

THE LOTUS SUTRA'S

UNIVERSAL GATE CHAPTER
on
AVALOKITESVARA BODHISATTVA

妙法蓮華經觀世音菩薩普門品



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Praise of Holy Water

With willow twigs, may the holy water be
sprinkled on the three thousand realms.

May the nature of emptiness and eight virtues
benefit heaven and earth.

May good fortune and long life both be enhanced
and extended. May wrongdoing be extin-
guished and be gone.

Burning flames transform into red lotus blossoms.

We take refuge in Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva-
Mahasattva. (repeat three times)

Homage to great compassionate Avalokitesvara
Bodhisattva.
(repeat three times)

Sutra Opening Verse

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

The Lotus Sutra's Universal Gate Chapter on Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva

At that time, Aksayamati Bodhisattva rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, put his palms together facing the Buddha, and said, “World-honored One, for what reason is Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva named ‘Observing the Sounds of the World?’”

The Buddha answered Aksayamati Bodhisattva, “Good men, if there be countless hundreds of millions of billions of living beings [...]

[...] experiencing all manner of suffering who hear of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva and call his name with single-minded effort, then Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva will instantly observe the sound of their cries, and they will all be liberated.

“If anyone who upholds the name of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva were to fall into a great fire, the fire would be unable to burn that person due to the bodhisattva’s awe-inspiring spiritual powers. If anyone, carried away by a flood, were to call his name, that person would immediately reach a shallow place.

“If there are living beings in the hundreds of millions of billions who go out to sea in search of such treasures as gold, silver, lapis lazuli, mother of pearl,

carnelian, coral, amber, and pearls, and if a fierce storm were to blow their ship off course to make landfall in the territory of raksas, and further if among them there is even one person who calls the name of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, then all of those people will be liberated from the torment of the raksas. This is why the bodhisattva is named “Observing the Sounds of the World.”

“Or if someone facing imminent attack calls the name of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, the knives and clubs held by the attackers will then break into pieces, and that person will attain liberation.

“If a great three thousand-fold world system was full of yaksas and raksas seeking to torment people, and they heard someone call the name of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, these evil demons would not even be able to see that person with their evil eyes, much less do any harm.

“Or if someone, whether guilty or not guilty, who is bound and fettered with manacles, shackles, and cangue calls the name of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, then all the bonds will be broken, and that person will instantly attain liberation.

[...]

[...] “If a great three thousand-fold world system were full of malevolent brigands, and a merchant chief were leading many merchants carrying valuable treasures along a perilous road, and among them one man were to speak up and say, “Good men, do not be afraid. You should call the name of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva with single-minded effort, for this bodhisattva can bestow fearlessness upon living beings. If you call his name, then you will surely be liberated from these malevolent brigands!” [...]

[...] and upon hearing this, if all of the merchants were to call out: "I take refuge in Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva," then by calling his name, they would instantly attain liberation.

"Aksayamati, lofty indeed are the awe-inspiring spiritual powers of the great Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva.

"If any living beings are much given to greed, let them keep in mind and revere Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, and they will be freed from their greed.

"If any are much given to anger, let them keep in mind and revere Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, and they will be freed from their anger.

"If any are much given to ignorance, let them keep in mind and revere Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, and they will be freed from their ignorance.

[...]

[...] “Aksayamati, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva possesses such awe-inspiring spiritual powers, and many have benefited from them. This is why living beings should constantly keep him in mind.

“If any woman wishes for a male child by worshipping and making offerings to Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, she will then give birth to a son blessed with merit and wisdom. If she wishes for a female child, she will then give birth to a daughter blessed with well-formed and attractive features, one who has planted the roots of virtue over lifetimes and is cherished and respected by all. Aksayamati, such are the powers of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva!

[...]

[...] “If any living being reveres and worships Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, their auspicious merit will not have been in vain.

“Therefore, let all living beings accept and uphold the name of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. Aksayamati, suppose someone were to accept and uphold the names of as many bodhisattvas as there are grains of sand along sixty-two hundred million Ganges Rivers, and spend a lifetime in making offerings of food, drink, clothing, lodging, and medicines to them. What do you think? Would the merit for such a good man or good woman be great or not?”

Aksayamati replied, “Great indeed, World-honored One.”

[...]

[...] The Buddha said, “Suppose there is another person who accepts and upholds the name of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, and worships and makes offerings to him for a single moment; the merit gained by these two people will be exactly the same without any difference. Such merit cannot be exhausted even in hundreds of millions of billions of kalpas. Aksayamati, such are the immeasurable and limitless benefits of the auspicious merit one obtains from accepting and upholding the name of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva.”

Aksayamati Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, “World-honored One, how does Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva wander through this Saha World? How does he teach the Dharma for the sake of living beings? How does he apply the power of skillful means?”

The Buddha told Aksayamati Bodhisattva, “Good men, if there are living beings in this land who should be liberated by someone in the form of a Buddha, then Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva will manifest in the form of a Buddha and teach the Dharma to them.”

“For those who should be liberated by someone in the form of a pratyekabuddha, then Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva will manifest in the form of a pratyekabuddha and teach the Dharma to them. For those who should be liberated by someone in the form of a sravaka, then he will manifest in the form of a sravaka and teach the Dharma to them.

[...]

[...] “For those who should be liberated by someone in the form of King Brahma, then he will manifest in the form of King Brahma and teach the Dharma to them. For those who should be liberated by someone in the form of Lord Sakra, then he will manifest in the form of Lord Sakra and teach the Dharma to them. For those who should be liberated by someone in the form of Isvara, then he will manifest in the form of Isvara and teach the Dharma to them.

“For those who should be liberated by someone in the form of the Mahesvara, then he will manifest in the form of the Mahesvara and teach the Dharma to them. For those who should be liberated by someone in the form of a great heavenly general, then he will manifest in the form of a great heavenly general and teach the Dharma to them. [...]

[...] For those who should be liberated by someone in the form of Vaisravana, then he will manifest in the form of Vaisravana and teach the Dharma to them.

“For those who should be liberated by someone in the form of a lesser king, then he will manifest in the form of a lesser king and teach the Dharma to them. For those who should be liberated by someone in the form of an elder, then he will manifest in the form of an elder and teach the Dharma to them. For those who should be liberated by someone in the form of a layperson, then he will manifest in the form of a layperson and teach the Dharma to them. For those who should be liberated by someone in the form of a minister, then he will manifest in the form of a minister and teach the Dharma to them. [...]

[...] For those who should be liberated by someone in the form of a brahman, then he will manifest in the form of a brahman and teach the Dharma to them.

“For those who should be liberated by someone in the form of a bhiksu, a bhiksuni, an upasaka, or an upasika, then he will manifest in the form of a bhiksu, a bhiksuni, an upasaka, or an upasika and teach the Dharma to them.

“For those who should be liberated by someone in the form of a woman from the family of an elder, a layperson, a minister, or a brahman, then he will manifest in the form of a woman and teach the Dharma to them.

[...]

[...] “For those who should be liberated by someone in the form of a young boy or young girl, then he will manifest in the form of a young boy or young girl and teach the Dharma to them.

“For those who should be liberated by someone in such forms as a deva, a naga, a yaksa, a gandharva, an asura, a garuda, a kimnara, a mahoraga, a human or a nonhuman being, then he will manifest in all these forms and teach the Dharma to them.

“For those who should be liberated by a vajrapani deity, then he will manifest as a vajrapani deity and teach the Dharma to them.

“Aksayamati, such is the merit that Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva has accomplished, and the various forms in which he wanders the various lands bringing liberation to living beings.

“This is why all of you should single-mindedly make offerings to Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, for it is the great Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva who can bestow fearlessness in the midst of terror and in dire circumstances. This is why everyone in this Saha World calls him the bestower of fearlessness.”

Aksayamati Bodhisattva said to the Buddha, “World-honored One, now I must make an offering to Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva.” [...]

[...] Then he took from his neck a necklace of numerous precious gems worth thousands of ounces in gold, and gave it to him saying, “Kind one, accept this necklace of precious gems as a Dharma gift.”

At the time, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva was unwilling to accept it. Aksayamati spoke once more to Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, “Kind one, accept this necklace as a kindness to us.”

Then the Buddha said to Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, “Accept this jeweled necklace out of compassion for Aksayamati Bodhisattva, as well as the four groups of Buddhist disciples, the devas, nagas, yaksas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human and nonhuman beings.” [...]

[...] Thereupon, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva accepted the jeweled necklace out of compassion for the four groups of Buddhist disciples, the devas and nagas, and the human and nonhuman beings, and dividing it into two parts, presented one part to Sakyamuni Buddha and presented the other part to the stupa of Prabhutaratna Buddha.

“Aksayamati, it is with such freely exercised spiritual powers that Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva wanders through the Saha World.”

Then Aksayamati Bodhisattva asked his question in verse:

“World-honored One with all the wonderful signs,

Let me now ask about him once more:

For what reason is this son of the Buddha

Named ‘Observing the Sounds of the World?’”

World-honored One with all the wonderful signs

Answered Aksayamati in verse:

“You listen now to the practice of Avalokitesvara,

Who well responds to every region.

His great vow is as deep as the sea,

Inconceivable even after many kalpas.

Having served Buddhas in the hundreds of billions,

He has made a great and pure vow.

Let me briefly tell you:

Hearing his name and seeing his form,

Keeping him unremittingly in mind,

Can eliminate all manner of suffering.

Suppose someone with harmful intent,

Casts you into a great pit of fire;

Keep in mind Avalokitesvara's powers,

And the pit of fire will change into a pond.

Or you are cast adrift upon an immense ocean,

Menaced by dragons, fish, and demons;

Keep in mind Avalokitesvara's powers,

And the waves will not drown you.

Or someone pushes you down,

From the top of Mount Sumeru;

Keep in mind Avalokitesvara's powers,

And you will hang in the sky like the sun.

Or you are pursued by evil doers,

Who push you down from Mount Vajra;

Keep in mind Avalokitesvara's powers,

And not one of your hairs will be harmed.

Or if surrounded by malevolent brigands,

Each one brandishing a knife to attack you;

Keep in mind Avalokitesvara's powers,

And they will all experience a mind of loving-kindness.

Or if persecuted by the royal court,

Facing death by execution;

Keep in mind Avalokitesvara's powers,

And the executioner's blade will break into pieces.

Or if imprisoned with cangue and chains,

Hands and feet manacled and shackled;

Keep in mind Avalokitesvara's powers,

And the bonds will loosen and you will be liberated.

If there is someone who would do you harm,

Using spells and various poisons;

Keep in mind Avalokitesvara's powers,

And any harm will rebound on the originator.

Or if you encounter evil raksas,

Venomous dragons, various ghosts, and the like;

Keep in mind Avalokitesvara's powers,

And then none of them will dare harm you.

If you are surrounded by evil beasts

With their sharp teeth and claws so horrifying;

Keep in mind Avalokitesvara's powers,

And they will flee in all directions.

When lizards, snakes, vipers, and scorpions

Scorch you with their poisonous vapors;

Keep in mind Avalokitesvara's powers,

And they will retreat at the sound of your voice.

When thunderclouds rumble with lighting strikes,

As hailstones and torrential rains come down;

Keep in mind Avalokitesvara's powers,

And the storm will disperse that very moment.

Living beings suffer in agony,

Oppressed by immeasurable pain;

The power of Avalokitesvara's wondrous wisdom

Can bring liberation from the world's sufferings.

Perfect in supernatural powers,

Widely practicing the skillful means of wisdom,

In all the lands of the ten directions,

There is no place where he fails to manifest.

The lower realms in all their forms,

That of hell-beings, hungry ghosts, and animals,

The sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death,

He steadily brings them all to an end.

Contemplation of truth, contemplation of purity,

Contemplation of the vast and greater wisdom,
Contemplation of compassion and contemplation
of kindness;

Ever longed for, ever looked up to.

His undefiled light of purity

Is the wisdom-sun dispelling all darkness,

What can quell winds and fires that bring disaster

And illuminate the world universally.

Precepts of his compassionate body are like rolling
thunder;

The profundity of his kind mind is like a great cloud;

He showers us with Dharma rain like nectar,

That extinguishes the flames of affliction.

When lawsuits bring you to court,

Or when fear strikes you in battle,

Keep in mind Avalokitesvara's powers,

And the enemy forces will all retreat.

Contemplating the world's voices with a wondrous
voice,

A Brahma voice, an ocean-tide voice,

What surpasses those voices of the world;

Therefore constantly keep them in mind.

Never doubt from moment to moment,

The pure and noble Avalokitesvara;

For those in pain and agony, or facing death,

He can be their aid and support!

In possession of all merit and virtue,

He views living beings with the eyes of loving-kindness;

His ocean of accumulated merit is infinite,

So worship him with prostrations.

At this time Dharanimdhara Bodhisattva rose from his seat, came forward, and said to the Buddha, “World-honored One, if there are living beings who hear this chapter on Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva about his freedom of action, his revelation of the universal gate, and his supernatural powers, it should be known that their merits are not few.”

[...]

[...] When the Buddha preached this chapter on the Universal Gate, the eighty-four thousand living beings assembled there all generated the aspiration to attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

Heart Sutra

Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, while contemplating deeply the prajnaparamita, realized the five aggregates are empty and was liberated from all suffering and hardship.

Sariputra, form is not different from emptiness, emptiness is not different from form. Form is emptiness. Emptiness is form. The same is true of feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness.

[...]

[...] Sariputra, all phenomena are empty. They do not arise or cease, are not defiled or pure, do not increase or decrease. Thus, in emptiness, there are no forms, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, or consciousness.

No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind; no form, sound, smell, taste, touch or dharmas; no eye consciousness so on unto mind consciousness; no ignorance and extinction of ignorance; even unto no aging and death and no extinction of aging and death; no suffering, cause of suffering, cessation, or path; no wisdom and no attainment.

[...]

[...] As there is no attainment, bodhisattvas who rely on the prajnaparamita have neither worry nor obstruction. Without worry and obstruction, there is no fear. Away from confusion and delusion, they will ultimately reach nirvana. All the Buddhas of the past, present, and future rely on the prajnaparamita to attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi.

Thus, know that the prajnaparamita is the great profound mantra, is the illuminating mantra, is the most supreme of all mantras, is the unequalled mantra, able to eliminate all suffering, is true and not false.

[...]

[...] Thus, proclaim the “Prajnaparamita Mantra,”
proclaim the mantra that says:

Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha.

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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.

Glossary

anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. A Sanskrit term meaning “complete, unexcelled enlightenment”; an attribute of all Buddhas.

Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. The bodhisattva of compassion whose name means “Observing the Sounds of the World.” He is known as one of the great bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism and is very popular throughout China.

bodhisattva. While the term can describe a practitioner anywhere on the path to Buddhahood, it usually refers to a class of beings who stand on the very edge of full enlightenment but remain in the world to help other beings become enlightened.

Buddha. A Sanskrit word meaning “Awakened One.” Though there are many Buddhas, the term typically refers to Sakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha and founder of Buddhism. Buddhahood is the attainment and expression that characterizes a Buddha and the ultimate goal of all sentient beings.

Dharma. A Sanskrit word meaning “truth”; referring to the Buddha’s teachings, as well as the truth of the universe.

When capitalized, it denotes both the ultimate truth and the teachings of the Buddha. When the term appears in lowercase, it refers to anything that can be thought of, experienced, or named; this usage is close in meaning to the concept of “phenomena.”

emptiness. The concept that everything in the world arises due to dependent origination and has no permanent self or substance. All phenomena are said to be empty of an inherently independent self.

enlightenment. The state of awakening to the ultimate truth. This is freedom from all afflictions and suffering.

five aggregates. The five aggregates make up a human being. They are: form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness.

merit. Blessings that occur because of wholesome deeds.

nirvana. A state of perfect tranquility that is the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice. The original meaning of this word is “extinguished,” “calmed,” “quieted,” “tamed,” or “dead.” In Buddhism, it refers to the absolute extinction of individual existence or the extinction of all afflictions and desires; it is the state of liberation beyond the cycle of birth and death.

paramita. A Sanskrit word meaning “crossed over” or “perfection.” This denotes passage to the other shore of the tranquility of nirvana. This is spiritual success.

prajna. A Sanskrit word meaning “wisdom.” This typically refers to a transcendent variety of wisdom that comes from seeing the true nature of reality. Prajna wisdom is considered the highest form of wisdom, the wisdom of insight into the true nature of all phenomena.

Saha World. Saha literally means “endurance.” It indicates the present world where we reside, which is full of suffering to be endured. The beings in this world endure suffering and afflictions due to their greed, anger, hatred, and ignorance. Also referred to as “samsara,” or the cycle of birth and death. When sentient beings die, they are reborn into one of the six realms of existence: heaven, human, asura, animal, hungry ghost, and hell. The cycle continues as a result of one’s karmic actions. Outside of the Saha World exist four additional realms: that of the sravaka, pratekyabuddha, bodhisattva, and Buddha. Taken together with the six realms previously mentioned, they are called the ten realms.

Sakyamuni Buddha. Siddhartha Gautama of the Sakya clan, the historical Buddha and founder of the religion known today as Buddhism. The name “Sakyamuni”

means "Sage of the Sakyans." He was born the prince of Kapilavastu, son of King Suddhodana. At the age of twenty-nine, he left the royal palace and his family in search of the meaning of existence. At the age of thirty-five, he attained enlightenment under the bodhi tree. He then spent the next forty-five years expounding his teachings, which include the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the law of cause and effect, and dependent origination. At the age of eighty, he entered the state of parinirvana.

Sariputra. One of the ten great disciples of the Buddha. He is known as foremost in wisdom.

sutra. A Sanskrit word used to describe a variety of religious and non-religious writings, but most commonly used in a Buddhist context to refer to the recorded discourses of the Buddha.

Tathagata. One of the ten epithets of a Buddha, literally translated as "Thus Come One," meaning the one who has attained full realization of suchness, which means true essence or actuality. Tathagata is the one dwelling in the absolute, beyond all transitory phenomena, so that he can freely come and go anywhere.

three thousandfold world system. According to Buddhist cosmology, there are an infinite number of worlds. Each

world has at its center a Mount Sumeru surrounded by seven oceans with seven rings of golden mountains separating each ocean. Surrounding these are four continents and eight subcontinents. Humans reside on the southern continent of Jambudvīpa. When one thousand of these worlds are grouped together it is called a “small world system,” one thousand small world systems equal a “medium world system,” and one thousand medium world systems equal a “large world system.” A “three thousandfold world system” is a combination of these three types of world systems.

World-honored One. One of the ten epithets of the Buddha.

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