



**SUTRA ON THE MERITS OF
THE FUNDAMENTAL VOWS
OF THE MASTER OF HEALING,
The Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathagata**



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DAILY TRIPLE REFUGE


- 1) I will go to the Buddha for my refuge
- 2) I will go to the Dharma for my refuge
- 3) I will go to the Sangha for my refuge




DAILY BODHISATTVA'S VOWS

- 1) I vow to save all sentient beings of the Ten Directions of Space.
- 2) I vow to eradicate all the inexhaustible afflictions.
- 3) I vow to study and practice all the illimitable Buddhist Dharma doors.
- 4) I vow to attain the Supreme Enlightenment (Nirvana).



utra on the Merits of
the Fundamental Vows of
the Master of Healing, The Lapis
Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata

or

utra of Sacred Formula of
the Binding Vows of the
Twelve Deva Generals to Enrich
All Sentient Beings

or

utra of Tearing Away All
Karma Veils

From the Chinese version of the Tripitaka Master
Hstian-tsang (T'ang, 650 C.E.). T. XIV, 450.

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Om. Homage to the Omniscient One. Homage to the Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance King Tathāgata.¹

Thus have I heard; once, when the Lord was traveling through the various states to teach and transform the inhabitants, he arrived at Vaiśālī. There he dwelt at the base of a tree from which music resounded. Together with him was a great assembly of monks, totaling 8,000. Thirty-six thousand Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas were there, and the king of the state, his great ministers, brahmins, learned laymen, *devas*, *nāgas*, *yākṣas*, and beings human and non-human also were in attendance. This immeasurably large assembly respectfully gathered around the Buddha, and he then expounded his teaching to them.

1. These opening phrases are found in the Sanskrit manuscript versions of the *Bhaiṣajya-guru vaidūrya-prabha-rāja-sūtram*, Nalinaksha Dutt, ed. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. I (Srinagar, Kashmir: 1939), p. 1 (unless otherwise noted, page numbers refer to the numbering of the Sanskrit text). The Chinese text used, upon which this translation is principally based, was copied in 765 C.E. It was found by Sir Mark Aurel Stein at Tun-huang early in this century, and now is in the collection of the British Museum (Stein ms. 2616, Giles catalog 3574).

The Dharma Prince Mañjuśrī, receiving through inspiration the Buddha's sublime spiritual force, arose from his seat, bared his shoulder on one side, and knelt with his right knee on the ground. Bowing down towards the Lord and clasping his hands together, Mañjuśrī addressed him and said: "O Lord, I sincerely wish that you expound upon the forms and varieties of all the Buddhas' names and on the rare merits of their fundamental great vows [made when they first set out on the Bodhisattva Path]. All who hear this will be caused to be purified of their karmic fetters, so that they may confer benefits and joy to all the sentient beings in the age of the replica teachings [when only form rather than content remains of spiritual teachings]."

The Lord then praised the youth Mañjuśrī, and he said: "Excellent, excellent, Mañjuśrī. You have implored me with your great compassion to expound on all the Buddhas' names and the merits of their fundamental vows, in order to tear off the karmic fetters which bind sentient beings and to benefit, enrich, and bring peace and joy to all sentient beings in the period of the replica teachings. You should listen now with utmost care and consider well what I shall tell you."

Mañjuśrī said, "I sincerely wish that you will speak. We all will listen with great joy to your explanations."



THE BUDDHA OF HEALING: HIS TWELVE VOWS & HIS EASTERN PARADISE

The Buddha told Mañjuśrī: “If you go eastward beyond as many Buddha fields as there are ten times the number of grains of sand in the Ganges River, you will find a realm known as ‘Pure Lapis Lazuli.’ The Buddha there is known as Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata, Arhat,² Perfectly Enlightened One, Perfect in Mind and Deed, Well-Gone, He Who Knows the World, Unsurpassed Being, Tamer of the Passions, Teacher of Devas and Men, Buddha, and Lord. Mañjuśrī, when that Buddha, Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata first set out on the Bodhisattva Path, he made twelve vows to enable all sentient beings to obtain that which they seek.

2. Though the Chinese text (p. 405A) has only half the compound for “arhat,” *ying* (instead of *ying-kung*), the Sanskrit text (p. 2) has “arhat.” This peculiar omission is found in many of the Healing Buddha texts, including the *Sūtra on the Merits of the Fundamental Vows of the Seven Buddhas, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Masters of Healing* (T. 451).

First Great Vow

‘I vow that when I attain the unexcelled complete enlightenment in a future age, a radiant light will blaze forth from my body. It will brilliantly illumine limitless, countless, boundless realms. This body will be excellently adorned with the thirty-two marks of the great man and the eighty secondary marks.³ I will cause all sentient beings to wholly resemble me.’

Second Great Vow

‘I vow that when I attain enlightenment in a future age, my body will be like lapis lazuli within and without, bright with penetrating and flawless purity. The radiance will be of great merit and will be imposing, indeed. My body will be an excellent and tranquil dwelling, adorned with [an aureole like] a glowing net surpassing the sun and moon in

3. There are a number of lists of these thirty-two principal marks and eighty secondary marks, which differ in minor aspects. In Alex Wayman’s article “Contributions regarding the thirty-two characteristics of the great person” (*Sino-Indian Studies* V, 1957 [Liebenthal Festschrift], pp. 243-260), it is noted that analysis of the characteristics or marks (*lakṣaṇa*) of the body to foretell the destiny of a child was an Indian practice predating Buddhism. Among the primary marks of the great man, often depicted in Buddhist art, are those such as: the *uṣṇiṣa*, a bulge on the top of the head indicating authority; the *ūrṇā*, a curl of silver hair between the eye-brows (depicted in images as a slight bulge at the location of the “third-eye”); hands and feet marked by a wheel rim; webs joining the fingers and toes on the hands and feet.

its radiance. I will show the dawn to those beings who are completely concealed in darkness, so that they may act in accordance with their desired paths.’

Third Great Vow

‘I vow that when I attain enlightenment in a future age, with infinite and boundless insight and means, I shall cause all beings to obtain all that they need. They shall never lack [the necessities of life].’

Fourth Great Vow

‘I vow that when I attain enlightenment in a future age, if there are sentient beings who tread upon heretical paths, I will cause them all to peacefully abide within the path of enlightenment. If there are those who are adherents of the *śrāvaka* or *pratyekabuddha* vehicles, they will all become securely established in the Great Vehicle (Mahāyāna).’

Fifth Great Vow

‘I vow that when I attain enlightenment in a future age, if there are limitless and boundless sentient beings who cultivate and practice the pure conduct of my teaching, I will cause them all to be able to follow perfectly the rules of

conduct and be complete in the three cumulative precepts.⁴ Those who slander and offend will, after hearing my name, be able once again to attain purity, and they will not sink to a woeful existence.’

Sixth Great Vow

‘I vow that when I attain enlightenment in a future age, if there are sentient beings whose bodies are inferior, whose sense organs are impaired, who are ugly, stupid, deaf, blind, mute, bent and lame, hunchbacked, leprous, convulsive, insane, or who have all sorts of diseases and sufferings – such beings when they hear my name shall obtain proper appearances and practical intelligence. All their senses will become perfect and they shall have neither sickness nor suffering.’

Seventh Great Vow

‘I vow that when I attain enlightenment in a future age, if there are any sentient beings who are ill and oppressed, who have nowhere to go and nothing to return to, who have neither doctor nor medicine, neither relatives nor immediate family, who are destitute and whose sufferings

4. To commit no faults, to act in a wholesome manner, and to seek to benefit all sentient beings.

are acute – as soon as my name passes through their ears, they will be cured of all their diseases and they will be peaceful and joyous in body and mind. They will have plentiful families and property, and they will personally experience the supreme enlightenment.’

Eighth Great Vow

‘I vow that when I attain enlightenment in a future age, if there are any women who suffer from any of the hundred woes that befall women, who are wearied at the end of their lives and wish to abandon their female form – when these women hear my name, they all will obtain transformation in rebirth from female into male physical forms. They all will personally experience the supreme enlightenment.’⁵

Ninth Great Vow

‘I vow that when I attain to enlightenment in a future age, I will cause all sentient beings to escape from Māra’s net. They will be freed from the fetters of all deviant paths. If there are those who have sunk into various negative views

5. Two aspects are referred to here: the physical difficulties and sorrows which women were subject to in an age when medical treatment was often primitive, and the apparent low social status of women in the region where this text was first composed. For more on this, see p. 64.

as dense as a jungle, I will embrace them and establish them in correct views. I will gradually cause them to cultivate and study all the Bodhisattva practices, and they will soon personally experience the supreme enlightenment.’

Tenth Great Vow

‘I vow that when I attain enlightenment in a future age, if – according to that which is recorded in the king’s laws – there are any sentient beings who are bound and whipped, tied up and thrown into prison, or who will be subjected to capital punishment; and to whom boundlessly catastrophic difficulties occur that are humiliating; grievous, and distressing, their bodies and minds suffering these bitternesses – if such persons hear my name, due to the beneficial spiritual force of my auspicious virtues, they will be freed from all sorrows and sufferings.

Eleventh Great Vow

‘I vow that when I attain enlightenment in a future age, if there are any sentient beings who are tormented by hunger and thirst and who create bad karma in their [desperate] search for sustenance – if they hear my name and firmly retain it in their minds and hold to it, then I will provide them first with incomparably marvelous food and drink to

fully satisfy their bodies. Afterwards, through providing them with the taste of the Teaching, they will ultimately become peaceful and joyous and well established in it.’

Twelfth Great Vow

‘I vow that when I attain enlightenment in a future age, if there are any sentient beings who are poor and, having no clothing, are annoyed and irritated through the day and night by flies and mosquitos, heat and cold – if they hear my name and firmly retain it in their minds and hold to it, in accordance with their wishes, they will obtain all sorts of superior and marvelous clothing. They will also obtain every precious adornment, garlands, powder incense, music, and [the enjoyment of] various performing arts. I shall cause them to have in abundance whatever their hearts desire.’

“Mañjuśrī, these are the twelve subtle, sublime, and superior vows expressed by that Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata when he set out onto the Bodhisattva Path. As to the merits and glorious adornments of his Buddha-land, if I tried to speak of them for an æon, or even for longer than an æon, I would not be able to describe them in full. The Lord Master of Healing’s

Buddha-land has been singularly pure up to the present, and there is no temptation there,⁶ no woeful paths of existence, and no cries of suffering. The ground is made of lapis lazuli, and roads are marked with gold. The walls and gates, palaces and ‘pavilions, balconies and windows, draperies and curtains are all made of the seven precious substances.⁷ It is similar to the Joyous Realm of the West; its merits and adornments are no different.

“In this land, there are two Bodhisattva-mahāsattvas. One is named All-Pervading Solar Radiance and the other is named All-Pervading Lunar Radiance. They are the leaders of the limitless, numberless host of Bodhisattvas there. They are fully able to uphold the treasury of the genuine teachings of the Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata.

“For these reasons, Mañjuśrī, all the good sons and daughters [of the Buddhist family] having faithful hearts should aspire to be reborn in that Buddha’s realm.”

6. Literally “there have been no women there.” My rendering of this phrase in a non-literal manner is due to the encouragement of all “good sons and daughters” to vow to be reborn in the paradise, this statement occurring a mere two paragraphs after the phrase in question.

7. Gold, silver, lapis lazuli, quartz crystal, agate, carnelian, and ruby or red pearl.



THE BUDDHA AIDS THOSE WHOSE KARMA HAS LED THEM TO DISTRESS

The Lord then told the youth Mañjuśrī: “Mañjuśrī, there are beings who do not distinguish between good and bad, who only cherish greed and stinginess. They know nothing of spreading charity and of the fruits and rewards of giving. Stupid and dense, they have no insight and lack the roots of faith. Amassing wealth and jewels, they industriously guard and protect [their hoard]. When they see a beggar coming, they become displeased, and if they fail to protect themselves and are forced to give in charity, they generate such deep and painful resentment that it seems as if they are cutting a piece off their own bodies.

“Furthermore, there are sentient beings who are boundlessly stingy and avaricious. They amass riches, and since they do not even spend it on themselves, how could they possibly be able to give to their parents, wives, children, or to their maidservants, laborers, or to beggars.

“At the end of their present lives, these sentient beings will be reborn as starving ghosts or animals. Because in a former incarnation as a human being, such a being briefly heard the name “Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata,” in this woesome path of existence he will suddenly remember that Tathāgata’s name. When he recalls the Tathāgata’s name, he will disappear from that place and once again be born among humans. Obtaining knowledge of his past lives and dreading [return to] the woesome paths, he will no longer take joy in worldly pleasures. He will come to like practicing benevolent charity, he will praise those who delight in giving, and he will not be greedily attached to his possessions. One after the other, using his head, eyes, hands, feet, blood, flesh and torso, he will be able to distribute charity to all who come seeking it. How much more will he be able to distribute his other property?

“Next, Mañjuśrī, there may be sentient beings who have broken the precepts of moral purity (*śīla*) even though they have accepted the various points of the teachings of the Tathāgata. There may be those who; even if they have not broken the precepts, have broken regulations of the Order. There may be those who, even though they have followed the precepts and rules in a manner which is not improper,

have defamed right views. Also, there may be those who, even though they have not defamed right views, have abandoned the practice of studying. Thus, they fail to comprehend the profound principles of the *sūtras* taught by the Buddha. There may be those who, though learned, have become conceited, and because their minds are clouded by conceit, they think they are right and all others are wrong. They come to detest and hate the genuine Teachings, becoming companions and associates of Māra. In this way, these stupid persons themselves practice heretical views. They repeatedly send vast millions of sentient beings plunging into the pitfalls of danger. These persons will sink to the Naraka hell realms, or to the paths of animal or ghostly rebirth, endlessly remaining in *saṃsāra*.

“If they should hear the name of this Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata, it will cause them to abandon their negative practices and cultivate and practice the wholesome Teachings. They will not sink to the pits of woeful existence. But if there are some who are unable to reject negative practices, who are unable to cultivate and practice the wholesome teachings, then they will [continue to] sink to the woesome paths. Due to the awesome force of the fundamental vows made by this Tathāgata, such beings will be caused to arise from their present state to

hear the Buddha's name for a fleeting moment. Then, following the end of that life, they will be reborn as humans. They will obtain correct views, and – making effort – they will control the desires of the mind. Furthermore, they will be enabled to reject the path of the householder by taking refuge in the teaching of the homeless Tathāgata. They will accept and hold to the points of the teachings and will have nothing to do with that which is offensive and breaks the precepts. Holding to correct views, they will become learned and understand the deep meanings of the *sūtras*. Divorced from pride, they will no longer slander the genuine Teachings. They will not become Māra's companions. Gradually, they will cultivate and practice the various aspects of the Bodhisattva Path, and they will soon attain to that Path's fulfillment.

“Next, Mañjuśrī, there may be sentient beings who are grudging and greedy, envious and jealous, who praise themselves while slandering others. These beings will sink to the three woesome paths. For limitless thousands of years they will suffer all sorts of miseries. When they have suffered these miseries, at the end of their lives they will be reborn into the world of men, as oxen or horses, camels or donkeys. Constantly whipped, annoyed and irritated by hunger and

thirst, they will always be burdened with heavy loads on their backs as they follow the roads and thoroughfares.

“If they obtain human rebirth, it will be as a menial in someone’s home, as a male or female servant who constantly receives orders to do manual labor for others. Such a one will never be free.

“In the former life as a human, if such a one ever heard the name of the Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata, due to this good cause, he will be led to recollect it, and he will take refuge in the Buddha with utmost sincerity. By means of the Buddha’s spiritual power, he will be liberated from all his sufferings. He will gain perceptive and sharp senses, he will become insightful and learned. He will ever seek for the sublime teachings, constantly meeting wholesome [spiritual] friends. He will sever his ties to Māra for eternity, piercing through the veils of ignorance. The river of afflictions will dry up, and he will be liberated from the sorrows and sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death.

“Next, Mañjuśrī, if there are any sentient beings who take delight in schisms, who quarrel and cause irritations between themselves and others; and if by means of deeds,

words, and thoughts they create, increase, and prolong all sorts of negative karma; if they constantly further matters which are not beneficial; if they plot revengeful injury; if they summon the spirits of the mountains, forests, and tomb mounds; if they kill living creatures in order to obtain their blood and flesh as sacrificial offerings to the *yakṣa* and *rākṣasa* demons and others; if they write down the names of the cursed, make images of them, by means of evil sorcery curse and harm them, and practice evil magic to raise ghouls, thus putting an end to the life of the enemy and destroying his body – if any of these sentient beings hear the name of this Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata, they will become unable to do injury by all those evil ways. In all the turnings of their minds, there will arise thoughts of loving kindness. They will think of benefits for others, of peace and joy, and they will have no thoughts of torment or hate. Each will be delighted with whatever he receives, and he will be satisfied. These beings will not encroach upon or maltreat others, but will seek to benefit each other.

“Next, Mañjuśrī, there may be some among the four classes of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen, among the good sons and daughters of pure faith, who are able to

accept and maintain the eightfold vows, observing all the aspects of them for a Year or three months.⁸ By means of these wholesome roots, they expect to be granted rebirth in the Realm of Utmost Joy of Amitayus Buddha in the western regions. However, though they have heard the genuine Teachings, they are not yet established in them. If they hear the name of the Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata, then when they reach the end of their lives; eight great Bodhisattvas will ascend through space using their spiritual powers, and they will come to point out the route [to the Western Paradise].⁹ In that [Western] realm, they will be spontaneously reborn in multi-colored jeweled flowers.

“If there are those who – even though they have been born in this celestial realm and ‘have established wholesome

8. The eightfold vows include: no killing, no stealing, no improper sexual conduct, no false speech, no alcoholic drinks, no cosmetics or personal adornments, sleeping on a mat on the ground, and no food after noon.

9. The names of the eight Bodhisattvas are: Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, Mahasthāmaprāpta, Akṣayamati, “Precious Sandal Blossom” (this Bodhisattva is not well-known; his name has no standard Sanskrit equivalent), Bhaiṣajyarāja, Bhaiṣajya-samudgata, and Maitreya. Though not mentioned either in this Chinese version of the *sutra* or the Sanskrit manuscript, they are specifically named in chapter twelve of the *Abhiṣeka-sutra*, T. XXI, 1131, p. 534A.

roots in their previous lives – still have not exhausted (their karma), because they have been born in this celestial realm they will never again be born into any of the woesome paths. When their stay in the celestial realm reaches its end, such a one will be reborn into the human world as a wheel-turning king who will unite all within the four continents. Due to the sovereignty of his beneficial virtues, he will securely establish limitless hundreds of thousands of sentient beings in the way of the ten wholesome precepts.

“Or, such a one will be born into a great family of *kṣatriyas*, brahmins, or learned laymen, with abundant wealth, jewels, and granaries and storehouses filled to overflowing. His appearance will be extremely majestic, and he will have a complete array of retainers. He will be intelligent and wise, brave and strong, imposing and fierce like a great master of martial arts.

“Or, even if such a one is born as a woman, if she hears the name of the Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Tathāgata, and with utmost sincerity she accepts it and holds to it, then in subsequent lives this person will never again be born as a woman.”

A MYSTIC FORMULA FOR DISPELLING DISEASE & SUFFERING¹⁰

[“Then, Mañjuśrī, when this Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata attained enlightenment, due to the force of his fundamental vows he was able to observe all sentient beings. Some suffered from various diseases and were emaciated, feverish, jaundiced, and so on; others were in the thrall of noxious poisons of repugnant demons; further, others were (naturally) short-lived or were on the brink of untimely death. He sought to cause all these diseases and sufferings to be ended, and to fulfill all desires.

[“At that point, the Lord entered into the *samādhi* named ‘Dispeller of the Afflictions of All Beings.’ Having entered this *samādhi*, a great brilliant light shone from the *ūrṇā* between his eyebrows, and from its midst a great *dhāraṇī* resounded:

10. This section, though found neither in the Tun-huang version of Hsüan-tsang’s translation nor in the Sanskrit manuscript remains, can be found in slightly altered form in the later expanded version of this *sūtra*, the scripture of the Seven Healing Buddhas (Translation IV). It is also popularly incorporated into modern versions circulated among Chinese Buddhists, including a version in my possession recently published in Hong Kong. It is included in Walter Liebenthal’s translation, *The Sūtra of the Lord of Healing* (Peking: 1936), and is also found in a Chinese version of the *sūtra* circulated in Peking in the early 1930s, found in the collection of the late Prof. F. D. Lessing.

‘*Namo bhagavate bhaiṣajyaguru-vaidūṛva prabhā-rājāya tathāgatāya arthate saṃyak-sambuddhāya tadyathā. Oṃ bhaiṣajye bhaiṣajye bhaiṣaiya-samudgate svāhā.*’¹¹

[“Then after this *dhāraṇi* was uttered, from the midst of this light, there was a great rumbling and shaking of the earth and a great radiance shone forth. Illnesses and miseries were removed from all beings, and they all became peaceful and joyous.

[“O Mañjuśrī, if there is a good son or daughter who is ill, for the sake of that person you should wholeheartedly constantly clean and bathe him. You should provide for him food, medicine, and water from which all insects have been strained, having recited the *dhāraṇi* over it 108 times. Upon swallowing these substances, all the sufferings of disease will be dispelled. If this person seeks something, with utmost sincerity he should think of the *dhāraṇi* and recite it. In this way, he will obtain all that he seeks, be free of illnesses, and have a long life. At the end of his life, this person will be reborn into the realm of the Buddha (of Healing). He will achieve the non-regressing state and reach enlightenment.

11. This can be translated as: “I honor the Lord Master of Healing, the King of Lapis Lazuli Radiance, Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One, saying: To the healing, to the healing, to the supreme healing hail!”

[“This is why, Mañjuśrī, good sons and daughters should, with utmost sincerity, diligently revere and worship that Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata, and they should ever hold this *dhāraṇi*, never allowing it to be lost.

[“Next, Mañjuśrī, any sons or daughters of pure faith who hear all the names of the Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfectly Enlightened One, should – having heard them – recite them and hold to them. At dawn, they should clean their teeth with sticks of wood, bathe, and purify themselves.

With various fragrant flowers, incense, perfumed unguents, and with music from all instruments, they should worship an image (of that Buddha). They should personally copy this *sūtra* or have others do so, and they should wholeheartedly accept it, hold to it, and listen to its principles. They should offer *pūjā* worship to the master of the teachings (who explicates the principles), and should offer to him all the necessities of life, making sure that he lacks none of these. Having done so, they will be covered by the protective thoughts of the Buddhas. All that they seek shall be fulfilled, and they will reach enlightenment.”]



WORSHIP OF THE BUDDHA OF HEALING & ITS BENEFITS

Then the youth Mañjuśrī saluted the Buddha and said: “O Lord, I aspire that in the age of the replica teachings, by all sorts of means, I shall cause the good sons and daughters of pure faith to hear the name of the Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata. Even during their sleep, I will awaken their ears with the Buddha’s name.

“O Lord, they should accept this *sūtra* and hold to it, read it, and recite it. Furthermore, they should lecture on it and explicate its points to others. They themselves should copy, it or have others copy it, and worship and pay reverence to the *sūtra* with all sorts of fragrant flowers, perfumed unguents, powdered incense, burning incense, garlands, necklaces, banners, a canopy, drums and music,

and they should perform *pūjā* with a five-colored cloth cover for it. They should sweep the site, sprinkle water to purify the area, and then set up a tall throne and securely place the *sūtra* on it. At that time, the Four Great *Deva* Kings together with their retinue overflowing with countless hundreds of thousands in the *deva* assembly will all go to this place of *pūjā* and guard and protect it.

“O Lord, if in this place where the *sūtra* is precious and popular there are those who are able to accept and hold to it, then by means of the merits of the fundamental vows of the Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata and through hearing his name, one should know that in this place there no longer shall be untimely deaths. Also, never again in this place will evil ghosts and demons snatch away the vital spirits of men. Those who have suffered thusly will once again regain their original peace and joy of body and mind.”

The Buddha told Mañjuśrī: “So it is, so it is. [It shall be] exactly as you say, Mañjuśrī. If there are any good sons and daughters of pure faith who wish to worship in *pūjā* that Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata, first they should make an image of that

Buddha's form, set up a pure throne, and securely place the image on it. They should scatter all sorts of flowers there, burn various incenses, and they should gloriously adorn the site with various banners and pennants. For seven days and seven nights they should accept and hold to the eight-fold vows, eat pure food, bathe in fragrant and pure water, and wear new and clean clothing. They should give birth to the unstained, single-minded state, with no thought of anger or harm. Towards all sentient beings, there should arise the thoughts of blessings and benefits, peace, loving kindness, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. They should play musical instruments and sing praises while circumambulating to the right of the Buddha image. Furthermore, they should recall the merits of that Tathāgata's fundamental vows and study and recite this *sūtra*. They should think only of its principles and lecture on the *sūtra*, elucidating its main points.

“It will follow that all those joyous things which are sought shall come to pass. If long life is sought, then longevity shall be granted. If wealth and abundance are sought, then that prosperity shall be obtained. If an official position is sought, then it shall be gained, and if a son or daughter is sought, the child will be born.

“Furthermore, if there is a person who suddenly has nightmares, who sees all sorts of evil apparitions, or who encounters monstrous birds which flock together, or if a hundred ominous portents materialize in his home – if that person uses all sorts of marvelous and valuable utensils to perform reverent *pūjā* to that Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata, then the nightmares, evil apparitions, and all inauspicious things will disappear, unable to cause harm.

“If there are any persons who are threatened by water, fire, sword, poison, hanging from a precipice, wicked elephant, a lion, tiger, wolf, bear, poisonous snake, scorpion, centipede or millipede, or mosquito – if such a one is able to recall with perfect sincerity that Buddha and reverently worship him, he will be freed from all dreadful things. If another state invades and disturbs the peace, or if robbers and thieves cause disorder, one who recalls and reverently worships that Tathāgata also will obtain freedom [from these disturbances].

“Next, Mañjuśrī, there may be good sons and daughters of pure faith who – having reached the end of their days – have never served another *deva*, have taken wholehearted

refuge in the Buddha, the Teachings, and the Order and accept and hold to the restraining precepts. If among the five precepts, or the two hundred fifty precepts of the monks, or the five hundred precepts of the nuns that such a person has accepted, if any of these precepts that were accepted have been broken, then that person may fear that he will sink into a woesome path. If such a one is able to concentrate solely on the name of that Buddha and reverently worship him, then he certainly will not suffer rebirth in any of the three woesome paths.

“If there is a woman about to give birth who suffers from acute pain, if she is able to praise the name and form and reverently worship that Tathāgata with utmost sincerity, then all her pain will be removed and her child will be born without bodily defect. The appearance of her child will be perfect, and all who see him will exclaim with joy. The child will be endowed with keen sense organs, intelligence, and tranquility. He will seldom become ill, and non-human beings will never snatch away his vital spirit.”



THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH

At this time the Lord told Ananda: “All the merits of that Lord Buddha Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Tathāgata, just as I have praised them, are [aspects of] the profound range of spiritual activities¹² of the Buddhas, and they are difficult to comprehend. Do you have faith in them or not?”

Ananda replied: “O Lord of Great Virtue, no doubts arise in me towards the *vaipulya sūtras* spoken by the Tathāgata. Why is this so? The karma produced by the deeds, words, and thoughts of all the Tathāgatas is entirely pure. O Lord, the discs of the sun and the moon can be caused to sink and fall, and the wonderfully lofty king of mountains [Mount Sumeru] may be caused to shake, but the words of the Buddhas never change.

“O Lord, the roots of faith of sentient beings are incomplete. Though they hear descriptions of the profound ranges of activity of the various Buddhas, these beings of incomplete faith may merely think: ‘How can we, just by concen-

12. *hsing-chu* is the equivalent of the Sanskrit *gocara* (“range, abode, field of action”), Sanskrit text, p. 21.

trating on the name of a single Buddha, Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata, thereby obtain such excellent blessings?’ From this lack of faith, there arises in turn slander and defamation. In the long night, these beings lose their great beneficial joy and sink into the woesome paths, plunged inexhaustibly into *samsāra*.”

The Buddha told Ananda: “If these sentient beings hear the name of the Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata, and with utmost sincerity accept it and hold to it, and no doubts arise, then they will not fall into a woesome path, “Ananda, it is difficult to have faith in and comprehend the profound practices of the Buddhas. You now are able to accept them, and you should know that this has been caused by the beneficial power of the Tathāgatas. Ananda, the *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, the Bodhisattvas who have not yet climbed the stages [of development), and all the others are unable to have faith in them and comprehend them with such sincerity. It is only the Bodhisattva with one remaining birth [who can do so].

“Ananda, a human incarnation is difficult to obtain. It is also difficult to obtain faith in the Three Jewels, and to revere, honor, and respect them. It is even more difficult to be granted the opportunity to hear the name of the Lord

Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata. Ananda, if I were to describe the boundless Bodhisattva practices, the limitless excellent and clever means, the infinitely vast great vows of that Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata – if I were to describe these for an aeon or even longer, that period would soon be exhausted. The practices, vows, and excellent skillful means of that Buddha are inexhaustible.”



SAVING THOSE ON THE BRINK OF DEATH OR DISASTER

At that time in the assembly, there was a Bodhisattva-mahāsattva named “Saving Deliverance.”¹³ He rose from his seat and circumambulated the Buddha, baring his right shoulder. Kneeling with his right knee to the ground, he bowed with palms clasped together and addressed the Buddha: “O Lord of Great Virtue, in the era of the replica teachings, there will be sentient beings who are distressed by various kinds of suffering, emaciated by lengthy ill-

13. *Chiu-t’o* is the equivalent of the Sanskrit *Trāṇamukta*. In the Sanskrit text, p. 23.

nesses. Unable to eat or drink, their throats parched and their lips dry, every direction in which they look seems dark. The signs of death appear, and parents, relatives, friends, and acquaintances will gather around such a person with lamentations and weeping.

“Then, while his body lies in its original position, he is seized by the messengers of Yama who lead his spirit consciousness before that King of the Law. The inborn spirits attached to all sentient beings, who record whether each being’s conduct is good or bad, will then hand down these records in their entirety to Yama, King of the Law. Then, the King will interrogate this person, and he will sum up the person’s deeds. According to the positive and negative factors, he shall judge him.

“If that sick person’s relatives, close friends, and acquaintances are able to take refuge in the Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata for that person’s sake, and if they ask an assembly of monks to recite this scripture, light the seven-storied lamps and suspend the five-colored life-prolonging spirit banner – then that person’s consciousness may be returned to his body [immediately]. He will clearly remember what he has experienced; as if it were a dream.

“If his consciousness returns after passing through seven, twenty-one, thirty-five, or forty-nine days, he will feel as if he is awakening from a dream, and he will remember that he has received the fruits and retributions of his good and bad karma. Due to his personally witnessing and experiencing the fruits and retributions of his karma, and since he reached this life with difficulty, he will not create bad karma for himself [in the future].

“Because of this, good sons and daughters of pure faith, you all should accept and hold to the name of the Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata and, accordingly, revere and worship him with effort to the utmost of your capacity.”

Then Ananda inquired of the Bodhisattva Saving Deliverance “Good son, please explain how one should revere and worship that Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata? How should one construct the life-prolonging banner and lamps?”

The Bodhisattva Saving Deliverance replied: “O Virtuous One, if you desire to deliver a sick person from the pain of disease, for the sake of this person you should accept and hold to the eightfold vows for seven days and seven nights.

You should collect together food, drink and other property and, in accordance with your means, provide a *pūjā* offering to the community of monks.

“You should worship with a *pūjā* offering that Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata, six times during the day and night. Read and recite this *sūtra* forty-nine times. Light forty-nine lamps and make seven images of the form of that Tathāgata. In front of each image arrange seven lamps. Make each lamp as large as a cart-wheel, and for forty-nine days let their shining light ceaselessly burn. Make a five-colored, variegated banner forty-nine hand-lengths in height. You should release forty-nine living creatures of varied species. Then the sick person will be able to obtain passage through this danger, and he will be removed from the grasp of evil demons.

“Furthermore, Ananda, in the case of a *kśatriya* king properly enthroned by means of the *abhiṣeka* rite, when calamities and troubles arise – such as an epidemic among the people, invasion of the state, internal rebellion, an adverse delineation of the stars, a lunar or solar eclipse, unseasonal winds and rains, or the lack of rain in its proper season – there should arise in that properly enthroned *kśatriya* king the thought of compassion and pity towards all sentient be

He should pardon all who are incarcerated. Relying on the method of *pūjā* described above, he should worship the Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata.

“Due to these good roots and the force of that Tathāgata’s fundamental vows, his state will be caused to become tranquil. The winds and rains will occur at their proper seasons, and the crops will all ripen. All sentient beings will be healthy and will be gladdened and joyous. In his state, there will be no tyrannical *yakṣas*, nor sentient beings with various spiritual distresses. All negative omens will be removed, and the *kṣatriya* ruler will have a long life, handsomeness, and vitality free from disease. His sovereign rule will be prosperous.

“Ananda, if the ruler, the queen and lesser consorts, the heir apparent and other princes, the great ministers, court attendants and ladies, the provincial officials, and the masses are troubled by the suffering of disease or other calamities, they also should make and set up five-colored spirit banners and kindle lamps, seeing that they burn continuously. They should release various living creatures, scatter flowers of varied colors, and light various famous incenses. They will then obtain freedom from all diseases and liberation from all difficulties.”

At that point, Ananda asked the Bodhisattva Saving Deliverance, “Good son, how can one increase the life of one whose span is already exhausted?”

The Bodhisattva Saving Deliverance said: “O Virtuous One, how can you not have heard the Tathāgata speak of the nine untimely deaths?¹⁴ This is why I am encouraging you to make the life-prolonging banners and lamps and to cultivate the various auspicious virtues. By cultivating the auspicious, one thereby lives to the fullest extent of his life-span, and does not experience suffering and distress.”

Ananda asked, “What are the nine untimely deaths?”

The Bodhisattva Saving Deliverance replied: “There may be sentient beings who have contracted an illness, which – though minor – goes untreated through lack of both medicine and physician. Or, the person may meet a doctor who gives him the wrong medicine. Such persons actually should not die, yet they are caused to have untimely deaths. Furthermore, a person may have faith in materialistic and demonic heretics, masters of black magic. The false explanations of calamities and blessings which they provide will lead to fearful actions. Since this [misled] person cannot

14. “Untimely” also carries the connotation of “violent.”

discern correctly with his own heart, he asks divinatory questions in his search for good fortune, and he kills all sorts of living creatures to propitiate spirits. He calls the spirits of the waters and begs for blessings, desiring to lengthen his years. In the end, he is unable to obtain this. Stupid and confused, believing in false and inverted views – it follows that such a person is led to an untimely death and enters into a hell with no definite time of release. These are what is known as the first untimely death.

“The second untimely death is by execution according to the ruler’s laws. The third is when someone goes out on hunts or pleasure excursions and engages in debauchery and drunkenness to excess, with no limits. His vital spirit is snatched away by a [demonic] non-human being, thus causing untimely death. The fourth untimely death is burning by fire. The fifth is by drowning in water.

“Some are devoured by wild beasts, thus causing the sixth untimely death. The seventh untimely death is by falling off a mountain precipice. The eighth untimely death is caused by harm from poisonous herbs, hateful entreaties [spells], and magical incantations causing corpses, devils, and other such things to arise. The ninth is caused by starvation and dehydration due to not obtaining food and drink.

“This is the Tathāgata’s summary explanation of the nine types of untimely deaths. Beyond these, there are, in addition, limitless other untimely deaths which would be altogether difficult to expound upon.

“Next, Ananda, that King Yama is in charge of the entering of names in the register of all persons in the world. If there are any sentient beings who are not filial, who have committed the five disobediences,¹⁵ who have broken and defiled the Three Jewels, who have infringed upon the laws of the ruler and subjects, and who have slandered faith in the precepts, then the King of the Law, Yama, will punish them in accordance with his examination of the severity of the crimes. This is why I now am urging all sentient beings to kindle lamps, make banners, and give rise to the cultivation of that which is auspicious. This will cause sentient beings to pass over suffering and distress, to avoid meeting with all sorts of difficulties.”



15. *Pañcāntarya*: patricide, matricide, killing an arhat, shedding the blood of a Buddha, and destroying the harmony of the Saṃgha.

THE YAKSA GENERALS & THEIR PLEDGE

At that time in the assembly, there were Twelve Great *Yakṣa* Generals seated together in the meeting. Their names are: Kumbhira, Vajra, Mihira, Aṇḍīra, Anila, Saṇḍila, Indra Pajra, Makura, Kinnara, Catura, and Vikarāla.¹⁶ Each of these Twelve *Yakṣa* Generals has seven thousand *yakṣas* in his troops.

They raised their voices together and addressed the Buddha: “O Lord, we now, having received the Buddha’s beneficial force, have been granted the hearing of the name of the Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata. Never again will we have the fear of sinking into a woesome path. Together, we all have the same thought: we will take utmost refuge in the Buddha, the Teachings, and the Order. We aspire to bear responsibility to do acts of righteous benefit, enrichment, peace and joy for all sentient beings, no matter in what village, town, capital, or forest grove of retirement they dwell.

16. These are tentative reconstructions based on traditional Sino-Japanese understanding of the text. For variants, see Dutt’s Sanskrit edition and his notes, pp. 29-30.

“As to those who circulate this *sūtra* or who further accept and hold to the name of the Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata and revere and worship him, we will cause them to be freed from all suffering and difficulties. All the desires of these persons will be caused to be fulfilled. Those who seek release from the distress of illness should also read and recite this *sūtra*. Taking a five-colored rope, they should knot our names into it, untying the knots when their wishes are fulfilled.”

At that point, the Lord praised all the Great *Yakṣa* Generals saying: “Excellent, excellent, Great *Yakṣa* Generals! When you think of repaying the merciful blessings of the Lord Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata, you should ever serve all sentient beings in the way you have described, bringing to them blessings and benefits, peace and joy.”



NAMING THE SUTRA & CONCLUSION

Then Ananda asked the Buddha, “O Lord, what name should be given to this teaching and how should we uphold it?”

The Buddha told Ananda: “The name of this teaching is ‘The Merits of the Fundamental Vows of the Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata.’ It is also called ‘Sacred Formula of the Binding Vows of the Twelve *Deva* Generals to Enrich All Sentient Beings.’ It is also called Tearing Away All Karmic Veils.’ In this way, you should uphold it.”

After the Lord finished speaking, all the Bodhisattvamahāsattvas, the great *śrāvakas*, the king of the state, great ministers, brahmins, learned laymen, *devas*, *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, *gandharvas*, *asuras*, *garuḍas*, *kiṃnaras*, and beings human and nonhuman – all in the entire great congregation who heard the Buddha’s teaching rejoiced. They faithfully accepted and put into practice the teachings of the *sūtra* of the merits of the fundamental vows of the Master of Healing, the Lapis Lazuli Radiance Tathāgata.