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The Sutra on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life

The Larger Sutra

The Larger Sutra consists of two scrolls: Part One and Part Two. Part One of the sutra contains the Prologue and the first half of the Main Body. Part Two comprises the second half of the Main Body and Epilogue.

The sutra begins with the words, “Thus I have heard,” and is a record of a sermon delivered by Śākyamuni Buddha to an audience of bhikkhus and bodhisattvas at Vulture Peak in Rājagṛha.

The most famous scene in the Prologue is where Śākyamuni’s countenance is so unusually radiant that Ānanda notices the change, and inquires as to its significance. Śākyamuni praises Ānanda’s astuteness, and reveals that he is about to preach the Sutra on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, also known as the Larger Sutra. The main purpose of this scenario is to demonstrate that the Buddha’s appearance in this world was solely to expound Amida’s Primal Vow by means of the story that unfolds in this sutra.

The Main Body of the sutra consists of the following six divisions: Bodhisattva Dharmākara vows, Bodhisattva Dharmākara’s practice, Amida Buddha’s merit acquired through practice, the cause of birth in Amida Buddha’s Pure Land, the result of birth in Amida Buddha’s Pure Land, and Śākyamuni Buddha’s admonishments.

In the first half of the narrative, Bodhisattva Dharmākara makes the vow of Buddhahood, and after five kalpas of contemplation, he establishes forty-eight vows, among them the all-important Eighteenth Vow. He then proceeds to practice for innumerable kalpas to actualize these vows. Bodhisattva Dharmākara thus becomes Amida Buddha, who is characterized by the dual features of “immeasurable light” and “immeasurable life,” emblematic of his fulfillment of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Vows. Amida Buddha also establishes his own Buddha-land called *Sukhāvatī*, or “Land of Perfect Bliss”, which is also called the Pure Land for the purpose of liberating all beings.

The second half of the narrative opens with a statement on the cause of birth in the Pure Land. This is represented by the so-called passage on the fulfillment of the three vows:

The Eleventh, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth.

The Epilogue declares the sutra to be the teaching that the Buddha wishes to entrust to posterity. By hearing Amida's Name, being mindful of and uttering the Buddha's Name "even once," the sentient being establishes the cause of the attainment of birth in the Pure Land.

The effectiveness of the nembutsu practice of saying the Name of Amida lies in the Eighteenth Vow in particular. The Buddha then urges aspirants who accept Amida's compassionate working to be "mindful of the Buddha even once." This section closes with a statement that those who hear the Buddha's teaching will all greatly rejoice and awaken in the mind of aspiration for enlightenment.

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Larger Sutra Part One

○ ○ *Bus-se[tsu] mu-ryō ju-kyō kanjō*

[1]

ga mon nyo ze
ichi ji bu[tsu] ju ō sha jō
gi sha kus-sen jū
yo dai bi ku shu
man ni sen nin ku
is-sai dai shō
jin zū i da[tsu]
go myō wa[tsu]
son ja ryō hon zai
son ja shō gan
son ja shō go
son ja dai gō
son ja nin gen
son ja ri ku
son ja myō mon
son ja zen ji[tsu]
son ja gu soku
son ja go ō
son ja u—ru bin ra ka shō
son ja ga ya ka shō
son ja na dai ka shō
son ja ma ka ka shō
son ja sha—ri ho[tsu]
son ja dai mok-ken ren
son ja kō hin na
son ja dai ju
son ja dai jō shi
son ja ma ka shu na
son ja man gan ji
son ja ri shō
son ja ru kan

son ja ken buku
son ja men nō
son ja i jō
son ja nin shō
son ja ka raku
son ja zen rai
son ja ra un
son ja a nan
kai nyo shi tō
jō shu sha ya
u yo dai jō
shu bo sak-ku
fu gen bo sa[tsu]
myō toku bo sa[tsu]
ji ji bo sat-tō
shi gen gō chū
is-sai bo sa[tsu]
u gen go tō
jū roku shō ji
zen shi gi bo sa[tsu]
shin ne bo sa[tsu]
ku mu bo sa[tsu]
jin zū ke bo sa[tsu]
kō yō bo sa[tsu]
e jō bo sa[tsu]
chi dō bo sa[tsu]
jak-kon bo sa[tsu]
gan ne bo sa[tsu]
kō zō bo sa[tsu]
hō yō bo sa[tsu]
chū ju bo sa[tsu]
sei gyō bo sa[tsu]
ge da[tsu] bo sa[tsu]

[2]

kai jun fu gen
dai ji shi toku
gu sho bo sa[tsu]
mu ryō gyō gan
an ju is-sai
ku doku shi hō
yu bu jip-pō
gyō gon hō ben
nyū bu[tsu] hō zō
ku kyō hi gan
o mu ryō se kai
gen jō tō gaku
sho to sot-ten
gu sen shō bō
sha hi ten gu
gō jin mo tai
ju u kyō shō
gen gyō shichi bu
kō myō ken nyō
fu shō jip-pō
mu ryō bu[tsu] do
roku shu shin dō
ko shō ji shō
go tō o se
i mu jō son
shaku bon bu ji
ten nin ki gō
ji gen san ge
mon gei sha go
haku sō dō ju[tsu]
kan ren gun jaku
yu o go on
kō mu shi gei
gen sho ku jū

shiki mi shi ken
ken rō byō shi
go se hi jō
ki koku zai i
nyū sen gaku dō
buku jō byaku me
hō kan yō raku
ken shi ryō gen
sha chin myō e
ni chaku hō buku
tai jo shu ho[tsu]
tan za ju ge
gon ku roku nen
gyō nyo sho ō
gen go joku se[tsu]
zui jun gun jō
ji u jin ku
moku yoku kon ru
ten nan ju shi
toku han shuc-chi
ryō kin yoku ju
ō gei dō jō
kichi jō kan chō
hyō shō kō so
ai ju se sō
fu bu[tsu] ju ge
ka fu ni za
fun dai kō myō
shi ma chi shi
ma so[tsu] kan zoku
ni rai his-shi
sei i chi riki
kai ryō gō buku
toku mi myō hō