

THE SUTRA OF MEDICINE BUDDHA

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3456 Glenmark Drive
Hacienda Heights, CA 91745 U.S.A.
Tel: (626) 330-8361 / (626) 330-8362
Fax: (626) 330-8363
www.fgsitc.org

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Praise of Incense Offering

Incense burning in the censer,
All space permeated with fragrance.
Buddhas perceive it from every direction.
Auspicious clouds gather everywhere.
With our sincerity,
Buddhas manifest themselves in their entirety.
We take refuge in the bodhisattvas, mahasattvas.
(repeat three times and prostrations)

Sutra Opening Verse

The unexcelled, most profound, and exquisitely
wondrous Dharma,
Is difficult to encounter throughout hundreds of
thousands of millions of kalpas.
Since we are now able to see, hear, receive and retain
it,
May we comprehend the true meaning of the
Tathagata.

Medicine Buddha Sutra

Thus have I heard. One time, while traveling and teaching throughout several countries, the Bhagavat arrived at the magnificent city of Vaisali. There he sat beneath the Joyful Tree of Musical Breezes and was joined by a great multitude of beings, both human and non-human. In attendance was a retinue of highly cultivated bhiksus, eight thousand in number. Accompanying them was a throng of bodhisattvas and great bodhisattvas, thirty-six thousand in total. Also in attendance were kings and their subjects, brahmins, laity, and a constellation of heavenly beings. This great congregation respectfully gathered around the Buddha to hear his teaching.

At that time, the Dharma Prince Manjusri, with the Buddha's omniscient power, arose from his seat and came before the Buddha. Baring his right shoulder and bowing upon his right knee with joined palms, the young prince implored, "World-Honored One, we wish that you would

speak to us about the various Buddhas' names and honorary titles, their great vows, and their magnificent virtues. We hope that all who are within hearing of these words can become free from karmic obstructions. Moreover, for the sake of sentient beings in the Period of Semblance Dharma, we hope these beneficial words can make them truly happy."

Upon hearing this request, the World-Honored One praised Manjusri, "Excellent, excellent, Manjusri! It is out of your deep and heartfelt compassion for sentient beings that you have implored me to speak of the Buddhas' names and titles, original vows, and virtues that accompany them. This is in order to release sentient beings from their entanglements in karmic obstructions and also to bring peace and joy to those in the Period of Semblance Dharma. Now, for your benefit, I am going to speak. You should listen attentively and contemplate carefully what I am going to say."

"Splendid!" replied Manjusri. "We are most happy to hear from you."

The Buddha thus began to speak, "Manjusri, east of here, beyond Buddha lands as innumerable as the sands

of the Ganges River, there exists a Buddha world called ‘The Land of Pure Crystal,’ where the ‘Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance’ presides. Adorned with sacred titles, this Buddha is commonly honored as, ‘Worthy One,’ ‘Truly All-Knowing,’ ‘Perfect in Knowledge and Conduct,’ ‘Well-Gone,’ ‘Knower of the World,’ ‘Unsurpassed,’ ‘Tamer,’ ‘Teacher of Heavenly and Human Beings,’ ‘Awakened One,’ and ‘Bhagavat.’

“Manjusri, twelve great vows evolved from the heart of the World-Honored Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance as he advanced upon the bodhisattva path. These vows were made with the heartfelt wish that all sentient beings might fulfill their aspirations.

“The first vow is this: ‘In a future lifetime, may I attain Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi. Thus, my body shall be one of bright radiance, shining forth in blazing illumination, without measure, boundary, or limitation, lighting up innumerable worlds. This body will be adorned with the thirty-two marks of excellence and the eighty noble qualities, which accompany the form of the True Man. May all sentient be likewise brilliant and adorned in body, completely

equal to me.’

_____ “The second vow is this: ‘In a future lifetime, upon my enlightenment, may my body be as clear as pure crystal, flawless and impeccable within and without. May it be of boundless radiance and majestic virtue, of serene abiding goodness. May this body be a magnificent blazing net of glory, more brilliant than the sun and moon, able to embrace and awaken even those beings caught in the depths of profound darkness and gloom. Thus, shall all beings accomplish their endeavors according to their intentions.’

“The third vow is this: ‘In a future lifetime, upon my enlightenment, may I enable all beings to gain an abundance of things most useful and enjoyable, eliminating all scarcity or want. This I will accomplish through boundless wisdom and skillful means beyond measure.’

“The fourth vow is this: ‘In a future lifetime, upon my enlightenment, may all sentient beings choose to follow the peaceful way of bodhi instead of traveling the path of evil. If there are beings who are proceeding via the sravaka or pratyeka-buddha vehicle, may they become engaged by means of the great vehicle.’

“The fifth vow is this: ‘In a future lifetime, upon my enlightenment, may sentient beings beyond number practice wholesome living and uphold all precepts according to my teachings. Through the commitment to actualize the Dharma, may they accomplish the Tri-Vidhani Silani (three categories of bodhisattva precepts). When beings violate any precept, their purity can be restored and they can avoid falling into the suffering realms simply upon hearing my name.’

“The sixth vow is this: ‘In a future lifetime, upon my enlightenment, I vow to aid all sentient beings who suffer from any form of malady. I vow to relieve those whose bodies are deformed, who lack their complete sense organs, who lack beauty and appeal, or who are simple-minded or foolishly stubborn. Those who are blind, deaf, raspy-voiced, or mute, who suffer with palsied or crippled limbs, who are hunchbacks or lepers or insane, or who encounter any other form of infirmity; all these shall, after hearing my name, gain optimum health and intuitive mastery of all knowledge and skills. They shall find themselves in complete possession of all sense organs and no longer experience the suffering of illness.’

“The seventh vow is this: ‘In a future lifetime, upon my enlightenment, if there are any sentient beings who are tormented by illness, who have no hope of release or respite from their suffering, who are without doctors or medicine, or who have no family members or other caregivers to assist them, who are homeless or impoverished, or are suffering in any way, I vow that once the sound of my name has penetrated their ears, all illness shall cease, and they shall find serene contentment in body and mind. They shall be surrounded by family and caregivers and all that they have previously lacked shall become abundantly available to them, even unto the actualization of Buddhahood.’

“The eighth vow is this: ‘In a future lifetime, upon my enlightenment, if there are any women who feel coerced or oppressed by the many disadvantages of the female form and have given rise to the desire to let go of that form, they shall, after hearing my name be transformed into the male form. Accompanying this form are all the characteristics of the true man, even unto the attainment of Buddhahood.’

“The ninth vow is this: ‘In a future lifetime, upon my enlightenment, all who are caught in the net of evil shall be released from their entanglement in heterodox practices. If

there are those who have fallen into the dark forest of evil views, they shall all become established in the correct perspective and gradually assume practice of all the bodhisattvas' disciplines, quickly actualizing Buddhahood.'

“The tenth vow is this: ‘In a future lifetime, upon my enlightenment, if there are any sentient beings who, due to the enforcement of local laws, find themselves sentenced to flogging, incarceration, torture, execution, or any other manner of brutal punishment, they shall be aided by hearing my name. For those who are insulted, humiliated, or in abject misery or who are oppressed by burning anxiety, suffering in both body and mind, if they hear my name, due to the power of my awe-inspiring spiritual élan, all shall gain release from their suffering and woes.’

“The eleventh vow is this: ‘In a future lifetime, upon my enlightenment, if there are any sentient beings who commit wrongdoings due to the agony of hunger and thirst, they shall be aided by hearing my name and concentrating on it. First, by providing exquisite delicacies, I will bring about their complete bodily satisfaction and contentment. Physically sated, they may then enjoy the wondrous flavor of the Dharma and become established in spiritual

satisfaction and contentment.’

“The twelfth vow is this: ‘In a future lifetime, upon my enlightenment, if there are any sentient beings who are without clothing due to poverty, who suffer day and night the afflictions of extreme heat and cold and the torment of insects, they shall be aided by hearing my name and concentrating on it. They shall be afforded that which they wish: the acquisition of many kinds of exquisite clothing, precious gems for adornment, flowered hair ornaments, perfumed ointments, and musical entertainment. The full enjoyment of all these things shall evoke their complete satisfaction and contentment.’

“Manjusri, these are the twelve supremely subtle and wonderful vows of the ‘World-Honored Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance, Worthy One, Truly All-Knowing’ while he was practicing the bodhisattva path.”

Again the Buddha said to Manjusri, “Even in one or more kalpas, I could not finish speaking of the magnificent vows the Medicine Buddha pledged while on the bodhisattva path, nor fully describe the wonders of the pristine Buddha land he attained. I can tell you this Buddha land is infinitely pure. There are no women’s forms, the

lower forms of rebirth or sounds of suffering. The land itself is made of pure crystal with ropes of gold bordering the paths. There are magnificent palaces and pavilions with spacious windows strung with nets, all made of the seven precious gems. The virtue and magnificence of this Buddha land is no different from that of the Western Pure Land. In this Buddha realm, among the innumerable bodhisattvas, there are two bodhisattvas at the highest level, preceding Buddhahood. Their names are Radiant Sunlight Bodhisattva and Radiant Moonlight Bodhisattva. Both bodhisattvas are skillful in upholding the Medicine Buddha's Dharma. Thus, Manjusri, all good men and women who have confidence and faith should vow to be born in this Buddha land."

Continuing in this manner, the World-Honored One said to Manjusri, "There are sentient beings who do not know the difference between beneficial and harmful conduct. Bent on acquiring and maintaining advantages for themselves alone, they remain greedy and closefisted, unaware of the beneficial fruit of giving. Ignorant and therefore lacking in any trust in the merit of giving, they desperately accumulate and guard their material riches. Thus,

upon meeting a beggar, they experience suffering from the knowledge that they will receive nothing in return for their donation. So strong is their attachment to their riches that to part with even a portion is like parting with a portion of their own flesh. Manjusri, there are innumerable sentient beings, who being stingy and greedy, amass great resources and wealth. Yet, they are incapable of enjoying that which they have accumulated for themselves, let alone sharing any of their wealth with parents, spouses, stewards, servants, or beggars. Those sentient beings who die in this frame of mind will be reborn in either the hungry ghost or animal realm. However, due to the fact that while in the human realm, they temporarily had the chance to hear the name of the Medicine Buddha, upon remembering this Buddha's name, they shall immediately be reborn in the human realm. Influenced by the memory of that past-life experience and the suffering of the lower realms, they are willing to forego the enjoyment of sensual pleasures and instead enter into activities of generosity, even praising the efforts of others who give. They are no longer attached to their possessions and are gradually willing to share parts of their bodies, if necessary, with any who request it, as well

as the remainder of their wealth and possessions.

“And Manjusri, there are sentient beings who break the precepts even though they have received the Buddha’s teachings about them. There are those who do not break the precepts per se, but they do, however, break rules and regulations pertaining to daily life. Then there are those who are successful in upholding the precepts and adhering to the rules and regulations of daily life, but they do not have the right view. Some sentient beings have the right view, but waste or avoid the opportunity to further their learning and cannot encounter the deep and profound meaning of the Buddha’s teachings. Others pursue opportunities to learn, but do so with an arrogant attitude. Because this conceit obscures their minds, they still consider themselves as right and others as wrong. This mindset leads them to criticize the Dharma and undermines their understanding of the truth. As they ignorantly slander the Dharma and incorrectly practice the Dharma, they harmfully influence others, causing them to fall into a dangerous pit. All these beings shall find themselves endlessly migrating in the lower realms.

“However, if these beings are able to hear the name of the Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance, they can give up their harmful practices and undertake all beneficial ones, no longer entering any lower realms. There are some who cannot immediately abandon their unwholesome practices and will drop into the lower realms. Here, through the power of the Buddha’s vows, when they eventually hear the Buddha’s name chanted even for a moment, their existence in the lower realms will end, and they will be reborn in the human realm. Then they will gain right view and right diligence, and properly attain the mind of joy. Thereupon, they are able to give up conventional living to initiate monastic life. They are capable of receiving and upholding the precepts without violation. By taking advantage of opportunities to hear the Dharma with the right view, they become capable of understanding it on a deep and profound level. No longer ignorantly slandering the Dharma and incorrectly practicing the Dharma, they gradually develop bodhisattva characteristics and quickly gain all-embracing completeness.

“Manjusri, if there are sentient beings who are stingy, greedy, jealous, boastful of themselves, and slanderous of

others, they will fall into the three lower realms for innumerable thousands of years. After they have endured severe pain and suffering there, they will be born once again in the saha world, but as cows, horses, camels, or donkeys. These animals must bear heavy loads and walk long distances. Constantly subjected to whipping, thirst, and hunger, they are driven to exhaustion and anguish. Or, such beings are born as humans, but must endure life in lowly, despicable states of existence. As the servants and slaves of people, they are constantly commanded to labor for others with no freedom for themselves.

“If, however, in former lives in the human realm, they have heard the name of the Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance and are able to remember it, they can wholeheartedly take refuge in the Buddha. Because of the strength of this Buddha’s unique spiritual élan, they are liberated from all their sufferings. All their faculties are keen, and they are wise and learned, constantly seeking the superlative Dharma. They are able to meet beneficial friends who encourage their development of virtue. They forever cut the net of demon’s entanglements, break through the shell of ignorance, and cease the river of deluded thoughts.

They are set free from worry, suffering, agitation, birth, old age, illness, and death.

“Again, Manjusri, if there are sentient beings who are habitually contrary and divisive, who engage in fighting and litigation, aggravating and disturbing both self and others by means of body, speech, and mind, these beings increase the occurrence of malevolent deeds. They call upon the spirits that reside in mountains, forests, trees, or tombs, such as yaksas or raksasas, who in turn may slay animals and offer up their blood and flesh in an act of sacrificial worship. Then these sentient beings write the name of the person they hold a grudge against and make an image in his or her likeness, using wizardry to cast a curse upon it. They engage in sorcery and use magical potions to harm the subject of their evil practices. They even use spells to raise the dead who, at their bidding, harm or kill the intended victim.

“However, if in the midst of harming by such means, they hear the name of the Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance, all their vicious intentions will no longer have a harmful effect. Gradually, the compassionate mind will arise in the perpetrators and their victims, benefiting

both with the presence of peace and joy. With the mind of hatred, destruction, and harm no longer present, each individual is happy and content with what he or she has received in its place. They no longer consider it necessary to abuse or invade one another, but instead find abundant mutual benefit.

“Again, Manjusri, concerning the bhiksu and bhiksuni, layman and laywoman, and good men and women of pure faith, if they receive and uphold the eight purification precepts for one year or even for three months, they will have established good roots. Due to their cultivation, they wish to be reborn in Amitabha Buddha’s Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss in order to hear and learn the correct Dharma. However, they may not have yet fully developed the necessary resolve to be reborn there. In this circumstance, when they approach the end of life, if they hear the name of the Medicine Buddha, eight great bodhisattvas will come to their aid: Manjusri Bodhisattva, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, Maha Bodhisattva of Great Power to Heal and Save, Unlimited Intention Bodhisattva, Treasure of Sandalwood Flower Bodhisattva, the Medicine King Bodhisattva, the Supreme Medicine Bodhisattva,

and Maitreya Bodhisattva. Gliding through the sky, they show these beings the path to the Pure Land of numerous precious multicolored blossoms, where each is instantly reborn in the heart of the flowers.

“Or, if the resolve of these beings is weaker yet, they will be reborn in one of the heavenly realms. Despite this rebirth, their good roots remain intact. Therefore, after their life span in the heavenly realms, they will not be reborn in any of the lower realms, but instead will return to be born in the human realm. There they may be born as a cakravartin, a world sovereign of great virtue who effortlessly unites the four continents, peacefully establishing unlimited sentient beings in the ten good ways. Or, they may be born as a ksatriya, a brahmin, or a member of a prominent, prosperous family with numerous relatives and overflowing abundance of wealth and material possessions. They will have a pleasing appearance, and are astute, wise, courageous, and valiant, possessing physical health, strength, and energy. Or, if they were previously women, and were able to hear the name of the Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance and wholeheartedly receive and uphold it, they will not again receive a woman’s form.

“Manjusri, at the time of his enlightenment and due to the strength of his original vows, the Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance was capable of seeing numerous sentient beings encountering various forms of illness, such as emaciation, yellow fever, and disorientation due to magical practices.

He also observed them suffering due to premature demise, or an unexpected or violent death.

“Wanting to relieve these beings’ suffering and illness, to fulfill all that they sought, he then, at that moment, entered into the samadhi called ‘Eliminating the Suffering and Agitation of All Beings.’ Upon entering meditative absorption, a great light emanated from the crown of the Buddha’s head. Immersed in this light, the Buddha then recited a great dharani:

‘Namo Bhagavat Bhaisajyaguru vaidurya prabha-
rāja tathagataya arhate samyaksambuddhaya
tadyatha Om bhaisajye bhaisajye-bhaisajya
samudgate svaha.’

“After he uttered the dharani in the midst of such great light, the earth began trembling and sent forth a great

radiance. All sentient beings' illnesses and suffering were healed, and they enjoyed total ease of body and mind.

“Manjusri, if you see men and women who suffer from illness you should, with a devoted heart and mind, help bathe them, cleanse their mouths, and administer food, medicine, or water which has been purified through one hundred and eight recitations of the dharani. All their illness and suffering shall thereupon be extinguished. If there is something they wish for, by reciting the dharani wholeheartedly, they shall obtain it. Thus, they shall enjoy long lives free from illness. After their lives have come to an end, they shall be reborn in the realm of the Medicine Buddha, where, without any regression, they advance to supreme enlightenment.

“Manjusri, there are men and women who wholeheartedly, earnestly, and respectfully make offerings to the Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance and who often uphold this dharani without neglect, never forgetting it.

“Also, Manjusri, there are men and women of pure faith who have the chance to hear and recite all the titles of the Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance, who chew on the teeth-cleansing twig, rinse their mouths, and bathe

their bodies before they offer fragrant flowers and incense and various kinds of devotional music to the image of the Medicine Buddha. Then there are those who record or copy the sutra or teach others to transcribe it, and who listen to the sutra and understand its meaning, thereupon wholeheartedly upholding it. If there is a monastic who specializes in teaching the practice of the Medicine Buddha, one should offer all that is necessary for daily living, ensuring that the teacher lacks nothing. All of these mentioned will thereupon be protected and will be in the awareness of all Buddhas; that which they wish for will be fulfilled on their path to enlightenment.”

At that time, Manjusri spoke to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, I will vow, at the time of the Period of Semblance Dharma, with various skillful means, to make it possible for all good men and women of pure faith to hear the titles of the World-Honored Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance. Even while asleep they are able to awaken to truth upon hearing this sound in their ears.

“I will also make possible the upholding of this sutra through various skillful means such as recitation, explication of its profound meaning, self-practice through transcribing, or

teaching others to transcribe it. Other means also include respectfully making offerings to the sutra itself by cleaning and purifying its environment and preparing an elevated place such as an altar upon which the sutra can be placed. Having made silk bags of the five colors and placing the sutra therein, one can make offerings of the various fragrances of flowers, pastes, powders, and incense along with garlands of precious gems and jade, parasols, banners, and devotional music. Upon the completion of these offerings, the Four Heavenly Kings and their retinue of hundreds of thousands of heavenly beings shall arrive at that place and offer their protection.

“World-Honored One, wherever this precious sutra is introduced and practiced, due to the virtue of the original vows of the Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance, the hearing of his titles, and the upholding of this sutra, that place shall be free from the occurrence of any violent deaths. Those living in this area shall not be deprived of their vital energy. For those who have been deprived of their vital energy in this manner, they shall have it returned to them and enjoy peace of body and mind.”

The Buddha then responded to Manjusri, “Yes! Yes! It

is as you have said, Manjusri. If there are men and women of pure practice who desire to make offerings to the World-Honored Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance, they should first place an image of that Buddha in a clean, peaceful place and surround it with various flowers, fragrant burning incense, and colorful streamers and banners. “For seven days and nights, they should uphold the eight purification precepts, eat vegetarian meals, bathe their bodies to become clean and fragrant, and wear clean clothing. A mind free from turbidity, anger, and the desire to harm will give rise to a beneficial mind of peace, loving-kindness, compassion, joy, equanimity, and equality for all sentient beings. They should circle the Buddha statue in a clockwise direction, drumming and singing songs of joyous praise. They should also contemplate the Buddha’s vows of great virtue, study and recite this sutra, consider its meaning, and speak to reveal the profound teaching. If these pure practices are followed, all their wishes shall be granted: those who seek long life shall gain long life; those who seek abundant wealth shall gain abundant wealth; those who seek a government post shall receive such; and those who seek the birth of a male or female child shall be granted such.

“If one unexpectedly experiences nightmares, apparitions, the ominous gathering of strange birds, or the arising of various strange phenomena around his or her residence, should he or she respectfully make offerings of numerous exquisite material objects, all these omens shall disappear without doing any harm. If there are those who encounter fears due to flood, fire, calamities of warfare, near-death experiences, or vicious wild creatures such as elephants, lions, tigers, wolves, brown bears, poisonous snakes, scorpions, centipedes, millipedes, mosquitoes, and biting flies, when they wholeheartedly contemplate the Buddha and respectfully make offerings to him, all their fears shall subside. If they have fears of being invaded by other countries, internal rebellions, or the activities of robbers and thieves, upon respectfully contemplating the Buddha, they shall find relief from these fears.

“Again, Manjusri, let us suppose that good men and women of pure faith, who even unto death have not followed the path of any other faith, take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha and uphold the various sets of precepts, such as the five precepts, the ten precepts, the four hundred bodhisattva precepts, the two hundred and

fifty bhikṣu precepts, and the five hundred bhikṣuṇī precepts. If, in the midst of upholding these precepts, they violate any of them and thus become fearful of falling into the three lower realms upon rebirth, should they become absorbed in the contemplation of the Buddha's titles and respectfully make offerings, they can be certain of no further rebirth in these realms.

“When an expectant mother is experiencing the pains of labor, by chanting the Buddha's name as an offering, all of her fears and pain shall be removed. Due to the smooth delivery, the form and five faculties of the baby shall be perfectly complete. His or her countenance shall be very pleasant, such that people will be delighted when they see the baby. This child shall be inherently astute, enjoy a peaceful existence, and encounter little illness. No non-human being shall be capable of seizing that child's vital energy.”

At that time, the World-Honored One spoke to Ananda saying, “Thus I praise all the virtues of the World-Honored Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance. This virtuous state is shared by all Buddhas as a result of their deep and profound practice, but it is very difficult for

ordinary people to understand. How about you, Ananda, do you trust this?”

Ananda replied, “World-Honored One, with regard to the sutra spoken by the Buddha, I have absolutely no doubts concerning it. Why is that so? Because all the activities proceeding from the Buddha’s body, speech, and mind are already completely pure. Even though the sun and moon may fall from the sky, even though the tallest mountain may collapse, the words of every Buddha are not subject to change. World-Honored One, there are many beings who are not equipped with the roots of faith. Upon hearing the description of the profound state shared by all Buddhas, these beings question why such a multitude of remarkable benefits would accrue to one who simply contemplates and recites the titles of the Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance. Due to this lack of trust, they even go so far as to engage in slander. As a result, they remain in the endless darkness of ignorance, thus losing the opportunity for great benefit and happiness, and repeatedly fall into the various lower realms.”

The Buddha thus spoke to Ananda, “For those particular sentient beings, if they hear the titles of the

World-Honored Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance and uphold them without doubt and bewilderment, there is no point in even being concerned about falling into lower realms of rebirth. Ananda, this is the deep and profound practice of all Buddhas, found difficult to believe and understand by most. Your comprehension of this can be ascribed to the power of the Buddha's practices as well, Ananda. All sravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, and bodhisattvas who have not yet ascended the first of the ten stages of bodhisattva development are not yet able to understand and know the true nature of this practice. Only those bodhisattvas who will attain Buddhahood in their next lifetime are capable of true understanding. Ananda, it is difficult to be reborn in human form. Having faith and respect in the Triple Gem is also not easy. Most difficult to achieve, however, is the opportunity to hear the titles of the World-Honored Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance. Ananda, the Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance has practiced endless bodhisattva spiritual disciplines, as well as developed innumerable wonderful skillful means and achieved numerous great vows. Were I to elaborate on this Buddha's disciplines, skillful means, and vows

for one kalpa or more, I could not describe them completely for they are vast and limitless.”

Subsequently, a great bodhisattva named Rescuing Aid Bodhisattva arose from the audience. With bared right shoulder and bowing upon his right knee with joined palms, he respectfully said to the Buddha, “Great Virtuous World-Honored One, during the Period of Semblance Dharma, there will be many sentient beings who will be trapped by various kinds of suffering and adversity. They will experience long periods of illness and grow weak and feeble. Unable to eat and drink, their lips and throats will become parched and dry. No matter where they look, they shall see only darkness and exhibit all the symptoms of approaching death. Their mothers, fathers, relatives, and friends will gather around them, weeping and wailing. However, unaware of all the concern that surrounds them, those on their deathbeds will be experiencing the arrival of the Judgment King of Hell’s messenger, who escorts the consciousnesses of those who are dying into the presence of the King. Subsequently, these beings clearly recollect all their own deeds, both good and bad, record them and deliver their lists of deeds to the Judgment King of Hell.

Thereafter, the King will interrogate them, and after considering the number of good and bad deeds, he will deliver an appropriate decision concerning their lives. If, at that time, the parents, relatives, and friends of those who are sick take refuge in the World-Honored Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance, request many monastics to recite this sutra, light seven layers of lamps, display the five-colored longevity banners, or undertake any similar practices on behalf of those who are sick, their consciousnesses could return after seven, twenty-one, thirty-five, or forty-nine days. When their consciousnesses return, it is like waking up from a dream. Through this experience, they remember all their good and bad deeds as well as the karmic retribution, thus proving to themselves the connection between cause and effect. Afterwards, they will no longer engage in activities that create bad karma. Therefore, all good men and women of pure faith should receive and uphold the titles of the Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance according to their ability, and respectfully make offerings to him.”

Then, Ananda asked Rescuing Aid Bodhisattva, “How should one make offerings to the Buddha? Furthermore,

concerning the longevity banners and lamps, how should one engage in this type of activity?”

Rescuing Aid Bodhisattva said, “Great Virtuous One, if there are sick people who seek relief from their suffering, those who care about them can, on their behalf, uphold the eight purification precepts for seven days and nights. According to their means, they can make offerings of food, drink, and other material needs to monastics. Throughout the day, they can bow and make offerings before the World-Honored Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance, recite this sutra forty-nine times, and light forty-nine lamps. They can create seven images of the Buddha and place seven lamps in front of each. The glow from each lamp should be as large as the circumference of the wheel of a cart, and the radiant brightness should never be extinguished during the forty-nine days. They can assemble the splendid five-colored longevity banners, each of which is composed of forty-nine three-finger-length sections. Also, they can set free forty-nine living beings of various kinds. Through these activities, sick individuals are supported in overcoming danger and distress, and are immune to being held hostage by any evil spirit.

“Again, Ananda, if calamities such as epidemics, invasions, internal rebellions, strange changes in constellations, solar and lunar eclipses, untimely wind and rain, or drought arise in a country, the ruler of that country should give rise to the heart and mind of compassion for all sentient beings and grant amnesty to all who are imprisoned. In reference to what I have previously suggested concerning offerings, they also can make offerings to the World-Honored Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance on behalf of all sentient beings. Because of these good roots and the strength of the Buddha’s original vows, that country will be able to quickly attain peace and stability. The wind and rain will arrive according to season and the harvest will be bountiful. All sentient beings will be free from illness and experience happiness. In the midst of this country there will be no yaksas, demons, and other spirits that harass sentient beings, and all evil phenomena will instantly disappear. Because the ruler engages in these activities on behalf of the populace, he shall remain energetic and enjoy a long life free from illness, in perfect ease.

“Ananda, if the king, queen, the king’s consorts, the prince, high-ranking officials, prime ministers, palace

servants, officials, and the general public become troubled by illness or other difficulties, these people should assemble the five-colored longevity banners and light the lamps of continuous illumination. They also should set free a multitude of sentient beings, scatter multicolored flowers, and light numerous types of incense. Thereafter, they shall recover from the illness they have suffered and be released from their many difficulties.”

Ananda asked Rescuing Aid Bodhisattva, “Good man, how is it that a life at its end can still be lengthened and benefited by these practices?”

Rescuing Aid Bodhisattva replied, “Great Virtuous One, haven’t you ever heard about the nine kinds of unfortunate death that the Buddha has spoken about? It is because of this that I encourage the assembling of longevity banners, lighting of lamps, and the cultivation of various blessings and virtues so that one does not have to experience suffering throughout one’s life.”

Ananda then asked, “What are the nine kinds of unfortunate death?”

Rescuing Aid Bodhisattva responded, “For example, there are sentient beings who are suffering minor illnesses

and find themselves without a doctor, medicine, or caregiver. Even though they might eventually find a doctor, they are administered the wrong medicine. Because it is a minor illness, they are not expected to die, but unfortunately they do.

“Some of these beings believe in harmful heterodox and magical practices, seeking evil teachers who presumptuously predict disaster or good fortune. Thereupon, their lives become unstable and fearful, and their hearts and minds are turned in the wrong direction. Unsure of themselves, they seek methods of divination to predict disasters, and they kill various sentient beings as sacrifices in order to ask for blessings and protection from the deities and spirits of mountains and rivers. Although they hope to extend the duration of their lives, eventually it is clear they cannot do so. Due to their foolishness and confusion, they believe in inverted evil points of view and subsequently suffer an unfortunate death. They are then reborn in hell without hope for release. This is what is referred to as the first unfortunate death.

“The second kind of unfortunate death is execution due to the laws of a particular country. The third kind of

unfortunate death comes about because of an indulgent lifestyle, which consists of hunting for pleasure, carousing, drinking, and engaging in lewd and licentious behavior. As a result of their idle ways, death occurs when non-human beings snatch their vital energy from them. The fourth kind of unfortunate death is by burning. The fifth kind of unfortunate death is drowning. The sixth kind of unfortunate death is being devoured by vicious beasts. The seventh kind of unfortunate death is plummeting off a mountain cliff. The eighth kind of unfortunate death is caused by poison, a curse, or a zombie. The ninth kind of unfortunate death is caused by severe hunger without relief. These are the unfortunate deaths that the Buddha briefly spoke about. Here we have mentioned nine kinds, but there are numerous other kinds as well. It would be difficult for me to mention them all.

“Again, Ananda, the Judgment King of Hell is primarily in charge of the record book of both good and evil deeds. If there are sentient beings who do not respect their parents, commit one of the five violations, damage or slander the Triple Gem, break the laws of their country, or violate the five precepts, the Judgment King of Hell will weigh and

evaluate their deeds and punish them accordingly. This is the reason I now encourage all sentient beings to light lamps and make longevity banners, and cultivate merit by the practice of releasing captive beings so that they might pass through suffering and stress without difficulties.”

In the midst of this gathering, there were Twelve Yaksa Generals who had been in attendance during the entire assembly. Their names were: General Kumbhira, General Vajra, General Mihira, General Andira, General Majira, General Shandira, General Indra, General Pajra, General Makura, General Sindura, General Catura, and General Vikarala.

These Twelve Yaksa Generals, each with his own seven-thousand-member retinue, raised their voices in praise to the Buddha, saying, “World-Honored One! Due to the blessings of the Buddha’s omniscient power, we now can hear the titles of the World-Honored Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance. We no longer need to experience the fears of the three lower realms. With one accord, we wholeheartedly take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha for the duration of our lives in this form. We vow to bear responsibility for all sentient beings and

to work toward their benefit. Because of this, there will be abundant peace and joy. We shall become the protectors of any village, town, city, country, or forest, that has been introduced to this sutra as well as its inhabitants who uphold the title of the Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance and make respectful offerings thereto. All shall find relief from their suffering and woes, and all existing wishes shall be fulfilled. If there are those who seek relief from an illness or a particular stressful situation, they should just recite this sutra. Using the five-colored ribbon streamers, they should tie a knot for each of our names. After their wishes are fulfilled, they can untie the knots.”

At that time, the World-Honored One praised the Yaksa Generals, saying, “Excellent! Well done! Your wish to protect and bring happiness and peace to all sentient beings is an appropriate way to express your gratitude to the Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance.”

Then, Ananda addressed the Buddha, “World-Honored One, from now on, how should we refer to this Dharma practice and how should we respectfully uphold it?”

The Buddha responded, “This Dharma practice is

called the ‘Meritorious Virtuous and Original Vows of Medicine Buddha of Pure Crystal Radiance,’ or it can be also referred to as the ‘Powerful Mantra and Wish-Weaving Twelve Yaksa Generals Benefiting Sentient Beings.’ This also may be referred to as ‘The Practice of Removing All Karmic Obstructions.’ This is how it can be named and upheld.”

After the Bhagavat had said these words, the entire assembly of all the bodhisattvas, great bodhisattvas, sravakas, kings and their subjects, brahmins, laypeople, nagas, yaksas, gandharas, asuras, garudas, kinnaras, mahoragas, human and non-human beings, and so forth, was delighted to hear the words of the Buddha and faithfully received this teaching and practice.

Triple Refuge

I take refuge in the Buddha, wishing that all sentient beings understand the Dharma and make the supreme vow.

I take refuge in the Dharma, wishing that all sentient beings study the sutras diligently and obtain an ocean of wisdom.

I take refuge in the Sangha, wishing that all sentient beings lead the masses in harmony without obstruction.

Dedication of Merit

May kindness, compassion, joy , and equanimity
pervade the dharma realms;

May all people and heavenly beings benefit from our
blessings and friendship;

May our ethical practice of Chan, Pure Land, and
Precepts help us to realize equality and patience;

May we undertake the great vows with humility and
gratitude.

Fo Guang Shan

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