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Jōdoron 淨土論: Discourse on the Pure Land

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INTRODUCTION

Vasubandhu, the great Indian Buddhist thinker of the fifth century CE made major contributions to the development of Hīnayāna as well as Mahāyāna thought through the profusion of works which he produced during his lifetime. Among those texts was his *Sukhāvativyūhopadeśa*, a discourse on the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra*, one of the essential sutras of the Pure Land tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Translated by Bodhiruci in 529 as 無量壽經優婆提舍願生偈 (*Discourse on the Sutra of Eternal Life and Gāthā of Aspiration to Be Born in the Pure Land*), the text today exists only in its Chinese form. However, both Hōnen and Shinran considered Vasubandhu's work to be one of the fundamental texts of the Pure Land teaching along with the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra* 佛說無量壽經, the *Amitāyur-dhyāna sūtra* 佛說觀無量壽經, and the *Smaller Sukhāvativyūha Sutra* 佛說阿彌陀經.

Although the *Discourse on the Pure Land* 淨土論, as it is commonly called, directly expounds the method of religious practice to be performed by one following the bodhisattva path, it nevertheless constitutes an important cornerstone for the later development of the Pure Land teaching of salvation for the ordinary person who is unable to perform such disciplines.

The text begins with a *gāthā*, which is followed by a prose section in which the significance of the *gāthā* is explained. In the *gāthā*, Vasubandhu first of all declares his single-minded entrusting in Amida Buddha and his aspiration to be born in the Pure Land of that Buddha. He then describes the virtues of that land in terms of twenty-nine adornments which he organizes into three types: seventeen adornments of the land itself, eight of Amida Buddha, and four of the bodhisattvas in that land. Briefly, those adornments are as follows:

Adornments of the Buddha Land

1. Purity 清淨
2. Immeasurability 無量
3. (Essential) Nature 性
4. Appearance 形相
5. Various Things 種種事
6. Marvelous Colors 妙色
7. Tactile Objects 觸
8. the Three Objects (Water, Earth, Space) 三種：水、地、虛空
9. Rain 雨
10. Light 光明
11. the Wondrous Voice 妙聲
12. the Master 主
13. the Family 眷屬
14. Nourishment 受用
15. the Absence of Adverse Conditions 無諸難
16. the Mahāyāna Gate 大義門
17. the Fulfillment of All Wishes 一切所求滿足

Adornments of Amida Buddha

1. (Amida's) Seat 座
2. (Amida's) Bodily Activity 身業
3. (Amida's) Verbal Activity 口業
4. (Amida's) Mental Activity 心業
5. (Amida's) Great Multitudes 大眾
6. (Amida's) Leadership 上首
7. (Amida as) Master 主
8. (Amida's) Infallible Sustaining Activity 不虛作住持

Adornments of the Bodhisattvas

1. Manifesting transformed bodies throughout the ten quarters while remaining unmoved 不動而至
2. Reaching throughout the ten quarters in the instant of one thought-moment 一念遍至
3. Making offerings and praising the virtues of all buddhas in all worlds 供養讚歎
4. Sustaining the three treasures—Buddha, dharma, and sangha 三寶住持

Vasubandhu extols these adornments as the perfections of the virtues of Amida Buddha's primal vow to create a Pure Land into which all sentient beings can be born. At the end of the *gāthā*, Vasubandhu states that, in composing the *Discourse*, he aspires to see Amida Buddha and to be born in the Pure Land together with all other beings.

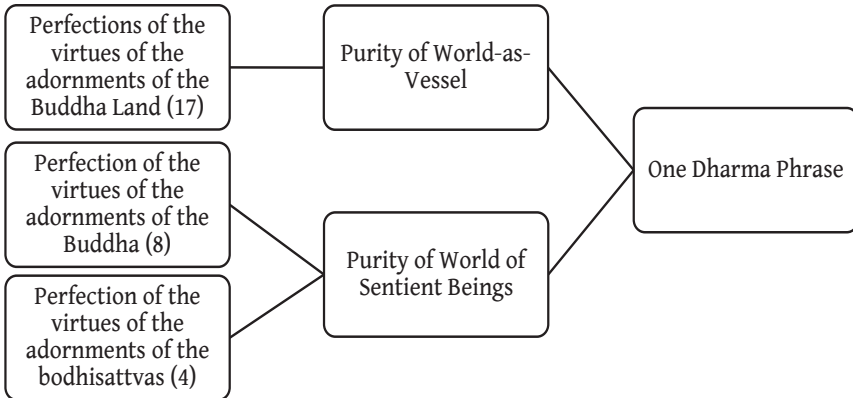
In the prose section, Vasubandhu begins by stating that, by contemplating Amida Buddha's Land of Peace and Bliss, the practitioner of the bodhisattva path will see the Buddha and gain birth in that land. He then goes on to explain that the practitioner is able to contemplate, as well as give rise to, the single pure faith through the perfection of the practices of the five gates of mindfulness 五念門. That is, these five gates are presented as forms of practice by which Pure Land followers may all attain birth in the Pure Land. The five gates of mindfulness are:

1. The Gate of Worship 礼拝
2. The Gate of Praise 讚嘆
3. The Gate of Aspiration 作願
4. The Gate of Contemplation 觀察
5. The Gate of Merit Transference 回向

The first three gates constitute practices performed with one's three karmic activities. One worships Amida Buddha with one's body, praises the Buddha's name with one's mouth, and aspires to be born in the Pure Land by single-mindedly concentrating one's thoughts (*śamatha* 奢摩他). Thereupon, in the fourth gate one contemplates the adornments of the Pure Land with insight into their true nature (*vipaśyanā* 毗婆舍那).

Those adornments are not material objects, but instead constitute phenomena arising out of and giving expression to dharma-nature itself. Vasubandhu represents this dharma as the virtue of the adornment of purity, that is, the One Dharma Phrase 一法句. Stated more precisely, the adornments of the Buddha Land, Amida Buddha, and the bodhisattvas all constitute the perfections of the virtues of the Buddha's vow and right practices. They are expressions of the perfections of the Buddha's virtues of self-benefit and benefiting-others, and, as such, represent purity. Specifically, the seventeen adornments of the Buddha Land represent the Purity of the World-as-Vessel 器世間清淨, while the eight adornments of the Buddha and the four adornments of the bodhisattvas represent the Purity of the World of Sentient Beings 衆生世間清淨. Vasubandhu states that the perfections of these two types of purity "enter into the One Dharma Phrase" 入一法句.

That is, the One Dharma Phrase—the aspect of purity 清淨句—is the unconditioned dharma body of true and real wisdom 真實智慧無為法身 which has given rise to the Land, Buddha, and bodhisattvas in order to save all sentient beings. Schematically, the relationship is as follows:

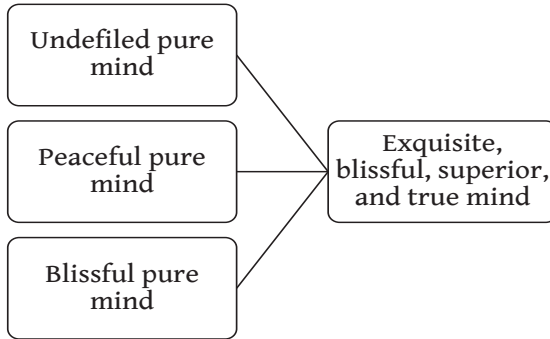


Further, Vasubandhu explains that, through the perfection of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* both fully 広 and in condensed forms 略 as set forth above, the practitioner will attain the perfection of the fifth gate of transference of merits to others through skillful means. By fulfilling the practices of the five gates of mindfulness, the practitioner amasses good roots of merit and virtue. With them the practitioner does not seek pleasure for one's own sake, but instead desires to eliminate the suffering of all sentient beings and wishes that they may all be born in the Pure Land together.

Through the perfection of the gate of transference of merits, the practitioner thereupon abandons three things which contradict the *bodhi* gate, that is, things which obstruct the way to enlightenment. Correspondingly, the practitioner fulfills three things which accord with the *bodhi* gate. First, the practitioner abandons the mind of being greedily attached to oneself, thereby no longer seeking one's own happiness. Vasubandhu calls this the undefiled pure mind 無染清淨心, which is actually the perfection of the mind of wisdom 智慧. Second, the practitioner abandons the mind of not giving peace to others, thereby seeking to eliminate the suffering of all sentient beings. This is referred to as the peaceful pure mind 安清淨心 and is equivalent to the perfection of the mind of compassion 慈悲. Third, the practitioner abandons the mind of worshipping, praising, and venerating oneself, thereby pitying all

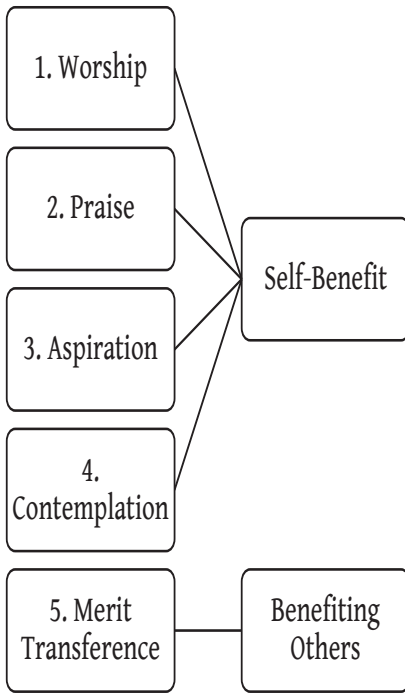
beings. This Vasubandhu calls the blissful pure mind 樂清淨心, explaining that it corresponds with the perfection of the mind of expediency 方便 which allows one to benefit all beings without hindrance.

Vasubandhu goes on to state that these three pure minds are all condensed into the one exquisite, blissful, superior, and true mind 妙樂勝真心. Stated in another way, the three fulfilled minds of wisdom, compassion, and expediency all comprise the single mind of *prajñā* 般若.

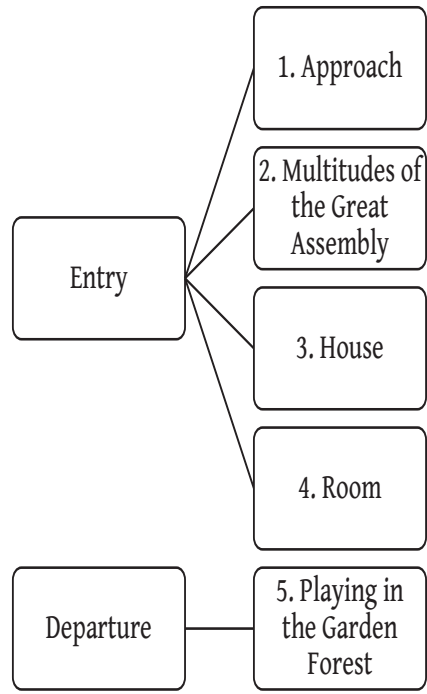


Vasubandhu explains another aspect of this relationship by stating that the five gates of mindfulness respectively perfect five types of virtues 五功德門. Through the perfection of the activity of worship the practitioner perfects the gate of approach 近門, thereby gaining birth in the Pure Land. The perfection of the gate of praise leads to inclusion within the multitudes of the great assemblage 大會衆門 there. Through the perfection of the activity of aspiration the practitioner perfects the gate of the house 宅門, which refers to entry into *samādhi*. The perfection of contemplation in turn perfects the gate of the room 室門, wherein the practitioner attains insight. In this way, Vasubandhu states, the practitioner perfects the four activities of self-benefit and thereby perfects the virtue of entry 入功德. Through the perfection of the fifth gate of benefiting others through merit transference, the practitioner perfects the virtue of departure 出功德 whereby one returns to the world of *saṃsāra* to teach other beings the way to enlightenment. This Vasubandhu refers to as the gate of playing in the garden and forest 園林遊戲地門.

Five Gates of Mindfulness



Five Types of Virtue



Vasubandhu ends his *Discourse on the Pure Land* by stating that, by perfecting the practices of the five gates of mindfulness, the practitioner will perfect the virtues of self-benefit and benefiting-others and quickly obtain the highest enlightenment, or *prajñā*. The significant conclusion is that all of this is due to the power of Amida Buddha's primal vow.

T'an-luan's 曇鸞 later commentary on *Vasubandhu's Discourse of the Pure Land* is said to have directly provided the philosophical foundation for the development of Pure Land thought as a teaching for the salvation of the ordinary being who is not otherwise capable of performing bodhisattva practices. Nevertheless, it is also clear that Vasubandhu's text is in itself of great importance to that movement in its presentation, albeit for the sake of sages, of a method of bodhisattva practice which arises precisely within the context of the working of Amida Buddha's primal vow to have all sentient beings obtain birth in the Pure Land.



Discourse on the Sutra of Eternal Life and Gāthā of Aspiration to Be Born in the Pure Land

Composed by Bodhisattva Vasubandhu

Chinese Trans. Bodhiruci of the Latter Wei Dynasty

English Trans. David Matsumoto

GĀTHĀ

O World-Honored One, I, with single-mindedness, take refuge in the Tathāgata whose unhindered light exhaustively fills the ten quarters and aspire to be born in the Land of Peace and Bliss.

I, in accordance with the embodiments of true and real virtues revealed in the *Sutra of Eternal Life*, will now present an all-comprehensive *gāthā* of aspiration to be born and thereby correspond with the *buddhadharma*.

In contemplating the manifestations of that world, I realize that its excellence surpasses the paths of the three worlds. Ultimately, it is just like empty space, vast and boundless.

It has arisen from the roots of supramundane good, namely, the great compassion of the right path. Its pure light is full, just like a mirror, the sun, or the moon.

It is endowed with the nature of all rare jewels and possesses marvelous adornments. Its undefiled light brilliantly illuminates that world clearly and purely.

Grasses, having virtues in the nature of jewels, are soft and tender, waving to the right and left. One who touches them receives great pleasure, surpassing that of the *kācīlindika*.¹

Ten million varieties of jeweled flowers cover completely the lakes, streams, and springs. When a soft, gentle breeze moves the flowers and leaves, reflected rays of light intermingle and dance.

Palaces and many towers overlook the ten quarters of the universe without obstruction. A miscellany of trees having different colors and shades are all encircled by jeweled railings.

Innumerable nets of jewels, twisting and intermingling, cover the sky. Within them all manner of bells emit ringing which proclaims the exquisite sounds of the dharma.

From the sky rain the adornments of flowers and garments. Innumerable fragrances pervade everywhere. The wisdom of the buddha, as clear and pure as the sun, eliminates the darkness of the foolishness of the world.

Its sacred voice which enlightens all is deep and profound. It is exquisite and is heard throughout the ten quarters. Amida Buddha, the perfectly enlightened Dharma King, resides there and sustains that land well.

The multitudes of beings there, the pure flowers of the Tathāgata, are born transformed from the blossoms of perfect enlightenment. They delight in the taste of the *buddhadharma*, and take *dhyāna* and *samādhi*² as nourishment.

They are forever free from physical pain and mental anguish and always receive happiness without cease. This world of the good roots of the Mahāyāna is one of equality; there are no slanderous or loathsome names.

Women and persons with imperfect organs, as well as those having the seeds of the two vehicles will not be born there.³ The sentient beings' aspirations for happiness will all be fulfilled.

Therefore, I aspire to be born in Amida Buddha's Land. There is a delicate and pure flowered seat-pedestal made up of the most precious and immeasurably magnificent of jewels.

The light of Amida Buddha's countenance extends one fathom. His form and figure far surpass those of sentient beings. The sacred tone of the Tathāgata's exquisite voice is heard throughout the ten quarters.

In the same manner as earth, water, fire, wind, and space, he is without a mind of discrimination. The many *devas* and human beings who are unshakable are born from the pure wisdom-ocean.

Just like Sumeru,⁴ the king of mountains, Amida Buddha is supreme, wondrous, and unsurpassed. *Devas*, humans, and heroic beings venerate, circumambulate, and look up in reverence to Amida.

In contemplating the power of the Buddha's primal vow, I realize that no one who encounters it will pass by in vain. It enables one to quickly attain the great treasure-ocean of virtues.

The Land of Peace and Bliss is pure and bodhisattvas constantly turn the undefiled dharma wheel. Manifested buddhas and bodhisattvas are like the sun, or like Mount Sumeru in its steadfast immovability.

In a single moment of time, the undefiled, sublime light of the bodhisattvas universally illuminates all of the assemblages of buddhas and benefits all of the sentient beings therein.

By raining heavenly music, flowers, garments, and marvelous fragrances they equally give offerings to and praise the virtues of all the buddhas. In so doing they have no discriminating thoughts.

If there are any worlds which are without the virtuous treasures of the *buddhadharma*, they vow, "I aspire to be born in them all, revealing the *buddhadharma*, just as the Buddha does."

By writing a discourse and composing this *gāthā*, I aspire to see Amida Buddha and, together with all sentient beings everywhere, to be born in the Land of Peace and Bliss.

EXPOSITION

I have generally explained with this *gāthā* the passages of the *Sutra of Eternal Life*.

In comment, I state: What significance does this *gāthā* of aspiration clarify? It reveals that, by contemplating the World of Peace and Bliss, one will see Amida Buddha and will aspire to be born in that land.

How does one contemplate? How does one produce pure faith?⁵ If a good man or woman practices the five gates of mindfulness and if that person's practice is perfected, ultimately that person will obtain birth in the Land of Peace and Bliss and will see Amida Buddha. What are the five gates of mindfulness? The first is the gate of worship. The second is the gate of praise. The third is the gate of aspiration. The fourth is the gate of contemplation. The fifth is the gate of merit transference.

How does one worship? With one's bodily actions, one worships Amida Tathāgata, *arhat* and *samyaksambuddha*⁶ with the intention of being born in that land.

How does one praise? One praises with one's words. One calls the name of that *tathāgata* in accordance with that *tathāgata*'s light, which is the embodiment of wisdom, and in accordance with the significance

of the name, for one wishes to practice in accordance with reality and attain unity with it.

How does one aspire? One aspires constantly in one's heart and mind. With single-mindedness one exclusively thinks about ultimately being born in the Land of Peace and Bliss, wishing to practice *śamathā*⁷ in accordance with reality.

How does one contemplate? One contemplates with wisdom, correctly thinking about and visualizing that land and Buddha, for one wishes to practice *vipaśyanā*⁸ in accordance with reality. There are three types of contemplation. What are the three types? The first is to contemplate the virtues of the adornments of that Buddha Land. The second is to contemplate the virtues of the adornments of Amida Buddha. The third is to contemplate the virtuous adornments of all of the bodhisattvas in that land.

How does one transfer merits? Without abandoning any suffering sentient being, one aspires constantly in one's heart and mind. By making merit transference the foremost matter, one will be able to perfect the mind of great compassion.

How does one contemplate the virtues of the adornments of that Buddha Land? Because the virtues of the adornments of that Buddha Land possess inconceivable power, they are in nature like the *maṇi* jewel,⁹ for it is a thing which resembles and is comparable to them. As for contemplating the perfection of the virtues of the adornments of that Buddha Land, there are seventeen kinds of adornment virtues. This you should know. What are the seventeen?

The first is the perfection of the virtue of the adornment of purity.

The second is ... immeasurability.

The third is ... (essential) nature.

The fourth is ... appearance.

The fifth is ... various things.

The sixth is ... marvelous colors.

The seventh is ... tactile objects.

The eighth is ... the three objects (water, earth, and space).

The ninth is ... rain.

The tenth is ... light.

The eleventh is ... the wondrous voice.

The twelfth is ... the master.

The thirteenth is ... the family.

The fourteenth is ... nourishment.

The fifteenth is ... the absence of adverse conditions.

The sixteenth is ... the Mahāyāna gate.

The seventeenth is ... the fulfillment of all wishes.

As for the perfection of the virtue of the adornment of purity, it is stated in the *gāthā*, “In contemplating the manifestations of that world, I realize that its excellence surpasses the paths of the three worlds.”

As for ... immeasurability, ... “Ultimately, it is just like empty space, vast and boundless.”

As for (essential) nature, “It has arisen from the roots of supra-mundane good, namely, the great compassion of the right path.”

As for ... appearance, ... “Its pure light is full, just like a mirror, the sun, or the moon.”

As for ... various things, ... “It is endowed with the nature of all rare jewels and possesses marvelous adornments.”

As for ... marvelous colors, ... “Its undefiled light brilliantly illuminates that world clearly and purely.”

As for ... tactile objects, ... “Grasses, having virtues in the nature of jewels, are soft and tender, waving to the right and left. One who touches them receives great pleasure, surpassing that of the *kācilindika*.”

As for the perfection of the virtue of the adornment of the three objects, there are three kind of objects. This you should know. What are the three? The first is water. The second is earth. The third is space.

As for the perfection of the virtue of the adornment of water, it is stated in the *gāthā*, “Ten million varieties of jeweled flowers cover completely the lakes, streams, and springs. When a soft, gentle breeze moves the flowers and leaves, reflected rays of light intermingle and dance.”

As for ... earth, ... “Palaces and many towers overlook the ten quarters of the universe without obstruction. A miscellany of trees having different colors and shades are all encircled by jeweled railings.”

As for ... space, ... “Innumerable nets of jewels, twisting and intermingling, cover the sky. Within them all manner of bells emit ringing which proclaims the exquisite sounds of the dharma.”

As for ... rain, ... “From the sky rain the adornments of flowers and garments. Innumerable fragrances pervade everywhere.”

As for ... light, ... “The wisdom of the Buddha, as clear and pure as the sun, eliminates the darkness of the foolishness of the world.”

As for ... wondrous voice, ... “Its sacred voice which enlightens all is deep and profound. It is exquisite and is heard throughout the ten quarters.”

As for ... master, ... “Amida Buddha, the perfectly enlightened Dharma King, resides there and sustains that land well.”

As for ... family, ... “The multitudes of beings there, the pure flowers of the Tathāgata, are born transformed from the blossoms of perfect enlightenment.”

As for ... nourishment, ... “They delight in the taste of the *buddha-dharma*, and take *dhyāna* and *samādhi* as nourishment.”

As for ... the absence of adverse conditions, ... “They are forever free from physical pain and mental anguish and always receive happiness without cease.”

As for ... the Mahāyāna gate, ... “This world of the good roots of the Mahāyāna is one of equality; there are no slanderous or loathsome names. Women and persons with imperfect organs, as well as those having the seeds of the two vehicles will not be born there.”

The recompense of the Pure Land is free from two kinds of slanderous and loathsome imperfect things. This you should know. The first is substances. The second is names. There are three types of substances. The first is persons of the two vehicles. The second is women. The third is persons with imperfect organs. Because there are none of these imperfections in that land, it is said that it is free from loathsome substances. There are also three types of slanderous names. It is not just that there are none of the three substances in that land, but also one does not hear the names of those three types, that is, persons of the two vehicles, women, and persons with imperfect organs. Because of that it is said that it is the land which is free from slanderous names and loathsome imperfect things. “Equal” refers to the aspect of overall and undivided equality.

As for the perfection of the virtue of the adornment of the fulfillment of all wishes, it is stated in the *gāthā*, “The sentient beings’ aspirations for happiness will all be fulfilled.”

Briefly, I have expounded on the perfection of the seventeen kinds of adornments of the Land of Amida Buddha, thereby revealing the perfection of the Tathāgata’s self-benefiting great merit power, as well as the perfection of the virtue of benefiting others. The adornments of the Land of the Buddha of Eternal Life are the embodiments of that

wondrous World of the Highest Truth. I have expounded in terms of sixteen aspects and one aspect. This you should know.

How does one contemplate the perfections of the virtues of the adornments of the Buddha? In contemplating the perfections of the virtues of the adornments of the Buddha there are eight kinds of aspects. This you should know. What are the eight? The first is the perfection of the virtue of the adornment of (Amida's) seat.

The second is ... (Amida's) bodily activity.

The third is ... (Amida's) verbal activity.

The fourth is ... (Amida's) mental activity.

The fifth is ... (Amida's) great multitudes.

The sixth is ... (Amida's) leadership.

The seventh is ... (Amida as) master.

The eighth is ... (Amida's) infallible sustaining activity.

What is the perfection of the virtue of the adornment of (Amida's) Seat? It is stated in the *gāthā*, "There is a delicate and pure flowered seat-pedestal made up of the most precious and immeasurably magnificent of jewels."

What is ... (Amida's) bodily activity? ... "The light of Amida Buddha's countenance extends one fathom. His form and figure far surpass those of sentient beings."

What is ... (Amida's) verbal activity? ... "The sacred tone of the Tathāgata's exquisite voice is heard throughout the ten quarters."

What is ... (Amida's) mental activity? ... "In the same manner as earth, water, fire, wind, and space, he is without a mind of discrimination."

What is ... (Amida's) great multitudes? ... "The many *devas* and human beings who are unshakable are born from the pure wisdom-ocean."

What is ... (Amida's) leadership? ... Just like Sumeru, the king of mountains, Amida Buddha is supreme, wondrous, and unsurpassed."

What is (Amida as) master? ... "Devas, humans, and heroic beings venerate, circumambulate, and look up in reverence to Amida."

What is ... (Amida's) infallible sustaining activity? "In contemplating the power of the Buddha's primal vow, I realize that no one who encounters it will pass by in vain. It enables one to quickly attain the great treasure-ocean of virtues."

That is to say, upon seeing that Buddha, the bodhisattva who has not yet realized the pure mind will ultimately attain the realization of the dharma-body of equality. In the same manner as the bodhisattva

of pure mind and all of the bodhisattvas of the upper stages do, that bodhisattva will ultimately attain tranquility and equality.

Briefly, I have expounded the eight aspects, thereby revealing in order the perfections of the adornments of the Tathāgata's virtues of self-benefit and benefiting-others. This you should know.

How does one contemplate the perfections of the virtues of the adornments of the bodhisattvas? As for the contemplation of the perfections of the virtues of the adornments of the bodhisattvas, in contemplating those bodhisattvas, there are four kinds of perfections of the virtues of right practices. This you should know. What are the four?

The first is that, although their bodies remain unmoved in one buddha land, bodhisattvas, by manifesting various transformed bodies throughout the ten quarters and practicing in accordance with reality, constantly perform Buddhist activities. It is stated in the *gāthā*, "The Land of Peace and Bliss is pure and bodhisattvas constantly turn the undefiled dharma wheel. Manifested buddhas and bodhisattvas are like the sun, or like Mount Sumeru in its steadfast immovability." This is because they cause the lotus flowers growing in the mud of all sentient beings to bloom.

The second is that the bodhisattvas' transformed bodies at all times, simultaneously and in an instant of one thought-moment, radiate great light, all of which is able to universally reach the worlds of the ten quarters and teach sentient beings the *buddhadharma*. They perform various practices of expedient means, thereby extinguishing and eliminating the suffering of all sentient beings. It is stated in the *gāthā*, "In a single moment of time, the undefiled, sublime light of the bodhisattvas universally illuminates all of the assemblages of buddhas and benefits all of the sentient beings therein."

The third is that bodhisattvas, in all worlds without exception, illuminate all assemblages of the buddhas. All of the great assemblages which are, without exception, vast and immeasurable, make offerings, pay homage, and praise the virtues of all of the buddhas and *tathāgatas*. It is stated in the *gāthā*, "By raining heavenly music, flowers, garments, and marvelous fragrances they equally give offerings to and praise the virtues of all the buddhas. In so doing they have no discriminating thoughts."

The fourth is that, in all worlds in the ten quarters in which the three treasures do not exist, bodhisattvas sustain and adorn the ocean-like treasures of virtues—Buddha, dharma, and sangha. Universally,

they reveal the *buddhadharma*, bringing beings to understand the practice which accords with reality. It is stated in the *gāthā*, “If there are any worlds which are without the virtuous treasures of the *buddhadharma*, they vow, ‘I aspire to be born in them all, revealing the *buddhadharma*, just as the Buddha does.’ “

Further, I have above expounded the contemplation of the perfections of the virtues of the adornments of the Buddha Land, the perfections of the virtues of the adornments of the Buddha, and the perfections of the virtues of the adornments of the bodhisattvas. These three types of perfections are adorned by the mind of aspiration. This you should know.

Briefly, I will explain how these perfections enter into the one dharma phrase. The one dharma phrase is the aspect of purity. The aspect of purity is the unconditioned dharma-body of true and real wisdom. Within such purity, there are two types. This you should know. What are the two types? The first is the purity of the world-as-vessel. The second is the purity of the world of sentient beings. The purity of the world-as-vessel is like the above-mentioned seventeen varieties of perfections of the virtues of the adornments of the Buddha Land. These are called the purity of the world-as-vessel. The purity of the world of sentient beings is like the above-mentioned eight varieties of perfections of the virtues of the adornments of the Buddha and the four varieties of the perfections of the virtues of the adornments of the bodhisattvas. These are called the purity of the world of sentient beings. In this way, the one dharma phrase embraces the significance of the two types of purity. This you should know.

Thus the bodhisattva, by performing *samatha* and *vipāśyanā*, both fully and in condensed form, perfects the soft and gentle mind, thereby, in accordance with reality, knowing the dharmas fully and in condensed form. In this way, the bodhisattva perfects the transference of merits through skillful means.¹⁰ What is the bodhisattva’s transference of merits through skillful means? The bodhisattva’s transference of merits through skillful means is as follows:

With all of the good roots of merit and virtue which have been amassed through the practice of the above-mentioned five types of practices of worship, and so on, the bodhisattva does not seek pleasure for his own sake, but instead desires to eliminate the suffering of all sentient beings. The bodhisattva aspires that, by embracing all sentient beings, they will together and in the same way be born in the

Buddha's Land of Peace and Bliss. This is called the bodhisattva's perfection of the transference of merits through skillful means.

The bodhisattva, by knowing well in this manner the perfection of the transference of merits, is able to abandon the three types of things which contradict the *bodhi* gate.¹¹ What are the three types of abandonment? The first is that, due to the gate of wisdom, one does not seek one's own happiness, but instead one abandons the mind of being greedily attached to oneself. The second is that, due to the gate of compassion, one eliminates the suffering of all sentient beings, for one has abandoned the mind of not giving peace to sentient beings. The third is that, due to the gate of expediency,¹² one pities all sentient beings, for one has abandoned the mind which worships, praises, and venerates oneself. This is called the abandoning of the three types of things which contradict the *bodhi* gate.

The bodhisattva, by abandoning these three types of such things which contradict the *bodhi* gate, attains the fulfillment of the three types of things which accord with the *bodhi* gate. What are the three types of fulfillment? The first is the mind which is undefiled and pure due to the fact that one does not seek various pleasures for oneself. The second is the mind which is peaceful and pure due to the fact that one eliminates the suffering of all sentient beings. The third is the mind which is blissful and pure due to the fact that one brings all sentient beings to the attainment of great *bodhi*. Through the embracing of sentient beings, the bodhisattva causes sentient beings to be born in that land. This is called the fulfillment of the three types of things which accord with the *bodhi* gate. This you should know.

The above-mentioned three types of gates of wisdom, compassion, and expediency all comprise *prajñā*.¹³ *Prajñā* embraces expediency. This you should know. The above-mentioned three types of things, namely, the abandoning of the mind of being greedily attached to oneself, the abandoning of the mind of not giving peace to sentient beings, and the abandoning of the mind which worships, praises, and venerates oneself are all the abandoning of the obstructions to the attainment of the *bodhi* mind. This you should know. The above-mentioned three types of minds, namely, the undefiled pure mind, the peaceful pure mind, and the blissful pure mind are condensed into one which is the perfection of the exquisite, blissful, superior, and true mind. This you should know.

In this way, through the mind of wisdom, the mind of expediency, the mind without hindrances, and the superior and true mind,

the bodhisattva is able to be born in the Pure Buddha Land. This you should know. This is called the bodhisattvas' and *mahāsattvas'* compliance with the five types of dharma gates and fulfillment of their actions freely and according to their wishes. As mentioned above, their bodily activity, verbal activity, mental activity, activity of wisdom, and activity of expedient wisdom all accord with the dharma gates.

Furthermore, the five types of gates perfect in order the five types of virtues. This you should know. What are the five gates? The first is the gate of approach. The second is the gate of the multitudes of the great assemblage. The third is the gate of the house. The fourth is the gate of the room. The fifth is the gate of playing in the garden and forest. Of these five types of gates, the first four types of gates perfect the virtue of entry. The fifth gate perfects the virtue of departure.

As for the first gate of entry, because one worships Amida Buddha in order to be born in that land, one will obtain birth in the World of Peace and Bliss. This is called the first gate of entry.

As for the second gate of entry, because one praises Amida Buddha and calls the Tathāgata's name in accordance with the significance of the name and practices in accordance with the Tathāgata's light which is the embodiment of wisdom, one will obtain entry into and be numbered among the multitudes of the great assemblage. This is called the second gate of entry.

As for the third gate of entry, because, by single-mindedly thinking and aspiring, one will be born in that land and will practice *śamatha* and the tranquility *samādhi*, one will obtain entry into the Lotus-Storehouse World.¹⁴ This is called the third gate of entry.

As for the fourth gate of entry, because, by solely thinking and contemplating those exquisite adornments, one practices *vipaśyanā* one will be able to reach that land and will enjoy the happiness of the various tastes of the dharma. This is called the fourth gate of entry.

As for the fifth gate of departure, one contemplates all suffering sentient beings with great compassion, manifests oneself in a transformed body, turns and enters into the garden of birth and death and the forest of blind passions, playing with miraculous powers and thereby reaching the stage of teaching. Since this is all due to the transference of merits through the power of the primal vow, it is called the fifth gate of departure.

The bodhisattva, by entering the four types of gates, perfects the self-benefiting practices. This you should know. The bodhisattva, by

departing through the fifth gate, perfects the practices of benefiting others through the transference of merits. This you should know. The bodhisattva, in this way performing the practices of the five gates, will accomplish self-benefit and benefiting-others and quickly obtain the perfection of the highest, perfect enlightenment.¹⁵

I have now finished briefly explaining the significance of the *Discourse on the Sutra of Eternal Life and the Gāthā of Aspiration to be Born in the Pure Land*.

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NOTES

1. *Kācilindika* 迦旃隣陀. A mythical grass of India. It was said that anyone who touched this soft and gentle grass would receive great pleasure and happiness. It was often used as a metaphor for the Pure Land. Also a variety of water fowl, with extremely soft and fine feathers.

2. *Dhyāna* and *samādhi*.

Dhyāna 禪. Meditation or concentration. Practice whereby the mind is focused upon an object of meditation so that all other intellectual and emotional activities are cut off. In this way, the mind is cleared and purified, thereby allowing one to directly experience true reality.

Samādhi 三昧. The mental state attained through *dhyāna* practice wherein one is able to visualize transcendental existence and realize true reality.

3. Women and persons with imperfect organs, as well as those having the seeds of the two vehicles will not be born there.

It can be said that this notion reflected attitudes which prevailed in Indian society since early days. Women not only occupied a lower social position, but were said to possess deeper karmic evil than men. For this reason, it was said that women could not become Brahman, Indra, Devil King, Cakravartin King, or Buddha 五障. However, since such discriminatory notions contradicted the fundamental Mahāyāna teaching that all sentient beings can become buddha, the notion that women take on male form when born in the Pure Land was devised. Examples can be seen in the thirty-fifth vow of the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sutra* 變成男子の願 as well as in the present text. In Jōdo Shinshū, men as well as women are seen as beings of deep and heavy karmic evil who are equally carried to the Pure Land and brought to enlightenment by Amida Buddha's vow.

Persons with imperfect organs 根缺 refers to those who are deficient in eye, ear, nose, mouth, body, or mind. This again may be said to reflect societal values prevalent in India at that time which discriminated against disabled

persons. Another interpretation of the phrase is that it refers to those who lack the good roots to become buddhas.

Those having the seeds of the two vehicles 二乗の種 refers to those possessing the seeds (種子, *bīja*) or karmic potential to become *śrāvaka* 声聞 or *pratyekabuddha* 縁覚. *Śrāvakas* are disciples who reach attainment by listening to a teacher. *Pratyekabuddhas* are those who attain emancipation by themselves through realization of the twelve links of causation. Both are Hīnayāna sages who are said to attain only self-benefit, without regard for benefiting others. They are therefore said to be excluded from the Mahāyāna gate of the Pure Land.

It is perhaps possible to interpret this entire phrase to mean that, within the Mahāyāna gate, all who enter are ultimately equal. Since Vasubandhu states in the prose section that not only the substances, but even the names of these three types of beings are not present in the Pure Land, it is possible to infer that this means that no distinctions such as man-woman, etc., are made there. The land, being the perfection of Amida Buddha's vow to save all sentient beings, is therefore one of "overall and undivided equality."

4. Mount Sumeru 須弥山 is, in Indian Buddhist cosmology, a mammoth mountain, towering over all other peaks and standing resolute within a great ocean in the center of the world. Around it revolve the sun and the moon. The realm of heavenly beings exists both above and upon the surface of the mountain. On four sides of its base lie four great continents which represent the realm of human beings.

5. "Pure faith" actually appears as 信心 (*shinjin*) in the text. 信心 is often translated as faith, believing mind, entrusting mind, or mind of serene faith. A debate presently exists in Shinshū circles over the proper translation of the term. While some prefer one of the above English translations or a variation thereof, others prefer to leave the word untranslated as "*shinjin*." In the latter case, "*shinjin*" is used to express Shinran's understanding 信心 as the true and real mind of the Buddha.

Here, "pure faith" has been chosen. It is important to note that, in the *Discourse*, the term 信心 appears only once, i.e., at the beginning of the prose section. From the context the term can be taken to refer to the mind attained by the perfection of the five gates of mindfulness, i.e., the exquisite, blissful, superior, and true mind 妙樂勝真心 which is the union of the undefiled pure mind 無染清淨心, the peaceful pure mind 安清淨心, and the blissful pure mind 樂清淨心. T'an-luan, in turn, interpreted the passage in question, stating, "By contemplating these seventeen types of adornments, one is able to produce true and real pure faith and, without fail, attain birth in the Buddha Land of Peace and Bliss" (*Shinshū Shōgyō Zensho*, vol. 1, 328). Accordingly, it was felt that here the term 信心 should be translated as "pure faith," that is, the true and real mind of pure faith which is ultimately produced in the practitioner by the activity of the primal vow.

6. *Tathāgata, arhat, samyaksambuddha*. *Tathāgata* means one who has gone into thusness 如去, as well as one who has come from thusness 如来. *Arhat* 阿羅漢 is often used to refer to a Hīnayāna sage who has achieved the fourth and highest stage of attainment. Here, the term 応 is an abbreviation of 応供 which means one who is worthy of offerings. *Samyaksambuddha* 正遍知 means one who has realized true enlightenment. All three terms are among the ten appellations of the Buddha 十号 and here all refer to Amida Buddha.

7. *Śāmatha* 奢摩他 means to concentrate the mind on a single object in order to eliminate all extraneous, confused thoughts and achieve a mind of tranquility.

8. *Vipaśyanā* 毗婆舍那 means, once having attained a tranquil mind through concentration and meditation, to freely and clearly contemplate an object, or the truth, with insight into its true nature.

9. *Maṇi jewel* (摩尼如意宝, Skt. *viśvarūpacintā-maṇi*). A mythical jewel which, it was said, could bring to fruition all that one desires, such as the elimination of suffering, etc.

10. Skillful means (方便, Skt. *upāya*). The term means expediency, means, method, device, and so on. It has been used to express, among other things, (a) a superior, skillful method of teaching and saving sentient beings; (b) a dharma gate which has been temporarily and provisionally provided to lead sentient beings ultimately to the true and real teaching; (c) relative wisdom which arises out of and gives expression to absolute wisdom; (d) all religious practices leading to enlightenment.

In the *Discourse*, 方便 is presented as that which allows the bodhisattva of wisdom and compassion to benefit all beings without hindrance. As such, wisdom, compassion, and skillful means (expediency) must necessarily be perfected together in the fulfillment of the virtues of self-benefit and benefiting-others.

11. *Bodhi gate* 菩提門. *Bodhi* means wisdom and enlightenment. The *bodhi gate* is the way to enlightenment.

12. Expediency. See n10. Skillful means.

13. *Prajñā* 般若 means transcendental wisdom, inherent wisdom, and that which is true and real. Having realized *prajñā*, one is able to grasp totally the entirety of existence.

14. Lotus-Storehouse World 蓮華藏世界. The Recompensed Pure Land of Amida Buddha, perfected and fulfilled through the vows and practice of Dharmākara Bodhisattva. In the *Avataṃsaka sūtra*, it is the land of Vairocana Buddha.

15. Highest perfect enlightenment (阿耨多羅三藐三菩提, Skt. *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*). The unsurpassed, perfectly fulfilled wisdom of the buddhas.