

Original Vows of
Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Sutra

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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.

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Chapter One

Spiritual Penetration in the Trayastrimsa Heaven

Thus have I heard. At one time, the Buddha was in the Trayastrimsa Heaven expounding Dharma for his mother. At that time, from measureless worlds of the ten directions, all Buddhas and great Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas, inexpressibly-inexpressibly [many], all came and assembled there. They praised how Sakyamuni Buddha was able to manifest inconceivable, great wisdom and supernatural powers to regulate and train obstinate living beings in the evil age of the five degenerations, so that beings would come to understand suffering and happiness. Each of them sent his attendant to inquire after the World-Honored One.

At that time, the Tathagata smiled and emitted hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of clouds of great

light. There were clouds of light of great perfect completeness, clouds of light of great kindness and compassion, clouds of light of great wisdom, clouds of light of great prajna, clouds of light of great samadhi, clouds of light of great auspiciousness, clouds of light of great merit, clouds of light of great virtue, clouds of light of great refuge, and clouds of light of great praise.

After emitting an inexpressible [number of] clouds of light such as these, he furthermore gave forth various sublime, wonderful sounds. There was the sound of perfection of giving, the sound of perfection of morality, the sound of perfection of patience, the sound of perfection of diligence, the sound of perfection of meditation, the sound of perfection of prajna, the sound of kindness and compassion, the sound of joy and equanimity, 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 cloud thunder, and the sound of great cloud thunder.

After he had given forth an inexpressibly-inexpressible [number of] sounds such as these, from the saha world and other lands, measureless millions of devas,

nagas, ghosts, and spirits also assembled in the palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven. They were from the Heaven of the Four Deva Kings, the Trayastrimsa Heaven, the Suyama Heaven, the Tusita Heaven, the Heaven of Delight in Transformations, the Heaven of Mastery over Others' Transformations, the Heaven of Brahma's Assembly, the Heaven of Brahma's Ministers, the Great Brahma Heaven, the Heaven of Limited Light, the Heaven of Measureless Light, the Light-Sound Heaven, the Heaven of Limited Purity, the Heaven of Measureless Purity, the Heaven of Universal Purity, the Heaven of Birth of Merit, the Heaven of Love of Merit, the Heaven of Abundant Results, the Heaven of No Perception, the Heaven of No Affliction, the Heaven of No Heat [from affliction], the Heaven of Good Sight, the Heaven of Good Manifestation, the Ultimate Form Heaven, the Mahesvara Heaven, and so forth, up to the Heaven of the State of Neither-Perception-nor-Non-Perception. All the multitudes of devas, nagas, ghosts, and spirits came and assembled there.

Furthermore, from other lands and the saha world, sea spirits, river spirits, stream spirits, tree spirits, mountain spirits, earth spirits, brook-and-marsh spirits,

seedling-and-crop spirits, day spirits, night spirits, space spirits, heaven spirits, food-and-drink spirits, grass-and-wood spirits—spirits such as these all came and assembled there.

Furthermore, from other lands and the saha world, great ghost kings known as Ghost King Evil Eyes, Ghost King Consuming Blood, Ghost King Consuming Vital Energy, Ghost King Consuming Fetuses and Eggs, Ghost King Spreading Diseases, Ghost King Controlling Poisons, Ghost King Kindhearted, Ghost King Merit and Benefit, Ghost King Great Love and Respect—ghost kings such as these all came and assembled there.

At that time, Sakyamuni Buddha said to Manjusri, Dharma Prince, Bodhisattva-Mahasattva, “Look at all the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, devas, nagas, ghosts, and spirits from this and other worlds, from this and other lands—those who come and assemble in the Trayastrimsa Heaven now. Do you know their number?”

Manjusri said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, even if I were to measure and fathom with the power of my spiritual penetration for a thousand kalpas, I would not be able to know it.”

The Buddha told Manjusri, “As I see them through the Buddha eye, their number still cannot be counted fully. All these are beings who have been guided across, are being guided across, will be guided across [to the other shore], have been brought to attainment, are being brought to attainment, or will be brought to attainment by Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva throughout many long kalpas.”

Manjusri said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, in the past I have long cultivated roots of goodness and have attained unobstructed wisdom; therefore, when I hear what the Buddha says, I immediately believe and accept it. However, sravakas of small attainment, devas and nagas and others of the eight classes of beings, as well as living beings in the future—although hearing the sincere, truthful words of the Tathagata, will certainly harbor doubts. Even if they receive these words most respectfully, they may still be unable to avoid slandering them. O World-Honored One, please speak in detail about what practices Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva cultivated and what vows he made during his causal states [of cultivation] that have enabled him to accomplish such inconceivable deeds.”

The Buddha told Manjusri, “As an analogy, suppose all the grasses, trees, thickets, forests, rice, sesame, bamboo, reeds, mountains, stones, and dust particles in the three thousandfold world system were each counted as a unit, and [for each unit] there would be a Ganges River; for each grain of sand in each of these Ganges Rivers, there would be a world; for each speck of dust in each of these worlds, there would be a kalpa; and for every speck of dust accumulated during each of these kalpas, there would be a kalpa. The time since Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva attained the Tenth Ground of Fruition [of Bodhisattva Development] is thousands of times greater than that of the above analogy. How much greater yet [is the time] since Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva was at the stages of sravaka and pratyekabuddha!

“Manjusri, inconceivable are the awesome spiritual penetration and vows of this Bodhisattva. In the future if there are good men and good women who hear this Bodhisattva’s name, and they sing his praises, reverently gaze, pay obeisance, recite his name, make offerings, or if they paint, carve, sculpt, or use lacquer to make his image, these people will be reborn a hundred times in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Devas and will never fall into the lower

realms.

“Manjusri, in the distant past, an inexpressibly-inexpressible [number of] kalpas ago, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva was once the son of a great elder. At that time in the world there was a Buddha named Lion’s Swift Rousing Perfect in Ten Thousand Practices Tathagata. The elder’s son saw the Buddha’s signs and characteristics of excellence, how he was adorned with thousands of merits. He therefore inquired of that Buddha what practices he had cultivated and what vows he had made to achieve these signs of excellence.

“Lion’s Swift Rousing Perfect in Ten Thousand Practices Tathagata told the elder’s son that if he wished to attain this [Buddha] body, he would have to guide all suffering beings across to liberation throughout a very long time.

“Manjusri, the elder’s son hence made a vow, saying ‘From now on, throughout incalculable kalpas in the future, I will employ many skillful means for the sake of wrongdoing suffering beings in the six realms of existence, causing all of them to attain liberation; only after that will I myself attain Buddhahood.’ He made such a great vow in front of that Buddha. Now, hundreds of thousands of

myriads of millions of nayutas of inexpressible kalpas later, he is still a Bodhisattva.

“Moreover, in the past, inconceivable asamkhyeya kalpas ago, in the world there was a Buddha named Awakening-Blossom Concentration Mastery King Tathagata. The lifespan of that Buddha was four hundred thousand myriad million asamkhyeya kalpas. During the Age of Semblance Dharma, there was a Brahman woman who had ample, profound merits from previous lives. She was admired and respected by people. Whether she was walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, devas guarded and protected her. Her mother, however, believed in false doctrines and often slighted the Triple Gem. The holy woman used many skillful means to persuade and encourage her mother to give rise to right view, but her mother did not fully believe. Before long, the mother’s life ended and her consciousness fell into the Incessant Hell.

“The Brahman woman knew that when her mother was alive, she had not believed in cause and effect. Realizing that her mother would certainly be reborn in the lower realms in accordance with her karma, the woman sold the family house and searched far and wide for incense, flowers, and

various objects worthy to be offered. She then made many great offerings to that past Buddha's stupas and monasteries. In one of the monasteries, she saw Awakening-Blossom Concentration Mastery King Tathagata's image: his awe-inspiring appearance was sculpted and painted, replete with splendor and dignity. As the Brahman woman gazed up at and made obeisance to his honored countenance, her reverence multiplied. She thought to herself, 'The Buddha is called the great awakened one, replete with all wisdom. If [it were] during the time that this Buddha is in the world, and I were to inquire of him after my mother's death, he would certainly know where she is.'

"The Brahman woman wept for a long time as she gazed up longingly at the Tathagata. Suddenly she heard a voice in the sky saying, 'Weeping holy woman, do not be so sorrowful. I will show you where your mother has gone.'

"The Brahman woman joined her palms, faced skyward, and answered by saying, 'Who is the divine virtuous one relieving me of my worry? Ever since I lost my mother, I have held her in memory day and night. There is nowhere that I can ask about the realm of her rebirth.'

"A voice again resounded in the sky, telling the woman,

‘I am the one to whom you gaze reverently and pay obeisance, the past Awakening-Blossom Concentration Mastery King Tathagata. I have seen that you think of your mother many times more than ordinary beings do theirs. Therefore, I have come to show you [where she is].’

“Upon hearing these words, the Brahman woman cast her entire body [skyward] to prostrate herself, injuring her limbs and joints. Her attendants supported and attended her for quite a while before she finally came to. Then she said toward the sky, ‘I implore the Buddha to take kind pity upon me and quickly tell me in what realm my mother has been reborn, now that I am near death myself.’

“Awakening-Blossom Concentration Mastery King Tathagata told the holy woman, ‘After your offering is complete, go home quickly. Sit upright and meditate on my name. You will soon know where your mother has been reborn.’

“After the Brahman woman made obeisance to the Buddha, she returned home immediately, and because she thought of her mother, she sat upright meditating on Awakening-Blossom Concentration Mastery King Tathagata.

“After a day and a night, she suddenly saw herself beside a sea whose waters seethed. Many evil beasts with iron bodies flew and ran on the sea, rushing here and there in pursuit. She saw hundreds of thousands of myriads of men and women, rising and sinking in the sea, snatched up and devoured by vying evil beasts. She also saw yaksas whose appearances were each different—some had many hands, some many eyes, some many legs, some many heads—and protruding from their mouths were teeth as sharp as swords. They drove the wrongdoers on toward the evil beasts; moreover, they themselves hit and seized those people; they forced their heads and feet together—the forms [of torment] were myriad in variety, a sight at which one would not dare look for long. During that time, the Brahman woman was naturally without fear because of the power of recollecting the Buddha.

“There was a ghost king named Poisonless who prostrated himself to welcome her. He said to the holy woman, ‘Excellent, Bodhisattva! For what reason have you come here?’

“The Brahman woman asked the ghost king, ‘What is this place?’

“Poisonless replied, ‘This is the first of the seas west of the Great Iron Encircling Mountains.’

“The holy woman asked, ‘I have heard that hells are within the Iron Encircling [Mountains]. Is this really so?’

“Poisonless replied, ‘There really are hells.’

“The holy woman asked, ‘Now, how have I come to the hells?’

“Poisonless replied, ‘If it were not by [the power of] awesome spiritual penetration, then it would have been by the force of karma. Without either, one cannot come here at all.’

“The holy woman asked further, ‘Why is this water seething, and why are there so many wrongdoers and evil beasts?’

“Poisonless replied, ‘These are recently deceased beings of Jambudvipa who had done evil. They have passed through forty-nine days without any descendants doing virtuous deeds on their behalf to rescue them from suffering. Besides that, during their lifetime they did not plant any good causes. Therefore, their own karma will accordingly bring about the hells, and naturally they are to cross this sea first. A hundred thousand yojanas east of

this sea, there is another sea where the suffering is many times greater than this one. To the east of that sea, there is yet another sea where the suffering is multiplied again. Brought on by the evil causes in the karma of body, speech, and mind, these seas are called the seas of karma. This is that place.’

“The holy woman again asked Ghost King Poisonless, ‘Where are the hells?’

“Poisonless replied, ‘Within the three seas are great hells. They number in the hundreds of thousands, and each one is different. There are eighteen specifically known as the great hells. Second [to them] there are five hundred, where the agonizing suffering is measureless; and next, there are hundreds of thousands, also with measureless suffering.’

“The holy woman again asked the great ghost king, ‘My mother passed away not long ago. I wonder, to what realm has her consciousness gone?’

“The ghost king asked the holy woman, ‘What actions did the Bodhisattva’s mother do habitually while she was alive?’

“The holy woman replied, ‘My mother held false

views, and she ridiculed and slandered the Triple Gem. Even when she temporarily believed, she would quickly become disrespectful again. She passed away recently. I do not know where she has been reborn.’

“Poisonless asked, ‘What was the name and clan of the Bodhisattva’s mother?’

“The holy woman replied, ‘My parents were both Brahmans. My father’s name was Silou Shanxian, and my mother’s name was Yue Dili.’

“Poisonless joined his palms and informed the Bodhisattva, ‘Holy One, please return to your home. Do not be worried or sorrowful in remembering, for the woman wrongdoer Yue Dili was reborn in heaven three days ago. It is said that by virtue of her filial child’s making offerings to cultivate merit in the mother’s behalf by practicing giving to the stupas and monasteries of Awakening-Blossom Concentration Mastery King Tathagata, not only was the Bodhisattva’s mother released from the hells, the other wrongdoers in the Incessant Hell, too, experienced happiness and were reborn on that day.’ After the ghost king had finished speaking, he joined his palms and withdrew.

“The Brahman woman quickly returned as if from a

dream. Upon realizing this event, she made an immense vow before the image and stupa of Awakening-Blossom Concentration Mastery King Tathagata, ‘I vow that throughout the future kalpas, I will employ many skillful means for all wrongdoing suffering beings, causing them all to attain liberation.’”

The Buddha told Manjusri, “Ghost King Poisonless then is now Leader In Wealth Bodhisattva, and the Brahman woman is now Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva.”

Chapter Two

The Assembly of the Emanations

At that time, emanation Ksitigarbha Bodhisattvas from all the hells in hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of unthinkable, ineffable, immeasurable, inexpressible, measureless asamkhyeyas of worlds all came and assembled in the palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven. Because of the spiritual power of the Tathagata, each came from his direction with beings—also numbering in the thousands of myriads of millions of nayutas—who had obtained liberation from the karmic paths, and all came holding incense

and flowers to make offering to the Buddha. Those groups of beings who came were irreversibly [on the path] to unexcelled perfect complete awakening because they had been taught and transformed by Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. For many long kalpas these beings had been wandering in samsara, undergoing suffering in the six realms of existence with never a momentary rest. Due to the great kindness and compassion and profound vows of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, they each had realized attainments. When they came to the Trayastrimsa Heaven, their hearts danced joyously. They gazed up in reverence at the Tathagata, their eyes never leaving him for a moment.

At that time, the World-Honored One stretched forth his golden arm and placed his hand on the crowns of the heads of all the emanation Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas from hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of unthinkable, ineffable, immeasurable, inexpressible, measureless asamkhyeyas of worlds and spoke these words, “I teach and transform obstinate living beings like these in the evil age of the five degenerations, causing their minds to be regulated and tamed so that they abandon the false and return to the true. However, there are one or

two out of every ten who still have evil habits. I too transform into hundreds of thousands of millions of emanations and employ many skillful means [for living beings]. Some beings are of keen capacity: they immediately believe and accept upon hearing [the Dharma]. Some are reaping the results of wholesome [deeds]: they achieve accomplishments through energetic encouragement. Some are ignorant and dull: they return [to the true] only after long being instructed. Some have karma that is heavy: they do not give rise to respect [for the Dharma].

“Living beings like these types are each different. I therefore transform into emanations to guide them across to liberation. The emanations are manifested in the forms of a man, a woman, a deva, a naga, a spirit, a ghost, or a mountain, a forest, a stream, a plain, a river, a pond, a spring, or a well to benefit people, so that they all may be guided across to liberation. The emanations are also manifested in the forms of Sakra, Brahma, a wheel-turning king, a householder, a king, a high minister, a government official, or a bhiksu, a bhiksuni, an upasaka, an upasika, or a sravaka, an arhat, a pratyekabuddha, a Bodhisattva, or others to teach and guide living beings across. It is not

only in the form of a Buddha that I have manifested before them.

“You see how, kalpa after kalpa, diligently and arduously I guide difficult-to-teach, obstinate, wrongdoing, suffering beings such as these across to liberation. Those not yet regulated and tamed experience ripened effects according to their karma. If they fall into the lower realms and undergo great suffering, you should remember what I am earnestly entrusting to you now in the Trayastrimsa Heaven: Help all living beings in the saha world from now until Maitreya [Buddha] arises in the world—cause them to attain liberation, to leave all suffering forever, and to meet [Maitreya] Buddha and be given prediction.”

At that time, emanation Ksitigarbha Bodhisattvas from the various worlds returned together to one form, and weeping from pity and great love, he said to the Buddha, “Throughout many long kalpas Buddhas have guided me, so that I am able to attain inconceivable spiritual power and be replete with great wisdom. My emanations fill worlds as numerous as the sand grains in hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of Ganges Rivers. In each of these worlds, I transform into hundreds of thousands of myriads

of millions of emanations. Each emanation guides hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of people across, causing them to revere and take refuge in the Triple Gem, leave samsara forever, and reach the bliss of nirvana. As long as they do good deeds in Buddhadharma, even if such deeds are as little as a strand of hair, a drop of water, a grain of sand, a speck of dust, or a bit of a minute down hair, I will gradually guide them across to liberation, causing them to gain great benefits. O World-Honored One, please do not be concerned about future living beings who have unwholesome karma.”

Thus he said three times to the Buddha, “O World-Honored One, please do not be concerned about future living beings who have unwholesome karma.”

At that time, the Buddha praised Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, saying, “Excellent, excellent! I will help in your aspirations. You will be able to fulfill the profound vows taken throughout many long kalpas, finish guiding [beings] far and wide [to the other shore], and immediately attain bodhi.”

Chapter Three

Observing the Karmic Conditions of Living Beings

At that time, the Buddha's mother, Queen Maya, respectfully joined her palms and asked Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, "Holy One, living beings of Jambudvīpa generate different karma. What ripened effects do they experience?"

Ksitigarbha replied, "There are thousands of myriads of worlds and lands: some have hells, others do not have hells; some have women, others do not have women; some have Buddhadharmā, others do not have Buddhadharmā; this is also the case for [the presence or absence of] śrāvaka, pratyekabuddhas, and so forth. There is not only the category of ripened effects of wrongdoing as occur in the hells."

Queen Maya again said to the Bodhisattva, "I wish to hear about the lower realms brought on by the ripened effects of wrongdoing in Jambudvīpa."

Ksitigarbha replied, "Holy Mother, please listen and I will briefly speak about that."

The Buddha's mother answered, "Holy One, please tell me."

At that time, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva said to the Holy Mother, “The offenses in Jambudvīpa and the ripened effects are like these: If there are living beings who are not filial toward their parents, who even kill them, they will fall into the Incessant Hell, and for thousands of myriads of millions of kalpas, be without a time of release despite their wishes.

“If there are living beings who shed a Buddha’s blood, who slander the Triple Gem, who disrespect the sacred sutras, they too will fall into the Incessant Hell, and for thousands of myriads of millions of kalpas, be without a time of release despite their wishes.

“If there are living beings who usurp or damage the property of the sangha, who defile monks or nuns, who commit sexual acts in the monastery, or who kill or harm beings there—living beings like these will fall into the Incessant Hell, and for thousands of myriads of millions of kalpas, be without a time of release despite their wishes.

“If there are living beings who pretend to be monastics but whose hearts are not those of monastics—they abuse the property of the sangha, deceive lay devotees, go against the precepts, do various evil acts—living beings like

these will fall into the Incessant Hell, and for thousands of myriads of millions of kalpas, be without a time of release despite their wishes.

“If there are living beings who steal the wealth, goods, grains, food, drink, clothing from the property of the sangha, who take anything at all [from the sangha] that is not given to them, they will fall into the Incessant Hell, and for thousands of myriads of millions of kalpas, be without a time of release despite their wishes.”

Ksitigarbha continued, saying, “Holy Mother, if there are living beings who commit such offenses, they will fall into the hell with fivefold incessancy. Although they seek for their suffering to stop temporarily, that will not happen, not even for a thought-moment.”

Queen Maya again asked Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, “Why is that hell named Incessant Hell?”

Ksitigarbha replied, “Holy Mother, the hells are within the Great Iron Encircling Mountains. There are eighteen of the great hells; second [to them] there are five hundred, each with a different name; and next, there are hundreds of thousands, each also with a distinct name.

“In regard to the Incessant Hell, this city of hells is

more than eighty thousand li in perimeter. The city walls are made entirely of iron, ten thousand li in height. Atop these walls the mass of fire leaves hardly a gap. Within this city of hells, the various hells are interconnected, each with a different name. There is just one hell named Incessant. It is eighteen thousand li in perimeter. Its hell walls are a thousand li in height, all made of iron, and with flames at the top reaching to the bottom and flames at the bottom reaching to the top. Iron snakes and iron dogs spew fire and rush here and there in pursuit atop these hell walls.

“In this hell there is a bed that extends for ten thousand li. When one person undergoes torment there, that person sees his own body filling the bed. When thousands of myriads of people undergo torment there, each of them sees his own body filling the bed, too. Such are the ripened effects brought on by the many [kinds of] karma.

“Moreover, the wrongdoers undergo all manner of suffering. There are hundreds of thousands of yaksas and evil ghosts with teeth like swords and eyes like lightning who pull and drag the wrongdoers with copper-clawed hands. There are also yaksas wielding large iron halberds who pierce the wrongdoers’ bodies, into their mouths and

noses or into their abdomens and backs. They toss them into the air, catch them again, or else place them on the bed. There are also iron eagles that peck at the wrongdoers' eyes. There are also iron snakes that strangle the wrongdoers' necks. Long nails are driven into all their hundreds of joints. Their tongues are pulled out and plowed through. Their bowels are drawn out and chopped up. Molten copper is poured into their mouths. Their bodies are bound in hot iron. They undergo myriads of deaths and as many births. Such are the consequences brought about by their karma.

“They pass through millions of kalpas without a time of release despite their wishes. When this world undergoes destruction, they will be transferred to live [and suffer] in another world. When that world undergoes destruction, they will be transferred to another one. When that other world, too, undergoes destruction, they will pass in turn through others. After this world is formed, they will return here once again. Such are the ripened effects of wrongdoing as occur in the Incessant Hell.

“Moreover, this hell is called Incessant because of five qualities of such karmic consequences. What are the five?

“First, torment is undergone day and night throughout

many kalpas with never any break. Therefore, it is called Incessant.

“Second, one person fills this hell; many people fill it, too. Therefore, it is called Incessant.

“Third, there are instruments of torment such as forks, clubs, eagles, snakes, wolves, dogs, pestles, grinders, saws, chisels, files, axes, cauldrons of boiling liquid, iron nets, iron ropes, iron donkeys, and iron horses. The wrongdoers are flayed alive. Their heads are bound in their own skin. Hot iron is poured over their bodies. They swallow iron balls when hungry and drink molten iron when thirsty. The wretched suffering continues nonstop throughout nayutas of kalpas. Therefore, it is called Incessant.

“Fourth, be they men, women, of any race, young or old, of upper or lower class, or nagas, spirits, devas, or ghosts, they all undergo such karmic consequences based on the offenses they committed. Therefore, it is called Incessant.

“Fifth, if beings fall into this hell, they will undergo myriads of deaths and myriads of births each day and night from the time of entry and on through hundreds of thousands of kalpas. Although they seek to pause, even in

a thought-moment, that will not happen. Only when their karma is exhausted can they be reborn. Because of this continuity, it is called Incessant.”

Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva said to the Holy Mother, “This is a brief description of the Incessant Hell. If I were to speak in detail about the names of the hells and the instruments of torment and also about all the sufferings there, I could not finish even in a kalpa.”

After hearing this, Queen Maya sorrowfully joined her palms, prostrated herself, and withdrew.

Chapter Four

The Karmic Consequences of Living Beings of Jambudvipa

At that time, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, it is through the power of awesome spiritual penetration of the Buddha Tathagata that I transform into emanation-forms throughout hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of worlds to rescue all beings who undergo the ripened effects of karma. If it were not for the power of the Tathagata’s great

kindness, I would not be able to perform such transformations. Now, I have further been entrusted by the Buddha to guide all beings in the six realms of existence across to liberation until Ajita becomes a Buddha. I will do so, World-Honored One. Please do not be concerned.”

Then the Buddha told Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, “All beings who have not yet attained liberation are without fixity in their nature and consciousness: Through evil habits they form [unwholesome] karma, and through good habits they form [wholesome] results. Depending on situations, they give rise to good and evil doings. Revolving wheel-like through the five realms of existence with never a momentary rest, they pass through kalpas as numerous as dust particles, confused, deluded, hindered, and [afflicted] with difficulties. They are like a fish that swims in nets while following a long flowing current; now and then it would get free temporarily, only to be caught in the nets again. I would think with concern about these beings. However, because you will fulfill your past vows, the profound oaths taken kalpa after kalpa to guide wrongdoing beings far and wide [to the other shore], what further cause of worry need I have?”

As these words were spoken, in the assembly there was a Bodhisattva-Mahasattva named Concentration Mastery King who said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, what vows has Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva made during the many kalpas past that he now receives profuse praise from the World-Honored One? O World-Honored One, please briefly speak about this.”

Then the World-Honored One told Concentration Mastery King Bodhisattva, “Listen attentively, listen attentively. Ponder and remember this well. I will explain them separately for you.

“At a time immeasurable asamkhyeyas of nayutas of inexpressible kalpas ago, there was a Buddha named All Wisdom Accomplished Tathagata, Worthy of Offering, Truly All Knowing, Perfect in Knowledge and Conduct, Well Gone, Knower of the World, Unsurpassed, Tamer, Teacher of Devas and Humans, Buddha, World-Honored One. The lifespan of that Buddha was sixty thousand kalpas. Before he renounced the household life, he was the king of a small country and friends with the king of a neighboring country. They both practiced the ten wholesome actions and benefited living beings. However, in

the neighboring country most people did many evil acts. The two kings conferred with each other and planned to employ many skillful means for them. One king vowed, ‘I will attain Buddhahood early and guide all these people across without exception.’

“The other king vowed, ‘If I do not first guide all wrongdoing suffering beings across, causing them to attain peace and happiness and enabling them to achieve bodhi, I shall not become a Buddha.’”

The Buddha told Concentration Mastery King Bodhisattva, “The king who vowed to become a Buddha early is All Wisdom Accomplished Tathagata. The king who vowed to always guide wrongdoing suffering beings across and not to become a Buddha yet is Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva.

“Moreover, in the past, measureless asamkhyeya kalpas ago, there arose in the world a Buddha named Pure Lotus Eyes Tathagata. The lifespan of that Buddha was forty kalpas. During the Age of Semblance Dharma, there was an arhat who guided living beings across by [means of] merit, teaching and transforming them in sequence. He came upon a woman named Bright Eyes who made a food offering to him. The arhat asked her, ‘What is your wish?’

“Bright Eyes replied, ‘In the days after my mother’s death, I performed meritorious deeds for her rescue, but I do not know in what realm my mother has been reborn.’

“Out of compassion for her, the arhat entered into meditative concentration to make observation and saw that Bright Eyes’ mother had fallen into a lower realm and was undergoing extremely great suffering. The arhat asked Bright Eyes, ‘What actions did your mother do while she was alive? She is now undergoing extremely great suffering in a lower realm.’

“Bright Eyes replied, ‘My mother had a habit of only liking to eat fish, turtles, and the like. Of the fish and turtles that she had eaten, she had most often consumed their eggs, fried or boiled, and she would indulge in eating them. I would reckon the number of all these lives to be thousands of myriads and many times over. O Venerable One, please take pity. How can she be saved?’

“Out of compassion for them, the arhat used a skillful means. He advised Bright Eyes, ‘You may, with sincere resolve, recollect Pure Lotus Eyes Tathagata. Also, sculpt and paint his image. Both the living and the deceased will reap the results.’

“After hearing this, Bright Eyes immediately gave up everything she loved to have an image of that Buddha painted right away. She then made offerings to his image, and furthermore, with a reverent mind, she wept sorrowfully, gazed up at, and made obeisance to him. That night, in her dream, she suddenly saw that Buddha—his body a dazzling golden hue, [majestic] like Mount Sumeru, and emitting great light. He said to Bright Eyes, ‘Before long your mother will be reborn in your household. She will speak as soon as she can feel hunger and cold.’

“Shortly thereafter, a maidservant in her household bore a child who spoke within three days of birth. The infant, prostrating and weeping sorrowfully, told Bright Eyes, ‘In the cycle of birth and death through karmic conditions, one undergoes the results [of one’s actions] oneself. I am your mother. I have long dwelled in darkness. Since parting from you, again and again I agonized in the great hells. It was through the strength of your merit that I was finally able to be reborn as a person of the lower class, and my lifespan will be short. At the end of thirteen years, I am to fall into a lower realm. Do you have any way to help relieve me [of these sufferings]?’

“When Bright Eyes heard what was said, she knew without a doubt that this infant was her mother. Sobbing and crying sadly, she said to the maidservant’s child, ‘Since you are my mother, you should know your own past wrongdoing. What actions did you do that caused you to fall into a lower realm?’

“The maidservant’s child replied, ‘Killing and reviling. I was undergoing the ripened effects of these two actions. If it were not for the merit [that you have cultivated] to deliver me from difficulties, my karma would be such that I still could not have been released.’

“Bright Eyes asked, ‘What took place during the ripened effects of wrongdoing in the hells?’

“The maidservant’s child replied, ‘I cannot bear to speak of those torments of wrongdoing. Even in a hundred thousand years I would not be able to describe them all.’

“Upon hearing this, Bright Eyes cried and wailed. She said toward the sky, ‘May my mother be forever released from the hells. At the end of thirteen years, may she be finished with her heavy offenses and not go through the lower realms again. O Buddhas of the ten directions, kindly take pity upon me. Please hear the far-reaching vow that I

am making for the sake of my mother. If she can forever leave the three lower realms, the low and mean, and never again be reborn as a woman, then, in front of the image of Pure Lotus Eyes Tathagata, I vow that from this day forth, throughout hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of future kalpas in all worlds where there are hells, where there are the three lower realms, I will rescue all wrongdoing suffering beings, causing them to leave the lower realms of hells, animals, and hungry ghosts. Only when the beings who undergo the ripened effects of wrongdoing have all become Buddhas will I myself attain perfect awakening.’

“After making this vow, she clearly heard Pure Lotus Eyes Tathagata saying to her, ‘Bright Eyes, you have great kindness and compassion. It is excellent that you can make such a great vow for your mother. I see that after your mother passes on from the present ripened effect at thirteen years of age, she will be reborn as a Brahman with a lifespan of a hundred years. After that ripened effect is over, she will be reborn in the Land of No Sorrow with a lifespan of incalculable kalpas. Later she will attain Buddhahood, and far and wide she will guide humans and devas as numerous as

the sand grains in the Ganges River [to the other shore].”

The Buddha told Concentration Mastery King, “The arhat who guided Bright Eyes across by [means of] merit then is now Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva; Bright Eyes’ mother is now Liberation Bodhisattva; and the woman Bright Eyes is now Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva.

“Throughout many long kalpas past, [Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva] has been so kind and compassionate that he has made as many vows as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River to guide living beings far and wide [to the other shore].

“In the future, if there are men and women who do not practice good deeds but do evil, who do not believe in cause and effect, and who engage in sexual misconduct, who speak falsehood, who engage in divisive talebearing, who use harsh speech, who slander the Mahayana—beings with karma like these will certainly fall into the lower realms. However, if they meet a virtuous friend who encourages them so that they take refuge in Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva within the time of a finger-snap, they will obtain release from the ripened effects [to be experienced] in the three lower realms. If people are able to revere and take refuge

in him with a resolute mind, as well as reverently gaze, pay obeisance, sing his praises, and make offerings of incense, flowers, clothing, jewels of all sorts, or also food and drink to him, they will be reborn in the various heavens to experience excellent, wonderful happiness during hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of kalpas in the future. When their heavenly merit is exhausted and they are reborn below in the world of humans, they will frequently be emperors or kings throughout hundreds of thousands of kalpas and will be able to remember the cause and effect of the sequence of events of their previous lives.

“Concentration Mastery King, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva has such power of inconceivable, great awesome spiritual penetration to widely benefit living beings thus. All of you Bodhisattvas should remember this sutra. Expound and propagate it far and wide.”

Concentration Mastery King said to the Buddha, “O World-Honored One, please do not be concerned. Through [the power of] the Buddha’s awesome spiritual penetration, we, thousands of myriads of millions of Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas, will certainly be able to expound this sutra widely throughout Jambudvīpa to benefit living beings.”

Having spoken thus to the Buddha, Concentration Mastery King Bodhisattva joined his palms in respect, made obeisance, and withdrew.

At that time, the Deva Kings of the four directions all rose from their seats, joined their palms in respect, and said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva has made such great vows throughout many long kalpas past. As of now, living beings have not all been guided across. How is it that he makes further immense vows again? O World-Honored One, please explain this for us.”

The Buddha told the Four Deva Kings, “Excellent, excellent! Now for the broad benefit of you as well as of devas and humans in the present and future, I will speak of what Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva does in the paths of birth and death in Jambudvīpa in the saha world: How he kindly and compassionately rescues and liberates all wrongdoing suffering beings by way of skillful means.”

The Four Deva Kings replied, “Yes, World-Honored One, we joyfully wish to listen.”

The Buddha told the Four Deva Kings, “For many long kalpas past and up to the present, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva

has been guiding living beings across to liberation; nevertheless, he has not yet completed his vows. He has [great] kindness and compassion for wrongdoing suffering beings in this world, and he further sees that, during measureless kalpas in the future, their causes [of suffering] are endless like vines. Hence, he makes profound vows again. In Jambudvipa in the saha world, this Bodhisattva teaches and transforms living beings by way of hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of skillful means thus:

“Four Deva Kings, to those who kill, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva would say that [such action] would lead to misfortune and short lifespan. To those who steal or rob, he would say that [such action] would lead to poverty and wretched suffering. To those who engage in sexual misconduct, he would say that [such action] would lead to rebirth as peacocks, pigeons, and mandarin ducks.

“To those who use harsh speech, he would say that [such action] would lead to quarrels and fights in one’s family. To those who utter slander, he would say that [such action] would lead to being tongueless and having a cancerous mouth.

“To those who are angry and hateful, he would say

that [such action] would lead to being ugly, deformed, and crippled. To those who are miserly, he would say that [such action] would lead to not obtaining what one seeks. To those who are immoderate in consuming food and drink, he would say that [such action] would lead to hunger, thirst, and throat diseases.

“To those who indulge in hunting, he would say that [such action] would lead to derangement from terror, and then loss of life. To those who are contrary and perverse to their own parents, he would say that [such action] would lead to being killed by natural disasters.

To those who set fire to mountains or forests, he would say that [such action] would lead to death from derangement and confusion. To those who are cruel parents or stepparents, he would say that [such action] would lead to being likewise abused in the present life. To those who net or trap young animals, he would say that [such action] would lead to separation of parents and children.

“To those who slander the Triple Gem, he would say that [such action] would lead to being blind, deaf, and mute. To those who slight the Dharma or look down on instruction, he would say that [such action] would lead

one to remain in the lower realms for an interminably long time. To those who abuse the property of the sangha, he would say that [such action] would lead one to revolve through the hells for millions of kalpas. To those who defile those living the holy life, or who make malicious accusations against the monastics, he would say that [such action] would lead one to remain in the animal realm for an interminably long time.

“To those who scald, burn, behead, chop, or otherwise harm living beings, he would say that [such action] would lead to repayment in kind in samsara. To those who violate the precepts and rules of eating, he would say that [such action] would lead to rebirth as fowls and beasts suffering from hunger and thirst. To those who unreasonably destroy things and deplete resources, he would say that [such action] would lead to insufficiency and lack in what one seeks.

“To those who are conceited and arrogant, he would say that [such action] would lead to being lowly and servile. To those whose divisive talebearing causes dissension and disorder, he would say that [such action] would lead to having no tongue or being ‘a hundred tongues.’ To

those who hold false views, he would say that [such action] would lead to rebirth in borderlands.

“Living beings of Jambudvipa such as these—the evil habits in their karma of body, speech, and mind bear fruits, giving rise to hundreds of thousands of effects, of which I have now spoken in general terms. What the karma of such beings of Jambudvipa brings forth is different; accordingly Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva uses hundreds of thousands of skillful means to teach and transform them. These living beings are to undergo ripened effects like the ones mentioned first, and then fall into the hells, where they pass through many kalpas without a time of release. Therefore, you should protect people and protect their countries. Do not allow living beings to be deluded by these many [kinds of] karma.”

After hearing this, the Four Deva Kings wept and sighed sorrowfully, joined their palms and withdrew.

Chapter Five

The Names of the Hells

At that time, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva-Mahasattva

said to Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, “Benevolent One, for the sake of devas, nagas, the fourfold assembly, as well as for all living beings in the present and future, please speak about the names of the hells, where wrongdoing suffering beings of Jambudvipa in the saha world undergo ripened effects, and bad consequences [that they experience], so that living beings of the Age of Declining Dharma in the future may know of such results.”

Ksitigarbha replied, “Benevolent One, now through [the power of] the Buddha’s awesome spiritual penetration and through your strength, that of the Mahasattva, I will speak in brief about the names of the hells and the ripened effects of wrongdoing, the bad consequences.

“Benevolent One, to the east of Jambudvipa there are mountains named Iron Encircling. Dark and abysmal are these mountains, without the light of the sun and moon. There is a great hell there called Extreme Incessant, and a hell named Great Avici.

“Furthermore, there is also a hell named Four Corners, a hell named Flying Knives, a hell named Flaming Arrows, a hell named Squeezing Mountains, a hell named Piercing Spears, a hell named Iron Carts, a hell named Iron Beds, a

hell named Iron Oxen, a hell named Iron Clothing, a hell named Thousand Blades, a hell named Iron Donkeys, a hell named Molten Copper, a hell named Pillar Embracing, a hell named Flowing Blazes, a hell named Tongue Plowing, a hell named Head Chopping, a hell named Feet Ablaze, a hell named Eye Pecking, a hell named Iron Balls, a hell named Quarreling, a hell named Iron Axes, and a hell named Much Anger.”

Ksitigarbha said, “Benevolent One, within the Iron Encircling there are hells such as these, which are limitless in number. In addition, there is the Hell of Crying Out, the Hell of Tongue Plucking, the Hell of Excrement and Urine, the Hell of Copper Locks, the Hell of Flaming Elephants, the Hell of Flaming Dogs, the Hell of Flaming Horses, the Hell of Flaming Oxen, the Hell of Flaming Mountains, the Hell of Flaming Rocks, the Hell of Flaming Beds, the Hell of Flaming Beams, the Hell of Flaming Eagles, the Hell of Teeth Sawing, the Hell of Skin Flaying, the Hell of Blood Drinking, the Hell of Hands Burning, the Hell of Feet Burning, the Hell of Thorns Reversing, the Hell of Flaming Houses, the Hell of Iron Houses, and the Hell of Flaming Wolves.

“There are hells such as these, and within each there are one, two, three, four, or even as many as hundreds of thousands of smaller hells, each with a different name.”

Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva told Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, “Benevolent One, such are the karmic consequences of beings of Jambudvīpa who do evil. The force of karma is so great that it can rival Mount Sumeru [in height], surpass the immense oceans in depth, and hinder [one’s cultivation of] the noble path. Therefore, living beings must not underestimate small wrongs and consider them harmless, for after death there will be ripened effects to be experienced to the most exact detail. Beings as closely related as fathers and sons will part their respective ways. Even if they should meet, neither would consent to undergo the consequences in the other’s place. Now, through the Buddha’s awesome [spiritual] power, I will speak in brief about the ripened effects of wrongdoing as occur in the hells. O Benevolent One, please take a moment to hear these words.”

Samantabhadra replied, “I have long known of the ripened effects [experienced] in the three lower realms. I hope the Benevolent One will speak about them so that at a later time, in the Age of Declining Dharma, all beings

who do evil may hear your words and be moved to take refuge in the Buddha.”

Ksitigarbha said, “Benevolent One, the ripened effects of wrongdoing as occur in the hells are like these: In some hells the wrongdoers’ tongues are taken out and then plowed over by oxen. In some hells the wrongdoers’ hearts are taken out and eaten by yaksas. In some hells the wrongdoers’ bodies are cooked in cauldrons full of boiling liquid. In some hells the wrongdoers are compelled to embrace red-hot, burning copper pillars. In some hells fires burn and overtake the wrongdoers. In some hells there is cold and ice at all times. In some hells there is limitless excrement and urine. In some hells there are solely flying caltrops. In some hells there are many flaming spears. In some hells the wrongdoers are struck solely on the chests and backs. In some hells their hands and feet are burned specifically. In some hells iron snakes twine around and strangle them. In some hells iron dogs pursue them. In some hells they all ride on [flaming] iron mules.

“Benevolent One, there are ripened effects such as these. In each hell, there are hundreds of thousands of kinds of instruments [of torment] of this karmic path, all

made of copper, iron, stone, and fire—these four materials are brought on by the many [kinds of] karma. Suppose I were to speak in detail about the ripened effects of wrongdoing as occur in the hells: In any one hell there are furthermore hundreds of thousands of kinds of wretched suffering. How much more numerous [are the torments] in the many hells! Now through the Buddha’s awesome spiritual penetration and at the Benevolent One’s request, I have briefly described this matter in this way, for if I were to explain in detail, I could not finish even when a kalpa is over.”

Chapter Six

The Praise of the Tathagata

At that time, the World-Honored One emitted great light from his entire body, illuminating Buddha Worlds as numerous as the sand grains in hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of Ganges Rivers. He gave forth a great voice, telling all the Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas as well as devas, nagas, ghosts, spirits, humans, non-humans, and others in the various Buddha Worlds, “Listen as I now praise

and extol Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva for how he manifests powers of great, inconceivable awesome spiritual penetration, kindness and compassion in the worlds of the ten directions to rescue and care for all wrongdoing suffering beings. After I enter parinirvana, all of you Bodhisattvas, Great Beings, and all you devas, nagas, ghosts, spirits, and others should employ many skillful means to guard and protect this sutra, causing all living beings to attain the bliss of nirvana.”

After these words were spoken, in the assembly there was a Bodhisattva named Universally Vast who joined his palms in respect and said to the Buddha, “We now see the World-Honored One commending Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva that he has such virtue of inconceivable, great awesome spiritual penetration. O World-Honored One, for the sake of living beings of the Age of Declining Dharma in the future, please speak about the cause and effect of how Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva benefits humans and devas, so that devas, nagas, others of the eight classes of beings and living beings of the future may receive the Buddha’s words most respectfully.”

At that time, the World-Honored One told Universally

Vast Bodhisattva, the fourfold assembly, and others, “Listen attentively, listen attentively. I will describe in brief for you the meritorious and virtuous matters of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s benefiting humans and devas.”

Universally Vast replied, “Yes, World-Honored One, we joyfully wish to listen.”

The Buddha told Universally Vast Bodhisattva, “In the future if there are good men and good women who hear Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva’s name and join their palms, sing his praises, make obeisance, or feel great love and admiration for him, these people will transcend thirty kalpas of torments [of offenses].

“Universally Vast, if there are good men and good women who paint this Bodhisattva’s image or make his image with clay, stone, resin, lacquer, gold, silver, copper, or iron, and then reverently gaze at and make obeisance to his image but once, these people will be reborn a hundred times in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Devas and will never fall into the lower realms. If their heavenly merit is exhausted and they are reborn below in the world of humans, they will still be kings and will not lose great benefits.

“If there are women who are weary of being women and who wholeheartedly make offerings in veneration to Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s image, whether the image be a painting or made of clay, stone, resin, lacquer, copper, iron, or other materials, and if they do so day after day without fail, making offerings to him with flowers, incense, food, drink, clothing, colored silk, banners, money, jewels, and the like, then after the present ripened effect to be a woman comes to an end, throughout hundreds of thousands of myriads of kalpas these good women will never again be reborn in worlds where there are women, much less be one—unless that, through the power of their compassionate vows, they wish to be women in order to liberate living beings. Through the strength of their making offerings to Ksitigarbha and the power of this virtue, they will not be reborn as women throughout hundreds of thousands of myriads of kalpas.

“Furthermore, Universally Vast, if there are women who are weary of being ugly and frequently ill and, with a resolute mind before Ksitigarbha’s image, they reverently gaze at and make obeisance to him for even just the time of a meal, then throughout thousands of myriads of

kalpas they will be reborn with perfect looks and features. If these ugly women are not weary of being women, then for hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of lives they will always be princesses, queens, or daughters of high ministers, prominent families, or great elders and be born beautiful and with perfect features. They gain such merit because they reverently gaze at and make obeisance to Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva with a resolute mind.

“Furthermore, Universally Vast, if there are good men and good women who are able to make offerings to him by playing music, singing songs of praise, and presenting incense and flowers before this Bodhisattva’s image, or who are also able to encourage others, one or many, to do likewise, both now and in the future they will be protected day and night by hundreds of thousands of ghosts and spirits who will even prevent evil matters from reaching their ears, much less allow them to meet with disasters personally.

“Furthermore, Universally Vast, in the future if there are evil people, evil spirits, and evil ghosts who see good men and good women venerating and taking refuge [in this Bodhisattva], making offerings, singing his praises, reverently gazing at, and making obeisance to Ksitigarbha

Bodhisattva's image, and if those beings then wrongly express ridicule and slander, maligning that such deeds are without virtue or benefit, or they laugh at these people, or they utter slander behind their backs, or they urge others to slander likewise, whether one person or many, or they bear a mere thought of ridicule and slander, such beings will fall into and remain in the Avici Hell, undergoing extremely severe torments as the consequence for their ridiculing and slandering, even after all the thousand Buddhas of the present kalpa have entered parinirvana. Only after the [present] kalpa has passed will they be reborn in the company of hungry ghosts, where they will pass a thousand more kalpas before being reborn as animals. Then they will pass another thousand kalpas before they may finally be reborn as humans. Even when they are reborn as humans, they will be poor, lowly, and with incomplete faculties. Their minds will frequently be fettered by their unwholesome karma. Before long, they will again fall into the lower realms. Universally Vast, those who ridicule and slander others' making offerings in veneration will reap such ripened effects. How much worse [the consequences will be] if beings have evil views and do destructive things!

“Furthermore, Universally Vast, in the future if there are men and women who are bedridden with a long [illness] and unable to get well or die despite their wishes, and at night they dream of evil ghosts, of family and relatives, of wandering in dangerous paths, or they have many nightmares of wandering in the company of ghosts and spirits; and as days, months, and years go by, their illnesses worsen and they waste away; they cry out in their sleep; they are miserable and melancholy—all these represent cases of karma and [the ensuing] realm of existence under judgment, with the degrees of seriousness still undetermined, making it difficult for these people to die or recover. The ordinary eyes of men and women cannot discern such matters.

“In this instance, this sutra should be recited aloud once before the images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and possessions that the sick person loves, such as clothing, jewels, manors, gardens, or houses, should be offered by someone saying clearly in front of the sick person, ‘In the presence of the sutras and images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, I, so-and-so, give these items on behalf of this sick person to make offerings to the sutras and images, to make

the images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, to construct stupas and monasteries, to light oil lamps, or to give gifts to the sangha.’

In such way the sick person should be told three times so that he may hear and know of the offerings being made.

“If his various consciousnesses are dispersed and his breathing ceases, then for one day, two days, three days, four days, or onto seven days, [such offerings] should be stated clearly and this sutra should be read aloud. After this person’s life ends, he will gain release from misfortunes and severe torments that result from past offenses, even the five great violations that lead to incessant torments. Wherever he is reborn, he will know his previous lives.

“[Consider how a sick person can be benefited,] how much greater [the results will be] when good men and good women personally copy this sutra in writing, teach others to copy it, personally sculpt or paint the Bodhisattva’s image, or even teach others to sculpt or paint [his image]! They will certainly gain immense benefits.

“Therefore, Universally Vast, if you see people who read and recite this sutra, who have even a thought of praise for it, or who revere it, you should use hundreds of

thousands of skillful means to encourage these people to keep their diligent mind from fading. They will be able to attain thousands of myriads of millions of inconceivable virtues in both the present and future.

“Furthermore, Universally Vast, in the future if living beings when dreaming or dozing should see ghosts, spirits, and other forms who are sad, crying, worried, sighing, fearful, or terrified, these are the living beings’ fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, or other relatives from one, ten, a hundred, or a thousand lives past who are in the lower realms and unable to leave. They have no place from which to hope for the strength of merit to rescue them, and so they plead with their family from their previous lives to use skillful means, hoping that they may thereby leave the lower realms.

“Universally Vast, use your spiritual power to cause these living kin to personally read this sutra aloud with a resolute mind before the images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, or request others to read it aloud, three or seven times. When the sutra has been read aloud for such a number of times, the relatives in the lower realms will gain release, and these kin will never see them again when dreaming.

“Furthermore, Universally Vast, in the future if there are various persons of the lower classes, slaves, maidser-vants, and other people without freedom, who realize [that they are undergoing the ripened effect of] their past karma and wish to repent, they should, with a resolute mind, reverently gaze at and make obeisance to Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s image for seven days and recite the Bodhisattva’s name a full ten thousand times. When their present ripened effect is over, for thousands of myriads of lives they will always be reborn among the respected and wealthy, and they will not undergo the suffering of the three lower realms again.

“Furthermore, Universally Vast, in the future in Jambudvipa, if Ksatriyas, Brahmans, elders, householders, and others of various names and clans have newborn infants, boys or girls, they should read and recite this inconceivable sutra and recite the Bodhisattva’s name a full ten thousand times early on within seven days of birth for the sake of their children. If these newborn children, boys or girls, are due to have misfortunes as a result of their past, they will gain release and be well, happy, and easily raised, and their lifespans will increase. If they had been reborn by

virtue of their [past] merit, their well-being and happiness will increase and so will their lifespans.

“Furthermore, Universally Vast, in the future on the first, eighth, fourteenth, fifteenth, eighteenth, twenty-third, twenty-fourth, twenty-eighth, twenty-ninth, and thirtieth days of the [lunar] month, the offenses of living beings will be compiled and the degrees of seriousness assessed. The acts and thoughts of the beings of Jambudvīpa are invariably karma and wrongdoing. How much more so when they give themselves over to killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech—hundreds of thousands of offenses! If they are able to read this sutra aloud once in front of the images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, holy ones, and worthies on these ten observance days, there will not be disaster or calamity for a hundred yojanas to the north, south, east, and west. Those in their families, both young and old, will be apart from the lower realms now and throughout hundreds of thousands of years in the future. If they can recite this sutra once on each of the ten observance days, in the present life there will not be untoward dire events and illnesses in the family, and there will be food and clothing in abundance.

“Therefore, Universally Vast, you should know that through the power of his great awesome spiritual penetration, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva has inexpressible hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of instances of benefiting [beings] such as these. Living beings of Jambudvīpa have great cause and condition with this Great Being. If these living beings hear this Bodhisattva’s name, see this Bodhisattva’s image, or hear but three words, five words, a verse, or a sentence of this sutra, they will have superbly wonderful peace and happiness in the present life. For hundreds of thousands of myriads of lives in the future, they will always be good looking and be reborn in respected and wealthy families.”

At that time, after Universally Vast Bodhisattva had heard the Buddha Tathagata praise and extol Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, he knelt on his knees, joined his palms, and said to the Buddha once more, “World-Honored One, I have long known that this Great Being has such power of inconceivable spiritual penetration as well as power of great vows. For living beings in the future I make the request to the Tathagata, so that they may know such benefits. Yes, we receive [this Dharma teaching] most respectfully.

World-Honored One, how should this sutra be named, and how should we propagate it?”

The Buddha told Universally Vast, “This sutra has three names: the first is called the Original Vows of Ksitigarbha; it is also called the Original Practices of Ksitigarbha; and it is also called the Power of the Original Vows of Ksitigarbha. Because this Bodhisattva has made such profound vows throughout many long kalpas to benefit living beings, all of you should propagate it in accordance with these vows.”

After hearing this, Universally Vast joined his palms in respect, made obeisance, and withdrew.

Chapter Seven

Benefiting the Living and the Deceased

At that time, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, I observe that the mental stirring and thoughts of living beings of Jambudvīpa are [almost] always wrongdoings. Although now and then they [may generate virtuous thoughts and] gain good benefits, they mostly retreat from their initial resolve. If they encounter evil conditions, in every thought

they increase and add to [the unwholesome]. These people are as if walking in the mire and carrying heavy rocks. They would become more trapped and weighted down as their feet would sink deeper with each step. If such a person can meet a virtuous friend, this person's burden will be lightened or even completely removed, because such a virtuous friend has great strength. Furthermore, the virtuous friend will lend him support, advise him to keep his steps firm and steady, and point out that once he reaches the level ground, he should beware of the bad road and not walk on it again.

“World-Honored One, living beings who are accustomed to evil begin with a minute amount then quickly escalate into measureless [evil]. Because these beings have such a habit, when they are about to depart this life, their parents and relatives should make merit in their behalf to assist them on the road ahead. This may be done by hanging banners and canopies and lighting oil lamps, by reciting the sacred sutras, by making offerings in veneration to the images of Buddhas and holy ones, as well as by reciting the names of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and pratyekabuddhas in such a way that the recitation of each name reaches the

ear of the dying one and may be heard in his fundamental consciousness.

“These dying beings, should the results brought about by the unwholesome karma they generated be reckoned, would certainly fall into the lower realms. However, by virtue of their relatives’ cultivating these noble causes in their behalf, their manifold [torments of] offenses can be dissolved. If relatives can furthermore widely perform many good deeds during the seven seven-day periods after the death of such beings, then the deceased will be able to leave the lower realms forever, be reborn as humans and devas, and experience excellent, wonderful happiness. The living relatives will themselves receive measureless benefits.

“Therefore, in the presence of the Buddha, World-Honored One, as well as devas, nagas, and others of the eight classes of beings, humans, non-humans, and others, I now exhort living beings of Jambudvīpa to be careful—do not kill, harm [beings], generate evil conditions, or worship and offer sacrifices to ghosts and spirits, or seek the help of goblins on the days when someone is nearing death. Why? Your killing, harming, worshipping, offering sacrifices, and so forth are not the least bit helpful to the

deceased, but bind up conditions of wrongdoing so that they become deeper and more severe. If in this life or in the future the departed one gains elements of holiness and is to be reborn among humans or devas, but because his relatives commit these evil causes [for his sake] when he is on the verge of death, he will become involved in dispute and be delayed from being reborn in an upper realm. How much worse the situation will be for the dying persons who never had even a few roots of goodness from their lifetime! Each of them will undergo the lower realms in accordance with his own karma; how can he bear to have relatives add to that karma? It is as if there was a person who had traveled from afar. He had been out of food for three days and carrying a load that weighed more than a hundred kilogram. Suddenly he came upon a neighbor who attached a few more things to it. He would be even more burdened then.

“World-Honored One, I see that as long as living beings of Jambudvīpa are able to follow the teachings of the Buddhas, or even just do good deeds as little as a strand of hair, a drop of water, a grain of sand, or a speck of dust, they themselves will gain all the benefits.”

As these words were spoken, in the assembly there was an elder named Great Eloquence. This elder had long since attained nonarising; he taught and guided living beings of the ten directions [to the other shore]. Manifesting in the form of an elder, he joined his palms in respect and inquired of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, “Mahasattva, after beings of Jambudvīpa die, and their family and relatives cultivate virtues for their sake, make vegetarian meal offerings and so forth, planting many good causes, will these departed ones gain great benefits and release?”

Ksitigarbha replied, “Elder, now through the Buddha’s awesome [spiritual] power, I will explain this in general terms for the sake of all living beings in the present and future. Elder, beings in the present and future who hear a Buddha’s name, a Bodhisattva’s name, or a pratyekabuddha’s name on the days when they are nearing death will gain release regardless of whether they have offenses or not.

“If there are men and women who did not cultivate good causes but committed many offenses while they were alive, and after their death their family and relatives make merit and benefit in their behalf, they will receive

one-seventh of the virtues of the holy deeds, and the other six-sevenths will benefit the living relatives themselves. Therefore, good men and good women in the present and future should themselves cultivate [virtue] when they are healthy and hearing well. They will receive every part [of the benefit].

Chapter Eight

The Praise of King Yama and His Retinue

At that time, from within the Iron Encircling Mountains, King Yama and measureless ghost kings all arrived at the Trayastrimsa Heaven and came to where the Buddha was. They were Ghost King Evil Poison, Ghost King Many Evils, Ghost King Great Quarrels, Ghost King White Tiger, Ghost King Blood Tiger, Ghost King Red Tiger, Ghost King Disseminating Disasters, Ghost King Flying Body, Ghost King Lightning Flash, Ghost King Wolf Teeth, Ghost King Thousand Eyes, Ghost King Beast Devouring, Ghost King Rock Carrying, Ghost King Presiding Over Depletion, Ghost King Presiding Over Calamities, Ghost King Presiding Over Food, Ghost King Presiding Over

Wealth, Ghost King Presiding Over Domestic Animals, Ghost King Presiding Over Fowls, Ghost King Presiding Over Beasts, Ghost King Presiding Over Goblins, Ghost King Presiding Over Birth, Ghost King Presiding Over Life, Ghost King Presiding Over Illnesses, Ghost King Presiding Over Danger, Ghost King Three Eyes, Ghost King Four Eyes, Ghost King Five Eyes, King Qi Lishi, King Daqi Lishi, King Qi Licha, King Daqi Licha, King A Nuozha, and King Da'a Nuozha.

There were great ghost kings such as these, each with hundreds of thousands of minor ghost kings. They all reside in Jambudvipa, and each of them has duties to carry out and preside over. Through the awesome spiritual penetration of the Buddha and the strength of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva, these ghost kings and King Yama all came to the Trayastrimsa Heaven and stood to one side.

At that time, King Yama knelt on his knees, joined his palms, and said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, it is through the awesome spiritual penetration of the Buddha and the strength of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva that the ghost kings and I are now able to come to this great assembly in the Trayastrimsa Heaven. We can therefore

gain wholesome benefits, too. Now, there is a little question that I dare to ask the World-Honored One. O World-Honored One, with your kindness and compassion, please expound on it.”

The Buddha told King Yama, “Ask whatever you wish. I will explain it for you.”

At that time, King Yama reverently gazed at and made obeisance to the World-Honored One, turned to behold Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, and then said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, I see that Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva uses hundreds of thousands of skillful means in the six realms of existence to guide wrongdoing suffering beings across [to liberation], and he does so indefatigably. This great Bodhisattva has deeds of such inconceivable supernatural power. Yet, the multitudes of beings—after they gain release from the ripened effects of wrongdoing, before long they again fall into the lower realms. World-Honored One, since Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva has such inconceivable spiritual power, why do living beings not dwell relying on the virtuous path and attain eternal liberation? O World-Honored One, please explain this for me.”

The Buddha told King Yama, “Living beings of

Jambudvīpa have obstinate dispositions, difficult to regulate and difficult to tame. This great Bodhisattva rescues such beings everywhere throughout hundreds of thousands of kalpas, causing them to attain liberation early. For people who undergo the ripened effects of wrongdoing, even those who have fallen into the very low realms, the Bodhisattva uses the power of skillful means to extract their fundamental karmic conditions and lead them to realize the events of their previous lives. However, because beings of Jambudvīpa have heavy habits of forming evil, no sooner have they left [the lower realms] they go back in [again]. This necessitates the Bodhisattva to work hard throughout many kalpas in guiding them across to liberation.

“Suppose there was a person who lost his way home and, by mistake, entered a dangerous path, in which there were many yaksas, tigers, wolves, lions, lizards, snakes, vipers, and scorpions. Such a confused person on that dangerous path would be harmed within a short time. A virtuous friend who was knowledgeable of many great skills and good at stopping and keeping out the injurious and poisonous, including yaksas and other evil fierce beings, would suddenly come upon the confused man about to

walk further on that dangerous path and say to him, ‘Hey! Fellow! Why are you entering this road? What special means do you have to restrain injurious and poisonous beings?’

“Upon hearing these words suddenly, the confused traveler would come to realize that he was on a dangerous path and would immediately turn back, seeking to leave that road. That virtuous friend would then take him by the hand, lead him off the dangerous path so that he would avoid the evils and poisons, and help him reach the good path so that he would gain peace and happiness. Then the virtuous friend would say to him, ‘Well! Confused one! From now on, do not walk on that path again. Those who enter it will have difficulty getting out, and moreover, they will suffer harm to their lives.’

“The confused traveler would feel the seriousness [of the dangers on that path], too. As they were about to part, the virtuous friend would further say, ‘If you see relatives, friends, as well as other travelers, be they men or women, tell them that, on that dangerous path there are many poisons and evils which will cause people to lose their lives. Do not allow them to [unwittingly] bring about

their own deaths.’

“In the same way, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, replete with great kindness and compassion, rescues wrongdoing suffering beings and enables them to be reborn among humans and devas, so that they experience wonderful happiness. These wrongdoing beings would come to know the suffering of the [bad] karmic paths. After they obtain release, they would never go [on those paths] again. They are like the confused traveler who by mistake entered the dangerous path but who, having met a virtuous friend who led him out, would never enter it again. Whenever he would come upon others, he would advise them not to enter that path, saying that because he was confused, [he took that path before, but now that] he has gained release, he would not enter that path again.

“If he should walk on it again, he would still be confused and mistaken, unaware that it is the dangerous path he had fallen into before. He may then lose his life. This is like falling into the lower realms. By virtue of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s power of skillful means, beings obtain release and gain rebirth among humans and devas, but shortly thereafter, they go back [to doing evil and fall] into [the

lower realms] again. If they form heavy karma, interminably long they will remain in the hells without a time of release.”

At that time, Ghost King Evil Poison joined his palms in respect and said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, we measureless number of ghost kings benefit or harm people in Jambudvīpa, and we each do so differently. However, the ripened effects of karma cause our retinues and us to travel in the world [doing] much of the unwholesome and little of the wholesome. When we pass people’s homes, cities, villages, manors, or houses where there are men or women who cultivate wholesome deeds as minute as hair fibers, who but hang a banner or a canopy or present a little incense or a few flowers to make offering in veneration to the images of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, or who recite the sacred sutras or burn incense as an offering to even a sentence or a verse in them, all of us ghost kings respect and revere such people, just as we do for the Buddhas of the past, present, and future. We command the smaller ghosts, each of whom has great power, as well as the earth spirits to protect them and not allow evil events, untoward happenings, virulent diseases, untoward serious illnesses, as well

as unwelcome phenomena to come near these houses and places, much less enter the doors.”

The Buddha praised the ghost kings, “Excellent, excellent! All you ghost kings and Yama are able to support and protect good men and good women in this way. I will tell Brahma and Sakra to protect all of you as well.”

As these words were spoken, in the assembly there was a ghost king named Presiding Over Life who said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, in accordance with conditions of karma I preside over a human’s lifespan in Jambudvīpa; I am in charge of both the time of birth and the time of death. As in my original vows, I wish very much to benefit living beings, but they do not realize my intention. They therefore go through birth and death in distress. Why is this?

“When people of Jambudvīpa have just borne children, whether boys or girls, or when they are about to give birth, good deeds should be done to increase the benefits of the household. Then naturally the local earth spirits will be immeasurably joyful and will protect the mother and child so that they obtain great peace and happiness. After the birth, be careful—do not kill or harm [beings] in order to

offer fresh meat to the mother, nor gather relatives to drink alcohol, eat meat, sing, and play instruments, for these acts can keep the mother and child from peace and happiness. Why? During the difficult time of childbirth, there are countless evil ghosts, goblins, and sprites who want to consume the foul blood. I command the local earth spirits of that household early on to protect the mother and child so that they are peaceful and happy, thereby gaining benefits. When people in such households see that the mother and child are peaceful and happy, they should cultivate merit in thanks to the earth spirits. If instead of doing so, they kill, harm, and gather relatives [for feasting], their violations will bring misfortune to themselves, and the mother and child will also be harmed.

“Moreover, for people of Jambudvipa who are on the verge of death, regardless of whether they [have done] good or evil, I wish to keep these dying ones from falling into the lower realms; but how much more [can I do so] when they have cultivated roots of goodness and have increased my ability [to help]! When a practitioner of good deeds is about to depart this life, there too are hundreds of thousands of ghosts and spirits of the lower realms who disguise

themselves as his parents or other relatives in an attempt to lead him into the lower realms. How much more is this the case for those who have done evil!

“World-Honored One, when such a man or woman of Jambudvīpa is on the verge of death, his consciousness is confused and dim, he is unable to distinguish between good and evil, and his eyes and ears are unable to see and hear. His relatives should then make great offerings, recite the sacred sutras, and recite the names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Such wholesome conditions can cause the departed one to keep away from the lower realms, and the demons, ghosts, and spirits will all withdraw and disperse.

“World-Honored One, all living beings who are nearing the time of death, if they are able to hear a Buddha’s name, a Bodhisattva’s name, or a sentence or a verse from the Mahayana sutras, I observe that such people—excepting those with [any of] the five great violations of killing and harming that lead to incessant torments—those who have small unwholesome karma, which would otherwise cause them to fall into the lower realms, will obtain release quickly.”

The Buddha told Ghost King Presiding Over Life,

“Because of your great kindness, you are able to make such great vows and protect all beings amid their births and deaths. In the future when men and women reach their time of birth and death, do not retreat from your vows; be sure to cause all of them to be liberated and gain eternal peace and happiness.”

The ghost king said to the Buddha, “Please do not be concerned. Until the end of my present form, in every thought I will support and protect living beings of Jambudvīpa so that they gain peace and happiness both at the time of birth and the time of death. I only wish that at the time of birth and death, these living beings will believe and accept my words, so that they will all be liberated and gain great benefits.”

At that time the Buddha said to Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva, “This great ghost king, Presiding Over Life, has passed through hundreds of thousands of lives as a great ghost king, supporting and protecting living beings amid their births and deaths. It is only because of this Great Being’s compassionate vows that he manifests in the form of a great ghost. In reality, he is not a ghost. After one hundred and seventy kalpas, he will become a Buddha

named Signless Tathagata, his kalpa will be called Peace and Happiness, and his world will be named Pure Dwelling. The lifespan of that Buddha will be incalculable kalpas.

“Ksitigarbha, so inconceivable are the matters about this great ghost king. The devas and humans whom he guides across, too, are immeasurable.”

“The great ghost of impermanence can come to one at any time. The consciousness [of the departed one] then wanders in darkness, not knowing how his offenses and merits [will turn out overall]. During the ensuing seven seven-day periods, he is as if stunned and deaf, or he is at various authorities being examined and questioned regarding his karma and the effects. Once the result is determined, he undergoes rebirth in accordance with his karma. In the time before [his rebirth] is determined, he is tormented by thousands of myriads of worries. How much more anguished will he be if he falls into the lower realms! Throughout the seven seven-day periods, in every thought the departed one who has not yet undergone rebirth hopes that his parents, children, and relatives will engender the strength of merit to rescue him. After these [periods of] days, he will undergo the ripened effects according to his

karma. If he is a wrongdoer, he will pass through hundreds of thousands of years without a day of release. If his offenses include [any of] the five great violations that lead to incessant torments, he will fall into that great hell and for thousands of kalpas, for an interminably long time, undergo manifold sufferings.

“Furthermore, Elder, after the death of such a being with wrongdoing karma, his parents, children, and relatives may make vegetarian meal offerings to help him in his karmic path. In the process of preparing such a meal and before that offering is completed, rice rinsings and vegetable leaves should not be thrown onto the ground, and before the food has been offered to the Buddha and sangha, no one should eat it. If there is any transgression or laxness in this matter, the departed one will gain no strength from it. If purity is diligently maintained in making the offering to the Buddha and sangha, the departed one will receive one-seventh of the benefit.

“Therefore, Elder, if after the death of parents and relatives, living beings of Jambudvīpa are able to make vegetarian meal offerings in their behalf with diligence, sincerity, and a resolute mind, they will benefit both the

living and the deceased.”

As these words were spoken, thousands of myriads of millions of nayutas of ghosts and spirits of Jambudvipa who were in the Trayastrimsa Heaven all gave rise to the immeasurable bodhi mind. Elder Great Eloquence made obeisance and withdrew.

Chapter Nine

Reciting the Names of Buddhas

At that time, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, for living beings in the future I will now expound on beneficial matters, so that they may obtain great benefits while in the cycle of birth and death. O World-Honored One, please allow me to speak on this.”

The Buddha told Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, “You now give rise to vast kindness and compassion to rescue all wrongdoing suffering beings in the six realms of existence, wishing to expound on inconceivable matters. This is the right time. You should speak at once, for I will enter parinirvana before long. [Such matters] will let you fulfill your

vows early, and I too will have no worry about all the beings in the present and future.”

Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, in the past, measureless asamkhyeya kalpas ago, there arose in the world a Buddha named Infinite Forms Tathagata. If there are men and women who hear this Buddha’s name and give rise to reverence momentarily, they will transcend forty kalpas of severe torments of samsara. How much more so when they sculpt and paint his image, make offerings, and sing his praises! These people will gain merit that is measureless and boundless.

“Moreover, in the past, as many kalpas ago as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, there arose in the world a Buddha named Jewel Nature Tathagata. If there are men and women who hear this Buddha’s name and, within the time of a finger snap, generate the mind to take refuge in him, these people will never fall back or turn away from the Unsurpassed Way.

“Moreover, in the past there arose in the world a Buddha named Lotus Excellence Tathagata. If there are men and women who hear this Buddha’s name, who have the sound pass through their ears, these people will be

reborn a thousand times in the six heavens of the desire realm. How much more so when they recite and meditate on his name with a resolute mind!

“Moreover, in the past, inexpressibly-inexpressible asamkhyeya kalpas ago, there arose in the world a Buddha named Lion’s Roar Tathagata. If there are men and women who hear this Buddha’s name and in a thought take refuge in him, these people will meet measureless Buddhas who will place their hands on the crowns of their heads and give them prediction.

“Moreover, in the past there arose in the world a Buddha named Krakucchanda Buddha. If there are men and women who hear this Buddha’s name, and with a resolute mind, they gaze reverently at and make obeisance to him, or they also sing his praises, these people will be great Brahma kings in the assemblies of the thousand Buddhas of the present kalpa and be given superior prediction.

“Moreover, in the past there arose in the world a Buddha named Vipasyin [Buddha]. If there are men and women who hear this Buddha’s name, they will never fall into the lower realms and will always be reborn among humans or devas and experience excellent, wonderful

happiness.

“Moreover, in the past, as many kalpas ago as there are grains of sand in measureless, countless Ganges Rivers, there arose in the world a Buddha named Jewel Excellence Tathagata. If there are men and women who hear this Buddha’s name, they will never fall into the lower realms and will frequently be in the heavens and experience excellent, wonderful happiness.

“Moreover, in the past there arose in the world a Buddha named Jewel Sign Tathagata. If there are men and women who hear this Buddha’s name and give rise to a reverent mind, these people will attain arhatship before long.

“Moreover, in the past, measureless asamkhyeya kalpas ago, there arose in the world a Buddha named Kasaya Banner Tathagata. If there are men and women who hear this Buddha’s name, they will transcend a hundred great kalpas of torments of samsara.

“Moreover, in the past there arose in the world a Buddha named Great Penetration Mountain King Tathagata. If there are men and women who hear this Buddha’s name, these people will meet as many Buddhas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River, who will extensively expound

the Dharma for them, and they will certainly attain bodhi.

“Moreover, in the past, there was Pure Moon Buddha, Mountain King Buddha, Wisdom Excellence Buddha, Pure Name King Buddha, Wisdom Accomplished Buddha, Unsurpassed Buddha, Wonderful Sound Buddha, Full Moon Buddha, and Moon-Countenance Buddha—there were inexpressibly [many] Buddhas such as these.

“World-Honored One, all living beings in the present and future—be they devas or humans, men or women—as long as they remember a Buddha’s name, they will attain measureless virtues. How much more so when they remember many [Buddhas’] names! These beings will gain great benefits at the time of birth and the time of death, and they will never fall into the lower realms.

“If a person is on the verge of death and his family members, even just one of them, recite a Buddha’s name clearly for the sick one’s sake, with the exception of the five great violations that lead to incessant torments, the ripened effects of the dying person’s other karma will be dissolved. The five great violations that lead to incessant torments are so extremely grave that the offender would pass through millions of kalpas without release. Nevertheless, by virtue

of other people reciting and meditating on the names of Buddhas for his sake when he is on the verge of death, [even the torments from] such offenses can be gradually dissolved, too. How much more so when living beings themselves recite and meditate on [the names of Buddhas]! They will gain measureless merit and dissolve measureless [torments of] offenses.”

Chapter Ten

Comparing the Conditions and Virtues of Giving

At that time, through [the power of] the Buddha’s awesome spiritual penetration, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva rose from his seat, knelt on his knees, joined his palms, and said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, I observe living beings in the karmic paths and compare their acts of giving: some [acts] are small and some are great. Some beings then receive merit for one life, some receive merit for ten lives, and some receive great merit and benefit for hundreds of lives, for thousands of lives. Why is this? O World-Honored One, please explain this for me.”

At that time, the Buddha told Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, “Now, in this assembly in the Trayastrimsa Heaven, I will speak on the giving done by beings of Jambudvīpa and compare the virtues therein. You should listen attentively. I will explain for you.”

Ksitigarbha said to the Buddha, “I have doubts about this matter, and I joyfully wish to listen.”

The Buddha told Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, “In Jambudvīpa there are kings, high ministers, ranking officials, great elders, great Ksatriyas, great Brahmans, and others who encounter those who are the lowest and poorest and those who are hunchbacked, crippled, mute, deaf, mentally deficient, blind—people who are handicapped in various ways such as these. At the time these great kings and others wish to give alms, if they are able to do so with great kindness and compassion, a humble mind, and a smile, giving out gifts to all these people personally or through their representatives and comforting them with gentle words, the merit and benefit that these kings and others will obtain will be comparable to the benefit derived from the virtue of giving to as many Buddhas as there are grains of sand in a hundred Ganges Rivers. Why is this?

These kings and others will reap such results, receiving merit and benefit, because they give rise to a mind of great kindness toward the poorest, lowest people and those who are handicapped. For hundreds of thousands of lives they will always have an abundance of the seven jewels, not to mention food, clothing, and the necessities of life!

“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if there are kings, Brahmans, and others who encounter Buddha-stupas, monasteries, or images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, sravakas, or pratyekabuddhas, and if they then personally prepare and make offerings and give gifts, these kings and others will be Sakras for three kalpas and experience excellent, wonderful happiness. If they are able to dedicate the merit and benefit of that giving to the Dharma Realm, these great kings and others will be great Brahma kings for ten kalpas.

“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if there are kings, Brahmans, and others who encounter ancient Buddha-stupas, temples, sutras, or images that are damaged or dilapidated, and if they are able to generate the resolve to restore them—these kings and others then do so themselves, or they encourage others, as many as hundreds of

thousands of people, to also give and form [wholesome] conditions—these kings and others will always be wheel-turning kings for hundreds of thousands of lives, and those who practice giving along with them will always be kings of smaller countries for hundreds of thousands of lives. Moreover, in front of the stupas or temples, if they can give rise to the mind of [merit]-dedication, then such kings, others, and their helpers will all attain Buddhahood, for such results are measureless and boundless.

“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if there are kings, Brahmans, and others who see the old, the sick, or women in childbirth and if in a thought-moment, they have the mind of great kindness and provide them with medicine, food, drink, and bedding to make them peaceful and comfortable, the merit and benefit [of their giving] will be very inconceivable. For a hundred kalpas they will always be lords of the pure-abode heavens, for two hundred kalpas they will always be lords of the six heavens of the desire realm, and they will ultimately become Buddhas. They will never fall into the lower realms, and for hundreds of thousands of lives they will not hear the sounds of suffering.

“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if there are

kings, Brahmans, and others who are able to give in such ways, they will gain measureless merit. Moreover, if they are able to dedicate [the merit of their giving]—be it a lot or a little—[to the Dharma Realm], they will ultimately become Buddhas, not to mention reaping the ripened effects to be Sakras, Brahmas, and wheel-turning kings. Therefore, Ksitigarbha, encourage all living beings to learn [to give] thus.

“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if good men and good women plant in Buddhadharma a few roots of goodness, even as little as [a strand of] hair, [a grain of] sand, or [a speck of] dust, the merit and benefit that they will receive will be beyond compare.

“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if there are good men and good women who encounter the images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, or wheel-turning kings, and give gifts and make offerings to them, they will gain measureless merit. They will always be reborn in the human and heaven realms and experience excellent, wonderful happiness. If they can dedicate [that merit] to the Dharma Realm, their merit and resulting benefit will be beyond compare.

“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if there are good men and good women who encounter the Mahayana sutras or just hear a verse or a sentence and give rise to a sincere, reverent mind, sing praises, venerate, and make offerings, these people will reap great results which are measureless and boundless. If they can dedicate [that merit] to the Dharma Realm, their merit will be beyond compare.

“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if there are good men and good women who encounter Buddha-stupas, monasteries, or Mahayana sutras that are new, and they make offerings, gaze reverently, pay obeisance, sing praises, and join their palms in respect; and if they encounter old or damaged ones and they make repairs and restorations—they generate the resolve to do so themselves or they encourage many others to generate the resolve to do so with them—those who help will always be kings of smaller countries for thirty lives. The donors who lead the giving will always be wheel-turning kings and will teach and transform the kings of smaller countries by means of the good Dharma.

“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if there are

good men and good women who plant roots of goodness in Buddhadharma by giving, making offerings, repairing stupas or monasteries, rebinding sutras, or doing deeds as little as a strand of hair, a speck of dust, a grain of sand, or a drop of water—as long as they can dedicate [the merit of] such wholesome deeds to the Dharma Realm, the virtues of these people will lead them to experience superior, wonderful happiness for hundreds of thousands of lives. However, if they dedicate [the merit] only to their family or relatives or to their personal benefit, the result will be to experience happiness for three lives. To give one is to receive ten thousandfold in return. Thus, Ksitigarbha, such are the causes and conditions of giving.”

Chapter Eleven

The Dharma Protection of the Earth Spirit

At that time, Earth Spirit Firm and Solid said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, since long time past, I have reverently gazed at and prostrated to measureless Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas. All of them have great, inconceivable supernatural power and wisdom, and they

all guide living beings far and wide across [to the other shore]. Among the Bodhisattvas, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva has made particularly profound vows. World-Honored One, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva has great cause and condition with Jambudvīpa. [The Bodhisattvas] Manjusri, Samantabhadra, Avalokitesvara, and Maitreya also transform into hundreds of thousands of forms to guide those in the six realms of existence, but their vows still have an end. Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva has made these vows to teach and transform all beings in the six realms of existence throughout kalpas as numerous as grains of sand in hundreds of thousands of millions of Ganges Rivers.

“World-Honored One, I see living beings in the present and future who find a pure place in the southern part of their residences and build a shrine there with clay, stone, bamboo, or wood; within the shrine they are able to sculpt, paint, or use gold, silver, copper, or iron to make Ksitigarbha’s image; and they light incense, make offerings, reverently gaze, pay obeisance, and sing his praises. Such people will gain ten kinds of benefits around their residences. What are the ten?

First, their lands will be fertile.

Second, their families and homes will ever be in peace.

Third, their deceased relatives will be reborn in the heavens.

Fourth, the living will enjoy ever greater longevity.

Fifth, they will obtain what they seek with ease.

Sixth, they will not suffer disasters of flood or fire.

Seventh, events that cause depletion will be eliminated.

Eighth, they will not have nightmares.

Ninth, they will be protected by spirits in their daily comings and goings.

Tenth, they will come across many causes of holiness.

“World-Honored One, if living beings in the present and future are able to make offerings in their residences in such way, they will gain such benefits.”

[The Earth Spirit] further said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, in the future if there are good men and good women who have this sutra and this Bodhisattva’s image in their residences, and who furthermore are able to recite this sutra and make offerings to the Bodhisattva, I

will always use my spiritual power to protect these people day and night, so that flood, fire, robbery, theft, major calamities, minor misfortunes—all bad occurrences will be eliminated.”

The Buddha told Earth Spirit Firm and Solid, “Your great spiritual power is seldom matched by other spirits. Why is this so? The land of Jambudvīpa is entirely protected by you, and the grasses, trees, sand, stones, rice plants, sesame, bamboos, reeds, grains, and jewels all come forth from the earth because of your power. Moreover, you frequently extol the beneficial deeds of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva. Your virtues and spiritual penetration are hundreds of thousands of times greater than those of the ordinary earth spirits. In the future if there are good men and good women who make offerings to the Bodhisattva and recite this sutra, as long as they cultivate and practice according to even one aspect of the Original Vows of Kṣitigarbha Sutra, you should use your spiritual power to protect them.

Do not allow any disasters or unwelcome phenomena to even reach their ears, much less happen to them personally.

“Not only will you alone protect these people, but Sakra, Brahma, their retinues as well as other devas and their retinues will also support and protect them. Why will they receive support and protection from holy ones and worthies such as these? It is due to their gazing reverently at and making obeisance to Ksitigarbha’s image and reciting the Original Vows of Ksitigarbha Sutra. Naturally, they will leave the sea of suffering and ultimately attain the bliss of nirvana. Therefore, they receive great support and protection.”

Chapter Twelve

The Benefits from Seeing and Hearing

At that time, the World-Honored One emitted hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of rays of great urna light from the crown of his head. There were rays of white urna light, great white urna light, auspicious urna light, great auspicious urna light, jade urna light, great jade urna light, purple urna light, great purple urna light, blue urna light, great blue urna light, azure urna light, great azure urna light, red urna light, great red urna light, green urna light, great green urna light, golden urna light,

great golden urna light, urna light [manifesting] propitious clouds, urna light [manifesting] great propitious clouds, urna light [manifesting] the thousand-spoked wheel, urna light [manifesting] the great thousand-spoked wheel, urna light [manifesting] the jewel wheel, urna light [manifesting] the great jewel wheel, urna light [manifesting] the sun disc, urna light [manifesting] the great sun disc, urna light [manifesting] the moon disc, urna light [manifesting] the great moon disc, urna light [manifesting] palaces, urna light [manifesting] great palaces, urna light [manifesting] ocean-like clouds, and urna light [manifesting] great ocean-like clouds.

After emitting rays of urna light such as these from the crown of his head, he issued forth his sublime, wonderful voice, telling the great assembly—devas, nagas, and others of the eight classes of beings, humans, non-humans, and others, “Hear me now in the Trayastrimsa Heaven as I praise and extol Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva for how he benefits those in the human and heaven realms and so forth—on inconceivable matters, on the matters of causes for transcending to holiness, on the matters of attainment of the Tenth Ground, and on the matters of ultimately being

irreversibly [on course] to unexcelled perfect complete awakening.”

As these words were spoken, in the assembly there was a Bodhisattva-Mahasattva named Avalokitesvara who rose from his seat, knelt on his knees, joined his palms, and said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva is replete with great kindness and compassion, taking pity on wrongdoing suffering beings. He transforms into thousands of myriads of millions of emanations in thousands of myriads of millions of worlds—all his virtues as well as the power of his inconceivable, awesome spiritual penetration! I have heard the World-Honored One and measureless Buddhas of the ten directions unanimously praise Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, saying that even if all Buddhas in the past, present and future were to speak of his virtues, these virtues still could not be described fully, and just now, the World-Honored One has told everyone in the great assembly that he wishes to extol on how Ksitigarbha benefits [beings] and so forth. O World-Honored One, for the sake of all living beings in the present and future, please expound on the inconceivable matters of Ksitigarbha and cause devas, nagas,

and others of the eight classes of beings to gaze reverently, make obeisance to him, and gain merits.”

The Buddha told Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, “You have great cause and condition with the saha world. If devas, nagas, men, women, spirits, ghosts, or any wrongdoing suffering beings in the six realms of existence hear your name, see your image, feel great love and admiration for you, or sing your praises, these beings definitely will not fall back or turn away from the Unsurpassed Way. They will ever be reborn as humans or devas and experience excellent, wonderful happiness. When the effects of their causes come to maturity, they will meet Buddhas and be given prediction. Now, replete with great kindness and compassion, you take pity on living beings, on devas, nagas, and others of the eight classes of beings, and listen as I expound on Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s inconceivable deeds of benefiting [beings]. You should listen attentively. I will speak on them now.”

Avalokitesvara replied, “Yes, World-Honored One, I joyfully wish to listen.”

The Buddha told Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, “In various worlds in the present and future, there are devas

who have exhausted their heavenly merit and manifest the five signs of decay; some of them are about to fall into the lower realms. When such devas, whether male or female, manifest these signs, if they see Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva's image or hear Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva's name, and they reverently gaze at and make obeisance to him once, these devas will increase their heavenly merit, experience great happiness, and will not fall into [and experience] ripened effects in the three lower realms. How much more will that be the case for those who see and hear the Bodhisattva and honor him with gifts and offerings of incense, flowers, clothing, food, drink, jewels, and necklaces! The virtues, merits, and benefits that they will obtain will be measureless and boundless.

“Furthermore, Avalokitesvara, in various worlds in the present and future, when living beings in the six realms of existence are on the verge of death, if they are able to hear Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva's name, even if the sound of his name passes through their ears just once, such beings will not undergo the sufferings of the three lower realms. How much more will that be the case when a person is on the verge of death, and parents and other relatives use the

dying one's house, wealth, jewels, and clothing to commission the sculpting or painting of Ksitigarbha's image; if the sick one has not yet passed away, they can try to help him see, hear, and understand that for his benefit, relatives have used his house, jewels, and so forth for the sculpting or painting of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva's image. If the ripened effects of this person's karma are such that he would have to undergo severe illness, through these virtues he will soon recover and his lifespan will be prolonged. If the ripened effects of this person's karma are such that his life would end and his offense obstacles and karmic obstacles should send him to the lower realms, then through these virtues, he will be reborn among humans or devas and experience excellent, wonderful happiness after he departs this life, and all his offense obstacles will dissolve.

“Furthermore, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, in the future, if there are men or women who have lost their fathers, mothers, brothers, or sisters during infancy or at the age of three, five, or under ten, and as adults such people think of those deceased parents and relatives and long to know into what realms they have fallen, or in what worlds, or in what heavens they have been reborn, and if these

people are able to sculpt or paint Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva's image, hear his name, reverently gaze at and make obeisance to him for one to seven days without retreating from their initial resolve—continuously they hear his name, see his image, reverently gaze, pay obeisance, and make offerings to him: If these people's relatives had fallen into the lower realms due to their karma and would remain there for many kalpas, through the virtues of their sons', daughters', brothers', or sisters' sculpting or painting Ksitigarbha's image, reverently gazing at, and making obeisance to him, they will quickly gain release, be reborn among humans or devas, and experience excellent, wonderful happiness. If the relatives had already been reborn as humans or devas and were already experiencing excellent, wonderful happiness by the strength of their own merit, then through these virtues they will increase their causes for holiness and experience measureless happiness.

“If furthermore these people are able to gaze reverently at and make obeisance to Ksitigarbha's image wholeheartedly for three seven-day periods and recite the Bodhisattva's name a full ten thousand times, then the Bodhisattva will manifest his infinite forms and describe to them the

realms into which their relatives have been reborn, or in their dreams the Bodhisattva will manifest his great spiritual power and personally lead them to those worlds to see their relatives.

“If these people can furthermore recite the Bodhisattva’s name one thousand times a day every day for one thousand days, then the Bodhisattva will send the ghosts and spirits in the vicinity of these people to guard and protect them for their entire lives. Their food and clothing will be abundant in the present life, and they will not have suffering from sickness and other causes. Untoward dire events will not enter the doors [of their homes], much less affect them personally. The Bodhisattva will ultimately place his hand on the crowns of their heads and give them prediction.

“Furthermore, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, in the future if there are good men and good women who wish to generate the mind of vast, great kindness to rescue and guide all living beings, who wish to cultivate the unsurpassed bodhi, and who wish to leave the threefold world, and if these people see Ksitigarbha’s image, hear his name, and wholeheartedly take refuge in him, or if they also make offerings of incense, flowers, clothing, jewels, food, and

drink, reverently gaze at and make obeisance to him, these good men and good women will soon fulfill their vows and will never be hindered by obstacles.

“Furthermore, Avalokitesvara, in the future if there are good men and good women who wish to fulfill hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of wishes and succeed in hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of undertakings in both the present and future, they should take refuge [in this Bodhisattva], reverently gaze, pay obeisance, make offerings, and sing praises [before] Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s image. Then they will achieve all their aspirations and goals. Should they moreover implore Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva—who is replete with great kindness and compassion—to support and protect them always, then in dreams the Bodhisattva will place his hand on the crowns of their heads and give them prediction.

“Furthermore, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, in the future if good men and good women give rise to profound reverence for the Mahayana sutras and generate an inconceivable resolve, wishing to read and recite them [from memory], yet, even with the instruction of a wise teacher showing them how to learn the sutras by heart, no

sooner have they learned them they forget. Months, even years go by; still they are unable to read and recite them. These good men and [good women] have karmic obstacles from past lives that have not yet been resolved; therefore, they are unable to read and recite the Mahayana sutras. When such people hear Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva's name, see Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva's image, they should, with their full original resolve, reverently state their situation to the Bodhisattva. In addition, they should make offerings of incense, flowers, clothing, food, drink, and all material objects they enjoy to the Bodhisattva. They should place a cup of pure water before the Bodhisattva for a day and a night; afterward, they should join their palms, implore reverently, take hold of the cup, turn to face south, and drink the water. When the water is about to enter their mouths, they should be wholeheartedly sincere and earnest. After drinking the water, they should be careful—abstain from the five pungent plants, alcohol, meat, sexual misconduct, false speech, and killing and harming for one or three seven-day periods. Then in dreams these good men and good women will see Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva manifesting his infinite forms to pour water on the crowns of their heads.²⁴

When they awaken, they will be endowed with keen intelligence. Should these sutras be heard in their ears but once, they will forever remember them and never forget or lose a single sentence or verse.

“Furthermore, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, in the future if there are various people whose food and clothing are insufficient, who cannot obtain whatever they seek, who have frequent illnesses, who encounter much misfortune and decline, whose families or homes are without peace, whose relatives are scattered, who physically suffer frequent untoward occurrences, or who are often terrified in dreams, if such people hear Ksitigarbha’s name, see Ksitigarbha’s image, and with wholehearted reverence, recite his name a full ten thousand times, these disagreeable circumstances will gradually disappear. They will have peace and happiness thereafter, their food and clothing will be abundant, and even in dreams they will be peaceful and happy.

“Furthermore, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, in the future if there are good men and good women who, for the sake of livelihood, public or personal matters, events of birth and death, or other urgent business, need to enter

the mountains or forests, cross the rivers, oceans, or other large bodies of water, or travel along dangerous paths, these people should first recite Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva's name a full ten thousand times. Then the ghosts and spirits on the lands they pass through will guard and protect them. Whether they are walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, their peace and happiness will be safeguarded. Even when they encounter tigers, wolves, lions, or all that are poisonous or injurious, none will be able to harm them."

The Buddha told Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, "Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva has great cause and condition with Jambudvīpa. Suppose I were to describe the benefits and so forth derived by living beings who see [his image] and hear of [his name], in hundreds of thousands of kalpas I could not finish describing them. Therefore, Avalokitesvara, you should use your spiritual power to propagate this sutra, thus enabling living beings of the saha world to always have peace and happiness throughout hundreds of thousands of myriads of kalpas."

At that time, the World-Honored One spoke in verse, saying:

"I observe that Ksitigarbha's awesome spiritual power

Cannot be told fully even in kalpas as many as
grains of sand of Gange River
Seeing, hearing, reverently gazing, or making
obeisance to him in a thought-moment
Will benefit humans and devas in measureless
ways.

“If men, women, nagas, or spirits who are,
Nearing the end of the present ripened effect,
would fall into lower realms
Wholeheartedly take refuge in this Great Being,
Their lifespans will be lengthened, offense obstacles
dissolved.

“Those who when very young have lost their
parents’ love—
Wonder to what realm has [their parents’] con-
sciousness gone—
Brothers, sisters, or other kin, [whose whereabouts]
The grown surviving ones do not know:
If these people sculpt or paint this Great Being’s
image,
Gaze up longingly, make obeisance to him
unceasingly,

And recollect his name for three seven-day periods,
The Bodhisattva will manifest his infinite forms,
Revealing the realms of rebirth of their kin,
Who, even if fallen in lower realms, will soon gain
release.

If they do not retreat from their initial resolve,
He will place his hand on the crowns of their heads
and give them holy prediction.

“Those wishing to cultivate the unsurpassed bodhi
And to leave behind the threefold world’s suffering,
Having given rise to the mind of great compassion,
Should first gaze up at and make obeisance to this
Great Being’s image.

All their vows will soon be fulfilled;
No karmic obstacles can ever hinder or stop them.

“There are people who resolve to remember and
recite the sutras,

Wishing to guide confused beings over to the other
shore,

Although having made this vow so inconceivable,
What they read they quickly forget—losing much in
their forgetfulness.

Because these people have karmic obstacles
deluding them,
They cannot remember the Mahayana sutras.
They should honor Ksitigarbha with offerings of
incense, flowers
Clothing, food, drink, and objects they enjoy,
Place pure water before this Great Being's [image]
After a day and a night, implore reverently and
drink the water,
Give rise to a diligent and serious mind, abstain
from the five pungent plants,
Alcohol, meat, sexual misconduct, and false speech,
Not to kill or harm for three seven-day periods,
And wholeheartedly meditate on this Great Being's
name.
Then soon in dreams they will see his infinite
[forms],
And when they awaken they will gain keen
hearing.
Once the sutras and teachings pass through their
ears,
Never will they forget them throughout thousands

of myriads of lives.

Because this Great Being is so inconceivable,

He can enable these people to gain such wisdom.

Beings who are poor or afflicted by illnesses,

Whose households are in misfortune and decline,

whose relatives are scattered,

Whose sleep and dreams are not peaceful,

Who cannot obtain whatever they seek—having

nothing go their way—

Should wholeheartedly gaze up at and make

obeisance to Ksitigarbha's image.

All the bad things will dissolve,

And their dreams will be peaceful, too,

Food and clothing abundant, and spirits and ghosts

will protect them.

“Those wishing to enter mountains or forests or

cross the seas

Where there are ferocious fowls and beasts, evil

people,

Evil spirits, evil ghosts, and evil winds—

All sorts of calamities and various distresses—

Should gaze reverently, pay obeisance, and make

offerings

To the image of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, the Great
Being.

In the mountains, forests, and on the great seas,
Those evils will all disappear.

“Avalokitesvara, wholeheartedly listen to me.

Endless are the inconceivable [matters] of
Ksitigarbha.

In hundreds of thousands of myriads of kalpas the
description is still not complete,

To extensively expound on such powers of this
Great Being!

If people hear the name ‘Ksitigarbha’

And see his image, reverently gaze, pay obeisance,
Make offerings of incense, flowers, clothing, food,
and drink,

They will experience wonderful happiness for
hundreds of thousands [of kalpas].

If they can dedicate such merit to the Dharma
Realm,

They will go beyond the cycle of birth and death,
and ultimately become Buddhas.

Therefore, Avalokitesvara, you should know this
And tell everyone throughout lands as many as
Ganges' sand."

Chapter Thirteen

Entrusting Humans and Devas

At that time, the World-Honored One raised his golden arm, again placed his hand on the crown of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva's head, and spoke these words, "Ksitigarbha, Ksitigarbha, inconceivable is your spiritual power, inconceivable your kindness and compassion, inconceivable your wisdom, inconceivable your eloquence. Even if all the Buddhas of the ten directions were to praise and speak on the inconceivable matters about you, they could not be described fully in thousands of myriads of kalpas.

"Ksitigarbha, Ksitigarbha, remember that today in the Trayastrimsa Heaven, in this great assembly of hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of inexpressibly-inexpressible [number of] Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, devas, nagas, and others of the eight classes of beings, I once again entrust to you humans, devas, and other beings who

have not yet left the threefold world, who are still in this burning house. Do not allow these living beings to fall into the lower realms even for a single day and night, much less fall into the hell with fivefold incessancy or the Avici Hell, where they would pass through thousands of myriads of millions of kalpas without a time of release.

“Ksitigarbha, living beings of Jambudvīpa are without fixity in their wills and characters. Most of them are accustomed to evil. Even when they generate a wholesome mind, it fades within a short time. If they encounter evil conditions, [the unwholesome] is increased thought upon thought. For this reason, I transform into hundreds of thousands of millions of emanation-forms to teach beings and guide them across to liberation, all in accord with their capacities and dispositions.

“Ksitigarbha, I now earnestly entrust devas, humans, and the multitudes of beings to you. In the future, if there are devas, good men, and good women who plant a few roots of goodness in Buddhadharmā, even as little as a strand of hair, a speck of dust, a grain of sand, or a drop of water, you should use the power of the noble path to support and protect them, so that they gradually cultivate

the Unsurpassed [Way] and do not retreat from it or lose it.

“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future, if devas or humans fall into the lower realms to undergo ripened effects according to their karma, and when on the verge of falling into these lower realms or at the front of these entrances, if these beings are able to recollect a Buddha’s name, a Bodhisattva’s name, or a sentence or a verse from the Mahayana sutras, you should use your spiritual power to skillfully rescue these beings. Manifest your infinite forms at the places where they are, shatter the hells for them, and enable them to be reborn in the heavens and experience excellent, wonderful happiness.”

At that time, the World-Honored One spoke in verse, saying:

“Devas, humans, multitudes of beings of the
present and future

I now earnestly entrust to you:

Use great supernatural power and skillful means
guide them across [to liberation].

Do not allow them to fall into the lower realms.”

At that time, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva knelt on his knees, joined his palms, and said to the

Buddha, “O World-Honored One, I implore the World-Honored One not to be concerned. In the future, if there are good men and good women who have a single thought of respect in Buddhadharma, I will use hundreds of thousands of skillful means to guide these people across to liberation, so that they will soon be freed from the cycle of birth and death. How much more so for those who hear the wholesome matters and cultivate their practices, thought upon thought! Naturally they will never fall back or turn away from the Unsurpassed Way.”

As these words were spoken, in the assembly there was a Bodhisattva named Akasagarbha who said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, since I came to the Trayastrimsa Heaven I have heard the Tathagata praise Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s inconceivable might of awesome spiritual penetration. In the future, if there are good men, good women, and devas and nagas who hear this sutra and Ksitigarbha’s name or gaze reverently at and make obeisance to his image, how many kinds of merits and benefits will they gain? O World-Honored One, for the sake of all the multitudes of beings in the present and future, please briefly speak about this.”

The Buddha told Akasagarbha Bodhisattva, “Listen attentively, listen attentively. I will describe them separately for you. In the future, if there are good men and good women who see Ksitigarbha’s image and who hear this sutra, who moreover read and recite it, who give gifts and make offering of incense, flowers, food, drink, clothing, or jewels, who sing his praises, gaze reverently at, and make obeisance to him, they will gain twenty-eight kinds of benefits:

First, devas and nagas will protect them.

Second, their wholesome results will increase daily.

Third, they will accumulate superior causes for holiness.

Fourth, they will not retreat from bodhi.

Fifth, their food and clothing will be abundant.

Sixth, they will not be infected by diseases or pestilence.

Seventh, they will not be in disasters of flood or fire.

Eighth, they will not fall victim to robbery or theft.

Ninth, people who see them will admire and respect them.

Tenth, spirits and ghosts will aid and support them.

Eleventh, women [who wish to] will be reborn as men.

Twelfth, [if reborn as women] they will be daughters of kings and ministers.

Thirteenth, they will be good looking and with perfect features.

Fourteenth, they will frequently be reborn in the heavens.

Fifteenth, they may be emperors or kings.

Sixteenth, they will have the wisdom to know past lives.

Seventeenth, they will fulfill their wishes.

Eighteenth, their family members will be happy.

Nineteenth, untoward dire occurrences will be eliminated.

Twentieth, they will forever leave the karmic paths.

Twenty-first, they will pass through safely wherever they go.

Twenty-second, their dreams at night will be peaceful and happy.

Twenty-third, their deceased relatives will leave

suffering behind.

Twenty-fourth, they will be reborn on the strength
of their past merit.

Twenty-fifth, holy ones will praise them.

Twenty-sixth, they will be intelligent and have
keen faculties.

Twenty-seventh, their hearts will be replete with
kindness and compassion.

Twenty-eighth, they will ultimately become
Buddhas.

“Furthermore, Akasagarbha Bodhisattva, if devas, nagas, ghosts, and spirits in the present and future hear Ksitigarbha’s name, make obeisance to Ksitigarbha’s image, or hear of Ksitigarbha’s original vows, deeds, and practices, and they sing his praises, gaze reverently at, and make obeisance to him, they will gain seven kinds of benefits:

First, they will quickly ascend the stages of
holiness.

Second, their unwholesome karma will dissolve.

Third, Buddhas will protect and be near them.

Fourth, they will not retreat from bodhi.

Fifth, their inherent powers will increase.

Sixth, they will know past lives.

Seventh, they will ultimately become Buddhas.”

At that time, all the inexpressibly-inexpressible [number of] Buddhas, Tathagatas, who had come from the ten directions as well as great Bodhisattvas, devas, nagas, and others of the eight kinds of beings, on having heard Sakyamuni Buddha praise and extol Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s power of great awesome spiritual penetration as being inconceivable, exclaimed that there had never been anything like this.

At that time, measureless incense, flowers, heavenly garments, and pearl necklaces rained down in the Trayastrimsa Heaven as offerings to Sakyamuni Buddha and Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. Afterward, the entire assembly again reverently gazed, made obeisance, joined their palms, and withdrew.

Praise

Ksitigarbha's original vows,
Examining the causes and effects:
Being hunchbacked, crippled, and mute are results
from past lives.
In this life, recite the Mahayana sutras.
Merit and benefits are endless;
Assuring rebirth in the jeweled lotus.

Homage to Ksitigarbha
Bodhisattva-Mahasattva.

Praise of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva

Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva is wonderful, beyond
compare—

Manifesting his golden countenance everywhere.

Beings of the three woeful states and the six realms
of existence hear his wonderful Dharma;

Beings of the four kinds of birth and the ten
Dharma Realms all receive his benevolent
kindness.

His brilliant pearl illuminates the way to the
heavens;

His golden staff jolts open the gates of hell.

Relatives of many kalpas all receive his guidance.

By the nine grades of lotus pedestals, we bow to
the kind, honored one.

Homage to the great kind and compassionate
KsitigarbhaBodhisatta of the world of darkness
in Mount Jiuhua.

Homage to Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva.

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.

Fo Guang Shan

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