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The Prophecy Concerning Strīvivarta

Strīvivartaavyākaraṇa

འཕགས་པ་བྱད་མེད་འགྱུར་བ་ལྷུང་བསྟན་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ།

'phags pa bud med 'gyur ba lung bstan pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo

The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra “The Prophecy Concerning Strīvivarta”

Āryastrīvivartavyākaraṇanāmahāyānasūtra



Toh 190
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SUMMARY

s.1 In this sūtra, Subhūti, one of the Buddha's close disciples, enters into a discussion with several individuals in the course of his alms rounds. His primary interlocutor is a laywoman who reveals herself to be a bodhisattva great being named Strīvivarta; her teachings are profound and challenging, consistently pointing in the direction of ultimate truth. The sūtra culminates in the Buddha prophesying Strīvivarta's future awakening.

ac.

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ac.1 Translated by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee under the guidance of Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche. Miguel Sawaya produced the translation and wrote the introduction. Andreas Doctor and Catherine Dalton compared the translation with the original Tibetan and edited the text. The translators are grateful to Khenpo Tokpa Tulku and Khenpo Gyaltsen from Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling Monastery for their assistance in resolving several difficult passages.

ac.2 The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

As the Buddha's disciple Subhūti goes to collect alms one morning, he encounters a laywoman who imparts to him wise and penetrating teachings on the nature of reality. The bulk of the sūtra recounts Subhūti's encounter and dialogue with this laywoman, who turns out to be a highly developed spiritual being named Strīvivarta. Subhūti himself adheres to the Hearers' Vehicle, a spiritual path based on the teachings that emphasize the discipline of the *prātimokṣa* vows and the lack of any fixed, singular entity that could constitute a personal "self." By contrast, Strīvivarta is a follower of the Bodhisattva Vehicle, a path toward the development of boundless compassion, the ability to benefit beings on a vast scale, and wisdom that realizes not only the lack of a personal self but also the lack of a fixed, graspable identity in all phenomena. Thus, their exchange serves to contrast these two approaches to awakening. It is worth noting that the name Strīvivarta means "female transformation," a fact that seems relevant as she in fact transforms into a male at the end of the sūtra.

i.2

Set in Rājagṛha, where the Buddha is staying with a large number of disciples, the sūtra commences with Subhūti asking the Buddha about his dream the night before. The Buddha explains that Subhūti's dream indicates that a previously unheard Dharma teaching will be heard; and with that, Subhūti sets off for town to collect alms. Eventually he arrives at the home of Strīvivarta, who immediately poses challenging questions to the monk on a series of profound subjects. In exchange after exchange, Subhūti does his best to reply to the laywoman, but she continuously confronts him with ever more provocative questions.

i.3

As their dialogue unfolds, we encounter explanations regarding an array of challenging topics. In addition to Strīvivarta's eloquent ability to outshine Subhūti on topics of profound import, she is also able to read Subhūti's mind. This fact significantly increases the monk's consternation—not only does she challenge him regarding what he says, she even directly confronts him

about his thoughts! Moreover, others (including disembodied voices from the sky and various gods) appear throughout the sūtra to put Venerable Subhūti to the test. When Subhūti tries to excuse himself and make an exit, he is schooled as to why it is inappropriate to take leave in such a situation.

i.4 Over the course of their encounter, Strīvivarta delivers a series of formidable teachings that illuminate the nature of the Great Vehicle and the Buddha's purposes in going for alms. Strīvivarta also explains how she leads beings to spiritual maturity through skillfully bringing them pleasure. Throughout the exchange, the laywoman's power and authority are highlighted by the fact that periodically, at the close of particular passages of her teaching, members of the audience attain significant levels of spiritual maturity.

i.5 Later in the sūtra, two of the laywoman's young male disciples cross paths with Subhūti. They explain the greatness of bodhisattvas in comparison to the hearers and recite verses in praise of their teacher and her skillful means. This skillfulness becomes strikingly clear when Strīvivarta assumes a handsome male form, showing Subhūti the body with which she teaches women. With this, she stuns the monk to the point that he admits he is at a loss for words; and once again, he tries to leave to complete his alms rounds before it grows too late in the day. In response, Strīvivarta confounds his sense of time by showing various buddha realms in various times and by moving the sun's position in the sky. Convinced of the truth of her teachings, and no longer concerned about time, Subhūti remains.

i.6 Following meaningful encounters with a celestial being and another inspiring bodhisattva, Subhūti finally returns to the Buddha, to whom he relates his experiences. The Buddha explains that the woman he encountered is in fact a bodhisattva great being who benefits countless beings by skillfully bringing them pleasure. Soon thereafter, the great bodhisattva herself arrives with a large retinue of women. When Subhūti pays the woman homage, the senior monk Śāriputra questions why he makes such a gesture of respect to a woman lacking both the spiritual qualities and the body of a noble one. Strīvivarta then proceeds to teach on what constitutes a noble being, the profound nature of the Great Vehicle and its followers, and the unhindered confidence of bodhisattvas.

i.7 There are other sūtras that prominently feature female bodhisattvas. The protagonists in *The Questions of the Girl Vimalaśraddhā* (Toh 84),¹ *The Questions of Vimaladattā* (Toh 77), and *The Lion's Roar of Śrīmālādevī* (Toh 92) are princesses. Elsewhere, royal women are the protagonists predicted to future awakening in *The Sūtra of Aśokadattā's Prophecy* (Toh 76), *The Questions of Vimalaprabhā* (Toh 168), and *The Sūtra of Kṣemavati's Prophecy* (Toh 192). Less privileged laywomen are the main interlocutors in *The Questions of the Girl*

Sumati (Toh 74), *The Questions of Gaṅgottara* (Toh 75), *The Questions of an Old Lady* (Toh 171),² *The Miraculous Play of Mañjuśrī* (Toh 96),³ and *The Sūtra of the Girl Candrottārā's Prophecy* (Toh 191). Even so, given the longstanding Buddhist tradition of according primacy to males, the focus on Strīvivarta in this scripture is unusual and refreshing. Still, in the end Strīvivarta bows down at the Buddha's feet, saying that she will not rise again until she has received a prophecy of her future awakening *and* has obtained a man's body. The five hundred women in her retinue do and say the same. In the Buddha's prophecy that follows, he says that in the bodhisattva's future buddha realm "not even the word *woman* will exist." Upon receiving this prophecy, Strīvivarta and the five hundred women rise into the air, overjoyed, and "take on the appearance of sixteen-year-old boys." The traditional stance on male superiority thus seems to be, after all, reinstated.

i.8

The original Sanskrit of this sūtra no longer seems to be extant, but no less than five Chinese translations are found in the Taishō canon (Taishō 562-566), the earliest of which is datable to the late third century.⁴ According to the colophon to the Tibetan translation, the sūtra was translated into Tibetan by the two Indian preceptors Jinamitra and Prajñāvarman, along with the Tibetan translator Yeshé Dé and others. This locates the Tibetan translation in the late eighth or early ninth century. This dating is also confirmed by the text's inclusion in the Denkarma Catalog of the early ninth century.⁵ In producing this translation, we have based our work on the Degé xylograph while consulting the Comparative Edition (Tib. *dpe bsdur ma*) and the Stok Palace Kangyur.

The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra

The Prophecy Concerning Strīvivarta

1.

The Translation

[F.201.a] [B1]

1.1 Homage to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was dwelling in Rājagṛha, at Vulture Peak Mountain, together with a great saṅgha of five thousand monks. [F.201.b] Also present were eight thousand bodhisattvas. All of them were renowned, had attained the superknowledges, and had unimpeded eloquence, fearlessness, and the acceptance that phenomena are unborn. All of them had generated roots of virtue in the presence of countless buddhas and had become followers of the Great Vehicle. Among them were the bodhisattva great beings Nimindhara, Dharaṇīdhara, Terrace Holder, Holder of the Family of Offering and Giving, Illuminating Intelligence, Completely Pure Intelligence, Purified Intelligence, Viśeṣamati, Anantamati, Vardhamānamati, Priyadarśana, Sudarśana, Surūpa, and the bodhisattva great being Seeing All Meanings. All the bodhisattva great beings of the Good Eon, such as Maitreya, had also gathered and were present in that retinue.

1.2 While the Blessed One was staying in the city of Rājagṛha, the king and all the princes, merchants, householders, ministers, attendants, and city residents, as well as all the people of that area, venerated him, showed him reverence, served him, and made offerings to him.

1.3 One morning, Venerable Subhūti put on his lower garment and robes, picked up his alms bowl, and approached the Blessed One. He prostrated, placing his head at the Blessed One's feet, and then sat to one side. Sitting there, Venerable Subhūti told the Blessed One, "Blessed One, in my dream last night I saw the Thus-Gone One seated upon the seat of awakening. He raised his right hand, which was the color of gold, placed it on the crown of my head, and said, 'Subhūti, tomorrow you will hear a Dharma teaching that you have not heard before.' Blessed One, [F.202.a] what does this foretell?"

The Blessed One replied, “Subhūti, this is an omen that sons and daughters of noble family who long for the Dharma will hear a previously unheard Dharma teaching.”

1.4 Then Venerable Subhūti said to the Blessed One, “Blessed One, I will go to the city of Rājagṛha for alms.”

“If you know that it is time for that, Subhūti, then go,” replied the Blessed One.

1.5 Having received the Blessed One’s assent, Venerable Subhūti prostrated, placing his head at the Blessed One’s feet, and then went into the city of Rājagṛha for alms. Venerable Subhūti proceeded through the city of Rājagṛha seeking alms, and, arriving at the residence of a particular householder, he stood quietly inside the gate. Emerging from that home came a lovely lady, beautiful and elegantly adorned with jewelry. She wore jewelry of precious stones, pearl, coral, and gold, so that she blazed with splendor. Her complexion was lustrous and beautiful. The lady prostrated, placing her head at Venerable Subhūti’s feet, and asked, “What do you desire, honorable Subhūti, standing at my gate?”

“Elder sister,” replied Subhūti, “it is because I seek alms that I am here at the gate.”

1.6 “Honorable Subhūti,” asked the lady, “does the notion of alms still occur to you? Have you, honorable Subhūti, not yet fully understood the notion of alms?”

Subhūti replied, “Indeed, I have fully understood the notion of alms. Nevertheless, elder sister, this body born of parents and developed by consuming rice and porridge cannot subsist without food.”

1.7 The lady asked, “Has honorable Subhūti [F.202.b] not actualized the cessation of formative factors through the cessation of ignorance; the cessation of consciousness through the cessation of formative factors; the cessation of name and form through the cessation of consciousness; the cessation of the six sense sources through the cessation of name and form; the cessation of contact through the cessation of the six sense sources; the cessation of sensation through the cessation of contact; the cessation of craving through the cessation of sensation; the cessation of grasping through the cessation of craving; the cessation of becoming through the cessation of grasping; the cessation of birth through the cessation of becoming; the cessation of old age and death, as well as misery, lamentation, suffering, unhappiness, and agitation, through the cessation of birth?”

“Elder sister,” replied Subhūti, “I have actualized cessation.”

1.8 “Honorable Subhūti, what is it that ceases? What is it that you cultivate?”

“Elder sister, cessation is not cultivating anything at all.”

1.9 “Honorable Subhūti, if cessation is not the cultivation of anything at all, how is it that honorable Subhūti’s body will be nourished by means of alms?”

“Elder sister, having entered the equilibrium of cessation, the body that has arisen from the ceasing of all sensation is nourished by alms.”

1.10 “Honorable Subhūti, if you have passed into nirvāṇa, how is it that your body is to be nourished?”

“Elder sister, the Blessed One’s hearers wander for alms in order to nourish the body.”

1.11 “Well, hasn’t the Blessed One taught that honorable Subhūti is supreme among those without afflictions?”

“That is so, elder sister.”

1.12 “Well, does one who is without afflictions wander or move about?”

“No, elder sister, that is not the case.”

1.13 “Well then, to what end does honorable Subhūti wander about for alms?”

“Elder sister, I do not wander for alms in order to beautify the body. Rather, I go for alms in order to cease sensations and to remain alive.”

1.14 “Honorable Subhūti, are you still dominated by sensations?” [F.203.a]

“Although I am not dominated by sensations, elder sister, I wander for alms in order to cease sensations.”

1.15 “Honorable Subhūti, one who is without afflictions is peerless. And why is that? One who is without afflictions does not experience bodily or mental sensations. One who is without afflictions is not associated with body or mind. One who is without afflictions does not feel pleasure or displeasure. One who is without afflictions is not beset with afflictions for anyone. So, why has the Blessed One taught that honorable Subhūti is supreme among those without afflictions? And why is the absence of afflictions called *the absence of afflictions*?”

Subhūti replied, “Elder sister, the absence of afflictions that is beyond apprehending is free from the flaws of passion.”

1.16 “Honorable Subhūti, is it then the case that if one has no afflictions, one is also free from passion?”

“That is not the case, elder sister.”

1.17 “Well then, honorable Subhūti, how is it that the absence of afflictions is also freedom from the flaws of passion?”

“The teaching on the absence of afflictions, elder sister, amounts to nothing more than an explanation.”

1.18 “Well, honorable Subhūti, does this explanation regarding the absence of afflictions not exist?”

“No, elder sister, it does not.”

1.19 “Honorable Subhūti, if this explanation regarding the absence of afflictions does not exist, what are you explaining here?”

“Elder sister, the Blessed One’s hearers simply make designations on the conventional level using conventional terms.”

1.20 “Honorable Subhūti, to the degree that there is expression, to that extent there are conventional designations. To the degree that there are conventional designations, to that extent there is error. To the degree that there is error, to that extent there will be contention. To the degree that there is contention, to that extent this is not the Dharma of mendicants.”

1.21 “So then, elder sister, what is the Dharma of mendicants?”

“Honorable Subhūti, the Dharma of mendicants is without conventions. [F.203.b] It is unmistaken, and it is free from contention. The Dharma of mendicants is beyond Dharma and non-Dharma. The Dharma of mendicants is free from attachment and nonattachment. The Dharma of mendicants is without objects, and it is not an object. The Dharma of mendicants is without attachment; it is neither bound nor liberated. The Dharma of mendicants is without mind; it is free from mind, mentation, and consciousness. The Dharma of mendicants is contentment. The Dharma of mendicants is letting go of jealousy and attachment. The Dharma of mendicants is having little desire and being content. The Dharma of mendicants is free from all desires. The Dharma of mendicants completely transcends all objects, and it is without grasping. The Dharma of mendicants is definitely freed from the demon of the aggregates. The Dharma of mendicants is without afflictions; it has completely passed beyond the demon of the afflictions. The Dharma of mendicants is unborn. The Dharma of mendicants is free from the demon of the Lord of Death. The Dharma of mendicants is without deceit, arrogance, and concepts; it is unobscured and unfettered. The Dharma of mendicants has completely passed beyond the realm of the demons. The Dharma of mendicants is free from adopting and discarding. The Dharma of mendicants is free from birth and perishing. The Dharma of mendicants is not defiled by the demon of the gods. The Dharma of mendicants is without mental engagement and entirely unsullied. The Dharma of mendicants is without clinging, without marks, and free from all marks. The Dharma of mendicants is not altered by any modes of elements and nonelements; it is without enumeration, separation, and location, and it is equal to space.”

1.22 When the lady gave this teaching on the Dharma of mendicants, for the four thousand gods among those who had gathered by her gate to listen to the Dharma, [F.204.a] the faultless and stainless eye of Dharma that beholds phenomena was purified. For another five hundred gods who were dedicated to the vast Dharma, the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening was brought forth after hearing the lady’s eloquent teaching.

1.23 Then Venerable Subhūti thought, “It is amazing that this elder sister is so eloquent. Since this elder sister can demonstrate such eloquence, she is surely an emanation of the Thus-Gone One.”

1.24 The lady, who knew what he was thinking, said to the elder Subhūti, “Honorable Subhūti, when you thought, ‘She is surely an emanation of the Thus-Gone One,’ you were right indeed. Why is that? Just as the Thus-Gone One has understood suchness, likewise I too have understood suchness. That being so, I am indeed an emanation of the Thus-Gone One. That which is the suchness of the form of the Thus-Gone One, and the suchness of his feelings, perceptions, formations, and consciousnesses, is also my suchness. That being so, I am an emanation of the Thus-Gone One. The suchness of the Thus-Gone One never changes into something that is not suchness. Likewise, my suchness, along with the suchness of all beings, also never changes into something that is not suchness. That being so, I am an emanation of the Thus-Gone One. The Thus-Gone One’s suchness does not only sometimes become suchness; and likewise, my suchness does not only sometimes become suchness. Rather, it is always exclusively suchness. That being so, I am an emanation of the Thus-Gone One. My suchness, along with the suchness of all beings [F.204.b] and the suchness of all phenomena, is simply suchness, genuine and not otherwise. That being so, I am an emanation of the Thus-Gone One.”

1.25 Then Venerable Subhūti said to the lady, “Elder sister, is it by the power of the Thus-Gone One that you knew my mind, or did you know it by means of your own mind?”

“Honorable Subhūti, all those who know the minds of others, be they hearers, solitary buddhas, bodhisattvas, or sages who possess the five extraordinary abilities, know the minds of others due to the power of the Buddha. In that way, elder Subhūti, the knowledge of the minds of others is knowledge through the power of the Buddha. Honorable Subhūti, to give an analogy, beings with eyes see forms in dependence upon the moon, the sun, fire, jewels, lamps, and stars. Similarly, honorable Subhūti, anyone who knows the minds of others, while living here in the darkness of ignorance, attains this knowledge in dependence upon the Thus-Gone One.”

1.26 Then Venerable Subhūti said to the lady, “Elder sister, you are so eloquent! Tell me who you are and whence you came.”

The lady responded, “Honorable Subhūti, what response could be given if someone were to question an emanation of the Thus-Gone One, saying, ‘Noble son, tell me who you are and whence you came?’”

“Elder sister, no response whatsoever could be given.”

1.27 “Similarly, honorable Subhūti, knowing that all phenomena are essentially emanations, what is there for me to say? Furthermore, if someone were to question honorable Subhūti, saying, ‘Are you an ordinary being, a learner, or a worthy one?’ how would you respond?”

While honorable Subhūti was pondering how to respond to the elder sister, [F.205.a] a voice called out from the sky, “Honorable Subhūti, explain briefly to this elder sister how you know that you are a worthy one, whether it is due to your attainment, realization, experience, or understanding.”

1.28 Hearing this voice from the sky, Venerable Subhūti said to the lady, “Elder sister, I am not an ordinary being, nor am I a learner, nor am I a worthy one.”

1.29 “Honorable Subhūti, how am I to understand that?”

“Elder sister, think of me just like someone designated as an emanation of the Thus-Gone One.”

1.30 “Honorable Subhūti is called ‘the foremost among the worthy ones whose defilements have been exhausted and who are without afflictions, worthy of offerings.’ ”

“Elder sister, I am not the foremost among the worthy ones whose defilements have been exhausted and who are without afflictions, worthy of offerings.”

1.31 “If you speak in such a way, honorable Subhūti, aren’t you deliberately lying?”

“Elder sister, if I were to think that I was the foremost and most worthy of offerings among those whose defilements have been exhausted and who are without afflictions, then I would be lying. However, since I do not think that, I speak honestly, and this cannot be called lying.”

1.32 “Honorable Subhūti, aren’t you deceiving the gods who have seen the truths and who have gathered by the gate to listen to the Dharma?”

“Elder sister, one cannot deceive those who have seen the truths.”

1.33 “Has honorable Subhūti seen the truths?”

“I have.”

“If the truths can be seen, they are not the truths. Why not? Because the truths cannot be seen by anyone at all.”

1.34 “Elder sister,” replied Subhūti, “what does the phrase ‘seeing the truths’ mean?” [F.205.b]

“ ‘Seeing the truths,’ honorable Subhūti, refers to beholding all phenomena as sameness. Saying ‘I have seen the truths’ refers to seeing that which is mistaken.”

1.35 “What do you mean by that, elder sister?”

“Honorable Subhūti, seeing the truths is to see that afflictions occur because of being mistaken. Therefore, by seeing that which is mistaken, it is said that one sees the truths.”

1.36 Then the gods who had gathered at the gate to listen to the Dharma revealed the coarse forms of their bodies to elder Subhūti and said, “Honorable Subhūti, you have heard the eloquence of this elder sister; this is a fortunate discovery by you. Anyone who, hearing this teaching, dedicated to it has also met with similar fortune. However, those who appreciate it are not liberated from anything. And why is that? It is because for those who are greatly appreciative, there is no liberation from anything at all. Since those who are greatly appreciative are not bound, they are also not liberated from anything.”

1.37 Then the lady said to Venerable Subhūti, “Honorable Subhūti, aren’t you going for alms? Why have you stopped collecting food?”

“Elder sister, my food is just this—it will suffice to listen to the Dharma like this. Elder sister, one who worries about Dharma robes and alms is not one who longs for the Dharma. One who longs for gain, esteem, and praise is not one who longs for the Dharma. One who is concerned with his body, life, and alms is not one who longs for the Dharma. Even one who longs for approval is also not one who longs for the Dharma. Elder sister, what are the sons and daughters of noble family who long for the Dharma like?”

1.38 “Honorable Subhūti, one who does not crave pleasure is one who longs for the Dharma. One who is not concerned with the eyes and forms, and who is not concerned with the ears and [F.206.a] sounds, the nose and odors, the tongue and tastes, the body and tangible objects, or the mind and mental phenomena—that is one who longs for the Dharma. One who does not depend upon any phenomenon whatsoever is one who longs for the Dharma. Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, one who does not long for the aggregates, elements, and sense sources is one who longs for the Dharma. One who does not long for the realms of desire, form, and formlessness is one who longs for the Dharma. One who does not desire to focus on the characteristics of what is observed is one who longs for the Dharma.”

1.39 Then Venerable Subhūti said to the lady, “Elder sister, I beg your pardon, as I must take my leave of your gate.”

“Honorable Subhūti,” replied the lady, “to give an analogy, one does not beg pardon of the earth element. Likewise, honorable Subhūti, one does not beg pardon of someone whose mind is like earth. Honorable Subhūti, one does not beg pardon of water. Likewise, one does not beg pardon of someone whose mind is like water. Honorable Subhūti, one does not beg pardon of fire, wind, or space. Likewise, one does not beg pardon of someone whose mind is like fire, wind, or space. Honorable Subhūti, one does not beg pardon of a ship, platform, bridge, or highway. Likewise, honorable Subhūti, one does not beg pardon of someone whose mind is like a ship, platform, bridge, or highway. Honorable Subhūti, although one begs

pardon of immature beings, one does not beg pardon of noble ones. Honorable Subhūti, although one begs pardon of those for whom ill will, wrath, and latent tendencies arise, one does not beg pardon of those for whom these do not arise. Honorable Subhūti, to give an analogy, one might seek to extinguish a blazing fire, but one would not seek to extinguish a fire that is not blazing. Likewise, honorable Subhūti, although one begs pardon of those whose afflictions are blazing, one does not beg pardon of those without afflictions.” [F.206.b]

1.40 Then Venerable Subhūti said to the lady, “Elder sister, what is it that you desire as you roar like a lion in this way?”

“Honorable Subhūti, one who has desire cannot resound with a lion’s roar. It is those who desire nothing at all who resound with a lion’s roar. Why is that? For someone who has reference points, there is desire. But for one who is free from reference points, a lion’s roar does not exist at all. For one who has the view of the transitory collection, there is desire. But for one who does not hold views, there is no lion’s roar at all. Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, what wish liberates the mind from defilements with no further grasping?”

1.41 “Elder sister, for one who has desire there is no liberation whatsoever.”

“Honorable Subhūti, in that way I have also entered the state where the mind is liberated from defilements with no further grasping. So I too am now liberated. I too have attained an understanding of the realm of phenomena.”

1.42 Then Venerable Subhūti said to the lady, “Elder sister, if you explain to me the aspects, signs, and features of the Great Vehicle, I will have no doubt that you have genuinely entered the Great Vehicle.”

1.43 The lady replied, “Honorable Subhūti, do you know the Great Vehicle’s aspects, signs, and features?”

“Elder sister, without hearing about them, the hearers are unable to know the Great Vehicle’s aspects, signs, and features. So therefore, elder sister, please explain the aspects, signs, and features of the Great Vehicle.”

1.44 “Honorable Subhūti, the *Great Vehicle* refers to a vehicle without attachment. It is unobscured wisdom and wisdom beyond distinctions. [F.207.a] To give an analogy, honorable Subhūti, the chariots of the active gods and those of the moon and the sun spontaneously traverse the sky and shine on beings, doing so without attachment, without obscuration, and without interruption. Similarly, honorable Subhūti, holy beings who have genuinely entered the Great Vehicle act by the strength of the six perfections and shine the light of the Dharma on all beings without attachment, without obscuration, and without interruption. To give an analogy, honorable Subhūti, the four continents belong to the universal monarch, and wherever he goes it is appropriate that he be attended by the people of the four

continents. But the universal monarch does not think of those subjects as being unequal to him; rather, he acts with loving-kindness toward them. Likewise, honorable Subhūti, wherever bodhisattvas who have genuinely entered the Great Vehicle go, whether to hamlets, cities, towns, districts, provinces, or royal palaces, it is appropriate that they be attended by all beings. Nevertheless, those bodhisattvas have an attitude of impartiality toward all those beings and do not act differently toward them. When bodhisattvas gather disciples through the four means of attraction, their love for all beings never differs. This is why it is called the *Great Vehicle*.

1.45 “Honorable Subhūti, the *Great Vehicle* means that the vehicle is greater. It is worshiped by gods, *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, *gandharvas*, *asuras*, *garuḍas*, *kinnaras*, *mahoraḡas*, humans, nonhumans, Śakra, Brahmā, the guardians of the world, wise ones, holy beings, knowledgeable ones, those who have gone correctly, and those who have entered correctly. [F.207.b] This is why it is called the *Great Vehicle*. Since the Great Vehicle is unborn, it is inexhaustible. This vehicle is the unbroken lineage of the Buddha. This vehicle is the consolidation of the Dharma lineage. This vehicle upholds the Saṅgha lineage. Since this vehicle provides opportunities for all beings and is without obscurations, it is expansive. Since this vehicle is not a matter of improvement, it is unconditioned. This vehicle brings proficiency by means of the six perfections. This vehicle excellently draws others in through the four means of attraction. Since it follows the eight branches of the path of the noble ones, this vehicle proceeds correctly. Due to the cultivation of tranquility and special insight, this vehicle is a fine conveyance. Because the four applications of mindfulness and the mind of awakening are not forgotten, it is the abode of the excellent helmsman. Because of its great compassion, this vehicle is extremely stable. This vehicle is well-established by the state of omniscience itself. Because it conquers all demons, this vehicle is free from fear. Displaying the light of knowledge, this vehicle is free from darkness. Having gathered and accumulated all roots of virtue, this vehicle is the greatest wealth. This vehicle is revered by the world and its gods. This vehicle cannot be destroyed by any opponent. This vehicle is difficult for any hearer or solitary buddha to comprehend.

1.46 “This vehicle delights those lacking faith. This vehicle brings loving-kindness to those who are aggressive. This vehicle brings generosity to the miserly. This vehicle brings discipline to those whose discipline is lax. This vehicle brings patience to those who harbor ill will. This vehicle brings diligence to the lazy. This vehicle brings mindfulness to the forgetful. This vehicle brings calm to the distracted. [F.208.a] This vehicle brings knowledge to those whose knowledge is faulty. This vehicle brings wealth to the poor.

This vehicle brings ease to those who suffer. This vehicle brings supreme joy to the wise. This vehicle brings delight to the knowledgeable. This being so, it is called the *Great Vehicle*.”

1.47 Then Venerable Subhūti said to the lady, “Elder sister, you have excellently articulated the aspects, signs, and features of the Great Vehicle.”

“Honorable Subhūti,” replied the lady, “even if I were to explain the aspects, signs, and features of the Great Vehicle for an eon, or even longer than that, I would not reach the end. Honorable Subhūti, just as the Great Vehicle is immeasurable, so too are its aspects, signs, and features.”

1.48 Venerable Subhūti continued by asking the lady, “Elder sister, when you asked what I desire in going for alms, you were looking for faults in me. However, since the Thus-Gone One, the master of Dharma himself, also goes for alms, are you looking for faults in the Thus-Gone One as well?”

“Honorable Subhūti,” said the lady, “if you know of the skillfulness with which the Thus-Gone One goes for alms, please say so.”

1.49 “No, elder sister, with which skillfulness does the Thus-Gone One go for alms?”

“Honorable Subhūti, the Thus-Gone One goes for alms because he sees twenty-one great purposes. And what are those twenty-one? The Thus-Gone One goes for alms in order to display his excellent form body. Anyone who sees the body of the Thus-Gone One, adorned with the thirty-two marks of a great being and the best of all features, [F.208.b] engenders the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening in order to attain the marks of the Thus-Gone One’s form body. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.

1.50 “Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, when the Thus-Gone One goes to hamlets or cities for alms, those who are blind regain their sight. Those who are deaf can hear again. The mad regain their senses. Those who are naked find clothing. Those who are hungry acquire food. Those who are thirsty find drink. And everyone without exception becomes free from the harms of passion, aggression, delusion, envy, stinginess, wrath, haughtiness, hypocrisy, and anguish. Everyone becomes loving and perceives others as their parents. Since many beings behold these perfect qualities of the Thus-Gone One when he goes to hamlets or cities, they give rise to the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.

1.51 “Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, when the Thus-Gone One goes to hamlets, cities, and towns, gods, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kinnaras, mahoragas, Śakra, Brahmā, and the guardians of the world follow close behind, in order to offer him worship. By the power of the Buddha, humans are able to see gods, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras,

[F.209.a] garuḍas, kinnaras, mahoragas, Śakra, Brahmā, and the guardians of the world worshiping the Blessed One. Seeing this, they admire the Thus-Gone One, thinking, 'The qualities of the Thus-Gone One are truly amazing and wondrous!' With this admiration for the Thus-Gone One, they give rise to the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.

1.52 "Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, when they see the Thus-Gone One going for alms, countless beings who are conceited and obsessed with resources and power, as well as those who are conceited and obsessed with their looks, caste, livelihood, and health, think, 'It is said that he cast away the kingdom of a universal monarch and became a renunciate going for alms. If he has overcome pride like that, surely we too should vanquish our pride.' With this observation, they give rise to the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.

1.53 "Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, when the Thus-Gone One goes to hamlets or cities for alms, the majestic and magnificent gods perceive his state of mind and say, 'He is not afflicted by hunger or thirst, nor is his body weak. And still, through his ever-increasing affection for others, he goes for alms. That being so, we too should go for alms in a similar fashion, with a mind of ever-increasing affection for others.' With this observation, they give rise to the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms. [F.209.b]

1.54 "Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, there are lazy and indolent people who never come to see, pay homage to, and honor the Thus-Gone One. However, when the Thus-Gone One goes to hamlets or cities, they are able to see him effortlessly. Then, seeing him in this way, they experience intense pleasure and joy. With that feeling of intense pleasure and joy, they give rise to the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.

1.55 "Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, the blessed buddhas are meaningful to behold. If beings even so much as behold the Thus-Gone One with a calm gaze for merely a single conscious moment, this becomes an enduring cause for them to pass into nirvāṇa. Honorable Subhūti, it is through considering this great purpose that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.

1.56 "Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, when the Thus-Gone One goes to hamlets or cities, those who are bound by fetters are freed from their fetters. They think, 'It is by the power of the Thus-Gone One that we have been

freed from these fetters.’ Understanding this, they are appreciative and grateful to the Thus-Gone One, and they give rise to the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.

1.57 “Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, when sons and daughters of noble family hear praises of the Thus-Gone One’s qualities, they think, ‘My goodness! We must offer alms to the Thus-Gone One. Let’s give him Dharma robes, make offerings, and show respect. Let’s make offerings with whatever is suitable.’ And those who think this way go to see him. [F.210.a] But there are also those who are under the protection of mothers, fathers, elder siblings, spouses, and partners. Due to such circumstances, they cannot go directly before the Thus-Gone One. Instead, when they see that the Thus-Gone One has come to their hamlet or city, they feel fulfilled and gladdened. Extremely delighted, they experience joy and happiness, and they offer alms to the Thus-Gone One. Moreover, having offered, they give rise to the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.

1.58 “Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, the gods in the realm of the Four Great Kings offered an alms bowl to the Thus-Gone One, and he accepted it. When beings of meager resources with only little to give, whoever they may be, see the Thus-Gone One’s alms bowl they perceive it as full. However, beings of greater resources with much to give, whoever they may be, see the Thus-Gone One’s alms bowl as not full, and so they offer as much as necessary. Having filled his alms bowl, they give rise to the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.

1.59 “Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, when many delicious foods are placed into the Thus-Gone One’s alms bowl, they do not become mixed, but remain apart, as if they were in separate containers. Many gods, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kinnaras, and mahoragas behold such miracles of the Thus-Gone One’s alms bowl, [F.210.b] and thereby give rise to the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.

1.60 “Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, even if the food of all the monks is put into the Thus-Gone One’s alms bowl, it is not filled, nor will it ever become full. Many gods, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kinnaras, and mahoragas behold such miracles of the Thus-Gone One’s alms bowl. They are amazed and give rise to the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.

- 1.61 “Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, the Thus-Gone One’s body is solid throughout; it is not hollow, but solid like a vajra. Although the body of the Thus-Gone One has no stomach, intestines, excrement, or urine, he nevertheless goes for alms and eats food. Even so, he does not swallow the food. Many gods, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kinnaras, mahoragas, humans, and nonhumans witness this and thereby give rise to the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.
- 1.62 “Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, when the Thus-Gone One goes to hamlets or cities, many beings offer alms, whether a lot or a little, excellent or poor. Although those beings may be unable to perfect all the qualities that the Thus-Gone One possesses, they do experience many of the pleasures of gods and humans. [F.211.a] And those qualities are not exhausted until they pass into nirvāṇa. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.
- 1.63 “Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, the Thus-Gone One is perpetually in equipoise and never leaves the state of absorption. When Brahmā or other majestic and magnificent gods of the form realm see the Thus-Gone One going for alms without wavering from his absorption, they think, ‘He exerts himself for the welfare of beings, but surely he does not long for food.’ With this thought they are elated and give rise to the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.
- 1.64 “If, honorable Subhūti, the Thus-Gone One neither went for alms nor ate food, then those sons and daughters of noble family who have gone forth and renounced the householder’s life for the sake of the well-spoken Dharma and Vinaya would also not eat. They would think, ‘We, too, should not go for alms; we, too, should not eat.’ In that way they would go hungry and grow feeble and therefore be unable to realize the unique attainment. It is with their future accomplishment of the unique attainment in mind that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms and partakes of food. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.
- 1.65 “Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, the Thus-Gone One goes for alms in order to fully care for those in the family of the noble ones.
- 1.66 “Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, it is because of his affection for future beings that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms. Otherwise, in the future faithless priests and householders would feel strong aversion for monks and nuns, saying, ‘Why do they go for alms if their teacher himself did not?’ [F.211.b] Now they will instead think, ‘If even their teacher went for alms,

why should they not as well?' Thus, they will utter praise and give alms. They will say, 'Going for alms is indeed a sacred tradition. This practice was praised by the Thus-Gone One.' It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.

1.67 "Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, there are those who have renounced their householder's lives as kings, ministers, priests, householders, and sons of ministers and have gone forth out of faith in the well-spoken Dharma and Vinaya. Out of shame, they might not go for alms, thinking, 'If we have been born into such high castes, why should we go from house to house for alms?' But this way they can go for alms, following in the footsteps of the Thus-Gone One, who himself went for alms in all his majesty. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.

1.68 "Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, the thus-gone ones intend to act in accord with the world. They act in whichever way brings beings to maturity. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the Thus-Gone One goes for alms.

1.69 "Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, the Thus-Gone One is without obscurations, thirst, feebleness, attachment, or anything that could become attachment. He has no wish for negative deeds, and he does not accumulate negativity. [F.212.a] Nevertheless, the thus-gone, worthy, and perfect Buddha goes for alms in order to act in accord with the world and bring beings to full maturity. It is through considering this great purpose, honorable Subhūti, that the thus-gone, worthy, and perfect Buddha goes for alms.

1.70 "That being so, honorable Subhūti, do you also go for alms with such skillfulness, such great compassion, and such pure purpose?"

"No, elder sister, I am incapable of that. To give an analogy, elder sister, there are no dogs or cats capable of destroying Mount Meru, the king of mountains. And there are no foxes capable, even over the course of eons, of teaching the lion, the king of beasts, how to obtain its powerful abilities and its resounding roar. Similarly, elder sister, there are no hearers or solitary buddhas capable of demonstrating such conduct, skillfulness, or great compassion as the Thus-Gone One."

1.71 When this account of the Thus-Gone One's skill in means and his going for alms was given, two thousand eight hundred people from that household, as well as from other households, who had come to listen to the Dharma gave rise to the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening.

1.72 Then Venerable Subhūti said to the lady, "Elder sister, where is your husband now?"

- “Honorable Subhūti,” replied the lady, “my husband does not amount to just one. And why is that? I have as many husbands as there are beings to be tamed by skillfully bringing them pleasure.”
- 1.73 “Elder sister, the Thus-Gone One does not grant anyone sensual pleasure.”
- “Honorable Subhūti, as befits the circumstances, a monk may own and make use of robes, alms, bedding, seat, healing substances, [F.212.b] and medicinal goods, and he may approach the households of close ones and those who provide alms. He may please his friends and follow, attend, and serve his preceptors and masters. The Thus-Gone One has referred to these acts in terms of increasing virtuous qualities and decreasing nonvirtuous qualities.”
- 1.74 “Elder sister, it is just as you have said.”
- “That being the case, honorable Subhūti, it is by such means that the Thus-Gone One grants beings all sensual pleasure.”
- 1.75 “Elder sister, you must have tamed a lot of beings by skillfully bringing them pleasure.”
- “Honorable Subhūti, if one were to count all the stars in the great trichiliocosm, one could determine their number. However, one cannot do so for the number of beings that I have trained by skillfully bringing them pleasure and have subsequently established in unsurpassed and perfect awakening.”
- 1.76 “Elder sister, what kind of pleasure do you give those beings?”
- “Honorable Subhūti,” replied the lady, “there are beings who are keen for the pleasure of Brahmā. To them, honorable Subhūti, I give the pleasure of the boundless concentrations, so that they attain the state of Brahmā. After giving them this, I cause them to enter into unsurpassed and perfect awakening. Honorable Subhūti, there are beings keen for the pleasure of Śakra, to whom, honorable Subhūti, I give the pleasure of Śakra. After giving them this, I cause them to enter into unsurpassed and perfect awakening. Honorable Subhūti, there are beings who are keen for the pleasures of the gods, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kinnaras, and mahoragas, to whom, honorable Subhūti, I give such pleasures. After giving them these, I cause them to enter into unsurpassed and perfect awakening. [F.213.a] Honorable Subhūti, there are beings who are keen for the pleasures of a universal monarch’s realm, while others are keen for the pleasures of ministers, townsfolk, countrymen, priests, and the members of the warrior, aristocratic, and commoner castes. There are beings keen for the pleasures of forms, sounds, odors, tastes, and touch. There are beings keen for the pleasures of flowers, fragrant substances, incense, flower garlands, lotions, powders, parasols, victory banners, pennants, and fans. There are beings

keen for the pleasures of gold, silver, gems, pearls, beryl, conches, crystal, red pearls, coral, emerald, cat's eye, and many sorts of precious substances. There are beings keen for the pleasures of the various sounds of instruments, such as the large drum, clay drum, conch, gong, lute, and flute. To those beings, honorable Subhūti, I grant all wishes, pleasures, and amusements. After granting them these, I cause them to enter into unsurpassed and perfect awakening."

1.77 "Elder sister," said Subhūti, "the five sense pleasures are to be avoided up until the path of the noble ones. Yet you guide others by giving them such pleasures? This seems to be a contradiction in terms. However, elder sister, although it is indeed difficult to guide others by means of those very things that one should avoid until one is on the path of the noble ones, bodhisattva great beings nevertheless do so. How amazing!" [B2]

1.78 At this point, two sons of merchants had gathered by the gate to listen to the Dharma. Through her skillful ways of bringing pleasure to others, the lady had already matured both of them for unsurpassed and perfect awakening. Now they said to Venerable Subhūti, [F.213.b] "Honorable Subhūti, do not judge the knowledge of bodhisattvas by your own knowledge. Why not? Tell us, honorable Subhūti, can a small oil lamp be extinguished by the breath from one's mouth or by the draft caused by waving one's hands or clothes?"

"Sons of noble family, yes, the breath from one's mouth or the draft caused by waving one's hands or clothes can extinguish a small oil lamp."

1.79 "Similarly, honorable Subhūti," continued the two, "even a single desirous thought eradicates the miniscule light of knowledge and merit of sons and daughters of noble family who belong to the Hearers' Vehicle. Now tell us, honorable Subhūti, can the mass of the blazing apocalyptic fire be extinguished by the Ganges river, filled with water?"

1.80 "Sons of noble family, if it cannot be extinguished even by a hundred thousand oceans, what need to mention the Ganges river, brimming with water?"

"Likewise, honorable Subhūti," they said, "the light of knowledge and merit of bodhisattva great beings should be considered to be like that. Honorable Subhūti, even if bodhisattva great beings were to frolic and enjoy themselves by means of the five sense pleasures and were to engage in lovemaking for eons as numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges river, the light of knowledge and merit of those bodhisattvas could not be exhausted by that.

1.81 "It is like the following analogy, honorable Subhūti. In order to heal and alleviate the illness of a poor person who is sick, a physician dispenses many inexpensive medicines that are sweet, sour, salty, spicy, bitter, and

astringent. The sick person will then decide to take those medicines so that they may experience relief. As the illness diminishes due to the medicines, they finally regain their health. Similarly, honorable Subhūti, those who follow the Hearers' Vehicle [F.214.a] experience all sorts of suffering in terms of having to endure ascetic practices, reducing their belongings, having few desires, living in remote places, practicing modesty, and having few resources and little to do. Having experienced such suffering, they eventually pass into nirvāṇa without further grasping. By way of that instruction, honorable Subhūti, you should understand that the liberation of those who follow the Hearers' Vehicle is like the healing of a poor person.

1.82 "To give another analogy, honorable Subhūti, consider the efforts to heal a king of the royal caste upon whom royal authority has been conferred. When he falls ill, a physician carefully concocts and proffers medicine worthy of a king; medicine of the most excellent color, smell, and taste; medicine that is delicious when ingested, and easy on the stomach. Thus, he proffers any and all essential elixirs worthy of a king. Moreover, he offers flowers, fragrant substances, incense, flower garlands, and lotions so that the king is not displeased. Gathering appropriate musical instruments and cymbals, he offers song. To the degree that the king is pleased in these various ways, he is released from his illness. Similarly, honorable Subhūti, certain bodhisattvas, being skilled in bringing pleasure to others, experience themselves all sorts of pleasure and awaken to unsurpassed and perfect awakening by means of a vehicle that brings all types of pleasure in its wake. There are indeed such bodhisattvas. Through this explanation, honorable Subhūti, you should understand that the bodhisattvas' realization of wisdom is like the healing of a king.

1.83 "Furthermore, honorable Subhūti, the five sense pleasures are without root and without location. And omniscience itself also has no root and no location. [F.214.b] One with acceptance of this will naturally understand what to do and what to avoid. Whoever has attained the acceptance of not focusing on the five sense pleasures naturally understands what the correct and incorrect paths are like. The five sense pleasures are empty, and so is omniscience. Thus, one with such acceptance does not seek to drive away pleasures. However, he or she will still condemn pleasures and not teach them."

1.84 Then Venerable Subhūti asked the two sons of merchants, "How did this elder sister come to you two sons of noble family?"

1.85 At this point the two sons of merchants joined their palms and spoke the following verses to Venerable Subhūti:

1.86 "This is our father as well as our mother.
This is our best and closest friend.

- This is our spouse and our support.
This is our unsurpassed teacher.
- 1.87 “She, with her power,
Has brought about total liberation.
Possessed of thusness,
She has freed us from the bondage of suffering.
- 1.88 “She reveals all teachings
And understands by way of all types of reasoning.
She bestowed pleasure upon the two of us,
And ushered us into the deathless state.
- 1.89 “Like fish caught
With baited hooks,
She has skillfully snatched up the two of us
Through her manifold meritorious works.
- 1.90 “Just as the effects of the poison of a venomous snake
Are allayed with poison,
Similarly, the poison of our passion
She has quelled with poison.
- 1.91 “Just as a person burned by fire
Gains relief when warmed by fire,
Similarly, she has freed us from the scorching agony
Of our afflictions, by means of the afflictions.
- 1.92 “We two have realized the sacred Dharma
And do not pursue desires.
Immature beings who pursue desires
Are not ones who desire awakening.
- 1.93 “Those things taught to be worldly desires
Are like terrifying executioners;
Yet the realization of those very things [F.215.a]
Is the liberation of those who are wise.”
- 1.94 Then Venerable Subhūti asked the lady, “Elder sister, is it the case that you only tame sons of noble family through your skills in bringing pleasure to others? Or do you also tame daughters of noble family?”
“Honorable Subhūti, there is no sentient being I do not tame with my skills in bringing pleasure to others. However, honorable Subhūti, since the minds of women especially crave pleasure, most beings I have tamed

- skillfully by bringing them pleasure are women.”
- 1.95 “How is it, elder sister, that you tame women with a female form?”
- At that point, the lady took on the appearance of a twenty-two-year-old man, dressed in fine, immaculate clothes, adorned with men’s jewelry, handsome and pleasing to behold, with the most radiant complexion, and said, “It is with a physical body such as this one, honorable Subhūti, that women are tamed.”
- 1.96 Then Venerable Subhūti asked that noble son, “Are you a woman, or are you a man?”
- “Honorable Subhūti,” came the response, “are you an ordinary being or a learner?”
- 1.97 “Noble son, I am not an ordinary being, nor am I a learner.”
- “So it is with me, honorable Subhūti—I am not a woman, nor am I a man.”
- 1.98 “If you are neither man nor woman,” said Subhūti, “then how should I think of you?”
- “If you, honorable Subhūti, are neither an ordinary being nor a learner, how should I think of you?”
- 1.99 Venerable Subhūti considered the matter, thinking, “Amazing! This bodhisattva has profound knowledge! Whenever I ask a question, I am questioned in response.” [F.215.b]
- The noble son mentally investigated Venerable Subhūti’s mind and then said to him, “Honorable Subhūti, you are irresolute and scared of questions. Do not be scared of questions, honorable Subhūti.”
- 1.100 “I am a worthy one, for whom defilements have been exhausted.”
- “Honorable Subhūti, which are the defilements that have been exhausted? Are they those of the past, those of the future, or those in the present? If you say that those of the past have been exhausted, any past exhaustion does not exist. Those of the future have not yet come about; thus, they also cannot be exhausted. Those in the present do not remain; so they, too, cannot be exhausted.”
- 1.101 “Noble son,” replied Subhūti, “I am incapable of answering all these questions; and, moreover, it is time for me to go for alms. Thus, I am going for alms, before I run out of time.”
- 1.102 At this point, the noble son entered the bodhisattvas’ absorption called *showing all buddha realms*. As soon as the noble son settled in that way, Venerable Subhūti beheld countless, innumerable buddha realms. He saw that in some, the sun was just coming up. In some, the sun’s heat was just beginning to be felt. In some, it was early morning. In some, it was midmorning. In some, it was approaching midday. In some, it was time for the *gaṇḍī* to be sounded. In some, it was time for the early adjournment. In some, the adjournment had just been completed.⁶ In some, it was time to sit

and eat. In some, it was time to get up. In some, it was time to clean one's alms bowl. In some, it was early afternoon. In some, it was afternoon time. In some, it was dusk. In some, it was midnight. In some, it was predawn.⁷ In some, there was no moon or sun, but rather an intrinsic radiance.

1.103 "Honorable Subhūti," said the noble son to the elder Subhūti, [F.216.a] "at what time do you take food? About what time is it now?"

"Noble son," said Subhūti, "I eat at this very time, but not at the times in the other buddha realms."

1.104 Then that noble son moved the orb of the sun, which had by now moved to its afternoon position, back to its midmorning position. Through such a miraculous display, he was able to arrest the sun at its midmorning position.

"Honorable Subhūti," said the noble son to Venerable Subhūti, "now see what time it has become."

1.105 Venerable Subhūti saw and believed, and he was no longer hasty. "Noble son," he asked, "tell me, what is your name?"

"Honorable Subhūti," replied the noble son, "what is my name to you? Or, ask the Thus-Gone One himself, and he will answer you. Moreover, honorable Subhūti, all names are non-names. And why is that? Because all names are imputations and inauthentic. So how can one say, 'Its name is *this*,' with respect to what is imputed and inauthentic?"

1.106 Honorable Subhūti asked, "Is the name *omniscience* itself also imputed and inauthentic?"

"Indeed, honorable Subhūti. And why? Because omniscience also has various names in different buddha realms."⁸

1.107 "Noble son, these various names of omniscience—what are they like?"

"In some buddha realms, honorable Subhūti, omniscience is called *power*. In some it is called *gathering*, in some *illumination of all*, in some *stainless*, in some *teaching all meanings*, [F.216.b] in some *without degeneration*, in some *making offerings*, in some *directly perceiving*, in some *holding coral*, in some *great victory*, in some *great sound*, and in some *boundless*. In this way, honorable Subhūti, the various names for omniscience in different buddha realms cannot be fathomed. Similarly, the various names for form, feeling, perception, formation, and consciousness cannot be fathomed either. Likewise, the various names in different buddha realms for the aggregates, elements, sense sources, applications of mindfulness, authentic exertions, bases of miraculous power, faculties, powers, branches of awakening, and the eight branches of the path of the noble ones also cannot be fathomed. That being so, honorable Subhūti, through this explanation you should understand that all names are non-names, and that they are imputed and inauthentic in this way."

- 1.108 Then Venerable Subhūti said to the noble son, “Through the presence here of such beings worthy of offerings, the priests and householders of Rājagṛha have encountered fortunate circumstances.”
- 1.109 “Honorable Subhūti,” asked the noble son, “do you know what characterizes beings worthy of offerings in the world?”
- “I will explain, son of noble family, to the extent that I am confident to do so. Those who observe discipline, who engage in virtue, and whose minds are without confusion are beings worthy of offerings in the world.”
- “Honorable Subhūti, those you have described are not perfect objects of offerings.”
- 1.110 “Noble son, then what are perfect objects of offerings like?” [F.217.a]
- “Honorable Subhūti, those in whom great love and great compassion for all beings has arisen, but who do not observe any being whatsoever, are worthy of offerings in the world. Those who do not interrupt the way of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha are worthy of offerings in the world. Those who endeavor to eliminate the afflictions of all beings are worthy of offerings in the world. Those who have inexhaustible wisdom, inexhaustible knowledge, inexhaustible merit, and inexhaustible eloquence are worthy of offerings in the world. Those who do not associate with ordinary beings, but rather with noble ones, are worthy of offerings in the world. Those completely pure individuals who see the wisdom of beings, merely by seeing those beings, are worthy of offerings in the world.”
- 1.111 At the time, there was a god who had constantly followed the elder Subhūti, but without gaining certainty. Hearing this teaching on those who are worthy of offerings, he gave rise to the mind intent upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening. He prostrated at the feet of Venerable Subhūti and begged his pardon, saying, “Honorable Subhūti, I will no longer follow you.”
- 1.112 “Celestial being, why are you begging pardon of honorable Subhūti?” inquired the noble son.
- “Noble son, I have followed honorable Subhūti for twelve years. Yet never before have I heard such a teaching about those who are worthy of offerings. For that reason, as I heard this teaching about those who are worthy of offerings, I formed a good motivation and gave rise to the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening. Thus, I now think that I should go anywhere I can to hear such teachings that gather bodhisattvas who exemplify the pure state of those worthy of offerings.” [F.217.b]
- 1.113 Venerable Subhūti rejoiced that the god had given rise to such a motivation, and said to him, “Celestial being, you have found something excellent in mentally bowing down to the vast qualities of the Buddha. My mind, celestial being, has been injured with respect to omniscience. Now,

since I am not a suitable vessel for the qualities of the Buddha, there is nothing that can be done. Celestial being, since my mind is not liberated, I too should surely give rise to the mind set upon unsurpassed and perfect awakening. Furthermore, celestial being, I should constantly and uninterruptedly attend to a spiritual friend, just like the holy being who is causing you to hear Dharma teachings you have not heard before and not allowing those you have heard to go to waste.”

1.114 Then the noble son said to the god, “Unsurpassed and perfect awakening is difficult to attain, celestial being. One does not fully awaken merely by means of the most basic preparations.”

“Holy being,” replied the god, “unsurpassed and perfect awakening is indeed difficult to attain. Nevertheless, I will, by any means, make my search meaningful and accomplish it.”

1.115 “How will you accomplish this, celestial being?”

“I will accomplish it by being impartial toward all beings, by liberating all beings from afflictions, by taking on the burden of the aggregates of all beings, by bringing all beings to maturity, and by understanding all suffering.”

1.116 “Celestial being,” replied the noble son, “for one who conceives of beings, there is no impartiality toward all beings. For one who conceives of afflictions, there is no liberating all beings. For one who conceives of aggregates, there is no taking on the burden of the aggregates of all beings. For one who imputes roots of virtue, there is no bringing beings to maturity. [F.218.a] For one who conceives of self and other, there is no understanding of all suffering.”

1.117 At that point, through the teaching of these oral instructions, the god attained acceptance with respect to all the concordant teachings. Then, in order to venerate the noble son, the god scattered celestial flowers at the gate.

1.118 Next, Venerable Subhūti spoke to the god, saying, “Celestial being, I beg your pardon as well, for having delighted in giving Dharma teachings of the hearers without being aware of your motivation.”

“Honorable Subhūti,” responded the god, “although I prostrate to you, do not limit any sentient being. Do not teach the Dharma to any sentient being, whoever they are, without first investigating their motivation. And what is the reason for that? Honorable Subhūti, for one who longs for awakening, it would be better not to have heard anything than to have listened to teachings belonging to the Hearers’ Vehicle. It would be better, honorable Subhūti, for someone to have gone hungry for a long time than to have eaten

food mixed with poison. Similarly, honorable Subhūti, for one who belongs to the Bodhisattvas' Vehicle, it would be better not to have heard anything than to have listened to the teachings of the Hearers' Vehicle."

1.119 Then the noble son once again took on a female appearance and complexion, just like before, and said to Venerable Subhūti, "Please wait for a moment, honorable Subhūti, until I offer you alms."

1.120 The lady entered her home, assembled some delicious food, and returned outside. She then said to Venerable Subhūti, "Partake of these alms, honorable Subhūti, but do not do so in a way that involves passion. Nor in a way that is divorced from passion. Do not do so in a way that involves aggression. Neither do so in a way that is divorced from aggression. Do not do so in a way that involves delusion. Neither do so in a way that is divorced from delusion. Do not do so in a way that involves afflictions. Neither do so in a way that is divorced from afflictions. [F.218.b]

1.121 "If honorable Subhūti has not understood suffering, has not relinquished its origin, has not actualized cessation, and has not cultivated the path, then, in that case, partake of these alms. If honorable Subhūti has not cultivated the four applications of mindfulness, and has not cultivated the four authentic exertions, four bases of miraculous power, five faculties, five powers, seven branches of awakening, and eight branches of the path of the noble ones, then, in that case, partake of these alms. If honorable Subhūti has also not disturbed the transitory collection and if he has attained the path that has a sole destination, then, in that case, partake of these alms.

1.122 "If honorable Subhūti has experienced liberation through knowing without destroying ignorance; if he has experienced the unconditioned without bringing about the exhaustion of the conditioned; if he has been liberated without relying on the movement of consciousness; if he has transcended the three realms without forming concepts regarding name and form; if he has meditated on emptiness, which is a gateway to liberation, without indulging in the six sense sources; if he has meditated on the absence of signs, which is a gateway to liberation, without indulging in visual contact; if he has directly experienced the absence of wishes, which is a gateway to liberation, without focusing on sensation; if he has realized suchness without focusing on craving; if he has understood the entirety of the absence of grasping without any thoughts of grasping; if he has understood existence without anything arising; if he has realized birth as non-birth; if he has realized old age and death to be ineffable; and if he has realized all the links of existence to be like this, then, in that case, partake of these alms.

- 1.123 “If honorable Subhūti has not beheld the Buddha, nor heard the Dharma, nor relied upon the Saṅgha, then, in that case, partake of these alms. [F.219.a] If honorable Subhūti has, by means of the sameness of the noble ones, realized the sameness of ordinary beings, then, in that case, partake of these alms. Honorable Subhūti, if you yourself neither go out of existence from this world nor take birth in the next, then, in that case, partake of these alms. If honorable Subhūti has realized the sameness of the absence of afflictions by means of the sameness of passion, aggression, and delusion, and has also realized the sameness of passion, aggression, and delusion by means of the sameness of the absence of afflictions, then, in that case, partake of these alms. If honorable Subhūti has not transcended the level of ordinary beings, nor entered the level of noble ones, then, in that case, partake of these alms. If honorable Subhūti neither appears nor is going to appear, has neither entered saṃsāra nor attained nirvāṇa, and is one who speaks neither falsely nor truly, then, in that case, partake of these alms.
- 1.124 “If honorable Subhūti has neither brought defilements to their extinction nor stirred up what is not extinguished; if he engages in concentration free from afflictions with neither wavering from the aggregates, elements, and sense sources, nor indulging in them; and if he does not ever have wishes with respect to anything at all, but has mentally gained understanding of phenomena, then, in that case, partake of these alms. Honorable Subhūti, if you have not realized the teaching of renunciates, then in that case, partake of these alms. Honorable Subhūti, if Subhūti’s absence of afflictions and that of hell-beings are both of the same worth, then, in that case, partake of these alms. [F.219.b] One would deprecate the noble Subhūti by saying that whatever notions might be harbored about someone being worthy of offerings, none of them would pertain, or apply, to the honorable Subhūti. If, however, honorable Subhūti does have these qualities, then in that case, partake of these alms.”
- 1.125 As Venerable Subhūti prepared to leave the gate, he raised his right hand and said, “Elder sister, those who speak truthfully will say that I possess such qualities. In doing so, they describe me correctly.” Having said that, he took up the alms.
- 1.126 “Excellent,” said the lady to Venerable Subhūti, “Those beings who are worthy of offerings and who receive alms with sameness are indeed rare.”
Venerable Subhūti said, “Those with excessive pride repudiate and belittle the state of sameness. Doing so leads most of them to take birth in the hell realms.”
- 1.127 The god said to Venerable Subhūti, “What do you mean, honorable Subhūti, when you say that most of those who repudiate and belittle this Dharma take birth in the hell realms?”

“Celestial being, consider this: Is it repudiation or belittling to say that some illusory phenomenon has a cause or that it lacks a cause?”

“No, it is not, honorable Subhūti.”

1.128 “Similarly, celestial being, when all phenomena have been understood to be like illusions, what is there for me to repudiate or belittle? Furthermore, celestial being, the sounds expressed by all beings, whether true or untrue, are all the same to me. Why is that? Because all expressions, due to their illusory essence, are actually non-expressions.”

1.129 When this teaching on receiving alms had been given, one hundred gods purified the faultless and stainless eye of Dharma that beholds phenomena.

1.130 Then the lady excused herself, saying to noble Subhūti, “Honorable Subhūti, please have some food and then proceed to the Blessed One. [F.220.a] I, too, will go there to listen to the Dharma.”

1.131 Having taken up the alms, Venerable Subhūti departed from the city of Rājagṛha. Delighted and overjoyed with the Dharma teaching he had heard, he did not consider the food, but thought, “As I have taken up these alms, to whom can I offer them without it being a downfall?”

At that point the bodhisattva Not Grasping Any Phenomenon knew what Venerable Subhūti was thinking. He went before him, prostrated with his head at Venerable Subhūti’s feet, and said, “Please give me these alms, honorable Subhūti. If you give them to me, it will not be a downfall.”

1.132 “Noble son, are you one who has taken up discipline or one who adheres to discipline?”

“Honorable Subhūti, there is no phenomenon that can be taken up. Thus, there is also no discipline. Nor is there faulty discipline. Moreover, honorable Subhūti, I engage in killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct due to desire; I lie and speak divisively; I speak harsh words and meaningless words; and I harbor covetousness, ill will, and wrong views.”

1.133 Venerable Subhūti thought, “Since a teaching such as this one has been given by this noble son, there is no doubt that he is a bodhisattva whose progress toward awakening is irreversible. I will ask him about the meaning behind this.” So Venerable Subhūti said to the noble son, “What do you mean, noble son, when you say, ‘I engage in killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct due to desire; I lie [F.220.b] and speak divisively; I speak harsh words and meaningless words; and I harbor covetousness, ill will, and wrong views?’”

1.134 The bodhisattva Not Grasping Any Phenomenon then spoke these verses in reply:

1.135 “I have trained in the unsurpassed path,
The path of awakening.

- I have also established billions
Of beings on this path.
- 1.136 “I destroy the individual being,⁹
And it is for that reason that I speak in this way.
Those who are trained on the path
Are known as *killers*.
- 1.137 “The gods do not grant awakening;
Śakra and Brahmā do not bestow it.
That which was not given, I took
And thus I steal.
- 1.138 “In order to benefit all living beings,
One takes up a suitable vehicle.
For that reason, the Great Vehicle
Has been *taken without being given*.
- 1.139 “Fully knowing sexual misconduct
Is described as desiring the Dharma—this I know.
Such types of desire are not desire,
And hence I engage in what is *misconduct*.
- 1.140 “All words are designations
That rightly have been taught to be false.
Since they do not exist, they are false;
And so, I also speak through *lies*.
- 1.141 “There are those beings
Who long for the Lesser Vehicle;
In order to separate those beings from that vehicle,
I establish them in the Great Vehicle.
- 1.142 “With divisive speech I separate
Others who are *tīrthikas*.
Those who have strayed onto negative paths
I establish on the genuine path.
- 1.143 “I have defeated adversaries,
And they do not like it in the least.
Through speaking harsh words,
I have conquered all demons.
- 1.144 “I speak harsh words,
Yet my mind is without wrath.

- In order to bring beings to maturity
I apply the methods of heroic beings.
- 1.145 “I have understood words
And the intention behind those words.
Thus, with this in mind, I speak comprehensively,
And tame millions of beings.
- 1.146 “To some I speak with consideration,
Yet some perceive it as lies. [F.221.a]
Thus, as I speak with consideration,
I elicit direct understanding of the Dharma.¹⁰
- 1.147 “All beings without exception,
Each and every one of them,
Experience covetousness and crave
The pleasures of the nonhuman gods in the world.
- 1.148 “Whoever possesses this pleasure
Becomes a benevolent guardian of the world.
Thus, wise ones are covetous in wishing
That all beings may have such happiness.
- 1.149 “Saying ‘May all beings be victorious!’
Wise beings are perpetually covetous.
Since covetousness is like that,
I also claim to be *covetous*.
- 1.150 “At the time when the sacred Dharma is perishing,
Mighty beings put an end to that decline.
They forgo their own happiness,
And do not abandon the Dharma, nor living beings.
- 1.151 “There are those who display ill will
In order to bring into harmony
All fighting in the world
And all disagreement among beings.
- 1.152 “If one were to quarrel with them for an eon,
Or even for millions of eons,
They would not abandon the sacred Dharma,
Nor turn their back in any way.
- 1.153 “Those who are brave with respect to wrong views
Are equanimous toward everything conditioned.

- They understand wrong views,
And comprehend authentic views.
- 1.154 “Whoever possesses such qualities
Adheres to a variety of disciplines.
Adhering where there is nothing to adhere to,
Wise ones realize awakening.”
- 1.155 Thereupon, Venerable Subhūti offered the alms to that noble son, saying,
“Such holy beings do not cause downfalls through alms offered with faith.”
Thus, Venerable Subhūti did not eat. In the afternoon, he rose from his inner
absorption and went before the Blessed One. He prostrated with his head at
the Blessed One’s feet and then recounted to the Blessed One all that had
happened.
- 1.156 “Subhūti, do you know who that bodhisattva was?” asked the Blessed
One.
“Blessed One, I do not know.” [F.221.b]
- 1.157 “Subhūti, that bodhisattva great being is called Strīvivarta. She tames
beings by skillfully bringing them pleasure. To give an analogy, Subhūti,
consider a chariot filled with two hundred Magadha bushels of mustard
seeds. Now, if every hundred years one were to remove a single mustard
seed from that chariot, one would soon determine how many mustard seeds
fit in such a chariot. However, that is not the case for the beings in this Sahā
world system whom the bodhisattva Strīvivarta has brought to maturity in
unsurpassed and perfect awakening by skillfully bringing them pleasure;
nor is it the case for the many beings she has established in births as gods or
humans.”
- 1.158 Then the lady, with five hundred women surrounding and preceding her,
left the city of Rājagṛha and went before the Blessed One at Vulture Peak
Mountain. The Blessed One saw at a great distance that the lady was
approaching, and he asked Venerable Subhūti, “Subhūti, do you see these
five hundred women that are coming this way?”
“I see them, Blessed One.”
- 1.159 “The bodhisattva Strīvivarta has brought every single one of them to
maturity and established them in unsurpassable and perfect awakening by
skillfully bringing them pleasure.”
- 1.160 Strīvivarta, surrounded by the five hundred women, went before the
Blessed One. She prostrated, placing her head at the Blessed One’s feet, and
sat to one side. Venerable Subhūti greeted the lady, joining his palms and
paying homage. Then Venerable Śāriputra asked Venerable Subhūti,
“Venerable Subhūti, why are you paying homage to a woman who has
neither the qualities nor the body of a noble one?”

“Elder Śāriputra,” responded the lady, “if you know who in this world is a noble being [F.222.a] and who is not, please do tell us.”

1.161 “Elder sister,” said elder Śāriputra, “do you know who in this world is a noble being and who is not?”

“Yes, honorable Śāriputra, I do.”

1.162 “Which ones are they?”

“Those who do not sever the lineage of the noble ones, honorable Śāriputra, are noble beings. Those who do not sever the lineages of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha are noble beings. Noble beings are those who love other noble beings and seek liberation for those who are not noble beings. Moreover, honorable Śāriputra, a woman—elegantly adorned with jewelry, dressed in fine, immaculate clothes, beautified by powders, fragrances, flower garlands, and lotions, and pleasing to the five senses—whose mind is not divorced from the state of omniscience is far preferable to a worthy one who remains isolated and engages in concentration on the eight liberations. Honorable Śāriputra, in order to communicate this very meaning, I will give you an analogy. Now tell me, honorable Śāriputra, would you put a trinket in a container of beryl? Or would you put a priceless jewel in a cesspit?”

“Elder sister,” replied elder Śāriputra, “neither would I put a priceless jewel in a cesspit, nor would I put a trinket in a container of beryl.”

1.163 “Likewise, honorable Śāriputra, a woman who is pleasing to the five senses and whose mind is not divorced from the state of omniscience is far superior to a worthy one who remains isolated and engages in concentration on the eight liberations.”

1.164 “Elder sister,” asked Venerable Śāriputra, “have you truly entered into the Great Vehicle?”

“Honorable Śāriputra, in the Great Vehicle [F.222.b] there is nowhere at all to be, nor is there anything to withdraw from.”

1.165 “Elder sister, if you do not abide anywhere at all within the Great Vehicle, and if, moreover, there is nothing to withdraw from, then what do those who enter into the Great Vehicle enter into?”

“Honorable Śāriputra, followers of the Great Vehicle do not abide anywhere at all. They do not abide in order to bring about the exhaustion of ignorance up through old age and death. How is that? Honorable Śāriputra, it is because ignorance up through old age and death are inexhaustible. Therefore, they do not arise, nor do they cease. If they arose, then they would also come to an end. However, since they do not arise, they also do not come to an end. Consequently, they are inexhaustible and unborn. The Dharma of mendicants is unarisen. That being so, honorable Śāriputra, that which is dependently originated is unarisen and unceasing.”

1.166 Venerable Śāriputra said to the lady, “Elder sister, as you are worthy of the homage of the world with its gods, as well as of the hearers and solitary buddhas, what need is there to mention the homage of Venerable Subhūti?”

Venerable Śāriputra then said to the Blessed One, “Blessed One, is there any person who can appraise others? This elder sister, elegantly adorned with jewelry, speaks with perfect eloquence.”

“Honorable Śāriputra,” replied the lady, “I am not confident because of my jewelry.”

1.167 “Well then, what kind of confidence do you have?”

“Honorable Śāriputra, there are eight ornaments of bodhisattvas, which are as follows: the ornament of not forgetting the mind of awakening; the ornament of maintaining the good motivation of great compassion; the ornament of being without animosity toward any sentient being; the ornament of being insatiable when it comes to seeking out Dharma teachings; the ornament of proper investigation and analysis of the Dharma teachings that one has heard [F.223.a] and mastered; the ornament of bringing beings to full maturity without observing any phenomenon; the ornament of wisdom that ascertains the profound Dharma and knows dependent origination, as well as the various faculties of beings; and the ornament of the Buddha’s blessing and skill in means. Honorable Śāriputra, these are the eight ornaments. A bodhisattva bedecked with these ornaments has unimpeded confidence.”

1.168 Venerable Śāriputra asked the Blessed One, “Blessed One, where did this elder sister die before she was born here?”

At this point the lady emanated a woman with a body exactly like her own in front of Venerable Śāriputra and told him, “Ask this lady, honorable Śāriputra, where she died before she was born here.”

“This lady is an emanation,” replied elder Śāriputra. “Emanations do not die, nor are they born.”

1.169 “Similarly, honorable Śāriputra, the Thus-Gone One has fully awakened to the fact that all phenomena are essentially emanations. Do not ask questions about the death and birth of those who understand all phenomena to be essentially emanations.”

1.170 “Śāriputra,” said the Blessed One, “this is the bodhisattva great being Strīvivarta. After she died in Manifest Joy, the buddha realm of the Thus-Gone One Akṣobhya, she came here to bring beings to full maturity. Śāriputra, in this Sahā world system the bodhisattva Strīvivarta has ripened countless, innumerable beings into unsurpassed and perfect awakening.”

1.171 At this point the bodhisattva Strīvivarta, [F.223.b] in her female form, prostrated with her head at the feet of the Blessed One and said, “Until I receive a prophecy regarding my unsurpassed and perfect awakening, and

until I no longer have this female body but rather a male body, I will not rise from the Blessed One's feet."

1.172 The five hundred women also prostrated with their heads at the feet of the Blessed One and said, "Blessed One, we, too, will not rise until our nature changes from female to male, and until a prophecy is given regarding our unsurpassed and perfect awakening."

1.173 The Blessed One smiled. As happens when blessed buddhas smile, the following occurred: instantly, many different kinds of light rays emerged from the Blessed One's mouth; they were blue, yellow, red, white, crimson, crystal, and silver-colored. The light pervaded boundless and infinite world systems, reaching as far as the Brahmā realm, then returned and disappeared into the crown of the Blessed One's head.

1.174 Venerable Ānanda arose from his seat, draped his robe over one shoulder, bowed with joined palms to the Blessed One, and said to him, "Blessed One, the thus-gone ones do not smile without causes and conditions. That being so, what is the cause of your smile, and what are its conditions?"

"Ānanda," replied the Blessed One, "did you see the bodhisattva Strīvivarta, surrounded by five hundred women, touching the Thus-Gone One's feet?"

"I did, Blessed One."

1.175 "Ānanda," continued the Blessed One, [F.224.a] "incalculable eons from now, this bodhisattva Strīvivarta will fully awaken to unexcelled and perfect buddhahood. In the world she will be known as the thus-gone, worthy, and perfect Buddha Eloquent King of Qualities. When she attains awakening, each of these five hundred women will attain retention, possess unimpeded eloquence, and become a bodhisattva adorned with the eight ornaments described by the bodhisattva great being Strīvivarta in her teaching on the ornaments of good qualities. The Thus-Gone One Eloquent King of Qualities will prophesy the unsurpassed and perfect awakening of those bodhisattvas. Moreover, Ānanda, the buddha realm of the Thus-Gone One Eloquent King of Qualities will be rich and vast, and filled with happiness, good harvests, humans, and many other beings, such that its resources will equal those of the gods in the Heaven of Joy. In that buddha realm, not even the word *woman* will exist. Everyone will take miraculous births from the hearts of lotuses. Seated cross-legged, they will be pure and celibate, and will be adorned with those eight ornaments."

1.176 As they heard the Blessed One's clear prophesy, the bodhisattva Strīvivarta and the five hundred women, totally delighted and overjoyed, rose up into the sky to the height of seven palm trees. As soon as that happened, they all took on the appearance of sixteen-year-old boys.

Descending from the sky, they prostrated to the Blessed One, and the Thus-Gone One placed his hand on the crowns of their heads. Immediately, they all attained retention and the absorption called *complete illumination*.

1.177 The Blessed One said to venerable Ānanda, [F.224.b] “Remember this Dharma teaching, Ānanda, and teach it correctly and extensively to others.”

1.178 “Blessed One, what is the name of this Dharma teaching? How should it be known?”

“Ānanda,” spoke the Blessed One, “you should remember this Dharma teaching as *The Ornament That Brings About Eloquence*. You can also remember it as *The Prophecy Concerning Strīvivarta*.”

1.179 When the Blessed One had said this, the bodhisattva great being Strīvivarta together with her retinue, venerable Ānanda and the great hearers, the bodhisattvas, and the world with its gods, nāgas, asuras, and gandharvas rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had said.

1.180 *This completes the noble Great Vehicle sūtra “The Prophecy Concerning Strīvivarta.”*

c.

Colophon

c.1 This was translated, proofed, and finalized by the Indian preceptors Prajñāvarman and Śīlendrābodhi, together with the translator-editor Bandé Yeshé Dé and others.

NOTES

n.

- n.1 See Karma Gyaltsen Ling Translation Group, trans., *The Questions of the Girl Vimalaśraddhā* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh84.html>) (Toh 84), 2021.
- n.2 See Sakya Pandita Translation Group (International Buddhist Academy Division), trans., *The Questions of an Old Lady* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh171.html>) (Toh 171), 2011.
- n.3 See Jens Erland Braarvig, trans., *The Miraculous Play of Mañjuśrī* (<https://read.84000.co/translation/toh96.html>) (Toh 96), 2020.
- n.4 On the Chinese translations, see Schuster 1984.
- n.5 The Denkarma catalog is dated to c. 812 CE. See Denkarma, 298.a.6. See also Herrmann-Pfandt 2008, 78, no. 143.
- n.6 Translation of these two last sentences is tentative. Degé reads: *la lar ni snga ma bkad pa tsam / la lar ni bkad zin pa tsam*. Stok palace reads: *la lar ni snga ma bkod pa tsam / la lar ni bkod zin pa tsam*.
- n.7 Translation of this sentence is tentative. All witnesses read *nam chung 'khor/khor*.
- n.8 Translated based on Choné, Lhasa, Lithang, Narthang, Kangxi, Yongle, and Stok Palace, which all omit *ma* before *mchis*.
- n.9 Here, “individual being” translates the Tibetan *srog*, which can also mean “life force,” “vitality,” or “soul.”
- n.10 Translation of this verse is tentative.

b.

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GLOSSARY

g.

g.1 Aggregate

phung po

ཕུང་པོ།

skandha

The fivefold basic grouping of the components out of which the world and the individual self are formed.

g.2 Akṣobhya

mi 'khrugs pa

མི་འཁྲུགས་པ།

Akṣobhya

The buddha in the realm of Manifest Joy.

g.3 Ānanda

kun dga' bo

ཀུན་དགའ་བོ།

Ānanda

The Buddha's cousin and principal attendant.

g.4 Anantamati

mtha' yas blo gros

མཐའ་ཡས་ལྗོ་གོས།

Anantamati

A bodhisattva.

g.5 Authentic exertions

yang dag par spong ba

ཡང་དག་པར་སྐྱོང་བ།
samyakprahāṇa

Relinquishing negative acts in the present and the future and enhancing positive acts in the present and the future. These four are part of the thirty-seven factors of awakening.

g.6 Bandé Yeshé Dé

ban de ye shes sde

ཡེ་ཤེས་སྡེ།

—

A prolific Tibetan translator active during the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

g.7 Bases of miraculous power

rdzu 'phrul gyi rkang pa

རྩུ་འཕྲུལ་གྱི་རྐང་པ།

ṛddhipāda

Determination, discernment, diligence, and concentration. These four are part of the thirty-seven factors of awakening.

g.8 Brahmā

tshangs pa

ཚངས་པ།

Brahmā

A high-ranking deity, presiding over a divine world where other beings consider him the creator; he is also considered to be the “Lord of the Sahā World” (our universe).

g.9 Brahmā realm

tshangs pa'i 'jig rten

ཚངས་པའི་འཛིན་རྟེན།

Brahmaloka

The heaven of Brahmā, the god who rules the Sahā World.

g.10 Branches of awakening

byang chub kyi yan lag

བྱང་ཚུབ་གྱི་ཡན་ལག།

bodhyāṅga

Mindfulness, discrimination, diligence, joy, pliancy, absorption, and equanimity. These seven are part of the thirty-seven factors of awakening.

g.11 Completely Pure Intelligence

rnam par dag pa'i blo gros

རྣམ་པར་དག་པའི་སྒོ་གྲོ་ས།

—

A bodhisattva.

g.12 Dependent origination

rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba

རྟེན་ཅིང་འབྲེལ་པར་འབྱུང་བ།

pratītyasamutpāda

The relative nature of phenomena, which arises in dependence on causes and conditions. Together with the four truths of the noble ones, this was one of the first teachings given by the Buddha.

g.13 Dharaṇīdhara

sa 'dzin

ས་འཛིན།

Dharaṇīdhara

A bodhisattva.

g.14 Eight branches of the path of the noble ones

'phags pa'i lam yan lag brgyad pa

འཕགས་པའི་ལམ་ཡན་ལག་བརྒྱད་པ།

āryāṣṭāṅgamārga

Correct view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and absorption. These eight are part of the thirty-seven factors of awakening.

g.15 Eight liberations

rnam par thar pa brgyad

རྣམ་པར་ཐར་པ་བརྒྱད།

aṣṭavimokṣa

The liberation of form observing form, the liberation of the formless observing form, the liberation of observing beauty, the liberation of infinite space, the liberation of infinite consciousness, the liberation of nothing

whatsoever, the liberation of neither presence nor absence of perception,
and the liberation of cessation.

g.16 Elements

khams

ཁམས།

dhātu

One way of describing experience and the world in terms of eighteen elements: eye, form, and eye consciousness; ear, sound, and ear consciousness; nose, odor, and nose consciousness; tongue, taste, and tongue consciousness; body, touch, and body consciousness; mind, mental objects, and mind consciousness.

g.17 Eloquent King of Qualities

yon tan gyi rgyal po spobs pa can

ཡོན་ཏན་གྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་སྤོབས་པ་ཅན།

—

The buddha that the female bodhisattva Strīvivarta will one day become.

g.18 Faculties

dbang po

དབང་པོ།

indriya

Faith, diligence, mindfulness, absorption, and wisdom. These five are part of the thirty-seven factors of awakening.

g.19 Five extraordinary abilities

mngon par shes pa lnga

མངོན་པར་ཤེས་པ་ལྔ།

pañcābhijñā

Five extraordinary abilities that result from meditative concentration: divine sight, divine hearing, knowing others' minds, recollecting past lives, and the ability to perform miracles.

g.20 Four applications of mindfulness

dran pa nye bar gzhag pa bzhi

དྲན་པ་ཉེ་བར་གཟག་པ་བཞི།

catoāri smṛtyupasthāna

Mindfulness of the body, feelings, the mind, and phenomena. These four are part of the thirty-seven factors of awakening.

g.21 Four continents

gling bzhi

སྒྲིང་བཞི།

caturdvīpa

According to traditional Indian cosmology, our own Sahā world system is said to comprise four continents, namely, Pūrvavideha in the east, Jambudvīpa in the south, Aparagodānīya in the west, and Uttarakuru in the north.

g.22 Gaṇḍī

gaN+DI

གཞུང་།

gaṇḍī · gaṇḍī

An elongated, shoulder-held wooden bar (or beam) struck with a wooden striker to call the saṅgha community to assembly.

g.23 Hearer

nyan thos

ཉན་ཐོས།

śrāvaka

A follower of those teachings of the Buddha that focus on the monastic lifestyle and liberating oneself from suffering, in contrast to followers of the Bodhisattva Vehicle who seek buddhahood for the sake of all beings.

g.24 Heaven of Joy

dga' ldan

དགའ་ལྷན།

Tuṣita

One of the six heavens in the desire realm.

g.25 Holder of the Family of Offering and Giving

mchod sbyin rus 'dzin

སཚོད་སྦྱིན་རུས་འཛིན།

—

A bodhisattva.

g.26 Illuminating Intelligence

snang ba'i blo gros

སྒྲོལ་བའི་སྒྲོ་བློ་སེམས།

—

A bodhisattva.

g.27 Inner absorption

nang du yang dag 'jog pa

ནང་དུ་ཡང་དག་འཇོག་པ།

pratisaṃlayana

This term can mean both physical seclusion and a meditative state of withdrawal.

g.28 Maitreya

byams pa

བྱམས་པ།

Maitreya

A bodhisattva.

g.29 Manifest Joy

mngon par dga' ba

མངོན་པར་དགའ་བ།

Abhirati

The buddha realm of the Buddha Akṣobhya.

g.30 Mendicant

dge sbyong

དགེ་སྦྱོང་།

śrāmaṇa

The Sanskrit term literally means “one who toils,” i.e., an ascetic, and the term is applied to spiritual renunciants or monks, whether Buddhist or otherwise.

g.31 Mount Meru

ri rab

རི་རབ།

Meru

In Buddhist cosmology, the sacred mountain at the center of the world.

- g.32 Nimindhara
mu khyud 'dzin
 མུ་ཁྱུད་འཛིན།
Nimindhara
 A bodhisattva.
- g.33 Not Grasping Any Phenomenon
chos thams cad mi len pa
 ཚོས་ཐམས་ཅད་མི་ལེན་པ།
 —
 A bodhisattva.
- g.34 Powers
stobs
 ལྷོ་བས།
bala
 The powers of faith, diligence, mindfulness, absorption, and wisdom. These five are part of the thirty-seven factors of awakening.
- g.35 Prajñāvarman
pradz+nyA barma
 པརྫོ་བས།
Prajñāvarman
 An Indian preceptor resident in Tibet during the late eighth and early ninth centuries.
- g.36 Prātimokṣa vows
so so thar pa'i sdom pa
 སོ་སོ་ཐར་པའི་སྡོམ་པ།
prātimokṣasaṃvara
 The vows of moral discipline which are followed by monks and nuns. The term “prātimokṣa” can be used to refer both to the disciplinary rules themselves and to the texts from the Vinaya that contain them.
- g.37 Priyadarśana
mthong dga'
 མཐོང་དགའ།
Priyadarśana

A bodhisattva.

g.38 Purified Intelligence

sbyangs pa'i blo gros

སྤངས་པའི་བློ་གྲོས།

—

A bodhisattva.

g.39 Rājagṛha

rgyal po'i khab

རྒྱལ་པོའི་ཁབ།

Rājagṛha

The capital of the ancient kingdom of Magadha.

g.40 Realm of the Four Great Kings

rgyal chen bzhi'i ris

རྒྱལ་ཆེན་བཞིའི་རིས།

Cāturmahārājakāyika

One of the heavens of Buddhist cosmology, lowest among the six heavens of the desire realm. Dwelling place of the Four Great Kings, traditionally located on a terrace of Mount Meru.

g.41 Sahā world system

mi mjed kyi 'jig rten gyi khams

མི་མཇེད་ཀྱི་འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་ཁམས།

Sahālokadhātu

The present world in which we live.

g.42 Śakra

brgya byin

བརྒྱ་བྱིན།

Śakra

The lord of the gods. Also known as Indra, the deity who is called “Lord of the Gods” dwells on the summit of Mount Meru and wields the thunderbolt. The Tibetan translation *brgya byin* (meaning “one hundred sacrifices”) is based on a creative etymology that *śakra* is an abbreviation of *śata-kratu*, one who has performed a hundred sacrifices. Each world with a central Meru has a Śakra.

g.43 Seeing All Meanings

don kun mthong

དོན་ཀུན་མཐོང་།

—

A bodhisattva.

g.44 Sense sources

skye mched

སྐྱེ་མཆེད།

āyatana

The six “inner” senses (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind), and their respective six “outer” objects of forms, sounds, odors, tastes, touch, and mental objects, are sometimes called collectively the “six sense sources,” but are also sometimes taken as two separate groups, making twelve.

g.45 Śīlendrabodhi

shI len+d+ra bo d+hi

ཤི་ལེན་བོ་ཤི།

Śīlendrabodhi

An Indian preceptor resident in Tibet during the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

g.46 Solitary buddha

rang sangs rgyas

རང་སངས་རྒྱས།

pratyekabuddha

One who has attained liberation entirely through their own contemplation as a result of progress in previous lives but, unlike a buddha, does not have the accumulated merit and motivation to teach others.

g.47 Strīvivarta

bud med 'gyur ba

བུད་མེད་འགྱུར་བ།

Strīvivarta

A female bodhisattva.

g.48 Subhūti

rab 'byor

—

རབ་འབྱོར།

Subhūti

One of the closest disciples of the Buddha, known for his profound understanding of emptiness.

g.49 Suchness

de bzhin nyid

དེ་བཞིན་ཉིད།

tathatā

The ultimate nature of things, or the way things are in reality, as opposed to the way they appear to unawakened beings.

g.50 Sudarśana

legs mthong

ལེགས་མཐོང་།

Sudarśana

A bodhisattva.

g.51 Surūpa

cher snang

ཆེར་སྐྱང་།

Surūpa

A bodhisattva.

g.52 Terrace Holder

bang rim 'dzin

བང་རིམ་འཛོན།

—

A bodhisattva.

g.53 Thirty-seven factors of awakening

byang chub kyi phyogs kyi chos sum cu rtsa bdun

བྱང་ཚུབ་གྱི་ཕྱོགས་གྱི་ཚོས་སུམ་བུ་བདུན།

saptatrimśadbodhipakṣadharmā

Thirty-seven practices or qualities that lead the practitioner to the awakened state: the four applications of mindfulness, the four authentic exertions, the four bases of miraculous power, the five faculties, the five powers, the eight

branches of the path of the noble ones, and the seven branches of awakening.

g.54 Thus-gone one

de bzhin gshegs pa

དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ།

tathāgata

A frequently used synonym for a buddha. The expression is interpreted in different ways, but in general it implies one who has arrived at, or gone to, the ultimate state. When spelled with a capital letter it refers to Buddha Śākyamuni.

g.55 Tīrthika

mu stegs can

མུ་སྟེགས་ཅན།

tīrthika

Religious or philosophical orders that were contemporary with the early Buddhist order. Initially, the term *tīrthika* or *tīrthya* may have referred to non-brahmanic ascetic orders.”

g.56 Universal monarch

'khor los sgyur ba'i rgyal po

འཁོར་ལོས་སྐུར་བའི་རྒྱལ་པོ།

cakravartin

The term “universal monarch” denotes a just and pious king who rules over the universe according to the laws of Dharma. Such a monarch is called a *cakravartin* because he wields a disk (*cakra*) that rolls (*vartana*) over continents, worlds, and world systems, bringing them under his power. A universal monarch is often considered the worldly, political correlate of a buddha.

g.57 Vardhamānamati

'phel ba'i blo gros

འཕེལ་བའི་བློ་གྲོས།

Vardhamānamati

A bodhisattva.

g.58 Viśeṣamati

khyad par blo gros

ཐུན་པ་སྒོ་གྲོས།

Viśeṣamati

A bodhisattva.

g.59 Vulture Peak Mountain

bya rgod phung po'i ri

བྱ་རྒོད་ཕུང་པོའི་རི།

Gṛdhrakūṭaparvata

The mountain where many Great Vehicle teachings were delivered by the Buddha Śākyamuni.

g.60 Worthy one

dgra bcom pa

དགྲ་བཅོམ་པ།

arhat

A person who has been liberated from saṃsāra. Also used to refer specifically to a person who has accomplished the final fruition of the path of the hearers.