

**ORIGINAL VOWS OF  
KSITIGARBHA BODHISATTVA  
SUTRA**

**Chapter Four**

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 Four

*The Karmic Consequences of Living Beings  
of Jambudvīpa*

If the principle of cause and effect, such as Ksitigarbha's teachings given here, can take root among them, people will be more willing to observe the ten virtues with confidence and become more righteous, reliable and trustworthy. On the other hand, if people have no idea about the consequences of their actions and thoughts, and just do whatever they feel good without any discipline or introspection, it would be difficult for them to become a kind person with noble qualities.

—Khenpo Sodargye

# **Lecture Seven**

**July 22nd, 2020**

I would like to stress one thing before our lesson today. Tomorrow we will enter the sixth Tibetan lunar month which is considered a very auspicious month for practicing virtues because Chokhor Duchen, the anniversary of the first turning of the Wheel of Dharma by Buddha Shakyamuni occurred on the 4th day of this month. The merit generated by any virtuous practice within this month will be multiplied numerous times. We should take advantage of this good opportunity to carry out virtuous deeds, such as learning and practicing the Dharma, chanting sutras and prayers, circumambulating stupas, offering water and lamps to the Buddha, making offerings to the sangha, and freeing captive lives.

Especially on the fourth day, Buddhist followers all over the world will actively engage in all kinds of virtues to celebrate this festival. As we know, Buddhism has four major annual festivals: Chotrul Duchen, the Festival of Miracles on the 15th day of the first month, Saga Dawa Duchen, the Festival of Vaishakha on the 15th day of the fourth month, Chokhor Duchen, the Festival of Turning the Wheel of Dharma on the 4th day of the sixth month, and Lha Bab Duchen, the Festival of the Descent from Heaven on the 22nd day of the ninth month. As said in sutras and shastras, on these days the effects of any positive or negative action are multiplied countless times. There is an incredibly special interdependency on these days so we should make good use of these occasions to

perform as many virtuous deeds as we can. If we simply ignore these opportunities, we have not fully understood the principle of dependent arising.

At a minimum, we should refrain from any negative deed and also avoid any distraction, laziness and heedlessness in this month, because any negativity generated in this month will also be amplified. Therefore, try your best to be meticulously attentive to your actions and exert all your efforts in virtuous practice. Never be timid and weak, instead be well disciplined and endure any hardship you will face in your Dharma practice.

## MASTER OUYI'S CONNECTION WITH KSITIGARBHA

Before going to the text, I would like to share with you the story of the great master Ouyi Zhixu, the ninth patriarch of the Pure Land School in Han Buddhism and one of the four eminent masters of the late Ming Dynasty. When the master was a teenager, he studied Confucianism and despised Buddhism and even wrote several dozens of anti-Buddhist essays as a way to defend Confucianism. However, at the age of seventeen, he had a chance to read two books, *Jottings Under a Bamboo Window* and *Record of Self-Awareness*, both written by Master Yunqi Zhuhong who was also one of the four eminent masters of the late Ming Dynasty. Inspired by these writings, he had a change of heart toward Buddhism. Thereupon he burnt all his anti-Buddhist essays and started to follow Buddhism.

At the age of twenty, his father died, and this heartbreaking loss impacted him immensely. One day, he heard someone chanting the

*Ksitigarbha Sutra*. He was so attracted by this sutra that he started to read it. Deeply inspired by the sutra, he generated a sincere mind of renunciation and started to chant the name of Amitabha attentively as his main practice. At the age of twenty-two, emulating the great deeds of Amitabha, he made forty-eight great aspirations to be an authentic Mahayana practitioner. In his aspiration prayer he wrote, “I vow to liberate sentient beings till the end of time, and I will never forsake sentient beings in the time of the five degenerations, not even for a thought-moment.” This aspiration was quite like Ksitigarbha’s fundamental vow which stated that he would not attain buddhahood until the hell was emptied. Eventually at the age of twenty-four, he took ordination and formally became a monk.

The master later stayed in Mount Jiuhua as his main residence to practice the Dharma. He made great efforts to foster Ksitigarbha’s spirit in the mountain as he believed Mount Jiuhua was indeed the manifestation of Ksitigarbha and all living beings inside the mountain were offspring of this great bodhisattva. In one of the essays he wrote in Mount Jiuhua, Master Ouyi called himself “the unlearned servant of Ksitigarbha” because “it was Ksitigarbha who uprooted my wrong views and placed me in the role of a monastic sangha.” And he further encouraged every practitioner on the mountain to “give up the differentiation of others and I,



right and wrong, but whole-heartedly engage in the transcendental practice of emptiness and thus spread the great spirit of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva everywhere.”

Among his works, there were many that were related to Ksitigarbha. He composed a commentary and a guidance of the actual practice of the *Sutra on the Divination of the Effect of Good and Evil Actions*, one of three main sutras on Ksitigarbha. He also made a confessional and aspirational sadhana of Ksitigarbha. The master also started to prepare commentaries on the other two sutras on Ksitigarbha, the *Sutra of the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha* and the *Original Vows of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Sutra*. Unfortunately, these two works were not finished before he passed into nirvana.

As we follow in the footsteps of past great masters and learn the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, let us not just scratch its surface. Instead, I hope every one of you will be deeply inspired by Ksitigarbha and also vow to benefit sentient beings and aspire firmly, “I will not attain buddhahood until I guide all living beings of the six realms to attain the perfect and full enlightenment.” As we make such aspirations, we should further lessen our self-centeredness and enhance our altruistic mind to benefit others as much as we can. It is through the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* that Master Ouyi generated the mind of renunciation and started to practice and propagate Buddhism. In the same manner, as a result of our living environment and the

education we received since childhood, we could have denigrated the Dharma due to our ignorance. Through learning this sutra and making these great aspirations, we will surely be able to purify our negativities and bring great benefits to others.

The Ksitigarbha practice is indeed an extraordinary one. In *Always Remember*, a book of selected instructions spoken by His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, His Holiness talked about the origination and benefits of the four great annual Dharma assemblies at Larung Gar. Regarding the Dharma assembly of the Ksitigarbha practice, His Holiness talked about the benefits of praying to Ksitigarbha. He said, “Anyone who prays to Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha will enjoy long life, good health, wealth, and the fulfillment of their wishes in this life. Ultimately speaking, if you pray to Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha, you will surely attain the supreme merit and wisdom of the hearers, self-realized buddhas, bodhisattvas and buddhas. Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha is a unique jewel that even 100,000 wish-fulfilling jewels cannot compare with. If you pray to an ordinary wish-fulfilling jewel, it can only bestow worldly wealth, but not exceptional transcendental merit gained through discipline, concentration, and wisdom.”

At that time His Holiness frequently addressed the unusual benefits of praying to Ksitigarbha, but since it was in my early years at Larung Gar, I often wondered why. I used to ponder, “Among the

Eight Great Bodhisattvas, why don't we have a Dharma assembly for Avalokiteshvara or Manjushri practice, but just for Ksitigarbha?" After all, no other scripture of Ksitigarbha has been found in the Tibetan Tripitaka except the *Sutra of the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha*, and that is why the scriptural proofs Mipham Rinpoche cited for Ksitigarbha in his *Biographies of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas* are only from this sutra. Also, there were scant stories of the efficacy of Ksitigarbha in the Tibetan regions. These questions bothered me for a long time. It was not until last year when I was translating the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* that I fully understood His Holiness's deep intention. His Holiness attached so much importance to this practice likely because he had observed with his extraordinary wisdom the uncommon dependent arising of the Ksitigarbha practice.

In brief, Ksitigarbha is a wish-fulfilling jewel for every living being. In order to quickly fulfill any worldly or transcendental wish, the best way is to pray to Ksitigarbha. One time, Sertar and its downstream regions experienced severe drought for many days. During the worst of it, His Holiness asked the entire sangha of Larung Gar to recite the name of Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha and then it began to rain as a result. When autumn came, harvests in the Sertar region were just as good as in normal years.

The current situation is the opposite. Many places around the world are suffering from devastating floods and the homes and livelihoods of millions of people are hopelessly destroyed. Many countries are also struggling to revive their economies that have been battered by the Covid-19 pandemic. With all these difficulties, I do believe praying to Ksitigarbha would bring us surprising changes and help us overcome obstacles that are seemingly overwhelming.

## EFFICACY STORY: KSITIGARBHA CHANGED A POOR GIRL'S LIFE

In the *Records of Efficacy of Ksitigarbha Image*, there is a story of a poor girl in the Song Dynasty. She worked as a maid and was a sincere follower of Ksitigarbha who prayed to Ksitigarbha for many years. One day, as she was observing the Eight Precepts, she saw a huge crowd of tiny golden ants crawling on the ground of her room. Fearing that she might kill them by accidentally stepping on them, she did not go into the room. The next day when she went to see the ants again, all of them had disappeared while on her bed there were piles of granules made of pure gold. She collected them and sold them, becoming extraordinarily rich. This deepened her devotion to Ksitigarbha, so she turned her house into a temple in which Ksitigarbha was venerated. Later, the wife of the local prefectural governor passed away, and the governor married the girl and held her in high regard. All the changes in her life were the result of her firm devotion and strong mindfulness of Ksitigarbha.

Even if one only considers the worldly benefits of the blessing of Ksitigarbha, they are already incredible. Anyone who wants to fulfill any worldly wish, whether it is to overcome financial difficulties or to become rich and well-respected, can pray sincerely to Ksitigarbha. As a result of the pandemic, the world has undergone many structural changes. Natural disasters seem to appear much more frequently and many people, businessmen, in particular, are facing serious financial challenges. At such a time, if we pray sincerely to Ksitigarbha, all negative circumstances may be averted. The blessing of Ksitigarbha is truly incredible, and the power of dependent arising is utterly amazing.

# THE BUDDHA'S ENTRUSTMENT TO KSITIGARBHA

## Chapter Four

### The Karmic Consequences of Living Beings of Jambudvīpa

At that time, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, it is through the power of awesome spiritual penetration of the Buddha Tathagata that I transform into emanation-forms throughout hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of worlds to rescue all beings who undergo the ripened effects of karma. If it were not for the power of the Tathagata’s great kindness, I would not be able to perform such transformations. Now, I have further been entrusted by the Buddha to guide all beings in the six realms of existence across to liberation until Ajita becomes a Buddha. I will do so, World-Honored One. Please do not be concerned.”



This chapter talks about the unbelievable karmic consequences of living beings. Here Ajita is another name of Bodhisattva Maitreya, who would be the next buddha in this world after Buddha Shakyamuni. Ksitigarbha respectfully told the Buddha that due to the powerful blessing of the Buddha he was able to transform himself into countless forms to liberate sentient beings in all different worlds and he expressed his deep gratitude to the Buddha. In the meantime, Ksitigarbha reassured the Buddha that he had the confidence and power to guide beings across to liberation, so that the Buddha need not be too concerned for those who are simply too obstinate to tame.



The Buddha appeared to be worried about the living beings in this world because they were untamed and stubborn, and frequently created heavily negative karma. As the Buddha was about to enter nirvana, he was concerned that no one would be there to save these beings from falling into the hell realm. Ksitigarbha fully understood the Buddha's concern, so he promised to continue the Buddha's enlightenment activities of liberating all beings from samsara until the next Buddha comes to this world. It is because of Ksitigarbha's great vows and his miraculous powers that the Buddha entrusted all sentient beings of Jambudvipa to him, and as a disciple of the Buddha, Ksitigarbha also had the confidence and devotion to fulfill the entrusted task.

A deep sense of gratitude to our teacher is always needed for us Dharma practitioners. As we go to a certain place to seek the Dharma, we can only rely on our teachers to learn and deepen our insight into the Dharma. Then gradually our wisdom, compassion, and the ability to benefit others will increase. Without the guidance and instructions from our teachers, how would we acquire the precious knowledge and skillful methods required to tame our minds and better ourselves? As such, we owe our teachers a great debt of gratitude, and these teachers are the source of our spiritual development and achievement. As the saying goes, "One should always remember where one's water comes from." It is not

reasonable for us to think that all our progress is just the result of our own wisdom and efforts. If we are ungrateful and unaware of our teacher's great kindness, it would be impossible for us to become true Dharma practitioners, and even less likely would we be able to benefit others.

I have been in the role of a monastic sangha for quite a long time and I have the honor of being recognized as a khenpo and a lama. In addition, I have engaged in a range of Dharma activities such as teaching and translation without encountering any insurmountable obstacles. All of these are not the results of my own ability but have come from the blessings of the Three Jewels, buddhas and bodhisattvas, as well as Dharma protectors. In particular, it was my root guru who bestowed wisdom and compassion upon me and enabled me to achieve all these accomplishments. I am deeply grateful for my guru who made me who I am today.

**Then the Buddha told Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, "All beings who have not yet attained liberation are without fixity in their nature and consciousness: Through evil habits they form [unwholesome] karma, and through good habits they form [wholesome] results. Depending on situations, they give rise to good and evil doings. [...]"**

It is quite true that the nature and consciousness of beings who have not yet attained liberation are unfixed and capricious. If we are habituated to negative deeds, then we will generate negative karma and experience negative results and vice versa. In the text it says sentient beings could form unwholesome karma as well as wholesome results. It is thus rhetorical that with negative habits one would accumulate negative karma and bear negative results while virtuous habits could lead to wholesome results.

In fact, good or bad habits are largely determined by the circumstances and environment one faces. These include the conditions we have chosen to stay in, the education we have received, and the people we associate with. As a proverb goes, “He that lives with cripples learns to limp.” If we stay with negative friends and get used to negative habits, such negative influences will eventually change us into a bad person. This is why we need virtuous friends and teachers to protect and strengthen our virtuous roots. *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* says, “In the sandalwood forests of the Malaya mountains, when an ordinary tree falls, its wood is gradually infused with the sweet perfume of the sandal. After some years that ordinary wood comes to smell as sweet as the sandal trees around it.”

Also, it is said in *The Forest of Gem in the Garden of Dhamra*, “Sentient beings lack stability in their inner orientation and are affected by circumstances. Under circumstances that are good, they become good. Under circumstances that are bad, they become bad.” So external circumstances can have a major influence on our personality.

Not only are ordinary people easily influenced by circumstances, the same goes for animals. In *The History of the Entrustment of the Dharma Sutra*, there is a story of an elephant whose temperament was changed back and forth by the external environment. In an ancient country, the king used a strong white elephant to trample to death the offenders who were sentenced to capital punishment. After the elephant stable caught fire, the elephant was relocated to another place near a Buddhist temple. The elephant frequently heard monks chanting the Dharma verses such as “Virtuous actions lead one to the celestial realm and non-virtuous actions lead one to the hell realm.” Gradually, the elephant became tender and compassionate. When offenders were sent to it, instead of trampling them as it had done before, the elephant just sniffed the offenders, licked them, and then left.

Upon seeing this, the king was confused and he asked his ministers why that was the case. One of them said, “It must be the temple nearby that has changed its temperament. If the elephant is near a slaughterhouse, its mind would become cruel again as

it sees animals being brutally slaughtered.” The king accepted this suggestion and moved the elephant to a place that was near a slaughterhouse. Soon after, the mind of the elephant regressed back to a savage state, even crueler than before.

As Sakya Pandita said in his *Treasury of Good Advice*,

*Try as one might to reform bad people,  
They simply do not become good-natured.  
Even if one vigorously washes coal,  
It simply cannot be made white.*

Other than those individuals who simply remain untamed and have very evil personality, most ordinary people can be influenced by external circumstances. With this knowledge, ordinary people should avoid distractive environments and negative associations. For instance, one may be confident of not getting addicted to gambling on his first few visits to a casino. However, over the long run, it could become extremely difficult to avoid forming a gambling habit and becoming infatuated with such places.

Among the students I sponsored through college, some of them used to be very ill-disciplined but they became well-mannered as they have received higher education and obtained gainful employment. The opposite can also occur. There was one sad case

where the person was very kind-hearted before, but after college graduation he chose a job that involved inflicting punishment on others. When I saw him again two years later, it was frightening to even look at his eyes. I feel deeply sorry for him.

Dharma practitioners should be even more vigilant with their environment and the people they associate with. Do not ever be overconfident about yourself, thinking that having been learning the Dharma or having been ordained for years you will not be easily influenced by others. You can never be sure. Venerable Atisha once said that only enlightened bodhisattvas who have attained the first bhumi and above would not be subject to negative influences and that before one reached that level that one should always abide in a solitary place and rely on a teacher. The Buddha also said in *The Sutra of Forty-Two Chapters*, “Be careful not to depend on your own intelligence—it is not to be trusted.” So ordinary practitioners should not be too confident with their own thoughts since they are all without fixity in their nature and consciousness.

**“[...] Revolving wheel-like through the five realms of existence with never a momentary rest, they pass through kalpas as numerous as dust particles, confused, deluded, hindered, and [afflicted] with difficulties. They are like a fish that swims in nets while following a long flowing current; now and then it would get free temporarily, only to be caught in the nets again. I would**

**think with concern about these beings. However, because you will fulfill your past vows, the profound oaths taken kalpa after kalpa to guide wrongdoing beings far and wide [to the other shore], what further cause of worry need I have?"**



Driven by positive and negative karma, sentient beings must take rebirths in the five realms of samsara, or normally referred to as six realms. Their transmigration is like a continuously turning wheel without a momentary rest. Thus they would not attain any real happiness but only endless suffering. As Maitreya said, "Just as there is no good smell in a cesspool, there is no happiness among the five classes of beings."

The samsaric situation is described vividly in the text by using an example. Just like a fish swimming in nets that are in a long flowing current, it may break out from the nets for a short while, but it is soon trapped again. Similarly, due to sentient beings' confusion and delusion, most of the time they are trapped in the nets of the three lower realms for numerous kalpas. Occasionally, thanks to their virtuous deeds, they may occasionally take rebirths in the three higher realms. But driven by their negative karma, they will soon again fall into the lower realms and experience endless suffering. No matter how many times they repeat this process, they simply cannot break free from samsara or gain any assurance of liberation.

Given this situation, the Buddha was genuinely concerned for all beings, particularly those of Jambudvīpa. But Kṣitigarbha promised the Buddha that he would accomplish all his vows to save countless wrongdoing beings from the lower realms. Kṣitigarbha made these profound vows not just for one lifetime but for numerous lifetimes kalpa after kalpa. Seeing this great bodhisattva's steadfast commitment and powerful spiritual penetration, the Buddha said that he had no more concern.

That being so, we are truly fortunate to have encountered the precious Dharma and the noble Mahayana teachers who can guide us across to liberation. Such an opportunity is as rare an



encounter as a blind turtle stumbling upon a wooden yoke in a boundlessly vast ocean. It is not by chance that we gain such a precious opportunity, but instead, it is the result of our constant accumulation of merit through numerous lives. If we waste this opportunity and just idle this life away aimlessly, we may never get it again in the future. Even worse, because of our negative karma, we will stay in the three lower realms for countless kalpas. By then, encountering the Dharma and freeing us from suffering will be as difficult as fishing a needle out of a vast ocean.

Therefore, as Patrul Rinpoche urged us in his *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, we must resolve to cast rebirth in samsara aside once and for all with the help of the precious Dharma and qualified spiritual teachers whom we can rely on. In this fleeting life, all Dharma practitioners must resolve deep in their hearts and exert themselves to engage in Dharma practice and gain the assurance for liberation.

## A KING'S ASPIRATION



As these words were spoken, in the assembly there was a Bodhisattva-Mahasattva named Concentration Mastery King who said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, what vows has Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva made during the many kalpas past that he now receives profuse praise from the World-Honored One? O World-Honored One, please briefly speak about this.”

**Then the World-Honored One told Concentration Mastery King Bodhisattva, “Listen attentively, listen attentively. Ponder and remember this well. I will explain them separately for you.**

In the Dharma assembly, there was probably curiosity among the attendees on what vows Ksitigarbha had made over the numerous kalpas that now deserved the Buddha’s earnest praises. Among them was a great bodhisattva, Concentration Mastery King, who stood up and asked the Buddha. We should not think that this question and answer had nothing to do with us. In fact, the Buddha answered this question not just for the bodhisattva Concentration Mastery King but also as a special teaching for every listener who was present as well as all future disciples including us.

Before answering the question, the Buddha asked the bodhisattva to “listen attentively” and to “ponder and remember” the answer well. This simple requirement refers to the systematic procedure of studying and practicing the Dharma, which contains three steps: listening, contemplating, and meditating. This standard procedure is highly emphasized in the Tibetan Buddhism because without it one can never truly enter the Dharma and merge one’s mind with the Dharma.

To be specific, through proper listening, one can generate the wisdom of listening to recognize one’s mental afflictions; through

deep contemplation, one can generate the wisdom of contemplation to subdue one's mental afflictions; and through one-pointed meditation, one can generate the wisdom of meditation to uproot one's mental afflictions, the decisive step to free one from the ocean of samsara. In the text, "listen attentively" refers to the first procedure of listening to the Dharma teaching; "ponder" connotes deep contemplation of the teaching; and "remember" means to familiarize the teaching and to transform one's mind with what one has contemplated.



**"At a time of immeasurable asamkhyeyas of nayutas of inexpressible kalpas ago, there was a Buddha named All Wisdom**

Accomplished Tathagata, Worthy of Offering, Truly All Knowing, Perfect in Knowledge and Conduct, Well Gone, Knower of the World, Unsurpassed, Tamer, Teacher of Devas and Humans, Buddha, World-Honored One. The lifespan of that Buddha was sixty thousand kalpas. Before he renounced the household life, he was the king of a small country and friends with the king of a neighboring country. They both practiced the ten wholesome actions and benefited living beings. However, in the neighboring country most people did many evil acts. The two kings conferred with each other and planned to employ many skillful means for them. One king vowed, 'I will attain Buddhahood early and guide all these people across without exception.'

"The other king vowed, 'If I do not first guide all wrongdoing suffering beings across, causing them to attain peace and happiness and enabling them to achieve bodhi, I shall not become a Buddha.'"

The Buddha told Concentration Mastery King Bodhisattva, "The king who vowed to become a Buddha early is All Wisdom Accomplished Tathagata. The king who vowed to always guide wrongdoing suffering beings across and not to become a Buddha yet is Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva.



In the following text the Buddha talked about two stories of Ksitigarbha in his previous lives to give the audience a glimpse of what kind of vows Ksitigarbha had made in his previous lives. The first story is a good example of different ways to give rise to bodhicitta. In many teachings on bodhicitta, such as Patrul Rinpoche's *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, three classifications of arousing bodhicitta based on the degrees of one's courage are introduced: a king's way of arousing bodhicitta—the wish to first attain buddhahood for oneself and then to bring others to buddhahood; a boatman's way of arousing bodhicitta—the wish to attain buddhahood for oneself and all beings at the same time; and a shepherd's way of arousing bodhicitta—the wish to establish

all beings in buddhahood before achieving it for oneself. The third type displays the greatest courage. The way Manjushri and Ksitigarbha gave rise to bodhicitta belongs to the third type, as both had vowed to guide all beings to achieve buddhahood and refused to first become a buddha. This attitude is also described in *The Shurangama Sutra*, “The attitude of establishing others in perfect buddhahood before achieving it for oneself is the aspiration of a bodhisattva.”

In this story, the two kings chose different ways of developing aspirational bodhicitta. To some extent, whether one vows to attain buddhahood first or to guide all beings across to liberation before achieving one’s own buddhahood are not that different. These are simply different ways to benefit and guide sentient beings towards enlightenment. What matters most is that as Dharma practitioners, we must arouse bodhicitta deep in our hearts in this present life. In those early years at Larung Gar, as one of His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche’s traditions, on the remarkable day of Chokhor Duchon, His Holiness would confer the bodhisattva vow and encourage everyone to arouse bodhicitta. I believe at that time, every sangha member at Larung Gar had sincerely given rise to bodhicitta relying on the powerful blessing of His Holiness.

His Holiness’s teaching was powerfully contagious and impressive. Whatever he taught, either Mahayana or Vajrayana teachings, he

possessed the ability to bring us into his world of extraordinary wisdom and each of us was fully captivated and concentrated on his teaching. For instance, when he was teaching Chandrakirti's *Introduction to the Middle Way*, we were entirely immersed in the world of Madhyamika and spent all our time and energy contemplating the teaching, reciting the stanzas and studying the related commentaries such as Chandrakirti's auto-commentary, the commentaries composed by Mipham Rinpoche and Gorampa and so on. At that time, all of us had the feeling that we were extremely fortunate to meet the profound teaching of the Middle Way in this life and that we must develop the unshakable conviction of emptiness through comprehensive study.

With the approaching of Chokhor Duchon, I would encourage you to take advantage of this special and auspicious occasion to make the aspiration of bodhicitta. As it is said in *Letter to a Disciple*, "Like a lamp blown by the fierce wind, one's life is instantly destructible and so it is unreliable." Today I am sitting here teaching the Dharma and you are listening to me, but no one can guarantee the same thing will repeat tomorrow. I am not sure how you feel about impermanence but it is a critical principle to me personally. If we fail to make the aspiration on this special occasion this year, who can guarantee that we will still be alive the same day next year? If we can indeed arouse aspirational bodhicitta to enlighten



all sentient beings when we are alive, then such an incredible aspiration will continue to exist in all our future lives, no matter which realm we take rebirth in. That is why it is crucial for each of us to generate a sincere mind of bodhicitta in this very life.

## THE ASPIRATION OF BRIGHT EYES



“Moreover, in the past, measureless asamkhyeya kalpas ago, there arose in the world a Buddha named Pure Lotus Eyes Tathagata. The lifespan of that Buddha was forty kalpas. During the Age of Semblance Dharma, there was an arhat who guided living beings across by [means of] merit, teaching and transforming them in sequence. He came upon a woman named Bright Eyes

who made a food offering to him. The arhat asked her, 'What is your wish?'

**"Bright Eyes replied, 'In the days after my mother's death, I performed meritorious deeds for her rescue, but I do not know in what realm my mother has been reborn.'**

This is the second story in another previous life of Ksitigarbha. In this life he was a woman named Bright Eyes who once made offering to an arhat. Being a field of merit, an object that is worthy of offering and that can give birth to great merit, an arhat would connect with beings by receiving their offerings and then use different manners to teach and convert them. After he enjoyed the meal offered by Bright Eyes, he asked what she wanted as a return for her offering. Then the woman requested to know her mother's rebirth as she had performed virtuous deeds to rescue her mother after her death.

In general, when benefactors make offerings to a sangha group or to individual monastic they always have certain wishes that need to be fulfilled. Some may want to stay healthy; some to be wealthy; while others may have a transcendent wish to liberate sentient beings from samsara, and so on and so forth. Knowing this, when accepting offerings from others, monastics should never take it for granted nor squander it carelessly but should instead be extremely

cautious in dealing with offerings, particularly those offerings that are not easy to consume or pay back. Since these offerings often have values and would cost the benefactors significant money or efforts, the benefactors would expect a commensurate return. In some situations the benefactor has a strong clinging to his possessions and may think twice before spending any money, so his generous offerings to a monk or to a guru must be expected with a huge return. If a receiving sangha squanders or misuses the offerings and without offering any proper dedication, negative consequences may await the receiver ahead.

Making dedications by reciting some Buddhist prayers or mantras and sutras is necessary for any monastic to receive any offering. In 1986 when I took the summer retreat in a monastery, someone offered me ten yuan. As a novice monk, I was so afraid to bear any negative karma resulting from the improper use of this little money that I recited a lot of Mani mantras for that person. Now I always spend any money offered to me on meaningful Dharma activities that can bring great benefits to more people so that I can make sure that the offerings would not be wasted.

**“Out of compassion for her, the arhat entered into meditative concentration to make observation and saw that Bright Eyes’ mother had fallen into a lower realm and was undergoing extremely great suffering. The arhat asked Bright Eyes, ‘What actions did**

your mother do while she was alive? She is now undergoing extremely great suffering in a lower realm.'

"Bright Eyes replied, 'My mother had a habit of only liking to eat fish, turtles, and the like. Of the fish and turtles that she had eaten, she had most often consumed their eggs, fried or boiled, and she would indulge in eating them. I would reckon the number of all these lives to be thousands of myriads and many times over. O Venerable One, please take pity. How can she be saved?'



The arhat felt compassion for her and entered samadhi to observe. Then he saw her mother undergoing extremely great suffering in

the hell realm so he asked Bright Eyes what her mother had done when she was alive. It was possible that with his miraculous power of samadhi, the arhat already knew the answer, but in order to verify it or for some other purpose, for instance, to make the karmic law more convincing to Bright Eyes, he still asked the question. Sometimes the Buddha would also purposely bring up a question while he already knew the exact answer for a good reason.

Bright Eyes honestly told the arhat her mother's previous eating habit which she thought was the major cause for her mother falling into the hell realm because it costed numerous lives. People growing up by the sea usually have the habit of eating seafood such as fish, turtles, shrimps. Some may prefer eating baby fish that are still in the womb of the mother fish, the number of which is hard to calculate, so the karma of killing is much more severe. Nowadays caviar is regarded as a food for the rich and many envy those who can enjoy such a luxury product. However, considering that just a spoon of caviar means numerous lives are involved, enjoying such food would result in an inexhaustible karma of killing that could possibly imprison someone in hell.

It is true that nowadays most people are unaware that fishes, shrimps, and the like are all sentient beings not different from human beings. Ironically, even some Buddhists believe fish and shrimps are edible for vegetarians and eating such species does

not involve killing. Because of their ignorance, many people have accumulated severely negative karma by doing so. Even worse, many people with good incomes get used to ordering the live seafood to be prepared for them to make sure that their dishes are fresh and tasty. Hardly do they know that the wealth they have has conspired to help them create evil karma. It is the same in the Tibetan regions. Usually, a wealthy household that owns many yaks and sheep will create more severe karma of killing than a poor family.

Animal slaughtering involves mostly yaks and sheep in the Tibetan regions. In Tibetan folklore, fish is inedible because Tibetans believe that when a fish dies, it dies unrest and its eyes remain open and thus will remember those who kill it and eat it. Of course, this is only a traditional belief and no related teaching is found in Buddhist scriptures. When I was studying at a traditional school, fish was often provided in the canteen. On such occasions I just chose something else to eat, so during my entire life, I have never eaten fish. For those who have eaten fish, it would be necessary to confess this negative act.

**“Out of compassion for them, the arhat used a skillful means. He advised Bright Eyes, ‘You may, with sincere resolve, recollect Pure Lotus Eyes Tathagata. Also, sculpt and paint his image. Both the living and the deceased will reap the results.’**

**“After hearing this, Bright Eyes immediately gave up everything she loved to have an image of that Buddha painted right away. She then made offerings to his image, and furthermore, with a reverent mind, she wept sorrowfully, gazed up at, and made obeisance to him. [...]**



The arhat suggested Bright Eyes to make offering and pray to the buddha named Pure Lotus Eyes Tathagata by recollecting the buddha’s name. By doing so, she could rescue her deceased mother from hell. This buddha had probably appeared in that world at that time, just as Buddha Shakyamuni is the fundamental teacher in our world. Indeed, performing virtuous deeds for the deceased is necessary and helpful in enabling them to have a better next



life. *The Buddha Speaks of Abhisheka Sutra* says, “Doing virtuous things for the dead is like offering traveling expense for those traveling afar, who will definitely acquire assurance.” Making buddha images or statues, chanting sutras, mantras, or names of buddhas, offering money or meals to monastics, offering waters or lamps to the Three Jewels, all of these will accumulate great merit for the dead so that their negative karma can be lessened, and a chance for a better rebirth can be secured.

Traditionally, Tibetans will perform these acts of virtue within 49 days after the death of their family members. In that way, the dead will be greatly benefited and may even be assured of a rebirth in the pure land. Or like me, many people may have lost their parents for a long time, and if they can nonetheless ask the sangha to perform these virtuous activities for their parents, both the dead and the living will receive immense benefits.

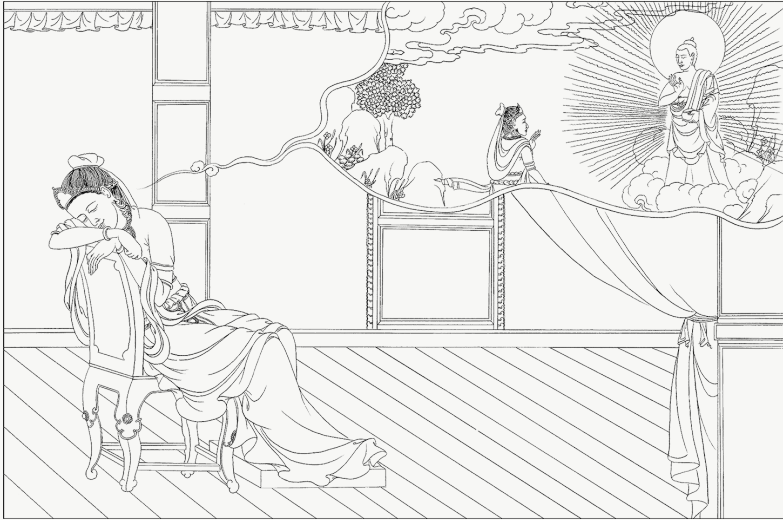
Another point is when a family member dies, it is best to use his or her own properties to perform these virtuous activities so as to accumulate merit on behalf of the dead person. Instead of being passed on to the rest of the family, the dead’s properties can be used to free captive lives, print sutras, make offerings to the Three Jewels, and perform many other virtuous deeds. For example, in the Tibetan tradition, when a family member dies, the

rest of the family would offer the best horse, clothes, jewels or the most cherished things of the dead to the sangha.

Many sutras mention this as the best way to benefit the dead. However, modern people seldom have this idea and instead take possession of the dead's properties as quickly as they can. When a parent dies, the children immediately take the parent's belongings as their own, whether it is a luxury watch, a car, a laptop, a rosary, or other items. Or the children just sell them and divide the money up for their own use. Although someone has died, he may still have a strong attachment to his own properties and if someone takes them away, he may develop a grudge against that person. With this kind of negative emotions, the deceased may not be able to take a good rebirth and could fall into the lower realms.

But if all the properties of the deceased are used to accumulate merits for him, his negative karma can be reduced and he would gain peace and reach a better place for his next life. So here is my suggestion. All properties of the deceased should be used for the benefit of the dead, especially those items that the dead had most cherished. For example, a family of three may own 30,000 dollars, meaning each of them owns 10,000 dollars. If one of them dies, then at least 10,000 dollars should be used to perform virtuous deeds for the dead. However, if only 10 dollars are used for the

dead and the rest is divided up by the other two, then this will not do any good either to the dead one or to the living ones.



**“[...] That night, in her dream, she suddenly saw that Buddha—his body a dazzling golden hue, [majestic] like Mount Sumeru, and emitting great light. He said to Bright Eyes, ‘Before long your mother will be reborn in your household. She will speak as soon as she can feel hunger and cold.’**

**“Shortly thereafter, a maidservant in her household bore a child who spoke within three days of birth. The infant, prostrating and weeping sorrowfully, told Bright Eyes, ‘In the cycle of birth and death through karmic conditions, one undergoes the results [of one’s actions] oneself. I am your mother. I have long dwelled**

in darkness. Since parting from you, again and again I agonized in the great hells. It was through the strength of your merit that I was finally able to be reborn as a person of the lower class, and my lifespan will be short. At the end of thirteen years, I am to fall into a lower realm. Do you have any way to help relieve me [of these sufferings]?’



“When Bright Eyes heard what was said, she knew without a doubt that this infant was her mother. Sobbing and crying sadly, she said to the maidservant’s child, ‘Since you are my mother, you should know your own past wrongdoing. What actions did you do that caused you to fall into a lower realm?’

**“The maidservant’s child replied, ‘Killing and reviling. I was undergoing the ripened effects of these two actions. If it were not for the merit [that you have cultivated] to deliver me from difficulties, my karma would be such that I still could not have been released.’**

**“Bright Eyes asked, ‘What took place during the ripened effects of wrongdoing in the hells?’**

**“The maidservant’s child replied, ‘I cannot bear to speak of those torments of wrongdoing. Even in a hundred thousand years I would not be able to describe them all.’**

Due to the daughter’s sincere devotion and fervent praying, the Buddha appeared in front of her and told her about the new birth of her mother. All the virtuous deeds Bright Eyes had done were not in vain but enabled her mother to be released from the hell and reincarnate into a human baby who would speak within three days of birth, as the Buddha said, “as soon as she can feel hunger and cold.” However, because the mother’s previous negative karma was too heavy, the merit Bright Eyes cultivated for her could only bring her a short human life in a family of the lower caste. After that she would have to fall back into the lower realm again.

In order for her mother to have a strong conviction on the karmic law, Bright Eyes intentionally asked her mother what kind of wrongdoing caused her to fall into the hell and what took place in the hell. Thanks to the blessings of the Buddha, her mother clearly knew the answer. In general, sentient beings fall into the hell realm because of two types of wrongdoings: killing and reviling. *Observing the Disciplines of Ten Virtues Sutra* says, “Among celestial beings, the most fragrant is pleasant language; in the three worlds, nothing is more putrid than malicious language.” As in the case of the wrongdoer woman Yue Dili described in the first chapter, this mother probably often slandered the Three Jewels while she indulged herself in killing and eating fish and the like. A sensible person should be very careful with speech as the karma of negative language can be as severe as the action of killing, both of which drive the wrongdoer into the hell realm to undergo indescribable torments for endless years.

**“Upon hearing this, Bright Eyes cried and wailed. She said toward the sky, ‘May my mother be forever released from the hells. At the end of thirteen years, may she be finished with her heavy offenses and not go through the lower realms again. O Buddhas of the ten directions, kindly take pity upon me. Please hear the far-reaching vow that I am making for the sake of my mother. If she can forever leave the three lower realms, the low**

and mean, and never again be reborn as a woman, then, in front of the image of Pure Lotus Eyes Tathagata, I vow that from this day forth, throughout hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of future kalpas in all worlds where there are hells, where there are the three lower realms, I will rescue all wrongdoing suffering beings, causing them to leave the lower realms of hells, animals, and hungry ghosts. Only when the beings who undergo the ripened effects of wrongdoing have all become Buddhas will I myself attain perfect awakening.'



Upon hearing the miserable situation of her mother, Bright Eyes made great vows in front of the image of Pure Lotus Eyes Tathagata. There were basically two parts to her vow. The first part involved

her mother's well-being and the second part, her own commitment. In my Tibetan translation, I moved the sentences "O Buddhas of the ten directions, kindly take pity upon me. Please hear the far-reaching vow that I am making for the sake of my mother" to the beginning of her statement. I think this makes the text easier to follow but I am not sure if this would be considered a mistake by changing the original sutra.

As we are learning the vows made by Bright Eyes, we should also make the similar aspiration of freeing all mother-like sentient beings from suffering and guiding them to ultimate peace and happiness. Born in this degenerated world, we are burdened with strong mental afflictions and heavy negativities. But luckily, we have met the most compassionate Buddha, bodhisattvas and great masters who would never abandon us miserable beings. They are the most powerful support for us and most supreme objects for us to make our vows. If we make aspirations in front of them, even though we may be just ordinary beings full of delusion, their miraculous blessing will nonetheless enable our aspirations to be fulfilled without fail. Therefore, in order to liberate all those beings who have karmic connections with us, we should follow in the footsteps of Buddha Shakyamuni, Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha, Samantabhadra and Manjushri to make a firm vow that we will



not become buddhas until we bring all sentient beings across to liberation!

# Lecture Eight

August 3rd, 2020

## A FEW WORDS BEFORE THE TEACHING

### Larung Gar Is a Place for Acquiring Knowledge

After the Ksitigarbha Dharma Assembly, I visited several monasteries and nunneries in other Tibetan areas. It was quite a busy trip as I wanted to come back by Monday and continue today's lecture, so I had to travel hundreds of miles every day until late into the night. These monasteries and nunneries are sort of like extensions of Larung Gar because Dharma practitioners there were all from Larung Gar. Due to certain external issues beyond our control, these individuals were unable to stay at Larung Gar and they have been settled over the past few years in these locations. I promised to visit them on a regular basis. Thanks to the khenpos, khenmos and other sangha administrators, all the monasteries and nunneries are well-managed and all the practitioners are diligent in hearing, contemplating and meditating on the Buddhadharma,

with an even stronger faith in the Three Jewels. I am truly happy for them and rejoice in their persistent efforts.

I guess most of us prefer to stay at Larung Gar as long as circumstances would allow. Some Dharma friends even hope to die here as they feel this could assure a good rebirth into the pure land. Yet, Larung Gar is not a place to reside permanently but a university to acquire knowledge. After finishing your study, you should leave Larung Gar and share what you have learned with people in different areas. This is the best way for a Mahayana practitioner to benefit sentient beings. If every resident practitioner chooses to die here, I am afraid we would have too many corpses even for the vultures in our Charnel Ground. In the Great Perfection tradition, a great yogi would die in the way of a wild beast, meaning that instead of choosing a fixed place for death, anywhere would be a good place, either inside an isolated mountain or in a crowded big city. We should follow this tradition and do not clinging to a permanent residence. All of us have spent our lives learning and practicing the Dharma, our top priority should be to propagate the Dharma and to benefit others instead of worrying about where we live or die.

## Use the Sangha's Possessions Properly

The sangha's possessions should be properly used and allocated in accordance with the precepts explained in the Vinaya and the regulations made by the sangha. It is said that some practitioners live in a dorm room alone that can accommodate two or three persons. It is fine if no other persons need to live there. But it is quite inappropriate if one refuses to share it with others out of one's personal reasons such as a desire to practice alone, or one cannot get along with others. All of you have already learned a lot of Dharma teaching, so you must know that this is a big fault and its karmic retribution will be terrifying if one misuses the sangha's possessions. So please be particularly mindful when dealing with the sangha's property, knowing exactly what you have access to and what you do not.

Regarding the use of rooms, some departments make full use of their allocated rooms, while some do not. I hear that some departments use their extra rooms to store miscellaneous items while not allowing others to use them for their intended purposes. Last year a sangha administrator in my hometown monastery renovated some of the sangha's rooms, and these rooms were again used as storage after the renovation. Such cases are indeed bad examples. This is particularly true at Larung Gar where we have limited rooms available either for dormitory or for office use.

So please do not waste any room you have or occupy any room without a good reason. For miscellaneous items that are no longer in use, it is not appropriate to allow to accumulate and take up extra room. You can offer them to the sangha or put them up for sale. I hope khenpos, khenmos and managerial staff of each department will pay more attention on these matters and make sure that the sangha's possessions are utilized properly.

## **Live a Simple and Contented Monastic Life**

Since Larung Gar is a place for knowledge, everyone should pay his or her full attention to hear, contemplate, and meditate on the Dharma while we are staying here. However, there seems to be a trend for some practitioners to seek more comfort. Since new personal cabin construction has been stopped, some practitioners have decided to modify the interior design and decoration of their existing cabins. Although their efforts could not compare to the budgets and efforts city people spend on home design and decoration, I still think we should not dilute our focus with these matters as our main focus is to learn and practice the Dharma. A simple place is good enough for us to stay, and a luxury cabin is not helpful at all in improving our inner qualities.

Another thing is that some practitioners here, especially monks, buy cars for their personal use. Since parking capacity is quite limited

at Larung Gar, some monks ingeniously set up their garages by digging caves at the foot of mountains along the road surrounding Larung Gar. The fact is that car ownerships could bring a host of issues for Dharma practitioners. On the one hand, jealousy and desire could arise when they try to compare their cars with those owned by others; furthermore, the extra time and energy spent to maintain the car could negatively impact one's Dharma study and practice.

Why wouldn't we want to live a simple and contented life? Patrul Rinpoche said in his *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, "If you owned a horse, you would have one horse's worth of trouble. If all you had was a bag of tea, you could still be sure of having a bag of tea's worth of trouble." Personally I am quite content with my current life. The log cabin I live in now was built in the 90's. When we first came here, living conditions were very poor. Most of our cabins were made of mud and if we needed to go somewhere, we did not usually have any transportation and we had to walk. There was no electricity and since we wanted to study at night, we had to walk to the town of Sertar to buy kerosene, which is more than 20 miles away. Yet, we still made great progress in both scholarly study and actual practice during that time. Now one can buy anything here, food, clothes, and all other living essentials. Please bear in mind that you are here not for material comfort but for the cultivation

of virtuous personality, pure precepts, compassion, and wisdom. These are exactly what you should aim for.

Last year, we happened to see an adobe cabin that was built in the 80's. Since we no longer build such crude cabin nowadays, I suggested that we should protect this old cabin with glass as a way to remember the old times here at Larung Gar. Everything is changing, and previous lifestyle is no longer existent after over 30 years. Fortunately, our values of pursuing wisdom and compassion remain unchanged. We should always cherish this spirit instead of getting lost in external temptations.



## THE STORY OF BRIGHT EYES

In the previous lecture we have learned that Bright Eyes was very sad for her mother's death. Instructed by an arhat she made offerings to, she prayed to the Pure Lotus Eyes Tathagata who later told her about the rebirth of her mother. Then shortly after her mother was reborn in her maidservant's family, this new baby told Bright Eyes her karmic retributions in the lower realm before and after this short human life. Upon hearing this, Bright Eyes made the far-reaching vow for the sake of her mother. She vowed that if her mother could forever leave the three lower realms, she would rescue all wrongdoing suffering beings from the three lower realms and only when all these beings have become buddhas would she attain perfect awakening.

Initially, Bright Eyes made offering to the arhat with a sincere wish to rescue her mother. Starting with such a personal intention, while learning about her mother's miserable situation in the hell realm, she extended her compassion to all beings in the three lower realms and made a much greater vow to liberate all of

them throughout countless kalpas. The bodhicitta generated by Ksitigarbha manifested in the profound vows made in that life. Due to the powerful aspirations Bright Eyes had made, her mother gained liberation and she also enhanced her noble qualities of abandonment and realization.

Though the text says that Bright Eyes vowed to rescue beings in the three lower realms, all beings of the six realms were also included because none of samsaric beings in cyclic existence could forever remain in the higher realms without falling into the lower realms. This is the reality of the wheel of samsara and the core reason why sentient beings need to seek liberation from this ocean of suffering.

Similar to Bright Eyes, we would also be heartbroken when our parents or close relatives and friends pass away and want to help them avoid any suffering in the lower realms. However, it is not enough to just benefit those who are close to us but rather we should have a greater aspiration to benefit all beings and help them attain liberation. Developing such intentions and motivations are of great importance. Indeed, this is the conventional way of generating aspirational bodhicitta as taught, for instance, by the Venerable Atisha. In order for an ordinary practitioner to generate bodhicitta, one needs to first develop a deep gratefulness to one's own parents and a wish to bring them peace and happiness. Then

one can extend this strong feeling equally to every living being because all of them had been one's mother in previous lives. In such a way, one can arouse the bodhicitta that would transform one into an authentic Mahayana practitioner.



**“After making this vow, she clearly heard Pure Lotus Eyes Tathagata saying to her, ‘Bright Eyes, you have great kindness and compassion. It is excellent that you can make such a great vow for your mother. I see that after your mother passes on from the present ripened effect at thirteen years of age, she will be reborn as a Brahman with a lifespan of a hundred years. After that ripened effect is over, she will be reborn in the Land of No Sorrow with a lifespan of incalculable kalpas. Later she will**

**attain Buddhahood, and far and wide she will guide humans and devas as numerous as the sand grains in the Ganges River [to the other shore].”**

After Bright Eyes made her vow, the Pure Lotus Eyes Tathagata praised her great compassion and aspiration and then told her the amazing reward her mother would receive after this short life. That is, she would take rebirth as a noble human being for one life which would be followed by rebirth into a pure land called No Sorrow for countless kalpas until she attains buddhahood.

Normally people make wishes to have good health, good looks, longevity or peace. These are all good wishes, but not extraordinary ones. Instead of focusing on one's own welfare, the highest aspiration is to seek to have all sentient beings attain true happiness and ultimate peace, which is bodhicitta. As ordinary practitioners, we can only exertively remind ourselves of this altruistic aspiration of bodhicitta repeatedly to counter our habituated selfish mind. But as long as we train our mind according to the teachings in the Dharma, bodhicitta will gradually and spontaneously arise in our minds without any difficulty and make us realize how narrow and harmful an ego-centered mind is.

The mother of Bright Eyes did commit grave offenses when she was alive. She had not only eaten so many living beings such as

fish, turtles, and their eggs, but also held wrong views. Yet, due to the great vow Bright Eyes made as a result of her bodhicitta, the mother's negative karma was purified and she would not have to go through the lower realms anymore. The bodhicitta Bright Eyes generated was so powerful that it brought her mother such huge rewards. As it is said in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*,

*Just as by the fire that will destroy the world,  
Great sins are surely and at once consumed by it.*

*Sutra of the Heap of Jewels* also says,

*Bodhicitta is the most supreme, like Agada medicine,  
Which can remove all afflictions and bestow all happiness.*

Agada is a medicine in ancient India that was believed to be extremely effective in curing all kinds of diseases. Likewise, through the incredible power of bodhicitta, all negative karma can be purified, and all happiness can be granted. Generating bodhicitta brings great benefit to both oneself and others, both in this present life and in all future lives. One who has aroused bodhicitta will be very happy life after life because bodhicitta is an efficient antidote to one's selfishness, the root cause for all sufferings and afflictions we ordinary people experience.

We know that most of our sufferings are due to our blind fixation on our ego which makes our mind rigid and narrow. If we focus on other beings' happiness whole-heartedly, our mind will become open and flexible, tender, and compassionate which would elevate our happiness and foster our spirits. This is a direct benefit of a bodhicitta mind. With sincere bodhicitta arising in our mind, we will instinctively benefit all living beings in an amazing way, particularly those who have a deep karmic connection to us. This is exactly what we have learned in the story of Bright Eyes. If we perform the Buddhist pujas for others, either the dead or the alive, they will be remarkably benefited due to the powerful blessing of bodhicitta just as the great benefit the mother of Bright Eyes had received.

**The Buddha told Concentration Mastery King, "The arhat who guided Bright Eyes across by [means of] merit then is now Inexhaustible Intention Bodhisattva; Bright Eyes' mother is now Liberation Bodhisattva; and the woman Bright Eyes is now Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva.**

**"Throughout many long kalpas past, [Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva] has been so kind and compassionate that he has made as many vows as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River to guide living beings far and wide [to the other shore].**



At the end of the story, the Buddha told Concentration Mastery King that now in this life, the arhat, Bright Eyes, and her mother have all become great bodhisattvas, and Bright Eyes herself is Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. Just like what happened in that life of Bright Eyes, throughout numerous kalpas, Ksitigarbha has made as many vows as grains of sand in the Ganges River to guide all living beings in samsara across to liberation.

From this paragraph we learn that making aspiration or generating bodhicitta only once is never enough. As stated in different scriptures such as the *Fortunate Aeon Sutra* and the *Sutra of the Heap of Jewels*, Buddha Shakyamuni did make vows many times in front of different buddhas in his causal stage. The Buddha made many

different vows, many of them he claimed to be his initial vows to generate bodhicitta. Maudgalyayana was curious and once asked the Buddha, “Sometimes you said you had vowed initially in front of this buddha and sometimes you said another buddha, in front of which buddha did you exactly make your initial vows?” The Buddha answered, “I spoke of different initial vows for the benefits of beings in different dispositions. There were good reasons behind these statements. Please do not think that there should only be one time to make an initial vow.” In the same manner, Ksitigarbha had made myriads of vows in front of different buddhas for the sake of all living beings.

Therefore, when we make vows, we should not be satisfied with just making them once or twice. We should emulate Shakyamuni Buddha and Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva to do so repeatedly and untiringly whenever and wherever it is possible, for instance, during a pilgrimage, seeing a Buddha statue, or visiting a great master, we should make great vows deep in our hearts. Gradually, just as little brooks become streams, streams become rivers, and rivers become oceans, our vows can accrue to match those made by buddhas and bodhisattvas. This is of great importance for every Mahayana practitioner.



## GREAT BENEFITS OF TAKING REFUGE IN KSITIGARBHA



**“In the future, if there are men and women who do not practice good deeds but do evil, who do not believe in cause and effect, and who engage in sexual misconduct, who speak falsehood, who engage in divisive talebearing, who use harsh speech, who**

**slander the Mahayana—beings with karma like these will certainly fall into the lower realms. However, if they meet a virtuous friend who encourages them so that they take refuge in Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva within the time of a finger-snap, they will obtain release from the ripened effects [to be experienced] in the three lower realms. [...]**

Shakyamuni Buddha then spoke of the benefit in taking refuge in Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. He said, “In the future, if any man or woman who does not believe in the karmic law and the Three Jewels, but strongly holds wrong views and perform all kinds of evil deeds such as engaging in sexual misconduct, speaking falsehood, sowing discord, slandering the Mahayana teaching, such a person will certainly fall into the three lower realms because of their gravely negative karma. However, if this person meets a virtuous friend who guides him to take refuge in Ksitigarbha, he will be instantly released from the karmic retributions in the three lower realms.” Ksitigarbha is therefore an incredible refuge who can help secure one’s future life against falling into the lower realms. Whenever it is possible, we should encourage others to recite the name of Ksitigarbha or read this sutra even just once.

## Efficacy Story: Ksitigarbha's Palace of Merit in Hell

There is a story in the *Records of Efficacy of Ksitigarbha Image*. In the Song Dynasty, a military governor of Chang'an named Lixi Cui died of dehydration. After he died, he was escorted to see the Lord of Death. The Lord of Death asked Cui if he had done any virtuous deeds when he was alive. He answered that he took refuge in Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva and made offerings to the monastics. The Lord of Death said, "You have accumulated great merit by taking refuge in Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva." The Lord further asked his henchmen by his side, "Has Cui's lifespan been exhausted?" They checked Cui's document and answered, "Not yet." Then the Lord asked Cui, "Do you want to return to the human world?" Cui said, "Yes." The Lord of Death further asked, "Before you return, do you want to see the hells?" Cui said, "Yes, I want to take a look at the hells."

Then Cui started his hell journey with three henchmen of the Lord of Death. First, they went to a big iron city, in which there was a tile-roofed house with an iron gate. One of the henchmen opened it and Cui saw some of his deceased relatives experiencing immense suffering inside the house. They broke out in tears when seeing Cui and asked him to save them. Cui told them to take refuge in Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva and recite his name. Then they went to

another city where there were burning beds and some monks that Cui knew were sitting on the burning beds. Their bodies were like the coal burning with great fire. Cui asked the monks why they had to experience such suffering. They said it was because when they were alive they had practiced the Dharma only for their own fame and wealth but not in accord with the teaching at all. They asked Cui to save them and as before, Cui told them to take refuge in Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva and recite his name.

Like this Cui visited tens of hells and inside each of them there were wrongdoers undertaking various unbearable suffering. On their way back, they came to a green-roofed house which looked quite beautiful. The surrounding environment was very pleasant, and on both sides of the walkway there were jeweled trees laden with fruits. Cui asked the henchmen how such a place could exist in hell. One of them answered, "Beings reborn here were those who didn't have faith in Ksitigarbha but just had painted the image of Ksitigarbha. Those who did have great faith all took rebirth in pure land or Tushita Heaven according to where they wanted to go."

Then they came to a great jeweled palace, in which there were hundreds of thousands of males and females enjoying all kinds of play. Cui again saw the deceased relatives whom he had just met in the other hell. They greeted Cui delightfully and said, "Thank

you for instructing us to take refuge in Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva and recite his name. Relying upon his powerful blessing, we were freed from the hell and came here.”

Cui asked the henchmen: “Where is this place?” They told Cui that this palace was named the Palace of Merit. Those beings reborn here were endowed with long life and freed from all kinds of suffering and would attain liberation in the time of Maitreya Buddha. Cui further asked who established such a place. They said it was Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva because this great bodhisattva had promised Shakyamuni Buddha that he would save all beings from falling into the lower realms until Maitreya Buddha appears in the world. In order to save those who were unable to take rebirth in pure land and had to fall into the lower realms, Ksitigarbha placed them temporarily in this Palace of Merit. Later Cui returned to the human world and shared with people what he had witnessed in the hell. As a result, a lot of people generated deep faith in Ksitigarbha and took refuge in him.

This story illustrates Ksitigarbha’s incredible powers and blessings. Those who take refuge in Ksitigarbha can obtain great benefits in the snap-of-a-finger. Some may question how those in hell could be liberated so quickly just by taking refuge in Ksitigarbha. It would seem reciting the name of Ksitigarbha is just too easy an action. This can be attributed to the inconceivable mechanism of

the law of causality. When the proper causes and conditions are gathered together, the power of Ksitigarbha will free beings from their ripened effects in the lower realms and grant them peace and happiness.

## Be Open to Something Inconceivable

Sentient beings and their karma are inconceivable, so are the blessings of Ksitigarbha. We should not judge and deem something wrong when it seems inconceivable. As ordinary beings, our perceptions and conceptual thoughts are very limited. The scope of what we can imagine or what we can see is quite narrow. Take human vision for example. Human eyes can detect light at wavelengths only in the visual spectrum which is a really small portion of the electromagnetic spectrum. Both ultraviolet light and infrared light are invisible to human eyes. Yet, being invisible does not mean they do not exist. We need to admit that our ordinary sensory faculties are limited and unreliable, as the Buddha said in the *The King of Samadhi Sutra*,

*The eyes, the ears, and the nose are unreliable.*

*The tongue, the body, and the mind are unreliable.*

Regarding inconceivable phenomena, modern people seem to be able to only accept some of them. Most people would accept

whatever the scientific research offers them even when they cannot conceive or understand. When it comes to religion, however, they would naturally think those inconceivable statements are just superstitious. Take the Buddhist terms of trichiliocosm and kalpa for example. In Buddhism, trichiliocosm refers to one billion worlds while kalpa refers to a vast period of time. Astronomy says that it is impossible to know exactly how many stars are out there in the cosmos, but for sure there are billions of galaxies that can be observed, which is similar to the Buddhist concept of countless trichiliocosm in ten directions. Geology estimates that the earth has a history of about 4.5 billion years, which is divided into four eons of the geologic time scale, again a similar concept with kalpa. Though concepts such as trichiliocosm and kalpa are similar to those described in Astronomy and Geology, some people still think what astronomers and geologists claim are correct while what is stated in Buddhism is just religious talk without any factual basis. Their confusion may be due to their lack of knowledge in Buddhist philosophy or a simple misunderstanding that mixes some statements fabricated by others with authentic Buddhist doctrines.

As Buddhists, we should not only study the Buddhist doctrines, but also learn about people's various opinions on Buddhism. Most people actually do not have a strong belief in either eternalism or

nihilism but they lack basic knowledge or proper education on Buddhism to understand the true reality of the world. If we can clarify their misunderstandings or confusions, it may be possible for them to develop the right views. Without clarifications, they may simply stick to their wrong views and continue to solidify their biases against Buddhism. In order to prevent this unfortunate misunderstanding, we Buddhists need to provide the general public with understandable clarifications. It is our responsibility to be the others' virtuous friends by sharing the Dharma teaching with them.

As the Buddha said here, instructed by a virtuous friend, beings with heavily negative karma can be released from their ripened effects in the lower realms. Therefore, a virtuous friend is of great benefit to all sentient beings. If we cannot make others take refuge in the Three Jewels and diligently follow the Buddhist path, we can at least introduce the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* to them. For example, when you are on a train, you might start a conversation with people around you and share your snacks to make them feel at ease before introducing them to the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*. If they can generate faith and take refuge in Ksitigarbha even for a very short while, you have become a truly virtuous friend to them as they will attain great benefits because of you. This is just an example of a bodhisattva's four ways of attracting beings in daily life.



**“[...] If people are able to revere and take refuge in him with a resolute mind, as well as reverently gaze, pay obeisance, sing his praises, and make offerings of incense, flowers, clothing, jewels of all sorts, or also food and drink to him, they will be reborn in the various heavens to experience excellent, wonderful happiness during hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of kalpas in the future. When their heavenly merit is exhausted and they are reborn below in the world of humans, they will frequently be emperors or kings throughout hundreds of thousands of kalpas and will be able to remember the cause and effect of the sequence of events of their previous lives.**

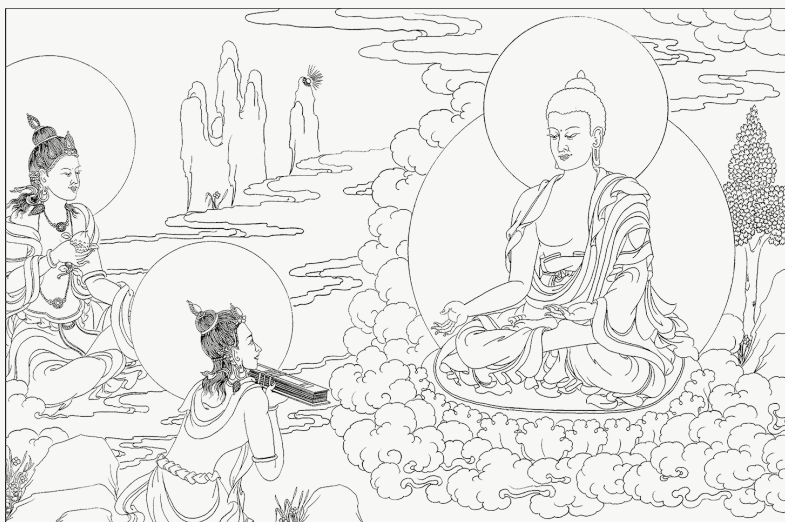


If even wrongdoers with grave offenses can be freed from the three lower realms by taking refuge in Ksitigarbha in the time of a snap-of-a-finger, beings who venerate and pray to the bodhisattva with a resolute mind will certainly accumulate great merit and receive unbelievable benefits. They will be reborn in heavens to enjoy great happiness for boundless time. When their heavenly merit is exhausted, they will be reborn as humans with a good memory of the cause and effect of their previous lives.

During the recent Ksitigarbha Dharma Assembly, we arranged various offerings such as flowers and fruits in grand amount in front of the statue of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. This shows our great devotion to Ksitigarbha and in doing so, we have accumulated vast merit for ourselves and others. I have stated earlier that only the Ksitigarbha practice is included in our annual Dharma assemblies at Larung Gar but not the practice of Avalokiteshvara or Manjushri. One of the reasons for this is because Ksitigarbha is of great benefit especially for beings in this degenerate age. Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva vowed determinedly in front of Shakyamuni Buddha that he would guide beings in the degenerate age to attain liberation. Thanks to the great vows Ksitigarbha made again and again in his previous lives, anyone who prays to him or recites his name and mantra will be freed from sufferings such as famine, diseases and wars, which are particularly pervasive in this degenerate age, and

also have all their wishes fulfilled. In the *Sutra of the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha*, dozens of benefits from reciting the long mantra of Ksitigarbha were detailed. The Larung Gar sangha also recite the mantra of Ksitigarbha during the Ksitigarbha Dharma Assembly very quickly and fluently.

## Persevere in Propagating the Sutra



**“Concentration Mastery King, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva has such power of inconceivable, great awesome spiritual penetration to widely benefit living beings thus. All of you Bodhisattvas should remember this sutra. Expound and propagate it far and wide.”**

**Concentration Mastery King said to the Buddha, “O World-Honored One, please do not be concerned. Through [the power**

of] the Buddha's awesome spiritual penetration, we, thousands of myriads of millions of Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas, will certainly be able to expound this sutra widely throughout Jambudvipa to benefit living beings."

Having spoken thus to the Buddha, Concentration Mastery King Bodhisattva joined his palms in respect, made obeisance, and withdrew.

After introducing the qualities and powers of Ksitigarbha, the Buddha urged Concentration Mastery King as well as all bodhisattvas present to keep this sutra in mind and expound and propagate it extensively. Relying upon the awesome spiritual blessing of the Buddha, Concentration Mastery King and thousands of myriads of bodhisattvas vowed together in front of the Buddha that they would spread widely the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* in this life and all future lives to benefit infinite sentient beings.

As we know, teaching the noble Dharma to others is an important way to benefit beings. In *The Mahasamnipata Sutra*, the Buddha said:

*For those who are blind and lost on the spiritual path,  
You bodhisattvas should open their Eyes of Authentic Dharma.*

As long as the Eyes of Authentic Dharma in sentient beings are opened, they will instinctively know what to adopt and what to avoid, free themselves from their suffering and attain happiness and eventually buddhahood.

When I read this paragraph in the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, I felt an immediate conviction to translate this important sutra into Tibetan. Although the Tibetan population is not large, I felt that it was still necessary to spread this sutra widely among Tibetan communities in accordance with the Buddha's direction. The *Ksitigarbha Sutra* is already translated into several languages such as Chinese, English, Italian, Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese. Propagating and explaining the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* in other languages is very much needed.

A number of Dharma friends are compiling the Chinese lecture notes on this sutra based on my oral teaching. I hope that you can ensure the quality and timely delivery of your work. Lecture notes of high quality are of great benefits to all future readers. On the one hand, the materials in written format can be more easily preserved and shared. On the other hand, some of my audiences may have difficulties in understanding my audio recordings as my

Mandarin is not that standard. Learning this sutra from the lecture notes solves this problem. So, when you are doing the transcription, please make sure that you do not overlook any key point or any details, and make sure that flow is well organized and logical. For those who will translate the lecture notes into different languages, my suggestion is that you should consider the culture of the target readers and use their ways of expression so that they can more easily grasp the meaning of the sutra.

Although we only have a small live audience for the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, let us try our best to share this sutra with different groups of people because this sutra will dispel their difficulties and bring them peace and happiness. As a Mahayana Buddhist, each of you is responsible for spreading this sutra with your best efforts. You may also emulate Concentration Mastery King Bodhisattva and aspire to spread the Ksitigarbha practice to numerous beings life after life. In the course of propagating this sutra, you may encounter only a small audience of dozens of listeners or you may be confronted with unfavorable conditions from time to time. Regardless, you should persevere and not give up. By maintaining this attitude and propagating the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, you will bring huge benefits to many others.

When I first taught Chinese students in the Samye Stupa of Larung Gar more than 30 years ago there were only about seven persons.

During those years, I tried my best to teach them and never quit. Now the number of the Chinese students has multiplied thousands of times. I used to wonder why in western culture there was a lot of emphasis on resilience and perseverance. Be it a national president or a university chancellor, he or she would always try to inspire people to never ever give up. I believe that this is a spirit that needs to be constantly fostered. From my life experience, I feel deeply that never giving up is a vital success factor in any endeavor, either spiritual or secular.

## KSITIGARBHA'S SKILLFUL MEANS TO TRANSFORM BEINGS

At that time, the Deva Kings of the four directions all rose from their seats, joined their palms in respect, and said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva has made such great vows throughout many long kalpas past. As of now, living beings have not all been guided across. How is it that he makes further immense vows again? O World-Honored One, please explain this for us.”

The Buddha told the Four Deva Kings, “Excellent, excellent! Now for the broad benefit of you as well as of devas and humans in the present and future, I will speak of what Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva does in the paths of birth and death in Jambudvīpa in the saha world: How he kindly and compassionately rescues and liberates all wrongdoing suffering beings by way of skillful means.”

The Four Deva Kings replied, “Yes, World-Honored One, we joyfully wish to listen.”





After the Buddha addressed the question of Concentration Mastery King, this bodhisattva withdrew, and it was the turn for the Four Deva Kings to ask their questions. The Four Deva Kings from the east, west, south, and north asked the Buddha why there are still so many beings who have not crossed over and how Ksitigarbha can make further immense vows again and again.

Sometimes it is normal for us to get confused when seeing others doing one thing repeatedly. Even the Deva Kings seem to be curious about Ksitigarbha's repeated vow-making over boundless time, let alone ordinary people. This reminded me of one time when I visited home after my ordination. I used to read books under the oil lamp till late at night while my family members slept. I

have an uncle who stayed with my family at that time. He was not that devoted in Buddhism. Around midnight, my uncle woke up and complained, “Are you still reading? Go to bed, don’t disturb our sleep! You used to love reading, now as a monk you still read so late, is there an end for your reading?” So, my uncle was very puzzled why I was always reading and studying.

The Buddha praised the Deva Kings’ question by saying “excellent” twice and they showed great delight in listening to the Buddha’s answer. It is true that when people ask good questions, these questions can elicit even more wonderful responses from the wise. Dharma teachers and students who engage in teaching and studying the Dharma need to have an open and flexible mind and be ready to ask any sharp questions for their fellow Dharma friends. In this way, both questioners and repliers can benefit greatly.

I have visited many schools and universities, among which the Hebrew University in Jerusalem stood out. When I was lecturing there, I could see from the students’ facial expressions that they were smart and intelligent, and their eyes seemed to sparkle with wisdom. I had a feeling that they would ask some really good questions and they actually did. That led to some very insightful interactions. In order to have good answers, we need to have good questions.

The Buddha told the Four Deva Kings, “For many long kalpas past and up to the present, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva has been guiding living beings across to liberation; nevertheless, he has not yet completed his vows. He has [great] kindness and compassion for wrongdoing suffering beings in this world, and he further sees that, during measureless kalpas in the future, their causes [of suffering] are endless like vines. Hence, he makes profound vows again. In Jambudvīpa in the saha world, this Bodhisattva teaches and transforms living beings by way of hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of skillful means thus:

The Buddha addressed the questions of the Four Deva Kings directly. Ksitigarbha has not yet completed his vows and he sees that the causes of suffering for wrongdoing suffering beings are endless like vines, out of his great kindness and compassion he continues to make profound vows again and again and applies numerous skillful means to guide these beings across to liberation.

Wrongdoing suffering beings in samsara are mostly controlled by their ignorance and delusion. Because of their ignorance, they cannot stop creating karma; driven by their karma and mental afflictions, they have to experience endless birth and death which involve all kinds of suffering that strengthen their habitual tendencies of mental afflictions. Therefore, they cannot break free

from the cyclic existence of samsara and their causes of suffering (karma and mental afflictions) are like creeping vines that spread far and wide. Because of this, Ksitigarbha's great vows to liberate all sentient beings are endless, and even before his great vows are completed, he continues to take even stronger vows.

Meanwhile, Ksitigarbha uses innumerable skillful means to teach and transform sentient beings. He applies different methods to different beings in accordance with their different faculties to directly attack their faults and provide them a heartfelt introspection to renew themselves. In the texts that follow, Ksitigarbha teaches retribution of killing in front of people who like to kill and teaches retribution of sexual misconduct in front of people who engage in sexual misconduct.

To benefit different beings, it is necessary to consider their faculties, dispositions and preferences. Before sharing any Dharma teaching with anyone, it would be best to figure out what they want to hear so that what we say can deeply touch them and inspire them. Without such awareness, your listeners could become confused and eventually get bored with your topic. For example, a Buddhist beginner would not be able to understand such an advanced topic as the difference between Svatantrika and Prasangika, the two sub-schools of Madhyamika. There are some Dharma teachers who do not even take a passing glance at their audience when giving a

Dharma teaching. They just carry on with their favorite subjects and pay no attention to the audience's reactions. In that case, I am afraid that their teaching would not be that helpful to the listeners. When a senior khenpo gives a Dharma teaching in the West and he just follows the tradition and starts his teaching straight away without addressing any of the needs of the audience nor initiating any interaction with them, given the cultural difference and the audience's different focus and interest, it would be difficult to truly benefit the listeners.

I think some of you will have the opportunity to spread Dharma teachings in the West. My experience is that do not attempt to impart Dharma teachings to Westerners by using Eastern thoughts and concepts. You should take into consideration their different backgrounds and cultures. Sometimes an ordinary topic for easterners may be amusing to westerners but sometimes it works the opposite. When I first started giving lectures in the West, I had no experience in using humor with western audience. I frequently got confused as to why listeners did not laugh at my jokes. Similarly, when His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche gave teachings in the West, there were incidences when the listeners unexpectedly burst out laughing while we thought there was nothing funny. Clearly these were due to people's different values, preferences,

dispositions and habitual tendencies. Thus, it is essential to consider each circumstance and situation like Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, who is super adept at employing skillful means to benefit different sentient beings.

**“Four Deva Kings, to those who kill, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva would say that [such action] would lead to misfortune and short lifespan. To those who steal or rob, he would say that [such action] would lead to poverty and wretched suffering. To those who engage in sexual misconduct, he would say that [such action] would lead to rebirth as peacocks, pigeons, and mandarin ducks.**



The Buddha listed some of the skillful means that Ksitigarbha would employ with different beings. The bodhisattva would tell

people with different bad habits their corresponding karmic retributions so that they can abandon these negative actions. In this part there are a total of 23 types of actions which will bring unwanted results in their present or future lives.

## 1. Killing

To those who like to kill, Ksitigarbha teaches them that such action will bring them misfortune and short lifespan life after life. Most people consume meat as a dietary habit or purposely for their physical health. Since this causes the massive killing of animals in the meat industry, people who eat meat are directly or indirectly engaged in the non-virtuous action of killing. However, according to the karmic law, anyone who seeks health and longevity should avoid killing. In the *Shastra of the Bodhisattva Bhumi*, it says, “Neither harming sentient beings nor having an intention to harm them is the cause of longevity.”

Each sentient being, even as tiny as an ant, cherishes its own life the most. In the *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, it says, “Of all treasures, life comes first. People acquire wealth for their life, but do not sacrifice their life for wealth.” There are some exceptions who work so hard for their career or business who pay no attention to their physical health. In most cases, it is unlikely anyone would be willing to die in the pursuit of wealth. Thus, because every

being regards their own life as the most precious thing, if a person deprives of another being's life, this person creates the most severe karma that would cause him or her to fall into the lower realms. When this person is able to be reborn as a human, he or she will still have poor health and a short life.

Some people might wonder why they are still sick after they have performed a lot of virtuous acts. The reality is that one's karmic consequences can be caused by the karma from his present life or that from previous lifetimes. For me personally, I often think my illness is due to the negative karma from my previous lifetimes as in this life I have not intentionally committed any killing since my childhood. There may have been cases of stepping on small insects accidentally but I am quite fortunate to be able to observe the discipline of non-killing in this life. Some of you might have enjoyed various types of meat before you became a Buddhist, like the mother of Bright Eyes did. In this case, you should purify this negative karma through the practice of confession, otherwise its retributions in future lives will be terrifying.

## 2. Stealing

To those who steal or rob, Ksitigarbha teaches them such action will bring them poverty and wretched suffering instead of a life of abundance and happiness. This is how the law of cause and effect



functions: whatever you do to others, you will experience similar results of your actions. For instance, your life will become short if you harm other's life, and you will become poor if you rob others of their wealth.

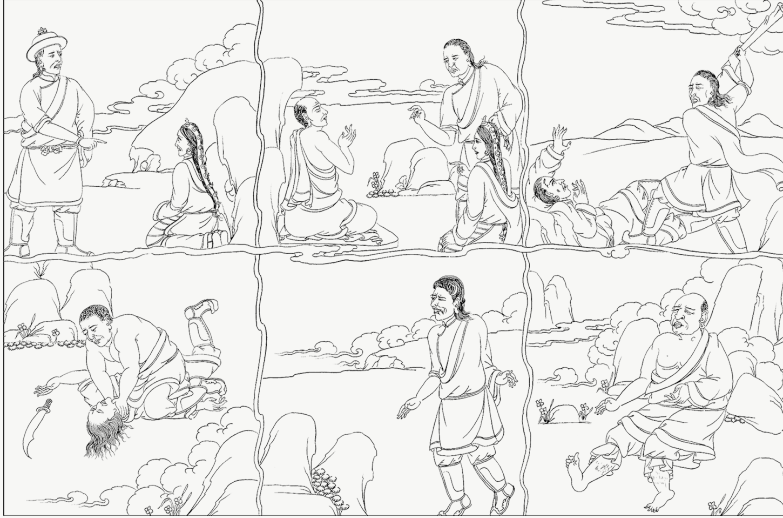
### 3. Sexual Misconduct

To those who engage in sexual misconduct, Ksitigarbha teaches them such action will lead them to be reborn as peacocks, pigeons, and mandarin ducks. In traditional Chinese culture, mandarin ducks are believed to be extremely faithful to their partners and would die together in pairs. They are regarded as symbols of love and this kind of behavior is an indication of their strong attachment to each other. Birds always represent desire or attachment in the Buddhist teachings. As an example, in the Tibetan painting of the wheel of life, the pig represents ignorance, the snake represents aversion, and the bird represents attachment.

**“To those who use harsh speech, he would say that [such action] would lead to quarrels and fights in one's family. To those who utter slander, he would say that [such action] would lead to being tongueless and having a cankerous mouth.**

**“To those who are angry and hateful, he would say that [such action] would lead to being ugly, deformed, and crippled. To**

those who are miserly, he would say that [such action] would lead to not obtaining what one seeks. [...]



#### 4. Speaking Harsh Words

To those who speak harsh words, Ksitigarbha teaches them such action will result in constant quarrels and fights among their family members and friends.

#### 5. Slandering

To those who slander, Ksitigarbha teaches them such action will cause them to be tongueless and have cankerous sores in their mouth in their future lives. Those who suffer from tongue cancer,

oral cancer, or cankerous sores could be receiving retributions from slandering.

## 6. Anger and Hatred

To those who are angry and hateful, Ksitigarbha teaches them such action will make them ugly, deformed and crippled. In Chandrakirti's *Introduction to the Middle Way*, it says,

*Wrath disfigures face and form and leads to evil states;  
It robs the mind of judgment to distinguish good from ill.*

Those who are angry and hateful will become ugly and deformed in the present and all future lives. Their anger will lead them to non-virtuous actions, and worst of all, they will be unable to act sensibly because anger and hatred will cause them to be unable to discern between good and bad. Driven by such strong emotions, one will lose complete self-control. The results of anger and hatred are therefore truly terrible. It is said in many sutras that angry and hateful sentient beings will be reborn as poisonous animals such as scorpions and vipers and their hatred becomes the poison.

## 7. Miserliness

To those who are miserly, Ksitigarbha teaches them such action will cause their wishes to be unfulfilled. We see in our daily lives

that some people seem to never get what they want. For example, they would not be able to get into their dream schools or sign up for the courses they want; they cannot get a job they like or find an ideal partner; or they are always dissatisfied with the places they live. These could be the result of the stinginess they showed in their previous lives. When they had wealth, they were miserly and did not show generosity.

The above examples show the skillful means used by Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva to teach and transform sentient beings. These words, though simple and obvious, are effective antidotes to our mental afflictions. We should contemplate and apply these teachings in our daily practice to cope with our negative emotions and behaviors. For example, knowing the karmic retribution of speaking harsh words, we should reflect on it deeply and frequently, and make corresponding changes in our speech. Also, now that consequences of hatred and miserliness are clear, we should constantly examine our thoughts and mental states to avoid these negative emotions. Without such reflection and introspection, theoretical or literal understanding alone would not help us tame our mind.

Scientists in a number of disciplines have made conclusions similar to concepts articulated in Buddhism, for example, a person has no self, any phenomenon has no solid existence, or the mind projects the world we live in. Yet, are these scientists able to

apply their knowledge to deal with their own mental afflictions and solve their own suffering from sickness and death as many Dharma practitioners have accomplished in their spiritual practice? The answer is no. While scientists may only remain on the level of theoretically understanding their knowledge, accomplished Dharma practitioners are able to independently apply the Dharma teachings into their practice through contemplation and meditation, leading them finally to the actualization of the teaching.

There was another story in the sutra where an experienced illusionist would conjure up a beautiful woman. Although he clearly knew this woman was not real, he was still not able to control his powerful desires towards this woman, thus generating mental afflictions and negative karma. Similarly, if we do not put the Dharma teaching we learn into practice step by step, and if we simply regard the teaching as an intellectual exercise and separate it from our own life, we would not be any different from these intelligent scientists or smart illusionists who cannot overcome their own ignorance and stop their samsaric journey.

Shakyamuni Buddha had attained full and complete enlightenment. He was, therefore, omniscient and had precise knowledge on everything worldly and transcendental. Then why did the Buddha preach mostly the teachings on the Four Noble Truths, emptiness, buddha nature and so on rather than scientific and technological

knowledge that modern people attach more importance to? It was because the Buddha was trying to free sentient beings from samsara, not solidify their delusions in samsara. In order to do so, the Buddha focused his teachings on the path of enlightenment and liberation, spending most of his life elaborating the emptiness of both person and phenomena. All the Buddha's followers are urged to apply his teachings to uproot their ego and ignorance and thus awaken themselves and others.

For matters that were not related to liberation, the Buddha followed the general world views. In the *Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, or the *Samyutta Nikaya*, the Buddha said, "I do not argue with the world. It is the world that argues with me." This is a profound statement. On the one hand, one can say Buddhism is an inclusive religion that can be compatible with many cultures and traditions as well as modern science; on the other hand, this statement also asserts that anything within this illusory world is not as crucial as the Dharma teaching that enables one to break free from this illusory world. In order to achieve this goal, it is essential that we learn and practice the relative truth such as the karmic law of cause and effect, and the ultimate truth such as emptiness and buddha nature.

As followers of the Buddha, we cannot simply learn the Buddha's teachings as an intellectual matter, we need to also exert ourselves

to actualize these teachings into our life and practice. Without actual practice, we will never grasp the profound meaning of the Dharma even if we have learned all the theories and principles of the Five Treatises and earned the most advanced degree in Buddhism. As Kadampas said, “A horse can run through the gap between the mind and Dharma teachings.” Without practice, the blessing of the Dharma would not ripen in our mindstreams and will not help us tame our minds.

I hope that all of you will be able to apply what we have discussed in this lesson on the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* to cope with your mental afflictions and tame your mind. Uprooting mental defilements is a difficult task but there are methods to fix them. The Buddha’s teachings are direct antidotes to the three mental poisons of attachment, aversion, and ignorance. As long as we persist in Dharma practice, our minds will be gradually tamed and merged with the Dharma teaching. Eventually we will be able to free ourselves and others from this illusory world of samsara and attain ultimate peace and happiness.

# **Lecture Nine**

**August 4th, 2020**



We now continue with the teaching on the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*. Historically, we see that the Ksitigarbha practice has been held in high regard by many great masters as well as ordinary Buddhist followers. Even among those who did not take refuge in the Three Jewels, many were also interested in the Ksitigarbha practice and were sincerely devoted to Ksitigarbha. As I said before, I will not elaborate too much on the sutra itself because its word-by-word meaning is not difficult to understand and that there are many good commentaries on this sutra. However, in order to propagate the Ksitigarbha practice to an even wider audience, it is still helpful for us to study together. In every lecture, I will share with you stories of the efficacy of Ksitigarbha so that our conviction to this great bodhisattva can be deepened and strengthened.

## EFFICACY STORY: A KSITIGARBHA STATUE IN A TEMPLE

Today, I would like to talk about a story that happened in the Tang Dynasty. In a temple named Kai Shan, there was a one-meter-high statue of Ksitigarbha but no one knew who built it. A local governor whose family name was Deng died of a minor illness at the age of sixty-one. After one day and one night, he revived and demanded to go to the Kai Shan Temple. Upon arriving, he asked the monks to show him that one-meter-high Ksitigarbha statue. At first, those monks had no idea about this statue. Then according to Deng's description, they found it among many statues of buddhas and bodhisattvas, which was not displayed in their shrine hall. After paying homage to the statue by prostration, he asked the monks whether he could bring the statue to his home. This aroused the curiosity of the monks and they wondered why he was doing so.

It turned out that after he died, he was brought to the Lord of Death. The Lord of Death said to him, "You cannot die because upholding

and spreading the Dharma is your calling. You should go back to the mortal world as soon as possible, but since the horrible situation of the hell realm remains foreign to mortal people, do you want to take a look in person?" Upon his acceptance of the invitation, he was brought to the city of the hell where the eighteen great hells and numerous smaller ones were located.

The hells were all bursting with raging flames, and wrongdoers inside were experiencing all manners of indescribable suffering. However, in each hell there was a monk trying to save them by giving them proper teachings. On his way back, the monk came out from the hell city and asked him, "Do you know who I am?" Deng said no. After a long while, the monk said, "I am the Ksitigarbha from the Kai Shan Temple. In the past, in order to save suffering beings from the lower realms, Master Zhi Man, a student of Master Zhi Zang, built a statue of mine in that temple. Following the master's request, I came to the hell every day to instruct wrongdoing beings. Upon hearing my teachings, those with relatively strong virtuous root could attain liberation from the hell; those with less virtuous root would have the seed of liberation planted in their minds; those with little virtuous root or even strongly holding wrong views would not generate slightest regret and thus had to stay in the hell for endless time. In the human realm those with little virtuous root are still possible to be

transformed. However, once they fall into the hell, even buddhas and bodhisattvas have no way to liberate them because their minds simply remain unmoved like wood and stone.”

Ksitigarbha further told him, “You are blessed by the power of the Dharma, so you will not undertake sufferings in the hell. Please go back promptly to the human world and let people know this situation.” This was what Deng experienced during that one day and one night, and then Deng said to the monks, “Not certain whether this was true or not and I dared not tell anyone until I could see this statue in this temple. It looks exactly like the monk I saw in the hell realm. This is why I want to invite the statue home.” Hearing this, the monks said joyfully, “Excellent! It is your faith that called Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva to appear personally. Instead of taking the statue home, you may have another Ksitigarbha statue identical to this one made for people to worship so that we can bring great benefits to others.” Then Deng followed the suggestion and made an identical statue, which inspired many people to take refuge in Ksitigarbha.

This story tells us that having a Ksitigarbha statue indeed can produce immense positive power for a whole community. If it is placed in a city, then the whole citizenry will be benefited. If it is built in a monastery, the entire monastery and the surrounding areas will be benefited. If it is worshiped in a household, then

the whole family will benefit. So it is that we should try to build a Ksitigarbha statue wherever it is possible, or at least place a Ksitigarbha statue or image in our shrine room. It does not matter from which tradition you choose the statue, either Han Buddhist tradition or Tibetan Buddhist tradition. As long as you have faith in your Ksitigarbha statue, it will grant you unbelievable blessings. Their different postures and ornaments will not affect their power and blessing at all.

Take the image of Buddha Shakyamuni for example. There are slight differences in the Buddha's form and posture among different schools and some statues are sculpted standing while some are seated. When I visited Thailand, I noticed that the Buddha's ushnisha is depicted much more pointed in the Theravada tradition than in other traditions. But this difference certainly will not affect my devotion to the Buddha, not even in the slightest. The same for Guru Padmasambhava: in most cases Padmasambhava is drawn seated, but in *The Prayer in Seven Chapters to Padmakara*, the Second Buddha, Padmasambhava is depicted as standing. Besides, in the Eight Manifestations of Padmasambhava, some are ordained while some are not. Avalokiteshvara also takes on different forms. We need to understand that the appearance of a deity in a variety of forms is essential to inspire beings with different faculties and preferences. Whichever form you prefer, you can make offering

and pray to the deity in that form to deepen your faith in it. And as long as you have devoted faith, it makes no difference how a deity appears or which posture the deity adopts. Faith is the most important thing for us to cultivate, and in order to deepen and strengthen it, we need to hold a pure faith toward any kind of Buddhist statues or images.

Some of you who are younger may doubt the immense benefit a Buddhist statue can bring. Some even believe worshipping an image of a Buddhist deity is the same as idol worship. This is quite understandable if these younger individuals have not received an inclusive education on different cultures and religions. For instance, if a person has never learned about Confucianism and holds a rigid view based on his own culture, this person may feel the statue of Confucius is irrelevant. Similarly, those who lack a historical understanding of American freedom and liberty may not feel the Statue of Liberty has any meaning. However, these personal opinions can vanish if people are opened to learning more about the profound cultural heritage, religious significance, or philosophical foundation behind these images and see that a statue from a different tradition could convey high value in regards to its art, culture and religion. One should not make any rash conclusions without first gaining good knowledge of the background of a tradition.

Today, there are individuals with only a sophomoric understanding of religious culture who would reject or even denigrate certain religious art. This only shows their ignorance and imprudence. If one's education since childhood is inclusive and diverse, and supported by religions and spirituality, one's inner qualities and morals will thrive together with one's intelligence. However, the widespread acceptance of the theory of evolution over the past few centuries has led to the rapid growth of materialism and to the great detriment of spirituality. The separation of religious institutions from the state in many countries has also led to the withdrawal of spirituality from public education. Historically, European countries were theocracies and most educational institutions were run by the Church. Similarly, in some Muslim countries the governments were run based on certain aspects of Sharia. Unfortunately, some religious leaders abused their authorities and instead of improving the welfare of their countrymen, they used religious doctrines to control their people in order to fulfill their own selfish interests. Their approaches were often cruel, unreasonable, or even illegal. Because of its irrationality and uncertainty, theocracy has since lost much of its credibility among people and more and more countries have chosen to be secular. As a result, religious education is no longer offered as a public service and sometimes even banned from schools.

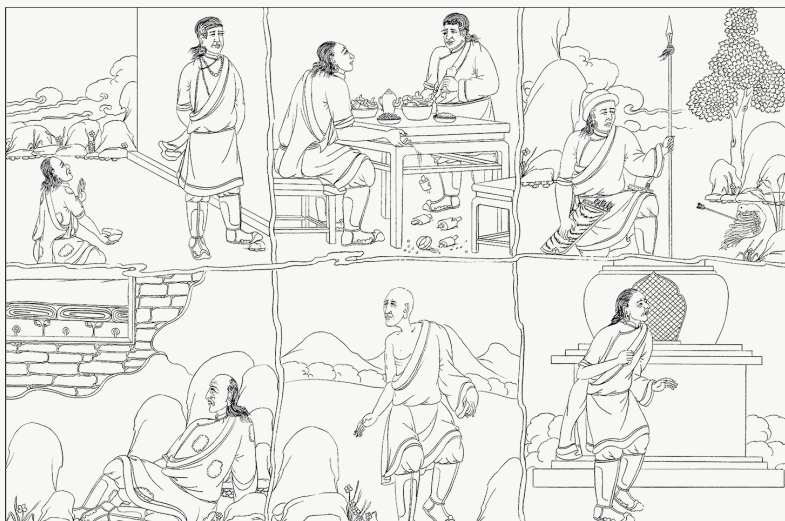
This is the historical backdrop on why modern people are less familiar with religions and spirituality. With this understanding, we should avoid making rash judgement on statues with cultural or religious attributes that we are not familiar with simply based on their appearance. We should bear in mind that as an ancient art that has been existing for so many centuries in human history, these statues are by no means as simple as they look. They could carry great cultural and religious significance that we have yet to learn and that they deserve our respect.

Now let us continue with the text of the sutra where the Buddha is talking about Ksitigarbha's skillful means to teach and transform sentient beings who have committed various negative deeds and are suffering from their corresponding retributions. In the previous session, we have talked about seven types of negative deeds, now we continue from the eighth type of negative deeds.



## KSITIGARBHA'S SKILLFUL MEANS TO TRANSFORM BEINGS

**"[...] To those who are immoderate in consuming food and drink,  
he would say that [such action] would lead to hunger, thirst, and  
throat diseases.**



## 8. Eating Immoderately

To those who are gluttonous, consuming food and drink immoderately, Ksitigarbha said that such action would bring them hunger, thirst and throat diseases, esophageal cancer for example, as their karmic retribution.

Speaking of people who eat and drink without limit, the viral mukbang videos on the internet come to mind. In these “eating broadcasts”, people, usually skinny ones, film themselves eating a staggeringly huge amount of food, e.g., piles of shrimps and lobsters in one meal. Although this type of “limitless” eating and drinking is already a negative deed, what is worse is that in addition to consuming food excessively themselves, some of these people also try to persuade others to emulate them. Since mukbangers usually eat meat, they are not only encouraging others to squander food, they are also causing more creatures to be deprived of their lives. It is sad to think how they could escape the karmic retributions described in the text. Patients suffering from severe throat diseases are unable to take even a drop of water or eat a mouthful rice. These miseries could be the ripened effects of their excessive consumption and waste of food in this or previous lives.

**“To those who indulge in hunting, he would say that [such action] would lead to derangement from terror, and then loss of life. [...]**

## 9. Hunting

To those who indulge in hunting, Ksitigarbha said that such action would cause them to become crazed and die in terror. Not only would the death be miserable, people who suffer from the retribution may even see themselves hunted by animals. Master Chin Kung once talked about his personal story of hunting. Before he became a Buddhist, starting at the age of sixteen, he spent three years hunting and fishing with his father. According to his account, he was a crack shot and never missed a shot so they killed a lot of animals and ate a lot of fish. Then his father got a rare panic disorder at the age of 45, and very soon died in a crazed state. Later, Master Chin Kung had a chance to read the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*. While reading this sentence, “To those who indulge in hunting, he would say that such action would lead to derangement from terror, and then loss of life”, he realized that the way his father died was exactly the horrible retribution for the hunting and fishing. Then the master vowed not to kill, be a vegan for the remainder of his life, and to sincerely confess the severe negativity he had committed.

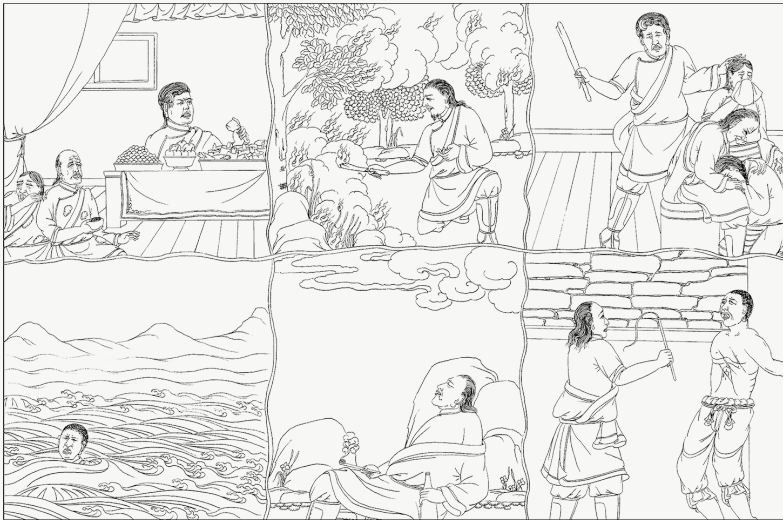
As is the case with everyone, even great masters could have performed negative deeds before they turned to Buddhism. But what is extraordinarily important is that they would sincerely confess their misdeeds and make a thorough change once they realized their faults. This could be something that had happened in their real life or merely an intentional manifestation that would inspire and transform ordinary beings. In Master Chin Kung's story, it was his father's death that deeply touched him and inspired him to believe in the karmic law and follow Buddhism. As we are learning these teachings taught by Ksitigarbha, we should also reflect deeply in our hearts on our daily behaviors.

People who suffer from mental disturbances can be so out of control that they have to be institutionalized in psychiatric facilities where extreme methods such as electric shock therapy is used to help them regain control. Such tragic conditions could be the karmic retribution from excessive killing in their present or previous lives. Those who have indulged in hunting willfully should sincerely confess this negative karma before it ripens into effect.

When I was a child herding yaks, one of my neighbors was a hunter. When we herded yaks together, he would teach me how to set traps with ropes and iron wires to capture prey. But I just pretended. After he laid his traps, I would sneak back and destroy them. I was

glad that although he wanted me to become his student, he never succeeded.

**“[...] To those who are contrary and perverse to their own parents, he would say that [such action] would lead to being killed by natural disasters.**



## 10. Unfilial to One's Parents

To those who are mean to their parents, Ksitigarbha said that such action would cause them to suffer from untimely death, being killed in a natural or man-made disaster, such as lightening, tsunami, earthquake, landslide or car accidents.

A while back, a car with six students drove into river from a mountain road near Sertar. This tragedy happened at around 2 a.m., leaving one student severely injured and the other five together with the driver dead. About an hour before the accident, the students called their parents and asked them to wait up for them. However, not long after the call, maybe because the driver was too sleepy, the car drove directly into the river. Among the six students, only a girl was able to grasp a branch in the river and gradually pulled herself to shore. She was injured badly and because the accident happened in the middle of the night, she was not discovered until the next day. All the others were washed away and drowned.

In this example, even in the same accident, different people can have different experiences. The outcome for the people is mainly controlled by their individual karma. When bad things happen like this, some may get angry and say, “Why was it me? Why is this happening to me? Why does everyone else have peace and happiness but not me?” However, if we understand the principle of causality, we will see that everything we experience is a karmic result of our past actions. The karma generated in our past lives are stored in the form of seeds in our all-ground or alaya consciousness. At the proper time and conditions, they will ripen into effects, meaning that we will have to experience its result regardless. Since

the karma everyone has generated varies, each person's experiences in this life are also different.

Therefore, everything we experience, good or bad, pleasant, or unpleasant, is the result of a series of obvious and unobvious causes and conditions. Our experiences are just the manifestation of the continuity of causes and conditions. In Buddhism, this continuity of causes and conditions is described as the infallibility of cause and effect of one's actions. As the Buddha said in many sutras, "One's karma will not vanish naturally even after hundreds of thousands of kalpas." People who first hear about this principle might think it is a fabricated religious concept and it is too ridiculous to accept. Anyone is certainly entitled to examine the law of causality as long as it is based on careful study and research; however, if we jump to a conclusion simply because the concept is not in line with our entrenched thinking, then it is a pitiful sign of our ignorance. If we follow the Buddha's teaching and study it in depth, we will be fully convinced of the validity and profundity of the principle of causality.

Personally, whatever challenge or difficulty I encounter, I will try to deal with it with all efforts. But if it still cannot be overcome, I would accept it without any frustration because I know it is the ripened result of my previous karma and I have no doubt about it. This mindset works for everyone because the karmic law applies to

everyone. It is useless to deny or ignore it. Say if someone contracts a rare disease and cannot be cured, one should accept it as the result of one's karma: "Getting such an incurable disease must be the result of the evil karma I created before. Now that the result has ripened, doctors cannot help me, even the Medicine Buddha cannot help me either. I can only purify this karma through my own confession." This would help keep one from feeling beleaguered but rather to face the disease peacefully.

It is essential to internalize the principle of cause and effect as we navigate our lives. Since life is not static, everyone experiences aging and death, thriving and decay, and successes and failures. Despite being invisible to us and impossible for us to discern through our conceptual thoughts, all of these are under the operation of the principle of cause and effect. All we can do is to deeply study and contemplate the related Dharma teaching, such as the teachings of Ksitigarbha provided here, and then to absorb them into our minds to transform our thoughts and behaviors. By doing so repeatedly, we will eventually gain an unwavering certainty towards the principle of karma, which, in nature, is a profound wisdom that can help us easily confront all kinds of challenges in life.

**"To those who set fire to mountains or forests, he would say that [such action] would lead to death from derangement and**



confusion. To those who are cruel parents or stepparents, he would say that [such action] would lead to being likewise abused in the present life. To those who net or trap young animals, he would say that [such action] would lead to separation of parents and children.



## 11. Setting Fire to Mountains and Forests

To those who set fires to mountains, forests, or woods, whether intentionally or unintentionally, Ksitigarbha said that such action would cause them to suffer from mental disturbance. In the worst case, they may even try to kill themselves out of their insanity because their previous actions deprived numerous birds and

animals of their lives. Committing suicide is often the result of mental disorders. If the person's mind is functioning normally, he or she would regret this action.

## 12. Abusing One's Children

To those parents who are malicious to their children or stepchildren, Ksitigarbha said that such action would cause them to be abused in the present life or they may be reborn as the children of cruel parents and suffer abuse in their future lives. If an individual is being mistreated by their parents or stepparents as a child, this could be their karmic retribution for having abused their children in their previous lives.

## 13. Trapping Young Animals

To those who like to catch young animals, Ksitigarbha said that such action would cause them to experience the separation of parents and children. Here in Chinese "young animals" mainly refers to young birds. When a mother bird hatches a newborn bird, she must love it deeply. If someone traps or even kills the baby bird, this cruel act would make the mother suffer the unbearable loss of her baby. In this case, the karmic result of that person is that he will experience the same suffering of losing his own children or being separated from his parents while he is young.

**“To those who slander the Triple Gem, he would say that [such action] would lead to being blind, deaf, and mute. To those who slight the Dharma or look down on instruction, he would say that [such action] would lead one to remain in the lower realms for an interminably long time. [...]**

#### 14. Slandering the Three Jewels

To those who slander the Three Jewels, Ksitigarbha said that such action would cause them to be blind, deaf, and mute. Since the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha are auspicious objects of veneration, denigrating them generates severe negative karma that brings about the impairment of these senses.

We should sympathize with people who suffer from physical impairment. While feeling sad for them, we should examine whether we have denigrated the Three Jewels. If we have committed such negativities, the karma has been stored in the form of seeds in our mindstreams. And if we don't burn the seeds in this life or even worse, strengthen their viability by creating more karma instead, then these seeds could ripen into effects very soon and we would have to bear the resultant suffering life after life which could be even more miserable than those we pity now.

Having encountered the authentic Dharma and been taught how to confess, we must purify our negative karma as soon as possible.

Otherwise, we will only be trapped in the lower realms with no way for us to break free from samsara. As it is said in the *Sutra of the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha*, “If people who committed negativities can expose and confess their mistakes, they are called the courageous ones who have gained purity.” So, the practice of confession and purification is very necessary and urgent for all of us and should not be delayed for any reason.

#### 15. Slighting the Dharma and Instruction

To those who slight the sacred Dharma and instructions, as well as to those who defame qualified Dharma teachers, Ksitigarbha said that such action would cause them to take rebirth in the three lower realms for an interminably long time.

**“[...] To those who abuse the property of the sangha, he would say that [such action] would lead one to revolve through the hells for millions of kalpas. To those who defile those living the holy life, or who make malicious accusations against the monastics, he would say that [such action] would lead one to remain in the animal realm for an interminably long time.**

#### 16. Abusing the Property of the Sangha

To those who destroy or misuse the property of the sangha, Ksitigarbha said that such action would keep them in the hell realm



for millions of kalpas. Knowing this consequence, one should be extremely cautious when dealing with the property of the sangha. In a sangha community, it is necessary to have a sound accounting and management system so that all sangha members are clear on what kind of property they can have access to and what they cannot, and to properly control the use of the sangha's money.

For proper financial control, there should be at least an accountant, a cashier, and a supervisor to manage the money together. Any amount of money that flows in or out should be recorded clearly with signatures of the three persons and accounting reconciliation should be done on a regular basis. Since these are all volunteer work in our sangha, it is best to keep their service period to no

longer than five years in case they have become less attentive after working for a long time. In addition, accounting records must be kept appropriately and audited periodically by other sangha administrators. Oral explanations alone would not be sufficiently convincing if allegation of corruption is raised. In case someone is accused of embezzlement, he should ensure that valid evidence can be provided to vindicate himself.

The karmic retribution for people who misuse the money of the sangha is that they will stay in the hell realm for hundreds of millions of kalpas, an incredibly long period of time. The length of even one kalpa is already unimaginable, let alone the length of hundreds of millions of kalpas. One can easily imagine what a horrible retribution it is.

As lay practitioners, you should verify the authenticity of all related information, including the project itself as well as the bank account that would receive your donation before you donate money to a certain project. If someone asks you to transfer money to his or her personal account for making offerings to the sangha or for freeing captive lives while not providing you with any valid receipt or the like, you should be on guard against being deceived. Monastics at Larung Gar are especially prudent in receiving donations. At Larung Gar, anyone who is found to have solicited money from others in the name of this academy will be expelled. I

have never solicited funds for any project at Larung Gar or in my own monastery. So, if you hear someone say that either I or other gurus at Larung Gar are short of money for certain project, it is very likely a fraudulent claim.

#### 17. Defiling or Accusing Monastics

To those who defile monastics who lead a pure life, or those who viciously accuse monastics, Ksitigarbha said that such action would lead them to remain in the animal realm for an interminably long time, which is a horrible retribution.

**“To those who scald, burn, behead, chop, or otherwise harm living beings, he would say that [such action] would lead to repayment in kind in samsara. [...]**

#### 18. Harming Living Beings Brutally

To those who scald sentient beings, burn them alive, behead or chop them, or harm them in any brutal way, Ksitigarbha said that such action would cause them to suffer from the same treatment in the future. For instance, if we scald living beings with burning water, we may have to experience being scalded with hot water for the next five hundred lifetimes. Or if we burn living beings with fire, say, we roast lobsters, crabs, fish, snakes, and other animals for food, then we will be killed in the same way in the future.

Once upon a time, the great master in Han Buddhism, Zhi Gong, was invited to a wedding ceremony. Seeing the scene in the venue, he cried out, "What a samsara show! The grandson is marrying his grandmother. The cows and sheep sit there as the guests and the relatives are boiled in the pot. All the guests say congratulations, but I say: Suffering it is! Suffering it is!" It turned out Master Zhi Gong saw with his divine power that the bride was the reincarnation of the grandmother of the bridegroom; the guests in the ceremony were the reincarnations of the cows and sheep the family had eaten; the meat used to serve the guests were taken from animals that were the reincarnations of their late relatives.

In *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, there described a similar story that Arhat Katyayana encountered. One day while the Arhat Katyayana was out on his alms-round he came across a man with a child on his lap. The man was eating a fish with great relish and throwing stones at a female dog that was trying to get at the bones. What the master saw with his clairvoyance, however, was this. The fish was the man's own father in that very lifetime, and the dog was his mother. An enemy he had killed in a past existence had been reborn as his son, as the karmic repayment for the life the man had taken.

Therefore, as we cause other beings to suffer so will we be repaid in kind. This is how the principle of cause and effect operates. In



*The Shurangama Sutra*, it says, “If a man kills a sheep to eat its meat, the sheep will be reborn as a human being and the man, after his death, will be reborn as a sheep to repay his former debt. Thus, living beings of the ten states of birth devour each other and so form evil karma which will have no end.” From these teachings we can see how horrible the cyclic existence of birth and death is.

For those who are living an easy life and have never had to experience misfortunes, they may doubt the principle of cause and effect. However, since the principle of cause and effect is an infallible universal law, it is necessary for everyone to develop a strong conviction in it. Being profound in itself, one way to comprehend it is by means of the theoretical understanding of emptiness, which can provide us with a support to trust the function of karma. As we mentioned in the previous lecture, Aryadeva said in his *Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way*,

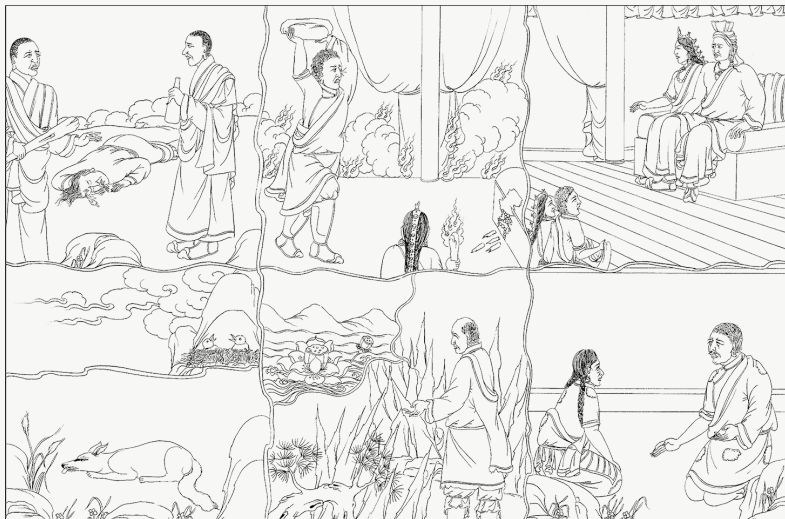
*Whoever doubts what the Buddha said,  
About that which is hidden  
Should rely on emptiness  
And gain conviction in him alone.*

In Chandrakirti’s auto-commentary to *Introduction to the Middle Way*, he explained, “The Buddha stated that the workings of karmic consequences are inconceivable, so he discouraged speculation

about the workings of karmic actions and results, otherwise ordinary beings could end up denying karmic consequences and demolishing the relative.” Although the karmic law is too concealed for us ordinary beings to fathom, we can rely first on the teaching of emptiness to gain conviction in the Buddha as well as the Buddha’s teaching. With such conviction, we would then be able to accept the Buddha’s teaching on the principle of cause and effect so that we can become proper vessels for higher practices, as in the case of unsurpassable Vajrayana. This is why great masters in the past always attached great importance to contemplating the four outer preliminaries, which are: 1) the difficulty of finding freedoms and advantages; 2) the impermanence of life; 3) the defects of samsara; and 4) the infallibility of the cause and effect of our actions. Without a conviction on the karmic law and the defects of samsara, we would never become qualified practitioners who can realize the true reality of emptiness or buddha nature.

Since the emergence of Buddhist modernism in the late 19th century, many forms of reformed Buddhism came into vogue around the world, especially in the West, e.g., the United States and the United Kingdom. Followers mostly believe in parts of the Buddhist concepts such as emptiness, compassion, or impermanence, yet discard the fundamental tenets in Buddhism such as the law of cause and effect, past and future lives, the existence of samsara, and so forth. In some part of India, there was Buddhist reformation

as well, as in the case of Navayana Buddhism. The founder created his own doctrines and thought the teaching of the Four Noble Truths was flawed. He also believed that the concept of no-self was in contradiction with karma and rebirth which he considered superstitions. There are many well-known celebrities, including best-selling authors, who are followers of this kind of reformed Buddhism. It is fine for people not to accept Buddhist teachings, but it would be strange for someone to claim to be a Buddhist and yet refuse to believe in karma, reincarnation, and samara. Buddhist practitioners should be on guard against such a mentality.



**“[...] To those who violate the precepts and rules of eating, he would say that [such action] would lead to rebirth as fowls**

**and beasts suffering from hunger and thirst. To those who unreasonably destroy things and deplete resources, he would say that [such action] would lead to insufficiency and lack in what one seeks.**

#### 19. Violating Precepts

To those who have taken certain set of vows such as the vow of individual liberation, the bodhisattva vow and the eight one-day vows but violated any of them, Ksitigarbha said that such action would lead them to become fowls or beasts suffering from hunger and thirst. An example would be if someone has taken a vow to not eat after noon but he or she still eats in the afternoon or even later, this person would take rebirth in the animal realm and experience hunger and thirst. This means that many animals today are probably the rebirths of people who had violated their precepts when they were alive. There are also many people who suffer from hunger and thirst, which could be the retribution for their negative karma generated through violation of the precepts.

#### 20. Destroying Things and Depleting Resources Unreasonably

To those who like to destroy things at random or deplete resources arbitrarily, say, sabotage public facilities, road, greenbelts, and other's belongings, Ksitigarbha said that such actions would cause

them to experience insufficiency and failure in getting what they want.



**“To those who are conceited and arrogant, he would say that [such action] would lead to being lowly and servile. To those whose divisive talebearing causes dissension and disorder, he would say that [such action] would lead to having no tongue or being ‘a hundred tongues.’ [...]**

## **21. Being Conceited and Arrogant**

To those who are arrogant and vain, Ksitigarbha said that such actions would lead them to be lowly and in an inferior and servile position. In some societies, there are established social classes, e.g.

the caste system in India, while most others have unspoken rules and norms around social status. Some people are born into noble or upper-class families and possess attributes such as intelligence, appearances, and abilities that would outshine their peers. Others who are born into unprivileged families and lower classes are rarely endowed with any outstanding qualities. These individuals could be the result of the ripened effect of being arrogant and conceited in their previous lives. However, if these people can practice the Dharma diligently and revere the object of veneration wholeheartedly, they will be reborn as noble ones in their future lives.

## 22. Divisive Talk

To those who like to instigate conflicts and disorder through divisive talk, Ksitigarbha said that such actions would make them tongueless or turn them into beings with multiple tongues. Those who are born with festered tongues or tongues like those found in snakes are probably experiencing the ripened effect of their negative karma of sowing discord among others.

With this warning, we should be mindful of our speech in order not to accumulate negative karma through mindless talking. If we often gossip, talking about others' faults, then severe negative karma will accumulate in the process. On the contrary, if we often say words of

praise, praising others' qualities, praising the Three Jewels and so forth, tremendous positive karma will be accumulated. That was why practitioners in the past used to say, "Chat less and recite more buddha's name." Some people are dominated by their negative karma and make quick judgments on everything and everyone at sight and constantly disparage others. Those who are mindful of their speech, no matter how badly they have been wronged, will always try to make sense out of it and behave decently to avoid creating negative karma out of speech.

While being mindful of our speech in everyday life, we should also pay attention to our choice of word while writing books and posting messages on social media which have allowed anyone to become an online writer and reporter. Those who freely post abusive or silly and meaningless messages are not only disturbing others, they are also creating a lot of negative karma. Since the internet has provided more opportunities and a bigger forum for speech, one's words and thoughts can now influence more and more people. We should therefore be especially aware of our words on social media. If we are going to post a message on a social media such as Weibo or make a TikTok video, it is best to create content that would deliver positive energy and be beneficial to others. If a positive post gets a high click-through rate, hundreds of thousands of people will be benefited. In the same manner, if

a post expresses only one's bad moods, negative comments, or complaints gains wide exposure, it will bring harmful influences to numerous people and create severely negative karma for the content creator and others.

Some people really like to express their moods and feelings on the internet and such an act can easily invite judgment from others. Many people today tend to closely monitor their social media and can be quite judgmental when it comes to other people's posts and behaviors. "Well, he posted this today, I bet he will post that in a few days." "This person must be in a bad mood recently." "He must be in high spirits recently." In some extreme cases, there are those who tweet more than a hundred posts a day to complain about this and that. Many of us will certainly think that there is something wrong with this person because a normal person would not behave this way.

I seldom browse social media posts except for the WeChat Moments of a few Tibetan khenpos. Their posts are always about their devotion to Buddha Shakyamuni, Padmasambhava and so on. From their posts I can feel the peace and contentment in their minds and I am sure their friends seeing the posts will feel the same way. As a Tibetan saying goes, "Before you speak one sentence, you should first assess the crowd." It is important to speak words suitable to the circumstance and listeners. Despite that, it is unavoidable that



our words would sometimes accidentally invite misunderstanding from others. Still, we should try to be mindful with our words at all times in order not to sow discord or create disharmony among others. It would be terrifying otherwise to experience the suffering of being tongueless or having multi tongues.

**“[...] To those who hold false views, he would say that [such action] would lead to rebirth in borderlands.**

### 23. Holding Wrong Views

To those who hold wrong views, Ksitigarbha said that such action would lead them to take rebirth as ignorant beings in places where Dharma teaching was unknown. As a result, they would have no idea of what they should and should not do, and thus continue to commit negative karma that would lead to endless suffering. Therefore, it is crucial to rid oneself of any wrong views when there is an opportunity to study the Dharma.

Here Ksitigarbha described a total of 23 types of negative deeds and their respective retributions. Although we have not heard these teachings directly from Ksitigarbha, we should use them to observe our daily behaviors and thoughts because we can commit these wrongdoings so easily in daily life. It is certainly difficult for us ordinary people to completely avoid acts such as giving

rise to wrong views, never gossiping about others, or being never arrogant. Only enlightened bodhisattvas can reach this perfect state. Nevertheless, we should be vigilant to avoid committing the more severe ones such as killing, violating precepts, or willfully usurping the property of the sangha.

Some Buddhists are very careful with their words and deeds and always talk sensibly and act prudently. From these behaviors, we can conclude that they must have clearly accepted the teachings on the principle of cause and effect. If someone never pays attention to his or her actions, and engages in gossip or slander frequently, it indicates that this person has either never received teachings on karmic laws or is simply overwhelmed by his or her negative karma.

As Buddhist practitioners, we should be persistent in trying to transform our words, acts and thoughts for the better and not go back to our old behaviors. It is insufficient to just pay attention to our speaking during the several days of receiving a teaching, to the point of even wearing a “silence” badge on our clothes, and then regress to our old behaviors after the teaching fades from our memory. As authentic Dharma practitioners, we need to absorb these teachings into our beings to guide our behaviors for our entire life. Such is the stable personality that we practitioners should cultivate.

Stability is an important attribute as it helps a person win trust from others. When we evaluate a person, we would often consider whether he is stable or not, especially when we look for a volunteer to do a certain job. If someone is stable, one's body must be stable, one's words reliable, and one's view steadfast. Then why is it that some would often change their minds? On the one hand, they could be swayed by their strong negative karma; on the other hand, it is likely that they do not realize their own problems and instead just follow their ego-driven emotions. A good way to understand oneself and recognize one's own problem is to rely on virtuous friends. There is a verse in Sakya Pandita's *Treasury of Good Advice* that reads:

*Even though one may lack wealth and attendants,  
With intelligent friends one achieves one's goals.  
If this is the case even for animals,  
Needless to say, it is so for humans.*

Therefore, having a trustworthy friend is especially important for anyone. However, many today do not have any close or reliable friend and they often suffer from loneliness and social isolation. According to a survey done in the West, the number of close friends a person has on average is decreasing and because people today are preoccupied with themselves and have no time to care about others,

finding trustworthy friends has become increasingly difficult. As a consequence of increased self-centeredness, it has become more and more difficult for people to be altruistic and considerate of others, and hence difficult for them to become a trustworthy friend to others.

The strong and pervasive influence of self-centeredness has its roots in the global mega trend of individualism that has increasingly prevailed in human society over the past couple of centuries. Traditionally, cultural concepts such as being loyal, trustworthy, filial to parents, and loving friends were rooted in the minds of many people around the world, and every country has her own moral tradition. However, the rise of individualism has shifted people's attention to themselves over others, as in the case of their friends, spouses, parents, as well as communities. Modern education encourages self-actualization and uniqueness.

As a result, many people isolate themselves from others and cherish their own time. Although this may seem desirable in the beginning, in the long run they lose their passion and opportunity to share their joy and love with others, and worse, they destroy their social relationships and build barriers to their friends. This is why some individuals have become a lonely island all unto themselves and are unable to find a trustworthy friend to talk to when they are emotionally down or confronted with challenges in life. Because

of this cultural context, people with an altruistic motive may even be viewed with criticism, skepticism and suspicion on why they would help others before they are able to completely take care of themselves.

Given such realities, it is necessary to create more opportunities to let people learn about Buddhist concepts such as the principle of cause and effect and altruism. If the principle of cause and effect, such as Ksitigarbha's teachings given here, can take root among them, people will be more willing to observe the ten virtues with confidence and become more righteous, reliable and trustworthy. On the other hand, if people have no idea about the consequences of their actions and thoughts, and just do whatever they feel good without any discipline or introspection, it would be difficult for them to become a kind person with noble qualities. As many great masters have said, a good personality endowed with the ten virtues is the fundamental root of spiritual practice, without which one cannot succeed in any spiritual practice, nor take rebirth in the celestial realm or in the Pure Land of Bliss.

The way to help people discover the value of the principle of cause and effect is through education. Although there are exceptional people who are born with altruism, honesty, and trustworthiness, these qualities need to be cultivated through teaching and instruction for most people. Sadly, modern education now offers mostly

a package of knowledge and skills which is devoid of moral and ethical principles. Growing up in such an educational environment, most will end up being trained as smart individualists.

As Buddhist practitioners, we should learn about the overall situation of the world and the thought processes of modern people so that we can gain a better understanding of their needs and offer them appropriate help through Dharma teachings. Meanwhile, since the influence of individualism is pervasive and we are not immune, even though we are currently immersed in the Mahayana teaching of altruism and compassion, we also need to reflect deeply in our hearts on whether our selfish inclinations have been weakened or not. The principle of cause and effect deserves to be highly valued by everyone. If someone realizes its importance and acts accordingly, clearly knowing what kinds of behavior should be adopted and what should be abandoned, this person will be greatly benefited. It is my sincere wish that through learning this sutra, each of you can develop a firm confidence in the principle of cause and effect and then further take it as your responsibility to spread the teaching to each and every fortunate person you encounter, just like Ksitigarbha is doing with all his skillful methods.

## THE BUDDHA'S ENTRUSTMENT TO THE FOUR DEVA KINGS

“Living beings of Jambudvipa such as these—the evil habits in their karma of body, speech, and mind bear fruits, giving rise to hundreds of thousands of effects, of which I have now spoken in general terms. What the karma of such beings of Jambudvipa brings forth is different; accordingly, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva uses hundreds of thousands of skillful means to teach and transform them. These living beings are to undergo ripened effects like the ones mentioned first, and then fall into the hells, where they pass through many kalpas without a time of release. Therefore, you should protect people and protect their countries. Do not allow living beings to be deluded by these many [kinds of] karma.”

After hearing this, the Four Deva Kings wept and sighed sorrowfully, joined their palms and withdrew.





After briefly explaining how Ksitigarbha educates those beings with various negative habits, the Buddha said that he can only describe in general their countless karmic effects and the innumerable expedient methods Ksitigarbha uses to instruct and transform them. Sentient beings who commit these negativities will first receive their respective retributions mentioned above and then fall into the hells without a time for release. Therefore, the Buddha entrusted beings of this world to the Four Deva Kings to protect them from being deluded by their karma and committing more negativities, otherwise these beings will fall into the hell realm and experience immense suffering for endless time.

Upon hearing the Buddha's words, knowing that sentient beings are undergoing great suffering due to their ignorance and delusion, the Four Deva Kings wept compassionately and promised to follow the Buddha's instruction to save sentient beings. In addition to this sutra, the Four Deva Kings also vowed to protect beings of Jambudvīpa in other scriptures such as the *White Lotus: An Extensive Biography of the Lives of Buddha Shakyamuni* and the *Sutra of the Medicine Buddha*. In the Buddhist tradition, at the entrance of a Buddhist monastery, the images of the Four Deva Kings who are to protect people from committing negativities are usually displayed.

From the Buddha's explanation of how Ksitigarbha teaches beings, we can see that this great bodhisattva is expert in giving proper teachings according to the propensities and dispositions of sentient beings. This is the key point we should consider when sharing the Dharma teaching with others. The content of our teaching must correspond to the preferences and needs of the listeners. If people are afflicted with anger, it would be better to give teachings related to anger such as its negative impact and the way to ease it; if they are filled with greed, we may start by teaching them the defect of such grasping and the appropriate way to accumulate wealth, etc.

An approach that often leads to failure in spreading the Dharma is to believe that whatever we like applies to everyone else. Take the teachings of hells: If we talk about the existence of hells and their unbearable sufferings to someone who has not even heard about the six realms of samsara and has not yet taken refuge in the Three Jewels, the most likely outcome is that we would simply scare this person away from following Buddhism. In the early years at Larung Gar, there was a khenpo who was a debate expert. I would often pass his yard when I went to carry water. One time I heard him teaching a bunch of children about the respective opinions Je Tsongkhapa and Master Gorampa held toward a question. But the thing was those children were all playing by themselves and they

could not care less about who Je Tsongkhapa or Master Gorampa was.

Therefore, knowing the mindset and preferences of your potential audience is always necessary in order to give them a proper and beneficial teaching. This should be a primary concern in your future Dharma activities. I too have been making efforts in this regard. When I traveled overseas to give talks in different countries and universities, no matter where I went, I would do my homework to learn about their local traditions, their cultural taboos, the likes and dislikes of the locals, so on and so forth. If my schedule were too tight for me to do detailed research, I would chat directly with the locals whenever possible. Often on my way from the airport to the hotel, I would learn a lot from the driver about the local customs and habits. This was quite helpful to me as I prepared for the talks I was going to give.

Since we cannot cover a very large part of the sutra in our daily lectures, I hope that every one of you can internalize every day's teaching and use it to bring about the corresponding change. For instance, your conviction in the infallibility of the karmic law and your appreciation of the greatness of Ksitigarbha's work in teaching and transforming sentient beings should be deepened by today's lecture. Furthermore, you should be inspired to follow the example of Ksitigarbha and vow to enlighten sentient beings

with various skillful means. Such an aspiration should not be made only once. Even Ksitigarbha himself had made vows as numerous as the grains of sand in multiple Ganges rivers. For us ordinary practitioners, making aspirations just a handful of times is undoubtedly not sufficient. We should aim to strengthen the power of our vows by repeating them again and again.

## 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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