

維摩詰所說經

Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra: Seven Treasures



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Preface

It is our honor to be able to introduce the magnificent Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra to you. This sutra is popular from when I came from (Singapore), and I mistakenly thought that it is somehow lacking in this part of the world. This is a very profound sutra, it is way beyond me to completely comprehend it. My precept teacher even took 3 years of weekends to go through it once with lay followers. Nevertheless, despite my under-qualification, I would rather say something about this sutra, than to totally remain silent and miss the opportunity to introduce it to you. Please point out my mistakes as I make them, so that I can learn from your wisdom as well.

Here I hope to give you a glimpse of this good sutra through seven treasures I found in it. Your own wisdom and good karma will probably help you understand the sutra better than any of my attempts.

Introduction

0.1 Objective

There are many treasures in this sutra. They are hidden in 3 levels of understanding: the syntactical level, the philosophical level and the symbolic level. That is why the more you read this sutra, the more treasures you can find in it. Written in such profound way, it also facilitates the reader to learn only what his wisdom is ready for. Due to time constrain tonight, we shall only cover 5 of the treasures. The last two mentioned here, are for your own reading.

0.2 Story Overview

Buddha was in Vaisali with many disciples. Meanwhile there was a lay follower named Licchavi Vimalakirti who was well versed in Buddhism. He was sick, hence the Buddha asked upon his disciples to pay Vimalakirti a visit. All his disciples declined to visit Vimalakirti because their wisdom could not match that of Vimalakirti¹. The Buddha then called upon the Bodhisattvas to visit Vimalakirti. All the Bodhisattvas also declined for the same reason.

Finally the Buddha asked Manjushri (who is the wisest among Bodhisattvas) to visit Vimalakirti. The audience expected great teachings from this visit, hence all of them went along with Manjushri. Vimalakirti knew of this visit and emptied his house of all furniture and people. Later Vimalakirti skilfully used his sickness, the emptiness of his house, and the offering of food to his visitors to lead various Dharma discussions. The climax of the sutra is reached in the discussion of the Dharma-door of nonduality.

¹It was customary for monks who visit the sick, to give teachings to the sick. Hence the disciples could not go because they had no confidence of teaching Vimalakirti.

Vimalakīrti then brought all his visitors to visit the Buddha. They discussed the various ways of liberation. Finally the sūtra ends with affirmation of the faith.

0.3 Theme Overview

The sūtra fundamentally discusses how we can engage Buddhism in our daily lives. It begins with the definition of a ‘Buddha-field’, cites the virtues of a Buddha, and gives us a reason why this world is worth cultivating for - because this world is our Buddha’s Buddha-field (pure land).

Through the Buddha’s requesting his disciples to visit Vimalakīrti, the sūtra brought out many perspectives that an engaged Buddhist should take note of. As we progress towards ending our sufferings and detachment from the world, the sūtra suggested how we can adopt new perspectives to ‘come back’ into the world to benefit others. Through the Buddha’s requesting the Bodhisattvas to visit Vimalakīrti, the sūtra introduces fundamental Mahāyāna concepts. Up till here, the stage was set for a great discussion at Vimalakīrti’s house.

In Vimalakīrti’s house, the discussion centered around the need for a Bodhisattva to engage the world in order to attain ultimate wisdom. Buddhism is fundamentally about coping with life, and dealing with the living, thus life itself is the training ground of Bodhisattvas. It is the ultimate middle grounds of middle grounds: to live life as it is, yet totally in mindfulness and self control; not to go astray with the world’s distractions, yet not to be so mentally detached that one’s mind become independent of the world. The secret lies in nonduality: the nongrasping and nonrejecting, the destruction and nondestruction, the nonaction and non-nonaction.

The sūtra hinted that the Dharma as we were taught, is ultimately non-unique. This strikes home the emptiness nature of Dharma. The Buddha taught around the theme of suffering because we, through our enormous habitual energies, are basically stubborn and ‘uncivilized’. Fortunately we are still open to reasoning and have the dislike for suffering. Hence the Buddha taught us definitions, reasonings and precepts patiently and rigorously. All these numerous ways of ending suffering, are but a minute drop in the entire ocean of Dharma. Hence we should be open minded about all skillful means, and even other religious or liberative methods.

Chapter 1

Readings from the Sutra¹

1.1 The World as a Pure Land²

Brahma Sikhin replied, “The fact that you see such a buddha-field as this as if it were so impure, reverend Sariputra, is a sure sign that there are highs and lows in your mind and that your positive thought in regard to the buddha-gnosis is not pure either. Reverend Sariputra, those whose minds are impartial toward all living beings and whose positive thoughts toward the buddha-gnosis are pure see this buddha-field as perfectly pure.”

...

The Buddha said, “Sariputra, this buddha-field is always thus pure, but the Tathagata makes it appear to be spoiled by many faults, in order to bring about the maturity of the inferior living beings. For example, Sariputra, the gods of the Trayastrimsa heaven all take their food from a single precious vessel, yet the nectar which nourishes each one differs according to the differences of the merits each has accumulated. Just so, Sariputra, living beings born in the same buddha-field see the splendor of the virtues of the buddha-fields of the Buddhas according to their own degrees of purity.”

¹The sutra is taken from “The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti: A Mahayana Scripture” by Robert A. F. Thurman, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976. Due to time constrain of this session, many valuable verses were left out from the following quotations. Some omissions may even damage the context of the quotations. These were regretful compromises.

²Taken from Chapter 1, end portion (pg. 18) of book.

1.2 The Engaged Way of Contemplation³

... You should absorb yourself in contemplation so that neither body nor mind appear anywhere in the triple world. You should absorb yourself in contemplation in such a way that you can manifest all ordinary behavior without forsaking cessation. You should absorb yourself in contemplation in such a way that you can manifest the nature of an ordinary person without abandoning your cultivated spiritual nature. You should absorb yourself in contemplation so that the mind neither settles within nor moves without toward external forms. You should absorb yourself in contemplation in such a way that the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment are manifest without deviation toward any convictions. You should absorb yourself in contemplation in such a way that you are released in liberation without abandoning the passions that are the province of the world.

1.3 Taming the Mara⁴

“... there is a door of the Dharma called “The Inexhaustible Lamp.” Practice it! What is it? Sisters, a single lamp may light hundreds of thousands of lamps without itself being diminished. Likewise, sisters, a single bodhisattva may establish many hundreds of thousands of living beings in enlightenment without his mindfulness being diminished. In fact, not only does it not diminish, it grows stronger. ...’

1.4 Integration of Practice into Daily Lives⁵

“... Even should he go into the hells, he remains free of all taint of passions. ...

“He may follow the ways of desire, yet he stays free of attachment to the enjoyments of desire. ...

“He may follow the ways of the poor, yet he holds in his hand a jewel of inexhaustible wealth. ... He may follow the ways of those of lowly birth, yet, through his accumulation of the stores of merit and wisdom, he is born in the family of the Tathagatas. ...

³Taken from Chapter 3, beginning portion (pg. 24) of book.

⁴Taken from Chapter 4, middle portion (pg. 39) of book. This is one of those regretful compromises where the context is lost. The story about Mara immediately before this verse is essential. A summary of the story can be found in the commentary §2.3.

⁵Taken from Chapter 8, beginning portion (pg. 64) of book.

“... He follows the ways of all the world, yet he reverses all states of existence. He follows the way of liberation without ever abandoning the progress of the world.

...

“... flowers like the blue lotus, the red lotus, the white lotus, the water lily, and the moon lily do not grow on the dry ground in the wilderness, but do grow in the swamps and mud banks. Just so, the Buddha-qualities do not grow in living beings certainly destined for the uncreated but do grow in those living beings who are like swamps and mud banks of passions.

“... without going out into the great ocean, it is impossible to find precious, priceless pearls. Likewise, without going into the ocean of passions, it is impossible to obtain the mind of omniscience. ...”

1.5 The Dharma-Door of Nonduality⁶

“‘Grasping’ and ‘nongrasping’ are two. What is not grasped is not perceived, and what is not perceived is neither presumed nor repudiated. Thus, the inaction and noninvolvement of all things is the entrance into nonduality.”

...

“Duality is constituted by perceptual manifestation. Nonduality is objectlessness. Therefore, nongrasping and nonrejection is the entrance into nonduality.”

...

“... all your explanations are themselves dualistic. To know no one teaching, to express nothing, to say nothing, to explain nothing, to announce nothing, to indicate nothing, and to designate nothing - that is the entrance into nonduality.”

1.6 Ten Virtuous Practices of Bodhisattvas⁷

The Licchavi Vimalakirti declared, “So be it, good sirs! It is as you say. The great compassion of the bodhisattvas who reincarnate here is extremely firm. In a single

⁶Taken from Chapter 9, beginning portion (pg. 73) of book. This is another one of those regretful compromises. Although the context is preserved, much of the rigorous description of nonduality is lost. Readers are strongly encouraged to read the entire chapter.

⁷Taken from Chapter 10, end portion (pg. 83) of book.

lifetime in this universe, they accomplish much benefit for living beings. So much benefit for living beings could not be accomplished in the universe Sarvagandhasugandha even in one hundred thousand aeons. Why? Good sirs, in this Saha universe, there are ten virtuous practices which do not exist in any other buddha-field. What are these ten? Here they are: to win the poor by generosity; to win the immoral by morality; to win the hateful by means of tolerance; to win the lazy by means of effort; to win the mentally troubled by means of concentration; to win the falsely wise by means of true wisdom; to show those suffering from the eight adversities how to rise above them; to teach the Mahayana to those of narrow-minded behavior; to win those who have not produced the roots of virtue by means of the roots of virtue; and to develop living beings without interruption through the four means of unification. Those who engage in these ten virtuous practices do not exist in any other buddha-field.”

1.7 Openmindedness to Other Practices⁸

Those bodhisattvas then asked the Licchavi Vimalakirti, “How does the Buddha Sakya-muni teach the Dharma?”

Vimalakirti replied, “Good sirs, these living beings here are hard to discipline. Therefore, he teaches them with discourses appropriate for the disciplining of the wild and uncivilized. How does he discipline the wild and uncivilized? What discourses are appropriate? Here they are:

“This is hell. This is the animal world. This is the world of the lord of death. These are the adversities. These are the rebirths with crippled faculties. These are physical misdeeds, and these are the retributions for physical misdeeds. These are verbal misdeeds, and these are the retributions for verbal misdeeds. These are mental misdeeds, and these are the retributions for mental misdeeds. This is killing. This is stealing. This is sexual misconduct. This is lying. This is backbiting. This is harsh speech. This is frivolous speech. This is covetousness. This is malice. This is false view. These are their retributions. This is miserliness, and this is its effect. This is immorality. This is hatred. This is sloth. This is the fruit of sloth. This is false wisdom and this is the fruit of false wisdom. These are the transgressions of the precepts. This is the vow of

⁸Taken from Chapter 10, end portion (pg. 82) and Chapter 11, middle portion (pg. 86) of book.

personal liberation. This should be done and that should not be done. This is proper and that should be abandoned. This is an obscuration and that is without obscuration. This is sin and that rises above sin. This is the path and that is the wrong path. This is virtue and that is evil. This is blameworthy and that is blameless. This is defiled and that is immaculate. This is mundane and that is transcendental. This is compounded and that is uncompounded. This is passion and that is purification. This is life and that is liberation.'

“Thus, by means of these varied explanations of the Dharma, the Buddha trains the minds of those living beings who are just like wild horses. Just as wild horses or wild elephants will not be tamed unless the goad pierces them to the marrow, so living beings who are wild and hard to civilize are disciplined only by means of discourses about all kinds of miseries.”

...

“So it is, Ananda! It is as you say, Ananda! There are buddha-fields that accomplish the buddha-work by means of bodhisattvas; those that do so by means of lights; those that do so by means of the tree of enlightenment; those that do so by means of the physical beauty and the marks of the Tathagata; those that do so by means of religious robes; those that do so by means of good; those that do so by means of water; those that do so by means of gardens; those that do so by means of palaces; those that do so by means of mansions; those that do so by means of magical incarnations; those that do so by means of empty space; and those that do so by means of lights in the sky. Why is it so, Ananda? Because by these various means, living beings become disciplined. Similarly, Ananda, there are buddha-fields that accomplish the buddha-work by means of teaching living beings words, definitions, and examples, such as ‘dreams,’ ‘images,’ ‘the reflection of the moon in water,’ ‘echoes,’ ‘illusions,’ and ‘mirages’; and those that accomplish the buddha-work by making words understandable. Also, Ananda, there are utterly pure buddha-fields that accomplish the buddha-work for living beings without speech, by silence, inexpressibility, and unteachability. Ananda, among all the activities, enjoyments, and practices of the Buddhas, there are none that do not accomplish the buddha-work, because all discipline living beings. Finally, Ananda, the Buddhas accomplish the buddha-work by means of the four Maras and all the eighty-four thousand types of passion that afflict living beings.”

Chapter 2

Commentary

2.1 The World as a Pure Land

This is an example of a treasure in the syntactical level. The sutra starts by validating that this world which we are in, is indeed a pure land of the Buddha. We cannot see it as a pure land because our minds are impure. When our minds are impure, even paradise may seem like hell. Conversely, if our minds are pure, this world will reveal itself as a pure land.

In the darkest hours of my life, when I am too weak and tired to even recite a prayer, the simple affirmation from this sutra, helps me tremendously. I need someone to tell me that this world is fundamentally good, my life is worth living, and there is ultimate equanimity among people. This treasure gives all that. Buddha did not say our next life will be in paradise. He said this world is paradise itself. Thus every corner of it, every thing in it and every interaction within it, contains hope, love, rejoice and peace. We just need a pure mind to see it.

2.2 The Engaged Way of Contemplation

This is an example of a treasure in the philosophical level. If you substitute the word ‘contemplation’ with the word ‘meditation’, you will catch a glimpse of the idea. If you substitute with the word ‘mindfulness’, you will see the application aspect.

Being in mindfulness means that our body and mind are with us, not anywhere else in the world. Our mindfulness should not be affected by internal or external forms. Mindfulness is really a tool to manage our actions and thoughts better. Hence it is most

effective when applied not just in meditation, but also in daily life. It also helps us integrate other spiritual practices into common day activities. Mindfulness is not only a means to end our suffering, but also a means to help us benefit others better.

2.3 Taming the Mara

This is an example of a treasure in the symbolic level. The interpretation is subjective, differing among people with different maturity and life experiences. Symbolism appreciation is the most ‘Zen’ part of Buddhism. First as a beginner, we interpret nothing. Then as a learned practitioner, we could interpret into a million different subjective meanings. Finally with ultimate wisdom of emptiness, we interpret nothing again (nonexpression of the unexpressable).

2.3.1 About Subjective Interpretation

Subjective interpretation, with mindful caution, can be helpful in our practices. It is a reflection of our state of mind. A negative person sees negativeness, positive person sees positiveness, fearful person sees fear, insecure person sees reassurance. When we see wisdom out of a symbolism, it is usually a summary of our current wisdom. Thus we see wisdom which we are ready for and not wisdom meant for higher ‘levels’. Thus the same text teaches people of many ‘levels’.

Unfortunately ignorance also propagates in symbolism interpretations, just as the fearful sees fear. Hence all interpretations should be subjected to the rigor of free inquiry and rationalization. That is why mindful caution is required. As long as we learn something, it becomes a precious experience along our cultivation path.

2.3.2 The Story

The Bodhisattva Jagatindhara was meditating at home one day. Mara disguised as Indra, the King of the Gods, came with twelve thousand heavenly maidens with the sounds of music and singing. Mara said to Jagatindhara, ‘Please accept these divine maidens as your servants.’ Fortunately, Vimalakirti came and exposed Mara’s disguise of Indra. Vimalakirti asked Mara to give the maidens to him instead. Mara, being exposed,

was terrified. He tried to disappear but couldn't. Eventually Mara had to give away his maidens to Vimalakirti unwillingly.

Vimalakirti then gave the goddesses teachings, and all of them conceived the spirit of enlightenment. Mara then said to the goddesses, 'Now come along and let us return home.'

The goddesses replied, 'You gave us to this householder, Now we should enjoy the delights of the Dharma and should no longer enjoy the pleasures of desires.'

Then Mara said to Vimalakirti that if he truly had no mental attachment, then he should give all the goddesses back to Mara. Vimalakirti willingly returned all the goddesses to Mara. On parting, the goddesses asked Vimalakirti how they could live in the abode of the Maras. Vimalakirti replied with 'The Inexhaustible Lamp' practice, encouraging them to inspire other gods and goddesses in the realm of Mara, with the spirit of enlightenment.

2.3.3 The Interpretation

I interpret this third treasure as our mindfulness meditation process. When we meditate, 'twelve thousand' distractions come to our mind. If we realize the existence of these stray thoughts, all of them (Mara) become powerless. They may try to disappear, but they cannot. They become fully under our control (servants). This treasure suggests that we then transform these thoughts into positive ones, or reconcile them with the spirit of enlightenment. Finally we exercise nonattachment by letting go even these positive thoughts. We are confident that these positive thoughts will gradually cleanse our negative thoughts habitual energies, after they 'go back' (The Inexhaustible Lamp). If we are distracted by desires, we should take refuge in the fact that Dharma joy exceeds 'joys' brought about by desires.

The Inexhaustible Lamp is an interesting lesson to learn as well. The gift of inspiration, multiplies inspiration for both the giver and the recipient. The same goes for the gift of love, compassion, rejoice and equanimity. The same also goes for the sharing of Dharma and practices. He who shares not only does not lose any, instead receives the most in return.

2.4 Integration of Practice into Daily Lives

Buddhism is about life and living beings, hence if we seclude our practices from daily life, it will become artificial and unnatural. This treasure teaches how to integrate Buddhism into our daily lives. Within the limits of our spiritual capacity, we continue to engage in our social requirements and responsibilities. If it is beyond our capacity, we exercise restraint through precepts. In either cases, we are in constant full awareness and control over our minds, never letting astray. Thus we are conscientious on our cultivation, but not to the extend of seclusion; we engage life, but not be distracted by life. This is the middle path of the middle path.

2.5 The Dharma-Door of Nonduality

We differentiate things, and evaluate, judge, and categorize things every day. We cannot blame ourselves for doing that, because this is what our survival needs of us. However since communication is always incomplete, and that we need to interpolate missing information, we often do the above wrongly. This often leads to a lot of misunderstanding, inequanimity and suffering.

There are three ways to end this kind of suffering. The first is to refrain from judging. This is the quickest and most direct way out in many cases. When conflicts are so tremendous that rationality could not even find a first grip, then it helps to abandon judgment for a while and practice deep listening.

The second is to adopt a ‘perpendicular’ perspective so that equanimity is again established. For example I am male and she is female, hence we two are different. However if we adopt the perspective that both of us are humans, then both of us are the same again. Adopting a perpendicular perspective is often a quick solution to conflicts and inequanimity, where rationality can find a first grip. However it is often impermanent since our perspectives cannot be maintained as a constant forever. In this way this solution is more like a ‘make believe’ than a direct confrontation on the inequanimity.

This treasure suggests a third solution: to practice acceptance and nongrasping. In general, opposite polarities do exist, and in between, its various grades of differences. We do not deny their existences by not judging, and we do not ‘escape’ from the differences

by adopting a perpendicular perspective. Instead we exercise wisdom into understanding the true nature of the polarities.

As we understand the polarities and realize that each has a role in dependent origin, we learn to accept things as they are (non-rejecting). Then we hold one polarity in our hand, and realize the illusionary nature of the polarity - that this polarity does not really exist (non-grasping), thus the opposite polarity does not really exist as well, therefore nonduality surfaces.

Manjushri pointed out that even this theory about non-rejecting and non-grasping creates duality, for as long as there is an absolute, there will be an opposite absolute. Hence the true nonduality lies in ‘no one teaching, express nothing, say nothing, explain nothing, announce nothing, indicate nothing and designate nothing.’ Omitted in our reading, Manjushri then asked Vimalakirti the teaching of nonduality. Vimalakirti kept his silence. Manjushri applauded, “Excellent! Excellent, noble sir! This is indeed the entrance into the nonduality of the bodhisattvas. Here there is no use for syllabus, sounds, and ideas.”

This idea is the closest to the contemporary Zen theory: the non-expression of the unexpressable. However if we do not express, then how can we benefit sentient beings? Therefore this chapter did not start with the ultimate ‘answer’ of silence, but explore the nonduality of many polarities such as good versus evil, happiness versus misery, defilement versus purification, sinfulness versus sinlessness, pure versus immaculate etc. When we suffer from specific inequanimity, we can pick on the specific verse to contemplate on. Nonduality is realized one polarity at a time. We shall finally realize the ultimate nonduality when we are ready for it. Eventually equanimity is the key to the perfection of loving kindness, compassion and rejoice.

This treasure contrasts with Tao De Jing. What do you think are the similarities and differences, and hence their implications to practices?

2.6 Ten Virtuous Practices of Bodhisattvas

This treasure tells us that it is natural to face difficulties in our practices. It is by overcoming these difficulties, that we mature more quickly and firmly. Sometimes just by not falling back, we would achieve moving forward.

This treasure suggests ten virtuous ways of interacting with people. What we see lacking in others, we do not follow suit. Instead we reaffirm our practice and inspire others to be like us. The treasure suggests that we inspire others by our own example and practice, rather than preaching or reacting to others. It is hard enough to change oneself already, how could preaching and reacting change others? On the other hand, inspiration gives positive strength to others helping them change themselves. This benefits others and ourselves. By not reacting to others, and keeping to the ‘right’ action instead, we break the karmic chain reaction, giving others the breathing space for their mindfulness. They will notice it, and one day, they will do the same for others as well.

2.7 Openmindedness to Other Practices

This treasure ‘generalizes’ Buddhism. Buddhism takes a scientific approach in our world, because of our inclination. We need to learn step by step, using reasoning to overcome our stubbornness, and using practices to cleanse our habitual energies (the uncivilized ways). There is no short cut to all these hard work.

Yet beyond all these hardwork, we are mindful that this is not the only means to liberation, this is only the means for us of our nature. There are numerous other means to liberation for numerous other inclinations. Hence we should maintain an open mind about other practices. Other means have other flavors, which may be beyond our understanding and imagination. We should respect and rejoice in all other means, while continuing diligently in our practices.

Chapter 3

Conclusion

The title of this sutra is also called ‘The Teaching of Vimalakirti’, ‘The Reconciliation of Dichotomies’ or ‘Section of the Inconceivable Liberation’. Hence any introduction to this sutra would be incomplete without a mention on the last perceptive — that of Inconceivable Liberation.

So far, I have adopted the perspective of going from ‘impure’ to ‘pure’, that Buddhahood is quite an unreachable ideal and we are taking small steps towards there. This perspective rhymes with the first title ‘The Teaching of Vimalakirti’, that there is something for Vimalakirti to teach. The second title’s mention of dichotomies would hint to you that there is a dualistic perspective on this sutra. This perspective is captured in the third title through the words ‘inconceivable liberation’.

In order that I do not go into great lengths of logic, let me appeal to a feeling that you might have and then magnify that feeling. Try to remember a previous experience of true wisdom realization. For example it could be a realization of impermanence. It could be inspired by a falling leave, or surviving a dramatically tragic incident. At that moment of realization, we suddenly felt calm, our ego disappeared, we seemed to be at one with our surroundings like the thin air.

Whenever we realize something, our ‘thinking sphere’ seems to enlarge. Sometimes it only enlarges a little, other times it seems to extend beyond heavens! Whatever is in this enlargement, was previously ‘inconceivable’ to us. At first, we were not even aware of it. Then we later learn of it or become mindful of it, but we could not understand it. Finally when our ‘thinking sphere’ engulfs it, it becomes fully ‘conceivable’.

The path to Enlightenment is essentially realizing more and more ‘inconceivables’ into

‘conceivables’. Starting from simple axioms like the law of cause and effect (niyama) and rebirth, we conceive the Four Noble Truths, then impermanence, then emptiness, then non-self. When our ‘thinking sphere’ is this ‘big’, we form the will for nonattachment to many things, perhaps even the samsara world. The sphere reaches a certain size and could not grow anymore. We become aware of the limited space of this sphere, and also aware of more ‘inconceivables’. We become troubled as to why we cannot break beyond the boundaries.

Then one day, we realize that it is the very thing that helped us expand our thinking spheres, that is holding us back. It is our attachment to theories of impermanence, emptiness and non-self. Once we realize this and take the leap of faith to let go of the attachment, suddenly our thinking spheres open into a larger dimensionality. Greed, anger and ignorance etc, even suffering etc, are no longer the center of our spheres. In fact, there is no center. Every point we pick can generate a sphere, however we become trapped in the sphere. In order to go beyond the sphere into the inconceivables, we have to burst it.

The inconceivables are no more profound than the conceivables, for they are also conceivables but in a different sphere. In fact, the inconceivables co-exist in this world with the conceivables. This means every phenomenon we see every moment and everywhere are both conceivables and inconceivables. This includes even ‘mundane’ actions like sweeping the floor, walking the dog and doing laundry, or experiences like being scolded or praised, being hated or loved. With such realization, we cannot help but to treasure every experience with full mindfulness, and yet not rejecting nor grasping any of them.

The most miraculous part of all these is, even with such realization, we find that we ‘gained’ nothing, for the world has always been as such. In fact, even we are part of these conceivable/inconceivable phenomena, just like every other sentient beings. Each and everyone of them is capable of such inconceivable liberation any moment (buddha nature). By the awe for such great potential of each, we cannot help but to feel love and compassion for all sentient beings, yet without passionate attachment.

This is the heart of Zen (raising awareness of the inconceivable), as well as Tian Tai (also Tien Tai or Tendai, emphasis on the buddha nature). In one single Vimalakirti Nirdesa sutra, embeds the duality of ‘mind dictates phenomenon’ and ‘phenomenon dictates mind’.

Chapter 4

Dedication of Merit

It is a popular practice to dedicate merit after attending a Buddhist activity. This is to prevent the enormous amount of merit gained to be dissipated into unworthy causes due to our ignorance. Tonight I would like to share with you a Tibetan style of dedication in a Mahayana way. I shall recite the dedication verse:

Due to this merit may I soon
Attain the enlightened state of Guru-Buddha,
That I may be able to liberate
All sentient beings from their sufferings

May the precious Bodhi mind,
Not yet born, arise and grow.
May that born have no decline,
But increase for ever more.

Thank you.