

The Sutra On The Merit Of Bathing The Buddha

Thus have I heard:

At one time the Blessed One was in Rajagriha, on Eagles Peak, together with one thousand, two hundred and fifty monks. There were also an immeasurable, unlimited multitude of Bodhisattvas and the eight classes of gods, nagas and so forth, who were all assembled. At that time, the Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva was seated in the midst of this assembly. Because he aspired to extend compassion toward all sentient beings, he thought: "by what means do the Buddhas, Tathágatas, obtain the pure body, furnished with the marks of the great person?" Again he thought: "all classes of living beings are able to meet the Tathágata and approach him with offerings. The blessings that are obtained are without measure or limit. I do not yet know, however, what offerings living beings will make or what merit they will cultivate after the death of the Tathágata so as to bring about those roots of good merit that quickly lead to final, supreme enlightenment." After thinking this, he then arose from his seat and bared his right shoulder, having bowed his head at the feet of the Buddha; he knelt upright, with palms in salutation and spoke to the Buddha, saying, "World Honored One, I wish to ask questions and hope that you deign to acknowledge them." The Buddha said, "Noble son, I will teach according to what you ask."

At that time the Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva spoke to the Buddha saying, "By what means do the Buddhas, Tathágatas, perfectly enlightened ones obtain the pure body, furnished with the marks of the great person? Also, all living beings are able to meet the Tathágata and approach him with offerings. The blessings that are obtained are without merit or limit. I have not yet discerned what offerings living beings will make or what merit they will cultivate after the death of the Tathágata so as to bring about those good qualities that quickly lead to final, supreme enlightenment."

At that time, the World Honored One said to the Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva: "excellent, excellent, that you are able for the sake of future beings to bring forth such questions! Now listen carefully, reflect on this well, and practice as I say. I will explain for you in detail."

The Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva said, "So be it, World Honored One, I dearly wish to listen."

The Buddha explained to the Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva: "Noble son, you should know that because giving, morality, patience, vigor, meditation, and wisdom; benevolence, compassion, delight, and should know that because giving, morality, patience, vigor,

meditation, and knowledge and experience of liberation; the ten strengths and the four confidences are all the characteristics of the Buddha and are all various kinds of knowledge, virtue, and purity, they are the purity of the Tathágata.

If the Buddhas, Tathágatas, are in this way given various offerings with a pure heart—incense, flowers, gems, garlands, banners, parasols, and cushions—displayed before the Buddha, multifariously adorning him, and the marvelously scented water is used to bathe his noble form, the dark smoke of the burning incense will carry your mind to the Dharma realm. Furthermore, you celebrate the extraordinary merit of the Tathágata with food and drink, percussion and stringed music; you will manifest the superb vow to direct your mind to the supreme ocean of omniscience. The merit thereby produced will be immeasurable and without limit; it will be perpetually continued through successive rebirths to the point of enlightenment. Why is this? The blessed wisdom of the Tathágata is inconceivable, infinite, and unequaled.

Noble son, all Buddhas, World Honored Ones, have three bodies. They are known as the Dharma body or Dharmakaya, the glorified body or the Sambhogakaya, and the manifestation body or the Nirmanakaya. After my Nirvana, if you wish to do homage to these three bodies then you should do homage to my relics. But these are of two kinds: the first is the bodily relic; the second is the Dharma-verse relic. I will now recite the verse:"

All things arise from a cause.

The Tathágata has explained their cause
and the cessation of the cause of these things.

This the great ascetic has explained.

"If men, women, or the five groups of mendicants would build an image of the Buddha; or if those without strength would deposit one as large as a grain of barley, or build a stupa—its body the size of a jujube, its mast the size of a needle, its parasol equal to a flake of bran, its relic like a mustard seed—or if someone writes the Dharma verse and installs it inside the stupa, it would be like doing homage by offering up a rare jewel. If in accordance with one's own strength and ability one can be truly sincere and respectful, it (the image or stupa) would be like my present body, equal without difference.

Noble son, if there are beings who are able to make such excellent offerings, they will glorify themselves by achieving the fifteen superb virtues. First, they will always be modest. Second, they will manifest a mind of pure faith. Third, their hearts will be simple and honest. Fourth, they will cleave to good friends. Fifth, they will enter a state of passionless wisdom. Sixth, they will constantly encounter Buddhas. Seventh, they will always maintain the correct teaching. Eighth, they will be able to act according to my teaching. Ninth, they will be reborn in pure Buddha fields according to their wishes. Tenth, if they are reborn among men, they will be noblemen of great families; being

respected among men, they will produce joyous thoughts. Eleventh, being born among men, they will naturally set their minds on the Buddha. Twelfth, an army of demons will not be able to harm them. Thirteenth, they will be able in the final age to protect and maintain the True Dharma. Fourteenth, they will be protected by the Buddhas of the ten directions. Fifteenth, they will be able to quickly obtain the five attributes of the Dharma body."

At that time, the World Honored One uttered these verses:

After my death

You will be able to honor my relics

Some will build stupas

Or images of the Tathágata.

At the place of the image or stupa,

One who anoints that spot of ground

With various incenses and flowers

Scattering them over its surface

Uses pure, beautifully scented water

To pour onto the body of this image,

Offers it various flavorful drinks and foods,

Fully maintaining it with oblations,

Eulogizes the virtue of the Tathágata,

Which is endlessly difficult to conceive;

Through the wisdom of skillful means and the supernatural power of the Buddha

Such a one will quickly reach the other shore of Nirvana.

He will obtain the diamond body

Complete with the thirty-two marks of a great person

And the eighty minor signs of excellence.

He will ferry the multitude of living beings to the shore of Nirvana.

At that time, the Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva, having heard these verses, addressed the Buddha saying, "Future living beings will ask, 'why bathe the image?'"

The Buddha answered the Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva: "Because you will equal the Tathágata in producing right mindfulness. You will not be attached to the two sides that deceive people with 'emptiness' and 'being.' You will long insatiably for virtuous conduct. The three emancipations, morality, and wisdom will be constantly sought to

escape the endless cycle of birth and death. You will produce great compassion toward all living beings. You will aspire to obtain and quickly perfect the three kinds of bodies.

Noble son, I have already expounded for your sake the four noble truths, the twelve conditioned co-productions and the six perfections. Now I teach the method of bathing the image for your sake and the sake of the various kings, princes, ministers, concubines, princesses, gods, nagas, men and demons. Among the various types of homage, this (the bathing of the image) is the best. It excels the giving of the seven jewels equal to the sands of the Ganges.

When you bathe the image, you should use ox-head sandalwood, white sandalwood, red sandalwood, or aloe-wood incenses. You should burn Mountain Top Tulip incense, 'Dragons Brain' incense, Ling-ling (Mountain) incense, and so forth. On the surface of a clean stone you should grind these to make paste; use this paste to make scented water and place it in a clean vessel. At a clean spot, make an altar with good earth, square or round, its size suited to the circumstances. On top establish the bathing platform and place the Buddha image in the middle. Pour on the scented hot water, purifying and cleansing it, repeatedly pouring the pure water over it. The water that is used must be completely filtered so as not to cause harm to insects. Drops from two fingers of the water with which you bathed the image should be taken and placed on your own head—this is called 'good luck water.' Drain off the water onto clean ground without allowing your feet to tread upon it. With a fine, soft towel wipe the image, making it clean. Burn the above name incenses spreading the aroma all around and put the image back in its original place.

"Noble son, the consequence of performing this bathing of the Buddha image is that you and the great multitude of men and gods will presently receive wealth, happiness, and long life without sickness; your every wish will be fulfilled. Your relatives, friends, and family will all be at ease. You will bid a long farewell to the eight conditions of trouble and forever escape the fount of suffering. You will never again receive the body of a woman and will quickly achieve enlightenment.

When you have set up the image and burned the various incenses, face the image, clasp your palms together in pious salutation and recite these praises:

I now bathe the Tathágata.

His pure wisdom and virtue adorn the assembly.

I vow that those living beings of this period of the five impurities

May quickly witness the pure Dharma body of the Tathágata.

May the incense of morality, meditation, wisdom and the knowledge and experience of liberation

Constantly perfume every realm of the ten directions.

I vow that the smoke of this incense will likewise

Do the Buddhas work of salvation without measure or limit.

I also vow to put a stop to the three hells and the wheel of samsara,

Completely extinguishing the fires and obtaining the coolness of relief

So that all may manifest the thought of unsurpassed enlightenment

Perpetually escaping the river of desires and advancing to the other shore of Nirvana."

The Buddha finished expounding this Sutra. At this time there were among this assembly an immeasurable, unlimited number of Bodhisattvas who obtained stainless concentration. The countless gods obtained never lapsing wisdom. The multitude of Voice Hearers vowed to seek the fruits of Buddhahood. The eighty-four thousand living beings all manifested the thought toward unexcelled, complete enlightenment.

At that time, the Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva said to the Buddha: "World Honored One, being fortunate to receive the compassion and pity of the Great Teacher (the Buddha), we shall teach the method of bathing the image. I will now convert kings, ministers, and all those of good faith, cheer, or merit. Every day I will bathe the noble image to procure great blessings. I pledge to always receive and carry out with pleasure "The Sutra On The Merit Of Bathing The Buddha."