

THE AMITABHA SUTRA
AS DISCOURSED BY THE BUDDHA

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Praise of Incense Offering

Incense burning in the censer,
All space permeated with fragrance.
Buddhas perceive it from every direction.
Auspicious clouds gather everywhere.
With our sincerity,
Buddhas manifest themselves in their entirety.
We take refuge in the bodhisattvas, mahasattvas.
(repeat three times and prostrations)

Sutra Opening Verse

The unexcelled, most profound, and exquisitely
wondrous Dharma,
Is difficult to encounter throughout hundreds of
thousands of millions of kalpas.
Since we are now able to see, hear, receive and retain
it,
May we comprehend the true meaning of the
Tathagata.

The Amitabha Sutra as Discoursed by the Buddha

Thus have I heard:

Once the Buddha was staying at Jetavana, Anathapindika's Park in the Kingdom of Sravasti with a great sangha of *bhiksus*,¹ one thousand two hundred and fifty in all. All were great arhats who the multitudes knew and recognized, such as the elders Sariputra, Mahamaudgalya-yana, Mahakasyapa, Mahakatyayana, Mahakaus-thila, Revata, Suddhipanthaka, Nanda, Ananda, Rahula, Gavampati, Pindola Bharadvaja, Kalo-dayin, Mahakapphina, Vakkula, Aniruddha and other great disciples like these. Also, the bodhisattvas, mahasattvas, Dharma Prince Manjusri, Ajita Bodhisattva, Gandhahastin Bodhisattva, Nityodyukta Bodhisattva and other great bodhisattvas like these—as well as Sakra Devanam Indra

1. A male member of the Buddhist monastic community who has renounced the household life and received full ordination.

and immeasurable other heavenly beings—were all in the great assembly.

At the time, the Buddha told the elder Sariputra, “West of here, passing beyond hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhas’ lands, there is a world called ‘Ultimate Bliss.’ In that land there is a Buddha named Amitabha who has now manifested there to teach the Dharma.

“Sariputra, why is that land called ‘Ultimate Bliss’? The sentient beings in that land are without any kind of suffering, and only enjoy various kinds of happiness, therefore it is called Ultimate Bliss.

“Furthermore, Sariputra, completely circling the Land of Ultimate Bliss are seven tiers of railings, seven layers of netting, and seven rows of trees, which are all made of the four treasures. For this reason, that land is called Ultimate Bliss.

“Furthermore, Sariputra, in the Land of Ultimate Bliss there are ponds of seven treasures that are filled with the water of eight virtues, and the ground on the bottom of the ponds is covered solely by gold sand. On the four sides, there are stairways composed of gold, silver, lapis

lazuli, and crystal. Above, there are towered pavilions that have gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, nacre, red pearls, and carnelian magnificently adorning them.

“In the ponds there are lotus flowers as large as carriage wheels that are blue colored with a blue sheen, yellow colored with a yellow sheen, red colored with a red sheen, and white colored with a white sheen. They are fine, wondrous, fragrant, and pure. Sariputra, the Land of Ultimate Bliss is complete with virtues and adornments like these.

“Furthermore, Sariputra, in that Buddha land heavenly music constantly plays, and the ground is made of gold. Throughout the six periods of day and night, heavenly mandarava flowers rain down. Early in the morning, the sentient beings in that land always fill the hem of their robes with many wondrous flowers and make offerings to the hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhas in the other directions, and return by mealtime to eat their food and walk in meditation. Sariputra, the Land of Ultimate Bliss is complete with virtues and adornments like these.

“Moreover, Sariputra, in that land there are always various kinds of rare multicolored birds, such as snow cranes, peacocks, parrots, saris, kalavinkas, and birds that

are conjoined. Throughout the six periods of day and night, all of these birds sing in harmony and with elegant sound. These sounds proclaim the five faculties, the five strengths, the seven factors of awakening, the Noble Eightfold Path, and other teachings like these. After hearing these sounds, all the sentient beings in that land are fully mindful of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

“Sariputra, you should not say that these birds are actually born because of the karmic effects of past offenses. Why is this? Because that Buddha land is without the three lower realms. Sariputra, that Buddha land does not even have the names of the three lower realms, so how could they exist? All of these birds are transformationally produced through Amitabha Buddha’s intention to cause the sounds of the Dharma to be widely circulated.

Sariputra, when gentle breezes blow in that Buddha land, all of the rows of jeweled trees and jeweled nets let out a subtle, wondrous sound similar to hundreds of thousands of types of music playing simultaneously.

Those who hear the sounds will spontaneously give rise to a mind that is mindful of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Sariputra, that Buddha land is complete

with virtues and adornments like these.

“Sariputra, what do you think? Why is that Buddha named Amitabha?

“Sariputra, that Buddha’s brilliant radiance is immeasurable and illuminates the lands of the ten directions without any obstruction, therefore he is named Amitabha.

“Furthermore, Sariputra, the lifespan of that Buddha and his people lasts for immeasurable, infinite *asamkhya*² *kalpas*.³ Therefore, he is called Amitabha.

“Sariputra, it has been ten *kalpas* since Amita-bha Buddha attained Buddhahood.

“Furthermore, Sariputra, that Buddha has immeasurable, infinite *sravaka*⁴ disciples, who are all arhats and whose numbers cannot be known by calculation. All of the bodhisattvas are also like this. Sariputra, that Buddha land is complete with virtues and adornments like these.

“Furthermore, Sariputra, the sentient beings who are born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss are all *avaivartikas*,⁵ and among them there are many who will become Buddhas in

2. A Sanskrit term that literally means incalculable. A very large number unit. It is the sixtieth number of successively larger numbers with each one ten times greater than the preceding one.

3. An Indic unit of time, a very long period of time.

4. One who has heard. One who has been liberated from the cycle of birth and death after listening to the Buddha’s teachings but does not seek to become a Buddha.

5. A bodhisattva who will not regress on the path to Buddhahood.

one more rebirth. Their numbers are extremely vast, and cannot be known by calculation. One could only speak of them in terms of immeasurable, infinite *asamkhyas*.

“Sariputra, sentient beings who hear this should set forth a vow to be reborn in that land. Why is this? Because they will be able to meet with all of the utmost virtuous people like these in a single place.

“Sariputra, it is not possible to obtain rebirth in that land with few wholesome roots and meritorious causes and conditions.

Sariputra, if good men and women hear Amitabha Buddha mentioned and hold firmly to his name for one day, two days, three, four, five, six, or seven days, wholeheartedly without distraction, then when these people are near the end of life, Amitabha Buddha will appear in front of them with a host of sages.

“In their final moments, if the minds of these people are not distorted, then they will be reborn in Amitabha’s Land of Ultimate Bliss.

“Sariputra, I recognize these benefits, therefore I proclaim these words: ‘If there are sentient beings who hear this spoken, they should set forth a vow to be born in that land.’

“Sariputra, similar to me now, there are also those in the eastern region who praise the inconceivable virtues of Amitabha Buddha, such as Aksobya Buddha, Sumeru Emblem Buddha, Great Sumeru Buddha, Sumeru Light Buddha, Wondrous Voice Buddha, and other Buddhas like these who are as numerous as grains of sand in the Ganges River.

From their own lands, they each extend their characteristic long, broad tongues covering everywhere in the three thousandfold world systems⁶ and speak these sincere and true words: ‘Sentient beings, you should believe in the *Praising the Inconceivable Virtues Which All Buddhas Have Protected Sutra*.’

“Sariputra, in the southern region there is Sun Moon Beacon Buddha, Renowned Light Buddha, Great Blazing Shoulders Buddha, Sumeru Beacon Buddha, Immeasurable Diligence Buddha, and other Buddhas like these who are as numerous as grains of sand in the Ganges River. From their own lands, they each extend their characteristic long,

6. According to Buddhist cosmology, a world consists of a Mount Sumeru at its center surrounded by nine mountains, eight oceans, four continents, sun, moon, and star. A group of one thousand such worlds is called a “small world system,” one thousand small world systems equal a “medium world system,” and one thousand medium world systems equal a “large world system.” A three thousandfold world system is a combination of these three types of world systems.

broad tongues covering everywhere in the three thousand-fold world systems and speak these sincere and true words: ‘Sentient beings, you should believe in the *Praising the Inconceivable Virtues Which All Buddhas Have Protected Sutra.*’

“Sariputra, in the western region there is Immeasurable Life Buddha, Immeasurable Emblem Buddha, Immeasurable Banner Buddha, Great Light Buddha, Great Brilliance Buddha, Treasure Emblem Buddha, Pure Light Buddha, and other Buddhas like these who are as numerous as grains of sand in the Ganges River. From their own lands, they each extend their characteristic long, broad tongues covering everywhere in the three thousand-fold world systems and speak these sincere and true words: ‘Sentient beings, you should believe in the *Praising the Inconceivable Virtues Which All Buddhas Have Protected Sutra.*’

“Sariputra, in the northern region there is Blazing Shoulders Buddha, Most Excellent Voice Buddha, Unstoppable Buddha, Sun Birth Buddha, Net Brilliance Buddha, and other Buddhas like these who are as numerous as grains of sand in the Ganges River. From their own

lands, they each extend their characteristic long, broad tongues covering everywhere in the three thousandfold world systems and speak these sincere and true words:

‘Sentient beings, you should believe in the *Praising the Inconceivable Virtues Which All Buddhas Have Protected Sutra*.’

“Sariputra, in the lower region there is Lion Buddha, Renowned Buddha, Acclaimed Light Buddha, Dharma Buddha, Dharma Banner Buddha, Upholding the Dharma Buddha, and other Buddhas like these who are as numerous as grains of sand in the Ganges River. From their own lands, they each extend their characteristic long, broad tongues covering everywhere in the three thousandfold world systems and speak these sincere and true words: ‘Sentient beings, you should believe in the *Praising the Inconceivable Virtues Which All Buddhas Have Protected Sutra*.’

“Sariputra, in the upper region there is Brahma Voice Buddha, Constellation King Buddha, Foremost Fragrance Buddha, Fragrance and Light Buddha, Great Blazing Shoulders Buddha, Multicolored Jeweled Flower Adornment Body Buddha, King of the Sala Tree Buddha,

Jeweled Flower Virtue Buddha, Discerning All Meanings Buddha, Sumeru-Like Buddha, and other Buddhas like these who are as numerous as grains of sand in the Ganges River. From their own lands, they each extend their characteristic long, broad tongues covering everywhere in the three thousandfold world systems and speak these sincere and true words: ‘Sentient beings, you should believe in the *Praising the Inconceivable Virtues Which All Buddhas Have Protected Sutra*.’

“Sariputra, what do you think? Why is it called the *Praising the Inconceivable Virtues Which All Buddhas Have Protected Sutra*?

“Sariputra, if there are those good men and women who hear this sutra and receive and retain it, and hear the name of all the Buddhas, then all of these good men and women are protected and kept in mind by all Buddhas.

All of them will attain non-regression from *anut-tara-samyak-sambodhi*.⁷ For this reason, Sariputra, all of you should believe and receive my words, and those of all Buddhas.

“Sariputra, if there are those who have already put

7. A Sanskrit term meaning complete, unexcelled enlightenment; an attribute of all Buddhas.

forth a vow, or who are presently setting forth a vow, or who will set forth a vow wanting to be reborn in the Land of Amitabha Buddha, then all of these people will attain non-regression from *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*, whether they are already born, presently being born, or will be born in that land. For this reason, Sariputra, if there are those good men and women who believe, they should set forth a vow to be reborn in that land.

“Sariputra, just as I now praise the inconceivable virtues of all Buddhas, those Buddhas also commend my inconceivable virtues, proclaiming these words: ‘Sakyamuni Buddha is able to accomplish extremely difficult and rare feats. In the Saha land amid the evil period of five degenerations—*kalpa* degeneration, view degeneration, affliction degeneration, sentient being degeneration, and lifespan degeneration—he is able to attain *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*. For the sake of all sentient beings, he teaches this Dharma that this world finds hard to believe.’

“Sariputra, you should know, I have practiced these difficult feats during the evil period of five degenerations, attaining *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*, and have taught this Dharma that the world finds hard to believe. This is

extremely difficult.”

After the Buddha spoke this sutra, Sariputra and all of the *bhiksus*, and heavenly beings, humans, and *asuras*⁸ of all the worldly realms heard what the Buddha said, rejoiced in it, and faithfully accepted it. They made obeisance and then departed.

[Thus ends] the *Amitabha Sutra* as Discoursed by the Buddha.

8. Also known as non-heaven; they are prone to hatred, arrogance, and suspicion.

Triple Refuge

I take refuge in the Buddha, wishing that all sentient beings understand the Dharma and make the supreme vow.

I take refuge in the Dharma, wishing that all sentient beings study the sutras diligently and obtain an ocean of wisdom.

I take refuge in the Sangha, wishing that all sentient beings lead the masses in harmony without obstruction.

Dedication of Merit

May kindness, compassion, joy , and equanimity
pervade the dharma realms;

May all people and heavenly beings benefit from our
blessings and friendship;

May our ethical practice of Chan, Pure Land, and
Precepts help us to realize equality and patience;

May we undertake the great vows with humility and
gratitude.

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