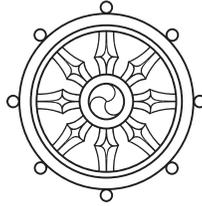


NĀGĀRJUNA
ON
MINDFULNESS OF THE BUDDHA

To refrain from doing any manner of evil,
to respectfully perform all varieties of good,
and to purify one's own mind—
This is the teaching of all buddhas.

The Ekottara Āgama Sūtra
(T02 n.125 p.551a 13–14)



A NOTE ON THE PROPER CARE OF DHARMA MATERIALS

Traditional Buddhist cultures treat books on Dharma as sacred. Hence it is considered disrespectful to place them in a low position, to read them when lying down, or to place them where they might be damaged by food or drink.

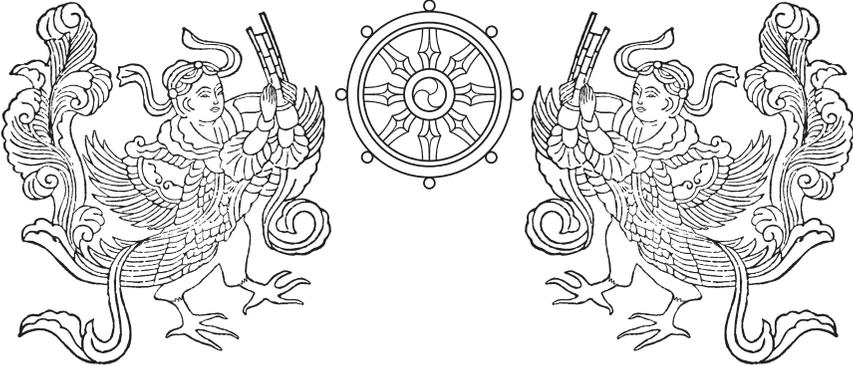
NĀGĀRJUNA
ON
MINDFULNESS OF THE BUDDHA

The Easy Practice
Nāgārjuna's Treatise on the Ten Grounds, Chapter 9

The Pratuyutpanna Samādhi
Nāgārjuna's Treatise on the Ten Grounds, Chapters 20–25

Recollection of the Buddha
Nāgārjuna's Exegesis on the Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra
Chapter 1, Part 36-1

As Translated into Chinese by Tripiṭaka Master Kumārajīva
Annotated English Translation by Bhikshu Dharmamitra



KALAVINKA PRESS
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON
WWW.KALAVINKAPRESS.ORG

KALAVINKA PRESS
8603 39TH AVE SW
SEATTLE, WA 98136 USA
(WWW.KALAVINKAPRESS.ORG)

Kalavinka Press is associated with the Kalavinka Dharma Association, a non-profit organized exclusively for religious educational purposes as allowed within the meaning of section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. Kalavinka Dharma Association was founded in 1990 and gained formal approval in 2004 by the United States Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization to which all donations are tax deductible.

Donations to KDA are accepted by mail and on the Kalavinka website where numerous free Dharma translations and excerpts from Kalavinka publications are available in digital format.

Edition: NMOB-EO-1019-1.0

Kalavinka Buddhist Classics Book 14b

© 2019 Bhikshu Dharmamitra

ISBN: 978-1-935413-14-1 / Library of Congress Control #: 2019029481

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Nāgārjuna, active 2nd century. | Dharmamitra, Bhikshu, translator. | Kumārajīva, -412? translator.

Title: Nāgārjuna on mindfulness of the Buddha / as translated into Chinese by Tripiṭaka Master Kumārajīva ; annotated English translation by Bhikshu Dharmamitra.

Other titles: Daśabhūmivibhāṣāsāstra. Selections. English & Chinese

Description: Nmob-EO-1019-1.0 | Seattle, Washington : Kalavinka Press, 2019.

| Series: Kalavinka Buddhist classics; book 14b | Includes bibliographical

references. | In English and Chinese; translated from the Chinese translation

of the Sanskrit original. | Summary: "Nāgārjuna on Mindfulness of the

Buddha" consists of three extended passages from Bhikshu Dharmamitra's

original annotated translations from Sino-Buddhist Classical Chinese of

works written by Ārya Nāgārjuna (circa 150 ce). All three of these passages

have been selected from Tripiṭaka Master Kumārajīva's early Fifth Century

Sanskrit-to-Chinese translations of works by Nagarjuna, as follows: 1) "The

Easy Practice" -- Nāgārjuna's Treatise on the Ten Grounds, Chapter 9; 2) "The

Pratyutpanna Samadhī" -- Nāgārjuna's Treatise on the Ten Grounds, Chapters

20-25; and 3) "Recollection of the Buddha" -- Nāgārjuna's Exegesis on the

Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra, Chapter 1, Part 36-1"-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019029481 | ISBN 9781935413141 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Nāgārjuna, active 2nd century.

Daśabhūmivibhāṣāsāstra--Criticism, interpretation, etc. | Tripiṭaka.

Sūtrapiṭaka. Daśabhūmīśvara--Commentaries--Early works to 1800. |

Bodhisattva stages (Mahayana Buddhism)--Early works to 1800. | Pure Land

Buddhism--Doctrines--Early works to 1800.

Classification: LCC BQ1632.A1 D425 2019 | DDC 294.3/85--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019029481>

DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of the selfless and marvelous life of the Venerable Dhyāna Master Hsuan Hua, the Guiyang Ch'an Patriarch and the very personification of the bodhisattva's six perfections.

DHYĀNA MASTER HSUAN HUA

宣化禪師

1918–1995

Kalavinka Press books are printed on acid-free paper.
Cover and interior designed by Bhikshu Dharmamitra.
Printed in the United States of America

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The accuracy and readability of this translation have been greatly improved by many corrections, preview comments, and editorial suggestions generously contributed by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Parts 1 and 2), Feng Ling, and Nicholas Weeks.

Expenses incurred in bringing forth this publication were underwritten by generous donations from Craig and Karen Neyman, Madalena Lew, Shuyu Yang, Jiajing Li, Kam Chung Wong, Loritta Chan, David Fox, Nicholas Weeks, Yuen-Lin Tan, and the BDK English Tripitaka Project. Assistance with aspects of Adobe Indesign book layout was provided by Anagarika Mahendra.

Were it not for the ongoing material support provided by my late guru's Dharma Realm Buddhist Association and the serene translation studio provided by Seattle's Bodhi Dhamma Center, creation of this translation would have been much more difficult.

Additionally, it would have been impossible for me to produce this translation without the Dharma teachings and personal inspiration provided to me by my late guru, the awesomely wise and compassionate Dhyāna Master Hsuan Hua, the Guiyang Ch'an Patriarch, Dharma teacher, and exegete.

Finally, I owe an immense debt of gratitude to the members of the liver care and transplant teams at Seattle's University of Washington Medical Center who cured me of liver cancer in 2010, gave me a liver transplant several months later, and finally cured me of hepatitis C in the winter of 2014–15. Without their wonderfully attentive and compassionate care along with the marvelous generosity of an anonymous liver donor, I would have died a half dozen years ago and thus never could have completed the scriptural translations I have produced in the last eight years.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
BCSD	Hirakawa's <i>Buddhist Chinese-Sanskrit Dictionary</i>
BHSD	Edgerton's <i>Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary</i>
CBETA	Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association's edition of the Taisho edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon.
CDB	<i>The Connected Discourses of the Buddha</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
EA	<i>Ekottara Āgama</i>
KB	Kumārajīva and Buddhayaśas (T286)
KJ	Kumārajīva
MDPL	<i>Materials for a Dictionary of the Prajñāpāramitā Literature</i>
MLDB	<i>The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima nikāya</i>
Mppu	<i>Mahāprajñāpāramitā upadeśa</i>
MW	Monier Williams' <i>A Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i>
N	Ārya Nāgārjuna
NDB	<i>Numerical Discourses of the Buddha</i>
PDB	Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism
PTS	Pali Text Society
SN	Samyutta Nikāya
SYMG	The Song, Yuan, Ming, Gong editions of the Chinese Buddhist canon.
SZPPS	<i>Shizhu piposha lun</i>
T	Taisho Chinese Buddhist Canon via CBETA (Version 2004. ed.) Taipei)
VB	Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi

OUTLINING IN THIS WORK

The chapter titles in this work are from the Taisho Chinese text. All other outline headings originate with the translator. Buddhist canonical texts are often so structurally dense that they are best navigated with the aid of at least a simple outline structure such as I have supplied here.

GENERAL TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	5
Acknowledgments	7
List of Abbreviations	8
Outlining in This Work	8
General Table of Contents	9
Directory to Chapter Subsections	11
Translator’s Introduction	15
Nāgārjuna on Mindfulness of the Buddha	23
Part One: On the Easy Practice	27
<i>(Treatise on the Ten Grounds, Ch. 9)</i>	
Part One Endnotes	47
Part Two: The Pratyutpanna Samadhi	51
<i>(Treatise on the Ten Grounds, Ch. 20–25)</i>	
Ch. 20 - Mindfulness of the Buddhas	53
Ch. 21 - Forty Dharmas Exclusive to Buddhas (Part 1)	73
Ch. 22 - Forty Dharmas Exclusive to Buddhas (Part 2)	85
Ch. 23 - Forty Dharmas Exclusive to Buddhas (Part 3)	113
Ch. 24 - Verses Offered in Praise	142
Ch. 25 - Teachings to Aid Mindfulness-of-the-Buddha Samādhi	153
Part Two Endnotes	171
Part Three: On Recollection of the Buddha	185
<i>(Exegesis on the Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sutra – Ch.1, Part 36-1)</i>	187
Part Three Endnotes	201
Bibliography	203
Glossary	205
About the Translator	217
Kalavinka Buddhist Classics’ Current Title List	219

DIRECTORY TO CHAPTER SUBSECTIONS

I. CHAPTER NINE: ON THE EASY PRACTICE	27
A. Q: HOW DIFFICULT! IS THERE AN EASIER PATH TO THE AVAIVARTIKA GROUND?	27
B. A: HOW WEAK & INFERIOR! BUT, IF YOU WANT THAT, I WILL EXPLAIN	28
1. THE PRACTICE OF CALLING ON TEN BUDDHAS, ONE IN EACH DIRECTION	28
2. Q: CAN ONE INSTEAD CALL ON OTHER BUDDHAS AND BODHISATTVAS?	35
3. A: YES, THERE IS AMITĀBHA AS WELL AS OTHER SUCH BUDDHAS	35
a. AMITĀBHA'S ORIGINAL VOWS AND A PRAISE VERSE	37
4. ALSO, THE SEVEN BUDDHAS OF THE PAST AS WELL AS MAITREYA	40
5. ALSO, BY CALLING ON TEN OTHER BUDDHAS	42
6. ALSO, BY CALLING ON ALL BUDDHAS OF THE THREE TIMES	43
7. ALSO, BY CALLING ON THE GREAT BODHISATTVAS	44
II. CHAPTER 20: MINDFULNESS OF THE BUDDHAS	53
A. ON FINISHING 1ST GROUND PRACTICES, THE BODHISATTVA SEES BUDDHAS	53
1. Q: IS THERE ANY OTHER WAY TO BE ABLE TO SEE THE BUDDHAS?	53
2. A: ON ENTERING THE PRATYUTPANNA SAMĀDHI, ONE SEES THE BUDDHAS	53
3. Q: HOW CAN ONE ACQUIRE THIS SAMADHI?	53
4. A: ENVISION THE BUDDHAS WITH THE 32 MARKS AND 80 CHARACTERISTICS	54
a. RECOLLECTION OF THE BUDDHAS' QUALITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS	54
b. RECOLLECTION OF THE 32 MARKS OF THE BUDDHAS	54
c. RECOLLECTION OF OTHER QUALITIES OF THE BUDDHAS	56
d. RECOLLECTION OF MORE SPECIAL QUALITIES & ABILITIES OF BUDDHAS	58
e. CONTEMPLATIVE RECOLLECTION OF THE 80 SECONDARY CHARACTERISTICS	60
f. ENVISIONING THE BUDDHAS IN AN ASSEMBLY, TEACHING, ON THE LION SEAT	64
1) ENVISIONING THE BUDDHAS AS THEY SIT ON THE LION'S SEAT	64
2) ENVISIONING THE AUDIENCE AS THE BUDDHAS TEACH DHARMA	64
3) ENVISIONING THE MANNER IN WHICH THEY TEACH DHARMA	65
4) ENVISIONING THE EFFECTS OF THE BUDDHAS' TEACHING OF DHARMA	66
5) INSTRUCTION ON THIS TYPE OF CONTEMPLATIVE MINDFULNESS	67
6) THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAISING THE MAJOR MARKS AND SECONDARY SIGNS	67
a) VERSES IN PRAISE OF THE BUDDHAS' 32 MARKS	67
b) VERSES IN PRAISE OF THE BUDDHAS SECONDARY CHARACTERISTICS	69
c) SUMMATION ON IMPORTANCE OF SUCH RECOLLECTIVE CONTEMPLATION	71
III. CHAPTER 21: FORTY DHARMAS EXCLUSIVE TO BUDDHAS (PART 1)	73
A. INTRODUCTION TO THE FORTY DHARMAS EXCLUSIVE TO BUDDHAS	73
B. 1) SOVEREIGN MASTERY OF THE ABILITY TO FLY	74
C. 2) [THE ABILITY TO MANIFEST] COUNTLESS TRANSFORMATIONS	76
D. 3) BOUNDLESS PSYCHIC POWERS OF THE SORT POSSESSED BY ĀRYAS	77
E. 4) SOVEREIGN MASTERY OF THE ABILITY TO HEAR SOUNDS	79
F. 5) IMMEASURABLE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE TO KNOW OTHERS' THOUGHTS	80
G. 6) SOVEREIGN MASTERY IN [TRAINING AND SUBDUING] THE MIND	80
H. 7) CONSTANT ABIDING IN STABLE WISDOM	81

I.	8) NEVER FORGETTING	82
J.	9) POSSESSION OF THE POWERS OF THE VAJRA SAMĀDHI	82
IV.	CHAPTER 22: FORTY DHARMAS EXCLUSIVE TO BUDDHAS (PART 2)	85
A.	Q: YOUR CLAIM THAT OMNISCIENCE EXISTS IS FALSE FOR THESE REASONS	85
B.	A: WRONG. AS I SHALL NOW EXPLAIN, THE BUDDHA TRULY IS OMNISCIENT	93
V.	CHAPTER 23: FORTY DHARMAS EXCLUSIVE TO BUDDHAS (PART 3)	113
A.	10) THOROUGH KNOWING OF MATTERS THAT ARE UNFIXED	113
B.	11) THOROUGH KNOWING OF FORMLESS ABSORPTION PHENOMENA	116
C.	12) THE KNOWLEDGE OF ALL MATTERS RELATED TO ETERNAL CESSATION	119
D.	13) THOROUGH KNOWING OF NON-FORM DHARMAS UNRELATED TO MIND	120
E.	14) THE GREAT POWERS PĀRAMITĀ	121
F.	15) THE FOUR UNIMPEDED KNOWLEDGES PĀRAMITĀ	121
G.	16) THE PĀRAMITĀ OF PERFECTLY COMPLETE REPLIES AND PREDICTIONS	122
H.	17) INVULNERABILITY TO HARM BY ANYONE	125
I.	18) THEIR WORDS ARE NEVER SPOKEN WITHOUT A PURPOSE	126
J.	19) THEIR SPEECH IS FREE OF ERROR	128
K.	20) COMPLETE USE OF THE THREE TURNINGS IN SPEAKING DHARMA	129
L.	21) THEY ARE THE GREAT GENERALS AMONG ALL ĀRYAS	129
M.	22–25) THEY ARE ABLE TO REMAIN UNGUARDED IN FOUR WAYS	130
N.	26–29) THEY POSSESS THE FOUR TYPES OF FEARLESSNESSES	131
O.	30–39) THEY POSSESS THE TEN POWERS	133
1.	THE FIRST POWER	133
2.	THE SECOND POWER	134
3.	THE THIRD POWER	135
4.	THE FOURTH POWER	136
5.	THE FIFTH POWER	136
6.	THE SIXTH POWER	137
7.	THE SEVENTH POWER	137
8.	THE EIGHTH POWER	137
9.	THE NINTH POWER	138
10.	THE TENTH POWER	138
P.	40) THEY HAVE ACHIEVED UNIMPEDED LIBERATION	138
Q.	SUMMARY DISCUSSION OF THE DHARMAS EXCLUSIVE TO THE BUDDHA	139
VI.	CHAPTER 24: VERSES OFFERED IN PRAISE	142
A.	THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAISES TO MINDFULNESS-OF-THE-BUDDHA PRACTICE	142
B.	THE PRAISE VERSES	142
1.	VERSES IN PRAISE OF THE FORTY DHARMAS EXCLUSIVE TO THE BUDDHAS	142
2.	VERSES PRAISING THE FOUR BASES OF MERITORIOUS QUALITIES	145
a.	VERSES PRAISING THE TRUTH BASIS OF MERITORIOUS QUALITIES	146
b.	VERSES PRAISING THE RELINQUISHMENT BASIS OF MERITORIOUS QUALITIES	146
c.	VERSES PRAISING THE QUIESCENCE BASIS OF MERITORIOUS QUALITIES	148
d.	VERSES PRAISING THE WISDOM BASIS OF MERITORIOUS QUALITIES	149
3.	CONCLUDING PRAISE VERSES	151

VII. CHAPTER 25: TEACHINGS AIDING MINDFULNESS-OF-THE BUDDHA SAMĀDHI	153
A. INITIAL INSTRUCTIONS ON THE MINDFULNESS-OF-THE BUDDHA SAMĀDHI	153
B. FOUR DHARMAS CAPABLE OF BRINGING FORTH THIS SAMĀDHI	155
C. FOUR MORE DHARMAS CAPABLE OF BRINGING FORTH THIS SAMĀDHI	156
D. FOUR MORE DHARMAS CAPABLE OF BRINGING FORTH THIS SAMĀDHI	156
E. FOUR MORE DHARMAS CAPABLE OF BRINGING FORTH THIS SAMĀDHI	156
F. FOUR MORE DHARMAS CAPABLE OF BRINGING FORTH THIS SAMĀDHI	157
G. FOUR MORE DHARMAS CAPABLE OF BRINGING FORTH THIS SAMĀDHI	157
H. FIVE MORE DHARMAS CAPABLE OF BRINGING FORTH THIS SAMĀDHI	157
I. FIVE MORE DHARMAS CAPABLE OF BRINGING FORTH THIS SAMĀDHI	158
J. THE GUIDELINES FOR LAY AND MONASTIC CULTIVATION OF THIS SAMĀDHI	158
1. TWENTY GUIDELINES FOR LAY CULTIVATORS OF THIS SAMĀDHI	159
2. SIXTY GUIDELINES FOR MONASTIC CULTIVATORS OF THIS SAMĀDHI	159
3. FIFTY DHARMAS SUPPORTING CULTIVATION OF THIS SAMĀDHI	162
K. THE BENEFITS OF CULTIVATING THIS PRATYUTPANNA SAMĀDHI	164
L. THIS SAMĀDHI'S VARIOUS STATIONS AND LEVELS OF CULTIVATION	167
M. VARIOUS QUALITATIVE VARIATIONS IN HOW THIS SAMĀDHI MANIFESTS	167
N. VARIOUS ABHIDHARMIC CLASSIFICATIONS OF THIS SAMĀDHI	168
O. THE PRACTITIONER'S OFFERINGS, ROOTS OF GOODNESS, AND TEACHING	168
P. THE PRACTITIONER'S USE OF THE FOUR MEANS OF ATTRACTION	169
Q. THE PRACTITIONER'S DEDICATION OF ROOTS OF GOODNESS	169
VIII. RECOLLECTION OF THE BUDDHA	187
A. THE PURPOSE OF THE PRACTICE	187
B. EXPLANATION OF THE PRACTICE	187
C. THE TEN NAMES OF THE BUDDHA	187
D. THE ILLUSTRIOUS LINEAGE AND MARVELOUS BIRTH OF THE BUDDHA	189
E. THE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BUDDHA	189
F. THE BUDDHA'S ACCUMULATION OF MORAL PRECEPTS	191
G. THE BUDDHA'S ACCUMULATION OF MEDITATIVE ABSORPTIONS	191
H. THE BUDDHA'S ACCUMULATION OF WISDOM	194
I. THE BUDDHA'S ACCUMULATION OF LIBERATIONS	196
J. THE BUDDHA'S ACCUMULATION OF THE KNOWLEDGE AND VISION OF LIBERATION	197
K. CONCLUDING STATEMENT ON MINDFULNESS OF THE BUDDHA PRACTICE	198

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

In this volume I present Ārya Nāgārjuna's explanations of three closely related but rather different "mindfulness-of-the-Buddha" practices that are sometimes mistaken for each other:

"Mindfulness of the Buddha" as Pure land practice;

"Mindfulness of the Buddhas" as cultivation of the "seeing-the-Buddhas" (*pratyutpanna*) samādhi;¹ and

"Recollection of the Buddha" as a protective practice.

In order to facilitate the clear understanding of the first two of these three topics, I present exemplary chapters from Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Ten Grounds*,² and, to distinguish and clarify the final topic, I present a long passage from Nāgārjuna's *Exegesis on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*.³

In his *Treatise on the Ten Grounds*, a third of the way through his discussion of the first bodhisattva ground, Nāgārjuna explains the "pure land" practice that involves reverential devotion to and invocation of the name of a particular buddha with the aim of achieving irreversibility on the bodhisattva path with the option of gaining rebirth in that buddha's purified buddha world. It is my translation of that single-chapter discussion, "The Easy Practice" (Chapter 9) that constitutes the first section of this book.

Later in that same text, in the final third of his discussion of the first bodhisattva ground, Nāgārjuna explains in great detail how to engage in "mindfulness of the Buddhas" practice in such a way that one may then enter the *pratyutpanna* samādhi,⁴ the samādhi in which one is able to see the buddhas of the ten directions and listen to them teach the Dharma. It is my translation of that marvelously detailed six-chapter discussion of "mindfulness of the Buddhas" that forms the second section of this book.

Two thirds of the way through the immense (34-fascicle) "Introduction" to his 100-fascicle *Exegesis on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, Nāgārjuna presents a very detailed description of "the eight recollections" of which the initial subsection is his discussion of "recollection of the Buddha." It is my translation of that discussion that forms the third section of this book.

The Rationale for Issuing This Volume

My primary reason for bringing forth this volume is to introduce to the English-speaking Buddhist audience selections from two classic Indian Mahāyāna texts that serve to distinguish and clarify the meaning and practice of these three important Mahāyāna practices that may otherwise be so closely associated with each other as to be thought of as somewhat synonymous.

The first of these three practices, “mindfulness of the Buddha” as “pure land” practice, is seldom recognized in Western Buddhism as a very early and important classic Indian Mahāyāna practice used as a means of progressing on the bodhisattva path to buddhahood. Rather it is most often associated with the later pure land schools of, first, China, and then, much later, Japan, where pure land practice has often been most focused on mere recitation of Amitābha Buddha’s name with the aim of being reborn in his pure land. I feel it is very important for students of the Dharma to understand this practice in accordance with its early Mahāyāna character and meaning wherein it was regarded as a practice to be integrated into one’s practice of the bodhisattva path.

The second of these three practices, “mindfulness of the Buddhas” aimed at acquisition of the *pratyutpanna* samādhi, is not much known in Western Buddhism. Where it is known, it may be easily confused with the “mindfulness of the Buddha samādhi” that one may enter through recitation of Amitābha Buddha’s name. But these are two somewhat different samādhis and it is important to distinguish them and understand them as such. Nāgārjuna’s extensive explanation of the practice leading to acquisition of this “seeing-the-Buddhas” samādhi eliminates any such confusion.

The third and last of these three practices, “recollection of the Buddha,” is also easily confused with pure land practice. In fact, it is an entirely different practice with very different purposes that is found in both Southern Tradition Buddhism⁵ and classic Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism. It has as its principal aims the allaying of fear and the provision of protection for practitioners attempting to pursue practice of the path in frightening, dangerous, or discouraging circumstances. The initial section of Nāgārjuna’s discussion of the “eight recollections” focuses exclusively on “recollection of the Buddha” and serves quite well to distinguish this practice from others while also clarifying precisely how to employ this practice as an aid to cultivation.

Part One: The Easy Practice

In Nāgārjuna's discussion of the first bodhisattva ground, in response to a discouraged interlocutor fearful of the difficulty of achieving "irreversibility" on the seemingly interminably long bodhisattva path, he offers an alternative means for the bodhisattva practitioner to very quickly and easily achieve irreversibility on this path to buddhahood. This alternative means which he refers to as "the easy practice" involves earnest invocation of the name of particular buddhas who have vowed to come to the aid of anyone who sincerely calls upon them. The practitioner who takes up this "easy practice" is then said to be able to achieve irreversibility on the path to buddhahood by this means.

In this chapter entitled "The Easy Practice," Nāgārjuna first lists the names of ten buddhas, one from each of the ten directions, stating that, through the practice of invoking these buddhas' names, one can swiftly reach the ground of irreversibility. He then quotes a long passage in the *Questions of Precious Moon Sutra*⁶ that describes the purified buddha world of Meritorious Qualities Buddha off in the East and describes how, through faith in this buddha, one may achieve irreversibility on the bodhisattva path.

After quoting this sutra, Nāgārjuna then notes the identical circumstances and practices associated with the nine other exemplary buddhas that dwell off in the other nine directions. Having done so, he then names and describes each of these other nine buddhas and their buddha lands.

Next, in response to a questioner wondering if there are other such buddhas, Nāgārjuna lists the names of Amitābha Buddha and 108 other such buddhas, after which he presents a 32-stanza verse praising and describing Amitābha Buddha, his vows, his pure land, his audience, and the advantages of achieving rebirth in his land. This praise verse concludes with Nāgārjuna's declaration of his own personal aspiration to always be borne in mind by this buddha and to succeed in achieving eternal purification of mind in Amitābha Buddha's presence.

Having so extensively described and praised Amitābha Buddha, Nāgārjuna then instructs us to praise and revere the seven historical buddhas of this era (including Śākyamuni Buddha) as well as Maitreya, the next buddha to appear in this world, after which he sets forth verses in praise of each of them. Then he lists ten⁷ more buddhas followed by corresponding praise verses after which he

lists “all buddhas of the past, the future, and the present” and also sets forth corresponding praise verses to them.

“The Easy Practice” chapter then concludes with Nāgārjuna’s instruction to also bear in mind all of the great bodhisattvas, after which he lists 143 great bodhisattvas and states: “One should bear in mind all such bodhisattvas and bow down to them in reverence as one seeks to attain the *avaivartika*’s “ground of irreversibility.”⁸

Part Two: The *Pratyutpanna Samādhi*

Toward the end of his discussion of the first bodhisattva ground, the Ground of Joyfulness, Nāgārjuna sets forth a verse indicating that, once the bodhisattva path practitioner has already come to dwell on the first ground, “he will naturally be able to see several hundred buddhas,” whereupon he is immediately asked by an interlocutor who is clearly worried about the immense difficulty of even reaching the first bodhisattva ground: “Is it solely through the power of roots of goodness and merit [resulting from completely fulfilling the first-ground practices] that one becomes able to see buddhas, or is there instead some other method by which one can do so?”

In answer to this question, quoting from the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sūtra*,⁹ Nāgārjuna sets forth a very detailed explanation of the means by which, without first reaching the first bodhisattva ground, acquiring the heavenly eye, or acquiring the heavenly ear, one may nonetheless be able to see the buddhas of the ten directions and listen to them speak the Dharma.

In the extremely detailed and precisely organized subsequent discussion, Nāgārjuna describes how to envision the Buddhas as seated on a lion throne in the midst of a great assembly and tells how to recollect the qualities of the Buddhas, including their vows, their four immeasurable minds, their four bases of meritorious qualities, their six perfections, and their thirty-two major marks and eighty minor characteristics along with the causes for acquiring each of those physical signs. After describing many more qualities and skills of the Buddhas, this “Mindfulness of the Buddhas” chapter ends with a long reiterative verse.

This initial chapter on “Mindfulness of the Buddhas” is then followed by three chapters devoted to close explanation of “forty dharmas exclusive to the Buddhas,” a single chapter consisting entirely of praise verses, and a final very detailed chapter on exactly

which practices to cultivate and how to cultivate them in order to acquire this *pratyutpanna* samādhi wherein one can see and hear the buddhas of the present. This final chapter is entitled “Teachings to Assist the Mindfulness of the Buddhas Samādhi.”

Part Three: Recollection of the Buddha

In subchapter 36 of the 52-part introductory chapter to his *Exegesis on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, Nāgārjuna discusses the “eight recollections” of which “recollection of the Buddha” is the first part. It is preceded by a short prefatory introduction to this practice wherein its fear-allaying, protective, and practice-inspiring functions are described.

After noting the role of the eight recollections in allaying fear, depression, discouragement, or disgust to which an isolated practitioner may have become subject, particularly in the wake of cultivating the nine reflections on the deterioration of a corpse, the introductory part of this “eight recollections” discussion then turns to an explanation of the first of these eight recollections, “recollection of the Buddha.” This discussion involves a detailed topic-by-topic treatment of a series of bases for carrying out an orderly reflection on the Buddha as an object of contemplation that inspires fearlessness, determination, and happiness. The main subsections of that reflection are as follows:

- a) The listing and explanation of the underlying meanings of the ten names of the Buddha;
- b) A description of the illustrious lineage and marvelous birth of the Buddha;
- c) A description of the physical characteristics, strength, and extraordinary physical marks of the Buddha’s body;
- d) A long and detailed description of the Buddha’s perfection of the five “accumulations,” namely moral precepts, meditative absorptions, wisdom, liberations, and the knowledge and vision associated with the liberations;
- e) A summarizing list of other qualities of the Buddha upon which one should reflect which includes: the Buddha’s omniscience; his manifold types of knowledge and vision; his great kindness and great compassion; his ten powers; his four fearlessnesses, his four types of unimpeded knowledge, and his eighteen special dhar-mas.

Nāgārjuna’s discussion of “recollection of the Buddha” then concludes with a summary of various *abhidharma*-related factors

regarding the stations of existence in which it can be practiced, the presence or absence of the contaminants in the practitioner, its association with bliss, joy, and equanimity, and the potential for achieving facility in “recollection of the Buddha” either through practice or as a result of prior karmic actions. In the case of those who acquire it through practice, this refers to those who practice the “mindfulness of the Buddha” samādhi. As for those who acquire it as a karmic result, this refers to such beings as those that inhabit the purified buddha world of Amitābha Buddha.

On the Authorship of the Texts

The author of both these texts, the *Treatise on the Ten Grounds* and the *Exegesis on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, is considered by the Sino-Mahāyāna tradition to be Ārya Nāgārjuna, the same 2nd century CE Indian monk who produced such works as the *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*, the *Bodhisambhāra-sāstra*, the *Ratnāvalī*, and the *Suḥrillekha*. Although there have been a number of scholars who have doubted the Nāgārjunian authorship of this *Exegesis on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, their arguments tend to boil down to an abundance of opinionation, for there is nothing but very thin circumstantial evidence for their doubts. I have found the internal evidence of doctrinal consistency with other Nāgārjunian texts to be quite strong and I think that the testimony of Kumārajīva (the translator who produced the Chinese edition) is far more trustworthy on the issue of this text’s authorship, not least because he lived within 200 years of the life of Nāgārjuna and was the foremost authority on these matters at the time.

In Summation

I hope that this volume of Nāgārjunian texts focused on “mindfulness of the Buddha” practices will be both useful and inspiring to students of Dharma who wish to study, understand, and correctly cultivate these closely related modes of contemplation and practice common in classic Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Bhikshu Dharmamitra

Seattle

May 14, 2019

Introduction Endnotes

- 1 “*Pratyutpanna samādhi*” is an abbreviation for *pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukha-avasthita-samādhi*, “the samādhi in which one encounters the buddhas of the present face-to-face.”
- 2 *Daśabhūmika-vibhāṣā* (十住毘婆沙論 / T26, no. 1521). This is Nāgārjuna’s 17-fascicle, 35-chapter discussion on the meaning of the *Ten Grounds Sutra* (*Daśabhūmika-sūtra* [十住經 / T10, no. 286]).
- 3 *Mahāprājnāpāramitopedeśa* (大智度論 / T25, no. 1509).
- 4 The complete name of this samādhi is “the *pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukha-avasthita samādhi*,” lit., “the samādhi in which the Buddhas of the present stand directly before one.”
- 5 “Recollection of the Buddha” constitutes the first of the “four protective meditations” in Southern Tradition Buddhism. (The other three protective meditations are loving-kindness, the unloveliness of the body, and death.)
- 6 See *The Sutra on the Youth Precious Moon’s Questions on Dharma* (大乘寶月童子問法經 – T14n0437_p108c01-110a07).
- 7 Actually, the text lists eleven buddha names, but it is probable that one of those names is included only as a scribal error involving unintentional redundancy. This conclusion is corroborated by the absence of any mention of this “eleventh” buddha in the ensuing verses that individually praise each of these buddhas.
- 8 An “*avaivartika*” is one who has achieved irreversibility on the bodhisattva path to buddhahood.
- 9 “The Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sūtra” (*Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukha-avasthita-samādhi-sūtra*) is preserved in the *Taisho Canon* as the *Banzhou Sanmei Jing* (般舟三昧經 / T13.no. 0418.902c23-919c05) of which Paul Harrison has produced a translation for the BDK English Tripitaka.