

CHAPTER 5

Saviors and Siddhas: The Mahāyāna Pantheon and Tantric Buddhism

The history of Mahāyāna thought is in part the history of great sūtras, in part the history of great philosophical thinkers who were influential in developing doctrine, and in part the elaboration of the bodhisattva path. But it is also the history of an exuberance of mythological thinking, which sought to illustrate the practice of that path with the paradigms of great bodhisattvas and Buddhas, and it is the history of the development of alternative means to enlightenment. In the sections that follow, we shall look at some of these further evolutions in Mahāyāna thought by focusing first on the development of the Buddhism of devotion, which centered on certain savior figures of the growing Mahāyāna pantheon. We shall then examine some of the principles and practices of Tantric Buddhism, concentrating in particular on the visionary tradition of meditation.

5.1 THE LIFE SPAN OF THE TATHĀGATA

One important area where Mahāyānists departed from earlier Mainstream Buddhist views lay in their understanding of the person of the Buddha Śākyamuni. Though still recognized as the “founder” of the tradition, Śākyamuni was, in the Mahāyāna, magnified and apotheosized in such a way that he was no longer thought of as a strictly historical figure (albeit an exceptional one). In particular, the view developed that his time as the Buddha was not limited to a mere eighty years on earth. Rather, as a transcendent Savior whose life is immeasurable, he was thought to exist eternally. The *locus classicus* for this new Mahāyāna vision of Śākyamuni was the *Lotus Sūtra*. The selection that follows, however, is taken from a later text, the *Sūtra of Golden Light*, which expresses the doctrine in a somewhat more straightforward manner in its account of the bodhisattva Ruciraketu’s doubts about the life span of Śākyamuni.

Śākyamuni, however, was not the only Buddha in the Mahāyāna pantheon. With the unlimited extension of his life span, what had once been (in Mainstream Buddhism) a plurality of short-lived Buddhas existing in time and suc-

ceeding one another over the aeons, now became a multiplicity of infinitely long-lived Buddhas existing in space and spread out in world systems in the various cardinal directions. The cult of these so-called celestial Buddhas, savior figures such as Amitābha, Akṣobhya, and Bhaiṣajyaguru quickly became an important feature of the Mahāyāna, and it will be dealt with below in section 5.4. Some of these figures already appear in the selection that follows, however, as witnesses to Śākyamuni’s glory.

177
Sav.
Siddh.
Mah.
Pan.
and
Buc

At that time, in the great city of Rājagṛha, there dwelt a bodhisattva named Ruciraketu. He had served a past Buddha, under whom he had planted roots of merit, and then he honored many hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of Buddhas.

One day, this thought occurred to him: “What is the cause, what is the underlying reason that the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha had a life span that was limited to just eighty years? Indeed, did the Blessed One not declare that there are two causes, two reasons, for long life—abstaining from taking life and making offerings of food? Now the Blessed Śākyamuni abstained from taking life for incalculable hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of aeons! And as he gave his possessions, so too he gave himself as food to beings, satiating those who were hungry with the flesh, blood, bones, and marrow of his own body!”

Now, while Ruciraketu was thus recollecting the qualities of the Buddha his house suddenly became vast and spread out. Transformed by the Tathāgata, it became made of cat’s eye, studded with many divine gems, suffused with more-than-heavenly perfumes. And in that house, in the four directions, there appeared four seats made of divine gems; and on those seats, divine cushions, covered with bejeweled cotton cloth; and on those cushions, divine lotuses . . . also studded with gems. And on those lotuses, there appeared, seated on lion thrones, four Blessed Buddhas: in the East, the Tathāgata Akṣobhya; in the South, the Tathāgata Ratnaketu; in the West, the Tathāgata Amitāyus; and in the North, the Tathāgata Dundubhisvara.

Then, just as the great city of Rājagṛha was suffused with a great shining light, the trichilomegachiliocosm and world systems in all ten directions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges also became suffused with light. Divine blossoms came down in showers, and divine musical instruments were heard; and all the beings in the trichilomegachiliocosm became endowed with divine bliss, through the power of the Buddhas. Those who were born blind were able to see, the deaf could hear, those who were mad regained their senses, those who were distracted became attentive, the naked were clothed, the hungry ate their fill, the thirsty had their thirsts quenched, the diseased were cured of their illness, and the handicapped recovered full use of their limbs. In general, many marvelous things happened in the world.

Then the bodhisattva Ruciraketu, seeing those Blessed Buddhas, was astonished: “How can this be?” he wondered. And, pleased, glad, elated, delighted, giving rise to joy and happiness, he saluted those Buddhas with folded hands. But when he saw that the Buddhas were not

then recollecting the qualities of the Buddha Śākyamuni, he considered again the life span of the latter and remained puzzled: "How can this be? Why is it that the Blessed Śākyamuni had a life span that was limited to just eighty years?"

Then, those Blessed Buddhas, mindful and conscious of what the bodhisattva Ruciraketu was thinking, said to him: "O son of a good family, do not think that the life span of the Blessed Śākyamuni was limited in this way. Apart from fully enlightened Buddhas, we do not perceive anyone—in the world of gods, Māras, and Brahmas or among śramaṇas, brahmins, divinities, humans, or asuras—who is capable of understanding from one end to the other the life span of the Blessed Tathāgata Śākyamuni."

As soon as those Blessed Buddhas had uttered this explanation of the life span of the Tathāgata, by the power of the Buddha, the gods dwelling in the realms of desire and of form, such as nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kinnaras, and mahoragas, as well as many hundreds of thousands of millions of billions of bodhisattvas, all assembled in that house of the bodhisattva Ruciraketu. And then those Tathāgatas delighted that whole congregation with these verses explaining the life span of the Blessed Śākyamuni:

"It is possible to count the drops of water in all the seas, but no one can measure the life of Śākyamuni.

"It is possible to number the atoms of Mount Meru, but no one can measure the life of Śākyamuni.

"As many atoms as there are on earth, it is possible to count them all, but not to figure the life of the Buddha.

"Someone may wish somehow to measure space, but no one can measure the life of Śākyamuni.

"Talk of aeons and millions of aeons will come to a standstill; the Buddha cannot be arrived at by counting. . . .

"Therefore, do not be confused; do not have a single doubt: no full measure of the life span of the Buddha can be obtained."

Source: Translated from *Survaṃśaprabhāsa sūtra*, ed. S. Bagchi, *Buddhist Sanskrit Texts*, no. 8 (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1967), pp. 4-6.¹

5.2 SAVIOR BODHISATTVAS

The bodhisattva path described in 4.4 was not just a set of ideals and practices, it was also a catalyst for the development of legends about great bodhisattvas and about even greater Buddhas, who had fulfilled all their bodhisattva vows. Here we enter the realm of mythology—of the Mahāyāna pantheon peopled by "savior bodhisattvas" (also called "celestial bodhisattvas") and "savior," or "celestial," Buddhas and of the wonderful Buddha fields, or Pure Lands, that developed around them. Here we also enter the

¹ Alternative English translation, R. E. Emmerick, *The Sūtra of Golden Light* (London: Luzac, 1970), nn. 3-5.

realm of the devotional cult of individual Buddhas and bodhisattvas, the "Buddhism of Faith," which grew not only in India but also took root throughout the Mahāyāna world in China, Japan, and Tibet. As this cult developed, Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Kṣitigarbha, Tārā, and other bodhisattvas who were thought to be far advanced on the path all became renowned as figures who were dedicated to saving all sentient beings as part of their bodhisattva practice.

5.2.1 The Compassion of Avalokiteśvara

In the story of Vimalakīrti (see 4.4.4), we have already had an example of a bodhisattva's use of skillful means to fulfill the role of teacher. But being "saved" did not just mean being guided or goaded into a better understanding of the perfection of wisdom; it also meant being rescued from specific situations of suffering—from monsters, murderers, shipwrecks, and the like. The bodhisattvas' compassionate role, therefore, quickly expanded, so that in addition to being perceived as guides on the path to enlightenment, they were seen as figures who could be relied upon for help in more down-to-earth difficulties. They became savior bodhisattvas in the fullest sense of the term.

Early on, Avalokiteśvara, the embodiment of compassion, became famous as this kind of savior bodhisattva. Always available to succor and help out suffering sentient beings, he was renowned for his ability to take on a multiplicity of forms in doing so. In China and Japan, in fact, Avalokiteśvara permanently became known in female form as the so-called Goddess of Mercy, Kuan-yin (Japanese: Kannon).

One of the most famous texts on the compassion of Avalokiteśvara/Kuan-yin is the chapter devoted to him/her in the *Lotus Sūtra*, translated in the section that follows. In this text, in order to call on Avalokiteśvara's aid one has to "recollect him," to remember him with mindfulness (anusmṛti). In time, however, it was also possible to do this with the aid of Avalokiteśvara's own mantra, the famous "OM MANI PADME HŪM," much used in Tibet, where Avalokiteśvara became a guardian deity of the country as a whole.

... Listen to the course of conduct of Avalokiteśvara. Listen and I will explain how, for unimaginable hundreds of aeons, he purified himself by reaffirming his vows in the presence of thousands of millions of Buddhas.

The systematic visual and auditory recollection of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara will, without fail, result in this world in the elimination of all the sufferings and sorrows of living beings.

If an evil-minded fiend, intent on killing you, throws you in a pit of coals, recall Avalokiteśvara, and the fire will be extinguished as though it were sprayed with water.

If someone throws you into the depths of the ocean, the abode of nāgas, monsters, and demonic beings, recall Avalokiteśvara, the king of the waters, and you will never drown.

If an evil-minded fiend, intent on killing you, tosses you off the top of Mount Meru, recall Avalokiteśvara, and you will be upheld in midair like the sun

If someone, intent on killing you, hurls down upon your head rocky missiles the size of mountains as hard as diamonds, recall Avalokiteśvara, and not a hair on your body will be hurt.

If hosts of enemies surround you, swords in hand and intending to do you harm, recall Avalokiteśvara, and right away their hearts will be filled with friendliness.

If you are led to the execution ground and given over to the executioners, recall Avalokiteśvara, and their swords will fall into pieces.

If you are bound in stocks made of wood or with iron shackles, recall Avalokiteśvara, and your bonds will immediately be broken.

Powerful spells, magical formulas, herbal concoctions, and ghosts and goblins can all destroy the body, recall Avalokiteśvara, and they will go back whence they came.

If you are surrounded by yakṣas, nāgas, asuras, ghosts and ghouls who sap your strength, recall Avalokiteśvara, and not a hair on your body will be hurt.

If you are surrounded by ferocious beasts and wild animals, fearsome with their sharp teeth and claws, recall Avalokiteśvara, and they will immediately go off in all directions.

If you are surrounded by malicious and terrible cobras, spitting venom at your eyes as though their heads were emitting fiery rays, recall Avalokiteśvara, and immediately they will lose their poison.

If a heavy downpour falls from thunderclouds emitting bolts of lightning, recall Avalokiteśvara, and the storm will instantaneously be calmed.

Seeing beings oppressed by hundreds of sorrows and afflicted by many sufferings, he looks down upon the world, including the gods, and protects it. . . .

Recall, recall, and do not doubt that pure being, Avalokiteśvara! In the face of death, misfortune, and calamity, he is a protector, a refuge, a recourse.

He, Avalokiteśvara, has perfected all qualities, and he looks upon all beings with pity and loving kindness. Virtuous—a great ocean of virtue—he is worthy of praise.

He has compassion for the world and will one day in the future become a Buddha. I bow down before him, Avalokiteśvara, who puts an end to all suffering, fear, and sorrow.

Source: Translated from *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, ed. U. Wogihara and C. Tsuchida (Tokyo: Seigo Kenkyūkai, 1934–35), pp. 366–72.²

5.2.2 The Multiple Forms of Tārā

Another favorite savior bodhisattva in both Indian and Tibetan Buddhism was the “goddess” Tārā, who is sometimes paired with Avalokiteśvara. Tārā, like Avalokiteśvara, could take on a variety of forms. She could be benign and comforting and was tireless in the assistance she provided to the oppressed

and downtrodden; but she could also be ferocious, specializing not only in saving sentient beings from their enemies but also in fiercely destroying those enemies. She too had a short mantra (OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SVĀHA) by which she could be invoked. The following selection is from a Sanskrit work in praise of Tārā, attributed to Saṃajñānamitṛa, an Indian monk of the late seventh or early eighth century.

Om! Praise to the Blessed Noble Tārā! [. . .]

Your compassion truly extends equally to all beings on the pathways of rebirth; therefore, I am surely among those whom it embraces.

Your unequalled capacity to save beings shines like the sun on the dark passions, the impurities of the whole world; and I too suffer and am tormented! Oh! The impure misdeeds that I have committed!

Woe! Woe! Ill-fated am I! I am blind, even in the light of the sun! I am thirsty even on the banks of a refreshing icy mountain stream! I am poor even with access to abundant jewels in the mines of the Isle of Gems! Being without refuge, I make you my protector, Blessed Lady, you who are the support of the whole world.

Even a mother gets tired of a baby who constantly cries for milk. Even a father gets angry at a son who daily asks for things he does not have. But you, like a great wish-granting tree, fulfill the desires of this Triple World. You never fail to grant the requests of all those who reverence you. [. . .]

When those who are injured—whose limbs are being fed on by vermin that have attached themselves to their oozing open wounds, smelling of flesh, flowing with blood, suppurating with stinking pus, filled with impurities due to their past evil deeds—devote themselves . . . to service at your feet, their physical bodies become beautiful like gold, and their eyes like lotuses.

Those in whose ear the gurus have not repeated the sacred texts (as though they were putting alms in a bowl) and those who, lacking a wealth of knowledge, become mute in the fellowship of the learned—they will become the Lord of Speech as a result of devotion to you. . . .

Those whose loins are covered with rags that are torn and dark with dirt from lying on the ground; who pick lice and seek food from others in a broken pot—they will gain universal sovereignty over the earth by propitiating you. . . .

Those who are tired of seeking ways in which to make a living by bartering, by carrying out a trade, or by being employed in the service of others and who fail to get money even though they have amassed merit in previous lives—by turning to you who surpass the gods, Mother of the destitute, they . . . will obtain a treasure of gold spewed forth from the earth. [. . .]

Some see you in your fierce form, striking out with bright weapons uplifted and swinging, breaking and pervading the sky, your arms entwined with bracelets that are hooded serpents. Taking on this frightful aspect, you scare enemies away, your laughter causes great tumult, like the rolling and crashing of a mountain dam.

² Alternative English translation, Hendrik Kern, *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka or The Lotus of the True Fairchild* (London: Clarendon Press 1884) at 412–17.

But for others, in each of your hairs is visible the expanse of heaven and earth wherein dwell in bliss the gods Brahmā, Indra, and Rudra as well as humans, maruts, siddhas, gandharvas, and nāgas. And all directions are pervaded by hundreds of Buddhas without end, which you have magically fashioned. Worthy of worship by the Triple World, in your own being, you contain all creatures. . . .

Some see you red like the sun whose rays are redder than red lacquer or vermilion. Others see you blue like dust made of the pulverized fragments of a magnificent precious sapphire. And some see you white, more dazzling than the churned ocean of milk and brighter than gold. Your form, like a crystal, takes on various aspects, changing according to the different things that are placed near it.

Source: Translated from *Āryatārāśragdharāstotra*, ed. Godefroy de Blonay, *Matériaux pour servir à l'étude de la déesse buddhique Tārā* (Paris: Émile Bouillon, 1895), pp. 34–39.³

5.2.3 Samantabhadra and the Reciters of the Lotus Sūtra

The bodhisattva Samantabhadra was relatively late in gaining popularity in India, but he achieved some importance in East Asia, where he is known as P'u-hsien (Chinese) or Fugen (Japanese) and is famed in his own right as well as for the great white elephant on which he is said to ride. He is often paired with Mañjuśrī, the prime bodhisattva of wisdom. In the *Lotus Sūtra*, however, from which the following selection is taken, he is given a specialized role as the protector of all those who preserve the sūtra by reciting it.

Then the great bodhisattva Samantabhadra . . . went to Vulture's Peak and approached the Blessed One. He saluted him by prostrating himself at his feet, then circumambulated him seven times and said: "Blessed One, I have come here from the Buddha field of the Blessed Tathāgata Ratnajojoyudgata, since I have heard that in this world system the Blessed Tathāgata Śākyamuni is preaching a discourse on the Dharma, the *Lotus of the Wonderful Law*, and I wish to hear it. . . .

[Then, having heard the sūtra expounded], the great bodhisattva Samantabhadra said: "Blessed One, in later times, in a later period, . . . I will protect all those monks who recite this Dharma discourse. I will ensure their well-being, preserve them from persecution, protect them from malignant poisons, so that no one looking for a way to oppress them will be able to get at them: neither Māra, nor his sons, nor his daughters, nor others of his followers and neither gods, nor demons, nor hungry ghosts, nor ghouls, nor evil spirits, nor spectres.

"Blessed One, I will always constantly guarantee the protection of one who recites this Dharma. And when a Dharma-reciter who applies himself to this sūtra mounts the walkway to practice walking meditation, I

³Alternative French translation, in de Blonay, *Matériaux*, pp. 41–47.

will mount my six-tusked white elephant and, surrounded by a host of bodhisattvas, go to his hut and safeguard his recitation of the Dharma.

"And when that Dharma-reciter, applying himself to this sūtra, forgets so much as a word or a syllable of the text, I will mount my six-tusked white elephant, appear to him in person, and repeat the whole Dharma discourse for him. And seeing my actual self and hearing from me the whole Dharma discourse, without lacunae, he will become happy, delighted, exultant, . . . and he will make heroic efforts in his recitation and, upon seeing me, will immediately acquire samādhi and be endowed with various spells to ensure his protection."

Source: Translated from *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, ed. U. Wogihara and C. Tsuchida (Tokyo: Seigo Kenkyūkai, 1934–35), pp. 384–86.⁴

5.3 SAVIOR TEXTS

Samantabhadra's function in the *Lotus Sūtra*—to protect those who rehearse and venerate the sūtra itself—reflects the growing magical, salvific function of Buddhist scriptures. Indeed, in the Mahāyāna the personae of bodhisattvas were not the only agents of salvation; the very texts in which they figured, because they contained and conveyed the Dharma, came to be seen as having the power both to enlighten and to protect beings who turned to them. And the intervention of a Samantabhadra figure to ensure protection was by no means always needed: the text itself came to be seen as quite capable of doing so on its own. Just as the power of bodhisattvas could be called upon by the recitation of their particular mantras, the power of texts could likewise be captured by the recitation or copying of a portion of the text, a chapter, a verse, or even just the title.

This gave rise, in the Mahāyāna, to the phenomenon of self-laudatory texts, sūtras that devote a few lines or a chapter to the praise of their own preservation, recitation, and power. Indeed, in other portions of the *Lotus Sūtra*, we can read how those who commit to memory or copy out but a portion of it will be guaranteed immense soteriological benefits. In time, whole Buddhist sects came to be focused on the salvific power of such texts, the prime example, perhaps, being the Japanese Nichiren sect, where the primacy of the *Lotus Sūtra* is much emphasized and the mantra in praise of its title (Namu Myōhō renge kyō—"Praise to the *Lotus Sūtra* of the Wonderful Dharma") is much chanted (see 9.7).

In time, also, some sūtras appeared that were almost entirely self-laudatory in nature, as the following selection testifies. Here the emphasis is not so much on the recitation of the text as on its writing, its copying—something that was seen as a powerful, protective act of praise and merit. The following example comes from a relatively obscure text, the *Aparimitāyuh Sūtra* (*Discourse on Unbounded Life*).

⁴Alternative English translation, Hendrik Kern, *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka or The Lotus of the True Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884), pp. 431–34.

Om! Praise to the Blessed One, the king of immeasurable life, . . . the arhat, the completely enlightened Buddha.

Whoever copies or sponsors the copying of this *Aparimitāyuh sūtra* will never be reborn in the hells, nor among animals, nor in the world of Yama, nor in any of the places of inopportune rebirth, and wherever they are reborn, they will, in each birth, be able to remember their previous lives. . . .

Whoever copies or sponsors the copying of this *Aparimitāyuh sūtra* will thereby have caused to be written the 84,000 sections of the Dharma. . . .

Whoever copies or sponsors the copying of this *Aparimitāyuh sūtra* will thereby have built and established 84,000 stupas. . . .

Whoever copies or sponsors the copying of this *Aparimitāyuh sūtra* will never unwittingly commit any of the five deeds that result in immediate retribution in hell. [. . .]

Whoever copies or sponsors the copying of this *Aparimitāyuh sūtra* will be followed everywhere by the four celestial guardian kings, who will ensure his or her protection. . . .

Whoever copies or sponsors the copying of this *Aparimitāyuh sūtra* will be reborn in the Sukhāvati world system, Buddha field of the Tathāgata Amitābha. . . .

Whoever copies or sponsors the copying of this *Aparimitāyuh sūtra* will never be reborn as a woman. . . .

Whoever, for the sake of teaching this *Aparimitāyuh sūtra*, would give so much as a penny, it would be as though he or she had given a gift by filling up the trichullomegachulicocosm with the seven precious gems.

Indeed, if one were to venerate, with offerings of the seven precious gems, all the Tathāgatas of the past, . . . it would still be possible to measure the merit thereby accumulated, but it is not possible to measure the amount of merit that comes from this *Aparimitāyuh sūtra*.

Source: Translated from *Aparimitāyuh sūtra*, Sanskrit text ed. A. K. Rudolf Hoernle, *Manuscript Remains of Buddhist Literature found in Eastern Turkestan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916), pp. 309ff.

5.4 CELESTIAL BUDDHAS AND PURE LANDS

Savior texts such as the *Aparimitāyuh sūtra* and bodhisattvas such as Tārā and Avalokiteśvara were effective in dealing with the problems of this world, but they were not, of course, the only figures in the Mahāyāna pantheon. An equally important role must be assigned to those bodhisattvas who, by fulfilling their vows, had become celestial, or savior, Buddhas such as Amitābha, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, and Bhaiṣajyaguru.

It is sometimes asked how these Buddhas differ from the savior bodhisattvas who are often closely associated with them. Are they simply "more advanced" beings on the same path, or are they radically different in nature? The

assertions that Buddhahood is one of the things that bodhisattvas will not attain without assisting other sentient beings to final enlightenment, and that Buddhas, being totally transcendent, are not supposed to be able to intercede personally in everyday worldly affairs. The problem can be elucidated, however, by a consideration of two features of the careers of these celestial Buddhas: first, their vows and second, their Pure Lands.

The mythology of the celestial Buddhas likes to feature the vows that they made long ago when they were still bodhisattvas. Typically, these elaborate vows are set in conditional terms, expressing a desire on the part of the bodhisattva *not* to become a Buddha *unless* such and such items specified in the vow have been fulfilled. For example, in one Pure Land text, Dharmākara (the bodhisattva who eventually becomes the Buddha Amitābha) makes a series of vows (see below) and then reflects: "Having made these world-surpassing vows, I am certain to attain the unsurpassable Way. But, I pledge that, if my vows are not fulfilled, I will not realize perfect awakening. If I do not become a generous donor for endless cosmic ages, rescuing everywhere the destitute and the suffering, I pledge I will not realize perfect awakening."⁵ Such statements, however, are presented as having been made long ago. In the meantime, the bodhisattva making them (in this case, Dharmākara) has gone on to become a "full" Buddha (in this case, Amitābha). What this amounts to, then, is the ultimate guarantee of the genuineness of his vows, for, in a certain sense, they have already been fulfilled.

Obviously, one of the things to which this mythology opened the door was a mushrooming among devotees of the sentiment of faith, of reliance on the vows or former vows of Buddhas for one's own attainment of enlightenment and one's own benefit in this world.

Buddhas, however, are sometimes portrayed as not being supposed to intervene directly in the affairs of human beings. Unlike bodhisattvas, who might be said to be "in this world though not of it," celestial Buddhas are "neither of it nor in it." Instead, they reside in transcendent, utterly wonderful "other worlds"—not ordinary heavens but Pure Lands—where they wait to welcome devotees. As a consequence, their compassion tends to be more centripetal than that of the great bodhisattvas. Rather than going out to help sentient beings, they attract them to themselves.

5.4.1 Amitābha and His Pure Land

One of the best known of the celestial Buddhas is the Tathāgata Amitābha, who dwells in the Western Pure Land of Sukhāvati (the Land of Bliss). In the *Larger Sukhāvati vyaḥs sūtra*, the forty-eight (or forty-six; the number varies) vows he made long ago as the bodhisattva Dharmākara are listed. These conditional vows lie at the basis of what was eventually to become, in the Pure Land tradition of China and Japan, a very sophisticated theology of salvation by means of faith in the grace of this Buddha, but for the most part they describe characteristics of Amitābha's future Pure Land, Sukhāvati.

⁵Juñis O. Gómez, *The Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), p. 172. Original text: *Larger Sukhāvati vyaḥs sūtra* (Taishō shinshū daizōkyō, ed. J. Takakusu and K. Watanabe [Tokyo, 1924–29], no. 360, 12:269b).

Amitābha's vows are too numerous to spell out fully here, but a summary can be given.⁶ Dharmākara first promises that his Pure Land will have certain characteristics: it will be a place where there will be no unfortunate realms of rebirth (vow 1) and no danger of falling into any of them (vow 2); where all beings will have golden skin (vow 3) and there will be no difference between gods and humans (vow 4); where all beings will be endowed with magical powers (vow 5), such as the ability to remember former births (vow 6); the divine eye (vow 7), the divine ear (vow 8), and mind-reading powers (vow 9); where there will be no notion of personal possessions (vow 10); and where there will be no beings who are not fixed in the truth (vow 11). Dharmākara further promises not to attain Buddhahood if anyone should be able to count his disciples (vow 12); if the light of his body is measurable (vow 13), or if the life span of beings in his Pure Land (vow 14) or his own life span (vow 15) are measurable; or even if the word *demeritorious* is known there (vow 16); or if all Buddhas everywhere do not praise his name (vow 17).

There then follows, in Chinese versions of the text, Dharmākara's famous Eighteenth Vow, which is not fully stated in the Sanskrit text but which became of key importance in the Chinese and Japanese Pure Land tradition. In it, Dharmākara guarantees entry into his Pure Land to anyone who repeats his name as many as ten times and thinks on him with faith. Indeed, to this day, millions of Buddhists in East Asia seek to make good on this vow by sincerely chanting "Praise to the Buddha Amitābha" (Japanese: *Namu Amida Butsu*), desiring rebirth in his Pure Land.

Dharmākara then goes on to promise to appear to people at the moment of their death (another important feature of East Asian Pure Land mythology) and, in another vow not found in the Sanskrit text, to make sure that all beings in his Pure Land are endowed with the thirty-two marks of a Great Man. The next several vows (nos. 20–32 in the Sanskrit text) all promise beings in his Pure Land ease of access to various sorts of things: opportunities to worship, the wherewithal to do so, and abilities to fathom doctrine, to know things. Moreover, beings there will be freed from rebirth (vow 33), freed from being women (vow 34), clothed in new monastic robes (vow 36), and free from pain (vow 37); the jewel-trees there will produce magnificent ornaments (vow 38); Buddhas and bodhisattvas everywhere will praise Amitābha's name (vows 35 and 39); and beings in his Pure Land will easily attain knowledge, powers, and various meditative trances (vows 40–46).

These vows give us some idea of what Amitābha's Sukhāvati is like, but the Pure Land texts do not rest at that. They go on to describe its features in detail, features that make it much resemble a paradise. The following passage is from the Sanskrit text of the "Smaller Description of the Land of Bliss."

Then the Blessed One spoke to the Venerable Śāriputra: "Śāriputra, over a hundred thousand billion Buddha fields to the west of here, there is a Buddha field called the world of Sukhāvati. And there dwells a

Tathāgata, an altogether enlightened Buddha named Amitāyus [Amitābha]. . . . Now what do you think, Śāriputra, why do they call that world the land of bliss? Because, Śāriputra, in that world, Sukhāvati, beings do not experience suffering [duḥkha], neither with their body nor with their mind, and the things causing happiness are innumerable. . . .

"Śāriputra, Sukhāvati is adorned and enclosed by seven railings, seven rows of palm trees and strings of bells. And it is beautiful and embellished with four kinds of precious materials: gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and crystal. . . . And, Śāriputra, there are lotus pools there made of seven precious materials: gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, red pearls, diamonds, and coral. They are filled with water endowed with eight good qualities . . . and they are strewn with sand of gold. And going down into those lotus pools, from all four sides, are four flights of steps, beautiful, and embellished with four precious materials. . . . and all around the lotus pools jewel-trees are growing, beautiful, and embellished with seven precious materials. . . . And in those lotus pools, lotuses are growing: various kinds of blue ones, and various kinds of yellow ones, and various kinds of red ones, and various kinds of white ones, beautiful, beautifully colored, beautifully resplendent, beautiful to look at, and as big around as the wheel of a cart. . . .

"Furthermore, Śāriputra, in that Buddha field, divine musical instruments are always playing, and the earth is pleasant and golden colored. And in that Buddha field, three times each night and three times each day, showers of blossoms fall, divine mandāra blossoms. And the beings there, during the time it takes to eat one morning meal, can pay homage to a hundred thousand billion Buddhas, by going to other universes. And after showering each Tathāgata with a hundred thousand billion flowers, they return to their own world in time for a nap. . . .

"Furthermore, Śāriputra, in that Buddha field, there are geese, snipe, and peacocks. Three times each night and three times each day, they come and sing together, each uttering its own cries. . . . And when the people there hear that sound, they become mindful of the Buddha, mindful of the Dharma, and mindful of the Sangha. Now, Śāriputra, [because of these birds] are you thinking that there are beings who have been reborn in that Buddha land as animals? That is not the way you should see it. Why? Because, in that Buddha field, Śāriputra, no one is born as a hell being, an animal, or a hungry ghost in the dominion of Yama the god of the dead. These birds were magically fashioned by the Tathāgata Amitāyus, and their cries are the sound of the Dharma. With such marvelous Buddha-field qualities, Śāriputra, is that Buddha field Sukhāvati arrayed."

Source: Translated from "Sukhāvativyūhaḥ [saṃkṣiptamātrkā]" in *Mahāyāna-sūtra-saṃgraha*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, *Buddhist Sanskrit Texts*, no. 17 (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1961), pp. 254–55.⁷

⁷Alternative English translation, Luis O. Gómez, *The Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), pp. 16–18.

⁶For the full text, see "Sukhāvativyūhaḥ [vīṣṭaramātrkā]" in *Mahāyāna-sūtra-saṃgraha*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, *Buddhist Sanskrit Texts*, no. 17 (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1961), pp. 225–30; English translation, F. Max Müller, in *Buddhist Mahāyāna Texts*, ed. E. B. Cowell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), part 2, pp. 12–22.

buddhas' path join the Mahāyāna, the path to unsurpassed enlightenment.

5. "When I have attained enlightenment, may beings in my order lead chaste and studious lives, and may they be perfect and well-restrained in their observance of the precepts; and if any of them happen to be deficient in morality, may they not be reborn in a lower state of rebirth, after hearing my name.
6. "When I have attained enlightenment, may beings who are physically disabled; whose senses are impaired; who have bad skin color; who are deaf and mute, lame, humpbacked, albino, maimed, blind, or mad; and whose bodies are otherwise defective have their senses restored and their limbs made wholesome, after hearing my name.
7. "When I have attained enlightenment, may those beings who are afflicted by various diseases, without shelter or refuge, without the aid of medicine, helpless, poor, and suffering, be cured of all their illnesses, should my name fall upon their ears; may they be free from sickness and grief right up until enlightenment.
8. "When I have attained enlightenment, any woman who is afflicted by the hundreds of various disadvantages of womanhood and who wishes to be liberated from being reborn as a loathsome female should bear my name in mind, and she will no longer be reborn in the female state, right up until enlightenment.
9. "When I have attained enlightenment, all those beings who have been caught by Māra's noose, who are closely tied to various wrong views—may I free them from all of Māra's heretical entrapments, instill in them correct views, and consequently show them the way of the bodhisattva.
10. "When I have attained enlightenment, may those beings who are smitten by fear of the king, imprisoned in shackles, condemned to die, plagued by many hallucinations, dishonored, and afflicted by sufferings of body, speech, and mind be liberated from all fears and oppression by the meritorious power of the hearing of my name.
11. "When I have attained enlightenment, those beings who are suffering the pangs of hunger or who, in their search for food and drink, were caused unwillingly to commit evil deeds—if they bear my name in their minds, I will satiate their bodies with foods that look, smell, and taste good.
12. "When I have attained enlightenment, any beings who have no clothes, who are poor, who are plagued by cold and heat and mosquito bites and suffering day and night—if they bear my name in their minds, I will clothe them in wonderful garments, dyed various colors; and I will bring them pleasures in various ways, by means of jewels, ornaments, perfumes, garlands, unguents, and the sounds of song and musical instruments; in these ways I will fulfill all the wishes of all beings.'

5.4.2 The Twelve Vows of Bhaisajyaguru

Sukhāvatī, the Land of Bliss in the west, was, of course, not the only Pure Land, and the Tathāgata Amitābha not the only celestial Buddha to become the object of a cult. The so-called Buddha of Medicine, or Healing Buddha, Bhaisajyaguru, also attained a tremendous popularity in East Asia. His cult has its origins in India, however, where he especially appealed to people who found themselves plagued by sickness or all sorts of other sufferings. In the following Sanskrit text, the Buddha Śākyamuni tells the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī about Bhaisajyaguru's vows.

The Buddha then said: "Listen, Mañjuśrī, and pay careful attention to what I say."

"I shall," said the ever-youthful Mañjuśrī, and he gave ear to the Blessed One.

"East of here, Mañjuśrī, beyond Buddha fields as numerous as the sands of ten Ganges rivers, there is a world called Vaidūryanirbhāsa. There dwells a fully enlightened Tathāgata named Bhaisajyaguru Vaidūryaprabha (Lord of Medicine Resplendent as Lapis Lazuli). He is perfect in wisdom and good conduct, accomplished and knowing the world, an unsurpassed guide of those who are to be trained, a teacher of gods and humans, a Blessed Buddha. Now, Mañjuśrī, that Blessed Tathāgata Bhaisajyaguru Vaidūryaprabha, long ago, carrying out the practices of a bodhisattva, made these twelve great vows:

1. "When I, in the future, am awakened to unsurpassed complete enlightenment, then may innumerable, inconceivable, unmeasurable world systems be lit up, warmed and illuminated by the brilliant glow of my body. And may the bodies of all beings become endowed, as mine is, with the thirty-two marks and the eighty minor signs of the Great Man.
2. "When I, in the future, have attained enlightenment, may my body be absolutely pure, inside and out, like a priceless jewel of lapis lazuli; because my body is large, may it be endowed with a most excellent brilliance and radiance, may its rays surpass those of the sun and the moon and give light everywhere, so that beings born in that world system, even those who are out in the dark, gloomy night, can see to go their various ways and do good deeds.
3. "When I have attained enlightenment, may I, through my inconceivable wisdom and the use of my unmeasurable skillful means, be a supporter of beings, providing for their protection, food, and enjoyment; and may those who are in some way deformed no longer be so.
4. "When I have attained enlightenment, may those beings who are following a heretical path, or the disciples' path, the pratyeka-

"These, Marījuśrī, are the twelve vows that were made long ago by the Blessed Bhaiṣajyaguru Vaidūryaprabha, Tathāgata, arhat, completely enlightened one, as he was carrying out the practices of a bodhisattva."

Source: Translated from *Bhaiṣajyaguru vaidūryaprabhārāja sūtra*, ed. Nalinaksha Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts* (Srinagar: Government Research Department, 1939), 1:2-7.

5.4.3 How to Be Reborn in Akṣobhya's Land

The importance of faith and invocation as means of being reborn in the Pure Land was much emphasized by the Amidist schools that developed in China and Japan. But this should not obscure the fact that in other texts, other ways—more complementary than contradictory—of getting to the Pure Land were advocated. One of these is the practice of visualization, a meditative technique that we have already encountered, which takes as its object of concentration, of "construction," the characteristics of the Pure Land and of the body of the Buddha. In the *Amiāyur-dhyāna sūtra*,⁸ for example, one starts by contemplating the setting sun (appropriately in the West) and proceeds to visualize various features of the Pure Land of Sukhāvati—the water, the land, the jewel-trees—before moving on to the lotus throne of the Buddha and finally the Body of Amitābha itself. If all this is too difficult and complicated, an alternative is then proposed: simply to repeat the name of the Buddha, "Namu Amida Butsu."

In addition to visualization, however, some texts stressed the importance of moral discipline and lifestyle. The following verses suggest that access to the Buddha Akṣobhya's Pure Land was to be had by observing the precepts and doing good, meritorious deeds. The importance of Akṣobhya's cult should not be overlooked. In some ways, his Pure Land of Abhirati, located in the East, was but a counterpart to Amitābha's Pure Land of Sukhāvati in the West, but in other ways it differed significantly from it. Of special note was the fact that women could be reborn as women in Abhirati and could even give birth there, without labor pains. This was not the case in the Pure Lands of Amitābha and Bhaiṣajyaguru, where women, in gaining rebirth, became men. Moreover, it is evident in the Abhirati texts that the earliest notions of a Pure Land were ones that featured it not as a concession to the rank and file but as something that individual Buddhists should establish for themselves just as Akṣobhya did.⁹ In this way, one might not only aspire to "be born in Akṣobhya's Land" but to "give birth to a land like Akṣobhya's" by virtue of one's actions and merit. The following passage is from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*, a Mahāyāna text that is not primarily concerned with Akṣobhya but that pauses long enough to do justice to his cult.

⁸ English translation, Junjiro Takakusu, "Meditation on Buddha Amītyasus," in *Buddhist Mahāyāna Texts*, ed. E. B. Cowell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), part 2, pp. 161-201.

⁹ See Jan Nattier, "The Realm of Akṣobhya: A Missing Piece in the History of Pure Land Buddhism," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 23 (2000): 71-102.

Do no injury to living beings,
Hold firmly to all the rules of restraint,
Accept the Buddha's exquisite teaching,
And you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

Do not steal other people's property,
Always be kind and generous to all,
Everywhere build habitations for monks,
And you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

Do not ravish others' wives and daughters,
Do not take your own wife at the wrong time,
Have your bed in keeping with the precepts,
And you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

Keep watch on your mouth and avoid false speech
Either for your own sake or for others,
In search of advantage or out of fear,
And you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

Do not slander any good acquaintance,
Keep far away from evil company,
Let your mouth always speak agreeably,
And you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

Be the same as all the bodhisattvas,
Always free from evil utterances,
So that men will gladly hear what you say,
And you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

Even when you are playing and laughing
Do not utter inappropriate words,
Be careful always to speak timely words,
And you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

Seeing others receive gain and service,
Let your thoughts be always those of gladness,
Never let knots of jealousy be tied,
And you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

Cause no affliction to living beings,
Let your thoughts always be those of kindness,
Do not employ evil expedients,
And you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

Perverted views say there is no giving
To one's parents, no past and no future.
If you do not entertain such notions,
Then you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

Dig good wells beside roads in the desert,
Plant and cultivate orchards of fruit trees,
Always give nourishment to mendicants,
And you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

If to the Buddha, Doctrine and Order
You offer one incense lamp in worship
Or even present a single flower,
Then you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

If either because of apprehension
Or for the sake of profit or merit
You write out one stanza of this scripture,
Then you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

If, for the hope of profit and fortune
In the course of one day you are able
To read and recite this scriptural text,
Then you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

If, for the sake of supreme enlightenment
Throughout a whole day and throughout one night
You adhere to the eight rules of fasting,
Then you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

If you do not reside in the same place
As those who violate the chief precepts
And scold slanderers of the expanded texts,
Then you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

If you can give charity to the sick,
Even if it is just a piece of fruit
And giving them a pleasant, cheering glance,
Then you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

If you do not steal the Order's offerings
But guard the property of the Buddha
And paint and sweep Buddha and Order's sites,
Then you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

If you make images and Buddha-shrines,
Even if they are only a thumb's size,
And if you always take delight in them,
Then you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

If for the sake of this scriptural text
Your own body, your wealth and your treasures
You give to the preacher of the Doctrine,
Then you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

If you are able to listen, write down,
Receive, and remember and read and recite
All the Buddha's reservoir of secrets,
Then you will be born in Akṣobhya's Land.

Source: Reprinted by permission of the publisher from Richard Robinson,
Chinese Buddhist Verse (London: John Murray, 1954), pp. 61–63.¹⁰

¹⁰Original text: *Maṇiparīśrāvā sūtra* (Taishō shinshū daizōkyō, ed. J. Takakusu and K. Watanabe [Tokyo, 1924–29], no. 375, 12:734a–b).

5.5 TANTRIC BUDDHISM, OR THE VAJRAYĀNA

Tantric Buddhism is based on the Tantras, a category of texts commonly distinguished from the sūtras. The first appearance of the Tantras is very difficult to date (fourth century c.e.), and the area of their origin within India is still much disputed. Tantric Buddhism is sometimes considered as a final outgrowth of the Mahāyāna, but it is sufficiently distinct as a movement that it is perhaps best to consider it as a “vehicle” in itself. As such it is often called the Vajrayāna (Diamond, Thunderbolt, or Adamantine Vehicle) or the Mantrayāna (Mantra Vehicle).

The complexities of Tantric Buddhism cannot be gone into here, but a number of its features need to be highlighted. First, taking seriously the Mādhyamika doctrine of the inseparability of *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*, the Tantras asserted that enlightenment could be attained by means of the things of this world itself, by means of one's own body, one's own speech, one's own mind. To make the point even more graphically (and to reassert, perhaps, through iconodlastic and eccentric language and behavior the freedom from convention that comes with liberation), some Tantrics sought out the equation with *nirvāṇa* by involvement in some of the most impure forms of *saṃsāra*—meat eating, wine drinking, sex.

More generally, the Vajrayāna sought to enable one to become identified, in one's own body, speech, and mind, with the enlightened Buddha. This process of identification could be accomplished in this lifetime (the Vajrayāna was commonly seen as a shortcut to enlightenment) by means of certain rituals and visualizations. Calling upon all the powers of concentration that had long been utilized in Buddhist yogic techniques, assuming the constructs of the Mind to be as real as the Vijnānavādins asserted them to be, and basing themselves on the full potential of emptiness, Tantric meditators developed visualization practices whereby they could envision an enlightened Buddha (or several Buddhas) and themselves as merging.

Such visualizations made much use of the creative and transformative power of letters and words, either chanted as mantras or visualized as seed syllables, of different colors, and of their different relations to the Buddhas. They also used mudrās, symbolic hand gestures adopted by both the meditator and the visualized figures of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, as well as maṇḍalas, structured arenas, sacred worlds in themselves, in which one could symbolically arrange or find arranged many visualized figures of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. It is clear in all of this that ritual and iconography play important roles in Tantric Buddhism.

At the same time, in the Tantras the theme of the creative union of polar opposites came to the fore. Buddhism had always sought a Middle Way between the extremes of world denial and world affirmation. One way of doing this was to seek to combine, to merge perfectly, inclinations in the two directions. Thus a bodhisattva should have both wisdom (*prajñā*) and skillful means (*upāya*) and should be involved in both emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*). In Tantric Buddhism, the symbols for expressing such polarities and their union mushroomed: sun and moon, vowels and consonants, right and left. But one of the most prevalent images that developed was that of female and male, the union of which effected the union of

wisdom and means, of the understanding of emptiness and compassionate involvement with the forms of this world.

5.5.1 Tantra against a Mādhyaṃika Background

In early Buddhist literature, a saying is sometimes quoted to the effect that people who trip and fall on the ground must get up again by supporting themselves on the very ground that made them stumble. In the following selection, from a text that is attributed to a monk called Āryadeva II (in order to distinguish him from Nāgārjuna's disciple, Āryadeva I), this principle is extended to the whole of life in this world and reinterpreted in the context of the Mādhyaṃika notion of the nonduality of nirvāṇa and saṃsāra.

Those who do not see things as they are think in terms of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. Those who see things as they are think of neither saṃsāra nor nirvāṇa.

For false discrimination is the "great grabber" that causes one to sink in the ocean of saṃsāra. Free from false discrimination, great beings are released from the bonds of becoming.

Unenlightened people are afflicted by the poison that is the poison of doubt. Having uprooted it completely, one who is compassionate should continue practicing.

Just as pure crystal takes on the colors of other objects, so too the jewel of the mind is colored by its false imaginings.

By nature, the jewel of the mind is free from the colorations of false imaginings; it is originally pure, unproduced, without inherent self-existence, immaculate.

Therefore, because of this fundamental purity of the mind, one should strive to do everything that fools condemn, by means of union with one's own tutelary deity . . .

One who has aroused the thought of enlightenment and set his mind on Buddhahood should not try to deny or get out of the world.

One who, in contemplating the world, does not see it as originally pure, unproduced, without inherent self-existence, and immaculate is not a Buddha and is not liberated.

What should we do? Where can we obtain the various powers of becoming? Someone who is overcome by poison can become poison-free by the use of some more poison [as an antidote].

Similarly, water in the ear can be washed out by water, and a thorn removed by a thorn. In this way, the wise can get rid of passion by means of passion itself.

Just as a washerman gets the dirt out of clothes by means of dirt, so too the wise resort to vices to get rid of vices.

Source: Translated from *Cittavīśuddhiprakaraṇa* of Āryadeva, ed. Prabhupāda B. Patel (Shantiniketan: Visvabharati, 1949), pp. 2-3.¹¹

¹¹ Alternative English translation of some of these verses, David Snellgrove, in Edward Conze, *Buddhist Texts through the Ages* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), p. 221.

5.5.2 The Perfection of Nonduality

Some of the implications of this lack of distinction between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are borne out in the practices or visualization-meditations (sādhana) of Tantric adepts. We shall start with a relatively short text written in the ninth century C.E. by a yogin named Lakṣminkarādevī. She was the sister of King Indrabhūti and achieved fame as one of the eighty-four siddhas (perfected ones) of the Indo-Tibetan Vajrayāna. In her work she sets forth a method of unconventional ritual-meditational acts designed to help one break through this world of conventional reality, this world of attachment to "things," to "ideas," and to the "dos and don'ts" that go with them. Indeed, in a world that is marked by emptiness, in which saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are indistinguishable, nothing (or everything) is sacred, and Lakṣminkarādevī, like later Zen masters, can even advocate murdering the Buddha. At the same time, it must be realized that Lakṣminkarādevī is also using here the conventions of what was called "twilight language," in which certain terms likely to shock not only mean what they say but also stand as symbols for a whole set of other connotations. Thus, for example, when she speaks of "feces, urine, and semen," she is also calling to mind delusion, hatred, and desire; the Buddhas Vairocana, Akṣobhya, and Amitābha; and body, speech, and mind (bodhicitta).

Oṃ. Homage to Vajrasattva [Diamond Being]!

I bow my head before Vajrasattva, resplendent by nature, omniscient, originator of the Triple World, deliverer of desired fruit! I will speak briefly about the supreme sādhana of Vajrasattva . . .

Even in a hundred billion aeons, one who does not have true yoga will fail to succeed through the practice of restraints, vows, fasting, uttering mantras, or meditating.

The mantrayānist should always practice true meditation by making devotional offerings of such things as feces, urine, and semen as well as snot.

The yogin should always make devotional offerings, employing wisdom and skillful means, to his mother and sister, as well as his daughter and niece.

The yogin should always make devotional offerings, by means of meditation on knowledge and Vajra, to any woman who is missing a limb, who is vile, an artisan, an outcaste.

These are the seed syllable mantras of the Truth: OM AH HŪM.

Those terrifying deeds that bind living beings are the very ones that will liberate them from their bonds of becoming when accompanied by skillful means.

Every day, the yogin should carry out the sacraments that originated in the five divine families of the Tathāgatas, and make devotional offerings of flesh mixed with seminal "milk" produced on various occasions.

Having aspired to complete enlightenment, the mantrayānist should contemplate the ocean of knowledge with a smile on his face and his eyes wide open.

Everything that abides in the Triple World, whether it be stationary or moving, should be seen, by means of true yoga, as having Vairo.

Those who follow other traditions or who are marked by being of mixed caste should not be despised; they too are transformations of Vajrasattva.

Treating all beings equally—they have all come into existence without a Self—the mantrayānist should always meditate upon his body, which is pure by nature.

The Lord delights in receiving offerings made with skillful means such as perfumes, garlands, cloth, incense, and such things as song, music, and dance.

The yogin should not undertake painful practices, such as fasting, bathing, purification; also he should quit his village responsibilities.

He should not venerate gods who are made of wood, stone, or clay but should always make devotional offerings to his own body, by inward concentration.

He should make devotional offerings to the Vajra-bearer with feces and urine mixed with honey together with the flesh of the five [animals: cow, dog, horse, elephant, and human].

By means of true meditation, he should make devotional offerings to the deity dwelling in the body, with the self-born flowers of women together with seminal "milk" produced on various occasions.

He should seize the property of others; he should have intercourse with their wives. He should tell lies; and he should kill all the Buddhas.

He should not build caityas or other monuments made of stone or clay. He should take no delight in books. He should not make maṇḍalas, even in his dreams, neither in body, speech, or mind.

The knower of mantras should not be disgusted by anything at all, for Vajrasattva himself is physically present, abiding in all things. And the mantrayānist should pay no attention to the differences between such things as where one can go and where one cannot go, what one can eat and what one cannot eat, what one can drink and what one cannot drink.

For the sake of his accomplishment, the knower of the secret truth should eat the creatures produced from the body of all beings and those excreted by Vairocana.

A woman sprung from any caste should not disgust him; indeed she is Blessed Wisdom incarnate in a conventional form.

You need pay no attention to lunar dates, constellations, or fasts. One who is endowed with the knowledge of nonduality will accomplish Buddhahood.

What is the use of so much talk? The knower of the Truth, by means of true yoga, will see everything that there is to perceive. . . .

Source: Translated from *Advayasiddhi*, ed. Malati J. Shendge (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1964), pp. 15–23.¹²

5.5.3 Worship in a Tantric Context

In Tantric Buddhism, visualization was ritual and ritual was visualization, and both, when properly done, were magical, meaningful, dynamic processes that

¹²Alternative English translation, Shendge, *Advayasiddhi*, pp. 24–30.

were soteriologically effective. But visualizations and the mantras and symbolic gestures that accompany them also became important features of ritual worship, of routine practices such as going for refuge, confessing one's faults, making meritorious offerings to one's teacher or to the Buddha, and so forth. Often such visualizations were preliminary practices incorporated into meditative sādhanas aimed at realizing identification with a divinity, but they could also be, as in the following selection from a manual for Buddhist laypersons, ways of practicing one's daily devotions, ways that had the advantage of being able to be done anywhere and of greatly enhancing, at least mentally, the magnificence of one's worship (and the magnitude of one's offerings).

When the third watch of the night has passed, you should get out of bed, cup your hands in devotion, bow your head down to the ground, and say:

"Om! I worship the feet of all the Tathāgatas through union with their body, speech, and mind.

"Om! I present myself for service in the worship of all the Tathāgatas, by pervading the whole realm of reality with the Vajra of my body, speech, and mind. O, you who are the Vajra Being [Vajrasattva] of all the Tathāgatas, give me a firm basis!

"Om! I present myself for initiation into the worship of all the Tathāgatas. O, you who are the Vajra Jewel [Vajraratna] of all the Tathāgatas, initiate me!

"Om! I present myself for the duty of the worship of all the Tathāgatas. O, you who are the Vajra Duty [Vajradharma] of all the Tathāgatas, set me in motion!

"Om! I present myself for the effectuation of the worship of all the Tathāgatas. O, you who are the Vajra Action [Vajrakarma] of all the Tathāgatas, have me carry it out!

"And I engender the Vajra Mind of the knowledge of all things by giving rise to the thought that is equal to the Vajra Knowledge of all Tathāgatas, in order to attain a realization of the true essence of reality equal to my roots of merit."

Such is the ritual to be done. . . .

Then, after kneeling and touching your head to the ground, you should brush your teeth. . . . And over the water held in your hand [for rinsing the mouth] you should recite: "Om! You whose elements are pure, cleanse me of all sins, take away all my misconceptions, hūṃ!"

Then you should wash your face with water over which you have chanted seven times: "Om! Lotus, Lotus. . . . You who are lovely, Lotus of my eyes, hūṃ! hūṃ! hūṃ!" In this way, you will become well liked by all human beings and will suffer from no disease of the eyes.

Then, in your meditation chamber on a comfortable seat, you should contemplate the divinity of your choice, and if you tire of meditation, you should recite mantras. . . .

When the sun has risen, you should immediately offer water that has been purified to Jambhala [the Lord of the Waters]. . . . Then you should do the following ritual visualization: In front of you a red syllable

appears; it becomes an eight-petaled lotus; on top of it there appears a white syllable *a*; it becomes the disk of the moon; the whole becomes pale red: wisdom and means together. And on top of that, a yellow *jam* appears [which is Jambhala himself]. He is in samādhi, in union with his consort Vasudhārā. On his head is the golden Buddha Ratnasambhava. He is bedecked with all his ornaments, his stomach protrudes, he is small in stature, and he is wearing a garland of blue lotuses.

Then, on your right hand, you should visualize the syllables *om* on your wrist, *hūm* in the middle of your hand, *ṛūm* at the tips of your fingers, and *saḥ* at the base of your fingers. And you should recite the following mantra over your hand: "Om! To the Lord of Waters, svāhā!" And with your cupped hand, drink the five nectars of immortality (or, alternatively, perfumed water) saying: "Om hūm ṛūm saḥ."

Then you should offer 108 handfuls of water to Jambhala, for as the Blessed One has said, "One who, with a firm mind and fervent faith, makes such an offering will soon become like Jambhala."

Then, in a pure place, offer 108 handfuls of water to the hungry ghosts while reciting this mantra: "Om! This water is for all hungry ghosts. svāhā!"

Next, without delay, you should make a clay caitya. . . . The ritual is as follows: "Om! Praise to the Blessed One, . . . the completely enlightened Tathāgata arhat! Om! O subtle, unequalled, quiet, subdued, unreachable, independent, glorious nirvāṇa. . . svāhā!"

After reciting this over a lump of clay or sand twenty-one times, you should fashion it into a caitya, saying, "As many as there are atoms in this lump of clay may there be that number of billions of caityas made!" And then set the caitya up with the stanza: "The Tathāgata has explained the cause of those elements of reality that arise from a cause, as well as their cessation. Of this, the great monk has spoken."

Then you should make an offering of flowers to the caitya, reciting the following mantra: "Om! Flowers, flowers, great flowers, good flowers, arisen from flowers, source of flowers, moving beyond flowers, covered with flowers, svāhā!" And for each of the flowers that you offer, it is as though you were giving a billion flowers.

Then you should pay homage to the caitya, saying: "Om! Praise to the Blessed One, . . . the completely enlightened Tathāgata arhat! Om! Jewels, jewels, great jewels, jewel-victory, svāhā!" And for each time you venerate the caitya, it is as though you were venerating it a billion times.

Then comes the ritual smiting [or consecration of the image]:

With the mantra "Om! Mother Earth, svāhā!" you should take up the clay. With "Om! To the Vajra-born, svāhā!" shape it into an image. With "Om! Clean and pure, svāhā!" coat it with oil. With "Om! Womb of the Vajra-realm, svāhā!" complete the image. With "Om! Womb of the Dharma-realm, svāhā!" complete the mudrās. With "Om! Vajra hammer, smash, hūm! Phat! svāhā!" smash [the demons]! With "Om! Pleasure of the Dharma, svāhā!" call out [the Buddha in the image]. With "Om! Well-established Vajra, svāhā!" establish its basis [in the image]. With "Om! Womb of the Dharma-realm blazing with the splendor of the jewels of all the Tathāgatas, svāhā!" fix it there. With "Om! Pure essence womb of the Dharma-realm, come, be off, svāhā!" you should dismiss it. And with

"Om! Womb of the realm of space, svāhā!" you should ask for forgiveness for any ritual errors committed. Then, place what is now an object of worship in a pure place. . . .

In worshipping the Buddha, you should first symbolically bathe the image by stroking it with a peacock feather and reciting the bath mantra. . . . Then make these offerings:

Om! Āḥ! Vajra goods! hūm! svāhā!
Om! Āḥ! Vajra garments! hūm! svāhā!
Om! Āḥ! Vajra flowers! hūm! svāhā!
Om! Āḥ! Vajra incense! hūm! svāhā!
Om! Āḥ! Vajra lights! hūm! svāhā!
Om! Āḥ! Vajra food! hūm! svāhā!

Source: Translated from *Ādikarmapradīpa*, ed. Louis de La Vallée Poussin, *Bouddhisme, études et matériaux* (London: Luzac, 1898), pp. 190–93.¹³

5.5.4 The Meditator Becomes the God

Visualizations, of course, were not restricted to use in devotional worship. They were also put to work in Tantric meditations (sādhana) which had as their aim a double identification: that of the meditator with the Buddha/divinity being visualized and that of the Buddha/divinity with the visualizing meditator. These two realizations, of course, occurred together, but they might be thought of as reflecting the complementary processes of the Tantric path: the quest for wisdom and the expression of compassion.

In the following sādhana, described by the sixteenth century Tibetan monk Pema Karpo, there are several processes of identification with the divinity, and overall the meditation is a visionary endeavor that is fast paced, is constantly changing, and mixes down-to-earth images with syllables, sounds, abstract doctrines, body parts, colors, Buddhas, bodhisattvas, divinities, and so forth. Important in all of this are not only verbal elements and mental elements of the meditation but also the whole physiology of the meditator with its bodily channels and yogic cakras. Truly, this sādhana involves the coordination of body, speech, and mind.

It is often hard to follow in this visualized world what is inside and what is outside, what is the meditator and what is the tutelary deity (the meditator's yidam—here Cakrasamvara, who emanates and is emanated from all the letters of the alphabet), and what is the Buddha (here in one of his "fierce" forms as Heruka). Indeed, unifications of all these figures in the "father-mother" (Tibetan: yab-yum) sexual mode and interpenetrations and identifications are part of the whole purpose of the visualization. But not forever: as in all such meditations, there is, in the end, a systematic dissolution of all the visions. Emptiness is what has made the whole process possible, and to emptiness the process returns; and the meditator comes back to the world, but not unchanged.

¹³ Alternative English translation, Stephan Beyer, *The Buddhist Experience* (Encino, C.A., 1964), pp. 107–10.

We shall start our selection toward the end of the *sādhana*, at the point where the meditator, having already gone through several transformations, identifies himself with the deity in his fierce manifestation, then visualizes himself united in yab-yum embrace with his consort, and then further generates the maṇḍala of the deity within his heart.

And my body is colored white; I have four heads and twelve arms; my right foot is stretched out, trampling upon the breast of the red Lady Night-of-Time; and my left foot is slightly bent, trampling upon the forehead of the blue Creator-of-Terror. My head in front is white, my head on the left is green, my head in the rear is red, and my head on the right is yellow, and each of my faces has three eyes.

I have matted and piled hair, marked with a jewel, a crossed vajra, and a crescent moon; on each of my heads is a diadem of five dried human skulls; and I have made a necklace of fifty dripping human heads. I am adorned with the six signs of ferocity: wheel and earrings and necklace and bracelets and girdle and ashes of the dead. . . .

And upon my lap is the Mother; her body is colored red; she has one head and two hands; and her face has three eyes.

Her left hand holds a skull-bowl filled with entrails, and with this arm she embraces the Father; her right hand holds a vajra aloft to the sky, with a terrifying gesture; on her head is a diadem of five dried human skulls, and she has made a necklace of fifty human skulls; her hair hangs free, and she is adorned with the five signs of ferocity.

And the calves of her legs embrace the thighs of the Blessed One, and we both stand in the midst of the blazing fire of knowledge.

On a moon at the tops of the heads of both Father and Mother is OM; on a sun at our necks is AH; on a sun at our hearts is HUM. And SVĀ is at the break of our waists; ĀḤ is on our sexual organs; and HĀ is between our thighs.

In the secret place of the Father appears the syllable HUM which transforms into a white vajra; on its tip appears the syllable BAM, which transforms into a red gem; and the hole is blocked by a yellow PHAT.

In the Mother's place of space appears the syllable AH, which transforms into a red lotus; in its center appears the syllable OM, which transforms into its white anthers; and the hole is blocked by a yellow PHAT.

And the Father and Mother enter into union, and the vajra is within the lotus; and by the sound of the bliss thereof, and by the light which radiates forth from our hearts, we invite all those whose accomplishment of deity is innate, and all those whom we have cleansed and transformed into the maṇḍala of the Blessed Cakrasamvara.

And they all enter into union in the sky before me: they melt into Great Bliss and enter through my mouth; they descend my central channel; they pass through my vajra, and fall and mix into the lotus of the Mother. . . .

In my heart is an eight-petaled lotus and in its center stands the god himself, the same as I am, but only four fingers tall; on the four petals in

the four directions are the four goddesses of the central lotus, and in the intermediate directions are the four offerings. And in the twenty-four places of my body, as I touch each place with the ring finger of my left hand, there appear the twenty-four syllables PUM JĀM OM AM GOM RAM DEM MĀ KAM OM TRIM KOM KĀM LAM KĀM HIM PREM GREM SAUM SUM NAM SIM MAM KUM!

And these syllables melt into light and become the twenty-four great places of pilgrimage in the world: the fields and solitary places, the assembly places and cemeteries. And in this divine pavilion of radiance within my body there appear all the deities of my maṇḍala; and each place of pilgrimage is a stage on the path to enlightenment, and all the gods and goddesses therein are the qualities which lead to enlightenment. . . .

And the eight Ladies who guard the gates of the maṇḍala stand at the portals of my mouth and nose and penis and anus and left ear and eyes and right ear.

And my body has become the world, and my whole body is filled with the maṇḍala.

And I grasp the ego of the unchanging body and speech and mind of all Those Who Have Come: OM AH HUM! I am the very self whose essence is the diamond of the body and speech and mind of all the gods and goddesses! OM! All events are diamond pure, diamond pure am I! [. . .]

And the deity himself is upon a lotus in my heart, and in his heart is a moon, and upon the moon in his heart is the syllable HUM.

And the dot of the HUM is the essence of the five Buddhas, and its light is like a rainbow halo; and in the midst thereof I clearly see the whole maṇḍala and its retinue.

And every time my breath goes out, the divine hosts of the Blessed Cakrasamvara radiate forth on the tips of beams of light, to purify the world of inanimate objects into a divine palace, and the beings of the world of animate objects into a divine maṇḍala like themselves. And then my breath gathers them all back into me; and this happens over and over again as I breathe.

Then the syllable HUM appears where the secret places of the Father and Mother join together; and then it appears on the tip of my penis, within the vagina of the Mother; and thereby my mind and my breath are firmly fixed within my central channel; and this alone is the very highest of recitations of the mantra.

Then the mantra issues forth with light from the HUM in my heart; it descends the diamond path; it passes through the central channel; it circles through my vajra into the lotus of the goddess and upward from mouth to mouth.

And this is the forward recitation of the mantra; if the direction is reversed, upward through the diamond path and into the mouth of the goddess, this is the fierce recitation; and I practice each of these in turn.

And I recite the mantras in a whisper. . . .

The final emptiness. The vowels and consonants issue forth from my right nostril, with five-colored beams of light; and on the tips of these beams of light there radiate forth the deities of the maṇḍala; they purify

the entire Triple World and render it into the essence of their divine body and speech and mind.

And the whole world is made equal to these gods and goddesses, whose deity is forever innate; and the world is gathered back into me with the vowels and consonants; they enter through my left nostril and reach the level of my navel.

And the vowels and consonants transform into a moon of red and white radiance: the gods and goddesses transform into a white and red syllable *hūṃ*.

And the syllable *hūṃ* transforms into a two-armed Blessed One, Father and Mother, doing the sport of lust; and by the sound of their inner experience of spontaneous joy, the whole *maṇḍala* is aroused and satiated with Great Bliss.

And the cemeteries are gathered into the gates; and the gates into the central lotus, and the lotus into me, the Lord at the center of the *maṇḍala*: and I am gathered into the Father and Mother at my navel.

And the Father and Mother melt into light and transform once more into the moon and its syllable *hūṃ*.

And the moon dissolves into the *hūṃ*, and the U-vowel into the *ha*, and the *ha* into the head-stroke, and the head-stroke into the crescent, and the crescent into the dot; and the dot dissolves into Pure Sound.

And my mind is bound to the Pure Sound, and as it grows fainter and fainter I enter into the inconceivability which imposes no constructs upon reality.

The return to the world. And then there arises the Pure Sound, and from that there arises the syllable *hūṃ*, and from the syllable *hūṃ* the *maṇḍala* instantaneously appears again: and I am the god himself in the world.

Source: Reprinted by permission of Wadsworth, Inc. from Stephan Beyer, *The Buddhist Experience* (Encino, CA: Dickenson, 1974), pp. 146–53.¹⁴

5.5.5 Offering the World-*Maṇḍala* to One's Guru

Within the Tantric Buddhist system of training, one's guru (teacher) occupies a position of prime importance. In some ways, because gurus are present in this world and active as compassionate guides, their disciples are to think of them as prior even to the Buddha or, as in the following text, as embodiments of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha combined. Indeed, in Tibet, the guru is often added as a "fourth refuge" to the traditional formula of taking refuge in the Triple Gem.

There are many ritual expressions of devotion to one's guru. One of these is the offering of a *maṇḍala*. The word *maṇḍala* literally means "circle." In

¹⁴Original text: Pad-ma dkar-po, *Snyan-rgyud yi-bzhin nor-bu'i bskyed-pa'i rim-pa rgyas-pa 'dod-pa'i re-skong zhes bya-ba* [The Process of Generation of the Wishing Gem of the Ear-Whispered Teachings] (Dalhousie: Phum-tshogs chos-khor gling, n.d.), folios 1–19.

Vajrayāna Buddhism it generally refers to a directionally organized diagram of divinities (usually Buddhas and bodhisattvas) that is at once a representation macrocosmically of the whole of reality and microcosmically of the mystical physiology of the meditator. In the present instance, however, *maṇḍala* refers to a representation of the world—the Buddhist cosmos consisting of Mount Meru surrounded by the four continents, in the midst of the great ocean, encircled by the cosmic fence. Monastics and laypersons who carry out this ritual offering today often make use of small world-*maṇḍala* "kits," a flat metal pan complete with encircling rings, on which they can symbolically construct the cosmos by heaping up small piles of grain to represent each of its continents and other features, all the while chanting mantras and visualizing the "real" things. In this way they can make a total offering of the entire cosmos to their guru or to any other object of devotion, who may well also be visualized.

You should make a *maṇḍala* offering to your guru. Why? Because it is said, "The guru is like all the Buddhas," and also, "The guru should be seen as the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha." [. . .]

This is the ritual: Saying, "OM! *ĀḤ!* *hūṃ!*" you assure the protection of the place and of yourself. Saying, "OM! *hrīm!* *svāhā!*" you establish your seat. Saying, "OM! *ĀḤ!* *Vajra-ground, hūṃ!*" you take possession of the ground.

Reciting "OM! *Vajrasattva*, throw out all obstructions! *hūṃ!* *phat!*" you take cow dung and purify the place and prepare the surface of the *maṇḍala*-disk. With "OM! *ĀḤ!* *Vajra-fence, hūṃ!*" you [encircle the world with a fence and] establish its basis.

Then you should take some flowers, over which you have recited a mantra, and saying, "OM! Best of *Vajra-gurus*, accept my worship and my offering, *hūṃ!*" you should offer them in the middle [of the prepared surface]. Then you should wash your hands.

Then, in the middle of the surface, place and visualize the establishment of a four-sided Mount Meru, with eight summits, its east side made of silver, its south side made of lapis lazuli, its west side made of crystal, and its north side made of gold. And in the middle, on top of a lion's throne made of gems, in the center of an eight-petaled lotus, you should see your glorious guru, bedecked with various ornaments. . . .

Then, on the four sides of Mount Meru, you should distinguish the four cosmic continents: *Pūrvavideha* in the East, in the shape of a half-moon and white; *Jambudvīpa* in the South, triangular and golden; *Āparagodāniya* in the West, round and red; and *Uttarakuru* in the North, square and blue. And you should visualize each and every one of these continents as filled with rubies, sapphires, lapis lazuli, emeralds, diamonds, pearls, and coral.

Then you should take the flowers previously given and offer them again in the center of the *maṇḍala*, saying, "OM! *hūṃ!* Praise to the guru in the center!" And offer them above the *maṇḍala*, saying, "OM! Praise to the *Vajra-guru!*"

Then you should honor the four continents in the four directions:

"OM! YAM! Praise to Pūrvavideha!
 "OM! RAM! Praise to Jambudvīpa!
 "OM! LAM! Praise to Aparagodāniya!
 "OM! VAM! Praise to Uttarakuru!"

Then you should honor the subcontinents, visualizing them in the intermediate directions:

"OM! YĀ! Praise to Dehavideha!
 "OM! RĀ! Praise to Ambara!
 "OM! LĀ! Praise to Kurukaurava!
 "OM! VĀ! Praise to Śākhā Uttarmañjarya!"

And you should honor the [first four regalia-treasures of a great cakravartin king,] visualizing them on the four continents surrounding Mount Meru:

"OM! YA! Praise to the Elephant-treasure!
 "OM! RA! Praise to the Adviser-treasure!
 "OM! LA! Praise to the Horse-treasure!
 "OM! VA! Praise to the Woman-treasure!"

And you should honor the [four other regalia-treasures of a great cakravartin king,] visualizing them on the subcontinents in the intermediate directions:

"OM! YAH! Praise to the Sword-treasure!
 "OM! RĀH! Praise to the Gem-treasure!
 "OM! LĀH! Praise to the Wheel-treasure!
 "OM! VĀH! Praise to the Great Wealth-treasure!"

And you should offer flowers, in front of and behind Mount Meru, visualizing them as the sun and the moon and saying:

"OM! ĀḤ! Praise to the Moon!
 "OM! ĀḤ! Praise to the Sun!"

And as you recite all these mantras, all of these things come into being of their own accord, and you should offer them to your guru. Taking flowers between your outstretched hands, you should visualize everything as filled with precious gems, and say:

"Praise to you, Praise to you,
 Praise to you, Praise, Praise!
 With devotion, I praise you,
 my guru and my master, be gracious to me!"

Source: Translated from "Ādikarmapradīpa," in Louis de La Vallée Poussin, *Bouddhisme, études et matériaux* (London: Luzac, 1898), pp. 194-97.¹⁵

¹⁵ Alternative English translation, Stephan Beyer, *The Buddhist Experience* (Encino, CA: Dickenson, 1974), pp. 60-61.

5.5.6 Songs of a Mad Saint

For all of its emphasis on realization through transformation of the self and the world and its graphic visualizations, Tantric Buddhism did not escape the processes of systematization and institutionalization. Indeed, in time, the Vajrayāna came to be an academic discipline, part of the curriculum of the monastic universities, and initiations into sādhanas came to be seen as transitional points in one's monastic career. This, however, was not universally the case, for alongside the ranks of monastic Tantrics there were also iconoclasts, homeless wanderers, who expressed in their antinomian behavior the visionary trips of the sādhanas.

Sometimes, these wanderers are said to form what is called the Sahajiyā movement, a variety of Tantra that differed from the mainstream less in its doctrines than in its lifestyle. The Sahajiyā "saints" were long-haired eccentrics who sought not only to be free from rules and restrictions but also to challenge and ridicule them. Wandering about, often with their sexual companions, openly engaging in drunken and licentious behavior, sometimes quite insane, they spoke of Wisdom as a great Whore and sought to shock both the monastic and the social establishments. Some of these "saints" composed songs about their experiences, spontaneous poems that were written in vernacular dialects and were filled with references to their practices, both physical and meditational. The following example is taken from the songs of Kāṇha, who lived in Bengal in the ninth century C.E.

The path is blocked by vowels and consonants.
 Kāṇha is disconsolate when he sees it.
 Kāṇha, where will you go to make your abode?
 You are indifferent to all the objects of your mind.
 There are three, there are three, but the three are separate:
 Kāṇha says: it is existence separates them.
 Whatever comes goes away:
 Kāṇha is disconsolate at all this coming and going.
 Hey, Kāṇha! The palace of the Conquerors is found nearby.
 Kāṇha says: I don't understand this.

He tramples the solid posts of reality.
 He tears off the bonds which encompass him.
 Kāṇha frolics, rutting with wine.
 He enters the lotus lake of the spontaneous and finds peace.
 The more the elephant lusts for his mate
 The more he drips the musk of Suchness.
 All the creatures of the six destinies are pure in essence:
 Neither being nor nonbeing has a hairtip of impurity.
 The ten precious strengths radiate in the ten directions.
 Tame the elephant of ignorance with nondefilement.

His staff holds firm the power of his channels,
 His drum unstruck gives forth warlike sounds:
 Kāṇha, the skullbearer, the yogin, has set out to practice:
 He wanders alone in the city of his body.

The vowels and consonants are made his anklets,
The sun and moon are made his earrings.
He smears himself with the ashes of lust, hatred, and delusion,
He takes supreme freedom to be his string of pearls.
He has slain his mother-in-law and sisters-in-law within the house,
He has slain his mother: Kāṇha has become a skullbearer.

Hey, Whore, your hut is outside the city.
You stroke the brahman boys and go away.
Hey, Whore, I shall join together with you,
I, the shameless Kāṇha, the naked yogin, the skullbearer.

The lotus is one, its petals sixty-four:
I climb upon it and dance with the Whore.
Hey, Whore, honestly I ask you:
In whose boat do you come and go?
The Whore sells string as well as wicker baskets.
For your sake I have given up dancing.
You are a Whore, I a skullbearer.
For your sake I have put on a garland of bones.

I play chess on the board of compassion:
Instructed by my true guru, I capture the chessmen of existence.
Two are removed. Ha! I checkmate the king.
The Conqueror's palace is near, Kāṇha,
In the direction of the castle.
First I take up the pawns and slay them.
I take up the rook and crush the five men.
The bishop sends the king to nirvāṇa.
I keep them from moving, I capture the chessmen of existence.
Kāṇha says: I offer a good stake.
I count out sixty-four squares and take them.

Eight maidens form my boat of the three refuges.
My body is compassion, emptiness my mistress.
I have crossed the sea of existence like an illusion, a dream.
I feel the flow of waves in the middle.
I make the five [Tathāgatas] my oars:
Row your body, Kāṇha, that net of illusion.
Smell, touch, taste: whatever they may be
They are like a waking dream.
My mind is the helmsman in the boat of emptiness:
Kāṇha has gone to live with Bliss.

Easily I ply the triple world.
I sleep in the play of Bliss.
Hey, Whore! How is your flirting?
The patricians are outside, the skullbearers within.
Hey, Whore! You have spoiled everything.
For no reason you have spoiled the moon.
Some people say you are ugly.
But wise men cling to your neck.
Kāṇha sings of his low-caste lover:
There is no better whore than you.

Existence and nirvāṇa are the two drums,
Mind and breath are the two cymbals:
The bass drum resounds *jaa jaa* "Victory victory"
As Kāṇha goes off to marry the Whore.
The whore is married, birth is eaten up,
The dowry is the highest Law.
Day and night pass in lovemaking.
The night is brightened with my Lady's flame.
The yogin who is devoted to the Whore
Does not leave her for a moment: he is drunk with the spontaneous.

The mind is a tree, the five senses its branches,
Desires its many leaves and fruits.
Cut it down with the axe of the true guru's word.
Kāṇha says: the tree will not appear again.
The tree grows with the water of good and evil.
The wise man cuts it down at the command of his guru.
Whoever doesn't know the secret of cutting it down—
The fool slips and falls, and experiences it as existence.
The tree is emptiness, the axe is the sky:
Cut down the tree! Leave neither root nor branch.

He strikes at existence with the arm of emptiness.
He steals the stores of delusion and eats them.
He is asleep.
He does not know the difference between himself and others.
The naked Kāṇha sleeps in the spontaneous.
Neither aware nor feeling, he has gone full asleep.
And dreams in Bliss that he sets all beings free.
In a dream I saw the empty world
Spinning about, neither coming nor going.
I shall make the great yogin my friend:
The scholars don't see things my way.

The objects of the mind are rubbish.
Texts and traditions are piles of bricks.
Tell me how you can speak of the spontaneous
Where body, speech, and mind do not enter.
The guru teaches his disciple in vain.
How can he speak of what is beyond the path of speech?
The more he says, the more he is an old humbug.
The guru is dumb, and the disciple is deaf.
Kāṇha says: what is the jewel of the Conqueror like?
It is like the dumb enlightening the deaf.

The mind spontaneously is full of emptiness.
Do not grieve when you lose your body.
Tell me how Kāṇha doesn't exist any more:
Every day he spreads through the triple world, and measures it.
The fool is sad when he sees the seen destroyed.
Does a breaking wave dry up the ocean?
The fool does not see how the world is:
He does not see the butter in the milk.

Nothing comes or goes in reality.
That's the reality that Kāṇha plays in.

Source: Reprinted by permission of Wadsworth, Inc. from Stephan Beyer, *The Buddhist Experience* (Encino, CA: Dickenson, 1974), pp. 258-61.¹⁶

5.5.7 The Story of the Yoginī Mañibhadrā

Kāṇha and the Sahajiyā saints notwithstanding, the lifestyle of Tantric adepts was not all freedom and flaunting of convention. The union of wisdom and means in this very body, speech, and mind could, in fact, take on many different expressions.

In the following story of Mañibhadrā, one of the the eighty-four siddhas of the Indo-Tibetan tradition, we have an example of a person who appears, at least for a time, to harmonize her practice and realization with the routines of her daily life.

In the town of Agarce there lived a wealthy householder, who had a thirteen year old daughter. She was betrothed to a man of her own caste, and as was the custom the young woman lived in her parents' house until she was old enough to be her husband's wife. During this period the Guru Kukkuripa came to her house begging food.

"What a fine handsome man you are!" the girl told him. "Why do you wear patched robes and beg your food when you could take a wife and live comfortably?"

"I am terrified of the wheel of rebirth, and I am trying to find the great joy of liberation from it," Kukkuripa told her. "If I do not take this opportunity, in my next life I may not be so lucky. This human birth is really a precious chance, and if I break my vows of chastity by taking a wife, all my hopes and aspirations will be shattered and I'll be afflicted with many kinds of grief. When I realized that, I gave up the pursuit of women."

The girl was impressed by Kukkuripa and trusted him. After she had offered him good food, she said, "Please show me the way to liberation."

"I live in the cremation ground," Kukkuripa replied. "If you so desire, come to me there."

Preoccupied with the significance of the Guru's words, Mañibhadrā, for that was her name, neglected her work for the rest of the day, and then at nightfall she went to the cremation ground. Kukkuripa recognized her spiritual maturity and gave her the Saṃvara initiation and empowerment together with instruction in the union of creative and fulfillment meditation. Thereafter she remained in solitude for seven days, establishing herself in the practice of her sādhana. But when she returned

¹⁶Original text: *Hājār Bācharer Purāṇa Bāṅgālā Baudhha Cān O Dohā* [Buddhist Songs in Old Bengali], ed. Haraprasad Sastri (Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1916), with the emendations of Tarapada Mukherji, *The Old Bengali Language and Text* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1963).

home her parents beat her and reviled her. Mañibhadrā defended herself, "There is no one in the universe who has not been either father or mother to me," she said. "Besides, a pure blood line and a good family upbringing do not free a girl from the grip of saṃsāra. So relying upon a Guru, I have decided to practice a sādhana that can bring me liberation. I have already begun."

Her words mollified her parents, who could find nothing to answer her with, and putting all thought of her housework out of her mind, Mañibhadrā began to practice her sādhana one-pointedly. After a year, when her betrothed came to take her to his own house, she accompanied him without demur. In her new home she performed everything that was expected of her cheerfully and uncomplainingly, always speaking modestly and sweetly, thus controlling both her body and speech. In good time, she gave birth to a son and a daughter and brought them up in an exemplary manner.

Twelve years had passed since she met her Guru and formed her aspiration, then one morning as she returned from the stream with a pitcher full of water, she tripped over a root and fell down, breaking her pot. In the afternoon, after she had been missed from the house, her husband came looking for her and found her gazing fixedly at the broken pitcher. When he asked her what was the matter, she continued to stare, evidently not having heard him. All her family and neighbors came to try to distract her, but she remained silent and unmoving until nightfall, and then she expressed her realization in these words:

Sentient beings from beginningless time
Break their vessels, their lives ended,
But why do they return home?
Today I have broken my vessel
But abandoning my saṃsāra home
I go on to pure pleasure.
The Guru is truly wonderful!
If you desire happiness, rely on him.

So saying, Mañibhadrā floated into the sky and taught the people of Agarce for twenty-one days. Thereafter she attained the Dakinī's Paradise.

Source: Reprinted by permission of the publisher from Keith Dowman, *Masters of Mahāmudrā: Songs and Histories of the Eighty-Four Buddhist Siddhas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), pp. 313-15.