

# **The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva**

# **The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva**

*Based on the English Translation by:*  
**Buddhist Text Translation Society**

*A General Explanation by:*  
**Master YongHua**



## **The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva**

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*In this commentary, I have quoted my teacher, Master Xuan Hua, in various locations without specifically citing him.*

*I encourage the reader to reference Master Xuan Hua's books, published by the Buddhist Text Translation Society, for further information. In addition, I would like to thank the Buddhist Text Translation Society for this translation of the Earth Store Sutra.*

*Master YongHua  
July, 2012*

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva



Earth Store Bodhisattva

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## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

### SUTRA PREFACE:

#### The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

Ksitigarbha is a Sanskrit name that is translated as Earth Store Bodhisattva.

“Earth” has the connotation of being reliable and being able to uphold, as well as being able to help grow.

A shastra states that the Bodhisattva can be at ease and unmoving like the great *earth*. *Store* implies that he contains deep secrets, as the result of stillness contemplation.

地：能勝依持，令生產

地藏十論經：安忍不動猶如大地，靜慮深密一秘藏，因此故名地藏

There are ten aspects of “earth”:

1. It is wide and extensive 廣大.
2. It supports all living beings 衆生依.
3. It is impartial 地無好惡.
4. It can receive the great rain 受大雨.
5. It produces grass and trees 生草木.
6. It holds all planted seeds 種所依倚.

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7. It produces many treasures 生眾寶.
8. It produces medicine 產諸藥.
9. It is not moved by the wind 風吹不動.
10. It does not tremble at the lion's roar 獅子吼不驚.

The Buddha entrusted the following tasks to Earth Store Bodhisattva:

1. Ensuring that those who have created even the tiniest bit of merit and virtue 一毛一塵，一沙一滴, will be saved.
2. Ensuring that, at the gate of hell, if one can recite one Buddha's name or one Bodhisattva's name, one will be saved.
3. Saving all living beings, and preventing them from staying even one day or one night in the three evil paths, not to mention falling to the hells for long kalpas!

Furthermore, with one look (瞻 reverent look) or even one bow 禮, one can overstep 超過 30 kalpas of offenses. If one can listen to five words, or even a single word, of the Earth Store Sutra in this current life, then one will obtain peace and bliss, and all calamities and difficulties will be eradicated.

Earth Store Bodhisattva works to dispel deviant minds and control the evil ghosts. He roams the worlds of the Five Turbidities, the human and god realms, and the hells, using transformation bodies to rescue and cross over living beings,



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and helping them escape calamities and difficulties.

Once, when the Buddha was at Mount Grdhrakuta 靈鷲山, Earth Store Bodhisattva was traveling through the worlds to teach and transform living beings. He went by Mount Vipula 毗富羅山 and arrived at Elder Qiao Ti's 喬提長者 home. All 500 hundred people there had been robbed of their essence by the ghosts and were very depressed 被鬼奪其精氣，皆悶絕. Earth Store Bodhisattva gave rise to the thought, "That is real suffering, there is so much pain! The world is full of such happenings that can't be spoken of. I pity these folks and wish to rescue them." He then soared to Mount Grdhrakuta and said to the Buddha: "I observed such a thing at Elder Qiao Ti's household. It has been like this for quite a few days. It made me give rise to pity and wish to protect them. Please teach me a Dharma to rescue them and restore them to their original state." The Buddha then emitted a light from his crown that shines about 10,000 xun 從於頂上毫放光萬尋 (a xun is roughly equivalent to 8 feet) and illuminated Earth Store Bodhisattva's body. Everyone in the Great Assembly was telling each other, "The World Honored One illuminated the Bodhisattva's body with his light. He will certainly accomplish a great Dharma and teach living beings." Earth Store Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, "I have a spiritual mantra that can dispel deviant minds and control the evil ghosts. I remember that in distant kalpas past, there was a Buddha called Burning Light Buddha 燒光佛. After his Nirvana, during the Dharma Semblance age, I was a layman. There was an immortal who was practicing at Mount

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Jù Tè Luó 俱特羅山. I saw living beings being harassed by ghosts just like those at the Elder's household. I then brought forth the resolve to meet with a Good Knowing Adviser to learn a Dharma to defeat those ghosts. At that time, the immortal enabled me to understand such a Dharma within three days. It enabled me to quell all evil for vast areas, making the evil ghosts gather at my place, take refuge, cultivate according to the teachings and bring forth the mind for the Way. In an instant, all living beings that were undergoing suffering in the hells, each ascended on a lotus flower and all their suffering ceased 停息. Then, the immortal saw the extent of my spiritual powers, telling me that limitless Buddhas of limitless worlds will give me a prediction and name me Earth Store. In the midst of the worlds of the Five Turbidities, the human and god realms, and the hells, I will use my transformation bodies to rescue and cross over living beings, helping them escape calamities and difficulties." After remembering this, Earth Store Bodhisattva went to the Elder's household and rescued everyone there, restoring them to health.

It is said 地藏十論經 that every day in the early morning 每晨朝時, wishing to bring living beings to accomplishment 成熟, Earth Store Bodhisattva entered 殞伽河沙等諸定 limitless samadhis, arose from the samadhis, then went to the various Buddhalands to cross over living beings, enabling them to attain benefit, peace and bliss. Already throughout limitless great kalpas, during the time of the five turbidities, as well as during the times where no

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Buddha was in the world, he helped sentient beings realize their cultivation. In some worlds where there was war 刀兵劫, he arose from samadhi and dispelled the fighting. Where there were epidemics and pestilence 疫病劫, he expelled them too. The same goes for times of famine 饑饉劫. Such “rescue operations” are limitless.

Earth Store Bodhisattva is one of four great Bodhisattvas who provide Shakyamuni Buddha with great assistance in his teaching work:

1. Manjushri: who now resides at Mount Wu Tai 山西的五臺山. This mountain along with the ensuing three mountains are famous locales in China.
2. Universal Worthy: who can be found at Mount E Mei 四川的峨眉山.
3. Guan Yin: who dwells at Mount Pu Tuo Qie 浙江的普陀洛伽山.
4. Earth Store Bodhisattva: who stays at Mount Jiu Hua 安徽的九華山.

All the four Great Bodhisattvas’ sagely records 聖迹 are numerous.

1,500 years after the Buddha’s Nirvana, Earth Store Bodhisattva was born in Korea 降迹新羅國 into a royal family, with the surname of Gold. In Chinese, his name was

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Qiáo Jué 喬覺, during the time of 唐高宗永徽四年 emperor Gao Zong of the Tang dynasty (653). At the age of 24, he left the home-life and was given the name of Shàn Ting 善聽. He crossed the sea by boat and came to China. At the summit of Mount Jiu Hua 安徽省池州府青陽縣九華山的山巔, he sat for 75 years 載, until 玄宗開元十六年 (728), on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh lunar month, he accomplished the Way, becoming enlightened. At that time he was 99 years old. Shortly after his awakening, Shàn Ting met a rich man named Gé Lǎo Mǐn 閻老閔 who was very kind, enjoyed doing good and liked to practice giving. He organized a vegetarian meal offering for many left-home people. Shàn Ting was invited to be the 100<sup>th</sup>. Afterwards, the Bodhisattva asked for land to build a way place. The rich man said, “All of the Jiu Mountain from top to bottom is mine. Please feel free to have as much as you need.” The monk said that he only needed about the size of his precept sash. The wealthy man agreed. The monk unfolded his sash and spread it out, coving the top of the entire mountain. He thus was offered all the land that was covered by his sash. The wealthy man further told his son to leave the home-life. The son was given the name Dào Míng 道明. The rich man then later also left the home-life and bowed to his son as his teacher. That is why on many altars, to Earth Store Bodhisattva’s left is Dào Míng, and to his right is Mǐn Gong 閔公, the wealthy man’s Dharma name. Twenty-nine years later (757), the Bodhisattva entered Stillness.

We can take a cursory look at the sutra through the Tian Tai

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Five-fold Profound Meanings:

1. Explanation of the *Title*: This sutra belongs to the Person (Earth Store) and Dharma (Past Vows) classification. The phrase ‘Past Vows’ represents karma, or deeds performed in the past. The mind is like the great “Earth” because it gives birth to the myriad things and can “Store” many things as well, such as the myriad precious gems. Further, this Bodhisattva is just like the earth because he can produce the myriad things and make them grow.. His “Past Vows” were made long ago, when he stated, “*If the hells are not empty I will not become a Buddha; only when living beings are all saved, will I attain Bodhi.*” The hells, however, cannot be empty until the karma and afflictions of living beings come to an end (which is never!). He is still laboring away at the hells to aid the ghosts. It’s probably considered to be sheer stupidity in this day and age, but in Mahayana, this is the utmost Filiality.
2. Discerning the *Substance*: The sutra contains the True Mark (which contains both True Emptiness and Wonderful Existence; also known as the Middle Way).
3. Clarifying the *Doctrine*: This sutra’s principles are contained under four major headings: i) The practice of filial piety: “*Heaven and Earth deem filial piety essential; It is foremost 天地重孝, 孝當先.*” With one filial son, an entire family is peaceful. By being filial to one’s parents, one’s child will in turn be filial 孝順還生孝順子. Filiality is the first responsibility for human beings. If it were not for one’s parents, one could not have been born and would not have the chance to become a Buddha! There are four basic

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kinds of filial piety: 1) Limited Filiality 小孝: I.e. one practices filiality within one's own family but one fails to treat others' elders as one's own, or treat others' children as one's own. 2) Extensive Filiality 大孝: This entails reaching out to the whole world 天下 and being filial to all fathers and mothers 老於老以及人之老. However, this is not yet Ultimate Filiality 真孝, which is complete only upon becoming a Buddha, and is therefore beyond the four types of filiality mentioned here). 3) Contemporary Filiality 近孝: This involves modeling oneself on present-day methods of filial piety and studying the respective methods of behavior. 4) And, Classic Filiality 遠孝, which requires being filial to the myriad things. One can find this kind of filiality exemplified in the 24 Paragons of Filial Virtues that are well known in China (though even these are still not ultimate!). Classic Filiality requires us to go back to the methods of ancient times 萬古. ii) Crossing over the 12 kinds of living beings of the nine realms as described in the Shurangama Sutra), to help them cross over from the shore of afflictions and ignorance to the other shore of enlightenment. iii) Rescuing of the sufferers 拔苦: this sutra can liberate living beings from their suffering. iv) Repaying of the kindness 報恩 of one's parents.

4. Describing the *Function*: Seven days after giving birth to the Buddha, out of the left side of her upper body

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左脇, Lady Maya died and was reborn into the Heavens. After speaking Dharma for 49 years in over 300 assemblies, the Buddha went to the Trayastrimsa heaven to teach her. This occurred between the Lotus Sutra and Mahaparanirvana Sutra. He stayed there for three months and spoke this sutra of filial piety.

5. Ranking the *Teaching*: This sutra belongs to the Lotus-Nirvana period, and deals with the Vehicles of the Bodhisattvas, Men and Gods. It belongs to both the Sutra and Vinaya stores.

At the age of 19 years the Buddha left home, when he was 29 years old he became enlightened, and when he has 80 years old he entered Nirvana. The fifty one years during which he taught the Dharma can be divided into the following five teaching periods:

1. The Avatamsaka period, or Perfect teaching, was taught by the Buddha in 21 days
2. The Agama period, or Store teaching, was expounded in twelve years.
3. The Vaipulya period, or Connective teaching, took the Buddha eight years to teach.
4. The Vajra period, or Separate teaching, was transmitted in 22 years.
5. Dharma Flower – Nirvana period, or Perfect teaching, required eight years.

The teachings that the Buddha gave during these five periods are contained in the many sutras that exist today. Sutra is the general name for the Buddha's discourses. It contains several meanings:

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1. Thread 線: Stringing together the principles like thread strings together the beads in a necklace.
2. To gather in or attract 攝: Sutras draw in those who are ready to be helped.
3. Permanent 常: The sutras will not change; nothing can be added or subtracted from them.
4. Method 法 of practice: Providing a model for all living beings in the three periods of time.
5. Bubbling spring 湧泉: Because the flavor of the principles 義味 is endless like a bubbling spring.
6. Carpenter's plumb line 繩墨: Serving as a guideline to discern proper from deviant.
7. Path 徑: The Sutras can quickly lead us to the fruitions.
8. Garland 結鬘: Stringing together many principles, like flowers in a garland.
9. Tally 契經: In the past, two matching pieces were brought together to fulfill contracts. Likewise, sutras tally with the principles from the Buddhas above and with living beings' capacity below.

This sutra is generally believed to have been translated in the Tang dynasty by Tripitaka Master Sramana Siksānanda (實叉難陀) which means to “delight in the study” of the Buddhadharmā. He diligently studied the Tripitaka and Dharma bliss manifested. He was well versed in both Hinayana as well as Mahayana scriptures and also was very



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knowledgeable with externalist doctrines and dharmas 異道學術. He was well respected by all. In particular, he was able to bring both the emperor and empress to venerate and honor the Triple Jewel and Mahayana. He translated this sutra and the 80 chapters of the Avatamsaka Sutra. He also translated many more sutras like the Shurangama Sutra and the Manjushri Giving Prediction Sutra 文殊授記經. When he entered Stillness and was cremated, his tongue did not turn into ash. His bone and tongue relics were escorted back to Khotan and put into a seven-story stupa for offerings and worship.

He was born in Khotan 于闐國, a central Indian country bordering the Yún Nán province of China. Khotan means “Earth Milk 地乳”. According to legend, an early king from this region who was without heir, prayed to the god of the local temple for a son. From the image’s head would come a child who would become heir to the throne. He would drink neither human nor cow’s milk, but only a particular milky fluid that appeared on the earth. Subsequent to this mysterious event, the country was given its name. The Buddhadharma was transmitted into this country 82 years beforehand and the Great Vehicle was widely practiced. Therefore when the Buddhadharma was transmitted to China, a great many sutras and scriptures originated from this country.

Other people credit the translation to Tripitaka Dharma Master Fǎ Deng 法燈 of the Sòng Dynasty, who was a Chinese bhikshu living in the late Tang dynasty. Bhikshu and

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bhikshuni are the Sanskrit words for Buddhist monks and nuns. The Sanskrit word sramana, however, refers in general to left home people of the various religious traditions.

Five kinds of terms are not translated:

1. Words with multiple meanings, like bhikshu.
2. Venerated words, like Baghavan.
3. Things not found in this country, such as Jamdudana tree.
4. Terms in accord with ancient usage (e.g. anuttara-samyak-sambodhi: saying it creates a lot of merit and virtues)
5. Those with secret meaning: e.g. mantras.

The Earth Store Sutra has three rolls and thirteen chapters.

Chapters 1 and 2 introduce Earth Store Bodhisattva who can transform living beings. He creates numberless transformation bodies, deeply enters defilements, transforms living beings through acts of filial piety, enabling them to escape the three evil destinies and be born in the heavenly and human realms.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 describe the living beings that the Bodhisattva transforms. In particular, Earth Store Bodhisattva specializes in helping those who are undergoing retributions for not being filial to their parents, disrespecting the Triple Jewel and creating many offenses.

Chapters 6,7 and 8 clarify the conditions for crossing over living beings; namely, offering incense, reciting sutras, creating banners and images, as well as various other good

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conditions.

Chapters 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 explain the causes for becoming Buddhas, encouraging people to recite the Buddha's name with utmost sincerity and give wealth and Dharma, all of which constitute the various Bodhi proper causes for crossing over limitless living beings.

## **CHAPTER 1: Spiritual Penetrations in the Palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven**

“Trayastrimsa” is also known as the Heaven of the Thirty-Three. With a height of 80,000 yojanas, it is the central heaven. On each of its four sides are eight additional heavens. The king of Trayastrimsa is called Shakra or Indra. Unlike humans, Indra can go without food for up to one year without food, sleep or sex. Although his desires are lighter, they still exist. The central city in this heaven is called the City of Good View is made from the seven jewels and is 60,000 yojanas high. At the center of the city is Shakra’s palace, made of the most exquisite gems. He enjoys tremendous heavenly bliss. He is very hospitable to humans. One day and night there is the equivalent of 100 human years. The gods have a lifespan of 1,000 years. In the time of Kashyapa Buddha, he was a poor woman. She ran into a dilapidated temple and vowed to restore it. A group totaling 32 friends and relatives (mostly women) agreed to help her. With their collective efforts, she repaired the temple. Each of them was then reborn as a lesser King in the Trayastrimsa.

“Heaven” means natural. This Trayastrimsa heaven naturally manifested as a result of the karmic retributions of this poor woman and her 32 friends.

The “palaces” there are most exquisite, and extremely adorned.

There are six kinds of “spiritual penetrations”:

1. Heavenly Eye.

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2. Heavenly Ear.
3. Penetration of Other's Thoughts.
4. Knowledge of Past Lives.
5. Spiritual Fulfillment (also known as 'As You Wish').
6. Extinction of Outflows.

Spiritual penetrations are inherent to the self-nature that each of us possesses. These powers are simply obscured in common people.

The Chinese Book of Changes 易經 notes, “Yin and yang that cannot be conceived of are called spiritual 陰陽不測之謂神; Spiritual is still and not moving 寂而不動, because it can respond to and accord with, it can penetrate or connect 感而隨通.”

The Necklace 瓔珞 Sutra states: “神名天心 spiritual is the name for the mind of the gods, 徹照無礙 it shines through without obstructions, and therefore is called spiritual penetration.” It says that when the six organs are purified, one obtains the spiritual penetrations. The eye organs give rise to the heavenly eye, the ear organ to the heavenly ear, the body to spiritual fulfillment, and the mind to knowledge of past lives, knowledge of others' thoughts, as well as the extinction of outflows and corresponding end of birth and death, and all afflictions.

The Buddha uses spiritual penetrations to manifest various bodies replete with All Wisdom 一切智, so that he can

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speak the various Dharmas. The Buddha has inconceivable spiritual penetrations. In this chapter he uses them to emit numberless rays of light.

*Sutra text:*

**Thus I have heard; at one time the Buddha dwelt in the Trayastrimsa Heaven speaking Dharma for his mother. At that time an indescribable number of Buddhas as well as great Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas, from limitless worlds in the ten directions, all assembled together to praise Shakyamuni Buddha's ability to manifest the power of indescribably great wisdom and spiritual penetrations in the Evil World of the Five Turbidities, as well as his ability to regulate and subdue obstinate living beings so that they might come to know the dharmas of suffering and bliss. Each of these sent his attendants to greet the World--Honored One.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**Thus I have heard; at one time the Buddha dwelt in the Trayastrimsa Heaven speaking Dharma for his mother.** Why did the Buddha instruct Ananda to use the four words “Thus I have heard”?

1. To distinguish Buddhist sutras from other non-Buddhist texts, which typically begin with either “A 阿” or “Ou 憂”, meaning respectively “non-existence 無” or “existence 有”. This is because they believe all existent, or worldly, dharmas are not beyond those

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- two characters. None of them can explain True Emptiness and Wonderful Existence.
2. To resolve the doubts of the Dharma Assembly. Because Ananda looked very similar to the Buddha, when the assembly saw him take the Dharma seat, they gave rise to three doubts: 1) Shakyamuni came back to life. 2) Another Buddha came to speak Dharma. 3) Ananda realized Buddhahood. Therefore when Ven. Ananda said “Thus I have heard”, these doubts were resolved.
  3. To end the assembly’s debates and clarify that these teachings are the Buddha’s, and not Ananda’s.

Six requirements are fulfilled to denote that this sutra was explained by the Buddha:

1. Faith: **Thus** denotes stillness; the Dharma is thus; the starting point of cultivation is faith in the Triple Jewel; having utmost belief in the Triple Jewel enables one to enter the Triple Jewel substance; the Triple Jewel is not obtained from others; the Buddha jewel is your nature; the Dharma jewel is your wisdom; the Sangha Jewel is your conduct. The Great Wisdom shastra says that the Buddhadharma is like the great ocean 佛法大海: it can only be entered through faith 為信能入, and can only be crossed over with wisdom 為智能度. The Vajra Sutra says that a mind with faith that is purified 信心精淨 is the production of the Real Mark 即生實相. The real mark is just another name for the Triple Jewel. Ultimately, faith enables the ten thousand dharmas to manifest 信則萬法現

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前.

2. Hearer: **I have heard** from the Buddha's mouth myself. "I" refers to the false self manifested by the Bodhisattvas in order to teach and transform living beings. The Buddha's disciples should follow and listen to his lectures and can become enlightened 聞聲悟道.
3. Time: **at one time**, when living beings' good roots mature, then the principles become obvious 時節若至, 其理自彰. This is the same as when, though Guan Yin Bodhisattva manifests the 32 transformation bodies to speak Dharma, if the causes and conditions are not mature yet, there will be no enlightenment.
4. Host: **the Buddha**, who can enlighten himself, enlighten others and attain perfect enlightenment.
5. Place: **Trayastrimsa Heaven**—the Buddha speaks Dharma more often in the human realm and rarely in the heavens. The first time that he spoke in the heavens was when he had just accomplished the Way and went to the Trayastrimsa heaven to speak "The Ten Dwellings" chapter of the Avatamsaka Sutra. The second time was before he entered Nirvana, when he went to the heavenly palaces with all his disciples and stayed there for the three month summer retreat 三月安居, during which time he spoke this sutra for his mother.
6. Audience: The Buddha spoke this sutra **for the sake of his mother** and also for the great assembly consisting of the usual 1250 bhikshus who are his constant fol-



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lowers as well as Shakra and the numerous gods. His mother listened to the Dharma and certified to the First Stage Arhatship.

This certifies that this sutra was truly spoken by the Buddha.

The phrase **at one time** can be explained in five ways:

1. At the time the Buddha wishes to speak (on filial piety).
2. When He wishes to correct the wrong views of the externalists whose dharmas lack understanding of the past, present and future.
3. At the time of planting seeds 下種 (so that one can harvest in the future). 莫道出家容易得，皆因屢世種菩提 admiring the Way and leaving the home-life with ease, arises from many lifetimes of planting the Bodhi seeds.
4. At the time of a true teacher 正師, 正教 and 正學: Initially one starts with the earnest desire to study and cultivate, and subsequently one needs to find a Good Knowing Adviser to increase one's chances of success.
5. At the appropriate time when both the speaker likes to speak and the hearers like to hear.

**At that time an indescribable number of Buddhas as well as great Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas from limitless worlds in the ten directions, all assembled together to praise Shakyamuni Buddha's ability to manifest the power of indescribably great wisdom and spiritual penetrations in the Evil World of the Five Turbidities, as well as his ability to regulate and subdue obstinate living beings so that they**

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**might come to know the dharmas of suffering and bliss.**

**An indescribable number of Buddhas:** They have the same substance as Shakyamuni Buddha. They all have the same virtues. Only confused living beings still differentiate between self and others.

**Worlds:** This word comes from the Chinese shì 世, denoting the three times jiè 界, denoting the ten directions. There are two kinds of worlds:

1. Sentient living beings: proper retribution.
2. Insentient: dependent retribution.

**Shakyamuni:** Shakya means “capable of humaneness”, meaning that he can cross over all living beings. Muni means still and silent 寂默, referring to samadhi. He is still and unmoving and yet can respond to living beings’ requests 隨緣. It is said: “The thoughts of all living beings are known and seen by the Thus Come One 一切衆生若幹種心, 如來悉知悉見”. One part of sincerity 真心 invokes a part of response; ten parts of sincerity invoke ten parts of response. Conversely, Shakyamuni can accord with living beings, also often referred to as “according with conditions”, and yet not change. We Buddhist disciples have Shakyamuni Buddha as our teacher, that is why we recite, “Na Mo Original Teacher Shakyamuni Buddha.”

**Buddha** is the enlightened one. There are three kinds of enlightenment:

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1. Inherent 本 enlightenment: This first kind of enlightenment refers to that of ordinary living beings. Though they are confused, intrinsically they are nonetheless fully endowed with the enlightened nature.
2. Initial 始 enlightenment: This refers to when confused beings meet with Good Knowing Advisers and begin to practice the Way such that their wisdom starts to unfold.
3. Ultimate 究竟 enlightenment: Initial enlightenment belongs to noumenon, or principles; inherent enlightenment belongs to the wisdom that arises from the principles learned. Ultimately, this wisdom is perfected and becomes ultimate enlightenment, the wisdom of a Buddha.

Upon his enlightenment, Shakyamuni Buddha said, “Strange indeed! All living beings have the Thus Come One’s knowledge and views, only they cannot actualize them because of their attachments and false thinking.”

**Turbidities** can be likened to quicksand, which is very difficult to extricate oneself from. Turbidity is created by taking clear water and tossing in mud and sand. Turbidities have five marks and hence are referred to as the **five turbidities**:

1. *The kalpa turbidity* refers to turbid times. The kalpa turbidity arises dependent on the other four turbidities, taking the growth of the other four as its basic substance. Originally, there were no turbidities, they merely happen to arise at this time. The kalpa turbidity also takes unceasing flame as its mark. Like flaming firewood, the more it burns the higher it blazes.

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Shakyamuni realized Buddhahood in this time. So he knows how difficult it is to do so. He therefore decided to speak of this Dharma without request because it is one of the most important Dharmas for our time. In the Decreasing Kalpa, the time of the kalpa turbidity occurs when the average lifespan reaches 20,000 years. When the lifespan reaches 100 years, that is called the Five Turbidities Evil Time. This is when Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in the world. More specifically, the kalpa turbidity takes the five view delusions as substance and nature. During this time, many prefer to draw near the externalists. Evil views proliferate. There will be times of hunger, epidemics and wars which could happen concurrently.

2. *The view turbidity* takes the five quick servants as its basic substance. The five quick servants are: 1) Body views 身: we deeply love and attach to the body, not realizing that the body is just the four elements falsely united. It is false, like a mirage and is impermanent. 2) Extreme views 邊: we believe in nihilism or permanence, which are the two extreme views, instead of the Middle Way. 3) View grasping views 見取: we take what is not a retribution as a retribution, e.g. the Unlearned Bhikshu. 4) Precept grasping views 戒取: we take what is not a cause to be a cause, such as those who cultivate the unbeneficial ascetic practices. And finally, 5) Deviant views 邪: we do not believe in cause and effect. These view delusions are called servants because they can make living beings create

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offenses and thus undergo retributions, drawing them into the flow of birth and death. View delusions take mistaken wisdom and cattle morality, that is all the views that arise in confusion 諸見紛起, as its mark. With deviant knowledge and views, people take the genuine doctrine to extremes.

3. *The affliction turbidity* takes the five dull servants as its basic substance. The five dull servants are: 1) Greed: attaching to pleasant states, we do not realize that all conditioned dharmas are like a dream or mirage. 2) Hatred: Toward unfavorable states, we give rise to hatred and anger, grow impatient and do not realize that one thought of hatred opens the door to the eighty thousand obstructions. 3) Stupidity: Toward neutral states we give rise to stupid thoughts, failing to understand and analyze that all dharmas are impermanent, and ultimately empty. 4) Arrogance: Toward living beings, we cannot be humble, and we do not understand that all living beings are fundamentally equally endowed with the Buddha nature. And finally, 5) Doubt: Toward the Dharma, we harbor doubts and do not understand that one ought to draw near what is good, and that one ought to proceed on the Way. These five servants belong to the thought delusions. The affliction turbidity takes the irritation of afflictions, which make one upside down and feeling oppressed, as its mark. During this turbidity, living beings are increasingly greedy for deviant dharmas, fight with weapons, and continually file lawsuits against one another. They use flattery and lies to transmit deviant

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dharmas not to mention the rest of the unwholesome dharmas. Living beings endure all sorts of afflictions other than the five views.

4. *The living being turbidity* takes the combination of the three conditions of father, mother and one's own karma as its basic substance. It takes the unceasing turning in the wheel as its mark. Here "form" 色 and mind 心 陋 can be characterized as "ugly" 劣 and "inferior" . The five skandhas unite to form living beings. The skandhas are: 1) Form, which has solidity and the connotation of impeding. 2) Feeling, which has the connotation of being receptive (to the five dusts). 3) Thought, which has the connotation of grasping at marks. (This skandha corresponds to the sixth consciousness that processes, calculates, and thinks about the dharmas.) 4) Formation, which has the meaning of flowing. (This corresponds to the seventh consciousness that constantly evaluates and discriminates, thought after thought, unceasingly like white water rapids.) And finally, 5) Consciousness, which has the meaning of sustaining. (This corresponds to the eighth consciousness that contains the three elements of breath, warmth and life.) Though living beings are a union of the five skandhas, the skandhas nonetheless cover up their true nature.
5. *The life turbidity* takes the reception of warmth as its basic substance and the decline and extinction of the lifespan as its mark. Both cause and effect are inferior. Cause refers to the view and thought turbidities. View

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and thought delusions are the causes for the feeling retribution. Effect refers to the living beings turbidities, to the coarse and miserable five skandhas which are the effect for birth. As a retribution for the killing karmas, the average lifespan will not exceed 100 years.

Still Intention 寂意 Bodhisattva asked the Buddha why he chose the world of five turbidities to accomplish Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi, and speak the three Dharmas. Why didn't he choose a pure world, apart from the five turbidity evil world? The Buddha replied, "Due to the Bodhisattva's past vows, he chooses an impure world to accomplish great compassion."

**Know the dharmas of suffering and bliss:** suffering is to revolve in the three realms. To escape and get to Nirvana is bliss.

Buddhas teach by **regulating and subduing** and harmonizing living beings. Just like the five flavors (sour, hot, sweet, bitter and salty) are harmonized and blended in cooking to produce a balanced and harmonious dish.

**Each of these sent his attendants to greet the World--Honored One.**

The Buddhas came from limitless worlds in the ten directions, each of which has a Buddha. Each Buddha also brings his own attendant, who is a great Bodhisattva.

**Each of these sent his attendants, not just one, to greet:** they make a half bow and ask, "Does the World Honored

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One, because is most honored by the world and world-transcending realms, have few sicknesses, and few afflictions? Is he peaceful and happy?” Remember, this is the evil world of the five turbidities, that is why they ask about sickness, affliction and strength.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time the Thus Come One smiled and emitted hundreds of thousands of millions of great light clouds such as the Great Perfect Fullness Light Cloud, the Light Cloud of Kindness and Great Compassion, the Light Cloud of Great Wisdom, the Light Cloud of Great Prajna, the Light Cloud of Great Samadhi, the Great Auspicious Light Cloud, the Light Cloud of Great Blessing, the Light Cloud of Great Merit and Virtue, the Light Cloud of Great Refuge, and the Light Cloud of Great Praise.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time the Thus Come One smiled and emitted hundreds of thousands of millions of great light clouds such as the Great Perfect Fullness Light Cloud, the Light Cloud of Kindness and Great Compassion, the Light Cloud of Great Wisdom, the Light Cloud of Great Prajna, the Light Cloud of Great Samadhi, the Great Auspicious Light Cloud, the Light Cloud of Great Blessing, the Light Cloud of Great Merit and Virtue, the Light Cloud of Great Refuge, and the Light Cloud of Great Praise.**

The Buddha then uses two manifestations, with his spiritual powers, to catch their attention and convoke the assembly:



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through light and sound.

**Smiled:** He smiles slightly. His mouth is closed, but all the hair pores are open. He sees that living beings are replete with the Buddha nature. They can enlighten themselves by listening to the Buddha's Dharma. The Buddhadharmas are present in everyday life—living beings are simply confused and do not recognize it. Living beings are already endowed with the myriad virtues, that is why he **emitted** lights to reveal those types of virtues. (Note: when born, each Buddha emits light that surrounds his body with an area of one zhàng 丈, about ten feet). Typically, after emitting light, the Buddhas would retract it. In this sutra, however, Shakyamuni does not. This symbolizes responding to the potential and establishing the teaching 應機設教, destroying evil and eliminating doubt 破惡除疑, and giving rise to functionality from the substance 從體起用. The lack of retraction signifies that it will be done in the future. Now he will speak of Earth Store Bodhisattva's story.

Only “ten” are mentioned to represent the myriad of things. Ten represents the ten Dharma Realms.

**Cloud** refers to vapors from the earth that rise up. Rain would be vapors from the heavens that descend. In the naturally occurring activity of rain and clouds, both yin and yang gather, thoroughly extending and covering from above. Clouds appear from the mountains without a mind, spreading emptiness without a trace and numerous filling and covering the sky. The Buddha manifests his body like clouds

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which, when scattered in space without a trace, symbolize no mind, and speaks the Dharma like rain, which symbolizes his non-discerning wisdom 無分別智, his responding to conditions and the manifesting of his body 緣感現身, all of which enable living beings to rely on him when he speaks Dharma so that their Bodhi roots will naturally sprout.

### **The Great Perfect Fullness Light Cloud 大圓滿光明雲:**

This represents the Buddhadharma which pervades the entire Dharma Realm. This light illuminates everywhere. It is called perfect and complete 圓滿 because it is not only the Buddha who has it, but all living beings have it as well. Ultimately, living beings and the Buddha are one and the same 無異無別.

The Great Perfect Fullness Light Cloud is the leader of the light rays, and the other nine are emitted forth from this. ‘Great Perfect Fullness’ refers to the Thus Come One’s fruition virtue Three Bodies 果德三身. This light cloud is replete with all Dharmas 無法不備.

### **The Light Cloud of Great Kindness and Compassion 大**

**慈悲光明雲:** Kindness gives joy. Great Compassion rescues living beings from their suffering. This cloud represents the Bodhisattva Vehicle. Samantabhadra (Universal Worthy) Bodhisattva used to be an attendant at a monastery dining hall 作行堂. He had to walk between the tables with a condiment tray to serve the bhikshus. To

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practice the Bodhisattva Path is to draw near and fulfill living beings' wishes. To be too close is not to be modest, meaning unreasonable; not following rules, and to be too far: is just to blame. All living beings' self-nature is replete with great kindness and compassion. Consequently, we should bring forth the resolve for Bodhi and make the four limitless vows.

### The Light Cloud of Great Wisdom 大智慧光明雲

represents the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle. Pratyekabuddhas practice the 12 conditioned links:

1. Ignorance,
2. Action,
3. Consciousness,
4. Name and form,
5. Six entrances,
6. Contact,
7. Feeling,
8. Love,
9. Grasping,
10. Existence,
11. Birth,
12. Old age and death.

They acquire wisdom and realize that all things self produce and self destruct. Living beings' self-nature can sever ignorance and afflictions.

The practice of Samatha and Contemplation 止觀 produces samadhi wisdom 定慧 (the wisdom of samadhi), which is also called great wisdom.

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### **The Light Cloud of Great Prajna 大般若光明雲**

represents the Arhat Vehicle. Arhat means ‘Sound Hearer’ in Sanskrit. They “hear” the teaching, obtain Prajna and attain Arhatship. Prajna means wisdom, and consists of literary, contemplative and ultimate wisdom. Arhatship refers to the lower levels of awakening that the Hinayana practitioners aspire to. Living beings’ self-nature intrinsically has great Prajna wisdom and can at all times illuminate all phenomenon and noumenon, cause and effect, common and sagely people. They know all dharmas throughout the Dharma Realm.

The Light Cloud of Great Prajna relies on non-production as its leader 無生為首 in order to universally destroy all delusions 遍破諸惑. Furthermore, it relies on non-production to enter the door 入門 (of contemplation Prajna), destroying both the length and breadth 縱橫具破 (of literary Prajna), enabling consciousness and substance to be universal (their universality is just Real Mark Prajna).

### **The Light Cloud of Great Samadhi 大三昧光明雲**

represents the God Realm. The gods cultivate the Ten Good Deeds and obtain the eight levels of samadhi, which is a Sanskrit word that can roughly be translated as proper concentration. The Eight Samadhis consist of the Four Dhyanas and the Four Stations of Emptiness. The First Dhyana is called the Blissful Ground of Leaving Production 離生喜樂地. The Second Dhyana is called Blissful Ground of the Birth of Samadhi 定生喜樂地. The Third Dhyana is called the Ground of the Wonderful Bliss of

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Leaving Happiness 離喜妙樂地. The Fourth Dhyana is called the Ground of the Purity of Renouncing Thought 捨念精淨地. The Four Stations of Emptiness are the Stations of Boundless Space 空無邊處, Boundless Consciousness 識無邊處, Nothing whatsoever 無所有處 and Neither Thought nor Non-thought 非想非非想處. The gods also took refuge and took the five precepts. From living beings' self-nature arises functioning 從性起用, whatever is being done (eating, drinking, speaking, resting, bowing, etc...) is always done in samadhi.

**The Great Auspicious Light Cloud 大吉祥光明雲** represents the Human Realm where auspicious events are causes for rejoicing. Those who take refuge with the Triple Jewel and observe the Five Precepts plant the causes for birth in the human realm. Taking refuge and observing precepts eradicates offenses and produces blessings, dispels confusion and brings wisdom, turns the inauspicious into auspicious, transforms disaster into good fortune, enables the deaf to hear, the mute to speak, and the sick to be cured.

**The Light Cloud of Great Blessing 大福德光明雲** represents the Asura Realm. Asuras have the virtues of the gods but lack their blessings. Bodhisattvas and Buddhas are complete with blessings.

Blessings and virtues are just giving etc. They assist the Proper Way. The Proper Way has many obstructions,

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preventing us from penetrating the perfect Principles. We therefore need to practice phenomenon blessings to help open the way.

### **The Light Cloud of Great Merit and Virtue 大功德光明**

**雲** represents the Animal Realm. This light eradicates all their offenses and enables them to leave suffering and attain bliss in the future. The self-nature can sever view and thought delusions, delusions like dust motes, ignorance, and the 84,000 afflictions, ultimately allowing them to obtain Nirvana's bliss.

Practitioners cannot help but have overweening pride. When one encounters this light, it has the merit of extinguishing evil and the virtue of producing goodness **生善**.

### **The Light Cloud of Great Refuge 大皈依光明雲**

represents the Hungry Ghost Realm. This light induces hungry ghosts to change their ways and take refuge with the Triple Jewel. The self-nature intrinsically is of one substance with the Triple Jewel.

Facing this light, one can peacefully endure unfavorable circumstances. To take refuge is to return to one's own self-nature, rely on the Triple Jewel, become one brilliant and adorned substance, peacefully dwell in non-production, and progress with ease.

### **The Light Cloud of Great Praise 大讚歎光明雲**

represents the Hell Realm. The Buddha uses this mind of

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praise to emit this kind of light which can help those who see it escape suffering, change from evil towards good and bring forth the Bodhi mind. The self-nature is replete with the Triple Jewel's numberless and limitless merit and virtues. One can praise it without ever stopping.

*Sutra text:*

**After emitting more indescribable clouds of light, he also emitted a great many wonderfully subtle sounds such as the Dana Paramita sound, the Sila Paramita sound, the Kshanti Paramita sound, the Virya Paramita sound, the Dhyana Paramita sound, and the Prajna Paramita sound.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**After emitting more indescribable clouds of light, he also emitted a great many wonderfully subtle sounds such as the Dana Paramita sound, the Sila Paramita sound, the Kshanti Paramita sound, the Virya Paramita sound, the Dhyana Paramita sound, and the Prajna Paramita sound.**

The Buddha speaks with one **sound** and yet each living being can understand it in his or her own language 佛以一音聲演說法, 衆生隨類各得解. That is an inconceivable state. Refer to the eight sounds of the Buddha explained in the Sutra in 42 Sections.

The Buddha's voice is such that the listener is never bored and always wants to hear more 無厭無足. His voice can be the basis as well as the causes and conditions for giving bliss

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to all saving them from suffering 拔苦.

One time Mahamaudgalyayana, foremost in spiritual powers, traveled east and went through worlds systems as many as Ganges sands. Yet he could still hear the Buddha's voice as if he was right in front of the Buddha.

**Paramita** is Sanskrit for “reached the other shore”. It means to accomplish what is to be done. In Buddhism, we often refer to crossing over from our current shore of birth and death to the other shore of Nirvana. Shores can be non-ultimate (like the fruition of First Stage Arhat) or ultimate (Anuttarasamyak-sambodhi).

Paramitas are described because:

1. The Buddha's and Bodhisattvas' Dharma Body is produced from all the merit and virtue Dharma Doors.
2. When the Buddha speaks Dharma, all Dharmas are contained within the six paramitas.

**Dana** 檀 means giving. There are three kinds of giving:

1. Wealth
2. Dharma
3. Fearlessness.

One should give such that the substance of the three wheels (三輪體空; 1. the giver; 2. the gift; 3. the receiver) are empty. If not one will only reap heavenly rewards! The self-nature, like the great earth, can not only produce the 10,000 things, but can also renounce them in order to give to all living beings for their benefit.



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**Sila 尸羅** means “stopping (evil) and obtaining (goodness)”, “pure and cool 精涼”, “no (hot) affliction 無熱惱”, “defending and stopping 防止”. Sila are the precepts or rules of morality: “do no evil, do all good 諸惡莫作, 眾善奉行”. A great dharma protector once asked an eminent master, “Venerable Sir, what is the Buddhadharma?” The master replied, “Do no evil and do all good.” The layman retorted, “Hum, even a three year old can understand this, how can it be the Buddhadharma?” The monk said, “A three year old child can understand it but an eighty year old man can’t practice it 三歲的小兒雖懂得, 八十老翁行不得.”

Vinaya Master Dào Xuan 道宣 maintained the precepts so purely that the gods came to offer him food. He exemplified the cultivation of the Three Thousand Awesome Comportments 三千威儀, 八萬細行, which are grounded in the following basic actions: walk like the breeze 行如風, stand like a pine tree 住如松, sit like a bell 坐如鍾 and lie like a bow 臥如弓. Each of these four has 250 practices making a total of 1,000, which, when multiplied by the three periods of time, yields the three thousand comportments. Master Dào Xuan did not engage in idle talk, did not answer immediately when questioned, did not get angry and did not burst out in happiness. He could maintain the Middle Way, not show emotions, in every action at all times.

He lived in the Chung Nán mountains, which are in the same range as the Himalayas. Many cultivators live there. Tigers

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and wolves act as their dharma protectors. Master Dào Xuan lived in a thatched hut 茅棚 and ate one meal a day before noon. Each morning a god Lù Xuán Chàng 陸玄暢 would bring him a food offering. His contemporary, National Master Kui Ji 窺基 paid him a visit in order to taste heavenly food... However, that day the god could not bring the food because there was a blinding golden light for a forty miles radius that prevented him from seeing the way.

Do not get defiled by the dusts, keep the three karmas pure. This is a prerequisite for certifying to the Unsurpassed Way. If one seeks great goodness and benefits, one should firmly hold precepts, like cherishing rare jewels or protecting one's body and life. As the great earth is the place of reliance of the 10,000 things, so are precepts the dwelling place of all the good Dharmas.

**Kshanti** 羸提 means patience. This practice requires a long time to perfect. The practitioners of this dharma are constantly tested. For instance, there was an old cultivator who, after many years of practice, thought that he made it. He posted a sign saying "Nature like Ashes" outside of his place of abode. Someone passed by and asked him what it says. "Nature like Ashes," he replied. The passerby asked, "Pardon?" The old cultivator repeated, "It says 'Nature like Ashes'." The visitor kept on asking the old cultivator for help in reading the sign. This went on for quite a while. No matter how often the traveler was informed, he still could not get it. Finally, the old cultivator exploded saying, "Damn it! I've told you at least a million times already, it reads 'Nature like Ashes'." "I see,"

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the passer-by said, as he stepped into the air and manifested as Guan Yin Bodhisattva, saying “There still are some embers left in those ashes! Good man, keep at it.”

The self-nature is unproduced 自性不生. All evil thoughts and confused thoughts are originally unproduced. When one certifies to the patience of non-production of Dharmas, no evil is produced.

Bodhisattvas, who practice production patience 生忍, obtain limitless blessings and virtues. Practicing non-production patience, they obtain limitless wisdom. When both wisdom and blessings are complete, everything is as one wishes 事事如所願.

**Virya 毗離耶** means vigor. Take care to apply vigor to the cultivation of the Proper Dharma and not to the deviant dharmas. During the Buddha’s time, he had a lot of bhikshus who were externalists. They were taught to recite the following verses daily:

“Guard the mouth, Reign in the mind, Commit no offenses with the body 守口攝意身莫犯,

Make sure not to annoy any sentient being 莫惱一切諸有情,

Leave behind non-beneficial ascetic practices 無益苦行當遠離,

Such cultivators can surely save the world 如是行者可度

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世。”

Vigor itself is one of the six paramitas, but all of the other paramitas involve vigor as well. Giving, Morality and Patience require vigor of the body. Dhyana and Prajna involve vigor of the mind.

The self-nature is continuous 不間斷. That is called vigor Jing Jìn 精進. Jing 精 means not false or mixed. Jìn 進 means to awaken to the principles. Therefore, vigor means to get rid of the false and enlighten to the principles 去忘悟理. The Avatamsaka Sutra, Chapter 40 states: “念念相續, 無有間斷, 身、語、意業無有疲厭 Thought after thought in succession without interruption, the karmas of body, mouth and mind know no tiredness.” To cultivate the vigor paramita is like the chicken incubating its eggs: it cannot stop. It’s also like the cat spying on the mouse: it cannot leave even for a split moment.

To accomplish the Way, there are two general Dharma Doors. The first type of Dharma Door is the cultivation of blessings and virtues through giving, precepts and patience. These practices can eradicate all offenses, enabling one to obtain what one wishes. The second type of Dharma Door develops wisdom, or Real Mark Prajna, which brings freedom from the fear of birth and death. Furthermore, to not enjoy Nirvana, one needs to cultivate Chan samadhi, which particularly requires vigor.

Body vigor requires us to cultivate all good dharmas, whereas

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mind vigor requires us to practice the good path.

**Dhyana** 禪 means “thought cultivation 思惟修” or “stillness contemplation 靜思”. Contemplate within stillness 靜中思慮; 靜是止, 思是觀; 靜思 is just another name for “止觀 stopping and contemplating”. There is a saying 大學云: 知止而後有定 to be able to stop and then enter samadhi, 定而後能靜 is to have samadhi and to be able to be still, 而後能安 then to be able to be still is to be able to be peaceful, 安而後能思 being at peace and then being able to contemplate, 而後能得 and to contemplate and then to be able to attain. There are both worldly and transcendental Dhyanas.

**Prajna** 般若 means “wisdom” and can be either worldly or transcendental. Ultimately, there is only one kind of wisdom. When applied to the world, it is called worldly wisdom. Transcendental wisdom helps one escape the world.

There is an old saying:

“Intelligence results from secretly helping others 聰明乃是陰鷲助,

Secret assistance leads one to the road of intelligence 陰鷲引入聰明路.

*If one does not believe that secret assistance is the cause of*

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*intelligence* 不行陰鷲使聰明,

*Intelligence is misused and becomes a hindrance* 聰明反被聰明誤”。

One cause of intelligence is good deeds done in past lives. Another is the recitation of sutras. If one does not practice secret good deeds this life, one's intelligence backfires and becomes an obstruction. Why? Because one tends to abuse one's intelligence and create offenses instead.

Prajna is called wonderful wisdom, or simply good knowledge 良知. Wisdom 智 is the nature of the mind 心之性, just as water has moisture 濕 for nature, fire has warmth 熱 for nature, earth has solidity 堅 for nature.

Whereas the mind produces all dharmas, wisdom 智 knows all dharmas. To know and yet not know 知而無知, to not know and yet know 無知而知; to know all dharmas 知一切法, to be apart from all marks 離一切相, to obtain All Wisdom 一切智, this is called Prajna. Prajna is knowing all dharmas and yet not being attached, such that one can empty the two attachments of self and dharmas, certify to the two doctrines of Emptiness and True Suchness, and reach the shore of True Suchness.

*Sutra text:*

**The Sound of Kindness and Compassion, the Sound of Joyous Giving, the Sound of Liberation, the Sound of No-**

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**Outflows, the Sound of Wisdom, the Sound of Great Wisdom, the Sound of the Lion's Roar, the Sound of the Great Lion's Roar, the Sound of Thunderclouds, the Sound of Great Thunderclouds.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The Sound of Kindness and Compassion, the Sound of Joyous Giving, the Sound of Liberation, the Sound of No-Outflows, the Sound of Wisdom, the Sound of Great Wisdom, the Sound of the Lion's Roar, the Sound of the Great Lion's Roar, the Sound of Thunderclouds, the Sound of Great Thunderclouds.**

**The Sound of Kindness and Compassion 慈悲音:** Those who hear this sound will leave suffering, attain bliss and end birth and death.

There are three kinds of kindness:

1. Conditioned living beings kindness 緣衆生, which entails contemplating all living beings as one's parents.
2. Conditioned dharmas kindness 緣法, which entails seeing all dharmas as being produced from conditions.
3. No conditions kindness 無緣, which entails not dwelling on the Dharma mark 不住法相 or the living beings mark 及衆生相.

Similarly, compassion also has the same three kinds as kindness.

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The three kinds of kindness and the three kinds of compassion form the four limitless minds: kindness, compassion, joy and renunciation. The first two, kindness and compassion, are the basis for the Way 佛道根本, while the latter two are produced from the first two. That is why they are grouped into pairs.

**The Sound of Joyous Giving 喜捨音:** This sound contains two of the Four Unlimited Minds, brings joy and enables one to practice renunciation. The merit and virtues thus cultivated are transferred to all living beings in the Dharma Realm, and one forsakes one's own enjoyment. The Vajra Sutra states: “以諸菩薩 All Bodhisattvas 不受福德故 do not receive any blessings and virtues. 菩薩所作福德 Bodhisattvas should not be greedy for and attach to the blessings and virtues they have created 不應貪著.”

Joy is to celebrate the bliss that others' have obtained. Renunciation means no enmity 憎, and no love.

**The Sound of Liberation 解脫音:** Liberation means one is free from bondage, free from the wheel of reincarnation. This pertains to the independence 自由 of the self-nature. “Life and death are in my own hands and not the Heaven's.” There are two kinds of independence: The first is independence of the consciousness-spirit 識神自由, which belongs to the yin sphere. For example you can travel to New York but cannot physically bring things back with you. The second is



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independence of the inherent Buddha nature 根本的佛性, which belongs to the yang sphere. A million worlds are contained in one thought. One can go anywhere. You can stretch out your arm and take something from far away. This state is not meant to be publicized. The Buddha told his disciples that after his Nirvana, they should not manifest spiritual penetrations because doing so will not allow them to remain in the world for very long. It would also cause people to be startled and turn against them.

**The Sound of No-Outflows 無漏音:** This is the sound of existence without the ignorance that is the basis of all afflictions.

The Hinayana uses the truths of Sufferings and Accumulation as cause and effects with outflows 有漏因果 and the truths of Extinction and the Way as causes and effects with no outflows 無漏因果. Outflows are afflictions which cause loss to our self-nature through leakages.

Buddhism teaches us to follow the Middle Way between the two extremes of existence and emptiness. For common people, their outflows fall into the extreme of existence 落有邊, whereas the Two Vehicles' outflows fall into the extreme of emptiness 落空邊. The outflows of the Three Teachings Bodhisattvas' 三教菩薩 fall into both extremes 漏落二邊.

## Explained by Master YongHua

“This world’s true teaching substance is pure at sound 此方真教體, 精淨在音聲;” the fundamental substance of our Saha world’s Buddhadharma is contained in sound. Sound is utilized to propagate it. That is why there are all sorts of sounds of commendations 表揚, explanations 演說, and praises 讚歎.

This sound helps one attain the bliss of Nirvana.

**The Sound of Wisdom 智慧音:** Wisdom is the absence of stupidity. Ultimately, however, wisdom and stupidity are one and the same. The Chinese refer to such a smart person who appears to be so stupid. Regardless of whether or not you believe that they are one and the same, you cannot deny that stupidity can become wisdom. Wise people are in control 作主 and cannot be moved. They clearly recognize states 認境, and have judicious discernment and the True Dharma Selecting Eye 摘法眼.

This sound enables beings to know the worldly Dharmas.

**The Sound of Great Wisdom 大智慧音:** Great Wisdom refers to that of enlightened beings and is obtained by investigating and practicing the Buddhadharma.

This sound enables beings to know the world-transcending Dharmas.

## **The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva**

**The Sound of the Lion's Roar 師子吼音:** The lion is the king of beasts. His roar can bring all other beasts to their knees, causing them to freeze in terror.

This sound enables beings to explain the Dharmas of the Three Vehicles.

**The Sound of the Great Lion's Roar 大師子吼音:** Great here refers to the state of the Buddha.

This sound enables beings to speak of the One Vehicle Dharma.

**The Sound of Thunderclouds 雲雷音:** Thunderstorms can help wake us up. Furthermore, they bring the rain which nourishes our roots.

This sound enables Buddhas to make an appearance in the Saha World to speak Dharma.

**The Sound of Great Thunderclouds 大雲雷音:** Greatness is in the unsurpassed ability to awaken us and help bring our good roots to maturity quickly.

This sound enables Buddhas to speak Dharma at The Flower Store World 華藏世界.

There is a saying: “現身如雲, 說法如雷” to manifest bodies like clouds, to speak Dharma like thunder.”

## Explained by Master YongHua

*Sutra text:*

**After such indescribable sounds had issued forth, countless millions of gods, dragons, ghosts, and spirits from the Saha world and other realms assembled in the Palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven. They arrived from the Heaven of the Four Kings, the Trayastrimsa Heaven, the Suyama Heaven, the Tushita Heaven, the Transformation of Bliss Heaven, and the Heaven of Comfort Gained through Transformation of Others' Bliss.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**After such indescribable sounds had issued forth, countless millions of gods, dragons, ghosts, and spirits from the Saha world and other realms assembled in the Palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven.**

The Buddha emits clouds of light and produces subtle and wonderful sounds, covering the Dharma Realm. Those living beings in the Dharma Realm who have the right conditions see the light or hear the sound. They all come to the Heavenly palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven to listen to Shakyamuni Buddha speak Dharma. From the Saha World as well as other worlds, limitless gods, dragons, ghosts and spirits convene. One plants the cause for becoming a dragon by being lax with the precepts 戒緩 but vigorous with the practice 乘疾 (one has many good roots from listening to the Dharma). However, if humans can maintain precepts firmly and often recite sutras, being energetic with both precepts and practice 戒疾 乘疾, they can then manifest in a body of a god at the as-

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sembly.

**Dragons** belong to heaven species 天類. They can manifest as dark or emit light, they can be large or small, long or short. In the spring time, they ascend to the heavens. In the fall, they enter the water. They can have scales 蛇龍, horns 有角龍 or no horns 無角龍. They can protect and support the people in the country and support the Proper Dharma. There are four kinds of dragons: 1) Those who guard heavenly palaces so that they don't fall. 2) Those who create clouds to make rain fall to benefit humans. 3) Earth dragons who live in bodies of water. 4) Those who guard the Wheel-Turning King's blessings treasure store.

**Ghosts, and spirits:** The word 'ghost' 鬼 has two meanings: 1) "Return 歸", which refers to dying and returning to that state. 2) Fearsome or awesome 威, because ghosts can instill fear and awe in others. Spirits are the pure qi of sages 聖人之精氣. They are capable 能 for those with great strength can move mountains and fill up oceans. In addition, they can appear, disappear and make transformations. Both spirits and ghosts belong to the path of ghosts 鬼道.

The Proper Dharma Recitation Sutra 正法念經 says that there are thirty six types of hungry ghosts. Another Sutra 佛說摩尼羅剎咒經 states that there are over one hundred kinds of ghosts. The varieties account for the various retribu-

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tions. According to Proper Principles 正理 there are wealthy, poor and destitute ghosts.

**Saha** is Sanskrit for “able to endure”. This refers to the way in which the inhabitants of the Saha world have no choice but to endure the three poisons, as well as the many afflictions and evils that make the Saha world a place of extreme suffering 極苦 as compared to the Western Bliss Pure Land.

**And other realms 他方國土:** This refers to the other worlds.

**Heaven** means natural 天然. The inhabitants of the heavens have natural blessings to enjoy. When they think of clothing, it comes, or of food, it arrives. Heavenly clothing need not be sewn. Sweet dew arrives by itself and does not need to be produced.

The Great Shastra says there are four kinds of heavens:

1. Named Heavens 名天: such as the Chinese emperor who used to call himself son of the Heavens.
2. Birth Heavens 生天: the 28 heavens (from the Four Heavenly Heavens up to the Heaven of Non-thought nor not Non-thought).
3. Pure Heavens 淨天: for the sages amongst the humans.
4. Pure Birth Heavens 淨生天: for sages in the Desire Heavens, First Stage Arhats, Second State Arhats, Third Stage Arhats in the Form Realm (the five kinds

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of Third Stage Arhats Heaven), and the Formless Realm's Third Stage Arhat (one kind).

**They arrived from the Heaven of the Four Kings, the Trayastrimsa Heaven, the Suyama Heaven, the Tushita Heaven, the Transformation of Bliss Heaven, the Heaven of Comfort Gained through Transformation of Others' Bliss,...**

First, the Desire Realm has six heavens.

**The Heaven of the Four Kings** is located half way up Mount Sumeru, which is 84,000 yojanas tall, deep and wide (a yojana is 13 miles, or 16 Chinese miles). The Eastern King is called He Who Maintains Countries 持國, and the land there is made of gold. In the south, there is a king named Increase and Growth 增長, and the land is lapis lazuli. The Western King is called Wide Eyes 廣目. The land there is silver.

The Northern King is called Much Learning 多聞, and the land there is crystal. From practicing giving, maintaining the precept of not killing, and being filial to one's parents one creates the causes to be born to this heaven. The gods in this heaven are half a yojana tall and have a lifespan of 500 years. Each day there is equivalent to 50 human years. Their proximity to the human realm enables them to keep a close watch on human affairs. They have families just as we do in the human realm, and are born by transformation as a small child on top the adults' knees, as big as a five-year human child. Naturally, heavenly sweet dew appears in jeweled vessels. The child eats and becomes an adult after the meal. The

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lifespan is nine million years.

**The Trayastrimsa Heaven** is located on top of Mount Sumeru. The king here is named Shakra, which means 能天王 capable heavenly king. The inhabitants are one yojana tall and live for 1,000 years. The causes for rebirth here are to practice giving in the human realm, hold the not-stealing precept, make offerings to one's parents and the venerated ones. With their hearts set on excellence 心欲求勝, they thus obtain rebirth. They practiced the ten superior grade good deeds 上品十善, but did not practice samadhi 無禪定功. The lifespan is 36 million years.

**Suyama Heaven** 須臾摩天 means “well divided time 善時分”. It is much higher up in space such that the light of the sun and moon cannot reach it. The gods in this heaven are the first ones to dwell suspended in space. Their bodies emit light. Time is measured by the opening (day time) and closing (night time) of the lotus flower. The gods are two yojanas tall and live for 2,000 years. Successively, each higher heaven doubles in height and lifespan. The gods here are very happy and enjoy the five desires. The causes for birth here are practicing giving, maintaining the no deviant sex precept, having a gentle and harmonious mind. Furthermore, those who get reborn in the Suyama Heaven, tended to have been more still than animated when they were in the human realm 動少靜多. After death, they are born in space and dwell there naturally. Their lifespan is 144 million years.



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**Tushita Heaven** 兜率陀天 means contentment 知足; the god king's name means 妙足 wonderful contentment. In regard to the five desires, they often know contentment (they can stop) 止足. The Tushita Heaven has an outer 外院 and an inner court 內院. The outer court is subject to destruction of the Three Disasters, fire, water and wind, that occur at the end of the life cycle of the worlds. The inner court is not. One is reborn here as a result of practicing giving, not violating the four evil mouths, being fond of erudition, discerning good and ugly 好醜, loving Nirvana, and having a mind bent on merit and virtue. The next Buddha awaits in the inner court. The average lifespan in this heaven is 576 million years.

The inhabitants in **the Transformation of Bliss Heaven** 化樂天 take pleasure in transformational creations of the five dust entertainments and pleasures 五塵娛樂. For example, if they wish for food, it naturally appears. They themselves can transform the states of the five desires for their own enjoyment 自能變化五欲之境, 自享受. The causes for their birth are having a mind deeply set on giving, maintaining precepts and erudition, and earning their own livelihood. Their lifespan is 2.3 billion years.

The inhabitants in **the Heaven of Comfort Gained through Transformation of Others' Bliss** 他化自在天 obtain their bliss not by creating it themselves but by stealing it away from the other heavens (using their spiritual powers). The

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inhabitants here are neither spirits nor immortals. They actually are heavenly demons. The causes for birth in this heaven are giving and practicing purity, purely hold precepts, being fond of erudition, regarding oneself as honorable and indulging in emotions 自貴情多. They loathe suffering and steal pleasure from others. Their lifespan is 9.2 billion years.

Rebirth to the heavens above the Four Heavenly Kings is a result of practicing the Ten Superior Grade Good Deeds. Shakra is the king of the earth dwelling gods. The King of the Sixth Desire Heaven is in charge of the gods who dwell in space.

The heavens in space (up to the Pure Dwelling Heaven 淨居) are sustained by the Wind Wheel; they rely on densely packed clouds that are propped up by wind. The Forth Dhyana Heavens have lighter and thinner clouds that are like scattered stars.

The heavens listed above are called the Six Desire Heavens. Newborns in these heavens are born by transformation. In the Heaven of the Four Kings, newborns are as big as a five-year old child. The age at which the gods are born increases by one for each higher heaven: e.g. in Trayastrimsa they are born at six years old, in the heavenly demons heaven, they are born at ten years old. Shortly after their birth, the infants sit on the knees of an adult and eat spontaneously appearing sweet dew. Not long afterwards, they reach maturity and are as large as an adult god). Sexual desire lessens the higher the heaven: the less desire, the more the wisdom.

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*The Four Heavenly, Trayastrimsa heavenly beings desire to couple and embrace* 四天忉利欲交抱,

*Those in the Suyama hold hands and the Tushita dwellers smile* 夜摩執手兜率笑,

*Transformation of Bliss gods stare and those in the Heaven of Comfort Gained through Transformation of Others' Bliss discreetly glance* 他樂熟視他暫視,

*That is how desires are fulfilled in the Six Desire Heavens* 此是六天之欲樂.

*Sutra text:*

**...the Heaven of the Multitudes of Brahma, the Heaven of the Ministers of Brahma, the Heaven of the Great Brahma Lord, the Heaven of Lesser Light, the Heaven of Limitless Light, the Heaven of Light-Sound, the Heaven of Lesser Purity, the Heaven of Limitless Purity, the Heaven of Universal Purity.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**...the Heaven of the Multitudes of Brahma, the Heaven of the Ministers of Brahma, the Heaven of the Great Brahma Lord, the Heaven of Lesser Light, the Heaven of Limitless Light, the Heaven of Light-Sound, the Heaven of Lesser Purity, the Heaven of Limitless Purity, the Heaven of Universal Purity.**

The Form Realm heavens are apart from desire, coarseness and scattered-ness 離欲粗散. They are not, however, out

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of the form cage. They do obtain samadhi when sitting (in contrast to the Desire Realm heavens where the gods have no samadhi power). Also, in the Form Realm heavens, their bodies are pure, unlike the filthy and defiled retribution bodies 垢染 of those in the Desire Realm.

Whereas the mindset of the Desire Realm is scattered and chaotic 散亂, the mindset of the Formless Realm is characterized by the four limitless minds, the eight renunciations 八背捨, the eight superior places 八勝處, and the nine successive samadhis 九次地定. Their minds are supple and harmonious 柔和, just like riding a horse and letting it go as it wishes until it returns to the stable. **Brahma** means pure, not defiled by desires. All eighteen heavens in the Form Realm are pure and devoid of desires.

大智度論釋初品中三三昧義第三十二(卷第二十)

龍樹菩薩造

後秦龜茲國三藏鳩摩羅什奉 詔譯

【經】 「空三昧、無相三昧、無作三昧，四禪、四無量心、四無色定，八背捨、八勝處、九次第定、

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十一切處。」 【論】 問曰： 何以故次三十七品後，  
說八種法？ 答曰： 三十七品是趣涅槃道，  
行是道已，得到涅槃城。 涅槃城有三門，  
所謂空、  
無相、無作。 已說道，次應說到處門；  
四禪等是助開門法。 復次，三十七品是上  
妙法，  
欲界心散亂，行者依何地、何方便得？當依  
色界、  
無色界諸禪定。於四無量心、八背捨、八勝  
處、  
九次第定、十一切處中，  
試心知得柔軟自在隨意不？譬如御者試馬，  
曲折隨意，然後入陣。

The heavens of the First, Second and Third Dhyanas follow.  
Each of these has three heavens.

**The Heaven of the Great Brahma Lord** is where the god  
king of the First Dhyana Heaven resides. His name is 尸棄  
meaning 頂髻, or Summit Hair Coil; he is in charge of the  
great thousand world 大千世界. There are ten thousand  
hundred million 萬億 of these kings who cultivated vigor-

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ously. However, he only cultivated blessings and therefore did not awaken and certify to the fruition. Upon death he was reborn to this Heaven. His officials 宰官 reside in **the Heaven of the Ministers of Brahma 梵輔天**. They have inner awakening contemplation 內有覺觀. Outwardly they use language to help the god king propagate the pure virtues 宣揚梵德. Ordinary gods reside in **the Heaven of the Multitudes of Brahma 梵眾天**. Brahman means pure 離欲得禪. The gods here leave desire, obtain samadhi and their form is pure 其色精淨. Hence it is called the form realm. Their bodies do not emit light.

The First Dhyana is called the Joyful Stage of Leaving Production 離生喜樂地. Here, the pulse 脈 stops. This is commonly mistaken as death but the self-nature goes to the heavens and the body neither decays nor dies. The samadhi may last for as long as thirty days or more.

The First Dhyana Heavens still have differentiation of honored and lowly 貴賤. If you can practice superior grade samadhi and kindness you can be reborn as king. Practice middle grade samadhi and kindness and you'll be reborn as his ministers. There are ten thousand hundred million Brahma Lords. In the heavens above the First Dhyana Heavens, there is no longer a differentiation between honored and lowly: the retribution is the same for all. In the Second Dhyana Heavens, superior and inferior are gauged by merit and virtues. Also, the First Dhyana Heavens still rely on words and lan-

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guage on the outside and contemplation on the inside. Above the three First Dhyana Heavens, there are no more words and languages.

If humans, when practicing giving obtain pleasure and therefore practice more giving, they thus obtaining even more pleasure. They further contemplate, renounce the five desires and discard the five coverings, 五蓋 which are: 1) Greed and desire 貪欲 (especially sexual desire). 2) Anger and resentment 瞋恚. 3) Torpor 惛眠: laziness and sleepiness. 4) Agitation 掉舉. And 5) Doubt 疑: to have no faith in the Proper Dharma. If humans can renounce these five things, they can enter First Dhyana. This applies to the higher levels of concentration as well, up to the eighth samadhi.

By Practicing superior, middle, lower grade Chan, one can be born in the three First Dhyana Heavens. Similarly for practicing superior, middle, lower grade kindness.

You cannot reach Second Dhyana Heaven unless you cut off desire and sever love. If you still have either of them, you cannot be born there.

Also, light has superior, middle and inferior grades. What are the causes for your body to emit light?

1. To practice giving, and hold precepts.
2. To offer lamps in dark areas or to images or temples.
3. To often practice kindness, universally being mindful of living beings.
4. To practice the samadhi of the Buddha's recitation, be-

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ing mindful of the Buddha's brilliance and Chan virtue  
光明禪德.

5. To use the light of wisdom 智慧光明 to teach and transform living beings (as well as the fire practitioners 修火之人).

As a result of planting these causes, the gods can obtain the light of the mind's wisdom 心中之慧明, such that the body emits light. The shastra states that the marks of the gods' retribution bodies are: having neither bones nor flesh, being neither small nor large, and not being impure or needing to use the toilet, etc. Their bodies emit light night and day, they have the five spiritual penetrations, and their form is unobstructed.

**The Heaven of Lesser Light, the Heaven of Limitless Light** (there are many many lights there!), and **the Heaven of Light-Sound**: These three heavens belong to the Second Dhyana which is called the Joyful Stage of the Arising of Samadhi 定生喜樂地. When in the Second Dhyana, not only does the pulse stop, but the breathing stops as well.

The bodies of the inhabitants of **the Heaven of Lesser Light** emit light 定體發光, more than those of the Suyama Heaven. This is increasingly so with each higher heaven because their samadhi power increases. They shine because when in the world, they were more pure with the precepts and specialized in keeping them. The First Dhyana cultivators also observe precepts, but not that well and thus they do not emit light.



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In the **Heaven of Light-Sound**, sound is carried by light. Thus they use light instead of words to speak 內無覺觀之細念, 外無言語之粗況.

**The Heaven of Lesser Purity, the Heaven of Limitless Purity, and the Heaven of Universal Purity** are the three heavens of the Third Dhyana which is called the Ground of the Wonderful Bliss of Being Apart from Joy 離喜妙樂地. In the Third Dhyana, not only are the pulse and breath suspended, but thought 念 (false thinking 妄念) stops as well. In a ksana 剎那, which is an extremely short period of time, there are ninety productions and extinctions 生死. In each of these, there are 900 thoughts. A mediator in the Third Dhyana can last for years without having any awareness of the passage of time. When they wish to return, the thought “I’m sitting in meditation” arises and their thoughts no longer remain still. As long as there are thoughts, there is no real purity (like dust on the ground). “Wonderful” arises from the fact that even bliss must be put aside and not be attached to before one can enter this state.

In the Third Dhyana, meditators 少淨天 forsake the First Dhyana’s joyful mind 離初禪之喜心, 得淨定之樂境, and obtain the bliss of the state of purity. While the second Dhyana Heaven’s samadhi power (and purity) increases over the first, the bliss of purity that marks the Third Dhyana Heaven is limitless. In the **Heaven of Universal Purity** 遍淨天, “極淨之樂, 周遍身心” the extreme purity bliss

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pervades body and mind. The bliss in all three realms is at its utmost in this heaven 三界之樂, 以此天為第一.

*Sutra text:*

**...the Birth of Blessings Heaven, the Love of Blessings Heaven, the Abundant Fruit Heaven, the No-Thought Heaven, the No-Affliction Heaven, the No-Heat Heaven, the Good Views Heaven, the Good Manifestation Heaven, the Ultimate Form Heaven, the Mahesvara Heaven and so forth, until the Heaven of the Station of Neither Thought nor Non-thought. All of those assemblies of gods, dragons, ghosts and spirits came and gathered together.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**...the Birth of Blessings Heaven, the Love of Blessings Heaven, the Abundant Fruit Heaven, the No-Thought Heaven, the No-Affliction Heaven, the No-Heat Heaven, the Good Views Heaven, the Good Manifestation Heaven, the Ultimate Form Heaven, the Mahesvara Heaven and so forth, until the Heaven of the Station of Neither Thought nor Non-thought. All of those assemblies of gods, dragons, ghosts and spirits came and gathered together.**

Next, the nine Fourth Dhyana Heavens are described. Three are for common people, and five are for the Third Stage Arhats.

1) **The Birth of Blessings Heaven 福生天:** Unlike the first two Dhyana heavens where, even though the pulse and breath

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have stopped, suffering and distress still remain, here the causes of suffering 苦因 cease to exist. Since gods here have no suffering, they are also not attached to their happiness. Thus it is said that their bliss is not permanent. The gods of the Second Dhyana have cut off thoughts of sexual desire. In the Fourth Dhyana Heaven, the seeds of desire 欲, and thus of suffering, are cut off. Consequently, all coarse forms disappear 粗重相滅了.

Of all the blessings, the blessings of Chan are foremost, therefore Chan is called birth of blessings 一切福中, 以禪定之福最勝, 固名福生.

2) **The Love of Blessings Heaven 福愛天** is where supreme renunciation reigns 捨心圓融. What cannot be renounced is nonetheless renounced, and what cannot be given up is given up. The gods here obtain a supreme purity of liberation 勝解精淨 and have inconceivably great blessings. They reach a state beyond heaven and earth, of wonderful compliance in which everything accords with their intent 隨心如意. They renounce bliss and are apart from both bliss and suffering. They nevertheless harbor hope, seeking the heavens directly above them (the Abundant Fruit and No Thought Heavens).

Then, there is a fork between two heavens: 3) **the Abundant Fruit Heaven 廣果天** and 4) **the No-Thought Heaven 無**

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**想天.** **The Abundant Fruit Heaven** is the highest reward that ordinary people (of six desire heavens) can attain. Here all the defilements of the lower heavens are left behind and there is limitless and inexhaustible happiness. Here the miraculous functioning of the spiritual penetrations can be found (therefore it is very difficult to be born into this heaven). The wonderful compliance **妙隨順** attained in the prior heavens is even more subtle in this heaven. The gods are able to obtain whatever they wish. In the other path of the fork lies **the No-Thought Heaven**. Thoughts **思想** are cut off for the first 499 kalpas (16 million years) of their lifespan, but not permanently. During this time they the gods here have no thoughts at all. However, in the last half of the last kalpa, thought spontaneously arises, causing them to fall. This is prime destination for the externalists and demons who think that they have achieved supreme Nirvana because they succeed in suppressing thoughts **厭破妄想, 妄想不生, 一定五百劫, 三界中無處可安住, 固居此天**. For that time period, their minds are not moved by all the worldly suffering and pleasure.

Then there are the **五不還天** Five Heavens of No-Return, where the Third Stage Arhats dwell until they certify to Fourth Stage Arhatship.

5) **The No-Affliction Heaven 無煩天**: Here, there are neither views **見**, which arise from greed when faced with states, nor thoughts **思**, which are due to confusion about

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principles and indulgence in discrimination. The gods have neither suffering nor bliss, and thus obtain cool refreshment 青涼. The Third Stage Arhats whose lower realm delusions have come to an end, and whose higher realm delusions are sparse 下界惑盡, 上界惑薄 reside here. 緣真斷或 They connect with the true and have severed delusions. Out of pity for living beings, these Third Stage Arhats often request the Buddha to speak Dharma. They are not mixed up by views, thoughts and afflictions. They do not give rise to thoughts of fighting 鬥心不交.

6) **The No-Heat Heaven 無熱天** is characterized by the absence of heat from afflictions 熱惱. The Third Stage Arhats who are reborn here, and the other residents, have severed delusions and succeeded in making their views become very subtle and sparse 所斷之惑, 轉見為薄. They are neither afflicted by the external states 無煩覺外境, nor heated by internal states 無熱內心.

7) **The Good Views Heaven 善見天** has extremely wide and expansive vista 見非常大, 非常遠 of the ten directions. Obstructions are minute, samadhi power strong 障微定勝, 見色明徹 form can be clearly and thoroughly seen.

8) **The Good Manifestation Heaven 善現天** is where a subtle transformation 微妙變化 occurs and the inhabitants

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can create all sorts of wonderful pleasures; not only can they see form, but they can also manifest form 現.

9) **The Ultimate Form Heaven 色究竟天**: Here the form dharma is at its utmost 色法最極. One thought of emptying form 一念空色, 便離色界 one then leaves the Form Realm. It is also known as **The Mahesvara Heaven 摩醯首羅天**, or **Great Self-Sufficiency Heaven 大自在天**, is at the top (peak) of the Form Realm. Its God King has eight arms and three eyes, rides a great white ox and holds a white whisk 白拂. In one thought, he can travel throughout the great thousand world; in one thought he can know the number of rain drops in the great thousand world. As a result, he thinks that he is very independent. His great self-sufficiency 大自在 comes from samadhi power.

All of the above ten heavens, with the exception of the Heaven of No-Thought, which is the abode of demons and externalists, are heavens of the Fourth Dhyana. The Fourth Dhyana is called the Stage of Renouncing Thought 捨念精淨地, because all thoughts (even fine ones) are put aside.

**And so forth** refers to the heavens of Infinite Space 大佛頂首楞嚴經: 空無邊處天: 從色界四禪, 以方便力, 滅可見可對色、又滅不可見可對色、更滅不可見無對色; 三色一滅, 便出色籠, 但見虛

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空無邊，故名「空無邊處天」。"若在捨心。捨厭成就。覺身為礙。銷礙入空。如是一類。名為空處。" Those who dwell in the thought of renunciation and who succeed in renunciation and rejection, realize that their bodies are an obstacle. If they thereupon obliterate the obstacle and enter into emptiness, they are among those at the first Station of Emptiness, known as Infinite Consciousness 大佛頂首楞嚴經：識無邊處天：此天再用方便力，滅空識現，但覺識心無邊際，故名。諸礙既銷。無礙無滅。其中惟留阿賴耶識。全於末那半分微細。如是一類。名為識處。 For those who have eradicated all obstacles, there is neither obstruction nor extinction. Then only the alaya consciousness and half of the subtle functions of the manas remain. These beings are among those at the Station of Boundless Consciousness and Nothing Whatsoever 大佛頂首楞嚴經：無所有處天：再用方便力滅識，識滅一切皆無故。 In the **Heaven of Neither Thought nor Non-thought** those who have already done away with emptiness and form eradicate the conscious mind as well. 大佛頂首楞嚴經：非想非非想處天：再以定力滅無，無滅想現；又以定力滅想，想滅無現。總不能想與無及我，三者一時俱滅，所以滅而非滅。空色既亡。識心都滅。十方寂然。迴無攸往。如是一類。名無所有處。 In the extensive tranquility of the

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ten directions there is nowhere at all to go. These beings are among those at the Station of Nothing Whatsoever. Consciousness is practically non-existent (that is why this heaven is said to have no thought). However, there still is a tiny trace left, that is why it's called neither thought nor non-thought.

To reach the Formless Realm from the Fourth Dhyana, one must wish to enter emptiness 入空處, use expedients, and extinguish three types of form:

1. Form that can be seen and can be faced 可見可對色 (form dust 色塵).
2. Form that cannot be seen and can be faced 不可見可對色 (five roots, four dusts).
3. Form that cannot be seen and cannot be faced 不可見無對色 (法入少分 (the dharma is minute; 無表色 no representative form).

Although there is no coarse form, there is still subtle form 細色. It is said that, although the Formless Realms are not based on the four great elements 非無四大造, they are created by the fruition of samadhi 定果所為, and hence they all act as a wall 皆是牆壁. The Dharma Flower Sutra says that 'wall' is an analogy for the seventh consciousness 意識. The Three Realms are sustained by the seventh consciousness. The Shurangama Sutra says: "In the four empty heavens, body and mind are extinguished, and samadhi nature manifests. There is no karma, no fruition form 無業果色,



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from this until the end 從此待充。”

In the Formless Realm, although form can be extinguished (only the other four skandhas remain), the formless “cage” cannot be escaped. When their heavenly retributions are exhausted, they will continue to revolve in the turning wheel and be reborn wherever their retributions call for 此天只有心識而無色身.

In the first Formless heaven, the mind is apart from the three kinds of form, which are:

1. The five roots 五根: These are our five sensory organs.
2. The five states 五境: These are known as the five dusts.
3. The non-represented form 無表色: That which has no actual form that can be seen but still is perceived as form. For example, the consciousness connects with what was seen in the past but no longer has a form now.

In separating from the three kinds of form, the mind moves on to connect with 緣 emptiness and thus is in accord with formlessness 初離三種色・心緣虛空・既與無色相應. That is why this heaven is called The Station of Boundless Space 無邊空處. (It is also called the emptiness samadhi place 虛空定處). Here one is rid of the Form Realm’s form body.

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One then renounces emptiness and 緣 moves along to reach the Station of Boundless Consciousness 識無邊處. Abandoning even that perception of emptiness, what remains is just consciousness 捨空緣識 • 以識為處 • 正從所緣處受名.

One then detests and renounces 厭 consciousness to enter the Station of Nothing Whatsoever 無所有處, which is also called 不用處. Practicing this samadhi one does not use all inner (內境 consciousness) or outer (外境 emptiness) states.

In the fourth Formless heaven, **the Heaven of Neither Thought nor Non-thought**, consciousness is practically non-existent. There are many explanations for this state. We have already discussed how this can mean that there is only a minimal trace of thought left. Another explanation, however, is that in this samadhi, one does not attach to the Station of Boundless Consciousness, and therefore it is called ‘non-thought’. Also, one does not attach to the Station of Nothing Whatsoever, and thus it is called ‘not non-thought’ 此定不緣識處 • 故非想 • 不緣不用處 • 故非非想.

Stopping and Contemplating 止觀 explains that in this state the consciousness nature is unmoving 識性不動, and is extinguished to the ultimate 以滅窮研: hence the phrase

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‘non-thought’ is used 非想. 豈非不緣識處乎 How does one not connect with the station of consciousness? By bringing on the limited 發宣盡性, in the midst of the limitless 於無盡中: that is ‘not non-thought’.

Another explanation is that the occurrence of both existence and non-existence 如存不存, 即非想 is ‘non-thought’, whereas, being exhausted and not exhausted 盡不盡即非非想 is ‘not non-thought’.

Finally, the Chan Dharma Door explains that in the midst of this samadhi, one does not perceive all marks 不見一切相貌: that is ‘non-thought’. Furthermore, if one is continually without thought then one is no different from wood or stone. How can one know of non-thought? That is why it is called ‘not non-thought’.

識性不動。以滅窮研。於無盡中。發宣盡性。如存不存。若盡非盡。如是一類。名為非想非非想處。

~大佛頂首楞嚴經正脈疏 - 卷三十五

四、非想非非想處天，此定不緣識處，故非想；不緣不用處，故非非想。此第四天，古多異解，今取止觀者，以見大師雖未見楞嚴，凡所釋義，

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與經雅合。彼云識性不動，以滅窮研，則是非想，豈非不緣識處乎？於無盡中，發宣盡性，則是非非想，豈非不緣不用處乎？又云：如存不存，即非想也；若盡不盡，即非非想也。故禪門云：此定中，不見一切相貌，故言非想；若一向無想，如木石無異，云何能知無想，故言非非想。如此釋義，天然吻合，若非古佛再來，安能發此妙義。

~ 地藏菩薩本願經卷上科注

*Sutra text:*

**Moreover, sea spirits, river spirits, stream spirits, tree spirits, mountain spirits, earth spirits, brook and marsh spirits, sprout and seedling spirits, day, night, and space spirits, heaven spirits, food and drink spirits, grass and wood spirits, and other such spirits from the Saha and other worlds came and assembled together.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**Moreover, sea spirits, river spirits, stream spirits, tree spirits, mountain spirits, earth spirits, brook and marsh spirits, sprout and seedling spirits, day, night, and space spirits, heaven spirits, food and drink spirits, grass and wood spirits, and other such spirits from the Saha and other worlds came and assembled together.**

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Those living beings with conditions all assemble to listen to the Dharma. They have planted blessings with the Triple Jewel in the past. Buddhas can only cross over those with whom he has affinities. In other words, without good roots, they cannot come and listen to the Dharma. Therefore, we should frequently recite the Buddha's name, the sutras, investigate Chan, etc... We should plant more of the seeds in the Alaya Consciousness otherwise we will miss the boat.

Seas, rivers and streams are some of the various bodies of water 積陰之氣 that we are familiar with. Water corresponds to an accumulation of yin qi 陰氣. In the heavens, water appears as dew; on earth, it appears as rivers. The Great Shastra says that amongst all the things, water is the largest. Across the great earth in all directions, there is nothing that has no water. That is why without heaven's mandate for (dragon-made) rain and without the existence of the heavenly water repelling pearl, the heavens and earth would all be flooded. The Agama Store Long Sayings 長阿含經 say that the sun's heat draws water from the earth, plants and living beings, causing the water to accumulate into various types of bodies of water. As noted in The Shurangama Sutra, water is all-pervasive (e.g. condensation appears on metal when it is left outside overnight) and manifests at selected places, just like the inherent Buddha nature in living beings. All four elements of earth, wind, water and fire are pervasive. They may appear to conflict each other but their natures work in harmony and do not conflict. The Four Heavenly Kings have a precious gem 消水珠 which can halt water. Without it, heaven and earth would be joined in a mass of water.

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The ocean is the king of the multitude of streams and rivers. That is why the sea spirits are listed first.

**Sea spirits** 海神 include the dragon kings, the Hǎi Ruò 海若, the Yáng Hé 陽和, and others. The chief sea spirit is the Hǎi Ruò which has eighteen tails, eight legs and eight heads. Its heads look human, four of them being male, and four female. It's an animal, not an insect. Its place of abode is the sea.

**River spirits** 江神 are named jiang bó 江. Rivers 江 may be broad but are not deep, as compared to the sea. Further, water from rivers is for common use.

The **streams** 河, whose leader spirit is named mì fei 宓妃, are even smaller, and can be very calm when no wind is blowing. Unlike the sea which accepts waters, the streams follow the earth's contours and flow ceaselessly.

**Tree spirits** 樹神: Tree in Chinese is a homonym for upright or perpendicular. Large and older trees are known to be dwellings for ghosts (yaksas and raksashas) as well as spirits. If a tree spirit leaves the tree in which it lives, then that tree will wither. Once the Táng dynasty emperor was visiting the Nine Flower Mountain, he dreamt of an old man who came and pleaded for help because there were wood cutters who are coming to harm him the next morning. After waking, the emperor went up the mountain and saw a group of wood cutters about to cut down an old pine tree and understood. In Jambudvīpa, the king of trees is Jambunada. In the past

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(Three Warring States period), General Cáo Cao 曹操 ordered a great tree to be cut down even though it was rumored to be the house of a spirit. The general did not believe in such ‘superstitions’. Shortly after, he developed a splitting headache. Physician Hua Tuó 華陀 cured him and told him that it was caused by the tree spirit whose home he had destroyed. At Nán Huá 南華 monastery, a camphor tree spirit 樟樹 received the precepts from Great Master Xu Yun. At Nán Yuè 南嶽, the Dharma Seat of the Old Man of Mount Wei 南嶽津山老人, a ginkgo tree spirit 白果樹 also received the precepts.

The great trees are where yakshas and rakshasas live. Without these trees they would have to suffer.

**Mountain spirits 山神:** Mountains are defined by the Chinese words that mean “grow” or “produce”, since things can grow and flourish on their sides. Larger mountains have bigger spirits. The spirit at Mount Grdhrakuta is called “Pi Luo 埤羅”.

**Earth spirits 地神:** Earth is a homonym for “bottom” in Chinese. Even though the earth is at the bottom, it can still produce the myriad things. Jambudvīpa’s earth spirit is called “solid and durable 堅牢”.

**Brook and marsh spirits 川澤神:** Brooks can go over the earth or areas that originally had no water. They can flow by

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boring through the ground. Marshes occur where there is pooled water.

**Sprout and seedling spirits** 苗稼神: Sprouts 苗 can grow to a certain height. Seedlings 稼 are planted into the ground. In China, a man called Hòu Jì 后稷 taught others how to farm 耕種. He became a sprout and seedling spirit after death.

**Day and night spirits** 晝神、夜神: Day starts at midnight while night begins at noon. Although the sun is not yet visible at midnight, the yang energies already begin to rise. Shortly before daybreak, between three and five am, this rise corresponds with a rise of lustful desire in people. After noon, when the yin energies are rising, a similar phenomenon occurs. If desire can be contained, it can be transformed into wisdom. This is not unlike the forked path formed by the Abundant Heaven and No-Thought Heaven. Taking one path leads to the flourishing of desires, while turning to the other leads to the growth of wisdom.

The **space spirit** 空神 is called Sunyata 舜若多 in Sanskrit (refer to the Shurangama Sutra). Its body has no coarse marks and has subtle and wonderful colors, thus it appears in the Buddha's light. Unlike things whose substance creates obstructions, the nature of space is unreal and not obstructive. The Nirvana Sutra states that while material objects can obstruct, the nature of emptiness is false and non-obstructive. The Small Vehicle takes brightness and darkness as substance. The Great Vehicle takes emptiness manifesting



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form as substance 涅槃云・物體質礙・空性虛通・  
小乘以明暗為體・大乘以空一顯色為體。

**Heaven spirits 天神:** Heaven denotes manifesting 顯 (in the skies). It also means cool and composed 坦然, lofty and far 高而遠. All the heavens are under the control of one heaven spirit king named Hào Tian Shàng Dì 昊天上帝・亦曰天皇大帝, who is also called Tàì Yì 亦名太一. He has five assistant kings 其佐曰五帝.

**Food and drink spirits 飲食神:** Anything we eat or drink is watched over by a spirit who is also known as Zào Shén 灶神 (the kitchen god).

We rely on food and drinks to sustain our body and life.

In Peking there once lived a man named Duàn Zhèng Yuán 段正元, who was often known as Honorable Master Duàn 段師尊. He once encountered a remarkable individual who was the son of a very busy official who supervised several hundred people. While the father worked at the duties incumbent upon such an official, the twenty-something year old son slept day in and day out. This behavior annoyed the father, who finally confronted his son.

"Look at me," he said, "I'm over sixty and working full time to support you, a young man in your twenties. You ought to

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be ashamed."

"You, Father," the son said, "are a government official; I am a food and drink official 陰間官."

"Whatever are you talking about?"

"Every day I allocate the food which everyone will consume. It's that simple."

"You must be mad," said the father, controlling his temper, "There is no such thing. All right, if that is what you do, just tell me now what am I going to eat tomorrow?"

"Just a moment," said the son, "I have to sleep first and then I will be able to tell you."

The father, by now nearly mad with rage, choked and shook as his son dropped off once again to sleep. When he finally awoke, he informed his father that on the next day he would go hungry.

"Now I know you're mad," said his father. "How can a major government official possibly go hungry?"

"Well, Father, actually you are going to get something, but it's only going to be a slightly spoiled egg and half a bowl of soured millet gruel."

"Incredible," shouted the outraged father. "My own son is trying to make a fool of me!" He rushed off to order preparations for dressing ducks, chickens, geese, fish, and other

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delicacies for the next day's meal.

The kitchen staff was unusually busy the next morning preparing an elaborate meal, which was delayed a bit as a result of the great amount of care and effort that went into it. Just as he was about to sit down to dinner, the official received an urgent message, an order to disperse a group of bandits in the countryside. Not a moment could be lost, and he sprang to his mount at the head of his troops, leaving the banquet steaming on the table. Before long, the bandits were engaged and defeated.

The men, who had eaten their ordinary meal at the usual time, were not fatigued by hunger, but the official himself had not eaten a thing and was weak with exhaustion. Accompanied by some of his troops, he stopped at a nearby farmhouse and asked for some provisions.

"We haven't a thing," replied the head of the household, "except an old egg and half a bowl of millet gruel, which we were saving for my pregnant wife. The egg's a bit bad, and the gruel's gone sour, but you're welcome to them if you would like."

As he downed the simple meal the official suddenly recalled his son's prediction of the preceding day. From that time onward he left his son alone to preside over food and drink, while he himself continued to preside over human beings.

**Grass and wood spirits 草木神:** Grass and wood also have their own spirits who dwell there. Grass grows easily but its roots are not sturdy and thus it perishes in the winter.

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The above list merely names the major groups. Between them, the total number of spirits is as numerous as all the grains of sand in the Ganges River.

*Sutra text:*

**In addition, all the great ghost kings from the Saha and other worlds assembled together. They were the Evil-Eyed Ghost King, the Blood-Eating Ghost King, the Essence-and Energy-Eating Ghost King, the Fetus-and-Egg-Eating Ghost King, the Sickness-Spreading Ghost King, the Poison-Gathering Ghost King, the Kindhearted Ghost King, the Blessings and Benefit Ghost King, the Great Love and Respect Ghost King, and others.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**In addition, all the great ghost kings from the Saha and other worlds assembled together. They were the Evil-Eyed Ghost King, the Blood-Eating Ghost King, the Essence-and Energy-Eating Ghost King, the Fetus-and-Egg-Eating Ghost King, the Sickness-Spreading Ghost King, the Poison-Gathering Ghost King, the Kindhearted Ghost King, the Blessings and Benefit Ghost King, the Great Love and Respect Ghost King, and others.**

The world has yin and yang, dark and bright. Brightness belongs to yang where gods and spirits dwell. Dragons could be either. Ghosts belong to yin. To keep things in order, there are ghost kings which are in charge. Without them, the ghosts will misbehave, obey no rules and harm living beings. Earth Store Bodhisattva is the teaching host of the dark world

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### 幽冥教主.

A lot of ghosts are mentioned here. They exist whether you believe in them or not. However, if your mind does not move, there isn't a single ghost after all: "One thought not arising, the entire substance manifests, the six organs suddenly move and one is covered up by clouds 一念不生全體現, 六根忽動被雲遮".

**Ghosts** are homonyms for "to return". When a person dies, he returns to the place where he committed offenses.

**Kings** have awesome virtue 威德. They are honored 貴, or else they would be called lowly 賤. They have wealth, abundant clothes and food. In fact, they have heavenly clothes and eat heavenly offered food. Refined in appearance, they are carefree and roam with leisure. This is from having practiced great giving in their prior lives. However, because they used to be flattering and tortuous 諂曲, because they were not truthful 不實, they fell to the ghost path.

**Evil-Eyed Ghost King 惡目鬼王**: His eyes are most frightening. One look at him, and one can't help but have the shakes. The ten thousand dharmas are created from the mind alone. The mind controls consciousness inside and manifests as form outside. The mind that dwells on goodness is associated with a facial expression that is kind and accomodating. The evil mind naturally manifests in ugly and unplesant facial expressions. The mind of this ghost king

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dwells in intransigence and stubbornness. His angry eyes are very mean, as when one looks at one's arch enemy.

The mind has spirit and light which manifest through the eyes. The openings pair with the liver 竅開於肝. The kidneys exit through the eyeballs 睛出於腎. One should nurture the spirit in darkness 育神於暗. The eyes can manifest as beneficent from the mind of kindness or as evil from the mind of impatience. The Wonderful Arm Sutra 妙臂經 says that an angry look can harm the body, or even end a life 嗔目視之。乃至破壞身命.

**The Blood-Eating Ghost King 噉血鬼王:** The ghosts eat fresh blood. They often come to slaughter houses and butcher shops, feasting on raw meat, fish or mutton. They are kept in check by this ghost king. He likes to spread blood on food before eating. It's from killing, and eating blood in the past. He did not share with his wife and children. He was that greedy and miserly! Due to his stinginess, he thus received this body to undergo the retribution of feeding on filthy stuff.

**The Essence-and-Energy-Eating Ghost King 噉精氣鬼王:** This ghost king is named "Pisaci" 毗舍闍 in Sanskrit, meaning 顛鬼 dementia ghost. He looks like a small child. He eats the essential energies of both people and plants (the five grains 五穀之氣), causing unexpected decay in them.

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The Moon Treasury Sutra 月藏經 says that there are the earth essential qi, human essential qi, and essential qi of the Proper Dharma superior flavor sweet dew. 月藏經云 • 地精氣 • 衆生地精氣 • 正法勝味甘露地精氣 •

**The Fetus-and-Egg-Eating Ghost King 噉胎卵鬼王** is responsible for miscarriages and stillbirths. The fetus forms after three months. At that time, both form and character are incomplete. If the child is exposed to goodness, it will lean towards the good 感於善則善; if exposed to evil, it will tend to be bad. This is why the ancients have fetus schooling. The fetus exits the womb after ten months, and the evil ghosts then fight each other to eat the fetus bag.

孕三月成胎 • 形猶未具 • 從月台聲 • 爾時生氣未定 • 感於善則善 • 感於惡則惡 • 古有胎教 •

**The Sickness-Spreading Ghost King 行病鬼王** runs about spreading diseases and epidemics. The 富單那鬼 putana ghost spreads warm illnesses in the human realm. The Mansjushri Jewelled Treasury Dharani Sutra 文殊寶藏陀羅尼經 says that after the Buddha's Nirvana, the evil dharmanas multiply. All sorts of disasters plague the world. The evil ghosts will come to the world in female forms and spread all kinds of sicknesses with the men.

**The Poison Gathering Ghost King 攝毒鬼王** is a benefi-

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cial ghost king who removes poison from people. He's really a transformation of a Bodhisattva. He can handle all kinds of poison, including dragon poison, snake poison, and gǔ 蠱 (a legendary poisonous insect) poison.

**The Kindhearted Ghost King 慈心鬼王** leads the other ghosts to set their mind on Bodhi. He is very kind-hearted. He often gives joyful happenings to humans. Thought after thought, he loves and protects living beings.

**The Blessings and Benefit Ghost King 福利鬼王:** Blessings 福 are the opposite of disaster 禍; benefit 利 is opposed to loss 損. This ghost king is in charge of all the other ghosts who are in charge of the world's wealth and assets 治生財產. He took refuge and received the precepts from the Buddha. Pardoning people's offenses and giving them blessings, he protects their wealth 護人財物.

**The Great Love and Respect Ghost King 大愛敬鬼王** loves and protects the cultivators who maintain precepts, bow to the Buddhas and recite sutras. He uses his body of a ghost king to encourage all those who practice good.

The Wonderful Arm Sutra 妙臂經云 says that when the eight-fold division and immortals meet a cultivator of this Dharma, they respectfully bow, join palms, and say, "Rare indeed! Rare indeed! The greatly kind and compassionate One, pities and is mindful of all sentient beings."



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The above-mentioned kings are leaders of the ghosts. They are actually great Bodhisattvas practicing the gathering 攝 or subduing 折 Dharma Doors. Each living being will encounter good or bad ghosts depending on when their good or bad karmas ripen. In any case, do not be too stuck on good or bad responses: they can change without notice! These Bodhisattvas use the Ghost King form to arrive and listen to the Dharma. Their names reflect the different good or evil Dharmas they utilize in their practice.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time Shakyamuni Buddha said to the Great Being, the Dharma Prince, Bodhisattva Manjusri, "As you contemplate these Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, gods, dragons, ghosts, and spirits from this and other worlds, who are now assembled in the Trayastrimsa Heaven, do you know their number?"**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time Shakyamuni Buddha said to the Great Being, the Dharma Prince, Bodhisattva Manjusri, "As you contemplate these Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, gods, dragons, ghosts, and spirits from this and other worlds, who are now assembled in the Trayastrimsa Heaven, do you know their number?"**

**Manjusri** means “Wonderful Virtue 妙德”. He understands and sees the three virtues and the Buddha nature 了見三德

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佛性. He does not indulge, and is principled 無縱無橫.

Manjusri also means “Pure Youth 童真”, as he has entered and certified to the True and Permanent 入證真常, does not grasp at states and is free from attachments (like a youth) 無取著.

Or his name could mean “Wonderful Auspiciousness 妙吉”. Ten miraculous signs occurred at his birth:

1. Light filled the room 光明滿室.
2. All vessels were filled with sweet dew 甘露盈庭.
3. The seven gems welled up from the earth 地涌七珍.
4. The treasures within the earth were revealed 神開伏藏.
5. Chickens gave birth to phoenixes 雞生鳳子.
6. Pigs gave birth to dragons 豬孩龍肫.
7. Horses gave birth to unicorns 馬產騏驎.
8. Cows gave birth to white cai (a serpent-like animal with two bodies and one head) 牛生白驛.
9. The grains in the granaries turned to gold 倉變金粟.
10. Elephants with six tusks appeared 象具六牙.

Manjusri already attained Buddhahood a long time ago, when his name was Superior Venerable Dragon Seed King 龍種

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

上尊王佛. He is currently the Buddha called Happy Store Accumulation of Mani Gems 歡喜藏瑪瑙寶積佛 of the Happiness World 歡喜世界 in the northern direction. In the future, he will manifest accomplishing Buddhahood, and be called Universal Manifestation Thus Come One 普現如來. He manifests the small and hides the great 隱大示小; he rides the compassionate vessel backwards 倒駕慈航. He is foremost in the wisdom of seeing the Buddha Nature 見佛性智慧. He teaches all Bodhisattvas, causing them to bring forth the Bodhi mind and understand and see 了見 the Buddha Nature. That is why he is called Great Wisdom Manjushri 大智文殊師利.

He is Shakyamuni's Grand Master 師祖. Sun Moon Lamp Brilliance Buddha 日月燈明佛, the last of the 20,000 Buddhas, had eight sons, the last of whom was the Buddha Dipankara "Burning Lamp 然燈", whose teacher was the Dharma Master Wonderful Light 妙光法師 and who bestowed a prediction of Buddhahood on Shakyamuni.

**The Dharma Prince 法王子:** Amongst all the Dharma princes, their virtues are surpassed by Manjusri 德推文殊. In all the sutras, Manjusri is the leader of the Bodhisattva assembly 菩薩衆首.

## Explained by Master YongHua

**Contemplate 觀:** This is not what your Wisdom Eye can even contemplate.

*Sutra text:*

**Manjusri said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, even if I were to measure and reckon with my spiritual penetrations for a thousand aeons, I would not be able to calculate it."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**Manjusri said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, even if I were to measure and reckon with my spiritual penetrations for a thousand aeons, I would not be able to calculate it."**

The Dharma is not fixed 無定性. Sometimes, they say they know, sometimes they say they don't know. It's all in order to benefit living beings depending on the circumstances.

Manjusri says that he cannot fathom the number of living beings present in the assembly, which, as we will see below, is in fact the same number of beings crossed over by Earth Store Bodhisattva. Here Manjusri is verifying the Bodhisattva's great vow, and that he really crossed over, is crossing over, and will cross over, these living beings in the past, present and future. It's for real!

How can the heavenly palace accommodate that many multitudes?

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1. They do not mutually obstruct each other.
2. This is due to the Buddha's and Earth Store Bodhisattva's inconceivable spiritual powers.

*Sutra text:*

**The Buddha told Manjusri, "As I regard them with my Buddha Eye, their number still cannot be exhausted. Throughout many aeons all these beings have been taken across, are being taken across, will be taken across, have been brought to accomplishment, are being brought to accomplishment, or will be brought to accomplishment, by Earth Store Bodhisattva."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The Buddha told Manjusri, "As I regard them with my Buddha Eye, their number still cannot be exhausted."**

**Buddha eye** is one of the Five Eyes. There is a verse about the Five Eyes:

*The Heavenly Eye penetrates without obstructions*

天眼通非礙

*The Flesh Eye see obstacles but does not penetrate*

肉眼礙非通

*The Dharma Eye contemplates the mundane*

法眼唯觀俗

*The Wisdom Eye understands True Emptiness*

慧眼了真空

*The Buddha Eye shines like a thousand suns.*

## Explained by Master YongHua

佛眼如千日

*Although the illuminations differ, their substance is one.*

照異體還同

Although their functions differ, their substance is just of one source.

The Heavenly Eye can penetrate things. The Flesh Eye can only see objects and people and cannot see through them. In order to “see”, one must give rise to a thought! When opened, the Dharma Eye can, for example, see sutras without using books because the entire extent of space is seen to be full of limitless Dharma treasures. The Dharma Eye can see worldly affairs, and it can also see the true marks of all dharmas 諸法實相; 俗諦 the Mundane Truth is also called False Truth 假諦. The Wisdom Eye can see that everything is unreal. The Buddha Eye can see the real mark of all dharmas. The Great Shastra says: “佛眼無是不知, 無是不聞, 無是不見 there is nothing that the Buddha Eye does not know, does not hear or does not see.”

**Throughout many aeons all these beings have been taken across, are being taken across, will be taken across, have been brought to accomplishment, are being brought to accomplishment, or will be brought to accomplishment, by Earth Store Bodhisattva."**

The Buddha Eye was used to demonstrate that Earth Store Bodhisattva has been crossing over numberless living beings continuously. This proves that the Bodhisattva's great vow is inexhaustible.

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

**Accomplishment** can have two meanings:

1. “Become flourishing 盛”, this is the meaning of the original Chinese character.
2. A derivation from the first meaning, can mean high, lofty and expansive (jiù 就 means tall 高), connoting the idea of an emperor. In ancient times, emperors ruled by filial piety and thus accomplished ultimate virtue. Only emperors were able to call themselves filial.

Similarly, a major theme of this sutra is that filial piety is the method by which one can accomplish ultimate virtue.

*Sutra text:*

**Manjusri said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, throughout many aeons I have cultivated good roots and certified to unobstructed wisdom. When I hear what the Buddha says, I immediately accept it with faith. Sound Hearers of small attainment, gods, dragons, and the remainder of the Eightfold Division, as well as other living beings in the future, may hear the Thus Come One's sincere and actual words but will certainly harbor doubts. They may receive the teaching most respectfully, but they will be unable to avoid slandering it. World-Honored One, please discuss in detail the conduct of Earth Store Bodhisattva while he was on the causal ground, and tell about the vows he made that have enabled him to accomplish such an inconceivable task."**

*Sutra commentary:*

## Explained by Master YongHua

**Manjusri said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, throughout many aeons I have cultivated good roots and certified to unobstructed wisdom. When I hear what the Buddha says, I immediately accept it with faith. Sound Hearers of small attainment, gods, dragons, and the remainder of the Eightfold Division, as well as other living beings in the future, may hear the Thus Come One's sincere and actual words but will certainly harbor doubts.**

**Sound Hearers of small attainment** 小果聲聞 refers to those:

1. Who only learned the Four Truths and 12 Conditioned Links.
2. Who have narrow roots 根狹.
3. Whose consciousness is deficient 罔識.

The members of **the Eightfold Division** 八部 are of inferior capacity 下機.

As for **living beings in the future** 未來世諸眾生等, typically:

1. Their resolve nature is not durable 志性不堅.
2. They have heavy karmic obstructions, making it very difficult for them to obtain liberation 業障難脫.

They will **slander** the Dharma and fall according to their offenses.

To see one's nature belongs to the wisdom according to the



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principles 如理智, which is also called no attachment wisdom 無著智. Then one cultivates the later attained wisdom 後得智—until one can penetrate limitless worlds’ phenomena. This belongs to the “according to the count wisdom 如量智”, which is also called 無礙智 unobstructed wisdom. If one uses the self unobstructed wisdom 我無礙智 to contemplate the Thus Come One’s words, once one hears, one immediately believes. But those with inferior wisdom cannot help but give rise to skepticism because of their failure to understand the Buddha’s purport (see appendix # 21).

**Unobstructed wisdom** refers to the Four Unobstructed Eloquences 四無邊礙:

1. Unobstructed eloquence of Dharma 法無邊礙.
2. Unobstructed eloquence of principle: Millions of principles can be spoken, yet they all return to one 義無邊礙.
3. Unobstructed eloquence in phrasing: Every word carries principles 詞.
4. Unobstructed eloquence of delight in speech 樂說無礙.



左序第十 天龙八部诸神众

The Eightfold division

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The Eightfold Division consists of:

1. Gods 天,
2. Dragons 龍,
3. Yaksas 夜叉,
4. Gandharvas 乾闥婆,
5. Asuras 阿脩羅,
6. Garudas 迦樓羅,
7. Kinnaras 緊那羅,
8. Mahoragas 摩侯羅伽.

**They may receive the teaching most respectfully, but they will be unable to avoid slandering it.**

They may respect the teacher and therefore be able to receive the teaching respectfully. However, the teaching is so profound that they cannot possibly understand it and may not be able to avoid slandering it.

**World-Honored One, please elaborate on this and discuss in detail the conduct of Earth Store Bodhisattva while he was on the causal ground, and tell about the vows he made that have enabled him to accomplish such an inconceivable task, so that living beings who hear of these inconceivable feats can more readily accept and believe them.**

**Causal ground** refers to the past lives when the causes leading to the effect were planted.

After making **vows**, one will surely encounter many tests of

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one's resolve. Vows allow for guidance. To make vows but not act is to make empty vows. To act but not make vows results in single acts.

*Sutra text:*

**The Buddha said to Manjusri, "By way of analogy, it is as if all the grasses, trees, forests, hemp, bamboo, reeds, mountains, rocks, and motes of dust in a Three Thousand Great Thousand World System were enumerated, and each one made into a Ganges River, while within each Ganges River each grain of sand became a world and within each world each mote of dust was an aeon, while within those aeons the motes of dust which would accumulate were in turn to become aeons. The time elapsed since Earth Store Bodhisattva has remained on the position of the Tenth Ground is a thousand times longer than that in the above analogy. Even longer was his dwelling on the grounds of Sound Hearer and Pratyekabuddha. "**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The Buddha said to Manjusri, "By way of analogy, it is as if all the grasses, trees, forests, hemp, bamboo, reeds, mountains, rocks, and motes of dust in a Three Thousand Great Thousand World System were enumerated, and each one made into a Ganges River, while within each Ganges River each grain of sand became a world and within each world each mote of dust was an aeon, while within those aeons the motes of dust which would accumulate were in turn to become aeons.**

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

The Buddha starts out by using an analogy to illustrate that the numbers are simply uncountable. Only the Buddhas can know the final number.

### Three Thousand Great Thousand World System: A

(Small) Thousand World System 小千世界 consists of 1,000:

1. Suns.
2. Moons.
3. Jambudvipas.
4. And all up to the three Second Dhyana Heavens.

A Two Thousand World System is a thousand Small Thousand World Systems, including all up to the three Third

Dhyana Heavens. A Three Thousand Great Thousand World System is a thousand Two Thousand World Systems 三千

大千世

界. In total, there are a hundred one hundred million 百億:

1. Suns
2. Moons
3. Jambudvipas
4. And all up to the four Fourth Dhyana Heavens.

The Great Shastra says that each Small World System 小千世界名周利 (小千梵名) is suspended in space by the Wind Wheel. On top of the Wind Wheel is the Water Wheel. Above the Water Wheel is the ground where humans live.

**The time elapsed since Earth Store Bodhisattva has remained on the position of the Tenth Ground is a thousand times longer than that in the above analogy. Even longer**

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**was his dwelling on the grounds of Sound Hearer and Pratyekabuddha."**

The Buddha uses an analogy to indicate how long Earth Store Bodhisattva remained at the Tenth Ground position. If we imagine each thing, amongst the numberless things in the world, to be itself a Ganges River 恆河, although the Ganges' River has a finite amount of sand, the sand in all of these Ganges Rivers would be innumerable 無量. Further, if we now imagine that each of these innumerable grains of sand is itself a world, and we take the number of all of the dust motes 塵沙 in all of those worlds, then we would have an infinitely large number. That number represents how many kalpas 劫 Earth Store Bodhisattva has remained at the Tenth Ground Position.

Why did the Buddha use the **Ganges** River? Because it has a lot of sand. It is the biggest river in India. People believe that the river can bestow blessings and virtue, in addition to being very auspicious. If one can enter it and wash oneself, all one's offenses and defilements can be expelled. It is considered a sacred river and is very well-known. There is no way to count all the sand in the Ganges (all the kalpas). Only the Buddha and the Dharma Body Bodhisattvas can know.

The Ten Grounds, which are levels of enlightenment that are attained by Dharma Body Bodhisattvas, are:

1. The Ground of Happiness (Dry Wisdom) 歡喜地.
2. The Ground of Leaving Defilement 離垢地.

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3. The Ground of Emitting Light 發光地.
4. The Ground of Flaming Wisdom 焰慧地.
5. The Ground of Being Difficult to Defeat 難勝地.
6. The Ground of Manifestation 現前地.
7. The Ground of Traveling Far 遠行地.
8. The Unmoving Ground 不動地.
9. The Ground of Good Wisdom 善慧地.
10. The Dharma Cloud Ground 法雲地.

The First Ground, the Ground of Happiness, uses the Middle Contemplation 中道觀 to break through one part of ignorance 破一分無明 and therefore manifest one part of the three virtues 顯一分三德. It is called the position of seeing the Way 見道位. Also it may be called No Labor Functioning 又無功用. A Bodhisattva at this ground can act as Buddha in a hundred worlds 百界作佛, manifesting the eight appearances of accomplishing the Way 八相成道 to benefit living beings 行五百由旬初入實相無障礙土. This is the first entry to the Truth 初入實所.

Speaking of positions, the Buddha only mentioned the Tenth Ground, the 53<sup>rd</sup> out of 54 positions. This is not to mention the Small Vehicle 小乘 positions, which can be provisional 權 or actual 實 (permanent 常). The Small Vehicle posi-

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tions include the Arhat position and the Enlightened to Conditions positions.

Earth Store Bodhisattva remained in each of these positions for such a long time so that he could cross over more living beings.

*Sutra text:*

**"Manjushri, the awesome spirit and vows of this Bodhisattva are inconceivable. If good men or women in the future hear this Bodhisattva's name, say his name, praise him, regard and worship him, make offerings to him, or if they draw, carve, cast, sculpt, or lacquer his image, they will be born among the Heaven of the Thirty-Three one hundred times, and will never again fall into the Evil Paths."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Manjushri, the awesome spirit and vows of this Bodhisattva are inconceivable.**

Why are they **inconceivable**? Because:

1. They cannot be ascertained 不決定.
2. One cannot ascertain the story 不能決定其化事.

All the worldly gods, humans and others cannot believe:

1. The extent of Earth Store Bodhisattva's merit, virtues, and good roots.
2. That he can enter and become enlightened to the Buddha's state 善能悟入如來境界.



## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

3. That he obtained mastery of all Dharmas.
4. That he would stop at all worlds to rescue living beings.

**If good men or women in the future hear this Bodhisattva's name, say his name, praise him, regard and worship him, make offerings to him, or if they draw, carve, cast, sculpt, or lacquer his image, they will be born among the Heaven of the Thirty-Three one hundred times, and will never again fall into the Evil Paths."**

If such people are mindful of Earth Store Bodhisattva's merit and virtue thought after thought without interruption, they will obtain a response with the Way. The Bodhisattva's merit and virtue will permeate this person's body and mind 透入身心. Relying on the Bodhisattva's merit and virtue, this person can thus be reborn in the heavens a hundred times. Furthermore, he can meet with the Buddha, listen to and practice according to his Dharma, stop evil, cultivate good, and will never fall into the evil paths. This pertains to the various ways in which we worship the Bodhisattva, such as hearing 聞, praising 讚歎, worshipping 瞻禮, reciting his name 稱名, and making offerings 供養.

Since he made the vow, "Only when all the hells are emptied will I become a Buddha; only when all living beings have been saved will I attain to Bodhi 地獄不空, 誓不成佛; 衆生度盡方證菩提," Earth Store Bodhisattva has been using his awesome spirit to subdue living beings who have accumulated bad karma. He thus has passed through an un-

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thinkably long time yet still has not realized Buddhahood, because after one being has been taken across, there is always another ready to go, and after that one, yet another, and so on.

There is no one-to-one correlation between the number of beings born and those entering Nirvana, since those who are born outnumber those who attain Nirvana by tens of hundreds of millions. The same relationship exists in the realm of birth and death, since the number of births in any given period is greater than the deaths in the same time. Beings have to grow old and pass through an entire life before they die, but those who are waiting to be born only have to spend nine months in the womb. Since birth is such a rapid process, the people born greatly outnumber those who die at any given moment. For this reason Earth Store Bodhisattva has not yet become a Buddha. He does not, however, have any regrets about his vow, and the more living beings there are to rescue, the more he has to do. If there were no living beings, there would be no work, and if there were no work, he would become a Buddha, since Buddhas have nothing left to do. However, when there actually isn't anything to do, Earth Store Bodhisattva goes looking for work. Although he could remain quiet and at leisure, he continues to busy himself over living beings because of the power of his vows.

There is no way that we can imagine the strength of such vows. What has been mentioned here is only the smallest part of their greatness. Indeed, there is no way they can ever be fully discussed. On hearing of these vows, people ought to consider their own behavior. If you find that you have vowed to rescue even one or two people, then you have not been studying this sutra in vain. But if you say that Bodhisattvas

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are Bodhisattvas and we people are quite another matter, then you might as well never have studied a single word of it.

Don't let your motto be, "Amitabha Buddha, every man for himself; Mahasattva, don't worry about others 彌陀佛各顧各, 摩訶薩不管他." If you have a girlfriend or boyfriend, vow to cross her or him over. If you're too young to have such people to rescue, then you must still be close to your parents, and you can save them. Even if you are an orphan, you still have siblings or friends. Vow to see all of them over to Buddhahood.

Whenever we make prostrations before the images of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, when we recite their names, such as when we recite, "Namo Earth Store Bodhisattva of Great Vows", when we explain the sutras, such as this one, which describes the inconceivable qualities of a Bodhisattva, or when we place flowers, fruits, and incense before his image, these practices are called contemplating and worshipping, reciting the name, praising, and making **offerings**.

Those who know how to draw or paint can make **images** of Buddha and thereby enhance their own appearance. With every image, their appearance will improve. Those who wish to perfect the Thirty-Two Marks and Eighty Minor Characteristics may do so by making images (painted, sculpted, carved etc...). Every image adds to the perfection of one's features, and finally, after hundreds of thousands of millions have been made, the full set of Thirty-Two Hallmarks and the Eighty Subtle Characteristics will be achieved. They will be born in the heaven of the Thirty Three one hundred times.

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This means that they will be born throughout all the six heavens of the Desire Realm. After each birth, they will be born again into the **Heaven of the Thirty Three** and will complete this cycle **a hundred times**. They will never fall again into the three evil paths.

*Sutra text:*

**"Manjusri, indescribably many aeons ago, during the time of a Buddha named Lion Sprint Complete in the Ten Thousand Practices Thus Come One, Earth Store Bodhisattva was an elder's son. On seeing that Buddha adorned with a thousand blessings, the elder's son asked what practices and vows had enabled him to achieve such an appearance. The Thus Come One said, 'If you wish to perfect such a body, throughout long aeons, you must liberate living beings who are undergoing suffering.'**

*Sutra commentary:*

This is the very first time that the Bodhisattva made the vow to cross over living beings.

**"Manjusri, indescribably many aeons ago, during the time of a Buddha named Lion Sprint Complete in the Ten Thousand Practices Thus Come One, Earth Store Bodhisattva was an elder's son.**

**Elder:** According to the Lotus Flower Scripture 法華文句, an elder has (all) ten virtues:

1. An honorable name 姓貴 (such as being an emperor's

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descendant, or having a distinguished family 貂插之家).

2. A high position 位高 (high officials).
3. Great wealth 大富 (one is so wealthy that one regularly indulges in extravagance).
4. An awesome reputation 威猛 (adorned and refined, not stern and yet commanding respect 嚴霜隆重,不肅而威).
5. Deep wisdom 智深 (as strong as an army, wielding superior and outstanding power, authority and use of expedients 胸如武軍,權奇超拔).
6. Advanced in years 年耆 (old in appearance and having etiquette that can transform others 蒼蒼稜稜,物儀所伏).
7. Pure conduct 行淨 (flawless, one's behavior is consistent with one's words 白珪无玷,所行如言).
8. Well-respected 禮備 (one's comportment is consistent with worldly norms and order, one acts as a role model 節度庠序,世所式瞻).
9. Praised by one's superiors 上歎 (一人所敬).
10. Subordinates take refuge in him 下歸: everyone wishes to rely on him 四海所歸. 子者・尊稱也・如此方孔老稱子等・非長者所生之子・

## Explained by Master YongHua

**Lion Sprint 師子奮迅.** The lion is the king of beasts and is fearless amongst them. Similarly, the Buddha can subdue all of the ninety-six kinds of externalists.

Sprinting represents the ability to suddenly/quickly escape the dust **頓脫塵勞**. One can eradicate the fine and minute obstructions to samadhi (dusts). One can enter and exit samadhi very quickly.

**Complete** means containing all the **Ten Thousand Practices**.

He received his name because he accomplished Buddhahood from the power of this samadhi.

**On seeing that Buddha adorned with a thousand blessings, the elder's son asked what practices and vows had enabled him to achieve such an appearance. The Thus Come One said, 'If you wish to perfect such a body, throughout long aeons, you must liberate living beings who are undergoing suffering.'**

**On seeing that Buddha adorned 見佛相好:** This refers to the Buddha's 32 hallmarks and 80 subtle characteristics. The hallmarks alone, without the subtle characteristics, would not be perfection.

The Five Precepts are included in the cultivation of the Ten Good Deeds. Therefore there are fifty merits at the start of cultivation and fifty at its completion, resulting in a total of one hundred. The Ten Good Deeds are contained in each of

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these 用 hundred, leading to a thousand blessings. When one thousand of these blessings are accumulated, one is said to have completed one superior blessing. Being **adorned with a thousand blessings** refers to one thousand of these superior blessings.

Using the three karmas with outflows of the body, mouth and mind to practice good and cultivate the six paramitas, generates the hundred blessings and virtues. The hundred blessings and virtues in turn are the causes for each of the 32 hallmarks.

Bodhisattvas practice the ten good deeds. Each deed has five minds (inferior, middle, superior, superior middle superior, superior superior). From the first moment of bringing forth the five minds until they all are complete, is called the hundred minds, or the hundred blessings.

Just like the Nirvana Sutra says, the causes and conditions of the Four Noble Truths have limitless marks that the Sound Hearers and Enlightened to Conditions cannot possibly know. That is why one must cultivate **throughout long aeons**.

*Sutra text:*

**"Manjusri, the elder's son then made this vow: 'Throughout immeasurable aeons until the very boundaries of the future, I will establish many expedient devices for the sake of suffering and criminal beings in the Six Paths. When they have all been liberated I myself will perfect the Buddha Way.' From the time he made this vow in the presence of that Buddha until the present, unspeakably many hundreds of thousands of nayutas of aeons have passed,**

and still he is a Bodhisattva."

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Manjusri, the elder's son then made this vow: 'Throughout immeasurable aeons until the very boundaries of the future which cannot be even be conceived off, I will establish many expedient devices for the sake of suffering and criminal beings in the Six Paths.**

**Suffering and criminal beings in the Six Paths:** The Lotus Sutra gives us a glimpse of Bodhisattva's mind, telling us that Bodhisattvas see living beings in the Six Paths as:

1. Destitute, having no merit and virtue.
2. Entering the dangerous road of birth and death.
3. Experiencing continuous and never ending suffering.
4. Having difficulty in discerning good and evil.
5. Subject to the four types of suffering: birth, aging, sickness and death.

Therefore, Bodhisattvas vastly create expedients to help all beings escape the Mundane. This is their most critical task.

The Stopping and Contemplating Treatise 止觀 says that the causes and conditions for entering the Mundane are:

1. Having a very kind and compassionate mind 慈悲心重.
2. Being mindful of one's original vows 意本誓願.
3. Having invincible and sharp wisdom 智慧猛利.
4. Using expedients 善巧方便.



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### 5. Having great vigor power 大精進力.

All living beings in the **Six Paths** constantly like to create offenses 舉心動念無非是罪, 非是業.

**When they have all been liberated I myself will perfect the Buddha Way.' From the time he made this vow in the presence of that Buddha until the present, unspeakably many hundreds of thousands of nayutas of aeons have passed, and still he is a Bodhisattva."**

He thus made his vows. The deeper the vow is, the more inconceivable is the position.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, inconceivable asamkhyeya kalpas ago there was a Buddha named Enlightenment-Flower Samadhi Self-Mastery King Thus Come One. That Buddha's lifespan was four hundred thousand million asamkhyeya kalpas."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, inconceivable asamkhyeya kalpas ago there was a Buddha named Enlightenment-Flower Samadhi Self-Mastery King Thus Come One. That Buddha's lifespan was four hundred thousand million asamkhyeya kalpas."**

The Buddha does not appear in the world that often. Usually,

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countless kalpas must elapse before living beings' good roots mature, creating a response that brings a Buddha to the world. For example, although Shakyamuni Buddha has entered Nirvana, when our good roots mature, Maitreya Bodhisattva will appear as the next Buddha and speak Dharma. As soon as we hear him speak the Dharma, we will become enlightened.

Unlike confused living beings who do not know (better), the Buddha has the three wisdom penetrations 三達之智 (he knows past, present and future worlds without obstructions). That is why he knows of the Buddhas who appeared in the past.

**Enlightenment-Flower 覺華** represents a cause (as well as source 本, or samadhi 定), while **Self-Mastery King 自在王** represents the consequences (as well as end 末, or wisdom 慧). He uses wisdom to illuminate all dharmas and thus obtain great ease. In addition, after planting the cause, he used **Samadhi** to attain the result. According to Dharma Master Shèng Yi, the mind is like a lotus flower; by using wisdom to contemplate the mind, the mind opens and therefore enters samadhi. The Thus Come One Store Sutra 如來藏經 says: "In the middle of all the afflicted minds, the Buddha sees a Thus Come One sitting in full lotus, adorned and awe-inspiring 儼然, without moving, replete with all the virtue marks."

The **Buddha's lifespan** can be explained in several ways. In Chinese, "lifespan" consists of two terms: one for longevity

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or duration and the other for the continuity of life itself.

The Lotus Sutra explains that the Dharma Body of the Buddha is not separate from all dharmas. This coexistence with all constitutes its longevity. The fundamental principle of True Suchness constitutes the life of the Dharma Body.

The lifespan of the Reward Body, or Retribution Body, is based on True Mark Wisdom and the interactive response between wisdom and its objects/states. 境智相應; the states are wisdom and vice versa. The Buddha uses wisdom to clearly illuminate all states and all states that come are clearly understood, thus uniting both wisdom and states. This is known as being identical with the wisdom that knows. Thus all states are instantly and fully understood. Although wisdom and its states are originally a duality, ultimately they function as a single entity that constitutes the longevity of the Retribution Body.

The third body is the Response Body or Transformation Body. The longevity of this body is the hundred-year duration of the human lifespan. This body's life is determined by causal conditions and circumstances.

From the perspective of the Contemplation Sutra (the Sutra of the Sixteen Contemplations), it is not necessary to break "lifespan" down into constituents. The Transformation Body has a lifespan that shows a beginning and an end (the Buddha's birth and his entering Nirvana). The Retribution Body has a beginning but no end. The Dharma Body has neither a beginning nor an end. The lifespan of **four hundred thousand million asamkhyeya kalpas** mentioned here, is that of

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this Buddha's Transformation Body.

**Asamkhyeya 阿僧祇** means countless, and has two aspects:

1. Countless nights, days, months, and years.
2. Countless great kalpas.

**Asamkhyeya kalpas**, as observed by the Buddha, are just like one day. This is from the power of his penetration of past lives which is inconceivable. A king 分和壇王 once expressed his doubts about the extent of the Buddha's knowledge. The World Honored One told him, "If you use all the great ocean water as ink, and split all the trees to make pens to write a sutra that contains all of my knowledge, the ocean water may dry up and the tree branches may be used up but my sutra will not have an end."

*Sutra text:*

**"During the Dharma-Image Age there was a Brahman woman who had many blessings from former lives and who was respected by everyone. In walking, standing, sitting, and lying down she was surrounded and protected by gods. Her mother, however, had improper belief and often slighted the Triple Jewel."**

*Sutra commentary:*

Typically there are three ages associated with each Buddha's Dharma:

1. The "Proper Dharma Age", which lasts 1,000 years, during which time people cultivate with great sincerity

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- and many obtain the fruition.
2. The “Dharma-Semblance Age”, which also lasts 1,000 years, during which time people practice much less. Their efforts are applied to externals: they construct many temples, stupas and pagodas. During this era, people seek blessings and disregard wisdom.
  3. The “Dharma-Ending Age”, which is the one that we are now in, lasts 10,000 years. It is characterized by wars, internal conflicts, degeneracy and strife of all kinds.

**During the Dharma-Image Age** of Enlightenment-Flower Samadhi Self-Sufficient King Thus Come One, **there was a Brahman woman**. Brahman means pure. These pure practices include vegetarianism and celibacy, without which there can be no purity. Brahmans are also called “pure descendents 淨裔”. They aspire to be born onto the Brahma Heaven. The Brahmans tend to cultivate these practices haphazardly, and therefore they cannot obtain the ultimate principle. Yoga is one of its practices. The Taoists are their Chinese counterparts.

**Who had many blessings from former lives and who was respected by everyone**. She was well regarded because of her past numerous meritorious deeds. A person’s physiognomy reflects his or her past merits. Those who were more meritorious in the past, have full and harmonious features. Those who lacked merit in the past are now ugly.

The thousand **blessings** discussed earlier could also be explained in the following way: 1,000 good deeds constitute one blessing. Once perfected, they lead to the Thirty-two Hall-

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marks and 80 Subtle Characteristics.

Blessings can be of three types:

1. Holding precepts 持戒福, which counteracts the miserly mind.
2. Giving 布施福, which counteracts our tendency to create evil karmas.
3. Cultivating samadhi 修定福, which counteracts the way of anger and scattered-ness that are prevalent in the world.

This Brahman woman was replete with all three blessings. That is why the sutra mentions **many blessings**.

**In walking, standing, sitting, and lying down she was surrounded and protected by gods.** This is due to her prior life's blessings, which enabled her to obtain an upright and proper appearance, making her liked and respected by all who saw her.

**Her mother, however, had improper belief and often slighted the Triple Jewel.”**

**Deviant belief** refers not only in improper teachings, but also to half-hearted beliefs (half belief, half doubt). Inwardly, she gave rise to deviant views. Outwardly, she belittled the Triple Jewel. The Triple Jewel is the kind vessel in the sea of suffering. To be respectful creates inconceivable blessings.

If one recognizes that the Buddhadharma is very difficult to encounter and therefore respects it by firmly believing it and

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clearing one's mind 識佛法難遇 • 弘信仰而澄神, then one will create blessings. On the other hand, if one looks down on the Buddhadharma, one will create offenses. (Note 23)

In particular, one such non-believer is called an icchantika 闍提. Such people use coarse and evil words to slander the Proper Dharma, saying there is no Buddha and no Buddhadharma. They do not believe in the law of cause and effect or in retribution. They do neither draw near good friends, nor observe the Buddha's precepts.

*Sutra text:*

**"That holy woman worked many skillful means to entice her mother to hold right views, yet the mother did not totally believe. Before long her life ended and her spirit fell into the uninterrupted hell."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"That holy woman worked many skillful means to entice her mother to hold right views, yet the mother did not totally believe, her mother was more enamored with improper beliefs. Before long her life ended and her spirit fell into the uninterrupted hell."**

**Before long** points to life's impermanence. We don't have as much time as we think. There was a saying:

*When I see another's death, my heart burns like fire;*

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*It burns, but not for him, for death rolls on toward me.*

Death can be bad, as in untimely or accidental death, or good, as when one wishes, such as when the sages have completed their work in our world, they can decide to die and move on.

**Spirit 魂神** refers to the Alaya Consciousness or the Seventh Consciousness.

**The uninterrupted hell** is so named because there is no interruption of time, life or body. It is full with just one person or with many. Suffering is undergone endlessly. As soon as death occurs, there is instantaneous rebirth into the same continuously tormented body. It will be described in greater details later.

*Sutra text:*

**"Knowing that when her mother was in the world she had not believed in cause and effect, the Brahman woman realized that, in accordance with her karma, her mother would be reborn in the evil paths. Thereupon she sold the family house, procured vast quantities of incense, flowers, and other items, and performed a great offering in that Buddha's temple. In one of the temples in particular, she saw that the modeling and painting of the image of the Thus Come One Enlightenment-Flower Samadhi Self-Mastery King was awesome in appearance, well-formed, and adorned to perfection. The Brahman woman gazed in worship at the honored countenance and became doubly respectful. She thought to herself, 'Buddhas are also called Greatly Enlightened Ones who are complete with**



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**All-Wisdom. If this Buddha were in the world and I were to ask him, he would certainly know where my mother had gone at death.'**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Knowing that when her mother was in the world she had not believed in cause and effect, the Brahman woman realized that, in accordance with her karma, her mother would be reborn in the evil paths.**

**Not believed in cause and effect:** There is a saying: "Of all the offenses, the worst one is not to believe in the true principles 一切罪中, 以不信真理之罪最大。”

**Thereupon she sold the family house, procured vast quantities of incense, flowers, and other items, and performed a great offering in that Buddha's temple.**

The **family house** is associated with personal safety and comfort. She got rid of it because she does not even think of herself.

**Incense and flowers** are the better offerings, symbolizing the beginning of sincerity. Incense can erase filth 辟穢. Flowers represent the perfect cause 具圓因. It is said that the bad odors from the human realm rise and cause the gods to loathe us (because the gods are pure). However they do not dare to come here because of the Buddha's instructions. That is why, within the Buddhadharma, incense serves as the Buddha's messenger 使.

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She makes a **great offering** to the Buddha and present sangha. She hopes that this sincere act will invoke a response from the Triple Jewel and makes a transference to her mother.

**In one of the temples in particular, she saw that the modeling and painting of the image of the Thus Come One Enlightenment-Flower Samadhi Self-Mastery King was awesome in appearance, well-formed, and adorned to perfection. The Brahman woman gazed in worship at the honored countenance and became doubly respectful. She thought to herself, 'Buddhas are also called Greatly Enlightened Ones who are complete with All-Wisdom. If this Buddha were in the world and I were to ask him, he would certainly know where my mother had gone at death.'**

**Gazed at the venerable image:** This phrase can be explained with an anecdote for gazing at the Buddha image. In the past, after Emptiness King Thus Come One 空王如還來 entered Nirvana, there were four bhikshus who studied the Buddhadharma together. They applied themselves vigorously and as a result forced out a lot of afflictions. However, later they became overwhelmed by their afflictions and wanted to create evil offenses. Just as they were about to fall (into the evil paths), suddenly a voice appeared in space, saying, “Bhikshus! Hurry inside the temple and contemplate the Buddha image. Contemplate as if the Buddha is still in the world.” The bhikshus followed the instructions and gazed at the white hair mark 白毫相. They further thought, “It’s as if the Thus Come One is still with us. Great Hero, please extinguish our offenses and defilements.” Because of the caus-

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es and conditions established by their contemplation of the image and their repentance, for 80 hundred millions of kalpas 八十億劫, they did not fall into the evil paths. They later accomplished Buddhahood as Ashoka 阿闍鞞 Buddha in the east, Jeweled Production 寶生 Buddha in the south, Limitless Life Buddha in the west and Accomplishment 成就 Buddha in the north.

There is another anecdote from the Contemplating the Buddha Samadhi Sutra 觀佛三昧經 which demonstrates that the merit and virtue of gazing in worship are inconceivable: In the past, there was a Buddha named Jeweled Awesome Virtue Superior King Thus Come One 寶威德上王如來. A bhikshu came to his temple with his nine disciples. They bowed and praised a jeweled image. At the end of their lives, they were all reborn by transformation to this Buddha's land in the east 大蓮華中. They all practiced the pure conduct and obtained the Buddha recitation samadhi sea 念佛三昧海. The Buddha gave them predictions and they all became Buddhas. Today, the eastern direction's Good Virtue Buddha 善德佛 was that teacher and the nine directions' No Worry Virtue Buddhas 無憂德佛 were his nine disciples.

*Sutra text:*

**"Then the Brahman woman wept for a long time with lowered head and then fixed her gaze on the Thus Come One. Suddenly a voice was heard in space, saying, 'O**

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**weeping holy woman, do not be so sorrowful, I shall show you where your mother has gone.'**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Then the Brahman woman wept for a long time with lowered head feeling so lost and helpless and then fixed her gaze on the Thus Come One to regain her composure. Suddenly a voice was heard in space, saying, 'O weeping holy woman, do not be so sorrowful, I shall show you where your mother has gone.'**

**Wept:** She wept without making any sounds.

According to the Buddha Speaks of Inconceivable Vinaya Sutra 佛說決定毗尼經, the Buddha tells Shariputra that, besides the Buddha's wisdom there is no other Vehicle that can help living beings obtain liberation and arrive at Nirvana. Only he can demonstrate the path of liberation, enable living beings to distance themselves from the deviant paths and manifest the sagely paths. That is why he is called the **Thus Come One**.

She is considered a **holy woman** because of her good roots. She was of the utmost sincerity.

*Sutra text:*

**"The Brahman woman placed her palms together toward space and said, 'What divine virtuous one is this who comforts my grief? From the day I lost my mother onward I have held her in memory day and night, but there is no-**

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where I can go to ask about the realm of her rebirth'."

*Sutra commentary:*

**"The Brahman woman placed her palms together toward space and said, 'What divine virtuous one is this who comforts my grief? From the day I lost my mother onward I have held her in memory day and night, but there is nowhere I can go to ask about the realm of her rebirth'."**

**Placed her palms together toward space 合掌向空:** She was extremely grateful and happy for the response.

This woman was very filial.

*"The tree would be still, but the wind will not rest;*

*The son would maintain the parents, but they are gone;*

**樹欲靜而風不止；子欲養而親不在。”**

Parents' kindness is as boundless as the sky, higher than heaven, broader than the earth. She felt remorse that she was not able to repay her mother's kindness. All of us should also ask ourselves, "What have I done to repay my parents' kindness?"

*Sutra text:*

**"A voice again resounded from space and declared to the holy woman, 'I am the one whom you behold and worship, the past Enlightenment-Flower Samadhi Self-Mastery**

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**King Thus Come One. Because I have seen that your regard for your mother is double that of ordinary living beings, I will now show you the place of her rebirth.'**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"A voice again resounded from space and declared to the holy woman, 'I am the one whom you behold and worship, the past Enlightenment-Flower Samadhi Self-Mastery King Thus Come One. Because I have seen that your regard for your mother is double that of ordinary living beings, I will now show you the place of her rebirth.'**

She obtained a response from the Buddha because of her sincerity. She really cared for her mother, not for herself. The response itself comes in the form of a sound and yet there is no physical manifestation.

*Sutra text:*

**"On hearing this voice the Brahman woman suddenly leaped up and fell down, breaking all her limbs. Those around her picked her up, and after a long time she was revived, she spoke into space and said, 'I hope that the Buddha will be compassionate, have pity on me and quickly tell me into what realm my mother has been reborn. My present body and mind will perish not long after this.'**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"On hearing this voice the Brahman woman suddenly**

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**leaped up and fell down, breaking all her limbs.**

In her state of high anxiety, she leapt up and broke her bones and yet, in the midst of her great pain, she still only thought of her mother.

Because of her high level of anxiety she was extremely eager to know where her mother had been reborn. Therefore, she bowed down and threw her body like a collapsing mountain. She had no concern for her own body.

情發於中・聲感於外・舉身撲拜・如太山崩・  
急欲知母生界・何暇顧惜形骸・遂致肢體骨節  
・悉損壞而悶絕矣。

She obtained a response from the Buddha from her sincerity. She really cared for her mother, not for herself. The response come in the form of sound and yet there was no form, thus manifesting production without production 顯生而不生. Furthermore, there was no form and yet there was sound, revealing that there is extinction and yet no extinction 無相而有聲者・示滅而不滅.

**Those around her picked her up, and after a long time she was revived, she spoke into space and said, 'I hope that the Buddha will be compassionate, have pity on me and quickly tell me into what realm my mother has been reborn. My present body and mind will perish not long after this.'**

Her assistants propped her up. She said that she could not last

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much longer, her body was all broken and her mind was in great pain 形殘心苦: “Please tell me where she is.”

*Sutra text:*

**"The Thus Come One Enlightenment-Flower Samadhi Self-Mastery King, spoke to the pious woman and said, 'After your offering is complete, return home quickly. Sit upright thinking of my name and you will certainly know your mother's place of rebirth.' After she had finished worshipping the Buddha, the Brahman woman returned home, where, mindful of her mother, she sat upright re-collecting the Thus Come One Enlightenment-Flower Samadhi Self-Mastery King.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"The Thus Come One Enlightenment-Flower Samadhi Self-Mastery King, spoke to the pious woman and said, 'After your offering is complete, return home quickly. Sit upright thinking of my name and you will certainly know your mother's place of rebirth.' After she had finished worshipping the Buddha, the Brahman woman returned home, where, mindful of her mother, she sat upright re-collecting the Thus Come One Enlightenment-Flower Samadhi Self-Mastery King.**

She then managed to finish making offerings and went home. “Home” also symbolizes her body home of the five skandhas. Contemplate the five skandhas and wisdom will manifest.

Did she rest so that her body would have the chance to recov-



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er? No, she sat upright 端坐即金剛正坐 • 或全跏 and recited the Buddha's name for one day and night. She forgot about her physical pain because she entered samadhi.

Sitting in full lotus is called the subduing demon posture. Half-lotus 半跏 is the as you wish posture 如意坐.

She immediately went home after making the offering to the Buddha. This represents the pressing nature of turning over confusion to unravel enlightenment 表翻迷為悟之疾.

**Thinking** means to contemplate. There is a triad here: her mind, The Buddha **Thus Come One Enlightenment-Flower Samadhi Self-Mastery King** whom she contemplates and her mother. Mother is the mother of her mind 母即母心.

Buddha is the Buddha of the mind 佛即佛心. They are three but they fundamentally coalesce into one.

*Sutra text:*

**"After a day and a night she suddenly saw herself beside a sea whose waters seethed and bubbled. Many evil beasts with iron bodies flew about the sea, rushing to the east and west. She saw hundreds of thousands of millions of men and women rising and sinking in the water, being fought over, seized, and devoured by the evil beasts. She beheld yakshas as well, each with a different form. Some had many hands, some many eyes, some many legs, some many heads. Sharp, sword-like fangs protruded from their mouths, and they drove the offenders on toward the evil beasts. Some yakshas seized the offenders and twisted**

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**their heads and feet together into myriad horrifying shapes at which none would dare look for long."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"After a day and a night she suddenly saw herself beside a sea whose waters seethed and bubbled.**

**a day and a night:** "Day" represents her enlightenment which illuminates like daylight; "night" represents her mother's delusion which is dark like the long night. "A" symbolizes the mind, the basis of confusion or enlightenment. In all, they represent the mind when enlightened and/or confused.

Her mother, having believed in the deviant and united with the dusts, turned her back on enlightenment. The holy woman sponsored the great offering, enabling the proper wisdom to enter her heart, thus uniting with enlightenment and turning her back on the dusts. Originally there is only one mind, both confusion and enlightenment branch out from it.

**Many evil beasts with iron bodies flew about the sea, rushing to the east and west. She saw hundreds of thousands of millions of men and women rising and sinking in the water, being fought over, seized, and devoured by the evil beasts.**

Why did the Buddha not just show her but instead made her go to the Hells to find out? Worldly people are covered by ignorance. They do not recognize good and evil, cause and fruition. Therefore he used this lady's personally witnessing the suffering in the hells, to warn worldly people who are stu-

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pid and obstinate. What does stupidity look like? We do not understand and are closed minded. We see the Buddha and do not seek instructions. We see sutras and do not read them. We see sanghans and do not offer to serve them. We see our parents and fail to be respectful toward them. We are not mindful of the worldly suffering. We are blissfully ignorant about the effects and suffering in the hells. Because of our inherent stupidity, we revolve incessantly in the wheel of re-incarnation. Thanks to her story, we can wake up and firmly believe that we must avoid doing evil, and concurrently do good.

She did not even take a break to attend to herself. She then saw herself by a sea (of karmas 業海). Her eighth consciousness (靈性或識神或魂魄) flew there. This is not a hallucination. This usually happens when sitting for a long time with undeviating single-mindedness. Within this samadhi, her consciousness went to the hells and she saw boiling seas and many beasts and ghosts. All were there from having created offenses.

Typically, one has to open the Five Eyes before one can see “things”. In this case, when her spiritual nature 靈性 left her flesh body, her five spiritual eyes then opened up and she was then able to freely use them. Thus she could see ghosts, spirits, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas.

**She beheld yakshas as well, each with a different form. Some had many hands, some many eyes, some many legs, some many heads. Sharp, sword-like fangs protruded from their mouths, and they drove the offenders on to-**

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ward the evil beasts.

**Yakshas** 夜叉 are “speedy ghosts” who come in many forms and shapes (e.g. ox, horse, lion, elephant, tiger, wolf; two-handed up to one-thousand hands; one-eyed up to one-thousand eyed, etc...). When the prisoners can escape (out-smart) the beasts, they then run into these speedy ghosts.

**Some yakshas seized the offenders and twisted their heads and feet together into myriad horrifying shapes at which none would dare look for long."**

They are toying with the convicts, making different shapes with their bodies.

When evil karmas come to an end, we will no longer see these fearsome ghosts and beasts 如正法念經.

*Sutra text:*

**"During this time the Brahman woman was calm and fearless because of the power of recollecting the Buddha. A ghost king named Poisonless bowed and came to welcome the holy woman and said, 'Good indeed, O Bodhisattva. What conditions have brought you here?'**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"During this time the Brahman woman was calm and fearless because of the power of recollecting the Buddha.**

**calm and fearless:** the Buddha told Manjushri (in the Earth

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ground contemplation 心地觀佛): it is just like in the dense forest, where there are plenty of ferocious animals waiting to pounce on men and harm them. If one puts the forest alight, all the beasts would then run away. When the mind is empty and perception extinguished 心空見滅, it is just the same.

All states appear in response to the mind. Conversely, the mind manifests according to the state. Fundamentally, the mind is empty. How can there be any state? When mind and state are both extinguished, how can there be any fear? 諸境由心・心由境現・心既本空・境亦何有・心境既亡・懼自何生

**A ghost king named Poisonless bowed and came to welcome the holy woman and said, 'Good indeed, O Bodhisattva. What conditions have brought you here?'**

**Poisonless:** This ghost king is free of the three poisons of greed, hatred and stupidity. He is in charge of the area.

He bowed 稽首, with his hands touching the ground. From her appearance, he could tell she was no ordinary woman. That is why he was very respectful.

*Sutra text:*

**"The Brahman woman asked the ghost king, 'What is this place?'**

**"Poisonless replied, 'This is the west side of the first encir-**

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cling sea of the Great Iron Ring Mountain.'

*Sutra commentary:*

"The Brahman woman asked the ghost king, 'What is this place?'

'What is this place?' 此是何處 She asked out of surprise and curiosity.

"Poisonless replied, 'This is the west side of the first encircling sea of the Great Iron Ring Mountain.'

Four continents surround Wonderfully High Mountain 須彌山. Outside of these continents there are eight mountains. Further outside is the Great Salty Ocean 鹹海. And even further outside is the Great Iron Ring Mountain 大鐵圍山.

The **first sea** 第一重海 is within the water boundaries of the Great Iron Ring Mountain.

準長阿含·起世經等·四洲地心·即是須彌山·山外別有八山·乃至其外鹹海·廣於無際·海外有山·即是大鍤圍山·依立世阿毗曇論·云大鹹海外有山·名曰鍤圍·入水三百二十由旬·出水亦然·廣亦如是·從閻浮提南際·取鍤圍山·三億六萬六百六十三由旬·從鍤圍山

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水際・極鑊圍山水際・逕度十二億二千八百二十五由旬・鑊圍山水際・周迴三十六億八千四百七十五由旬・第一重海・在其中・(準諸經論閻羅王宮・既在界外・則業海亦然・即泥犁經所云・鹹水泥犁是也)

*Sutra text:*

**"The holy woman said, 'I have heard that hell is within the Iron Ring. Is this actually so?'"**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"The holy woman said, 'I have heard that hell is within the Iron Ring. Is this actually so?'"**

Indeed, **hell is within the Iron Ring**, between the small Iron Ring mountain and Great Iron Ring Mountain.

*Sutra text:*

**"Poisonless answered, 'Hell is really here.'"**

**"The holy woman asked, 'How have I now come to the hells?'"**

**"Poisonless answered, 'No one can come here unless he has either awesome spirit or the required karma.'"**

*Sutra commentary:*

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**"Poisonless answered, 'Hell is really here.' Yes, you are in the hells.**

**"The holy woman asked, 'How have I now come to the hells?' How did I manage to get here?**

**"Poisonless answered, 'No one can come here unless he has either awesome spirit or the required karma.'**

**Awesome spirit 威神** means that, using one's spiritual penetrations, one can get there to rescue beings or to take a look. **The required karma 業力** refers to the process in which one's evil karmas mature and one must undergo the retributions. These are the two ways to get to the hells.

*Sutra text:*

**"The holy woman asked, 'Why is this water seething and why are there so many people with offenses and evil beasts?'**

**"Poisonless replied, 'These are the newly dead beings of Jambudvipa who have done evil deeds and who, during the first forty-nine days after their death, had no survivors to perform acts of merit on their behalf and rescue them from suffering and difficulty. Moreover, during their lives they planted no good causes. In accordance with their own deeds the hells appear, and they naturally are striving to first cross this sea. Ten thousand yojanas east of this sea is another sea which has double the suffering of this one. East of that is yet another sea where the**



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**suffering is doubled still again. What the combined evil causes of the Three Karmas evoke is called the sea of karma. This is that place. ' "**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"The holy woman asked, 'Why is this water seething and why are there so many people with offenses and evil beasts?'**

Why was the water **seething**? It is from the habit of arrogance, and liking to bully the weak. As a result, the water is incessantly creating waves.

Why were there many convicts? These are those who committed the ten evils. Their own offenses created the hell retribution.

Why were there many **evil beasts**? This is from the touching retributions 觸報 (body karma). For having created such karmas, they collected the evil fruition of seeing the beasts.

**"Poisonless replied, 'These are the newly dead beings of Jambudvipa who have done evil deeds and who, during the first forty-nine days after their death, had no survivors to perform acts of merit on their behalf and rescue them from suffering and difficulty.**

The Great Iron Ring Mountain 大鐵圍山 surrounds the seas around Mount Sumeru. Beyond it is hell as confirmed by the ghost king Poisonless. Do you believe that hell exists?

## Explained by Master YongHua

**Jambudvipa 閻浮提** translates into superior gold. The Long Agama Sutra says that Jambudvipa is the southern continent. This land is narrow in the south and broad in the north; it is 7,000 yojanas in both directions. It has the Jambunada **閻浮檀金樹** golden tree, which is seven yojanas in circumference, 100 yojanas tall, and has foliage **枝葉** extending 50 yojanas in the four directions **四布**. The liquid from the Jambunada tree flows into the rivers and becomes gold. This kind of gold is of the best quality.

There are two kinds of **death**:

1. Life terminates
  - a) Life ends **命盡 • 非是福盡**, not because blessings have run out.
  - b) Blessings end **福盡 • 非是命盡**, not because life ends.
  - c) Both life and blessings end **福命俱盡**.
2. External conditions death
  - a) Suicide **非分自害死**.
  - b) Death caused by others or by accidents **橫為他死**.
  - c) Both **俱死**.

Alternatively, death can be divided into three kinds. Death can come from:

- a) Debauchery **放逸死**.
- b) Destroying precepts **破戒死**.
- c) Destroying the life root **壞命根死**.

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

During the **forty-nine days**, or seven weeks, after someone has died, the living should help the deceased create merit and virtue. The sutras could be recited, or perhaps one could recite mantras to help cross them over **超度**. According to the shastras **瑜伽論**, extreme evil destines one to the hells; extreme good destines one to the pure lands or heavens without having to go through the intermediate skandha body which is only for those whose case is unfixed **不定**. This intermediate skandha body dies every seven days for a total of seven weeks.

**Moreover, during their lives they planted no good causes, choosing instead to indulge themselves. In accordance with their own deeds the hells appear, and they naturally are striving to first cross this sea. Ten thousand yojanas east of this sea is another sea which has double the suffering of this one. East of that is yet another sea where the suffering is doubled still again. What the combined evil causes of the Three Karmas evoke is called the sea of karma. This is that place. ' "**

They cross the sea on their own accord because of the retribution of evil karmas.

To the eastern direction there are more seas where the suffering is doubled each time. These seas exist because of the retribution for the Three Evil Karmas **三業惡因** of body, mouth and mind.

**泥犁經云・鹹水泥犁・縱橫數千里水・鹹水如**

Explained by Master YongHua

鹽・熱沸湧躍・水中有鳥・喙如鏤生・啄人肌・  
齧人骨・人不能忍是痛・更度水去・守泥犁鬼  
言・死惡人・汝何等求索・人言・我苦饑渴・鬼  
即以鉤・鉤其上下斷(音銀・齒根肉)・口皆挖開  
・復以消銅・灌入口中・唇舌咽腹皆焦盡・銅  
便下去・其人不能復忍・還入沸鹹水中・其人  
平生・於作惡甚・故求解不得解・隨波上下・  
迴復沉沒・其苦倍增・可勝言哉

These three seas altogether form **the sea of karma**. This **place** is created by living beings' karmas.

Blessings or offenses are unavoidable. If we create karma then we must undergo the corresponding retribution, like shadow follows form, or like echo follows sound.

*Sutra text:*

**"The holy woman again asked the ghost king Poisonless, 'Where is hell?'**

**"Poisonless answered, 'Within the three seas are hundreds of thousands of great hells, each one different. There are eighteen that are specifically known as great hells. In succession there are five hundred with unlimited cruel suffering, and further there are over one hundred thousand with limitless suffering.'**

**"The holy woman again spoke to the ghost king. 'My**

## **The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva**

**mother has not been dead long, and I do not know on what path her soul has gone.'**

**"The ghost king asked, 'When the Bodhisattva's mother was alive, what were her habitual deeds?'**

**"The holy woman replied, 'My mother had deviant views and ridiculed and slandered the Triple Jewel. Even if she occasionally believed, it was short-lived and turned again to disrespect. Although she has been dead but a few days, I do not know the place of her rebirth.'**

**"Poisonless asked, 'What was the Bodhisattva's mother's name and clan?'**

**"The holy woman replied, 'My parents were both Brahmans; my father's name was Sila Sudarshan, my mother's name was Yue Di Li.' "**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"The holy woman again asked the ghost king Poisonless, 'Where is hell?'**

This confirms the existence of the hells.

**"Poisonless answered, 'Within the three seas are hundreds of thousands of great hells, each one different. There are eighteen that are specifically known as great hells. In succession there are five hundred with unlimited cruel suffering, and further there are over one hundred thousand with limitless suffering.'**

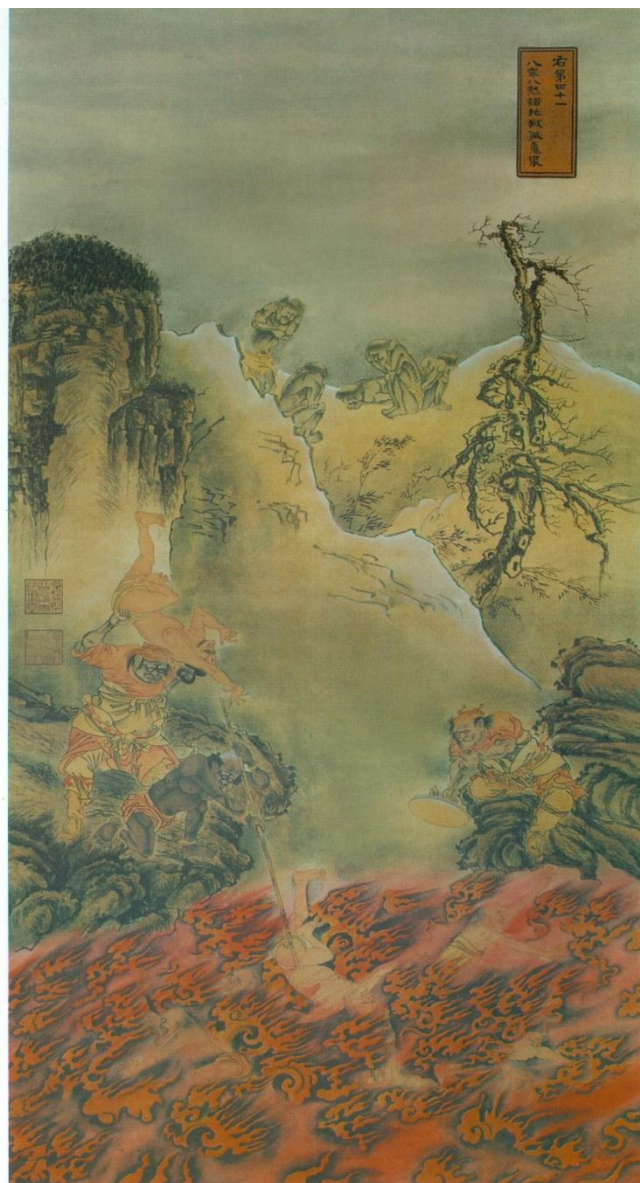
## Explained by Master YongHua

The ghost king replies to the woman that the great hells are inside the three seas.

**The three seas** represent a large quantity, and do not necessarily mean bodies of water. The three karmas created by living beings are as large as the seas.

大者。具有十八。有二釋一準問地獄經。云十八王者。即主領十八地獄是。一迦延典泥犁。乃至十八觀身典洋銅。則獄名典主。局定十八之數。若觀佛三昧海經。云阿鼻地獄。各有十八小地獄。小地獄中。各有十八。寒冰地獄。黑暗小熱乃至飲銅。各有十八。如是阿鼻大地獄中。有此十八地獄。一一地獄中。各有十八隔。(統紀是鬲。郎的切。鼎屬)始從寒冰。乃至飲銅。總三百四十二隔地獄。今謂彼經以阿鼻為最大。故以各有十八為小。今云大者有十八。或不對阿毗。故各名大。例如世間諸王。不對天子。各稱大王。若對至尊。則稱小王矣。

# The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva



右序第四十一 八寒八热诸地狱孤魂众

Prisoners in the eight hot and cold hells

## Explained by Master YongHua

Hells are of three general types: 1) hot 熱 2) cold 寒 3) adjoining 邊. The hot hells number eight, and are beneath Jambudvīpa, one on top the other. Living beings undergo hot suffering and afflictions 熱苦惱. Cold hells also number eight, and are at the bottom of the encircling iron mountains 鐵圍山. There, living beings undergo cold and freezing suffering. The adjoining hells number three. In these hells, living beings undergo suffering other than cold or hot, which takes place between mountains 山間, between water 水間, or in the wilderness 廣野.

The Roasting Hell is one of the eighteen Great Hells. Each would have eighteen subsections.

The **eighteen** great hells and **five hundred** etc. are based on fixed locations. Eighteen hells refer to those where the eighteen kings govern. Other sutras such Contemplating the Buddha Samadhi Sutra 觀佛三昧海經 also mention that Avīci 阿鼻 Hell has eighteen small hells, each having eighteen sub-hells, or partitions 隔.

The three seas, etc have listed eight cold and hot hells. Each would have in general 136 sub-hells, or 100,000 in breadth.

**Unlimited cruel suffering 苦毒無量:** According to the Naraka Sutra 準泥犁經, the Buddha says that if you want to know the kind of suffering that is most difficult to endure, you should look at the hells. There, suffering is so extreme



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that it cannot be expressed. For example, a thief 世逆賊 was caught by the government. He was given three hundred lashes and brought before the king. His wound festered and gave him extreme pain. A bhikshu told the Buddha, one sore alone could make the slightest movement of the body extremely painful, let alone three hundred! The Buddha said that the suffering in the hells is one hundred million one hundred million ten thousand times worse 億億萬倍. On top of it, the ghosts further inflict more pain and suffering. There is no end to the suffering in the hells.

There are numberless hells. Each corresponds to an evil deed done by living beings. They are created “on the fly” to help us undergo our evil retributions.

For example, in the Roasting Hell 炮烙 there is a large hollow brass 銅 pillar full of fire. Those who commit deviant sex fall into this hell and mistake the pillar for a beautiful person. They rush forth to embrace it to get themselves burned to death. Then, a “Clever Breeze 巧風” blows and revives the dead. Once revived, they have no recollection and rush toward the pillar again. The cycle repeats again and again.

**"The holy woman again spoke to the ghost king. 'My mother has not been dead long, and I do not know on what path her soul has gone. '**

**"The ghost king asked, 'When the Bodhisattva's mother was alive, what were her habitual deeds?'**

## Explained by Master YongHua

If you wish to know where you are going next, just look at your current habits. If you indulge in the poisons then you most likely will fall to the lower realms.

**Soul 魂神** refers to the eighth consciousness, which consists of two components:

1. 魂: yang spirit.
2. 魄: yin spirit.

氣也者。神之盛。魂也者。鬼之盛。道經云。魂者。氣之神。魄者。精之神。陽神曰魂。陰神曰魄。五教指第八識。法經云。是身為死物。精神無形法。自作受苦樂。身死神不喪。識神造三界。善不善三處。陰行而默至。所往如響應。故知必隨業而趣矣。

The ghost king addressed the Brahman woman as *Bodhisattva* because of her great filiality.

**"The holy woman replied, 'My mother had deviant views and ridiculed and slandered the Triple Jewel. Even if she occasionally believed, it was short-lived and turned again to disrespect. Although she has been dead but a few days, I do not know the place of her rebirth.'**

**"Poisonless asked, 'What was the Bodhisattva's mother's name and clan?'**

**"The holy woman replied, 'My parents were both Brah-**

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

mans; my father's name was Sila Sudarshan, my mother's name was Yue Di Li'."

**Deviant views** fall under one of the five Quick Servants, which are:

- a) The view of a body 身見: leading us to have over-zealous concerns for the body's welfare (which makes us afraid to take a loss).
- b) Extreme Views 邊見: of nihilism or permanence.
- c) Deviant Views 邪見: not believing in cause and effect.
- d) Seizing on views 見取見: mistaking what is not an effect for an effect.
- e) Views of Prohibitions 戒取見: mistaking what is not a cause for a cause.

The shastra 成論 says that it is better to stop and not do, rather than tread a deviant path. At the end of life, you will certainly fall into the evil paths. If your mind is inconstant, your nature is unfixed, in one instant of fleeting belief or on impulse, you may indulge in deviancy and give rise to slander.

To **ridicule and slander** the Triple Jewel could bring on the hell retribution! Be careful not to harbor deviant views in the inside and ridicule and slander on the outside.

Some maintain precepts with their body and mouth but harbor deviant views. They may practice vigorously but their mind continually plants the seeds for suffering due to their deviant views. It is much better to not hold precepts but have no deviant views, than the other way around.

## Explained by Master YongHua

The Indian caste system has four major groups:

1. Brahmans: pure caste 淨行.
2. Ksatriyas 剎帝利: warrior class 王種.
3. Vaisyas 吠奢: merchant class 商賈.
4. Chandalas 戍陀羅: the lowest class: butchers etc.

Upper castes and lower castes did not mix.

Speaking of lineage, in India, the Brahmans are considered to be descendants of the Gods and are the most honored lineage. The Buddhist sangha, on the other hand, takes giving as its foundation. Because the sangha practices giving and doing good, it really represents a great class. From the Buddhist perspective, people, regardless of social status, are honored from giving and goodness, not from birth.

**Sila Sudarshan:** 尸羅善 (good; the nature is good; liking to practice the good path and not be lax) 現 (manifest): her father's name means "cool and refreshing good view".

**Yuè Dì Lì 悅帝利** is her mother's name. There is really no explanation but I can give it a try. Yuè means to be favored (liked), and Dì means emperor. It may mean that she was favored by the emperor because of her beauty.

The Indians believed in the caste system which is rather static. In Buddhism, what matters is the kinds of seeds that you create: it's much more dynamic. If you wish to be respected and honored: DO GOOD!

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西天外道・專執婆羅門種・第一最尊・・如梵志頌婆羅延問種尊經云・本初起地上人時・皆是我曹婆羅門種・我曹最尊・初從口中出・世人從下去・我種・是第七梵天孫・佛反言天下一種・持我曹種・與剎利・田家・工師種等・我曹死・皆生梵天・・佛反持我曹與凡人等・佛言・我經中以施行為本・施行善者・最為大種・其天下尊貴者・皆施行善得・不以種得也・

*Sutra text:*

**"Poisonless placed his palms together respectfully and told the Bodhisattva, 'Please, Holy One, return to your original dwelling. Do not be worried or sorrowful, for the offense-laden woman Yue Di Li was born in the heavens three days ago. It is said that she received the benefit of the meritorious deeds performed by her filial child who, for her mother's sake, practiced giving at the stupas and temples of Enlightenment-Flower Samadhi Self-Mastery King Thus Come One. Not only has the Bodhisattva's mother obtained release from hell, but also, all those people in the Avici, on that day attained to bliss and were reborn together with her.' When the ghost king was finished speaking, he withdrew, with palms still respectfully joined.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Poisonless placed his palms together respectfully and**

Explained by Master YongHua

told the Bodhisattva, 'Please, Holy One, return to your original dwelling. Do not be worried or sorrowful, for the offense-laden woman Yue Di Li was born in the heavens three days ago. It is said that she received the benefit of the meritorious deeds performed by her filial child who, for her mother's sake, practiced giving at the stupas and temples of Enlightenment-Flower Samadhi Self-Mastery King Thus Come One. Not only has the Bodhisattva's mother obtained release from hell, but also, all those people in the Avici, on that day attained to bliss and were re-born together with her.' When the ghost king was finished speaking, he withdrew, with palms still respectfully joined.

The meaning of the text is self-evident.

**placed his palms together 合掌**: in a congratulatory fashion.

Her act of great merit not only benefited her mother but also other beings destined for the uninterrupted hell! However, it is interesting that the hells are already full again!

He **placed his palms together 合掌** in a congratulatory fashion.

*Sutra text:*

"The Brahman woman quickly returned as if from a dream, understood what had happened, and swore a deep vow before the image of Enlightenment-Flower Samadhi Self-Mastery King Thus Come One in the temple, saying,

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**‘I vow to establish many expedient devices in response to living beings who are suffering for offenses. Until the end of the future aeon, I shall cause those beings to obtain liberation.’ ”**

*Sutra commentary:*

**“The Brahman woman quickly returned as if from a dream, understood what had happened, and swore a deep vow before the image of Enlightenment-Flower Samadhi Self-Mastery King Thus Come One in the temple, saying, ‘I vow to establish many expedient devices in response to living beings who are suffering for offenses. Until the end of future aeon, I shall cause those beings to obtain liberation.’ ”**

After she **quickly returned** (because she does not belong there), she **understood** that **what had happened** was thanks to the Buddha’s power (and was not a dream). She therefore made a **deep vow** that is endless. This is the first time the Bodhisattva made this vast vow. This is a great vow of filial piety.

After seeing how much her own mother suffered in the hells, Earth Store Bodhisattva brought forth the mind of kindness and great compassion and vowed to go there to save all living beings’ mothers from suffering. She does not differentiate between her own and other living beings’ mothers. We should thus follow her example and broadly practice filial piety.

To be filial is to serve our parents well. It is foremost amongst the 100 undertakings. Serve them with a well-

## Explained by Master YongHua

meaning mind, a most sincere mind. The ancients said that the filial son takes care of his parents, enjoys making them happy 樂豫其心, will not go against their will 不違其志, pleases their ears and eyes 樂其耳目, and makes their sleep and meals peaceful 安其寢食. The Brahma Net Sutra says that filiality is the basis of the ultimate Way 至道之本.

Practicing filiality is one way to create the right kind of blessings that will be able to extinguish offenses. Common people create offenses which are with outflows. Outflows destine us to birth and death. The blessings that common people usually create are also with outflows, and hence also destine us to further birth and death. Such blessings with outflows cannot eradicate offenses with outflows. Only blessings with no outflows, which do not fall into birth and death, can do this. To create blessings without outflows, turn to the Triple Jewel. And since filiality is an integral part of Mahayana, it is one method of generating blessings without outflows.

*Sutra text:*

**The Buddha told Manjusri, "The ghost king Poisonless is the present Bodhisattva Foremost Wealth. The Brahman woman is now Earth Store Bodhisattva."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The Buddha told Manjusri, "The ghost king Poisonless is the present Bodhisattva Foremost Wealth. The Brahman woman is now Earth Store Bodhisattva."**



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The **Bodhisattva Foremost Wealth** 財首 has attained the seven treasures:

1. Faith 信 is the starting point.
2. Morality 戒 comes from faith.
3. Learning 多聞 and erudition come from goodness.
4. Renunciation 捨 comes from learning.
5. Wisdom 智慧 unfolds because of renunciation.
6. Shame 慚.
7. Remorse 愧.

The Buddhadharma takes faith as foremost of the seven types of wealth because it gives rise to the rest 信故持戒 • 善由多聞 • 聞故能捨 • 捨則生慧 • 故信為財首.

After Shakyamuni Buddha's Nirvana, there was a prince named Gold Banner 金幢 who was very arrogant and full of deviant views. He did not believe in the Buddhadharma. Also, there was a bhikshu named Samadhi Self-Mastery 定自在. The monk told the prince that inside the temple, there was an image of the Buddha that was much adorned; he should come in and take a look. The prince did and exclaimed, "This image is so beautiful; the Buddha himself must be quite a sight!" The monk told the prince that he was supposed to pay his respects to the image. The prince put his palms together and said, "Na Mo Fó." He then returned to his palace and could not stop thinking about the Buddha. He dreamt of the Buddha and woke up, became very happy, gave up his deviant views and took refuge with the Triple Jewel.

## **Explained by Master YongHua**

Because of the good roots from paying respects to the Buddha, the prince encountered 900 ten thousand hundred millions of nayutas of Buddhas. He obtained the very profound Buddha recitation samadhi. The Buddhas appeared and gave him a prediction. From there on, he went through one hundred ten thousand asamkheya kalpas without falling into the evil paths. Now the prince has obtained the profound Shurangama samadhi and has become the **Bodhisattva Foremost Wealth.**

## CHAPTER 2: The Assembly of the Division Bodies

Because Earth Store Bodhisattva broke through ignorance and certified to the Dharma Body, he can have transformation bodies 分身. He turned one body into numberless transformation bodies, making offerings to the Buddhas above and transforming living beings below. The Dharma Body is like the moon in the sky above and the transformation bodies are like its reflections on the water. The Dharma Body only manifests after ignorance is destroyed, just like the sky can only be seen when there are no clouds above. The transformation bodies only manifest according to the living beings' potentials 由機示現, just like water only manifests reflections in the right conditions.

**Division Bodies** can also be called “replicated spirit 分靈”, “replicated nature 分性” or “replicated mind 分心”. Bodhisattvas have a kind of spiritually efficacious response. “Because of responding one penetrates; if there is no seeking there is no response 由感自通, 無求不應.”

There is a verse:

*“A thousand pools of water,  
Moons in a thousand pools.  
Ten Thousand miles without a cloud,*

Explained by Master YongHua

*Ten thousand miles of sky.*

千潭有水千潭月，  
萬里無雲萬里天。”

The moon is reflected in the many bodies of water. The moon in the pool represents the “spirit” being discussed here. It also represents “nature” and one could say “thought” as well. Note that there are myriad reflections of the moon, but its substance does not replicate. Ten thousand miles without a cloud, it’s all clear sky.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time the division bodies of Earth Store Bodhisattva came and assembled in the palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven from hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of inconceivable, unutterable, immeasurable, ineffable, limitless asamkhyeyas of worlds, from all the places where there are hells. Because of the spiritual power of the Thus Come One, each came from his own direction together with thousands of ten thousands of nayutas of those who had obtained liberation from the paths of karma. All came holding incense and flowers as offerings to the Buddha. Because of the teachings of Earth Store Bodhisattva all of those who came were irreversible from Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, even though long kalpas ago they had been wandering in birth and death, undergoing suffering within the Six Paths without even temporary respite. Because of Earth Store Bodhisattva's great compassion and deep vows, however, each had obtained the fruition. When they came to the Trayastrimsa**

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**Heaven, their hearts jumped with joy. They gazed at the Thus Come One, their eyes not leaving him for a moment.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time the division bodies of Earth Store Bodhisattva came and assembled in the palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven from hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of inconceivable, unutterable, immeasurable, ineffable, limitless asamkhyeyas of worlds, from all the places where there are hells.**

Division bodies from **inconceivable, immeasurable** numbers of **worlds** come: this shows that the cosmos' worlds are incalculable.

The hells are where the most suffering is found. The Bodhisattva therefore replicated his body and went to numberless hells in the numberless worlds to rescue living beings. He would speak Dharma during the three periods of time. Those with lighter obstructions can leave the hells as soon as they hear the Dharma. Those with heavier retributions, even though they cannot understand the Dharma, still can plant seeds in their consciousness.

Clearly, he keeps himself pretty busy. But seeing the light emitted by Shakyamuni Buddha, he realizes that this is his last chance to pay respects to the Buddha. That is why his numberless replicated bodies all gather at the heavenly palace. Although busy at work in the hells, he never neglects drawing near the Buddha for teachings.

## Explained by Master YongHua

**The division bodies of Earth Store Bodhisattva** appear only in response to living beings' needs. His myriad transformation bodies that return to the Trayastrimsa Heaven came from **countless** worlds. He dispatched one to each of the hells of the worlds to rescue living beings.

**Because of the spiritual power of the Thus Come One, each came from his own direction together with thousands of tens of thousands of nayutas of those who had obtained liberation from the paths of karma. All came holding incense and flowers as offerings to the Buddha.**

**Offerings** can be of three kinds:

1. Offerings of Benefit 利益, referring to the four kinds of requisites (food, clothes, shelter or medicine).
2. Offerings of Respect 敬心, made through incense or flowers.
3. Offerings of Cultivation 修行, which refers to the execution of continual progress and continual growth.

**Because of the teachings of Earth Store Bodhisattva all of those who came were irreversible from Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, the Buddha fruition, even though long kalpas ago they had been wandering in birth and death, undergoing suffering within the Six Paths without even temporary respite. Because of Earth Store Bodhisattva's great compassion and deep vows, however, each had obtained the fruition.**

Many came to bear testimony to **Earth Store Bodhisattva's great compassion and deep vows**. He vowed that:

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

*“Only when the hells are empty will I become a Buddha, and only after all living beings have been saved, will I attain Bodhi.”*

There are four types of **wandering** 流浪:

1. View-flow Wandering 見流, referring to views in the Triple Realm 三界見.
2. Desire-flow Wandering 欲流, referring to delusions in the Desire Realm, except for views 除見 and stupidity.
3. Becoming-flow Wandering 有流, referring to delusions in the upper two realms, except for views 除見 and stupidity.
4. Ignorance-flow Wandering 無明流, referring to Triple Realm stupidity 三界癡.

According to the Great Shastra, living beings have three types of **suffering**:

1. Body suffering 身苦, in particular, aging, sickness, death.
2. Mind suffering 心苦, which refers to the three poisons.
3. Ensuing suffering 後苦, which is found in the hell, animal and ghost realms.

**Fruition** refers to the First through Fourth Stage Arhats, or to the higher level attainments above Arhatship.

## Explained by Master YongHua

**When they came to the Trayastrimsa Heaven, their hearts jumped with joy. They gazed at the Thus Come One, their eyes not leaving him for a moment.**

**Their hearts jumping, they gazed at the Thus Come One, their eyes not leaving him for a moment.** This is a manifestation of their utmost sincerity that originates in response to the Buddha's awesome virtues and adorned features.

**Gazed 瞻仰:** We admire the Buddha's awesome virtues and profound wisdom 仰 and do not get tired of looking at his most adorned features 瞻.

The Great Shastra states that the Buddha sits on the lion seat and manifests a most superb body, a radiant and bright form, and is replete with awesome virtues. Due to his inconceivable spiritual power, he can move living beings' minds; all those who have faith will reach Buddhahood.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time the World-Honored One stretched forth his golden-colored arm and rubbed the crowns of all the division bodies of Earth Store Bodhisattva, from the hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of unthinkable, unutterable, immeasurable, ineffable, limitless asamkhyeyas of worlds, and said, "I teach and transform obstinate living beings within the evil worlds of the Five Turbidities, causing their minds to be regulated and subdued, to renounce the deviant and return to the proper. One or two of ten, however, have bad habits remaining**



## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

and I also divide into hundreds of thousands of millions of bodies in order to establish numerous expedient devices for them. Perhaps, there are those of keen roots who hear and then faithfully accept, or perhaps, there are others of good roots and who have been energetically exhorted to accomplishment. Yet others are dark and dull and must long be taught and transformed in order to effect their return, while others whose karma is heavy do not give rise to respect. My division bodies take across and liberate all of these manifold kinds of living beings. Perhaps I appear in a male body, or that of a woman, or in a body of a god or dragon, or that of a spirit or ghost. Or I may appear as mountains, forests, streams, springs, and rivers; or as lakes, fountains, or wells, in order to benefit people. All of these may save beings. Or I may appear in the body of a Heavenly King, a Brahma King, a Wheel-turning King, a laymen, the king of a country, a prime minister, an official, a bhikshu, a bhikshuni, an upasaka, an upasika, and so forth including the body of a Sound Hearer, an Arhat, a Pratyekabuddha, or a Bodhisattva, in order to teach and rescue beings. It is not only the body of a Buddha which manifests before them."

*Sutra commentary:*

At that time the World-Honored One stretched forth his golden-colored arm and rubbed the crowns of all the division bodies of Earth Store Bodhisattva, from the hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of unthinkable, unutterable, immeasurable, ineffable, limitless asamkhyeyas of worlds, and said,  
Using his spiritual powers, the Buddha rubbed the crowns of

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all the replicated bodies of Earth Store Bodhisattva.

The Great Shastra says that the Buddha's hand has virtue character, and is most adorned 縵網莊嚴. He uses it to rub the crown of living beings' heads in order to comfort them and give them fearlessness.

**“I teach and transform obstinate living beings within the evil worlds of the Five Turbidities, causing their minds to be regulated and subdued, to renounce the deviant and return to the proper.**

**Obstinate living beings within the evil worlds of the Five Turbidities:** The majority of us in the Dharma Ending Age are like this. We are obstinate 剛強 and do not follow the rules. “Why follow the rules?” we ask. The five turbidities are the kalpa, view, affliction, living being and lifespan turbidities.

A **regulated and subdued 調伏** mind is more harmonious and delights in receiving the Teaching, neither opposing nor doubting it.

**One or two of ten, however, have bad habits remaining and I also divide into hundreds of thousands of millions of bodies in order to establish numerous expedient devices for them. Perhaps, there are those of keen roots who hear and then faithfully accept, or perhaps, there are others of good roots and who have been energetically exhorted to accomplishment.**

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**Keen roots 利根** come from past lives. These folks are intelligent and have wisdom. On hearing the Dharma, they immediately accept it. For example, Shariputra, heard the following gatha when he encountered Asvajit 馬勝 Bhikshu: “*All dharmas arise from conditions 諸法從緣生、*  
*They also perish from conditions 諸法從緣滅、*  
*My teacher Shakyamuni the Buddha 我佛釋迦師、*  
*Often says so 常作如是說.*”

Upon hearing this verse, Shariputra immediately certified to First Stage Arhatship, as did his buddy Mahamaudgalyayana.

Furthermore, 黑氏梵志 Black Surname Brahman Ambition, was carrying flowers in his hands to come make offerings to the Buddha. The World Honored One said, “Drop it.” The man dropped the flower in his left arm. The World Honored One again said, “Drop it,” and the man let go of the flower in his right hand. Yet again, the World Honored One again said, “Drop it.” The man asked, “My two hands are already empty, what else can I drop?” The Buddha explained, “I told you to drop the six dusts on the outside, the six organs in the inside and the six consciousnesses in the middle.” He obeyed the instructions and immediately certified to the production of non-dharmas.

Also, there was an externalist who asked, “Not asking there is a sentence. Not asking, there is no sentence. Will the World-Honored One instruct me!” The Buddha remained silent. After a while, the externalist suddenly understood, made obeisance and left. Ananda asked the externalist about the princi-

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ple that he obtained. The Buddha said: “It’s like a good horse who sees the shadow of the whip and immediately enters the proper path.”

The scriptures refer to four kinds of horses, which are likened to four classes of left-home people:

1. Those who respond to the shadow of the whip: hearing of “birth” they immediately believe the Buddha’s words.
2. Those who respond to its lightest touch: hearing of “birth and old age” they immediately believe the Buddha’s words.
3. Those who respond to its mild application: hearing of “birth, old age, and sickness” they immediately believe the Buddha’s words.
4. Those who need the spur of the whip to bite the bone before they react: hearing of “death” they believe the Buddha’s words.

The Buddhas have already ended birth and death. They manifest a body so that gods and humans have a place to return and rely upon... There is nothing they cannot do with their spiritual penetrations. 化為種種禽獸之身・而不受其法・或時身滿虛空・或時身若微塵・或輕如鴻毛・或重若泰山・如是等神通變化力・皆從禪得・

The northern continent has no Buddhadharma. The western and eastern continents’ inhabitants are unwise, afflicted, and

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very difficult to transform. In the southern continent, though we love to create offenses, we are transformers; we can be **transformed** and saved.

**Energetically exhorting others to accomplishment** probably needs to be done more than once in the various forms of expedients.

**Yet others are dark and dull and must long be taught and transformed in order to effect their return, while others whose karma is heavy do not give rise to respect.**

Some living beings are **dark and dull and must long be taught and transformed in order to effect their return.** Others' karmas are so heavy that they **do not give rise to respect.**

Beings with **dull** roots are born by moisture or eggs. Also there are dull rooted people. Although their progress may not be as quick, when they hear of the Dharma, they too can bring forth the faith and gradually unfold their transcendental wisdom.

With respect to sharp and dull roots, it is worth noting that, at the time of the Buddha, Shravasti had 900,000 inhabitants 九億. Of these, 1/3 met 眼見 the Buddha, 1/3 only heard of him, and 1/3 neither met nor heard of him. And he was there for 25 years!

**My division bodies take across and liberate all of these manifold kinds of living beings** without any discrimination

## Explained by Master YongHua

as to their species or the difficulties involved. **Perhaps I appear in a male body, or that of a woman, or in a body of a god or dragon, or that of a spirit or ghost. Or I may appear as mountains, forests, streams, springs, and rivers; or as lakes, fountains, or wells, in order to benefit people.** He may appear in sentient form or insentient form. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas use all sorts of transformation bodies to help living beings depending on their likes and dislikes. All sentient or insentient manifestations are simply the Dharma Body of the Buddha.

**All of these may save beings. Or I may appear in the body of a Heavenly King, a Brahma King, a Wheel-turning King, a laymen, the king of a country, a prime minister, an official, a bhikshu, a bhikshuni, an upasaka, an upasika, and so forth including the body of a Sound Hearer, an Arhat, a Pratyekabuddha, or a Bodhisattva, in order to teach and rescue beings.**

Every **Wheel-turning king** has treasures 寶貝 such as a flying chariot 飛車 that is pulled by a horse and can go anywhere in one world system 三千大千世界 within an hour. He also has a treasure storehouse 藏寶. Whenever/wherever he needs money (or other gems), he simply states the amount and the earth opens and reveals what he wants. His great blessings are such that the wealth of the earth is at his disposal. Also, he has the Jade Woman 女寶 who will satisfy all his desires. He has the horse jewel 馬寶 which is just as fast as a rocket. Everything is as he wishes 隨心如意. Howev-

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er, he is still subject to the suffering of not getting what he wants 求不得. Living beings tend to bring forth the Bodhi mind as soon as they see him.

In the Chinese text, 尼: “Ni” in bhikshuni means female 女  
• 大論云 • 尼得無量律儀 • 應次比丘.

**Upasakas** and **upasikas** 優婆塞 • 優婆夷 are people who draw near the sangha to assist in their propagation of the Buddhardharma.

**It is not only the body of a Buddha which manifests before them.** In a ksana, the Buddha can manifest any body to cross over the necessary living being.

*Sutra text:*

**"You see that I have toiled hard for many kalpas and endured different kinds of suffering in order to liberate and take across those living beings who are difficult to transform and who suffer for their offenses. Those among them who have not yet been subdued, undergo retributions according to their karma. If they should fall into the evil destinies and endure a time of great suffering, you should remember my attentive and diligent charge to you here in the Palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven, to cause all living beings in the Saha world, until Maitreya's appearance in the world, to attain liberation, to leave suffering forever, and to encounter Buddhas and receive their predictions."**

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*Sutra commentary:*

**"You see that I have toiled hard for many kalpas and endured different kinds of suffering in order to liberate and take across those living beings who are difficult to transform and who suffer for their offenses. Those among them who have not yet been subdued, undergo retributions according to their karma.**

Shakyamuni Buddha underwent unspeakable suffering for countless kalpas in order help living beings. And look at us, how we would like to take it easy, and sleep a little more!

**Who suffer for their offenses 罪苦:** The Great Shastra 大論 explains that there are two types of retribution suffering:

1. Body suffering: the body is in pain.
2. Mind suffering: the mind is severely afflicted, making the physical pain worse than it really is.

The sutra says that worldly people are blissfully ignorant about the consequences of their actions. They do not realize that there is life after death, like some famous scientists who claim otherwise. They should look at their own health to see how wise their lifestyle really is. Do good and you will enjoy blessings. Do evil and you will discover how unpleasant life can be in the evil paths. When you fall, it will be too late to do anything about it and you will certainly regret it.

Recently, someone approached me to help a dying friend. This is what she posted online:

*Doctors hand out antibiotics like candy, but you don't hear*



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*about people like me - my intestines were destroyed by antibiotics. I have Leaky Gut Syndrome and as a result am slowly dying of malnutrition because I can't absorb the nutrients from my food. Also my intestines are porous, so particles from them leak into my system and poison me. My immune system is also heavily affected and basically useless. I'm bedridden because of constant pain and the lack of fuel to function...*

It is hard to hear of such suffering and it is certainly most difficult for that lady who must be undergoing unspeakable suffering, especially the mental anguish and the feeling of being victimized by the system. I offered to provide a little of relief to her with our Medicine Master Buddha Dharma. In addition, I advised her to try to make sense of the situation by understanding cause and effect. We have created killing karmas in the past. All of us could find ourselves in similarly dire straights when our past evil karmas mature. In her case, reconciling with the past through the law of cause and effect will reduce her mental anguish. Sometimes it is better to invest in creating blessings so as to get a better birth the next go round.

**If they should fall into the evil destinies and endure a time of great suffering, you should remember my attentive and diligent charge to you here in the Palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven, to cause all living beings in the Saha world, until Maitreya's appearance in the world, to attain liberation, to leave suffering forever, and to encounter Buddhas and receive their predictions."**

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This is how greatly compassionate Shakyamuni Buddha truly is. He is charging Earth Store Bodhisattva with rescuing living beings who are in big trouble and have fallen into the evil paths.

**Prediction** for Buddhahood.

**Until the advent of Maitreya.** After Shakyamuni's extinction, fifty six hundred seven thousand ten thousand million years 五十六億七千萬年 (4000 years in the Tushita heaven) will pass before Maitreya Bodhisattva becomes the next Buddha. This will be the tenth Small Kalpa. When he accomplishes Buddhahood, he will have this thought: "These living beings have planted blessings in the Buddhadharma. Shakyamuni has led them to me. I should accept them. Good Indeed! Shakyamuni Buddha could teach these living beings, and is sending them to me!" He thus praises Shakyamuni Buddha three times. He will then speak the Four Noble Truths. Those who hear all will obtain the Way at the same time. At the first speaking of the Dharma, 96 hundred million 九十六億 men will obtain Arhatship. At the second saying, 94 hundred million 九十四億 men do so. The third time, another 92 hundred million 九十二億 men will. In addition, 96 hundred million people will receive the five precepts, 94 hundred million people will take refuge with the Triple Jewel, and 92 hundred million people will recite "Na Mo Buddha" once. Maitreya will teach for one day and night and then he will be done.

*Sutra text:*

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

At that time the division bodies of Earth Store Bodhisattva from all the worlds returned together to a single form which, weeping with pity, said to the Buddha, "Throughout long aeons I have received the Buddha's guidance, which has caused me to obtain inconceivable spiritual power and great wisdom. My division bodies fill as many worlds as there are grains of sand in a hundred thousand tens of thousands of Ganges Rivers. In each of those worlds, I transform into tens of thousands of millions of bodies, each of which takes across hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of people and causes them to take refuge with and respect the Triple Jewel, eternally leave birth and death, and reach the bliss of Nirvana. Even if their good deeds within the Buddhadharma are as little as a hair, a drop, a grain of sand, a mote of dust, or the tip of a hair, I shall gradually cause them to be liberated and attain great benefit."

In this way he addressed the Buddha three times, "I only hope that the World-Honored One will not be concerned about future living beings with evil karma."

At that time the Buddha praised Earth Store Bodhisattva and said, "Good indeed, good indeed, I shall help you in what you rejoice in doing so that you will be able to be successful in the completion of the great vows which you have made since long and distant kalpas. Just as you finish vastly taking living beings across, you will instantly be certified to Bodhi."

*Sutra commentary:*

## Explained by Master YongHua

**At that time the division bodies of Earth Store Bodhisattva from all the worlds returned together to a single form which, weeping with pity, said to the Buddha,**

To return **to a single form** means to return to the origin, to the source. In fact, he has no body because he has no mark of a self. You can do this too if you bring forth the resolve to practice his conduct!

Earth Store Bodhisattva **weeps** for four reasons:

1. Living beings in the six paths commit offenses and yet do not wish to change. Therefore they have to undergo suffering and yet have no sense of shame.
2. Living beings are stubborn and difficult to teach. Teach them Dharma and they get bored. Talk about nonsense and you have their total attention.
3. Shakyamuni was about to enter Nirvana. This makes the Bodhisattva very sorrowful.
4. He was instructed by the Buddha to work until Maitreya appears in the world. That is a very heavy responsibility.

**"Throughout long aeons I have received the Buddha's guidance, which has caused me to obtain inconceivable spiritual power and great wisdom.**

Buddhas do maintain a very long-term relationship with their charges.

**My division bodies fill as many worlds as there are grains of sand in a hundred thousand tens of thousands of Ganges Rivers.**

Great Bodhisattvas are such busy bodies!

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**In each of those worlds, I transform into tens of thousands of millions of bodies, each of which takes across hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of people and causes them to take refuge with and respect the Triple Jewel, eternally leave birth and death, and reach the bliss of Nirvana.**

**To take refuge with and respect the Triple Jewel:** To take refuge is called “casting off the deviant and returning to the proper 捨邪歸正, leaving the dark and entering the light 棄暗投明.”

**Nirvana** has the four qualities of permanence, bliss, true self and purity.

**Even if their good deeds within the Buddhadharma are as little as a hair, a drop, a grain of sand, a mote of dust, or the tip of a hair, I shall gradually cause them to be liberated and attain great benefit.**

Even if living beings create as little good 善之劣 as:

- **A hair 一毛:** representing the slightest 甚輕 of good deeds.
- **A drop 一滴:** representing the fewest 極少.
- **A grain of sand 一沙:** meaning the most minute 甚微.
- **A mote of dust 一塵:** representing the smallest 極

## Explained by Master YongHua

小. The Shurangama Sutra states that a mote of dust is one seventh of the smallest particle visible to the eye, bordering on emptiness.

- **A strand of down 毫髮許**: A fine piece of hair, like perspiration hair.

**Great benefit** pertains to Buddhahood.

The Great Bodhisattva uses numerous expedients to help us reach Bodhi and yet we living beings fail to believe him and do as he says. This is what Confucius refers to as wishing to stop and yet being unable: “It flows like this, unceasingly day and night! 孔子在川上曰。逝者如斯乎。不捨晝夜。即借水寄嘆。”

**In this way he addressed the Buddha three times, “I only hope that the World-Honored One will not be concerned about future living beings with evil karma.”**

**He spoke three times** to emphasize the importance of his statement.

**At that time the Buddha praised Earth Store Bodhisattva and said, "Good indeed you mean well, good indeed. I applaud your resolve and I shall help you in what you rejoice in doing so that you will be able to be successful in the completion of the great vows which you have made since long and distant kalpas. I would not ask you for help unless I was prepared to be in the trenches with you. Just as you finish vastly taking living beings across, you will instantly**

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**be certified to Bodhi."**

Isn't Shakyamuni most compassionate? Just before leaving, he instructed Earth Store Bodhisattva to pick up the slack until Maitreya Bodhisattva comes.

So is it the case that Earth Store Bodhisattva won't accomplish Bodhi until he can **fulfill these great vows after long and distant kalpas**? Not so. In fact, he has already become a Buddha and only manifests the small in order to help us.

For those of you who wish to accomplish Buddhahood as soon as possible, please do not be overly concerned with the Buddha's statement: '**Just as you finish vastly taking living beings across, you will instantly be certified to Bodhi.**' "Finish" here really means that when your mind becomes truly endless, like the number of living beings that you vow to rescue, you will instantly become a Buddha.

### CHAPTER 3: Contemplating the Karmic Conditions of Living Beings

The previous two chapters describe the host who can transform: Earth Store Bodhisattva 能化之主. This chapter describes those living being who will be transformed 所化之機.

The Chinese characters for living beings 衆生 mean “many born”. Living beings grasp at the five skandhas 眾陰 of form, feeling, thought, formation and consciousness, and thereby obtain bodies. They are born into various states as a result of past karma 隨境而生. Cause refers to a single instance. Karma, which can be of body, mouth or mind, refers to many causes that accumulate over a long time. Conditions are a kind of karma creating cause 造業的因緣.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time the Buddha's mother, the Lady Maya, placed her palms together respectfully and said to Earth Store Bodhisattva, "Holy One, the karmas created by the living beings of Jambudvīpa differ. What are their respective retributions?"**

**Earth Store replied, "In an immeasurable number of worlds and lands, whether with or without hells, with or**



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without women, the Buddhadharmas, Sound Hearers, Pratyekabuddhas, and so forth, the retributions of the hells differ.

*Sutra commentary:*

At that time the Buddha's mother, the Lady Maya, placed her palms together respectfully and said to Earth Store Bodhisattva, "Holy One, the karmas created by the living beings of Jambudvīpa differ. What are their respective retributions?"

**Lady Maya.** After speaking Dharma for forty-nine years at over three hundred Dharma Assemblies, the Buddha was about to enter Nirvana. He then realized that he needed to speak Dharma for his mother to cross her over. So he went to the Trayastriṃśa Heaven to cross her over. She is the mother of the thousand Buddhas who appear in the Worthy Aeon. Maya means Great Skill 大術 or great magic 大幻.

**Holy One:** There is nothing that he does not penetrate 無事不通.

Confucius told Lu Gong, "The so-called Holy One thoroughly knows the Great Way's limitless transformations in response to the living beings' emotions and nature." Here, Earth Store Bodhisattva employs inexhaustible inconceivable expedients in response to living beings' needs. That is why he is called the Holy One.

孔子對魯哀公云・所謂聖者・知通大道應變不

Explained by Master YongHua

窮・測物之情性者也・今地藏以不思議方便・  
應變無方・故稱聖者・閻浮衆生下・正申疑詞  
・一切衆生・隨自業轉・有上中下・差別不同・  
・占察經・地藏菩薩云・所觀三世果報善惡之  
相・有一百八十九種・須者自檢

**Earth Store replied, "In an immeasurable number of worlds and lands, whether with or without hells, women, or the Buddhadharma, with or without Sound Hearers who awakened from listening to the Buddha's sermons, with or without Pratyekabuddhas who became enlightened by contemplating the twelve conditioned links, and so forth, in all these worlds the retributions of the hells differ.**

The Western Bliss Pure Land has no hell and only men. Our Saha world has hells, men and women. The Medicine Master Buddha's land may have women but there is no deviant desire there.

智論云・菩薩觀欲・種種不淨・於諸衰中・女  
衰最重・・火刀・雷電・霹靂・怨家・毒蛇之屬  
・猶可暫近・・女人慳妒・瞋諂妖穢・鬪諍貪嫉  
・不可親近故也

Some worlds do not have the **Buddhadharma**. In those worlds, no one who speaks Dharma, there are no Buddha images, no sutras and no sangha. If there is a Buddha in the world, then living beings can obtain liberation from the Triple

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Realm. Living beings can know there are offenses and blessings. They can take refuge, receive the five precepts, eight vegetarian precepts, including the left-home five-fold assembly, and all sorts of good dharmas. Being born into a world without a Buddha is one of the eight difficulties. In a world without a Buddha, even the gods and humans cannot cultivate the good dharmas. Not all worlds have all Vehicles.

*Sutra text:*

**The Lady Maya again spoke to Earth Store Bodhisattva: "I wish to hear only of the evil paths that are the retributions for offenses in Jambudvipa."**

**Earth Store Bodhisattva replied, "Holy Mother, please listen and I will explain it in general terms."**

**The Buddha's mother answered, "I hope that you, Holy One, will do so."**

**Earth Store Bodhisattva said to the Holy Mother, "These are the names of the retributions for offenses in Southern Jambudvipa. Living beings who are not filial to their parents, even to the extent of harming or killing them, will fall into the uninterrupted hell where, for a thousand millions of kalpas, they will seek escape in vain. "**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The Lady Maya again spoke to Earth Store Bodhisattva: "I wish to hear only of the evil paths that are the retributions for offenses in Jambudvipa." Yes, she would like very**

## Explained by Master YongHua

much to hear more about the retributions.

**Earth Store Bodhisattva replied, "Holy Mother, please listen and I will explain it in general terms."**

**The Buddha's mother answered, "I hope that you, Holy One, will do so."** Please notice on how polite the Buddha's mother was toward the Bodhisattva. When you ask for instructions, it is imperative to be most reverent.

**Earth Store Bodhisattva said to the Holy Mother, "These are the names of the retributions for offenses in Southern Jambudvipa. Living beings who are not filial to their parents, even to the extent of harming or killing them, will fall into the uninterrupted hell where, for a thousand millions of kalpas, they will seek escape in vain."**

First the Bodhisattva brings up **filial** piety. Filial piety is of primary importance to living beings. It is the basis for humanity: "The Profound Kindness Sutra 恩重經 says: 'Father gave me a life, mother raised me; their kindness—as vast as heaven, as manifold as the hairs on the head—is difficult to repay 父兮生我, 母兮育我, 昊天罔極, 撮髮難報'.

To be filial is to comply with your parent's fundamental intent 順他的心, but not with superficial desires such as their liking to smoke dope. To comply is to be in accordance with another's wishes 不逆他的心:

*"The lamb kneels to drink its milk, 羊有跪乳之恩,*

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*The young crow returns to the nest* 鴉有反哺之義。”

The lamb kneels to show respect for its mother's gift. The crow is called the filial bird in China because the young returns to the nest to take care of their old parents which can no longer fly. If we humans are not filial, then we are not even equal to the birds and beasts.

In China there is a story about Guo Jù who buries his son 郭巨埋兒. Guo Jù was very poor. His wife gave birth to a son. His elderly mother dearly loved her grandson. Fearing that her grandson did not have enough to eat and could not grow up properly, she often gave him her own portion of food. Guo Jù felt bad that he could not provide well for his own mother but did not know what to do. Therefore he resorted to waiting until his sons went outside to play to then bring food to his mother. One day, his son slipped, fell into the water and drowned. His wife was extremely distraught and could not stop crying. He told her, "Please do not alarm mother. Mother is very old and doesn't have much time left. But we're still young and can have more children in the future. Why don't we go bury our son." His wife did not dare go against her husband's wishes. They took his body to the outskirts of the village to bury him. Husband and wife were digging a hole at about three feet deep and suddenly a thunderbolt struck and revived their son. At the same time, they discovered a chest of gold, the following was written on top: "This is a heavenly gift of gold for filial man Guo Jù. Let no official be allowed to appropriate it and no citizens be able to take it."

## Explained by Master YongHua

There are Five Virtues possessed by humans: humaneness 仁, propriety 義, etiquette 禮, knowledge 智, and trust 信. If we can practice the above five virtues then how can we not equal the best behaviors of the birds and beasts? Filial piety which can encompass all the above five virtues, is of utmost importance!

The ultimate form of practice is to leave the home-life:

*“One son enters the Buddha’s door 一子入佛門,  
Nine generations ascend to the Heavens 九族生天.”*

The Difficult to Repay Sutra 難報經 says that if one carries one’s mother on the left shoulder and one’s father on the right for one thousand years, it will still not enough to repay their kindness.

The Proper Dharma Recollection Sutra 正法念經 says that there are four kinds of kindnesses that are difficult to repay:

1. The kindness of your mother.
2. The kindness of your father.
3. The kindness of the Thus Come One.
4. The kindness of a teacher who speaks Dharma 說法師.

If one can make offerings to these four types of beings, one will obtain limitless blessings, will be praised by man this lifetime and will obtain enlightenment in the future. However, if one is not working to repay the kindness this lifetime, one has already lost one’s position as a child. How much the

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worse it would be to commit the five rebellious offenses 五逆.

The sutra says that unfiliality is the worst of offenses and will cause one to fall into the unintermittent hells to undergo suffering for thousands of tens of thousands of hundreds of millions of kalpas with no escape.

*Sutra text:*

**"Living beings who shed the Buddha's blood, who slander the Triple Jewel, and who do not respect and venerate sutras, will also fall into the uninterrupted hell, and for thousands of tens of thousands of millions of kalpas they will seek escape in vain."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Living beings who shed the Buddha's blood, who slander the Triple Jewel, and who do not respect and venerate sutras, will also fall into the uninterrupted hell, and for thousands of tens of thousands of millions of kalpas they will seek escape in vain. "**

To **shed the Buddha's blood** after he has entered Nirvana means to destroy his images (statues, drawings). This kind of offense is unrepentable 不通懺悔. The exceptions 開緣 would be when one is drunk or crazy.

Once when the Buddha was walking beneath Vulture Peak, Devadatta 提婆達多, his cousin 堂弟, used his spiritual

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powers to cause an avalanche 推山厭佛 (by shoving the mountain with his hand), hoping to crush the Buddha. A Dharma Protector 金剛力士 named Pí La 埤羅 who guarded the mountain used his Vajra pestle 金剛寶杵 to smash one of the large boulders that was about to hit the Buddha. One of the fragments struck the Buddha's little toe and cracked a bone. Instantaneously, the earth opened and a fiery chariot emerged to carry Devadatta off to the hells while still alive. If worldly people burn sutras and images, it is the same as this offense.

To **slander the Triple Jewel** is to speak evil of the Triple Jewel or to speak of its flaws or of the four-fold assembly's errors. This may cause blinding of the Dharma Selecting Eye in others. The retributions are:

1. Becoming deformed and crippled, without arms, hands, ears or legs.
2. Possibly becoming mute.
3. Having to undergo all poisons and suffering.
4. Experiencing pain and oppression that are very difficult to endure.

Ordinary people have no way of comprehending the state of sages. Furthermore, sages tend not to justify themselves. That is why sages are often misunderstood and vilified, as the following two stories make clear.

During the reign of emperor Wǔ of the Liáng Dynasty 梁武帝, there was a Dhyana Master called Zhì Gong 智公. He ate two pigeons 鴿子 every day. His cook got curious and



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stole a pigeon wing. Master Zhì Gong immediately called in the cook and scolded him for having stolen his food. The cook refuted the master's claim and asked him what proof he had. The Chan master said, "You still are lying through your teeth! You want proof? This is the proof that you stole one of the wings." He then spat out two pigeons, which came flying out of his mouth. One pigeon had one wing missing. The cook immediately confessed and repented.

At Líng Yīn 靈隱 (miraculous and hidden) Monastery at West Lake 西湖 in Háng Chou 杭州 lived Dhyana Master Jì Gong 濟公. He was famous for eating dog meat and drinking wine. He was always inebriated. That is when he was teaching and transforming living beings. Once, the temple had new Buddha images that needed to be gilded. The drunken monk offered to take charge. The abbot acquiesced. After waiting for some time, he found that the images were not yet gilded. He inquired and Master Jì Kong replied that it would be done that night. Night came but he merely kept on drinking. After everyone was asleep, he went to the images and spewed forth pure gold which covered the images. The abbot heard about it and ordered him to stop such unseemly conduct. The next morning, the abbot inspected the images and found that everything was gilded except for one which had a small unfinished spot on the crown of its head. Although a master goldsmith finished the work, his gold could not match the quality of the gold supplied by the Dhyana Master.

**Venerate sutras:** Sutras must be treated with respect. The Vajra Sutra states: "Wherever this sutra is, there is the Bud-

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dha 若是經典所在之處，則為有佛。” The sutras should be venerated because they are the source of all Buddhas. The sutras are their Dharma Body. They should be placed at a high level. They should not be placed in the places where we sleep because such places are unclean.

It is disrespectful to touch sutras with dirty hands, wrap them inside dirty clothes, put them on marital beds or dirty places, or handle them when one's mind is disrespectful.

*Sutra text:*

**"Living beings who usurp or damage the property of the 'Permanently Dwelling', who defile bhikshus or bhikshunis, who practice sexual acts within the Sangharama, or who kill and harm beings there, will fall into the uninterrupted hell where, for thousands of millions of kalpas, they will seek escape in vain."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Living beings who usurp or damage the property of the 'Permanently Dwelling', who defile bhikshus or bhikshunis, who practice sexual acts within the Sangharama, or who kill and harm beings there, will fall into the uninterrupted hell where, for thousands of millions of kalpas, they will seek escape in vain."**

To **usurp property of the permanently dwelling** is to steal, or use things without offering compensation. For example, when staying in the Sangharama, make sure to make an offering for it. Sangharama, or Way Place, refers to a monastery

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or temple where monastics live. This applies to the left-home people as well. Make sure to at least not deplete the resources of the Way Place. If you have no money then make sure to make up for it other things like work, etc...

**Permanently Dwelling** 常住 comes from Sanskrit 僧祇 and refers to things of the sangha of the four directions 四方僧物. There are four kinds of Permanently Dwelling:

1. The Permanently Dwelling 常住常住: fixed and immovable goods such as buildings, trees, land, animals 舍樹木田園僕畜 and things that cannot be divided 體局當處 • 不通餘界 • 但得受用 • 不通分賣 • 故重言常住.
2. The Permanently Dwelling of the Ten Directions 十方常住: items that may be shared by the Sangha at whatever place 僧家供僧常食 • 體通十方 • 唯局本處 • 此二名僧祇物.
3. The Current Permanently Dwelling 現前常住: private property of the current members of the sangha who reside at a particular Way Place. 現前現前: 得施之物 • 唯施此處現前僧 •
4. The Current Permanently Dwelling of the Ten Directions 十方現前常住: all Sangha members from the ten directions have a share. This represents the property left by deceased sangha members (the five-fold assembly) which may be divided among the

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sangha of the ten directions, whether they come now or later. Current Permanently Dwelling 現前現前常住, in contrast, indicates only those who are present at that time, but not those who arrive later. 亡五眾物・未羯磨・從十方僧得罪・已羯磨望現前僧得罪・

At any place where there is a Buddha image, sexual activities should not be engaged in. When a ghost who had genital cancer 男根瘡爛 once asked Mahamaudgalyayana 目連 about his condition, he replied that the reason for it was because he violated this regulation in the past when he was a man.

Also, avoid killing or harming living beings at Way Places.

In the Tang dynasty, there was a bhikshuni who passed away. At night her relative heard a voice that told her that when the nun was in the world, she committed many offenses in her room. She liked to eat meat, and therefore killed many living beings. She was very fond of eating fish and thus killed a lot of them. Now she was undergoing retribution in the knife and sword hell 受刀劍地獄. Seven knives painfully pierce her bones and marrow. She asked for help from the relative. They had the great Dharma Master of the temple write the seven rolls of the Vajra Sutra and perform repentance ceremonies in front of the Buddhas on her behalf. Each roll of the Sutra being written resulted in one less knife that pierced her body. At the end, the deceased found escape from the hells.

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*Sutra text:*

**"Living beings who pretend to be sramanas but whose hearts are not those of sramanas, who make destructive use of the goods of the permanently dwelling, who swindle and deceive the white-robed, and who turn their backs on the precepts, doing all manner of evil acts, will fall into the uninterrupted hells and for thousands of tens of thousands of millions of kalpas, seeking escape in vain."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Living beings who pretend to be sramanas but whose hearts are not those of sramanas, who make destructive use of the goods of the permanently dwelling,**

As was mentioned earlier, a **Sramana** is a Buddhist bhikshu or bhikshuni. There four kinds of **sramanas**:

1. Sramanas of the Way of Wisdom 聖道沙門 (Buddhas and Bodhisattvas).
2. Sramanas who Speak of the Way 說道沙門 (Dharma Masters or Arhats expounding the Dharma 正法).
3. Sramanas who live the Way 活道沙門 (by taking cultivation as a way of life 修諸善品).
4. Sramanas who defile the Way 污道沙門 (described in this passage 諸邪行者・偽者・詭詐也・外現修行之狀・內藏瑕穢之情・即污道也).

In Sanskrit, sramana means “diligent 勤” (vigorously culti-

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vating the three non-outflow studies) and “putting to rest 息” (the three poisons).

Confused living beings turn their back on enlightenment and unite with the dust.

**Living beings who pretend to be sramanas but whose hearts are not those of sramanas** do not energetically cultivate precepts, samadhi and wisdom. Instead, they **make destructive use of the goods of the permanently dwelling**. Be careful not even to waste a piece of thread that belongs to the Triple Jewel. There is a saying: “To use a blade of grass or a splinter of wood not given is to steal 一草一木不得不與而取.” Also, “a single needle or thread is an offering 一針一線皆為布施.” One cannot casually give away anything given as an offering to the temple lest one commit the stealing offense.

### **Who swindle and deceive the white-robed,**

The **white-robed** refers to lay people who used to wear white robes.

### **And who turn their backs on the precepts,**

Precepts are the foundation of the practice of the left-home people. They are the cause and conditions for arriving at Nirvana. The Great Shastra quotes the Buddha telling Sangha Protector 僧護 Bhikshu: “Holding precepts is most blissful. The body will not undergo suffering and afflictions. One’s

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sleep will be consistently peaceful. When one is awake, one's mind is happy. When one violates the precepts, the human and heavenly paths come to an end and hell's gate is wide open."

**Doing all manner of evil acts, living beings who pretend to be sramanas will fall into the uninterrupted hells and for thousands of tens of thousands of millions of kalpas, seeking escape in vain."**

Do evil and you'll have to suffer in the hells for a long long time, without any hope for escape.

*Sutra text:*

**"Living beings who steal the wealth and property of the permanently dwelling, such as their grain, food and drink, clothing, or anything that has not been given to them, will fall into the uninterrupted hells, where they will seek escape for thousands of tens of thousands of millions of years in vain."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Living beings who steal the wealth and property of the permanently dwelling...** There are some who pray on left-home people thinking that they have a lot of cash lying around.

**Stealing grain, food and drink, clothing, or anything that has not been given to them** refers to taking things without asking for permission. People who commit such offenses **will fall into the uninterrupted hells, where they will seek es-**

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**cape for thousands of tens of thousands of millions of years in vain."**

He says that living beings may have killed their parents many thousands of times and he can still save them. However, if they steal from the Permanently Dwelling, he has no way to save them.

The Contemplating the Buddha Samadhi Sutra 觀佛三昧經 says: "To steal the sangha's hair or possessions is worse than the offense of killing one's parents 84,000 times 盜僧鬘物者，過殺八萬四千父母罪。"

Flower Gathering 華聚 Bodhisattva says, "Those who commit the five rebellious offenses and the four unrepentable offenses, I can save. But I can't save those who steal from the sangha."

*Sutra text:*

**Earth Store Bodhisattva continued speaking to the Holy Mother: "If living beings commit such offenses, they will fall into the uninterrupted hells, and although they seek their suffering to stop temporarily, it will not do so, not even for the space of a thought."**

**The Lady Maya asked, "Why are they called uninterrupted hells?"**

**Earth Store replied, "Holy Mother, the hells are within**



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the Great Iron Ring Mountains. There are eighteen great hells and five hundred secondary ones, their names all different. In addition, there are another hundred thousand, with distinct names. The wall surrounding the uninterrupted hell is over eighty thousand Li in circumference, made entirely of iron. It is ten thousand Li in height, and topped by an unbroken mass of fire. Inside the walls of that hell are many interconnected hells, each with its own name. There is just one hell which is properly called uninterrupted. Its circumference is eighteen thousand Li, and its solid iron wall is a thousand Li high, surmounted by a fire that plunges toward the base and is met by a fire at the bottom that leaps upward. Iron snakes and dogs spewing fire gallop east and west atop that wall."

*Sutra commentary:*

**Earth Store Bodhisattva continued speaking to the Holy Mother: "If living beings commit such offenses as the five previous evil karmas, which belong to the ten superior grade evil deeds, they will fall into the uninterrupted hells, and although they seek their suffering to stop temporarily, it will not do so, not even for the space of a thought."**

**The Lady Maya asked, "Why are they called uninterrupted hells?"**

The Buddha admitted that he too fell to the hells for long kalpas without respite. He also became small insects and evil people. He gradually gathered good roots and obtained great wisdom. Now he became the Buddha with limitless spiritual powers. All living beings too can obtain the same. Just culti-

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vate vigorously, and seek to obtain liberation.

**Earth Store replied, "Holy Mother, the hells are within the Great Iron Ring Mountains. There are eighteen great hells and five hundred secondary ones, their names all different. In addition, there are another hundred thousand, with distinct names.**

This describes the Avici Hell. Its Sanskrit name means uninterrupted, so called because of the incessant suffering which does not stop **even for the space of a thought.**

At the end of life, after we lose our body but have not yet received our next body, living beings typically enter a state called the Intermediate Skandha Body and enter the hells to receive judgment. They are all gathered there while waiting for up to seven weeks to obtain their next body. They could die every seven days up to seven times. For each time they are revived, it's thanks to two kinds of "Clever Breezes", putrid or fragrant. Living beings destined to the hells are revived by the putrid wind (taking on ugly features). Those destined for the heavens are revived by the fragrant wind (obtaining nice features).

The hells are contiguous 相連.

The eighth is called uninterrupted 無間, consisting of eight hot hells. Each hell has its own secondary hells.

Only in the uninterrupted does suffering never cease. In all the other hells, the suffering is not constant 非恆.

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The twenty five planes of existence 有 consist of the Four Continents 洲, the Four Evil Paths 惡趣, the Six Desire Heavens 欲天, the Brahma Heaven 梵天, the Four Dhyanas, the Four Emptiness Stations 空處, the No-thought Heaven 無想天, and the Five-Anagamins-Heavens 那含天.

**The wall surrounding the uninterrupted hell is over eighty thousand Li in circumference, made entirely of iron.**

Its **circumference is eighteen thousand li** and was created as a response to the ten evils and eight deviancies.

**It is ten thousand Li in height, and topped by an unbroken mass of fire. Inside the walls of that hell are many interconnected hells, each with its own name. There is just one hell which is properly called uninterrupted. Its circumference is eighteen thousand Li, and its solid iron wall is a thousand Li high, surmounted by a fire that plunges toward the base and is met by a fire at the bottom that leaps upward.**

The **solid iron wall that is a thousand li high** represents extremely evil people, who are cold hearted, cold-blooded, and accumulate offenses a thousand xún 旬 high (a xún is around eight feet). Iron is also called black gold. Its nature is hard and feels cold.

**It is surmounted by a fire that plunges toward the base**

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**and is met by a fire at the bottom that leaps upward,** which symbolizes evil people's seeds arising and activating. These evil seeds mutually “smoke 熏” (similarly to the Western concept of smoking the barbaqueued meat to introduce more flavor) each other and are queued up without interruption.

**Iron snakes and dogs spewing fire gallop east and west atop that wall.** This symbolizes how evil people's hatred is like snakes, and their greed and desires are like dogs. When they were in the human realm, greed and hatred made them harm others, day and night continuously.

觀佛三昧海云・鐵城二隔間・有八萬四千鐵蟒  
大蛇・吐毒火中・身滿城內・其蛇哮吼・如天  
震雷・兩大鐵丸・四角有四大銅狗・廣長四十  
由旬・眼如至擊電・牙如劍樹・齒如刀山・舌  
如鐵刺・一切身毛・皆然猛火・其烟臭惡・既  
吐毒火・復爭馳相逐於獄墻之上・東西急走  
・使諸罪人・畏避無所

**The wall surrounding the uninterrupted hell** is very high. That is why all sunlight is blocked, but fires cast enough light to see. The **unbroken mass of fire** that covers the walls in all four directions is composed of the karmic fires which roast and sear living beings to death.

This is not a day at the beach. In contrast, there is utter suffering and untold misery.

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**Solid iron** represents the hardness and strength of the karmic offenses that send beings to the hells.

At the top of each corner in the hell are **dogs** 800 yojanas tall. Each dog has eight heads, each of which has six horns (thus making a total of 48 horns). As they swing their heads, these horns become wheels of fire and knives.

These **iron snakes and dogs** belch out noxious fire and a stench so putrid that it makes living beings vomit their own guts. There are 84,000 great iron snakes. They spit poisonous fumes and fire. They are everywhere.

The Contemplating the Buddha Samadhi Sutra 觀佛三昧 says that stupid living beings slander and curse giving, saying giving has no retribution. They exhort people to conceal and accumulate. Toward the king, great officials and all living beings, they claim that giving has no cause or effect. That is why they are born into this hell.

*Sutra text:*

**"In the midst of that hell is a bed that extends for ten thousand Li. When one person undergoes punishment, he sees his own body extended across and completely filling the bed, and yet each of the thousands of tens of thousands of people sees his own body completely filling the bed. Such are the retributions for various evil deeds.**

**"Moreover, the offenders undergo suffering to the utmost. A hundred thousand yakshas, as well as evil ghosts with sword-like teeth and eyes like lightning, drag and pull at**

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**them with brass-clawed hands. Moreover, there are yakshas who brandish great iron halberds, which they pass through the offenders' bodies, either through their mouths and noses or through their bellies and backs. They toss them into space, turn them over, or else they place them on the bed. There are also iron eagles that peck at the offenders' eyes, and iron serpents that encircle their necks. Long nails are driven into all their joints; their tongues are pulled out and plowed through; their guts are pulled out, sawed, and chopped apart. Molten brass is poured into their mouths and their bodies are bound in hot iron. Such are their karmic retributions throughout ten thousand deaths and as many births. They pass through millions of aeons, seeking for escape in vain."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"In the midst of that hell is a bed that extends for ten thousand Li, symbolizing how evil people's minds do not have a single bit of goodness. Ten thousand evils pervade their heart.**

**When one person undergoes punishment, he sees his own body extended across and completely filling the bed, and yet each of the thousands of tens of thousands of people sees his own body completely filling the bed. This symbolizes how, when evil people create offenses, they create the conditions for undergoing the corresponding retribution. They see their body fill up the hell and undergo their suffering. One person cannot take the place of another.**

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When reciting (sutras or mantras etc.), we use our qi, which both originates from, and should be recycled back to, our dan tián. The dan tián is our center of gravity, located just behind the navel. Do not over use the qi; rather just use enough so that you do not harm your qi. That is gongfu.

**Such are the retributions for various evil deeds.** Violating the rules is like a steel ball tossed into the air: it will not stop or become suspended in midair, but will quickly fall to the ground. In other words, we are bound to fall to dire straights.

十輪經云・(五逆)・復有四種大罪・同於四逆・犯根本罪・・殺辟支佛・是名殺生犯根本罪・阿羅漢比丘尼・是名邪淫犯根本罪・・若人捨財・與佛法僧・主掌此物・而輒用之・是名盜犯根本罪・若人倒見・破壞比丘僧・是名破僧犯根本罪・・其人既犯逆罪・又犯根本罪・譬如鐵丸・雖擲空中・終不暫住・速疾投地・・如是五逆・犯四重禁・及二種衆生・毀壞正法・誹謗賢聖・・如是等十一種人・犯一一罪者・身壞命終・皆墮無間獄中・豈非眾業所感・而獲報如是耶

**"Moreover, the offenders undergo suffering to the utmost.** The six organs only perceive evil dusts; there is no respite.

The Long Agama Sutra says that offenders open their eyes and only see evil forms. They only hear evil sounds, smell

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evil smells, taste evil flavors, their bodies only touch suffering and pain, and their minds think only of evil dharmas. Even for the span of a finger snap, there is no break in the suffering. That is why it is called the Unintermittent hell. This is the last place you want to visit even for the briefest moment!

**A hundred thousand yakshas, as well as evil ghosts with sword-like teeth and eyes like lightning, drag and pull at them with brass-clawed hands. Moreover, there are yakshas who brandish great iron halberds, which they pass through the offenders' bodies, either through their mouths and noses or through their bellies and backs. They toss them into space, turn them over, or else they place them on the bed.**

The five quick servants, also known as view delusions, arise as quickly as ghosts and therefore invoke the retribution of encountering the yakshas and evil ghosts. These quick servants pervade the three realms, have 88 servants and thus invoke the hell retribution of seeing **a hundred thousand** evil ghosts and yakshas.

**Yakshas** are speedy ghosts 捷疾鬼, fundamentally very evil, belonging to the earth traveling ghosts 地行夜叉. Their mouths are like caverns of blood, their teeth like blades. They have enormous strength: they can pick us up and toss us perhaps 100 yards. Or they could place you on a **bed** where they stick you with their halberds. They are also called beastly ghosts. They may have an ox head and human arms. Their feet have hoofs. They typically hold an iron trident.



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*Question:* Are the hell soldiers sentient or insentient?

*Answer:* Those who first arrive at the hells are sentient. Those who use all sorts of torture instruments on the prisoners are not sentient. The scriptures say 妙樂云 that, whether sentient or insentient, both are karmic retributions that make the mind change.

此楞嚴所謂觸報招引惡果。神識自見牛頭獄卒  
• 馬頭羅差剎。手執鎗稍。驅入無間也。銅爪  
拖拽。不足以苦罪人。

There are a lot of hell soldiers: They have eight heads and 64 horns, all of which are ablaze. The horns transform into knife wheels. Their mouths and teeth are gruesome. They have brass claws and are extraordinarily strong.

If your mind constantly harbors anger and poison, enjoys accumulating evil offenses, and you really love seeing others suffer, upon death you will become a hell soldier.

With their **sword-like teeth and eyes like lightning**, the yakshas **drag and pull at them with brass-clawed hands**, symbolizing the five quick servants comprising of deviant views that harm others, and allow the five organs to cooperate and create evil.

**There are yakshas who brandish great iron halberds, which they pass through the offenders' bodies.** This symbolizes how the five quick servants induce living beings to create body karma. **Either through their mouths and noses**

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refers to creating mouth karma. **Through their bellies and backs** symbolizes mind karma.

戟・兵器也・單枝為戈・雙枝為戟・格也・旁有枝格也・(兩邊橫刃長六寸・中刃長七寸半・橫刃接柄處・長四寸半・並廣寸半)今言大鐵戟・則長大燒赤・非世戟可比・

**Toss them into space, turn them over:** The five quick servants create evil causes in space and they must undergo the retribution. **or else they place them on the bed:** Sometimes the current retribution is not adequate, and they must later undergo the hell retribution.

準楞嚴・由於怨習交嫌發於千銜恨・二習相吞・故有投擲擒捉擊射拋撮諸事・循業發現也・

**There are also iron eagles that peck at the offenders' eyes, and iron serpents that encircle their necks. Long nails are driven into all their joints; their tongues are pulled out and plowed through; their guts are pulled out, sawed, and chopped apart. Molten brass is poured into their mouths and their bodies are bound in hot iron. Such are their karmic retributions throughout ten thousand deaths and as many births. They pass through millions of aeons, seeking for escape in vain."**

Next, the text describes the retribution received after death.

Due to the five dull servants, when we are faced with a state, we give rise to greed. That is why **iron eagles... peck at the**

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**offenders' eyes** as a result of their eyes being turned by states. Alternatively, when faced with states, they may give rise to hatred and destroy people's harmony, resulting in **iron serpents that encircle their necks**. Finally, when the five dull servants are faced with a state and give rise to stupidity, one faces the retribution of having **long nails are driven into all one's joints** 長阿含云・鐵釘地獄・獄卒撲之・偃熱鐵上・舒卷其身・以釘釘手足・・周邊身體・盡五百釘・苦毒號吟・猶不復死・ **Their tongues are pulled out and plowed through** for giving rise to arrogance, indulging in one's mind 縱意, for looking down on others, or for slandering the Dharma. Next, because doubt makes the mind and stomach harbor delusion, **their guts are pulled out, sawed, and chopped apart**. 抽腸剉斬・此是抽腸拔肺地獄・所謂長叉拄助・肝心確仇擣・裂膽抽腸・屠身會膾肉・剉之斬之・形如齏粉・此皆妄語所致・及餘惡業所感・

**Iron eagles 鐵鷹** could peck your eyes out or crack open your skull and eat your brains. 毒痛不可忍・泥犁經・鐵蛇・如前・觀佛三昧經云・此由愚癡衆生・毀辱布施・言施無報・勸人藏積・向國王大臣・一切衆生・說施無因・亦無果報・故生此獄・

There is a Tang dynasty record for a hellish experience. In the Cao province city, a military man was fond of hunting since his youth. He therefore killed very many living beings.

## Explained by Master YongHua

In the year 11 of the Tang dynasty, he died for one night and then came back to life to recount his experience. At his death, he saw two men who made him climb stairs leading to a mountain top. Suddenly, a big white eagle with an iron mouth and claws flew over, grabbed his left cheek and flew away. Then a black eagle grabbed his right shoulder and flew away. The men continued on toward the southern direction and arrived at a city that was at a high altitude and dangerously steep. They knocked on the northern door. It opened. The city was filled with raging fire. On the sides of the door, there were poisonous snakes over 10 feet long 丈. More precisely they were one zhang, which is 3.33 meters or 10.925 feet, with enormous heads as big as five measures. Each measure is like a wooden bucket. Their mouths spit fire towards people. The hunter was so terrified: he lowered his head and recited the Buddha's name. The doors immediately closed by themselves. He then met with officials who told him that he was not supposed to be dead yet. Unfortunately, once he entered city, there would be no escape. The only way out was that he returned and practiced merit and virtues. He agreed. He was immediately revived and still felt the pain from the eagles's claws. Afterwards, he left his wife and became a monk. He cultivated at home, concentrating on reading and reciting sutras.

如冥報記・唐曹州城・武人方山開・少好遊  
獵・所殺無數・貞觀十一年・死經一宿・穌云・  
初死之時・二人引上一山・登梯至頂・忽有  
一大白鷹・鐵為嘴爪・飛來・攫左頰而去・  
又  
一黑鷹・攫右肩而去・二人即引南行・至一城

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

• 非常嶮峻 • • 二人扣城 • 北門即開 • 城中總是猛火 • 門側有數箇毒蛇 • 皆長十餘丈 • 頭大如五斗塊 • 口中吐火射人 • 山開恐懼 • 唯叩頭念佛 • 門即自閉 • 乃見官人 • 欲遣受罪 • • 侍者諫曰 • 未合即死 • 但恐一入此城 • 不可得出 • • 未若且放 • 令修功德 • 官人放之 • 須兒即穌 • • 爪跡極深 • 終身不滅 • • 後捨妻子出家 • 以宅為佛院 • 恆以讀誦為業 • •

**Tongues are pulled out and plowed through** as retributions for various mouth karmas.

**Molten brass is poured into their mouths** 烱銅灌口:

This is a retribution from using one's mouth to harm others (the five dull servants are induced on the outside) **and their bodies are bound in hot iron** (on the inside), which is a result of having used the body to create evil offenses. 熱鐵纏身 • 即鐵鑿地獄 • 燒熱鐵鑿 • 表裏洞徹 • 纏裏裏其身 • • 內灌烱銅 • 外裹熱鐵 • 餘業未盡 • 猶不死耳:

In brief, the five quick servants and dull servants' cause afflictions and thus create offenses which in turn invoke the hell retributions.

A typical day entails **ten thousand deaths and as many births**. In the yang realm, if one has a thought of creating an

## Explained by Master YongHua

offense, one must then undergo one birth and one death in the hells. If one creates offenses thought after thought, one then will undergo numberless births and deaths in the hells. Offenders are tortured to death and are instantaneously reborn.

動與靜對・心體本靜・人自動之・起信云・不知真如法一故動・動則有苦・果不離因故・・此業相初動・漸至起惑・造業・受報・・字書云・力重為動・・凡夫業力甚深・故成地獄劫之壽・

*Sutra text:*

**"When this world decays, the offender is born in another world, and when that world is annihilated, he passes in turn through others. When those worlds too, fall and decay, he is sent back and forth, so after this world comes into being again, he returns here. Such is the phenomena of uninterrupted retribution for offenses.**

**"Moreover, this hell is given the name uninterrupted for five reasons. What are they? 1) Punishment is undergone day and night throughout kalpas, and there is no time of respite. Therefore it is called uninterrupted. 2) One person fills it, yet many people also fill it. Therefore it is called uninterrupted. 3) The implements of punishment are forks, clubs, eagles, serpents, wolves, and dogs, which pound, grind, saw, drill, chisel, cut, and chop; boiling liquids, iron nets, iron ropes, iron donkeys, and iron horses that flay one alive, bind the head in rawhide, and pour hot**

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iron over one's body; meals of iron pellets and drinks of iron fluids. Throughout many nayutas of kalpas such suffering continues without respite. Therefore it is called uninterrupted. 4) Whether a man, a woman, a barbarian, old or young, honorable or lowly, a dragon or a spirit, a god or ghost, everyone must undergo retribution for the offenses he has committed. Therefore it is called uninterrupted. 5) From the time of entry, one undergoes ten thousand deaths and as many births each day and night throughout a hundred thousand kalpas. He may seek relief for but the space of a thought, but even such a brief pause does not happen. Only when one's karma is exhausted can he attain rebirth. Because of this continuity, it is called uninterrupted."

*Sutra commentary:*

"When this world decays, the offender is born in another world, and when that world is annihilated, he passes in turn through others. When those worlds too, fall and decay, he is sent back and forth, so after this world comes into being again, he returns here. Such is the phenomena of uninterrupted retribution for offenses.

Each world goes through the cycles of becoming, dwelling, decay and emptiness 成, 住, 壞, 空. One kalpa is one increase and one decrease. An increase is the time it takes the average lifespan to increase from 10 years to 84,000 years, given that it goes up by one year every hundred years. A small kalpa is 1,000 kalpas. A middle kalpa is twenty small kalpas. Four middle kalpas make a great kalpa, which is the lifespan of a world. Even when a world is destroyed, the hell

## Explained by Master YongHua

inhabitants are simply temporarily moved to a different world.

The hells are underneath Jambudvīpa. Just before the kalpa fire destroys the First Dhyana Heaven, the hells are destroyed. Those prisoners, whose terms have not yet ended, will be transferred to another world to continue their suffering in the same kind of hell. Even if the next world then is subject to destruction, they keep on getting transferred to the hells of different worlds. When the original world is “restored”, they are then automatically transferred back to its hells.

The Unintermittent Hell 無間・八熱獄之最下者 is the eighth, and lowest, of the hot hells 一薩婆多部・有八大地獄・•一等活・•二黑繩・•三眾合・•四叫喚・•五大叫喚・•六熱・•七眾熱・•八名無擇・亦名無間・

The hot hells are piled up underneath the southern continent in succession. The first two hells have governors. The next three hells have little governing. The last three have no governors. No torture instrument imaginable is lacking 此八地獄・在閻浮洲下・重累而住・•前貳有主治・次三少主治・後三無主治。

**"Moreover, this hell is given the name uninterrupted for five reasons. What are they? 1) Punishment is undergone day and night throughout kalpas, and there is no time of respite. Therefore it is called uninterrupted. 2) One per-**



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son fills it, yet many people also fill it. Therefore it is called uninterrupted. 3) The implements of punishment are forks, clubs, eagles, serpents, wolves, and dogs, which pound, grind, saw, drill, chisel, cut, and chop; boiling liquids, iron nets, iron ropes, iron donkeys, and iron horses that flay one alive, bind the head in rawhide, and pour hot iron over one's body; meals of iron pellets and drinks of iron fluids. Throughout many nayutas of kalpas such suffering continues without respite. Therefore it is called uninterrupted. 4) Whether a man, a woman, a barbarian, old or young, honorable or lowly, a dragon or a spirit, a god or ghost, everyone must undergo retribution for the offenses he has committed. Therefore it is called uninterrupted. 5) From the time of entry, one undergoes ten thousand deaths and as many births each day and night throughout a hundred thousand kalpas. He may seek relief for but the space of a thought, but even such a brief pause does not happen. Only when one's karma is exhausted can he attain rebirth. Because of this continuity, it is called uninterrupted."

It is called **unintermittent** because there is neither happiness nor bliss 無喜樂間. Then do the other seven great hells have fun, joy, dancing, eating etc...? Although they have no such amusements, at times a cool breeze 涼風 blows and revives people, and at that moment of rebirth, there is a temporary respite of suffering 暫喜樂間苦受. Therefore they are not called unintermittent.

## Explained by Master YongHua

- 1) **Punishment is undergone day and night throughout kalpas, and there is no time of respite.** This refers to the aspect of time 時: One's karma affects the future.
  
- 2) **One person fills it, yet many people also fill it.** This refers to the aspect of form 形. The hell is not big, the body is not small: 各見身形無間斷處 when in the world, the evil created may not be widespread. However, the evil mind really pervades the Dharma Realm!
  
- 3) **Complete without interruption 具:** No evil is not done, that is why one undergoes all kinds of suffering in the hells.

It is complete with all sorts of torture instruments.

For example, there are locks, whips and sticks which are retributions for cheating. The eagles, serpents, wolves, dogs, iron donkeys and horses are retributions for touch offenses. The pounding, grinding, sawing, drilling and chiseling are for being cruel and angry.

楞嚴云・詐習交誘・發於相調・引起不住  
・故有杻械枷鎖・鞭杖槌棒諸事・・鷹蛇

狼犬・鐵驢鐵馬・此由觸報招引・・碓磨  
鋸鑿・此由枉習瞋習所感・

碓・即搗碓地獄・立世阿毘曇云・是時獄  
卒謂其伴言・我今共汝・一彈指頃・舂搗  
罪人・・即捉諸罪人・納熱鐵槽中・以熱  
鐵杵・搗最碎其身・・一彈指頃・當人中  
五百年壽・・

磨鋸・剉(砍)・斫・俱如後・・

罪業報經・信相菩薩・白佛言・今有受罪  
衆生・為諸獄卒剉斫斬身・從頭至足・乃  
至其頂・斬之已訖・巧風吹活・而復斬之  
・何罪所致・・佛言・以前世時・生不信  
三尊・不孝父母・屠兒魁膾・斬截衆生・  
故獲斯罪・

鑊湯・如後・

鐵網・獄中有七重鐵網・羅覆其上・・獄  
卒取熱鐵網・纏絡其身・燒熱焦爛鐵繩・  
・長阿含云・獄卒捉彼罪人・撲熱鐵上・  
以熱鐵繩・兵拼之使直・・以熱鐵斧・逐

繩道斫罪人作百千段。復以鐵繩。拼鋸鋸之。復懸熱鐵網。交橫無數。驅迫罪人。使行繩間。惡風暴起。吹諸鐵繩歷絡其身。燒皮徹肉。焦骨沸髓。

生革絡首。長阿含云。獄卒捉罪人。剝取其皮。纏罪人身。著火車上。輪碾熱地。周迴往反。身體碎爛。皮肉墮落。既以生革絡首。復以鐵汁澆身。使令疾馳。

飢吞鐵丸等。準起世經云。從五叉小地獄出。詣向饑餓地獄中。守獄者即問。汝等何欲。答言。我等饑餓。守獄者。即便取地獄衆生。撲著熾然熱鐵地上。令其仰臥。使以鐵鉗。開張其口。用熱鐵丸。擲著口中。唇口應時燒然。次第燒舌。燒齶。乃至經過小腸。向下而出。其丸尚赤。從饑餓地獄出。詣向焦渴地獄中。守獄者問言。汝等今何所須。答言。我今甚渴。即取撲著熱鐵地上。在猛焰中。仰而沃之。使取鐵鉗。開張其口。融赤銅汁。灌其口中。唇口即便燒腸。燒胃。直破小腸。向下而出。由往昔所造

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若人非人身中一切惡業。於獄中次第而受。  
• 毒痛度可忍。• 泥犁中如是勤苦。經那  
由他劫。略無絲毫樂間。名苦無間也。

- 4) **Retribution without interruption 果.** No matter who you are, whether old (70 years) or young (below 10 years), man or woman, ugly or pretty, human or god, honorable (high position or social status) or lowly, you must undergo your retribution.

Dragons, spirits, gods and ghosts 或龍或神。或天或鬼 all can fall directly to the hells.

- 5) **Lifespan without interruption 命.**

Sutra 觀佛三昧: one day and night in hell equals 60 small kalpas in Jambudvipa. The hell beings have to endure 84,000 great kalpas of suffering. Each day they must go through 10,000 deaths. There is never even a finger snap's worth of respite from the torture. Every day is like this until the retribution comes to an end.

除非業盡。方得受生。準鐵城泥犁經。從第一泥犁出。乃至展轉入第八泥犁。• 復從第八。反入第七。乃至第一阿鼻泥犁來

Explained by Master YongHua

• 遙見鐵城 • 皆歡喜 • 大呼萬歲 • • 閻羅  
即呼罪人前 • 若非怨 • 今汝去 • 當復為人  
作子 • 當孝順 • • 當事長年 • • 當畏帝王  
禁戒 • • 當承事沙門道人 • • 端心 • • 端口  
• • 端身 • • 得阿羅漢者 • 諸泥犁道 • 皆為  
閉塞 • • 於是從泥犁出 • 皆生善道 • 故言  
業盡受生 • 既初以至業盡 • 生死連綿故 •  
名命無間。

*Sutra text:*

**Earth Store Bodhisattva said to the Holy Mother, "This is a general description of the uninterrupted hell. If I were to speak extensively about all the names of the implements of punishment in the hells, and all the suffering there, I could not finish speaking in an entire kalpa."**

After hearing this, the Lady Maya placed her palms together sorrowfully, made obeisance, and withdrew.

*Sutra commentary:*

**Earth Store Bodhisattva said to the Holy Mother, "This is a general description of the uninterrupted hell. If I were to speak extensively about all the names of the implements of punishment in the hells, and all the suffering there, I could not finish speaking in an entire kalpa."**

There simply is not enough time to fully describe the extent of the suffering in the hells.

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**After hearing this, the Lady Maya placed her palms together sorrowfully, made obeisance, and withdrew.**

When she **placed her palms together** 合掌, it symbolizes that her mind was not scattered.

**Sorrowfully** 愁憂: Lady Maya was sad to hear how the hell prisoners must undergo limitless suffering and worries from which she is unable to rescue them.

She **made obeisance** 頂禮 and was very grateful to Earth Store Bodhisattva for speaking to her. Then she returned to her seat.

## CHAPTER 4: Karmic Retribution of Living Beings

Living beings create karma and then must undergo their retribution. Their suffering impels the Buddha and Bodhisattvas to appear in the world to the rescue them. The Lotus Sutra states that the Buddha looks at living beings in the triple realm as his children. They are undergoing so much suffering in the Saha world. Only he can rescue them. In other words, Buddhas appear in the world out of compassion, in order to eliminate suffering in living beings. A sutra says: “The Pure Dharma Realm Body fundamentally has no coming or going. Out of the vow power of great compassion, the Buddha manifests receiving a body 淨法界身, 本無出入, 大悲願力, 示現受身”. Living beings in Jambudvīpa are especially obstinate 剛強 and thus must undergo a lot of suffering.

長阿含云。所以名閻浮者。下有金山。高三十由旬。由閻浮樹故。名閻浮金。樹有五大栴。 (木四方為椽。八椽三椽為栴)。四面四栴。上有一栴。果大如摩伽陀國一斛之甕。摘其果時。汁隨流出。色如乳味甘如蜜。其東栴果。乾闥婆所食。其南栴者。七國人所食。一拘樓。 (此云不正叫) 二拘羅婆。 (云叫喚) 三毘提。 (云不正體) 四善毘提。 (云賢) 五漫陀。 (云善賢) 六婆羅。 (云牢) 七婆力梨。 (云勝) 西栴果



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• 海蟲所食 • • 北瓜果禽獸所食 • • 上瓜果 • 星宿天所食 •

觀佛三昧云 • 閻浮提果 • 無以為譬 • • 其形團圓滿半由旬 • • 婆羅門食 • 即得先道 • 五通具足 • 壽命一劫 • • 凡夫食之 • 得四沙門果 • 三明六通 • 無不悉備 •

立世阿毘曇云 • 此樹 • 生在閻浮提地北邊 • 在泥民陀羅河南岸 • • 是樹株本 • 正洲中央 • • 從樹株中央 • 取東西角 • 並一千由旬 • 生長具足 • 形容可愛 • 枝葉相覆 • 久住不彫 • • 次第相覆 • 高百由旬 • • 下本洪直 • 都無瘤節 • 五百由旬 • • 圍十五由旬 • • 枝橫出五十由旬 • • 間但亘度 • 一百由旬 • • 周圍 • 三百由旬 • • 其果 • 甘美無比 • 其核 • 如世間閻浮子大 • • 上有鳥獸之形 • • 根悉金沙所覆 • • 春雨不漏 • 夏則不熱 • • 冬無風寒 • • 乾闥婆 • 及藥叉神 • 依樹而住 • • 然穢樹之名 • 前已略釋 • 今更解之 •

立世云 • 一人乘通 • • 欲行至閻浮提樹 • 辭埽北行 • 經過七山 • 至第七金邊山 • 登山頂向北 • • 從身遠望 • 唯見黑暗 • 怖畏而返 • • 佛言 • 此黑暗色 • 即閻浮提樹 • • (此取黑暗為穢) 又其果

Explained by Master YongHua

香氣・能染人心・發顛狂・・(此取染污為穢)長  
阿含云・何緣月有黑影・以閻浮提樹影・在於  
月中・故月有影・豈非月宮・本自光明・・因樹  
・故現黑影・・穢樹之名・得非取此義乎・

準今兩處所釋・則庶乎其不差矣・・故載詳出  
・請證諸賢・

This chapter relates how the Bodhisattva rescued her mother and then broadened her resolve and made her great vows.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time Earth Store Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, because I have received the awesome spiritual power of the Buddha, the Thus Come One, I divide my body and rescue living beings from their karmic retributions everywhere, throughout hundreds of thousands of millions of worlds. If it were not for the great compassionate strength of the Thus Come One, I would be unable to perform such changes and transformations. Now, I receive the World-Honored One's entrustment; until the coming of Ajita, I will cause all living beings in the Six Paths to attain liberation. Yes, it shall be so, World-Honored One, do not be concerned."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time Earth Store Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, because I have received the awe-**

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**some spiritual power of the Buddha, the Thus Come One, I divide my body and rescue living beings from their karmic retributions everywhere, throughout hundreds of thousands of millions of worlds.**

Although **Earth Store Bodhisattva** has tremendous spiritual powers, he still knows that his accomplishments could not have happened without the Buddha's assistance.

**Awesome spiritual power:** “awesome 威” refers to having the four fearlessness, “spiritual 神” refers to the six spiritual penetrations, and “power 力” refers to the ten powers . The Buddha is replete with the Ten Powers from within, and therefore has no fear of external conditions 外緣. He widely gives rise to spiritual powers 廣起神通 to transform and cross over living beings. This is what Bodhisattvas have not yet accomplished. That the Bodhisattva can have division bodies 分身 throughout the Dharma Realm, is really thanks to the Buddha's compassionate assistance.

Having division bodies 分身 that rescue and cross over living beings is the execution of the “same work 同事” Dharma of the four Dharmas of attraction.

**If it were not for the great compassionate strength of the Thus Come One, I would be unable to perform such changes and transformations.**

All Bodhisattvas who practice the ascetic practices 苦行事

## Explained by Master YongHua

find them very difficult to do 辦 and to accomplish 成. Therefore, they tend to become dejected. However, if this occurs, Buddhas will then comfort them 安慰, saying: “Do not get dejected 疲厭, proceed with vigor, and practice these Ten Powers; then you will obtain limitless retributions 果報.” That is why it is said that without his compassionate help, the Bodhisattvas could not possibly perform such transformations 變化. Just like the verse says: “不經一番寒澈骨 焉得梅花撲鼻香 If the plum tree did not undergo the freezing cold winter, how could the blossoms be so fragrant!”

**Change 變** between one another, to swap.

**Transformation: 化** What did not formerly exist now does. Bodhisattvas can manifest eight kinds of transformations. Namely, they can:

1. Manifest the small 能作小.
2. Manifest the big 能作大.
3. Make it light 能作輕.
4. Manifest self-mastery 能作自在.
5. Be in control 能有主.
6. Go far 能遠到.
7. Shake the earth 能動地.
8. Manifest as willed 隨意所作.

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These are also called the eight self-masteries 八自在我。

由菩薩善住和敬之法。與一切猶如水乳。欲生物希有之心。故現大神通力。

如化人所化事。本無有實。故大品云。一切法皆是化。於是法中。有聲聞。辟支。菩薩。豬佛法變化。有煩惱法變化。有業因緣法變化。若不生不滅無誑相涅槃。是法非變化。以一切平等故。今言作變化者。依生滅隨情說耳。

**Now, I receive the World-Honored One's entrustment; until the coming of Ajita, I will cause all living beings in the Six Paths to attain liberation. Yes, it shall be so, World-Honored One, do not be concerned."**

**Ajita** means “Invincible 無能勝”, because he possesses superior wisdom. It also means “The Kind One 慈氏”. This is another name for Maitreya Bodhisattva. He cultivates the kind heart samadhi 慈心三昧。

唯。應速之辭。今佛不喚。何須速應。乃西域口辭也。

*Sutra text:*

Explained by Master YongHua

**The Buddha then told Earth Store Bodhisattva, “Living beings who have not yet obtained liberation have unfixed natures and consciousnesses. Their evil habits will reap karma, while their good habits will reap a corresponding fruit. Their good or evil acts arise in accordance with their states, and they turn in the Five Paths without a moment's rest.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The Buddha then told Earth Store Bodhisattva, “Living beings who have not yet obtained liberation have unfixed natures and consciousnesses.**

Those who have **not yet obtained liberation** 未解脫 are those who have not yet attained Arhatship (Small Vehicle liberation) or Nirvana without residue 人無餘涅槃 (Mahayana liberation).

To **have unfixed natures and consciousnesses** 性識無定 is to lack determined resolve. They tend to be hesitant. Though they may decide to cultivate, they then quickly change their minds. They fail to be constant whether in regressing or progressing. They go back and forth ceaselessly.

**Their evil habits will reap karma, while their good habits will reap a corresponding fruit. Their good or evil acts arise in accordance with their states, and they turn in the Five Paths without a moment's rest.**

**Their good or evil acts arise in accordance with their**

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**states.** They follow along doing good with good friends and companions or evil with evil friends and companions. This is why, earlier, it was said that they have an unfixed nature.

This is the meaning of the proverb: “Draw near rouge and

turn red 近珠者赤; draw near ink and turn black 近墨者

黑.” We should choose our friends and companions carefully.

If they do not realize that everything is false, they will therefore attach to the five desires, follow evil habits and get confused by afflictions. That is why they create karma and ceaselessly revolve in the Wheel.

Everything arises from the mind, which creates good or bad.

The Secret Adornment Sutra 密嚴經 says that, since beginningless time, the eighth consciousnesses of living beings have been bound by the seeds created by their evil offenses.

These seeds are conditioned 熏 by sophistry and bad habits.

阿賴耶識 • 從無始世來 • 為戲論熏習諸業所繫

• As a result, living beings revolve in the Wheel. It is like in the ocean: the cause winds give rise to the consciousness

wave. We constantly are born and die, failing to realize that the mind creates these states. 輪迴不已 • 如海因風 • 起

諸識浪 • 恆生恆滅 • 不斷不常 • • 而諸衆生 • 不

自覺知 • 隨於自識 • 現眾境界 • • 蓋由真如不

守自性 • 隨染淨緣 • 不合而合 • 故輪轉五道也。

To undo this cycle, we have to start with the mind. We should guard the self-nature and not follow defiled conditions.

National Master Loyal says that when one is confused, one

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creates the mind by tying up the nature. Upon enlightenment, one realizes the nature by releasing the mind. 忠國師云 • 迷時結性成心 • 悟時釋心成性 •

*Sutra text:*

**They pass through kalpas as numerous as motes of dust, confused, deluded, obstructed, and afflicted by difficulties, like fish swimming through nets that have been put in a stream. They may slip free of them and temporarily escape, but then, they again are caught in the nets. It is for beings such as these that I would be concerned; but since you have made extensive vows and sworn to cross over such offenders throughout many kalpas, I have no further cause for worry."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**They pass through kalpas as numerous as motes of dust, confused, deluded, obstructed, and afflicted by difficulties, like fish swimming through nets that have been put in a stream. They may slip free of them and temporarily escape, but then, they again are caught in the nets.**

**Confused and deluded 迷惑** refers to the ten servants 使: the five quick servants 利, or view delusions, and the five dull 鈍 servants, or thought delusions.

The fish analogy addresses how living beings often enter the sea of birth and death. Without the wisdom eye, they reincar-



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nate more often in the three evil paths than the better paths (human and gods). If it weren't for the Bodhisattva's efforts in countless kalpas, the Buddha would have real cause for worry.

**Fish** symbolizes the five paths, **net** represents the three realms, and **stream** 長流 symbolizes our retributions.

Stream has the connotation of having long term effects: once one offense matures, it can give further rise to one hundred, one thousand or ten thousand offenses, making us undergo retributions interminably. We may **slip free** and find ourselves temporarily reborn in the heavens or the human realm. Finally, **caught** represents revolving in the wheel (falling into the three evil paths). Fish and water species are analogies for living beings' nature and consciousness being unfixed. Fish species are greedy for food and thus encounter nets. Living beings, because of love, encounter the demons' traps 魔網.

**It is for beings such as these that I would be concerned; but since you have made extensive vows and sworn to cross over such offenders throughout many kalpas, I have no further cause for worry."**

The Buddha has many layers of worries that correspond to the many difficulties that living beings face: In particular, it is very difficult to obtain a human body; it is difficult to be replete with the six roots; amongst the mouth eloquences 口辯, talent and intelligence 才聰 are difficult to attain; long life is difficult to obtain; wise people 明人 are difficult to encounter; a straight-forward faith 直信 is difficult to have; the

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great mind (resolve for Bodhi) 大心 is difficult to bring forth 發; sutras and Dharmas are difficult to hear; and Thus Come Ones are difficult to meet.

It is like there is a tree that does not flower. When the Buddha appears in the world, that is analogous to the tree flowering.

Such blessings are all from past lives' cultivating blessings and virtues, such as:

- To follow wisdom and enter wisdom 從明入明;
- Seeking the Thus Come One's trace 跡;
- To have long practices without stopping 累行不止;
- To gather at Way places 會於道場;
- Not to destroy others' roots 無毀其根;
- Not to lose prior merit 不亡失前功.

Once we lose the mind for the Way 道意, it will be many kalpas before we regain it 動有劫數. That is why the Thus Come One is worried.

**Offenders 罪輩** are those who like to create offenses.

*Question:* Why are those in the two good paths of gods and humans still called offenders?

*Answer:* Gods still have their own suffering; they still create offenses. As for humans, if they do not cultivate, then they

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will be constantly confused about the Way and Dharma 恆迷道法; or even if they choose to cultivate goodness, they often fail to destroy the deviant retributions 不除邪報.

For example, lay people give rise to fighting from grasping at the five dusts 取五塵, whereas left-home people give rise to fighting due to grasping at views.

*Sutra text:*

**When this was said, a Bodhisattva, Mahasattva named Samadhi Self-Mastery King arose from the midst of the assembly and said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, what vows has Earth Store Bodhisattva made during these many kalpas that he now receives the World-Honored One's special praise? Please, World-Honored One, briefly speak about this."**

**The World-Honored One said to Samadhi Self-Mastery King, "Listen attentively, consider this well. I shall now explain this matter for you."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**When this was said, a Bodhisattva, Mahasattva named Samadhi Self-Mastery King arose from his seat in the midst of the assembly and said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, what vows has Earth Store Bodhisattva made during these many kalpas that he now receives the World-Honored One's special praise? Please, World-Honored One, briefly speak about this."**

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A **Mahasattva** is a Great Bodhisattva. **Samadhi Self-Mastery King** 定自在王 Mahasattva attained a self-contained existence through samadhi. He is free from worldly love, obtained Chan from leaving desire and accomplished limitless merit and virtues. In the four compartments he's never apart from samadhi.

**The World-Honored One said to Samadhi Self-Mastery King, "Listen attentively, consider this well. I shall now explain this matter for you."**

From listening to the Dharma, one must be very attentive and can accomplish the wisdom of listening of the Dharma 聞法智慧. Then from listening one then contemplates the principles 思惟其義 and thus accomplishes contemplative wisdom. Then in thought after thought without forgetting, one continues to contemplate and eventually one will enlighten to its principles, thus accomplishing the cultivation wisdom 修慧. True listening to the Dharma must be replete with the three wisdoms. That is why the Buddha said: **"Listen attentively, consider this well."**

*Sutra text:*

**"Once, limitless asamkhyeyas of nayutas of unspeakable of kalpas ago, there was a Buddha named All-Knowledge-Accomplished Thus Come One, the One Worthy of Offerings, the One of Proper and Pervasive Knowledge, the One Perfect in Clarity and Conduct, Well Gone One, Unsurpassed Knight Who Understands the World, Regulat-**

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ing and Subduing Hero, Teacher of Gods and Humans, the Buddha, the World-Honored One. That Buddha's lifespan was sixty thousand kalpas.

*Sutra commentary:*

"Once, limitless asamkhyeyas of nayutas of unspeakable of kalpas ago, there was a Buddha named All-Knowledge-Accomplished Thus Come One, the One Worthy of Offerings, the One of Proper and Pervasive Knowledge, the One Perfect in Clarity and Conduct, Well Gone One, Unsurpassed Knight Who Understands the World, Regulating and Subduing Hero, Teacher of Gods and Humans, the Buddha, the World-Honored One. That Buddha's lifespan was sixty thousand kalpas.

The Buddha's Heavenly Eye can contemplate far into the distant past and can see very clearly.

**All-Knowledge-Accomplished Thus Come One** 一切智成就如來: He accomplished all sorts of wisdom.

**Asamkhyeyas**, **nayutas** and **unpseakable** all refer to unknowably large numbers.

There are three kinds of Wisdom:

1. All Wisdom 一切智 penetrates all inner and outer Primary Dharma Marks 了知內外一切法總相. Primary marks are simply emptiness marks. This is the wisdom of the Two Vehicles.

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2. Wisdom of the Way 道種智 penetrates all Dharma Separate Marks 了知內外一諸切法別相. Separate Marks are all sorts of different dharmas of the Way 種種差別之道法. This is the Bodhisattva's wisdom.
3. Wisdom of All Modes encompasses the first two 一切種智. This is the Buddha's wisdom.

According to the Tian Tai school, these three wisdoms arise from the successful three contemplations (Emptiness 空, Mundane 假 and Middle 中).

The sutra text describes the ten titles of the Buddha.

**Thus Come One:** “Thus” has neither place nor direction. “Come” is a response and manifestation. 來無所從, 如無所去: The Buddha is thus neither coming from anywhere nor going anywhere. “Thus” is the principle of initial enlightenment 始覺之智 and “Come” is the wisdom of inherent enlightenment 本覺之理. The Buddha appears in reliance on the principle of inherent enlightenment and according with the wisdom of the initial enlightenment 以本覺的理, 契始覺的智.

**The One Worthy of Offerings 應供:** “worthy”, “deserving”. Like all other titles of the Buddha, this one has its own particular meaning: “Capable of Being a Field of Blessings

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勘為福田號”。 There are two kinds of fields of merit: 1) The field of merit of self-benefit: to investigate the principles and obtain understanding; and 2) the field of merit of benefiting others: to teach others so that they too can obtain great benefit. The Buddha can be living beings’ field of blessings. Those who make offerings to him obtain limitless merit and virtues. He is worthy to receive offerings from gods and humans.

### The One of Proper and Pervasive Knowledge 正遍知:

“Proper” distinguishes Buddhist Dharma from the externalists, who fail to understand that all dharmas are unmoving and do not deteriorate 諸法不動不壞; “pervasive” distinguishes the Mahayana Dharma from that of the Two Vehicles, who attain to the one-sided emptiness 偏空 but fail to see the equality of emptiness and existence. Buddhas do not create one dharma or two dharmas; they well know that all dharmas are neither excessive nor limited 不為一法二法

- 以悉知一切法無餘不盡. There is nothing that is not known 無所不知. “Knowledge” distinguishes the Buddha’s realization from the understanding of ordinary folks. The particular meaning of this title is “Universal Knowledge of The Dharma Realm 遍知法界號”. The Shurangama Sutra says: “The straightness of the pine tree, the twining of the bramble, the whiteness of the egret and the blackness of the crows are fully understood in their original existence 松直棘曲，鶻白鳥玄，皆了元由.” The Buddha knows the reasons for all phenomena, just as he knows every drop of

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rain that falls, even those outside of the Three Thousand Great Thousand Worlds.

**The One Perfect in Clarity and Conduct 明行足:** “Clarity” means understanding 明白; “conduct” means cultivation. Clarity is wisdom, conduct is blessings. This refers to the double perfection of virtues and blessings. There are three kinds of clarity: 1) of the Heavenly Eye 天眼明, 2) of Past Lives 宿命明, and 3) of the Exhaustion of Outflows 漏盡明. This title means the “Display of Causal Virtues in the Results 果顯因德號” because it is on the causal ground of results that the virtuous conduct is made manifest.

**Well Gone One 善逝:** The meaning of this title is “Wonderfully Gone to Bodhi 妙往菩提號”. It denotes the Buddha’s ability to go to all Buddhalands of the Ten Directions and use expedients to teach living beings. Also, once certified to Bodhi one never gives rise to afflictions again, just as, when ore becomes gold, it never returns to the state of ore again. Another way to look at it is that the Buddha goes to the same place as previous Buddhas also did, the best place that one can possibly ascend to, and he will never again be in a lower state 如先佛所去處 • 佛亦如是去 • 第一上升永不復還.

**Who Understands the World 世間解:** This means to understand the false and penetrate the true 達偽通真, to know



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and understand all worldly dharmas. It is just like the Sixth Patriarch says: “The Buddhadharma is in the world, enlightenment is not apart from the world. To leave the world and seek enlightenment is like searching for a rabbit with horns 佛法在世間，不離世間覺，離世覓菩提，恰如求兔角。” Another aspect of “understand” is to know. The Buddha truly knows the realm of all living beings. Because he thoroughly understands, he is free from all afflictions and is totally pure. That is why he truly understands the world.

**Unsurpassed Knight 無上士:** To harbor the slightest bit of delusion (there are view delusions, thought delusions, and delusions like sand) means that one can be surpassed. The Buddha has removed all ignorance. He knows that the self and states are empty and false. This title has the meaning “Penetrating through the Counterfeit and Reaching the True 通偽達真號”. From another perspective, Nirvana is unsurpassed amongst all the dharmas, and the Buddha is unsurpassed amongst all living beings. Because there is nothing to be severed, he is called Unsurpassed Knight.

**Regulating and Subduing Hero 調御丈夫:** He regulates all living beings in the Six Paths and guides them towards Buddhahood. This title has the meaning “Collecting and Teaching Beings in Accordance with the Way 攝化從道號”. He can tame living beings’ minds which are like wild horses.

This is a rather important concept. The Buddha can skillfully regulate and subdue all living beings and exhort them to

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guard their roots (which are like open doors). The Long Agama Sutra says that we should skillfully ride the six entrances by protecting, maintaining, subduing and regulating them so that they are like the level ground where one can ride a four horse chariot. While at it, use the whip and bridle to control them so that they stay on course.

佛能調伏衆生善護根門。長阿含云。善御六觸。護持調伏。猶如平地。駕四馬車。善調御者。執鞭執控。使不失轍。若云調女人。則不尊重。故名調御丈夫

**Teacher of Gods and Humans 天人師:** The Buddha acts as a model for gods and men. This title has the meaning “Speaking Dharma in Accord with Living Beings’ Roots 應機說法號”. Humans’ roots are keener and they can more easily enter the Way. The Buddha speaks Dharma and limitless gods and humans enlighten to the Way.

Though he mainly crosses over gods and humans, he does cross over some living beings from the other paths.

**The Buddha:** The meaning of this title is “Fully Bright in the Three Enlightenments of self, others and perfection of both enlightenment and conduct 三覺圓明號.”

The Buddha accomplished All Wisdom and knows the number of sentient beings as well as insentient beings, permanent and impermanent dharmas etc... 一切智慧成就。知衆

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生非衆生數常無常等法・

**The World-Honored One:** This title is used because he is honored in and beyond this world. Its special meaning is “The Only Revered One of the Triple World (the Three Realms) 三界獨尊號”. When Shakyamuni was born, he pointed one hand at heaven and one at earth, took seven steps and said, “In the heavens above and here below, I alone am honored 天上天下, 維我獨尊.” There six additional meanings to this honorific title:

1. Self-mastery 自在.
2. Blazing 熾勝.
3. Upright and Adorned 端嚴.
4. Universally Renowned 普聞.
5. Auspicious 吉祥.
6. Venerable and Honorable 尊貴.

*Sutra text:*

Before leaving home he had been the king of a small country and had been friendly with the king of a neighboring country with whom he practiced the Ten Good Deeds and benefited living beings. Because the citizens of these countries did many evil acts, the kings agreed to devise large-scale expedient devices for them. One vowed, ‘I will accomplish the Buddha Way quickly and then cross over all the others without exception.’

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**"The other king vowed, 'If I do not first cross over all those who suffer for their offenses, and cause them to attain peace and Bodhi, I shall not accomplish Buddhahood.'**

**The Buddha told the Bodhisattva Samadhi Self-Mastery King, "The King who vowed to become a Buddha quickly is All-Knowledge-Accomplished Thus Come One. The king who vowed not to become a Buddha until he had seen all others safely across is Earth Store Bodhisattva."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**Before leaving home he had been the king of a small country and had been friendly with the king of a neighboring country with whom he practiced the Ten Good Deeds and benefited living beings. Because the citizens of these countries did many evil acts, the kings agreed to devise large-scale expedient devices for them.**

He was a king before he left the home-life.

**Friendly 友** can have the following aspects:

- Same resolve 合志.
- Mutual assistance.
- Providing power or strength.

**The Ten Good Deeds 十善** are the basis for birth into the heavens. Those who have faith get to plant blessings. They will have no worries in future lives.

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The Manifestation Buddha Auspicious and Evil Sutra 事佛吉兇經 says that the ten evils and enmity 十惡怨家, the ten good deeds and loyal friends 十善厚友, being at peace and obtaining the Way 安神得道, all arise from goodness 皆從善生. Those who can preserve the faith are naturally blessed 有能守信・福報自然. Just follow the good to arrive at the good 從善至善. This is not a gift from spirits 非神授與. If you have faith then you can plant good seeds 信者得植. In future lives, you'll have no worries 後生無憂.

**Evil acts** refer to the 10 evil deeds.

**One vowed, 'I will accomplish the Buddha Way quickly and then cross over all the others without exception.'**

The Great Shastra states that **crossing over** has two approaches:

- 1) First cross over oneself, then cross over living beings.
- 2) First cross over living beings, then cross over oneself.

One king vowed to become a Buddha so that he could have the wisdom and power to cross over living beings.

**"The other king vowed, 'If I do not first cross over all those who suffer for their offenses, and cause them to attain peace and Bodhi, I shall not accomplish Buddhahood.'**

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**The Buddha told the Bodhisattva Samadhi Self-Mastery King, "The King who vowed to become a Buddha quickly is All-Knowledge-Accomplished Thus Come One. The king who vowed not to become a Buddha until he had seen all others safely across is Earth Store Bodhisattva."**

**Leaving home:** The Worthy and Stupid Sutra 賢愚經 describes the merit and virtues of leaving the home-life as bigger than Mount Sumeru, deeper than the great ocean, and as wide as empty space. From the good roots of leaving home, one will ultimately accomplish the Way.

There are four kinds of leaving the home-life:

- 1) Body and mind.
- 2) Body but not mind.
- 3) Mind but not body.
- 4) Neither body nor mind.

Two are good, two are not.

Or there are three kinds:

- 1) Leaving the worldly lay home 出世俗家, which means leaving the family and ordinary feelings.
- 2) Leaving the triple realm 出三世俗家, which refers to escaping birth and death, and certify to Arhatship.
- 3) Leaving ignorance 出無明家, which means certifying to the Dharma Body and accomplishing the Way.

**Vow** power comes from the mind. Of all powers, the mind power is the greatest.

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*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, limitless asamkhyeya kalpas ago a Buddha named Pure-Lotus-Eyes Thus Come One appeared in the world. His lifespan was forty kalpas. During his Dharma-Image Period, an Arhat who had great merit and who crossed over living beings, teaching them as he encountered them, met a woman named Bright Eyes who made an offering of food to him.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, limitless asamkhyeya kalpas ago a Buddha named Pure-Lotus-Eyes Thus Come One appeared in the world. His lifespan was forty kalpas.**

**Appeared in the world.** According to the Cause and Effect Sutra 因果經, before appearing in the world at the Equal Enlightenment position in Tushita heaven, the Buddhas in waiting did five contemplations. He contemplated in order to see:

- 1) Whether living beings are ripe yet.
- 2) Whether or not it is the right time.
- 3) In which country to be born.
- 4) In which caste to be born.
- 5) His past causes and conditions, which will enable him to determine who will be his parents.

Indian lotuses are blue, similar to the Buddha's eyes. Therefore this Buddha is named **Pure-Lotus-Eyes Thus Come One**. Among the 32 hallmarks, his face is like the full moon and his eyes are like lotus flowers. Because he severed all

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evils and perfected all sorts of goodness, he obtained naturally wonderful eyes which are like Pure Lotus flowers.

**During his Dharma-Image Period, an Arhat who had great merit and who crossed over living beings, teaching them as he encountered them, met a woman named Bright Eyes who made an offering of food to him.**

In the ancient times, once one has accomplished the Way, one then descends from the mountain to transform the world 遊化人間, 廣度有緣人.

**Arhat** is a Sanskrit term that has three meanings:

1. Non-birth 無生: They no longer have to undergo births in the triple realm.
2. Killer of thieves 殺賊: The 98 servants of view and thought affliction thieves are destroyed 九十八使見思煩惱賊滅.
3. Non-outflow 無漏. They put an end to all their afflictions and can help living beings obtain blessings that have no outflows 自福不漏.

Making an **offering of food** has five merits and virtues:

1. Giving of life 施命.
2. Giving of form 施色.
3. Giving of strength 施力.
4. Giving of security 施安.



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### 5. Giving of eloquence 施辯.

These make up the five blessings. When giving to an Arhat, the blessings are multiplied 100 times.

**Bright Eyes:** According the Chinese, the five stores and six organs' pure Qi dwells at the eyes. The essence resides at the eyes. The essence of the bones resides at the pupil of the eyes, while the purer essence usually manifests in the darker colors of the iris of the eyes. 準靈樞 • 五藏六府之精氣 • 皆上住於目 • 而為精 • • 精之窠為眼 • • 骨之精為瞳子 • • 節之精為黑眼 •

然目能發光者 • 以藏府之精 • 皆秉受脾土 • • 脾為諸陰之首 • 目乃血氣之宗 • • 故脾虛 • 則五藏精氣 • 皆失所司 • 不能歸明於目矣 •

*Sutra text:*

**"What is your wish?" asked the Arhat.**

**"Bright Eyes replied, 'On the day of my mother's death I performed meritorious deeds for her rescue, but I do not yet know in what path she has been born.'**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"What is your wish?" asked the Arhat.**

Arhats are sages. To make offerings to them creates human and heavenly blessings which can bring one's wishes to reali-

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zation 人天之福皆能如意.

**"Bright Eyes replied, 'On the day of my mother's death I performed meritorious deeds for her rescue, but I do not yet know in what path she has been born.'**

She only wants to know her mother's whereabouts, manifesting deep gratitude to her own mother.

The Nirvana Sutra states that gratitude is the basis for great compassion. Those who are ungrateful are even lower than animals 知恩者 • 大悲之本 • 不知恩者 • 墮於畜生

•

*Sutra text:*

**"Out of pity for her, the Arhat entered into samadhi to contemplate, and saw that Bright Eyes' mother had fallen into an evil path where she was undergoing extremely great suffering. The Arhat asked, 'When your mother was alive, what deeds did she do that she should now be undergoing such extreme great suffering in an evil path?'**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Out of pity for her, the Arhat entered into samadhi to contemplate, and saw that Bright Eyes' mother had fallen into an evil path where she was undergoing extremely great suffering.**

An Arhat needs an act of volition for his contemplation 作意

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**觀察** whereas Bodhisattvas can do it on the fly without needing to make an effort.

**Saw 見**: This refers to the ability to contemplate using ones' Wisdom Eye.

**undergoing extremely great suffering**: in the unintermittent hells.

**The Arhat asked, 'When your mother was alive, what deeds did she do that she should now be undergoing such extreme great suffering in an evil path?'**

*Question*: According to the Great Shastra, the Wisdom Eye has completely ended discerning even a single different mark **盡滅一異相**. It does not receive all Dharmas **不受一切法**. The Wisdom Eye cannot cross over living beings, because it has no discrimination **無所分別** • **故生法眼**.

Now, as an Arhat who understands emptiness and stillness **了知空寂**, how can he possibly see her mother's place of retribution?

*Answer*: The Wisdom Eye understands Emptiness **慧眼知空**. It is well regulated and does not attach to states **調於境不著**. How is it different from being born dead or blind if it really cannot see anything at all **豈如生盲** • **全無所見也**? That is why it is said that **故大品云** the Bodhisatt-

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va with the Wisdom Eye 慧眼菩薩 can see all dharmas 無法不見 and can recognize all dharmas 無法不識. Although the Arhats can contemplate (with their Heavenly Eyes) the things in the Great Thousand World 能觀大千世界事, they cannot know their causes 但不能知其因. That is why he asked.

*Sutra text:*

**"Bright Eyes replied, 'My mother enjoyed nothing better than eating fish, turtles, and the like. She particularly relished their fried or boiled roe, and because she was fond of eating, she took thousands of lives. Oh, Venerable Compassionate One, how can she be saved?'**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Bright Eyes replied, 'My mother enjoyed nothing better than eating fish, turtles, and the like. She was a sea food lover like many of us. She particularly relished their fried or boiled roe, and because she was fond of eating, she took thousands of lives. Oh, Venerable Compassionate One, how can she be saved?'**

Very bad habits indeed! Her mother self-indulged and killed a lot of living beings. Refer to the following verse about the enmity created with the act of killing, or just go to a slaughter house.

“千百年來碗裏羹 For hundreds of thousands of years,

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the thick soup in the bowl,

冤深似海恨難平 Has caused enmity as deep as the ocean  
and hatred that cannot be resolved.

欲知世上刀兵劫 If you want to know why there are wars  
and conflicts in the world,

試聽屠門夜半聲 Just listen to the sounds from the  
butcher shop at midnight.”

*Sutra text:*

**"The Arhat pitied her and established an expedient device, saying, 'With a sincere resolve, be mindful of Pure Lotus Eyes Thus Come One, and also make carved and painted images of him. Both those living and those who have perished will be rewarded.'**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"The Arhat pitied her and established an expedient device saying, 'With a sincere resolve, be mindful of Pure Lotus - Eyes Thus Come One,**

Being **sincere** is critical in order to obtain a response.

Arhats have not yet destroyed ignorance and certified to the Dharma Body. Their spiritual powers are not as great as the Bodhisattvas. They cannot really rescue living beings from suffering by themselves.

**And also make carved and painted images of him. Both those living and those who have perished will be reward-**

## Explained by Master YongHua

**ed.'** Making images will benefit both the living and the dead. Not only will their blessings increase, so too will their wisdom.

Regarding making images of the Buddha, a King once asked the Buddha, “After the Buddha’s Nirvana, if living beings create the Buddha’s images, what blessings will they get?” The Buddha replied, “Those living beings who create my images will obtain limitless merit and virtues that cannot be counted. Life after life, they will not fall into the evil paths. They will be born in the Human and God realms to enjoy blessings and bliss, up to and including becoming the Great Brahma Heaven king. Their appearance will be upright and without compare. Eventually, they will be reborn in Amitabha’s Land, become great Bodhisattvas, the most venerated of Bodhisattvas, and ultimately attain Buddhahood.”

*Sutra text:*

**“On hearing this, Bright Eyes renounced everything she loved, afterwards drew an image of that Buddha, and made offerings before it. Moreover, she wept sorrowfully as she respectfully gazed at and bowed to that Buddha. During the second half of the night, suddenly, as if in a dream, she saw that Buddha’s body, dazzling gold in color and as large as Mount Sumeru, emitting great light.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**“On hearing this, Bright Eyes renounced everything she loved, afterwards drew an image of that Buddha, and made offerings before it.**

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

She gave up her material possessions in order to make an offering, demonstrating an act of sincerity. She then obtained an “intertwined response with the Way” and she saw the Buddha’s body.

**Moreover, she wept sorrowfully as she respectfully gazed at and bowed to that Buddha. During the second half of the night, suddenly, as if in a dream, she saw that Buddha's body...**

To see the Buddha’s body in a **dream** is very good indeed.

There are four kinds of dreams:

1. The four great elements are not harmonious dreams **四大不和夢**: One may see mountains collapse, or be chased by thieves, tigers, wolves, etc.
2. Dreaming of what was seen **先見夢**: At night, one dreams of things that one has seen during the day.
3. God and human dreams **天人夢**: gods and humans manifest good or evil dreams, making people experience good or evil events **天人現善惡 • 令人得善惡事**.
4. Thinking dreams **想夢**: Such dreams may be of prior lives or from blessings, offenses or obstructions, which now manifest as good or evil dreams.

The first two kinds are false, the latter two are true. Bright Eyes experienced the latter two kinds here.

The Producing the Bodhi Mind Sutra **出生菩提心經** says:

## Explained by Master YongHua

“If one can dream of the Buddha’s image that has a complete and adorned body, living beings should be joyous. One will certainly become the Tamer and Teacher 調御.”

**Dazzling gold in color and as large as Mount Sumeru, emitting great light.** She saw that the Buddha’s body is **gold in color 金色晃耀**: The eastern side of Great Mount Sumeru is made of pure gold 大須彌東面 • 及小須彌七山 • 純是黃金 • The light from the Buddha’s body is even brighter than that of gold mountain.

*Sutra text:*

**"This Buddha said to Bright Eyes, ‘Before long your mother will be born in your own household and as soon as she can know hunger and cold she will speak.’"**

**"Shortly thereafter, a maidservant in the house bore a son who spoke within three days of his birth. Lowering his head and weeping mournfully, he said, ‘In life and death one must undergo retributions for his own deeds. I am your mother and have been in darkness for a long time. Since leaving you I have constantly been reborn in the great hells. As a result of receiving the power of your meritorious deeds, I have been able to be reborn, but only as a poor son of low station. My lifespan, moreover, will be short, and after thirteen years I will fall into an evil path again. Do you not have some way to effect my liberation?’"**

*Sutra commentary:*



## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

**"This Buddha said to Bright Eyes, 'Before long your mother will be born in your own household and as soon as she can know hunger and cold she will speak.'**

**"Shortly thereafter, a maidservant in the house bore a son who spoke within three days of his birth.**

This is an example of merit and virtue turning the heavy retribution into a lighter one.

This baby **spoke within three days of his birth**. Usually it takes a few years before a child can speak. This must be the Buddha's power which enabled the child to remember past conditions.

**Lowering his head and weeping mournfully, he said, 'In life and death one must undergo retributions for his own deeds. I am your mother and have been in darkness for a long time.**

One should not doubt the law of karma. If one creates offenses, one will surely have to undergo the **retributions**.

**Since leaving you I have constantly been reborn in the great hells. As a result of receiving the power of your meritorious deeds, I have been able to be reborn, but only as a poor son of low station. My lifespan, moreover, will be short, and after thirteen years I will fall into an evil path again. Do you not have some way to effect my liberation?'**

The shastra **十地論** says that creating killing karma will re-

## Explained by Master YongHua

sult in three retributions:

1. Different maturation retribution 一異熟果: meaning that one is born into the three evil paths.
2. Various realms retribution 等流果: when born onto the human realm, one has many sicknesses and has a short life span.
3. Increasing retribution 增上果: the external things that one obtains are of inferior grade and will not be of use for long.

Without Bright Eyes' meritorious deeds, her mother would have not been able to escape the three evil paths! Even so, she was then born into a lowly station.

*Sutra text:*

**"When Bright Eyes heard the words of the servant's child, she knew without doubt that he was her mother and, choked with sobs, said to the child, 'Since you are my mother you should know your own past offenses. What deeds did you do that caused you to fall into the Evil Paths?'"**

**"The servant's child said, I have undergone this retribution as a result of killing and slandering. If I had not received the blessings which you earned to rescue me from difficulty, my karma would be such that I could not yet have been released.'**

**"On hearing this, Bright Eyes asked, 'What happens during retribution in the hells?'"**

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

**"The servant's son answered, 'Merely to speak of the suffering is unbearable, and even a hundred thousand years would not suffice to describe it all.'**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"When Bright Eyes heard the words of the servant's child, she knew without doubt that he was her mother and, choked with sobs, said to the child, 'Since you are my mother you should know your own past offenses. What deeds did you do that caused you to fall into the Evil Paths?'"**

First Bright Eyes dreamt of the Buddha and then she heard the child. She had no doubt at all by then.

**"The servant's child said, I have undergone this retribution as a result of killing and slandering. If I had not received the blessings which you earned to rescue me from difficulty, my karma would be such that I could not yet have been released.'**

**"On hearing this, Bright Eyes asked, 'What happens during retribution in the hells?'"**

**"The servant's son answered, 'Merely to speak of the suffering is unbearable, and even a hundred thousand years would not suffice to describe it all.'**

Killing karmas, which are considered to be the worst offense 眾罪之上, and slandering karmas, which are considered to

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be the starting point of all evil 萬惡之先, made her fall into the hells.

In the Worthy and Stupid Sutra 賢愚經, a mother tells her children 蘇曼女告諸子曰 that because of killing offenses, one will enter the hells to receive all sorts of suffering and afflictions for ages. One might have the head of a deer, a rabbit or all sorts of animals that the hell soldiers fight each other for. Even though one yearns for an escape, one cannot get out for long kalpas. It is said 荀子云 that nice words are like the warmth from soft fabric. Harmful words are worse than spears and blades. How much worse it is for slander and libel. Therefore the Accomplishing Shastra 成論 says that if people use harsh words, curse or scolding words, they will undergo the proper retribution accordingly in the hells. Killing living beings ranks at the top of the list of offenses. Slander and libel is foremost of the ten thousand evils.

*Sutra text:*

**"Bright Eyes heard this, wept bitterly and said into empty space, 'May my mother be eternally separated from the hells, and after these thirteen years may she be free of her heavy offenses and leave the Evil Paths. O Buddhas of the Ten Directions, have compassion and pity me. Hear the vast, great vows which I am making for the sake of my mother. If she can leave the Three Paths forever, leave being of low station, up to and including leaving the body of a woman, and never again have to endure them, then, before the image of the Thus Come One Pure-Lotus-Eyes, I**

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

vow that from this day forth, throughout hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of kalpas, I will rescue living beings who are suffering in the hells for their offenses, and others of the Three Evil Paths. I will rescue them all and cause them to leave the realms of the hells, hungry ghosts, animals, and the like. Only when the beings who are undergoing retribution for their offenses have all become Buddhas will I myself accomplish the right enlightenment.'

*Sutra commentary:*

"Bright Eyes heard this, wept bitterly and said into empty space, 'May my mother be eternally separated from the hells, and after these thirteen years may she be free of her heavy offenses and leave the Evil Paths.'

She understands the great suffering in the hells. Therefore she wishes that her own mother never have to experience those types of suffering ever again. Furthermore, she wishes that, after her mother endures the fixed karmic retributions for **thirteen years**, she will leave the three evil paths.

**O Buddhas of the Ten Directions, have compassion and pity me. Hear the vast, great vows which I am making for the sake of my mother.**

She'll make great vows in order to create great blessings to help her mother end her suffering rapidly.

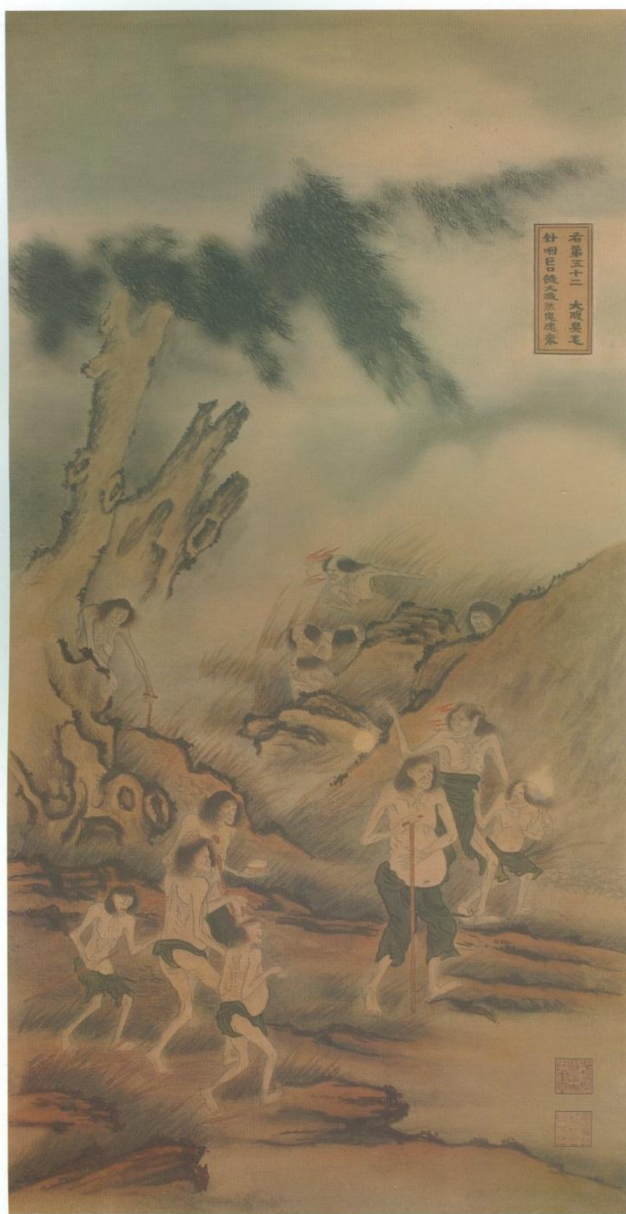
**O Buddhas of the Ten Directions:** She is seeking certification from the Buddhas of the ten directions:

## **Explained by Master YongHua**

1. This manifests that the mind that makes the vow is vast and expansive.
2. This reveals the Buddha's compassion and pity for the three evil paths and those of lowly stations.

She made the great vow. This is not unlike using great water to extinguish a small fire, her mother's offenses.

# The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva



右序第五十二 大腹臭毛针咽巨口饥火炽鬼魂众

Hungry ghosts with their big bellies and needle-size throats

Explained by Master YongHua

**If she can leave the Three Paths forever, leave being of low station, up to and including leaving the body of a woman, and never again have to endure them, then, before the image of the Thus Come One Pure-Lotus-Eyes, I vow that from this day forth, throughout hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of kalpas, I will rescue living beings who are suffering in the hells for their offenses, and others of the Three Evil Paths. I will rescue them all and cause them to leave the realms of the hells, hungry ghosts, animals, and the like. Only when the beings who are undergoing retribution for their offenses have all become Buddhas will I myself accomplish the right enlightenment.'**

After falling into hells and undergoing limitless suffering (first proper retribution), one gets out of the hells and goes into the animal realm where one often must toil greatly, not having enough food and water (second proper retribution). Afterwards, one is reborn into the hungry ghost realm and undergoes the suffering of starvation and thirst. Hungry ghosts will not even hear of the words for water, drink and food for limitless thousand kalpas. Their throats are as small as a needle, while their bellies are as big as a mountain. Whatever food or drink they obtain become burning charcoal in their mouth (third proper retribution). After this, they eventually make it to the human realm into destitute and lowly stations, become others' servants, have a hard time obtaining wealth and gems, have a hard time obtaining what is sought and at all times, and have no freedom.

*Sutra text:*



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**After making this vow she clearly heard the Thus Come One Pure-Lotus-Eyes say to her, "Bright Eyes, you have great kindness and compassion to be able to make such a great vow for your mother's sake. I see that your mother will cast off this body after thirteen years and will be born a Brahman with a lifespan of one hundred years. After that life she will be born with a lifespan of kalpas in the Land of No Concern, after which she will accomplish Buddhahood and cross over as many men and gods as there are sand grains in the Ganges."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**After making this vow she clearly heard the Thus Come One Pure-Lotus-Eyes say to her, "Bright Eyes, you have great kindness and compassion to be able to make such a great vow for your mother's sake. I see that your mother will cast off this body after thirteen years and will be born a Brahman with a lifespan of one hundred years.**

The Buddha can contemplate the future and see that her great vow power has enabled her mother to ascend from a low class to an honored position (The Brahma class was the highest back then). Further, her lifespan also increased, enabling her to enjoy her blessings.

**After that life she will be born with a lifespan of kalpas in the Land of No Concern, after which she will accomplish Buddhahood and cross over as many men and gods as there are sand grains in the Ganges."**

The **Land of No Concern** is the Western Bliss Pure Land,

## Explained by Master YongHua

which turns worry into bliss and all worries are put to rest.

The history of concern (worry) is as follows:

1. Falling to the hells to receive punishment.
2. Being born into a lowly station.
3. Having a short life span. After living in misery for thirteen years, her mother would have fallen into the evil paths again.
4. Being born as a Brahman who will engage in deviant practices and arrogance.

In the All Dharmas High King Sutra 一切法高王經, the Buddha told Shariputra, “All Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas, when they first bring forth the resolve for Bodhi, that very moment, they are already a field of blessings for all Sound Hearers, Those Enlightened to Conditions and living beings. Beings numbering as many as the Ganges’ sands are crossed over.”

*Sutra text:*

**Shakyamuni Buddha told Samadhi Self-Mastery King, "The Arhat with great merit who helped Bright Eyes is now Inexhaustible-Intention Bodhisattva, the mother of Bright Eyes is Liberation Bodhisattva, and Bright Eyes herself is now Earth Store Bodhisattva. Throughout many aeons, because of his kind pity, he has made as many vows as there are sand grains in the Ganges to rescue living beings.**

*Sutra commentary:*

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

**Shakyamuni Buddha told Samadhi Self-Mastery King, "The Arhat with great merit who helped Bright Eyes is now Inexhaustible-Intention Bodhisattva, the mother of Bright Eyes is Liberation Bodhisattva, and Bright Eyes herself is now Earth Store Bodhisattva.**

**Inexhaustible-Intention Bodhisattva** in the past practiced the Small Vehicle. Now he has turned to the Great Vehicle and that is why his practice and vows are endless. All of his karmas are Without Action 無作, a state of the sages.

**Liberation Bodhisattva** chose to make a long detour into the Hells.

**Throughout many aeons, because of his kind pity, he has made as many vows as there are sand grains in the Ganges to rescue living beings.**

**Kind pity:** The Great Sutra says, "What is the basis for all good roots? Kindness is. If kindness is not replete with the Buddha's Ten Powers, Four Fearlessnesses, and the 32 Hallmarks, then it is the Sound Hearers' kindness. If it is replete with all these factors, then it is the Tathagata's kindness.

That is the cluster of Great Dharmas 大法聚. That is precisely the Great Nirvana. Kindness power is vast and profound, replete with all blessings, virtues and adornments."

*Sutra text:*

**"Men and women in the future who do not practice good but do evil, who do not believe in cause and effect, who**

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indulge in sexual misconduct and false speech, who practice double-tongued and harsh speech, and who slander the Great Vehicle, will certainly fall into the Evil Paths. But if they encounter a good, knowing adviser who, in the snap of a finger, leads them to take refuge with Earth Store Bodhisattva, those living beings will obtain release from the retribution of the Three Evil Paths. Those whose acts show deference to him; who are respectful with a determined mind; who gaze in worship, praise, and make offerings of flowers, incense, clothing, gems, or food and drink will be born in the heavens. There they will enjoy supremely wonderful bliss for hundreds of thousands of kalpas. When their heavenly merit is ended and they are born below in the world of humans, they will be emperors throughout hundreds of thousands of kalpas and will be capable of remembering the causes and results of their former lives. O, Samadhi Self-Mastery King, Earth Store Bodhisattva has inconceivable and ineffable great spiritual power with which to benefit living beings. All you Bodhisattvas should be mindful of this sutra and proclaim and widely spread it."

Samadhi Self-Mastery King said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, please do not be concerned. We thousands of tens of thousands of millions of Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas, receiving the Buddha's awesome spirit, will certainly proclaim this sutra widely throughout Jambudvipa for the benefit of living beings."

Having spoken thus to the Buddha, the Bodhisattva Samadhi Self-Mastery King put his palms together respectfully, bowed, and withdrew.

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Men and women in the future who do not practice good but do evil, who do not believe in cause and effect, who indulge in sexual misconduct and false speech, who practice double-tongued and harsh speech, and who slander the Great Vehicle, will certainly fall into the Evil Paths. But if they encounter a good, knowing adviser who, in the snap of a finger, leads them to take refuge with Earth Store Bodhisattva, those living beings will obtain release from the retribution of the Three Evil Paths.**

The Great Shastra mentions one ghost that has the head of a pig. Odorous bugs exit from its mouth. Its body, however, has a golden light. In a former life, this ghost was a bhikshu who used foul words to scold guest bhikshus. But because he maintained precepts purely with his body, the ghost has a golden light. Since he used coarse speech, odorous bugs now come out of his mouth. The Shastra further elaborates that it would be better to have one's tongue cut by sharp knives than to use evil words and coarse language; such are the causes for those who slander the Great Vehicle and fall into the Evil Paths.

A **Good Knowing Adviser** is capable (good善 means capable 能) of knowledge. 知 he or she is fully aware that triple world is like a burning house and can recognize 識 states.

There are three kinds of Good Knowing Advisers:

1. Outer (dharma) protectors 外護, who help cultivators.
2. Fellow cultivators 同行, who cultivate together and

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can also act as a mirror to help us spot our errors. This is like working with jade: sometimes one cuts, sometimes one grinds, and sometimes one polishes.

3. Teachers 教授, who speak Dharma and propagate Buddhism.

Again, 知 know(ing): to have heard of his name. Whereas, the term adviser 識: has the connotation of being able to meet with 見形.

A **snap of the finger** lasts for 64 ksanas. Each ksana 剎那 lasts for the space of 20 blinks of the eye 瞬 and contains 900 births and deaths 生滅. Each blink is twenty thoughts 念 long. Earth Store Bodhisattva can, in the snap of a finger, eradicate limitless offenses that would otherwise bring on woeful states.

**Those whose acts show deference to him; who are respectful with a determined mind; who gaze in worship, praise, and make offerings of flowers, incense, clothing, gems, or food and drink will be born in the heavens. There they will enjoy supremely wonderful bliss for hundreds of thousands of kalpas.**

**Incense** represents the ability to enjoy samadhi bliss. Because of this offering, one can obtain the Tathagata's unobstructed wisdom 是能悅懌三昧・以此供養・即得如萊無礙之智.

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

**Flowers** are the jeweled adornment samadhi. Because of this offering, one can quickly obtain the Tathagata's forty eight wonderful marks 是寶莊嚴三昧・以此供養・速得如萊四八妙相.

Chandana Fragrance Bhikshu: when he was born, the hair pores on his body all emanated chandana incense fragrance. His mouth is fragrant with the blue lotus flower, 優鉢華 ut-pala. He came and made offerings chandana incense to the stupa of 毘婆尸 Vipasyin Buddha.

**Clothing** shields one from the cold or heat.

**Gems** can embellish even ugliness.

**When their heavenly merit is ended and they are born below in the world of humans, they will be emperors throughout hundreds of thousands of kalpas and will be capable of remembering the causes and results of their former lives. O, Samadhi Self-Mastery King, Earth Store Bodhisattva has inconceivable and ineffable great spiritual power to benefit living beings. All you Bodhisattvas should be mindful of this sutra and proclaim and widely spread it."**

**Capable of remembering the causes and results of their former lives 憶宿命因果本末.** This refers to the knowledge of past lives spiritual penetration. The Ambattha Sutra 阿摩晝經 quotes the Buddha saying that because his mind is in samadhi, it becomes pure and without defilements,

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soft and supple, subdued and well regulated. Therefore one is able to remember the events of past lives. One can remember events not just from one life, but from countless previous lives. For many kalpas of formation and destruction, one dies in this world and is then born onto another one. One remembers one's family name and class, whether the food and drink was good or bad, whether one's lifespan was long or short, all the bliss or suffering one received, as well as one's shape, complexion and appearance.

**All you Bodhisattvas should be mindful of this sutra and proclaim and widely spread it:** That is how we get to encounter this sutra.

**Samadhi Self-Mastery King said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, please do not be concerned. We thousands of tens of thousands of millions of Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas, receiving the Buddha's awesome spirit, will certainly proclaim this sutra widely throughout Jambudvīpa for the benefit of living beings."**

This sutra should be widely propagated to benefit all living beings.

**Having spoken thus to the Buddha, the Bodhisattva Samadhi Self-Mastery King put his palms together respectfully, bowed, and withdrew.**

*Sutra text:*

**At that time the Four Heavenly Kings arose from their seats, put their palms together respectfully, and said to the**



## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

**Buddha, "World-Honored One, since Earth Store Bodhisattva has made such extensive vows for kalpas, why then has he not yet completed his crossing over of beings? Why does he continue to practice such far-reaching vast vows? Please, World-Honored One, explain this for us."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time the Four Heavenly Kings arose from their seats, put their palms together respectfully, and said to the Buddha,**

The Four Heavenly Kings of the four directions live halfway up Mount Sumeru in palaces forty-two thousand yojanas 由旬 high, made of the seven precious things: gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, mother-of-pearl, red pearls, and carnelian. Their palaces are adorned with seven tiers of railings, seven layers of netting, and seven rows of trees. There are multitudes of birds which sing harmoniously. These four kings have many spiritual penetrations.

The king of the east, Dhrtarastra 提頭賴吒, which means "he who upholds his country 持國王," 黃金埵, has ninety-nine sons, all of whom are named Indra. He commands two groups of ghosts and spirits, the fragrant spirits 乾闥婆 and the malodorous ghosts 富單那. The ground in his land is made of gold.

The fragrant spirits are gandharvas 乾闥婆 (meaning fra-

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grance seekers 尋香), or heavenly musicians. Gandharvas are extremely fond of incense and will flock to places where it is burned. The Jade Emperor, who is chief of the Indras, has a very rare and wonderful sandalwood which he burns to attract them. When they arrive, he has them play music for him, since he is still caught up in the realm of defiling objects and enjoys hearing music.

The malodorous ghosts, or budana, are called Fù Dan Nà 富單那 in the Shurangama Mantra. Wherever they go they are followed by a putrid stench. They are responsible for spreading hot diseases and are relatively well to do hungry ghosts 主熱病鬼; 餓鬼中勝者.

The king of the south, where the ground is made of lapis lazuli 琉璃埵, is called Virudhaka 毘留勒叉, or "increasing and growing 增長," because he is able to lengthen and increase the good roots of living beings. He too has ninety-nine sons, all of whom are named Indra 因陀羅. In fact, each of the four kings has ninety-nine sons, all with the same name, so that there are three hundred and ninety-six Indras in all.

Virudhaka also watches over two groups of ghosts and spirits: the Kumbhandas 鳩槃荼 and the Pretas 餓鬼多. The Kumbhandas, called "distant" ghosts 遠鬼 because they like to stay far away from people, are also known as barrel ghosts or melon ghosts because of their shape (they have no head

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

and no legs). Sometimes they appear in your dreams sitting on top of you, causing you to suffocate 夢壓鬼. Pretas, on the other hand, are called "proximate" ghosts 近鬼 because they like to be near people, and, in fact, often establish themselves as ancestral spirits at the memorial plaques people set up for their deceased relatives 最劣的惡鬼.

The king of the west, where the ground is made of silver 白銀埵, is named Virupaksa 毘留博叉, meaning "many languages 雜語," because he can speak the tongues of all countries. He is also called Broad Eyes 廣目天王. Like the other kings, he is responsible for two groups of ghosts and spirits, the Pisaci and poison dragons.

The Pisaci 毘舍闍, as called in the Shurangama Mantra, are also called madness ghosts 顛狂鬼 because they can cause incurable insanity in people. They subsist on essential energies 噉精氣鬼, particularly those of humans, and always flock to places where sexual activities are producing these substances. The other group under jurisdiction of this king is the poison dragons 毒龍, whose poison may be contracted by seeing 眼毒, hearing 聲毒, smelling 氣毒, or even just being near them 觸毒.

The king of the north, Vaisravana 毘沙門, or "widely learned 多聞," is the leader of the Four Heavenly Kings, 水

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精埵. The reputation of his blessings and virtues is known throughout the four directions. It is in his palace that the four Heavenly Kings' meetings are convened. The two groups of ghosts and spirits under his command are the Yaksas 夜叉 and the Rakshasas 羅剎. There are several categories of Yaksas; those who live on the ground, those who live in space, and those who abide in the heavens. Because Yaksas travel more or less at the speed of light 飛行鬼, they are called speedy ghosts 捷疾鬼. Rakshasas, or "fearsome ghosts 可畏鬼 (or 暴惡鬼)", are so called because of their terrifying appearance.

They placed their palms together out of great respect and thirst for the Dharma.

**"World-Honored One, since Earth Store Bodhisattva has made such extensive vows for kalpas, why then has he not yet completed his crossing over of beings? Why does he continue to practice such far-reaching vast vows? Please, World-Honored One, explain this for us."**

They voice their doubt on behalf of all of us who may harbor such skepticism.

*Sutra text:*

**The Buddha told the Four Heavenly Kings, "Excellent, excellent. For your benefit as well as for the benefit of men and gods of the present and future, I will speak of Earth Store Bodhisattva's works in the paths of birth and death**

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

**in Jambudvipa in the Saha world. I shall speak of his expedient devices, and of his compassion and pity in rescuing, saving, crossing over, and liberating beings who are suffering for their offenses."**

**The Four Heavenly Kings replied, "Yes, World-Honored One, we would like to hear about his work."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The Buddha told the Four Heavenly Kings, "Excellent, excellent. For your benefit as well as for the benefit of men and gods of the present and future, I will speak of Earth Store Bodhisattva's works in the paths of birth and death in Jambudvipa in the Saha world. I shall speak of his expedient devices, and of his compassion and pity in rescuing, saving, crossing over, and liberating beings who are suffering for their offenses."**

The Buddha doubly praises the Four Heavenly Kings:

1. For their expedient questioning: they really have no doubt at all themselves.
2. For their vast merit and virtues in seeking to protect the four directions, and in particular the living beings of the southern continent who practice many evils.

Living beings have all kinds of illnesses. That is why Bodhisattvas have all sorts of cures 藥 for them. Their expedient wisdom is inexhaustible, enabling them to save endless living beings.

**The Four Heavenly Kings replied, "Yes, World-Honored**

Explained by Master YongHua

One, we would like to hear about his work."

*Sutra text:*

**The Buddha told the Four Heavenly Kings, "From kalpas long ago until the present, Earth Store Bodhisattva has crossed over and liberated living beings, yet out of compassionate pity for those beings still suffering in the world, he has not yet completed his vows. Moreover, he sees that their causes for limitless kalpas in the future are like uncut vines, and, because of this, he makes his mighty vows. Thus, in the continent of Jambudvipa, in the Saha world, this Bodhisattva teaches and transforms beings by means of thousands of tens of thousands of myriads of expedient devices.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The Buddha told the Four Heavenly Kings, "From kalpas long ago until the present, Earth Store Bodhisattva has crossed over and liberated living beings, yet out of compassionate pity for those beings still suffering in the world, he has not yet completed his vows.**

The Buddha told the Four Heavenly Kings that Earth Store Bodhisattva sees all the causes and conditions of living beings. The power of our deeds is like the tendrils that grow on plants and grasses, getting longer year after year. We commit deeds in one life and then in the next life we commit more, building up our karma. This continues life after life and the offense karma becomes heavier, while the merit we have acquired becomes lighter and lighter. With only slight merito-

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

rious virtue, you cannot become a Buddha, and if your karmic obstacles are extremely heavy, you can become a ghost.

People of little understanding say that there are no such things as ghosts. However, their argument is not up to the level of a child's. Children, at least, will usually believe an explanation that is principled, whereas people who oppose belief in ghosts and spirits usually do so without paying attention to the principles involved. If there were no ghosts, there could be no Buddhas, since the difference between the two is just a turn. If the turn is made, you are a Buddha; if not, you are a ghost. Humans are in the midst of the turning, and, consequently, if their karma becomes heavier, it is very easy for them to fall into the realms of the ghosts.

The offenses that living beings create have four kinds of retributions:

1. This life 現報: receiving the retribution immediately this lifetime.
2. Next life 生報: receiving the retribution in one's next life.
3. Future life 後報: it could be many many more lifetimes before the retribution manifests.
4. No retribution 無報: like neutral karmas 無記等業.

**Moreover, he sees that their causes for limitless kalpas in the future are like uncut vines, and, because of this, he makes his mighty vows. Thus, in the continent of Jambudvīpa, in the Saha world, this Bodhisattva teaches and transforms beings by means of thousands of tens of thou-**

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### sands of myriads of expedient devices.

In the Great Shastra, it is said that Dharma Body Bodhisattvas transform into countless bodies and speak Dharma to living beings but the Bodhisattva's mind has no discrimination at all. It is like a spiritual musical instrument that is without a player and yet produces music to the liking of the listener. Furthermore, their minds are not scattered either. They have no mark of speaking the Dharma. Yet, because of their countless blessings, virtues, samadhis and wisdoms, all sorts of Dharma sounds are spoken according to their wishes.

In the next passage of text the Buddha describes to the Four Heavenly Kings the expedient devices used by Earth Store Bodhisattva.

*Question:* Why does the sutra insist on speaking about evil?

*Answer:* To help describe marks for people to recognize. Once they understand the retributions, they will give rise to abhorrence and desire to distance themselves 厭離 from evil.

*Sutra text:*

**"Four Heavenly Kings, to killers, Earth Store Bodhisattva speaks of a retribution of a short lifespan; to robbers and petty thieves, he speaks of a retribution of poverty and acute suffering; to those who practice sexual misconduct, he speaks of the retribution of being born as sparrows, pigeons, mandarin drakes and ducks; to those who practice harsh speech, he speaks of the retribution of a quarreling family.**



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*Sutra commentary:*

**"Four Heavenly Kings, to killers, Earth Store Bodhisattva speaks of a retribution of a short lifespan;**

First, the sutra speaks of the ten evils. Of the three evils of the body, killing is the heaviest.

**Killers.** Humans like to live, living beings are greedy for life. Even insects have the Buddha nature. Those who commit the act of killing are creating offenses against future Buddhas. Their retribution is a short lifespan and they suffer a lot of diseases.

A ghost once asked Mahamaudgalyayana, "My children, whether sons or daughters, die of an early age. What offenses did I commit in the past to deserve such a retribution?" The reply was, "When you were in the human realm and saw children commit the killing act (of animals), you gave assistance and rejoiced. You then ate their meat with those children." Killing results in a short lifespan. Rejoicing results in pain and suffering.

**To robbers and petty thieves, he speaks of a retribution of poverty and acute suffering.** Stealing includes not only actual theft but also the use of people's property without their knowledge or permission. When Earth Store Bodhisattva meets people who commit this kind of offense, he tells them of the retribution of poverty. The reason there are so many poor people in the world is that there have been many who have stolen in past lives, who are now undergoing the appropriate retribution. The more one steals,

## Explained by Master YongHua

the poorer we will be, and the more we will have cause to fear one of the most bitter of all kinds of suffering, that of poverty. Create wealth instead of stealing it.

Money, assets, jade, and silk are considered externals 外所依, while the temple's property, such as banners and flowers, are considered inner offerings 內供養. Stealing externals can be repented. Stealing inner offerings is a difficult offense from which to be rescued: one often falls in the three evil paths to undergo limitless suffering. When one finally makes it back to the human realm, one will be destitute, experience a multitude of difficulties and suffering, and the gods will desert and distance from one. Externally, there will be no place to rely on or take shelter, and there will be no companions or friends. Internally, one will have no blessings and virtue. The sutras liken the suffering of poverty and destitution to that of the hells, saying it is not different than death itself.

**to those who practice sexual misconduct, he speaks of the retribution of being born as sparrows, pigeons, mandarin drakes and ducks;**

**Sexual misconduct** refers to adultery and all manners of extramarital affairs. One should not misconstrue this, however, and say that since one is married there is no problem and one can be totally unrestrained in his sexual activity with his wife. Even married couples had best decrease this activity because it leads to dullness. The more one is involved in sexual matters, the less light one has. One has light and manifests wisdom if one does not engage in sex.

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**Sparrows** 雀 are jealous by nature. They like to smooth their own feathers, and have no need for companions.

The **pigeon** 鴿 is thought to be the most lustful bird of all and can raise an amazing number of fledglings every year. Most animals and birds mate with the male above and the female below, but the pigeon is so lustful that he reverses these positions.

The emotional attachment of **mandarin drakes and ducks** to their mates is extremely strong, and they are absolutely inseparable, not only in the water and on land but even in the air. If humans catch one, the other will die out of longing for its mate.

Although birds may seem to have independence of a sort, they are by no means free, and theirs is certainly not a good state to be in. For those who engage in sexual misconduct, the retribution of the bird realm is a likely one, and so Earth Store Bodhisattva speaks of it to such people.

When they obtain a human body, they will have to undergo two retributions:

1. Fighting amongst relatives and close acquaintances  
親厚鬥訟.
2. Being constrained by the laws of the country 王法所加.

**To those who practice harsh speech, he speaks of the retribution of a quarreling family.**

## Explained by Master YongHua

Now, the four mouth karmas are mentioned. Harsh speech is first. The next passage will continue with slander, which includes the remaining three.

**Harsh speech** invokes the retribution of one's retinue not being harmonious, constantly liking to fight.

There are two retributions when one eventually returns to the human realm:

1. One often hears evil sounds 惡聲.
2. One constantly has quarreling and law suits 諍訟.

He tells those who scold, slander, and speak falsely and harshly that they will always be surrounded by strife and never know peace. Those who like to prattle and talk confusedly, who slander the Triple Jewel, will be mutes or stutterers in the future. This is also the reason people sometimes develop incurable canker sores in their mouths.

In the Repaying Kindness Sutra, the Buddha told Ananda, “Men of the world, disaster comes from the mouth 禍從口出. One should guard one's mouth as if it's a fierce fire. Fire can burn all the worldly wealth. Excessive harsh speech can burn the seven sagely types of wealth; it is like the ax that can destroy the body or the disaster that extinguishes the body.”

*Sutra text:*

**"To slanderers, he speaks of the retribution of a tongueless and cankerous mouth; to the angry and hateful, he**

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speaks of being ugly and crippled; to the stingy, he speaks of frustrated desires; to gluttons, he speaks of the retribution of hunger, thirst and sicknesses of the throat; to those who enjoy hunting, he speaks of the retribution of a frightening insanity and disastrous fate; to those who rebel against their parents, he speaks of the retribution of being killed in natural disasters; to those who set fire to mountains or forests, he speaks of the retribution of seeking to commit suicide in the confusion of insanity.

*Sutra commentary:*

**"To slanderers, he speaks of the retribution of a tongueless and cankerous mouth;**

**Slanderers** refers especially to those who speak ill of the good, the worthy, and the wise.

The sutras say that slandering the Dharma is an extremely heavy offense. Even if it is just slandering a gatha, one will fall to the hells, will never get to see the Buddha, and will obtain the no eyes or tongue retribution. Please be careful!

大方廣總持經云・謗法之人・極大重業・墮三惡道・難可出離・・以謗他故・七十劫中・受大苦惱・・況彼愚人・實無所知・而自貢高・乃至誹謗一四句偈・定墮地獄・永不見佛・得無眼無舌之報・・故不可不慎也・

Now, the sutra mentions the three retributions of the mind.

## Explained by Master YongHua

**To the hateful 瞋恚, he speaks of a retribution of being ugly and crippled.** This retribution is spoken of to people whose natures are like those of asuras, whose tempers flare up at the slightest provocation. When people get angry their faces turn purple and their eyes bulge, their veins stand out, and they become quite repulsive. If you like to get angry now, you will face the retribution of ugliness.

The Discerning the Good and Evil That Has Arisen Sutra 分別善惡所起經 says that the humans of the world like to be hateful and do not discern good and evil. Upon death, they enter the hells 太山 for thousands of tens of thousands of years. When they get to the human realm, their face and eyes often appear evil. If you see people of evil form, it is a retribution of their past lives' being hateful.

The Chinese term that refers to the retribution of being crippled 躄殘. If you always get angry, in future lives you will not only be ugly, you will also be plagued by the myriad illnesses.

**To the stingy, he speaks of frustrated desires;**

**Stingy 慳吝** people will reap the retribution of not getting what they want.

Those who have wealth but are not willing to give, do not really love their family; they do not give to the poor and destitute. They don't give and/or serve the sramanas/cultivators. They refuse to give to beggars, children and the sick. They

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do not dare eat their fill, and have inadequate clothing. They constantly scold their servants, are very stingy and often make them feel ashamed. Upon death, they fall to the evil ghosts realm. When they see water and try to drink, it is instantaneously transformed into molten copper or a mixture of pus and blood 便化消銅膿血. When these people get back to the human realm, they are often poor and destitute, and must endure the cold and hunger. If one is poor, is destitute and has to resort to begging, this is from the prior life's stinginess, greed and stupidity karmas.

### **To gluttons, he speaks of the retribution of hunger, thirst and sicknesses of the throat;**

There are some people, **gluttons**, who eat and drink nonstop from morning until night 無度. Excesses of this kind simply indicate stupidity. After they eat, they nap and then wake to eat again in a routine that never varies. They are totally uncontrolled, knowing no regulation or moderation. Earth Store Bodhisattva tells such people that in the future they will never be able to get their fill, and that their throats will be so diseased and swollen that they will be unable to swallow even water. The sutra says that obstructed throat sicknesses can be lethal. This is an indicator that perhaps one was a hungry ghost in one's previous life 誠餓鬼之前相.

Now the sutra speaks of assorted retributions.

First, the sutra starts with hunting: there are a lot of animals, that is why people like to hunt. They also pursue beasts and animals because they damage crops.

## Explained by Master YongHua

**To those who enjoy hunting, he speaks of the retribution of a frightening insanity and disastrous fate;**

**Hunters** are people who take pleasure in the chase. Having killed an animal they are filled with pride, strength, and joy. To those who are totally given over to such activities, Earth Store Bodhisattva speaks of the **retribution of a frightening insanity and disastrous fate**. He might say, for example, "In your next life you will quite probably go mad and have an untimely death." This refers to accidental deaths like those in automobile collisions, airplane explosions, or falling in front of a speeding train—all unexpected, violent, and premature deaths. People may be led to stop hunting as a result of hearing such predictions.

In the past there was a rich elder who had only one son. One day, the son climbed a tree to pick flowers for his wife. He fell down and died. When asked, the Buddha explained, "In the past, there was a boy who used an arrow to shoot at a sparrow. Accompanying him were three people who rejoiced with the hunt. That child became the son who fell out of the tree, while the three companions are now the parents and wife.

**To those who rebel against their parents, he speaks of the retribution of being killed in natural disasters;**

Humans owe their lives to their parents. Therefore, filial piety is the law of nature. To disobey this law of the heavens will incur the retribution of being put to death by heaven and earth.



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**To those who set fire to mountains or forests, he speaks of the retribution of seeking to commit suicide in the confusion of insanity.**

**Those who set fire to mountains or forests** kill a lot of beings. They also destroy the country's natural resources. That act incurs the retribution of suicide in the midst of insanity.

According to the shastra 準三法度論, the Wailing Hell 哭地獄 is the place of retribution for burning the mountains and wilderness and places of abode of people 即焚燒曠野  
• 及黑燒穴居衆生果報處也.

*Sutra text:*

**"To malicious parents or step-parents, he speaks of the retribution of being flogged in future lives; to those who net and trap young animals, he speaks of the retribution of separation of flesh from bone; to those who slander the Triple Jewel, he speaks of the retribution of being blind, deaf, or mute; to those who slight the Dharma and regard the teachings with arrogance, he speaks of being in the Evil Paths forever; to those who recklessly use the things of the permanently dwelling, he speaks of the retribution of revolving in the hells for myriads of kalpas; to those who defile the pure conduct of others and purposely slander the Sangha, he speaks of an eternity in the animal realm; to those who scald, burn, behead, cut, or otherwise harm animals, he speaks of repayment in kind.**

*Sutra commentary:*

## Explained by Master YongHua

**"To malicious parents or step-parents, he speaks of the retribution of being flogged in future lives;**

Confucius' disciple Mǐn Zǐ Qian 閔子騫 had a stepmother who was partial to her own son and did not like Mǐn Zǐ Qian at all. In the winter, when padded garments are worn, she made a quilted and double-lined robe for her own child but a single-layered robe stuffed with rushes for Mǐn Zǐ Qian. While her own son was warm and cozy, Mǐn Zǐ Qian quietly endured the cold.

One day his father was riding with Mǐn Zǐ Qian in a chariot and saw that the boy was trembling. Chiding the lad for shivering on what was not a very cold day, the father lashed out with his whip and ripped his son's coat. When he saw the single layer of cloth and rushes, the father wept, felt ashamed at how badly he had treated his son, and vowed to get rid of his new wife immediately.

Mǐn Zǐ Qian knelt before his father and pleaded on his stepmother's behalf, saying, "When stepmother is here, one son has a simple garment, but if the mother leaves, two sons will freeze." When his father confronted Mǐn Zǐ Qian's stepmother with the facts, she felt shame and realized what a good stepson she had. Thereafter she treated both boys equally.

In China there were often adopted children in a family. These children were frequently treated very poorly by their stepparents. The result of such treatment of stepchildren is **flogging in future lives**.

**To those who net and trap young animals, he speaks of the**

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### retribution of separation of flesh from bone;

**Separation of flesh from bone** is a retribution incurred by those who trap animals, particularly very young ones. The term "flesh from bone" refers to one's family; as a retribution for this type of deed, one's family is dispersed and its members cannot see one another. Humans and birds may have different bodies, but a mothers' love for her children is the same.

**Young animals 雛** refers to young birds. There was a man who netted and trapped birds and sparrows for a living. One day, sparrows landed on a tree branch to rest during their winter trek. The man prepared a sticky pole and climbed up the branch. The branch broke. He fell. The pole pierced his head through his brain and he slowly bled to death. This story is well known in both Hinayana and Mahayana.

### To those who slander the Triple Jewel, he speaks of the retribution of being blind, deaf, or mute;

People who are **blind, deaf, or mute** have slandered the Triple Jewel and have fallen into the hells, where they spent countless kalpas. After their term they worked their way up to becoming animals, and, once they managed to escape the animal realm, they obtained human birth. This birth was into poor or impoverished circumstances or as mutes or blind people.

The Buddha is like the physician king, the Dharma is like good medicine and the sangha like a physician 瞻病人. Now, to slander the Triple Jewel means that one has no faith

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in Buddhism. One is blind and cannot see Triple Jewel. One is deaf and cannot hear the name of Triple Jewel. One is mute and cannot praise the Triple Jewel's virtues. Being thus alive is worse than death.

**To those who slight the Dharma and regard the teachings with arrogance, he speaks of being in the Evil Paths forever; Without the Dharma, who will save you from falling into the Evil Paths?**

Instead of regarding the Dharma Master as a Good Knowing Adviser, showing veneration, respecting and regarding him as the Buddha, they are arrogant. If there is such a Dharma Master who propagates the teachings, even if the Buddha stays in the world to speak of his merit and virtue for one kalpa, he could not finish. Slighters will fall into the three evil paths and undergo countless amounts of suffering. Humans have the chance to study and cultivate the Dharma. The chance of obtaining a human body is as tiny as the chance that a blind tortoise surfacing from the depths of the ocean will poke its head through a hole in a floating piece of wood 盲龜值浮木孔. How can we possibly slight the Dharma now that we have the chance to encounter it?

**To those who recklessly use the things of the permanently dwelling, he speaks of the retribution of revolving in the hells for myriads of kalpa to repay an equivalent amount of suffering. Beware of the multiplier!**

**To those who defile the pure conduct of others and purposely slander the Sangha, he speaks of an eternity in the animal realm;** For example, those who spread rumors of

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cheating, drinking, or killing about a monk who has not done anything wrong, will first fall into the hells and then spend an eternity among the animals.

**To those who scald, burn, behead, cut, or otherwise injure animals, he speaks of repayment in kind.** If you use boiling water or fire to get rid of ants or an insect nest, for example, or if you slice or club animals to death, you will be repaid in kind.

Scalding animals to skin them or to get rid of the feathers, or using fire to roast their bodies: does that sound familiar? The sutras relate how humans eat a goat. The goat dies and becomes a human and the human who ate the goat later dies and become a goat and gets eaten. They mutually eat one another. The vicious cycle of repayment never ends.

*Sutra text:*

**"To those who violate precepts and the regulations of pure eating, he speaks of the retribution of being born as birds and beasts suffering from hunger and thirst; to those who make unprincipled and destructive use of things, he speaks of the retribution of never obtaining what they seek; to those who are arrogant and haughty, he speaks of a retribution of being servile and of low class; to those whose double-tongued behavior causes dissension and disorder, he speaks of a retribution of tonguelessness and speech impediments; to those of deviant views, he speaks of rebirth in the frontier regions.**

*Sutra commentary:*

## Explained by Master YongHua

**"To those who violate precepts and the regulations of pure eating, he speaks of the retribution of being born as birds and beasts suffering from hunger and thirst;**

**Violating precepts** is doing that which you know quite clearly to be wrong. The offenses incurred by this class of wrongdoing are particularly heavy, much more so than when one misbehaves unknowingly. If you kill after taking the precept against killing, you are violating that precept. If you steal after receiving the precept, the same is true, and so forth for the precepts against sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants.

All these, however, are visible surface manifestations that everyone can see. There is yet another type of violation of the precepts, with which most people are unfamiliar, since it is invisible. There are two major kinds of precept violations: that which has form and can be seen and that which has no form and is invisible. In the Buddhadharma the latter is considered a violation of precepts just as much as is the former, even though in most other religions this is not the case.

The coarse offenses can be easily seen. Maintaining the precepts mark however, is more subtle and difficult to perceive. The Buddha told Kashyapa 十住毘婆沙・佛告迦葉： There are four kinds of violations that have no form and cannot be seen. In the first of these, one is able to maintain the pure precepts and practice them superficially, but in the practice there remains a view of a self 有比丘於戒經中  
• 盡能具行 • 而說有我： "I hold the precepts, I maintain the precepts. I do this, and I do that." Although such a per-

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son may not have actually violated any precept per se, he still has not maintained the true precepts, for one who does so cannot possibly have a view that he is higher or better than others.

In the second type of violation, one may be able to recite and quote all the sutras and regulations, yet never leave a view of the body 有誦持經律・守護戒行・於身見中・不動不離. In the first type of violation there was always the thought of I. In this case, although there is not constant thought of I, continual attention is paid to the body, which is never allowed to be the least bit uncomfortable. If one prefers a lazy and sloppy body and continues to pamper it, even though such a person has not violated any specific precept, neither has he truly maintained the precepts.

The third category of violation is related to those who are able to practice the Twelve Dhuta, or ascetic practices. Such practices are cultivated with great energy, vigor, and alertness: "I never sleep, yet I have great energy; instead of sleeping I just sit and meditate. Others like to eat, but I don't even drink water." Although one may follow austere practices, he may also retain the view that things still exist 見諸法定有, and he may not have relinquished the view of a self. One who cultivates such practices, but who has not yet seen through the emptiness of self and things, may seem to be holding precepts, but in fact his cultivation is still far off the mark.

In the fourth category of violation, one may practice and maintain a heart of great compassion toward all beings, yet be frightened or alarmed on hearing that dharmas are empty, nei-

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ther produced nor destroyed 有緣衆生行慈心・聞諸行  
無生相・心則驚怖。 In this case, as in the three above,  
even though there has been no actual violation of precepts,  
the moral conduct is far from perfected.

**Pure eating** refers not only to abstaining from meat but to eating at prescribed times. If, for example, one has vowed not to eat after noon and then does so, he not only violates the precept regarding pure eating, he violates the precept against stealing as well. When asked whether or not he has eaten, such a person may reply that he has not and thus also violate the precept against lying. The one who supplies food to the violator also violates precepts in these cases, and the Buddha said of all such persons, "They are not my disciples." Such persons are like garbage-eating seabirds or dung-eating ghosts. They are extremely unfortunate, and Earth Store Bodhisattva warns them that they may suffer the **retribution of becoming hungry birds and beasts**.

**To those who make unprincipled and destructive use of things, he speaks of the retribution of never obtaining what they seek;**

**Those who make unprincipled and destructive use of things** will also undergo retribution. Take, for example, a teacup that could have a long period of useful functioning. If, for no good reason, you decide to smash it and render it useless, you are committing the offense mentioned here. This principle applies not only to teacups but to anything which belongs to the permanently dwelling or to private individuals. In the future, those who commit this offense will be unable to fulfill their wishes and will never obtain what they seek.



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**Arrogant and haughty people will incur a retribution of being servile and of low class.** Arrogance is like a heavy burden. If you don't let go of it, you will definitely fall into the hells. Also, the view of a self can sever your wisdom life.

**To those whose double-tongued behavior causes dissension and disorder, he speaks of a retribution of tonguelessness and speech impediments;** Speaking with a double-tongue can cause countless acts of fighting, mutual cheating, slandering, etc...

**To those of deviant views, he speaks of rebirth in the frontier regions.**

**Deviant views** refers to those who absolutely refuse to comply with rules 違理. The worst of deviant views can sever good roots. There are two kinds of deviant views 中論明二種:

1. Views that destroy worldly bliss, by saying that there are no offenses, blessings, sages or worthy ones • 破世間樂 • 言無罪福聖賢等.
2. Views that destroy Nirvana's Way because they promote greed and attachment to evil and like to discriminate existence and emptiness 破涅槃道 • 貪著於握 • 分別有無.

This brings about the retribution of **rebirth in the frontier regions**, areas that are difficult and poor. These areas have no principles 義理. Father and son mutually make fun of

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each other. They sell their own family members. Or they may have to work as others' servants, and often must be servile to others. They are often beaten or punished. Or although they have human form, they live with animals.

*Sutra text:*

**"This is a general description of the hundreds of thousands of differing retributions resulting from the habitual bad deeds of body, mouth, and mind committed by the living beings of Jambudvipa. Since they have such differing responses, Earth Store Bodhisattva uses hundreds of thousands of expedient means to teach them. The living beings who commit offenses must first undergo retributions such as these, and then fall into the hells, where they pass through kalpas with no moment of escape. You should therefore protect people and protect their countries. Do not allow living beings to be confused by these manifold deeds."**

**On hearing this the Four Heavenly Kings wept sorrowfully, placed their palms together, and withdrew.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"This is a general description of the hundreds of thousands of differing retributions resulting from the habitual bad deeds of body, mouth, and mind committed by the living beings of Jambudvipa. Since they have such differing responses, Earth Store Bodhisattva uses hundreds of thousands of expedient means to teach them. The living beings who commit offenses must first undergo retribu-**

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**tions such as these, and then fall into the hells, where they pass through kalpas with no moment of escape. You should therefore protect people and protect their countries. Do not allow living beings to be confused by these manifold deeds."**

The habitual bad deeds of body, mouth, and mind, the three evils, are ten in all. Three pertain to the body: killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. There are four evils of the mouth: idle speech, false speech, evil speech, and double-tongued speech. There are three evils of the mind: greed, hatred, and stupidity. Taken together, these are called the Ten Evil Deeds.

We thus incessantly revolve on the Wheel, creating karmas and then undergo our retributions. At times, we are born into the heavens (including the eighth samadhi heaven) to enjoy our good karmas. Once these blessings are exhausted, we then fall. Or we could fall to the hells when our evil offenses mature to undergo unspeakable suffering for countless kalpas.

**After hearing this the Four Heavenly Kings wept sorrowfully, placed their palms together, and withdrew.**

They wept, on one hand, for those many beings who had to endure such suffering and, on the other, from shame that they had not fulfilled their responsibility to protect living beings. They were greatly moved, placed their palms together, and withdrew.

Contemplate the Four Noble Truths Wisdom, which says that the east is associated with Accumulation, the south is associated with Suffering, the west is associated with the Way and

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the north is associated with Extinction. These Four Heavenly Kings protect the states of the Four Noble Truths. In other words, they protect living beings.

These Four Heavenly Kings are called “protecting the world”, meaning that they protect others. They guard the mind king. If one does not illuminate the Four Noble Truths, the view and thought delusions will invade and harm the mind king, wreaking destruction on the states. If the mind king perishes, the states then fail and the people will also fail. Both states and wisdom are afflicted by the ghosts and spirits. If we can contemplate Suffering and Accumulation, we can then subdue the view and thought delusions. The country can become peaceful and the people secure. That is why the Four Heavenly Kings are called Contemplating The Mind Protecting The World Four Heavenly Kings.

觀心釋護世四天王・云東集・南苦・西道・北滅・四諦理・是四天・・觀四諦智・為四王・護四諦境・名護國護心數・是護衆生・・世者・他也・為他說心數・名護他衆生・若不照四諦理・見思二惑・侵害心王・毀損境界・・心王亡・境國敗・心數人民迸散・境智俱為鬼神所惱・能觀苦集・・控御見思・則國安民寧・・能為他說四諦・是護他國土・遮彼見思・使彼安樂・是為觀心護世四天王也・・央掘云・護真實法・名為護世也・

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End of the upper roll of the Sutra.

## CHAPTER 5: The Names of the Hells

This Chapter marks the start of middle roll.

Hells are created “on the fly” as the conditions (karmic forces) call for them. That is, they appear at the time one is supposed to receive one’s hellish retributions. The hells are also called the Yin World 陰間 because there is neither sunlight nor moonlight: it is very dark.

“Hell” comes from Chinese a compound “ground prison 地獄”: shadowy prisons within the ground.

The living beings of Jambudvīpa create karma. As a result, they must first undergo human realm retribution; this belongs to the “flower retribution 花報”. Then they will undergo the hells retribution, belonging to the fruit retribution.

The Sanskrit term for hell, which is transliterated as “Nī Lī 泥犁” in Chinese, means non-existent 無有. There is no happiness there. It makes one ponder one’s actions, doesn’t it? Each karmic action invokes a corresponding retribution. Everything is created from the mind alone. Therefore, the hells are designed to help those with inferior roots stop doing evil; those with middle roots are encouraged to practice goodness; those with superior roots have the chance to awaken to the fact that the Dharma nature is emptiness and thus bring forth the mind for Bodhi. That is what the hells are for,

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do not be confused by the coarse name “hell”.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, said to Earth Store Bodhisattva, "Humane One, for the sake of the gods, dragons, and the fourfold assembly, as well as for all living beings of the present and future, please speak about the names of the hells which are places where living beings of Jambudvīpa in the Saha World who are suffering for their offenses undergo retribution for their evil deeds, and of the retributions undergone for evil, so that future generations of living beings in the Dharma-Ending Age will know what those retributions are."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, said to Earth Store Bodhisattva,**

**At that time 爾時:** After the sutra mentioned the karma conditions and karma responses 業感, now it speaks of the different marks of karmic retributions 業報.

**Universal Worthy Bodhisattva** rides a six-tusked white elephant. His conduct pervades the Dharma Realm 行彌法界, that is why he is called Universal. His position is extremely close to Sagehood 位臨極聖, hence he is called Worthy. The Avatamsaka Sutra describes Manjushri as a child and

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Universal Worthy as an eldest son. As the elder son, he guides all the other Bodhisattvas to practice the ten thousand conducts. When these conducts are perfected, the fruition is accomplished: i.e. they certify to Bodhi. He resides in the é méi mountain 四川的峨眉山, one of the five holy peaks in China. This mountain has a light at its peak. This is because in Jambudvīpa, every household has the custom of lighting lamps to offer to the Buddha. That is one of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva's ten thousand practices. For those who can contemplate with utmost sincerity, a lamp will appear at night. (Each person will have a slightly different experience, depending on their individual blessings and wisdom). For instance, Great Master Xu Yún saw numberless lamps at night.

In the past, Universal Worthy was the fifth prince of No Fighting Thought King. He was named Fearless 無所畏. Because his practice was superior to the Bodhisattvas', Jeweled Treasury Buddha 寶藏佛 changed his name to Universal Worthy.

The foremost in subduing the Way, such causes are pervasive: that is Universal. After the severing Way, one comes near to the Sagely fruition: that is Worthy 文句云 • 伏道之頂 • 其因周徧曰普 • 斷道之後 • 隣於極聖曰賢.

Or one could say that once certified one is called true 真, and to not yet be certified is called similar 似. Universal Worthy reached Equal Enlightenment and comes close to the utmost



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attainment (Buddhahood). Therefore he is called Worthy. 記云・已證名・未證名似・普賢等覺・望極名似・故立賢名.

His views and conduct are pervasive throughout the Dharma Realm. That is how his compassionate vows are extremely vast 以見行彌法界・方能悲願偏弘.

**"Humane One, for the sake of the gods, dragons, representatives of the eight-fold division of Dharma protectors and the fourfold assembly, as well as for all living beings of the present and future, please speak about the names of the hells which are places where living beings of Jambudvīpa in the Saha World who are suffering for their offenses, undergo retribution for their evil deeds, and of the retributions undergone for evil, so that future generations of living beings in the Dharma-Ending Age will know what those retributions are."**

The title **Humane One** expresses veneration. Humaneness is an aggregate substance of the mind and virtue 仁為心德之統體. Heaven symbolizes the Buddhas, Earth symbolizes living beings. The human mind that can mesh heaven and Earth will become that of the Buddha 人心參合其中・直令生佛一體.

**The fourfold assembly** includes monks, nuns, upasikas and upasakas.

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*Sutra text:*

**Earth Store Bodhisattva** replied, "Humane One, receiving the Buddha's awesome spirit as well as your strength, I shall speak in general terms of the names of the hells, and of the retributions for offenses and evil deeds.

*Sutra commentary:*

**Earth Store Bodhisattva** replied, "Humane One, receiving the Buddha's awesome spirit as well as your strength, I shall speak in general terms of the names of the hells, and of the retributions for offenses and evil deeds.

**Humane One** means great kindness and compassion.

The phrase **your strength** carries a connotation of being unmatched and having established a track record of success in crossing over living beings. Universal Worthy Bodhisattva has limitless practices. He fully understands that the ten thousand conducts are of the same nature and that crossing over living beings resides in one mind 了萬行之一性・度衆生於一心. Because Universal Worthy Bodhisattva can establish such an extremely high position, Earth Store Bodhisattva alludes to his strength as that of a great knight 大士力.

**In general terms** 略說 are words of modesty.

*Sutra text:*

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**"Humane One, east of Jambudvipa there is a mountain called Iron Ring, which is totally black and has neither sun nor moonlight. There is a great hell there called Ultimately Uninterrupted, and another called the Great Avici. There is also a hell called Four Pointed, a hell called Flying Knives, a hell called Fiery Arrows, and a hell called Squeezing Mountains; a hell called Piercing Spears, a hell called Iron Carts, a hell called Iron Beds, and a hell called Iron Ox; a hell called Iron Clothing, a hell called Thousand Blades, a hell called Iron Donkeys, and a hell called Molten Brass; a hell called Embracing Pillar, a hell called Flowing Fire, a hell called Plowing Tongues, and a hell called Head Chopping; a hell called Burning Feet, a hell called Eye Pecking, a hell called Iron Pellets, and a hell called Quarreling; a hell called Iron Ax, and a hell called Much Hatred."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Humane One, east of Jambudvipa there is a mountain called Iron Ring, which is totally black and has neither sun nor moonlight.**

In the Long Agama Sutra 長阿含・世記經地獄品, the Buddha told the bhikshus that those Four Continents “under heaven” are encircled by 8,000 “under heavens”, which are circled on the outside by the great sea. Then there is the Great Vajra Mountain that encircles the Great Sea 大海水. Then outside the Great Vajra Mountain, there is another Great Vajra Mountain. The area between the two Vajra Mountains is very dark. According to the texts, 邃 this area is very dis-

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tant and very dark • 邃 • 深遠 • 黑而且邃 • 闇之極者, and the sun, moon and gods with great spiritual powers cannot use their light to illuminate it. The Abidharma Shastra says 立世阿毘曇論 that is where the eight great hells are located. It is so dark there that one cannot even see one's raised hand. However, when Buddhas appear in the world, his light illuminates universally, so these residents can then see each other.

**There is a great hell there called Ultimately Uninterrupted, and another called the Great Avici.**

It is not clear from the scriptures, if the Ultimately Uninterrupted 極無間 Hell and another called the Great Avici are one or two. According to the Long Agama and Contemplating The Buddha's Samadhi Sutras 觀佛三昧, they are one. According to this sutra and the Shurangama Sutra, they are two.

There is a great hell called the Ultimately Uninterrupted and another called the Great Avici. "Uninterrupted" contains the five previously discussed meanings. Avici is Sanskrit for 阿=無, 鼻=遮 conceal and help: no one can conceal it so that it cannot be entered, 無救 no way to help: no one can help the inhabitants escape from suffering. This hell is distinguished from the Ultimately Uninterrupted. As compared to the Uninterrupted Hell, the Avici is for extremely evil people who must undergo more suffering over a longer time period. Within the great Avici Hell, there are countless smaller hells.

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Extreme evil refers to the Five Rebellious Offenses 五逆. Also, there are four kinds of great offenses 大罪, equivalent to the four inviolable precepts of monks 四逆・犯根本罪. Those who commit any one of these offenses will, at their end of their lives, fall into the Great Avici.

The Buddha says that there are nine types of people who often visit the Avici Hell 大阿鼻. Namely, those:

1. Who eat the sangha's food.
2. Who eat the Buddha's food.
3. Who kill their father.
4. Who kill their mother.
5. Who Kill an Arhat.
6. Who destroy the Sangha's harmony 破和合僧.
7. Who destroy a bhikshu's pure precept 破比丘淨戒
8. Bhikshunis who violate the pure precept 犯淨行尼.
9. Icchantikas 作一闍提.

The Proper Dharma Mindfulness Sutra 正法念經 says that the suffering in the Avici Hell is a thousand times worse than that in the other hells. The life span there is one great kalpa. Also, the Contemplating the Buddha Samadhi Sutra 觀佛三昧海經 says that the Avici Hell is 8,000 yojanas square. It has seven layers of iron walls, seven layers of iron nets and seven layers of sword forests. Each layer has eighteen cold and freezing hells and other hells.

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There is also a hell called Four Pointed, a hell called Flying Knives, a hell called Fiery Arrows, and a hell called Squeezing Mountains; a hell called Piercing Spears, a hell called Iron Carts, a hell called Iron Beds, and a hell called Iron Ox; a hell called Iron Clothing, a hell called Thousand Blades, a hell called Iron Donkeys, and a hell called Molten Brass; a hell called Embracing Pillar, a hell called Flowing Fire, a hell called Plowing Tongues, and a hell called Head Chopping; a hell called Burning Feet, a hell called Eye Pecking, a hell called Iron Pellets, and a hell called Quarreling; a hell called Iron Ax, and a hell called Much Hatred."

There is also 復有地獄: The following hells are subsidiary to the Great Avici Hell 阿鼻地獄眷屬.

The **Four Pointed 四角** Hell is square with four horn-like prods whose points prick living beings. Those who pretend to be left-home people, who indulge in defiled pleasures and lose their purity, fall into this kind of hell upon death. This is part of the hot hells. It is surrounded by an iron wall 500 yojanas long. There is rain of fire, and iron falls from above. The body is constantly cooked or burned.

Or they could be six pointed or eight pointed or four cornered 或為六角・或八角・或四稜. Those who when in the human realm either chopped off living beings' limbs, noses or ears, lopped flesh off their back, etc, or taught others to do so, would end up in these types of hells.

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**The Flying Knives** 飛刀 Hell 刀輪地獄 is also known as Knife Wheel Hell. Prisoners are surrounded by knife mountains on all four sides. In space, there are eight hundred ten thousand hundred million extremely large knife wheels which are successively lowered like rain 八百萬億極大刀輪・隨次而下・猶如雨滴. Knives suddenly appear and fly at people, who suffer fatal pain 身分斷絕・頭首分離 but are instantly reborn to undergo suffering again. In the human realm, they used to indulge in fighting, and gave knives and sticks to others for use in their fights. They capriciously killed and harmed a lot of people 肆意殺害.

The **Fiery Arrows** 火箭 Hell has countless fire arrows that go through the bodies. Or prisoners are laid on an iron bed; from above and below there are countless fiery arrows that pierce the body. In one day and one night, the prisoners experience six hundred one hundred million deaths 六百億生死. In prior lives, they were stupid, greedy and had a lot of desires; they weren't filial to their parents, were not respectful to their elders and teachers, did not accord with goodness 不順善教, killed and harmed many living beings, and deceived people. Thus they fell into this hell.

The **Squeezing Mountains** 夾山 Hell's eastern doors open and the prisoners rush out to escape. They see a pair of mountains toward which they rush to hide. Suddenly fire breaks out before and behind them, preventing any escape; the mountains come together and crush them; blood flows

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like a river, bones and muscles are mashed. The same applies to the doors of all the four directions. This is the karmic retribution for oppressing others with worldly power.

In the **Piercing Spears** 通槍 Hell, the spears are bigger than the fire arrows previously mentioned. They come from all directions to pierce the body, creating huge holes and causing death. This retribution is from excessive killing karmas, especially with a love of fighting.

In the **Iron Carts** 鐵車 Hell, prisoners are run over by great iron carts which go back and forth over them, crushing them to death. When Shakyamuni was cultivating on the causal ground, he opened his heavenly eye and saw the suffering in this hell. He then brought forth the mind of great kindness and vowed to save all offenders in the hells. That was his initial resolution for kindness and great compassion.

The **Iron Beds** 鐵床 Hell contains an iron bed on which the offenders are forced to lie; the ghosts then set this bed (or pillar 銅柱) on fire. Also, at end of their life, prisoners sit on the bed and a knife wheel descends from above and rises from below to chop them. Deviant sex habits create the iron beds and iron pillars hell. Another variation might be that the prisoners are laid on the bed or forced to embrace a pillar. Hell soldiers then light them up with fire to burn them.

The **Iron Ox** 鐵牛 Hell is filled with horned oxen. They stab the prisoners to death with their horns which are made of fiery hot steel. This hell is full of noises from the furious ox-



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en as well as screams of pain from the prisoners. This is because when these beings were in the human realm, they were whimsical, barbarous, unprincipled, and loved to afflict sentient beings.

The **Iron Clothing** 鐵衣 Hell is for those who receive precepts but do not uphold them. Hooks, barbs and knives strip them of their clothing. When naked, they see an iron suit of clothes flying in the air. They call out to it and it comes. The iron becomes searing hot and burns them to death, whereupon they are revived by the Clever Breeze and the iron clothes disappear by themselves. The ancients have a saying: “Seeing those who do not wear their sashes, these people will go to this hell and wear iron clothing.” This retribution arises from whipping or hitting living beings, and is also a consequence for left-home people who break precepts and yet receive or use land and clothes offerings. Also, it is for left-home people who do not wear their precept sashes.

In the **Thousand Blades** 千刃 Hell, blades (or “daggers” 匕首名刃，千刃刺體) fall upon prisoners like rain, mincing them to death. They are then revived by the Clever Breeze. This retribution is for those who do not follow their teacher’s instructions, give rise to evil minds for rebellious acts 興惡逆心, have no gratitude for being nurtured and grown 不知恩養, steal from and harm their teachers, defile their teacher’s pure food, sit on their teacher’s seat or bed, steal their teacher’s alms bowl, scold or slander their teachers, beat them, kill them, and poison them. Whether it’s left-home people or Brahmans, they do illegal acts 作諸非法,

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know no shame or remorse, destroy images and stupas, steal Dharmas and precious things, kill their uncles, parents, and siblings. Upon their death, they are born sitting on a great knife bed. A hundred hundred million 百億 fiery blades burn and pierce their body. A fire wheel descends from space smashing their body into thousands of pieces.

**In the Iron Donkeys 鐵驢** Hell, the donkeys trample on the prisoners' bodies.

In the **Molten Brass 烱銅** Hell, brass is poured into the prisoner's mouths, burning them to death.

As Great Master Xuan Hua already explained in the Shurangama Sutra, people who are excessively fond of sex are punished in the **Embracing Pillar 抱柱** Hell:. They mistake the pillar for their favorite lover when alive. Their six organs are on fire. Fiery iron bugs enter through their eyes and exit through the sex organ. Each day and night there are 900 hundred hundred thousand million 九百億 deaths.

The **Flowing Fire 流火** Hell (also known as great crying hell 大哭) contains fire that moves like a current, burning one's bones and marrow. This is the result of living beings' lustful deeds, and is created by their lust fire. There is a large iron mountain that has fire everywhere. In addition, the hell guards here are ruthless, bark out angry words, and use fiery iron pestles to crush the prisoner's heads, a retribution that arises from harassing and tormenting the ten thousand people

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when in the human realm.

The **Plowing Tongues** 耕舌 Hell is for living beings who slander the Triple Jewel or commit other mouth karmas. Their tongue is pulled out (with a hook) to several feet (elongating it and making it swollen) and then furrowed with a plow.

The **Head Chopping** 剝首 Hell is for those who behead living beings, or mutilate their heads (e.g. seeing a scorpion or centipede or other such poisonous insect, you used something to crush its head). The hell soldiers use sharp knives or axes to skin or chop prisoners 解散, like chopping the heads off of lambs, ripping off their skin and flesh.

In the **Burning Feet** 燒腳 Hell (also called the Hot Charcoal/Ash 熱灰) Hell, fire is applied to the feet, and the surfaces of the feet are covered with burning charcoal 炭. Also, after one comes out from the great hell, wherever the feet are set, blazing fires spring up, burning the flesh. One may see what looks like flat terrain, and feel very happy, thinking it's safe, but then step on hot ash when walking there, This retribution is from putting live beings into fire, into burning charcoal or burning sands, or from deviant sex with another's wife. Left-home people who dwell at way places and break precepts or trample the way place 或蹋踐四支提境界 • 及履支提影 also end up here.

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The **Eye Pecking** 噉眼 Hell has vultures which suddenly appear and seize prisoners with their iron claws, gouging out their eyes. Sometimes they then drink their eye socket fluid, and crack their skull to drink their brain fluids. This is the retribution for stupidity and the karma from giving others drinks 本與酒惡業果報.

In the **Iron Pellets** 鐵丸 Hell, the iron pellets come from all around you to hit your head and body until you die. Or, in another variation, hungry living beings swallow hot iron pellets.

The **Quarreling** 諍論 Hell is for those who like to argue and fight due to greed and jealousy, often indulging in hatred and anger. They are constantly tormented and berated by the myriad ghosts. The prisoners use iron claws to mutually harm each other. Razor sharp claws are naturally formed on their hands.

In the **Iron Ax** 鐵鈇 Hell, your head is axed off. Just out of the Iron Pellets hell, the prisoners are very fearful, seeking escape. Suddenly they find themselves arriving here (it is about 500 yojanas square). The hell employees catch them, put them on top of hot iron, use axes to chop their hands, ears, nose, and body. They scream in pain and terror. This is the result of ‘having an ax at one’s mouth’—i.e. chopping people with one’s evil words.

The **hell called Much Hatred** 多瞋 is for those who like to get angry. The fire of hatred burns one’s insides. Here also

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the prisoners use iron claws to mutually harm each other. Razor sharp half moon shaped claws are naturally formed on their hands. Each gives rise to the mind of blaming others, thinking, "He or she oppressed me. Now I should oppress them back in return." Both sides are thus very angry.

*Sutra text:*

**Earth Store Bodhisattva said, "Humane One, such are the unlimited number of hells within the Iron Ring. In addition there is the hell of Crying Out, the hell of Pulling Tongues, the hell of Dung and Urine, and the hell of Brazen Locks; the hell of Fire Elephants, the hell of Fire Dogs, the hell of Fire Horses, and the hell of Fire Oxen; the hell of Fire Mountains, the hell of Fire Stones, the hell of Fire Beds, and the hell of Fire Beams; the hell of Fire Eagles, the hell of Sawing Teeth, the hell of Flaying Skin, and the hell of Blood Drinking; the hell of Burning Hands, the hell of Burning Feet, the hell of Hanging Thorns, and the hell of Fire Houses; the hell of Iron Rooms, and the hell of Fire Wolves.**

**"Such are the hells, and within each of them there are one, two, three, four, or as many as hundreds of thousands of smaller hells, each with its own name."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**Earth Store Bodhisattva said, "Humane One, such are the unlimited number of hells within the Iron Ring.**

The sutra only mentions general names for the hells, each of

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which has its own smaller hells. Their numbers are limitless.

**Such is the unlimited number of hells 有(如是等地獄):** Ordinary people have false thinking and give rise to love and grasping. They grasp existence as a state. Therefore there is cause and effect, and suffering and bliss.

The Consciousness Only Shastra **唯識論** says that the hells function in the same way as our everyday experience: The soldiers in the hells oppress the prisoners because they are manifestations of the prisoners' evil minds. Outside of the evil mind, there are no bronze dogs, serpents etc... Likewise, the Consciousness Only Shastra teaches that all the worldly dharmas are thus and that everything in our everyday experience is also a manifestation of our minds. **一切如地獄・同見獄卒等・能為逼迫事・皆是罪人惡業心現・並無心外實銅狗鐵蛇等事・世間一切事法・亦復如是。**

**In addition there is the hell of Crying Out, the hell of Pulling Tongues, the hell of Dung and Urine, and the hell of Brazen Locks; the hell of Fire Elephants, the hell of Fire Dogs, the hell of Fire Horses, and the hell of Fire Oxen; the hell of Fire Mountains, the hell of Fire Stones, the hell of Fire Beds, and the hell of Fire Beams; the hell of Fire Eagles, the hell of Sawing Teeth, the hell of Flaying Skin, and the hell of Blood Drinking; the hell of Burning Hands, the hell of Burning Feet, the hell of Hanging Thorns, and the hell of Fire Houses; the hell of Iron Rooms, and the hell of Fire Wolves.**

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Inside the eighteen hells, there are eight cold hells, and eight hot hells. According to the Long Agama Sutras, **the hell of Crying Out** 叫喚, also called the Loudly Crying out Hell, is the fourth of these eight hot hells; the fifth is called Great Crying Out hell. Each of these has sixteen levels 遊增. The hell of Crying Out is very noisy night and day. These prisoners never stop screaming. The hell soldiers catch the prisoners and put them inside large cauldrons to fry, cook and drown. This is the retribution for evil acts from anger, hatred, harboring poisonous minds and deviant views. The Great Crying hell is the destination of choice for those who have the habits of deviant views and create evil karmas from lust and love.

**The hell of Pulling Tongues** 拔舌 specializes in pulling out people's tongues with iron hooks.

**The hell of Dung and Urine** 糞尿 is filled with the substances to which it owes its name. When hungry, the prisoners here eat dung and, when thirsty, they drink urine.

There is no way to escape from the **hell of Brazen Locks** 銅鎖. 800 iron locks tie up the prisoners' necks. This is the result of the seven kinds of disciples and 96 kinds of brahmins claiming improper dharmas to be proper, claiming proper dharmas to be improper or breaking lighter precepts but failing to repent for a long time. Each day and night, they go through ninety ten thousand deaths.

## Explained by Master YongHua

In **the hell of Fire Elephants** 火象, fire elephants trample the prisoners to death. During the time of Kashyapa Buddha 迦葉佛, there was a bhikshu who failed to hit the board before the meal offering. A white robe asked why not. The bhikshu replied 惡口: “These other bhikshus are like white elephants: they are never full.” He thus saved the unconsumed offerings for the following day. He then fell to this hell and received a white elephant body 火燒受苦・至今不絕. The prisoners undergo suffering from their prior karma. Other guests come because they thought that by making elephants drunk, they could kill more people, thus enabling them to win the battle. They thus gave wine to elephants and got them drunk.

**The hell of Fire Dogs** 火狗 has many dogs who have black-purple colored bodies 黑紫色 that are blazing with fire and full of smoke. They are very filthy and terrifying in appearance. They eat both the flesh and bones of the prisoners. These prisoners used to raise animals and then cook or grill them.

In **the hell of Fire Horses** 火馬, horses whose bodies are on fire run about as if crazy and chase after the prisoners.

In **the hell of Fire Oxen** 火牛, oxen with fire on their bodies pierce the prisoners with their horns. This hell and the prior are the result of sexual acts with horses and oxen. Seeing these animals, the prisoners eagerly approach them because of



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those sexual habits. They enter their sexual organs, and immediately enter into their bellies which are full of fire. They are thus tortured.

In **the hell of Fire Mountains** 火山, mountains with fire all over, burn the prisoners to death. The mountains crush together or rub into each other, killing the prisoners, and then returning to their original places.

The hell guards in **the hell of Fire Stones** 火石 use stones made of fire to crush the prisoners to death. Prisoners are first laid face up on the stones and then other stones are used to crush and burn them. This occurs repeatedly until their body and flesh become paste.

**The hell of Fire Beds** 火床 is similar to the Iron Beds Hell described before, except the beds are made from fire rather than iron.

**The hell of Fire Beams** 火梁 has (all) fire beams. Prisoners are either hung on the beams or crushed by the beams.

**The hell of Fire Eagles** 火鷹 is similar to the Iron Eagles Hell described earlier. There is a mountain that is filled with fire as tall as 5,000 yojanas. It has an iron tree that is full of iron eagles whose bodies are on fire. These fire eagles break open the prisoner's skulls and eat the brains. They particularly like to eat people's eyes (also brains, heart, stomach, large and small intestines). After eating the eyes, they fly off.

## Explained by Master YongHua

In **the hell of Sawing Teeth 鋸牙**, the prisoners are on fiery iron ground, bound by fiery black ropes. Their bodies are sawed apart by fiery saws. In addition, their teeth are sawed off. This is from the four evil mouth karmas.

In **the hell of Flaying Skin 剝皮**, people are skinned to death. After being skinned, their flesh is then cut off. These used to be meat suppliers: killers of sheep, pig, cattle and deer, fish and fowl.

People's blood is drunk by bugs in **the hell of Blood Drinking 飲血**. Their blood turns into a lake. The bugs then break the tendons 筋 and drink their marrow. Or the prisoners are forced to drink their own blood. This results from the stealing karma: they stole goats 羊 or donkeys 驢 to have sexual intercourse with them because there were no women.

In **the hell of Burning Hands 燒手**, hands are burned by molten iron, causing the entire body to also be burned 通身俱燒. This is the sixth hot hell 八熱地獄第六燒炙.

The seventh hot hell is **the hell of Burning Feet 燒腳**, in which prisoners must tread on fire charcoals which burn their entire bodies 通身俱燒. This and the previous hell are the result of killing living beings, chopping off their hands and feet to grill, burn, cook or fry them.

**The hell of Hanging Thorns 倒刺** is also called the

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“disturbing river 撓撓河”. It is 20,000 yojanas square in size. Both sides of the river have iron trees. Each tree has a lot of iron hooks that hang down, which are aflame day and night; the trees are one yojana tall, and the hooks are 16 centimeters 寸. The prisoner’s bodies are hooked on them.

Thorns are used to pierce from below or above. In their prior lives, they used to be women who engaged in deviant sex behind their husbands’ backs.

**The hell of Fire Houses 火屋** has houses which are all made of iron, and are on fire. The guards catch the prisoners and fling them into these rooms where there is raging hot fire. The raging fire is very hard to endure. This hell is followed by:

**The hell of Iron Rooms 鐵屋**, where the rooms are made of iron and are also all on fire. The prisoners scream in great pain.

In **the hell of Fire Wolves 火狼**, there are terrifying, evil and coarse fire wolves chasing after the prisoners and eating them. The wolves chew on their body and flesh, stepping on them with their feet and gnawing/tugging them with their mouths. This is the retribution for all evil deeds.

**"Such are the hells, and within each of them there are one, two, three, four, or as many as hundreds of thousands of smaller hells, each with its own name."**

Each hell has its own subsidiary hells.

## Explained by Master YongHua

*Sutra text:*

**Earth Store Bodhisattva told the Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, "Humane One, such are the karmic retributions of the living beings of Jambudvipa who do evil. The power of karma is extremely great and can rival Mount Sumeru; it can deepen the great ocean and can obstruct the way of wisdom. For this reason, living beings should not disregard small evils and consider them as being no offense, for after death retribution is undergone in the most exact detail. Father and son may be close, but their roads diverge and each goes his own way, and even if they should meet, neither would consent to undergo suffering in the other's place. Now, drawing on the awesome spiritual power of the Buddha, I shall speak of the events of hellish retributions for offenses. Please, Humane One, hear these words."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**Earth Store Bodhisattva told the Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, "Humane One, such are the karmic retributions of the living beings of Jambudvipa who do evil. The power of karma is extremely great and can rival Mount Sumeru; it can deepen the great ocean and can obstruct the way of wisdom.**

In particular, living beings in Jambudvipa's resolve and nature are unfixed. They habitually create evil karmas and therefore create these hells to incur the retributions.

Karma is created by the mind. The mind had limitless power,

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therefore, the retributions caused are just as boundless: they are much higher than Mount Sumeru, and much deeper than the great ocean. Worse, these retributions can obstruct the Way and prevent us from seeing it. All of this is from the karmic forces 業力 which can obstruct the sagely Way. The karmas that are with outflows can obstruct the Three Vehicles sagely Way. The karmas that are non-outflow can obstruct the Buddha Nature Middle Way. That is why cultivators are most fearful of the power of retributions. The people with wisdom, such as Bodhisattvas, fear causes and do not dare commit offenses.

**For this reason, living beings should not disregard small evils and consider them as being no offense, for after death retribution is undergone in the most exact detail.**

Furthermore, beware!

The Nirvana Sutra states: “Do not disregard the small evil, thinking that it’s inconsequential; a drop of water may not be much but will gradually fill up the vessel.”

Each must undergo the exact retribution from the offenses created. No substitution to undergo the retribution is possible.

In the Samadhi Sutra 三昧經, the Buddha informs Ananda: “Why can’t the worldly people obtain the Way? Because they have been accumulating defiled thoughts while sitting. A thought comes and goes. A day and night has 840,000 八億四千萬 thoughts that follow one another incessantly. A

## Explained by Master YongHua

good thought creates a good retribution. A bad one creates a bad retribution, just like the echo that follows sound, or the shadow that follows form.”

**Father and son may be close, but their roads diverge and each goes his own way, and even if they should meet, neither would consent to undergo suffering in the other's place, there is no substitution allowed. Now, drawing on the awesome spiritual power of the Buddha, I shall speak of the events of hellish retributions for offenses. Please, Humane One, hear these words."**

That is why cultivators of the Way generally start with repenting of their karmic obstructions. We perform various dharmas of repentance. We repent until we are purified. Every day, we recite sutras, the Buddha's name, mantras etc... Eventually, we will obtain a response and can eradicate karmic obstructions. Then, everything opens up: it becomes easy to cultivate, to encounter the Dharma, meet with Good Knowing Advisers, listening to Dharma, or leave the home-life.

*Sutra text:*

**Universal Worthy replied, "I have long known of the retributions of the Three Evil Ways. I hope that the Humane One will discuss them, so that living beings who do evil in the future time of the Dharma-Ending Age may hear the Humane One's words and take refuge in the Buddha."**

*Sutra commentary:*

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**Universal Worthy replied, "I have long known of the retributions of the Three Evil Ways. I hope that the Humane One will discuss them, so that living beings who do evil in the future time of the Dharma-Ending Age may hear the Humane One's words and take refuge in the Buddha."**

If there is birth, there must also be death. In the midst of birth and death, the Triple Jewel, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, are the only reliable places one can turn to. That is why every day we recite the Triple Refuges.

*Sutra text:*

**Earth Store said, "Humane One, these are the phenomena of retribution in the hells for offenses. There is a hell in which the offender's tongue is stretched out and plowed through by cattle; there is a hell in which the offender's heart is pulled out and eaten by yakshas; there is a hell in which the offender's body is fried in cauldrons of seething broth; there is a hell in which the offender is made to embrace a red-hot bronze pillar; there is a hell in which the offender is followed everywhere by fire; there is a hell in which there is cold and ice; there is a hell in which there is limitless dung and urine; there is a hell in which there are flying maces; there is a hell in which there are many fiery spears; there is a hell in which one is constantly beaten on the chest and back; there is a hell in which one's hands and feet are burned; there is a hell in which the offender is wrapped and bound by iron serpents; there is a hell in which there are running iron dogs; and there is a hell in which the offender is yoked between iron donkeys.**

## Explained by Master YongHua

*Sutra commentary:*

**Earth Store said, "Humane One, these are the phenomena of retribution in the hells for offenses.**

Following is a brief list of the various types of retributions in the hells. There is every kind of torture imaginable in the hells.

**There is a hell in which the offender's tongue is stretched out and plowed through by cattle; there is a hell in which the offender's heart is pulled out and eaten by yakshas; there is a hell in which the offender's body is fried in cauldrons of seething broth; there is a hell in which the offender is made to embrace a red-hot bronze pillar; there is a hell in which the offender is followed everywhere by fire; there is a hell in which there is cold and ice; there is a hell in which there is limitless dung and urine; there is a hell in which there are flying maces; there is a hell in which there are many fiery spears; there is a hell in which one is constantly beaten on the chest and back; there is a hell in which one's hands and feet are burned; there is a hell in which the offender is wrapped and bound by iron serpents; there is a hell in which there are running iron dogs; and there is a hell in which the offender is yoked between iron donkeys.**

**There is a hell in which the offender's tongue is stretched out and plowed through by cattle** and molten copper is poured into her mouth. This hell is for those who like to swear at others or for those who commit the four mouth karmas, or slander the Triple Jewel. There is intense suffering



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and they cannot die even though they wish to.

**There is a hell in which the offender's heart is pulled out and eaten by yakshas.** This is the destination for those evil folks who indulge in evil thoughts all day long. They like to think of ways to harm living beings, their evil thoughts are abundant. In particular, they like to steal from their parents, elders and teachers. After death, they are sent to this kind of hell where their hearts are eaten by yakshas or given to dogs to eat. They go through five hundred one hundred million births and deaths each day and night, undergoing limitless suffering. 諸罪人生灰河中・諸劍樹間・有一羅刹・以叉・叉其心出・與夜叉食者・

**There is a hell in which the offender's body is fried in cauldrons of seething broth.** These evil people committed offenses with their body: they killed, beat, harmed, or stole. Each hell has 18 cauldrons, each of which is 40 yojanas wide and filled with boiling iron. 500 raksashas fan the enormous stone coals to heat the copper cauldron. The stone flames form a continuous line for 60 days without extinguishing; during this time Jambudvipa would have elapsed 13,000 years. The boiling copper gushes forth rapidly and disperses, transforming into fire wheels and returning back to the cauldrons. This is the result of breaking precepts, killing living beings as offerings (to the spirits) and then eating their flesh and blood; or from burning mountains. Prisoners are burned to death in the cauldrons, only the bones are left. Ghosts then pick them out, and give them to iron dogs to eat. The dogs then vomit onto the ground: the prisoners thus are revived. The ghosts guards then bind them and drive them back onto the caul-

## Explained by Master YongHua

drons.

**There is a hell in which the offender is made to embrace a red-hot bronze pillar**, as has already described, for those who commit acts of lust, and destroy other's chastity.

**There is a hell in which the offender is followed everywhere by fire.** Those who like to pressure good people, after their death, will fall into this kind of hell. Fierce fire constantly pursues them. The more they run, the fiercer the fire becomes. They cannot escape and end up being burned to death.

**There is a hell in which there is cold and ice**, which is 20,000 yojanas square. As soon people enter it, freezing winds blow from the four directions. The prisoners there suffer from cold wind and icy water. Their bodies, stomachs, muscles are frozen and cracked. This is retribution arises from not being good.

**There is a hell in which there is limitless dung and urine.** Prisoners here must not only drink urine and eat excrements, but their tongues and hearts are also infested with excrement bugs. They used to break the eight vegetarian precepts and have impure evil karmas 不淨惡業.

The Hell Sutra 地獄經 says that the boiling dung hell has 18 partitions. Each partition is 8,000 yojanas wide, containing 18 iron cities. Each city also has 18 partitions which are enclosed by four walls. There are one hundred thousand hundred million knife trees which produce iron bugs. The pris-

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oners help themselves to the excrement which is full of iron bugs which chew at their tongues and eat their hearts. 沸屎獄・有十八隔・各八千由旬・十八鐵城・一一有十八隔・隔中四壁・百萬億劍樹・皆生鐵蟲・口中熱屎有情飲屎・此蟲啞舌啖心。

**There is a hell in which there are flying maces**, which are the size of apples or lemons, and are covered with many thorns or needles. They are either on the ground or they could be flying even though they are made of iron. They fly and spear your head, eyes, ears, and nose: all over your body through to the marrow. Beings have to live here for five hundred ten thousand hundred million years 經五百萬億歲. When in the human realm, they used to be soldiers who used maces to harm people.

**There is a hell in which there are many fiery spears** that pierce your sense organs and four limbs and burn you to death. This is similar to the **Piercing Spears** hell described before, except there is more fire.

**There is a hell in which one is constantly beaten on the chest and back** by a red hot iron hammer (熱鐵錘). This is the direct result for such karmas in the past.

**There is a hell in which one's hands and feet are burned:** Fire burns the hands and stepping on charcoals burns the feet.

**There is a hell in which the offender is wrapped and bound by iron serpents.** In the hells where offenders are

## Explained by Master YongHua

coiled and bound by iron snakes, there are serpents whose entire bodies are covered with mouths from which they spit out small snakes, each of which has 20 iron mouths. The small snakes drill into the eyes and emerge from the genitals. This extremely unbearable pain comes from lustful conduct.

**There is a hell in which there are running iron dogs** that constantly chase after prisoners to maul and kill them. Iron snakes and dogs are like those described earlier.

**There is a hell in which the offender is yoked between iron donkeys.** During the time of Kashyapa Buddha, a monk used to give himself twice or three times his share when distributing food and drinks. The other monks reprimanded him. He replied: "I have much toil as cook. You are not grateful. Although your body is as healthy as a donkey, your merits are beneath them." After death, for having created such mouth karmas he received the donkey body as retribution in this hell. The prisoners ride on these iron donkeys, and the fire burns their bodies.

*Sutra text:*

**"Humane One, such are the retributions. In each hell there are a hundred thousand kinds of utensils of karma, and all are made of copper, iron, stone, or fire, the four materials which are summoned by the manifold karmas. If I were to explain the hellish retributions for offenses in detail, any single hell would have hundreds of thousands of kinds of acute suffering. How much more numerous would the suffering in the many hells be. Now, drawing upon the awesome spirit of the Buddha, I have replied to**

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**the Humane One's question. It has been a general discussion, for if I were to speak in detail, I could not finish for kalpas."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Humane One, such are the retributions. In each hell there are a hundred thousand kinds of utensils of karma, and all are made of copper, iron, stone, or fire, the four materials which are summoned by the manifold karmas.**

The text only mentions a few hells. The Hell of Crying Out is the fourth of the eight hot hells, which are counted among the 18 hells. There are also 18 hot hells in that list.

Outside of the mind, there are no hells. There is no need for a host of the hells. They are created in response to living beings' karmas (and thus we see ghosts, beasts, suffering, and hells, ...). If living beings have no discrimination, how can there be suffering or hell? All of it is just a mirage. They are actually empty.

**If I were to explain the hellish retributions for offenses in detail, any single hell would have hundreds of thousands of kinds of acute suffering. How much more numerous would the suffering in the many hells be. Now, drawing upon the awesome spirit of the Buddha, I have replied to the Humane One's question. It has been a general discussion, for if I were to speak in detail, I could not finish for kalpas."**

All hells are created from the mind alone.

## **Explained by Master YongHua**

There is no possible substitute for anyone in the hells in order to spare their suffering.

The offenses that we create are comprised of the ten evils. The three poisons are their causes. The limitless torture utensils are used daily on the prisoners as retribution for having created limitless offenses every day.

## CHAPTER 6: The Thus Come One's Praises

Only the Buddha knows the extent of the Bodhisattva's spiritual powers, and hence only he can praise Earth Store Bodhisattva. Why does he make praises? First, to confirm that the Bodhisattva has such powers. Secondly, to enable living beings to obtain all sorts of benefits.

Why did the Buddha praise his spiritual powers and not his merit and virtues? The merit and virtues of the six paramitas are the causes while the inconceivable spiritual powers are the fruitions. The Great Shastra states: "There are two kinds of living beings : 1) those who like good dharmas 樂善法, and 2) those who like the fruitions/retributions of the good dharmas 樂善法果報. For those who enjoy good dharmas, praise the merit and virtues. For those latter ones, praise the spiritual powers." The Buddha praises Earth Store Bodhisattva's spiritual powers so as to help living beings obtain all kinds of benefits.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time the World-Honored One emitted a great bright light from his entire body, illuminating as many Buddha-lands as there are grains of sand in hundreds of thousands of millions of Ganges Rivers. With a great sound he spoke to all the Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas, from all these Buddha-lands, as well as to the gods, dragons, ghosts and spirits, humans, nonhumans, and others, say-**

Explained by Master YongHua

ing, "Listen as I now praise and extol Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, who manifests great and inconceivable awesome spirit and compassionate power to rescue and protect living beings wherever they encounter misery and suffering. After my extinction, all of you Bodhisattvas, Great Beings, and all you gods, dragons, ghosts, spirits, and others should practice expedient devices for the sake of protecting this sutra and causing all living beings to testify to the bliss of nirvana.

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time the World-Honored One emitted a great bright light from his entire body, illuminating as many Buddha-lands as there are grains of sand in hundreds of thousands of millions of Ganges Rivers.**

The emission of light from the Buddha's entire body is to emphasize the importance of the sutra. If living beings encounter this light, they are sure to obtain ultimate enlightenment.

**With a great sound he spoke to all the Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas, from all these Buddha-lands, as well as to the gods, dragons, ghosts and spirits, humans, nonhumans, and others, saying, "Listen as I now praise and extol Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, who manifests great and inconceivable awesome spirit and compassionate power to rescue and protect living beings wherever they encounter misery and suffering.**

Living beings who hear the Buddha become joyful and re-



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spectful, even if he may **sound** like roaring thunder or the lion's roar. When speaking Dharma, make sure to speak loudly and clearly. The pleasant sound makes it easy for listeners to enter the Dharma Hearing Samadhi 聞法三昧.

**Great sound** is reminiscent of the five kinds of sounds made by the Brahma Heaven King. These five are:

1. Deep and profound like thunder 甚深如雷.
2. Pure, penetrating and far-reaching: making the listeners give rise to bliss 清徹遠聞 • 聞者悅樂.
3. Make the listener bring forth reverence and adoration 人心敬愛.
4. Help the listener easily understand the principles 諦了易解.
5. Make the listeners captivated and not bored 聽者欲聞無厭.

**Manifests 現** means arising 起. Although the Buddha understands that dharmas are without nature 雖知諸法無性, the Buddha seeds nonetheless arise from conditions 佛種卻從緣起. Living beings rely on these causes to affect a response 衆生以此因而感. That is why Earth Store Bodhisattva relies on these conditions to manifest a response 地藏以此緣而應.

**After my extinction, all of you Bodhisattvas, Great Beings,**

## Explained by Master YongHua

**and all you gods, dragons, ghosts, spirits, and others should practice expedient devices for the sake of protecting this sutra and causing all living beings to testify to the bliss of nirvana.**

First one starts by making kind and compassionate vows to rescue living beings. Then one must develop spiritual powers in order to be able to rescue them. That is what Earth Store Bodhisattva did. The Buddha encourages the Bodhisattvas and gods, dragons, ghosts and spirits to protect this sutra because without it, living beings would not know that they can rely on Earth Store Bodhisattva.

Why does the Buddha manifest entering **Extinction**? Just as when firewood is burned up then the fire should go out 蓋以機薪盡而應火亡, so too do the Buddhas simply accord with Mara (the death demon king) and manifest extinction 順波旬而現滅也. In other words, after he is finished helping those living beings who could be helped, his work is done and he simply accords with Mara to manifest death.

As for **expedient devices**, they are the two-edged expedients of the Bodhisattvas who cannot be apart from them even for the briefest moment 乃菩薩二利之器・不可須臾暫離. Vimalakirti says that to have no expedients is to be wisdom bound, but to have expedients is to be wisdom liberated. They use no mind of love and views. They adorn the Pure Land and accomplish living beings. Towards Emptiness, No Mark, and No Action Dharma: they self-regulate and do

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not get tired or dejected 故維摩云・無方便・慧縛・  
有方便・慧解・謂不以愛見心・莊嚴佛土・成  
就衆生・於空・無相・無作法中・以自調伏・而  
不疲厭・是名有方便慧解・不・則縛矣。

*Sutra text:*

**After the Buddha spoke, a Bodhisattva named Universally Expansive arose from the midst of the assembly, placed his palms together respectfully, and said to the Buddha, "We now hear the World-Honored One's praise of Earth Store Bodhisattva's awesome spiritual virtue. World Honored One, for the sake of future living beings in the Dharma-Ending Age, please tell us how Earth Store Bodhisattva has benefited men and gods and caused the gods, dragons, and the remainder of the Eightfold Division, as well as other living beings of the future, to receive the Buddha's teaching respectfully."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**After the Buddha spoke, a Bodhisattva named Universally Expansive arose from the midst of the assembly, placed his palms together respectfully, and said to the Buddha, "We now hear the World-Honored One's praise of Earth Store Bodhisattva's awesome spiritual virtue."**

**Universally Expansive** benefits all living beings universally and expansively. To use the mind to make the resolve 從心發志 that pervades the Dharma Realm 彌法界: that is uni-

## Explained by Master YongHua

versal. Using transcendental wisdom to practice teaching and guiding 導行, a practice which fills up empty space: That is expansive. The mind is the state substance 境體. Universal Expansion is its functioning 用. The mind is the Dharma Body. Universal is Prajna. Expansive is Liberation. This Bodhisattva has certified to the Three Virtues a long time ago and has been expansively crossing over living beings.

Although functioning is not apart from substance 雖用不離體, substance can only manifest through functioning 而體藉用彰. This is naming based on functioning 故從用立名.

One might ask why praise the Bodhisattvas, given that they appear in the world; they have no attachments with respect to the Triple Realm; they have no subject or object; and they look upon externalists, evil people, Bodhisattvas, and Arhats, as equal and without differentiation? The Great Shastra, however, explains why stating: “Because the Buddha praises the Bodhisattvas, limitless living beings adore and worship the Bodhisattvas, respect and make offerings to them, and they will all eventually accomplish the Way.” Do not forget that under the Buddha’s eyes, all living beings are the same and not different; the Buddhas don’t discriminate like us.

Keep in mind that Earth Store Bodhisattva knows full well that Nirvana is the unsurpassed truth but does not choose to enter it. He also realizes that living beings are like a mirage and yet he can still create the three karmas (of body, mind and mouth) to make vast and limitless vows: he has great compas-

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sion!

**World-Honored One, for the sake of future living beings in the Dharma-Ending Age, which includes us, please tell us how Earth Store Bodhisattva has benefited men and gods and caused the gods, dragons, and the remainder of the Eightfold Division, as well as other living beings of the future, to receive the Buddha's teaching respectfully."**

**To receive the Buddha's teaching respectfully 頂受 : 領納於心名受 • 人身以頂為尊 • 今云頂受 • 敬之極 • 信之深也 • indicates extreme veneration and deep faith. After all, these are the Buddha's words!**

*Sutra text:*

**At that time the World-Honored One said to the Bodhisattva Universally Expansive and to the Fourfold Assembly, "Listen attentively, listen attentively. I will briefly describe how Earth Store Bodhisattva's blessings and virtues have benefited men and gods."**

**Universally Expansive replied, "So be it, World Honored One, we will be glad to listen."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time the World-Honored One said to the Bodhisattva Universally Expansive and to the Fourfold Assembly, "Listen attentively, listen attentively. I will briefly describe how Earth Store Bodhisattva's blessings and**

**virtues have benefited men and gods."**

Speaking of blessings, the heavens bless those who do good. Therefore, doing good accords with the heavens. By combining qi (inside) and sun (outside), one can follow the instructions, and can thus understand the heavens' mandate.

As for virtues, one strengthens the goodness already present. The straight mind is virtuous and one lives in accordance with one's inherent propriety. One also learns to do things according with conditions.

福者。天道佑善也。善則順天。和氣日相湊泊。從示。從[幅-巾]。會其意耳。德者。固有之善也。直心為德。性命本來之正。學問易簡之功。

There are Five Blessings discussed in the section of the Book of History 書經 called the "Great Plan 弘範". The first of these is called "blessings and longevity 福壽". "Blessings" indicates a quality of comfort and ease in everything, while "longevity" indicates life to an old age. These blessings are threefold (三星拱照 corresponding to each of the three stars): they may be of wealth 福, revenue 祿, or long life 壽. The first of these, wealth, refers to the goods that come to one naturally; the second, revenue, indicates that which comes through a salary or other source of income; and the third is simply an extended lifespan. China has legends about the long life sage 壽星公, who was bald and had a very long white beard. In Taoism, he is also referred in as Nán 南 Jí

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極 Zi 子. He has three heavenly rolls on his head, the upper, middle and lower rolls, which enable him to know everything. If one has these three advantages, one is said to have blessings.

The second of the Five Blessings is "riches 富貴," which includes both wealth and honor. The third is "soundness of body and serenity of mind 康寧". The fourth is the "love of virtue 修好德" (loving to do virtuous deeds) and the fifth is "life crowned with a good end 考終命"—in other words, a peaceful death.

In addition to the Five Blessings, 論語示五德 there are the Five **Virtues** 德, the first of which is "warmth 溫"; that is, being neither too cold, like an immobile statue, nor too warm, like a playful flirt. The Superior Person is warm when there should be warmth, laughs when there should be laughter, and speaks when there should be speaking.

The second of the Five Virtues is "good-heartedness 良善".

The third is "respect 恭," a virtue that should be applied to everyone; one should not be arrogant and look down upon others. The fourth, "thrift 儉" means not being wasteful and being thrifty towards oneself. This is very important, as is the fifth virtue, which is "yielding 讓". This refers to yielding good things to others.

## Explained by Master YongHua

To be thrifty is to avoid wasting a single thing, to economize wherever possible. If, for example, we usually eat five bowls of food, we might economize and eat only three, thus saving two bowls for those who do not have anything themselves. One ought to be thrifty with respect to his own person and also with respect to his merit. It is not a good idea to have too much food, to own many clothes, or too large a place to live in. Always be sparing.

The fifth virtue, "yielding", is the quality of always letting others go first and always being polite. Long ago in the Three Countries in China there was an official named Kǒng 孔 Róng 容, who is referred to by the proverbial phrase, "Kǒng Róng yielded the pears at four 容四歲，能讓梨。” When Kǒng Róng was a little boy of four years old, a visitor came to his home and brought a basket of pears. All the children in the household were summoned together and allowed to choose a pear each, and Kǒng Róng deliberately sought out the smallest of the lot. When questioned as to the reason for this action, he replied that since he was the smallest, he should take the least amount and leave the rest for his older brothers.

Another saying, "Huáng 黃 Xiang 香 (yellow fragrance) warmed the sheets at nine 香九齡，能溫席," refers to a boy who dutifully warmed his parents' cold sheets before he himself would go to sleep. Both of these show virtuous conduct which embodies the Five Virtues. Whereas the previous story emphasizes the virtue of yielding, this story especially demonstrates the virtue of respect and caring.



## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

**Universally Expansive replied, "So be it, World Honored One, we will be glad to listen."**

According to the Four Heavenly Kings Sutra 準四天王經, on the six vegetarian days, the emissaries, crown prince and heavenly king come to Jambudvīpa to inspect living beings' giving, practice, and behavior to determine whether it is auspicious or inauspicious. If on these days, one can purify one's mind and observe vegetarianism 淨心守齋, take refuge, respect, bow and make offerings to Earth Store Bodhisattva, then the gods will dispatch good spirits to patrol and surround the doors and windows, so that evil epidemics are kept out and the multitude of deviants have all their schemes and plans eradicated. At night, one will have no evil dreams. Corrupt officials and robbers, and water and fire disasters, ultimately cannot harm one. At the end of life, they will welcome our soul to ascend to the heavens. Their heavenly blessings and virtues are such that, once they are in the heavens, whatever they wish comes true naturally, they live in seven jewel palaces and everything is as they wish. At the end of the heavenly existence, they will be born into royal families. Their complexion will be bright and fresh. People like to see them. They will get to meet with the Buddha and Dharma. They will surely attain Nirvana. All such retributions are from observing the Five Precepts and Ten Good Deeds, guarding the emotions and restraining desires. Observing the six vegetarian days will thus develop human and heavenly blessings and virtues.

*Sutra text:*

## Explained by Master YongHua

**The Buddha told the Bodhisattva Universally Expansive, "If in the future good men or good women hear Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva's name, and if they place their palms together in respect, praise, bow to, or fix their gaze on him, they will overcome the offenses of thirty kalpas.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The Buddha told the Bodhisattva Universally Expansive, "If in the future good men or good women hear Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva's name, and if they place their palms together in respect, praise, bow to, or fix their gaze on him, they will overcome the offenses of thirty kalpas.**

Hearing of the Bodhisattva's name can eradicate offenses.

**Good men or good women** are those who practice the ten good deeds. These include being filial to one's parents, repaying their kindness, and caring for them in their old age. Also, to patiently endure evil is goodness.

When people **place their palms together** it symbolizes that the Provisional and Actual are just one substance. The nine realms are the Provisional while the Buddha realm is the Actual. Living beings and the Buddha are just one substance.

**Bow to:** If living beings make full bows with their body and mind in utmost sincerity, there will be a response with the Way. The bower and bowed to are both empty and still in their nature 能所禮性空寂; thus the bower can become

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one with the Bodhisattva 與菩薩打成一片。 Relying on the Bodhisattva's spiritual power, one can eradicate **the offenses of thirty kalpas**. This is thanks to the Bodhisattva's kindness and great compassion power.

**Gazing 戀慕** means to stare reverently to the exclusion of everything else.

*Sutra text:*

**Universally Expansive, if good men or good women paint, draw, use clay, stone, lacquer-ware, gold, silver, brass, or iron to make this Bodhisattva's image, gaze at it, and bow but once, they will be reborn one hundred times in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, and will eternally avoid falling into the Evil Paths. If their heavenly merit becomes exhausted and they are born below in the human world, they will be kings of countries, and not lose their great benefits.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**Universally Expansive, if good men or good women paint, draw, use clay, stone, lacquer-ware, gold, silver, brass, or iron to make this Bodhisattva's image, gaze at it, and bow but once, they will be reborn one hundred times in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, and will eternally avoid falling into the Evil Paths.**

Making images creates heavenly blessings.

## Explained by Master YongHua

Why use the afore-mentioned materials? Even though their cost varies, they are more durable. Gold has five different colors. Silver is also called white gold. Brass is also called one of the three types of gold, coming after gold and silver. Iron is called black gold and can be extremely durable after long periods of working. Iron is the least valuable type of gold but is most often used.

In ancient times, glue was not permitted for images because they could fall apart over time. No busts were allowed. If the countenance was not proper, one would fall into the cycle of birth and death.

Creating images was originally a heavenly profession 天業. That is why it generates heavenly blessings.

At the time of Emperor Liang 梁武帝, there was a great virtuous one named Zhang (extend) Seng (sangha) Yáo 張僧繇. He drew an image of Earth Store Bodhisattva with the appearance of a monk. While he sat in meditation, that image emitted light. Later, others copied the image which also emitted light. Furthermore, there was a merchant's wife who was pregnant for 28 months but hadn't yet given birth. As she made the resolve to copy the image, that very night she entered labor and gave birth to a son who was very handsome and upright and proper. People who saw him immediately liked him.

**If their heavenly merit becomes exhausted and they are born below in the human world, they will be kings of**

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**countries, and not lose their great benefits.**

The Making Images Merit and Virtues Sutra 造像功德經 states that if a person at the end of his life wishes to make an image, even with wheat, he then can eradicate 81 hundred millions kalpas of lifetime offenses created in the three periods of time. He will be endowed with eleven virtues:

1. Life after life, his eyes will be clear and pure.
2. His place of birth will be devoid of evil.
3. He will often be born into honorable 貴 families.
4. His body will have a purple gold 紫磨金色 color.
5. He will have abundant gems and play things 豐饒珍玩.
6. He will be born into sagely and good families 生賢善家.
7. He can become a king.
8. He can become a Gold Wheel-Turning King.
9. He will be born into the Brahma Heavens.
10. He will not fall into the evil paths.
11. He will respect and venerate the Triple Jewel in future lives.

The sutras further say: “These types of people gradually accrue merit and virtues, and are replete with the mind of great compassion; they all have already accomplished the Buddha Way.”

**Kings** revered and made offerings to Earth Store Bodhisattva in the past. Nowadays they are presidents.

## Explained by Master YongHua

### *Sutra text:*

**"If there are women who detest the body of a woman, and who full-heartedly make offerings to Earth Store Bodhisattva's image, whether the image be a painting or made of earth, stone, lacquer-ware, brass, iron, or some other material, and if they do so day after day without fail, using flowers, incense, food, drink, clothing, colored silks, banners, money, jewels, and other items as offerings, when the female retribution body of those good women comes to an end, for hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of aeons they will never again be born in worlds where there are women, much less be reborn as one, unless it be through the strength of their compassionate vows to take on a woman's body voluntarily in order to liberate living beings. By receiving the power resulting from these offering to Earth Store Bodhisattva and the power of meritorious virtues, they will not receive the bodies of women throughout hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of aeons.**

### *Sutra commentary:*

**"If there are women who detest the body of a woman, and who full-heartedly make offerings to Earth Store Bodhisattva's image, whether the image be a painting or made of earth, stone, lacquer-ware, brass, iron, or some other material, and if they do so day after day without fail, using flowers, incense, food, drink, clothing, colored silks, banners, money, jewels, and other items as offerings, when the female retribution body of those good women comes to an end, for hundreds of thousands of tens of**

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

**thousands of aeons they will never again be born in worlds where there are women, much less be reborn as one,**

Female and male bodies have no fixed-nature. However, those with heavier afflictions often receive a female body 蓋女人因淫業而致・乘愛心而來. Male bodies generally have relatively fewer afflictions.

Those who have heavy habits such as jealousy and obstructedness, are greedy for small benefit and like to be pretty, etc., will usually be born in the future as women. However, if one succeeds in cleaning out the female habit energies, then one will not receive a female body in future lives.

If one has received a female body, it is because of karmic obstructions. Yet, by relying on the Bodhisattva's spiritual powers, if one wishes, one can change one's female body. Even the dragon maiden could accomplish Buddhahood. It is a matter of who applies effort in cultivation.

The sutras discuss Five Obstructions and Ten Difficulties encountered by women. These obstructions and difficulties may not be 'politically correct' by modern standards, but I will nonetheless include them here because, although there is great merit to the spirit of equality behind modern day feminist movements, this approach may sometimes prevent us from observing certain general differences that do occur between men and women.

Let us first examine the Five Obstructions. The first obstruc-

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tion is that women are not able to become the Great Brahma Lord because that position is accomplished through purity, whereas the body of a woman has many impurities.

The second obstruction mentioned in the sutras is that women cannot become Shakra. An astute student may object that earlier we discussed the thirty-three women who became lords of the heavens. This objection is a valid one, but it should be realized that upon reaching the heavens their bodies became male, because only males can be lords of the heavens. Although Shakra has some desire remaining, that desire is quite light; women, on the other hand, actually have a very strong libido, though this energy may sometimes manifest as other kinds of emotional attachments. For this reason, women cannot become Shakra.

Third, women cannot become demon kings. This is not too bad. They cannot attain this position because demons are extremely hard, solid, and firm, whereas women tend to be gentle and soft in nature.

Fourth, those with female bodies cannot be wise wheel-turning kings—the gold, silver, copper, and iron wheel-turning kings. Wise kings teach others about goodness and encourage people to maintain the Five Precepts and the Ten Good Deeds, which is very hard for women to do, because when they see something good occur to others, they often become jealous, making it harder for them to see and promote the goodness in others. Thus, they cannot become wheel-turning kings.

Fifth, the sutras tell us that women cannot become Buddhas.



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Buddhas have ten thousand virtues. When they awaken to Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi, they eliminate all yin energy and become entirely yang, which can only occur in a male body, because the energetic composition of the female body necessarily has at least some yin energy. Though females can become very virtuous with cultivation, the female body will always retain traces of jealousy and emotion, and consequently can never have the complete virtue of a Buddha. However, let's face it, how many men are anywhere near eliminating all yin energy and attaining perfect virtue? In fact, in this day and age, women are often more compassionate, virtuous and astute than men, despite the fact that the male body has a potential for perfect virtue which the female body lacks.

Further, if women are able to rid themselves of jealousy, desire, weakness, defilement, and of all evils, they can ascend and realize sagehood, so theirs is certainly not a hopeless plight. Take, for example, the case of the dragon king's daughter. When Shariputra said that she could not become a Buddha, she took a precious gem, her most valuable and cherished possession, and offered it to the Buddha, who accepted it. She then asked Shariputra if the Buddha's acceptance of her offering was fast, and he replied that, indeed, it had been quick. "I shall become a Buddha that quickly," she said and then she became a Buddha. This is proof that a women's lot is not hopeless. All they must do is resolve to cultivate courageously and they too can become Buddhas.

There are also Ten Difficulties that pertain to women. The first is that, at their birth their parents are often displeased. Although it is not always the case that parents are displeased at the birth of a daughter, in most societies this is the case,

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and a daughter starts out life by making a bad impression on her parents.

The second difficulty is that raising daughters is not a very interesting task. The third is that women are often afraid of people. Boys are not usually afraid, but girls almost always are. The fourth difficulty associated with being a woman is that their parents undergo a great deal of worry about their daughters' marriage. In America this is not a major matter, but in most other countries parents have to give a great deal of consideration to finding good husbands for their daughters.

Once girls grow up, the fifth of the Ten Difficulties occurs, when they have to leave their parents alone. The sixth comes after they have been married, when they may often find themselves feeling fearful of their husbands 畏夫喜怒. When their husband likes something, they are pleased, and when he is angry, they cower in terror.

The seventh difficulty of being a women is the arduousness and fear of giving birth 懷生甚難.

The eighth difficulty is that no matter what they do or say, the report gets back to their parents that they are not good 少為父母檢錄. Although they may in fact be good, it is a goodness that does not influence their parents.

The ninth is that they are often controlled by their husbands and are subject to many restrictions, which, if broken, can lead to divorce.

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The above nine difficulties apply to women in their youth. When they become old, the tenth difficulty arrives when their own children and grandchildren often slight them. As the proverb says, "To be old and not yet dead is to be a thief."

**Make offerings:** Living beings are attached to money, jewels and the various things. If they can let go of life or wealth with no regret in their minds, internally having ended greed and stinginess, then the blessings obtained are limitless.

**...unless it be through the strength of their compassionate vows to take on a woman's body voluntarily in order to liberate living beings. By receiving the power resulting from these offerings to Earth Store Bodhisattva and the power of meritorious virtues, they will not receive the bodies of women throughout hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of aeons.**

Beings who truly cultivate will be reborn as women only if they have made a vow to appear in that form in order to teach others. This is the "Same Work" Dharma of the Four Dharmas of Attraction. Even though a woman may now think that she does not want a woman's body, it is possible that she has obtained it through vows made in the past. Consequently, you never know which of you now studying this sutra might be here as a woman because of such a vow.

The Buddha's mother, the Lady Maya 摩耶夫人, for example, roams at play among beings by means of the Samadhi of Great Illusion 大幻願智法門 and has made the vow to be the mother of all the 1,000 Buddhas who appear in the world.

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The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, She Who Observes the Sounds of the World, is neither male nor female but knows that men enjoy beautiful women and sometimes manifests in such a body for the sake of teaching them. Although she is manifested in the body of a woman, Avalokitesvara is not involved in emotional states and is never affected by them.

This method of teaching should be studied and applied, for if one is to rescue beings, one must lead them out of suffering and not be pulled back by them to flounder in the sea of suffering. One who is affected by greed for her environment, and by the pleasure found in emotions, is confused and lacks samadhi. When Avalokitesvara manifests in the body of a woman, she is never defiled by emotion, and her practice of kindness and compassion is thus genuinely loving and protective of living beings.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Universally Expansive, if a woman who dislikes being ugly, vile, and prone to illness, simply gazes at and worships an image of Earth Store Bodhisattva with a sincere mind for even the space of a single meal, throughout thousands of tens of thousands of aeons she will always receive a body with perfect features. If that ugly woman does not dislike the body of a woman, during hundreds of thousands of ten thousands of millions of lives she will always be a royal daughter or the concubine of a king, the daughter of a minister of great family, or the daughter of an elder, and be upright with well-formed features. Such are the rewards for sincerely beholding and bowing to Earth Store Bodhisattva.**

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*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Universally Expansive, if a woman who dislikes being ugly, vile, and prone to illness, simply gazes at and worships an image of Earth Store Bodhisattva with a sincere mind for even the space of a single meal, throughout thousands of tens of thousands of aeons she will always receive a body with perfect features.**

There are Ten Bad Deeds that can cause one to be born as a woman with an ugly appearance.

The first is being fond of anger 好行忿怒. Those who fly into a rage over as small a thing as a needle, and, what is more, enjoy it, may well receive the retribution of an ugly female body.

The second reason for ugliness is doubt and gossip 好懷嫌恨. Full of doubts about everything, those who constantly talk about how they are mistreated, and thus constantly spread hateful gossip, may also receive the retribution of an ugly female body.

The third reason for their ugliness is that, in the past, they liked to lie and to confuse people 誑惑於他.

The fourth is that they delighted in stirring up trouble 惱亂眾生.

The fifth is that they may have had a lack of love and respect

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for their parents 於父母所無愛敬心.

The sixth is that they were disrespectful in holy places, in temples, or in places of those who have cultivated and certified to the Way 於賢聖所不生恭敬.

The seventh is that, in the past, they liked to appropriate the property of the sages for themselves. 侵奪賢聖資生田業.

The eighth is that they liked to extinguish the lamps lit before the Buddhas 於佛塔廟斷滅燈明. Although there are not too many who would do this, it does happen and it brings forth the retribution of ugliness.

The ninth reason is that they belittled and looked down on those who are ugly 見醜陋者，毀訾輕賤. Although you are unaware of it, there is something in the nature of things that acts like a camera. When an ugly person is maligned for his appearance, a picture is taken and stored until the next lifetime when the one who looked down on another becomes ugly himself.

The tenth reason is that they liked to learn every possible variation of bad conduct 習諸惡行. These are the ten causes for ugliness among women.

There are also ten deeds that may cause one to be born as a woman who is sickly 多病報.

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The first of these is beating other living beings.

The second is exhorting others to beat living beings, telling them, for example, to hit cats, club dogs, trample mice, or beat children.

The third is praising the practice of beating and telling others how good it is.

The fourth is taking delight in seeing others beaten.

The fifth is taking delight in seeing the sick. Another variation would be afflicting one's parents 惱亂父母.

The sixth is displeasure felt on seeing someone cured. Or another variation would be afflicting the sages and worthy ones 惱亂賢聖.

The seventh cause for becoming sickly is giving medicine to the sick but giving them the wrong ones. For example, one gives to headache sufferers, medicine for stomach cramps and then brags about how well they have nursed the sick. Another variation would be feeling very happy when one sees one's enemy get sick or suffer. 見怨病苦 • 心大歡喜.

The eighth cause is becoming jealous when a doctor cures a patient and sometimes even wishing that the doctors would disappear. Another variation would be feeling unhappy upon seeing one's enemies get well 見怨病癒 • 心生不樂.

The ninth is hoping the sick will remain invalids and never be

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cured. Another variation would be giving wrong medicine to one's enemy 於怨病所 • 與非治藥.

The tenth reason is incessant eating. Before they have finished digesting one meal, they are back eating and never stop. If they had not in the past engaged in some of these twenty kinds of bad conduct, the women discussed here would not be ugly, or prone to sickness.

In a body with **perfect features** 相貌圓滿, every organ looks as it should; the ears are shaped like proper ears, the eyes like eyes, and so forth. It might be objected that eyes are always eyes and never look like anything else. This is true, but here we are speaking of features that are shaped properly. Some eyes are very square shaped, and others are triangular; some ears are well shaped and some are pointed.

If born ugly, how can one make changes? There is only one way: change your karma 轉業. When karma changes, the retributions also transform accordingly 業轉報改.

Among other things, a person's face reveals their merit. From looking at the features, an entire life may be known; one can see the progress from youth to middle age and on to old age. Physiognomy has been studied deeply by the Chinese. One obtains full and complete features from having worshiped Earth Store Bodhisattva.

**If that ugly woman does not dislike the body of a woman, during hundreds of thousands of ten thousands of millions of lives she will always be a royal daughter or the concu-**



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**bine of a king, the daughter of a minister of great family, or the daughter of an elder, and be upright with well-formed features. Such are the rewards for sincerely beholding and bowing to Earth Store Bodhisattva.**

When the sutra says that a woman will be born **upright and with well-formed features**, it means that all her features will be in harmony with one another. If the eyes are good but the nose is not, she cannot be said to have full features. If one ear is large and the other small, if eyes and nose are complete but the ears are not good, her features are incomplete. The features should also be well balanced on the face and not crowded together in the middle. When the features are thus balanced and all the parts are well formed, it is a result of having worshiped Earth Store Bodhisattva sincerely.

For example, King Prasenajit 波斯匿 had a daughter named Vajra who was born extremely ugly. Her hair was as tough as steel, her skin felt like the bark of a tree, and she had the facial features of a ghost. Her father locked her inside and would not let her out. After she was married off, her husband would also lock her up. She therefore had this thought: “I was born into a royal household. Yet when I was young, my father forbade me to go outside. After I became an adult, my husband then restricted me to stay inside. I really have no freedom at all. What karma did I create in the past to have received such cruel and unjust retributions? Since the Buddha is in the world, I should repent and reform for my prior life’s offenses with the Great Kind and Compassionate One.” She went to the World Honored One and bowed to him. As she lifted her head to look at him and saw his hair, her own hair

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turned soft and supple. Upon seeing his face, her own face turned beautiful. One look at the Buddha's body, and her own body became adorned. The Buddha said: "In your prior life, you scorned a sage, that is why you received such a retribution this life."

**Sincerely:** With utmost sincerity one can engender a response. This is the key.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Universally Expansive, if a good man or woman is able to play music, sing, or chant praises, and make offerings of incense and flowers before that Bodhi-sattva's image, and is able to exhort others to do likewise, both now and in the future that person will be surrounded day and night by hundreds of thousands of ghosts and spirits who will even prevent bad news from reaching his ears, much less allow him to suffer accidents.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Universally Expansive, if a good man or woman is able to play music, sing, or chant praises, and make offerings of incense and flowers before that Bodhi-sattva's image, and is able to exhort others to do likewise, both now and in the future that person will be surrounded day and night by hundreds of thousands of ghosts and spirits who will even prevent bad news from reaching his ears, much less allow him to suffer accidents.**

The next section describes offerings of music.

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If anyone is able to **sing**, hum, or **chant praises** of Earth Store Bodhisattva (the Chinese have many kinds of praises for the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas) and **make offerings of incense and flowers before his image**, he IS, and will CONSTANTLY be, surrounded by MANY Dharma protectors (in this lifetime) who will avert calamities such as airplane crashes, automobile wrecks, drownings, train derailments, buses going off a cliff and so forth. This kind of protection is also extended to those who maintain the Great Compassion Mantra or Shurangama Mantra. They also have a lot of Eight-fold Division Dharma Protectors who follow them everywhere. One only has to not strike up any false-thinking and sincerely believe in Bodhisattvas, they will certainly protect you.

Those who believe in the Buddha should not fear ghosts, since ghosts must bow to those who have cultivated merit. Of course, if one does not do meritorious deeds, there will be no protectors, and anything might happen.

The Dharma Flower Sutra states that when one makes offerings of music to the Buddha, one will certainly accomplish the Way.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Universally Expansive, in the future evil men, spirits, or ghosts may see good men or women taking refuge with, respectfully making offerings to, praising, beholding, and bowing to Earth Store Bodhisattva's image. These evil beings may wrongly express ridicule and malign the acts of worship as profitless affairs devoid of meritorious qualities. They may bare their teeth in laughter,**

condemn them behind their backs, and exhort others to do likewise, whether one person or many, or they may even bear just one single thought of slander. Such beings will fall into and remain in the Avici Hells, undergoing the utmost misery as retribution for their calumny, and they will remain there even after the nirvana of the thousand Buddhas of the Auspicious Aeon. Only after that aeon they will be reborn among the hungry ghosts, where they will pass a thousand aeons before being reborn as animals. After another one thousand aeons, even though they may again attain a human body, their faculties will be deficient, they will be poor and of low station, and their many evil deeds will bind up their minds. Before long they will fall into the Evil Paths again. Universally Expansive, such are the retributions that will be undergone by those who ridicule and slander others' offerings. How much worse will it be if they have other evil views and acts of maligning and destruction.

*Sutra commentary:*

"Moreover, Universally Expansive, in the future evil men, spirits, or ghosts may see good men or women taking refuge with, respectfully making offerings to, praising, beholding, and bowing to Earth Store Bodhisattva's image. These evil beings may wrongly express ridicule and malign the acts of worship as profitless affairs devoid of meritorious qualities. They may bare their teeth in laughter, condemn them behind their backs, and exhort others to do likewise, whether one person or many, or they may even bear just one single thought of slander. Such beings will fall into and remain in the Avici Hells, undergoing the

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**utmost misery as retribution for their calumny, and they will remain there even after the nirvana of the thousand Buddhas of the Auspicious Aeon. Only after that aeon they will be reborn among the hungry ghosts, where they will pass a thousand aeons before being reborn as animals.**

Making offerings brings blessings. Ridiculing and maligning brings transgression retributions.

**Evil** has three types: 1) evil 2) great evil 3) evil within evil  
顎中之惡.

**Evil men** do the ten evil deeds or commit the five great offenses.

**Evil spirits** are inveterate troublemakers 不守規矩. Some of them go to temples, impersonate the presiding deity, and receive offerings. In the temples of Guan Gong for example, Guan Gong is not present at all times. While he is gone, the evil spirits may come and cause people to make flesh and blood offerings. We tend to be afraid that if the evil spirits appear in the world, they will make us lose our retinues.

The majority of the big **evil ghosts** are Kumbhandas 鳩槃荼, although there are others. Kumbhandas are large, melon-shaped beings who are also known as nightmare ghosts 壓寐鬼, because they enjoy sitting on sleeping people, who wake up terrified and unable to move.

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In addition to these, there are other small evil ghosts who lodge in plants and trees, where they manifest their powers and cause people to believe in them. People who are sick might go to such a tree and offer incense in hope of a cure; if they have lost things, they might ask a certain tree to help retrieve them. When the response they sought occurs, people think that the tree has brought about a miraculous intervention on the part of some Bodhisattva, and will often sacrifice chickens, pigs, or other animals as offerings to the tree, not knowing it is inhabited by an evil ghost. A camphor tree spirit 樟樹 at Nán Hua temple, which later took refuge and received the precepts from the Venerable Master Xu Yún, was an example of such a phenomenon.

A great many strange events occur in this world. For those who do not understand the Buddhadharma, it is very easy to think that a miraculous response has been obtained from a Buddha or Bodhisattva, but those who understand these matters clearly realize that not every response is a sign of the Buddha's aid and thus they are not taken in by evil ghosts and spirits.

**They may bare their teeth in laughter, slander them behind their backs, and exhort others to do likewise.** Laughing is done to the face, while slander is done behind the back of people who cultivate the Way. For example, some people may say, "I've been up to the temple and I've seen them put on robes 袍 and precept sashes 搭衣 and then knock their heads on the ground before the Buddha-image, get up, and do it again. All day long they bow and recite sutras. What a bother. All that useless ceremony! Why don't they take a

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nap?"

When they **exhort others to do likewise**, they say things like, "There is no point to reciting sutras, no benefit is derived from listening to lectures on Dharma, and there is no interest at all in reciting mantras. Don't bother with that, just take a bit of this fine drug and you'll end up in the Land of Ultimate Bliss." Their rationalizations are common in the world and are not rare even within Buddhism. Since a person who behaves like this cannot break the rules of proper conduct by himself and get away with it, he gets others to join him for support. Thus when called on for their behavior, they claim that they are not alone: "Hey! What's the big deal? Everybody is doing it!"

Those who **ridicule** 譏 do so because they have a mind of jealousy.

Those who **malign** 毀 do so because they give rise to thoughts of greed or anger.

The mind is a source of evil. The mouth is a basis for invoking disasters.

The aeon in which we live is called Auspicious 賢劫 because it has one thousand Buddhas, of which Shakyamuni is the fourth, as well as many sages, all of whom appear in the world. Usually, a long long time must elapse before the next Buddha appears in the world following the Nirvana of the previous Buddha. Thus the time required for the remaining nine hundred and ninety-six Buddhas to come into the world

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and enter extinction is long indeed. Those who will receive the retribution for **slander** in the Avici hell, will remain there until after all thousand Buddhas have entered Stillness. For them, one of our days and nights constitutes sixty small aeons. Therefore their time in Avici hell will be exponentially longer than the already long time it will take for the thousand Buddhas to enter extinction. As mentioned above, fifty of our years make one day and night in the Heaven of the Four Kings, and one hundred of our years make a day and night in the Trayastrimsa Heaven. The reason for these differences is that when one is feeling happy, time seems to pass quickly, but when he is suffering or unhappy, minutes seem like hours and hours like days. Because the suffering in the hells is so intense, time passes extremely slowly.

**After another one thousand aeons, even though they may again attain a human body, their faculties will be deficient, they will be poor and of low station, and their many evil deeds will bind up their minds. Before long they will fall into the Evil Paths again. Universally Expansive, such are the retributions that will be undergone by those who ridicule and slander others' offerings. How much worse will it be if they have other evil views and acts of maligning and destruction.**

After aeons of suffering in the Evil Paths, those who have slandered are born into poverty. Poverty is not caused by conditions in this life alone but is retribution for deeds done long ago. The solution to this problem lies not in solely putting people on a welfare dole but also in teaching them to do good and to cease doing the kinds of deeds that get them into such a destitute position in the first place. Merely doling out



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money will not correct the essential cause of poverty. True welfare lies in teaching people to respect the Buddha and to refrain from slandering the Triple Jewel.

**Their faculties will be deficient.** Perhaps they will lack eyes, ears, nose, tongue, hands, feet etc. The six organs are not complete.

**Their many evil deeds will bind up their minds:** In general, they seem to be constantly in trouble, and nothing is as they wish. When the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are in the world, there is an opportunity to plant merit and avert the causes of poverty. No matter what the conditions are, something bad always occurs to those who have slighted the Triple Jewel. If they are not without food, then they have no clothes or shelter, and before long they commit offenses and fall back into the states of woe. Earlier the sutra mentioned a person who was reborn with a lifespan of only thirteen years, after which he was to have fallen into the states of woe again. This is an example of what is being discussed here.

Are the periods of time mentioned in this passage definitely fixed? That is, will such persons really have to spend a thousand aeons as hungry ghosts and as many among the animals? These various retributions were made clear by Shakyamuni Buddha and are certain. There are, however, mitigating circumstances. A hungry ghost who resolves his thoughts on compassion and acts as a protector for someone who is cultivating is an example. Ghosts may also see someone cultivating and decide to undertake the practice of bowing to the Buddhas. Because such ghosts plant good roots while they are still suffering for their offenses, they may find early es-

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cape from their time in the realm of ghosts, and be reborn as animals or even as humans.

Animals which live near cultivators—those who live on temple grounds, for example—may gradually become permeated with Buddhism and come to have faith in the Buddha, thus lessening their karmic obstacles. When the Venerable Master Xu Yún was at Nán Hua temple, a chicken followed along with the monks as they circumambulated the Buddha. After three years of such practice it stood before the Buddha and went off to rebirth. Although these states of retribution are undergone for fixed periods of time, there are always special circumstances that may alter the normal course of retribution.

People who come to realize that their poverty, low stature, and handicaps are a result of not having respected Earth Store Bodhisattva and of having slandered the Triple Jewel may change their ways 改過自新. They may undertake the practice of vegetarianism and recitation of the Buddha's name, or they may even leave home to become bhikshus. Such persons will not necessarily have to return to the states of woe. Although the Buddhadharma contains principles, it is totally alive, not fixed and dead 死板; therefore, it is necessary to look at each particular case to see what special conditions there may be. If someone guilty of offenses repents and reforms his conduct, it is not certain that he will have to fall into the states of woe.

In the final chapter of the Avatamsaka Sutra, on the Vows and Conduct of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva, it is said that if karmic obstacles had form and substance, one person's

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would fill all of empty space. Although they do not have form, they should not be considered lightly. Doing a little more evil here or there is certainly dangerous, especially when one understands the principles involved. However, repenting can eradicate offenses, and so it is said, "Bowling before the Buddhas wipes away offenses as many as sands of the Ganges; giving support increases blessings without limit. 佛前頂禮, 罪滅河沙; 捨錢一文, 增福無量." What really matters is how sincere you are when bringing forth the mind to make an offering.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Universally Expansive, in the future men or women may be bedridden with a long illness and in spite of their wishes be unable either to get well or to die. At night they may dream of evil ghosts, of family and relatives, or of wandering in dangerous paths. In numerous nightmares they may roam with ghosts and spirits. As these dreams continue over a period of days, months, and years, such persons may weaken and waste away, cry out in pain in their sleep, and be depressed and melancholy. All of this is due to the degree of severity of their evil karmic paths being unresolved, which makes it difficult for them to die and be cured. The eyes of common men and women cannot distinguish such things.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Universally Expansive, in the future men or women may be bedridden with a long illness and in spite of their wishes be unable either to get well or to die.**

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The Buddha Speaks of Medicine Sutra 佛說醫經 states that the human body has four major kinds of illnesses, those of: 1) earth, 2) water, 3) fire, and 4) wind. That is because the four great elements make up the body and are also the conditions for invasions and harm. According to the Great Wisdom Shastra, each of the great elements can give rise to the hundred and one illnesses. There are 202 cold illnesses because they arise from the water and wind elements. The hot illnesses also are of 202 kinds, because they arise from the fire and earth elements. We are constantly exposed throughout our lifetime. The body is really a conduit for suffering. Why are living beings so attached to it?

This passage does not refer to ordinary **illnesses**, but to chronic and crippling diseases that leave one bed-ridden. What is the origin of such diseases? They arise due to heavy sexual desire. Their diseases such as paralysis 癱瘓 or withering 萎症 prevent them walking or moving about. This is because the legs belong to the kidney 腎. Many people have a hard time walking because their legs are swollen. They need the use of a cane. In fact, it's not because they had an accident or were injured on the battlefield. In America, there are many such people who have a hard time walking because of their excessive sexual desire. They have no idea why!

Some of those who are handicapped by such illnesses may wish to die and be relieved of their suffering, but cannot do so; they may wish to be cured and restored to a healthy life, but that too does not occur.

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**At night they may dream of evil ghosts, of family and relatives, or of wandering in dangerous paths. In numerous nightmares they may roam with ghosts and spirits.**

In their **dreams** such people may consort with evil ghosts and practice a variety of unclean and evil deeds. The more numerous these deeds, the worse the illness becomes. What is more, they may see their deceased relatives in dreams, an inauspicious sign. At the door of every household there are protective spirits who will allow those under their protection to enter the home. When evil ghosts wish to molest the living, they are unable to get past the guardians of the door and so they tag along with a dead member of that family and thus sneak into the household. Seeing dead relatives in dreams is an inauspicious sign because, even though the relatives themselves are not coming to do the living any harm, they are followed by their friends, among whom may be some very malevolent ghosts.

These ill persons may also dream of walking high in the mountains in an area given to sudden landslides or on a road infested with wolves, tigers, and monsters. They may be attacked by Kumbhanda ghosts who render them incapable of movement or sound so that they just lie paralyzed and terrified as if entranced in some demonic samadhi. These attacks may occur several times in a single night. The victims may even know that they are dealing with ghosts, yet in their dreams they may roam about and play with them, because in dreams they frequently do not know enough to be afraid.

**As these dreams continue over a period of days, months, and years, such persons may weaken and waste away, cry**

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**out in pain in their sleep, and be depressed and melancholy. All of this is due to the degree of severity of their evil karmic paths being unresolved, which makes it difficult for them to die and be cured. The eyes of common men and women cannot distinguish such things.**

Those who have this illness may become emaciated, consumptive, racked with pain and spasms, and be always on the verge of tears. All of this is because the offenses which they have committed are numerous, and although they are not yet dead, their retributions are being determined in the hells.

*Sutra text:*

**"In this instance this sutra should be recited once in a loud voice before the images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, or one should offer possessions which the sick one cherishes, such as clothing, jewels, gardens, or houses, chanting in a voice before the sick person, 'I, so and so, before this sutra and image, give all these items on behalf of this "sick person", as offerings to the sutra and images, or making images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, or constructing temples and monasteries, or lighting oil lamps, or giving to the permanently dwelling.' In such a manner one should tell the sick person three times of the offerings that are being made so that he both hears and understands them.**

**"If all his consciousnesses have been scattered and his breathing has stopped, then for one, two, three, four, and on through seven days, this sutra should be read aloud in a clear voice. When that person's life is ended he will**

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achieve eternal liberation from all the heavy and disastrous offenses committed in his life, even the five offenses that receive uninterrupted retribution. He will always be born in a place where he will know his past lives. How much greater will the beneficial retributions be if a good man or woman writes this sutra out himself, tells others to do so, carves or paints images himself, or teaches others to do so. They will definitely receive great benefits.

*Sutra commentary:*

**"In this instance this sutra should be recited once in a loud voice before the images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,**

**This sutra should be recited once** to resolve the cause retributions of the past.

Human sicknesses can be of two kinds: 1) The four great elements, or body sickness. 2) The three poisons, or mind sickness. Body sicknesses can be treated with medicine. Mind sicknesses must be cured with blessings.

**Or one should offer possessions which the sick one cherishes, such as clothing, jewels, gardens, or houses,**

Why making offerings of things? The mind of three poisons is used to amassing them. Now one forsakes what is most difficult to forsake in order to make amends.

**Clothing** which people primarily use to adorn their bodies, **jewels** which one can save to attain wealth, **gardens** which

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are for one's for leisure and play, **or houses** which provide shelter for children and grandchildren, and are also for our own use, and cannot be lacking: All the properties mentioned in the sutra may be sold and the proceeds used to construct images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas—acts productive of extremely great merit. Even though they are inanimate objects, seeing them makes living beings think of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, no differently than as if they were present.

**Chanting in a voice before the sick person, 'I, so and so, before this sutra and image, give all these items on behalf of this "sick person", as offerings to the sutra and images, or making images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, or constructing temples and monasteries, or lighting oil lamps, or giving to the permanently dwelling.'** In such a manner one should tell the sick person three times of the offerings that are being made so that he both hears and understands them.

When the announcement of the offerings is made, those who are performing them on behalf of the sick person should insert their own names where the text says, "I, so and so." The announcement is to be made three times so that the sick person knows what is being done. All things will disintegrate and scatter 分散. The only thing that remains is this vow king.

**"If all his consciousnesses have been scattered and his breathing has stopped, then for one, two, three, four, and on through seven days, this sutra should be read aloud in a clear voice. When that person's life is ended he will achieve eternal liberation from all the heavy and disas-**



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**trous offenses committed in his life, even the five offenses that receive uninterrupted retribution. He will always be born in a place where he will know his past lives.**

**Consciousnesses** refers to all the eight consciousnesses:

- 1) the eighth: Alaya consciousness or store consciousness. This stores limitless seeds.
- 2) The seventh: 末那識. This is responsible for the attachment to the self. It conduits all the karma seeds to the eighth. When the attachment to the self is broken, the eighth only then stores seeds with no outflows.
- 3) The sixth: 意識. Thought after thought discriminates self and others, right and wrong 是非, 取捨 grasping and renouncing, or hatred and love 憎愛. Given the favorable or unfavorable situation, it creates the resulting good or bad karmas. In collaboration with the seventh, the attachment to the self, it creates seeds for birth and death in the eighth.
- 4) The first five consciousnesses: The sixth can discriminate but cannot discern the states 境. It relies on the first five consciousnesses which arise from the five organs to grasp at the five dusts.

When one cultivates, one starts with the sixth consciousness by not indulging in discrimination. With non-discriminating wisdom, one can then break the seventh consciousness' attachment to the self. This will prevent the seeds with outflows in the eighth from being activated and therefore they will wither. When the eighth only has seeds with no outflows remaining, that is the pure Dharma Body. These seeds are

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activated when one starts to practice from the nature 從性起修, widely cultivating the six paramitas and bringing them to accomplishment one by one. That is the Reward Body. From the Reward Body one gives rise to responses 從報起應, utilizing the Wonderful Observing Wisdom to contemplate the potential to dispense the teaching 觀機逗教, and utilizing the Wisdom To Accomplish What Is To Be Done 成所作智 to manifest a body to speak Dharma, to teach and transform everywhere, thus accomplish the Transformation Body.

**How much greater will the beneficial retributions be if a good man or woman writes this sutra out himself, tells others to do so, carves or paints images himself, or teaches others to do so. They will definitely receive great benefits.**

The reference at the end of the passage to **teaching others to do so** means to solicit funds for the sake of making images.

The Making Images Blessings Retribution Sutra 造像福報經 says if people under heaven can make Buddha images, then life after life, they will be born with bright and pure eyes, have upright and outstanding features, and their bodies, arms and feet will be soft and supple. If born in the heavens, they will also be that pure, outstanding amongst the gods, with a body of purple golden color, upright and proper without compare. Making images of Bodhisattvas will result in similar merit and virtues. The same applies to making stupas and temples. Furthermore, the sutra states that making stupas

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and temples, at the end of one's life, one will be born into the heaven of the 33. As for lamps 燃燈, the merit and virtue of offering even the tiniest lamp or torch 燈炬 is only known to the Buddhas as the Buddha told Shariputra.

*Sutra text:*

**"Therefore, Universally Expansive, if you see a person reading and reciting this sutra or having a single thought of praise for it, or if you meet someone who reveres it, you should employ hundreds of thousands of expedients to exhort him to be energetic and not retreat. In both the present and the future he will be able to obtain thousands of tens of thousands of millions of inconceivable meritorious virtues.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Therefore, Universally Expansive, if you see a person reading and reciting this sutra or having a single thought of praise for it, or if you meet someone who reveres it, you should employ hundreds of thousands of expedients to exhort him to be energetic and not retreat.**

The merit and virtues mentioned are simply inconceivable!

**Reading, reciting:** indicates faith; **praise** indicates practice, or the other way around; **revering** will create the first seeds 初下種子.

**In both the present and the future he will be able to obtain**

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**thousands of tens of thousands of millions of inconceivable meritorious virtues.**

The Great Means Expansive Mantra Sutra 大方廣總持經 says that after the Buddha's Nirvana, if there is a Dharma Master who, according with joy and pleasure 善隨樂欲, speaks Dharma for others, and can make those who listen give rise to the faintest pleasure, up to momentarily shedding a single tear drop: you should know that it is all from the Buddha's spiritual power.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Universally Expansive, when dreaming or drowsy, living beings in the future may see ghosts, spirits and other forms that are either sad, weeping, or worried, fearful, or terrified. These are all past fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, and relatives from one, ten, a hundred, or a thousand lives, who have not yet been able to leave the Evil Paths. They have no place from which to hope for the power of blessings to rescue them, and so they plead with their flesh-and-bone descendants to establish expedient devices for them so that they might leave the Evil Paths. Universally Expansive, using your spiritual power, you should cause all these descendants to recite this sutra with sincerity before the images of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, or to request others to recite it, either three or seven times. When the sutra has been sounded the proper number of times, relatives in the Evil Paths will obtain liberation and never again be seen by those who are dreaming or drowsy.**

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*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Universally Expansive, when dreaming or drowsy, living beings in the future may see ghosts, spirits and other forms that are either sad, weeping, or worried, fearful, or terrified. These are all past fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, and relatives from one, ten, a hundred, or a thousand lives, who have not yet been able to leave the Evil Paths. They have no place from which to hope for the power of blessings to rescue them, and so they plead with their flesh-and-bone descendants to establish expedient devices for them so that they might leave the Evil Paths.**

These are different from the dreams mentioned in the previous passage. Previously dreams about one's own karma were discussed. Now the sutra refers to relatives from the yin world 自身業對・此為遠屬陰纏. All the dreams are real.

According to the Chinese medical books, when the yin qi is excessive 陰氣所乘, we see ghosts and spirits 見鬼神. When the lung qi is in excess 肺氣盛 then we often dream of crying, flying or soaring 則夢哭泣飛揚. When the mind qi is excessive 心氣盛 then we dream of happiness, laughter and fearful events 則夢喜笑恐畏. Here, our own relatives obtain a response 親屬致感 and it has nothing to do with yin, yang, false, or true 非關陰陽虛實. When

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they are sad, cry, worry, and lament 悲恫啼愁歎, that is our ghost relatives seeking pity and help 親鬼乞憐之狀.

The term "**drowsy**" 寐 refers here to the state between ordinary wakefulness and sleep, just on the edge of sleep. The term "**dream**" 夢 refers to a number of classes of dreams:

1. Those that come from ignorant habits 無明習氣夢.
2. Those that contain prognostications of good or evil 善惡先征夢 or also called 吉凶預報夢.
3. Those that are caused by an imbalance of the four elements 四大偏增夢.
4. Those that are remembrances of things past 巡遊舊識夢.

The first of these classes of dreams is caused by confused and obscure habits. Because such dreams are unclear, they are not remembered when one awakens.

The second consists of those in which some foreknowledge is attained and warnings of impending events, either good or bad, are given. The Venerable Xu Yún's dream in which the Sixth Patriarch said: "Come back, return, there is yet work to be done" is an example of such a dream; in fact, it turned out to be a dream calling Venerable Xu Yún back to Nán Hua Monastery to restore the temple. Sometimes warnings are found in dreams, warnings to avoid doing certain things lest the person encounter accidents. Because people ignore such warnings they end up getting hurt.

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The third class of dreams arises from an imbalance of the four elements. According to a Chinese medical study, there are four hundred forty kinds of diseases and eight hundred and eighty cures. In Buddhism it is said that there are eighty-four thousand dharmas, which are prescriptions to cure as many illnesses. If any one of the four elements becomes predominant 偏增, a corresponding illness arises, and there may be dreams in connection with the illness.

The fourth class of dreams are those which are based on remembrance of past things. During the dream, the dreamer sees old friends and old places, but when he awakens it is all seen to have been unreal and a dream.

There are many kinds of ghosts that may occur in dreams: some with a flaming green face 青臉, red hair 紅髮, huge mouths 巨口, protruding teeth 獠牙 (like elephant tusks); some weeping and wailing, with running eyes and dripping noses; some in the form of friends and relatives who seem distraught and worried; and other forms as well. Some ghosts are parents and relatives from past lives, and for this reason all living beings should be regarded as one's past parents and as future Buddhas. One who regards all beings in this way will never bother a single being, for he sees them all as his own parents.

**Universally Expansive, using your spiritual power, you should cause all these descendants to recite this sutra with sincerity before the images of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, or to request others to recite it, either three or seven times. When the sutra has been sounded the proper number of**

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**times, relatives in the Evil Paths will obtain liberation and never again be seen by those who are dreaming or drowsy.**

Ghosts who are seen in dreams such as the ones mentioned above have done bad deeds and fallen into the states of woe. They have no one to help them by reciting sutras or doing other similar meritorious acts. For this reason there exists the Buddhist custom of reciting sutras for the benefit of either the living or the dead. Those for whose sake the act is being done receive merit in this way and can be freed from their states of woe.

We should create blessings for our past parents and relatives: this includes offering food to them.

The Proper Dharma Mindfulness Sutra 正法念經 says that we should cultivate blessings and practice giving on behalf of the those who have died in the past. If they fall onto the ghost realm, they will such reap blessings. Therefore they will feel repentant, and feel ashamed that they were stingy and greedy in their prior lives. That is why when we practice giving on their behalf, they will feel happy. They are unable to attain birth to the other realms by their own power. Most of the other realms cannot provide them with this kind of assistance. In this case, these beings seek expedients so that they can leave the evil destinies, which may unfortunately indicate that they are in the ghost realm.

If one's ancestors have become ghosts and one wishes to read this sutra for them but is unable to do so for some reason, he may hire others to do the reading for him. In any case, the sutra should be recited three or seven times. These are odd



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numbers and belong to the yang, whereas even numbers are yin. Thus the reading of the sutra a yang number of times symbolizes the breaking up of karmic obstacles in the hells.

Three is the number of Heaven and Earth. First, we start with the number one. One leads to two: yang gives birth to yin. Then we obtain number three: when yin and yang are in balance, they can give birth to all things: life after life having inexhaustible necessities and ease 生生無窮易. Number seven is a small yang number 少陽之數. Nine is a large yang number 老陽. Wishing to help them turn from the yin realm of the hell ghosts towards birth into the human and god realms, which are yang, we should recite the sutra a yang number of times: three, seven etc... We do not utilize the even numbers of six, eight, etc because they can be inappropriate and will not affect leaping out of the darkness.

When these ghosts **obtain liberation** 解脫, they can leave the evil paths. Perhaps they are born onto the human or god realms, or draw near the Three Vehicles Sagely Paths. When deceased relatives obtain liberation and ascension, they no longer appear in dreams.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Universally Expansive, in the future, lowly people, bondsmen, serving maids, and others who are not free may be aware of their past deeds and wish to repent of them and to reform. They should gaze at and worship Earth Store Bodhisattva's image with a sincere heart for**

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**seven days and recite his name a full ten thousand times. When their current retribution ends they will be born into wealth and honor, and throughout thousands of tens of thousands of lives they will not pass through any of the suffering of the Three Evil Paths.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Universally Expansive, in the future, lowly people, bondsmen, serving maids, and others who are not free may be aware of their past deeds and wish to repent of them and to reform.**

There are five basic reasons for which people are born into a **lowly** class 下賤, as opposed to an honored one. This includes poverty.

The first of these is arrogance; 憍慢不敬二親 not the general kind of arrogance but particularly toward one's parents.

The second is obstinacy; 剛強無恪心 that is, not being respectful towards teachers and elders, and refusing to listen to teachers and elders.

The third is lack of diligence, not following the rules. Not only that but also failing to honor the Triple Jewel. 放逸不禮三尊

The fourth is thievery. There is a class of people who special-

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ize in stealing from others to sustain themselves. There are a great many people who rob from others when they themselves have no money. They use their ill-gotten gains to eat, drink, and make merry, to keep themselves in wine and drugs. When the money is gone they go out and steal again. As a result, they are reborn in extremely low and servile positions.

### 盜竊以為生業

The fifth reason for being born into poverty is accumulation of unpaid debts **負債逃避不償**. Although money is false and empty, it cannot be used casually and wasted. To borrow money and not repay it, thinking that you have no obligation because money is of no true importance, will lead to rebirth as a servile and poor person.

**Bondsmen** and **serving maids** have to serve others (as opposed to serving others). And those **who are not independent** must obey others.

Speaking of noble and base social statuses in terms of the four directions, the northern continent has no differentiation but the other three directions have. There are kings and regular citizens. Every one is different depending on how they serve each other. There are six levels:

1. Venerated within the venerated **貴中之貴** such as the sagely wheel turning kings.
2. Next venerated **貴中之次**, such as emperors and kings.
3. Lowest venerated **貴中之下**, such as officials.
4. Lowly within the lowly **賤中之賤**, such as servants.

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5. Next lowly 賤中之次, such as slaves.
6. Lowest lowly 賤中之下 such as concubines or entertainers (who used to be looked down upon).

There are also five causes that lead to rebirth in wealthy and honorable families.

The first of these is universal and expansive giving 施惠普廣.

The second is respect for parents and teachers 恭敬父母師長. It is totally wrong for people to talk about how they hate their parents, how their parents restrict and hamper them, and how their parents are stupid. It is also wrong to bow to a master and then talk about him behind his back. Treating parents and teachers this way is to commit offenses that make it impossible to be reborn in a good family.

The third cause of birth into wealth and honor is worship of the Triple Jewel 恭敬禮拜三寶.

The fourth is patience 忍辱 and lack of anger 無有瞋恚.

柔和謙下 one should be soft mild mannered and humble. When one is scolded the best thing is to be happy, pleased, and not in the least upset. This is a difficult undertaking, for it is not always easy to be patient and to be polite to everyone.

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

The fifth cause is listening to sutras and Vinaya 博聞經律, which is to say, attending (MANY) lectures on sutras and studying and practicing the moral precepts laid down by the Buddha in the Vinaya.

Honorable and wealthy people have money and power. While the ideal is to have all afore-mentioned five virtues, the practice of even one will keep you from being born in a servile and lowly position.

**They should gaze at and worship Earth Store Bodhisattva's image with a sincere heart for seven days and recite his name a full ten thousand times. When their current retribution ends they will be born into wealth and honor, and throughout thousands of tens of thousands of lives they will not pass through any of the suffering of the Three Evil Paths.**

If we wish to escape, we must repent.

**For seven days and recite his name a full ten thousand times:** Seven days means up to seven days, until there is a response. 10,000 times represents eradicating the 10,000 evils and accruing the 10,000 goodnesses.

**Seven days 一七:** Worldly numbers top at seven. For example, if one recites one day and obtains no response, one most likely will if one recites a full seven days 世數極於七也 • 如一日念之不應 • 念之七日 • 必遂所求.

*Sutra text:*

## Explained by Master YongHua

**Moreover, Universally Expansive, if in the future, in Jambudvipa there are Kshatriyas, Brahmans, elders, upasakas, and others of various names and clans who have newborn sons or daughters, they should recite this inconceivable sutra and recite the Bodhisattva's name a full ten thousand times within seven days before the child's birth.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**Moreover, Universally Expansive, if in the future, in Jambudvipa there are Kshatriyas, Brahmans, elders, upasakas, and others of various names and clans who have newborn sons or daughters,**

This passage particularly mentions **Jambudvipa** 閻浮提, our continent. The process of birth and death is not the same in all places. In Uttarakuru, for example, people are born under trees. It is a very simple matter; the mother merely goes beneath a tree and, like a hen laying an egg, gives birth to a child without any pain or suffering. In the eastern continent, Purva-vidaha, and in the western continent, Aparagodaniya, there are relatively few births, since those who live there have comparatively little desire.

In our continent, many beings are born, and birth is usually quite painful for the mother. In some cases, the child may be born upside down, or be difficult to bear because of a breech birth. In another case, called the "plucking lotus birth," only one foot emerges at the beginning of birth; in another the womb is pulled out along with the child. In general, birth is a difficult experience.

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The **elders** mentioned in the text need not belong to either of the noble castes (the two upper castes), but they do have wealth and blessings.

**They should recite this inconceivable sutra and recite the Bodhisattva's name a full ten thousand times within seven days before the child's birth.**

Because the recitation of this sutra and of Earth Store Bodhisattva's name 10,000 times **within seven days before the child's birth** can cause those who should receive a disastrous life (from the prior life's karmas) to be easily brought up and long-lived, we can see that the lifespan is not a predetermined and fixed thing. If good is done, the lifespan will increase; if evil is done, it will diminish. Everything depends on what we do.

According to the Protecting All The Infants Dharani Sutra 護諸童子咒經, after the Buddha had just accomplished the Way, a Great Brahman heaven King came to pay his respects. The God King said, "There are fifteen yaksha and raksha ghost kings which like to eat the human fetus, rendering human beings to have no offspring. When man and women engage in sexual intercourse, these ghosts use their powers to render them confused and indiscriminate. The women will not get pregnant. When they do, up to the moment of child-birth, they could kill the fetus." He then proceeded to spell out the names and appearances of these fifteen ghosts. If one recites this sutra and Earth Store Bodhisattva's name, good spirits will surround and protect the abode, causing the evil ghosts to flee and stay away.

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duō dié tā 多經他

ā gā luō 阿伽羅

jiā níng 伽甯

nà jiā 那伽

jiā níng 伽甯

pó lòu lì 婆漏隸

zhī lì 祇隸

jiā pó lì 伽婆隸

pó lì 婆隸

bù lì 不隸

luō chā mí 羅叔彌

xiū luō bǐ 修羅俾

zhē luō bǐ 遮羅俾

suō ní 娑尼

bō luō hē 波羅呵

shā ní 沙尼

nà yì 那易

mǐ nà yì 彌那易

sū pó hē 穌婆呵。

*Sutra text:*

**If that newly born child was to have undergone a  
disastrous retribution for past lives, he will be liberated**



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**from that retribution and be peaceful, happy, easily raised, and long-lived. If he was to have received a life of blessings, his peace and happiness will increase, as will his lifespan.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**If that newly born child was to have undergone a disastrous retribution for past lives, he will be liberated from that retribution and be peaceful, happy, easily raised, and long-lived.**

This section explains that evil retributions can be avoided. This retribution could be from the newborn's past causes or the mother's improper preparations like smoking or drinking during pregnancy.

A lot of things can go bad during pregnancy and birth: one foot exiting first, the mother's intestines also exiting, etc... They can all be avoided with this Earth Store Bodhisattva Dharma. The newborn also receives the added advantages of easy rearing 易養 and a long-life filled with blessings and happiness.

**If he was to have received a life of blessings, his peace and happiness will increase, as will his lifespan.**

The Great Brahma King told the Buddha: "All females who seek their children to be born without difficulties and have long life, should often earnestly recite and practice the good dharmas. During the vegetarian days of the month, they should receive the Eight Precepts, maintain purity, and bathe

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cleanly. Those who recite my Dharani will give birth without any difficulties and until the end of his or her life, the child will not encounter disasters.” If we recite this sutra or invoke the Bodhisattva’s name, then we will not be disturbed or harmed by the evil ghosts, and our lifespan will increase. If we keep up the practice, then our current blessings will increase.

The Practicing the Way Ground Sutra 修行道地經 says that our conduct is not pure. Sometimes it is good, sometimes evil. While in the mother’s womb, until near the time of birth 至三十八七日, depending on one’s inherent conduct, a wind naturally blows. If one’s past conduct was good, then there will be a fragrant wind enabling the child to obtain a mind and body that is soft and gentle without any defect. This is true for his or her bones and joints as well, thus giving the child a proper and adorned appearance making people adore him or her. On the other hand, when the wind inside the mother’s womb arises, be it upper or lower wind, it will flip the fetus’ body and turn it upside down. Its head will be near the birth door. At that time, those children who are blessed will feel like wanting to enter a pond to swim and play or feel that they fell onto a high bed of flowers and fragrance. Those who have evil retributions will experience just the opposite.

If we can recite this sutra and the Bodhisattva’s name in the early stages, then riding on our past lives’ blessings we obtain birth. We should then be safe and happy, and have a long life.

*Sutra text:*

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

**"Moreover, Universally Expansive, on the first, eighth, fourteenth, fifteenth, eighteenth, twenty-third, twenty-fourth, twenty-eighth, twenty-ninth, and thirtieth days of the month, the offenses of living beings will be tabulated and their gravity assessed. Since every single movement or stirring of thoughts on the part of the living beings of Jambudvipa is karma and an offense, how much more likely are they to incur offenses when they actually give themselves over to killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and false speech. The variety of these offenses is a hundred and thousand-fold. If they are able to recite this sutra before the images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, or Worthy Sages once on these ten days, there will be no disasters for one hundred yojanas to the north, south, east, and west. Those in their families, both old and young, now and in the future, will be apart from the Evil Paths throughout hundreds of thousands of years. If they can recite it once on each of these ten vegetarian days, there will be no accidents or illnesses in the family and there will be food and clothing in abundance.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Universally Expansive, on the first, eighth, fourteenth, fifteenth, eighteenth, twenty-third, twenty-fourth, twenty-eighth, twenty-ninth, and thirtieth days of the month, the offenses of living beings will be tabulated and their gravity assessed.**

This section mentions the Earth Store Bodhisattva days. These vegetarian days are to help us to be apart from the deviant and rid ourselves of desires. We eat less and nurture our re-

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solve 節食養志. We maintain a pure body and mind, just like the Buddha's.

Guan Yin has six vegetarian days 齋日: 8, 14, 15, 23, 29 and 30. Each year would also have three entire vegetarian months 長齋月.

On the ten Earth Store Bodhisattva dates mentioned in the sutra text (lunar days 1, 8, 14, 15, 18, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30), the various ghosts and spirits gather and go over the deeds done by beings and determine the virtue and sinfulness of each.

According to the Manjushri Bodhisattva Good Evil Days Sutra 文殊菩薩善惡宿曜經: the 1st day is suitable for good karmas 善業 such as giving because everything is auspicious 吉祥. The 8th and 23rd days are suitable for strength and battle (力戰; 宜力用之事). The 14th and 29th days are fierce 勇猛 days. The 24th day 凶猛 is inauspicious. The 28th day is most invincible 最勝. The 15th and 30th days are auspicious 吉相 and suitable for making offerings to the deceased ancestors 宜祭先亡. These ten days are suitable for making offerings to ancestors, giving, making offerings to parents, the venerated ones and gods, holding vegetarian precepts, giving food or making offerings or ceremonies 祭祀.

According to the Four Heavenly Kings Sutra, Shakra relies on

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

each of the Four Heavenly Kings to be in charge of one direction. On the white month eighth day 白月八日, they send emissaries to investigate living beings' good and evil. On the 14<sup>th</sup> day, they send the crown princes. On the 15<sup>th</sup> day, the Kings personally come. The same applies to the black months three days 黑月三日. When the Kings come in person, they are accompanied by ghosts and spirits. If they encounter those who observe precepts or eat vegetarian meals, the gods rejoice and put it in their records.

Black and white months are based on India's calendar which goes on decreasing moons or increasing moons:

月盈至滿，謂之白分。月虧至晦，謂之黑分。黑分或十四日十五日，月有大小故也。黑前白後，合為一月。

月盈至滿 The moon waxing till full,

謂之白分 known as the white half.

月虧至晦 The moon waning till dark,

謂之黑分 known as the black half.

黑分或十四日十五日 Black half may be fourteen or fifteen days.

月有大小故也 so the great or small month (moon).

黑前白後 the black (half) before the white (half),

合為一月 combined together is one month (moon).

Explained by Master YongHua

**Since every single movement or stirring of thoughts on the part of the living beings of Jambudvīpa is karma and an offense, how much more likely are they to incur offenses when they actually give themselves over to killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and false speech.**

Creating offenses comes effortlessly to all of us. It is said that for us living beings, for each single stirring or movement of our mind, there is none that is not an offense 舉止動念, 無不是業, 無不是罪! How many offenses are then created a day? ‘Stirring’ (舉) 止 refers to when one is murky and sleepy 昏沉; ‘movement of the mind’ 動念 refers to false thinking. Each state has its own ghosts that obstruct our cultivation.

**The variety of these offenses is a hundred and thousand-fold. If they are able to recite this sutra before the images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, or Worthy Sages once on these ten days, there will be no disasters for one hundred yojanas to the north, south, east, and west. Those in their families, both old and young, now and in the future, will be apart from the Evil Paths throughout hundreds of thousands of years.**

The sutras say that if there is one person who maintains the vegetarian precepts \_ for left-home people, not eating after noon is considered a vegetarian precept \_, and recites the sutra once, then within an area of one hundred yojanas, there will be no calamities and difficulties.

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

In the past, a man sought instructions for the Way from a master. The Master said, “You are not mature yet 汝年未滿, therefore you should make your mind and thoughts proper 且正心念.” He taught him to contemplate his mind, telling him that, if an evil thought arises, he should put a black bean into the bag. He should also put a white bean into the bag for each good thought. Each day, he should thus tabulate before going to sleep to see the nature of his thoughts every day. The man thus cultivated with utmost sincerity until one day, all the beans were white. He eventually certified to Arhatship.

Even if one merely has thoughts of committing offenses he is, in effect, committing those offenses; how much heavier is his offense karma if he actually does those deeds of killing, stealing, lying, and sexual misconduct. The last of these is one that Westerners are prone to consider a very minor matter, but it is well to be aware that it is classed as an offense; it is the one living beings are most likely to commit.

**If they can recite it once on each of these ten vegetarian days, there will be no accidents or illnesses in the family and there will be food and clothing in abundance.**

The text discusses recitation of this sutra on the ten vegetarian days, fixed dates on which vows of abstention from unclean foods (meat and fish) are practiced. If one puts it to practice, recites the sutra once, when the mind empties the offenses are eradicated and the blessings are produced.

*Sutra text:*

Explained by Master YongHua

**"Therefore, Universally Expansive, you should know that such beneficial deeds are performed by Earth Store Bodhisattva through use of his indescribable hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of great and awesome spiritual powers. The living beings of Jambudvipa have strong affinity with this Great Knight, and if they hear his name, see his image, or hear but three or five words, a verse, or sentence of this sutra, they will obtain particularly wonderful peace and happiness in this present life. Through hundreds' of thousands of tens of thousands of future lives, their appearance will always be upright and handsome, and they will be born into honorable and wealthy families."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Therefore, Universally Expansive, you should know that such beneficial deeds are performed by Earth Store Bodhisattva through use of his indescribable hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of great and awesome spiritual powers. The living beings of Jambudvipa have strong affinity with this Great Knight, and if they hear his name, see his image, or hear but three or five words, a verse, or sentence of this sutra, they will obtain particularly wonderful peace and happiness in this present life.**

Earth Store Bodhisattva twice rescued his mother, and was once a king. This all happened in Jambudvipa. That is why the Buddha said that we all have strong affinities with the Bodhisattva: we now get to hear about this Bodhisattva and meet him. Such affinity comes from having planted causes



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with him long ago. The **three words** mentioned in the text represent the disintegration of the three delusions:

- 1) Coarse delusions 粗惑.
- 2) Fine delusions 細惑.
- 3) Delusions like dust and sand 塵沙惑.

Coarse delusions are deluded views; fine ones are the delusions of thought; and those as numerous as dust and sand are the delusions of ignorance.

**Three words** also represents the destruction of the three obstacles:

- 1) The retribution obstacle 報障.
- 2) The karma obstacle 業障.
- 3) The affliction obstacle 煩惱障.

It may be objected by some that they have studied sutras for a long time but do not feel as though their obstacles have been overcome. Such a thought is in itself a sign that those obstacles have already started to disappear. If they were not being eradicated, you would not even know that you had such problems, since you would still mistake your afflictions for precious gems and would not want to be rid of them.

In addition to the above effects, the **three words** also represent the accomplishment of the Three Kinds of Wisdom:

- 1) Wisdom of the Way 道種智.
- 2) All Wisdom 一切智.

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### 3) Wisdom of All Modes 一切種智.

They also represent the perfection of the Three Virtues of:

- 1) The Dharma Body 法身德.
- 2) Prajna 般若德.
- 3) Liberation 解脫德.

When the text mentions **five words**, it refers to the disintegration of the Five Dwellings (破五住煩惱).

The first of these is dwelling in the affliction of views and love 見愛住煩惱. Because there are views, there is also a love that arises for that which is viewed.

The second is dwelling in the affliction of desire and love 欲愛住煩惱. Because of desire there arises love and, consequently, afflictions. In people who manage to be devoid of love there is no hate, and without hatred, there are no afflictions.

The third is the affliction of dwelling in form and love 色愛住煩惱, which arises when love or attachment occurs with respect to form.

The fourth is the affliction of dwelling in formlessness 無色愛住煩惱. This arises after birth into the Formless Realm.

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The fifth is the affliction of dwelling in ignorance 無明住煩惱.

On hearing this sutra it is possible to break the Five Dwellings in affliction and leave the Five Paths. The asura path is scattered throughout the other five. It is also possible to strengthen the Five Faculties, develop the Five Powers, and accomplish the fivefold Dharma Body 五分法身. The Five Faculties are:

- 1) Faith 信根.
- 2) Vigor 進根.
- 3) Mindfulness 念根.
- 4) Concentration 定根.
- 5) Wisdom 慧根.

The five powers are the resulting strengths that arise from development of the Five Faculties.

The fivefold Dharma Body is composed of:

- 1) Morality 戒.
- 2) Samadhi 定.
- 3) Wisdom 慧.
- 4) Liberation 解脫.
- 5) Liberated knowledge and views 解脫知見. Even knowledge and views are liberated!

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Hearing **one verse** 一偈 or even a **sentence** 一句 of principle from this sutra can cause you to leave through the One Door and enter the Miraculous Adornment Road 一門超出. Hearing one sentence can cause you to attain the complete brightness of the One Nature 一性圓明, the Nature Sea perfect Brightness 性海圓明.

**Through hundreds' of thousands of tens of thousands of future lives, their appearance will always be upright and handsome, and they will be born into honorable and wealthy families."**

People's **appearances** 相貌 are not always proper and their features are not always put together harmoniously 不端正. For example, some may be born with a monkey-like hand, with horse-like nostrils, or with rat-like eyes. There is a Chinese proverb that says, "A rabbit's head 兔頭 and a serpent's eyes 蛇眼, ears like a rat 鼠耳 and a vulture's beak 鷹腮." A person with these features does not have a proper physiognomy; his face resembles many animals moving together to form a whole. What we are talking about here is achieving a proper and organized physiognomy.

People can also be born wealthy as a result of their virtuous conduct. On the other hand, those who are not wealthy, who are poor, lowly, and servile, have slandered the Triple Jewel.

*Sutra text:*

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

After Universally Expansive had heard the Buddha, the Thus Come One, extol and praise Earth Store Bodhisattva, he knelt with both knees on the ground, placed his palms together, and again addressed the Buddha:

"World-Honored One, I have long known that this Great Knight had such inconceivably great spiritual powers and vast mighty vows. My questions are put for the sake of benefiting living beings of the future; I shall receive the answer most respectfully. World-Honored One, what should we call this sutra and how should it be propagated?"

The Buddha said, "This sutra has three names: the first is the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva; it is also called Earth Store's Past Conduct; and it is called Sutra of the Power of Earth Store's Past Vows. Because this Bodhisattva has made such great vows over so many aeons to benefit living beings, you should all propagate the sutra in accord with his vows."

After Universally Expansive heard this he placed his palms together respectfully, made obeisance, and withdrew.

*Sutra commentary:*

After Universally Expansive had heard the Buddha, the Thus Come One, extol and praise Earth Store Bodhisattva, he knelt with both knees on the ground, placed his palms together, and again addressed the Buddha:

"World-Honored One, I have long known that this Great Knight had such inconceivably great spiritual powers and

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**vast mighty vows. My questions are put for the sake of benefiting living beings of the future; I shall receive the answer most respectfully. World-Honored One, what should we call this sutra and how should it be propagated?"**

There are two styles of kneeling. In the first, 胡跪 one sits on his left leg, which is placed under the body. According to the Chinese text, the right knee kneels and the left does not; in Thailand, Myanmar, Hinayana countries even new bhikshus seeing more senior bhikshus "half-kneel"; Shamis must also lower their head and not look at bhikshus; "half-kneel" also means to lower one's head because one cannot casually look at one's seniors; this applies to both genders. The second method is ordinary kneeling with both knees on the ground and is known as "long kneeling 長跪" because it is a position that can be maintained for some time; the former style can be maintained only for relatively short periods. The Buddha said that because of the difficulty of the former position, women should kneel with both knees on the ground but men should use the other method.

In Burma, Ceylon, and other countries, young bhikshus kneel when they see older bhikshus, and sramaneras kneel whenever they meet any bhikshu. They keep their eyes downcast and do not look at the bhikshu's face.

**The Buddha said, "This sutra has three names: the first is the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva; it is also called Earth Store's Past Conduct; and it is called Sutra of the Power of Earth Store's Past Vows. Because this Bodhi-**

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

**sattva has made such great vows over so many aeons to benefit living beings, you should all propagate the sutra in accord with his vows."**

From the three names given to this sutra we can realize the importance of the conduct of Bodhisattvas who make and practice great vows, even to the extreme of giving their head if it can benefit beings, and not giving a hair of their body if it will cause harm. The sutra should be **propagated** and spread throughout the world, in accord with such vows and practices.

Earth Store Bodhisattva exhibits the four kinds of **Power**:

1. The power that cannot be destroyed: Since making his resolve for Bodhi until now, the Bodhisattva's intention cannot be destroyed.
2. The power that can be of benefit: He can benefit all living beings.
3. The power that displays courage **有膽**: He goes to the hells of the ten directions
4. The power that one can take refuge with: He is a place of refuge for living beings of the six paths.

**Vow** refers to that which the mind desires.

**After Universally Expansive heard this he placed his palms together respectfully, made obeisance, and withdrew.**

The Bodhisattva respectfully bowed to express his deference and gratitude for the teaching, and returned to his seat.

## **CHAPTER 7: Benefits for the Living and the Dead**

This chapter explains the various things that the living can do to help the dead. In doing so, the living also receive the benefit of increasing their blessings and wisdom. The Triple Jewel is the only thing that can save living beings. To bow and make offerings to ghosts and spirits is of no use.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, I see that every motion and stirring of thought of the living beings of Jambudvipa is an offense, and that those living beings discard the wholesome benefits they have obtained, many of them retreating from their initial resolve. If they encounter evil conditions, their offenses increase with every thought.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, I see that every motion and stirring of thought of the living beings of Jambudvipa is an offense,**

The minds and consciousness of living beings in Jambudvipa are not constant 識心無定.



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**Every motion and stirring of thought:** “Thought” 心念 points to the first six consciousnesses. “Motion and stirring” 舉動 refers to their functionality 功能. The sixth and seventh consciousnesses collaborate 和合 to confuse 濁亂 the eighth consciousness, the one in charge 主人. They also combine to then 復令 cause the first five consciousnesses to be greedy for sound, grasp at form, taste flavors, smell fragrances, and touch soft and smooth bodies 身軟滑. It attaches and grasps at everything 處處貪緣. That is why there is no motion or stirring of thought that is not **an offense 無非是罪**.

When living beings in **Jambudvīpa** generate thoughts, they usually commit **offenses 舉心動念, 無非是罪**, because most of their thoughts are motivated by greed, desire, jealousy, obstructions, and arrogance. Proper thoughts respect those who are better at something than oneself and aid those who are less able. Because we beings have not resolved to act in this fashion, our thoughts almost always constitute offenses.

**And that those living beings discard the wholesome benefits they have obtained, many of them retreating from their initial resolve. If they encounter evil conditions, their offenses increase with every thought.**

Many people study for a year or two and then decide to quit the Buddhadharmā. In the first year of study the Buddha

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seems to be right before their eyes; after two years he seems to retreat a bit, and by the end of the third year he is eighty-four thousand miles away. After this he seems to retreat to the very border of the universe. These feelings represent withdrawal from one's initial resolve. Even those who do not think about quitting should constantly inspect their thoughts and actions to be sure they are in accord with their resolve as it was when they first left the home-life. For example, those who have gone forth into the homeless life cannot speak casually all the time, because talking is a useless waste of vital energy and spirit and an impediment to cultivation. Constant inspection of your own behavior to ascertain that it is in accord with your initial resolve to study the Buddhadharma is a sign that you are not retreating from that resolve.

Many people begin to cultivate and then encounter some demon or other and are turned away by it. Once you encounter evil conditions and become involved in them, they tend to increase and grow. In addition, the resolve for enlightenment can either grow day by day or diminish and scatter. Most living beings tend to decrease their thoughts of enlightenment, and to grow toward evil. The more one becomes immersed in bad habits, the harder it is to extricate oneself from doing evil.

The Worthy and Stupid Sutra 賢愚經 says that a human body is very difficult to obtain. When we encounter evil causes and conditions, we can easily lose it. Evil is pervasive while goodness is rare. Each day, we may have thousands of evil thoughts and not a single good thought. Our mind is usually scattered, and we cannot maintain a steady course. It is easy to retreat from our resolve. If we could subdue our own

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

mind and anchor it to the Way, we'd have inconceivable power. Unfortunately, the living beings of Jambudvīpa have mixed thoughts that swirl and are difficult to sustain or guard. Typically, good thoughts decrease while evil thoughts increase out of habit energies.

*Sutra text:*

**This is like a man carrying a heavy rock through the mud. It gradually becomes more difficult as the stone becomes heavier, and he sinks deeply with every step. If he meets a mentor who shoulders his burden, or, because that mentor has great power, he may bear the entire burden. Moreover, he will assist him and urge him to plant his feet firmly on the ground. If he reaches level ground he should remain aware of the evil road and never traverse it again."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**This is like a man carrying a heavy rock through the mud. It gradually becomes more difficult as the stone becomes heavier, and he sinks deeply with every step.**

In the analogy given in this passage, the **rock** represents the **heavy** load of evil karma, the **muddy bog** represents the three states of woe, and the good **guide** is the Buddha, a Bodhisattva, or a good knowing adviser with great wisdom who takes some of the **load**.

**If he meets a mentor who shoulders his burden, or, because that mentor has great power, he may bear the entire**

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### **burden.**

When we get in trouble, if we are lucky, even if we only have the tiniest good roots, then we can meet with a Good Knowing Adviser. If we are not lucky, we cannot find one. Furthermore, the Good Knowing Adviser can totally or partially bear the burden.

**Moreover, he will assist him and urge him to plant his feet firmly on the ground. If he reaches level ground he should remain aware of the evil road and never traverse it again."**

Living beings get into trouble and cannot extricate themselves. They require the force of the Triple Jewel's non-outflow merit and virtue to eradicate the offenses of outflows and rescue them. This is why we cultivate: to develop the strength to help extricate living beings from their difficulties.

*Sutra text:*

**"World-Honored One, the habitual evil of living beings extends from the subtlety of a hair to an immeasurable degree.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"World-Honored One, the habitual evil of living beings extends from the subtlety of a hair to an immeasurable degree.**

Since beginningless time we have planted seeds of ignorance,

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greed and anger. Tiny evils create seeds in the eighth consciousness. Due to the circumstances or environment, these seeds tend to activate one another, impelling us to create karmas and make us start sliding down the slope. We can't help ourselves! We attach to dharmas (everything!) and like to discriminate. We claim that dharmas exist or do not exist, that they are good or bad, ... It is difficult to ascend but easy to fall. We simply have too many attachments to the body. In Buddhism, we have a repentance Dharma that calls for repentance before morning light, such as performing the morning ceremony; this is designed to erase these bad seeds before they are activated.

Evil tendencies 惡習 would indicate the existence of evil seeds.

**Habitual evil** 習惡 refers to one's conduct, and arises from evil seeds that mature into evil practices. These could range from the tiniest seeds to countless seeds.

The Sutra on the Divination of the Effect of Good and Evil Actions 占察經 says that seeking the mind's form and state 求心形狀 is futile because there is not a single bit that can be obtained 無一區分而可得者. However, from living beings' ignorance, stupidity, habits tending towards darkness and various other causes and conditions, states falsely manifest. This has the effect of making the mind produce all sorts of thoughts of dharma toward all sorts of dharmas. Some dharmas are true, some are false. Some are good, others are evil. Limitless thoughts of dharmas can be thus produced.

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Because we engage with too many evil conditions **多緣諸惡身故**, it is said **光明玄云** that it is difficult to ascend and it is easy to fall.

*Sutra text:*

**Since all beings have such habits, their parents or relatives should create blessings for them when they are on the verge of dying in order to assist them on the road ahead. This may be done by hanging banners and canopies, lighting oil lamps, reciting the venerated sutras, or making offerings before the images of Buddhas or sages. It includes recitation of the names of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Pratyekabuddhas in such a way that the recitation of each name passes by the ear of the dying one and is heard in his fundamental consciousness.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**Since all beings have such habits, their parents or relatives should create blessings for them when they are on the verge of dying in order to assist them on the road ahead. This may be done by hanging banners and canopies, lighting oil lamps, reciting the venerated sutras, or making offerings before the images of Buddhas or sages. It includes recitation of the names of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Pratyekabuddhas**

Creating blessings to aid the deceased:

When we were alive, we liked to hoard wealth by harming

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and stealing from others! We did not know any better! What are the chances that surviving relatives will help?

A man I know is quite financially secure during his retirement years. His mother passed away and left him significant assets. I advised him to invest in her rebirth to the Pure Land because I stressed to him that it was after all her money. He rejected my advise and spent the minimum on her rebirth. Luckily she was reborn to the heavens because she basically had a decent lifestyle. Unfortunately, she is still very upset with her favorite son because of his stinginess and greed. She has not forgiven him yet.

**Creating blessings** has two types of retributions: First, **hanging banners and canopies** and **lighting oil lamps** 懸繡蓋及燃油燈 can create phenomenon blessing retributions 修事福果. And second, **reciting the venerated sutras, or making offerings before the images of Buddhas or sages, or reciting their names** 轉讀尊經。或供像念佛菩薩辟支佛名 can give rise to honoring the Triple Jewel retributions 敬三寶果.

The 普廣經 Universally Expansive Sutra says that after the death of the four-fold disciples, if one creates and hangs banners at the day of death, then such offering will enable one to escape the eight difficulties and be born into the Pure Lands of the ten directions. If one offers banners and canopies, then things will be as one wishes, up to and including achieving

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Bodhi. The banners turn in the wind, destroying all obstructions and turning them into motes of dust. When the banners turn, one can acquire the position of Wheel Turning King. Or when the motes of dust are blown, one acquires the retribution of being a small king. The retributions are limitless. Offering images generates the same blessings. And the blessings from reciting will be described later.

If one lights oil lamps as offerings, that will illuminate darkness. Those who are suffering and can encounter this light, and can then see each other. Thanks to these blessings and virtues, living beings obtain respite in their suffering.

*Question:* We no longer use oil lamps. What can we do instead?

*Answer:* Any type of lamp can be used.

In the Mindfulness of the Proper Dharma Sutra 正法念經, the Suyama Heaven King tells his gods, “If you can be mindful of the Buddha then it is called a good life because you are not apart from mindfulness of the Buddha. This is the preferred way of life. The same goes for mindfulness of the Dharma and the Sangha.”

**In such a way that the recitation of each name passes by the ear of the dying one and is heard in his fundamental consciousness.**

The Alaya consciousness is **fundamental** 本 consciousness.



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It is the basis for birth and death. That is why it is called fundamental.

At the time of death, the eighth consciousness lingers longer after the seventh leaves. When sound passes the ear organ, it is stored in the eighth consciousness and will never be destroyed. It is like Vajra entering the belly: it will never be digested and will invariably nurture 熏 the seeds in our eighth consciousness that can mature and help us have the chance to listen to the Buddha's sermons.

Even if **living beings** have such weighty karmic loads that they are due to fall into the hells, their survivors can do meritorious deeds to benefit them. If they recite the names of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Pratyekabuddhas, they should be certain to do so in a clear voice that can be heard by the dying person before he dies, so that it will register in his fundamental **consciousness**, the eighth consciousness. There is a verse that says of the eighth consciousness:

*This wide, inexhaustible triple store is unfathomably deep* 浩浩三藏不可窮，

*Its realm is that of the seventh's waves blown up by former states. It is the deep gulf (8th) with waves (7th) that have been kept blowing by the wind of states (5th,6th,7th)* 淵深七浪境前風。

*Receiving the permeation, holding the seeds of the organs, body, and things* 受薰持種根身器，

*It is the first to come and last to go, acting as the host* 去後

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來先作主翁。

In this verse the eighth consciousness is compared to a vast 浩浩 sea that stores the seeds of the past, present, and future (san zàng). The myriad thoughts of living beings are like waves on the sea, and they are transmitted by the seventh consciousness to the eighth. The seventh 傳送識 transmits the prior six consciousnesses to the eighth; this is like the wind of the former six blowing the waves of the seventh up to the eighth. Once they have permeated the eighth consciousness, they are held or stored up and are the seeds from which organs, body, and objective world 器 sprout. At birth the eighth consciousness is the first to appear, and it is the last to leave at death. Consequently it acts as the master. Although false thoughts appear as functions of the sixth consciousness, they come from seeds in the eighth.

When all the other seven consciousnesses have scattered and left at the time of death, the basic 本識, or eighth, consciousness remains a while longer. At that time Mahayana **sutras** should be read aloud or the Buddha's name recited, and they should be spoken loudly enough to be heard by that consciousness.

法音經耳, 功報彌劫, 一歷耳根, 永為道種: the Dharma sound passes through one's ear; the blessing retributions fill up aeons; once they have passed through the ear organ, the seeds of the Way are thus created forever.

This is not the only thing that can be done to benefit the dead.

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*Sutra text:*

**"The result of the evil karma created by living beings may be reckoned as certain to make them fall into the evil destinies, yet if, when they are near death, their relatives cultivate the planting of these sagely causes for them, their many offenses will all be destroyed.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"The result of the evil karma created by living beings may be reckoned as certain to make them fall into the evil destinies,**

**Destiny 趣** can also mean to arrive 到, and can be called path 道. Our own good or evil causal paths can transport us towards birth destinies 彼善惡因道 • 能運到生趣處. The karmas we have created propel us towards the various birth destinies.

The Great Vehicle Same Nature Sutra 大乘同性經 tells us that King Léng Qié 楞伽王 asked the Buddha, "How do living beings leave this body and attain the next?" The Buddha replied, "Living beings who have already abandoned their current body are blown by the force of their karma 業力吹, which moves their consciousness towards the retribution for prior karmas 移識將去 • 自所受業 • 而受其果."

That is why a Chan Master 圭峯大師 says that if you wish to know whether or not you'll be at ease at the time of death,

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just examine whether or you are at ease on a normal day!

**Yet if, when they are near death, their relatives cultivate the planting of these sagely causes for them, their many offenses will all be destroyed.**

Cultivating **sagely causes** such as making offerings to the Triple Jewel, reciting sutras or the names of Buddhas, etc, can help one attain sagehood. Therefore, these merits and virtues with non-outflows are certain to eradicate offenses.

*Sutra text:*

**If within a period of forty-nine days after the person's death, the relatives do many good deeds, that can cause the dead one to leave the Evil Paths forever, be born among humans or gods, and enjoy supremely wonderful bliss. The benefits that accrue to their current relatives are also unlimited."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**If within a period of forty-nine days after the person's death, the relatives do many good deeds, that can cause the dead one to leave the Evil Paths forever, be born among humans or gods, and enjoy supremely wonderful bliss.**

During the first **forty-nine days** after death, the severity of karmic retribution is not finalized. Many merit-producing practices that can have a beneficial effect can be done on behalf of the dead during this time. These deeds can increase

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blessings and erase offenses.

**The benefits that accrue to their current relatives are also unlimited."**

Remember that the body is the foundation for suffering 眾苦之本. It is the source for all the difficulties and disasters 患禍之元. Those who attach to the self 吾我縛著, will undergo birth and death incessantly 生死不息.

*Sutra text:*

**"Therefore, before the World-Honored One, as well as before the gods, dragons, and the rest of the Eightfold Division, both human and nonhuman, I exhort the living beings of Jambudvīpa to be careful and avoid harming, killing, and creating evil conditions, or worshipping or making sacrifices to ghosts, spirits, or seeking anything from Wang Liang on the day of death. Why? Sacrificing beings is not in the least helpful to the dead but binds up the conditions of offense so that they grow ever more deep and heavy.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Therefore, before the World-Honored One, as well as before the gods, dragons, and the rest of the Eightfold Division, both human and nonhuman, I exhort the living beings of Jambudvīpa to be careful and avoid harming, killing, and creating evil conditions, or worshipping or making sacrifices to ghosts, spirits, or seeking anything from**

**Wang Liang on the day of death.**

Making sacrifices to the ghosts and spirits are of no use!  
They simply have no power help the deceased.

There is a custom prevalent in China, but not widely practiced in the United States, of sacrificing to ghosts and spirits. Among the supernatural beings are a class called **Wǎng Liǎng 魍魎**, which are strange ghosts that develop in the mountains and wilderness 山妖 (or weird water creatures 水怪); In addition, there are other bizarre forms of nature spirits as well 山精水怪之類. A verse that discusses the practices of sacrificing to ghosts and spirits says:

*People, confused and ill at ease* 有等迷人不安康,  
*Sacrifice pigs and sheep to ghosts and gods* 對神期許賽  
豬羊.

*This killing reflects enmity from past lives* 殺生冤業前生  
事.

*Why add frost to snow* 如何雪上又加霜?  
*Do not be so certain it is a pig or goat* 休勿認定是  
豬羊,

*For heads and faces change ten thousand times* 改頭換面  
幾千場.

*As the wheel turns and beings trade their places* 如車輪轉  
相還報,

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*There is not a single place to hide in the depths of the sea or sky* 雲海騰空無處藏.

In China people often make offerings on major occasions. They are called red sacrifices 紅事 if made for the living, and white sacrifices 白事 if made for the dead. People do not always understand how things ought to be done, and when someone in their family dies, they pray to the gods and **spirits** to keep their relatives out of the hells. In order to obtain a response they bring offerings of chicken, pork, and other flesh foods and repeat such offerings again and again.

Keep in mind that ghosts and spirits can know people's lifespan, offenses and blessings. In particular, they can know when the retributions are arriving, or will arrive. However, make no mistake about it. They cannot revive people, make them rich, honored, destitute or lowly. They can only get people to commit evil and kill, by confusing them.

This constant taking of lives reflects enmity from the past. Once a killing takes place, it is repaid in kind, and a vicious cycle is inaugurated, all of which is the result of hatred that began in past lives. To commit more killings on top of those already committed is as senseless as adding frost to already frozen snow.

It is simplistic to think that pigs are just pigs, and that sheep are only sheep, for people often fall into the realm of the animals. People can become pigs; pigs can become people. In fact, if you study the inhabitants of any particular country you will often find that they look a great deal like the kind of ani-

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mal they most like to eat. Countries where people eat a lot of pork are often inhabited by porcine people, and it may also be observed that the eyes of people who eat a great deal of beef are slightly bovine. In some countries of Southeast Asia (like Thailand), people eat great quantities of frogs, and many have froglike eyes. Such changes are constantly occurring.

**Why? Sacrificing beings is not in the least helpful to the dead but binds up the conditions of offense so that they grow ever more deep and heavy.**

The Shurangama Sutra explains how sheep are transformed into people, and the same logic applies to other animals. The spiritual nature of a pig may end up in the body of a human, and a man may end up in the body of a swine. This is just like moving from house to house. It is possible to go from a great mansion to a wretched hotel. At the moment, we happen to be people, but it is not certain that we always have been or will remain so. Wait until you find yourself in the realm of the pigs, and you will suddenly find out how unpleasant it is. Although most people think that everything remains static and unchanging, those with the penetration of seeing into past lives know about this constant motion and interchange and the interrelation of all living beings.

*Sutra text:*

**The dead one might be due to receive a sagely portion and be born among humans and gods in his next life or in the future, but because of evil causes committed by his family in his name, he is further burdened by having to argue and plead his own case, so his rebirth in a good place is**



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**delayed. How much the more is this the case for a person on the verge of death who has not even planted a few good roots in this life. Everyone must undergo the Evil Paths in accordance with his own deeds. It is even more unbearable when relatives add to those deeds.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The dead one might be due to receive a sagely portion and be born among humans and gods in his next life or in the future, but because of evil causes committed by his family in his name, he is further burdened by having to argue and plead his own case, so his rebirth in a good place is delayed.**

**Sagely portion 聖分** refers to the Seven Bodhi Shares, the Eight-fold Sagely Way Shares or the Bodhisattva Fruition Share. Instead of enabling these sagely causes to mature, their surviving relatives weight them down with karmic debts.

When a dead man comes to be judged by King Yama, the sacrifices made by his relatives for his sake are held against him, and even though he claims no connection with the deeds, they still affect his rebirth. From this it can clearly be seen that the best thing to do after a death is to maintain the practice of vegetarian eating, recitation of the Buddha's name, and recitation of sutras, in order to lighten, rather than increase, the deceased person's karmic burden.

Creating **evil causes** for a dead person is like adding more weight to the burden of one who is already weak with hunger. It can delay the deceased's good birth (preventing the sagely

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portion 聖分 from maturing) or it can aggravate his case.

**How much the more is this the case for a person on the verge of death who has not even planted a few good roots in this life. Everyone must undergo the Evil Paths in accordance with his own deeds. It is even more unbearable when relatives add to those deeds.**

If you wish to make offerings, you should use flowers, incense, milk, cheese, butter or fruit. This creates blessings for the deceased.

*Sutra text:*

**It is as if a man had been traveling from a distant place with a hundred-pound load and had been cut off from his provisions for three days. If he were suddenly to encounter a neighbor who gave him a few more things to carry, his load would become heavier and more distressing.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**It is as if a man had been traveling from a distant place with a hundred-pound load and had been cut off from his provisions for three days.**

This analogy to illustrates the above mentioned point.

**It is as if a man:** designates living beings in Jambudvīpa;  
**traveling from a distant place:** symbolizes abandoning ancestral home and enter the flow of birth and death.

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**Provisions for three days:** symbolizes the three non-outflow studies.

**A hundred-pound load** represents sinking into the sea of birth and death. The addition of further weight can only make him stumble and fall more heavily. Further, the baggage can be taken to represent the Five Skandhas and its weight of a hundred pound as standing for the Ten Evil Deeds.

**If he were suddenly to encounter a neighbor** representing the relative who sacrifices animals for the deceased **who gave him a few more things to carry, his load would become heavier and more distressing.** Making sacrifices to ghosts and spirits has this kind of effect.

Improper actions from the surviving relatives and friends can have detrimental effects on the rebirth chances of the deceased.

*Sutra text:*

**"World-Honored One, as I contemplate the living beings of Jambudvīpa, I see that they will completely benefit from any good deed they are able to do within the Buddha's teaching, even if it is as little as a strand of hair, a drop of water, a grain of sand, or a mote of dust.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"World-Honored One, as I contemplate the living beings of Jambudvīpa, I see that they will completely benefit**

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**from any good deed they are able to do within the Buddha's teaching, even if it is as little as a strand of hair, a drop of water, a grain of sand, or a mote of dust.**

Merit and virtue planted with the Triple Jewel is like Vajra. It is indestructible and the smallest piece can destroy anything.

*Sutra text:*

**After this had been said, an elder in the assembly whose name was Great Eloquence, who had long since testified to non-production, and who often appeared in the body of an elder to teach and transform those in the ten directions, placed his palms together respectfully, and said to Earth Store Bodhisattva, "Great Knight, when the close and distant relatives of the dead in Jambudvipa cultivate meritorious virtues for the dead by preparing vegetarian meals and planting other good causes, does the dead one benefit greatly and become liberated?"**

*Sutra commentary:*

**After this had been said, an elder in the assembly whose name was Great Eloquence, who had long since testified to non-production, and who often appeared in the body of an elder to teach and transform those in the ten directions, placed his palms together respectfully, and said to Earth Store Bodhisattva,**

Elder **Great Eloquence** is endowed with the four Unobstructed Eloquences 無礙辯才:

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1. Eloquence of meaning 義無礙辯: Within one meaning one can expound limitless meanings.
2. Eloquence of Dharma 法無礙辯: One can speak of the limitless Dharmas.
3. Eloquence of words 詞無礙辯: One has the use of limitless words.
4. Eloquence of delight in speech 樂說無礙辯: To be able to speak of the previous three with delight until the end of time.

Long ago, Great Eloquence certified to **non-production**: the patience of non-production of Dharmas. The confused have production because of their erroneous views. The proper view is that all dharmas are not produced. Even birth and death are not existent. Prajna is not produced; the non-produced is not produced. What is there to be ended?

The Dharma Flower Sutra says: “Fundamentally, all dharmas are permanently dwelling, their marks are still extinction 諸法從本來, 常住寂滅相.”

The Middle Shastra says: “諸法不自生, 亦不從他生, 不共生, 不無因生, 是故說無生 all dharmas are not produced by themselves, not produced from others, not produced together, not produced without causes; that is why they are called unproduced.”

**"Great Knight, when the close and distant relatives of the dead in Jambudvipa cultivate meritorious virtues for the**

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**dead by preparing vegetarian meals and planting other good causes, does the dead one benefit greatly and become liberated?"**

**close and distant relatives 小大眷屬:** Distant 小 indicates offspring, whereas close 大 refers to parents and elders.

*Sutra text:*

**Earth Store Bodhisattva replied, "Elder, based on the awesome spiritual power of the Buddha, I will now explain this matter, in a general way, for the sake of living beings of the present and future. Elder, if living beings of the present and future on the verge of dying hear the name of one Buddha, one Bodhisattva, or one Pratyekabuddha, they will attain liberation whether they have offenses or not.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**Earth Store Bodhisattva replied, "Elder, based on the awesome spiritual power of the Buddha, I will now explain this matter, in a general way, for the sake of living beings of the present and future.**

**Based on the awesome spiritual power of the Buddha:** This represents his deep and profound respect for the Buddha.

**Elder, if living beings of the present and future on the verge of dying hear the name of one Buddha, one Bodhisattva, or one Pratyekabuddha, they will attain liberation**

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**whether they have offenses or not.**

The phrase "**on the verge of dying**" specifically refers to the time when the life-force is cut off. The life-force 命根 consists of three things: warmth 暖, breath 息, and consciousness 識. When warmth ceases and the breath stops, the dispersal of consciousness follows. Of this moment it is said, "When the birds die their calls are pitiful 鳥之將死, 其鳴也哀; when men die, their words are always good 人之將死, 其言也善." At the final moment people tend to awaken to what they have done and manifest a good heart. They become aware of their errors and may repent. If they hear the name of a Buddha, Bodhisattva, or Pratyekabuddha at that time, they may eradicate limitless offenses and plant limitless good seeds.

It is because of the extreme importance of this moment of death, and the difficulty of maintaining a clear thought of repentance at that time, that we constantly recite the Buddha's name while alive. If we wait until the moment of death, it will be too easy to forget to do this. But if we recite while alive, we will be unlikely to forget at the critical moment. While it is possible to wait until the moment of death to recite the Buddha's name and become good-hearted, such an act is difficult to manage at that time.

If one can bring forth the thought of repentance at the time of death, it is extremely effective. It can eradicate all offenses.

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In the past, a king asked Sramana Nà Xian 那先, “If a person commits evil deeds until the age of 100 and then recites the Buddha’s name, it is said that he then can obtain rebirth in the Buddhaland: I don’t believe it!” The sramana replied, “This is just like how a 100 pound stone won’t sink if you put in on a boat. A person may be evil, but thanks to the power of the Buddha’s recitation, he would thus not fall into the hells. In contrast, a pebble sinking is like a person who does evil and does not know about the Buddha’s name, thus falling into the hells.”

*Sutra text:*

**"If a man or woman who has not cultivated good causes and who has committed many offenses while alive, has close or distant relatives who perform for their sakes all kinds of holy deeds which create blessings for them, they will receive one-seventh of the benefit, and six parts will accrue to those who help him. Therefore, all good men and women of the present and future who hear this and do their own cultivation while they are still in good health, each and every portion will accrue to them."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"If a man or woman who has not cultivated good causes and who has committed many offenses while alive, has close or distant relatives who perform for their sakes all kinds of holy deeds which create blessings for them, they will receive one-seventh of the benefit, and six parts will accrue to those who help him."**



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It is imperative to practice while one is still alive and is able to because then one can get all the merit and virtue instead of getting only one seventh, meaning not much! However, accruing merit and virtue on behalf of the deceased is not in vain. Why so? Because while they were alive, they did not believe in Way virtue, and hence would not have cultivated anyway. Even one seventh of the merit and virtue is still significant.

**Therefore, all good men and women of the present and future who hear this and do their own cultivation while they are still in good health, each and every portion will accrue to them. "**

**While still being in good health** refers to cultivating early in one's life, before it's too late! Also while in good health, we should practice non-stop.

*Sutra text:*

**"The arrival of the great ghost of impermanence is unexpected, the spirit roams in darkness and obscurity, not knowing what is offense and what is merit. For forty-nine days it is as if one were stunned and deaf, or as if in the courts arguing over one's own karmic retribution. Once judgment has been fixed, rebirth is undergone in accordance with one's deeds. In the time before it has been determined, there are thousands of ten thousands of worrisome sufferings that must be undergone. How much more is this the case for those who are to fall into the Evil Paths.**

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*Sutra commentary:*

**"The arrival of the great ghost of impermanence is unexpected, the spirit roams in darkness and obscurity, not knowing what is offense and what is merit.**

**Impermanence** refers to:

1. The continual deterioration of dharmas 相續法壞.
2. Thought after thought arising and dying 念念生滅.

It has four marks (which can be seen at two different levels):

1. Coarse retribution: birth, aging, sickness and death 生  
• 老 • 病 • 死.
2. Subtle retribution: birth, dwelling, change and  
extinction 生 • 住 • 異 • 滅.

Why is it called **the ghost of impermanence**? It is because when it arrives, then you are impermanent. You can't tell when it arrives! There is a Chinese saying that there are many solitary tombs which belong to the young; do not wait until you're old to plant your blessings. “孤墳多是少年人, 未待老來方修行!”

**The spirit 魂魄** is just the Intermediate Skandha Body.

This pertains to the “existence 有” of the Twelve Conditioned Links: the prior five Skandhas have been extinguished and the future Five Skandhas have not yet been born. This Intermediate Skandha Body looks at the earth and only sees darkness; the world has no light whatsoever.

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**For forty-nine days it is as if one were stunned and deaf, or as if in the courts arguing over one's own karmic retribution. Once judgment has been fixed, rebirth is undergone in accordance with one's deeds.**

During the 49 days while the spirit still does not know whether or not it has **offenses** or blessings, it is in a state of great confusion (**stunned**) and as if **deaf** (it feels like it still has ears but cannot hear anything!).

This Intermediate Skandha Body is even more impermanent. It dies every seven days. It can last for a maximum of seven lives. Hence 49 days is the maximum amount of time before it goes for rebirth.

The hells 地府, King Yama's court, have five officials:

1. Fresh 鮮官: in charge of investigating your killing karmas 禁殺.
2. Water 水官: investigates how much stealing you did 禁盜.
3. Steel 鐵官: investigates how many times you've performed deviant sex 禁淫.
4. Earth 土官: investigating your double-tongue and mouth karmas 禁兩舌.
5. Day 天官: investigates how much you drank 禁酒.

Good or bad retributions 業報 have three grades. At the time of karma's creation, one's mental state varies. One must

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follow the force of one's karma to receive the ensuing retribution. For example, due to the killing karma, one will become a may fly: born in the morning and dying in the evening. Not repaying one's debts 捍債者 will result in becoming a donkey, horse or ox. For having committed stealing, one will become a pig or lamb to be slaughtered. For indulging in lust, one will take on the body of a crane, duck, or river deer. Those who are double-tongued will become owls.

**In the time before it has been determined, while waiting for judgment, there are thousands of ten thousands of worrisome sufferings that must be undergone.**

We worry about our future and feel miserable about our predicament.

**How much more is this the case for those who are to fall into the Evil Paths.**

Their tormentors have a field day since the deceased is most vulnerable during this time.

*Sutra text:*

**"Throughout forty-nine days one whose life has ended and who has not yet been reborn, in every thought, hopes that all his flesh-and-bone relatives will earn blessings powerful enough to rescue him or her. At the end of that time one undergoes retribution according to one's karma. If he is an offender, he passes through a hundred thousand years without a day of being liberated; if his offenses are the five of uninterrupted retribution, he falls into the**

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**great hells, where he undergoes constant suffering for thousands of tens of thousands of aeons."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Throughout forty-nine days one whose life has ended and who has not yet been reborn, in every thought, hopes that all his flesh-and-bone relatives will earn blessings powerful enough to rescue him or her.**

During the period of the seven weeks following death one is as if in darkness, or as if in a court arguing his case. In the hells there are ten Yamas, each of whom has five subalterns 五司]. Within all five divisions there is argument and discussion about the deeds that have been done and the retributions to be undergone.

In China it is customary to have monks recite sutras and do various things for the benefit of the dead during the seven weeks following death. This custom is derived from the principle clearly stated in this passage.

**At the end of that time one undergoes retribution according to one's karma. If he is an offender, he passes through a hundred thousand years without a day of being liberated; if his offenses are the five of uninterrupted retribution, he falls into the great hells, where he undergoes constant suffering for thousands of ten thousands of aeons.**

**The five forms of uninterrupted retribution are:**

1. Time uninterrupted 時無間: from start to finish there

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is no getting way from the hells.

2. Form uninterrupted 形無間: one person sees his body filling up the hells, and the same goes for all those who are there.
3. Suffering uninterrupted 苦無間: all punishments are not interrupted.
4. Lifespan uninterrupted 命無間: for each moment of the lifespan in the hells one receives punishments without interruption.
5. Retribution uninterrupted 果報無間: there is no break in the retributions to be undergone.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, elder, after a living being with such karmic offenses dies, his flesh-and-blood relatives may prepare a vegetarian offering to aid him in his karmic path. In doing this they should not throw rice-washing water or vegetable leaves on the ground during the preparation of the meal, or before it has been eaten, and all food that has not first been offered to the Buddha and Sangha should not be eaten. If there is laxness or transgression in this matter, the deceased will receive no strength from it. If purity is vigorously maintained in making the offering to the Buddha and Sangha, the dead one will receive one seventh of the merit.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, elder, after a living being with such karmic**

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**offenses dies, his flesh-and-blood relatives may prepare a vegetarian offering to aid him in his karmic path.**

This describes the dharma for vegetarian offerings.

Keep your hands clean when making offerings, even when preparing meals, such as when washing rice.

The Buddhas really do not have to eat. They only manifest eating in order to benefit living beings. The sutras state that before the Buddhas receive the food offering, we cannot digest those offerings. To eat before the Buddhas makes the offering leftovers; it is just the same as not making the offering! This also applies to tasting the food while cooking it! The taster makes the gods as well as ghosts and spirits unhappy, and may result in their having to undergo 500 lifetimes of suffering as a hungry ghost.

**In doing this they should not throw rice-washing water or vegetable leaves on the ground during the preparation of the meal, or before it has been eaten, and all food that has not first been offered to the Buddha and Sangha should not be eaten.**

**They should not throw rice-washing water or vegetable leaves on the ground during the preparation of the meal:** One cannot be lax during the preparation of the meal offering. After making an offering to the Buddhas, how can the offering be thrown on the ground? That would not be respectful.

It is customary in Buddhist societies to make special food as an **offering** to the Buddha on holidays and special occasions.

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It is particularly stressed here that the food may not be eaten before it has been offered to the Buddha and Sangha (as was stated, this would make it become leftovers!). In general, this holds true for whatever is eaten in temples and Buddha-halls.

When an offering is made people usually use an odd number of bowls (three, five, seven, nine or more) that are reserved for this purpose only, and place them symmetrically in front of the Buddha images. Careful and orderly arrangement of the offering is a sign of respect; tossing things down before the Buddha is not permitted. People who have any sense of cleanliness and propriety are not pleased when something is thrown in front of them, and since the Buddha is ultimately pure and proper, it is unseemly to toss things before him. The place reserved for offering bowls should not be cluttered with articles that do not pertain to the offering; it should be a place especially set aside for offerings.

Anything used as an offering to the Buddha should not only be carefully placed, but it should be properly laid out as well. That is, it is not correct to bring an offering in a box and then set the unopened box in front of the Buddha. It is a matter of simple courtesy. We would never invite a guest to dinner and then set an unopened bag of food before him, and we ought to realize that this applies to the Buddha as well. Everything should be symmetrically placed and well arranged, for there is an order to everything. Sometimes an offering is made in which hundreds of dishes are used, some containing food, others holding clothing, jewels, or anything else that is new and unusual. The offerings are passed from one person to another, so that each person, in turn, offers up each article.



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This order holds in relations with those who have left the home-life as well; one who has been ordained a moment longer is to be regarded as senior. Juniors must do as instructed by their seniors or else they break the rules. This is not a question of age but rather of seniority in Buddhism. If you are one hundred years old and have just left home, you are junior to everyone else. When bhikshus die, their age is recorded in two cycles, and it will be said, "His worldly age 世壽 was sixty and his precept age 僧壽 (臘) was forty."

All bhikshus, however, mutually addresses one another as precept older brother 戒兄 out of courtesy. There is no precept younger brother 戒弟. In particular, novices should obey sramanas' instructions or else they commit the offense of being disrespectful to one's elders 犯上. Left-home people are very cognizant of the order 長幼尊卑. This might be shocking to people of the world but it denotes the Buddhist protocol of respecting virtuous people, who have earned it through their seniority, and Dharma elders.

One should wait until after the vegetarian meal offering is over before the animals are fed with leftovers.

**If there is laxness or transgression in this matter, the deceased will receive no strength from it. If purity is vigorously maintained in making the offering to the Buddha and Sangha, the dead one will receive one seventh of the merit.**

All of these matters may seem trivial, but they are important

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issues in Buddhism. Now that the Buddhadharma is being properly established in the West, it is important that such things be understood.

If offerings are cultivated with great reverence and respect; if the Sangha does not eat until the offering has been made to the Buddha; if the lay people wait until the Sangha has been served; if everything is handled properly, arranged correctly, and treated with the proper respect, the dead receive **one seventh of the merit** generated.

*Sutra text:*

**Therefore, elder, if the living beings of Jambudvīpa make vegetarian offerings after the death of their fathers, mothers, and relatives, and make earnest supplication on their behalf, they will benefit the living and the dead."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**Therefore, elder, if the living beings of Jambudvīpa make vegetarian offerings after the death of their fathers, mothers, and relatives, and make earnest supplication on their behalf, they will benefit the living and the dead."**

Making a meal offering according to the Dharma will bring benefit to both the living and deceased. The key here is to **make earnest supplication**.

Anything can be offered to Triple Jewel. But it should be new. Do not offer things that you do not want anymore like used stuff. Sincerity, not emotions, brings about a response.

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*Sutra text:*

**After this had been said, thousands of tens of thousands of millions of nayutas of ghosts and spirits of Jambudvipa who were in the Trayastrimsa Heaven resolved their thoughts on the unsurpassed Bodhi. The elder, Great Eloquence, made obeisance and withdrew.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**After this had been said, thousands of tens of thousands of millions of nayutas of ghosts and spirits of Jambudvipa who were in the Trayastrimsa Heaven resolved their thoughts on the unsurpassed Bodhi. The elder, Great Eloquence, made obeisance and withdrew.**

Not only should disciples bow to their teachers, younger disciples should also bow to their elder brothers. It should not be like here in the United States where brothers and sisters do not have to get along. Be careful to be respectful to your elder precept brothers or else you will receive the retribution of being burned to death.

**Unsurpassed Bodhi** has such inconceivable powers! Have you made your resolve for Bodhi yet?

**Made obeisance and withdrew:** First, he came forth to make the request. Then he returned to his position, symbolizing that each dwelt in Samatha.

## CHAPTER 8: The Praises of the Multitudes of King Yama

It is generally said that there are ten **Yamas**, who are chief officials over ghosts. In this text, however, we are discussing not merely the ten Yamas of Jambudvipa, but all the innumerable Yamas who came from all the worlds, from the moon, the planets, the stars, and other iron ring mountains. In general, wherever there are people there are Yamas, and where there are no people, there are no Yamas. This is because if there were no people there would be no ghosts, if there were no ghosts, there would be no Buddhas, and if there were no Buddhas there would be no Yamas. What is most important to realize is that if there were no people, there would not be anything at all. People require, make, and use everything. Without people there would be no Buddhas, no Bodhisattvas, no animals, hungry ghosts, or hells.

The question arises, of course, as to how people come to exist. And the answer is that they, like all the other nine Dharma Realms, are created by the mind alone. The Avatamsaka Sutra says, "If a man wishes to understand the nature of all Buddhas of the three periods of time, he should contemplate the nature of the Dharma realm: everything comes from the mind alone." The idle thoughts in our minds are like waves on the water, and the mountains, rivers, and the great earth are merely the result of those thoughts. When there is false thinking inwardly, outwardly there are objects; if we did not think, everything would be empty.

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**The multitudes** are King Yamas' retainues. For example, worldly kings are surrounded by officials, guards, jesters, courtiers etc...

**Praises** refer to Earth Store Bodhisattva's inconceivable wisdom, state and spiritual powers.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time from within the Iron Ring Mountain came the God Yama, and with him limitless ghost kings, all of whom appeared before the Buddha in the Trayastrimsa Heaven: the ghost king Evil Poison, the ghost king Many Evils, the ghost king Great Argument, the ghost king White Tiger, the ghost king Blood Tiger, the ghost king Crimson Tiger, the ghost king who brings Disaster, the ghost king Flying Body, the ghost king Lightning Flash, the ghost king Wolf Tooth, the ghost king Thousand Eyes, the ghost king Animal Eater, the ghost king Rock Bearer, the ghost king Lord of Bad News, the ghost king Lord of Calamities, the ghost king Lord of Food, the ghost king Lord of Wealth, the ghost king Lord of Domestic Animals, the ghost king Lord of Birds, the ghost king Lord of Beasts, the ghost king Lord of Mountain Spirits, the ghost king Lord of Birth, the ghost king Lord of Life, the ghost king Lord of Sickness, the ghost king Lord of Danger, the ghost king Three Eyes, the ghost king Four Eyes, the ghost king Five Eyes, the Qi Li Shi King, the Great Qi Li Shi King, the Qi Li Cha King, the Great Qi Li Cha King, the E Nuo Zha King, the Great E Nuo Zha King, and other such great ghost kings. There were also hundreds of thousands of minor ghost kings who dwelt throughout**

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**Jambudvipa, each of whom ruled over something specific.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time from within the Iron Ring Mountain came the God Yama, and with him limitless ghost kings, all of whom appeared before the Buddha in the Trayastrimsa Heaven:**

Within the Flower Store World Sea is a Lotus Flower Curtain 蓮花幢世界 with twenty tiers. The world in which we live is located on the thirteenth tier. Surrounding the Lotus Flower Curtain are seven golden mountains and seven fragrant seas, and beyond all of that (outside of the seven fragrant seas) there is a great iron ring mountain. This mountain is made of iron. It has innumerable ghost kings.

All the Yamas who came to the **Trayastrimsa** Dharma Assembly are sons of heaven. Some emperors, too, are called sons of heaven, but none of these sons of heaven are greater or smaller than others. **Yama** is recognized as a son of heaven by the Buddha, as are the emperors.

The son of heaven might not be a great position, but Yama does not think that his position is too lowly, because it is his responsibility. In Buddhism, after receiving the bhikshu precepts, one can become a teacher of gods and men; not only can a bhikshu be the son of heaven, he can be the grandfather of heaven as well.

**The ghost king Evil Poison, the ghost king Many Evils, the ghost king Great Argument, the ghost king White Tiger,**

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the ghost king Blood Tiger, the ghost king Crimson Tiger, the ghost king who brings Disaster, the ghost king Flying Body, the ghost king Lightning Flash, the ghost king Wolf Tooth, the ghost king Thousand Eyes, the ghost king Animal Eater, the ghost king Rock Bearer, the ghost king Lord of Bad News, the ghost king Lord of Calamities, the ghost king Lord of Food, the ghost king Lord of Wealth, the ghost king Lord of Domestic Animals, the ghost king Lord of Birds, the ghost king Lord of Beasts, the ghost king Lord of Mountain Spirits, the ghost king Lord of Birth, the ghost king Lord of Life, the ghost king Lord of Sickness, the ghost king Lord of Danger, the ghost king Three Eyes, the ghost king Four Eyes, the ghost king Five Eyes, the Qi Li Shi King, the Great Qi Li Shi King, the Qi Li Cha King, the Great Qi Li Cha King, the E Nuo Zha King, the Great E Nuo Zha King, and other such great ghost kings.

The ghost king Evil Poison 惡毒鬼王 is the leader of the ghost kings, and thus is listed first. ‘Evil’ here refers to the Ten Evil Deeds, and ‘Poison’ refers to the three poisons. The three poisons belong to the intentions 意 which are the cause 本 of the seven evils of body and mouth, and therefore are called evil poison 故名惡毒. These poisons demonstrate cause and effect 本末兼明. The ghost king Evil Poison is extremely fierce, and wishes to swallow every living being he sees. His mouth is evil and poisonous. There is no need to be afraid of him, however, since he harms only people who are evil and poisonous themselves; he uses evil to cure 攻 evil,

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and poison to counteract 出 poison. If you recite the Buddha's name you will gain the respect of this ghost king, who will bow to you. As long as you recite the Buddha's name, recite sutras, and keep your thoughts resolved on enlightenment, there will be no problems with this ghost king, since, although he manifests an outwardly poisonous and evil appearance, he inwardly has the heart of a Bodhisattva, as does Yama himself. Consequently, those who practice the Buddhadharma do not have anything to fear from him.

**The ghost king Many Evils 多惡鬼王** also opposes those who do evil, and so I doubt that you who are now studying Buddhadharma and who have mended your ways will have anything to fear from him. He particularly frightens those who have committed patricide or matricide, murdered Arhats, broken up the Sangha, or shed the Buddha's blood. Each of his thoughts is full of all kinds of evil.

People who like to argue, who always manage to find principles where there are none, who maintain that they have not violated precepts when in fact they have, and who practice deceit, encounter **the ghost king Great Argument 大諍鬼王**. In fact, great argument means no argument: he helps living beings resolve hatred and untie knots. In the Long Agama Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha told Shakra, “Enmity 怨 is created because of greed and jealousy, thus making living beings pick up knives and sticks 刀杖相加.” Shakra asked, “Where do greed and jealousy 貪嫉 arise from?” The Buddha replied, “From love and hate 憎.” The patriarchs further



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clarified, saying, “Severing 離 love and hate 憎, one’s mind thoroughly understands.”

According to Zhuang Zi 莊子, the bickering and fighting between wife and mother-in-law originate from the evil mind. The mouth is the source of trouble and disaster 口為禍器.

**The White Tiger ghost king 白虎鬼王** has a ghost's body and a tiger's head. The tiger is a beast of the western direction 西方之獸.

**The ghost king Blood Tiger 血虎鬼王** has a mouth like a bloody basin 血盆.

**The ghost king Crimson Tiger 赤虎鬼王** has a red body and a tiger's head; its hair is as red as if on fire 毛如火赤. These ghosts have horrifying appearances (they all have tiger’s heads) because they terrorize and appear at the end of people’s lives to battle those who have committed the ten offenses and the five rebellious acts. If it were not for the compassionate aid of Dharma protectors and Bodhisattvas, who see how pitiful you are and protect you when you meet up with these ghosts, your end would be quite pathetic.

Tigers are beasts of the mountain. They are ferocious and awesome, arrogant and very violent.

**The ghost king who brings Disaster 散殃鬼王** brings all

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sorts of inauspicious events, such as bandits, thieves, and fires, as retributions to people who warrant them. Everything that occurs, even disasters, is the result of causes planted in the past: not respecting the heavens and the earth 不敬天地, not being filial to one's parents, not venerating teachers and elders, slighting and scamming the spirits 欺負神理, the mouth acquiescing while the mind disavows 口是心非, etc.; all these are examples of upside-down causes.

**The ghost king Flying Body 飛身鬼王** flies to places. He is even faster than a rocket. He is in charge of the space traveling yakshas 飛行夜叉.

**The ghost king Lightning Flash 電光鬼王** has eyes as bright as a lightning flash, which terrify those who encounter him.

**The ghost king Wolf Tooth 狼牙鬼王** has teeth that are revealed on the outside and eyes that are blue 青.

**The ghost king Thousand Eyes 千眼鬼王** is not like the Thousand-Handed Thousand-Eyed Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, whose each hand contains an eye. He is also not like the ghost whose many horns have eyes. This ghost's body is covered with holes, places where there is only bone and no flesh, and in the bone in each hole there is an eye which shines like the beam of light from a flashlight.

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**The ghost king Animal Eater 噉獸鬼王** eats tigers and other large beasts. He is part ghost, part animal. Often, he has a human shape and a face like a pig.

**The ghost king Rock Bearer 負石鬼王** carries around a huge rock with which he flattens anyone who has committed offenses. He makes small ghosts carry rocks, or sand, to fill up rivers and obstruct seas.

**The ghost king Lord of Bad News 主耗鬼王** is responsible for the transmission of bad news such as premonitions of death which occur during dreams.

**The ghost king Lord of Calamities 主禍鬼王** not only sends messages of bad news, but actually brings about accidents and disasters such as airplane crashes.

The previous two spirits together, dish out retributions according to the severity of the offense. If the offense is light then we receive bad news. If it is heavy then we will hear of or encounter disasters.

**The ghost king Lord of Food 主食鬼王** is in charge of what you eat, what is used for cooking. What you eat is already pre-determined: it is “quietly” allocated to you. Do good and enjoy the blessings. Food is part of the prosperity component. Do evil and prosperity diminishes. For example, destroy heavenly goods and receive the retribution of dying from a great famine.

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**The ghost king Lord of Wealth 主財鬼王:** If you receive an offering that is because this ghost king “tells” someone to make the offering. It is based on cause and effect.

**The ghost king Lord of Domestic Animals 主畜鬼王** is in charge of all domestic animals, which have the four kinds of birth: from the womb, eggs, moisture, or by transformation 住有三處. Along with the next two lords, these three lords govern domestic animals, birds and beasts, whether they live in oceans, land or air (the three types of places). Each type of place has four types of animals; namely, those of: feather, fur, scales and shell.

**The ghost king Lord of Birds 主禽鬼王** is in charge of flying species, in particular, the feathered species.

**The ghost king Lord of Beasts 主獸鬼王** watches over all animals which walk 走. They are the species with hair. They are stronger, difficult to catch, and often can serve as guards.

According to the Great Collection sutras 準大集, a ghost king who is lord of tigers, rabbits, and dragons lives on a lapis lazuli mountain in the east. In the south is a crystal mountain whose ghost king is lord of snakes, horses, and sheep. There is a silver mountain in the west, and its ghost king is lord of monkeys, chickens and dogs. On a gold mountain in the north, which cannot be reached, there is a ghost king who is lord of pigs, mice, and cows. Each direction also has two fe-

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male raksashas which make offerings to three spirits. Their cave is the place of residence of Bodhisattvas.

Each of these beasts is practicing the Sound Hearers' kindness and has already made the vow in front of the Buddhas. Every day and night, one beast would patrol Jambudvīpa 遍閻浮提. The rest of the time would be spent on staying in peace and practicing kindness. From the first day of the seventh month, the mouse would be in charge. The ox would take charge on the second day, ...and so on until the thirtieth day. After which it cycles back to the mouse.

This ghost king is just the Beast King Bodhisattva 獸王菩薩 who is respected by the other directions.

### The ghost king lord of Mountain Spirits 主魅鬼王

watches over the ghosts 魑魅魍魎 who come into being from mountain essences, earth, stones, trees, and so forth 老精物. Such ghosts and other weird phenomena, often occurring at large trees, are collectively known as Lí Mèi and Wǎng Liǎng. In the third section of the Shurangama Mantra, they are mentioned: La She Po Ye 囉闍婆夜, Zhu La Ba Ye 主囉跋夜, E Qi Ni Po Ye 阿祇尼婆夜, Wu Tuo Jia Po Ye 烏陀迦婆夜, Pi Sha Po Ye 毗沙婆夜, She Sa Duo La Po Ye 舍薩多囉婆夜, Po La Zhao Jie La Po Ye 婆囉斫羯囉婆夜, and Tu Shai Cha Po Ye 突瑟叉婆

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夜 (these are names of ghost kings).

**The ghost king Lord of Birth 主產鬼王** presides over births and makes the process either easier or more peaceful (if the mother is a good person) or more painful, depending on the nature of the mother and child. This activity, like those of the ghost kings described earlier, is for the purpose of teaching beings to change their wrong ways.

**The ghost king Lord of Life span 主命鬼王** watches over the life of everything that has blood and breath 四天下人命.

**The ghost king Lord of Sickness 主疾鬼王** is in charge of whatever sicknesses befall people.

**The ghost king Lord of Danger 主險鬼王** is in charge of disasters and dangers. For example, these ghost kings are in charge of avalanches. If a sentient being's life has not yet meant to end, this ghost king would provide protection.

According to the Great Shastra, the hells have two major divisions: cold 寒冰 and hot 炎火, which describes the feeling against the body that determines how one receives suffering. There is a dark and obscure area that is very difficult and dangerous: that is where this ghost king lives.

The eyes of **the ghost kings Three Eyes 三目, Four Eyes,**

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**and Five Eyes 四目, 五目鬼王** are not arranged like the five spiritual eyes gained through cultivation. The eyes of the ghost king Three Eyes are placed in a triangle 豎亞一目・如摩醯壯, those of Four Eyes are in a square 額上又橫開二目・與倉頡同, and those of the king Five Eyes 於上下中・豎生一目也 come together in a bizarre and frightening fashion. In general, these ghosts have frightening appearances.

The **Qi Li Shi King 祁利失王** lives on a mountain in the south and watches over fire. He is known as the fire spirit. The **Great Qi Li Shi King 大祁利失王** lives farther south, in a big mountain, and is also a great fire ghost.

The **Great Qi Li Cha King 大祁利叉王** is in charge of the small fire spirits and ghosts in the area.

The **E Nuo Zha King 阿那吒王** translates as Utmost Great Strength King 大力盡王; he is a Dharma protector and the elder son of the Erudition Heavenly King 多聞長子.

The **Great E Nuo Zha King 大阿那吒王**: He's in charge of the small ghost kings.

**There were also hundreds of thousands of minor ghost kings who dwelt throughout Jambudvīpa, each of whom ruled over something specific.**

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All these thirty four great ghost kings were followed by little ghosts, ghost sons, ghost mothers, and ghost grandchildren. Each rules over its own area of responsibility. They are not from the other directions but all dwell in the southern continent.

*Sutra text:*

**Aided by the Buddha's awesome spirit and the power of Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, all these ghost kings, as well as the God Yama, Son of Heaven, came together in the Trayastrimsa Heaven and stood off to one side. Then, the God Yama knelt on one knee, and placed his palms together and said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, because of the Buddha's awesome spirit and the power of Earth Store Bodhisattva, all these ghost kings and I have been able to come to this great assembly in the Trayastrimsa Heaven. There is now a small doubt that we should like to express, and we hope the World-Honored One will be compassionate and resolve it."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**Aided by the Buddha's awesome spirit and the power of Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, all these ghost kings, as well as the God Yama, Son of Heaven, came together in the Trayastrimsa Heaven and stood off to one side.**

**Stood off to one side:** They are standing out of respect; this reveals their status within the Buddha's assembly. For example, Bodhisattvas in contrast have seats.



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According to the Long Agama Sutra, the Small One Thousand Worlds have one thousand King Yamas.

**Then, the God Yama knelt on one knee, and placed his palms together and said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, because of the Buddha's awesome spirit and the power of Earth Store Bodhisattva, all these ghost kings and I have been able to come to this great assembly in the Trayastrimsa Heaven. There is now a small doubt that we should like to express, and we hope the World-Honored One will be compassionate and resolve it."**

They are constantly mindful of the Buddha and Earth Store Bodhisattva's spiritual help and protection. That is how they have obtained great benefits so far. Today, however, they wish to resolve a matter of a **small doubt**.

*Sutra text:*

**The Buddha told the God Yama, "As you will, I shall speak for you."**

**At that time the God Yama looked respectfully at the World-Honored One, made obeisance, turned his head to acknowledge Earth Store Bodhisattva, and then said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, as I contemplate, I see that Earth Store Bodhisattva uses hundreds of thousands of expedient devices to cross over living beings who suffer for their offenses within the six paths of birth. I see that he does so without the least fatigue or weariness. This great Bodhisattva has inconceivable spiritual penetrations that enable living beings to obtain release from the retri-**

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butions for their offenses; nonetheless, before long, they fall back into their evil ways.

"World-Honored One, since Earth Store Bodhisattva has such great inconceivable spiritual power, why do living beings not rely on it, stay in the good way, and eternally hold to their liberation? Please, World-Honored One, explain this for me."

*Sutra commentary:*

The Buddha told the God Yama, "As you will, I shall speak for you."

At that time the God Yama, looked respectfully at the World-Honored One, made obeisance, turned his head to acknowledge Earth Store Bodhisattva, and then said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, as I contemplate, I see that Earth Store Bodhisattva uses hundreds of thousands of expedient devices to cross over living beings who suffer for their offenses within the six paths of birth. I see that he does so without the least fatigue or weariness. This great Bodhisattva has inconceivable spiritual penetrations that enable living beings to obtain release from the retributions for their offenses; nonetheless, before long, they fall back into the evil ways.

Yama was not only respectful to the Buddha but also showed deference to Earth Store Bodhisattva as well.

Looking respectfully 瞻禮 is part of the protocol for showing respect for the Buddha and seeking the Dharma.

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According to the Long Agama Sutras, there are one thousand King Yamas in a Small Thousand Worlds.

This King Yama saw living beings become liberated and then return to face him again. That is why he has some doubts:

1. Earth Store Bodhisattva has inconceivable spiritual powers, and could have helped those living beings rely on the good path and attain eternal liberation.
2. The living beings of the six paths received Earth Store Bodhisattva's help, but fell again. Is it the case that Earth Store Bodhisattva's powers are inadequate?

**"World-Honored One, since Earth Store Bodhisattva has such great inconceivable spiritual power, why do living beings not rely on it, stay in the good way, and eternally hold to their liberation? Please, World-Honored One, explain this for me."**

The Vimalakirti Sutra says that the Ten Good Deeds are the Bodhisattvas' Pure Lands. Living Beings who can rely on the Ten Good Deeds and will automatically be liberated from birth and death.

*Sutra text:*

**The Buddha told the God Yama, "The living beings of Jambudvīpa have stubborn and intransigent natures, are difficult to tame, difficult to subdue. This great Bodhisattva time after time rescues such living beings throughout hundreds of thousands of aeons, and causes them to obtain liberation quickly. The Bodhisattva extricates from their own basic karmic conditions such people who**

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**must undergo retribution for their offenses, including those who have fallen into the paths of great evil, and then leads them to understand the events of past lives.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The Buddha told the God Yama, "The living beings of Jambudvipa have stubborn and intransigent natures, are difficult to tame, difficult to subdue.**

Unlike the Dharma nature which is fundamentally supple and harmonious 柔和, the nature of living beings (or habit energy nature 習性) is **stubborn and intransigent 剛強**. Earth Store Bodhisattva teaches living beings, making those who are obstinate 剛 become supple, and those who are intransigent 強, become harmonious.

An example of **obstinacy and intransigence 剛強** (e.g. like evil elephants, or 駑馬 inferior horses) can be seen in those people who consider all forms of law and order as evil, and think only anarchy is worthwhile. However, there is no way to get a perfect measure without using a standard rule 不以規矩, 不能成方圓. Their nature is not intrinsically supple and harmonious 柔和.

**This great Bodhisattva time after time rescues such living beings throughout hundreds of thousands of aeons, and causes them to obtain liberation quickly. The Bodhisattva extricates from their own basic karmic conditions such**

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people who must undergo retribution for their offenses, including those who have fallen into the paths of great evil, and then leads them to understand the events of past lives.

Earth Store Bodhisattva has spent a great deal of time rescuing living beings one by one, time and time again (because they fall back into their evil ways again).

The three poisons are the cause for creating evil. The Accomplishing the True Shastra 成實論 states: “If the root of the tree is not pulled out 樹根不拔, 其樹有生 the tree will grow again; 貪根不拔 if the root of greed is not pulled out, 苦樹常在 the tree of suffering is still there. Therefore know that birth and death 故知生死, have greed and love as their basis 貪愛為本. If greed and desire are extinguished 若滅貪欲, that is called the third Truth 名第三帝”. The Ten Wheels Sutra 十輪經 says that extinguishing and eradicating all delusions, obstructions and habit energies is like the hot sun melting and lightening ice 滅除一切惑障息氣, 猶如烈日銷釋輕冰. That is why the impermanence verses 無常偈 say: “Bright eyes cannot compare with wisdom 明眼無過慧, darkness cannot compare with stupidity 黑暗不過癡. Once the fundamental retribution 今根本業緣既拔 conditions are eradicated, the events of past lives are remembered 自悟宿

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世之事, just like wiping the dust of the old mirror 譬古鏡  
之重揩 enables its brightness to manifest again 其常光而  
自現。”

*Sutra text:*

**"Because the living beings of Jambudvipa are bound up with heavy bad habits, which cause them to revolve in and out of the various paths, it takes this Bodhisattva many aeons to completely rescue and liberate them."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Because the living beings of Jambudvipa are bound up with heavy bad habits, which cause them to revolve in and out of the various paths, it takes this Bodhisattva many aeons to completely rescue and liberate them."**

The text says that living beings are **bound** by many **bad habits**. Bound means linked, the idea being that past, present, and future lives are all linked through karmic retribution. It is the living beings who bind themselves; this is not the Bodhisattva's doing!

The first **bad habit** is lust 婬欲, the primary problem of living beings, and the most difficult to eliminate, more difficult than jumping into the sky. If men and women are able to cut off all lustful thoughts of each other, they are said to have subdued the tiger 降虎; if they have cut off afflictions, they have tamed the dragon 伏龍. Afflictions and ignorance are

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like an untamed dragon that undergoes limitless transformations and appears in many strange guises. Those who cultivate should examine themselves to see if they have achieved the skill of taming the dragon and subduing the tiger. If living beings have totally eliminated all desires, they are said to be without outflows; if desire remains, they still have outflows.

The second major habit of living beings is greed 貪. It is because of greed for pleasurable sensations that there is desire. One then seeks to satisfy one's desires.

The third habit is arrogance 慢. Basically one may not be any different from anyone else, yet he comes to see himself as superior to others and look down upon them. The desire to be foremost, to be always out in front, constantly seeking validation, is called arrogance.

The fourth habit is hatred 瞋, or the wish to harm others unrelentingly, maybe because they have done something bad to you.

The fifth is cheating 詐, which is to say, doing deceitful and false deeds. One is inclined towards quick fixes and sometimes takes perverse pleasure in this.

The sixth is lying 誑. Deceit involves covering up known bad with a good appearance, whereas lying is out-and-out misrepresentation of the truth under all circumstances.

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The seventh bad habit of living beings is blaming 怨—i.e. passing the buck and trying to shift one's errors off on others.

The eighth is improper knowledge and views 邪見.

The ninth is deviousness 枉, which refers to not being straightforward, and being inclined to do injustice 冤枉.

The tenth is accusation 訟, enjoyed by those bringing suits against others even though they lack any principle in their own case.

The above list is discussed in the Shurangama Sutra as the ten fine, subtle causes for undergoing retributions in the Six Paths. These ten kinds of habit causes 習因 create the heavy bad habits 結惡習重.

Therefore, greed and love are the origin of birth and death.

*Sutra text:*

**They are like a man who becomes confused, loses track of his original home, and mistakenly enters a dangerous path in which there are many yakshas, tigers, wolves, lions, serpents and vipers. Such a confused person would certainly be poisoned very quickly on that path. When a wise adviser with much understanding and many skills, who is good at counteracting all the noxious poisons of those yakshas, evil ghosts, and others, suddenly encounters the**



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**confused man about to enter the dangerous road, the adviser says to him, 'Say, fellow, why are you entering this road? What methods do you have to deal with all that poison?'**

*Sutra commentary:*

This is an analogy to illustrate the point.

**They are like a man who becomes confused, loses track of his original home, and mistakenly enters a dangerous path in which there are many yakshas, tigers, wolves, lions, serpents and vipers. Such a confused person would certainly be poisoned very quickly on that path.**

**Loses track of his original home:** He cannot find the way back to his own home.

In the **dangerous path**, **yakshas** represent doubt, one of the five dull servants. Doubt means that one does not believe in anything; **tigers** represent greed; **wolves** represent hatred; **lions** represent stupidity; **serpents and vipers** represent arrogance. They thus represent the five dull servants. **A confused person would certainly be poisoned very quickly on that path** and will create offenses that will cause him to fall into the three evil paths.

Yakshas have wisdom 智 and spiritual penetrations. They fly and move very fast, just like sharp servant deviant views: one proclaims there is no cause and effect and makes persuasive arguments using sharp and speedy worldly wisdom and eloquence. Tigers, wolves, ...are species of animals that

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are stupid and stubborn 愚頑, representing the dull servants. According to the shastra 俱舍論, arrogance is symbolized by lions and tigers, and anger is symbolized by serpents and vipers 虻蛇蝮蠍. Therefore, according to the Discerning Good and Evil Sutra 分別善惡經, if one is often arrogant towards man, one will be born as a ferocious tiger. Wolves are an analogy for the greed servant: they seek food, and will not stop until satisfied. Lions symbolize stupidity; in the past, they never developed pure wisdom and were arrogant towards others, causing them to fall into the animal realm. However, since they maintained precepts very strictly, thanks to the precepts power, they obtained the animal king body, which, having no wisdom, is stupid. Vipers and scorpions 虻蛇蝮蠍 symbolize anger 瞋使.

According to the Nirvana Sutra, snakes have four kinds of poison:

1. View poison 見毒.
2. Touch poison 觸毒.
3. Biting poison 齧毒.
4. Stinging poison 螫毒.

**When a wise adviser with much understanding and many skills, who is good at counteracting all the noxious poisons of those yakshas, evil ghosts, and others, suddenly encounters the confused man about to enter the dangerous road, the adviser says to him, 'Say, fellow, why are you entering this road? What methods do you have to deal with all**

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that poison?'

Earth Store Bodhisattva is an example of a **wise adviser**, who has inconceivable spiritual powers and wisdom, and therefore **understands many skills**. He can very effectively neutralize **all the poison of those yakshas, evil ghosts, and others**.

The Mindfulness of Kindness Sutra 思恩經 says that, towards living beings who have fallen into deviant paths, he gives rise to a mind of great compassion and makes them enter the proper path, seeking for himself neither gratitude nor reward; hence he is called a guiding teacher 導師 or wise adviser 即知識也.

The Great Sutra 大經 says that one who can see the Buddha nature 能見佛性 is called the hero 名為丈夫. Since we are still confused about the Buddha nature 今迷佛性, we are called man 故以男子.

The various **methods** 異術 for **dealing with all that poison** symbolize expedients which can control the evil Dharma Doors and help manifest the Primary Principle 第一義諦.

**Skills** refer to spiritual powers.

*Sutra text:*

**"The confused traveler who hears such words suddenly knows that it is a dangerous path, and begins to retreat, to**

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leave it. The good, knowing adviser then takes him by the hand and, avoiding all the noxious poisons leads him off the dangerous path. They reach a good way and he becomes happy and at peace. The adviser then says to him, 'Well, confused one, do not go back into that path again, for those who enter it have a difficult time getting out, and moreover, it destroys their very nature and life.'

*Sutra commentary:*

"The confused traveler who hears such words suddenly knows that it is a dangerous path, and begins to retreat, to leave it.

The lost **traveler** would not be able to know of the dangers ahead without help.

**Suddenly** hearing 忽聞 refers to hearing the Four Noble Truths. He never heard of it before, now he suddenly hears those words. It is like Sudatta whose body hairs stood on end when he first heard of the Buddha's name.

**Knowing that it is a dangerous path** 知險道 indicates that he is afraid of suffering and accumulation 苦集, just as we all are.

**To retreat** means to stop evil, not create offenses, and to stop giving rise to the false.

**Leaving** the danger requires widely practicing all good and escaping the evil paths.

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**The good, knowing adviser then takes him by the hand and, avoiding all the noxious poisons leads him off the dangerous path. They reach a good way and he becomes happy and at peace.**

Earth Store Bodhisattva even **takes him by the hand and, avoiding all the noxious poisons, leads him off the dangerous path.** To get off the path is to do no evil, to get rid of all evil and poisons, to sever evil habits, and to be born into the good paths of the human and god realms.

**The adviser then says to him, 'Well, confused one, do not go back into that path again, for those who enter it have a difficult time getting out, and moreover, it destroys their very nature and life.'**

When one's **nature and life** are destroyed, one loses one's own dharma body and wisdom life.

The Great Shastra says that you should take a good look at the path before getting started. While at it, you should be vigorous. While being vigorous, you should be mindful of your Good Knowing Adviser's instructions. Being thus mindful, single-mindedly proceed. Do not follow the improper path. This is the proper way.

*Sutra text:*

**"The confused traveler thanks him profusely, and as they are about to separate, the adviser says to him, 'If you see those whom you know personally, as well as other travelers, be they men or women, tell them that there are many**

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**poisons and evils on that path which can cause them to lose their very nature and life. Do not let them seek their own deaths.'**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"The confused traveler thanks him profusely, and as they are about to separate, the adviser says to him, 'If you see those whom you know personally, as well as other travelers, be they men or women, tell them that there are many poisons and evils on that path which can cause them to lose their very nature and life. Do not let them seek their own deaths.'**

The Bodhisattva even reminds him to tell others whom he knows, such as the six relatives and friends 化化不絕, about the dangers of the three evil paths in which **there are many poisons and evils.**

**Travelers 路人** refers to those who are still revolving in the six paths.

Telling **those whom you know personally 親知**, who are revolving in the six paths and are not yet liberated, **as well as other travelers 諸路人** who have not received the Way and are still within birth and death, about these dangers, symbolizes transmitting samadhi and wisdom 表授定慧.

The Five Sufferings and Obstructions Sutra 五苦章經 says that King Yama once asked the accused, "Why did you come

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here?” They said, “Before we died, we did not know that doing evils, naturally makes us pursue go in this direction and brings us here.” The king said, “You must undergo the retribution for what you yourself did.”

*Sutra text:*

**In the same way, Earth Store Bodhisattva, replete with great kindness and compassion, rescues living beings who suffer from their offenses and causes them to be born among humans and gods, where they enjoy wonderful bliss.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**In the same way, Earth Store Bodhisattva, replete with great kindness and compassion, rescues living beings who suffer from their offenses and causes them to be born among humans and gods, where they enjoy wonderful bliss.**

**Kindness** can give joy **and** great **compassion** can eradicate suffering.

The Bodhisattva helps us obtain birth onto the human and god realms, become Dharma vessels and enjoy wonderful bliss.

*Sutra text:*

**"All the offenders, knowing the suffering of the path of evil karma, obtain release and never go down that road again. They are like the lost person who mistakenly en-**

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ters a dangerous road but who, having encountered a good adviser who leads him out, does not enter that road again. If he meets others he urges them not to enter into that road by saying. 'I took that road myself because I was confused. But having been liberated, I will not enter that road again.' If he encounters that dangerous path again and he is still confused and makes the mistake, unaware that it is the dangerous path he encountered before, then he will probably lose his life. The same thing is true if one has fallen into the Evil Path and, because of the powerful expedient device of Earth Store Bodhisattva, has been made to take rebirth among humans or gods, but then falls into the Evil Paths again. If one's karmic bonds are heavy, one dwells in the hells for a long time without liberation."

*Sutra commentary:*

"All the offenders, knowing the suffering of the path of evil karma, obtain release and never go down that road again.

Release 脫出得離 means escaping and getting away from the path of evil karma, the three evil paths.

They are like the lost person who mistakenly enters a dangerous road but who, having encountered a good adviser who leads him out, does not enter that road again. If he meets others he urges them not to enter into that road by saying. 'I took that road myself because I was confused. But having been liberated, I will not enter that road again.'



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Not only can he escape but he also tells **others** to also avoid going down that **road**.

In the Contemplating the Buddha's Samadhi Sutra 觀佛三昧經, the Bodhisattvas scold the hungry ghosts, saying, "In your former lives, throughout numberless lives, you created boundless offenses, did not believe in and slandered the Triple Jewel, fell into the Avici hell, and underwent all kinds of suffering that cannot all be told. Now, you should bring forth the mind of kindness and compassion." After they heard, the hungry ghosts said, "Na Mo Buddha." At the end of their lives, they were born into the Four Heavenly Kings heaven.

**If he encounters that dangerous path again and he is still confused and makes the mistake, unaware that it is the dangerous path he encountered before, then he will probably lose his life. The same thing is true if one has fallen into the Evil Paths and, because of the powerful expedient device of Earth Store Bodhisattva, has been made to take rebirth among humans or gods, but then falls into the Evil Paths again. If one's karmic bonds are heavy, one dwells in the hells for a long time without liberation."**

Even though he has wised up, at times his **karmic bonds are heavy**, thus making him unable to recognize **that dangerous path** and he takes the fall **again**.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time the ghost king Evil Poison placed his palms**

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together respectfully, addressed the Buddha, and said, "World-Honored One, we limitless ghost kings of Jambudvipa either benefit or harm beings. Each of us is different; our karmic retribution causes us and our followers to roam in the world doing much evil and little good. When we pass a household or a city, a town, village, or hamlet, a garden, cottage, or hut where there is a man or woman who has cultivated as little as a hair's worth of good deeds, who has hung but one banner or one canopy, who has used a little incense or a few flowers as offerings to images of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, or who has read and recited the sutras, or burned incense as an offering to even one sentence or gatha in them, all of us ghost kings will respect and revere that person as we would the Buddhas of the past, present, and future.

*Sutra commentary:*

At that time the ghost king Evil Poison placed his palms together respectfully, addressed the Buddha, and said, "World-Honored One, we limitless ghost kings of Jambudvipa either benefit or harm beings. Each of us is different; our karmic retribution causes us and our followers to roam in the world doing much evil and little good.

Protecting those who cultivate good.

Proper places 正處: 500 yojanas below the southern continent, under the command of Yama, are the dwellings of his retainers. Those with awesome virtue 威德者 dwell in mountains, valleys, in space or in the oceans. In addition,

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they all have palaces. Those with no awesome virtue rely on filthy places, grass, trees, or tombs. Some have no shelters at all.

In the Long Agama Sutra, the Buddha told Ananda that all men and women at birth have ghosts and spirits surround and protect them. Now why are there those who are touched and harassed by ghosts and spirits and some not? There are those who practice illicit Dharmas 非法, practice deviant views, or do the ten evils. For such people, 100 of them may have one spirit protector. In contrast, for those who practice good dharmas, have proper views, faith, and cultivate the ten good karmas, one such individual might have 100 or 1,000 protector spirits. Therefore, doing good will benefit more people, whereas doing evil will harm more people.

The Proper Dharma Mindfulness Sutra 正法念經 says that greed, jealousy, deviancy, cheating, lying, being tortuous in order to accumulate assets, and not practicing giving, all will result in becoming a ghost.

These ghost kings and their retinues **either benefit or harm beings**. They benefit living beings in order to encourage them. They harm living beings in order to subdue them. Everything is in accord with their respective retributions from past karmas, **much evil and little good**.

By creating goodness secretly 造善於幽, the retribution manifests 得報於顯. That is called hidden virtue 世謂陰德. Everyone believes in you and has faith in you. If you

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create goodness in the open 造善於顯, the retribution obtained is hidden 得報於幽斯理灼然. How can you not believe it 寧不信耶?

Therefore, the sages manifest blessings to encourage us to do good 故聖人陣福以勸善 and manifest calamity to discourage evil 示禍以戒惡. All good and bad things have their roots, and do not occur without the proper causes.

In the Long Agama Sutra, the Buddha told Ananda that all people's houses and abodes have ghosts and spirits. There is no empty space.

**When we pass a household or a city, a town, village, or hamlet, a garden, cottage, or hut where there is a man or woman who has cultivated as little as a hair's worth of good deeds, who has hung but one banner or one canopy, who has used a little incense or a few flowers as offerings to images of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, or who has read and recited the sutras, or burned incense as an offering to even one sentence or gatha in them, all of us ghost kings will respect and revere that person as we would the Buddhas of the past, present, and future.**

After Shakyamuni's Nirvana, an Indian upasaka picked a flower 菴摩羅花 on the road. He entered a temple, was mindful of the Buddha's merit and virtues and then offered it to an image of Shakyamuni Buddha. Afterwards, he asked the guest prefect monk, "What kind of benefit does offering a flower to the Buddha have?" The monk replied, "I don't

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know, let's ask the monk who reads sutras.” He in turn replied, “I haven't obtained the Heavenly Eye yet, you have to ask the Arhat who practices Chan.” That Arhat then entered samadhi and observed that the upasaka will be reborn to the heavens and enjoy the heavenly blessings for 80,000 great kalpas, yet these blessings would not exhausted. He thus went up the Tushita heaven to ask Maitreya Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva replied, “The Buddha field of blessings is limitless. It's unsurpassed. They create all sorts of retributions that are inexhaustible. I myself do not know. Even a thousand times ten thousand Bodhisattvas of Equal Enlightenment would not know. Only the Buddha knows!”

The Great Chapter Sutra says 大品 that tossing a flower in the air to make an offering 一華散空 can end suffering 乃至畢苦. The blessings are unlimited 其福不盡. The shastra says that to speak of ending suffering 言至畢苦者, is to refer to the two deaths 二死盡也. The two deaths are: 1. Natural death 命盡死: life takes its course 2. External condition deaths 外緣死: other than natural death such as suicide or accidental deaths. The blessings from offering a flower to the Buddhas can help us accomplish Buddhahood and does not end there 蓋言成佛散華之福・猶尚不盡.

As for the rest of the offerings: even one sentence 句 or gatha 偈, brings us closer to Bodhi 增進菩提, and even by

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offering one thing or one stick of incense 一色一香, one will never retreat from Bodhi 永不退轉.

*Question:* Ghosts are evil creatures, why would they revere or respect those who practice even the slightest good?

*Answer:* All Buddhas are accomplished through the cultivation of good dharmas. Now that men or women do good, the Buddha seeds are sewn, earning the ghosts' respect.

*Sutra text:*

**We will order all the smaller ghosts, each of whom has great power, as well as all the ground spirits, to surround and protect that person. Evil events, accidents, severe and unexpected illnesses, as well as all other unwelcome phenomena, will not be allowed to draw near his dwelling or place of residence, much less enter the door."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**We will order all the smaller ghosts, each of whom has great power, as well as all the ground spirits, to surround and protect that person. Evil events, accidents, severe and unexpected illnesses, as well as all other unwelcome phenomena, will not be allowed to draw near his dwelling or place of residence, much less enter the door."**

**Evil events 惡事** are things that are not as one wishes, like one's house burning down or other mishaps that occur without any rhyme or reason.

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**Accidents 橫事** refers to car accidents, plane crashes or train derailments, etc.

**Severe and unexpected illnesses 惡病橫病** refers to grave sicknesses that may cause death and to the general class of incurable illnesses.

**All other unwelcome phenomena 乃至不如意事** are inauspicious events.

People doing meritorious deeds, making offerings to the Triple Jewel and cultivators will encounter good fortune because bad things will be much less likely to come to their homes.

*Sutra text:*

**The Buddha said to the ghost kings, "It is excellent, excellent, that all you ghost kings and Yama are able to protect good men and women in this way. I shall tell Lord Brahma and Lord Shakra to see that you are protected as well."**

**When this was said, a ghost king in the assembly named Ghost King Lord of Lifespan said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, my conditions are such that I am lord of the lifespan of humans in Jambudvīpa, and govern the time of their birth and death. My fundamental vows are based on a great desire to benefit people, but living beings do not understand my intent and go through birth and death uneasy. Why is this?"**

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*Sutra commentary:*

**The Buddha said to the ghost kings, "It is excellent, excellent, that all you ghost kings and Yama are able to protect good men and women in this way. I shall tell Lord Brahma and Lord Shakra to see that you are protected as well."**

**Lord Brahma and Lord Shakra** are the rulers of the First Dhyana Heaven and Second Desire Heaven, respectively. They watch over our welfare like good rulers are supposed to.

**When this was said, a ghost king in the assembly named Ghost King Lord of Lifespan said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, my conditions are such that I am lord of the lifespan of humans in Jambudvipa, and govern the time of their birth and death. My fundamental vows are based on a great desire to benefit people, but living beings do not understand my intent and go through birth and death uneasy. Why is this?"**

**Ghost King of Lifespan** is in charge of our human lifespan.

Although these ghost kings have awesome virtue 威德, they are nonetheless subservient to the gods.

**Living beings do not understand** this ghost king's intent and fail to realize that they themselves are responsible for their own disasters. For example, if they create offenses then it might shorten their life. The bad things that happen to them are really not of this ghost king's doing!



## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

When we are alive and can act with respect, principles, com-  
portment and protocol, it affects the length and quality of life.  
Doing good lengthens life, doing evil shortens it.

*Sutra text:*

**"When humans in Jambudvipa have just borne children,"  
Lord of Lifespan continued, "be they boys or girls, or  
when they are just about to give birth, good deeds should  
be done to increase the benefits of the household and thus  
cause the local earth spirits to be immeasurably pleased.  
The spirits will then benefit the entire family and protect  
the mother and child so that they obtain great peace and  
happiness. After the birth, all killing and injuring for the  
purpose of offering fresh foods to the mother should care-  
fully be avoided, as should having large family gatherings  
with drinking of wine, eating meat, singing, making mu-  
sic, and playing instruments, for all these things can keep  
the mother and child from obtaining peace and happiness.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"When humans in Jambudvipa have just borne children,"  
Lord of Lifespan continued, "be they boys or girls, or  
when they are just about to give birth, good deeds should  
be done to increase the benefits of the household and thus  
cause the local earth spirits to be immeasurably pleased.  
The spirits will then benefit the entire family and protect  
the mother and child so that they obtain great peace and  
happiness.**

At the time of **birth**, good deeds should be done to cause an

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auspicious light to protect the household. The local earth spirits are greatly pleased by this and also act to protect the home. The class of ground **spirits** referred to here has the lowest rank, much like a notary public in the civil service system, and each of them is responsible for a particular area of a city or district. These spirits are in such a position because of a fondness for doing good deeds unaccompanied by actual cultivation.

**Good deeds** benefit living beings.

**After the birth, all killing and injuring for the purpose of offering fresh foods to the mother should carefully be avoided, as should having large family gatherings with drinking of wine, eating meat, singing, making music, and playing instruments, for all these things can keep the mother and child from obtaining peace and happiness.**

**Fresh foods 鮮味** refers to buying live chicken, duck or fish to eat.

**Drinking wine** cuts off the seeds of wisdom, and **eating meat** cuts off seeds of kindness and compassion.

**Singing, making music, and playing instruments** tend make one's spirit scattered.

A respected sanghan said 云棲大師曰 that when giving birth to a son, it is not appropriate to kill. Humans without children are grieved, those with children are happy. Humans fail to realize that birds and animals too love their children.

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

How can your mind be at peace if you celebrate the birth of your child at the expense of their children?

*Sutra text:*

**“Why? At the difficult time of birth there are uncountable evil ghosts, such as Wang Liang, goblins, and spirit-beings, who desire to eat the strong-smelling blood. I quickly cause the earth spirits of that household to protect the mother and child, allowing them to be peaceful and happy and to obtain benefit. When people in such households see this benefit they should establish merit in response to the earth spirits. If instead of doing this they harm, kill, and assemble all the relatives together for feasting and playing, they will undergo a retribution for this violation, which harms both mother and child.”**

*Sutra commentary:*

**“Why? At the difficult time of birth there are uncountable evil ghosts, such as Wang Liang, goblins, and spirit-beings, who desire to eat the strong-smelling blood.**

**Wang Liang and Jing Mei** include weird mountain and water essences, of which there are many different kinds. They all come and fight for the food. They are not unlike vultures or scavengers. Have you ever seen hyenas surrounding corpses and fighting for scraps?

**I quickly cause the earth spirits of that household to protect the mother and child, allowing them to be peaceful and happy and to obtain benefit.**

## Explained by Master YongHua

People don't realize that successful births are the result of this ghost king's work. In fact, when a child is born, the heavenly spirits are joyous, and respectfully chant 1,600 sounds 唱奉一千六百聲.

**When people in such households see this benefit they should establish merit in response to the earth spirits. If instead of doing this they harm, kill, and assemble all the relatives together for feasting and playing, they will undergo a retribution for this violation, which harms both mother and child."**

There are yakshas and raksashas who enjoy eating human fetuses, rendering people childless. Or they harm them during the pregnancy, kill the child at birth or cause it to be stillborn. This is a retribution from the child's own killing karmas, and is not because the earth spirits' failure to provide protection.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, when the humans of Jambudvipa are on the verge of death, I desire to keep them from falling into the Evil Paths, regardless of whether they have done good or evil, but how much is my power to do so increased when they have cultivated good roots! When a practitioner of good in Jambudvipa is about to die, there are hundreds of thousands of ghosts and spirits of the evil ways who transform themselves and appear as the parents, relatives, and friends of the dying in an attempt to lead him to fall into the Evil Paths. How much more is this the case for those who have done evil!**

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, when the humans of Jambudvipa are on the verge of death, I desire to keep them from falling into the Evil Paths, regardless of whether they have done good or evil, but how much is my power to do so increased when they have cultivated good roots!**

Lord of Lifespan's **power to do so increases when they have cultivated good roots** and therefore it takes less effort for him.

**When a practitioner of good in Jambudvipa is about to die, there are hundreds of thousands of ghosts and spirits of the evil ways who transform themselves and appear as the parents, relatives, and friends of the dying in an attempt to lead him to fall into the Evil Paths. How much more is this the case for those who have done evil!**

At the time of death, even the good doers are harassed by evil ghosts and spirits. Surely, it's much worse for the evil doers.

These ghosts have the five spiritual powers which they can use to manifest as relatives to confuse the deceased.

The Great Shastra Causing Discrimination Karma Sutra says 大論引|分別業經 the Buddha told Ananda that even those who practiced good this lifetime may be reborn into a bad destiny. Similarly, the evil doers may be reborn into a good path. It all depends on which past karmas mature at death!

## Explained by Master YongHua

The Pure Land Samadhi Sutra 淨土三昧經 says of rebirth in the heavens or hells, that each path has its own greeting personnel. When sick and wishing to die, one sees these greeting personnel. If one is destined for the heavens, the heavenly spirits in their heavenly clothing come with music. Those who are to fall to the hells, see soldiers holding weapons come and surround them. The manifestations differ but each must undergo his own retributions.

*Sutra text:*

**"Therefore, World-Honored One, when a man or woman in Jambudvīpa is on the verge of death and his consciousness and spirit are confused and dark, when he is unable to discriminate between good and evil and his eyes and ears are unable to see or hear, his relatives should certainly establish great offerings, recite the holy sutras, and recite the names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Such good conditions can cause the dead person to leave the Evil Paths, and all the demons, ghosts, and spirits will withdraw and disperse.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Therefore, World-Honored One, when a man or woman in Jambudvīpa is on the verge of death and his consciousness and spirit are confused and dark, when he is unable to discriminate between good and evil and his eyes and ears are unable to see or hear, his relatives should certainly establish great offerings, recite the holy sutras, and recite the names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.**

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

**Consciousness and spirit** are the eighth consciousness or the intermediate skandha body.

**Confused** means to be unclear because the consciousness already left the body and yet does not know that the body is dead.

At the time of death, all the sense organs are darkened. The consciousnesses can no longer discern. For instance, the ears are there but we cannot hear.

The Nirvana Sutra discusses a dying person whose relatives surrounded his death bed, crying and wailing in grief. The dying man was terrified, and did not know where to seek help. He could not feel his body; though he felt that he could move his limbs, he could not prop himself up. His body seemed unreal and cold; warmth and breathing wanted to terminate.

When this occurs, the Intermediate Skandha Body is confused and unaware that it is dead; it cannot tell good from evil and has no perceptions. During this period the survivors should do great merit for the sake of the dead one.

In China, there is a custom of inviting monks to recite **sutras** or **recite the names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas** for up to seven weeks. For example, after Ven. Xu Yún's death, the assembly created over 160 days of merit and virtue. They recited the entire Prajna Paramita roll, a feat that has never been done before. That is called a **great offering**.

**Such good conditions can cause the dead person to leave the Evil Paths, and all the demons, ghosts, and spirits will**

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**withdraw and disperse.**

*Sutra text:*

**"World-Honored One, if at the time of death any living being hears the name of one Buddha or Bodhisattva, or if he hears a sentence or gatha of a Mahayana sutra, I see that such a person can be liberated from his small bad deeds, which unite to pull him into the Evil Paths, and that he can also be kept apart from the uninterrupted retribution of the Five Uninterrupted Offenses."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"World-Honored One, if at the time of death any living being hears the name of one Buddha or Bodhisattva, or if he hears a sentence or gatha of a Mahayana sutra, I see that such a person can be liberated from his small bad deeds, which unite to pull him into the Evil Paths, and that he can also be kept apart from the uninterrupted retribution of the Five Uninterrupted Offenses."**

The **time of death** refers to the time when warmth, breath, and consciousnesses have ceased.

The scriptures say 大品 that if a person recites the Buddha's name once, that can help end suffering. His blessings will be limitless. Why? Because hearing the Buddha's name can cross over birth, aging, sickness and death.

The last sentence of this section in the Chinese text might also be taken as saying that one can be liberated from all but the



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**Five Uninterrupted Offenses**; in other words, that hearing the name of a Buddha or Bodhisattva at the time of death can liberate one from all his offenses except those of the Five Offenses that incur uninterrupted retribution. On the other hand, it is also possible to read the Chinese as saying that even the latter offenses can be eradicated. If an ultimately sincere thought is produced at the time of death, all offenses can be eradicated; the problem is that it is extremely difficult to have such a thought at that time.

*Sutra text:*

**The Buddha told the ghost king Lord of Lifespan, "Because of your great kindness you are able to make such great vows and protect all living beings in the midst of life and death. In the future, when men and women reach the time of death, do not withdraw from your vow, but cause them to attain liberation and be eternally peaceful."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The Buddha told the ghost king Lord of Lifespan, "Because of your great kindness you are able to make such great vows and protect all living beings in the midst of life and death. In the future, when men and women reach the time of death, do not withdraw from your vow, but cause them to attain liberation and be eternally peaceful."**

The **Buddha** reminded the **ghost king Lord of Lifespan** to go by his own **vow**, especially at the time of living beings' death, regardless of whether or not they have offenses, are greatly evil or small evil doers. He must rescue them from

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the three evil paths, causing them to be born into the human and god realms and enjoy peace and bliss.

**Great kindness** is just like the Buddha's mind; **great vows** are just like the Bodhisattvas' minds.

*Sutra text:*

**The ghost king told the Buddha, "Please do not be concerned. Until the end of this life I shall constantly protect the living beings of Jambudvipa, both at the time of birth and at the time of death, so that they obtain tranquility. I only wish that at the time of birth and death they will believe what I say and thereby be liberated and attain great benefit."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The ghost king told the Buddha, "Please do not be concerned. Until the end of this life I shall constantly protect the living beings of Jambudvipa, both at the time of birth and at the time of death, so that they obtain tranquility. I only wish that at the time of birth and death they will believe what I say and thereby be liberated and attain great benefit."**

This **ghost king** is extremely independent and can do as he pleases. If he wants a person to live, he will live, if he wants him to die, he dies. Since all lives are in his hands, you can be sure that if he were greedy and could be bought off, like many officials, there would be quite a lot more people in the world.

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During the time of Dharma Master Dào Sheng 道生, this ghost king once came to hear Dharma spoken. Ven. Dào Sheng told him that he ought to become a human, to which the ghost replied, "I've been a ghost three thousand autumns, with no worries and no cares. The noble Sheng now tells me to become a man, but I do not think I am able. I would probably commit offenses and fall into even worse states than the one I am in now. I think I'll remain a ghost." This is not unlike the Chinese proverb that says, "If a beggar begs for three years, he won't accept the imperial position."

The ghost spoke of Dharma Master Dào Sheng as "the noble Sheng 生公." This practice of using one character of a person's name and preceding it by the world noble is a sign of great respect and is still in use. One can use either of the characters of the name depending on what is easier to say.

However, the term Hé Shàng (e.g. precept Hé Shàng) is even more respectful and should be used instead of "noble" when appropriate. In addition, when speaking to a Hé Shàng, one does not want to stare at him; one should instead gather one's body and mind 收攝身心.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time the Buddha told Earth Store Bodhisattva, "This great ghost king, Lord of Lifespan, has already passed through hundreds of thousands of lives as a great ghost king, protecting living beings in life and death. Only because of this great lord's kind and compassionate vows does he manifest the body of a ghost king, for in re-**

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ality he is not a ghost. After one hundred and seventy aeons have passed, in an aeon named Tranquility, he will accomplish Buddhahood. His kalpa will be called Happiness and his world will be named Pure Dwelling. His name will be No Mark Thus Come One, and his lifespan will be incalculable aeons. Earth Store, the doings of this great ghost king are inconceivable, and the men and gods whom he crosses over are limitless."

*Sutra commentary:*

At that time the Buddha told Earth Store Bodhisattva, "This great ghost king, Lord of Lifespan, has already passed through hundreds of thousands of lives as a great ghost king, protecting living beings in life and death. Only because of this great lord's kind and compassionate vows does he manifest the body of a ghost king, for in reality he is not a ghost.

This is a case of concealing the great and manifesting the small in order to rescue living beings.

After one hundred and seventy aeons have passed, in an aeon named Tranquility, he will accomplish Buddhahood. His kalpa will be called Happiness and his world will be named Pure Dwelling. His name will be No Mark Thus Come One, and his lifespan will be incalculable aeons.

His kalpa will be called Happiness 安樂劫 whereas our kalpa is called Worthy. When he was a ghost, he did not know happiness and peace because he was being ordered around. This ghost used to live in impure places. However,

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after accomplishing Buddhahood, his world will be called Pure Dwelling.

To have **no mark** is not only to be devoid of the marks of birth 生, dwelling 住, change 異 and extinction 滅, but further, not even “no mark” is existent. Although he realized no mark from his ghost mark, from having terrifying marks (Wonderful Existence) he progressed toward True Emptiness (No Mark).

**Earth Store, the doings of this great ghost king are inconceivable, and the men and gods whom he crosses over are limitless."**

People should not be too attached to appearances.

## CHAPTER 9: (Reciting) the Titles of Buddhas

The previous chapters discuss the conditions for taking living beings across. From this chapter on, we are discussing the causes for accomplishing Buddhahood. As the title of the chapter states 稱佛名號品, cheng 稱 means 念: to recite.

Ordinary people recite the Buddha's name. His name symbolizes his merit and virtues. After reciting his name for a while, we will awaken to his merit and virtues. We should then cultivate his merit and virtues in order to ultimately certify to them. In short, reciting his name is the proper cause for attaining Bodhi because it creates limitless merit and virtues.

Originally all Buddhas had ten thousand names each, but because no one could remember so many, the names were reduced to one thousand each. Since that was still too many to be remembered by most people, the names were further simplified to one hundred, which were reduced still further to ten. These Ten Designations, common to all Buddhas, were explained in Chapter Four. I will refresh your memory by reviewing the names once again. They are: the Thus Come One, the One Worthy of Offerings, the One of Proper and Universal Knowledge, the One Perfect in Clarity and Conduct, the One Skillful in Leaving the World through Liberation, the Unsurpassed Knight, the Tamer of Heroes, the Master of Gods and Men, the Buddha, the World-Honored One.

*Sutra text:*

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At that time Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, I shall now proclaim a beneficial act for the sake of living beings of the future, so that they may obtain great benefit in the midst of life and death. Please, World-Honored One, hear my words."

*Sutra commentary:*

At that time Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, I shall now proclaim a beneficial act for the sake of living beings of the future, so that they may obtain great benefit in the midst of life and death. Please, World-Honored One, hear my words."

Rescuing living beings out of kindness: that is his motivation.

In The Four Things That Cannot Be Obtained Sutra 佛說四  
不可得經 the Buddha says that the world has four things  
that cannot be obtained:

1. Maintaining a youthful appearance 年幼, 顏色煒燁  
, and being loved and respected by the multitudes 眾  
人愛敬. One suddenly ages, one's hair becomes  
white and one's teeth fall out. Those who wish for the  
fountain of youth 欲使常少不老, ultimately cannot  
obtain it 終不可得.
2. One's body remains healthy and strong 身體強健.  
Serious illnesses suddenly befall those who are healthy  
為謂毫強疾病卒至 • 眾患難癒. Those wish-

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ing for permanent peace and no illnesses 欲免常安無病, will not obtain it 終不可得.

3. Having a long life 欲求長壽. As long as the five desires are still raging like the wind blowing at the clouds 五欲永存・非常對至・如風吹雲, those wishing for long life 冀念長生 will not get what they want 終不可得.
4. Having one's parents and siblings' love, honor and happiness 父母兄弟・恩愛榮樂. When one's past karmas suddenly arrive 宿對卒至, it is like hot water melting the snow 如湯消雪. Those who wish for immortality 欲求不死 will not obtain it and will have to part with their loved ones.

Since ancient times, throughout the creation of the heavens and earth, there is no way to avoid these four misfortunes. Because of these four difficulties, Buddhas appear in world. If one wishes to escape these four types of suffering, there is nothing better than reciting the Buddha's name.

The Great Collection Sutra says 大集 that, if one spends an entire month to offer clothes and food to all living beings, this is inferior to one person reciting the Buddha's name once. The merit and virtue derived from one recitation is sixteen times that of the act of offering. Suppose that we forge gold into human statues, and load them onto chariots along with other gems to give away. This is inferior to making the resolve one time for Buddhahood and lifting one foot towards it. The merit and virtue of such an act is boundless.



## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

*Sutra text:*

**The Buddha told Earth Store Bodhisattva, "With your great compassion you now wish to undertake the inconceivable task of rescuing all those in the Six Paths who suffer for their offenses. The time is just right, speak quickly, for I am about to enter Nirvana. You should complete this vow soon so that I have no need to be concerned for living beings of the present or future."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The Buddha told Earth Store Bodhisattva, "With your great compassion you now wish to undertake the inconceivable task of rescuing all those in the Six Paths who suffer for their offenses. The time is just right, speak quickly, for I am about to enter Nirvana."**

The Buddha agrees to the Bodhisattva's request.

**The time is just right:** 'Your timing is pretty good because I do want to speak of these matters before I leave.' This sutra is spoken after the Lotus Sutra and before the PariNirvana Sutra.

**Nirvana** is the place of abode of all Buddhas. Great Master Xuan Zang translates it as "Perfect Stillness 圓寂": here "perfect" indicates that there is no virtue that is lacking, and "Stillness" means that there is no obstruction that is not ended. It can also be the place of security and peace for all living beings.

## Explained by Master YongHua

Shakyamuni spent 49 years speaking Dharma at over 300 assemblies. Those who could be taken across already have been. Those to be taken across in the future have already planted sagely causes. Now the torch is about to burn out.

**You should complete this vow soon so that I have no need to be concerned for living beings of the present or future."**

Besides the Earth Store Dharma, of all the Dharma bequeathed by Shakyamuni Buddha, reciting the Buddha's name is one of the most important Dharma Doors, especially in the Dharma ending age. It can take limitless living beings across the sea of suffering. It truly is the vessel of kindness within that sea.

*Sutra text:*

**Earth Store Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, "In the past, numberless asamkhyeyas of aeons ago, a Buddha named Limitless Body Thus Come One appeared in the world. If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name and suddenly gives rise to a thought of respect, that person will overstep the heavy offenses of forty aeons of birth and death. How much more will he be able to do this if he sculpts or paints this Buddha's image, or praises and makes offerings to him. The merit of this is limitless and unbounded."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**Earth Store Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, "In the past, numberless asamkhyeyas of aeons ago, a Buddha named Limitless Body Thus Come One appeared in the world.**

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**Asamkhyeyas** is an Sanskrit term for a very large number.

**Limitless Body Thus Come One:** Limitless Body is the specific title; his body spans to the end of space and pervades the Dharma realm. The Avatamsaka Sutra states: “佛真法身，猶如虛空；應物現形，如水中月 the Buddha’s true Dharma Body is like emptiness; he accords with living beings and manifests a body, just like the moon’s reflection on the water.”

**If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name and suddenly gives rise to a thought of respect, that person will overstep the heavy offenses of forty aeons of birth and death.**

**Suddenly gives rise to a thought of respect 暫生恭敬:**  
Suddenly 暫 means without a moments hesitation. To give rise to 生 means to make the resolve. Respect has two aspects:

1. 恭: To respect with the body, like looking upwards 謂束身翹仰.
2. 敬: To respect with the mind, thinking of nothing else 謂心無異緣.

A sudden thought of respect can **overstep 超越** heavy offenses because the noumenon nature opens.

**How much more will he be able to do this if he sculpts or**

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**paints this Buddha's image, or praises and makes offerings to him. The merit of this is limitless and unbounded."**

Planting blessings with the Triple Jewel will result in inconceivable benefits.

*Sutra text:*

**"Again, in the past, as many aeons ago as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, a Buddha named Jewel Nature appeared in the world. If a man or woman hears the name of this Buddha and in the space of a finger-snap decides to take refuge, that person will never retreat from the unsurpassed path.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Again, in the past, as many aeons ago as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, a Buddha named Jewel Nature appeared in the world.**

**As many aeons ago as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River** 過去恆河沙劫 refers to a time long before the just mentioned Buddha.

The self-nature of **the Buddha Named Jewel Nature** is extremely precious 寶貴. It can accord with conditions and yet not change (he manifests various bodies throughout the Dharma Realm to rescue living beings and yet his nature remains unchanged). It can also not change and yet accord with

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conditions. This symbolizes the Dharma Body. The jewel nature is just the four virtues of Nirvana: permanence, purity, (true) self and bliss. The Lotus Flower Face Sutra 蓮華面經 says that all the Buddhas are the jewels of living beings.

Gold is foremost amongst metals for four reasons:

1. Its color does not change 色無變.
2. Its substance is pure 體無染.
3. It can be formed without obstructions 轉作無礙.
4. It gives wealth 令人富.

**If a man or woman hears the name of this Buddha and in the space of a finger-snap decides to take refuge, that person will never retreat from the unsurpassed path.**

The Three Vehicles' knights 士, go through asamkheya kalpas without much success whereas the Buddha recitation Dharma can help one obtain the position of non-regression in the span of a finger snap.

**To take refuge:** The Rare Sutra 希有經 says that under the heavens as well as in the six desire heavens, obtaining the four fruitions is inferior to taking refuge with the Triple Jewel. Also in the Agama Store, a verse says that those who take refuge will not fall into the three evil paths.

**Will never retreat from the unsurpassed path:** He will not regress from the Unsurpassed Bodhi Path of Enlightenment because he is never apart from his self-nature, just as the

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verse from the Triple Refuges states: “Returning to the Buddha of my self-nature, I vow that all living beings will understand the Great Way profoundly and bring forth the Bodhi mind.”

There is a rather technical description that I will include here for future reference: 於無上道・永不退・此唯約圓教・纔(只)聞佛名・以根利故・或超人十信・即淨六根・・或頓入初住・開佛知見・・故位不退・從初信至七信・見思羸垢・任運先落・見圓真諦理・・行不退・在八九十信・入假位中・起四門諸行・斷內外塵沙・備俗諦理・・念不退・在圓初住去・念念進趣果海・任運流入真源。

Instantaneous achievement of non-retreating, is it possible? It is like already owning a precious pearl which, unbeknownst to you, has been sewn into your clothes. Now you only need to be told of the pearl and you will instantaneously become rich.

There is an anecdote of the Act of Truth, in which a fire threatened some monks. Panicked, they wanted to build a firebreak. Some ran to the Buddha for help. He picked a spot, and told them stand there. When the fire came, it extinguished everything around an area of “sixteen lengths”. When the monks asked why, they were told that this was due to the “Act of truth”. That very spot would not be burned for one aeon. This is why: in the past, the Buddha was born into a quail family. His parents fed him mouth-to-mouth. When a

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fire broke out, even his parents fled in fear. The infant quail was stuck in the shell, unable run away. What to do? It thought, "In this world, there is 'Efficacy of Goodness' and 'Efficacy of Truth'. There were Buddhas who realized Par-amitas in past ages, who obtained liberation by goodness, tranquility and wisdom. They also possessed discernment of knowledge of such liberation, and were filled with truth, compassion, mercy and patience. They embraced all creatures alike. There was efficacy in the attributes they perfected. I too grasp one truth; I hold and believe in the single principle in Nature. Therefore, I call to mind the Buddhas of the past and the efficacy they have realized. I lay hold of true belief that is in me touching the principle of Nature and by the Act of Truth make these flames go back, to save both of myself and the of rest of the birds." This event was later known as "Aeon Miracle".

*Sutra text:*

**"Again, in the past, a Buddha named Padma-Victory Thus Come One appeared in the world. If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name, or if the name merely passes by his or her ear faculty, that person will attain one thousand births in the Six Desire Heavens. How much more will this be true if he or she sincerely recites the name of that Thus Come."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Again, in the past, a Buddha named Padma-Victory Thus Come One appeared in the world.**

## Explained by Master YongHua

**Padma 波頭摩** is the name of the red lotus flower, the supreme and unsurpassed lotus; it surpasses the other yellow, blue and white lotuses: that is why it is called **Victory 勝**.

Red lotuses symbolize living beings' fundamental mind **本心**. It can create all the ten thousand things and yet not get defiled by them; just like the great earth can produce the million things and yet is not attached to any of them. If one does not get defiled by the mud one does not get attached to a single dharma, one can then understand one's fundamental mind.

Lotuses in the human realm have ten petals **瓣**. Heavenly lotuses have a hundred petals. The Buddha's lotuses have a thousand petals, symbolizing a thousand Dharmas bright doors **法明門**. This is why there are one thousand returns.

**If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name, or if the name merely passes by his or her ear faculty, that person will attain one thousand births in the Six Desire Heavens. How much more will this be true if he or she sincerely recites the name of that Thus Come."**

If one merely hears the name **Padma-Victory Thus Come One**, one will be reborn in the Six Desire Heavens that were discussed earlier. Since merely hearing the name has such great merit, reciting it certainly has even more.

Lotuses grow amongst mud and yet are not defiled by it. This symbolizes that even though they are born into the Desire heavens, actually they do not grasp at the five dusts. How? They understand and distance themselves from that hearing



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nature which is fundamentally empty 以解離聞性本空.  
Furthermore, to be born to the heavens is not apart from stillness 生天亦寂. Realizing that emptiness is false, they expediently appear in the body of a god to cross over those real living beings who attach to desires 以空處即假・權示  
天身・以度實生著欲之者.

*Sutra text:*

**"Again, in the past, indescribable asamkhyeyas of aeons ago, a Buddha named Lion Roar Thus Come One appeared in the world. If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name and single-mindedly takes refuge, that person will encounter numberless Buddhas who will rub his or her crown and bestow predictions of enlightenment upon the individual.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Again, in the past, indescribable asamkhyeyas of aeons ago, a Buddha named Lion Roar Thus Come One appeared in the world. If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name and single-mindedly takes refuge, that person will encounter numberless Buddhas who will rub his or her crown and bestow predictions of enlightenment upon the individual.**

**Lion Roar** is an analogy for the Buddha speaking the One Vehicle Dharma (not two or three vehicles). Earlier in his career, Shakyamuni Buddha spoke of the Three Vehicles as expedients to prepare his disciples for the Actual Dharma of

## Explained by Master YongHua

One Vehicle.

In the Long Agama Sutra, the Buddha told Kashyapa 迦葉 that 'lion' is an analogy for the fact that when the Buddha broadly speaks Dharma to the Great Assembly he is completely at ease and has no fear.

When the lion roars, all animals are frightened. Similarly, when the Buddha speaks the Dharma sound, it can subdue 降伏 all the externalists. This is an analogy of the mark of the Buddha's speaking the Dharma.

*Sutra text:*

**"Again, in the past, a Buddha named Krakucchanda appeared in the world. If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name and sincerely beholds, worships, or praises him, that person will be the Great Brahma King in the assemblies of the one thousand Buddhas of the Auspicious Aeon, and will there receive a superior prediction.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Again, in the past, a Buddha named Krakucchanda appeared in the world.**

**Krakucchanda 拘留孫佛** translates as Should Sever 所應斷 (afflictions, what else? Refer to the appendix for a discussion of the three kinds of afflictions; this can also refer to the five dwellings and two deaths 此約五住二死). Or it

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could be translated as Adorned Store 作用莊嚴.

The two deaths are:

1. Share section birth and death 分段生死: Ordinary living beings have a body with shape and form and a lifespan that could be short or long: with sections or shares.
2. Change birth and death 變易生死: This is from the mind and consciousness producing thought after thought continuously. The previous thought changes and the subsequent thought transforms 由心識之念念相續而前變後易. Because of external causes and conditions, based on the compassionate vow power without outflows, one transforms the original share section birth and death coarse body into a body that has a subtle and wonderful non-existent form and shape, with an unlimited lifespan 係由無漏之悲願力改轉原先的分段生死之粗身，而變為細妙無有色形、壽命等無定限之身.

This is not the ninth Buddha of the Worthy Aeon by the same name who appeared in the world during the decreasing kalpa when the average lifespan was 60,000 years. The 10,000 Buddha Names Sutra says that there are limitless Buddhas who share those seven Buddha's names.

**If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name and sincerely beholds, worships, or praises him, that person will be**

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**the Great Brahma King in the assemblies of the one thousand Buddhas of the Auspicious Aeon, and will there receive a superior prediction.**

**Hears** refers to the mind karma, manifesting the proper cause Buddha nature 顯正因佛性; **beholds, worships** 瞻禮 refers to the body karma, manifesting the conditioned cause Buddha nature 顯緣因佛性; **praises** alludes to the mouth karma, manifesting the severing cause Buddha nature 顯了因佛性. All three karmas thus manifest the proper causes for the Buddha nature. Thanks to these three causes and conditions, that person will act as a **Great Brahma King** within the Thousand Buddhas Assembly of the Auspicious Aeon.

According to this Worthy Aeon, which divides into decay, emptiness, realization, and dwelling 壞, 空, 成, 住, we are currently in the dwelling kalpa 住劫. A thousand Buddhas will appear in the world. Three already did, the fourth Buddha is the current one. According to the Abhidharma Shastra 立世阿毗曇論, eight small kalpas already passed while eleven more are left. Shakyamuni accomplished the Way within the ninth small kalpa.

How can there be another 996 Buddhas?

According to the Medicine King Medicine Superior Sutra 藥王藥上經, the Buddha says that countless kalpas in the past, at the Dharma ending age of Wonderful Light Buddha

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妙光佛, I left the home-life and cultivated the Way. I heard the names of 53 Buddhas. My mind was ecstatic. I taught them to others and encouraged them to recite. We took turns and taught others until there were a thousand of us. With different mouths but the same sound, we single-mindedly bowed. We thus were able to eradicate countless 100,000,000's of kalpas 億劫 of birth and death offenses. These first 1,000 men would become Buddhas and have Flower Light Buddha 花光佛 as their leader, accomplishing the Way in the Adorned Kalpa 莊嚴劫. The next 1,000 Buddhas have Krakucchanda Buddha 拘留孫佛 as their leader, accomplishing the Way in the Worthy Kalpa 賢劫. The last 1,000 Buddhas have Sun Light Buddha 日光佛 as their leader, accomplishing the Way in the Constellation Kalpa 星宿劫.

The Buddha Names Sutra 佛名經 has another version of the 1,000 Buddhas. Regardless, Buddhas appear when conditions are ripe; the time intervals between their appearances are not fixed.

*Sutra text:*

**"Again, in the past, a Buddha named Vipasyin appeared in the world. If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name, that person will eternally avoid falling into the Evil Paths, will always be born among humans and gods, and will experience unsurpassed, wonderful bliss.**

## Explained by Master YongHua

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Again, in the past, a Buddha named Vipasyin appeared in the world.**

**Vipasyin:** Pí Pó Shi 毗羅尸; Pí Pó means victory, Shi translates as contemplation. **Vipasyin** means both “victorious contemplation 勝觀” and “manifold contemplation 種種觀.”

The Buddhadharma encourages us to contemplate our mind. The Chinese character for mind “心” has three dots:

1. The first dot represents Emptiness contemplation 空觀: every dharma that enters the mind is empty. Because it is empty, the mind can store all dharmas. If a single dharma is not empty, it creates obstructions in the mind.
2. The second dot represents the contemplation of the mundane 俗觀: every dharma is produced from conditions. They are all like an illusion, or a transformation. Bodhisattvas enter birth and death but do not get obstructed by birth and death. They certify to Nirvana and yet do not stay in Nirvana because that too is just an illusion. They choose instead to enter the sea of birth and death to take living beings across. They thus cultivate both wisdom and compassion to benefit themselves and others. That is from understanding that all dharmas are like an illusion.
3. The third dot represents the Middle contemplation 中

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觀: to not attach to the extremes 不落兩邊. All dharmas are neither produced nor extinguished, neither permanent nor annihilated, neither one nor different, neither come nor gone. This is the Buddha's Wisdom 一切種智 (the wisdom of all modes) that enables them to see the real mark of all dharmas.

These three contemplations are neither one nor three. They are one and yet three. Three and one are mutually interfused 三一圓融. This is why it is called "victorious contemplation."

**If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name, that person will eternally avoid falling into the Evil Paths, will always be born among humans and gods, and will experience unsurpassed, wonderful bliss.**

When the text says that by merely hearing or reciting the names of these Buddhas, living beings will not fall into the states of woe, it is important to realize that this means that we must stop doing evil. If after hearing these names we continue to do wrong, it is still possible to fall into the hells. People who say that now that they have heard the Buddha's name they are sure to avoid the hells, and use this as an excuse to commit murder and arson and indulge in all sorts of antisocial behavior, will fall nonetheless.

According to a shastra 準論, Shakyamuni Buddha was often free from a female body and the four evil paths for the first asamkhyeya kalpa of his cultivation, thanks to this Dharma of hearing Vipasyin Buddha's name. According to the scrip-

## Explained by Master YongHua

tures 妙玄釋籤, during the third asamkhyeya kalpa of his cultivation, he was free from the five obstructions, never fell to the evil paths and was often born to the heavens. According to another scripture 如戒疏, during the first asamkhyeya kalpa, he obtained five kinds of virtues:

1. Birth to the human and heavenly realms.
2. Birth to honored families.
3. Obtaining a male body.
4. Having complete organs.
5. Having the Knowledge of Past Lives.

It is also said 文句云 that not to be born to the three evil paths, that is position non-regression; not to be born to the distant regions, having all organs replete, and not receiving a female body, that is practice non-regression; often recognizing one's prior lives, that is thought non-regression.

**Experience unsurpassed, wonderful bliss 受勝妙樂:** To be born onto the human and heavenly realms to experience Dharma bliss and Chan bliss. Just like in the Great Adornment Shastra 大莊嚴論, the Buddha's Sermons Verses 佛說偈 say that not getting sick is the best benefit 無病第一利, knowing contentment is the best wealth 知足第一富, having a good friend is the best relative 善友第一親, and Nirvana is the best bliss 涅槃第一樂. This includes receiving but not receiving and not receiving but receiving 此乃受即不受・無受即受也.



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*Sutra text:*

**"Again, in the past, as many aeons ago as there are grains of sand in limitless and boundless numbers of Ganges Rivers, a Buddha named Jeweled Victory appeared in the world. If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name, that person will never again fall into the Evil Paths and will eternally dwell in the heavens, where he or she will experience unsurpassed, wonderful bliss.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Again, in the past, as many aeons ago as there are grains of sand in limitless and boundless numbers of Ganges Rivers, a Buddha named Jeweled Victory appeared in the world. If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name, that person will never again fall into the Evil Paths and will eternally dwell in the heavens, where he or she will experience unsurpassed, wonderful bliss.**

**Jeweled Victory 寶勝:** The Sanskrit term for Jeweled is La Dá Nán 囉怛囊 ratna and for Victory is Pí Pó 毗婆 śikha. Jeweled here does not refer to worldly jewels but to transcendental jewels. Transcendental jewels represent the four virtues of Nirvana (permanence, true self, bliss, and purity; all the jewels are born from them). When replete with these four virtues, one does not fall into birth and death or into Nirvana with outflows, thus attaining the true virtues of Nirvana. It is called Jeweled Victory because it is apart from worldly upside-down views as well as the Two Vehicle upside-down views.

## Explained by Master YongHua

*Sutra text:*

**"Again, in the past, a Buddha named Jeweled Appearance Thus Come One appeared in the world. If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name and gives rise to a thought of respect, that person will before long attain the fruit of Arhatship."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Again, in the past, a Buddha named Jeweled Appearance Thus Come One appeared in the world. If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name and gives rise to a thought of respect, that person will before long attain the fruit of Arhatship."**

**Jeweled Appearance 寶相:** Venerable Zhi Zhe 智者 says: “**實相尊貴, 故名寶相** True mark is venerated and honorable, and is therefore called jeweled appearance.” “True mark” refers to the true mark of all dharmas.

The Vajra Sutra says: “Moreover if there is a man **若復有人**, who hears of this sutra **得聞是經**, and gives rise to a mind of faith and purity **信心清淨**, that will produce true mark **則生實相**.” It also states: “True mark **是實相者**, is just no mark **則是非相**, that is why the Thus Come One **是故如來**, calls it true mark **說名實相**.” From the true mark, the Two Dharmas (sudden and gradual), Three Paths (three vehicles), and Four Fruitions (Sound Hearers, Pratyek-

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abuddhas, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas) are produced.

The Flower Adornment Sutra says that in the Great Sea, there are four resplendent great jewels 熾然光明大寶:

1. The sun store 日藏, symbolizing Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom 大圓鏡智.
2. Being apart from moisture 離潤, representing Wonderful Observing Wisdom 妙觀察智.
3. The fire pearl 火珠, symbolizing Equal Nature Wisdom 平等性智.
4. Ultimately no surplus 究竟無餘, representing Accomplishing What is to be Done Wisdom 成所作智.

Without these four jewels, the four continents under heaven up to the Heaven of Neither Thought Nor Non-Thought 非想非非想 would be submerged under water 漂沒. These jewels are referred to as the water repellent pearl 消水珠 in the Great Shastra.

The scriptures 大師 say that not going and not coming 無去無來 is the Dharma nature true mark 法性實相. The true mark is honored and valued 實相尊貴. That is why it is called Jewelled Appearance.

*Sutra text:*

Explained by Master YongHua

**"Again, limitless asamkhyeyas of aeons ago, a Buddha named Kashaya Banner Thus Come One appeared in the world. If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name, that person will overcome the offenses of birth and death for one hundred great aeons.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Again, limitless asamkhyeyas of aeons ago, a Buddha named Kashaya Banner Thus Come One appeared in the world. If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name, that person will overcome the offenses of birth and death for one hundred great aeons.**

**Kashaya Banner Buddha's 袈裟幢** sash is used as a banner. It is the jeweled banner of the Buddhas of the three periods of time. When putting it on, if one contemplates it as a jeweled banner, all the externalists cannot destroy it or dare attack you. It can eradicate the multitudes of offenses and produce all sorts of blessings and virtue.

*Sutra text:*

**"Again, in the past, a Buddha named Great Penetration Mountain King Thus Come One appeared in the world. If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name, that person will encounter as many Buddhas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, who will speak Dharma for him, and he will certainly realize Bodhi.**

*Sutra commentary:*

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**"Again, in the past, a Buddha named Great Penetration Mountain King Thus Come One appeared in the world. If a man or woman hears this Buddha's name, that person will encounter as many Buddhas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, who will speak Dharma for him, and he will certainly realize Bodhi.**

**Great Penetration Mountain King 大通山王.** Great penetration is Prajna Wisdom, which is obtained when one certifies to the Dharma Body and can penetrate all dharmas; this is the Prajna cause 般若因. The Mountain King (Mt. Sumeru) is the Buddha's virtue. The four virtues of Nirvana are symbolized by the four jewels that make up Mount Sumeru, the king of mountains; this is the Reward Body fruition 報身果.

*Sutra text:*

**"Again, in the past, there were Buddhas named Pure Moon Buddha, Mountain King Buddha, Wise Victory Buddha, Pure Name King Buddha, Accomplished Wisdom Buddha, Unsurpassed Buddha, Wonderful Sound Buddha, Full Moon Buddha, Moon Face Buddha, and other such indescribable Buddhas. World-Honored One, living beings of the present and future, both gods and humans, men and women, will obtain limitless meritorious virtues by merely reciting one Buddha's name. How much the more if they recite many names. In birth and death all these living beings will obtain great benefit and never will not fall into the Evil Paths.**

## Explained by Master YongHua

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Again, in the past, there were Buddhas named Pure Moon Buddha, Mountain King Buddha, Wise Victory Buddha, Pure Name King Buddha, Accomplished Wisdom Buddha, Unsurpassed Buddha, Wonderful Sound Buddha, Full Moon Buddha, Moon Face Buddha, and other such indescribable Buddhas.**

**Pure Moon Buddha 淨月** alludes to the Buddha's Dharma Body being like emptiness. He manifests bodies in accord with living beings. Like the moon's reflection on the water, he comes to the world and is not defiled by it.

**Mountain King Buddha's 山王** virtues are as awesome as the king of mountains, Mount Sumeru.

**Wise Victory 智勝 Buddha** refers to the Wisdom of All Modes 一切種智. Of all wisdoms of the Three Vehicles, the Buddha's wisdom is foremost; Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas have All Wisdom 一切智; Bodhisattvas have the Wisdom of the Way 道種智.

**Pure Name King Buddha 淨名王:** Pure refers to substance, Name refers to functionality. From substance one gives rise to functioning 從體起用. One is at ease with all dharmas. The five dwellings and the two deaths are completely purified 五住二死淨盡淨.

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**Accomplished Wisdom Buddha 智成就** accomplished the Wisdom of All Modes 一切種智. Both the Provisional and Actual Wisdoms are accomplished.

**Unsurpassed Buddha 無上:** Only Buddhas are unsurpassed because they have nothing to sever. Just like the Buddha Speaks of Unsurpassed Places Sutra 佛說無上處經 says, if living beings give rise to faith and resolve for the Buddha's Unsurpassed place, they will obtain the unsurpassed fruition amongst the human and god realms.

**Wonderful Sound Buddha 妙聲** makes living beings produce the mind of great joy when listening to him speak Dharma. Also, all other living beings' sounds cannot compare to his.

The virtues of **Full Moon Buddha 滿月** are perfected just like the shape of the moon at mid month.

**Moon Face Buddha's 月面** face is as alluring as the full moon. It shines light that reaches the ten directions and is complete with kindness, compassion, joy and renunciation. The moon is the king of all constellations, most superior and most excellent. This Buddha's face is pure and perfect like the appearance of the moon in the sky.

**World-Honored One, living beings of the present and future, both gods and humans, men and women, will obtain limitless meritorious virtues by merely reciting one Bud-**

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**dha's name. How much the more if they recite many names. In birth and death all these living beings will obtain great benefit and never will not fall into the Evil Paths.**

Each name contains limitless merits and virtues that pervade the Dharma Realm. Each virtue contains all other virtues. That is why reciting one name creates limitless virtues and ultimately will enable us never to fall to the evil paths.

The five dwellings are the bases for all afflictions. They can also produce afflictions. They are:

1. View dwelling.
2. Desire realm love dwelling.
3. Form realm love dwelling.
4. Existence love dwelling.
5. Ignorance dwelling.

Our explanation of the Small Amitabha Sutra has a more detailed explanation.

*Sutra text:*

**"If even one person in a dying person's family loudly recites one Buddha's name for the sake of the dying person, that dying one will quickly be freed from all karmic offenses except the uninterrupted retribution of the Five Offenses. The Five Uninterrupted Offenses warranting uninterrupted retribution are so extremely heavy that one who commits them should not escape retribution for myriads of aeons. If, however, at the time of the offender's death, another person recites the names of Buddhas on his behalf, his offenses can be gradually wiped away. How**



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**much more will this be true for living beings who recited those names themselves. The merit thus attained is limitless and eradicates measureless offenses.”**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"If even one person in a dying person's family loudly recites one Buddha's name for the sake of the dying person, that dying one will quickly be freed from all karmic offenses except the uninterrupted retribution of the Five Offenses.**

At the time of death one's mind is at its fiercest and sharpest 猛利. Thus when the Buddha's name passes through one's ear organ, one will not let go of the name, sustaining it thought after thought 念念不捨. Except for the Five Rebellious Offenses, which the Buddha will address later, relying on the Buddha's power eradicates karmic obstructions just as light disperses darkness in its entirety.

**The Five Uninterrupted Offenses warranting uninterrupted retribution are so extremely heavy that one who commits them should not escape retribution for myriads of aeons. If, however, at the time of the offender's death, another person recites the names of Buddhas on his behalf, his offenses can be gradually wiped away. How much more will this be true for living beings who recited those names themselves. The merit thus attained is limitless and eradicates measureless offenses.”**

**The Five Uninterrupted Offenses** are the heaviest. And yet

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they can be gradually erased with repeated recitations of the Buddha's name.

**唐法照** Great Master Fǎ Zhào, Dharma Illumination, went to Mount Wǔ Tái and saw Manjusri and Universal Bodhisattva speaking Dharma to the assembly. He bowed and asked, "What is the foremost Dharma for living beings in the Dharma Ending Age?" Manjushri Bodhisattva replied, "Of all Dharma Doors, there is none better than reciting the Buddha's name. It is through recitation of the Buddha's name that I obtained the Wisdom of All Modes." The Dharma Master further asked, "Which Buddha's name?" The Bodhisattva replied, "Amitabha Buddha of the western direction has inconceivable vow powers. You should **繫念** recite his name earnestly and without interruption. At the end of your life, you will definitely be reborn to his Buddhaland."

Great Wisdom **大智** Vinaya Master made the vow to constantly be born in the Saha world to act as a great teacher. He also confided in Dharma Master Hui Bu **慧布**, wisdom giving, that even though the Western Land may be pure he still does not wish to be reborn there. He therefore chose not to rely on the Pure Land Dharma Door and even slandered those who practice it. Later he fell very sick, and his mind became extremely confused. He suddenly realized his prior offenses and blamed himself profoundly.

The Tian Tai Shastra further states that those Bodhisattvas who started bringing forth the Bodhi mind and have not yet obtained the patience of non-production, should often stay

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close to the Buddha, seeking rebirth to the Pure Lands.

The Great Shastra also states that ordinary people who have the mind of great compassion and therefore make the vow to be born into the evil worlds to rescue living beings are making a big mistake. The infant should not leave his mother, and the young bird should only wander within the nest's nearby branches. Wise people abandon a lifetime of study in favor of seeking the Pure Land Dharma.

A shastra addresses the question of how reciting near the time of death can surpass a whole lifetime of practice: that mind may be of short-duration, but its power is very fierce, just as fire or poison, even though small, can accomplish great feats.

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## **CHAPTER 10: The Conditions and Comparative Merit and Virtues of Giving**

The previous chapter is about the Buddha Jewel. This chapter is about the Dharma Jewel which refers to the unsurpassed principles. Also it describes a cause for accomplishing the Way.

Awakening to the principles can be shallow or deep. That is why there are the four sagehood levels. Confusion about the principles can be light or heavy. That is why there are the six ordinary paths. The Three Evil Paths come about because of heavy confusion. Pure goodness without evil causes rebirth in the heavens. The human realm comes from both good and evil. Revolving in the six paths is due to being confused about the principles.

This chapter discusses the Dharma for accomplishing Buddhahood, focusing on the six paramitas and ten thousand practices. The six paramitas include the ten thousand practices. Giving includes all the other remaining paramitas.

There are three kinds of giving: the giving of wealth, of Dharma and of fearlessness. Giving of wealth has inner and outer aspects, in reference to the body. And giving of fearlessness is to pacify, or comfort living beings in trouble.

Wealth giving is the Giving paramita. The paramitas of Holding Precepts, not getting afflicted and holding no grudges, and Patience, not retaliating towards those whom you have

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a grudge against, belong to the giving of fearlessness. To vigorously speak Dharma, Samadhi and Wisdom, and to not speak erroneously (to the wrong audience 錯機 or of the wrong principles 不顛倒) belong to the giving of Dharma.

Why compare? The wise and the confused have different and varying depths of understanding.

The dharma of Giving: ordinary people attach to marks and therefore only obtain human and heavenly blessings. Sages are apart from marks and thus can certify to the permanent bliss of Nirvana.

Shariputra once offered rice to the Buddha. The World Honored One in turn gave it to a dog. He asked Shariputra, “Whose merit is greater?” His disciple replied, “Yours.” Merit is from the mind not the field of blessings.

In contrast, section 11 of the Sutra In 42 Sections describes the comparative merits of giving to those who are evil, up to and including giving to the Buddha. Each level up, the multiplier for the blessings generated is geometrically increased. This is to discuss giving from the viewpoint of the field of blessings and not the mind.

In the Vimalakirti Sutra, Good Virtue Elder offers a necklace to Vimalakirti, who then splits it in half and gives one half to 難勝如來 Difficult to Defeat Thus Come One and the other half to the lowliest of the beggars in the Assembly. Yet, the merit is equal in both acts of giving as a result of giving with a level and equal mind.

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In a former life, Ajnatakaundinya offered coarse rice to a Pratyekabuddha and thus obtained 91 kalpas of heavenly and human blessings of not being poor. The rest of the blessings enabled him to attain to Arhatship. That is from the perspective of the retribution of making offerings to difficult-to-encounter sages.

This chapter talks about the various causes and conditions of the merit and virtues of giving.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, inspired by the Buddha's awesome spirit, arose from his seat, knelt on one knee, placed his palms together and said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, when I compare the various acts of giving done by the beings in their karmic paths, I see some that are great and some that are small. As a result, some receive blessings for one life, some for ten lives, and some receive great blessings and benefit for one hundred or one thousand lives. Why is this? Please, World-Honored One, explain this for me."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, inspired by the Buddha's awesome spirit, arose from his seat, knelt on one knee, placed his palms together and said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, when I compare the various acts of giving done by the beings in their karmic paths, I see some that are great and some that are small.**

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The Bodhisattva asks about the differences in the retributions for the various kinds of **giving**.

**Beings in their karmic paths** 業道眾生 refers to those in the six ordinary realms. Because of delusion 迷, the living beings of the Six Paths create offenses. They then have to undergo those retributions.

**As a result, some receive blessings for one life, some for ten lives, and some receive great blessings and benefit for one hundred or one thousand lives. Why is this? Please, World-Honored One, explain this for me."**

Killing, stealing etc... are black karmas 黑業. Giving, etc... are white karmas 白業. How come from similar acts of giving, the retributions widely differ? Living beings have no way of knowing the retributions. For instance, refer to the earlier anecdote of a person giving a flower and asking what kind of retributions he would receive. Even Arhats cannot tell!

*Sutra text:*

**At that time the Buddha told Earth Store Bodhisattva, "For the sake of all these assembled in the palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven, I will discuss the comparative meritorious virtues of the great and small acts of giving done by the living beings in Jambudvīpa. Listen attentively to what I say."**

**Earth Store Bodhisattva replied, "I have had doubts**

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**about this matter and will be pleased to listen."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time the Buddha told Earth Store Bodhisattva, "For the sake of all these assembled in the palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven, I will discuss the comparative meritorious virtues of the great and small acts of giving done by the living beings in Jambudvipa. Listen attentively to what I say."**

**Earth Store Bodhisattva replied, "I have had doubts about this matter and will be pleased to listen."**

He really has no doubt. He is only representing living beings to request Dharma to quell their doubts. Do not look at it literally and think that the Bodhisattva is still pretty confused. Nor should you think that he is lying. He is not cheating anyone because it is of no benefit to him whatsoever and no one suffers any loss because of it.

*Sutra text:*

**The Buddha said to Earth Store Bodhisattva, "In Jambudvipa, the kings of countries, noblemen, great ministers, great elders, great Kshatriyas, great Brahmans, and others may encounter the most inferior and poor people, or those with various handicaps such as the hunchbacked, crippled, dumb, mute, deaf, retarded, or eyeless. When those kings and others may wish to give and are able to do so replete with great kindness and compassion, a humble heart, and a smile, they may everywhere give personally**



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with their own hands, or arrange for others to do so, using gentle words and sympathetic speech. Such kings and others will obtain blessings and benefits comparable to the meritorious virtue of giving to as many Buddhas as there are grains of sand in one hundred Ganges Rivers. Why is this? Because of having shown a great compassionate heart toward the most impoverished, inferior, and handicapped individuals, the kings and others will receive such a reward. For one hundred thousand lives they will always have an abundance of the seven gems, not to mention clothing, food, and the necessities of life.

*Sutra commentary:*

The Buddha said to Earth Store Bodhisattva, "In Jambudvīpa, the kings of countries, noblemen, great ministers, great elders, great Kshatriyas, great Brahmans, and others may encounter the most inferior and poor people, or those with various handicaps such as the hunchbacked, crippled, dumb, mute, deaf, retarded, or eyeless.

This is the dharma for venerated and honorable people to give to the people of the lowest station, in particular to those who are handicapped—i.e. not replete with human marks.

**Elders** have both wealth and virtues 德行. The term 'elder' has ten meanings:

1. Venerable name 性貴.
2. High position 位高.
3. Great blessings 大福.

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4. Great power 威猛.
5. Deep wisdom 智深.
6. Pure conduct 行淨.
7. Advanced in years 年耆.
8. Proper etiquette 裡備.
9. Praised from those above 上歎.
10. A source of refuge for those below 下歸.

India has the four castes:

1. **Kshatriyas** 剎利 are the noblemen 王種 or 貴族.
2. **Brahmans** 婆羅門 are offspring of Pure Conduct, 淨裔 or 貴族.
3. Merchant class is known as vaisya 吠舍.
4. Sudra consists of butchers, etc 旃陀羅.

**And others** 等 refers to the other lay people.

The Great Shastra 大論三十二 says that if people practice giving and holding precepts then they can be born into Kshatriya families. If one is attached to wisdom, sutras and books, does not afflict living beings, practices giving and holds precepts, then one can be born into Brahman families. Lay people of lower status can become rich because, if they have practiced giving in previous lives, now they may reap the retribution of wealth and honor.

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The Great Love For The Way Sutra 大愛道經 says that one cause for being born among the **most inferior and poor people** is bringing forth the mind to give to the poor and destitute, making them become joyful at the prospect, and then changing one's mind and not giving.

**Various handicaps such as being hunchbacked, crippled, dumb, mute, deaf, retarded, or eyeless** arise from prior life offenses such as seeing a beggar come to beg and making grimaces or scowling from displeasure, mouthing harsh words or insults, or whipping or beating the seeker; or from saying that one does not believe in giving; or from seeing others practice giving and failing to rejoice and follow their example, instead criticizing and deriding the donor, thus making them stop believing in giving; or from receiving a share of one's family's assets but being stingy, intentionally using more than one's share and being bent on not giving.

**When those kings and others may wish to give and are able to do so replete with great kindness and compassion, a humble heart, and a smile, they may everywhere give personally with their own hands, or arrange for others to do so, using gentle words and sympathetic speech.**

To able to give to the less fortunate **with great kindness and compassion**, one's heart filled with great compassion, a **humble heart** (with a mind of pity 憐憫), and a **smile whether everywhere with their own hands**, implying an impartial mind, **or arrange for others to do so, using gentle words and sympathetic speech**, using a comforting mind, would make the Buddhas very happy because the gift is made

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with the mindset of a Bodhisattva, without any discrimination. That is why it has the same merit and virtues as giving to endless Buddhas.

**Such kings and others will obtain blessings and benefits comparable to the meritorious virtue of giving to as many Buddhas as there are grains of sand in one hundred Ganges Rivers. Why is this? Because of having shown a great compassionate heart toward the most impoverished, inferior, and handicapped individuals, the kings and others will receive such a reward. For one hundred thousand lives they will always have an abundance of the seven gems, not to mention clothing, food, and the necessities of life.**

**Abundance** means that they will lack nothing and will not run short of their needs.

The Great Love of the Way Sutra 大愛道經 says that if you have wealth and do not give to others, you will end up being destitute life after life.

When giving for the sake of recognition, or seeing the poor and destitute one scolds and chases them away: we can give a lot of wealth but the retribution obtained is small. This is because we are not a true field of compassion 悲田.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, if in the future the kings of countries, Brahmans, and the like encounter Buddha stupas,**

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**monasteries, or images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Sound Hearers, or Pratyekabuddhas, and personally make offerings or give gifts, those persons will obtain three aeons as Lord Shakra and will enjoy supremely wonderful bliss.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, if in the future the kings of countries, Brahmans, and the like encounter Buddha stupas, monasteries, or images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Sound Hearers, or Pratyekabuddhas, and personally make offerings or give gifts, those persons will obtain three aeons as Lord Shakra and will enjoy supremely wonderful bliss.**

The previous section describes giving of out of pity to those below. This section describes offering up to those above.

**Pratyekabuddhas 辟支佛** practice the twelve conditioned links. They could be called “Enlightened to conditions” or “Solitary Enlightened”.

In the Great Shastra, a bhikshu asked the Buddha about Sundarananda’s leaving the home-life and certifying to the fruition. The Buddha said that after Vipasyin Buddha 毗婆尸佛 entered Nirvana, Sundarananda was an elder. At a Pratyekabuddha’s stupa, he drew the Pratyeka’s image on a blue black mud wall. Because of that he made the vow that in life after life he will be born into honored and noble families, his body will be of a golden color, and he will meet with the Buddha and obtain the Way. For 91 great kalpas, he never fell to the evil paths.

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The Proper Dharma Mindfulness Sutra 正法念經 says that the gold wheel-turning king's pleasure is less than 1/16th of **Shakra's**.

If the king and high officials behave with utmost respect, they certainly will have a great influence toward the general population!

In the Middle Agama Sutra, a bhikshu asked the Buddha what the causes and conditions are for becoming Shakra 釋提桓因. According to the Buddha, this was because when he was in the human realm, toward sramanas, Brahmans, the poor, destitute and those suffering and in difficulty, he was able to give food and drink, money, wealth, lamps, etc...

**Three aeons 三劫** refers to three Small kalpas.

*Sutra text:*

**If they are able to transfer the merit of that giving and dedicate it to the Dharma Realm, those great kings and others will be Great Brahma Heaven Kings for ten aeons.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**If they are able to transfer the merit of that giving and dedicate it to the Dharma Realm, those great kings and others will be Great Brahma Heaven Kings for ten aeons.**

Originally, there is a self in the act of giving. If one can bring forth the mind to give up the blessings and transfer them to

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the Dharma Realm for all to enjoy the blessings, this mind is vast indeed. Therefore, the blessings are proportionally increased. This blessing is as vast as emptiness, enabling one to be reborn as the **Great Brahma Heaven King**.

Transference, the act of **dedicating the merit to the Dharma Realm 迴向法界**, has three meanings:

1. To transfer from phenomenon to noumenon **迴事向理**. Originally we are replete with the noumenon that gives rise to the phenomenon functioning **元由理具**  
• **方有事用**. Now, we transfer this mind towards the True **今迴此心** • **向於實際** realizing the Truth of Emptiness **真諦空界說**: the ten Dharma Realms are empty. This is also called transferring from manifestation to True Suchness.
2. To transfer from oneself to others **迴自向他**. In the past, we were confused about the noumenon everywhere (we were born) and would prefer to adorn our body **昔迷理遍** • **善嚴自身**. Now we accord with our inherent nature and transfer towards living beings **今順本性** • **迴向衆生**. We bypass the small self to vastly benefit living beings, realizing the Mundane Truth **俗諦假界**: the ten Dharma Realms are false.
3. To transfer from cause towards effect **迴因向果** We dedicate all goodness toward the accomplishment of the three virtues of Prajna, liberation and the Dharma

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Body, realizing the Middle Way Truth 中諦中界.  
This is the Middle Way.

According to the Great Shastra, there are four causes for receiving the Brahma Heaven blessings:

1. Maintaining a pure mind 清淨心.
2. Repairing or maintaining stupas 補治寺.
3. Keeping the sagely assembly in harmony 能和合聖眾.
4. Being a human or god who requests the Buddha to turn the Dharma Wheel for the first time 諸天世人勸請  
• 佛初轉法輪.

The blessings for the Brahma Heaven are much greater than those of the Desire Realm. If one can practice giving and make transferences, if one can understand that the three wheel substances are fundamentally empty and that the four marks are also empty, and if one can produce a mind that dwells nowhere, this is in accord with Prajna wisdom.

**Ten aeons 十劫** refers to ten medium aeons.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, if in the future, kings, Brahmans, and others encounter ruined, decayed, broken, and tumbled-down stupas, temples, sutras, or images of previous Buddhas, and are capable of resolving to restore them, they may then do so themselves or encourage as**



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many as a hundred thousand other people to make offerings and thereby establish affinities. Those kings and others will be Wheel-Turning Kings throughout a hundred thousand continuous lives, and all those others who made offerings with them will be kings of smaller countries for a hundred thousand continuous lives. If, before the stupa or monastery, they are, in addition, able to resolve to transfer and dedicate this merit to the Dharma Realm, such kings and the others will without exception accomplish the Buddha path, and their retribution for this will be limitless and unbounded.

*Sutra commentary:*

"Moreover, Earth Store, if in the future, kings, Brahmans, and others encounter ruined, decayed, broken, and tumbled-down stupas, temples, sutras, or images of previous Buddhas, and are capable of resolving to restore them, they may then do so themselves or encourage as many as a hundred thousand other people to make offerings and thereby establish affinities.

Restoring temples and images enables the previous donors to continue to receive blessings while one's blessings are also increased; it's like killing two birds with one stone. According to The Resolving Doubts Sutra 像法決疑經: "Building anew is not as good as repairing 造新不如修故, creating blessings is not as good as avoiding disasters 作福不如避禍." To avoid disasters enables one to continue to enjoy existing blessings.

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The Buddha was visiting a country 拘薩羅國 and came across a Brahman who was tilling the field. The farmer leaned on his ox cane to bow to the Buddha. The World Honored One had a slight smile. His attendant asked why and the Buddha replied, “This Brahman was bowing to two Buddhas, me and Kashyapa 迦葉佛塔 Buddha’s stupa underneath his ox cane.” The bhikshu attendant requested to see the stupa of Kashyapa Buddha. He looked for it in the field of the Brahman and it appeared. The Buddha explained that even if people offer a thousand pounds of gold, that is not as good as to respectfully bow to the Buddha’s stupa. Nor is it as good as using a handful of mud to repair the Buddha’s stupa. So even an offering of mud can be significant!

The Hundred Conditions Sutra 百緣經 tells us: “A wealthy elder had a son who was upright, proper, superior and wonderful; he was loved and respected by gods and humans. As he was growing up, he encountered the Buddha and obtained Arhatship. This is because in the past a stupa of Vipasyin 毗婆尸 Buddha was in disrepair. A small child entered the stupa and, together with the crowd, joyously used mud to make repairs. He then made the vow for Bodhi and left. For that merit and virtue, for 91 kalpas, he did not fall into the evil paths and received unsurpassed pleasures amongst the humans and gods. He then encountered the Buddha, left the home-life and obtained the Way.

**Those kings and others will be Wheel-Turning Kings throughout a hundred thousand continuous lives, and all those others who made offerings with them will be kings**

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of smaller countries for a hundred thousand continuous lives.

People who make such offerings can become a **Wheel-Turning King**, or universal monarch, if they do not cultivate or a Buddha if they do. This result comes from practicing the following seven dharmas:

1. Giving to the poor 給施貧乏.
2. Respecting people, being filial and nurturing them 敬民孝養豬
3. Offering to the assemblies 四時八節以祭四海 by widely sponsoring religious ceremonies.
4. Practicing patience 時修忍辱.
5. Eliminating greed.
6. Eliminating anger.
7. Eliminating stupidity. (Greed, anger and stupidity constitute the three poisons 除三毒).

The Gold Wheel-Turning King is foremost amongst humans.

**If, before the stupa or monastery, they are, in addition, able to resolve to transfer and dedicate this merit to the Dharma Realm, such kings and the others will without exception accomplish the Buddha path, and their retribution for this will be limitless and unbounded.**

**Transferring and dedicating this merit** helps destroy the view and attachment to a self. Dedicating it to the fruition 迴因向果 will enable one to obtain the reward body. Dedicat-

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ing it to the principles 迴事向理 will help one obtain the Dharma Body. And dedicating it to others 迴自向他 will help obtain the transformation body.

If we practice giving as mentioned above, we will only obtain human and heavenly blessings, but not Nirvana causes.

When Emperor Liang of the Wu dynasty asked Patriarch Bodhidharma, “Since I became emperor, I built temples and allowed people to leave the home-life, how much merit and virtues does that create?” The Patriarch replied, “Actually, you earned no merit and virtue. It’s only human and heavenly small fruitions, causes with outflows.” The emperor then asked, “What is true merit and virtue?” Bodhidharma then said, “Pure wisdom that is perfect and wonderful 淨智妙圓

. Its substance is empty and still 體自空寂. Such merit and virtue cannot be sought in the world.” Accordingly, one should make transferences from the phenomenon towards the noumenon—only then we can accord with Real Prajna Wisdom 與般若實智相應.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, if in the future the kings of countries, Brahmans, and others are filled with great kindness for the duration of a single thought upon seeing the old, the sick, or women in childbirth, and provide them with medicinal herbs, food, drink, and bedding so as to make them peaceful and comfortable, the merit of their giving is quite inconceivable. For one hundred aeons such kings will constantly be lords of the Pure Dwelling Heaven; for**

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**two hundred aeons they will be lords in the Six Desire Heavens, and they will ultimately attain Buddhahood. They will eternally not fall into the Evil Paths, and for one hundred thousand lives they will hear no sounds of suffering.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, if in the future the kings of countries, Brahmans, and others are filled with great kindness for the duration of a single thought upon seeing the old, the sick, or women in childbirth, and provide them with medicinal herbs, food, drink, and bedding so as to make them peaceful and comfortable, the merit of their giving is quite inconceivable.**

This section discusses the field of compassion.

If one has **thoughts of great kindness** that are truly great, and are not merely thoughts of a little bit of kindness, then even if they last only for the duration of that thought, they will be efficacious.

The old and sick are in great suffering. If they do not get help, they may suffer an agonizing death. The old and the sick are the first two of the three fields of blessings; those giving birth 產 are the third. If women in childbirth do not receive food and medical help in a timely fashion, both mother and child will perish in great pain. That is why the Buddha said that of the eight fields of blessings, helping the sick is foremost. The concept of a field of blessings refers to a set of people to whom one can make offerings, both benefiting them

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and accruing blessings for oneself thus is similar to using them as fields to plant our blessings. The eight kinds of fields of blessings are:

1. The Buddha.
2. The sages.
3. The he shangs: senior seated monks of the assembly.
4. The acharyas: teaching monks.
5. The sanghans.
6. One's father.
7. One's mother.
8. Those who are sick.

**For one hundred aeons such kings will constantly be lords of the Pure Dwelling Heaven; for two hundred aeons they will be lords in the Six Desire Heavens, and they will ultimately attain Buddhahood. They will eternally not fall into the Evil Paths, and for one hundred thousand lives they will hear no sounds of suffering.**

**Lords of the Pure Dwelling Heaven 淨居天主** reside in the fourth Dhyana Heaven.

**One hundred aeons 百劫** refers to one hundred great aeons.

**Two hundred aeons 二百劫** refers to two hundred middle aeons.

The Great Shastra 33 states that giving while not apart from desire **未離欲布施** enables one to be born in the human realm with great wealth and honor **福貴** as well as the six

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desire heavens. And if one can be apart from desire while giving 離欲心布施, then one can be born in the Brahma Heaven up to the Abundant Fruit Heaven 生梵世天上・乃至廣果. If one is apart from the form mind and give 離色心布施, one will be born in the Formless Realm. If one can be apart from the three realms while giving 離三界布施, that is Nirvana: one will attain Arhatship. If one gives and loathes evil 布施時・厭惡憤鬥, muddle-headedness and chaos, cherishing leisure and stillness 好樂閑靜, one will obtain Pratyekabuddhahood. If one gives with great compassion 起大悲心, wishing to cross over all living beings, one will obtain the foremost, deep and profound ultimate pure wisdom and attain Buddhahood.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, if kings, Brahmans and others can give in this way, in the future they will receive limitless blessings. If they are able to dedicate that merit, be it great or small, they will ultimately attain Buddhahood. How much more easily will they be able to attain the positions of Shakra, Brahma, or Wheel-Turning King. Therefore, Earth Store, you should exhort all living beings everywhere to learn to perform such actions.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, if kings, Brahmans and others**

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**can give in this way, in the future they will receive limitless blessings. If they are able to dedicate that merit, be it great or small, they will ultimately attain Buddhahood.**

**Dedicating merit, be it great or small** indicates that the dharma of dedication is very important.

Learn to give with a kind, compassionate, equal and impartial, sympathetic, and pitying heart 憐憫心. The blessings thus obtained are limitless. They are further magnified when dedicated towards the Dharma Realm. This is like pouring a cup of water into the ocean. No matter how small the amount, it becomes one with the water of the great ocean.

**How much more easily will they be able to attain the positions of Shakra, Brahma, or Wheel-Turning King. Therefore, Earth Store, you should exhort all living beings everywhere to learn to perform such actions.**

The Worthy and Stupid 賢愚 Sutra recounts how Elder Suddatta 蘇達多 and Shariputra 身子 were using rope to measure the pure abode. Shariputra had a slight smile and was asked why. He said, “As you are preparing to build this pure abode, your heavenly palace in the six desire heavens has already been finished. As Shariputra continued to use his Heavenly Eye to observe, he suddenly frowned in sadness. When queried, he replied, “When Vipasyin 毗婆尸 Buddha was also building a pure abode at this location, these ants were born. After going through seven Buddhas, they are still ants here. Life after life, they have received ant bodies for 91



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great kalpas without liberation. Birth and death are long and endless. Planting blessings, which one can think of as seeds, is critical for liberation. Further, if one does not seek heavenly blessings and can make transference to the Dharma Realm, no matter how small the seed, one will certainly accomplish the Way.

In the Solid Intention Sutra 堅意經, the Buddha told Ananda that broadly speaking of giving plants blessings for birth and death. This is just like planting seeds: each seed will germinate its own kind. One can never obtain the fruit without the seed. Planting goodness helps one obtain blessings which return to one's own self.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, if there are good men or women who plant a few good roots in the Buddhadharma, amounting to as little as a fine hair, a grain of sand, or a mote of dust, they will receive incomparable blessings.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, if there are good men or women who plant a few good roots in the Buddhadharma, amounting to as little as a fine hair, a grain of sand, or a mote of dust, they will receive incomparable blessings.**

Giving is a Dharma that can be practiced by all. It is listed as the first paramita for accomplishing the Way.

The Sixth Patriarch says, "Renouncing greed and stinginess

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on the inside 內捨貪慳, benefiting living beings on the outside 外利衆生, that is called giving 是名布施。”

In a prior lifetime, King Ashoka was a child playing on the beach. He saw the Buddha and made an offering of a cake made of sand and thereby planted the seeds to eventually become one of the most powerful monarchs in India.

The Great Shastra says: “Even though there are all sorts of fields of blessings, the Buddha’s is foremost, because it is replete with limitless Buddhas and Dharmas.”

The Great Shastra says that the Buddha’s field of blessings is pure, because he already uprooted the defiled grass of love and other afflictions. The pure precepts are the level ground. Great kindness and compassion create goodness and beauty: they can eradicate evil, deviant salty soil. The 37 wings of enlightenment are like the field partition dikes 溝塍. The ten powers, four fearlessnesses and four limitless wisdoms are like walls 牆. They can produce the Three Vehicles as well as the Nirvana fruition. Plant within this unsurpassed, incomparable field and you will obtain inexhaustible blessings.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, good men or women in the future may encounter the image of a Buddha, Bodhisattva, Pratyekabuddha, or wheel-turning king, and may give gifts or make offerings. Such persons will attain limitless blessings, will always be born among humans and gods,**

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**and enjoy supremely wonderful bliss. If they can dedicate that merit to the Dharma Realm, their blessings and profits will be beyond compare.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, good men or women in the future may encounter the image of a Buddha, Bodhisattva, Pratyekabuddha, or wheel-turning king, and may give gifts or make offerings.**

The Buddha told Ananda that teaching others to escape suffering is the respect field of blessings for living beings 敬田.

In the future, even making offerings to **images** will result in inconceivable blessings.

The two paths of humans and gods make it easier to obtain the Way. In the human realm, the bonds and servants are sparse 結使薄, and the mind of abhorrence can easily be produced 厭心易生. In the heavenly realm, wisdom is sharp 智慧利. That is why both paths are conducive to the Way.

The scriptures 光明疏 say that the human realm symbolizes the positions of the Three Worthies and the heavenly realm symbolizes the Ten Ground sagely positions.

The Great Shastra says: "Humans who practice giving, are well-known throughout the ten directions and respected and

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loved by sages. They are fearless in the human realm and will be reborn in the heavenly realm at death. They will ultimately enter Nirvana.”

**Such persons will attain limitless blessings, will always be born among humans and gods, and enjoy supremely wonderful bliss. If they can dedicate that merit to the Dharma Realm, their blessings and profits will be beyond compare.**

The Great Shastra says: “Wealth is the cause and condition for an evil mind. One should constantly renounce it. As for not giving, stinginess is the mark of inauspiciousness and doom 慳為凶衰相 • 為之生憂危畏. To indulge in it produces worry and fear. To wash it off with the water of giving 洗之以施水 • 則為生福利 will bring on wealth and benefit.”

According to the Great Shastra, the Buddha explains that giving Dharma is the foremost of the two kinds of giving. The giving of wealth, on the other hand, has limited retributions 果報有量. As for Dharma giving, its retribution is unlimited. Wealth giving produces Desire Realm retributions, whereas Dharma giving generates the Triple Realm retributions as well as transcendental retributions. If one does not seek fame, wealth, benefit, power and influence, but either gives for the sake of producing a great mind of kindness and compassion, or to free living beings’ from old age, sickness and suffering, then it is called pure giving.

*Sutra text:*

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**"Moreover, Earth Store, if good men or good women in the future encounter a Mahayana Sutra, and on hearing but one gatha or sentence of it, energetically and respectfully resolve, praise, venerate and make offerings, those people will attain great, limitless, and unbounded rewards. If they can dedicate that merit to the Dharma Realm, their blessings will be incomparable.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, if good men or good women in the future encounter a Mahayana Sutra, and on hearing but one gatha or sentence of it, energetically and respectfully resolve, praise, venerate and make offerings,**

The prior section described the Buddha field of blessings. This section describes how one should plant blessings with the Dharma.

**Mahayana Sutras** are extremely difficult to encounter. For instance, even if they are available in English, how many of them are properly explained?

Great Vehicle: Why is it called great? According to the Bringing Forth the Faith Shastra 起信論, there are three reasons:

- 1) Great substance: All dharmas and True Suchness are level and equal, neither increasing nor diminishing.
- 2) Great mark: The Tathagata's Treasury is replete with limitless nature merit and virtues.
- 3) Great use: It can produce all worldly and transcendental causes and fruitions of goodness.

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The MahaNirvana Sutra says that from hearing 聽聞, one can open one's Dharma Eye and thus draw near Nirvana's bliss. There are three kinds of people; those who are:

- 1) Blind 無目: i.e. ordinary folks. They often do not hear the Dharma.
- 2) One-eyed: i.e. the Two Vehicles. They hear for a short while but their minds do not dwell on it.
- 3) Two-eyed: i.e. Bodhisattvas who single-mindedly listen and practice accordingly.

Once the Dharma seeds have entered into the eighth consciousness, they will definitely help one accomplish the Way when conditions allow them to mature.

Wealth is limited, the Dharma is not.

**Those people will attain great, limitless, and unbounded rewards. If they can dedicate that merit to the Dharma Realm, their blessings will be incomparable.**

The Buddha told Ananda, "If one follows and listens to one gatha or sentence spoken by a wise teacher, then for one thousand kalpas even if one carries that teacher on one's shoulder or back, bows to, or makes offerings of all sorts of musical instruments, one still cannot repay that kindness. If one gives rise to disrespectful thoughts towards one's teacher and often speaks of his faults, this is extreme stupidity that will call for extreme suffering. This person will certainly fall into the evil paths. That is why I teach all of you disciples to constantly have a respectful and honoring mind, cherishing

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and valuing the Triple Jewel's deep and profound Dharmas. This will surely result in limitless great fruitions.”

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, if in the future good men or women encounter new Buddha stupas, temples, or sutras of the Great Vehicle and make offerings to them, gaze at them in worship, and respectfully make praises with joined palms; or if they encounter old temples, stupas, or sutras that are in ruins and either repair them themselves or encourage others to aid them, such people will be the kings of small countries throughout thirty continuous lives. The danapatti will always be Wheel-Turning Kings, who, moreover, will use the good Dharma to teach and transform those minor kings.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, if in the future good men or women encounter new Buddha stupas, temples, or sutras of the Great Vehicle and make offerings to them, gaze at them in worship, and respectfully make praises with joined palms; or if they encounter old temples, stupas, or sutras that are in ruins and either repair them themselves or encourage others to aid them, such people will be the kings of small countries throughout thirty continuous lives. The danapatti will always be Wheel-Turning Kings, who, moreover, will use the good Dharma to teach and transform those minor kings.**

Danapatti 檀越之人 refers to a lead donor.

## Explained by Master YongHua

Temples and sutras all have Dharma protectors. To make offerings by bowing or making repairs to the facilities or sutras accrues limitless blessings.

It should not be a surprise to anyone that a king is a person who made offerings to the Triple Jewel.

There were five kings who were very good friends. The most powerful king was called King Pǔ An (普安 Universal Peace). He practiced the Bodhisattva path. The other four kings indulged in deviant practices. King Pǔ An devised an expedient and invited his four friends over for a week of pleasure. At parting time, all were asked to say what they wished. One king wished that the moon, forests and trees would be luxuriant so that he could travel and admire the scenery. Another king desired to always be a king, venerated and respected by all. Another one wished for upright and handsome queens and princes, all living very happily together. Another one wished for his parents and retainers to behave according to the rules of propriety and morality. The great king said, “None of that will provide long lasting happiness!” They asked him what he wished for. He said, “I’d like neither to be born nor die, neither to suffer nor have pleasure, neither to be hungry nor thirsty, hot nor cold, and be at ease whether alive or dying.” They all exclaimed, “What fun is there in that?” All five decided to visit the Buddha and asked for instructions. The Great King requested the World Honored One to explain to them the Truth of Suffering. The Buddha widely preached about the eight kinds of suffering. After hearing them, the four small kings were ecstatic and certified to First Stage Arhatship. They all made obeisance to



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the Great King, saying, “You truly are a Great Bodhisattva who has been patiently teaching. We could have not obtained the sagely fruition without your help. Before, we were very attached to our palaces. Now, we look at them as toilets and get no pleasure from them.” All four then renounced their thrones and left the home-life to cultivate the Way. This was recorded in the Agama store.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, in the future, good men or good women may plant good roots in the Buddhadharma by giving, making offerings, repairing temples or monasteries, rebinding sutras, or they may plant good roots only as small as one strand of hair, one mote of dust, a grain of sand, or a drop of water. Merely by transferring the merit from such deeds to the Dharma Realm, those people's meritorious virtues will be such that they will enjoy supremely wonderful bliss for one hundred thousand lives. If they dedicate the merit only to their own family or relatives, or to their own personal benefit, they will receive as a result only three lives of bliss. By giving up one, a ten-thousand-fold reward is obtained. Earth Store, such are the causes and conditions of giving."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, in the future, good men or good women may plant good roots in the Buddhadharma by giving, making offerings, repairing temples or monasteries, rebinding sutras, or they may plant good roots only as small as one strand of hair, one mote of dust, a grain of**

## Explained by Master YongHua

**sand, or a drop of water.**

According to the Sutra of the Field of Blessings 福田經: “The Buddha told Shakra, amongst the 96 kinds of paths the Buddha Path is foremost; of the 96 kinds of Dharmas the Buddhadharma is most true; amongst the 96 kinds of sangha the Buddha’s sangha is most proper.” Why so? Because, since asamkhyeya kalpas in the past, Buddhas have made vows to seek the Truth 發願誠諦. They have sacrificed their own lives to accrue virtue. They made the oath to become living beings. They cultivated the six paramitas, the 10,000 practices etc... Their good roots are universally replete. Their acquired wisdom is perfected. The Triple Realm venerated gods cannot compare.

The Great Shastra states: “There are three kinds of good roots: having no greed, no hatred and no stupidity. All good dharmas grow from these three roots.”

Good roots are blessings.

In the Great Shastra, The Buddha and Ananda were doing the alms bowl round. At that time, the Brahma believer king passed an edict that imposed a fine of 500 gold pieces on those who gave food to or spoke with the Buddha. Thus they both returned with empty alms bowls. On their way back, they encountered an old servant who was holding a broken clay bowl that was filled with dirty and of inferior grade food. She saw the Buddha’s empty bowl and wanted to make an offering. The Buddha knew and extended his bowl towards her to beg. The old maid thus made the offering with a pure

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mind. The Buddha told Ananda that because of this offering, she would enjoy fifteen kalpas of blessings and pleasures in the human and god realms, never falling into the three evil paths. She later obtained a male body, left home and became a Pratyekabuddha.

The Analogies Sutra 譬喻經 relates another story: Outside Sravasti 舍衛城, there was woman with pure faith. The Buddha came to her door to beg for food. She placed food into the Buddha's bowl and bowed. The Buddha said: plant one and produce ten 種一生十, plant ten and produce one hundred, plant one hundred and produce 1,000, plant 1,000 produce 10,000, plant 10,000 produce 100,000. You will see the Way 得見諦道. Her husband did not believe, and silently criticized the Buddha, saying, "Ridiculous! How can one give one bowl of rice and obtain such blessings, and obtain Way?" The Buddha asked, "Can you see the 尼拘陀 tree 尼拘陀, nyagrodha? It is huge and yet its seed is tiny. Would you say that it is ridiculous that the tree is enormous and yet its seed is tiny? The reply was "No". The Buddha then said, "Similarly, the earth is insentient and yet its retribution force is great 地是無知・其報力尚爾. How much more for humans who are sentient. Joyfully offering rice to the Buddha, such blessings are even greater." The husband's mind lit up and he attained First Stage Arhatship.

Just then, a Brahman who overheard the conversation came up to the Buddha and said, "You are the crown prince of the Pure Rice king. How could you be begging for food and

## Explained by Master YongHua

“speak untrue words?” The Buddha stuck out his tongue which covered his entire face and reached his hair line saying, “Have you ever seen someone with this kind of tongue speak falsely yet?” The Brahman brought forth the mind of belief and said, “I don’t understand how giving a little can produce so much retribution.” The Buddha asked, “Have you ever seen a rare thing?” The Brahman said: “I once saw a Nyagrodha tree whose foliage covered 500 carts.” The Buddha asked, “How big was its seed?” to which the man replied, “It was one third of a mustard seed.” “How is that possible?” responded the Buddha. The Brahman said, “But it is the truth!” The Buddha then said, “I saw that woman make an offering to the Buddha with a pure mind. That was how she obtained such a great retribution. It is no different than that tree: a small cause can create a great fruition.” The Brahman’s mind suddenly opened up and he understood. He apologized and repented to the Buddha who spoke Dharma for him. He thus certified to First Stage Arhatship as well and loudly proclaimed, “All of you living beings, the Dharma Door of sweet dew has opened up. Why don’t you walk through it?” Many heard him and brought 500 gold pieces to the king, asking to make an offering to the Buddha. The king and his officials took refuge with the Buddha who spoke Dharma for them. They all obtained the Way fruitions. Thus the sutra says that we should practice giving, no matter little or how much.

There is another example in which Mahamaudgalyayana once saw a goddess sitting on a lotus that was one hundred yojanas wide. The flower was exquisitely wonderful and inferior to none. Furthermore, whatever that goddess needed, her palace, food and drinks and anything else, was available as

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she wished. He was curious and asked her how she got such blessings. She told him that after Kashyapa Buddha's Nirvana, his disciples built a jeweled stupa for his shariras. At that time, she was a woman and visited the stupa. She saw the Buddha's image, recited his name and removed the flower from her hair to make an offering to the image. That is how she obtained such blessings!

**Merely by transferring the merit from such deeds to the Dharma Realm, those people's meritorious virtues will be such that they will enjoy supremely wonderful bliss for one hundred thousand lives. If they dedicate the merit only to their own family or relatives, or to their own personal benefit, they will receive as a result only three lives of bliss.**

There are five causes and conditions for being part of a retinue or family:

- 1) Grudge 怨家: e.g. father or son have killed one another in the past.
- 2) Debtor 債主: e.g. a son misuses or wastes his father's wealth, indicating that his father owes him from a past life.
- 3) Repaying past debt 償債: e.g. a son gladly makes offerings to his parents.
- 4) Original vows 本願: e.g. having made vows in past lives, we now pay with joy.
- 5) True friend 真友: e.g. in a prior life they cultivated together and mutually assisted one another, and now they continue to mutually assist one another.

## Explained by Master YongHua

**By giving up one, a ten-thousand-fold reward is obtained. Earth Store, such are the causes and conditions of giving."**

Giving up one brings in 10,000 捨一得萬報: there is a multiplier in the act of giving.

**Such are the causes and conditions of giving:** The Analogy Sutra 譬喻經 says that in the past, there were two bhikshus who both attained First Stage Arhatship. One often practiced giving and going on alms bowl rounds to create blessings. The other however only sat in meditation and guarded himself 自守. He did not like to cultivate blessings. He even told his beggar colleague, "Why don't you sit? Emptiness brings self-mastery while Movement creates suffering 空自動苦." The blessings cultivator replied, "The Buddha often told the bhikshus to practice giving." Later when both men's lives came to an end, they both were reborn into an Elder's family. The blessings cultivator became a son: well served by servants, clothes and food in abundance, happy and blissful. The meditator was born as a servant, sitting alone on the ground, hungry, thirsty and in tears. Both had the knowledge of past lives. At that time, the elder's son told the servant son, "I did advise you to practice giving but you did not listen. It's of your own doing, what's the use of crying?" Later, both left the home-life, and both certified to Arhatship. The elder's son often sat in meditation and yet disciples would send clothes and food over. The monk who had been the servant boy went outside to beg, and yet no one would give to him; he often went hungry and endured thirst. Therefore, in light of these causes and conditions, practitioners of the Way

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should not only maintain precepts, meditate and recite, but should also cultivate blessings.

The Great Love of the Way Sutra 大愛道經 says that if you extinguish offenses this life, next life you will get some reprieve 今世滅罪・後世得申. If you have wealth but do not practice giving, then life after life you'll be poor and destitute 有財不施・世世受貧. Therefore, to enter the Way, one must have wisdom as a basis 故入道必以智慧為本. Wisdom must have blessings and virtue for a foundation 智慧必以福德為基. Just like a bird needs two wings to fly, a cart needs two wheels to go the distance. Conditions must be present to accomplish the proper cause. By ending the conditions (e.g. repaying one's debts), we accumulate the requirements for Proper Enlightenment. That is how we can be crossed over and open up our Buddha nature 緣了之資成正因・是度之助開佛性.

## CHAPTER 11: The Dharma Protection of an Earth Spirit

The previous two chapters discuss the Buddha and Dharma Jewels. This chapter relates on how the Earth Spirit brought forth the resolve to act as a dharma protector. When one cultivates, one needs a home and food and drink, all of which depend on the spiritual power of the earth spirit.

The name of the great **earth spirit** 地神 referred to in this chapter's title is "Firm and Stable 堅牢", which describes a primary attribute of the earth. Living beings are to the earth as insects are to a great ocean-going vessel: although they may run back and forth across its surface, they are unable to move the vessel itself at all. Just as a liner moves through the sea, so too does our planet move through space, with living beings on it.

Earth spirits are very numerous. However, in the Long Agama Sutras the foremost earth spirit, Firm and Stable, appeared before the Buddha, took a haughty and arrogant stance, and blustered that there were no spirits besides her, claiming that she alone was the supreme spirit. She was rather upset to hear the Buddha explain that there were also water and fire spirits as well as many other earth spirits. She finally heard the Buddha speak Dharma pertaining to these fire spirits, water spirits and wind spirits. The Buddha used many expedients to convince the earth spirit. When he explained the Four Noble Truths to her, she immediately obtained the purity of



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the Dharma Eye 遠塵離垢 • 得法眼淨, lost her haughtiness and took refuge with the Triple Jewel; she made the vow not to kill for the rest of her life; this vow includes all five precepts, up to not drinking or taking intoxicants. Thus she vowed that within the Buddhadharma that she would act as an upasika.

Just as the four elemental spirits exist in space, so too do the four elements exist within the bodies of living beings.

The term "earth" was explained earlier in the sutra, from the perspective of the phenomenon, in which all sorts of things can grow from the earth. Now, it will be explained from the perspective of noumenon, in particular, in terms of the four qualities of Nirvana: permanence, happiness, purity, and true-self. Because of the Dharma Door of Prajna Paramita, the earth is unchanging and so can be called permanent; because it supports the ten thousand things it can be said to have the virtues of happiness; because the earth gives birth to and supports all things, and since they are pure at birth, it has the virtue of purity; because the earth is independent and self-sufficient 地力自在, it can thus be said to have the virtues of the true self.

To be mindful of the Way and propagate the teachings, one needs to rely on the earth 意道弘經必藉地. To turn the Dharma Wheel requires food 轉法須賴食. This spirit feels that she is in charge of the earth and that food cannot grow without her 地由我主之 • 食亦由我生之.

## Explained by Master YongHua

In this chapter, the spirit of the earth makes a vow to protect those who recite this sutra and the name of Earth Store Bodhisattva.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time the earth spirit Firm and Stable spoke to the Buddha and said, "World-Honored One, from long ago I have personally beheld and bowed to limitless Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas, all of whom have inconceivable and great spiritual penetrations and wisdom, and all of whom take across many living beings. Among all the Bodhisattvas, Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, has deep and weighty vows. World-Honored One, Earth Store Bodhisattva has great affinity with beings in Jambudvipa. Likewise, Manjusri, Samantabhadra, Avalokitesvara, and Maitreya also produce by transformation, hundreds of thousands of bodies to cross over those in the Six Paths, yet their vows have an end. Earth Store Bodhisattva has made these vows to teach and transform living beings in the Six Paths throughout aeons as many as the number of sand grains in hundreds of thousands of millions of Ganges Rivers.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time the earth spirit Firm and Stable spoke to the Buddha and said, "World-Honored One, from long ago I have personally beheld and bowed to limitless Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas, all of whom have inconceivable and great spiritual penetrations and wisdom, and all of whom take across many living beings.**

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To behold 瞻視 is to gaze without moving one's eyes.

**Among all the Bodhisattvas, Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, has deep and weighty vows. World-Honored One, Earth Store Bodhisattva has great affinity with beings in Jambudvipa. Likewise, Manjusri, Samantabhadra, Avalokitesvara, and Maitreya also produce by transformation, hundreds of thousands of bodies to cross over those in the Six Paths, yet their vows have an end.**

**Earth Store Bodhisattva has great affinity with beings in Jambudvipa;** in fact he has already rescued myriads of them from the hells.

Here, except for Manjushri, Universal Worthy, Guan Yin and the other similar Great Bodhisattvas, compared with the other Bodhisattvas in light of vows may have an end or may not, Earth Store Bodhisattva's vows are unending.

**Manjusri** goes all over the ten directions to teach living beings to bring forth the Bodhi mind. He does not come to Jumbudvipa as often. The Foremost Shurangama Samadhi Sutra 首楞嚴三昧經 says that Manjushri was Dragon Species Venerated Buddha 龍種尊佛. For 72 times 100,000,000 kalpas he also was Pi Zhi Jia Buddha 七十二億・作辟支迦佛.

In the Manjushri Nirvana Sutra 文殊師利涅槃經, the Buddha told Bhadra, "Manjushri has great kindness and compassion. In the past he was born into the Tala country in a

## Explained by Master YongHua

Brahman family. At the moment of birth, he came out from his mother's right side onto a lotus flower. His body was of the purple golden color. He could speak upon birth and was covered by a jeweled canopy. He left the home-life under the Buddha and dwelled in the Foremost Shurangama samadhi. 450 years after the Buddha's Nirvana, he came to Snow Mountain and proclaimed the twelve divisions to 500 immortals, transformed them and enabled them to obtain non-regression. He then went to a tree in a lake and entered the Foremost Shurangama samadhi. His hair pores radiated a golden light that universally illuminated the worlds of the ten directions. When he crossed over living beings, he would manifest a purple golden colored eight foot tall body that was extremely adorned. He would be surrounded by 500 transformation Buddhas, each one would have 500 transformation Bodhisttvas as attendants. Manjushri would exhibit limitless spiritual penetrations. For instance, once a monk named Biàn Cōng 辯聰 from Wu Tai mountain entered the capital city. Before he left his old monk teacher gave him a letter and asked him to travel north of city to look for person named Bó Hé 勃荷(勃荷=薄荷 mint) and give the letter to him. When he arrived by the side of a river he heard some kids calling a pig with golden hair by the name of Bó Hé, so he gave the letter to this pig. The pig ate the letter, stood up like a person and died. Biàn Cōng then realized that his old teacher monk was Manjushri and the pig was Universal Worthy Bodhisattva. The owner was a butcher who only fed the pig with mint leaves for fifteen years. That was why it was named Bó Hé. Dharma Masters Hán Shān 寒山 and Shě Dé 捨得 are the same Bodhisattvas.”

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**Samantabhadra** is busy teaching all the Bodhisattvas to practice the ten thousand practices. He doesn't often stay in our World.

**Avalokitesvara** sends division bodies in the ten directions, responding to living beings' supplication by sound. He only manifests various transformation bodies to those with conditions. He therefore does not come that often.

**Maitreya** dwells in the Tushita Heaven and teaches the gods the patience of the non-production of Dharmas. Thus he doesn't come to our world that often either.

The Wisdom Victory Bodhisattva Sutra 慧上菩薩經 states that during the time of Ju Lóu Qín Buddha 拘樓秦佛, there was a bhikshu named No Defilement 無垢 who used to live in a mountain cave. Nearby, there were five immortals 神仙. Once a woman who avoided the rain by taking shelter in the cave. She left after it stopped raining. The five immortals noticed and claimed that the bhikshu broke precepts. The bhikshu heard and stepped onto empty space. The five immortals became ashamed and fearful. They bowed to the monk and repented. The monk was Maitreya.

Only **Earth Store Bodhisattva** constantly rescues living beings in the three evil paths. That is what the earth spirit witnessed.

**Earth Store Bodhisattva** has made these vows to teach and transform living beings in the Six Paths throughout aeons as many as the number of sand grains in hundreds of

## Explained by Master YongHua

**thousands of millions of Ganges Rivers.** He made those vows not only before one Buddha, but in fact, he drew near limitless Buddhas and made such vows in front of all of them.

*Sutra text:*

**"World-Honored One, as I regard the living beings of the present and future, I see those who make shrines of clay, stone, bamboo, or wood and set them on pure places in the southern part of their dwellings. They place within the shrines an image of Earth Store Bodhisattva, either carved, painted, or made of gold, silver, copper, or iron. They then burn incense and make offerings, gaze at, bow to and praise him. By doing these things they will receive ten kinds of advantages and benefits."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"World-Honored One, as I regard the living beings of the present and future, I see those who make shrines of clay, stone, bamboo, or wood and set them on pure places in the southern part of their dwellings. They place within the shrines an image of Earth Store Bodhisattva, either carved, painted, or made of gold, silver, copper, or iron. They then burn incense and make offerings, gaze at, bow to and praise him. By doing these things they will receive ten kinds of advantages and benefits."**

When we make offerings to the images of the Bodhisattva, we use the images for the sake of giving rise the mind of respect  
起敬之門.

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The practice of gazing at the image of a Buddha or Bodhisattva is similar to how men and women sometimes like to stare ceaselessly at each other for long periods. The gazing between men and women, however, is impure, since it is based on desire. On the other hand, when one gazes at a Buddha, after all desires have been transformed into wisdom, such long gazing is pure and natural, arises spontaneously, and is constantly practiced. That is why the sutra tells us to **gaze at, bow to and praise 瞻禮讚歎** Earth Store Bodhisattva.

One may look at an image, look at it again and again, and end up in Buddhahood through gazing. One can thus become one with Earth Store Bodhisattva.

*Sutra text:*

**"What are these ten? First, their lands will be fertile; second, their families and homes will be peaceful; third, their ancestors will be born in the heavens; fourth, those still alive will have benefit and will have their lifespan increased; fifth, they will obtain what they seek; sixth, they will escape the disasters of water and fire; seventh, they will avoid unforeseen calamities; eighth, their nightmares will cease; ninth, they will be protected by spirits in all their comings and goings; and tenth, they will encounter many causes of sagehood."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"What are these ten? First, their lands will be fertile; second, their families and homes will be peaceful; third, their ancestors will be born in the heavens; fourth, those still alive will have benefit and will have their lifespan in-**

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**creased; fifth, they will obtain what they seek; sixth, they will escape the disasters of water and fire; seventh, they will avoid unforeseen calamities; eighth, their nightmares will cease; ninth, they will be protected by spirits in all their comings and goings; and tenth, they will encounter many causes of sagehood."**

This section describes the benefits of making offerings to the Bodhisattva's image:

First, the sutra mentions the land where homes are built. Next it brings up a household where one can obtain peace and security. Then it is up to the spirits to protect and assist. Ultimately, the blessings are capped with encountering the sagely causes.

Those who worship Earth Store will have **fertile lands** 土地豐壤, 壤:無塊柔土 which means the soil is not clumpy and soft, by color it is good to look at, people can easily till or work on it 土:以萬物自生, and the myriad things can grow on the soil. Thus whatever they plant will bring forth an abundant harvest. A good harvest is of no major interest, however, if there is not a **peaceful home** 家宅永安 (家:擇吉託處) in which to enjoy it, and so the second of the ten benefits is the peace and happiness of the home. In addition to these benefits, those reverent members of the household mentioned above, as well as other relatives who have died, will be able to **be born in the heavens** 先亡生天, all as a result of having survivors who gaze at and worship Earth



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Store Bodhisattva. The Golden Light Sutra 例如金光明 says that if living beings make offerings to the sutras by adorning their homes, up to and including hanging one banner, streamer, canopy or one piece of cloth, then in the Desire heavens there already is a palace made of the seven gems waiting for them. At the end of life, they will be born there and be served by seven goddesses to enjoy their heavenly blessings. Night and day they will constantly enjoy inconceivable subtle and wonderful bliss.

It may be objected that there is no way to verify these rebirths in the **heavens**. If you cultivate and work hard, you will attain the penetration of the heavenly eye and be able to see into the heavens for yourself. In any case, the next of the ten benefits is something that can be seen, namely, having a prolonged **life span** 現存益壽.

All the above benefits affect others. The fifth one promises that one's own wishes will be fulfilled 所求遂意 (遂: 從志; 莫不隨意; 在內). If you wish to obtain a good spouse, it will happen; if you have left home and wish to be a good bhikshu or bhikshuni that will occur as well. Of course, it is best not to have any desire for these results, but if you do, they will come about.

The sixth benefit insures freedom from being drowned or burned 無水火災 (在外). The **fire** spirit is a great one-legged red bird who runs away as soon as his name, 方勉, is called. His last name fang means direction, and his first name

## Explained by Master YongHua

miǎn means urge. The **water** spirit, named 罔象, looks like a little boy with red eyes, black color, long claws and very long ears that droop to the ground.

The seventh of the ten benefits which accrue to those who worship Earth Store Bodhisattva is freedom from **calamities**, including insect infestations, and unexpected accidents 虛耗辟除 (耗:多而亂; 俗謂正月十六日 • 為耗磨日官司不開倉庫).

The eighth is that all **nightmares will cease** 杜絕惡夢. Sometimes people have dreams and wake up to find that they are immobilized by a large heavy creature who keeps them from moving or speaking. Those who have this sort of problem, caused by ghosts called Nightmare Ghosts 魘魅鬼, or Kumbhandas 鳩槃荼, will not have them again after they cultivate the worship of Earth Store Bodhisattva.

The ninth benefit is that such persons will always be **protected by spirits** in whatever they do 出入神護. If, for example, they are in an automobile accident and manage to escape without a scratch, it is because of such protection. In the scriptures 光明 it is said: “We, the Four Heavenly Kings and the 28 divisions of various ghosts and spirits, use the Heavenly Eye whose power exceeds that of the human eye, to constantly observe and protect Jambudvīpa.”

The above nine benefits are worldly. The tenth of the bene-

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fits is transcendent and insures that they will **encounter many causes of sagehood 多遇聖因**. This includes opportunities to hear lectures on sutras and to practice cultivation. In particular, one will encounter good knowing advisers. According to the Nirvana Sutra, a good knowing adviser makes one gradually distance oneself from the evil dharmas, and increase the good dharmas. For those who do not yet have samadhi, wisdom, liberation, knowledge and right views, they will be able to obtain them. For those who already have them, a good knowing adviser will help them grow and expand.

*Sutra text:*

**"World-Honored One, living beings of the present and future will obtain these advantages and benefits if in part of their dwelling they can make offerings in the prescribed manner."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"World-Honored One, living beings of the present and future will obtain these advantages and benefits if in part of their dwelling they can make offerings in the prescribed manner."**

Choose a place of worship in the southern part of your abode.

The Ten Wheels Sutra 十輪經 says: "Good men, suppose that there are people who take refuge for a hundred kalpas in utmost sincerity with Maitreya, Wonderful Auspicious, Guan

## Explained by Master YongHua

Yin, Universal Worthy, etc., as leaders of the Bodhisattvas as numerous as the Ganges' sands, and recite their names, are mindful, bow and make offerings in order to obtain what is sought, it is not as good as at an instant of sincerely taking refuge with Earth Store Bodhisattva. This is because this great knight, wishing to guide all sentient beings to accomplishment, has been practicing for a long time, has durable great vows, great kindness, and is valiantly vigorous, surpassing all Bodhisattvas.

*Sutra text:*

**Firm and Stable continued to speak to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, if good men or women in the future keep this sutra and an image of the Bodhisattva in their homes, and if in addition they recite the sutra and make offerings to the Bodhisattva, I shall use my spiritual powers to guard and protect them day and night so that all threat of floods, fire, robbery and theft, great calamities, and small accidents, will be eliminated."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**Firm and Stable continued to speak to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, if good men or women in the future keep this sutra and an image of the Bodhisattva in their homes, and if in addition they recite the sutra and make offerings to the Bodhisattva,**

This Earth spirit made a vow to protect places where this sutra is; spirits will invisibly guard it day and night.

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**I shall use my spiritual powers to guard and protect them day and night so that all threat of floods, fire, robbery and theft, great calamities, and small accidents, will be eliminated."**

**Great calamities**, such as dying in an auto accident, are of nine kinds:

1. Premature death.
2. Executed by the law.
3. Being robbed of one's essence and energy.
4. Being burned to death.
5. To drown.
6. Being devoured by wild beasts.
7. Falling from a steep cliff.
8. Being harmed by poison, voodoo, evil mantras, or corpse-raising ghosts.
9. Dying from hunger and thirst.

For more details regarding these nine great calamities, please see our Medicine Master Sutra.

**Small accidents**, such as receiving a little bit of an injury from a mishap, are discussed in greater detail in the Nine Calamities Sutra 九橫經. This includes all evil events 一切惡事, evil dreams, evil curses 惡夢蠱道, evil stars 五星諸宿, changes and disasters 變異災禍.

All the ghosts and spirits are on guard in all four directions.

In this day and age, many mishaps can occur. If one has wealth, it is wise to conceal it or else one may be robbed. In particular, being wealthy will tend to make one become arro-

## Explained by Master YongHua

gant and makes one prone to being robbed. As for inner wealth 自性寶 as opposed to outer wealth 外財, one tends to be robbed by ghosts and weird spirits 妖怪. Our sense organs are those thieves; they prevent us from becoming a Buddha.

The six roots can become dharma protectors if one knows how to use them. For example, if one looks at something and brings forth a proper thought, that is protecting Dharma. Otherwise, if one gives rise to a deviant thought, that is ghosts and demons. The Sixth Patriarch says, “With deviant thought, demons are at home 邪念之時魔在舍; with proper thought, the Buddha is in the hall 正念之時佛在堂.”

*Sutra text:*

**The Buddha told the earth spirit Firm and Stable, "There are few spirits who can match the great spiritual power you possess. Why? All the lands in Jambudvīpa receive your protection; all the grasses, woods, sands, stones, paddy fields, hemp, bamboo, reeds, grains, rice, and gems come forth from the ground because of your power. Moreover, your constant praise of the beneficial deeds of Earth Store Bodhisattva makes your meritorious virtues and spiritual penetrations hundreds of thousands of times those of ordinary earth spirits.**

*Sutra commentary:*

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

**The Buddha told the earth spirit Firm and Stable, "There are few spirits who can match the great spiritual power you possess. Why? All the lands in Jambudvīpa receive your protection; all the grasses, woods, sands, stones, paddy fields, hemp, bamboo, reeds, grains, rice, and gems come forth from the ground because of your power.**

All these things **come forth from the ground** and grow thanks to Firm and Stable's power. Because she used her powers to benefit living beings, these powers increase daily!

Growth is also a result of living beings' blessings. Further, by practicing the ten good deeds, one's blessings will grow in abundance. In contrast, if we practice the ten evils, we will reap the retribution of lacking external things 外物・悉不具足. When living beings practice a lot of the ten evils, the earth spirits no longer provide protection 減損萬物.

**Moreover, your constant praise of the beneficial deeds of Earth Store Bodhisattva makes your meritorious virtues and spiritual penetrations hundreds of thousands of times those of ordinary earth spirits.**

To **praise 稱揚** is Universal Worthy Bodhisattva's second vow. One sincere thought of praise is replete with the ten thousand virtues 蓋一念稱揚・萬德自具.

*Sutra text:*

**"If good men or women make offerings in the future to**

Explained by Master YongHua

**this Bodhisattva, or recite the Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva, and rely upon merely a single aspect of it in their cultivation, you should use your spiritual power to protect them and not allow disastrous or unwelcome affairs even to be heard, much less undergone, by them. Not only will those people be protected by you, but Brahma, Shakra, and their retinues, as well as the retinues of all the other gods, shall also protect them. Why will they obtain protection from worthies and sages such as these? It is all from having beheld and worshiped the image of Earth Store Bodhisattva, and from having recited this sutra of his past vows. They shall naturally leave the sea of suffering and ultimately certify to the bliss of Nirvana. These are the reasons they receive such great protection."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"If good men or women make offerings in the future to this Bodhisattva, or recite the Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva, and rely upon merely a single aspect of it in their cultivation, you should use your spiritual power to protect them and not allow disastrous or unwelcome affairs even to be heard, much less undergone, by them.**

We can **rely upon** 依: 憑此經功 this sutra's virtue.

Once one understands, one needs to practice. Or else, it is like talking of food and expecting it to fill one's stomach. There is a saying: "Saying that one has gained one yard, is not



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as good as practicing and obtaining one inch 說得一丈,不如行得一寸.” Without practice, one cannot certify to the fruition.

In particular, practice ONE Dharma (recite the Buddha’s name, hold mantras, meditate, etc...) single-mindedly and you’ll get there: “制心一處,無事不辦 If you can engage the mind fully in one task, there is nothing that cannot be accomplished.”

There was a Chan monk who investigated Chan. He went through seven sitting mats until he was into his eighties before he became enlightened.

Chan Master Tian Rán (natural) 丹霞天然禪師 had a disciple who was a buffalo herder. After leaving the home-life, even though he was unlearned and rather dense, he resolved to study the sutras. The Chan Master told him: “You should continue your studies, and bow to Guan Yin to seek wisdom. You shouldn’t rest until midnight.” So every day, the disciple worked like everyone else. At night, he bowed to the Bodhisattva until the wee hours of the night. He practiced this way for thirteen years. One night at around 9 pm, as he was bowing, he saw Guan Yin wave her hand. He then went to bed. His Master asked him why he stopped that early. He replied, “I was bowing until the Bodhisattva waved at me.” His shifu said, “All right, you should continue to bow until you’re given the signal.” Again, the Bodhisattva manifested in front of the monk, this time asking, “What is that you seek?” He replied, “I’m not sure. I think my Master will eventually tell

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me.” He continued to bow for three more years. Then the Bodhisattva asked him again, “What do you seek?” He replied, “Wisdom.” Guan Yin told him to drink the altar water offering in front of the Buddha. When he did, his body felt cool, the six organs purified, and he obtained great wisdom. He later became the abbot of the temple.

Just practice one dharma to the ultimate and you will taste success.

**Not only will those people be protected by you, but Brahma, Shakra, and their retinues, as well as the retinues of all the other gods, shall also protect them. Why will they obtain protection from worthies and sages such as these? It is all from having beheld and worshiped the image of Earth Store Bodhisattva, and from having recited this sutra of his past vows. They shall naturally leave the sea of suffering and ultimately certify to the bliss of Nirvana. These are the reasons they receive such great protection."**

If one practices with sincerity, the gods and the eight-fold division will act as Dharma protectors.

Practitioners of the Earth Store Bodhisattva Dharma, which includes gazing at and bowing to Earth Store Bodhisattva images; as well as reading and reciting this sutra, receive a lot of protection from the spirits and gods. Furthermore, **they shall naturally leave the sea of suffering and certify to the bliss of Nirvana.**

## CHAPTER 12: The Benefits from Seeing and Hearing

This chapter discusses the Sangha Jewel. The Sanskrit word sangha: Chinese: 僧伽耶, means harmonious assembly 和合眾. The Sangha Jewel is replete with limitless merit and virtue that can benefit living beings, whether through seeing or hearing.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time the World-Honored One emitted hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of great rays of light from the “door” of his crown: the White Ray, the Great White Ray, the Auspicious Portent Ray, the Great Auspicious Portent Ray, the Jade Ray, the Great Jade Ray, the Purple Ray, the Great Purple Ray, the Blue Ray, the Great Blue Ray, the Azure Ray, the Great Azure Ray, the Red Ray, the Great Red Ray, the Green Ray, the Great Green Ray, the Gold Ray, the Great Gold Ray, the Celebration Cloud Ray, the Great Celebration Cloud Ray, the Thousand-Wheeled Ray, the Great Thousand-Wheeled Ray, the Jeweled Wheel Ray, the Great Jeweled Wheel Ray, the Solar Disc Ray, the Great Solar Disc Ray, the Lunar Disc Ray, the Great Lunar Disc Ray, the Palace Ray, the Great Palace Ray, the Ocean Cloud Ray and the Great Ocean Cloud Ray.**

*Sutra commentary:*

## Explained by Master YongHua

**At that time the World-Honored One emitted hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of great rays of light from the “door” of his crown:**

The Buddha belongs to enlightenment. Once enlightened, all Dharmas manifest. The Buddhadharma belongs to the principles. Understanding the principles will help wisdom unfold, that is the Buddha. Dharma and Buddha in harmony, bring forth the Sangha which has limitless merit and virtue.

**Great 大** represents the Dharma Body virtue **法身德**, **rays 毫相** represent the Liberation virtue **解脫德**, and **light 光** represents Prajna virtue **般若德**.

The “**door**” of his crown **頂門上** refers to an invisible "opening" **無見頂相** in the crown of the Buddha's head, which is said to be "invisibly high.” It is not something exclusive to the Buddhas, however, since everyone may have such a "door." It is through this door that the Buddha-nature of a person skilled in cultivation of the Way leaves the body at death. When it leaves it goes wherever one wishes, but only on the condition that some successful work of cultivation took place during the person's life. This crown door **頂門** symbolizes the Wisdom of All Modes **一切道種智**, the superior cause and extreme fruitions **超因極果**.

The **light rays**, which illumined all beings in the nine Dharma realms below the Buddha, lit up hundreds of millions of worlds in order to reveal the importance of this sutra to living

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beings. These manifold light rays serve to remind us to put forth great effort in explaining, lecturing on, printing, and circulating this sutra.

The printing and circulation of sutras is a beneficial cause that leads to the development of wisdom. Since there are so few sutras and commentaries available in the West, it can be said that the ground is parched and waiting for the rain of Dharma. The circulation of sutras such as this one is the falling of the Dharma rain.

The names of the various rays of light indicate what the rays reveal and how they function. For example, the five colors represent the five paths:

- Blue 青: the hells.
- Yellow 黃: the hungry ghosts.
- Red 赤: the animals.
- White 白: the human and god realms.
- Black 黑: the asuras, if integrated into the other paths, they may be non-existent.

As for the light marks:

- The small color mark 少色像 • 譬二乘 symbolizes the Two Vehicles.
- The great color mark 大色像 • 譬通菩薩 symbolizes penetrative Bodhisattvas.
- The short color mark 短色像 • 譬別菩薩 symbolizes separate Bodhisattvas.

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- The long color mark 長色像 • 譬佛因果 symbolizes the Buddha cause and fruition.

**The White Ray, the Great White Ray, the Auspicious Portent Ray, the Great Auspicious Portent Ray, the Jade Ray, the Great Jade Ray, the Purple Ray, the Great Purple Ray, the Blue Ray, the Great Blue Ray, the Azure Ray, the Great Azure Ray, the Red Ray, the Great Red Ray, the Green Ray, the Great Green Ray, the Gold Ray, the Great Gold Ray, the Celebration Cloud Ray, the Great Celebration Cloud Ray, the Thousand-Wheeled Ray, the Great Thousand-Wheeled Ray, the Jeweled Wheel Ray, the Great Jeweled Wheel Ray, the Solar Disc Ray, the Great Solar Disc Ray, the Lunar Disc Ray, the Great Lunar Disc Ray, the Palace Ray, the Great Palace Ray, the Ocean Cloud Ray and the Great Ocean Cloud Ray.**

The **White Ray** 白毫相光, which is one of the 32 hallmarks, and the **Great White Ray** represent the power of Earth Store Bodhisattva and of this sutra to disperse the darkness in the world.

**White** 白: is 居眾色之先 the starting color of all the other colors. White can accept the other colors 白可受彩. It also gives rise to the color of all lights 起諸光之色.

**Ray** denotes: 1) That it can be discerned, and 2) That there is brightness 攬而可識曰相 • 熾然如燄曰光.

This **White Ray** represents giving. Just as white is the es-

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sence 本 of all colors, so is giving is the essence of all dharmas. Giving is replete with both the virtues of Liberation and Prajna. When the Three Wheel Substances are empty 三輪體空, then one can see the Real Mark of Giving which is replete with the three virtues. Then it is called **Great**.

The **Auspicious Portent Ray** and the **Great Auspicious Portent Ray** 瑞毫相光 bring auspiciousness.

The **Auspicious Ray** represents Precepts. When one stops evil, all good springs forth, making everything auspicious. **Great** is when one can see the true mark of precepts.

The **Jade Ray** and the **Great Jade Ray** 玉毫相光 refer to a kind of light that is like jade.

The **Jade Ray** represents Patience. From being patient, all evils are not produced; afflictions do not arise, just like jade without flaws. **Great** symbolizes the Patience of Non-Production of Dharmas, which entails seeing the true mark of Patience.

The **Purple Ray** and the **Great Purple Ray** 紫毫相光 are both of a purple color. The **Purple Ray** symbolizes vigor. By practicing all the good dharmas, and does not get them mixed up with evil dharmas 精. One progresses instead of regressing 進. **Great** is when body and mind, the two marks, are lost. Then one no longer sees any mark of vigor. One is apart from the false 精 and awakens to the principle 進.

## Explained by Master YongHua

**The Blue Ray and the Great Blue Ray 青毫相光** are a shade of blue 青 that is similar to black but lighter 似黑而淺。色則揚矣。

The **Blue Ray** symbolizes Chan. Blue belongs to the eastern direction 屬木, the leader of movement of the mass 群動之首。In the midst of movement, there is non-movement: that is Chan. Faced with a state, the mind does not move. **Great** symbolizes the samadhi of the Buddha, who is never without samadhi, the Shurangama samadhi of the Summit 首楞嚴定。

**The Azure Ray and the Great Azure Ray 碧毫相光** are that deep green color 深青色 that we know as azure 碧。The **Azure Ray** designates Prajna, which can empty all marks, break all attachments, accomplish All Wisdom 一切智, and cross to the other shore; just like the azure jade, which is foremost amongst jades. **Great** or transcendental Prajna, which itself serves as a guide for all dharmas, guiding us to the other shore. No Dharma is not the Buddhadharmas.

**The Red Ray and the Great Red Ray 紅毫相光** represent the southern direction which belongs to fire 南方屬火。The **Red Ray** represents Expedients which can unglue, untie knots, sever delusions and help one certify to the True, just like the red light that illuminates the thousand worlds. **Great** refers to the expedients of the One Vehicle. Expedients ena-



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ble the Three Vehicles to explain the Provisional to reveal the Actual 開權顯實.

**The Green Ray** and **the Great Green Ray** 綠毫相光 are a pure green that is in between blue and yellow. The **Green Ray** represents vows to enter the sea of birth and death to cross over those in suffering and difficulty, just as the green foliage can provide shade to living beings. This is no easy task. **Great** represents vowing to help living beings accomplish Buddhahood. If these great beings do not enter the hells, who will?

**The Gold Ray** and **the Great Gold Ray** 金毫相光 display the five types of colors that gold can have, among which yellow is foremost. Gold can be buried a long time and yet will not change its characteristics. It can be worked a hundred times and will not lose its weight. The **Gold Ray** represents Power. Use spiritual power to take people across, leave suffering and attain bliss, just like gold. **Great** designates the Buddha's Ten Powers, replete with all the power necessary to take living beings across.

**The Celebration Cloud** refers to the Knowledge paramita. The sea of the Buddhadharma can only be crossed with the Knowledge paramita, just like the celebration dharma cloud that covers the sea of birth and death. And **the Great Celebration Cloud** 慶雲毫相光 designates the Wisdom of All Modes 一切種智.

The **Thousand-Wheeled Light** 千輪毫光 reveals the ap-

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pearance of a thousand-spoked wheel such as is seen on the sole of the Buddha's feet.

The Shastra 十論 says that **wheel 輪** refers to the state of the light of the full moon which pervades empty space and illuminates everything without obstruction.

The **Thousand-Wheeled Ray** symbolizes kindness which can give the world all kinds of joy. **Great** refers to the great kindness of those without conditions, which can give living beings transcendental joy.

**The Jeweled Wheel Ray and the Great Jeweled Wheel Ray 寶輪毫光** manifest a wheel made from jewels. The **Jeweled Wheel Ray** represents compassion which can eradicate all kinds of worldly suffering. **Great** points to the great compassion of being of the same substance, which can eradicate both the suffering of both share section and change section birth and death.

**The Solar Disc Ray and the Great Solar Disc Ray 日輪毫光** are like the sun. The **Solar Disc Ray** represents joy: rejoicing about others' various merit and virtues, just like the sun lights up the great earth, benefiting and warming the ten thousand things. **Great** refers to great joy. When living beings become Buddhas before I do, I feel great joy, just like the great sun that universally illuminates the ten thousand things, enabling them to bear fruits.

**The Lunar Disc Ray and the Great Lunar Disc Ray 月輪**

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**毫光** are like light from the moon. The **Lunar Disc Ray** refers to renunciation; when both relatives and enemies are renounced, the mind is cool and fresh like the moon. **Great** refers to great renunciation: of all the merit and virtue that we accrue, we give it up for the sake of all sentient beings, just like the great moon which illuminates the earth and enables all to be cool and fresh.

**The Palace Ray and the Great Palace Ray 宮殿毫光** are a kind of light that reveals many palaces made of the seven gems. **Palaces 殿** have a hall that is tall and large, and are huge, awe-inspiring and lofty. Palaces are also conspicuous and beautiful. The **Palace Ray** refers to the Three Vehicles Bodhi, which is as adorned as a palace. **Great** symbolizes the One Vehicle Bodhi: to become the Dharma King who is at ease with all dharmas.

**The Ocean Cloud Ray and the Great Ocean Cloud Ray 海雲毫光** arises from the ocean. This cloud ray universally covers like the expansive ocean that seems endless. The **Ocean Cloud Ray** symbolizes the Three Vehicles Nirvana, covering the sea of birth and death. **Great** is the Great Nirvana that covers the great Dharma Realm sea.

*Sutra text:*

**After emitting such rays of light from the “door” of his crown, the Buddha spoke in wonderfully subtle sounds to the great assembly of gods, dragons, and other members of the Eightfold Division of ghosts and spirits, and to hu-**

## Explained by Master YongHua

**mans, nonhumans, and others: "Hear me now in the palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven as I praise Earth Store Bodhisattva's beneficial and inconceivable deeds among humans and gods, his transcendental deeds which planted the causes of his Sagehood, his certification on the Tenth Ground, and his ultimate irreversibility from Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**After emitting such rays of light from the "door" of his crown, the Buddha spoke in wonderfully subtle sounds to the great assembly of gods, dragons, and other members of the Eightfold Division of ghosts and spirits, and to humans, nonhumans, and others:**

At first, he smiled and emitted all kinds of light rays and spoke in subtle and wonderful sounds to praise the originally endowed nature virtue of all living beings.

Now, he emits light rays from the door on top of his head, speaking in subtle and wonderful sounds to praise living beings' cultivation virtue. Bodhisattvas give rise to practice from their nature 從性起修. When the practice virtue has merit 修德有功, the nature virtue manifests 性德顯現. The self-nature can produce limitless merit and virtue to benefit limitless living beings.

The nature virtue 性德 is what all living beings are intrinsically endowed with. The ensuing practice virtue 修德 relies on the power of the Buddha and the Dharma. That is seeing

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the Buddha and listening to the Dharma. The Buddha and Dharma must be united harmoniously 和合, phenomenon and noumenon interfused 事理圓融, for limitless merit and virtues to be produced to benefit living beings.

**Wonderfully subtle sounds** refers to the Four Types of Eloquence and the Eight Types of Sound.

The first of the Four Types of Eloquence is Unobstructed Eloquence of Meaning 義無礙辯. Although there is fundamentally no meaning to express, when the Buddha speaks Dharma to awaken beings to the state beyond words, the meanings and doctrines become infinite and multilayered in response to the needs of living beings.

The second kind of eloquence is Unobstructed Eloquence in Dharma 法無礙辯. Fundamentally there is just one kind of Dharma, but when the Buddha speaks, it manifests as limitless and unbounded Dharmas. Even though so many Dharmas appear, they eventually return to one, and so it is said, "One root disperses into the myriad numbers 一本散為萬數, the myriad numbers all return to the single root 萬數仍歸一本."

The third is Unobstructed Eloquence of Phrasing 辭無礙辯. When some people speak they finish in two or three short sentences; when the Buddha speaks, on the other hand, his words are like an inexhaustible torrent 滔滔不決.

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The fourth type of eloquence is the Eloquence of Delight in Speech 樂說無礙辯. It includes not only the enjoyment of speaking Dharma, but also the quality which causes those who hear it to enjoy listening.

In addition to the Four Types of Eloquence there are Eight Types of Sound:

1. The Ultimately Good Sound 極好音: The sound of the Buddha's voice is devoid of all the rasping, harsh qualities so often found among people. It is a harmonious sound, and the more one hears it the more we wish him to continue speaking.
2. The Gentle Sound 柔軟音: This sound is like the soft sound of a flowing brook, and it far surpasses the sound of orchestra music.
3. The Appropriate Sound 合適音: It's just right, making the listeners feel that there is nothing better.
4. The Venerable and Wise Sound 尊慧音: The Buddha's voice is such that we need not even mention listening to his words; just hearing his sound is sufficient to lead to the development of wisdom.
5. The Non-Yin Sound 不陰音: This is the "yin" that occurs in the compound yin and yang. Yin represents the passive, negative, feminine, earthy, and so forth. Yang represents the active, positive, masculine, heavenly, and so forth. Many people's voices show yin qualities, such as a high and delicate timbre. When the Buddha speaks there is no such quality in his sound.
6. The Non-misleading Sound 不誤音: Everything the

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Buddha says is right and proper.

7. The Far-Reaching Sound 深遠音: The Buddha's disciple Mahamaudgalyayana, foremost in spiritual powers, once passed through limitless millions of Buddha-lands to the east in order to find out where the Buddha's voice stopped. No matter how far he traveled, the voice was still just as if the Buddha were right by his ear.
8. The Inexhaustible Sound 不竭音: The sound of the Buddha's voice can never be cut off. His sound is continuous.

When the Buddha speaks he may use all, or only some, of these eight sounds. One person may hear the Far Reaching Sound while at the same time another hears the Gentle Sound. This is due to the differing natures of living beings.

**"Hear me now in the palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven as I praise Earth Store Bodhisattva's beneficial and inconceivable deeds among humans and gods, his transcendental deeds which planted the causes of his Sagehood, his certification on the Tenth Ground, and his ultimate irreversibility from Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi."**

**His transcendental deeds which planted the causes of his Sagehood 超聖因事.** His sagely wisdom unfolded very quickly.

The sutra text here makes a passing reference to the Ten **Grounds**, part of the fifty-five stages of a Bodhisattva's progress. This is discussed in great detail in the Avatamsaka Su-

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tra, as well as in the Shurangama Sutra.

The first of the ten is called the Ground of Joy 歡喜地. At this stage a Bodhisattva is always happy, even if beaten or reviled. Because of his constant joy he is able to reach the second ground, Leaving Defilement 離垢地. Leaving defilement means putting aside all greed for personal comfort and most particularly greed for sexual pleasure. When all desire and unclean thoughts have been put aside, the third stage, Emitting Light 發光地, is reached. Once light is emitted, it flares into the blazing light of wisdom. Consequently, the name of the fourth stage is Blazing Wisdom 發慧地. The fifth ground is called Difficult to Conquer 難勝地, since the Bodhisattva in this stage has such wonderful spiritual powers that he is invincible in debate and in spiritual powers. The sixth ground is called Manifestation 現前地, since there are further manifestations of wisdom and light. The seventh is called Far Traveling 遠行地 because the Bodhisattva can travel very far, and the eighth is called Unmoving 不動地. At the eighth stage the Bodhisattva does not need to move from his field of enlightenment and yet he is able to manifest and teach beings throughout the universe 不動道場而化十方的衆生. The ninth stage is called Good Wisdom 善慧地, and the tenth is known as Dharma Cloud 法雲地. At this stage the wisdom and compassion of the Bodhisattva cover beings like a great cloud that shades the earth.



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In the above passage of text the Buddha praised Earth Store Bodhisattva's irreversibility from **Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi** 無上正等正覺, the Utmost, Right, and Equal Enlightenment. Although Earth Store Bodhisattva has not yet become a Buddha, the degree of his enlightenment is equal to that of the Buddhas.

There are varying degrees of enlightenment. Those of the Two Vehicles, Sound Hearers and those enlightened to causation, are surpassed by the enlightenment of the Bodhisattvas. The enlightenment of the Bodhisattvas is said to be right and equal 正等, since it can be said to be equal to that of the Buddhas. Such enlightenment, however, is still not the highest degree, since it is surpassed by that of the Buddha. Thus only Buddhas are said to have the Unsurpassed 無上, Right, and Equal Enlightenment.

The term "irreversibility" 不退 refers to the Three Types of Non-retreating. The first of these is Irreversibility of Position, so called because there is no retreat to the practices of the Two Vehicles. The second is Irreversibility of Practice, since there is no retreat to the non-cultivating behavior of common people. The third is Irreversibility of Thought, so called because one's thought is firmly fixed on the practice of the Great-Vehicle Dharmas.

Earth Store Bodhisattva's attainments are **inconceivable**, meaning he has great spiritual powers. He has reached the level of **sagehood**, and hence has knowledge powers. Because when he was at the **Tenth Ground**, he did help others

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all reach this fruition. And because he has attained **irreversibility**, he can also enable living beings to be irreversible on the Path to Bodhi.

*Sutra text:*

**As this was said, in the midst of the assembly a Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, named Contemplator of the World's Sounds, arose from his seat, knelt on one knee, and with palms together said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, is replete with great compassion and pities living beings who suffer for their offenses. In thousands of tens of thousands of millions of worlds he manifests thousands of tens of thousands of millions of transformation bodies. His meritorious virtues and awesome spiritual powers are inconceivable.**

**"I have heard the World-Honored One and the limitless Buddhas of the ten directions praise Earth Store Bodhisattva with different mouths but a common sound, saying that even if all the Buddhas of the past, present, and future were to speak of his meritorious qualities, they still could not finish speaking of them. Moreover, I have previously heard the World-Honored One tell the great assembly that he wished to praise Earth Store Bodhisattva's beneficial acts. World-Honored One, for the sake of living beings of the present and future, please explain Earth Store Bodhisattva's inconceivable deeds. Cause the gods, dragons, and the others of the Eightfold Division to gaze in worship and attain blessings."**

*Sutra commentary:*

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

As this was said, in the midst of the assembly a Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, named Contemplator of the World's Sounds, arose from his seat, knelt on one knee, and with palms together said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, is replete with great compassion and pities living beings who suffer for their offenses. In thousands of tens of thousands of millions of worlds he manifests thousands of tens of thousands of millions of transformation bodies. His meritorious virtues and awesome spiritual powers are inconceivable.

When the Contemplator of the World's Sounds, Avalokitesvara, says that he has heard the **Buddhas of the ten directions praise Earth Store Bodhisattva with different mouths but a common sound**, there are two possible explanations. One is that each Buddha spoke at a different time and place, yet each of them said exactly the same words; the other is that all the Buddhas simultaneously made this statement. All Buddhas can speak of Earth Store Bodhisattva's merit and virtues endlessly.

**Contemplator 觀** refers to that wisdom that can contemplate. One can use the three wisdoms to illuminate the proper nature and examine root and branch tips **察本末也**. The World's Sound **世音** refers to the state being contemplated: namely, the ten thousand images that are separate and different **所觀之境 • 萬像隔別**.

According to the Compassionate Flower Sutra **悲華經**, in

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the past, No Fighting Mindfulness 無爭念 king's first crown prince 太子, called Not Blinking 不瞬, brought forth the Bodhi resolve and made the four vast oaths. That is why Jeweled Treasury 寶藏 Buddha told him, "You contemplate the gods and humans as well as the three evil paths, all living beings, and produce the mind of great compassion, wishing to end 斷 all their affliction and suffering 苦惱. You thus wish them to dwell in peace and bliss 住安樂. I hereby call you 'One who contemplates the world's sounds'. When you practice the Bodhisattva path, there already are a hundred thousand limitless hundred million nayutas 百千無量億那由他衆生 of living beings who obtained liberation from suffering thanks to you. When you are a Bodhisattva, you could already do great Buddha's work."

**"I have heard the World-Honored One and the limitless Buddhas of the ten directions praise Earth Store Bodhisattva with different mouths but a common sound, saying that even if all the Buddhas of the past, present, and future were to speak of his meritorious qualities, they still could not finish speaking of them. Moreover, I have previously heard the World-Honored One tell the great assembly that he wished to praise Earth Store Bodhisattva's beneficial acts. World-Honored One, for the sake of living beings of the present and future, please explain Earth Store Bodhisattva's inconceivable deeds. Cause the gods, dragons, and the others of the Eightfold Division to gaze in worship and attain blessings. "**

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

Although the meritorious qualities derived from worshipping the Buddhas are limitless, we can select five representative benefits as examples. Those who bow to and worship Buddhas and Bodhisattvas gain a pleasing appearance 端正圓滿, a physiognomy that causes anyone who sees them to feel respect and like them. The second benefit is that of obtaining of a clear and resonant voice 得妙聲. The third is the attainment of wealth and honor 多饒財. The fourth is birth in an honorable family 生處高貴. The fifth is rebirth in the heavens 生天上. That is why when humans and gods bow to Earth Store Bodhisattva, they will naturally obtain blessings.

The Buddha's verse says 佛偈云 that life is like a lamp in the wind. One does not know when it will go out.

*Sutra text:*

**The Buddha replied to the Bodhisattva Contemplator of the World's Sounds, "You have great affinity with the Sa-ha World. If gods, dragons, men, women, spirits, ghosts, or any other beings who suffer for offenses within the Six Paths hear your name, see your image, yearn for you, or praise you, they will definitely become irreversible in the unsurpassed Way. They will always be born among humans and gods and there fully experience wonderful bliss. When the fruit of their causes is about to ripen, they will encounter Buddhas and be given their predictions of enlightenment. You now have great compassion and pity for**

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**living beings, for gods, dragons, and the others of the Eightfold Division. Listen as I proclaim the inconceivable benefits of Earth Store Bodhisattva. Listen attentively. I will now talk about it."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The Buddha replied to the Bodhisattva Contemplator of the World's Sounds, "You have great affinity with the Sa-ha World.**

Guan Yin has **affinity** with all types of beings in our world. They often call to her for help in times of difficulties.

**If gods, dragons, men, women, spirits, ghosts, or any other beings who suffer for offenses within the Six Paths hear your name, see your image, yearn for you, or praise you, they will definitely become irreversible in the unsurpassed Way.**

Have faith in Guan Yin and you too will certainly realize the Way.

**They will always be born among humans and gods and there fully experience wonderful bliss. When the fruit of their causes is about to ripen, they will encounter Buddhas and be given their predictions of enlightenment. You now have great compassion and pity for living beings, for gods, dragons, and the others of the Eightfold Division. Listen as I proclaim the inconceivable benefits of Earth Store Bodhisattva. Listen attentively. I will now talk about it."**

## **The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva**

One encounters Guan Yin thanks to the combination of:

1. Her wisdom and great compassion as a cause.
2. Living beings' suffering as conditions.

*Sutra text:*

**The Contemplator of the World's Sounds said, "So be it, World-Honored One, I will be pleased to hear."**

**The Buddha told the Bodhisattva Contemplator of the World's Sounds, "In worlds of the present and future there will be gods whose heavenly merit has ended, who manifest the five signs of decay and who may be about to fall into the Evil Paths. When those signs appear, if those gods, whether male or female, see Earth Store Bodhisattva's image, hear his name, gaze at him or bow once to him, they will increase their heavenly blessings, experience great happiness, and never again fall into the retributions of the Three Evil Paths. How much more will limitless, boundless merit, virtue, and blessings accrue to those who see and hear the Bodhisattva and use incense, flowers, clothing, food, drink, jewels, and necklaces as offerings."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The Contemplator of the World's Sounds said, "So be it, World-Honored One, I will be pleased to hear."**

**The Buddha told the Bodhisattva Contemplator of the World's Sounds, "In worlds of the present and future there will be gods whose heavenly merit has ended, who**

**manifest the five signs of decay and who may be about to fall into the Evil Paths.**

While the heavenly blessings are extremely blissful. For example, the gods' bodies are soft and supple, refined and smooth 其身體柔軟細滑. Their imminent fall is marked by certain signs. When these signs appear, they feel extreme suffering that is not different from the hell suffering. The heavenly blessings are not unlike honey poison: first it is sweet but suffering is looming. There could be five major 大 signs, five minor 小 signs, or seven signs.

The five major signs 五大衰相 are:

- 1) The ever-fresh flower headdresses of the gods begin to wilt 華冠光萎. The gods' hats are made of flowers.
- 2) The permanently clean clothes of the gods become soiled 衣著塵垢. Normally, their clothes never get soiled, yet at their end they will get dirty 衣服今穢.
- 3) The gods never sweat, but when signs of their decay occur, they perspire under their arms 兩腋流汗.
- 4) The normally fragrant bodies of the gods begin to stink when the signs of decay appear 體生臭氣.
- 5) The gods normally sit still and composed, as if in samadhi. When the signs of decay appear they begin to fidget 不樂本坐.

Once these signs have occurred, the gods fall and may be re-born to the lower realms as humans, ghosts, animals, hell dwellers, and so forth.



## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

The Proper Dharma Mindfulness Sutra 正法念經 says that as their blessings are ending, afflictions arise 業盡懷憂惱. The prospect of having to renounce their goddesses causes them great suffering 捨離諸天女・退時大苦惱・不可譬喻. Thus they need to seek for help 故須求救也. If they fall into evil paths, they must follow its own karmic force 或有墮惡道者・隨其業力.

In addition to the five major signs of decay, there are five minor signs, which are as follows:

1. The subtle voices of the gods, which are normally very beautiful and wonderful, become coarse 樂聲不起.
2. The shining light of their bodies fades 身光微昧.
3. Normally, when bathing, their bodies usually repel water like glass. When the signs of decay appear, they become soaked by water (rain) 浴水著身.
4. They become unable to renounce certain states of existence and become strongly attached to them 著境不捨.
5. They become weak and devoid of energy 身虛眼瞬. At this time their eyes, which normally remain fairly steady, begin to flit about.

In addition to the five major and five minor **signs of decay**, there is yet another list giving seven signs of decay. Some of these repeat those in the above lists but since they are often given as a unit, they will be treated as such here.

1. The (body) light of the gods is extinguished 光滅.

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2. The flowers (on top of their heads) fade 華萎.
3. Their beautiful form changes and they become unattractive 色變.
4. Their clothing catches dust 衣塵.
5. They perspire 腋汗.
6. Their bodies become thin 身瘦. Normally, they do not need to eat anything at yet they are not thin.
7. They cannot remain still in their seats 離本坐.

A Sutra records that a god in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three saw the above-mentioned seven signs of decay, and at end of his life fell to earth and became a suckling pig 作豚.

**When those signs appear, if those gods, whether male or female, see Earth Store Bodhisattva's image, hear his name, gaze at him or bow once to him, they will increase their heavenly blessings, experience great happiness, and never again fall into the retributions of the Three Evil Paths.**

When they **gaze** at the Bodhisattva's image, they must fix their gaze as if not able to look away from it for an instant.

If, when these signs of decay are manifested, the gods are able to worship Earth Store Bodhisattva, their **blessings** will not only continue, but increase 轉報增福, and they will not fall into the lower realms 衰相滅.

The Saha World has one billion Shakras. One of them saw

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

the five signs of decay appear. He sought the Buddha's instructions. The Buddha spoke Dharma for him, enabling him to understand the Truth 見諦. The five signs of decay instantaneously disappeared and he immediately obtained more **heavenly blessings**. He was ecstatic and jumped up and down with joy. He uttered the following praise: "The Great Immortal should know that I, sitting here, have obtained again heavenly blessings. Please be mindful and support me!" According to the Long Agama Sutra, there are five types of blessings that the gods can increase: 1. Heavenly lifespan, 2. Heavenly form, 3. Heavenly reputation, 4. Heavenly bliss, and 5. Heavenly awesome deportment.

There was another god who had the appearance of a suckling pig 豚. He was naturally very unhappy with his fate but did not know what to do. The other gods urged him to seek help from the Buddha. The Buddha told him that in order to eradicate his causal offenses, he should often recite the three refuges 自歸依. After doing so for seven days, he was reborn in the human realm in the household of an elder. At birth, he would kneel three times 跪三歸. At the age of seven, he was playing by the road side and met Shariputra and Mahamaudgalyayana. He bowed to them and invited the Buddha to come to his house for a visit. When the Buddha spoke Dharma for him, he, his parents and relatives all obtained non-regression 阿惟越致.

**How much more will limitless, boundless merit, virtue, and blessings accrue to those who see and hear the Bodhisattva and use incense, flowers, clothing, food, drink, jew-**

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els, and necklaces as offerings."

Making offerings can result in even greater benefits.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Contemplator of the World's Sounds, if living beings in the Six Paths, present and future, are on the verge of death and hear the name of Earth Store Bodhisattva pass through their ear a single time, they will never endure the suffering of the Three Evil Paths. How much more will this be true if the parents and relatives use the dying man's houses, wealth, jewels, and clothing to commission the carving or painting of Earth Store Bodhisattva's image. Or if that sick person has not yet died and sees or hears that, on his behalf, relatives have used his house, jewels, and so forth for the carving or painting of Earth Store Bodhisattva's image, because of that merit, he may quickly be cured and his lifespan prolonged, even if his karmic retribution is such that he should have undergone severe sickness. If that person's retribution is such that his life is at an end and because of all manner of offense obstacles and karmic obstructions he should fall into the Evil Paths, because of receiving such merit he will be born among humans and gods, and there enjoy extremely wonderful bliss. All his obstacles due to offenses will be eradicated.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Contemplator of the World's Sounds, if living beings in the Six Paths, present and future, are on the**

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**verge of death and hear the name of Earth Store Bodhisattva pass through their ear a single time, they will never endure the suffering of the Three Evil Paths.**

In other words, while many people are primarily concerned with obtaining rebirth to Amitabha's Pure Land upon their death, savvy people should also consider reciting this Bodhisattva's name when on the verge of death as a form of insurance against falling into the evil paths.

**How much more will this be true if the parents and relatives use the dying man's houses, wealth, jewels, and clothing to commission the carving or painting of Earth Store Bodhisattva's image. Or if that sick person has not yet died and sees or hears that, on his behalf, relatives have used his house, jewels, and so forth for the carving or painting of Earth Store Bodhisattva's image, because of that merit, he may quickly be cured and his lifespan prolonged, even if his karmic retribution is such that he should have undergone severe sickness.**

**Karmic retribution:** Originally he is supposed to receive heavy retribution, and should have sickness ghosts and karmic retributions come harass him, but **because of that merit, he may quickly be cured and his lifespan prolonged.**

**If that person's retribution is such that his life is at an end and because of all manner of offense obstacles and karmic obstructions he should fall into the Evil Paths, because of receiving such merit he will be born among humans and gods, and there enjoy extremely wonderful bliss. All his obstacles due to offenses will be eradicated.**

## Explained by Master YongHua

The Great Compilation Sutra 大集經 tells us that cultivating a good mind 修一善心 can destroy 破 the hundred ten thousand kinds of evil, just as a small piece of Vajra can destroy Mount Sumeru, a small fire can burn everything, or a little bit of poison can harm living beings. Small goodness can destroy great evil.

We should repent. Those who repent will abound in goodness and possess vast blessings.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Contemplator of the World's Sounds, in the future a man or woman may lose father, mother, brothers, or sisters while he or she is still an infant or three years old, or five years old, or under ten years of age. When fully grown the person may think of these parents and relatives but does not know into what path or world or heaven they have been born. If that person is able to carve or paint an image of Earth Store Bodhisattva, hear his name, or gaze upon and worship him; and if he can continue to do so from one through seven days, constantly hearing his name, seeing his image, beholding, worshipping, and making offerings without retreating from his initial resolve, then that person's relatives will be liberated for many aeons. Even though their karma might be such as to cause them to fall into Evil Paths for kalpas, they will be quickly reborn in the heavens, where they will receive supremely wonderful bliss. This results from their receiving the meritorious virtues established by that son, daughter, brother, or sister who has carved or painted an image**

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**of Earth Store Bodhisattva and then gazed upon it and worshiped it.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Contemplator of the World's Sounds, in the future a man or woman may lose father, mother, brothers, or sisters while he or she is still an infant or three years old, or five years old, or under ten years of age.**

**Infants 乳哺時** are still fed on milk, often until the age of three.

**When fully grown the person may think of these parents and relatives but does not know into what path or world or heaven they have been born.**

He does not know **into what path**, of the six paths, **or world**, which country or which world in the ten directions, **or heaven**, of the six Desire Heavens. his relatives have been born.

**If that person is able to carve or paint an image of Earth Store Bodhisattva, hear his name, or gaze upon and worship him; and if he can continue to do so from one through seven days, constantly hearing his name, seeing his image, beholding, worshipping, and making offerings without retreating from his initial resolve, then that person's relatives will be liberated for many aeons.**

**From one through seven days** refers to the time period required until there is a response.

## Explained by Master YongHua

To be successful, he must not be **retreating from his initial resolve**, from the time he first brought forth the resolve to bow to the Bodhisattva's image. This is of critical importance! The majority of us fall off by the way side!

**Even though their karma might be such as to cause them to fall into Evil Paths for kalpas, they will be quickly re-born in the heavens, where they will receive supremely wonderful bliss. This results from their receiving the meritorious virtues established by that son, daughter, brother, or sister who has carved or painted an image of Earth Store Bodhisattva and then gazed upon it and worshiped it.**

This is similar to rich parents who hear of their children being in trouble and use their vast resources to help them.

*Sutra text:*

**"If that person's relatives have already been born in the heavens on the strength of their own merit and are already experiencing supremely wonderful bliss, upon receiving this additional merit, the causes for their attaining sagehood will increase and they will experience limitless bliss. If, in addition, that person is able to behold and worship Earth Store Bodhisattva's image single-mindedly during three weeks, reciting his name a full ten thousand times, the Bodhisattva may manifest a limitless body and tell that person the name of the world in which his relatives have been born. The Bodhisattva may manifest great spiritual power and personally lead him to those worlds in a dream to see his relatives."**



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*Sutra commentary:*

**"If that person's relatives have already been born in the heavens on the strength of their own merit and are already experiencing supremely wonderful bliss, upon receiving this additional merit, the causes for their attaining sagehood will increase and they will experience limitless bliss.**

This Dharma Door can make the rich richer and the privileged more blessed. Let's not forget about them!

**If, in addition, that person is able to behold and worship Earth Store Bodhisattva's image single-mindedly during three weeks, reciting his name a full ten thousand times, the Bodhisattva may manifest a limitless body and tell that person the name of the world in which his relatives have been born. The Bodhisattva may manifest great spiritual power and personally lead him to those worlds in a dream to see his relatives."**

Before, the sutra mentioned only one bow. Now it talks about **three weeks** in order to see those relatives. During this three-week period, one should be very respectful and single-mindedly gaze at and bow to his image, recite his name for a full ten thousand times with utmost sincerity. At that time, the ten thousand offenses are eradicated and the ten thousand blessings are accrued: there will be a response with the Way 感應道交.

A **limitless body 無邊身**: There is no place where he can-

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not manifest his body. Also, he can manifest any body of any living being 無類不現身.

Because living beings, even those who believe in the Buddha, may sometimes be quite confused, the Bodhisattva does not always come to them in their waking state but sometimes appears in **dreams**.

Ordinary people who have many outflows and cannot enter samadhi can only see their relatives in dreams. Relying on the his great spiritual powers, the Bodhisattva may lead their consciousness to those worlds to see those relatives.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, if one is able to recite the Bodhisattva's name one thousand times a day every day for one thousand days, the Bodhisattva will command the ghosts and spirits in the vicinity of that person to guard and protect him for his entire life. In this world his clothing and food will be abundant and he will have no suffering from sickness. No accidents will occur in his house, much less affect his person. Finally, the Bodhisattva will rub his crown and bestow a prediction of enlightenment upon him.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, if one is able to recite the Bodhisattva's name one thousand times a day every day for one thousand days, the Bodhisattva will command the ghosts and spirits in the vicinity of that person to guard and protect him for his entire life.**

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**To recite the Bodhisattva's name one thousand times a day every day for one thousand days:** or for about three years.

The Bodhisattva will **command the ghosts and spirits**, sending the earth spirit and various ghosts and spirits to protect you this lifetime.

**In this world his clothing and food will be abundant and he will have no suffering from sickness. No accidents will occur in his house, much less affect his person. Finally, the Bodhisattva will rub his crown and bestow a prediction of enlightenment upon him.**

**Accidents 横事**, small or big, will not enter his doors.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Contemplator of the World's Sounds, if a good man or woman in the future wishes to practice great kindness and compassion to rescue all living beings and wishes to cultivate unsurpassed Bodhi in order to leave the Triple World, and if that person sees Earth Store Bodhisattva's image, hears his name, and sincerely takes refuge with and relies on him; or, uses incense, flowers, clothing, jewels, food, and drink to make offerings; or gazes at and worships him, his wishes will quickly be realized and he will never have any obstructions.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Contemplator of the World's Sounds, if a**

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**good man or woman in the future wishes to practice great kindness and compassion to rescue all living beings and wishes to cultivate unsurpassed Bodhi in order to leave the Triple World,**

Such people would be rare indeed!

**And if that person sees Earth Store Bodhisattva's image, hears his name, and sincerely takes refuge with and relies on him; or, uses incense, flowers, clothing, jewels, food, and drink to make offerings; or gazes at and worships him, his wishes will quickly be realized and he will never have any obstructions.**

Earth Store Bodhisattva is called the King of Vows not only because he made great vows, but also because he can help living beings accomplish their vows.

The **Triple World** refers to the Desire Realm, Form Realm and Formless Realm.

In a Chinese temple 宋空觀寺 there was a monk who took refuge with Earth Store Bodhisattva. Each month, he observed the ten vegetarian days, copied images of the Bodhisattva, bowed and made offerings to him, praying for him to make an apparition. After three full years, a small guest shami passed the night in the temple. The monk went outside and spoke with the shami. They spoke for a few moments and suddenly the shami disappeared. The temple people asked the monk what the shami said. The monk told them the shami had said, “Your wonderful wish has now come to fruition, why is your resolve that short-sighted?” The monk un-

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derstood and immediately brought forth the resolve for unsurpassed Bodhi. He later dreamt of the Bodhisattva telling him, "That shami was me. You sought to see me but did not bring forth the resolve for Bodhi. That is why I came to remind you. You copied a lot of my images, will thus never fall into the evil paths. At the end of your life, you will be reborn to the Tushita Heaven and will see Maitreya who will then bestow a prediction of Enlightenment upon you. I accord with your wishes, like shadow follows form, or water conforms to the vessel." After he woke up, he wept a storm from gratitude.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Contemplator of the World's Sounds, if good men and women in the future wish to fulfill hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of wishes and to succeed in as many undertakings regarding both present and future, they should simply take refuge with, gaze in worship at, make offerings to, and praise the image of Earth Store Bodhisattva. In such a way, their wishes and goals will certainly be realized. Moreover, they may ask Earth Store Bodhisattva, the Great Kind and Compassionate One, to eternally protect them. In a dream the Bodhisattva will rub their crowns and bestow predictions of enlightenment.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Contemplator of the World's Sounds, if good men and women in the future wish to fulfill hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of wishes and to**

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**succeed in as many undertakings regarding both present and future, they should simply take refuge with, gaze in worship at, make offerings to, and praise the image of Earth Store Bodhisattva.**

**Hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of wishes** refers to all sorts of wishes that can span the three periods of time.

**In such a way, their wishes and goals will certainly be realized. Moreover, they may ask Earth Store Bodhisattva, the Great Kind and Compassionate One, to eternally protect them. In a dream the Bodhisattva will rub their crowns and bestow predictions of enlightenment.**

**Goals** refer to what is sought.

In a temple 宋千福寺 in China, there was a statue of Earth Store Bodhisattva that was one meter and six centimeters 一尺六寸 tall. No one knows who made it, or when it was made. However, the statue was very magical. Staying for the night and bowing and repenting would definitely bring about a response. Once there was a lay person who was 37 years old who had lost all of his teeth. He came to the statue, made an offering of food 段食 and prayed. At night he dreamt the statue's image came and rubbed the crown of his head. His whole body was very peaceful and he experienced light ease. When he awoke, 38 teeth had grown.

*Sutra text:*

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**"Moreover, Contemplator of the World's Sounds Bodhisattva, good men and women in the future may have high regard for the Great-Vehicle Sutras and make the inconceivable resolve to read and recite them from memory. Although they may encounter a good master who instructs them, so that they may become familiar with the texts, whatever they learn they forget in a short while, so that after months and years they are no longer able to read or recite them from memory. It is because such persons' karmic obstructions from past lives have not yet been eradicated that they do not have the proper disposition to read and recite sutras of the Great Vehicle. Upon hearing Earth Store Bodhisattva's name or seeing his image, such people should wholly use their original minds and respectfully state their situation to the Bodhisattva. They should then take incense, flowers, clothing, food, and drink, as well as all manner of playthings, and make offerings to the Bodhisattva. They should place a bowl of pure water before the Bodhisattva's image for one day and one night. Afterwards, placing their palms together, let them state their request and then drink the water while facing south. As the water is about to enter their mouths they should be particularly sincere and solemn. After drinking the water they should abstain from the five pungent plants, wine, meat, all sexual activity, and false speech, as well as all killing and harming, for one to three weeks.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Contemplator of the World's Sounds Bodhisattva, good men and women in the future may have high regard for the Great-Vehicle Sutras and make the in-**

## Explained by Master YongHua

**conceivable resolve to read and recite them from memory. Although they may encounter a good master who instructs them, so that they may become familiar with the texts, whatever they learn they forget in a short while, so that after months and years they are no longer able to read or recite them from memory.**

Having **high regard for the Great-Vehicle Sutras** 深生珍重 suggests that, perhaps, once they look at a Mahayana sutra, it is as if they have encountered the most precious thing.

The Dharma for reciting and reading sutras is as follows: the eyes look, the mouth recites and the mind contemplates or recites. The mind contemplates its meaning.

**They may then moreover encounter** a competent teacher but have trouble remembering the teachings.

**It is because such persons' karmic obstructions from past lives have not yet been eradicated that they do not have the proper disposition to read and recite sutras of the Great Vehicle.**

The reason beings encounter **obstructions** to their cultivation is that they have not yet eradicated obstructing karma from past lives. These obstructions often appear at moments when beings are about to undertake some beneficial practice, the recitation of sutras, for example. Just as they are about to start they are overwhelmed with weariness and become captivated by the demons of sleep. As soon as they put the text of the sutra down, the demons leave them alone; if they then be-



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come involved in idle, useless activities and chatter, they find themselves bursting with energy. The dharma given here to counteract this type of obstruction includes making offerings, among them even playthings. This refers to all sorts of toys, such as the balls children play with. Do not think, however, that the Bodhisattva likes to play with toys. The point of this offering is that one gives the things one most enjoys. This particular dharma also requires abstention from the five pungent plants, a list that includes everything in the category of garlic, onions, shallots, chives, and leeks. These items are forbidden because they tend to increase torpor, stupidity, anger, and sexual desire.

Such **karmic obstructions from past lives that have not yet been eradicated** arise as a result of two causes: 1) Stinginess with Dharma: in the past, people asked for Dharma but one would not give it. 2) One has obstructed others from speaking Dharma, from learning sutras, or from reading or reciting sutras. Also, failure to draw near the Triple Jewel and not respecting the Sangha are causes for losing wisdom seeds.

**Upon hearing Earth Store Bodhisattva's name or seeing his image, such people should wholly use their original minds and respectfully state their situation to the Bodhisattva.**

They should **state their request**, saying, “Na Mo Earth Store Bodhisattva, please help me eradicate this sleep or memory ghost obstruction.”

**They should then take incense, flowers, clothing, food, and drink, as well as all manner of playthings, and make offer-**

## Explained by Master YongHua

**ings to the Bodhisattva.**

**Incense** and **flowers** represent bringing forth the Bodhi mind, **clothing** symbolize stillness extinction patience, **food and drink** represent increasing the wisdom life, and **all manner of playthings** symbolize spiritual powers that enable one to playfully roam 遊戲神通.

**They should place a bowl of pure water before the Bodhisattva's image for one day and one night.**

**A bowl of pure water** refers to a small cup of the cleanest (not dirty) water, which can clean and erode obstructions. Pure water symbolizes the eight virtues. The cup symbolizes single-mindedness 制心一處. Water has flowing and cleansing functions, and is also able to nourish and sustain living beings.

Place the water **before the Bodhisattva's image** to seek his samadhi power support. **For one day and one night** symbolizes extinguishing stupidity and producing wisdom. Day symbolizes wisdom brightness. Night symbolizes stupidity darkness.

**Afterwards, placing their palms together, let them state their request and then drink the water while facing south.**

One **faces south**, not forgetting that in China, the Bodhisattva dwells in the south.

**As the water is about to enter their mouths they should be**

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**particularly sincere and solemn** and (this is key) contemplate the Bodhisattva coming to bless 加被 the offered water.

**After drinking the water they should abstain from the five pungent plants, wine, meat, all sexual activity, and false speech, as well as all killing and harming, for one to three weeks.**

To avoid **pungent plants, wine, meat** etc... is to observe morality. With morality, it is easier to produce samadhi. Observe this strictly for a period of **one to three weeks**, even after a response has been obtained.

As far as pungent plants go, when cooked and consumed, they give rise to sexual desire; when consumed uncooked, they give rise to anger and hatred. They have such a bad smell that the gods and immortals of the ten directions stay far away whereas hungry ghosts lick and kiss the eater's lips. To have ghost as companions will tend to exhaust our blessings and virtues. Those who eat these pungent plants, sow the cause for falling into the excrement and urine hells. Once they escape, they will be reborn as pigs or dogs. When they finally obtain a human body, their bodies will have a bad odor.

As for wine, the Buddha explains that the source of the three karmas' evil is wine.

Sex is the leader of all evil 萬惡首.

## Explained by Master YongHua

If one cultivates like this **for one to three weeks**, a response could occur within three weeks. However, if we harbor slightest doubt, there will be no response!

*Sutra text:*

**In dreams these good men or women will see Earth Store Bodhisattva manifesting a limitless body and anointing their crowns with water. When they awaken they will be endowed with keen intelligence. Should this sutra then be heard by them one time, they will eternally remember it and never forget or lose a single sentence or verse."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**In dreams these good men or women will see Earth Store Bodhisattva manifesting a limitless body and anointing their crowns with water.**

This section describes the response of having wisdom unfold 發慧. This kind of response is rather hard to come by. It requires utmost sincerity and purity.

Earth Store Bodhisattva's **limitless body** is the Dharma Body which is limitless. When this manifests, one's mind is purified and past karmic obstacles are eradicated.

**Anointing their crowns with water:** One of the 42 Hands and Eyes is called the Sweet Dew Hand and Eyes. With it, one feels very good, as if taking a bath. It wipes away all defilements and karmic obstructions. Those who have received transmission should make sure to practice every day. If not,

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they will have to start over again.

**When they awaken they will be endowed with keen intelligence. Should this sutra then be heard by them one time, they will eternally remember it and never forget or lose a single sentence or verse."**

How can one remember all sutras? That is from the power of the Bodhisattva and Dharanis.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Contemplator of the World's Sounds Bodhisattva, if there are people in the future whose food and clothing are insufficient, who find their efforts thwarted, or who endure sickness and ill fortune, whose families are not peaceful, whose relatives are scattered, or who are bothered by unfortunate occurrences, or who are often startled in their sleep by dreams, upon hearing the Bodhisattva's name and seeing his image, they should recite his name a full ten thousand times with extreme sincerity and respect. Those inauspicious matters will gradually be eradicated, and they will attain peace and bliss. Their food and clothing will be abundant and even in their dreams they will be peaceful and blissful.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Contemplator of the World's Sounds Bodhisattva, if there are people in the future whose food and clothing are insufficient,**

## Explained by Master YongHua

The previous section explained how to seek wisdom; this section discusses how to seek blessings.

To have **insufficient food and clothing** 衣食不足 is humans' worst suffering.

Just like an elder in Shravasti who was extremely wealthy but unfortunately he was robbed by a gang of bandits and as a result lost all of his fortune. His own wife and children abandoned him and his servants deserted him. Friends and relatives avoided him like the plague. He had to beg for food and was met with contempt and disapproval. That was why he sighed, saying, "The poor and destitute have few choices in where they can come or go, and what they can say or hear. Poor and destitute people are like corpse raising ghosts in that no one wants to see them. They are like fatal illnesses which are very difficult to cure. To be poor is to have to endure so many difficulties and be subject to unbearable hunger, cold, hatred and resentment. One is often slighted and rudely treated. One is discriminated against, often scolded or blamed and has many worries. Such multitudes of suffering arise from poverty. Destitution has tremendous power and can make my own relatives abandon me in a flash."

If there are destitute people **who find their efforts thwarted, or who endure sickness and ill fortune, whose families are not peaceful, whose relatives are scattered, or who are bothered by unfortunate occurrences, or who are often startled in their sleep by dreams, upon hearing the Bodhi-sattva's name and seeing his image, they should recite his name a full ten thousand times with extreme sincerity and respect.**

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For those who **cannot get what they seek** 求者乖願, whatever they wish cannot be fulfilled.

When one has to **endure sickness** 多疾病, one cannot go to work to earn money. Or when sick, one cannot get medical help because of lack of medical insurance. And for one who has **ill fortune** 多兇衰, nothing is auspicious, nothing is right.

When **families are not peaceful** 家宅不安, then not only the physical location, but also those who live inside it, will not be peaceful either.

**Those inauspicious matters will gradually be eradicated, and they will attain peace and bliss. Their food and clothing will be abundant and even in their dreams they will be peaceful and blissful.**

The Bodhisattva extends protection to us day and night.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Contemplator of the World's Sounds, good men or women in the future who must enter mountain forests; cross over rivers, seas, and other large bodies of water; or pass through dangerous roads for the sake of earning their own livelihood, for public or personal affairs, matters of life and death, or other urgent business, such people should first recite the name of Earth Store Bodhisattva a full ten thousand times. The ghosts and**

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**spirits of the ground they pass over will always surround and protect them in their walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. The peace and happiness of those persons will constantly be preserved, so that even if they encounter tigers, wolves, lions, or other harmful or poisonous creatures, the creatures will be unable to harm them."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Contemplator of the World's Sounds, good men or women in the future who must enter mountain forests; cross over rivers, seas, and other large bodies of water; or pass through dangerous roads**

One may need to enter dangerous routes in order to address **matters of life and death**, such as the announcement of a birth or death, or **other urgent business**, such as governmental issues, robberies, disasters, or invasions.

**For the sake of earning their own livelihood, for public or personal affairs, matters of life and death, or other urgent business, such people should first recite the name of Earth Store Bodhisattva a full ten thousand times.**

For those matters, earning a living, public or private reasons, death or urgent business, they should **first recite the name of Earth Store Bodhisattva a full ten thousand times**. Do not get stuck on the number 10,000. It really means recite with utmost sincerity until it is enough 滿足.

**The ghosts and spirits of the ground they pass over will always surround and protect them in their walking, stand-**



## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

**ing, sitting, and lying down.**

They will receive protection in everything they do.

**The peace and happiness of those persons will constantly be preserved, so that even if they encounter tigers, wolves, lions, or other harmful or poisonous creatures, the creatures will be unable to harm them."**

Those who mean them harm will be unable to inflict harm upon them.

*Sutra text:*

**The Buddha told the Contemplator of the World's Sounds, "Earth Store Bodhisattva has great affinities with beings in Jambudvipa. Hundreds of thousands of aeons would not be time enough to describe the benefits derived by living beings who see this Bodhisattva and hear his name. Therefore, Contemplator of the World's Sounds Bodhisattva, you should use your spiritual powers to propagate this sutra and to cause the living beings of the Saha world to receive peace and happiness throughout hundreds of thousands of ten thousands of aeons."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**The Buddha told the Contemplator of the World's Sounds, "Earth Store Bodhisattva has great affinities with beings in Jambudvipa. Hundreds of thousands of aeons would not be time enough to describe the benefits derived by living beings who see this Bodhisattva and hear his**

## Explained by Master YongHua

**name.**

The benefits from this Dharma Door are truly inconceivable.

**Therefore, Contemplator of the World's Sounds Bodhisattva, you should use your spiritual powers to propagate this sutra and to cause the living beings of the Saha world to receive peace and happiness throughout hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of aeons."**

Use your spiritual powers to **propagate this sutra** so that other living beings can also benefit from its Dharmas.

The Shastra 十論 says that Earth Store Bodhisattva gives joy to living beings, rescues them from the suffering of the three existences and showers them in limitless types of Dharma rain. This unsurpassed true sutra, is like eyes for living beings, a lamp in a dark room, gems to the impoverished, and medicine to the sick. We should quickly propagate it everywhere.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time the World-Honored One spoke verses, saying:**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time the World-Honored One spoke verses, saying:**

The Buddha uses the verses to restate the Dharmas just to

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make sure that living beings get it.

There are four reasons for the repetitive verses 重頌:

- 1) They accord with the country's customs 隨國土. For example, India has the custom of scattering or stringing flowers.
- 2) They accord with beings' understanding 隨生解. Various forms of words are more suitable to help living beings get the point.
- 3) They accord with preferences 隨樂欲. Some prefer prose, some prefer verse.
- 4) They accord with sharp or dull roots 隨利鈍. Some can immediately grasp it, some require more repetition.

*Sutra text:*

***“As I contemplate Earth Store Bodhisattva's awesome spiritual strength,***

***Speaking for aeons as many as Ganges sands would fail to describe it.***

***To see, to hear, to worship for but one thought***

***Brings endless benefit to humans and gods.***

***If a man's or woman's or a god's or dragon's***

***Lifespan ends and he should fall into evil ways,***

Explained by Master YongHua

*But with utmost sincerity he takes refuge with this Great Being*

*His lifespan will increase and his offenses will be eradicated.*

*Sutra commentary:*

We should *contemplate* 觀 that the Buddha's eyes are like 1,000 suns, illuminating and observing 照察 past and present 同於掌果.

One gaze, one bow, or one thought directed towards this Bodhisattva can bring measureless benefits to men and gods.

Take refuge with the Bodhisattva and you can increase your blessings without interruption.

The benefits are just endless and it would take forever to mention them all.

Gods and humans alike, all are greedy for long life, peace, bliss and freedom from difficulty 壽命安樂無患. That is why it says that one's **lifespan will increase and** one's **offenses will be eradicated** 壽命轉增除罪障.

*Sutra text:*

**The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva**

*Those who when small, lost their parents' loving affection,  
And do not know what paths their spirits took;  
Lost brothers, sisters, or some other kin,  
Whom they never knew while they were growing up,  
Should carve or paint an image of this Great Being,  
Should gaze and worship him unceasingly,  
And for twenty-one days constantly recite his name.  
The Bodhisattva will manifest a boundless body  
And show the realms in which the kin were born.  
And even if they've fallen into an evil path, they will find  
escape.*

*Sutra commentary:*

If want to know where close relatives are reborn, make an image of the Bodhisattva and worship and gaze unceasingly at it. Recite his name for twenty-one days without losing the initial resolve and he will help.

*Sutra text:*

Explained by Master YongHua

*If one is able to not retreat from one's first resolve,*

*The crown of one's head will be rubbed, and a prediction of sagehood received.*

*One who wishes to cultivate Bodhi unsurpassed*

*And leave behind the suffering Triple World,*

*Having given rise to the great compassionate heart,*

*Should first gaze upon and worship the image of this Great Being.*

*Each wish one makes will quickly come to pass*

*Karmic hindrances never can cover up nor hinder.*

*One may resolve to recite a sutra text,*

*Wishing to cross over the crowds of confused beings to the other shore,*

*But although making such a vow is inconceivable,*

*Our efforts to accomplish it are in vain for whatever one reads is shortly thereafter forgotten;*

*Because of karmic obstructions and delusions,*

*One cannot remember the Great Vehicle sutras.*

*To Earth Store Bodhisattva he should offer*

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*Scents and flowers, clothing, food, and all sorts of toys,*

*And place pure water on that Great Being's altar,*

*Wait one day and night, then drink the water;*

*Be diligent and respectful, and carefully avoid the pungent plants,*

*Both meat and wine, deviant sex and false speech;*

*For twenty-one days neither kill nor injure;*

*With extreme sincerity be mindful of the name of this Great Being.*

*Then in a dream one will see the boundless,*

*And, once awake, obtain keenness of the ear faculty;*

*So that when the teachings of this sutra are heard passing through one's ear*

*Throughout ten million lives one will not forget.*

*The power of this Lord is inconceivable*

*It can cause one to obtain this wisdom.*

*Sutra commentary:*

## Explained by Master YongHua

This section gives Dharmas to eradicate karmic obstructions.

***Wait one day and night, then drink the water:*** wait for one day and night, kneel in front of his image, bow and take the small cup, face south and drink.

***With extreme sincerity be mindful of the name of this Great Being*** 至心思念大士名: Drop everything else, recite his name and contemplate his great vow power and virtuous conduct.

Why avoid the pungent plants? Their nature is extraordinarily defiled and turbid 穢著, and produces the many mistakes and hinder the sagely Way. The Shurangama Sutra says that when cooked, they give rise to sexual desire, when raw, they give rise to anger. The gods and sages of the ten directions all stay away from the odor. After death, one who eats them will fall into the Excrement and Urine hell 死墮糞屎地獄. Then they'll be born as pig or dogs 出作野干豬狗. When one finally obtains a human body again, it will constantly emanate a bad odor 其體腥臭.

There was a high sanghan in the Tang dynasty who built a sutra recitation hall 誦經堂. Every time he recited the Golden Light Sutra 金光名經, the Four Heavenly Kings would come to listen. Afterwards, when he read the sutra store, he would not forget a single word.

Earth Store Bodhisattva's inconceivable powers can make the



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dull become sharp and the obtuse become wise.

*Sutra text:*

*If poverty-stricken beings, plagued with disease,*

*Whose homes are troubled, whose relatives are scattered,*

*Who aren't at peace, even in sleep or dreams,*

*Whose efforts are thwarted, so they cannot carry out their wishes,*

*Gaze upon and worship Earth Store's image with utmost sincerity,*

*All their evil affairs will be eradicate.*

*And even their dreams will be totally peaceful.*

*Their food and clothing will be plentiful, and gods and ghosts will surround and protect them.*

*Sutra commentary:*

Only responses can be obtained from sincerely worshipping Earth Store Bodhisattva. Worshipping the other Bodhisattvas can also bring great benefits. For example, there was a group of people who boarded a boat into the high seas. They encountered an evil wind which brought them to the yaksha

## Explained by Master YongHua

country. One person recited Guan Yin and taught the rest to do so. One Hinayana monk refused. He was the only one that was bound up while the rest were freed. He then decided to recite the Bodhisattva's name and he too obtained liberation.

*Sutra text:*

*Those who travel in mountain forests, across great seas,*

*Or among poisonous or evil birds and beasts, or evil people;*

*Among evil ghosts, and spirits, and also evil winds—*

*So many kinds of troublesome disturbances—*

*Need only gaze in worship and make offerings*

*To an image of Earth Store Bodhisattva, the Great Being.*

*In such a way, within the mountain forests, and on the great seas,*

*All evil should thereby cease.*

*Avalokitesvara, listen with extreme sincerity to what I say.*

*Earth Store Bodhisattva is endless and inconceivable.*

*Hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of kalpas is time too brief*

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*To fully describe the powers of this Great Being.*

*If humans can but hear the name "Earth Store",*

*Or if they see his image, and gaze in worship,*

*Or offer flowers, clothing, food, drink, and incense,*

*They will delight in a thousand wondrous joys.*

*If one can dedicate such merit to the Dharma Realm,*

*One will finally become a Buddha, transcending birth and death.*

*Therefore, Contemplator of the World's Sounds, you should know about this*

*And inform all lands everywhere, as many as Ganges River's sands."*

*Sutra commentary:*

*Bitter sorrows* 惡事 refers to evil happenings.

*Men, ghosts and spirits* all have the potential to be either good or evil. *Evil winds* have evil ghosts causing trouble.

How does Earth Store Bodhisattva **dispel evil beasts/ghosts?**  
By using the lion's roar.

## **Explained by Master YongHua**

Only Guan Yin is able to fathom Earth Store Bodhisattva's powers. That is why the Buddha speaks to her.

## CHAPTER 13: The Entrustment of Humans and Gods

The final chapter begins.

Entrustment 囑咐: The Buddha entrusts sentient beings to the Bodhisattvas, and makes the Bodhisattvas joyously do the hard and bitter work. In particular, the men and gods of the future 累劫 are entrusted to them, because these two kinds of beings have the easiest time obtaining the Way thanks to their sharper roots.

The sutra relates, “Can one make the vow to simultaneously bring all living beings in the five paths to the accomplishment of Buddhahood?” The Buddha replies, “One cannot accomplish the Way without a body. One should first take across beings in the three paths, enabling them to obtain a human or god body. Afterwards, one can then help them attain the Way.”

Furthermore, of the six paths, ghosts and spirits are immersed in darkness and worries, animals must struggle for food and evade predators, asuras have a big temper, the gods enjoy themselves. Therefore, the human path is most suitable to practicing the Bodhisattva path. A human body is very hard come by. Are we practicing?

This chapter has the same spirit as a mother on her death bed, who is particularly concerned about her young ones and

## Explained by Master YongHua

entrusts them to the elders, making the elders promise to teach the young ones to become assets.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time the World-Honored One raised his gold-colored arm and again rubbed the crown of Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, as he said, "Earth Store, Earth Store, your spiritual powers, compassion, wisdom, and eloquence are inconceivable. Even if all the Buddhas of the ten directions were to proclaim their praise of your inconceivable deeds, they could not finish in thousands of tens of thousands of aeons.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time the World-Honored One raised his gold-colored arm and again rubbed the crown of Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, as he said,**

In the previous chapter the Buddha rubbed the crown of the division bodies to comfort them on the hard task of crossing over living beings. Now, he only  **rubs the crown of Earth Store Bodhisattva**, which symbolizes that the origin and manifestation are one and the same 本機一如.

The golden color symbolizes the Middle Way. The arm has the ability to pull and lift, symbolizing lifting and carrying living beings in the six paths. Therefore, **raising his gold-colored arm 舉金色臂** symbolizes returning to the Middle Way One Nature 歸中道一性.

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

Before the Buddha rubbed the Bodhisattva's crown to console him and acknowledge the hard work involved in crossing over living beings. Now the Buddha rubs the Bodhisattva's crown to entrust living beings to him. Before one hand rubbed numberless crowns, symbolizing one and many self-mastery 表一多自在. Now one hand rubs one crown symbolizing that inherently there is only one Way that manifests the six paths and nine realms and that there is no other Way 表本同一道 • 則顯六道九界 • 更無二道也.

**"Earth Store, Earth Store, your spiritual powers, compassion, wisdom, and eloquence are inconceivable.**

Now that he's about to enter Nirvana, the Buddha calls **Earth Store Bodhisattva's** name twice in order to show the depth of his compassion and loving care for him. Earth Store's **spiritual powers** are said to be inconceivable because all the beings in the hells receive their benefit, enabling even those who fundamentally should not be able to leave their suffering to do so. In addition, his **compassion** is said to be inconceivable because there are none to whom he is not compassionate.

There are three major types of compassion: compassion which is offered with conditions, compassion with respect to the Buddhadharma, and unconditionally offered compassion. The latter kind of compassion is particularly wonderful and inconceivable. The power of Earth Store Bodhisattva's compassion is unusually great, and is a strength which most other Bodhisattvas cannot match: he alone has made the vow to go to the hells and rescue beings. Avalokitesvara, Manjusri, and Samantabhadra have great vows, yet they teach beings in the

## Explained by Master YongHua

world; only Earth Store Bodhisattva does not fear the suffering of the hells and goes there to teach beings. Thus he is known as the Teaching Host in the Dark Regions.

A demonstration of his inconceivable eloquence can be found in his ability to teach hungry ghosts to turn from evil to good. If his eloquence were not completely unobstructed and beyond thought, he would certainly be unable to effect such changes. Even if you wish to investigate the inconceivability of Earth Store Bodhisattva's various states, you will be unable to do so, since they are completely beyond all thought. This being the case, what is there to investigate?

**Even if all the Buddhas of the ten directions were to proclaim their praise of your inconceivable deeds, they could not finish in thousands of tens of thousands of aeons.**

The Great Shastra 大論 says that the Buddhas praise Bodhisattvas who are replete with the ten paramitas, spiritual powers, wisdom, eloquence, fearlessnesses, eighteen uncommon Dharmas etc., and yet do not stay within Nirvana but return to birth and death to save living beings.

*Sutra text:*

**"Earth Store, Earth Store, remember that now, in the Trayastrimsa Heaven in this great assembly of hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of indescribable, indescribable numbers of all the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, gods, dragons, and eightfold divisions of spirits, I again entrust to you the humans and gods of the future who are still in the burning house and have not yet left the**



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**Triple World. Do not allow those beings to fall into the Evil Paths for the space of even a single day and night, much less fall into the Uninterrupted Hell of the Five Offenses and the Avici hell where they would have to pass through thousands of tens of thousands of millions of aeons without being able to leave.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Earth Store, Earth Store, remember that now, in the Trayastrimsa Heaven in this great assembly of hundreds of thousands of tens of thousands of millions of indescribable, indescribable numbers of all the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, gods, dragons, and eightfold divisions of spirits, I again entrust to you the humans and gods of the future who are still in the burning house and have not yet left the Triple World.**

**The burning house of the Triple World: What fun is there in such a dangerous place?**

**Do not allow those beings to fall into the Evil Paths for the space of even a single day and night, much less fall into the Uninterrupted Hell of the Five Offenses and the Avici hell where they would have to pass through thousands of tens of thousands of millions of aeons without being able to leave.**

**The Five Offenses 五無間 are the five rebellious offenses that destine one towards the Great Unintermittent Hell.**

## Explained by Master YongHua

**Avici hell 阿鼻地獄** is the worst place that one can be. It is best to stay as far away as possible.

The Buddha entrusts all (諸眾生等) living beings to Earth Store Bodhisattva from his Nirvana until Maitreya's appearance in the world.

One day and night in the Heavens of the Four Heavenly Kings is equivalent to 50 years in the human realm. Our one day and night in the human realm is 500 years in the hells, because there is so much suffering there that it seems that long.

*Sutra text:*

**"Earth Store, the beings of Jambudvipa are of irresolute will and nature, and they habitually do many evil deeds. Even if they resolve their thoughts on good, in an instant they turn back on that resolve. And if they encounter evil conditions, in every thought they tend to become increasingly involved in them. For this reason I reduplicate hundreds of thousands of millions of transformation bodies, to cross them over and liberate them, all in accord with their fundamental natures.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Earth Store, the beings of Jambudvipa are of irresolute will and nature, and they habitually do many evil deeds. Even if they resolve their thoughts on good, in an instant they turn back on that resolve.**

## The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva

The **irresolute nature** 性無定 of living beings can be seen in those who want to study one day and not the next, who want to do good for a moment and then decide to do evil. In one moment you resolve to cultivate and accomplish the pure Dharma Body, and then the resolve changes to a wish for the retribution body. A moment later you may decide that having a hundred thousand million transformation bodies is the most desirable goal and switch to that, and so there is nothing fixed about your will or resolve. These are examples of irresolute will concerning the bodies of the Buddha.

On the other hand, irresolute will can also be seen in the desire, on one day, to cultivate the Ten Good Deeds and attain rebirth in the heavens, followed by a burst of activity in the Ten Evils the next. One's resolve is set for the heavens, but the next day one thinks that being an animal would not be bad. An unfixed nature very commonly shows up in the resolve to stop smoking, drinking, or taking drugs: one's resolutions often last for only a moment. What is particularly bad about this kind of vacillating behavior is that people who act this way always end up rationalizing their actions one way or another.

**And if they encounter evil conditions, in every thought they tend to become increasingly involved in them.**

When people of irresolute nature meet a teacher who tells them to learn or do something and stresses its importance, they may try to take action, but they lack the resolve to complete the project. If someone tells them to misbehave, on the other hand, they don't even need instructions but learn to do it spontaneously. Gamblers are an excellent example of this

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tendency: no one has to teach them how to place bets; they see it done once and remember all the details of how to do it themselves in the future.

While it does happen that living beings may decide to do good deeds, such as contributing to build a temple, printing sutras, or making images, they may quickly turn back on their initial resolve. They give, but the gift is accompanied by the thought, "What's in it for me?" A good historical example of such a person is the Emperor Wu 張僧繇 of the Liang Dynasty, who built temples, aided the Sangha, and propagated Buddhism, but who still had to ask Patriarch Bodhidharma how much merit he had accrued.

When living beings tend to retreat from good, they surge forward into evil—they are attracted by anything that is conducive to falling into evil paths. Foremost among these causes are greed for sex and wealth; hatred, which leads to murder, arson, and other antisocial acts; and stupidity, which drives one constantly to try to get what one cannot attain.

**For this reason I reduplicate hundreds of thousands of millions of transformation bodies, to cross them over and liberate them, all in accord with their fundamental natures.**

We certainly keep this Bodhisattva pretty busy! However, this is quite challenging and most rewarding work!

*Sutra text:*

**"Earth Store, I now earnestly entrust the multitudes of**

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**humans and gods to you. If, in the future, gods or humans, whether good men or good women, plant a few good roots in the Buddhadharma, be they as little as a strand of hair, dust mote, grain of sand, or drop of water, you should use your spiritual powers and virtues to protect them so that they gradually cultivate the unsurpassed way and do not retreat from it.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Earth Store, I now earnestly entrust the multitudes of humans and gods to you. If, in the future, gods or humans, whether good men or good women, plant a few good roots in the Buddhadharma, be they as little as a strand of hair, dust mote, grain of sand, or drop of water,**

**In the future:** that includes us.

All living beings are replete with Buddha nature. Icchantikas 闍提 who fail to bring forth the faith, although evil, are still replete with their good nature.

If we plant the smallest of good seeds with the Buddhadharma, then we will receive the largest retributions imaginable.

It should be clear that those who are studying this sutra are included in the group of good men and women, for if they were not they would have given up the study long ago. Evil men and women who take up this study feel as if they are sitting on needles: they put it aside and run off as soon as possible. Good men and women who take it up feel ever increasing joy in study. Furthermore, this passage reassures us that,

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although we beings are of irresolute nature and mind, there is no need to be frightened, since Shakyamuni Buddha and Earth Store Bodhisattva have made this pact. All that is required is to have done good works in the Buddhadharmā.

**You should use your spiritual powers and virtues to protect them so that they gradually cultivate the unsurpassed way and do not retreat from it.**

It may be objected by some that they have done good but have never seen Earth Store Bodhisattva come to protect them. Think it over for a moment. Although his protection may not have been visible, were you ever in an accident in which you might have been injured or killed but from which you escaped unharmed? That is an example of Earth Store Bodhisattva's protection of you.

If you object that you have never been in an accident and consequently have not been protected by Earth Store Bodhisattva, then continue to reflect. Have you ever had a serious illness from which you recovered? Or have you ever been on a boat in rough waters and avoided capsizing? Such good fortune is due to the protection of Earth Store Bodhisattva. Have you ever been on an airplane trip that was completely without incident? That too is through the protection of Earth Store Bodhisattva. In fact, if you've ever felt apprehensive about undertaking a voyage and managed to overcome your fear, that too is an example of Earth Store Bodhisattva giving you a little added courage. The situations in which he responds are varied and uncountable. Because of the agreement made in the palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven, living beings should have faith in him.

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The sutra 處胎經 remarks on the difficulties of getting a human body: “The blind turtle perhaps can consistently emerge with its head through a whole in a piece of wood 盲龜浮木孔・時時猶可值. However, the human body is hard to obtain again in one hundred million kalpas 人一失命根億劫復難事・. In the great ocean, one needle can be found 海水深廣大・三百三十六・一針投海中・求之上可得. Yet, once a human body is lost it is very hard to restore 一失人身命・難得過於是.”

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, if in the future, humans and gods who ought to fall into the Evil Paths as karmic retribution, are on the verge of falling into those paths, or are already at the very gates of those paths, are able to recite the name of one Buddha or Bodhisattva, or a single sentence or verse from a Mahayana sutra, you should use your spiritual powers to rescue them with expedient means. Display to them a limitless body, smash the hells, and cause them to be born in the heavens and experience supremely wonderful bliss."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Earth Store, if in the future, humans and gods who ought to fall into the Evil Paths as karmic retribution are on the verge of falling into those paths,**

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**Karmic retribution** is not necessarily from this life time but could also be from prior lives. It is a matter of when these bad seeds created in the past mature!

**Or who are already at the very gates of those paths, are able to recite the name of one Buddha or Bodhisattva, or a single sentence or verse from a Mahayana sutra,**

There was a woman who recited the Buddha's name her entire life. One day she fell gravely ill. She was hospitalized and the doctor gave up on her. As she was dying, her own daughter was by her side and reminded her to recite the Buddha's name. She could not even utter a sound. The key word here is to be "able".

**You should use your spiritual powers to rescue them with expedients means. Display to them a limitless body, smash the hells, and cause them to be born in the heavens and experience supremely wonderful bliss."**

**Smash the hells** with your tin staff 錫丈. He opens the doors of the hells and enables all the hungry ghosts spring loose.

The Analogy 譬喻 Sutra states that there was a king who killed his father to usurp the throne. An Arhat knew that this king would not live more than seven days. When he died, he was surely bound for the Avici Hells to undergo suffering for one kalpa. The Arhat thus taught the king to recite with utmost sincerity "Na Mo Buddha". The king thus recited day and night without rest. At his time of death, he was escorted



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by the ghosts to the door of the Avici hell. He started reciting the Buddha's name loudly. All the other prisoners also heard and imitated him in his recitation. The hell's fierce fire immediately became extinguished and all the reciters obtained liberation. They were reborn in the human realm and later met with the Arhat who spoke Dharma for them, causing them to attain First Stage Arhatship 須陀洹.

*Sutra text:*

**The World Honored One then spoke in verse, saying,**

***Humans and gods and other beings of the present and the future,***

***I now earnestly entrust to you.***

***With great spiritual penetrations, skill-in-means, take them across,***

***Do not allow them to fall into the Evil Paths."***

*Sutra commentary:*

We ought to have faith and do more good so that the Bodhisattva has more chances to help us avoid falling **into the Evil Paths**.

*Sutra text:*

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**At that time Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, knelt on one knee, placed his palms together, and said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, please do not be concerned. If good men and women in the future have a single thought of respect toward the Buddhadharmā, I shall use hundreds of thousands of expedient devices to cross them over so that they may quickly attain liberation from birth and death. How much more will those who have heard of good undertakings and whose every thought is of cultivating, never retreat from the unsurpassed Way."**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time Earth Store Bodhisattva, Mahasattva, knelt on one knee, placed his palms together, and said to the Buddha, "World Honored One, please do not be concerned. If good men and women in the future have a single thought of respect toward the Buddhadharmā, I shall use hundreds of thousands of expedient devices to cross them over so that they may quickly attain liberation from birth and death.**

**Have a single thought of respect toward the Buddhadharmā** simply by putting your palms together or nodding your head towards a Buddha image.

The sutra says that we should be mindful of impermanence. Cultivators should take advantage of this false body, knowing that the 10,000 things will return to Emptiness 歸空.

**How much more will those who have heard of good undertakings and whose every thought is of cultivating, nev-**

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**er retreat from the unsurpassed Way."**

The Four Self-invasions Sutra 四自侵經 says that cultivators should examine themselves. Each should inwardly contemplate that their body is like a dream or an illusion, or that it is like an army on its way to combat, under the direction of a famous general, to wage war against a ferocious enemy. Cultivators of the Way should subdue their mind and keep their will in check, cultivate the Dharma and obey the Way, behave in accord with the rules and stay within the bounds of the precepts. Their body and mind should be pure and spotless. They should give kindness and donate virtue. They should expel and abandon anger, consternation, arrogance, and excessive fighting and argument. They should single-mindedly and vigorously practice the Way, understanding that there is no obtaining and no obstruction. They set the proper resolves. If they teach living beings, they should first make their mind proper. Even the body conduct must also be proper. Body and mind should both be proper so that there are no flaws. Because there are no flaws, they obtain the Way and end revolving in the Wheel. That is why the Ten Wheels Shastra 十輪 says that those who follow good conduct are like the bright sun, enabling them to **never retreat from the unsurpassed Way** 自然於無上道永不退轉.

As the saying goes: "A long journey of a thousand miles 千里遠行, starts with the first step 始於初步; a thousand, or ten thousand thoughts, are not apart from the first thought 千念萬念, 不離初念."

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It is important to consider the reasons that one was born as a human being. Are we humans merely in order to live in confusion and die a muddled death? Is the point of our lives merely to eat our fill and go to sleep, only to wake up and eat again? Are we in the world only in order to work at a job and get enough money for a couple of meals a day and a suit of clothes? If all we are here for is to eat and sleep, sleep and eat again, while waiting to die, then it would be better to die, for such a life is utterly meaningless. The troubles and difficulties far surpass the ease and pleasure, and death is preferable.

But if we come to human life for the purpose of establishing merit and benefiting those who come after us, then there is meaning. It is for those who come first to teach those who come later, for those who understand to teach those who do not. If everyone understood the principle of cultivation, there would be much less sorrow in the world. In whatever you do, see to it that you are helping others, not trying to be helped by them. Emulate the behavior of Shakyamuni Buddha, of the Bodhisattvas, of the great Patriarchs of old, all of whom worked exclusively for the benefit of beings. Do not merely become involved in "intellectual Zen" and chatter about Dharma.

If you hear of someone doing a meritorious deed such as printing sutras, or constructing temples, then support those endeavors. If you are unable to do so with money, give your labor. In general, make sure that your every action is for the purpose of aiding beings.

*Sutra text:*

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When this was said, a Bodhisattva in the assembly named Empty Space Treasury spoke to the Buddha: "World Honored One, I personally have come to the Trayastrimsa Heaven and heard the Thus Come One speak of the inconceivable power of Earth Store Bodhisattva's awesome spiritual strength. If in the future good men or good women, as well as gods and dragons, hear this sutra and the name of Earth Store Bodhisattva, or if they gaze at and worship his image, how many kinds of blessings and benefits will they attain? Please, World Honored One, say a few words about this for the sake of those living beings in the present and in the future."

*Sutra commentary:*

When this was said, a Bodhisattva in the assembly named Empty Space Treasury spoke to the Buddha:

**Empty Space Store Bodhisattva** 虛空藏 comes from a world thousands of millions of world systems away. To the west of our Saha world by a number of worlds equal to the sands in eighty Ganges rivers, there is a Buddhaland called 一切香積依 All Incense Accumulation Sash. Its Buddha is named Victory Flower Arrangement Treasury Thus Come One 勝華敷藏如來. In addition, the Bodhisattva named Empty Space Store also dwells there. He has a jewel 如意珠 in his top knot from which anything one wishes for will come, the brilliance of which surpasses all other jewels, just as his virtues are only unsurpassed by those of the Tathagata. Should you ever encounter a Bodhisattva with a wishing gem

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atop his head, you should recognize him, for if you do, he will give you jewels and treasures; you will be able to have some of the treasures he has in empty space, and you will never be poor. There is a saying: “無一法不歸空如來藏故 Not a single dharma does not return to the Emptiness Thus Come One Treasury”. Only this Bodhisattva can integrate and store 融納 Earth Store Bodhisattva’s limitless merit and virtue.

**"World Honored One, I personally have come to the Trayastrimsa Heaven and heard the Thus Come One speak of the inconceivable power of Earth Store Bodhisattva's awesome spiritual strength. If in the future good men or good women, as well as gods and dragons, hear this sutra and the name of Earth Store Bodhisattva, or if they gaze at and worship his image, how many kinds of blessings and benefits will they attain? Please, World Honored One, say a few words about this for the sake of those living beings in the present and in the future."**

Emptiness and the Mundane are not dual 空假不二. In actuality, they are of one substance 當體即中, and this one substance can perfectly encompass the wonderful conduct 圓融妙行. All return to the Secret Store 同歸秘藏. That is why he is called Empty Space Store 故終乎虛空藏.

*Sutra text:*

**The Buddha told Empty Space Store Bodhisattva, "Listen attentively, listen attentively, I shall enumerate and de-**

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scribe them to you. If there are good men and women in the future who see Earth Store's image, or who hear this sutra or read or recite it; who use incense, flowers, food and drink, clothing, or gems as offerings; or if they praise, behold, and worship him, they shall attain twenty-eight kinds of advantages:

- 1) *Gods and dragons will be mindful of them and protect them.*
- 2) *The fruits of their goodness will increase daily.*
- 3) *They will accumulate superior causes of sagehood.*
- 4) *They will not retreat from Bodhi.*
- 5) *Their food and drink will be abundant.*
- 6) *Epidemics will not touch them.*
- 7) *They will not encounter disasters of fire and water.*
- 8) *They will not have difficulties with thieves or armed robbers.*
- 9) *They will be respected by all who see them.*
- 10) *They will be aided by ghosts and spirits.*
- 11) *Women will be reborn as men.*
- 12) *If born as women they will be daughters of kings and ministers.*
- 13) *They will be upright and have handsome appearances.*
- 14) *They will often be born in the heavens.*
- 15) *They may be emperors or kings.*
- 16) *They will know their past lives.*
- 17) *They will attain whatever they seek.*
- 18) *Their families will be happy.*
- 19) *All disasters will be eradicated.*
- 20) *They will eternally be apart from the bad karmic paths.*

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- 21) *They will always arrive at their destination.*
- 22) *At night their dreams will be peaceful and happy.*
- 23) *Their deceased ancestors will leave suffering behind.*
- 24) *They will receive the blessings from their past lives to aid their rebirth.*
- 25) *They will be praised by the sages.*
- 26) *They will be intelligent and have sharp faculties.*
- 27) *They will have magnanimous, kind, and sympathetic hearts.*
- 28) *They will ultimately attain Buddhahood.*

*Sutra commentary:*

**The Buddha told Empty Space Store Bodhisattva, "Listen attentively, listen attentively, I shall enumerate and describe them to you. If there are good men and women in the future who see Earth Store's image, or who hear this sutra or read or recite it; who use incense, flowers, food and drink, clothing, or gems as offerings; or if they praise, behold, and worship him, they shall attain twenty-eight kinds of advantages:**

The key here is to be extremely sincere in the act of seeing, hearing, gazing, praising or making an offering. Use your six organs with extreme sincerity toward the sutra or image.

To skillfully speak the Dharma 夫善說法者 is to not speak and not explain 無說無示. To listen to the Dharma well 善聽法者 is to obtain nothing and hear nothing 無得無聞. There is really nothing real: **Listen attentively, listen**



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**attentively** 諦聽諦聽. If one can discern well the real marks of all dharmas, if one is at the Primary Meaning but does not move 善能分別諸法相・於第一義而不動, then one is consistent with the Tathagata's instruction 乃如來分別之指.

When the text speaks of beings that see Earth Store Bodhisattva's image, it refers to the truth of their vision. Hearing the sutra shows the truth of their hearing. Recitation and offerings of food and drink show the truth of their speech and taste, while offerings of incense and flowers show the truth of their sense of smell. And the use of clothing and gems shows the truth of their sense of touch. When all six senses (including thought) are true, living beings may derive twenty-eight kinds of benefit.

Since many are self-explanatory, only a few of the benefits will be mentioned in this commentary.

**1. They will be remembered and protected by gods and dragons** 天龍護念. This includes the heavenly asuras.

The music spirits (Gandharvas 乾闥婆) may be male or female. The males have a horn on their head. As soon as they smell the incense burned by Shakra, the male Gandharvas immediately come, dancing and singing. When you recite this sutra, they are in space and praise you.

**2. The fruits of their goodness will increase daily** 善果日增. Thus causes you not to retreat from cultivation. One can

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vigorously strive forward. Goodness engenders goodness. The fruitions increase thanks to the causes. The causes rely on the fruitions to accumulate 事迹相連 • 果由因而增進 • 因藉果而積集.

**3. They will accumulate superior causes of Sagehood 集聖上因.** The causes of wisdom include listening to explanations of sutras and hearing Dharma spoken, things which most ordinary people do not become involved in. The more they accumulate, the sturdier their mind for the Way becomes, and the more valiant their vow power becomes.

**4. They will not retreat from Bodhi 菩提不退.** When we cultivate, sometimes, we are very vigorous, at other times, we feel like retreating because it seems that there is no response. If we recite this sutra, our Way mind will constantly make progress daily and will not retreat. Cause and effect follow one another. Naturally one will not retreat from Bodhi.

**5. Their food and drink will be abundant 衣食豐足.** Everyone ought to look at themselves at this point and ask why it is that they may not have sufficient food and clothing in their lives. This is a result of not having planted good roots in the past, of not having worshiped Earth Store Bodhisattva's image, and of not having recited this sutra. The word zú 足 means to know contentment (one is able to reign in the greedy mind): that is a tremendous blessing in itself!

Clothes cover the body. Food nourishes it. Although these

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may appear to be insignificant conditions, they make it easier to cultivate and accomplish the great feats.

**6. Epidemics will not touch them 疾疫不臨.** The death of so many at one time from a single disease is what is meant by an epidemic.

Sicknesses are conditions for retreating from the Way 退道之緣: they are internal obstructions. They cause the body and strength to diminish and become damaged 能令色力減損.

The Shastra 十論 says that if sentient beings are controlled by evil ghosts which cause them to be sick, then by making offerings to Earth Store Bodhisattva, they will obtain liberation from everything and have no more fear. Their bodies and minds will be at peace and agreeable. That is why it is said that *epidemics will not touch them*.

**7. They will not encounter disasters of fire and water 離水火災.** Recite this sutra and there will be no such disasters, or external obstructions. Fall into the water and one will not drown. Enter the fire and one will not get burned. Even if one falls into the sea, perhaps one will reach a shallow place. Or while endangered by the fire, suddenly one will be rescued.

The Shastra 十論 says that if one worships Earth Store Bo-

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dhisattva, even the three great calamities 災 can also be prevented.

**8. They will not have difficulties with thieves and armed robbers 無盜賊惡.** One is robbed because of past causes and now one must repay the debt. The Bodhisattva can thus help free us from past enmities. Learn to recognize the law of cause and effect in action.

The Shastra 十論 states that if sentient beings are frightened of enemies, bandits, armies or war, and other kinds of scary things that surround and harass them causing their body and mind to be alarmed, and if they can make offerings and be respectful towards Earth Store Bodhisattva, then all frightening things will be avoided, and they will obtain safety.

**9. They will be respected by all who see them 人見欽敬.** It will not be necessary to hang out a sign and advertise oneself. There will be no effort required for people to respect you, for respect will come naturally. If there is virtue, then respect comes naturally. If there is no virtue, no matter how hard a wind you blow, you will never be able to stir up respect. It is definitely not a good thing to go about saying what a great protector of the Buddhadharma you are or how you are a member of this and that benevolent association. It is pseudo-virtue that constantly tries to sell itself, and the result of such activity is that, while those without eyes may be deceived, people who see clearly will know you for the pitiful thing you are. Those with true merit and virtue do not need to advertise it.

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### **10. They will be aided by ghosts and spirits 神鬼助持.**

Whatever difficulties you encounter, the dharma protectors will come and invisibly help you. Not only the good spirits but also the evil spirits will help you, because the Bodhisattva's power and way virtue, causes them to change their ways and come create merit and virtue with you. Why are you not helped? Maybe because you have not got it yet. Keep working at it and your turn will come.

**11. Women will be reborn as men 女轉男生.** It was mentioned earlier in the sutra that women have five obstacles and cannot hold certain positions. It is important to understand that this passage is not saying that a woman can turn into a man in this life. If she dislikes the body of a woman, she may be reborn male in the next life.

**12. If born as women they will be daughters of kings and ministers 為王臣女.** Women who do not mind being women, however, will be reborn into royal households. They can have tremendous influence which can be used it to teach and transform others.

**13. They will be upright and have handsome appearances 端正相好.** All their features will be upright 端正 and perfect 圓滿, from having wisdom and blessings.

**14. They will often be born in the heavens 多生天上.** Often they will be reborn in the heavens to enjoy heavenly blessings and wonderful bliss.

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**15. They may be emperors or kings 或為帝王.** If you feel that you have enough and do not wish to become emperors, how about becoming a Buddha?

**16. They will know their past lives 宿智命通.** To know what one was in prior lives gives one the power of understanding the causes 了因之力 of one's current conditions. When one is not confused about the prior causes 前因不昧, one leaves the dust to cultivate 離塵修道. Bodhisattvas have the hundred practices, among which wisdom ranks as foremost 士有百行・智為其首.

**17. They will attain whatever they seek 有求皆從.** Seeking wealth and honor, sons or daughters, food or drinks, or power and influence: one gets it all. Do not be so stuck with externals though! Seek Bodhi!

**18. Their families will be happy 眷屬歡樂.** In spite of the intimacy between father and son, sometimes this relationship is strained. Children often look on their parents as having addled or petrified brains totally incapable of understanding modern trends. They often feel that their parents have no idea how to be a father or mother and that the parents are totally misguided and confused. Parents, on the other hand, may sometimes realize that their children are up to no good, but because of the deep compassion and love they have for them, they are willing to overlook their children's faults.

The same kind of problem may even arise between husbands

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and wives. Before the marriage everything is fine and there is never a quarrel, but after the wedding they begin to display their tempers to one another. As a result of worshipping Earth Store, none of these problems appear.

**19. All disasters will be eradicated 諸橫消滅.** All disasters and unexpected events 外意事 will not occur. People don't realize that bad things occur because they have an improper frame of mind. Harboring bad thoughts has a way of drawing the trouble makers who bring along undesirable happenings to you and your family. Instead, if one maintains the sutra sincerely long enough, one will tend to have the proper frame of mind and thus avoid having potential disasters come their way.

**20. They will eternally be apart from the paths of evil karma 業道永除.** *Paths of evil karma* refers to the three evil paths. From cultivating non-outflow karmas, all three realms with outflow karmas are extinguished. The evil paths are to be avoided at all costs for those who wish to cultivate.

**21. They will always arrive at their destination 去處盡通.** Wherever you wish to go, you will get there without problems, and everything will be auspicious without obstructions. You can roam without fear and with self-mastery. This is from worshipping Earth Store Bodhisattva.

**22. At night their dreams will be peaceful and happy 夜夢安樂.** They may dream of making offerings to the Buddha, of bowing, reciting sutras, of holding mantras, of chanting the

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Buddha's name, or of other beneficial practices.

**23. *Their deceased ancestors will leave suffering behind*** 先亡離苦. This refers not only to relatives in this life but to ancestors and parents of aeons of past lives. Xian 先 means ancestors; wáng 亡 means deceased. The Asians have this great tradition of taking care of their ancestors. That is a form of filial piety that should be taught and preserved by the new generations.

**24. *They will receive the blessings from their past lives to aid their rebirth*** 宿福受生. Your good roots and blessings from prior lives will spillover to this lifetime. Why are you not well off this lifetime? Because in prior lifetimes, you did not help the poor and lonely. The Earth Store Dharma will activate the good seeds that you have accrued from past lives in order to help you obtain rebirth.

Bodhisattvas relentlessly garner their blessings by helping others. Furthermore, they have four Dharmas that cause them not to lose their previously accrued good roots 得先因力・不失善根:

1. Bodhisattvas do not see other's deficiencies as flaws 見他闕・不以為過. For example, parents who know that their children are so wrong and yet do not see them as having faults are like this. Someone immediately raised her hand and objected, "If I don't see faults in my children, am I not failing to teach and protect them? Am I not a failure as a parent?" A west-



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erner student says that children have minds of their own. We can't tell them what to do. I prefer the middle road.

I feel that normally, children are able to understand what you tell them. However, they choose to ignore your advice. Quite often, this leads to confrontations and arguments between the parents over how to go about educating the children. There is nothing wrong with wishing to teach your children. However it is wrong to insist that they get it immediately. Yes, they get it but they tend to choose to heed your advice when they like it.

What are parents supposed to do? You tell them in no uncertain terms that you believe that they are so wrong. However, you respect them profoundly and that is why you must give them the room and chance to make mistakes and learn. When they fail, be prepared to be there for them and share in the hurt. Tell them that seeing them in trouble hurts you a lot more, not only because you hate it when they suffer, but also because you then have the burden of guilt of having failed to convince them not to make those mistakes. That way, your children will get the message and are less likely to commit the same mistakes again. Of course, it does not hurt to give them blessings so that they are less likely to get into trouble.

Not to see others' deficiencies really means that you are not afflicted by their flaws. It does not mean at all that you turned blind, deaf and dumb all of a sudden.

## Explained by Master YongHua

2. Towards angry people, Bodhisattvas always practice kindness 於怒人常修慈心. There are three stages to this Dharma. First, you do not reject angry people, no matter how ugly and unpleasant they are. I know, like many of you, I too have been in situations where I would do anything to be able to sock it to them. It would feel so good! Also, there are cases where they are angry at us for totally absurd reasons. In that case, we should refrain from even attempting to justify ourselves. Why? Because the first step is to learn to bear it without complaining or justifying. For example, if we were to justify ourselves, then they may not get as angry towards us any more and therefore we would forego the opportunity to endure a worsening situation, which would help us build our patience.

This is how we become increasingly patient: keep enduring the abuse until we cannot take any more. Then walk away and admit defeat. The reason we fight is because we cannot take being defeated. After we have recovered, then we can come back for more abuse and try to endure a little bit more each time. One becomes more patient by building it up. It does not happen overnight.

The second step is keep enduring the abuse until the person calms down. That is one way to settle the past karmic debt. Once it is paid up, they will naturally stop getting angry at us. While we are at it, we should learn to become grateful to the person for giving us the

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chance to practice patience. Do you realize that when people get angry, their heart and liver get adversely impacted? This is a well known fact in Eastern medicine. For example, it explains why there are so many heart diseases in this day and age: people get angry so often.

One of my disciples came to me and complained about chest pains. I told her that I had been waiting for the opportunity to help her work on her anger issues. Since she reached a pretty high level of gongfu, every time that she allowed herself to get angry, her heart took a serious beating. After she knew and learned to control her anger, her chest pains went away in no time. If we can learn to appreciate the price they have to pay for giving us the chance to practice patience, it makes it easier to graduate to the third stage, which is to give rise to the mind of kindness towards angry people.

3. Bodhisattvas often speak of causes and conditions 當說諸法因緣.
4. Bodhisattvas are always mindful of Bodhi 常念菩提

**25. They will be praised by the sages 諸聖讚歎.** The Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Arhats of the ten directions praise you. This occurs because you have cultivated superior blessings. The Great Shastra says: “When Bodhisattvas listen to the deep and profound and inconceivable Buddhadharma,

## Explained by Master YongHua

they do not give rise to skepticism 疑悔。”

**26. They will be intelligent and have sharp faculties 聰明利根.** One will be very smart, have excellent memory and be very wise. Not only will one's eyes be very bright and far-seeing and one's ears be very sharp, but also all of one's six organs will be very sharp and acute.

**27. They will have magnanimous, kind, and sympathetic hearts 饒慈愍心.** Like Bodhisattvas, one's heart will be very kind and compassionate towards all. Even when one is poorly treated, there will be no ill-feeling at all!

Kindness has five benefits:

1. One will not be injured by knives.
2. One will not be harmed by poison.
3. One will not be burned by fire.
4. One will not be drowned by water.
5. One will be liked by those who are angry and evil 瞋惡見喜.

**28. They will ultimately attain Buddhahood 畢竟成佛.**  
They will definitely attain Buddhahood.

*Sutra text:*

**"Moreover, Empty Space Treasury Bodhisattva, if gods, dragons, or spirits of the present or future hear Earth Store Bodhisattva's name, bow to his image, or merely**

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**hear of his past vows, deeds and practices, and then praise him and gaze at and worship him, they will benefit in seven ways.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**"Moreover, Empty Space Treasury Bodhisattva, if gods, dragons, or spirits of the present or future hear Earth Store Bodhisattva's name, bow to his image, or merely hear of his past vows, deeds and practices, and then praise him and gaze at and worship him, they will benefit in seven ways.**

Why do we **bow** to Buddhas? Because it eradicates karmic offenses as many as the sands in the Ganges river.

*Sutra text:*

- 1 They will quickly reach the sages' ground.*
- 2 Their evil karma will be eradicated.*
- 3 All the Buddhas will protect and be near them.*
- 4 They will not retreat from Bodhi.*
- 5 Their inherent powers will increase.*
- 6 They will know their past lives.*
- 7 They will ultimately realize Buddhahood.*

*Sutra commentary:*

*1. They will reach the sages' ground 速超聖地.* They will very quickly advance, for example, skipping from third to fifth Samadhi. This applies to all ten (sagely) grounds and is a result of having very sharp faculties and superior roots.

## Explained by Master YongHua

**2. *Their evil karma will be eradicated* 惡業消滅.** Evil karmas are filth that prevents you from becoming a Buddha. They also are those dark corners of your mind that you do not wish others to know about. Although we have created evil karmas, the three obstructions are automatically eradicated.

**3. *All the Buddhas will protect and be near them* 諸佛臨護.** One can encounter Buddhas and obtain their protection. This occurs naturally like the moon watches over the rivers.

**4. *They will not retreat from Bodhi* 菩提不退.** Irreversibility from *Bodhi* simply refers to setting out to become a Buddha and continuing until that goal is reached. You start out by holding the Five Precepts, leaving home, cultivating to become a great monk, or maybe a patriarch, and then, after you practice the Bodhisattva way, a Buddha. Of course, you must continue the practice and not turn back. You cannot say one day that you will cultivate the Five Precepts and then the very next moment hesitate about practicing them. Do not think that if you receive the precepts and then break them it will be a great loss of face, too embarrassing a position, and consequently put off receiving them. Do not on the one hand think about leaving home and, on the other, start doubting the merits of doing so.

**5. *Their inherent powers will increase* 增長本力.** This means that their inherent ability to become Buddhas will grow daily. Externally, they cultivate the causes which gradually imbue 熏 and increase the True Suchness fundamental

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power 增真如本力. And because of their profound practices, Bodhisattvas are replete with compassion and wisdom which continue to increase. Hence their inherent powers will also increase.

**6. They will know their past lives 宿命接通.** In addition to these benefits, they will attain the penetration of *their past lives* and know, for example, "Once I was a tiny ant and now I have obtained the enormous body of a human. I went from an ant to a butterfly, from a butterfly to a songbird; the songbird became an eagle, a vegetarian eagle, and so blessings and wisdom were cultivated for accomplishing Bodhi. Along that road I have now become a human." When you obtain the penetration of your past lives you will know all of this, for behind one body there follow limitless numbers of differing bodies. One can go back to 80,000 great kalpas like the Arhats. Regarding the knowledge of past lives and knowledge of others' thoughts, if sentient beings make offerings of all sorts of great and wonderful food and drink, then thanks to this karma power they will be able to attain this wisdom.

**7. They will ultimately realize Buddhahood 畢竟成佛.**  
That is the final goal.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time, all those who had come from the ten directions, the indescribable, indescribable numbers of Buddhas, Thus Come Ones, as well as the great Bodhisattvas, gods, dragons, and the remainder of the Eightfold Divisions who heard Shakyamuni Buddha's praise of Earth**

Explained by Master YongHua

**Store Bodhisattva's great awesome, and inconceivable spiritual powers, exclaimed that there had never been anything like this before.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time, all those who had come from the ten directions, the indescribable, indescribable numbers of Buddhas, Thus Come Ones, as well as the great Bodhisattvas, gods, dragons, and the remainder of the Eightfold Divisions who heard Shakyamuni Buddha's praise of Earth Store Bodhisattva's great awesome, and inconceivable spiritual powers, exclaimed that there had never been anything like this before.**

Everyone agrees that never before has there been a Bodhisattva as rare and powerful as this.

*Sutra text:*

**At that time limitless incense, flowers, heavenly garments, and pearl necklaces rained down in the Trayastrimsa Heaven as offerings to Shakyamuni Buddha and Earth Store Bodhisattva. When this was finished, the entire assembly again gazed upward, made obeisance, placed their palms together, and withdrew.**

*Sutra commentary:*

**At that time limitless incense, flowers, heavenly garments, and pearl necklaces rained down in the Trayastrimsa Heaven as offerings to Shakyamuni Buddha and Earth**



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### Store Bodhisattva.

The goddesses were scattering the most precious **incense, flowers, heavenly garments, and gems** as offerings to the Buddha 能說之教主 and Earth Store Bodhisattva 能行之願王.

**Incense** 香 represents the cause penetrating the fruition sea 因通果海, accomplishing the Dharma body 五分法身.

**Flowers** 華 symbolize the perfect cause and commensurate fruition 圓因剋果, replete with the forty-one positions.

**Heavenly garments** 天衣 are produced on trees, and are light 輕, refined 細 and natural 自然, representing certification to the Patience of Still Extinction 證寂滅之忍. Jeweled **necklaces** 珠璣 represent the four superior 勝 dharmas (precepts, samadhi, wisdom and dharani), that adorn the Dharma Body. Also, necklaces adorn the neck, symbolizing the nature and virtue of the Middle Way. **Limitless** 無量 symbolizes that the cause and effect Dharma is replete with limitless merit and virtue.

**When this was finished, the entire assembly again gazed upward, made obeisance, placed their palms together, and withdrew.**

**Placing their palms together** 合掌 symbolizes that the ten Dharma Realms are just one substance.

## Explained by Master YongHua

In **withdrawing** 退, they manifesting that the ten thousand species all return to one 顯萬類同歸.

The exegesis of the sutra text is now finished, but cultivation is not complete until Buddhahood has been achieved. Only then can it be said, "Done is what had to be done 所作以辦 . The life of purity has been led 梵行以立, there is no further becoming 不受後有."

Those who have been able to study this sutra are people with good roots, for if they were not, there is no way they could have had this opportunity. In fact, even if they wanted to study it they would have been unable to do so. For example, three years ago when I first started explaining this sutra, a lay man requested that I continue explaining this sutra at Repaying Kindness Temple so that he could come and listen to it. I agreed. However, he was able to attend only around five lectures before he dropped out.

Some who do not have good roots might even say that they do not wish to become Buddhas, that they would just as soon go off to the hells and let Earth Store Bodhisattva use his great powers to release them, so that they could continue a life of wrongdoing. They ignore the fact that Earth Store Bodhisattva's great spiritual powers enable him to know full well what is in their thoughts, and that when he sees such a plan he neglects to open the gates of that offenders' hell that quickly. Do not study the ways of such people because we would too have to endure great suffering in the hells. Go onward in cultivation, practice in accordance with the principles of this su-

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tra. Do so with energy, do not retreat. Go forward with vigor.

**Explained by Master YongHua**



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### **Master YongHua's biography**

A native of Vietnam, Master YongHua came to the US for college where he earned a BS and an MBA with the aspiration of eventually returning to Vietnam to help rebuild his war-ravaged country. However, after climbing up the corporate ladder and reaching executive management positions, he found himself disillusioned with the business world. Around this time, he was exposed to Great Master XuanHua's teachings, which inspired him to enter monastic training. He soon realized that he had discovered his true calling, and decided to dedicate the rest of his life to serving Buddhism.

Master YongHua not only studied meditation in the Gui Yang Lineage of Great Master Xuan Hua, but also inherited the Lin Ji lineage from Master Man Giac. Now that he has investigated Mahayana for over 20 years, Dharma Master YongHua continues the Buddhist tradition of “repaying his teachers’ kindness” by extensively speaking on the Buddhadharma and vigorously training the next generation of cultivators. In the past several years, many of Master YongHua’s students have become accomplished meditators.

Master YongHua advocates the joint practice of Chan and Pure Land. This way those who have the potential can obtain immediate liberation through Chan. Furthermore, at the end of this lifetime, all those who truly believe will have the chance for rebirth to the Pure Land. He offers a practical, contemporary explanation of the Buddha’s ancient teachings in order to help us penetrate the sages' wisdom and apply it to our daily lives, hoping that all living beings will quickly escape suffering and attain bliss.