

The
Saddharmapundarika Sutra

An abridged rendering produced for WBO Day '99

This rendering of *The Saddharmapundarika Sutra* is an abridgement derived by using selected excerpts from *The Lotus Sutra* translated by Burton Watson (Columbia Press '93), Soothill's *Lotus of the Wonderful Law* ('30), *The Threefold Lotus Sutra* trans. Bunno Kato (Weatherhill, '84), *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* trans. Leon Hurvitz (Columbia '76), *The Saddharma-pundarika* H. Kern (Sacred Books of the East Vol.xx1). Whilst intending to remain as faithful to the original texts as much as possible, the reader should bear in mind the inevitably interpretative means employed with such an extensive abridgement.

Cittapala - March '99

[PART ONE:]

[I. INTRODUCTION]

[Ananda]: Thus have I heard:

At one time when the Buddha was staying at *Rajagriha*, the City of Royal Palaces, he assembled on Mount *Grdhrakuta* a great multitude of leading bhikshus, in all twelve thousand. All were arhats, faultless - their outflows exhausted, never again subject to earthly *klesas*; their minds free, they had attained what was to their advantage, being emancipated from all bonds of existence. Also assembled were eighty thousand Bodhisattva-mahasattvas, none of them ever regressing on the path to Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. All had mastered the *dharanis*, and being eloquent, delighted in teaching and turning the irreversible wheel of the Dharma.

Present also were *Indra*, king of the gods, with his twenty thousand sons, as well as the eight *Naga* kings, four *Kimnara* kings, four *Gandharva* kings, four *Asura* kings, four *Garuda* kings, each with several hundreds of thousands of followers. And there was also King *Ajatashatru*, the son of *Vaidehi*, with several hundreds of thousands of followers. Each of these, after making obeisance before the Buddha, withdrew and took a seat to one side.

Then the World-honoured One, surrounded by this great fourfold assembly, received offerings and tokens of respect and was honoured and praised. And after all this had been concluded, for the sake of the Bodhisattvas the Buddha taught the Mahayana sutra called *Ananta-nirdesa*, a teaching to instruct the Bodhisattva, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas.

When the Buddha had finished teaching this sutra, he sat with his legs crossed in lotus position and entered into the samadhi called *Ananta-nirdesa-pratisthana-samadhi*, in which his body and mind were motionless. At that time the heavens rained down great *mandarava* and *manjushaka* flowers, scattering them over the Buddha and the great assembly, and everywhere the Buddha world quaked and trembled in six different ways. And as a consequence the bhiksus, bhiksunis, upasakas, upasikas, *devas*, *nagas*, *yakshas*, *gandharvas*, *asuras*, *garudas*, *kimnaras*, *mahoragas*, human and nonhuman beings in the assembly, as well as the petty kings and wheel-turning sage king, all of this great assembly, obtained that which had never been before, were filled with joy and, pressing their palms together, gazed at the Buddha with a single mind.

Then the Buddha, from the curl of white hair between his eyebrows, sent forth a ray of light illuminating eighteen thousand worlds in the eastern quarter. There was

no place that the light did not penetrate, reaching downward as far as the *Avichi* hell and upward to the *Akanishtha* heaven.

Here, in this our own world, could be seen the living beings in the six paths of existence in all of those other lands. Likewise one could see the Buddhas present at that time in those other lands and could hear the sutra teachings which those Buddhas were expounding, as well as the bhiksus, bhiksunis, upasakas and upasikas who through practice had attained the Way. So too were Bodhisattva-mahasattvas to be seen who, through various causes and conditions, and various types of faith and understanding, and in various forms and aspects were carrying out the way of the Bodhisattva. And one could also see the Buddhas who had entered parinirvana, and the stupas adorned with the seven treasures erected for their Buddha relics.

And then the Bodhisattva *Maitreya* had this thought: [*Maitreya*]: ‘The World-honoured One has manifested these miraculous signs. But what is the cause of these auspicious portents? An unfathomable event such as this is seldom to be met with. Since the Buddha, the World-honoured One, has entered into samadhi, who shall I question about this? Who can give me an answer? *Manjushri*, son of the Dharmaraja, has already personally attended and given offerings to immeasurable numbers of Buddhas in the past. Surely he must have witnessed such unprecedented signs as these? I will now question him.

“*Manjushri!*
Why does our Master and teacher
From the white curl between his eyebrows
Radiate this great light?
The rain of *mandarava*
And *manjushaka* flowers
And fragrant breezes of sandalwood
Delight our every heart.
The earth is everywhere adorned and purified,
Quaking and trembling in six ways.
All are filled with joy and delight,
Rejoicing in body and mind,
Having gained what they never had before.
Buddha son, *Manjushri*,
Why has the World-honoured One
Sent forth this bright beam of light?”

Then *Manjushri* replied, [*Manjushri*]: “Good sons! I suppose that the Buddha, the World-honoured One wishes now to expound the ultimate truth, to pour down the rain of the true Dharma, to raise the banner of the true Dharma, to kindle the torch of the true Dharma, to blow the conch of the true Dharma, to beat the great drum of the

true Dharma, to elucidate the meaning of the true Dharma. Whenever in the past I have seen this auspicious portent among the Buddhas, they sent forth a beam of light like this, and after that they expounded the ultimate truth of the Dharma. Therefore we should know that, when the present Buddha manifests this auspicious portent of light, he will do likewise. He wishes to cause all living beings to hear and understand the real truth, which is difficult for all the world to believe. The Tathagata is about to teach the Mahayana sutra called *The Saddharmapundarika - the White Lotus of the Real Truth*, revealing the meaning of the true essence of phenomena, a teaching to instruct the Bodhisattva, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas. Human beings will now come to know it. Let us press our palms together and wait with a single mind. The Buddha will pour down the rain of the Dharma to fully satisfy all true seekers of the way. You who seek the three vehicles, if you have doubts and regrets, the Buddha will resolve them for you, bringing them to an end.”

[Ch.2 EXPEDIENT MEANS]

[Ananda]: When *Manjusri* had finished speaking, the World-honoured One, calmly arising from samadhi, addressed *Shariputra*, saying:

[The Buddha]: “The wisdom of the Buddhas is profound and infinite. The school of their wisdom is difficult to enter and to understand. Not one of the *sravakas* or *pratyekabuddhas* is able to comprehend it. What is the reason for this?

“Immeasurable are the world’s heroes,
None amongst men,
Nor the world’s heavenly creatures
Can fathom the Buddhas.
Long ago I followed countless Buddhas,
And perfectly trod the ways
Of the profound and mystic Dharma,
Hard to perceive and perform.
During infinite *kotis* of *kalpas*,
Having followed all these ways,
Attaining fruition on the Wisdom-throne
I perfectly understand
The meaning of every nature and form.
I and the Buddhas of the universe
Alone can understand these things -
The Truth, beyond demonstration,
The Truth, beyond expression,
The Truth, beyond the realm of terms.
But among living beings none comprehend it,
Except Bodhisattvas unshaken in the power of faith.

Shariputra!

Even the many arhats who,
Have already cut off all outflows
And now dwell in their last birth,
Even such persons have not the power needed.
Though men like *Shariputra* filled the whole world,
Though they pooled their capacities,
They could not fathom the Buddha-Wisdom.
With the Buddhas of the ten directions
Only I understand these truths.

Shariputra!

The words of the various Buddhas never differ!
Toward the Dharma taught by the Buddhas
Cultivate a great power of faith.
I announce to all assembled:
Through the power of expedient means,
To pry living beings from their attachments,
The Buddha has long taught preparatory doctrines,
According to his disciples' capacities,
He has shown the Way to attain release
By means of the three vehicles.
But now the Buddha will reveal
The mysterious, incomprehensible,
Profound, subtle and wonderful Dharma,
The perfect Truth in full."

[Ananda]: Now when the *sravakas* and Arhats amongst the great assembly heard the Buddha speak in this way, each reflected: 'For what reason does the World-honoured One now so earnestly praise expedient means, saying that the Dharma attained by him is so profound and difficult to understand and that the meaning of what he is about to teach is so difficult to comprehend that it is beyond the grasp of the *sravakas* or *pratyekabuddhas*? Since the Buddha has taught but one principle of emancipation, by which we have attained nirvana, we cannot follow the gist of what he is saying now.'

Shariputra, understanding their doubts and he himself not yet fully understanding, addressed the Buddha, saying, *[Shariputra]:*

"O Sun of Wisdom!
Great Sage and World-honoured One!
At last, unasked, you will announce the highest truth.
But now the fourfold assembly
Is fallen into a net of doubts.
For what reason do you so earnestly

Praise expedient means,
The foremost device of the Buddhas'
Profound, subtle and wonderful Dharma
- so difficult to understand?
From times past I have never heard
This kind of teaching from the Buddha.
With folded hands and reverent minds,
We beg the World-honoured One
To expound this matter
Wishing to hear of the Perfect Path.

After *Shariputra* had made this request three times, the World-honoured One replied, [**The Buddha**]: “*Shariputra*, three times you have stated your earnest request. How can I refuse to speak? Listen attentively and carefully ponder. For your sake I will now explain the matter clearly.”

[**Ananda**]: But when the Buddha had spoken these words, some five thousand bhiksus, bhiksunis, upasakas and upasikas in the assembly immediately rose from their seats. Bowing to the Buddha, they withdrew, and left the great assembly. What was the reason for this? The root of sin in these beings was so deep and their haughty spirits so enlarged that they imagined they had attained and understood what in fact they had not. Being so mistaken, they would not remain where they were. The World-honoured One was silent and did not try to detain them.

After they had left, the Buddha said to *Shariputra*, [**The Buddha**]: “Now this assembly of mine is free of useless twigs and leaves, having none but the firm fruit of the steadfast and true.

“*Shariputra*, the Buddhas' words
Are not empty or false.
The Buddhas teach the Dharma,
Employing countless expedient means,
Discussing causes and conditions,
Using words of simile and parable
To expound innumerable teachings.
But bhiksus and bhiksunis
Obsessed by utmost arrogance,
Upasakas in self-conceit,
Upasikas in unbelief,
Such the like as these
Perceiving not their error
And faults in moral law,
Nursing only their flaws,
Such small-wits have gone.

This chaff, these unhappy men,
Shutting out this Truth,
Hide from the Buddha's majesty, -
(Now) has this assembly nor twigs nor leaves,
But only the true and real.
Shariputra! Listen carefully
To the Dharma obtained by the Buddhas,
Which by infinitely skilful means,
They expound for all creatures.
This Dharma cannot be understood
Through pondering or analysis.
Like the *udumbara*,
Seldom seen in flower,
So the Buddhas rarely teach
This subtle, wonderful Dharma.
The Buddha, thoroughly knowing
The thoughts of living beings,
The nature of their desires,
And the ways they tread,
According to their capacity,
With various reasonings, parables,
Terms and tactful ways,
Causes them all to rejoice.
To the dull who have failed,
Under countless Buddhas,
To walk the profound and mystic Way,
But who delight in petty rules,
And to those greedily attached to mortality,
Being harassed by suffering
- To these I teach Nirvana.
Such is my first expedient in
Leading them to Buddha-wisdom.
Not yet could I say to them,
'You all shall attain to Buddhahood',
For the time had not yet arrived.
But now the very time has come
And I must teach the Great Vehicle.
But when I teach this Buddha-Way,
The ignorant, lacking wholesome roots,
Remain confused and deluded,
And accept not my teaching.
By stubbornly clinging to base desires,
Infatuated with greed and delusion,
They suffer the utmost misery.
Revolving through the six realms

They pass from generation to generation,
Poor in virtue and of little happiness,
Oppressed by suffering.
Dwelling in the thickets of opinion,
Relying on empty propositions,
They become rooted in false philosophy,
Tenacious and unyielding,
Self-inflated and arrogant,
Suspicious, sycophantic and insincere.
During thousands and millions of *kalpas*
Such hear not the name of Buddha,
Nor ever learn of the Truth;
These men are hard to save.
In the perilous round of mortality,
In continuous, unending misery,
Firmly tied to their passions
As a yak in love with its tail,
Such, smothered by greed and infatuation,
Blinded and seeing nothing,
Seek not the Buddha, the Mighty,
And the Truth that ends suffering.
But deeply sunk in heresy,
By suffering seeking to rid suffering
Such are hard to save;
For the sake of all these creatures
My heart is stirred with compassion.
For their sake, *Shariputra*,
I set up an expedient,
Proclaiming a Way to end suffering,
Revealing it as Nirvana.
Yet, though I proclaim Nirvana,
It is not real extinction.
To teach the Buddha-wisdom
The Buddha employs provisional terms;
But in the Buddha-lands of the ten directions,
All dharmas from the first
Are ever of Nirvana nature,
There is only the Dharma of the One *yana*,
Not two, still less three.
The Buddha appears in the world
Only for this One Reality;
For never by a smaller vehicle,
Does a Buddha save any creature.
The Buddha abides in the Great-Vehicle
Enriched by meditation and wisdom,

And living by the Truth so attained,
By it all creatures are saved.
The Buddhas open (the eyes of) the living
To the pure Way of the Perfect Knowledge
Of the One Buddha-Wisdom.
Living beings, hearing the Buddha-Dharma,
All enter the One Buddha-yana,
All finally obtain Perfect Enlightenment.
Know, O *Shariputra*!
Long ago I made a vow,
In desire to cause all creatures
To rank equally with me without distinction;
Now all will be fulfilled:
When a Buddha-son treads the true Path,
In a world to come he becomes Buddha.
Know, *Shariputra*!
The stupid and those of little wit,
Those tied to externals,
And the proud cannot believe this Truth.
But now I gladly and with boldness
In the midst of (you) Bodhisattvas,
Straightway put aside expediency
And only proclaim the Supreme Way.
It was as expedient means
That I expounded a Three-Vehicle Law.
Let all be free of doubt and perplexity.
World-Honoured Ones, without exception,
Teach this Way: the One Buddha-yana.
(For) all Buddhas take the one vow:
'The Buddha-way which I walk,
I will universally cause all the living
To attain this same Way with me.'
Though Buddhas in future ages
Proclaim hundreds, thousands, *kotis*,
Of countless ways into the doctrine,
In reality there is but the One-Vehicle.
In the same fashion that Buddhas,
Past, present, and future, teach this Dharma,
So also will I now proclaim
The one and undivided Dharma.
Even in infinite, countless *kalpas*,
Rarely may this Dharma be heard,
And those able to listen to it,
Such men as these are rare.
Who hears and joyfully extols it,

Though but by a single word,
Thus pays homage to
All Buddhas in the three realms.
Know, *Shariputra*,
That this Wonderful Dharma
Is the secret of all the Buddhas.
Rejoice greatly in your heart,
Knowing that you will become a Buddha.”

[Ch.3 SIMILE AND PARABLE]

[Ananda]: At that time *Shariputra*, ecstatic with joy, immediately rose, and, pressing his palms together and gazing in reverence at the face of the World-honoured One, said to the Buddha,

[Shariputra]: “Now, when I hear from the World-honoured One this voice of the Dharma, my heart dances with joy, since I have gained what I have never had before. Why do I say this? Because, when in the past I heard how the Bodhisattvas were predicted to attain Buddhahood, I and others felt excluded. I was deeply grieved to think I would never gain the immeasurable insight of the Tathagata. World-honoured One, I have constantly lived in the mountain forest or alone under the trees and always I have thought to myself, ‘we have entered all alike into the nature of the Dharma, so why does the Tathagata use the Dharma of the Lesser Vehicle to deprive us of the opportunity to gain the unsurpassed attainments and body of a Buddha?’

“But the fault is mine, not that of the World-honoured One. I failed to understand that the Buddha was employing expedient means, and teaching what was appropriate to our circumstances. For example, when I first heard the Buddha’s teaching, which rooted out my mistaken views, I immediately supposed that I had fully understood the teaching of Emptiness, and assumed I had reached the final goal. I now realise that this was not the true Nirvana.

“World-honoured One, for a long time now, day and night, I have repeatedly taxed myself with this thought. But now I hear the Buddha’s gentle voice, hear what I had never heard before, a wonderful teaching, profound, extremely subtle, far beyond ordinary understanding, setting forth the pure Dharma, the means to accomplish Supreme Perfect Enlightenment for all. My doubts and regrets are ended. My heart is filled with joy; my body and mind are at ease; I have gained peace and security. Today, at long last, I indeed know that I am the Buddha's son, born of the Buddha's

mouth, born through conversion to the Dharma, and received my inheritance of the Buddha's Teaching! I am certain that I too will become a Buddha!"

And then the Buddha said to *Shariputra* [**The Buddha**]: "Indeed, *Shariputra*, in ages to come, having made offerings to numberless Buddhas, being endowed with all the Bodhisattva practices, the ten powers and other blessings, you will realise the unsurpassed Way. You will become a Buddha, of universal wisdom, venerable, bearing the name *Padmaprabha* Tathagata, Worthy of offerings, Fully and Perfectly Awake, Equipped with Knowledge and Practice, Happily Attained, Knower of the World, Guide Unsurpassed of Men to Be Tamed, Peerless Leader, Teacher of gods and men, Buddha, World-honoured One, and you will save countless multitudes. Your world will be called *Viraja* - 'Free from Stain' - , pure, without flaw or blemish. Its land will be made of lapis lazuli, its roads bounded by ropes of gold, and seven-jewelled trees in a blaze of colours will constantly bear blossoms and fruit. After countless kalpas have passed, your kalpa will be named *Maharatna-pratimandita* - or 'Great Treasure Adornment.' Why? Because your Bodhisattvas will be infinite, boundless, inconceivable, beyond compare - wherever they walk, jewel flowers will receive their feet. The lifespan of the Buddha *Padmaprabha* will be twelve minor kalpas. He will then predict the Bodhisattva *Dhriti-paripurna* to become a Buddha whose name will be *Padma-vrsabha-vikramin* - or 'He who walks securely on lotuses.' After that Buddha *Padmaprabha* has passed into extinction, the True Dharma will endure in the world for thirty-two small kalpas, saving living beings far and wide. The actions of *Padmaprabha* Buddha will all be as I have said. This most excellent and holy of men will be foremost and without peer. And he will be none other than you, *Shariputra* - you should rejoice and count yourself fortunate!"

Then *Shariputra* said, [**Shariputra**]: "World-Honoured One, now I have no more doubts or second-thoughts; but for the sake of these disciples gathered here, who have heard what they have never heard before, I beg you to resolve their uncertainty."

The Buddha replied, [**The Buddha**]: "*Shariputra*, have I not said before that the Buddhas, World-honoured Ones, by a variety of reasonings, parables and terms, teach the Dharma as may be expedient. All these are for the purpose of transforming their disciples into Bodhisattvas. But, let me again by means of simile and parable make this clearer, for intelligent people can thereby reach understanding.

[The Parable of the burning house]

"*Shariputra*, suppose that in a certain town in a certain country there was a rich

elder of great power, advanced in years, his wealth incalculable, owning many estates, mansions and surrounded by servants. One of his houses was large and spacious, but also very old: the foundations were collapsing, the walls cracked and the plaster crumbling, its ceilings falling in, with pillars rotten at their base, beams slipping, and the roof and rafters crooked and aslant. And in this house lived a great many people ~ a hundred, two hundred, perhaps as many as five hundred. But also living as well were all manner of venomous creatures such as rats, mice, snakes, beetles, insects, raccoons, weasels and many types of birds. Packs of dogs, driven by hunger and fear, raced through the house searching for food. The house stank of excrement and overflowed with streams of filth. And all manner of ferocious demons and evil spirits, shrieking and howling, roamed everywhere making the house fearful and perilous.

“One day, quite suddenly, a fire broke out, and spreading quickly, the house was soon ablaze. As it happened, the rich man was standing outside the gate to the house, when someone said to him, ‘A little while ago, all your young children went into the house to play.’ Greatly alarmed, the rich man rushed into the burning house to save them. But when he saw huge flames leaping up on every side, he was very fearful, thinking, ‘Although we can escape to safety through the burning doorway, my children are too preoccupied enjoying themselves and playing games; my children are very young, knowing nothing as yet, and they love their games, and are completely engrossed in them. Unaware, they don’t understand and are not frightened. Though the fire is closing in on them, with pain and suffering imminent, yet they don’t mind; they don’t think of trying to escape!’

“*Shariputra*, this rich man thought to himself, ‘I am strong; perhaps I can carry each of them out of the house? But then he thought, ‘there is only one door through which we could go, and it is too narrow and small for me to carry them. All I can do is to warn them that they will get hurt by the flames, that they must be quick to get out in time before they come to great harm.’

“So he called out to all his children, saying, ‘You must come out at once!’ But though the father was moved by compassion and spoke kindly, the children, absorbed in their games, paid no attention to him. They were not frightened, and did not want to pay any attention to him, nor to leave the house. Moreover, they did not really understand what he meant, nor what danger they were in. They merely raced up and down in play, from time to time glancing at their father.

“Then the rich man thought: ‘My children are taking no notice of me; they are bewitched by their play. But the house is already blazing with this huge fire. If I and my children do not get out at once, we are certain to be burned. I will have to invent some way or another to ensure that the children escape harm.’

“So the father knowing his children, knowing which toys and playthings that each child liked and delighted in, called out to them, ‘Here are the kind of playthings you like, which are so hard to find. If you don’t come and get them now when you can, you will be sorry for it later. I have all sorts of goat-carts, deer-carts, and ox-carts for you to play with; they are all outside the gate now where you can play with them. So hurry up, you must come quickly out of this burning house. Then whatever ones you want, I will give them to you!’

“When the children heard their father telling them about these attractive toys, and because the carts were just what they wanted, every one of them eagerly, pushing and shoving one another, came wildly dashing out of the burning house.

“When the rich man saw that all his children were safe and no longer in danger, and were all waiting in the square, he sat down greatly relieved and ecstatic with joy. Then the children asked their father, ‘The lovely toys you promised that we could play with, the goat-carts and deer-carts and ox-carts ~ please give them to us now!’

“*Shariputra*, then the rich man gave to each of his children a large chariot, high and spacious, adorned with all manner of precious things, surrounded with railed seats, hung with bells on its four sides, and covered with curtains, splendidly decorated with precious jewels, hung with garlands of flowers, thickly spread with beautiful carpets and vermilion cushions. Each chariot was yoked with pure white bullocks, handsome and strong, capable of pulling the chariot smoothly, and also with the speed of the wind. Each chariot had many grooms and servants to attend and guard it.

“What was the reason for this? The rich man thought to himself, ‘My wealth is limitless and I have many kinds of storehouses that are all filled and over-flowing; it would not be right if I were to give my children small carts of inferior make. These are my children and I love them equally.’ So each child, filled with excitement, mounted his large chariot, gaining something he had never had before, something he had originally never expected, and was free to play and roam as he wished without hindrance.

“*Shariputra*, what do you think of this? Has that elder, in only giving to his children great chariots adorned with rare jewels, been guilty of falsehood or not?”

Then *Shariputra* replied to the Buddha, [*Shariputra*]: “No, World-honoured One. This rich man simply made it possible for his children to escape the peril of the fire. He did not commit a falsehood. Why do I say this? Because in having their lives saved, the children already obtained a plaything of sorts. World-honoured One, even if the rich man had not given them the tiniest cart, he would still not be guilty of falsehood. Why? Because this rich man from the outset had made up his mind that he would use an expedient to cause his children to escape. Using a device of this kind

was no act of falsehood. How much less so then, when the rich man, knowing that his wealth was limitless and he intended to enrich and benefit his children, gives to each of them a marvellous chariot.”

The Buddha then said to *Shariputra*, [**The Buddha**]: “Very good, very good! It is just as you say. *Shariputra*, the Tathagata is like this, for he is a father to all the world. He is born into this triple world, a burning house, rotten and old, to save living beings from the fires of birth, old age, sickness and death, grief, suffering, stupidity, darkness, and the three poisons, to teach them to attain Perfect Enlightenment.

“He sees living beings scorched by the fires of suffering, undergoing many kinds of pain because of their five desires and their greed for wealth. He sees how, through striving after their desires and attachments, they undergo numerous pains in their present existence, and later how they suffer the pain of being reborn in hell or as beasts or hungry spirits. And even if they are reborn in the heavenly realm or the realm of human beings, there are all kinds of sufferings, such as the pain of poverty and want, the pain of being parted from loved ones, the bitterness of encountering those they detest.

“Yet living beings, drowning in the midst of all this, delight and amuse themselves, unaware, unknowing, without alarm or fear. They feel no sense of loathing and make no attempt to escape. In this burning house which is the triple world, they race about here and there, and though they encounter great sufferings, they remain unconcerned. When the Buddha sees this, he reflects thus: ‘I am the father of living beings. I must rescue them from their sufferings and give them the bliss of the measureless and boundless Buddha-wisdom to play with.’

“*Shariputra*, the Tathagata also has this thought: ‘If I should only employ supernatural power and wisdom, casting aside every expedient and extol for all creatures the Tathagata's insight, power and freedom from fear, then they would not by this be saved.’ Why? Because these living beings have not yet escaped from birth, old age, sickness, death, grief and suffering, but are consumed by flames in the burning house that is the triple world. How could they understand the Buddha's wisdom?

“*Shariputra*, just as that rich man, although he had strength in his body and arms and yet did not use it, but resolutely resorts to a carefully contrived expedient to rescue his children from the peril of the burning house, so it is with the Tathagata. Though he possesses power and fearlessness, he does not use these. Instead he merely employs wise expedients to rescue living beings from the burning house of

the triple world saying, ‘you must come out of this triple world with its coarse and shoddy forms so that you can acquire the three vehicles, the vehicles of the *sravaka*, the *pratyekabuddha* and the Buddha. Mounted on these three vehicles, you will perfect faculties, powers, perceptions, samadhis, paths and emancipations and become happy and gain incalculable peace and joy. This I guarantee, and that promise will never prove false.’

“And furthermore, just as that rich man, first used three types of carts to entice his children, but seeing that they had all escaped from the burning house safely and were no longer threatened, recalled that his wealth was immeasurable and presented each of them with just the great chariot adorned with jewels, the safest, most comfortable kind of all, so the Tathagata does likewise. Just as that rich man was not guilty of falsehood, the Tathagata is without falsehood. Being the father of all living beings, the Tathagata has this thought: ‘I possess measureless, boundless wisdom, power, fearlessness, and the storehouse of the Dharma of the Buddhas. Living beings are all my children. I will give the Great Vehicle to all of them equally so that there will not be those who gain nirvana for themselves, but that all may do so by way of the nirvana of the Tathagata.’

“*Shariputra*, the Tathagata is capable of giving to all living beings the Teaching of the Great Vehicle. But, not all of them are capable of receiving it. For this reason you should understand that the Buddhas employ the power of expedient means. And because they do so, they make distinctions in the one Buddha vehicle and preach it as three.”

[Ch.4 BELIEF AND UNDERSTANDING]

[Ananda]: Then, at that time, when those venerable and wise disciples, *Subhuti*, *Maha-katya-yana*, *Maha-kashyapa*, and *Maha-maudgalya-yana* had heard the Buddha talk of that unprecedented Dharma, and hearing the World-honoured One’s prophecy that *Shariputra* would attain Supreme Perfect Enlightenment, they were struck with wonder and ecstatic joy. At once they rose from their seats, and arranging their robes appropriately, bent their right knees to the ground. Pressing their palms together they bowed respectfully, and then gazing up in reverence at the face of the Honoured One, they said to the Buddha:

“We stand at the head of the bhiksus and all of us are advanced in years. We believed that we had already attained nirvana and that there was nothing further to do, and so we never sought to attain Supreme Enlightenment. It has been a long time since the World-honoured One first began to expound the Dharma. Since that time

we have been meditating solely on the concepts of emptiness, non-form and non-action. But as to the Bodhisattva-Dharma, its pleasures and transcendental powers, or of the purifying of Buddha lands and of the salvation of living beings ~ in these our minds took no joy. Why is this? Because the World-honoured One had made it possible for us to transcend the triple world and to attain the enlightenment of nirvana. Moreover, being old and decrepit, when we heard of Supreme Perfect Enlightenment, which the Buddha uses to teach and convert the Bodhisattvas, our minds were not filled with any enthusiasm. But now in the presence of the Buddha we have heard this *sravaka* receive a prophecy that he will attain Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. We are greatly delighted; we have gained what we never had before. Suddenly we have heard a teaching so rarely encountered, something that we never expected. We are profoundly fortunate to have gained great goodness and benefit, an immeasurably rare jewel, something unsought that came of itself. World-honoured One, we wish to tell a parable to make our meaning clear.

[The Parable of the Return Journey]

“It is like a youth who, on attaining manhood, abandoned his father and ran away. For a long time he lived in another country, for perhaps ten, twenty or more years. As he grew older, he found himself increasingly poor and in need. He wandered from place to place in search of clothing and food, roaming farther and farther afield.

“The father meanwhile had been searching for his son without success and eventually had taken up residence in a certain city. And at this time the father became powerful and very wealthy, with immeasurable riches and treasures. Gold, silver, lapis lazuli, corals, amber, crystal and other gems all filled and overflowed from his storehouses. He had many grooms and menservants, clerks and attendants, and elephants, horses, carriages, oxen, and herds beyond number. His business ventures extended far and wide, and his traders and customers were constantly coming and going. He was held in high esteem and affection by the king, ministers and noble families. For all these reasons his guests were many.

“Meanwhile the impoverished son roamed from place to place, scraping his livelihood together, until at last he came by chance to the great city where his father had settled. Although they had been parted for a long time the father thought constantly of his son; but, he had never told anyone else about the matter. He merely pondered to himself, his heart filled with sadness, regret and longing. He thought to himself, ‘I’m old and worn; I have great wealth and possessions: gold, silver, and rare treasures; my granaries and storehouses are overflowing. But I do not have my son.

One day I will die, and all my wealth and possessions will be scattered and lost, for I have no-one to entrust them to.'

"In this way he'd constantly reflect, and earnestly repeat to himself, 'If only I could find my son and entrust my wealth and possessions to him, how contented and happy I would be!'

"World-honoured One, one day the son, drifting from one kind of employment to another, famished, weak and gaunt, covered with scab and itch, came by chance to his father's mansion. As he stood at the outer gate, in the distance he was amazed to see a rich man (who he did not recognise as his father), seated on a lion throne, his legs supported by a jewelled foot-rest, while Brahmins, noblemen, and householders, uniformly deferential, surrounded him. Festoons of pearls worth thousands, or tens of thousands, adorned his body, and clerks, grooms, and menservants holding white fly whisks stood in attendance to left and right. A jewelled canopy covered him, with flowered banners hanging from it, perfumed water had been sprinkled over the ground, heaps of rare flowers were scattered about and precious objects were ranged here and there. Clerks came and went, some counting up gold, silver and precious things, some recording in ledgers incoming and outgoing goods, and noting down bonds. Such were the rich man's many different types of adornments, the emblems of prerogative and marks of distinction.

"When the son saw how great was the rich man's power and authority, he was filled with fear and awe and regretted he had ever come to such a place. In some alarm, he thought to himself: 'This must be some king, or very powerful man. This is not the sort of place where I can hire out my labour and gain a living. It would be better to go to some poor village where, if I work hard, I will find a place and can easily earn food and clothing. If I stay here for long, I may be seized and pressed into service!' With this in mind, he hurried away.

"But, his father, seated on his lion throne, had instantly spied his son recognising him immediately. His heart was filled with great joy and at once he thought: 'My thoughts have constantly been with this son of mine, but I had no way of seeing him. But now quite unexpectedly he has come, and my longing is satisfied. Though worn with years, I yearn for him as of old. Now at last I have someone to whom I can give my wealth!'

"Immediately he dispatched an attendant to go after the son as quickly as possible and bring him back. When the attendant caught up with the son, he laid hold of him. The poor man, surprised and scared, cried out angrily, 'I have done nothing wrong!

Why am I being seized?' But the attendant held on to him all the more tightly and forcibly started to drag him back.

“The son, thinking to himself, ‘I’m innocent! I have not committed any crime; why should I be arrested? Surely I am going to be put to death!’ was so terrified that he sank to the ground, and fainted with despair.

“His father, observing this from a distance, immediately sent a messenger, saying, ‘Leave the man alone; I have no need of him. Sprinkle cold water on his face so he will regain his senses. Then say nothing more to him!’

“Why did he do that? Because the father, seeing that his son’s disposition was now so humble, knew his own rich and eminent position could only cause his son more distress. Whilst knowing very well that this was his son, he tactfully refrained from saying to anyone, ‘This is my son.’

“When the son had revived, the messenger said to him, ‘You’re free to go now, wherever you wish.’ Delighted the son quickly left to look for food in some poor village.

“Then the father, hoping to entice his son back again, decided to resort to a device. So he sent two of his attendants, men who were lean, haggard and shabby in appearance, saying to them, ‘Go and find that poor man; approach him casually. Tell him you know a place where he can earn twice the regular wage. If he agrees, then bring him here and put him to work. If he wants to know what sort of work he will be put to, say that he is hired to move dung and filth, and that the two of you will be working with him.’

“The two men then set out at once to find the son, and when they had done so, put their proposition to him. The son, getting his wages in advance, decided to join them in their work.

“From that day the father secretly gazing out his window would constantly observe his son, his body, gaunt and emaciated, filthy with dust and sweat, and from the dung and excrement he was clearing away. When the father saw how happily his son engaged in this menial work, he was struck with both pity and amazement.

From time to time the father would take off his necklaces, his soft fine garments and his other adornments, and disguising himself in clothes that were ragged and soiled, he would smear dirt on his body. Carrying a dung-hod and acting as a foreman, he would gruffly order the labourers around saying, ‘Get on with your work! Don’t be lazy!’ By this device, he was able to approach his son.

“After some time had passed, the rich man called his son to him and said, ‘Now then, young man! You stay and work here; you have no need to go elsewhere! I will increase your wages, and give you whatever you need, whether it is food, clothes or bedding; I also have an old servant I can lend you whenever you need him. Set your mind at ease: I will be like a father to you, so you need worry no further. Why do I say this? You are not like the other workers: all the time you’ve been working here, you have never been deceitful, lazy, angry or grumbled. I am getting old, but you are still young and sturdy. From now on, I will treat you like my own son.’ And then the rich man gave his son a new name, treating him as if he were his own child, allowing him to come and go in his own house.

“Whilst the son was delighted at this turn of events, he nevertheless still thought of himself as a menial worker. Because of this, he continued in his original job, clearing away excrement for a long time, and continued to live in his grass hut outside the rich man’s gates. But during this time, the son’s self-confidence became stronger and, feeling that he was understood and trusted, he came and went at ease.

“World-honoured One, one day the father fell ill, and bearing in mind that he might soon die, he spoke to his son, saying, ‘I have great quantities of gold, silver, and rare treasures that fill and overflow from my storehouses. I want you to become my steward, to take complete charge of the accounting, the income and expenditure. So you must keep your wits about you and see that there are no mistakes or losses. This is what I have in mind, and I want you to carry out my wishes.’

“So the son, taking up his new job, took over attending to all the rich man’s goods, gold, silver, rare treasures, and various storehouses. In spite of all this wealth he never once thought of appropriating for himself so much as the cost of a single meal. Indeed, he still continued to live where he had before, and at first was unable to abandon his sense of inferiority.

“Nevertheless as time passed, the father saw that his son was bit by bit becoming more self-assured and that with a changing view of himself he was become more ambitious and ashamed of his former low opinion of himself. Realising that his own end was fast approaching, the father ordered his son to arrange a meeting with his relatives, as well as the king’s representative, high ministers, and noblemen. When they were all gathered together, the father addressed this great assembly saying, ‘Gentlemen, know that this is my son, who was born to me. It is over fifty years since from from a certain city he left me and ran away, and for long time he wandered about suffering hardship. But by chance, we met up again. This is in truth my son,

and I in truth am his father. Now everything that belongs to me, all my wealth and possessions, shall belong entirely to this son of mine.'

“When the son heard his father speak, he was overjoyed at this unexpected news, and he thought to himself, ‘Although I have never thought to want or look for such wealth, now it has come of its own accord!’

“World-honoured One! The Buddha likewise,
Knowing our fondness for the petty,
Has never before told us
‘You shall become Buddhas!’
We all, during a long night,
After the true Buddha-wisdom
Never aspired nor sought.
For we, in regard to the Dharma
Thought we had reached finality.
We kept to the dharma of Sunyata
Throughout the long night of time,
Escaping from the triple world's
Burden of suffering and care,
And dwelt in our final existence,
Where form only remains.
Without doubt, we thought,
To have won the Way
By the Buddha taught,
And thereby the Buddha's grace to repay.
Although teaching the bodhisattva-dharma,
In that we had no hope.
Our Leader saw and let us be,
For into our minds he looked,
And sought not to stir our zeal
By telling of our true Gain.
Just as the rich elder,
By his own tactfulness,
Knowing his son's lower bent,
Softens and moulds his mind,
So that later to him
All his riches he can bequeath,
So is it with the Buddha
In the display of his treasures;
Knowing those by trifles pleased,
Yet by skilful devices
Tames he their minds,
And only then teaches the greater wisdom.
To-day we have obtained

What we never had before;
What we previously never looked for,
We have unforeseen obtained,
Just as that poor son
Received inestimable treasures.
World-honoured One!
Steeped in the Buddha Dharma,
For long time have we kept
The Dharma-rajā's pure discipline,
Thereby through faultless Dharma,
Attaining to clear vision.
But to-day for the first time
Have we won the Fruit of the Way;
Today we attain the faultless,
Peerless Great Fruit.
Now at last we are
Truly Arhats.
Now at last we are
Truly hearers of the Sound,
Who sing the song of Buddha-Way
For all creatures to hear.
The World-honoured One,
In his great loving-kindness,
With rare and precious things,
Compassionate, instructs
And confers benefits on us;
Through countless *kotis* of *kalpas*,
Who could ever repay him?
Service of hands and feet,
Homage all prostrate,
Every kind of offering,
Are all unable this to repay.
Buddhas, Dharma-rajās,
With powers rare and inconceivable,
Boundless and infinite,
Faultless and ineffable,
For the sake of inferior minds,
Are effortlessly patient;
To common folk, attached to externals,
They teach as befits them.
Exercising complete freedom in the Dharma,
Appraised of living beings' desires,
Their pleasures and aspirations,
So, according to their capacity,
The Buddhas, by innumerable parables,

To them they teach the Way.
According as all the living
Have planted wholesome roots,
Knowing the mature from the immature,
And discerning the fruits of each,
The Buddha discriminating,
As is most befitting,
Thereby for the sake of the One Vehicle,
Teaches it as the Three.”

[Ch. 5 THE PARABLE OF THE MEDICINAL HERBS]

The Buddha: At that time the World-honoured One said to *Mahakashyapa* and the other major disciples: “Excellent, excellent, *Kashyapa*. You have described truly the real merits of the Tathagata. Know *Kashyapa*! The Tathagata is the Dharma-rajā. Whatever he teaches is free from falsity; he expounds all teachings with wise expediency. The Tathagata understands the workings of the innermost hearts of all living beings, penetrating them completely and without hindrance. He observes and understands the end to which all doctrines tend. And his teaching always leads towards Supreme Perfect Enlightenment.

“*Kashyapa*!

It is like unto a great cloud
Rising above the world,
Covering all things everywhere,
A gracious cloud laden with moisture;
Lightning-flames flash and dazzle,
A voice of thunder vibrates afar,
Bringing joy and ease to all.
The sun's rays are veiled,
And the earth is cooled;
The cloud's masses lower and spread
As if to be touched;
It rains down equally
Descending on all sides,
Streaming and pouring unstinted,
Permeating the land everywhere:
Whether by mountain-stream,
River, ravine, or cavern.
Wherever grow plants and trees,
Both great and small,

Thickets, groves and bushes,
Medicinal herbs of many kinds;
Grape-vine and sugar-cane,
The shoots of the ripening grain,
Each in their different soils,
Each with its own name and hue,
The rain moistens them all.
All are abundantly enriched;
The parched ground soaked,
Everywhere herbs and trees grow lush.
From the one water which
Issues from that cloud,
Plants, trees, thickets, forests,
According to need receive moisture.
All the various trees,
Lofty, medium, low,
Each according to its size,
Sprouts and grows
Roots, stalks, branches, leaves,
Blossoms and fruits in their brilliant colours.
Wherever the one rain reaches,
All become fresh and glossy.
According as their bodies, forms
And natures are great or small,
So the enriching rain,
Though one and the same rain,
Yet causes each to flourish.
In like manner also the Buddha
Appears here in the World,
Like unto a great cloud
Universally covering all things;
And having appeared in the world,
He, for the sake of the living,
Discriminates and proclaims
The truth regarding phenomena.
The Great Sage
- that World-honoured One
Among gods and men
And among other beings - declares:
'I am the Tathagata,
Most Honoured among men;
I appear in the world
Like unto this great cloud,

To pour enrichment on
Parched living beings - one and all,
To free them from their misery,
To attain the joy of peace,
Joys of this world
And joy of Nirvana.
Gods, men, and every one!
Hearken well with mind attentive,
Behold the Peerless Honoured One
Who cannot be equalled!
I appear in the world,
To give rest to every creature,
And to the hosts of the living teach,
The Dharma, pure as sweet dew,
Of one flavour, the Dharma
Of deliverance and Nirvana,
With one transcendent voice
Forever unfolding the means
For the Great Way.
Upon all I ever look
Everywhere impartially,
Without distinction of persons,
Or mind of love or hate.
I am without greed or attachment
Without limitation or hindrance.
Ever to all beings
I teach the Dharma equally;
As I teach to one person,
So I teach to all.
Going, coming, sitting, standing,
Untiringly engaged in naught else,
Ever I proclaim the Dharma.
Like the all-moistening rain
On honoured and humble, high and low,
Precept-keepers and -breakers alike,
Those of perfect character,
And those of imperfect,
Orthodox and heterodox,
Quick witted and dull witted,
Equally on all
I rain down the Dharma,
Pouring it copiously
On the world unwearyingly.
Know, *Kashyapa*
The Dharma taught by the Buddha

Is like this great rain-cloud,
Whose rain of one flavour
Moistens human flowers,
By which each bears its own fruit.
Kashyapa, by various expedients
Such as simile and parable,
I demonstrate the Buddha Way.
For you and others,
I now teach the highest truth:
What you tread is the Bodhisattva-path,
By whose learning and practise,
You shall all achieve Buddhahood.”

[Part II]

[Ch. 7 THE MAGIC CITY]

[The Buddha]: Thereupon, the World-honoured One addressed the great assembly, saying: “Bhiksus, when a Tathagata knows that the time has come to enter nirvana, and knows that the members of the assembly are pure, firm in faith and discernment, thorough in their comprehension of the Dharma of Sunyata and deeply entered into meditation practice, then he will call together the assembly of Bodhisattvas and *sravakas* and will teach this *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* to them. In the world there is no second vehicle for attaining nirvana; there is only the one Buddha vehicle for such attainment.

“Bhiksus, you must understand this. The Tathagata in his use of expedient means penetrates deeply into the nature of living beings. He knows how their minds delight in trifling things and how deeply they are attached to human desires. Knowing they are like this, when the Tathagata teaches nirvana, he does so in such a way that those hearing it can readily believe and accept it.

[The parable of the Magic City]

“Suppose there is a stretch of bad road of great length, steep and difficult, barren, without water, wild and deserted, inhabited by venomous beasts, a truly fearful place to men. And suppose there is a large company wishing to pass along that road so they can reach a place where there are rare treasures. And suppose they have a guide, thoroughly acquainted with the perilous road, wise, astute, clear-headed, of resolute mind, who wishes to lead them through this arduous region.

“But on the way the group becomes weary and disheartened and they say to the

leader, 'We are utterly exhausted and moreover frightened as well. We cannot go any farther. Since there is still such a long way to go, we would like to turn back.'

'Their guide, a man of great resourcefulness, thinks to himself, 'These wretches are to be pitied! How can they abandon such a fortune of rare treasure as they are seeking and want to turn back!' Reflecting in this way he decides to resort to a devise: in the midst of the perilous road, he conjures up a great walled city with massive gates and lofty towers, its mansions splendidly adorned by gardens and groves, streams, lakes and bathing pools. He says to the company, 'Don't be afraid! You must not turn back, for here is a great city where you can stop and rest. Enter this city and quickly restore yourselves. Later when you feel you can go on to the place where the treasure is, you can leave the city.'

'Then the group, being utterly exhausted, are overjoyed at such an unprecedented event and exclaim, 'Now indeed we can escape from this dreadful road and find ease and tranquillity!' So they press forward and enter the city where, feeling that they have been saved from their difficulties, they settle in comfort.

'After some time, when they are all rested and are no longer fearful or weary, the leader makes the magical city disappear, saying to the group, 'We must go now; the treasure is close by. That great city was a mere phantom that I conjured up so that you could rest. I saw that you were tired and going to turn back mid-way. But now you must press forward with diligence so that you reach the place of treasure.'

'Bhiksus! So it is with the Tathagata. He acts as a great Guide for you all. He well knows that the hard road of birth and death and earthly desires is steep, difficult, long and far-stretching, but that it must be travelled, it must be passed over. He also knows that if living beings hear only of the one Buddha vehicle, then they will not want to see the Buddha, will not want to draw near him, but will be disheartened thinking to themselves, 'The Buddha-way is long and far-stretching; only after the long suffering of arduous labour can the end be reached!'

'The Buddha knows that the minds of living beings are timid and weak, and so, as an expedient, he teaches two stages of Nirvana in order to provide a resting place along the way. But if living beings choose to remain in the secondary stage, then the Tathagata will say to them, 'You have not yet accomplished your task. Although this place where you choose to remain is close to the Buddha-wisdom, you should consider and ponder further that this nirvana that you have attained is not the real one! It is simply that the Tathagata, as an expedient, has made distinctions within the one Buddha vehicle.' In this way the Buddha is just like the guide who, when he

knew that the travellers were rested, said to them, ‘The place of treasure is nearby. This city is not real. It is merely something I conjured up.’”

[Ch 8. PROPHECY OF ENLIGHTENMENT]

[Ananda]: Thereupon the arhats in the assembly reflected to themselves, ‘We rejoice at gaining what we have never had before. If the World-honoured One should give each of us a prophecy of enlightenment such as he has given to his other major disciples, would that not be cause for delight?’ The Buddha, knowing that this thought was in their minds, said to *Mahakashyapa*,

[The Buddha]: “On these arhats who are now before me I will one by one bestow a prophecy that they will attain Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. Among this assembly is a major disciple of mine, the monk *Kaundinya*. He will offer alms to sixty-two thousand million Buddhas, and after that will himself become a Buddha. His name will be ‘Universal Light’ Tathagata, and he will be Worthy of offerings, Fully and Perfectly Awake, Equipped with Knowledge and Practice, Happily Attained, Guide Unsurpassed of Men to Be Tamed, Peerless Leader, Teacher of gods and men, Buddha, World-honoured One. Five hundred arhats, including *Uru-vilva-kashya-pa*, *Gaya-kashya-pa*, *Nadi-kashya-pa*, *Kalo-dayin*, *U-dayin*, *Ani-ruddha*, *Revata*, *Kap-phina*, *Bakkula*, *Chunda*, *Sva-gata*, and the others, will all attain Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. All will have the same name, being called ‘Universal Light.’”

[Ananda]: Then these five hundred arhats, hearing this prediction in the presence of the Buddha, were ecstatic with joy, and immediately rising from their seats, they made obeisance at the feet of the Buddha, touching their heads to the ground. Rebuking themselves, they confessed their error saying, “World-honoured One, we always used to think of ourselves that we had attained final nirvana. But now we know that we were ignorant. Why? Because, although we were capable of attaining the wisdom of the Tathagata, we contented ourselves with petty wisdom.

[The parable of the Jewel in the Garment]

“World-honoured One, it is like the story of the man who goes to the house of a close friend and, after getting drunk on wine, falls asleep. Meanwhile his friend, having to go out on official business, sews a priceless jewel as a gift into the lining of the drunk man’s robe. The man being drunk and asleep knows nothing of what has happened. When he has recovered, he sets off on a journey to another country. But encountering great hardship, he has to work very hard and make do with what little he can come by in order to make ends meet.

“Later, quite by chance he happens to meet his old friend. But his friend, seeing his condition, remonstrates with him saying, ‘Alas Sir! How have you come to this merely for the sake of food and clothing? Wishing for you to be in comfort and to live in ease, on such-and-such a day and month and year I took a priceless jewel and sewed it into the lining of your robe. It must still be there now. You in your ignorance are slaving and wearing yourself out trying to make a living. How foolish! Take the jewel and exchange it for what you need, and never experience poverty or want again.’

“Like this also were we, and
Like this friend is the Buddha.
The World-honoured One, compassionate,
Throughout the long night of time
Has taught us to cultivate
The seeds of supreme aspiration;
But, we being ignorant,
Neither perceived nor knew it;
The way of the arhat attained,
We supposed we had gained extinction.
Gaining but a glimpse of Nirvana,
Contented we sought no more.
Now the Buddha awakens us,
Saying ‘this is not real Nirvana;
In attaining supreme Buddha-wisdom,
Does real Nirvana lie.’
Now we, hearing from the Buddha
Our prediction and its glory,
Body and soul o’flow with joy.”

[Ch. 10 THE TEACHER OF THE LAW]

Then the World-honoured One addressed the great assembly through the Bodhisattva *Bhaisajya-rajā*, saying, *[The Buddha]*: “*Bhaisajya-rajā*, do you see in this great assembly incalculable *devas, nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas*, human and nonhuman beings, as well as bhiksus, bhiksunis, upasakas and upasikas, those who seek to become *sravakas*, those who seek to become *pratyekabuddhas*, and those who seek the Buddha way? If any of these various kinds of beings who in the presence of the Buddha listen to one single *gatha* or a single phrase of the *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* and even for a moment think of it with joy, I predict that they will attain Supreme Perfect Enlightenment.

“Furthermore, if, after the Tathagata has passed into extinction, there should be

anyone who listens to the *Saddharmapundarika Sutra*, even one verse or one phrase, and for a moment thinks of it with joy, likewise I predict that they will attain Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. Again, if there be any who receives, keeps, reads, recites, expounds or copies even a single verse of this *Saddharmapundarika Sutra*, and looks upon it with reverence as if it were the Buddha, making offerings to it in various ways with flowers, perfume, garlands, sandal-wood, incense for burning, silk-canopies, banners, flags, garments and music, or even pays homage to it with folded hands, know, *Bhaisajya-rajā*, it is a sign that these people have already paid homage to ten myriad *kotis* of Buddhas, and in those Buddhas' presence taken a great vow: therefore out of compassion for all living beings, they are born among men.

“*Bhaisajya-rajā*, it is like a man who, parched with thirst, searches for water by digging in a tableland. So long as he sees that the soil is dry he knows that water is still far away. But if he does not cease his efforts, bit by bit he sees the soil becoming damper, until gradually he has works his way into mud. Seeing this he is determined in his mind to go on, for he knows that he is bound to be nearing water.

“The way of the Bodhisattva is the same as this. This storehouse of the *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* is hidden deep and far away where no person can reach it. But now the Buddha has revealed it for instructing and perfecting the Bodhisattvas. As long as a person has not yet heard, not yet understood, and not yet been able to practise this *Saddharmapundarika Sutra*, then you should know that that person is still far away from Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. But if any is able to hear, understand, ponder and practise the sutra, then you should know that they can draw near to Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. Why? Because in all cases Bodhisattvas, who attain Supreme Perfect Enlightenment, do so through this sutra. This sutra opens the way from the expedient, partial method to the full revelation of truth and reality.

“Should any desire to recite this sutra,
Undaunted amidst the multitude
Let him enter the Tathagata abode,
And wearing the Tathagata robe,
Sit on the Tathagata throne.
Great compassion is the abode,
Gentleness and patience the robe,
The emptiness of all dharmas the throne.
Abiding in these, let him delight
In sounding the drum of the true Dharma.”

[Ch. 11 THE REVELATION OF THE JEWELLED STUPA]

[Ananda]: And then suddenly in front of the Buddha a stupa of stupendous size and magnificence sprang up out of the earth and came to rest suspended in mid-air above the assembly. The stupa was five hundred *yojanas* in height and two hundred and fifty *yojanas* in width and depth. It was made of the seven precious treasures of gold, silver, lapis-lazuli, moon-stone, agate, pearl and carnelian, being built with thousands of recesses, parapets and railings. It was splendidly adorned with countless canopies, streamers, flags and banners, all made with the seven precious substances. It was hung with festoons of jewels, and myriads of jewelled bells were suspended from it. The exquisite fragrance of the rare *tamalapattra* sandalwood emanated from it pervading the whole world.

Then the gods of the *Trayastrimsha* heaven rained down heavenly *mandarava* flowers as an offering to the jewelled stupa, and the vast assembly of *devas, nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kinnaras, mahoragas*, human and nonhuman beings made offerings of all manner of flowers, perfumes, garlands, streamers and delightful music, extolling the precious stupa with reverence, honour and praise.

Thereupon from the midst of the jewelled stupa came a mighty voice, speaking words of praise: “Excellent! How excellent, World-honoured Shakyamuni, that for the sake of the great assembly you teach the *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* of Great Universal Wisdom, by which Bodhisattvas are instructed, a teaching guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas! Thus it is, World-honoured Shakyamuni! Truly it is just as you say! All that you have expounded is the truth!”

Then the fourfold assembly all experienced the joy of the Dharma, marvelling at this unprecedented event that they had never known before. Rising from their seats, and with their palms together in reverence, they withdrew to one side.

Meanwhile the Bodhisattva-mahasattva *Mahapratibhana*, understanding the question in the minds of those assembled, said to the Buddha: “World-honoured One, for what reason has this stupa risen up out of the earth? And why does this voice issue from its midst?”

The Buddha replied to the Bodhisattva *Mahapratibhana*, **[The Buddha]:** “Inside this precious jewelled stupa is the complete body of a Tathagata. Long ago, in the distant past, incalculable thousands of myriads of millions of *asamkhyas* of worlds to the east, in a land called *Ratnavisuddha*, there was a Buddha by name *Prabhutaratna*, or, Abundant Treasures. Earlier, when that Buddha was practising the

Bodhisattva Path, he made a great vow, saying, ‘After I become a Buddha and have entered parinirvana, if there is anywhere in the universe where the *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* is taught, then let my stupa arise and appear in that spot, so that I can listen to the sutra, and bear witness to it and praise its excellence.’ And so it is, that wherever in the universe the *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* is taught, that Buddha, through the transcendental powers of his vow, causes this precious jewelled stupa containing his whole body to spring forth, appearing in the presence of those assembled, who hear his voice praising the sutra saying, ‘Excellent! excellent!’”

[Ananda]: Thereupon the Bodhisattva *Mahapratibhana*, knowing the supernatural powers of the Tathagata, spoke to the Buddha, saying, “World-honoured One, we earnestly wish to see the body of this Buddha.”

The Buddha replied: **[The Buddha]:** “This Buddha Abundant Treasures has taken a profound vow, saying, ‘If, whenever my stupa appears in the presence of any Buddha so that I may listen to him teaching the Lotus Sutra, that World-Honoured One should wish to show me to his fourfold assembly, then all the various Buddhas who are his emanations and who are teaching the Dharma in the worlds of the ten directions must return and assemble in that single spot. Only when that has been done will my body become visible.’”

[Ananda]: *Mahapratibhana* said to the Buddha, “World-honoured One, I and the others assembled wish to see these Buddhas that are emanations of the World-honoured One, and to make obeisance to them and worship them.”

Then the Buddha emitted a ray of light from the curl of white hair between his eyebrows, immediately making visible Buddhas in the eastern region in lands as numerous as five hundred myriads of millions of *nayutas* of Ganges sands. In the southern, western and northern regions as well, and in the four intermediate quarters, wherever the beam of light from the Buddha’s curl of white hair shone, the same was true.

In all these lands, where the earth was of crystal and precious textures and adorned with jewelled trees and hung with jewelled nets, there were countless millions of Bodhisattvas with jewelled canopies stretched above them. The Buddhas in these lands accompanied by immeasurable millions of Bodhisattvas could all be seen teaching the various teachings of the Dharma with subtle, attractive voices.

At that time the Buddhas of the ten directions each spoke to his accompanying host of Bodhisattvas, saying, “Good Sons! We must now go to Shakyamuni Buddha in the Saha-world, and pay homage to the precious Stupa of the Tathagata ‘Abundant Treasures.’”

Thereupon this Saha-world instantly became pure; there were no villages, towns or cities, oceans or rivers, streams or forests or any kingly ranges of mountains such as the *Mahamuchilinda* Mountains, Great Iron Encircling Mountains, and Mount *Sumeru*. The whole area comprised a single Buddha land, a jewelled region level and smooth. There remained only the fourfold assembly, all other heavenly and human beings having been moved to another region. With lapis lazuli for earth, cords of gold marked the ground's eight quarters; everywhere was strewn with *mandarava* flowers and adorned with jewel-trees; jewelled nets, banners and curtains, hanging with jewel-bells, were spread above, and the air was perfumed by most precious incense.

Then all the Buddhas, each with a great Bodhisattva to act as his attendant, started to arrive in the Saha-world and each went to the foot of a jewel-tree. Each of these jewel trees was five hundred *yojanas* high and adorned with branches, leaves, flowers and fruit in due proportion. Under all the jewel-trees were lion seats five *yojanas* in height, also decorated with magnificent jewels. Each Buddha sat crossed-legged on his own lion-throne, and in this way the seats were filled throughout the thousand-millionfold world. But still there was no end to the emanations of Shakyamuni Buddha arriving from merely one direction. So Shakyamuni Buddha, wishing to make room for all the Buddhas who had emanated from himself, transformed two hundred ten thousand million *nayutas* of lands in each of the eight directions of space, making them all pure. In this way, bit by bit, the Buddhas from the ten directions all came, assembled and each were seated on their lion-thrones beneath a jewel-tree.

Then each Buddha dispatched their attendant to go and greet Shakyamuni Buddha, each sending a cupped double-handful of jewelled flowers, with the following instruction, "Noble son, you must go to Mount *Grdhrakuta*, the abode of Shakyamuni Buddha, and speak to him as I instruct you. Say, 'Are you in good health and free from disease and illness? Is your strength unimpaired? And are your Bodhisattvas and *sravakas* all well and at peace?' Then scatter these jewelled flowers over the Buddha as an offering, and say, 'The Buddha So-and-so joins in wishing that the Precious Stupa be opened.'

When Shakyamuni Buddha saw all the Buddhas that were his emanations had assembled, and heard all these Buddhas say that they wished to participate in the opening of the Precious Stupa, he immediately rose up from his seat into midair. Likewise the fourfold assembly stood up, and pressing their palms together, gazed at the Buddha with a single mind.

Thereupon Shakyamuni Buddha with the fingers of his right hand opened the door of the Stupa of Seven Treasures, which made a loud sound, like that of a crossbar being withdrawn from a great city gate. At once all the members of the assembly caught sight of the Tathagata 'Abundant Treasures' seated on a lion throne inside the Stupa, his body whole and unimpaired, sitting as if in meditation. And they heard him exclaiming, "Excellent, excellent, Shakyamuni Buddha! It is well that you are teaching this *Saddharmapundarika Sutra*; it is to listen to it that I have come here." Then the Buddha 'Abundant Treasures' offered half of his throne in the Precious Stupa to Shakyamuni Buddha, saying, "Shakyamuni Buddha, sit here!" Shakyamuni Buddha at once entered the Stupa and took half of the throne, seating himself in cross-legged position.

When the members of the great assembly saw that the two Tathagatas were in the Stupa of seven treasures, they all thought to themselves, 'These Buddhas are seated high up and far away! If only the Tathagatas would employ their transcendental powers to enable all of us to join them there in the air!' Immediately Shakyamuni Buddha lifted all the members of the great assembly up into the air. Then the fourfold assembly, observing the Buddha who had passed into parinirvana immeasurable thousands, myriads, *kotis* of *kalpas* in the past, praised this unprecedented marvel by scattering masses of heavenly jewelled flowers over the Buddha 'Abundant Treasures' and Shakyamuni Buddha.

When this had been done, in a loud voice Shakyamuni Buddha addressed the whole fourfold assembly in a great voice, declaring, [*The Buddha*]: "Who is capable of publishing abroad the *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* in this Saha-world? Now indeed is the time, for not long hence the Tathagata will enter nirvana. The Buddha wishes to entrust this *Sutra of the White Lotus of the Real Truth* so that it may be preserved.

"O Sons of the Buddha!
Who can guard the Dharma?
Let him make a great vow
To ensure it long endures!
Whosoever cares for this Dharma-sutra
Worships me, my emanated Buddhas,
And this Buddha 'Abundant Treasures',
Who with his Precious Stupa,
Journeys everywhere for this Sutra.
All you, my good sons!
Let each carefully ponder
That this is a difficult task,

Needing a great vow.
All the other sutras,
Numerous as sands of Ganges,
Though one expounded them all,
'Twould still not be counted hard.
But if, after the Buddha's extinction,
In the midst of an evil world,
One should hear and receive this Sutra
And search into its meaning,
Or should copy and keep,
Or cause another to copy,
Or is able to teach this Sutra,
This indeed is hard.
He who in the future
Can read and keep this Sutra,
Is truly a Buddha-son,
Dwelling in the stage of pure goodness.
After the Buddha's extinction,
He who can expound its meaning,
Will be the eye of the world
For both gods and men.
He who, in the last age of fear,
Can teach it but for a moment,
By gods and men
Will be venerated.
I, on account of Buddhahood,
In innumerable lands
From the beginning until now,
Have expounded many Sutras;
But, amongst them all,
This Sutra is the chief.
If any one is able to keep it,
Then he keeps the Buddha's Body.
All you, my good sons!
Let him who, on my extinction,
Is able to receive and keep,
Read and recite this Sutra,
Now in presence of the Buddha,
Himself announce his vow!
This Sutra so hard to keep,
If any should keep it
For but a short time,
I shall still be pleased.
Such a one as this
Will be praised by all the Buddhas;

Being the eyes of the world,
Such a one is brave,
Such a one is zealous.
Speedily shall he attain
To Supreme Buddhahood.”

[Ch 13 ENCOURAGING DEVOTION]

[Ananda]: Thereupon the Bodhisattva-mahasattvas *Bhaisajya-rajā* and *Mahapratibhana* together with their retinues of myriads of Bodhisattvas joined their voices together and made this vow:

“O World-Honoured One,
Our Guide and Teacher,
Comforter of Gods and men,
Hearing your prediction,
Perfect peace reigns in our hearts.
Pray be without anxiety!
After the Buddha’s parinirvana,
In the last dread evil age,
We will proclaim this Sutra.
Though many ignorant men
Will with evil mouth abuse us,
And beat us with swords and staves,
We will endure it all.
Monks in that evil age,
Heretical, warped, suspicious,
Crying ‘attained’ when they have not,
Will have minds full of arrogance.
Others - forest-dwellers
Will wear the patched robe in seclusion,
Thinking they walk the true path,
Scorn dwellers among men.
Others greedy for gain,
Will teach the Dharma to laymen
And be revered by the world as Arhats
Of the Six Transcendent Powers;
These men cherishing evil minds,
Ever thinking of earthly things,
Assuming the name of *Aranyas*,
Will love to calumniate us,
Saying such words as these
- ‘All these bhikṣu-fellows,
Because of love of gain,
Teach a heretical doctrine,
Themselves have composed this Sutra

To delude the people of the world;
For the sake of acquiring fame,
They specialise in this Sutra.’
Always in the assemblies,
In order that they may ruin us,
To kings and to their ministers,
To Brahmans and to citizens,
To the other groups of bhiksus,
Of us they will speak slanderously,
Saying: ‘These are men of false views,
Who proclaim heretical doctrines.’
But, from reverence for Buddha,
We will endure those evils.
Though contemptuously addressed as
- ‘All you Buddhas!’
Even such scorn and arrogance
We will patiently endure.
In the corrupt *kalpa*’s evil age
Abounding in fear and dread,
Devils will take possession of them
To curse, abuse and insult us.
But we, reverently believing in the Buddha,
Will wear the armour of long-suffering;
For the sake of teaching this Sutra
Every hard thing we will endure.
We will not love body nor life,
But care only for the Supreme Way.
In the presence of the World-honoured One
And the Buddhas from every direction,
Thus we make our vows,
And the Buddha knows our hearts.”

[Ch 14 STEADFASTNESS]

[Ananda]: Then the Bodhisattva-mahasattva *Manjushri*, the Dharmaraja’s crown-prince, spoke to the Buddha, saying:

[Manjushri]: “World-honoured One! Rare indeed are Bodhisattvas such as these, who out of respectful duty to the Buddha, undertaking a task of such difficulty, make a great vow that in the evil age hereafter they will guard, uphold, read, recite and teach this *Saddharmapundarika Sutra*. World-honoured One, how should these Bodhisattva-mahasattvas go about expounding this sutra?”

[The Buddha]: “If any Bodhisattva-mahasattva desires to expound this sutra for the sake of living beings in the evil age to come, he should practise four methods of

steadfastness: first, he should be steadfast in the spheres of conduct and intimates proper for a Bodhisattva. *Manjushri*, what do I mean by the spheres of conduct and intimates of a Bodhisattva?

“The Bodhisattva takes his stand on *kshanti*, is gentle and agreeable, neither hasty nor overbearing, and remains unperturbed being never alarmed at heart; he has no active interest in worldly affairs, but sees all things as they truly are, not acting upon false discrimination, always delighting in quiet surroundings, learning to still his mind and sitting in meditation. There the Bodhisattva should remain tranquil, unmoving like Mount *Sumeru*, constantly delighting in contemplating all phenomena as empty, just like space, according to their true marks and as beyond the reach of words: nameless, formless, unborn, unimpeded, incalculable, without volume, without limits, without barriers, without constant abiding or extinction, without innate nature or true being; characterless, not inverted, nor emerging, nor arising, nor moving, nor regressing, nor revolving; existing solely through causes and conditions, their appearance born of wrong views; from upside-downness come distinctions, that phenomena exist, or do not exist, are real, or are not real, are born, or are not born.

“Then the Bodhisattva-mahasattva,
Occupies his proper Sphere of Intimacy;
Ever avoiding rulers and and their heirs,
Great ministers and their officials,
And those who play dangerous games.
Consorting not with men of arrogance,
Precept-breakers - Arhats in name alone - ,
Nor with scholars deeply attached
To the Hinayana Tripitaka,
Nor with bhiksunis
Fond of banter and jocularly.
But if such people, in goodness of their hearts,
Come to the Bodhisattva to hear the Buddha-Way,
Then the Bodhisattva with fearless heart,
Cherishing no expectation,
Should teach them the Dharma.
If there should be any disciple
Who, after my extinction,
Enters this Sphere of Conduct
And this Sphere of Intimacy,
When he teaches this Sutra,
He will be freed from timid weakness.
When this Bodhisattva
Seeing things in their true meaning,
Rises from his meditation,

Whether to kings or nations,
Or princes, ministers and people,
To Brahmans or to others,
Opens up, expounds,
And teaches to them this Sutra,
His mind shall be at ease
And free from timid weakness.

Manjusri!

This is the Bodhisattva's
First Method of Steadfastness,
By which he is able, in future ages,
To teach this *Saddharmapundarika Sutra*.

“Furthermore, *Manjushri*, after the Tathagata's parinirvana, the Bodhisattva who wishes to expound this sutra should practise the second and third methods of steadfastness, that of heartfelt serenity, and of compassionate speech. If the Bodhisattva wishes to teach this sutra, he must set aside pride, jealousy, hatred, and arrogance, as well as a mind that is fawning, deceitful, false, and instead constantly practise honest and upright conduct. The Bodhisattva should demolish thoughts of overweening pride and teach the Dharma without obstacles by thinking on the Buddhas and great Bodhisattva-mahasattvas with respect and reverence, saying, ‘These are my great teachers!’

“*Manjushri*, when a son of the Buddha teaches the Dharma he is at all times gentle and full of forbearance, having compassion on all, never giving way to a negligent or slothful mind. When he is teaching, he takes no pleasure in fault-finding; nor does he disparage other Dharma-teachers, speaking of their tastes or shortcomings; nor does he single out disciples by name, neither exposing their mistakes nor praising them. Nor does he cause others to have doubts or regrets by saying, ‘You will never become a Buddha!’ Nor does he look with contempt on others, arguing or holding frivolous debates on doctrine. Instead by cultivating a serene heart, ever gentle and patient, the Bodhisattva ensures that his listeners do not oppose him, answering those who ask difficult questions after the manner of the Mahayana.

The wise man in ways such as these,
Rightly cultivates his mind,
And is able to abide serene.
The merit of such a man,
Thousands, myriads, *kotis* of *kalpas*
Spent in reckoning and comparison
Would not suffice for the telling.

“Then again, *Manjushri*, the Bodhisattva practices the fourth steadfastness in the

age hereafter, when the Dharma is about to perish, toward those who are not Bodhisattvas, and who are either still in the household life or those who have left the household life, by cultivating a mind of great compassion, thinking: 'These persons simply missed the Tathagata's expedient means, his exposition of the Dharma in accordance with what is appropriate, not hearing it, nor being aware of it. But although these persons do not inquire into it, do not believe and do not understand this *Saddharmapundarika Sutra*, when I have attained Supreme Perfect Enlightenment, wherever I may happen to be, I will employ my transcendental powers and power of wisdom to draw them to me and cause them to abide in this Dharma.'

"Manjushri,

It is like to powerful Wheel-rolling King
Who, to his war-distinguished soldiers,
Makes presents of many rewards:
Elephants, horses, carriages,
Palaquins, personal ornaments,
As well as fields and houses,
Villages and cities,
Or bestows garments,
Various kinds of jewels,
Gold and other wealth,
Bestowing all with joy;
But only for one, heroic
And of rare exploits,
Does the king take from his head
The crown-jewel to give him.
Thus also is it with the Tathagata:
He is the Dharmaraja,
Possessing great powers of endurance
And the treasury of wisdom;
With great benevolence,
Seeing every human being
Suffering from pains and distresses,
Fighting against the Maras,
And seeking for deliverance,
He transforms the world with his teaching.
To these living beings,
In great tactfulness,
He has taught numerous Sutras;
Finally knowing the living
Have attained developed powers,
At the very last he to them

Teaches this Lotus Sutra.
As the king takes from his head
The jewel and bestows it,
So this Sutra is preeminent
Among all the Sutras.
After my parinirvana,
Whoever seeks Buddhahood
And desires in serenity
To proclaim this Sutra
Will behold the wonderful:
Seen will be the Tathagatas,
Seated on Lion-Thrones,
Their golden bodies radiant
Illuminating all beings
With boundless light,
And heard will be their Brahma-voices,
Teaching the Supreme Truth.
In their midst, such a one
Praising Buddha with folded hands,
Will hear the Dharma with joy.”

[Ch 15: EMERGING FROM THE EARTH]

[Ananda]: When the World-honoured One had finished speaking, all the Bodhisattva-mahasattvas who had gathered from the lands of the Buddhas who were emanations of Shakyamuni Buddha, stood up in the midst of the great assembly, and bowing with their palms pressed together, addressed the World-honoured One saying: “World-honoured One, if you will allow us, then in the age after the Buddha’s parinirvana, by diligently and earnestly protecting, reading, reciting, copying and making offerings to this sutra, we will teach it widely throughout this Saha-world!”

But the Buddha interrupted them, saying: **[The Buddha]:** “Enough! My good sons, there is no need for you to protect this sutra. Why? Because in this Saha-world there are already Bodhisattva-mahasattvas as numerous as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges. And furthermore, each one of these Bodhisattvas has a retinue equal to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges. After I have entered parinirvana all these will protect, read, recite and widely teach this sutra.”

[Ananda]: As soon as the Buddha had spoken these words, the earth of the thousand-millionfold lands of this Saha-world all trembled, quaked and split open, and from its clefts emerged at the same instant immeasurable thousands, myriads of *kotis* of Bodhisattva-mahasattvas. These Bodhisattvas had golden-hued bodies

emanating a boundless golden radiance; each one of these Bodhisattvas led his own great assembly equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges. Such were there numbers: immeasurable, boundless, beyond comprehension through calculation, simile or parable.

On hearing the voice of Shakyamuni Buddha teaching, these Bodhisattvas sprung forth from the open space where they all had been dwelling beneath the Saha-world, and each proceeded to the wonderful Stupa of Seven Treasures suspended in the sky in which Tathagata 'Abundant Treasures' and Shakyamuni Buddha were seated. On reaching it, they turned to the two World-honoured Ones and made obeisance at their feet. They then also performed obeisance to the Buddhas seated on lion seats underneath the jewelled trees.

Thereupon, the Bodhisattva-mahasattva *Maitreya* wishing to resolve his own doubts, pressing his palms together, turned to the Buddha and made this inquiry:

[Maitreya]:

“World-honoured One! Of measureless Virtue
Only by you can our wonder be resolved.
We have never seen the like
Of this great Bodhisattva host,
Of countless myriads.
What is the course of their history?
Be pleased to tell, honoured of men,
Whence came they and why
They are thus assembled?
Mighty of frame, transcendent in power,
Of wisdom inscrutable,
Strong of will and memory,
Firm in endurance,
Whom all rejoice to see -
Whence came they?
If anyone tried to keep tally
Through *kalpas* as Ganges' sands
He still could not tell their number.
All these great, majestic,
Zealous Bodhisattva hosts -
Who has taught the Dharma to them,
Instructed and perfected them?
From every quarter of the riven earth
They spring forth from its midst.
World-honoured One! From of old
We have never witnessed such beings.
We know not a single one

Among this countless host,
Who suddenly spring from the earth.
Be pleased to tell us the cause!”

The Buddha replied to *Maitreya*’s question, saying: [*The Buddha*]: “Excellent! how excellent, that you should question the Buddha about this great affair! All of you with a single mind and firm resolve should don the armour of diligence, for the Tathagata now intends to reveal and declare the wisdom of the Buddhas, the Buddhas’ mastery of transcendental power, their swift lion-like and awe-inspiring strength of the powers.

“*Maitreya*!
These Great Bodhisattvas,
Who from past numberless *kalpas*
Have observed the Buddha wisdom,
All of these are my disciples,
Whose minds I have set on the Great Way.
These Bodhisattvas are my sons
Who dwell in this Buddha-world.
Ever practising the ascetic (*dhuta*) deeds,
Joyfully devoted to quiet places,
Shunning the clamour of crowds,
Taking no delight in much talk,
With no pleasure in many words,
They reject the assembly’s fret and confusion.
Nor do they linger among heavenly beings,
But constantly delight in profound wisdom,
Being free from all hindrances.
All these sons of mine,
Learning and keeping the discipline of my Way
For the sake of seeking Buddhahood,
Are always zealous day and night.
They dwell below the Saha-world,
In the region of space beneath it.
Their minds devoid of any fear,
Firm in their powers of will and memory,
Ever diligent in seeking wisdom,
They teach every kind of mystic law.
I, near the city of Gaya,
Sitting beneath the Bodhi-tree,
Accomplished Perfect Enlightenment;
And rolling the supreme Dharma-wheel,
I then taught and converted them
And caused them to seek the One Way.
Now they all abide in the never-relapsing state,

And every one will become a Buddha.
What I now speak is the truth;
Believe it with a single mind!
I from a long distant past
Have taught and trained all this host.”

[Ananda]: Then the Bodhisattva-mahasattva *Maitreya*, as well as countless other Bodhisattvas, were seized with doubt and perplexity, wondering at this unprecedented event. They all puzzled to themselves: ‘How could the World-honoured One in such a short space of time have taught and converted such an immeasurable, countless number of great Bodhisattvas of this sort?’

Addressing the Buddha, *Maitreya* said, **[Maitreya]:** “World-honoured One! The Tathagata not far from the city of Gaya sat in the place of practice and there attained Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. But barely forty years or more have passed since then. World-honoured One, how in that short time could you have accomplished so much work? World-honoured One, such a claim the world will find hard to credit! It is as if, for example, a young man of twenty-five, with fine complexion and hair still black, should point to an old man of a hundred years and say, ‘This is my son!’ or that centenarian should point to the youth and say, ‘This is my father who sired and raised me!’ This would be hard to believe, and so too is what the Buddha says, since his attainment of the Way is in fact not been long. But these great hosts of Bodhisattvas for numberless *kalpas* have already devoted themselves diligently and earnestly for the sake of the Buddha way. They have learned to enter into, emerge from and dwell in immeasurable samadhis, have attained great transcendental powers, have over a long period carried out noble practices; step by step they have practised all manner of practices, becoming skilled in questioning and answering, are treasures amongst men and of extreme rarity. Yet today the World-honoured One tells us that, in the time since he attained the Buddhahood, he has caused these persons for the first time to aspire to enlightenment, has instructed, led and directed them toward Supreme Perfect Enlightenment! World-honoured One, we beg you to explain this matter!”

[Ch 16 REVELATION OF THE TATHAGATA’S (ETERNAL) LIFE]

Then the Buddha replied to the assembly, **[The Buddha]:** “Good men, believe and understand the truthful word of the Tathagata.” He repeated these words three times.

[Ananda]: In response the great host of Bodhisattvas, with the Bodhisattva-mahasattva *Maitreya* as their leader, pressed their palms together and addressed the

Buddha, saying: “World-honoured One, we beg you to explain; we will receive the Buddha’s words with faith.” They spoke in this manner three times, and then said once more: “We beg you to explain; we will receive the Buddha’s words with faith.”

At that time the World-honoured One, seeing that all in the assembly repeated their request three times and more, spoke to them, saying: *[The Buddha]*: “Listen carefully and hear of the secret, mysterious, transcendental power of the Tathagata. I will declare this plainly. All the worlds of *devas*, men and *asuras* declare: ‘Shakyamuni Buddha, after leaving the palace of the Shakyas, seated himself in the place of practice not far from the city of Gaya and there attained Supreme Perfect Enlightenment.’ But my good sons, it has been immeasurable, boundless myriads of *kotis* of *nayutas* of *kalpas* since I in fact attained Buddhahood.

“Suppose there were myriad *kotis* of numberless Three-Thousand-Great-Thousandfold Worlds; let someone grind them to atoms, pass eastward through numberless countries, and then drop one of those atoms; suppose he thus proceeded eastward till he had finished those atoms, - what do you think, good sons, is it possible to imagine and calculate all those worlds so as to know their number? Now suppose you take as atomised all those worlds, and counting every place that an atom has been deposited, and everywhere that it has not been deposited, as a *kalpa*, the time since I became the Buddha still surpasses these by hundreds, thousands, myriads, *kotis*, *nayutas* of numberless *kalpas*. Ever since then I have been constantly in this Saha-world, teaching the Dharma. And elsewhere I have led and benefited living beings in myriads of *kotis* of *asamkhyas* of lands.

“The Tathagata perceives the true character of the triple world exactly as it is. For him there is no birth-and-death, nor going away nor coming forth; neither existing in this world nor cessation; neither reality nor illusion, neither thus nor otherwise. Unlike the way that those dwelling in the triple world perceive it to be, the Tathagata sees all such things clearly and without error.

“Good sons! all that I teach is true and not false. The sutras expounded by the Tathagata are all for the purpose of saving and emancipating living beings whether they speak of myself, or of others. During this time, I have spoken of the Buddha *Dipankara* and other Buddhas, and have told of their entering nirvana. Such distinctions I have made as an expedient. In this way, whenever living beings come to me, with my Buddha eye I observe their faith and all their faculties, whether keen or dull, and then according to their capacity and attainment, I explain, in stage after stage, my different names, length of lives, and describe the length of time during which my teachings will be effective, plainly stating I must enter Nirvana. At other

times I resort to different expedients to teach the subtle and wonderful Dharma, thus causing living beings to awaken joyful hearts.

“Why does the Tathagata do this? He employs a variety of similes, parables and reasonings to teach the Dharma, firstly because living beings have different natures, different desires, different actions and different ways of thinking and making distinctions, and secondly because he wants them to produce wholesome roots. The Tathagata observes the propensity of living beings toward lower things, being meagre in virtue and heavy with defilement. For such persons I describe how in my youth I left my household and attained Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. But in truth, as I have told you the time since I attained Buddhahood is extremely long. It is simply that I use this expedient means to teach and convert living beings so that they can enter the Buddha way. That is why I speak in this manner. This, the Buddha’s work, I have never for a moment neglected. Thus, since I attained Buddhahood in the far distant past my life span is of numberless *kalpas*, forever existing and immortal.

“Now, although in fact I do not actually enter extinction, I announce that I am going to adopt the course of extinction. This is an expedient means which the Tathagata uses to teach and convert living beings. Why do I do this? Because if the Buddha remains in the world for a long time, those persons with shallow virtue will fail to plant wholesome roots but, living in poverty and lowliness, will become attached to the five desires and be caught in the net of deluded thoughts and imaginings. If they see that the Tathagata is constantly in the world and never enters extinction, they will either grow arrogant or become lazy. And since they will not realise how difficult it is to encounter the Buddha, they will not approach him with respect and reverence.

“Therefore as an expedient means the Tathagata says: ‘Bhiksus, you should know that it is a rare thing to live at a time when one of the Buddhas appears in the world.’ When living beings hear these words, they are certain to realise how difficult it is to encounter the Buddha. In their minds they will cherish a longing and a thirst to gaze upon the Buddha; thus they will work to plant roots of goodness. Therefore the Tathagata, though in truth he does not enter extinction, speaks of passing into extinction.

[The Parable of the Good Physician]

“Good men! Suppose, for example, that there is a good physician who is wise and perspicacious, conversant with medical art, and skilful in healing all sorts of diseases. And he has many sons, say perhaps ten, twenty, or even a hundred. Then because of some matter he goes abroad to some distant country. Some time after he has gone, the

children drink some kind of poison that makes them fall to the ground, where they roll about delirious with pain. And this is how the physician finds them when he returns home: some have lost their senses, while others on seeing their father approaching are overjoyed. Kneeling down, they entreat him, saying: 'How good it is that you have returned safely. We were stupid and by mistake drank some poison. We beg you to cure us and restore our health!'

"The father, seeing his children in such distress, gathers good medicinal herbs that meet all the requirements of colour, fragrance and flavour, and then according to his prescriptions, grinds, sifts and mixes them together. Giving a dose of these to his children, he tells them: 'Take this excellent medicine, and you will quickly be relieved of your sufferings and will be free of all illness.'

"Then those children who have not lost their senses, seeing the good medicine take it immediately and are completely cured of their sickness. But those who are out of their minds, although begging their father to cure their sickness, refuse to take the medicine. Why? Because the poison has penetrated so deeply that they have lost their sanity. They say that the medicine is no good.

"The father thinks to himself: 'Alas my poor children! Afflicted by this poison, their minds are completely befuddled. Although happy to see me and asking me to cure them, they refuse to take this excellent medicine. I must now devise some expedient to induce them to take it.' So he says to them: 'I am now worn out with old age, and the time of my death has come. I will leave this good medicine here. You should take it and be confident that it will cure you.' Leaving them with these instructions, he then goes off to another land, where he sends a messenger home to announce, 'Your father is dead.'

"When the children hear that their father has died, they are overcome with grief and think to themselves: 'If our father were alive he would have pity on us, and we should be saved. But now he has abandoned us and died in some other country far away. We are shelterless orphans with no one to rely on!'

"Constantly harbouring such feelings of grief, they at last come to their senses and realise that the medicine is in fact excellent; on taking it, they are healed of all the effects of the poison. Then their father, hearing that his children are all recovered, immediately returns home.

[The Buddha]: "Good men, what is your opinion? Can anyone say that this skilled physician is guilty of lying? Likewise it has been immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, millions of *nayutas* of *asamkhya kalpas* since I attained Buddhahood. But for the sake of living beings I resort to an expedient, saying that I

pass into extinction. In view of the circumstances, how can anyone say that I have been guilty of lies or falsehood?

“Like the physician who, with clever device
In order to cure his demented sons,
Though indeed alive, announces his death,
Yet none can charge him with falsehood,
I, too, being Father of this world,
Who heals all misery and affliction,
For the sake of perverted people,
Though indeed alive, say I am extinct;
Though near, failing to see me
They look on me as extinct.
Those creatures, full of sin
By reason of their evil karma,
Through *kalpas* numberless hear not
The name of the most Precious Three.
I, beholding all living creatures
Sunk in the sea of suffering,
Being dissolute, set in their five desires,
And fallen into karma-paths of ill,
To set them expectant and thirsting
At first do not show myself,
Lest, because they always see me,
They should arrogant minds beget.
When hearts are longing,
I appear to teach the Dharma,
To save all creatures,
I expediently speak of Nirvana.
When creatures upright and gentle in mind,
Everywhere worshipping my relics,
Cherish a desire for goodness
And thirst with aspiration,
Wholeheartedly looking for Buddha,
Then I on the Vulture-Peak appear,
To teach the Supreme Dharma
To all announcing,
That I exist forever undying:
Only as expedient revealing
Myself as dead - yet not dead.
I ever remain in this world,
In supernatural power,
Ever teaching the Dharma.
Wherever beings, reverent and joying in faith,
I am in their midst.

You, not knowing this,
Only say I am extinct.
Yet indeed by supernatural power,
Throughout *kalpas* numberless
On Holy *Grdhrakuta* am I.
While the living see, at the *kalpa's* end,
The conflagration in its burning,
Tranquil remains this realm of mine,
Ever full of gods and men,
Parks and many palaces
With every sort of gem adorned,
Blooming and fruitful jewel trees,
Where all creatures pleasure take;
The gods strike up their heavenly drums
And music make for evermore,
Showering down celestial flowers
On Buddha and His mighty host.
My Pure Land is not destroyed,
Though all view it as being burnt up,
And grief and horror and distress
Thus fill them to the full.
But those of virtuous deeds,
Gentle and of upright nature,
These will ever me behold
Here expounding to all the Supreme Dharma:
Unto this eager throng,
I teach the Buddha's eternal life."

[Ch 22 ENTRUSTMENT]

[Ananda]: When Shakyamuni Buddha had finished speaking he arose from the lion throne on which he had been seated with the Tathagata Abundant Treasures, and by means of his supernatural powers laid his right hand on the heads of all the Bodhisattva-mahasattvas, speaking these words:

[The Buddha]: "For incalculable hundred thousands of myriads of kotis of aeons I have practised this rare Dharma of Supreme Perfect Enlightenment which now I transfer and entrust into your hands. Single-mindedly you must receive, fathom and propagate abroad this *Saddharmapundarika Sutra*, making it increase and prosper far and wide. The Tathagata is benevolent and has great compassion. He is in no way mean or avaricious; fearlessly he is willing to impart to living beings the wisdom of the Buddha, the Tathagata-wisdom that comes of itself. The Tathagata is the great Lord of Giving to all living beings. You should follow and learn from the Tathagata's

example: give unstintingly!

“In future ages where there are good men and women who have faith in the Tathagata, you should teach and expound the *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* to them, for in this way you can help them gain the Buddha wisdom. If there are living beings who do not believe and accept it, use some of the other profound teachings of the Tathagata to teach, benefit and bring joy to them. If you do all this, then you shall repay the kindness of the Buddhas.”

[Ananda]: When the multitude of Bodhisattva-mahasattvas heard the Buddha speak these words three times, they were delighted and a great joy filled their bodies. With even greater reverence than before, they saluted the Buddha, and then raising their voices in unison they replied three times: “We will respectfully carry out all these things just as the World-honoured One has commanded. We beg the World-honoured One to have no concern on this account!”

Thereupon Shakyamuni Buddha addressed the immeasurable emanation Buddhas from the ten directions who were seated on lion thrones under the jewelled trees, as well as the Buddha Abundant Treasures, saying: “Buddhas! Peace be with you - proceed at your pleasure. The Precious Stupa of the Tathagata ‘Abundant Treasures’ may again be as it was.”

When the World-Honored One had spoken these words, the whole great assembly with the Buddha Abundant Treasures, the immeasurable emanation Buddhas, the great multitude of boundless *asamkhyas* of Bodhisattva-mahasattvas, *Shariputra* and the other *sravakas* and the whole great fourfold assembly with its *devas*, human beings, *asuras* and others were all filled with great joy.

(Total words: 17271 = 131 mins)