

THE GOING FOR REFUGE SUTRA

Kenneth Liberman

This sutra from the Great Vehicle is called "Going for Refuge to the Three Sublime Ones."

I¹ prostrate to the triple gem. Thus have I² heard. The Conquerer was residing with a great gathering of 250 assembled monks in the park of (the benefactor) Anathpandika in the forest of King Jitavana. At the time Shariputra was living in solitude, and there arose in his mind this thought, "If I have the opportunity to meet the Praised One, I would go before the presence of the Dharma King, the One Gone Thus, and ask him how much merit one can accumulate if, with sincere devotion, one takes refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha."

One afternoon, upon arising from meditative absorption³ and having gone to where the Conquerer was staying, he prostrated to the Conquerer's feet and found a seat off to one side. After having sat down, Shariputra addressed the Conquerer in this way, "Revered One, when I was alone in meditative absorption this thought came to me, 'How much merit can one accumulate if, with sincere devotion, one takes refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha?'"

After Sariputra had posed his question, the Conquerer replied in this way, "Shariputra, it is excellent that you have asked your question for the sake of the happiness of others and with compassion for your fellow beings. You have come before the presence of the One Gone Thus with the thought of asking this; therefore, Shariputra, in order to help you understand the matter well I will explain by giving an example.

"If someone having miraculous powers were to construct a stupa out of seven kinds of precious stones, beautifully arranged—gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystals, red pearls, emeralds, and gems—and it covered an area equal to that of this world Jambudvipa and its adjacent continents having a length and breadth of 7,000 miles and it reached as high as the world of Brahma; and then, having made an offering to the stupa of heavenly incense, heavenly flowers, heavenly garlands, heavenly umbrellas, victory banners, and silk pennants, if this person having miraculous powers also poured the water out of the four great oceans with Maruka oil, planted in wick as big as Mt. Meru, and burned this offering lamp continuously for many eons until the end of existence, what would you think of that, Shariputra? On the basis of that how much merit do you think he would accumulate?"

"Oh Conquerer, a great deal of merit," he replied. "Oh One Gone to Bliss, a great deal of merit indeed. It would be beyond the understanding of all the Hearers and Solitary Realizers. Oh Conquerer, this is only a object of understanding for the One Gone Thus. Oh, One Gone to Bliss, this is an object

of understanding for the One Gone Thus. Oh, One Gone to Bliss, this is an object of understanding for One Gone to Bliss."

The Buddha then commented, "Shariputra, the collection of merit of such a person would not approach the vicinity of the collection of merit of one who has gone for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The latter collection is a hundred times greater than the former. A thousand times greater. A hundred thousand times greater. The amount of merit and the quality of its substance is incalculable."

Following the Buddha's statement the third world system of great thousands shook and trembled. Everything trembled. It quaked and trembled, and quaked again. Its contents collided together, and these collisions brought on further tremors. At that moment a great bolt of lightening flashed above that very spot, and even the gods beat their drums in proclamation.

Then Ananda asked the Conquerer thusly, "Oh Conquerer, what shall we call this particular instruction?" How shall we best maintain its significance?"

The Conquerer replied, "Ananda, call this instruction, 'endless means for attainment'. Its significance may be held in that way. That is how you shall refer to it." Upon the conclusion of this statement, Shariputra and the assembled monks rejoiced at the Conquerer's words.

Thus concludes the Great Vehicle Sutra known as "Going to Refuge to the Three Sublime Ones"⁴.

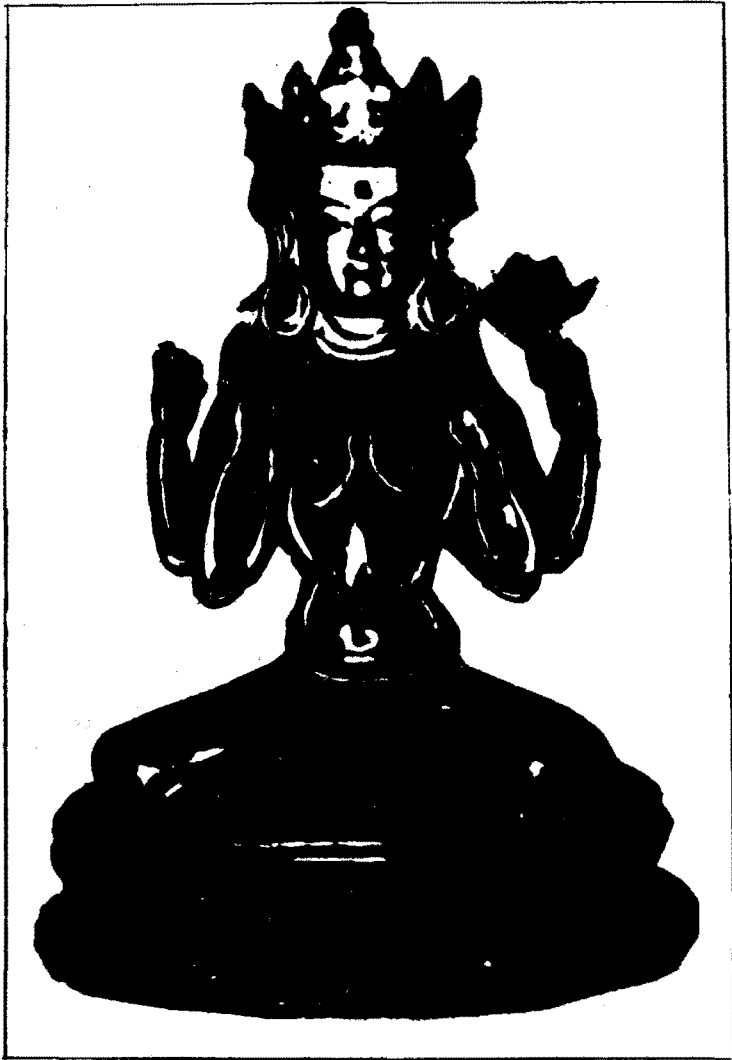
1. The Tibetan translator.

2. Shariputra.

3. nang. du. yang. dag. 'jog; lit. "placing the inside in perfect order."

4. Translated into English from the Tibetan by Ven. Jampa Losel and Kenneth Liberman at Sakya College, Rajpur, India.





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