

**KHENPO  
SODARGYE'S**  
*Commentary on*



**ORIGINAL VOWS OF  
KSITIGARBHA  
BODHISATTVA  
SUTRA**

**4<sup>th</sup>**  
of 4 books  
2023 Edition

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KSITIGARBHA BODHISATTVA  
SUTRA**

**4th of 4 books**

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.



**Khenpo  
Sodargye**

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## Chapter Eleven

*The Dharma Protection of the Earth Spirit*

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

—Khenpo Sodargye

# Lecture Twenty-One

August 25th, 2020

## EFFICACY STORY: STORY OF BHIKSUNI ZHIZANG

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## WHO IS EARTH SPIRIT FIRM AND SOLID?

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

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

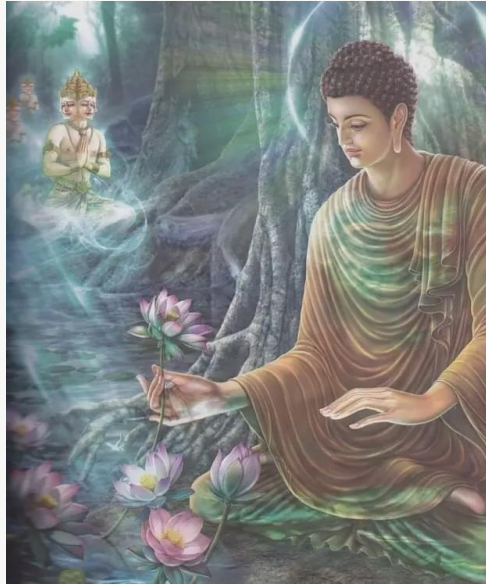
It is recounted in the sutra that, when Prince Siddhartha sat under the bodhi tree, Mara, leading hundreds of millions of demonic spirits, came to prevent the prince from attaining buddhahood. At that time, Mara threatened Siddhartha that if he did not leave this place, he would be thrown into the sea.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

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

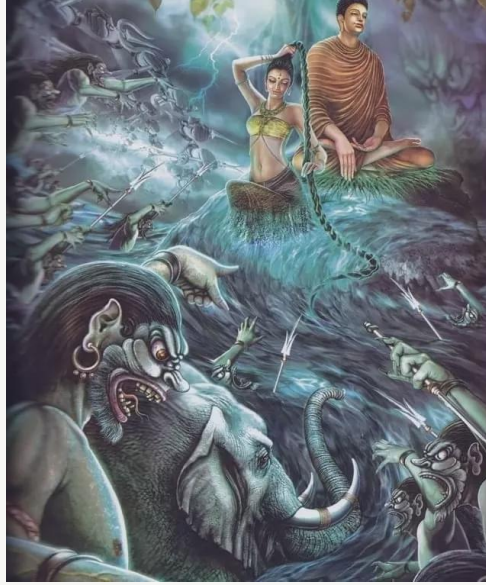
speaking to Mara, "I have been here when the earth was formed. I am a witness of everything that happens on the earth. I can testify that the Buddha has been accumulating merit for such a long time in this world." As a result, Mara failed in his attack on the Buddha.

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

## Indian Pictures



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



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

## Tibetan Pictures



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



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

## Chinese Pictures



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

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

# KSITIGARBHA'S VOWS HAVE NO END

## Chapter Eleven

### The Dharma Protection of the Earth Spirit

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

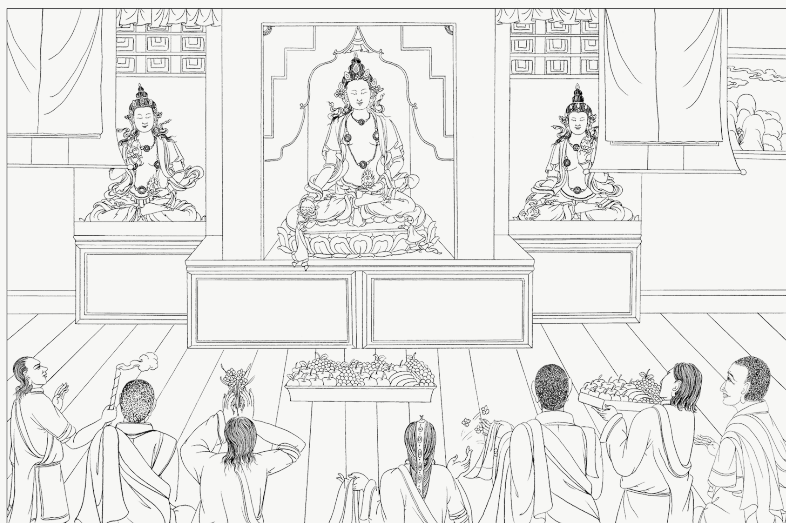
*Instead of many eons of manifold veneration and prayer  
To Manjughosha, Lokeshvara, Samantabhadra,  
Ajita and the rest—supreme bodhisattva heirs of the victorious ones,  
To think, just for an instant, of you alone will fulfil all hopes  
and desires.*

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

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

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

## TEN BENEFITS OF WORSHIPING KSITIGARBHA



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

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

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

## **Why in the South?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**“[...] What are the ten?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## BEING PROTECTED BY SPRITS AND GODS



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

*Even if the stars in the sky fall,*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Chapter Twelve

*The Benefits from Seeing and Hearing*

The benefits of encountering Ksitigarbha's image, hearing his name, or simply contemplating his presence are so immense and far-reaching that they cannot be fully described by anyone, whether they are shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, or even buddhas, even if for hundreds and thousands of kalpas. The Buddha himself recognized the power of Ksitigarbha and exhorted Avalokiteshvara to spread the teachings of this sutra far and wide.

—Khenpo Sodargye

# **Lecture Twenty-Two**

**August 27th, 2020**

## EFFICACY STORY: KSITIGARBHA PROTECTED HIM FROM DANGER

Let us now continue with the teaching on *Ksitigarbha Sutra*. As is our custom, I will first share with you a story. In the Tang Dynasty, there was a high official named Jian Ke who was a devoted Buddhist. One day he asked a group of monks to recommend a buddha or bodhisattva for him to worship at home. They gave him several different suggestions. Some recommended Avalokiteshvara as he is the one who grants fearlessness to sentient beings of the saha world. Some suggested Medicine Buddha who is the most beneficial to beings in the Age of Semblance Dharma. Some said that he should worship Maitreya as he is the regent and successor of Buddha Shakyamuni. Others suggested Ksitigarbha since he is the one to whom the Buddha had entrusted all sentient beings of Jambudvīpa in this degenerate age. Therefore, this great bodhisattva would not abandon a single being in this world.

Jian Ke decided then to worship Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. He made a three-inch statue of Ksitigarbha out of sandalwood and placed it in his hair bun. He began to continually recite the name of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva all the time, whether he was walking, standing, sitting, or lying down. Because he constantly venerated Ksitigarbha, he received supreme blessings from him on many occasions. One time, political turmoil struck the country and Jian Ke was surrounded by a group of rebels. With nowhere to escape, Jian Ke prayed wholeheartedly to the Ksitigarbha statue over his head. Surprisingly, the troop leader was startled and told his soldiers that the one they encircled was indeed Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva and that they almost mistakenly hurt the noble being, so they left.

Another time when he departed for his appointed position, his enemy got wind of his travel and waited on a road where Jian Ke must pass, intending to harm him. However, he only saw a monk passed by. Later, he learned that Jian Ke had already passed by and the monk he saw was none other than Jian Ke himself. Then the enemy realized that Jian Ke was under the protection of noble beings. He was filled with regrets and he let go of his grudges against Jian Ke.

There was another incident when he stayed overnight in an inn on one of his travels, it was raining so heavily that all lights went out.

The statue in his hair started to emit bright light and illuminated his room. Suddenly, he heard a child's voice urging him to leave quickly. Although surprised by the instruction, he followed the light emitted from his hair and left the inn. The next day, he found out that the rain had triggered a flood and the inn had been submerged. Jian Ke then realized that it was Ksitigarbha who had again saved him from danger.

Jian Ke lived to seventy-eight years old and as he was dying, the Ksitigarbha statue emitted light again. He joined his palms and chanted Amitabha Buddha devotedly before passing away peacefully. When people saw that the light shone all the way up to the sky, they were all convinced that the light had sent Jian Ke to the pure land.

People in ancient times used to wear their hair in a bun and this was how many Buddhist statues in the Tibetan regions were depicted. Many Tibetan people wore hair in a bun as well. Instead of wearing a bun, Songtsen Gampo, the first of Tibet's three great religious kings and an emanation of Avalokiteshvara, was born with a protuberance or an ushnisha on the crown of his head which was in the form of Amitabha Buddha.

Jian Ke may have worn the Ksitigarbha statue as his protection amulet. Some Buddhists nowadays may also put amulets in their

Gawu box or wear them around their neck. I once saw a lady string the badges of all her gurus together and wore them around her neck for blessing. I was at first quite surprised but later thought it was good that she had faith in them and could rely on them. Some may think that Buddhists are very superstitious and often cling to objects or idols. The fact is that any religion or even secular organization has its own figures, logos, and cultures that people in that group hold in high regard. Without realizing this point, some may feel others' behaviors are strange. But if they examine their own behaviors, they would realize that they themselves may also have strong beliefs or trust in certain forms and figures.

On the surface, Jian Ke only carried a Ksitigarbha statue as small as an amulet, but it brought immense benefits to his present and future lives. I believe most of you have a pure faith in the Three Jewels, so you should treat statues of buddhas and bodhisattvas, their names and mantras, as well as Buddhist scriptures with due respect and reverence. If you occasionally have wrong views or develop doubts, you must find ways to counteract them. It is helpful to seek advice from the wise ones and discuss your doubts with them. Or you can cut through your doubts by learning the Dharma extensively. Only when your doubts and wrong views are uprooted can your faith become purer and stronger.

## Explore into Reality

Such a faith is an important part of being human. Other animals do not appear to have the ability to generate religious faith in their minds. In this respect, human beings can be considered the most intelligent species in this world. However, if we fail to probe into our relationship with the natural world, with animals, and with other human beings, or if we don't care about the true reality of who we are, and how our body and mind are related, then we are no better than a machine for making money with everything becoming purely materialistic and our life remain meaningless no matter how long it lasts.

As intelligent beings, it is important for us to establish our own values and beliefs. Undeniably, many people have been looking for the meaning of their life since they were very young. Sadly, many of them would end up with something fragile and unreliable. Some work desperately for money, some for marriage, and some for social status. All of these are impermanent and even if one had possessed them all, one would still have to deal with a myriad of mental and emotional issues and problems. Without a good knowledge of the mind, one will never be free from mental suffering and confusion. As we can see, wealth does not necessarily bring peace and happiness, and a rich person still needs to endure the suffering that comes from aging, sickness, and death, as well as the anxiety

from insecurity and uncertainty. Similarly, a loving partner, a good reputation, or the like cannot free us from the suffering and puzzles of life.

Therefore, I do believe among all human pursuits, the most important thing is to explore our mind. Once we have realized that the nature of our mind is none other than the non-duality of luminosity and emptiness, and that the nature of mental afflictions is none other than our primordial wisdom, we will know that everything in this phenomenal world, gains and losses, survival and death, prosperity and decline, are illusory and dream-like, without any solid existence and as transient as a fleeting cloud. On the ultimate level, everything is empty, ungraspable, and free from elaborations and conceptual thoughts. Anyone who has achieved such a realization is the wealthiest person, the healthiest and happiest person, and the most successful among all beings.

As Buddhists, we should focus on figuring out the ultimate goal of learning the Dharma. It is far from adequate to just simply skim the surface of the teaching or just perform Buddhist rituals and formalities without delving into their profound meaning. If we only do that, we will never realize the true nature of the mind. Of course, it is also not appropriate to just blindly pursue the most profound instructions because without laying a concrete foundation in common and basic teachings, such as faith in buddhas

and bodhisattvas, devotion to gurus, and compassion for all living beings of samsara, it would be like constructing a building on ice, which would collapse sooner or later due to the lack of a solid foundation that can withstand challenge.

Today we will start with the 12th chapter, *The Benefits from Seeing and Hearing*. As I have said before, I personally like this chapter a lot because it tells us what great benefit one can attain in the present and future lives just by hearing Ksitigarbha's name or seeing his image. After learning this chapter, we should be able to develop an even stronger devotion to Ksitigarbha's image and name, and thus be more diligent in the Ksitigarbha practice. The content of this chapter is relatively easy. Even a person like me with poor Chinese can explain it literally so you should not have any difficulty understanding it. But we should not undervalue it simply because its literal meaning is straightforward. Instead, we must extract the deeper meaning it holds and let it inspire us.

# THE BUDDHA'S PRAISE TOWARD KSITIGARBHA

## Chapter Twelve

### The Benefits from Seeing and Hearing

At that time, the World-Honored One emitted hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of rays of great urna light from the crown of his head. There were rays of white urna light, great white urna light, auspicious urna light, great auspicious urna light, jade urna light, great jade urna light, purple urna light, great purple urna light, blue urna light, great blue urna light, azure urna light, great azure urna light, red urna light, great red urna light, green urna light, great green urna light, golden urna light, great golden urna light, urna light [manifesting] propitious clouds, urna light [manifesting] great propitious clouds, urna light [manifesting] the thousand-spoked wheel, urna light [manifesting] the great thousand-spoked wheel, urna light [manifesting] the jewel wheel, urna light [manifesting] the

great jewel wheel, urna light [manifesting] the sun disc, urna light [manifesting] the great sun disc, urna light [manifesting] the moon disc, urna light [manifesting] the great moon disc, urna light [manifesting] palaces, urna light [manifesting] great palaces, urna light [manifesting] ocean-like clouds, and urna light [manifesting] great ocean-like clouds.



After emitting rays of urna light such as these from the crown of his head, he issued forth his sublime, wonderful voice, telling the great assembly—devas, nagas, and others of the eight classes of beings, humans, nonhumans, and others, “Hear me now in the Trayastrimsa Heaven as I praise and extol Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva for how he benefits those in the human and heaven

realms and so forth—on inconceivable matters, on the matters of causes for transcending to holiness, on the matters of attainment of the Tenth Ground, and on the matters of ultimately being irreversibly [on course] to unexcelled perfect complete awakening.”

In order to benefit beings of different realms such as hell beings, animals, asuras, humans, and celestial beings, the Buddha would emit light from different parts of his body, such as the soles of his feet, his knees, his private part, and so forth. Generally speaking, when the Buddha emitted light from his ushnisha, the crown of his head, the light could reach all sentient beings of the trichiliocosm and grant them liberation from samsara.

Here, various types of wondrous and subtle light are emitted from the Buddha’s ushnisha, and each type has general and greater intensities. After radiating all these rays of light, the Buddha proclaimed in a subtle and wondrous voice to all those assembled, including the eight classes of gods and demons, humans, and non-humans, saying that he was about to praise Ksitigarbha for his inconceivable qualities and ask them to listen carefully.

According to Nagarjuna’s *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, when the Buddha was about to turn the Dharma Wheel, he would first emit light from his body to purify the minds of listeners so

that they would generate pure faith in the Buddha. After that, the Buddha would emit wisdom light to enlighten them. Also, since most sentient beings are attached to five desires and particularly the desire for colors and shapes, when they see the light emitted by the Buddha, they will be immediately attracted and abandon their original desire for worldly things, becoming capable vessels to receive the Buddha's teaching.

Some may think that the light emitted from the Buddha's body is no different from worldly light. But in fact it grants blessing to sentient beings, dispels the darkness of their ignorance, and enables them to attain wisdom. So, it is completely different from any worldly light. Other beings such as celestial beings, shravakas, and pratyekabuddhas may emit light as well, which according to Nagarjuna, only makes others delighted but cannot guide them to be enlightened by the Dharma teaching.

Auspicious signs such as colorful light or rainbow will appear when great masters or accomplished practitioners give Dharma teachings, display miracles, or pass into nirvana. We cannot deny them by simply saying that everything is non-existent. Light of this kind can indeed arouse faith in people's minds toward the path of the Dharma. As it is said in the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish*, ordinary people are fascinated by divine powers and miracles. They love to see if some sort of light appears. When a monastic's

shaved head looks shiny and bright, some may wonder fervently, "Is your head emitting light?" It is just a reflection of light, having nothing to do with any supernatural powers. When you give your face a good wash, or maintain your skin very well, you may also look radiant. But we cannot deny that there are auspicious signs appearing when buddhas, bodhisattvas, and great masters liberate sentient beings. If we read biographies of great masters, we will notice that unusual light often appeared along with their extraordinary enlightenment activities.

The Buddha was about to praise Ksitigarbha for how he benefited sentient beings in the human and heavenly realms through various methods. His inconceivable matters include his divine powers, his miraculous displays, and his numerous emanations, through which he brings inconceivable benefits to living beings' present and future lives. "The matters of causes for transcending to holiness" means that Ksitigarbha guides beings to become enlightened, and even to reach the state that surpasses the realization of shravakas and pratyekabuddhas. Although transcending shravakas and pratyekabuddhas is not directly seen in the text, Ksitigarbha is such a great bodhisattva that he must possess the motivation and ability to guide beings onto the Mahayana path, which far surpasses the selfish intentions in the common vehicle. So when I was translating this phrase, I interpreted it as "the

matters of causes for transcending holy beings”, in which “holy beings” refers to shravakas and pratyekabuddhas.

And next, since Ksitigarbha has long reached the tenth bhumi, he is able to guide beings to gradually reach the levels of bodhisattva from the first bhumi to the tenth bhumi. This is what “the matters of attainment of the Tenth Ground” refers to. The last one, Ksitigarbha protects Mahayana practitioners from regressing on the spiritual path and guides them to achieve the unexcelled perfect awakening. This chapter mainly expands on these incredible matters.

**As these words were spoken, in the assembly there was a Bodhisattva-Mahasattva named Avalokitesvara who rose from his seat, knelt on his knees, joined his palms, and said to the Buddha, “World-Honored One, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva-Mahasattva is replete with great kindness and compassion, taking pity on wrongdoing suffering beings. He transforms into thousands of myriads of millions of emanations in thousands of myriads of millions of worlds—all his virtues as well as the power of his inconceivable, awesome spiritual penetration! I have heard the World-Honored One and measureless Buddhas of the ten directions unanimously praise Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, saying that even if all Buddhas in the past, present and future were to speak of his virtues, these virtues still could not be described fully, and just now, the World-Honored One has told everyone in the great**

assembly that he wishes to extol on how Ksitigarbha benefits [beings] and so forth. O World-Honored One, for the sake of all living beings in the present and future, please expound on the inconceivable matters of Ksitigarbha and cause devas, nagas, and others of the eight classes of beings to gaze reverently, make obeisance to him, and gain merits.”



After the Buddha’s words, Avalokiteshvara rose from his seat and respectfully implored the Buddha to expound on Ksitigarbha’s inconceivable qualities so that the eight classes of gods and demons could pay homage to him and receive his blessing. As Avalokiteshvara described, in order to guide and transform living beings,

Ksitigarbha has transformed into countless emanations in countless worlds, just like a thousand rivers have a thousand reflections of the moon. Ksitigarbha's qualities and the power of his awesome spiritual penetration are truly inconceivable. Even all buddhas of the three times could not adequately describe all his virtues. Therefore, Avalokiteshvara and the whole assembly were eager to hear the Buddha's further explanations on this matter.

In many sutras such as the *Mahasamnipata Sutra*, the phrase "the power of awesome spiritual penetration" is translated as "the power of blessing", which is more frequently used in modern language. As we can see, the Buddha had been planning to praise Ksitigarbha, and then Avalokiteshvara stood up and eagerly implored the Buddha to do so. It was not that the Buddha himself did not want to speak about Ksitigarbha's virtue and that Avalokiteshvara had to make the request ardently. Actually, when the Buddha himself was about to turn the Dharma Wheel, it was necessary for his followers to create the favorable condition to make it happen, for instance, by making a sincere request, so that the Buddha would give the teaching in an auspicious manner. So here Avalokiteshvara's request worked as the dependent condition for the Buddha to praise Ksitigarbha. Another thing we should notice is that among great bodhisattvas, there is no competition or jealousy at all. Unlike ordinary people who may constantly compare themselves with

their fellow beings, noble beings would only compliment and support each other for their enlightenment activities.

## AVALOKITESHVARA'S GREAT AFFINITY WITH THIS WORLD

The Buddha told Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, “You have great cause and condition with the saha world. If devas, nagas, men, women, spirits, ghosts, or any wrongdoing suffering beings in the six realms of existence hear your name, see your image, feel great love and admiration for you, or sing your praises, these beings definitely will not fall back or turn away from the Unsurpassed Way. They will ever be reborn as humans or devas and experience excellent, wonderful happiness. When the effects of their causes come to maturity, they will meet Buddhas and be given prediction. Now, replete with great kindness and compassion, you take pity on living beings, on devas, nagas, and others of the eight classes of beings, and listen as I expound on Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s inconceivable deeds of benefiting [beings]. You should listen attentively. I will speak on them now.”

**Avalokitesvara replied, “Yes, World-Honored One, I joyfully wish to listen.”**

The Buddha first talked about Avalokiteshvara’s great affinity with sentient beings in the saha World. Anyone who hears his name, sees his image, develops faith in him, and praises him will not regress from the path to supreme enlightenment and will forever be born in the human or heaven realms. They will further encounter buddhas and be given predictions of their attainment of buddhahood. Then the Buddha started to expound on the inconceivable deeds of Ksitigarbha and asked the assembly to listen attentively.

As I often think, having been born in the age of five degenerations, we are indeed unfortunate; but meanwhile, we are also so fortunate to be guided by Buddha Shakyamuni, our exceptional fundamental teacher, and to be accompanied by so many amazing bodhisattvas such as Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, and Ksitigarbha, all of whom have close affinity with us and have vowed to take care of us in this turbulent world. As long as we have faith in the Dharma and keep steady on the spiritual path, we do have a high probability of attaining liberation. We are like naughty students meeting a bunch of remarkable teachers who are all extremely kind to us, with their help and guidance, we may gradually become great people.

Having close affinity with noble beings is really crucial. Had we been born in a world of darkness where even the names of buddhas or bodhisattvas were never heard of, then we would not be able to build affinity with them, not to mention to supplicate them for blessings. Thinking deeper on this point, we would realize that we must not squander this human life. Rather, we should rely on these extraordinary blessings to attain liberation or to take rebirth in pure land. It would be a great pity if we waste our precious life for nothing. The *Letter to a Friend* says,

*More stupid yet than one who throws some slops  
Into a golden vessel all bejeweled  
Is he who's gained a precious human birth  
And wastes it in an evil, sinful life.*

Having obtained a precious human life that is hard to obtain, immersed in the loving-kindness and compassion of buddhas and bodhisattvas, and being guided by qualified teachers who are no different from buddhas and bodhisattvas, if we don't work harder in our Dharma practice and gain the certainty of liberation, it would be no exaggeration to say that we are foolish and pitiful.

From this paragraph, we see how highly the Buddha praised Avalokiteshvara. His name and his mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum" are the authentic wish-fulfilling jewel in this world that we

should never abandon or neglect. Elderly Tibetans make reciting the Mani mantra their compulsory practice and would recite it tens of millions of times or even hundreds of millions of times during their whole life. Although modern young Tibetans may attach less importance to it due to the education they receive, this was especially important for people in previous generations. Reciting the Mani mantra our whole life is not a superstitious or blind practice, instead, it has great meaning because it can engender significant benefits.

In the *Karandavyuha Sutra*, the qualities of Avalokiteshvara and the merit of the Mani mantra are extolled. I have always wanted to teach this sutra and hope we can learn it together sometime in the future. Avalokiteshvara is replete with numerous noble qualities. Since buddhas and bodhisattvas are able to manifest in different forms, it does not matter if he appears in the form according to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition or in the Han Buddhist tradition, as long as we have faith in him, Avalokiteshvara will infallibly grant us compassion and accomplishment. As said in the *Lotus Sutra's Universal Gate Chapter*,

*Whether hearing his name, seeing his image,  
Or recollecting him, as long as without any wandering,  
He will pacify all sufferings of samsaric existence.*

“Without any wandering” means that when hearing Avalokiteshvara’s name, one will naturally recite his name, when seeing his image, one will naturally pay homage to him, and when recollecting him, one will naturally think of his noble qualities. By doing so, one creates a virtuous karma that is related to Avalokiteshvara in terms of speech, body, and mind that will not fail to bear fruit. As a result, one will be blessed by Avalokiteshvara and he will eliminate all kinds of suffering that one would experience in birth and death in the three realms, as well as one’s afflictions, the cause of suffering.

It is good to see that many Han Chinese have great devotion to Avalokiteshvara and often supplicate him sincerely by saying, “Avalokiteshvara, with your great loving-kindness and compassion, save me from suffering and difficulties!” To constantly and devotedly pray to Avalokiteshvara is important. In the *Karandavyuha Sutra*, it says that anyone who recollects the name of Avalokiteshvara will be freed from the sufferings of samsara and swiftly reborn in the Sukhavati to see Amitabha Buddha in person and to receive wondrous teaching directly from him. Whoever builds connections with Avalokiteshvara will be greatly benefited.

# THE BENEFITS OF SEEING AND HEARING KSITIGARBHA

## Avoid Taking Lower Rebirth

The Buddha told Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, “In various worlds in the present and future, there are devas who have exhausted their heavenly merit and manifest the five signs of decay; some of them are about to fall into the lower realms. When such devas, whether male or female, manifest these signs, if they see Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s image or hear Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s name, and they reverently gaze at and make obeisance to him once, these devas will increase their heavenly merit, experience great happiness, and will not fall into [and experience] ripened effects in the three lower realms. How much more will that be the case for those who see and hear the Bodhisattva and honor him with gifts and offerings of incense, flowers, clothing, food, drink, jewels, and necklaces! The virtues, merits, and benefits that they will obtain will be measureless and boundless.



This paragraph mainly talks about how devas can be saved by Ksitigarbha from their death. When devas have nearly exhausted their heavenly merits, they will exhibit the five signs that foreshadow their death and some of them would fall into the lower realms. At this time, if they see Ksitigarbha's images or hear Ksitigarbha's name, and respectfully gaze upon and pay homage even just once, their heavenly merit will be increased immediately so that they can continue to enjoy great happiness in their heaven, and they will never fall into the three lower realms. The blessings will be even greater for those who make offerings of incense, flowers, clothing, food, drink, jewels, or decorative necklaces to Ksitigarbha. The

resulting merits and benefits are inconceivably immeasurable and boundless.

Generally, buddhas and bodhisattvas also take the celestial realm as their abode. For instance, in the Trayastrimsa Heaven, there are Dharma assemblies taking place regularly in the palace of Good Dharma, a gathering place of celestial beings in this heaven to receive Dharma teachings. However, unlike in the human world where there are numerous buddhas and bodhisattvas guiding and transforming sentient beings, not many buddhas and bodhisattvas would teach the Dharma in heavens because the celestial beings are very much distracted by all kinds of enjoyment and the idea of renunciation or awakening rarely occurs to them.

The five signs that foreshadow the death of a deva are described in many scriptures such as *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Although the descriptions of the five signs in different sources may be a bit different, the narratives are mostly the same. The first sign is the wilting of his previously never withered flower garlands. The second is that his previously pristine and unblemished garments begin to get old and filthy. The third is his armpits, which have never perspired at all before, begin to sweat. Fourth, his previously unblinking eyes would start to wink. Or according to other Abhidharma treatises, his body would start to have a bad odor. The last

concerns his throne, upon which he has never before felt weary of sitting, would no longer please him and he doesn't feel like sitting there anymore.

Speaking of a deva's growing weariness of his throne as he nears death, there are some Dharma friends who easily grow weary of a place after staying there for a period of time. Somehow, they cannot stay in one place for any length of time, either keep changing the departments where they volunteer or keep switching from one class to another in their study. If these things happen to a deva, it suggests that the deva could be about to die, and to an ordinary person, I would consider it a sign that their minds may be too distracted and that they may not have a steady personality. Stable and trustworthy people will not behave like this. As is often said by Tibetans, wherever they stay, they would be as stable as a stake pushed into the ground. People who lack this quality are like fallen leaves blown around by the wind. In this situation, they can hardly be expected to achieve any essential progress.

When the five signs occur to a deva, other devas would know that this deva is dying and they would begin to avoid him. They would just toss flowers to him and greet him from a distance, saying, "When you die and pass on from here, may you be reborn among the humans. May you perform virtue and be reborn among

the devas again.” They would then abandon him. Utterly alone, the dying deva is consumed by sorrow. The same would happen with humans. When people are prosperous and successful, they would always be surrounded by everyone. When they lose their reputation, wealth, and status, or become old-aged, even their own children may keep their distance from them, let alone the others. This is the reality for both humans and celestial beings.

What is worse, with his divine eye, a dying deva knows where he is going to be reborn. If it is to a realm of suffering, he would experience even more intense agony. For devas of the form and formless realms, although they will not experience obvious sufferings of death, when the power of their meditative concentration is exhausted, they will wake up from their meditation and see where they will take rebirth. Knowing that the meditative concentration they practice would no longer help them escape death, they will instantly generate wrong views toward meditation and the noble Dharma, which will cause them to be dragged to the lower realms of hell, hungry ghosts, and animals. Many animals such as lions and tigers used to be celestial beings. Such is inconceivable karmic experience of sentient beings in the six realms of cyclic existence.

## Dispel Disease, Increase Longevity, and Attain Higher Rebirths

“Furthermore, Avalokitesvara, in various worlds in the present and future, when living beings in the six realms of existence are on the verge of death, if they are able to hear Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s name, even if the sound of his name passes through their ears just once, such beings will not undergo the sufferings of the three lower realms. How much more will that be the case when a person is on the verge of death, and parents and other relatives use the dying one’s house, wealth, jewels, and clothing to commission the sculpting or painting of Ksitigarbha’s image; if the sick one has not yet passed away, they can try to help him see, hear, and understand that for his benefit, relatives have used his house, jewels, and so forth for the sculpting or painting of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s image. If the ripened effects of this person’s karma are such that he would have to undergo severe illness, through these virtues he will soon recover and his lifespan will be prolonged. If the ripened effects of this person’s karma are such that his life would end and his offense obstacles and karmic obstacles should send him to the lower realms, then through these virtues, he will be reborn among humans or devas and experience excellent, wonderful happiness after he departs this life, and all his offense obstacles will dissolve.



This *Ksitigarbha Sutra* is very pragmatic and helpful to ordinary people. If we were to talk about the philosophy of the Prasangika in the Madhyamika school, the concept of attainment being explained in the *Treasury of Abhidharma*, or the meditative absorptions of the formless realm, many people may not be able to understand. But the topics addressed in this sutra are the common concerns of everyone, making it very necessary for everyone to receive this teaching. In this part, we will learn about how the sick and the deceased can be benefited from the Ksitigarbha practice.

In the various worlds of the present and future, if sentient beings hear Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva's name when they are on the verge of death, even if they have no faith, they will not enter the three

lower realms and experience the sufferings there. The benefits will be even greater if their parents and relatives use their possessions, such as houses, cars, and money to make Ksitigarbha images. If possible, it is best to let the dying people know that their belongings are used to make Ksitigarbha images on their behalf. As a result, if these dying people's karmic retributions are such that they were only to be extremely ill, then through the virtues created on their behalf, they will be cured quickly and have their lifespans extended. If their karmic retributions are such that their life would end, then by these virtues, they will be reborn in higher realms and enjoy all kinds of wonderful happiness. All their karmic obstacles that would cause them to fall into the lower realms will be extinguished.

The power of such virtues which relate to noble beings like Ksitigarbha is truly inconceivable. When we are challenged by obstacles, if we recite sutras and prayers, or offer some money to the sangha to do these for us, the situation can be materially improved. It is the same for people who fall ill. If their lifespan were not destined to end and their families sell their properties such as houses and cars and offer the money to the sangha to chant prayers or to make Ksitigarbha statues on their behalf, they would quickly recover. However, it is also possible that some non-believers may blame their families after they get better and notice that their possessions

are gone. They may grumble, “I was not going to die, why did you sell all my stuff?” Because these causes would be invisible to ordinary people, their complaints are also to be expected.

Depending on whether one’s lifespan is exhausted or not, there could be two scenarios. In either case, the ill person would greatly benefit from the virtue of sculpting or painting Ksitigarbha’s image. For the dying, all their offense obstacles will dissolve and they will not experience the suffering of the lower realms. This is crucial as everyone is afraid of falling into the evil realms. When we encounter dying beings or when we ourselves are facing death, we should recite the name of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva and Amitabha Buddha. We can also recite “Namo Buddha Ratnasikhin”, or the verse for taking refuge,

*Namo Buddhaya,*

*Namo Dharmaya,*

*Namo Sanghaya.*

All these recitations are extremely beneficial to the dying and will enable them to gain a higher rebirth instead of falling into the lower realms, as stated in *The Sutra of Great Liberation*.

Recently, I have been thinking about teaching *The Sutra of Great Liberation* as my faith in this sutra has grown even stronger. Yesterday,

I made a comparison between its Chinese and Tibetan versions. Although the translators of both versions remain unknown, they translated the sutra very well. The Chinese version that is collected in the Taisho Tripitaka was compiled and emendated based on several Dunhuang manuscripts of this sutra. The Tibetan version is said to have been translated from Chinese, but it remains unclear who was the translator and when it was translated. It can be certain that the Chinese version came out earlier than the Tibetan version, as suggested by the Tibetan version from Derge Parkhang and other editions.

Inside the big prayer wheel that I use every day when we chant prayers before and after class are printed copies of *The Sutra of Great Liberation*. This is a very important sutra which states the names of numerous buddhas of the past, present, and future, as well as the names of numerous bodhisattvas. If a person could hear *The Sutra of Great Liberation* even just once at death, he or she will never fall into a lower realm and will most definitely be liberated. Therefore, when a person dies, it would be best to recite the sutra for him once every day within the forty-nine days after his death. The recitation of the Chinese version can be done under three hours while the Tibetan version could take a bit longer. When the condition is more favorable, I would like to give the teaching on *The Sutra of Great Liberation*.

In the Tibetan regions, almost every household reads this sutra, and many practitioners would chant it as their daily practice. In terms of sutra chanting, some practitioners in the past were truly remarkable. Master Meng Can, for example, a great master of Han Buddhism, kept the habit of reading the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* once every day. His attendant said that even when the Master was 100 years old, he still got up around 3 or 4 a.m. every day to chant the sutra. Compared to practitioners in the past, we may feel ashamed of ourselves in this regard. Not to speak of *The Sutra of Great Liberation*, we may even find it challenging to just chant the shorter *Ksitigarbha Sutra* once every day. It is rare to even find those who keep chanting the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* just once every week. I am aware of some Dharma friends who read one chapter of the sutra every day and complete the recitation of the entire sutra once every two weeks. Compared to those who do not even read the sutra, they deserve a thumbs up.

Having obtained our precious human life and received the precious Dharma teaching, we dare not claim the achievement of the rainbow body within this life, however, we should at least gain the certainty of not falling into the lower realms. This is crucial. To achieve this goal, we need to purify our transgressions and chant the names of buddhas and bodhisattvas as much as we can. The faults of negative deeds and the merit of hearing the names of buddhas

and bodhisattvas were clearly stated by the Buddha. His words are undecieving. We should have faith in the Buddha's teaching and act in accordance with the Dharma. This is important to bear in mind.

## Know the Destination of the Deceased

**“Furthermore, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, in the future, if there are men or women who have lost their fathers, mothers, brothers, or sisters during infancy or at the age of three, five, or under ten, and as adults such people think of those deceased parents and relatives and long to know into what realms they have fallen, or in what worlds, or in what heavens they have been reborn, and if these people are able to sculpt or paint Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva's image, hear his name, reverently gaze at and make obeisance to him for one to seven days without retreating from their initial resolve—continuously they hear his name, see his image, reverently gaze, pay obeisance, and make offerings to him: If these people's relatives had fallen into the lower realms due to their karma and would remain there for many kalpas, through the virtues of their sons', daughters', brothers', or sisters' sculpting or painting Ksitigarbha's image, reverently gazing at, and making obeisance to him, they will quickly gain release, be reborn among humans or devas, and experience excellent, wonderful happiness. If the relatives had already been**

reborn as humans or devas and were already experiencing excellent, wonderful happiness by the strength of their own merit, then through these virtues they will increase their causes for holiness and experience measureless happiness.



“If furthermore these people are able to gaze reverently at and make obeisance to Ksitigarbha’s image wholeheartedly for three seven-day periods and recite the Bodhisattva’s name a full ten thousand times, then the Bodhisattva will manifest his infinite forms and describe to them the realms into which their relatives have been reborn, or in their dreams the Bodhisattva will manifest his great spiritual power and personally lead them to those worlds to see their relatives.



**“If these people can furthermore recite the Bodhisattva’s name one thousand times a day every day for one thousand days, then the Bodhisattva will send the ghosts and spirits in the vicinity of these people to guard and protect them for their entire lives. Their food and clothing will be abundant in the present life, and they will not have suffering from sickness and other causes. Untoward dire events will not enter the doors [of their homes], much less affect them personally. The Bodhisattva will ultimately place his hand on the crowns of their heads and give them prediction.**

In the present and future, there may be men or women who lost their parents or siblings when they were in their infancy or when they were at the age of three, five, or under ten. As they grow older, they miss their deceased loved ones and wonder in which realms they were reborn. Had they taken rebirth in the celestial realm, which heaven is it exactly, in the desire realm, the form realm, or the formless realm? These people may forge Ksitigarbha statue, paint his thangka, hear his name, and respectfully gaze at and pay homage to him for one to seven days. If they can do so without retreating from their initial resolve, they will receive a response from Ksitigarbha. If their deceased loved ones had fallen into suffering realms and would remain there for many kalpas, they would soon be released and take rebirth in the human or heaven realm. If the deceased ones had already been reborn as humans or devas, they would further increase their causes for attaining liberation from samsara and experience boundless bliss.

People usually cannot recall anything that happened to them before the age of three. After that, they would remember their family members. For those who have lost their parents after they grow up, they may also follow this instruction to figure out where their parents have taken rebirth and to accumulate merit for them. Reading the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, building Ksitigarbha statues, or

making offerings to Ksitigarbha image on behalf of the deceased can bring them immense benefits.

If these people can further devotedly pay homage to Ksitigarbha's images and chant his name ten thousand times within twenty-one days, then Ksitigarbha will manifest his immeasurable forms to tell them where their deceased loved ones have been reborn, or in their dreams lead them to see their loved ones in various worlds. If they can further devotedly chant the name of Ksitigarbha one thousand times per day for one thousand days, then Ksitigarbha will send the local deities to protect them for the rest of their lives. For their present lives, they will have an abundance of clothing and food. They will not suffer from serious illnesses, nor will accidents occur near their homes, let alone happen to them. Ksitigarbha will eventually touch these people's heads and give the prediction of their enlightenment.

Reciting "Namo Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva" one thousand times per day won't take too much time. But remember that once you make such a vow of doing it for one thousand consecutive days, which is about three years, you should keep your word and not give up halfway. Anyone who can complete this practice will be protected by the local ghosts and spirits for their whole lives. This protection will be constant and will always be there. Unlike when we accompanied His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche on his

trips, we were not always around. Sometimes we saw no one was coming to visit, we would just leave His Holiness for a while to relax a bit. Then suddenly, a surge of visitors unexpectedly showed up. Later His Holiness would appear displeased and say, “Where have you been? I couldn’t take care of so many people.” But the local deities sent to protect us if we chant “Namo Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva” would never behave like this.

## Quickly Fulfill All Wishes



**“Furthermore, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, in the future if there are good men and good women who wish to generate the mind of vast, great kindness to rescue and guide all living beings, who wish to cultivate the unsurpassed bodhi, and who wish to**

leave the threefold world, and if these people see Ksitigarbha's image, hear his name, and wholeheartedly take refuge in him, or if they also make offerings of incense, flowers, clothing, jewels, food, and drink, reverently gaze at and make obeisance to him, these good men and good women will soon fulfill their vows and will never be hindered by obstacles.

In the future, there may be virtuous men or women who resolve to arouse the supreme bodhicitta to rescue and guide all sentient beings and to achieve the unexcelled perfect enlightenment of bodhi. If they devotedly take refuge in Ksitigarbha, pay homage, and make offerings to him with various substances, they will quickly fulfill their aspirations and never be obstructed by any obstacles. As we have repeatedly mentioned, Ksitigarbha is a precious wish-fulfilling jewel. The *Sutra of the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha* says,

*If anyone who wishes to cultivate virtues,  
Right mindfulness, precepts, and wisdom of hearing,  
Takes refuge in and makes obeisance to Ksitigarbha,  
All their pursuits will be fulfilled.*

In this sutra, many more wishes are listed that can be fulfilled by taking refuge in and venerating Ksitigarbha. By sincerely supplicating Ksitigarbha, all the secular and transcendental qualities

that we wish to cultivate, such as vigilance and mindfulness, pure precepts, and the wisdom gained from hearing the Dharma, will be perfected. Most people wish for peace and health. Authentic Mahayana practitioners however, as mentioned in the text, aspire to generate the authentic bodhicitta and to be able to help and protect sentient beings. To actualize this vast compassionate intention, they should pray to Ksitigarbha with sincere devotion.

Having obtained this precious human existence, it is of great significance for us to generate bodhicitta and to proceed on the Mahayana path. Earlier on June 4th this year (Tibetan calendar), I conferred the bodhisattva vow to all of you by following the sadhana composed by His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche, *The Concise Sadhana of the Bodhisattva Vow*. I wonder whether you have engendered the authentic bodhicitta in your mind or not. If you were to be asked when you generated your initial bodhicitta, I hope you can remember that exact time. Of course, some people would say, "I aspire to engender bodhicitta every day." This is too general. At least, you should be able to give an answer such as, "June 4th, 2020, on the Tibetan calendar, is the very day that I officially generated the aspirational bodhicitta." Every Dharma practitioner should mark such an important time. Otherwise, if we just simply say that we are arousing bodhicitta, it is hard to say

whether it can truly arise in our minds. In the *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, it says,

*A Bodhisattva's vast intentions,  
The roe of a fish and flowers of a mango tree,  
The amount of the three is large at the beginning  
But becomes little when bearing fruit.*

This is very true. The number of eggs contained in the ovaries of a female fish is massive, but those which can develop and hatch into larva or baby fish are very few. A mango tree can sprout a lot of flowers, but those that can bear fruit are not many. Similarly, there are many practitioners who aspire to generate bodhicitta at the beginning, but regress from the path when challenged by obstacles. This is why Patrul Rinpoche says in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, "The most important thing about bodhicitta is not arousing it, but rather that it has actually arisen." Had bodhicitta truly arisen in our minds, we would never feel resentment or even try to fight back against those who hurt us.

Since it is very hard for us to encounter Mahayana teachings, it is worth remembering every special time that marks a milestone on our Dharma path, such as the day when we arouse the mind of renunciation, and the day when we first generate bodhicitta. If you have never formally aroused any of it before, I suggest

that you carefully choose an auspicious time to give rise to it. Even Buddha Shakyamuni talked about a special time in a special world when and where he first generated bodhicitta. My peer Dharma friends and I had engendered bodhicitta in front of His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. His Holiness once composed a stanza for arousing bodhicitta back in 1986, saying that he gave rise to bodhicitta on the fourth day of the sixth Tibetan month, and encouraged his disciples to also arouse bodhicitta on that day. We did aspire to engender bodhicitta at that time, but personally I felt I was just mouthing the sadhana. Later after that, bodhicitta truly arose in my mind and transformed my life in every aspect. For instance, things that used to be intolerable to me such as hostility or harm from others magically became acceptable.

Therefore, I would encourage you to think hard about the importance of bodhicitta. After we have received this precious human life and encountered Mahayana teachings, it is far from enough to just simply talk about bodhicitta. Intellectual understanding is not strong enough to transform our mind. We need to strive to make it truly arise in our mind. As I said earlier, for anyone who has not formally generated bodhicitta, choose a special day to do so such as the Lhabab Duchen (Festival of the Descent from Heaven), the Chokhor Duchen (Festival of Turning the Wheel of Dharma), the anniversary of His Holiness's parinirvana, or just your own

birthday. Arousing bodhicitta on your birthday is actually a good choice, making your birthday no longer simply a beginning for your physical body, but also for your awakening mind.

Generating bodhicitta is a critical step in the progress of our practice, without it, it will be the greatest pity because we would have squandered this precious human body for nothing when we die. In that case, we would be no different from those who have never embarked on the Mahayana path. We must make full use of this human body on the bodhisattva path so that the seed for full enlightenment will be rooted in our alaya consciousness and never become fruitless. It is of great significance.

# Lecture Twenty-Three

August 28th, 2020

Before this session, I would like to tell you about our schedule next week. I will be teaching the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* next Monday and Tuesday. The rest of this sutra will likely take about two more lectures to finish but I am not quite sure yet, we will see.

After this course, I have not decided what I am going to teach next, possibly *The Sutra of Great Liberation*. However, there could be some difficulties. The Chinese translation of this sutra can be found in the Taisho Tripitaka, and it is incomplete and a few pages are missing. Two different Buddhist scholars have complemented the sutra and made them available online. As I compared the Chinese and the Tibetan translations of the whole sutra, they are compatible for the most parts while minor differences do exist mainly regarding the names of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Therefore, it should not be a problem to use the existent Chinese text. The major challenge is that we do not have enough hard copies of this sutra. Given the current situations, it may not be possible to get more printed out for you. Copying the whole sutra by hand would be a very laborious task, so let us see how we will manage this. Nevertheless, I hope to teach this sutra this year because it has great merit and learning it would further ensure our liberation.

## A TEACHING FROM THE VINAYA

Today, I read a teaching from the Ksudrakavastu, Minor Division in the Vinaya. It gives three important pieces of advice and is quite essential for us practitioners. I want to share them with you:

*Gossiping on trivial matters,  
Wearing scruffy clothes,  
Showing up uninvited,  
These are the three things despised by people.*

First, we need to mind our speech. As Ju Mipham Rinpoche said in *The Just King*,

*Sometimes goals are not accomplished unless you state them,  
But sometimes goals are accomplished without saying anything.  
If you do not know when to speak and when to remain silent,  
Speech becomes frivolous, and many faults ensue.*

We should always be watchful of our words. Speaking when it is necessary at the appropriate time and keeping silent when it

is needed. Important things must be spoken, otherwise no one will know. Except that, we should avoid excessive talk, especially useless chatters. Some people love chatting, and in particular rumors and gossip. They tend to criticize others out of jealousy, broadcast others' privacy, or spread scaremongering news. This will incur enmity and bring trouble and afflictions to themselves. Therefore, we need to be mindful of our speech, as Ju Mipham Rinpoche said in the same treatise,

*Few people have attained the status of enemy or friend  
On the basis of actions,  
But many have attained it on the basis of their words.  
So think about the words you speak.*

Second, dress decently. Every monastic or lay practitioner should wear clean and proper clothing. It does not have to be fashionable and posh. Although on special occasions, such as large festivals or tsok practice, you may want to dress up to conform to the tradition of great masters. The point is that we should dress properly in what suits us, but not clothes that are either scruffy or inappropriate. For instance, now it is already summer to early autumn, but a few here are still dressed in heavy winter coats and trousers. Unless they are ill and need to keep warm, it is not clear why they dress like that.

In any situation, it is never proper to dress untidily. Since most of us are not materially deficient, there is no reason to dress in tattered clothing. Some beginner Buddhists think that they should renounce everything and so they deliberately wear ragged clothes. Actually, if your mind does not renounce attachment, dressing in rags and tattered clothing will not make you a real renunciant. Back in the 80s, there was a lama called Gyare living at the upper area of the Jewel Sword District (a living area for males at Larung Gar). He has since passed away. Lama Gyare used to wear rags and tatters all the time. His Holiness once scolded him in class saying, "It's no use to wear ragged clothes if you don't let go of the attachment in your mind!"

Third, do not be an unwanted guest. Some people like to drop in uninvitedly. They would visit other practitioners' cabins at mealtime, trying to scrounge a free meal but they would never welcome anyone who visit them. This is not good. Every spiritual practitioner needs his or her own personal space. We should also respect others' time. If there is no need, we should never disturb others. Visiting, calling, or sending messages could unsettle a meditator. Some of these people would complain about others not sparing time for them and that they are not kind to them. In fact, they are quite inconsiderate of others' busy schedules.

These are the three inappropriate behaviors mentioned in the Vinaya text. If we have such faults, people will look down at us unfortunately. So, each of you, regardless of whether you are a Dharma practitioner or a worldly person, should determine if you have any of these bad habits. If you do, correct them promptly and behave in accordance with the Dharma and the code of conduct.

## EFFICACY STORY: KSITIGARBHA SAVED VICTIMS OF GHOSTS

I would like to share an anecdote about Ksitigarbha from *The Brief Records of Efficacy of the Three Jewels*. When the Buddha resided in Vulture Peak, Ksitigarbha traveled widely to benefit and enlighten sentient beings. Once he journeyed to the foot of a mountain and visited an elder's house. He saw five hundred people who were drained of their energy and strength by ghost spirits. Because of that, they had fallen into a stupor for ten days. Seeing this situation, Ksitigarbha generated great compassion and sympathy toward their misery. He immediately went to Vulture Peak through his supernatural power and told the Buddha the whole story, asking for the Buddha's affirmation to allow him to save them.

At that time, the Buddha emitted lights from the top of his head and shined over Ksitigarbha. Knowing that this was the Buddha's affirmation, Ksitigarbha shared a story of how he had saved people of similar misfortune in the past. He said that, in a previous

lifetime when he was still an ordinary being, he encountered a similar situation in which people were haunted by ghost spirits and learned a method from a rishi who was skilled at spiritual things. Through this method, he cured people with this problem and also converted all the ghosts. Having obtained the Buddha's approval and shared his story, Ksitigarbha returned to the elder's house and saved the five hundred people so that they all regained consciousness.

Another similar story is found in the *Records of Efficacy of Ksitigarbha Image*. In the Tang Dynasty, there was a lay person who had a family of more than thirty people. One time, some evil spirits inflicted harm on the whole family and everyone fell ill. Some spat blood, some fainted, while others experienced other agonies. This man came to a monk for advice and the monk told him the above story and suggested to him that he should take refuge in Ksitigarbha. Hearing this, the man was gratified and endeavored to draw an image of Ksitigarbha. Not long after, all members of the family recovered. And 50 years afterwards, this kind of misfortune never recurred in the entire county where he resided.

As we can see, it can be of immense help to pray to Ksitigarbha when strange diseases or epidemics occur. In places suffering from regional plagues or unusual and ongoing epidemic, or in family stricken by misfortune such that the whole family has lapsed

into rare illnesses one after another, evil ghost may be the causes. Sometimes they would extract energy from people, causing them to fall sick. Sometimes they would emit viruses and spread them all around. Under these circumstances, the inauspiciousness can be dissipated if we make images of Ksitigarbha and supplicate to him sincerely.

The whole world has been suffering in recent years from the pandemic in addition to the variety of already existing incurable diseases. In many countries and regions, including Bhutan, Sikkim as well as Southeast Asia, and other western countries, the pandemic is now raging fiercely. According to the WHO, till now more than 800,000 people have died globally in the pandemic. It is not clear if a second wave will come in the coming winter.

In Chinese, the pronunciation of 2020 sounds like “love you love you”. At the beginning of this year, I am sure all of us earnestly sent all kinds of good wishes to our loved ones. But sadly, it has turned out to be a difficult year indeed when so many people have lost those who were close to them. For those of you who are receiving this teaching, can you be sure that you will still be alive in this world next year? Including myself, the answer may be “yes” or may be “no,” because there are too many uncertainties and none of us can be sure of the future.

Let us pray together to Ksitigarbha for the welfare of all humankind including ourselves. Perhaps we may hold an attitude of seeking protection from fear or an attitude of wishing to better one's lot, a motive that is less encouraged in the traditional Dharma practice since it is not in accord with the basic goal of renouncing samsara. Nonetheless, it is still needed for us to pray wholeheartedly to Ksitigarbha for the wellbeing of all people in this world. May everyone have less suffering and more happiness. May they enjoy their own merit and not encounter any unexpected catastrophes, diseases, or sudden death within their full natural lifespan.

I am particularly pleased with this course on the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* because my teaching should evoke listeners' strong faith in Ksitigarbha. Many of you have expressed a strong desire to engage in the Ksitigarbha practice and an eagerness to spread the teaching and practice of Ksitigarbha, particularly, in building statues of Ksitigarbha, and printing and circulating this sutra where they live. I did not expect to have such impact, either when I just started my translation or when I began to give the teaching.

Such a satisfactory result could be due to two reasons. On the one hand, I have strong faith in whatever Dharma I teach, which helps my teaching make a strong impression on my audiences. Thanks to the blessing of my gurus, I have a strong devotion to and take delight in what I am teaching, even for subjects that may seem

a little dry and dull, such as *Abhidharmakosa* or Buddhist logic. With the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, what I say has quickly resonated with listeners and many people have found the teaching engaging and inspiring.

On the other hand, the recent frequent occurrences of natural disasters and instability motivate people to accept this teaching. Since most of us are afraid of death and catastrophes, what is happening across the world now makes people more willing to embrace this sutra, a teaching of great blessing. It had been difficult for many people to forego entertainment and distractions to receive Dharma teaching. But with the pandemic, they are doing their best to attend any teaching that can directly relieve their distress and bestow them blessing.

For these reasons, the propagation of the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* has been exceptional in terms of the scope of its dissemination, the number of people in the audience, and the listeners' inclination to put the teaching into practice. This has been quite beyond my expectation, considering that many great masters in the past had already spread the teaching and practice of Ksitigarbha in both the Han and Tibetan regions. I am profoundly gratified.

But to be frank, I do not know how long people's enthusiasm would last. Every time I give a teaching, listeners would be eager to practice

it and promote it to others, often aspiring that “I must recite this sutra” or “I must propagate it.” But two or three years later, many would completely forget their aspirations. Regardless, through these lessons, everyone has enhanced his or her virtuous root and built a good connection with Ksitigarbha. I believe everyone present here, lay practitioners and monastics alike, will have the opportunity to promote the teaching and practice of Ksitigarbha in the future and bring great benefits to living beings.

# HOW TO GAIN BLESSINGS FROM KSITIGARBHA?

## How to Fulfill Wishes?

“Furthermore, Avalokitesvara, in the future if there are good men and good women who wish to fulfill hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of wishes and succeed in hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of undertakings in both the present and future, they should take refuge [in this Bodhisattva], reverently gaze, pay obeisance, make offerings, and sing praises [before] Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s image. Then they will achieve all their aspirations and goals. Should they moreover implore Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva—who is replete with great kindness and compassion—to support and protect them always, then in dreams the Bodhisattva will place his hand on the crowns of their heads and give them prediction.

Besides those who have no aims or goals in life and are only concerned about three meals a day, most of us have many wishes to

fulfill and goals to complete. Especially for Mahayana practitioners, whose obligation is to benefit sentient beings, there are numerous altruistic tasks to complete and meaningful aspirations to realize. In these cases, they should take refuge in Ksitigarbha, gaze often at his image, pay homage and make offerings to Ksitigarbha, and sing praises before Ksitigarbha. This way, they will actualize whatever they want.

In fact, just to gaze at or to pay homage to images of noble Buddhist figures can evoke our faith. When we look at their images, we would naturally feel devotion and put our palms together. Sometimes, when we visit temples and enter the shrine of sublime Buddhist statues, if we pray and gaze reverentially at their magnificent appearance, we will feel as if there are rays of light emitting from them, shining on our bodies and dissolving into us.

The *Sutra of the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha* says,

*Should one ask for crops, medicines, fields,  
Husband, wife, clothes, or servants,  
Take refuge in Ksitigarbha and worship him,  
Then all wishes can be fulfilled.*

As long as we earnestly take refuge in, gaze up at, supplicate, and make offerings to Ksitigarbha, everything we ask for will

be granted. All wishes and goals can be realized by relying on Ksitigarbha. How does Ksitigarbha possess such ability? In *Sutra on the Divination of the Effect of Good and Evil Actions*, the Buddha said, “By the power of this bodhisattva’s original aspiration, he can swiftly fulfill all kinds of wishes of sentient beings and eliminate all their grave offenses.”

The decisive factor for the exceptional ability of buddhas or bodhisattvas is their aspirations. For example, the original aspiration of Ksitigarbha is to fulfill the wishes of all beings and save them from the lower realms; the aspiration of Manjushri is to rescue sentient beings from the darkness of ignorance and grant them wisdom; and Avalokiteshvara’s aspiration is to let sentient beings be free from suffering and enjoy happiness. Every great bodhisattva has his specific aspirations, and when these aspirations are fulfilled, their capabilities would become different. For example, although a group of people graduate from the same college, because they have majored in different subjects, they would end up with different professional skills. Bodhisattvas have endeavored to realize their ambitions through eons of lifetimes, now they are able to benefit beings in the way they have aspired. That is why when we pray to Ksitigarbha, our wishes will be easily fulfilled.

Recently, several people expressed to me their regret that although they had attended the Ksitigarbha Dharma Assembly at Larung

Gar many times, they had never recited the prayers sincerely as they had not realized the extraordinariness of Ksitigarbha. Now, as they have learned how powerful Ksitigarbha is and how outstanding he is in bestowing blessings, they have decided to participate sincerely in future collective practices of Ksitigarbha. But there can be no assurance that large Dharma assemblies would always be permitted!

The point is, it is particularly worthy to pray to Ksitigarbha and aspire before Ksitigarbha so that we may possess the ability to propagate the Dharma, benefit sentient beings, and fulfill every wish of sentient beings as Ksitigarbha does. We know that this is not an easy task to accomplish because every being has his own sufferings to be resolved and his own needs to be considered. But as long as we make such an aspiration, it will be actualized eventually because the power of aspirations is inconceivable.

Faith is indeed of crucial importance. Whatever practice you engage in, for instance, praying to Ksitigarbha or Guru Padmasambhava, as long as you have great and strong faith, you will promptly receive their unusual blessing. It is akin to the way you miss your lover. If you long for your lover very much, you will soon meet him or her in your dream. In the same manner, if you think of buddhas and bodhisattvas with strong devotion, keep recalling

their meritorious qualities and aspirations, their blessing will be immediate, and you will soon experience it.

On the contrary, if your prayers are not done with faith and intensity, then very likely it would take longer for you to feel the blessing. Some would claim how many years they have done retreats, how many mantra recitations they have accumulated, or how diligent they have been chanting their daily prayers and then complain that they have had no profound experience nor received any special blessing. The likely causes are that they probably lacked concentration and sincere devotion, nor had they observed their own behaviors carefully and followed the practice instructions properly. Therefore, when you cannot feel any blessing, it is not because buddhas and bodhisattvas lack power, it is because you have failed to practice in a proper manner. If you have taken a medicine carelessly without following the doctor's instructions, it would not be reasonable to blame the doctor when you do not recover.

## **How to Attain Keen Intelligence?**

**“Furthermore, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, in the future if good men and good women give rise to profound reverence for the Mahayana sutras and generate an inconceivable resolve, wishing to read and recite them [from memory], yet, even with the**

**instruction of a wise teacher showing them how to learn the sutras by heart, no sooner have they learned them they forget. Months, even years go by; still they are unable to read and recite them. These good men and [good women] have karmic obstacles from past lives that have not yet been resolved; therefore, they are unable to read and recite the Mahayana sutras. [...]**

There are those who try to gain a mastery of the Mahayana sutras, but even with the instruction of a wise teacher, they still cannot become fluent with the texts. As soon as they learn them, they forget. They may work for months or years but are still unable to comprehend the texts and recite the sutras from memory. It is likely that they simply lack a good connection with the Mahayana scriptures. Why? Because they may have karmic obscurations from past lives, e.g., they might have defamed the Dharma, been stingy with Dharma teachings, or engaged in unwholesome acts like killing, adultery, the five crimes with immediate retribution and the like, and so on. If they had done these evil acts and have not purified their karmic imprints, such karma could obscure them from reading and memorizing the Mahayana sutras.

Here “a wise teacher” refers to a qualified master. While the qualifications for good masters are many, they should at least be knowledgeable in both sutras and shastras and be experienced in actual practice. They do not have to be famous. Sometimes, famous

teachers are probably no better than those who are unknown but honest and simple. For students, there could be huge variances in their abilities. Sometimes we see two people starting together to memorize certain scriptures. One would be able to memorize many verses in a short time, but the other would not be able to remember even a short verse after a long time. The Vinaya text tells the following story:

At the time of the Buddha, there was a monk called Chulapanthaka who was unable to memorize even just one simple stanza. Chulapanthaka had an elder brother named Mahapanthaka who was ordained before him. Not soon after ordination, Mahapanthaka attained arhathood and later guided Chulapanthaka to monkhood. After accepting Chulapanthaka into the sangha, Mahapanthaka taught him a verse, letting him memorize it and always contemplate its meaning. It is,

*Create no evil karma in terms of body, speech, and mind,  
Nor harm any living beings in the world.  
Be aware and mindful that the object of desire is empty,  
And stay away from meaningless austerity.*

After three months, Chulapanthaka failed to memorize this single verse, no matter how hard he had tried. Later, even under the guide of the Buddha, he still could not remember a

verse. Finally, the Buddha taught him a simpler verse with just two short lines, “get rid of the dust, get rid of the impurities,” but he still failed memorizing it. Then the Buddha let him dust other monks’ shoes and requested other monks to recite this simple two-line verse to him again and again. In the end, Chulapanthaka was able to keep this verse in his mind and by further contemplating its meaning, he got enlightened and became an arhat.

After his enlightenment, the monks came to ask the Buddha why Chulapanthaka was born so dull-witted. The Buddha revealed that at the time of Kashyapa Buddha, Chulapanthaka was a great Dharma teacher who was knowledgeable in the Tripitaka. But at that time, he was so stingy with the Dharma teachings that he was reluctant to teach anyone even a single verse of Dharma. After he died, he took rebirth in the heaven. After that celestial life, he was born into a human family of butchers and made a living slaughtering pigs.

When the market day was coming to the neighboring village across the river, the butcher thought to himself, “If I kill the pigs and transport the pork for sale, the meat will begin to go bad. It would be better if I transport the pigs to the village and slaughter them at a right time. Then there will be no loss and I will earn more money.” So, he took the pigs across the

river with him to the market. On the journey, those pigs kept moving about, causing the boat to capsize and both people and pigs fell into the river. All the pigs drowned, and the butcher floated downstream.

At that time, in a forest to the side of the river, resided five hundred pratyekabuddhas. One of them came to fetch water at the river and found the unconscious butcher. Knowing that the man was still alive, the pratyekabuddha pulled him to the shore through his supernatural power and then left. Later the butcher woke up, and by following the footprint, he came to the place of those pratyekabuddhas. He paid homage to them and asked to stay with them. Thereafter, he collected fruits for the pratyekabuddhas and served them every day.

The butcher observed that the pratyekabuddhas sat often in meditation so he emulated them and practiced meditation. Through diligent practice, he was able to abide in the conception-free absorption. After that life, he took rebirth as long-lived gods in the Heaven of Conception Free, one of the eight states where there is no opportunity to practice the Dharma. After that life, he was reborn again in the human realm and became Chulapanthaka. Because he had been stingy with his Dharma teaching, slaughtered animals, and abided in the Heaven of Conception Free where wrong views were

nourished in his previous lives, these negative karma caused him to be born extremely slow-witted.

As we learn from this story, instead of blaming fate or others, those who are less capable should take responsibilities for their own performance. Some students who do poorly at school may blame others for their deficiencies, saying “Why did my parents not give me a smarter brain?” and so on and so forth. But their poor performance could be the result of past misdeeds. Some students who want to do well in their studies desperately try but always fail, struggling because of their cognitive abilities. This often leads to feelings of hopelessness, especially during critical exams such as college entrance exams. However, as the saying goes, “Pitiful ones must have their own wrongdoings.” Since everything happens for a reason, they must have done something in their previous lives that resulted in their diminished cognitive abilities. It is important for these individuals to reflect on their past actions and seek ways to improve in the present. On that basis, praying to Ksitigarbha or Manjushri may help to increase intelligence and academic success.



**“[...] When such people hear Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s name, see Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s image, they should, with their full original resolve, reverently state their situation to the Bodhisattva. In addition, they should make offerings of incense, flowers, clothing, food, drink, and all material objects they enjoy to the Bodhisattva. They should place a cup of pure water before the Bodhisattva for a day and a night; afterward, they should join their palms, implore reverently, take hold of the cup, turn to face south, and drink the water. When the water is about to enter their mouths, they should be wholeheartedly sincere and earnest. After drinking the water, they should be careful—abstain from the five pungent plants, alcohol, meat,**

sexual misconduct, false speech, and killing and harming for one or three seven-day periods. Then in dreams these good men and good women will see Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva manifesting his infinite forms to pour water on the crowns of their heads. When they awaken, they will be endowed with keen intelligence. Should these sutras be heard in their ears but once, they will forever remember them and never forget or lose a single sentence or verse.

How should these people pray to Ksitigarbha to overcome their karmic obstacles? First, they should reverently state their situation to Ksitigarbha and offer all material objects they enjoy before a Ksitigarbha image. In Tibetan Buddhism, we offer tormas, which represent delicacies. At Tibetan Buddhist temples or during a puja, there will be artistic tormas and butter flowers exquisitely made and set on the shrine. They are meant to symbolize offerings of food.

As a second step, individuals should place a cup of pure water before Ksitigarbha's image for full day and night. After this time, they should place their palms together and face the south as it is a direction having a special connection to Ksitigarbha. They should then drink the water with the utmost sincerity and earnestness, without any hesitation, suspicion, or any discursive thoughts. This is a way to receive the blessing of Ksitigarbha. This act of devotion

can strengthen their spiritual connection with Ksitigarbha and aid in their spiritual growth.

As a final step, individuals should abstain from consuming the five pungent plants, alcohol, meat, sexual misconduct, false speech, and killing and harming for one or three weeks after drinking the water. The five pungent plants include leeks, garlic, shallots, onion, and scallions. There are different opinions as for what the five are and some may include chives as well. These plants emit strong odors that can deter deities from approaching, that's why they should be avoided.

Through this practice, individuals may see Ksitigarbha appear in their dreams, conferring them with empowerment and blessings by pouring water on the crowns of their heads. Upon awakening, individuals may experience an increase in intelligence, allowing them to remember and retain whatever teachings in sutras that comes into their ears, remembering the whole content and never forgetting even a stanza or phrase. This means they will have gained dharani, the ability to retain all kinds of Dharma without ever missing anything.

There are fortunate individuals who have transformed from being slow-witted to highly intelligent through the blessings of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Certainly, it could not be done without their

great faith and devotion, as well as their own diligent efforts. Examples can be found within our sangha community. While some of the sangha members at Larung Gar with limited worldly education initially appeared dull and slow-minded and could not understand whatever I was talking about even after repeated explanation, through practice and perseverance, they became skilled in debating, memorizing scriptures, and other aspects.

Intelligence can be acquired through both natural talent and diligent effort, while some may remain less intellectually inclined. We see a range of outcomes both in the worldly context as well as among khenpos and khenmos here. I remember distinctly the story of every Han khenpo and khenmo and how each of them was when they arrived. Some were excellent in every aspect, while others appeared average initially and turned out to be outstanding in their practice.

The way in which one develops intellectually and spiritually is deeply connected to their virtuous roots and the accumulation of merit. I recall individuals who were initially brilliant and excelled in Dharma study, leading me to believe they would play an important role in propagating the Dharma and benefiting sentient beings. However, gradually, they became unsatisfactory in their moral conduct, precepts, and behavior. Sadly, in the end, they failed to achieve what I had hoped and even developed wrong views and

bad behaviors. In contrast, there were those who lacked wisdom and a solid Dharma practice, yet transformed quickly after hearing, contemplating, and practicing the Dharma. The systematic study of the Dharma had an immediate and positive effect on them.

When His Holiness was alive, he once shared the personal stories of each khenpo to remind us all not to become arrogant. He mentioned how one khenpo was poorly dressed and even had lice on his body when he first arrived at Larung Gar, and how another was so impoverished that he could not even afford regular meals. His Holiness was a great orator and every khenpo he named felt embarrassed with some even being scolded severely. I remember feeling nervous when His Holiness mentioned my name, not knowing what he would say about me. Fortunately, I was not reprimanded. Now, if I were to share the stories of the Han khenpos and khenmos, I would also have a lot to say. Perhaps we should find a time to do so, which would likely surprise some students in their classes. The point here is that significant change can occur through the amazing blessing of the Three Jewels.

## **How to Dispel Misfortunes?**

**“Furthermore, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, in the future if there are various people whose food and clothing are insufficient, who cannot obtain whatever they seek, who have frequent illnesses,**

who encounter much misfortune and decline, whose families or homes are without peace, whose relatives are scattered, who physically suffer frequent untoward occurrences, or who are often terrified in dreams, if such people hear Ksitigarbha's name, see Ksitigarbha's image, and with wholehearted reverence, recite his name a full ten thousand times, these disagreeable circumstances will gradually disappear. They will have peace and happiness thereafter, their food and clothing will be abundant, and even in dreams they will be peaceful and happy.



The Buddha, in his teachings, highlighted various kinds of misfortunes that people may experience in the future. Let's take a closer look at these misfortunes:

1) Insufficiency of food and clothing: In today's world, the issue of food scarcity is a concern for many countries, especially those that rely heavily on food imports. During the pandemic, trade between certain countries has been impeded and so countries that have been focusing less on the development of agriculture and animal husbandry and instead relying largely on food import have to face increased risk in food security. For example, Malaysia has been focusing on developing a high-tech economy while shrinking its agriculture. This reliance on food imports made the country more vulnerable under the impact of Covid-19. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, developing countries, particularly small island developing countries which are dependent on tourism have experienced a precipitous collapse in their revenues given that international travel has come to a halt, making it difficult to pay for the imported food necessary for survival in these countries. Countries are now rethinking the importance of developing agriculture to address this issue. The Chinese government has also encouraged her citizens to avoid wasting food and promote thrift.

2) Failing to obtain what one wants: Some individuals are often unlucky and never seem to achieve their goals. It would appear that whatever they do would always become a failure and everything would go against their wishes. In the end, they feel resigned to

their fate and become disheartened by their inability to succeed, saying “How unlucky I am! Whatever I want is unattainable and whatever I do never succeed.”

3) Being frequently ill: Some people are born weak and have to endure various sicknesses throughout their lives. I also suffer from a lot of diseases, and every day, in the morning, noon, and evening, I have to take many different Tibetan and Western medicines. There is no choice if you are sick.

4) Encountering many misfortune and tragedies: Certain individuals may face frequent calamities such as car accidents, earthquakes, tsunamis, shipwrecks, plane crashes, and other disasters which can lead to severe trauma.

5) Families or homes are without peace: Although I think in most cases, the death of one person would not likely be something that would be disastrous for a society, a company, or a department where he has worked, to every family, no matter which member dies, be it the father, the mother, the wife, the husband or the child, it would be a great loss because this family suddenly becomes incomplete. After my mother died, it seemed that everyone in the family becomes less connected. When she was alive, all of us would gather together regularly. At that time, we brothers and sisters

often had the opportunity to meet. But now even if everyone is present, the focus of the family seems to be missing.

The passing away of a monastic, such as an abbot, a khenpo, or a master, however, seems to have less impact on their families because they have already renounced their family ties. Although people around them may feel sorry, they will not be as grief-stricken as the family of a deceased. As time passes, the sense of loss dissipates. In Tibet, when a monastic dies, everyone, including his or her family contributes to holding a 49-day ritual for him. Afterwards, the residual impact on the family is minimal.

For ordinary families, the loss of any member is insufferable. Even if a child dies at a young age, the atmosphere of suffering across the entire family can linger for a long time. In some families, members die every year, which is unfortunate.

6) Relatives and retainers are scattered or split: Many employers cannot find steady and loyal workers. When faced with difficulties such as a factory closure, their workers would all leave. Some managers experience afflictions because they cannot manage their staff and are constantly faced with conflicts and arguments within their organizations.

7) Suffering frequent untoward occurrences: Some people are careless and accident-prone which could often result in sudden death, unforeseen illness, and various accidents.

8) Being startled in dreams: There are those who often have dreams of horrors involving dead persons or haunting ghosts. Nightmares often happen when one is in poor health. I dreamed of His Holiness last night; it was a very good dream but I am not going to discuss it now. I have recorded these dreams in my diary which may be made public after my death. We should not form too strong an attachment to these dreams.

Everyone in this world will inevitably encounter tragedies and misfortunes. Therefore, it would be wise to prepare in advance. A Tibetan saying goes, “Build walls when the wind has not come and construct dams when the flood has not arrived.” It is best to recite the name of Ksitigarbha before any kind of tragedy occurs. We have so many people attending this course on the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* this time and I hope everyone listening to this teaching completes 10,000 recitations of the name of Ksitigarbha within a month or two, or at most within the year. Since it is mentioned in several places in the sutra that disasters and misfortunes can be eliminated if one recites the name of Ksitigarbha ten thousand times, this is required.

I recommend that you follow the Tibetan way of chanting, *“Bodhisattva, great Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha, to you I pay homage! To you I make offerings! In you I take refuge!”* If that is hard for you, then just recite *“Namo Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva”* instead. This should be easy, and some may even finish tens of thousands of such recitations within a day. This simple act will create an auspicious origination that bonds you with Ksitigarbha.

Some people have never had a connection with Ksitigarbha. I hope that everyone can create favorable conditions for others to bond with Ksitigarbha. I am planning to make statues of Ksitigarbha and distribute them to those here in Larung Gar. It is not necessary for you to rush to raise funds for this activity because it has already been arranged. There are not that many people here at Larung Gar so our needs are modest. However, if you have the abilities and resources, you should make statues of Ksitigarbha and print this sutra and give them to as many people as possible who are close to you. This would be auspicious.

Let us return to the topic, it is indeed beneficial for everyone to meet the quota for recitation, especially for lay people. Since you need to take care of your family, your life relies on your communities, and you need all manners of resources that are necessary to support your life, including provisions, possessions, money, and the like. Without favorable conditions, it would be difficult to

achieve anything. Therefore, we are truly in need of Ksitigarbha's blessing, and chanting his name is a necessary practice to receive his blessing.

In comparison to lay people, monastics experience less pressure since they do not have the same attachments to worldly possessions or a fixed sense of home. As the saying goes among Tibetans, "Where a beggar dies, his stick crumbles." Just as a beggar carries their stick with them wherever they go, monastics have nothing but themselves wherever they travel, and are therefore comfortable with the idea of dying anywhere. Experienced monks and nuns may have initially been concerned with preserving their physical bodies, but through the study of prajnaparamita, they come to understand that the four elements that make up the physical body are ultimately empty in nature. As a result, they are able to let go of their attachment to the body and no longer fear death.

In these times of widespread tragedies and hardships, the intangible and profound blessing of Ksitigarbha is especially important. However, it is equally essential for individuals to cultivate inner strength and resilience in order to face life's challenges. This is what we all need to do. Regardless of what you encounter, wisdom, diligence, and patience are indispensable qualities for navigating difficult situations. It is important not to be too fragile or vulnerable to the point of being easily shattered as a heart of glass by

even minor setbacks. Instead, we should strive to be tough and perseverant, with a heart that can withstand adversity and bounce back from difficulties.

## How to Avoid Dangers When Traveling?



**“Furthermore, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, in the future if there are good men and good women who, for the sake of livelihood, public or personal matters, events of birth and death, or other urgent business, need to enter the mountains or forests, cross the rivers, oceans, or other large bodies of water, or travel along dangerous paths, these people should first recite Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva’s name a full ten thousand times. Then the ghosts**

**and spirits on the lands they pass through will guard and protect them. Whether they are walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, their peace and happiness will be safeguarded. Even when they encounter tigers, wolves, lions, or all that are poisonous or injurious, none will be able to harm them."**

While encountering predators such as tigers, wolves, and lions is now a rare occurrence for most people, modern life brings its own set of dangers such as car accidents, air crashes, pandemics, and various forms of violence and harassment from human and non-human beings. As a result, many individuals experience anxiety and fear when embarking on journeys, "Will I come back safe and sound?" Buddhists may wonder, "Should I chant some prayers for blessing?" Indeed, reciting prayers for blessing may offer a sense of comfort and protection. In particular, reciting the name of Ksitigarbha ten thousand times before embarking on a journey is believed to bring about a smooth and safe trip.

## SPREAD THE *KSITIGARBHA SUTRA*



The Buddha told Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, “Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva has great cause and condition with Jambudvīpa. Suppose I were to describe the benefits and so forth derived by living beings who see [his image] and hear of [his name], in hundreds of thousands of kalpas I could not finish describing them. Therefore, Avalokitesvara, you should use your spiritual power to propagate this sutra, thus enabling living beings of

**the saha world to always have peace and happiness throughout hundreds of thousands of myriads of kalpas.”**

The benefits of encountering Ksitigarbha’s image, hearing his name, or simply contemplating his presence are so immense and far-reaching that they cannot be fully described by anyone, whether they are shravakas, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, or even buddhas, even if for hundreds and thousands of kalpas. The Buddha himself recognized the power of Ksitigarbha and exhorted Avalokiteshvara to spread the teachings of this sutra far and wide. In the opening of this chapter, the Buddha emphasized Avalokiteshvara’s great cause and condition with the saha world, and now he highlights Ksitigarbha’s profound and intimate connection with all beings in this world. It is in this context that Avalokiteshvara is called upon to safeguard and disseminate this sutra, and Avalokiteshvara will definitely bestow his blessings for this sutra to spread widely.

Given its immense value, it is incumbent upon all of us to make every effort to propagate the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* far and wide, both in the East and the West. Fortunately, the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* has already been translated into many languages and circulated in different countries. There are about six versions of *Ksitigarbha Sutra* in English, and four different versions in the Korean Tripitaka. The earliest English translation of this sutra dates back to the 1960s. You

can also find this sutra in Spanish, Italian, Japanese, Vietnamese, and other languages. With such wide availability, there is great potential for us to share this sutra with people around the world, helping to alleviate suffering and inspire spiritual growth.

The *Ksitigarbha Sutra* has been praised by many masters as a valuable teaching that can be welcomed by western communities. Master Meng Can, while giving Dharma teachings in the US, found it challenging to promote the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. However, when he taught the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, many people came to listen. Similarly, Master Chin Kung, whenever he was establishing a new Dharma center, would always begin with the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* as he believed that it would secure the facilities and buildings with the powerful blessing of Ksitigarbha.

Master Chin Kung also requested that whenever people promote the Dharma, both at home and abroad, that they should start with the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, and then the *Infinite Life Sutra*, as it helps to purify their negative karma and take rebirth in Sukhavati, the Western Pure Land after death. He even gave a comprehensive teaching on the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, which included an explanation of its most well-known commentary composed by Bhiksu Qing Lian, a monk from the time of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty.

Promoting the Dharma is the responsibility of both monastics and lay practitioners. In the Chinese version of *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish*, the Buddha said, "Those who want to attain buddhahood should take delight in scriptures, and praise, recite and expound them. Even when a lay person speaks the Dharma, gods and ghost spirits will come to listen, let alone monastics." Therefore, even lay people can teach and spread the Dharma.

Nowadays, there are already some lay Dharma instructors who can teach the Dharma comprehensively. It is sometimes more convenient for lay people to give the teaching. While some monastic Dharma teachers give public lectures, they would change their monastic robes, it is not necessary and I do not approve of it. I was once invited by a college to give a speech, but they required me to change my robe to non-monastic clothes, as monastics were unwelcome in their academic setting. My reply was, "I am sorry. Maybe in my next life, if you demand. I cannot take off my monastic robe in this life."

Regardless of one's status, everyone, either lay or monastic should aspire to promote the teaching and practice of Ksitigarbha in this and all future lives. There are various ways to accomplish this, such as making statues of Ksitigarbha in different shapes, forms, and appearances, according to the culture and customs of different places. Many statues of Ksitigarbha are already available in different styles from various countries. I would like to share with you

below the pictures of several antique Ksitigarbha statues which are in the collections of a number of prestigious international museums to increase the awareness and appreciation for Ksitigarbha's teachings.



This image of Ksitigarbha is in the collection of the British Museum, London. It is from the last century of China.



This one is from the Museum of Fine Arts Boston in the United States. It was made in Japan in the 12th century.



This Ksitigarbha statue is from the Tokyo National Museum of Japan, a very precious cultural relic from the 14th century of Japan.



This is from the collection of Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty at The Palace Museum in Beijing, China. This statue was made according to Tibetan Buddhist tradition. This statue was enshrined in a small shrine, quite like a gawu box.



This one is in the National Museum of Korea.

By the way, in Japan, statues of Ksitigarbha can be found almost everywhere. There are many different forms of Ksitigarbha in Japan. Some of them look like a boy, wearing a red scarf. Japanese believe Ksitigarbha to be a protector for children and ghosts of aborted infants and dead children.



This statue is from the Rubin Museum of Art in the United States. It is a cultural relic of the 17th century. This standing Ksitigarbha is a typical Tibetan Buddhist statue.

Perhaps because I am a Tibetan, I prefer buddha statues of the Tibetan tradition. Tibetan statues have strict requirements in size and measurement. Of course, images of buddhas and bodhisattvas in different nations have their own distinctive features. Any of them is deserving of your devotion and respect.

If we propagate the Dharma in other countries and ethnic groups in the future, we should adapt to their culture and traditions. Take the image of Buddha Shakyamuni for example. While many of us like his Indian style, Thais have their own style, and in Chinese history there are also different styles in different historical periods. So, when you make statues at various places or for different people, you should do it in the style they like. In essence, those images are no different and carry the same blessing, it is just that they appear in different forms before different sentient beings. So, in the process of promoting the Dharma, we should have a broad view, be inclusive and open-minded, never to be parochial and restrict ourselves to a certain frame. Overall, let us aspire to propagate the teaching and practice of Ksitigarbha. This carries great significance and makes our human existence meaningful.

# **Lecture Twenty-Four**

**August 31st, 2020**

There are two books on my desk, one is Ju Mipham Rinpoche's *A Feast of the Nectar of the Supreme Vehicle: An Explanation of The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*, which I translated from Tibetan into Chinese several years ago and has now been published, the other is *Life and Spirituality*, a collection of short teachings that His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche gave to his disciples. Its English version is also available on my website. During 2019, I posted a short teaching of His Holiness on my Weibo accompanied by one photo of him every day. These posts are now compiled into this book.

Today we will continue with the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* and tomorrow will be our last lecture. Then on Thursday, I will give a teaching on the *Mangala Sutta*, a short sutra highly regarded in the Theravada tradition. On Friday, I am going to teach *The Buddha Speaks of the Matanga Sutra*, again a short sutra translated into Chinese by An Shigao in the 2nd century. Last year I translated these two sutras from Chinese into Tibetan and have always been considering proofreading my translations afterwards. Recently, as I pondered what to teach after this course, I thought of them. I can proofread my Tibetan translation while teaching them. That is the course schedule for this week. As for next week, we will see.

## EFFICACY STORY: KSITIGARBHA STATUE RESCUED HIS PARENTS

Ksitigarbha's blessing is inconceivable and making his image can greatly benefit one's family members, regardless of whether they are Buddhists or not. Here is a Buddhist anecdote collected in Changjin's *Records of Efficacy of Ksitigarbha Image*. In the Tang Dynasty, there was a prefectural governor. Although he was a devout Buddhist, his parents had no faith at all. He built a one-meter-high golden Ksitigarbha statue on behalf of his parents and always made offerings and paid homage to the statue. Despite his parents' disbelief, this statue had brought great benefits to them.

His father once went on a trip and left his mother alone at home. One night, a burglar came to their house intending to steal something. However, when he peeped into the house, he just saw Ksitigarbha sitting there. Astonished, he left quickly. The next day, the burglar changed into his regular outfit and visited the house. He saw only the old lady but no Ksitigarbha statue. He realized that it must

have been a miraculous occurrence. He felt compelled to confess everything to the old lady and told her what happened last night. That was how Ksitigarbha protected his mother.

On another trip away from home, one of his father's foes was hiding along the route, lying in wait to kill him. As his father approached, the foe drew a knife to stab him. At this critical moment, a monk with a golden glow appeared and shielded his father with his body. The foe stabbed three times, but they were all blocked by the monk. The monk then fell to the ground. Thinking that he had killed his target, the assailant ran away. His father came to realize what had happened and was amazed at how he had survived.

The old man then went to his son's house and told him about the attack. Realizing that it was indeed a miracle, they went to pay homage to the Ksitigarbha statue. As soon as they entered the shrine, they noticed three cuts on the statue's head, as well as traces of blood on its golden skin. They then knew it was Ksitigarbha who had saved the father. The father generated great faith in Ksitigarbha and thereafter, the parents came to live with their son and together made offerings and paid homage to Ksitigarbha every day.

The father later died at the age of seventy-nine. After thirty-five days of his death, the governor dreamed of him. Looking remarkably radiant, his father said that he had taken rebirth in the celestial

realm. His father also told him that by virtue of Ksitigarbha's blessing and guidance, all his family members would take a good rebirth—his mother would take rebirth in 13 years, he in 25 years, and his wife in 28 years. His father then disappeared. Afterwards, they all passed away at the exact time his father had foretold. This then inspired many local people to build statues or draw images of Ksitigarbha and many of them experienced the great blessings of Ksitigarbha.

This shows us that when we worship Ksitigarbha, the Bodhisattva will also bless and protect our family. We know that even though a person may have great faith in Buddhism, his parents, children, or beloved could reject it to the degree that it is not possible to convert them and benefit them with the Dharma in this life. If this is the case, you may pray sincerely and engage in virtuous deeds on their behalf with a pure mind. For example, you can make an image of Ksitigarbha, recite the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, or acquire certain Buddha statues or scriptures to worship at home. By the inconceivable power of the Three Jewels and the principle of dependent arising, such acts will bring benefits to their present and future lives directly or indirectly.

## INCONCEIVABLE DEEDS OF BENEFITING BEINGS

Now, let us continue with the study of the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*. We are on the twelfth chapter. In our previous section, the Buddha had expounded on Ksitigarbha's inconceivable deeds of benefiting beings. Now in the rest of this chapter, the Buddha reiterated what he had expounded in the format of verses. The content in this section is essentially the same as the previous section with only minor differences. I will just give a simple and literal explanation of each verse.

### Benefit Humans and Devas

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

**"I observe that Ksitigarbha's awesome spiritual power  
Cannot be told fully even in kalpas as many as grains of  
sand of Ganges River**

**Seeing, hearing, reverently gazing, or making obeisance to  
him in a thought-moment  
Will benefit humans and devas in measureless ways.**

The power of Ksitigarbha's wisdom, compassion, and blessing is inconceivable and cannot be fully described in as many kalpas as the grains of sand in the Ganges River. Whoever sees Ksitigarbha's image, praises or pays homage to him, hears his name, his mantra, or the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, even for as short time as an instant, such a person or celestial being will enjoy boundless benefits.

In Buddhism, these numerical phrases like "grains of sand of Ganges River" or "hundreds of thousands of kotis" denote an extremely large figure instead of an exact number. For example, in *The Sutra of Great Liberation*, there are many numerical phrases. Take one frequently appeared numerical phrase for instance. While the Chinese version says "a hundred million", in the Tibetan text, it is often translated as "a hundred thousand". Great lotsawas or Buddhist translators in the past had different interpretations of the same numerical phrase. It is quite possible that those phrases do not stand for specific numbers. They represent a large figure, which if it were to be specified would be hard to count or imagine. In addition, it is the tradition of India to use analogies to describe a number, and their culture sometimes does not attach great importance to an exact number.

This verse talks about the immense benefit for humans and devas. Because this sutra was taught in the heaven, the Buddha particularly stressed the benefit for devas. According to the verse, even an instant of seeing, hearing, beholding, and worshipping Ksitigarbha creates great merit and virtue. Therefore, it would be best if we can recite the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* every day. If there is no such time, we can do it whenever we are free and relaxed. It can be a Sunday, or after we have a good meal and feel relaxed, or when we are not troubled by negative news from friends, or whenever we feel happy and worry-free. At these times, we can take the time to recite this sutra or the name of Ksitigarbha, which would bring measureless merit to ourselves and all sentient beings.

## Dispel Negative Karma and Prolong Life

**“If men, women, nagas, or spirits who are,  
Nearing the end of the present ripened effect, would fall  
into lower realms  
Wholeheartedly take refuge in this Great Being,  
Their lifespans will be lengthened, offense obstacles  
dissolved.**

When men, women, nagas, yakshas, or other spirits have accumulated grave negative karma, and as a result are destined to fall into the three lower realms of hell, hungry ghosts, and animals

after this life, if these sentient beings earnestly and fervently seek refuge in Ksitigarbha, venerate and bow to him, their lifespan will be prolonged, offenses and obscurations purified, and they will thus not fall into the lower realms.

## Find Lost Loved Ones

**“Those who when very young have lost their parents’  
love—**

**Wonder to what realm has [their parents’]  
consciousness gone—**

**Brothers, sisters, or other kin, [whose whereabouts]**

**The grown surviving ones do not know:**

**If these people sculpt or paint this Great Being’s image,**

**Gaze up longingly, make obeisance to him unceasingly,**

**And recollect his name for three seven-day periods,**

**The Bodhisattva will manifest his infinite forms,**

**Revealing the realms of rebirth of their kin,**

**Who, even if fallen in lower realms, will soon gain release.**

**If they do not retreat from their initial resolve,**

**He will place his hand on the crowns of their heads and  
give them holy prediction.**

Some people have been separated from their parents, relatives, or friends from a young age. Once they are older, they may wonder

where their lost ones are and if they are still alive, or in which realm they have been reborn if they have died. Parents may also want to know the whereabouts of their deceased children or children whom they have lost from kidnapping or the like. In these cases, they should make or obtain Ksitigarbha's image, beseech and bow to him intently and continually. Furthermore, if they chant Ksitigarbha's name, say ten thousand times in three weeks, the Bodhisattva may manifest his infinite forms to inform them of where their lost friends or relatives are. If they maintain their initial resolve, their devotion to the Ksitigarbha, their faith in the Three Jewels, and their great compassion for sentient beings, Ksitigarbha will place his hand on their heads and give them the prediction of their enlightenment.

So whenever one loses someone, child, parent, relative, or friend, praying to Ksitigarbha will be helpful. By doing so, they will get a desirable outcome. Even if the lost ones are not found in this life, by virtue of making offerings and paying homage to Ksitigarbha, they will attain peace and happiness. For those who have died and fallen into the three lower realms, they will be liberated quickly by the power of Ksitigarbha.

## Transcend Samsara and Attain Bodhi

**“Those wishing to cultivate the unsurpassed bodhi  
And to leave behind the threefold world’s suffering,  
Having given rise to the mind of great compassion,  
Should first gaze up at and make obeisance to this  
Great Being’s image.  
All their vows will soon be fulfilled;  
No karmic obstacles can ever hinder or stop them.**

As Mahayana Buddhists, we aspire to be free from samsara and attain the supreme *bodhi*. To achieve that, we must first arouse the mind of great compassion and bodhicitta. On that basis, we should pay homage to Ksitigarbha’s image. Then all our aspirations will be expeditiously accomplished.

In order to fulfill a vast and profound aspiration, for instance, renouncing worldly life, generating bodhicitta, it requires not only a strong inner motivation but powerful external support is also needed. In this turbulent age of degeneration when evil forces are overwhelming, it would be difficult for us to achieve our aspirations by relying only on our own strength. For example, many people start with a meritorious intent vowing, “I’ll take monasticism and keep pure precepts throughout the rest of my life.” Or “I shall embrace the supreme bodhicitta and never harm any sentient

beings from now on.” But throughout the process of spiritual practice, there will be ups and downs, twists and turns, and all kinds of obstacles. As a result, few people can persist to the end and achieve a good accomplishment.

Therefore, if we want to generate the supreme bodhicitta, it would be best for us to pay homage and pray to great bodhisattvas, such as Ksitigarbha, Manjushri, or Avalokiteshvara, to sublime spiritual masters who are the embodiment of great bodhisattvas, as well as to Dharma protectors who have vowed to protect Dharma practitioners in front of Guru Padmasambhava and other mahasiddhas. With their assistance, your paths in this and all future lives will be made smoother and eventually your aspirations will be realized.

For Mahayana practitioners, what we care about most is to achieve spiritual accomplishment as soon as possible and gain the ability to benefit other beings. Countless sentient beings are drifting in the ocean of samsara and experiencing all sorts of suffering such as birth, old age, sickness, death, poverty, separation from loved ones, or encounters with hostile enemies. Such incredible challenges they have to face! Although we may desire to help these beings, if our ability falls short, we would be like a mother without arms whose child is being swept away by a river—we can only watch them suffer and commit unwholesome deeds that corrupt them without being able to do anything to help them. Thus, we need to

pray to Ksitigarbha so that our aspiration of helping beings will be swiftly fulfilled.

Praying to Ksitigarbha not only fulfils wishes but also deactivates karmic obscurations. Being able to remove the hinderance caused by negative karma is crucial. In this age of degeneration when the world is filled with turbidities and the power of samsara is overwhelming, even if we generate a kind intention to follow the Mahayana path, it could be easily blocked by the “dark clouds” of samsara. As a result, we could again be lost in the ocean of suffering.

It is normal for people to be enthusiastic about benefiting sentient beings, especially when they are inspired by virtuous teachers. However, such passion wears out easily. When we held the World Youth Buddhist Symposium in the past few years, there were many enthusiastic young participants. We did not focus on traditional Buddhist teachings in these symposia but we did share ideas from treatises such as *In Praise of Dependent Origination* or *Thirty-seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*. Upon hearing these talks, many young people were inspired, saying, “I will benefit sentient beings and propagate the Dharma from now on, forever and ever.” However, when they went back to their normal life, they were again drowning in the ocean of suffering, totally forgetting their initial words and resolve. In these situations, it would be important for us to rely

on Ksitigarbha to remove our karmic obstacles so that we will not backslide on our Mahayana path.

## Obtain Wisdom

“There are people who resolve to remember and recite  
the sutras,

Wishing to guide confused beings over to the other shore,  
Although having made this vow so inconceivable,  
What they read they quickly forget—losing much in  
their forgetfulness.

Because these people have karmic obstacles deluding  
them,

They cannot remember the Mahayana sutras.

They should honor Ksitigarbha with offerings of  
incense, flowers

Clothing, food, drink, and objects they enjoy,

Place pure water before this Great Being’s [image]

After a day and a night, implore reverently and drink  
the water,

Give rise to a diligent and serious mind, abstain from the  
five pungent plants,

Alcohol, meat, sexual misconduct, and false speech,

Not to kill or harm for three seven-day periods,

And wholeheartedly meditate on this Great Being’s name.

**Then soon in dreams they will see his infinite [forms],  
And when they awaken they will gain keen hearing.  
Once the sutras and teachings pass through their ears,  
Never will they forget them throughout thousands of  
myriads of lives.**

**Because this Great Being is so inconceivable,  
He can enable these people to gain such wisdom.**

These verses provide guidance on how we should pray to Ksitigarbha in order to obtain keen intelligence. First, one should practice for three seven-day periods. A seven-day period is a common time unit for Dharma practice. Many practices in Han Buddhist traditions last on the basis of seven-day periods. For example, there are Seven-Day Amitabha Recitation Retreat, a seven-day retreat where participants keep reciting Buddha Amitabha, Seven-Day Avatamsaka Zen Retreat, a seven-day meditation retreat to recite *Avatamsaka Sutra*, and Pratyutpanna Samadhi Retreat, a practice of reciting Amitabha continuously day and night without sitting or lying down. You may also perform the practice of Ksitigarbha for seven days.

Next, the sutra tells us how to practice. A good example of such practice would be the Ksitigarbha Dharma Assembly held at Larung Gar, which conforms to the teaching here. For seven days at the Ksitigarbha Dharma Assembly, we arrange the five

offerings (flowers, incense, lamps, perfume, and food), and recite the supplications, mantra, and name of Ksitigarbha. In addition, we would place water in the Ksitigarbha mandala. It is the tradition in Vajrayana to put water in the mandala during a collective practice and bless the water through mantra recitation, and then we would take the water and drink it at the end of the practice, which usually lasts for seven or twenty-one days. This is a way of receiving siddhi in tantric Buddhism, a form of collective practice for great accomplishment.

Speaking of collective practice, it is not exclusive to Tibetan Buddhism, but also exists in other Buddhist traditions. The Pratyutpanna Samadhi practice is one example. Although I have never participated in such practice, I learned that during the practice, participants keep walking while chanting Amitabha nonstop throughout the duration without a moment of sitting or lying down for rest, however tired they may be. It is a very ascetic practice. But for those who can abide in the deep concentration on Amitabha and constantly visualize Amitabha, it is not a hardship but a great accomplishment in receiving Amitabha's powerful blessing.

For the Ksitigarbha practice, you can attend a Dharma assembly for collective practice, or you can do it by yourself or with other Dharma friends. You may perform the practice by following the instruction here—make offerings, place pure water before Ksitigarbha, and

concentrate on the chanting of his name. Although many Han Buddhists are accustomed to reciting the *Ksitigarbha Sutra*, few would practice according to what is described here. I hope that they would also engage in such practice in the future and gain wisdom from the blessed water.

## Dispel Misfortune

**“Beings who are poor or afflicted by illnesses,  
Whose households are in misfortune and decline,  
whose relatives are scattered,  
Whose sleep and dreams are not peaceful,  
Who cannot obtain whatever they seek—having nothing  
go their way—  
Should wholeheartedly gaze up at and make obeisance  
to Ksitigarbha’s image.  
All the bad things will dissolve,  
And their dreams will be peaceful, too,  
Food and clothing abundant, and spirits and ghosts will  
protect them.**

The situations described in the root verses—poverty, disease, misfortunes occurring to the household, the separation of family members and relatives, suffering from insomnia and nightmares, and not being able to get what one seeks—are the miseries that

ordinary people find most distressing. If those who are being challenged by any of these miseries earnestly behold and pay homage to Ksitigarbha's image, all these adverse situations will simply be lifted from them, and even their dreams will be totally peaceful. They will obtain ample food and clothing and will always be protected by ghosts and spirits.

### **1 Poverty and Illness**

There is no doubt that different people have different fortunes due to their individual karma. Some are extremely poor while some are well-off. For those who enjoy much wealth due to their previous virtuous karma, they should invest part of their fortune in practicing virtues. You should consider your next life while you enjoy your freedom as a human being in this life. Regrettably, many people who are blessed with wealth are often stingy and fail to consider accumulating merit for their future lives. Our lifespan is so limited and we can almost predict how long we will be in this world. When you leave this world, can you take any of your possessions along with you? Therefore, it would be wise to spend what you have now on things that are meaningful.

This does not mean that you should give everything away to such an extent that you will have to scrape by. That would be overdoing it. For those who are not so well endowed with wealth, however

devout they may be, I think they should make sure that they have enough for themselves. Conversely, those who are better off should use more for meritorious deeds, and not keep so much for themselves as if they are planning to live for ten thousand years.

We all should be aware of impermanence. While my own practice is not perfect in many aspects, I do have a good sense of impermanence. Whenever I encounter people who are admired by others because of their wealth, high positions, appearance, or the like, the feeling of impermanence is often my first reaction. For example, when someone has been newly elected as a president and is receiving the compliments of everyone, I would feel that it would not be something that lasts because “what has been high will be brought low.” When someone is recognized for being extremely wealthy, what comes to my mind is “what has been accumulated will be exhausted.” The concept of impermanence has been deeply rooted in my mind, even before I started my formal education in Buddhism at the age of 23. This perception was not cultivated deliberately. I feel I was born with the awareness of impermanence. Wherever I go, whatever I do, whenever it is, I always have a strong sense of impermanence.

Nonetheless, unlike those who often misunderstand the concept of impermanence, it does not make me in any way pessimistic, dispirited, or slack in my life and work. Instead, I cherish whatever

I do even more. I understand that everything in the world is no different from a dream and that there is nothing worthy of grasping onto. However, while we are still in the dream and not capable of waking from it, we must endeavor to accumulate as much merit as possible so that we can gain more opportunities to be rid of the dream. That is why I have never lost faith in life or become particularly weary and unwilling to do anything.

Impermanence manifests in many aspects of our life. Such a feeling is particularly strong when I see people in distressed circumstances. It made me think about how they have gotten themselves into such a wretched state. They must have been excessively stingy, robbed others of their possessions, or engaged in this kind of non-virtuous deeds in their previous lives. The impermanent nature of wealth means that those who are wealthy now cannot guarantee that they will continue to be rich in their future lives. Whether they would be exposed to the unbearable situations of poverty remains uncertain.

## **2 Family Misfortunes and Separation of Family Members**

Bad Feng Shui in the house may cause a family to be overwhelmed by misfortune and decline, or when family members experience their year of misfortune, for instance, as predicted according to their Eight Characters of Birth (Ba Zi), many inauspicious things

would happen. To some families, these unfortunate events would come one after another uninterruptedly. As the old saying goes, misfortunes never come alone. Often troubles would arrive in groups and cause misery for the whole family.

There are also many who suffer from the pain of separation from their families and relatives, their loved ones, or being divorced. Speaking of divorce, it is now common in the West for couples to sign a prenuptial agreement, or “prenup” for short, that would spell out how their wealth and property are to be divided, if their marriage ends in separation, especially by death or divorce. I heard that this now is also increasingly common in big cities of China.

In the Tibetan regions, however, this practice seems to remain virtually unknown and rare. You may be surprised by the marriage customs of Tibetan herders. They are quite different from those of other ethnic groups. Generally, when a Tibetan man and woman get married, both of their families will offer some yaks, usually dozens from each side to the new couple for them to raise together as their common property. The new couple would live in a new tent, usually a black one in the old days, as their new home. When they divorced, they would herd the yaks given by their own families back to where they came from and tear the tent in half so that each of them could take away the half. But since once the tent is split in half it would become sort of useless, they would often count the

tent as one property and identify something else that is equivalent in value to the tent, say yaks or coral, and then they would draw lots to decide who gets which property.

Nowadays, most of the tents in which Tibetan herders live are white. The other day, I called my sister to find out how she was doing. It turned out that she had just helped a relative herd his yaks back home. “Didn’t you help him send the yaks away last year? And now he is bringing them back?” I asked. “Yes! It hasn’t even been a year since he got married, but now they are divorced!” “Did they live in a white tent? Who gets the tent?” “The woman.”

At times, hearing something like this can provide a favorable condition for our practice. Think about it, when they got married, they happily gathered their yaks and herded them together. After less than one year, they divorced and took back their own yaks and other property with a broken heart. The joining and parting in our life, which constantly happen, demonstrate the true reality of impermanence. For ordinary people, a perfect and happy family is always desirable, whereas divorce, along with other misfortunes such as bankruptcy and layoff, is very painful for them because they have to start over in a different situation and that they may even be judged by others, facing a lot of pressure.

Often when people are faced with judgments from others, especially from the public, they would make excuses and blame others (pass the buck). Buck-passing is now not only common among countries in international politics, it is also widespread among ordinary people. We even see this kind of blame game and irresponsibility among the volunteers who work for the sangha. For example, when a volunteer is dismissed by a department, instead of reviewing what he has done wrong, he would try to pass the buck to others saying that it is because someone has told on him, or because this tulku, that guru, or another abbot, has said something negative. We can see that unfavorable things in life create discomfort and make us feel pain. When something unexpected happens, we would often find it difficult to face up to them, especially when we lack wisdom or a certain level of realization gained from Dharma practice.

### **3 Insomnia and Dashed Hopes**

There are those who often suffer from restless sleep and bad dreams. More and more are afflicted with different levels of insomnia caused by a number of reasons such as poor diets, stress, angst, and anxiety. In the old days, despite the poor economic conditions, most people did not have such problems. However, nowadays if someone says that he has had a good night's sleep, others may become envious and say how blessed he is. Being unable to sleep well is indeed a

great pain. If insomnia sufferers pray to Ksitigarbha, they may be able to sleep well and sound without the need of any medication.

Another situation that is difficult to deal with and leads to suffering is when we are unable to get what we want. There are people whose efforts are always thwarted, and nothing goes their way. Some people seem to be quite unfortunate in all aspects of their lives and things often go against their wishes. Their health is not good; their financial status is poor; others always look down on them; they cannot have a good relationship with others; they are always in a negative mindset; their spiritual practice is getting worse and worse. It is as if they have been driven into a dead corner and their whole world is gray and gloomy. Their misfortunes are so overwhelming that they do not know how to carry on and some may even contemplate ending their own lives.

The sutra says that these unfavorable circumstances can be averted by praying to Ksitigarbha and that anyone who acts accordingly will be protected by local gods and spirits so that all things in their life will go smoothly and all their wishes would be readily fulfilled. It would be really helpful as one faces the difficulties in life if one has internalized certain Buddhist teachings and even better if he has gained a level of realization of these teachings. Such personal experience of the Dharma would undoubtedly require devoted faith and an in-depth study and contemplation of the Dharma. As

a follower of Buddhism, it is especially meaningful to receive the blessing and protection of the Buddha by virtue of our genuine faith, and gain realization of the truth of the Dharma with the superior wisdom gained from a thorough study and contemplation of the Dharma. With this faith and realization, we would never be bothered by any adversities in life.

As a result of their sense of superiority in their religions and culture that was based on their advanced development of science and economy, some westerners, including certain scholars and religious people, had marginalized oriental religious traditions. Since western societies had produced many prominent scientists and the western economy had performed strongly over a long period of time, it is natural for people to be arrogant if they think they are more intelligent and have more wealth than others. Since the 1950s, however, societal and economic instability has led to a spiritual crisis where western traditions and cultures have failed to provide sufficient spiritual nourishment. Young people began to feel the need to seek alternative forms of religious experience and expression, Buddhism in particular, to supplement the existential longing that they were encountering in their own lives. Some even started to travel to Asia to places like Nepal, Tibet, and India in search of teachers and gurus, and to receive Buddhist meditation training, through which they gained great spiritual wealth.

As they began to gradually let go of their arrogance over eastern spirituality, they realized that even if they had gained everything they could in the world, such as affluence, fame, and advanced scientific and technological resources, none of these truly helped them ease their suffering in life or solve their puzzles in their minds. Surprisingly, it was through the teaching and practice of eastern spirituality that they were able to find the cure to their life's problems. Because of this growing interest in Buddhism among westerners, when Tibetan lamas traveled to the West at about the same time and brought with them the precious Vajrayana teachings, including Dzogchen instructions, they soon attracted a substantial number of followers who were seriously receptive to those teachings.

When I talked to some of the senior professors I met in the United States on my lecture tours there, they often recalled the arrogant American attitudes around the 1970s after the US had established herself as the world's preeminent power in almost every respect after World War II. But this predominance did not offer Americans a path out when they were spiritually challenged. It was indeed the eastern Buddhist training they received that inspired them, especially the training they received from the many Tibetan Buddhist masters who traveled to the US at that time. Those great

masters were not simply eminent in reputation, they truly possessed supreme spiritual power that could tame and transform the minds of numerous people. They helped dispel their doubts at many levels which allowed them to gain wisdom and peace of the mind, the most significant benefit for us ordinary people.

For those of us Dharma practitioners who have received systematic Buddhist training, we should think about which teaching is appropriate as a medicine for different people to solve their mental afflictions and to dispel their doubts and wrong views. Some practitioners only desperately focus on their own personal training, panicking, "How can I help myself? I am so afflicted by my destructive emotions. What should I do? I am so miserable." They are constantly focused on their own struggles with their own afflictions, never thinking of helping other beings. Although it is indeed difficult for practitioners who have not freed themselves from the dreamlike samsara to truly inspire other sentient beings, whenever our affliction eases, we should think about how we can better benefit other sentient beings.

## THE SECRET OF MIND

Given the importance of science in modern societies, Buddhists, either lay practitioners or monastics, should put more efforts into the collaboration between science and Buddhism. Although we will not be able to explore every scientific topic in this short lifetime, it would be important for us to do more research and gain a mastery of the viewpoints of both science and Buddhism in areas such as those related to the mind, spiritual practice, and the existence of past and future lives to find topics that can inspire modern people.

### Does the Mind Come from Matter?

Take the example of the mind. Up to now, scientific research on the human mind has remained almost fruitless. A prevailing consensus among materialists and scientists is that the mind is generated by a material substance, the brain. However, as for how and in what way the brain creates the mind, no scientist has elucidated it, at least not in a convincing way. Some scientists provide seemingly logical

explanations, but if we take a close examination, their assumption and conclusion cannot be proven by their experimental technology and their empirical approach. They assume that the mind has no entity of its own but is only a physical process in the same sense as lightning or photosynthesis. But in fact, they can only observe the neural correlates of experiences, not the experiences themselves, not to mention the mind itself. Or they think that the mind is a product of the organization of energetic activity in the brain, but the very nature of energy itself, as they have admitted, still remains mysterious and they do not understand how it contributes to the generation of consciousness.

As explained in Buddhist logic, to understand how the mind arises, we must identify its right cause. Just like an apple seed would only bear the fruit of apple, the right cause is necessary to generate a given object. To establish the relationship of causality between the brain and the mind, there must be explicit and valid logical evidence, rather than some correlations or interactions between the two. When I ask people, including some brain scientists I have met who believe that the mind is a physical phenomenon going on inside the brain, how exactly the brain generates the mind, they seem to be unable to give a sensible answer. It is indeed necessary for Buddhists to engage in discussions with brain scientists on this issue. Over the years, many great Buddhist

masters in the West have had conversations with neuroscientists and brain experts in this regard, through which many scientists have acknowledged the Buddha's teaching on the mind to be enlightening and instructive.

Why do scientists hold the view that it is the brain which produces the mind? Studies show that the human brain, whether it be the cerebrum (front of brain) or the cerebellum (little brain), is covered with numerous nerves, and the human brain has roughly 86 billion neurons and as many glial cells, however the exact number of neurons and glial cells remains unknown. These numerous neurons talk to each other using a combination of electrical and chemical (electrochemical) signals, forming a very complicated nervous system. Therefore, scientists try to define the mind as the product of brain activity: According to the classic argument, the brain is the physical substance, and the mind is the conscious product of those firing neurons.

Such a description of the brain, however, is not exclusive to science. In Buddhism, although no obvious description or analysis on the topic of the brain is found in Abhidharma, it is elucidated in Tantrayana texts, Kriyatantra and Charyatantra in particular. For example, while science talks about neurons and the nervous system, tantric Buddhism talks about subtle channels within the human body. Generally, there are 72,000 subtle channels within the

human body and five hundred in the human brain, the working of which enables sensations to be possible, in a manner similar to the way the nervous system energizes the physical body.

It is believed that the human brain is the most complex biological structure known to scientists, and so far, they have not figured out how exactly it works. According to neuroscience, the brain is the center of consciousness and controls all voluntary and involuntary movement and bodily functions. It can be divided into different sections with each section governing certain functions—some control memory, some pressure, some consciousness, some sensations and emotions, etc. It communicates with each part of the body through the nervous system, a network of channels that carry electrochemical signals. Because the brain has this important function, brain health issues can have detrimental effects on the rest of the body. Damage to a certain section of the brain may cause a loss of certain bodily function. For instance, the virus that causes COVID-19 can cause widespread brain dysfunction, resulting in nervous system problems and mental health issues, some of which may linger long after recovery from the acute illness.

## **Buddhist View on the Mind**

Based on these studies, it is accurate to say that the brain plays a vital role in all the functions of the body, but this is far from enough

to prove that the mind is generated by the brain. From a Buddhist point of view, the focus of scientific research has only been on the coarse level of consciousnesses and has no ability to touch its deeper and subtler levels. According to tantric teaching, our sense consciousnesses rely on brain functions to perceive the external and internal world. Within the brain, like a remote controller, there are subtle channels controlling all the body's functions through the nervous system and exerting different levels of influence on the mind, or the eight sets of consciousness in Buddhist terminology, i.e., the five sense consciousnesses, the mind consciousness, the defiled mental consciousness, and the all-ground consciousness. The subtle channels within the brain do have an impact on our mind but they do not produce the mind. Further, Buddhism delves into the ultimate nature of the mind, such as primordial wisdom, buddha nature, or Dharmakaya, which completely transcends conceptual thoughts and material approaches.

Given the complexity of the mind, it is understandable that scientists would miss the deep level of the mind and instead just focus on the obvious experiences from which they try to identify consciousness. They apply various methods, models, and tools, for example, dissecting and analyzing the human brain or animal models, mostly, mice and rats, or observing and comparing the brain activities of patients in comatose states and patients in awake

states, and collect a lot of data trying to figure out which part of the brain is responsible for consciousness. Their research is significant to human beings, providing a way to discover and test new and effective treatments for human nervous system disorders. Scientists believe that it is possible to identify the specific neurons and brain pathways affected in mental disorders or diseases and then to develop effective treatments for the patients. Nevertheless, there is no solid evidence proving that the mind is just a physical process or a product of the brain activity that can be detected by instruments or quantifiable data.

Let us assume that consciousness is generated from the brain but since the brain can be divided into many different sections, which part does it actually come from, the cerebrum, the cerebellum, or some other parts? No scientist has provided any evidence to identify the exact location yet. Instead, more and more scientists have started to believe the immaterial nature of the mind based on their decades-long research on the human brain. Some found that patients with massive brain damage were shown to still have a mental life. Some think the evidence from neuroscientific research on the relationship between the mind and the brain best fits the idea that certain powers, particularly the intellect and will, are not generated by matter but are immaterial. Dr. Peter Fenwick, a highly regarded neuropsychiatrist who has been studying the

human brain and consciousness for 50 years, believes his extensive research suggests that consciousness actually exists independently and outside of the brain as an inherent property of the universe itself like dark matter and dark energy or gravity.

Because it is not our focus, Buddhism does not analyze in detail how exactly the brain works, such as the neural connections for sensations, neural pathways and networks for certain functions, and so on. The primary concern of Buddhism is to help people understand the suffering of birth, old age, sickness, and death, how they are trapped in the cycle of samsara, and how to break free from it by ascertaining the philosophy of the selflessness of the individual and the selflessness of phenomena. This realization is the only way out of samsara. This is the top priority of Buddhism.

Tulku Tenzin Gyatso was quite versed in many aspects of Tantrayana, and he wrote a book on the cranial nervous system in early times which contains an analysis of the brain and the mind. Unfortunately, it is only available in Tibetan so non-Tibetan readers cannot get access to it. From the Buddhist point of view, consciousness exists independently of the brain and it continues from life to life. A mind in this life comes from the previous life. It is implanted with the habitual tendencies and karma accumulated in numerous past lives and will continue to take rebirth to the next life as long as one has not broken free from samsara. I think it is much easier

and more logical to understand if we describe the mind in this context.

If consciousness is just the product of brain activity without a stream-like continuum, as some scientists claim, then many things related to the mind such as habitual tendencies, karmic seeds, and memories about previous lives will be difficult to explain. Many researchers have tried to explain personal characteristics, mental health, and the mind with scientific methods but their research findings are often ambiguous and not very convincing. A number of eminent scientists have dedicated decades or even life-long efforts to these issues and have become authorities in their fields of study. Although their scientific spirit is truly splendid and praiseworthy, their findings are not always satisfactory because human beings' dualistic thoughts and data collection have fundamental limitations.

As Buddhists, we should always pay attention to the study of the mind in both Buddhism and science such that when someone challenges the Buddhist view as untenable that it is the mind that produces the mind, we would not feel doubt or be easily persuaded by them. Among all Buddhist teachings, the most unique one is the teaching on the mind, on where the mind comes and where it goes, and how to recognize the nature of the mind. This is a concept that is exclusive to Buddhism and remains mysterious to science or any

other religion in the world. The deeper you study and practice the teaching, the more you will find it fascinating and truthful. For people who have not studied or practiced it, however, they tend to think that all theories from various religions and science are no different.

When I was in middle school, one of my teachers was fascinated with materialism and brain science. In his class, he would use many analogies to talk about the cranial nervous system. It was quite interesting. But as a materialist, he rejected the Buddhist view of the existence of previous and future lives. I sort of formed a prejudice against him and when he was teaching, I did not pay any attention. I was quite an intelligent and energetic student then and I should have tried to learn more from him. But because of our biases toward each other, I just wasted my time and I regret that today. When a teacher fails to make a good first impression, we would find it difficult to accept them, no matter what he or she says. This could also happen with spiritual masters. For the lost learning opportunity, the loss is on us, not on the teacher.

**“Those wishing to enter mountains or forests or cross  
the seas**

**Where there are ferocious fowls and beasts, evil people,**

**Evil spirits, evil ghosts, and evil winds—**

**All sorts of calamities and various distresses—**

**Should gaze reverently, pay obeisance, and make offerings  
To the image of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, the Great Being.  
In the mountains, forests, and on the great seas,  
Those evils will all disappear.**

[Khenpo skipped these two verses and explained them in the next lecture.]

# EXHORTATION TO PROPAGATE KSITIGARBHA PRACTICE

“Avalokitesvara, wholeheartedly listen to me.  
Endless are the inconceivable [matters] of Ksitigarbha.  
In hundreds of thousands of myriads of kalpas the  
description is still not complete,  
To extensively expound on such powers of this  
Great Being!  
If people hear the name ‘Ksitigarbha’  
And see his image, reverently gaze, pay obeisance,  
Make offerings of incense, flowers, clothing, food,  
and drink,  
They will experience wonderful happiness for hundreds  
of thousands [of kalpas].  
If they can dedicate such merit to the Dharma Realm,  
They will go beyond the cycle of birth and death, and  
ultimately become Buddhas.  
Therefore, Avalokitesvara, you should know this

**And tell everyone throughout lands as many as  
Ganges' sand."**

The Buddha summarized that Ksitigarbha's merit is inconceivable, and even a time as long as hundreds of thousands of myriads of kalpas is still too short to describe fully his inconceivable powers. People who hear his name, see his image, and who revere him, pay homage, and make offerings to him will enjoy all the supreme happiness of humans and gods for countless kalpas. If they dedicate such merit to the supreme awakening of sentient beings, they will transcend the cycle of birth and death and ultimately become buddhas. Since the qualities of Ksitigarbha is so inconceivable, the Buddha told Avalokiteshvara that he should tell everyone throughout all different worlds that they should devotedly supplicate Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva.

When Larung Gar was holding the annual Ksitigarbha Dharma Assembly, His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche would emphasize that we should make offerings of flowers, lamps, water and so on as bountifully as possible. There were not many offerings of flowers during other Dharma assemblies, but during Ksitigarbha Dharma Assembly, the entire shrine hall was decorated fully with plastic flowers. Back then, we had only a small shrine hall, and the flowers we could get were all plastic flowers which may not seem very attractive today. But still, when the assembly was over,

the flowers would be sold and monastics would buy them back to their homes. Because they were laid out on the road for sale, most of those flowers were filled with dust. That simple and rough life reminds me of our pure and strong devotion to Ksitigarbha. What a beautiful scene!

# **Lecture Twenty-Five**

**September 1st, 2020**

## WORDS IN THE BEGINNING

Before today's teaching, I would like to address a few things.

### Regulations at Larung Gar

In spite of the many unexpected events so far this year, including the pandemic, practitioners at Larung Gar are still able to continue with their Dharma study and practice. Although we have not been able to carry the same curriculum as before—courses were occasionally disrupted and exams had to be canceled—by and large, we have not been affected too much. Notably, khenpos and khenmos are resolute as ever in the teaching and administration of the Han sangha, overcoming all kinds of hardship and obstacles. I hope this would motivate all of you to exert yourselves in Dharma study and practice as we have been accustomed to.

Regarding the management of all the activities here at Larung Gar, we always adhere to the laws and regulations of the government even though they have gotten to be stricter over the past few years. Everyone here has been admitted in accordance with legal

requirements. Since 2017, we have not been allowed to enroll any new students in either the monastery or the nunnery at Larung Gar. In addition, regular students have to be over the age of 18 and under the age of 40.

For you temporary visitors, please conform to our regulations. Even if you are just visiting for a short period of time, from several days to a few months, I hope you will cooperate with our administration. In the past, many guest students had stayed for as long as a couple of years without being administered by any class or department. Given the difficulty of management, we will no longer accept such students going forward. We have had internal discussions over this matter and have not yet reached a final decision. There is a lot to take into consideration when managing such a big academy.

Please understand that Larung Gar is a formal Buddhist academy that has strict admission requirements, not a school for children nor a care home for the aged. If you are unable to meet these requirements, I urge you to consider other alternatives for your Dharma study and practice. Since the capacity and resources of Larung Gar are quite limited and it is under the strict supervision of the government, we simply cannot accommodate too many people. We will take everything into account but we will need to have a new set of policies, especially for guest students. The policy is still being finalized.

During this time, I hope that people would carefully consider and refrain from any impulsive decision to come to Larung Gar for long stay. A Buddhist academy is certainly not a place where you can just come and go casually. Larung Gar is a prestigious Buddhist academy on a sacred land. I hope everyone will respect our rules and regulations. It would be shameful if your actions, as a Buddhist, especially a Mahayana Buddhist, purposely disregard our rules out of self-centered aims and motives and cause harm to the academy.

## Newly Published Books

The second topic concerns my newly published books. My Chinese translation of *A Feast of the Nectar of the Supreme Vehicle: An Explanation of The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras* was recently published. It is a two-volume collection of Ju Mipham Rinpoche's commentary on Maitreya's *The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*. I spent four years translating it, and after completing the translation, I taught 111 lectures on it during a period of four years. Many people attended the teaching at that time. Back then, we could only provide a simple print copy of the text and I told you that you could get a better version when it is published. Now, it is available both online and in physical bookstores.

Last year, several of my translations were also published, including Jamyang Loter Wangpo's *A Lamp Illuminating Vasubandhu's Intention*, the commentary on the *Treasury of Abhidharma*, Ju Mipham's *Words to Delight My Master Manjughosha*, the commentary on *The Adornment of the Middle Way*, and Ju Mipham's *Commentary on Nagarjuna's Root Stanzas of the Middle Way*. Many years ago, after translating these texts, I taught all of them to the Han sangha at Larung Gar. The commentary on the *Treasury of Abhidharma* took 160 lectures from 2003 to 2004. The commentary on *The Root Stanzas of the Middle Way* took 114 lectures in 2004. The commentary on *The Adornment of the Middle Way* took 128 lectures from 2005 to 2006. We only have audio recordings of these teachings because we had not started to record the videos back then.

Usually, I would do the translations before my lectures, and then as I lectured, I would proofread and revise any inaccuracy in the translations. Therefore, before these books were put into print, I had proofread them several times and made corrections or adjustments where necessary. These published texts should be high-quality translations.

It is good that these Dharma books can be circulated under the protection of the commercial law. As the printing and publishing policy are tightened, it has become difficult to purchase hard copies of Dharma texts. I would advise you to treasure the ones

that are available so you would not feel any regret when they are no long available in the future. I know that when I give teachings, sometimes people complain that they do not have the printed text. But when they are made available, sometimes people do not cherish them very much at all.

Since Dharma books may not be always available, it would be advised for you to collect them for your own study when you have the opportunity. It is not a requirement and I am not advertising my books. But for me, wherever I go, whether on a trip abroad or elsewhere, I love to visit bookstores and buy a wide range of books. This has been a habit of mine. Except for books, I feel that everything else, including even things with great utility, is not so meaningful to me.

### **New Course on *The Sutra of Great Liberation***

The third thing is that starting next Monday, I am going to teach *The Sutra of Great Liberation*. Its full Chinese name is *The Noble Vaipulya Adornment Sutra of Great Liberation Which Purifies Negativities through Confession and Leads to Buddhahood*. I had initially planned to teach it at a later time. Then I decided that such an important subject should not be postponed because none of us knows what will happen to us in the future. That was why I decided to start this new

course next week. Because I have many other matters to manage, we may not finish the full sutra this year.

It is our custom to have a tantric course every year and this year, *The Sutra of Great Liberation* is what we will study because it is also classified as a tantra in the Tibetan Buddhist Canon. The requirements for attending a tantric teaching are usually quite strict and my requirement for this teaching is simple—if you want to participate, you need to attend all the lectures from the beginning to the end without fail. For those of you who are already here at Larung Gar, you may come to the shrine hall to listen. For people elsewhere who also have strong faith in this sutra and would like to receive the teaching, the requirement is the same. There is no need to publicize the upcoming lectures to too many people. I have noticed with the *Ksitigarbha Sutra* and other courses that online attendance was always higher in the sessions at the beginning and the end than the ones in the middle. Skipping Dharma teaching lectures is not the right attitude.

On my part, it is indeed propitious to teach *The Sutra of Great Liberation* now because I have the pure transmission and I feel this is the right timing for giving this teaching. I hope that after receiving this teaching that you will propagate it to others. As far as I know, despite its enormous merit, this sutra is seldom taught and propagated in the Han region and elsewhere outside of the

Tibetan region. In the Tibetan region, it is highly regarded as a great teaching with profound instructions for attaining supreme enlightenment. Being taught by the Buddha before his demonstration of parinirvana under the twin sal trees on the fifteenth day of the second month, this sutra is one of the last precious teachings that the Buddha left with all of us in the world.

The sutra contains many pith instructions, like how to make confession and purify negative karma, how to gain realization of emptiness, how to make great aspirations to liberate sentient beings, and so on. The Buddha also mentioned the abundant merit of this sutra, one of which was that encountering it is rarer than meeting tathagatas. As he said, “To hear the name of this sutra is to hear the Buddha; to behold this sutra is to behold the Buddha; to keep this sutra is to have the presence of the Buddha; to practice this sutra is to engage in the activity of the Buddha...” This sutra is truly meritorious and I believe you will benefit a lot from this teaching.

I always carefully consider which sutra or shastra to teach before making my final decision. I am pleased that I always provided teachings that helped you cultivate great faith in them and that you felt fortunate and derived joy in learning them. Many of you have expressed a wish to have the opportunity to study them again and to share these teachings with others. I think the same will go

for this sutra and that you would feel so blessed after receiving the teaching. I feared initially that we may not have the printed texts but our circulation center has managed to print them out. As you can see with these loose pages here, although the quality of the binding is not so great, at least we will have the printed copy.

Since I announced that I will be teaching this sutra a few days ago, there has been a tremendous response from people outside of Larung Gar. They have begun to print hard copies of this sutra with different cover designs and have begun to ship large numbers of them here from different places. It is likely that later on, each of you would get several copies of this sutra. If you think that you have too many copies, you may keep the best one for yourselves and send the others to your Dharma friends. Just joking! For people outside of Larung Gar who want to receive this teaching, you may download the text online and print it out. It will not cost much since it is not a thick book. This sutra is part of the Taisho Tripitaka so you can easily find the sutra online, either in traditional Chinese or simplified Chinese. There is still a week before the start of the teaching and those who are interested and want to study this sutra should make the necessary preparations to arrange their schedules and get the text of the sutra ready.

## PROTECT YOU FROM EVILS

In the last lecture, I was informed after class that I had missed a couple of verses. None of you pointed out my omissions during the lecture, not even those who were helping me make my lecture notes. Perhaps you also failed to notice it, or you were just reluctant to tell me. In the future, if the teacher misses some parts of the text or read incorrectly when giving the transmission or teaching, you should raise your hands and inform the teacher. Many of you are not very quiet when you come to the shrine hall, speaking and chatting loudly. Yet you fail to speak when it is necessary—to remind a teacher of his careless omission during the teaching. It is ill-mannered to chat at the shrine hall, but when a teacher carelessly skips certain parts of the text, which may happen sometimes, it is necessary to point it out.

**“Those wishing to enter mountains or forests or cross the seas  
Where there are ferocious fowls and beasts, evil people,  
Evil spirits, evil ghosts, and evil winds—  
All sorts of calamities and various distresses—**

**Should gaze reverently, pay obeisance, and make offerings  
To the image of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, the Great Being.  
In the mountains, forests, and on the great seas,  
Those evils will all disappear.**

Suppose one is going to climb the mountains, cross the seas, or pass through some dangerous places where there are a lot of vicious animals, malicious people, or demonic spirits, and where disasters and misfortunes could occur frequently. As long as this person prays to Ksitigarbha by chanting his name, beholding his image, paying homage, and making offerings to him, then these kinds of dangers will vanish immediately.

In the future, we will probably encounter life-threatening disasters or horrible situations in our lives. When faced with these situations, remember to pray to Ksitigarbha or other powerful deities like Tara or Avalokiteshvara, the potent savior in times of life-threatening danger. We can also recite prayers of taking refuge in the Three Jewels,

*Namo Buddhaya*

*Namo Dharmaya*

*Namo Sanghaya*

*I go for refuge in the Buddha,  
I go for refuge in the Dharma,  
I go for refuge in the Sangha.*

Through such prayers, these horrors and calamities will disappear. Even though modern technology and inventions have brought us a lot of convenience and safety, from time to time, we may still have to go on a perilous journey, like traveling through some dark or uninhabited areas as it was the case in the past.

I had a frightening travel experience when I was in the middle school. At that time, I had to board at the school and unlike today, it was difficult for us to go home. The journey was long and inconvenient, and we had to walk for a long time to get to our families. As you know, nomads had no permanent abode and they lived in tents and traveled from place to place to find fresh pasture for their yaks. It was not unusual that they moved many times during a year. Because we had no phones to contact each other, sometimes, we would have to walk over many hills and valleys to find our families.

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro once wrote about such an experience in his book. It was the second year he came to Larung Gar. One day he got a message from his parents saying that they wanted to see him urgently and asked him to come home. He traveled to the

place where his family used to stay but didn't find them. Then, he inquired of their whereabouts from the neighbors. After walking and searching hills after hills, he finally found them in another location.

Back to my story, it happened during a winter holiday. When everything at school was finished and I was ready to go, it was already noon. Usually, it would take me a whole day to walk home, but since I was missing my parents very much and they were also eagerly waiting for me, I embarked on my journey home mid-day. When I was only halfway through the journey, it got dark and the only way home was through a large forest. I was alone and had no torch in my hand. There were many roads in the forest, but only one would lead me to my home. It was very difficult to find and worse still, there were two places along the road with especially horror stories.

A couple of years before, a tough and stout woman whom we were familiar with hanged herself to death on that road. After her suicide, many people claimed to have seen her haunting there, and many fell ill after encountering her. There were so many rumors about it. Also, there was another spot where many bandits were killed under a tree. People said that those dead often yelled out loud in the middle of the night. Many yak herders used to hear

those strange sounds and had been chased after by their ghosts, when they searched for their lost yaks to that area.

The road was particularly terrifying at night. As I walked along it, I kept chanting prayers all the way, either praying to the Three Jewels or supplicating Tara. I didn't dare to chant too loudly, for fear that my voice would attract the attention of that woman's ghost. Occasionally, I heard various strange sounds, probably rats and the like as I now recall. But at that time, whenever I heard a little sound, I was so scared that all my hair stood on end.

It was really scary and I was so petrified that at times I could not even continue to walk and had to sit still for a while. Because people used to describe her story very vividly, whenever I sat for a rest, I couldn't stop thinking of the dead woman, how she was hanged, how many people saw her ghost later on, and how those people fell sick afterwards. But thanks to the blessing of Tara and the Three Jewels, I finally got home safely. If I remember correctly, I arrived at our family's tent at around 2 a.m.

I was less than twenty years old at that time, and I think about that experience often. Last year, when I returned home and passed by that forest, I asked my little brother, "Wasn't that the place where the woman hanged herself?" "Yes," answered my brother. That place was very well known for its danger to the local people. I

think I was rather brave that night and I bet many of you would not want to have such an experience. Although nothing miraculous happened that directly demonstrated the blessing of the Three Jewels, at least through my praying, I felt less afraid and could calm myself down. My point is that in life, we will unavoidably encounter terrible or awful situations, like having nightmares, being haunted by horrible spirits, or facing threats from wicked people. All these troubles can be pacified by praying to Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, in particular, by chanting his name 10,000 times as said several times in this sutra.



## Chapter Thirteen

*Entrusting Humans and Devas*

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

—Khenpo Sodargye

# **Lecture Twenty-Five**

**(Continued)**

**September 1st, 2020**

## THE BUDDHA'S ENTRUSTMENT

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

### Chapter Thirteen

#### Entrusting Humans and Devas

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

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



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

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

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

The *Sutra of the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha* enumerates many of Ksitigarbha's incredible qualities, one being that even in the short time of a meal, Ksitigarbha can liberate an incalculable number of sentient beings in innumerable worlds. He carries on his enlightenment activities every moment and in every world of the ten directions. His abilities and deeds of benefiting sentient beings are so infinite and unbelievably great that not only we ordinary

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

## Essential Qualities for Spreading the Dharma

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

In his (Zurpoche) sixty-first year, when he had almost finished building the temple at Dropuk, that great man, an undeniable emanation who lived on the level of a holder of the awareness

of spontaneous presence, having fully realized the attributes of the five paths, resolved to transform his coarse body into its pure essential substance. He said, "Summon Zurchungpa from Trak Gyawo."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Neuroscience vs Buddhist Study on Consciousness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Buddha's Earnest Entrustment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

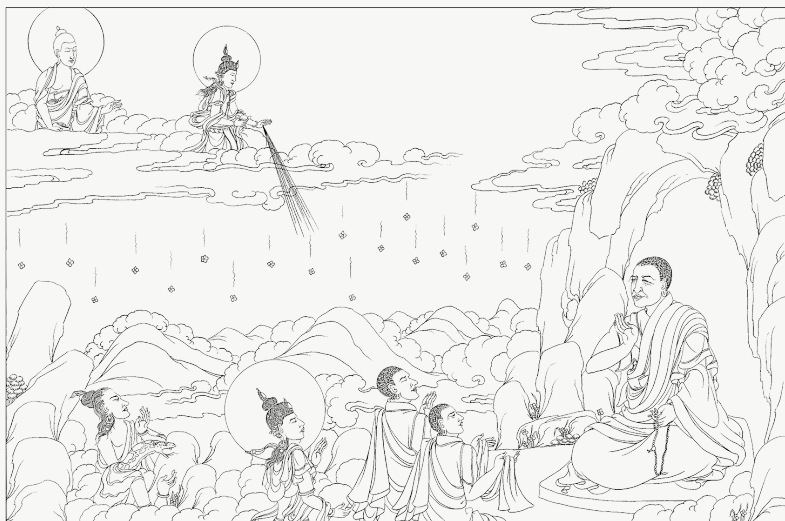
In order to liberate sentient beings of this world, Shakyamuni Buddha manifested thousands of millions of emanations to transform beings in various ways that accord with their capacities and temperaments. In Ashvaghosha's *Sutralankara*, it says,

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

**I now earnestly entrust to you:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Efficacy Story: The Power of Making Ksitigarbha Statue**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Ksitigarbha’s Commitment**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## BENEFITS OF WORSHIPING KSITIGARBHA

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

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

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



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

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

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

## Twenty-Eight Benefits for Human Beings



**“First, devas and nagas will protect them.**

**Second, their wholesome results will increase daily.**

**Third, they will accumulate superior causes for holiness.**

**Fourth, they will not retreat from bodhi.**

**Fifth, their food and clothing will be abundant.**

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

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

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

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

**Tenth, spirits and ghosts will aid and support them.**

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

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

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

Fourteenth, they will frequently be reborn in the heavens.

Fifteenth, they may be emperors or kings.

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

Seventeenth, they will fulfill their wishes.

Eighteenth, their family members will be happy.

Nineteenth, untoward dire occurrences will be eliminated.

Twentieth, they will forever leave the karmic paths.

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

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

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

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

Twenty-fifth, holy ones will praise them.

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

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

Twenty-eighth, they will ultimately become Buddhas.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7) One will not encounter flood or fire disasters.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

28) One will ultimately attain buddhahood.

## Seven Benefits for Nonhuman Spirits



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

**First, they will quickly ascend the stages of holiness.**

**Second, their unwholesome karma will dissolve.**

**Third, Buddhas will protect and be near them.**

**Fourth, they will not retreat from bodhi.**

**Fifth, their inherent powers will increase.**

**Sixth, they will know past lives.**

**Seventh, they will ultimately become Buddhas.”**

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

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

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

## THE PERFECT ENDING



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

May every household enjoy peace and happiness.

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

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

## Dedication

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

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

Please email us at: *translation@khenposodargye.org*



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