

**ORIGINAL VOWS OF
KSITIGARBHA BODHISATTVA
SUTRA**

Chapter Two

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 Two

The Assembly of the Emanations

Ksitigarbha certainly has great power and skillful means. In this degenerate age, whether it is to liberate sentient beings or tame our own afflicted mind, we should pray to Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva for his great blessing. Due to his past profound and vast vows and the promise he made to Buddha Shakyamuni, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva is especially compassionate towards beings with severe negative karma and he will save them with all his skillful means.

—Khenpo Sodargye

Lecture Five

July 17th, 2020

EFFICACY STORY: MAKING KSITIGARBHA STATUE SAVES ONE FROM DEATH

We will now continue with the teaching on *Ksitigarbha Sutra*. Firstly, I would like to briefly talk about Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva's merit by introducing another story to you from the *Records of Efficacy of Ksitigarbha Image*, a book in the collection of Successive Tripitaka from which we have shared another story in the previous lecture.

In the Song Dynasty, there was a monk who misused the sangha's properties when he dealt with affairs for the monastery, violated monastic precepts, and indulged frequently in various distractions concerning his body, speech and mind. Because he neither kept pure precepts nor accumulated any virtue as a monastic, he died of a minor ailment one day. However, the upper part of both sides of his body remained warm and three days later, he revived and started crying.

Tearfully, he declared to others what happened after he passed away. Upon his death, two subordinates of the King Yama came and forcefully took him away. When they came to a city gate, a monk appeared and said to him, “I am Ksitigarbha. When you were alive, you once made a statue of me in the capital city. Though you did not make any offering to my statue, I still need to reward you for making it. Since you are a follower of the Huayan School, I am now teaching you a verse:

*If people want to really know
All Buddhas of the three times,
They should contemplate that
It is the mind that creates all tathagatas.*

If you can recite this verse, the way to hells will be blocked and the path to pure realms will open to you.”

He memorized this verse and carried on walking into the gate to meet the King Yama. The King Yama asked him, “Since you had encountered the Dharma when you were alive, what kind of virtuous deeds had you performed?” He replied, “Ignorant as I was, I indulged in distractions and did not perform any virtuous deeds. When I was dealing with affairs for the monastery, I did not observe the precepts purely either. There is only one Dharma verse with four lines that I had received and kept in heart.”

The King Yama then asked him to recite it. As soon as he recited the complete verse that Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva taught him, all beings in hell who heard his recitation were liberated from their suffering. Seeing this, the King Yama told him to stop and asked to send him back to the human world, which was why he got revived.

Later on, he found that the verse was quoted from *Avatamsaka Sutra*. Thereafter, the monk often told other monks about his experience and those who heard it generated sincere faith towards *Avatamsaka Sutra* and aspired to study and practice it. You may find another version of this verse, which reads,

*If people want to really know
All buddhas of all times,
They should contemplate the nature of the cosmos:
All is but mental construction.*

The reason for such discrepancy is due to the different versions of *Avatamsaka Sutra*. The version directly above was from Siksanda's 80-fascicle *Avatamsaka Sutra* in the Tang Dynasty, while the verse in the story is from an earlier version of *Avatamsaka Sutra* translated by Buddhahadra in the Eastern Jin Dynasty.

From this story, we should know that, whether it is listening to the teaching of *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, printing *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, making

statues or pictures of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, or hearing the name of Ksitigarbha, the merit generated is enormous.

THE GATHERING OF KSITIGARBHA'S EMANATIONS

Next, we will discuss the second chapter, *The Assembly of the Emanations*. “Emanations” here refer to the numerous emanations of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, and “assembly” talks about all the emanations Ksitigarbha gathered in the Trayastrimsa Heaven. So what happened here? At that time, numerous emanations of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva were liberating sentient beings in multitudes of worlds. Since Buddha Shakyamuni was turning the Dharma Wheel in the Trayastrimsa Heaven, all Ksitigarbha emanations throughout those worlds gathered in the Trayastrimsa Heaven awaiting Buddha Shakyamuni to expound on the noble Dharma.

Toward the messages conveyed in this chapter, those who have faith in the Dharma will easily accept and be convinced, while for those who have no faith, some of the messages might be too unthinkable to believe. As a matter of fact, faith is the prerequisite for learning the Dharma. In Nagarjuna's *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*,

it states, “For the ocean of the Dharma, faith enables one to enter it, and wisdom enables one to cross it.” So if you really want to enter the Dharma that is as vast as the ocean, you need to have faith in it, and you also need wisdom to master its deep meaning. As a result, with both faith and wisdom, you will be able to attain liberation from samsara and also benefit sentient beings accordingly.



Chapter Two

The Assembly of the Emanations

At that time, emanation Ksitigarbha Bodhisattvas from all the hells in hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of unthinkable, ineffable, immeasurable, inexpressible, measureless

asamkhyeyas of worlds all came and assembled in the palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven. [...]

There are incalculable and infinite number of worlds out there and each world has six realms. In every hell realm of the six realms there are miserable sentient beings who were saved by innumerable emanations of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. At that time, they all came to the palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven.

The Inconceivableness of the World System

In the text, four words are used to describe how infinite and measureless the number of the worlds are. Unthinkable means it is inconceivable with our conceptual mind; ineffable means that no words or languages can precisely describe it; immeasurable means it is beyond the evaluation of conventional valid cognition; inexpressible means it cannot be expounded by any means, be it words or any other manner.

From here we should know that buddhas and bodhisattvas will manifest in multitude of forms across the six realms of infinite worlds in order to benefit all sentient beings. Likewise, many great Mahasiddhas also manifest various emanations simultaneously in different places so that those fortunately connected beings can see their physical forms, hear their Vajra speech and receive their wisdom blessings. These amazing stories are easily found

in the biographies of these great masters. For example, in Lama Tsongkhapa's biography, it records that he manifested different emanations at the same time in different realms and places such as the Dakini realm, the Tushita heaven, and the human world Jambudvīpa. Even in the human world, he appeared simultaneously in front of his disciple Khedrup Je in the Tibetan area and 1,800 bhiksus in Mount Wutai in the Han area. As a matter of fact, as he told Khedrup Je, his emanations were everywhere.

Another good example is Jetsün Milarepa. Before Milarepa passed into parinirvana, he stayed at Drin Dingma in order to release a terrible sinner called Geshe Tsakpuwa. After Geshe Tsakpuwa was transformed, Milarepa said, "It was necessary for me to stay in this place (Drin Dingma) so that a terrible sinner could express his regret and thus be released from his sinful deeds. But now as this is done, I should find another place to die. For a meditator like me to die in a village would be like a king dying in a commoner's house. So now I shall go to make my charnel ground at Chubar."

Seban Repa, one of the disciples said, "Since you are fatigued by illness, we should carry you on a stretcher."

"You cannot be certain that I am sick, and you cannot be certain that I shall die. I have displayed the appearance of sickness, and I shall go to Chubar to display the appearance of death. I do not

require a stretcher. Some of you younger repas go on ahead of me to Chubar.”

The younger repas then left for Chubar, but the Jetsun reached Driche Puk before them. Another Jetsun departed in the company of the senior resident disciples. Yet another Jetsun displayed the appearance of illness seated upon the flat rock Rekpa Dukchen. Another was attended by faithful disciples who came to see him later at Chubar. Still another Jetsun taught the Dharma seated at Drakar to patrons from Dingma who had gathered outside, and furthermore, individual Jetsuns appeared inside the homes of each resident to receive their respects.

Those who had gone on ahead to Chubar said, “The Jetsun has reached Chubar before us.”

The senior disciples said, “He was accompanied by us on the journey.”

Each person who arrived later said that he had accompanied the Jetsun during the trip.

One person said, “He is staying in my house.” Those who had listened to his Dharma teachings said, “On that day he was in Drakar teaching the Dharma.”

Each person who had paid his respects likewise said, “On that day I invited him to my home to pay my respects.”

As they all had different stories and could not agree upon what had happened, they asked the Jetsün, who replied, “All of you are correct. I was teasing you.”

As seen in this incidence, when great masters were about to enter into nirvana, they would sometimes perform miraculous acts. We should also understand how inconceivable the world truly is. Imagine how people must have thought of the idea of infinite worlds in the universe at a time when geocentrism (a belief in the earth being at the center of the universe) or heliocentrism (a belief in the sun being at the center of the universe) prevailed. People must think that the idea was absurd and would ask, “How is it possible? Where are they?” Today in the 21st century, with the aid of astronomical telescopes and other astronomical observations and studies, we now clearly know that there are unimaginably massive number of planets that exist out there in the vast universe.

Sometimes we see from a photo or a computer image that there are innumerable star-like bright spots in the space. We know that each of those bright spots is indeed a galaxy with innumerable luminous stars with their own light. This is in addition to the

incalculable and infinite number of associated planets which do not produce their own lights.

We might feel that the Earth we live on today is a huge planet, but compared to what is within the entire universe, or even just our galaxy, the Milky Way, it is merely a small, tiny dust particle. From this perspective, those who find the Buddhist terms of “unthinkable, ineffable, immeasurable, and inexpressible” unacceptable simply do not understand Buddhist cosmology. In a way, it is the same as people who do not have specialized knowledge and expertise in the field of astronomy finding these astronomical concepts or even pictures describing the universe as unthinkable, ineffable, immeasurable, and inexpressible.

The Buddhist understanding of the world from a macro perspective that was taught more than 2,500 years ago is so comprehensive that even people in this era of digital technology cannot fully grasp. If we probe into Buddhist cosmology, we will realize how profound and rich it actually is and it is not at all as narrow and constrained as some individual religions and scholars claimed.

[...] Because of the spiritual power of the Tathagata, each came from his direction with beings—also numbering in the thousands of myriads of millions of nayutas—who had obtained liberation from the karmic paths, and all came holding incense and flowers

to make offering to the Buddha. Those groups of beings who came were irreversibly [on the path] to unexcelled perfect complete awakening because they had been taught and transformed by Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. For many long kalpas these beings had been wandering in samsara, undergoing suffering in the six realms of existence with never a momentary rest. Due to the great kindness and compassion and profound vows of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, they each had realized attainments. When they came to the Trayastrimsa Heaven, their hearts danced joyously. They gazed up in reverence at the Tathagata, their eyes never leaving him for a moment.

Besides countless emanations of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, by virtue of Buddha Shakyamuni's miraculous power, beings from different worlds of the ten directions who had attained liberation from samsara also came to the palace of the Trayastrimsa Heaven. They all had generated a supreme mind, gained comfort, and been freed from the karmic paths. The number of these beings is uncountably large. All of them held various offering objects such as incense and flowers and made offerings to Buddha Shakyamuni. We could imagine how grand the scene was.

These beings all had been taught and transformed by Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. This great bodhisattva had inspired them to generate positive motivation, had ripened their mindstreams and had

liberated them from samsara. Having been taught by Ksitigarbha, they all gave rise to an awakened mind and would never retrogress from the path to unexcelled and perfect enlightenment.

Among them, some were from form realm, some formless realm and some desire realm. For numerous long eons they had been wandering in samsara and experiencing severe sufferings the whole time without a moment of rest. Thanks to the great loving-kindness, compassion, and the deep and vast vows of Ksitigarbha, they attained different stages of enlightenment such as the fruition of arhathood, solitary realizer, bodhisattvas and even buddhahood.

It was not an easy thing for them to come to the Trayastrimsa Heaven and see the majestic physical form of the Buddha. So upon seeing the Buddha, they all felt joyful and could not take their eyes off the Buddha. They gazed at the Buddha's countenance with reverence and delight, their eyes not leaving him for a moment.

HOW DID THE BUDDHA TRANSFORM OBSTINATE BEINGS?



At that time, the World-Honored One stretched forth his golden arm and placed his hand on the crowns of the heads of all the emanation Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas from hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of unthinkable, ineffable, immeasurable, inexpressible, measureless asamkhyeyas of worlds and spoke these words, [...]

At that time, Buddha Shakyamuni stretched forth his golden colored arm and touched the crowns of all the emanations of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. The Buddha displayed only one magnificent physical form, yet he was able to place his hand on the crowns of all those countless emanations of Ksitigarbha at the same time, which is truly beyond our imagination.

People may hold different views towards rituals such as touching one's head or giving one initiation. Actually, as a way to bestow blessing, touching one's head is mentioned in many sutras such as the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Vimalakirti Sutra*. Through this action, a genuinely enlightened master can transfer his or her blessings and accomplishments to those fortunately connected disciples.

If a disciple has steadfast and devoted faith, the best way for the disciple to receive siddhis and blessings from the guru is for the guru to touch the disciple's head. But for those who lack faith or even hold wrong views, even if they were touched 500 times by a guru, it would still be meaningless or even worse, become a cause to damage their minds stream.

Speaking from my own experience, when His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche was alive, I often had the opportunity to receive His Holiness's touching of my head. After His Holiness left this world, I often dreamt of him, and whenever I see him

in my dream, the first thing he would do is to touch my head. I often write down the dreams I had in my diary. When I review my diary, it would appear that I received his touching more often in my dreams than in real life when His Holiness was alive.

Buddha Shakyamuni's Analysis of Beings in His Time

[...] "I teach and transform obstinate living beings like these in the evil age of the five degenerations, causing their minds to be regulated and tamed so that they abandon the false and return to the true. However, there are one or two out of every ten who still have evil habits. [...]"

The Buddha had made five hundred great vows in order to teach and transform beings in the evil age of the five degenerations. These beings were very stubborn and obstinate, and the Buddha employed various skillful means to tame their minds so that they would renounce evil and return to the virtuous and right path. But in the process of transformation, one or two-tenths of them would still cling to their evil habits and refuse to be tamed.

This could be considered as a general analysis by Buddha Shakyamuni when he was alive of sentient beings in the degenerate age. Sentient beings of the evil times are indeed difficult to be

transformed. Because of the persistent power of Mara, many great masters often face severe challenges in their efforts to benefit sentient beings. Great Mahasiddha Lingje Repa once said, “In bringing sentient beings to liberation, no one is able to stop me except for those who have violated the samaya. I cannot liberate a person who has broken the samaya.” Later in life he was visited by a disciple who broke the samaya. Even such an accomplished master could still be tainted by his student’s fault of breaking samaya. As a result, he became delirious and lost the power of his speech. Soon after, he passed into parinirvana.

When khenpos and khenmos, or monastic Dharma teachers in general, do not engage in activities benefiting sentient beings and do not pay sufficient attention to the dispositions of various beings, they will have no idea how difficult it is to teach and educate their disciples. Only after one has engaged in instructing and guiding sentient beings would one be able to identify with the Buddha’s analysis and realize at the end that some of them would be either too obdurate to be tamed at all or extremely challenging to do so.

When Buddha Shakyamuni was alive, adults could live to about 100 years. If at the Buddha’s time, one or two out of ten were not transformable, in the more degenerated present when we do not live such longevity, the ratio of untamable would likely be much higher. Moreover, the Buddha was adorned with immaculate

qualities and merits. Arising from his omniscient wisdom, the Buddha has unimaginably numerous skillful means to attract and teach sentient beings. So if the Buddha would still not be able to tame one or two out of ten himself, the bodhicitta aspirations of us ordinary beings may not be strong enough to sustain us to tirelessly and effectively benefit sentient beings.

When we look at the biographies of many great masters, their entire Dharma activities can be divided into three phases: the early phase, the middle phase and the final phase. As Dharma practitioners who aspire to liberate sentient beings today, we should be prepared for a bumpy journey because as the age is becoming increasingly degenerate, sentient beings may present with all sorts of problems and challenges. Faced with such uncertainties, it is likely that we would encounter failures in benefiting sentient beings. So we should be mentally prepared while at the same time continuously deepen our realization of the true nature of all phenomena through meditative practice.

Four Types of Predispositions of Sentient Beings

“[...] I too transform into hundreds of thousands of millions of emanations and employ many skillful means [for living beings]. Some beings are of keen capacity: they immediately believe

and accept upon hearing [the Dharma]. Some are reaping the results of wholesome [deeds]: they achieve accomplishments through energetic encouragement. Some are ignorant and dull: they return [to the true] only after long being instructed. Some have karma that is heavy: they do not give rise to respect [for the Dharma].

To tame sentient beings, Buddha Shakyamuni also transformed into hundreds of billions of emanations, which is a staggering number, and applied numerous skillful to teach sentient beings. Here in the text the Buddha divided beings into four groups: those of keen faculty, those reaping the results of wholesome deeds, those who are ignorant but educatable, and those with heavy negative karma and unreceptive to the Dharma teaching.

Those with keen faculties can understand and accept the Dharma teaching straightaway upon hearing it, and thus be able to eliminate their mental afflictions by practicing the teaching. Those with great merits and being fortunately connected to the Dharma through virtuous deeds can gain attainments on the path as easily and naturally as fruits falling off the trees when ripe. To this group of beings, the Buddha could just energetically encourage them and they will then be ripened on to the Dharma path to attain accomplishments.

For those who are dull, stubborn and ignorant, the Buddha took much time and great efforts to instruct and guide them so that they can renounce evil and return to the right path. While for those with severe negativities, even the Buddha himself has no way to make them generate faith in the Dharma and respect the Dharma. Even if they could generate slight faith in the Dharma occasionally, they would soon be obscured again by their strong mental afflictions and deviant views.

People with strong afflictions are very pitiful and miserable. For a strongly afflicted person, he or she may possess the afflictions of as much as a hundred ordinary persons'. They are overwhelmed with a host of distorted views, afflictive emotions and suffering that even the Buddha would find difficult to resolve because they show no respect, faith or reverence to the Dharma teaching.

In the *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* and the Vinaya, sentient beings who had no connection with the Buddha could not benefit from the Buddha's teachings. If these people could not even be attracted by the Buddha himself who is incomparably virtuous, then it would be even more difficult for ordinary Buddhists to benefit them.

THE BUDDHA'S VARIOUS EMANATIONS TO TAME BEINGS

“Living beings like these types are each different. I therefore transform into emanations to guide them across to liberation. The emanations are manifested in the forms of a man, a woman, a deva, a naga, a spirit, a ghost, or a mountain, a forest, a stream, a plain, a river, a pond, a spring, or a well to benefit people, so that they all may be guided across to liberation. [...]

As a result of their specific karma from previous lives, sentient beings vary a great deal from one another in terms of their faculties. For some people, tears well up in their eyes upon hearing a bit of the Dharma, and they accept the teaching immediately and generate the right view. On the opposite, some may generate more and more wrong views even as they listen to the Dharma for years or even for eons. There are also the middle ones, who are slowly absorbed into the Dharma and eventually embark on the right path. Because all sentient beings are different in terms of propensity and

faculties, the Buddha would manifest in various forms to liberate and free them from their sufferings.

As the Buddha told us, his manifestations include men, women, devas, nagas, spirits and ghosts. Thereby those ghosts and gods that people worship are possibly the manifestations of the Buddha. What is more, the Buddha also manifests various insentient forms such as mountains, forests, streams, plains, rivers, ponds, springs or wells to bring beings to liberation.

As elaborated in *Finding Rest in the Nature of Mind*, even roads, lamps, and doorsteps can be the manifestations of the Buddha. Also, it states in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*,

*The profound realm of the buddhas
Is equal in extent to space.
To comply with sentient beings,
They comprehensively enter the world.*

The profound realization of buddhas is as deep and vast as the expanse of the space, but in order to act in accord with sentient beings, they enter the world universally and have numerous manifestations in front of sentient beings. Hence, many forms, whether it is a male body, a female body, or even a mountain, a stream, a river, can all be the manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Very likely, people we despise and loath, our enemies, or even the wicked ones are also the manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas who come to teach and subdue sentient beings purposely in this way. This is called the magical display of buddhas and bodhisattvas.

“[...] The emanations are also manifested in the forms of Sakra, Brahma, a wheel-turning king, a householder, a king, a high minister, a government official, or a bhikṣu, a bhiksuni, an upasaka, an upasika, or a sravaka, an arhat, a pratyekabuddha, a Bodhisattva, or others to teach and guide living beings across. It is not only in the form of a Buddha that I have manifested before them.



Given this teaching, we can imagine that a country's president or chief executive could be the manifestation of the Buddha. It is not only in the form of a buddha that the Buddha appears. Here a shravaka means a shravakayana practitioner who has attained the first, second or third level of the shravakayana enlightenment, which can be called a stream-enter, a once-returner, or a non-returner. And an arhat means the one who attains the fourth level, the highest fruition of the shravakayana.

Many people pay homage to a buddha statue whenever they go to a monastery, believing he is the one who could liberate sentient beings. Yet toward people around them, they would simply think of them as they are: This is a brahman, that is a lay practitioner or just a monastic. They seldom think that these ordinary beings to whom they have little respect for could be the manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas. However, the Buddha told us that if he appeared only in the form of a buddha, it would be impossible for him to bring all sentient beings to liberation, so he must manifest in various forms.

There are many great masters throughout history who are widely recognized as the true emanations of buddhas and bodhisattvas. In Han Buddhism, for example, Master Hanshan and Master Shide were said to be the emanations of Manjushri and Samantabhadra

respectively. In Tibet, King Trisong Detsen was generally recognized as the emanation of Manjushri, Songtsen Gampo was the manifestation of Avalokiteshvara and Lha Thothori Nyentsen was Samantabhadra.

In modern history, Master Qingding, a well-known Han master in the 20th century, was deemed to be the manifestation of Ksitigarbha. For my root guru H. H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, there are many prophecies indicating that he was the reincarnation of certain great master. For instance, he was recognized as the reincarnation of Lerab Lingpa, the manifestation of Nanam Dorje Dudjom, as well as the embodiment of Padmasambhava. Nevertheless, regardless of what he had been prophesized and regardless of whether others accept it or not, I firmly believe he is Manjushri himself. When I pray to His Holiness, or when I practice the guru yoga, I have a strong faith that my guru is no different from Manjushri and all his words and behaviors are perfectly pure. Relying on such faith, as a person heavily burdened with negative karma, I have received enormous blessings, specifically uncommon wisdom and compassion, from the great bodhisattva Manjushri.

When His Holiness was at Mount Wutai in 1987, the worldly abode of Manjushri, he revealed several tantric sadhanas that require the practitioner to visualize his or her guru to be no different from Bodhisattva Manjushri. In this way the practitioner can gain

enormous blessings. Also, the guru yoga prayer of His Holiness reads:

*In the pure realm of the great sacred site, the Five-Peaked Mountain,
The blessings of Manjushri's wisdom ripened in your mind—*

Jigme Phuntsok, at your feet I pray!

*Inspire me with your blessings: transmit the realization of the wisdom-
mind lineage!*

In this prayer, His Holiness simply said that he received the blessings of Manjushri's wisdom. But in my mind, His Holiness is exactly Manjushri, and they are not two separate entities. Although His Holiness often encouraged us to recite the names of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, Eliminate-Obstructions Bodhisattva (Sarvanivaranavishkambhin), and other bodhisattva names, personally speaking, I find it difficult to visualize His Holiness as these deities. But it is rather easy for me to visualize him in the form of Manjushri. You might think that it is just my conceptual thought at play but it is indeed one of my personal experiences in Dharma practice. Anyway, whether His Holiness is in this world or not, if we perceive him with no difference from Manjushri, we will surely receive his extraordinary blessings.

KSITIGARBHA'S PROMISE TO SAVE SENTIENT BEINGS

The Buddha's Entrustment to Ksitigarbha



“You see how, kalpa after kalpa, diligently and arduously I guide difficult-to-teach, obstinate, wrongdoing, suffering beings such as these across to liberation. Those not yet regulated and tamed experience ripened effects according to their karma. If they fall

into the lower realms and undergo great suffering, you should remember what I am earnestly entrusting to you now in the Trayastrimsa Heaven: Help all living beings in the saha world from now until Maitreya [Buddha] arises in the world—cause them to attain liberation, to leave all suffering forever, and to meet [Maitreya] Buddha and be given prediction.”

The Buddha concluded that for numerous kalpas he had toiled and endured all kinds of challenges in order to liberate obstinate and wrongdoing sentient beings. Of course, the Buddha is free from suffering and disturbing emotions himself, but he still appeared to undergo the hardship in this degenerate age because sentient beings are exceptionally obdurate and difficult to teach. Many of them do not accept the noble Dharma, and also refuse to follow the virtuous worldly rules to change their evil habits. Therefore, even Buddha Shakyamuni himself found no way to transform them. As a result, the Buddha asked Ksitigarbha to take care of these wrongdoers and suffering beings, before Buddha Maitreya appears in this world in the future.

According to *The Buddha Speaks of All Causes* translated into Chinese by An Shigao, Maitreya will come to this human world to attain buddhahood after 570,600,000 years, which is an unimaginably long time. Here in the second chapter of this sutra, the Buddha

declared his entrustment to every emanation of Ksitigarbha gathering in the Trayastrimsa Heaven. He said, “Those who fail to be tamed by me would experience ripened effects of their negative karma. When they fall into lower realms, you Ksitigarbha should remember that I have solemnly, sincerely and repeatedly entrusted you that it is your responsibility to bring these beings to liberation.” In the last chapter, *Entrusting Humans and Devas*, Buddha Shakyamuni once again entrusted Ksitigarbha with those untamed beings and asked him to use great supernatural power and skillful means to guide them across to liberation.

From here we see that even the Buddha was not able to bring each and every being to enlightenment at his time. It is then unnecessary to expect ordinary Dharma teachers like us to try to liberate all sentient beings in this even more degenerate age. Sometimes, just planting a virtuous seed in one’s mind alone can be extremely difficult. It is also possible that even though we may exert all our strengths to benefit someone, sometimes we not only fail to bring any benefit to them, but even worse, we inflict harm on them.

Therefore, in the course of propagating the Dharma and benefiting beings, it is best to focus on those beings who have karmic connections with us. If some people are simply impossible to convert even though we have exhausted every possible means, then we should hand them over to a more suitable person to continue working on

their enlightenment. People's karmic conditions are inconceivable, for example, some would not be tamed by Ananda, yet Manjushri found a way; some where Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara failed but Ananda and Kasyapa succeeded in getting remedies to subdue them. If we hand them over to someone else who happens to have stronger affinity with them, they might be liberated more swiftly. This is a very useful skillful means.

How Does Ksitigarbha Guide Beings?



At that time, emanation Ksitigarbha Bodhisattvas from the various worlds returned together to one form, and weeping from pity and great love, he said to the Buddha, "Throughout many long kalpas Buddhas have guided me, so that I am able to attain

inconceivable spiritual power and be replete with great wisdom. My emanations fill worlds as numerous as the sand grains in hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of Ganges Rivers. In each of these worlds, I transform into hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of emanations. Each emanation guides hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of people across, causing them to revere and take refuge in the Triple Gem, leave samsara forever, and reach the bliss of nirvana. [...]

Upon hearing the Buddha's words, those inexpressible and inconceivable numbers of Ksitigarbha's emanations all emerged into one single form of Ksitigarbha. Then this Ksitigarbha was weeping to the Buddha with great love. He told the Buddha, all his inconceivable power and great wisdom were due to the guidance and blessings of buddhas throughout numerous kalpas, and now as a result, he was able to teach and guide numerous beings in numerous worlds by transforming himself into numerous emanations. As we can see, the display of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva is truly inconceivable, and the blessings of buddhas are even more inconceivable.

Then how does Ksitigarbha guide sentient beings? He first teaches them to respect and take refuge in the Three Jewels, then he frees them from samsara, and eventually, he guides them to the ultimate peace of nirvana. Taking refuge in the Three Jewels is the

first crucial step. After taking refuge, whether you later become a monastic or just remain as a lay practitioner, as long as you maintain veneration for the Three Jewels and have steadfast faith at all time, and keep daily practices and prayers in your lifetime instead of committing any severe negativity, then even if you are not practicing diligently, you will never be corrupted and fall into the lower realms. This is stated in many sutras such as the *The Noble Sutra of Recalling the Three Jewels*.

Certainly, it is only Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva who has such a great aspiration and power to manifest countless emanations in order to liberate countless suffering beings. Some other bodhisattvas who have not attained such power or have not made such an aspiration may not even be able to go to hells. In the *Sutra of the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha*, it states, “He is called Ksitigarbha because of his great courage. He appears in the deportment of a monastic.” The Sanskrit word Ksitigarbha can be translated as Earth Treasury, and it also means the treasury of quality, or as indicated in this sutra, being very courageous.

The appearance of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva in Han Buddhism is somehow different from that in Tibetan Buddhism. In Han Buddhism, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva usually appears as a monastic monk, as described in the *Sutra of the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha*. In many stories of Ksitigarbha in Han Buddhism, Ksitigarbha is a

monk holding a monk staff in his right hand and a wish-fulfilling jewel in his left hand. While in Tibetan Buddhism, Ksitigarbha is in a sambhogakaya form, adorned with thirteen special ornaments. In Ju Mipham Rinpoche's *Verses of the Eight Noble Auspicious Ones*, Ksitigarbha holds a vase of goodness and a wish-fulfilling jewel in his hands, which is based on the traditional depiction of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas. He has another liturgy of Ksitigarbha, in which the bodhisattva holds a wish-fulfilling jewel in one hand, and a flower in the other.

These forms of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva in both Tibetan Buddhism and Han Buddhism can be the object of visualization when you practice Ksitigarbha. You can choose the form in which you have the strongest faith. In fact, as long as you have faith towards a particular bodhisattva, no matter what robes he wears and what postures or mudra he takes, it would be similarly meaningful to you.

“[...] As long as they do good deeds in Buddhadharma, even if such deeds are as little as a strand of hair, a drop of water, a grain of sand, a speck of dust, or a bit of a minute down hair, I will gradually guide them across to liberation, causing them to gain great benefits. [...]

What kind of sentient beings can be guided and liberated by Ksitigarbha? They are those who engage in virtuous activities within the Buddhadharma. Even if their good deeds are as little as a hair, a drop, a grain of sand, or a speck of dust, a bit of a minute down hair, Ksitigarbha will gradually guide and save them, and bring them both temporary and ultimate benefits.

So we should never neglect a good deed just because it is trivial. As an old saying goes, “Do not fail to do a good thing even if it is small, and do not commit an evil thing even if it is small.” Speaking of the Dharma practice, we should never think it meaningless or insignificant to make a prostration or offer a little lamp in front of a buddha statue, or to chant the name of a buddha or bodhisattva even just a few times. Actually, even the chanting of Ksitigarbha’s name seven times can create incredible power to pacify our mental afflictions, as well as to bring peace to the entire world.

It is quite important for each of us to make connections to Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, either by making his statue, printing his sutra, reciting his name, or by any other virtuous deeds. With such connection, we gain the hope to be transformed and liberated by him in the future. Also, if we want to help someone, the best and most efficient way is to get this person connected with Ksitigarbha. On the contrary, if no virtue related to the Dharma is performed, one will not be able to form any connection with Ksitigarbha, and

consequently one cannot attain liberation through the power of this great bodhisattva.

Ksitigarbha, Savior of Beings of the Degenerate Age

“[...] O World-Honored One, please do not be concerned about future living beings who have unwholesome karma.”

Thus he said three times to the Buddha, “O World-Honored One, please do not be concerned about future living beings who have unwholesome karma.”

Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva spoke this three times to Buddha Shakyamuni, promising the Buddha that he would take care of those most rebellious, obstinate and evil beings whom even the Buddha found difficult to transform. At the end of the sutra, the Buddha once again entrusted beings in the evil time of degeneration to Ksitigarbha, and Ksitigarbha assured the Buddha that he would take the responsibility of liberating sentient beings of the degenerate age.

Ksitigarbha certainly has great power and skillful means. In this degenerate age, whether it is to liberate sentient beings or tame our own afflicted mind, we should pray to Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva for his great blessing. Due to his past profound and vast vows and the

promise he made to Buddha Shakyamuni, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva is especially compassionate towards beings with severe negative karma and he will save them with all his skillful means.

At the time when the Dharma was prosperous and the afflictive emotions of sentient beings were much weaker, for instance, at the Age of the Right Dharma, a lot of buddhas and bodhisattvas manifested in the world. And since there were so many great masters present to guide sentient beings, many achieved different stages of enlightenment through Dharma practice. Given that all kinds of favorable causes and conditions were gathered together, everything was auspicious at that time.

In the present degenerate age, however, unwholesomeness is everywhere. In the outer phenomenal world, all types of natural and man-made disasters such as wars and famine, which have been increasingly obvious in the past 30 or 40 years, are ravaging sentient beings. In people's inner worlds, their root and subsidiary afflictive emotions, such as greed, hatred, ignorance, jealousy, arrogance, hypocrisy, deception and resentment, are like surging waves accelerating day by day. Within Buddhism itself, heartbreaking news appears frequently: monasteries and buddha statues being demolished, eminent masters passing into nirvana, etc.

At a time like this, it is impossible for us to avoid these tragedies by our own effort. We must rely on the very powerful deities such as Ksitigarbha, Padmasambhava and Tara to safeguard us. By sincerely and fervently praying to these deities, many negativities in either the outer world or the inner world can be drastically transformed. If some of them cannot be transformed, it is only due to the severe ripening karma that cannot be stopped by any means. This is how the karmic law works in the phenomenal world.

At that time, the Buddha praised Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, saying, “Excellent, excellent! I will help in your aspirations. You will be able to fulfill the profound vows taken throughout many long kalpas, finish guiding [beings] far and wide [to the other shore], and immediately attain bodhi.”

The Buddha praised Ksitigarbha and said, “I am pleased with your vows and I rejoice in your deeds. The vast and profound vows you made through so many kalpas will be fulfilled and your vast activities to bring sentient beings everywhere to liberation will be accomplished. By then, you will instantly attain bodhi.” So it is not that Ksitigarbha will never attain buddhahood. When his activities are accomplished, he will reach unexcelled and perfect enlightenment.

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.

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