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The Buddhist Pure Land

Around the first century of the common era, and possibly much earlier, the teachings of Buddhism were gradually transmitted from India to China via the silk routes of Central Asia. Buddhism's novel cosmologies and spiritual practices were not well understood until some centuries later, but by the Six Dynasties era (220–589) scholars had translated many Buddhist scriptures into Chinese.

By the time Buddhism reached China, it was an established tradition with a history of over five hundred years, and since it is impossible to understand Chinese Buddhism without some background knowledge of its Indian roots, a brief explanation of the basic tenets of the early teachings of Buddhism is presented here. Originating south of the Himalayan mountains in what is now Nepal, Buddhism traces its origins to the teachings of Siddhārtha Gautama (ca. 566–ca. 486 B.C.E.), a historical figure about whom little is actually known. According to traditional accounts of his life, he was born into a wealthy family, married, and had a son; disaffected by the sufferings of human life, however, he left home in his late twenties or early thirties and became a forest-dwelling wandering ascetic, a common enough practice at that time. After five or six years of spiritual exercises, he experienced a new, enlightened perspective on reality and thereafter was known as “the Buddha,” an epithet that literally means “the awakened one” or “the enlightened one.” He spent the rest of his life articulating that experience in his teachings, and he acquired many followers, both male and female. The community of followers, who were originally mendicant wanderers but later adopted a sedentary monastic life-style, was called the *sangha* (Sanskrit) and included both monastics and lay followers.

The content of that teaching is now somewhat difficult to define, since it was communicated verbally, transmitted orally from disciple to disciple, and only consigned to writing sometime around the third century B.C.E. Essential truths of that teaching, however, are expressed in the Buddha's “Four Noble Truths,”

which might be understood as a medical diagnosis of the ills of human existence. These truths are as follows: (1) life is unsatisfactory, (2) unsatisfactoriness is caused by inordinate craving, (3) craving can cease, (4) the route to cessation is an eightfold path. Life is unsatisfactory in the sense that all things are subject to grosser and subtler kinds of suffering; all things are transient and have no permanent self-nature. Even human beings have no permanent self-nature or everlasting soul: they are only temporary, ever-changing composites of five “aggregates” (Sanskrit *skandhas*): material form, sensations, perceptions, volitions and attitudes, and consciousness. Unsatisfactoriness is augmented by inordinate cravings or thirsts to possess, contain, and own permanently those things that are by their very nature impermanent and always changing. Craving, however, can cease, and this cessation is called nirvana. Cessation may be sought through an eightfold path divided into three larger categories: wisdom, ethical behavior, and mental discipline. Wisdom entails (1) right thoughts of unselfish detachment from the world and (2) right understanding and insight into the nature of reality. Ethical behavior requires (3) right speech, (4) right action, (5) and right livelihood, that is, refraining from harming all creatures in word and action and developing sentiments of selfless compassion toward them. Mental discipline involves (6) right efforts to develop oneself mentally, (7) right mindfulness and awareness of things, and (8) right concentration, the development of concentrative or meditative states (Sanskrit *dhyāna*). In the few hundred years after Siddhārtha Gautama’s death, a large tripartite body of literature was compiled to record the Buddha’s teaching, or *Dharma*. This Buddhist canon, or *Tripiṭaka* (literally “three baskets”), consists of the Buddha’s own discourses, or *sūtras*, which became the scriptures of the tradition; the monastics’ code of discipline; and philosophical commentaries by various thinkers.

Originally, the teachings of Siddhārtha Gautama were not theistic, and the Buddha was revered as an extraordinary human being but was not considered a god or divinity. Questions regarding the purported origins or structure of the cosmos were dismissed as issues not conducive to the more urgent problem of the alleviation of human suffering. Those who sought to recapture the enlightenment experience of the Buddha did so by virtue of their own efforts, for there existed no supranormal forces or deities to assist them.

The Four Noble Truths and other teachings of the Buddha, however, accommodated varied interpretations, and they generated much philosophical speculation and contention. Beginning around the third century B.C.E., novel trends of

Buddhist thought, which might only very loosely be called “schools” of thought, developed in India. Some thinkers particularly emphasized certain aspects of the eightfold path, such as wisdom or mental discipline; other, more conservative, thinkers adhered more closely to the original teachings. Yet others proposed new cosmologies and asserted, for example, that Siddhārtha Gautama, the historical Buddha, was in fact but one particular earthly manifestation of a timeless cosmic Buddha or Buddha essence that manifested itself in innumerable universes simultaneously; hence, there is not one but many Buddhas throughout the past, present, and future. New scriptures purporting to be the words of the historical Buddha promulgated new spiritual paths and soteriological techniques, and some held that all people, even those not well versed in the eightfold path, could themselves attain Buddhahood. (Those scriptures did not, however, necessarily clearly explain what Buddhahood actually was.) Moreover, human beings could call on the assistance of various Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*, literally “enlightened beings,” to assist them in their spiritual progress. So when Buddhist teachings and scriptures entered China around the first century of the common era, they presented a very heterogeneous and unsystematized mix of ideas. Selections from some of the most important scriptures to influence the Chinese Buddhist tradition are presented here.

One of these is the *Scripture of the Pure Land* (*Sukhāvatīyūha*), which describes a sweet or happy realm that is the antithesis of the world of human suffering. Both longer and shorter versions of the sutra exist, and this is a selection from the former. The *Scripture of the Pure Land* was translated into Chinese a number of times beginning in the third century, and, at least as early as the fifth century, societies formed in China to practice its teachings; it remains extremely popular to the present day.

The scripture takes the form of an imaginary conversation between the historical Buddha and one of his disciples, Ānanda, as the Buddha explains the Pure Land of the Buddha Amitābha, the Buddha of Light, also known as the Buddha Amitāyus, the Buddha of Life. In a previous lifetime in eons past, Amitābha was once the monk Dharmākara, who made a vow before a Buddha of the past to save all beings; through the powers of concentration, Dharmākara created in his mind a perfect world. Dharmākara kept his vow and now abides in that perfect world-system as Amitābha, and in that Pure Land saves countless sentient beings. The geography of the Pure Land is scaled to provide a comfortable environment ideally suited to the attainment of enlightenment; every imaginable physical

and conceptual aid to spiritual perfection is provided by the Tathāgata, or “Thus Come One,” a honorific epithet of a Buddha. Here are the three refuges where one may find safety: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the sangha. Here also are the six perfections of a bodhisattva: the perfections of the qualities of giving, ethics, renunciation, wisdom, effort, and patience.

Buddhism espoused a notion of rebirth, which may be understood literally or figuratively. The Pure Land scripture asserted that humans unable to attain nirvana in this life may be reborn into the Pure Land in the next provided they are reverently devoted to Amitābha, accumulate a store of spiritual merit by the performance of good works, try to attain enlightenment, and make a vow to be reborn in Amitābha’s happy land. Enlightenment is assured for those who hear the name of Amitābha and resolutely devote themselves to him with even a single thought. Amitābha can be directly seen at the time of death; paintings of him sometimes were equipped with strings that the dying might grasp to facilitate ascension into the Pure Land. Pure Land Buddhism, which adopts the religious practices recommended in the sutra, is sometimes considered a devotional as opposed to a philosophical tradition, yet the scripture describes a realm where the practitioner may joyfully hear the most abstruse analytical discourses. The Pure Land may be understood literally as a place of sensual comforts or figuratively as a realm of perfect concentration like that conceived in Dharmākara’s mind.

Selection from the Scripture of the Pure Land

This world Sukhavati, Ananda, which is the world system of the Lord Amitabha, is rich and prosperous, comfortable, fertile, delightful and crowded with many Gods and men. And in this world system, Ananda, there are no hells, no animals, no ghosts, no Asuras and none of the inauspicious places of rebirth. And in this our world no jewels make their appearance like those which exist in the world system Sukhavati.

And that world system Sukhavati, Ananda, emits many fragrant odours, it is rich in a great variety of flowers and fruits, adorned with jewel trees, which are frequented by flocks of various birds with sweet voices, which the Tathagata's miraculous power has conjured up. And these jewel trees, Ananda, have various colours, many colours, many hundreds of thousands of colours. They are variously composed of the seven precious things, in varying combinations, i.e. of gold, silver, beryl, crystal, coral, red pearls, or emerald. Such jewel trees, and clusters of banana trees and rows of palm trees, all made of precious things, grow everywhere in this Buddha-field. On all sides it is surrounded with golden nets, and all round covered with lotus flowers made of all the precious things. Some of the lotus flowers are half a mile in circumference, others up to ten miles. And from each jewel lotus issue thirty-six hundred thousand kotis of rays. And at the end of each ray there issue thirty-six hundred thousand kotis of Buddhas, with golden-coloured bodies, who bear the thirty-two marks of the superman, and who, in all the ten directions, go into countless world systems, and there demonstrate Dharma.

And further, Ananda, in this Buddha-field there are nowhere any mountains—black mountains, jewel mountains, Sumerus, kings of mountains, circular mountains and great circular mountains. But the Buddha-field is everywhere even, delightful like the palm of the hand, and in all its parts the ground contains a great variety of jewels and gems.

And many kinds of rivers flow along in this

world system Sukhavati. There are great rivers there, one mile broad, and up to fifty miles broad and twelve miles deep. And all these rivers flow along calmly, their water is fragrant with manifold agreeable odours, in them there are bunches of flowers to which various jewels adhere, and they resound with various sweet sounds. And the sound which issues from these great rivers is as pleasant as that of a musical instrument, which consists of hundreds of thousands of kotis of parts, and which, skilfully played, emits a heavenly music. It is deep, commanding, distinct, clear, pleasant, and one never tires of hearing it; it always agrees with one and one likes to hear it, like the words "Impermanent, peaceful, calm, and not-self." Such is the sound that reaches the ears of those beings.

And, Ananda, both the banks of those great rivers are lined with variously scented jewel trees, and from them bunches of flowers, leaves, and branches of all kinds hang down. And if those beings wish to indulge in sports full of heavenly delights on those river-banks, then, after they have stepped into the water, the water in each case rises as high as they wish it to—up to the ankles, or the knees, or the hips, or their sides, or their ears. And heavenly delights arise. Again, if beings wish the water to be cold, for them it becomes cold; if they wish it to be hot, for them it becomes hot; if they wish it to be hot and cold, for them it becomes hot and cold, to suit their pleasure. And those rivers flow along, full of water scented with the finest odours, and covered with beautiful flowers, resounding with the sounds of many birds, easy to ford, free from mud, and with golden sand at the bottom. And all the wishes those beings may think of, they all will be fulfilled, as long as they are rightful.

And as to the pleasant sound which issues from the water (of these rivers), that reaches all the parts of this Buddha-field. And everyone hears the pleasant sound he wishes to hear, i.e. he hears of the Buddha, the Dharma, the Samgha, of the (six) perfections, the (ten) stages, the powers, the grounds of self-confidence, of

the special dharmas of a Buddha, of the analytical knowledges, of emptiness, the signless, and the wishless, of the unaffected, the unborn, of non-production, non-existence, non-cessation, of calm, quietude, and peace, of the great friendliness, the great compassion, the great sympathetic joy, the great evenmindedness, of the patient acceptance of things which fail to be produced, and of the acquisition of the stage where one is consecrated (as a Tathagata). And, hearing this, one gains the exalted zest and joyfulness, which is associated with detachment, dispassion, calm, cessation, Dharma, and brings about the state of mind which leads to the accomplishment of enlightenment. And nowhere in this world-system Sukhavati does one hear of anything unwholesome, nowhere of the hindrances, nowhere of the states of punishment, the states of woe and the bad destinies, nowhere of suffering. Even of feelings which are neither pleasant nor unpleasant one does not hear there, how much less of suffering! And that, Ananda, is the reason why this world-system is called the "Happy Land" (Sukhavati). But all this describes it only in brief, not in detail. One aeon might well reach its end while one proclaims the reasons for happiness in the world-system Sukhavati, and still one could not come to the end of (the enumeration of) the reasons for happiness.

Moreover, Ananda, all the beings who have been reborn in this world-system Sukhavati, who are reborn in it, or who will be reborn in it, they will be exactly like the Paranirmitavasavartin Gods; of the same colour, strength, vigour, height and breadth, dominion, store of merit, and keenness of superknowledges; they enjoy the same dresses, ornaments, parks, palaces, and pointed towers, the same kind of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and touchables, just the same kinds of enjoyments. And the beings in the world-system Sukhavati do not eat gross food, like soup or raw sugar; but whatever food they may wish for, that they perceive as eaten, and they become gratified in body and mind, without there being any further need to throw the food into the body. And if, after their bodies

are gratified, they wish for certain perfumes, then the whole of that Buddha-field becomes scented with just that kind of heavenly perfumes. But if someone does not wish to smell that perfume, then the perception of it does not reach him. In the same way, whatever they may wish for comes to them, be it musical instruments, banners, flags, etc.; or cloaks of different colours, or ornaments of various kinds. If they wish for a palace of a certain colour, distinguishing marks, construction, height, and width, made of various precious things, adorned with hundreds of thousands of pinnacles, while inside it various heavenly woven materials are spread out, and it is full of couches strewn with beautiful cushions—then just such a palace appears before them. In those delightful palaces, surrounded and honoured by seven times seven thousand Apsarases, they dwell, play, enjoy, and disport themselves.

And the beings who are touched by the winds, which are pervaded with various perfumes, are filled with a happiness as great as that of a monk who has achieved the cessation of suffering.

And in this Buddha-field one has no conception at all of fire, sun, moon, planets, constellations, stars, or blinding darkness, and no conception even of day and night, except (where they are mentioned) in the sayings of the Tathagata. There is nowhere a notion of monks possessing private parks for retreats.

And all the beings who have been born, who are born, who will be born in this Buddha-field, they all are fixed on the right method of salvation, until they have won Nirvana. And why? Because there is here no place for and no conception of the two other groups, i.e. of those who are not fixed at all, and those who are fixed on wrong ways. For this reason also that world-system is called the "Happy Land."

And further again, Ananda, in the ten directions, in each single direction, in Buddha-fields countless like the sands of the river Ganges, Buddhas and Lords countless like the sands of the river Ganges glorify the name of the Lord Amitabha, the Tathagata, praise him, proclaim

his fame, extol his virtue. And why? Because all beings are irreversible from the supreme enlightenment if they hear the name of the Lord Amitabha, and, on hearing it, with one single thought only raise their hearts to him with a resolve connected with serene faith.

And if any beings, Ananda, again and again reverently attend to this Tathagata, if they will plant a large and immeasurable root of good, having raised their hearts to enlightenment, and if they vow to be reborn in that world system, then, when the hour of their death approaches, that Tathagata Amitabha, the Arhat, the fully

Enlightened One, will stand before them, surrounded by hosts of monks. Then, having seen that Lord, and having died with hearts serene, they will be reborn in just that world-system Sukhavati. And if there are sons or daughters of good family, who may desire to see that Tathagata Amitabha in this very life, they should raise their hearts to the supreme enlightenment, they should direct their thought with extreme resoluteness and perseverance unto this Buddha-field and they should dedicate their store of merit to being reborn therein.

The *Lotus Sutra*

One of the most influential texts in all of Asia is the *Lotus Sutra*, a scripture that promises universal salvation for all beings and assures the assistance of benevolent Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Compiled in India between around 50 to 150 C.E., the scripture was rendered into Chinese at least six times from the third to the sixth centuries. This selection, chapter 25 of the sutra, is based on a version completed under the noted translator Kumārajīva (ca. 350–410); it describes the bodhisattva known in Sanskrit as Avalokiteśvara, the Regarder of the Cries of the World, the bodhisattva of compassion.

Descriptions of Avalokiteśvara's manifold powers reveal clearly the distinctions between Buddhism's human founder, Siddhārtha Gautama, and the suprathuman savior-divinities of later Buddhism. Couched as a dialogue between the historical Buddha and the bodhisattva Infinite Thought, this chapter describes the merciful attentiveness of Avalokiteśvara, who watches the world from all sides and in all directions. The Four Noble Truths had asserted the importance of personally applying oneself to an eightfold course toward spiritual emancipation, but here both the means and the goals of salvation are somewhat different: devotion, reverence, and homage to the bodhisattva, as well as offerings and the invocation of his name, ensure deliverance from personal danger, mental vexation, or want. Yet both the earlier and later traditions emphasize the alleviation of human suffering. The bodhisattva also acts as a teacher of the Law, or Dharma, by appearing in this world in many manifestations. These manifestations are one aspect his tactfulness, or skill in liberative techniques (*upāya*), for freeing all sentient beings from the pains of this world.

Avalokiteśvara's name was translated into Chinese as Kuan-yin, literally, the One Who Perceives Sounds. Kuan-yin became one of the most popular divinities of Chinese Buddhism and appears in many iconographic forms: originally male in India, the bodhisattva of compassion is also depicted in female form in Chi-

nese painting and sculpture. Ultimately, however, Kuan-yin is beyond all conceptions of male and female; many visual depictions of her, like those of other Buddhist divinities, are deliberately ambiguous in terms of gender. She is often considered an associate of the Buddha Amitābha, whose Pure Land lies in the west. Kuan-yin, however, was also believed to preside over her own world-system, called Potalaka (Chinese P'u-t'o), in the south. By the eleventh century, this realm was identified with the island of Mount P'u-t'o off the southern coast of China, which became a well-known pilgrimage site for devotees of Kuan-yin.

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“The All-Sidedness of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World”

At that time the Bodhisattva Infinite Thought rose up from his seat, and baring his right shoulder and folding his hands toward the Buddha, spoke thus: “World-honored One! For what reason is the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara named Regarder of the Cries of the World?”

The Buddha answered the Bodhisattva Infinite Thought: “Good son! If there be countless hundred thousand myriad kotis of living beings suffering from pain and distress who hear of this Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, and with all their mind call upon his name, the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World will instantly regard their cries, and all of them will be delivered.

“If there be any who keep the name of that Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, though they fall into a great fire, the fire will not be able to burn them, by virtue of the supernatural power of that bodhisattva’s majesty. If any, carried away by a flood, call upon his name, they will immediately reach the shallows. If there be hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of beings who in search of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, moonstones, agate, coral, amber, pearls, and other treasures go out on the ocean, and if a black gale blows their ships to drift upon the land of the rākshasa demons, and if amongst them there be even a single person who calls upon the name of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, all those people will be delivered from the throes of the rākshasas. It is for this reason that [he] is named Regarder of the Cries of the World.

“If, again, there be any man on the verge of [deadly] harm who calls upon the name of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, the sword of the attacker will instantly snap asunder and he will be set free. Even if the three-thousand-great-thousandfold world were full of yakshas and rākshasas seeking to afflict people, these wicked demons, hearing them call upon

the name of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, would not be able to see them with [their] wicked eyes, how much less to hurt them.

“If, moreover, there be anyone, guilty or not guilty, loaded with manacles, fetters, cangues, or chains, who calls on the name of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, they shall all be snapped and broken off and he shall be freed.

“If the three-thousand-great-thousandfold world were full of enemies and robbers, and there were a merchant chief who led many merchants having charge of costly jewels along a perilous road, and among them one man speaks forth: ‘Good sons! Be not afraid. With one mind do you invoke the title of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, for this bodhisattva is able to give courage to all the living. If you invoke his name, you will be freed from these enemies and robbers.’ On hearing this, if all the traders together with one voice cry, ‘Namah! Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World!’ then, by invoking his name, they will be relieved. Infinite Thought! Such is the awe-inspiring supernatural power of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World.

“If any living beings much given to carnal passion keep in mind and revere the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, they will be set free from their passion. If any much given to irascibility keep in mind and revere the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, they will be set free from their irascibility. If any much given to infatuation keep in mind and revere the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, they will be set free from their infatuation. Infinite Thought! Such are the abundant benefits conferred by the supernatural power of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World. Consequently, let all the living ever keep him in mind.

“If any woman desiring a son worships and pays homage to the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, she will bear a son happy, virtuous, and wise. If she desires a daughter, she will bear a daughter of good demeanor and

... has planted virtuous roots, delivered and respected by all. Infinite Thought! Such is the power of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World. If any of the living revere and worship the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, blessings will not be rudely rejected.

"Therefore, let all the living cherish the title of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World. Infinite Thought! Suppose anyone cherishes the names of bodhisattvas [numerous as] the sands of sixty-two kotis of the Ganges, who all his life makes them offerings of food, drink, garments, bedding, and medicaments—what is your opinion—are not the merits of that good son or good daughter abundant?" Infinite Thought replied: "Extremely abundant!" The World-honored One, the Buddha, proceeded: "But if [any]one cherishes the title of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, or only for a moment worships and reveres him, the blessings of these two men will be exactly equal without difference, and cannot be exhausted in hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of kalpas. Infinite Thought! Such is the immeasurable, boundless degree of blessedness he will obtain who cherishes the name of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World."

The Bodhisattva Infinite Thought [again] said to the Buddha: "World-honored One! How is it that the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World wanders in this sahā-world? How does he preach the Law to the living? What is the character of his tactfulness?"

The Buddha replied to the Bodhisattva Infinite Thought: "Good son! If the living in any realm must be saved in the body of a buddha, the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World appears as a buddha and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of a pratyekabuddha, he appears as a pratyekabuddha and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of a śrāvaka, he appears as a śrāvaka and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of Brahma, he appears as Brahma and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of Śakra, he appears

as Śakra and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of Īśvara, he appears as Īśvara and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of Maheśvara, he appears as Maheśvara and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of a great divine general, he appears as a great divine general and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of Vaiśravaṇa, he appears as Vaiśravaṇa and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of a minor king, he appears as a minor king and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of an elder, he appears as an elder and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of a citizen, he appears as a citizen and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of a minister of state, he appears as a minister and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of a Brahman, he appears as a Brahman and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of a bhikshu, bhikshuṇī, upāsaka, or upāsikā, he appears as a bhikshu, bhikshuṇī, upāsaka, or upāsikā and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of the wife of an elder, citizen, minister, or Brahman, he appears as a woman and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of a youth or maiden, he appears as a youth or maiden and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in the body of a god, dragon, yaksha, gandharva, asura, garuḍa, kinnara, mahoraga, human or nonhuman being, he appears in every such form and preaches to them the Law. To those who must be saved in [the shape of] a diamond-holding god, he appears as a diamond-holding god and preaches to them the Law. Infinite Thought! Such are the merits acquired by this Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World and the various forms in which he rambles through many lands to save the living. Therefore, do you with single mind pay homage to the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World. This Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva Regarder of the Cries of the World is able to make fearless

those in anxiety and distress. For this reason all in this sahā-world give him the title Bestower of Fearlessness."

The Bodhisattva Infinite Thought said to the Buddha: "World-honored One! Let me now make an offering to the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World."

Thereupon he unloosed from his neck a necklace of pearls worth a hundred thousand pieces of gold and presented it to him, making this remark: "Good sir! Accept this pious gift of a pearl necklace." But the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World would not accept it.

Again the Bodhisattva Infinite Thought addressed the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World: "Good sir! Out of compassion for us, accept this necklace." Then the Buddha said to the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World: "Out of compassion for this Bodhisattva Infinite Thought and the four groups, and for the gods, dragons, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human and non-human beings, and others, accept this necklace." Then the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, having compassion for all the four groups and the gods, dragons, human and non-human beings, and others, accepted the necklace, and dividing it into two parts, offered one part to Sakyamuni Buddha and offered the other to the stupa of the Buddha Abundant Treasures.

"Infinite Thought! With such sovereign supernatural powers does the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World wander through the sahā-world."

Then the Bodhisattva Infinite Thought made inquiry thus in verse:

The World-honored One with all the mystic signs!

Let me now again inquire of him:
For what cause is this Buddha-son named
Regarder of the Cries of the World?

The Honored One with all the mystic signs answered Infinite Thought in verse:

Listen to the deeds of the Cry Regarder,
Who well responds to every quarter;
His vast vow is deep as the sea,
Inconceivable in its eons.

Serving many thousands of kotis of buddhas,
He has vowed a great pure vow.

Let me briefly tell you.

[He who] hears his name, and sees him,
And bears him unremittingly in mind,
Will be able to end the sorrows of existence.
Though [others] with harmful intent

Throw him into a burning pit,
Let him think of the Cry Regarder's power
And the fire pit will become a pool.

Or driven along a great ocean,
In peril of dragons, fishes, and demons,
Let him think of the Cry Regarder's power
And waves cannot submerge him.

Or if, from the peak of Sumeru,
Men would hurl him down,
Let him think of the Cry Regarder's power
And like the sun he will stand firm in the
sky.

Or if, pursued by wicked men,
And cast down from Mount Diamond,
He thinks of the Cry Regarder's power,
Not a hair shall be injured.

Or if, meeting with encompassing foes,
Each with sword drawn to strike him,
He thinks of the Cry Regarder's power,
All their hearts will turn to kindness.

Or if, meeting suffering by royal [command],
His life is to end in execution,
[And] he thinks of the Cry Regarder's power,
[The executioner's] sword will break in
pieces.

Or if, imprisoned, shackled, and chained,
Arms and legs in gyves and stocks,
He thinks of the Cry Regarder's power,
Freely he shall be released.

Or if by incantation and poisons
One seeks to hurt his body,
And he thinks of the Cry Regarder's power,
All will revert to their originator.

Or if, meeting evil rākshasas,
Venomous dragons, and demons,
He thinks of the Cry Regarder's power,
At once none will dare to hurt him.

If, encompassed by evil beasts,
Tusks sharp and claws fearful,
He thinks of the Cry Regarder's power,
They will flee in every direction.

If, scorched by the fire-flame
Of the poisonous breath
Of boas, vipers, and scorpions,
He thinks of the Cry Regarder's power,
Instantly at his voice they will retreat.

Clouds thunder and lightning flashes,
 Hail falls and rain streams:
 He thinks of the Cry Regarder's power
 And all instantly are scattered.
 The living, crushed and harassed,
 Oppressed by countless pains:
 The Cry Regarder with his mystic wisdom
 Can save [such] a suffering world.
 Perfect in supernatural powers,
 Widely practiced in wisdom and tact,
 In the lands of the universe there is no place
 Where he does not manifest himself.
 All the evil states of existence,
 Hells, ghosts, and animals,
 Sorrows of birth, age, disease, death,
 All by degrees are ended by him.
 True regard, serene regard,
 Far-reaching wise regard,
 Regard of pity, compassionate regard,
 Ever longed for, ever looked for!
 Pure and serene in radiance,
 Wisdom's sun destroying darkness,
 Subduer of woes of storm and fire,
 Who illumines all the world!
 Law of pity, thunder quivering,
 Compassion wondrous as a great cloud,
 Pouring spiritual rain like nectar,
 Quenching the flames of distress!
 In disputes before a magistrate,
 Or in fear in battle's array,

If he thinks of the Cry Regarder's power
 All his enemies will be routed.
 His is the wondrous voice, voice of the
 world-regarder,
 Brahma-voice, voice of the rolling tide,
 Voice all world-surpassing,
 Therefore ever to be kept in mind,
 With never a doubting thought.
 Regarder of the World's Cries, pure and
 holy,
 In pain, distress, death, calamity,
 Able to be a sure reliance,
 Perfect in all merit,
 With compassionate eyes beholding all,
 Boundless ocean of blessings!
 Prostrate let us revere him.

Thereupon the Bodhisattva Stage Holder rose from his seat, and went before and said to the Buddha: "World-honored One! If any living being hears of the sovereign work and the all-sided transcendent powers [shown in] this chapter of the Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World, it should be known that the merits of this man are not a few."

While the Buddha preached this chapter of the All-sided One, the eighty-four thousand living beings in the assembly all set their minds upon Perfect Enlightenment, with which nothing can compare.

The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti

One Buddhist scripture that elaborates upon the “wisdom” aspect of the eight-fold path is *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, a philosophical satire of conventional conceptions of reality that invites the reader to enter a limitless perfect wisdom where ordinary boundaries of space and time collapse. This is the wisdom of inconceivable liberation, a domain where one transcends the apparent dualities of materiality and immateriality and abides in infinity without, however, leaving the finite world behind. In this realm lives the layman Vimalakīrti, who compassionately invites visitors into his “house,” the abode of the infinite, and guides them toward inconceivable liberation by means of vision, metaphor, and paradox.

In “Inconceivable Liberation,” one chapter from *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, the monk Śāriputra becomes Vimalakīrti’s guest. The historical Śāriputra was a direct disciple of Siddhārtha Gautama, and here he is depicted as a disciple of the Buddha who has grasped the outer formulations of the Buddha’s teachings but has not comprehended inner transcendent wisdom. He and the other “disciples” are in a sense allegories of the old dispensation of Buddhism taught by Siddhārtha Gautama; Vimalakīrti and the bodhisattvas represent a new interpretation of the old wisdom. Buddhist life for Śāriputra consists of joining the *sangha*, or Buddhist community, and following the Four Noble Truths; to Vimalakīrti, the Four Noble Truths, if understood in only a limited way, are just verbiage. Śāriputra arrives at Vimalakīrti’s house seeking a chair (limited understanding) instead of the Dharma (limitless understanding), and Vimalakīrti critiques the monk for objectifying what is beyond conceptualization and for mistaking the Dharma for a chair.

To expand Śāriputra’s inner vision and visually demonstrate the limitless possibilities of the Dharma, Vimalakīrti then collaborates with Mañjuśrī, the archetypal embodiment of wisdom, to conjure from another universe a hierophany of

chairs, lion thrones of unimaginable numbers and proportions. Vimalakīrti's house magically accommodates them all, for the world is essentially *śūnyatā*, that is, limitless in all directions. While the bodhisattvas are able to sit upon the thrones by virtue of their greater mental flexibility, the disciples, their vision constricted by an unquestioning acceptance of conventional boundaries of space and time, are unable to seat themselves save by the grace of a Tathāgata ("One of Suchness," a Buddha). Vimalakīrti then tries to suggest to Śāriputra a new perspective on the world that accommodates the infinity of the large and the infinity of the small simultaneously. One who has access to that perfectly enlightened perspective, intimated by the term "inconceivable liberation," is able to envision all the stars and planets in the space of a single pore of skin and maintain limitless universes in the mind's eye.

Śāriputra's worldview, however, is still confined to a superficial comprehension of surface appearances when in the chapter "The Goddess" he encounters a female divinity who lives in Vimalakīrti's house. Śāriputra accepts the commonly held belief that women are inferior to men and must first be reborn as males before they can attain spiritual enlightenment, and he asks the goddess why, if she has supernatural powers, she does not transform herself into a man. She replies by switching genders with him, thus drastically disabusing him of any adherence to mundane dualities of male and female, let alone of inferiority and superiority. Yet lest the dissolution of mundane perspectives itself become a limitation, the goddess quizzically concludes that there is perfect enlightenment because there is no perfect enlightenment. Thus toying with gender and language, the goddess instructs Śāriputra in the unknowable possibilities of unlimited understanding.

Little is known of the origins of the *Vimalakīrti* scripture, but it may have appeared in India around the first century B.C.E. or the first century of the common era. Whatever its language of origin, it was translated into Chinese a number of times from the third to the seventh centuries C.E. under such translators as Kumārajīva (floruit ca. 385–409) and Hsüan-tsang (600–664). The scripture strongly influenced the development of Chinese Buddhist philosophy and is frequently depicted in Chinese art and sculpture. The following selections have been translated from a Tibetan text in consultation with Kumārajīva's and Hsüan-tsang's works.

“Inconceivable Liberation”

Thereupon, the venerable Śāriputra had this thought: “There is not even a single chair in this house. Where are these disciples and bodhisattvas going to sit?”

The Licchavi Vimalakīrti read the thought of the venerable Śāriputra and said, “Reverend Śāriputra, did you come here for the sake of the Dharma? Or did you come here for the sake of a chair?”

Śāriputra replied, “I came for the sake of the Dharma, not for the sake of a chair.”

Vimalakīrti continued, “Reverend Śāriputra, he who is interested in the Dharma is not interested even in his own body, much less in a chair. Reverend Śāriputra, he who is interested in the Dharma has no interest in matter, sensation, intellect, motivation, or consciousness. He has no interest in these aggregates, or in the elements, or in the sense-media. Interested in the Dharma, he has no interest in the realm of desire, the realm of matter, or the immaterial realm. Interested in the Dharma, he is not interested in attachment to the Buddha, attachment to the Dharma, or attachment to the Saṅgha. Reverend Śāriputra, he who is interested in the Dharma is not interested in recognizing suffering, abandoning its origination, realizing its cessation, or practicing the path. Why? The Dharma is ultimately without formulation and without verbalization. Who verbalizes: ‘Suffering should be recognized, origination should be eliminated, cessation should be realized, the path should be practiced,’ is not interested in the Dharma but is interested in verbalization.

“Reverend Śāriputra, the Dharma is calm and peaceful. Those who are engaged in production and destruction are not interested in the Dharma, are not interested in solitude, but are interested in production and destruction.

“Furthermore, reverend Śāriputra, the Dharma is without taint and free of defilement. He who is attached to anything, even to liberation, is not interested in the Dharma but is interested in the taint of desire. The Dharma is not an object. He who pursues objects is not

interested in the Dharma but is interested in objects. The Dharma is without acceptance or rejection. He who holds on to things or lets go of things is not interested in the Dharma but is interested in holding and letting go. The Dharma is not a secure refuge. He who enjoys a secure refuge is not interested in the Dharma but is interested in a secure refuge. The Dharma is without sign. He whose consciousness pursues signs is not interested in the Dharma but is interested in signs. The Dharma is not a society. He who seeks to associate with the Dharma is not interested in the Dharma but is interested in association. The Dharma is not a sight, a sound, a category, or an idea. He who is involved in sights, sounds, categories, and ideas is not interested in the Dharma but is interested in sights, sounds, categories, and ideas. Reverend Śāriputra, the Dharma is free of compounded things and uncompounded things. He who adheres to compounded things and uncompounded things is not interested in the Dharma but is interested in adhering to compounded things and uncompounded things.

“Thereupon, reverend Śāriputra, if you are interested in the Dharma, you should take no interest in anything.”

When Vimalakīrti had spoken this discourse, five hundred gods obtained the purity of the Dharma-eye in viewing all things.

Then, the Licchavi Vimalakīrti said to the crown prince, Mañjuśrī, “Mañjuśrī, you have already been in innumerable hundreds of thousands of buddha-fields throughout the universes of the ten directions. In which buddha-field did you see the best lion-thrones with the finest qualities?”

Mañjuśrī replied, “Noble sir, if one crosses the buddha-fields to the east, which are more numerous than all the grains of sand of thirty-two Ganges rivers, one will discover a universe called Merudhvaja. There dwells a Tathāgata called Merupradiparāja. His body measures eighty-four hundred thousand leagues in height, and the height of his throne is sixty-eight hundred thousand leagues. The bodhisattvas there are forty-two hundred thousand leagues tall and

their own thrones are thirty-four hundred thousand leagues high. Noble sir, the finest and most superb thrones exist in that universe Merudhvaja, which is the buddha-field of the Tathāgata Merupradīparāja."

At that moment, the Licchavi Vimalakīrti, having focused himself in concentration, performed a miraculous feat such that the Lord Tathāgata Merupradīparāja, in the universe Merudhvaja, sent to this universe thirty-two hundred thousand thrones. These thrones were so tall, spacious, and beautiful that the bodhisattvas, great disciples, Śakras, Brahmās, Lokapālas, and other gods had never before seen the like. The thrones descended from the sky and came to rest in the house of the Licchavi Vimalakīrti. The thirty-two hundred thousand thrones arranged themselves without crowding and the house seemed to enlarge itself accordingly. The great city of Vaiśālī did not become obscured; neither did the land of Jambudvīpa, nor the world of four continents. Everything else appeared just as it was before.

Then, the Licchavi Vimalakīrti said to the young prince Mañjuśrī, "Mañjuśrī, let the bodhisattvas be seated on these thrones, having transformed their bodies to a suitable size!"

Then, those bodhisattvas who had attained the superknowledges transformed their bodies to a height of forty-two hundred thousand leagues and sat upon the thrones. But the beginner bodhisattvas were not able to transform themselves to sit upon the thrones. Then, the Licchavi Vimalakīrti taught these beginner bodhisattvas a teaching that enabled them to attain the five superknowledges, and, having attained them, they transformed their bodies to a height of forty-two hundred thousand leagues and sat upon the thrones. But still the great disciples were not able to seat themselves upon the thrones.

The Licchavi Vimalakīrti said to the venerable Śāriputra, "Reverend Śāriputra, take your seat upon a throne."

He replied, "Good sir, the thrones are too big and too high, and I cannot sit upon them."

Vimalakīrti said, "Reverend Śāriputra, bow

down to the Tathāgata Merupradīparāja, and you will be able to take your seat."

Then, the great disciples bowed down to the Tathāgata Merupradīparāja and they were seated upon the thrones.

Then, the venerable Śāriputra said to the Licchavi Vimalakīrti, "Noble sir, it is astonishing that these thousands of thrones, so big and so high, should fit into such a small house and that the great city of Vaiśālī, the villages, cities, kingdoms, capitals of Jambudvīpa, the other three continents, the abodes of the gods, the nāgas, the yakṣas, the gandharvas, the asuras, the garuḍas, the kiṁnaras, and the mahoragas—that all of these should appear without any obstacle, just as they were before!"

The Licchavi Vimalakīrti replied, "Reverend Śāriputra, for the Tathāgatas and the bodhisattvas, there is a liberation called 'Inconceivable.' The bodhisattva who lives in the inconceivable liberation can put the king of mountains, Sumeru, which is so high, so great, so noble, and so vast, into a mustard seed. He can perform this feat without enlarging the mustard seed and without shrinking Mount Sumeru. And the deities of the assembly of the four Mahārājas and of the Trayastriṁśā heavens do not even know where they are. Only those beings who are destined to be disciplined by miracles see and understand the putting of the king of mountains, Sumeru, into the mustard seed. That, reverend Śāriputra, is an entrance to the domain of the inconceivable liberation of the bodhisattvas.

"Furthermore, reverend Śāriputra, the bodhisattva who lives in the inconceivable liberation can pour into a single pore of his skin all the waters of the four great oceans, without injuring the water-animals such as fish, tortoises, crocodiles, frogs, and other creatures, and without the nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, and asuras even being aware of where they are. And the whole operation is visible without any injury or disturbance to any of those living beings.

"Such a bodhisattva can pick up with his right hand this billion-world-galactic universe as if it were a potter's wheel and, spinning it round,

throw it beyond universes as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, without the living beings therein knowing their motion or its origin, and he can catch it and put it back in its place, without the living beings suspecting their coming and going; and yet the whole operation is visible.

“Furthermore, reverend Śāriputra, there are beings who become disciplined after an immense period of evolution, and there are also those who are disciplined after a short period of evolution. The bodhisattva who lives in the inconceivable liberation, for the sake of disciplining those living beings who are disciplined through immeasurable periods of evolution, can make the passing of a week seem like the passing of an aeon, and he can make the passing of an aeon seem like the passing of a week for those who are disciplined through a short period of evolution. The living beings who are disciplined through an immeasurable period of evolution actually perceive a week to be the passing of an aeon, and those disciplined by a short period of evolution actually perceive an aeon to be the passing of a week.

“Thus, a bodhisattva who lives in the inconceivable liberation can manifest all the splendors of the virtues of all the buddha-fields within a single buddha-field. Likewise, he can place all living beings in the palm of his right hand and can show them with the supernatural speed of thought all the buddha-fields without ever leaving his own buddha-field. He can display in a single pore all the offerings ever offered to all the Buddhas of the ten directions, and the orbs of all the suns, moons, and stars of the ten directions. He can inhale all the hurricanes of the cosmic wind-atmospheres of the ten directions into his mouth without harming his own body and without letting the forests and the grasses of the buddha-fields be flattened. He can take all the masses of fire of all the supernovas that ultimately consume all the universes of all the buddha-fields into his stomach without interfering with their functions. Having crossed buddha-fields as numerous as the sands of the

Ganges downward, and having taken up a buddha-field, he can rise up through buddha-fields as numerous as the sands of the Ganges and place it on high, just as a strong man may pick up a jujube leaf on the point of a needle.

“Thus, a bodhisattva who lives in the inconceivable liberation can magically transform any kind of living being into a universal monarch, a Lokapāla, a Śakra, a Brahmā, a disciple, a solitary sage, a bodhisattva, and even into a Buddha. The bodhisattva can transform miraculously all the cries and noises, superior, mediocre, and inferior, of all living beings of the ten directions, into the voice of the Buddha, with the words of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, having them proclaim, ‘Impermanent! Miserable! Empty! Selfless!’ And he can cause them to recite the words and sounds of all the teachings taught by all the Buddhas of the ten directions.

“Reverend Śāriputra, I have shown you only a small part of the entrance into the domain of the bodhisattva who lives in the inconceivable liberation. Reverend Śāriputra, to explain to you the teaching of the full entrance into the domain of the bodhisattva who lives in the inconceivable liberation would require more than an aeon, and even more than that.”

Then, the patriarch Mahākāśyapa, having heard this teaching of the inconceivable liberation of the bodhisattvas, was amazed, and he said to the venerable Śāriputra, “Venerable Śāriputra, if one were to show a variety of things to a person blind from birth, he would not be able to see a single thing. Likewise, venerable Śāriputra, when this door of the inconceivable liberation is taught, all the disciples and solitary sages are sightless, like the man blind from birth, and cannot comprehend even a single cause of the inconceivable liberation. Who is there among the wise who, hearing about this inconceivable liberation, does not conceive the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment? As for us, whose faculties are deteriorated, like a burned and rotten seed, what else can we do if we do not become receptive to this great vehicle? We, all the disciples and solitary sages, upon

hearing this teaching of the Dharma, should utter a cry of regret that would shake this billion-world-galactic universe! And as for the bodhisattvas, when they hear this inconceivable liberation they should be as joyful as a young crown prince when he takes the diadem and is anointed, and they should increase to the utmost their devotion to this inconceivable liberation. Indeed, what could the entire host of Māras ever do to one who is devoted to this inconceivable liberation?"

When the patriarch Mahākāśyapa had uttered this discourse, thirty-two thousand gods conceived the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.

Then, the Licchavi Vimalakīrti said to the patriarch Mahākāśyapa, "Reverend Mahākāśyapa, the Māras who play the devil in the innumerable universes of the ten directions are all bodhisattvas dwelling in the inconceivable liberation, who are playing the devil in order to develop living beings through their skill in liberative technique. Reverend Mahākāśyapa, all the miserable beggars who come to the bodhisattvas of the innumerable universes of the ten directions to ask for a hand, a foot, an ear, a nose, some blood, muscles, bones, marrow, an eye, a torso, a head, a limb, a member, a throne, a kingdom, a country, a wife, a son, a daughter, a slave, a slave-girl, a horse, an elephant, a chariot, a cart, gold, silver, jewels, pearls, conches, crystal, coral, beryl, treasures, food, drink, elixirs, and clothes—these demanding beggars are usually bodhisattvas living in the inconceivable liberation who, through their skill in liberative technique, wish to test and thus demonstrate the firmness of the high resolve of the bodhisattvas. Why? Reverend Mahākāśyapa, the bodhisattvas demonstrate that firmness by means of terrible austerities. Ordinary persons have no power to be thus demanding of bodhisattvas, unless they are granted the opportunity. They are not capable of killing and depriving in that manner without being freely given the chance."

"Reverend Mahākāśyapa, just as a glowworm cannot eclipse the light of the sun, so, reverend

Mahākāśyapa, it is not possible without special allowance that an ordinary person can thus attack and deprive a bodhisattva. Reverend Mahākāśyapa, just as a donkey could not muster an attack on a wild elephant, even so, reverend Mahākāśyapa, one who is not himself a bodhisattva cannot harass a bodhisattva. Only one who is himself a bodhisattva can harass another bodhisattva, and only a bodhisattva can tolerate the harassment of another bodhisattva. Reverend Mahākāśyapa, such is the introduction to the power of the knowledge of liberative technique of the bodhisattvas who live in the inconceivable liberation."

"The Goddess"

Śāriputra: Goddess, what prevents you from transforming yourself out of your female state?

Goddess: Although I have sought my "female state" for these twelve years, I have not yet found it. Reverend Śāriputra, if a magician were to incarnate a woman by magic, would you ask her, "What prevents you from transforming yourself out of your female state?"

Śāriputra: No! Such a woman would not really exist, so what would there be to transform?

Goddess: Just so, reverend Śāriputra, all things do not really exist. Now, would you think, "What prevents one whose nature is that of a magical incarnation from transforming herself out of her female state?"

Thereupon, the goddess employed her magical power to cause the elder Śāriputra to appear in her form and to cause herself to appear in his form. Then the goddess, transformed into Śāriputra, said to Śāriputra, transformed into a goddess, "Reverend Śāriputra, what prevents you from transforming yourself out of your female state?"

And Śāriputra, transformed into the goddess, replied, "I no longer appear in the form of a male! My body has changed into the body of a woman! I do not know what to transform!"

The goddess continued, "If the elder could again change out of the female state, then all

women could also change out of their female states. All women appear in the form of women in just the same way as the elder appears in the form of a woman. While they are not women in reality, they appear in the form of women. With this in mind, the Buddha said, ‘In all things, there is neither male nor female.’”

Then, the goddess released her magical power and each returned to his ordinary form. She then said to him, “Reverend Śāriputra, what have you done with your female form?”

Śāriputra: I neither made it nor did I change it.

Goddess: Just so, all things are neither made nor changed, and that they are not made and not changed, that is the teaching of the Buddha.

Śāriputra: Goddess, where will you be born when you transmigrate after death?

Goddess: I will be born where all the magical incarnations of the Tathāgata are born.

Śāriputra: But the emanated incarnations of the Tathāgata do not transmigrate nor are they born.

Goddess: All things and living beings are just the same; they do not transmigrate nor are they born!

Śāriputra: Goddess, how soon will you attain the perfect enlightenment of Buddhahood?

Goddess: At such time as you, elder, become endowed once more with the qualities of an ordinary individual, then will I attain the perfect enlightenment of Buddhahood.

Śāriputra: Goddess, it is impossible that I should become endowed once more with the qualities of an ordinary individual.

Goddess: Just so, reverend Śāriputra, it is impossible that I should attain the perfect enlightenment of Buddhahood! Why? Because perfect enlightenment stands upon the impossible. Because it is impossible, no one attains the perfect enlightenment of Buddhahood.

Śāriputra: But the Tathāgata has declared: “The Tathāgatas, who are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, have attained perfect Buddhahood, are attaining perfect Buddhahood, and will go on attaining perfect Buddhahood.”

Goddess: Reverend Śāriputra, the expression, “the Buddhas of the past, present and future,” is a conventional expression made up of a certain number of syllables. The Buddhas are neither past, nor present, nor future. Their enlightenment transcends the three times! But tell me, elder, have you attained sainthood?

Śāriputra: It is attained, because there is no attainment.

Goddess: Just so, there is perfect enlightenment because there is no attainment of perfect enlightenment.

Then the Licchavi Vimalakīrti said to the venerable elder Śāriputra, “Reverend Śāriputra, this goddess has already served ninety-two million billion Buddhas. She plays with the superknowledges. She has truly succeeded in all her vows. She has gained the tolerance of the birthlessness of things. She has actually attained irreversibility. She can live wherever she wishes on the strength of her vow to develop living beings.”