

The Amitabha Sutra" or "The Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Sutra" holds the unusual distinction of being a Sutra that Shakyamuni Buddha chose to speak spontaneously, without being asked any particular question and with no specific request to speak about any particular topic. It describes in detail the supremely beautiful adornments of the Western Pure Land, and it explains how to attain rebirth there. It also describes the Buddhas who dwell not only in the *Pure Land*, but in other *Buddha-lands* as well.

The Amitabha Sutra has particular importance to Pure Land practitioners. In fact, it is one of five Sutras that are considered of paramount importance in Pure Land study. (All five of these Pure Land Sutras are presented either in full or in summary form on this Web Site; for details, see the page titled "Pure Land Texts.")

The Amitabha Sutra was translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva in the Yao Ch'in period during the reign of Emperor Yao Hsing. The translation that follows was compiled by Mark Andrews, using as reference materials (1) a Chinese copy of the Sutra provided by the Amitabha Society of the U.S.A.; (2) "A General Explanation of The Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Sutra," an English-language translation and commentary published by the Buddhist Text Translation Society; and (3) "The Two Buddhist Books in Mayana" by P.C. Lee.

The Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Sutra

Thus I have heard: At one time, the Buddha dwelt at Shravasti in the Jetta Grove in the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary, together with a gathering of great Bhikshus, twelve hundred fifty in all, all great Arhats whom the Assembly knew and recognized:

Elders Shariputra, Mahamaudgalyayana, Mahakasyapa, Mahadatyayana, Mahakausthila, Revata, Suddhipanthaka, Nanda, Ananda, Rahula, Gavampati, Pindola-Bharadvaja, Kalodayin, Mahakaphina, Vakkula, Aniruddha, and others such as these, all great Bodhisattvas, together with Shakra, chief among gods, and the countless great multitudes from all the heavens.

At that time, the Buddha told the elder Shariputra:

"Passing from here through hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddha-lands to the West, there is a land called Ultimate Bliss. In this land, at this moment, a Buddha named Amitabha teaches the Dharma.

"Shariputra, for what reason is that land called Ultimate Bliss? All living beings in that land endure no sufferings but enjoy every bliss. Therefore it is called Ultimate Bliss.

"Moreover, Shariputra, this Land of Ultimate Bliss is on all sides surrounded by seven tiers of railings, seven layers of netting, and seven rows of trees, all formed from the four treasures and for this reason named Ultimate Bliss. Moreover, Shariputra, in the Land of Ultimate Bliss there are pools made of the seven jewels, filled with the eight waters of merit and virtue. The bottom of each pool is pure, spread over with golden sand. On the four sides are stairs of gold, silver, lapis lazuli and crystal; above are raised pavilions adorned with gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, mother-of-pearl, red pearls, and carnelian. In the pools are lotuses as large as carriage wheels: green-colored by green light; yellow-colored by yellow light; red-colored by red light; white-colored by white light; subtly, wonderfully fragrant and pure.

"Shariputra, the realization of the Land of Ultimate Bliss is thus meritoriously adorned.

"Moreover, Shariputra, in that Buddha-land there is always heavenly music, and the ground is yellow gold. In the six periods of the day and night, a heavenly rain of Mandarava flowers falls,

and throughout the clear morning each living being in this land, with bagfuls of of myriads of wonderful flowers, makes offerings to the hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhas of the other directions. At mealtime, each returns to his own country, and having eaten they stroll around.

"Shariputra, the realization of the Land of Ultimate Bliss is thus meritoriously adorned.

"Moreover, Shariputra, in that land there are always rare and wonderful multi-colored birds: white cranes, peacocks, parrots, egrets, kalavinkas, and two-headed birds. In the six periods of the day and night, the flocks of birds sing forth harmonious and elegant songs. Their clear and joyful sounds proclaim the Five Roots, the Five Powers, the Seven Bhodhi Shares, the Eight Sagely Way Shares, and other such Dharmas. When living beings of that land hear these sounds, they are completely mindful of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

"Shariputra, do not say that these birds take birth as retribution for the karmic offenses. For what reason, then? In this Buddha-land there are no Three Evil Ways of rebirth. Shariputra, in that Buddha-land, not even the names of the Three Evil Ways exist -- how much less their actuality! Desiring that the Dharma sound be widely proclaimed, Amitabha Buddha by transformation made this multitude of birds.

"Shariputra, in that Buddha-land, when the soft wind blows, the rows of jeweled trees and jeweled nets give forth subtle and wonderful sounds, like a hundred thousand kinds of music played at the same time. All those who hear this sound naturally bring forth in their hearts mindfulness of the Buddha, mindfulness of the Dharma, and mindfulness of the Sangha.

"Shariputra, the realization of the Land of Ultimate Bliss is thus meritoriously adorned.

"Shariputra, what do you think? Why is this Buddha called Amitabha? Shariputra, the brilliance of that Buddha's light is measureless, illuminating the Lands of the Ten Directions everywhere without obstruction. For this reason he is called Amitabha.

"Moreover, Shariputra, the life of that Buddha and that of his people extends for measureless, limitless Asankhyeya kalpas. For this reason he is called Amitabha.

"Moreover, Shariputra, since Amitabha realized Buddhahood, ten kalpas have passed. Moreover, that Buddha has measureless, limitless sound-hearer disciples, all Arhats, their number incalculable. Thus also is the Assembly of Bodhisattvas.

"Shariputra, the realization of the Land of Ultimate Bliss is thus meritoriously adorned.

"Moreover, Shariputra, those living beings born in the land of Ultimate Bliss are all Avaivartika. Among them are many who in this very life will dwell in Buddhahood. Their number is extremely many. It is incalculable and only in measureless, limitless Asankhyeya kalpas could it be spoken.

"Shariputra, those living beings who can hear should should vow, 'I wish to be born in that country.' And why? All those who thus attain are all superior and good people, all coming together in one place. Shariputra, one cannot be lacking in good roots, blessings, virtues, and causal connections and attain birth in that land.

"Shariputra, if a good man or woman hears 'Amitabha' spoken and holds that name, whether for one day, two days, three, four, five days, six days, as long as seven days, with one heart unconfused -- when this person approaches the end of life, before him will appear Amitabha and

all the Assembly of Holy Ones. When the end comes, his heart will be without inversion; in Amitabha's Land of Ultimate Bliss, he will attain rebirth.

"Shariputra, because I see this benefit, I speak these words: If living beings hear this spoken, they should make the vow, 'I wish to be reborn in that land.'

"Shariputra, as I now praise the inconceivable benefit from the merit and virtue of Amitabha, thus in the East are also Aksobhya Buddha, Sumeru Appearance Buddha, Great Sumeru Buddha, Sumeru Light Buddha, Wonderful Sound Buddha; all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges sands. In his own country each brings forth the appearance of a vast and long tongue, everywhere covering the Three Thousand Great Thousand Worlds, and speaks the sincere and actual words: 'All you living beings should believe, praise, and hold in reverence the inconceivable merit and virtue of this Sutra of the Mindful One of whom all Buddhas are protective.'

"Shariputra, in the Southern World are Sun Moon Lamp Buddha, Well Known Light Buddha, Great Blazing Shoulders Buddha, Sumeru Lamp Buddha, Measureless Vigor Buddha; all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges sands. In his own country each brings forth the appearance of a vast and long tongue, everywhere covering the Three Thousand Great Thousand Worlds, and speaks the sincere and actual words: 'All you living beings should believe, praise, and hold in reverence the inconceivable merit and virtue of this Sutra of the Mindful One of whom all Buddhas are protective.'

"Shariputra, in the Western World are Measureless Life Buddha, Measureless Appearance Buddha, Measureless Curtain Buddha, Great Light Buddha, Jeweled Appearance Buddha, Pure Light Buddha, all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges sands. In his own country each brings forth the appearance of a vast and long tongue, everywhere covering the Three Thousand Great Thousand Worlds, and speaks the sincere and actual words: 'All you living beings should believe, praise, and hold in reverence the inconceivable merit and virtue of this Sutra of the Mindful One of whom all Buddhas are protective.'

"Shariputra, in the Northern World are Blazing Shoulders Buddha, Most Victorious Sound Buddha, Hard to Injure Buddha, Sun Birth Buddha, Net Brightness Buddha, all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges sands. In his own country each brings forth the appearance of a vast and long tongue, everywhere covering the Three Thousand Great Thousand Worlds, and speaks the sincere and actual words: 'All you living beings should believe, praise, and hold in reverence the inconceivable merit and virtue of this Sutra of the Mindful One of whom all Buddhas are protective.'

"Shariputra, in the World Below are Lion Buddha, Well Known Buddha, Famous Light Buddha, Dharma Buddha, Dharma Curtain Buddha, Dharma Maintaining Buddha, all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges sands. In his own country each brings forth the appearance of a vast and long tongue, everywhere covering the Three Thousand Great Thousand Worlds, and speaks the sincere and actual words: 'All you living beings should believe, praise, and hold in reverence the inconceivable merit and virtue of this Sutra of the Mindful One of whom all Buddhas are protective.'

"Shariputra, in the World Above are Pure Sound Buddha, Kin of Stars Buddha, Superior Fragrance Buddha, Fragrant Light Buddha, Great Blazing Shoulders buddha, Varicolored Jewels and Flower Adornment Body Buddha, Sala Tree King Buddha, Jeweled Flower Virtue Buddha, Vision of All Meaning Buddha, Such as Mount Sumeru Buddha, all Buddhas such as these, numberless as Ganges sands. In his own country each brings forth the appearance of a vast and long tongue, everywhere covering the Three Thousand Great Thousand Worlds, and speaks the sincere and actual words: 'All you living beings should believe, praise, and hold in reverence the

inconceivable merit and virtue of this Sutra of the Mindful One of whom all Buddhas are protective.'

"Shariputra, if a man or woman hears this Sutra and holds to it, and hears the names of all these Buddhas, this good man or woman will be the mindful one of whom all Buddhas are protective, and will irreversibly attain to Annutara-Samyak-Sambodhi. Therefore, Shariputra, all of you should believe and accept my words, and those which all Buddhas speak.

"Shariputra, if there are people who have already made the vow, who now make the vow, and or who are about to make the vow, 'I desire to be born in Amitabha's country,' these people, whether born in the past, now being born, or to be born in the future, all will irreversibly attain to Annutara-Samyak-Sambodhi. Therefore, Shariputra, all good men and good women, if they are among those who have faith, should make the vow, 'I will be born in that country.'

"Shariputra, just as I am now one who praises the merit and virtue of all Buddhas, all those Buddhas equally praise my inconceivable merit and virtue, saying these words: 'Shakyamuni Buddha can complete extremely rare and difficult deeds in the Saha land, in the Evil Time of the Five Turbidities, in the midst of the Kalpa Turbidity, the View Turbidity, the Affliction Turbidity, the Living Beings Turbidity, and the Life Turbidity. He can attain Annutara-Samyak-Sambodhi and, for the sake of living beings, speak this Dharma which in the whole world is hard to believe.'

"Shariputra, you should know that I, in the Evil Time of the Five Turbidities, practice these difficult deeds, attain Annutara-Samyak-Sambodhi, and for all the world speak this Dharma, difficult to believe, extremely difficult!"

After the Buddha spoke this Sutra, Shariputra and all the Bhikshus, all the gods, humans, and Asuras, and others from all the worlds, hearing what the Buddha had said, joyously welcomed it, faithfully accepted it, bowed, and withdrew.

Thus Ends The Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Sutra.