

VIII

The Śūraṅgama Mantra

1

Establishing a Place for Awakening

“Ananda, you have asked about guarding and focusing the mind, and I have now told you about the wondrous method that will lead practitioners to enter samādhi. If you seek to become a Bodhisattva, you must first follow the four instructions on purity so that your comportment may be as pure as the glistening frost. Then very naturally you will no more be able to commit the three errors of the mind and the four errors of speech than a tree is able to leaf out in freezing weather. How could anything demonic happen to someone who faithfully follows the four instructions on purity, Ānanda? How much the more will that person be protected if his mind is not paying attention to sights, sounds, odors, flavors, tangible objects, or objects of cognition!

“As for people who cannot get rid of their stubborn habits, teach them to recite single mindedly the mantra of supreme efficacy, which is called ‘Mahā-Sitātapatra’ — the ‘Great White Canopy.’ This is the mantra spoken by the Buddha whom I make appear from my unconditioned mind — the Buddha who is seated invisible to ordinary sight, amidst a blaze of light on a precious lotus flower at the crown of my head.

“Consider, moreover, that in previous lifetimes during many eons, you and the young Mātāṅga woman developed affinities with each other, which led to habits of love and devotion. It has not been for one lifetime only, nor even for one eon only. Yet hearing me proclaim the Dharma freed her mind forever from the entanglements of love. Now she is an Arhat, though she had been a mere courtesan, someone who had never intended to undertake spiritual cultivation. But by the hidden aid of the mantra’s power, she quickly became one who needs no further instruction. You Hearers of the Teaching in this assembly who seek to board the greatest of vehicles in your resolute quest to become Buddhas should reach your goal with no more effort than the wind needs to scatter a handful of dust into the air. Is there any danger that you will meet with difficulty?

“Those who wish to establish a place for awakening in the time of the Dharma’s ending should begin by undertaking to follow the monks’ prohibitory precepts. They should seek a teacher, an elder monk who himself observes the precepts with purity. Further, they must receive precepts from a member of the Sangha who is truly pure; otherwise they will not succeed in following those precepts. After the practitioners have received precepts, they should put on new clothes or newly washed clothes, and then in a quiet place burn incense and recite one hundred and eight times the efficacious mantra spoken by the Buddha who is made to appear from the mind of the Thus-Come One. Then they may establish the place for awakening and safeguard its boundaries.

“These spiritual practitioners should ask the peerless Thus-Come Ones throughout the ten directions — each without departing from his own land — to pour down a light of great compassion on the head of each practitioner. Then, Ānanda, in the time of the Dharma’s ending, pure monks, nuns, and white robed laity and other alms givers, in whose minds all sexual desire and all craving have been extinguished and who follow the Buddha’s pure precepts, should enter a place for awakening and there make the vows of a Bodhisattva. If they can bathe before re-entering their place of awakening and if they can continue their practice throughout the six periods of the day and the six periods of the night without sleep for twenty-one days, I myself will appear before them to bless each one of them by circling my hand over the crown of his head, and I will help each one become enlightened.

Ānanda said respectfully to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, I have received the Thus-Come One’s supremely compassionate instruction, and my mind has already awakened. I myself know how to practice so that I can realize the enlightenment of one who needs no further instruction. But suppose spiritual practitioners should wish to establish a place for awakening in the time of the Dharma’s ending. How may they safeguard its boundaries in accord with the Buddha’s rules concerning purity?”

The Buddha said to Ānanda, “People in the time of the Dharma’s ending who wish to establish a place for awakening should begin by finding a strong white ox living in the Himalayas. It should be an ox that feeds upon rich and fragrant grasses and drinks only the pure waters of the mountain snows. The dung of such an ox will be of an exceptional purity. Those who wish to establish a place for awakening may mix this pure ox dung with sandalwood incense and spread the mixture upon the ground.

“The dung of an ox that does not live in the Himalayas will be foul smelling and too unclean to be applied to the ground of a place for awakening. If that is all the spiritual practitioners can obtain, then instead they should look for a spot on the plain where yellow loam can be found.

They should dig up the loam from a depth of about five and a half feet and then mix it with sandalwood incense, aloeswood incense, storax, frankincense, saffron, teak resin, birthwort, basil, spikenard, and cloves. They should grind these ten fragrant substances into a powder, sift them together with the loam, and spread the mixture as a paste on the ground of the place for awakening. The place should be octagonal and sixty-five feet across.

“A lotus made of gold, silver, copper, or wood should be placed in the center of the place for awakening, and a bowl filled with dew collected during the eighth lunar month should be placed in the center of the flower. An abundance of flower petals should be made to float upon the water in the bowl. Eight round mirrors should be arranged around the flower and bowl so that the mirrors face outward in each of the eight directions. Next, sixteen lotus flowers and sixteen elegant censers should be placed in front of the mirrors; the censers should alternate with the flowers. Only aloes wood incense should be burned in these censers, and they should be burned in such a way as to produce no flames.

“The practitioners should make fried cakes with sixteen jars of the milk of a white cow and then set the cakes out onto sixteen dishes. They should place raw sugar upon sixteen other dishes. Upon sixteen other dishes they should place oil cakes; and in the same manner, rice gruel, storax, honeyed ginger, clarified butter, and filtered honey should be distributed so that there are sixteen dishes of each of these eight kinds of offerings. These should be distributed by setting dishes containing each of the eight offerings behind each of the sixteen flowers as offerings to the Buddhas and great Bodhisattvas.

“At mealtime and at midnight, the practitioners should prepare a pint of honey and mix it three times with clarified butter. They should place a small burner in front of the place for awakening, prepare a decoction of storax, bathe charcoal with the decoction, and then ignite the charcoal, letting it blaze forth. The butter and honey should be tossed upon the flames. As long as it lasts, the fragrant smoke will be an offering to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

“Outside the four walls of the room in which the place for awakening is located, the practitioners should hang banners and arrangements of flowers. Further, they should adorn the walls inside the room with images of the Thus-Come Ones and the Bodhisattvas of the ten directions. Centered on the wall facing south, images of the Buddha Vairocana, the Buddha Śākyamuni, the Bodhisattva Maitreya, the Buddha Akṣobhya, and the Buddha Amitābha should be displayed. On one side of those images, an image of one of the imposing manifestations of the Bodhisattva Who Hears the Cries of the World should be shown; and on the other side, an image of the Bodhisattva-King Vajra-Treasury. On either side of the door, images should be placed of Lord Śakra, King Brahma, Fire-Head, the Blue Durgā, Kuṇḍalī-rāja, Bhṛkuṭi, and the Four Celestial Kings, together with Vināyaka. Also, eight mirrors should be suspended from the ceiling in such a way that they directly face the other mirrors which have already been set up in the place for awakening. The mirrors will then reflect each other in infinite repetitions.

“During the first seven days, the practitioners should bow with the utmost sincerity to the Thus-Come Ones, the great Bodhisattvas, and the Arhats of the ten directions. During the six periods of the day and the six periods of the night, the practitioners should recite the mantra continuously while circumambulating the place for awakening, single mindedly repeating the mantra one hundred and eight times. During the next seven days, the practitioners should focus their minds on the Bodhisattva’s vows, not letting their minds turn aside from them. My instructions to you in the monastic code have included teachings about the making of vows.

“During the last seven days, the practitioners should single mindedly recite the Buddha’s Mantra of the White Canopy continuously throughout the twelve periods of the day and night. On the final day, the Thus-Come Ones from all ten directions will appear at the same time. They and their light will be reflected in the mirrors as each of them circles his right hand on the crown of the head of each of the practitioners. If people can practice samādhi in an excellent place for awakening like this in the age of

the Dharma's ending, their bodies and minds will become as pure and bright as crystal. But, Ānanda, if the precept master from whom a monk received precepts was not pure, or if any of the other monks in his group is not pure, then the practice in the place of awakening is unlikely to be successful.

“After the three weeks, the practitioners should remain sitting upright and peacefully for a hundred days. If their roots in the Dharma are deep and strong, they will not rise from their seats during that time, and they will become Arhats at the first stage. Even if they do not reach the level of a sage in body and mind, they will be certain that in the future they will become Buddhas.

“You asked how to establish a place for awakening. This is how it should be done.”