

Pure Light of Bliss

The Amitayur Dhyana Sutra : an article by Ming Zhen Shakya
The Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Sutra
Sutra on the Contemplation of the Buddha Amitayus

Sources :

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The Amitayur Dhyana Sutra

By Ming Zhen Shakya

Especially in *The Amitayur Dhyana Sutra* we find what we most admire and what we most deplore about Buddhist scriptures. We find originality, charm, and theological profundity, just as we are confounded by the bizarre additions of naive scribes, the often contradictory beliefs, the endless repetitions, and the variety of styles all purporting to have been composed by the same person.

Usually, we find many versions of a sutra, some so different that we can barely recognize them as recordings of the same text. *The Amitayur Dhyana Sutra* is not an exception. When renowned orientalist Max Muller decided to include the sutras sacred to Japan's Pure Land sect in his fifty volume tome, *Sacred Books of the East*, he apparently could find no acceptable version among the extant editions and sought in vain for a manuscript in the original sanskrit. An associate of his, J. Takakusu, informed him that he possessed an old Chinese translation of the sutra and offered to create an English version, and Muller gladly accepted the offer. He later admitted, however, that while he did not doubt the integrity of the Takakusu translation, he was so disappointed by its contents that he did not want to publish it. Only his promise to Japanese friends that he would include the three sacred books of the Pure Land sect in his collection induced him to include it.

We tend to confer reliability upon the written word, especially religious works which, additionally, are regarded with reverence. *The Old Testament*, *The New Testament*, and the *Koran* were recorded by literate prophets and teachers who lived in literate societies. Scholars may debate modern translations of old words; but the laity generally accepts whichever version is in customary usage. Yet each text passes through many hands before it is held up as an official document. Nevertheless, while there may be misprints and production errors, no additions or deletions are permitted. *The New Testament*, for example, which consists of various recordings made close in time to the life of Christ, has numerous translations. The classical version commissioned by King James some four hundred years ago is not exempt from publishing error. A 1631 edition records the commandment, "Thou shalt commit adultery." A 1795 edition quotes Jesus as directing, "Let the children first be killed" instead of "filled." Another version had Judas, instead of Jesus, pray in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Errors of this sort are the least of Buddhism's scriptural problems. In the Buddha's India, by law and by custom, all religious teachings were the province of the Brahmin caste. A priest was forbidden to allow sacred words to enter the ears of outcaste persons; and these persons could pay with their lives if they positioned themselves to be within earshot of a sermon. The Brahmins made it their life's work to memorize the teachings, and Buddhist monks attempted to do likewise. For several centuries the Buddha's new message had not become "scripture." When finally it was written down it was already contaminated (if that is not too strong a word) by old established views, principally those of the Jains.

Once the words were committed to print they were carried throughout Asia and, by the proselytizing efforts of the Emperor Asoka, all the way to the Mediterranean.

Buddhist proselytism at the time of king Ashoka (260â€“218 BCE).

Bilingual edict (Greek and Aramaic) by King Ashoka, from Kandahar. Kabul Museum.

As the monks entered lands where languages alien to their own were spoken, they found it necessary to trust persons who may or may not have been qualified to effect an accurate translation. It also was necessary to inject explanatory and descriptive passages into the text to clarify objects, flowers, and fauna that were unfamiliar to the audience. We can understand the problem if we imagine how much explanation would be necessary to describe a blizzard to people who lived on a tropical island.

Additionally, there were problems with the recording media's fragility. Books were thin slats of organic material - wood, stiffened silk, pressed palm leaves or papyrus stalks, animal skin parchment, bamboo, tree bark - most of which were bound by leather or silk cords much like the rings of a loose leaf book. But silk and leather are not steel. The bindings wore out quickly and when they finally broke, the unbound text might find itself scattered on the ground like so many dropped playing cards. The accuracy with which the slats were reassembled could rarely be assured, especially since the writing on them was so often faded. Worse, the organic nature of the recording media invited mice and hungry insects to dine on sacred words.

Of all the hazards a text encountered, the most pernicious were the clerical addenda. Along with necessary descriptions, a proselytizing monk was free to insert passages that skewed the meaning of the text until its new slant conformed more favorably to his audience's viewpoint or to his own opinions. Usually, the text suffered less from deletions than it did from additions that garbled the message, often to inanity. The absence of central control made it impossible to establish "a sanctioned version" of any scripture.

Aside from these corruptions, the priestly reluctance to convey sacred information to those who were considered insufficiently advanced to comprehend it caused them to employ a vast - but unwritten - vocabulary of "Twilight Speech" - euphemisms and innocent-sounding substitutions for sexual words.

The Mahayana Canon was compiled in the first few centuries of the Christian era and is generally considered to have a "western" origin. The three sutras sacred to the Pure Land sect are *The Larger Sukhavati-vyuha* (The Land of Bliss), a rambling text which gives interminable descriptions of the jewel encrusted western Paradise.

According to the text, to enter this Land, a person must achieve a high degree of morality and devotion. He must attain the Six Paramitas and perform an assortment of meritorious deeds; along with the daily practice of reciting the Buddha Amitayus' name.

The Smaller Sukhavati-vyuha, the most popular of the three sutras, is not a smaller version of the Larger as the name suggests. Following its instructions, a devotee finds it considerably easier to enter heaven. It gives a description of the exquisitely jeweled landscape, and also of the melodic chants and music - principally bells and birdsongs that sweeten the atmosphere, and specifies that good works will not determine who shall enter the Land of Bliss. Instead, a true believer who repeats the Buddha Amitayus' name in a sincere and prayerful attitude has accomplished all that is necessary to be admitted to the Blessed Land.

The third is The Amitayur Dhyana Sutra, commonly called The Meditation Sutra. The question, then, is what was so objectionable about The Amitayur Dhyana Sutra that Max Muller did not want to publish it?

The principal objection a scholar of Max Muller's caliber would have is its obvious pastiche of contradictory characterizations and theologies. The sutra reads like the conclusions of several committees who did not speak a common language. Muller, being an honest scholar, could not tamper with the text. It was what it was; and if it was corrupted by alien ingredients, there was nothing he could do but to verify, line by line, the accuracy of the translation. Persons with religious experience would automatically follow the Great Swan's example and, when presented with such an adulterated beverage, simply drink the milk and leave the excess water behind. In Buddhism, this is often a necessity. The discrepancies in The Amitayur Dhyana Sutra are so flagrant that the Swan can take little credit for its work.

There is mixing, but not compounding, of several fundamentally different Buddhist schools. To be consistently Mahayana, most of the text, particularly in its middle to ending sections, could and should be stricken.

Picking up where The Smaller Sukhavati-vyuha left off, the Sutra expounds upon the expressions of love and adoration that inform the prayerful utterance of Amitayus' (Amitabha's) sacred name. How may that love be actualized in the devotee's religious life? The answer made clear in its allegorical way is by ritualistic participation in the mysteries of Communion in all of its exalted forms. And this, as we shall see, is the Mahayana's contribution to the document.

Whenever possible, a teacher who desires to present a truth in a more interesting and memorable fashion, will frequently use parables and allegories. In this latter case, historical persons often fill the roles of the characters in the allegorical dramas. We readily understand this not only from Biblical references but from ordinary childhood stories. To illustrate the virtue of telling the truth and of taking responsibility for our actions, we are told, for example, that young George Washington chopped down a cherry tree. Washington's exemplary service to the nation supplies the story's character with the necessary meritorious reputation. Naturally, when Washington's angry parents demanded to know who had chopped down the tree, he replied, "I cannot tell a lie. I did." George Washington's existence is fact. The cherry tree story is fiction. For the purposes of the allegory, it is never necessary to tell us why he chopped down the tree in the first place.

Throughout history many princes have deposed their fathers in order to seize the throne for themselves. In the Max Muller version we are following, Prince Ajatasatru of Rajagriha, having been prodded by the Buddha's troublemaking cousin, Devadatta, is recorded as having imprisoned his sixty-seven year old father, King Bimbisara. The motive for such an egregious act is of no more importance to the story than Washington's motive for chopping down a cherry tree. Allegories and parables are created to illustrate a truth; they are not inquiries into the psychological predispositions of the characters. It is sufficient to be told that Prince Ajatasatru did this to his father, King Bimbisara, and that his mother was Queen Vaidehi, chief consort of the king.

In this version, the sutra illustrates three different stages of personal Buddhist belief: Queen Vaidehi was well-established in her faith - a vessel pure enough to contain sacred food; King Bimbisara was in the process of converting to Buddhism; and Prince Ajatasatru was not a believer but, as history records, would eventually become one. Positioning a female in the vanguard of the Illuminated might not have been well received in areas in which it was assumed that a woman would have to be reborn as a man before she could even imagine entering Nirvana; nevertheless, this is how the spiritual states of the three characters are, in fact, described.

To illustrate the importance of devotional practice, of ritual, and, in particular, of receiving the spiritual sustenance of Communion, these characters are given symbolic roles. It must be noted that "prasada," a form of partaking of the essence of divinity through the medium of food, was, since the timeless days of the Vedas, an integral part of many liturgical practices.

The Sutra consists of four parts containing a total of thirty-three sections. The first five sections seem absolutely authentic in their relation of the allegory. As the sutra opens, Prince Ajatasatru has placed his father in a seven walled prison cell. This immediately suggests the marvelously efficacious Yoni Mudra in which the mind's seven apertures are closed.

(According to tradition: The thumbs are pressed against the ear canals. The index fingers are gently pressed against closed eyes. The middle fingers are pressed against the nostrils. The fourth and little fingers pushed against closed lips, pursing them. Inhalation is facilitated by releasing the pressure on the nostrils. The sound of "Ommmm" is pronounced by beginning it as "Ahh in the back of your mouth, and let it roll deep into your throat as it begins to form an "Oooo" and then, as the syllable is finished, by releasing the pursed lips just enough to allow the "mmmm" sound to vibrate on the lips.)

Since the sutra encodes the sacred food of a Communion ritual, Prince Ajatasatru further orders that his father be starved to death and that no one be permitted to attend or to visit him. But Queen Vaidehi, "true and faithful to her Lord," at great risk to herself, penetrates these seven barriers to feed the starving king. She accomplishes this by performing her ablutions, and then by covering her body with gluten (wheat flour), ghee (clarified butter), and honey - a eucharistic recipe derived from the Mithraic "Hot Cross Bun" on which appear Mithra's Crossed Swords inside a circular Sun symbol are decorated. She also brings him "the juice of the grape" which she has hidden within the garlands she wears.

After each of her daily visits, the king calls for water to be brought to him so that he can wash down the salvific food, leaving none of it in his mouth. Then he prays to

the Buddha, asking him to cause the saintly Mahamaudgalyayana to appear in his cell to teach him the Dharma. The Buddha consents, and each day "with the speed of a falcon or an eagle" dispatches Mahamaudgalyayana along with the disciple, Purna, to the king's cell in order to convey the Dharma's message.

At the end of twenty one days (a woman's "clean" time of the month. (the final menstrual week being considered "unclean"), Queen Vaidehi ceases to visit her husband.

The Prince, assuming that his father is dead, casually asks the warden about the old man's condition. The warden tells him that the imprisoned king is actually doing quite well. Incredulous and indignant, the Prince asks how this is possible. The warden reveals that his mother has been bringing food to the prisoner and also, he adds, two shramanas (ascetics) come through the sky to preach the Law to him. "It is impossible to prevent them from coming," he says defensively.

The prince is furious and draws his sword intending to kill his mother for consorting with shramanic rebels who have obviously used magic spells of illusion and delusion in order to delay his wicked father's death. As the prince brandishes his sword, determined to slay his mother, two of his ministers declare that they will not countenance such an act. They warn him about the consequences of matricide, insisting that he will bring disgrace upon his own class and be regarded as the lowest kind of human being if he commits such an unpardonable act. Meaningfully, they take a step backwards, "each with his hand placed on his sword."

Intimidated, the prince lays down his sword, repents, and asks for mercy. "He finally ordered the officers of the inner chambers to put the queen in a hidden palace and not to allow her to come out again." This, of course, suggests a tabernacle. Thus, in the ancient meaning of the word "host," she is both the sacrificed and the sacrificer.

Alone, the Queen now seeks permanent residence in the Land of Bliss. She prays to the Buddha, reminding him that in former times he had sent Ananda to her "for enquiry and consolation." She asks him now to send Ananda and Mahamaudgalyayana to her "to come and have an interview with me." But the Buddha knows that she wants to see him, too. He, therefore, complies by sending his two exalted disciples, but additionally, he personally appears before her. "When the Queen raised her head as she finished homage to the distant Buddha, she saw before her the World-Honored Buddha Shakyamuni whose body was purple gold in color, sitting on a lotus flower which consisted of a hundred jewels: with Mahamaudgalyayana sitting on his left and Ananda on his right. Indra and Brahman and other gods that protect the world were seen in the midst of the sky, everywhere showering heavenly flowers with which they made offerings to Buddha in their worship."

The Queen removes her garlands, prostrates herself on the floor before the Buddha, and peculiarly asks him a rather mundane question - but one that we all ask, sooner or later. "Lord, what did I ever do to deserve such a rotten son like Ajatasatru, and, since Devadatta is a relative of yours, how did it ever happen that you share blood with the likes of that troublemaker?" (Actually, she says, "What former sin of mine has produced such a wicked son: And again, O Exalted One, from what cause and circumstance hast thou such an affinity by blood and religion with Devadatta?") This may mean simply that she is acknowledging that we all sin although we may not know just how or why we did so.

We'd like to hear the answer to those questions; but as Max Muller points out in a footnote, "those two questions, although appropriate, have not, after all, been answered by Buddha in this sutra."

Vaidehi then tells the Buddha that she is not satisfied with the world of depravity (the material world) and asks if he will tell her how she could be born anew in a place where such depravity does not exist. "Now I throw my five limbs down to the ground before thee, and seek for thy mercy by confessing my sins. I pray for this only that the Sun-like Buddha may instruct me how to meditate on a world wherein all actions are pure."

The Buddha immediately shows her images of seven different worlds and invites her to take her pick. The seven worlds are: 1. filled with jewels; 2. filled with lotus flowers; 3. one like the palace of Shiva; 4. a mirror of crystal with the countries in the ten quarters reflected therein. Aside from the mathematics, Vaidehi says that while there are all very nice indeed, she prefers to be reborn in the realm of Buddha Amitayus or Amitabha. "Now I simply pray thee, O World-Honored One, to teach me now to concentrate my thought so as to obtain a right vision of that country."

This ends Section #5 of Part 1. Section #6 is a complete fabrication. We are told that the Buddha smiles gently at her request and that, as he smiles, rays of different colors come out of his mouth and shine all the way to the head of King Bimbisara. And immediately the King spiritually advances from the point of needing to learn the Dharma to having attained Anagamin - the third of the four stages of becoming an Arhat.

Sections #7 and 8 are also flagrant attempts to superimpose Old School Buddhism upon the new version. The Buddha instructs her in the fundamental rules of deportment. People who want to get into Paradise first "should act filially towards their parents and support them; serve and respect their teachers and elders, be of compassionate mind, abstain from doing any injury, and cultivate the ten virtuous actions. Secondly, they should fulfill all moral precepts, and never lower their dignity or neglect any ceremonial observance. Thirdly they should give their whole mind to the attainment of Bodhi (perfect wisdom), deeply believe in the principles of cause and effect, study and recite the sutras, and persuade and encourage others who pursue the same course as themselves." It therefore contradicts completely the Smaller Sukhavati-vyuha and imposes on the laity all the rules and regulations of the old school.

Then he speaks to her as if she were a child - and not the recipient of visits and personal instruction from no less than Ananda; and who has been favored by the ethereal presences of the Buddha, Mahamaudgalyayana, and Ananda; and whose personal spiritual powers are sufficient to pass through the seven walls of her husband's prison. It is as if she requires a beginner's catechism.

Condescendingly he asks both Vaidehi and Ananda (who was despised by the "old school,") "Listen carefully, listen carefully! Ponder carefully on what you hear. I, Tathagata, have now declared the pure actions needful for entering that Buddha country."

He then proceeds to insult Vaidehi. He turns to her and says, "Thou art but an ordinary person; the quality of thy mind is feeble and inferior. Thou has not as yet obtained the divine eye and canst not perceive what is at a distance."

Part II, Section #9, of The Amitayur Dhyana Sutra reverts to the original presentation. Vaidehi has asked for ways to meditate and the Buddha now advises that she should keep her thoughts concentrated on the image of the western paradise. Also, "All beings, if not blind from birth, are uniformly possessed of sight, and they all see the setting sun. Thou shouldst sit down properly, looking in the western direction, and prepare thy thought for a close meditation on the sun. Cause thy mind to be firmly fixed on it so as to have an unwavering perception by the exclusive application of thy thought, and gaze upon it more particularly when it is about to set and looks like a suspended drum. After thou hast thus seen the sun, let that image remain clear and fixed, whether thine eyes be shut or open - such is the perception of the sun, which is the First Meditation.

(MZS Comment: This meditation should not be performed unless the sun can be seen at sea level. Also, because of the salutary effects of light as, for example, in the Ganzfeld response, it is probably better to perform this meditation at dawn. Once the sun has cleared the horizon and there is sky completely around the disk of the sun, the attempt is made to mentally push the sun back 93,000,000 miles - so that instead of it being a small sphere close to the earth (the way we normally perceive it - it is seen as a huge sphere far away. This is an extremely powerful meditation.)

The Second Meditation, Section 10, is a Water meditation. The meditator should position himself before a body of water that is clear and pure. He should fix his attention and all his thoughts on the water. When he achieves that steadiness of attention, he should perceive the water as ice, shining and transparent, of the color of lapis lazuli blue.

At this point the meditations become elaborate exercises in frustration, impossible to perform. Section 10, for example, would have the meditator see the blue ice as the ground "consisting of lapis lazuli, transparent and shining both within and without. Beneath this ground of lapis lazuli there will be seen a golden banner with the seven jewels, diamonds and the rest, supporting the ground." Max Muller footnotes this oddity, "A banner supporting or lifting up the ground is rather strange, but there is no other way of translating it." The sutra continues, "It extends to the eight points of the compass, and thus the eight corners (of the ground) are perfectly filled up. Every side of the eight quarters consists of a hundred jewels, every jewel has a thousand rays, and every ray has eighty-four thousand colours which, when reflected in the ground of lapis lazuli, look like a thousand millions of suns, and it is difficult to see them all, one by one. Over the surface of that ground of lapis lazuli there are stretched golden ropes intertwined crosswise; divisions are made by means of (strings of) seven jewels with every part clear and distinct. Each jewel has rays of five hundred colours which look like flowers or like the moon and stars. Lodged high up in the open sky these rays form a tower of rays, whose storeys and galleries are ten millions in number and built of a hundred jewels. Both sides of the tower have each a hundred millions of flowery banners furnished and decked with numberless musical instruments. Eight kinds of cool breezes proceed from the brilliant rays. When those musical instruments are played, they emit the sounds: "suffering," "non-existence," "impermanence" and "non-self;" - such is the perception of the water, which is the Second meditation."

Immediately, however, Section #11 opens, "When this perception has been formed, thou shouldst meditate on its (constituents) one by one and make (the images) as clear as possible, so that they may never be scattered and lost, whether thine eyes

be shut or open. Except only during the time of thy sleep, thou shouldst always keep this in thy mind. One who has reached this (stage of) perception is said to have dimly seen the Land of Highest Happiness (Sukhavati). One who has obtained the Samadhi (the state of supernatural calm) is able to see the land (of that Buddha country) clearly and distinctly: (this state) is too much to be explained fully; - such is the perception of the land, and it is the Third Meditation."

As tedious as this alleged meditation is, it is not finished. The conclusion is worth the additional irritation: "Thou shouldst remember, O Ananda, the Buddha words of mine, and repeat this law for attaining to the perception of the land (of the Buddha country) for the sake of the great mass of the people hereafter who may wish to be delivered from their sufferings. If any one meditates on the land (of that Buddha country), his sins (which bind him to) births and deaths during eighty millions of kalpas shall be expiated; after the abandonment of his (present) body, he will assuredly be born in the pure land in the following life. The practice of this kind of meditation is called 'right meditation.' If it be on another kind it is called 'heretical meditation.'"

Sections 12, 13, 14 are more of the same exponential increases that delight children: It is an unpleasant variation on the theme of "As I was going to Saint Ives, I met a man with seven wives. The seven wives had seven sacks. The seven sacks had seven cats. The seven cats had seven kits. Kits, cats, sacks, and wives. How many were going to Saint Ives?"

Max Muller's patience has been exhausted and he footnotes Section #15, "Hereafter, for brevity's sake, I take the liberty of omitting several passages which seem to be unnecessary repetitions." He is too kind. The Sutra has devolved into a spiteful, taunting propaganda piece created by an ignorant proponent of the Old School.

Sections #16 continues the exponential increase of details. But in the Sixteenth Meditation, we finally are given the mantra, "Adoration to Buddha Amitayus" (Namo-mitabhaya Buddhaya" or, "Namo-mitayushe Buddhaya." "Having uttered the name of the Buddha, he will be freed from the sins which would otherwise involve him in births and deaths for fifty millions of kalpas."

Sections #17 and 18 contain more of the same inane thousands of details of leaves, jewels, trees, rays, colors, thrones, lakes, streams, flowers, and so on.

Curiously, when describing the numerous marks of the form of the Buddha Amitayus in Section #18, the Sutra emphasizes his blue eyes. But again, so many thousands of details are given that beyond a few characteristics of his face and form, the meditation is impossible to perform. Yet the threat remains: if certain meditations are not completed successfully, the meditator will be condemned to endless transmigrations.

Section #19, orders that when the meditator has seen the Buddha Amitayus distinctly, he should further meditate upon Avalokitesvara in the same impossible way. (Since the Old School did not recognize Bodhisattvas, it would seem, then, that some references from the original document have been allowed to stand.) The characteristics are more of those exponential increases of details... rays... colors... jewels... dimensions.. On and on the details pile up into an insurmountable mountain.

Section #20 continues the details, ad nauseam.

Section #21 recommends that a huge image of the Buddha Shakyamuni be visualized as sitting on a lotus flower in that lake of the Water Meditation.

Then comes the truly bizarre Part III. Sarcasm begins to drip from the lines.

Section 22 divides those who aspire to enter the Pure Land into three categories: the highest of the highest (the compassionate); the midlevel of the highest (those who study and recite the Sutras; and the lowest of the highest (those who practice the Sixfold remembrances). But then the text specifies that they need have "accomplished any of these meritorious deeds for one day or even for seven days." At any rate, the highest of the highest will be offered a diamond throne.

Section #23, the midlevel of the highest, who don't necessarily learn, remember, study, or recite the sutras, but understand the meaning of the truth in them, and deeply believe in the principle of cause and effect (i.e., karmic retribution,) and seek to be born in the "Country of Highest Happiness" will, when about to die, encounter Amitayus, surrounded by the two Bodhisattvas "Aval. and Mahas." and an innumerable retinue of dependents. Amitayus will praise him, saying, "O my son in the Law! thou hast practised the Mahayana doctrine; thou hast understood and believed the highest truth; therefore I now come to meet and welcome thee." He (Amitayus) and the thousand "created" Buddhas simultaneously extend their hands. It is interesting to note that the names of the Bodhisattvas are irreverently abbreviated and that suddenly other Buddhas referred to are "created" as if to say, "made up."

Section #24 introduces the lowest form of the highest grade, and the sarcasm thickens. When someone of this class, who hasn't slandered the Mahayana doctrine and who does believe in "cause and effect" simply likes the idea of being born in the highest Bodhi, dies, "Amitayus, with Aval., Mahas., and all the dependents, will offer him a golden lotus-flower; and he will also miraculously create five hundred Buddhas in order to send and meet him." These "created" Buddhas will, all at once, praise him for having cherished the thought of attaining Bodhi, and after a few weeks of apparently being inside a budding lotus, will, upon its opening, be able to dimly see, and after only three kalpas (eons), will become an arhat., etc.

It should come as no surprise that Section 25 concerns itself with persons in the highest form of the midlevel grade. A voice will come out of the clouds saying, "O son of a noble family, thou are indeed an excellent man," and so on. Although of lower status, he has lived an exemplary life and believed what he was supposed to believe, and he immediately obtains "the fruition of Arhatship.

Section 26, naturally, deals with the middle form of the midlevel grade. These persons "who either observe the eight prohibitive precepts, and the fasting for one day and one night, or observe the prohibitive precept for Sramanera (a novice) for the same period (a day and a night) After a few days he comes out of his lotus and sees Nirvana; and in only half a kalpa becomes an Arhat.

Section #27 are the lowest form of the middle grade. They have been good to their parents and have been compassionate towards the world, etc. As they lay dying, they "will meet a good and learned teacher" who will describe the Buddha country of Amitayus, etc. They will quickly die and be born into the World of Highest Happiness in the western quarter. A week later they'll meet Aval. and Mahas., and in only a lesser kalpa they will attain to the fruition of an Arhat.

Section #28 informs us that someone of the highest level of the lowest grade can have committed many evil deeds - and is obviously a very stupid man who is "neither ashamed nor sorry for all the evil actions that he has done," and who, providing he did not speak evil of the Mahavaipulya Sutra (The Avatamsaka Sutra), will find someone to read the "headings and titles of the twelve divisions of the Mahayana sutras." This will free him from the greatest sins which would involve him in births and deaths during a thousand kalpas (eons)."

What is most astonishing is that at this point the sutra says "A wise man also will teach him to stretch forth his folded hands and to say, 'Adoration to Buddha Amitayus (Namo-mitabhaya Buddhaya, or, Namo mitayushe Buddhaya'). This is the first time the mantra is mentioned. Sarcasm continues to infect the lines as the text continues, "Having uttered the name of the Buddha, he will be freed from the sins which would otherwise involve him in births and deaths for fifty millions of kalpas. Thereupon the Buddha will send a created Buddha, and the created Bodhisattvas Aval. and Mahas., to approach that person with words of praise, saying: "O son of a noble family, as thou has uttered the name of that Buddha, all thy sins have been destroyed and expiated, and therefore we now come to meet thee."

But then, after seven weeks of instruction by these bodhisattvas, "in a period of ten lesser kalpas (eons), he will gain entrance to the knowledge of the hundred divisions of nature, and be able to enter upon the first (joyful) stage (of Bodhisattvas)."

Section #29, as expected, regards the midlevel of the lowest grade. Any person who "transgresses the five and the eight prohibitive precepts, and also all the perfect moral precepts; he, being himself so stupid" that he is a thief and also impurely preaches the Law and is neither ashamed nor sorry for his impure preaching of the Law, but instead magnifies and glorifies himself with many wicked deeds: - such a sinful person deserves to fall into hell in consequence of those sins. At the time of his death, when the fires of hell approach him from all sides, he will meet a good and learned teacher" who will explain the virtues of the Buddha Amitayus to him. "After having heard this, he will be freed from his sins, which would involve him in births and deaths during "eighty millions of kalpas." He'll be born inside the jeweled lotus in the lake, and after only six kalpas the Bodhisattvas will show up and preach to him and he'll immediately attain "the highest Bodhi."

Section #30 informs us that the beings who will be born in the lowest form of the lowest grade can commit even those deadly sins that were considered unpardonable in the Larger Sukhuvati Sutra (killing one's father; mother; an arhat; injuring a Buddha; and creating schism in the sangha) and deserves to fall into a miserable path of existence and suffer endless pains during many kalpas," shall, nevertheless, "meet a good and learned teacher who will soothe and encourage him in various ways, but, being harassed by pains, he will have no time to think of Buddha. Some good friend will then say to him: "Even if thou canst not exercise the remembrance of Buddha, thou mayest, at least, utter the name, 'Buddha Amitayus.'" Naturally, he'll then remember the formula, "Namo mitayushe Buddhaya" and if he says it ten times, expiate the sins which involve him in births and deaths during eighty millions of kalpas. Then after only waiting 12 greater kalpas he'll meet Aval. and Mahas. etc.

Part IV, Section #31, seems to return to the original text since the Buddha is once again addressing Queen Vaidehi and her Ladies in Waiting.

Section #32 has Ananda ask the Buddha what to call this teaching and is told, "The meditation on the Land of Sukhavati, on Buddha Amitayus, Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, Bodhisattva Mahastama, or otherwise be called "the Sutra on) the entire removal of the obstacle of Karma, (the means of) being born in the realm of the Buddhas."

Section #33 provides the complementary closing expression.

Finally, we are able to address the relative ease by which a Pure Land devotee experiences salvation. Is it sufficient simply to believe in the Buddha's divine goodness and to repeat his sacred name?

In the Smaller Sukhavati, sections are inserted which name the numerous Buddhas of each of the four directions, the nadir, and the zenith, which Muller notes are given in the Pali (Old School) versions (and that not even the Buddha Amitabha's name appears). This celestial roll call is intended to cover the various languages spoken in distant countries. Then a more Mahayana tone is heard as the Buddha clearly states, "Every son or daughter of a family who shall hear the name of that repetition of the Law and retain in their memory the names of those blessed Buddhas, will be favoured by the Buddhas, and will never return again, being once in possession of the transcendent true knowledge.... They will be born in that Buddha country."

The repetition of the mantra is no different from any prayer said on a mala or rosary and should not be denigrated in any way.

We are able only to compare this "relative ease" with Christianity's requirements. Among the many similar assertions in the Bible, we find in Acts 16:31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." From Romans 3:28, "...a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law." And Jesus says in John 6:40, "And this is the will of him that sent me: that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."

When it comes to soteriological considerations, it would seem, then. that The Smaller Sukhavati imposes no more conditions on Mahayana devotees than the Bible imposes on Christians.

The belief and the faith of a sincere devotee who invokes the sacred name of the Buddha of Infinite Light and Time is sufficient to assure deliverance to the Land of Bliss; and the specific form of that mantra may be Namu Amida Buddha or Amitofo as in any of the Chinese, Japanese, or Sanskrit chants dedicated to the Buddha Amitabha/Amitayus.

In this world, we sin and we are sinned against. Knowing that the Buddha's mercy is infinite, we need only be sincere in our regrets and voice our desire for Salvation.

We can quickly consider the nonsensical stories that were created to fill in the gaps that exist when someone regards the allegory as if it were a true history.

In some versions, the venomous Devadatta told Prince Ajatasatru the circumstances of his birth. He says that King Bimbisara and Queen Vaidehi, desperate to have a child, asked a soothsayer if they would ever be successful. The answer was that a certain hermit lived in the forest; and that three years after this hermit died, the Queen would have a child. The King impatiently ordered the hermit to be murdered, and the Queen became pregnant. When, however, the King was told that the boy

would grow up and commit regicide in order to usurp the throne, he ordered the Queen to throw the baby out the window of a high tower. She did, but miraculously, the baby (Ajatsatru) suffered only an injury to his little finger. When the Prince received this information from Devadatta, he decided to kill his father.

One night, as the Prince furtively entered Bimbisara's room with a knife, the palace guards caught him and the king discovered the plan. The good King did not punish the Prince, but instead used the opportunity to go into a religious retreat. He therefore abdicates in the Prince's favor.

The ungrateful Prince, upon receiving such royal power, ordered that his father be thrown into the darkest, coldest dungeon in the palace. "Let him have no visitors other than my mother," he says, "and give him no food so that he will starve to death."

But since the Queen secretly brought him food which she had hidden in her hair knot, Bimbisara did not die. When the Prince found out how she brought him food, he made her loosen her hair. But then the Queen bathed her body and covered it with a mixture of honey, butter, ghee and sugar. "By licking this food off her body, the good king survived." When the prince learned of this, he forbade all visits to the king. Now the king had no food at all to sustain him and would surely die.

Days passed and still the king did not die. The warden reported that the king slowly walked back and forth in his cell, praying. Ajatasattu shouted out in rage, "Call the barber."

He directed the barber to cut open the soles of his father's feet with his razor, to tear the skin away, to put salt and vinegar on the raw flesh, and to force the king to walk on burning charcoal until he died. His orders were carried out and his father died in great pain.

"On that very day," Ajatasattu learned that his wife had given birth to a son. Overjoyed, he began to wonder about his father's feelings toward him. He asked his mother, "Tell me. Did my father ever love me?"

Then, to quote the story, "His mother replied, 'When you were in my womb, I wanted to drink blood from your father's hand. When he found this out, happily he cut his wrist for me to drink his blood for you. When the fortune-tellers predicted that you would be your father's enemy, I tried to have a miscarriage, but he prevented me. Again I tried to kill you when you were born; he stopped me even though he knew that one day you would kill him. Is that not love?'

"Do you see that scar on your thumb? That was a boil you had when you were small. You were crying from so much pain that nobody could put you to sleep. When your father heard this, he stopped his royal duties and came running to see you. Gently he took you in his lap and sucked the boil until it burst open in his mouth. Oh my son, your father swallowed it out of love for you â€“ that pus and blood. Would you do for your son what your father did for you?"

"When he heard this, Ajatasattu was choked with tears. He ordered his guards, 'Run, run and release my father before he dies.' But it was too late. His father had just died. Ajatasattu fell to his knees and cried until his body jerked violently, uttering over and over, 'Forgive me, father. Please forgive me.'"

As for King Bimbisara, "He was reborn as a deva (god)."

Other accounts paint an opposing motivation. The king is so good that even though he knows that his son will one day murder him, he loves him unconditionally and does not complain when the Prince orders him to be starved to death in a diabolically heated cell.

These maudlin and grotesque versions succeed only in satisfying a wretched sensationalism as they obscure or trivialize the Sutra's serious purpose.

Communion, that is to say, the ingestion of the flesh and blood of the beloved, has nothing whatsoever to do with cannibalism. Atheists and other opponents of the ritual are fond of equating religious Communion with dining on a freshly killed human being - preferably one that has been tenderized by hatred. The Communion ritual enacts a fundamental expression of love and devotion as is possible for a human being to achieve.

For mammals - humans and even most herbivores - our first meal is flesh. Whether or not there was a time that human mothers routinely consumed the placenta (placentophagia) after giving birth, the fact is that in many cultures the human placenta is eaten. The organ is extremely rich in iron and other vitamins, minerals, and hormones that assist the uterus to return to its normal state and also to promote lactation. It is also said, with some controversy, that it contains other chemicals that ward off post partum depression. Dried and pulverized human placenta is commonly prescribed in Chinese medicine; and in most areas where the placenta is consumed, it is either cooked outright like a big hamburger, or dried and ground and put into gelatin capsules.

We can observe this ingestion at the birth of puppies. There is also strong licking of the newborn's anus and genitals to stimulate elimination and to provide the mother with the nutrient-rich meconium - the contents of the fetal digestive tract. Usually this substance is black and sterile and is completely different from subsequent fecal material.

The baby's first meal is, of course, its mother's milk. The mutually adoring expressions exchanged between the baby and its mother as it nurses are enhanced by the intense emotion of giving and receiving human flesh.

Every mother on the planet has playfully nibbled on her baby's feet or belly and cooed "Momma's gonna eat you up!" Teenaged girls in the first rush of sexual attraction will gush, "Oh, I love him so much I could just eat him up!" just as a desirable female is often referred to in gastronomic terms. Although it is rarely alluded to, in that first euphoric love phase lovers will drink each other's urine (urophagia) to accomplish that same melding and absorption of their bodies. Even the verbs we use to describe eating are virtually the same verbs we use to describe love-making.

The Communion ritual, then, of body and blood, is an expression of overwhelming adoration and sacrifice. Through the miracle of Transubstantiation we cease having to worship the Divine Beloved from a distance, but rather are privileged to take Him or Her into ourselves, to assimilate the Divine Substance and make it a vital, sacred part of our body and mind. We are raised up and made aware of the Interior Presence that now is privy to all that we think and do. We strive, then, to be worthy of the sacred food.

There is another form of Buddhist Communion observed in Zen Temples. Since, in antiquity, it was believed that amniotic fluid nourished the fetus, altar boys pour water into a goblet and by various mudras and mantras, the officiating priest consecrates it; then, through the miracle of Transubstantiation, the water becomes sacred amniotic fluid. The goblet or chalice is passed around for each cleric present to sip. When there are too many persons present, the priest, alone, will consume the water, or he may use sprigs of willow as an aspergillum and sprinkle the water by an underhand flick of the dipped willow sprigs upon the clerical congregation. (For some reason the palm must be kept down during the sprinkling process.) Zen Buddhist rituals of this gravity require that the non-clerical members in the congregation first be "dismissed" - which also happened to be the practice in early Christianity - and the reason the Mass is still called the Missa. These rituals, however, are undoubtedly Persian in origin, the fetus in question being Maitreya, the Future Buddha, who is elsewhere called Miroku or Mithras.

The life-or-death importance we give to merging with the Divine Beloved is nowhere more clearly illustrated in Buddhist literature than in the allegory given in The Amitayur Dhyana Sutra. It is a natural conclusion. The Queen is functioning as Guan Yin whose self-sacrificing love can save those who are spiritually starved.

A broader interpretation of the Communion ritual's Eucharist is given by Thich Nhat Hanh: "When we hold a piece of bread to eat, if mindfulness is there, if the Holy Spirit is there, we can eat the bread in a way that will allow us to touch the whole cosmos deeply. A piece of bread contains the sunshine. That is not something difficult to see. Without sunshine, the piece of bread cannot be. A piece of bread contains a cloud. Without a cloud, the wheat cannot grow; without the wheat the baker cannot make bread. One thing contains everything.

"Suppose we try to return one of the elements to its source. Suppose we return the sunshine to the sun. Do you think that this loaf of bread will be possible? No, without sunshine, nothing can be. And if we return the baker to his mother, then we have no bread either. The fact is, that this bread is made up only of 'non-bread elements.' And if we return these non-bread elements to their sources, then there can be no bread at all. As insignificant as this loaf of bread is in the universe, it contains everything in the universe. All the universe is within it." (TNH Going Home)

There is another ritual involving unleavened bread which is not a Communion ritual. This is the "Feeding the Hungry Ghosts" ceremony during which the officiating priest tosses handfuls of unleavened biscuit-like pieces of bread onto the temple floor. This ritual is of an entirely different order.

For individuals and sanghas who desire to conduct a Communion ritual, a recipe for Eucharistic bread can be found on the internet and in most bread books. The recipe I use is based on a bread machine's standard whole wheat bread. My recipe is as follows:

3 cups of whole wheat flour
1 cup wheat gluten flour
2 packets of dry yeast.
1/4 cup of honey
1/2 stick (1/8 pound) softened butter

one and a half cups of skimmed milk.

These ingredients are tossed (dry ingredients first) into the bread machine and 3 to 4 hours later

there is delicious bread. Any spice that was present two thousand years ago - such as cinnamon - may be added before or after baking.

The individual pieces of bread may be decorated with an X inside a Circle. (Cross swords inside a Sun symbol.) Icing can be made from butter, honey, cinnamon, and water stirred together over gentle heat until the desired consistency is achieved. It is then carefully dribbled onto each piece.

The bread should be served with grape juice and then, after the Communion ritual is concluded, tea may be served.

The ritual is a solemn dedication. In temples it may be public as when a temple building is being consecrated; or within a sangha at the time of ordination; or as a regular once a month meeting of the sangha; or as a personal act of devotion and reaffirmation of an individual's Buddhist vows at any time the person desires.

The following prayer may be quietly read before or during the ceremony.

Lord, I was a beggar who,

Like like a man who thought himself

The monarch of his kingdom,

Found himself standing alone

As in a prison cage.

All that he could see beyond the bars

Were the smoking ruins of his life.

He searched in vain for something to sustain him,

To shelter and feed him,

And keep him warm through the bitter nights.

Like him, all I could see was desolation;

And I knew that what I saw was what I, myself,

Had squandered or destroyed.

I betrayed and was betrayed.

I schemed and was schemed against.

I loved and cast aside my love.

I loved and was abandoned.

Starving, in the midst of my isolation and misery,

With the last of my strength,

I cried out for Thy mercy.

*And then Thou sendest the loveliest of the Good,
The most fearless of the Compassionate,
Thy Bodhisattva Kannon.
She came to me in my darkest hour.
She brought me light and nourished me with Her sacred body.
And then I saw Thy Light shining from within me,
Illuminating the Real, the True, the Eternal,
The World that was pristine in its Beauty;
And I knew that through Thy Grace, I was saved,
Liberated, and exalted among all men.
As Her food strengthened me
And the veil of delusion fell from my eyes,
I, at last, could see. Then the bars melted away,
The deadly earth around me swelled with life,
Green, blossoming, and filled with fruitful trees.
Now, as I again eat the food She brought me
And sip the sweet drink she delivered to me,
Bringing Her divine presence into every cell of my body,
I thank Thee. The well of my gratitude is deep.
It shall never be exhausted.*

Amen

The Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Sutra

Namo!

*Homage to the Lotus Pool Assembly of Buddhas and
Bodhisattvas As Vast As the Sea*

Thus I have heard, at one time the Buddha dwelt at Shravasti, in the Jeta Grove in the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Forlorn, together with a gathering of Great Bhikshus, twelve-hundred fifty in all, all Great Arhats well-known to the assembly: Elders Shariputra, Mahamaudgalyayana, Mahakasyapa, Mahakatyayana, Mahakausthila, Revata, Suddhipanthaka, Nanda, Ananda, Rahula, Gavampati, Pindola-Bharadvaja, Kalodayin, Mahakaphina, Vakkula, Aniruddha, and others such as these, all Great Disciples, together with all the Bodhisattvas, Mahasattvas: Manjushri, Prince of Dharma; Ajita Bodhisattva, Gandhastin Bodhisattva, Nityodukta Bodhisattva, and others such as these, all Great Bodhisattvas, and together with Shakra, Chief among Gods, and the numberless great multitudes from all the heavens.

At that time, the Buddha told the Elder Shariputra, From here, passing through hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhalands to the West there is a world called Utmost Happiness. In this land a Buddha called Amitabha right now teaches the Dharma.

Shariputra, why is this land called Utmost Happiness? All living beings of this country never suffer, but enjoy every bliss. Therefore it is called Utmost Happiness.

Moreover, Shariputra, this land of Utmost Happiness is completely surrounded by seven tiers of railings, seven layers of netting, and seven rows of trees, all formed from the four treasures, and for this reason called Utmost Happiness.

Moreover, Shariputra, in the land of Utmost Happiness are pools of the seven jewels, filled with the waters of eight meritorious qualities; the bottom of each pool is pure, covered with golden sands. On the four sides climb stairs of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, mother-of pearl, rubies, and carnelian.

In the pools bloom lotuses as large as carriage wheels with colors of green light, red light, yellow light, and white light, subtle, rare, fragrant, and pure. Shariputra, the Land of Utmost Happiness is crowned in splendor and virtues such as these.

Moreover, Shariputra, in this Buddhaland heavenly music always plays, and the ground is made of gold. In the six periods of the day and night a heavenly rain of mandarava flowers falls, and throughout the clear morning, each living being of this land offers sacks filled with myriads of wonderful flowers to the hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhas of the other directions. At mealtime they return to their own countries and after eating they walk about. Shariputra, the Land of Utmost Happiness is crowned in splendor and virtues such as these.

Moreover, Shariputra, in this country there are always rare and unusual birds of many kinds and colors: white geese, cranes, peacocks, parrots, egrets, kalavinkas and two-headed birds. In the six periods of the day and night the flocks of birds sing forth harmonious and elegant sounds. Their clear and joyful calls proclaim the Five Roots, the Five Powers, the Seven Limbs of Bodhi, the Eightfold Path of Sages, and dharmas such as these. When living beings of this land hear their calls they are altogether mindful of the Buddha, mindful of the Dharma, and mindful of the Sangha.

Shariputra! Do not say that these birds are born as retribution for their sins. And why not? Because in this Buddhaland the three evil paths do not exist. Shariputra, even the names of the three evil paths are unknown in this Buddha's land; how much the less could they actually exist! Wishing to proclaim the Dharma's sound far and wide, Amitabha Buddha created these multitudes of birds by transformation.

Shariputra, in that Buddhaland when the gentle winds blow, the rows of jewelled trees and jewelled nets reverberate with fine and wondrous sounds, as a symphony of one hundred thousand kinds of music played in harmony. All who hear these sounds are naturally mindful of the Buddha, mindful of the Dharma, and mindful of the Sangha. Shariputra, the Land of Utmost Happiness is crowned in splendor and virtues such as these.

Shariputra, what do you think? Why is this Buddha called Amitabha? Shariputra, the brilliance of that Buddha's light is measureless, illumining the lands of the ten directions everywhere without obstruction. For this reason he is called Amitabha.

Moreover, Shariputra, the lifespan of that Buddha and that of his people extends for measureless, limitless asamkhyeyas of kalpas. For this reason he is called Amitayus. And, Shariputra, since Amitabha became a Buddha, ten kalpas have passed.

Moreover, Shariputra, that Buddha has measureless, limitless asamkheyas of Sound-Hearer disciples, their number incalculable. So too is the assembly of Bodhisattvas. Shariputra, that Buddhaland is crowned in splendor and virtues such as these.

Moreover, Shariputra, the living beings born in the Land of Utmost Happiness are all avaivartika. Among them are many who in this very life will dwell in Buddhahood. Their number is extremely many; it is incalculable. And only in measureless, limitless asamkhyeyas of kalpas could they be counted.

Shariputra, those living beings who hear of this should vow: I wish to be born in that country. And why? Because those who are born there assemble in one place with people whose goodness is unsurpassed. Shariputra, if one has few good roots, blessings, and virtues, one cannot be born in that land.

Shariputra, if there is a good man or good woman who hears of Amitabha and holds his name whether for one day, two days, three, four, five days, six days, as long as seven days with one mind unconfused, when this person nears the end of life, before him will appear Amitabha and all the Assembly of Holy Ones. When the end comes, his mind will not be utterly confused, and in Amitabha's Land of Utmost Happiness he will quickly be reborn. Shariputra, because I see this benefit, I speak these words; and, if living beings hear this teaching they should make the vow: I wish to be born in that land.

Shariputra, just as I now praise the inconceivable benefits arising from the merit and virtue of Amitabha, so too in the East does Akshobya Buddha, Sumeru Likeness Buddha, Great Sumeru Buddha, Sumeru Light Buddha, Wonderful Sound Buddha; all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own country gives forth a vast and far-reaching sound that pervades the threefold, great, thousand-world realm and proclaims these sincere and honest words: All you living beings should believe in this sutra which all the Buddhas praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, a sutra they protect and bear in mind.

Shariputra, in the Southern World, Sun-Moon Lamp Buddha, Sumeru Lamp Buddha, Celebrated Light Buddha, Great Radiant Shoulders Buddha, Sumeru Lamp Buddha, Measureless Vigor Buddha, all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own country gives forth a vast and far-reaching sound that pervades the threefold, great, thousand-world realm and proclaims these sincere and honest words: All you living beings should believe in this sutra which all Buddhas praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, a sutra they protect and bear in mind.

Shariputra, in the Western World, Measureless Life Buddha, Infinite Features Buddha, Measureless Curtain Buddha, Great Light Buddha, Great Clarity Buddha, Jewelled Likeness Buddha, Pure Light Buddha, all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own country gives forth a vast and far-reaching sound that pervades the threefold, great, thousand-world realm and proclaims these sincere and honest words: All you living beings should believe in this sutra which all Buddhas praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, protecting and bearing it in mind.

Shariputra, in the Northern World, Radiant Shoulders Buddha, Most Glorious Sound Buddha, Invincible Buddha, Sun-Birth Buddha, Luminous Net Buddha, all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own country gives forth a vast and far-reaching sound that pervades the threefold, great, thousand-world realm and proclaims these sincere and honest words: All you living beings should believe in this sutra which all Buddhas praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, a sutra they protect and bear in mind.

Shariputra, in the World Below, Lion Buddha, Well-Known Buddha, Celebrated Light Buddha, Dharma Buddha, Dharma-Curtain Buddha, Upholding Dharma Buddha, all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own country gives forth a vast and far-reaching sound that pervades the threefold, great, thousand-world realm and proclaims these sincere and honest words: All you living beings should believe in this sutra which all Buddhas praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, a sutra they protect and bear in mind.

Shariputra, in the World Above, Pure Sound Buddha, Constellation King Buddha, Superior Fragrance Buddha, Fragrant Light Buddha, Great Radiant Shoulders Buddha, Varicolored Jewels-Adorned Body Buddha, Sala Tree King Buddha, Jewelled Flower of Virtue Buddha, Discerning All Meanings Buddha, Like Sumeru Mountain Buddha, all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges' sands, each in his own country gives forth a vast and far-reaching sound that pervades the threefold, great, thousand-world realm and proclaims these sincere and honest words: All you living

beings should believe in this sutra which all Buddhas praise for its inconceivable merit and virtue, a sutra they protect and bear in mind.

Shariputra, what do you think? Why is it called Sutra which all Buddhas protect and bear in mind? Shariputra, if a good man or good woman hears this sutra and upholds it, and hears the names of all these Buddhas, this good man or good woman will also be one whom all Buddhas protect and bear in mind, and will attain non-retreat from anuttarasamyaksambodhi. Therefore, Shariputra, all of you should believe and accept my words and the words all Buddhas speak.

Shariputra, if there are people who have already made the vow, who now make the vow, or who will make the vow, I wish to be born in Amitabha's country, these people, whether born in the past, now being born there, or to be born there in the future, will all attain non-retreat from anuttarasamyaksambodhi. Therefore, Shariputra, all good men and good women who believe should make the vow, I wish to be born in that country.

Shariputra, just as I now praise the inconceivable merit and virtue of all Buddhas, all those Buddhas also praise my inconceivable merit and virtue, saying these words: Shakyamuni Buddha can accomplish extremely difficult and rare deeds in the Saha Land during the evil time of the Five Turbidities: during the time turbidity, the views turbidity, the affliction turbidity, the living beings turbidity, and the lifespan turbidity. He can attain anuttarasamyaksambodhi and for the sake of living beings proclaim this Dharma, which the whole world finds hard to believe.

Shariputra, you should know that I, in the evil time of the Five Turbidities, perform these difficult deeds, attain anuttarasamyaksambodhi, and for the entire world proclaim this Dharma which is difficult to believe, extremely difficult!

After the Buddha spoke this Sutra, Shariputra, all the Bhikshus, and the entire world of gods, humans, asuras, and others, hearing what the Buddha had said, joyously delighted in it, faithfully accepted it, bowed and withdrew.

End of the Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Sutra

Sutra on the Contemplation of the Buddha Amitayus

PART I.

1. Thus have I heard: At one time the Buddha dwelt in Rajagriha, on Vulture Peak, with a large assembly of Bhikkhus and with thirty-two thousand Bodhisattvas, with Manjushri the Dharma-Prince at the head of the assembly.
2. At that time, in the great city of Rajagriha there was a prince, the heir-apparent, named Ajatasatru. He listened to the wicked counsel of Devadatta and other friends and forcibly arrested Bimbisara his father, the king, and shut him up by himself in a room with seven walls, proclaiming to all the courtiers that no one should approach (the king). The chief consort of the king, Vaidehi by name, was true and faithful to her lord, the king. She supported him in this way: having purified herself by bathing and washing, she anointed her body with honey and ghee mixed with corn-flour, and she concealed the juice of grapes in the various garlands she wore in order to give him food without being noticed by the warder. As she stole in and made an offering to him, he was able to eat the flour and to drink the juice of grapes. Then he called for water and rinsed his mouth. That done, the king stretched forth his folded hands towards Vulture Peak and duly and respectfully made obeisance to the World-Honored One, who at that time was living there. And he uttered the following prayer: 'Mahamaudgalyayana is my friend and relative; let him, I pray, feel compassion towards me, and come and communicate to me the eight prohibitive precepts of the Buddha.' On this, Mahamaudgalyayana at once appeared before the king, coming with a speed equal to the flight of a falcon or an eagle, and communicated to him the eight precepts.

Day after day he visited the king. The World-Honored One sent also his worthy disciple Purna to preach the Dharma to the king. Thus a period of three weeks passed by. The king showed in his expression that he was happy and contented when he had an opportunity of hearing the Dharma as well as of enjoying the honey and flour.

3. At that time, Ajatasatru asked the warden of the gate whether his father was yet alive. On this, the warden answered him : 'Exalted king, the chief consort of your father brought food and presented it to him by anointing her body with honey and flour and filling her garlands with the juice of grapes, and the Sramanas, Mahamaudgalyayana and Purna, approached the king through the sky in order to preach the Dharma to him. It is impossible, king, to prevent them coming.'

When the prince heard this answer his indignation arose against his mother: 'My mother,' he cried, 'is indeed a rebel, for she was found in the company of that rebel. Wicked people are those Sramanas, and it is their art of spells causing illusion and delusion that delayed the death of that wicked king for so many days.' Instantly he brandished his sharp sword, intending to slay his mother. At that moment, there intervened a minister named Chandraprabha, who was possessed of great wisdom and intelligence, and Jiva (a famous physician). They saluted the prince and remonstrated with him, saying: 'We, ministers, Great king, heard that since the beginning of the kalpas there had been several wicked kings, even to the number of eighteen thousand, who killed their own fathers, coveting the throne of their respective kingdoms, as mentioned in the Sutra of the discourse of the Veda. Yet never have we heard of a man killing his mother, though he be void of virtue. Now, if you, king, should dare to commit such a deadly sin, you would bring a stain upon the blood of the Kshatriyas, the kingly race. We cannot even bear to hear of it. You are indeed a Chandala, the lowest race; we will not stay here with you.'

After this, the two great ministers withdrew stepping backward, each with his hand placed on his sword. Ajatasatru was then frightened and greatly afraid of them, and asked Jiva, 'Will you not be my friend?' In reply Jiva said to him, 'Do not then, O great king, by any means think of injuring your mother.' On hearing this, the prince repented and sought for mercy, and at once laid down his sword and did his mother no harm. He finally ordered the officers of the inner chambers to put the queen in a hidden palace and not to allow her to come out again.

4. When Vaidehi was thus locked up in confinement she became afflicted by sorrow and distress. She began to do homage to Buddha from afar, looking towards the Vulture Peak. She uttered the following words: 'Tathagata! World-Honored One! In former times you have constantly sent Ananda to me for enquiry and consolation. I am now in sorrow and grief. You, World-Honored One, are majestic and exalted; in no way shall I be able to see thee. Will thou, I pray you, command Mahamaudgalyayana and your honoured disciple, Ananda, to come and have an interview with me ?' After this speech, she grieved and wept, shedding tears like a shower of rain. Before she raised her head from doing homage to the distant

Buddha, the World-Honored One knew what Vaidehi was wishing in her mind, though he was on the Vulture Peak. Therefore, he instantly ordered Mahamaudgalyayana and Ananda to go to her through the sky. Buddha himself disappeared from that mountain and appeared in the royal palace.

When the queen raised her head as she finished homage to Buddha, she saw before her the World-Honored Buddha Shakyamuni, whose body was purple gold in color, sitting on a lotus-flower which consists of a hundred jewels, with Mahamaudgalyayana attending on his left, and with Ananda on his right. Sakra (Indra), Brahman, and other gods that protect the world were seen in the midst of the sky, everywhere showering heavenly flowers with which they made offerings to Buddha in their obeisance. Vaidehi, at the sight of Buddha the World-Honored One, took off her garlands and prostrated herself on the ground, crying, sobbing, and speaking to Buddha: 'World-Honored One! what former sin of mine has produced such a wicked son? And again, Exalted One, from what cause and circumstances have you such an affinity (by blood and religion) with Devadatta (Buddha's wicked cousin and once his disciple)?'

5. 'My only prayer,' she continued, 'is this: World-Honored One, may you preach to me in detail of all the places where there is no sorrow or trouble, and where I ought to go to be born anew. I am not satisfied with this world of depravities, with Jambudvipa, which is full of hells, full of hungry spirits, and of the brute creatures. In this world of depravities, there are many assemblies of the wicked. May I not hear, I pray, the voice of the wicked in the future and may I not see any wicked person.'

'Now I throw my limbs down to the ground before you, and seek for your mercy by confessing my sins. I pray for this only that the Sun-like Buddha may instruct me how to meditate on a world wherein all actions are pure.' At that moment, the World-Honored One flashed forth a golden ray from between his eyebrows. It extended to all the innumerable worlds of the ten quarters. On its return the ray rested on the top of the Buddha's head and transformed itself into a golden pillar just like Mount Sumeru, wherein the pure and admirable countries of the Buddhas in the ten quarters appeared simultaneously illuminated.

One was a country consisting of seven jewels, another was a country all full of lotus-flowers; one was like the palace of Mahesvara Deva (god Siva), another was like a mirror of crystal, with the countries in the ten quarters reflected therein. There were innumerable countries like these, resplendent, gorgeous, and delightful to look upon. All were meant for Vaidehi to see (and choose from).

Thereupon Vaidehi again spoke to Buddha: 'World-Honored One, although all other Buddha countries are pure and radiant with light, I should, nevertheless, wish myself to be born in the realm of Buddha Amitayus, in the world of Highest Happiness, Sukhavati. Now I simply pray you, World-Honored One, to teach me how to concentrate my thought so as to obtain a right vision of that country.'

6. Thereupon the World-Honored One gently smiled upon her, and rays of five colors issued forth out of his mouth, each ray shining as far as the head of king Bimbisara.

At that moment, the mental vision of that exalted king was perfectly clear though he was shut up in lonely retirement, and he could see the World-Honored One from afar. As he paid homage with his head and face, he naturally increased and advanced in wisdom, whereby he attained to the fruition of an Anagamin, the third of the four grades to Nirvana.

7. Then the World-Honored One said: 'Now do you not know, Vaidehi, that Buddha Amitayus is not very far from here? You should apply your mind entirely to close meditation upon those who have already perfected the pure actions necessary for that Buddha country.

'I now proceed to fully expound them for you in many parables, and thereby afford all ordinary persons of the future who wish to cultivate these pure actions an opportunity of being born in the Land of Highest Happiness (Sukhavati) in the western quarter. Those who wish to be born in that country of Buddha have to cultivate a threefold goodness. First, they should act filially towards their parents and support them; serve and respect their teachers and elders; be of compassionate mind, abstain from doing any injury, and cultivate the ten virtuous actions". Second, they should take and observe the vow of seeking refuge with the Three jewels, fulfill all moral precepts, and not lower their dignity or neglect any ceremonial observance. Third, they should give their whole mind to the attainment of perfect wisdom, deeply believe in the principle of cause and effect, study and recite the Mahayana doctrine, and persuade and encourage others who pursue the same course as themselves.

'These three groups as enumerated are called the pure actions leading to the Buddha country.'

'Vaidehi!' Buddha continued, 'To clarify if do you not understand now: These three classes of actions are the effective cause of the pure actions taught by all the Buddhas of the past, present, and future.'

8. The Buddha then addressed Ananda as well as Vaidehi: 'Listen carefully, listen carefully! Ponder carefully on what you hear! I, Tathagata, now declare the pure actions needful for Birth in that Buddha country, for the sake of all beings hereafter that are subject to the misery inflicted by the enemy of the passions. Well done, Vaidehi! Appropriate are the questions which you have asked! Ananda, be sure to remember these words of mine, the Buddha, and repeat them openly to many assemblies. I, Tathagata, now teach Vaidehi and also all beings hereafter in order that they may meditate on the World of Highest Happiness, Sukhavati, in the western quarter.

'It is by the power of Buddha only that one can see that pure land of Buddha as clear as one sees the image of one's face reflected in the transparent mirror held up before one.

'When one sees the state of happiness of that country in its highest excellence, one greatly rejoices in one's heart and immediately attains a spirit of resignation prepared to endure whatever consequences may yet arise.' Buddha, turning again to Vaidehi, said: 'You are but an ordinary person; the quality of your mind is weak and confused.

'You have not as yet obtained the divine eye and cannot perceive what is at a distance. All the Buddhas, Tathagatas have various means at their disposal and can therefore afford you an opportunity of seeing that Buddha country.' Then Vaidehi rejoined: 'World-Honored One, people such as I can now see that land by the power of Buddha, but how shall all those beings who are to come after Buddha's Nirvana, and who, as being depraved and devoid of good qualities, will be harassed by the five worldly sufferings - how shall they see the World of Highest Happiness of the Buddha Amitayus?'

PART II.

9. Buddha then replied: 'You and all other beings besides ought to make it your only aim, with concentrated thought, to get a perception of the western quarter. You will

ask how that perception is to be formed. I will explain it now. All beings, if not blind from birth, are uniformly possessed of sight, and they all see the setting sun. You should sit down properly, looking in the western direction, and prepare your thought for a close meditation on the sun; cause your mind to be firmly fixed on it so as to have an unwavering perception by the exclusive application of your mind, and gaze upon it in particular when it is about to set and looks like a suspended drum.

'After you have thus seen the sun, let that image remain clear and fixed, whether your eyes be shut or open;—such is the perception of the sun, which is the First Meditation.

10. 'Next you should form the perception of water; gaze on the water clear and pure, and let (this image) also remain clear and fixed (afterwards); never allow your thought to be scattered and lost.

'When you have thus seen the water you should form the perception of ice. As you see the ice shining and transparent, you should imagine the appearance of lapis lazuli.

'After that has been done, you will see the ground consisting of lapis lazuli, transparent and shining both within and without. Beneath this ground of lapis lazuli there will be seen a golden banner with the seven jewels, diamonds and the rest, supporting the ground. It extends to the eight points of the compass, and thus the eight corners (of the ground) are perfectly filled up. Every side of the eight quarters consists of a hundred jewels, every jewel has a thousand rays, and every ray has eighty-four thousand colors which, when reflected in the ground of lapis lazuli, look like a thousand million suns, and it is difficult to see them all one by one. Over the surface of that ground of lapis lazuli there are stretched golden ropes intertwined crosswise; divisions are made by means of strings of seven jewels with every part clear and distinct.

'Each jewel has rays of five hundred colors which look like flowers or like the moon and stars. Lodged high up in the open sky these rays form a tower of rays, whose storeys and galleries are ten millions in number and built of a hundred jewels. Both sides of the tower have each a hundred million flowery banners furnished and decked with numberless musical instruments. Eight kinds of cool breezes proceed from the brilliant rays. When those musical instruments are played, they emit the sounds "suffering," "non-existence," "impermanence," and "non-self"; such is the perception of the water, which is the Second Meditation.

11. 'When this perception has been formed, you should meditate on its (constituents) one by one and make (the images) as clear as possible, so that they may never be scattered and lost, whether your eyes be shut or open. Except only during the time of your sleep, you should always keep this in your mind. One who has reached this (stage of) perception is said to have dimly seen the Land of Highest Happiness (Sukhavati).'

'One who has obtained the Samadhi of supernatural calm is able to see the land of that Buddha country clearly and distinctly: this state is too much to be explained fully; such is the perception of the land, and it is the Third Meditation.

'You should remember, Ananda, the Buddha words of mine, and repeat this law for attaining to the perception of the land of the Buddha country for the sake of the great mass of the people hereafter who may wish to be delivered from their sufferings. If any one meditates on the land of that Buddha country, his sins which bind him to births and deaths during eighty million kalpas shall be expiated; after the abandonment of his present body, he will assuredly be born in the pure land in the following life. The practice of this kind of meditation is called the "right meditation." If it is of any other kind it is called "heretical meditation."

12. Buddha then spoke to Ananda and Vaidehi: 'When the perception of the land (of that Buddha country) has been gained, you should next meditate on the jewel-trees (of that country). In meditating on the jewel-trees, you should take each by itself and form a perception of the seven rows of trees; every tree is eight hundred yojanas high, and all the jewel-trees have flowers and leaves consisting of seven jewels all perfect. All flowers and leaves have colors like the colors of various jewels -from the color of lapis lazuli there issues a golden ray; from the color of crystal, a saffron ray; from the color of agate, a diamond ray; from the color of diamond, a ray of blue pearls. Corals, amber, and all other gems are used as ornaments for illumination; nets of excellent pearls are spread over the trees, each tree is covered by seven sets of nets, and between one set and another there are five hundred million palaces built of excellent flowers, resembling the palace of the Lord Brahman; all heavenly children live there, quite naturally; every child has a garland consisting of five hundred million precious gems like those that are fastened on Sakra's (Indra's) head, the rays of which shine over a hundred yojanas, just as if a hundred million suns and moons were united together; it is difficult to explain them in detail. That (garland) is the most excellent among all, as it is the commixture of all sorts of jewels. Rows of these jewel-trees touch one another; the leaves of the trees also join one another.

'Among the dense foliage there blossom various beautiful flowers, upon which are miraculously found fruits of seven jewels. The leaves of the trees are all exactly equal in length and in breadth, measuring twenty-five yojanas each way; every leaf has a thousand colors and a hundred different pictures on it, just like a heavenly garland. There are many excellent flowers which have the color of Jambunada gold and an appearance of fire-wheels in motion, turning between the leaves in a graceful fashion. All the fruits are produced just (as easily) as if they flowed out from the pitcher of the God Sakra. There is a magnificent ray which transforms itself into numberless jewelled canopies with banners and flags. Within these jewelled canopies the works of all the Buddhas of the Great Chilicosm appear illuminated; the Buddha countries of the ten quarters also are manifested therein. When you have seen these trees you should also meditate on them one by one in order. In meditating on the trees, trunks, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits, let them all be distinct and clear;-- such is the perception of the trees (of that Buddha country), and it is the Fourth Meditation.

13. 'Next, you should perceive the water (of that country). The perception of the water is as follows:

'In the Land of Highest Happiness there are waters in eight lakes; the water in every lake consists of seven jewels which are soft and yielding. Deriving its source from the king of jewels that fulfills every wish, the water is divided into fourteen streams; every stream has the color of seven jewels; its channel is built of gold, the bed of which consists of the sand of variegated diamonds.

'In the midst of each lake there are sixty million lotus-flowers, made of seven jewels; all the flowers are perfectly round and exactly equal (in circumference), being twelve yojanas. The water of jewels flows amidst the flowers and rises and falls by the stalks (of the lotus); the sound of the streaming water is melodious and pleasing, and proounds all the perfect virtues (Paramitas), "suffering," "non-existence," "impermanence," and "non-self;" it proclaims also the praise of the signs of perfection, and minor marks of excellence of all Buddhas. From the king of jewels that fulfills every wish, stream forth the golden-colored rays excessively beautiful, the radiance of which transforms itself into birds possessing the colors of a hundred jewels, which sing out harmonious notes, sweet and delicious, ever praising the remembrance of Buddha, the remembrance of the Dharma, and the remembrance of the Sangha -- such is the perception of the water of eight good qualities, and it is the Fifth Meditation.

14. 'Each division of that (Buddha) country, which consists of several jewels, has also jewelled storeys and galleries to the number of five hundred million; within each storey and gallery there are innumerable Devas engaged in playing heavenly music. There are some musical instruments that are hung up in the open sky, like the jewelled banners of heaven; they emit musical sounds without being struck, which, while resounding variously, all propound the remembrance of Buddha, of the Dharma and of the Sangha, Bhikkhus, and so forth. When this perception is duly accomplished, one is said to have dimly seen the jewel-trees, jewel-ground, and jewel-lakes of that World of Highest Happiness (Sukhavati) -- such is the perception formed by meditating on the general features of that Land, and it is the Sixth Meditation.

'If one has experienced this, one has expiated the greatest sinful deeds which would otherwise lead one to Transmigration for numberless millions of kalpas; after his death he will assuredly be born in that land.

15. 'Listen carefully! listen carefully! Think over what you have heard! I, Buddha, am about to explain in detail the law of delivering one's self from trouble and torment. Commit this to your memory in order to explain it in detail before a great assembly.' While Buddha was uttering these words, Buddha Amitayus stood in the midst of the sky with Bodhisattvas Mahasthama and Avalokitesvara, attending on his right and left respectively. There was such a bright and dazzling radiance that no one could see clearly; the brilliance was a hundred thousand times greater than that of gold (Jambunada). Thereupon Vaidehi saw Buddha Amitayus and approached the World-Honored One, and made obeisance to him, touching his feet, and spoke to him as follows: 'Exalted One! I am now able, by the power of Buddha, to see Buddha Amitayus together with the two Bodhisattvas. But how shall all the beings of the future meditate on Buddha Amitayus and the two Bodhisattvas?'

16. The Buddha answered: 'Those who wish to meditate on that Buddha ought first to direct their thought as follows: form the perception of a lotus-flower on a ground of seven jewels, each leaf of that lotus exhibits the colors of a hundred jewels, and has eighty-four thousand veins, just like heavenly pictures; each vein possesses eighty-four thousand rays, of which each can be clearly seen. Every small leaf and flower is two hundred and fifty yojanas in length and the same measurement in breadth. Each lotus-flower possesses eighty-four thousand leaves, each leaf has the kingly pearls to the number of a hundred million, as ornaments for illumination; each pearl shoots out a thousand rays like bright canopies. The surface of the ground is entirely covered by a mixture of seven jewels. There is a tower built of the gems which are like those that are fastened on Sakra's head. It is inlaid and decked with eighty thousand diamonds, Kimsuka jewels, Brahma-mani and excellent pearl nets.

'On that tower there are miraculously found four posts with jewelled banners; each banner looks like a hundred thousand million Sumeru mountains.

'The jewelled veil over these banners is like that of the celestial palace of Yama, illuminated with five hundred million excellent jewels, each jewel has eighty-four thousand rays, each ray has various golden colors to the number of eighty-four thousand, each golden color covers the whole jewelled soil, it changes and is transformed at various places, every now and then exhibiting various appearances; now it becomes a diamond tower, now a pearl net, again clouds of mixed flowers, freely changing its manifestation in the ten directions it exhibits the state of Buddha -- such is the perception of the flowery throne, and it is the Seventh Meditation.'

Buddha, turning to Ananda, said: 'These excellent flowers were created originally by the power of the prayer of Bhikkhu, Dharmakara. All who wish to exercise the remembrance of that Buddha ought first to form the perception of that flowery throne. When engaged in it one ought not to perceive vaguely, but fix the mind upon each detail separately. Leaf, jewel, ray, tower, and banner should be clear and distinct, just as one sees the image of one's own face in a mirror. When one has achieved this perception, the sins which would produce births and deaths during fifty thousand kalpas are expiated, and he is one who will most assuredly be born in the World of Highest Happiness.

17. 'When you have perceived this, you should next perceive Buddha himself. Do you ask how? Every Buddha Tathagata is one whose spiritual body is the principle of nature (Darmadhatu-kaya), so that he may enter into the mind of any beings. Consequently, when you have perceived Buddha, it is indeed that mind of yours that possesses those thirty-two signs of perfection and eighty minor marks of excellence which you see in a Buddha. In conclusion, it is your mind that becomes Buddha, nay, it is your mind. that is indeed Buddha. The ocean of true and universal knowledge of all the Buddhas derives its source from one's own mind and thought. Therefore you should apply your thought with an undivided attention to a careful meditation on that Buddha Tathagata, Arhat, the Holy and Fully Enlightened One. In forming the perception of that Buddha, you should first perceive the image of that Buddha; whether, your eyes are open or shut, look at an image like Jambunada gold in color, sitting on that flower throne mentioned before.

'When you have seen the seated figure your mental vision will become clear, and you will be able to see clearly and distinctly the adornment of that Buddha country, the jewelled ground, and so forth. In seeing these things, let them be clear and fixed

just as you see the palms of your hands. When you have passed through this experience, you should further form a perception of another great lotus-flower which is on the left side of Buddha, and is exactly equal in every way to the above-mentioned lotus-flower of Buddha. Still further, you should form (a perception of) another lotus-flower which is on the right side of Buddha. Perceive that an image of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara is sitting on the left-hand flowery throne, shooting forth golden rays exactly like those of Buddha. Perceive then that an image of Bodhisattva Mahasthama is sitting on the right-hand flowery throne.

'When these perceptions are gained the images of Buddha and the Bodhisattvas will all send forth brilliant rays, clearly lighting up all the jewel-trees with golden color. Under every tree there are also three lotus-flowers. On every lotus-flower there is an image, either of Buddha or of a Bodhisattva; thus (the images of the Bodhisattvas and of Buddha) are found everywhere in that country. When this perception has been gained, the devotee should hear the excellent Dharma preached by means of a stream of water, a brilliant ray of light, several jewel-trees, ducks, geese, and swans. Whether he be wrapped in meditation or whether he has ceased from it, he should ever hear the excellent Dharma. What the devotee hears must be kept in memory and not be lost, when he ceases from that meditation ; and it should agree with the Sutras, for if it does not agree with the Sutras, it is called an illusory perception, whereas if it does agree, it is called the rough perception of the World of Highest Happiness;-such is the perception of the images, and it is the Eighth Meditation.

'He who has practiced this meditation is freed from the sins (which otherwise involve him in) births and deaths for innumerable million kalpas, and during this present life he obtains the Samadhi due to the remembrance of Buddha.

18. 'Further, when this perception is gained, you should next proceed to meditate on the bodily marks and the light of Buddha Amitayus.

'You should know, Ananda, that the body of Buddha Amitayus is a hundred thousand million times as bright as the color of the Jambunada gold of the heavenly abode of Yama; the height of that Buddha is six hundred thousand nayutas of kotis of yojanas innumerable as are the sands of the river Ganges.

'The white twist of hair between the eyebrows all turning to the right is just like the five Sumeru mountains.

'The eyes of Buddha are like the water of the four great oceans; the blue and the white are quite distinct.

'All the roots of hair of his body issue forth brilliant rays which are also like the Sumeru mountains.

'The halo of that Buddha is like a hundred million Great Chilicosms; in that halo there are Buddhas miraculously created, to the number of a million nayutas of kotis innumerable as the sands of the Ganges; each of these Buddhas has for attendants a great assembly of numberless Bodhisattvas who are also miraculously created.

'Buddha Amitayus has eighty-four thousand signs of perfection, each sign is possessed of eighty-four minor marks of excellence, each mark has eighty-four thousand rays, each ray extends so far as to shine over the worlds of the ten quarters, whereby Buddha embraces and protects all the beings who think upon him and does not exclude any one of them. His rays, signs, and so forth are difficult to be explained in detail. But in simple meditation let the mind's eye dwell upon them.

'If you pass through this experience, you will at the same time see all the Buddhas of the ten quarters. Since you see all the Buddhas it is called the Samadhi of the remembrance of the Buddhas.

'Those who have practiced this meditation are said to have contemplated the bodies of all the Buddhas. Since they have meditated on Buddha's body, they will also see Buddha's mind. It is great compassion that is called Buddha's mind. It is by his absolute compassion that he receives all beings.

'Those who have practiced this meditation will, when they die, be born in the presence of the Buddhas in another life, and obtain a spirit of resignation wherewith to face all the consequences which shall hereafter arise.

'Therefore those who have wisdom should direct their thought to the careful meditation upon that Buddha Amitayus. Let those who meditate on Buddha Amitayus begin with one single sign or mark -- let them first meditate on the white twist of

hair between the eyebrows as clearly as possible; when they have done this, the eighty-four thousand signs and marks will naturally appear before their eyes. Those who see Amitayus will also see all the innumerable Buddhas of the ten quarters. Since they have seen all the innumerable Buddhas, they will receive the prophecy of their future destiny to become Buddha in the presence of all the Buddhas -- Such is the perception gained by a complete meditation on all forms and bodies of Buddha, and it is the Ninth Meditation.

19. 'When you have seen Buddha Amitayus distinctly, you should then further meditate upon Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, whose height is eight hundred thousand nayutas of yojanas ; the color of his body is purple gold, his head has a turban at the back of which there is a halo; the circumference of his face is a hundred thousand yojanas. In that halo, there are five hundred Buddhas miraculously transformed just like those of Shakyamuni Buddha; each transformed Buddha is attended by five hundred transformed Bodhisattvas who are also attended by numberless gods. Within the circle of light emanating from his whole body appear illuminated the various forms and marks of all beings that live in the five paths of existence.

'On the top of his head Is a heavenly crown of gems like those that are fastened (on Indra's head), in which crown there is a transformed Buddha standing, twenty-five yojanas high.

'The face of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara In, like Jambunada gold in color.

'The soft hair between the eyebrows has all the colors of the seven jewels, from which eighty-four kinds of rays flow out, each ray has innumerable transformed Buddhas, each of whom is attended by numberless transformed Bodhisattvas; freely changing their manifestations they fill up the worlds of the ten quarters; (the appearance) can be compared with the color of the red lotus-flower.

'He wears a garland consisting of eight thousand rays, in which is seen fully reflected a state of perfect beauty. The palm of his hand has a mixed color of five hundred lotus-flowers. His hands have ten tips of fingers, each tip has eighty-four thousand pictures, which are like signet-marks, each picture has eighty-four thousand colors, each color has eighty-four thousand rays which are soft and mild and shine over all things that exist. With these jewel hands he draws and embraces all beings. When he lifts up his feet, the soles of his feet are seen to be marked with a wheel of a thousand spokes which miraculously transform themselves into five hundred million pillars of rays. When he puts his feet down to the ground, the flowers of diamonds

and jewels are scattered about, and all things are simply covered by them. All the other signs of his body and the minor marks of excellence are perfect, and not at all different from those of Buddha, except the signs of having the turban on his head and the top of his head invisible, which two signs of him are inferior to those of the World-Honored One -- such is the perception of the real form and body of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, and it is the Tenth Meditation.'

The Buddha, especially addressing Ananda, said: 'Whosoever wishes to meditate on Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara must do so in the way I have explained. Those who practice this meditation will not suffer any calamity; they will utterly remove the obstacle that is raised by karma, and will expiate the sins which would involve them in births-and deaths for numberless kalpas. Even the hearing of the name of this Bodhisattva will enable one to obtain immeasurable happiness. How much more, then, will the diligent contemplation of him!'

'Whosoever will meditate on Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara should first meditate on the turban of his head and then on his heavenly crown.

'All the other signs should also be meditated on according to their order, and they should be clear and distinct just as one sees the palms of one's hands.

'Next you should meditate on Bodhisattva Mahasthama, whose :bodily signs, height and size are equal to those of Avalokitesvara; the circumference of his halo is one hundred and twenty-five yojanas, and it shines as far as two hundred and fifty yojanas. The rays of his whole body shine over the countries of the ten quarters, they are purple gold in color, and can be seen by all beings that are in favorable circumstances. If one but sees the ray that issues from a single root of the hair of this Bodhisattva, he will at the same time see the pure and excellent rays of all the innumerable Buddhas of the ten quarters.

'For this reason this Bodhisattva is named the Unlimited Light; it is with this light of wisdom that he shines over all beings and causes them to be removed from the three paths of existence, and to obtain the highest power. For the same reason this Bodhisattva is called the Bodhisattva of Great Strength (Mahasthama). His heavenly crown has five hundred jewel-flowers; each jewel-flower has five hundred jewel-towers, in each tower are seen manifested all the pure and excellent features of the far-stretching Buddha countries in the ten quarters. The turban on his head is like a lotus-flower; on the top of the turban there is a jewel pitcher, which is filled with various brilliant rays fully manifesting the state of Buddha. All his other bodily

signs are quite equal to those of Avalokitesvara. When this Bodhisattva walks about, all the regions of the ten quarters tremble and quake. Wherever the earth quakes there appear five hundred million jewel-flowers; each jewel-flower with its splendid dazzling beauty looks like the World of Highest Happiness (Sukhavati).

'When this Bodhisattva sits down, all the countries of seven jewels at once tremble and quake: all the incarnate, divided Amitayuses - innumerable as the dust of the earth - and all the incarnate Bodhisattvas - Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta - who dwell in the middlemost Buddha countries situated between the Buddha country of the lower region presided over by Buddha "Golden Light," and the country of the upper region presided over by Buddha "King of Light" -- all these assemble in the World of Highest Happiness (Sukhavati) like gathering clouds, sit on their thrones of lotus-flowers which fill the whole sky, and preach the excellent Dharma in order to deliver all the beings that are immersed in suffering -- such is the perception of the form and body of Bodhisattva Mahasthamaprapta, and it is the Eleventh Meditation.

'Those who practice this meditation are freed from the sins which would otherwise trap them in births-and-deaths for innumerable asamkhyas kalpas.

'Those who have practiced this meditation do not live in an embryo state but obtain free access to the excellent and admirable countries of Buddhas. Those who have experienced this are said to have perfectly meditated upon the two Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta.

20. 'After you have had this perception, you should imagine yourself to be born in the World of Highest Happiness in the western quarter, and to be seated, cross-legged, on a lotus-flower there. Then imagine that the flower has shut you in and has afterwards unfolded; when the flower has thus unfolded, five hundred colored rays will shine over your body, your eyes will be opened so as to see the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who fill the whole sky; you will hear the sounds of waters and trees, the notes of birds, and the voices of many Buddhas preaching the excellent Dharma, in accordance with the twelve divisions of the scriptures. When you have ceased from that meditation you must remember the experience ever after.

'If you have passed through this experience you are said to have seen the World of Highest Happiness in the realm of the Buddha Amitayus -- this is the perception obtained by a complete meditation on that Buddha country, and is called the Twelfth Meditation.

'The innumerable incarnate bodies of Amitayus, together with those of Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta, constantly come and appear before such devotees as above mentioned.'

21. Buddha then spoke to Ananda and Vaidehi: 'Those who wish, by means of their serene thoughts, to be born in the western land, should first meditate on an image of the Buddha, who is sixteen cubits high, seated on a lotus-flower in the water of the lake. As it was stated before, the real body and its measurement are unlimited, incomprehensible to the ordinary mind.

'But by the efficacy of the ancient prayer of that Tathagata, those who think of and remember him shall certainly be able to accomplish their aim.

'Even the mere perceiving of the image of that Buddha brings to one immeasurable blessings. How much more, then, will the meditating upon all the complete bodily signs of that Buddha! Buddha Amitayus has supernatural power; since everything is at his disposal, he freely transforms himself in the regions of the ten quarters. At one time he shows himself as possessing a magnificent body, which fills the whole sky, at another he makes his body appear small, the height being only sixteen or eighteen cubits. The body he manifests is always pure gold in color; his halo - bright with transformed Buddhas - and his jewel lotus-flowers are as mentioned above. The bodies of the two Bodhisattvas are the same always.

'All beings can recognize either of the two Bodhisattvas by simply glancing at the marks of their heads. These two Bodhisattvas assist Amitayus in his work of universal salvation -- such is the meditation that forms a joint perception of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, and it is the Thirteenth Meditation.'

PART III.

22. Buddha then spoke to Ananda and Vaidehi: 'The beings who will be born in the highest form of the highest grade (i. e. to Buddhahood) are those, whoever they may be, who wish to be born in that country and cherish the threefold thought whereby they are at once destined to be born there. What is the threefold thought, you may ask. First, the True Thought; second, the Deep Believing Thought; third, the Desire to be born in that Pure Land by bringing one's own stock of merit to

maturity. Those who have this threefold thought in perfection shall most assuredly be born into that country.

'There are also three classes of beings who are able to be born in that country. What, you may ask, are the three classes of beings ? First, those who are possessed of a compassionate mind, who do no injury to any beings, and accomplish all virtuous actions according to Buddha's precepts; second, those who study and recite the Sutras of the Mahayana doctrine, for instance, the Vaipulya Sutras; third, those who practice the sixfold remembrance. These three classes of beings who wish to be born in that country by bringing (their respective stocks of merit) to maturity, will become destined to be born there if they have accomplished any of those meritorious deeds for one day or even for seven days.

'When one who has practiced (these merits) is about to be born in that country, Buddha Amitayus, together with the two Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta, also numberless created Buddhas, and a hundred thousand Bhikkhus and Sravakas, with their whole retinue, and innumerable gods, together with the palaces of seven jewels, will appear before him out of regard for his diligence and courage; Avalokitesvara together with Mahasthamaprapta, will offer a diamond seat to him; thereupon Amitayus himself will send forth magnificent rays of light to shine over the dying person's body. He and many Bodhisattvas will offer their hands and welcome him, when Avalokitesvara, Mahasthamaprapta, and all the other Bodhisattvas will praise the glory of the man who practiced the meritorious deeds, and convey an exhortation to his mind. When the new-comer, having seen these, rejoicing and leaping for joy, looks at himself, he will find his own body seated on that diamond throne; and as he follows behind Buddha he will be born into that country, in a moment. When he has been born there, he will see Buddha's form and body with every sign of perfection complete, and also the perfect forms and signs of all the Bodhisattvas; he will also see brilliant rays and jewel forests and hear them propounding the excellent Dharma, and instantly be conscious of a spirit of resignation to whatever consequences may hereafter arise. Before long he will serve every one of the Buddhas who live in the regions of the ten quarters. In the presence of each of those Buddhas he will obtain successively a prophecy of his future destiny. On his return to his own land Sukhavati, in which he has just been born he will obtain countless hundreds of thousand Dhāranis -- such are those who are to be born in the highest form of the highest grade to Buddhahood.

23. 'Next, the beings who will be born in the middle form of the highest grade are those who do not necessarily learn, remember, study, or recite those Vaipulya Sutras, but fully understand the meaning of the truth contained in them, and having a firm grasp of the highest truth do not speak evil of the Mahayana doctrine, but deeply believe in (the principle of) cause and effect; who by bringing these good

qualities to maturity seek to be born in that Country of Highest Happiness. When one who has acquired these qualities is about to die, Amitayus, surrounded by the two Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta, and an innumerable retinue of dependents, will bring a seat of purple gold and approach him with words of praise, saying: "O my son in the Dharma! you have practiced the Mahayana doctrine; you have understood and believed the highest truth; therefore I now come to meet and welcome you." He and the thousand created Buddhas extend their hands all at once.

'When that man looks at his own body, he will find himself seated on that purple gold seat; he will, then, stretching forth his folded hands, praise and eulogize all the Buddhas. As quick as thought he will be born in the lake of seven jewels of that country. That purple gold seat on which he sits is like a magnificent jewel-flower, and will open after a night; the new-comer's body becomes purple gold in color, and he will also find under his feet a lotus-flower consisting of seven jewels. Buddha and the Bodhisattvas at the same time will send forth brilliant rays to shine over the body of that person whose eyes will instantaneously be opened and become clear. According to his former usage (in the human world) he will hear all the voices that are there, preaching primary truths of the deepest significance.

'Then he will descend from that golden seat and make obeisance to the Buddha with folded hands, praising and eulogizing the World-Honored One. After seven days, he will immediately attain to the state of the highest perfect knowledge, anuttarasamyaksambodhi, from which he will never fall away; next he will fly to all the ten regions and successively serve all the Buddhas therein; he will practice many a Samadhi in the presence of those Buddhas. After the lapse of a lesser kalpa he will attain a spirit of resignation to whatever consequences may hereafter arise, and he will also obtain a prophecy of his future destiny in the presence of Buddhas.

24. 'Next are those who are to be born in the lowest form of the highest grade: this class of beings also believes in the principle of cause and effect, and without slandering the Mahayana doctrine, simply cherishes the thought of obtaining the highest Bodhi and by bringing this good quality to maturity seeks to be born in that Country of Highest Happiness. When a devotee of this class dies, Amitayus, with Avalokitesvara, Mahasthamaprapta and all the dependents, will offer him a golden lotus-flower; he will also miraculously create five hundred Buddhas in order to send for and meet him. These five hundred created Buddhas will all at once extend their hands and praise him, saying: "O my son in the Dharma! you are pure now; as you have cherished the thought of obtaining the highest Bodhi, we come to meet you." When he has seen them, he will find himself seated on that golden lotus-flower. Soon the flower will close upon him; following behind the World-Honored One he will go to be born in the lake of seven jewels. After one day and one night the lotus-flower will unfold itself. Within seven days he may see Buddha's body, though

his mind is not as yet clear enough to perceive all the signs and marks of the Buddha, which he will be able to see clearly after three weeks; then he will hear many sounds and voices preaching the excellent Dharma, and he himself, travelling through all the ten quarters, will make obeisance to all the Buddhas, from whom he will learn the deepest significance of the Dharma. After three lesser kalpas he will gain entrance to the knowledge of a hundred divisions of nature and become settled in the first joyful stage of Bodhisattva. The perception of these three classes of beings is called the meditation upon the superior class of beings, and is the Fourteenth Meditation.

25. 'The beings who will be born in the highest form of the middle grade are those who observe the five prohibitive precepts, the eight prohibitive precepts and the fasting, and practice all the moral precepts; who do not commit the five deadly sins, and who bring no blame or trouble upon any being; and who by bringing these good qualities to maturity seek to be born in the World of Highest Happiness in the western quarter. On the eve of such a person's departure from this life, Amitayus, surrounded by Bhikkhus and dependents, will appear before him, flashing forth rays of golden color, and will preach the Dharma of suffering, non-existence, impermanence, and non-self. He will also praise the virtue of homelessness that can liberate one from all sufferings. At the sight of Buddha, that believer will excessively rejoice in his heart; he will soon find himself seated on a lotus-flower. Kneeling down on the ground and stretching forth his folded hands he will pay homage to Buddha. Before he raises his head he will reach that Country of Highest Happiness and be born there. Soon the lotus-flower will unfold, when he will hear sounds and voices praising and glorifying the Four Noble Truths of suffering. He will immediately attain to the fruition of Arhatship, gain the threefold knowledge and the six supernatural faculties, and complete the eightfold emancipation.

26. 'The beings who will be born in the middle form of the middle grade are those who either observe the eight prohibitive precepts, and the fasting for one day and one night, or observe the prohibitive precept for Sramanera for the same period, or observe the perfect moral precepts, not lowering their dignity nor neglecting any ceremonial observance for one day and one night, and by bringing their respective merits to maturity seek to be born in the Country of Highest Happiness. On the eve of departure from this life, such a believer who is possessed of this moral virtue, which he has made fragrant by cultivation during his life, will see Amitayus, followed by all his retinue; flashing forth rays of golden color, this Buddha will come before him and offer a lotus-flower of seven jewels.

'He will hear a voice in the sky, praising him and saying: "O son of a noble family, you are indeed an excellent man. Out of regard for your obedience to the teachings of all the Buddhas of the three worlds, I now come and meet you." Then the

newcomer will see himself seated on that lotus-flower. Soon the lotus-flower will fold around him, and being in this he will be born in the jewel-lake of the World of Highest Happiness in the western quarter.

'After seven days that flower will unfold again, when the believer will open his eyes, and praise the World-Honored One, stretching forth his folded hands. Having heard the Dharma, he will rejoice and obtain the fruition of a Srotapanna.

'In the lapse of half a kalpa he will become an Arhat.

27. 'Next are the beings who will be born in the lowest form of the middle grade to Buddhahood. If there are sons or daughters of a noble family who are filial to their parents and support them, besides exercising benevolence and compassion in the world, at their departure from this life such persons will meet a good and learned teacher who will fully describe to them the state of happiness in that Buddha country of Amitayus, and will also explain the forty-eight prayers of the Bhikkhu Dharmakara. As soon as any such person has heard these details, his life will come to an end. In a brief moment he will be born in the World of Highest Happiness in the western quarter.

'After seven days he will meet Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta, from whom he will learn the Dharma and rejoice. After the lapse of a lesser kalpa he will attain to the fruition of an Arhat. The perception of these three sorts of beings is called the meditation of the middle class of beings, and is the Fifteenth Meditation.

28. 'Next are the beings who will be born in the highest form of the lowest grade. If there be any one who commits many evil deeds, provided that he does not speak evil of the Mahayana Sutras, he, though himself a very stupid man, and neither ashamed nor sorry for all the evil actions that he has done, yet, while dying, may meet a good and learned teacher who will recite and laud the headings and titles of the twelve divisions of the Mahayana scriptures. Having thus heard the names of all the Sutras, he will be freed from the greatest sins which would involve him in births and deaths during a thousand kalpas.

'A wise man also will teach him to stretch forth his folded hands and to say, "Adoration to Buddha Amitayus" (Namo Amitabhaya Buddhaya, or Namu Amida Butsu). Having uttered the name of the Buddha, he will be freed from the sins which

would otherwise involve him in births and deaths for fifty million kalpas. Thereupon the Buddha will send a created Buddha, and the created Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta, to approach that person with words of praise, saying: "O son of a noble family, as you have uttered the name of that Buddha, all your sins have, been destroyed and expiated, and therefore we now come to meet you." After this speech the devotee will observe the rays of that created Buddha flooding his chamber with light, and while rejoicing at the sight he will depart this life. Seated on a lotus-flower he will follow that created Buddha and go to be born in the jewel-lake.

'After the lapse of seven weeks, the lotus-flower will unfold, when the great compassionate Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta will stand before him, flashing forth magnificent rays, and will preach to him the deepest meaning of the twelve divisions of the scriptures. Having heard this, he will understand and believe it, and cherish the thought of attaining the highest Bodhi. In a period of ten lesser kalpas he will gain entrance to the knowledge of the hundred divisions of nature and be able to enter upon the first joyful stage of Bodhisattva. Those who have had an opportunity of hearing the name of Buddha, the name of the Dharma, and the name of the Sangha - the names of the Three jewels - can also be born in that country.'

29. Buddha continued: 'Next are the beings who will be born in the middle form of the lowest grade. If there is any one who transgresses the five and the eight prohibitive precepts, and also all the perfect moral precepts; he, being himself so stupid as to steal things that belong to the whole community or things that belong to a particular Bhikkhu and not be ashamed nor sorry for his impure preaching of the Dharma (in case of preacher), but magnify and glorify himself with many wicked deeds - such a sinful person deserves to fall into hell in consequence of those sins. At the time of his death, when the fires of hell approach him from all sides, he will meet a good and learned teacher who will, out of great compassion, preach the power and virtue of the ten faculties of Amitayus and fully explain the supernatural powers and brilliant rays of that Buddha; and will further praise moral virtue, meditation, wisdom, emancipation, and the thorough knowledge that follows emancipation. After having heard this, he will be freed from his sins, which would involve him in births and deaths during eighty million kalpas; thereupon those violent fires of hell will transform themselves into a pure and cool wind blowing about heavenly flowers. On each of these flowers will stand a created Buddha or Bodhisattva to meet and receive that person. In a moment he will be born in a lotus-flower growing in the lake of seven jewels. After six kalpas the lotus-flower will open, when Avalokitesvara and Mahasthama will soothe and encourage him with their Brahma-voices, and preach to him the Mahayana Sutras of the deepest significance.

'Having heard this Dharma, he will instantaneously direct his thought toward the attainment of the highest Bodhi.

30. 'Finally, there are the beings who will be born in the lowest form of the lowest grade. If there is any one who commits evil deeds, and even completes the ten wicked actions, the five deadly sins and the like; that man, being himself stupid and guilty of many crimes, deserves to fall into a miserable path of existence and suffer endless pains during many kalpas. On the eve of death he will meet a good and learned teacher who will, soothing and encouraging him in various ways, preach to him the excellent Dharma and teach him the remembrance of Buddha, but, being harassed by pains, he will have no time to think of Buddha. Some good friend will then say to him: "Even if you cannot exercise the remembrance of Buddha, you may, at least, utter the name, "Buddha Amitayus." Let him do so serenely with his voice uninterrupted; let him be (continually) thinking of Buddha until he has completed ten times the thought, repeating the formula, "Adoration to Buddha Amitayus" (Namah Amitabha Buddhayah, Namu Amida Butsu). On the strength of his merit of uttering that Buddha's name he will, during every repetition, expiate the sins which involved him in births and deaths during eighty million kalpas. He will, while dying, see a golden lotus-flower like the disk of the sun appearing before his eyes; in a moment he will be born in the World of Highest Happiness. After twelve greater kalpas the lotus-flower will unfold; thereupon the Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta, raising their voices in great compassion, will preach to him in detail the real state of all the elements of nature and the law of the expiation of sins. On hearing them he will rejoice and will immediately direct his thought toward the attainment of the Bodhi -- such are the beings who are to be born in the lowest form of the lowest grade to Buddhahood. The perception of the above three is called the meditation of the inferior class of beings, and is the Sixteenth Meditation.'

PART IV.

31. When Buddha had finished this speech, Vaidehi, together with her five hundred female attendants, could see, as guided by the Buddha's words, the scene of the far-stretching World of the Highest Happiness, and could also see the body of Buddha and the bodies of the two Bodhisattvas. With her mind filled with joy she praised them, saying: 'Never have I seen such a wonder!' Instantaneously she became wholly and fully enlightened, and attained a spirit of resignation, prepared to endure whatever consequences might yet arise. Her five hundred female attendants too cherished the thought of obtaining the highest perfect knowledge, and sought to be born in that Buddha country.

32. The World-Honored One predicted that they would all be born in that Buddha country and be able to obtain the Samadhi (the supernatural calm) of the presence of many Buddhas. All the innumerable Devas (gods) also directed their thought toward the attainment of the highest Bodhi.

Thereupon Ananda rose from his seat, approached Buddha, and spoke thus: 'World-Honored One, what should we call this Sutra? And how should we receive and remember it in the future?'

Buddha said in his reply to Ananda: 'Ananda, this Sutra should be called 'The Meditation on the Land of Sukhavati, on Buddha Amitayus, Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, Bodhisattva Mahasthamaprapta,' or otherwise be called 'The Sutra on the entire removal of the obstacle of Karma, the means of being born in the realm of the Buddhas.' You should take and hold it, not forgetting nor losing it. Those who practice the Samadhi in accordance with this Sutra will be able to see, in the present life, Buddha Amitayus and the two great Bodhisattvas.

'In case of a son or a daughter of a noble family, the mere hearing of the names of the Buddha and the two Bodhisattvas will expiate the sins which would involve them in births and deaths during innumerable kalpas. How much more will the remembrance of that Buddha and the Bodhisattvas!

'Know that the one who remembers that Buddha is the White Lotus among people, whom the Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthama consider an excellent friend. Such a person will, sitting in the Bodhi-mandala, be born in the abode of Buddhas.'

The Buddha further spoke to Ananda : 'You should carefully remember these words. To remember these words is to remember the name of Buddha Amitayus.' When Buddha concluded these words, the worthy disciples Mahamaudgalyayana, and Ananda, Vaidehi and the others were all enraptured with boundless joy.

33. Thereupon the World-Honored One came back, walking through the open sky to Vulture Peak. Ananda soon after spoke before a great assembly of all the occurrences as stated above. On hearing this, all the innumerable Devas, Nagas and Yakshas were inspired with great joy; and having made obeisance to the Buddha they went their way.

Here ends the Sutra of the Meditation on Buddha Amitayus, spoken by Buddha Shakyamuni.