VIMALAKIRTI NIRDESA SUTRA

Translated by Robert A. F. Thurman

1. Purification of the Buddha-Field

Reverence to all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Aryasravakas, and Pratyekabuddhas, in the past, the present, and the future.

Thus have I heard:

At one time the Lord Buddha was in residence in the garden of Amrapali, in the city of Vaisali, attended by a great gathering. Of Bhikkhus there were eight thousand, all saints. They were free from impurities and afflictions, and all had attained self-mastery. Their minds were entirely liberated by perfect knowledge. They were calm and dignified, like royal elephants. They had accomplished their work, done what they had to do, cast off their burdens, attained their goals, and totally destroyed the bonds of existence. They all had attained the utmost perfection of every form of mind control.

Of bodhisattvas there were thirty-two thousand, great spiritual heroes who were universally acclaimed. They were dedicated through the penetrating activity of their great super-knowledge's and were sustained by the grace of the Buddha. Guardians of the city of Dharma, they upheld the true doctrine, and their great teachings resounded like the lion's roar throughout the ten directions.

Without having to be asked, they were the natural spiritual benefactors of all living beings. They maintained unbroken the succession of the Three Jewels, conquering devils and foes and overwhelming all critics.

Their mindfulness, intelligence, realization, meditation, incantation, and eloquence all were perfected. They had attained the intuitive tolerance of the ultimate incomprehensibility of all things. They turned the irreversible wheel of the Dharma. They were stamped with the insignia of sign-less-ness. They were expert in knowing the spiritual faculties of all living beings. They were brave with the confidence that overawes all assemblies. They had gathered

the great stores of merit and of wisdom, and their bodies, beautiful without ornaments, were adorned with all the auspicious signs and marks.

They were exalted in fame and glory, like the lofty summit of Mount Sumeru. Their high resolve as hard as diamond, unbreakable in their faith in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, they showered forth the rain of ambrosia that is released by the light rays of the jewel of the Dharma, which shines everywhere.

Their voices were perfect in diction and resonance, and versatile in speaking all languages. They had penetrated the profound principle of relativity and had destroyed the persistence of the instinctual mental habits underlying all convictions concerning finitude and infinitude. They spoke fearlessly, like lions, sounding the thunder of the magnificent teaching. Unequaled, they surpassed all measure. They were the best captains for the voyage of discovery of the treasures of the Dharma, the stores of merit and wisdom. They were expert in the way of the Dharma, which is straight, peaceful, subtle, gentle, hard to see, and difficult to realize.

They were endowed with the wisdom that is able to understand the thoughts of living beings, as well as their comings and goings. They had been consecrated with the anointment of the peerless gnosis (intuitive knowledge) of the Buddha. With their high resolve, they approached the ten powers, the four fearlessnesses, and the eighteen special qualities of the Buddha.

They had crossed the terrifying abyss of the bad migrations, and yet they assumed reincarnation voluntarily in all migrations for the sake of disciplining living beings. Great Kings of medicine, understanding all the sicknesses of passions, they could apply the medicine of the Dharma appropriately. They were inexhaustible mines of limitless virtues, and they glorified innumerable Buddha-fields with the splendor of these virtues. They conferred great benefit when seen, heard, or even approached. Were one to extol them for innumerable hundreds of thousands of myriads of aeons, one still could not exhaust their mighty flood of virtues.

These bodhisattvas were named: Samadarsana, Asamadarsana, Samadhivikurvitaraja, harmesvara, Dharmaketu, Prabhaketu, Prabhavyuha, Ratnavyuha, Mahavyuha, Pratibhanakuta, Ratnakuta, Ratnapani, Ratnamudrahasta, Nityapralambahasta, Nityotksipthasta, Nityatapta, Nityamuditendriya, Pramodyaraja, Devaraja, Pranidhanapravesaprapta, Prasiddhapratisamvitprapta, Gaganaganja, Ratnolkaparigrhita, Ratnasura, Ratnapriya, Ratnasri, Indrajala, Jaliniprabha, Niralambanadhyana, Prajnakuta,

Ratnadatta, Marapramardaka, Vidyuddeva, Vikurvanaraja, Kutanimittasamatikranta, Simhanadanadin, Giryagrapramardiraja, Gandhahastin, Gandhakunjaranaga, Nityodyukta, Aniksiptadhura, Pramati, Sujata, Padmasrigarbha, Padmavyuha, Avalokitesvara, Mahasthamaprapta, Brahmajala, Ratnadandin, Marakarmavijeta, Ksetrasamalamkara, Maniratnacchattra, Suvarnacuda, Manicuda, Maitreya, Manjusrikumarabhuta, and so forth, with the remainder of the thirty-two thousand.

There were also gathered there ten thousand Brahmas, at their head Brahma Sikhin, who had come from the Ashoka universe with its four sectors to see, venerate, and serve the Buddha and to hear the Dharma from his own mouth. There were twelve thousand Sakras, from various four-sector universes. And there were other powerful gods: Brahmas, Sakras, Lokapalas, devas, nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, and mahoragas. Finally, there was the fourfold community, consisting of Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunis, laymen, and laywomen.

The Lord Buddha, thus surrounded and venerated by these multitudes of many hundreds of thousands of living beings, sat upon a majestic lion-throne and began to teach the Dharma. Dominating all the multitudes, just as Sumeru, the king of mountains, looms high over the oceans, the Lord Buddha shone, radiated, and glittered as he sat upon his magnificent lion-throne.

Thereupon, the Licchavi bodhisattva Ratnakara, with five hundred Licchavi youths, each holding a precious parasol made of seven different kinds of jewels, came forth from the city of Vaisali and presented himself at the grove of Amrapali. Each approached the Buddha, bowed at his feet, circumambulated him clockwise seven times, laid down his precious parasol in offering, and withdrew to one side.

As soon as all these precious parasols had been laid down, suddenly, by the miraculous power of the Lord, they were transformed into a single precious canopy so great that it formed a covering for this entire billion-world galaxy. The surface of the entire billion-world galaxy was reflected in the interior of the great precious canopy, where the total content of this galaxy could be seen: limitless mansions of suns, moons, and stellar bodies; the realms of the devas, nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, and mahoragas, as well as the realms of the four Maharajas; the king of mountains, Mound Sumeru; Mount Himadri, Mount Mucilinda, Mount Mahamucilinda, Mount Gandhamadana, Mount Ratnaparvata, Mount Kalaparvata, Mount Cakravada, Mount Mahacakravada; all the great oceans, rivers, bays torrents, streams, brooks, and springs; finally, all the villages, suburbs, cities, capitals, provinces, and wildernesses. All this could be clearly seen by everyone. And the voices of all

the Buddhas of the ten directions could be heard proclaiming their teachings of the Dharma in all the worlds, the sounds reverberating in the space beneath the great precious canopy.

At this vision of the magnificent miracle affected by the supernatural power of the Lord Buddha, the entire host was ecstatic, enraptured, astonished, delighted, satisfied, and filled with awe and pleasure. They all bowed down to the Tathágata, withdrew to one side with palms pressed together, and gazed upon him with fixed attention. The young Licchavi Ratnakara knelt with his right knee on the ground raised his hands; palms pressed together in salute of the Buddha, and praised him with the following hymn:

Pure are your eyes, broad and beautiful, like the petals of a blue lotus.

Pure is your thought, having discovered the supreme transcendence of all trances.

Immeasurable is the ocean of your virtues, the accumulation of your good deeds.

You affirm the path of peace.

Oh, Great Ascetic, obeisance to you!

Leader, bull of men, we behold the revelation of your miracle.

The superb and radiant fields of the Sugatas appear before us,

And your extensive spiritual teachings, that lead to immortality

Make themselves heard throughout the whole reach of space.

Dharma-King, you rule with the Dharma your supreme Dharma-kingdom,

And thereby bestow the treasures of the Dharma upon all living beings.

Expert in the deep analysis of things, you teach their ultimate meaning.

Sovereign Lord of Dharma, obeisance to you.

All these things arise dependently, from causes,

Yet they are neither existent nor nonexistent.

Therein is neither ego, nor experiencer, nor doer,

Yet no action, good or evil, loses its effects.

Such is your teaching.

O Shakyamuni, conquering the powerful host of Mara,

You found peace, immortality, and the happiness of that supreme enlightenment,

Which is not realized by any among the heterodox,

Though they arrest their feeling, thought and mental processes.

O Wonderful King of Dharma,

You turned the wheel of Dharma before men and gods,

With its threefold revolution, its manifold aspects,

Its purity of nature, and its extreme peace;

And thereby the Three Jewels were revealed.

Those who are well disciplined by your precious Dharma

Are free of vain imaginings and always deeply peaceful.

Supreme doctor, you put an end to birth, decay, sickness, and death.

Immeasurable Ocean of virtue, obeisance to you!

Like Mount Sumeru, you are unmoved by honor or scorn.

You love moral beings and immoral beings equally.

Poised in equanimity, your mind is like the sky.

Who would not honor such a precious jewel of a being?

Great Sage, in all these multitudes gathered here,

Who look upon your countenance with hearts sincere in faith,

Each being beholds the Victor, as if just before him.

This is a special quality of the Buddha.

Although the Lord speaks with but one voice,

Those present perceive that same voice differently,

And each understands in his own language according to his own needs.

This is a special quality of the Buddha.

From the Leader's act of speaking in a single voice,

Some merely develop an instinct for the teaching, some gain realization,

Some find pacification of all their doubts.

This is a special quality of the Buddha.

Obeisance to you who command the force of leadership and the ten powers!

Obeisance to you who are dauntless, knowing no fear!

Obeisance to you, leader of all living beings,

Who fully manifests the special qualities!

Obeisance to you who have cut the bondage of all fetters!

Obeisance to you who, having gone beyond, stand on firm ground!

Obeisance to you who save the suffering beings!

Obeisance to you who do not remain in the migrations!

You associate with living beings by frequenting their migrations.

Yet your mind is liberated from all migrations.

Just as the lotus, born of mud, is not tainted thereby,

So the lotus of the Buddha preserves the realization of void-ness.

You nullify all signs in all things everywhere.

You are not subject to any wish for anything at all.

The miraculous power of the Buddhas is inconceivable.

I bow to you, who stand nowhere, like infinite space.

Then, the young Licchavi Ratnakara, having celebrated the Buddha with these verses, further addressed him:

"Lord, these five hundred young Licchavis are truly on their way to unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, and they have asked what is the bodhisattvas' purification of the Buddha-field. Please, Lord, explain to them the bodhisattvas' purification of the Buddha-field!"

Upon this request, the Buddha gave his approval to the young Licchavi Ratnakara: "Good, good, young man!

Your question to the Tathágata about the purification of the Buddha-field is indeed good. Therefore, young man, listen well and remember! I will explain to you the purification of the Buddha-field of the bodhisattvas."

"Very good, Lord," replied Ratnakara and the five hundred young Licchavis, and they set themselves to listen.

The Buddha said, "Noble sons, a Buddha-field of bodhisattvas is a field of living beings. Why so? A bodhisattva embraces a Buddha-field to the same extent that he causes the development of living beings. He embraces a Buddha-field to the same extent that living beings become disciplined. He embraces a Buddha-field to the same extent that, through entrance into a Buddha-field, living beings are introduced to the Buddha-gnosis. He embraces a Buddha-field to the same extent that, through entrance into that Buddha-field, living beings increase their holy spiritual faculties. Why so? Noble son, a Buddha-field of bodhisattvas springs from the aims of living beings.

"For example, Ratnakara, should one wish to build in empty space, one might go ahead in spite of the fact that it is not possible to build or to adorn anything in empty space. In just the same way, should a bodhisattva, who knows full well that all things are like empty space, wish to build a Buddha-field in order to develop living beings, he might go ahead, in spite of the fact that it is not possible to build or to adorn a Buddha-field in empty space.

"Yet, Ratnakara, a bodhisattva's Buddha-field is a field of positive thought. When he attains enlightenment, living beings free of hypocrisy and deceit will be born in his Buddha-field.

"Noble son, a bodhisattva's Buddha-field is a field of high resolve. When he attains enlightenment, living beings that have harvested the two stores and have planted the roots of virtue will be born in his Buddha-field.

"A bodhisattva's Buddha-field is a field of virtuous application. When he attains enlightenment living beings that live by all virtuous principles will be born in his Buddha-field.

"A bodhisattva's Buddha-field is the magnificence of the conception of the spirit of enlightenment. When he attains enlightenment, living beings that are actually participating in the Mahayana will be born in his Buddha-field.

"A bodhisattva's Buddha-field is a field of generosity. When he attains enlightenment, living beings that give away all their possessions will be born in his Buddha-field.

"A bodhisattva's Buddha-field is a field of tolerance. When he attains enlightenment, living beings with the transcendences of tolerance, discipline, and the superior trance - hence beautiful with the thirty-two auspicious signs - will be born in his Buddha-field.

"A bodhisattva's Buddha-field is a field of meditation. When he attains enlightenment, living beings that are evenly balanced through mindfulness and awareness will be born in his Buddha-field.

"A bodhisattva's Buddha-field is a field of wisdom. When he attains enlightenment, living beings that are destined for the ultimate will be born in his Buddha-field.

"A bodhisattva's Buddha-field consists of the four immeasurables. When he attains enlightenment, living beings that live by love, compassion, joy, and impartiality will be born in his Buddha-field.

"A bodhisattva's Buddha-field consists of the four means of unification. When he attains enlightenment, living beings that are held together by all the liberations will be born in his Buddha-field.

"A bodhisattva's Buddha-field is skill in liberative technique.

When he attains enlightenment, living beings skilled in all liberative techniques and activities will be born in his Buddha-field.

"A bodhisattva's Buddha-field consists of the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment. Living beings who devote their efforts to the four foci of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four bases of magical power, the five spiritual faculties, the five strengths, the seven factors of enlightenment, and the eight branches of the holy path will be born in his Buddha-field.

"A bodhisattva's Buddha-field is his mind of total dedication. When he attains enlightenment, the ornaments of all virtues will appear in his Buddha-field.

"A bodhisattva's Buddha-field is the doctrine that eradicates the eight adversities. When he attains enlightenment, the three bad migrations will cease, and there will be no such thing as the eight adversities in his Buddha-field.

"A bodhisattva's Buddha-field consists of his personal observance of the basic precepts and his restraint in blaming others for their transgressions. When he attains enlightenment, even the word 'crime' will never be mentioned in his Buddha-field.

"A bodhisattva's Buddha-field is the purity of the path of the ten virtues. When he attains enlightenment, living beings who are secure in long life, great in wealth, chaste in conduct, enhanced by true speech, soft-spoken, free of divisive intrigues and adroit in reconciling factions, enlightening in their conversations, free of envy, free of malice, and endowed with perfect views will be born in his Buddha-field.

"Thus, noble son, just as is the bodhisattva's production of the spirit of enlightenment, so is his positive thought. And just as is his positive thought, so is his virtuous application.

"His virtuous application is tantamount to his high resolve, his high resolve is tantamount to his determination, his determination is tantamount to his practice, and his practice is tantamount to his total dedication, his total dedication is tantamount to his liberative technique, his liberative technique is tantamount to his development of living beings, and his development of living beings is tantamount to the purity of his Buddha-field.

"The purity of his Buddha-field reflects the purity of living beings; the purity of the living beings reflects the purity of his gnosis; the purity of his gnosis reflects the purity of his doctrine; the purity of his doctrine reflects the purity of his transcendental practice; and the purity of his transcendental practice reflects the purity of his own mind."

Thereupon, magically influenced by the Buddha, the venerable Shariputra had this thought: "If the Buddha-field is pure only to the extent that the mind of the bodhisattva is pure, then, when Shakyamuni Buddha was engaged in the career of the bodhisattva, his mind must have been impure. Otherwise, how could this Buddha-field appear to be so impure?"

The Buddha, knowing telepathically the thought of venerable Shariputra, said to him, "What do you think, Shariputra? Is it because the sun and moon are impure that those blind from birth do not see them?"

Shariputra replied, "No, Lord. It is not so. The fault lies with those blind from birth, and not with the sun and moon."

The Buddha declared, "In the same way, Shariputra, the fact that some living beings do not behold the splendid display of virtues of the Buddha-field of the Tathágata is due to their own ignorance. It is not the fault of the Tathágata. Shariputra, the Buddha-field of the Tathágata is pure, but you do not see it."

Then the Brahma Sikhin said to the venerable Shariputra, "Reverend Shariputra, do not say that the Buddha-field of the Tathágata is impure. Reverend Shariputra, the Buddha-field of the Tathágata is pure. I see the splendid expanse of the Buddha-field of the Lord Shakyamuni as equal to the splendor of, for example, the abodes of the highest deities."

Then the venerable Shariputra said to the Brahma Sikhin, "As for me, O Brahma, I see this great earth, with its highs and lows, its thorns, its precipices, its peaks, and its abysses, as if it were entirely filled with ordure."

Brahma Sikhin replied, "The fact that you see such a Buddha-field as this as if it were so impure, reverend Shariputra, is a sure sign that there are highs and lows in your mind and that your positive thought in regard to the Buddha-gnosis is not pure either. Reverend Shariputra, those whose minds are impartial toward all living beings and whose positive thoughts toward the Buddha-gnosis are pure see this Buddha-field as perfectly pure."

Thereupon the Lord touched the ground of this billion-world-galactic universe with his big toe, and suddenly it was transformed into a huge mass of precious jewels, a magnificent array of many hundreds of thousands of clusters of precious gems, until it resembled the universe of the Tathágata Ratnavyuha, called Anantagunaratnavyuha. Everyone in the entire assembly was filled with wonder, each perceiving himself seated on a throne of jeweled lotuses.

Then, the Buddha said to the venerable Shariputra, "Shariputra, do you see this splendor of the virtues of the Buddha-field?"

Shariputra replied, "I see it, Lord! Here before me is a display of splendor such as I never before heard of or beheld!"

The Buddha said, "Shariputra, this Buddha-field is always thus pure, but the Tathágata makes it appear to be spoiled by many faults, in order to bring about the maturity of the inferior living beings. For example, Shariputra, the gods of the Trayastrimsa heaven all take their food from a single precious vessel, yet the nectar, which nourishes each one, differs according to the differences of the merits each has accumulated. Just so, Shariputra, living beings born in the same Buddha-field see the splendor of the virtues of the Buddha-fields of the Buddhas according to their own degrees of purity."

When this splendor of the beauty of the virtues of the Buddha-field shone forth, eighty-four thousand beings conceived the spirit of unexcelled perfect enlightenment, and the five hundred Licchavi youths who had accompanied the young Licchavi Ratnakara all attained the conformative tolerance of ultimate birthlessness.

Then, the Lord withdrew his miraculous power and at once the Buddha-field was restored to its usual appearance. Then, both men and gods who subscribed to the disciple-vehicle thought, "Alas! All constructed things are impermanent."

Thereby, thirty-two thousand living beings purified their immaculate, undistorted Dharma-eye in regard to all things. The eight thousand Bhikkhus were liberated from their mental defilements, attaining the state of non-grasping. And the eighty-four thousand living beings that were devoted to the grandeur of the Buddha-field, having understood that all things are by nature but magical creations, all conceived in their own minds the spirit of unexcelled, totally perfect enlightenment.

2. Inconceivable Skill in Liberative Technique

At that time, there lived in the great city of Vaisali a certain Licchavi, Vimalakirti by name. Having served the ancient Buddhas, he had generated the roots of virtue by honoring them and making offerings to them. He had attained tolerance as well as eloquence. He played with the great super-knowledge's. He had attained the power of incantations and the fearlessnesses. He had conquered all demons and opponents. He had penetrated the profound way of the Dharma. He was liberated through the transcendence of wisdom. Having integrated his realization with skill in liberative technique, he was expert in knowing the thoughts and actions of living beings. Knowing the strength or weakness of their faculties, and being gifted with unrivaled eloquence, he taught the Dharma appropriately to each. Having applied himself energetically to the Mahayana, he understood it and accomplished his tasks with great finesse. He lived with the deportment of a Buddha, and his superior intelligence was as wide as an ocean. He was praised, honored, and commended by all the

Buddhas and was respected by Indra, Brahma, and all the Lokapalas. In order to develop living beings with his skill in liberative technique, he lived in the great city of Vaisali.

His wealth was inexhaustible for the purpose of sustaining the poor and the helpless. He observed a pure morality in order to protect the immoral. He maintained tolerance and self-control in order to reconcile beings who were angry, cruel, violent, and brutal. He blazed with energy in order to inspire people who were lazy. He maintained concentration, mindfulness, and meditation in order to sustain the mentally troubled. He attained decisive wisdom in order to sustain the foolish.

He wore the white clothes of the layman, yet lived impeccably like a religious devotee. He lived at home, but remained aloof from the realm of desire, the realm of pure matter, and the immaterial realm. He had a son, a wife, and female attendants, yet always maintained continence. He appeared to be surrounded by servants, yet lived in solitude. He appeared to be adorned with ornaments, yet always was endowed with the auspicious signs and marks. He seemed to eat and drink, yet always took nourishment from the taste of meditation. He made his appearance at the fields of sports and in the casinos, but his aim was always to mature those people who were attached to games and gambling. He visited the fashionable heterodox teachers, yet always kept unswerving loyalty to the Buddha. He understood the mundane and transcendental sciences and esoteric practices, yet always took pleasure in the delights of the Dharma. He mixed in all crowds, yet was respected as foremost of all.

In order to be in harmony with people, he associated with elders, with those of middle age, and with the young, yet always spoke in harmony with the Dharma. He engaged in all sorts of businesses, yet had no interest in profit or possessions. To train living beings, he would appear at crossroads and on street corners, and to protect them he participated in government. To turn people away from the Hinayana and to engage them in the Mahayana, he appeared among listeners and teachers of the Dharma. To develop children, he visited all the schools. To demonstrate the evils of desire, he even entered the brothels. To establish drunkards in correct mindfulness, he entered all the cabarets.

He was honored as the businessman among businessmen because he demonstrated the priority of the Dharma. He was honored as the landlord among landlords because he renounced the aggressiveness of ownership. He was honored as the warrior among warriors because he cultivated endurance, determination, and fortitude. He was honored as the aristocrat among aristocrats because he suppressed pride, vanity, and arrogance. He was honored as the official among officials because he regulated the functions of government according to the Dharma. He was honored as the prince of princes because he reversed their

attachment to royal pleasures and sovereign power. He was honored as a eunuch in the royal harem because he taught the young ladies according to the Dharma.

He was compatible with ordinary people because he appreciated the excellence of ordinary merits. He was honored as the Indra among Indra's because he showed them the temporality of their lordship. He was honored as the Brahma among Brahmas because he showed them the special excellence of gnosis. He was honored as the Lokapala among Lokapalas because he fostered the development of all living beings.

Thus lived the Licchavi Vimalakirti in the great city of Vaisali, endowed with an infinite knowledge of skill in liberative techniques.

At that time, out of this very skill in liberative technique, Vimalakirti manifested himself as if sick. To inquire after his health, the king, the officials, the lords, the youths, the aristocrats, the householders, the businessmen, the town-folk, the country-folk, and thousands of other living beings came forth from the great city of Vaisali and called on the invalid. When they arrived, Vimalakirti taught them the Dharma, beginning his discourse from the actuality of the four main elements:

"Friends, this body is so impermanent, fragile, unworthy of confidence, and feeble. It is so insubstantial, perishable, short-lived, painful, filled with diseases, and subject to changes. Thus, my friends, as this body is only a vessel of many sicknesses, wise men do not rely on it. This body is like a ball of foam, unable to bear any pressure. It is like a water bubble, not remaining very long. It is like a mirage, born from the appetites of the passions. It is like the trunk of the plantain tree, having no core. Alas! This body is like a machine, a nexus of bones and tendons. It is like a magical illusion, consisting of falsifications. It is like a dream, being an unreal vision. It is like a reflection, being the image of former actions. It is like an echo, being dependent on conditioning. It is like a cloud, being characterized by turbulence and dissolution. It is like a flash of lightning, being unstable, and decaying every moment. The body is ownerless, being the product of a variety of conditions.

"This body is inert, like the earth; selfless, like water; lifeless, like fire; impersonal, like the wind; and non-substantial, like space. This body is unreal, being a collocation of the four main elements. It is void, not existing as self or as self-possessed. It is inanimate, being like grass, trees, walls, clods of earth, and hallucinations. It is insensate, being driven like a windmill. It is filthy, being an agglomeration of pus and excrement. It is false, being fated to be broken and destroyed, in spite of being anointed and massaged. It is afflicted by the four hundred and four diseases. It is like an ancient well, constantly overwhelmed by old age. Its

duration is never certain - certain only is its end in death. This body is a combination of aggregates, elements, and sense-media, which are comparable to murderers, poisonous snakes, and an empty town, respectively.

Therefore, such a body should repulse you. You should despair of it and should arouse your admiration for the body of the Tathágata.

"Friends, the body of a Tathágata is the body of Dharma, born of gnosis. The body of a Tathágata is born of the stores of merit and wisdom. It is born of morality, of meditation, of wisdom, of the liberations, and of the knowledge and vision of liberation. It is born of love, compassion, joy, and impartiality. It is born of charity, discipline, and self-control. It is born of the path of ten virtues. It is born of patience and gentleness. It is born of the roots of virtue planted by solid efforts. It is born of the concentrations, the liberations, the meditations, and the absorptions. It is born of learning, wisdom, and liberative technique. It is born of the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment. It is born of mental quiescence and transcendental analysis. It is born of the ten powers, the four fearless-nesses, and the eighteen special qualities. It is born of all the transcendences. It is born from sciences and super-knowledge's. It is born of the abandonment of all evil qualities, and of the collection of all good qualities. It is born of truth. It is born of reality. It is born of conscious awareness.

"Friends, the body of a Tathágata is born of innumerable good works. Toward such a body you should turn your aspirations, and, in order to eliminate the sicknesses of the passions of all living beings, you should conceive the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment."

While the Licchavi Vimalakirti thus taught the Dharma to those who had come to inquire about his sickness, many hundreds of thousands of living beings conceived the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.

3. The Disciples' Reluctance to Visit Vimalakirti

Then, the Licchavi Vimalakirti thought to himself, "I am sick, lying on my bed in pain, yet the Tathágata, the saint, the perfectly accomplished Buddha, does not consider or take pity upon me, and sends no one to inquire after my illness."

The Lord knew this thought in the mind of Vimalakirti and said to the venerable Shariputra, "Shariputra, go to inquire after the illness of the Licchavi Vimalakirti."

Thus having been addressed, the venerable Shariputra answered the Buddha, "Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go to ask the Licchavi Vimalakirti about his illness. Why? I remember one

day, when I was sitting at the foot of a tree in the forest, absorbed in contemplation, the Licchavi Vimalakirti came to the foot of that tree and said to me, 'Reverend Shariputra, this is not the way to absorb yourself in contemplation. You should absorb yourself in contemplation so that neither body nor mind appear anywhere in the triple world. You should absorb yourself in contemplation in such a way that you can manifest all ordinary behavior without forsaking cessation. You should absorb yourself in contemplation in such a way that you can manifest the nature of an ordinary person without abandoning your cultivated spiritual nature. You should absorb yourself in contemplation so that the mind neither settles within nor moves without toward external forms. You should absorb yourself in contemplation in such a way that the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment are manifest without deviation toward any convictions. You should absorb yourself in contemplation in such a way that you are released in liberation without abandoning the passions that are the province of the world.

"'Reverend Shariputra, those who absorb themselves in contemplation in such a way are declared by the Lord to be truly absorbed in contemplation.'

"Lord, when I heard this teaching, I was unable to reply and remained silent. Therefore, I am reluctant to go to ask that good man about his sickness."

Then, the Buddha said to the venerable Maha-Maudgalyayana, "Maudgalyayana, go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness." (Maha is a title that means "Great")

Maudgalyayana replied, "Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness. Why? I remember one day when I was teaching the Dharma to the householders in a square in the great city of Vaisali, and the Licchavi Vimalakirti came along and said to me, 'Reverend Maudgalyayana, that is not the way to teach the Dharma to the householders in their white clothes. The Dharma must be taught according to reality.

"'Reverend Maudgalyayana, the Dharma is without living beings, because it is free of the dust of living beings.

It is selfless, because it is free of the dust of desire. It is lifeless, because it is free of birth and death. It is without personalities, because it dispenses with past origins and future destinies.

"'The Dharma is peace and pacification, because it is free from desire. It does not become an object, because it is free of words and letters; it is inexpressible, and it transcends all movement of mind.

"'The Dharma is omnipresent, because it is like infinite space. It is without color, mark, or shape, because it is free of all process. It is without the concept of "mine," because it is free of the habitual notion of possession. It is without ideation, because it is free of mind, thought, or consciousness. It is incomparable, because it has no antitheses. It is without presumption of conditionality, because it does not conform to causes.

"'It permeates evenly all things, because all are included in the ultimate realm. It conforms to reality by means of the process of nonconformity. It abides at the reality-limit, for it is utterly without fluctuation. It is immovable, because it is independent of the six objects of sense. It is without coming and going, for it never stands still. It is comprised by void ness, is remarkable through sign-less-ness, and is free of presumption and repudiation, because of wish-less-ness. It is without establishment and rejection, without birth or destruction. It is without any fundamental consciousness, transcending the range of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and thought. It is without highness and lowness. It abides without movement or activity.

"'Reverend Maha-Maudgalyayana, how could there be a teaching in regard to such a Dharma? Reverend Maha-Maudgalyayana, even the expression "to teach the Dharma" is presumptuous, and those who listen to it listen to presumption. Reverend Maudgalyayana, where there are no presumptuous words, there is no teacher of the Dharma, no one to listen, and no one to understand. It is as if an illusory person were to teach the Dharma to illusory people.

"'Therefore, you should teach the Dharma by keeping your mind on this. You should be adept in regard to the spiritual faculties of living beings. By means of the correct vision of the wisdom-eye, manifesting the great compassion, acknowledging the benevolent activity of the Buddha, purifying your intentions, understanding the definitive expressions of the Dharma, you should teach the Dharma in order that the continuity of the Three Jewels may never be interrupted.'

"Lord, when Vimalakirti had discoursed thus, eight hundred householders in the crowd conceived the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, and I myself was speechless. Therefore, Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go to this good man to inquire about his illness."

Then, the Buddha said to the venerable Maha-Kasyapa, "Maha-Kasyapa, you go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness."

"Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness. Why? I remember one day, when I was in the street of the poor begging for my food, the Licchavi Vimalakirti came along and said to me, 'Reverend Maha-Kasyapa, to avoid the

houses of the wealthy, and to favor the houses of the poor - this is partiality in benevolence. Reverend Maha-Kasyapa, you should dwell on the fact of the equality of things, and you should seek alms with consideration for all living beings at all times. You should beg your food in awareness of the ultimate nonexistence of food. You should seek alms for the sake of eliminating the materialism of others.

When you enter a town, you should keep in mind its actual void ness, yet you should proceed through it in order to develop men and women. You should enter homes as if entering the family of the Buddha. You should accept alms by not taking anything. You should see form like a man blind from birth, hear sounds as if they were echoes, smell scents as if they were winds, experience tastes without any discrimination, touch tangibles in awareness of the ultimate lack of contact in gnosis, and know things with the consciousness of an illusory creature. That which is without intrinsic substance and without imparted substance does not burn. And what does not burn will not be extinguished.

"'Elder Maha-Kasyapa, if, equipoised (a state of equilibrium) in the eight liberations without transcending the eight perversions, you can enter the equanimity of reality by means of the equanimity of perversion, and if you can make a gift to all living beings and an offering to all the saints and Buddhas out of even a single measure of alms, then you yourself may eat. Thus, when you eat, after offering, you should be neither affected by passions nor free of passions, neither involved in concentration nor free from concentration, neither living in the world nor abiding in liberation.

Furthermore, those who give such alms, reverend, have neither great merit nor small merit, neither gain nor loss. They should follow the way of the Buddhas, not the way of the disciples. Only in this way, Elder Maha-Kasyapa, is the practice of eating by alms meaningful.'

"Lord, when I heard this teaching, I was astonished and thought: 'Reverence to all bodhisattvas! If a lay bodhisattva may be endowed with such eloquence, who is there who would not conceive the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment? From that time forth, I no longer recommend the vehicles of the disciples and of the solitary sages but recommend the Mahayana. And thus, Lord, I am reluctant to go to this good man to inquire about his illness."

Then, the Buddha said to the venerable Subhuti, "Subhuti, go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness."

Subhuti replied, "Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go to this good man to inquire about his illness. Why? My Lord,

I remember one day, when I went to beg my food at the house of the Licchavi Vimalakirti in the great city of Vaisali, he took my bowl and filled it with some excellent food and said to me, 'Reverend Subhuti, take this food if you understand the equality of all things, by means of the equality of material objects, and if you understand the equality of all the attributes of the Buddha, by means of the equality of all things. Take this food if, without abandoning desire, hatred, and folly, you can avoid association with them; if you can follow the path of the single way without ever disturbing the egoistic views; if you can produce the knowledge's and liberations without conquering ignorance and the craving for existence; if, by the equality of the five deadly sins, you reach the equality of liberation; if you are neither liberated nor bound; if you do not see the Four Holy Truths, yet are not the one who "has not seen the truth"; if you have not attained any fruit, yet are not the one who "has not attained"; if you are an ordinary person, yet have not the qualities of an ordinary person; if you are not holy, yet are not unholy; if you are responsible for all things, yet are free of any notion concerning anything.

"'Take this food, reverend Subhuti, if, without seeing the Buddha, hearing the Dharma, or serving the Sangha, you undertake the religious life under the six heterodox masters; namely, Purana Kasyapa, Maskarin Gosaliputra, Samjayin Vairatiputra, Kakuda Katyayana, Ajita Kesakambala, and Nirgrantha Jnaniputra, and follow the ways they prescribe.

"'Take this food, reverend Subhuti, if, entertaining all false views, you find neither extremes nor middle; if, bound up in the eight adversities, you do not obtain favorable conditions; if, assimilating the passions, you do not attain purification; if the dispassion of all living beings is your dispassion, reverend; if those who make offerings to you are not thereby purified; if those who offer you food, reverend, still fall into the three bad migrations; if you associate with all Mara's; if you entertain all passions; if the nature of passions is the nature of a reverend; if you have hostile feelings toward all living beings; if you despise all the Buddhas; if you criticize

all the teachings of the Buddha; if you do not rely on the Sangha; and finally, if you never enter ultimate liberation.'

"Lord, when I heard these words of the Licchavi Vimalakirti, I wondered what I should say and what I should do, but I was totally in the dark. Leaving the bowl, I was about to leave the house when the Licchavi Vimalakirti said to me, 'Reverend Subhuti, do not fear these words, and pick up your bowl. What do you think, reverend Subhuti?

If it were an incarnation created by the Tathágata who spoke thus to you, would you be afraid?'

"I answered, 'No indeed, noble sir!' He then said, 'Reverend Subhuti, the nature of all things is like illusion, like a magical incarnation. So you should not fear them. Why? All words also have that nature, and thus the wise are not attached to words, nor do they fear them. Why? All language does not ultimately exist, except as liberation. The nature of all things is liberation.'

"When Vimalakirti had discoursed in this way, two hundred gods obtained the pure doctrinal vision in regard to all things, without obscurity or defilement, and five hundred gods obtained the conformative tolerance. As for me, I was speechless and unable to respond to him. Therefore, Lord, I am reluctant to go to this good man to inquire about his illness."

Then, the Buddha said to the venerable Purna-maitrayaniputra, "Purna, go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness."

Purna replied, "Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go to this good man to inquire about his illness. Why? Lord, I remember one day, when I was teaching the Dharma to some young monks in the great forest, the Licchavi Vimalakirti came there and said to me, 'Reverend Purna, first concentrate yourself, regard the minds of these young Bhikkhus, and then teach them the Dharma! Do not put rotten food into a jeweled bowl! First understand the inclinations of these monks, and do not confuse priceless sapphires with glass beads!

"'Reverend Purna, without examining the spiritual faculties of living beings, do not presume upon the one-sidedness of their faculties; do not wound those who are without wounds; do not impose a narrow path upon those who aspire to a great path; do not try to pour the great ocean into the hoof-print of an ox; do not try to put Mount Sumeru into a grain of mustard; do not confuse the brilliance of the sun with the light of a glowworm; and do not expose those who admire the roar of a lion to the howl of a jackal!

"'Reverend Purna, all these monks were formerly engaged in the Mahayana but have forgotten the spirit of enlightenment. So do not instruct them in the disciple-vehicle. The disciple-vehicle is not ultimately valid, and you disciples are like men blind from birth, in regard to recognition of the degrees of the spiritual faculties of living beings.'

"At that moment, the Licchavi Vimalakirti entered into such a concentration that those monks were caused to remember their various former existences, in which they had produced the roots of virtue by serving five hundred Buddhas for the sake of perfect enlightenment. As

soon as their own spirits of enlightenment had become clear to them, they bowed at the feet of that good man and pressed their palms together in reverence. He taught them the Dharma, and they all attained the stage of irreversibility from the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. It occurred to me then, 'the disciples, who do not know the thoughts or the inclinations of others, are not able to teach the Dharma to anyone. Why? These disciples are not expert in discerning the superiority and inferiority of the spiritual faculties of living beings, and they are not always in a state of concentration like the Tathágata, the Saint, the perfectly accomplished Buddha.'

"Therefore, Lord, I am reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his health."

The Buddha then said to the venerable Maha-Katyayana, "Katyayana, go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness."

Katyayana replied, "Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go that good man to inquire about his illness. Why? Lord, I remember one day when, after the Lord had given some brief instruction to the monks, I was defining the expressions of that discourse by teaching the meaning of impermanence, suffering, selflessness, and peace; the Licchavi Vimalakirti came there and said to me, 'Reverend Maha-Katyayana, do not teach an ultimate reality endowed with activity, production, and destruction! Reverend Maha-Katyayana, nothing was ever destroyed, is destroyed, or will ever be destroyed. Such is the meaning of "impermanence." The meaning of the realization of birthlessness, through the realization of the void ness of the five aggregates, is the meaning of "suffering." The fact of the non-duality of self and selflessness is the meaning of "selflessness." That which has no intrinsic substance and no other sort of substance does not burn, and what does not burn is not extinguished; such lack of extinction is the meaning of "peace."'

"When he had discoursed thus, the minds of the monks were liberated from their defilements and entered a state of non-grasping.

Therefore, Lord, I am reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness."

The Buddha then said to the venerable Aniruddha, "Aniruddha, go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness."

"My Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go that good man to inquire about his illness. Why? I remember, Lord, one day when I was taking a walk, the great Brahma named Subhavyuha and the ten thousand other Brahmas who accompanied him illuminated the place with their radiance and, having bowed their heads at my feet, withdrew to one side and asked me,

'Reverend Aniruddha, you have been proclaimed by the Buddha to be the foremost among those who possess the divine eye. To what distance does the divine vision of the venerable Aniruddha extend?'

I answered, 'Friends, I see the entire billion-world-galactic universe of the Lord Shakyamuni just as plainly as a man of ordinary vision sees a myrobalan nut on the palm of his hand.' When I had said these words, the Licchavi Vimalakirti came there and, having bowed his head at my feet, said to me, 'Reverend Aniruddha, is your divine eye compounded in nature? Or is it uncompounded in nature?

If it is compounded in nature, it is the same as the super-knowledge's of the heterodox. If it is uncompounded in nature, then it is not constructed and, as such, is incapable of seeing. Then, how do you see, O elder?'

"At these words, I became speechless, and Brahma also was amazed to hear this teaching from that good man.

Having bowed to him, he said, 'Who then, in the world, possesses the divine eye?'

"Vimalakirti answered, 'in the world, it is the Buddhas who have the divine eye. They see all the Buddha-fields without even leaving their state of concentration and without being affected by duality.'

"Having heard these words, the ten thousand Brahmas were inspired with high resolve and conceived the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. Having paid homage and respect both to me and to that good man, they disappeared. As for me, I remained speechless, and therefore I am reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness."

The Buddha then said to the venerable Upali, "Upali, go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness."

Upali replied, "Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness. Why? Lord, I remember that one day there were two monks who had committed some infraction and were too ashamed to appear before the Lord, so they came to me and said, 'Reverend Upali, we have both committed an infraction but are too ashamed to appear before the Buddha. Venerable Upali, kindly remove our anxieties by absolving us of these infractions.'

"Lord, while I was giving those two monks some religious discourse, the Licchavi Vimalakirti came there and said to me, 'Reverend Upali, do not aggravate further the sins of these two monks. Without perplexing them, relieve their remorse. Reverend Upali, sin is not to be apprehended within, or without, or between the two. Why?

The Buddha has said, "Living beings are afflicted by the passions of thought, and they are purified by the purification of thought."

"'Reverend Upali, the mind is neither within nor without, nor is it to be apprehended between the two. Sin is just the same as the mind, and all things are just the same as sin. They do not escape this same reality.

"'Reverend Upali, this nature of the mind, by virtue of which your mind, reverend, is liberated - does it ever become afflicted?'

"'Never,' I replied.

"'Reverend Upali, the minds of all living beings have that very nature. Reverend Upali, passions consist of conceptualizations. The ultimate nonexistence of these conceptualizations and imaginary fabrications - that is the purity that is the intrinsic nature of the mind. Misapprehensions are passions. The ultimate absence of misapprehensions is the intrinsic nature of the mind. The presumption of self is passion. The absence of self is the intrinsic nature of the mind. Reverend Upali, all things are without production, destruction, and duration, like magical illusions, clouds, and lightning; all things are evanescent, not remaining even for an instant; all things are like dreams, hallucinations, and unreal visions; all things are like the reflection of the moon in water and like a mirror-image; they are born of mental construction. Those who know this are called the true upholders of the discipline, and those disciplined in that way are indeed well disciplined.'"

"Then the two monks said, 'this householder is extremely well endowed with wisdom. The reverend Upali, who was proclaimed by the Lord as the foremost of the upholders of the discipline, is not his equal.'

"I then said to the two monks, 'Do not entertain the notion that he is a mere householder! Why? With the exception of the Tathágata himself, there is no disciple or bodhisattva capable of competing with his eloquence or rivaling the brilliance of his wisdom.'

"Thereupon, the two monks, delivered from their anxieties and inspired with a high resolve, conceived the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. Bowing down to that good man,

they made the wish: 'May all living beings attain eloquence such as this!' Therefore, I am reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness."

The Buddha then said to the venerable Rahula, "Rahula, go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness."

Rahula replied, "Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness. Why? Lord, I remember that one day many young Licchavi gentlemen came to the place where I was and said to me, 'Reverend Rahula, you are the son of the Lord, and, having renounced a kingdom of a universal monarch, you have left the world. What are the virtues and benefits you saw in leaving the world?'

"As I was teaching them properly the benefits and virtues of renouncing the world, the Licchavi Vimalakirti came there and, having greeted me, said, 'Reverend Rahula, you should not teach the benefits and virtues of renunciation in the way that you do. Why? Renunciation is itself the very absence of virtues and benefits.

Reverend Rahula, one may speak of benefits and virtues in regard to compounded things, but renunciation is uncompounded, and there can be no question of benefits and virtues in regard to the uncompounded. Reverend Rahula, renunciation is not material but is free of matter. It is free of the extreme views of beginning and end. It is the path of liberation. It is praised by the wise, embraced by the saints, and causes the defeat of all Mara's. It liberates from the five states of existence, purifies the five eyes, cultivates the five powers, and supports the five spiritual faculties. Renunciation is totally harmless to others and is not adulterated with evil things. It disciplines the heterodox, transcending all denominations. It is the bridge over the swamp of desire, without grasping, and free of the habits of "I" and "mine." It is without attachment and without disturbance, eliminating all commotion. It disciplines one's own mind and protects the minds of others. It favors mental quiescence and stimulates transcendental analysis. It is irreproachable in all respects and so is called renunciation. Those who leave the mundane in this way are called "truly renunciant." Young men, renounce the world in the light of this clear teaching! The appearance of the Buddha is extremely rare. Human life endowed with leisure and opportunity is very hard to obtain. To be a human being is very precious.'

"The young men complained: 'But, householder, we have heard the Tathágata declare that one should not renounce the world without the permission of one's parents.'

"Vimalakirti answered: 'Young men, you should cultivate yourselves intensively to conceive the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. That in itself will be your renunciation and high ordination!'

"Thereupon, thirty-two of the Licchavi youths conceived the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.

Therefore, Lord, I am reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness."

The Buddha then said to the venerable Ánanda, "Ánanda, go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness."

Ánanda replied, "Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness. Why? Lord, I remember one day when the body of the Lord manifested some indisposition and he required some milk; I took the bowl and went to the door of the mansion of a great Brahman family. The Licchavi Vimalakirti came there, and, having saluted me, said, 'Reverend Ánanda, what are you doing on the threshold of this house with your bowl in your hand so early in the morning?'

"I replied: 'the body of the Lord manifests some indisposition, and he needs some milk. Therefore, I have come to fetch some.'

"Vimalakirti then said to me, 'Reverend Ánanda, do not say such a thing! Reverend Ánanda, the body of the Tathágata is tough as a diamond, having eliminated all the instinctual traces of evil and being endowed with all goodness. How could disease or discomfort affect such a body?

"'Reverend Ánanda, go in silence, and do not belittle the Lord. Do not say such things to others. It would not be good for the powerful gods or for the bodhisattvas coming from the various Buddha-fields to hear such words.

"'Reverend Ánanda, a universal monarch, who is endowed only with a small root of virtue, is free of diseases.

How then could the Lord, who has an infinite root of virtue, have any disease? It is impossible.

"'Reverend Ánanda, do not bring shame upon us, but go in silence, lest the heterodox sectarians should hear your words. They would say, "For shame! The teacher of these people

cannot even cure his own sicknesses. How then can he cure the sicknesses of others?" Reverend Ánanda, go then discreetly so that no one observes you.

"'Reverend Ánanda, the Tathágatas have the body of the Dharma - not a body that is sustained by material food.

The Tathágatas have a transcendental body that has transcended all mundane qualities.

There is no injury to the body of a Tathágata, as it is rid of all defilements. The body of a Tathágata is uncompounded and free of all formative activity. Reverend Ánanda, to believe there can be illness in such a body is irrational and unseemly!'

"When I had heard these words, I wondered if I had previously misheard and misunderstood the Buddha, and I was very much ashamed. Then I heard a voice from the sky: 'Ánanda! The householder speaks to you truly.

Nevertheless, since the Buddha has appeared during the time of the five corruptions, he disciplines living beings by acting lowly and humble. Therefore, Ánanda, do not be ashamed, and go and get the milk!'

"Lord, such was my conversation with the Licchavi Vimalakirti, and therefore I am reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness."

In the same way, the rest of the five hundred disciples were reluctant to go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti, and each told the Buddha his own adventure, recounting all his conversations with the Licchavi Vimalakirti.

4. The Reluctance of the Bodhisattvas

Then, the Buddha said to the bodhisattva Maitreya, "Maitreya, go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness."

Maitreya replied, "Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness. Why? Lord, I remember that one day I was engaged in a conversation with the gods of the Tushita heaven, the god Samtusita and his retinue, about the stage of non-regression of the great bodhisattvas. At that time, the Licchavi Vimalakirti came there and addressed me as follows:

"'Maitreya, the Buddha has prophesied that only one more birth stands between you and unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. What kind of birth does this prophecy concern, Maitreya?

Is it past? Is it future? Or is it present? If it is a past birth, it is already finished. If it is a future birth, it will never arrive. If it is a present birth, it does not abide. For the Buddha has declared, "Bhikkhus, in a single moment, you are born, you age, you die, you transmigrate, and you are reborn."

"'Then might the prophecy concern birthlessness? But birthlessness applies to the stage of destiny for the ultimate, in which there is neither prophecy nor attainment of perfect enlightenment.

"'Therefore, Maitreya, is your reality from birth? Or is it from cessation? Your reality as prophesied is not born and does not cease, nor will it be born nor will it cease. Furthermore, your reality is just the same as the reality of all living beings, the reality of all things, and the reality of all the holy ones. If your enlightenment can be prophesied in such a way, so can that of all living beings. Why, because reality does not consist of duality or of diversity. Maitreya, whenever you attain Buddhahood, which is the perfection of enlightenment, at the same time all living beings will also attain ultimate liberation. Why? The Tathágatas do not enter ultimate liberation until all living beings have entered ultimate liberation. For, since all living beings are utterly liberated, the Tathágatas see them as having the nature of ultimate liberation.

"'Therefore, Maitreya, do not fool and delude these deities! No one abides in, or regresses from, enlightenment.

Maitreya, you should introduce these deities to the repudiation of all discriminative constructions concerning enlightenment.

"'Enlightenment is perfectly realized neither by the body nor by the mind. Enlightenment is the eradication of all marks. Enlightenment is free of presumptions concerning all objects. Enlightenment is free of the functioning of all intentional thoughts. Enlightenment is the annihilation of all convictions. Enlightenment is free from all discriminative constructions. Enlightenment is free from all vacillation, mentation, and agitation.

Enlightenment is not involved in any commitments. Enlightenment is the arrival at detachment, through freedom from all habitual attitudes. The ground of enlightenment is the ultimate realm. Enlightenment is realization of reality. Enlightenment abides at the limit of reality.

Enlightenment is without duality, since therein are no minds and no things. Enlightenment is equality, since it is equal to infinite space.

"'Enlightenment is un-constructed, because it is neither born nor destroyed, neither abides nor undergoes any transformation. Enlightenment is the complete knowledge of the thoughts, deeds, and inclinations of all living beings. Enlightenment is not a door for the six media of sense. Enlightenment is unadulterated, since it is free of the passions of the instinctually driven succession of lives. Enlightenment is neither somewhere nor nowhere, abiding in no location or dimension. Enlightenment, not being contained in anything, does not stand in reality. Enlightenment is merely a name and even that name is unmoving. Enlightenment, free of abstention and undertaking, is energy-less. There is no agitation in enlightenment, as it is utterly pure by nature. Enlightenment is radiance, pure in essence. Enlightenment is without subjectivity and completely without object. Enlightenment, which penetrates the equality of all things, is undifferentiated. Enlightenment, which is not shown by any example, is incomparable. Enlightenment is subtle, since it is extremely difficult to realize. Enlightenment is all-pervasive, as it has the nature of infinite space.

Enlightenment cannot be realized, either physically or mentally. Why? The body is like grass, trees, walls, paths, and hallucinations. And the mind is immaterial, invisible, baseless, and unconscious.'

"Lord, when Vimalakirti had discoursed thus, two hundred of the deities in that assembly attained the tolerance of birthlessness. As for me, Lord, I was rendered speechless. Therefore, I am reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness."

The Buddha then said to the young Licchavi Prabhavyuha, "Prabhavyuha, go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness."

Prabhavyuha replied, "Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness. Why? Lord, I remember one day, when I was going out of the great city of Vaisali, I met the Licchavi Vimalakirti coming in. He greeted me, and I then addressed him: 'Householder, where do you come from?' He replied, 'I come from the seat of enlightenment.' I then inquired, 'What is meant by "seat of enlightenment"?' He then spoke the following words to me, 'Noble son, the seat of enlightenment is the seat of positive thought because it is without artificiality. It is the seat of effort, because it releases energetic activities. It is the seat of high resolve, because its insight is superior. It is the seat of the great spirit of enlightenment, because it does not neglect anything.

"'It is the seat of generosity, because it has no expectation of reward. It is the seat of morality, because it fulfills all commitments. It is the seat of tolerance, because it is free of anger toward any living being. It is the seat of effort, because it does not turn back. It is the seat of

meditation, because it generates fitness of mind. It is the seat of wisdom, because it sees everything directly.

"'It is the seat of love, because it is equal to all living beings. It is the seat of compassion, because it tolerates all injuries. It is the seat of joy, because it is joyfully devoted to the bliss of the Dharma. It is the seat of equanimity, because it abandons affection and aversion.

"'It is the seat of paranormal perception, because it has the six super-knowledge's. It is the seat of liberation, because it does not intellectualize. It is the seat of liberative technique, because it develops living beings. It is the seat of the means of unification, because it brings together living beings. It is the seat of learning, because it makes practice of the essence. It is the seat of decisiveness, because of its precise discrimination. It is the seat of the aids to enlightenment, because it eliminates the duality of the compounded and the uncompounded. It is the seat of truth, because it does not deceive anyone.

"'It is the seat of interdependent origination, because it proceeds from the exhaustion of ignorance to the exhaustion of old age and death. It is the seat of eradication of all passions, because it is perfectly enlightened about the nature of reality. It is the seat of all living beings, because all living beings are without intrinsic identity. It is the seat of all things, because it is perfectly enlightened with regard to void ness.

"'It is the seat of the conquest of all devils, because it never flinches. It is the seat of the triple world, because it is free of involvement. It is the seat of the heroism that sounds the lion's roar, because it is free of fear and trembling. It is the seat of the strengths, the fearlessnesses, and all the special qualities of the Buddha, because it is irreproachable in all respects. It is the seat of the three knowledge's, because in it no passions remain. It is the seat of instantaneous, total understanding of all things, because it realizes fully the gnosis of omniscience.

"'Noble son, when bodhisattvas are thus endowed with the transcendences, the roots of virtue, the ability to develop living beings, and the incorporation of the holy Dharma, whether they lift up their feet or put them down, they all come from the seat of enlightenment. They come from the qualities of the Buddha, and stand on the qualities of the Buddha.'

"Lord, when Vimalakirti had explained this teaching, five hundred gods and men conceived the spirit of enlightenment, and I became speechless. Therefore, Lord, I am reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness."

The Buddha then said to the bodhisattva Jagatimdhara, "Jagatimdhara, go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness."

Jagatimdhara replied, "My Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness. Why? Lord, I remember that one day, when I was at home, the wicked Mara, disguised as Indra and surrounded with twelve thousand heavenly maidens, approached me with the sounds of music and singing. Having saluted me by touching my feet with his head, he withdrew with his retinue to one side. I then, thinking he was Sakra, the king of the gods, said to him, 'Welcome, O Kausika! You should remain consciously aware in the midst of the pleasures of desire. You should often think on impermanence and strive to utilize the essential in body, life, and wealth.'

"Mara then said to me, 'Good sir, accept from me these twelve thousand divine maidens and make them your servants.'

"I replied, 'O Kausika, do not offer me, who am religious and a son of the Sakya, things which are not appropriate. It is not proper for me to have these maidens.'

"No sooner had I said these words than the Licchavi Vimalakirti came there and said to me, 'Noble son, do not think that this is Indra! This is not Indra but the evil Mara, who has come to ridicule you.'

"Then the Licchavi Vimalakirti said to Mara, 'Evil Mara, since these heavenly maidens are not suitable for this religious devotee, a son of the Sakya, give them to me.'

"Then Mara was terrified and distressed, thinking that the Licchavi Vimalakirti had come to expose him. He tried to make himself invisible, but, try as he might with all his magical powers, he could not vanish from sight. Then a voice resounded in the sky, saying, 'Evil One, give these heavenly maidens to the good man Vimalakirti, and only then will you be able to return to your own abode.'

"Then Mara was even more frightened and, much against his will, gave the heavenly maidens.

"The Licchavi Vimalakirti, having received the goddesses, said to them, 'Now that you have been given to me by Mara, you should all conceive the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.'

"He then exhorted them with discourse suitable for their development toward enlightenment, and soon they conceived the spirit of enlightenment. He then said to them, 'You have just conceived the spirit of enlightenment.

From now on, you should devote yourselves to find joy in pleasures of the Dharma, and should take no pleasure in desires.'

"They then asked him, 'What is "joy in the pleasures of the Dharma"?'

"He declared, 'It is the joy of unbreakable faith in the Buddha, of wishing to hear the Dharma, of serving the Sangha and honoring the spiritual benefactors without pride. It is the joy of renunciation of the whole world, of not being fixed in objects, of considering the five aggregates to be like murderers, of considering the elements to be like venomous serpents, and of considering the sense-media to be like an empty town. It is the joy of always guarding the spirit of enlightenment, of helping living beings, of sharing through generosity, of not slackening in morality, of control and tolerance in patience, of thorough cultivation of virtue by effort, of total absorption in meditation, and of absence of passions in wisdom. It is the joy of extending enlightenment, of conquering the Mara's, of destroying the passions, and of purifying the Buddha-field. It is the joy of accumulating all virtues, in order to cultivate the auspicious marks and signs. It is the joy of the liberation of non-intimidation when hearing the profound teaching. It is the joy of exploration of the three doors of liberation, and of the realization of liberation. It is the joy of being an ornament of the seat of enlightenment, and of not attaining liberation at the wrong time. It is the joy of serving those of equal fortune, of not hating or resenting those of superior fortune, of serving the spiritual benefactors, and of avoiding sinful friends. It is the joy of the superior gladness of faith and devotion to the Dharma. It is the joy of acquiring liberative techniques and of the conscious cultivation of the aids to enlightenment. Thus, the bodhisattva admires and finds joy in the delights of the Dharma.'

"Thereupon, Mara said to the goddesses, 'now come along and let us return home.'

"They said, 'you gave us to this householder. Now we should enjoy the delights of the Dharma and should no longer enjoy the pleasures of desires.'

"Then Mara said to the Licchavi Vimalakirti, 'If it is so that the bodhisattva, the spiritual hero, has no mental attachment, and gives away all his possessions, then, householder, please give me these goddesses.'

"Vimalakirti replied, 'they are given, Mara. Go home with your retinue. May you fulfill the religious aspirations of all living beings!'

"Then the goddesses, saluting Vimalakirti, said to him, 'Householder, how should we live in the abode of the Mara's?'

"Vimalakirti replied, 'Sisters, there is a door of the Dharma called "The Inexhaustible Lamp." Practice it!

What is it? Sisters, a single lamp may light hundreds of thousands of lamps without itself being diminished.

Likewise, sisters, a single bodhisattva may establish many hundreds of thousands of living beings in enlightenment without his mindfulness being diminished. In fact, not only does it not diminish, it grows stronger. Likewise, the more you teach and demonstrate virtuous qualities to others, the more you grow with respect to these virtuous qualities. This is the door of the Dharma called "The Inexhaustible Lamp." When you are living in the realm of Mara, inspire innumerable gods and goddesses with the spirit of enlightenment. In such a way, you will repay the kindness of the Tathágata, and you will become the benefactors of all living beings.'

"Then, those goddesses bowed at the feet of the Licchavi Vimalakirti and departed in the company of Mara.

Thus, Lord, I saw the supremacy of the magical power, wisdom, and eloquence of the Licchavi Vimalakirti, and therefore I am reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness."

The Buddha then said to the merchant's son, Sudatta, "Noble son, go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness."

Sudatta replied, "Lord, I am indeed reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness. Why? Lord, I remember one day in my father's house when, in order to celebrate a great sacrifice, I was bestowing gifts upon religious devotees, Brahmans, the poor, the wretched, the unfortunate, beggars, and all the needy. On the

seventh and final day of this great sacrifice, the Licchavi Vimalakirti came there and said, 'Merchant's son, you

should not celebrate a sacrifice in this way. You should celebrate a Dharma-sacrifice. What is the use of the sacrifice of material things?'

"I then asked him, 'How does one give a Dharma-sacrifice?'

"He replied, 'A Dharma-sacrifice is that which develops living beings without beginning or end, giving gifts to them all simultaneously. What is that? It consists of the great love which is consummated in enlightenment; of the great compassion which is consummated in the concentration of the holy Dharma on the liberation of all living beings; of the great joy which is consummated in the awareness of the supreme happiness of all living beings; and of the great equanimity which is consummated in concentration through knowledge.

"'The Dharma-sacrifice consists of the transcendence of generosity, which is consummated in peacefulness and self-discipline; of the transcendence of morality, which is consummated in the moral development of immoral beings; of the transcendence of tolerance, consummated through the principle of selflessness; of the transcendence of effort, consummated in initiative toward enlightenment; of the transcendence of meditation, consummated in the solitude of body and mind; and of the transcendence of wisdom, consummated in the omniscient gnosis.

"'The Dharma-sacrifice consists of the meditation of void ness, consummated in effectiveness in the development of all living beings; of the meditation of sign-less-ness, consummated in the purification of all compounded things; and of the meditation of wish-less-ness, consummated in voluntarily assuming rebirths.

"'The Dharma-sacrifice consists of heroic strength, consummated in the upholding of the holy Dharma; of the power of life, consummated in the means of unification; of the absence of pride, consummated in becoming the slave and the disciple of all living beings; of the gain of body, health, and wealth, consummated by the extraction of essence from the essence-less; of mindfulness, consummated by the six remembrances; of positive thought, consummated through the truly enjoyable Dharma; of purity of livelihood, consummated by correct spiritual practice; of the respect of saints, consummated by joyful and faithful service; of soberness of mind, consummated by absence of dislike for ordinary people; of high resolve, consummated by renunciation; of skill in erudition, consummated by religious practice; of retirement in solitary retreats, consummated by understanding things free of passions; of introspective meditation, consummated by attainment of the Buddha-gnosis; of the stage of the practice of yoga, consummated by the yoga of liberating all living beings from their passions.

"'The Dharma-sacrifice consists of the store of merit which is consummated by the auspicious signs and marks, the ornaments of the Buddha-fields, and all other means of development of living beings; of the store of knowledge which is consummated in the ability to teach the Dharma according to the thoughts and actions of all living beings; of the store of wisdom, which is consummated in the uniform gnosis free of acceptance and rejection in regard to all things; of the store of all roots of virtue, consummated in the abandonment of all passions, obscurations, and un-virtuous things; and of the attainment of all the aids to enlightenment, consummated in the realization of the gnosis of omniscience as well as in accomplishment of all virtue.

"'That, noble son, is the Dharma-sacrifice. The bodhisattva who lives by this Dharma-sacrifice is the best of sacrifice's, and, through his extreme sacrifice, is himself worthy of offerings from all people, including the gods.'

"Lord, as soon as the householder had discoursed thus, two hundred Brahmans among the crowd of Brahmans present conceived the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. And I, full of astonishment, having saluted this good man by touching his feet with my head, took from around my neck a necklace of pearls worth one hundred thousand pieces of gold and offered it to him. But he would not accept it. I then said to him, 'Please accept, good man, this necklace of pearls, out of compassion for me, and give it to whomsoever you wish.'

"Then, Vimalakirti took the pearls and divided them into two halves. He gave one half of them to the lowliest poor of the city, who had been disdained by those present at the sacrifice. The other half he offered to the Tathágata Dusprasaha. And he performed a miracle such that all present beheld the universe called Marici and the Tathágata Dusprasaha. On the head of the Tathágata Dusprasaha, the pearl necklace took the form of a pavilion, decorated with strings of pearls, resting on four bases, with four columns, symmetrical, well constructed, and lovely to behold. Having shown such a miracle, Vimalakirti said, 'the giver who makes gifts to the lowliest poor of the city, considering them as worthy of offering as the Tathágata himself, the giver who gives without any discrimination, impartially, with no expectation of reward, and with great love - this giver, I say, totally fulfills the Dharma-sacrifice.'

"Then the poor of the city, having seen that miracle and having heard that teaching, conceived the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. Therefore, Lord, I am reluctant to go to that good man to inquire about his illness."

In the same way, all the bodhisattvas, great spiritual heroes, told the stories of their conversations with Vimalakirti and declared their reluctance to go to him.

5. The Consolation of the Invalid

Then, the Buddha said to the crown prince, Manjusri, "Manjusri, go to the Licchavi Vimalakirti to inquire about his illness."

Manjusri replied, "Lord, it is difficult to attend upon the Licchavi Vimalakirti. He is gifted with marvelous eloquence concerning the law of the profound. He is extremely skilled in full expressions and in the reconciliation of dichotomies. His eloquence is inexorable, and no one can resist his imperturbable intellect. He accomplishes all the activities of the bodhisattvas. He penetrates all the secret mysteries of the bodhisattvas and the Buddhas. He is skilled in civilizing all the abodes of devils. He plays with the great super-knowledge's. He is consummate in wisdom and liberative technique. He has attained the supreme excellence of the indivisible, non-dual sphere of the ultimate realm. He is skilled in teaching the Dharma with its infinite modalities within the uniform ultimate. He is skilled in granting means of attainment in accordance with the spiritual faculties of all living beings. He has thoroughly integrated his realization with skill in liberative technique. He has attained decisiveness with regard to all questions. Thus, although he cannot be withstood by someone of my feeble defenses, still, sustained by the grace of the Buddha, I will go to him and will converse with him as well as I can."

Thereupon, in that assembly, the bodhisattvas, the great disciples, the Sakras, the Brahmas, the Lokapalas, and the gods and goddesses, all had this thought: "Surely the conversations of the young prince Manjusri and that good man will result in a profound teaching of the Dharma."

Thus, eight thousand bodhisattvas, five hundred disciples, a great number of Sakras, Brahmas, Lokapalas, and many hundreds of thousands of gods and goddesses, all followed the crown prince Manjusri to listen to the Dharma. And the crown prince Manjusri, surrounded and followed by these bodhisattvas, disciples, Sakras, Brahmas, Lokapalas, gods, and goddesses, entered the great city of Vaisali.

Meanwhile, the Licchavi Vimalakirti thought to himself, "Manjusri, the crown prince, is coming here with numerous attendants. Now, may this house be transformed into emptiness!"

Then, magically his house became empty. Even the doorkeeper disappeared. And, except for the invalid's couch upon which Vimalakirti himself was lying, no bed or couch or seat could be seen anywhere.

Then, the Licchavi Vimalakirti saw the crown prince Manjusri and addressed him thus: "Manjusri! Welcome, Manjusri! You are very welcome! There you are, without any coming. You appear, without any seeing. You are heard, without any hearing."

Manjusri declared, "Householder, it is as you say. Who comes, finally comes not. Who goes, finally goes not.

Why? Who comes is not known to come. Who goes is not known to go. Who appears is finally not to be seen.

"Good sir, is your condition tolerable? Is it livable? Are your physical elements not disturbed? Is your sickness diminishing? Is it not increasing? The Buddha asks about you - if you have slight trouble, slight discomfort, slight sickness, if your distress is light, if you are cared for, strong, at ease, without self-reproach, and if you are living in touch with the supreme happiness.

"Householder, whence came this sickness of yours? How long will it continue? How does it stand? How can it be alleviated?"

Vimalakirti replied, "Manjusri, my sickness comes from ignorance and the thirst for existence and it will last as long as do the sicknesses of all living beings. Were all living beings to be free from sickness, I also would not be sick. Why? Manjusri, for the bodhisattva, the world consists only of living beings, and sickness is inherent in living in the world. Were all living beings free of sickness, the bodhisattva also would be free of sickness. For example, Manjusri, when the only son of a merchant is sick, both his parents become sick on account of the sickness of their son. And the parents will suffer as long as that only son does not recover from his sickness. Just so, Manjusri, the bodhisattva loves all living beings as if each were his only child. He becomes sick when they are sick and is cured when they are cured. You ask me, Manjusri, whence comes my sickness; the sicknesses of the bodhisattvas arise from great compassion."

Manjusri: Householder, why is your house empty? Why have you no servants?

Vimalakirti: Manjusri, all Buddha-fields are also empty.

Manjusri: What makes them empty?

Vimalakirti: They are empty because of emptiness.

Manjusri: What is "empty" about emptiness?

Vimalakirti: Constructions are empty, because of emptiness.

Manjusri: Can emptiness be conceptually constructed?

Vimalakirti: Even that concept is itself empty, and emptiness cannot construct emptiness.

Manjusri: Householder, where should emptiness be sought?

Vimalakirti: Manjusri, emptiness should be sought among the sixty-two convictions.

Manjusri: Where should the sixty-two convictions be sought?

Vimalakirti: They should be sought in the liberation of the Tathágatas.

Manjusri: Where should the liberation of the Tathágatas be sought?

Vimalakirti: It should be sought in the prime mental activity of all living beings. Manjusri, you ask me why I am without servants, but all Mara's and opponents are my servants. Why? The Mara's advocate this life of birth and death and the bodhisattva does not avoid life. The heterodox opponents advocate convictions, and the bodhisattva is not troubled by convictions. Therefore, all Mara's and opponents are my servants.

Manjusri: Householder, of what sort is your sickness?

Vimalakirti: It is immaterial and invisible.

Manjusri: Is it physical or mental?

Vimalakirti: It is not physical, since the body is insubstantial in itself. It is not mental, since the nature of the mind is like illusion.

Manjusri: Householder, which of the four main elements is disturbed - earth, water, fire, or air?

Vimalakirti: Manjusri, I am sick only because the elements of living beings are disturbed by sicknesses.

Manjusri: Householder, how should a bodhisattva console another bodhisattva who is sick?

Vimalakirti: He should tell him that the body is impermanent, but should not exhort him to renunciation or disgust. He should tell him that the body is miserable, but should not encourage him to find solace in liberation;

that the body is selfless, but that living beings should be developed; that the body is peaceful, but not to seek any ultimate calm. He should urge him to confess his evil deeds, but not for the sake of absolution. He should

encourage his empathy for all living beings on account of his own sickness, his remembrance of suffering experienced from beginning-less time, and his consciousness of working for the welfare of living beings. He should encourage him not to be distressed, but to manifest the roots of virtue, to maintain the primal purity and the lack of craving, and thus to always strive to become the king of healers, who can cure all sicknesses. Thus should a bodhisattva console a sick bodhisattva, in such a way as to make him happy.

Manjusri asked, "Noble sir, how should a sick bodhisattva control his own mind?"

Vimalakirti replied, "Manjusri, a sick bodhisattva should control his own mind with the following consideration: Sickness arises from total involvement in the process of misunderstanding from beginning-less time. It arises from the passions that result from unreal mental constructions, and hence ultimately nothing is perceived which can be said to be sick. Why? The body is the issue of the four main elements, and in these elements there is no owner and no agent. There is no self in this body, and except for arbitrary insistence on self, ultimately no "I" which can be said to be sick can be apprehended. Therefore, thinking "I" should not adhere to any self, and "I" should rest in the knowledge of the root of illness,' he should abandon the conception of himself as a personality and produce the conception of himself as a thing, thinking, 'This body is an aggregate of many things; when it is born, only things are born; when it ceases, only things cease; these things have no awareness or feeling of each other; when they are born, they do not think, "I am born." When they cease, they do not think, "I cease."'

"Furthermore, he should understand thoroughly the conception of himself as a thing by cultivating the following consideration: 'Just as in the case of the conception of "self," so the conception of "thing" is also a misunderstanding, and this misunderstanding is also a grave sickness; I should free myself from this sickness and should strive to abandon it.'

"What is the elimination of this sickness? It is the elimination of egoism and possessiveness. What is the elimination of egoism and possessiveness? It is the freedom from dualism. What is freedom from dualism? It is the absence of involvement with either the external or the

internal. What is absence of involvement with either external or internal? It is non-deviation, non-fluctuation, and non-distraction from equanimity. What is equanimity? It is the equality of everything from self to liberation. Why because both self and liberation are void. How can both be void? As verbal designations, they both are void, and neither is established in reality. Therefore, one who sees such equality makes no difference between sickness and void ness; his sickness is itself void ness, and that sickness as void ness is itself void.

"The sick bodhisattva should recognize that sensation is ultimately non-sensation, but he should not realize the cessation of sensation. Although both pleasure and pain are abandoned when the Buddha-qualities are fully accomplished, there is then no sacrifice of the great compassion for all living beings living in the bad migrations. Thus, recognizing in his own suffering the infinite sufferings of these living beings, the bodhisattva correctly contemplates these living beings and resolves to cure all sicknesses. As for these living beings, there is nothing to be applied, and there is nothing to be removed; one has only to teach them the Dharma for them to realize the basis from which sicknesses arise. What is this basis? It is object-perception.

Insofar as apparent objects are perceived, they are the basis of sickness. What things are perceived as objects?

The three realms of existence are perceived as objects. What is the thorough understanding of the basic, apparent object? It is its non-perception, as no objects exist ultimately. What is non-perception? The internal subject and the external object are not perceived dualistically. Therefore, it is called non-perception.

"Manjusri, thus should a sick bodhisattva control his own mind in order to overcome old age, sickness, death, and birth. Such, Manjusri, is the sickness of the bodhisattva. If he takes it otherwise, all his efforts will be in vain. For example, one is called 'hero' when one conquers the miseries of aging, sickness, and death.

"The sick bodhisattva should tell himself: 'Just as my sickness is unreal and nonexistent, so the sicknesses of all living beings are unreal and nonexistent.' Through such considerations, he arouses the great compassion toward all living beings without falling into any sentimental compassion. The great compassion that strives to eliminate the accidental passions does not conceive of any life in living beings. Why? Because great compassion that falls into sentimentally purposive views only exhausts the bodhisattva in his reincarnations. But the great compassion, which is free of involvement with sentimentally purposive views, does not exhaust the bodhisattva in all his reincarnations. He does not reincarnate through

involvement with such views but reincarnates with his mind free of involvement. Hence, even his reincarnation is like liberation. Being reincarnated as if being liberated, he has the power and ability to teach the Dharma, which liberates living beings from their bondage. As the Lord declares: 'It is not possible for one who is himself bound to deliver others from their bondage. But one who is himself liberated is able to liberate others from their bondage.' Therefore, the bodhisattva should participate in liberation and should not participate in bondage.

"What is bondage? And what is liberation? To indulge in liberation from the world without employing liberative technique is bondage for the bodhisattva. To engage in life in the world with full employment of liberative technique is liberation for the bodhisattva. To experience the taste of contemplation, meditation, and concentration without skill in liberative technique is bondage. To experience the taste of contemplation and meditation with skill in liberative technique is liberation. Wisdom not integrated with liberative technique is bondage, but wisdom integrated with liberative technique is liberation. Liberative technique not integrated with wisdom is bondage, but liberative technique integrated with wisdom is liberation.

"How is wisdom not integrated with liberative technique a bondage? Wisdom not integrated with liberative technique consists of concentration on void ness, sign-less-ness, and wish-less-ness, and yet, being motivated by sentimental compassion, failure to concentrate on cultivation of the auspicious signs and marks, on the adornment of the Buddha-field, and on the work of development of living beings it is bondage.

"How is wisdom integrated with liberative technique a liberation? Wisdom integrated with liberative technique consists of being motivated by the great compassion and thus of concentration on cultivation of the auspicious signs and marks, on the adornment of the Buddha-field, and on the work of development of living beings, all the while concentrating on deep investigation of void ness, sign-less-ness, and wish-less-ness - and it is liberation.

"What is the bondage of liberative technique not integrated with wisdom? The bondage of liberative technique not integrated with wisdom consists of the bodhisattva's planting of the roots of virtue without dedicating them for the sake of enlightenment, while living in the grip of dogmatic convictions, passions, attachments, resentments, and their subconscious instincts.

"What is the liberation of liberative technique integrated with wisdom? The liberation of liberative technique integrated with wisdom consists of the bodhisattva's dedication of his roots of virtue for the sake of enlightenment, without taking any pride therein, while forgoing all convictions, passions, attachments, resentments, and their subconscious instincts.

"Manjusri, thus should the sick bodhisattva consider things. His wisdom is the consideration of body, mind, and sickness as impermanent, miserable, empty, and selfless. His liberative technique consists of not exhausting himself by trying to avoid all physical sickness, and in applying himself to accomplish the benefit of living beings, without interrupting the cycle of reincarnations. Furthermore, his wisdom lies in understanding that the body, mind, and sickness are neither new nor old, both simultaneously and sequentially. And his liberative technique lies in not seeking cessation of body, mind, or sicknesses.

"That, Manjusri, is the way a sick bodhisattva should concentrate his mind; he should live neither in control of his mind, nor in indulgence of his mind. Why? To live by indulging the mind is proper for fools and to live in control of the mind is proper for the disciples. Therefore, the bodhisattva should live neither in control nor in indulgence of his mind. Not living in either of the two extremes is the domain of the bodhisattva.

"Not the domain of the ordinary individual and not the domain of the saint, such is the domain of the bodhisattva.

The domain of the world yet not the domain of the passions, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. Where one understands liberation, yet does not enter final and complete liberation, there is the domain of the bodhisattva.

Where the four Mara's manifest, yet where all the works of Mara's are transcended, there is the domain of the bodhisattva. Where one seeks the gnosis of omniscience, yet does not attain this gnosis at the wrong time, there is the domain of the bodhisattva. Where one knows the Four Holy Truths, yet does not realize those truths at the wrong time, there is the domain of the bodhisattva. A domain of introspective insight, wherein one does not arrest voluntary reincarnation in the world, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. A domain where one realizes birthlessness, yet does not become destined for the ultimate, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. Where one sees relativity without entertaining any convictions, there is the domain of the bodhisattva. Where one associates with all beings, yet keeps free of all afflictive instincts, there is the domain of the bodhisattva. A domain of solitude with no place for the exhaustion of body and mind, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of the triple world, yet indivisible from the ultimate realm, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of void ness, yet where one cultivates all types of virtues, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of sign-less-ness, where one keeps in sight the deliverance of all living beings, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of wish-less-ness, where one voluntarily manifests lives in the world, such is the domain of the bodhisattva.

"A domain essentially without undertaking, yet where all the roots of virtue are undertaken without interruption, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of the six transcendences, where one attains the transcendence of the thoughts and actions of all living beings, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain

of the six super-knowledge's, wherein defilements are not exhausted, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of living by the holy Dharma, without even perceiving any evil paths, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of the four immeasurables, where one does not accept rebirth in the heaven of Brahma, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of the six remembrances, unaffected by any sort of defilement, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of contemplation, meditation, and concentration, where one does not reincarnate in the formless realms by force of these meditations and concentrations, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of the four right efforts, where the duality of good and evil is not apprehended, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of the four bases of magical powers, where they are effortlessly mastered, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of the five spiritual faculties, where one knows the degrees of the spiritual faculties of living beings, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of living with the five powers, where one delights in the ten powers of the Tathágata, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of perfection of the seven factors of enlightenment, where one is skilled in the knowledge of fine intellectual distinctions, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of the holy eightfold path, where one delights in the unlimited path of the Buddha, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of the cultivation of the aptitude for mental quiescence and transcendental analysis, where one does not fall into extreme quietism, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of the realization of the unborn nature of all things, yet of the perfection of the body, the auspicious signs and marks, and the ornaments of the Buddha, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of manifesting the attitudes of the disciples and the solitary sages without sacrificing the qualities of the Buddha, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain of conformity to all things utterly pure in nature while manifesting behavior that suits the inclinations of all living beings, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. A domain where one realizes that all the Buddha-fields are indestructible and un-creatable, having the nature of infinite space, yet where one manifests the establishment of the qualities of the Buddha-fields in all their variety and magnitude, such is the domain of the bodhisattva. The domain where one turns the wheel of the holy Dharma and manifests the magnificence of ultimate liberation, yet never forsakes the career of the bodhisattva, such is the domain of the bodhisattva!"

When Vimalakirti had spoken this discourse, eight thousand of the gods in the company of the crown prince Manjusri conceived the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.

6. The Inconceivable Liberation

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

The Licchavi Vimalakirti read the thought of the venerable Shariputra and said, "Reverend Shariputra, did you come here for the sake of the Dharma? Or did you come here for the sake of a chair?"

Shariputra replied, "I came for the sake of the Dharma, not for the sake of a chair."

Vimalakirti continued, "Reverend Shariputra, he who is interested in the Dharma is not interested even in his own body, much less in a chair. Reverend Shariputra, 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 Sangha. Reverend Shariputra, 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 Shariputra, 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 Shariputra, 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 Shariputra, 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 Shariputra, if you are interested in the Dharma, you should take no interest in anything."

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

Then, the Licchavi Vimalakirti said to the crown prince, Manjusri, "Manjusri, 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?"

Manjusri 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 Tathágata called Merupradiparaja. 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 Tathágata Merupradiparaja."

At that moment, the Licchavi Vimalakirti, having focused himself in concentration, performed a miraculous feat such that the Lord Tathágata Merupradiparaja, 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, Sakras, Brahmas, Lokapalas, 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 Vimalakirti. The thirty-two hundred thousand thrones arranged themselves without crowding and the house seemed to enlarge itself accordingly. The great city of Vaisali did not become obscured; neither did the land of Jambudvipa, (or "land of the jambu trees," this is a land populated by people with very bad karma) nor the world of four continents.

Everything else appeared just as it was before.

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

Then, those bodhisattvas who had attained the super-knowledge's 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 Vimalakirti taught these beginner bodhisattvas a teaching that enabled them to attain the five super-knowledge's, 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 Vimalakirti said to the venerable Shariputra, "Reverend Shariputra, take your seat upon a throne."

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

Vimalakirti said, "Reverend Shariputra, bow down to the Tathágata Merupradiparaja, and you will be able to take your seat."

Then, the great disciples bowed down to the Tathágata Merupradiparaja and they were seated upon the thrones.

Then, the venerable Shariputra said to the Licchavi Vimalakirti, "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 Vaisali, the villages, cities, kingdoms, capitals of Jambudvipa, the other three continents, the abodes of the gods, the nagas, the yakshas, the gandharvas, the asuras, the garudas, the kimnaras, and the mahoragas - that all of these should appear without any obstacle, just as they were before!"

The Licchavi Vimalakirti replied, "Reverend Shariputra, for the Tathágatas 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 Maharajas and of the Trayastrimsa heavens do not even know where they are.

Only those beings that are destined to be disciplined by miracles see and understand the putting of the king of mountains, Sumeru, into the mustard seed; that, reverend Shariputra is an entrance to the domain of the inconceivable liberation of the bodhisattvas.

"Furthermore, reverend Shariputra, 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 nagas, yakshas, 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 Shariputra, 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 that 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 Lokapala, a Sakra, a Brahma, 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 Shariputra, I have shown you only a small part of the entrance into the domain of the bodhisattva who lives in the inconceivable liberation. Reverend Shariputra, 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 Maha-Kasyapa, having heard this teaching of the inconceivable liberation of the bodhisattvas, was amazed, and he said to the venerable Shariputra, "Venerable Shariputra, 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 Shariputra, 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 that, 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 of 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 Mara's ever do to one who is devoted to this inconceivable liberation?"

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

Then the Licchavi Vimalakirti said to the patriarch Maha-Kasyapa, "Reverend Maha-Kasyapa, the Mara's 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 Maha-Kasyapa, 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 Maha-Kasyapa, 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 Maha-Kasyapa, just as a glowworm cannot eclipse the light of the sun, so reverend Maha-Kasyapa, it is not possible without special allowance that an ordinary person can thus attack and deprive a bodhisattva. Reverend Maha-Kasyapa, just as a donkey could not muster an attack on a wild elephant, even so, reverend Maha-Kasyapa, one who is not himself a bodhisattva cannot harass another bodhisattva, and only a bodhisattva can tolerate the harassment of another bodhisattva. Reverend Maha-Kasyapa, such is the introduction to the power of the knowledge of liberative technique of the bodhisattvas who live in the inconceivable liberation."

7. The Goddess

Thereupon, Manjusri, the crown prince, addressed the Licchavi Vimalakirti: "Good sir, how should a bodhisattva regard all living beings?"

Vimalakirti replied, "Manjusri, a bodhisattva should regard all livings beings as a wise man regards the reflection of the moon in water or as magicians regard men created by magic. He should regard them as being like a face in a mirror; like the water of a mirage; like the sound of an echo; like a mass of clouds in the sky; like the previous moment of a ball of foam; like the appearance and disappearance of a bubble of water; like the core of a plantain tree; like a flash of lightning; like the fifth great element; like the seventh sense-medium; like the appearance of matter in an immaterial realm; like a sprout from a rotten seed; like a tortoise-hair coat; like the fun of games for one who wishes to die; like the egoistic views of a stream-

winner; like a third rebirth of a once-returner; like the descent of a non-returner into a womb; like the existence of desire, hatred, and folly in a saint; like thoughts of avarice, immorality, wickedness, and hostility in a bodhisattva who has attained tolerance; like the instincts of passions in a Tathágata; like the perception of color in one blind from birth; like the inhalation and exhalation of an ascetic absorbed in the meditation of cessation; like the track of a bird in the sky; like the erection of a eunuch; like the pregnancy of a barren woman; like the un-produced passions of an emanated incarnation of the Tathágata; like dream-visions seen after waking; like the passions of one who is free of conceptualizations; like fire burning without fuel; like the reincarnation of one who has attained ultimate liberation.

"Precisely thus, Manjusri, does a bodhisattva who realizes the ultimate selflessness consider all beings."

Manjusri then asked further, "Noble sir, if a bodhisattva considers all living beings in such a way, how does he generate the great love toward them?"

Vimalakirti replied, "Manjusri, when a bodhisattva considers all living beings in this way, he thinks: 'Just as I have realized the Dharma, so should I teach it to living beings.' Thereby, he generates the love that is truly a refuge for all living beings; the love that is peaceful because free of grasping; the love that is not feverish, because free of passions; the love that accords with reality because it is equanimous in all three times; the love that is without conflict because free of the violence of the passions; the love that is non-dual because it is involved neither with the external nor with the internal; the love that is imperturbable because totally ultimate.

"Thereby he generates the love that is firm, its high resolve unbreakable, like a diamond; the love that is pure, purified in its intrinsic nature; the love that is even, its aspirations being equal; the saint's love that has eliminated its enemy; the bodhisattva's love that continuously develops living beings; The Tathágatas love that understands reality; the Buddha's love that causes living beings to awaken from their sleep; the love that is spontaneous because it is fully enlightened spontaneously; the love that is enlightenment because it is unity of experience; the love that has no presumption because it has eliminated attachment and aversion; the love that is great compassion because it infuses the Mahayana with radiance; the love that is never exhausted because it acknowledges void ness and selflessness; the love that is giving because it bestows the gift of Dharma free of the tight fist of a bad teacher; the love that is morality because it improves immoral living beings; the love that is tolerance because it protects both self and others; the love that is effort because it takes responsibility for all living beings; the love that is contemplation because it refrains from indulgence in tastes; the

love that is wisdom because it causes attainment at the proper time; the love that is liberative technique because it shows the way everywhere; the love that is without formality because it is pure in motivation; the love that is without deviation because it acts from decisive motivation; the love that is high resolve because it is without passions; the love that is without deceit because it is not artificial; the love that is happiness because it introduces living beings to the happiness of the Buddha. Such, Manjusri, is the great love of a bodhisattva."

Manjusri: What is the great compassion of a bodhisattva?

Vimalakirti: It is the giving of all accumulated roots of virtue to all living beings.

Manjusri: What is the great joy of the bodhisattva?

Vimalakirti: It is to be joyful and without regret in giving.

Manjusri: What is the equanimity of the bodhisattva?

Vimalakirti: It is what benefits both self and others.

Manjusri: To what should one resort when terrified by fear of life?

Vimalakirti: Manjusri, a bodhisattva who is terrified by fear of life should resort to the magnanimity of the Buddha.

Manjusri: Where should he who wishes to resort to the magnanimity of the Buddha take his stand?

Vimalakirti: He should stand in equanimity toward all living beings.

Manjusri: Where should he who wishes to stand in equanimity toward all living beings take his stand?

Vimalakirti: He should live for the liberation of all living beings.

Manjusri: What should he who wishes to liberate all living beings do?

Vimalakirti: He should liberate them from their passions.

Manjusri: How should he who wishes to eliminate passions apply himself?

Vimalakirti: He should apply himself appropriately.

Manjusri: How should he apply himself, to "apply himself appropriately"?

Vimalakirti: He should apply himself to production-less-ness and to destruction-less-ness.

Manjusri: What is not produced? And what is not destroyed?

Vimalakirti: Evil is not produced and good is not destroyed.

Manjusri: What is the root of good and evil?

Vimalakirti: Materiality is the root of good and evil.

Manjusri: What is the root of materiality?

Vimalakirti: Desire is the root of materiality.

Manjusri: What is the root of desire and attachment?

Vimalakirti: Unreal construction is the root of desire.

Manjusri: What is the root of unreal construction?

Vimalakirti: The false concept is its root.

Manjusri: What is the root of the false concept?

Vimalakirti: Base-less-ness.

Manjusri: What it the root of base-less-ness?

Vimalakirti: Manjusri, when something is baseless, how can it have any root? Therefore, all things stand on the root, which is baseless.

Thereupon, a certain goddess who lived in that house, having heard this teaching of the Dharma of the great heroic bodhisattvas, and being delighted, pleased, and overjoyed, manifested herself in a material body and showered the great spiritual heroes, the bodhisattvas, and the great disciples with heavenly flowers. When the flowers fell on the bodies of the bodhisattvas, they fell off on the floor, but when they fell on the bodies of the great disciples, they stuck to them and did not fall. The great disciples shook the flowers and

even tried to use their magical powers, but still the flowers would not shake off. Then, the goddess said to the venerable Shariputra, "Reverend Shariputra, why do you shake these flowers?"

Shariputra replied, "Goddess, these flowers are not proper for religious persons and so we are trying to shake them off."

The goddess said, "Do not say that, reverend Shariputra. Why? These flowers are proper indeed! Why? Such flowers have neither constructual thought nor discrimination. But the elder Shariputra has both constructual thought and discrimination.

"Reverend Shariputra, impropriety for one who has renounced the world for the discipline of the rightly taught Dharma consists of constructual thought and discrimination, yet the elders are full of such thoughts. One who is without such thoughts is always proper.

"Reverend Shariputra, see how these flowers do not stick to the bodies of these great spiritual heroes, the bodhisattvas! This is because they have eliminated constructual thoughts and discriminations.

"For example, evil spirits have power over fearful men but cannot disturb the fearless. Likewise, those intimidated by fear of the world are in the power of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures, which do not disturb those who are free from fear of the passions inherent in the constructive world. Thus, these flowers stick to the bodies of those who have not eliminated their instincts for the passions and do not stick to the bodies of those who have eliminated their instincts. Therefore, the flowers do not stick to the bodies of these bodhisattvas, who have abandoned all instincts."

Then the venerable Shariputra said to the goddess, "Goddess, how long have you been in this house?"

The goddess replied, "I have been here as long as the elder has been in liberation."

Shariputra said, "Then, have you been in this house for quite some time?"

The goddess said, "Has the elder been in liberation for quite some time?"

At that, the elder Shariputra fell silent.

The goddess continued, "Elder, you are 'foremost of the wise!' Why do you not speak? Now, when it is your turn, you do not answer the question."

Shariputra: Since liberation is inexpressible, goddess, I do not know what to say.

Goddess: All the syllables pronounced by the elder have the nature of liberation. Why? Liberation is neither internal nor external, nor can it be apprehended apart from them. Likewise, syllables are neither internal nor external, nor can they be apprehended anywhere else. Therefore, reverend Shariputra, do not point to liberation by abandoning speech! Why? The holy liberation is the equality of all things!

Shariputra: Goddess, is not liberation the freedom from desire, hatred, and folly?

Goddess: "Liberation is freedom from desire, hatred, and folly" that is the teaching of the excessively proud.

But those free of pride are taught that the very nature of desire, hatred, and folly is itself liberation.

Shariputra: Excellent! Excellent, goddess! Pray, what have you attained, what have you realized, that you have such eloquence?

Goddess: I have attained nothing, reverend Shariputra. I have no realization. Therefore I have such eloquence.

Whoever thinks, "I have attained! I have realized!" is overly proud in the discipline of the well-taught Dharma.

Shariputra: Goddess, do you belong to the disciple-vehicle, to the solitary-vehicle, or to the great vehicle?

Goddess: I belong to the disciple-vehicle when I teach it to those who need it. I belong to the solitary-vehicle when I teach the twelve links of dependent origination to those who need them. And, since I never abandon the great compassion, I belong to the great vehicle, as all need that teaching to attain ultimate liberation.

Nevertheless, reverend Shariputra, just as one cannot smell the castor plant in a magnolia wood, but only the magnolia flowers, so, reverend Shariputra, living in this house, which is redolent with the perfume of the virtues of the Buddha-qualities, one does not smell the perfume of the disciples and the solitary sages. Reverend Shariputra, the Sakras, the Brahmas, the Lokapalas, the devas, nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, and mahoragas who live in this house hear the Dharma from the mouth of this holy man and,

enticed by the perfume of the virtues of the Buddha-qualities, proceed to conceive the spirit of enlightenment.

Reverend Shariputra, I have been in this house for twelve years, and I have heard no discourses concerning the disciples and solitary sages but have heard only those concerning the great love, the great compassion, and the inconceivable qualities of the Buddha.

Reverend Shariputra, eight strange and wonderful things manifest themselves constantly in this house. What are these eight?

A light of golden hue shines here constantly, so bright that it is hard to distinguish day and night; and neither the moon nor the sun shines here distinctly. That is the first wonder of this house.

Furthermore, reverend Shariputra, whoever enters this house is no longer troubled by his passions from the moment he is within. That is the second strange and wonderful thing.

Furthermore, reverend Shariputra, this house is never forsaken by Sakra, Brahma, the Lokapalas, and the bodhisattvas from all the other Buddha-fields. That is the third strange and wonderful thing.

Furthermore, reverend Shariputra, this house is never empty of the sounds of the Dharma, the discourse on the six transcendences, and the discourses of the irreversible wheel of the Dharma. That is the fourth strange and wonderful thing.

Furthermore, reverend Shariputra, in this house one always hears the rhythms, songs, and music of gods and men, and from this music constantly resounds the sound of the infinite Dharma of the Buddha. That is the fifth strange and wonderful thing.

Furthermore, reverend Shariputra, in this house there are always four inexhaustible treasures, replete with all kinds of jewels, which never decrease, although all the poor and wretched may partake to their satisfaction.

That is the sixth strange and wonderful thing.

Furthermore, reverend Shariputra, at the wish of this good man, to this house come the innumerable Tathágatas of the ten directions, such as the Tathágatas Shakyamuni, Amitabha, Aksobhya, Ratnasri, Ratnarcis, Ratnacandra, Ratnavyuha, Dusprasaha, Sarvarthasiddha, Ratnabahula, Simhakirti, Simhasvara, and so forth; and when they come they teach the door

of Dharma called the "Secrets of the Tathágatas" and then depart. That is the seventh strange and wonderful thing.

Furthermore, reverend Shariputra, all the splendors of the abodes of the gods and all the splendors of the fields of the Buddhas shine forth in this house. That is the eighth strange and wonderful thing.

Reverend Shariputra, these eight strange and wonderful things are seen in this house. Who then, seeing such inconceivable things, would believe the teaching of the disciples?

Shariputra: 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 Shariputra, 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?"

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

Goddess: Just so, reverend Shariputra, 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 Shariputra to appear in her form and to cause herself to appear in his form. Then the goddess, transformed into Shariputra, said to Shariputra, transformed into a goddess, "Reverend Shariputra, what prevents you from transforming yourself out of your female state?"

And Shariputra, 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 Shariputra, what have you done with your female form?"

Shariputra: 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.

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

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

Shariputra: But the emanated incarnations of the Tathágata 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!

Shariputra: 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.

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

Goddess: Just so, reverend Shariputra, 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.

Shariputra: But the Tathágata has declared: "The Tathágatas, 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 Shariputra, 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?

Shariputra: 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 Vimalakirti said to the venerable elder Shariputra, "Reverend Shariputra, this goddess has already served ninety-two million billion Buddhas. She plays with the super-knowledge's. 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."

8. The Family of the Tathágatas

Then, the crown prince Manjusri said to the Licchavi Vimalakirti, "Noble sir, how does the bodhisattva follow the way to attain the qualities of the Buddha?"

Vimalakirti replied, "Manjusri, when the bodhisattva follows the wrong way, he follows the way to attain the qualities of the Buddha."

Manjusri continued, "How does the bodhisattva follow the wrong way?"

Vimalakirti replied, "Even should he enact the five deadly sins, he feels no malice, violence, or hate. Even should he go into the hells, he remains free of all taint of passions. Even should he go into the states of the animals, he remains free of darkness and ignorance. When he goes into the states of the asuras, he remains free of pride, conceit, and arrogance. When he goes into the realm of the lord of death, he accumulates the stores of merit and wisdom. When he goes into the states of motionlessness and immateriality, he does not dissolve therein.

"He may follow the ways of desire, yet he stays free of attachment to the enjoyments of desire. He may follow the ways of hatred, yet he feels no anger to any living being. He may follow the ways of folly, yet he is ever conscious with the wisdom of firm understanding.

"He may follow the ways of avarice, yet he gives away all internal and external things without regard even for his own life. He may follow the ways of immorality, yet, seeing the horror of even the slightest transgressions, he lives by the ascetic practices and austerities. He may follow the ways of wickedness and anger, yet he remains utterly free of malice and lives by love. He may follow the ways of laziness, yet his efforts are uninterrupted as he strives in the cultivation of roots of virtue. He may follow the ways of sensuous distraction, yet; naturally concentrated his contemplation is not dissipated. He may follow the ways of false wisdom, yet, having reached the transcendence of wisdom, he is expert in all mundane and transcendental sciences.

"He may show the ways of sophistry and contention, yet he is always conscious of ultimate meanings and has perfected the use of liberative techniques. He may show the ways of pride, yet he serves as a bridge and a ladder for all people. He may show the ways of the passions, yet he is utterly dispassionate and naturally pure. He may follow the ways of the Mara's, yet he does not really accept their authority in regard to his knowledge of the qualities of the Buddha. He may follow the ways of the disciples, yet he lets living beings hear the teaching they have not heard before. He may follow the ways of the solitary sages, yet he is inspired with great compassion in order to develop all living beings.

"He may follow the ways of the poor, yet he holds in his hand a jewel of inexhaustible wealth. He may follow the ways of cripples, yet he is beautiful and well adorned with the auspicious signs and marks. He may follow the ways of those of lowly birth, yet, through his accumulation of the stores of merit and wisdom, he is born in the family of the Tathágatas. He may follow the ways of the weak, the ugly, and the wretched, yet he is beautiful to look upon, and his body is like that of Narayana.

"He may manifest to living beings the ways of the sick and the unhappy, yet he has entirely conquered and transcended the fear of death.

"He may follow the ways of the rich, yet he is without acquisitiveness and often reflects upon the notion of impermanence.

He may show himself engaged in dancing with harem girls, yet he cleaves to solitude, having crossed the swamp of desire.

"He follows the ways of the dumb and the incoherent, yet, having acquired the power of incantations, he is adorned with a varied eloquence.

"He follows the ways of the heterodox without ever becoming heterodox. He follows the ways of the entire world, yet he reverses all states of existence. He follows the way of liberation without ever abandoning the progress of the world.

"Manjusri, thus does the bodhisattva follow the wrong ways, thereby following the way to the qualities of the Buddha."

Then, the Licchavi Vimalakirti said to the crown prince Manjusri, "Manjusri, what is the 'family of the Tathágatas'?"

Manjusri replied, "Noble sir, the family of the Tathágatas consists of all basic egoism; of ignorance and the thirst for existence; of lust, hate, and folly; of the four misapprehensions, of the five obscurations, of the six media of sense, of the seven abodes of consciousness, of the eight false paths, of the nine causes of irritation, of the paths of ten sins. Such is the family of the Tathágatas. In short, noble sir, the sixty-two kinds of convictions constitute the family of the Tathágatas!"

Vimalakirti: Manjusri, with what in mind do you say so?

Manjusri: Noble sir, one who stays in the fixed determination of the vision of the uncreated is not capable of conceiving the spirit of unexcelled perfect enlightenment. However, one who lives among created things, in the mines of passions, without seeing any truth, is indeed capable of conceiving the spirit of unexcelled perfect enlightenment.

Noble sir, flowers like the blue lotus, the red lotus, the white lotus, the water lily, and the moon lily do not grow on the dry ground in the wilderness, but do grow in the swamps and mud banks. Just so, the Buddha-qualities do not grow in living beings certainly destined for the uncreated but do grow in those living beings who are like swamps and mud banks of passions. Likewise, as seeds do not grow in the sky but do grow in the earth, so the Buddha-qualities do not grow in those determined for the absolute but do grow in those who conceive the spirit of enlightenment, after having produced a Sumeru-like mountain of egoistic views.

Noble sir, through these considerations one can understand that all passions constitute the family of the Tathágatas. For example, noble sir, without going out into the great ocean, it is impossible to find precious, priceless pearls. Likewise, without going into the ocean of passions, it is impossible to obtain the mind of omniscience.

Then, the elder Maha-Kasyapa applauded the crown prince Manjusri: "Good! Good Manjusri! This is indeed well spoken! This is right! The passions do indeed constitute the family of the Tathágatas. How can such as we, the disciples, conceive the spirit of enlightenment, or become fully enlightened in regard to the qualities of the Buddha? Only those guilty of the five deadly sins can conceive the spirit of enlightenment and can attain Buddhahood, which is the full accomplishment of the qualities of the Buddha!

"Just as, for example, the five desire objects have no impression or effect on those bereft of faculties, even so all the qualities of the Buddha have no impression or effect on the disciples, who have abandoned all adherences.

Thus, the disciples can never appreciate those qualities.

"Therefore, Manjusri, the ordinary individual is grateful to the Tathágata, but the disciples are not grateful.

Why? The ordinary individuals, upon learning of the virtues of the Buddha, conceive the spirit of unexcelled perfect enlightenment, in order to insure the uninterrupted continuity of the heritage of the Three Jewels; but the disciples, although they may hear of the qualities, powers, and fearlessnesses of the Buddha until the end of their days, are not capable of conceiving the spirit of unexcelled perfect enlightenment."

Thereupon, the bodhisattva Sarvarupasamdarsana, who was present in that assembly, addressed the Licchavi Vimalakirti: "Householder, where are your father and mother, your children, your wife, your servants, your maids, your laborers, and your attendants? Where are your friends, your relatives, and your kinsmen? Where are your servants, your horses, your elephants, your chariots, your bodyguards, and your bearers?"

Thus addressed, the Licchavi Vimalakirti spoke the following verses to the bodhisattva Sarvarupasamdarsana:

Of the true bodhisattvas,

The mother is the transcendence of wisdom,

The father is the skill in liberative technique;

The Leaders are born of such parents.

Their wife is the joy in the Dharma,

Love and compassion are their daughters,

The Dharma and the truth are their sons;

And their home is deep thought on the meaning of void ness.

All the passions are their disciples,

Controlled at will.

Their friends are the aids to enlightenment;

Thereby they realize supreme enlightenment.

Their companions, ever with them,

Are the six transcendences.

Their consorts are the means of unification,

Their music is the teaching of the Dharma.

The incantations make their garden,

Which blossoms with the flowers of the factors of enlightenment,

With trees of the great wealth of the Dharma,

And fruits of the gnosis of liberation.

Their pool consists of the eight liberations,

Filled with the water of concentration,

Covered with the lotuses of the seven impurities -

Who bathes therein becomes immaculate.

Their bearers are the six super knowledge's,

Their vehicle is the unexcelled Mahayana,

Their driver is the spirit of enlightenment,

And their path is the eightfold peace.

Their ornaments are the auspicious signs,

And the eighty marks;

Their garland is virtuous aspiration,

And their clothing is good conscience and consideration.

Their wealth is the holy Dharma,

And their business is it's teaching,

Their great income is pure practice,

And it is dedicated to the supreme enlightenment.

Their bed consists of the four contemplations,

And its spread is the pure livelihood,

And their awakening consists of gnosis,

Which is constant learning and meditation.

Their food is the ambrosia of the teachings,

And their drink is the juice of liberation.

Their bath is pure aspiration,

And morality their unguent and perfume.

Having conquered the enemy passions,

They are invincible heroes.

Having subdued the four Mara's,

They raise their standard on the field of enlightenment.

They manifest birth voluntarily,

Yet they are not born, nor do they originate.

They shine in all the fields of the Buddhas,

Just like the rising sun.

Though they worship Buddhas by the millions,

With every conceivable offering,

They never dwell upon the least difference

Between the Buddhas and themselves.

They journey through all Buddha-fields

In order to bring benefit to living beings,

Yet they see those fields as just like empty space,

Free of any conceptual notions of "living beings."

The fearless bodhisattvas can manifest,

All in a single instant,

The forms, sounds, and manners of behavior

Of all living beings.

Although they recognize the deeds of Mara's,

They can get along even with these Mara's

For even such activities may be manifested

By those perfected in liberative technique.

They play with illusory manifestations

In order to develop living beings,

Showing themselves to be old or sick,

And even manifesting their own deaths.

They demonstrate the burning of the earth

In the consuming flames of the world's end,

In order to demonstrate impermanence

To living beings with the notion of permanence.

Invited by hundreds of thousands of living beings,

All in the same country,

They partake of offerings at the homes of all,

And dedicate all for the sake of enlightenment.

They excel in all esoteric sciences,

And in the many different crafts,

And they bring forth the happiness

Of all living beings.

By devoting themselves as monks

To all the strange sects of the world,

They develop all those beings

Who have attached themselves to dogmatic views.

They may become suns or moons,

Indras, Brahmas, or lords of creatures,

They may become fire or water

Or earth or wind.

During the short aeons of maladies,

They become the best holy medicine;

They make beings well and happy,

And bring about their liberation.

During the short aeons of famine,

They become food and drink.

Having first alleviated thirst and hunger,

They teach the Dharma to living beings.

During the short aeons of swords,

They meditate on love,

Introducing to nonviolence

Hundreds of millions of living beings.

In the middle of great battles

They remain impartial to both sides;

For bodhisattvas of great strength

Delight in reconciliation of conflict.

In order to help the living beings,

They voluntarily descend into

The hells, which are attached

To all the inconceivable Buddha-fields.

They manifest their lives

In all the species of the animal kingdom,

Teaching the Dharma everywhere.

Thus they are called "Leaders."

They display sensual enjoyment to the worldlings,

And trances to the meditative.

They completely conquer the Mara's,

And allow them no chance to prevail.

Just as it can be shown that a lotus

Cannot exist in the center of a fire,

So they show the ultimate unreality

Of both pleasures and trances.

They intentionally become courtesans

In order to win men over,

And, having caught them with the hook of desire,

They establish them in the Buddha-gnosis.

In order to help living beings,

They always become chieftains,

Captains, priests, and ministers,

Or even prime ministers.

For the sake of the poor,

They become inexhaustible treasures,

Causing those to whom they give their gifts

To conceive the spirit of enlightenment.

They become invincible champions,

For the sake of the proud and the vain,

And, having conquered all their pride,

They start them on the quest for enlightenment.

They always stand at the head

Of those terrified with fright,

And, having bestowed fearlessness upon them,

They develop them toward enlightenment.

They become great holy men,

With the super-knowledge's and pure continence,

And thus induce living beings to the morality

Of tolerance, gentleness, and discipline.

Here in the world, they fearlessly behold

Those who are masters to be served,

And they become their servants or slaves,

Or serve as their disciples.

Well trained in liberative technique,

They demonstrate all activities,

Whichever possibly may be a means

To make beings delight in the Dharma.

Their practices are infinite;

And their spheres of influence are infinite;

Having perfected an infinite wisdom,

They liberate an infinity of living beings.

Even for the Buddhas themselves,

During a million aeons,

Or even a hundred million aeons,

It would be hard to express all their virtues.

Except for some inferior living beings,

Without any intelligence at all,

Is there anyone with any discernment

Who, having heard this teaching,

Would not wish for the supreme enlightenment?

9. The Dharma-Door of Non-duality

Then, the Licchavi Vimalakirti asked those bodhisattvas, "Good sirs, please explain how the bodhisattvas enter the Dharma-door of non-duality!"

The bodhisattva Dharmavikurvana declared, "Noble sir, production and destruction are two, but what is not produced and does not occur cannot be destroyed. Thus the attainment of the tolerance of the birthlessness of things is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Srigandha declared, " 'I' and 'mine' are two. If there is no presumption of a self, there will be no possessiveness. Thus, the absence of presumption is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Srikuta declared, " 'Defilement' and 'purification' are two. When there is thorough knowledge of defilement, there will be no conceit about purification. The path leading to the complete conquest of all conceit is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Bhadrajyotis declared, " 'Distraction' and 'attention' are two. When there is no distraction, there will be no attention, no mentation, and no mental intensity. Thus, the absence of mental intensity is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Subahu declared, " 'Bodhisattva-spirit' and 'disciple-spirit' are two. When both are seen to resemble an illusory spirit, there is no bodhisattva-spirit, nor any disciple-spirit. Thus, the sameness of natures of spirits is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Animisa declared, " 'Grasping' and 'non-grasping' are two. What is not grasped is not perceived, and what is not perceived is neither presumed nor repudiated. Thus, the inaction and noninvolvement of all things is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Sunetra declared, " 'Uniqueness' and 'character-less-ness' are two. Not to presume or construct something is neither to establish its uniqueness nor to establish its character-less-ness. To penetrate the equality of these two is to enter non-duality."

The bodhisattva Tisya declared, " 'Good' and 'evil' are two. Seeking neither good nor evil, the understanding of the non-duality of the significant and the meaningless is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Simha declared, " 'Sinfulness' and 'sin-less-ness' are two. By means of the diamond-like wisdom that pierces to the quick, not to be bound or liberated is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Simhamati declared, "To say, 'This is impure' and 'this is immaculate' makes for duality. One who, attaining equanimity, forms no conception of impurity or immaculateness, yet is not utterly without conception, has equanimity without any attainment of equanimity - he enters the absence of conceptual knots.

Thus, he enters into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Suddhadhimukti declared, "To say, 'This is happiness' and 'That is misery' is dualism. One who is free of all calculations, through the extreme purity of gnosis - his mind is aloof, like empty space; and thus he enters into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Narayana declared, "To say, 'This is mundane' and 'that is transcendental' is dualism. This world has the nature of void ness, so there is neither transcendence nor involvement, neither progress nor standstill. Thus, neither to transcend nor to be involved, neither to go nor to stop - this is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Dantamati declared, "'Life' and 'liberation' are dualistic. Having seen the nature of life, one neither belongs to it nor is one utterly liberated from it. Such understanding is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Pratyaksadarsana declared, "'Destructible' and 'indestructible' are dualistic. What is destroyed is ultimately destroyed. What is ultimately destroyed does not become destroyed; hence, it is called 'indestructible.' What is indestructible is instantaneous, and what is instantaneous is indestructible. The experience of such is called 'the entrance into the principle of non-duality.'"

The bodhisattva Parigudha declared, "'Self' and 'selflessness' are dualistic. Since the existence of self cannot be perceived, what is there to be made 'selfless'? Thus, the non-dualism of the vision of their nature is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Vidyuddeva declared, "'Knowledge' and 'ignorance' are dualistic. The natures of ignorance and knowledge are the same, for ignorance is undefined, incalculable, and beyond the sphere of thought. The realization of this is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Priyadarsana declared, "Matter itself is void. Void ness does not result from the destruction of matter, but the nature of matter is itself void ness. Therefore, to speak of void ness on the one hand, and of matter, or of sensation, or of intellect, or of motivation, or of consciousness on the other - is entirely dualistic.

Consciousness itself is void ness. Void ness does not result from the destruction of consciousness, but the nature of consciousness is itself void ness. Such understanding of the five compulsive aggregates and the knowledge of them as such by means of gnosis is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Prabhaketu declared, "To say that the four main elements are one thing and the etheric space-element another is dualistic. The four main elements are themselves the nature of space. The past itself is also the nature of space. The future itself is also the nature of space. Likewise, the present itself is also the nature of space. The gnosis that penetrates the elements in such a way is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Pramati declared, "'Eye' and 'form' are dualistic. To understand the eye correctly, and not to have attachment, aversion, or confusion with regard to form - that is called 'peace.' Similarly, 'ear' and 'sound,' 'nose' and 'smell,' 'tongue' and taste,' 'body' and touch,' and 'mind' and 'phenomena' - all are dualistic. But to know the mind, and to be neither

attached, averse, nor confused with regard to phenomena - that is called 'peace.' To live in such peace is to enter into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Aksayamati declared, "The dedication of generosity for the sake of attaining omniscience is dualistic. The nature of generosity is itself omniscience, and the nature of omniscience itself is total dedication.

Likewise, it is dualistic to dedicate morality, tolerance, effort, meditation, and wisdom for the sake of omniscience. Omniscience is the nature of wisdom, and total dedication is the nature of omniscience. Thus, the entrance into this principle of uniqueness is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Gambhiramati declared, "It is dualistic to say that void-ness is one thing, sign-less-ness another, and wish-less-ness still another. What is void has no sign. What has no sign has no wish. Where there is no wish there is no process of thought, mind, or consciousness. To see the doors of all liberations in the door of one liberation is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Santendriya declared, "It is dualistic to say 'Buddha,' 'Dharma,' and 'Sangha.' The Dharma is itself the nature of the Buddha, the Sangha is itself the nature of the Dharma, and all of them are uncompounded. The uncompounded is infinite space, and the processes of all things are equivalent to infinite space. Adjustment to this is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Apratihatanetra declared, "It is dualistic to refer to 'aggregates' and to the 'cessation of aggregates.' Aggregates themselves are cessation. Why? The egoistic views of aggregates, being un-produced themselves, do not exist ultimately. Hence such views do not really conceptualize 'These are aggregates' or 'These aggregates cease.' Ultimately, they have no such discriminative constructions and no such conceptualizations. Therefore, such views have themselves the nature of cessation. Nonoccurrence and non-destruction are the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Suvinita declared, "Physical, verbal, and mental vows do not exist dualistically. Why? These things have the nature of inactivity. The nature of inactivity of the body is the same as the nature of inactivity of speech, whose nature of inactivity is the same as the nature of inactivity of the mind. It is necessary to know and to understand this fact of the ultimate inactivity of all things, for this knowledge is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Punyaksetra declared, "It is dualistic to consider actions meritorious, sinful, or neutral. The non-undertaking of meritorious, sinful, and neutral actions is not dualistic. The intrinsic nature of all such actions is void ness, wherein ultimately there is neither merit, nor sin, nor neutrality, nor action itself. The non-accomplishment of such actions is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Padmavyuha declared, "Dualism is produced from obsession with self, but true understanding of self does not result in dualism. Who thus abides in non-duality is without ideation, and that absence of ideation is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Srigarbha declared, "Duality is constituted by perceptual manifestation. Non-duality is object-less-ness. Therefore, non-grasping and non-rejection is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Candrottara declared, "'Darkness' and 'light' are dualistic, but the absence of both darkness and light is non-duality. Why? At the time of absorption in cessation, there is neither darkness nor light, and likewise with the natures of all things. The entrance into this equanimity is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Ratnamudrahasta declared, "It is dualistic to detest the world and to rejoice in liberation, and neither detesting the world nor rejoicing in liberation is non-duality. Why? Liberation can be found where there is bondage, but where there is ultimately no bondage where is there need for liberation? The mendicant who is neither bound nor liberated does not experience any like or any dislike and thus he enters non-duality."

The bodhisattva Manikutaraja declared, "It is dualistic to speak of good paths and bad paths. One who is on the path is not concerned with good or bad paths. Living in such unconcern, he entertains no concepts of 'path' or 'non-path.' Understanding the nature of concepts, his mind does not engage in duality. Such is the entrance into non-duality."

The bodhisattva Satyarata declared, "It is dualistic to speak of 'true' and 'false.' When one sees truly, one does not ever see any truth, so how could one see falsehood? Why? One does not see with the physical eye, one sees with the eye of wisdom. And with the wisdom-eye one sees only insofar as there is neither sight nor non-sight.

There, where there is neither sight nor non-sight, is the entrance into non-duality."

When the bodhisattvas had given their explanations, they all addressed the crown prince Manjusri: "Manjusri, what is the bodhisattva's entrance into non-duality?"

Manjusri replied, "Good sirs, you have all spoken well. Nevertheless, all your explanations are themselves dualistic. To know no one teaching, to express nothing, to say nothing, to explain nothing, to announce nothing, to indicate nothing, and to designate nothing - that is the entrance into non-duality."

Then the crown prince Manjusri said to the Licchavi Vimalakirti, "We have all given our own teachings, noble sir. Now, may you elucidate the teaching of the entrance into the principle of non-duality!"

Thereupon, the Licchavi Vimalakirti kept his silence, saying nothing at all.

The crown prince Manjusri applauded the Licchavi Vimalakirti: "Excellent! Excellent, noble sir! This is indeed the entrance into the non-duality of the bodhisattvas. Here there is no use for syllables, sounds, and ideas."

When these teachings had been declared, five thousand bodhisattvas entered the door of the Dharma of non-duality and attained tolerance of the birthlessness of things.

10. The Feast Brought by the Emanated Incarnation

Thereupon, the venerable Shariputra thought to himself, "If these great bodhisattvas do not adjourn before noontime, when are they going to eat?"

The Licchavi Vimalakirti, knowing telepathically the thought of the venerable Shariputra, spoke to him:

"Reverend Shariputra, the Tathágata has taught the eight liberations. You should concentrate on those liberations, listening to the Dharma with a mind free of preoccupations with material things. Just wait a minute, reverend Shariputra, and you will eat such food as you have never before tasted."

Then, the Licchavi Vimalakirti set himself in such a concentration and performed such a miraculous feat that those bodhisattvas and those great disciples were enabled to see the universe called Sarvagandhasugandha, which is located in the direction of the zenith, beyond as many Buddha-fields as there are sands in forty-two Ganges rivers. There the Tathágata named Sugandhakuta resides, lives, and is manifest. In that universe, the trees emit a fragrance that far surpasses all the fragrances, human and divine, of all the Buddha-fields of the ten directions. In that universe, even the names "disciple" and "solitary sage" do not exist, and the Tathágata Sugandhakuta teaches the Dharma to a gathering of bodhisattvas only. In that universe, all the houses, the avenues, the parks, and the palaces are made of various

perfumes, and the fragrance of the food eaten by those bodhisattvas pervades immeasurable universes.

At this time, the Tathágata Sugandhakuta sat down with his bodhisattvas to take his meal, and the deities called Gandhavyuhahara, who were all devoted to the Mahayana, served and attended upon the Buddha and his bodhisattvas. Everyone in the gathering at the house of Vimalakirti was able to see distinctly this universe wherein the Tathágata Sugandhakuta and his bodhisattvas were taking their meal.

The Licchavi Vimalakirti addressed the whole gathering of bodhisattvas: "Good sirs, is there any among you who would like to go to that Buddha-field to bring back some food?"

But, restrained by the supernatural power of Manjusri, none of them volunteered to go.

The Licchavi Vimalakirti said to crown prince Manjusri, "Manjusri, are you not ashamed of such a gathering?"

Manjusri replied, "Noble sir, did not the Tathágata declare, 'Those who are unlearned should not be despised'?"

Then, the Licchavi Vimalakirti, without rising from his couch, magically emanated an incarnation-bodhisattva, whose body was of golden color, adorned with the auspicious signs and marks, and of such an appearance that he outshone the whole assembly. The Licchavi Vimalakirti addressed that incarnated bodhisattva: "Noble son, go in the direction of the zenith and when you have crossed as many Buddha-fields as there are sands in forty-two Ganges rivers, you will reach a universe called Sarvagandhasugandha, where you will find the Tathágata Sugandhakuta taking his meal. Go to him and, having bowed down at his feet, make the following request of him:

"'The Licchavi Vimalakirti bows down one hundred thousand times at your feet, O Lord, and asks after your health - if you have but little trouble, little discomfort, little unrest; if you are strong, well, without complaint, and living in touch with supreme happiness.'

"Having thus asked after his health, you should request of him 'Vimalakirti asks the Lord to give me the remains of your meal, with which he will accomplish the Buddha-work in the universe called "Saha." (Saha means ‘endurance’ and always refers to our present world system) Thus, those living beings with inferior aspirations will be inspired with lofty aspirations, and the good name of the Tathágata will be celebrated far and wide."

At that, the incarnated bodhisattva said, "Very good!" to the Licchavi Vimalakirti and obeyed his instructions.

In sight of all the bodhisattvas, he turned his face upward and was gone, and they saw him no more. When he reached the universe Sarvagandhasugandha, he bowed down at the feet of the Tathágata Sugandhakuta and said, "Lord, the bodhisattva Vimalakirti, bowing down at the feet of the Lord, greets the Lord, saying: 'do you have little trouble, little discomfort, and little unrest? Are you strong, well, without complaint, and living in touch with the supreme happiness?' He then requests, having bowed down one hundred thousand times at the feet of the Lord: 'May the Lord be gracious and give to me the remains of his meal in order to accomplish the Buddha-work in the universe called Saha. Then, those living beings who aspire to inferior ways may gain the intelligence to aspire to the great Dharma of the Buddha, and the name of the Buddha will be celebrated far and wide.'"

At that the bodhisattvas of the Buddha-field of the Tathágata Sugandhakuta were astonished and asked the Tathágata Sugandhakuta, "Lord, where is there such a great being as this? Where is the universe Saha? What does he mean by 'those who aspire to inferior ways'?"

Having thus been questioned by those bodhisattvas, the Tathágata Sugandhakuta said, "Noble sons, the universe Saha exists beyond as many Buddha-fields in the direction of the nadir as there are sands in forty-two Ganges Rivers. There the Tathágata Shakyamuni teaches the Dharma to living beings that aspire to the inferior ways, in that Buddha-field tainted with five corruptions. There the bodhisattva Vimalakirti, who lives in the inconceivable liberation, teaches the Dharma to the bodhisattvas. He sends this incarnation-bodhisattva here in order to celebrate my name, in order to show the advantages of this universe, and in order to increase the roots of virtue of those bodhisattvas."

The bodhisattvas exclaimed, "How great must that bodhisattva be himself if his magical incarnation is thus endowed with supernatural power, strength, and fearlessness!"

The Tathágata said, "The greatness of that bodhisattva is such that he sends magical incarnations to all the Buddha-fields of the ten directions, and all these incarnations accomplish the Buddha-work for all the living beings in all those Buddha-fields."

Then, the Tathágata Sugandhakuta poured some of his food, impregnated with all perfumes, into a fragrant vessel and gave it to the incarnation-bodhisattva. And the ninety million bodhisattvas of that universe volunteered to go along with him: "Lord, we also would like to go to that universe Saha, to see, honor, and serve the Buddha Shakyamuni and to see Vimalakirti and those bodhisattvas."

The Tathágata declared, "Noble sons, go ahead if you think it is the right time. But, lest those living beings become mad and intoxicated, go without your perfumes. And, lest those living beings of the Saha world become jealous of you, change your bodies to hide your beauty. And do not conceive ideas of contempt and aversion for that universe. Why? Noble sons, a Buddha-field is a field of pure space, but the Lord Buddhas, in order to develop living beings, do not reveal all at once the pure realm of the Buddha."

Then the incarnation-bodhisattva took the food and departed with the ninety million bodhisattvas and by the power of the Buddha and the supernatural operation of Vimalakirti, disappeared from that universe Sarvagandhasugandha and stood again in the house of Vimalakirti in a fraction of a second. The Licchavi Vimalakirti created ninety million lion-thrones exactly like those already there, and the bodhisattvas were seated.

Then, the incarnation-bodhisattva gave the vessel full of food to Vimalakirti, and the fragrance of that food permeated the entire great city of Vaisali and its sweet perfume spread throughout one hundred universes.

Within the city of Vaisali, the Brahmans, householders, and even the Licchavi chieftain Candracchattra, having noticed this fragrance, were amazed and filled with wonder. They were so cleansed in body and mind that they came at once to the house of Vimalakirti, along with all eighty-four thousand of the Licchavis.

Seeing there the bodhisattvas seated on the high, wide, and beautiful lion-thrones, they were filled with admiration and great joy. They all bowed down to those great disciples and bodhisattvas and then sat down to one side. And the gods of the earth, the gods of the desire-world, and the gods of the material world, attracted by the perfume, also came to the house of Vimalakirti.

Then, the Licchavi Vimalakirti spoke to the elder Shariputra and the great disciples: "Reverends, eat of the food of the Tathágata! It is ambrosia perfumed by the great compassion. But do not fix your minds in narrow-minded attitudes, lest you be unable to receive its gift."

But some of the disciples had already had the thought: "How can such a huge multitude eat such a small amount of food?"

Then the incarnation-bodhisattva said to those disciples, "Do not compare, venerable ones, your own wisdom and merits with the wisdom and the merits of the Tathágata! Why? For example, the four great oceans might dry up, but this food would never be exhausted. If all

living beings were to eat for an aeon an amount of this food equal to Mount Sumeru in size, it would not be depleted. Why? Issued from inexhaustible morality, concentration, and wisdom, the remains of the food of the Tathágata contained in this vessel cannot be exhausted."

Indeed, the entire gathering was satisfied by that food, and the food was not at all depleted. Having eaten that food, there arose in the bodies of those bodhisattvas, disciples, Sakras, Brahmas, Lokapalas, and other living beings, bliss just like the bliss of the bodhisattvas of the universe Sarvasukhamandita. And from all the pores of their skin arose a perfume like that of the trees that grow in the universe Sarvagandhasugandha.

Then, the Licchavi Vimalakirti knowingly addressed those bodhisattvas who had come from the Buddha-field of the Lord Tathágata Sugandhakuta: "Noble sirs, how does the Tathágata Sugandhakuta teach his Dharma?"

They replied, "The Tathágata does not teach the Dharma by means of sound and language. He disciplines the bodhisattvas only by means of perfumes. At the foot of each perfume-tree sits a bodhisattva, and the trees emit perfumes like this one. From the moment they smell that perfume, the bodhisattvas attain the concentration called 'source of all bodhisattva-virtues.' From the moment they attain that concentration, all the bodhisattva-virtues are produced in them."

Those bodhisattvas then asked the Licchavi Vimalakirti, "How does the Buddha Shakyamuni teach the Dharma?"

Vimalakirti replied, "Good sirs, these living beings here are hard to discipline. Therefore, he teaches them with discourses appropriate for the disciplining of the wild and uncivilized. How does he discipline the wild and uncivilized? What discourses are appropriate? Here they are:

"'This is hell. This is the animal world. This is the world of the lord of death. These are the adversities. These are the rebirths with crippled faculties. These are physical misdeeds, and these are the retributions for physical misdeeds. These are verbal misdeeds, and these are the retributions for verbal misdeeds. These are mental misdeeds, and these are the retributions for mental misdeeds. This is killing. This is stealing. This is sexual misconduct. This is lying. This is backbiting. This is harsh speech. This is frivolous speech. This is covetousness. This is malice. This is false view. These are their retributions. This is miserliness, and this is its effect. This is immorality. This is hatred. This is sloth. This is the fruit of sloth. This is false wisdom

and this is the fruit of false wisdom. These are the transgressions of the precepts. This is the vow of personal liberation.

This should be done and that should not be done. This is proper and that should be abandoned. This is an obscuration and that is without obscuration. This is sin and that rises above sin. This is the path and that is the wrong path. This is virtue and that is evil. This is blameworthy and that is blameless. This is defiled and that is immaculate. This is mundane and that is transcendental. This is compounded and that is uncompounded. This is passion and that is purification. This is life and that is liberation.'

"Thus, by means of these varied explanations of the Dharma, the Buddha trains the minds of those living beings who are just like wild horses. Just as wild horses or wild elephants will not be tamed unless the goad pierces them to the marrow, so living beings who are wild and hard to civilize are disciplined only by means of discourses about all kinds of miseries."

The bodhisattvas said, "Thus is established the greatness of the Buddha Shakyamuni! It is marvelous how, concealing his miraculous power, he civilizes the wild living beings that are poor and inferior. And the bodhisattvas who settle in a Buddha-field of such intense hardships must have inconceivably great compassion!"

The Licchavi Vimalakirti declared, "So be it, good sirs! It is as you say. The great compassion of the bodhisattvas who reincarnate here is extremely firm. In a single lifetime in this universe, they accomplish much benefit for living beings. So much benefit for living beings could not be accomplished in the universe Sarvagandhasugandha even in one hundred thousand aeons. Why? Good sirs, in this Saha universe, there are ten virtuous practices, which do not exist in any other Buddha-field. What are these ten? Here they are: to win the poor by generosity; to win the immoral by morality; to win the hateful by means of tolerance; to win the lazy by means of effort; to win the mentally troubled by means of concentration; to win the falsely wise by means of true wisdom; to show those suffering from the eight adversities how to rise above them; to teach the Mahayana to those of narrow-minded behavior; to win those who have not produced the roots of virtue by means of the roots of virtue; and to develop living beings without interruption through the four means of unification. Those who engage in these ten virtuous practices do not exist in any other Buddha-field."

Again the bodhisattvas asked, "How many qualities must a bodhisattva have, to go safe and sound to a pure Buddha-field after he transmigrates at death away from this Saha universe?"

Vimalakirti replied, "After he transmigrates at death away from this Saha universe, a bodhisattva must have eight qualities to reach a pure Buddha-field safe and sound. What are the eight? He must resolve to himself: 'I must benefit all living beings, without seeking even the slightest benefit for myself. I must bear all the miseries of all living beings and give all my accumulated roots of virtue to all living beings. I must have no resentment toward any living being. I must rejoice in all bodhisattvas as if they were the Teacher. I must not neglect any teachings, whether or not I have heard them before. I must control my mind, without coveting the gains of others, and without taking pride in gains of my own. I must examine my own faults and not blame others for their faults. I must take pleasure in being consciously aware and must truly undertake all virtues.'

"If a bodhisattva has these eight qualities, when he transmigrates at death away from the Saha universe, he will go safe and sound to a pure Buddha-field."

When the Licchavi Vimalakirti and the crown prince Manjusri had thus taught the Dharma to the multitude gathered there, one hundred thousand living beings conceived the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, and ten thousand bodhisattvas attained the tolerance of the birthlessness of things.

11. Lesson of the Destructible and the Indestructible

Meanwhile, the area in which the Lord was teaching the Dharma in the garden of Amrapali expanded and grew larger, and the entire assembly appeared tinged with a golden hue. Thereupon, the venerable Ánanda asked the Buddha, "Lord, this expansion and enlargement of the garden of Amrapali and this golden hue of the assembly -what do these auspicious signs portend?"

The Buddha declared, "Ánanda, these auspicious signs portend that the Licchavi Vimalakirti and the crown prince Manjusri, attended by a great multitude, are coming into the presence of the Tathágata."

At that moment the Licchavi Vimalakirti said to the crown prince Manjusri, "Manjusri, let us take these many living beings into the presence of the Lord, so that they may see the Tathágata and bow down to him!"

Manjusri replied, "Noble sir, send them if you feel the time is right!"

Thereupon the Licchavi Vimalakirti performed the miraculous feat of placing the entire assembly, replete with thrones, upon his right hand and then, having transported himself

magically into the presence of the Buddha, placing it on the ground. He bowed down at the feet of the Buddha, circumambulated him to the right seven times with palms together, and withdrew to one side.

The bodhisattvas who had come from the Buddha-field of the Tathágata Sugandhakuta descended from their lion-thrones and, bowing down at the feet of the Buddha, placed their palms together in reverence and withdrew to one side. And the other bodhisattvas, great spiritual heroes, and the great disciples descended from their thrones likewise and, having bowed at the feet of the Buddha, withdrew to one side. Likewise all those Indras, Brahmas, Lokapalas, and gods bowed at the feet of the Buddha, placed their palms together in reverence and withdrew to one side.

Then, the Buddha, having delighted those bodhisattvas with greetings, declared, "Noble sons, be seated upon your thrones!"

Thus commanded by the Buddha, they took their thrones.

The Buddha said to Shariputra, "Shariputra, did you see the miraculous performances of the bodhisattvas, those best of beings?"

"I have seen them, Lord."

"What concept did you produce toward them?"

"Lord, I produced the concept of inconceivability toward them. Their activities appeared inconceivable to me to the point that I was unable to think of them, to judge them, or even to imagine them."

Then the venerable Ánanda asked the Buddha, "Lord, what is this perfume, the likes of which I have never smelled before?"

The Buddha answered, "Ánanda, this perfume emanates from all the pores of all these bodhisattvas."

Shariputra added, "Venerable Ánanda, this same perfume emanates from all our pores as well!"

Ánanda: Where does the perfume come from?

Shariputra: The Licchavi Vimalakirti obtained some food from the universe called Sarvagandhasugandha, the Buddha-field of the Tathágata Sugandhakuta, and this perfume emanates from the bodies of all those who partook of that food.

Then the venerable Ánanda addressed the Licchavi Vimalakirti: "How long will this perfume remain?"

Vimalakirti: Until is it digested.

Ánanda: When will it be digested?

Vimalakirti: It will be digested in forty-nine days, and its perfume will emanate for seven days more after that, but there will be no trouble of indigestion during that time. Furthermore, reverend Ánanda, if monks who have not entered ultimate determination eat this food, it will be digested when they enter that determination. When those who have entered ultimate determination eat this food, it will not be digested until their minds are totally liberated. If living beings that have not conceived the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment eat this food, it will be digested when they conceive the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. If those who have conceived the spirit of perfect enlightenment eat this food, it will not be digested until they have attained tolerance. And if those who have attained tolerance eat this food, it will be digested when they have become bodhisattvas one lifetime away from Buddhahood. Reverend Ánanda, it is like the medicine called "delicious," which reaches the stomach but is not digested until all poisons have been eliminated only then is it digested. Thus, reverend Ánanda, this food is not digested until all the poisons of the passions have been eliminated only then is it digested.

Then, the venerable Ánanda said to the Buddha, "Lord, it is wonderful that this food accomplishes the work of the Buddha!"

"So it is, Ánanda! It is as you say, Ánanda! There are Buddha-fields that accomplish the Buddha-work by means of bodhisattvas; those that do so by means of lights; those that do so by means of the tree of enlightenment; those that do so by means of the physical beauty and the marks of the Tathágata; those that do so by means of religious robes; those that do so by means of good; those that do so by means of water; those that do so by means of gardens; those that do so by means of palaces; those that do so by means of mansions; those that do so by means of magical incarnations; those that do so by means of empty space; and those that do so by means of lights in the sky. Why is it so, Ánanda? Because by these various means, living beings become disciplined. Similarly, Ánanda, there are Buddha-fields that accomplish the Buddha-work by means of teaching living beings words, definitions, and examples, such

as 'dreams,' 'images,' 'the reflection of the moon in water,' 'echoes,' 'illusions,' and 'mirages'; and those that accomplish the Buddha-work by making words understandable. Also, Ánanda, there are utterly pure Buddha-fields that accomplish the Buddha-work for living beings without speech, by silence, inexpressibility, and un-teach-ability. Ánanda, among all the activities, enjoyments, and practices of the Buddhas, there are none that do not accomplish the Buddha-work, because all discipline living beings. Finally, Ánanda, the Buddhas accomplish the Buddha-work by means of the four Mara's and all the eighty-four thousand types of passion that afflict living beings.

"Ánanda, this is a Dharma-door called 'Introduction to all the Buddha-qualities.' The bodhisattva who enters this Dharma-door experiences neither joy nor pride when confronted by a Buddha-field adorned with the splendor of all noble qualities, and experiences neither sadness nor aversion when confronted by a Buddha-field apparently without that splendor, but in all cases produces a profound reverence for all the Tathágatas. Indeed, it is wonderful how all the Lord Buddhas, who understand the equality of all things, manifest all sorts of Buddha-fields in order to develop living beings!

"Ánanda, just as the Buddha-fields are diverse as to their specific qualities but have no difference as to the sky that covers them, so, Ánanda, the Tathágatas are diverse as to their physical bodies but do not differ as to their unimpeded gnosis.

"Ánanda, all the Buddhas are the same as to the perfection of the Buddha-qualities, that is: their forms, their colors, their radiance, their bodies, their marks, their nobility, their morality, their concentration, their wisdom, their liberation, the gnosis and vision of liberation, their strengths, their fearlessnesses, their special Buddha-qualities, their great love, their great compassion, their helpful intentions, their attitudes, their practices, their paths, the lengths of their lives, their teachings of the Dharma, their development and liberation of living beings, and their purification of Buddha-fields. Therefore, they are all called 'Samyaksambuddhas,' 'Tathágatas,' and 'Buddhas.'

"Ánanda, were your life to last an entire aeon, it would not be easy for you to understand thoroughly the extensive meaning and precise verbal significance of these three names. Also, Ánanda, if all the living beings of this billion-world galactic universe were like you the foremost of the learned and the foremost of those endowed with memory and incantations - and were they to devote an entire aeon, they would still be unable to understand completely the exact and extensive meaning of the three words 'Samyaksambuddha,' 'Tathágata,' and 'Buddha.'

Thus, Ánanda, the enlightenment of the Buddhas is immeasurable, and the wisdom and the eloquence of the Tathágatas are inconceivable."

Then, the venerable Ánanda addressed the Buddha: "Lord, from this day forth, I shall no longer declare myself to be the foremost of the learned."

The Buddha said, "Do not be discouraged, Ánanda! Why? I pronounced you, Ánanda, the foremost of the learned, with the disciples in mind, not considering the bodhisattvas. Look, Ánanda, look at the bodhisattvas.

They cannot be fathomed even by the wisest of men. Ánanda, one can fathom the depths of the ocean, but one cannot fathom the depths of the wisdom, gnosis, memory, incantations, or eloquence of the bodhisattvas. Ánanda, you should remain in equanimity with regard to the deeds of the bodhisattvas. Why? Ánanda, these marvels displayed in a single morning by the Licchavi Vimalakirti could not be performed by the disciples and solitary sages who have attained miraculous powers, were they to devote all their powers of incarnation and transformation during one hundred thousand millions of aeons."

Then, all those bodhisattvas from the Buddha-field of the Tathágata Sugandhakuta joined their palms in reverence and, saluting the Tathágata Shakyamuni, addressed him as follows: "Lord, when we first arrived in this Buddha-field, we conceived a negative idea, but we now abandon this wrong idea. Why? Lord, the realms of the Buddhas and their skill in liberative technique are inconceivable. In order to develop living beings, they manifest such and such a field to suit the desire of such and such a living being. Lord, please give us a teaching by which we may remember you, when we have returned to Sarvagandhasugandha."

Thus having been requested, the Buddha declared, "Noble sons, there is a liberation of bodhisattvas called 'destructible and indestructible.' You must train yourselves in this liberation. What is it? 'Destructible' refers to compounded things. 'Indestructible' refers to the uncompounded. But the bodhisattva should neither destroy the compounded nor rest in the uncompounded.

"Not to destroy compounded things consists in not losing the great love; not giving up the great compassion; not forgetting the omniscient mind generated by high resolve; not tiring in the positive development of living beings; not abandoning the means of unification; giving up body and life in order to uphold the holy Dharma; never being satisfied with the roots of virtue already accumulated; taking pleasure in skillful dedication; having no laziness in seeking the Dharma; being without selfish reticence in teaching the Dharma; sparing no effort in seeing and worshiping the Tathágatas; being fearless in voluntary reincarnations; being

neither proud in success nor bowed in failure; not despising the unlearned, and respecting the learned as if they were the Teacher himself; making reasonable those whose passions are excessive; taking pleasure in solitude, without being attached to it; not longing for one's own happiness but longing for the happiness of others; conceiving of trance, meditation, and equanimity as if they were the Avici hell; conceiving of the world as a garden of liberation; considering beggars to be spiritual teachers; considering the giving away of all possessions to be the means of realizing Buddhahood; considering immoral beings to be saviors; considering the transcendences to be parents; considering the aids to enlightenment to be servants; never ceasing accumulation of the roots of virtue; establishing the virtues of all Buddha-fields in one's own Buddha-field; offering limitless pure sacrifices to fulfill the auspicious marks and signs; adorning body, speech and mind by refraining from all sins; continuing in reincarnations during immeasurable aeons, while purifying body, speech, and mind; avoiding discouragement, through spiritual heroism, when learning of the immeasurable virtues of the Buddha; wielding the sharp sword of wisdom to chastise the enemy passions; knowing well the aggregates, the elements, and the sense-media in order to bear the burdens of all living beings; blazing with energy to conquer the host of demons; seeking knowledge in order to avoid pride; being content with little desire in order to uphold the Dharma; not mixing with worldly things in order to delight all the people; being faultless in all activities in order to conform to all people; producing the super-knowledge’s to actually accomplish all duties of benefit to living beings; acquiring incantations, memory, and knowledge in order to retain all learning; understanding the degrees of people's spiritual faculties to dispel the doubts of all living beings; displaying invincible miraculous feats to teach the Dharma; having irresistible speech by acquiring unimpeded eloquence; tasting human and divine success by purifying the path of ten virtues; establishing the path of the pure states of Brahma by cultivating the four immeasurables; inviting the Buddhas to teach the Dharma, rejoicing in them, and applauding them, thereby obtaining the melodious voice of a Buddha; disciplining body, speech, and mind, thus maintaining constant spiritual progress; being without attachment to anything and thus acquiring the behavior of a Buddha; gathering together the order of bodhisattvas to attract beings to the Mahayana; and being consciously aware at all times not to neglect any good quality. Noble sons, a bodhisattva who thus applies himself to the Dharma is a bodhisattva who does not destroy the compounded realm.

"What is not resting in the uncompounded? The bodhisattva practices void ness, but he does not realize void ness. He practices sign-less-ness but does not realize sign-less-ness. He practices wish-less-ness but does not realize wish-less-ness. He practices non-performance but does not realize non-performance. He knows impermanence but is not complacent about his roots of virtue. He considers misery, but he reincarnates voluntarily. He knows selflessness but does not waste himself. He considers peacefulness but does not seek extreme

peace. He cherishes solitude but does not avoid mental and physical efforts. He considers place-less-ness but does not abandon the place of good actions. He considers occurrence-less-ness but undertakes to bear the burdens of all living beings. He considers immaculateness, yet he follows the process of the world. He considers motionlessness, yet he moves in order to develop all living beings. He considers selflessness yet does not abandon the great compassion toward all living beings. He considers birthlessness, yet he does not fall into the ultimate determination of the disciples. He considers vanity, futility, insubstantiality, dependency, and place-less-ness, yet he establishes himself on merits that are not vain, on knowledge that is not futile, on reflections that are substantial, on the striving for the consecration of the independent gnosis, and on the Buddha-family in its definitive meaning.

"Thus, noble sons, a bodhisattva who aspires to such a Dharma neither rests in the uncompounded nor destroys the compounded.

"Furthermore, noble sons, in order to accomplish the store of merit, a bodhisattva does not rest in the uncompounded, and, in order to accomplish the store of wisdom, he does not destroy the compounded. In order to fulfill the great love, he does not rest in the uncompounded, and, in order to fulfill the great compassion, he does not destroy compounded things. In order to develop living beings, he does not rest in the uncompounded, and in order to aspire to the Buddha-qualities, he does not destroy compounded things. To perfect the marks of Buddhahood, he does not rest in the uncompounded, and, to perfect the gnosis of omniscience, he does not destroy compounded things. Out of skill in liberative technique, he does not rest in the uncompounded, and, through thorough analysis with his wisdom; he does not destroy compounded things. To purify the Buddha-field, he does not rest in the uncompounded, and, by the power of the grace of the Buddha, he does not destroy compounded things. Because he feels the needs of living beings, he does not rest in the uncompounded, and, in order to show truly the meaning of the Dharma, he does not destroy compounded things. Because of his store of roots of virtue, he does not rest in the uncompounded, and because of his instinctive enthusiasm for these roots of virtue, he does not destroy compounded things. To fulfill his prayers, he does not rest in the uncompounded, and, because he has no wishes, he does not destroy compounded things. Because his positive thought is pure, he does not rest in the uncompounded, and, because his high resolve is pure, he does not destroy compounded things. In order to play with the five super-knowledge's, he does not rest in the uncompounded, and, because of the six super-knowledge's of the Buddha-gnosis, he does not destroy compounded things. To fulfill the six transcendences, he does not rest in the uncompounded, and, to fulfill the time, he does not destroy compounded things. To gather the treasures of the Dharma, he does not rest in the uncompounded, and, because he does not

like any narrow-minded teachings, he does not destroy compounded things. Because he gathers all the medicines of the Dharma, he does not rest in the uncompounded, and, to apply the medicine of the Dharma appropriately, he does not destroy compounded things. To confirm his commitments, he does not rest in the uncompounded, and, to mend any failure of these commitments, he does not destroy compounded things. To concoct all the elixirs of the Dharma, he does not rest in the uncompounded, and, to give out the nectar of this subtle Dharma, he does not destroy compounded things. Because he knows thoroughly all the sicknesses due to passions, he does not rest in the uncompounded, and, in order to cure all sicknesses of all living beings, he does not destroy compounded things.

"Thus, noble sons, the bodhisattva does not destroy compounded things and does not rest in the uncompounded, and that is the liberation of bodhisattvas called 'destructible and indestructible.' Noble sirs, you should also strive in this."

Then, those bodhisattvas, having heard this teaching, were satisfied, delighted, and reverent. They were filled with rejoicing and happiness of mind. In order to worship the Buddha Shakyamuni and the bodhisattvas of the Saha universe, as well as this teaching, they covered the whole earth of this billion-world universe with fragrant powder, incense, perfumes, and flowers up to the height of the knees. Having thus regaled the whole retinue of the Tathágata, bowed their heads at the feet of the Buddha, and circumambulated him to the right three times, they sang a hymn of praise to him. They then disappeared from this universe and in a split second were back in the universe Sarvagandhasugandha.

12. Vision of the Universe Abhirati and the Tathágata Aksobhya

Thereupon, the Buddha said to the Licchavi Vimalakirti, "Noble son, when you would see the Tathágata, how do you view him?"

Thus addressed, the Licchavi Vimalakirti said to the Buddha, "Lord, when I would see the Tathágata, I view him by not seeing any Tathágata. Why? I see him as not born from the past, not passing on to the future, and not abiding in the present time. Why? He is the essence, which is the reality of matter, but he is not matter. He is the essence, which is the reality of sensation, but he is not sensation. He is the essence, which is the reality of intellect, but he is not intellect. He is the essence, which is the reality of motivation, yet he is not motivation. He is the essence, which is the reality of consciousness, yet he is not consciousness. Like the element of space, he does not abide in any of the four elements. Transcending the scope of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, he is not produced in the six sense-media. He is not involved in the three worlds, is free of the three defilements, is associated with the triple liberation, is endowed with the three knowledge's, and has truly attained the unattainable.

"The Tathágata has reached the extreme of detachment in regard to all things, yet he is not a reality-limit. He abides in ultimate reality, yet there is no relationship between it and him. He is not produced from causes, nor does he depend on conditions. He is not without any characteristic, nor has he any characteristic. He has no single nature nor any diversity of natures. He is not a conception, not a mental construction, nor is he a non-conception. He is neither the other shore, nor this shore, nor that between. He is neither here, nor there, nor anywhere else. He is neither this nor that. He cannot be discovered by consciousness, nor is he inherent in consciousness. He is neither darkness nor light. He is neither name nor sign. He is neither weak nor strong.

He lives in no country or direction. He is neither good nor evil. He is neither compounded nor uncompounded.

He cannot be explained as having any meaning whatsoever.

"The Tathágata is neither generosity nor avarice, neither morality nor immorality, neither tolerance nor malice, neither effort nor sloth, neither concentration nor distraction, neither wisdom nor foolishness. He is inexpressible. He is neither truth nor falsehood; neither escape from the world nor failure to escape from the world; neither cause of involvement in the world nor not a cause of involvement in the world; he is the cessation of all theory and all practice. He is neither a field of merit nor not a field of merit; he is neither worthy of offerings nor unworthy of offerings. He is not an object, and cannot be contacted. He is not a whole, nor a conglomeration. He surpasses all calculations. He is utterly unequaled, yet equal to the ultimate reality of things. He is matchless, especially in effort. He surpasses all measure. He does not go, does not stay, and does not pass beyond. He is neither seen, heard, distinguished, nor known. He is without any complexity, having attained the equanimity of omniscient gnosis. Equal toward all things, he does not discriminate between them. He is without reproach, without excess, without corruption, without conception, and without intellectualization. He is without activity, without birth, without occurrence, without origin, without production, and without non-production. He is without fear and without sub-consciousness; without sorrow, without joy, and without strain. No verbal teaching can express him.

"Such is the body of the Tathágata and thus should he be seen. Who sees thus, truly sees. Who sees otherwise, sees falsely."

The venerable Shariputra then asked the Buddha, "Lord, in which Buddha-field did the noble Vimalakirti die, before reincarnating in this Buddha-field?"

The Buddha said, "Shariputra, ask this good man directly where he died to reincarnate here."

Then the venerable Shariputra asked the Licchavi Vimalakirti, "Noble sir, where did you die to reincarnate here?"

Vimalakirti declared, "Is there anything among the things that you see, elder, that dies or is reborn?"

Shariputra: There is nothing that dies or is reborn.

Vimalakirti: Likewise, reverend Shariputra, as all things neither die nor are reborn, why do you ask, "Where did you die to reincarnate here?" Reverend Shariputra, if one were to ask a man or woman created by a magician where he or she had died to reincarnate there, what do you think he or she would answer?

Shariputra: Noble sir, a magical creation does not die, nor is it reborn.

Vimalakirti: Reverend Shariputra, did not the Tathágata declare that all things have the nature of a magical creation?

Shariputra: Yes, noble sir, that is indeed so.

Vimalakirti: Reverend Shariputra, "death" is an end of performance, and "rebirth" is the continuation of performance. But, although a bodhisattva dies, he does not put an end to the performance of the roots of virtue, and although he is reborn, he does not adhere to the continuation of sin.

Then, the Buddha said to the venerable Shariputra, "Shariputra, this holy person came here from the presence of the Tathágata Aksobhya in the universe Abhirati."

Shariputra: Lord, it is wonderful that this holy person, having left a Buddha-field as pure as Abhirati, should enjoy a Buddha-field as full of defects as this Saha universe!

The Licchavi Vimalakirti said, "Shariputra, what do you think? Does the light of the sun accompany the darkness?"

Shariputra: Certainly not, noble sir!

Vimalakirti: Then the two do not go together?

Shariputra: Noble sir, those two do not go together. As soon as the sun rises, all darkness is destroyed.

Vimalakirti: Then why does the sun rise over the world?

Shariputra: It rises to illuminate the world, and to eliminate the darkness.

Vimalakirti: Just in the same way, reverend Shariputra, the bodhisattva reincarnates voluntarily in the impure Buddha-fields in order to purify the living beings, in order to make the light of wisdom shine, and in order to clear away the darkness. Since they do not associate with the passions, they dispel the darkness of the passions of all living beings.

Thereupon, the entire multitude experienced the desire to behold the universe Abhirati, the Tathágata Aksobhya, his bodhisattvas, and his great disciples. The Buddha, knowing the thoughts of the entire multitude, said to the Licchavi Vimalakirti, "Noble son, this multitude wishes to behold the universe Abhirati and the Tathágata Aksobhya - show them!"

Then the Licchavi Vimalakirti thought, "Without rising from my couch, I shall pick up in my right hand the universe Abhirati and all it contains: its hundreds of thousands of bodhisattvas; its abodes of devas, nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, and asuras, bounded by its Cakravada mountains; its rivers, lakes, fountains, streams, oceans, and other bodies of water; its Mount Sumeru and other hills and mountain ranges; its moon, its sun, and its stars; its devas, nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, and asuras themselves; its Brahma and his retinues; its villages, cities, towns, provinces, kingdoms, men, women, and houses; its bodhisattvas; its disciples; the tree of enlightenment of the Tathágata Aksobhya; and the Tathágata Aksobhya himself, seated in the middle of an assembly vast as an ocean, teaching the Dharma. Also the lotuses that accomplish the Buddha-work among the living beings; the three jeweled ladders that rise from its earth to its Trayastrimsa heaven, on which ladders the gods of that heaven descend to the world to see, honor, and serve the Tathágata Aksobhya and to hear the Dharma, and on which the men of the earth climb to the Trayastrimsa heaven to visit those gods. Like a potter with his wheel, I will reduce that universe Abhirati, with its store of innumerable virtues, from its watery base up to its Akanistha heaven, to a minute size and, carrying it gently like a garland of flowers, will bring it to this Saha universe and will show it to the multitudes."

Then, the Licchavi Vimalakirti entered into a concentration, and performed a miraculous feat such that he reduced the universe Abhirati to a minute size, and took it with his right hand, and brought it into this Saha universe.

In that universe Abhirati, the disciples, bodhisattvas, and those among gods and men who possessed the super-knowledge of the divine eye all cried out, "Lord, we are being carried away! Sugata, we are being carried off! Protect us, O Tathágata!"

But, to discipline them, the Tathágata Aksobhya said to them, "You are being carried off by the bodhisattva Vimalakirti. It is not my affair."

As for the other men and gods, they had no awareness at all that they were being carried anywhere.

Although the universe Abhirati had been brought into the universe Saha, the Saha universe was not increased or diminished; it was neither compressed nor obstructed. Nor was the universe Abhirati reduced internally, and both universes appeared to be the same as they had ever been.

Thereupon, the Buddha Shakyamuni asked all the multitudes, "Friends, behold the splendors of the universe Abhirati, the Tathágata Aksobhya, the array of his Buddha-field, and the splendors of these disciples and bodhisattvas!"

They replied, "We see them, Lord!"

The Buddha said, "Those bodhisattvas who wish to embrace such a Buddha-field should train themselves in all the bodhisattva-practices of the Tathágata Aksobhya."

While Vimalakirti, with his miraculous power, showed them thus the universe Abhirati and the Tathágatas Aksobhya, one hundred and forty thousand living beings among the men and gods of the Saha universe conceived the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, and all of them formed a prayer to be reborn in the universe Abhirati. And the Buddha prophesied that in the future all would be reborn in the universe Abhirati.

And the Licchavi Vimalakirti, having thus developed all the living beings that could thereby be developed, returned the universe Abhirati exactly to its former place.

The Lord then said to the venerable Shariputra, "Shariputra, did you see that universe Abhirati, and the Tathágata Aksobhya?"

Shariputra replied, "I saw it, Lord! May all living beings come to live in a Buddha-field as splendid as that! May all living beings come to have miraculous powers just like those of the noble Licchavi Vimalakirti!

"We have gained great benefit from having seen a holy man such as he. We have gained a great benefit from having heard such teaching of the Dharma, whether the Tathágata himself still actually exists or whether he has already attained ultimate liberation. Hence, there is no need to mention the great benefit for those who, having heard it, believe it, rely on it, embrace it, remember it, read it, and penetrate to its depth; and, having found faith in it, teach, recite, and show it to others and apply themselves to the yoga of meditation upon its teaching.

"Those living beings who understand correctly this teaching of the Dharma will obtain the treasury of the jewels of the Dharma.

"Those who study correctly this teaching of the Dharma will become the companions of the Tathágata. Those who honor and serve the adepts of this doctrine will be the true protectors of the Dharma. Those who write, teach, and worship this teaching of the Dharma will be visited by the Tathágata in their homes. Those who take pleasure in this teaching of the Dharma will embrace all merits. Those who teach it to others, whether it be no more than a single stanza of four lines, or a single summary phrase from this teaching of the Dharma, will be performing the great Dharma-sacrifice. And those who devote to this teaching of the Dharma their tolerance, their zeal, their intelligence, their discernment, their vision, and their aspirations, thereby become subject to the prophesy of future Buddhahood!"

Epilogue

Antecedents and Transmission of the Holy Dharma

Then Sakra, the prince of the gods, said to the Buddha, "Lord, formerly I have heard from the Tathágata and from Manjusri, the crown prince of wisdom, many hundreds of thousands of teachings of the Dharma, but I have never before heard a teaching of the Dharma as remarkable as this instruction in the entrance into the method of inconceivable transformations. Lord, those living beings who, having heard this teaching of the Dharma, accept it, remember it, read it, and understand it deeply will be, without a doubt, true vessels of the Dharma; there is no need to mention those who apply themselves to the yoga of meditation upon it. They will cut off all possibility of unhappy lives, will open their way to all fortunate lives, will always be looked after by all Buddhas, will always overcome all adversaries, and will always conquer all devils. They will practice the path of the bodhisattvas, will take their places upon the seat of Enlightenment, and will have truly

entered the domain of the Tathágatas. Lord, the noble sons and daughters who will teach and practice this exposition of the Dharma will be honored and served by me and my followers. To the villages, towns, cities, states, kingdoms, and capitals wherein this teaching of the Dharma will be applied, taught, and demonstrated, I and my followers will come to hear the Dharma. I will inspire the unbelieving with faith, and I will guarantee my help and protection to those who believe and uphold the Dharma."

At these words, the Buddha said to Sakra, the prince of the gods, "Excellent! Excellent, prince of gods! The Tathágata rejoices in your good words. Prince of gods, the enlightenment of the Buddhas of the past, present, and future is expressed in this discourse of Dharma. Therefore, prince of gods, when noble sons and daughters accept it, repeat it, understand it deeply, write it completely, and, making it into a book, honor it, those sons and daughters thereby pay homage to the Buddhas of the past, present and future.

"Let us suppose, prince of gods, that this billion-world-galactic universe were as full of Tathágatas as it is covered with groves of sugarcane, with rosebushes, with bamboo thickets, with herbs, and with flowers, and that a noble son or daughter were to honor them, revere them, respect and adore them, offering them all sorts of comforts and offerings for an aeon or more than an aeon. And let us suppose that, these Tathágatas having entered ultimate liberation, he or she honored each of them by enshrining their preserved bodies in a memorial stupa made of precious stones, each as large as a world with four great continents, rising as high as the world of Brahma, adorned with parasols, banners, standards, and lamps. And let us suppose finally that, having erected all these stupas for the Tathágatas, he or she were to devote an aeon or more to offering them flowers, perfumes, banners, and standards, while playing drums and music.

That being done, what do you think, prince of gods? Would that noble son or daughter receive much merit as a consequence of such activities?"

Sakra, the prince of gods, replied, "Many merits, Lord! Many merits, O Sugata! Were one to spend hundreds of thousands of millions of aeons, it would be impossible to measure the limit of the mass of merits that that noble son or daughter would thereby gather!"

The Buddha said, "Have faith, prince of gods, and understand this: Whoever accepts this exposition of the Dharma called 'Instruction in the Inconceivable Liberation,' recites it, and understands it deeply, he or she will gather merits even greater than those who perform the above acts. Why so? Because, prince of gods, the enlightenment of the Buddhas arises from

the Dharma, and one honors them by the Dharma worship, and not by material worship. Thus it is taught, prince of gods, and thus you must understand it."

The Buddha then further said to Sakra, the prince of gods, "Once, prince of gods, long ago, long before aeons more numerous than the innumerable, immense, immeasurable, inconceivable, and even before then, the Tathágata called Bhaisajyaraja appeared in the world: a saint, perfectly and fully enlightened, endowed with knowledge and conduct, a blissful one, knower of the world, incomparable knower of men who need to be civilized, teacher of gods and men, a Lord, a Buddha. He appeared in the aeon called Vicarana in the universe called Mahavyuha.

"The length of life of this Tathágata Bhaisajyaraja, perfectly and fully enlightened one, was twenty short aeons.

His retinue of disciples numbered thirty-six million billion, and his retinue of bodhisattvas numbered twelve million billion. In that same era, prince of gods, there was a universal monarch called King Ratnacchattra, who reigned over the four continents and possessed seven precious jewels. He had one thousand heroic sons, powerful, strong, and able to conquer enemy armies. This King Ratnacchattra honored the Tathágata Bhaisajyaraja and his retinue with many excellent offerings during five short aeons. At the end of this time, the King Ratnacchattra said to his sons, 'Recognizing that during my reign I have worshiped the Tathágata, in your turn you also should worship him.'

"The thousand princes gave their consent, obeying their father the king, and all together, during another five short aeons, they honored the Tathágata Bhaisajyaraja with all sorts of excellent offerings.

"Among them, there was a prince by the name of Candracchattra, who retired into solitude and thought to himself, 'Is there not another mode of worship, even better and more noble than this?'

"Then, by the supernatural power of the Buddha Bhaisajyaraja, the gods spoke to him from the heavens: 'Good man, the supreme worship is the Dharma-worship.'

"Candracchattra asked them, 'What is this "Dharma-worship"?'

"The gods replied, 'Good man, go to the Tathágata Bhaisajyaraja, ask him about the "Dharma-worship," and he will explain it to you fully.'

"Then, the prince Candracchattra went to the Lord Bhaisajyaraja, the saint, the Tathágata, the insuperably, perfectly enlightened one, and having approached him, bowed down at his feet, circumambulated him to the right three times, and withdrew to one side. He then asked, 'Lord, I have heard of a "Dharma-worship," which surpasses all other worship. What it this "Dharma-worship"?'

"The Tathágata Bhaisajyaraja said, 'Noble son, the Dharma-worship is that worship rendered to the discourses taught by the Tathágata. These discourses are deep and profound in illumination. They do not conform to the mundane and are difficult to understand, difficult to see and difficult to realize. They are subtle, precise, and ultimately incomprehensible. As Scriptures, they are collected in the canon of the bodhisattvas, stamped with the insignia of the king of incantations and teachings. They reveal the irreversible wheel of Dharma, arising from the six transcendences, cleansed of any false notions. They are endowed with all the aids to enlightenment and embody the seven factors of enlightenment. They introduce living beings to the great compassion and teach them the great love. They eliminate all the convictions of the Mara's, and they manifest relativity.

"'They contain the message of selflessness, living-being-less-ness, lifelessness, person-less-ness, void ness, sign-less-ness, wish-less-ness, nonperformance, non-production, and nonoccurrence.

"'They make possible the attainment of the seat of enlightenment and set in motion the wheel of the Dharma.

They are approved and praised by the chiefs of the gods, nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, and mahoragas. They preserve unbroken the heritage of the holy Dharma, contain the treasury of the Dharma, and represent the summit of the Dharma-worship. They are upheld by all holy beings and teach all the bodhisattva practices. They induce the unmistaken understanding of the Dharma in its ultimate sense. They certify that all things are impermanent, miserable, selfless, and peaceful, thus epitomizing the Dharma. They cause the abandonment of avarice, immorality, malice, laziness, forgetfulness, foolishness, and jealousy, as well as bad convictions, adherence to objects, and all opposition. They are praised by all the Buddhas. They are the medicines for the tendencies of mundane life, and they authentically manifest the great happiness of liberation.

To teach correctly, to uphold, to investigate, and to understand such Scriptures, thus incorporating into one's own life the holy Dharma - that is the "Dharma-worship."

"'Furthermore, noble son, the Dharma-worship consists of determining the Dharma according to the Dharma; applying the Dharma according to the Dharma; being in harmony with relativity; being free of extremist convictions; attaining the tolerance of ultimate birthlessness and nonoccurrence of all things; realizing selflessness and living-being-less-ness; refraining from struggle about causes and conditions, without quarreling, or disputing; not being possessive; being free of egoism; relying on the meaning and not on the literal expression; relying on gnosis and not on consciousness; relying on the ultimate teachings definitive in meaning and not insisting on the superficial teachings interpretable in meaning; relying on reality and not insisting on opinions derived from personal authorities; realizing correctly the reality of the Buddha; realizing the ultimate absence of any fundamental consciousness; and overcoming the habit of clinging to an ultimate ground. Finally, attaining peace by stopping everything from ignorance to old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, anxiety, and trouble, and realizing that living beings know no end to their views concerning these twelve links of dependent origination; then, noble son, when you do not hold to any view at all, it is called the unexcelled Dharma-worship.'

"Prince of gods, when the prince Candracchattra had heard this definition of Dharma-worship from the Tathágata Bhaisajyaraja, he attained the conformative tolerance of ultimate birthlessness; and, taking his robes and ornaments, he offered them to the Buddha Bhaisajyaraja, saying, 'When the Tathágata will be in ultimate liberation, I wish to defend his holy Dharma, to protect it, and to worship it. May the Tathágata grant me his supernatural blessing, that I may be able to conquer Mara and all adversaries and to incorporate in all my lives the holy Dharma of the Buddha!'

"The Tathágata Bhaisajyaraja, knowing the high resolve of Candracchattra, prophesied to him that he would be, at a later time, in the future, the protector, guardian, and defender of the city of the holy Dharma. Then, prince of gods, the prince Candracchattra, out of his great faith in the Tathágata, left the household life in order to enter the homeless life of a monk and having done so, lived making great efforts toward the attainment of virtue.

Having made great effort and being well established in virtue, he soon produced the five super-knowledge's, understood the incantations, and obtained the invincible eloquence. When the Tathágata Bhaisajyaraja attained ultimate liberation, Candracchattra, on the strength of his super-knowledge's and by the power of his incantations, made the wheel of the Dharma turn just as the Tathágata Bhaisajyaraja had done and continued to do so for ten short aeons.

"Prince of gods, while the monk Candracchattra was exerting himself thus to protect the holy Dharma, thousands of millions of living beings reached the stage of irreversibility on the path to unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, fourteen billion living beings were disciplined in the vehicles of the disciples and solitary sages, and innumerable living beings took rebirth in the human and heavenly realms.

"Perhaps, prince of gods, you are wondering or experiencing some doubt about whether or not, at that former time, the King Ratnacchattra was not some other than the actual Tathágata Ratnarcis. You must not imagine that, for the present Tathágata Ratnarcis was at that time, in that epoch, the universal monarch Ratnacchattra.

As for the thousand sons of the King Ratnacchattra, they are now the thousand bodhisattvas of the present blessed aeon, during the course of which one thousand Buddhas will appear in the world. Among them, Krakucchanda and others are already born, and those remaining will still be born, from Kakutsunda up to the Tathágata Roca, who will be the last to be born.

"Perhaps, prince of gods, you are asking yourself if, in that life, in that time, the Prince Candracchattra who upheld the Holy Dharma of Lord Tathágata Bhaisajyaraja was not someone other than myself. But you must not imagine that, for I was, in that life, in that time, the Prince Candracchattra. Thus it is necessary to know, prince of gods, that among all the worships rendered to the Tathágata, the Dharma-worship is the very best. Yes, it is good, eminent, excellent, perfect, supreme, and unexcelled. And therefore, prince of gods, do not worship me with material objects but worship me with the Dharma-worship! Do not honor me with material objects but honor me by honor to the Dharma!"

Then the Lord Shakyamuni said to the bodhisattva Maitreya, the great spiritual hero, "I transmit to you, Maitreya, this unexcelled, perfect enlightenment which I attained only after innumerable millions of billions of aeons, in order that, at a later time, during a later life, a similar teaching of the Dharma, protected by your supernatural power, will spread in the world and will not disappear. Why? Maitreya, in the future there will be noble sons and daughters, devas, nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, and asuras, who, having planted the roots of virtue, will produce the spirit of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. If they do not hear this teaching of the Dharma, they will certainly lose boundless advantages and even perish. But if they hear such a teaching, they will rejoice, will believe, and will accept it upon the crowns of their heads. Hence, in order to protect those future noble sons and daughters, you must spread a teaching such as this!

"Maitreya, there are two gestures of the bodhisattvas. What are they? The first gesture is to believe in all sorts of phrases and words, and the second gesture is to penetrate exactly the profound principle of the Dharma without being afraid. Such are the two gestures of the bodhisattvas. Maitreya, it must be known that the bodhisattvas who believe in all sorts of words and phrases, and apply themselves accordingly, are beginners and not experienced in religious practice. But the bodhisattvas, who read, hear, believe, and teach this profound teaching with its impeccable expressions reconciling dichotomies and its analyses of stages of development these are veterans in the religious practice.

"Maitreya, there are two reasons the beginner bodhisattvas hurt themselves and do not concentrate on the profound Dharma. What are they? Hearing this profound teaching never before heard, they are terrified and doubtful, do not rejoice, and reject it, thinking, and 'whence comes this teaching never before heard?' They then behold other noble sons accepting, becoming vessels for, and teaching this profound teaching, and they do not attend upon them, do not befriend them, do not respect them, and do not honor them, and eventually they go so far as to criticize them. These are the two reasons the beginner bodhisattvas hurt themselves and do not penetrate the profound Dharma.

"There are two reasons the bodhisattvas who do aspire to the profound Dharma hurt themselves and do not attain the tolerance of the ultimate birthlessness of things. What are these two? These bodhisattvas despise and reproach the beginner bodhisattvas, who have not been practicing for a long time, and they do not initiate them or instruct them in the profound teaching. Having no great respect for this profound teaching, they are not careful about its rules. They help living beings by means of material gifts and do not help them by means of the gift of the Dharma. Such, Maitreya, are the two reasons the bodhisattvas who aspire to the profound Dharma hurt themselves and will not quickly attain the tolerance of the ultimate birthlessness of all things."

Thus having been taught, the bodhisattva Maitreya said to the Buddha, "Lord, the beautiful teachings of the Tathágata are wonderful and truly excellent. Lord, from this time forth, I will avoid all such errors and will defend and uphold this attainment of unexcelled, perfect enlightenment by the Tathágata during innumerable hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of aeons! In the future, I will place in the hands of noble sons and noble daughters who are worthy vessels of the holy Dharma this profound teaching. I will instill in them the power of memory with which they may, having believed in this teaching, retain it, recite, it, penetrate its depths, teach it, propagate it, write it down, and proclaim it extensively to others.

"Thus I will instruct them, Lord, and thus it may be known that in that future time those who believe in this teaching and who enter deeply into it will be sustained by the supernatural blessing of the bodhisattva Maitreya."

Thereupon the Buddha gave his approval to the bodhisattva Maitreya: "Excellent! Excellent! Your word is well given! The Tathágata rejoices and commends your good promise."

Then all the bodhisattvas said together in one voice, "Lord, we also, after the ultimate liberation of the Tathágata, will come from our various Buddha-fields to spread far and wide this enlightenment of the perfect Buddha, the Tathágata. May all noble sons and daughters believe in that!"

Then the four Maharajas, the great kings of the quarters, said to the Buddha, "Lord, in all the towns, villages, cities, kingdoms, and palaces, wherever this discourse of the Dharma will be practiced, upheld, and correctly taught, we, the four great kings, will go there with our armies, our young warriors, and our retinues, to hear the Dharma. And we will protect the teachers of this Dharma for a radius of one league so that no one who plots injury or disruption against these teachers will have any opportunity to do them harm."

Then the Buddha said to the venerable Ánanda, "Receive then, Ánanda, this expression of the teaching of the Dharma. Remember it, and teach it widely and correctly to others!"

Ánanda replied, "I have memorized, Lord, this expression of the teaching of the Dharma. But what is the name of this teaching, and how should I remember it?"

The Buddha said, "Ánanda, this exposition of the Dharma is called 'The Teaching of Vimalakirti,' or 'The Reconciliation of Dichotomies,' or even 'Section of the Inconceivable Liberation.' Remember it thus!"

Thus spoke the Buddha. And the Licchavi Vimalakirti, the crown prince Manjusri, the venerable Ánanda, the bodhisattvas, the great disciples, the entire multitude, and the whole universe with its gods, men, asuras and gandharvas, rejoiced exceedingly. All heartily praised these declarations by the Lord.

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