

Discrimination of Merit and Virtue

Chapter 17

At that time, when the assembly heard the Buddha describe the number of eons in the length of his life span, limitless, boundless asamkhyeyas of living beings gained great benefit.

The World Honored One then spoke to the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Maitreya, saying, “Ajita! When I spoke of the great length of the Thus Come One’s life span, living beings to the number of sand grains in six hundred and eighty myriads of kotis of nayutas of Ganges Rivers gained Patience with the Non-production of Dharmas.”

“Again, a thousand times that number of Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas gained the Dharani-door of hearing and upholding.”

“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in a single world system gained the unobstructed eloquence of delight in speech.”

“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in a single world system gained the Dharani of a hundred thousand myriad kotis of limitless revolutions.”

“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in a great world system became capable of turning the irreversible Dharma-wheel.”

“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number

of dust motes in a middle-sized world system were enabled to turn the pure Dharma-wheel.”

“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in a small world system were destined to gain Anuttarasamyaksambodhi after eight lifetimes.”

“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in four sets of four continents were destined to gain Anuttarasamyaksambodhi after four lifetimes.”

“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in three sets of four continents were destined to gain Anuttarasamyaksambodhi after three lifetimes.”

“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in two sets of four continents were destined to gain Anuttarasamyaksambodhi after two lifetimes.”

“Again, Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas to the number of dust motes in one set of four continents were destined to gain Anuttarasamyaksambodhi after a single lifetime.”

“Again, living beings to the number of dust motes in eight world systems all brought forth the resolve for Anuttarasamyaksambodhi.”

As the Buddha proclaimed these great advantages in the Dharma that the Bodhisattvas Mahasattvas had attained, there rained from space mandarava flowers and mahamandarava flowers, which floated down and settled upon the Buddhas seated on lion thrones beneath limitless hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of

jeweled trees, as well as upon Shakyamuni Buddha and Many Jewels Thus Come One, who had entered Nirvana long ago, both of whom were seated on the lion throne within the stupa of seven treasures. The flowers also settled upon the great Bodhisattvas and the fourfold assembly.

There also rained down finely ground chandana powder and aloe-wood incense. Heavenly drums in space sounded of themselves, and their wonderful sounds reached far and wide. There also rained down thousands of kinds of heavenly garments strung with beads, as well as laces of real pearls, laces of Mani pearls, and laces of As-You-Will pearls that covered the nine directions. Another offering to all in the great assembly was priceless incense burning in a multitude of precious censers, so that its scent naturally pervaded the great assembly and its surroundings.

Above each Buddha were Bodhisattvas holding aloft banners and canopies in a procession that extended clear up to the Brahma Heavens. All the Bodhisattvas, with wonderful sounds, sang limitless chants in praise of all Buddhas.

At that time Maitreya Bodhisattva rose from his seat, uncovered his right shoulder, placed his palms together, and spoke to the Buddha, saying:

“The Buddha speaks the rare Dharma,
Such as we have never heard before.
The World Honored One has great
power,
And his life span is without limit.
Countless disciples of the Buddha,
Hearing the World Honored One

discriminate
And tell of those who gain the Dharma's
benefit,
Have been filled with joy.

Some dwell on the irreversible ground.
Some gain the Dharanis.
Others gain unobstructed delight in
speech,
Or myriads of millions of Dharanis of
revolution.

As many Bodhisattvas
As dust motes in a great thousand world
system
All gain the ability to turn
The irreversible Dharma-wheel.

Again, Bodhisattvas in number
To the dust motes in a middle thousand
world system
All gain the ability to turn
The pure Dharma-wheel.

Again, Bodhisattvas in number
To the dust motes in a small thousand
world system
Are destined to gain the Buddha Way
After eight more lifetimes.

Again, Bodhisattvas in number
To the dust motes in four, three, or two
Sets of four continents shall gain
Buddhahood after a respective number
of lives.

Further, Bodhisattvas in number
To the dust motes in one set of four
continents

Shall accomplish All-Wisdom
After one more lifetime.

Living beings such as these,
Hearing of the vast length of the
Buddha's life,
Gain limitless, non-outflow,
Pure reward as retribution.

Again living beings in number
As the dust motes in eight worlds,
Hearing the Buddha speak of his life
span,
All bring forth the supreme mind.

The World Honored One speaks
limitless,
Inconceivable Dharmas,
Bringing many benefits,
As boundless as space itself.

Heavenly mandarava flowers
And mahamandarava flowers rain down.

From countless Buddhalands
Come Shakras and Brahmas like the
Ganges sands;
Chandana and aloe-wood incense
Filter through the air,
Falling in profusion
Like flocks of birds flying down from the
sky,
Scattered as an offering to the Buddhas.

In empty space, heavenly drums
Make magnificent sounds by
themselves,
While thousands of tens of thousands of

heavenly garments
Come whirling and swirling down.

Wonderful censers studded with jewels
Burn with priceless incense,
Which naturally pervades the
surroundings
As an offering to the World Honored
Ones.

The great assembly of Bodhisattvas
Hold banners and canopies made of
seven treasures,
High and splendid, of a million varieties,
In a procession that reaches the Brahma
heavens.

And before each Buddha
Hang jeweled flags and banners of
victory,
As myriads upon myriads of verses are
used
To praise and laud the Thus Come
Ones:
All such things as these
As never have been seen before.
Hearing of the Buddha's limitless life
span,
All are filled with joy.
The Buddha's name pervades the ten
directions.
He vastly benefits living beings,
All of whom perfect good roots
And are helped to bring forth the
supreme mind."

At that time the Buddha told Maitreya Bodhisattva Mahasattva, "Ajita! If there are living beings who, on hearing that the Buddha's life span is as long as this, can bring forth even a single thought of faith and

understanding, the merit and virtue they will gain is measureless and limitless.”

“If a good man or a good woman, for the sake of Anuttarasamyaksambodhi, were to practice the five paramitas—Dana Paramita, Shila Paramita, Kshanti Paramita, Virya Paramita, and Dhyana Paramita; all except Prajna Paramita—throughout eighty myriads of millions of nayutas of eons, the merit and virtue he or she would derive if compared with that of the previous person’s would not come to a hundredth part, nor to a thousandth, nor to a hundred thousand myriad millionth part, nor could it be known by resort to calculation or analogy.”

“For a good man or a good woman possessing merit and virtue such as this, to retreat from Anuttarasamyaksambodhi would be simply impossible.”

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

“If someone wishes to seek the Buddha’s wisdom
Throughout eighty myriads of millions
Of nayutas of kalpas,
Practicing the five paramitas
Throughout all those eons,
He would give by making offerings to the Buddhas,
The Pratyekabuddha disciples,
And to the hosts of Bodhisattvas.

His gifts might be rare and precious food and drink,
Fine clothing and bedding.
He might give pure abodes made of chandana
And adorned by gardens and groves.

Gifts such as these,
Varied and fine,
Throughout this number of eons,
He would dedicate to the Buddha Way.

Further he might hold the prohibitive precepts purely,
Without flaw or fault,
Seeking the supreme path,
Praised by all the Buddhas.

Again, he might practice patience,
Dwelling on the Ground of Compliance,
So that should evil befall him,
His mind would not be disturbed.

Also if those who have gained the Dharma,
But who harbor overweening pride,
Ridicule and torment him,
He would be able to bear it.

He might be diligent and vigorous,
Ever solid in his resolve,
Throughout limitless millions of eons,
Single-minded and never lax.

And for countless eons he might
Dwell in a tranquil place,
Ever collecting his thoughts, avoiding sleep,
While either sitting or walking.

Because of these causes and conditions,
He would then give rise to Dhyana concentration,
So that for eighty millions of myriads of eons,
His mind would be secure and unconfused.

Blessed with this single-mindedness,
He would seek the unsurpassed path, saying,
"May I gain All-Wisdom
And exhaust the limits of Dhyana concentrations."

This person, for hundreds of thousands
Of tens of millions of eons,
Might practice such meritorious virtues
As told above.

But should there be a good man or woman,
Who, hearing me speak of my life span,
Gives rise to even a single thought of faith,
His or her blessings will exceed those of the person just
described.

Any person who can be completely free
Of doubts and misgivings
And, with deep thought, believe for but an instant,
Will reap blessings such as those.

Should there be Bodhisattvas
Who have practiced the Way for limitless eons
And who hear me speak of my life span,
They shall be able to believe and accept it.

Persons such as these
Will receive this Sutra atop their heads,
Vowing, "May we in the future
Gain long lives and save living beings.

Just as today the World Honored One,
King of the Shakyas,
In the Bodhimanda puts forth the lion's roar,
Speaking the Dharma without fear,
So may we in lives to come
Be revered by all
And, while seated in the Bodhimanda,
Speak of our life spans in the same way."

Should there be those who deeply believe,
Who are pure and straightforward,
With much learning and dharanis,
Who explain the Buddhas' words according to the doctrine--
Persons such as these
Will have no doubts about this matter."

"Further, Ajita, if anyone hears of the long duration of the Buddha's life span and understands the import of these words, the merit and virtue such a one gains will be without boundary or limit, for it shall enable one to give rise to the supreme wisdom of the Thus Come One."

"How much the more so will this be the case for one who can listen to this Sutra extensively; ask others to listen; uphold it oneself; ask others to

uphold it; write it out oneself; ask others to write it out; or use flowers, incense, beads, banners, flags, silk canopies, fragrant oils, or butter lamps to make offerings to this Sutra. Such a person's merit and virtue will be limitless and boundless, for it shall enable that person to give rise to Wisdom of All Modes."

"Ajita! If a good man or good woman hears of the long duration of the Buddha's life span and, with deep mind, believes and understands, he or she will then see the Buddha ever-present on Mount Grdhrakuta together with the great Bodhisattvas and the assembly of Hearers surrounding him as he speaks the Dharma. He or she will also see the Saha world's soil become lapis lazuli. It will be flat and even, with eight major roads bordered with Jambunada gold and lined with jeweled trees. Adjacent to the roads will be pavilions and towers all made of jewels, wherein hosts of Bodhisattvas dwell. To behold in this way is indicative of deep faith and understanding."

"Further, after the extinction of the Thus Come One, if a person hears this Sutra and does not defame it but instead rejoices over it, you should know that this indicates he already has deep faith and understanding."

"How much the more so is this the case for one who reads, recites, receives, and upholds it."

"This person carries the Thus Come One on the top of his head."

"Ajita! This good man or good woman need not build stupas or temples for me, nor build Sangha dwellings, nor make the four kinds of offerings to the Sangha. Why not? This good man or good woman, in receiving, upholding, reading, and reciting this Sutra, has already built stupas, erected Sangha dwellings, and made offerings to the Sangha. He has built stupas of the seven treasures for the Buddha's sharira.

The stupas are high and broad, tapering up to the Brahma Heavens, hung with banners and canopies. He has also offered many jeweled bells, flowers, incense, beads, ground incense, paste incense, and burning incense, as well as many drums, musical instruments, pipes, flutes, reeds, various dances, and praises sung with wonderful sounds. He has already made such offerings throughout limitless thousands of myriads of millions

of eons.”

“Ajita! If, after my extinction, a person, hearing this Sutra, can receive and uphold it, write it out, or ask others to write it out, he will thereby have built Sangha dwellings and made thirty-two halls of red chandana, eight tala trees in height, high, broad, and adorned, with hundreds and thousands of Bhikshus dwelling within them, filled also with gardens, groves, bathing ponds, pathways, Dhyana caves, clothing, food, drink, bedding, medicines, and musical instruments.

Such Sangha dwellings, halls, and pavilions—uncountable hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of them—shall be uncountable in number and shall manifest as an offering before me and the Bhikshu Sangha. Therefore I say that after the Thus Come One’s extinction, if a person receives, upholds, reads, recites, or explains this Sutra to others, if he writes it out, asks others to write it out, or makes offerings to this Sutra, he need not further build stupas, monasteries, or Sangha dwellings as offerings to the Sangha.”

“How much the more so does this apply to a person who can uphold this Sutra and at the same time practice giving, holding precepts, patience, vigor, single-mindedness, and wisdom.”

“His virtue shall be supreme, limitless, and unbounded. Just as space to the north, east, south, west, the intermediate points, the zenith, and the nadir is limitless and boundless, so too this person’s merit and virtue shall be limitless and boundless, and he shall speedily attain to the Wisdom of All Modes.”

“A person may read, recite, receive, and uphold this Sutra, explain it to others, write it out, or ask others to write it out, and he may further build stupas or Sangha dwellings. He may make offerings to and praise the Sangha of Hearers, and laud the merit and virtue of the Bodhisattvas in hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of ways.

Further he may explain the meanings in the Dharma Flower Sutra to others while according with their various causes and conditions. In addition he may uphold the precepts purely, dwell in harmony with people, be patient and without anger, and be of solid resolve and mindfulness. He may always value sitting in Dhyana, obtaining deep concentration. He may be

vigorous and heroic, gathering all good dharmas. He also may possess keen faculties and wisdom, and be skillful at answering questions.”

“Ajita! If there is a good man or good woman who, after my extinction, is able to receive, uphold, read, and recite this Sutra and who also is able to amass these other good deeds and meritorious virtues, such a person has already turned towards the Bodhimanda, has drawn near to Anuttara-samyaksambodhi, and is seated beneath the tree of the Way.

Ajita! Wherever such a good man or good woman is, whether he or she is sitting, standing, or walking, one should build a stupa at that place, and all gods and humans should make offerings to it as if it were a stupa of the Buddha.”

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

“If a person, after my extinction,
Can reverently uphold this Sutra,
His blessings shall be unlimited,
As described above.

For he will have then completed
All manner of offerings,
And built sharira-stupas
Adorned with the seven treasures,
With towers high and broad,
Tapering up to the Brahma Heavens,
Hung with millions and millions of jeweled bells,
Making wonderful sounds in the wind.

And also, throughout limitless eons,
He shall have made offerings to this stupa
Of flowers, incense, beads,
Heavenly garments, and all kinds of music.

He shall burn fragrant oil in butter lamps,
Which shine brightly all around.
In the evil age, during the Dharma's demise,
He who can uphold this Sutra,

Will then, as mentioned above,
Have perfectly made all these offerings.

If a person can uphold this Sutra,
It will be as if in the presence of the Buddha himself
He used oxhead chandana
To build Sangha dwellings as offerings to him.

These thirty-two halls,
Eight tala trees in height,
Replete with fine food, clothing,
And bedding, wherein
Hundreds of thousands may dwell,
Will be amply adorned with gardens, groves, bathing ponds,
Pathways, and Dhyana caves.

He may, with faith and understanding,
Receive, uphold, read, recite, and write,
Or request others to write,
And make offerings to this Sutra,
Scattering flowers, incense, and scented powder,
And constantly burning lamps with fragrant oils
Made of sumana, champaka, and atimuktaka.

He who makes such offerings
Gains limitless merit and virtue.
Just as empty space is boundless,
So shall his blessings be.

How much greater is the merit
Of he who upholds this Sutra,
Who also gives, holds precepts,
Who is patient and takes delight in Dhyana samadhi,
Who is never hateful or foul-mouthed,
And who is reverent in stupas and temples,
Humble towards the Bhikshus,
Far-removed from arrogance,
And ever-thinking on wisdom.

He may refrain from anger
When asked difficult questions
But be compliant in making explanations.
He who can perform such practices
Shall have limitless merit and virtue.

If one sees a Dharma Master
Accomplish virtues such as these,
One should scatter heavenly flowers,
Offer him heavenly garments,
Bow with one's head at his feet,
And think of him as one would a Buddha.

One should further think,
"Soon he will arrive at the Bodhimanda,
Attain to no-outflows—the unconditioned—
And broadly benefit gods and humans."

Wherever such a person stays,
Walks, sits, or reclines,
Or speaks but a single verse,
One should build a stupa,
Wonderfully fine and adorned,
And make all kinds of offerings to it.

The disciple of the Buddha, dwelling in this place,
Enjoys it as would the Buddha,
Always abiding therein,
Walking, sitting, or reclining."