



The Descent of Amida Buddha and attendants, Nanbokucho period, 14th century.

The Sukhāvativyūha-Sūtra *The Land of Bliss Sūtra*

[*The two Land of Bliss Sutras, known to Western students of Buddhism as the “Smaller” and “Larger” Sukhāvativyūha Sūtras, are foundational texts for Pure Land Buddhism. The two texts depict an ideal world, a “Land of Bliss” that lies to the west of our own, imperfect world. This distant world is the wondrous paradise of the Buddha Amitabha (Amitābha), the Buddha of Infinite Light. The two texts explain the conditions that lead to rebirth in that land and the manner in which human beings are reborn there. The following selection is a translation of Kumarajīva’s (344-413) Chinese translation of the original Sanskrit shorter discourse.*]

The Shorter Discourse
The Sutra of Amita Buddha
Kumarajīva’s Chinese Version, the Amito-jing

Preamble: The Setting and the Audience

§1. This I have heard. At one time, the Buddha was staying in the royal capital city of Shravasti, in Prince Jeta’s grove. He was staying in the cloistered park that the generous Anathapindada gave to the Buddhist Order in Prince Jeta’s grove.

§2. At that time the Buddha was surrounded by a large assembly of monks—one thousand two hundred fifty of them. These monks were all great arhats, highly respected among the people for their holiness.

§3. Among them were the elders Shariputra and Maha-Maudgalyayana, and Maha-Kashyapa, Maha-Katyayana, Maha-Kaushthila, Revata,

Chula-Panthaka, Nanda, Ananda, Rahula, Gavampati, Pindola Bharadvaja, Kalodayin, Maha-Kapphina, Vakkula, Anuruddha—and other great disciples like these.

§4. And he was also accompanied by an assembly of bodhisattvas mahasattvas; present were the bodhisattva Manjushri, the Prince of Dharma, as well as the future Buddha, the bodhisattva Maitreya, also known as Bodhisattva Ajita. The bodhisattva Gandhahastin, and the bodhisattva Nityodyukta were also there, with other great bodhisattvas like these.

§5. And the Buddha was likewise accompanied by a large crowd of countless gods, Shakra, known as Indra, the King of the gods, and many others.

The Main Discourse

The Land of Supreme Bliss

§6. Then, the Buddha spoke to the Venerable Shariputra: “West of here, a hundred billion buddha-fields away, there is a world system called ‘Supreme Bliss.’ In that field there is a buddha named ‘Amita.’ At this very moment he dwells in that faraway land, preaching the Dharma.

§7. “Shariputra, why is that field called ‘Supreme Bliss’? Because the living beings in that realm are free from all forms of suffering and they only experience all forms of happiness. Therefore, it is called ‘Supreme Bliss.’

§8. “Furthermore, Shariputra, all around this Land of Supreme Bliss, there are seven tiers of railings, seven rows of netting, and seven rows of trees. They are all made of the four precious substances. All around, they encircle the perimeter of this land. Therefore, that land is called ‘Supreme Bliss.’

§9. “Furthermore, Shariputra, in the Land of Supreme Bliss there are bathing pools made of the seven precious substances. They are filled with

the best water, endowed with eight good qualities: their water is always limpid, cool, sweet-tasting, light, soft, placid, healthy, and thirst-quenching. The bottom of these pools is completely covered with golden sand. In each of their four sides, they have steps made of gold, silver, lapis-lazuli, and crystal.

“Above, there are towered pavilions, adorned with gold, silver, lapis-lazuli, crystal, coral, red pearls, and agate. On the surface of the pools, there are lotus blossoms as large as cart wheels. These are blue colored, with a blue sheen; yellow colored, with a yellow sheen; red colored, with a red sheen; white colored, with a white sheen; they are delicate and fragrant.

“Shariputra, in the Land of Supreme Bliss, good qualities and ornaments like these are brought to perfection.

§10. “Furthermore, Shariputra, in this buddha-field celestial music is constantly heard. And the ground is made of gold. Four times a day, exactly on the hour, day and night, mandara flowers rain down from heaven. Early every morning, each living being in this land picks some of those exquisite flowers, places them in the hem of his robe, and travels to worship with these flowers a hundred billion buddhas in other worlds in the other regions of the universe. Immediately thereafter, each of these persons returns, in time for his forenoon meal, to this, his own world, and takes his meal and afternoon stroll.

“Shariputra, in the Land of Supreme Bliss, good qualities and ornaments like these are brought to perfection.

§11. “Moreover, Shariputra, in that land you will always see many flocks of rare and exquisite birds of many colors—white egrets, peacocks, parrots, shari and kalavinka birds, and those birds called ‘Living-Together.’ Doves of these birds gather to sing with soothing, exquisite voices four times a day, exactly on the hour, day and night. Their voices proclaim the tenets of the Buddha’s

teaching—for instance, they sing of the five spiritual faculties, of the five spiritual powers, of the seven aspects of awakening, of the Eightfold Path that is followed by those of spiritual nobility, and of many other aspects of the Buddha's Dharma. When the living beings in that buddha-field hear such song, they all immediately enjoy thoughts of the Buddha, of his Dharma, and of his Order, and keep these three in mind incessantly.

§12. "Shariputra, you should not say that these birds are actually born here as a result of their past evil deeds. Why not? Because the three undesirable courses of rebirth are not found in this buddhafield. Moreover, Shariputra, in this buddha-land even the names of the three undesirable paths of rebirth are not to be found. How then could they exist in fact? The birds that sing in this buddhafield have all been created by the Buddha Amita himself, by means of his miraculous power, because he wanted to have them broadcast the sound of the Dharma.

§13. "Shariputra, in that buddha-land, a subtle breeze blows, swaying the rows of jeweled trees and the jeweled nets, so that they emit an exquisite sound, like that of hundreds of thousands of diverse kinds of musical instruments playing together at the same time. All those who hear this sound enjoy spontaneously and immediately thoughts of the Buddha, of his Dharma, and of his Order, and keep these three in mind incessantly, bringing to mind the Buddha, bringing to mind his Dharma, bringing to mind his Order.

"Shariputra, in that buddha-land, good qualities and ornaments like these are brought to perfection.

The Buddha Presiding Over the Land of Supreme Bliss

§14. "What do you think, Shariputra? Why is this Buddha called 'Amita'—'measureless'? Shariputra, this Buddha's beaming light is measureless. It shines without obstruction into

buddha-fields in the ten directions. Therefore, he is called 'Amita.'

§15. "Furthermore, Shariputra, this Buddha's life-span, and the life-span of the human beings in his buddha-field as well, has a duration of measureless, boundless, countless, cosmic ages. For this reason too he is called 'measureless,' Amita.'

"Shariputra, ten cosmic ages have now passed since the Buddha Amita attained buddhahood.

The Inhabitants of the Land of Supreme Bliss

§16. "Furthermore, Shariputra, this Buddha has measureless, inestimable numbers of disciples that are auditors, all of them arhats. Their number cannot be grasped. The same is true also of the community of bodhisattvas in that land.

"Shariputra, in that buddha-land, good qualities and ornaments like these are brought to perfection.

§17. "Furthermore, Shariputra, all living beings born in the Land of Supreme Bliss will progress irreversibly in the path. Many among them are only one more birth away from the full awakening of a buddha. Their numbers are vast. Their numbers cannot be grasped. One can only speak of their spiritual careers in terms of measureless, boundless, incalculable, cosmic ages.

Exhortation

§18. "Shariputra, living beings who hear this should generate an earnest desire, wishing to be reborn in that land. Why? Because in that land one will be able to meet in one place persons of such high virtue as the many living beings I have described here. Shariputra, one cannot be reborn in that buddha-field, if one depends on the merit of only a few roots of goodness.

§19. "Shariputra, if good men or good women hear this explanation of the qualities of the Buddha Amita, and embrace his name, and keep

it in mind single-mindedly and without distraction, be it for one day, or for two, for three, for four, for five, for six, or for seven days, then, when their lives come to an end, the Buddha Amita, together with his holy entourage, will appear before them. At the time of their death, their minds free of any distorted views, they will be able to be reborn forthwith in Amita Buddha's Land of Supreme Bliss.

§20. "Shariputra, I have seen the benefit of this. Therefore, I say this to you: A living being who hears this discourse should aspire to be reborn in that land.

Confirmation: All Buddhas Praise Their Lands

§21. "Shariputra, in the same way that I now praise the inconceivable merits of the Buddha Amita, other buddhas, in the eastern regions of the universe, praise him—buddhas as many as the number of grains of sand in the Ganges. Each one of these buddhas—buddhas like the Buddha Akshobhya, the Buddha Sumeru's Emblem, the Buddha Great Sumeru, the Buddha Sumeru's Light, the Buddha Exquisite Voice, and others—each in his own land extends his broad and long tongue, encompassing all the worlds in their three thousandfold, great thousandfold, world systems. Then, each of these buddhas makes a solemn declaration, proclaiming these true words: 'O living beings, you should believe in this discourse, which praises inconceivable virtues—the discourse called Receiving the Protection of All Buddhas.'

§22. "Shariputra, in the same way that I now praise the inconceivable merits of the Buddha Amita, other buddhas, in the southern regions of the universe, praise him—buddhas as many as the number of grains of sand in the Ganges. Each one of these buddhas—buddhas like the Buddha Beacon of the Sun and Moon, the Buddha Splendor of Fame, the Buddha Great Heap of Flames, the Buddha Sumeru's Beacon, the Buddha

Inestimable Vigor, and others—each in his own land extends his broad and long tongue, encompassing all the worlds in three thousandfold, great thousandfold, world systems. Then, each of these buddhas makes a solemn declaration, proclaiming these true words: 'O living beings, you should believe in this discourse, which praises inconceivable virtues—the discourse called Receiving the Protection of All Buddhas.'

§23. "Shariputra, in the same way that I now praise the inconceivable merits of the Buddha Amita, other buddhas, in the western regions of the universe, praise him—buddhas as many as the number of grains of sand in the Ganges. Each one of these buddhas—buddhas like the Buddha Measureless Life-Span, the Buddha Measureless Banner, the Buddha Measureless Pennant, the Buddha Magnificent Sunlight, the Buddha Magnificent Moonlight, the Buddha Jewel Pennant, the Buddha Pure Beaming Light, and others—each in his own land extends his broad and long tongue encompassing all the worlds in three thousandfold, great thousandfold, world systems. Then, each of these buddhas makes a solemn declaration, proclaiming these true words: 'O living beings, you should believe in this discourse, which praises inconceivable virtues—the discourse called Receiving the Protection of All Buddhas.'

§24. "Shariputra, in the same way that I now praise the inconceivable merits of the Buddha Amita, other buddhas, in the northern regions of the universe, praise him—buddhas as many as the number of grains of sand in the Ganges. Each one of these buddhas—buddhas like the Buddha Heap of Flames, the Buddha Voice of the Invincible, the Buddha Unconquerable, the Buddha Descended from the Sun, the Buddha Netting Moonbeams, and others—each in his own land extends his broad and long tongue, encompassing all the worlds in three thousandfold, great thousandfold,

world systems. Then, each of these buddhas makes a solemn declaration, proclaiming these true words: ‘O living beings, you should believe in this discourse, which praises inconceivable virtues—the discourse called Receiving the Protection of All Buddhas.’

§25. “Shariputra, in the same way that I now praise the inconceivable merits of the Buddha Amita, other buddhas, in the regions in the lower regions of the universe, praise him—buddhas as many as the number of grains of sand in the Ganges. Each one of these buddhas—buddhas like the Buddha Lion, the Buddha Fame, the Buddha Beaming Light of Fame, the Buddha Dharma, the Buddha Banner of Dharma, the Buddha Upholder of Dharma, and others—each in his own land extends his broad and long tongue, encompassing all the worlds in three thousandfold, great thousandfold, world systems. Then, each of these buddhas makes a solemn declaration, proclaiming these true words: ‘O living beings, you should believe in this discourse, which praises inconceivable virtues—the discourse called Receiving the Protection of All Buddhas.’

§26. “Shariputra, in the same way that I now praise the inconceivable merits of the Buddha Amita, other buddhas, in the regions in the higher regions of the universe, praise him—buddhas as many as the number of grains of sand in the Ganges. Each one of these buddhas—buddhas like the Buddha Voice of Brahma, the Buddha King of the Zodiac, the Buddha Incomparable Fragrance, the Buddha Fragrant Light, the Buddha Heap of Flames, the Buddha Lovely Color of a Jeweled Lotus, the Buddha Jeweled Lotus Virtue, the Buddha Discerning All Meanings, the Buddha Sumeru’s Grandeur, and others—each in his own land extends his broad and long tongue, encompassing all the worlds in three thousandfold, great thousandfold, world systems. Then, each of these buddhas makes a solemn declaration, proclaiming these true words: ‘O

living beings, you should believe in this discourse, which praises inconceivable virtues—the discourse called Receiving the Protection of All Buddhas.’

Trust, Commitment, Embracing

Exhortation by Shakyamuni

§27. “Shariputra, what do you think? Why is this discourse called The Discourse of Receiving the Protection of All Buddhas? Shariputra, if good men or good women hear this discourse and keep it in mind, or hear the name of all buddhas, these good men and good women will all be protected and remembered by all buddhas, they will all become irreversible in their progress toward unsurpassable, complete awakening. Therefore, Shariputra, all of you should accept with faith these, my words, and the words pronounced by all buddhas.

Benefits of the Vow

§28. “Shariputra, those who have made the vow, are now making the vow, or will make the vow, and with it resolve to be reborn in the land of Amita Buddha, they all alike will not fall back from unsurpassable, complete awakening. They are already born, they are being born, or they will be born in that land. Therefore, Shariputra, good men or good women who believe in this should make a vow to be reborn in that land.

Exhortation by All the Buddhas: The Buddha’s Task

§29. “Shariputra, in the same way that I now praise the inconceivable virtues of all buddhas, all buddhas praise my inconceivable virtues, saying: ‘Shakyamuni Buddha has been able to accomplish this most difficult and marvelous task. In this Saha World, during this evil age plagued by the five corruptions—the corruption of the evil cosmic age, the corruption of views, the corruption of the afflictions, the corruption of living beings, and the corruption of the life span—he has attained unsurpassable, perfect awakening, and has

preached, for the sake of living beings, this Dharma that the whole world finds so difficult to believe in.'

§30. "Shariputra, you should know that during this evil age plagued by the five corruptions I have carried out this difficult task. I have attained unsurpassable, perfect awakening, and I have, for the sake of living beings, preached this Dharma that is so difficult to believe in. This was a most difficult task."

Coda

31. As the Buddha finished delivering this discourse, Shariputra, with all the monks, and the gods, humans, asuras, and all the other living beings in the whole world, having heard these words of the Buddha, rejoiced with his words and accepted them with faith. They then paid homage to the Buddha, and went their way.

Luis O Gómez, trans. *The Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light: Sanskrit and Chinese versions of the Sukhāvataīvyūha sūtras* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996).