

**ORIGINAL VOWS OF
KSITIGARBHA BODHISATTVA
SUTRA**

Chapter Thirteen

Commented by Khenpo Sodargye

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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 Thirteen

Entrusting Humans and Devas

In this chapter, the Buddha entrusted humans, devas, and all beings who are sinking in the three realms of samsara to Ksitigarbha, asking him to use his inconceivable power, wisdom, and compassion to protect and liberate them. In other words, the Buddha designated Ksitigarbha to preserve and propagate the Dharma, and in particular, to spread this teaching to fortunate humans and devas in this world.

—Khenpo Sodargye

Lecture Twenty-Five

(Continued)

September 1st, 2020

THE BUDDHA'S ENTRUSTMENT

Today it is our last lecture and we will finish the final chapter, *Entrusting Humans and Devas*. In this chapter, the Buddha entrusted humans, devas, and all beings who are sinking in the three realms of samsara to Ksitigarbha, asking him to use his inconceivable power, wisdom, and compassion to protect and liberate them. In other words, the Buddha designated Ksitigarbha to preserve and propagate the Dharma, and in particular, to spread this teaching to fortunate humans and devas in this world. For us followers who study and practice this sutra, we also have the responsibility to propagate the teaching to as many beings as we can.

Chapter Thirteen

Entrusting Humans and Devas

At that time, the World-Honored One raised his golden arm, again placed his hand on the crown of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva's head, and spoke these words, "Ksitigarbha, Ksitigarbha, inconceivable is your spiritual power, inconceivable

your kindness and compassion, inconceivable your wisdom, inconceivable your eloquence. Even if all the Buddhas of the ten directions were to praise and speak on the inconceivable matters about you, they could not be described fully in thousands of myriads of kalpas.



The Buddha put his hand gently on the crown of Ksitigarbha and called his name twice with intense earnestness and ardent expectations because the Buddha was going to hand over to Ksitigarbha the great responsibility of protecting and liberating all sentient beings in samara. Because the Buddha would soon enter parinirvana, he was concerned for all the beings who were still

wandering in samsara. In this sutra, the Buddha touched twice the crown of Ksitigarbha's head, and every time the Buddha did so with a special intent. In the second chapter, *The Assembly of the Emanations*, the Buddha touched Ksitigarbha's head to console and praise him, and also entrusted Ksitigarbha with the task of helping all living beings suffering in the saha world to attain liberation. Here, at the end of the Dharma assembly, the Buddha did so again for the sake of all beings in samsara.

Then the Buddha praised Ksitigarbha for his incredible blessing, mighty power, boundless compassion, extraordinary wisdom, and excellent eloquence. Ksitigarbha is indeed inconceivable: his spiritual power is unparalleled in this world; his compassion is so great that he treasures every being more than himself; his wisdom penetrates the reality of all phenomena and knows the best way to benefit beings; his eloquence is prominent—it is not just sophisticated speech or slick rhetoric but the kind that is characterized by the eight treasures of eloquence.

The *Sutra of the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha* enumerates many of Ksitigarbha's incredible qualities, one being that even in the short time of a meal, Ksitigarbha can liberate an incalculable number of sentient beings in innumerable worlds. He carries on his enlightenment activities every moment and in every world of the ten directions. His abilities and deeds of benefiting sentient beings

are so infinite and unbelievably great that not only we ordinary beings, but enlightened beings like shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, and even buddhas of the ten directions cannot fully describe them. Since the Buddha was going to entrust all sentient beings to Ksitigarbha, he first praised his qualities to delight him. From a worldly perspective, the Buddha had great social skills and he understood the ways of the world and knew how to communicate effectively with others.

Essential Qualities for Spreading the Dharma

These qualities of Ksitigarbha extolled by the Buddha are indeed indispensable to any master who aims to propagate the Dharma and benefit sentient beings. In *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, it tells the story of how before master Zurchen Shakya Jungne (Zurpoche) left this world for Sukhavati, he entrusted his followers to Zurchung Sherab Drakpa, one of his heart disciples, saying that Zurchung had achieved remarkable realization, possessing inconceivable wisdom, ability, and eloquence, and requesting them to follow Zurchung as they did to him. Here is the whole story excerpted from *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*:

In his (Zurpoche) sixty-first year, when he had almost finished building the temple at Dropuk, that great man, an undeniable

emanation who lived on the level of a holder of the awareness of spontaneous presence, having fully realized the attributes of the five paths, resolved to transform his coarse body into its pure essential substance. He said, "Summon Zurchungpa from Trak Gyawo."

When Zurchungpa arrived the master said, "I entrust this center of mine to you, Zurchungpa. You must benefit the host of disciples by means of the doctrine. Grant it to them according to their intellectual capacities. Protect them as I have done.

"You disciples, too, must attend carefully to whatever Zurchungpa does. Do not disobey his word. Do not even step on his shadow, footprints, or robe; for this one has attained the accomplishment of the body, speech, and mind of the Great Glorious One. Therefore, he is even higher than I. Because he will protect you as I have done, practice respectful devotion perfectly."

Then Zurpoche went off to his hermitage at Trampa. One day he said to his attendant, "Prepare a meal this morning before the heat." At sunrise, when the attendant came into his presence, the great guru was sitting on his bed, getting all dressed up. The attendant asked, "Now, where are you off to, that you are getting dressed up?"

I am going to Sukhavati Buddha-field.
Address your prayers to the meditational deity,
For the Great Glorious One and I are no different.

So saying, the master took up his vajra and rang his bell. As he did so his body was transformed into light; and he vanished into the heart of the image of the Great Glorious Heruka.

When a monastery wants to select an abbot or a master wants to choose a Dharma heir to continue his or her career of upholding and propagating the Dharma, they would be advised to follow the same standard and take the aforementioned qualities into consideration. Without any of these prerequisites, one will not be able to accomplish that great task. If one lacks the power of blessing, it would be hard to influence others; without compassion, the person will be selfish and so lack the motivation to benefit beings; if one is deficient in wisdom, one will likely fail in what they do. In particular, in this degenerated age, eloquence is a vital quality. Without enough articulation and eloquence to deliver a proper speech, even if one is endowed with many other excellent qualities, these qualities will become like hidden termas, unable to be fully demonstrated. Nowadays, there are so many people who do not have faith in Buddhism but harbor all kinds of wrong views

toward its teaching. In such cases, without eloquence, it will be difficult to propagate the Dharma and benefit them.

In a nutshell, during the process of Dharma study and practice, it is important that we develop an altruistic compassionate mind imbued with wisdom and eloquence. Especially in these modern times, it is necessary that we enrich our knowledge and equip ourselves with the eloquence of expounding the Dharma logically and convincingly. For instance, by referring to scientific ideas, we may explain the Dharma on the mind more effectively. Suppose that we have never studied related Buddhist philosophies nor scientific research, when being asked about the issue of consciousness, it would be difficult for us to provide a satisfactory answer regarding its essence and origin.

In the previous lecture, I discussed neuroscience studies on the mind. After the teaching, someone spoke to me, “How come you start talking about neuroscience when you are teaching the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*? Why did you talk about that?” I said that on one hand, I wanted to add a bit more extra to enrich my teaching, and on the other, because modern people have faith in science, they would be less persuaded by the Dharma teaching if it was given without any analysis from the perspective of science.

Neuroscience vs Buddhist Study on Consciousness

Since we are discussing neuroscience, I would like to address a little bit more on the science of Buddhism. Lately, while I was translating the *Wish Fulfilling Treasury*, I found some teachings that describe the psycho-physical system of the human body, a sort of interface between the mind and the physical body consisting of a dynamic network of subtle channels, wind-energies, and essences that could provide some additional inspiration to neuroscience. Let me quote one short part from this treatise,

There are three principal channels in the body, and many more subtle channels, whose number and category are articulated in various tantras... To be specific, there are 72,000 subtle channels in the body. The *Tathagata's Parietal Bone Tantra* says that,

It is well expounded that there are
Seventy-two thousand types of subtle channels.

As for the inner air or psychic wind, there are different types categorized by their function with regard to the five elements. Generally speaking, there are 21,600 movements of the inner air in a single day.

To put it in modern words, tantric texts teach that there are 72,000 subtle body systems within our body. Moreover, it is taught that in one day and one night, a person breathes about 21,600 times, which corresponds with modern scientific findings. Besides that, the *Wish Fulfilling Treasury* cites many tantric teachings to describe the subtle construction of the human body, as well as its connection with spiritual realization. Though it is not an extensive description, it provides us with a clear enough picture of our body and its relationship with our consciousness.

Scientists nowadays think that consciousness is generated by the brain. But how does the brain really generate consciousness? Are the mind and brain actually one entity or separate entities? If they are one entity, how can one thing generate from itself? If they are two separate entities, how can a nonphysical consciousness come from a physical brain? Even scientists cannot give satisfactory answers. Actually, the assumption that consciousness comes from the brain has many flaws, and in Buddhism, there are abundant arguments and deduction that prove such an assumption to be wrong.

In their experiments, scientists find out that when some parts of the brain change or get damaged, one's memory, perception, or cognition will be influenced accordingly. However, although these experiments demonstrate certain correlation between the brain and

consciousness, they are insufficient to establish the argument that consciousness is generated by the brain. Buddhist teachings claim that there are various channels, wind-energies, and essences in the body that are in charge of different aspects of our consciousness. For example, some channels and wind-energies control visual perception. Although the subtle body system is not the same entity with consciousness, it can actually influence consciousness. In other words, changes in the physical body can result in psychological reactions. But such interaction does not mean that consciousness arises from the subtle body system. Physical organs and systems work only as a contributory factor of mental activities, but not the fundamental cause of consciousness. We need to understand this through careful investigation.

While Buddhism teaches alaya consciousness, the basis or ground for the arising of all other types of consciousness, scientific studies still only revolve around the sixth consciousness, the superficial level of the mind. And even with that, many questions remain unanswered. Modern psychology only has a history of over a hundred years and cognitive neuroscience just emerged in the late 20th century. In recent years, although more and more experts start to engage in the study of cognitive neuroscience, they have not reached a consensus on the origin of consciousness. In contrast, there are abundant teachings in tantric texts on the psycho-physical

system of the human body. In Tibetan medicine, which has many of its sources found in tantra, there is also a great deal of elaboration on the subtle system of the human body. Although descriptions of the psycho-physical system vary in different tantras, they have provided clear elucidation on the interaction between the physical body and the mind.

For example, the *Wish Fulfilling Treasury* elaborates how our perception, consciousness, and even spiritual realization are affected by the function of our psycho-physical system. In particular, it reveals how this subtle body system determines our dreams at night. In our body, there are various channels, including human-type channels, animal-type channels, hell-type channels, and more, which store the seeds that will demonstrate the characters of humans, animals, hell beings, and others respectively. During sleep, if your wind-energy and essence enter an animal-type channel, you will dream of becoming an animal like a tiger, jackal, or else. If your wind-energy and essence enter a human-type channel, you will dream of being a person. I should not elaborate too much on this, otherwise, we will not finish this sutra today. That being said, for those of you who may not have sufficient Dharma study, it is necessary for me to explain certain Dharma teachings in this way by addressing related scientific studies.

The Buddha's Earnest Entrustment

“Ksitigarbha, Ksitigarbha, remember that today in the Trayas-trimsa Heaven, in this great assembly of hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of inexpressibly-inexpressible [number of] Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, devas, nagas, and others of the eight classes of beings, I once again entrust to you humans, devas, and other beings who have not yet left the threefold world, who are still in this burning house. Do not allow these living beings to fall into the lower realms even for a single day and night, much less fall into the hell with fivefold incessancy or the Avici Hell, where they would pass through thousands of myriads of millions of kalpas without a time of release.

Seeing that so many humans, devas, and other beings are still sinking in samsara, the burning house of suffering, the Buddha was filled with compassion and very concerned for them. He again earnestly called Ksitigarbha's name twice to entrust these poor beings to him, just like a loving mother who has to depart for somewhere else asks a reliable friend to take care of her children. The Buddha requested Ksitigarbha to protect these beings and not let them fall into any lower realm for a single day, to say nothing of a long period of time. So Ksitigarbha was urged by the Buddha to save beings everywhere from suffering, and the Avici Hell in

particular. Now we know why Ksitigarbha always goes to hell to save beings.

The compassion and blessing of buddhas and bodhisattvas are inconceivably great. Given the Buddha's entrustment out of his great compassion, together with Ksitigarbha's incredible skillfulness, powerful blessing, profound wisdom, and compassion, this great bodhisattva can certainly benefit and liberate us living beings with all means. Nonetheless, if we have never built any connection with Ksitigarbha, it would be hard for his blessing to reach us. Also, even if we have tied ourselves in with him, if we have not accumulated any merit, his effort will still fall short. It is like a prisoner who has no money will still not get bailed out of prison even if he knows some high officials. Or, if one lacks the required ability, it would be hard to get a position, regardless of how good he may associate with the one in charge. When we have accumulated enough merit and built a close connection with Ksitigarbha, we can be assured to receive the blessings from him and achieve what we want.

We must be aware that it would indeed be terrible to fall into the lower realms because once we are born there, it would be hard to get liberated. Many Dharma practitioners also feel that "It would be okay if I cannot take rebirth in Sukhavati. But at least, I do not want to fall into the three lower realms. That's my minimum requirement for myself." I have mentioned many times the story

of Tulku Tishta at the Dhomang Monastery. He was particularly diligent in reciting scriptures and practicing all kinds of virtues every day because he feared that he would fall into the three lower realms. As he repeatedly said, once a person has fallen into the three lower realms, there is little chance for one to escape. Quite often, when he was among the sangha members, he would say, "Please grant me your blessings so that I won't sink into the lower realms after this life, otherwise when will I have the chance to be liberated?" This had been this great enlightened master's frank and sincere demonstration.

Many of us wish to achieve enlightenment within this single life or attain rainbow body at the end of this life. These are beautiful and praiseworthy wishes and nothing can be better than them for us Dharma practitioners. But even if we fail to achieve such high level of spiritual accomplishment, we should seek the ability to ensure that we would not fall into the evil realms in future lives. We should ensure a human rebirth which would give us the chance to continue our spiritual practice. For this reason, it is particularly meaningful to build a good connection with Ksitigarbha.

"Ksitigarbha, living beings of Jambudvipa are without fixity in their wills and characters. Most of them are accustomed to evil. Even when they generate a wholesome mind, it fades within a short time. If they encounter evil conditions, [the unwholesome]

is increased thought upon thought. For this reason, I transform into hundreds of thousands of millions of emanation-forms to teach beings and guide them across to liberation, all in accord with their capacities and dispositions.

“Ksitigarbha, I now earnestly entrust devas, humans, and the multitudes of beings to you. In the future, if there are devas, good men, and good women who plant a few roots of goodness in Buddhadharma, even as little as a strand of hair, a speck of dust, a grain of sand, or a drop of water, you should use the power of the noble path to support and protect them, so that they gradually cultivate the Unsurpassed [Way] and do not retreat from it or lose it.



It is true that sentient beings in this world of Jambudvīpa have highly unreliable natures and the majority have evil tendencies. Even if they have resolved to engage in virtuous practices, for example, generating renunciation, bodhicitta, or a pure faith in the guru and the Three Jewels, it does not take long for them to regress back to their old ways. If they encounter bad influences, such as bad companions and unqualified teachers, their evil tendencies would grow in strength. Because of this, the Buddha manifested trillions of emanations in accordance with their different temperaments, dispositions, and capacities to help and liberate them.

Now since the Buddha was going to enter nirvana, he earnestly entrusted all devas, humans, and other sentient beings to Kṣitigarbha. If these beings plant a virtuous root in the Buddhādharma, even one as little as a strand of hair, a speck of dust, a pebble of sand, or a droplet of water, Kṣitigarbha would use his wisdom, power, and skillful means to support and protect them, so that they will never regress from the Dharma path and ultimately attain supreme enlightenment.

It is indeed a great weakness to have an unstable and fickle mind. We can see this from the actions of some Dharma practitioners. It would be different if one were forced into performing a negative deed because of certain irresistible reasons. But that is not the case and for some practitioners, monastics and lay practitioners alike,

they should have the condition to always engage in virtuous deeds and stay away from negative activities. However, the fact is, driven by their emotions and negative habits, they become extremely volatile. They can expect to make occasional mistakes while they are trying to cultivate goodness most of the time. Unfortunately, as the sutra says, they are inclined to evil deeds and even when they generate a wholesome mind, it fades within a short time.

The Buddha also said in the previous chapter that the acts and thoughts of the beings of Jambudvīpa are invariably driven by their karma and are prone to wrongdoing. The favorable conditions for us to perform virtuous deeds are not many while inner and outer obstacles can frequently appear along the way. In terms of inner obstacles, our minds may not be so resolved in virtuous practice, and speaking of outer obstacles, there are many restrictions and limitations in the external environment for religious activities. For example, if we intend to build a monastery, a buddha statue, or release captive animals, we may have difficulty obtaining the necessary governmental authorization. Ironically, when it comes to committing negative deeds, such as killing, stealing, or even something related to the five crimes with immediate retribution and the like, it would seem that favorable conditions for them could be gathered quickly and authorizations may not be required whatsoever from the law, policies or the government. Therefore,

it would appear that committing negative deeds is always easier in this degenerate world while performing virtuous deeds could inevitably come with various obstacles.

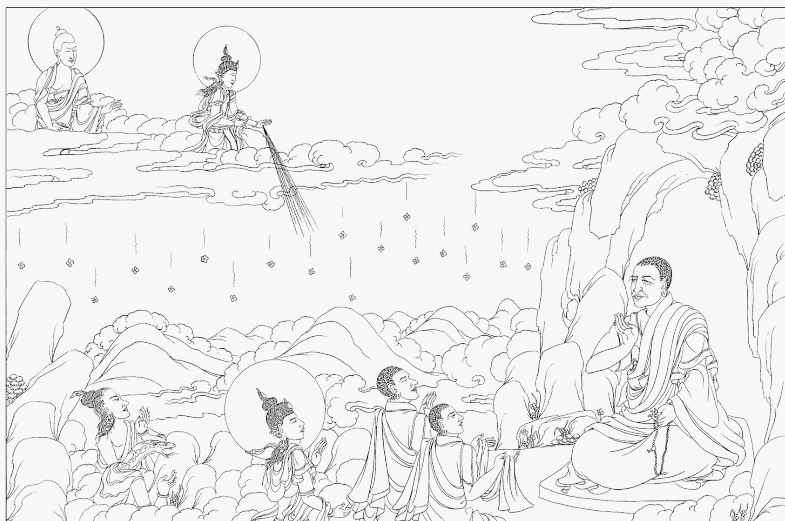
In order to liberate sentient beings of this world, Shakyamuni Buddha manifested thousands of millions of emanations to transform beings in various ways that accord with their capacities and temperaments. In Ashvaghosha's *Sutralankara*, it says,

*Throughout the three realms,
The Buddha looks for beings ready to be tamed
Just like a cow looks for her calf
Whose love never stops.*

Like a mother cow which would not stop looking for her calf, the Buddha never stops looking for sentient beings who are ready to be tamed, and his love for sentient beings never ceases, not even for an instant. It is the same with qualified spiritual masters. Many great masters are indeed the authentic emanations of buddhas and bodhisattvas, earnestly teaching and transforming sentient beings day and night. As long as there are capable beings who possess keen faculties and have connection with them, such as those having faith in the guru and the Three Jewels, observing pure precepts, and taking delight in benefiting others, these great masters cannot wait to guide and teach them. This is especially

true for Mahayana masters. I have met a lot of masters, including those I have followed, all of them are very compassionate to their disciples. Their great care for their disciples is never contaminated by their self-concern such as trying to find someone to look after them when they are old. Instead, they want to make sure that their disciples are of good capacities and will bring great benefit to sentient beings in the future.

Here the Buddha entrusted sentient beings to Ksitigarbha and asked him to lead beings to supreme enlightenment. However, the prior condition is that people must establish wholesome roots in the Dharma. For those who do nothing but evil all day long, even the Buddha's sublime hand cannot pacify their suffering. In the *Compassionate Lotus Sutra*, it says, "Although the Tathagata, the World-Honored One, is a field of merit, he is not able to cut off sentient beings' afflictions if they do not cultivate virtuous root at all." The Buddha is replete with various noble qualities including compassion, wisdom, and power, however, if we do not build a virtuous connection with the Buddha by planting a virtuous root in his field of merit, there is no way for the Buddha to uproot our afflictions and save us from agony. Therefore, we should never forget to perform virtues in the Dharma, even as tiny as a drop of water or a speck of dust. Otherwise, it will be impossible for us to be liberated.



“Furthermore, Ksitigarbha, in the future, if devas or humans fall into the lower realms to undergo ripened effects according to their karma, and when on the verge of falling into these lower realms or at the front of these entrances, if these beings are able to recollect a Buddha’s name, a Bodhisattva’s name, or a sentence or a verse from the Mahayana sutras, you should use your spiritual power to skillfully rescue these beings. Manifest your infinite forms at the places where they are, shatter the hells for them, and enable them to be reborn in the heavens and experience excellent, wonderful happiness.”

At that time, the World-Honored One spoke in verse, saying:

**“Devas, humans, multitudes of beings of the present
and future**

I now earnestly entrust to you:

**Use great supernatural power and skillful means
guide them across [to liberation].**

Do not allow them to fall into the lower realms.”

Moreover, there will be gods and humans in the future who, due to the maturation of their negative karma, may be on the verge of falling into the lower realms or at the front of these entrances. If these beings can recite the name of a buddha or a bodhisattva even only once or recite just a single sentence or a verse from a Mahayana sutra, the Buddha directed Ksitigarbha to use his miraculous power to skillfully rescue them. Ksitigarbha would manifest in his infinite transformations at the places where the beings are, smash the hells and liberate them so that they can take rebirth in the heavenly realm and enjoy supreme and wonderful happiness.

In the *Collection of Essence of All Sutras*, it sets down a story that illustrates the powerful blessing received by supplicating to a buddha. There was a king who had usurped the throne by killing his own father. An arhat, with his divine power, knew that the

king only had seven days to live and once he died, he would fall into the Incessant Hell to suffer for as long as a kalpa. In order to save him from the suffering, the arhat went to the king to teach him to chant “Namo Buddhaya”, saying that he should devotedly recite this for seven consecutive days. When the arhat was about to leave, he urged the king to remember what he said.

The king thus wholeheartedly recited “Namo Buddhaya” day and night with his palms joined. On the seventh day, he died and reached the gate of the Incessant Hell. Because of the power of reciting “Namo Buddhaya”, he knew that he had fallen into hell, so he spent more energy loudly reciting “Namo Buddhaya”. While he was reciting, other hell beings who heard him joined him in the recitation. Immediately the fierce flames of hell were pacified and all beings were liberated from the hell and took rebirth as humans.

Here Buddha Shakyamuni reiterated his entrustment in verses to exhort Ksitigarbha that he should make full use of his supernatural powers and expedient means to liberate sentient beings of the present and future, and to ensure that no sentient being is to fall into any of the lower realms, which is the basic request the Buddha made for Ksitigarbha. Even if they may continue to suffer in the human world, it is much better compared to experiencing suffering in the evil realms. Actually, with his various expedient means and

powers, Ksitigarbha can not only help close the door of the lower realms, but he can also guide beings to Sukhavati. This is indeed meaningful.

Efficacy Story: The Power of Making Ksitigarbha Statue

I forgot to share a story of Ksitigarbha in the beginning of the teaching as I have usually done. I will make up of it now as we are talking about staying away from the three lower realms. This story is again from the *Records of Efficacy of Ksitigarbha Image*. There was a monk named Dao Zhen who was a devout tantric practitioner and he constantly made offerings to Yama ghosts to receive their blessing. One day he vowed to make the statues of Amitabha, Avalokiteshvara, Mahasthamaprapta, Ksitigarbha, and Nagarjuna. Then several Yama ghosts came to his dream and all appeared very sad. They said to Dao Zhen that although he had made frequent offerings to them, they were still worried. When Dao Zhen asked why, they said, “Please don’t make statues of Ksitigarbha and Avalokiteshvara because if you make their statues, all you human beings will not come to our place after they die, and the three lower realms will be empty. In that case, there will be no one under our governance.” When Dao Zhen woke up, he stopped making offerings to the Yama ghosts and concentrated on making more statues of Avalokiteshvara and Ksitigarbha. Many of these statues

were still existent at the time this book was compiled by the monk Changjin.

Just like Dao Zhen built many statues of the two bodhisattvas in many places, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche had built Guru Padmasambhava statues in many places. These statues are indeed replete with powerful blessings. In the future, we should aspire to build Ksitigarbha statues wherever and whenever we can. Since most people today reside in tall buildings in cities, it may not be convenient to build traditional temples as we used to. If possible, we can try to place Ksitigarbha statues or hang Ksitigarbha thangkas in public areas, where local people, whether they have faith or not, can easily see them and pay homage to them. Even though we all have different capabilities, it is important and meaningful for us to make such an aspiration.

You may have heard the news of the “Buddha of Oakland”. It was a 60-cm-tall buddha statue placed on an intersection of two main streets in Oakland by a local resident in 2009. Initially, this area was riddled with a variety of illegal activities ranging from littering and vandalization to drug dealing, robberies, prostitution, and assaults. The resident who placed the statue is not religious at all but believed in the power of positive and negative energy, so he decided to place a small buddha statue in the hope that there might be an improvement in his neighborhood. What he certainly

did not expect was the Buddha statue did create a ripple effect that resulted in the utter transformation of his neighborhood. Since 2012, overall year-to-date crime had dropped by 82 percent. Police statistics showed that between 2012 and 2014 “robbery reports went from 14 to three, aggravated assaults from five to zero, burglaries from eight to four, narcotics from three to none, and prostitution from three to none”.

It can indeed be very meaningful that we erect Ksitigarbha statue in public places. If it is simply too difficult to do so, we could create a Ksitigarbha shrine in our own houses and leave proper instructions on how it is to be handled after we leave the world in accordance with probate laws. This is especially the case in western countries. You do not have to be a famous writer to keep your books and other things after you die. Any deceased person’s belongings will be taken care of according to his or her will. Chinese practitioners should also ask their family members to handle their Buddhist objects properly after they die, such as a Ksitigarbha statue, a Shakyamuni Buddha statue, or Buddhist scriptures. But despite their will, if their families are non-believers, it is possible that all these representatives of the Three Jewels would be sold or thrown away after their death.

Anyway, if one has the ability, it is best to erect Ksitigarbha statues in Buddhist centers, neighborhoods, and so forth. Or, we don’t

have to build a Ksitigarbha shrine hall for worship, just make the statue as a cultural icon or something auspicious that is welcomed by ordinary people. For example, if a company places a Ksitigarbha statue in a public area, it will bring auspiciousness to the company in many ways such as increasing good fortune and improving interpersonal relationships. One thing we need to be careful of is that any Buddhist statue should not be placed directly on the ground but at a higher level and best be supported by a stand.

As it is said in *Mangala Sutta*, all devas and humans wish for benefit and happiness, which is why a deva came to ask the Buddha to teach what brings the most auspiciousness. Then the Buddha spoke of this very short sutra, and I will teach it tomorrow. His Holiness used to say a lot, “Good fortune as you wish!” He spoke these few words in Mandarin (Ji Xiang Ru Yi) very well. I always want to post his recording of saying these few words online during Chinese New Year, because the voice of his vajra speech can bring the clouds of auspiciousness to anyone who hears it.

Ksitigarbha’s Commitment

At that time, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva knelt on his knees, joined his palms, and said to the Buddha, “O World-Honored One, I implore the World-Honored One not to be concerned. In the future, if there are good men and good women

who have a single thought of respect in Buddhadharma, I will use hundreds of thousands of skillful means to guide these people across to liberation, so that they will soon be freed from the cycle of birth and death. How much more so for those who hear the wholesome matters and cultivate their practices, thought upon thought! Naturally they will never fall back or turn away from the Unsurpassed Way."

Ksitigarbha assured the Buddha that he will use hundreds of thousands of expedient means to rescue living beings even if they have just one thought of respect in regard to the Three Jewels. He will help them quickly achieve liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. If those beings, after learning various Dharma teachings, are inspired to practice them with every thought, such as contemplating and meditating on the Dharma, working for the well-being of others, then they will naturally not fall back or turn away from the supreme path of enlightenment.

As we see from this paragraph, it is of vital importance for us to have a close connection with the Three Jewels. As we have repeated many times, even making a small offering in front of a buddha statue, be it a bouquet of flowers, an incense stick, or a lamp, is very meaningful. As ordinary people in this chaotic world, it is increasingly difficult for us to spend our time entirely on the Dharma practice, but as long as we do not give up our

chanting, studying, meditating, and so forth, we will definitely make progress. This is the infallible law of dependent origination, as the *Lotus Sutra* states,

*If people with a distracted mind
Take even one flower
And offer it to a buddha image,
They would come to see countless buddhas.*

This *Ksitigarbha Sutra* is very practical for worldly people who are busy, tired, or distressed and facing pressures of various kinds in their daily life. This is because, however busy and tired they may be, it cannot be too hard for them to pray to Ksitigarbha by reciting his name a few times or making the offering of one lamp or one incense stick in front of his image. Such practice costs nothing at all, and they should really persist in such practice. Eventually, Ksitigarbha will close the entrance to the evil realms for them and guide them further to the higher realm or even the pure land of Sukhavati.

BENEFITS OF WORSHIPING KSITIGARBHA

As these words were spoken, in the assembly there was a Bodhisattva named Akasagarbha who said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, since I came to the Trayastrimsa Heaven I have heard the Tathagata praise Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s inconceivable might of awesome spiritual penetration. In the future, if there are good men, good women, and devas and nagas who hear this sutra and Ksitigarbha’s name or gaze reverently at and make obeisance to his image, how many kinds of merits and benefits will they gain? O World-Honored One, for the sake of all the multitudes of beings in the present and future, please briefly speak about this.”

The Buddha told Akasagarbha Bodhisattva, “Listen attentively, listen attentively. I will describe them separately for you. In the future, if there are good men and good women who see Ksitigarbha’s image and who hear this sutra, who moreover

read and recite it, who give gifts and make offering of incense, flowers, food, drink, clothing, or jewels, who sing his praises, gaze reverently at, and make obeisance to him, they will gain twenty-eight kinds of benefits:



Akasagarbha bodhisattva now spoke up. Except Mahasthamaprapta and Sarvanivarana-Vishkambhin, the rest of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas have all now been mentioned or appeared in the sutra. It seems that the Eight Great Bodhisattvas were quite active at this Dharma assembly. After Ksitigarbha concluded his words, Akasagarbha asked the Buddha how many types of benefits one would gain by hearing this sutra and Ksitigarbha's name, or by respectfully gazing upon and paying homage to his images.

Akasagarbha raised this question mainly for the sake of all future beings. In reply to his question, the Buddha stated that there would be twenty-eight kinds of benefits. To gain these benefits, there are two key requirements for us: to recite this sutra or the name of Ksitigarbha and to pay homage to Ksitigarbha. I think most of you are able to meet these two requirements. By learning this sutra, I believe many people will pray to Ksitigarbha and recite his name or this sutra as their life-long practice. For those devoted practitioners, these practices are not difficult at all. Without faith, however, any practice would become difficult to persist.

For those who have neither faith nor interest, even offering one incense stick is too much to ask. When you ask a non-believer to pay homage to a buddha statue, very likely they will groan, “Why? I don’t want to do this!” When some kids come to a Buddhist shrine hall with their parents, they’d refuse to make prostrations and even behave outrageously, shouting, “No, no prostrations!” They are very amiable when playing iPad, but if they are asked to pay homage to buddhas and bodhisattvas, they become rather petulant. Without faith and interest, any virtuous practice as little as making a prostration or the offering of a flower would become impossible.

Twenty-Eight Benefits for Human Beings



“First, devas and nagas will protect them.

Second, their wholesome results will increase daily.

Third, they will accumulate superior causes for holiness.

Fourth, they will not retreat from bodhi.

Fifth, their food and clothing will be abundant.

Sixth, they will not be infected by diseases or pestilence.

Seventh, they will not be in disasters of flood or fire.

Eighth, they will not fall victim to robbery or theft.

Ninth, people who see them will admire and respect them.

Tenth, spirits and ghosts will aid and support them.

Eleventh, women [who wish to] will be reborn as men.

Twelfth, [if reborn as women] they will be daughters of kings and ministers.

Thirteenth, they will be good looking and with perfect features.

Fourteenth, they will frequently be reborn in the heavens.

Fifteenth, they may be emperors or kings.

Sixteenth, they will have the wisdom to know past lives.

Seventeenth, they will fulfill their wishes.

Eighteenth, their family members will be happy.

Nineteenth, untoward dire occurrences will be eliminated.

Twentieth, they will forever leave the karmic paths.

Twenty-first, they will pass through safely wherever they go.

Twenty-second, their dreams at night will be peaceful and happy.

Twenty-third, their deceased relatives will leave suffering behind.

Twenty-fourth, they will be reborn on the strength of their past merit.

Twenty-fifth, holy ones will praise them.

Twenty-sixth, they will be intelligent and have keen faculties.

Twenty-seventh, their hearts will be replete with kindness and compassion.

Twenty-eighth, they will ultimately become Buddhas.

The twenty-eight benefits as enumerated by the Buddha are:

1) One will always be protected by devas and nagas as well as their retinues. Even if you occasionally take a break for one or two days from your daily practice, say the practice of making offerings to Dharma protectors, no need to worry that you will displease them. They will still protect you because you are the one who recites the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* and the name of this bodhisattva.

2) One's merit or wholesome results, both conventional and transcendental, will increase day by day. Should their merit be dedicated with the mind of bodhicitta, it will multiply and never extinguish.

3) One will gather supreme causes for holiness. Causes for holiness may refer to merits that lead one to transcend samsara, such as the aspiration of bodhicitta, the realization of emptiness, and the like. Merits can be divided to those tending to happiness and those tending to liberation. So, as I was translating this term, I put "causes for holiness" as "merit tending to liberation".

4) One will not regress from the bodhi path. Some practitioners who have generated bodhicitta may regress from it. But by paying homage to Ksitigarbha and by reciting this sutra or the name of Ksitigarbha, one will never regress from the bodhisattva path.

5) One will have abundance of food and clothing and enjoy perfect wealth. Nowadays, some people are extremely destitute. Although they pursue wealth desperately, they still cannot get what they want and thus often feel sad. Their difficulty can be resolved if they engage in the Ksitigarbha practice as suggested here.

6) One will be immune to any illnesses or pestilences, for example, the pandemic over the past few years such as COVID-19, Ebola virus, bird flu, and more.

7) One will not encounter flood or fire disasters.

8) One will not be burglarized or robbed. In the past, thieves stole yaks or horses from house to house at night. Nowadays, there are high-tech thieves. One may find out when he goes to the ATM or the bank to withdraw money that all his savings are gone, causing some to faint. Those who recite this sutra or Ksitigarbha's name need not to worry about this kind of loss.

9) One will be respected and loved by anyone who sees them, even the flowers they pass by will blossom. There are people who are frowned upon by anyone they encounter. They are very distressed and have no self-confidence because they feel they are disliked. People who engage in the Ksitigarbha practices can always be self-assured because they are liked and respected not only by humans, but also by ghosts and spirits.

10) One will receive assistance from all worldly ghosts and spirits including evil ghosts, yakshas, and rakshasas. To gain assistance and protection from non-humans is very important. With their protection, many things can go smoothly. Otherwise, if they create troubles for us, many things will be unsuccessful.

11) & 12) A woman who wants to be a man will be reborn as a man. If she still wants to be a woman, she will take rebirth as the daughter of a national leader or high-ranking official.

13) One will have an impressive, beautiful, and perfect appearance.

14) After death, one will not fall into the evil realms. Instead, one will often be born in heavens such as the Trayastrimsa Heaven and the Tushita Heaven, enjoying happiness.

15) If one takes rebirth in the human realm, one will become a king, a president, a prime minister, and so on.

16) One will recall their past lives. Many of us have no idea about our past lives, so we ignorantly commit evil. *The Mahaparinirvana Sutra* says, "When something bad is done, one does not feel its effects immediately. It is like fresh milk that curdles over time, or like ashes being placed over a fire, on which the fool blithely treads." Because we don't know the consequences of our actions,

we are indifferent to what to adopt and what to forsake, and thus commit evil deeds that will force us to be burned by the fierce flames in hell. Should we gain the wisdom to know our past lives, we would never behave recklessly.

17) One will get whatever they seek. Some practitioners would control their own thoughts carefully because whatever random expectations or wishes they think of will come true. "I cannot think of accumulating wealth, or else it will rush to me." "I cannot think of being liked, otherwise everyone will love me." "I cannot think about having high social status because it will just come my way." It seems they are quite confident with themselves.

18) One's loved ones and people around him or her are very happy. They get along well and always have a friendly atmosphere, unlike in some groups, where people have a lot of rivalry, infighting, and gossip.

19) One will never experience any unexpected disasters, either natural or man-made. For example, some young people today die from violent attacks that may have resulted from their negative karma from their previous lives. By praying to Ksitigarbha, one will not encounter these untoward occurrences.

20) One will leave the evil karmic paths forever. Some people may have created severe negative karma that will cause them to fall

into the lower realms. For instance, the five crimes with immediate retribution will make one fall into the Incessant Hell right after death. But relying on the blessing and protection of Ksitigarbha, their negative karma will be purified and they will be saved from the lower realms.

21) Wherever one wants to travel, there are no dangers or hindrances as if there is a passport that secures one to go everywhere. Passports do have different strengths and allow the holders to enter certain countries without the need to apply for a visa. The number of such assigned countries varies according to different countries that issue the passport. Someone used to tell me that his passport allowed him to visit 180 countries, almost everywhere in the world. I was quite envious of him because at that time we were not as open as now. It is good to be unimpeded wherever we want to travel, but it is even better that after we die, we can take rebirth freely in whichever pure realm we like without any hindrances, such as the Tushita Heaven, Sukhavati, or the Medicine Buddha's pure land.

22) Anyone who hears or reads the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* and pays homage to his image will have peaceful and auspicious dreams at night.

23) One's deceased family members will be free from suffering.

24) One will take a higher rebirth by virtue of their past merit. Beings in the lower realms such as animals and hell beings were not born in their realms as a result of their merit but due to their negative karma. To people with great merit, although their alaya consciousness must have stored the seeds of negative karma from their previous lives, they were born in the human realm this life due to the strength of their past merit. If they continue to accumulate merit while alive, they will continuously take rebirth in higher realms life after life, and those negative karmic seeds will not have a chance to ripen and drive them to the evil realms. There are varied interpretations regarding this benefit. I have made references on them during translating, and feel my current explanation is a better way to understand it.

25) One will be praised by buddhas, bodhisattvas, and great masters.

26) One will be intelligent and have keen faculties. One will have a sharp mind that allows him or her to understand everything quickly and thoroughly. A simple word to them is sufficient enough to understand a complex concept.

27) One will have great compassion that nourishes and comforts others' hearts.

28) One will ultimately attain buddhahood.

Seven Benefits for Nonhuman Spirits



“Furthermore, Akasagarbha Bodhisattva, if devas, nagas, ghosts, and spirits in the present and future hear Ksitigarbha’s name, make obeisance to Ksitigarbha’s image, or hear of Ksitigarbha’s original vows, deeds, and practices, and they sing his praises, gaze reverently at, and make obeisance to him, they will gain seven kinds of benefits:

First, they will quickly ascend the stages of holiness.

Second, their unwholesome karma will dissolve.

Third, Buddhas will protect and be near them.

Fourth, they will not retreat from bodhi.

Fifth, their inherent powers will increase.

Sixth, they will know past lives.

Seventh, they will ultimately become Buddhas.”

If devas, dragons, ghosts, and spirits of the present and future hear Ksitigarbha’s name, pay homage to his image, or praise, behold, and show respect to Ksitigarbha after hearing his original vows and deeds, they will be benefited in seven ways. Since these seven kinds of benefits pertain to devas, dragons, ghosts, and spirits, the Buddha particularly addressed them at the end of the sutra because this teaching was given in the Trayastrimsa Heaven.

- 1) They will quickly ascend the holy stages, surpassing shravakas and solitary realizers.
- 2) Their negative karma and obscurations, some of which are quite grave, will be purified.
- 3) All buddhas will protect and be near them.
- 4) Those who have generated bodhicitta will not retreat from the bodhisattva path.
- 5) Their inherent powers will increase. Each ghost or deva has their own abilities and divine powers such as flying and going anywhere freely, which will not fade but become stronger due to the blessing of Ksitigarbha.

- 6) They will possess the wisdom of knowing their past lives.
- 7) They will ultimately attain buddhahood.

THE PERFECT ENDING



At that time, all the inexpressibly-inexpressible [number of] Buddhas, Tathagatas, who had come from the ten directions as well as great Bodhisattvas, devas, nagas, and others of the eight kinds of beings, on having heard Sakyamuni Buddha praise and extol Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva's power of great awesome spiritual penetration as being inconceivable, exclaimed that there had never been anything like this.

At that time, measureless incense, flowers, heavenly garments, and pearl necklaces rained down in the Trayastrimsa Heaven as offerings to Sakyamuni Buddha and Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. Afterward, the entire assembly again reverently gazed, made obeisance, joined their palms, and withdrew.

After hearing Shakyamuni Buddha's praising and expounding on Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva's inconceivable miraculous power and qualities, all of the attendees, including the inexpressible number of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and eight classes of gods and spirits, exclaimed that this was unprecedented and there had never been anything like this. At that time in the Trayastrimsa Heaven, immeasurable amounts of incense, flowers, heavenly clothing, and jewels rained down as offerings to Shakyamuni Buddha and Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. All beings in the gathering again gazed upon and paid homage to them. Then, they joined their palms and withdrew.

At the end of this sutra, there is no concluding that "Everyone rejoiced in the Buddha's words." This is because, as some great masters explained, like the *Nirvana Sutra*, when the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* was preached, it was close to the Buddha's nirvana and he also mentioned several times about his nirvana during the teaching, so the atmosphere was a bit sad and the disciples were

not very joyful when the teaching was finished. Maybe it is true, but sometimes it is not necessarily the case because certain agama scriptures taught by the Buddha in his early times also end without words like “everyone present rejoiced in the Buddha’s words.” There can be different endings in sutras.

Now we have completed the study of *Ksitigarbha Sutra* successfully. My Tibetan translation was finished on March 6th this year and I have read it to you. This may be considered as an oral transmission of my translation since there are sutras in the Tibetan Tripitaka translated from Chinese such as *The Hundred Deeds* and the *Nirvana Sutra*, which all have their oral transmissions being passed down in the Tibetan Tripitaka.

At the beginning of this year, due to various circumstances including the pandemic and governmental policies, each of you here at Larung Gar was confined to your small cabins and could not come out. It was hard to predict whether we could have had any teaching at all. But with everyone’s effort and hard work, we have now managed to complete this sutra perfectly at the beginning of September. Now let’s pray, by the mighty power and qualities of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva as well as of the *Original Vows of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Sutra*,

May the world be free of wars, famines, plagues, and other calamities.

May every household enjoy peace and happiness.

May all monastics observe pure precepts, continuously hear, contemplate, and meditate on the Dharma, and perfect their activities of spreading the Dharma and benefiting sentient beings.

May the whole world be at peace, endowed with good circumstances and auspiciousness always!

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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