

# **The Amitabha Sutra**

**Translated into Chinese by Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva**

**Translated from Chinese into English by J.C. Cleary**

1.

Thus have I heard: Once Buddha was in the land of Shravasti, in the garden of Jeta and Anathapindika. He was accompanied by twelve hundred and fifty great Bhikshus, all of them great Arhats, well known to the assembly. Among them were his leading disciples, such figures as the Elders Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, Mahakashyapa, Maha Katyayana, and Mahakausthila, Revata, Suddhipanthaka, Nanda, Ananda, Rahula, Gavampati, Pindola-bharadvaja, Kalodayin, Mahakapphina, Vakula, and Aniruddha, etc., all great disciples. Also present were the Bodhisattvas Mahasattva: Manjushri, Prince of the Dharma, the Bodhisattva Ajita the Invincible, and the Bodhisattva of Constant Progress, Gandhahastin, Nityodyukta, and other such great enlightening beings. Also present was Shakra, the king of the gods, along with countless numbers of heavenly beings, making up a great assembly.

At that time Buddha said to the Elder Shariputra: "West of here, past a hundred billion Buddha-lands, there exists a world called "Ultimate Bliss". In this land there exists a Buddha called Amitabha, who is expounding the Dharma right now.

[Buddha says to Shariputra:] "Why is this land called Ultimate Bliss"? It is called "Ultimate Bliss" because the sentient beings in this land are free from the myriad sufferings, and only know every kind of joy.

2.

Furthermore, this land is called "Ultimate Bliss" because it is surrounded by seven rings of railings, and seven layers of nets, and seven rows of trees, all made of the four precious jewels.

Moreover, the Land of Ultimate Bliss has many jeweled ponds filled with the waters of eight virtues. The bottom of each of the ponds is pure golden sand, and the stepped walkways that lead up from all four sides of each of the ponds are made of gold, silver, lapis lazuli and crystal. Above the ponds there are towers which are adorned with silver and gold and lapis lazuli and crystal and mother of pearl and red agate. In the ponds there are lotus flowers as big as cart wheels: blue ones shining with blue light, yellow ones shining with yellow light, red ones shining with red light, and white ones shining with white light, each emitting a subtle pure fragrance.

The Land of Ultimate Bliss is complete with all these merits and adornments.

3.

And there is more—celestial music is constantly playing in this Buddha-land, and the ground is made of tawny gold. Flowers in the shape of heavenly orbs rain down at all hours of the day and night. Every morning the sentient beings of this land decorate their garments with multitudes of wondrous flowers and make offerings to hundreds of billions of Buddhas in other worlds. When it is meal time, they return to their own lands, to eat and circumambulate [the teaching assembly].

The Land of Ultimate Bliss is complete with all these merits and adornments.

And there is more still—in this land there are birds of all sorts of wondrous variegated colors: white cranes, peacocks, orioles, myna birds, cuckoos. All these birds bring forth harmonious songs day and night. Their songs communicate such Buddhist teachings as

the five roots, the five powers, the seven factors of awakening, the eightfold path, as well as other teachings. When the sentient beings in this land hear the voices of the birds, they are mindful of the Buddhas, mindful of the Dharma, and mindful of the Sangha.

Do not think that these birds were born as birds due to karmic retribution for past misdeeds. Why not? In this Buddha-land, the three evil planes of existence (as animals, hungry ghosts, and hell-beings) do not exist.

In this Buddha-land even the names of the evil planes of existence do not exist, much less the realities. All these birds are the creations of Amitabha Buddha, fashioned in order to broadcast the sounds of the Dharma.

4.

In this Buddha-land, there is a slight breeze that stirs the rows of jewel trees and jewel nets, so that they emit subtle wondrous sounds, like hundreds and thousands of melodies playing all at once. All those who hear these sounds spontaneously develop the intention to be mindful of the Buddha, mindful of the Dharma, and mindful of the Sangha.

This Buddha-land is complete with all these merits and adornments.

5.

What do you think: why is this Buddha called Amitabha?

The light of this Buddha is infinite, and shines on all lands throughout the universe without obstruction. Thus this Buddha is called Amitabha.

Also, the life span of this Buddha and his people is an infinite number of immeasurable eons, and so he is called Amitabha.

Amitabha Buddha attained awakening ten eons ago.

Moreover, this Buddha has innumerable disciples, all of whom are Arhats, and whose numbers are incalculable. Amitabha also has a following of innumerable Bodhisattvas.

The Land of Ultimate Bliss is complete with all these merits and adornments.

6.

None of the sentient beings who are born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss ever fall back into a lower realm [i.e., they are avavartika]. Many among them have only one more lifetime [to go before awakening]. These beings are very numerous, and their number is incalculable: they can be spoken of as innumerable.

When sentient beings hear [of the Land of Ultimate Bliss], they must take a vow to be born in this land. Why so? So that they can be together with all these beings of superior goodness.

7.

One cannot be born in this land through minor good roots, blessings, virtues and causal connections. If there are good men or good women who hear of Amitabha Buddha, and recite his name single-mindedly and without confusion, for one day or two days or three days or four days or five days or six days or seven days, then when these people are about to die, Amitabha Buddha and all the sages who are with him will appear before them. When these people die, their minds will not fall into delusion, and they will attain rebirth in Amitabha Buddha's Land of Ultimate Bliss.

8.

I have seen this benefit, and so I speak these words. If sentient beings hear what I say, they must make a vow to be born in that land.

Right now I am extolling the benefits of the inconceivable merits of Amitabha Buddha. But in the eastern direction there are also countless other Buddhas, like Akshobhya Buddha, and the Buddha "Marks of the Polar Mountain", and the Buddha "Great Polar Mountain", and the Buddha "Light of the Polar Mountain", and the Buddha "Wondrous Voice". Each of them preaches in his own land with the eloquence of a Buddha, and covers a whole cosmos, speaking the truth. All of you sentient beings should believe this scripture extolling their inconceivable merits, and which all Buddhas protect and keep in mind.

In the worlds of the southern direction there are countless other Buddhas, like the Buddha "Lamp of the Sun and Moon", and the Buddha "Light of Renown", and the Buddha "Great Flaming Shoulders", and the Buddha "Lamp of the Polar Mountain", and the Buddha "Infinite Progress". Each of them preaches in his own land with the eloquence of a Buddha, and covers a whole cosmos, speaking the truth. All of you sentient beings should believe this scripture extolling their inconceivable merits, and which all Buddhas protect and keep in mind.

In the worlds of the western direction there are countless other Buddhas, like the Buddha "Infinite Life", and the Buddha "Innumerable Characteristics", and the Buddha "Innumerable Banners", and the Buddha "Great Light", and the Buddha "Great Illumination", and the Buddha "Mark of Reality", and the Buddha "Light of Purity". Each of them preaches in his own land with the eloquence of a Buddha, and covers a whole cosmos, speaking the truth, All of you sentient beings should believe this scripture extolling their inconceivable merits, and which all Buddhas protect and keep in mind.

In the worlds of the northern direction there are countless other Buddhas, like the Buddha "Flaming Shoulders", and the Buddha "Supreme Voice", and the Buddha "Unstoppable", and the Buddha "Born of the Sun", and the Buddha "Netted Light". Each of them

preaches in his own land with the eloquence of a Buddha, and covers a whole cosmos, speaking the truth. All of you sentient beings should believe this scripture extolling their inconceivable merits, and which all Buddhas protect and keep in mind.

In the worlds of the nadir there are countless other Buddhas, like the Buddha "Lion", and the Buddha "Repute", and the Buddha "Light", and the Buddha "Dharma Banner", and the Buddha "Upholding the Dharma". Each of them preaches in his own land with the eloquence of a Buddha, and covers a whole cosmos, speaking the truth. All of you sentient beings should believe this scripture extolling their inconceivable merits, and which all Buddhas protect and keep in mind.

In the worlds of the zenith there are countless other Buddhas, like the Buddha "Pure Voice", and the Buddha "Sojourner King", and the Buddha "Incense Fragrance", and the Buddha "Fragrant Light", and the Buddha "Great Blazing Shoulders", and the Buddha "Body of Multicolored Jewel Flower Garlands", and the Buddha "Sala Tree King", and the Buddha "Precious Flower Virtue", and the Buddha "Sees All Truths", and the Buddha "Like the Polar Mountain". Each of them preaches in his own land with the eloquence of a Buddha, and covers a whole cosmos, speaking the truth. All of you sentient beings should believe this scripture extolling their inconceivable merits, which all Buddhas protect and keep in mind.

Why do you think this is called the sutra that is protected and kept in mind by all the Buddhas?

If there are good men and good women who hear this scripture, accept it, and uphold it, and they hear the names of all these Buddhas, all these good men and good women will be protected and kept in mind by all these Buddhas, and all of them will reach the level

where they do not turn back from complete, unexcelled, correct awakening. Therefore, all of you should faithfully accept what I say and what all the Buddhas have said.

All those people who have vowed, or are vowing, or will vow to be born in the land of Amitabha Buddha reach the level where they do not turn back from complete, unexcelled awakening, whether in their past lives, their present lives, or their future lives. Therefore; all good men and good women, if they have faith, must make a vow to be born in that land.

9.

Just as I am now extolling the inconceivable merits of all the Buddhas, all those Buddhas are likewise extolling my inconceivable merits, with these words: "Shakyamuni Buddha is able to carry out a most difficult and rare task. In the world "Endurance" [this world], in an evil world of the Five Corruptions—the corruption of the age, the corruption of views, the corruption of afflictions, the corruption of sentient beings, and the corruption of life—he is able to achieve complete, unexcelled awakening, and to expound the Truth which all beings in all worlds find hard to believe."

Know then that in the midst of this evil world of the Five Corruptions, I am able to carry out this difficult task, attain complete, unexcelled awakening, and expound the Truth which is so hard to believe for beings in all worlds. This is indeed most difficult!

10.

When Buddha had finished preaching this scripture, Shariputra and all the monks and all the other gods and humans and asuras and the rest who had been listening, having heard what the Buddha said, rejoiced and faithfully accepted it. They all bowed in homage and departed.