

**ORIGINAL VOWS OF  
KSITIGARBHA BODHISATTVA  
SUTRA**

**Chapter Eleven**

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 Eleven

*The Dharma Protection of the Earth Spirit*



Those who regularly engage in the Ksitigarbha practice will be protected by all kinds of earth gods and Dharma protectors. Why are there so many earth spirits and heavenly gods supporting and protecting these practitioners? The reason is because they venerably behold, worship, and pay homage to the image of Ksitigarbha and recite the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*. In a word, it is because these practitioners have attached great importance to the teaching and practice of Ksitigarbha that they are protected by spirits and ultimately they will be free from the ocean of samsara and obtain the bliss of nirvana.

—Khenpo Sodargye

# Lecture Twenty-One

August 25th, 2020

## EFFICACY STORY: STORY OF BHIKSUNI ZHIZANG

Before starting our teaching on the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* today, I would like to first share with you a story from the *Records of Efficacy of Ksitigarbha Image*. In the Song Dynasty, there was a bhiksuni in Taiyuan named Zhizang, “Treasury of Wisdom”. The bhiksuni had great faith in Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva and sincerely wished to take rebirth in Sukhavati, the pure land of Amitabha Buddha. She hired a painter to draw an image of Amitabha Buddha, Avalokiteshvara, and Ksitigarbha, with Amitabha Buddha in the middle and the two bodhisattvas on each side. Traditionally the two bodhisattvas beside Amitabha Buddha are Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthamaprapta, but because of Bhiksuni Zhizang’s strong faith toward Ksitigarbha, this bodhisattva was painted in the image. Bhiksuni Zhizang arranged it in her shrine as the object of worship and always paid homage and made offerings to it.

One day, a windstorm struck the area and destroyed many people's houses, including the one Zhizang was living in. The painting of the three deities was lost in the disaster, greatly saddening Zhizang. She prayed to Ksitigarbha with the hope that she could recover the lost painting. One day, Zhizang looked up into the sky and saw a shining object floating in the air. When it finally fell slowly to the ground in front of her, she discovered that it was the lost painting! She was overjoyed and picked it up. She returned the painting to its previous position in her shrine and worshiped the three holy deities diligently.

One day many years later, Zhizang told a friend that thanks to the guidance of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva that she would be reborn in the pure land the next day. On that day, she placed incense and flower offerings in front of the image of Ksitigarbha, Avalokiteshvara, and Amitabha Buddha, and chanted each of their names 108 times. She then sat in a meditation posture, with her palms joined and facing the west, she passed away.

As told by this story, one can take rebirth in Sukhavati by relying upon Ksitigarbha. The story also shows us the powerful blessing of the images of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Although they may be just images, either in the form of statues made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, or resin, or photos displayed in computers or thangkas hung on walls, they can carry inconceivable blessing. It is of

great significance that we venerate and have pure perception and strong faith toward the images of Buddhist deities, dakinis, or Dharma protectors. Although these images appear to be no different from ordinary pictures, the strength they bring us is truly inconceivable.

The fact that images can bring inspiration and spiritual enhancement is not something found only in Buddhism, we can also see this in other worldly contexts. For example, in a monarchy where the king or queen is idolized by the people, portraits of the monarch will be hung at notable places as a way to encourage its people. Also, when people try to promote a culture, they would design particular images to demonstrate the spirit of this culture and put them on posters. For those who like football or music, they would post pictures of their favorite football stars or singers on the wall in their houses as they believe they would gain strength by seeing these pictures.

When I visited students in their college dormitories, I would often find that students post what they like in the small spaces around their bunks. Most of them would post the pictures of their favorite stars while some would hang images of certain buddhas, bodhisattvas, or great masters. I suppose they have faith in both Buddhist figures and worldly celebrities.

Recently I visited a Buddhist institute. Although most monks would place statues or posters of buddhas and bodhisattvas in their rooms, I noticed that a few monks had posted pictures of their favorite pop singers on the wall of their dorms. An old lama was in charge of the institute and I asked him who those people on the wall were. He seemed to have no idea at all, saying, "I don't know why these monks would have such hobbies!" Then I joked, "Don't you know that there is a profound meaning behind these pictures!"

Indeed, images can be inspirational. Although in a sense, venerating noble images is still a form of attachment, ordinary people should not abandon such a virtuous practice. It is true that when one realizes the inseparability of emptiness and appearance, one would have no attachment at all and would transcend the dualistic concept of good and bad. But before one is able to reach that level, these images are indeed helpful in enhancing one's Dharma practice. Ordinary minds can be easily influenced by external environment. Whether one moves toward virtue or non-virtue depends on how much one engages in Dharma practices. Therefore, it is always helpful for ordinary people to venerate images of noble beings, which would bring them great blessing and positive energy.

## WHO IS EARTH SPIRIT FIRM AND SOLID?

Now let us start on Chapter Eleven, *The Dharma Protection of the Earth Spirit*. This chapter describes a conversation between Buddha Shakyamuni and Earth Spirit Firm and Solid, in which they talk about the inconceivable benefits of reciting the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* and making offering to the image of Ksitigarbha.

Earth Spirit Firm and Solid is a powerful goddess of earth who can command most of the other earth spirits. She plays a very important role in the history of Buddhism and appears in many stories of Buddha Shakyamuni. The most famous story about her is when Mara tried to thwart the Buddha's attainment of Buddhahood and questioned the Buddha's practice of immeasurable virtues throughout his innumerable lifetimes, the Earth Goddess appeared and claimed herself to be the witness of all these virtuous practices.

It is recounted in the sutra that, when Prince Siddhartha sat under the bodhi tree, Mara, leading hundreds of millions of demonic spirits, came to prevent the prince from attaining buddhahood. At that time, Mara threatened Siddhartha that if he did not leave this place, he would be thrown into the sea. Then Siddhartha replied, “Nobody in the world can harm me at all. In your previous life, you built a temple, offered a bowl of food to a pratyekabuddha, and observed the one-day vow of eight precepts once. Because of that simple virtue, you have now reincarnated as Mara, the demonic celestial king. I have made offerings to countless buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arhats in three great asamkhyeya kalpas, and meanwhile, I gave away my head, eyes, brain, and marrow countless times for the benefit of sentient beings. You just engaged in several simple virtuous deeds, but I have been practicing virtue throughout countless kalpas, so there is no way for you to harm me at all.”

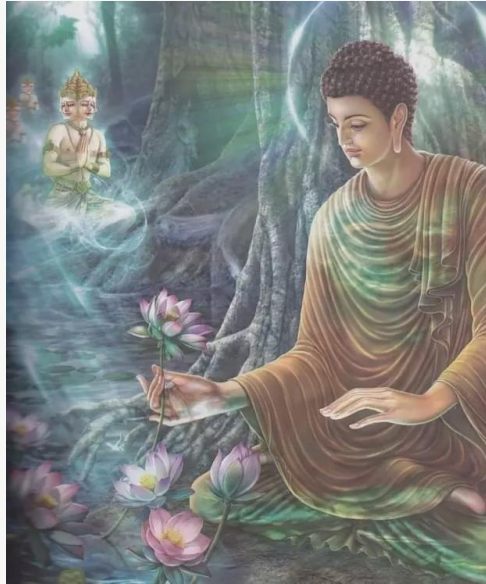
Then Mara spoke, “As you said, I built a temple, offered a bowl of food to a pratyekabuddha, and observed the one day lay vows once in my past life. I know this and you also testified to it. But for your accumulation of merit throughout three great asamkhyeya kalpas, who is your witness that can confirm this?” Siddhartha then touched the earth with his right hand and claimed, “This whole earth can be my witness.” Right at that moment, Earth Spirit Firm and Solid emerged with half of her body still in the ground,



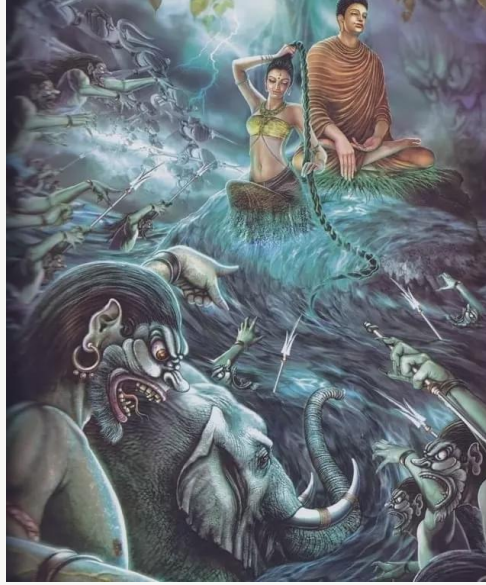
speaking to Mara, "I have been here when the earth was formed. I am a witness of everything that happens on the earth. I can testify that the Buddha has been accumulating merit for such a long time in this world." As a result, Mara failed in his attack on the Buddha.

I found a few images of Earth Spirit Firm and Solid from different cultural traditions, where she is depicted differently in each tradition.

## Indian Pictures



This is an Indian style portrait where the Buddha is depicted sitting under the bodhi tree and a four-faced spirit which is said to be Earth Spirit Firm and Solid is sitting next to him.



This one is also an Indian style painting, possibly a modern painting. It depicts the scene when Mara who has transformed into a myriad of animals and mara-women to annoy the Buddha, the Earth Goddess emerged from the ground, stood firmly beside the Buddha, and testified to the Buddha's accumulation of innumerable virtues throughout an inconceivably long time.

## Tibetan Pictures



Earth Spirit Firm and Solid has also been widely depicted in Tibetan Buddhism. In this painting, the Buddha sits with his right hand touching the earth. Below the Buddha's hand is the Earth Spirit Firm and Solid, a half-human and half-snake being depicted as like a female naga. She is painted in the same color of her surroundings, making her not easily detected. Conversely, Mara is clearly depicted in this painting.



In the newly published Chinese version of the *White Lotus: An Extensive Biography of the Lives of Buddha Shakyamuni* which I translated from Tibetan, there is also an image of Earth Spirit Firm and Solid. She is depicted as a yellow half-human and half-snake being, like a female naga, with her palms joined together.

## Chinese Pictures



In Han Buddhism, Earth Spirit Firm and Solid has also been widely depicted. In addition to images, she has also been venerated in shrines in many monasteries, where she is worshiped as a Dharma protector. Many images of Earth Spirit Firm and Solid in Han Buddhism are of the Tang style probably as a result of the widespread adoption of Buddhism during the Tang Dynasty in China when many images of buddhas and bodhisattvas were created. Traditionally, paintings and sculptures of Buddhist figures need to be made in precise proportions and require high craftsmanship.

You may not be able to see these pictures clearly in the small telescreens (there are many telescreens at the shrine hall of the Han Chinese sangha) and unfortunately the big screen in the middle was broken and has not yet been repaired. When I asked the people who were in charge of this the other day, they said that it would be fixed in one week. But now it has been two weeks and it is still broken. Without being pushed, some of our volunteers may procrastinate and open issues are not resolved. We all need to feel a sense of ownership and urgency on all matters relating to our institute. I will not talk about these matters further here, though there are some other similar issues.

# KSITIGARBHA'S VOWS HAVE NO END

## Chapter Eleven

### The Dharma Protection of the Earth Spirit

At that time, Earth Spirit Firm and Solid said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, since long time past, I have reverently gazed at and prostrated to measureless Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas. All of them have great, inconceivable supernatural power and wisdom, and they all guide living beings far and wide across [to the other shore]. Among the Bodhisattvas, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva has made particularly profound vows. World-Honored One, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva has great cause and condition with Jambudvīpa. [The Bodhisattvas] Manjusri, Samantabhadra, Avalokitesvara, and Maitreya also transform into hundreds of thousands of forms to guide those in the six realms of existence, but their vows still have an end. Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva has made these vows to teach and transform all beings



**in the six realms of existence throughout kalpas as numerous as grains of sand in hundreds of thousands of millions of Ganges Rivers.**



Earth Spirit Firm and Solid praised Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva as incredibly exceptional among all the bodhisattvas she had seen. She said that although countless great bodhisattvas, such as Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri, Samantabhadra, Mahasthamapra, and Akasagarbha, all have inconceivable power and wisdom and work extensively to liberate sentient beings, Ksitigarbha has the greatest and vastest aspirations among them. His vows are so endless that if we compare other bodhisattvas' vows with his, their vows would seem to be limited. Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva has a particularly close

connection with our world of Jambudvīpa and similarly, we are also closely connected to Kṣitigarbha in the same way as we have the great affinity with our fundamental teacher Buddha Śākyamuni. Because of this special connection, it is easy for us to receive Kṣitigarbha's blessing.

## **We Are Closely Connected to Kṣitigarbha**

Affinity is of great importance when we pray to a deity or follow a spiritual teacher. When one has an auspicious connection with a master of great accomplishment, then whatever this master says or does would be easily beneficial to this person. On the contrary, if one never forms a close connection with the master, then no matter how remarkable and extraordinary the master is, one is unlikely to gain significant benefit. Some of you may have had such experience that although you have encountered a venerable teacher who is truly a mahasiddha of great renown, somehow, you are unable to generate faith in him or her. The same can be found in nonreligious context. In schools or universities, you may also hear something like, "This teacher is quite knowledgeable, but we just don't click and I just cannot learn very much from his teaching."

The same applies to how we connect to buddhas and bodhisattvas. There is no doubt that every buddha or bodhisattva is compassionate to all living beings. However, because their vows differ and

the karma of sentient beings varies, different beings have different connections toward different buddhas and bodhisattvas. If we pray to the enlightened beings who are strongly connected to us, the blessing and strength that we would receive from them would be remarkable, far surpassing what we can get from those buddhas and bodhisattvas who are less connected to us.

Therefore, it is of great benefits for us to regularly supplicate, prostrate and make offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas with whom we have a great affinity. In the same manner, those spiritual masters who have taught us the Dharma and have special and extraordinary connections with us should be regarded as the most important ones to us. We should hold the deepest veneration toward them and harbor the strongest enthusiasm to see and to associate with them. Should a practitioner follow a spiritual master in this way, meritorious qualities like compassion and wisdom will easily arise in his or her mind.

## **Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva's Vows Have No End**

Among all remarkable bodhisattvas, Ksitigarbha's vows are the greatest. Other great bodhisattvas such as Manjushri, Samantabhadra, Avalokiteshvara or Maitreya also made numerous great vows to benefit beings and keep sending myriads of manifestations into the six realms of samara to guide sentient beings across.

However, compared with Ksitigarbha, their vows seem to have an end.

Some may wonder that even if other bodhisattvas cannot compare to Ksitigarbha, Manjushri must be an exception. According to quite a few sutras, Manjushri had made many great vows on various occasions and all those aspirations are indeed inconceivably great. For instance, in the *Manjushri of Thousand Arms and Bowls Sutra*, it records ten great vows of Manjushri and in the *Array of the Qualities of Manjushri's Realm*, the fifteenth chapter of the *Sutra of the Heap of Jewels*, it mentions eighteen great vows of Manjushri. It says Manjushri vowed that he would not achieve the buddhahood of unsurpassable awakening until he saw in person that all buddhas in the infinite worlds had been placed in awakening, in bodhicitta, and in the paramitas, and had been encouraged and taught by him. In the *Manjushri Treasury Dharani Sutra*, the Buddha said that the vows of the youthful Manjushri cannot be fathomed by all buddhas in the ten directions, let alone ordinary beings.

Likewise, Avalokiteshvara's spirit and power to rescue sentient beings are incredible. The *Great Compassion Dharani Sutra* records that Avalokiteshvara vowed to grant benefit and happiness to all living beings in the future. Avalokiteshvara said that, should any being who recites and holds the holy mantra of Great Compassion

fall into the three lower realms or not be reborn in any buddha field upon their death, he vowed to not achieve buddhahood.

Even though other great bodhisattvas had also made inconceivable vows, why then are their vows not considered as extraordinary as those of Ksitigarbha? First, if we consider the extent of their vows, Ksitigarbha's stand out among others because his aspirations are infinitely vast, in particular with his most well-known vow that if the hell were not empty, he would not attain buddhahood. That is the reason why Earth Spirit Firm and Solid emphatically extolled Ksitigarbha. Ksitigarbha had made innumerable vows to teach and transform beings in the six realms throughout as many eons as the number of grains of sand in millions of Ganges Rivers. Although other great bodhisattvas also made exceptional aspirations, they are not the equal of Ksitigarbha because their aspirations are not as vast and infinite as Ksitigarbha's.

Secondly, Ksitigarbha has the supreme ability to fulfill sentient beings' wishes. It is stated in the *Sutra of the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha* that, "Suppose one has certain wishes and prays devotedly for a hundred eons to Maitreya, Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, Samantabhadra and immeasurable other Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas, whose number is as numerous as the sands of the Ganges River, by reciting their names, taking refuge, paying homage, prostrating, and making offerings to them. Yet, it is not as effective as reciting the name

of Ksitigarbha and taking refuge, paying homage, prostrating, and making offerings to him in the short time of a meal. If one prays to Ksitigarbha, all his or her wishes will be fulfilled quickly.”

In Ju Mipham Rinpoche’s *Beautiful Adornment of the Earth: In Praise of Ksitigarbha*, it also says:

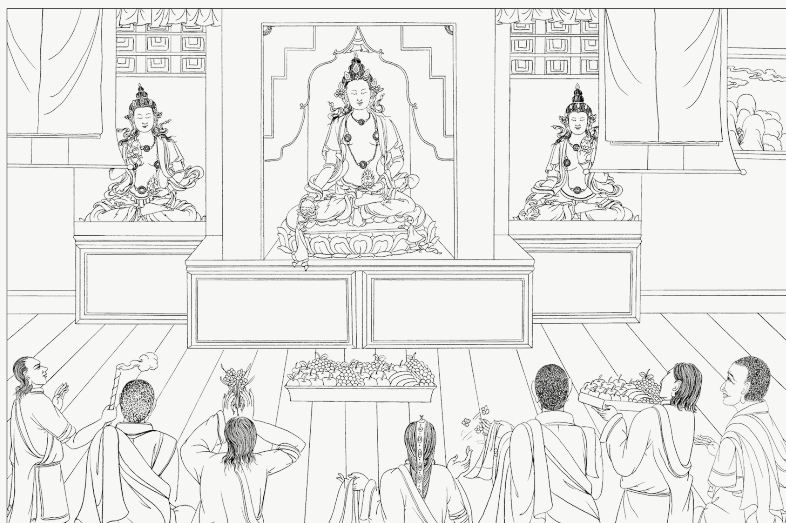
*Instead of many eons of manifold veneration and prayer  
To Manjughosha, Lokeshvara, Samantabhadra,  
Ajita and the rest—supreme bodhisattva heirs of the victorious ones,  
To think, just for an instant, of you alone will fulfil all hopes  
and desires.*

*For this, you have been praised by the victorious ones  
As pre-eminent in the bestowal of wishes—O foremost heir,  
Inseparable from the victorious, through praising you,  
May you grant the excellent splendor of everything I wish for  
and desire!*

Therefore, with regard to fulfilling wishes, the Buddha and other great masters teach that Ksitigarbha is peerless in comparison with Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, Maitreya, and all other bodhisattvas. Making offerings and praying to Ksitigarbha for even a short period of time is more effective than doing so to other bodhisattvas for a hundred eons. Hence, just as worldly people

seeking to build connection with a high official, or as students wanting to attract their teachers' attention, it is essential for us sentient beings in Jambudvipa to have a close relationship with Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, our principal guide in this world.

## TEN BENEFITS OF WORSHIPING KSITIGARBHA



“World-Honored One, I see living beings in the present and future who find a pure place in the southern part of their residences and build a shrine there with clay, stone, bamboo, or wood; within the shrine they are able to sculpt, paint, or use gold, silver, copper, or iron to make Ksitigarbha’s image; and



**they light incense, make offerings, reverently gaze, pay obeisance, and sing his praises. Such people will gain ten kinds of benefits around their residences. [...]**

Earth Spirit Firm and Solid further said that people who revere and make offerings to the image of Ksitigarbha would gain ten kinds of benefits. If we are able, we should build a shrine in the southern part of our residences to enshrine the images of Ksitigarbha, either painted, sculpted, or made of gold, silver, copper, or iron. We should then make offerings with incense, pay homage, prostrate, and recite praises to him. By doing so, we would accumulate immense merits.

## **Why in the South?**

Why did Earth Spirit Firm and Solid suggest building the shrine in the southern part of our residences? Master Chin Kung taught that the south was not referring to a fixed physical direction but instead symbolized the residence of wisdom, or where virtuous teachers reside. To me, this explanation seems a bit difficult to relate to. In my opinion, “the southern part” can be understood literally as the southern part of one’s residence. Different buddhas or bodhisattvas may have their special connections with a certain direction such that for practices involving specific deities, a particular direction, such as east, south, west, and north, would often be emphasized.

In the case of Ksitigarbha, it is possible that he is particularly connected to the south direction.

Why would Ksitigarbha be linked with the south direction? I suppose it could be that Ksitigarbha is related to the ratna family, which is linked with the south direction. Generally speaking, among the four activities of pacifying, increasing, magnetizing, and subjugating, Ksitigarbha is associated with the activity of increasing, because his characteristic is to help beings gain fame, increase wealth, and make improvements in every aspect of life. Also, in both Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist traditions, Ksitigarbha is always depicted in yellow. Since the activity of increasing is connected with the ratna family and the representative color for this family is yellow, we can infer that Ksitigarbha may be related to the ratna family and therefore, is linked with the south direction.

However, it does not mean that the south direction is a must and that we are not allowed to enshrine Ksitigarbha in other directions. It is with the same logic that, although a specific color is used to symbolize each of the four activities, i.e., white for pacifying, yellow for increasing, red for magnetizing, and blue for subjugating, this does not mean that an activity could not use other colors and that it is exclusively linked to that one particular color. Also, in the concept of the five buddha families, each buddha family is associated with one of the five directions of the center, east, south,

west, and north. For example, Akshobhya is believed to reside in the east and Amitabha in the west. But this does not mean Amitabha has to be placed only in the west side of the shrine and never in any other direction.

## **How to Enshrine Buddha Statues?**

To enshrine statues of buddhas or bodhisattvas at home, the shrine should be set up in a dignified and stately manner. I feel that Tibetan Buddhist shrines are very artistic and well-crafted. A traditional Tibetan Buddhist shrine is designed to be multilayered and majestically displayed to arouse great faith even in those who have just taken a glance at it. Generally, a Tibetan style shrine is composed of a niche in the middle, a bookcase on each side of the niche made of many small compartments, and a three-layered altar like a three-step stair in front of them. In the niche is always placed a large buddha image, usually the statue of Shakyamuni, Amitabha, or Guru Padmasambhava, to each side of which is one small statue of other Buddhist deity. The two bookshelves are used to store scriptures, and the altar is used for setting offerings like butter lamps, water, tormas, and more.

Of course, how you build your shrine would depend on your own conditions. If your house is very small, it would be difficult to build a grand shrine. In such a case, it would be acceptable if your

shrine does not have all the compartments and different layers of offering tables. But whatever your condition is, the shrine needs to be orderly and well-arranged. Basically, any holy objects, be they scriptural texts, buddha statues, or stupas, should be put in a relatively high place. They should be at least placed somewhere higher than one's waistline, with a well-arranged base underneath and offerings exquisitely set in front.

Some people place holy objects casually and carelessly. Some set buddha statues at the bottom layer of their shrine and the offerings on the top layer. Such placement is improper and does not show sufficient respect. Some people put scriptures at the bottom of the bookcase while placing the worldly books in the highest compartment. Some even put buddha statues on the floor. All these arrangements are rather impudent and disrespectful. In some lay Buddhists' homes that I had visited, the most precious Tantrayana texts were stored in a cabinet of the floor level below other objects. The explanation was that since these esoteric texts were forbidden from being read by others, they wanted to keep them in a hidden place. But this is far from being proper.

After we have enshrined buddha statues, we should form the habit of making offerings to these noble objects. When I was a child herding yaks, it was difficult to find buddha statues. At that time, I loved collecting pebbles and bones that are close to a triangle shape

and putting them on top of some big rocks, pretending them to be buddha statues. I would then call some of the other shepherd boys to come together to make offerings and prostrate to these “buddha statues.” We would go over the hills to pick a lot of wildflowers as our offerings. I feel that this was indeed a very good practice. Do you agree? Later on as I grew up, I read a verse in the *Lotus Sutra’s Skillful Means Chapter*, which says that,

*All those who made buddha stupas  
Out of piles of earth in desolate places;  
And even children in play  
Who made buddha stupas out of heaps of sand—  
All such people have certainly attained  
The path of the buddhas.*

I think it is very good for children to play in this way. We have all seen many children making sandcastles and playing with each other on the beach. Actually, it will be much more meaningful and meritorious for them if they can use sand, pebbles, and the like to make buddha statues or stupas and make some offerings in front of them, even by just sprinkling some sea water on them. It is so important for children to develop good habits from an early age. This will help them accumulate incredible merit.

**“[...] What are the ten?**

**First, their lands will be fertile.**

**Second, their families and homes will ever be in peace.**

**Third, their deceased relatives will be reborn in the heavens.**

**Fourth, the living will enjoy ever greater longevity.**

**Fifth, they will obtain what they seek with ease.**

**Sixth, they will not suffer disasters of flood or fire.**

**Seventh, events that cause depletion will be eliminated.**

**Eighth, they will not have nightmares.**

**Ninth, they will be protected by spirits in their daily  
comings and goings.**

**Tenth, they will come across many causes of holiness.**

The sutra goes on to say that those who worship Ksitigarbha in the aforementioned way, their families, dwellings, and surroundings will be benefited in ten ways. So what are these ten benefits?

1) Their lands will be fertile. The soil will not be barren and the weather will always be favorable, bringing about bumper harvests of all crops. There will be no shortages of food and no need to maintain a large stockpile. Food crisis can be a huge worry but over-stockpiling can also lead to losses and wastes. If we worship Ksitigarbha as instructed here, we will be free from all these problems.

2) Their families and homes will always be peaceful. No sudden death or illness will befall their families and no negative factors will emerge to cause conflicts and disharmony among family members. Their family will be blessed with health, wealth, and all kinds of well-being and happiness.

This year, I made some Ksitigarbha statues for the local laities. Many lay people are indeed very troubled. On the one hand, they want to be rich and famous, and to do well in every aspect of life, but because they lack the merit accumulated from the past, what they do would often lead to the opposite of what they want. With this in mind, keeping a statue of Ksitigarbha could bring them some benefits.

The power of buddhas and bodhisattvas is inconceivable. Nonetheless, I cannot absolutely guarantee that the statue I distribute could significantly change everyone's life because the karma of every sentient being is different and its power is also inconceivable. But for those who are karmically fortunate, the blessing of a Ksitigarbha statue will definitely bring them benefit. Unfortunately, when we promote the benefits of Ksitigarbha statues, there are some who would try to make a profit. They would advertise the benefits of the images of Ksitigarbha and sell them at a high price. Similar cases occurred when we promoted the benefits of other sacred objects,

so I am rather hesitant to further stress the benefits of Ksitigarbha statue here.

3) Their deceased family members will be reborn in the heavens. By the blessings of the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* and Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, the deceased relatives and ancestors will be able to take rebirth in the human or heaven realms. When some family members die, should they be unable to take rebirth, quite possibly they will haunt their living relatives, bringing troubles and misfortune to the family and their descendants. Therefore, it is important that as soon as possible that we help the deceased take rebirth in good places where they could enjoy peace and happiness. This can be achieved by enshrining the image of Ksitigarbha.

4) The living family members will enjoy long lives. Members of their families will have their lifespan extended, and enjoy a safe, happy, smooth, and successful life.

5) They will have their wishes fulfilled. Whatever they want, be it worldly pursuits such as a good career, dignified appearance, abundant wealth, prominent status, or even spiritual achievement like attaining liberation and enlightenment, all of these would be fulfilled at their will without any difficulty.

6) They will not experience calamities such as floods and fire. We see frequent natural disasters. For example, since August,



California has experienced major, sustained wildfires across much of the state. It is still raging and the news reported that more than a hundred thousand people have been evacuated due to the wildfire. Many cities in China are also currently suffering from major floods. I read the other day that the flood in Leshan, Sichuan, has been so severe that the flood water had reached the foot of the Leshan Giant Buddha. If we enshrine images of Ksitigarbha, we will be protected from such calamities. If people do more virtuous deeds, there will be fewer catastrophes of earthquakes, floods, fire, and hurricanes in this world.

7) Events that cause depletion will be eliminated. For those, whose wealth and possessions are frequently exhausted by all kinds of events, if they make and enshrine Ksitigarbha statue, such events will naturally disappear and they will no longer experience financial crisis. Some people are constantly strapped for money, and no matter how they endeavor, they are always in debt. Even when they decide to sell their houses or cars, they just cannot get a good deal. In the end, they cannot pull themselves together and thus lose hope in life. When this happens, some people may choose to do foolish things. If one prays to Ksitigarbha with devotion, impoverishment can be eliminated.

8) One will never have nightmares. If you experience frequent bad dreams, you can eliminate them by relying on Ksitigarbha

Bodhisattva. Even if these nightmares occasionally return, by immediately praying to Ksitigarbha or Medicine Buddha, they will not bring you any negative influence. This is helpful indeed.

9) They will be protected by spirits in their daily comings and goings. In all their comings and goings, spirits like Dharma protectors, Earth Spirit Firm and Solid, and others will always be by their side. I often feel I am well-protected by Dharma protectors wherever I go. The point here is that if someone is under the protection of the earth deities or Dharma protectors, all of his or her affairs will go smoothly. On the contrary, without this protection, misfortune will befall and unexpected disasters could occur to them.

10) They will encounter causes and conditions for their enlightenment. That is, they will frequently meet good spiritual mentors and companions. Some people are truly fortunate and everyone they meet is good, whereas others would often come across bad people and even con men. They would often be tricked by these people and either scammed out of their money or emotionally cheated, or even if they have embarked on the spiritual path, they would encounter fake gurus. It is as if they are just surrounded by liars. Fortunately, after learning the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* and through the blessing of Ksitigarbha, they will no longer run into those cheaters.

**“World-Honored One, if living beings in the present and future are able to make offerings in their residences in such way, they will gain such benefits.”**

According to Earth Spirit Firm and Solid, if sentient beings in the present and future make offering to Ksitigarbha in their homes in the abovementioned manner, they will attain these ten benefits. We are giving out a Ksitigarbha statue to everyone here today. Some of you may have already collected too many buddha statues and not appreciate this very much. His Holiness used to say that if someone does us a favor, even if we are unable to do something in return right on the spot, we should be thankful and express our gratitude. Therefore, you should at least feel happy with and be grateful for this Ksitigarbha statue.

## BEING PROTECTED BY SPRITS AND GODS



[The Earth Spirit] further said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, in the future if there are good men and good women who have this sutra and this Bodhisattva’s image in their residences, and who furthermore are able to recite this sutra and make offerings to the Bodhisattva, I will always use my spiritual power

**to protect these people day and night, so that flood, fire, robbery, theft, major calamities, minor misfortunes—all bad occurrences will be eliminated.”**

The Earth Spirit said, if people in the future keep this sutra and an image of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva where they live, chant this sutra, and make offerings to Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, she will use her divine power to protect them day and night so that they will not be harmed by any kind of calamities like flood, fire, robbery, and theft.

With that in mind, it would be beneficial to everyone if you can recite this sutra once every day. Many monastics and lay practitioners engage in such practice, particularly in the Han region where this sutra is held in high regard. It may be difficult for you at Larung Gar to make this commitment because you have already committed to many recitations and practices in your daily chant. Often when there is a collective practice for a certain deity, some people would vow to do a large amount of recitation. In the end, they cannot finish and leave themselves in debt of mantra chanting. As a Tibetan saying goes, “It is easy to make a vow, but difficult to implement.” Therefore, be prudent when making a vow and make sure that you can fulfill it without any trouble.

If you find it difficult to chant this sutra every day, you can carry the sutra or an image of Ksitigarbha with you. This way, the Earth Spirit will still help you and protect you. For those who worry about natural disasters, illness, and other kinds of calamities, you can pray to Ksitigarbha or bring a copy of *Ksitigarbha Sutra* with you in order to prevent these from happening.

While the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* is highly valued in the Han region for its extraordinary blessing, Tibetan people attach particular importance to *The Supremely Victorious King of Sutras*, *The Sublime Golden Light*, which is more commonly known as *The Sutra of Golden Light*. In the Tibetan region, almost every family, including those who could not read, enshrines *The Sutra of Golden Light* and *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in Eight Thousand Lines* at home. Although I don't know how and when this practice started, this is an excellent tradition.

Like the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, *The Sutra of Golden Light* brings auspiciousness and protection to the families which enshrine it. As it is mentioned in this sutra, if a ruler of a place venerates and upholds this sutra or respects and attends to monastic teachers who promote this sutra, his or her domain will be protected by gods and spirits like Indra, Brahma, Four Great Kings, yakshas and so on. In the Chinese Tripitaka, several translated versions of *The Sutra of Golden Light* exist, among them the one translated by

Tripitaka Master Yijing of the Tang Dynasty is the most well-known in the Han region. An English version of *The Sutra of Golden Light* is also available. You can enshrine this sutra at home if possible.

For lay people, it is particularly good to enshrine the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* and *The Sutra of Golden Light* at home. When you have friends or relatives getting married or moving into a new house, you can give them a representative of the Three Jewels as a gift, such as a copy of the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, *The Sutra of Golden Light*, or *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in Eight Thousand Lines*. These gifts will certainly bring them great benefits.

In Han Buddhism, *The Sutra of Golden Light*, the *Lotus Sutra*, and the *Humane King Sutra* are traditionally known as “Three Sutras that Provide Protection for a Country.” These three sutras are of great significance with regard to their power of providing protection and bestowing well-being to a country. Tibetan practitioners attach greater importance to the *Diamond Sutra* and *The Sutra of Great Liberation*, the latter of which contains many pith instructions for spiritual practice. Inside the big prayer wheel I use every day during the chanting before and after class is *The Sutra of Great Liberation* and the Six-Syllable Mantra of Avalokiteshvara. It is one of the most powerful sutras in the Tibetan Tripitaka and is well known for its great blessing for liberation. I am not sure if there is

an opportunity to give a teaching on it in the future. I will try to at least give you its oral transmission when we have time.



**The Buddha told Earth Spirit Firm and Solid, “Your great spiritual power is seldom matched by other spirits. Why is this so? The land of Jambudvīpa is entirely protected by you, and the grasses, trees, sand, stones, rice plants, sesame, bam-boos, reeds, grains, and jewels all come forth from the earth because of your power. Moreover, you frequently extol the beneficial deeds of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva. Your virtues and spiritual penetration are hundreds of thousands of times greater than those of the ordinary earth spirits. In the future if there are good men and good women who make offerings to the Bodhisattva and recite**



**this sutra, as long as they cultivate and practice according to even one aspect of the *Original Vows of Ksitigarbha Sutra*, you should use your spiritual power to protect them. Do not allow any disasters or unwelcome phenomena to even reach their ears, much less happen to them personally.**

Earth Spirit Firm and Solid is certainly powerful and strong. If we recite the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* and make offerings to Ksitigarbha, she will protect us from all kinds of calamities. Many people say that they want a powerful amulet to provide them with blessing and protection. When they go to temples and make offerings, all they wish for is that they themselves, their friends, and their relatives stay well. Everyone asks for protection and well-being, but if we do not know the right approach, no matter how much we want them, we will not be able to get them.

Whatever we want, be it good health, wealth, or staying safe and sound, the simplest way is, as taught here, to make offerings to the image of Ksitigarbha, or to recite and enshrine the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*. If we follow this instruction, our wishes will be fulfilled. These are the infallible words of the Buddha. In *The King of Samadhi Sutra*, it says,

*Even if the stars in the sky fall,*

*The earth, the oceans, and all cities and towns are destroyed,*

*The unconditioned nature of space changes,  
You, the Tathagata, will never speak an untrue word.*

Even when all the stars in the sky fall to the ground, all the earth and oceans, and all cities and towns are in ruins, and the unconditioned nature of space changes into something else, the Buddha will not utter any untruthful word. The Buddha's speech will never be delusive, imprudent, or false, because he has annihilated the cause that leads to any fault in speech.

This may not be convincing enough for some of you. You may doubt, "Is whatever the Buddha says really true?" Many people harbor doubts about Buddhism nowadays. They lack enough understanding of the Buddha's teaching, and as a result, they fail to recognize the truthfulness of the Buddha's words. The wisdom of the Buddha's teaching is instead only clear to the wise and practitioners who have actually practiced the Buddha's teaching. Through earnest examination and evaluation, it is possible for a person to cultivate conviction in the Buddha's words. Simply by focusing on the Buddha's exposition on the nature of the mind, you will get an idea on the infallibility of the Buddha's teachings. If you compare the theory and study on the mind from different schools of philosophies and fields of science and psychology with the Buddha's teaching, you will reach the conclusion that there is no other analysis on the mind as profound as that in Buddhism.

Some people place their trust in scientific experts, taking their words as the only measurement of truth. But in reality, scientific research can have a number of limitations. It is constrained by the extent of existing knowledge and can only go as far as what the existing technology can measure. Take the study of the mind as an example, scientific studies on this subject is mainly focused on brain research. Neuroscientists compare the brain as a central computer that controls all the body's functions and reactions, and the rest of the nervous system as a network that relays messages to parts of the body. They have found that the brain is made up of many parts, each with a specific and important function, and therefore damage to a certain part of the brain would cause dysfunction of the corresponding part of the body.

Many scientists believe that all parts of our body, as well as our thoughts and emotions, are controlled by our brain. They believe that it is the material neurons and glial cells that compose our brain that create our immaterial consciousness. This theory has led to the conclusion that material things can "perceive" objects, however, this is illogical. Deeper exploration into this topic has led some to discover that while the brain has a certain effect on our feelings and thinking, there is something intangible beyond that controls the functioning of the brain. Neuroscientists from a number of world-renowned universities who are investigating

the brain and cranial nervous system have begun to consider the possibility of the existence of the immaterial mind.

For example, the research on split-brain patients conducted by the Nobel Laureate neuroscientist Roger Sperry suggested that while a person's brain can be divided in half, his intellect and will—what some people would call the soul—remained undivided. Also, Dr. Adrian Owen found that in cases where the patients suffered from such severe brain damage that they were considered to be in a persistent vegetative state, they were actually capable of sophisticated thought. Neuroscientist Mario Beauregard argues that the existence of the soul can be revealed in research in which patients are healed after receiving only a placebo, objects are moved using only thoughts, and brain activity in the areas connected to compassion, well-being, and attention is activated by meditation.

While science is still struggling to figure out the truth about consciousness, the Buddha had already explained it thoroughly and revealed its features, categories, and all other aspects more than 2,500 years ago. In summary, the Buddha taught that on a relative level, the mind can be categorized into eight consciousnesses, and on the absolute level, the mind is none other than the perfect union of emptiness and luminosity. Even if we ignore science's lack of any explanation of the ultimate nature of the mind and just focus

on the material level, science has so far provided little insight into even the relative features of the mind.

If we delve into Buddhist shastras, sutras, and tantras, even if only through theoretical analysis, we will marvel at the truth of the mind revealed by the Buddha. If we then take a step further and put the teaching into practice, we will gain an actual realization of the nature of the mind which will itself demonstrate the authenticity of the words of the Buddha. In the part of the *Wish Fulfilling Treasury* which discusses the philosophy of the Prasangika school of Madhyamika, the Omniscient Longchenpa teaches a simple yet direct instruction that points out the nature of the mind. He says,

First, sit in the full lotus position on a comfortable cushion. Second, take refuge and arouse bodhicitta. Then let your mind relax naturally and abide single-pointedly, neither getting distracted by external events nor focusing too intently inwards, in a state of luminosity and clarity, without any concept, thought or discrimination. Realizing that there is nothing substantially existent, neither external objects nor mental activities, thus do not grasp to any of them. This is being free from the dualistic concept of “the grasper” and “the grasped.” Also, as for the mind that is meditating, there is nothing to establish nor refute. Since the mind (as the subject) is non-existent, all phenomena (which are the object of the mind) are likewise

non-existent. This is the meaning of the teaching “there is nothing to be grasped in front of the mind.” Such realization is to be experienced as the wisdom of one’s own rigpa, the vast primordial wisdom that is free from any dualistic concept. That exemplifies the teaching in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*,

*When something and its nonexistence  
Both are absent from before the mind,  
No other option does the latter have:  
It comes to perfect rest, from concepts free.*

After coming out of the meditation, realize that all phenomena appear while being illusory, devoid of intrinsic nature. In the end, dedicate your merit from the meditation to all sentient beings who are also illusory.

During the post meditation session, keep in mind that everything happening in this life is of illusive nature, thus harbor no fixation about anything and break free from any fetters. Meanwhile, engage diligently in virtuous practice to accumulate merit, such as making prostration, circumambulating stupas, reciting scriptures, making tsa-tsa, offering water to hungry ghosts, and so on.

By always abiding in the realization of reality, gradually the activity of the conceptual mind will cease, and in the end, even the subtle grasping to reality will perish. As it is said in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*,

*By training in this aptitude for emptiness,  
The habit to perceive real things will be relinquished.  
By training in the thought "There isn't anything,"  
This view itself will also be abandoned.*

To sum it up, the point of this practice is to abide in the nature of the mind. It is not so hard, and we can try to practice it in our daily life. The fact is once one is engaged in this properly, the practice is pretty straightforward.

**"Not only will you alone protect these people, but Sakra, Brahma, their retinues as well as other devas and their retinues will also support and protect them. Why will they receive support and protection from holy ones and worthies such as these? It is due to their gazing reverently at and making obeisance to Ksitigarbha's image and reciting the *Original Vows of Ksitigarbha Sutra*. Naturally, they will leave the sea of suffering and ultimately attain the bliss of nirvana. Therefore, they receive great support and protection."**

Those who regularly engage in the Ksitigarbha practice will be protected by all kinds of earth gods and Dharma protectors. Why are there so many earth spirits and heavenly gods supporting and protecting these practitioners? The reason is because they venerably behold, worship, and pay homage to the image of Ksitigarbha and recite the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*. In a word, it is because these practitioners have attached great importance to the teaching and practice of Ksitigarbha that they are protected by spirits and ultimately they will be free from the ocean of samsara and obtain the bliss of nirvana.

A master says in his book that the Earth Spirit Firm and Solid is a goddess who leads eight billion subordinates. Since there are less than eight billion humans in this world, there should be no problem for the Earth Goddess to provide protection for every one of us. When you walk in the darkness at night, where there is no streetlight, you don't have to be afraid as you have her protection. Because of the power of the Earth Goddess, if we worship Ksitigarbha or this sutra, we will receive her protection to ensure that everything will go smoothly in our life.

You should note that Buddhist texts are often under the protection of nonhuman spirits. This is especially the case for Vajrayana teachings. In tantric texts, there is always an epilogue stating that the text is safeguarded by certain designated Dharma protectors.



Also, in many Sutrayana texts, there is a section at the end that describes how the Buddha has entrusted certain bodhisattvas, celestial beings, and earth spirits with the task of preserving and promoting the given sutra. There is also such a chapter at the end of this sutra.

## 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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