

BUDDHA SPEAKS THE AMITABHA SUTRA

TRANSLATED BY J. C. CLEARY

Bell master: Buddha Speaks

Everyone: The Amitabha Sutra

Thus have I heard: Once Buddha was in the land of Shravasti, in the garden of Jeta and Anathapindika. He was accompanied by twelve hundred and fifty great bhikshus, all of them great Arhats, well known to everyone. Among them were his leading disciples, such figures as the Elders Shariputra, Mahamaudgalyayana, Mahakasyapa, Mahakatyayana, and Mahakausthila, Revata, Suddhipanthaka, Nanda, Ananda, Rahula, Gavampati, Pindola-bharadvaja, Kalodayin, Mahakapphina, Vakula, and Aniruddha...[and others such as these], all great disciples. Also present were the Bodhisattvas-Mahasattvas: Manjushri, Prince of the Dharma; the Bodhisattva Ajita, the Invincible; the Bodhisattvas Gandhahastin and Nityodyukta, and other such great Bodhisattvas. Also present was Shakra, the king of the gods, along with countless numbers of heavenly beings, making up a great assembly. (—)

At that time Buddha said to the Elder Shariputra: “West of here, past a hundred billion Buddha-lands, there exists a world called Ultimate Bliss. In this land there is a Buddha called Amitabha, who is teaching the Dharma right now.

[Shariputra,] why is this land called Ultimate Bliss? It is called “Ultimate Bliss” because the sentient beings in this land are free from the myriad sufferings common to mankind, and only know every kind of joy.

Furthermore [Shariputra], this land is called “Ultimate Bliss” because it is surrounded by seven rings of railings, seven layers of netting, and seven rows of trees, all made of the four precious jewels.

Moreover [Shariputra], the Land of Ultimate Bliss has ponds of seven jewels filled with the waters of eight virtues. The bottom of each of the ponds is pure golden sand, and the stepped walkways that lead up from

all four sides of each of the ponds are made of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and crystal. Above the ponds there are towers which are adorned with silver and gold and lapis lazuli and crystal and mother of pearl, red agate and carnelians. In the ponds there are lotus flowers as big as cartwheels: blue ones shining with blue light, yellow ones shining with yellow light, red ones shining with red light, and white ones shining with white light, each emitting a subtle pure fragrance.

[Shariputra,] the Land of Ultimate Bliss is complete with all these adornments and virtues.

And there is more [Shariputra]—celestial music is constantly playing in this Buddha-land, and the ground is made of pure gold. Heavenly flowers rain down at all hours of the day and night. In the morning the sentient beings of this land fill their robes with multitudes of wondrous flowers and make offerings to hundreds of billions of Buddhas in other worlds. When it is mealtime, they return to their own land...to eat, and [to] circumambulate the teaching assembly.

[Shariputra,] the Land of Ultimate Bliss is complete with all these adornments and virtues.

And there is more still [Shariputra]—in this land there are birds of all sorts of wondrous variegated colors: white cranes, peacocks, orioles, egrets, kalavinkas and jivanjivas. All these birds bring forth harmonious songs day and night. Their songs communicate such Buddhist teachings as the Five Roots, the Five Powers, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, the Eightfold Path, as well as other teachings. When sentient beings in this land hear the singing of the birds, they become mindful of the Buddha, mindful of the Dharma, mindful of the Sangha.

[Shariputra,] do not think that these birds were born as birds due to karmic retribution for past misdeeds. Why not? In this Buddha-land, the Three Evil...[Paths] of Existence do not exist.

[Shariputra,] in this Buddha-land even the names of the Evil...[Paths] of Existence do not exist, much less the realities. All these birds are the

creations of Amitabha Buddha, fashioned in order to sing the sounds of the Dharma.

[Shariputra,] in this Buddha-land there is a slight breeze that stirs the rows of jewel trees and jewel netting, so that they emit subtle wondrous sounds, like hundreds and thousands of melodies playing all at once. All those who hear these sounds spontaneously become mindful of the Buddha, mindful of the Dharma, and mindful of the Sangha.

[Shariputra,] the Land of Ultimate Bliss is complete with all these adornments and virtues.

What do you think [Shariputra]: why is this Buddha called Amitabha?

[Shariputra,] the light of this Buddha is infinite, and shines on all lands throughout the universe without obstruction. Thus this Buddha is called Amitabha.

Also [Shariputra], the life-span of this Buddha and his people is an infinite number of immeasurable eons, and so he is called Amitabha.

[Shariputra,] Amitabha Buddha attained enlightenment ten eons ago.

Moreover [Shariputra], this Buddha has innumerable disciples, all of whom are Arhats, whose numbers are incalculable. Amitabha also has a following of innumerable Bodhisattvas.

[Shariputra,] the Land of Ultimate Bliss is complete with all these adornments and virtues.

[Moreover Shariputra,] none of the sentient beings who are born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss ever fall back into a lower realm. Many among them have only one more lifetime to go before Buddhahood. Their number is incalculable: they can be spoken of as innumerable.

[Shariputra,] when sentient beings hear these teachings, they must take a vow to be born in this land. Why so? So that they can be together with all these Beings of Superior Goodness.

[Shariputra,] one cannot be born in this land through minor good

roots...[good fortune] and causal connections. [Shariputra,] if there are good men or good women who hear of Amitabha Buddha, and recite his name singlemindedly and without confusion, for one day or two days or three days or four days or five days or six days or seven days, then when these people are about to die, Amitabha Buddha and his whole assembly will appear before them. When they are about to die, their minds being unified and not chaotic they will attain rebirth in Amitabha's Land of Ultimate Bliss.

[Shariputra,] I have seen this benefit, and so I speak these words. If sentient beings hear what I say, they must make a vow to be born in that land.

[Shariputra,] right now I am extolling the benefits of the inconceivable virtues of Amitabha Buddha. (八) In the eastern direction there are also countless other Buddhas, like Akshobhya Buddha, the Buddha Marks of the Polar Mountain, the Buddha Great Polar Mountain, the Buddha Light of the Polar Mountain, and the Buddha Wondrous Voice. Each of them...[teaches in his own land with the truthfulness of a Buddha] and covers a whole cosmos, speaking these sincere words: "all of you sentient beings should believe this sutra extolling inconceivable virtues, which all Buddhas protect and keep in mind."

[Shariputra,] in the worlds of the southern direction there are countless other Buddhas, like the Buddha Lamp of the Sun and Moon, the Buddha Light of Renown, the Buddha Great Blazing Shoulders, the Buddha Lamp of the Polar Mountain, and the Buddha Infinite Vigor. Each of them...[teaches in his own land with the truthfulness of a Buddha] and covers a whole cosmos, speaking these sincere words: "all of you sentient beings should believe this sutra extolling inconceivable virtues, which all Buddhas protect and keep in mind."

[Shariputra,] in the worlds of the western direction there are countless other Buddhas, like the Buddha Infinite Life, the Buddha Innumerable Characteristics, the Buddha Innumerable Banners, the Buddha Great

Light, the Buddha Great Illumination, the Buddha Jewel Appearance, and the Buddha Light of Purity. Each of them...[teaches in his own land with the truthfulness of a Buddha] and covers a whole cosmos, speaking these sincere words: “all of you sentient beings should believe this sutra extolling inconceivable virtues, which all Buddhas protect and keep in mind.”

[Shariputra,] in the worlds of the northern direction there are countless other Buddhas, like the Buddha Blazing Shoulders, the Buddha Supreme Voice, the Buddha Hard to Injure, the Buddha Born of the Sun, and the Buddha Netted Light. Each of them...[teaches in his own land with the truthfulness of a Buddha] and covers a whole cosmos, speaking these sincere words: “all of you sentient beings should believe this sutra extolling inconceivable virtues, which all Buddhas protect and keep in mind.”

[Shariputra,] in the worlds of the nadir there are countless other Buddhas, like the Buddha Lion, the Buddha Repute, the Buddha Light, the Buddha Dharma Banner, and the Buddha Upholding the Dharma. Each of them ...[teaches in his own land with the truthfulness of a Buddha] and covers a whole cosmos, speaking these sincere words: “all of you sentient beings should believe this sutra extolling inconceivable virtues, which all Buddhas protect and keep in mind.”

[Shariputra,] in the worlds of the zenith there are countless other Buddhas, like the Buddha Pure Voice, the Buddha Sojourner King, the Buddha Incense Fragrance, the Buddha Fragrant Light, the Buddha Great Blazing Shoulders, the Buddha Body of Multicolored Jewel Flower Garlands, the Buddha Sala Tree King, the Buddha Precious Flower Virtue, the Buddha Sees All Truths, and the Buddha Like the Polar Mountain. Each of them...[teaches in his own land with the truthfulness of a Buddha] and covers a whole cosmos, speaking these sincere words: “all of you sentient beings should believe this sutra extolling inconceivable virtues, which all Buddhas protect and keep in mind.” ()

[Shariputra,] why do you think this is called the sutra that is protected and kept in mind by all the Buddhas?

[Shariputra,] if there are good men or women who hear this...[sutra], uphold it and hear the names of all these Buddhas, these good men and women will be protected and kept in mind by all the Buddhas, and will not retrogress along the path of Supreme, Perfect Enlightenment. Therefore [Shariputra,] all of you should faithfully accept what I say and what all the Buddhas have said.

[Shariputra,] all those who have vowed, or are vowing, or will vow to be born in the land of Amitabha Buddha reach the level where they do not retrogress from Supreme, Perfect Enlightenment. They are already born, are now being born, or will be born in that land. Therefore, [Shariputra,] all good men and women, if they have faith, must make a vow to be born in that land.

[Shariputra,] just as I am now extolling the inconceivable virtues of all the Buddhas, all those Buddhas are likewise extolling my inconceivable virtues, with these words: (∧) “Sakyamuni Buddha (⊔) is able to carry out a most difficult and rare task. In the Saha World, the World of Endurance, in an evil world of the Five Corruptions—the corruption of the age, the corruption of views, the corruption of afflictions, the corruption of sentient beings, and the corruption of life—he is able to achieve Supreme, Perfect Enlightenment, and to expound the Pure Land teaching, which all beings in all worlds find hard to believe.”

[Shariputra,] know then that in the midst of this evil world of the Five Corruptions, I am able to carry out this difficult task, attain Supreme, Perfect Enlightenment, and expound the Pure Land teaching, which is so hard for beings in all worlds to believe. This is indeed most difficult!

When Buddha finished...[teaching this sutra], Shariputra and all the monks, gods, humans, asuras and others who had been listening, having heard what the Buddha said, rejoiced and faithfully accepted it. They all bowed in homage and departed.