

Phil Treloar *Feeling to Thought*

Sudhana Cycle No. 34

SAMANTASATTVATRANOJAHSHRI

for String Quartet

commissioned by
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and
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As directed, I have come to you,
Observing your qualities;
A pure aura of light beams
Emanated from between your brows,
Illuminating all places,
Producing great light in the world;
Having shown many various wonders,
It descended into my body.

Sudhana: a gāthā in praise of
Samantasattvatranojahshri

In the same assembly as occupied by *Pramuditānayanajagadvirocana*, his previous spiritual friend, Sudhana saw another night goddess, *Samantasattvatranojahshri*. Through her benefaction he realized the stage of 'blazing radiance'. According to the commentary by Li Tongxuan, in this stage or 'rank', knowledge and compassion are completed and one is born in the house of the enlightened, never parting from enlightenment; hence the goddess was in this assembly at the Buddha's site of enlightenment.

When Sudhana asked *Samantasattvatranojahshri* about her state of enlightening liberation she replied that it is the sphere of enlightening beings imbued with great compassion who have undertaken the salvation of all sentient beings, and who have undertaken to preserve the teachings of all buddhas; buddhas who have attained the state of the light of instantaneous knowledge of the ocean of wisdom of past, present, and future.

In his Introduction to the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* Thomas Cleary – the sutra's translator – makes the observation that "the past, as it exists relative to the present, is not a fixed actuality, but depends on what elements of past causes are accessible and how they are perceived and experienced, what elements are in fact being acted on in a given situation, and how they are being acted on."

Many eons ago there lived a king in an age called Sphere of Dispassion in a world called Sunny Brilliance. In the eastern part of that world was a set of four continents called Jewel Flower Lamp Banner and in the southern-most of those was a central capital city, also named Jewel Flower Lamp Banner, where the king, born in the calyx of a lotus and bearing the thirty-two marks of a great man, lived and ruled justly over the four continents. The king had a beautiful wife and they

had a daughter who was so beautiful that no one ever tired by the sight of her. North of the city was an enlightenment tree called Sound of Clouds of Teachings Illuminating All, which, being perfectly formed, emanated sounds of magical displays of the spheres of all buddhas. In front of that enlightenment sight was a pond of fragrant water called Sound of Clouds Thundering Teachings with Jewel Flower Lightning and this was surrounded by millions of trees bearing the same perfect form as the enlightenment tree. In the middle of the pond appeared a ruby lotus called Array of Clouds of Light Rays Flashing Lightening from Between the Leaves Illuminating the Sphere of the Buddhas of Past, Present, and Future.

The beings of that world, Sunny Brilliance, each had a life-span that was measureless but, due to the evil of mutual contempt, they'd lost this measureless span of life together with their physical appearance, strength, and happiness. In the pond of fragrant water, in that ruby lotus, appeared a buddha named Paragon of Virtue Radiant with the Light of Universal Knowledge. He prepared sentient beings for the appearance of the buddha and there emerged from that great ruby lotus a light called 'spotless lamp of all beings.' Beings touched by that light became aware that the buddha would emerge in ten-thousand years hence. With the passing of each of the one-thousand-year periods an auspicious light emerged from the enlightenment tree and beings touched by the light were transformed into a higher state.

Finally, when the buddha, Paragon of Virtue Radiant with the Light of Universal Knowledge, had realized supreme perfect enlightenment, the buddhas in all worlds in the ten directions attained supreme perfect enlightenment and set in motion the wheel of teaching for sentient beings. Samantabhadra, the universally good enlightening being, then appeared declaring, 'Know, O king, that a buddha has appeared in the world. He is in this very realm of yours, at the enlightenment sight Emblem of the Sound of Clouds of Teaching Revealing Universal Truth.' The daughter of the king, enraptured and inspired by having seen the form-body (*rūpakāya* : the *nirmāṇakāya* and *saṃbhogakāya*, both of which appear *as if* physical bodies or manifestations of the *dharmakāya*—the intrinsically radiant consciousness of a Buddha; the wisdom-body, eternal and unchanging; transcendent of conception) and the supernal manifestation of light of Universally Good and, hearing the sound of his ornaments, declared: "May I also dispel the darkness of nescience ['ignorance': *avidyā*—the factor behind 'craving' and the real cause of suffering; the root cause of continued involvement in *saṃsāra*] in sentient beings and produce the light of great knowledge. Wherever I may be born, may I never be apart from this spiritual benefactor."

She saw the buddha, Vairocana ('Illuminator' – 'He Who Is Like the Sun': the embodiment of the Awareness of the Continuum of Reality; located at the center of the five-Buddha families; viewed as the personification of the *dharmakāya*; referred to as Mahāvairocana), and she saw all the enlightening beings reflected in the body of Universal Good (Samantabhadra: a bodhisattva often associated with Vairocana though depicted in the company of *Shākyamuni* and *Mañjuśrī*; a central figure in the entire *Avatamsaka-sūtra*), and she saw herself there too. She saw ways of turning the wheel of teaching, various sayings of the buddhas, various indications of oceans of ways of expressing thought, and enunciations of multitudes of various scriptures, and was all the more enraptured. Ten-hundred-thousand concentrations descended into her, such as, 'face-to-face communication with all buddhas,' and 'penetrating the principles of all pasts, presents, and futures'; 'communicating the voice of all means of emancipation from all suffering and torture of the mundane whirl', and 'manifestation of the vow to dispel darkness of all sentient beings.' And so, with her mind reaching everywhere, she plunged into the ocean of vows of all buddhas, took up the vow of universal good to guide all sentient beings to perfection, to know all ways to the realm of reality, to continue with each moment of consciousness the practice of enlightening beings which increasingly becomes aware of omniscient knowledge, and together with these, she made many more such vows.

Ten eons prior to this, in the world Light Shining from a Jewel Sun and Moon, in which the teaching of the buddha Moonlike Brilliance was preserved, that same women, instructed by the enlightening being Universally Good, repaired a ruined image of the Buddha seated on a lotus, having gone to Universally Good with the aspiration for enlightenment. Because of that root of goodness, she never fell into misfortune, always being born into celestial or human families. She always saw buddhas and associated with the enlightening being Universally Good, and in every life was developed, inspired, and caused to be mindful by that spiritual benefactor.

The king of that time was none other than the enlightened being *Mañjushrī*, the Glorious One, – it was *Mañjushrī* (the bodhisattva of wisdom) who initiated Sudhana’s journey and whom he’ll encounter again – while his queen was *Prshantarutasagaravati* – whom Sudhana will encounter as his next benefactor. And it was their daughter, *Samantasattvatranajahshri* who, in the time of the teaching left by the buddha Moonlike Brilliance, repaired a ruined image of the Buddha on a lotus. That ‘root of goodness’ became a determining factor for her all the way to supreme enlightenment.

When the world Radiant Brilliance had passed away and the age of Sphere of Dispassion was over, there followed a world called Magnificent Array Brilliantly Adorned with Jewel Discs, and an age called Great Light. Five-hundred buddhas emerged therein, and *Samantasattvatranajahshri* propitiated them all. From each buddha she obtained illumination by the lightning of omniscience, called ‘womb of knowledge of past, present, and future, extensive as the cosmos’, which is the oceanic body of the reality realm, containing at once all the practices of universal good.

Listen to me explain how I first aspired to enlightenment
In quest of the qualities of buddhas,
And how I attained
This liberation of awareness.

a gāthā by the ‘night goddess’ *Samantasattvatranajahshri*

After hearing *Samantasattvatranajahshri* sing verses further elucidating the enlightening liberation showing guidance for beings in all worlds, she sent Sudhana on to the night goddess, *Prshantarutasagaravati*, whom he would find at the same enlightenment site, in the same assembly and in fact, whom was seated right next to *Samantasattvatranajahshri*. Sudhana paid her his respects, then departed.

Honor the guide of your own will—
Muster great energy and go to him.

The King, in praise of buddha.