

Welling forth from the Earth

Chapter 15

At that time the Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas, who had come from other lands in numbers exceeding the grains of sand in eight Ganges Rivers, rose up in the great assembly, placed their palms together, made obeisance, and said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, if you will allow us, after the Buddha’s quiescence, here in this Saha world we will with ever-increasing vigor protect, maintain, read, recite, write out, and make offerings to this Sutra, and we will proclaim it far and wide throughout this land.”

The Buddha then told the host of Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas, “Stop! Good men, you do not need to protect and maintain this Sutra. Why not? Within my Saha world itself there are Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers, each of whom has a retinue equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers. After my quiescence, all of them will protect, uphold, read, recite, and vastly proclaim this Sutra.”

Just as the Buddha said this, the earth in the three thousand great thousand lands in the Saha world trembled and split open, and from its midst limitless thousands of tens of thousands of millions of Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas simultaneously welled forth.

All of those Bodhisattvas possessed golden-hued bodies, the thirty-two marks, and limitless light.

They had been dwelling beneath the Saha world

in the space belonging to this world.

Upon hearing the sound of Shakyamuni Buddha's voice, all the Bodhisattvas came up from below.

Each one of the Bodhisattvas was a leader who instructed and guided a great multitude. Each had a retinue numbering as many as the sand grains of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers. Still others had retinues numbering as many as the sand grains of fifty thousand, forty thousand, thirty thousand, twenty thousand, or ten thousand Ganges Rivers. Others had retinues numbering as many as the sand grains of one Ganges River, one half a Ganges River, one fourth, and on down to one thousandth of a ten thousandth of a millionth of a nayuta of a Ganges River.

Other had retinues numbering in the billions of nayutas. Others had retinues numbering in the hundreds of millions. Others had retinues numbering in the tens of millions, the millions, and on down to the tens of thousands. Others had a thousand or a hundred and on down to ten. Others had five, four, three, or two disciples, down to one disciple. Still others came alone, preferring isolation. And so it was that their numbers were limitless and boundless, beyond the power of calculation or analogy to make known.

Having welled forth from the earth, all the Bodhisattvas went to the Wonderful Stupa of Seven Jewels in space, where the Thus Come One Many Jewels and Shakyamuni Buddha were. Arriving there, they turned toward the two World Honored Ones and bowed with their heads

at those Buddhas' feet. They went on to where all the Buddhas were seated on lion thrones beneath jeweled trees, bowed to them, circumambulated them three times to the right, put their palms together respectfully, and praised them with various Bodhisattva praises. Then they withdrew to one side and gazed joyfully at the two World Honored Ones.

From the time the Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas first welled forth from the earth, and while they praised the Buddhas with various Bodhisattva praises, a period of fifty small eons elapsed. During that time, Shakyamuni Buddha remained seated in silence, and the four assemblies were silent for fifty small eons as well.

Because of the Buddha's spiritual power, all in the great assembly thought only half a day had passed. At that time the four assemblies were also able, because of the Buddha's spiritual power, to see all the Bodhisattvas completely filling the space of limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of lands.

Among the multitude of Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas were four leaders. The first was named Superior Practice, the second was named Boundless Practice, the third was named Pure Practice, and the fourth was named Secure Practice. These four Bodhisattvas, among the assembly, were the foremost leaders, the spokesmen and guides. Before the great multitudes, they joined their palms together, contemplated Shakyamuni Buddha, made deep bows from the waist and said, "World Honored One, are you in good health and free from worry? Are you peaceful and happy in your practice? Are those who should be crossed over receptive to

the teaching? They do not cause the World Honored One weariness, do they?”

The four Great Bodhisattvas then spoke verses, saying:

“Is the World Honored One happy and at peace,
Free from worry and disease?
In teaching and transforming beings,
Is he free from weariness?
And further, do living beings
Receive transformation easily?
They do not cause the World Honored One
To become fatigued, do they?”

The World Honored One then, in the midst of the great host of Bodhisattvas, said this: “So it is, so it is, good men. The Thus Come One is peaceful and happy, free from disease and worry. All the living beings are easy to transform and cross over, and they do not cause me weariness. Why is this? All these living beings have, in lifetime after lifetime, have always received my teaching, and they have also paid reverence to and venerated the Buddhas of the past, thereby planting the roots of goodness. All these living beings, from the time they first saw me and heard my teaching, all, except for those who had formerly cultivated and studied the small vehicle, immediately believed and accepted it and entered the Thus Come One’s wisdom. As to those who cast aside their former cultivation and study the Small Vehicle, I now lead even such people as these to hear this Sutra and to enter the Buddha’s wisdom.”

At that time the Great Bodhisattvas spoke these verses:

“Good indeed, good indeed,
Great Hero, World Honored One,
That all the living beings
Are easy to transform and save,
That they can ask about the Buddha’s
deep wisdom
And, having heard it, believe and
practice it.
We all rejoice accordingly.”

Then the World Honored One praised the leaders of all those Great Bodhisattvas: “Good indeed, good indeed, that you good men have brought forth a heart of rejoicing in accord with the Thus Come One.”

At that time Maitreya Bodhisattva and the Bodhisattvas in the multitudes, numbering as many as the sand grains in eight thousand Ganges Rivers, all had this thought: “From of old, we have never seen or heard of these Great Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas who have welled forth from the earth and who are standing before the World Honored One, joining their palms, making offerings, bowing from the waist, and inquiring after his welfare.”

Then Maitreya Bodhisattva Mahasattva, knowing the thoughts in the minds of the Bodhisattvas and others, numbering as many as the sand grains in eight thousand Ganges Rivers, and wishing as well to resolve his own doubts, placed his palms together, faced the Buddha, and spoke verses.

“These limitless thousands of myriads of
kotis of
Bodhisattvas forming a great host,
Such as we have never seen before.
We pray the Doubly-Complete Honored

One
Will tell us where they came from
And why they are gathered here.

They have huge bodies, great spiritual
penetrations,
And inconceivable wisdom.
They are solid in resolve and will,
And possess the great power of
patience.

Living beings delight in seeing them.
But where did they come from?
Each and every Bodhisattva
Has brought a retinue
Limitless in number,
Like the Ganges sand grains.

Some of the Great Bodhisattvas
Lead retinues of beings as many as
The sand grains in sixty thousand
Ganges Rivers.
Such are the great assemblies
Single-mindedly seeking the Buddha
Way.

These Great Masters,
In number like the sand grains in sixty
thousand Ganges Rivers,
Have all come to make offerings to the
Buddha
And to protect and uphold this Sutra.
Those with retinues comprised of as
many as
the sand grains in fifty thousand Ganges
Rivers
Are even more in number.

Those with retinues numbering forty, or

thirty thousand,
Twenty down to ten thousand,
One thousand, one hundred,
And so forth, down to the sand grains of
a single Ganges River,
And those with a half, a third, or a
quarter thereof,
Down to one ten thousandth of a
millionth thereof,
Or one thousandth of a ten thousandth
of a nayuta thereof,
And the ones with tens of thousands of
millions of disciples,
on down to half a million,
Are even more numerous.

There are also those with hundreds of
tens of thousands,
Or tens of thousands
Thousands, or hundreds,
Fifty, or ten,
Down to three, two, or one,
And those who come alone without a
retinue,
Preferring isolation—
All these come before the Buddha
In numbers surpassing those just stated.

So large is the assembly,
That were one to count them
For eons numbering more than Ganges
sand grains,
Still one could not fully know them.

Who spoke the Dharma for
All these of great awesome virtue—
This vigorous host of Bodhisattvas—
Teaching, transforming, and bringing

them to accomplishment?
Under whom did they first bring forth
their resolve?
Whose Buddhadharma do they praise
and proclaim?
Whose Sutras do they receive, uphold,
and practice?
And which Buddha's Way do they
cultivate?
Such are the Bodhisattvas' powers
Of spiritual penetrations and great
wisdom,
That throughout the four directions,
The earth quakes and splits open,
And they rise out of it.

World Honored One, from of old,
I have never seen such a thing.
Pray tell us the names
Of the countries they come from.

I am always roaming through the lands,
But I have never seen this assembly.
I do not recognize
A single one of them.

Suddenly they have welled forth out of
the earth.
Pray explain the reason why.
Now in this great assembly,
The limitless hundreds of thousands of
millions
Of Bodhisattvas all
Wish to understand this event:
The causes and conditions, first to last,
Of this host of Bodhisattvas.
O World Honored One of limitless virtue,

We only pray you will resolve the assembly's doubts."

At that time all the division bodies of Shakyamuni Buddha, who had come from limitless thousands of myriads of kotis of lands in other directions, sat in lotus posture on lion thrones beneath jeweled trees throughout the eight directions. The attendants of those Buddhas, seeing this great assembly of Bodhisattvas of the three thousand great thousand worlds welling forth from the earth in the four directions and dwelling in space, each said to his respective Buddha, "World Honored One, where have all the limitless boundless, asamkhyeyas of Bodhisattvas in this great host come from?"

Each of those Buddhas then told his attendants, "All of you good men, just wait one moment! There is a Bodhisattva Mahasattva named Maitreya, upon whom Shakyamuni Buddha has bestowed a prediction that he shall be the next Buddha. He has already asked about this matter, and the Buddha is about to answer him. For this reason, you may all hear about it."

Shakyamuni Buddha then said to Maitreya Bodhisattva, "Good indeed, good indeed, Ajita, that you can ask the Buddha about such a great matter."

"You should all single-mindedly don the armor of vigor and bring forth a firm resolve."

"The Thus Come One now wishes to disclose and proclaim the wisdom of all Buddhas, the power of all Buddhas' sovereignty and spiritual penetrations, the power of all Buddhas' lion

sprint, and the power of all Buddhas' awesome courage and mighty strength.”

At that time, the World Honored One, wishing to restate these principles, spoke verses:

“You should be vigorous and single-minded.
For I wish to speak about this matter.
Hold no doubts or regrets—
The wisdom of the Buddhas is
inconceivable.

Bring forth, now, the power of faith,
And abide in patience and goodness,
For the Dharma which from of old has
never been heard,
You are now about to hear.

I am comforting you now,
So have no doubt or fear.
The Buddhas never speak falsely,
And their wisdom cannot be measured.

That foremost Dharma they have gained
Is extremely profound, beyond
discerning.
As such, it should now be explained,
And you should single-mindedly listen.”

The World Honored One, having recited those verses, then said to Maitreya Bodhisattva, “In this great assembly, I now make this announcement to all of you: Ajita! These incalculable asamkhyeyas of Great Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas, who have welled forth from the earth and whom you have never seen before, are those whom I taught, transformed, and guided in this Saha World after I attained Anuttarasamyak-sambodhi. I tamed and subdued the minds of

these Bodhisattvas, causing them to bring forth the resolve for the Way.”

“All of these Bodhisattvas live in the space beneath the Saha World. They have read and recited all the Sutras until they have penetrated them thoroughly. They have pondered their meanings in detail and have been properly mindful of them.”

“Ajita! All these good men take no delight in dwelling with the multitudes or in much talk. They always enjoy living in quiet places where they practice with diligence and vigor, never resting. They do not take up residence with humans or gods.”

“They always delight in deep wisdom and have no obstacles. They also always delight in the Dharmas of all Buddhas. With single-minded vigor they seek supreme wisdom.”

At that time the World Honored One, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke verses, saying:

“Ajita, you should know,
For countless eons,
All these Great Bodhisattvas,
Have cultivated and practiced the
Buddha-wisdom.

I taught them all,
Causing them to bring forth the great
resolve for the Way.
They are all my disciples,
Dwelling in this world system.

Ever practicing the work of dhuta,
They delight in quiet places.

Renounce the bustle of crowds,
And take no delight in much talk.

These disciples
Study and practice the Dharma of my
Way,
Vigorous always, day and night,
They seek the Buddha Way.

They dwell in the space
Beneath this Saha world,
Solid and powerful in resolve and will.
They are ever diligent, seeking wisdom.
They speak various Wonderful Dharmas,

With no fear in their hearts.

In the City of Gaya,
Sitting beneath the Bodhi Tree,
I realized the most proper enlightenment
And turned the supreme Dharma-wheel.
Only then did I teach and transform
them,
Causing them first to bring forth their
resolve for the Way.

Now they all dwell in irreversibility,
And shall all become Buddhas.
I now speak the truth,
You should believe it with a single mind.
For endless eons,
I have taught and transformed these
multitudes.”

At that time Maitreya Bodhisattva Mahasattva
and the countless Bodhisattvas gave rise to
doubts in their minds. Puzzling over this
unprecedented occurrence, they thought, “How
could the World Honored One, in such a short
space of time, have taught and transformed such

limitless, boundless, asamkhyeyas of Great Bodhisattvas and caused them to dwell in Anuttarasamyaksambodhi?”

Just then they spoke to the Buddha, saying, “World Honored One, when the Thus Come One was a crown prince, he left the Shakya Palace and went to a place not far from the city of Gaya where he sat in the Bodhimanda and realized Anuttarasamyaksambodhi. From that time until now, only forty-some years have elapsed. How, in such a short space of time, could the World Honored One have done such great Buddha work—using the Buddha’s mighty power and the Buddha’s merit and virtue to teach and transform such limitless hosts of Great Bodhisattvas so that they can realize Anuttarasamyaksambodhi?”

“World Honored One, the multitudes of Great Bodhisattvas are such that if a person were to try to count them throughout thousands of myriads of millions of eons, he could not finish or reach their limit. From endless eons in the presence of limitless, boundless numbers of Buddhas, they have planted good roots and accomplished the Bodhisattva Way, always cultivating Brahma conduct.”

“World Honored One, a matter such as this is hard for those in the world to believe.”

“It is as if, by way of analogy, there were a handsome man, twenty-five years old and with shiny black hair, who pointed to hundred-year-old men and said, ‘These are my sons.’ Then suppose the hundred-year-old men pointed to that young man and said, ‘He is our father, the one who begot and reared us.’ Such a thing would be hard to believe.

“The Buddha is also like this. It has really not been long since he attained the Way. On the other hand, the great hosts of Bodhisattvas have already, throughout limitless thousands of myriads of millions of eons, practiced with diligence and vigor for the sake of the Buddha Way. They are well able to enter, leave, and dwell in limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of samadhis.

They have attained great spiritual powers and have long cultivated Brahma conduct. They are well able to practice in succession all wholesome dharmas, and their questions and answers are clever. They are jewels among humankind, extremely rare in the world. Yet, just now, the World Honored One said that only when the Buddha attained the Way did he cause them to first bring forth their resolve. By teaching, transforming, and guiding them, he led them toward Anuttarasamyaksambodhi.”

“It has not been long since the World Honored One gained Buddhahood, and yet he has been able to do these great and meritorious deeds!”

“We believe that the Buddha speaks in accord with what is appropriate, that the Buddha has never spoken falsely, that the Buddha’s understanding is complete and penetrating.”

“However, when Bodhisattvas who have just brought forth the resolve hear these words after the Buddha’s quiescence, they may not believe or accept them. On the contrary, they may give rise to the causes and conditions for the offense karma incurred in destroying the Dharma.”

“This being the case, World Honored One, we hope that you will explain in order to dispel our doubts, and so that those good people of the future who hear of this matter also will not give rise to doubts.”

At that time, Maitreya Bodhisattva, wishing to restate this meaning, spoke verses, saying:

“In the past, the Buddha of the Shakyan
line
Left home and drew near the city of
Gaya
To sit beneath the Bodhi Tree,
And it has not been long since then.

All these disciples of the Buddha,
Incalculable in their number,
Have long practiced the Buddha Way
And now dwell in the power of spiritual
penetrations.

Well have they studied the Bodhisattva
Way.
Undefined by worldly dharmas,
Like a lotus flower floating on the water,
They have welled forth from the earth.

All give rise to reverent hearts,
As they stand before the World Honored
One.
Such a thing is hard to conceive of,
How can it be believed?

The Buddha only recently attained the
Way,
Yet his accomplishments are so very
many.
Please dispel the doubts of the

assembly
And tell us how this can actually be.

It is as if a strong young man,
Only twenty-five years of age,
Pointed to hundred-year old men
With white hair and wrinkled faces
And said, "These are my sons."
And the sons also said, "He is our
father."

A father so young with sons so old
Is a thing hard for the world to believe.
The World Honored One is also like this;

He has only recently attained the Way
And all these Bodhisattvas
Of firm resolve, neither weak nor
indecisive,
Throughout limitless eons
Have practiced the Bodhisattva Way.
Clever in answering difficult questions,
They have no fear in their minds.
Patient under insult, resolute in their
thoughts,
They are upright and proper, possessing
awesome virtue.

Praised by the Buddhas of the ten
directions,
Skilled in their ability to distinguish and
explain,
They take no delight in being with the
multitudes,
But always prefer Dhyana concentration.

Because they seek the Buddha Way,
They have been dwelling in the space

below.

Hearing this from the Buddha,
We have no doubts about this matter,

But we hope that the Buddha will, for
those of the future,
Give explanations to cause them to
understand.

For if they were to give rise to doubts
And fail to believe this Sutra,
They would thereupon fall into the evil
paths.

Presently we have asked for this
explanation
Of these limitless Bodhisattvas
And how, in such a short space of time,
You have taught and transformed them,
Causing them to bring forth the resolve
And to dwell on the Ground of
Irreversibility.”