

"Sutra on the Contemplation of Buddha Amitayus"

NOTE: The famous "Sutra on the Contemplation of Buddha Amitayus" ("Contemplation Sutra") is revered as canonical by all Pure Land Buddhists. In the "Contemplation Sutra," the Nembutsu (Namu Amida Butsu) is specifically proclaimed as the avenue to liberation of suffering beings from samsara. This English translation by J. Takakusu published originally as vol. XLIX of "The Sacred Books of the East" series (Oxford, 1894, public domain) has been edited for ease of reading and comprehension by modern readers.

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 warder of the gate whether his father was yet alive. On this, the warder 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 deprived 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 Chilocosm 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 propounds 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 Chilocosms; 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 is, 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 asamkhya 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 Dharanis -- 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.