

Teaching on Sūtra

The Miraculous Play of Mañjuśrī

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June 5, 2020

Commemorating the anniversary this month of the Buddha’s birth—and 84000’s 10th year of translating his words into modern languages—our Founding Chair, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, offers a three-part teaching on one of our recently published sūtras.

The Miraculous Play of Mañjuśrī presents a series of profound teachings within a rich narrative structure involving a beautiful courtesan’s daughter, Suvarṇottamaprabhāśrī. A banker’s son has purchased her favors, but while they are riding together toward a pleasure garden the girl’s attention is captivated instead by the radiantly attractive Mañjuśrī, who gives her instructions related to the meaning of the mind set on awakening. She then expresses her new understanding in a dialogue with Mañjuśrī, in the presence of King Ajātaśatru, his retinue, and the citizens of Rājagṛha. Meanwhile the banker’s son, with the help of Mañjuśrī and Śakra, experiences his own realization and receives teaching from the Buddha himself. The sūtra deals with well-known Mahāyāna themes, but places special emphasis on the emptiness and sameness of all phenomena.

[Follow along](#) or [download the sūtra](#) and we hope you enjoy these precious teachings!

The following transcript has been copyedited, and is divided into three parts ([Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), and [Part 3](#)) that correspond with the recorded videos.

Part 1

(00:03):

Tad yathâ om muni muni mahâmunaye svâhâ. Buddham Sharanam Gacchami.

Namo Manjushriye Kumaraya Buddhaya Bodhisattvaya Mahasattvaya Mahakarunikaya—
[chants prayers]

(00:27):

So first, I'd like to offer my greetings, and offer my joy and gratitude, towards all those who are listening this time. I would also like to especially mention and offer my gratitude towards those translators who have been working so hard the past 10 years. I'm doing this partly to celebrate our 10th anniversary of the 84000 endeavor. Anyway, I was saying, [inaudible] from the depth of my heart, gratitude towards all the translators and those who dedicate so much time and energy administrating all our work, and all the generous donors who have really made this possible. We are also going to launch a video. I hope you will enjoy it.

What I'm doing this time, is really to express my joy. It's just so amazing to have these texts available in many different languages. I would just like to express that joy, and [say that] definitely, I cannot cover word by word, the sūtras.

(03:11):

To celebrate our 10th anniversary we are going to discuss a little bit here and there—not completely—*Mañjuśrī's Play*. The sūtra, *Mañjuśrī's Play*. [[The Miraculous Play of Mañjuśrī](#)]

(03:37):

I think Jens Erland Braarvig, the translator, has done a really good job: The proper title of the sūtras, and all the names of the characters and, of course, the actual sūtra itself. Please enjoy reading Jens' translation. Thank you for translating this, Jens. I hope you live long and stay healthy and translate more of these texts: Not just in this life, but in many, many lifetimes in the future.

Now, I need to tell you this: Sūtra, according to many *panditas*—and many great masters of the past have said that—the sūtras cannot be understood by ordinary, samsaric, defiled beings. So, obviously, I will not be able to, you know, explain the Sūtra. It's because of that [that] there's a śāstra. And having had the merit and fortune to have studied a little bit of śāstras in the past, based on that, I will just express joy by sharing some of the contents in this Sūtra this time, as a part of our celebration.

(05:55):

I hope our endeavor of translating the words of the Buddha will trigger interest in the teachings of the Buddha. Because, I think many times it's so unfortunate that teachings of the Buddha get categorized as something archaic and, you know irrelevant. I don't know, like a museum piece which is really, really unfortunate. And I think this kind of attitude comes usually just out of sheer ignorance, of really like not knowing, not really putting effort in hearing and contemplating, and really going through these teachings. More than ever, these teachings are relevant. You know, as you know, the world is driven so crazy with one single thing: and that's called duality.

(07:24):

You can see this: The duality—the “black” and “white” “right” and “wrong” “left” and “right”—it's really tearing us apart. And in the process we are becoming more and more insecure. In the process, we are becoming more and more materialistic. We are looking for solutions more outside—rather than inside—when the solution is very much within you. And the solution is actually quite, it's so, you know, blatantly simple. Here, now, free of charge. But, because we have somehow learned to get distracted, we are now so entangled by this duality, this materialism, this, I don't know, this—there's so much entanglement. So, there's just so much dissatisfaction. There's so much anxiety; so much alienation; so much angst; so much insecurity; so much uncertainty. And even worse, having no clue at all about one's own existence.

(09:34):

So in these kinds of situations, even if you sort of intellectually, even on the intellectual level, if you can invest a little bit of time and energy in just discussing some of these contents of these teachings, these sūtras, or the śāstras—I mean, it is something that is very empirical, you know. You can experience it. So, it's a really worthy, I don't know, it's a worthy endeavor.

Now, I need to tell you this: This is a Mahāyāna Sūtra. I mean, generally, [for] the study of all wisdom traditions, I believe—whatever you are doing—you have to really have a very, very open mind. You know, you have to be like that. You have to create some sort of a blank canvas: Like if a Chinese studies what Plato or Socrates taught, you know, that Chinese student has to really sort of clear a lot of prejudice, or a lot of conclusions or preconceptions. And then you will really appreciate what Socrates [or] Plato had taught, right? Just like that. A lot of the modern people—and I say “modern people.” When I say modern people, I'm talking mainly about those who have gone through a lot of modern education, which is predominantly Western education. So here I'd like to just say that when you look into these kinds of Sūtra, I want you to be really open minded. I really want you to really try to use a different angle, different view; or at least, tell yourself that maybe you are using the old angle, maybe you are using the old tools—you know, just a little bit of, at least a motivation to think out of the box. That would help.

The reason why I'm emphasizing why we have to think out of box is because, clearly we know that the problems that we have—I'm not only talking about the big problems of the climate, the political, you know, like, tug of war, but I'm talking about day-to-day in our life—it should be obvious that all these problems come from duality, dualistic distinctions.

I mean, the moment you have a “good” and “bad” there's already a struggle of wanting to, wanting to be that “good”, and not wanting to be that “bad”, right? “Beauty” and “ugly,” “black” and “white,” “left” and “right.” You know, all that. The moment you have the duality, there is a struggle.

And okay, so here, what are we trying to do? Okay, why are these sūtras relevant? The fundamental question is, “Why we study these things?” Why we study at all? Why we study anything—mathematics, geography, economy? Why? Because we want to be satisfied, we want to be happy, right? We want to be, yeah, satisfied. That's what we want. We want to have fun. We want to be happy. That's fundamentally what we want.

(14:34):

And here, these texts are not denying that: These texts are not saying that you should not have fun. And I'm stressing this because again, here, out of ignorance—due to the lack of knowledge in studies on Buddhist philosophy and all of that—a lot of people seem to have this idea that, you know, “Oh, to be a Buddhist, you have to go to a cave. You have to become a monk or nun.” As you will see, I mean, as you can see in this text, this is a discussion between a very, very, celebrated, sort of sought-after courtesan, and a Bodhisattva. And as you will find in the text—you know generally the Buddhist path and especially the Mahayana path—[it] is not at all falling into some sort of extreme dualistic sort of view, action, attitude, and practice. You know, when you read this text, I want you to really read with an open mind. Okay?

Now of course, those who are Buddhists, those who have taken the path of the Buddha as your spiritual path, and especially those who have taken the Bodhisattva path as your path, then of course on top of being open-minded, you should definitely have, you should listen and contemplate, and discuss these matters with the motivation of not only awakening oneself, but awakening all beings. And when we say, “awaken” we're not talking about some sort of an exotic, awakened state. We are talking about awaken ourselves from this nightmare that's created by our dualistic thinking, and that we are so entangled with.

As you will read in the text, this liberation, this awakened state can be achieved right here, right now. I mean, without needing to go, somewhere. Like awaking from a nightmare. When you awaken from a nightmare, you haven't gone anywhere. You are there, lying down. You just woke up from a nightmare. And once you woke up from the nightmare, it doesn't matter what kind of

nightmare you have had. Actually, sometimes when we have a nightmare—like falling from a cliff—and while you are having the nightmare, if you know that this is just a dream, this is not really happening, then you already experience this awakened state, you know. You already experience this sense of liberation, you know, basically you are ... you will not panic. Especially if you have a complete realization that this is just a dream, this is just a nightmare. You will actually glide with it. You will actually play with it.

(19:20):

So likewise, we have all the ingredients, we have all the—what do you call it—parts, or the potential of being able to awaken, without needing to go somewhere. Now, this title of this Sūtra, which is—there's a long, what do you call it, title but I'm just going to, for the sake of communication—I'm just going to call it the Sūtra of Mañjuśrī's Play, ok? But, it's quite interesting here.

Okay, first, “sūtra” is like a collection of pith instructions, okay? So that's like advice. Advice, collection of the pith instructions. It has a few other meanings, but let's be happy with that for now. Now, part of the title also, is "*Arya*." *Arya* means sublime. Now, that's quite interesting because, why is this text called *arya*? Many reasons, I think.

(21:17):

One, the contents of the sūtra is basically a path, or a technique, or instructions to get beyond the duality. You know "sublime." *Pagpa arya pag*, you know, the word *arya* is something like "beyond." Beyond the, you know, sort of the normal situation or—what do you call it—position. So, because the subject matter of this sūtra is to do with how to go beyond, so to speak, ok? I'm making it very, very, you know, those who really wish to actually explore the Sūtra in a deeper and more thorough, please refer to the text. I'm just—as I said earlier—I'm just sharing my joy and I will just pick up some of the points that I think I understand.

(22:42):

Okay, so, yeah, so the sūtra contents, the contents of the sūtra, has a lot to do with going beyond the normal, what you call “dualistic world.” So, there's that “*arya*.” And then very, very interesting title: "play." Now that's interesting, because you know, it's a play, it's a game. You know, play, game. It's sort of has that connotation of not that serious. Again, we are talking about, you know, because things are actually not dual as how we dualistic people seem to make out—things are actually non-dual. Because things are not dual, we can use dualistic methods because it doesn't matter, because you know, it's like the nightmare I was talking earlier? Because the moment you know you're having a nightmare—let's say you are, you know, falling from a cliff—and then suddenly in the middle of the dream, the nightmare, as you fall from the cliff, you know: Oh, this is just a dream!

(24:18):

Then what do you do? You can wake up from it. That's also a play. Because actually you're not really falling, so you cannot really stop falling, you know? You cannot sort of end it, because there was never really falling. Or, you can be more wild and say: Oh, I'm going to, since this is just a dream, since I'm not going to have a crash landing, I'm not going to die, let's just float around, and let's just see some other sights. And you can maybe decide to fly. All these possibilities because, you know, either way it's not really happening, right?

So, *rolpa*—the game, the play. I mean, from another angle you can say, this is a game played by Mañjuśrī. Or, this is a game played by the Buddha Shakyamuni out of his compassion and his power and his blessing. We have a play, and there is a stage, and there is a play that's happening between the central character, this courtesan, and then Mañjuśrī, and then there is also a banker's son. So, we now basically, watch or we look at this play—this game—and learn from that, how each of us, we deceive ourselves. We entangle ourselves. How we put ourselves into deeper trouble all the time. How we never learn to stay out of trouble. All this, we learn, through this play. So, I'm just, you know, telling you—I think, you can always look into this in a few different angles.

Part 2

(00:01):

So this is a Mahāyāna sūtra.

[pause]

When we talk about Mahā—I think the word Mahā has a connotation of grand, vast, big. Anyway, that's what the Sanskrit word means. But, I think it's really important to not interpret the word as in [a] hierarchy because, we're not really talking about [it] as if this is a better, or a quicker, or a grander, that kind of— Because here, we are talking about an attitude, an attitude that is driven or triggered by, a very open and—therefore, the word “Maha” we use—really open attitude. And the reason why there's an open attitude is because there's [an] open motivation—there's a really incredible motivation. And the reason why there's this grand motivation is because there's a grander view. And I think it's important that we see it in every different aspects. Even the way it was told, the setup, everything.

(01:53)

Of course, I also must mention that the readers of such a sūtra must also remember this is an ancient text, this is a classic Buddhist text. So, we are not talking about, you know, your best seller last year— So we are talking about our nuances, the language, the style, that is quite ancient.

(02:32)

Now this is the amazing part, even though it is so ancient—and we're talking about 2,500 years—even if it is just 500 years, it's quite mindboggling how people at that time really thought in a most open and most progressive, if you like, way. I mean we have, [in] many ways we have become so backward—especially when it comes to sort of inner, sort of more inward, thinking. Yes, of course we have become very advanced with smartphones, antibiotics etc. But when it comes to mind, when it comes to consciousness, when it comes to truth, we have become very narrow. So again, here I really request you, implore you, to really look at this text in a really open-minded [way] and keep in mind that the nuances are ancient Indian. So, when you read it, when you read such texts, don't easily sort of make some sort of conclusion that this is some sort of fairytale or [is] like overly poetic, etc. Even though, I have to say, there is a lot of poetry in it, and poetry is important. Poetry is—you know, how do you tell truth to bunch of people who can't digest or even appreciate the truth right, you know, from the start? How do you talk to them? You can only talk to these people, and if you really feel that you need to tell—and supposedly, you know, if you care for people, if you really deeply care for someone that you love, and you

know this somebody is going to have hard time to even understand the truth, let alone face it—then how do you talk [to them]? You see, so this is where, you know, poetic, stories, analogies, they all become quite important.

(05:51)

Anyway, again, I have to remind you that I can't possibly, you know, teach and give you a complete explanation on any sūtra, including this one. But, this is just sharing with you what I can fathom, or what I can sort of generalize, and what I can sort of understand—very, very minute, very limited.

(06:40)

Okay, so this is the story setting: Okay, first of all, one would think, “Oh, why is this in the sūtra? Why is this in the Kangyur? Why is this not in the śāstra sections?” Because, after all, this whole teaching seems to be happening—I mean the main person who's actually expounding many of the answers and teachings is Mañjuśrī—and some other characters—not really the Buddha. At least in the beginning, right?

(07:17)

But, there are lot of sūtras like this, just like the Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya sūtra even though it is a discussion between Avalokiteśvara and Śāriputra, their discussion was triggered if you like—is a blessing, basically a blessing of the Buddha who was meditating at that time and through his power—basically you can say in very crude language, Buddha “set up” that conversation between Śāriputra and Avalokiteśvara. Just like this, you can say Buddha was—at that time on Vulture's Peak and with many monks, and Bodhisattvas—and so, it was through his blessing, it was his—yes, you can say it's a “setup.”

(08:25)

So while Buddha was on Vulture's Peak among his disciples, nearby in the city of Rājagṛha, a beautiful courtesan— So okay see now? This is one of the main characters, the courtesan, [who was] very, very famed for being beautiful and because of her virtue and merit in the past life, she was very magnificent. Basically, so many people are in awe of her, they're in love with her, they're dazzled by her. And she also has this power to make people happy, make people feel soothed. She speaks gently. She's always, you know, adorned with a smile. She makes everyone harmonious. And all princes and merchants and, you know, bankers—they all wish to be with her.

(10:19)

So, Bhayadatta—the banker's son—managed to hire her. And so she was traveling—I think the scene was she's traveling on her beautiful chariot—and at the town so many people gathered to just to have a glimpse of her. And, around that time, Mañjuśrī was just finishing his meditation,

and as he aroused from his meditation he contemplated and thought, okay, who should he benefit today? Who should he ripen? Who should he teach? And as he contemplated Mañjuśrī realized that it is this courtesan. I guess [due to] his omniscience—he saw the courtesan traveling in the chariot. And then—now this is really important—as he looked throughout, you know, the 3,000[-fold] world, you know, who needs to be tamed, who needs to be liberated, who needs to be taught, who shall Mañjuśrī, benefit today? He realized that the courtesan’s time had ripened, that this courtesan has the ability to become the vessel of virtue. The courtesan is the fortunate being. Basically the courtesan has the merit.

(13:15)

And realizing this, knowing this, Mañjuśrī then manifests himself into quite a magnificent being. And, not only a very handsome, magnificent being, but he also miraculously manifested a very beautiful garment. He put that on, and wore all kinds of jewels and, I don't know, [a whole] outfit. And, Mañjuśrī just went to the spot where the courtesan would be passing. And as her chariot—her sort of caravan, her sort of entourage—gets closer to where Mañjuśrī is staying, all the radiance and the magnificent quality of her entourage, her chariot and her own, I don't know, presence, everything becomes very, sort of outshined.

(15:03):

So as she saw this amazing, princely Mañjuśrī, she was so attracted by the presence of Mañjuśrī. And, she thought, “Oh, I'm going to lure this man, this is just so amazing.” And not only that, “I'm going to ask this guy, this man for his garment”—the very, very special garment that Mañjuśrī is wearing. When she thought of that, one of the guardian kings, Vaiśravaṇa, knew what the courtesan was thinking. Disguising [himself] as a human being, he told the courtesan, “You better be careful with this man. Maybe, better not be attached to this guy, because this guy is not really interested in pleasures, you know, he's not really looking for anything.”

(16:43):

That actually made the courtesan even more curious because, you know, she had never been rejected. Everybody wanted her. So suddenly there's this man, Vaiśravaṇa, who says, you know this man is a very special man who has nothing that he wants or needs. So then she asked Vaiśravaṇa, “Who is this? Who is this man? What's his name?” And Vaiśravaṇa said, “Oh, this is a great bodhisattva. He's name is, [Tibetan] *'jam dpal gzhon nur gyur pa* [[milestone 1.5](#)], Mañjuśrī.”

(17:39):

And, then the courtesan asks, “What is a Bodhisattva? Is a Bodhisattva a god? Is a Bodhisattva a naga? Is a Bodhisattva a rākṣasa?”

Vaiśravaṇa says, “No, none of them. A Bodhisattva is not a God, not a naga, not a rākṣasa. Nothing like that. Not an Indra, not a Brahma, not a King. A Bodhisattva is somebody who fulfills the wishes of sentient beings. That's why they are considered a Bodhisattva: Whatever you ask, they give. There's nothing that the Bodhisattvas don't give.”

(19:10)

At that point the girl thought, “Then for sure he will give me that garment.” Because she really wanted that garment. So she dismounted the chariot and she approached Mañjuśrī. And [she] asked for the garment.

And in reply Mañjuśrī said, “Yes, fine. But with only one condition: Only if you enter into the *bodhi*. If you become a bodhisattva, or if you enter into the path of the *bodhi*. If you do that, I will give you my garment.”

Then she asked, “Oh, okay, what is *bodhi* anyway? What is *bodhi*? What do I have to do? What is *bodhi*?” Then Mañjuśrī, looking at her said, “You are *bodhi*.”

(20:09)

So [you] see, this is what I was trying to tell you—the story, the setup or the dialogue. And then also the character here—we have a character, a courtesan, right? Sort of [the] epitome of—or a character that represents, sort of—the epitome of the desire realm. You know, like sensory, sensual pleasure, desire, courtesan, music, chariot, the wealth, and this beautiful lady who is wanted by everyone. But at the same time, the courtesan also has, like in many societies—and I'm sure you know, during that time in India, and still today in many societies—courtesans are a little bit looked down [upon], prostitute, you know, like looked down [on]. Not like [a] job or work that has honour, right? Like a professor or doctor or a nurse. It's sort of looked down [upon]. But, that's really important here because—this being, the girl, this beautiful courtesan—she at first wants to—to put it very crudely—date Mañjuśrī. Not only that, she wants to actually have his garment, this beautiful garment.

(22:15)

So she approaches Mañjuśrī, and Mañjuśrī says, “Yes, I will give [it] you; but only if you enter the path of the *bodhi*.” “And, what is path of the *bodhi*,” she asked. And there actually, Mañjuśrī briefly explains what *bodhi* is. And this is one of the most quintessential teachings. I mean, he briefly explains what is *bodhi*, first saying that the *bodhi* is something that cannot be expressed, *bodhi* is something that cannot be written down. *Bodhi* has no, you know, sort of a concrete, tangible aggregates. *Bodhi* cannot be manipulated because *bodhi* is not an element. *Bodhi* is nothing to do with the subject and object. So on and so forth. And then lastly, Mañjuśrī says, “But *bodhi* is you, you are the *bodhi*.” And Mañjuśrī continues saying, “So Sister”—Mañjuśrī uses the word “sister”—“Sister, why don't you take the Bodhisattva vow? If you take the

Bodhisattva vow—” or “Why don't you generate Bodhicitta? If you take the Bodhicitta, I will give you my garment.”

(23:52):

And then the courtesan sort of was puzzled and said, “Well, I don't really understand what you're talking about.” So, she asked, “How come I have the *bodhi*, or I am *bodhi*?” Then Mañjuśrī answered, “There is a great Tathāgata—an enlightened being, sister—there is a Tathāgata, an enlightened being, whose name is Shakyamuni at the moment alive. And he said—the Tathāgata said—that, equality of the form, equality of anything basically is the *bodhi*. For this reason, Sister courtesan, I see you as the *bodhi* and I refer to you as the *bodhi*.”

(25:08):

And then Mañjuśrī continues saying this, “Sister, listen: Look at your own body, your feeling consciousness, look at your aggregates, look at your, you know, sense and sense objects. Look at them closely, look at them without any prejudice or preconceptions. Can you see anything that is solid, independent, and [with] truly existing nature?”

When Mañjuśrī said that—I think, for me, this is another important point of the sūtra: [Tibetan] *bstan pa 'di thos nas sngon gyi dge ba'i rtsa ba'i rgyu mthun pas chos la snang ba skyes par gyur te* [[milestone 1.19](#)]
—When she heard that, this phrase, this sentence—because of her merit, because she, you know— Time and again we have been told in the Mahāyāna sūtras and śāstras that the truth of non-duality, only someone who has the affinity with it, who has the karmic link with it—basically who has the merit to hear the word “non-duality—only they will understand it. You know, time and again we have been told [this]. So see, this is the point here is [that it is] not just intellectual. You know, [that] by reading many, many books, by debating many, many hours, by questioning many, many questions, you will understand non-duality or the equality, in this case. See, here the courtesan, because she has the merit—she has the ability, she has the knack if you like, she has the feel for nonduality—she [becomes] so interested with this subject. She gets so inspired and interested and curious. And then you know, the big discussion, which is basically the content of this sūtra begins.

(27:50):

And then there's a big back and forth between the courtesan and Mañjuśrī each time. Mañjuśrī asks questions like, “What do you think? What is form? What is feeling? What is consciousness? When you say form, what are you pointing at?”

Her answers are like— it's all general imputed, sort of, labelling for the sake of convention [that] we categorize things like, form, feeling. We just imagine this, we just make it up. Other than that, there is nothing solid, nothing truly existing thing which you can isolate as form, feeling, and so forth. Even though, each of these aggregates—each of these phenomena such as the form,

feeling—don't have truly existing substance, an independently existing entity. It's not as if they are void that they do not exist, that they're not there. They're still there! Like an illusion, like a mirage. They appear [but] at the same time, they're not there. And not only that—not only the form and feeling and so on and so forth—even the very concept of the body is like a mirage, like an illusion.

(30:17):

For this reason Mañjuśrī says, “Sister I call you, you are *bodhi*.” And then there's a lengthy discussion about, the notion of self. What is self? You know, obviously that's a important one isn't it? The self, me, mine. You know the self, myself. What is that?

A lengthy discussion, or more like a deconstructing discourse on how “self” is not sentient; “self” is not soul; “self” is not a person. Basically, there is no truly existing entity or substance that you can call “self.” But as an illusion—as a mirage, as an imputed sort of hallucination—there is a notion of self. That [to] which we cling, and that which produces hope, fear, all of that. And you know, the deconstruction or analysis, the method, the conversation between the courtesan and the Mañjuśrī, is really in depth.

(32:11)

I mean for instance like, you know when we talk about “self,” we then also talk about sense, like sense and sense objects. Like eyes, ears, nose—which play very important parts in our psychological world. But if you look into it—this eye consciousness, ear consciousness, all the sense and sense objects—they're not male, they're not female. Gender is discussed here. What is gender? So this is what I was saying, if you can recall—this is a discussion that happened you know 2,000 years ago and already, you know, there was this progress, when today we are still, I don't know, maybe not talking enough about gender, but completely falling into an extreme of its existence or its non-existence.

(33:52)

So after a long discussion, the courtesan now very, very convinced of this truth—the truth of non-duality or truth of the sort of great equality—had so much joy and happiness and devotion and, what do you call it, humility. And with that, she prostrated to Mañjuśrī. She bowed towards Mañjuśrī's feet and took refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha, and generated the Bodhicitta mind; and expressed to Mañjuśrī, “Oh Mañjuśrī, I—a courtesan—also want to follow your footsteps. I also want to generate love and care and compassion towards sentient beings.”

(35:36)

And—I just pick this up because I feel this is also really one of the most important points:
[Tibetan] *sangs rgyas kyi gdung mi gcad pa dang/ chos kyi gdung mi gcad pa dang/ dge 'dun gyi gdung mi gcad pa 'i slad du khyod kyi bstan pa bla na med pa yang dag par rdzogs pa 'i byang*

chub der sems bskyed par bya' [[milestone 1.51](#)] Because, you remember our discussion started when she asked for the garment and Mañjuśrī said, “Okay, only if you take the Bodhisattva vow”? And the discussion then went to, you know, her asking, “What is *bodhi*?” And Mañjuśrī said, “You are *bodhi*.” And then that led to the discussion on that *bodhi* is basically, that everything that seems to appear as aggregate—as soul, as a sentient, as black, white, blue, tall, short, all these diversities all this infinite seemingly dualistic phenomena—in reality, are all nondual. And that is the *bodhi*, right? So even the *bodhi* itself is an illusion. And it is inexpressible—cannot be written, all of that.

(37:03)

Now, impressed by this truth, the courtesan bowed down to Mañjuśrī's feet, took refuge to Buddha—the one who taught this Truth; the Teaching—you know the truth itself; and the Sangha—the community that accepts this truth basically. And then she also takes the Bodhisattva vow and—this is important I think—she says that, “I will take the Bodhisattva vow because I want to prolong,”— I want to uphold, prolong, it's actually more like— Let's say there's, a very important family lineage, a powerful, rich, maybe like a royal family. You know like, a king-and-queen royal family. Now, if there's no children, then there's no more heritage, there's no more lineage, so to speak, right? So, you know, I think this is so profound because what she is saying is that, you know, she's now so convinced about this *bodhi* but [to ensure] the heir of the Buddha, heir of the Dharma, heir of the Sangha, is continuous—so that the lineage, the family tree will carry on, the family of the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha will carry on—for that she wants to take the Bodhisattva vow, she wants to generate the Bodhicitta.

(39:41):

Can you see the very beautiful way, you know—See, I was saying this, you know, so here you are talking about nonduality—no being, no body, I mean not, not as “we” think, after complete nonduality right? And the truth of nonduality is the only truth that will dispel the suffering of sentient beings. Now see? There is that sort of paradox so to speak, if you like. So, there is an illusion of pain, and anxiety, and suffering, and that bothers all of us. We need to awake from it. And, [the] only way to awake from this is to keep the heir of the lineage of the heritage of the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha [continuous]. And for this reason, the courtesan is taking the refuge and generating the Bodhicitta mind.

Part 3

(00:00)

In nonduality, or the truth, or the *bodhi* in this case—by actualizing, you awake from this nightmare, this illusion, which is the cause of all the pain and suffering. From how I read this sūtra, one of the most quintessential points that this sutra is telling me is that—you see, when we talk about a path, we always talk about, you know, a problem of course, right? And there's a problem, and then there's somebody who goes through that problem and, of course there's a wish to get out of that problem, to solve this problem, and then there's an antidote or some sort of remedy to overcome this problem.

(01:35):

I think something that we really need to make note of when we read this sūtra is, you know when Mañjuśrī says, "You are *bodhi*." This can be understood in several ways. First of all—and especially for modern people like us in this day and age—when we are so bombarded with dualistic distinctions, moral distinctions especially within the sort of religious sphere: Okay, so for example like, “I am a problem”, or you know, actually “I have a problem.” Or even worse than that, “I myself am the problem” and I'm kind of, you know— the attitude [in this religious sphere] is that I'm forever doomed because I'm a problem.

(02:50):

But here, Mañjuśrī says—this is a sort of special remark—that *you*, the courtesan—I mean, that's just in a way it's a metaphor isn't it?—*we* are all *bodhi*. So, we are actually not a problem. We are actually the solution, if you need to talk in terms of problems and solutions. We are actually the solution also.

(03:36):

Of course, you know, like in all the sūtras of this kind—and as I've been telling you, it's challenging to talk about liberation from non-existent suffering. I don't know how to put this properly, but we talked about, you know, like waking up from a nightmare, then the moment you talk about waking up from a nightmare, there's a danger of understanding a scene as if whatever you are dreaming during the nightmare, does exist. But that's not true. The nightmare—no matter how bad it is—fundamentally, is a dream. Meaning before you dream, after you wake up, during the dream—all this time, whatever is happening—it is an illusion.

(04:50):

And coming back to the point I'm trying to make is, yes that, that illusory aspect—that sort of truly non-existent aspect—is there, it is orderly, it's frightening, it's really tiring, it's exhausting;

but at the same time, it does not truly exist. That itself, the nightmare itself, is the solution. If the nightmare is not actually a dream—if it does exist—then, you know, we have a problem here.

(05:42):

So this is how I am reading much of the dialogue here between the courtesan and Mañjuśrī. There's even a section where Mañjuśrī, during their discussions, the courtesan says, [Tibetan] *Nyon mongs pa rnams ni byang chub kyi sa bon te/ nyon mongs pa rtogs pa ni byang chub lags so* [[milestone 1.54](#)] “emotion is the seed of the *bodhi*.”

When you understand the emotions, when you understand the *kleśas*, when you understand anger, when you understand desire—that is what is labeled as '*bodhi*'. But anger, desire, they are the seed of *bodhi*. You know, here we are talking really on one of the highest levels of the Mahāyāna teachings.

(06:48):

And it goes on to the courtesan talking about—because the defilements are not truly existent, because the defilements are like an illusion—just like a mirage, like a nightmare—therefore, there's nothing to fear. There's nothing to fear. There's nothing to be discouraged [by]. And she gives so many good examples like, you know, like twigs, like dry leaves and branches. The fire is not afraid of them. In fact, the more [there is] of these twigs and dry woods and leaves, then the more that means more fire.

(07:51):

Now, of course as I was—I've been repeating this—you know, the teaching goes back and forth between sort of the ultimate point of view and the relative point of view also. So there's also a lot of emphasis on how one must not get entangled, one must not get robbed, and hijacked, and lured by defilements. Even though from the ultimate point of view they do not exist. And, not being caught by defilements—the non-existent defilements—that itself is the liberation.

(08:46):

This sūtra goes on until the courtesan actually wants to become a *bhikṣuṇī*—she wants to become a nun. She asks Mañjuśrī [about wanting] to become a nun, and then there Mañjuśrī again—incredible, you know this part—says that shaving one's hair is not renunciation. Shaving one's hair is not [the same as] becoming a *bhikṣuṇī*. A real *bhikṣuṇī* is when there is a wish to destroy or cut the thread of defilement that exists within sentient beings. That is a *bhikṣuṇī*, that is the real *bhikṣuṇī*. [He says that,] wearing maroon robes, or yellow robes, saffron robes is not a *bhikṣuṇī*. A *bhikṣuṇī* is someone who would engage—not only engage in the practice of the *bhikṣuṇī* discipline for oneself, but someone who would liberate sentient beings through skillful means of discipline; and also not foresake those who have breached the discipline and the vows. And Mañjuśrī keeps on saying, goes on to say that retreating yourself to an isolated place—like

the mountains or the forest—that's not being a *bhikṣuṇī*, that's not being a renunciant. Someone who would actually mingle with the defiled sentient beings—and have the utmost wish to save them from their defilements—that is a *bhikṣuṇī*. So on and so forth.

(11:45):

And after a while, Mañjuśrī says, “Okay Sister, now you should ride this chariot. And, go to Bhayadatta”—you know, the banker's son. So Mañjuśrī actually sends the courtesan to the boy who hired her. And many people were surprised about how can a renunciant—the courtesan—and a man, can be together. So, you know, so after that there's more episodes or accounts of the interactions between the courtesan and Bhayadatta, who initially wanted to enjoy with her. And, there's an account—a beautiful account—of how when he was trying to sleep on her lap, suddenly he smelled all these rotten flesh, pus, blood smell, which then triggered him to see the truth of decay, of impermanence, and of the non-substantially existing nature [of compounded things].

(13:40):

And just to wrap it up—because it's really difficult to cover the whole sūtra within a short time—Bhayadatta also ends up hearing many teachings, and the sūtra ends with Sakyamunī Buddha's recollection of the previous lives of all the bodhisattvas and some of the disciples there.

Like many Mahāyāna sūtras, this is again one of the sūtras that is quoted by many masters, and *Mañjuśrī Sūtra*—this particular one—parts of this, are also quoted in many śāstras. So those who wish to study especially the subject of relative truth and ultimate truth—especially the subject of *śūnyatā*, and how *śūnyatā* relates to the concepts of Bodhicitta, compassion, and therefore, the Six Pāramitās—I think if those who are interested, if they just even browse through this sūtra, I think it can give them a lot of in-depth angles and insights. So I really urge people to do this.

The teaching ends here.