Next, the sutra will bring up the eight divisions and the four kings, their liberation doors and their individual verses of praise.]