

hand if he be entirely passed away [from life], unattached to the world, escaped from all existence, then honours would not be offered to him. For he who is entirely set free accepts no honour, and any act done to him who accepts it not becomes empty and vain.' This is a dilemma which has two horns. It is not a matter within the scope of those who have no mind it is a question fit for the great. Tear asunder this net of heresy, put it on one side. To you has this puzzle been put. Give to the future sons of the Conqueror eyes wherewith to see the riddle to the confusion of their adversaries."

"The Blessed One, O king," replied the Elder, "is entirely set free. And the Blessed One accepts no gift. Even at the foot of the Tree of Wisdom he abandoned all accepting of gifts, how much more then [sic] now when he has passed entirely away by that kind of passing away which leaves no root over [for the formation of a new existence]. For this, O king, has been said by Sariputta, the commander of the faith:

"Though worshipped, these Unequaled Ones, alike
By gods and men, unlike them all they heed
Neither a gift nor worship. They accept
It not, neither refuse it. Through the ages
All Buddhas were so, so will ever be!"

The king said: "Venerable Nāgasena, a father may speak in praise of his son, or a son of his father. But that is no ground for putting the adversaries to shame. It is only an expression of their own belief. Come now! Explain this matter to me fully to the establishing of your own doctrine, and to the unravelling of the net of the heretics."

The Elder replied: "The Blessed One, O king, is entirely set free [from life]. And the Blessed One accepts no gift. If gods or men put up a building to contain the jewel treasure of the relics of a Tathagata who does not accept their gift, still by that homage paid to the attainment of the supreme good under the form of the jewel treasure of his wisdom do they themselves attain to one or other of the three glorious states.¹ Suppose, O king, that though a great and glorious fire had been kindled, it should die out, would it then again accept any supply of dried grass or sticks?"

¹That is, to another life as a man, or as a god, or to Arahatsip here, on earth, in this birth. [Translator's note.]

3

The Kushan Empire and the Influence of Buddhism, Second Century BCE–Second Century CE

9

The Questions of King Milinda

ca. 166–150 BCE

King Milinda, known to the Greeks as Menander, was an Indo-Greek king who ruled northwestern India before the coming of the Kushans. He was interested in the theology and practices of Buddhism but was puzzled by seeming contradictions. Thus he invited a Buddhist scholar, Nāgasena, to discuss them with him. The Buddhist sage agreed to the discussion, with the condition that they meet as scholars, not as king and subject. Presumably, the discussion was recorded, and it became a Buddhist text. The Questions of King Milinda. How did the Greek king's curiosity about Buddhist theology reflect changes in Buddhism itself? To what extent were these changes caused by the cosmopolitan culture of the Silk Roads?

On Honours Paid to the Buddha

Then Milinda the king, having thus been granted leave, fell at the feet of the teacher, and raising his clasped hands to his forehead, said: "Venerable Nāgasena, these leaders of other sects say thus: 'If the Buddha accepts gifts he cannot have passed entirely away. He must be still in union with the world, a shareholder in the things of the world; and therefore any honour paid to him becomes empty and vain. On the other

The Questions of King Milinda, trans. Rhys David (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1890), in *Sacred Books of the East*, 35:144–53, 246–48.

"Even as it burned, Sir, it could not be said to accept fuel, how much less when it had died away, and ceased to burn, could it, an unconscious thing, accept it?"

"And when that one mighty fire had ceased, and gone out, would the world be bereft of fire?"

"Certainly not. Dry wood is the seat, the basis of fire, and any man who want fire can, by the exertion of their own strength and power, such as resides in individual men, once more, by twirling the fire-stick, produce fire, and with that fire do any work for which fire is required."

"Then that saying of the sectarians that 'an act done to him who accepts it not is empty and vain' turns out to be false. As that great and glorious fire was set alight, even so, great king, was the Blessed One set alight in the glory of his Buddhahood over the ten thousand world systems. As it went out, so has he passed away into that kind of passing away in which no root remains. As the fire, when gone out, accepted no supply of fuel, just so, and for the good of the world, has his accepting of gifts ceased and determined. As men, when the fire is out, and has no further means of burning, then by their own strength and effort, such as resides in individual men, twirl the fire-stick and produce fire, and do any work for which fire is required—so do gods and men, though a Tathagata has passed away and no longer accepts their gifts, yet put up a house for the jewel treasure of his relics, and doing homage to the attainment of supreme good under the form of the jewel treasure of his wisdom, they attain to one or other of the three glorious states. Therefore is it, great king, that acts done to the Tathagata, notwithstanding his having passed away and not accepting them, are nevertheless of value and bear fruit.

"Now hear, too, another reason for the same thing. Suppose, O king, there were to arise a great and mighty wind, and that then it were to die away. Would that wind acquiesce in being produced again?"

"A wind that has died away can have no thought or idea of being reproduced. And why? Because the element wind is an unconscious thing.

"Or even, O king, would the word 'wind' be still applicable to that wind, when it had so died away?"

"Certainly not, Sir. But fans and punkahs are means for the production of wind. Any men who are oppressed by heat, or tormented by fever, can by means of fans and punkahs, and by the exertion of their own strength and power, such as resides in individual men, produce a breeze, and by that wind allay their heat, or assuage their fever."

"Then that saying of the sectarians that 'an act done to him who accepts it not is empty and vain' turns out to be false. As the great and mighty

wind which blew, even so, great king, has the Blessed One blown over the ten thousand world systems with the wind of his love, so cool, so sweet, so calm, so delicate. As it first blew, and then died away, so has the Blessed One, who once blew with the wind so cool, so sweet, so calm, so delicate, of his love, now passed away with that kind of passing away in which no root remains. As those men were oppressed by heat and tormented with fever, even so are gods and men tormented and oppressed with threefold fire and heat.² As fans and punkahs are means of producing wind, so the relics and the jewel treasure of the wisdom of a Tathagata are means of producing the threefold attainment. And as men oppressed by heat and tormented by fever can by fans and punkahs produce a breeze, and thus allay the heat and assuage the fever, so can gods and men by offering reverence to the relics, and the jewel treasure of the wisdom of a Tathagata, though he has died away and accepts it not, cause goodness to arise within them, and by that goodness can assuage and can allay the fever and the torment of the threefold fire. Therefore is it, great king, that acts done to the Tathagata, notwithstanding his having passed away and not accepting them, are nevertheless of value and bear fruit.

"Now hear another reason for the same thing. Suppose, O king, a man were to make a drum sound, and then that sound were to die away. Would that sound acquiesce in being produced again?"

"Certainly not, Sir. The sound has vanished. It can have no thought or idea of being reproduced. The sound of a drum when it has once been produced and died away, is altogether cut off. But, Sir, a drum is a means of producing sound. And any man, as need arises, can by the effort of power residing in himself, beat on that drum, and so produce a sound."

"Just so, great king, has the Blessed One—except the teacher and the instruction he has left in his doctrine and discipline, and the jewel treasure of his relics whose value is derived from his righteousness, and contemplation, and wisdom, and emancipation, and insight given by the knowledge of emancipation—just so has he passed away by that kind of passing away in which no root remains. But the possibility of receiving the three attainments is not cut off because the Blessed One has passed away. Beings oppressed by the sorrow of becoming can, when they desire the attainments, still receive them by means of the jewel treasure of his relics and of his doctrine and discipline and teaching. Therefore is it, great king, that all acts done to the Tathagata, notwithstanding his having passed away and not accepting, are nevertheless of value and bear fruit. And this future possibility, great king, has been foreseen by

²That is, the three fires of lust, ill-will, and delusion, the going out of which is the state called, par excellence, "the going out" (Nirvana). [Translator's note.]

the Blessed One, and spoken of, and declared, and made known, when he said: 'It may be, Ananda, that in some of you the thought may arise: "The word of the Master is ended. We have no Teacher more!" But it is not thus, Ananda, that you should regard it. The Truth which I have preached to you, the Rules which I have laid down for the Order, let them, when I am gone, be the Teacher to you.' So that because the Tathagata has passed away and consents not thereto, that therefore any act done to him is empty and vain—this saying of the enemy is proved false. It is untrue, unjust, not according to fact, wrong, and perverse. It is the cause of sorrow, has sorrow as its fruit, and leads down the road to perdition!

"Now hear another reason for the same thing. Does the broad earth acquiesce, O king, in all kinds of seeds being planted all over it?"

"Certainly not, Sir."

"Then how is it those seeds, planted without the earth's consent, do yet stand fast and firmly rooted, and expand into trees with great trunks and sap and branches, and bearing fruits and flowers?"

"Though the earth, Sir, gives no consent, yet it acts as a site for those seeds, as a means of their development. Planted on that site they grow, by its means, into such great trees with branches, flowers, and fruit."

"Then, great king, the sectaries are destroyed, defeated, proved wrong by their own words when they say that 'an act done to him who accepts it not is empty and vain.' As the broad earth, O king, is the Tathagata, the Arahata, the Buddha supreme. Like it he accepts nothing. Like the seeds which through it attain to such developments are the gods and men who, through the jewel treasures of the relics and the wisdom of the Tathagata—though he have passed away and consent not to it—being firmly rooted by the roots of merit, become like unto trees casting a goodly shade by means of the trunk of contemplation, the sap of true doctrine, and the branches of righteousness, and bearing the flowers of emancipation, and the fruits of Samanaship. Therefore is it, great king, that acts done to the Tathagata, notwithstanding his having passed away and not accepting them, are still of value and bear fruit.

"Now hear another and further reason for the same thing. Do camels, buffaloes, asses, goats, oxen, or men acquiesce in the birth of worms inside them?"

"Certainly not, Sir."

"Then how is it then, that without their consent worms are so born, and spread by rapid reproduction of sons and grandsons?"

"By the power of evil Karma, Sir."

"Just so, great king, is it by the power of the relics and the wisdom of the Tathagata, who has passed away and acquiesces in nothing, that an act done to him is of value and bears fruit.

"Now hear another and further reason for the same thing. Do men consent, O king, that the ninety-eight diseases should be produced in their bodies?"

"Certainly not, Sir."

"Then how is it the diseases come?"

"By evil deeds done in former births."

"But, great king, if evil deeds done in a former birth have to be suffered here and now, then both good and evil done here or done before has weight and bears fruit. Therefore is it that acts done to the Tathagata, notwithstanding his having passed away and not consenting, are nevertheless of value and bear fruit.

"Now hear another and further reason for the same thing. Did you ever hear, O king, of the ogre named Nandaka, who, having laid hands upon the Elder Sariputta, was swallowed up by the earth?"

"Yes, Sir, that is matter of common talk among men."

"Well, did Sariputta acquiesce in that?"

"Though the world of gods and men, Sir, were to be destroyed, though the sun and moon were to fall upon the earth, though Sineru the king of mountains were to be dissolved, yet would not Sariputta the Elder have consented to any pain being inflicted on a fellow creature. And why not? Because every condition of heart which could cause him to be angry or offended has been in him destroyed and rooted out. And as all cause thereof had thus been removed, Sir, therefore could not Sariputta be angered even with those who sought to deprive him of his life."

"But if Sariputta, O king, did not consent to it, how was it that Nandaka was so swallowed up?"

"By the power of his evil deeds."

"Then if so, great king, an act done to him who consents not is still of power and bears fruit. And if this is so of an evil deed, how much more of a good one? Therefore is it, O king, that acts done to the Tathagata, notwithstanding his having passed away and not accepting them, are nevertheless of value and bear fruit.

"Now how many, O king, are those men who, in this life, have been swallowed up by the earth? Have you heard anything on that point?"

"Yes, Sir, I have heard how many there are."

"Then tell me."

"Kinka the Brahmin woman, and Suppabuddha the Sakyan, and Devadatta the Elder, and Nandaka the ogre, and Nanda the Brahman—these are the five people who were swallowed up by the earth."

"And whom, O king, had they wronged?"

"The Blessed One and his disciples."

"Then did the Blessed One or his disciples consent to their being so swallowed up?"

"Certainly not, Sir."

"Therefore is it, O king, that an act done to the Tathagata, notwithstanding his having passed away and not consenting thereto, is nevertheless of value and bears fruit."

Adoration of Relics

"Venerable Nāgasena, the Tathagata said: 'Hinder not yourselves, Ananda, by honouring the remains of the Tathagata.' And on the other hand he said:

'Honour that relic of him who is worthy of honour,
Acting in that way you go from this world to heaven.'

"Now if the first injunction was right the second must be wrong, and if the second is right the first must be wrong. This too is a double-edged problem now put to you, and you have to solve it."

"Both the passages you quote were spoken by the Blessed One. But it was not to all men, it was to the sons of the Conqueror that it was said: 'Hinder not yourselves, Ananda, by honouring the remains of the Tathagata.' Paying reverence is not the work of the sons of the Conqueror, but rather the grasping of the true nature of all compounded things, the practice of thought, contemplation in accordance with the rules of Satipathana, the seizing of the real essence of all objects of thought, the struggle against evil, and devotion to their own [spiritual] good. These are things which the sons of the Conqueror ought to do, leaving to others, whether gods or men, the paying of reverence.

"And that is so, O king, just as it is the business of the princes of the earth to learn all about elephants, and horses, and chariots, and bows, and rapiers, and documents, and the law of property, to carry on the traditions of the Khattiya³ clans, and to fight themselves and to lead others in war, while husbandry, merchandise, and the care of cattle are the business of other folk, ordinary Vessas and Suddas.—Or just as the business of Brahmins and their sons is concerned with the Rig-veda, the Yagur-veda, the Sama-veda, the Atharva-veda, with the knowledge

³ *Khattiya* is a corrupt form of *Ksatriya* (in Sanskrit), the second caste in the Brahmanical system. Buddha spoke a vernacular language instead of the orthodox Sanskrit, and *The Questions of King Miliinda* was composed in a northern Indian vernacular.

of lucky marks [on the body], of legends, Puranas,⁴ lexicography, prosody, phonology, verses, grammar, etymology, astrology, interpretation of omens, and of dreams, and of signs, study of the six Vedangas, of eclipses of the sun and moon, of the prognostications to be drawn from the flight of comets, the thunderings of the gods, the junctions of planets, the fall of meteors, earthquakes, conflagrations, and signs in the heavens and on the earth, the study of arithmetic, of casuistry, of the interpretation of the omens to be drawn from dogs, and deer, and rats, and mixtures of liquids, and the sounds and cries of birds—while husbandry, merchandise, and the care of cattle are the business of other folk, ordinary Vessas and Suddas. So it was, O king, in the sense of 'Devote not yourselves to such things as are not your business, but to such things as are so' that the Tathagata was speaking when he said: 'Hinder not yourselves, Ananda, by honouring the remains of the Tathagata.' And if, O king, he had not said so, then would the Bhikkhus have taken his bowl and his robe, and occupied themselves with paying reverence to the Buddha through them!"

"Very good, Nāgasena! That is so, and I accept it as you say."

⁴ Puranas are, literally, things in the past. They are among the numerous sacred texts of the Hindus.

10

The Lotus of the True Law

First Century BCE—First Century CE

The Lotus of the True Law is a Buddhist text that reveals how Mahayana Buddhism encouraged and promoted Silk Roads trade. It was one of the earliest Buddhist texts composed in Sanskrit, rather than Pali and other vernacular languages used in early Buddhism, and among the first Buddhist texts to be translated into Chinese. During Kushan times, Mahayana became the dominant school in Buddhism. Mahayana

The Saddharma-Pundarika: or, The Lotus of the True Law, trans. H. Kern, in *The Sacred Books of the East*, Book XXIV (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1884), 21:406-9.

Buddhists worshipped many bodhisattvas, and Avalokitesvara was one of the most powerful. According to The Lotus of the True Law, he did not provide a paradise in which devotees could rest before proceeding to nirvana but saved people who were in trouble. Therefore traders and pilgrims made donations to him in the shrines that housed his image. From what dangers did the traders and pilgrims seek protection? Why do you think Avalokitesvara was the most popular deity among travelers on the Silk Roads?

Thereafter the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Akshayamati rose from his seat, put his upper robe upon one shoulder, stretched his joined hands towards the Lord, and said: For what reason, O Lord, is the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Avalokitesvara called Avalokitesvara? So he asked, and the Lord answered to the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Akshayamati: All the hundred thousands of myriads of kotis¹ of creatures, young man of good family, who in this world are suffering troubles will, if they hear the name of the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Avalokitesvara, be released from that mass of troubles. Those who shall keep the name of this Bodhisattva Mahasattva Avalokitesvara, young man of good family, will, if they fall into a great mass of fire, be delivered therefrom by virtue of the lustre of the Bodhisattva Mahasattva. In case, young man of good family, creatures, carried off by the current of rivers, should implore the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Avalokitesvara, all rivers will afford them a ford. In case, young man of good family, many hundred thousand myriads of kotis of creatures, sailing in a ship on the ocean, should see their bullion, gold, gems, pearls, lapis lazuli, conch shells, stones [?], corals, emeralds, Musaragalvas, red pearls [?], and other goods lost, and the ship by a vehement, untimely gale cast on the island of Giantesses, and if in that ship a single being implores Avalokitesvara, all will be saved from that island of Giantesses. For that reason, young man of good family, the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Avalokitesvara is named Avalokitesvara.²

If a man given up to capital punishment implores Avalokitesvara, young man of good family, the swords of the executioners shall snap asunder. Further, young man of good family, if the whole triple chiliocosm were teeming with goblins and giants, they would by virtue of the

¹ Ten million, the highest unit in the numbering of that time.

² *Avalokita* means "beheld"; it is as such synonymous with *drishta*, seen, visible, and *pratyaksha*, visible, manifest, present. The bodhisattva is everywhere present, and therefore implored in need and danger. [Translator's note.]

name of the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Avalokitesvara being pronounced lose the faculty of sight in their wicked designs. If some creature, young man of good family, shall be bound in wooden or iron manacles, chains or fetters, be he guilty or innocent, then those manacles, chains or fetters shall give way as soon as the name of the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Avalokitesvara is pronounced. Such, young man of good family, is the power of the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Avalokitesvara. If this whole triple chiliocosm, young man of good family, were teeming with knaves, enemies, and robbers armed with swords, and if a merchant leader of a caravan marched with a caravan rich in jewels; if then they perceived those robbers, knaves, and enemies armed with swords, and in their anxiety and fright thought themselves helpless; if further, that leading merchant spoke to the caravan in this strain: Be not afraid, young gentlemen, be not frightened; invoke, all of you, with one voice the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Avalokitesvara, the giver of safety; then you shall be delivered from this danger by which you are threatened at the hands of robbers and enemies; if then the whole caravan with one voice invoked Avalokitesvara with the words: Adoration, adoration be to the giver of safety, to Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva Mahasattva; then, by the mere act of pronouncing that name, the caravan would be released from all danger. Such, young man of good family, is the power of the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Avalokitesvara. In case creatures act under the impulse of impure passion, young man of good family, they will, after adoring the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Avalokitesvara, be freed from passion. Those who act under the impulse of hatred will, after adoring the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Avalokitesvara, be freed from hatred. Those who act under the impulse of infatuation will, after adoring the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Avalokitesvara, be freed from infatuation. So mighty, young man of good family, is the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Avalokitesvara. If a woman, desirous of male offspring, young man of good family, adores the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, she shall get a son, nice, handsome, and beautiful; one possessed of the characteristics of a male child, generally beloved and winning, who has planted good roots. If a woman is desirous of getting a daughter, a nice, handsome, beautiful girl shall be born to her; one possessed of the (good) characteristics of a girl, generally beloved and winning, who has planted good roots. Such, young man of good family, is the power of the Bodhisattva Mahasattva Avalokitesvara.

11

*The Amitabha Sutra**First Century BCE—First Century CE*

Amitabha (also known as Amitayus) was an influential bodhisattva residing in the Western Pure Land, a paradise full of the Seven Treasures, among them the gems, silks, and other luxuries traded on the Silk Roads. He welcomed all willing to go there, even if they did not make the decision until they were on their deathbeds. Because the Western Pure Land was so beautiful and Bodhisattva Amitabha always on call to take people in, his followers were even more numerous than those of Avalokitesvara (Document 10). This text was also translated into Chinese, and the image of Amitabha later became the fat sitting Buddha who blesses devotees while attracting donations. As a sutra, this short text is meant to be learned by heart and recited continuously by devotees. Why was Amitabha transformed into the popular fat smiling Buddha?

Adoration to the Omniscent!

Thus it was heard by me: At one time the Blessed [Bhagavat, i.e. Buddha] dwelt at Sravasti,¹ in the Geta-grove, in the garden of Anathapindaka, together with a large company of Bhikshus [mendicant friars], viz. with twelve hundred and fifty Bhikshus, all of them acquainted with the five kinds of knowledge, elders, great disciples, and Arhats,² such as Sariputra, the elder, Mahamaudgalyayana, Mahakasyapa, Mahakaphisa, Mahakatyayana, Mahakaushthila, Revata, Suddhipanthaka, Nanda, Ananda, Rahula, Gavampati, Bharadvaga, Kalodayin, Vakkula, and Aniruddha. He dwelt together with these and many other great disciples, and together with many noble-minded Bodhisattvas, such as Mangusri, the prince, the Bodhisattva Agita, the Bodhisattva Gandhahastin, the Bodhisattva Nityodyukta, the Bodhisattva Anikshiptadhura. He dwelt together

¹ Sravasti, capital of the Northern Kosalas, residence of King Prasenagit. [Translator's note.]

² The great disciples of the Buddha.

The Smaller Sukhavati-syūha, trans. J. Takakusu, *The Sacred Books of the East*, Book 49 (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1894), 49:89–102.

with them and many other noble-minded Bodhisattvas, and with Sakra, the Indra or King of the Devas,³ and with Brahman Sahampati. With these and many other hundred thousand nayutas of sons of the gods, Bhagavat dwelt at Sravasti.

Then Bhagavat addressed the honoured Sariputra and said, "O Sariputra, after you have passed from here over a hundred thousand kōfis of Buddha countries there is in the Western part a Buddha country, a world called Sukhavati [the happy country]. And there a Tathagata, called Amitayus, an Arhat, fully enlightened, dwells now and remains and supports himself, and teaches the Law.

"Now what do you think, Sariputra, for what reason is that world called Sukhavati [the happy]? In that world, Sukhavati, O Sariputra, there is neither bodily nor mental pain for living beings. The sources of happiness are innumerable there. For that reason is that world called Sukhavati [the happy].

"And again, O Sariputra, that world Sukhavati is adorned with seven terraces, with seven rows of palm-trees, and with strings of bells. It is enclosed on every side, beautiful, brilliant with the four gems, viz. gold, silver, beryl, and crystal. With such arrays of excellences peculiar to a Buddha country is that Buddha country adorned.

"And again, O Sariputra, in that world Sukhavati there are lotus lakes, adorned with the seven gems, viz. gold, silver, beryl, crystal, red pearls, diamonds, and corals as the seventh. They are full of water which possesses the eight good qualities,⁴ their waters rise as high as the fords and bathing-places, so that even crows may drink there; they are strewn with golden sand. And in these lotus-lakes there are all around on the four sides four stairs, beautiful and brilliant with the four gems, viz. gold, silver, beryl, crystal. And on every side of these lotus-lakes gem-trees are growing, beautiful and brilliant with the seven gems, viz. gold, silver, beryl, crystal, red pearls, diamonds, and corals as the seventh. And in those lotus-lakes lotus-flowers are growing, blue, blue-coloured, of blue splendour, blue to behold; yellow, yellow-coloured, of yellow splendour, yellow to behold; red, red-coloured, of red splendour, red to behold; white, white-coloured, of white splendour, white to behold; beautiful, beautifully-coloured, of beautiful splendour, beautiful to behold, and in circumference as large as the wheel of a chariot.

³ Sakra is the Buddhist name for Indra, the king of Devas, or gods.

⁴ The eight good qualities of water are limpidity and purity, refreshing coolness, sweetness, softness, fertilizing qualities, calmness, power of preventing famine, productiveness. [Translator's note.]

"And again, O Sariputra, in that Buddha country there are heavenly musical instruments always played on, and the earth is lovely and of golden colour. And in that Buddha country a flower-rain of heavenly Mandarava blossoms pours down three times every day, and three times every night. And the beings who are born there worship before their morning meal a hundred thousand *koṣis* of Buddhas by going to other worlds; and having showered a hundred thousand *koṣis* of flowers upon each Tathagata, they return to their own world in time for the afternoon rest. With such arrays of excellences peculiar to a Buddha country is that Buddha country adorned.

"And again, O Sariputra, there are in that Buddha country swans, curlews, and peacocks. Three times every night, and three times every day, they come together and perform a concert, each uttering his own note. And from them thus uttering proceeds a sound proclaiming the five virtues, the five powers, and the seven steps leading towards the highest knowledge. When the men there hear that sound, remembrance of Buddha, remembrance of the Law, remembrance of the Church, rises in their mind.

"Now, do you think, O Sariputra, that there are beings who have entered into the nature of animals [birds, &c.]? This is not to be thought of. The very name of hells is unknown in that Buddha country, and likewise that of [descent into] animal bodies and of the realm of Yama [the four *apayas*].⁵ No, these tribes of birds have been made on purpose by the Tathagata Amitayus, and they utter the sound of the Law. With such arrays of excellences, &c.

"And again, O Sariputra, when those rows of palm-trees and strings of bells in that Buddha country are moved by the wind, a sweet and enrapturing sound proceeds from them. Yes, O Sariputra, as from a heavenly musical instrument consisting of a hundred thousand *koṣis* of sounds, when played by Aryas, a sweet and enrapturing sound proceeds, a sweet and enrapturing sound proceeds from those rows of palm-trees and strings of bells moved by the wind. And when the men hear that sound, reflection on Buddha arises in them, reflection on the Law, reflection on the Church. With such arrays of excellences, &c.

"Now what do you think, O Sariputra, for what reason is that Tathagata called Amitayus? The length of life [ayus], O Sariputra, of that Tathagata and of those men there is immeasurable [amita]. There-

⁵Niraya, the hells, also called Naraka. Yamaloaka, the realm of Yama, the judge of the dead, is explained as the four *apayas*, that is, Naraka, hell. [Translator's note.]

fore is that Tathagata called Amitayus, And ten kalpas have passed, O Sariputra, since that Tathagata awoke to perfect knowledge.

"And what do you think, O Sariputra, for what reason is that Tathagata called Amitabha? The splendour [abhā], O Sariputra, of that Tathagata is unimpeded over all Buddha countries. Therefore is that Tathagata called Amitabha.

"And there is, O Sariputra, an innumerable assembly of disciples with that Tathagata, purified and venerable persons, whose number it is not easy to count. With such arrays of excellences, &c.

"And again, O Sariputra, of those beings also who are born in the Buddha country of the Tathagata Amitayus as purified Bodhisattvas, never to return again and bound by one birth only, of those Bodhisattvas also, O Sariputra, the number is not easy to count, except they are reckoned as infinite in number.

"Then again all beings, O Sariputra, ought to make fervent prayer for that Buddha country. And why? Because they come together there with such excellent men. Beings are not born in that Buddha country of the Tathagata Amitayus as a reward and result of good works performed in this present life. No, whatever son or daughter of a family shall hear the name of the blessed Amitayus, the Tathagata, and having heard it, shall keep it in mind, and with thoughts undisturbed shall keep it in mind for one, two, three, four, five, six or seven nights, — when that son or daughter of a family comes to die, then that Amitayus, the Tathagata, surrounded by an assembly of disciples and followed by a host of Bodhisattvas, will stand before them at their hour of death, and they will depart this life with tranquil minds. After their death they will be born in the world Sukhavatī, in the Buddha country of the same Amitayus, the Tathagata. Therefore, then, O Sariputra, having perceived this cause and effect, I with reverence say thus, Every son and every daughter of a family ought with their whole mind to make fervent prayer for that Buddha country....

"Now what do you think, O Sariputra, for what reason is that repetition [treatise] of the Law called the Favour of all Buddhas? Every son or daughter of a family who shall hear the name of that repetition of the Law and retain in their memory the names of those blessed Buddhas, will be favoured by the Buddhas, and will never return again, being once in possession of the transcendent true knowledge. Therefore, then, O Sariputra, believe, accept, and do not doubt of me and those blessed Buddhas!

"Whatever sons or daughters of a family shall make mental prayer for the Buddha country of that blessed Amitayus, the Tathagata, or are making it now or have made it formerly, all these will never return again,

being once in possession of the transcendent true knowledge. They will be born in that Buddha country, have been born, or are being born now. Therefore, then, O Sariputra, mental prayer is to be made for that Buddha country by faithful sons and daughters of a family.

"And as I at present magnify here the inconceivable excellences of those blessed Buddhas, thus, O Sariputra, do those blessed Buddhas magnify my own inconceivable excellences.

"A very difficult work has been done by Sakyamuni, the sovereign of the Sakyas. Having obtained the transcendent true knowledge in this world Saha, he taught the Law which all the world is reluctant to accept, during this corruption of the present kalpa,⁶ during this corruption of mankind, during this corruption of belief, during this corruption of life, during this corruption of passions.

"This is even for me, O Sariputra, an extremely difficult work that, having obtained the transcendent true knowledge in this world Saha, I taught the Law which all the world is reluctant to accept, during this corruption of mankind, of belief, of passion, of life, and of this present kalpa."

Thus spoke Bhagavat joyful in his mind. And the honourable Sariputra, and the Bhikshus and Bodhisattvas, and the whole world with the gods, men, evil spirits and genii, applauded the speech of Bhagavat.

This is the Mahayanasutra called Sukhavatī-vyūha.

Votive Inscription on a Silver Plaque from Taxila First—Second Centuries CE

Mahayana Buddhism encouraged devotees to make contributions to monasteries to secure their own nirvana and their welfare while on earth.

Many who did so had a record of their donation inscribed, so it would be preserved. This inscription, on a silver plaque from Taxila, an ancient town in Pakistan that was visited by Alexander the Great and later became a Buddhist center, begins with the donor's identity. What does he donate, and for what purpose? Notice his devotion to the Kushan ruler and state, as well as to his own family.

Anno 1.36, on the 15 day of the first month Ashadha, on this day were established relics of the Lord by Urasaka, of the Imtavuria boys, the Bactrian, the resident of the town of Noacha. By him these relics of the Lord were established in his own bodhisattva chapel, in the Dharmarajika compound of Takshasila, for the bestowal of health on the Great King, the King of Kings, the Son of Heaven, the Khushana, in honour of all Buddhas, in honour of the Pratyekabuddhas, in honour of the Arhats, in honour of all beings, in honour of mother and father, in honour of friends, ministers, kinsmen, and blood-relations, for the bestowal of health upon himself.

May this thy right munificence lead to Nirvana.

⁶A cosmological unit of time, equal to 4.32 billion years.