

[top page](#)

# The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment (Yuanjue jing)

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September 17, 2003

## Table of Contents

[Translator's Introduction](#)

[Convocation](#)

1. [Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva 文殊師利](#)
2. [Samantabhadra Bodhisattva 普賢菩薩](#)
3. [Universal Vision Bodhisattva 普眼菩薩](#)
4. [Vajragarbha Bodhisattva 金剛藏菩薩](#)
5. [Maitreya Bodhisattva 彌勒菩薩](#)
6. [Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva 清淨慧菩薩](#)
7. [Power and Virtue Unhindered Bodhisattva 威德自在菩薩](#)
8. [Voice of Discernment Bodhisattva 辨音菩薩](#)
9. [Purifier of all Karmic Hindrances Bodhisattva 淨諸業障菩薩](#)
10. [Universal Enlightenment Bodhisattva 普覺菩薩](#)
11. [Perfect Enlightenment Bodhisattva 圓覺菩薩](#)
12. [Most Excellent of Worthies Bodhisattva 賢善首菩薩](#)

## Translator's Introduction

### Content Overview

The *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* (Ch. *Yuanjue jing* 圓覺經) is a Buddhist scripture that has its origins within the Chan and Huayan circles of study and practice, probably composed in China around the beginning of the eighth century. The sutra was extremely popular and influential within the meditation-oriented Buddhist schools of East Asia: first in Chinese Chan, where its influence was considerable, and then later in Korean Seon, where it grew in popularity to the extent that it was made part of the official monastic curriculum of the main Korean school, the Jogye. The sutra also had some influence in Japan, although it never received the kind of attention from the Zen schools there that it did in China and Korea.

The popularity of this scripture can be attributed to two main factors. The first is the distinctly East Asian metaphysical dimension of its soteriology, as the sutra contains, in a tightly organized

format, focused discussions of the most important theoretical issues concerning the nature of enlightenment that were at the fore of the East Asian Buddhist consciousness at its period of maturation. These are discussed through conceptual frameworks that have their antecedents in East Asian indigenous Buddhist texts such as the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* and *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra*, in indigenous schools such as Tiantai and Huayan, as well as in the pre-Buddhist thought-systems of Confucianism and Daoism.

The second is the sutra's highly practical and concise orientation: much of its content consists of direct instruction on matters of meditation and other related religious issues, such as monastic ritual, confession, the means of selecting a proper teacher, how to maintain a proper relationship with such a teacher, and so forth. A large portion of the meditation-related explanations are not merely descriptive, but performative, which means that the reading of such passages is in itself a meditative exercise. The *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* does not only explain to its reader the philosophy that grounds the "as-illusion *samādhi*" —it directly leads him/her through an exercise aimed at its attainment in the course of reading.

The term "perfect enlightenment," as it is taught in this text, refers to an enlightenment that is not limited in scope. It is also not an enlightenment that is attained exclusively from any partial aspect of the Buddhist doctrine, such as the so-called "elementary" teachings or *prajñāpāramitā* teachings, and so forth. It is an enlightenment that can accept and explain all the various aspects of the Buddhist doctrine. This is why the full, formal name of the sutra as listed in the East Asian Buddhist canon is the *Great Corrective Extensive Perfect Enlightenment Sutra of the Complete Doctrine*.

The *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* is arranged in twelve chapters, plus the short convocation. The convocation section describes the scene of the sermon and lists the major participants. The location is a state of deep meditative concentration (*samādhi*) and the participants are the Buddha and one hundred thousand great bodhisattvas, among whom twelve eminent bodhisattvas act as spokesmen. Each one of the twelve gets up one by one and asks the Buddha a set of questions about doctrine, practice and enlightenment. The structure of the sutra is such that the most "essential" and suddenistic discussions occur in the earlier chapters and the more "functional" and gradualistic dialogues occur later. This kind of structure reflects a motif associated with the doctrine of the Huayan school, which affirms that the Buddha delivered the abstruse *Huayan jing* as his first sermon, in an effort to directly awaken those whose "roots of virtue" were well-matured. The terminology that such commentators as Zongmi (780-842) and Gihwa (1376-1433) use to describe these advanced practitioners is that they possess the capacity for the teaching of "sudden enlightenment" —a direct awakening to the non-duality of reality, which necessarily precludes gradualistic, "goal-oriented" practice. In the first two chapters (the chapters of Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra), the Buddha holds very strictly to the sudden position, denying the possibility of enlightenment through gradual practice. In the third chapter he begins to allow for a bit of a gradual view, and the next several chapters become mixtures of the two. The final few chapters offer a fully

gradualistic perspective.

According to the major Korean commentator on the sūtra, Gihwa, the first three chapters are aimed at those of superior capacity, the next seven for those of middling capacity and the final two for those of inferior capacity. However, this method of categorization does not necessarily mean that the later chapters become gradually easier to read and understand. In fact some of the most difficult discussions come in the later chapters. Most notable in this regard is the discussion of the "four traces" of Self, Person, Sentient Being and Life in Chapter Nine. Since the distinction between each of these four is extremely subtle, and the wording of the text itself is not that clear, this turns out to be one of the most difficult chapters to digest.

### Version Notes

The original Chinese text of the sutra is found in the Taisho canon at vol. 17, no 842. However, for this translation we have used the version of that text that was amended by Gihwa in the course of his commentary on it. Gihwa discovered a number of places where he believed the text was out of joint, and offered clear corrections for these in his commentary. Having, in my study of the text, come to believe that Gihwa was on the mark, I have translated according to his suggested amendments. The Chinese source text provided is also re-edited according to Gihwa's amendments.

The translation of this amended version is basically equivalent to that contained in the appendix to my 1999 translation of the sutra under the title *The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment: Korean Buddhism's Guide to Meditation* (SUNY Press). The translation in the main body of that book includes Gihwa's full commentary, along with my own explanatory notes, and is recommended for anyone who wants to undertake more serious study of the sutra. I have made some small changes and corrections here, and expect to make more of these in the future when I have the chance to go through the sutra again more fully.<sup>1</sup>

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## Convocation

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Thus I have heard. One time, the Bhagavan entered the supramundane great radiant bright repository, in the exactly attained *samādhi*, where all tathāgatas abide in radiant splendor. This is the ground of pure enlightenment of sentient beings, the equal original reality where body and mind are completely erased.

He completely filled the ten directions with the accordance with non-duality, and in this non-dual state manifested all pure lands.

He was with one hundred thousand great bodhisattva-mahasattvas. Those who served as leaders of the assembly were named Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, Universal Vision

Bodhisattva, Vajragarbha Bodhisattva, Maitreya Bodhisattva, Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva, Power and Virtue Unhindered Bodhisattva, Voice of Discernment Bodhisattva, Purifier of All Karmic Hindrances Bodhisattva, Universal Enlightenment Bodhisattva, Perfect Enlightenment Bodhisattva and Most Excellent of Worthies Bodhisattva. With their retinues, all entered into the same *samādhi* as the Tathāgata at this assembly of the equal dharma.

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## 1. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva 文殊師利

[\[Chinese Source Text\]](#)

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva then arose from his seat in the great assembly. He bowed his head to the Buddha's feet and circumambulated him three times to the right.

He then knelt down with his hands clasped and addressed the Buddha, saying: "Greatly Compassionate World Honored One. Please, for all members of this assembly who have come for your dharma, teach us about the reality-[dharma] practice of the Tathāgata's originally arisen pure causal stage. Also, please teach the bodhisattvas to arise pure mind in the great vehicle and become distantly removed from all dis-eases, such that they can cause the future sentient beings of the degenerate age who seek the great vehicle not to fall into mistaken views." Having said this, he prostrated to the ground. He asked this question three times in succession.

[\[Chinese Source Text\]](#)

Then the World Honored One, speaking to Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva said: "Excellent! Excellent! Good Son, you have skillfully asked on behalf of the bodhisattvas about the reality-practice of the causal stage of the Tathāgata, and have caused all the bodhisattvas to arouse the pure mind in the great vehicle. You have also caused all sentient beings of the degenerate age who seek the great vehicle to gain correct abiding such that they do not fall into erroneous views. Now listen well, and I shall explain for you." Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva received the teaching with reverence and joy; all those in the great assembly became silent and listened.

[\[Chinese Source Text\]](#)

"Good sons, the unsurpassed King of the dharma possesses the great *dhāraṇī*-entrance. It is called 'Perfect Enlightenment.' From it is manifested all purity, suchness, *bodhi*, nirvana and the *paramitas* which teach bodhisattvas. All tathāgatas in their originally-arisen causal stage rely on the perfect illumination of the attributes of pure enlightenment to permanently sever ignorance and directly accomplish the Buddha-Way."

What is ignorance? Good sons, all sentient beings fall into various inverted views without beginning. Just like a disoriented person who confuses the four directions, they mistakenly take the Four

Elements as the attributes of their bodies and the conditioned shadows of the Six Objects as the attributes of their mind. It is just like when our eyes are diseased and we see flowers in the sky, or a second moon. Good sons, the sky actually has no flowers—they are the false attachment of the diseased person. And because of this false attachment, not only are we confused about the self-nature of the sky; we are also mixed up about the place where real flowers come from. From this there is the falsely existent transmigration through life and death. Therefore it is called "ignorance."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, this 'ignorance' actually lacks substance. It is like a man who is dreaming. At the time of the dream, there is no non-existence. But when he awakens he finds that there is nothing for him to hold on to. Similarly, when the sky-flowers disappear from the sky, you cannot say that there is a definite point of their disappearance. Why? Because there is no point from which they arose. All sentient beings falsely perceive arising and ceasing within the unarisen. Therefore they say that there is 'transmigration through life-and-death.' "

"Good sons, in the practice of Perfect Enlightenment of the causal stage of the Tathāgata one understands these 'sky-flowers,' thus there is no transmigration, nor body/mind to undergo life-and-death. But they are not caused to be non-existent. It is because they lack original nature. Now, this [prior] awareness is in itself void, like empty space. Yet since this awareness that perceives it to be like empty space is none other than the appearance of sky-flowers, you also cannot say that there is no nature of awareness. Existence and non-existence both being dispelled is called 'according with pure enlightenment.' "

"Why? Because its nature is completely empty; because it is eternally changeless; because there is neither arising nor ceasing within the matrix of the Tathāgata, and because there are no fixed points of view. Like the nature of the reality-realm it is totally complete and perfect, pervading the ten directions. Therefore it is called the 'reality-practice of the causal stage.' Bodhisattvas, relying upon it arouse their pure mind within the Mahayana. Sentient beings of the degenerate age who practice relying on this will not fall into erroneous views."

Then, the World Honored One, wanting to restate the gist of this, spoke a verse. He said:

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Mañjuśrī, you should know  
 All Tathāgatas  
 From their originally arisen causal stage  
 Penetrate ignorance  
 With enlightened wisdom.  
 Knowing it to be like sky-flowers  
 They are able to escape transmigration.

It is like the man in the dream  
 Who has nothing to grasp upon awakening.  
 Awareness is like space  
 Equal, changeless.  
 Enlightenment pervading the worlds of the ten directions  
 Is none other than the attainment of the Buddha-way.  
 All illusions cease at no-place  
 And in accomplishing the Way there is nothing attained.  
 That's because the original nature is complete, perfect.  
 In it, bodhisattvas  
 Are able to produce bodhicitta  
 All sentient beings of the degenerate age  
 Practicing this, will avoid erroneous views.

## 2. Samantabhadra Bodhisattva 普賢菩薩

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then Samantabhadra Bodhisattva rose from his seat in the great assembly. He bowed to the Buddha's feet and circumambulated him three times to the right. He knelt down with his hands clasped, and said to the Buddha: "Greatly Compassionate World Honored One. I would like to ask for all the bodhisattvas at this assembly and for the sentient beings of the degenerate age who are practicing Mahayana: Please reveal the expedient stages of practice and let them hear of this pure realm of perfect enlightenment. How should we practice?"

World Honored One, if these sentient beings know about "illusion," and that body and mind are also illusion, how can they remedy illusion using illusion? If all illusory natures are completely annihilated, then there is no mind. Who is going to carry out the practice? Moreover, based on this, how can you teach the practice of "illusion?" If all sentient beings originally do not practice, then they will remain forever trapped within the illusion of life and death. Not having penetrated the realm of the illusory, how will they liberate the mind that is trapped in false conceptualization?

"I implore you on behalf of all the bodhisattvas at this assembly, as well as for all sentient beings of the degenerate age, to teach the gradual practice of expedient means: what kind of expedient means of gradual practice should we introduce to cause sentient beings to be eternally free from all illusions?" Having said this, he prostrated fully to the ground. He asked this question three times in succession.

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the World Honored One, speaking to Samantabhadra Bodhisattva said: "Excellent, excellent! Good son, you have well asked the Tathāgata on behalf of the bodhisattvas and the sentient beings of the degenerate age about the expedient stages of the practice of the bodhisattva's 'as-

illusion-*samādhi*.' This practice enables all the sentient beings to gain freedom from illusion. Now listen well, and I shall explain it for you." Samantabhadra received this teaching with great joy and reverence; all in the great assembly became silent and listened.

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, all sentient beings' various illusions are born from the perfectly enlightened marvelous mind of the Tathāgata, just like the sky-flowers come to exist from the sky. But even though the illusory flowers vanish, the nature of the sky is indestructible. The illusory mind of sentient beings also vanishes based on illusion, and while all illusions are utterly erased, the enlightened mind is unchanged. The use of illusion to speak of enlightenment is also called illusion. If you say there is enlightenment, you are not yet free from illusion. If you say there is no enlightenment, this is the same thing. Therefore, the cessation of illusion is called 'unchanging.' "

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, all bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age should separate from all illusory and false realms. By firmly abiding in separation from thought, you also separate from the thought of 'illusion.' You also separate from the illusion of 'separation.' You also separate from this separation from this illusion of separation. You will reach 'nothing to be separated from,' which is the removal of all illusion. It is like making a fire with two sticks. The fire blazes and the wood is consumed; the ashes fly away and the smoke vanishes. Using illusion to remedy illusion is exactly like this. Yet even though all illusions are extinguished, you do not enter into nothingness."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, when you know illusion, you will immediately be free, without devising expedient means. Freedom from illusion is in itself enlightenment, and there are no stages. All Bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age who practice like this will be permanently free from all illusion."

Then the World Honored One, wanting to restate the gist of this, spoke a verse. He said:

Samantabhadra, you should know  
 The beginningless illusory ignorance  
 Of all sentient beings  
 Is all created from  
 The perfectly enlightened mind of all the Tathāgatas.  
 It is just like the sky-flowers  
 Which have their appearance in relation to the sky;  
 Though the sky-flowers vanish  
 The sky has never changed.  
 Illusion is born from enlightenment;  
 In the cessation of illusion enlightenment remains perfectly complete.

This is because the enlightened mind is changeless.  
 If these bodhisattvas  
 And sentient beings of the degenerate age  
 Always appropriately separate from illusion,  
 They will completely free themselves from it.  
 Like the flame that springs from wood:  
 The wood is consumed and the flame again disappears.  
 If you are enlightened, then there are no stages of practice  
 Nor is there such a thing as expedient means.

### 3. Universal Vision Bodhisattva 普眼菩薩

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the bodhisattva Universal Vision arose from his seat in the great assembly. He bowed to the Buddha's feet and circumambulated him three times to the right. He knelt down with his hands clasped and addressed the Buddha, saying: "Greatly Compassionate World Honored One. I beg of you on behalf of the bodhisattvas of this assembly and the sentient beings of the degenerate age, to expound on the bodhisattvas' stages and practice. How should they think? How should they abide? For sentient beings who have not yet awakened, what kinds of expedient means should be devised to cause them all to awaken?"

"World Honored One, if these sentient beings lack the correct expedients and correct thought, then when they hear you explain this *samādhi*, confusion will arise in their minds and they will be unable to awaken and enter. Please arouse your compassion for us and for the sentient beings of the degenerate age, and provisionally explain these expedient methods." Having said this, he prostrated himself to the ground. He made this request three times in succession.

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the World Honored One, addressing the bodhisattva Universal Vision, said: "Excellent, excellent! Good son, you have asked well for the bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age about the stages of the Tathāgata's practice; about his thought and abiding, and about the explanation of all the various expedient means. Now listen well, and I shall explain for you." Universal Vision Bodhisattva received this instruction with great joy. The great assembly became silent and listened.

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, these newly awakened bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age who yearn for the pure enlightened mind of the Tathāgata must correct their thoughts and rid themselves of all illusions, first relying on the Tathāgata's practice of *śamatha*. Firmly established in moral discipline



and living in harmony with like-minded students, then practicing silent sitting in a quiet room, they should uninterruptedly be mindful of the following:"

"This present body is a synthesis of the Four Elements. Hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, bones, marrow, brains and pigment all return to Earth. Saliva, mucus, pus, blood, sputum, scum, phlegm, tears, semen, urine and feces all return to Water. Heat returns to Fire, and movement returns to Wind. When the Four Elements have been separated, where can the false body exist? Now you know that this body ultimately has no substance. As a synthesis it appears, but in reality it is like an illusion conjured by a magician."

"When these four factors temporarily combine, the Six Faculties falsely appear; through the internal and external matching of the Six Faculties and Four Elements, there is the deluded apprehension of conditioned energy. Within this conglomeration, there seem to be marks of this conditioned energy, which is provisionally called 'mind.' Good sons, if this false mind does not have its Six Objects, it cannot exist. If the Four Elements are separated, there are no objects to be experienced. At this point, the cognized objects each disperse and vanish, and ultimately there is no dependently arisen mind to be seen."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, since the illusory body of this sentient being vanishes, the illusory mind also vanishes. Since the illusory mind vanishes, illusory objects also vanish. Since illusory objects vanish, illusory vanishing also vanishes. Since illusory vanishing vanishes, non-illusion does not vanish. It is like polishing a mirror: when the filth is gone its brightness naturally appears. Good sons, you should understand both body and mind to be illusory filth. When the defiled aspects are permanently extinguished, the entire universe becomes pure."

"Good sons, it is like a pure mani-pearl which reflects as all kinds of colors, depending upon its surroundings. The foolish see that pearl as really having these colors. Good sons, the pure nature of Perfect Enlightenment is disclosed in bodies and minds, according to each individual type. When these ignorant fellows say that pure Perfect Enlightenment really has body and mind, it is the same sort of error. It is only because these people are unable to free themselves from illusory appearances that I call body and mind 'illusory filth.' The one who opposes and removes illusory filth is named 'bodhisattva.' When filth is gone, its opposition is removed; then there is no opposition, no filth, nor anything to be named."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, because these bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age fully witness all illusion and dispel all images, they immediately experience limitless purity."

"Good sons, enlightenment reveals limitless space. Since enlightenment is perfectly clear, the manifest mind is pure. Since the mind is pure, the objects of vision are pure. Since vision is pure, the eye faculty is pure. Since the eye faculty is pure, the visual consciousness is pure. Since this consciousness is pure, hearing is pure. Since hearing is pure, the ear faculty is pure. Since the faculty is pure, the auditory consciousness is pure. Since the consciousness is pure, all perception is pure, and so it is true for smell, taste, touch and conceptualization as well."

"Good sons, since the eye faculty is pure, the color spectrum is pure. Since color is pure, the field of sound is also pure. The same is true of the fields of smell, taste, touch and thought."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, since the six objects are pure, the Earth element is pure. Since Earth is pure, Water is pure, and so are Fire and Wind. Good sons, since the Four Elements are pure, the Twelve Loci, the Eighteen Realms and the Twenty-Five Kinds of Existence are pure. Since these are pure, the Ten Powers, the Four Kinds of Fearlessness, the Four Types of Unobstructed Wisdom, the Buddha's Eighteen Distinctive Characteristics, and the Thirty-seven Aids to Enlightenment are pure, and so on up to the Eighty-four thousand *dhāraṇī*-entrances, everything is pure."

"Good sons, since all true marks are pure in their nature, one body is pure. Since one body is pure, many bodies are pure. Since many bodies are pure the same is true of all sentient beings in the ten directions, who are perfectly enlightened and pure. Good sons, since one world is pure, many worlds are pure. Since many worlds are pure, we can see that throughout all of space, completely including the three times, all things are equal, pure and changeless."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, since space is equal and changeless, you should know that the nature of enlightenment is equal and changeless. Since the Four Elements are changeless, you should know that the nature of enlightenment is equal and changeless. The same holds true all the way up through the 84,000 *dhāraṇī*-entrances which are equal and changeless. Therefore you should know that the nature of enlightenment is equal and changeless."

"Good sons, the unchanging purity of the nature of enlightenment completely pervades—it includes everything without restriction. Therefore you should know that the six faculties completely pervade the realm of reality. Since the faculties completely pervade, you should know that the six sensory fields completely pervade the realm of reality. Since the sensory fields completely pervade, you should know that the Four Elements completely pervade the realm of reality. It is the same way with all things, including the *dhāraṇī*-entrances, which completely pervade the realm of reality."

"Good sons, since this marvelous nature of enlightenment completely pervades, there is neither

conflict nor confusion between the natures of the faculties and their objects. Since the faculties and objects have no conflict, it is like this through all of existence, including in the *dhāraṇī*-entrances, which have neither conflict nor confusion. It is like one hundred thousand lamps shining in one room. Their light completely pervades without conflict or confusion."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, since their enlightenment is fully perfected, you should know that bodhisattvas are not attached to the dharma, and do not seek liberation from the dharma. They do not hate *saṃsāra* and do not love nirvana. They do not venerate one for keeping the precepts, nor despise the person who breaks them. They are not in awe of the adept practitioner and do not look down on the beginner. Why? Because they are all enlightened. It is like vision seeing an object. The vision completely pervades without experiencing like or dislike. Why? Vision, in essence has no duality, therefore there is neither like nor dislike."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, these bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age who cultivate this mind and are able to fully consummate it, have neither cultivation nor consummation. Their Perfect Enlightenment illuminates everywhere, and is perfectly still, without duality. Here, Buddha-worlds a quintillion times as many as the incalculable amount of grains of sand in the Ganges river haphazardly arise and cease like flowers in the sky. There is neither sameness nor difference, neither bondage nor freedom. Now you know for the first time that all sentient beings are originally perfect buddhas; that *saṃsāra* and nirvana are like last night's dream."

"Good sons, since they are like last night's dream, you should know that *saṃsāra* and nirvana have neither arising nor ceasing, neither coming nor going. In the actualization of this there is neither gain nor loss, neither grasping nor releasing. In the one who realizes, there is no 'naturalism,' 'stopping,' 'contrivance,' or 'annihilation.' In this actualization there is neither subject nor object, and ultimately neither actualization nor actualized one. The nature of all dharmas is equal and indestructible."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, these bodhisattvas use this kind practice, gradually advance like this, think in this way, abide in this way, and awaken others using these kinds of expedient means. If you seek this kind of dharma, you will not again be vexed."

Then the World Honored One, wanting to restate the gist of this, spoke a verse. He said:

Universal Vision, you should know  
The bodies and minds of all sentient beings  
Are only illusion.

The body is composed of the Four Elements;  
 The mind depends upon the Six Objects.  
 When the Four Elements disperse,  
 Who will be there as a synthesis?  
 In this kind of gradient practice  
 All is completely pure,  
 Unchanging, pervading the realm of reality.  
 Without contrivance, stopping, naturalism or annihilation  
 And also without any subjective "releaser,"  
 All Buddha-worlds are  
 Just like sky-flowers.  
 The three times are all the same  
 Ultimately without coming or going.  
 Bodhisattvas who have recently arisen their minds  
 And sentient beings of the degenerate age  
 Who want to enter the Buddha Way  
 Should practice like this.

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#### 4. Vajragarbha Bodhisattva 金剛藏菩薩

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the bodhisattva Vajragarbha rose from his seat in the great assembly and bowed his head to the Buddha's feet. He circumambulated him three times to the right, and then he knelt down with his hands clasped and said to the Buddha: "Greatly Compassionate World Honored One, you have lectured superbly for all these bodhisattvas about the purity of Perfect Enlightenment, the great *dhāraṇī*, the dharma practice of the causal stage and gradient practices according to provisional explanations. You have cleared away the sentient beings' clouds of darkness; all those at this dharma assembly, having received your compassionate instruction, have clarified their optical illusions and purified their wisdom eye."

"World Honored One; if all sentient beings are originally perfect buddhas, then how can they also possess ignorance? If sentient beings are originally ignorant, how can you say that they have always been perfect buddhas? If all the worldlings in the ten directions are originally perfectly enlightened, but later give rise to ignorance, at what point do all these tathāgatas regenerate these afflictions? My only request is that you not discard your limitless great compassion and that you reveal the concealed treasure to the bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age. This will cause bodhisattvas to gain unshakable faith, and allow all sentient beings of the degenerate age to gain access to this teaching which is a sutra instruction of the complete doctrine, such that they can permanently sever doubt and regret." Having said this, he prostrated himself to the ground. He asked this question three times in succession.

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Then the World Honored One, speaking to the bodhisattva Vajragarbha said: Excellent, excellent! Good son, you have asked well for the bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age about the Tathāgata's extremely deep and recondite final expedient means. This is the highest teaching given by the bodhisattvas, the fully revealed doctrine of the Great Vehicle, which is able to cause the enlightening bodhisattvas of the ten directions, as well as the sentient beings of the degenerate age to gain unshakable faith and permanently sever doubt and regret. Now listen well, and I shall explain this for you." Vajragarbha Bodhisattva received this instruction with reverence and great joy and those in the great assembly became silent and listened.

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, all worlds begin and end, are born and die, have prior and after, exist and do not exist, gather and scatter, arise and cease. This circular motion of going and returning without a moment's lapse, variously being grasped and released, is all cyclic existence. The nature of a Perfect Enlightenment that is discerned without having left cyclic existence is simply transmigratory. If you think you can escape cyclic existence in this way, you are completely off the mark."

"It is comparable to the way in which shaking the eyes can make still water appear to move, or the way that a transfixed gaze can enable the appearance of a fire-wheel. In the same way, clouds flying past the moon make it seem to move, and when you are in a moving boat, the shore appears to move. Good sons, all these things are in motion without cease, and even though the objects are already stationary, you can't get a fix on them. How can you possibly expect to get a glimpse of the Buddha's Perfect Enlightenment with the cyclical, samsaric, stained mind which has never been clear? Because of this, you are prone to give rise to these three mental disturbances."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, it is like an illusory eye disease falsely engendering a vision of sky-flowers. If the illusory eye disease is removed, you cannot ask: 'now that this eye-disease is cleared away, when will other eye-diseases reappear?' Why? Because these two things—flowers and eye-disease, are not interdependent. It is also like when the sky-flowers vanish from the sky. You can't say, 'when will the sky re-arise sky-flowers?' Why? Since the sky originally has no flowers, they do not arise and cease. *Samṣāra* and nirvana are the same as arising and ceasing; marvelous enlightenment illuminates perfectly, and is free from flowers or eye disease."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, you should know that the sky does not exist for an instant nor not exist for an instant. How much more so with the Tathāgata's perfectly enlightened marvelous mind and becoming the equal original nature of the sky?"

"Good sons, it is like smelting gold ore. The gold does not come into being because of smelting; it is already perfect gold, and after refinement will never again become ore. Even though it passes through endless time, the nature of the gold is never corrupted. It is wrong to say that it is not originally perfect. The Perfect Enlightenment of the Tathāgata is also like this."

[Chinese Source Text]

"Good sons, the marvelous perfectly enlightened mind of the tathāgatas originally has neither bodhi nor nirvana; it has neither accomplishment of Buddhahood nor non-accomplishment of Buddhahood; no false cyclic existence and no non-cyclic existence."

"Good sons, in the state is the consummation of the direct disciple path, there is complete severance of the karmic activities of word, thought and action."

"Yet they are still incapable of attaining their own actualized and manifest nirvana. How can you possibly expect to fathom the Tathāgata's state of Perfect Enlightenment using discursive thought? It is like trying to burn Mt. Sumeru with the fire from a firefly—it is impossible!"

"Using the cyclic mind, you produce cyclic views and you will never be able to enter the Tathāgata's ocean of perfect tranquillity. Therefore, I say that all bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age should first sever the beginningless root of cyclic existence."

[Chinese Source Text]

"Good sons, habituated discursive thought arises from the conditioned mind. The six data- fields, false conceptualization and conditioned energies are not the true essence of mind— indeed, they are like sky-flowers. But using discursive thought to discern the Buddha-state is like the sky-flowers further producing 'sky-fruits.' Circular false thoughts are useless here."

"Good sons, false, floating thoughts and numerous clever views are incapable of perfecting the expedient means of Perfect Enlightenment. Using this kind of discrimination, you cannot even formulate a proper question."

Then the World Honored One, desiring to restate the gist of this, spoke a verse, saying:

Vajragarbha, you should know  
 The Tathāgata's perfectly tranquil nature  
 Has never had a beginning or end.  
 If you use the cyclic mind  
 Discursive thought just revolves,  
 At most, reaching the limits of cyclic existence,  
 And you are unable to enter the Buddha-sea.

It is like smelting gold ore:  
 The gold does not exist because of smelting,  
 Yet crude gold, from smelting  
 Once subsequently perfected,  
 Never returns to the state of ore.  
*Sam̐sāra* and nirvana,  
 Worldlings and Buddhas  
 Like sky-flowers, are appearances.  
 Discursive thought is just an illusory phenomenon:  
 How can it penetrate falsity?  
 Only after you fully know this mind  
 Can you seek Perfect Enlightenment.

## 5. Maitreya Bodhisattva 彌勒菩薩

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the bodhisattva Maitreya arose from his seat in the great assembly and bowed his head to the Buddha's feet. He circumambulated him three times to the right, and then knelt down with his hands clasped. He addressed the Buddha, saying: "Greatly Compassionate World Honored One, you have opened wide the secret treasure for the bodhisattvas and have made all in the great assembly deeply awaken to transmigration and distinguish between the correct and mistaken. You have been able to impart the Fearless Eye of the Way and unshakable faith in Great Nirvana to the sentient beings of the degenerate age; they will not again chase after cyclic existence or give rise to cyclic views."

"World Honored One; if the bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age aspire to float on the Tathāgata's great tranquil ocean, how should they sever the root of cyclic existence? In the various kinds of cyclic existence, how many types of beings are there? How many differences are there in types of practice of the Buddha's bodhi? When we reenter the dirty and difficult world, what kinds of teaching devices should we establish to save all sentient beings? I implore you not to relax in your world-saving great compassion—that you clarify the Wisdom Eye of all practicing bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age, illuminate their mind-mirror, and completely awaken the Tathāgata's unsurpassed insight." After saying this, he prostrated fully to the ground. He asked this question three times in succession.

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the World Honored One, addressing the Bodhisattva Maitreya, said: "Excellent, excellent! Good son, you have questioned well on behalf of the bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age about the Tathāgata's mysterious, secret, subtle doctrine. You have enabled the Bodhisattvas to purify their Wisdom Eye, and allowed all sentient beings of the degenerate age to permanently sever themselves from cyclic existence. Their minds will awaken to their true

characteristic and they will possess the equipoise that comes with the awareness of the non-arising characteristic of existence. Now listen well, and I shall explain this for you." Maitreya received this instruction with joy and great reverence. All those in the great assembly became silent and listened.

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, all sentient beings transmigrate because of their possession, from beginningless time, of affection, attached love, craving and desire."

"Since all the different types of beings—those born from eggs, those born from wombs, those born from moisture and those born by transformation all receive their birth and life from sexual desire, you should realize that cyclic existence has attached love as its basis. This tendency to be gripped by attached love is abetted by the existence of all desires, therefore it is able to empower the continuity of *saṃsāra*. Desire arises depending upon attached love; life force exists depending upon desire. Furthermore, the attached love and life of sentient beings have desire as their root. Attached love and desire are causes, attached love and life are results."

"It is in reference to the objects of desire that you arise all likes and dislikes. When the object is contrary to the attached mind, you arise aversion and jealousy and go around creating all sorts of karma. It is because of this that you are reborn as a hell-being or a hungry ghost. But then, knowing that desire should be abandoned and attaching to the path of abandonment of karmic activity, you cast off evil and enjoy goodness; hence, you are reborn as a god or man. Again, knowing that you should dislike all forms of attachment, you let go of attachment and enjoy detachment. This greatly nourishes the root of attachment and you automatically produce conditionally enhanced positive states. But since all of this is cyclic existence, you still do not attain to the sagely Way. Therefore, sentient beings who desire to be free from birth and death and want to escape cyclic existence, first have to sever desire and rid themselves of attached love."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, when bodhisattvas appear in the world to teach, it is not based on attachment. It is only their compassionate intention to have the sentient beings discard attachment that they provisionally take on all kinds of desire and enter birth-and-death."

"If all sentient beings of the degenerate age can cast off their desires and remove love and hate, they will permanently end their cyclic existence. Seeking the perfectly enlightened state of the Tathāgata in their pure minds, they will directly attain awakening."

"Good sons, sentient beings, because of their base of desire, generate ignorance and manifest the distinctions and inequalities of the Five Natures. Because of the Two Hindrances there is manifestation of deep and shallow. What are the Two Hindrances? The first is the noumenal



hindrance which obstructs correct awareness; the second is the phenomenal hindrance which enables the continuation of *saṃsāra*."

"What are the 'Five Natures?' Good sons, if sentient beings have not yet been able to destroy the Two Hindrances, this is called 'non-consummation of one's Buddhahood.' If sentient beings permanently discard desire, first removing the phenomenal hindrance, but not yet severing the noumenal hindrance, they are able to awaken in the way of direct disciples and solitary realizers but are not able to manifest and dwell in the state of the bodhisattva."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, if all sentient beings of the degenerate age desire to float on the great ocean of the Tathāgata's Perfect Enlightenment, they should first arouse the determination to do away with the Two Hindrances. Once the Two Hindrances are subdued, one can awaken and enter the state of the bodhisattva; after permanently destroying the noumenal and phenomenal hindrances, one is able to enter the sublime Perfect Enlightenment of the Tathāgata, and able to fully accomplish bodhi and great nirvana."

"Good sons, all sentient beings without exception actualize Perfect Enlightenment."

"When you meet a Genuine Teacher, rely on the reality-practice of the causal stage that he sets up for you. When you follow this practice, both sudden and gradual will be contained. If you come upon the correct path of practice of the unsurpassed bodhi of the Tathāgatas, then there are no 'superior' or 'inferior' abilities of people: all accomplish Buddhahood. If, while seeking a Genuine Teacher, sentient beings meet one with mistaken views, they will not gain the correct awakening. Although this is called the 'heterodox nature,' the mistake is the fault of the teacher, and not that of the sentient beings. This is the 'distinction of the five natures' of sentient beings."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, it is only through their Greatly Compassionate expedient means that bodhisattvas enter the secular world, awakening the unenlightened, manifesting various forms and shapes, functioning in agreeable and disagreeable circumstances. It is only relying on the beginningless pure power of their vow to save all beings that they physically work together with these people and cause them to accomplish Buddhahood. Any sentient being of the degenerate age who would arouse the mind intensified toward great Perfect Enlightenment, must arouse the pure great determination of the bodhisattvas. He should say 'I hereby vow to dwell in the Perfect Enlightenment of the Buddha, to seek Genuine Teachers and not to plant roots with heterodox paths or practitioners of the Two Vehicles.' Practicing based on this vow, you sever the hindrances one by one. When the hindrances are gone, the vow is fulfilled. You will automatically ascend to the Pure Dharma Palace of Liberation, and actualize the marvelously adorned realm of Great Perfect Enlightenment."

Then the World Honored One, wanting to restate the gist of this, spoke a verse; he said:

Maitreya, you should know  
 That the non-attainment of great liberation  
 By all sentient beings  
 Is only due to desire;  
 Therefore they are drawn into birth and death.  
 If you can separate yourself from like and dislike,  
 As well as desire, hatred and ignorance  
 You will all perfect the Buddha's way  
 And permanently destroy the Two Hindrances,  
 Without needing any "distinctions in nature."  
 Seek a teacher who has the correct awakening  
 Practice the vow to arouse the bodhi-mind  
 Rely on Great Nirvana.  
 The bodhisattvas in the ten directions  
 All appear in the world of *saṃsāra*  
 Relying on the Greatly Compassionate vow.  
 Present practitioners  
 As well as sentient beings of the degenerate age  
 Should strive to eliminate all attached views  
 And directly return to Great Perfect Enlightenment.

## 6. Pure Wisdom Bodhisattva 清淨慧菩薩

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the bodhisattva Pure Wisdom rose from his seat in the great assembly. He bowed his head to the Buddha's feet, and circumambulated him three times to the right. He then knelt down with his hands clasped and addressed the Buddha saying: "Greatly Compassionate World Honored One; you have magnanimously explained for all of our group this inconceivable matter which was originally not seen and originally not heard. We who are presently here and have received your superb instruction have gained composure of body and mind, and received great benefit. I would like to request this: would you re-explain the nature of the Perfect Fulfilling Enlightenment of the King of the Dharma for those who have come for your teaching? What differences are there between that which is grasped and actualized by sentient beings, bodhisattvas and World Honored Tathāgatas? Please let sentient beings of the degenerate age hear this sagely teaching that they may conform to it, awaken through it and gradually become capable of entering." Having said this, he prostrated fully to the ground. He asked in this way three times in succession.

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the World Honored One, addressing the bodhisattva Pure Wisdom, said: "Excellent, excellent! Good son, you have asked well for the bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age about the Tathāgata's distinctions in level. Now listen well, and I shall explain these for you." The bodhisattva Pure Wisdom received this instruction with reverence and great joy. All the members of the great assembly became silent and listened.

[\[Chinese Source Text\]](#)

"Good sons, although the self-nature of Perfect Enlightenment is not a nature (like the previously described five natures of the Chapter of Maitreya), nonetheless, a nature exists which is concomitant with the arising of all natures. But there is neither acquisition nor actualization of it. From the point of view of reality, there are actually neither bodhisattvas nor sentient beings. Why? Bodhisattvas and sentient beings are nothing but illusory appearances, and since illusory appearances are erased, there is neither 'acquirer' nor 'actualizer.' It is like the eye not being able to see itself: in the nature's own equality, there is nothing that is 'equal.' Sentient beings are thoroughly confused and are unable to rid themselves of all illusory appearances. Since they have not extinguished [the mark of] cessation, in illusory activity they automatically make discriminations. If they attain accordance with the cessation of the Tathāgata, there is really neither cessation nor person who brings cessation about."

[\[Chinese Source Text\]](#)

"Good sons, all sentient beings have, because of a deludedly conceived 'self' and attachment to that self, beginninglessly never known moment-to-moment arising and cessation for themselves; therefore they arise likes and dislikes, and become addicted to the objects in the five sense fields. If they meet a Genuine Teacher, he will awaken them to the essence of pure Perfect Enlightenment. Discovering arising and cessation, they will directly know that this mind's very nature is that of anxiety. There may be a person who permanently severs that anxiety and experiences the purity of the realm of reality, but who allows his understanding of purity in turn to become a hindrance. This person is tending towards Perfect Enlightenment but is not perfectly free. He is called a 'worldling who is according with the nature of enlightenment.' "

[\[Chinese Source Text\]](#)

"Good sons, all bodhisattvas see their understanding as an obstruction. But even if they eliminate the 'understanding-obstruction' they still abide in a view of enlightenment. This 'enlightenment-obstruction' becomes a hindrance and they are not perfectly free. They are called bodhisattvas who have not yet entered the bodhisattva grounds who are according with the nature of enlightenment."

"Good sons, since the possession of illumination and enlightenment are termed together as "hindrance" and 'obstruction,' the bodhisattva is always enlightened without abiding. Illumination and illuminator simultaneously vanish. It is like the case of a person who cuts off his own head—when the head is cut

off, there is no longer any 'cutter.' Hence the use of the obstructing mind to eliminate all obstructions: when obstructions have been eliminated, there is no one to eliminate obstructions. These are called 'bodhisattvas who have entered the bodhisattva grounds who are according with the nature of enlightenment.' "

"Good sons, all hindrances are none other than ultimate enlightenment. Whether you attain mindfulness or lose mindfulness, there is no non-liberation. Establishing the Dharma and refuting the Dharma are both called nirvana; wisdom and folly are equally prajna; the method that is perfected by bodhisattvas and false teachers is the same bodhi; ignorance and suchness are not different realms; morality, concentration and wisdom, as well as desire, hatred and ignorance are all divine practices; sentient beings and lands share the same dharma nature; hell and heaven are both the Pure Land; those having Buddha-nature and those not having it equally accomplish the Buddha's enlightenment. All defilements are ultimately liberation. The reality-realms's ocean-like wisdom completely illumines all marks to be just like empty space. This is called 'the Tathāgata's accordance with the nature of enlightenment.' "

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, if all bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age would merely do this: at all times, not arise false thoughts; in false states of mind, not strive for cessation; when abiding in false objects, not try to impose a complete understanding; while lacking complete understanding, not try to analyze true reality. If these sentient beings, hearing this teaching, believe, understand, assimilate and remember it without being shocked or frightened by it, they are said to be 'according with the nature of enlightenment.' "

"Good sons, you should all be aware that these sentient beings have already made offerings to myriads of Buddhas a quintillion times as numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges river, and have cultivated their roots of virtue with as many great bodhisattvas. I call these people 'fully developed in omniscience.' "

Then the World Honored One, wanting to restate the gist of this, composed a verse. He said:

Pure Wisdom, you should know  
 The nature of perfect *bodhi*  
 Has no acquisition, no actualization  
 Neither bodhisattva nor sentient being.  
 Yet between the times of enlightenment and non-enlightenment  
 There are differences in level.  
 Sentient beings are obstructed by their understanding;  
 Bodhisattvas are not free from enlightenment.  
 Entering the bodhisattva stages they are forever tranquil  
 And do not abide in any mark.

Great enlightenment fully includes everything  
 And is called "pervasively according."  
 Sentient beings of the degenerate age  
 Whose minds do not arise falsity  
 I call  
 "Appearing in the world as bodhisattvas."  
 They have made offerings to countless buddhas  
 And are already replete with virtuous merit.  
 Even though there are many expedient teaching methods  
 As a sum, they are called "the wisdom that reaches everything."

## 7. Power and Virtue Unhindered Bodhisattva 威德自在菩薩

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the bodhisattva Power and Virtue Unhindered arose from his seat in the great assembly. He bowed to the feet of the Buddha and circumambulated him three times to the right. He then knelt down with his hands clasped and addressed the Buddha saying: "Greatly Compassionate World Honored One, you have analyzed for us at length this accordance with the enlightened nature, causing the enlightened minds of the bodhisattvas to effloresce and receive the Buddha's Perfect Voice, and causing them to receive excellent benefit which is not caused by religious practice. World Honored One, it is like a great city which has four gates on its exterior—those who come from various directions are not limited to one path. Similarly, all bodhisattvas who adorn Buddha-lands and who perfect enlightened wisdom are not limited to a single expedient method. World Honored One, my only wish is that you explain in detail for us the gradations of all the expedient methods. In general, how many kinds of religious practitioners are there? Please allow the bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age who are seeking the great vehicle to quickly attain awakening and to sport about in the Tathāgata's great ocean of cessation-extinction." Saying this, he prostrated to the ground. He asked this question three times in succession.

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the World Honored One, addressing the bodhisattva Power and Virtue Unhindered, said:

"Excellent, excellent! Good son, you have questioned well for the bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age about these expedient methods of the Tathāgata. Listen well now, and I shall explain them for you." The bodhisattva Power and Virtue Unhindered received this teaching with awe and joy; all those in the great crowd became silent and listened.

"Good sons, unsurpassed marvelous enlightenment pervades all the ten directions. It gives birth to all tathāgatas, who share the same equal essence with all dharmas. Thus, as far as the various practices are concerned, there is in reality, no duality. Nonetheless, the expedient methods which conform to

Perfect Enlightenment are numberless. Among these, there are three general types which all practitioners rely on, according to the difference in their inclination."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, some bodhisattvas awaken pure Perfect Enlightenment, and using the mind of pure enlightenment take quiescence as their practice. Then, by settling all thoughts they become aware of the agitated motion of the consciousness, and thus produce quiescent wisdom. From this, the mind, the body and external objects are permanently extinguished and they directly generate quiescent pliancy from within themselves. Because of this cessation and quiescence, the minds of all the tathāgatas in all the worlds in the ten directions are made manifest, just like the images in a mirror. This expedient method is called *śamatha*."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, some bodhisattvas awaken pure Perfect Enlightenment, then using the pure enlightened mind, they completely realize that the nature of mind as well as the faculties and objects are all based on illusory transformations. Then here they produce various illusions in order to remove illusion. Creating (transforming) all illusions, they enlighten the illusory multitude. From the production of illusion they are able to arouse great compassionate pliancy within. All bodhisattvas who follow this 'arising practice' gradually advance. Since the 'meditation on illusion' is not the same as illusion, it is also not the same as 'illusory observation.' Since both are [recognized as] illusory, illusory marks are permanently removed. This marvelous practice that is perfected by bodhisattvas is like a shoot growing out of the ground. This expedient method is called *samapatti*."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, some bodhisattvas awaken pure Perfect Enlightenment, and using the pure enlightened mind, do not attach to illusory transformation or the marks of quiescence, and fully realize body and mind both to be obstructions. Without awareness of the illumination of enlightenment (of *śamatha*) and without depending on all sorts of obstructions (the illusions analyzed in *samapatti*), they eternally transcend realms of obstruction and non-obstruction, receiving and using the world as well as body and mind, whose marks abide in the objective realm. It is comparable to the ringing sound in a bell which penetrates to the outside. Affliction and nirvana not hindering each other, they are directly enabled to produce the pliancy of cessation-extinction from within. Accordance with marvelous enlightenment and the realm of cessation and extinction is something that self and other, body and mind are unable to reach. Sentient beings and life are all just floating concepts. This expedient method is called *dhyāna*."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, these three practices are all close accordance with Perfect Enlightenment; the tathāgatas

in the ten directions achieve Buddhahood depending upon these, and all the various and sundry expedient methods of the bodhisattvas of the ten directions, with all their similarities and differences are without exception derived from these three activities. If you perfectly actualize these, that is the same as perfectly actualizing enlightenment."

"Good sons, if there were a person who cultivated the sagely path and elevated a quadrillion people to the stage of *arhat* and *solitary realizer*, he would not be equal to the person who heard this unobstructed teaching of Perfect Enlightenment and practiced it for only an instant."

Then the World Honored One, desiring to reiterate the gist of this, spoke a verse. He said:

Power-Virtue, you should know  
 Even though the unsurpassed mind of great enlightenment  
 Originally has not even two marks.  
 The expedient methods for according with it  
 Are numberless.  
 When I explain them according to general type,  
 There are three kinds:  
 Stable *samatha*  
 Is like a mirror reflecting all images;  
 As-illusion *samādhi*  
 Is like a shoot growing out of the ground;  
*Dhyāna* is only cessation-extinction  
 Like the sound in the bell.  
 These three kinds of marvelous dharma-practices  
 Are all accordance with enlightenment.  
 The tathāgatas in the ten directions  
 As well as all the great bodhisattvas  
 Are able to attain the Dao based on these.  
 The full actualization of these three activities  
 Is called "absolute nirvana."

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## 8. Voice of Discernment Bodhisattva 辨音菩薩

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the bodhisattva Voice of Discernment rose from his seat in the great assembly, and bowed to the Buddha's feet. He bowed to the feet of the Buddha and circumambulated him three times to the right. He then knelt down with his hands clasped and addressed the Buddha saying: "Greatly Compassionate World Honored One, this teaching is quite wondrous! World Honored One, for all the bodhisattvas engaged in the teaching and practice of Perfect Enlightenment, how many different kinds of these expedient methods are there? I beseech you to use expedient methods to teach those

at this great assembly and sentient beings of the degenerate age, and cause them to awaken to the marks of reality." Saying this, he prostrated to the ground. He asked this question three times in succession.

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the World Honored One, addressing the bodhisattva Voice of Discernment, said: "Excellent, excellent! Good son; you have questioned well for the bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age about the various practices of the Tathāgata. Now listen well, and I shall explain for you." The bodhisattva Voice of Discernment received this teaching with reverence and joy. All those in the great crowd became silent and listened.

"Good sons, the purity of the Perfect Enlightenment of all tathāgatas originally has neither practice nor practitioner. When they practice, all bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age depend upon the power of unenlightened illusion. At that time (the time of practice dependent upon illusion) there are twenty-five kinds of pure meditation applications."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Some bodhisattvas exclusively grasp ultimate quiescence, and through the power of quiescence permanently sever affliction absolutely and perfectly, and directly enter nirvana without rising from their seats. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *śamatha* only."

"Some bodhisattvas exclusively contemplate all-as-illusion, and by means of Buddha-power transform the world and carry out various activities, thoroughly putting into operation all the marvelous pure bodhisattva practices. In all continuous concentrations they do not fail in cessation of thought and quiescent wisdom. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *samapatti* only."

"Some bodhisattvas exclusively extinguish all illusions, and without activity in the world individually sever affliction. Affliction completely severed, they directly actualize the marks of reality. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *dhyāna* only."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Some bodhisattvas first attain perfect quiescence, and through the mind of quiescent wisdom shed light on all illusions and directly within these illusions arise the bodhisattva practices. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *śamatha* first and *samapatti* next."

"Some bodhisattvas actualize the perfectly quiescent nature through quiescent wisdom, and then directly sever affliction and permanently escape from birth and death. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *śamatha* first and *dhyāna* next."

"Some bodhisattvas use cessation-quiescent wisdom to re-manifest illusion-power and establish all



kinds of transformations to save sentient beings. Subsequently they sever affliction and enter cessation-extinction. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *śamatha* first, *samapatti* next, and *dhyāna* last."

"Some bodhisattvas use the power of perfect quiescence to sever all affliction. They then arise the pure, marvelous practices of the bodhisattvas and save all sentient beings. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *śamatha* first, *dhyāna* next and *samapatti* last."

"Some bodhisattvas use the mind empowered by perfect quiescence to sever affliction and then save sentient beings and establish objective realms. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *śamatha* first and subsequent simultaneous *samapatti* and *dhyāna*."

"Some bodhisattvas use the power of perfect quiescence to aid in the initiation of transformations, then subsequently sever afflictions. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of simultaneous *śamatha* and *samapatti*, followed by the practice of *dhyāna*."

"Some bodhisattvas use perfect quiescence to aid in extinction, and subsequently carry out activities to transform the world. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of simultaneous *śamatha* and *dhyāna*, who subsequently practice *samapatti*."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Some bodhisattvas use transformation power to make various kinds of accordance, and thereby attain perfect quiescence. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *samapatti* first and *śamatha* next."

"Some bodhisattvas use transformation power to create various realms, and thereby attain cessation-extinction. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *samapatti* first and *dhyāna* next."

"Some bodhisattvas use transformation power to carry out Buddha-works. Then, abiding in cessation-quiescence, they sever affliction. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *samapatti* first, *śamatha* next and *dhyāna* last."

"Some bodhisattvas use transformation power's unhindered function to sever affliction, and are therefore able to abide in perfect quiescence. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *samapatti* first, *dhyāna* next and *śamatha* last."

"Some bodhisattvas use transformation power for the activity of expedient teaching and then practice within both perfect quiescence and extinction together. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *samapatti* first, followed by simultaneous *śamatha* and *dhyāna*."

"Some bodhisattvas use the various arising functions of transformation power to aid in the attainment

of perfect quiescence and subsequently sever affliction. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of simultaneous *samapatti* and *śamatha*, followed by *dhyāna*."

"Some bodhisattvas use transformation power to aid in extinction, and subsequently abide in pure uncreated quiescence of thought. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of simultaneous *samapatti* and *dhyāna* followed by *śamatha*."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Some bodhisattvas use the power of extinction to arise perfect quiescence and abide in purity. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *dhyāna* first and *śamatha* next."

"Some bodhisattvas use the power of extinction, yet enter activity, and this negating function is practiced within all realms. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *dhyāna* first and *samapatti* next."

"Some bodhisattvas use the various self natures of extinction power, and abiding in mental quiescence, produce transformations. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *dhyāna* first, *śamatha* next and *samapatti* last."

"Some bodhisattvas use the inactive self-nature of extinction power to engage in activity, then purify the objective realm and return to quiescence. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *dhyāna* first, *samapatti* next and *śamatha* last."

"Some bodhisattvas use the various purity of extinction power, then, abiding in mental equipoise, they produce transformations. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of *dhyāna* first, followed by simultaneous *śamatha* and *samapatti*."

"Some bodhisattvas use extinction power to aid in the attainment of quiescence, and then give rise to transformations. These bodhisattvas are called practitioners of simultaneous *dhyāna* and *śamatha*, followed by *samapatti*."

"Some bodhisattvas use extinction power to aid in transformation, producing perfect quiescence which purifies and illuminates the world. These bodhisattvas are called simultaneous practitioners of *dhyāna* and *samapatti*, followed by *śamatha*."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Some bodhisattvas, using the wisdom of Perfect Enlightenment, harmoniously combine all of these, and in connection with all natures and characteristics, never separate from the enlightened nature. These bodhisattvas are called 'practitioners of the three kinds of accordance with the purity of the self-nature.' "

"Good sons, these are called 'the twenty-five applications' of the bodhisattvas. The teachings of the sutras are like the finger pointing to the moon. If you also look at the moon and completely understand, then that which is pointing is ultimately not the moon. All the various words and explanations of the Tathāgata that are used to awaken bodhisattvas are also like this. All bodhisattvas practice like this."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"If you bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age deign to use these 'applications,' you must maintain practices of purity, quiescence and contemplation and sincerely repent. Then passing through three weeks, you settle upon whichever of the twenty-five applications is indicated on your lot. With your whole mind and a repentant spirit, immediately choose one. Depending on what is indicated on the chosen lot, you will immediately know whether you are to practice the sudden or gradual. If there is one moment of doubt you will not be able to accomplish your assigned application."

Then the World Honored One, desiring to reiterate the gist of this, spoke a verse. He said:

Voice of Discernment, you should know,  
 All bodhisattvas'  
 Unobstructed pure wisdom  
 Is without exception, produced from meditation.  
 The so-called *śamatha*  
*samapatti* and *dhyāna*—  
 The three methods of sudden and gradual practice,  
 Have twenty-five applications.  
 There are none among the tathāgatas of the ten directions  
 And the practitioners of the three worlds  
 Who do not rely upon these methods  
 In their attainment of perfection of bodhi—  
 Except for suddenly enlightened people  
 And those who have nothing to do with the dharma.  
 All bodhisattvas  
 And sentient beings of the degenerate age,  
 Should always embrace these applications,  
 Following them, endeavoring to practice them.  
 Relying on the power of the Buddha's great compassion,  
 Before long they will actualize nirvana.

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## 9. Purifier of all Karmic Hindrances Bodhisattva 淨諸業障菩薩

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the bodhisattva Purifier of All Karmic Hindrances arose from his seat in the great assembly. He bowed to the Buddha's feet, and circumambulated him three times to the right. He then knelt down with his hands clasped and addressed the Buddha, saying: "Greatly Compassionate World Honored One, you have explained at length for all of us this inconceivable matter of the aspects of the practice of the causal stage of all Tathāgatas, enabling all in the great assembly to gain that which they have never had. Having had this chance to see the Tamer, all of their passage through realms of suffering for countless kalpas seems as if it were but an instant of thought. We bodhisattvas have been greatly encouraged."

World Honored One, if this enlightened mind is originally pure, what kind of defilements cause sentient beings to be suffer in delusion and not enter? My only request is that you thoroughly reveal the nature of phenomena [dharmas], and cause those in this great assembly and sentient beings of the degenerate age to create the "future eye." After finishing this speech, he prostrated himself to the ground. He asked this three times in succession.

[\[Chinese Source Text\]](#)

Then the World Honored One, addressing the bodhisattva Purifier of All Karmic Hindrances, said: "Excellent, excellent! Good son, you have asked well for sentient beings of the degenerate age about the skillful methods of the Tathāgata. Listen well, and I shall explain for you." The bodhisattva Purifier of All Karmic Hindrances reverently and joyfully received this teaching; those in the great assembly became silent and listened.

[\[Chinese Source Text\]](#)

"Good sons, from beginningless time all sentient beings deludedly conceive and attach to the existence of 'self,' 'person,' 'sentient being' and 'lifespan' —they discern these four distortions to be a real self-essence."

"From this they directly give rise to the two states of like and dislike. In this false essence, they again attach to falsehood. These two delusions interact to produce the path of deluded activity [karma], and since there is deluded karma, they deludedly perceive transmigration. Those who come to dislike *saṃsāra* deludedly perceive nirvana, and because of this are unable to enter pure enlightenment. It is not that enlightenment rejects those who are capable of entry—rather, it is because those capable of entry do not awaken and enter. Therefore whether one's thoughts are jumping around or silenced—both conditions ultimately revert to delusion. Why? Because there is beginningless originally arisen ignorance which becomes the subjective ego; thus all sentient beings produce the eye of ignorance. The various natures of body, mind, etc., are nothing but ignorance. Take for example the person who does not want to end his own life. Therefore, you should know there is enjoyment of 'selfhood' when things go well. When things don't go as one likes, then hatred and anger arise. Since this mind of

like/dislike nourishes ignorance, those who strive to cultivate the way never attain it."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, what is the 'trace of self' ? It is that which is witnessed by the mind of sentient beings. Good sons, when you are in good health you naturally forget about your body. But when the body becomes sick, and you make an effort correct the infirmity, with the slightest application of moxibustion and acupuncture you are immediately aware of your existence as a self. Thus, it is only in reference to this 'witnessing' that you perceive and grasp to an apparent self-essence. Good sons, every kind of witnessing from this level up to the Tathāgata's perfect perception of pure nirvana, is all the 'trace of self' "

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, what is the 'trace of person?' It is the cognition by sentient beings of the prior "witnessing." Good sons, once the self is cognized it is not again recognized in the same way. It is the same in the case where that which is cognized is non-self. This 'cognition' which has gone beyond every kind of 'witnessing,' is the 'trace of person.' Good sons, if, from this level of basic recognition of self up to the perfect recognition of nirvana as self, completely including the witnessing of principle, there remains in the mind even the smallest remainder of cognition, all are called the 'trace of person.' "

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, what is the 'trace of sentient being?' It is that which is beyond the self- witnessing and cognition of the minds of all sentient beings. Good sons, take for example the person who says "I am a sentient being." What this person has called 'sentient being,' is neither self nor other. Why is it not self? Since self is 'sentient being,' it is not self. Why is it not other? Since the self is sentient being, therefore it is not other. Good sons, what sentient beings realize in witnessing and realize in cognition is nothing more than the traces of self and person. That which does not reach the traces of self and sentient being, yet which remains as realized, is the trace of sentient being."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, what is the 'trace of lifespan?' This refers to that which sentient beings realize through the mind's illuminating pure awareness. Good Sons, that which is not perceivable by the totality of karmic wisdom is just like the life-faculty. It is like hot water melting ice: there is no discrimination of the existence of ice or knowledge of the ice's melting. The non-existence of a self and the awareness of a self are just like this. Good sons, when one sees with the mind's illumination, all these awarenesses are nothing but defilement. Since that of which the awarenesses are aware is not separate from defilement, it is called the 'trace of lifespan.' "

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, sentient beings of the degenerate age do not perceive the Four Traces, and though they may struggle through many kalpas of difficult practice while cultivating the Dao, it is still only conditioned existence. They are ultimately incapable of consummating the fruits of sagehood."

Why? Since they regard these traces of self to be nirvana, and they regard their witnessing and cognition to be consummation of enlightenment. It is like a man who mistakes a thief for his son. His family's holdings will always come up short. Why? Because the lover of self also loves nirvana, and takes the suppression of self as the characteristic of nirvana. The hater of self also hates *saṃsāra*. Not knowing that it is the attached love itself that is actually *saṃsāra*, he singles out *saṃsāra* for hatred, calling it "non- liberation."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"How can you know this dharma as 'non-liberation?' Good sons, these sentient beings of the degenerate age who are practicing bodhi regard the ego's infinitesimal perception as their own purity, and are therefore unable to penetrate to the root of self-trace. If someone praises their [mistaken] dharma, then they will be overjoyed and immediately try to save him. But if someone criticizes their attainments, they will be filled with anger and resentment."

"Hence, you can know that the trace of self is being firmly held to; it is concealed in the storehouse consciousness and is playing freely throughout the faculties without interruption."

"Good sons, if these aspirants do not remove the trace of self, they will be unable to enter pure enlightenment. Good sons, if the emptiness of self is known, there can be no 'eliminator of self.' If holding to self, you expound this dharma, it is because you have not yet eliminated self. It is the same with 'sentient being' and 'lifespan.' "

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, sentient beings of the degenerate age mistakenly understand these diseases to be the dharma. Therefore they are called 'the pitiable.' Even though they struggle with great effort, they merely exacerbate their various diseases, and therefore are unable to enter pure enlightenment."

"Good sons, sentient beings of the degenerate age do not discern the Four Traces, and erroneously taking the understanding and practice of the Tathāgata to be their own practice, they ultimately do not accomplish enlightenment. Thus there are sentient beings who understand non-attainment to be attainment and regard non-actualization as actualization. When they see a genuine adept practitioner, they are filled with jealousy. It is exactly because these sentient beings do not sever their love of self that they are unable to enter pure enlightenment."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, sentient beings of the degenerate age hope for Buddhahood but do not exert themselves to achieve awakening; they merely extend their intellectual knowledge, further enhancing the view of self. What they should do is just endeavor to subdue the afflictions and arouse great courage: attain what they have not attained, sever what they have not severed. Not allowing the greed, anger, love, pride, flattery, perversion, jealousy and envy which are directed at the objective realm to arise, and extinguishing all love and attachment to self and other 悠 call these people 'gradually consummated.' Finding a Genuine Teacher, you will not fall into mistaken views. Therefore it is called the 'true dharma in the degenerate age.' "

"But if you discriminate, and have a special feeling of desire or dislike regarding the [kind of teacher] you are seeking, you will be unable to enter the ocean of pure enlightenment."

Then the World Honored One, desiring to reiterate the gist of this, spoke a verse. He said:

Purifier of Karma, you should know  
 That because of attachment to and love of self  
 All sentient beings  
 Deludedly transmigrate without beginning.  
 Not removing four kinds of traces  
 They cannot accomplish bodhi.  
 Since love and hatred arise in the mind  
 And flattery and perversion remain in all thoughts  
 There is much delusion and grief;  
 You are unable to enter the citadel of enlightenment.  
 If you wish to be able to return to the enlightened realm,  
 First leave all desire, hatred and ignorance.  
 When the dharma of love does not remain in the mind  
 You can gradually Perfect Enlightenment.  
 The self originally does not exist:  
 How can love and hatred arise?  
 If this person seeks a Genuine Teacher  
 He will never fall into evil views.  
 But if "something separate to be sought" arises in his mind  
 There will ultimately be no consummation of enlightenment.

## 10. Universal Enlightenment Bodhisattva 普覺菩薩

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the bodhisattva Universal Enlightenment arose from his seat in the great assembly. He bowed to the Buddha's feet and circumambulated three times to the right. He then knelt down with hands

clasped and addressed the Buddha, saying: "Greatly Compassionate World-Honored One. You have explained clearly the meditation maladies, allowing the bodhisattvas to attain that which they have not yet experienced."

"Their consciousnesses have been completely stilled and they have attained great tranquillity. World Honored One, as the sentient being's departure from the age of the Buddha becomes gradually more distant, the sages and worthies conceal themselves, while the mistaken dharma grows and spreads. What kind of person should we have the sentient beings seek? On what kind of teachings should they rely? What kind of practice should they do? What kind of maladies should they remove, and what kind of resolution should we make, so as to prevent the blind multitude from falling into mistaken views?" Having said this, he prostrated himself to the ground. He asked this question three times in succession.

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the World Honored One, addressing the bodhisattva Universal Enlightenment, said: "Excellent, excellent! Good Son, you have been able to question the Tathāgata on this kind practice which is able to impart to all sentient beings the fearless Eye of the Way and cause them to attain the sagely Way. Now listen well, and I shall teach you." The bodhisattva Universal Enlightenment received this teaching with great joy. Those in the great assembly became silent and listened.

Good Sons, sentient beings of the degenerate age must arouse "great mind" and seek Genuine Teachers. Those who want to practice should seek out only someone with correct insight, whose thoughts do not abide in characteristics, who is not attached to the realms of the *arhats* and solitary realizers, and whose mind is constantly pure even while manifesting the world's afflictions.

"Even while pointing out your various faults, he praises your practices of purity, and prevents you from breaking the precepts. If you find this kind of person, you can attain Unsurpassed Correct Universal True Enlightenment. Sentient beings of the degenerate age who meet this kind of person should make offerings to him, not sparing body or life, even as far as holding on to property, wife, children and retainers. This Genuine Teacher constantly demonstrates purity throughout the four postures. Although he points all kinds of errors and difficulties, his mind lacks pride. Good Sons, if you do not arouse any negative feelings toward this Good Friend, you will ultimately be able to accomplish Correct Enlightenment. Your mind-flower will blossom, illuminating the worlds of the ten directions."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Good Sons, the subtle dharma that is actualized by this Genuine Teacher should be free from the Four Maladies. What are the Four Maladies? The first is the malady of "contrivance." Say, for example, there is someone who says "based on my original mind I shall carry out various practices"



and wants to achieve Perfect Enlightenment. Since the nature of Perfect Enlightenment is not something which can be attained by contrivance, it is called a "malady."

The second is the "naturalist" malady. Say, for example there is someone who says "We should presently neither cut off *saṃsāra* nor seek nirvana. *saṃsāra* and nirvana actually lack any conception of arising and ceasing. We should just naturally go along with the various natures of reality" and wants to achieve Perfect Enlightenment. Since the nature of Perfect Enlightenment does not come about through accepting things as they are, this is called a "malady."

The third is the "stopping" malady. Say, for example, there is someone who says "from my present thought, I shall permanently stop all thoughts and thus apprehend the cessation and equanimity of all natures" and wants to achieve Perfect Enlightenment. Since the nature of Perfect Enlightenment is not met through the stopping of thoughts, it is called a "malady."

The fourth is the "annihilation" malady. Say, for example, there is someone who says "I will now permanently annihilate all defilements. Body and mind are ultimately empty, lacking anything. How much more should all the false realms of the sense organs and their objects be permanently erased" and seeks Perfect Enlightenment. Since the characteristic of the nature of Perfect Enlightenment is not annihilation, it is called a "malady."

When you are free from the Four Maladies you will be aware of purity. The making of this observation is called "correct insight." Any other insight is called "mistaken insight."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, sentient beings of the degenerate age should exhaust their life energies in making offerings to Good Buddhist Friends and serving Genuine Teachers. If the Genuine Teacher becomes close and familiar with you, you should not be proud. If he is distant, you should not be resentful. The states of unpleasantness and pleasantness are just like the empty sky. Fully realize that body and mind are ultimately equalized and that you share the same essence with all sentient beings without difference. If you practice in this way you will enter Perfect Enlightenment."

"Good sons, when sentient beings of the degenerate age are unable to accomplish the Way, it is because of the presence of beginningless seeds of self and other, like and dislike. Therefore they are not liberated. If there is someone who looks upon his enemy as the same as his father and mother 誹 whose mind completely lacks duality, then he will eliminate all maladies. Then within all dharmas, self and other, like and dislike will also be eliminated in the same way."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good Sons, all sentient beings of the degenerate age who want to seek Perfect Enlightenment should make their resolution, saying the following: 'I vow to cause every sentient being throughout the

universe to enter the ultimate Perfect Enlightenment.' "

"Within that Perfect Enlightenment there is no attachment to 'enlightenment' nor are there any of the traces of self, person etc. If you make this kind of resolve, you will not fall into mistaken views."

Then the World Honored One, wanting to restate the gist of this, delivered a verse, saying:

Universal Enlightenment, you should know  
 That sentient beings of the degenerate age  
 Who desire to find a Genuine Teacher  
 Must look for one with the Right View  
 Whose mind is far removed from the Two Vehicles  
 Who does not break the precepts  
 And whose root of the precepts is constantly pure.  
 And in regard to the dharma has removed the Four Maladies,  
 Which are called contrivance, stopping, naturalism and annihilation.  
 If he becomes intimate with you, don't be proud  
 And if he is distant, don't be resentful.  
 Observing various realms, your mind will then produce the miraculous.  
 And if you leave home like the Buddha  
 You save all sentient beings  
 So that they ultimately enter Perfect Enlightenment.  
 Free from the traces such as "self" and "person"  
 You constantly rest in wisdom  
 You naturally attain transcendence of mistaken views  
 Actualizing enlightenment and parinirvana.

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## 11. Perfect Enlightenment Bodhisattva 圓覺菩薩

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the bodhisattva Perfect Enlightenment arose from his seat in the great assembly, bowed his head to the Buddha's feet and circumambulated him three times to the right. He knelt down with his hands clasped, and addressed the Buddha, saying: "Greatly Compassionate World Honored One. You have extensively explained pure enlightenment for us, as well as various expedient methods. You have caused the capacities of sentient beings of the degenerate age to be greatly quickened. World Honored One. Those of us present here have already awakened. But what about the case, after your passing away, of the sentient beings of the degenerate age who have not yet been able to awaken? How should they conduct meditation retreats to cultivate this pure realm of Perfect Enlightenment? And in the practice of the three meditations within Perfect Enlightenment, what are the initial steps? I only beg for your great compassion so that you will confer great benefit on the members of this great assembly and the sentient beings of the degenerate age." After saying this, he prostrated fully to the

ground. He asked this question three times in succession.

[Chinese Source Text]

Then the World Honored One, addressing the bodhisattva Perfect Enlightenment, said: "Excellent! Excellent! Good Son, you have questioned well to the Tathāgata about these kind of expedient means in order to confer great benefit on the sentient beings. Now listen well, and I shall explain for you." The bodhisattva Perfect Enlightenment received this teaching with great joy. All those in the great assembly became silent and listened.

[Chinese Source Text]

"Good Sons, among all sentient beings, whether it is when the Buddha is alive, or after he has passed away, or even during the period of the degeneration of the dharma, there are a number who have the aptitude for Mahayana and who have faith in the Buddha's mysterious mind of great Perfect Enlightenment, and who want to practice it. If they are living in the temple with many other followers, then they have numerous commitments and so they should just analyze according to the situation, as I have already taught."

"On the other hand, if they are not bound by commitments then they should erect a site of enlightenment and institute an intensive retreat. A long-term retreat should be one hundred and twenty days. A medium-length retreat should be one hundred days. A short one, eighty days, sitting quietly in a pure environment. If the Buddha is present, then you can directly correct your thoughts. If he has already passed away, then set up an image of him, and letting your mind abide in the mental picture of this image, you can bring about correct mindfulness, just the same as when he was here. After hanging up the banners and flowers, go through a period of three weeks, making obeisance to the names of all the Buddhas in the ten directions repenting and confessing all of your sins. Passing through three weeks with your thoughts focused, you will encounter excellent states of consciousness, and your mind will attain pliancy."

"If you pass through to the beginning of the retreat, then for three months you will abide in stillness, and carry out the pure quiet sitting of the bodhisattvas, with your mind free from the designs of the direct disciples and from involvements with other practitioners."

"When you come to the day of the retreat, in front of the Buddha, say this: "I, bhikṣu/bhikṣuni/upasaka/upasika so-and-so, would board the vehicle of the bodhisattvas, cultivate their practices of cessation-extinction and enter with them into their abiding in the pure marks of the real. I take great Perfect Enlightenment as my temple, with body and mind dwelling peacefully in the wisdom of the equality of the nature. Since the self-nature of nirvana is not restricted in any way, I now respectfully pray that I may not abide in the views of the direct disciples. And I will abide for three months of quiet retreat with the tathāgatas and great bodhisattvas of the ten directions. Since I

will be cultivating the bodhisattva's great causes and conditions of unsurpassed marvelous enlightenment, I will not be constrained by the limitations of the other practitioners." "

"Good sons, this is called 'the bodhisattvas' exemplifying silent retreat.' After passing through the three terms, you can practice anywhere without obstruction."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, if, when these practicing sentient beings of the degenerate age who seek the Way of the bodhisattvas enter the three meditation terms, they experience meditational states which are different from those outlined in this sutra, they should not attach to them."

"Good sons, those sentient beings who will practice *śamatha* must first grasp perfect quiescence, not arising any cogitation. Quiescence taken to its furthest limit results directly in enlightenment. If you can have this kind of initial quiescence, then proceeding from one body, enlightenment will extend like this throughout a whole world. Good Sons, when enlightenment fully pervades a whole world, if there is one sentient being within that world who arises a single thought, all, without exception will know it. The same is true in the case of a hundred thousand worlds. If it is not one of the meditational states about which you were previously instructed, you should not attach to it."

"Good sons, those sentient beings who want to practice *samapatti* should first become mindful of all the tathāgatas of the ten directions and all the bodhisattvas of all the worlds in the ten directions. Depending on their various methods they should grow by degrees through practice, struggling against suffering towards *samādhi*, broadly manifesting the great vow to save sentient beings, the perfumation of which creates seeds. But if it is not one of the states about which you were previously instructed, you should not attach to it."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, if these sentient beings want to practice *dhyāna*, they must first utilize the method of breath observance, and in the depths of their mind become fully aware of the arising, abiding and cessation of each thought. They must be clear in their discrimination of the breath count and practice it pervasively during each one of the four postures. There is no limit to how far this mindfulness of the discrimination of breaths can penetrate, as one can gradually advance to the point where he can be aware, within the domain of one hundred thousands worlds, of the falling of a single drop of rain, as if it were an object presented directly to him. But if it is really not one of the states of mind about which you were previously instructed, then afterwards you should not attach to it. These are called the introductory expedients of the three meditations."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"If sentient beings pervasively practice these three kinds of meditation, and keep working diligently to

advance, they will be called 'tathāgatas appearing in the world.' "

"If subsequent sentient beings of the degenerate age of dull faculties desire in their hearts to attain the Way, but somehow always fall short of their goal, it is because of karmic hindrances from the past. They must strive for penance and confession and continuously re-arise their hopes. They must first sever love and hatred, jealousy, envy, flattery and calumny and strive for the unsurpassed state of mind. Since the three types of meditation are all the investigation of the same single matter, if one meditation doesn't work, try again with one of the others. Don't let your mind dissipate, and gradually strive for actualization."

Then the World Honored One, wanting to restate the gist of this doctrine, spoke a verse. He said:

Perfect Enlightenment, you should know  
 That all sentient beings  
 Who want to seek the unsurpassed  
 Must, at the outset of the three retreats  
 Repent of, and admit their beginningless actions  
 For a period of three weeks;  
 Thereupon they will have correct thought.  
 But if they do not experience the states as they have been taught  
 They should not grasp them.  
 In *śamatha*, perfect quiescence;  
 In *samapatti*, correct mindfulness;  
 In *dhyāna*, clear observance of the breath.  
 These are called "the three purifying meditations."  
 Those who diligently practice  
 Are called "Buddhas appearing in the world."  
 Those of dull faculties who cannot bring this into effect  
 Must continuously strive at repentance  
 Of their beginningless crimes.  
 When all hindrances are extinguished  
 The Buddha-state appears before your eyes.

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## 12. Most Excellent of Worthies Bodhisattva 賢善首菩薩

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the bodhisattva Most Excellent of Worthies arose from his seat in the great assembly. He bowed his head to the feet of the Buddha and circumambulated him three times to the right. He then knelt down with his hands clasped and addressed the Buddha, saying: "Greatly Compassionate World Honored One. You have revealed extensively for us and sentient beings of the degenerate age about this inconceivable matter. World Honored One: What names are applied to this Mahayana teaching? How should it be cleaved to and practiced? What kinds of merits will be obtained by

sentient beings who practice according to it? How shall those who cleave to and practice it be protected? And to what lands should this teaching be propagated?" Having said this, he prostrated fully to the ground. He repeated this question three times in succession.

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then the World Honored One, addressing the bodhisattva Most Excellent of Worthies said:

"Excellent! Excellent! Good Son, you have asked well for the bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age about the merits and names of this sutra teaching. Now listen well, and I shall explain for you." The bodhisattva Most Excellent of Worthies received this instruction with great joy. Those in the great assembly became silent and listened.

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, this scripture is that which is taught by billions upon billions of countless buddhas; it is that which is protected by the tathāgatas of the three times; it is that which is relied upon by the bodhisattvas of the ten directions; it is the pure eye of the twelve divisions of the scriptures. This scripture is called The Great Curative Extensive Perfect Enlightenment *Dhāraṇī*; it is also called The Sutra of the Fully Revealed Meaning; it is also called The Mysterious Royal *Samādhi*; it is also called the Tathāgata's Realm of Full Decisiveness; it is also called The Distinction of the Self-Nature of the Tathāgatagarbha. You should cleave to it and practice according to it."

"Good sons, this scripture expresses nothing but the realm of the Tathāgatas, and only the Buddha-Tathāgatas are able to fully explain it. If the bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age practice according to this sutra, they will gradually advance to Buddhahood."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good sons, this scripture is called the Sudden Teaching of the Mahayana, and sentient beings with the capacity for the sudden will awaken through it. But it also embraces the gradual practice of all sentient beings. It is like a great body of water which does not deny the entrance of any small stream; and mosquitoes and horseflies, as well as asuras may drink its water and take their fill."

"Good sons, say for instance there were a man, who with the purest of motivations, gathered the seven jewels in a quantity sufficient to fill three thousand galaxies, and then gave them all away for charity. This man's merit would not be equal to that of a man who heard the name of this scripture and understood the meaning of a single passage."

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

"Good Sons, say for example there was a man who taught sentient beings as many as a hundred times the amount of the grains of sand in the Ganges river such that they all attained the level of arhat.

This man's merit would not be equal so someone who explicated a half of a gatha of this scripture. If there is any person who hears the name of this sutra and believes in it fully without a shadow of a doubt, then you can know that this person has not only sown the seeds of blessings and wisdom with one buddha or two buddhas, but has cultivated his roots of goodness with countless myriads of buddhas, listening to this sutra-teaching."

"Good sons, you should protect sentient beings of the degenerate age who are practicing this, and not let evil spirits and heretics upset their thoughts or cause them to lose heart." Then the World Honored One, wanting to restate the gist of this, spoke a verse. He said:

Most Excellent of Worthies, you should know  
 This scripture is that which all buddhas teach  
 And that which all tathāgatas well protect  
 It is the eye of the twelve divisions.  
 It is called  
 The Great Curative Extensive Perfect Enlightenment *Dhāraṇī*  
 It is the expression of the realm of the Tathāgata  
 Those who practice according to it  
 Gradually advance to Buddhahood.  
 It is like an ocean which accepts all rivers  
 And gives all of the thirsty their fill.  
 If there were a person who donated the seven jewels  
 Enough to fill three thousand galaxies  
 It would not be equal to hearing this sutra.  
 If someone transformed countless beings  
 Such that they all reached arhatship  
 It would not be equal to the explication of half a gatha.  
 You must all, for the later generations  
 Protect those who give and receive this teaching  
 And not allow them to backslide.

[[Chinese Source Text](#)]

Then, from the midst of the great assembly, arose Fiery-haired Vajra-warriors, Pulverizing Vajra-warriors, Blue Vajra-warriors—altogether eighty thousand Vajra-warriors together with their retinues. They got up from their seats, bowed their heads to the feet of the Buddha, and circumambulated him three times to the right. Then they addressed the Buddha, saying "World Honored One, if sentient beings of the degenerate age are able to cleave to this Scripture of Mahayana Decisiveness, we shall protect them, as if protecting our own eyes and we shall protect as well the places where they carry out their practice. We Vajra-warriors shall guide these people, protecting them morning and night, such that they do not retrogress. Their households shall never suffer from calamity; sickness shall be eradicated; their material possessions shall be abundant and

they shall never suffer from poverty."

Then the Great Brahma Kings, the Kings of the Twenty-Eight Heavens, together with the Kings of Mt. Sumeru and the Nation-Protecting Kings, arose from their seats. They bowed their heads to the Buddha's feet, circumambulated him to the right, and addressed him, saying: "World Honored One, we shall also protect those who cleave to this scripture. We shall bring them tranquillity and not allow them to retrogress."

Then a Great Mighty Demon King, whose name was Kumbhanda, together with a hundred thousand Demon Kings, arose from his seat. He bowed his head to the Buddha's feet and circumambulated him three times to the right. He addressed the Buddha, saying: "I shall also protect those who cleave to this scripture by guarding them morning and night and not letting them retrogress. If an evil spirit should dare to approach within the area of ten miles to the place of the practitioner's abode, I shall smash him to atoms."

The Buddha having finished his preaching of this scripture, the bodhisattvas, the devas, nagas, raksas and the rest of the eight kinds of spiritual beings along with their retinues, as well as the Heavenly Kings, Brahma Kings and the rest of the great assembly, having heard what the Buddha taught, were all filled with great joy. They believed, embodied and practiced.

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## Notes

1. I have not found any places where I feel I have mistranslated the text, but there is some terminology that I would probably change on the basis of my deepened studies of Buddhist soteriology in the interim.[\[back\]](#)

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