

**ORIGINAL VOWS OF
KSITIGARBHA BODHISATTVA
SUTRA**

Chapter Ten

Commented by Khenpo Sodargye

2023 Edition

Dedicated to

Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche in deep gratitude and love

May your compassion and wisdom illuminate everywhere
and enlighten every sentient being.

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Chapter Ten

Comparing the Conditions and Virtues of Giving

This chapter mainly compares the merit of giving under different circumstances. Even though the amounts of the alms may be the same, the merit thus generated may vary greatly due to the recipients' and the donors' motivations. With the same donation but different motivations, some will gain great merit and some will not. This is why in this chapter the Buddha talks about the merit of giving under different conditions.

—Khenpo Sodargye

Lecture Twenty

August 24th, 2020

EFFICACY STORY: EXTEND LIFESPAN BY THE POWER OF KSITIGARBHA

We continue with the teaching on the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*. As usual, I will first share with you an efficacy story of Ksitigarbha statue. In the Song Dynasty there was a person named Chen Jian in the state of Tai. He was very filial and in order to take good care of his parents, he built a special house for them and also had two statues of Ksitigarbha and Avalokiteshvara made on their behalf. Not long after, Chen grew ill and died suddenly. Overwhelmed with grief, his parents cried over his death. About four hours later, however, he was resurrected. He prostrated himself before his parents and told them about his experience after death.

In the bardo, Chen was sad that he had not fulfilled his filial duty to his parents. Then all of a sudden, he arrived at King Yama's place. To his surprise, the two statues he made for his parents stood in the hall and King Yama was paying respect to them. Seeing Chen coming, King Yama held Chen's hand, and the two statues also

supported him from each side and walked Chen to the middle of the hall.

An elegant voice then came from the statues, saying to King Yama that Chen's filial duty to his parents had not yet finished so he should be sent back to the human world to continue his duty. "But Chen's lifespan has been exhausted," King Yama replied. The statutes then said, "One's life expectancy is unfixed and can be changed by other conditions. Since Chen accumulated great merit, why should not his lifespan be prolonged?"

Hearing this, King Yama consulted a book and found the following words: For anyone who fulfills his filial piety to his parents by making Buddhist images or statues, his lifespan can be extended by forty years—the first 20 years would be spent being filial to his parents, and for the second 20 years he would be cared for by his filial child. At this time, a Yama guard dressed in green told King Yama, "Chen's son would only live for ten years. Who will take care of Chen?" King Yama answered, "The Dharma King Ksitigarbha's words are decisive. We shall extend his son's lifespan also."

By then Chen was resurrected. That experience aroused his great faith in Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. He told many people about his experience and those who heard it all felt that his experience was extraordinary.

As we see from the story, although Chen built the statues of Ksitigarbha and Avalokiteshvara for his parents, Chen himself derived immense benefit from his own action. Most of the stories I have shared with you are set down in the *Records of Efficacy of Ksitigarbha Image* which is collected in the Successive Tripitaka. Likely as a result of the personal style of the compiler, the monk Chang Jin, the storylines of many stories he collected appeared similar. We may try to find other efficacy stories with different storylines in the future.

Every one of these stories is truly inspiring. After learning about these great benefits of engaging in the Ksitigarbha practice, we should try our very best to make Ksitigarbha statues, read the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, listen to the teaching on the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, and also rejoice in others' engagement in all these practices while we are still alive in this world. The merit generated from any of these actions is inconceivable.

As we progress in this study, I have found the audience to have shown greater interest in the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* than I had expected. Since it is already August, I will try to finish this teaching before the end of September. To receive the teaching of an entire sutra is not easy as you would need to spend much time and energy. Likewise, to give a teaching in its entirety is also a significant undertaking. I

look forward to the completion of this sutra and I hope nothing unexpected would interrupt our teaching.

Today we will start with the tenth chapter, *Comparing the Conditions and Virtues of Giving*. This chapter mainly compares the merit of giving under different circumstances. Even though the amounts of the alms may be the same, the merit thus generated may vary greatly due to the recipients' and the donors' motivations. With the same donation but different motivations, some will gain great merit and some will not. This is why in this chapter the Buddha talks about the merit of giving under different conditions.

THE PROPER ATTITUDE WHILE GIVING

Chapter Ten

Comparing the Conditions and Virtues of Giving

At that time, through [the power of] the Buddha's awesome spiritual penetration, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva rose from his seat, knelt on his knees, joined his palms, and said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, I observe living beings in the karmic paths and compare their acts of giving: some [acts] are small and some are great. Some beings then receive merit for one life, some receive merit for ten lives, and some receive great merit and benefit for hundreds of lives, for thousands of lives. Why is this? O World-Honored One, please explain this for me."

At that time, the Buddha told Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, "Now, in this assembly in the Trayastrimsa Heaven, I will speak on the

giving done by beings of Jambudvīpa and compare the virtues therein. You should listen attentively. I will explain for you.”

Kṣitigarbha said to the Buddha, “I have doubts about this matter, and I joyfully wish to listen.”



Through the blessing of the Buddha’s miraculous power, Kṣitigarbha spoke about his doubts. Based on his observation, when different beings practice generosity, the merit accrued from their acts varies greatly. Some simply receive a little return while others receive a bountiful return. Some receive blessings in one life, some in ten lives, and some in one hundred or even one thousand lives.

Ksitigarbha wondered what caused such big differences and asked the Buddha to explain this to the audience.

Let us imagine the spectacular scene and the big audience in the Trayastrimsa Heaven that included numerous ghost kings and their retinues, gods, and non-humans. Among such a grand assembly, the Buddha decided to speak about the acts of generosity performed by beings of Jambudvipa and compare their merit. He asked the assembly to listen carefully. Ksitigarbha expressed great interest in this teaching and joyfully asked the Buddha to talk about it.

As we see, even a bodhisattva as great as Ksitigarbha still relies on the blessing of the Buddha's mighty power to ask or answer questions. Great bodhisattvas attribute everything they accomplish and every quality they possess to the blessing of the Buddha's miraculous power. Ordinary practitioners should be even more so. Whatever ability or spiritual realization we have gained on the Dharma path is linked to the benevolence of our gurus as well as all our great lineage masters. However, unfortunately, some Buddhists today fail to acknowledge this crucial point. When they gain even a tiny bit of ability or reputation, they forget the kindness of their teachers. This is indeed an ungrateful attitude. As Buddhists, we should always have a sincere feeling of gratitude toward our benevolent teachers.

Here, the Buddha's teaching is mainly focused on the beings of Jambudvīpa. This is because Jambudvīpa confers a particular power on the effects of action. It is a place where the force of karma is more powerful and its effects are experienced more strongly. Beings in the other three continents, such as Uttarakuru, experience the results of past actions for the most part rather than creating new karma. The Buddha's commentary was directed mainly to the practice of generosity performed by beings of Jambudvīpa and a comparison of the merit therein.

People do attain different amounts of merit from their acts of generosity. Say ten people go to a monastery and each offers 100 RMB to the sangha or to a buddha statue. Because their motivations and purposes for making this donation may vary, some may gain merit for one life, some for ten lives, and some for one hundred, one thousand, or even more lives. This shows the importance of motivation and aspiration when performing virtues.

When the Buddha was about to address this issue, Kṣitigarbha expressed a strong interest in hearing it. Similarly, when we listen to Dharma teachings, it is crucial that we arouse interest and joy in ourselves. Every time we are going to listen to a Dharma teaching, whether in the shrine hall, on the radio, or through the Internet, we need to develop a sense of joy, "I am about to listen to Mahayana teachings. This is such a rare and precious opportunity

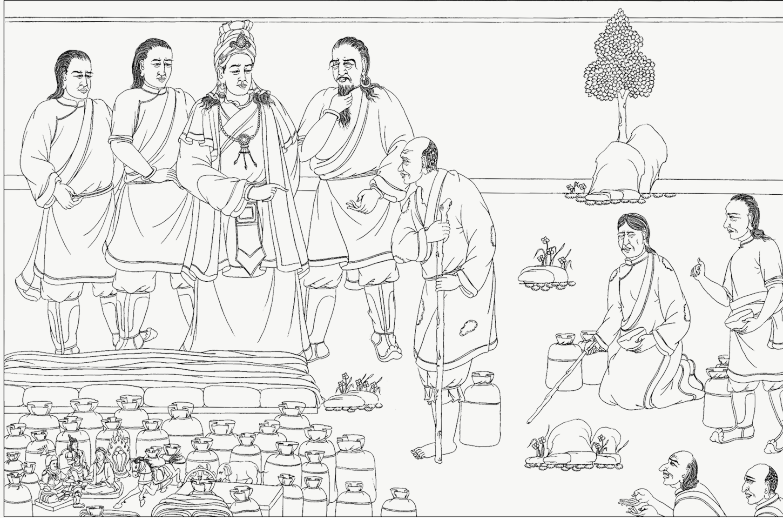
that I am so happy!” It is like the extreme joy one has when being offered a dream job. Or according to many sutras, the joy is indescribable because the opportunity to listen to the profound Mahayana teachings is indeed hard to come by for hundreds of thousands of kalpas. As the Buddha often said, “Human existence is rare to obtain; the Dharma teaching is rare to hear.” We should develop great joy and take delight in listening to the Dharma whenever we have such an opportunity.

This joyful attitude needs to be present no matter from whom we receive the Dharma teaching. Some of our Dharma friends may complain, “Need to attend the teaching again in the early morning! I am so tired of it. Not to mention the tutorial session after that! I am too sleepy. I should better sleep a bit longer. I will just tell my teacher I am off sick today.” In this case, listening to the Dharma has become a burden. We have to avoid this type of negative attitude. We should fully recognize its preciousness and joyfully receive the Dharma teaching like drinking delicious ambrosia. Since what the Buddha had taught was completely recorded in sutras, if we have the same joyfulness and eagerness in listening to the Dharma as Ksitigarbha had, we will for sure gain the benefit that is no different from personally listening to the teaching before the Buddha himself.

THE CONDITIONS AND VIRTUES OF GIVING TO THE POOR

The Buddha told Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, “In Jambudvīpa there are kings, high ministers, ranking officials, great elders, great Ksatriyas, great Brahmins, and others who encounter those who are the lowest and poorest and those who are hunchbacked, crippled, mute, deaf, mentally deficient, blind—people who are handicapped in various ways such as these. At the time these great kings and others wish to give alms, if they are able to do so with great kindness and compassion, a humble mind, and a smile, giving out gifts to all these people personally or through their representatives and comforting them with gentle words, the merit and benefit that these kings and others will obtain will be comparable to the benefit derived from the virtue of giving to as many Buddhas as there are grains of sand in a hundred Ganges Rivers. Why is this? These kings and others will reap such results, receiving merit and benefit, because they give rise to a mind of great kindness toward the poorest, lowest people

and those who are handicapped. For hundreds of thousands of lives they will always have an abundance of the seven jewels, not to mention food, clothing, and the necessities of life!



The Buddha started by analyzing the many acts of generosity performed by a group of distinguished people with high social status who possess wealth, fame, or successful careers, such as kings, ministers, officials, noble elders, the ruling class Ksatriyas, and brahmans. Not only people with high social status but also those who love to practice generosity, regardless of whether they are wealthy or not, are included here. These people will be frequently mentioned in the following texts, so we need to keep in mind who they are.

When these people from kings to brahmins encounter the lowest and poorest ones or those with impaired sense faculties such as the disabled, the mute and deaf, the mentally deficient, and the blind, they generate sincere loving-kindness and compassion toward them and give alms to them with a humble mind and a smile, either personally or through others, speaking to and comforting them with kind, gentle, pleasant, and mild words and without any harsh attitude or behavior in the process. If they give alms in such a way, the merit that accrues from their acts is tantamount to that of making offerings to as many buddhas as the number of the grains of sand in one hundred Ganges Rivers. Why? It is because they have generated sincere compassion and bodhicitta for those who really need help. With this merit, for hundreds of thousands of lives, they will be endowed with the wealth of the seven treasures, not to mention food, clothing, and the necessities of life.

A humble mind and a sincere smile are always needed to express one's kindness and compassion. When helping others, one's words should be soft and mild, comforting and loving, sweet and heart-touching. Some privileged people may give alms to the poor in an arrogant and condescending manner. You cannot even find a trace of joy in their faces but only sullen looks. Their words may also be disrespectful. This is a very inappropriate attitude.

In the Wisdom and Compassion Foundation (a charitable organization under the supervision of Khenpo Sodargye), one of the projects is to sponsor children from poor families who cannot afford school. When visiting those families, some of the staff may speak to them with a tone of contempt. This also sometimes happens with some of the staff at my primary school when they admit new students. It is best to accept as many children as we can, but if we have to reject a child, we need to inform him or her in a respectful manner. I tell my staff that by no means should we be insulting or sarcastic.

People tend to feel self-important and behave arrogantly when they are endowed with certain worldly merits and power. This is inappropriate and shows a lack of wisdom. Although we may be privileged in many aspects in this lifetime, there is no guarantee that we can carry them to our next life. Therefore, a humble and kind attitude is needed when interacting with anyone. Especially when we participate in charitable activities, we will likely meet people who are in need. Their emotions may already be very fragile and sensitive because they are asking for help from others and they are not sure how others would respond. Under such difficult circumstances, our expressions and behavior, either kind or uncaring, could have a tremendous impact on them and would leave a material impression on them. With this understanding, we

should show compassion and kindness whenever we are helping others.

If one follows the way to perform generosity described here, it would align one's body, speech, and mind with the Dharma. One should be in a humble gesture and with a kind smile, refrain from harsh and insulting words, and carry love and compassion in one's mind. We should all keep this in mind when we give alms. If we are able to be charitable in this fashion, the sutra says that the merit accrued from giving alms to the poor and disabled is tantamount to that of making offering to numerous buddhas.

As for how such an inconceivably great merit can be generated from giving alms to the poor, it is because of bodhicitta, a pure altruistic motivation of benefiting all beings equally. The text indicates that people of such kind character want to help anyone in need equally and without personal discrimination. This is a unique quality of bodhicitta. Bodhisattvas extend their compassion unbiasedly to all living beings and treat them equally. They would bring benefit to every being with their best effort. It is quite wrong if a person only venerates buddhas but disrespects ordinary beings, as stated in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*,

*What kind of practice is it then,
That honors only buddhas but not beings?*

Also, if one practices generosity out of selfish motivation, the merit can never be great. Only a generous act performed with a sincere altruistic intention is able to generate immeasurable merit. The *Treatise on a Great Man* says,

Giving alms to one person with compassion,

The merit accrued is as vast as the earth.

Giving alms to all beings with a selfish motivation,

The merit accrued is as small as a mustard seed.

One can clearly see the immense difference between a mustard seed and the earth. In the same way, there is a clear distinction between the merit of practicing generosity with an altruistic intention and that with a selfish motivation.

Compare the Merit of Giving Practiced by Shariputra and the Buddha

In the *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, it says that the generosity performed by ordinary beings is often transactional, i.e., they practice generosity for a return, whereas great bodhisattvas practice generosity unconditionally and they are willing to give everything they have, including their lives and limbs to all beings, and they even donate all merit generated from their giving to all beings. Such is the distinct difference between a bodhisattva's

generosity and that of an ordinary being. Even if their alms are identical, the merit accrued will be greatly different because of the different motivations. The treatise also says,

Although the alms being given are the same, the amounts of merit accrued vary depending on whether one's motivation is super or less. Once Shariputra offered a bowl of food to the Buddha. The Buddha immediately passed the food to a dog, and then asked Shariputra, "Which offering accrues greater merit? Is it your offering food to me or my giving food to the dog?" Shariputra replied, "As I understand the Dharma, it must be the Buddha's giving to the dog that accrues greater merit." Shariputra is foremost in wisdom among human disciples and the Buddha is the most supreme object for growing one's merit, however, Shariputra's offering to the Buddha accrued not as great merit as the Buddha's act of giving food to a dog, a much inferior recipient. From this, we learn that great merit is generated from the mind, not from the target. Shariputra's motivation was infinitely inferior to the Buddha's.

If we have to choose to whom we make offerings, the Buddha or a dog, most would certainly select the Buddha over a dog. However, what matters most while making an offering or practicing generosity is the mind instead of the recipient. Even if it was to the

Buddha who is the most supreme recipient of all that Shariputra had offered food, his act of offering generated less merit than the Buddha's generosity to a dog. The reason is that the Buddha's mind was vast and his compassion was boundless, and comparatively, as a shravaka, Shariputra was not completely free of selfishness as he offered food to the Buddha.

In Buddhism, recipients can be classified into different fields of offering. For example, there are the field of kindness which includes individuals such as one's parents, the field of compassion which includes beggars and the disabled, and the field of qualities which includes individuals such as realized bodhisattvas and buddhas. However, if one practices generosity with a vast and pure intention, even if the recipient is not a supreme field, one would still obtain immeasurable merit. In the *Account of the Previous Lives of Bodhisattvas*, it says,

*When practicing generosity,
Even if the recipient is not a pure being,
As long as one has a vast motivation,
The result accrued is immeasurably great.*

When we practice generosity, even if the recipient is not pure or noble, as long as our motivation is pure and motivated by the mind of bodhicitta, we would gain immeasurable merit. Sometimes

people may worry, “I made offerings to a particular guru but later found out that he is a charlatan. What should I do?” Encountering an impure recipient could be the result of our lack of merit to meet a qualified and pure recipient. Nevertheless, as long as our motivation is pure and vast, such as wishing to propagate the Dharma and benefit all sentient beings, even if the recipient himself is not pure, our act of generosity would still generate great merit. This is because our motivation is the key.

HOW SHOULD THE PRIVILEGED MAKE OFFERINGS?



“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if there are kings, Brah-
mans, and others who encounter Buddha stupas, monasteries, or
images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, sravakas, or pratyekabuddhas,
and if they then personally prepare and make offerings and give
gifts, these kings and others will be Sakras for three kalpas and

experience excellent, wonderful happiness. If they are able to dedicate the merit and benefit of that giving to the Dharma Realm, these great kings and others will be great Brahma kings for ten kalpas.



“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if there are kings, Brahmans, and others who encounter ancient Buddha-stupas, temples, sutras, or images that are damaged or dilapidated, and if they are able to generate the resolve to restore them—these kings and others then do so themselves, or they encourage others, as many as hundreds of thousands of people, to also give and form [wholesome] conditions—these kings and others will always be wheel-turning kings for hundreds of thousands of

lives, and those who practice giving along with them will always be kings of smaller countries for hundreds of thousands of lives. Moreover, in front of the stupas or temples, if they can give rise to the mind of [merit]-dedication, then such kings, others, and their helpers will all attain Buddhahood, for such results are measureless and boundless.

Anyone from kings to brahmans, if they ever encounter buddha stupas, monasteries, and images of buddhas, bodhisattvas, shravakas, and pratyekabuddhas and they prepare and make offerings to them personally, these people will take rebirth as Sakras and enjoy the supreme joy for three kalpas. If these individuals dedicate the root of virtue to the Dharma Realm, they would become Brahma kings, the most meritorious ones in the secular world, for ten kalpas. Here, making dedication to the Dharma Realm is a special expression often used in Han Buddhism which simply means dedicating the merit for the supreme awakening of all sentient beings, wishing them to attain the ultimate fruition of Dharmakaya.

Further, if they encounter stupas of buddhas who had entered parinirvana, such as Buddha Kashyapa and Buddha Shakyamuni, monasteries, sutras, or statues that sustain damage, and they resolve to repair them either personally or encourage others to participate in this virtuous activity, by this root of virtue, they will continuously take rebirth as universal monarchs for hundreds of

thousands of lifetimes. All others who participate in this virtuous act will continuously take rebirth as kings of smaller countries for hundreds of thousands of lifetimes. If they dedicate this root of virtue with the supreme mind of bodhicitta, they will all attain buddhahood. Such result is indeed immeasurable and infinite.

We see that people's attitudes toward generosity could vary greatly, something that may have nothing to do with their wealth but is very much influenced by their habitual tendencies. There are those who are not wealthy but who love to give alms. Even if they only have 100 RMB, they will donate half or even all of it to those in need. In contrast, some who are quite blessed in terms of material wealth are not at all charitable and would regard this as none of their business. There are also those who are particularly enthusiastic about collecting donations for certain causes such as restoring old temples and they constantly solicit donations from others. However, they would refuse to donate even a penny themselves. It would seem that the only part they contribute to the causes is to share the news with others. This is certainly not a proper practice of generosity.

When we make donations, we should avoid having a miserly and regretful attitude. For instance, if you had given more than you wanted and you now regret having given the amount, you may not be able to receive the merit because it is now ruined by your

regret. Some people may donate all they have when they go to a monastery such that they would not even have enough money to go home, making it necessary for them to ask others for help. If nobody answers their request, they might then turn to the buddha or bodhisattva statues to see if their offering would be returned, only to find out that the statues remain in silent meditation and have no response to their request. This is completely avoidable.

When it comes to repairing damaged Buddhist objects, back at the time when I was a teenager, ruined monasteries, torn scriptures, broken buddha statues, destroyed stupas, and fragmented Mani stone piles were everywhere in the Tibetan regions. Fortunately, most of the ruined monasteries have been restored. We also seldom find broken stupas or statues, except for wall paintings in certain monasteries that have been eroded by rain or certain statues that are under maintenance. Most Buddhist objects are now in good conditions. However, in a few regions and countries, Buddhist stupas and statues are being demolished for religious and political reasons and there is no opportunity to repair them. If we encounter structures such as old temples and statues that are being damaged, we should try to repair them.

The merit generated by virtuous deeds related to Buddhist objects such as stupas and statues is immeasurable and infinite. In the sutra *Avadanasataka*, there was a story of a bhiksu named Golden Color.

He got this name because he had an attractive golden complexion. The Buddha told of a man in the time of Vipasyin Buddha who passed by a stupa and noticed it had sustained minor damage. He repaired the damage, gilded it, and then made a wish to break free from samsara. By this virtue, he never took rebirth in a lower realm for as long as ninety-one kalpas, and wherever he was reborn, either as a human being or a celestial being, he always had a golden complexion. In the time of Buddha Shakyamuni, he became a bhikṣu named Golden Color and achieved enlightenment.

Other similar stories are also found in this sutra. In the time of Vipasyin Buddha, there was a child who once visited a relic stupa of Vipasyin Buddha. During his visit, he saw some minor damages on it, so he kindly called upon some others to repair the stupa together. After repairing, he also made the wish to break free from samsara. With this merit, for ninety-one kalpas, he was exempted from falling into a lower realm and wherever he was born, he was well revered by anyone who saw him, humans and gods alike. In the time of Buddha Shakyamuni, he became a bhikṣu named Revered-By-All and achieved enlightenment. As we can see, even a small merit accumulated from the repair of Buddhist stupas or statues brings boundless rewards in numerous future lifetimes.

Just as the merit accumulated from these deeds is boundless, the fault for destroying Buddhist stupas or statues is also inconceivably

grave. As we live in a relatively peaceful age, it is less likely that we could commit such grave faults. However, those who are a bit older than us in the last generation had gone through a turbulent period in the last century when they were forced to commit many negative deeds related to the Three Jewels. Had we lived in that chaotic circumstance, we might also have unintentionally or been forced to create severely negative karma that is difficult to purify.

Primarily as a result of our ignorance, some of us may have slandered the Buddha, denigrated the Dharma, maligned the Sangha, and may even have destroyed Buddhist scriptures and stupas before we started to follow Buddhism. Many of us may also have accumulated grave negative karma since beginningless time even though we have no memory of it. For these reasons, we should constantly try to purify our negative karma by applying its antidotes, such as reciting the Vajrasattva mantra, generating the aspiration of bodhicitta, or achieving the realization of emptiness. We should try our best to repent all our negative karma before our death so that we will not encounter any big obstacle at the moment of death that will otherwise prevent us from taking rebirth in the pure lands or attaining liberation.

THE VIRTUE OF HELPING THOSE IN NEED

**“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if there are kings, Brah-
mans, and others who see the old, the sick, or women in child-
birth and if in a thought-moment, they have the mind of great
kindness and provide them with medicine, food, drink, and bed-
ding to make them peaceful and comfortable, the merit and ben-
efit [of their giving] will be very inconceivable. For a hundred
kalpas they will always be lords of the pure-abode heavens, for
two hundred kalpas they will always be lords of the six heavens
of the desire realm, and they will ultimately become Buddhas.
They will never fall into the lower realms, and for hundreds of
thousands of lives they will not hear the sounds of suffering.**

**“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if there are kings, Brah-
mans, and others who are able to give in such ways, they will
gain measureless merit. Moreover, if they are able to dedicate
[the merit of their giving]—be it a lot or a little—[to the Dharma**

Realm], they will ultimately become Buddhas, not to mention reaping the ripened effects to be Sakras, Brahmas, and wheel-turning kings. Therefore, Ksitigarbha, encourage all living beings to learn [to give] thus.



For those who encounter anyone in need from illness, age, or childbirth, if they instantly generate compassion and provide these people with medicines, food, drink, bedding, and other necessities to help them gain peace and comfort, they will gain inconceivable rewards and merit. For one hundred kalpas they will always be lords of the Five Pure Heavens of the form realm; for two hundred kalpas they will be lords in the Six Heavens of the desire realm, and they will eventually attain buddhahood. They will never fall into

the lower realms, and they will not hear the sounds of suffering for hundreds of thousands of lives. Helping those in need is really important. When the opportunity presents itself, we should try our best to offer them help. Even if their suffering were alleviated by just a little, we will receive inconceivable merit by this virtue.

Further, for anyone who practices generosity and dedicates his virtue with the mind of bodhicitta, no matter how big or small the virtue may appear, he would be on the right path to attain buddhahood, not to mention to reap the rewards of becoming Indras, Brahmas, and universal monarchs. The Buddha then exhorted Ksitigarbha to encourage all sentient beings to learn to practice generosity with an altruistic intention and the aspiration of bodhicitta. Such an attitude is important to remember and keep in mind.

In the Chinese Tripitaka, there is a very short sutra called *The Buddha Speaks of Jyotishka Sutra*. It was translated into Chinese from Sanskrit by Gunabhadra during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. I have not found a Tibetan translation of this sutra but Jyotishka was mentioned in several Tibetan sutras. In Theravada Buddhism, he was commonly known as Jotika, the Sanskrit name's transliteration in the Pali language. Jotika was a human being at the Buddha's time and was particularly blessed with almost

inexhaustible wealth. It was said in a number of other sources that he possessed almost the wealth of a god.

One time he was in the king's palace with all the other ministers of the court, and a piece of white cloth was blown toward them by the wind. The king asked his ministers if this was some kind of a sign. All the ministers said that it must have been a gift from the gods signifying that the kingdom would thrive. But Jotika didn't say anything. The king then asked him why he remained silent while everybody was so happy about such an auspicious sign. Jotika said, "I dare not deceive you, my king. Actually, this is just a towel used for wiping the nose in my house. It was hung beside the pool and now has been blown to the palace. That is why I remain silent."

Several days later, a nine-colored flower as big as a wheel was blown to the palace. The king summoned his ministers and asked what this meant. The ministers said that because the kingdom would thrive, the celestial gods had sent this gift for the celebration. This time, again, Jotika remained silent. When the king asked why, Jotika said that it was nothing but a withered flower from his backyard garden which was brought to the palace by the wind.

Hearing his statement, the king wanted to take his retinue of 200,000 persons to visit Jotika's house and asked Jotika to go home and make preparations for the visit. Jotika told the king that they

could go immediately with him and there was no need to prepare anything because everything such as bedding, food, and drink would spontaneously appear. When they arrived at his house, they entered through the south gate where there stood a handsome and lovely young boy. The king asked Jotika, "Is this your son?" Jotika answered, "I dare not deceive you, my king. He is the gatekeeper of my house." As they entered the inner door, there stood a beautiful young girl. When asked whether she was his wife, Jotika said that she was the door girl.

As they came to the main hall, the walls were made of silver and the ground was made of crystal, which made it like a pool of clear water and the king dared not go forward. Jotika just asked the king to follow him. When Jotika's wife came to greet the king, her eyes brimmed with tears. The king wondered why, and Jotika said that it was due to the smell of smoke from the king that caused tears to well up in her eyes. Unlike ordinary people's houses or the king's palace which needed to burn oil for lighting, Jotika's house used luminous jewel for lighting. That was why his wife could not bear the smell of the king.

In front of the main hall, there stood an extremely splendid twelve-storied mansion. The king toured Jotika's house for almost two months and all the while his ministers urged him to return to the palace to deal with the myriad of state affairs requiring his attention.

After returning to the palace, the king could not understand why his subordinate, Jotika, was so much richer than him in every way. Feeling intense resentment, he summoned his ministers and expressed his intention to mobilize the army to teach Jotika a lesson. Of course, this idea was supported by his ministers.

The king prepared 400,000 troops and sent them to Jotika's house. The troops encircled it completely. Seeing this, a servant from Jotika's house took a vajra and pointed it at them and immediately all the troops and their horses fell down and were unable to get up no matter how hard they tried. Jotika then came out and raised a miraculous wand which enabled them to stand up and return to the king's palace.

The king became even more curious as to why Jotika could be so blessed and surpassed him in every way. He asked Jotika to go with him to see the Buddha. After the king had told the Buddha about his doubt, the Buddha said that in one of his previous lives, Jotika was a leader of five hundred merchants. One day they were traveling on a mountain road and they encountered a sick practitioner deep in the mountain. Out of compassion, the merchant leader built a shelter for him and provided him with everything he needed such as bedding, clothing, food, and drink. Due to this virtue, his life had become extremely prosperous. The sick practitioner was now the Buddha himself.

There are many details of Jotika's story which I have skipped and I have just given you a brief account. In this story, we learn that Jotika provided food and provisions for a sick practitioner in his previous life, and as a result, he became so blessed that even the king was envious of him. That being the case, we should extend our sincere compassion to any sick or poor people we encounter and try our best to help them. When we see practitioners who suffer from illness and cannot afford medical expenses, or who lack basic sustenance, it is essential that we give them alms and support them.

However, it is not proper to expect to gain benefits in return for helping others, as if to make a trade. Even I have this kind of mindset sometimes. I used to sponsor a number of students to attend college. When they ignored me after they finished their studies, I would feel a little upset because they used to be very friendly with me but they would not even say hello to me after their graduation. What I should do is that when I decide to sponsor these students, I should do so unconditionally and without any expectation. Only this is a true practice of generosity.

It says in the *Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra* that "Bodhisattvas practice generosity for the benefit of all sentient beings, not for self-pleasure nor for gaining rewards in future lives. It is unlike trading in market." Bodhisattvas give alms not for their own happiness,

nor for gaining wealth and fame in future lifetimes, nor treat it like a transaction with the expectation that “I give alms to you today in the hope that you will repay me tomorrow or that I will gain much more in the future.” However, many people practice generosity with the intention of gaining benefit and happiness in their present or future lives. With a narrower and impure motivation, their karmic reward will be limited.

The Buddha also said in the *Ekottara Agama* and other discourses that there is no difference between giving alms to the sick and making offerings to the Buddha. The *Ekottara Agama* says,

*If one makes offerings to me
As well as all buddhas in the past,
The merit accrued from it
Is not greater than that of visiting the sick.*

We may prefer to make offerings to great masters endowed with supreme qualities rather than to the poor and sick. But in fact, making offerings to those who have already possessed everything is more like icing on the cake, which is less necessary. What is truly needed and important is to give alms to the poor and ill. In this case, there is no difference between helping a sick person and making offerings to the Buddha. We need to understand this teaching now that it has been reiterated several times.

THE VIRTUE OF MAKING OFFERINGS TO HOLY OBJECTS

“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if good men and good women plant in Buddhadharma a few roots of goodness, even as little as [a strand of] hair, [a grain of] sand, or [a speck of] dust, the merit and benefit that they will receive will be beyond compare.

“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if there are good men and good women who encounter the images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, or wheel-turning kings, and give gifts and make offerings to them, they will gain measureless merit. They will always be reborn in the human and heaven realms and experience excellent, wonderful happiness. If they can dedicate [that merit] to the Dharma Realm, their merit and resulting benefit will be beyond compare.



If there are virtuous men and virtuous women in the world to come who plant virtuous root in the Dharma that could be as tiny as a strand of hair, a grain of sand, or a speck of dust, the benefit derived from it would be beyond compare. When they encounter statues or thangkas of buddhas, bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, or universal monarchs who are blessed with supreme worldly merits and they make offerings to them, they will gain immeasurable merit. They will forever be reborn in the human and heaven realms and enjoy supreme happiness. If they further dedicate the root of virtue with the mind of bodhicitta, the merit accrued would be beyond compare.

In most of the confession liturgies as well as sutras concerning the names of buddhas and bodhisattvas in Han Buddhism, shravakas are not very often found. In contrast, pratyekabuddhas are more often found. Personally, I think this may be due to the fact that pratyekabuddhas have stronger altruism than shravakas.

When we are motivated by bodhicitta, offering even one lamp to a buddha statue will bear inexpressibly great merit. The amount of merit one gains from practicing generosity is not measured by the size or the value of the gift but by one's motivation and aspiration. If a person donates 10,000 RMB with a selfish and showy mind, this act will not generate a great deal of merit. By contrast, if one even donates 1 RMB but with the aspiration of bodhicitta, the merit created will be inconceivable. A story from the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish* tells of a poor woman who offered one butter lamp to the Buddha with the vast intention of eliminating the darkness of ignorance of all sentient beings. As a result, even the great arhat Maudgalyayana could not extinguish it with any of the miraculous power he applied. A virtuous act directed by bodhicitta will bear merit that is beyond compare.

The *Sutra on the Previous Stories of the One Thousand Buddhas* translated by Kumarajiva records the stories of the one thousand buddhas of the Fortunate Kalpa at their causal stage. In numerous kalpas past, there were one thousand young boys who saw a bhiksu

holding a buddha statue passing by. Seeing the dignified appearance of the buddha statue, they generated great faith and each offered the statue a lotus flower and paid respect at the buddha's feet. Because of this root of virtue, they encountered numerous buddhas in their future lives and became the one thousand buddhas of the Fortunate Kalpa. In the story of Prince Vessantara, it says that while he was a brahmin in the time of Buddha Dipamkara, he offered seven lotus flowers to Buddha Dipamkara and made great aspirations. Because of this act, the brahmin later became Prince Siddhartha, who attained full enlightenment in that very life and became Buddha Shakyamuni.

Such is the incredible working of karma and the principle of dependent arising. In this process, forming an aspiration is crucial. As we recite *The King of Aspiration Prayers* every day, even though we probably cannot visualize every aspiration clearly all the time, we should at least be making aspirations such as "I dedicate all my virtuous roots accumulated today to all infinite beings in the world and meanwhile, let me perfect the seven qualities of birth in a higher realm from life to life." Let us all try to make vast aspirations such as these and avoid any evil wish. This is of great importance.

"Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if there are good men and good women who encounter the Mahayana sutras or just

hear a verse or a sentence and give rise to a sincere, reverent mind, sing praises, venerate, and make offerings, these people will reap great results which are measureless and boundless. If they can dedicate [that merit] to the Dharma Realm, their merit will be beyond compare.

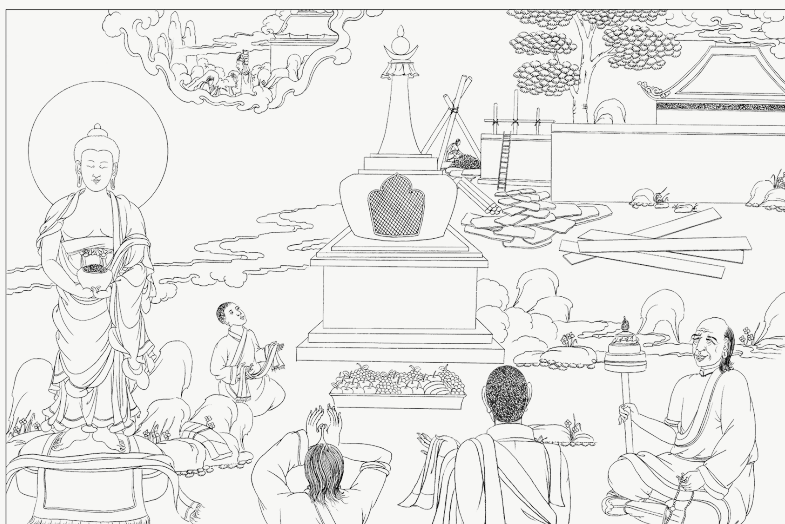
If a virtuous man or woman encounters a Mahayana scripture or hear one of the Mahayana stanzas such as “All phenomena are impermanent. They are subject to birth and death. When birth and death are ceased, this tranquility is called bliss”, or even just one line of a stanza such as “All phenomena are impermanent”, if they then generate sincere joy and reverence toward it, praising and making offerings to it, they will receive boundless and immeasurable rewards. If they further dedicate this root of virtue with bodhicitta, their merit will be even more incredible.

Over the past few years, we have learned together many important Mahayana scriptures such as the *Diamond Sutra*, the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, as well as the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* which we are currently studying. Mahayana sutras carry inconceivable blessings and merit. It is said that when Vasubandhu was reciting a prajnaparamita sutra, a dove was often present and heard his recitation with reverence. After the dove died, it took rebirth as a boy who later became one of the great disciples of Vasubandhu, the famous scholar Sthiramati. In the *Brief Records of the Efficacy*

of *Avatamsaka Sutra*, there is a story about a man who washed his hands after reading the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. It happened that several small insects were drowned in the water he used to wash his hands. Because of this karmic connection, those insects all took rebirth in heaven after their death.

Similarly, if there are animals such as insects or bugs around the venues of Dharma teachings or Dharma assemblies, they can also obtain great benefit. Non-believers who happen to be there will be benefited as well. Because of this, when I am invited to give teachings or preside over Dharma assemblies outside of the academy, I would always encourage the local people to bring their parents and children with them. It is true that with young children in the audience, there could be unanticipated noisy interruptions from their cries or movements. It is also true that they would not understand most of the teaching. Nevertheless, attending a Dharma lecture in their childhood will have a great impact on their whole lives. When they grow up, they may recall the occasion as well as the Dharma they heard. Such experience could bring about great transformation in them. Even if there is no obvious transformation, simply hearing the sound of the Dharma would be helpful to them because it will leave a virtuous imprint in their mindstreams.

Since Larung Gar is a Buddhist academy, it is unrealistic to include many children and elderly people in our classes. However, when lay practitioners outside the valley listen to the Dharma teaching through the Internet or other means, it would be meaningful if they can let their families hear the teaching. In spite of the fact that they are non-believers and may sometimes be annoyed by the sound of the lessons because they have no idea what the teaching is about, they will still benefit from it.



“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if there are good men and good women who encounter Buddha stupas, monasteries, or Mahayana sutras that are new, and they make offerings, gaze reverently, pay obeisance, sing praises, and join their palms in

respect; and if they encounter old or damaged ones and they make repairs and restorations—they generate the resolve to do so themselves or they encourage many others to generate the resolve to do so with them—those who help will always be kings of smaller countries for thirty lives. The donors who lead the giving will always be wheel-turning kings and will teach and transform the kings of smaller countries by means of the good Dharma.

“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future if there are good men and good women who plant roots of goodness in Buddhadharma by giving, making offerings, repairing stupas or monasteries, rebinding sutras, or doing deeds as little as a strand of hair, a speck of dust, a grain of sand, or a drop of water—as long as they can dedicate [the merit of] such wholesome deeds to the Dharma Realm, the virtues of these people will lead them to experience superior, wonderful happiness for hundreds of thousands of lives. However, if they dedicate [the merit] only to their family or relatives or to their personal benefit, the result will be to experience happiness for three lives. To give one is to receive ten thousandfold in return. Thus, Ksitigarbha, such are the causes and conditions of giving.”



The Buddha said that going forward, if virtuous men and virtuous women encounter either new or old buddha stupas, Buddhist monasteries, and Mahayana sutras, those who make offerings and pay respect, sing praises, and join their palms in respect to the new ones will accumulate great merit. They will also receive great benefits if they aspire to repair the old or damaged ones either by themselves or they call upon others to do it together. In the latter case, all those who are called up to participate will take rebirth as kings of minor countries for thirty lives. Those virtuous men or women who lead the activity will forever take rebirth as universal monarchs and will further teach and transform the kings

of minor countries together with their people by means of the noble Dharma.

Further, if virtuous men or women plant virtuous roots in connection to the Dharma by listening to one teaching, chanting one prayer, making offerings, giving alms, repairing damaged stupas, rebinding and restoring scriptures, or performing any small virtuous deeds, as long as they can dedicate their merit to the full enlightenment of all living beings, they will experience supreme and wonderful happiness for numerous lives. For instance, if they generate a pure altruistic motivation even for an instant and chant “Namo Amitabha”, “Namo Buddha Shakyamuni”, “Om Mani Padme Hum”, or “Om Vajra Sattva Hum” only once, as long as they engage in any of these virtuous deeds, they will accumulate merit little by little. It is similar to successful businessmen who accumulate their wealth step by step instead of trying to make a large amount of money all at once. Virtuous roots can only grow gradually and require one’s long-term effort.

The Buddha did mention one important factor. For those who only dedicate the merit to their own families or for their own personal benefit, such as only for their own peace, happiness, and health, they will only receive the resultant benefits for three lifetimes. On the contrary, if they dedicate the merit to the full enlightenment of all sentient beings, their beneficial rewards will be endless

and inexhaustible. The results of giving indeed differ massively depending on whether one dedicates it to the Dharma Realm or for his personal benefit.

The literal meaning of the sentence “To give one is to receive ten thousandfold in return” is a bit difficult to understand. While translating this sentence, I spent quite a long time looking through various commentaries on this sutra, trying to figure out its meaning. Based on my understanding, its original Chinese meaning should be “They abandon one and thus give up ten thousandfold that comes in return.” To “abandon one” means to abandon the essential mind of bodhicitta, that is, if one makes dedication only to their own benefit, they have abandoned bodhicitta. Consequently, they have given up a ten thousandfold reward. Or the other way around, we can say that to give rise to bodhicitta, one is to receive a ten thousandfold reward.

Many commentaries on the sutra interpret this sentence differently, and some of them are simply wrong. The reason why I explain it this way is that the previous text says that if one dedicates the merit with bodhicitta then one will enjoy happiness for hundreds of thousands of lives, but should one dedicate the merit merely to one’s own benefit, one can only receive a small amount of reward for three lives. Making dedication with a selfish mind signifies

that one has abandoned bodhicitta, the key element to receiving a bountiful reward.

Daily Chanting Practice

In regard to daily chanting practice, such as reciting a certain sutra or some prayers as everyday homework, some believe that the chanting cannot be interrupted otherwise its blessing power will be lost and that buddhas, bodhisattvas, and Dharma protectors will be displeased. This is not really the case. No interruption is certainly best. But as long as we do not suspend the chanting for an extended period, it is okay to have an occasional break if we are too busy.

However, the risk is that most people tend to be attracted to the new and abandon the old practice. Some people may be enthusiastic about reciting the *Diamond Sutra* at the beginning but after a while they just lose interest. Others may be passionate about making prostrations but would be cool about it before long. Many of us try to be stable in our practice, forming all kinds of aspirations and setting up a rigid daily schedule that specifies when they would get up and when they would go to bed. They have a strong initial determination which says, “From now on, I will follow my timetable and I will stick to it.” But along the way, they may encounter illness, pressures from work, family, and so forth, or

experience emotional difficulties that would put them off the track. They could become so frustrated that they are not even in a mood to eat, let alone engage in any Dharma practice. You need to know that this is understandable and quite normal for ordinary people. Only experienced practitioners are able to maintain a stable emotion and maintain their daily discipline.

We need to know that ordinary practitioners could often be deficient in these respects. If we could only maintain a good mental state, we will surely become much better practitioners. However, to maintain a positive mental state really requires the support of great merit. For most ordinary practitioners, it is not unusual to have a break from their daily practice or to backslide on their Dharma path. Even though many people may not show obvious signs of retrogression, they could still be dealing with their own afflictions and faults. The bottom line is we all need to persevere no matter the situation and never totally give up regardless of what kinds of ups and downs we experience. When our practice is interrupted for any reason, there is no need to be anxious, frustrated, or worried, nor should we stop halfway and never resume our practice. It would be a real shame otherwise.

No matter what practices we engage in every day, even as little as just reciting the Mani mantra or the *Heart Sutra* once, offering one lamp in front of a buddha statue, or making a few prostrations,

we should never abandon them permanently. Unlike people who have grown up in places like the Tibetan regions or Bhutan, the virtuous habits of most of our Dharma practitioners may not be that strong. For people who have grown up in places where Buddhism is their core value and culture, the concept of karma and causality is well set in their hearts and they would not easily stray from the path. However, for most Buddhists in this modern society, the environment of their upbringing, the education they have received, and the people they associate with daily, are mostly non-Buddhists and lack Buddhist faith. In this context, the tiny bit of virtuous root they have cultivated through the Dharma in this present life is as rare as a flash of lightning in an endless dark night. It is precious and transient like the light of a candle in a gale that can be easily extinguished.

We need to learn to protect this virtuous root in ourselves and in others. When we see someone regressing from their faith or behaving against the Dharma, we should try to offer them appropriate help and support so that they can regain their faith and stay on their Dharma path. Many people who used to struggle a lot are now resolute practitioners simply because others had kindly supported them in their time of need. On the road of life and our Dharma practice, there are all kinds of traps that can lead us to the wrong way. We must be vigilant in our own practice while also

paying attention to helping those around us when they are faced with difficulties and their faith start to waver. We should try as much as possible to help them overcome these setbacks.

The Preservation of Dharma Teachings

In this part, the Buddha talked about rebinding and restoring Buddhist scriptures. In Buddhism, there are many extremely precious ancient scriptures and texts. Western cultures seem to attach great importance to the preservation of old documents. They would often incur significant expense and use high technologies to restore them even when the damage is very minor. In contrast, people in certain parts of Asia tend to pay less attention to such details, for example we may not think it is such a big deal if we have a precious manuscript of a sutra from the Qianlong Emperor period.

Even more important than the preservation of ancient scriptures, we should maintain in good order the teachings of great masters. I have said before that my sincerest wish and aspiration are to keep all the teachings of H. H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche available to the world, not losing any little piece of his teaching or even a simple joke that His Holiness had said. Although people today may not see the benefit of these teachings, it will be extremely advantageous to the future beings tens to hundreds of years later. Due to the inconceivable power of a great master's aspirations, his

or her teachings can auspiciously impact beings of different times and generations. Even a short teaching from a great master such as His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, Ju Mipham Rinpoche, or the Omniscient Longchenpa is invaluable. Although Longchenpa had left this world for more than 600 years, we have seen numerous people received blessings and inspirations from his teachings and are eager to receive even a small piece of his teaching, cherishing these precious teachings like gold or a wish-fulfilling jewel. Therefore, we should attach great importance to the preservation of Dharma texts and the precious teachings of our lineage masters.

In order to maintain them in a safe condition so that they would not be damaged easily, we should build properly authorized libraries or heritage museums to hold these documents or store them in similar facilities. If they are kept in private storage, they could be easily damaged. I used to have a very famous and precious thangka which was given by Tulku Tishta, a great late master from Dhomang Monastery. In order to assure its secure preservation, I later donated it to an official cultural heritage museum. It is better not to keep particularly precious objects to ourselves lest they are dealt with improperly upon our death. It is a lot safer to assure their protection if they are put in a place that is officially safeguarded by the government or a reputable organization. The many books and cultural relics that have been collected by the British Museum

from numerous sources now tell the different histories of different peoples to the whole world. This is a good way to restore Buddhist scriptures.

Dedication

May the merit resulting from this piece of work contribute
in the greatest possible measure to the long life of all great masters,
to the flourishing of the Buddhadharma,
and to the welfare of all sentient beings.

It is always our wish to present a work of the highest quality to the readers so that anyone who reads this text would find inspiration. So we would very much appreciate your comments, feedback or suggestions for how this text might be improved and made more valuable. You are also greatly welcomed if you want to make a contribution to any of our other projects of translation.

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