

The Formation of the Outer Container

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The Formation of the Outer Container:
The Foundation of the Earth and the Mountains
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THE FORMATION OF THE OUTER CONTAINER

As it says in the *Noble Verses on the Collection of Precious Qualities*¹ concerning the formation of the outer container, the foundation of the earth and the mountains: “The wind [element] depends on space and aggregations of the water [element] depend on the wind [element]. This great earth, supporting sentient beings, depends on the water [element].” Furthermore, the former constituents of that world system, having been destroyed by fire, water, and wind of an eon then for twenty intermediate eons, will all together become nothing. It is after this [period of time], the constituents of the world system will form.²

The initial cause of this world system depends upon the collective karma of sentient beings. Known as the Pure Mind,³ it is a white space that radiates light and develops into a sizable container⁴ capable of supporting a three-thousandfold world system.⁵

Atop that space forms a wind mandala, and a blue rippling wind rises forth known as the Great Churning Wind.⁶ The All-Pervading Wind⁷ spreads it in all directions amassing like fog in the sky. The Wild and Rough Wind⁸ noisily scatters that wind like clouds in the sky, which is collected by the Colossal Gathering Wind,⁹ becoming vast and thick.

Through the burning of the fire that spreads from the orange Ripening Fire Wind,¹⁰ the wind mandala becomes smooth with an even surface. The multi-coloured Wind of the Dividing Wind¹¹ rises up in a rush, dispersing the wind mandala, and the Churning Wind mixes it into its proper formation.

The colour of the wind takes the aspect of a sapphire jewel, shaped like a crossed vajra and surrounded by a round rim. As for its size, its thickness is 1,600,000 yojanas¹² and has an immeasurable width. Since its inherent quality



is solid and firm, it supports the [elements] such as water.

A water mandala forms on top of that, and clouds possessing the essence of gold gather in the space above the wind mandala. A stream of rain descends about the size of a chariot's axle. From its swirling centre a shape like a full circular moon forms called the Calm and Clear Water.¹³ As for the size of the water mandala, its thickness is 120,000 yojanas and has an immeasurable width.

On top of that a golden foundation forms: The Churning Wind arises from the wind mandala that is underneath the water, churning the water mandala. Out of the cream that is produced from the churning of the water mandala, a golden foundation is established, like the ice that forms on a lake. It is square with a yellow gold-like hue, as for the size, its thickness is 220,000 yojanas and has an immeasurable width.

Mountains, oceans, and continents form on top of that. Moreover, in the space above the golden foundation clouds of various constituents amass, and a stream of water descends from them for a significant duration.

¹ *ārya prajñāpāramitāratnagūṣaṃcayagāthā*

² According to Buddhist cosmology, the cycle of the world system consists of four periods: 1. eon of formation (chags pa'i bskal pa, vivartakalpa), 2. eon of abiding (gnas pa'i bskal pa, vivartasthāyikalpa), 3. eon of dissolution ('jig pa'i bskal pa, samvartakalpa), and 4. eon of nothingness (stong pa'i bskal pa, samvartasthāyikalpa). The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (Chos mngon pa'i mdzod kyi bshad pa), attributed to the famous master Vasubhandu (c. 4th–5th CE), states that each of the four eons consists of twenty intermediate eons (bar bskal pa, antarakalpa). This initiatory section of the text describes the cycle of these four eons. For more information see: *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism 2014*: kalpa.

³ yid rnam par dwangs pa

⁴ snod

⁵ A three-thousandfold world system is the largest universe or cosmological container capable of containing upwards of a billion world

After this the Gathering and Sorting Wind¹⁴ separates the elements: a billion Mt. Sumerus are established from the best elements, a billion mountains of the seven rings are established from the mediocre elements, and billions of iron mountains of the outer rim, billions of the four continents, and billions of the sub-continents are established from the inferior elements. The manner of this formation is stated in the sutra.

In that way, when the four continents and sub-continents are formed with the inferior elements, the head of the four great rivers and the great Mt. Kailash are also established in the centre of the southern Jambudvīpa [continent]. This should be known.

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systems each with their own central Mt. Sumeru and geological and continental structures. For more information see: *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism 2014*: trisāhasramahāsāhasralokadhātu

⁶ rnam par srub byed kyi rlung

⁷ kun tu khyab byed kyi rlung

⁸ rtsub 'gyur gyi rlung yam

⁹ rnam par sdud byed kyi rlung

¹⁰ smin byed me'i rlung

¹¹ 'byed byed rlung gi rlung

¹² Yojana – An ancient Indic measurement of distance said to be the distance that a pair of yoked oxen can travel in a single day. There are various modern measurements estimating this distance ranging from four to ten miles. For more information see: *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism 2014*: yojana.

¹³ zhi ba gsal dag

¹⁴ 'byed sdud kyi rlung





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