

# **To Accomplish the Buddha Path in One Lifetime**

Vol II

## **Pure Land Principles and Practices**

**Upasakā Huichang**



一生成就佛道

慧常居士編述



## Acknowledgement

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the ten directions for their inconceivable empowerment and inspiration, without which it would be impossible for me to complete this arduous yet enjoyable mission.

Secondly, I am deeply indebted to Venerable Jingjie and Venerable Yanxu, who systematically taught me the profound teachings of Mahayana Buddhism and guided me to practise the Pure Land gateway, and also encouraged me to write these books. Both had also kindly written forewords for these books.

Thirdly, I am deeply grateful to the classmates of Pureland Learning Society (Singapore). Especially, Upāsikā Miaofang meticulously checked and corrected every sentence of the whole two volumes, transforming them into proper English; Upāsikā Zhenren proofread the two volumes several times and corrected many grammar and spelling mistakes; Upāsakas Huide and Huiming, and Upāsikā Zhenwen read the whole two volumes to ensure the correctness of meanings; Several Upāsikās of my classmates reconstructed Chapter 1 of Volume I, setting up a model for me to modify the later chapters.

Finally and importantly, I would like to express my appreciation to Mr. Shi'an Shen, who strongly suggested that I should use simple vocabulary and syntax, to encourage readers to read the books. Following his suggestion, I rewrote Volume I, replacing the long and complicated sentences with simple short ones, and replacing the difficult words with easy ones.

## Foreword by Venerable Heng Sure

Prince Siddhartha Gautama pondered an existential problem: whether or not a human could overcome mortality. In his Indian cultural context, he was on top of the world. If he did nothing but peacefully live out his days, he would become king of the country, general of the army, husband of a queen, father of a son, and wealthy beyond his dreams. A life of ease was not to be. He suddenly met the shock of a lifetime: the realization that death awaits all people without exception, rich or poor. Wealthy as the Prince was, the Ghost of Impermanence would surely come for him and all his power would come to nothing in the end. His priorities shifted radically; foremost in his mind was the single challenge: to discover whether any one could put an end to death and rebirth.

As the legend goes, he applied himself diligently to vigorous practice and discipline; after six years and forty-eight days of focused mental effort, he sat down beneath a tree on a river bank and immersed his body and mind in a state of Chan meditation. He saw a bright star in the night sky and awoke to the Way; he understood his mind and saw his nature and became the Buddha.

The problem that once seemed so overwhelming, had simply melted away, once he recognized its source: false-thoughts and attachments. Once the Prince saw the principle at the heart of the issue, the problems dissolved, like ice beneath the sun. This was do-it-yourself psychotherapy at the deepest level. What's more, seeing the problem

from the new perspective of wisdom sparked an awareness of compassion: he understood how all sentient beings are fundamentally connected and how we can all learn to deal with their own mental knots and afflictions.

Once we use the Buddha's wisdom to solve a personal challenge, the flavor of wisdom is unmatched. When the light of wisdom burns through the clouds of confusion there is no other insight that delights the mind in the same way.

Upasaka Hui Chang, the author of the present volume, *To Accomplish the Buddha Path In One Lifetime*, is a successful entrepreneur in the global marketplace. Through meeting good spiritual friends, he encountered the Buddha Dharma and felt as if he had discovered a treasure in his own backyard. Determined to dig deeper, he subjected the teachings to a rigorous investigation. His Bodhi Resolve (Bodhicitta) emerged and the wish to share his insights lead to the book you hold in your hands. You can use this systematic exposition of the methods for liberation as a primer, as a guidebook to a wealth of deep insights that can carry living beings all the way to Buddhahood. May all living beings follow Upasaka Hui Chang in making the Bodhi Resolve!

Rev. Heng Sure, PhD  
Chairperson  
Dharma Realm Buddhist Association  
14 Mar 2023

## Foreword by Venerable Jingjie

The World-Honoured Shakyamuni Buddha manifested in our Saha World more than 2,500 years ago out of great compassion and expounded the Dharma for 49 years, leaving behind the Twelve Divisions of Scriptures of Three Treasures. Subsequently, Buddhism was transmitted to China (approximately 2,000 years ago). Through the propagation of Dharma by various Dharma masters, Buddhism flourished and was well accepted by the Chinese people. Even though the propagation process was not without challenges, however, Buddhism endured over time to reach the common people. In particular, Mahayana Buddhist teachings are not only able to alleviate sufferings and bring forth happiness, but also able to overcome the sufferings of samsara to surpass birth and death and furthermore complete the Bodhi-path cultivation. Since the Sui and Tang Dynasties, even though there were 8 different schools of Buddhism in China, only the Pure Land Dharma Door (by virtue of Amitabha Buddha's power) benefits all sentient beings regardless of inferior, medium or superior capacities, encompassing the most astute to the dullest. No matter male or female, old or young, bright or dull, as long as one has sincere faith and earnest aspiration and proper practice in accordance with the Sutra, one will definitely be received by Amitabha Buddha at the end of one's life to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Successful rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss will fulfil Bodhi-path and surpass the cycle of birth and death in one step, with countless cases as testament to this. Therefore, the Pure Land Dharma Door had been recommended by various Dharma masters.

However, the Mahayana Buddhist teachings are profound and inconceivable. The tenet of Pure Land Dharma Door is deeply profound and inconceivable, thus unbelievable and difficult to understand. In order to thoroughly understand the tenet and build up sincere faith and earnest aspiration, fundamental comprehension of Mahayana Buddhism is necessary. For a lay Buddhist practitioner in this modern world (even for one with virtuous roots

cultivated in previous lives) will find it challenging to focus deeply on the Pure Land cultivation due to entanglement with worldly affairs leading to an agitated and impatient mind, which makes it even more difficult to read in-depth into sutras and commentaries of Dharma masters.

Since graduating from Jing Lu Buddhist College (淨律學佛院) more than 30 years ago, I initially spent more than 10 years teaching monastics, and next 20 years educating lay practitioners by giving dharma lectures on Pure Land practice and giving Mahayana Buddhism teachings. Subsequently, I realised that for lay practitioners, just solely relying on the venerable masters to conduct retreats and dharma lectures on an annual basis did not allow in-depth study of the Dharma nor guarantee diligent perseverance in their cultivation. Therefore, in 2013, I initiated the Academy of Pure Land Teaching and Contemplation in Singapore, Taiwan, China and Australia. The Academy will setup classes, where weekly class discussions are led by team leaders in each location. Having implemented this program for many years, the results are evident. Not only are lay practitioners attending these classes able to focus deeply on the teachings on a consistent basis, but a group of team leaders are also cultivated (akin to lighting up endless candles). Hui Chang is one of our team leaders. In addition to leading class discussions, he has summarised the essential concepts of the program as well as key points in his learning journey to write the Chinese book “To Accomplish the Buddha Path in One Lifetime” (《一生成就佛道》) in 2018.

The first part of the book provides a systematic introduction to the key principles of Mahayana Buddhism in modern language, including Buddhist Cosmology, Karma and its Causes, Fundamental terminologies and principles for the cultivations of the emancipation and enlightenment in Buddhism. The contents of the second part are based on the 3 Pure Land Sutras as foundation, with preservation of the lineage of the Pure Land school and the theoretical contributions of the 13 Pure Land Patriarchs as framework. This second part provides a systematic introduction of the Pure Land cultivation with the 3 provisions (sincere faith, earnest aspiration, practice) and concludes with primary cultivations of the Pure Land Dharma Door to ensure successful rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss to fulfil the Buddha-path. The contents of the books are clearly arranged with a compact structure, and strives to



provide a clear, concise and accurate explanation of the key terms, concepts and principles to help a beginner understand comprehensively the primary principles and terminology of Mahayana Buddhism within a short time, thus setting the foundation to dive deeper into the study of Mahayana Buddhism and the Pure Land Dharma Door. The second part will not only benefit beginners to understand and grasp the key principles of the Pure Land method and cultivation, but also benefit older practitioners to revise and memorise the contents of the Pure Land Sutras and commentaries of Pure Land Patriarchs.

Since the original Chinese book was published, it was well liked by many lay practitioners. In considering that many Singapore lay practitioners may be less proficient in the Chinese language, thereby rendering greater challenge in studying Mahayana Buddhism teachings which were written in ancient Chinese language, Hui Chang decided to embark on rewriting his Chinese book into the English language. Extensive efforts were made in researching English Dharma materials to ensure the many terminologies used in Buddhism were accurately translated. In addition, annotations and references were added to indicate the source materials from Sutras or commentaries, and also further enriched the content. The original Chinese book (previously one volume) is now in two separate volumes for the English version to avoid the bulkiness if both volumes are to be combined into one book. I rejoice in Hui Chang's publication of the English version of this book, which is also the result of empowerment by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. I believe this book will benefit the sentient beings of the English-speaking world to learn and understand Mahayana Buddhism in a systematic manner, and help them to practice the Pure Land Dharma Door.

釋淨界

12 May 2022

## Forward by Venerable Yanxu

Over 1300 years ago, great Master Shan Dao, the 2nd Patriarch of the Pure Land School, stressed the importance of holding a sincere heart and maintaining genuine practice as the necessary foundation for reaching the Pure Land. He encouraged his disciples to “Practice in alignment with the true teaching, and speak truthfully about what you have done.”

Our actions, words, and thoughts must correspond with a true heart. If our resolve is false, and we are merely pretending to be virtuous and hard-working, then our actions have created “merits with poisons”. It’s impossible to transfer these kinds of “toxic merits” towards rebirth in the Pure Land, because the causes and their desired effects do not match.

More than 1300 years after Patriarch Shan Dao, great Master Yin Guang, the 13th Patriarch of the Pure Land School, observed the current problems human beings have, and reminded us that,

“To gain the true benefits of Dharma, one should practice with respect and sincerity. With one per cent of respect and sincerity, we will gain one per cent of merit and eliminate one per cent of bad karma. With 100 per cent of respect and sincerity, we will gain 100 per cent of merit and eliminate 100 per cent of bad karma.”

1300 years have passed and with each generation, every patriarch shares the same mind and speaks the same truth. Every word comes from the bottom of their compassionate heart, to guide us according to our potentials and opportunities. For us ordinary people, being hypocritical and false is our habitual practice, while respect and sincerity arise and pass away like a flash of lightning.

Living in this world, drifting day by day, being born and then dying. We die and are then reborn. We are used to lives of endless reincarnation, through kalpa

after kalpa. There are some people, however, who have a true Bodhisattvas' spirit, who although they live in the same world, still do not allow themselves to become puppets of demons in the Three Realms. They fight for liberation from the cycle of reincarnation. They concentrate on the Way, truly practice what the Buddha and Patriarchs taught, and reduce their attachments, day by day. Aren't those people living like a pure, white lotus, rooted in filthy mud?

Upasaka Hui Chang, with the Buddhas's blessing and good roots, has transformed his fate several times. Even though he's still a beginner, he has encountered the proper Dharma, and achieved a pair of "golden hands". He has true sincerity, deep faith, and earnest practice, that allow him to enter the mountain of Dharma treasure. Moreover, with his quality of accountability, purity, and modesty, he believes that "to offer salvation to others before saving oneself is a Bodhisattva's heart". This is the source that inspired him to write this meaningful book: *To Accomplish Buddhahood in One Life time*.

I have read his book and found that Hui Chang has done his best to use everyday language to explain the Dharma. The work has rich content with well-organized structures and clear goals. I believe this is an excellent starting place for anybody willing to learn true Dharma.

I have been a monk for over 30 years, nevertheless my deluded mind is still not at peace and my afflictions are still numerous. I dare not write this preface, but I want to bring my prayer to all, to wish for world peace. May all sentient beings experience faith in Mahayana Buddhism; may they cultivate the Pure Land Dharma Door, recite Amitabha Buddha's name and be born in His Land of Bliss. Namo Amitufo.

Ven. Yan Xu  
Chief Dharma Master  
Singapore Buddhist Lodge



# Contents

|                                                                                                                           |                     |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----|
| Foreword .....                                                                                                            | Venerable Heng Sure |    |
| Foreword .....                                                                                                            | Venerable Jingjie   |    |
| Foreword .....                                                                                                            | Venerable Yanxu     |    |
| <br>Chapter 1 Introduction.....                                                                                           |                     | 1  |
| I.        A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE GENERAL<br>BUDDHIST CULTIVATION PATHS.....                                                |                     | 1  |
| 1.    The Path for Peaceful Happiness.....                                                                                |                     | 1  |
| (1) Cultivations of the Path for Peaceful Happiness.....                                                                  |                     | 1  |
| (2) Fruition of the Path for Peaceful Happiness .....                                                                     |                     | 2  |
| (3) Shortcomings of the Path for Peaceful Happiness .....                                                                 |                     | 2  |
| 2.    The Path for Emancipation .....                                                                                     |                     | 2  |
| (1) Cultivation of the Path for Emancipation .....                                                                        |                     | 2  |
| (2) Fruition of the Path for Emancipation .....                                                                           |                     | 3  |
| (3) Shortcomings of the Path for Emancipation .....                                                                       |                     | 3  |
| 3.    The Path for Ultimate Enlightenment .....                                                                           |                     | 3  |
| (1) Cultivation of the General Buddha Path .....                                                                          |                     | 3  |
| (2) Fruition of the General Buddha Path .....                                                                             |                     | 4  |
| (3) Shortcomings of the General Buddha Path .....                                                                         |                     | 4  |
| II.       A SPECIAL GATEWAY: THE PURE LAND .....                                                                          |                     | 4  |
| 1.      The Establishment of the Pure Land .....                                                                          |                     | 4  |
| 2.      Cultivations of the Pure Land .....                                                                               |                     | 5  |
| 3.      The Advantages of the Pure Land .....                                                                             |                     | 6  |
| III.      THE FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF<br>THE PURE LAND METHOD .....                                                |                     | 9  |
| 1.    The Teachings of the Pure Land Method .....                                                                         |                     | 9  |
| (1) <i>The Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan</i> .....                                                                       |                     | 9  |
| (2) <i>The Amitabha Sūtra</i> .....                                                                                       |                     | 10 |
| (3) <i>The Contemplation Sūtra</i> .....                                                                                  |                     | 11 |
| (4) The Chapter on the Practice and Vows of <i>Samantabhadra</i><br>Bodhisattva of <i>the Flower Ornament Sūtra</i> ..... |                     | 12 |
| (5) The Chapter on <i>Mahasthamaprapta</i> Bodhisattva's Perfect<br>Penetration Based on Buddha-Mindfulness of the        |                     |    |

|                                                       |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <i>Śūraṅgama Sūtra</i> .....                          | 14 |
| (6) <i>The Treatise on Rebirth</i> .....              | 15 |
| 2. The Tenets of the Pure Land Method .....           | 16 |
| (1) The Tenets on the Perspective of Phenomenon ..... | 16 |
| (2) The Tenets on the Perspective of Noumenon .....   | 17 |
| 3. The Practice of the Pure Land Method .....         | 18 |
| 4. The fruition of the Pure Land Method .....         | 18 |
| (1) Examples of Successfully Reborn Monks .....       | 19 |
| (2) Examples of Successfully Reborn Nuns .....        | 27 |
| (3) Examples of Successfully Reborn Lay Men .....     | 29 |
| (4) Examples of Successfully Reborn Lay Women .....   | 35 |

## Chapter 2 The Forty-Eight Great Vows of Amitabha

|                                                                                                       |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Buddha.....                                                                                           | 41 |
| I. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PURE LAND .....                                                           | 42 |
| 1. The Ancient Buddhas' Manifestation in the World .....                                              | 43 |
| 2. <i>Dharmākara</i> on the Causal Ground .....                                                       | 44 |
| 3. The Declaration of the Vows in front of the Buddha .....                                           | 47 |
| 4. The Accumulation of Meritorious Virtues through Practice .....                                     | 60 |
| 5. The Attainment of Buddhahood of <i>Bhikṣu Dharmākara</i> .....                                     | 62 |
| II. THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE FORTY-EIGHT VOWS.....                                                   | 63 |
| III. THE VOWS PERTAINING TO THE DHARMA BODY.....                                                      | 65 |
| 1. The Vow of Bright Light Pervasively Illuminating the Ten Directions (12 <sup>th</sup> ) .....      | 66 |
| 2. The Vow of Eternal Lifespan Same as Buddha's (13 <sup>th</sup> ) .....                             | 68 |
| 3. The Vow of All Buddhas Praising and Glorifying the Name (17 <sup>th</sup> ) .....                  | 70 |
| IV. THE VOWS PERTAINING TO THE PURE LAND.....                                                         | 72 |
| 1. General Characteristics of the Pure Land Environment .....                                         | 73 |
| (1) The Vow of Myriad Things with Extraordinary Excellence (27 <sup>th</sup> ) .....                  | 73 |
| (2) The Vow of Majestic Adornments Surpassing Those of All Devas and Humans (32 <sup>nd</sup> ) ..... | 74 |
| (3) Some Elaborations.....                                                                            | 75 |
| 2. The Bodhi-tree of the Pure Land .....                                                              | 86 |
| 3. The Reflection and Illumination of the Treasure Trees .....                                        | 87 |
| (1) The Vow of Pure Land Illuminating and Reflecting the Ten Directions (31 <sup>st</sup> ) .....     | 87 |
| (2) The Vow of Seeing All Buddha-lands at Will (40 <sup>th</sup> ).....                               | 88 |
| V. THE VOWS PERTAINING TO DEVAS AND                                                                   |    |

|                                                                                                                      |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| HUMANS IN THE PURE LAND.....                                                                                         | 88  |
| 1. Vows of Departure from Woeful Realms .....                                                                        | 89  |
| (1) Vow of Land without Three Woeful Realms (1 <sup>st</sup> ) .....                                                 | 89  |
| (2) Vow of Not Descending to Three Woeful Realms Again (2 <sup>nd</sup> ) .....                                      | 91  |
| (3) Vow of Land without Names of Non-Virtues (16 <sup>th</sup> ) .....                                               | 92  |
| 2. Vows of Majestic Colours and Appearances .....                                                                    | 94  |
| 3. Vows of Eternal Lifespan .....                                                                                    | 95  |
| 4. Vow of Clothes Appearing Spontaneously .....                                                                      | 97  |
| 5. Vows of Supernatural Powers .....                                                                                 | 98  |
| (1) Vow of All Born with Knowledge of Past Lives (5 <sup>th</sup> ) .....                                            | 99  |
| (2) Vow of All with Celestial Eye of Universal Sight (6 <sup>th</sup> ) .....                                        | 99  |
| (3) Vow of All with Celestial Ear of Universal Hearing (7 <sup>th</sup> ) .....                                      | 100 |
| (4) Vow of All with Knowledge of Others' Thoughts (8 <sup>th</sup> ) .....                                           | 101 |
| (5) Vow of All with Transcendental Travel and Flight (9 <sup>th</sup> ) .....                                        | 101 |
| 6. Vow of Limitless Bliss .....                                                                                      | 102 |
| 7. Vows of Liberation and Abiding in the Right Definite Assembly .....                                               | 103 |
| (1) The Vow of Non-Arising of Self-Attachment View (10 <sup>th</sup> ) .....                                         | 104 |
| (2) The Vow of Abiding in the Right Definite Assembly and<br>Attainment of <i>Nirvāṇa</i> (11 <sup>th</sup> ) .....  | 105 |
| VI . THE VOWS PERTAINING TO SAINTLY BEINGS IN<br>PURE LAND .....                                                     | 107 |
| 1. The Saintly Beings in the Pure Land .....                                                                         | 107 |
| 2. The Vow Pertaining to the <i>Śrāvakas</i> Assembly .....                                                          | 109 |
| 3. The Vows Pertaining to the Bodhisattva Assembly .....                                                             | 110 |
| (1) Vow of Automatically Hearing the Wondrous Dharmas (46 <sup>th</sup> ) .....                                      | 111 |
| (2) Vow of Universal Acquisition of Wisdom and Eloquence<br>When Receiving <i>Sūtras</i> (29 <sup>th</sup> ) .....   | 112 |
| (3) Vow of Wisdom and Eloquence without Limit (30 <sup>th</sup> ) .....                                              | 113 |
| (4) Vow of Bodhisattvas Expounding with Omniscient Wisdom (25 <sup>th</sup> ) .....                                  | 113 |
| (5) Vow of Bodhisattvas Endowed with Vajra Bodies (26 <sup>th</sup> ) .....                                          | 115 |
| (6) Vow of Universally Offering to Numerous Buddhas in One<br>Instant (23 <sup>rd</sup> ) .....                      | 116 |
| (7) Vow of All Offering Items Automatically (Appearing) As One Wished (24 <sup>th</sup> ) ...                        | 116 |
| (8) Vow of Attainment of the Stage of Bodhisattvas to Attain<br>Buddhahood in One Lifetime (22 <sup>nd</sup> ) ..... | 117 |
| VII . THE VOWS PERTAINING TO BODHISATTVAS OF<br>THE OTHER WORLDS .....                                               | 120 |
| VIII. THE VOWS PERTAINING TO MUNDANE<br>BEINGS OF THE OTHER LANDS .....                                              | 121 |

|                                                                                           |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. The Vows pertaining to Peaceful Happiness in Daily life .....                          | 122 |
| (1) The Four Vows Pertaining to the Peaceful Happiness .....                              | 122 |
| (2) The Typical Benefits Obtained from Name Recitation .....                              | 128 |
| 2. The Vows Pertaining to Benefits at the End of Life .....                               | 135 |
| (1) Vow of All Achieving Rebirth with Ten Recitations (18 <sup>th</sup> ) .....           | 136 |
| 1) Sincere Faith .....                                                                    | 137 |
| 2) Earnest Aspiration .....                                                               | 143 |
| 3) Convenient Practice .....                                                              | 145 |
| (2) Vow of Receiving and Escorting All with Diligent Cultivation (19 <sup>th</sup> )..... | 150 |
| (3) Vow of Assured Rebirth with Mindfulness (20 <sup>th</sup> ) .....                     | 152 |
| (4) The Comparison of the Three Vows .....                                                | 152 |
| Chapter 3 Study <i>the Contemplation Sūtra</i> .....                                      | 168 |
| I. INTRODUCTION .....                                                                     | 168 |
| II. THE TEACHINGS .....                                                                   | 170 |
| III. THE TENET: THE INTERACTIVE<br>CORRESPONDENCE .....                                   | 203 |
| 1. Elaboration on the Text .....                                                          | 203 |
| 2. Explication Based on Perfect Teachings .....                                           | 205 |
| IV. THE PRACTICES OF PURE LAND .....                                                      | 206 |
| 1. The Concentrated Virtuous Practices .....                                              | 207 |
| 2. The Three Types of Minds .....                                                         | 208 |
| (1) The Utmost Sincere Mind .....                                                         | 209 |
| (2) The Profound Faithful Mind .....                                                      | 211 |
| (3) The Aspiring Mind for Rebirth by Transferring .....                                   | 216 |
| 3. The Three Pure Conducts .....                                                          | 220 |
| (1) The Worldly Merits .....                                                              | 221 |
| (2) The Merits of Precepts .....                                                          | 222 |
| (3) The Merits of Mahayana Practice.....                                                  | 222 |
| (4) Master Shandao's Annotation of the Three Merits .....                                 | 223 |
| 4. Buddha Name Recitation .....                                                           | 224 |
| (1) The Buddha Name Recitation .....                                                      | 224 |
| (2) The Four Types of Mindfulness of the Buddha .....                                     | 225 |
| 5. Master Shandao's Comments on Pure Land Practices .....                                 | 226 |
| (1) The Dependent Arising .....                                                           | 226 |
| (2) The Classification of Practices .....                                                 | 227 |
| (3) Exclusively Praising the Buddha Name Recitation .....                                 | 228 |
| (4) The Relationship between Study and Practice .....                                     | 229 |
| V. THE EFFECT OF PURE LAND PRACTICES .....                                                | 230 |
| 1. The Rebirth of Upper Grade in the Superior Rank .....                                  | 230 |
| 2. The Rebirth of Middle Grade in the Superior Rank .....                                 | 236 |



|                                                                                                                         |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 3. The Rebirth of Lower Grade in the Superior Rank .....                                                                | 239 |
| 4. The Rebirth of Upper Grade in the Medium Rank .....                                                                  | 242 |
| 5. The Rebirth of Middle Grade in the Medium Rank .....                                                                 | 245 |
| 6. The Rebirth of Lower Grade in the Medium Rank .....                                                                  | 246 |
| 7. The Rebirth of Upper Grade in the Inferior Rank .....                                                                | 248 |
| 8. The Rebirth of Middle Grade in the Inferior Rank .....                                                               | 252 |
| 9. The Rebirth of Lower Grade in the Inferior Rank .....                                                                | 254 |
| 10. Summary of the Rebirth of the Nine Grades .....                                                                     | 257 |
| Chapter 4 Study <i>the Amitabha Sūtra</i> .....                                                                         | 264 |
| I. INTRODUCTION .....                                                                                                   | 264 |
| II. THE FIVEFOLD PROFOUND MEANINGS .....                                                                                | 266 |
| 1. The Explanation of the Title .....                                                                                   | 266 |
| 2. The Discernment of the Substance .....                                                                               | 269 |
| 3. The Explication of the Principle .....                                                                               | 278 |
| (1) What is the Principle of this <i>Sūtra</i> .....                                                                    | 278 |
| (2) What are the Three Provisions of Pure Land Method .....                                                             | 280 |
| 1) Faith .....                                                                                                          | 280 |
| 2) The Aspiration .....                                                                                                 | 289 |
| 3) The Wondrous Practice .....                                                                                          | 291 |
| 4. The Exposition of the Powers and Functions .....                                                                     | 295 |
| 5. The Exposition of the Categorisation of the Teachings .....                                                          | 302 |
| III. THE TRANSLATOR OF THE <i>SŪTRA</i> .....                                                                           | 304 |
| 1. A Brief Biographical Introduction .....                                                                              | 305 |
| 2. His Main Translation Works .....                                                                                     | 306 |
| IV. STUDY <i>THE AMITABHA SŪTRA</i> .....                                                                               | 307 |
| 1. The Introduction .....                                                                                               | 308 |
| (1) The General Introduction .....                                                                                      | 308 |
| (2) The Special Introduction .....                                                                                      | 315 |
| 2. The Main Text .....                                                                                                  | 321 |
| (1) Activating Faith by Expounding the Majestic Ornaments<br>of the Environmental and Life Retributions in Detail ..... | 322 |
| 1) General Explanation of the Meaning of Bliss .....                                                                    | 322 |
| 2) Detail Explanations of the Majestic Ornaments of the<br>Environmental and Life Retribution .....                     | 324 |
| (2) Particularly Encouraging Sentient Beings to Pursue Rebirth and<br>Develop Aspiration .....                          | 353 |
| 1) Revealing the Unsurpassed Causes and Conditions .....                                                                | 354 |
| 2) Particularly Stressing the Supreme Excellence of Pure Land .....                                                     | 356 |
| (3) Formally Specifying Buddha-name Recitation as the<br>Right Practice .....                                           | 358 |
| 1) Specification of the Foremost Causes and Conditions .....                                                            | 358 |

|                                                                      |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 2) Second Time Encouragement .....                                   | 369 |
| 3. The Transmission Part .....                                       | 375 |
| (1) The General Encouragement .....                                  | 376 |
| (2) The Summary Encouragement .....                                  | 388 |
| Chapter 5 Introduction of the Patriarchs of the Pure Land School.... | 392 |
| I. THE PERIOD OF EARLY CORROBORATION .....                           | 392 |
| 1. The Prelude of Pure Land School .....                             | 392 |
| 2. Master Huiyuan: the First Patriarch .....                         | 393 |
| 3. The First Lotus Society .....                                     | 395 |
| 4. The Influence of Master Huiyuan .....                             | 396 |
| II. THE PERIOD OF ESTABLISHMENT OF<br>THEORETICAL SYSTEM .....       | 399 |
| 1. Master Tanluan .....                                              | 400 |
| (1) A Brief Introduction of Master Tanluan .....                     | 400 |
| (2) Major Theoretical Contributions of Master Tanluan .....          | 402 |
| 2. Master Daochuo .....                                              | 407 |
| (1) A Brief Introduction of Master Daochuo .....                     | 407 |
| (2) Theoretical Contributions of Master Daochuo .....                | 408 |
| 3. Master Shandao: the Second Patriarch .....                        | 409 |
| (1) A Brief Biography of Master Shandao .....                        | 409 |
| (2) Master Shandao's Theoretical Contributions .....                 | 412 |
| III. THE PERIOD OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENT .....                         | 419 |
| 1. Master Cimin .....                                                | 419 |
| (1) A Brief Introduction of Master Cimin .....                       | 419 |
| (2) Master Cimin's Main Contributions .....                          | 420 |
| 2. Master Chengyuan: the Third Patriarch Master .....                | 420 |
| 3. Master Fazhao: the Fourth Patriarch Master .....                  | 423 |
| (1) A Brief Introduction of Master Fazhao .....                      | 423 |
| (2) Master Fazhao's Main Contributions .....                         | 426 |
| 4. Master Shaokang: the Fifth Patriarch Master .....                 | 427 |
| (1) A Brief Introduction of Master Shaokang .....                    | 427 |
| (2) Master Shaokang's Main Contributions .....                       | 429 |
| 5. Master Yongming Yanshou: the Sixth Patriarch Master .....         | 430 |
| (1) A Brief Introduction of Master Yongming .....                    | 430 |
| (2) Master Yongming's Main Contributions .....                       | 433 |
| 6. Master Xingchang: the Seventh Patriarch Master .....              | 438 |
| 7. Master Lianchi: the Eighth Patriarch Master .....                 | 440 |
| (1) A Brief Introduction of Master Lianchi .....                     | 440 |
| (2) Summary of Master Lianchi's Thoughts on Pure Land .....          | 442 |
| 8. Master Ouyi: the Ninth Patriarch Master .....                     | 449 |

|                                                                                                             |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| (1) A Brief Introduction of Master Ouyi .....                                                               | 449 |
| (2) The Main Contributions of Master Ouyi .....                                                             | 452 |
| 9. Master Xingce: the Tenth Patriarch Master .....                                                          | 457 |
| (1) A Brief Introduction of Master Xingce .....                                                             | 457 |
| (2) Master Xingce's Main Contributions .....                                                                | 458 |
| 10. Master Xing'an: the Eleventh Patriarch Master .....                                                     | 462 |
| (1) A Brief Introduction of Master Xing'an .....                                                            | 463 |
| (2) The Main Contributions of Master Xing'an .....                                                          | 465 |
| 11. Master Chewu: the Twelfth Patriarch Master .....                                                        | 469 |
| (1) A Brief Introduction of Master Chewu .....                                                              | 469 |
| (2) The Main Contributions of Master Chewu .....                                                            | 472 |
| 12. Master Yinguang: the Thirteenth Patriarch Master .....                                                  | 479 |
| (1) A Brief Introduction of Master Yinguang .....                                                           | 479 |
| (2) Legendary Manifestation of <i>Mahasthamaprabhata</i> Bodhisattva .....                                  | 483 |
| (3) Master Yinguang's Thoughts on the Pure Land .....                                                       | 485 |
| Chapter 6 Cultivations of the Pure Land Method .....                                                        | 500 |
| I. THE CONDITIONS TO ACHIEVE REBIRTH .....                                                                  | 500 |
| 1. The Conditions prescribed in the Three Pure Land <i>Sūtras</i> .....                                     | 501 |
| 2. Summary of the Conditions Based on the Pure Land <i>Sūtras</i> .....                                     | 505 |
| (1) The Absolutely Necessary Conditions .....                                                               | 505 |
| (2) The Alternative Necessary Conditions .....                                                              | 505 |
| 3. The Exclusive Cultivation and the Perfect Cultivation of<br>the Pure Land Gateway .....                  | 508 |
| II. FAITH IS THE FOUNDATION .....                                                                           | 511 |
| 1. The Contents of Faith .....                                                                              | 511 |
| (1) Faith in Real Existence .....                                                                           | 512 |
| (2) Faith in Virtues .....                                                                                  | 512 |
| (3) Faith in Capacity .....                                                                                 | 514 |
| 2. How to Verify our Faith .....                                                                            | 514 |
| (1) Verified by Attestation from Other Attractions .....                                                    | 514 |
| (2) Verified by Aspiration and Practice .....                                                               | 515 |
| 3. How to Establish Sincere Faith .....                                                                     | 515 |
| III. ASPIRATION IS THE KERNEL .....                                                                         | 518 |
| 1. How to Generate and Enhance the Aspiration for Cherishing<br>and Pursuing Rebirth in the Pure Land ..... | 519 |
| 2. How to Generate and Cultivate the Detestation of and<br>Desire to Escape the <i>Saha</i> World .....     | 521 |
| (1) Problems Faced by Lay Pure Land Practitioners .....                                                     | 521 |
| (2) How to Generate and Cultivate the Detestation of and Desire to<br>Escape the <i>Saha</i> World .....    | 526 |

|                                                                            |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 3. What is Earnest Aspiration .....                                        | 543 |
| (1) Attestation by Practice .....                                          | 543 |
| (2) Attestation by Situation and Circumstance .....                        | 544 |
| (3) Attestation by Receiving Notice to Achieve Rebirth .....               | 546 |
| IV. PRACTICE IS THE POWER .....                                            | 547 |
| 1. The Methods of the Pure Land Practice .....                             | 547 |
| (1) Buddha-Recitation .....                                                | 547 |
| (2) Observing Precepts .....                                               | 548 |
| (3) Generate Bodhicitta and Observing Bodhisattva Precepts .....           | 549 |
| (4) Read and Recite Mahayana Teachings.....                                | 550 |
| (5) Cultivate the Ten Virtuous Conducts and the Six <i>Pāramitās</i> ..... | 550 |
| 2. The Buddha-Recitation .....                                             | 551 |
| (1) Different Varieties of Buddha-Recitation .....                         | 551 |
| (2) How to Cultivate Concentrated Recitation .....                         | 555 |
| 1) Usual solitary recitations .....                                        | 555 |
| 2) Collective recitations .....                                            | 559 |
| 3) Recitation on the verge of death .....                                  | 559 |
| V. SUMMARY .....                                                           | 561 |
| 1. Persistently Adhere to One's Practice Plan .....                        | 561 |
| 2. Repeatedly Review the Pure Land Teachings .....                         | 562 |
| 3. Reflecting on One's Aspiration Every Day .....                          | 562 |
| 4. Other Rewarding Practices .....                                         | 563 |
| Index .....                                                                | 566 |

# Chapter 1 Introduction

This volume of *to Accomplish the Buddha Path in One Lifetime* is dedicated to the Pure Land gateway. It will systematically introduce the establishment and the inconceivable advantages of the Pure Land, the principles of achieving rebirth in the Pure Land, and the practices required to fulfil the purpose. Chapter 1 will first briefly review the general Buddhist cultivation paths and introduce the basic features of the Pure Land method.

## I. A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE GENERAL BUDDHIST CULTIVATION PATHS

In volume I, we have systematically introduced three types of Buddhist cultivation paths: the path for peaceful happiness, the path for emancipation and the path for ultimate enlightenment. The Buddha expounded them for the benefit of sentient beings. As sentient beings have diverse capacities and inclinations, Buddha expounded 8400 methods so that every being can choose a method that is appropriate for him or her to cultivate to attain his or her fruition.

### 1. The Path for Peaceful Happiness

#### (1) Cultivations of the Path for Peaceful Happiness

The cultivations of the path for peaceful happiness can be categorised into two types: seekers for rebirth in the human realm and seekers for rebirth in the celestial realm.

- ① Seekers for rebirth in the human realm need to behave in accordance with the restraints stipulated in the five precepts: no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying and no alcohol. It is more rewarding if one can perform the ten virtuous conducts.
- ② Seekers for rebirth in the celestial realm require two classes of cultivations:
  - i) Seekers for rebirth in the celestial planes of the desire sphere need to cultivate the ten virtuous conducts in daily life;

- ii) Seekers for rebirth in the celestial planes of the form sphere and the formless sphere need to cultivate the concentrative meditations in addition to the ten virtuous conducts.

## **(2) Fruition of the Path for Peaceful Happiness**

The fruition of the two paths for peaceful happiness are:

- ① Seekers for rebirth in the human realm will normally get rebirth as a human being in the next life, usually with desirable good health, intelligence, wealth, congenial environment and harmonious social relations.
- ② Seekers for rebirth in the celestial realm will achieve rebirth in corresponding planes of different spheres.

## **(3) Shortcomings of the Path for Peaceful Happiness**

The peace and happiness of the fruition of this path is only relative compared to the three woeful realms. They still possess the following shortcomings:

- ① They are not free from sufferings
  - i) Human beings are afflicted by the eight sufferings and the three levels of sufferings;
  - ii) The celestial beings cannot avoid the three levels of sufferings.
- ② They are impermanent: death is inescapable.
- ③ They have no mastery over their life and environment.
- ④ They are tainted, with both the afflictions of insight and cultivation.
- ⑤ The fruition is not certain, as one may still descend to the three woeful realms due to the maturing of extremely grave evil karmas, even if one cultivates the path for peaceful happiness diligently.

## **2. The Path for Emancipation**

### **(1) Cultivation of the Path for Emancipation**

There are primarily two types of seekers for emancipation: *śrāvakas* and Pratyekabuddhas.

① The *śrāvakas* mainly cultivate the Four Noble Truths to eradicate the afflictions of insight and cultivation, so as to achieve complete self-liberation from *samsara*.

② The Pratyekabuddha practitioners cultivate the Twelve Dependent Originations to attain emancipation from transmigrations in birth-and-death.

### **(2) Fruition of the Path for Emancipation**

① The fruition of the *śrāvakas* cultivators is categorised into four stages: stream-enterers, once-returners, nonreturners and Arhats.

② The fruition of the Pratyekabuddha practitioners is the attainment of Pratyekabuddhahood.

### **(3) Shortcomings of the Path for Emancipation**

Although the pursuers of the path for emancipation can completely escape the segmented death-and-birth, they are still imperfect:

① They are not ultimate, because they have merely escaped the segmented birth-and-death; they have not achieved the perfect attainment of Buddha.

② It takes many, even numerous lifetimes to accomplish the path.

③ It is difficult to cultivate in this turbid time:

- i) The afflictions of the modern people are extremely severe;
- ii) The environment is much more decadent and defiled than the past.

## **3. The Path for Ultimate Enlightenment**

The path for ultimate enlightenment is to accomplish the Buddha Path to attain Buddhahood. Practitioners of this path are called Bodhisattvas.

### **(1) Cultivation of the General Buddha Path**

The cultivations of Bodhisattvas of all general Buddha Path are the Six *Pāramitās*, although Bodhisattvas may differ in their preferences or emphasis in their practice. There are eight Mahayana schools in China, of which, each established its own specific cultivations.

## **(2) Fruition of the General Buddha Path**

The ultimate fruition of the Buddha Path is the attainment of Buddhahood. Along the path, the Bodhisattvas will attain different stages, which are specified by different schools.

## **(3) Shortcomings of the General Buddha Path**

The Buddha Path is the ultimate path with unsurpassed attainment. The cultivations of Bodhisattvas are beneficial to both themselves and all sentient beings, thus should be commended and emulated. Yet the general Buddha Path still has some shortcomings:

- ① The accomplishment of the general Buddha Path is inconceivably long, requiring three *asamkhyeya kalpas* to attain Buddhahood.
- ② The cultivators may retrogress before attaining the ground stage. Most mundane Bodhisattvas cannot maintain their cultivation continuously life after life. They either interrupt their cultivations frequently or even retreat from their cultivations due to inadequate causes and conditions.

# **II. A SPECIAL GATEWAY: THE PURE LAND**

## **1. The Establishment of the Pure Land**

At the causal stage, Amitabha Buddha realised that suffering is common amongst mundane sentient beings, and it is difficult for general Buddhist cultivators to accomplish the Buddha Path. Thus, he pledged to establish an extraordinary land so that everyone can easily achieve rebirth there and where beings can swiftly accomplish their Buddha Path in one lifetime.

Inconceivably uncountable *kalpas* ago, Amitabha Buddha was cultivating as a Bodhisattva, named *Dharmakāra*. Under the guidance and the empowerment of the World Sovereign King Buddha, he examined and evaluated all the advantageous and disadvantageous aspects of two hundred and ten *koṭīs* \* of Buddha-lands. He then formulated the blueprint of his superior Buddha-land in



the form of Forty-Eight Great Vows. Having pronounced his plan in front of the World Sovereign King Buddha and his great assembly, *Dharmakāra* Bodhisattva commenced on his grand journey of fulfilling his vows. After ineffably innumerable *kalpas* of assiduous cultivation of all the *pāramitās*, he accomplished the establishment of his designed Buddha-land, and spontaneously became Amitabha Buddha ten *kalpas* ago.

\**koṭī*s is large number in ancient India, equivalent to a hundred thousand or a hundred million.

## 2. Cultivations of the Pure Land

The purpose for Amitabha Buddha to establish the Pure Land is to enable and attract all sentient beings, in spite of their diverse capacities and inclinations, to aspire to gain rebirth in Pure Land so as to swiftly attain Buddhahood. Hence, the cultivations required to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land must be easy, simple and convenient. Only three types of conditions, also called the three provisions, are needed for Pure Land practitioners to ensure their successful rebirth there.

① **Faith:** Pure Land practitioners have to establish sincere faith in the existence of the Pure Land, its inconceivable meritorious virtues, and their own capability to achieve rebirth there.

② **Aspiration:** Pure Land practitioners must generate earnest aspiration to detest and desire to depart from this Saha world, and to cherish and pursue rebirth in the Pure Land.

③ **Practice:** the practice of the Pure Land method is incredibly simple and convenient, so no one can deny its suitability. One can choose to undertake any one or more than one aspect of the following practices:

- i) To cultivate the Buddha-name-recitation, referred to as Buddha-recitation in the rest of this book; that is, to recite the Buddha name wholeheartedly, by reciting either “Namo Amitabha Buddha” or simply “Amitabha Buddha”;
- ii) To receive and observe the five precepts or other precepts;
- iii) To read and recite the Mahayana *Sūtras*;
- iv) To generate Bodhicitta and observe the Bodhisattva precepts;

- v) To perform various virtuous conducts, etc.

All the merits created from the above practice(s) should be dedicated to the Pure Land as provisions for rebirth there, except the first one, which is automatically a Pure Land provision. As long as we cultivate the three provisions for the rest of our life, maintain our faith and aspiration on the verge of death, with ten or even fewer wholeheartedly recitations of the name of the Buddha, Amitabha Buddha promised to welcome and escort us to safely achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. No one can deny their capability to cultivate the above practices, hence no one is deprived of the opportunity to gain rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

### **3. The Advantages of the Pure Land**

Amitabha Buddha is fully aware of what sentient being detest and avoid, and what they are fond of and look forward to. Based on this knowledge, he established the Pure Land with all the advantages appealing to sentient beings pursuant to their respective capacities and dispositions.

#### **1) Advantages for those cultivating the path for peaceful happiness**

People cultivating the path for peaceful happiness will gain rebirth in the Pure Land and they would be in better position than those cultivating the general Buddha Path in this world. In Pure Land, the advantages are:

##### **① No suffering:**

- i) Pure Land has no woeful realms, even no name and expressions of these realms.
- ii) The devas and humans in the Pure Land are guaranteed to be free from woeful realms even if they, out of compassion to rescue other beings, chose rebirth and early termination of their permanent life in the Pure Land.
- iii) The eight sufferings and three sufferings for all beings do not exist in the Pure Land.
  - a. All beings in the Pure Land are born from lotus flower, no suffering of birth;
  - b. All beings in the Pure Land are automatically endowed with unlimited lifespan, no suffering of death;

- c. All beings in the Pure Land possess the body of the Vajra-god *Nārāyaṇa*, free from illness or aging;
  - d. All beings are endowed with unlimited lifespan and with transcendental powers, born from lotus flower with no kin, and no attachment, hence no woeful departure from loved ones;
  - e. All beings are accompanied by Bodhisattvas and other saintly beings, free from encountering adversaries;
  - f. All materials are spontaneously manifested as one wishes, no suffering from unfulfilled desires;
  - g. All beings are endowed with the body of the Vajra-god *Nārāyaṇa*, and devoid of self-attachment, hence no suffering of the flaming five aggregates.
- iv) The environment of the Pure Land is supremely congenial, beyond our imagination. It is a permanent world, not subject to the four phase transformations of construction, duration, destruction and vacant.
- ② All the devas and humans are automatically endowed with all the five supernatural powers: celestial eyes, celestial ears, power to penetrate past lives, power to know others' thoughts, and transcendental power in travel and flight.
- ③ All the devas and humans in the Pure Land enjoy blissful happiness surpassing that enjoyed by *bhikṣus* without outflow.

## **2) Advantages for those cultivating the path for emancipation**

Those who have been habitually cultivating the path for emancipation can find the following advantages in the Pure Land:

- ① There are ineffably countless number of Arhats in the Pure Land.
- ② All beings in the Pure Land are spontaneously free from self-attachment view, thus drastically accelerated the process of eliminating the afflictions of insight and cultivation.
- ③ Not only the Buddha and Bodhisattvas expound the Dharmas, but also the manifested birds and even the sound of breeze and flowing water pronounce various teachings in accordance to one's preference.

## **3) Advantages for those cultivating for the ultimate enlightenment**

The Pure Land established by Amitabha Buddha is an ideal cultivating site for accomplishing the Buddha Path and attain Buddhahood in one lifetime. The following will enumerate a few typical aspects:

- ① All beings born in the Pure Land are automatically free from the three types of retrogressions.
- ② All beings in the Pure Land constantly dwell in the right definite assembly, and all will attain nirvana.
- ③ All beings in the Pure Land will attain the stage of Bodhisattvas to attain Buddhahood in one-lifetime.
- ④ All sentient beings in the Pure Land can visit and pay homage to all Buddhas in the worlds of ten directions and to plant or to enhance their virtuous roots.
- ⑤ All Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land possess supreme wisdom and eloquence in expounding Dharmas.
- ⑥ With the help of transcendental powers, all Bodhisattvas can conveniently manifest in any world to rescue and deliver sentient beings who have affinity with them, and to facilitate their cultivation of the Six *Pāramitās*.
- ⑦ Because Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land can hear and learn any Dharma and can consult Buddha and other Bodhisattvas, they can cultivate their wisdom rapidly.

#### **4) Advantage for those who committed various transgressions**

The Pure Land provides Buddhist practitioners with incredible benefits. It can also provide immense benefits to the non-Buddhist people even evil ones, if they can, at the end of their life, recite the Amitabha Buddha's name wholeheartedly with faith and aspiration. By such minimal practice, not only can they avoid descending to the woeful realms, where they have to endure torments, but also can miraculously get rebirth in the Pure Land.

The establishment of the Pure Land and the benefits enjoyed by beings in Pure Land will be explicated in Chapter 2 of this volume in greater detail.

### III. THE FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PURE LAND METHOD

The fundamental characteristics of the Pure Land method are briefly introduced in four aspects: the teachings, the tenets, the practices and the fruition.

#### 1. The Teachings of the Pure Land Method

The teachings of the Pure Land gateway can be classified into two categories: the fundamental teachings and the general teachings. The fundamental teachings are composed of the Five *Sūtras* and One Treatise, while the general teachings comprise all the other *Sūtras* that mention or introduce the Pure Land gateway, and other treatises and commentaries on the Pure Land method.

Among hundreds of *Sūtras* and treatises relevant to the Pure Land gateway, our patriarch masters and historical Dharma masters selected five *Sūtras* and one treatise as the fundamental *Sūtras* of the Pure Land, and named them the Pure Land *Sūtras*. They are gradually added based on the first three kernel *Sūtras*—*the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*, *the Amitabha Sūtra* and *the Contemplation Sūtra*, and finally codified as the Five *Sūtras* and One Treatise of the Pure Land gateway.

##### (1) *The Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*

###### 1) A Brief Introduction of the *Sūtra*

The *Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* is the primary large *Sūtra* for learning and practising Pure Land Buddhism. Its complete name is *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan expounded by the Buddha* (《佛说无量寿经》). Twelve versions of the *Sūtra* were translated in Chinese, but only five versions are extant now. They are:

① “*The Sūtra of Immeasurable Pure and Equal Enlightenment*” (《无量清净平等觉经》), translated into Chinese by *Lokakṣema* (支娄迦讖) during the East Han Dynasty (25 – 220CE);

② “*The Amitabha Sūtra Expounded by the Buddha*” (《佛说阿弥陀经》), translated into Chinese by *Zhi Qian* (支谦) during the period of the Three Kingdoms (220 – 280CE);

- ③ “*The Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan Expounded by the Buddha*” (《佛说无量寿经》), translated by *Sanghavarman* (康僧铠) during the Cao Wei Dynasty (220–266CE);
- ④ “*The Section on the Congregation of Immeasurable Tathagata in the Sūtra of Great Treasure Assembly*” (《大宝积经：无量寿如来会》), translated by *Bodhiruci* (菩提流志) during Tang Dynasty (618—907CE);
- ⑤ “*The Sūtra of Majestic Adornment of Mahayana Immeasurable Lifespan*” (《大乘无量寿庄严经》), translated by Faxian (法贤) during Song Dynasty (960—1279CE).

## **2) The Gist of the *Sūtra***

- ① The *Sūtra* systematically and schematically introduces the process of how *Bhikṣu Dharmākara* established the Pure Land;
- ② It enumerates the Forty-Eight Great Vows;
- ③ It depicts the majestic wondrous environments of the Pure Land, and presents the unparalleled features of Amitabha Buddha and the extraordinary capabilities of beings there;
- ④ It summarises the requirements for the three classes of rebirth: to generate the Bodhicitta, to be exclusively mindful of Amitabha Buddha, and to observe precepts and to conduct meritorious virtues.
- ⑤ It explicates in detail the five sufferings, the five evil and the five burns of the *Saha* world, to exhort us to escape this miserable world.

Due to limitation of this volume, Chapter 2 will excerpt some text from this *Sūtra* to introduce the establishment of the Pure Land, the Forty-Eight Great Vows and the various meritorious virtues of the Pure Land.

## **(2) *The Amitabha Sūtra***

### **1) A Brief Introduction of the *Sūtra***

The complete title of the *Sūtra* is *the Amitabha Sūtra Expounded by the Buddha* (《佛说阿弥陀经》). Not only is this *Sūtra* mostly recited by Pure Land practitioners as their daily routine cultivation, but it is also accepted and recited by followers of other schools as well.

The *Sūtra* was translated into Chinese three times, but unfortunately only two versions are extant:

- ① “*The Amitabha Sūtra Expounded by the Buddha*” (《佛说阿弥陀经》), translated by Master *Kumārajīva* (鸠摩罗什) during the Yao Qin dynasty (384 - 417 CE);
- ② “*The Sūtra of Praising the Pure Land Buddha’s Mindful Protection*” (《称赞净土佛摄受经》), translated by Master Xuanzang (玄奘) during the Tang dynasty (618 -907 CE).

## 2) The Gist of the *Sūtra*

- ① *Śākyamuni* Buddha announced that there exists a world called the Land of Ultimate Bliss, located 100,000 *koṭis* Buddha Lands westward from here; and there is a Buddha named Amitabha in that land, who is right now expounding the Dharma.
- ② The *Sūtra* summarises the wondrous majestic adornment of the environmental and the life retributions to encourage beings to generate faith.
- ③ It exhorts sentient beings to develop aspiration to achieve rebirth in that land so as to dwell with all the superior virtuous saints.
- ④ It exclusively points out that the primary practice needed to get rebirth there is to recite Amitabha Buddha’s name.
- ⑤ It finally enumerates numerous Buddhas in the six directions all extending their wide and long tongues to authenticate the truthfulness of what *Śākyamuni* Buddha expounded.

*The Amitabha Sūtra* will be elucidated with Master Ouyi’s annotation in Chapter 4.

## (3) *The Contemplation Sūtra*

## 1) A Brief Introduction of the *Sūtra*

The complete title of the *Sūtra* is called *the Contemplation Sūtra of the Buddha of Immeasurable Lifespan Expounded by the Buddha*, (《佛说观无量寿佛经》). It was translated into Chinese by *Tripiṭaka* master *Kālayaśas* (曇良耶舍) from India, during the Liu Song dynasty (420–479 CE). There was another version translated by *Dharmamitra* (356~442CE), which is no longer in existence.

*The Contemplation Sūtra* is one of the three kernel *Sūtras*. It is not only welcomed and appreciated by the Pure Land patriarchs and Dharma masters, but also is well recognised and annotated by the patriarch masters of other Buddhist schools.

## 2) The Gist of the *Sūtra*

*The Contemplation Sūtra* clearly enumerates the practices needed for achieving rebirth in an operational structure. It also points out the fundamental tenets of rebirth in the Pure Land.

- ① It introduces the thirteen contemplations for meditative contemplation of the Pure Land, of Amitabha Buddha, of *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva and of *Mahasthamaprabhata* Bodhisattva, to ensure one to get rebirth in the Pure Land.
- ② It enumerates the three pure conducts for cultivation with scattered mind.
- ③ It categorises rebirth under nine grades, in three ranks, with detailed conditions respectively.
- ④ It points out the fundamental tenets of rebirth in the Pure Land: “**while the mind is formulating the Buddha, the mind is the Buddha.**”

The whole *Sūtra* will be explicated in Chapter 3, based on Master Shandao’s annotation.

## (4) The Chapter on the Practice and Vows of *Samantabhadra* Bodhisattva of the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*

### 1) A Brief Introduction of the *Sūtra*



*The Flower Ornament Sūtra* (The *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* in Sanskrit, 《大方广佛华严经》) is esteemed as the king of Mahayana *Sūtras*. It was translated into Chinese three times before it was completed. The first version was translated by *Buddhabhadra* (佛陀跋陀罗) around 420CE in 60 scrolls with 34 chapters. The second version was translated by *Śikṣānanda* (实叉难陀) around 699CE in 80 scrolls with 40 chapters, which has been widely studied and annotated. Later around 798CE, an additional part of the *Sūtra*, the section on *Entering the Dharma Realm* (the *Gaṇḍavyūha* section; 《入法界品》) was translated by *Prajñā* (般若).

This last added section, comprising 40 scrolls, is considered the epitome of the *Sūtra*. It is concluded by a chapter on *the Practice and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*, which summarises the cultivations of Bodhisattvas in ten great vow kings and directs and exhorts all practitioners to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land. Thus, this chapter alone is categorised in the fundamental Pure Land *Sūtras*.

## **2) The Gist of the Chapter on Practices and Vows of *Samantabhadra Bodhisattva***

① The Chapter enumerates and elucidates on the ten great vows of *Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*:

- i) pay homage and respect to all Buddhas;
- ii) praise the Thus Come Ones;
- iii) make abundant offerings;
- iv) repent misdeeds and evil karmas;
- v) rejoice at others' meritorious virtues;
- vi) request the Buddhas to turn the Dharma wheel;
- vii) request the Buddhas to remain in the world;
- viii) follow the teachings of the Buddha at all times;
- ix) accommodate and benefit all living beings;
- x) transfer all meritorious virtues universally.

② *Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* dedicates all meritorious virtues cultivated by means of the ten great vows to rebirth in the Pure Land, as the *Sūtra* states [1]:

**“I vow that when my life approaches its end,**

**All obstructions will be swept away;  
I will see Amitabha Buddha,  
And be born in his Land of Ultimate Bliss and Peace.”**

**(5) The Chapter on *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva’s  
Perfect Penetration Based on Buddha-Mindfulness  
of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra***

**1) A Brief Introduction of the *Sūtra***

*The Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (《大佛顶首楞严经》), a very famous *Sūtra* in Chinese Mahayana Buddhist schools, is known as the *Sūtra* for enlightenment, and also is considered a small encyclopaedia of Buddhism. It was translated in 705 CE by Śramaṇa Pāramiti (般刺密谛) from central India, with the assistance of Fang Rong (房融), Meghaśikha (弥伽释迦) and Huai Di (怀迪).

The tenet of the *Sūtra* is profound. With its beautiful and concise classic Chinese translation, it is widely recognised as one of the most difficult *Sūtras* to comprehend by most learners. Its contents are extensive and comprehensive, encompassing the revelation of the mind nature, the elucidation on the *tathāgatagarbha*, the establishment of cultivating site, the twenty-five perfect penetrations, the stages of Bodhisattvas, the transmigration of the seven realms, and the fifty skandhas demonic events etc.

The Chapter on *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva’s Perfect Penetration Based on Buddha-Mindfulness is excerpted from the chapter on the twenty-five perfect penetrations. Since it proposes the tenet of mindfulness of the Buddha and reveals the primary requirement of Buddha-mindfulness, it is codified as one of the *Five Fundamental Pure Land Sūtras* by Master Yinguang.

**2) The Gist of the Chapter on *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva’s  
Perfect Penetration Based on Buddha-Mindfulness**

① *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva reported that he had achieved perfect penetration by cultivating the samadhi of mindfulness of the Buddha. He also endeavours in mindfully protecting those practising Buddha-mindfulness and escorting them to get rebirth in the Pure Land. He can be recognised as the first patriarch master of the Pure Land in the Dharma realm.

② It exposes the tenet of interactive correspondence between Buddha and those mindful of him. If two people are wholeheartedly mindful of each other, they will never depart from each other life after life; otherwise, if one is mindful of the other, yet the other completely forgets the former, then they will not associate with each other even when they encounter each other in the next lives. The Buddhas of the ten directions are constantly mindful of sentient beings just as a mother would recollect her children. If the children run away, the mother only has the recollection with no result. If only the children are mindful of their mother, then they will never depart from each other in next lives. In brief, the mind of Buddha and the mind of sentient beings are always connected through induction. Thus, if sentient beings recollect the Buddha and are mindful of Buddha, they will definitely see the Buddha now or later.

③ It proposes that the operation of Buddha-mindfulness must be concentrated, that is, **“gathering the six faculties and keeping the pure mindfulness continuous.”**

## ***(6) The Treatise on Rebirth***

### **1) A Brief Introduction of *the Treatise on Rebirth***

*The Treatise on Rebirth* (《往生论》), with its complete title as *Verses of Aspiration for Rebirth and Upadeśa on the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* (《无量寿经优婆提舍愿生偈》), is the only treatise categorised into the fundamental Pure Land *Sūtras* and commentary. It is composed by *Vasubandhu* Bodhisattva, and translated into Chinese by *Bodhiruci* (菩提流志) during Wei Dynasty (386 – 534CE). *The Treatise on Rebirth* was commented by Master Tanluan (昙鸾大师; 476 – 542CE), who comprehensively explicated its imports and clarified many of the confusions about Pure Land doctrines that occurred at that time. Both the treatise and Master Tanluan’s commentary are indispensable Pure Land teachings for anyone who wish to learn the principles and teachings of the Pure Land gateway.

### **2) The Gist of *the Treatise on Rebirth***

The treatise is composed of two parts: the part of verses and the part of explication. The gist of the treatise is:

① It summarises the five gateways of mindfulness:

- i) **The gateway of homage:** the physical conducts to pay homage exclusively to Amitabha Buddha by people who aspire for rebirth in the Pure Land;
  - ii) **The gateway of praise:** the oral conducts to praise exclusively the name of Amitabha Buddha and his illuminating features;
  - iii) **The gateway of aspiration:** the mind always aspires to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land;
  - iv) **The gateway of contemplation:** wisely contemplates the meritorious virtues of the majestic adornments of the environmental and life retributions of the Pure Land;
  - v) **The gateway of dedication:** dedicate all attained meritorious virtues to sentient beings and to the Pure Land, so as to accomplish the great compassion.
- ② It enumerates twenty-nine majestic adornments of the Pure Land and condenses them into one Dharma phrase—the one pure mind, or the reality.

## 2. The Tenets of the Pure Land Method

The principles of rebirth in the Pure Land can be comprehended at two levels: the phenomenon level and the noumenon level:

### (1) The Tenets on the Perspective of Phenomenon

On the perspective of phenomenon, Amitabha Buddha originally vowed to establish a pure Buddha-land so that every being with faith and aspiration can get rebirth there with minimum requirement in conducts that can be performed by anyone. Having designed the blueprint of this land, he spent inconceivably countless *kalpas* to cultivate all the *pāramitās* to adorn his land. Eventually, he finished the construction and adornment of the land, thus he spontaneously became Amitabha Buddha, the lord of the Pure Land. After he fulfilled his vows, he welcomed and escorted all those with faith, aspiration and adequate practice to achieve rebirth in his Pure Land. It is similar to a worldly ambitious man with eternal life, who vows to build an enormous mansion for unlimited number of guests to dwell. After he completed the construction and adornment of the grand mansion, he can invite anyone to live in the mansion.

According to the doctrines of Consciousness-only school, a determined and concentrated mind on the verge of death has almost decisive power in influencing the maturity of projecting karmas. Additionally, we have the empowerment of Amitabha Buddha to welcome and escort us to get rebirth in the Pure Land, if our faith is sincere and our aspiration is earnest at the end of life.

The chapter on *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva's Perfect Penetration Based on Buddha-Mindfulness unravels the key for the tenets of rebirth. According to the interactive correspondence between minds of beings, if both minds recollect and are mindful of each other, they will never depart from each other life after life. Amitabha Buddha has omniscience. He is constantly mindful of us, the sentient beings; if only we could turn our mind to mindfulness of him like his mindfulness of us, we would definitely see him now or at the end of our life. Then, he could welcome and escort us to the Pure Land.

## (2) The Tenets on the Perspective of Noumenon

*The Contemplation Sūtra* exposes to us, **“All Buddha-Tathāgatas have a body of the Dharma-realm, which enters the mind and contemplations of all sentient beings. Therefore, when one contemplates a Buddha, one's mind has a Buddha's thirty-two physical characteristics and eighty excellent marks. While the mind is formulating the Buddha, the mind is the Buddha. The ocean of Right Omniscience is formed by one's mind and contemplations.”**

This paragraph reveals to us:

① Amitabha Buddha has a body of the Dharma-realm, pervading all space, thus can enter the minds of all sentient beings. On the other hand, our minds are intrinsically inseparable from the Buddha nature. Thus, at noumenon level, the minds of all sentient beings share the same Buddha nature with all the Buddhas, so it can also be extended boundless in the ten directions.

② While we are contemplating the Buddha in our mind, our mind is the Buddha at the moment, entailing complete alignment with Amitabha Buddha.

Master Ouyi elucidated this principle more clearly in his annotation of *the Amitabha Sūtra*. “Believing in self is to believe that our present thought-moment of mind is not the flesh heart, not the perceiver nor the mental object.

It extends temporarily without beginning and end, and it expands spatially without boundary. It constantly adapts to conditions, yet it constantly remains invariable. All the lands, as numerous as dust in the space in the ten directions, are originally matters manifested in our thought-moment of mind. Although we are ignorant, confused, inverted and deluded; if we could return to the mind for a thought-moment, we would definitely achieve rebirth in the Land of Bliss intrinsically endowed in our own mind, without scepticism and doubt. This is called believing in self.”

We are different from Buddhas because we are deluded and obscured by ignorance. At the moment while we are contemplating or reciting the Buddha-name, our mind is returned towards the Buddha. Since our mind is boundless, the Pure Land is certainly within the scope of our mind. Hence, we are naturally capable of achieving rebirth in that land.

The tenets of rebirth in the Pure Land will be explicated in Chapters 3 and 4.

### **3. The Practice of the Pure Land Method**

As briefly introduced in Section II, cultivations of the Pure Land gateway are incredibly convenient and direct. It comprises sincere faith, earnest aspiration and some practices such as Buddha-recitation or dedication of other virtuous conducts. These practices will be introduced in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5, and summarised in Chapter 6.

### **4. The Fruition of the Pure Land Method**

The fruition of the Pure Land cultivation can be categorised into two steps: the first step is to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, and the second step is to swiftly accomplish the Buddha Path. The second step is guaranteed and is almost spontaneous as explained in Chapters 2 and 4. The first step is to terminate transmigration in the six realms and to establish the foundation for the second step, so it is pivotal. Therefore, most of the texts of the following chapters will focus and elaborate on how to ensure successful rebirth in the Pure Land.

The results of rebirth in the Pure Land for most ordinary practitioners of Buddha-recitation and other virtuous conducts are categorised into nine grades in three ranks, depending on their effort of cultivation. The three ranks from

low to high are inferior, medium and superior respectively, and each rank encompasses lower, middle and upper grades.

The fruition of the Pure Land method will be elaborated in Chapters 3 and 4.

Faith and aspiration are the two absolutely necessary conditions for achieving rebirth in the Pure Land. As an introduction, this subsection will present some examples of successful rebirth, so as to motivate general people to establish faith and aspiration. All these examples are excerpted from *the Records of Saints and Sages of the Pure Land* [2].

## **(1) Examples of Successfully Reborn Monks**

### **1) Daozhen**

Daozhen (道珍), dwelled in Lushan (庐山) to cultivate the contemplation of Amitabha Buddha according to instructions in *the Contemplation Sūtra*, in the early years of Liang Dynasty (梁; 502 – 557CE). However, he still possessed some doubt and scepticism in his heart, so he had not established unwavering aspiration. One night he witnessed, in his dream, a large boat which carried a multitude of people who said that they were going to the Western Land of Bliss. Daozhen wished to go with them too, but he was told, “You have not constructed the bathroom for the monks, nor have you recited *the Amitabha Sūtra*, hence your meritorious virtues for the Pure Land are not accomplished yet, so you cannot go.” When he woke up from his dream, Daozhen immediately started to construct the bathroom for the monks, and began to recite *the Amitabha Sūtra*, without interrupt, for many years.

Later, while he was cultivating contemplation in his room, he suddenly saw a man carrying a silver pedestal to him, telling him, “Dharma master’s karmic retribution is exhausted, you will ascend onto this pedestal. Considering your meritorious virtues and cultivation, you should ascend on the golden pedestal. But your original aspiration was not earnest, and with doubt and scepticism. Thus, you can only ascend on this silver pedestal.” Daozhen was full of joy in his mind. He secretly recorded the event on paper, and hid the paper in the *Sūtra* box. On the night when he passed away, the mountain top was illuminated as if lighted by thousands of torches. The magnificent scene was witnessed by people from afar. Initially, they misinterpreted the cause as the event of local officials seeing the emperor. In the morning, they realised that Daozhen had

attained rebirth. Later, his disciples found his note in the *Sūtra* box and realised that the auspicious signs were associated with the demise of Daozhen.

## 2) Daosheng

Daosheng (道昇) was from Wei district of Hebei province during Tang Dynasty (唐朝; 618 – 907CE). In his childhood, he was pure and talented, with extraordinary comprehension capability as if cultivated from previous lives. He joined the monastic under Dharma Master Lingyou (灵佑法师) and attentively studied Mahayana teachings. Once, he expounded *the Treatise on the Ten Ground* until night. When the sky turned dark, there was no candle. Then Daosheng raised his hand high, exotic radiance shone from his palm, illuminating the large hall. Seeing the shocked audience, he said, “This radiance is inherently possessed by my hand all the time, why feel surprised?”

Daosheng’s mind was usually preoccupied with Western Pure Land, and he aspired to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha. Later, while he was dwelling in the Baoying Temple (报应寺), he knew the date of his rebirth in advance. Hence, he informed people with affinity, to come to bid farewell to him in early August.

On that appointed day, Daosheng had no physical pain at all. He ascended the podium to conduct rites for disciples of the four assemblies to receive the Bodhisattva precepts. The incense burner emitted exotic fragrance, his instructions were congruous with the tenets, making all the people deeply moved, earnest and respectful. At that time, Daosheng looked up at the sky, and saw multitude of celestial beings in the space, performing melodious heavenly music with various musical instruments. The music was clear and fresh, reverberating throughout space. Daosheng told the assembly, “The devas from the *Tusita* heaven have come to invite me to ascend there. However, the celestial realm is still subject to birth-and-death, and is not my aspired destination. I have always aspired earnestly to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. Why can I not fulfil this aspiration?” After these words, all the celestial music immediately vanished, and replaced by incense, flowers and music bands of the Pure Land which pervaded the whole space. Like beautiful clouds, they congregated in the sky, then circulated in the space above the assembly. All the people of the assembly witnessed this magnificent scene that day. Daosheng then announced, “Take good care of yourselves. Now the auspicious saintly



images of the Pure Land come to welcome me, I am going!” Having said that, he passed away on the podium, at the age of 69.

### 3) Mingzhan

Mingzhan (明瞻), with family name Du (杜), was born in Hengzhou (nowadays Zhengding county of Hebei province), during the Sui Dynasty (隋朝; 581 – 619CE). He established the aspiration of departing from worldly life at youth. At 17, he successfully obtained Juren degree (举人; the middle academic degree in the Chinese old educational system), and was recommended to participate in the imperial examination for Jinshi (进士; the highest academic degree). Nevertheless, he did not go for the examination. Instead, he went to Yingjue Temple (应觉寺) in the Feilong Mountain (飞龙山) to join the monastic.

During Sui Dynasty, Mingzhan dwelled in the capital city, frequently presided over Dharma lectures. Later in one year of Tang Dynasty, 627CE, he was invited by the emperor to sit on the throne of the emperor to accept offerings. He extensively discussed how wise emperors would govern the country, then he exhorted the emperor to compassionately rescue and protect all people as his objective. Hearing this kind encouragement, the emperor was overjoyed. He enacted a law to reserve the three months-- January, May and September—as the observance month, and the six days-- the eighth, fourteenth, fifteenth, twenty-third, and the last two days of each month as the *Upasatha* days, strictly prohibiting killing in these months and days. When receiving offerings, Mingzhan would give them to the other monks or sponsor the writings of Mahayana *Sūtras*.

Later, Mingzhan dwelled solitarily in Zhiju Temple (知炬寺) in Mount Taiyi (太乙山). In his final years, he earnestly aspired to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. When someone mocked him, saying that he was too old for that, he retorted, “If only people have sincere faith and earnest aspiration, they could achieve rebirth and see Amitabha Buddha with merely ten recitations at the end of their life. With my sincere faith and earnest aspiration, I am assured to get rebirth in the Pure Land. Why doubt with scepticism?”

In the winter of 628CE, he became ill and realised that his day for rebirth drew near. He went to Xingshan Temple (兴善寺) in the capital city to hold a feast to bid farewell to his friends. Even the prime ministers Fang Xuanling (房玄龄)

and Du Ruhui (杜如晦) participated in the feast. Mingzhan returned to Zhiju Temple that night, to contemplate concentratively on the Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha assiduously without rest. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of October, he suddenly told his assistant, “Amitabha Buddha has come.” A little while later, he said, “*Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva and *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva have also come. Of the sixteen contemplations of *the Contemplation Sūtra*, I have accomplished the twelfth contemplation, that is, the contemplation of rebirth in the lotus in the Pure Land. The other contemplations are not attained yet. Today, having seen the extraordinary and auspicious signs, I will get rebirth.” After these words, he joined his palms with joy, and passed away peacefully, at age 70.

#### 4) Xiongjun

Xiongjun (雄俊), with family name Zhou (周), was from Chengdu of Sichuan province. He was skilful in eloquence but lacked discipline and virtuous conducts. He joined the monastic but soon resumed secular life and became a soldier. However, he re-joined the monastic after a while, feeling shame and remorse. He cultivated Buddha-recitation as daily practice.

In the era of Dali of Daizong of Tang Dynasty (唐代宗大历年间; 766-779CE), Xiongjun died suddenly. When he passed the underground palace, he was reprimanded by Yama, who ordered to send him to hell. Xiongjun then shouted, “It is stated in *the Contemplation Sūtra* that even after one had committed the five heinous acts, one can still get rebirth in the Pure Land if one only recites the Buddha-name ten times at the end of one’s life. Although I had made many transgressions, I have not committed any of the five heinous acts. According to my daily practice of Buddha-recitation, I should achieve rebirth in the Pure Land; otherwise, the Buddhas in the ten directions are liars.” Having said these words, he joined his palms and, with extreme veneration, recited the Buddha-name wholeheartedly. At that time, a lotus flower of seven treasures suddenly appeared, and Xiongjun rode the lotus flower and flew to the west. Someone who returned from the underground world revealed the event to the world.

#### 5) Zhongmin

Zhongmin (仲闵) was from Quzhou (衢州; present Xian’an county of Zhejiang province) during the Song Dynasty (宋朝; 960—1279CE). He first studied in

Xiangfu Temple (祥符寺), followed Dharma Master Nanwen (南文法师) later, and was well-known for his proficiency in eloquence.

In 1111CE, he returned to his hometown, and dwelled in Mount Fushi (浮石山). A large group of followers suddenly congregated. He once said, “If my disciples are less than five hundred, I will not expound voluminous *Sūtras*.” Thus, he taught *the Golden Light Sūtra* and *the Section of Universal Gateways*, etc all his life.

When the date of his rebirth approached, he assembled the multitude and ascended the lion throne in the great hall. As soon as he was seated in lotus position, a silver pedestal suddenly manifested from the west. Zhongmin said, “I have comprehended the ultimate truth, and have been aspiring to take the golden pedestal. Why is it that I cannot have it.” Then he closed his eyes and demised.

## 6) Chongwen

Chongwen (崇文), his birth was not clearly recorded. He was a disciple of Master Lianchi (莲池大师), the eighth patriarch master of the Pure Land school. He became blind later, and dwelled in a quiet hut in Jiangsu province, reciting the Buddha-name diligently. He also conducted the Yoga ceremony of flaming mouth (a ritual to relieve the hunger of ghosts) to feed the hungry ghosts every night for three years without interruption.

On 14 March 1658, he asked his disciple Xingxian (行先) to tell his followers of both monastic and laity in the town, “Monk Chongwen will attain rebirth tomorrow, please come to bid farewell to him.” The next morning, more than thirty people congregated around him. Chongwen sat on the bed, and asked his disciples to recite *the Amitabha Sūtra*. After they finished the recitation, he passed away peacefully. The room was permeated with fragrance, which lasted for three days.

## 7) Monk Donggua

Monk Donggua (东瓜和尚), with the family name of Sun (孙), was from Hangzhou, during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912CE). Because he was fond of eating east melon, he was called Donggua Monk (Monk East Melon). He joined the monastic of Huayan Temple (华严寺). Silent in character, he roamed the

streets all day long, for more than ten years. No one was aware of his cultivated state. He was friendly only with Monk Huizhao (慧照) of the neighbouring temple. One month before he died, he told Huizhao, “I am leaving on the sixth of January, please come to bid me farewell.”

On the appointed day, Monk Donggua returned from an offering feast in Fahui Nunnery (法慧庵), and found Monk Huizhao waiting for him for a long time. He then asked Monk Huizhao, “Why have you come here?” Monk Huizhao smilingly replied, “You told me that you are going to achieve rebirth today, and you asked me to come to say goodbye.” Monk Donggua responded, “If you had not reminded me, I would have forgotten about it.” He then washed up, changed into clean robes, and then paid homage to the Buddha image. Subsequently, he said to Monk Huizhao, “Since I am leaving permanently, I cannot go without a stanza. Please write down on my behalf the following: ‘Wandering in the streets all day long, yet diligently reciting the Buddha-name in the mind. All the worldly people do not know, there is another paradise.’” After these words, he passed away delightedly and peacefully.

## 8) Suiqin

Suiqin (遂钦), named Yuecheng (越成), was from Wuxi of Jiangsu province. He became a *śrāmaṇera* at the age of 9. A few years later, he encountered a nun who encouraged him to cultivate the Buddha-recitation. He then recited the Buddha-name exclusively, without interruption, while walking, standing, sitting or reclining. Shortly after, he helped to renovate the great hall when he dwelled in the Baiyi Nunnery (白衣庵). He then cultivated the Buddha-recitation practice even more assiduously, and received the complete monastic precepts at the age of 50.

On one early morning someday in March of the year when he was 55, he called his disciple and told him, “I am leaving.” His disciple replied, “My master does not have any illness, why say that?” Then the disciple began to weep with lamentation. Suiqin exhorted him, “Do not be foolish. What benefit is it to weep for me? You should recite the Buddha-name attentively.” He then faced westward and sat in lotus position. The Master and his disciple recited the Buddha-name together. Suiqin passed away when one piece of incense was burnt out. This event happened in 1788CE.

## 9) Master Juxing

Master Juxing (具行大师), named Ribian (日辨), was from Huili of Yunnan province. His parents died when he was a child. When he was grown up, he was married into a Zeng (曾) family, and had two sons. His family was utterly destitute, so he led his family members to work in the Zhusheng Temple (祝圣寺) in Mount Jizu (鸡足山). In 1910, when he was 21, he joined the monastic together with his mother-in-law, wife, brother, brother-in-law, sons and a nephew. He received the complete monastic precepts under Master Xuyun (虚云大师) soon after.

Master Juxing was ugly, illiterate and had difficulty in hearing. Master Xuyun taught him to cultivate reciting Amitabha Buddha's name and the name of *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva and to aspire rebirth in the Pure Land. He then detached from all worldly affairs, and exclusively cultivated the Buddha-recitation and endeavoured in all sorts of ascetic cultivations. He kept reciting the Buddha-name without interruption. He usually undertook planting vegetables or did other toils in the morning, simultaneously reciting the Buddha-name during the process. In the evening, he would prostrate or sit before the Buddha image, while reciting the Buddha-name. He sometimes implored the Dharma masters to orally expound the teachings for him, memorising every word in mind. Within two years, he learned and recited many *Sūtras*.

In 1915, Master Xuyun encouraged him to visit other famous temples to enhance his knowledge. He returned to Yunnan in 1920, to participate in the reconstruction of the Yunqi Temple (云栖寺) in Mount Huating (华亭山) of Kunming, organised by Master Xuyun. When Master Xuyun asked him whether he had seen his family member, he replied, "No, I do not care about other matters." Master Xuyun asked him again, "What do you want to do?" He answered, "Let me do the most arduous toils or those hard work that others do not want to do." Hence, Master Xuyun let him dwell in the subsidiary Shengyin Temple (胜因寺). Master Juxing planted trees, carried stones, dug earth, swept the court, and cooked, without any rest. More importantly, he never stopped reciting the Buddha-name even while doing work.

Master Juxing did not accumulate any extra material possessions, nor did he talk much. When everybody was at rest, he would prostrate at *the Diamond*

*Sūtra* and at the *Pure Land Sūtras*, with one prostration for each character recited. At dawn, he would join the assembly for routine practice. While participating in the construction of Haihui Tower (海会塔), he told Master Xuyun that he would permanently dwell in the tower when it was finished, indicating he would get rebirth.

In 1924, while Master Xuyun was conducting the monastic precepts ordination, Master Juxing was assigned as the authenticating *Ācārya*. At the Dharma Hall, he was asked by the precept receivers to give some instructions. He answered modestly, “I joined the monastic halfway, and I am totally illiterate. All I know is to recite Amitabha Buddha.”

One day, he sold all his possessions to hold a feast for all monks. When the others asked him where he was going, he only smiled, without giving any answer. As soon as the precept ordination ceremony was over, he immediately went back to Shengyin Temple. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of March, after study-time at noon, he went to the square for drying rice, which was behind the Shengyin Temple. He was dressed in his formal robe. He put some straws on the ground, and sat on the straw, with his left hand holding a small bell and the right hand knocking the wooden fish. He faced westward, and recited the Buddha-name single-mindedly. He passed away in the evening and set himself alight by inner samadhi fire. Many people saw the bright light of fire.

Next day, many people began to look for him. They found him sitting on the ashes of burnt straw, with vivid countenance as if in meditation (see his photograph, Fig 1.1).



Fig 1.1 Master juxing

When Master Xuyun was informed of this situation, he immediately realised that Master Juxing had achieved rebirth in the Pure Land at saintly stage.

This news was shocking, and attracted many reporters and government officials who came to see him,

including General Tang Jiyao (唐继尧) and the director of treasury, Wang Zhucun (王竹村).

After Master Xuyun recited several verses to praise Master Juxing's cultivation, he struck the bell. At the sound of the bell being struck, Master Juxing's whole body suddenly collapsed into ashes. This miraculous process was witnessed by many people. Master Xuyun then asked his disciples to collect Master Juxing's ashes and to keep them in the Haihui Tower, to fulfil his wish. Master Juxing was 49 that year.

## **(2) Examples of Successfully Reborn Nuns**

### **1) Langran**

Langran (朗然), with family name Shen (沈), was from Jiaxing of Zhejiang province. When she was 18, having witnessed the excruciating agony of her sister-in-law giving birth to a child, she resolved not to get married. With the agreement of her parents, she joined the monastic in the county's Jingchi Nunnery (净池庵) to exclusively cultivate the Pure Land gateway. After a period of practice, she could recite the Buddha-name without interruption, whether she was busy with work or at rest.

One day in 1808, she told her disciple Fuyuan (福缘), "I dreamt of the lotus lake of seven treasures three times in the last three months. I was sitting in lotus position in the lotus flower. Hence, I am going to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. You should consolidate your aspiration, recite the Buddha-name wholeheartedly. It will not fail you. Please be diligent and do not miss this chance." On the 25th of March, she passed away peacefully in sitting position, without any ailment, at the age of 71.

### **2) Dawu**

Dawu (大悟), also called Falin (法林), with family name Yuan (袁), was from Nantong of Jiangsu province. She was engaged to a boy from the Shao family since childhood. Her fiancé died before they got married, but she was determined not to marry others. One day, she went to join the monastic at the Dabei Nunnery (大悲庵) on the west side of Nantong. She earnestly aspired to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land and cultivated Buddha-recitation diligently. She often said, "The Buddha Dharma is vast and boundless, but only the Pure

Land method is most adapted to our capacities and conditions. Prostrating at the *Sūtra*, meditating with incense and other meritorious activities are for the purpose of eliminating unwholesome karmas, and to ensure that we accomplish the Pure Land conducts.”

After Dawu joined the monastic, she endeavoured in ascetic cultivations, participated in all sorts of hard toils, such as fetching water, grinding grain and cooking meals, etc. She needed only basic sustenance and did not seek extra possessions nor other cravings. In time, her Pure Land cultivation became more and more assiduous, sincere and devoted.

The Dabei Convent where she dwelled was dilapidated. Dawu then raised funds not only to renovate it, but also to build an additional Buddha Hall. She also planted vegetables to facilitate others to concentrate on Pure Land cultivations. On seeing anyone distressed or worried, she would try to expound Dharma to console them, and to get them relieved and moved.

At old age, feeling her physical condition and vigour gradually decaying and waning, she went on a pilgrimage to Mount Putuo (普陀山) and Mount Jiuhua (九华山), with auspicious signs frequently manifesting.

In February of 1927, she was unwell with a minor illness. She then wrote the following verse, “Let go all worldly affairs, only Buddha-recitation is the true mind. The one-mind relieves a person of the sufferings of the *Saha* world, and eradicates all greed, hatred, delusions and affections. Arrive at the bright platform without any attachment, and penetrate the Dharma-body to escape from the suffering cycles. Completely fulfil the Pure Land aspiration and then return to the *Saha* world to deliver sentient beings.” On the 18th of the month, she witnessed Amitabha Buddha emitting brilliant radiance to welcome her, and passed away peacefully, at the age of 73.

### **(3) Examples of Successfully Reborn Lay Men**

The Pure Land method is applicable to everyone, regardless of one’s capacity and living condition. *The Records of Saints and Sages of Pure Land* included hundreds of lay men and lay women of diverse situations. In the following two subsections, we will select some typical examples to demonstrate the success of achieving rebirth by different people.



### 1) Ma Ziyun

Ma Ziyun (马子云) successfully became a Juren (a middle degree) in the official examination and was assigned as a junior officer in Jing County (泾县). Once, he was dispatched to guard the transportation of tax rice from the prefecture to the capital. Unfortunately, the boat capsized during a heavy storm and all the rice sank into the river, and he was put into prison. While in jail, Ziyun wholeheartedly recited the Buddha-name for five years, until he was released due to amnesty. After that, he dwelled solitarily in a temple in Mount Nanling (南陵山) to cultivate Pure Land practices diligently, eating only lunch every day.

One day in 751CE, he told someone, “Because of the misfortune in my life, I can assiduously cultivate the Buddha Dharma. Now, my Pure Land conducts are accomplished, so I will get rebirth in the Land of Bliss.” The next day, he washed up, changed into new clothes, and then sat in upright position, with his palms joined respectfully. After a short while, exotic fragrance permeated the room, and Ziyun announced, “The Buddha has come.” He died instantly after saying that phrase.

### 2) Zhang Zhongkui

Zhang Zhongkui (张钟馗) lived in Chang'an during Tang Dynasty (618 – 907CE), butchering chickens as his profession. On the verge of his death, he saw a man dressed in red, chasing a flock of chickens in front of him and shouting, “Peck! Peck!” All the chickens then pecked Zhongkui. Blood was gushing out of his eyes and he experienced excruciating agony. At that time, a monk was preaching Dharmas nearby. The monk erected a Buddha image and encouraged Zhongkui to recite the Buddha-name. Zhongkui followed the monk's instructions and recited the Buddha-name attentively. Suddenly, fragrance filled the room and all the chickens disappeared. Zhongkui passed away in a sitting position.

### 3) Wen Yanbo

Wen Yanbo (文彦博), also called Kuanfu (宽夫), was from Fenzhou of Shanxi province, during the Song Dynasty (960–1279CE). He had been a high government official for fifty years, including being the prime minister. He was also assigned as the editing director of scripture translation and was conferred the title of “Duke of Lu State” (潞国公) by the emperor.

Yanbo was a devoted Buddhist disciple. At old age, he became even more diligent in cultivating Buddhism and attentively recited the Buddha-name without interruption. Whether walking, standing, sitting or reclining, he practised the Buddha-recitation routine, with no weariness or indolence. He once expressed his aspiration, “I wish to maintain constant perseverance, and diligently cultivate all virtues. I wish to be enlightened to the mind nature, and to deliver all sentient beings.”

Wen Yanbo lived in the capital city. He once assisted Dharma Master Jingyan (净严法师) to assemble 100,000 people for a Pure Land Dharma congregation, resulting in numerous people being delivered, including many officials and intellectuals. He attained rebirth in the Pure Land at the age of 91.

#### 4) Yang Jiayi

Yang Jiayi (杨嘉祎), also called Banghua (邦华), was from Ji'an of Jiangxi province during Ming Dynasty. He was conferred the Xiucan degree (the elementary degree in official examination) in the era of Wanli (万历年间; 1573 – 1620CE). He was fond of reading widely without weariness, since childhood. Later, he started to study Buddhist teachings. At the age of 13, he began to observe strictly the precept of no-killing, and to refrain from harming animals. At 20, he enrolled into Guozijian (国子监), the imperial university in Nanjing.

Later, he suffered from an acute illness. In his dream, he went to hell and saw *Kṣitigarbha* Bodhisattva. After he woke up from the dream, he started to undertake the conduct of releasing lives, and invited monks to recite both the *Sūtras* and Amitabha Buddha's name. Not long after, he told the people, “I am going to achieve rebirth. The blue lotus flower has manifested in front of me. Isn't that an auspicious sign?” Hence, he kept reciting the Buddha-name day and night without interruption.

He asked the assistant to extinguish the candle, saying, “I am constantly in bright light, and there is no need for candles.” The assistant asked, “What did you see?” “I saw lotus flowers unfolding in four colours.” Jiayi replied. The assistant queried, “Have you seen Amitabha Buddha?” He answered, “I saw Amitabha Buddha. He is a thousand *zhang* (a Chinese unit of length, equivalent to 3.3m) in height.” The assistant again queried, “How about *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva?” Jiayi answered, “With the same appearance as Amitabha Buddha.

Only *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva has not appeared.” Having said that, Jiayi suddenly stood up and with incense in hand, announced, “The meritorious virtues of *the Amitabha Sūtra* is ineffable! Ineffable! I have accomplished the rebirth of superior rank!” He died after these words.

### 5) Mr. Chen

Mr. Chen, an *upāsaka*, was from Changshu of Jiangsu province. He got up early every morning, silently lighted incense and recited *Sūtras* and the Buddha-name every day. Nobody was aware of his secret cultivation. He cultivated for quite a few years without interruption, regardless of severe climate or other unfavourable condition. One day in July of 1835, he suddenly announced, “I am going to the West Land on 23<sup>rd</sup> of September.” His family did not believe him, as he had no illness.

Three days before his rebirth, Mr. Chen manifested some slight illness, but his behaviour was normal. On the day he predicted, he passed away in sitting position. The family members began to wail around him. He opened his eyes, briefly instructed them, and then said, “I am leaving.” He then closed his eyes, and died. At that time, all the pores of his body emitted exotic fragrance. After the funeral, the fragrance lasted in his room for another three days.

### 6) The Beggar at the East Gate

The beggar at the east gate, dwelled in a shabby hut near the Mingxing Bridge of Songjiang. Every day, he recited *the Prajna Heart Sūtra* in front of the gates of the shops, then he would ask for one penny. If someone gave him money, he would express his gratitude earnestly; otherwise, if anyone scolded him, he did not mind at all. The moment he begged enough money to buy simple food for his sustenance, he would go home, close his door and recite the Buddha-name. A local official, Cai Xizhai (蔡西斋) was surprised upon hearing his story. He personally went to visit the beggar with a lot of food and gave him some money to renovate his hut. However, the beggar declined his donation. Then Xizhai said, “What I am giving you is from my salary, and not from corruption or robbery.”

The beggar explained, “I know about your pure ethical principles. What I fear is that the comfortable living condition and surplus food will change my determination, so I truly cannot accept them. May I make an offering feast to

the monks on behalf of Mr. Cai?” The beggar then took all the food and money given by Mr. Cai to Dongchan Temple (东禅寺) to make offerings so as to accumulate merits for himself and Mr Cai. He then returned to the hut, and carried on the Buddha-recitation practice as usual. In the era of Jiaqing (嘉庆; 1796-1821) of Qing Dynasty, the beggar passed away in sitting position with no illness.

### **7) The Dull Taoist**

A dull Taoist, with family name Wang (王), used to live in Beijing. He was born dull. At an early age, both his parents died, without leaving any living sustenance for him. He just stayed at home idly, doing nothing throughout the day. When someone gave him money, he could not even distinguish the amount received. Later, a Taoist, Master Chen (陈道人) took him in as his disciple. Master Chen asked him to sweep the court and collect firewood during the day, and to recite Amitabha Buddha’s name several hundred times every evening, and then to prostrate before the Buddha, for the duration of burning one incense. At the beginning, the dull Taoist could not enunciate Buddha name clearly. Whenever he was drowsy, Master Chen would beat him with a bamboo, and reprimanded, “You are so dull. Be more diligent!” Three years passed in this way.

One evening, the dull Taoist burst out laughing unexpectedly. Master Chen wanted to beat him again. The dull Taoist suddenly said coherently as never before, “You cannot beat me today.” When Master Chen asked him for the reason, he replied, “Master, you have cultivated dull meditation for eighteen years without realising the correct method. If only you sincerely recite the Buddha-name and prostrate before the Buddha, you would have achieved rebirth in the Pure Land long time ago.” Master Chen was perplexed, and was unable to comprehend his meaning. The next day, the dull Taoist climbed to the top of a mountain, faced west, joined his palms, and passed away standing. At his cremation, two pieces of relics appeared.

### **8) Zhu Ziqiao**

*Upāsaka* Zhu Ziqiao (朱子桥) was born in Jinan of Shandong province where his father was an official. He was famous for his filiality since childhood. At middle age, he successively acted as the military governor of county and

province. After he resigned at middle age, he dedicated his time on rescuing and relieving affairs. He was in charge of the rescuing and relieving team in Henan, Shan'xi and Gansu during drought disasters, and the Jianghuai flood catastrophe, saving tens of millions of people. After 50, he began to learn Buddhism, and follow Master Yinguang to exclusively cultivate the Pure Land gateway. Not only did he continually recite the Buddha-name all day long, but also attentively consolidated his faith, aspiration and practice.

At the same time, he participated actively in all virtuous conducts. For instance, he helped to establish the Bliss Temple in Harbin (哈尔滨极乐寺); to renovate the Ci'en Temple (慈恩寺), Dayan Pagoda (大雁塔), Famen Temple (法门寺), the Pagoda for Buddha's relics (佛舍利塔), Daxingshan Temple (大兴善寺), and the pagodas of Master Xuanzang (玄奘大师), Master Daoxuan (道宣大师), Master Kuiji (窥基大师) and Master Yuance (圆测大师) etc., in Shan'xi Province. To reinvigorate Buddhism in Shan'xi, he helped to print the Buddhist canon and to advocate various forms of cultivating assembly.

Every day, he went to sleep after midnight and would get up after four hours to start his recitation of *Sūtras* and Buddha-name, without exception all year round. Even when he was travelling on the train, he was steadfast in the routine. One day, he was diagnosed with cancer. He planned to go to Beijing for treatment, but changed his mind after he heard Master Yinguang's instructions. Instead, he turned to diligently recite the Buddha-name and the name of *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva, resulting in the miraculous disappearance of the tumour.

During the Japanese war, Ziqiao undertook to rescue and relieve the people from tribulation, with his involvement covering a large area from Nanjing to Hubei, and from Sichuan to Shan'xi. Because of his long-time endeavour, he became seriously ill, with hematemesis, asthma and hydronephrosis. Nevertheless, he still continued his activities in promoting Dharma and benefiting sentient beings.

On 12 January 1941, during a disaster in Xi'an, he dwelled in a boarding home for children. After he washed up and shaved in the morning, he started to write until late at night, about one hundred calligraphic works which he promised others. His second son assisted him and repeatedly persuaded him to rest. But Ziqiao answered smilingly, "No need, since I am going to rest permanently."

After he finished the works, he wrote another four scrolls specifically for his son as souvenir. Then he gathered his friends in the rescuing team to make arrangements for four unfulfilled issues. He later remarked, “Although I have many children and grandchildren, they are contented with simple life, so I have nothing to worry about.” The others persuaded him to take a rest, and he agreed. On the next morning, after he washed up, he sat on the bed, and passed away, full of smiles and with vivid countenance as if alive. Three days later, when the others put him into the coffin, his limbs were supple, and the crown of his head was still warm.

### 9) Li Jihua

*Upāsaka* Li Jihua (李济华), with Dharma name Zhituo (智脱), was from Jiangsu province. He graduated from the College of Measurement during late Qing Dynasty and enrolled in the Bureau of Measurement of the Army in 1912. To demonstrate his aspiration, he changed his name to Jihua (meaning to relieve China). He also joined the Chinese Revolutionary League (同盟会) and participated in the Second Revolution. At the failure of the revolution, he was caught and put into prison. Fortunately, he was rescued and escaped. After the incident, he was determined to learn Buddhism and attentively studied Buddhist teachings. He became the director of the county council and the director of the Bureau of Construction and treasury after the success of the Northern Expedition.

In February of 1933, Jihua took refuge in the Triple Jewels, together with his wife, under Master Yinguang. They became vegetarian and began the cultivation of reciting *the Amitabha Sūtra* every morning and evening and reciting ten thousand times of Buddha-name every day.

During the Japanese war, he inhabited Shanghai to promote the Pure Land gateway, and to encourage people to aspire for rebirth in the Pure Land. In 1949, he moved to Taiwan with his family. He established the Buddha-recitation society with his lotus friends. To encourage more people to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, he also started organizations of supportive recitation, and as a result, exerted great influence.

Since the Buddha-recitation society was established, he frequently organised lotus friends to cultivate together, and led others to undertake the Buddha-

recitation practice. He also printed and donated many *Sūtras* and other relevant Buddhist teachings, and spared no effort in promoting the Pure Land gateway.

On 25 February 1962, he organised the Dharma assembly as usual. After lunch, he gave a lecture on *the Amitabha Sūtra*. The lecture ended at 2:50pm, and he then told the audience, “I am leaving.” Having said those words, he sat on the couch in the guest room, with the others reciting the Buddha-name to support him. At 3:05pm, he passed away peacefully with his hand in Amitabha *mudrā*, as if in meditation, at the age of 79. On 26<sup>th</sup>, when he was laid into the coffin, his body was supple, with vivid countenance as if alive, and the top of his head was still warm. After he was cremated on 4<sup>th</sup> of March, there appeared many relics.

#### **(4) Examples of Successfully Reborn Lay Women**

##### **1) Ms. Wang**

Ms. Wang (王氏) was born in Sui Dynasty (581–618CE). She was the wife of Mr. Xue (薛) and the mother of Monk Dinggai (顶盖). Ms. Wang usually recited the *Sūtras*, cultivated repentance, and wholeheartedly aspired to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. In 637CE, she fell ill, thus she recited the Buddha-name more assiduously and earnestly. Not long after, Ms. Wang saw a red lotus flower as large as a vase of 50 litres. She then saw blue lotus flowers filling the room, and Amitabha Buddha, *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva and *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva manifested in the sky. Her grandson Daxing (大兴), who was taking care of her, also witnessed in the sky the body of the grandiose Buddha, much taller than two Bodhisattvas. They appeared for quite a while before they vanished. Ms. Wang passed away during that period.

##### **2) Ms. Cui**

Ms. Cui (崔婆) was from Zichuan of Shandong province during the Song Dynasty. She was the nursing mother of a boy of the Liang family. The boy’s mother, Ms. Chao (晁), was fond of meditative cultivation. Ms. Cui was simple and honest, and became a vegetarian at an early age. She recited the Buddha-name all day long without interruption. At 72, being ill with dysentery, she cultivated the Buddha-recitation even more diligently. One day, she suddenly chanted a verse, “It is convenient to cultivate on the western path, since there is no mountain and no valley. We do not need to wear shoes and socks on the

way, for we step on the lotus to get rebirth.” When somebody asked her when she would get rebirth, she answered, “3 o’clock in the afternoon.” She truly died as she predicted. After cremation, her tongue remained intact, in a lotus shape.

### **3) Ms. Yu**

Ms. Yu (于媪), Yu Gui’s mother, was from Changping of Hebei province. She cultivated the Pure Land gateway exclusively, and she recited the Buddha-name even more diligently at old age. One day, she washed her best clothes, and told her son, “I am going to get rebirth in the Pure Land someday.” But her son did not believe her. On the specified day, Ms. Yu took a small table to the courtyard, sat on the table and passed away. Celestial music was heard by many people at that time.

### **4) Yang Xuanyi’s Wife**

Yang Xuanyi’s wife (杨选一妻) was from Nanchang during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). At age 30, having given birth to a son for Xuanyi, she separated from her husband to cultivate Buddha-recitation, and she encouraged her husband to remarry. After fifteen years of cultivation, she developed a gangrene on her back in August, which caused excruciating agony. She also saw a demonic ghost chasing her with a large knife, but the demon was expelled by a powerful deity, and her illness miraculously healed. After that event, she told her husband, “I am going to get rebirth.” “Where are you going to achieve rebirth?” her husband asked. “I am going to achieve rebirth in the Western Pure Land.” Having finished these words, she joined her palms, chanted the Buddha-name and passed away.

### **5) Ru Jiwan**

Ru Jiwan (汝季婉) was from Wujiang (nowadays Jiangsu province). She was married to Wang Mei (王枚), but the couple was childless. However, the couple lived together harmoniously for fifty years, respecting each other like guests. She was simple, quiet and amiable, and practised the Buddha-recitation wholeheartedly as the primary conduct. On 3 February 1819, she fell sick with a serious illness. She then told her family members, “The Bodhisattva has come, I am leaving.” After those words, she joined her palms together, closed her eyes, and focused on reciting the Great Compassion Mantra. Subsequently, all her



family members smelled the fragrance of sandalwood permeating the room. Jiwan's countenance was serene, benevolent and smiling, and looked even younger than when she was alive, although she was 82.

## 6) Zhang Hexian

Zhang Hexian (张鹤仙) was born in Liling county of Hunan province. She took refuge in the Three Jewels under Dharma master Shancheng (善成), and followed her mother to become a vegetarian and to cultivate meditation at the age of 5. In early May of 1933, she suddenly asked her mother, "I heard of someone who attained rebirth in the Pure Land after cultivating Buddha-recitation for three to four years. I have been reciting the Buddha-name for less than one year. Can I achieve rebirth?" Her mother asked her, "Do you want to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land now?" "Yes!" she confirmed. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, when they arrived home after participating in the Buddha-recitation retreat, she suddenly felt an acute headache and became unconscious. Her mother then besought before the Buddha image some water and put it into her mouth. A while later, she awoke and was able to speak. At midnight, after she recited *the Amitabha Sūtra*, the Rebirth *Mantra* and the Buddha-name, Hexian announced, "I am going back." Her mother and her sister-in-law conducted supportive recitation for her simultaneously. After a short while, she passed away peacefully with a smile, at the age of merely 6.

## 7) Yao Zerun

Yao Zerun (姚泽润) was the wife of *Upāsaka* Li Tongbai (李桐白) of Tongcheng county in Anhui province. From childhood, she was educated by her father to follow the female etiquette, so she filially supported her father-in-law and mother-in-law. Having experienced vicissitudes for several decades, she earnestly detested impermanence of life, thus she wholeheartedly cultivated the Pure Land gateway. She was still healthy and vigorous even at the age of 70.

In the autumn of 1929, Zerun had some slight illness. She then gradually reduced her meals, but her cultivation of prostration and reciting *Sūtras* continued as usual without any break. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, she was laid up, and unable to breathe smoothly, so she asked her daughter Ma Junwei (马君玮) and her nephew's wife Sun Xiaoda (孙孝达) to recite *Sūtras* for her.

On the night of the 9<sup>th</sup>, Zerun saw the manifested Buddha, glowing with golden brilliance. She then prostrated on the pillow to pay homage. She also saw *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva extending her hand to her. She thus held the Bodhisattva's hand, while reciting the Bodhisattva's name unceasingly. She asked Xiaoda to recite *the Amitabha Sūtra*; and when the paragraph describing the various majestic adornment of the Pure Land was recited, Zerun claimed, "Such scenes all exhibited before my eyes, just as depicted in the *Sūtra*." All the family members gathered around her and recited the Buddha-name. When someone wept silently, Zerun reproached him, "Why do you entangle me like this?" At 10pm, with her lips moving slightly, she passed away peacefully. Her countenance was glossy, with forehead as bright as a mirror; the top of her head was warm, and could be felt even one foot away.

## 8) Wang Huizhen

Wang Huizhen (王惠贞) was born into a family of intellectuals from Taidong (台东). Not only was her father a school master, her mother a teacher and her brothers and sisters all graduated from universities, but also her husband Mr. Zhang graduated with a master degree from MIT of USA. Huizhen, from childhood, followed her mother Huang Yunü (黄玉女) to learn Buddhism. She took refuge in the Triple Jewels, cultivated the Pure Land gateway, and had sincere faith and aspiration in the Pure Land.

In the autumn of 1980, she was diagnosed with womb cancer. After several rounds of treatments, she could not recover, so she profoundly realised the impermanence of life. She then donated all her precious jewels to charities, to relieve the poor in the society and to demonstrate her detachment from worldly wealth. To sever severe affections, she asked her husband and her son not to enter her room, so as to prevent impediments at the end of her life. After contemplating solitarily for seven days, she said, "Both husband and son can enter my room, since I will not be influenced by affections." From then on, she let go of all worldly affairs, and focused on reciting the Buddha-name to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.

A few days later, her mother came to visit her. Realising her terminal illness, her mother immediately invited Dharma Master Guanghua (广化法师) to personally give her instructions and encouragement. Master Guanghua expounded some Pure Land doctrines, then exhorted her, "Suppose you

wholeheartedly recite the Buddha name; if your lifespan expires, Amitabha Buddha will definitely come to guide you to achieve rebirth; otherwise, if your lifespan is not exhausted, Buddha-recitation will eliminate your unwholesome karmas and obstructions.” Huizhen confirmed, “Whatever is the situation, I am determined to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land, I do not want to remain in this *Saha* world to endure sufferings.” Master Guanghua then encouraged her, “My master, my teacher and my father have all succeeded in rebirth in the Pure Land. They are all your masters. If you recite the Buddha-name to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land, they will certainly respond and they will accompany Amitabha Buddha to welcome and escort you.” Huizhen nodded delightedly.

On 6 April 1981 (lunar calendar), Huizhen got up to wash up and to change into new clothes, then told her mother, “I feel purified and tranquil both physically and mentally now. Please invite Master Guanghua to come. I am leaving tomorrow.” On the next day, Master Guanghua came with his disciples after his daily routine cultivation. They recited the Buddha-name to support her recitation until midnight. Her appearance turned fresh, then Master Guanghua asked her, “Can you recite the Buddha-name in agony?” Huizhen pointed to her heart with her finger, indicating that she could recite. Since it was already midnight, Master Guanghua decided to lead his disciples to return to the college. But Huizhen did not agree, as if she knew that she could not wait until the next day. Master Guanghua promised that they would come immediately when she was leaving. He also left two monk students to undertake the supportive recitation.

At 4 am, she suddenly told her mother, “Please call Master Guanghua to come.” Unfortunately, there were some problems with the telephone and they were unable to get through until 6 am. She asked her mother to fetch some water, then washed up, and asked her mother to bring the images of the Three Saints of the West. Facing the images of the saints, Huizhen joined her palms, and sincerely recited, “Namo Amitabha Buddha! Namo Amitabha Buddha! Namo Amitabha...” Before the character “Buddha” was uttered, she passed away. Soon after, Master Guanghua came, and they continued their supportive recitation. After six hours, the top of her head was still warm, and her appearance transformed to a male form, extremely majestic. Of the assembly members from both monastic and laity, none did not praise the inconceivable meritorious virtues of Buddha-recitation.

## References

- [1] “The Practice and Vows of the Bodhisattva *Samantabhadra*”, Translated by Buddhist Text Translation Society.
- [2] 《净土圣贤录》弘化社。 “The Records of the Saints and Sages of the Pure Land.” The Promotion and Edification Press.

## Chapter 2 The Forty-Eight Great Vows of Amitabha Buddha

*How and when was the Pure Land established?*

*What are the contents of the Forty-Eight Great Vows of Amitabha Buddha?*

*How attractive is the environment in the Pure Land?*

*What benefits and powers can beings in the Pure Land enjoy?*

*What daily benefits can we obtain by reciting the Buddha name mindfully?*

*How can we achieve rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this life?*

This Chapter will provide meaningful insight on all the above questions.

The Forty-Eight Great Vows of Amitabha is the entire design blueprint of the Western World of Ultimate Bliss and the foundation of Pure Land Buddhism. We should repetitively and attentively study the contents of the Forty-Eight Vows. Furthermore, we should also examine how *Dharmākara* Bodhisattva, who was Amitabha prior to attaining Buddhahood, generated these vows and look into the process he undertook to establish the Pure Land. It would help us to penetratingly comprehend the three provisions of the Pure Land gateway—faith, aspiration and practice. At the same time, it enables us to understand the great compassion of Amitabha and to spur us to give rise to utmost gratitude and reverence towards him.

Learning and accepting what *Bhikṣu Dharmākara* had done in formulating these great vows and his ultimate fulfilment of these vows enable us to establish solid faith in the real existence of the Pure Land. The comprehensive understanding of the contents of each of the Forty-Eight Vows will enhance our faith in the meritorious virtues of the Pure Land; and being versed in His vows pertaining to receiving and escorting mundane beings to get rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this life will definitely encourage us to strengthen our

faith in achieving rebirth there. Through comparing the myriad bliss depicted in the Forty-Eight Vows with the various unavoidable sufferings of this world, we would generate strong aspiration to detest and depart from the *Saha* world, and to cherish and pursue rebirth in the Blissful Land. Furthermore, sincere faith and earnest aspiration will motivate us to cultivate the practices enumerated in the Forty-Eight Great Vows in order to be assuredly reborn in the Pure Land after this life. Once born there, we will ultimately be emancipated from the endless cycle of birth-and-death, and would tread on the expressway leading to the attainment of Buddhahood in one lifetime.

The scriptural text of the Forty-Eight Great Vows is excerpted from *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* [1][2][3][4]. This *Sūtra* systematically and schematically introduces the process of the establishment of the Pure Land by *Bhikṣu Dharmākara*; enumerates the Forty-Eight Great Vows; depicts the majestic wondrous environment of Pure Land; presents the unparalleled features of Amitabha and the extraordinary capabilities of beings there; summarises the requirements for the three classes of rebirth; and explicates in detail the five sufferings, the five evil and the five burns of the *Saha* world.

*The Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* is the primary large *Sūtra* for learning and practising Pure Land Buddhism. It has been translated into Chinese with 12 versions since the East Han dynasty (25–220 CE). However, only five of them are extant now. Most patriarchs and Dharma masters of the Pure Land school recommend the version translated by *Tripiṭaka Master Saṅghavarman* during the Cao Wei Dynasty (220–266CE). It is also adopted by Master Yinguang in the codified *Five Sūtras and One Śāstra of the Pure Land*. Therefore, all of the excerpts in this chapter are from this version if it is not otherwise specified.

## I. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PURE LAND

*The Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* was expounded by *Śākyamuni Buddha* in the *Grdhrakūṭa* Mountain, near the city of *Rājagṛha*. It was a grand event with 12,000 great *bhikṣus* (instead of the usual 1,250 *bhikṣus* in other *sūtras*) and a great multitude of Bodhisattvas of the worthy *Kalpa*, led by *Samantabhadra* Bodhisattva, *Mañjuśrī* Bodhisattva, and *Maitreya* Bodhisattva.

At the prologue, the *Sūtra* enumerated the great assembly and displayed the eight-phase practices of Bodhisattvas. Subsequently, *Śākyamuni* Buddha perceived that the virtuous roots and the suitable moment for his disciples and sentient beings of the world to cultivate the Pure Land practice was mature. He then manifested the auspicious appearance of majestic and splendid radiance, with utmost delight and purity. Witnessing the unprecedented manifestation, the venerable *Ānanda* besought the Buddha to explain the reason for this marvellous display. In response to *Ānanda*'s request, the Buddha praised his supplication and then expounded the great *Sūtra* on Pure Land.

This section will introduce briefly the process from the time *Bhikṣu Dharmākara* activated the Bodhicitta, beseeched the World Sovereign King Buddha to instruct him on the practices, formulated the Forty-Eight Vows, and finally cultivated to establish the Pure Land. The entire process is categorised into segments as in the *Sūtra* [1]. The contents of this section are mainly based on direct excerpts from the text of the *Sūtra* with short explanations only when necessary. The English translation was based on a synthesis of available resources [2][3][4], with some modifications of wording and syntax.

## 1. The Ancient Buddhas' Manifestation in the World

**“The Buddha told *Ānanda*, ‘In the distant past, innumerable, countless inconceivable *kalpas* ago, a *Tathāgata* named *Dīpaṃkara* (Lamp Lighter) appeared in the world. Having edified and delivered innumerable sentient beings, and enabling them to attain Bodhi, *Dīpaṃkara* then entered *parinirvāṇa*. After him, *Tathāgatas* that appeared in succession included Distant Light, ... (list of 52 Epithets of Buddhas). These Buddhas have all passed away. ”**（佛告阿难，乃往过去久远无量不可思议无央数劫，锭光如来，兴出于世，教化度脱无量众生，皆令得道，乃取灭度。次有如来，名曰光远。… 如此诸佛，皆悉已过。）

This paragraph has the following indications:

- ① Before Amitabha established the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, he had cultivated Bodhisattva practices in this world since time immemorial.
- ② Many Buddhas have manifested in this world to emancipate sentient beings.

**"Next appeared a Buddha named World Sovereign King (*Lokeśvararāja*), the *Tathāgata*, the *Holy One* (*Arhat*), *Samyak-Saṃbuddha* (Perfectly Enlightened One), Wisdom and Conduct Perfected, Sugata, Knower of the World, Unsurpassed One, Tamer of Men, Teacher of Gods and Humans, Buddha, the World-Honoured One." (尔时，次有佛，名世自在王，如来，应供，等正觉，明行足，善逝，世间解，无上士，调御丈夫，天人师，佛，世尊。)**

Likened *Dīpaṃkara* Buddha to *Śākyamuni* Buddha, the encountering of the World Sovereign King Buddha was the turning point in Amitabha's accomplishment of Buddha Path, as revealed below.

## **2. *Dharmākara* on the Causal Ground**

**"At that time there was a king who, on hearing the World Sovereign King Buddha's exposition of the Dharma, rejoiced in his heart and activated the Bodhicitta. He renounced his kingdom and throne, and became a *śramaṇa* named *Dharmakāra*. Having superior talent, courage and wisdom, he distinguished himself in the world. He went to see the World Sovereign King Buddha, prostrated himself at his feet, circumambulated the Buddha three rounds to the right, joined his palms together in obeisance, and praised the Buddha with the following verses: (时有国王，闻佛说法，心怀悦豫，寻发无上正真道意。弃国捐王，行作沙门，号曰法藏。高才勇哲，与世超异。诣世自在王如来所，稽首佛足，右绕三匝，长跪合掌，以颂赞曰。**

**" ... ...**

**When I become a Buddha,  
My land will be foremost in splendour,  
Adorned with myriad wonders,  
And its *bodhimaṇḍa* will be supreme.  
My land will be like *nirvāṇa*,  
Peaceful beyond comparison.  
With compassion,  
I will deliver all [sentient beings].  
Those from worlds in the ten directions who are reborn in my land  
Will have joyful pure minds.  
Upon arrival in my land,**



**They all will have peace and bliss.**

**May the Buddha's pure trust**

**Be my true witness.**

**Before Him, I make my vow**

**And strive to achieve my goal.**

**Just as World-Honoured Ones [in worlds] in the ten directions**

**Have unimpeded wisdom,**

**So does this World-Honoured One know**

**My mind and actions.**

**Even if I am in the midst of**

**Pain and anguish,**

**I persist in my vigorous progress**

**And endure without regrets."**

(令我作佛，国土第一。 其众奇妙，道场超绝。

国如泥洹，而无等双。 我当愍哀，度脱一切。

十方来生，心悅清淨， 已至我国，快乐安隱。

幸佛明信，是我真証。 发愿于彼，力精所欲。

十方世尊，智慧无碍， 常令此尊，知我心行。

假使身止，诸苦毒中， 我行精进，忍终不悔。)

**"Having spoken these verses, *Bhikṣu Dharmākara* said to World Sovereign King Buddha, 'Indeed, World-Honoured One, I have activated the *anuttarasamyaksaṃbodhi* mind, and I beseech you to fully expound the Dharma to me. I will cultivate and gather and choose the pure adornments of innumerable Buddha-lands, so that I will swiftly attain the perfect enlightenment, and eradicate the roots of the toils and sufferings and birth-and-death of all beings.'" (法藏比丘，说此颂已，而白佛言。唯然世尊，我发无上正觉之心。愿佛为我广宣经法，我当修行，摄取佛国清淨庄严无量妙土。令我于世，速成正觉，拔诸生死勤苦之本。)**

**“The World Sovereign King Buddha said to *Bhikṣu Dharmākara*, ‘You yourself should know how to cultivate and how to adorn your Buddha-land.’ The *bhikṣu* replied, ‘The modus operandi is too extensive and too profound for me to comprehend. World-Honoured One, I sincerely beseech you to expound and demonstrate the practices by which various Buddha-Tathāgatas established their Pure Lands. Having heard it, I will cultivate practices as instructed and fulfil my vow.’”** (时世自在王佛，语法藏比丘，如所修行，庄严佛土，汝自当知。比丘白佛，斯义弘深，非我境界。唯愿世尊，广为敷演诸佛如来净土之行。我闻此已，当如说修行，成满所愿。)

**“At that time the World Sovereign King Buddha recognised this *bhikṣu*’s exceptional capacity, and the profundity and immensity of his resolve. He then said to *Bhikṣu Dharmākara*, ‘As an analogy, if one keeps on bailing water out of a great ocean with a pint-measure, one will be able to reach the bottom after many *kalpas* and then obtain rare treasures. Likewise, if one sincerely, diligently and unceasingly seeks the Way, one will be able to reach one’s destination. What vow is there which cannot be fulfilled?’”** (尔时世自在王佛，知其高明，志愿深广。即为法藏比丘而说经言：‘譬如大海，一人斗量，经历劫数，尚可穷底，得其妙宝。人有至心精进，求道不止，会当克果，何愿不得。’)

**“Then the World Sovereign King Buddha explicated in detail the coarse and subtle aspects of two hundred and ten *koṭīs* of Buddha-lands, together with the good and evil natures of devas and humans living there. He revealed them all to the *bhikṣu* just as he had requested. Then the *bhikṣu*, having heard the Buddha’s exposition of the magnificent pure lands and also having seen all of them, resolved upon his supreme, unsurpassed vows. His mind was serene, and his aspirations were free of attachment, unexcelled throughout the world. For five complete *kalpas*, he contemplated and gathered the pure practices to adorn his Buddha-land.”** (于是世自在王佛，即为广说二百一十亿诸佛刹土，天人之善恶，国土之粗妙，应其心愿，悉现与之。时彼比丘，闻佛所说严净国土，皆悉睹见，起发无上殊胜之愿。其心寂静，志无所著。一切世间，无能及者。具足五劫，思惟摄取庄严佛国清净之行。)

① These paragraphs demonstrate how *Bhikṣu Dharmakāra* paid homage and reverence to the World Sovereign King Buddha. It shows that to gain benefits in the practice of Buddhism, we need to possess a sincere and venerating mind.

② The excerpted verses exhibit the noble aspiration of *Bhikṣu Dharmakāra*. He vowed to build a unique Buddha-land so as to receive all sentient beings to get liberated. This noble aspiration will be embodied in the Forty-Eight Vows shown later.

③ The most effective way to swiftly accomplish the Buddha Path is dependent on “*the other-power*”, especially Buddha’s power. The establishment of the Pure Land of Amitabha clearly demonstrates this efficacy. Instead of embellishing his Buddha-land purely based on his own cultivation, *Bhikṣu Dharmakāra* besought the World Sovereign King Buddha to show him the virtuous and the evil characteristics of other worlds, so as to adopt the former and avoid the latter.

**Then, *Bhikṣu Dharmakāra* gathered and adopted the pure practices which had led to the establishment of the excellent lands of two hundred and ten *koṭīs* of Buddhas. Having finished this cultivation, he went to the World Sovereign King Buddha, prostrated at his feet, circumambulated him three times, and joined his palms in obeisance while standing. He then said to the Buddha, 'I have gathered and adopted the pure practices for the establishment of a glorious Buddha-land.' The Buddha said to him, 'You should declare this (to the assembly), and you should know that now is the right time to encourage and delight the entire assembly. On hearing this, other Bodhisattvas will practice this Dharma, which will result in fulfilling their innumerable great vows.' The *bhikṣu* replied, 'I beg you to grant me your attention. Now I will completely declare my vows.' "** (时法藏比丘，摄取二百一十亿诸佛妙土清淨之行。如是修已，诣彼佛所，稽首礼足，绕佛三匝，合掌而住。白佛言：‘世尊，我已摄取庄严佛土清淨之行。’佛告比丘：‘汝今可说，宜知是时，发起悦可一切大众。菩萨闻已，修行此法，缘致满足无量大愿。’比丘白佛：‘唯垂听察，如我所愿，当具说之。’ )

### 3. The Declaration of the Vows in front of the Buddha

*Bhikṣu Dharmakāra* then declared his Forty-Eight Great Vows as enumerated below:

#### (1) Vow of Land without Three Woeful Realms (国中无三恶道愿)

**When I attain Buddhahood, if there should be any hell-dwellers, hungry ghosts or animals in my land, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国有地狱、饿鬼、畜生者，不取正觉。)**

**(2) Vow of Not Descending to Three Woeful Realms Again (不复更生恶道愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if devas and humans in my land after their death, should ever descend to the three woeful realms again, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中天人寿终之后，复更三恶道者，不取正觉。)**

**(3) Vow of All Obtaining Pure Golden Coloured Body (各得真金色身愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if devas and humans in my land should not be endowed with the colour of pure gold, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中天人，不悉真金色者，不取正觉。)**

**(4) Vow of Shape and Form without Beauty and Ugliness (形色无有好丑愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if devas and humans in my land should have different shapes and forms, with some being beautiful and others ugly, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中天人，形色不同，有好丑者，不取正觉。)**

**(5) Vow of All Born with Knowledge of Past Lives (生者皆得宿命愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if devas and humans in my land should not have the power of knowing their past lives, not knowing even the events that occurred during the previous hundred thousand *koṭīs* of *nayutas* of kalpas, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中天人，不识宿命，下至知百千亿那由他诸劫事者，不取正觉。)**

**(6) Vow of All with the Celestial Eye of Universal Sight (皆得天眼彻视愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if devas and humans in my land should not have the celestial eye of seeing at least a hundred thousand *koṭīs* of *naṃyutas* of Buddha-lands, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.** (设我得佛，国中天人，不得天眼，下至见百千亿那由他诸佛国者，不取正觉。)

**(7) Vow of All with the Celestial Ear of Universal Hearing (皆得天耳彻听愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if devas and humans in my land should not have the celestial ear of hearing, accepting and upholding the teachings of at least a hundred thousand *koṭīs* of *naṃyutas* of Buddhas, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.** (设我得佛，国中天人，不得天耳，下至闻百千亿那由他诸佛所说，不悉受持者，不取正觉。)

**(8) Vow of All with Knowledge of Others' Thoughts (皆得知他心念愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if devas and humans in my land should not possess the faculty of knowing the thoughts of others, at least those of all sentient beings living in a hundred thousand *koṭīs* of *naṃyutas* of Buddha-lands, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.** (设我得佛，国中天人，不得见他心智，下至知百千亿那由他诸佛国中众生心念者，不取正觉。)

**(9) Vow of All with Transcendental Travel and Flight (皆得神足飞行愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if devas and humans in my land should not possess the supernatural power of traveling anywhere in one instant, at least beyond a hundred thousand *koṭīs* of *naṃyutas* of Buddha-lands, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.** (设我得佛，国中天人，不得神足，于一念顷，下至不能超过百千亿那由他诸佛国者，不取正觉。)

**(10) Vow of Non-Arising of Self-Attachment View (不起贪计身见愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if devas and humans in my land should give rise to thoughts of self-attachment, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.** (设我得佛，国中天人若起想念贪计身者，不取正觉。)

**(11) Vow of Abiding in the Right Definite Assembly and Attainment of *Nirvāṇa* (正定必至涅槃愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if devas and humans in my land should not abide in the right definite assembly and unfailingly reach *Nirvāṇa*, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.** (设我得佛，国中天人，不住定聚，必至灭度者，不取正觉。)

**(12) Vow of Bright Light Pervasively Illuminating the Ten Directions (光明遍照十方愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if my bright light should be limited, unable to illuminate at least a hundred thousand *koṭīs* of *ayutas* of Buddha-lands, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.** (设我得佛，光明有限量，下至不照百千亿那由他诸佛国者，不取正觉。)

**(13) Vow of Everlasting Lifespan Same as Buddha's (寿命同佛永久愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if my lifespan should be limited even to the extent of a hundred thousand *koṭīs* of *ayutas* of kalpas, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.** (设我得佛，寿命有限量，下至百千亿那由他劫者，不取正觉。)

**(14) Vow of *śrāvakas* Being Numerous and Countless (声闻广多无量愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, suppose the number of *śrāvakas* in my land could be calculated or counted; even if all the sentient beings in three-great-thousandfold worlds would attain *Pratyekabuddhas* to count them together for a hundred thousand *kalpas*, should they know their number, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.** (设我得佛，国中声闻，有能计量，乃至三千大千世界众生，悉成缘觉，于百千劫悉共计校，知其数者，不取正觉。)

**(15) Vow of Lifespan Being Lengthened or Shortened at Will (寿命修短随意愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, devas and humans in my land would have unlimited lifespan, except those with original vows who can lengthen or shorten their lifespan at will. If this should not come true, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中天人，寿命无能限量。除其本愿，修短自在。若不尔者，不取正觉。)**

**(16) Vow of Land without Words Associated with Non-Virtues (国中无不善名愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if devas and humans in my land should ever hear words associated with non-virtues, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中天人，乃至闻有不善名者，不取正觉。)**

**(17) Vow of All Buddhas Praising and Glorifying the Name (诸佛称名赞叹愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if all the innumerable Buddhas in the lands of the ten directions do not praise and glorify my name, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，十方世界无量诸佛，不悉咨嗟称我名者，不取正觉。)**

**(18) Vow of All Achieving Rebirth in My Land with Ten Recitations (十念皆生我国愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if sentient beings of the lands of the ten directions who having heard my name, have utmost sincere mind of faith and delight, desire to be born in my land, and recite my name even for only ten times (or even with ten mindful thoughts), should not be born there, I would not attain perfect Enlightenment. Excluded, however, are those who commit the five heinous acts and malign the right Dharma. (设我得佛，十方**

众生，闻我名号，至心信乐。欲生我国。乃至十念，若不生者，不取正觉。唯除五逆，诽谤正法。)

### **(19) Vow of My Receiving and Escorting All with Diligent Cultivation (勤修我皆接引愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if sentient beings of lands in the ten directions, activated the Bodhicitta and cultivated various meritorious virtues; and desired to be born in my land with utmost sincere aspiration; at their death, should they not see me appearing before them with a great assembly, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.** (设我得佛，十方众生，发菩提心，修诸功德，至心发愿，欲生我国，临寿终时，假令不与大众围绕现其人前者，不取正觉。)

### **(20) Vow of Assured Rebirth with Mindfulness (系念必得往生愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if sentient beings of the lands in the ten directions who having heard my name, keep mindful of my land, plant various virtuous roots, and sincerely dedicate their merits towards my land with a desire to be born there; should they not eventually fulfil their aspiration, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.** (设我得佛，十方众生，闻我名号，系念我国，植众德本，至心回向，欲生我国，不果遂者，不取正觉。)

### **(21) Vow of Each Endowed with Thirty-Two Characteristics (各具三十二相愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if devas and humans in my land should not all be endowed with a great man's thirty-two physical characteristics, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.** (设我得佛，国中天人，不悉成满三十二大人相者，不取正觉。)

### **(22) Vow of Attainment of the Stage of Bodhisattvas to Attain Buddhahood in One Lifetime (菩萨一生补处愿)**



When I attain Buddhahood, Bodhisattvas from Buddha-lands of other quarters who are born in my land, will ultimately and unfailingly reach the stage of Bodhisattvas to attain Buddhahood in one lifetime. Exceptions are those who wish to manifest themselves at will in accordance with their original vows and, for the sake of sentient beings, wear the armour of great vows, accumulate virtuous roots, and deliver all beings from birth-and-death. They will visit Buddha-lands to cultivate the Bodhisattva practices, and make offerings to Buddhas, *Tathāgatas*, throughout the ten quarters. They will edify uncountable sentient beings as numerous as the sands of the River Ganges, and enable them to be established on the unsurpassable, right truthful path. Such Bodhisattvas will transcend the course of practice of ordinary Bodhisattvas of all stages, directly practicing and cultivating the virtues of *Samantabhadra* Bodhisattva. If this should not come true, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，他方佛土诸菩萨众，来生我国，究竟必至一生补处。除其本愿自在所化，为众生故，被弘誓铠，积累德本，度脱一切。游诸佛国，修菩萨行，供养十方诸佛如来。开化恒沙无量众生，使立无上正真之道，超出常伦诸地之行，现前修习普贤之德。若不尔者，不取正觉。)

### **(23) Vow of Universally Offering to Numerous Buddhas in One Instant (一时普供诸佛愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, if Bodhisattvas in my land should, by virtue of my transcendental power, fail to arrive and make offerings to Buddhas in immeasurable and innumerable koṭis of *ṇayutas* of Buddha-lands within the time of a meal, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中菩萨，承佛神力，供养诸佛。一食之顷，不能遍至无数无量亿那由他诸佛国者，不取正觉。)

### **(24) Vow of All Offering Items Automatically (Appearing) as Wished (供具自皆如意愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, Bodhisattvas in my land will demonstrate their virtuous roots before Buddhas. If they should fail to present at will their intended offering items to their satisfaction, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中菩萨，在诸佛前，现其德本。诸所求欲供养之具，若不如意者，不取正觉。)

**(25) Vow of Bodhisattvas Expounding with Omniscient Wisdom (菩萨演一切智愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if Bodhisattvas in my land should be unable to expound the omniscient wisdom, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中菩萨，不能演说一切智者，不取正觉。)**

**(26) Vow of Bodhisattvas Endowed with Vajra Bodies (菩萨得金刚身愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if Bodhisattvas in my land should not be endowed with the body of the Vajra-god *Nārāyaṇa*, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中菩萨，不得金刚那罗延身者，不取正觉。)**

**(27) Vow of Myriad Things with Extraordinary Excellence (万物悉皆殊特愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, devas and humans, and all the myriad things in my land will be majestically pure and gloriously resplendent in extraordinarily subtle and extremely wondrous forms and colours, beyond description and measurement. If sentient beings in my land, including those with the celestial eyes, should be able to discern and distinguish their names and numbers, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中天人，一切万物，严净光丽，形色殊特，穷微极妙，无能称量。其诸众生，乃至逮得天眼，有能明了，辨其名数者，不取正觉。)**

**(28) Vow of Bodhi-Tree Being Universally Seen (菩提道场树普见愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if Bodhisattvas in my land, even those with less meritorious virtues, should fail to know and see the innumerable radiant colours of the Bodhi-tree, which is four million *li* in height, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中菩萨，乃至少功德者，不能知见其道场树无量光色，高四百万里者，不取正觉。)**

**(29) Vow of Universal Acquisition of Wisdom and Eloquence When Receiving *Sūtras* (受经普得智辩愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, if Bodhisattvas in my land who read, recite, uphold, and expound *Sūtras* should fail to acquire eloquence and wisdom, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中菩萨，若受读经法，讽诵持说，而不得辩才智慧者，不取正觉。)

**(30) Vow of Wisdom and Eloquence without Limit (智辩无有限量愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, if Bodhisattvas in my land should have a limit in their eloquence and wisdom, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中菩萨，智慧辩才，若可限量者，不取正觉。)

**(31) Vow of Pure Land Illuminating and Reflecting the Ten Directions (净国照见十方愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, my land will be so clear and pure that it illuminates and reflects immeasurable, innumerable and inconceivable Buddha-lands in the ten directions, like one's own facial image reflected on a bright mirror. If this should not come true, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国土清淨，皆悉照见十方一切无量无数不可思议诸佛世界，犹如明镜，睹其面像。若不尔者，不取正觉。)

**(32) Vow of Majestic Adornments Surpassing Those of All Devas and Humans (严饰超诸天人愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, in my land, from the ground to the open sky, there will be palaces, towers, ponds, streams, flowers, and trees. Myriad things in my land will be composed of innumerable varieties of treasures and hundreds of thousands kinds of fragrances. These magnificent adornments are extraordinary and wondrous, surpassing all those of devas and humans. As the fragrances pervade all worlds in the ten directions, Bodhisattvas who smell them will all cultivate the Buddha Path. If this should not come true, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，自地以上，至于虚空，

宫殿楼观，池流华树，国土所有一切万物，皆以无量杂宝，百千种香，而共合成。严饰奇妙，超诸天人。其香普熏十方世界。菩萨闻者，皆修佛行。若不如是，不取正觉。)

**(33) Vow of Acquisition of Benefits When Body Is Touched by Light (蒙光触身获益愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, all sentient beings, in the innumerable inconceivable Buddha-lands in the ten directions, who are touched by my radiance, will become gentle and supple in body and mind, surpassing devas and humans. If this should not come true, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，十方无量不可思议诸佛世界众生之类，蒙我光明触其身者，身心柔软，超过天人。若不尔者，不取正觉。)

**(34) Vow of All Attaining Patience of Dharmas and *Dhāranīs* (皆得法忍总持愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, if sentient beings, in the immeasurable and inconceivable Buddha-lands in the ten directions, on hearing my name, should fail to achieve the patience of non-arising of dharmas of Bodhisattvas and to acquire various profound *dhāranīs*, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，十方无量不可思议诸佛世界众生之类，闻我名字，不得菩萨无生法忍，诸深总持者，不取正觉。)

**(35) Vow of Eternal Departure from Female Body with Joyful Faith (信乐永离女身愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, in all the immeasurable inconceivable Buddha-lands in the ten directions, there are women who hear my name with joyful faith, activate Bodhicitta, and loathe their female form. After their death, should they be reborn again in female form, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，十方无量不可思议诸佛世界，其有女人闻我名字，欢喜信乐，发菩提心，厌恶女身。寿终之后，复为女像者，不取正觉。)

### **(36) Vow of Definite Accomplishment of Buddha Path through Diligent Cultivation (勤修必成佛道愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, in all the immeasurable inconceivable Buddha-lands in the ten directions, multitudes of Bodhisattvas who hear my name, after their death, will be reborn to cultivate in the Brahma way of life (pure celibate practices) until their attainment of Buddhahood. If this should not come true, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，十方无量不可思议诸佛世界诸菩萨众，闻我名字，寿终之后，常修梵行，至成佛道。若不尔者，不取正觉。)

### **(37) Vow of Devas and Humans Being Moved by Taking Refuge (归依感动天人愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, *devas* and humans in the immeasurable and inconceivable Buddha-lands of the ten directions, who having heard my name, prostrate themselves on the ground to revere and worship me with joyful faith, and cultivate Bodhisattva practices; they would be respected by all *devas* and people of the world. If this should not come true, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，十方无量不可思议诸佛世界诸天人民，闻我名字，五体投地，稽首作礼，欢喜信乐，修菩萨行。诸天世人，莫不致敬。若不尔者，不取正觉。)

### **(38) Vow of Wonderful Clothing Spontaneously on Body (妙服自然在身愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, *devas* and humans in my land, who desire to obtain clothing, will immediately acquire them according to their thoughts, just as those wondrous garments praised by the Buddhas will spontaneously don the (*bhikṣus'*) bodies. If their garments should require sewing, bleaching, dyeing, or laundering, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中天人，欲得衣服，随念即至，如佛所赞应法妙服，自然在身。有求裁缝捣染浣濯者，不取正觉。)

**(39) Vow of Receiving Bliss Similar to Those without Outflow (受乐同于漏尽愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, if the happiness and bliss experienced by *devas* and humans in my land should be inferior to those of *bhikṣus* without outflow, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中天人所受快乐，不如漏尽比丘者，不取正觉。)

**(40) Vow of Seeing All Buddha-lands at Will (随意见诸佛国愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, the Bodhisattvas in my land who wish to see the immeasurable splendid and pure Buddha-lands of the ten directions, would be able to view them instantly at will. All of them will be illuminated and reflected in the jewelled trees, just like one seeing one's face reflected in a bright mirror. If this should not come true, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中菩萨，随意欲见十方无量严净佛土，应时如愿，于宝树中，皆悉照见。犹如明镜，睹其面像。若不尔者，不取正觉。)

**(41) Vow of All Sensory Faculties Being Complete by Hearing the Name (闻名诸根具足愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, if multitudes of Bodhisattvas in the lands of other quarters who, having heard my name should, at any time until attaining Buddhahood, have impaired, inferior or incomplete sensory organs, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，他方国土诸菩萨众，闻我名字，至于得佛，诸根缺陋不具足者，不取正觉。)

**(42) Vow of All Attaining Pure Liberation (悉得清净解脱愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, multitudes of Bodhisattvas in other lands of other quarters, who having heard my name, will all attain the *samādhi* of pure liberation. While abiding therein, without losing concentration, they would be able to make offerings in one instant to immeasurable and inconceivable Buddhas, World-Honoured Ones. If this should not come true, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，他方国土诸菩萨众，

闻我名字，皆悉逮得清净解脱三昧。住是三昧，一发意顷，供养无量不可思议诸佛世尊，而不失定意。若不尔者，不取正觉。)

**(43) Vow of Birth to Noble Place by Hearing the Name (闻名生处尊贵愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, multitudes of Bodhisattvas, in other lands in other quarters, who having heard my name will, after their death, be reborn into a noble family. If this should not come true, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，他方国土诸菩萨众，闻我名字，寿终之后，生尊贵家。若不尔者，不取正觉。)

**(44) Vow of Cultivating Practices and Consummating the Virtuous Roots (修行具足德本愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, multitudes of Bodhisattvas in other lands of other quarters, who having heard my name, will rejoice enthusiastically, cultivate the Bodhisattva practices and consummate their virtuous roots. If this should not come true, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，他方国土诸菩萨众，闻我名字，欢喜踊跃，修菩萨行，具足德本。若不尔者，不取正觉。)

**(45) Vow of All Attaining *Samādhi* and Seeing Buddhas (皆得三昧见佛愿)**

When I attain Buddhahood, multitudes of Bodhisattvas, in the lands of other quarters, who having heard my name, would attain the *samādhi* of universal equality and, while abiding therein, they would always be able to see all the immeasurable and inconceivable Buddhas until their attainment of Buddhahood. If this should not come true, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，他方国土诸菩萨众，闻我名字，皆悉逮得普等三昧。住是三昧，至于成佛，常见无量不可思议一切诸佛。若不尔者，不取正觉。)

**(46) Vow of Automatically Hearing the Wondrous Dharmas (自然得闻妙法愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, Bodhisattvas in my land will automatically hear Dharma according to their wishes and preferences. If this should not come true, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，国中菩萨，随其志愿所欲闻法，自然得闻。若不尔者，不取正觉。)**

**(47) Vow of Immediately Attaining Stage of Non-Retrogression (即得不退转地愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if multitudes of Bodhisattvas, in other lands of other quarters, who having heard my name, would not instantly reach the stage of non-retrogression, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，他方国土诸菩萨众，闻我名字，不即得至不退转者，不取正觉。)**

**(48) Vow of Immediately Attaining Various Types of Patience (即得诸忍究竟愿)**

**When I attain Buddhahood, if multitudes of Bodhisattvas, in other lands of other quarters, who having heard my name, could not achieve the first, the second, or the third of the three types of patience of the dharma, and could not attain the level of non-retrogression, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment. (设我得佛，他方国土诸菩萨众，闻我名字，不即得至第一忍，第二第三法忍，于诸佛法，不能即得不退转者，不取正觉。)**

## **4. The Accumulation of Meritorious Virtues through Practice**

Having pronounced his great vows, *Bhikṣu Dharmakāra* immediately commenced his vigorous cultivation of the *pāramitās* to fulfil his vows, as described by the text of *the Sutra of Immeasurable Lifespan*.

***Ānanda, Bhikṣu Dharmakāra* then proclaimed those universal vows in the presence of the World Sovereign Buddha and multitude of beings, including the eight kinds of superhuman beings, such as *devas* and dragon-spirits, Mara and Brahma. Having established these vows, *Bhikṣu Dharmakāra* was exclusively intent on embellishing the exquisite land. The Buddha-land**



**which he sought to establish was vast in extent, supreme and extraordinarily wonderful, permanently present and subject neither to decay nor change.**

(阿难！法藏比丘于其佛所，诸天、魔、梵龙神八部大众之中，发斯弘誓。建此愿已，一向专志庄严妙土。所修佛国，开廓广大，超胜独妙，建立常然，无衰无变。)

**"During inconceivable and innumerable *kalpas*, he cultivated the immeasurable meritorious practices of the Bodhisattva Path. He did not harbour any thought of greed, hatred or harmfulness; nor did he allow any idea of greed, hatred or harmfulness to arise. He was detached from form, sound, smell, taste, touch or thought. Having accomplished the power of patience, he was not disheartened by any agony. With contentment and few desires, he had no greed, hatred nor delusion. He dwelt in tranquil *samādhi*, and his wisdom was unimpeded. Freed from falsehood and deceitfulness, he spoke amiable words with kind expression, was considerate and actively greet others. He was courageous and diligent, strong-willed without weariness. He solely sought the pure Dharma so as to benefit sentient beings. He revered the Triple Jewels, respected his teachers and elders. He adorned his (Bodhisattva) practices with Mahayana (wisdom and merits) conduct, and enable sentient beings to accomplish their meritorious virtues.** (于不可思议兆载永劫，积植菩萨无量德行，不生欲觉、瞋觉、害觉，不起欲想、瞋想、害想，不着色声香味触法。忍力成就，不计众苦。少欲知足，无染患痴，三昧常寂，智慧无碍，无有虚伪谄曲之心，和颜爱语先意承问。勇猛精进，志愿无倦。专求清白之法，以惠利群生。恭敬三宝，奉事师长。以大庄严具足众行。令诸众生功德成就。)

**"He abided in the three samadhis: emptiness, non-appearance and non-wish. He realised that all dharmas are illusory, with neither action nor origin. He avoided all wrong speeches (false speech, divisive speech, harsh speech and frivolous speech) that would bring harm upon himself or others or both; he cultivated virtuous speeches that would bring benefit to himself or others or both. He renounced his kingdom and abdicated the throne, forgoing wealth and sensuous pleasures. He not only practiced the Six *Pāramitās* himself, but also taught others to practise them as well. During innumerable *kalpas*, he accumulated merits and amassed virtues.** (住空、无相、无愿之法，无作无起，观法如化。远离羸言，自害害彼，彼此俱害。修习善语，自利利人，人我兼利。弃国捐王，绝去财色，自行六波罗密，教人令行。无央数劫，积功累德。)

"Wherever he was born, an immeasurable stock of treasure spontaneously appeared as he wished. He edified and transformed countless sentient beings and guided them on the path of the Unsurpassed, Right and True Enlightenment. He manifested himself as an elder, a layperson, a member of a noble or majestic family, a *kṣatriya* king, a wheel-turning monarch, a king of one of the six heavens in the world of desire, or even higher, as a **Brahma-king**. (随其生处，在意所欲，无量宝藏自然发应。教化安立无数众生，住于无上正真之道。或为长者居士豪姓尊贵，或为刹利国君转轮圣帝，或为六欲天，主乃至梵王。)

He revered and worshipped all Buddhas with the four kinds of offerings. Such merit was beyond description and praise. His breath was fragrant and fresh, like *utpala* flowers (blue lotus-flower). Every pore of his body emitted the scent of sandalwood, which permeated innumerable worlds. His countenance was majestic, and his superb physical features were extraordinarily wondrous. His hands often emanated inexhaustible treasures, clothes, food and drink, rare and exquisite flowers and incense, silken canopies, banners, and other ornaments. In such manifestations he was unrivalled among all devas and human beings. He thus achieved the power of command of all dharmas."

(常以四事供养恭敬一切诸佛，如是功德不可称说。口气香洁如优钵罗华。身诸毛孔，出旃檀香，其香普熏无量世界。容色端正，相好殊妙。其手常出无尽之宝，衣服饮食、珍妙华香、繒盖幢幡庄严之具，如是等事，超诸人天。于一切法，而得自在。)

## 5. The Attainment of Buddhahood of *Bhikṣu Dharmākara*

After cultivating ceaselessly for uncountable kalpas, *Dharmakāra* Bodhisattva eventually consummated all the wisdom and meritorious virtues. The Pure Land he designed was finally accomplished ten *kalpas* ago, and *Dharmakāra* Bodhisattva automatically became the Amitabha Buddha, as confirmed in the *Sutra*.

*Ānanda* asked the Buddha, "Has the *Dharmakāra* Bodhisattva already attained Buddhahood and then passed into *Nirvāṇa*? Or not attained Buddhahood yet? Where is he now?" The Buddha replied, "The *Dharmakāra* Bodhisattva has already attained Buddhahood and is now dwelling in a

**Western Buddha-land, called 'Peace and Bliss,' a hundred thousand *koṭīs* of lands away from here." *Ānanda* further asked the Buddha, "How much time has passed since he attained Buddhahood?" The Buddha replied, "Since he attained Buddhahood, about ten *kalpas* has passed." (阿难白佛: “法藏菩萨, 为已成佛而取灭度? 为未成佛? 为今现在?” 佛告阿难: “法藏菩萨, 今已成佛。现在西方, 去此十万亿刹。其佛世界名曰安乐。” 阿难又问: “其佛成道已来, 为经几时?” 佛言: “成佛已来凡历十劫。”)**

## II. THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE FORTY-EIGHT VOWS

As the construction blueprint of the Pure Land, the Forty-Eight Vows are extensive and profound, and encompasses various aspects of meritorious virtues and functions. It is hard for beginners to comprehend them. Therefore, ancient and contemporary Dharma masters have categorised them according to their functions and the relevant beneficiaries. Master Huiyuan (慧远大师; 523 – 592 CE) of the Sui dynasty (not the first patriarch master of Pure Land Buddhism) classified the Forty-Eight Vows into three groups: Vows pertaining to the Dharma-body (12, 13, and 17), vows pertaining to the Pure Land (27, 28, 31, 32 and 40), and vows pertaining to sentient beings (the other 40 vows) [5][6]( Fig 2.1).

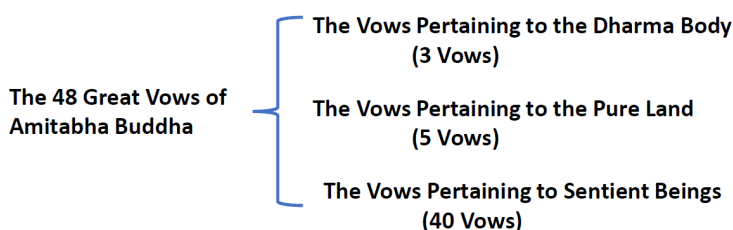


Fig 2.1 Basic Classification of the Forty-Eight Vows

Based on the classifications by ancient masters, Venerable Jingjie (净界法师) [7] specified five core vows: vows to glorify the unexcelled meritorious virtues of the resultant ground—the Pure Land (11 and 12); vows to manifest the

unrivalled cause--the right causes and conditions for rebirth in the Pure Land (18 and 19); and a vow relevant to both cause and effect (17). These five core vows are selected based on their benefits to mundane beings like us. They first praise and glorify the meritorious virtues of the resultant ground, then specify the cultivations required to get rebirth in Pure Land. Hence, having mastered the five core vows, we would obtain a penetrating comprehension of the learning and practice of the Pure Land method. He then categorised the remaining 43 vows into four groups: five vows dedicated to the majestic adornment of Pure Land (27, 28, 31, 32, and 40); nineteen vows describing the peaceful bliss of beings (1, 2, 16, 21, 3, 4, 38, 6, 7, 9, 8, 5, 13, 15, 26, 33, 39, 23 and 24); seven vows pertaining to supramundane liberation (10, 14, 46, 29, 30, 25 and 22); and twelve vows relevant to benefits obtained by hearing the sacred name (41, 35, 43, 36, 37, 44, 45, 42, 47, 48, 34 and 20).

Venerable Da'an (大安法师) [5] and Venerable Yanxu (延续法师) [6] first specified seven core vows (1, 11, 12, 17, 18, 19 and 22) out of the Forty-Eight Vows. Next, they categorised the Forty-Eight Vows into three groups as what Master Huiyuan did. They then split the vows pertaining to beings into two groups: vows about the beings of the Pure Land and vows regarding beings of the other worlds. The vows relevant to beings of the other worlds are further divided into two classes: vows related to mundane beings and vows dedicated to Bodhisattvas (Fig 2.2).

This chapter will introduce the Forty-Eight Great Vows based on the categorisation by Venerable Da'an and Venerable Yanxu. The only difference is in combining the discussion of the seven core vows into explication of respective groups. Detailed elucidation will be given on the vows that display the extraordinary environment of Pure Land and the vows that pertain to the inconceivable benefits bestowed to mundane sentient beings of Pure Land and the other worlds.

Repeated reading and contemplating of the contents of the vows will help us to establish and enhance our faith in Amitabha Buddha and the Pure Land. The comparative study of the bliss environment and supernatural endowments of beings in Pure Land with the stark suffering conditions of our world will definitely conduce us to engender unwavering earnest aspiration to get reborn there after this miserable life. The thorough comprehension of the vows on the

prerequisite conditions to be born in the Pure Land (18, 19 and 20) will motivate and encourage us to undertake the various activities to ensure the fulfilment of our aspiration. Moreover, incredible benefits can be acquired in our everyday life by reciting the Amitabha Buddha name, as guaranteed by the 37<sup>th</sup> vow.

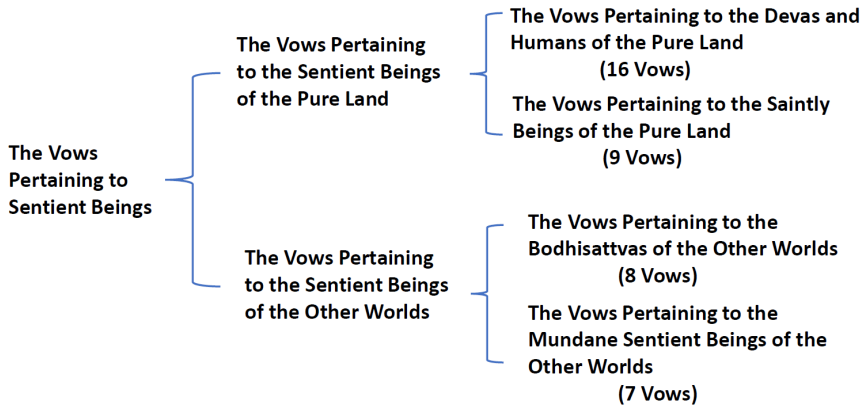


Fig 2.2 Further Classification of Vows Pertaining to Sentient Beings

### III. THE VOWS PERTAINING TO THE DHARMA BODY

Of the Forty-Eight Great Vows, three are dedicated to the meritorious virtues of Amitabha Buddha himself (Fig 2.3). They are the Vow of Bright Light Pervasively Illuminating the Ten Directions (12<sup>th</sup>), Vow of Everlasting Lifespan Same as Buddha's (13<sup>th</sup>) and Vow of All Buddhas Praising and Glorifying the Name (17<sup>th</sup>).

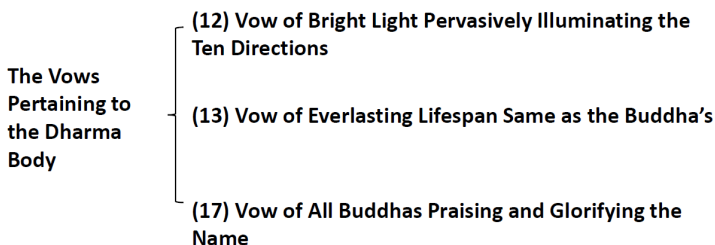


Fig 2.3 The Vows Pertaining to the Dharma Body

These three vows in fact reveal to us the fundamental indications and functionalities of Amitabha Buddha's name. The Chinese name of *Amituofo* is a transliteration of the Sanskrit name Amitabha, meaning infinite light. The other translation, that is, the Infinite Lifespan Buddha, is from the other Sanskrit name *Amitayus* Buddha, meaning unlimited lifespan. The Sanskrit *Amita* means infinite, indicating that every aspect of the meritorious virtues of Amitabha Buddha is infinite. The two kernels, Amitabha (infinite light) and *Amitayus* (infinite lifespan), are only two typical and essential representation of them.

## 1. The Vow of Bright Light Pervasively Illuminating the Ten Directions (12<sup>th</sup>)

In Buddhism, light represents wisdom. The crucial benefits bestowed by all Buddhas to sentient beings of the ten directions of the past, present and the future are to awaken their intrinsic wisdom for their liberation and to further their attainment of Buddhahood. Moreover, since light illuminates and pervades the ten directions, it indicates the boundlessly expansive space.

The infinite bright light of Amitabha Buddha has inconceivable significance to sentient beings of other worlds. It constitutes the medium of mental connection between the Buddha himself and the sentient beings who are mindfully reciting his name. *The Contemplation Sūtra* states, **“The Buddha of Immeasurable Lifespan has eighty-four thousand physical characteristics; and there are eighty-four thousand secondary marks of excellence in each of those characteristics. Each of those marks radiates eighty-four thousand rays of light, and each ray of light shines universally upon the worlds of the ten directions. Those sentient beings who are mindful of the Buddha are embraced by that light, never to be abandoned.”** (无量寿佛有八万四千相。一一相中，各有八万四千随形好，一一好中复有八万四千光明，一一光明遍照十方世界，念佛众生摄取不舍。[8] [9])

This indicates that the light of Amitabha Buddha is constantly pervading throughout space. Anyone, who has established sincere faith and earnest aspiration and is mindful of Amitabha Buddha, is assured to receive illumination by the auspicious light of Amitabha Buddha. The immediate

resultant benefits are that one will be respected and mindfully protected by deities or gods, and will remain gentle and supple in both body and mind, as guaranteed in other vows (33<sup>rd</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup>). The ultimate benefit is that one will be assuredly welcomed and escorted to be reborn in the Pure Land, at the end of one's life, and to further accomplish the Buddha Path in one lifetime.

It is not easy to believe and accept this vow. Ordinary people of materialism-oriented educational background may wonder why we cannot see, feel or perceive it like natural light, if Amitabha's light pervades the entire space. Let me ask you a question. Can you see or feel ultra-violet light,  $\alpha$ -rays, or electromagnetic waves and so on in space? Yet, we cannot deny or ignore their existence, because their utilities or applications are universally recognised nowadays. Hence, we cannot deny or ignore the existence of the light of Amitabha Buddha based on the evidence that we cannot observe it directly.

Unlike natural light, which can be seen or felt or even detected by some instrument, the light of Amitabha Buddha is of purely mental correspondence. It has real and extraordinary effect on those sentient beings who are earnestly mindful of the Buddha. For example, piously reciting Amitabha's name can eliminate karmas of heinous transgressions of birth-and-death of eight billion *kalpas*, as exposed in *the Contemplation Sūtra*, not to mention the less grave transgressions. Furthermore, the light of Amitabha Buddha illuminates a dying person who mindfully recites his name, preventing his or her mind from distraction, thus ensuring his or her rebirth in the Pure Land. As introduced in this book and *the Records of Saints and Sages of the Pure Land* [10], many historical and contemporary people have demonstrated the benefits bestowed by the Buddha light.

Even though we are inherently endowed with the omniscient wisdom and capabilities, just like Buddha, the ignorance and afflictions from beginningless time have obscured and confined our perceptive ability. Our world is constituted by the collective karmas of all beings inhabiting it. But it possesses multiple spheres. Beings can only perceive things or events in accordance with their mind, which is specified by their level of ignorance, afflictions and karmas. As stated in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, **“In the *tathagatagarbha*, the quintessential form is of true emptiness and the quintessential emptiness is**

**(endowed with) true form; it is intrinsically purified and pervasive in the whole Dharma-realm; it manifests the amount to be cognised in accordance with the mind of sentient beings, which develops and exhibits pursuant to their karmas.”** (如来藏中，性色真空，性空真色。清净本然，周遍法界。随众生心，应所知量。循业发现。) [11] [12]

Currently, human beings have developed myriad applications of various invisible rays or waves. For instance, TV signals are transmitted all over the world based on electromagnetic waves. They are unremittingly pervasive in the universe, yet invisible. However, as long as your TV terminal is tuned to the right corresponding frequency, clear programs will be displayed. If the TV terminal's receiving frequency is not in correspondence with the broadcasted signal, it is unable to receive the corresponding program. Analogously, the benevolent light of Amitabha Buddha is constantly pervasive in the universe; but it is only received by beings with right corresponding “frequency”, which is sincere faith and earnest mindfulness of the Buddha. Without sincere faith in the Buddha and earnest mindfulness of the Buddha, one cannot obtain the effect of the Buddha light. This is similar to that of a TV without the right modulated frequency and thus unable to receive the corresponding TV signal. Another simile can also demonstrate the necessity of specific correspondence. Magnets only attract magnetic materials such as iron. No matter how strong or powerful the magnet is, it does not attract non-magnetic materials. Similarly, the light of Amitabha Buddha only has effect on those who believe in him and are earnestly mindful of him. It is also true that sunlight illuminates all beings in the world, but blind beings cannot see it. Those beings who are without faith in Amitabha or refuse to be mindful of him are just like blind beings, unable to perceive the Buddha light.

## **2. The Vow of Eternal Lifespan Same as Buddha's (13<sup>th</sup>)**

The second essential meritorious virtue of Amitabha Buddha is the infinite lifespan. It represents the unlimitedness of time. In fact, both the Dharma-body and the reward-body of all Buddhas are infinite in time. The Dharma-body is without beginning or end. The reward-body begins at the attainment of Buddhahood, but it lasts endlessly. However, mundane beings cannot see the Dharma-body or reward-body, though they are eternal in nature. Only the



transformation-body or the response-body of Buddhas can be seen by mundane beings, since it is manifested for edifying corresponding sentient beings; and it is with beginning and with end. For example, *Śākyamuni* Buddha manifested in this world for eighty years from birth to entering *parinirvana*.

The eternal lifespan of Amitabha Buddha refers to his transformation-body which is manifested in his Pure Land. It has two types of indications and significance.

① In his original vows, he resolves to deliver limitlessly innumerable sentient beings. However, their capacities, virtuous roots and affinities with Amitabha are diverse. Their causal conditions or opportunities for encountering Pure Land teachings are also different. There are fortunate beings who heard the Pure Land teachings long time ago and have already been reborn there. For some, the opportunity to cultivate the Pure Land practice has just-matured. Hence, they can hear teachings from some Dharma masters or read some Pure Land *Sūtras* or commentary books. They thus started their learning and cultivation according to the Pure Land teachings, and are pursuing to get rebirth at the end of this very life. Many more beings will have to wait inconceivably innumerable *kalpas* to meet the opportunity and appropriate conditions to learn and practise Pure Land Buddhism to get rebirth there. If the lifespan of Amitabha Buddha is limited to a definite interval, whether it is hundreds of years, millions of years or even millions of *kalpas*, most of the future beings will lose the opportunity of getting reborn there.

② The primary purpose of Amitabha welcoming and escorting sentient beings to get reborn in the Pure Land is to facilitate them to attain Buddhahood swiftly, rather than providing them with merely a peaceful and blissful environment to enjoy life. The *Sūtras* and commentaries [13] say that it takes a sentient being three *asaṃkhyeya kalpas* from the faith stage to the attainment of Buddhahood based on general Buddhist cultivations. Here *asaṃkhyeya* implies a great number in ancient India, meaning innumerable, equivalent to the number  $10^{140}$ . Even though it will be much faster to accomplish Buddhahood, through the Pure Land gateway, due to the unique advantage of obtaining non-retrogression, and with the beneficial environment of Pure Land, it still requires an extremely long time for most beings to attain Buddhahood. Therefore, Amitabha Buddha

resolved to dwell in the Pure Land for inconceivably immeasurable time to ensure beings born there can accomplish the Buddha Path.

### **3. The Vow of All Buddhas Praising and Glorifying the Name (17<sup>th</sup>)**

Amitabha Buddha used five *kalpas* to formulate the Forty-Eight Great Vows, and he spent innumerable infinite number of *kalpas* to accumulate meritorious virtues to accomplish his Pure Land. The sole purpose is to attract sentient beings of the worlds of the ten directions to aspire rebirth there so as to attain Buddhahood. To realise this objective, he has to make his Pure Land and the prerequisite conditions for getting rebirth there be widely known to sentient beings of the other worlds. Otherwise, it would be futile, no matter how splendid his Pure Land is, or how incredibly easy it is to get reborn there. It is analogous to a company, which has designed and manufactured a marvellous product, and needs some stars to help promote the product.

As will be introduced in the following sections, the myriad extraordinary attributes of the magnificent environment, the supreme capabilities of the beings there, and the unbelievable convenience to get reborn there are all manifestations effected through the empowerment of Amitabha Buddha. They are totally beyond the imagination and description by mundane beings; and even Bodhisattvas cannot completely comprehend them. Only Buddhas can be ultimately aware of them. Furthermore, Buddhas are well recognised as truthful speakers, real words speakers. Hence the Buddhas of the ten directions are the most appropriate representatives to advocate the Pure Land teachings and practice. Therefore, the 17<sup>th</sup> great vow states that all Buddhas in the ten directions will glorify his Pure Land and praise his Name.

The realization of the 17<sup>th</sup> vow was demonstrated by the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni Buddha. Of the *Sūtras* expounded by the Buddha in his forty-nine years of preaching, more than a hundred mentioned the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha. The three Pure Land *Sūtras* are exclusively dedicated to the promulgation of Pure Land. Having realised that it was time for his disciples and other sentient beings of this *Saha* world to learn about Pure Land, Śākyamuni Buddha expounded *the Amitabha Sūtra* [13] without request. At the

distribution section of that *Sūtra*, innumerable Buddhas of six (or ten) directions all extend their extensive long tongues to certify the truthfulness of what is expounded in the *Sūtra*. In the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*, Śākyamuni Buddha on realising that the conditions to expound the *Sūtra* was mature, manifested extraordinary auspicious signs. He then empowered Ananda to ask about the reasons for the exceptionally marvellous splendours, thus resulting in the exposition of this epoch-making *Sūtra*. The preaching of the *Contemplation Sūtra* was the most dramatic. Prince Ajātaśatru of Magādhā state, misled by the counsel of Devadatta, confined his father, the king, to starve him to death, and also put his queen mother Vaidehi in prison. In extreme anguish and despair, queen Vaidehi besought the Buddha to send Venerable Maudgalyayana and Venerable Ananda to console and comfort her. To her surprise, Śākyamuni Buddha with his companions appeared before her. He then introduced to her the wondrous Pure Land and explicated to her on how to cultivate various contemplations and other practices to achieve rebirth there.

Through the inculcations of Śākyamuni Buddha, most people of our world are more familiar with Amitabha Buddha than with Śākyamuni Buddha himself. Amitabha Buddha and his assistant Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva are undoubtedly the most popular Buddhist saints in China and other countries with Mahayana Buddhism practices. Many people often voice “Amitabha Buddha” automatically whenever they encounter danger or excitement. The remarkable effect is definitely derived from this vow.

The second realization of the 17<sup>th</sup> vow occurs when all Buddhas in the ten directions praise Amitabha Buddha’s name. This expression reveals an extremely significant signal: the most convenient and effective practice required to get reborn in the Pure Land is to mindfully recite the name of Amitabha Buddha. All the three *Sūtras* dedicated to the Pure Land reveal both the environmental excellence and the supreme endowments of beings there, as well as introduce the various cultivations required to be born there. Amazingly, all the three *Sūtras* emphasise the practical skilful means of mindful recitation of the Buddha name, or “Namo Amitabha Buddha”.

The following chapters will further discuss the essence of the name of Amitabha Buddha. Briefly speaking, the name of Amitabha Buddha represents all the meritorious virtues accumulated by Amitabha Buddha through his

cultivations of inconceivably innumerable *kalpas*. It is entirely unbelievable. We can comprehend this wondrous phenomenon by an analogy. For instance, a successful entrepreneur established an enormous business empire, with a bank account which has billions and billions of dollars in deposit. A password is created and anyone who is authorised with the password and wants to withdraw money can use the password to get what he or she wants. Similarly, the Pure Land is the enormous bank account with unlimited inexhaustible wealth or cash deposits; sincere faith and earnest aspiration are the authorization, and the password for the “Amitabha Buddha bank” is the name of Amitabha Buddha. As long as one piously recites Amitabha Buddha’s name with sincere faith, one will definitely obtain current benefits. As our life approaches the end, if we mindfully recite Amitabha Buddha’s name with sincere faith and has utmost earnest aspiration to depart from this world and yearn rebirth in the Pure Land, we are guaranteed to get reborn there. This assurance is clearly stated in the 18<sup>th</sup> vow which will be explicated in section VIII.

## IV. THE VOWS PERTAINING TO THE PURE LAND

There are five vows pertaining to the adornment of the Pure Land itself, in the Forty-Eight Great Vows (Fig 2.4). They are the Vow of Myriad Things with Extraordinary Excellence (27<sup>th</sup>), the Vow of Bodhi-Tree Being Universally Seen (28<sup>th</sup>), the Vow of Pure Land Illuminating and Reflecting the Ten Directions (31<sup>st</sup>), the Vow of Majestic Adornments Surpassing Those of All Devas and Humans (32<sup>nd</sup>) and the Vow of Seeing All Buddha-lands at Will (40<sup>th</sup>).

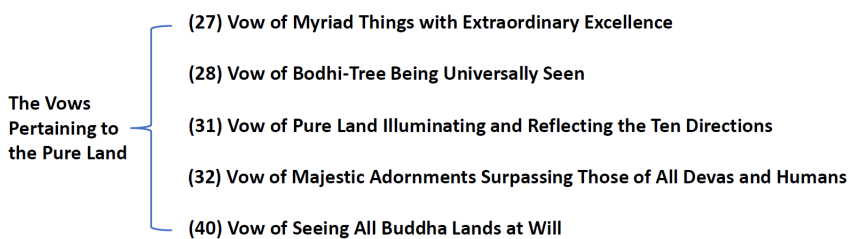


Fig 2.4 The Vows Pertaining to the Pure Land

If we plan to immigrate to another country or place and live there permanently, we tend to spend a lot of time studying the natural and social environment of that country or place. We will be eager to move there if the new target country or place is endowed with beautiful geographical environments, congenial climate, plentiful agricultural productions, spacious living area, and safe, harmonious and cordial social environment. On the contrary, if the country or place is fraught with hazardous mountains or rivers, severe weather, barren land, crowded living conditions, and dangerous combative neighbourhood, we will desire to leave desperately, let alone to migrate there. By the same token, it is impossible for us to generate the earnest aspiration to get reborn in the Pure Land if we know nothing about the Pure Land, especially the living conditions there. Hence it is imperative to study the descriptions about the splendid environment from the Pure Land *Sūtras* and the commentaries, and to compare it with our stark suffering environment.

The three *Sūtras* depict inconceivable excellence of the Pure Land environment from different perspectives. *The Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* not only presents a schematic introduction of several typical aspects of its excellence, but also provides us with some detailed and exquisite descriptions of the splendid magnificence of the Pure Land. *The Contemplation Sūtra* systematically outlines the spectacular grounds, trees, mansions, lakes, lotus etc. to facilitate practitioners to visualise the Pure Land hierarchically. *The Amitabha Sūtra* summarises the primary attributes of the Pure Land, enabling practitioners to memorise and recite them. The following will explicate these five vows with some excerpts from *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* and *the Contemplation Sūtra*.

## **1. General Characteristics of the Pure Land Environment**

The two vows, the Vow of Myriad Things with Extraordinary Excellence (27<sup>th</sup>) and the Vow of Majestic Adornments Surpassing Those of All Devas and Humans (32<sup>nd</sup>) give a schematical introduction of the general and essential characteristics of the Pure Land environment.

### **(1) The Vow of Myriad Things with Extraordinary Excellence (27<sup>th</sup>)**

This vow states, “**all the myriad things in my land will be majestically pure and gloriously resplendent in extraordinarily subtle and extremely wondrous forms and colours, beyond description and measurement**”.

① The essential characteristic of everything in the Pure Land is majestically pure and gloriously resplendent in extraordinary subtle and extremely wondrous forms and colours. Its substantial quality is pure, not defiled. Hence it will not instigate the afflictions of greed, hatred and delusion. The appearance of everything in the Pure Land exhibit brilliant light. For example, the ground is composed of various jewels, emitting myriad resplendent light; the trees are also constituted of various treasures, radiating brilliant light. Out of the pure nature and bright splendour, the forms and colours of everything in the Pure Land are extraordinarily subtle and extremely wondrous.

② Everything in the Pure Land is plentiful with myriad varieties. The abundance and varieties are beyond description and measurement. Amitabha Buddha resolves to attract inconceivably innumerable beings of the worlds of the ten directions to be reborn there, so he has prepared inexhaustible materials to satisfy everyone’s requirement. The multitude of beings possess diverse requirements and preference, so are the varieties of materials there.

The commentary on *the Treatise on Rebirth* summarises the general characteristics of the Pure Land environment in one stanza, “**Contemplate the characteristics of that world, it surpasses the three realms; it is ultimate like space, expansive without boundaries.** [15]” First, the pure essential characteristics of the Pure Land are vastly superior to our worlds. It is because Pure Land is constituted or manifested by the Dharma-body of Amitabha Buddha, unlike our world which is constructed based on the collective karmas of all beings dwelling here. Next, the magnitude of Amitabha Buddha’s mind while he generated his Bodhicitta and during the process of cultivation was infinite, hence the resultant Pure Land is endowed with boundless immeasurable expansiveness.

## **(2) The Vow of Majestic Adornments Surpassing Those of All Devas and Humans (32<sup>nd</sup>)**

This vow delineates the composition and functionalities of everything from ground to the sky, as declared, **“When I attain Buddhahood, in my land, from the ground to the open sky, there will be palaces, towers, ponds, streams, flowers, and trees. Myriad things in my land will be composed of innumerable varieties of treasures and hundreds of thousands kinds of fragrances. These magnificent adornments are extraordinary and wondrous, surpassing all those of devas and humans. As the fragrances pervade all worlds in the ten directions, Bodhisattvas who smell them will all cultivate the Buddha Path.”**

① This vow specifies that the entire environment of the Pure Land from palaces, lakes, streams, to trees and lotuses etc. are made of wish-fulfilling jewels. These jewels spontaneously radiate unlimited light, emit various wonderful fragrance and emanate wondrous sounds. They are totally different from the single function of jewels in our world, which possess one or a few kinds of colours and are incapable of generating light, fragrance or sounds.

② Beautiful things such as jewels, delightful scenes, melodious sounds, pleasant fragrance, delectable taste and comfortable tactile feelings usually create or increase the afflictions of greed or attachment of mundane beings. However, since the entire Pure Land is constructed by the Dharma-body of Amitabha Buddha, all the sensory enjoyment of the six faculties will automatically motivate one to be mindful of the Buddha, the Dharma and the *Sangha*.

③ Our imagining capability are quite limited. Even fifty years ago, we could hardly visualise the virtual world created by the current technologies, not to mention the Pure Land world manifested by the omniscient Amitabha Buddha. The wondrous magnificence is vastly superior to anything enjoyed by humans and devas, and beyond their imagination and description. *Śākyamuni* Buddha only used language comprehensible by us to describe some aspects that are within our imagination.

### **(3) Some Elaborations**

Although the above two vows introduce the general essential characteristics, the basic composition and the basic functionalities of the Pure Land environment, they are too concisely conceptual. We will excerpt some paragraphs from *the Contemplation Sūtra* and *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* to facilitate the reader to get a better comprehension of several wondrous aspects of the environment there.

### 1) The Ground of the Pure Land

In the instructions for the second contemplation, the ground contemplation, *the Contemplation Sūtra* [8] states:

**“When this vision is completed, next imagine that this ground of lapis lazuli shines brilliantly, both inside and out, and that the lapis lazuli ground is supported from below by majestic golden pillars made of adamant and the seven precious jewels. Each golden pillar has eight corners and eight sides, each side is made of a hundred jewels, each jewel shines with a thousand rays of light, and each ray of light has eighty-four thousand colours. As they are reflected on the lapis lazuli ground, they look like a thousand *koṭis* suns, so dazzling that it is impossible to see them all in detail.**

**"On the surface of this lapis lazuli ground, golden paths intricately mesh and crisscross like a net of cords, and the seven kinds of precious jewels form borders that demarcate the intersected parts of the ground. Each jewel emits a flood of light in five hundred colours. The light appears in the shape of a flower, or a star or the moon. Suspended in the sky, these rays form a tower of light on which there are ten million pavilions made of a hundred jewels. Both sides of the tower are adorned with a hundred *koṭis* flower-banners and countless musical instruments. Eight kinds of pure breezes of pleasing qualities are produced by these rays of light, causing the musical instruments to play in voices which proclaim the truths of ‘suffering, emptiness, impermanence and non-self.’”**

（“此想成已，见琉璃地，内外映彻。下有金刚，七宝金幢，擎琉璃地。其幢八方八楞具足。一一方面，百宝所成。一一宝珠，有千光明。一一光明。八万四千色，映琉璃地，如亿千日，不可具见。琉璃地上，以黄金绳，杂厕间错，以七宝界，分齐分明。一一宝中，有五百色光。其光如华，又似星月，悬处虚空，成光明



台。”“楼阁千万，百宝合成。于台两边，各有百亿华幢，无量乐器，以为庄严。八种清风，从光明出，鼓此乐器，演说苦，空，无常，无我之音。”）

From the above depiction, we can draw some conclusions:

- ① The ground of the Pure Land is made of lapis lazuli and other jewel materials, unlike our land which is composed of filthy earth, stones and sand.
- ② The lapis lazuli and all the jewels constituting the ground of the Pure Land are translucent or transparent, incessantly emitting resplendent light brighter than the suns and moons. Thus, there is no distinction between day and night in the Pure Land.
- ③ The magnificent light rays also create eight kinds of virtuous breezes, which waft the instruments to promulgate the four universal characteristics **“suffering, emptiness, impermanence and non-self.”** Venerable Daoyuan [16] in his commentary of the *Sūtra* said that the eight kinds of virtuous breezes indicate the Eightfold Right Path of the Buddhist practice.

Before visualizing the lapis lazuli ground of the Pure Land, the *Sūtra* instructs the practitioner to visualize first the water, next turning the water into ice, then transforming the ice into the lapis lazuli ground. This text indicates that the ground of the Pure Land is absolutely flat, unlike our land fraught with mountains, cliffs, canyons etc. *The Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* clarifies this fact: **“In that land, there are no mountains, such as Mount Sumeru and the Encircling Adamantine Mountains. Likewise, there are neither immense oceans nor small seas, streams, channels, wells, or valleys. But one, by the Buddha's power, can see those manifestations if one so wishes. In that land there is no hell, hungry ghost or animal realms of various tribulations.”**（又其国土，无须弥山，及金刚围一切诸山。亦无大海小海，溪渠井谷。佛神力故，欲见则见。亦无地狱饿鬼畜生诸难之趣。）

Buddhism stresses **“all dharmas are of mind-only (万法唯心)”**, that is, the entire environment world is created by our mind. Since sentient beings in our *Saha* world are characterised by inequality and discrimination, many people are dominated by cruelty and craft, the resultant world is uneven, with mountains, hills, valleys and caves etc. On the contrary, Amitabha Buddha's mind is purely equal with equanimity and compassion, hence, the world

constructed by his great equal mind is flat by nature. Of course, for the purpose of satisfying the multitude of beings, marvellous mountains or seas, or any peculiar scenes will spontaneously manifest themselves before the viewer as one wishes, with no influence on others who do not want to see them. Furthermore, because human beings in this world possess both virtuous thoughts and evil thoughts, we experience day and night. Since the hungry ghosts and hell dwellers are dominated by evil thoughts, they have to endure dark environments, without sun light. The Pure Land is the result of Amitabha Buddha's perpetual cultivation based on his purely virtuous thoughts and aspirations; hence, it is unremittingly bright with pleasant light.

Not only does everything, on the ground or in the space of the Pure Land, spontaneously emanates brilliant light, melodious sounds and pleasant fragrance, but also the tactile sensations of the ground are incredible. Unlike our world, where most of the ground is covered by sordid earth, loathsome dust or hard concrete, the Pure Land ground is carpeted with flower petals in addition to their jewelled embellishments. As depicted in *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*: **“Moreover, the breezes blow flowers scattered all over that Buddha-land, which fall orderly, according to their colours, not chaotically. They are soft and lustrous, with exuberant fragrance. When one's feet step on them, they sink down four inches, but when the foot is lifted, they rise to their former level. When the flowers have served their purpose, the earth opens up and they vanish, leaving the ground clean, with no trace of them. According to schedule, the breezes disperse the flowers in this way six times a day.”**（又风吹散华，遍满佛土。随色次第，而不杂乱，柔软光泽，馨香芬烈。足履其上，蹈下四寸，随举足已，还复如故。华用已讫，地辄开裂，以次化没，清淨无遗。随其时节，风吹散华，如是六反。）

## 2) The Trees of the Pure Land

In our world, exuberant trees and forest are indicators of vitality. An ideal land is replete with various trees and flowers. In Buddhism, trees have special significance. Four of the eight phases in the accomplishment of the Buddha Path are undertaken under trees:

- ① The Buddha was born under trees;

- ② The Buddha attained his perfect Enlightenment, i.e. the Buddhahood, under the Bodhi-tree;
- ③ Most of his teachings were given under trees;
- ④ He finally entered into *Parinirvana* under trees.

All the three Pure Land *Sūtras* mention or give detailed descriptions of the jewelled trees in the Pure Land.

In the fourth contemplation, *the Contemplation Sūtra* presents a vivid depiction of the jewelled trees.

**“When visualizing the jewelled trees, one should see them one by one and then visualize them in seven rows. Each tree is eight thousand *yojanas* high, adorned with blossoms and leaves made of the seven kinds of jewels. Each blossom or leaf is the colour of a different jewel. From the lapis lazuli-coloured blossoms is emitted a golden light; from the crystal-coloured is emitted a crimson light; from the agate-coloured is emitted a conch-shell light; and from the conch-shell-coloured is emitted a pearl-green ray of light. In addition, coral, amber and all the other myriad jewels serve as dazzling ornaments. ( “观宝树者，一一观之，作七重行树想。一一树高八千由旬。其诸宝树，七宝华叶，无不具足。一一华叶，作异宝色。琉璃色中，出金色光；玻璃色中，出红色光；玛瑙色中，出砗磲光；砗磲色中，出绿真珠光；珊瑚琥珀，一切众宝，以为映饰。” )**

**"Exquisite nets of pearls completely cover the trees, and each tree is veiled by seven layers of nets. Between each of the nets are 500 *koṭīs* of exquisite flower palaces that resemble the palace of Lord Brahma, and within each of them reside celestial children. Each of these children wears ornaments made of 500 *koṭīs* of noble wish-fulfilling jewels. The light from these *mani* jewels shines brightly for a radius of a hundred *yojanas* in all directions, like a constellation of 100 *koṭīs* suns and moons. No words can fully describe the brilliance of this light. The intermingling of the light from these various jewels produces a colour unexcelled among all colours. ( “妙真珠网弥覆树上。一一树上，有七重网。一一网间，有五百亿妙华宫殿，如梵王宫。诸天童子，**

自然在中。一一童子，五百亿释迦毗楞伽摩尼以为瓔珞。其摩尼光，照百由旬，犹如和合百亿日月不可具明。众宝间错，色中上者。” )

**"The rows of these jewelled-trees are evenly arranged, and their foliage is equally spaced. From among the leaves appear exquisite blossoms; and upon these flowers, fruits made of the seven kinds of jewels spontaneously appear. Each leaf is twenty-five *yojanas* in diameter, shining with a thousand colours and having a hundred different patterns like heavenly ornaments. The exquisite blossoms are the colour of *jambūnada-gold*. They resemble revolving wheels of fire gently turning among the leaves; and from these flowers, fruits well up as if from *Sakra's* vase. ( “此诸宝树，行行相当，叶叶相次。于众叶间，生诸妙华，华上自然有七宝果。一一树叶，纵广正等二十五由旬。其叶千色，有百种画如天瓔珞。有众妙华，作阎浮檀金色。如旋火轮，宛转叶间，涌生诸果，如帝释瓶。” )**

**"These fruits issue forth great floods of light that form banners, flags and countless canopies adorned with jewels. Within these jewelled canopies, all the deeds of the Buddhas of the three-great-thousandfold worlds are illuminated, and the Buddha-lands of the ten directions also appear within." ( “有大光明，化成幢旛，无量宝盖。是宝盖中，映现三千大千世界，一切佛事。十方佛国，亦于中现。” )**

This paragraph reveals to us the following information:

① Our mental objects are the recollections and reflections of perceived objects from our sensory faculties. We have never experienced the extraordinary sights, the sounds and fragrances of the jewelled trees of the Pure Land, and our mind is preoccupied and restricted by the images of various trees in our world. Hence it is impossible for us to contemplate or visualise the real magnificent trees of the Pure Land. In this *Sūtra*, *Śākyamuni* Buddha instructs us to gradually concentrate our mind by visualising the setting sun, the water and the ground. He then taught us how to visualise the jewelled trees. The jewelled trees of the Pure Land have the following features:

First, all trees in the Pure Land are arranged in even rows and patterns with seven rows in each group, unlike our trees which are sporadically or chaotically grown.

Second, all trees in the Pure Land are manifested by the meritorious virtues of Amitabha Buddha, hence they appear in full size instantly, different from the trees in our world which may take years to grow.

Third, the trees in the Pure Land are as high as eight thousand *yojanas*, equivalent to 160,000 km in our measurement, even higher than the diameter of our earth (12,742 km).

② All the foliage and blossoms of the jewelled trees are composed of seven kinds of treasures. Each blossom or leaf exhibits the colour of jewels. For instance, the lapis lazuli leaves emanate golden light, the crystal leaves exhibit ruby light, etc. The trees are decorated with corals, ambers and other myriad jewels, with their light reflecting each other.

③ Unlike trees in our world which are under the bare sky, each jewelled tree in the Pure Land are covered by seven layers of pearled nets. More amazingly, between these nets, are located 500 *koṭis* palaces of exquisite flowers, which are as wonderful as the palaces of the Brahma heavens. Celestial children reside in the palaces, and each child wears ornaments composed of 500 *koṭis mani* jewels. Furthermore, all the *mani* jewels emanate splendid light, which can illuminate hundreds of *yojanas*, similar to the combined brilliance of billions of suns and moons, beyond any description. Therefore, the scenes above or on the trees in the Pure Land surpass any paradise described in our mythologies.

④ Not only are the trees aligned in rows, but each leaf of the trees are geometrically corresponding to each other, forming miraculous patterns. Between the foliage are magnificent blossoms of golden colour, which spontaneously bear wondrous fruits of seven jewels. Each leaf reaches twenty-five *yojanas* in length and width (equivalent to 500km, just image it!) Moreover, each leaf is endowed with thousands of diverse beautiful colours, comparable to hundreds of exquisite paintings or pictures.

### **3) The Lakes and Water of the Pure Land**

Water is absolutely indispensable for the survival of humans and animals in our world. However, the bodies of humans and devas in the Pure Land are not gross and filthy like ours. With wondrous supreme bodies, they do not need water to sustain life. Nevertheless, given the habitual reliance on water before beings

are reborn in Pure Land, Amitabha Buddha, out of infinite loving kindness and compassion, manifested lakes and streams composed of various treasures. In the fifth visualisation of *the Contemplation Sūtra*, it depicts lakes and waters in the Pure Land.

**“The Land of Utmost Bliss has lakes of water of eight meritorious virtues; the waters of each one of these lakes are made of the seven treasures. These treasures are gentle and soft, born from the king of wish-fulfilling pearls. The water of each lake flows into fourteen streams, each of which is made of the seven treasures and is wondrous in colour. The banks of each channel are made of gold, and the bed is strewn with sand constituted of variegated diamonds. ( “极乐国土，有八池水。一一池水，七宝所成。其宝柔软，从如意珠王生。分为十四支，一支作七宝妙色。黄金为渠，渠下皆以杂色金刚，以为底沙。” )**

**"In the midst of each lake there are 600 koṭīs of seven-treasured lotus flowers. Each lotus flower is perfectly round and is twelve yojanas in diameter. The water flows among the flowers, upward and downward along the trees. The delicate and exquisite sounds of the flowing waters proclaim the teachings of suffering, emptiness, impermanence, non-self and the pāramitās. They also praise the physical characteristics and marks of the Buddhas. ( “一一水中，有六十亿七宝莲华，一一莲华，团圆正等十二由旬。其摩尼水流注华间，寻树上下。其声微妙，演说苦、空、无常、无我诸波罗密。复有赞叹诸佛相好者。” )**

**"The king of wish-fulfilling pearl emanates delicate and exquisite golden rays of light, which are transformed into singing birds as colourful as a hundred jewels. And their harmonious, mournful and elegant songs continually inspire one to be mindful of Buddha, to be mindful of Dharma and to be mindful of Sangha.” ( “如意珠王涌出金色微妙光明，其光化为百宝色鸟，和鸣哀雅，常赞念佛、念法、念僧。” )**

① Unlike water in our world, which is heavy and sometimes cause dreadful disasters, such as raging storms, hurricanes, flood, etc., the water in the Pure Land is composed of seven kinds of treasures. Though it is formed of treasures, its substance is soft, as it is produced by the king of wish-fulfilling jewels. The

water in the Pure Land has the following eight meritorious virtues, as enumerated in *Sūtras* and commentaries [17][18]:

- a) **Clear and clean:** the appearance is pure, clean and clear, unlike some of our water which look dirty and turbid.
- b) **Fresh:** it smells fragrant and odourless.
- c) **Delectable:** it tastes delicious.
- d) **Soft:** it feels soft to touch.
- e) **Moist:** it feels moist.
- f) **Light and peaceful:** unlike our water which is heavy, and sometimes causes dangerous and terrifying water-related disasters.
- g) **It can quench thirst.**
- h) **It can sustain and foster all the faculties.**

② All the streams are made of seven types of treasures, and the bed is strewn with the sand of variegated diamonds. This is unlike the mud and sand commonly found in streams of our world.

③ In each lake, there are 60 *koṭis* lotus flowers composed of seven treasures, and each lotus is perfectly round and is twelve *yojanas* in diameter (equivalent to 240 km).

④ The *mani* water flows and circulates in the midst of lotus flowers and trees. Different from the heavy water in our world, the water in the Pure Land can flow in all directions, downward, level, even spontaneously upward.

⑤ The water not only can exhibit delightful sensory enjoyment, but also expounds liberating Dharmas such as suffering, emptiness, impermanence and non-self, and various *pāramitās*, pursuant to the capacities and preference of the beings. It incessantly praises and glorifies the magnificent appearances and meritorious virtues of all Buddhas as well.

⑥ The king of *mani* (wishi-fulfilling) jewels not only produces the waters, but also emanates golden, subtle and wondrous light, which is transformed into hundreds of colourful, exquisite birds. These birds chirp and sing with elegant and mournful melodies, constantly praise and commend the mindfulness of the Buddha, the mindfulness of the Dharma and the mindfulness of the *Sangha*.

According to *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*, the water in the Pure Land flows or behaves in compliance with the wishes of the beings. It refreshes their bodies and cleanses their minds. **“When Bodhisattvas and śrāvakas in that land enter a jewelled lake, if they wish the water to cover their feet, the water will cover their feet. If they wish it to rise to their knees, it rises to their knees; if they wish it to rise to their waists, it rises to their waists; if they wish it to rise to their necks, it rises to their necks; if they wish it to pour over their bodies, it spontaneously pours over their bodies. If they wish it to recede, it recedes. Its temperature is moderate, cool or warm, pursuant to their wishes. The water comforts the body and refreshes the mind, washing away their mental defilements.”**（彼诸菩萨及声闻众，若入宝池，意欲令水没足，水即没足。欲令至膝，即至于膝。欲令至腰，水即至腰。欲令至颈，水即至颈。欲令灌身，自然灌身。欲令还复，水辄还复。调和冷暖，自然随意。开神悦体，荡除心垢。）

#### 4) The Lotus Flower of the Pure Land

To Pure Land Buddhist practitioners, the lotus flower is endowed with incredible practical functionalities as well as sublime pure symbolic significance.

① It represents the womb of those getting reborn in the Pure Land, since all beings there are born from lotus by transformation. It is said that as soon as one establishes sincere faith and earnest aspiration to get reborn in the Pure Land, and start to mindfully recite Amitabha Buddha’s name, a lotus with the name of the practitioner will appear in a lake there. The lotus will grow with the enhancement of faith, the fortification of aspiration and diligence in recitation. If one’s faith or aspiration fades away, or when one stops the cultivation of Pure Land practices, one’s lotus will wither. Furthermore, if they do not get rebirth of upper grade in the superior rank, they would remain in the lotus for a varied period of time after they get rebirth in the Pure Land. The length of time in the



lotus varies from one day to twelve great *kalpas*, depending on their grade of rebirth, as explicated in the next Chapter.

② The lotus is also the travelling vehicle, taking us from this world to the Pure Land. As instructed in *the Contemplation Sūtra*, as one reaches the verge of death, Amitabha with his companion will come to the practitioner, with the lotus, comforting and encouraging him or her, welcoming and escorting him or her to get born in the Pure Land without failure. Seeing the glorious image of Amitabha Buddha and his companion of saints, the practitioner feels joyful, watching himself or herself entering the lotus, sitting cross-legged, and instantly arriving in the Pure Land.

Here is another paragraph excerpted from *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* describing the wonders of the lotus in the Pure Land.

**“Moreover, lotus flowers of various jewels fill the land; each flower has a hundred thousand *koṭīs* of petals. These lotuses display bright lights of numerous colours — blue lotuses glow with a blue light, white ones with a white light, and likewise, dark blue, yellow, red, and purple lotuses glow with lights of their respective colours. The brilliance and splendour of these lights are so magnificent that they outshine the sun and the moon. Each flower emits 36 hundred thousand *koṭīs* of rays of light, and each ray of light sends forth 36 hundred thousand *koṭīs* of Buddhas. The bodies of these Buddhas are purple-gold, and their physical characteristics are superb and extraordinary. Each Buddha emits hundred thousand beams of light as he expounds the wondrous Dharma [in worlds] in the ten directions. Each Buddha set innumerable sentient beings on the right path to Buddhahood.”**

(又众宝莲华，周满世界。一一宝华，百千亿叶，其华光明，无量种色。青色青光，白色白光，玄黄朱紫，光色赫然。炜烨灿烂，明曜日月。一一华中，出三十六百千亿光。一一光中，出三十六百千亿佛，身色紫金，相好殊特。一一诸佛，又放百千光明，普为十方说微妙法。如是诸佛，各各安立无量众生于佛正道。)

## 5) The Climate and Weather of the Pure Land

With our retribution body from karma, we can seldom enjoy a few days of congenial, comfortable and pleasant weather in a year. Most of the time is either

freezing cold, or scorching or smothering hot, or with terrifying thundering storms or dreadful blizzard. However, the weather and climate in the Pure Land are inconceivably enjoyable, with perennial mild, comfortable temperature and moisture, as stated in *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*. “**Neither do the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter exist. It is perennially moderate and pleasant, never cold or hot.**” (亦无四时春秋冬夏，不寒不热，常和调适。)

## 2. The Bodhi-tree of the Pure Land

The Bodhi-tree, or the tree of *bodhimaṇḍa* in Sanskrit, is where Buddhas finally attain their perfect enlightenment. The Bodhi-trees are enormous in size and inconceivable in their empowerment to Buddhist practitioners if they see them directly.

① The height of the Bodhi-tree of Amitabha Buddha is four million *lis* (*li* is a Chinese unit of distance, equal to half a kilometre). Just image a tree two million kilometres high, which is more than five times the distance from our earth to the moon (384,400 km).

② The Bodhi-tree belongs to the reward-body of the Buddha, and can only be seen by Bodhisattvas who have attained Dharma-bodies. Hence Bodhisattvas with less meritorious virtues, that is, with part of their fundamental ignorance not destroyed, are incapable of directly perceiving the Bodhi-trees of Buddhas.

③ At his causal stage, Amitabha Buddha realised that Bodhisattvas with less meritorious virtues are incapable of seeing the Bodhi-trees of Buddhas, thus unable to acquire the empowerment to their cultivations. He then made this vow to guarantee that everyone born to his Pure Land is able to see his Bodhi-tree directly.

④ By merely seeing the Bodhi-tree, the practitioner will obtain tremendous merits, as stated in *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*. “**Again, the Bodhi-tree of the Buddha Amitāyus is four million *li* in height and five thousand *yojanas* in circumference at its base, with its branches spread two hundred thousand *li* in each of the four directions. It is naturally constituted of all kinds of**

precious treasures and is adorned with the kings of jewels, namely, moon-light *maṇi* gems and ocean-supporting-wheel gems. Everywhere between its twigs hang jewelled ornaments with a thousand million different colours intermingling in various ways, and their innumerable beams shine with the utmost brilliance. The Bodhi-tree itself is covered with nets of rare, excellent gems, which manifest all kinds of ornaments in accordance with one's wishes. When a gentle breeze wafts through the jewelled tree, innumerable wondrous Dharma-sounds arise, which spread far and wide, pervading all the other Buddha-lands in the ten directions. On hearing these sounds, one will attain penetrating insight into dharmas and dwell in the stage of non-retrogression; until they attain Buddhahood, their sense of hearing will remain clear and sharp, and they will not suffer from any pain or sickness. Whether they hear the sounds of the Bodhi-tree, see its colours, smell its perfumes, taste its flavours, perceive its lights or conceive of the Dharma in their minds, they will all attain profound patience of dharmas and dwell in the stage of non-retrogression; until they attain Buddhahood, their six sensory organs will remain pure and clear, and they will not suffer from any vexations and tribulations. (又无量寿佛，其道场树，高四百万里。其本周围五千由旬，枝叶四布二十万里。一切众宝自然合成。以月光摩尼持海轮宝，众宝之王，而庄严之。周匝条间，垂宝瓔珞，百千万色，种种异变，无量光炎，照曜无极。珍妙宝网，罗覆其上。一切庄严，随应而现。微风徐动，吹诸宝树，演出无量妙法音声。其声流布，遍诸佛国。闻其音者，得深法忍，住不退转，至成佛道，耳根清彻，不遭苦患。目睹其色，鼻知其香，口尝其味，身触其光，心以法缘，皆得甚深法忍，住不退转，至成佛道，六根清彻，无诸恼患。) ”

### **3. The Reflection and Illumination of the Treasure Trees**

The two vows (the 31<sup>st</sup> and the 40<sup>th</sup>) indicate that the land and trees in the Pure Land can display or exhibit scenes of innumerable Buddha-lands in the ten directions.

#### **(1) The Vow of Pure Land Illuminating and Reflecting the Ten Directions (31<sup>st</sup>)**

This vow states that the Pure Land is not only pure, but also have the functionality of illuminating and reflecting immeasurable, innumerable and

inconceivable Buddha-lands in the ten directions, as clear as one would see one's face in a bright mirror.

This vow is truly helpful for those humans and devas born in the Pure Land. Through watching the views exhibited, they could see vividly that beings in some worlds also suffer excruciating anguishes similar to those endured by beings in the three woeful realms of our *Saha* world. It will incite their vigilance and motivate them to cultivate diligently so as to rapidly master all the skilful means to rescue them. Furthermore, they will generate and enhance their gratitude and veneration to Amitabha Buddha. Moreover, perceiving the assiduous cultivations of Bodhisattvas of other lands, they will emulate them to accelerate their progress in cultivation.

## **(2) The Vow of Seeing All Buddha-lands at Will (40<sup>th</sup>)**

This vow states, **“the Bodhisattvas in my land who wish to see the immeasurable, splendid and pure Buddha-lands of the ten directions, would be able to view them instantly at will. All these views are illuminated and reflected in the jewelled trees, just as one would see one's face reflected in a bright mirror.”** It emphasises that the Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land can see clearly all other pure lands and their majestic adornment. It indicates that the Bodhisattvas can, at any time in accordance with their wishes, watch and listen to the expositions of Dharmas by Buddhas in other pure lands. It is similar to our internet education, where students can attend lessons at any place in the world by watching video screens; the only difference is that the reflections from the treasure trees surpass our current video effects innumerable times. Therefore, the ancients said that getting rebirth in the Pure Land is equivalent to be born in the pure lands of ten directions.

## **V. THE VOWS PERTAINING TO DEVAS AND HUMANS IN THE PURE LAND**

In the Forty-Eight Great Vows of Amitabha Buddha, there are altogether 40 vows pertaining to sentient beings, which can be categorised into two groups:

vows pertaining to beings in the Pure Land and vows benefiting beings in the other worlds (Fig 2.5). The vows pertaining to beings born in the Pure Land involve two types of beings: the mundane human and devas, and the saintly beings—the Arhats and Bodhisattvas, who have eradicated the afflictions of insight and cultivation. By studying these vows, we can reach a comprehensive understanding of the benefits and capabilities obtained by beings once they get reborn in the Pure Land. It will inspire us to establish sincere faith in the Pure Land and engender unshakeable earnest aspiration to yearn for rebirth there.

This section will explicate the vows pertaining to the mundane beings of the Pure Land, which contains 16 vows, the largest group in the Forty-Eight Vows (Fig 2.6). Not only do these 16 vows cover every aspect of the peaceful happiness enjoyed by humans and devas, but also two vows are dedicated to the emancipation and accomplishment of the Buddha Path.

## **1. Vows of Departure from Woeful Realms**

This group contains three vows: Vow of Land without the Three Woeful Realms (1<sup>st</sup>), Vow of Not Descending to the Three Woeful Realms Again (2<sup>nd</sup>) and Vow of Land without Names of Non-Virtues (16<sup>th</sup>). These three vows denote that the natural and social environments of the Pure Land are congenial, peaceful and pure, devoid of evil beings and wicked circumstances. One cannot even hear names and expressions of evil and wickedness there. It is the natural inclination of mundane beings to back away from suffering and to seek happiness. Being free from suffering is the foundation of happiness. If we live in an extremely painful and depressed condition, we are not in the mood to enjoy any beautiful clothes and delectable delicacies. Next, all beings have the instinctive requirement for safety. No matter how affluent a place is and how much money we can earn, we do not want to live in an area fraught with warfare, robberies, or natural disasters. Amitabha Buddha's design of the Pure Land fully fulfil and far surpass these desires of worldly beings.

### **(1) Vow of Land without Three Woeful Realms (1<sup>st</sup>)**

This vow guarantees that no hell denizens, hungry ghosts or animals exist in the Pure Land. In this *Saha* World, although human beings cannot enjoy satisfactory happiness all the time, their lives are basically split between

happiness and suffering. But fundamentally speaking, they are characterised by suffering. Beings inhabiting the three woeful realms are far more miserable and anguished. Propelled by grave level of the ten evil karmas, beings fall into the various layers of hells to endure the excruciating tortures continuously. Their torments usually last *kalpas* until their evil karmas are exhausted. Hungry ghosts evolved from beings who committed medium level of the ten evil conducts. They have to suffer from constant hunger and severe fear with their belly as large as a drum, but with a thin throat like the eye of a needle. We are most familiar with the lives of myriad animals. Animals are derived from beings who committed lesser grave levels of the ten evil or unwholesome karmas; they live in dull and fearful conditions. The living environments of wild animals are constantly deteriorating, entailing extinction of many species each year. Although domestic animals normally have sufficient food, most of them have to undertake various toils or are slaughtered for their flesh and fur. Even pet animals have to live a dependent and subordinate life, lacking freedom.

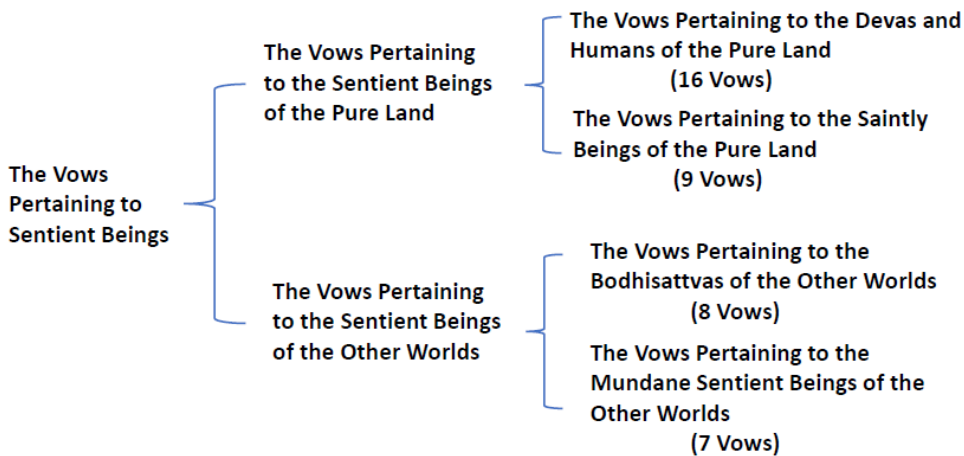


Fig 2.5 Vows Pertaining to Sentient Beings

According to Buddhist doctrines, we need to observe the five precepts to obtain rebirth as a human being in our next life; to perform the upper level of the ten wholesome actions to get rebirth in the heavens (see Chapters 2 and 3 of Volume I). Otherwise, we are destined to descend to the three woeful realms. Ignoring the enormous evil karmas we had accumulated in past lives from time immemorial, let us just reflect on our behaviour in this current life. How many of us are confident of obtaining rebirth as humans or even expect to get rebirth

into the heavens? It is most probable that we will be unable to escape the unfortunate descent into the three woeful realms to repay our evil karma. It is said that when one Arhat achieved the transcendental power of recollecting his past lives, his pores would ooze blood out of fear as he perceived the excruciating agonies that he had suffered in hells in his past lives.

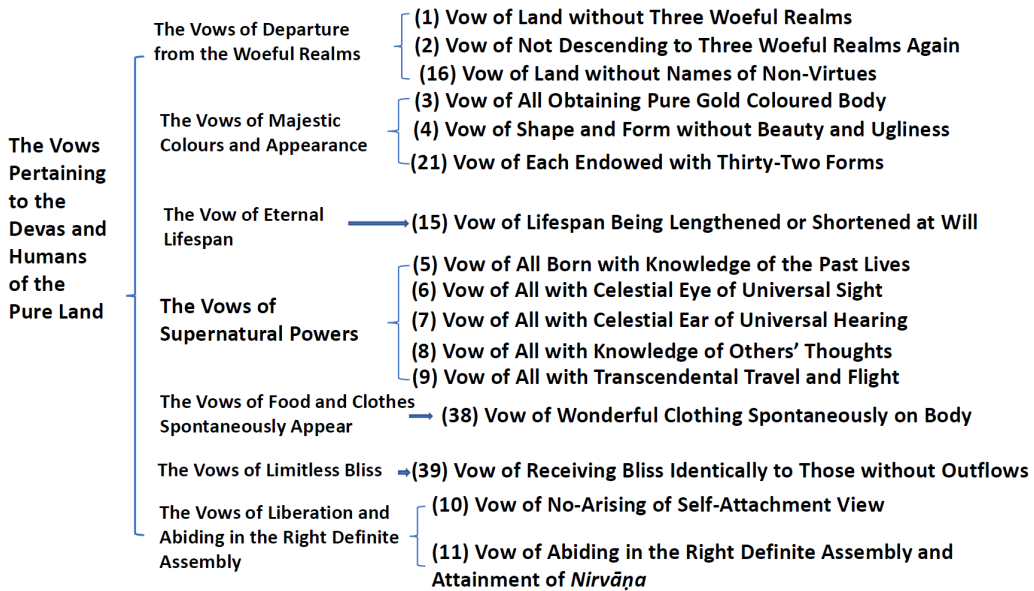


Fig 2.6 Vows Pertaining to Humans and Devas in the Pure Land

Having realized the tormenting sufferings of the three woeful realms, Amitabha Buddha resolved to remove them from his Pure Land, completely removing the grounds for utter sufferings of these miserable destinies.

## **(2) Vow of Not Descending to Three Woeful Realms Again (2<sup>nd</sup>)**

This vow assures us that once we succeed in rebirth in the Pure Land, we will be immune to rebirth in the three woeful realms, even though our *alaya* consciousness still stores innumerable seeds of various unwholesome karmas. Woeful realms do not exist in the Pure Land; also, sentient beings from Pure Land will never descend to the three woeful realms again, even if he, out of

great compassion and loving kindness, chooses to stop his life in the Pure Land and seek to get reborn in other worlds so as to rescue sentient beings.

Referring to the fruition of cultivation based solely on self-power, in order to attain this stage of non-return to the 3 woeful states, one needs to eliminate the affliction of insight, and to attain the stream-entering stage of *śrāvakas* or the first abode stage of the Bodhisattvas of the distinctive teachings. However, relying on the power of Amitabha Buddha, all of us will automatically acquire this prerogative once we achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.

### **(3) Vow of Land without Names of Non-Virtues (16<sup>th</sup>)**

While the above two vows guarantee to eradicate the possibility of being reborn into the three woeful realms, the 16th vow annihilates the condition to cause any latent unwholesome seeds to ripen to manifest results. According to the Consciousness-Only doctrines, people conduct unwholesome activities because they are driven by afflictions such as greed, hatred or delusion. But the arising of afflictions is based on six factors as stated in *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra* [19].

- ① **The relied factor: the seeds of corresponding afflictions.** This is the intimate cause for the arising of afflictions.
- ② **The conditions: the corresponding circumstances eliciting the occurrence of the afflictions.** Without the appearance of corresponding events or objects, the seeds of afflictions will remain dormant.
- ③ **Association with evil friends.** Most people are vulnerable to the influence of bad friends.
- ④ **Hearing and learning wrong teachings.**
- ⑤ **The potential power from previous habitual conduct/practices.**
- ⑥ **Absurd intentions.**



Of the above six prerequisites, corresponding circumstances are indispensable for the arising of afflictions. For example, we need some attractive objects or recollections of some impressive attractive memories to give rise to greed afflictions. On the same token, it requires the encountering of unpleasant circumstances or confronting an abhorrent person, or remembering some resentful experience or people for one to engender or harbour hatred or even resentment.

*The Śūraṅgama Sūtra* reveals that our hearing faculty is the most powerful and acute amongst the 5 sensory faculties. Thus, people of this *Saha* world are most vulnerable to the harassment of sounds, especially names and expressions, i.e., the human language. For instance, we usually feel delighted and comfortable when hearing praises with sweet or respectful words, but we find it difficult to control our chagrin, anger or exasperation on hearing blames, disparages or abuses. Therefore, there are four unwholesome conducts: lying speeches, divisive speeches, harsh speeches and frivolous speeches, in the ten unwholesome conducts. Associating with a group of decadent people with obscene or abusive languages, one tends to degenerate. The contemporary rampant criminal rates are severely influenced or even induced by the overwhelming proliferation of pornographic and violent websites. Conversely, living in a virtuous environment replete with noble and respectable people with kind, cordial, upright, encouraging languages, we are almost definitely inclined to refrain from unwholesome physical behaviour and deportment, and to mind our language. The harmonious environment tends to prevent our afflictions from arising. At any instant, our mind can only concentrate on one issue, or thought. If what we see and hear is pure and virtuous all the time, it will be hard for our mind to be preoccupied with evil or unwholesome thoughts. Because of the homogeneous flux property of our consciousness, habitual concentration on virtuous thoughts will enhance and entrench this tendency, which will form the virtuous character of a person.

Amitabha Buddha is completely aware of our weaknesses. He thus made this vow to ensure that we are not exposed to unwholesome verbal environment there. Furthermore, from *the Amitabha Sūtra*, and *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*, we learnt that not only the saints such as the Buddha himself and the Bodhisattvas expound the right Dharmas, but also even the waters, trees and

birds etc preach the teachings. As a result, the Pure Land is the best school to study and practise Buddhist Dharmas, and to attain Buddhahood in one lifetime.

## **2. Vows of Majestic Colours and Appearances**

Amitabha Buddha made three vows related to the colours and appearances of all beings in the Pure Land: Vow of All Obtaining Pure Gold Coloured Body (3<sup>rd</sup>), Vow of Shape and Form without Beauty and Ugliness (4<sup>th</sup>) and Vow of Each Endowed with Thirty-Two Characteristics (21<sup>st</sup>). These three vows signify that all humans and devas in the Pure Land are endowed with identical colour of purple gold, uniform shapes and appearances with the thirty-two characteristics of the Buddhas.

In our world, different skin colours often result in differentiation. Some coloured people were discriminated for hundreds of years. Even today, there still exist some discrimination based on the difference of skin colour or race, entailing many disputes and conflicts in the world.

The differences in people's physical shapes and appearances can cause much trouble in their lives, sometimes even induce combats and warfare. In Greek mythology, the famous Trojan War was waged against the city of Troy by the Achaeans (Greeks) because Paris of Troy took Helen from her husband Menelaus, king of Sparta. In the late Qing Dynasty of China (1636–1912CE), consecutive attacks were carried out by the Manchuria army for many years with no avail, because the fortress of Shanhaiguan was entrenched and General Wu Sangui organised a very valiant army to protect it. However, Wu had a beloved concubine, Chen Yuanyuan, known as the most beautiful girl at that time. She was captured by the rebellious army led by Li Zicheng, when his army conquered Beijing and overthrew the Ming Dynasty. Wu was so infuriated that he opened the entrance to the fortress and led the Manchuria army to defeat Li's army and to occupy whole of China.

In our society, good looking people usually attract admiring and even covetous looks. They feel confident, proud even complacent, while the homely looking ones are often ignored or despised by others, buried in self-inferiority and diffidence. Nowadays, more and more time and money are spent to sustain and improve one's appearance. A new business for plastic surgery gets prevalence

almost overnight. If we go to a department store, the most prominent areas are always occupied by cosmetics products. These demonstrate the dominant influence of appearance on people both socially and psychologically.

Because the Pure Land is a purely equal world, even the shapes and appearances of beings are the same as those of Buddhas. In the general Buddha Path, the magnificent appearances of the Buddhas are not spontaneously acquired; they are attained through hundred *kalpas* of arduous cultivations after they accomplished the cultivations of the Six *Pāramitās*. Amitabha Buddha bestows the thirty-two characteristics of the Buddhas, upon us, thus eliminating all the conditions for differentiation and discrimination. Furthermore, this vow also indicates that all beings in the Pure Land can accomplish the Buddha Path in one lifetime, by relieving the prerequisite of cultivations for the majestic appearances before attaining Buddhahood.

### **3. Vows of Eternal Lifespan**

This vow states that devas and humans in the Pure Land all have unlimited lifespans, except those with original vows who shorten their lifespan at will. Long lifespan is the foundation of all pursuits of the peaceful happiness path.

Due to intrinsic adherence to the current life governed by the *manas* consciousness, all sentient beings cherish the present life with utmost care. Even the most inferior creatures fear death and evade danger, while human beings treat lifespan as the basis of all blessings. Without a long lifespan, no matter how much wealth one can accumulate and how famous one becomes through arduous endeavours, one lacks the fundamental opportunity to enjoy them. Not knowing where we are going after death or believing in complete termination of life creates enormous fear or terror in many people when confronting or considering the unavoidable death.

The length of one's lifespan is determined by one's projecting karma. Thus, long lifespan is derived from non-killing in previous lives. Present people's overwhelming appetite for meat results in the mass capture, breeding and slaughtering of animals. How can we expect to have a prolonged life with so heavy killing karma? With the development of medical science, many diseases can be relieved or cured, and some lives can be prolonged, but chances of death

have also increased in other ways. For instance, modern industrial development severely pollutes the entire environment, including air, water resources and food, causing many people to succumb to cancer or other fatal diseases. The working arena is fraught with competition and deceit, and the insatiable desire for more success creates serious anxiety and depression, resulting in insomnia, high blood pressure and other sophisticated diseases, and even leading to suicide. Indulgent and dissipated lifestyles destroy many people's health, leading to enormous increase in diabetes, strokes, etc. Increasing number of people are killed in various traffic or industrial accidents, not to mention the mass of people killed in warfare, genocides, terrorist attacks, plagues and pandemics, and unpreventable natural disasters. Thus, the probability of death has increased and the opportunity of survival has decreased.

The pursuit of eternal life is the ultimate purpose of most people who practice heretical religious practices. Most people admire the devas in paradise thus craving to be born there because they believe that devas enjoy eternal life.

Even though Buddhist practitioners believe that death is merely a temporary pause for the ceaseless consciousness stream, just like moving from a dilapidated house to a new one, death is still a precarious event in the process of Buddha Path cultivations. If we have not attained the non-retrogression stage, we cannot guarantee that we will continue our cultivation in the next life from the state where we stopped at the end of the previous life. Most of us cannot even be certain whether we can retain our human form in the next life, not to mention continuous cultivation. Even if we are so fortunate to be reborn as a human being with complete faculties, how many of us could still remember the practices we had done in our past life? For most Buddhist practitioners, death is the most serious disruption in their cultivation, entailing most of them to remain in the indefinite phase in the Buddha Path. In some lives, when their virtuous roots mature, they have the good fortune to study and practise Buddhism and make some progress. But inevitably, they are interrupted by death. They then drift in other realms or in human realm where, most probably, they may not have the opportunity to encounter Buddhism or meet appropriate teachers.

Realising the threat of death for sentient beings and the impediments in Buddhist cultivation caused by death, Amitabha Buddha made this significant vow to guarantee that everyone born in the Pure Land are endowed with eternal

life until he or she accomplishes the Buddha Path. No matter how much evil karmas we have accumulated in previous lives, the death demon has left us forever.

If all humans and devas in Pure Land possess eternal lifespan, why then do some beings choose to stop living in Pure Land? This option fully signifies the utmost compassion of Amitabha Buddha. He realised that some beings are compassionate and wish to relieve sufferings of miserable beings in other worlds. As soon as they get out of the lotus and see Amitabha Buddha, they want to return to other worlds to rescue sentient beings mired in anguished transmigrations. They prefer to terminate their lives in the Pure Land so that they can get reborn with the sentient beings to accomplish their Bodhisattva practices. Of course, accompanied with this option, Amitabha Buddha made another great vow (2<sup>nd</sup>), to ensure that those who leave the Pure Land to rescue beings in other worlds will never descend into the three woeful realms again, to facilitate their sublime purpose.

#### 4. Vow of Clothes Appearing Spontaneously

Adequate food and clothes are the most fundamental requisites for survival. Though we are living in a developed industrial world with excessive production capability, there still exist an enormous number of people who live under the poverty line. Based on the World Bank data, around 10% of the world population, that is, 689 million people live on less than \$1.90 a day, 24.1 percent of the world live on less than \$3.20 a day and 43.6 percent live on less than \$5.50 a day in 2017. According to UN news in 2020, 690 million people live in a state of hunger. Even in US, the most developed country, its census declared that in 2014 14.8% of the general population lived in poverty.

Because of deficiency in our meritorious karma, we are reborn as humans, and have to undertake arduous toils to acquire what we want or need. Nothing is for free.

Knowing this unsatisfactory situation, Amitabha Buddha made the vow to ensure that everything in the Pure Land is inexhaustibly affluent, gratifying the requirements of everyone there. His 38<sup>th</sup> vow states, **“devas and humans in my land, who desire to obtain clothing, will immediately acquire them according to their thoughts, just as those wondrous garments praised by the Buddhas**

**will spontaneously don the (*bhikṣus*′) bodies.”** Furthermore, their garments do not require sewing, bleaching, dyeing, or laundering.

In fact, not only do clothes of any style or materials spontaneously fall on one’s body as one wishes, but all other materials appear in the same manner. As *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* expresses, **“When they desire to eat, bowls made of the seven treasures will spontaneously appear before them. Such bowls, made of gold, silver, aquamarine, conch shell, emerald, coral, amber, or the moonlight jewel, appear at their wish. The bowls are naturally filled with food and drink of one hundred flavours. Although such food is present, no one actually eats it, because their sustenance is based on mindfulness, hence they are satisfied and satiated by merely seeing the food and smelling its flavours. With supple and gentle body and mind, they are free from attachment to taste. The bowls vanish when the meal is over, and they reappear in due time.”** (若欲食时，七宝钵器，自然在前。金、银、琉璃、砗磲、玛瑙、珊瑚、琥珀、明月、真珠，如是诸钵，随意而至。百味饮食，自然盈满。虽有此食，实无食者，但见色闻香，意以为食，自然饱足。身心柔软，无所味著。事已化去，时至复现。)

As discussed in the previous sections, the climate in the Pure Land is perennially moderate, without cold and hot weathers, hence beings there do not need clothes to defend against coldness. Similarly, since their body is indestructible, and sustained purely on mindfulness, they do not need any food in reality.

People become greedy or crave for something, because it is rare or inadequate. Conversely, not many people will be afflicted by greed towards something free or excessively plentiful. The inexhaustible availability of everything in the Pure Land eliminates the conditions or circumstances to incite the generation of greed. Without greed and craving for more possessions, there will be no competition and struggle, hence some conditions for the arising of hatred are removed as well.

## 5. Vows of Supernatural Powers

*Dharmākara* Bodhisattva realised, in his causal ground, that most beings in the mundane worlds possess weak sight, and unable to see far away, nor physically penetrate any obstruction. Their hearing range is also limited to a short distance and narrow frequency band, with their sense of smell and taste, and tactile feeling capabilities even weaker and grosser. They are ignorant of their past life experiences and obscured from knowing the minds of others. Their travelling ability is limited in distance and speed, not to mention the lack of transformation powers. Since all these weaknesses create impediments for the cultivation of the Bodhisattva Path, *Dharmākara* Bodhisattva resolved to bestow to all beings in his Pure Land the five transcendental powers.

### **(1) Vow of All Born with Knowledge of Past Lives (5<sup>th</sup>)**

This vow guarantees that all devas and humans in the Pure Land would have the power to know their past lives and others' past lives, and even the events which occurred during the previous hundred thousand *koṭīs* of *nayutas* of kalpas. Here *nayutas* is an extremely huge number in ancient India, almost equivalent to countless, and *koṭīs* is another large number, equivalent to one million or hundred million. These two large number times hundred thousand, represent an inconceivably innumerable countless number. The *Sūtras* say that Arhats have the capability of knowing what happened in their past lives up to eighty thousand great *kalpas*. Therefore, the capability of humans and devas in the Pure Land to know their past life experiences surpasses that of Arhats countless times.

Through personally witnessing the excruciating torment that one has endured in the three woeful realms in innumerable past lives, and realising the futile interrupted cultivations in countless number of lives will inspire one to cultivate assiduously.

### **(2) Vow of All with Celestial Eye of Universal Sight (6<sup>th</sup>)**

This vow guarantees that all devas and humans in the Pure Land would have the celestial eye, and be able to see at least a hundred thousand *koṭīs* of *nayutas* of Buddha-lands. Our human sight can only see things with relative clarity within a few metres under adequate light, and this sight can be blocked by even a piece of paper. The human sight is also limited within a very narrow band,

unable to see light below infrared or beyond ultraviolet rays. We are incapable of seeing celestial beings, ghosts and hell denizens either. Celestial eye denotes the sight of celestial beings who can see everything clearly without obstruction in one small world (equivalent to one solar system). The sight of an Arhat can reach the boundary of one great-thousand-world system, seeing everything without impediment. Bodhisattvas' sight can reach hundreds, thousands, millions, or innumerable great-thousand-worlds, as they progress in stages. Only the Buddha's sight is absolutely unlimited. The celestial eye here only borrows that name to indicate the transcendental power of sight, since its real power exceeds not only that of ordinary celestial beings, but also that of great Arhats innumerable times.

This transcendental power of universal sight can facilitate mundane beings to accelerate their progress in the Buddha Path:

- ① Relying on the transcendental power of celestial sight, they can find their numerous previous parents, children, siblings, best friends, and other karmically connected beings in other realms and observe the conditions they live in. As soon as they obtain the capability, they can directly manifest in some appropriate form to rescue and deliver them.
- ② Most people do not believe in the existence of heavens, ghosts and hells because they cannot see them directly. With celestial eye, beings in the Pure Land can witness directly the enjoyable leisurely life of celestial beings and watch vividly the various incessant tortures endured by hell beings and the excruciating hunger experienced by hungry ghosts. These direct views will solidify the belief in the existence of the six realms of the *Saha* World, for those initially arrived mundane beings with lower rebirth grade.
- ③ With supreme celestial eye, beings can discern and distinguish the majestic splendour of pure lands and the wretched miserable anguished defiled lands. Emulating *Dharmākara* Bodhisattva, they can learn and choose the virtuous characteristics of other pure lands and eradicate unwholesome attributes of defiled lands when they prepare to establish their own Pure Land.

### **(3) Vow of All with Celestial Ear of Universal Hearing (7<sup>th</sup>)**



This vow signifies that all devas and humans in the Pure Land would have the celestial ear, and be able to hear, accept, and uphold the teachings of at least a hundred thousand *koṭīs* of *nayutas* of Buddhas. The celestial ear has the same extensive scope as other transcendental power, but here, we only emphasise the capability of hearing, accepting and upholding the teachings of Buddhas. This pertains particularly to beings from our *Saha* world, due to their most acute auditory faculty.

- ① This capability will enable beings in the Pure Land to hear and learn any teachings directly from Buddhas in other worlds in addition to those of Amitabha Buddha.
- ② It facilitates them to hear the suffering cries of beings in other worlds, thus inciting them to accelerate their cultivation so as to master the power and skilful means to rescue and deliver them.

#### **(4) Vow of All with Knowledge of Others' Thoughts (8<sup>th</sup>)**

This vow states that all devas and humans in the Pure Land would possess the faculty of knowing the thoughts of others, at least those of sentient beings living in a hundred thousand *koṭīs* of *nayutas* of Buddha-lands. Mundane people of *Saha* World are unable to detect and comprehend others' thoughts clearly and accurately, thus resulting in a lot of misunderstandings and causing numerous troubles and grudges.

- ① With the ability to clearly and accurately knowing others' thoughts and their inclinations, we can avoid troubles caused through misunderstandings, thus enhancing harmonious relationships.
- ② Realising the capacity and preference of other beings, one can choose the most effective doctrines to edify them, benefiting both the preacher and the recipients.

#### **(5) Vow of All with Transcendental Travel and Flight (9<sup>th</sup>)**

This vow reveals that all devas and humans in the Pure Land possess the supernatural power of traveling anywhere in one instant, at least beyond a

hundred thousand *koṭīs* of *naṃyutas* of Buddha-lands. From ancient times, supernatural power in traveling and flying is the dream of many people. Thus, we created the superman and other superheroes in movies and novels to embody this desire. This transcendental power, also known as wish-fulfilling power, surpasses the ordinary superpowers imagined by human beings. This power is exhibited in four types of forms:

- ① They can fly like birds in sky, only with much faster speed.
- ② They disappear in one location and reappear in another place instantly.
- ③ They can manifest in many different locations separately at the same time.
- ④ They can transform their appearance into any form, and they can transmute other materials into any desired form and quality, such as transmuting stones into gold, etc.

With this supernatural traveling and flying power, beings in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha can visit any Buddha-land to pay homage and make offerings to Buddhas in those lands, so as to quickly accumulate merits. Alternatively, they can access any sentient being instantly to help them.

## 6. Vow of Limitless Bliss

This vow guarantees that the happiness and bliss experienced by devas and humans in the Pure Land would not be inferior to those of *bhikṣus* without outflow. That is, the humans and devas in Pure Land could enjoy all sorts of incredible peaceful bliss, but remain pure and tranquil in their minds, without eliciting any afflictions.

In summary, Amitabha Buddha assures us that once we get reborn in the Pure Land, we will enjoy various environmental and bodily happiness:

- ① permanently depart from the woeful realms and fears;
- ② endowed with majestic appearance and dignity;

- ③ with eternal lifespan thus terminating the impermanence of life;
- ④ spontaneously have sufficient supply of clothes and sustenance without requirement of toils;
- ⑤ with transcendental powers to enjoy mastery at ease.

In contrast, the enjoyment of beings in the *Saha* world are never complete due to the deficiency in their karmic causes. For instance, some people may possess opulent wealth, yet with unsatisfactory children or spouse; some may enjoy power and prestige, but afflicted by chronic diseases or inharmonious even hostile workplace, exhausting one's ingenuity without one minute's peace of mind; others may be happy with satisfactory spouse and children, but destitute in living conditions, hence enduring worry and depression, etc. Even people, who are fortunate to have every aspect of life being satisfactory, have to confront the oppression of death, which will relentlessly deprive them of every cherished possession. It seems that the more blessings one has, the more difficult it is for him or her to relinquish their possessions on the verge of death. However, the bliss enjoyed by humans and devas in the Pure Land is all-encompassing and perfect.

Another defect of worldly enjoyment is that they tend to induce or enhance afflictions of greed, hatred and delusion. For instance, people are insatiable beings. The more wealth they possess, the more they want to acquire and accumulate; the higher their position, the higher they want to climb, etc. Therefore, the possession of something will not quench the craving fire, but rather add fuel to it. However, the supply of materials and power are never sufficient, hence competition and rivalry are unavoidable, resulting in jealousy and hatred. The indulgence in alcohol and other drugs only intoxicate one's senses and intelligence, intensifying delusion. However, the 39<sup>th</sup> vow guarantees that humans and devas in the Pure Land enjoy every aspect of life to the extreme, without inducing any arising of afflictions. Furthermore, these enjoyments can facilitate and enhance the cultivation of Buddha Path.

## **7. Vows of Liberation and Abiding in the Right Definite Assembly**

The above vows guarantee the perfect blissful life enjoyed by humans and devas in the Pure Land, which is the most ideal life beyond our imagination. However, Amitabha Buddha did not merely establish this Pure Land to attract beings to get reborn there to enjoy perfect lives. He constructed this land to invite beings of the worlds in the ten directions to get rebirth there for the purpose to attain liberation and Buddhahood. Thus, he made two vows pertaining to these two purposes: the Vow of Non-Arising of Self-Attachment View (10<sup>th</sup>) and the Vow of Abiding in the Right Definite Assembly and Attainment of *Nirvāṇa* (11<sup>th</sup>).

### **(1) The Vow of Non-Arising of Self-Attachment View (10<sup>th</sup>)**

The verbatim translation of the vow is **“When I attain Buddhahood, if humans and devas in my land give rise to any thought of attachment to their bodies, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.”** The vow in Bodhiruci’s translation states, **“When I attain Buddhahood, if sentient beings in my land give rise to a little thought of ‘I’ and ‘Mine’, I would not attain Bodhi.”** (若我成佛，国中有情，起于少分我、我所想者，不取菩提) [20] Synthesising the meaning of the two translations, we can derive that the afflictions of self-attachment of mundane beings in the Pure Land are completely subjugated. According to the doctrines of Consciousness-Only, it is the afflictions of self-attachment that incite mundane beings to conduct various deeds to create karmas, agitate the karma seeds to ripen and drive the consciousness to revolve in the death and birth process. Without activation of the affliction of self-attachment, beings cease the dynamic to create karmas or to accumulate mature karmas to form another rebirth. This demonstrates, from another point of view, that birth in the Pure Land is the final birth prior to attaining Buddhahood.

Not only the affliction of insight is completely subdued as guaranteed by this vow, but also the affliction of cultivation is subjugated as well based on the following reasons:

① The inexhaustible supply of materials remove completely the conditions for greed; the uniform gender eliminates the condition for sensual desire.

- ② The annihilation of conditions for competition, the subjugation of self-attachment, and the assembly with Bodhisattvas will eliminate conditions for generating hatred.
- ③ When everyone is of identical appearance and with no self-attachment, there will be no condition for the arising of arrogance.
- ④ The Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and even the water, trees, and birds promulgate right teachings constantly, hence no condition for delusion.

**(2) The Vow of Abiding in the Right Definite Assembly and Attainment of *Nirvāṇa* (11<sup>th</sup>).**

This vow guarantees a higher level of attainment by achieving rebirth in the Pure Land. It assures that all devas and humans in the Pure Land would abide in the right definite assembly and unfailingly reach *Nirvāṇa*. Here, abiding in the right definite assembly denotes the attainment of the three non-retrogressions: non-retrogression in state, non-retrogression in practice and non-retrogression in thought. Unfailingly reaching *Nirvāṇa* indicates that everyone having achieved rebirth in the Pure Land is guaranteed to attain Buddhahood thus, enter *Nirvāṇa*.

One can consummate one's pursuits in learning and practising Buddhism:

- ① One achieves and surpasses the peaceful happiness path by automatically obtaining all the sensory enjoyment, eternal lifespan and transcendental powers, but with no attachment to them;
- ② One accomplishes the liberation path, terminating transmigrations in the cycle of birth-and-death, by subjugating all the afflictions and living in an environment without conditions and circumstances to elicit generation of afflictions.
- ③ One achieves the three non-retrogressions and is guaranteed to accomplish the Buddha Path in one lifetime.

According to Buddhist literature, sentient beings can be categorised into three classes: **the indefinite assembly**, **the devious assembly** and **the right definite assembly**. According to *The Treatise on the Awakening of Faith in Mahayana* [21] [22], all Bodhisattvas before completion of the tenth faith stage and all mundane Buddhist practitioners belong to the indefinite assembly. Their cultivations alternate between forward progress when encountering favourable conditions and backward retreat when confronting unfavourable conditions. It takes ten great *kalpas* to fulfil the ten faith practices. There is a well-known example demonstrating the retreat of progress by *Sariputra*. In one of his previous lives, he activated his Bodhicitta and resolved to cultivate the Six *Pāramitās* to fulfil his Buddha Path. While he was enthusiastically practising generosity, one deva wanted to attest his determination. The deva transformed into a young man, begging *Sariputra* for his eye to serve as medicine catalyst to cure his mother's disease. Out of compassion and resolve to fulfil his practice of generosity *pāramitā*, *Sariputra* plucked out his left eye immediately without hesitation and handed it to the young man. Surprisingly, the young man said he wanted the right eye instead of the left one, then *Sariputra* dug out his right eye and gave it to him. Without showing slight gratitude, the young man threw the eyes to the ground and stepped on them, saying that they were stinky. Due to frustration and despair in rescuing other beings, *Sariputra* retreated to cultivate the *śrāvakas* path and straying from the sixth faith stage of Bodhisattva.

The devious assembly represents heretical practitioners or materialism believers. They either believe in devious cause and effect, or do not believe in the law of cause and effect, pursuing hedonist lifestyle and indulging in committing all sorts of unwholesome deeds. These beings are frequent dwellers of the three woeful realms, only rarely having opportunity to visit the human realm.

The third class refers to Bodhisattvas with non-retrogression in practice, who are unwaveringly resolved to progress in the Buddha Path until attainment of Buddhahood.

According to *the Amitabha Sūtra*, “**All sentient beings born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss are *avaivartikas*.**” *Avaivartika* is a Sankrit word meaning non-retrogression. This statement indicates that all beings born in the Pure Land are

automatically endowed with the capability of three non-retrogressions. First, they are blessed with non-retrogression in state, so that they will never retreat to mundane beings. They have departed from death and birth, equivalent to the Arhats or the Bodhisattvas at the seventh abode stage. Next, they acquire non-retrogression in practice, never falling back to the two-vehicle practitioners, equivalent to the tenth dedication stage of Bodhisattvas. And finally, they reach the position of non-retrogression in thought, thus their mind is preoccupied with the universal omniscient wisdom, equivalent to the Bodhisattvas of the first ground stage. Complete acquisition of the three non-retrogressions by all mundane beings once they achieve rebirth in the Pure Land is one of the prominent attractions for Buddhist practitioners pursuing the Buddha Path.

## **VI . THE VOWS PERTAINING TO SAINTLY BEINGS IN PURE LAND**

Of the Forty-Eight Great Vows, nine of them pertain to saintly beings in the Pure Land (Fig 4.7)

### **1. The Saintly Beings in the Pure Land**

Unlike our world where it is extremely rare to encounter a saint, the Pure Land is replete with multitude of countless number of both *śrāvakas* saints and saintly Bodhisattvas. These saints come from two origins: One class are constituted of the incumbent saints who have already attained saintly stage in other lands and then get reborn in the Pure Land. And the second class are formed from accomplished saints who were born in the Pure Land as mundane beings but attain sainthood there.

#### **(1) The Incumbent Saintly Bodhisattvas**

According to *the Section of Entering the Inconceivable Dharma Realm*, the last section of *the Flower Ornament Sūtra*, after *Sudana* had visited and venerated the fifty-two masters, he eventually paid his veneration to *Samantabhadra* Bodhisattva. The great Bodhisattva recommends and encourages him and all Bodhisattvas of the forty-one stages to get rebirth in the Pure Land so as to

accelerate their attainment of Buddhahood [3][23]. Following his instructions and through the vows of Amitabha Buddha, millions and billions of saintly Bodhisattvas from other worlds in the ten directions have aspired and ultimately succeeded in achieving rebirth in the Pure Land.

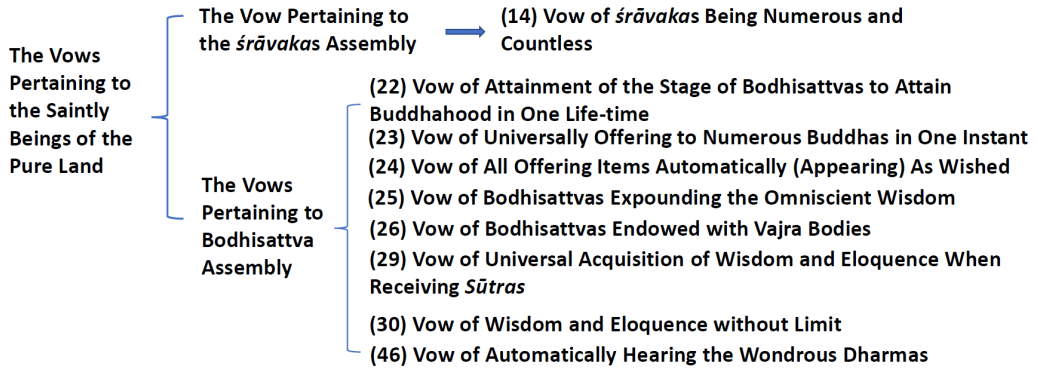


Fig 4.7 Vows Pertaining to Saintly Beings in the Pure Land

## (2) The Incumbent Saintly Śrāvakas

These saints represent those from other worlds of the ten directions who originally cultivated the practice of *śrāvaka* path and have succeeded in attaining the saintly stage. However, they relinquish the thought of entering nirvana. Instead, they change course to pursue the Bodhisattva path and aspire to be reborn in the Pure Land.

## (3) The Accomplished Saintly Bodhisattvas

*The Amitabha Sūtra* declares that Pure Land has been in existence for ten great *kalpas*, thus innumerable mundane beings reborn there have attained their sainthood. According to *the Contemplation Sūtra*, the beings born at the upper grade in the superior rank will attain the first ground stage as soon as they arrive in Pure Land; even beings reborn at the upper grade in the inferior rank will attain the first ground stage in ten small *kalpas* (see the next chapter).

## (4) The Accomplished Saintly Śrāvakas



According to *the Contemplation Sūtra*, beings born in the Pure Land at the upper level in the medium rank will attain Arhat stage once they arrive there; even beings reborn at the lower grade in the medium rank will attain Arhat stage in one small *kapla*.

## 2. The Vow Pertaining to the *Śrāvakas* Assembly

The 14<sup>th</sup> vow declares that the number of *śrāvakas* in the Pure Land cannot be calculated or counted. Even if all sentient beings in the great-thousandfold-worlds were to attain *Pratyekabuddhas* and together count them for a hundred thousand *kalpas*, they would not know the number. *Śrāvakas* are the Buddha's disciples, who hear and learn directly from the Buddha, and they cultivate for liberation based on the Four Noble Truths. Here, the *śrāvakas* represent all the Buddhist practitioners pursuing self-emancipation, including the *Pratyekabuddha* practitioners.

Readers may wonder why there are so many *śrāvakas* in the Pure Land? It seems controversial, since the *śrāvakas* mainly cultivate for self-liberation, targeting nirvana as their ultimate aim, whereas the Pure Land is a purely Bodhisattva world. *Vasubandhu* Bodhisattva undoubtedly stated in *the Treatise on Rebirth*, “**Pure Land is a realm of Mahayana virtuous roots, and it is equal without ridiculous or abhorrent names; there exist no women and no beings with incomplete faculties, and no seeds of the two-vehicles will be engendered.**” (大乘善根界，等无讥嫌名，女人与根缺，二乘种不生。)[15]

In fact, this vow does not indicate that many people will cultivate the *śrāvaka* path in the Pure Land, or pursue the Arhat or Pratyekabuddha fruition. As the treatise stated, no seeds of the two-vehicles will be generated and developed. All the *śrāvaka* saints either come from other worlds or attain the saintly stage as their initial accomplishment for those who get rebirth in Pure Land in the medium rank. The salutary environment of the Pure Land will enable them to swiftly achieve the eradication of the afflictions of insight and cultivation. However, all these practitioners have transformed their original aim of self-liberation to the ultimate attainment of Buddhahood.

The ninth patriarch of Pure Land school, Master Ouyi had an unambiguous answer for this question. “The determinate two-vehicle followers will not get

rebirth in that land. If one has been cultivating the lesser practice, but transforms to pursue Bodhi (the Perfect Enlightenment) and makes grand vows on the verge of one's death, then, one can get rebirth in the Pure Land. As one arrives in the Pure Land, the Buddha expounds to him teachings pursuant to his habit and capacity, so as to let him eradicate the afflictions of insight and cultivation, hence he is a nominal Arhat, equivalent to a Bodhisattvas of the seventh abode stage, with their afflictions of insight and cultivation eliminated. They are not real *śrāvakas*.” (他方定性二乘。不得生彼。若先习小行。临终回向菩提。发大誓愿者。生彼国已。佛顺机说法。令断见思。故名罗汉。如别教七住。断见思之类。非实声闻也。)[18]

The following elaborations can be derived from this paragraph:

- ① The determinate two-vehicle adherents who are determined to attain ultimate self-liberation and tranquil nirvana cannot get rebirth in the Pure Land. These practitioners do not believe in the existence of Buddhas in other lands, hence it is impossible for them to generate sincere faith and earnest aspiration to be born in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha.
- ② Only those two-vehicle practitioners who, on the verge of their death, have converted from self-liberation pursuit to the great Bodhisattva path, and generated sincere faith and earnest aspiration to get rebirth in the Pure Land to attain Buddhahood, can be born in the Pure Land.
- ③ The name *śrāvakas* or Arhats, here merely signifies beings, who like Arhats, have eradicated afflictions of insight and cultivation. They are not real Arhats; all are Bodhisattvas pursuing the Buddha Path.

### 3. The Vows Pertaining to the Bodhisattva Assembly

There are eight vows pertaining to the Bodhisattvas of the Pure Land. These Bodhisattvas encompass both the incumbent Bodhisattvas from the other worlds and the Bodhisattvas accomplished after arriving in the Pure Land. Although we are merely mundane beings and most probably will get rebirth in the Pure Land as mundane beings, we will become Bodhisattvas of the worthy stages even the saintly stages in a short period. Even with rebirth of the three

grades in the inferior rank, we will achieve the saintly stage within ten *kalpas*, or in the worst case, after twelve great *kalpas*, much less than the three *asaṃkhyeya* (countless) *kalpas* taken by practitioners to achieve Buddhahood via general Buddha Path. Therefore, these vows are also relevant to Pure Land practitioners like us. It is similar to that of applicants of a university who are interested in not only the benefits supplied for the freshmen, but also the subjects to be studied and the social activities related to senior year students.

### (1) Vow of Automatically Hearing the Wondrous Dharmas (46<sup>th</sup>)

This vow states that Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land will automatically hear Dharma according to their wishes and preferences. This privilege is extremely valuable for all Mahayana practitioners. As an initial aspirant Bodhisattva, we have made the Four Great Vows: **“However boundless are sentient beings, I vow to deliver them all; however endless are the afflictions, I vow to eradicate them all; however immeasurable are the Dharma doors, I vow to learn them all; however unsurpassable is the Buddha Path, I vow to accomplish it.”** The third vow signifies the necessity of learning and mastering all Buddhist teachings. We actually take refuge in the Dharma Jewel when we seek refuge in the Triple Jewels. The Buddha teaches us Dharmas; Buddha Dharmas enlighten us with wisdom, while the *Sangha* Jewel mainly perpetuates Buddha Dharmas. We, with our delusions, is analogous to a patient, while the Buddha acts like a doctor diagnosing our disease and prescribing medicine to us, and the *Sangha* is like nurses taking care of us. It is the medicine that actually cures our disease.

In ancient times without printing technology and powerful media, it was highly treasured to encounter the right Dharma; not to mention that our historical Buddha in one of his past lives sacrificed his life in exchange for learning half a stanza. The transmission of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* to China was also astonishing. During the Sui Dynasty (581-618 CE), when Patriarch Zhizhe (智者大师; 538 – 597 CE) was expounding his three contemplations, an Indian monk told him that his theory was in accord with the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* of his country. Since the *Sūtra* had not been translated into Chinese yet, Master Zhizhe then established an altar in Mount Tiantai to beseech for the *Sūtra*. He implored for eighteen years without success, because the king of the central

Indian country possessing this *Sūtra* cherished it as the state treasure, forbidding any transmission to other countries. Later, *Śramaṇa Pāramiti* from central India was determined to transmit the *Sūtra* to China, but failed to bring it out as he could not get past the custom. Finally, he wrote the text on very fine cloth, cut open his arms to stash it, thus succeeded in arriving in Guangzhou China with the *Sūtra* in 705 CE [8].

*Dharmakāra* Bodhisattva realised that it is not easy for Bodhisattvas in other worlds to hear Dharmas, hence he made this vow to ensure that Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land will unfailingly hear whatever Dharma they wish in any form at any time. From *the Amitabha Sūtra* and *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*, we learn that the Pure Land of Amitabha is a world of Buddha Dharmas. Not only does Amitabha Buddha himself expound Dharmas all the time, but he also transforms and manifests various exquisite birds to preach Dharmas; even the sound of wind wafting through trees and the sounds of flowing water all promulgate Dharmas.

## **(2) Vow of Universal Acquisition of Wisdom and Eloquence When Receiving *Sūtras* (29<sup>th</sup>)**

The 29<sup>th</sup> vow stresses that Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land who read, recite, uphold, and expound *Sūtras* would acquire eloquence and wisdom. Wisdom is mainly for self-enhancement, and eloquence is the capability to edify others. Here the vow introduces four types of methods to study and promote the *Sūtras*.

① Reading is to learn the *Sūtras* and to ponder their meanings by reading them loudly or silently. After the Buddha entered into *parinirvana*, reading *Sūtras* is one of the most effective ways to study Buddhism.

② Reciting is to recite and to memorise the *Sūtras*, without discriminating and pondering their meanings. The ancient patriarchs repeatedly emphasised that while reciting a *Sūtra*, just enunciate word after word, and stop discerning or discriminating the meanings of each word or paragraph. However, as elder Master Xuyun (虛云大師) suggested, when he encouraged his disciples to recite *the Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, that one would gradually comprehend the meanings and principles of the *Sūtra* if one repeatedly recites the text.

- ③ Upholding is to memorise the text and repeatedly contemplate its meanings.
- ④ Expounding is to preach and explicate to others how to practise according to the Dharma as well as to teach the text and explain its meanings.

### **(3) Vow of Wisdom and Eloquence without Limit (30<sup>th</sup>)**

This vow further signifies the bestowing of unlimited capabilities in wisdom and eloquence.

### **(4) Vow of Bodhisattvas Expounding with Omniscient Wisdom (25<sup>th</sup>)**

This vow is to specify that Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land would be able to expound omniscient wisdom. Here the omniscient wisdom denotes the universal omniscient wisdom possessed by Buddhas. This vow indicates that all Bodhisattvas of the Pure Land can expound Dharmas with the Buddha's wisdom, regardless of their actually attained stages.

The above four vows lay the fundamental cultivations for the Buddha Path. First, the 46<sup>th</sup> vow guarantees that Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land can hear any Dharma according to their wish, capacity and preference. Next, the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> vows ensure that Bodhisattvas will enhance their wisdom and eloquence without limit. With increasing wisdom, the Bodhisattvas will gradually subjugate and eradicate their delusions of afflictions, the delusions like dust and sand, and the delusion of ignorance. By improving their eloquence, the Bodhisattvas will augment their capability in edifying others in order to deliver them. Finally, the 25<sup>th</sup> vow specifies that all Bodhisattvas can expound the omniscient wisdom, that is, the Buddha's wisdom, with their unlimited eloquence.

As explicated in Volume I, there are three types of wisdoms hierarchically obtained by Buddhist cultivators.

- ① **The universal wisdom:** It denotes the wisdom to know the universal characteristics of all dharmas, that is, the characteristics of emptiness. It is the wisdom acquired by Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas, and the Bodhisattvas of the

seventh abode stage of the distinctive teachings. Due to the delusions of ignorance and afflictions, mundane beings discriminate and grasp everything including themselves and the environment around them as real existence. According to Buddhist doctrines, however, all dharmas in the world arise depending on causes and conditions, devoid of intrinsic substance, thus they are empty in essence.

② **The omniscient wisdom:** It is the wisdom to know all the distinctive characteristics of all dharmas. It is acquired by Bodhisattvas of the tenth practice stage of the distinctive teachings when they have eliminated the delusions like dust and sand. Although the general characteristics of all dharmas are universally empty, their demonstrated existence are distinct and varied. In order to edify and deliver various sentient beings, Bodhisattvas have to master two categories of dharmas. The first is to master the Dharmas of various teachings such as those of the *Tripitaka*, shared, distinctive and perfect teachings, as well as those expounding existence, emptiness, both existence and emptiness, and neither existence nor emptiness. The second is to clearly distinguish and understand the capacities and inclinations of sentient beings.

③ **The universal omniscient wisdom:** It is the wisdom uniquely possessed by Buddhas. The ocean of Buddha Dharmas is unfathomable, and the number of sentient beings is countless, so are their capacities and dispositions. All Bodhisattvas of higher stages master the wisdom of mundane beings; the two-vehicle practitioners and the Bodhisattvas with lower stages, cannot understand the wisdom of Bodhisattvas above their stages. However, Buddhas penetratingly understand everything in the world of the past, present and future.

*The Treatise on the Great Prajñāpāramitā* [24] recounts a very interesting story about the wisdom of Buddha. The Buddha and Dharma-body Bodhisattvas clearly know the number and the generation and extinction of dusts in the *Jambudvīpa*, not to mention the number of sands in the River Ganges. For instance, once while the Buddha was sitting under a tree in the *Jeta* Grove, a *Brahmin* came to ask the Buddha, “How many leaves are there on all the trees in this forest?” The Buddha instantly answered that there were leaves of some number. The *Brahmin* suspected the truthfulness of the Buddha’s answer. Thus, he went into the forest and secretly plucked some leaves from a tree. He then

asked Buddha how many leaves were left on the trees in the forest. The Buddha directly replied to him the number of leaves left, which was exactly the same as the total number of leaves deducting the number plucked by the *Brahmin*. The *Brahmin* was astonished with veneration and faith. He then became a disciple of the Buddha and later attained Arhatship.

Unimpeded eloquence is indispensable for Bodhisattvas to edify and deliver sentient beings, in addition to the omniscient wisdom. There are four types of unimpeded eloquence:

- ① **The eloquence in unimpeded Dharma:** It is the eloquence to accurately summarise and expound teachings.
- ② **The eloquence in unimpeded meaning:** It is the eloquence to master the meaning of teachings without obstruction and to expound them with skilful means.
- ③ **The eloquence in unimpeded expressions:** It is the eloquence to master various expressions, such as slangs, dialects and foreign languages in expounding teachings. For example, *Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sūtra* says, “**When the Buddha expounds the Dharma with one voice, various beings comprehend it pursuant to their species.**” (佛以一声演说法, 众生随类而得解) [25]
- ④ **The eloquence in unimpeded delight in expounding:** It is the eloquence to expound teachings with delight and enthusiasm.

To rescue and deliver sentient beings, Bodhisattvas need both wisdom and eloquence. Without the wisdom of mastering profound Buddha Dharmas and the diverse faculties and capacities of various sentient beings, a Bodhisattva lacks the foundation to give Dharma offerings. Even having mastery of the Buddha Dharmas and knowing the capacities of sentient beings, a Bodhisattva still cannot edify sentient beings effectively if he or she is destitute in the four types of eloquence.

## **(5) Vow of Bodhisattvas Endowed with Vajra Bodies (26<sup>th</sup>)**

This vow ensures that all Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land would be endowed with the body of the Vajra-god *Nārāyaṇa*, the same body as that of Buddhas. This body possesses two distinctive advantages:

- ① The body is indestructible, unlike our bodies which are subject to illness, decay and eventual death.
- ② The body is extremely powerful, free from weariness and suffering.

These two privileges enable the Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land to cultivate the Six *Pāramitās* constantly without interruption until they accomplish their Buddha Path.

On the contrary, practitioners of Buddha Path in our world are frequently plagued by illnesses, and are vulnerable to fatigue. Hence, they have to cut their cultivation into small time fragments, resulting in ineffectiveness. Even without illness or weariness, their bodies are constantly subject to the decaying process, entailing the faculties and senses becoming obtuse day by day. The worst inevitable case is that they all have to die at a certain age, thus interrupting their Bodhisattva pursuit.

#### **(6) Vow of Universally Offering to Numerous Buddhas in One Instant (23<sup>rd</sup>)**

This vow, by virtue of Amitabha Buddha's transcendental power, enables Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land, to arrive in immeasurable and innumerable *koṭis* of *nayutas* of Buddha-lands to make offerings to innumerable Buddhas, in the time of a meal.

#### **(7) Vow of All Offering Items Automatically (Appearing) as One Wished (24<sup>th</sup>)**

This vow ensures that Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land will be able to demonstrate their virtuous roots before Buddhas, and be able to present at will and to their satisfaction, their intended offering items.

It is well known that Buddhas are the supreme field of merits. *The Jewel Forest of Dharmas* [26] presents a story of King *Asoka* to demonstrate the merit



acquired by making offerings to Buddhas. According to the *Sūtra* of King *Aśoka*, one day the Buddha went to *Rājagaha*, with his assistant Ananda and his assembly of *bhikṣus*, on an alms round to collect food. They saw two boys, *Jaya* and *Vijaya* playing with sand. They were making castles and warehouses with sand and then putting sand to represent crop grains into the warehouse. When the two boys witnessed the golden light of Buddha illuminating the whole city, *Jaya* was delighted and offered a handful of sand from the warehouse to the Buddha as food. The boy made a vow to make offerings to all people of the world in the future. Because of his virtuous roots and the meritorious virtues of this great vow, he became the wheel-turning monarch, King *Aśoka*, ruling whole India, one hundred years later after Buddha entered *Parinirvana*.

*Dharmakāra* Bodhisattva was fully aware that it is an extremely rare opportunity for beings in other worlds to visit a Buddha in their world and that beings can hardly find adequate items to make offerings to the Buddha to satisfy their intention. Therefore, he made these two vows to guarantee that Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land can pay homage to inconceivably innumerable Buddhas in the ten directions within the short while of a meal duration. Furthermore, when they pay homage to Buddhas, they are able to present whatever offering items, such as jewels, pendants, wondrous incense, flowers and music etc, as they wish.

### **(8) Vow of Attainment of the Stage of Bodhisattvas to Attain Buddhahood in One Lifetime (22<sup>nd</sup>)**

The 22<sup>nd</sup> vow states that Bodhisattvas in the Buddha-lands of other quarters, who are reborn in the Pure Land, would ultimately and unfailingly reach the stage of Bodhisattvas to attain Buddhahood in one-lifetime; exceptions are those who wish to manifest themselves at will, in accordance with their original vows. For the sake of sentient beings, they wear the armour of great vows, accumulate virtuous roots, and deliver all beings from birth-and-death cycle. They can visit other Buddha-lands to cultivate Bodhisattva practices, and to make offerings to Buddhas throughout the ten quarters. They will edify uncountable sentient beings as numerous as the sands of the River Ganges, enabling them to be established on the unsurpassable, right truthful path. Such

Bodhisattvas transcend the course of practice of ordinary Bodhisattvas of all stages, and directly practice and cultivate the virtues of *Samantabhadra* Bodhisattva.

Bodhisattvas of the other worlds in the ten directions can cultivate with two options after they arrived in the Pure Land. First, if they remain to practice in the Pure Land, they are ensured to attain the stage of virtual enlightenment, and then they may continue to cultivate to establish their own Buddha-land. Otherwise, if their original vows are to return to other worlds to engage in edifying and delivering sentient beings, Amitabha Buddha will empower them with various capabilities to facilitate their process unimpeded, convenient, effective and at ease.

① **“wear the armour of great vows, accumulate virtuous roots, deliver all beings from birth-and-death”**: When Bodhisattvas choose to participate in the revolving birth-and-death cycles in other worlds to rescue and deliver sentient beings, they will inevitably encounter some adversities. With the empowerment of Amitabha Buddha, these Bodhisattvas will be immune from harm, and will never retreat from their arduous practice just like a warrior wearing an armour. When leaving the Pure Land, the Bodhisattvas only undertake two tasks: to accumulate and enhance their virtuous roots, and to widely establish virtuous affinities with other sentient beings and deliver them from the ocean of death-and-birth. This decision also denotes the three types of diligence of Bodhisattva practice: the diligence in wearing armours, the diligence in accumulation of virtuous roots and the diligence in delivering sentient beings.

② **“visit Buddha-lands to cultivate the Bodhisattva practices, and make offerings to Buddhas”**: It further elaborates on the diligence in the accumulation of virtuous roots by specifying the enhancement of meritorious virtues through visiting and paying homage to Buddhas. As a matter of fact, paying homage and performing veneration to all Buddhas in the ten directions of the past, present and future is enumerated as the first Bodhisattva practice in the ten great vows of *Samantabhadra* Bodhisattva.

③ **“edify uncountable sentient beings as numerous as the sands of the River Ganges, enabling them to be established on the unsurpassable, right truthful**

**path**”: With the omniscient wisdom and sublime eloquence, these Bodhisattvas can rescue and deliver innumerable sentient beings with skilful means, efficacy and at ease. All these beings will follow the unsurpassable Buddha Path, with perfect enlightenment as their ultimate pursuit.

④ **“transcend the course of practice of ordinary Bodhisattvas of all stages, directly practicing and cultivating the virtues of *Samantabhadra* Bodhisattva”**: This sentence denotes that all Bodhisattvas, regardless of their stage of cultivation prior to rebirth in the Pure Land, will be endowed with transcendental powers, the omniscient wisdom and unlimited eloquence in their Bodhisattva practice. Their endowments are equivalent to those of *Samantabhadra* Bodhisattva, hence they are able to follow his cultivation and virtues.

The practice and virtues of *Samantabhadra* Bodhisattva are characterised by his Ten Great Vows, **“ The first, is to worship and respect all Buddhas; the second, is to praise the Thus Come Ones; the third, is to extensively cultivate and give offerings; the fourth, is to repent of karmic obstacles and to reform; the fifth, is to follow along with and rejoice in merit and virtue; the sixth, is to request the turning of the Dharma wheel; the seventh, is to request that Buddha remain in the world; the eighth, is to follow the teachings of Buddha at all times; the ninth, is to constantly accord with living beings; the tenth, is to universally transfer all merits and virtues. ”** [3][23]. ( “一者礼敬诸佛。二者称赞如来。三者广修供养。四者忏悔业障。五者随喜功德。六者请转法轮。七者请佛住世。八者常随佛学。九者恒顺众生。十者普皆回向。 ” )

Each practice enumerated in the Ten Great Vows is beyond the capacity and comprehension of Bodhisattvas of lower stages, let alone mundane beings. For example, *Samantabhadra* Bodhisattva elaborates on his first great vow as follows [23]:

**“Good man, to worship and respect all Buddhas is explained like this: All Buddhas, World Honoured Ones, are as numerous as the fine motes of dust in all Buddha-lands in the ten directions and the three periods of time, to the exhaustion of the Dharma-realm and empty space. Because of the power of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva’s conduct and vows, I have a mind of deep**

**faith and understanding of them as if they were before my eyes. With my body, mouth, and mind karma completely pure, I constantly worship and respect them. In each and every place where there are Buddhas, I manifest bodies as numerous as fine motes of dust in ineffably ineffable numbers of Buddha-lands. I respect, each and every body everywhere in as many as fine motes of dust in ineffably ineffable numbers of Buddha-lands.**

**“When the realm of empty space is exhausted, my worship and respect will be exhausted. But because the realm of empty space is inexhaustible, my worship and respect will never end. In the same way, when the realms of living beings, the karma of living beings, and the afflictions of living beings are exhausted, my worship and respect will be exhausted. But the realms of living beings, the karma of living beings, and the afflictions of living beings are inexhaustible; therefore, my worship and respect are inexhaustible. They continue in thought after thought without cease. My body, mouth, and mind never tire of doing these deeds.”**（“言礼敬诸佛者。所有尽法界虚空界，十方三世一切佛刹，极微尘数诸佛世尊。我以普贤行愿力故，深信信解，如在目前。悉以清净身语意业，常修礼敬。一一佛所，皆现不可说不可说佛刹极微尘数身。一一身，遍礼不可说不可说佛刹极微尘数佛。虚空界尽，我礼乃尽。以虚空界不可尽故，我此礼敬无有穷尽。如是乃至众生界尽，众生业尽，众生烦恼尽，我礼乃尽。而众生界，乃至烦恼无有尽故，我此礼敬无有穷尽。念念相续，无有间断。身语意业，无有疲厌。”）

Only those Bodhisattvas with unimpeded penetration between noumenon and phenomena, unimpeded penetration between phenomena and phenomena, can completely follow these practices as specified in the Ten Grand Vows. However, as soon as Bodhisattvas arrived in the Pure Land, they would all acquire wisdom and eloquence, as well as the transcendental powers of separately manifesting into countless number of bodies in any place. Thus, all of them are able to cultivate directly the practices and virtues of the *Samantabhadra* Bodhisattva, resulting in swift accomplishment of the Buddha Path.

## **VII . THE VOWS PERTAINING TO**

### **BODHISATTVAS OF THE OTHER WORLDS**

Amitabha Buddha made eight vows to facilitate the cultivations of Bodhisattvas in other worlds (Fig 4.8)

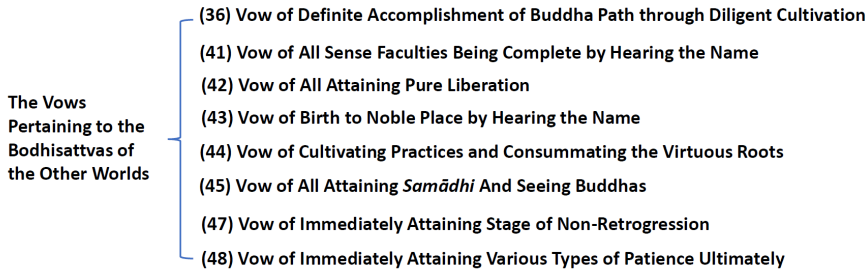


Fig 4.8 The Vows Pertaining to the Bodhisattvas in the Other Worlds

Not only does Amitabha Buddha welcome and encourage Bodhisattvas of other worlds to come to the Pure Land to swiftly attain Buddhahood in one lifetime, but he also made these vows to enhance their capabilities and to accelerate their cultivations if they want to practise and consummate their *pāramitās*. Since these vows are not applicable to mundane beings like us, we will not elaborate on them. Readers with interests can learn from other references. [6][7][27][28]

## VIII. THE VOWS PERTAINING TO MUNDANE BEINGS OF THE OTHER LANDS

In sections V and VI, we have elaborated on the benefits obtained by mundane beings and saintly beings when they succeed in attaining rebirth in the Pure Land. Section VII enumerated the vows pertaining to Bodhisattvas of the other worlds. This section will elucidate the vows which are most directly and closely related to us. They are the vows pertaining to mundane beings of other worlds. There are seven of them, which can be categorised into two groups, as shown in Fig 4.9. First group encompasses four vows introducing the benefits acquired by beings in daily life if they mindfully recite Amitabha Buddha's holy name with sincere faith and earnest aspiration. The other three vows ensure the crucial benefit of achieving successful rebirth at the end of this life, if they meet the requirements as specified below.

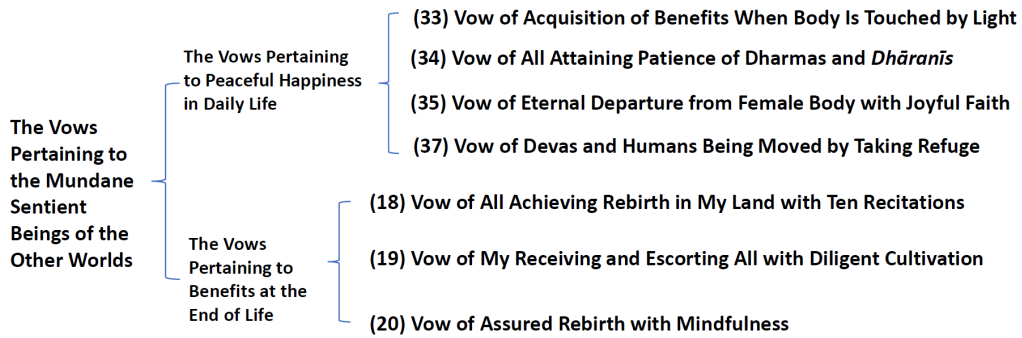


Fig 4.9 The Vows Pertaining to the Mundane Beings of the Other Worlds

## 1. The Vows Pertaining to Peaceful Happiness in Daily life

Amitabha Buddha demonstrates his compassion to its extreme. Not only has he guaranteed to welcome and escort us to the Pure Land at the end of this life if we cultivate the provisions accordingly, but he also bestows upon us enormous benefits in our current daily life as well.

### (1) The Four Vows Pertaining to the Peaceful Happiness

These four vows denote the four typical kinds of benefits we can obtain if we believe in Amitabha Buddha and recite his name devotedly.

#### 1) Vow of Acquisition of Benefits When Body Is Touched by Light (33<sup>rd</sup>)

This vow states that all sentient beings in the innumerable inconceivable Buddha-lands in the ten directions, when touched by Amitabha Buddha's radiant light, will become gentle and supple in body and mind, surpassing those of devas and humans. We all know that the Sanskrit word Amitabha denotes boundless light, which represents the immeasurable unsurpassed wisdom of Amitabha Buddha.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> vow, Amitabha Buddha pledged, **“When I attain Buddhahood, if my bright light should be limited, and unable to illuminate at least a hundred thousand *koṭīs* of *naṃyutas* of Buddha-lands, I would not attain perfect**

**enlightenment.”** It is clear that the 12<sup>th</sup> vow denotes the fact that Amitabha Buddha constantly emits bright light to the expansive universe, and the 33<sup>rd</sup> vow further specifies the typical functions of the light in our daily life.

Although Amitabha Buddha’s light pervades all directions, its medium for response is our mindfulness of him, as indicated by *the Contemplation Sūtra*: **“The Buddha of Immeasurable Lifespan has eighty-four thousand physical characteristics; and in each of those features there are eighty-four thousand secondary marks of excellence. Each of those marks sends forth eighty-four thousand rays of light; each ray of light shines universally upon the worlds of the ten directions; and those sentient beings who are mindful of the Buddha are embraced by that light, never to be abandoned.”**

Moreover, *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* further describes the incredible functions of Amitabha Buddha’s light by their respective names: **“Amitāyus is called by the following names: the Buddha of Infinite Light, the Buddha of Boundless Light, the Buddha of Unhindered Light, the Buddha of Incomparable Light, the Buddha of the Light of the King of Flame, the Buddha of Pure Light, the Buddha of the Light of Joy, the Buddha of Light of Wisdom, the Buddha of Unceasing Light, the Buddha of Inconceivable Light, the Buddha of Ineffable Light, and the Buddha of the Light Outshining the Sun and the Moon. If sentient beings encounter his light, their three defilements are removed; they feel tenderness, joy and pleasure; and good thoughts arise. If sentient beings in the three woeful realms see his light, they will all be relieved and freed from sufferings. At the end of their lives, they will all reach emancipation.”**

( “无量寿佛号无量光佛、无边光佛、无碍光佛、无对光佛、炎王光佛、清净光佛、欢喜光佛、智慧光佛、不断光佛、难思光佛、无称光佛、超日月光佛。其有众生遇斯光者，三垢消灭，身意柔软，欢喜踊跃，善心生焉。若在三涂极苦之处，见此光明，皆得休息，无复苦恼，寿终之后，皆蒙解脱。” )

Of the twelve different names of Amitabha Buddha, three are dedicated to subdue and eliminate the three poisonous afflictions:

① **The Buddha of Pure Light:** It is dedicated to counteract the greed affliction. As long as we are mindful of Amitabha Buddha, we will be able to

subdue and even eradicate the affliction of greed, especially lustful desire, and transmuting it into wisdom light. Thus, we will feel purely cool, devoid of restlessness.

② **The Buddha of the Light of Joy:** It signifies that mindfulness of Amitabha Buddha will bring enormous joy, subduing and eliminating the affliction of hatred.

③ **The Buddha of the Light of Wisdom:** It denotes that mindfulness of Amitabha Buddha will help to generate and enhance our wisdom, thus subjugating or discarding the affliction of delusion.

In the context of this vow, the phrase “**gentle and supple of body and mind**” indicates peaceful and happy states, opposite of anxiety and suffering. In this world, ordinary people are incessantly afflicted by greed, hatred and delusion, entailing subsidiary afflictions such as anxiety, restlessness, frustration, fury, depression, etc. However, if we believe in Amitabha Buddha, and recite his name devotedly, our mind will gradually become more and more peaceful and happy. Venerable Zhiyuan recounts a case in his *Lecture on the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan Buddha* [28].

In the time of Emperor Qianlong (1735 – 1796 CE), Qing Dynasty, Bai Wan'an (柏万安) was living in Changzhou. He invited his mother-in-law, Ms. Xu (许氏) of 65 years old, to his home and taught her to recite Amitabha Buddha's name. She followed his instructions, and kept reciting the name from March to June, without interruption. One day, she suddenly bowed to Wan'an, who was shocked and frightened, and asked for the reason. She replied, “I have lived a deluded dreamy life for more than 60 years, without one day passing peacefully and happily. Since I started following your instruction and recited Buddha's name, every day passed quickly from morning to night. How can the worldly peaceful happiness be compared to this! Therefore, I sincerely want to thank you.” “Very good!” encouraged Wan'an, who then expounded to her the extraordinary environment and benefits of the Pure Land. Three months later, while reciting Buddha's name attentively, she saw a golden lotus flower appearing in front of her eyes. It then transformed into hundreds of thousands of flowers, flying into the sky and illuminating the space. From then on, her glorious countenance looked like that of a person in her 30's. She undertook



the recitation more assiduously, completely ridding herself of frivolous talk. In 1777 CE, she passed away peacefully, in sitting position.

### **2) Vow of Devas and Humans Being Moved and Taking Refuge (37<sup>th</sup>)**

This vow states that *devas* and humans in the immeasurable and inconceivable Buddha-lands of the ten directions, who having heard Amitabha Buddha's name, prostrate themselves on the ground to revere and worship him with joyful faith, and cultivate Bodhisattva practices, should be respected by all *devas* and people of the world. Here, "hear Amitabha Buddha's name" indicates that one hears his name, has faith in what the name represents, and mindfully recites the name, not merely hearing of it. There are numerous examples to corroborate this vow. For instance, the following case is recorded in *the Records of Saints and Sages of the Pure Land*.<sup>[10]</sup>

There was a monk from Lin'an who, all year round, circumambulated the pagoda of Master Yongming Yanshou (永明延寿大师), the sixth patriarch of the Pure Land school. When being asked for the reason, the monk answered, "I was once sent to the underworld due to severe illness, wherein I saw King *Yama* bowing to a portrait on the left side of the hall. I then secretly asked whom King *Yama* was paying homage to. I was told that he was bowing to Master Yongming, who had just passed away, and had bypassed the underworld, and successfully attained rebirth with upper grade in the superior rank. King *Yama* had been paying homage to the portrait every day, to show his respect and veneration. Therefore, I came to circumambulate the pagoda out of sincere veneration."

### **3) Vow of Eternal Departure from Female Body with Joyful Faith (35<sup>th</sup>)**

This vow declares that in all the immeasurable inconceivable Buddha-lands in the ten directions, if there are women who heard Amitabha Buddha's name with joyful faith and if they activate the Bodhicitta, and loathe their female form, they will depart from their female form after death. This vow reveals the ultimate compassion of Amitabha Buddha and not because Buddhas discriminate female beings. According to Buddhist doctrines, female beings

face five impediments compared to male forms, as stated in *the Lotus Sūtra of Wonderful Dharma* [29]: **“Furthermore, there are Five Impediments to the feminine form: first, it is unfit for the *Brahmanic* Celestial Monarchship; second, unfit for the Shakya-Indra Celestial Emperorship; third, unfit for the *Mara* Kingship; fourth, unfit for the Wheel-revolving Sacred Kingship; fifth, unfit for Buddhahood.”** (又女人身、犹有五障，一者，不得作梵天王，二者，帝释，三者，魔王，四者，转轮圣王，五者、佛身)

Suppose a woman in other worlds has sincere faith in Amitabha Buddha and mindfully recites his name, generates Bodhicitta, and loathe her female form, then she will abandon her female form after the present life. If she has further developed the earnest aspiration to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land, she will be born there and definitely depart from the female body forever, since no female form exists there. On the other hand, if she resolves to cultivate her Bodhisattva path with the beings of the six realms, this vow will ensure that she is rid of the female form in future lives.

#### 4) Vow of All Attaining Patience of Dharmas and *Dhāranīs* (34<sup>th</sup>)

This vow guarantees that sentient beings in the immeasurable and inconceivable Buddha-lands in the ten directions, who heard Amitabha Buddha’s name, would be able to achieve the patience of non-arising of dharmas of Bodhisattvas and to acquire various profound *dhāranīs*.

In Buddhist literature, the patience of non-arising of dharmas is a well-known term, notorious for its profound meaning. It signifies the wisdom of acceptance of emptiness of dharmas. “Patience” here indicates acceptance with resolution, an unshakable abiding state. “Non-arising” denotes the nature of emptiness, that is, all dharmas are conditionally dependent, hence without self-nature. From the perspective of quintessence or the reality, all dharmas neither arise nor perish, neither increase nor decrease, neither are defiled nor are purified. In summary, the patience of non-arising of dharmas refers to the wisdom of perceiving and accepting with resolution the meaning of non-arising of all dharmas, or the wisdom to unwaveringly abide in the reality of neither arising nor perishing.

According to Mahayana doctrines, there exists different depths of the patience of non-arising of dharmas: The patience of non-arising of dharmas acquired by

mundane beings who comprehend the meaning with resolution is of the inferior level. The Bodhisattvas of the first ground stage directly awaken to the reality, departing from the duality of subject and object, attain the truly real acceptance of the meaning of non-arising, thus acquiring the medium level of the patience of non-arising of dharmas. Bodhisattvas of and above the eighth ground stage attain the superior level patience of non-arising of dharmas.

“*Dhāranī*” is a Sanskrit word, meaning profound upholding. It refers to comprehending all Dharmas and upholding all their meanings. There are four types of *dhāranīs*:

- ① ***Dhāranī* of Dharma**: It denotes that one will never forget the Dharmas after learning it.
- ② ***Dhāranī* of meaning**: It denotes that one will uphold and never forget the meaning and the principles.
- ③ ***Dhāranī* of mantras**: It denotes the non-forgetting of the esoteric mantras.
- ④ ***Dhāranī* of patience**: It signifies that one abides in the reality of all dharmas without losing it.

The acquisition of patience of non-arising of dharmas and the various *dhāranīs* are extremely beneficial in one’s pursuit of the Bodhisattva Path, as stated in the *Treatise on the Great Prajñāpāramitā*: “**If a Bodhisattva has not acquired the patience of non-arising of dharmas, he is deeply attached to the worldly matters with various entrenched afflictions. Even if he has a mind of meritorious virtues, it is obscured by afflictions because of its unsteadiness and slightness. With the acquisition of the patience of non-arising of dharmas, this will not happen. Without the patience of non-arising of dharmas, it is an arduous effort like travelling on foot; whereas with the patience of non-arising of dharmas, the effort is much easier, just like travelling by boat.**” (菩薩未得無生法忍，深著世間法，諸煩惱厚，雖有福德善心，軟薄不進故，為煩惱所遮；得無生忍法，無復是事。未得無生忍法，用力艱難，譬如陸行；得無生法忍已，用力甚易，譬如乘船。[24] p1375)

This turbid world is filled with various defiled environments. Without the patience of non-arising of dharmas, sentient beings perceive and believe everything they encounter as real, and get attached to them tenaciously. The attachment will develop to severe afflictions of greed, hatred and delusion. Hence, they cannot even emancipate themselves, let alone rescue and deliver other beings. With the amour of the patience of non-arising of dharmas, they will realise that all dharmas they encounter are just like dreams and illusions, devoid of intrinsic essence. Therefore, they are immune to the afflictions of greed and hatred, and thus able to deliver sentient beings at ease, just like lotus flowers which grow out of mud yet remain clean and pure.

## **(2) The Typical Benefits Obtained from Name Recitation**

We have elaborated on the four vows pertaining to the benefits bestowed to sentient beings whilst they are going about their daily life, if they mindfully recite the name of Amitabha Buddha. As a matter of fact, as the variety of sentient beings are innumerable, so are their capacities and preference. Therefore, the benefits are also diverse. Venerable Da'an enumerates six types of benefits from the recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name in his *Text of Pure Land School* [5].

### **1) The Benefits of Eliminating Evil Karma and Removing Obstacles**

We all have been revolving in the six realms since time immemorial, and we have definitely committed enormous evil deeds and hence accumulated immeasurable evil karmas in our *alaya* consciousness. As the *Flower Adornment Sūtra* points out, **"If evil karmas had physical form, the space of the ten directions could not hold them."** [23] When these evil karmas ripen, they will drive us to the three woeful realms to endure unbearable sufferings, or they will cause some unpleasant events or catastrophes in our lives.

Having learnt from Buddhist doctrines on the principle of cause and effect, we can practise repentance sincerely to subdue and postpone the maturity of evil karmas. Another effective method to subdue and eliminate evil karmas is to mindfully recite Amitabha Buddha's name. As clarified in the *Contemplation Sūtra*, **"The sentient beings with rebirth in the upper grade in the inferior rank are those who have committed myriad evil acts. Although they do not slander the *Vaipulya Sūtras*, these deluded beings repeatedly perform evil**

deeds, yet feel no remorse. When their lives are about to end, they meet a virtuous learned teacher who praises the titles of the Mahayana *Sūtras* of the twelve divisions. By hearing the titles of these *Sūtras*, the extremely grave evil karmas binding them to birth-and-death for a thousand aeons are eliminated. This learned teacher also teaches them to press their palms together and recite ‘Namo Amitabha Buddha.’ Because they recite the Buddha’s name, the evil karma binding them to birth-and-death for 50 *koṭis* aeons is eliminated.” [8] (下品上生者。或有众生作众恶业。虽不诽谤方等经典，如此愚人，多造恶法无有惭愧。命欲终时遇善知识，为说大乘十二部经首题名字。以闻如是诸经名故，除却千劫极重恶业。智者复教合掌叉手，称南无阿弥陀佛。称佛名故，除五十亿劫生死之罪。)

## 2) The Auspicious Benefits from Mindful Protection

*The Sūtra of Ten Rebirths to the Amitabha Buddha-land* [30] states,

“If there is a being, who profoundly believe in this *Sūtra*, and thus recites the name of Amitabha Buddha, and aspires to get rebirth there, Amitabha Buddha of the Ultimate Bliss will send *Avalokitesvara* Bodhisattva, *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva etc., and an assembly of 25 Bodhisattvas to protect the practitioner. Whether one walks or stands, sits or reclines, during daytime or at night, one will be freed from harassment by evil ghosts or evil deities at anywhere and at anytime.” ( “若有众生深信是经，念阿弥陀佛，愿往生者。彼极乐世界阿弥陀佛，即遣观世音菩萨、大势至菩萨，… …，是二十五菩萨，拥护行者，若行若住，若坐若卧，若昼若夜，一切时一切处，不令恶鬼恶神得其便也。” )

If we have sincere faith in Amitabha Buddha and mindfully recite his name all the time, we will obtain protection not only from the Dharma protecting devas and deities, but also from the Bodhisattvas. There are many true cases recorded in historical and current literature. Here we take two examples from *the Compilation of Master Yinguang’s Articles*.

“Chen Qi (陈企) of the Song Dynasty had killed someone. One day, he saw the man he had killed coming (in ghost form) to take revenge on him. Realising that the vindictive enemy came to collect his life, Chen Qi hurriedly started to recite “Namo Amitabha Buddha” and then noticed that by doing so, the

resentful ghost could not come near him. So, he continued to recite more vigorously, until the ghost left. From then on, Chen Qi kept on reciting the Buddha's name attentively, and subsequently succeeded in attaining rebirth in the Pure Land several decades later. He once possessed his grand daughter's body to tell others about his rebirth.” [31]

“Wang Tieshan (王铁珊) of Tongzhou, was the magistrate of Guangxi province in late Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1912). There were many bandits in the area at that time. He devised a plan to annihilate them, and slaughtered a large multitude. Two years ago, he fell ill. As soon as he closed his eyes, he would see himself in a dark room, with numerous ghosts besetting him, and he woke up in astonishment and terror. This nightmare lasted for three days without exception. The sleepless fatigue drove him to the verge of death. His wife encouraged him to recite the Buddha's name. He took her advice and fell into sound asleep soon after he recited merely a few dozen times. He gradually restored his spirit and recovered from his illness. From then on, he recited Buddha's name and was a convert vegan.”[32]

### **3) The Benefits of Preventing Disasters**

If we believe in Amitabha Buddha and keep reciting his name devotedly, not only will evil ghosts and deities not harm us, but we will also be protected from harm inflicted by fire, flood, resentful enemies, knives, arrows, prison, or any deadly accident, etc. The following are two cases recorded in *the Compilation of Master Yinguang's Articles*.

“One evening two months ago, Ms. Wang's (汪) home was attacked by a gang of more than twenty robbers with guns. There were seven families living in that building, wherein Ms. Wang lived on the middle floor. The couple immediately turned off the light, kneeled in front of the Buddha's altar to recite Buddha's name, beseeching him to protect them. The lamp in front of Buddha's image extinguished itself suddenly as if blown out by someone. The robbers could not open their door, and left. All the other six families were plundered but Ms Wong lost nothing.” [32]

“Fu Zou Renxian (傅邹仁显) was the wife of layperson Fu Chunpu of Qingjiang county, Jiangxi Province. She was kind and amiable, able to tolerate

hardship and toil, respectful of the Triple Jewels, and was persistent in reciting the Buddha's name. After her husband had passed away, she lived a solitary life, destitute and lonely, and her sustenance was supplied by friends and relatives. After she moved to live in Qingjing Nunnery, she became more diligent in her recitation and cultivation. Only occasionally did she go to the mountains to collect some firewood to exchange for food. Although most of the local people did not understand the practice of Buddha recitation, they were all fond of associating with her because of her virtuous character and practice. Renxian recited *Sūtras* for patients and gave them medicine, often with miraculous efficacy.

One morning, she went to the mountains to collect firewood after the morning session of her practice. As she carried her bound up firewood and prepared to return home, she saw a large animal like a cow in the reeds. Two pigs from the village were passing by, and one of them was bitten by the animal, and was on the verge of death. Startled by the sight, Renxian recited "Namo Amitabha Buddha" loudly. Miraculously, the animal let go of the pig, and the pig ran away. Then Renxian felt a pair of cold eyes staring at her. She was almost frightened to death when she realised it was a tiger. All she could do was repeatedly reciting the Buddha's name, since her legs were shaking and unable to move. Confronting her for a while, the tiger suddenly went away, leaving her unharmed. The incredible sight was witnessed by many peasants."<sup>[32]</sup>

Venerable Da'an recounted a story many times in his lectures <sup>[33]</sup>. One of his Dharma friends in Beijing who was working at a media company, diligently practised Buddha-recitation every day. Furthermore, he also gave rosaries to his friends and colleagues, advising and encouraging them to recite the Buddha's name. One day he received a phone call from a colleague who expressed her gratitude. She told him that her recitation of Amitabha Buddha had just saved her life. She was determined to break up with her boyfriend, yet he did not accept the breakup. They met at the park the previous Saturday evening to discuss about it. When she was about to tell him of her decision, he suddenly pulled out a knife, and threatened to kill her if she wanted to separate with him. Faced with his unscrupulous threat, she started to recite "Namo Amitabha Buddha, Namo Amitabha Buddha, ..." without interruption, and

expecting him to attack anytime. Time was frozen for quite a while, but nothing happened. When she turned to look, nobody was around. She received a phone call from him the next day to apologise for his irrational behaviour. He also told her that he suddenly felt very ashamed and guilty when he heard her reciting, though he did not know the meaning.

These cases evidently demonstrate the softening effect on beings when they hear devoted recitation of the name of Amitabha Buddha.

#### **4) The Benefits of Esteem by Devas and Humans**

If we devotedly recite the Buddha's name with sincere faith, not only are we protected by Bodhisattvas, devas and deities, but also, we are esteemed by the devas and deities. Here is another case from *the Records of Saints and Sages of Pure Land*.

During the Yuan Dynasty (1271 -1368 CE), the western area of Zhejiang province was plagued by severe famine for several consecutive years. Corpses were stacked everywhere in the streets of Hangzhou. Hence, the magistrate ordered the corpses to be removed daily and thrown into a large cave behind the Pagoda of Six Harmonies. For more than 20 days, there was a body of an elderly woman that did not decay and always stayed on top of the corpses, in spite of additional new corpses being thrown into the cave every day. Out of curiosity, people pulled her up and searched her pockets. They found three portraits of Amitabha Buddha and a record of her daily practice of recitation of Buddha's name. Proclaiming this miracle, the officials bought a coffin for her and cremated her. During the cremation process, holy images of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas appeared in the flame, extremely brilliant and glorious. As a result, many people in the area converted to recite the Buddha's name.

#### **5) The Benefits of Seeing the Buddha**

From nirvana of *Śākyamuni* Buddha to the descendance of *Maitreya* Buddha, ordinary people do not accumulate adequate blessings to see a Buddha in the world. However, Pure Land practitioners are capable of seeing the Buddha out of the empowerment of Amitabha Buddha, if they cultivate mindfulness of the Buddha. First, they will see Amitabha Buddha and his assembly of



Bodhisattvas welcoming and escorting them to the Pure Land at the end of this life. Second, some are able to see Amitabha Buddha if they cultivate mindfulness of him assiduously, especially if they cultivate the practice of mindfulness of Buddha by contemplating the image of Buddha. There are numerous records of practitioners seeing the Buddha during their practice in history. A practitioner, Mr. Liu Chengzhi (刘程之) once vividly saw Amitabha Buddha and felt his head being touched by Amitabha Buddha. The following is another example of seeing the Buddha from *the Records of Saints and Sages of the Pure Land*.

Ms. Ji (纪氏) was the wife of Ge Jizhi (葛济之) of Jiangsu province of Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE). Being the descendants of Ge Hong (葛洪; a famous practitioner of Chinese Taoism), all generations of Ge Jizhi's family had been practising the deity path, except Ms. Ji who sincerely believed in Buddhism. She followed the Buddhist path, venerated the Buddha without any hesitation and variation. One day, while she was weaving cloth, she raised her head and saw the cloudless blue sky, clear and brilliant. Suddenly, a jewelled canopy came from the west, and underneath it was Buddha, shining with golden light, illuminating the expansive space. Ms. Ji stopped her weaving, and watched the sight attentively. Filled with exaltation, she exclaimed, "The *Sūtras* says that there is an Amitabha Buddha, isn't this the case?" She immediately prostrated her head on the ground, and showed the phenomenon to Ge Jizhi by pointing to the direction of the Buddha. However, Ge Jizhi could only see half of Buddha's body and the canopies, (because of his disbelief in Buddhism). Soon the sacred sight disappeared. At the same time, all the neighbours in the village also witnessed the event, and many followed her to practise Buddhism.

## **6) The Benefits of Healthy Body and Mind**

It is inevitable for human beings to become ill, though no one likes it, for it results in inconvenience and suffering. Generally speaking, illness resulted from several types of causes: The first type of causes is unrestricted indulgence in unhealthy habits, such as unhealthy diet, over consumption of alcohol, drugs, sex, etc. The second type of causes are detrimental environment, such as polluted air and water, severe weather, especially various epidemics. The third type of causes are mental depression derived from perennial pressure in one's career, frustrations from uncongenial social relations, instability in social

environment, etc. The fourth type of causes are inherent diseases. The fifth type of diseases refers to those without any evident causes.

From the law of cause and effect, all illnesses are derived from one fundamental cause: karmic impediment, especially the last two types of diseases. This is why only some people become ill in unhealthy circumstance, whereas there are always some fortunate ones who are immune to the same detriments. We are inflicted by various illness, because we have tormented other beings in the past and present lives. And some seeds of these sufferings ripen to manifest in the form of illness. The mindful recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name can subdue and eliminate *kalpas* of deadly evil karmas, not to mention *karma* inducing illnesses. Hence, from the general perspective, reciting Buddha's name definitely has the effect of preventing some illness and curing some tenacious disease, even some inherent diseases.

More specifically, if we believe in Amitabha Buddha, and earnestly aspire to end transmigration and to get rebirth in the Pure Land, we will feel relieved of the pressure in our workplace and social environment. Furthermore, we will live an abstemious life, severing the first type of causes. Most of the pollution of the environment is driven by greedy excessive exploitation of resources and the careless disposition of poisonous materials. By believing in the law of cause and effect, we will curb our greed, and care more about others and the environment, and gradually the environment will become more congenial.

In a letter to Feng Bujiu (冯不疚) [32], Master Yinguang wrote, "There are illnesses which can be cured by doctors, and there also are illnesses which cannot be cured by doctors. Those illnesses which could be cured are usually caused by external infections or inner detriments. If the illness is derived from vindictive evil karmas, it cannot be cured even by deities. However, by the power of the Buddha, the Buddha-name recitation can help the foes of previous lives to be reborn in the good realms, thus entailing relief of their resentment, and the disease is cured. The Buddha-name recitation is not only salutary to the illness of hostile karmas, but also renders benefits to the illnesses caused by external infections and inner disorder reasons.

"As a principal of a school, Mr. Jiang Yiyuan (江易园) became severely ill, due to his excessive exertion of effort in teaching affairs. He saw many doctors of

both traditional Chinese medicine and western medicine, with no avail. Knowing Yiyuan's disbelief in Buddhism, Jiang Weinong (江味浓) visited him and dissuaded him from seeing doctors. Instead, he recommended him to recite Buddha's name to cure him of his illness. Yiyuan believed him and followed his instructions. His illness was soon cured. Yiyuan was so convinced that he actively recommended and encouraged others to recite Buddha's name. Once, while on his way home, he saw a relative of 70 years old with both eyes blind. Yiyuan then encouraged him to practice the Buddha-name recitation, and he miraculously regained his sight within one year. That summer, the Wuyuan area suffered from drought. Yiyuan asked the local people to recite the Buddha's name to implore rain. Within seven days, they obtained heavy rain."

In his lecture on *the Provisions of Pure Land* [33], Venerable Da'an described two real cases which happened during their seven-day Buddha-recitation retreats. The first occurred during a seven-day retreat in the winter of 2002. During the retreat, the practitioners chanted Amitabha Buddha's name from 4 am until 9 pm without rest every day. A *bhikṣu* who was diagnosed with severe tuberculosis and with fever also participated in the practice. He had suffered with great pain for several months. He thus resolved to depart from this world, with no fear of death. During the retreat, the fever afflicted him for the first few days while he was practising Buddha-recitation, yet it was mitigated in the last two days. As soon as he had finished his retreat practice, he went to check with the doctor. Incredibly, he found that his tuberculosis was completely cured.

There was a participant of another seven-day Buddha-recitation retreat, who was from Hunan province. He told Venerable Da'an that Amitabha Buddha is his savior. He was a patient of esophageal cancer of advanced stage that started ten years ago. The doctors refused to operate on him and recommended that he go home (to wait for death). He was a Buddhist adherent, diligently reciting the Buddha's name. When he returned home in despair, he recited the Buddha's name more assiduously, with Amitabha Buddha as the only reliance. One day, while he was reciting the Buddha's name in a taxi, he suddenly felt a stream of hot air starting from his head then permeated through his entire body. All the cells of his body felt hot. He then saw Amitabha Buddha appeared in the sky. From that day, his cancer was gradually cured!

## 2. The Vows Pertaining to Benefits at the End of Life

In the above sections, we have elaborated on Amitabha Buddha's great vows pertaining to the establishment and adornment of the Pure Land, adornment of the Dharma-body, benefits obtained by the mundane and saintly beings after they have achieved rebirth in the Pure Land, and the benefits acquired by beings of other worlds during their daily life. However, if we cannot successfully get rebirth in the Pure Land after this life, the fundamental benefits of emancipation and attaining Buddhahood are irrelevant to us. In that case, the Pure Land to us is similar to an exotic country in fantasy literatures, rendering little practical significance. To ensure all sincere Pure Land practitioners achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, Amitabha Buddha made three great vows pursuant to different capacities and inclinations of sentient beings, as shown in Fig 4. 10.

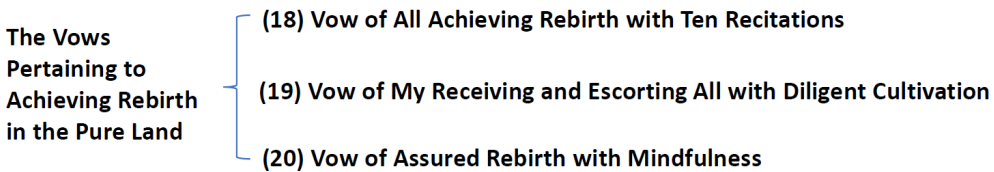


Fig 4.10 The Vows Pertaining to Achieving Rebirth in the Pure Land

### **(1) Vow of All Achieving Rebirth with Ten Recitations (18<sup>th</sup>)**

This vow is regarded by ancient masters as the core vow of the Forty-Eight Great Vows. Sentient beings in the worlds of ten directions will be rescued and delivered because of this vow. This vow assures that all sentient beings in the lands of the ten directions, who have utmost sincere mind of faith and delight, desire to be born in the Pure Land, and recite Amitabha Buddha's name even only ten times (or even with ten mindful thoughts), would be born there. Excluded, however, are those who have committed the five heinous acts and malign the right Dharma.

This great vow reveals to us the following information:

- ① The vow is applicable to all sentient beings in all worlds, regardless of realms, genders, ages, and capacities, etc.

② There are only three preconditions or provisions for achieving rebirth in the Pure Land: sincere faith, earnest aspiration and recitation of Buddha's name.

③ The vow excludes those who have committed the five heinous acts and malign the right Dharmas as well. The five heinous acts are killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing an Arhat, shedding the blood of a Buddha (that is, injuring a Buddha with malicious mind) and causing schism of a *Sangha*.

Since the three provisions constitute the necessary and sufficient conditions to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, many patriarchs and current Dharma masters of the Pure Land school have extensively elaborated on them. We will elucidate them separately in the following section:

## 1) Sincere Faith

Even to fulfil a worldly pursuit, we need to have faith in the benefits of the result and the causes to achieve the result. Faith is the foundation and of utmost importance in the learning and practising of Buddhism. *Nāgārjuna* Bodhisattva emphasised in *the Treatise on the Great Prajñāpāramitā*, “**the ocean of Buddhist Dharmas is only entered by faith, and traversed by wisdom.**” [24] (佛法大海，信为能入，智为能度。) Then what is faith? What is counted as truly real faith? How to establish truly real faith?

### i) What is Faith

We have introduced faith as the first wholesome mental factor in Chapter 2 and elaborated on it comprehensively in Chapter 7 of Volume I of this book. For the convenience of the reader, we would review some concepts here.

According to the doctrines of Consciousness-Only school, the definition of faith is as follows: “**Faith: Its characteristic is the purification of the mind, which is the profound acceptance of and delight inclination to the real existence, virtue and capability; its functions are antidote of non-faith and delight in wholesome dharmas. There are three aspects of faith according to the definition: the first is the faith in real existence, i.e. having deep faith in, without doubt, the truthful**

**reality of the phenomena and tenets expounded in Buddhist Dharmas; the second is faith in virtues, i.e. having profound faith and delight in the truly purified virtue of the Triple Jewels; and the third is faith in capability, i.e. having profound faith in the capability of fulfilling mundane and transcendental virtues and activate the desire to perform them.**” Applying this definition to the Pure Land practice, it indicates the following:

- ① We should sincerely believe that Amitabha Buddha and the Pure Land are real and current existence. They are not fantasies of literature or something that existed in the past but has disappeared now. Both *the Amitabha Sūtra* and *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* have undoubtedly proclaimed that the Pure Land exists on the west one hundred thousand *koṭīs* Buddha-lands away from our world. It has been established for ten *kalpas*, and that Amitabha Buddha is still expounding Dharmas there.
- ② We should sincerely believe that all the benefits pertaining to peaceful happiness, liberation and accomplishment of the Buddha Path are truly bestowed to us by Amitabha Buddha. We should also believe the existence of other inconceivable meritorious virtues of Amitabha Buddha that are unveiled in the Pure Land *Sūtras* and other *Sūtras*.
- ③ We should sincerely believe that the conditions for getting rebirth in the Pure Land are apt and attainable by ordinary beings, as well as saintly beings of all the worlds in the ten directions.

## ii) What is Counted as Truly Real Faith?

Faith belongs to the mental domain. Hence it does not possess any specific form or shape. Whether we truly believe in something or not is solely cognised by ourselves; others are not aware of it. Then what is counted as truly real sincere faith in Amitabha Buddha and the Pure Land? Our second patriarch Master Shandao presented to us the following lucent criteria for faith in his *Annotations of the Contemplation Sūtra* [34]:

- ① We should generate utmost sincere and truthful mind from the bottom of our heart, instead of the false or fake appearance demonstrated to show others.

② We should have a profound mind: We should definitely believe that we ourselves are evil mundane beings revolving in the mire of the death-and-birth cycle all the time, without opportunity and appropriate conditions for liberation. At the same time, we resolutely believe, without any doubt and hesitation, that Amitabha Buddha made the Forty-Eight Great Vows to rescue and gather in sentient beings, such that we can definitely achieve rebirth by relying on his vows.

To attest the faith in Amitabha Buddha, Master Shandao enumerated several levels of challenges:

- ① If someone were to expound to us that Amitabha and the Pure Land do not exist, we would not believe him.
- ② If an Arhat, Pratyekabuddha, and Bodhisattva prior to the ground stage were to deny the existence of Amitabha Buddha and his Pure Land with various claims, we would never doubt the existence of both.
- ③ Even if many Bodhisattvas of the ten ground stages were to concurrently deny the meritorious virtues of Amitabha Buddha and his Pure Land, we would never concur nor give rise to doubt.
- ④ Even if transformed Buddhas were to claim to deny the doctrines on the Pure Land, we would never waver in our resolute faith in the Pure Land. This is considered truly real faith.

Although faith is a mental state, and cannot be seen, measured or detected by ordinary physical instruments, it is concrete, and not ambiguous. For example, when we go home after school or work, we are certain in our mind that our home is a real existence, and the way leading to our home is a clear and right route. We will never suspect the current existence of our home. Similarly, when we go to a bank to withdraw some cash, we are definitely certain that the bank is real and we have bank accounts with enough money deposited in the bank, otherwise, we will not go to the bank. When farmers plant grain seeds in the field, they undoubtedly believe that the seeds they plant in the field will sprout,

grow, and bear more grains, otherwise they will never bother to undertake all the toils in the field.

Not only do we believe in what we directly see, but we also believe in most of what we are told or taught. For instance, most of us have seen our parents and grandparents, but are unable to see the grandparents of our grandparents. However, we never doubt their existence. We have never personally seen *Śākyamuni* Buddha, Confucius, George Washington, and other historical saints and sages as well as other prominent figures, yet we never challenge the facts of their existences. Most of us have never set foot on the Antarctica continent, but we believe in its existence and its direction with respect to us. Ancient people believed that our earth is flat, but nowadays, we all believe that our earth is a globe, rotating and orbiting in space. Therefore, our faith in the existence of Amitabha Buddha and his meritorious virtues should be without the slightest suspicion or doubt. It should be like our belief in the existence of our ancestors, the existence of the Antarctica continent, the global shape of our earth, the convenience to withdraw cash from a bank account, the warmth and comfort of homes, etc. That is regarded as truly real sincere faith.

### **iii) How to Establish Truly Real Faith?**

We have never been to the Pure Land, and most Pure Land practitioners only see Amitabha Buddha at the end of their life. How can we establish and strengthen our faith in the Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha?

People usually say, “seeing is believing”. That is, we trust our eyes or other sensory faculties. As a matter of fact, human beings’ eyesight and other faculties are very limited and deceptive. For example, we can directly perceive a very narrow band of light waves between ultraviolet and infrared light, but are unable to see the various electromagnetic waves in space. Human beings cannot see in completely dark environment either. However, we cannot draw the conclusion that electromagnetic waves beyond the visible light or everything in purely dark environment do not exist. As we have discussed in Volume I, due to our limited capacity, we see all solid materials as concrete and obstructive, yet they are more vacuous inside their atoms than our solar system.



Profound faith is usually derived from resolute comprehension. For example, contemporary people tend to immigrate to other countries to work or live. Before we move to a new country, even to a new city to live or work, we usually spend time to study the introduction and evaluations of the geographical and climate features, social and political environment, educational and medical levels, safety and welfare situations there etc. If that country or place is really good, the more we learn about the introductions of that country or city, the more we have resolute comprehension of that place, and gradually establish our faith in the new country or city.

It is similar to our belief in the atom structure and the global shape of the Earth after we have learnt about them from textbooks and had seen pictures drawn or taken by others. We believe all these because we have faith in our teachers and textbooks. By the same token, we should have even more faith in Buddhas and his teachings. Not only are Buddhas completely omniscient, but they also have no intention to deceive us. Their sole purpose is, out of compassion, to rescue and deliver us from the mire of death-and-birth cycle. Therefore, we should repeatedly and humbly read the Pure Land *Sūtras* and other Mahayana doctrines, and diligently study the commentaries and annotations on these Pure Land *Sūtras*.

Try to memorise the paragraphs depicting the magnificent features of the Pure Land. Imagine repeatedly the pure majestic attributes of the Pure Land described in the Pure Land *Sūtras*, and compare them with the stark suffering nature of our living environment. It is hard, even impossible for us to visualise the main features of the Pure Land described in *the Contemplation Sūtra* up to the concentrated state, due to our coarse and scattered mind. But we still can acquire tremendous benefits by reading about these instructions and contemplate on them repeatedly. More specifically, by repeatedly studying the meaning of the Forty-Eight Great Vows of Amitabha Buddha, we can gradually transform the unfamiliar objects of the Pure Land into familiar and intimate mental objects. We can further transmute the ambiguous descriptions into clear, concrete and trustworthy images in our mind. This will enable us to establish and enhance our faith in the Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha.

If anyone activates sincere faith as soon as he or she hears others introducing Pure Land doctrines or encounter some Pure Land *Sūtras* or commentaries, he

or she must have planted profound virtuous roots of the Pure Land. He or she has definitely learned and practised it for many lives in the past. As Master Shandao asserted in his *Annotation of the Contemplation Sūtra*: “If some people hear talks on Pure Land Dharmas as if they have not heard them, see them as if they have not seen them, we should know that these people just came out of the three woeful realms. Their evil obstructions have not been exhausted, so they have no faith and inclinations. The Buddha said that these people are not ready to be liberated yet.” (若有人闻说净土法门，闻如不闻，见如不见，当知此等，始从三恶道来，罪障未尽，为此无信向耳。佛言此人未可得解脱也。)

“If some people feel mixed sorrow and joy, with their body hair erected, as soon as they heard talks on the Pure Land Dharmas, we should know that these people had cultivated this Dharma (in previous lives). They give rise to exultation on hearing them again in this life. They will cultivate it with the right mindfulness and will definitely get rebirth.” (若人闻说净土法门，闻即悲喜交流，身毛为竖者，当知此人，过去已曾修习此法，今得重闻，即生欢喜。正念修行，必得生也。)

It was easier for ancient people to generate sincere faith in something, because of their simple lifestyle, honest and unsophisticated personality, and the scarcity of information. In China, from Master Shandao's time (613-681CE) till the late Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1912), most people lived a pastoral life in the countryside, and most of them were illiterate. They found it easier to establish sincere faith in the Pure Land doctrines, with innumerable practitioners attaining rebirth in Pure Land, as enumerated in *the Records of Saints and Sages of the Pure Land*. Master Yinguang inculcated to us that the Pure Land is too inconceivable even for Bodhisattvas of the ground stage to completely comprehend, not to mention mundane beings. Only Buddhas can completely comprehend it. He also repeatedly wrote to his adherents to tell them that it is easily accepted by the wisest intellectuals and those illiterate unsophisticated farmers and housewives. The more one tries to investigate and challenge it, the farther one is away from it, and the lesser one will benefit from it. This is controversial to our modern scientific spirit, which emphasises and encourages

one to suspect and challenge everything so as to explore and expand the frontiers of common knowledge.

Considering the difficulty in establishing a sincere faith in Amitabha Buddha and the Pure Land in contemporary time, we have to let go of our ego and put aside what we have learnt at school, especially those materialism-oriented teachings. We should read the Pure Land *Sūtras* and commentaries, learn from Dharma masters preaching Pure Land principles, or from Dharma friends who are proficient in Pure Land study and practice. We should also know that most of our patriarch masters are extraordinarily talented. They have profound faith in the Pure Land definitely not from blindly following others. Not only have they penetrated the principles of the doctrines, but they also have experienced the truth through their persevering cultivations. It is also particularly useful to read *the Records of Saints and Sages of the Pure Land*, and other real cases of successful rebirth that happened recently.

Faith is a mental state, which is subject to change, and influenced by repeatedly perfuming, that is, our mind is affected by strong or repeated influence. This attribute renders us to have confidence in the establishment of faith in the Pure Land through repeated and attentive studies.

## 2) Earnest Aspiration

Aspiration is expressed by “**desire to be born in my land**”. This signifies our determined longing to depart from the *Saha* world at the end of this life, and to attain rebirth in the Pure Land immediately without any hesitation.

Like faith, aspiration also belongs to the mental and wisdom domain, yet is also very concrete, specific and practical. Every day we make various choices and decisions based on our desire or aspiration. On the long-term perspective, we formulate life career plans, court spouse, bear and breed children, etc. For middle-term targets, we choose the college or university, decide the specialty to study, apply for a specific job, and make friends, etc. Most of these decisions, even the trivial daily decisions are not improvised spontaneously or incidentally. They are merely reflections of our desire and will. They are different only in the scale of determination, with some being adamantly determined and persistent, whereas others are easily altered. Aspiration to a person is like the

rudder to a ship; it determines the direction of the course. One prominent characteristic of most eminent people is the possession of a definite aspiration and the diligent persistence in pursuing the fulfilment of the aspiration. Since their aspiration is unified and definite, they can concentrate their time and effort on the endeavour pertaining to the target, and eventually enjoy successful result. Otherwise, lacking a definite and long-term aspiration, one tends to scatter his time and effort in any incidental occurrence, entailing no significant result. This habit of going with the flow will lead to a mediocre and uneventful life. They neither know where life comes from at birth, nor do they care where to go after this life.

In order to generate earnest aspiration, we have to constantly contemplate the sufferings of this world and visualise or imagine the ultimate bliss of the Pure Land. People of different blessings can contemplate the sufferings of this world pursuant to the specific circumstances of their lives:

① Suppose that our life is fraught with various dissatisfactions, such as an abhorrent workplace, an inharmonious family with a resentful spouse or ungrateful children, a destitute life with enormous debt or obligations, a decrepit body inflicted by chronic diseases, etc. These unfortunate circumstances are good opportunities to incite our strong aspiration to escape this anguished world forever.

② If we belong to the fortunate group with great blessings due to wholesome karma accumulated in our previous lives, we should be careful, not to be obscured by ostensible happiness. For instance, we may enjoy opulent wealth, respected privilege, a satisfied spouse and lovely children, and a healthy body and mind. However, we should be vigilant, as all these enjoyments are transient, which can be deprived at any time. Even if they are quite solid and durable, they will all leave us at death. Just as *the Section of Practice and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* emphasises [23], **“Further, when a person is on the verge of death, at the last instant of life, when all his faculties scatter and he departs from his relatives, when all power and status are lost and nothing survives, when his prime minister, great officials, his inner court and outer cities, his elephants, horses, carts, and treasuries of precious jewels can no longer accompany him, these kings of vows alone will stay with him. At all times, they will guide him forward, and in a single instant he will be**

**reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.”**（又复是人临命终时，最后刹那，一切诸根悉皆散坏，一切亲属悉皆舍离，一切威势悉皆退失。辅相大臣，宫城内外，象马车乘，珍宝伏藏，如是一切，无复相随。唯此愿王，不相舍离，于一切时，引导其前；一刹那中，即得往生极乐世界。）

Due to the defiled nature of the enjoyments of our sensory organs, most of us tend to indulge in the pursuit of more enjoyment, inevitably committing more unwholesome conducts, and resulting in descent into the woeful realms to endure long term torment.

③ There are some people, out of virtuous roots planted in previous lives, who cultivate Buddhism for the purpose of obtaining blessings for the next life, instead of for pursuing rebirth in the Pure Land. They should be aware that even if they, in this life succeed in obtaining all of what they aspire for; in the next life, they will be vulnerable to severe afflictions of greed and hatred. Thus, they will tend to conduct more unwholesome activities, leading to descent into the woeful realms in the following life after the next one. Master Yinguang repeatedly warned us of this situation as the vengeance (potential enemy) of three lifetimes: that is, cultivating merits in this life, enjoying the blessings in the next, and descending in the third life.

In summary, the nature of life in this world is suffering. No matter where we live, for better or worse, we inescapably undergo various sufferings either sooner or later, as long as we revolve in the death-and-birth cycle. While we contemplate the unavoidable sufferings of this world, we should try to visualise or imagine the various bliss acquired when we are reborn in the Pure Land, especially the benefits enumerated in the Forty-Eight Vows. Through repeated contemplation and comparison of this world with that of the Pure Land, we will gradually establish and solidify our earnest and unwavering aspiration to escape the *Saha* world and to attain rebirth in the Pure Land. The aspiration to leave this world is similar to the yearning to escape a prison of life-sentence; the desire to get rebirth in the Pure Land is as strong and as eager as the longing for one's home after years of lonely, wandering life.

### 3) Convenient Practice

In this vow, the stipulated practice is to recite the name of Amitabha Buddha, that is, mindfully recite or chant “Namo Amitabha Buddha”. Here, “namo” is

a Sanskrit term, meaning “Taking refuge in”. Although many cultivations with sincere faith and earnest aspiration will lead to successful rebirth, Buddha-recitation is the most direct, effective and convenient practice. This vow guarantees that with sincere faith and earnest aspiration, even ten devoted utterances of the Buddha’s name on the verge of one’s death will lead one to achieve rebirth. The salient advantage of this method is that it is suitable for everyone, whether intelligent or dull, erudite or illiterate, wealthy or destitute, men or women, old or young, busy or with leisure. etc.

However, please do not belittle the practice of Buddha-name recitation because of its simplicity and universal application. In fact, the cultivation of name recitation can achieve paramount stage if one can conduct it to one-pointedness of mind. Master Ouyi stated in his *Essential Annotations of the Amitabha Sūtra*: “If one’s upholding and reciting the Buddha’s name has not attained the stage of eradication of the afflictions of insight and cultivation, one can achieve the nine grades in the three ranks in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings based on either concentrated or scattered recitation. If one upholds and recites the Buddha’s name up to the stage of single-mindedness without distraction at phenomenon level, the afflictions of insight and cultivation will be effortlessly eliminated, and one will achieve rebirth in the land of convenience with residue. If one upholds and recites the name up to the stage of single-mindedness without distraction at noumenon level, and destroy one part of the ignorance, till forty-one parts of it, one will be reborn in the purely adorned land of reward, and partially attain the land of permanence, tranquillity and light. If one’s ignorance is completely eradicated, one will be reborn in the paramount land of reward of ultimate tranquillity and light.” (若执持名号，未断见思，随其或散或定，于同居土分三辈九品。若持至事一心不乱，见思任运先落，则生方便有余净土。若持至理一心不乱，豁破一品无明，乃至四十一品，则生实报庄严净土，亦分证常寂光土。若无明断尽，则是上上实报究竟寂光也。 [18])

Master Ouyi’s statement reveals to us the three levels of cultivation based on pure recitation of Amitabha Buddha’s name:

① The first level applies to most mundane beings. They have sincere faith and earnest aspiration to escape the *Saha* world and achieve rebirth in the Pure Land,

and they cultivate the name-recitation in daily life with either a scattered mind or low level of concentrated mind. Some practitioners may occasionally achieve some period of purified recitation without disturbance and scattering, but their afflictions of insight and cultivation are not eradicated. Their grades of rebirth will advance based on their effort and level of recitation.

② The second level is to achieve the single-mindedness without distraction at phenomenon level. These practitioners cultivate the Buddha-recitation based on their faith in the real existence of Amitabha Buddha and the Pure Land. However, they lack the contemplation of noumenon. That is, they do not contemplate the tenet that while the mind is formulating (contemplating) the Buddha, the mind itself is the Buddha. Nevertheless, their afflictions of insight and cultivation are all eliminated through the samadhi of mindfulness of the Buddha, or the profound concentration obtained through Buddha-recitation.

③ The third level is to achieve the single-mindedness without distraction at noumenon level. Not only do these cultivators sincerely believe that Amitabha Buddha, his inconceivable meritorious virtues and the Pure Land do exist, but they also realise that the Pure Land is inseparable from our pure mind. That is, they realise that there is no difference between the Buddha, sentient beings and our mind in quintessence. They penetrate that while they are contemplating the Buddha, their mind is the Buddha, hence the interactive correspondence between Amitabha Buddha and the cultivators are natural. With the one-pointedness of mind by Buddha-recitation, not only have they eradicated all the afflictions of insight and cultivation, but also further destroy one, more parts, or even all of the ignorance.

Due to proficiency in Buddhist doctrines or knowledge, many contemporary scholars tend to contempt the Buddha-recitation gateway, considering it only to be cultivated by illiterate or simple people. Of course, this method is most welcomed and suitable for simple minded people who can easily establish sincere faith and earnest aspiration. As a matter of fact, they are the people with the most wisdom, because of the utmost benefit they acquire through simple persistent cultivation of Buddha-recitation. At the end of this life, it is these simple people who succeed in the termination of transmigrations in the death-and-birth cycle, treading on the expressway to accomplish the Buddha Path in

one lifetime. On the contrary, most smart people, who are too arrogant to cultivate the simple Buddha-recitation, will wander in the six realms without knowing how to escape.

Moreover, the main reason for most people in this world who easily establish sincere faith and earnest aspiration is the virtuous roots that they have planted in previous lives. Buddha-recitation is easy, but it is difficult to build faith and aspiration. We encounter many people who show no interest, when we introduce to them the doctrines of Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha. Master Yinguang told a real case in his letter to Miss Zhang Jueming (张觉明) [35]: “In the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Guangxu (1893 CE), I lived at the Yuanguang Temple outside of the Fucheng Gate of Beijing. One day, I saw a beggar of fifteen to sixteen years old who did not appear hungry, begging for money, while I was walking with a monk from outside Xizhi Gate to Yuanguang Temple. I told the beggar that I would give him one penny of money if he could recite one utterance of Buddha’s name, but he refused to recite. I then told him that if he could recite ten times the Buddha’s name, I would give him ten pennies. Still, he refused to recite. I took out and showed him my money bag which contained more than four hundred pennies of money. I then encouraged him to recite the Buddha’s name by giving him one penny at each utterance until all the money in the bag is exhausted, but he still refused to recite. He even began to cry. I eventually gave him one penny and left. The boy so lacked virtuous roots that he refuses to recite Buddha’s name even for the sake of cheating money.”

According to the 18<sup>th</sup> vow of Amitabha Buddha, the necessary and sufficient condition to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land is merely ten mindful recitations of his name on the verge of death, with sincere faith and earnest aspiration. It looks like a very simple condition that everyone can do easily. However, although it is easy to recite ten times of Buddha’s name, it is far from easy to establish sincere faith and earnest aspiration, which are more necessary than the number of recitations of Buddha’s name. Just as Master Ouyi stated in *the*



*Essential Annotation on the Amitabha Sūtra*, “Whether one can achieve rebirth or not is entirely dependent on whether one has faith and aspiration or not; the higher or lower in the grades of rebirth is dependent on the depth of one’s recitation of the Buddha’s name.” (往生与否全由信愿之有无，品位高低全由持名之深浅。)

Furthermore, the situation on the verge of death is totally different from that in our daily life. Most of us do not know exactly when or how we are going to die. Only those who have accomplished their practice of the Pure Land gateway, know the exact time of death beforehand. Without daily diligent cultivation of Buddha-recitation, we cannot build up the habitual energy to start mindful recitation of the Buddha’s name automatically whenever our mind is not occupied by something else or when we encounter accidents or other abrupt occurrences. Venerable Yanxu listed ten occurrences which will impede us at the time of death if we do not cultivate in our daily life [6]:

- ① no virtuous friends will appear to advice and encourage us to recite the Buddha’s name on the verge of death;
- ② entangled by severe pains, thus unable to recite the Buddha’s name;
- ③ lost voice due to acute stroke;
- ④ lost mind due to mental disorder;
- ⑤ died in flood or fire;
- ⑥ killed by wild beast or traffic accident;
- ⑦ encounter some evil friend who would sabotage the faith in the practitioner;
- ⑧ died in coma state;
- ⑨ died in warfare;
- ⑩ died from falling from a cliff or other accident.

Additionally, at the end of our life, all the karmas accumulated in the present and previous lives will manifest in various forms to affect the mind of the dying, especially if one has committed much evil conducts, and many dreadful or heinous images will appear in front of him or her, causing one to be frightened or terrified. Facing a beloved family member or some cherished material on the verge of death, one may give rise to severe greed, and drive one to the hungry ghost or animal realm. Conversely, encountering a resentful and hated person when dying may instigate uncontrollable hatred, propelling one into the hell or animal realm.

In summary, although the minimum requirement for achieving rebirth in the Pure Land is merely ten mindful recitations of the Buddha's name, we should not have the wrong opinion that we do not need to cultivate in daily life, and just wait to recite ten times of the name at the end of our life. We should cultivate recitation every day, persistently reciting at least a fixed number of utterances, the more the better. Furthermore, we should try to participate in the Buddha-recitation retreats of one day, three days, seven days, etc. whenever our conditions allow. With consistent perseverance, we will gradually build up a habit of reciting the Buddha's name no matter what happens at the end of life. We just cannot bet the crucial matter of pursuing rebirth in the Pure Land on luck and that we will be comfortably lying in bed with Dharma friends accompanying us and reciting Buddha's name on the verge of our death.

## **(2) Vow of Receiving and Escorting All with Diligent Cultivation (19<sup>th</sup>)**

This vow applies to those who have generated the Bodhicitta and cultivated the Mahayana practices. It is stated that sentient beings in the lands of the ten directions, who have activated the Bodhicitta, cultivated various meritorious virtues, and desire to be born in the Pure Land with utmost sincere aspiration should, at their death, see Amitabha Buddha appearing before them, surrounded by a great assembly.

This vow specifies three requirements:

① The first is the generation of Bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is the aspiration to attain Buddhahood, and to edify others to accomplish the Buddha Path. This requirement differs from the 18<sup>th</sup> vow, which does not raise the requirement of Bodhicitta. However, Bodhicitta has some special specifications for Pure Land practitioners, as stated by Master Tanluan in his *Commentary on the Treatise on Rebirth*: “This unsurpassed Bodhicitta is the mind to aspire to become a Buddha. The mind to aspire to become a Buddha is the mind to deliver sentient beings. The mind to deliver sentient beings is the mind to gathering sentient beings to achieve rebirth in the Pure Buddha-land.” (此无上菩提心，即是愿作佛心。愿作佛心，即是度众生心。度众生心，即摄取众生生净土佛国心。[15]) Therefore, the most salient characteristics of Bodhicitta to a Pure Land cultivator is to aspire to get rebirth in the Pure Land so as to accelerate one’s cultivation and improve one’s capability, in order to deliver more sentient beings to the Pure Land. The masters of Pure Land school inculcate to us that to help one sentient being to attain rebirth in the Pure Land is equivalent to facilitating one to swiftly become a Buddha. There is no meritorious virtue more significant than this.

② The second is the cultivation of meritorious virtues, such as the practice of the Six *Pāramitās*, learning the Pure Land *Sūtras* and commentaries and to try to encourage others to practise the Pure Land method.

③ The third is the desire to get rebirth in the Pure Land with sincere aspiration. The statement implicitly includes sincere faith in Amitabha Buddha and the Pure Land, otherwise they cannot generate sincere aspiration. This is a necessary condition. Even if one generates sublime Bodhicitta and cultivate the Six *Pāramitās* wholeheartedly, without the earnest aspiration to escape transmigration in the six realms and to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, one will remain in the six realms. Hence, a Pure Land practitioner will dedicate all of his or her merits obtained from cultivations of the *pāramitās* to adorn the Pure Land, as the provision for rebirth there.

As a result, not only can one succeed in achieving rebirth in the Pure Land, but also Amitabha Buddha had promised that he, with his grand saintly assembly, will come to welcome and escort the practitioner to safely and exultantly get

rebirth in the Pure Land. These practitioners belong to rebirth with the three grades in the superior rank, as elaborated in the next chapter.

### **(3) Vow of Assured Rebirth with Mindfulness (20<sup>th</sup>)**

This vow states that sentient beings in the lands of the ten directions who, having heard the name of Amitabha Buddha, keep mindful of the Pure Land, plant various virtuous roots, and sincerely dedicate their merits towards the Pure Land with a desire to be born there, would eventually fulfil their aspiration.

① The first condition here is “**having heard the name of Amitabha Buddha**”, meaning that they have heard of Amitabha Buddha and his inconceivable meritorious virtues, and that they have accepted and believed in them.

② The second condition is to “**keep mindful of the Pure Land**”, meaning that they frequently remember the Pure Land, and not forget it, indicating faith and aspiration.

③ The practice of this vow signifies that they will cultivate various virtuous conducts such as filially supporting their parents, respecting their teachers, and other good conducts. Instead of seeking good blessings for the future, they dedicate all the good deeds towards the Pure Land with the desire to be born there.

As a result, Amitabha Buddha guarantees their rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of their life.

### **(4) The Comparison of the Three Vows**

These three vows utterly signify the unsurpassed compassion of Amitabha Buddha towards all sentient beings in the worlds of ten directions. No matter what their capacities and preferences are, they can always find a method to practise to get rebirth in the Pure Land, as long as they have sincere faith and earnest aspiration. Nevertheless, the three vows possess different emphasis regarding their applied audience and requirements.

#### **1) The 18<sup>th</sup> Vow**

The 18<sup>th</sup> vow applies to most audiences, from saintly beings to the wicked people who committed various vile conducts.

① It emphasises the sincere faith and earnest aspiration, which are the necessary conditions for anyone who want to get rebirth in the Pure Land, regardless of when one establishes them. It is effective even if one, on the verge of death, has virtuous root and fortunate conditions to hear from virtuous Dharma friends and, immediately believes in Amitabha Buddha and the Pure Land and aspires to get rebirth there.

② It points out the easiest practice needed to get rebirth in the Pure Land, that is, merely attentively reciting the Buddha's name, even ten times or one time on the verge of one's death. Of course, it applies more to those who assiduously recite the Buddha's name all their lives, which will enhance their rebirth grades.

③ There are three types of cultivators in the Pure Land school: **the exclusive cultivators, the perfect cultivators and the mixed cultivators**. This vow specifically applies to the exclusive cultivators, who exclusively recite Amitabha Buddha's name, prostrate in front of the image of Amitabha Buddha, and study exclusively the Pure Land *Sūtras* etc. People of this type are the most successful group, with “**ten thousand cultivating; with the result in ten thousand getting rebirth**”, as described by Master Shandao and other patriarchs.

The following are a few examples of successful rebirth in Pure Land by mainly practising recitation of Buddha's name, excerpted from *the Records of Saints and Sages of Pure Land*.

① **Chaoyin (潮音)**

Chaoyin, with her family name Jin (金), was born in Changshu of Jiangsu province. She married Mr. Gong (龚), but later became a widow and lived solitarily. She strictly observed the female virtues, and she renounced household life together with her son Duanwu (端吾). While Duanwu joined the monastic as a monk, Chaoyin went to Suzhou to become a disciple of *Bhikṣuṇī* Zhenru (真如). Later, she went back to her home village, rented a room and

cultivated alone. She continuously recited the Buddha's name loudly day and night. One day, when some minor illness fell upon her, she washed herself, put on her clean clothes, and then sat upright in the room. At dusk, she calculated, "I am leaving at the *hai* hour (from 9 pm to 11 pm)." She then withdrew her hands into the sleeves, passing away in upright sitting position peacefully. This happened in the years of Emperor Shunzhi (1644-1661) of Qing dynasty.

## ② Wang Zhong (王衷)

Wang Zhong was from Jiahe (Jianyang county of Fujian province) and lived in Gushan of Qiantang area of Zhejiang province. He was offered an official position while he lived as a hermit, in the years of Zhenghe (1111-1117CE) of the Emperor Huizong of Song dynasty. He rejected the initial offer, but accepted an official position later as "Chaosan Dafu (朝散大夫, a lower middle official position at that time)". He used to cultivate meditation, without awakening. One day, he fortuitously heard monks reciting the Amitabha *Sūtra*, and realised some awakening in his mind. He then turned to cultivate exclusively on the Pure Land method. He persistently recited the Amitabha *Sūtra* seven times and chant the Buddha's name ten thousand times each day without interruption for nineteen years. He also transformed his residence into a lotus society abode, so that more people could participate in the Buddha-recitation practice, regardless of whether they were monastic or laity, wealthy or destitute. He passed away peacefully in upright sitting position facing west, after he washed himself.

## ③ Ms. Yao (姚婆)

Ms. Yao was from Shangdang of Shanxi Province. She has a close associate, Ms. Fan(范婆). One day, Ms. Fan advised her to recite Amitabha Buddha's name. Following Ms. Fan's advice, she attentively recited Buddha's name, and discarded various house affairs. On the verge of her death, she witnessed Amitabha Buddha descending from the sky with two Bodhisattvas (*Avalokitesvara* Bodhisattva and *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva) one on each side. She then implored to Amitabha Buddha: "If I had not met Ms. Fan, how could I have the opportunity to witness the Buddha. Could you please wait a while, so that I could say goodbye to Ms. Fan?" When Ms. Fan came, the

Buddha was still clearly seen in the sky, then Ms. Yao immediately passed away in standing position.

#### ④ Mr. Huang (黄生)

Mr. Huang was from Tanzhou of Hunan province in Song Dynasty (960 – 1279 CE). He was a blacksmith. While he was hitting a piece of iron, he would utter “Amitabha Buddha” at each strike. One day, Mr. Huang asked a neighbour to write down a stanza he composed. “Clank, clank. It is transformed into steel after constant forging. The (time of) great peace is coming and I will go to the West (the Pure Land).” He continued, “after I leave, you can widely disseminate this stanza, and encourage people to recite Buddha’s name.” At the end of these words, he instantly passed away.

#### ⑤ Zhang Shanhe (张善和)

Zhang Shanghe lived as a butcher in the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907 CE). He slaughtered cows all his life. When he was dying, he saw more than ten cows speaking to him in human voice. “You killed us.” Shanhe was extremely terrified, and asked his wife to invite monks to recite Buddha’s name for him. The monk told Shanhe, “According to the *Sūtra*, sentient beings who committed evil conducts will descend to woeful realms. However, by reciting Amitabha Buddha’s name with sincere mind up to ten times, one can eliminate sinful karmas of birth-and-death of 50 *koṭīs Kalpas*, and one will achieve rebirth in the World of Ultimate Bliss.” Zhang Shanhe exclaimed, “The hell is approaching, I cannot wait for the incense burners.” While he was speaking, with his left hand holding the lighter, and right hand holding the incense, he loudly chanted the Buddha’s names, facing west direction. It was not up to ten utterances yet when he spoke hurriedly. “The Buddha has come, and he offers me a lotus jewelled seat.” After these words, he passed away.

### 2) The 19<sup>th</sup> Vow

This vow mainly applies to Mahayana practitioners, who have activated their Bodhicitta, and diligently engaged in the practice of various *pāramitās*. However, in order to accelerate their process to accomplish the Buddha Path, they want to get rebirth in the Pure Land after this life. This is similar to a young

entrepreneur aspirant, who decides to enter a university to study while he or she keeps preparing for future career.

The 19<sup>th</sup> vow is more suitable for perfect cultivators. They engage themselves in diligent recitation of the Buddha's name, and at the same time, participate in various virtuous activities, such as studying the Pure Land *Sūtras* and commentaries, and cultivating various *pāramitās*. They usually fervently promote the Pure Land studies and practices, encouraging everybody they encounter to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land. As mentioned above, these cultivators usually belong to the group of practitioners with rebirths in the superior rank. All of the patriarchs of the Pure Land school are paragons of this group.

Here we will list a few examples, from *the Records of Saints and Sages of Pure Land*, who achieved rebirth in the Pure Land by cultivating Bodhisattva practices.

#### ① Master Yuanying (圆瑛大师)

Master Yuanying, with epithet Taoguang (韬光), also named as Hongwu (弘悟), Master of One Roar Hall (一吼堂主人), and Master of Three Pursuit Hall (三求堂主人). He was originally from Gutian of Fujian province, with family name Wu (吴). Both of his parents died when he was five. He began to study the Confucian doctrines at school age, showing extraordinary talent. At the age of 18, he suddenly realised that life is like a dream, so he eagerly wanted to renounce the household life, but was opposed by his uncle. After he recovered from severe sickness the following year, he was determined to join the monastic. First, he became a disciple of Master Zengxi (增西上人) of Meifeng Temple of Xinghua, then he received his complete ordination from Monk Miaolian (妙莲和尚) of Yongquan Temple of Gushan at the age of 20. In the next year, he approached Monk Yekai (冶开) of Tianning Temple of Changzhou, and practised meditation for five years. He had experienced some concentrated state during his meditation, feeling both his body and mind expansive and bright. Since then, he completely comprehended all the questions and doubts arisen in his study of *Sūtras* and commentaries. At age 26, he went to Tiantong Temple of Ningbo to cultivate meditation and followed Monk Jichan (寄禅). While he was contemplating single-mindedly, the concentrated state appeared again, more splendid than before. He felt both his body and mind were empty,



absolutely tranquil and perfectly bright, and subsequently his wisdom progressed every day. When he reached 36 years old, he read the works of Master Yongming (永明大师, the 6<sup>th</sup> patriarch of the Pure Land school) and Master Lianchi (莲池大师, the 8<sup>th</sup> patriarch of the Pure Land school), and established profound sincere faith in the Pure Land gateway. He believed that it enables us to purify the three karmas (physical, verbal and mental), to perfectly fulfil the functions of samadhi (concentration), to transcend the nine existences (of the ten existences except Buddha), and to achieve the lotus rebirth of nine grades.

At 40 years old, he began to prepare and accumulate the provisions for rebirth in the Pure Land. Nevertheless, he was also eager to benefit sentient beings. Thus, he wrote lectures and texts for various Pure Land *Sūtras* and commentaries, circulating them at home and abroad. He presided over the Yuanming Dharma Giving Society to print and circulate massive books on Buddhism, promulgate Chan and Buddhist teachings all over China and Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Philippines and other Southeast Asian area. He preached and expounded Buddhist teachings hundreds of times, all directing to the Pure Land. Following the tradition of the ancient Lushan Lotus Society, he organised the Yuanming lotus Buddha-recitation society, attracted innumerable followers to believe and practise the Pure Land method. He led to renovate or rebuild the Jiedai Temple and Tiantong Temple of Ningbo, the Great Kaiyuan Temple of Quanzhou, Fahai Temple of Fuzhou, the Bliss Temple of Gutian, and their stupas. Furthermore, he helped to build orphanages, children's homes, primary schools, colleges, hospitals, refuges, factories and cemeteries, as well as the Institutes of *Sūrangama* Studies and Institute of Lecture and Practice. In summary, he spared no effort in embellishing the Dharma sites, educating monastic talents, and benefiting society.

He was appointed the Advisory Officer of the Chinese Buddhist Society in 1909, and he became the Chairman of the board of the Chinese Buddhist Society for seven terms from 1929. Fig 2.11 shows a photograph of Master Yuanying.

Master Yuanying aspired to promulgate the teachings of Buddha and to benefit sentient beings all his life, and he indeed fulfilled his will by undertaking all the activities without weariness.

In January of 1953, he fell seriously ill, due to persistent endeavours, with less intake of food and extreme fatigue in spirit. Several medical treatments turned

futile. In March, he was diagnosed with esophageal cancer. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of May, his disease became severe. As a result, he could not take any food, only sustained on the infusion of dextrose saline and other injections of Vitamin, etc.



Fig 2.11 Master Yuanying

Photo courtesy for Baidu encyclopaedia

Buddha's name, relinquished all worldly affairs, and solidified his aspiration to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of September, when the abbot of the temple and other monks came to visit him in the ward, Master Yuanying still talked and laughed with them composedly, devoid of weariness. In the afternoon, while his disciples came to visit and pay respect to him, he laughed whole-heartedly after the talk. He then turned to recite Buddha's name as usual, with his hand fingering a rosary. At 6 pm, when Dharma master Kuanrun (宽润) came to visit him, Master Yuanying asked him, "What is the date today?" "It is the 12<sup>th</sup> of August in Chinese

One day, he suddenly spoke to Mingyang (明旻), his disciple, and the others. "I still feel peaceful and pleasant in body and mind, do not worry. The monastics disregard birth-and-death, taking illness as a supportive condition. My epithet is 'Master of Three Pursuit Hall'-- pursuing blessings, wisdom and rebirth in the Pure Land. Now, having fulfilled the pursuits of blessings and wisdom, the only one left is to mindfully recite the Buddha's name, to pursue the rebirth in the Pure Land." He then asked someone to write "the visitors who recites the Buddha's name are genuine lotus friends" and to stick it on the wall. Thus, he wholeheartedly recited the

Calendar,” he replied, and Master Yuanying nodded his head. At 7 pm and 9 pm, he asked twice about the time.

At 10:15 pm, he asked others to help him to get up, went to the toilet, washed his body and changed clothes. While Mingyang and other disciples recite Buddha’s name supportively, he recited Buddha’s name silently and composedly, with his lips moving slightly. His breath began to fade, and the doctor decided to give him an injection. He then said, “Why will I take any more injections?”

At 11:15pm, after he looked at Mingyang and the others for the last time, he closed his eyes, reclined on the bed, and passed away peacefully with a smile, at the age of 76. His lips were red, and the top of his head was warm while his forehead was cold. Even at 6 am the next day, the top of his head still remained slightly warm. When he was put into the coffin on the 21<sup>st</sup>, his limbs were supple like a baby’s, with a smiling face as if alive. His lips became even redder when the coffin was covered on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

## ② Master Liaoyuan (了愿)

Liaoyuan, with family name Chen (陈), was from Huanggang county of Hubei province. He used to practice Taoism, but realised that it was not the ultimate, so he renounced home and was ordained as a monk at the age of 19. Having seen his son become a monk, his father renounced home as well. The father just sat reciting the Buddha’s name every day, and later passed away peacefully in sitting position, and knowing the date of his death beforehand. Liaoyuan was deeply moved by his father’s diligent cultivation in reciting Buddha’s name and achieving such wondrous death. He then devotedly recited Buddha’s name, with ten to twenty thousand recitations as daily minimum number. He visited on foot the four Famous Mountains, the Zhongnan Mountain, Tiantai Mountain and other places.

Later, he visited Master Yinguang, to ask about the tenets of Chan and Pure Land. Liaoyuan was proficient in the Chan and the Buddhist teachings, yet his mind was turned to the Pure Land. He sat on the chief seat of learned monks in Gaomo Temple of Yangzhou for more than ten years, and he was the abbot of Lingshan Temple and the Longhua Temple of Shanghai. For more than 30 years, he promulgated the teachings in Shanghai, Hangzhou, Suzhou and Changzhou area.

After 1949, Liaoyuan lived in Shanghai. He used to teach *the Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, *the Amitabha Sūtra* and other Mahayana *Sūtras*, with his Dharma rain widely spread over Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, and influenced numerous followers. He was cordial and kind to others, exhorting and encouraging anyone who visits him to become vegetarian and to recite Buddha's name to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land. He lived in Foziyuan in his late years, persistently reciting Buddha's name without interruption.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), he was struck by a stroke, losing speech and agility of his limbs. Medical treatments turned futile. Before the winter solstice, he caught the wind-cold syndrome, and felt weary. He then told his disciples, "I have personally seen Amitabha Buddha. My body does not feel pain and sickness and my mind is free from delusion. I am certain to be reborn in the Bliss World." At midnight, he said, "the Buddha has come!" Then he recited the Buddha's name loudly, gradually faded away with his lips moving slightly. He passed away peacefully on the morning of 24<sup>th</sup> of November in 1975, at the age of 86.

### ③ Wang Rixiu (王日休)

Wang Rixiu, named Xuzhong, was from Luzhou (Hefei of Anhui province). He successfully passed the imperial examination in the Gaozong years (1127-1162) of South Song Dynasty, became a *jinshi* (the highest degree in ancient China) of the Imperial College (太学). However, he relinquished the offering of government officials. Being an erudite scholar, proficient in all the classics, Wang Rixiu annotated *the Six Classics*, *the Analects of Confucius*, and *the Works of Mencius*, accomplished voluminous works of more than tens of thousands of words.

One day, Wang Rixiu suddenly abandoned all his works, and turned to cultivate exclusively on the Pure Land method. He lived a simple abstemious life, and he prostrated one thousand times before the Buddha's image as daily routine. He wrote a book, *the Articles on the Pure Land by Longshu* [36]. Wang Rixiu advised and encouraged all acquaintances, from high officials to butchers, beggars, maids, even prostitutes to take refuge in Pure Land Buddhism. *The Articles on the Pure Land by Longshu* was easy to understand, replete with metaphors and analogies. Its language is sincere and detailed, just like a father or big brother teaching his children or siblings. Wang Rixiu got up to pay

homage to the Buddha early every morning, then he would recite the Buddha's name assiduously, with earnest aspiration to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.

After his death, his students recounted to the others, "Wang Rixiu began to say goodbye to his Dharma friends three days before his demise, encouraging them to diligently cultivate the Pure Land practice. He told them that he would leave and could not see them again. On the last day, after expounding teachings to his students, he paid homage and recited Buddha's name just as usual. At midnight, he suddenly recited several utterances very loudly, and then chanted, 'the Buddha has come to welcome me!' After that, he passed away in standing position."

### **3) The 20<sup>th</sup> Vow**

This vow mainly applies to the ordinary good people in the world. With virtuous roots, they learn about Amitabha Buddha and his virtues, believe in them and keep mindful of them. They then establish their aspiration to get rebirth there. For the rest of their lives, they engaged in various salutary practices such as reciting the Buddha's name, fulfilling all their obligations, advising others to learn and practise the Pure Land method, etc. They earnestly dedicate all their merits to the Pure Land as their provisions for rebirth. This group of people belong to the mixed cultivators.

The following are a few examples of practitioners following the 20<sup>th</sup> vow adopted from *the Records of Saints and Sages of Pure Land*.

#### **① Huigong (慧恭), Sengguang (僧光) and Huilan (慧兰)**

Huigong was from Fengcheng of Jiangxi province. He joined the Lushan Lotus Society, together with Sengguang and Huilan, to follow Master Huiyuan (慧远大师, the first patriarch of Pure Land school) to learn and practise Buddhist Dharmas. Although Sengguang and the others are not as talented in learning as Huigong, their cultivation of concentrated mindfulness of the Pure Land is more sincere and earnest than his. Huilan once told Huigong, "Although you are diligent in study, with erudite knowledge, have you not heard of the saying in the *Sūtra*? 'As if the deaf plays music, one can entertain the others, whereas one cannot hear oneself.'" However, Huigong neglected Huilan's exhortation.

In the following seven years, Huilan and others passed away, all with wondrous responses.

Five years later, Huigong was severely ill. He sighed in grief. “We have been wandering in transmigration in the six realms, when can it stop? Between the coming and going of death and birth, where is my destiny?” He then prostrated before the altar, with tears streaming down his face, aspiring to get rebirth in the Pure Land. His will had never been interrupted since then. One day, he suddenly saw Amitabha Buddha and the golden lotus pedestal coming to welcome him. Huigong instantly felt himself sitting on the lotus pedestal, seeing Huilan and others waiting in the bright light above the lotus pedestal. They told Huigong, “Elder, you have achieved rebirth in the Pure Land, with the superior rank. We cannot control our delight and exultation. Only the resentful causal conditions of the five-turbid world entangled you, preventing our meeting until now.” Huigong told the others about this wondrous response that day, then he passed away in great delight and exultation. It happened in the eleventh year of Yixi (415CE) of Emperor An of East Jin Dynasty.

## ② Ms. Pan (潘氏)

Ms. Pan, named Guangtan, was the wife of Li Chunyang (李春阳), the director of the Industrial Department, from Yuyang, Zhejiang province. Li Chunyang was fond of donation, and he frequently recited Amitabha Buddha’s name when he was old. One year later after Li Chunyang passed away, his image manifested before Ms. Pan, exhorting her loudly. “You should cultivate! You should cultivate!” Ms. Pan was proficient in historical and present knowledges, and she used to slander Buddhism in her early years. She followed Master Yunqi (云栖大师) during her old age. From then on, she became a vegetarian, and learned to practise meditation, usually sitting in lotus position all night. She also engaged in cultivating various meritorious virtues, giving immeasurable money and wealth to help others.

In the winter of 1611 CE, she was ill. She realised that she would not recover by next spring, thus she dispatched her wealth in her will. Soon afterwards, she told her family, “I was a pure monastic for three lives, and I am going to the Pure Land with the accompaniment of *Avalokitesvara* Bodhisattva.” After these words, she passed away in the recitation of Buddha’s name. Her corpse was

supple, with glorious countenance as vivid as if alive, when she was put into the coffin.

### ③ Chen Zhiqi (陈智奇)

Chen Zhiqi was from Suzhou, and used to be called the old lady Chen. She lived at No. 1 in the street in front of the Wenshan Temple of Suzhou. She used to follow Master Yinguang, got her Dharma name Zhiqi. Later she turned to follow Master Xuyun (虚云大师), and received another Dharma name Kuanrong. The old lady possessed profound virtuous roots planted in the past, so she started to recite Buddha's name following her mother at a very early age. She became a widow with no child at middle age, and lived a destitute life. The old lady was gentle in temperament, able to forebear any encountered adversities, and generous in helping others, devoid of stinginess even with a hard life. She kept on, without interruption, reciting the *Śūraṅgama Mantra*, the Great Compassion *Mantra*, the Section on the Universal Doors, the *Vajra Sūtra*, as well as the Pure Land *Sūtras* and other Mahayana *Sūtras* every day. She also profoundly realised that the matter of birth-and-death was crucial, thus she engaged in the practice of repentance and wholeheartedly recite the Buddha's name, and aspire rebirth in the Pure Land.

Around 10 o'clock in the morning on the 26th of March in 1974, a Dharma friend came with some vegetables for her. Seeing her, the old lady said, "you just came at the right time. Please help me to wash my body and put on clean clothes." The Dharma friend immediately realised the meaning and encouraged her to recite the Buddha's name. The old lady replied, "don't worry, I already know the time of my death." After these words, she sat in front of the Buddha image, lighted incense, and chanting, "Send the rubbish to east, I will go to west." As soon as she finished uttering these words, she passed away with a smile, at the age of 83.

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## Chapter 3 Study *the Contemplation Sūtra*

*What are the contents of the Contemplation Sūtra?*

*Which annotations or commentaries should we study so as to precisely comprehend the Sūtra?*

*What are the fundamental tenets of the Pure Land gateway?*

*What are effective cultivations and practices of the Pure Land method?*

*What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for getting rebirth in the Pure Land?*

*What differences determine the grades of rebirth?*

These questions will be answered in this chapter based on the study of *the Contemplation Sūtra*.

### I. INTRODUCTION

At the time when *Śākyamuni* Buddha manifested in India, there was a powerful state *Magádha*, ruled by King *Bimbisāra*, whose queen was *Vaidehī*. Their son, the crown prince, *Ajātaśatru*, instigated by his evil friend *Devadatta*, imprisoned the king to starve him to death and usurped the throne. Out of loyalty to the king, *Vaidehī* secretly brought food and grape juice to the king every day. Additionally, the king asked *Mahāmaudgalyāyana* to convey to him the eight precepts. The Buddha also sent *Pūrṇa* to expound the Dharma to him as well. Three weeks later *Ajātaśatru*, the new king, found out the reasons why *Bimbisāra* was still alive. He was enraged and wanted to kill his queen mother. The heinous act however was dissuaded by Moonlight, a wise and intelligent minister, and *Jīva*. She was then confined to the inner palace instead.

Being devastated, distressed and desperate, Queen *Vaidehī* prostrated on the ground, paid obeisance to the Buddha from afar, and besought the Buddha to send *Mahāmaudgalyāyana* and the venerable *Ānanda* to comfort her. The Buddha realised that the condition to expound *the Contemplation Sūtra* to *Vaidehī* and the world was mature. Therefore, he not only sent his two disciples

to comfort her, but he also disappeared from the *Gṛdhrakūṭa* Mountain, and reappeared in front of the queen, who was in the inner palace. Because of her Mahayana virtuous roots, *Vaidehī* implored the Buddha to show her a place devoid of suffering and distress, and how to cultivate to achieve rebirth there. The Buddha then revealed to her innumerable pure lands, and she chose the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha. She further asked the Buddha how to contemplate to attain rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha. Out of great compassion and omniscient wisdom, the Buddha promulgated the three pure conducts and the sixteen contemplation practices.

*The Contemplation Sūtra* [1] is one of the three core *Sūtras* of the Pure Land school, together with *the Amitabha Sūtra* [2], *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* [3]. It belongs to the sudden and perfect teachings. Its tenet clearly states the fundamental principle of interactive correspondence between Amitabha Buddha and the sentient beings who are mindful of the Buddha. That is, “**while the mind is formulating the Buddha, the mind is the Buddha**”. The instructions of practice given in the *Sūtra* are systematic, comprehensive, precise and practical. They encompass the thirteen contemplations for those capable of meditative cultivations, and the three pure conducts as well as the Buddha name recitation for those who are not skilful in meditative cultivations. The effects of cultivations of the Pure Land are hierarchically enumerated, concrete and clear.

*The Contemplation Sūtra* was translated into Chinese in the Liu Song dynasty (420–479 CE), by *Tripiṭaka* master *Kālayaśas* from India. It was not only welcomed and appreciated by the Pure Land patriarchs and Dharma masters, but also well recognised and annotated by the patriarch masters of other Buddhist schools, such as Master Huiyuan (净影慧远大师, 523 – 592) of Jingyin Temple of the Dilun school, Master Jizang (吉藏大师, 549 – 623) of Three Treatise school, and Master Zhizhe (智者大师, 538 – 597) of Tiantai school. Nevertheless, their annotations and commentaries were influenced by the doctrines of their own school, thus there are some key points not completely in accord with the Pure Land doctrines. Master Shandao (善导大师, 613—681CE) , the second patriarch of Pure Land school, annotated *the Contemplation Sūtra* in four scrolls [4], clarified the controversial points, and undoubtedly confirmed that all the practitioners of the nine grades are mundane

beings. This clarification and confirmation are of great significance for encouraging ordinary beings like us to cultivate the Pure Land method. It was Master Shandao's prominent influence that resulted in the wide prevalence of Pure Land school, reaching its acme in the Tang Dynasty (618 -907CE).

This chapter will introduce *the Contemplation Sūtra* in four aspects: its teachings (Section II), its tenets (Section III), its practices (Section IV) and its effects (Section V), with emphasis on the last two aspects, see Fig 3.1. The explication of the practices and effects proposed in *the Contemplation Sūtra* is mainly based on *the Annotations of the Contemplation Sūtra* by Master Shandao [4][5][6][7]. Some lectures and texts also supply important information and knowledge to facilitate our understanding of the *Sūtra* [8][9].

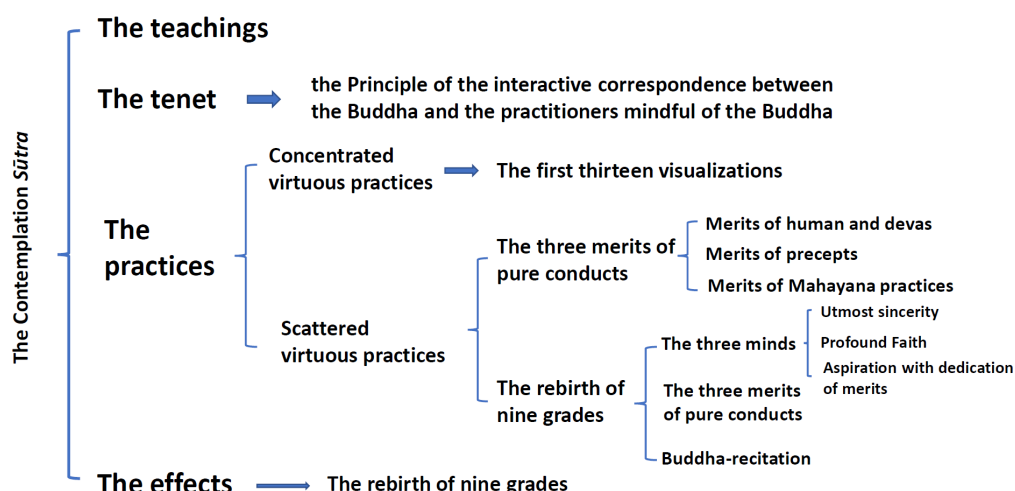


Fig 3.1 The Contents of Chapter 3

## II. THE TEACHINGS

*The Contemplation Sūtra*, spoken by Śākyamuni Buddha, is part of the Bodhisattva canon in the *Tripitaka*. It was translated into Chinese twice. However, only the version translated by the *Tripitaka* Master Kālayaśas is extant, the other version translated by *Dharmamitra* (356~442CE) was lost. Several English translations can be found on the website [10][11][12][13]. The following text is based on synthetical compilation of the other translations, and

with reference to Master Shandao's annotation and other lectures [7][8] 9] and text [14], with modifications based on the comprehension of the author.

## **The *Sūtra* of the Buddha Expounding the Contemplation of the Amitabha Buddha**

Translated into Chinese in the Liu Song Dynasty

By The *Tripiṭaka* Master *Kālayaśas* from India

### **Preface**

Thus I have heard: At one time the Buddha was staying at the *Gṛdhrakūṭa* Mountain, near the city of *Rājagṛha*, together with an assembly of 1,250 great *bhikṣus*, and 32,000 Bodhisattvas led by Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, the Dharma Prince. (如是我闻，一时，佛在王舍城耆闍崛山中，与大比丘众，千二百五十人俱。菩萨三万二千，文殊师利法王子而为上首。)

At that time, in the great city of *Rājagṛha*, the crown prince, *Ajātaśatru*, instigated by his evil friend *Devadatta*, had his father, King *Bimbisāra*, arrested and locked in a cell behind seven-fold walls. He decreed that no state ministers or officials should visit the king. (尔时王舍大城有一太子，名阿闍世，随顺调达恶友之教。收执父王频婆娑罗，幽闭置于七重室内，制诸群臣，一不得往。)

Nevertheless, Queen *Vaidehī* was loyal to the great king. Having bathed and cleansed her body, she spread her body with cream made from honey and wheat flour, and filled her ornaments with grape juice, and offered them secretly to the king. (国太夫人名韦提希，恭敬大王，澡浴清净，以酥蜜和粃用涂其身，诸璎珞中，盛蒲萄浆，密以上王。)

Having eaten the flour paste and drunk the juice, the great king asked for water to rinse his mouth. After rinsing his mouth, he joined his palms reverently, towards the *Gṛdhrakūṭa* Mountain, made obeisance to the World-Honoured One from afar. He said, "*Mahāmaudgalyāyana* is my kin

and friend. I beseech him, out of loving kindness and compassion, to confer the eight precepts to me.” *Maudgalyāyana* flew to the king like an eagle. Day after day, he imparted the eight precepts to the king. The World-Honoured One also sent the venerable *Pūrṇa* to expound the Dharma to the king. (尔时大王食𦰩饮浆，求水漱口，漱口毕已，合掌恭敬，向耆闍崛山遥礼世尊，而作是言：“大目犍连是吾亲友，愿兴慈悲，授我八戒”。时目犍连如鹰隼飞，疾至王所，日日如是，授王八戒。世尊亦遣尊者，富楼那，为王说法。)

Three weeks passed in this fashion. Because he ate the honey flour and heard the Dharma every day, the king looked peaceful and contented. (如是时间，经三七日，王食𦰩蜜，得闻法故，颜色和悦。)

Then *Ajātaśatru* asked the guard, “Is my father still alive?” The guard replied, “Your Majesty, each day the queen brings the king honey flour spread on her body and grape juice concealed under her ornaments. The *śramaṇas* *Maudgalyāyana* and *Pūrṇa* soar across the sky to expound the Dharma to the king. They are unstoppable.” Having heard these words, *Ajātaśatru* was furious with his mother. He said, “My mother is a traitor, and keeps company with traitors. The evil *śramaṇas* are using magic and spells to keep this evil king alive for so many days.” He drew his sharp sword, and was about to slay his mother. (时阿闍世问守门者：“父王今者犹存在耶？”时守门人白言：“大王！国太夫人身涂𦰩蜜，瓔珞盛浆，持用上王；沙门目连及富楼那，从空而来，为王说法，不可禁制。”时阿闍世闻此语已，怒其母曰：“我母是贼，与贼为伴；沙门恶人，幻惑咒术；令此恶王多日不死”！即执利剑，欲害其母。)

At that time, Moonlight, a wise and intelligent minister, and *Jīva*, saluted the king and said, “Your Majesty, we have learned from the Vedas that since the beginning of this *kalpa*, 18,000 evil kings have killed their fathers to usurp the throne. But never have we heard of anyone who outrageously killed his mother. Your Majesty, if you commit such a vicious murder, you will defile the name of the *kṣatriya* caste. As your ministers, we cannot bear to hear of it, for this belongs to *caṇḍāla* [an outcaste], so we should remain here no longer.” (时有一臣名曰月光，聪明多智，及与耆婆，为王作礼，白言：“大王！臣闻毗陀论经说，劫初以来，有诸恶王，贪国位故，杀害其父一万八千，未曾闻有无道害母。王今为此杀逆之事，污刹利种，臣不忍闻，是旃陀罗。我等不宜复住于此。”)



Having said that, the two great ministers retreated step by step, with their hands on swords. *Ajātaśatru* was astonished and intimidated. He asked *Jīva*, “You will not be with me?” *Jīva* replied, “Your Majesty, please restrain yourself from killing your mother.” (时二大臣说此语竟，以手按剑，却行而退。时阿闍世，惊怖惶惧，告耆婆言：“汝不为我耶？”耆婆白言：“大王！慎莫害母！”)

On hearing this, the king repented and begged for their forgiveness. Thereupon he immediately put away his sword, and withdrew the intent to kill his mother. Instead, he ordered the palace guards to confine his mother in an inner palace, forbidding her to go out. (王闻此语，忏悔求救，即便舍剑，止不害母。敕语内官，闭置深宫，不令复出。)

Having thus been detained, *Vaidehī* was stricken with grief and distress, and became emaciated. Facing the *Gr̥dhrakūṭa* Mountain from afar, she made obeisance to the Buddha and said, “In the past, the *Tathāgata*, the World-Honoured One, often sent *Ānanda* to greet and comfort me. I am greatly distressed, but I can hardly expect to see your sublime visage. I beseech you to send venerable *Mahāmaudgalyāyana* and *Ānanda* to see me.” Having said this, with tears of sorrow streaming down her cheeks like rain, she made obeisance to the Buddha from afar. (时韦提希，被幽闭已，愁忧憔悴，遥向耆闍崛山为佛作礼，而作是言：“如来世尊，在昔之时，恒遣阿难来慰问我；我今愁忧，世尊威重，无由得见，愿遣目连，尊者阿难，与我相见。”作是语已，悲泣雨泪，遥向佛礼。)

Even before *Vaidehī* raised her head, the World-Honoured One, on the *Gr̥dhrakūṭa* Mountain, instantly knew the thoughts in her mind, so he ordered *Mahāmaudgalyāyana* and *Ānanda* to go to her through the sky. He himself disappeared from the mountain and reappeared in the inner palace. When *Vaidehī* raised her head from her obeisance, she saw *Śākyamuni* Buddha, the World-Honoured One, with the body of purple-gold colour, seated on a hundred-jewelled lotus flower. He was attended by *Mahāmaudgalyāyana* on his left and *Ānanda* on his right. *Indra* and *Brahma*, along with the other heavenly beings guarding the world, hovered in the sky about him, scattering heavenly blossoms like rain so as to pay homage to the Buddha. (未举头顷，尔时世尊在耆闍崛山，知韦提希心之所念，即敕大目犍连及以阿难从空而来。佛从耆闍崛山没，于王宫出。时韦提希礼已，举头见世尊释迦

牟尼佛，身紫金色，坐百宝莲华，目连侍左，阿难侍右，释梵护世诸天，在虚空中，普雨天华，持用供养。)

When *Vaidehī* saw the Buddha, the World-Honoured One, she tore off her ornaments, threw herself and prostrated on the ground. Wailing loudly, she asked the Buddha, “Oh, the World-Honoured One, what evil *karma* did I commit in previous lives to give birth to such a vicious son? World-Honoured One, for what causes and conditions do you associate with Devadatta as a kin member? I beseech you, the World-Honoured One, to exhibit to me a land free from sorrow and distress, where I wish to be born. I dislike this turbid evil world of *Jambudvīpa*. This place is fraught with hell-dwellers, hungry ghosts, and animals. The evil ones congregate here. I wish that, in my next life, I will not hear the vicious sounds nor see any wicked people. I prostrate myself on the ground before the World-Honoured One, praying for your sympathy, and repenting. I only entreat you, the Sun-like Buddha, to teach me (how to) visualize to be born in a place of pure karma.” (时韦提希见佛世尊，自绝璎珞，举身投地，号泣向佛，白言：“世尊！我宿何罪，生此恶子？世尊！复有何等因缘，与提婆达多共为眷属？唯愿世尊，为我广说无忧恼处，我当往生，不乐阎浮提浊恶世也。此浊恶处，地狱饿鬼畜生盈满，多不善聚。愿我未来不闻恶声，不见恶人，今向世尊，五体投地，求哀忏悔，唯愿佛日，教我观于清净业处。)

### *Display of All Buddha-lands*

Then the World-Honoured One emitted a beam of golden light from between his eyebrows. It illuminated everywhere --innumerable worlds in the ten directions. Then the ray returned to the crown of the Buddha's head and transformed into a golden platform resembling Mount *Sumeru*. On the platform appeared the pure and wondrous lands of Buddhas in the ten directions. Some of these lands were made of seven treasures, some solely of lotus-flowers; some resembled the palace in the Heaven of Free Enjoyment of Manifestation by Others, while some were like a crystal mirror. All the lands in the ten quarters were reflected on the platform. Innumerable Buddha-lands like these, majestic, glorious and splendid, were shown to *Vaidehī*. (尔时，世尊放眉间光，其光金色，遍照十方无量世界，还住佛顶，化为金台，如须弥山；十方诸佛净妙国土，皆于中现。或有国土，七宝合成；复有国土，纯是莲华；复有国土，如自在天宫；复有国土，如玻璃镜；十方国土，皆于中现。有如是等无量诸佛国土，严显可观，令韦提希见。)

Then *Vaidehī* said to the Buddha, “World-Honoured One, although these Buddha-lands are all pure and resplendent, I now would rather be born in *Sukhāvatī*, Amitabha Buddha’s Land of Ultimate Bliss. I pray only that the World-Honoured One will teach me how to contemplate and how to attain *samadhi*.” (时韦提希白佛言：“世尊！是诸佛土，虽复清淨，皆有光明；我今乐生极乐世界，阿弥陀佛所，唯愿世尊教我思惟，教我正受。”)

Then the World-Honoured One smiled, and beams of light in five colours were emanated from the Buddha’s mouth. Each beam illuminated the crown of King *Bimbisāra*’s head. Although the great king was imprisoned, his mind-eye was unhindered. As he saw the World-Honoured One from afar, he made obeisance, placing his forehead on the ground, and automatically attained the fruition of an *Anāgāmin* (the third stage of the voice-hearer fruit). (尔时，世尊即便微笑，有五色光，从佛口出，一一光照频婆娑罗王顶。尔时，大王虽在幽闭，心眼无障，遥见世尊，头面作礼，自然增进成阿那含。)

### *The Three Merits of Pure Conducts*

Then the World-Honoured One told *Vaidehī*, “Do you know now? Amitabha Buddha is not far from here. You should be mindful of and attentively visualize that land formed by pure karma. I now will explicate it to you with analogies and thereby enable future mundane beings, who desire to conduct pure karmas, to be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. (尔时，世尊告韦提希：“汝今知不？阿弥陀佛，去此不远，汝当系念，谛观彼国净业成者。我今为汝广说众譬，亦令未来世一切凡夫，欲修净业者，得生西方极乐国土。”)

“Those who wish to be born in that land should cultivate the three merits. First, they should filially support their parents, serve and respect their teachers and elders, cultivate compassion and not kill sentient beings, and undertake the ten wholesome conducts. Second, they should take and uphold the Three Refuges, and fully observe the precepts without violating any dignity of conduct. Third, they should activate the *Bodhicitta*, profoundly believe in the law of cause and effect, read and recite *Mahāyāna sūtras*, and persuade others to practise. These three types of activities are called the pure conducts (karmas).” ( “欲生彼国者，当修三福：一者、孝养父

母，奉事师长，慈心不杀，修十善业；二者、受持三归，具足众戒，不犯威仪；三者、发菩提心，深信因果，读诵大乘，劝进行者。如此三事，名为净业。”）

The Buddha said to *Vaidehī*, “Do you now know or not? These three types of conducts are the right cause for [all] the pure karmas of Buddhas of the past, present, and future.”（佛告韦提希：“汝今知不？此三种业，乃是过去、未来、现在、三世诸佛，净业正因。”）

### *Explication of the Sixteen Contemplations*

The Buddha told *Ānanda* and *Vaidehī*, “Listen carefully, listen carefully, and ponder it deeply. I, the *Tathāgata*, shall explicate the pure conducts for the sake of all sentient beings of the future who are tormented by the thief of afflictions. It is excellent, *Vaidehī*, that you have willingly asked me about this.”（佛告阿难及韦提希：“谛听！谛听！善思念之：如来今者，为未来世一切众生，为烦恼贼之所害者，说清净业，善哉韦提希，快问此事。”）

“*Ānanda*, accept and uphold these words from the Buddha, and promulgate them to the multitudes. The *Tathāgata* will now teach *Vaidehī* and all sentient beings of the future how to contemplate the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. By virtue of the Buddha’s power, you will be able to see that Pure Land, just as you see the reflection of your own face in a bright mirror. Seeing the utmost wondrous and joyful matters in that land, they will rejoice and instantly attain the patience of the non-arising of dharmas.”（“阿难！汝当受持，广为多众宣说佛语，如来今者，教韦提希，及未来世一切众生，观于西方极乐世界，以佛力故，当得见彼清净国土。如执明镜，自见面像。见彼国土，极妙乐事，心欢喜故，应时即得无生法忍。”）

The Buddha told *Vaidehī*, “You are an ordinary being with coarse and feeble mind and perceptions. Without the celestial eye, you cannot see afar. Nevertheless, Buddha-*Tathāgatas* have exceptional ways to enable you to see afar.”（佛告韦提希：“汝是凡夫，心想羸劣，未得天眼，不能远观，诸佛如来有异方便，令汝得见。”）

At that time *Vaidehī* asked the Buddha, “By virtue of the power of the Buddha, I will be enabled to see that land. However, after the Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa*, how can sentient beings that are defiled and wicked, and

oppressed by the five sufferings, see Amitabha Buddha's Land of Ultimate Bliss?" (时韦提希白佛言: "世尊! 如我今者, 以佛力故, 见彼国土; 若佛灭后, 诸众生等, 浊恶不善, 五苦所逼, 云何当见阿弥陀佛极乐世界?" )

### *1. The Contemplation of the Sun*

The Buddha told *Vaidehī*, "You, as well as other sentient beings should concentrate your mind and focus on one place, thinking of the west. How does one visualize? All sentient beings with eyes that are not born blind have seen the setting sun. You should contemplate in such way: sitting properly, facing the west, and attentively gazing at where the sun is setting. You should firmly focus your mind without distraction, watching the sun setting, like a drum suspended (above the horizon). Having watched the sun, you should be able to see it clearly whether your eyes are open or closed. Success in visualizing the setting sun means that one can see it distinctly with eyes open or closed. This is the contemplation of the sun, called the first contemplation." (佛告韦提希: "汝及众生, 应当专心系念一处, 想于西方。云何作想? 凡作想者, 一切众生, 自非生盲, 有目之徒, 皆见日没, 当起想念。正坐西向, 谛观于日欲没之处, 令心坚住, 专想不移, 见日欲没, 状如悬鼓。既见日已, 闭目开目, 皆令明了。是为日想, 名曰初观。" )

### *2–3. The Contemplation of Water and the Ground*

The Buddha told *Ānanda* and *Vaidehī*, "Having achieved the first contemplation, one should next contemplate water. Envision the western quarter as being completely filled with water, clean and pure. The image of water is distinctly perceived and discerned, and one should keep the mind free from scattering or distraction. Once this water has been visualized, envision it turning into ice. Having visualized the ice as brilliant and transparent to its depth, envision it turning into lapis lazuli. When this contemplation is completed, next imagine this ground of lapis lazuli transparent and brilliant, both inside and out, which is supported from below by majestic golden pillars made of adamant and the seven precious jewels. Each golden pillar has eight corners and eight sides, each side is made of a hundred jewels, each jewel shines with a thousand rays of light. And each ray of light has eighty-four thousand colours, illuminating through the

**lapis lazuli ground like 1,000 *koṭis* suns, so dazzling that it is impossible to see them all in detail.** ( “次作水想，见水澄清，亦令明了，无分散意。既见水已，当起冰想，见冰映彻，作琉璃想。此想成已，见琉璃地，内外映彻，下有金刚，七宝金幢，擎琉璃地。其幢八方八楞具足，一一方面，百宝所成。一一宝珠，有千光明。一一光明。八万四千色，映琉璃地，如亿千日，不可具见。 )

**"On the surface of this lapis lazuli ground, golden paths intricately mesh and crisscross like a net of cords, and the seven kinds of precious jewels form borders that demarcate the intersected parts of the ground. Each jewel radiates beams of light in five hundred colours. These beams are like flowers, also like stars and moons, suspended in the sky, forming a platform of radiance. There are ten million lofty pavilions and towers made of a hundred jewels (on each platform). Both sides of the platform are adorned with 100 *koṭis* flower-banners and countless musical instruments. Eight kinds of pure winds flow out of the radiance to stir the musical instruments, which play tones expounding the truths: suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and non-self.** ( “琉璃地上，以黄金绳，杂厕间错，以七宝界，分齐分明。一一宝中，有五百色光，其光如华，又似星月，悬处虚空，成光明台。楼阁千万，百宝合成，于台两边，各有百亿华幢，无量乐器，以为庄严。八种清风，从光明出，鼓此乐器，演说苦、空、无常、无我之音。 ” )

**"This is the contemplation of water and is called the second contemplation."** ( “是为水想，名第二观。 ” )

**"When this contemplation has been accomplished, each image should be visualized individually and discerned with utmost clarity. They should be kept free from being scattered or lost, whether the eyes are shut or open. One should constantly remember this in mind except when eating. Contemplation in such way is called the general perception of the ground of the Land of Ultimate Bliss. If one succeeds in realizing the state of *samadhi*, seeing the ground of that land so clearly and distinctly that it cannot be adequately described, then it is the contemplation of the ground, which is called the third contemplation."** ( “此想成时，一一观之，极令了了。闭目开目，不令散失。唯除食时，恒忆此事。如此想者。名为粗见极乐国地。若得三昧，见彼国地，了了分明，不可具说。是为地想，名第三观。 ” )

The Buddha told *Ānanda*, "Uphold the Buddha's words and promulgate this Dharma of contemplation of the ground to the multitudes of the future who wish to be liberated from their sufferings. If they can visualize the ground like this, the evil karma binding them to birth-and-death for *80 koṭis kalpas* is eliminated. And after death, they, without doubt in their minds, will assuredly be born into the Pure Land. To perform contemplation in this way is called the right contemplation; to perform it in other ways is called a wrong contemplation." (佛告阿难: “汝持佛语, 为未来世一切大众, 欲脱苦者, 说是观地法。若观是地者, 除八十亿劫生死之罪。舍身他世, 必生净国, 心得无疑。作是观者, 名为正观; 若他观者, 名为邪观。”)

#### *4. The Contemplation of the Jewelled Trees*

The Buddha told Ananda and Vaidehi, "When the contemplation of the ground has been completed, the next contemplation is of the jewelled trees. In visualizing the jewelled trees, one should visualize them one by one, and then contemplate the trees aligned in seven-fold rows. Each tree is eight thousand *yojanas* high. And all the jewelled trees are replete with blossoms and leaves composed of the seven kinds of jewels. Each blossom or leaf possesses the colour of a different jewel. The lapis lazuli-coloured (jewels) gleam with golden light; the crystal-coloured (jewels), red light; the agate-coloured (jewels), conch shell light; and the conch shell-coloured (jewels), pearl-green light. In addition, coral, amber and all the other myriad jewels serve as dazzling ornaments. (佛告阿难, 及韦提希: “地想成已, 次观宝树。观宝树者, 一一观之, 作七重行树想。一一树高八千由旬。其诸宝树, 七宝华叶, 无不具足。一一华叶, 作异宝色。琉璃色中, 出金色光; 玻璃色中, 出红色光; 玛瑙色中, 出砗磲光; 砗磲色中, 出绿真珠光; 珊瑚琥珀一切众宝以为映饰。”)

"Exquisite nets of pearls completely cover the trees, and each tree is veiled by seven layers of nets. Between each of the nets there are 500 *koṭis* wondrous flower palaces that resemble the palace of *Brahma* King. Celestial children spontaneously reside in these palaces, and each child is adorned with necklaces of 500 *koṭis śakrābhilagna* (wish-fulfilling) jewels. The radiance of these jewels illuminates a distance of 100 *yojanas*, like an assembly of 100 *koṭis* suns and moons, unable to be adequately described. ( “妙真珠网弥覆树上。一一树上, 有七重网。一一网间, 有五百亿妙华宫殿, 如梵

王宫。诸天童子，自然在中。一一童子五百亿释迦毗楞伽摩尼以为瓔珞。其摩尼光，照百由旬，犹如和合百亿日月不可具名。）

The intermingling of these various jewels manifests an unexcelled colour among all colours. The jewelled trees are matched line to line, leaf to leaf. Among the tree leaves bloom wonderful flowers, which spontaneously bear fruits made of the seven treasures. Each tree leaf measures 25 *yojanas* in length and width and is endowed with 1,000 colours and 100 patterns, like celestial necklaces. The wonderful flowers with the colours of *jambunada* gold, winding among the leaves like rotating fire wheels. Various fruits spring up as if from the god-king Śakra's vase. (众宝间错，色中上者，此诸宝树，行行相当，叶叶相次。于众叶间生诸妙华，华上自然有七宝果。一一树叶，纵广正等二十五由旬。其叶千色，有百种画如天瓔珞，有众妙华，作阎浮檀金色。如旋火轮，宛转叶间，涌生诸果，如帝释瓶。”)

“Their vast radiance (from these fruits) is transformed into banners and innumerable jewelled canopies. Reflected and displayed in the jewelled canopies are all the Buddha's works in the great-thousandfold-world, and the Buddha-lands of the ten directions also manifest within. Having visualized the trees (as wholes), one should distinctly envision the tree trunks, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits, one by one. This is the contemplation of trees, and it is called the fourth contemplation.” ( “有大光明，化成幢旛，无量宝盖。是宝盖中，映现三千大千世界，一切佛事。十方佛国，亦于中现。见此树已，亦当次第一一观之，观见树茎、枝叶、华果，皆令分明。是为树想，名第四观。” )

### 5. The Contemplation of Lake Waters

The Buddha said to Ananda and *Vaidehi*, "When the contemplation of the trees has been completed, next visualize the bodies of water. The Land of Utmost Bliss has lakes of water of the eight meritorious virtues; the water of each one of these lakes is composed of the seven treasures, which are soft and produced from a wish-fulfilling jewel, the king of jewels. The water of each lake flows into fourteen streams, each of which is made of the seven treasures and is wondrous in colour. The banks of each channel are golden in colour, and the bed is strewn with the sand of variegated diamonds. In the midst of each lake there are sixty *koṭis* seven-treasured lotus flowers.



Each lotus flower is perfectly round and is twelve *yojanas* in diameter. The *maṇi* water flows among the flowers, and upward and downward along the trees. The sounds of (the flowing water) are subtle and wondrous, expounding suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and non-self; and the *pāramitās*. Some also praise Buddhas' sublime appearances. The wish-fulfilling pearl emanates delicate and exquisite golden rays of light, which transform into birds with colours of hundreds of treasures. With harmonious, mournful and elegant melodies, they constantly praise the mindfulness of the Buddha, the mindfulness of the Dharma and the mindfulness of the Sangha. This is the contemplation of water of the eight meritorious virtues, and it is called the fifth contemplation. " (樹想成已, 次当想水, 欲想水者, 极乐国土, 有八池水。一一池水, 七宝所成。其宝柔软, 从如意珠王生, 分为十四支, 一支作, 七宝妙色, 黄金为渠, 渠下皆以杂色金刚, 以为底沙。一一水中, 有六十亿七宝莲华, 一莲华, 团圆正等十二由旬。其摩尼水流注华间, 寻树上下。其声微妙, 演说苦、空、无常、无我诸波罗密; 复有赞叹诸佛相好者。如意珠王涌出金色微妙光明, 其光化为百宝色鸟, 和鸣哀雅, 常赞念佛、念法、念僧。是为八功德水想, 名第五观。" )

## 6. The Overall Contemplation

The Buddha told *Ānanda* and *Vaidehī*, "In every region of that land of myriad treasures there are 500 *koṭis* treasure towers, and in those towers and pavilions there are countless celestial beings playing celestial music. There are also musical instruments hovering in the sky like celestial jewelled banners, automatically emanating sounds without playing. All these sounds proclaim the mindfulness of the Buddha, the mindfulness of the Dharma and the mindfulness of the *bhikṣu Saṅgha*." ( "众宝国土, 一一界上, 有五百亿宝楼。其楼阁中, 有无量诸天, 作天伎乐。又有乐器, 悬处虚空, 如天宝幢, 不鼓自鸣。此众音中, 皆说念佛、念法、念比丘僧。" )

"When this contemplation has been completed, it is called the general perception of the jewelled trees, the jewelled ground and the jewelled lakes in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. This is the overall contemplation, called the sixth contemplation. For those who have achieved this vision, their gravest evil karmas done in innumerable *koṭis* of *kalpas* will all be obliterated. After death, they will definitely be reborn in that land. Performing contemplation in this way is called the right contemplation; and performing it in other ways

is called a wrong contemplation.”（“此想成已，名为粗见极乐世界、宝树、宝地、宝池。是为总观想，名第六观。若见此者，除无量亿劫极重恶业，命终之后，必生彼国。作是观者，名为正观；若他观者，名为邪观。”）

## 7. *The Contemplation of the Lotus Flower*

The Buddha told *Ānanda* and *Vaidehī*, “Listen attentively! Listen attentively! Ponder it carefully. I will now explicate and expound to you the Dharma for removing your sufferings and afflictions. You should remember and uphold it, and widely expound it to the multitudes.”（佛告阿难，及韦提希：“谛听谛听，善思念之，吾当为汝分别解说，除苦恼法；汝等忆持，广为大众分别解说。”）

While these words were being said, Amitabha Buddha appeared, standing in the sky, attended on his left and his right by the two great Bodhisattvas, *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahasthamaprapta*. They shone with such a radiant and resplendent light that it was impossible to see them in detail. The golden hue of hundreds of thousands of *jambunada* gold could not be compared.（说是语时，无量寿佛住立空中，观世音、大势至、是二大士，侍立左右。光明炽盛，不可具见，百千阎浮檀金色，不得为比。）

At that time *Vaidehī*, upon seeing Amitabha Buddha, made obeisance at the Buddha’s feet and asked, “World-Honoured One, by virtue of the Buddha’s power, I am enabled to see Amitabha Buddha and the two Bodhisattvas. How should sentient beings of the future visualize Amitabha Buddha and the two Bodhisattvas?”（时韦提希，见无量寿佛已，接足作礼，白佛言：“世尊！我今因佛力故，得见无量寿佛，及二菩萨，未来众生，当云何观无量寿佛及二菩萨？”）

The Buddha replied, “To visualize that Buddha, one should first visualize a lotus flower on the ground made of the seven treasures. One should visualize that each petal of that lotus flower possesses the colour of 100 jewels, and 84,000 veins like heavenly patterns; and each vein has 84,000 rays of light. Being clear and distinct, they all can be seen. Even the smaller flower petals each measure 250 *yojanas* in length and width. Such a lotus flower has 84,000 petals. Between these petals are 100 *koṭis mani*-jewel-kings serving as dazzling adornments. Each of these *mani*-jewels radiates a thousand rays of light which, like canopies made of the seven kinds of jewels,

**cover the entire land.** (佛告韦提希：“欲观彼佛者，当起想念，于七宝地上，作莲华想。令其莲华，一一叶上，作百宝色。有八万四千脉，犹如天画。脉有八万四千光，了了分明，皆令得见。华叶小者，纵广二百五十由旬。如是莲华，具有八万四千叶；一一叶间，有百亿摩尼珠王以为映饰。一一摩尼珠，放千光明，其光如盖，七宝合成，遍覆地上。”)

**"There is a pedestal made of *śakrābhi-lagna* jewels, and this lotus flower pedestal is adorned with 80,000 vajra *kiṃśuka* jewels, Brahmin *mani* Jewels, and wondrous nets of pearls.** ( “释迦毗楞伽宝，以为其台，此莲华台，八万金刚甄叔迦宝，梵摩尼宝。妙真珠网，以为校饰。” )

**Four columns with jewelled banners spontaneously arise from this pedestal. Each jewelled banner is as high as a hundred thousand *koṭis* of Mount *Sumerus*. Atop these bannered columns are jewelled draperies like those of the palace of the *Yāma* Heaven. The draperies are adorned with reflections of 500 *koṭis* wonderful precious gems. Each of these precious gems emits 84,000 rays of light, and each ray of light creates 84,000 different colours of gold. Each golden ray of light illuminates the entire jewelled ground and transforms itself everywhere into various forms: some become diamond pedestals, some form nets of pearls, and others create clouds of various kinds of flowers. In all the ten directions, they transform themselves according to one's wishes, performing the works of the Buddhas. This is the contemplation of the lotus seat and is called the seventh contemplation."** ( “于其台上，自然而有四柱宝幢，一一宝幢，如百千万亿须弥山，幢上宝幔，如夜摩天宫，复有五百亿微妙宝珠，以为映饰。一一宝珠，有八万四千光，一一光作八万四千异种金色。一一金色，遍其宝土，处处变化，各作异相。或为金刚台，或作真珠网，或作杂华云，于十方面，随意变现，施作佛事。” “是为华座想，名第七观。” )

**The Buddha told *Ānanda*, “Such a wonderful flower is formed by the power of the original vows of the *bhikṣu Dharmākara*. Those who wish to be mindful of that Buddha should first visualize this wondrous flower seat. When contemplating this, one should not visualize chaotically. One should visualize it item by item, discerning clearly each petal, each gem, each beam, each platform, and each banner. One should visualize everything so clearly, like seeing one's own face in the mirror. For those who have achieved this contemplation, their evil karmas entailing 50,000 *koṭis kalpas* of birth-and-death will all be expunged. One will definitely be reborn in the Land of**

**Ultimate Bliss. This contemplation is called the right contemplation while other contemplations are called a wrong contemplation.”**（佛告阿难：“如此妙华，是本法藏比丘愿力所成。若欲念彼佛者，当先作此华座想。作此想时，不得杂观，皆应一一观之，一一叶，一一珠，一一光，一一台，一一幢，皆令分明。如于镜中，自见面像。此想成者，灭除五万亿劫生死之罪，必定当生极乐世界。作是观者，名为正观；若他观者，名为邪观。”）

## **8. The Contemplation of Images**

The Buddha told *Ānanda* and *Vaidehī*, “After achieving this vision, one should next contemplate the Buddha. Why is it so? All Buddha-*Tathāgatas* have a body of the Dharma-realm, which enters the mind and contemplations of all sentient beings. Therefore, when one contemplates a Buddha, one’s mind has a Buddha’s thirty-two physical characteristics and eighty excellent marks. While the mind is formulating the Buddha, the mind is the Buddha. The ocean of the right omniscience of all Buddhas is formed by one’s mind and contemplations. Therefore, one should single-mindedly concentrate one’s mindfulness, to visualize that Buddha, the *Tathāgata*, *Arhat*, *Samyak-Saṃbuddha*.（佛告阿难，及韦提希：“见此事已，次当想佛。所以者何？诸佛如来，是法界身，入一切众生心想中。是故汝等，心想佛时，是心即是三十二相，八十随形好，是心作佛，是心是佛。诸佛正遍知海，从心想生，是故应当一心系念，谛观彼佛，多陀阿伽度，阿罗诃，三藐三佛陀。”）

“To contemplate that Buddha, one should first contemplate his image. With eyes open or closed, one should visualize a precious image in the colour of *jambunada* gold sitting on that lotus flower. Having beheld the image seated there, one’s mind-eye is opened. And one will see distinctly all the adornments in the Land of Ultimate Bliss made of the seven treasures, the jewelled ground, jewelled lakes, and jewelled trees in rows, the celestial jewelled draperies over the trees and the jewelled nets all over the open sky. The vision of this scene is so clear and distinct that it is like seeing them in one’s palm.（“想彼佛者，先当想像，闭目开目，见一宝像，如阎浮檀金色，坐彼华上。见像坐已，心眼得开，了了分明。见极乐国，七宝庄严，宝地宝池，宝树行列，诸天宝幔，弥覆其上，众宝罗网，满虚空中。见如此事，极令明了，如观掌中。”）

“Having achieved this vision, one should next contemplate on that Buddha’s left side a huge lotus flower, which is just like the lotus flower described

before, without any difference. Then one contemplates on the Buddha's right side another such lotus flower. One then contemplates an image of *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva seated on the left lotus flower seat, golden in colour like that Buddha's image. One then contemplates an image of *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva seated on the right lotus flower seat. ( “见此事已，复当更想一大莲华，在佛左边，如前莲华，等无有异。复作一大莲华，在佛右边。想一观世音菩萨像，坐左华座，亦作金色，如前无异，想一大势至菩萨像，坐右华座。” )

"When this contemplation has been completed, the images of the Buddha and the two Bodhisattvas all radiate exquisite rays of light, and these golden rays illuminate the jewelled trees. At the foot of each of the trees are also three lotus flowers, and atop these lotus flowers sit the figures of the Buddha and the two Bodhisattvas so that the land is completely filled with such images. ( “此想成时，佛菩萨像，皆放光明，其光金色，照诸宝树。一一树下，亦有三莲华，诸莲华上，各有一佛二菩萨像，遍满彼国。” )

“When this vision is achieved, the meditator should hear flowing waters, bright light, jewelled trees, ducks, geese, and mandarin ducks all expounding the wondrous Dharma. In or out of *samādhi*, one constantly hears the wondrous Dharma. Even when out of *samādhi*, one still remembers what one has heard and should verify whether the teachings heard in accord with those in the *Sūtras*. If not in accord, they are called false perceptions. If in accord, this contemplation is called a rough contemplation of seeing the Land of Ultimate Bliss. This is the contemplation of images, called the eighth contemplation. Having contemplated in this manner, one can eliminate gravest evil karmas of innumerable *koṭis* of *kalpas* of birth-and-death. One will attain the *Samādhi* of mindfulness of the Buddha in their present life.” ( “此想成时，行者当闻水流光明，及诸宝树，鳧雁鸳鸯，皆说妙法。出定入定，恒闻妙法，行者所闻，出定之时，忆持不舍，令与修多罗合。若不合者，名为妄想；若与合者，名为粗想，见极乐世界。是为像想，名第八观。作是观者，除无量亿劫生死之罪，于现身中，得念佛三昧。” )

## ***9. The Contemplation of the Body of Amitabha Buddha***

The Buddha told *Ānanda* and *Vaidehī*, “When this contemplation has been completed, next, one should further visualize the physical features and the

light of Amitabha Buddha. *Ānanda*, it should be known that Amitabha Buddha's body is in millions of *koṭis* colours of the *Jambunada* gold in *Yāma* Heaven. That Buddha's height measures as many *yojanas* as the sands of 600,000 *koṭis nayuta* River Ganges. The white hair between his eyebrows, like five *Sumeru* Mountains, curls to the right. The Buddha's eyes are pure like the waters of the four great oceans; the blue irises and the whites are clear and distinct; the pores of the Buddha's body emit rays of light that are the size of Mount *Sumeru*. The halo of that Buddha is as vast as 100 *koṭis* great-thousandfold-worlds. In his halo appear as many manifested Buddhas as the sands of a million *koṭis nayuta* River Ganges. Each manifested Buddha is attended by an innumerable multitude of manifested Bodhisattvas. (佛告阿难，及韦提希：“此想成已，次当更观无量寿佛，身相光明。阿难！当知无量寿佛，身如百千万亿夜摩天阎浮檀金色，佛身高六十万亿那由他恒河沙由旬，眉间白毫，右旋宛转，如五须弥山；佛眼如四大海水，青白分明。身诸毛孔，演出光明，如须弥山。彼佛圆光，如百亿三千大千世界，于圆光中，有百万亿那由他恒河沙化佛。一一化佛，亦有众多无数化菩萨，以为侍者。” )

Amitabha Buddha has 84,000 excellent characteristics; each characteristic includes 84,000 excellent marks; each mark radiates 84,000 beams of light. Each beam of light universally illuminates all worlds in the ten directions, embracing sentient beings who are mindful of the Buddha, never abandoning them. ( “无量寿佛，有八万四千相；一一相中，各有八万四千随形好；一一好中，复有八万四千光明；一一光明，遍照十方世界，念佛众生，摄取不舍。” )

His radiance, excellent characteristics and marks, and manifested Buddhas are beyond description. However, one should contemplate them and enable the mind-eye to see them. Seeing these matters is seeing all Buddhas [in worlds] in the ten directions. Because of seeing all Buddhas, it is called the *Samādhi* of mindfulness of the Buddha. Performing contemplation in this manner is called visualizing the bodies of all Buddhas. By visualizing the bodies of all Buddhas, one also perceives the Buddha's mind. The Buddha's mind is [the mind of] great lovingkindness and compassion. With unconditional lovingkindness, Buddhas embrace all sentient beings. Those who do this contemplation, when relinquishing the body (of this life), will be born, in the next life, before Buddhas and will attain the patience of no-arsing (of dharmas). Therefore, the wise should focus their minds and

**attentively visualize Amitabha Buddha.** ( “其光明相好，及与化佛，不可具说。但当忆想，令心眼见，见此事者，即见十方一切诸佛。以见诸佛故，名念佛三昧。作是观者，名观一切佛身；以观佛身故，亦见佛心；佛心者，大慈悲是；以无缘慈摄诸众生。作此观者，舍身他世，生诸佛前，得无生忍。是故智者，应当系心，谛观无量寿佛。” )

**To visualize Amitabha Buddha, one should begin with one excellent physical characteristic, the white hair between his eyebrows, and make it vividly clear. One who can perceive the white hair between his eyebrows will readily see all his 84,000 excellent characteristics. Seeing Amitabha Buddha is seeing innumerable Buddhas [in worlds] in the ten directions. Seeing innumerable Buddhas, one will receive in their presence the prophecy [of attaining Buddhahood]. This comprehensive contemplation of all the features of that Buddha’s physical body is called the ninth contemplation. Performing contemplation in this manner is called the right contemplation; and performing contemplation in other manners is called a wrong contemplation.”** ( “观无量寿佛者，从一相好入，但观眉间白毫，极令明了。见眉间白毫相者，八万四千相好，自然当现。见无量寿佛者，即见十方无量诸佛。得见无量诸佛故，诸佛现前授记。是为遍观一切色身相，名第九观。作是观者，名为正观；若他观者，名为邪观。” )

## ***10. The Contemplation of the Body of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva***

The Buddha told *Ānanda* and *Vaidehī*, “Having seen Amitabha Buddha clearly and distinctively, one should next visualize *Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva*. This Bodhisattva’s body is 800,000 *koṭis nayuta yojanas* in height, with the colour of purple gold. On the top of his head is a mound of flesh. The light halo from his neck measures hundreds of thousands of *yojanas* across. In the halo are 500 manifested Buddhas, similar to *Śākyamuni* Buddha. Each manifested Buddha is attended by 500 manifested Bodhisattvas and innumerable celestial beings. Within the light emanated from this Bodhisattva’s body, sentient beings of the five realms appear in all their various forms. (佛告阿难及韦提希：“见无量寿佛，了了分明已，次亦应观观世音菩萨，此菩萨身长八十万亿那由他由旬，身紫金色，顶有肉髻，项有圆光，面各百千由旬。其圆光中，有五百化佛，如释迦牟尼。一一化佛，有五百化菩萨，无量诸天，以为侍者。举身光中，五道众生，一切色相，皆于中现。” )

Atop the Bodhisattva's head is a heavenly crown made of wonderful *śakrābhilagna* jewel, and within this heavenly crown stands a manifested Buddha, 25 *yojanas* tall. ( “顶上毗楞伽摩尼宝，以为天冠。其天冠中，有一立化佛，高二十五由旬。” )

*Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva's face is of the colour of *jambunada* gold. The hair between his eyebrows has the colours of the seven treasures, emanating 84,000 different beams of light. In each beam are innumerable, countless hundreds of thousands of manifested Buddhas. Each Buddha is attended by innumerable manifested Bodhisattvas. They all freely manifest themselves everywhere in worlds in the ten directions. (观世音菩萨，面如阎浮檀金色，眉间毫相，备七宝色，流出八万四千种光明。一一光明，有无量无数百千化佛。一一化佛，无数化菩萨以为侍者，变现自在，满十方世界。” )

His arms, in the colour of red lotus flowers, are adorned with ornaments made of 80 *koṭis* subtle and wondrous rays of light. Within these ornaments, the majestic works are reflected in their entirety. The palms of the hands are the colours of 500 *koṭis* diverse lotus flowers, and the tip of each of the ten fingers shows 84,000 patterns like those on an engraved seal. Each pattern has 84,000 colours, each colour emits 84,000 rays of light, and each soft, delicate ray of light illuminates all beings. With these jewel-like hands, this Bodhisattva embraces and guides sentient beings. ( “臂如红莲华色，有八十亿微妙光明，以为瓔珞。其瓔珞中，普现一切诸庄严事。手掌作五百亿杂莲华色，手十指端，一一指端，有八万四千画，犹如印文。一一画有八万四千色，一一色有八万四千光，其光柔软，普照一切。以此宝手，接引众生。” )

When he raises his foot, his sole shows the mark of a thousand-spoked wheel, which readily transforms into 500 *koṭis* platforms of radiance. Wherever he lowers his foot, flowers made of diamonds and *mani* jewels are strewn about everywhere, filling and covering everything. His other physical characteristics are as perfect as those of a Buddha. Only the flesh mound on the top of his head and the invisible crown of his head cannot be compared with those of the World-Honoured One. This is the contemplation of *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva's real physical body, called the tenth contemplation. ( “举足时，足下有千辐轮相，自然化成五百亿光明台；下足时有金刚摩尼华，布散一切，莫不弥满。其余身相，众好具足，如佛无异。唯顶上肉髻，及无见顶相，不及世尊。是为观世音菩萨真实色身相。名第十观。” )



The Buddha told *Ānanda*, “Those who wish to visualize *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva should perform contemplation in this manner. Those who perform this contemplation will not encounter any disasters. Their karma hindrances will be completely removed, and their transgressions entailing innumerable *kalpas* of birth-and-death will all be expunged. Even to hear the name of this Bodhisattva is to gain immeasurable merits; how much more so if this Bodhisattva is clearly visualized? To visualize *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva, one should first visualize the mound of flesh on the top of his head; next visualize the heavenly crown; then visualize the remaining physical characteristics in order. All of them should be seen as clearly and distinctly as one might see them in one’s hand. Performing contemplation in this manner is called the right contemplation; performing contemplation in other manners is called a wrong contemplation.” (佛告阿难：“若欲观观世音菩萨者，当作是观。作是观者，不遇诸祸，净除业障，除无数劫生死之罪。如此菩萨，但闻其名，获无量福，何况谛观？若有欲观观世音菩萨者，先观顶上肉髻，次观天冠，其余众相，亦次第观之，悉令明了，如观掌中。作是观者，名为正观；若他观者，名为邪观。）

### ***11. The Contemplation of the Body of Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva***

The Buddha told *Ānanda* and *Vaidehī*, “One should next visualize *Mahāsthāmaprāpta* Bodhisattva. This Bodhisattva’s body measurement is the same as *Avalokiteśvara*’s. The halo measures 125 *yojanas* across and illuminates 250 *yojanas*. The radiance of his entire body illuminates the worlds in the ten directions with purple-golden light. Sentient beings with the right conditions can all see it. Seeing the light from even one of this Bodhisattva’s pores is seeing the pure radiance of innumerable Buddhas [in worlds] in the ten directions. Therefore, this Bodhisattva is called Boundless Light, who illuminates all sentient beings with the light of wisdom, enabling them to be free from the three woeful paths and to gain superb strength. Therefore, this Bodhisattva is called Great Might Arrived. ( “次观大势至菩萨，此菩萨身量大小，亦如观世音，圆光面各百二十五由旬，照二百五十由旬。举身光明，照十方国，作紫金色。有缘众生，皆悉得见。但见此菩萨，一毛孔光，即见十方无量诸佛，净妙光明。是故号此菩萨名无边光。以智慧光，普照一切，令离三涂，得无上力。是故号此菩萨，名大势至。” )

This Bodhisattva's celestial crown is adorned with 500 jewelled flowers. On each jewelled flower are 500 jewelled platforms. Wide-ranging features of pure wondrous Buddha-lands in the ten directions are exhibited on each platform. The flesh mound on the top of his head is like a *padma* (red lotus) flower. Standing on the flesh mound is a jewelled vase filled with radiance that displays the entire Buddha's works. His other physical characteristics are equal to *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva's, without any difference. ( “此菩萨天冠，有五百宝华。一一宝华，有五百宝台。一台中。十方诸佛净妙国土，广长之相，皆于中现。顶上肉髻，如钵头摩华。于肉髻上，有一宝瓶，盛诸光明，普现佛事。余诸身相，如观世音，等无有异。” )

When this Bodhisattva walks, the worlds in the ten directions all tremble and quake. On the quaking ground appear 500 *koṭis* jewelled flowers, each as splendid and glorious as those in the world of Ultimate Bliss. When this Bodhisattva sits down, the land made of the seven treasures is instantly shaken. ( “此菩萨行时，十方世界，一切震动，当地动处，有五百亿宝华。一一宝华，庄严高显，如极乐世界。此菩萨坐时，七宝国土一时动摇。” )

From (the Buddha-lands) between the land of Golden Light Buddha in the lower quarter and the Land of the Light King Buddha in the upper quarter, the manifested bodies of Amitabha Buddha together with those of *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahasthamaprapta*, as countless as particles of dust, all assemble like clouds in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, filling the entire sky. Sitting on lotus flower thrones, they proclaim the exquisite Dharma that liberates sentient beings from suffering. ( “从下方金光佛刹，乃至上方光明王佛刹，于其中间，无量尘数分身无量寿佛，分身观世音，大势至，皆悉云集极乐国土，毘塞空中，坐莲华座，演说妙法，度苦众生。” )

Performing contemplation in this manner is the contemplation of Bodhisattva *Mahasthamaprapta*; it is also known as the contemplation of the physical features of *Mahasthamaprapta*, which is called the eleventh contemplation. For those who visualize this Bodhisattva, the evil karma binding them to infinite aeons of birth-and-death is eliminated, and those who perform this contemplation will no longer be subject to birth from the womb, but will roam freely throughout the pure and wondrous lands of the Buddhas. When this contemplation has been accomplished, it is called the complete contemplation of *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahasthamaprapta*." (作此

观者，名为观见大势至菩萨，是为观大势至色身相。观此菩萨者，名第十一观。除无数劫阿僧祇生死之罪，作是观者，不处胞胎，常游诸佛，净妙国土。此观成已，名为具足观世音大势至。”）

## ***12. Contemplation of One's Rebirth in a Lotus Flower***

Having seen the preceding scenes, one should next visualize oneself reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, seated cross-legged inside a lotus flower. Contemplate the lotus flower being closed and contemplate the lotus flower being opened. When the lotus flower is opened, one should contemplate light rays with 500 colours illuminating one's body. Then one should contemplate that one's eyes are opened to see Buddhas and Bodhisattvas all over the sky. One also hears the sounds of the water, birds, trees, and Buddhas, expounding the wondrous Dharmas, which are all in accord with the Dharma in *Sūtras* in the twelve divisions. One will remember everything without lapse even when one is out of *samādhi*. Seeing these scenes is called seeing Amitabha Buddha's Land of Ultimate Bliss. This is the comprehensive contemplation, called the twelfth contemplation. Then innumerable manifested Amitabha Buddha, together with manifested *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahasthamaprabhata*, will often come to this practitioner.”（“见此事时，当起自身生于西方极乐世界，于莲华中，结跏趺坐，作莲华合想，作莲华开想。莲华开时，有五百色光，来照身想，眼目开想，见佛菩萨，满虚空中。水鸟树林，及与诸佛所出音声，皆演妙法，与十二部经合。若出定之时，忆持不失，见此事已，名见无量寿佛极乐世界。是为普观想，名第十二观。无量寿佛，化身无数，与观世音，及大势至，常来至此，行人之所。”）

## ***13. The Mixed Contemplation***

The Buddha told *Ānanda* and *Vaidehī*, “If one earnestly wishes to be born in the Western Pure Land, one should visualize a Buddha image sixteen feet tall, standing on the surface of lake water. As described earlier, Amitabha Buddha's body measurement is boundless, beyond the mental power of ordinary beings. However, because of the power of that *Tathāgata*'s original vows, those who memorises and contemplates him will succeed (in the contemplation). Simply visualizing the Buddha's image brings one immeasurable merits; how much more so if one visualizes all the perfect physical characteristics of that Buddha? (佛告阿难，及韦提希：“若欲至心，生

西方者，先当观于一丈六像，在池水上，如先所说，无量寿佛，身量无边，非是凡夫心力所及。然彼如来宿愿力故，有忆想者，必得成就。但想佛像，得无量福，况复观佛，具足身相？”）

**Amitabha Buddha demonstrates his transcendental powers at will as he freely manifests himself in worlds in the ten directions. Whether as a vast body filling the entire sky or as a small body, only sixteen or eighteen feet tall, all the forms he manifests are in the colour of pure gold. His halo, his manifested Buddhas, and jewelled lotus flower are just as previously described.**（“阿弥陀佛，神通如意，于十方国，变现自在。或现大身，满虚空中；或现小身，丈六八尺；所现之形，皆真金色。圆光化佛，及宝莲华，如上所说。”）

**The physical features of the Bodhisattvas *Avalokitesvara* and *Mahasthamaprapta* are the same in all aspects, and sentient beings who simply visualize the features on their heads can distinguish between *Avalokitesvara* and *Mahasthamaprapta*. These two Bodhisattvas assist Amitabha Buddha to deliver all (sentient beings). This is the mixed contemplation, called the thirteenth contemplation.**（“观世音菩萨，及大势至，于一切处身同众生。但观首相，知是观世音，知是大势至，此二菩萨助阿弥陀佛普化一切。是为杂想观，名第十三观。”）

### ***14. The Three Rebirths in the Superior Rank***

**The Buddha told *Ānanda* and *Vaidehī*, “(Sentient beings born in the Western Pure Land are classified into nine grades.) Those who wish to achieve a rebirth of upper grade in the superior rank must give rise to three types of minds. What are these three? First, an utmost sincere mind; second, a profound (faithful) mind; and third, a mind which aspires for rebirth by transferring merits. Those with these three types of minds will definitely be born in that land.**（佛告阿难，及韦提希：“上品上生者，若有众生愿生彼国者，发三种心，即便往生。何等为三？一者至诚心，二者深心，三者回向发愿心；具三心者，必生彼国。”）

**Moreover, there are three kinds of sentient beings that will be reborn there. What are those three? First, those who, with the mind of lovingkindness, refrain from killing sentient beings and fully observe the precepts in their conduct. Second, those who read and recite *Mahāyāna vaipulya sūtras*. Third, those who practice the six kinds of mindfulness. Transferring the**

merits for rebirth, they aspire to be reborn in that land. By accomplishing these meritorious virtues for a period of one to seven days, they will attain rebirth. ( “复有三种众生，当得往生。何等为三？一者慈心不杀，具诸戒行；二者读诵大乘，方等经典；三者修行六念。回向发愿，愿生彼国；具此功德，一日乃至七日，即得往生。” )

When an aspirant is about to be reborn in that land, because he (or she) has made valiantly energetic progress, Amitabha, the *Tathāgata*, together with Bodhisattvas *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahasthamaprapta*, innumerable manifested Buddhas, hundreds of thousands of *śrāvaka bhikṣus*, and innumerable celestial beings with a palace composed of the seven treasures, will appear to him (her). *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva, holding a diamond pedestal, together with *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva, will come before this person. Amitabha Buddha sends forth a great radiance to illuminate the body of the practitioner and, along with Bodhisattvas, offers welcoming hands. *Avalokiteśvara*, *Mahasthamaprapta*, and innumerable Bodhisattvas will praise the person, encouraging his (her) heart. ( “生彼国时，此人精进勇猛故，阿弥陀如来，与观世音，大势至，无数化佛，百千比丘，声闻大众，无量诸天，七宝宫殿，观世音菩萨，执金刚台，与大势至菩萨，至行者前，阿弥陀佛放大光明，照行者身，与诸菩萨授手迎接。观世音，大势至，与无数菩萨，赞叹行者，劝进其心。” )

Upon seeing this, the aspirant rejoices exultantly, seeing himself (herself) seated atop the diamond pedestal. Following the Buddha, he (she) is reborn into that land in an instant of a finger snap. ( “行者见已，欢喜踊跃，自见其身，乘金刚台，随从佛后，如弹指顷，往生彼国。” )

Once reborn in that land, the aspirant sees the Buddha's body consummated with myriad excellent characteristics and the Bodhisattvas with complete excellent features. The brilliant light and the jewelled forests widely expound the wondrous Dharma. And having heard them, the reborn one will instantly realise the patience of non-arising of dharmas. Then, in an instant, he will visit and venerate all the Buddhas of the ten directions. In the presence of each Buddha, he receives the prophecy (of attaining Buddhahood in the future). He will then return to his own land and acquire innumerable hundreds of thousands of *Dhāraṇī* doors. This is called the rebirth of upper grade in the superior rank. ( “生彼国已，见佛色身，众相具

足；见诸菩萨，色相具足；光明宝林，演说妙法。闻已，即悟无生法忍。经须臾间，历事诸佛，遍十方界，于诸佛前，次第受记，还至本国，得无量百千陀罗尼门。是名上品上生者。”）

Those who wish to achieve a rebirth of middle grade in the superior rank do not necessarily need to uphold or recite *vaipulya Sūtras*. However, they should have a good understanding of their tenets, and their minds should not be perplexed or shaken by the ultimate truth. They should profoundly believe in the law of cause and effect, and not malign the *Mahāyāna*. Transferring these meritorious virtues, they aspire to be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. ( “上品中生者，不必受持读诵方等经典。善解义趣，于第一义，心不惊动，深信因果，不谤大乘，以此功德，回向愿求生极乐。” )

At the end of the aspirant's life, who has performed these practices, Amitabha Buddha, together with Bodhisattvas *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahasthamaprapta*, surrounded by an innumerable multitude and retinue, holding a purple-golden pedestal, will come before the person. He praises the person with these words: 'Dharma disciple, since you practice the *Mahāyāna* and understand the ultimate truth, I now have come to welcome and receive you.' With this, Amitabha Buddha and one thousand manifested Buddhas offer their hands all at once. ( “行此行者，命欲终时，阿弥陀佛，与观世音，大势至，无量大众，眷属围绕，持紫金台，至行者前，赞言：‘法子！汝行大乘，解第一义，是故我今来迎接汝！’与千化佛，一时授手。” )

The practitioner will see himself (herself) seated on the purple-golden pedestal, with palms joined, praising Buddhas. In a thought-moment, he will be born in that land, in a seven treasures lake. This purple-golden pedestal is like a huge jewelled-lotus flower, which unfolds after one night. ( “行者自见坐紫金台，合掌叉手，赞叹诸佛，如一念顷，即生彼国。七宝池中，此紫金台如大宝华，经宿则开。” )

The practitioner's body is of the colour of purple-gold, and under his feet there are seven-treasure lotus flowers. The Buddha and the Bodhisattvas all send forth rays of light to illuminate the practitioner's body, causing his eyes to open, clear and bright. Because of the habitual practices from his previous lives, he hears various voices exclusively expounding the most profound ultimate truth. Descending from the golden pedestal, he pays obeisance to the Buddha with palms pressed together, and he praises the World-

**Honoured One.** ( “行者身作紫磨金色，足下亦有七宝莲华，佛及菩萨，俱时放光，照行者身，目即开明，因前宿习，普闻众声，纯说甚深第一义谛。即下金台，礼佛合掌，赞叹世尊。” )

**After seven days, he will achieve the non-retrogression on the path to attain *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*. Forthwith, he is able to fly to worlds in the ten directions to revere Buddhas. He cultivates various *samādhis* in those Buddha's places. After one small *kalpa*, he will attain the patience of non-arising of dharma, and will receive before Buddhas the prophecy [of attaining Buddhahood]. This is called a rebirth of middle grade in the superior rank.** ( “经于七日，应时即于阿耨多罗三藐三菩提，得不退转。应时即能飞行，遍至十方，历事诸佛。于诸佛所修诸三昧，经一小劫，得无生忍，现前受记。是名上品中生者。” )

**A rebirth of lower grade in the superior rank can be achieved by those who may have faith in the law of cause and effect, do not malign the *Mahāyāna*, and who mainly activate the mind of unsurpassed path (the Bodhicitta). They transfer these merits to the aspiration for rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. When such a person's life is ending, Amitabha Buddha and his five hundred manifested Buddhas, together with *Avalokiteśvara*, *Mahasthamaprapta*, and other Bodhisattvas, holding a golden lotus flower, will come to welcome this person. The five hundred manifested Buddhas will simultaneously extend their hands, praising, ‘Dharma disciple, since you are purified and have activated the unsurpassed Bodhicitta, we have come to welcome you.’** ( “上品下生者，亦信因果，不谤大乘，但发无上道心，以此功德回向，愿求生极乐国。行者命欲终时，阿弥陀佛，及观世音、大势至、与诸菩萨，持金莲华，化作五百佛，来迎此人。五百化佛，一时授手，赞言：‘法子！汝今清净，发无上道心，我来迎汝！’ ” )

**Having beheld this scene, the aspirant will find himself (herself) seated in the golden lotus flower, then the lotus flower will close. Following the World-Honoured One, he instantly gets rebirth in a lake of seven treasures. After one day and one night, the lotus flower will open, and he will be able to see that Buddha after seven days. Although he sees the Buddha's body, the various excellent characteristics are not clear in his mind. Only after twenty-one days will he be able to see them clearly and distinctly. He hears various sounds, all expounding wondrous Dharmas. Then he will travel in**

ten directions, making offerings to the Buddhas and listening to profound Dharmas from those Buddhas. After three small *kalpas*, he will realise the clear doors of one hundred dharmas, abiding in the ground of Joy (the first ground stage). ( “见此事时，即自见身坐金莲华，坐已华合，随世尊后，即得往生七宝池中，一日一夜，莲华乃开，七日之中，乃得见佛。虽见佛身，于众相好，心不明了，于三七日后，乃了了见。闻众音声，皆演妙法，游历十方，供养诸佛，于诸佛前，闻甚深法。经三小劫，得百法明门，住欢喜地。” )

This is called a rebirth of lower grade in the superior rank. They are known as the contemplation of birth in the superior rank, named the fourteenth contemplation. ( “是名上品下生者，是名上辈生想，名第十四观。” )

### *15. The Three Rebirths in the Medium Rank*

The Buddha told *Ānanda* and *Vaidehī*, “Those to be born of a rebirth of upper grade in the medium rank should accept and abide by the five precepts, or observe the eight precepts completely, and cultivate practices of various precepts, free from committing the five heinous acts or various other transgressions. Transferring these virtuous roots, they aspire to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. (佛告阿难，及韦提希：“中品上生者，若有众生，受持五戒，持八戒斋，修行诸戒，不造五逆，无众过患，以此善根，回向愿求，生于西方极乐世界。” )

When the aspirant approached the end of his (her) life, Amitabha Buddha, surrounded by *bhikṣus* and his retinue, will radiate golden light as he comes to this person. The Buddha will expound the teachings on suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and no self, praise renunciation of household life and liberation from various sufferings. Having beheld this scene, the practitioner, with great joy in his heart, will see himself (herself) seated on a lotus flower pedestal. He (she) will fall on both knees, join his (her) palms, and make obeisance to the Buddha. In an instant before he (she) raises his (her) head, he (she) will be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. ( “临命终时，阿弥陀佛，与诸比丘，眷属围绕，放金色光，至其所，演说苦、空、无常、无我，赞叹出家，得离众苦。行者见已，心大欢喜，自见己身，坐莲华台，长跪合掌，为佛作礼，未举头顷，即得往生极乐世界。” )

The lotus flower will open immediately. When the flower opens, he will hear various sounds praising the Four Noble Truths, and he will instantly attain



**Arhatship, achieving the three clarities, the six transcendental powers, and the eight emancipations. This is called the rebirth of upper grade in the medium rank.** ( “莲华寻开，当华敷时，闻众音声赞叹四谛，应时即得阿罗汉道。三明六通，具八解脱。是名中品上生者。” )

**To be born of a rebirth of middle grade in the medium rank are those who receive and observed for one day and one night the eight precepts completely, or the *śrāmaṇera* precepts, or the complete monastic precepts, with no flaw in their dignified conduct. They transfer these meritorious virtues to aspire to be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. They are permeated with the fragrance of the precepts. When the aspirant approached the end of his (her) life, he (she) will see Amitabha Buddha, together with his retinue, radiating golden light and holding a lotus flower of the seven treasures, coming before him. He (she) will hear a voice in the sky, praising, ‘Good man, because you are a virtuous man, who follows the teachings of Buddhas of the past, present, and future, I have come to welcome you.’** ( “中品中生者，若有众生，若一日一夜，持八戒斋；若一日一夜，持沙弥戒；若一日一夜，持具足戒；威仪无缺，以此功德回向愿求生极乐国。戒香熏修。如此行者，命欲终时，见阿弥陀佛，与诸眷属，放金色光，持七宝莲华，至行者前，行者自闻空中有声，赞言：‘善男子！如汝善人，随顺三世诸佛教故，我来迎汝！’ ” )

**The practitioner sees himself (herself) seated in a lotus flower, which then closes. He gets reborn in a jewelled lake in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. After seven days, the lotus flower will open. After the flower has opened, he will open his eyes, join his palms, and praise the World-Honoured One. Hearing the Dharmas, he will be delighted and attain *Srotāpanna* [Stream-Enterer]. After half a [small] *kalpa*, he will become an Arhat. This is called the rebirth of middle grade in the medium rank.** (行者自见，坐莲华上。莲华即合，生于西方极乐世界。在宝池中，经于七日，莲华乃敷。华既敷已，开目合掌，赞叹世尊，闻法欢喜，得须陀洹，无半劫已，成阿罗汉。是名中品中生者。” )

**A rebirth of lower grade in the medium rank can be achieved by virtuous men and virtuous women who filially support their parents and are beneficent to others. When such a person’s life is ending, he (she) encounters a virtuous learned friend who extensively expounds the blissful features in Amitabha Buddha’s land as well as the *bhikṣu Dharmākara’s***

**Forty-Eight Vows.** ( “中品下生者，若有善男子，善女人，孝养父母，行世仁慈，此人命欲终时，遇善知识，为其广说阿弥陀佛，国土乐事，亦说法藏比丘，四十八愿。 )

After hearing these introductions, he (she) dies, and gets reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, in an instant of a strong man bending and extending his arm. Seven days after the rebirth, he will encounter Bodhisattvas *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahasthamaprapta*. Having heard the Dharma from them, he will be delighted and become a *Srotāpanna*. After one small *kalpa*, he will attain *Arhatship*. This is called the rebirth of lower grade in the medium rank. They are known as contemplation of rebirth in the medium rank, named the fifteenth contemplation.” ( “闻此事已，寻即命终。譬如壮士，屈伸臂顷，即生西方极乐世界。经七日已，遇观世音，及大势至，闻法欢喜，得须陀洹，过一小劫，成阿罗汉。是名中品下生者。是名中辈生想，名第十五观。 ” )

### ***16. The Three Rebirths in the Inferior Rank***

The Buddha told *Ānanda* and *Vaidehī*, “Those to be born of upper grade in the inferior rank: There maybe beings who have committed myriad evil conducts. Although they have never maligned *vaipulya Sūtras*, these foolish people have repeatedly conducted evil deeds with no sense of shame or remorse. When such a person’s life is ending, he (she) encounters a virtuous learned friend who will pronounce the titles of *Mahāyāna Sūtras* in the twelve divisions. By hearing the titles of such *Sūtras*, his gravest evil karmas of 1,000 *kalpas* will be eliminated. The wise friend will also teach him (her) to join his (her) palms and to recite ‘Namo Amitabha Buddha.’ By reciting Amitabha Buddha's name, his evil karmas entailing 50 *koṭis kalpas* of birth-and-death will all be eradicated. (佛告阿难及韦提希： “下品上生者，或有众生作众恶业，虽不诽谤方等经典，如此愚人，多造恶法，无有惭愧，命欲终时，遇善知识，为说大乘十二部经首题名字，以闻如是诸经名故，除却千劫极重恶业。智者复教合掌叉手，称南无阿弥陀佛，称佛名故，除五十亿劫生死之罪。 ” )

Thereupon, that Buddha will immediately send manifested Buddhas and manifested Bodhisattvas *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahasthamaprapta* to come before this person, praising, “Good man, your evil karmas are eliminated because you recite the name of the Buddha. I have come to welcome you.”

After these words have been said, the practitioner immediately sees the radiance of manifested Buddhas entirely filling his room. Having beheld this scene, he (she) is delighted and then dies. ( “尔时彼佛，即遣化佛，化观世音，化大势至，至行者前，赞言：‘善男子！以汝称佛名故，诸罪消灭，我来迎汝！’作是语已，行者即见化佛光明，遍满其室，见已欢喜，即便命终，” )

Riding a jewelled lotus flower, and following the manifested Buddhas, he gets reborn in a jewelled lake. After forty-nine days, the lotus flower will open. When the flower unfolds, the great compassionate *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva, and *Mahasthamaprabhata* Bodhisattva, emit immense radiance, standing before the reborn one, expound the profound *Sūtras* of the twelve divisions. Upon hearing these teachings, with faith and comprehension, he activates the unsurpassed Bodhicitta. After ten small *kalpas*, he will realise the clear door of the one hundred dharmas, attaining the first ground. This is called the rebirth of upper grade in the inferior rank. ( “乘宝莲华，随化佛后，生宝池中。经七七日，莲华乃敷。当华敷时，大悲观世音菩萨，及大势至菩萨，放大光明，住其人前，为说甚深十二部经。闻已信解，发无上道心，经十小劫，具百法明门，得入初地。是名下品上生者。” )

The Buddha told *Ānanda* and *Vaidehī*, “Those to be born of middle grade in the inferior rank: There may be some sentient beings, who violate the five precepts, the eight precepts, or complete monastic precepts. Such deluded people steal the property of the *Saṅgha*, take the personal belongings of other monks, preach the Dharma with impure intent, and feel no shame or remorse. They adorn themselves with myriad evil karmas. These perpetrators, because of their evil karmas, should descend to hell. When such a person’s life is ending, the various fires of hell will simultaneously arrive at once. (佛告阿难，及韦提希：“下品中生者，或有众生，毁犯五戒，八戒，及具足戒，如此愚人，偷僧祇物，盗现前僧物，不净说法，无有惭愧。以诸恶业，而自庄严。如此罪人，以恶业故，应堕地狱，命欲终时，地狱众火，一时俱至。” )

Nevertheless, the perpetrator encounters a virtuous learned friend who, with great compassion, praises and explains the majestic virtues and the ten powers of Amitabha Buddha. This friend extensively praises the brilliance and transcendental powers of the Buddha, and praises the precepts, concentration and wisdom, emancipation, and insight of emancipation as

well. Having heard these instructions, his (her) evil karmas entailing **80 koṭi kalpas** of birth-and-death will all be eliminated. The raging fires of hell are transformed into cool breeze, which blow celestial flowers down from the sky. Seated on these flowers are manifested Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who have come to welcome and receive this person. ( “遇善知识，以大慈悲，即为赞说阿弥陀佛，十力威德，广赞彼佛，光明神力，亦赞戒定慧，解脱，解脱知见；此人闻已，除八十亿劫生死之罪，地狱猛火化为清凉风，吹诸天华，华上皆有化佛菩萨，迎接此人。 )

In a thought-moment, the aspirant is reborn in a lotus flower in a lake of the seven treasures. After six *kalpas*, the lotus flower will open. Bodhisattvas *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahasthamaprapta* will comfort this person with their Brahma voices. They will expound to him the profound *Mahāyāna Sūtras*. Having heard the Dharmas, he will immediately activate the unsurpassed Bodhicitta. This is called the rebirth of middle grade in the inferior rank.” ( “如一念顷，即得往生七宝池中，莲华之内，经于六劫，莲华乃敷。观世音，大势至，以梵音声，安慰彼人，为说大乘甚深经典。闻此法已，应时即发无上道心。是名下品中生者。 ” )

The Buddha told *Ānanda* and *Vaidehī*, “Those to be born with a rebirth of lower grade in the inferior rank: There may be sentient beings, who have conducted various unwholesome acts, such as the five heinous acts and ten unwholesome acts, as well as all sorts of evil acts. Because of their evil karmas, these foolish people should descend to the woeful paths, undergoing endless torments for many *kalpas*. (佛告阿难，及韦提希： “下品下生者，或有众生，作不善业，五逆十恶，具诸不善，如此愚人，以恶业故，应堕恶道，经历多劫，受苦无穷。 )

When such a foolish person’s life is about to end, this person meets a virtuous learned teacher who provides various kinds of comfort, expounds the wondrous Dharmas, and urges mindfulness of the Buddha. Whereas that person is too plagued by torments to be mindful of the Buddha, the virtuous friend says, “If you are unable to be mindful of the Buddha, you should recite the name of the Buddha of Immeasurable Lifespan.” (The dying person) then recites completely ten times, with utmost sincerity and uninterrupted voice, ‘Namo Amitabha Buddha.’ Because of recitation of the Buddha’s name, with each mindful recitation, the evil karmas entailing **80 koṭi kalpas** of birth-and-

**death are eliminated.** ( “如此愚人，临命终时，遇善知识，种种安慰，为说妙法，教令念佛，彼人苦逼，不遑念佛；善友告言：‘汝若不能念彼佛者，应称无量寿佛，如是至心，令声不绝，具足十念，称南无阿弥陀佛。’称佛名故，所念念中，除八十亿劫生死之罪。” )

**When the life of such a person comes to an end, a sun-like golden lotus flower appears in front of him (her). And in a thought-moment, the person will immediately attain rebirth inside a lotus flower in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. After twelve great *kalpas* the lotus flower opens. When the flower unfolds, *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahasthamaprapta*, with voices of great compassion, will expound to him the true reality of all dharmas and the dharmas for eradicating evil karmas. Having heard the teachings, he will be delighted and immediately activate the Bodhicitta. This is called the birth of lower grade in the inferior rank. They are known as the contemplation of inferior rank, named the sixteenth contemplation.** ( “命终之时，见金莲华，犹如日轮，住其人前，如一念顷，即得往生极乐世界。于莲华中，满十二大劫，莲华方开，观世音，大势至，以大悲音声，为其广说诸法实相，除灭罪法。闻已欢喜，应时即发菩提之心。是名下品下生者。是名下辈生想，名第十六观。” )

### ***Epilogue: Benefits Received from the Teachings***

**When the World-Honoured One spoke these words, *Vaidehī*, together with 500 female attendants, having heard what the Buddha had said, immediately saw the expansively wide features of Land of Ultimate Bliss, and saw the body of the Buddha and the two Bodhisattvas. Their hearts were filled with joy, marvelling at the unprecedented occurrence. She suddenly realised great awakening, attaining the patience of non-arising. The 500 female attendants activated the *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* mind and aspired to be reborn in that land. The World-Honoured One bestowed upon them a prophecy that they all would be reborn in that land and that, after their rebirth there, they would attain the *Samādhi* of all Buddhas manifesting presently. Meanwhile, innumerable celestial beings activated the unsurpassed Bodhicitta.** (说是语时，韦提希与五百侍女，闻佛所说，应时即见极乐世界广长之相，得见佛身，及二菩萨，心生欢喜，叹未曾有，豁然大悟，逮无生忍。五百侍女，发阿耨多罗三藐三菩提心，愿生彼国。世尊悉记，皆当往生。生彼国已，获得诸佛现前三昧。无量诸天，发无上道心。) )

### *Circulation of the Sūtra*

At that time *Ānanda* rose from his seat, and asked the Buddha, “Word-Honoured One, what is the name of this *Sūtra*? How should one receive and uphold the tenets of this Dharma?” (尔时阿难即从座起，白佛言：“世尊！当何名此经？此法之要，当云何受持？”)

The Buddha told *Ānanda*, “This Sūtra is called *Contemplation of the Land of Ultimate Bliss, Amitabha Buddha, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, and Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva*. It is also called *Annihilating Karmic Hindrances and Being Reborn before Buddhas*. All of you should accept and uphold it, never forgetting or losing it. (佛告阿难：“此经名观极乐国土无量寿佛、观世音菩萨、大势至菩萨；亦名净除业障，生诸佛前，汝当受持，无令忘失。”)

Those who cultivate this *samādhi* are, in their present life, able to see Amitabha Buddha and the two great Bodhisattvas. If there are virtuous men and virtuous women, who merely hear the names of that Buddha and the two Bodhisattvas, their evil karmas entailing innumerable *kalpas* of birth-and-death will all be eliminated. How much more so if these people are mindful of the Buddha? If there are any people mindful of the Buddha, you should know that these people are *puṇḍarīka* flowers among men. Bodhisattvas *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahasthamaprapta* will be their supreme friends, and he will be reborn in the Buddha family, to be seated in a *bodhimaṇḍa* (the site of enlightenment).” ( “行此三昧者，现身得见无量寿佛，及二大士。若善男子，及善女人，但闻佛名，二菩萨名，除无量劫生死之罪，何况忆念？若念佛者，当知此人，则是人中芬陀利华。观世音菩萨、大势至菩萨，为其胜友；当坐道场，生诸佛家。” )

The Buddha told *Ānanda*, “You should uphold these words well. To uphold these words is to uphold Amitabha Buddha’s name.” (佛告阿难：“汝好持是语，持是语者，即是持无量寿佛名。”)

After the Buddha had spoken these words, the venerable *Maudgalyāyana*, the venerable *Ānanda*, *Vaidehī*, and others, having heard the Buddha’s words, all greatly rejoiced. (佛说此语时，尊者目犍连，尊者阿难，及韦提希等，闻佛所说，皆大欢喜。)

**The World-Honoured One walked across the sky and returned to the *Gr̥dhrakūṭa* Mountain. Then *Ānanda* fully promulgated to the great multitudes this event, as described above. Innumerable celestial beings, dragons, and *yakṣas*, having heard the Buddha's words, all greatly rejoiced. They paid homage to the Buddha and departed.** (尔时世尊，足步虚空，还耆闍崛山。尔时阿难，广为大众，说如上事。无量诸天、龙、夜叉，闻佛所说，皆大欢喜，礼佛而退。)

### III. THE TENET: THE INTERACTIVE CORRESPONDENCE

Many people may wonder how Amitabha Buddha know that we have faith in him and aspire to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land after this life? They may also wonder how Amitabha Buddha can come to welcome and escort them at the end of their life? Their doubt or suspicion come from their speculation that the Pure Land is too far away and that there are too many beings being mindful of the Buddha at the same time, so how can he respond simultaneously to all of them?

This involves the fundamental tenet of Pure Land: the principle of the interactive correspondence between the Buddha and the beings who are mindful of the Buddha, which is precisely stated in *the Contemplation Sūtra*.

The *Sūtra* states, **“All Buddha *Tathāgatas* have a body of the Dharma-realm, which enters the mind and contemplations of all sentient beings. Therefore, when one contemplates a Buddha, one's mind has a Buddha's thirty-two physical characteristics and eighty excellent marks. While the mind is formulating the Buddha, the mind is the Buddha.”** We will elaborate on this paragraph to facilitate readers to comprehend its profound meaning.

#### 1. Elaboration on the Text

This paragraph is the core of *the Contemplation Sūtra*, and it is the foundation of the principle of the interactive correspondence between Buddha and sentient beings.

① **“All Buddha-*Tathāgatas* have a body of the Dharma-realm, which enters the mind and contemplations of all sentient beings.”** This sentence conveys the following information:

Amitabha Buddha’s body, or his pure mind, is of the Dharma-realm, that is, the Dharma-body, which is the embodiment of all tenets. It is intrinsically purified, devoid of any tangible form, yet it permeates or pervades all the space in the ten directions. Since our mind and thoughts are within the space of the ten directions, hence they are definitely encompassed by the Dharma-body of Amitabha.

② **“when one contemplates a Buddha, one’s mind has a Buddha’s thirty-two physical characteristics and eighty excellent marks.”** This sentence indicates that our mind itself does not possess a tangible or fixed form either. It takes the form of whatever it thinks or contemplates. When it contemplates the image, the meritorious virtues of the Buddha or recites the Buddha’s name, it will take the form of the Buddha, especially when it visualizes or contemplates them with one-pointed mind.

③ **“While the mind is formulating the Buddha, the mind is the Buddha.”** This sentence signifies the interactive correspondence between the Buddha and the sentient beings who are mindful of the Buddha. Literally speaking, formulating the Buddha is to constitute a Buddha in our mind by contemplating the Buddha or reciting his name whole-heartedly. As our mind possesses no specific form or appearance, and it can exclusively think of only one thing at each instant, therefore, when our mind is preoccupied with the Buddha, its form is that of Buddha, since it cannot be anything else in that moment. It is similar, when a scope of water turns into ice, the ice is the water itself. There is no other water beside the water within the ice.

Combining the above sentences, we can realise that the interactive correspondence between the Buddha and sentient beings depends on the activation of the sentient beings. Like the magnetic field in the space, Amitabha’s mind is constantly existent in the boundless space of the ten directions. However, it only responds to the activating mind of sentient beings who are mindful of him by either contemplating his image, his meritorious virtues or his powers, or reciting his name. As long as the sentient being’s mind



is mindful of the Buddha, the Buddha will certainly respond to one's incitement. It is analogous to a particular TV channel, of which the signal permeates the whole space; as long as a TV terminal is adjusted to align with the frequency of the channel, the TV can display the programme instantly. Otherwise, no matter how strong the signal, if the TV terminal is not aligned with the signal of the channel, it cannot show the programme. Like the aligned frequency, the aligned condition between the Buddha and sentient beings is their mindfulness of the Buddha.

The ancients usually used the relationship between a bell and the knocking action as a simile to explain the interactive correspondence. Amitabha Buddha is like an enormous bell, hanging there all the time. Only when someone knocks it, it will emanate sound. Without knocking, it will remain silent. Similarly, the mindfulness of the Buddha in sentient beings' mind is the knocking action. Whenever a sentient being is mindful of the Buddha, the Buddha is aware of it, without failure, just as whenever one knocks a hanging bell, it will ring. If sentient beings are not mindful of the Buddha, the Buddha will have no effect on them, just as without knocking, the hanging bell does not ring.

## **2. Explication Based on Perfect Teachings**

According to the perfect teachings, the minds of all sentient beings are intrinsically endowed with all the wisdom and meritorious virtues of the Buddha, only they are obscured by the fundamental ignorance and afflictions. This is the meaning of endowment of Buddha-nature in principle. However, because of the ignorance and the immeasurable accumulated karmas driven by afflictions, normal sentient beings are not aware of the fact. Their minds are preoccupied with greed, hatred and delusion, as well as all sorts of attachments. It is similar to the sea water, which manifests in all forms of waves with salty taste, whereas the pure tasteless water never departs from the sea water.

Since the Amitabha Buddha and the minds of sentient beings are not different in the intrinsic level, they can certainly be aligned together.

Furthermore, just as water can exhibit various phases in solid ice, liquid and vapour, so our mind can formulate in different forms, which cover ten realms. At the moment when it is contemplating the Buddha, the mind falls into the realm of the Buddha; similarly, when the mind is preoccupied with extreme

greed, it falls into the realm of hungry ghost, etc. This is the meaning of “**while the mind is formulating the Buddha, the mind is the Buddha.**” It indicates that we need to formulate a Buddha in our mind, that is, we need to contemplate the Buddha or recite the name of the Buddha first, in order to manifest the Buddha in our mind. Otherwise, if we do not formulate a Buddha in our mind first, our mind remains in the other realms, hardly beyond the six mundane realms.

Having realised this principle, our mindfulness of the Buddha is truly “**cultivating based on quintessence (称性起修)**”. That is, the mindfulness of Amitabha Buddha is not different from the mindfulness of our intrinsically endowed Buddha. It is simultaneously “**all cultivations are for the quintessence (全修在性)**”. That is, all the cultivation of mindfulness of the Buddha is to enlighten our own intrinsic Buddha-nature. Since our intrinsic Buddha-nature is devoid of form, it is difficult for ordinary beings to focus their mind on it. It requires some provisional skilful means to enable the beings to concentrate their mind. By cultivating mindfulness of Amitabha Buddha’s image, name, etc, sentient beings can gradually concentrate their scattered mind on Amitabha Buddha, which does not differ from our own intrinsic Buddha-nature. Hence, the cultivation of contemplation of the environment of Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha is often called “**relying on that environmental and life retributions** (that is, the Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha), **to manifest our own intrinsic nature.** (托彼依正, 显我自性)”

## IV. THE PRACTICES OF PURE LAND

The practices of the Pure Land are categorised into two types: the concentrated virtuous practices and the scattered virtuous practices, Fig 3.2.

Concentrated virtuous practices encompass the first thirteen contemplations, which are expounded by the Buddha in reply to the beseeching of *Vaidehī*; whereas scattered virtuous practices include the three types of minds, the three pure conducts and Buddha name recitation, which are all promulgated by the Buddha based on his own intention, and out of great compassion and wisdom, without asking.

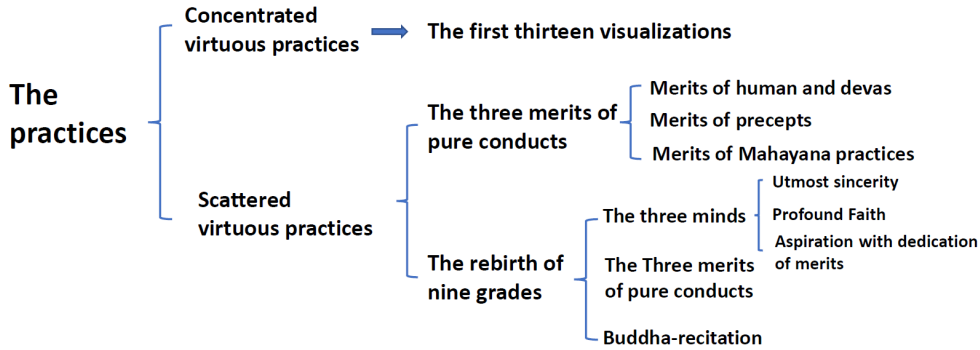


Fig 3.2 The Pure Land Practices

## 1. The Concentrated Virtuous Practices

After seeing and comparing the scenes of innumerable pure lands shown by *Śākyamuni* Buddha, *Vaidehī* chose the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha. She then besought the Buddha to teach her how to cultivate contemplation and to obtain *samadhi* so as to be able to get rebirth there. To reply her imploration, the Buddha hierarchically instructed her and sentient beings on the procedures to contemplate and visualize the extraordinary environments of the Pure Land and the three saints: Amitabha Buddha, *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva, and *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva.

- (1) **The Contemplation of the Sun:** Gazing at the setting sun, contemplating it in the mind, keeping it whether the eyes are open or closed. It indicates the direction of the Pure Land in the west, and brightness of the Pure Land.
- (2) **The Contemplation of Water:** Visualizing the water, ice and lapis lazuli, indicating the universal equality and purified characteristics of the Pure Land.
- (3) **The Contemplation of the Ground:** Visualizing the majestic adornment under and on the ground of Pure Land.
- (4) **The Contemplation of Jewelled Trees:** Visualizing the sevenfold-aligned trees composed of seven treasures.
- (5) **The Contemplation of Lake Waters:** Visualizing the treasured lakes and the water of the eight meritorious virtues.
- (6) **The Overall Contemplation:** Visualizing the palaces on or above the ground, obtaining a gross contemplation of the Pure Land.

- (7) **The Contemplation of the Lotus Flower:** Visualizing the lotus flower throne of Amitabha Buddha.
- (8) **The Contemplation of Images:** Visualizing the images of the three saints of the Pure Land.
- (9) **The Contemplation of the Body of Amitabha Buddha:** Visualizing the reward-body of Amitabha Buddha.
- (10) **The Contemplation of the Body of *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva:** Visualizing the physical form of *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva.
- (11) **The Contemplation of the Body of *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva:** Visualizing the physical form of *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva.
- (12) **The Contemplation of One's Rebirth in a Lake Flower or the Universal Contemplation:** Visualizing oneself attaining rebirth in a lotus flower in the Pure Land.
- (13) **The Mixed Contemplation:** Visualizing the manifested body of Amitabha Buddha of sixteen feet tall.

Of the thirteen contemplations or visualizations, the first two are provisional contemplations, to facilitate the practitioner to calm one's mind from the usual scattered or distractive thoughts. The latter eleven contemplations are true concentrated contemplations. When successfully achieved, they will ensure one to eliminate evil karmas, to perceive the extraordinary scenes and the marvellous reward bodies of the three saints of Pure Land, and to definitely get rebirth in the Pure Land. They are very operational and clear instructions are given for those practitioners with capacity and inclination of meditative cultivations. However, they are not applicable to most ordinary sentient beings, who either lack the capacity to cultivate concentrative meditation, or are devoid of the time or energy to cultivate them. Entirely aware of this fact, the Buddha proposed the scattered virtuous practices without asking, in order to enable all mundane beings of superior, medium and inferior capacities to attain rebirth in Pure Land and subsequently achieve Buddhahood.

## 2. The Three Types of Minds

All the three Pure Land *Sūtras* instruct that the three necessary and sufficient conditions to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land are faith, aspiration and practice. Although the practice proposed in the three *Sūtras* are different, to

accommodate beings with diverse capacities and preferences, sincere faith and earnest aspiration are the common factors. *The Contemplation Sūtra* is not exceptional. It is emphasised in the text on the section of rebirth of upper grade in the superior rank as the three types of minds. Yet they are the prerequisites for not only all the nine grade practitioners, but also are necessary for the concentrated virtues practitioners too.

The *Sūtra* states, **“Those who wish to achieve a birth of upper grade in the superior rank must give rise to three types of minds. What are these three? First, an utmost sincere mind; second, a profound (faithful) mind; and third, a mind which aspires for rebirth by transferring merits.”**

Master Shandao [4] extensively explicated the three minds, to make it possible for us to comprehend their meanings completely.

### **(1) The Utmost Sincere Mind**

Although all three Pure Land *Sūtras* emphasize the preconditions of faith and aspiration, *The Contemplation Sūtra* additionally stress the necessity of utmost sincerity of faith and aspiration. That is, the faith and aspiration must be generated from a sincere, truthful and real mind, as explicated by Master Shandao: “The first is the utmost sincere mind. It is truthful and real. It indicates that all the comprehension and practices cultivated by the body, speech and thought of all sentient beings must be performed with a sincere mind. One should not externally show virtuous and diligent appearances; but internally conceive false and fake, greedy and hatred, devious and hypocritical, and various treacherous (intentions). With an unconquerable evil habit, one behaves like a serpent or scorpion. Even though one conducts the three virtuous acts, they are virtuous acts mixed with poisons, or false and fake conducts, and are not named as sincere virtuous conducts. Conducting virtuous acts with such mind, even if done diligently and cultivated physically and mentally throughout day and night, as though one saves the head from burning; these acts are generally categorised as virtues mixed with poisons. If one wants to dedicate these virtuous conducts mixed with poisons to aspire to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, it is impossible to succeed. (一者至诚心。至者真，诚者实。欲明一切众生身口意业所修解行，必须真实心中作。不得外现贤善精进之相，内怀虚假，贪瞋邪伪，奸诈百端，恶性难侵，事同蛇蝎。虽起三业，

名为杂毒之善，亦名虚假之行，不名真实业也。若作如此安心起行者，纵使苦励身心，日夜十二时，急走急作，如救头燃者，总名杂毒之善。欲回此杂毒之行，求生彼佛净土者，此必不可也。)

“Why is it so? It is because when Amitabha Buddha cultivated the Bodhisattva practices in his causal stage, all the cultivations of three conducts of even every thought in every instant, were performed with utmost sincere mind. They were truthfully real during all implementation and intention.” (何以故? 正由彼阿弥陀佛因中行菩萨行时，乃至一念一刹那三业所修，乃是真实心中作。凡所施为趣求，亦皆真实。)

Master Shandao revealed to us that in order to acquire corresponding response from Amitabha Buddha to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, we must generate sincere faith and aspiration. Otherwise, we cannot get the response from Amitabha Buddha if we cultivate the three provisions with false and fake mind, thus losing the welcome and reception by him and his retinue. For the Pure Land was established by Amitabha Buddha through inconceivably innumerable *kalpas* of cultivations based on pure sincere mind. Only a pure sincere mind can induce responses from another pure sincere mind, just like only magnetic materials like iron can be attracted by magnetic force.

Sincere mind is necessary even if one wants to succeed in worldly affairs. There is an idiom, “utmost faith moves mountains,” implying that if someone’s beliefs and confidence are strong enough, they can achieve something that is very difficult. In his lecture [5], Venerable Da’an tells us an incredible story about Shang Qiukai (商丘开) [15], whose utmost sincerity resulted in miraculous effects, as shown in the following.

In the Jin state (晋国, a kingdom in the time of Spring and Autumn (770 – 403 BCE), there was a Mr. Fan (范), who had a son, named Zihua (子华). The king was fond of Zihua and for that reason, Zihua was well known as an influential powerful figure in the state, and was supported by an assembly of hangers-on. Though he was not an official, his influence surpassed those of the ministers.

Hesheng and Zibo were two honoured hangers-on of Zihua. One evening, they stayed in Qiukai’s home, where they boasted about the influential power and conduct of Zihua in the capital. When Qiukai eavesdropped, and heard that

Zihua could make the dead alive and make the poor rich, he was astonished and made up his mind to get associated with Zihua.

All Zihua's other hangers-on were from rich families, wearing beautiful silk attires, and travelling in luxurious carriages. When they saw that Quikai was a dark gaunt old man and dressed in shabby clothes, they all disdained him, and utilized every opportunity to tease and insult him.

Once, while Quikai was on a high platform with the others, one of the hangers-on shouted, "If any one dare to jump down from this platform, we will award him 100 *jin* (a Chinese unit of weight, equivalent to half a kilogram) of gold." Quikai believed him and jumped down. To the amazement of others, he landed on the ground like a swallow, free from injury. However, they all considered it a mere chance occurrence, not worthy of surprise.

Soon after, someone played a prank and pointed to a deep part of a river and announced, "there are pearls in the bottom of the water; whoever dare to dive in to collect them can have them." Quikai trusted them again and dived to the bottom and to their surprise, surfaced with pearls in hand. From then on, no one despised him anymore, and Zihua treated him in the same way as the others.

Later, Mr. Fan's house was on fire. Zihua announced, "Whoever gets in the house to take out the brocade, I will award him with equal values." Quikai showed no fear and entered the fire and exited many times, unscathed. The other hangers-on were shocked, and all asked for his forgiveness, "You are a deity in disguise, please forgive us for what we have done to you. Consider us as blind, deaf, and foolish." But Quikai told them that he was not a deity, and that he came to follow Zihua out of his faith in his power, and he only sincerely followed all instructions, without any doubt, as truth.

When Zaiwu told Confucius (孔子) about this story, he commented, "Don't you know? People with ultimate sincere faith can move things. They can move heaven and earth, sway ghosts and deities, confronting no adversities in the six directions, not limited to entering into perilous areas, waters or fires. This applies even to Shang Quikai's sincere belief even though the matters are false, not to mention when both our belief and objects are truthful. You should know this."

## (2) The Profound Faithful Mind

Master Shandao explicated the profound faithful mind as follows:

“The second is profound mind. The so-called profound mind is the mind of profound faith, which has two meanings: The first is resolutely and profoundly believing that we are now sinful mundane beings of birth-and-death, constantly submerge and revolve from beginningless time, without conditions to escape it. The second is resolutely and profoundly believing, without doubt or suspect, that Amitabha Buddha has made the Forty-Eight Great Vows to rescue and gather sentient beings, and that we can depend on his power of vows to achieve rebirth.” (二者深心。言深心者，即是深信之心也。亦有二种：一者决定深信自身现是罪恶生死凡夫。旷劫已来，常没常流转，无有出离之缘。二者决定深信彼阿弥陀佛四十八愿摄受众生，无疑无虑。乘彼愿力，定得往生。)

“Furthermore, we should resolutely and profoundly believe in the three merits, the nine-grade rebirth, the concentrated and scattered virtues expounded by Śākyamuni Buddha in the *Contemplation Sūtra*; and the environmental and life retributions attested and praised by him as being attractive and admirable.” (又决定深信释迦佛说此《观经》三福九品、定散二善，证赞彼佛依正二报，使人欣慕。)

“Furthermore, we should resolutely and profoundly believe *the Amitabha Sūtra*, and that Buddhas in the ten directions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges River attested and encouraged all sentient beings that they are definitely capable of rebirth.” (又决定深信《弥陀经》中十方恒沙诸佛证劝一切凡夫决定得生。)

“Moreover, for the profound belief, I wish all practitioners should wholeheartedly and solely believe in the speeches of Buddhas, disregard one’s life, and decidedly follow Buddha’s instructions. We should relinquish what the Buddha enjoins us to relinquish, practise what the Buddha encourages us to practise, and to go to where the Buddha directs us to go. We are then named as being in accord with Buddha’s teachings, in accord with Buddha’s intention, in accord with Buddha’s wish, and be called genuine Buddha’s disciples.” (又深信者，仰愿一切行者等，一心唯信佛语，不顾身命，决定依行。佛遣舍者即舍，佛遣行者即行，佛遣去处即去。是名随顺佛教，是名随顺佛意，是名随顺佛愿，是名真佛弟子。)



“All beings except Buddhas are still at the learner’s stage, incomplete in wisdom and practices. They have not completely eradicated the real and habitual impediments, nor are their fruition and vows perfectly fulfilled. Even if these mundane or saintly beings try to fathom Buddha’s teachings and meanings, they are still unable to judge and penetrate. When anyone makes any commentaries, it is necessary to turn to the Buddha to attest and certify them. If they are in accord with the Buddha’s meaning, they are authenticated as thusness, otherwise, if they are not in accord with the Buddha’s meanings, they are certified as that the meanings of what said are not thusness.”（除佛已还，智行未满，在其学地，犹有正习二障未除，果愿未圆。此等凡圣，纵使测量诸佛教意，未能决了。虽有平章，要须请佛证为定也。若称佛意，即印可言，如是如是。若不可佛意者，即言汝等所说，是义不如是。）

“Furthermore, anyone with profound mind and profound faith has definitely established the self-mind, cultivated practices that follow Buddha’s teachings, and are forever free from doubts and errors. One’s determination will not retreat or waver because of other explanations, other practices, disparate studies, views or attachments of others.”（又深心深信者，决定建立自心，顺教修行，永除疑错。不为一切别解、别行，异学、异见、异执之所退失倾动也。）

“If anyone extensively refers to various *Sūtras* and commentaries to assert that we are incapable of rebirth, the practitioner should tell him (her), ‘although you have referred to many *Sūtras* and commentaries to certify the incapability of rebirth, my determination will not be destroyed by you. Why is it so? I do not disbelieve in those *Sūtras* and commentaries. I respectfully believe in them all. However, when the Buddha spoke of those *Sūtras*, the place was different, so were the time, the capacities of the listeners and the benefits. Additionally, the time when he spoke those *Sūtras* was not the time when he expounded *the Contemplation Sūtra* and *the Amitabha Sūtra*. The Buddha expounded different teachings pursuant to the capacities of the audiences. He generally spoke the explanations and practices for humans, devas, and Bodhisattvas. When Buddha expounded the concentrated and scattered virtues in *the Contemplation Sūtra*, he solely confirmed the certainty of rebirth for *Vaidehī* and all beings entangled in the five turbidity and five

sufferings after his *parinirvana*. For this cause and condition, I will wholeheartedly follow this teaching and cultivate accordingly. Even if you and as much as hundreds, thousands, or millions in number all say (we are) unable to achieve rebirth, it will merely enhance and accomplish my faith in getting rebirth.” (若有人多引经论证云不生者，行者即报云，仁者虽将经论来证道不生，如我意者，决定不受汝破。何以故？然我亦不是不信，彼诸经论，尽皆仰信。然佛说彼经时，处别，时别，对机别，利益别。又说彼经时，即非说观经弥陀经等时。然佛说教被机，大有不同。彼即通说人天菩萨之解行。今说《观经》定散二善，唯为韦提及佛灭后五浊五苦等一切凡夫，证言得生。为此因缘，我今一心依此佛教，决定奉行。纵使汝等百千万亿道不生者，唯增长成就我往生信心也。)

“Moreover, the practitioner should further tell the speaker, ‘Please listen. I will now proclaim the quality of my decided faith. Even if there are Arhats, Pratyekabuddhas, or Bodhisattvas below the ground stages, singular or in multitude, up to filling the ten directions, all refer to *Sūtras* and commentaries to assert our incapability of rebirth, I will not give rise to slightest doubt. It will merely enhance and accomplish my pure faith. Why is it so? Because the Buddha’s words definitely fulfil the ultimate meaning, which cannot be destroyed by anything.” (又行者更向说言：仁者善听，我今为汝更说决定信相。纵使罗汉、辟支、地前菩萨等，若一若多，乃至遍满十方，皆引经论证言不生者，我亦不起一念疑心，唯增长成就我清净信心。何以故？由佛语决定成就了义，不为一切所破坏故。)

“In addition, practitioners, please listen carefully. Suppose that there are Bodhisattvas from the first to the tenth ground stage, singular or multitude, up to filling the ten directions. Even if all of them speak the following with one voice: *Śākyamuni* Buddha praises Amitabha Buddha, disparages the three spheres and the six realms. He encourages all beings to wholeheartedly recite the Buddha’s name and to cultivate other virtues, so that they will assuredly achieve rebirth in that land after this life. These sayings are false and delusional; one should not depend on nor believe in them. Even though having heard such assertions, I will not give rise to one thought of suspicion. It merely enhances and establishes my unsurpassed decided faith. Why is it so? It is because Buddha’s words are truthful, with definite and ultimate meaning. The Buddha truly knows, truly comprehends, truly perceives and truly attest, so his words are not from suspicious and delusional minds. They cannot be

destroyed by all the disparate views or explanations of Bodhisattvas. If they are real Bodhisattvas, they will not oppose Buddha's teachings." (又行者善听，纵使初地已上，十地已来，若一若多，乃至遍满十方，异口同音皆云，释迦佛指赞弥陀，毁谤三界六道，劝励众生专心念佛及修余善，毕此一身后，必定生彼国者，此必虚妄，不可依信也。我虽闻此等所说，亦不生一念疑心，唯增长成就我决定上上信心。何以故？乃由佛语真实决了义故。佛是实知、实解、实见、实证，非是疑惑心中语故。又不为一切菩萨异见、异解之所破坏。若实是菩萨者，总不违佛教也。)

"Furthermore, the Practitioners should know about this matter. Suppose that there are manifested Buddhas or reward Buddhas, singular or multitude up to filling the ten directions; all of them emit brilliance, stretch their wide long tongues to cover all the ten directions. Every one of them proclaims that the Western Pure Land advocated by *Śākyamuni* Buddha, his encouragement of all sentient beings to whole-heartedly recite the Buddha name and cultivate other virtues so as to achieve rebirth by dedication and aspiration, are false and delusional, and that there is definitely no such thing. Even though having heard such speeches by those Buddhas, I will not give rise to one thought of suspicion, retreat, or fear of being unable to get rebirth there. (又置此事。行者当知，纵使化佛报佛，若一若多，乃至遍满十方，各各辉光吐舌遍覆十方，一一说言，释迦所说西方净土，指赞劝发一切凡夫，专心念佛及修余善，回愿得生彼净土者，此是虚妄，定无此事也。我虽闻此等诸佛所说，毕竟不起一念疑退之心，畏不得生彼佛国也。)

"Why is it so? It is because from one Buddha to all Buddhas, all their insight and view, comprehension and practice, attainment and enlightenment, fruition and stages, and compassion are all identical, without trivial difference or distinction. Therefore, what is stipulated by one Buddha is equivalent to what is stipulated by all Buddhas. For instance, previous Buddhas stipulate that one should refrain from killing and refrain from committing the ten unwholesome conducts. If anyone does not violate or commit them, it is called the prohibitive practice of the ten wholesome conducts, and it is in accord with the meaning of the Six *Pāramitās*. When Buddhas manifest later, how can they change the previous wholesome conducts to encouraging the ten unwholesome conducts? Inferring based on this principle, we can clearly understand that the words and conducts of all Buddhas are not contradictory. Hence, when *Śākyamuni* Buddha encourages all sentient beings to be

exclusively mindful (of Buddha) and exclusively practise all one's life, then one will assuredly achieve rebirth in that land after this life, all the Buddhas will simultaneously praise, encourage and confirm it. Why is it so? It is because they share the same compassion. What one Buddha edifies is what all Buddhas edify, and what all Buddhas edify is what one Buddha edifies.” (何以故？一佛一切佛，所有知见、解行、证悟、果位、大悲等同，无少差别。是故一佛所制，即一切佛同制。如似前佛制断杀生十恶等罪，毕竟不犯不行者，即名十善止行随顺六度之义。若有后佛出世，岂可改前十善令行十恶也？以此道理推验，明知诸佛言行不相违失。故使释迦指劝一切凡夫，尽此一身专念专修，舍命已后定生彼国者，即时十方诸佛悉皆同赞同劝同证。何以故？同体大悲故。一佛所化，即是一切佛化。一切佛化，即是一佛所化。)

### (3) The Aspiring Mind for Rebirth by Transferring

In Master Shandao's words, the aspiring mind for rebirth by transferring merits is: “The third is the aspiring mind by transferring. The so-called aspiring mind by transferring is (like this). Suppose, in the past and present lives, one has cultivated worldly or transcendental virtuous roots through physical, verbal or mental conducts, and rejoiced over worldly or transcendental virtuous roots cultivated by other mundane or saintly beings through physical, verbal or mental conducts. One will then transfer all the virtuous roots cultivated by self and others to the aspiration of achieving rebirth in that land, with utmost sincere and profoundly faithful mind. Hence, it is called the aspiring mind by transferring.” (三者回向发愿心。言回向发愿心者，过去及以今生，身口意业所修世出世善根，及随喜他一切凡圣身口意业所修世出世善根。以此自他所修善根，悉皆真实深信心中，回向愿生彼国。故名回向发愿心也。)

To protect the faith of the Pure Land practitioners from interference from devious views, Master Shando presented a parable. He illustrated, “Suppose there is a man, who wants to travel hundreds of thousands of *li* (*li* is a unit of distance measurement, equivalent to half km) to the west. However, he confronts two rivers in the path, with one fire river to the south, and one water river to the north. Both rivers are 100 steps wide, fathomless deep and prolonged endlessly to the south and north. A narrow white path of four to five inches wide conjoins the fire and water rivers. The white path also extends 100 steps, from the east bank to the west bank. Water waves keep wetting the path, and flames keep burning the paths too. The water and

flames conflict each other perennially without rest, (as shown in the drawing, Fig 3.3.) (譬如有人，欲向西行百千之里。然于中路乃有二河，一是火河在南，二是水河在北。二河各阔百步，各深无底，南北无边。正水火中间，有一白道，可阔四五寸许。此道从东岸至西岸，亦长百步。其水波浪交过湿道，其火焰亦来烧道。水火相交，常无休息。)

“When he came to an isolated open area, no other people were around. Multitude of thieves and ferocious beasts on seeing this solitary person, vied to attack him. Out of fear of death, the man ran towards the west, but was suddenly blocked by the large rivers. He murmured to himself, ‘The rivers extend towards south and north without end, only with a white path extremely narrow. Although the distance between the two banks is near, how can I traverse? I will definitely die, without doubt.’ (此人既至空旷迥处，更无人民。多有群贼恶兽，见此人单独，竞来欲杀。此人怖死，直走向西。忽然见此大河，即自念言：此河南北不见边畔，中间现一白道，极是狭小。两岸相去虽近，何由可行？今日定死不疑。)

“When he was about to retreat, the multitude of thieves and beasts from behind moved forward. He was about to escape to the north or the south, but was confronted by vicious beasts and venomous snakes. Intending to traverse the white path towards west, he was afraid of falling into the water or fire river. His desperate terror was beyond description. (正欲倒回，群贼恶兽渐渐来逼。正欲南北避走，恶兽毒虫竞来向相。正欲向西寻道而去，复恐堕此水火二河。当时惶怖，不复可言。)

“He then pondered: Now, I will die if I retreat, die if I stay, and also die if I go, unescapable of death. I would rather go forward to cross this path. Since there exists this path, it should be passable. Having this thought, he suddenly heard someone encouraging him, ‘Good man. You should decidedly go along the path, there will be no death. Staying will lead to death.’ He also heard someone on the west bank calling, ‘You just come forward with whole-hearted right mindfulness. I will protect you, so don’t be afraid. You will not fall into the water or fire.’ After hearing the dispatching from this side and the calling from the other side, the man made up his mind and decided to go forward along the path, without any thought of suspicion or retreat. (即自思

念：我今回亦死，住亦死，去亦死。一种不免死者。我宁寻此道向前而去。既有此道，必应可度。作此念时，东岸忽闻人劝声：仁者！但决定寻此道行，必无死难。若住，即死。又西岸上有人唤言：汝一心正念直来，我能护汝，总不畏堕于水火之难。此人既闻此遣彼唤，即自正当身心，决定寻道直进，不生疑怯退心。)



Fig 3.3 The White Path between the Water and Fire Rivers

Photo courtesy to <http://www.guiyifo.com>

“When he walked about ten to twenty percent of the path, the multitude of thieves on the east bank called him, ‘Good man. Come back. This path is perilous and unpassable, you are assuredly going to die. We have no harming thoughts towards you.’ Although the man heard the calling, he did not look back, but went forward single-mindedly along the path. In an instant, he arrived at the west bank, departing from the various disasters forever. On meeting virtuous friends, he is delighted and enjoys never-ending happiness.

This is a metaphor.”（或行一分二分，东岸群贼等唤言：仁者回来，此道险恶不得过，必死不疑。我等总无恶心相向。此人虽闻唤声，亦不回顾，一心直进念道而行。须臾即到西岸，永离诸难。善友相见，庆乐无已。此是喻也。）

“The following is the explication of the metaphor. The so-called east bank represents the flaming house of this *Saha* world, whereas the west bank represents the treasured Land of Ultimate Bliss. The multitude of thieves and beasts pretending intimacy, represent the six faculties, six consciousnesses, the six objects, the five aggregates, and the four grand elements. The isolated open area indicates constantly confronting evil friends, without meeting virtuous learned friends. The water and fire rivers indicate that greed and lust of sentient beings are like water, and hatred is like fire. In between, the four to five inches wide white path signifies that sentient beings can still give rise to pure mind of aspiring to achieve rebirth in the midst of greed and hatred afflictions. Because the greed and hatred are strong, they are similar to water and fire; whereas the virtuous mind is weak, it is similar to the white path. The phrase of water waves constantly wetting the path indicates that the greedy thoughts often flare up to defile the virtuous mind. And the phrase of flames constantly burning the path indicates that thoughts of hatred can burn the Dharma wealth of meritorious virtues. （次合喻者。言东岸者，即喻此娑婆之火宅也。言西岸者，即喻极乐宝国也。言群贼恶兽诈亲者，即喻众生六根、六识、六尘、五阴、四大也。言无人空迥泽者，即喻常随恶友，不值真善知识也。言水火二河者，即喻众生贪爱如水，瞋憎如火也。言中间白道四五寸者，即喻众生贪瞋烦恼中，能生清净愿往生心也。乃由贪瞋强故，即喻如水火，善心微故，喻如白道。又水波常湿道者，即喻爱心常起，能染污善心也。又火焰常烧道者，即喻瞋嫌之心，能烧功德之法财也。）

“The person directly walking towards west along the path means transferring all the practices and conducts to the west. The phrase of hearing someone from the east bank encouraging him to go directly west along the path implies that after the *parinirvana* of *Śākyamuni* Buddha, people cannot see him anymore, yet his teachings are still available, and hence are represented by a voice. The expression of hearing the multitude of thieves calling him to go back when he walked about ten to twenty percent of the path indicates that people with other comprehensions, other practices, and other views, falsely expound their views to delude the practitioner, as well as the practitioner retreating

because of transgressions. (言人行道上直向西者，即喻回诸行业直向西方也。言东岸闻人声劝遣寻道直西进者，即喻释迦已灭，后人不见，犹有教法可寻，故喻之如声也。言或行一分二分群贼等唤回者，即喻别解、别行、恶见人等，妄说见解迭相惑乱，及自造罪退失也。)

“The phrase of someone on the west bank calling means Amitabha Buddha’s vows. Arriving at the west bank in an instant and meeting virtuous friends with delight and happiness has the following meaning: Sentient beings have been submerging and revolving in the birth-and-death from time immemorial, deluded and self-entangled, unable to get liberated. We rely on *Śākyamuni* Buddha’s dispatching instructions to direct us to go west and depend on the compassionate calling from Amitabha Buddha. Now we will believe and follow the intentions of both Buddhas, disregard the water and fire rivers, and be mindful in each thought. Treading the path of his vows, we will achieve rebirth in that land and meet the Buddha after this life. We will then enjoy extreme delight and happiness!” (言西岸上有人唤者，即喻弥陀愿意也。言须臾到西岸善友相见喜者，即喻众生久沉生死，旷劫轮回，迷倒自缠，无由解脱。仰蒙释迦发遣，指向西方。又藉弥陀悲心招唤。今信顺二尊之意，不顾水火二河，念念无遗，乘彼愿力之道，舍命已后，得生彼国，与佛相见，庆喜何极也。)

### 3. The Three Pure Conducts

When *Vaidehī* besought the Buddha to teach her how to contemplate and how to attain *samadhi* so as to be reborn in the Pure Land, *Śākyamuni* Buddha voluntarily proposed the three pure conducts instead. The reason is because contemplation and *samadhi* are suitable only to a limited number of beings with superior capacity, whereas the Pure Land Dharma-door benefits all sentient beings with medium and inferior capacities as well as superior capacity.

The *Sūtra* states, “**Those who wish to be born in that land should cultivate three merits. First, they should filially support their parents, serve and respect their teachers and elders, cultivate compassion and not kill sentient beings, and undertake the ten wholesome conducts. Second, they should take and uphold the three refuges, and fully observe the precepts without violating dignity of conduct. Third, they should activate the Bodhicitta, profoundly believe in the law of cause and effect, read and recite *Mahāyāna***



***Sūtras*, and persuade others to practise. These three types of activities are called the pure conducts (karmas).”**

These three types of merits are worldly merits, the merits of precepts, and the merits of Mahayana practice.

### **(1) The Worldly Merits**

These merits are derived from moral behaviour in daily life, and not for religious purposes.

① **To filially support our parents:** We are greatly indebted to our parents, because they gave birth to us and raised us. Without our parents, we cannot become an existent human being in this world; without their strenuous endeavour in caring, protecting, feeding, clothing, and teaching us, we cannot grow up normally.

② **To serve and respect our teachers and elders:** We are grateful to our teachers because they educate us. They teach us knowledges, techniques, and skills to train us to be a useful or skilful person in our life; or they edify us with Buddhist teachings to lead us to tread the liberation and enlightenment path.

③ **To cultivate compassion and not kill sentient beings:** All sentient beings instinctively cherish and protect their own lives. Therefore, we should cherish and protect their lives as if they are ours, hence, not killing is the first precept of the five precepts.

④ **To undertake the ten wholesome conducts:** The ten wholesome conducts encompass two stages: The first stage is to refrain from committing the ten unwholesome acts: three physical acts--killing, stealing and sexual misconduct; four verbal acts--false speeches, divisive speeches, harsh speeches and frivolous speeches; and three mental acts—greed, hatred and delusion. The second stage is to further perform good conducts as oppose to the ten unwholesome acts. For instance, instead of killing sentient beings, we try to protect them and release them from danger or predicaments; instead of stealing, we donate our possession to help others in need etc. One becomes a paragon among human beings if one completely performs the ten good conducts, and will usually achieve rebirth in the heavens after this life. Even when we perform

these ten good conducts moderately, we are still good people welcomed in the society, and will be able to retain rebirth as human in the next life.

## **(2) The Merits of Precepts**

The second type of merits are derived by conducting our behaviour in accord with the precepts.

① **To take and uphold the three refuges:** To take refuge is the first step to become a Buddhist adherent. As elaborated in Chapter 3 of the first volume, taking and upholding the three refuges alone can generate tremendous merits, protecting us from descending to the three woeful paths.

② **To fully observe the precepts:** In this type of merits, the precepts mentioned here encompass all types of precepts. There are precepts for the two-vehicles, such as the five precepts, the eight precepts, the 250 precepts for *bhikṣus* and the 348 precepts for *bhikṣuṇīs* etc. Of course, if we can take and observe the Bodhisattva precepts, it is even better. It will enable us to achieve rebirth in the superior rank in the nine grades, as discussed in the next section. Whatever precepts we take, we should observe them with care without breaching.

③ **Without violating dignity of conduct:** We should regulate our physical, verbal and mental behaviour, as well as walk, stay, sit and recline in accord with the dignity of conduct to facilitate our observation of precepts. Even if we commit trivial violations, we will sincerely repent in time.

## **(3) The Merits of Mahayana Practice**

The third type of merits are derived from Mahayana practices.

① **To activate the Bodhicitta:** Bodhicitta is the aspiring mind to attain Buddhahood, and to rescue all sentient beings. It is the foundation of Mahayana practice. The Pure Land patriarchs gave some extra meaning to Bodhicitta for Pure Land practitioners: If the reason one wants to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land is to accomplish the Buddha path, and to swiftly enhance one's capabilities so as to skilfully rescue and deliver sentient beings, that mind is the Bodhicitta.

② **To profoundly believe in the law of cause and effect:** It denotes that we profoundly believe in both the mundane cause and effect and the supramundane cause and effect, without any doubt or suspicion. The former indicates it is absolutely true that unwholesome conducts result in suffering effects, and that wholesome conducts lead to pleasant results. The latter denotes that cultivating in accord with the Four Noble Truths or the Twelve Dependent Origination Links leads to emancipation from birth-and-death. If we activate the Bodhicitta, and cultivate the Six *Pāramitās*, we will eventually attain Buddhahood. Moreover, if we cultivate the three provisions of the Pure Land method, we will assuredly get rebirth in that land.

③ **To read and recite *Mahāyāna Sūtras*:** To read the *Mahāyāna Sūtras* is to study the teachings and to ponder their meanings; and to recite the *Mahāyāna Sūtras* is to enunciate the *Sūtra* word by word without discerning and discriminating the meaning. Both acts will enable us to enhance our wisdom.

④ **To persuade others to practise:** Having learned the sublime teachings, and understood the mundane and supramundane causes and effects as well as the liberating and enlightening practices, especially the Pure Land method, we should try to advise and persuade others to practice too.

#### **(4) Master Shandao's Annotation of the Three Merits**

Master Shandao clearly categorised the three types of merits and confirmed their effects in leading us to rebirth in the Pure Land. “The first type of merits are the worldly virtuous roots. People who have never learned Buddhist Dharma, yet voluntarily perform filial support, benevolence, righteousness, wisdom, good manners, and credit are said to have worldly virtues. The second type of merits are merits from precepts. Among the precepts are human and celestial precepts, *śrāvakas* precepts and Bodhisattva precepts. Whether they are entirely taken or partially taken, completely observed or incompletely observed, transferring these merits (to rebirth in the Pure Land), will ensure rebirth there. The third type of merits are merits from practice. They are carried out by mundane beings, who activate the Mahayana mind (that is, Bodhicitta), practise, advise and persuade others with related conditions to practise the same. They relinquish unwholesome thoughts and

uphold wholesome thoughts, and transfer the merits to rebirth in the Pure Land. (今言三福者，第一福，即是世俗善根。曾来未闻佛法，但自行孝养仁义礼智信，故名世俗善也。第二福者，此名戒善。就此戒中，即有人天、声闻、菩萨等戒。其中或有具受不具受，或有具持不具持。但能回向，尽得往生。第三福者，名为行善。此是发大乘心凡夫，自能行行，兼劝有缘，舍恶持心，回生净土。)

“Furthermore, for these three types of merits, by performing the worldly merits alone, one can get rebirth by transferring merits. By performing the merits from precepts alone, one can also get rebirth by transferring the merits; or if one solely performs the merits from practice, one can also achieve rebirth by transferring the merits. If someone performs the first two types of merits, he (she) can get rebirth by transferring the merits; or if someone performs the last two types of merits, he (she) can also get rebirth by transferring the merits. If someone performs all the three types of merits and transfers these merits, he (she) can achieve rebirth too. If there is someone who performs none of the three types of merits, he (she) is named *icchantika* of ten evil devious views.” (又就此三福之中，或有一人单行世福，回亦得生。或有一人单行戒福，回亦得生。或有一人单行行福，回亦得生。或有一人行上二福，回亦得生。或有一人行下二福，回亦得生。或有一人具行三福，回亦得生。或有人等三福俱不行者，即名十恶邪见阐提人也。)

From the text of the *Sūtra*, the reader can clearly see the relationship between the types of merits and the ranks of rebirth. Performers of the merits of Mahayana practices will be reborn in the Pure Land with rebirth in the superior ranks. Those who perform merits from precepts of the two-vehicles will get rebirth with the higher and middle grades in the medium rank. By performing the worldly merits alone, one can get rebirth with the lower grade in the medium rank. The three grades in the inferior rank are obtained by those who perform none of the three types of merits, but they have cultivated virtuous roots in previous lives so that they can meet virtuous learned friend and wholeheartedly recite the Buddha’s name on the verge of their death.

## 4. Buddha-Name Recitation

### (1) The Buddha-Name Recitation

In *the Contemplation Sūtra*, the Buddha’s name recitation was prescribed as the practice for evil people. They have committed various unwholesome acts,

yet they still can get rebirth in the Pure Land because of their mindful recitation of the Buddha's name at the end of their lives. Their rebirths are limited to the three grades in the inferior ranks. However, please never belittle this method because it is easy to practise and is applicable to everyone.

According to Master Ouyi and other patriarchs, by reciting Buddha's name single-mindedly, not only can one achieve any of the nine grades, but can also even attain rebirth in the land of convenience with residues, or the majestic land of real reward [16]. Therefore, all patriarchs encourage Pure Land practitioners to cultivate the Buddha-name recitation method.

## **(2) The Four Types of Mindfulness of the Buddha**

The Pure Land school is also known as the school of mindfulness of the Buddha, with Buddha name recitation being the most popular type of mindfulness of Buddha. There are four types of mindfulness of Buddha: the mindfulness by contemplative meditations, the mindfulness of contemplation of image, the mindfulness of the reality and the mindfulness by Buddha name recitation. In fact, of the three Pure Land *Sūtras*, only *the Contemplation Sūtra* encompasses all the four types of mindfulness.

① **The mindfulness by contemplative meditations:** It is defined as the contemplation of the marvellous and splendid environment of the Pure Land and the magnificent and wondrous physical forms of Amitabha Buddha, *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva and *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva, by following the instructions given in *the Contemplation Sūtra*. It involves all the first thirteen contemplations of the concentrated virtues.

② **The mindfulness of contemplation of image:** The Buddha was fully aware of the fact that ordinary beings' minds are too coarse and scattered, almost impossible to visualize the detailed features of the environment and saintly figures. Hence, he provided us with a provisional method, through contemplation of image. In both the eighth contemplation and the thirteenth contemplation, he instructed us to visualize and contemplate an image of Amitabha Buddha, which is easier to visualize.

③ **The mindfulness of the reality:** This method is proposed in the eighth contemplation as “**Every Buddha-*Tathāgata*'s body is of the Dharma-realm,**

**which enters the mind and contemplations of all sentient beings. Therefore, when one contemplates a Buddha, one's mind has a Buddha's thirty-two physical characteristics and eighty excellent marks. While the mind is formulating the Buddha, the mind is the Buddha."** Therefore, if we can contemplate the Dharma-realm, and the reality, and if we contemplate that the Buddha and our mind are intrinsically nondual, we are cultivating the mindfulness of the reality.

④ **The mindfulness by Buddha-name recitation:** The method is recommended in the chapters of rebirth of nine grades.

## **5. Master Shandao's Comments on Pure Land Practices**

Master Shandao extensively elucidated on the Pure Land practices. The following are excerpts of some of the most significant paragraphs to help us in our understanding of the *Sūtra*.

### **(1) The Dependent Arising**

In the beginning profound meaning scroll of the four-scroll annotation, Master Shandao pointed out the dependent arising of the Buddha's expositions of the Pure Land practices. "It is because of *Vaidehī's* beseeching request, 'I now want to get rebirth in the Land of Peaceful Bliss, and only wish the *Tathāgata* to teach me how to contemplate and how to attain samadhi.' The manifested master of the *Saha* world (that is, *Śākyamuni* Buddha) extensively expounded the essential doors of the Pure Land due to her beseeching. The Peaceful Bliss and Benevolent (that is, Amitabha Buddha) manifested and displayed his special grand vow. The essential doors are the concentrated and scattered doors of this *Contemplation Sūtra*. The concentrated (practice) is to stop thoughts and to concentrate the mind; the scattered (practices) are to abolish the evil and to cultivate the virtues. Then transfer the merits of these two types of practices to aspire for rebirth (in the Pure Land). To say the grand vow means that of all the virtuous or evil sentient beings who get rebirth, according to the *Large Sūtra*, none of them does not entirely rely on Amitabha Buddha's grand karmic power and grand vows as the augmenting condition" (遇因韦提致请：我今乐欲往生安乐，唯愿如来教我思惟、教我正受。然娑婆化主因其请故，即广开净土之要门，安乐能仁显彰别意之弘愿。其要门者，即此《观经》定散二门

是也。定即息虑以凝心，散即废恶以修善。回斯二行，求愿往生也。言弘愿者，如大经说，一切善恶凡夫得生者，莫不皆乘阿弥陀佛大愿业力为增上缘也。）

## (2) The Classification of Practices

In explicating the profound faith, Master Shandao proposed to establish faith based on practices. He commented, “However, there are two types of practices: the first is proper practice, and the second is mixed practice. To say proper practice means to practice exclusively based on the practices advocated in the Rebirth *Sūtras* (that is, the Pure Land *Sūtras*), which is called the proper practice. What are they? They are: whole-heartedly read and recite this *Contemplation Sūtra*, the *Amitabha Sūtra*, the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*; whole-heartedly focus on, think, visualize and be mindful of the majestic adornments of environmental and life retributions of that land. In paying homage, one exclusively pays homage to that Buddha (Amitabha Buddha) whole-heartedly. In reciting, one exclusively recites that Buddha’s name whole-heartedly. In praising, glorifying and making offering, one exclusively praises, glorifies and makes offerings to that Buddha. This is named proper (practice).” (然行有二种：一者正行。二者杂行。言正行者，专依往生经行行者，是名正行。何者是也？一心专读诵此《观经》《弥陀经》《无量寿经》等。一心专注思想观察忆念彼国二报庄严。若礼，即一心专礼彼佛。若口称，即一心专称彼佛。若赞叹供养，即一心专赞叹供养彼佛。是名为正。)

“Moreover, there are two kinds of proper practices: The first is to exclusively recite the name of Amitabha Buddha. Regardless of whether one is walking, staying, sitting or reclining, for a long or a short time, if one keeps mindful (of Amitabha Buddha’s name) in each thought without losing it, it is called the conduct of proper samadhi, because it is in accord with the Buddha’s vow. The practices following the above paying homage or reciting (the Pure Land *Sūtras*) are called supportive conducts. Except the proper and supportive practices, all the other virtues are called mixed practices. (又就此正中，复有二种：一者一心专念弥陀名号，行住坐卧，不问时节久近，念念不舍者，是名正定之业，顺彼佛愿故。若依礼诵等，即名为助业。除此正助二行已外，自余诸善悉名杂行。)

“If one cultivates the former proper and supportive practices, one’s mind constantly accesses and is mindful of (the Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha)

without interrupt, it is called non-interrupt. If one cultivates the latter mixed practices, one's mind is often interrupted. Although one can still get rebirth by transferring (the merits), it is generally named alienated mixed practices.” (若修前正助二行，心常亲近忆念不断，名为无间也。若行后杂行，即心常间断，虽可回向得生，总名疏杂之行也。)

### (3) Exclusively Praising the Buddha-Name Recitation

From the above introductions, it is evident that Master Shandao exclusively praised and emphasised the Buddha name recitation method. He classified it as the only conduct of proper samadhi, whereas the other virtuous cultivations are either supportive proper practices or alienated mixed practices.

Furthermore, in the transmission chapter, it is emphasised, “**If there are virtuous men and virtuous women, who merely hear the names of that Buddha and the two Bodhisattvas, their evil karmas entailing innumerable kalpas of birth-and-death will all be eliminated. How much more so if these people are mindful of the Buddha? If there are people who are mindful of the Buddha, you should know that these people are *puṇḍarīka* flowers among men. Bodhisattvas *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahasthamaprapta* will be their supreme friends, and he will be reborn in the Buddha family, to be seated in a *bodhimaṇḍa* (the site of enlightenment).**”

Master Shandao specified mindfulness of the Buddha as the Buddha-name recitation. He elaborated, “It properly unravels the extraordinary functions of Buddha recitation samadhi, beyond comparison by those mixed virtues. It has five aspects:

“The first is exclusively reciting Amitabha Buddha's name.

“The second is to praise the practitioner who can recite Buddha's name.

“The third is to clarify that if anyone can consistently recite the Buddha's name, this person is extremely rare. Since the person is beyond anything as simile, only *puṇḍarīka* flowers can be used as an analogy. The Sanskrit word *puṇḍarīka* is called good flower, wondrous good flower, rare flower, excellent flower, the most supreme flower. The flower mentioned is alleged to be the white lotus flower. Thus, those who recite the Buddha's name, are the good



person among people, wondrous good person among people, rare person among people, excellent person among people, and the most supreme person among people.

“The fourth is those who exclusively recite the Buddha’s name will be constantly protected by *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva and *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva like shadows, as if their intimate relatives and friends, and virtuous advisers.

“The fifth is that those who exclusively recite the Buddha’s name not only obtain such benefits in their lifetime, but also will join the families of all the Buddhas, that is, the Pure Land, after this life.” (正显念佛三昧功能超绝，实非杂善得为比类。即有其五：一、明专念弥陀佛名；二、明指赞能念之人；三、明若能相续念佛者，此人甚为希有，更无物可以方之，故引芬陀利华为喻。梵言分陀利，此云好华，亦名妙好华，亦名希有华，亦名上上华，亦名最胜华，此华相传白莲华是。若念佛者，即是人中好人，人中妙好人，人中希有人，人中上上人，人中最胜人也。四、明专念弥陀名者，即观音势至常随影护，亦如亲友知识也。五、明今生既蒙此益，舍命即入诸佛之家，即净土是也。)

As conclusion, Master Shandao emphasised, “Although the benefits of both concentrated and scattered doors are expounded above, however, according to the fundamental vow of the Buddha, he wanted sentient beings to exclusively recite the name of Amitabha Buddha.” (上来虽说定散两门之益，望佛本愿，意在众生一向专称弥陀佛名。)

Just as Master Shandao exhorted us to cultivate exclusively the proper practices, other patriarchs also praised and recommended the Buddha-name recitation method. For example, Master Ouyi, the ninth patriarch praised the Buddha-name recitation method to its extreme [16], as explicated in the next Chapter. Master Yinguang particularly recommended that we exclusively practice the Pure Land method, especially the Buddha name recitation method. He repeatedly praised the Buddha name recitation method as “If ten thousand cultivate, ten thousand will go.” That is, if ten thousand people, no matter what capacities, cultivate the Buddha name recitation method, then all the ten thousand practitioners will succeed in rebirth in the Pure Land.

#### **(4) The Relationship between Study and Practice**

Master Shandao especially stressed exclusive practices, but did not mean to dissuade others from studying the Mahayana *Sūtras* and commentaries, as he commented, “The practitioners should be aware. If one wants to study for comprehension, from mundane to saintly stages, up to the fruit of Buddhahood, all are unimpeded, hence all are suitable for one to learn. However, if one wants to learn practice, he (she) must depend on a method with (appropriate) condition, entailing enormous benefits with less effort.” (行者当知，若欲学解，从凡至圣，乃至佛果，一切无碍，皆得学也。若欲学行者，必藉有缘之法，少用功劳，多得益也。)

*Śākyamuni* Buddha also encouraged us to extensively read and study the Mahayana teachings, and to advise and persuade others to follow the practices. If we are not proficient in the Mahayana doctrines, especially the doctrines and tenets of Pure Land *Sūtras*, how can we effectively and skilfully advise and persuade others to learn and practise them?

## V. THE EFFECT OF PURE LAND PRACTICES

When we prepare to apply for a university, if the detailed requirement of each subject is clear and attainable, it would give us enormous confidence. In the same token, to help to establish confidence for Pure Land practitioners of various capacities and inclinations, *Śākyamuni* Buddha enumerated the sufficient and necessary conditions for each grade of rebirth. These different conditions are diverse, attainable by mundane beings from highly talented virtuous people to wicked despicable ones respectively. All the Pure Land practitioners should repeatedly study the contents of rebirth of nine grades in this *Sūtra*, so as to choose a specific path to cultivate pursuant to one’s own capacity and preference.

This part of the text is the last three contemplations of the entire sixteen contemplations. It belongs to the scattered virtuous practices voluntarily expounded by Buddha.

### 1. The Rebirth of Upper Grade in the Superior Rank

To help readers comprehend the rebirth of nine grades, the following six or seven aspects pertaining to the cause, effect and distinctive features in the process of rebirth of each grade are enumerated.

### **(1) The Nature of the Aspirant**

According to Master Shandao, this category of practitioners are mundane Mahayana practitioners of superior virtues.

### **(2) The Right Cause: Primary Cultivations**

The *Sūtra* states, **“there are three kinds of sentient beings that will be reborn there. What are those three? First, those who, with the mind of lovingkindness, refrain from killing sentient beings and completely observe the precepts for their conduct. Second, those who read and recite *Mahāyāna vaipulya Sūtras*. Third, those who practice the six kinds of mindfulness. Transferring the merit for rebirth, they aspire to be reborn in that land. By accomplishing these meritorious virtues for a period of one to seven days, they will attain rebirth.”**

**“There are three kinds of sentient beings that will be reborn there.”** This sentence is to certify that beings performing the following three types of practices are to be born of upper grade in the superior rank.

#### **① There are two requirements included in this clause:**

**“with the mind of lovingkindness, refrain from killing sentient beings”:** The primary foundation for Mahayana practitioners is to cultivate great compassion towards all sentient beings, and to consider them as parents in our previous lives or as Buddhas of the future. With such compassionate mind, how can we kill any of them? One cannot personally kill any sentient being, cannot make others to kill either, or even give rise to the thought of killing.

**“completely observe the precepts for their conduct”:** The precepts are classified as precepts for humans and devas, precepts of the two-vehicles, and the Bodhisattva precepts. Here, for the aspirants of rebirth of three grades in the superior rank, they should observe the Bodhisattva precepts.

② “**those who read and recite *Mahāyāna vaipulya sūtras***”: Because of differences in people’s capacities and inclinations, their preferred methods are diverse. The first type of people is capable of cultivating compassion and observing precepts, whereas the second type of people undertake reading and reciting Mahayana teachings to enhance their wisdom. The above two are representatives of the last two of the three pure conducts.

③ “**those who practice the six kinds of mindfulness**”: The six kinds of mindfulness are mindfulness of the Buddha, Dharma, *Sangha*, precepts, generosity and heaven. These are also in accord with the third merit of the three merits.

The mindfulness of Buddha denotes being mindful of Amitabha Buddha’s physical, verbal and mental meritorious virtues. It also indicates that one should also be mindful of other Buddhas in the same way.

The mindfulness of the Dharma denotes being whole-heartedly and exclusively mindful of the Dharmas attained by various Buddhas. These Dharmas are the mother of all the Buddhas of the past, present and future. Although our historical Buddha is not present now, we can still study the doctrines and cultivate in accord with them because the Dharmas promulgated by Buddha are still available.

The mindfulness of the *Sangha* means being mindful of the saintly and sage Bodhisattvas and *śrāvakas* accompanying the Buddha.

The mindfulness of precepts: Precepts are the primary foundation of cultivation and practice; upholding one precept will help us eliminate one type of affliction, and awaken one part of our Buddha-nature.

The mindfulness of generosity is to contemplate the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the past, present and the future. They all perform the difficult to perform and give the difficult to give for immeasurable *kalpas* in their cultivations to attain Buddhahood.

The mindfulness of heaven indicates being mindful of the meritorious virtues of the Bodhisattva to attain Buddhahood in one lifetime residing in the *Tuṣita* heaven.

Finally, the sentence “**By accomplishing these meritorious virtues for a period of one to seven days, they will attain rebirth**” is explicated by Master Shandao as follows:

“It clarifies the period of cultivation: it can be as long as one lifetime or as short as one day, one hour or one thought; or from one thought to ten thoughts, up to one hour, one day or a lifetime. The general meaning is that from the generation of the mind (to cultivate), (one should) continue for the whole life without retrogression, until (rebirth) in the Pure Land. Furthermore, to say ‘accomplishing these meritorious virtues’ signifies that one should cultivate the first two, or the last two, or all the three. If anyone is devoid of any of the three types, the person is an animal in human skin, not human. Moreover, regardless of whether one completely or incompletely accomplishes the three types of practices, by transferring the merits, one will get rebirth.” (正明修行时节延促。上尽一形，下至一日一时一念等。或从一念十念，至一时一日一形。大意者，一发心已后，誓毕此生，无有退转，唯以净土为期。又言“具此功德”者，或一人具上二，或一人具下二，或一人三种兼具。或有人三种无分者，名作著人皮畜生，非名人也。又不问具三不具三，回尽得往生。)

Master Shandao’s annotation tells us:

- 1) Aspirants can achieve the rebirth of upper grade in the superior rank, if they can accomplish either two types or three types of the meritorious virtues, and transfer their merits to Pure Land.
- 2) For the aspirants of rebirth of upper grade in superior rank, they should undertake cultivations continuously till the end of this life without interruption or retreat, from the time of resolve.

### **(3) The Event of Welcoming and Escorting**

The *Sūtra* states, “**When an aspirant is about to be reborn in that land, because he (or she) has made valiantly energetic progress, Amitabha, the Tathāgata, together with Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mahasthamaprapta, innumerable manifested Buddhas, hundreds of thousands of śrāvaka bhikṣus, and innumerable celestial beings, together with a palace composed of the seven treasures, will appear before him (her).**”

The welcoming and escorting event at the end of the life of the practitioner of this grade is most spectacular. Not only do Amitabha Buddha and a great assembly of saintly Bodhisattvas and *bhikṣus* come to welcome the aspirant, but there are also innumerable manifested Buddhas in the assembly. Another unique feature is that they bring a palace of seven treasures along with them.

#### **(4) The Difference in the Flower Pedestals or Flowers**

The Sūtra states, “***Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva, holding a diamond pedestal, together with *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva, will come before this person.**”

The vehicle taking the aspirant of this grade is a pedestal composed of diamonds, which is distinctively superb compared with those of other grades.

#### **(5) The Duration for the Flower to Unfold**

The Sūtra states, “**Upon seeing this, the aspirant rejoices exultantly, seeing himself (herself) seated atop the diamond pedestal. Following the Buddha, he (she) is reborn into that land in an instant of a finger snap.**”

From the text, it indicates that the flower does not close for one reborn of this grade, he (she) will directly follow Amitabha Buddha and his assembly to the Pure Land.

#### **(6) The Progress after Rebirth**

The Sūtra states, “**Once reborn in that land, he sees the Buddha’s body consummated with myriad excellent characteristics and the Bodhisattvas with complete excellent features. The brilliant light and the jewelled forests widely expound the wondrous Dharmas. And having heard them, the reborn one will instantly realise the patience of non-arising of dharmas. Then, in an instant, he will visit and venerate all the Buddhas of the ten directions, and in the presence of each Buddha receive the prophecy (of attaining Buddhahood in the future). He will then return to his own land and acquire innumerable hundreds of thousands of *Dhāraṇī* doors.**” This paragraph contains the following indications:

- ① As soon as the reborn one arrives in the Pure Land, he attains the capability of clearly seeing the reward body of Amitabha Buddha, which can only be seen by Bodhisattvas of the ground stage.
- ② Having heard the exposition of wondrous Mahayana Dharma from the brilliant light and jewelled forest, he instantly realises the patience of non-arising of dharmas, equivalent to the Bodhisattvas of the first ground stage.
- ③ As soon as he arrives in the Pure Land, he automatically acquires all the transcendental powers, so he can visit and venerate all Buddhas in the ten directions, and receive their prophecies to attain Buddhahood.
- ④ On returning from venerating other Buddhas, he will acquire innumerable hundreds of thousands of *Dhāraṇī* doors, which will accelerate the process of accomplishing the Buddha Path dramatically.

From the above discussions, it is evident that as soon as the aspirant of the upper grade in the superior rank achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, he attains the first ground stage of Bodhisattva. If we cultivate the Six *Pāramitās* based entirely on our own effort, it will take one *asaṃkhyeya kalpas* to reach this stage. To cultivate diligently according to the conditions prescribed here for the rest of our life, one can surpass one *asaṃkhyeya kalpas*' arduous practice. How unbelievable and inconceivable it is!

Venerable Da'an in his lecture [5] recounted a real case of rebirth of upper grade in the superior rank from *the Records of Saints and Sages of the Pure Land* [17].

Huaiyu (怀玉), with family name Gao (高), was from Danqiu (the present Ninghai of Zhejiang province). He persistently observed the precepts diligently and completely, living with moral behaviour transcending the mundane world. With only one meal a day at noon, he kept sitting posture with no reclining for the whole day. Due to his assiduous cultivation without rest, lice and fleas abundantly grew in his clothes. He had recited *the Amitabha Sūtra* for three hundred thousand times, and he routinely kept reciting fifty thousand times of Amitabha Buddha's name every day, supported by frequent repentance and paying obeisance to various Buddhas.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of June, in the first year (742 CE) of Tianbao of Xuanzong of Tang Dynasty, he saw the images of the three western saints, as many as the number of sands in the Ganges River, pervaded the whole space. Seeing one man hoisting a silver pedestal, Huaiyu said, “I have been assiduously reciting the Buddha’s name all my life, aspiring to get rebirth of upper grade in the superior rank. Why is it not the gold pedestal to welcome me?” After his words, all the images in the space disappeared. Huaiyu then cultivated even more diligently. One day, he suddenly heard a voice in the sky, saying, “There is already a bright halo around the head of the Dharma master. Please sit in the lotus position with mudra to wait for the Buddha’s receiving and guidance.” Three days later, exotic bright light illuminated the whole room. Huaiyu said, “If there is the smell of exotic fragrance, it indicates that my karmic retribution (that is, my present life) is ending.” He then wrote a stanza, “Pure and clean without any dust or defilement, Upper lotus pedestal is my parents. I have been cultivating the path for ten *kalpas*, manifesting in this *Jambudvīpa* and detesting the various sufferings. Strenuously cultivating for one lifetime surpasses ten *kalpas*, I will depart the *Saha* world eternally and return to the Pure Land.”

After he finished this stanza, exotic wondrous fragrance pervaded space, and innumerable Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and holy assembly filled the ten directions. He also saw Amitabha Buddha, *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva and *Mahasthamaprabhata* Bodhisattva, all with bright purple-golden colour. Together, they held a diamond pedestal to welcome him. Huaiyu then passed away with a smile.

## 2. The Rebirth of Middle Grade in the Superior Rank

### (1) The Nature of the Aspirant

According to Master Shandao, this type of aspirants are Mahayana mundane practitioners with medium virtues.

### (2) The Right Cause: Primary Cultivations

The cultivations can be categorised in three groups:

① “**do not necessarily need to uphold or recite *vaipulya Sūtras***”: It indicates that one may uphold and recite the *vaipulya Sūtras*, or one may not uphold or recite it. It is not definite.



② **“they should have a good understanding of their tenets, and their minds should not be perplexed or shaken by the ultimate truth”**: Although they may not read and recite the Mahayana *Sūtras*, they possess clear and penetrating comprehension of the ultimate tenets of Mahayana doctrines, that is, the tenets of self-emptiness and dharma-emptiness. Furthermore, they have established solid faith in the ultimate truth of emptiness, without any doubt and perplexation. It indicates that although this type of aspirants may not spend a lot of time and effort in studying the Mahayana teachings, they must have planted profound virtuous roots in their previous lives. Therefore, whenever they hear any articles, paragraphs, even sentences or stanzas pertaining to the ultimate truth of the reality, they accurately accept and understand them immediately without any doubt and astonishment. Venerable Da’an proclaims that these people are equivalent to those awakened to the ultimate truth [5]. For example, Master Huineng (惠能), the sixth patriarch of Chan school, had never heard the Diamond *Sūtra* before. However, when he heard someone recite **“one should attach to nothing while generating the mind (the Bodhicitta)”** from the *Sūtra*, he awakened.

③ **“They should profoundly believe the law of cause and effect, and not malign the *Mahāyāna*”**: It denotes that the aspirants have profound belief in both the mundane and supramundane law of cause and effect. At the same time, they never malign the Mahayana teachings. From the law of cause and effect, if one maligns the Mahayana teachings, he (she) will descend to the *Avici* hell to endure torments for countless *kalpas*, then how can he (she) achieve rebirth in the Pure Land? Furthermore, if one maligns the Mahayana teachings, especially the Pure Land doctrines, and he (she) does not believe the inconceivable cause and effect of rebirth, then how can he (she) establish sincere faith and earnest aspiration to get rebirth there? Therefore, when we encounter any Mahayana *Sūtra*, regardless from which school, we should never slander or malign it, whether we can understand it or not. If we find some teachings are not attractive to us, we should contemplate that these teachings are not suitable for our capacity or preference, yet they must be the best for someone else.

Transferring the above three types of merits to aspiration to get rebirth in the Pure Land will lead one to achieve rebirth of middle grade in the superior rank.

### (3) The Event of Welcoming and Escorting

The *Sūtra* states, “**Amitabha Buddha, together with Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mahasthamaprapta, surrounded by an innumerable multitude and retinue, holding a purple-golden pedestal, will come before the person. He praises him (or her) with these words: ‘Dharma disciple, since you practise the Mahāyāna and understand the ultimate truth, I now have come to welcome and receive you.’ With this, Amitabha Buddha and one thousand manifested Buddhas offer their hands all at once.**”

From the above paragraph, it is clear that the number of manifested Buddhas are one thousand, compared with innumerable for those of the upper grade in the superior rank. No palace appears for the aspirants except for the one reborn of upper grade in the superior rank.

### (4) Difference in the Flower Pedestals or Flowers

From the *Sūtra*, it is specified that the holy assembly carries a purple-gold pedestal to welcome and escort the aspirant of this grade.

### (5) The Duration for the Flower to Unfold

The *Sūtra* states, “**This purple-golden pedestal is like a huge jewelled-lotus flower, which opens after one night.**” Different from those of upper grade in the superior rank, the lotus flower of the reborn one of middle grade in the superior rank takes one night to unfold. Please note that all the time intervals in this *Sūtra* refer to the time duration in our human world, not the time interval in the Pure Land. One day and night in the Pure Land is equivalent to one great *kalpa* of our time.

### (6) The Progress after Rebirth

① The practitioner’s body is of the colour of purple-gold, and under his feet are lotus flowers of seven treasures. As promised in his Forty-Eight Vows, Amitabha Buddha ensures that everyone reborn in the Pure Land will be endowed with purple-gold coloured form, and with all the thirty-two excellent characteristics.

- ② The Buddha and the Bodhisattvas all send forth rays of light to illuminate the body of the reborn one, causing his eyes to open, clear and bright.
- ③ Because of habitual practices from his previous lives, he hears various voices exclusively expounding the most profound ultimate truth.
- ④ Descending from the golden pedestal, he pays obeisance to the Buddha with palms pressed together, and he praises the World-Honoured One.
- ⑤ After seven days, he will achieve the non-retrogression on the path to attain *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*. Forthwith, he obtains the five transcendental powers, so he is able to fly to worlds in the ten directions to make offerings and pay homages to the Buddhas, cultivating various *samādhis* in those Buddha's places.
- ⑥ After one small *kalpa*, he will attain the patience of non-arising of dharma, and will receive before Buddhas the prophecy [of attaining Buddhahood]. That is, he will attain the first ground stage of Bodhisattva in a small *kalpa*'s time.

### **3. The Rebirth of Lower Grade in the Superior Rank**

#### **(1) The Nature of the Aspirant**

According to Master Shandao, this type of aspirants are mundane Mahayana practitioners with less virtues.

#### **(2) The Right Cause: Primary Cultivations**

- ① “**may have faith in causality**”: It indicates that the practitioners may believe in the law of cause and effect, or they may not believe in it, or may have a profound belief in it as those aspiring to get rebirth of middle grade in the superior rank. If their belief is not profound, their virtuous mind may repeatedly retreat, causing their unwholesome conducts to be committed repeatedly. If they deeply believe in the sufferings of birth-and-death, they will not repeatedly commit transgressions. And if they have profound faith in the unconditioned bliss of the Pure Land, their virtuous mind will never retreat after being generated. In fact, many contemporary people belong to this category. Due to the current education, which is mainly materialism-orientated, most of us find it hard to establish profound unwavering faith in anything we cannot directly

see, not to mention the law of cause and effect, which usually demonstrates results crossing over many lives.

② **“do not malign the *Mahāyāna*”** : Whether the practitioners believe the law of cause and effect profoundly or not, however, they never malign the Mahayana teachings.

③ **“who mainly activate the mind of unsurpassed path”**: The mind of unsurpassed path is the sublime Bodhicitta. The practitioners detest the sufferings, aspire to achieve rebirth in Pure Land, swiftly fulfil the great compassion and practices of Bodhisattvas, and voluntarily return to the birth-and-death cycle to rescue sentient beings. By activating this Bodhicitta as the main provision, one can achieve rebirth in the Pure Land of lower grade in the superior rank.

### **(3) The Event of Welcoming and Escorting**

The *Sūtra* states, **“When such a person’s life is ending, Amitabha Buddha and his five hundred manifested Buddhas, together with *Avalokiteśvara*, *Mahasthamaprapta*, and other Bodhisattvas, holding a golden lotus flower, will come to welcome this person. The five hundred manifested Buddhas will simultaneously extend their hands, praising, ‘Dharma disciple, since you are purified and have activated the unsurpassed Bodhicitta, we have come to welcome you.’”** From the text, it is clear that the number of manifested Buddhas to welcome the practitioner is reduced to five hundred. The manifested Buddhas and Bodhisattvas stress that the cause of rebirth is the generation of Bodhicitta.

### **(4) Difference in the Flower Pedestals or Flowers**

The receiving accompaniment to receive the aspirant is a golden lotus flower, instead of a pedestal.

### **(5) The Duration for the Flower to Unfold**

According to the *Sūtra*, it takes one day and one night for the lotus flower to unfold.

### **(6) The Progress after Rebirth**

- ① The reborn one will be able to see the Buddha only after seven days, although his lotus flower unfolds after one day and one night.
- ② Although he sees the Buddha's body, the various excellent characteristics are not clear in his mind. Only after twenty-one days will he be able to see them clearly and distinctly. It is amazing that merely after three weeks, the reborn one can see the real reward body of the Buddha.
- ③ He hears various sounds and voices, all expounding the wondrous Dharmas. Then he will travel in the ten directions, making offerings to the Buddhas and listening to profound Dharmas from those Buddhas. It takes the reborn one three weeks to obtain all the transcendental powers.
- ④ After three small *kalpas*, he will realise the clear doors of one hundred dharmas, and abide in the ground of joy (the first ground). It denotes that in three small *kalpas*, the reborn one of lower grade in the superior rank will attain the first ground stage of Bodhisattva. Just imagine what the aspirant has done in his causal ground!

### (7) Some Comments on the Three Grades in the Superior Rank

From the *Sūtra*, it is evident that the aspirants for the rebirth of the three grades in the superior rank are all with profound Mahayana virtuous roots planted in their previous lives. Based on the three types of minds of utmost sincerity, profound faith and aspiring mind by transferring merits as their proper causes, they cultivate the three merits as provisions, especially the activation of Bodhicitta, to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. They are ensured to succeed in getting rebirth of grades in the superior rank. These practitioners are encompassed in the objects of the nineteenth vow in the Forty-Eight Great Vows. **“When I attain Buddhahood, if sentient beings in the lands of the ten directions, who activate the Bodhicitta, cultivate various meritorious virtues, and desire to be born in my land with utmost sincere aspiration should not, at their death, see me appearing before them surrounded by a great assembly, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.”**

Having cultivated in accord with the conditions enumerated in the three grades in the superior rank till the end of their life, all of them will be welcomed and escorted by a magnificent assembly of Amitabha Buddha and Bodhisattvas.

However, there are four main differences to distinguish their specific grades in the superior rank.

- ① The number of Manifested Buddhas are different: the upper grade with innumerable, the middle grade with one thousand and the lower grade with five hundred.
- ② The flower and pedestals are different: the upper grade with diamond pedestal, the middle grade with purple-gold pedestal, and the lower grade only with golden flower without pedestal.
- ③ The duration for the flower to unfold is different: the upper grade with no duration, the middle grade takes one night, and the lower grade takes one day and one night.
- ④ The period taken to attain the first ground stage of Bodhisattva is different: the upper grade ones attain the stage as soon as they arrive in the Pure Land, the middle grade ones take one small *kalpa* and the lower grade ones take three small *kalpas* to attain the stage.

Considering the incredible benefits acquired by rebirth in the superior rank, practitioners treading the Buddha Path should aspire to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land at the superior rank first, so as to accelerate the process of accomplishment. We should generate the sublime Bodhicitta, accept and observe the Bodhisattva precepts, comprehensively study the Mahayana teachings, especially the Pure Land teachings, try to advise and persuade others to learn and practise the Pure Land methods, as well as profoundly believe in the law of cause and effect.

## **4. The Rebirth of Upper Grade in the Medium Rank**

### **(1) The Nature of the Aspirant**

According to Master Shandao, this type are two-vehicle-root mundane beings with superior virtues. They are inclined to cultivate the two-vehicle Dharmas.

### **(2) The Right Cause: Primary Cultivations**

The *Sūtra* states, “**accept and abide by the five precepts, observe the eight precepts completely, and cultivate practices of various precepts, free from**

**committing the five heinous acts or various other transgressions.”** It is clear that the primary cause for these people to be reborn in the upper grade of the medium rank is to refrain from causing harm to other beings by taking and observing various precepts completely. If they are home dwellers, they take the five precepts or frequently the eight precepts. For those monastics, they accept and observe the *bhikṣus*, *bhikṣuṇīs*, or *śrāmaṇeras* precepts without any transgression. It does not emphasise the virtuous conducts, such as generosity.

### **(3) The Event of Welcoming and Escorting**

The *Sūtra* states, **“Amitabha Buddha, surrounded by *bhikṣus*, and his retinue, will radiate golden light as he comes to this person. The Buddha will expound the teachings on suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and non-self, praise renunciation of household life and liberation from various sufferings.”** Because the aspirant is fond of cultivating self-emancipation practices, it induces the welcoming assembly to manifest in *bhikṣus* form, without Bodhisattvas. Pursuant to his (her) inclination and capacity, Amitabha Buddha expounds the teachings of the two-vehicles to him (her).

### **(4) Difference in the Flower Pedestals or Flowers**

For this grade, the difference in the flower or pedestal is not emphasised.

### **(5) The Duration for the Flower to Unfold**

It is incredible that the lotus flower of the reborn one of upper grade in the medium rank unfolds immediately as he arrives in the Pure Land. This reveals to us an important information: the magnificence of the welcoming assembly and the splendour of the pedestal as well as the time to attain the ground stage of Bodhisattva are determined by Bodhicitta and Mahayana practices. However, the time duration for the lotus flower to unfold is mainly determined by one's observation of precepts and one's conducts. Hence, the meritorious virtues of upholding precepts are inconceivable.

### **(6) The Progress after Rebirth**

The reborn one will immediately acquire the following benefits:

① He will hear various sounds praising the Four Noble Truths, and he will instantly attain *Arhatship*. That is, as soon as he hears the Four Noble Truths in

the Pure Land, he instantly eradicates all the afflictions of both insight and cultivation.

② Achieving the three clarities: the clarity of past lives, the clarity of celestial eye and the clarity of non-outflow. These are the wisdoms obtained by Arhats. The clarity of past lives denotes that one knows the past lives and their causes and conditions effecting each life of oneself and others. The clarity of celestial eyes indicates that one clearly knows the future lives and their causes and conditions effecting each life of oneself and others. The clarity of non-outflow signifies that one has completely eradicated the afflictions of insight and cultivation.

③ The six transcendental powers: It comprises the five transcendental powers and non-outflow.

④ The eight emancipations: The definitions of the eight emancipations or liberations are different in Tiantai school [18], Consciousness-Only school [19], and Theravada school. Since it is obtained by Arhats in this context, we adopt the Theravada definition [20].

**“Whilst remaining in the fine-material sphere, one perceives corporeal forms: this is the first liberation. Not one perceiving corporeal forms on one’s own person, one perceives corporeal forms externally: this is the second liberation. By thinking of the beautiful, one is filled with confidence: this is the third liberation. Through the total overcoming of the corporeality-perceptions, the vanishing of the reflex-perceptions and the non-attention to the multiformity-perceptions, the idea ‘Unbounded is space’, one reaches the ‘Sphere of Unbounded Space’ and abides therein: this is the fourth liberation. Through the total overcoming of the sphere of unbounded space, and with the idea ‘Unbounded is consciousness’, one reaches the ‘Sphere of Unbounded consciousness’ and abides therein: this is the fifth liberation. Through the total overcoming of the sphere of unbounded consciousness and with the idea of ‘Nothingness is there’, one reaches the ‘Sphere of nothingness’ and abides therein: this is the sixth liberation. Through the total overcoming of the ‘Sphere of nothingness’, one reaches the ‘Sphere of neither-Perception-Nor-Non-Perception’ and abides therein: this is the**



**seventh liberation. Through the total overcoming of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, one reaches the Extinction of perception and Feeling: this is the eight liberation.”**

The definition is quite difficult to understand. Its main meaning can be summarised as follows: The first liberation is obtained by the contemplation of impurity of the bodies of oneself and others, to eliminate the greed and lust of bodies. It is realised at the first *Dhyāna* of the form sphere. The second liberation is obtained by further contemplation of impurity to solidify the result of the first liberation, and it is realised at the second *Dhyāna* of the form sphere. The third liberation is obtained by merely contemplating the bright images in concentration, because the meditator has completely eliminated the greed afflictions pertaining to the desire sphere. It is realised at the fourth *Dhyāna* of the form sphere. The next four liberations are obtained based on contemplations of the four formless spheres. And the final eighth liberation is truly the liberation from the three spheres by eliminating all the afflictions of insight and cultivation.

## **5. The Rebirth of Middle Grade in the Medium Rank**

### **(1) The Nature of the Aspirant**

According to Master Shandao, this type of practitioners are two-vehicle-root mundane beings with lesser virtues. Although they are inclined to self-liberation, they do not cultivate diligently like those of rebirth of upper grade in the medium rank.

### **(2) The Right Cause: Primary Cultivations**

The merits of this type of aspirants are merely “**receive and observe for one day and one night the eight precepts completely, or the *śrāmaṇera* precepts, or the complete monastic precepts, with no flaw in their dignified conduct**”. These precepts do not include the five precepts, because they are usually taken and upheld for the rest of one’s life. The practitioners can take either type of the three kinds of precepts: the eight precepts, *śrāmaṇera* precepts, or the complete monastic precepts. However, whatever precepts they take and observe for one day and one night, they should completely and scrupulously observe them without trivial violation. Even the least transgressions are

considered as gravest transgressions. Their physical, verbal and mental behaviour or manner should be conducted in dignified posture or attitude.

### **(3) The Event of Welcoming and Escorting**

When the aspirant approaches the end of his (her) life, he (she) will see Amitabha Buddha, together with his retinue, radiating golden light. The person only hears a voice in the sky instead of seeing Amitabha Buddha, praising, **‘Good man, because you are a virtuous man, who follows the teachings of Buddhas of the past, present, and future, I have come to welcome you.’**

### **(4) Difference in the Flower Pedestals or Flowers**

The receiving and welcoming lotus flower is composed of seven treasures.

### **(5) The Duration for the Flower to Unfold**

The flower will unfold after seven days when the reborn one arrives in the Pure Land.

### **(6) The Progress after Rebirth**

- ① After the flower opens, he will open his eyes, join his palms, and praise the World-Honoured One.
- ② On hearing the Dharmas, he will be delighted and become a *Srotāpanna* [Stream-Enterer]. He abolishes the affliction of insight in seven days after he gets rebirth.
- ③ After half a [small] *kalpa*, he will become an Arhat. It takes merely half a small *kalpa* for the reborn one of middle grade in the medium rank to eradicate all the afflictions of insight and cultivation. It is unimaginable that all the merits the aspirant dedicated to the aspiration of rebirth in the Pure Land is attained by merely taking and observing the eight precepts or the monastic precepts perfectly for one day and night, which can be done by any normal person. It reveals to us how abundant the meritorious merits are by taking and observing precepts and how inconceivable the result of Amitabha Buddha’s empowerment is.

## **6. The Rebirth of Lower Grade in the Medium Rank**

### **(1) The Nature of the Aspirant**

According to Master Shandao, this type of people are mundane beings with worldly virtues and superior merits. These people are non-Buddhist adherents. Neither have they ever heard or learned Buddhist teachings in their lifetime, nor do they have any aspiration for liberation. However, they respect and observe the moral ethic social customs, are filial to their parents, and are inclined to participate in donations and other philanthropic activities, etc.

### **(2) The Right Cause**

For this grade, the aspirants are non-Buddhist practitioners, hence the right causes are not categorised as primary cultivations. Their right cause to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land are their faith and aspiration to get reborn there as soon as they hear about it, because of their virtuous roots planted in their previous lives. Their merits are merely dedicating their worldly virtuous conducts to the Pure Land or through recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name.

For the aspirant of rebirth of lower grade in the medium ranks, the causes and conditions are:

- ① They filially support their parents and are beneficent to others.
- ② As life approaches its end, the fortunate ones encounter a virtuous learned friend who will extensively expound the blissful features in Amitabha Buddha's land as well as Amitabha Buddha's Forty-Eight Great Vows.

After hearing these introductions, the person dies. It implies that the dying person has established sincere faith and the earnest aspiration to get rebirth in the Pure Land.

### **(3) The Event of Welcoming and Escorting**

Here the *Sūtra* does not mention any welcoming and escorting assembly for the reborn ones of the lower grade in the medium rank. According to the explication of Ven Daoyuan [9], there is definitely an assembly to welcome and escort the aspirants to get to the Pure Land, otherwise, they cannot arrive there by themselves. He also pointed out that even the aspirants of the three grades in the inferior rank are welcomed and escorted by the assembly from Pure Land,

therefore the welcoming and escorting assembly for this lower grade in the medium rank cannot be neglected.

#### **(4) Difference in the Flower Pedestals or Flowers**

The feature of the lotus flower is not described in the text.

#### **(5) Duration for the Flower to Unfold**

The *Sūtra* states, “**Seven days after the rebirth, he will encounter Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mahasthamaprapta.**” This implies that the lotus flower will unfold after seven days, the same as the reborn ones of middle grade in the medium rank.

#### **(6) The Progress after Rebirth**

① Having heard the Dharma from the Bodhisattvas, he will be delighted and become a *Srotāpanna*.

② After one small *kalpa*, he will attain *Arhatship*.

The *Sūtra* does not mention the time taken for the reborn ones to attain the first ground stage of Bodhisattva.

### **7. The Rebirth of Upper Grade in the Inferior Rank**

Master Shandao declared that all the people of rebirth of the three grades in the inferior rank are devoid of either virtuous roots of Buddha Dharma or the worldly virtuous roots. They are dominated by inclination to conduct evil acts.

#### **(1) The Nature of the Aspirant**

According to Master Shandao, this type of people are mundane beings who commit lesser grave transgressions of the ten unwholesome acts.

#### **(2) The Evil Conducts Committed by the Aspirants**

① These people are characterised by habitually conducting various unwholesome acts.

② When they commit these transgressions, they are devoid of remorse or shame. From the doctrines of Consciousness-Only, the evil karma will be

mitigated if one feels repentant or remorse prior to, during, or after the evil conduct. These habitual unwholesome conducts will drive the perpetrator to the three woeful realms after this life.

③ They have not committed the five heinous acts, nor have they ever maligned the Mahayana teachings.

### (3) The Right Cause

When such a person's life is ending, he (she) encounters a virtuous learned friend, who gives the following advice, which alters the path of the perpetrator completely.

① The friend pronounces the titles of *Mahāyāna Sūtras* in the twelve divisions. By hearing the titles of such *Sūtras*, his (her) gravest evil karmas of 1,000 *kalpas* will be eliminated.

② The wise friend will also teach him (her) to join his (her) palms and to recite 'Namo Amitabha Buddha.' By reciting Amitabha Buddha's name, his (her) evil karmas entailing 50 *koṭi kalpas* of birth-and-death will all be eradicated.

One may wonder why hearing the titles of the *Sūtras* of the twelve divisions only eliminate gravest evil karmas of 1,000 *kalpas*, whereas by reciting the Buddha's name once, one can eliminate evil karmas entailing 50 *koṭi kalpas* of birth-and-death. Master Shandao clearly answered, "The perpetrator has heavy impediments, and oppression from suffer and death. Although the virtuous friend speaks many *Sūtras*, the receiving mind is scattered and floating, so its effect in eliminating evil karmas is lesser. However, the Buddha name is single, which can gather the scattered mind to become preoccupied. Hence, (the friend) teaches and encourages the perpetrator to mindfully recite the Buddha's name. Because of the weighty (whole-hearted) mind, one can eradicate evil karmas of more *kalpas*." (造罪之人障重，加以死苦来逼。善人虽说多经，餐受之心浮散。由心散故，除罪稍轻。又佛名是一，即能摄散以住心。复教令正念称名，由心重故，即能除罪多劫也。) Other patriarchs and contemporary Dharma masters elaborated on this from other perspective, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

### (4) The Event of Welcoming and Escorting

The *Sūtra* states, “Thereupon, Buddha will immediately send manifested Buddhas and manifested Bodhisattvas *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahasthama-prapta* to come before this person, praising, ‘Good man, your evil karmas are eliminated because you recite the name of the Buddha. I have come to welcome you.’ After these words have been said, the practitioner immediately sees the radiance of manifested Buddhas entirely filling his room. Having beheld this scene, he (she) is delighted and then dies.”

① Only the manifested Buddhas and Bodhisattvas come to welcome and escort the aspirant. Without Mahayana cultivations, it is impossible for the aspirant to see the reward body of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

② The Buddha only emphasised that the perpetrators’ evil karmas are eliminated because of his (her) recitations of the Buddha’s name, without mentioning the hearing of titles of the *Sūtras* of the twelve divisions. Master Shandao further elaborated on this phenomenon, “It clarifies that the voice of manifested Buddha merely states the merits of Buddha-name-recitation as the cause of Buddha to welcome the aspirant rather than the hearing of *Sūtras*. Hence, according to the vows and intentions of the Buddha, he only advises us to mindfully recite the Buddha’s name so as to swiftly achieve rebirth, rather than performing mixed scattered conducts. Everywhere in this *Sūtra* and in others, the Buddha extensively praises and encourages us to recite the Buddha’s name, in order to acquire essential benefits. We should take note of this.” (但述称佛之功，我来迎汝，不论闻经之事。然望佛愿意者，唯劝正念称名，往生义疾，不同杂散之业。如此经及诸部中，处处广叹，劝令称名，将为要益也。应知。)

### **(5) Difference in the Flower Pedestals or Flowers**

The aspirant rides a jewelled lotus flower to get reborn in the treasured lake in the Pure Land.

### **(6) Duration for the Flower to Unfold**

The flower will unfold after forty-nine days.

### **(7) The Progress after Rebirth**

① When the flower unfolds, the great compassionate *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva, and *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva, will send forth great rays of light, stand before the aspirant, and expound the profound *Sūtras* of the twelve divisions. According to Buddhism, nothing is beyond the law of cause and effect. Due to the virtuous roots planted in previous lives, the wicked aspirant fortunately encounters a virtuous learned friend, who teaches the person the titles of the *Sūtras* of twelve divisions. Because of hearing the titles of Mahayana *Sūtras* on the verge of one's death, the reborn one first sees *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva, and *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva, who expound the *Sūtras* of twelve divisions, as the lotus flower opens.

② Upon hearing these teachings, with faith and comprehension, he activates the unsurpassed Bodhicitta. It is evident that all the aspirants of rebirth of medium rank and inferior rank have not activated their Bodhicitta prior to their rebirth.

③ After ten small *kalpas*, he will realise the clear door of the one hundred dharmas, and attain the first ground stage of Bodhisattvas.

It is worth noticing that the reborn ones in the medium ranks all attain Arhatship first, whereas the reborn ones of this grade directly activate the Bodhicitta and attain the Mahayana Bodhisattva stage directly, circumventing the *śrāvaka* fruition. Furthermore, such a habitual wicked person without any cultivation in this lifetime can attain the first ground stage of Bodhisattva, different from the reborn ones of lower grade in the superior rank only by seven small *kalpas*. Therefore, these perpetrators of evil conducts belong to the category of “**strong virtuous roots but with heavy afflictions**”.

Master Zhizhe of the Tiantai school categorised all sentient beings into four types:

The first type is “**strong roots with weak affliction**”: This type of people is endowed with strong virtuous roots, but their afflictions are weak. For instance, *Śāriputra* and *Mahāmaudgalyāyana*, the two prominent disciples of *Śākyamuni* Buddha belonged to this type. They originally followed heretical practices, but they attained their Arhat fruition within seven days after they converted to follow the Buddha. Their wisdom, or virtuous roots are extremely strong, while their afflictions are relatively weak.

The second type is “**strong roots with heavy afflictions**”: This type of people planted strong virtuous roots in previous lives, but their afflictions are also very heavy. In vicious environment, they are inclined to commit various evil acts; conversely, they are filled with Dharma bliss on hearing Buddhist teachings and easily establish faith.

The third type is “**less roots with weak afflictions**”: This type of people had not planted strong virtuous roots in previous lives, hence it is usually very hard for them to feel delight or establish faith when hearing Buddhist teachings. However, these people are endowed with high moral ethic attitude and self-discipline, and are inclined to help others.

The fourth type is “**less roots with heavy afflictions**”: This type of people are the worst. Not only are they unable to feel delight or to establish faith when hearing Buddhist Dharmas, but also are dominated by evil views and vicious habit, driving them to commit all sorts of unwholesome conducts. Furthermore, they usually malign the Buddhist doctrines when encountering them. These beings are frequent residents of the three woeful realms, only rarely visiting the human path.

It is evident that the aspirants of this grade belong to the second type of people, who must have cultivated the Mahayana practices or studied the Mahayana doctrines in many of their previous lives. We should not disdain them.

## **8. The Rebirth of Middle Grade in the Inferior Rank**

### **(1) The Nature of the Aspirant**

According to Master Shandao, this type of aspirants are mundane beings who violate the precepts with lesser evil conducts.

### **(2) The Evil Conducts Committed by the Aspirant**

① They violate the five precepts, the eight precepts, or the monastic precepts. This indicates that these aspirants used to be or are still Buddhist adherents, and are different from the above two types, who only hear the Buddhist teachings and Pure Land at the end of their lives. However, due to their heavy afflictions and vicious environment, they cannot help but violate the precepts they received and commit the following transgressions.



- ② Such deluded people steal the property of the *Saṅgha*, take the personal belongings of other monks.
- ③ They preach the Dharma with impure intent, such as for the purpose to gain material offerings or fame, or for competing with others, etc.
- ④ They feel no shame or remorse.
- ⑤ They adorn themselves with myriad evil karmas, because of their habitual violations of precepts and evil conducts.

These perpetrators, because of their evil karmas, should descend to hell. When such a person's life is ending, the various fires of hell will simultaneously arrive at once. The law of cause and effect never fails.

### **(3) The Right Cause**

The perpetrator encounters a virtuous learned friend who, with great compassion, praises and explains the majestic virtues and the ten powers of Amitabha Buddha. This friend extensively praises the brilliance and transcendental powers of the Buddha, and praises the precepts, concentration, wisdom, emancipation, and insight of emancipation as well. After the dying person has heard these instructions, his (her) evil karmas entailing 80 *koṭi kalpas* of birth-and-death will all be eliminated.

### **(4) The Event of Welcoming and Escorting**

Having eliminated evil karmas entailing birth-and-death by hearing the virtuous instructions, the aspirant sees the raging fires of hell being transformed into cool breeze, which blows celestial flowers down from the sky. Seated on these flowers are manifested Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who have come to welcome and receive this person.

### **(5) Difference in the Flower Pedestals or Flowers**

The *Sūtra* does not describe the feature of the lotus flower, only mentions the lake of seven treasures.

### **(6) Duration for the Flower to Unfold**

The lotus flower will open after six *kalpas*.

### **(7) The Progress after Rebirth**

- ① After the lotus flower opens, the reborn one will see Bodhisattvas *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahasthamaprapta*, who comfort this person with their Brahma voices.
- ② They will expound to him the profound *Mahāyāna Sūtras*.
- ③ Having heard the Dharmas, he will immediately activate the unsurpassed Bodhicitta.

The *Sūtra* does not specify the time duration needed for the reborn ones of the last two grades to attain the first ground stage of Bodhisattva.

## **9. The Rebirth of Lower Grade in the Inferior Rank**

### **(1) The Nature of the Aspirant**

According to Master Shandao, this type of people are the perpetrators who commit the gravest evil transgressions including the five heinous acts.

### **(2) The Evil Conducts Committed by the Aspirant**

They have conducted various unwholesome acts, such as the five heinous acts and ten unwholesome acts, as well as all sorts of evil acts.

Because of their evil karmas, these foolish people should descend to the woeful paths to suffer endless torments for many *kalpas*.

### **(3) The Right Cause**

- ① When such a foolish person's life is about to end, this person meets a virtuous learned teacher who provides various kinds of comfort, expounds the wondrous Dharmas, and urges mindfulness of the Buddha. This indicates that the virtuous friend encourages the perpetrator to contemplate the meritorious virtues of Amitabha Buddha, or the image of the Buddha in accord with the *Sūtra*.
- ② When that person is tormented and suffered too severely to be mindful of the Buddha, the virtuous friend says, 'If you are unable to be mindful of the Buddha, you should recite the name of the Buddha of Immeasurable Lifespan.'

(The dying person) then recites completely ten times, with utmost sincerity and uninterrupted voice, ‘Namo Amitabha Buddha.’ With each mindful recitation of the Buddha’s name, the evil karmas entailing 80 *koṭi kalpas* of birth-and-death are eliminated.

#### **(4) The Event of Welcoming and Escorting**

The *Sūtra* does not specify the welcoming assembly.

#### **(5) Difference in the Flower Pedestals or Flowers**

A sun-like golden lotus flower comes to receive the aspirant.

#### **(6) Duration for the Flower to Unfold**

The lotus flower will open after twelve great *kalpas*.

#### **(7) The Progress after Rebirth**

① When the flower unfolds, *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahasthamaprapta*, with voices of great compassion, will expound to him the true reality of all dharmas and the dharmas for eradicating evil karmas.

② Having heard the teachings, he will be delighted and immediately activate the Bodhicitta.

In the eighteenth vow of Amitabha Buddha, it specifies that those who commit the five heinous acts and malign the right Dharma are excluded from achieving rebirth. Why is that, in this *Sūtra*, the perpetrators with the five heinous acts can still get rebirth with the lower grade in the inferior rank? Master Shaodao answered, “This should be comprehended in the perspective of prohibition and protection. In the scriptures of the Forty-Eight Vows, those who commit the five heinous acts and malign the right Dharma are excluded. These two types of evil conducts result in extremely heavy obstruction. Those committing these acts will directly descend to *Avici* hell, enduring incessantly various torments for innumerable *kalpas*, without condition to escape. Therefore, out of worry that anyone would commit these two types of conducts, the *Tathagata* skilfully stipulated the prohibitive statement that they cannot get rebirth. It does not mean that Amitabha Buddha would reject them. (此义仰就抑止门中解。如四十八愿中，除谤法五逆者。然此之二业，其障极

重。众生若造，直入阿鼻。历劫周樟，无由可出。但如来恐其造斯二过，方便止言，不得往生，亦不是不摄也。）

“Furthermore, in the text of rebirth of lower grade in the inferior rank, the perpetrators of the five heinous acts are encompassed, yet excluding those who malign (Buddhist) teachings. That is, (the Buddha) does not abandon those who committed the five heinous acts and would have to revolve in the birth-and-death cycle, so he gathers them to get rebirth out of his great compassion. (又下品下生中，取五逆除谤法者，其五逆已作，不可舍令流转，还发大悲摄取往生。)

“As for those who have not committed maligning the right Dharma, the prohibitive statement that those who malign the right Dharma cannot get rebirth is stipulated. However, this is to be comprehended based on the condition of having not committed it; if committed, they still can get rebirth. (然谤法之罪未为，又止言若起谤法，即不得生。此就未造业而解也。若造，还摄得生。)

“Although they can get rebirth there, they will be closed in the flower for *kalpas*. These perpetrators will have three kinds of impediments while staying in the flower: the first is that they cannot see the Buddha and the saintly assembly; the second is that they cannot hear the right teachings; and the third is that they cannot visit other Buddha-lands to make offerings to other Buddhas. Except these, there are no more other sufferings. The *Sūtra* says it is similar to the pleasure enjoyed by *bhikṣus* who enter the third *Dhyana*. This should be noted.” (虽得生彼，华合经于多劫。此等罪人在华内时，有三种障：一者不得见佛及诸圣众；二者不得听闻正法；三者不得历事供养。除此已外，更无诸苦。经云犹如比丘入三禅之乐也。应知。)

Master Shandao clarified the above points to us out of his great compassion to advise and persuade each one of us to aspire to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, no matter what we have done before. However, we should not misinterpret his kindness. We should absolutely not take for granted that we will be ensured to achieve rebirth as long as we can recite ten times of Buddha's name at the end of our life, even if we have committed heinous acts and any sort of evil conducts.

First of all, the assumption of gathering the perpetrators to get rebirth pertain mainly to those who have not heard the Buddhist teachings in their life, not to those who have learned the teachings yet deliberately ignore the precepts, etc. Those who committed various unwholesome conducts out of ignorance of right Dharmas must have planted abundant virtuous roots in their previous lives, so that they can encounter a virtuous friend and they decidedly believe in the Dharmas as soon as they hear them.

Secondly, our thoughts have the characteristic of homogeneous flux, we cannot suddenly turn our insincere mind indulged in afflictions and evil habitual acts into a sincere faithful mind earnestly aspiring to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land.

Thirdly, the severe evil karmas we conducted in this life will have enormous impact on our consciousness on the verge of death. They will form the projecting karma to directly drive us to the three woeful realms if not devotedly and effectively repented. Repeated evil conducts without shame and remorse are outrageous demonstration of non-repentance, with each evil conduct exacerbating the weight of the evil karma. How can one expect to generate sincere repentance at the end of life when the consciousness is weak or even at a confused state.

## **10. Summary of the Rebirth of the Nine Grades**

Table 3.1 to 3.3 summarise the main attributes of rebirth of nine grades. From the study of *the Contemplation Sūtra*, especially having clearly comprehended the annotations of the *Sūtra* by Master Shandao, we should establish enormous confidence in achieving rebirth in the Pure Land. It is evident that no beings, from aspiring Bodhisattvas to the most wicked people who committed the five heinous acts, is disqualified from practising the Pure Land method. Unlike other schools, where the practitioners usually cultivate the same practice, the aspirants of Pure Land can cultivate any virtuous methods according to their capacities and inclinations, as long as they have sincere faith and earnest aspiration.

Those endowed with wisdom and compassion, should generate the unsurpassed Bodhicitta, cultivate various meritorious virtues, especially try to help and encourage others to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land, and dedicate all their merits to the Pure Land. This type of people are the candidates for rebirth in the

superior rank. Being a Buddhist disciple or follower, everyone should take the three refuges and try to receive precepts and observe them completely, even for one day and one night. The sublime meritorious virtues of upholding the precepts will enable one to get rebirth in the medium rank. However, according to Master Shandao's annotation, the most recommended practice is the mindful recitation of Buddha's name, which is the most effective method. Therefore, no matter what cultivations we undertake, we should combine them with the mindful recitation of Buddha's name practice. There is no conflict between cultivating other merits and Buddha-name recitation.

Another revelation of the last four types of rebirths is that hearing the Pure Land and the method of Buddha-name recitation at the end of one's life is extremely beneficial to those who have never learned or practised Buddhism in their lifetime. Whether they have accumulated merits for a better future life or have committed heinous acts to descend to the woeful realms, they will terminate eternally the transmigration in birth-and-death. Moreover, they will accomplish their Buddha path in the next life, surpassing innumerable *kalpas* of cultivation based on self-power alone.

On the other hand, this also reveal to us that we should try to instruct those on the verge of death about the Pure Land and Buddha name recitation, persuade and encourage them to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land. This act is of tremendous significance, which is carried out by many Pure Land practitioners as the caring at approaching end of life. This practice is especially advocated by Master Yinguang, the thirteenth patriarch, see Chapter 5.

Tab 3.1 Summary of the Rebirth in the Superior Rank

|                                      | Upper grade                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Middle Grade                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Lower Grade                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The nature of the aspirant           | <b>Mahayana practitioner with superior virtues</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <b>Mahayana practitioner with medium virtues</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>Mahayana practitioner with less virtues</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| The right cause                      | Cultivates three types of minds, three merits and six types of mindfulness completely                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Cultivates three types of minds, three merits and six types of mindfulness, less completely                                                                                                                                                                                  | Cultivates three types of minds, activates the Bodhicitta                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| The event of welcoming and escorting | Amitabha Buddha, <i>Avalokiteśvara</i> Bodhisattva, <i>Mahasthamaprapta</i> Bodhisattva, multitude of <i>śrāvakas</i> and innumerable manifested Buddhas assembly; palace of seven treasures                                                                                                                               | Amitabha Buddha, <i>Avalokiteśvara</i> Bodhisattva, <i>Mahasthamaprapta</i> Bodhisattva, and one thousand manifested Buddhas assembly;                                                                                                                                       | Amitabha Buddha, <i>Avalokiteśvara</i> Bodhisattva, <i>Mahasthamaprapta</i> Bodhisattva, and five hundred manifested Buddhas assembly;                                                                                                                                          |
| The difference in flower pedestals   | <b>Diamond pedestal</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Purple-gold pedestal</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>Golden lotus flower</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| The Duration for Flower to unfold    | <b>Not closed</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Single night</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Single day and night</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| The progress after rebirth           | ① Sees the body of the Buddha replete with excellent features and hears teachings of the ultimate truth;<br>② obtains the patience of non-arising, immediately attain the first ground stage;<br>③ acquires all transcendental powers and visits Buddhas, accepting prophecies;<br>④ acquires myriad <i>Dhāraṇī</i> doors. | ① Born with gold body, hears teachings of ultimate truth;<br>② after seven days, achieves non-retrogression and five transcendental powers to revere other Buddhas;<br>③ after one small <i>kalpe</i> , obtains the patience of non-arising, attains the first ground stage. | ① After seven days, sees the Buddha;<br>② after 21 days, sees the reward body of the Buddha;<br>③ hears Mahayana teachings and pays homage to other Buddhas;<br>④ after three small <i>kalpas</i> , achieves clear door of one hundred dharmas, attains the first ground stage. |

Tab 3.2 Summary of the Rebirth in the Medium Rank

|                                       | Upper Grade                                                                                                                                                                  | Middle Grade                                                                                                                                                                        | Lower Grade                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The nature of the aspirant            | <b>Two-vehicle root with superior virtues</b>                                                                                                                                | <b>Two-vehicle root with less virtues</b>                                                                                                                                           | <b>Non-Buddhist people with moral and merits</b>                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| The right cause                       | ① completely takes and observes precepts, such as the five precepts, eight precepts, and other precepts;<br>② does not commit the five heinous acts and other transgressions | ① Perfectly observes precepts, such as the eight precepts or monastic precepts for one day and night;<br>② non-violation in dignified conducts.                                     | ① filially supports parents and is beneficent to others in one's lifetime;<br>② heard of Pure Land and the Forty-Eight Great Vows at the end of life.                                                                                   |
| The event of welcoming and escorting  | ① Amitabha Buddha with assembly of <i>bhikṣus</i> ;<br>② the Buddha expounds <i>śrāvaka</i> s teachings.                                                                     | ① Amitabha Buddha and his retinue;<br>② hears voice praising his meritorious virtues in observing precepts.                                                                         | No welcoming assembly mentioned in the <i>Sūtra</i> .                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| The difference in flower or pedestals | Lotus flower pedestal                                                                                                                                                        | Lotus flower of seven treasures                                                                                                                                                     | Not specified.                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| The Duration for Flower to unfold     | The flower unfolds immediately                                                                                                                                               | After seven days, the flower will unfold.                                                                                                                                           | After seven days, the flower will unfold.                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| The progress after rebirth            | ① On hearing the Four Noble Truths, instantly attains <i>Arhatship</i> ;<br>② Acquires three clarities, the six transcendental powers and the eight liberations.             | ① After the flower opens, praises the Buddha, and delight in hearing Dharma;<br>② attains <i>Srotāpannaship</i> ;<br>③ after half a small <i>kalpa</i> , attains <i>Arhatship</i> . | ① After the flower opens, hears the Dharma from <i>Avalokiteśvara</i> Bodhisattva, <i>Mahasthamaprapta</i> Bodhisattva, feels delighted and become a <i>Srotāpanna</i> .<br>② After one small <i>kalpa</i> , attains <i>Arhatship</i> . |



Tab 3.3 Summary of the Rebirth in the Inferior Rank

|                                      | Upper Grade                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Middle Grade                                                                                                                                                                                          | Lower Grade                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The nature of the aspirant           | Immoral people with lesser grave transgressions                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Immoral people violating precepts and committing less transgressions                                                                                                                                  | Immoral people committing grave transgressions, conducting the five heinous acts.                                                                                                              |
| Unwholesome Conducts                 | ① Habitually conducts unwholesome acts;<br>② without shame and remorse;<br>③ without committing the five heinous acts;<br>④ do not malign right teachings.                                                                                                   | ① Violates all precepts received;<br>② steals properties of the <i>Saṅgha</i> ;<br>③ preaches Dharma with impure intentions;<br>④ without shame and remorse;<br>⑤ adorns themselves with evil karmas. | Commits all sorts of evil conducts, including the five heinous acts.                                                                                                                           |
| The right cause                      | At the end of life, hears virtuous friend telling the titles of Mahayana <i>Sūtras</i> , and is encouraged to recite “Namo Amitabha Buddha”, establishes faith and aspiration, mindfully recites the Buddha’s name.                                          | ① At the end of life, the perpetrator sees hell fire;<br>② virtuous friend praises the majestic virtues and the powers of Amitabha Buddha, and the Dharmas.                                           | ① At the end of life, hears virtuous friend teaching the wondrous Dharmas, and encouraging to be mindful of the Buddha, and to recite the Buddha’s name.<br>② mindfully recites Buddha’s name. |
| The event of welcoming and escorting | Manifested Buddhas and Bodhisattvas come to welcome and escort the aspirant.                                                                                                                                                                                 | ① Fire of hell transforms to cool breeze;<br>② Manifested Buddhas and Bodhisattvas come to welcome and escort the aspirant.                                                                           | Not specified.                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| The difference in flower             | Jewelled lotus flower                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Not specified                                                                                                                                                                                         | A sun-like golden lotus flower                                                                                                                                                                 |
| The Duration for Flower to unfold    | After forty-nine days, the flower will unfold.                                                                                                                                                                                                               | After six <i>kalpas</i> , the flower will unfold.                                                                                                                                                     | After twelve great <i>kalpas</i> , the flower will unfold.                                                                                                                                     |
| The progress after rebirth           | ① After the flower opens, hears <i>Avalokiteśvara</i> Bodhisattva, and <i>Mahasthamaprapta</i> Bodhisattva expounding <i>Sūtras</i> of the twelve divisions.<br>② Activates the Bodhicitta;<br>③ After ten small <i>kalpas</i> , attains first ground stage. | ① After the lotus flower opens, sees Bodhisattvas <i>Avalokiteśvara</i> and <i>Mahasthamaprapta</i> who comfort him and expound to him the <i>Mahāyāna sūtras</i> .<br>② Activates Bodhicitta.        | ① When the flower unfolds, hear <i>Avalokiteśvara</i> and <i>Mahasthamaprapta</i> , expounding ultimate dharmas.<br>② Be delighted and activates Bodhicitta.                                   |

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## Chapter 4 Study *the Amitabha Sūtra*

*What is the Amitabha Sūtra? What is its essence? What are its principles? What are its power and functionalities? What category of the teachings does it belong to?*

*What are the six aspects of faith?*

*What is the relationship between the three provisions?*

*What are the four lands of the Pure Land? Why does Master Ouyi particularly praise the land shared by mundane beings and saints?*

*Why does the Amitabha Sutra only advocate the Buddha-name-recitation practice? How do we comprehend the truth of the Buddha-name being the reality?*

*What is the upholding and reciting of Buddha-name at phenomenon level and noumenon level? What is the single-mindedness without distraction at phenomenon level and noumenon level?*

*What are the five types of turbidity?*

Most of the above questions involves the reality or the mind-nature, extremely difficult to comprehend insightfully. This Chapter will try to answer them based on Master Ouyi's *Essential Annotation of the Amitabha Sūtra*.

### I. INTRODUCTION

In previous chapters we have learned the establishment and the inconceivable meritorious virtues of the Pure Land, as well as the three provisions needed to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. They are mainly explained from the phenomenon perspective, through the study of the Forty-Eight Great Vows of Amitabha Buddha and *the Contemplation Sūtra*. This chapter will introduce the most widely prevalent *Sūtra* of the Pure Land, *the Amitabha Sūtra*, from both perspectives of noumenon and phenomenon. *The Amitabha Sūtra* is not only

mostly recited by Pure Land practitioners at their daily routine cultivations, but is widely accepted and recited by followers of other schools.

The *Sūtra* was translated into Chinese three times, but unfortunately only two versions are extant: one translated by Master *Kumārajīva* [1], the other by Xuanzang [2]. Both versions have been translated into English, more than once, such as [3][4][5][6][7][8]. It is amazing that Max Muller found a Sanskrit version of the *Sūtra* and translated it into English, which helps Buddhist scholars and learners study the *Sūtra* comparatively [9].

*The Amitabha Sūtra* is also extensively annotated, commented and lectured by many patriarch masters and contemporary Dharma masters. The most widely studied and recommended annotations of the *Sūtra* were composed by Master Lianchi [10], our eighth patriarch master, and Master Ouyi [11], our ninth patriarch master. The latter has been accepted as the most orthodox interpretation of the *Sūtra*, hence it received extensive studies and commentaries, such as [12][13][14][15] [16].

In this chapter, we will study *the Amitabha Sūtra* based on the annotation by Master Ouyi. The explanations are gleaned from the materials given in lectures and commentaries on the annotation listed in the reference. Some materials are also adopted from some contemporary lectures or commentaries on the *Sūtra* itself, such as [17][18][19]. Master Ouyi's *Annotation of the Amitabha Sūtra* has been translated in English by Cleary [26]. The English translation of the excerpted paragraphs of the annotation is mainly based on the author's understanding of their meanings, with some reference to Cleary's translation.

The contents of this chapter are arranged based on the schematic structure of Tiantai school method, which first introduces the fivefold profound meanings of the *Sūtra* and then explicates the contents of the *Sūtra*. The discussions of this chapter are more difficult than those of previous chapters, because they involve more explanations on the noumenon perspective. If the reader is not familiar with the concepts of the reality, or the mind-nature, he or she will find it difficult to comprehend what Master Ouyi proposed in annotating the text of the *Sūtra*. However, if one is proficient in the concepts of Buddha-nature, he or she will find it very beneficial and even enjoyable to read Master Ouyi's annotations, and find them insightful and enlightening.

This is the only chapter in the second volume dealing with discussions on the noumenon level. It is absolutely understandable if beginner readers skip this chapter first and proceed to study succeeding chapters instead, which are much easier and practical. If one truly wants to learn Master Ouyi's annotation and is eager to comprehend the elaborations on the Pure Land on the noumenon perspective, one should at least learn about the principles of the reality or the mind nature. One can either learn them from other *Sutras* such as *the Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, or commentaries, or the relevant sections in the first volume of this book. To fully comprehend the contents of this chapter, one needs to read the text repeatedly, and ponder on the meanings attentively.

## II. THE FIVEFOLD PROFOUND MEANINGS

The *Sūtra* is explicated based on the fivefold profound meanings, which is a prevalent method adopted by the Tiantai School Dharma masters. They are the explanation of the title, the discernment of the substance, the explication of the principle, the exposition of the powers and functions and the categorisation of the teachings.

### 1. The Explanation of the Title

The title of this *Sūtra* is “*the Sūtra of the Buddha Expounding Amitabha*”.

The titles of all Buddhist *Sūtras* may be divided into two parts: the general part and the special part. The special part of this *Sūtra* is *the Buddha expounding Amitabha*, and the word *Sūtra* is the general part.

*Sūtra* titles are categorised into seven types by their reference to person, Dharma, and metaphor.

- 1) **Single Three:** Three of the seven types are established by referring solely to either person, Dharma, or metaphor. For instance,

- ① The *Sūtra of Buddha expounding Amitabha* refers only to people. *Śākyamuni* Buddha and Amitabha Buddha are both persons who cultivate in accordance with the Buddha Path and have attained Buddhahood.

② The *Great Parinirvana Sūtra* solely refers to a Dharma. Nirvana is the Dharma of non-arising and non-perishing.

③ The *Net of Brahma Sūtra* only refers to metaphor, the analogy of the net of the Great Brahma King.

**2) Double Three:** There are three types of titles comprising a combination of either person and Dharma, person and metaphor, or Dharma and metaphor respectively. For example,

① The *Sūtra of Questions of Mañjuśrī* encompasses reference to a person, the greatly wise *Mañjuśrī* Bodhisattva, and the Dharma he requested, *Prajna*.

② The *Lion Roar of the Thus Come One Sūtra* contains reference to a person, the Thus Come One, and a metaphor, the Lion Roar. It indicates that the Buddha expounding Dharmas is similar to a lion, the king of beast, roaring, which makes beasts tremble with fear.

③ The *Lotus Sūtra of Wonderful Dharmas* consists of reference to a Dharma and a metaphor, where the wonderful Dharma is analogous to a lotus flower.

**3) Complete in One:** The seventh type contains references to all three subjects: person, Dharma, and metaphor. A typical example of this type is the king of *Sūtras*: *The Great Vaipulya Sūtra of the Buddha's Flower Garland*. Here, "*Vaipulya*" means correct and extensive, indicating the Dharma to attain Buddhahood; "Buddha" is the person; and "Flower Garland (or wreath or adornment)" refers to the manifestation of the beauty of Buddha's virtues or the causal flowers of the ten thousand conducts used to adorn the supreme virtue of the fruit, denoting metaphor.

The following is the annotation of the title by Master Ouyi.

"The first is to explain the title. This *Sūtra* takes the person who expounds and the person to be spoken of as the title."

"The 'Buddha' here denotes the expounding Dharma Master in this land, that is, *Śākyamuni* Buddha. Based on the power of great compassion and vow, he

manifested in the evil world of the five types of turbidity, attaining enlightenment first and then enlightening the later enlightened, with no dharma unknown and no dharma unseen.” (第一释名。此经以能说所说人为名。佛者，此土能说之教主，即释迦牟尼。乘大悲愿力，生五浊恶世。以先觉觉后觉，无法不知，无法不见者也。)

**Notes:** “Attaining enlightenment first” denotes self-enlightenment, transcending mundane beings in the six realms, who are not enlightened and are thus mired in the cycle of birth-and-death. Self-enlightenment refers to the ultimate liberation of *śrāvakas* and Pratyekabuddhas.

“Enlightening the later enlightened” means enlightening the others to attain Buddhahood. It signifies that Bodhisattvas cultivate to attain enlightenment first not only for themselves, but also to undertake the great course to deliver sentient beings, that is, to enlighten the later enlightened, surpassing the self-enlightenment of the two-vehicle practitioners.

“With no dharma unknown and no dharma unseen” indicates the complete enlightenment, which is only attained by Buddhas, who are omniscient in wisdom.

“‘Expound’ indicates being delighted in the heart. The Buddha’s intention is to deliver all sentient beings. When the opportunity of sentient beings to accomplish the Buddha Path is mature, he would expound the teachings difficult to believe so as to enable them to be ultimately emancipated, and thus he felt delighted. ‘Amitabha’ here is the guide master of that land. By means of the Forty-Eight Vows, he receives sentient beings who have faith and aspiration and are mindful of the Buddha, to get rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, and to attain non-retrogression.” (说者，悦所怀也。佛以度生为怀，众生成佛机熟，为说难信法，令究竟脱，故悦也。阿弥陀，所说彼土之导师，以四十八愿，接信愿念佛众生生极乐世界，永阶不退者也。)

In this *Sūtra*, the mindfulness of Buddha is exclusively emphasised as recitation of the Buddha-name.

“The Sanskrit term ‘Amitabha’ denotes immeasurable light, also denotes immeasurable lifespan. In summary, meritorious virtues, wisdom, transcendental powers, powers, life retribution and environmental



retribution, adornment, expounding Dharma, edification and deliverance, each aspect is immeasurable. Everything spoken by the golden mouth (of a Buddha) is called a *Sūtra*. The above words combine the general and special parts to constitute the title. Of teachings, practices and tenet, each can be characterised as general and special, as elaborated in the Tiantai school doctrines.” (梵语阿弥陀，此云无量寿，亦云无量光。要之功德智慧，神通力，依正庄严，说法化度，一一无量也。一切金口，通名为经。对上五字，是通别合为题也。教行理三，各论通别，广如台藏所明。)

**Notes:** “The golden mouth” indicates the Buddha’s mouth, because the body of all Buddhas is composed of *Jambūnada* gold. It also indicates that Buddha’s disciples venerate him, so all the *Sūtras* spoken by the Buddha are referred to as being spoken by the golden mouth.

## 2. The Discernment of the Substance

“All Mahayana *Sūtras* take the reality as their substance (essence).” (大乘经皆以实相为正体。)

**Notes:** The substance of a *Sūtra* is the essential content it proclaims. All the *Sūtras* of the Theravada school are authenticated by the Three Dharma Seals: impermanence, suffering and non-self, whereas the *Sūtras* of the Mahayana schools are all certified by the sole Dharma Seal--the reality.

“Our present one frame of the mind-nature is not inside, not outside, and not in the middle. It is not past, present or future. It is not blue, yellow, red or white, not long or short, square or round. It is not fragrance, not taste, not a tactile object, and not a mental object. Although unable to find it when searching for it, we cannot say it does not exist. Although it is endowed with and creates a hundred realms and a thousand thusness, we cannot say it exists. It is apart from all the conceptual deliberations and discriminations, and the characteristics of languages and words. However, all the conceptual deliberations and discriminations and the characteristics of languages and words do not possess separate self-nature apart from it. In essence, the reality is apart from all characteristics, but is inseparable from all dharmas. Being apart from characteristics, it is not appearance; being inseparable from characteristics, it is not non-appearance. We have no alternative but to

impose the name ‘the reality’ on it.”（吾人现前一念心性，不在内，不在外，不在中间。非过去，非现在，非未来。非青黄赤白，长短方圆。非香，非味，非触，非法。觅之了不可得，而不可言其无。具造百界千如，而不可言其有。离一切缘虑分别，语言文字相。而缘虑分别，语言文字，非离此别有自性。要之离一切相，即一切法。离故无相，即故无不相，不得已强名实相。）

For novice learners or practitioners of Buddhism, Master Ouyi’s *Annotation of the Amitabha Sūtra* is too profound and concise to comprehend without further explications, especially the fivefold profound meaning part. In order to facilitate the beginner learners to understand the content, we will try to explicate them in some detail.

**Notes:** “Our present one frame of the mind-nature”: According to the perfect teachings, Buddhas, the mind and sentient beings are all intrinsically the same, all inseparable from the reality. However, from the perspective of the Tiantai school, the Buddha is too sublime to contemplate, and the sentient beings are too diversified to contemplate, but the mind of mundane beings are just appropriate to be contemplated. Hence, Master Ouyi here select the mind to demonstrate the attributes of the reality. Moreover, if we can comprehend the nature of our mind, it will enable us to penetrate the tenet of Pure Land method, that is, **“while the mind is formulating the Buddha, the mind is the Buddha.”** The essence of Master Ouyi’s annotation is to comprehend our mind.

“not inside, not outside, not in the middle. It is not past, present or future. It is not blue, yellow, red or white, not long or short, and not square or round. It is not fragrance, not taste, not a tactile object, and not a mental object.” This paragraph describes the emptiness of our mind-nature.

One should note the difference between our mind and the mind-nature. Our mind here denotes all the activities and capabilities to perceive and conceptualise. It encompasses to perceive the five sense objects through the five sensory faculties, and to perceive and conceptualize the mental objects, as well as the activities of the *manas* and the *alaya* consciousnesses which are not perceptible by mundane beings. The mind-nature is what is behind and enables these consciousnesses. It is devoid of specific characteristics, as explained in the following.

“not inside, not outside, not in the middle”: In *the Śūraṅgama Sūtra* [20], the Buddha asked Ananda seven times to look for the location of the mind, yet he could not find it. Here Master Ouyi selected the first three locations: the inside, the outside and the middle to refute the existence of a specific location of the mind. Our mind is not the flesh heart in our chest, which does not have the perceptive and conceptual capability. If our mind is inside our body, it should be able to perceive the internal organs, and if it solely exists outside our body, it cannot give rise to feelings such as pain, hunger, etc. The middle is not a fixed location, it is only relative to the two designated points, so the mind is not located at a non-specific location. In fact, our mind-nature is pervasive throughout the space in the ten directions, because wherever we think about anything, no matter how far away, the object will appear in our mind instantly.

“It is not past, present or future”: Not only are we not able to find a specific location for the mind, but also it is not a specific temporal existence. Our mind can recall events or matters from the past, but it does not belong to the past, because it is also able to perceive and conceptualize the present objects. However, the present is not a fixed temporal existence, because when we mention the present time, it already becomes the past. The future is not a specific time either as it is not realised yet. Therefore, our mind covers all the temporal events from the past to the future, yet it does not belong to the past, the present or the future.

“It is not blue, yellow, red or white, not long or short, and not square or round”: This sentence indicates that the mind does not possess a specific form, with no fixed colour or shape.

“It is not fragrance, not taste, not a tactile object, and not a mental object”: Together with the above sentence, it denotes that the mind is not a sense or mental object.

The whole paragraph reveals that the mind-nature is intrinsically pure and pervasive throughout the Dharma-realm, representing its emptiness.

“Being unable to find it when searching for it, we cannot say it does not exist.” This sentence signifies the non-emptiness of the mind, or the reality. That is, although there exists no specific independent location, no specific form or appearance, the mind-nature or the reality is not absolutely non-existent,

because it manifests or demonstrates various functions and powers, presenting the conventional truth.

“It is endowed with and creates a hundred realms and a thousand thusness, but we cannot say it exists.” It indicates that although our mind possesses all sorts of functionalities and potentialities, we cannot claim it has a specific existence. Together with the above sentence, it refers to the truth of nonduality, signifying that the mind-nature or the reality is neither empty nor non-empty, it is also inseparable from emptiness or non-emptiness. The reality or our mind-nature remains constantly invariable yet it adapts to conditions, and while it adapts to conditions, it keeps invariable in quintessence. Similarly, pure gold is invariable in quality, but it can be forged into any shape adapting to conditions. Although gold can be forged into any shape, its essential quality of gold remains unchanged. Similarly, water is invariable in its molecular structure (H<sub>2</sub>O), but it does not prevent it from manifesting in any form of solid, such as ice, snow, or frost; any shape of liquid according to its container; or any state of vapour, such as cloud, steam, etc. At the same time, no matter in what phase or shape water exhibits, its quintessential composition of H<sub>2</sub>O molecules remains identical.

Our mind is intrinsically endowed with the ten realms of four saintly realms and six mundane realms. It is also able to create the thoughts of the ten realms. For example, abiding in the reality and unconditioned compassion is creating the mind of Buddhas, and contemplating the truth of impermanence, suffering and non-self is creating the mind of *śrāvakas*, and indulged in resentment or malice is creating the mind of hell beings, etc. The minds of the beings in each realm are endowed with the mind of ten realms, hence making one hundred endowed realms. The mind of beings in each realm can also create the mind of ten realms, hence making one hundred created realms.

The mind of beings of each realm possesses the ten thusness: the thusness of characteristic, the thusness of nature, the thusness of entity, the thusness of power, the thusness of functionality, the thusness of cause, the thusness of conditions, the thusness of fruition, the thusness of retribution, the thusness of ultimate completion from beginning to end. They are explicated in Chapter 3 of Volume I, hence not repeated here.

“It is apart from all the conceptual deliberations and discriminations and the characteristics of languages and words, however, all the conceptual deliberations and discriminations and the characteristics of languages and words do not possess separate self-nature” : It emphasises that our mind-nature is not the mental consciousness, which perceives external objects together with the other five consciousnesses, or conceptualises based on mental objects alone, and exerts names and descriptions to the objects. Most worldly people who have not learned Buddhist doctrines usually take this consciousness as the mind. The mind-nature is not the mental objects either. However, the sixth consciousness and its mental objects are not apart from the mind-nature, that is, they do not possess an independent self-nature. Similarly, the compound water is not specified by a particular form or phase, be it in solid, liquid or vapour states, but has the chemical composition of water molecules (H<sub>2</sub>O).

“In essence, the reality is apart from all characteristics, but is inseparable from all dharmas. Being apart from characteristics, it is not appearance; being inseparable from characteristics, it is not non-appearance”: From the perspective of quintessence, the reality, or the mind-nature, it is not specified by any particular characteristics, so it is apart from all characteristics. However, it is not inseparable from all dharmas, that is, it is the essential “composition” of all dharmas, similar to H<sub>2</sub>O being the composition of all forms of waters.

“it is not appearance” means that the reality is not specified by any type of appearance or characteristics.

“it is not non-appearance” means that it is embedded or exists in any appearance or characteristics, that is, all appearance or characteristics are nothing but the functional manifestation of the reality. These sentences also indicate that the absolute truth (the truth of emptiness) does not impede the conventional truth (the truth of non-emptiness), and vice versa.

“We have no alternative but to impose the name ‘the reality’ on it”: It indicates that the reality is not equivalent to any term described by language or word. Any description by language and words possesses a limited specific meaning, but the nature of the reality is infinite, inconceivable and ineffable. It is universally pervasive and all-encompassing. Everything or every event takes it as the essential “composition”, but it transcends anything and any event.

Whatever you name it, it not the reality. However, human beings conceptualise and convey information and knowledges based on language and words, otherwise, they cannot understand the meaning. Therefore, we impose a provisional name “the reality” to convey the meaning of what we discussed above.

“The substance of the reality is neither tranquil nor illuminating, but it is also tranquil and constantly illuminating, illuminating and constantly tranquil. Being illuminating yet tranquil, it is named the land of permanence, tranquillity and light; and being tranquil yet illuminating, it is named the pure Dharma-body. Furthermore, being illuminating yet tranquil, it is called the Dharma-body; and being tranquil yet illuminating, it is called the reward-body. Moreover, the intrinsic virtue being tranquil yet illuminating, is designated as the Dharma-body; and the cultivated virtue being tranquil yet illuminating, is designated as the reward-body. In addition, the cultivated virtue being illuminating yet tranquil, is termed as the enjoyment-body, and the cultivated virtue being tranquil yet illuminating, is termed as the response-body.” (实相之体，非寂非照，而复寂而恒照，照而恒寂。照而寂，强名常寂光土。寂而照，强名清净法身。又照寂强名法身，寂照强名报身。又性德寂照名法身，修德寂照名报身。又修德照寂名受用身，修德寂照名应化身。)

This paragraph elaborates on the functionalities of the two profound features, the tranquillity and illuminating, of the reality, or the mind-nature.

**Notes:** “Tranquillity” denotes the meaning of emptiness, indicating that the mind-nature is intrinsically purified without defilement and invariable like space.

“Illuminating” denotes the characteristics of existence, the various functionalities, adapting to conditions. First, the reality excludes emptiness and existence, it is neither tranquillity nor illuminating alone, it does not fall into the two sides of emptiness and existence. However, the reality at the same time encompasses both tranquillity and illuminating, it is non-dual.

“Being illuminating yet tranquil, it is named as the land of permanence, tranquillity and light; and being tranquil yet illuminating, it is named as the pure Dharma-body”: Here “being illuminating yet tranquil” emphasises the

attributes of tranquillity between the two attributes. Hence it is manifested as the land of permanence, tranquillity and light, which is the nirvana, meaning immovable and invariable. Whereas “being tranquil yet illuminating” emphasises the illuminating attributes, which represents the meaning of adapting to conditions. It is manifested as the pure Dharma-body of Buddhas, meaning adaptable to conditions. In this pair of the land and the Dharma-body, the former represents the meaning of being invariable and the latter indicates the meaning of adapting to conditions.

“being illuminating yet tranquil, it is called the Dharma-body; and being tranquil yet illuminating, it is called the reward-body”: With respect to the pair of the Dharma-body and the reward-body, the former means being invariable, but the latter represents the meaning of adapting to conditions. The Dharma-body is the noumenal entity of thusness, which is intrinsically endowed by all sentient beings. It is invariable, neither increased by Buddhas nor decreased by mundane beings. Whereas the reward-body of the Buddhas are realised by the ultimate eradication of all the delusions of afflictions, the delusion like dust and sand, and the delusion of ignorance, as well as the consummation of the *pāramitās*. The reward-body has two types of manifestations: the self-enjoyment-body experienced by Buddhas, and the reward-body manifested for Bodhisattvas of the ground stages.

“the intrinsic virtue being tranquil yet illuminating, it is designated as the Dharma-body; and the cultivated virtue being tranquil yet illuminating, it is designated as the reward-body”: This sentence signifies the comparison between the intrinsic virtues and cultivated virtues. The intrinsic virtue denotes the intrinsically endowed substance of virtues by the reality, similar to that of pure gold contained in gold ore. Whereas the cultivated virtues are the fulfilled virtues through *kalpas* of cultivations of the *pāramitās*, similar to the pure gold obtained after smelting process. Similar to the Dharma-body, the intrinsic virtue is also intrinsically endowed, not relying on cultivation. However, it is tranquil in quintessence yet illuminating when adapting to conditions. Like the reward-body, the cultivated virtues are realised through the consummation of the Buddha Path.

“the cultivated virtue being illuminating yet tranquil, is termed as the enjoyment-body, and the cultivated virtue being tranquil yet illuminating, is

termed as the response-body”: This sentence discusses the comparison between the two features of cultivated virtues: tranquillity and illuminating. When tranquillity of the cultivated virtues is emphasised, it represents the enjoyment-body in which the Buddhas remain in samadhi, enjoying permanence, bliss, self and tranquillity. While emphasising the illuminating feature of the cultivated virtues, it represents the response-body manifested entirely on the adaptation to the request and capacities of sentient beings in order to edify and deliver them.

It is quite confusing when reading this paragraph literally. There are several layers of invariable features and adaptation to conditions. Let us consider a simile concerning the space, the sun, the earth and the sentient beings. Between the space and the sun, the space is tranquil and invariable, but the sun is moving and adaptive to condition. Between the sun and earth, the sun is still, but the earth is orbiting around the sun. Furthermore, between the earth and beings on the earth, the earth is considered still but the beings keep moving around. The relationship between the land, the Dharma-body, the reward-body, the response-body is analogous to that between the space, the sun, the earth and the beings, all relative to each other.

“The tranquillity and illuminating are non-dual, the body and the land are non-dual, the intrinsic and the cultivated are non-dual, the truthful and the responsive are non-dual, they are none but the reality. The reality is neither dual, nor non-dual. Therefore, the entire entity acts as the environmental retribution and the life retribution, as the Dharma-body and the reward-body, as the self and the others. Hence, the speaking and the spoken of, the delivering and the delivered, the believing and the believed, the aspiring and the aspired, the upholding and the upheld, the capability to be born and the born, the praising and the praised, are none but the imprint of the right seal of the reality.” (寂照不二，身土不二，性修不二，真应不二，无非实相。实相无二，亦无不二。是故举体作依作正，作法作报，作自作他。乃至能说所说，能度所度，能信所信，能愿所愿，能持所持，能生所生，能赞所赞，无非实相正印之所印也。)

**Notes:** “The tranquillity and illuminating are non-dual, the body and the land are non-dual, the intrinsic and the cultivated are non-dual, the truthful and the responsive are non-dual, they are none but the reality”: Here non-dual denotes that the two compared aspects are not separate or independent; they are



just the two aspects of one substance, like the two sides of one coin. Body refers to the pure Dharma-body, and the land refers to the land of permanence, tranquillity and light.

Intrinsic represents the intrinsic virtues, and the cultivated represents the cultivated virtues. According to perfect teachings, all the cultivations are based on the intrinsic virtues, that is, the intrinsically endowed Buddha-nature, and all the cultivations are nothing but to reveal the intrinsically endowed Buddha-nature, thus, they are non-dual. We smelt a piece of gold ore, because it contains gold in it; only after repetitive smelting, the pure gold contained in the ore can be acquired.

The truthful represents the reward-body of the Buddha and the response represents the response-body of the Buddha. The response-body is the manifested form of the reward-body adapting to the conditions and the capacities of sentient beings, hence they are non-dual. All the above aspects are solely different attributes of the reality, none of them is apart from the reality.

“The reality is neither dual, nor non-dual”: Although the reality in quintessence is devoid of characteristics, it can manifest all sorts of characteristics and adapting to conditions, so it is not dual. However, the reality is the uniform attributes of all dharmas, it is not the diverse characteristics of the dharmas, hence, it is not non-dual.

“the entire entity acts as the environmental retribution and the life retribution, as the Dharma-body and the reward-body, as the self and the others”: It indicates that the entire entity of the reality adapt to conditions to constitute the environmental retributions and the life retributions of all the Buddhas and all sentient beings of ten directions. It can manifest the Dharma-bodies, reward-bodies and response-bodies, as well as various forms of bodies of sentient beings.

“the speaking and the spoken of”: “The speaking” refers to *Śākyamuni* Buddha, who expound *the Amitabha Sūtra*; “the spoken of” refers to Amitabha Buddha.

“the delivering and the delivered”: “The delivering” denotes *Śākyamuni* Buddha and Amitabha Buddha; “the delivered” are sentient beings who establish sincere faith and earnest aspiration to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land,

and cultivate various virtuous practices, especially mindfully reciting the Buddha's name.

“the believing and the believed”: “The believing” is our sincere mind, and “the believed” represents the Pure Land method.

“the aspiring and the aspired”: “The aspiring” is our resolve and determination, “the aspired” represents the detest and departure of the Saha world, and the pursuit of rebirth in the Pure Land.

“the upholding and the upheld”: “The upholding” denotes our mental, verbal and physical conducts, and “the upheld” represents the name of Amitabha Buddha.

“the capability to be born and the born”: “The capability to be born” denotes the three provisions of the Pure Land, that is, the sincere faith, the earnest aspiration and the virtuous practices; and “the born” represents the four types of land to be born after this life, as explicated later.

“the praising and the praised”: “The praising” denotes *Śākyamuni* Buddha and the Buddhas of the six directions enumerated in the transmission section, “the praised” are Amitabha Buddha and *Śākyamuni* Buddha.

“are none but the imprint of the right seal of the reality”: The above mentioned aspects, whether the performer side or the performed side, are all manifestations of the reality. That is, none of them is apart from the reality.

### **3. The Explication of the Principle**

#### **(1) What is the Principle of this *Sūtra***

“The third is explication of the principle. The principle is the primary path of cultivation and practice. It is the pivot and trigger for the comprehension of the substance, and the guiding principle to myriad practices. When one raises the net cord, the meshes open up, and when one holds the collar of a shirt, its breast and sleeves will follow. Therefore, after discernment of the substance, we should explicate the principles.” (第三明宗。宗是修行要径，会体枢机，而万行之纲领也。提纲则众目张，挈领则襟袖至。故体后应须辨宗。)

This part of the fivefold profound meanings is the most extensive one. It explicates the guiding principles of the Pure Land method being faith, aspiration and recitation of Buddha-name.

“This *Sūtra* designates faith, aspiration and recitation of Buddha-name as the principle of cultivation and practice. Without faith, it is not sufficient for one to activate aspiration; without aspiration, it is not sufficient for one to guide practice; and without the wondrous practice of name recitation, it is not sufficient for one to fulfil one’s aspiration and to verify one’s faith. In the *Sūtra*, the environmental and life retributions are first expounded to activate one’s faith. Then it encourages the generation of aspiration to guide one’s practice. And then it exposes name recitation to attain non-retrogression.” (此经以信愿持名为修行之宗要。非信不足启愿，非愿不足导行，非持名妙行不足满所愿而证所信。经中先陈依正以生信，次劝发愿以导行，次示持名以径登不退。)

Within the three provisions of the Pure Land method, faith is put first, because faith is the source of enlightenment path and the mother of all meritorious virtues. Master Ouyi emphasised the indispensable attributes of all the three provisions.

**Notes:** “without faith, it is not sufficient for one to activate aspiration”: We all agree that people are determined to pursue something or to go somewhere only after they have established full faith or trust on it. Therefore, to establish sincere and solid faith is the first requirement of Buddhist practice, it is even more true for the Pure Land practitioners.

“without aspiration, it is not sufficient for one to guide practice”: Aspiration acts as the steering wheel of a car or the rudder of a ship. It coordinates all the effort towards the target, so that the car or ship can arrive at the destination effectively. To a Pure Land practitioner, the aspiration is the pivot of the three provisions; only through earnest aspiration to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land can we dedicate all the meritorious virtues to the rebirth. Otherwise, without a clear and earnest aspiration of pursuing rebirth in the Pure Land, we may accrue a mass of merits, but they are most probably transformed into worldly blessings instead of provisions for achieving rebirth there.

“without the wondrous practice of name recitation, it is not sufficient for one to fulfil one’s aspiration and to verify one’s faith”: Pure Land method is

inconceivable in its simplicity of practice, its all-embracing of diverse capacities and its marvellous result. However, it still needs us to undertake actual practice, that is, to diligently recite the Buddha-name. Without actual practice, faith is not genuine faith, and aspiration becomes a vacant dream. Even though recitation of the Buddha-name is easy to cultivate, we cannot get rebirth if we do not perform it. If we cannot achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, how can we attest the truthfulness of what we believe in the Pure Land doctrines.

Master Ouyi clearly categorised the main text of the *Sūtra* into three sections: to activate faith, to encourage the generation of aspiration and point out the practice of name recitation. We will further discuss them following the text.

## **(2) What are the Three Provisions of Pure Land Method?**

“Faith is to believe in self, to believe in others, to believe in cause, to believe in effect, to believe in phenomena and to believe in noumenon. Aspiration is to detest and depart from the *Saha* world, and to cherish and pursue rebirth in the Land of Bliss. Practice is to uphold and recite the Buddha-name, single-mindedly without distraction.” (信则信自，信他，信因，信果，信事，信理。愿则厌离娑婆，欣求极乐。行则执持名号，一心不乱。)

This above paragraph gives the definitions of faith, aspiration and practice in brief, and the following will explain them in detail.

### **1) Faith**

The explication of faith by Master Ouyi is profound and difficult to comprehend, but it is most insightful. It is elaborated on six aspects:

#### **i) Believing in self**

“Believing in self is to believe that our present thought-moment of mind is not the flesh heart, not the perceiver nor the mental object. It extends temporally without beginning and end, and it expands spatially without boundary. It constantly adapts to conditions, yet it constantly remains invariable. All the land as numerous as dust in the space in the ten directions are originally matters manifested in our thought-moment of mind. Although we are ignorant, confused, inverted and deluded, if we can return to the mind for a

thought-moment, we will definitely achieve rebirth in the Land of Bliss which is intrinsically endowed in our own mind. We have no suspicion or doubt. This is called believing in self.” (信自者，信我现前一念之心，本非肉团，亦非缘影；竖无初后，横绝边涯；终日随缘，终日不变。十方虚空微尘国土，元我一念心中所现物。我虽昏迷倒惑，苟一念回心，决定得生自心本具极乐，更无疑虑。是名信自。)

Believing in self denotes believing in our mind-nature, which is intrinsically the same as that of the Buddha. It is the foundation of understanding the interactive correspondence and the path alignment between the Buddha and ourselves, because we share the same Buddha-nature. Because ours is obscured by ignorance and afflictions, it cannot manifest itself. Whereas the Buddhas have realised it through uncountable kalpas of cultivations. However, our intrinsic Buddha-nature has never left us. Only because we are all intrinsically endowed with the Buddha-nature, can we attain Buddhahood by reciting the Buddha-name. It is similar to the fact that we can smelt gold ore to acquire pure gold because the ore contains gold originally; we cannot get gold out of sand.

In the section of discernment of substance, Master Ouyi elaborated on the mind-nature. He further elucidated it pertaining to faith.

**Notes:** “our present thought-moment of mind is not the flesh heart”: First of all, our mind is not the flesh heart, which is considered being the source of mind by ancient people.

“not the perceiver nor the mental objects”: Most ordinary people consider the sixth consciousness as the true mind, because it can perceive, conceptualise, and discriminate mental objects. According to *the Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, this perceiving and discriminating consciousness belongs to the false mind, which arises and ceases adapting to conditions.

“It extends temporally without beginning and end, and it expands spatially without boundary.”: Our true mind, or mind-nature extends to the past and the future without limit, and it remains invariable. It does not arise or cease, does not increase or decrease, and it is not defiled or purified. Spatially, it pervades throughout space in the ten directions without boundary.

“It constantly adapts to conditions, yet it constantly remains invariable”: Our mind is endowed with a hundred realms and it can create embodiment in any of the hundred realms. It is also endowed with a thousand thusness, and it can

manifest all of them. However, its inherent nature remains unchanged, regardless of whatever it undergoes in any realm or demonstrates any form of thusness. We may transform in form in different realms life after life, but our mind-nature never changes. According to the Consciousness-Only doctrines, when we die, our first six consciousness stop functioning, but the *manas* and the *alaya* consciousness never stop functioning, which leave the dead body and constitute the next life. Even the *manas* and *alaya* consciousness are still not the mind-nature, because they are still subject to unceasing variations.

“All the land as numerous as dust in the space in the ten directions are originally matters manifested in our thought-moment of mind”: Because our mind-nature is spatially boundless, nothing is beyond its scope. Hence all the Buddha lands, including the Pure Land are encompassed in our mind. Just as the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* states [20], **“And thus does space arise within the great enlightenment, Appearing like a solitary bubble on the sea, And thus do beings with outflows and the worlds uncountable, Arise within that empty space. (空生大觉中 如海一沤发 有漏微尘国 皆依空所生)”** The great enlightenment represents our true mind, which encompasses the expansive space as if a great ocean contains a bubble. Innumerable lands are located in the space, which is within the true mind.

When we depart from this life, it is not our body that flies to the Pure Land, it is our minds that manifest in the Pure Land.

“we are ignorant, confused, inverted and deluded”: Ignorant denotes fundamental ignorance, which is the foundation for all the other delusions. Being confused means not clear of the three truths: the absolute truth of emptiness, the conventional truth of non-emptiness and the truth of nonduality. For mundane beings, being inverted indicates inverting the impermanence as permanence, suffering as happiness, non-self as self and impurity as purity. Being deluded refers to the three types of delusions: the delusion of afflictions, the delusion like dust and sand, and the delusion of ignorance.

“if we can return to the mind for a thought-moment, we definitely will achieve rebirth in the Land of Bliss which is intrinsically endowed in our own mind. We have no suspicion and doubt”: Although our mind-nature is obscured by all sorts of inversions and delusions, it still remains unchanged. Hence, if only we can return from delusions to the purified mind, by mindfulness of the Buddha

instead of greed, hatred and delusions, we are ensured to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, since it is intrinsically endowed in our own mind. If we can establish our faith in the Pure Land tenets in such way without any doubt, it is the meaning of believing in self.

## ii) Believing in Others

“Believing in others is to believe that *Śākyamuni* Buddha definitely never lies, the world Honoured One, Amitabha Buddha certainly never make false vows, and the multitude of Buddhas in the six directions absolutely never proposed equivocal words. One will follow the truthful teachings and resolve to pursue rebirth, free from suspicion and doubt. This is called believing in others.” (信他者，信释迦如来决无诳语，弥陀世尊决无虚愿，六方诸佛广长舌决无二言。随顺诸佛真实教诲，决志求生，更无疑惑。是名信他。)

Believing in others is to believe in the sublime virtues of Buddhas, who never deliver false or fake speeches, therefore, we should follow their teachings and instructions without slight doubt.

Firstly, we should believe in what *Śākyamuni* Buddha told us in the Pure Land *Sūtras*, pertaining to the existence of the Pure Land, its inconceivable wondrous environments, all the blissful and transcendental benefits, and the capability of our rebirth there if we cultivate the three provisions.

Secondly, we should believe that all of the Forty-Eight Vows are realised by Amitabha Buddha through immeasurable countless kalpas of cultivation, hence all of them are real, and valid.

Thirdly, we should believe what the multitude of innumerable Buddha in the six directions praise are absolutely true.

## iii) Believing in Cause

“Believing in cause is to profoundly believe that even recitation of the Buddha-name with distracted mind can be the seeds of attaining Buddhahood, not to mention recitation with single-minded state without distraction, how can one fail to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. This is believing in cause.” (信因者，深信散乱称名，犹为成佛种子，况一心不乱，安得不生净土。是名信因。)

Believing in cause is to believe that recitation of the Buddha-name is the cause of attaining Buddhahood, as proclaimed in *the Dharma Flower Sūtra* [21], **“Where should he utter merely once: ‘Namo Buddha’; This man should have attained the Buddha-way.** (一声南无佛，皆已成佛道)” Master Ouyi repeatedly emphasised that recitation of the Buddha-name is the seed to attain Buddhahood. He recounted a case when *Śākyamuni* Buddha was still alive. An old man pleaded to be ordained to become a member of the monastic, but was rejected by *Śāriputra* and the five hundred saints, who all claimed that the old man lacked virtuous roots. However, when the Buddha saw the old man, he personally ordained him and explained the reason. The Buddha told the assembly that the old man was a firewood collector innumerable *kalpas* before. One day, he was chased by a tiger, and he climbed up a tree to escape from the tiger. When the tiger was roaring under the tree, he spontaneously uttered “Namo Buddha” out of fear. The virtuous root was now mature, so he met me to accomplish the liberation. This could not be perceived by the wisdom eye of Arhats, who could only perceive past events of eighty thousand great *kalpas*.

Therefore, the diamond seeds implanted by recitation of Buddha will never decay. Even one unintentional utterance of “Namo Buddha” can become the seeds of accomplishing the Buddha Path, not to mention the attentive and diligent recitations of Amitabha Buddha’s name single-mindedly without distraction.

#### iv) Believing in Effect

“Believing in effect is to profoundly believe that the assembly of virtuous beings in the Pure Land all achieve their rebirth by the Buddha-remembrance-samadhi. It is similar to the fact that by planting melon seeds, one will reap melons, by planting bean seeds one will harvest beans. It also analogous to that shadow follows the shape, while echoes are outcome of sounds. It never fails or becomes invalid. This is called believing in effect.” (信果者，深信净土，诸善聚会，皆从念佛三昧得生，如种瓜得瓜，种豆得豆，亦如影必随形，响必应声，决无虚弃。是名信果。)

Believing in effect is to believe that rebirth in the Pure Land is the result of Buddha-name recitation. That is, the causal relationship between the cause of Buddha-name recitation and the result of rebirth in the Pure Land is absolutely true, and never fails.



### v) Believing in Phenomenon

“Believing in phenomenon is to profoundly believe that because our present thought-moment of mind is infinite, the worlds manifested by the mind in the ten directions are also infinite. In reality, there truly exists a Land of Bliss, extremely pure and majestic, and located a hundred thousand *koṭis* of Buddha-lands away. It is unlike the parables in *Zhuangzi*. This is called believing in phenomena.” (信事者，深信只今现前一念不可尽故，依心所现十方世界亦不可尽。实有极乐国在十万亿土外，最极清净庄严，不同庄生寓言。是名信事。)

Believing in phenomenon is to believe that there really exists a Western Pure Land in the phenomenon aspect, just like we believe in the existence of the earth and the universe. To be a Mahayana Buddhist adherent, we should always try to view the world in two inseparable aspects: the absolute truth of emptiness and the conventional truth. To believe in the absolute truth, we should never attach to anything because they are nothing but temporary manifestations conditionally originated. On the other hand, we should also believe the diverse existent matters and events, which all follow the law of cause and effect.

Since our defiled mind can induce the formation of the defiled world, the pure mind of Amitabha Buddha can also constitute the Pure Land. We should not give rise to any doubt about its existence, its extraordinary pure environment, and the capabilities of beings inhabiting it. This is similar to that a destitute person who, having been living in an isolated area all his life, cannot imagine the existence and living conditions of those billionaires in developed countries, but they do exist.

*Zhuangzi* (《庄子》) is one of the fundamental texts of Taoism; it is written by Zhuang Zhou (庄周; c. 369 BCE-c. 286 BCE), a famous Chinese thinker and philosopher. In *Zhuangzi*, Zhuang Zhou used a lot of parables and fictional figures to express his advocates.

### vi) Believing in Noumenon

“Believing in noumenon is to profoundly believe that the hundred thousand *koṭis* of Buddha-lands are not beyond our present micro thought-moment of mind, because there exists nothing outside our present thought-moment of

mind-nature. (信理者，深信十万亿土，实不出我今现前介尔一念心外，以吾现前一念心性实无外故。)

Believing in noumenon is to believe in the tenets of the reality, which is intrinsically pure and tranquil, and pervades space in the ten directions. Hence everything in the world is not beyond the reality. As it is noted in the explication of believing in self, our mind-nature is also the reality. Although our present thought-moment of mind is small, its nature is the reality, which encompasses the whole space, certainly including the Pure Land, hundred thousand *koṭis* of Buddha-lands away.

“We also deeply believe that all the environmental and life retributions, the master and companions are all reflections manifested in our present thought-moment of mind. All the phenomena are inseparable from the noumenon, all the falsities are inseparable from the truth, all the cultivations are inseparable from the quintessence, and all the others are inseparable from self. Our minds are all pervasive, so are the Buddha’s mind and the minds of all sentient beings. It is analogous to a thousand lamps in a room, with all the lights inter-pervasive, overlapping one another, without impediment. This is called believing in noumenon.” (又深信西方依正主伴，皆吾现前一念心中所现影。全事即理，全妄即真，全修即性，全他即自。我心遍故，佛心亦遍，一切众生心性亦遍。譬如一室千灯，光光互遍，重重交摄，不相妨碍。是名信理。)

*Notes:* “all the environmental and life retributions, the master and companions are all reflections manifested in our present thought-moment of mind”: the environmental retributions denote the environment of the Pure Land; and the life retributions are the beings there, including Amitabha Buddha, the Bodhisattvas, and all other beings reborn there. On the noumenon aspect, nothing is apart from the reality and everything is nothing but manifestations of the reality adapting to particular conditions. The environmental and life retributions are encompassed in the scope of everything; hence they are also manifestations of the reality. Since our mind shares the same reality in quintessence, hence, the Pure Land can also be considered as manifestations in our mind on the noumenon aspect.

“All the phenomena are inseparable from the noumenon, all the falsities are inseparable from the truth, all the cultivations are inseparable from the quintessence, and all the others are inseparable from self”: These four pairs

indicate the non-impediment between noumenon and phenomena. Phenomena, falsities, cultivations and the others are all phenomenon aspect, while the noumenon, the truth, the quintessence, and self all represent the noumenon aspect. They are inseparable and non-apart.

“Our minds are all pervasive, so are the Buddha’s mind and the minds of all sentient beings. It is analogous to a thousand lamps in a room, with all the lights inter-pervasive, overlapping one another, without impediment”: This paragraph signifies the non-impediment between phenomena. Our mind and the mind of Buddhas are both pervasive in boundless space, overlapping each other without impediment. The contemporary example of holography demonstrates overlapping non-impediment. There is no real physical substance in the holographic figures, which are merely manifestations of light effect. In noumenon aspect, all matters are similar to the holographic figures.

Since our mind can reach anywhere and adapt to particular conditions, it can definitely reach the Pure Land if one can cultivate the mindfulness of Buddha to attain samadhi. Quite a few of the Pure Land practitioners have realised the splendid experience of seeing or visiting the Pure Land when in concentrated mind. For example, Liu Yimin (刘遗民), a member of the Lotus Society established by Master Huiyuan (慧远大师), had visited the Pure Land while in concentration, and even drunk the water of eight meritorious virtues from a treasured lake.

It is also wonderful that if someone in this world establishes faith and aspiration, and starts to mindfully recite the name of Amitabha, a lotus flower with the name of that person will germinate and grow in the lakes of the Pure Land. As one cultivates diligently, the lotus flower will flourish; otherwise, if one becomes indolent in practice or abates in faith or aspiration, the lotus will shrink; if one stops practice or loses faith and aspiration completely, the lotus will wither. This was revealed in a case recorded in *the Records of Saints and Sages of Pure Land*.

The Madame of Yue State (越国夫人), Ms. Wang (王夫人) was the wife of King Jing (荆王), who was an uncle of Emperor Zhezong (哲宗) of Song dynasty (宋朝, 960CE—1279CE). Ms. Wang exclusively cultivate the Pure Land method diligently, without interruption every day and night. She also led and guided her maids to aspire to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land together. One

of the maids was indolent, hence the Madame reprimanded her, “We should not let you damage my rules.” The madame warned the maid that she could be expelled, causing the maid to fear and regret. She began to cultivate diligently, never feeling weariness. One day, the maid told other maids that she would go soon. All of them smelled exotic fragrance that night, and the maid passed away without any disease. The next night, another maid told the Madame, “Last night, I dreamed of the reborn maid. She asked me to express her gratitude to Madame, because it was fortunate for her to encounter Madame and to receive teaching and exhortation, so as to get rebirth in the Pure Land.”

The Madame said, “Only if she enters my dream, will I believe in what you tell me.” She really dreamed of the reborn maid that night, who thanked her personally just like what the other maid told her before. The Madame then asked, “Can I go to the Pure Land?” “Sure,” replied the maid. Then she led the Madame. After a short while, they saw a large lake, in which numerous lotus flowers bloomed. Some are large, exuberant and beautiful, some are small, shrivelled, even withered. When the Madame asked for the reason, the maid explained, “As soon as a person generates one thought of aspiring to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land, there will be a lotus flower growing in the lake. Because of the difference of diligence and indolence in their cultivations, their lotus flowers will show the difference in exuberance or withering. For those who cultivate assiduously, their flowers will blossom splendidly; while for those who are lazy or give up their cultivations, the lotus flower will shrink or wither. If one cultivates diligently without interruption for an adequate period, with mindfulness or contemplation accomplished, when the person dies, his or her consciousness will leave the body and definitely get reborn in the lotus flower.”

Later they saw a man in official uniform, sitting on a lotus flower, whose body was adorned with jewelled necklace. The Madame asked who he was. “Yang Jie, (杨杰)” answered the maid. Then they saw another man also in official uniform, but his flower was rather withered. The Madame asked again who this man was, and the maid replied, “Ma Yu (马珩).” Later, the Madame enquired about her place of rebirth. The maid then led her for several miles to see a golden lotus flower, splendid and transparent. The maid said, “This is the place for Madame’s rebirth. It is a gold pedestal of rebirth of upper grade in the superior rank.”

On the day of the Madame's birthday that same year, the Madame got up in the morning, lighted incense in the burner, and watched the statue of *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva in standing posture. When all the kinsmen and relatives were preparing to celebrate her birthday, they witnessed her getting rebirth in standing posture.

## 2) The Aspiration

“Once we establish such faiths, and realised that the defilements of the *Saha* world are induced by our own mind, then the defilements of our own mind should be detested and departed. The purity of Land of Bliss is also induced by our mind, hence it should be cherished and pursued.” (如此信已，则娑婆即自心所感之秽，而自心秽，理应厌离。极乐即自心所感之净，而自心净，理应欣求。)

Since the three spheres are mind-only, that is, everything is created or induced by our mind, the defiled *Saha* world and the pure Land of Bliss are both induced by our mind. When our mind indulges in afflictions of greed, hatred or delusion, instigating us to commit various evil transgressions, we will descend to the three woeful realms. When our mind is focused on sincere faith, earnest aspiration to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land and mindfulness of Amitabha Buddha, motivating us to recite the Buddha-name, the pure conducts will lead us to get rebirth in the Pure Land. If we believe in all these principles, we will definitely give rise to earnest aspiration to detest and escape the defiled world, and cherish and pursue rebirth in the Pure Land.

“We must detach from the defiled (world) and should reject it until ultimate, then there is nothing to be rejected. Pursuit to the Pure Land should be grasped until ultimate, then there is nothing to be grasped. Hence, *the Commentary on the Wondrous Purport of the Annotation on the Contemplation Sūtra* states, ‘if one grasps and rejects up to ultimate state, they do not differ in track-pit from non-grasping or non-rejecting.’” (厌秽须舍至究竟，方无可舍。欣净须取至究竟，方无可取。故《妙宗》云：取舍若极，与不取舍亦非异辙。)

What is earnest aspiration?

First, we should detest and detach from this evil and turbid world completely, without even the slightest reluctance or attachment, as if we are desperate to

escape a horrible prison full of evil criminals who keep bullying and torturing us incessantly. It is also similar to escaping from a precarious pit, fraught with poisonous snakes and ferocious beasts.

Suppose we are unfortunate in any aspect, such as being destitute in living conditions, tormented by chronic diseases, frightened by violent threats or warfare, or depressed out of competitions in the career arena or inharmonious social relations etc. These adversities are perfect motivations for us to strengthen our aspiration to escape this world. If we are fortunate, endowed with wealth, good health, harmonious and intimate family, congenial environment etc, we still should guarantee the longing for escaping from this world. We should be vigilant of the decaying feature of every good occurrence in this world. Furthermore, we should be aware that all the fortunate possessions tend to corrupt people into indulgence in sensuous enjoyments. This indulgence usually leads people to neglect virtuous cultivations and to commit transgressions, entailing their descent to the woeful realms in the next life.

Second, we should generate the absolute longing for rebirth in the Pure Land, with no other alternatives. We should dedicate every bit of merits produced from our virtuous cultivations towards rebirth in the Pure Land. To become a billionaire or even president of the most powerful country in the next life has no appeal to us. All the heavens are not our target for the next life. Even to be the most intelligent and eloquent Dharma master in the next life is not our first priority, because most of us cannot guarantee to continue the cultivation during the third life. If we can get rebirth in the Pure Land, our wisdom, transcendental power, our eloquence in edifying and rescuing other sentient beings are incomparable.

Third, we should fully prepare ourselves to leave this world at any time without a second of hesitation. Whenever Amitabha Buddha and his companions come to welcome and escort us, we will joyfully follow them immediately to go to the Pure Land, without the slightest attachment to anything in this world.

“If we do not grasp or reject at phenomenon level, and solely embracing non-grasping and non-rejecting, it is attachment to noumenon and abandoning phenomena. If phenomena (practices) are abandoned, the noumenon cannot be realised. If we realise that all the phenomena are inseparable from noumenon, grasping conforms with the noumenon, so does rejecting. The

grasping and rejecting are nothing but the Dharma-realm. Hence, aspiration is declared following faith.”（设不从事取舍，但尚不取不舍，即是执理废事。既废于事，理亦不圆。若达全事即理，则取亦即理，舍亦即理。一取一舍，无非法界。故次信而明愿也。）

This paragraph is to refute the claims of some other schools, who criticize the Pure Land practice as grasping and rejecting, which are against the Buddhist doctrine of non-grasping and non-rejecting. There exist different schools of Buddhism, advocating different doctrines. Some schools emphasize the emptiness of dharmas, hence, the practitioner should give up any sort of taking or grasping; one should contemplate the absolute truth of emptiness instead, so as to subdue and eradicate afflictions. However, according to perfect teachings, attachment to emptiness is also a kind of attachment, and should be eliminated.

For most Pure Land practitioners, they may not clearly comprehend the tenets of the reality, thus unable to understand the principle that the Pure Land is not beyond our mind-nature. Nevertheless, being unaware of this profound principle does not prevent them from achieving rebirth in the Pure Land, as long as they have faith, aspiration and mindfully recite the Buddha-name, as introduced in the previous two chapters. However, if anyone adheres to the emptiness aspect of the reality, so as not to undertake any actual practice, one will lose the opportunity to get rebirth, no matter how much Buddhist theory one understands.

### 3) The Wondrous Practice

“When we speak of upholding and reciting the Buddha-name with single-mindedness without distraction, it means to invoke the meritorious virtues by the Buddha-name. Since the meritorious virtues are inconceivable and ineffable, the Buddha-name is also inconceivable and ineffable. Because the meritorious virtues of the Buddha-name are inconceivable and ineffable, reciting with scattered mind can be the seeds for attaining Buddhahood, and upholding and reciting (Buddha’s name) will enable us to attain non-retrogression.”（言执持名号一心不乱者，名以召德，德不可思议，故名号亦不可思议。名号功德不可思议，故使散称为佛种，执持登不退也。）

Unlike the *Contemplation Sūtra* and the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*, the *Amitabha Sūtra* exclusively advocates the Buddha-name recitation practice. In

order to dissuade people from contempt of the power and functionality of the Buddha-name recitation, Master Ouyi praised and glorified the Buddha-name recitation method to its extreme.

He unequivocally declared that the Buddha-name represents the meritorious virtues of the Buddha. In this annotation, Master Ouyi clarified three types of inconceivable powers: the compassionate power of Amitabha Buddha is inconceivable, the power of our mind is inconceivable, and the meritorious virtues of the Buddha-name is inconceivable. Since our mind intrinsically share the same Buddha-nature with all Buddhas and is capable of creating hundred realms and thousand thusness, its power is truly inconceivable. Out of great compassion, Amitabha Buddha spent five kalpas to formulate the Forty-Eight Vows and cultivated *pāramitās* for countless innumerable kalpas to accumulate meritorious virtues in causal ground, until the fulfilment of all the vows. Thus, the power of his meritorious virtues is definitely inconceivable.

In order to share his meritorious virtues with sentient beings to enable them to swiftly accomplish the Buddha Path, he “encrypted” the inconceivable meritorious virtue in his name “Amitabha Buddha”. It is analogous to the password of a universe bank with immeasurable amount of money in it; one can withdraw whatever amount as long as one puts in the password. Hence, whenever anyone mindfully recites his name, the invoker will assuredly activate the power of Buddha’s meritorious virtues. Even recitation with scattered mind can help us to dissolve our transgressions in daily life. If armed with sincere faith and earnest aspiration, a few mindful recitations on the verge of death can ensure us to get rebirth in the Pure Land. The power of Amitabha Buddha’s name is truly inconceivable. We cannot imagine anything in the mundane world to compare with it.

“However, the practices of the Pure Land advocated by various *Sūtras* are different in many ways, such as contemplation of images, contemplative meditations, doing prostrations and making offerings, five repentances and sixfold mindfulness and so on. The accomplishment of each and every one of the practices will enable us to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.”（然诸经示净土行，万别千差。如观像、观想、礼拜供养、五悔六念等，一一行成，皆生净土。）

The other Pure Land *Sūtras* enumerate many practices, all will enable one to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, if one has sincere faith and earnest aspiration,



and dedicates the merits from the practice to the Pure Land. For example, the 19<sup>th</sup> vow of the Forty-Eight Vows emphasises that one should activate the Bodhicitta and cultivate various meritorious virtues. *The Contemplation Sūtra* explicates most of the cultivations listed in this paragraph, as introduced in the previous chapter.

There are two definitions of the five repentances: Master Yuanying (圆瑛大师) [12] defined them as the contents of the ten great vows of *Samantabhadra* Bodhisattva, and Venerable Daoyuan (道源法师) [13] adopted the definition of Tiantai school, as follows:

- ① **To repent one's past transgressions and refrain from committing any transgressions in the future.** We should practice repentance to remove karmic obstructions at the end of our life.
- ② **To beseech the Buddhas of the ten directions to turn the Dharma wheel.**
- ③ **To rejoice and praise all the virtuous roots of oneself and others.**
- ④ **To dedicate all the cultivated virtuous roots towards all sentient beings and the Buddha Path.**
- ⑤ **To make the Four Great Vows to guide the above practices.**

“Only the one method of Buddha-name recitation embraces the most diverse capacities, and it is the easiest to undertake. Hence, the compassionate Śākyamuni Buddha spontaneously expounded it to the wisest Śāriputra without request. It can be termed as the foremost convenience among all convenient methods, the ultimate complete truth among all complete truths, the utmost perfect and sudden among all perfect sudden methods. Hence the saying, ‘when we put the purifying pearl into turbid water, the turbid water cannot but to become clear; when we put the Buddha-name into a distracted mind, the distracted mind cannot but to become Buddha.’” (唯持名一法，收机最广，下手最易。故释迦慈尊，无问自说，特向大智舍利弗拈出，可谓方便中第一方便，了义中无上了义，圆顿中最极圆顿。故云：清珠投于浊水，浊水不得不清；佛号投于乱心，乱心不得不佛也。)

Among all the practices of Pure Land, only Buddha-name recitation is suitable for all beings, from the saintly Bodhisattvas to the mundane beings. For human beings, it can be practiced by both talented scholars and illiterate people, and even by simple-minded ones. Devoted Buddhist disciples and worldly virtuous people can practice it, so can the wicked ones who committed various transgressions, as demonstrated in *the Contemplation Sūtra*. Not only does it embrace the most diverse capacities, but it is also extremely easy and convenient to practice. Everyone can recite “Namo Amitabha Buddha”. Regardless of whether one recites it loudly or silently, for a long persistent period or a short period, the effect is valid.

**Notes:** “It can be termed as the foremost convenience among all convenient methods”: Among all the Buddhist practices of different schools, the Pure Land method is the most convenient, and among various Pure Land practices, such as those enumerated in *the Contemplation Sūtra*, the Buddha-name recitation is the most convenient.

“the ultimate complete truth among all complete truths”: All the first three types of teachings: the *Tripitaka* teachings, the shared teachings and the distinctive teachings are all provisional compared with the perfect teachings, which expound complete truth. The Buddha-recitation entails mindfulness of Buddha in each thought-moment, with its result to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land to attain Buddhahood. Hence, it is the most direct and complete truth.

“the utmost perfect and sudden among all perfect sudden methods”: Because Buddha-name recitation necessitates mindfulness of the Buddha in each thought-moment, each thought-moment is inseparable from the Buddha. By practicing Buddha-name recitation, one will achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, directly attain non-retrogression, and accomplish the Buddha Path in one lifetime. Hence it is the utmost perfect and sudden method of practice.

“when we put the purifying pearl into turbid water, the turbid water cannot but to become clear”: Venerable Yanxu (延续法师) recounted the story of the purifying pearl in his lecture [16]. In the Tang dynasty (618-907CE), there was an officer who obtained an exotic pearl, which was originally from the mid-Asia area. The pearl had an extraordinary power to purify water. When put into water, the water would become purified and clear, no matter how turbid the water was.

“When we put the Buddha-name into a distracted mind, the distracted mind cannot but to become Buddha”: Since our mind can only access one mental object at any instant, if we concentrate on Buddha-name recitation, our mind is preoccupied with the Buddha-name, and nothing else.

“Faith, aspiration and recitation of Buddha-name is the true cause of the one-Buddha-vehicle, and the four types of Pure Lands are the wondrous results of the one-Buddha-vehicle. If we cultivate in accord with the causes, results will definitely follow. Hence, faith, aspiration and recitation of Buddha-name are the right principles (path) of this *Sūtra*. ” （信愿持名，以为一乘真因。四种净土，以为一乘妙果。举因则果必随之，故以信愿持名为经正宗。）

According to *the Dharma Flower Sūtra*, the goal of the one-Buddha-vehicle is to convey the practitioners to attain Buddhahood, rather than conveying them to be Arhats or Pratyekabuddhas. The three provisions of faith, aspiration and the practice of Buddha-name recitation will enable one to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, and then directly attain Buddhahood in one lifetime. Hence, they are the true cause of attaining Buddhahood. The rebirths in the fourfold Pure Lands are the wondrous result, as explained next.

#### 4. The Exposition of the Powers and Functions

“The Fourth is the exposition of the powers and functions. This *Sūtra* takes rebirth and non-retrogression as the power and functions. ” （第四明力用。此经以往生不退为力用。）

The power and functions of a *Sūtra* denote the meritorious virtues or effect one can acquire if one cultivates in accordance with the principles proposed by the *Sūtra*. Here, Master Ouyi pointed out two effects: to achieve rebirths in the Pure Land and to attain non-retrogression, which will be further elaborated below.

“There are four types of lands of rebirth, each of which can be categorised into nine grades. Here I will briefly introduce the characteristics of the four lands. ” （往生有四土，各论九品。且略明得生四土之相：）

In the previous chapter, we learned, from *the Contemplation Sūtra* that Buddha-name recitation is performed only by sinful or evil persons, and that they can achieve rebirth only in one of the three grades in the inferior rank.

However, in Master Ouyi's annotation of this *Sūtra*, Buddha-name recitation can be cultivated by beings of all capacities, even the saintly Bodhisattvas can cultivate it, not to mention human beings with whatsoever capacities and virtuous roots. He also expounded that not only can one achieve any one of the nine grades of rebirth enumerated in *the Contemplation Sūtra*, but one can achieve rebirth in the land of convenience with residuals and the land of reward and adornment, even the land of permanence, tranquillity and light based on one's samadhi realised by Buddha-name recitation.

“If we can recite the Buddha-name yet without eradication of the afflictions of insight and cultivations, we will achieve rebirth in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings. The rebirth will be classified into nine grades in the three ranks, depending on the degree of the distracted or concentrated mind.” (若执持名号，未断见思，随其或散或定，于同居土分三辈九品；)

This paragraph pertains to the majority of Pure Land practitioners. Most of us fall into this category. We have established sincere faith and earnest aspiration to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land, but our Buddha-name recitation practice does not reach the level of profound single-mindedness. Most of the time our mind is scattered and distracted. Only occasionally someone can experience a short period of concentrated mind without distraction in recitation. Most of us have not subjugated, not to mention eradicated the afflictions of insight and cultivations. However, this does not prevent us from realising rebirth in the Pure Land; it only limits us to the land shared by mundane and saintly beings, with difference in rank and grade.

Although Master Ouyi praised the Buddha-name recitation with single-mindedness without distraction in his annotation, it is clear that single-mindedness without distraction is not a necessary condition for achieving rebirth. On the other hand, single-mindedness is a sufficient condition to achieving rebirth of even superior Pure Lands as explicated in the following.

“If we can recite the Buddha-name up to single-mindedness without distraction at phenomenon level, with the afflictions of insight and cultivation spontaneously eliminated, we will achieve rebirth in the land of convenience with residuals.” (若持至事一心不乱，见思任运先落，则生方便有余净土；)

**Notes:** “The Buddha-name recitation with single-mindedness without distraction at phenomenon level”: This level is realised by those practitioners who do not comprehend the tenets of the reality, who do not realise that Amitabha Buddha and the Pure Land of Bliss are not inseparable from our own mind-nature. Moreover, they are not aware that “**while our mind is formulating the Buddha, our mind is the Buddha.**” Nevertheless, they have profound sincere faith in the existence of the Pure Land and all the meritorious virtues of Amitabha Buddha, and they earnestly aspire to escape this *Saha* world and to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land. Out of faith and aspiration, they cultivate the Buddha-name recitation so diligently that they not only attain profound samadhi, but also spontaneously eradicated the afflictions of insight and cultivations. They had attained sainthood of the two-vehicle practitioners before they get rebirth in the Pure Land.

“The land of convenience with residuals”: This is the land dwelled by Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas. It is a provisional land introduced by Buddha to the two-vehicle practitioners as a skilful means to motivate them to cultivate so as to get emancipated from the cycle of birth-and-death. Hence it is a method of convenience. Although Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas have eradicated the afflictions of insight and cultivations, they still possess the delusion like dust and sands, and the delusion of ignorance, which they are not aware of, hence it is still with residual delusions.

“If we can recite the Buddha-name up to the single-mindedness without distraction at noumenon level, destroy one part of ignorance, until forty-one parts, we will achieve rebirth in the pure land of reward and adornment, and we also partially attain the land of permanence, tranquillity and light.” (若至理一心不乱，豁破无明一品，乃至四十一品，则生实报庄严净土，亦分证常寂光土；)

**Notes:** “Buddha-name recitation with single-mindedness without distraction at noumenon level”: This level is attained by those practitioners who have realised awakening to the reality, and who are penetratingly aware that “**while our mind is formulating the Buddha, our mind is the Buddha.**” Since they have realised that the Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha as well as his saintly companion are not outside our mind-nature, their faith and aspiration is sincere

and adamant. Furthermore, they cultivate so diligently that not only can they dwell in the Buddha-remembrance-samadhi, but they have spontaneously eradicated all the afflictions of insight and cultivations, and even destroyed one part or more parts up to forty-one parts of the delusion of ignorance. They have already attained sainthood in the Bodhisattva path.

“The land of reward and adornment”: This is the land inhabited by Bodhisattvas who have at least destroyed one part of ignorance, and realised one part of Dharma-body. No mundane beings or the saints of the two-vehicles can visit or even see this land.

“The land of permanence, tranquillity and light”: This is the land manifested by the Dharma-body, which can be partially realised by saintly Bodhisattvas, but the ultimate land of permanence, tranquillity and light can only be realised by Buddhas.

“If the ignorance is completely eradicated, we will achieve rebirth in the unsurpassed land of reward, and the ultimate land of permanence, tranquillity and light.” (若无明断尽，则是上上实报，究竟寂光也。)

This paragraph indicates that by mindfully reciting the Buddha’s name, one can even attain Buddhahood.

“Non-retrogression denotes four types. The first is the non-retrogression in thoughts: one destroys the ignorance and realises the Buddha-nature, to directly achieve rebirth in the land of reward, and to partially attain the land of permanence, tranquillity and light.” (不退有四义：一、念不退。破无明，显佛性，径生实报，分证寂光。)

*Notes:* Non-retrogression in thoughts denotes that the practitioner keeps every thought-moment in the mindfulness of the reality and will follow the Buddha Path until attaining Buddhahood. This state is realised only after one attains the first ground stage of distinctive teachings or the first abode stage of the perfect teachings, by destroying at least one part of the ignorance.

“The second is the non-retrogression in practice: one eradicates the afflictions of insight and cultivations, and eliminates the delusion like dust and sand, to

achieve rebirth in the land of convenience, and to pursue the ultimate fruition.”（二、行不退。见思既落，尘沙亦破，生方便土，进趋极果。）

*Notes:* The non-retrogression in practice is attained by Bodhisattvas who have accomplished the practices of the ten abodes, ten practices and ten dedications of the distinctive teachings. They have eradicated all the delusion of afflictions, and the delusion like dust and sand, and subdued the delusion of ignorance, so they will never retreat to the two-vehicles. Their future cultivations are all aligned to the accomplishment of the Buddha Path.

“The third is non-retrogression in state: one achieves rebirth in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings, taking the karmas with him or her. One will be born from a lotus flower, eternally apart from the conditions of retrogression.”（三、位不退。带业往生，在同居土，莲华托质，永离退缘。）

*Notes:* The non-retrogression in state signifies the inconceivable benefit that all mundane beings spontaneously attain as long as they can achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. Even if they are fraught with enormous evil karmas from their previous and present lives, all will be reborn in a lotus flower, dwelling in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings. If one attains the non-retrogression in state, it is equivalent to having eradicated all the afflictions of insight and cultivation, one will never retreat to mundane beings. The Pure Land is an ideal place for the Buddha Path practice, because it is apart from all the conditions for retreat, as discussed in Chapter 2.

“The fourth is ultimate non-retrogression: Whether the recitation is with sincere mind or scattered mind, intentionally or unintentionally, with comprehension or non-comprehension, once the Amitabha name or the Buddha-names of the six directions as well as the title of this *Sūtra* enters one’s ear, one will be delivered because of them, even though it may occur after hundreds of thousands *kalpas* later. It is as if hearing the sound of the drum smeared with poison, all from near or afar will die; and eating a small diamond, one can never digest it.”（四、毕竟不退。不论至心散心，有心无心，或解不解，但弥陀名号，或六方佛名，此经名字，一经于耳，假使千万劫后，毕竟因斯度脱。如闻涂毒鼓，远近皆丧，食少金刚，决定不消也。）

This non-retrogression is defined by Master Ouyi as the eternal validity of reciting Buddha's name in attaining Buddhahood, even if we do not succeed in achieving rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this life.

*Notes:* “hearing the sound of the drum smeared with poison, all from near or afar will die”: This is from a legend of ancient India. When a country was engaged in a battle with enemies, they smeared their drums with a special poison, which would permeate the air when the drums were struck. Their own soldiers would take antidote before the battle, and the enemy soldiers would die if they breathed in the poison mist which went as far as the drums' sound. This simile is used to indicate the pervasive validity of the Buddha-name recitation, covering all cases, whether it is undertaken in scattered or concentrated mind state, intentionally or unintentionally, with comprehension or without comprehension.

“eating a small diamond, one can never digest it”: This is to emphasise the eternal efficacy of the Buddha-name recitation, which will never be destroyed.

“Furthermore, if only we can achieve rebirth in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings, taking our karma with us, to attain the non-retrogression in state, we will assemble with the Bodhisattvas to attain Buddhahood in one-lifetime, and will attain Buddhahood in one lifetime.” (复次只带业生同居净证位不退者，皆与补处俱，亦皆一生必补佛位。)

Master Ouyi was exclusively endowed with the wisdom eye to single out the inconceivable features of those reborn in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings. First, it applies to the most diverse and the largest multitude of beings, so almost all ordinary practitioners in this world can achieve rebirth in this land. Second, its benefits are the most extraordinary, because the one born in the land can also associate with the saints of the upper lands, and he will also accomplish Buddha Path in one lifetime.

“Because of the congregation with the superior virtuous ones, achieving rebirth in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings is horizontally achieving rebirth in the upper three lands. Because one can attain Buddhahood in one lifetime, attaining non-retrogression in state is equal to



perfectly attaining three types of non-retrogressions.”（夫上善一处，是生同居，即已横生上三土，一生补佛。是位不退，即已圆证三不退。）

According to Master Yuanying [12], this paragraph is the eye of Master Ouyi's whole annotation of *the Amitabha Sūtra*. As long as we get rebirth in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings, taking all our karmas with us, we will be able to assemble with the superior virtuous ones and will be assured to attain Buddhahood in one lifetime. According to Master Ouyi, only those Bodhisattvas to attain Buddhahood in one-lifetime are qualified as superior virtuous ones. Although our *Saha* world is also a land shared by mundane and saintly beings, yet ordinary people have no opportunity to access any saintly beings. Even when Bodhisattvas such as *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva or *Mañjuśrī* Bodhisattva occasionally manifest in disguise in this world, no one recognises them. Only those dwelling in the land of reward and adornment can associate with other saintly Bodhisattvas in daily life.

Therefore, as long as we can achieve rebirth in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings in the Pure Land, it is equivalent to horizontally achieving rebirth in all the other superior lands. Theoretically speaking, mundane beings achieve rebirth only with non-retrogression in state, but, in actuality, they have perfectly attained three non-retrogressions, because they enjoy all the benefits and attributes of the other non-retrogressions.

“This kind of power and functions cannot be found in thousands of *Sūtras* and *śāstras*. Compared with that sudden awakening of the right cause is only the stepstone of progress in initial transcendental path, and one begins to expect the attainment of Buddhahood only after attaining non-retrogression of lifetime after lifetime, this is utterly incomparable. How can the followers of Chan and teachings never ponder on these?”（如斯力用，乃千经万论所未曾有。较彼顿悟正因，仅为出尘阶渐，生生不退，始可期于佛阶者，不可同日语矣。宗教之士，如何勿思。）

Master Ouyi concluded that this kind of benefits and efficacies are not found in other *Sūtras* and *śāstras*, to signify the singularity of Pure Land practices, especially the Buddha-name recitation method. He compared these extraordinary features with the cultivations of Chan school, referring to a stanza from Master Weishan (沩山) [12]. Chan practitioners cultivate contemplative

meditation to seek sudden awakening to the reality. However, even when one realises the sudden awakening, it only indicates the formal beginning of one's practice. The right cause refers to the intrinsic Buddha-nature, the reality, or our mind-nature.

## 5. The Exposition of the Categorisation of the Teachings

“The fifth is the categorisation of the teachings. This *Sūtra* is encompassed in the Mahayana Bodhisattva store. It is also expounded spontaneously without request. It is entirely empowered by Buddha's great compassion, to enable the seriously impeded sentient beings of the Dharma-ending age to directly attain non-retrogression, based on this *Sūtra*.” (第五教相。此大乘菩萨藏摄。又是无问自说，彻底大慈之所加持，能令末法多障有情，依斯径登不退。)

The categorisation of the teaching is to specify the characteristics of the teaching, whether it belongs to Theravada or Mahayana. Master Ouyi stated that this *Sūtra* belongs to the Mahayana Bodhisattva store. He also emphasised the fact that this *Sūtra* is too profound for anyone to ask, hence the Buddha spontaneously expounded it without request.

“Therefore, when all the *Sūtras* become oblivious, only this *Sūtra* will remain extant for another hundred years to widely deliver sentient beings. It is the *agada* medicine, which cures all diseases. It is beyond duality and is perfectly encompassing, hence it is inconceivable and ineffable.” (故当来经法灭尽，特留此经住世百年，广度含识。阿伽陀药，万病总持，绝待圆融，不可思议。)

At the end of the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*, Śākyamuni Buddha gave the following assurance [22], “**In the future age, all the *Sūtras* and teachings will disappear. Out of loving-kindness, compassion and sympathy, I will specifically empower this *Sūtra* to remain in the world for another hundred years. All those who encounter this *Sūtra*, will be delivered pursuant to their will and wishes.** (当来之世经道灭尽。我以慈悲哀愍。特留此经止住百岁。其有众生值斯经者。随意所愿皆可度)” All the patriarchs of Pure Land acknowledge that this affirmation includes the *Amitabha Sūtra*, which is supposed to be the short form of the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*.

**Notes:** “*Agada*” is a Sanskrit word, meaning panacea, which can cure any disease or illness, indicating that the Buddha-name recitation method can be practiced by anyone with guaranteed rebirth in the Pure Land.

“It is the profound repository of *the Flower Ornament Sūtra* and the esoteric essence of *the Lotus Sūtra of Wonderous Dharma*. It is the essence of the mind of all Buddhas and the compass of the myriad practices of Bodhisattvas. None of them is beyond this *Sūtra*. If I want to extensively praise and explicate it, the work cannot be finished even after innumerable *kalpas*, hence the wise ones should know this by themselves.” (华严奥藏，法华秘髓，一切诸佛之心要，菩萨万行之司南，皆不出于此矣。欲广叹述，穷劫莫尽，智者自当知之。)

The primary way of accomplishing the Buddha Path in *the Flower Ornament Sūtra* is advocated by *Samantabhadra* Bodhisattva at the last section of the *Sūtra*, who leads and encourages all the Bodhisattvas to get rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha. The fundamental principle of practice and objective of *the Amitabha Sūtra* is also to teach all beings to recite the Amitabha Buddha’s name so as to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land to accomplish the Buddha Path, hence this *Sūtra* conforms with the essence of *the Flower Ornament Sūtra*.

All Buddhist followers believe that *the Lotus Sutra of Wonderous Dharma* is the *Sūtra* of attaining Buddhahood. It reveals that all sentient beings will eventually attain Buddhahood, and even *Devadatta* is prophesied to attain Buddhahood. It is also specified that the fundamental cause to attain Buddhahood is by reciting Buddha’s name: “**Even when a person is aberrant and turbulent in the mind, And in such a mental state he happens to enter a Stupa or Temple, Where should he utter merely once, ‘Namo Buddha’, This man should have attained the Buddha-way.**”[21] This *Sūtra* exclusively emphasises that the right practice is by reciting the Buddha’s name to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land and then to accomplish the Buddha Path directly in one lifetime. Hence it demonstrates the essence of *the Lotus Sutra of Wonderous Dharma* esoterically.

The essence of mind of all Buddhas is not apart from the mind-nature of the present mindfulness of the Buddhas, so are all the myriad practices of Bodhisattvas.

In this brief introductory composition on the fivefold profound meanings, Master Ouyi pointed out all the essential points of *the Amitabha Sūtra*. He emphasised that all these points are nothing but the manifestations of the reality, especially from the perspective of our own mind-nature. It is the most difficult part yet the most important part of the text, so we adopt all the text in this book. Unfortunately, most beginners cannot understand nor absorb all of them at first reading. The author has not comprehended them himself; he merely tried to glean the nutrients from the commentaries by other Dharma masters and to present them in an elementary way to help novice learners. We need to repeatedly study and ponder each sentence and every paragraph attentively, and try to comprehend the truthful profound meanings divulged by him. It is amazing that every time we study it, we will gain more insight in the meanings; it never fails.

These points will be further explicated following the text of the *Sūtra*.

### III. THE TRANSLATOR OF THE *SŪTRA*

There exist two extant versions of *the Amitabha Sūtra*. The version most widely promulgated, studied and recited, was translated by *Tripiṭaka* Master *Kumārajīva* (鳩摩罗什; 344–413 CE) in the Yao Qin dynasty (384 CE–417 CE), and the other was translated by Master Xuanzang in the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE). Master Ouyi's annotation is also based on the translation by *Kumārajīva*, so we adopt and study this version in our text.

Usually, when Dharma masters annotate or give lectures on a *Sūtra*, they will introduce the translator after the explication of the title. Since the title is already explained in the previous section, information on the translator will be briefly introduced now.

*Tripiṭaka* master refers to someone who mastered the three stores of the *Sūtra*, the *Vinaya* and the *śāstra*. Master *Kumārajīva*, together with *Paramārtha* (真諦; 499–569 CE), Xuanzang (玄奘; 602 – 664CE) and *Amoghavajra* (不空; 705–774CE), constitute the four most eminent Buddhist translators in China. He lived a legendary life and left behind enormous and invaluable legacy. Here, we will take a few aspects of him from *the Biography of Eminent Monks* [23].

## 1. A Brief Biographical Introduction

Master *Kumārajīva*'s father was *Kumārāyana*, who was from ancient India. *Kumārāyana* was from a lineage of ministers, but he declined his ministry to become a monastic. He was invited by the King of *Kucha* (龟兹, a state in the present Xinjiang region) to be the royal priest, and married the king's sister, *Jīva*, also known as *Jīvaka*, whose life was also legendary. When she conceived *Kumārajīva*, *Jīva* became extraordinarily intelligent, she could even spontaneously understand the Sanskrit language, which she had never learned before. But the ability disappeared after *Kumārajīva* was born. When *Kumārajīva* was seven, his mother renounced worldly life to become a Buddhist nun, taking him with her.

*Kumārajīva* was exposed to Buddhist texts and practices from a very early age. He could recite one thousand verses of the treatise of the *Abhidharma* and understood their meaning at the age of seven. In order to enhance his education, *Jīva* took him to *Kashmir*, part of present-day India, at the age of nine. He encountered *Bandhudatta* (槃头达多) and studied *Dirgha Āgama*, *Madhyama Āgama* and the *Kṣudraka*, before returning with his mother, three years later.

At age 12, *Kumārajīva* was taken by his mother *Jīva* to travel back to the outskirts of *Kucha*, where he encountered teacher *Suryasoma* (耶利苏摩), who introduced him to Mahayana texts. *Kumārajīva* was ordained at the age of 20, and he also learned the precepts then. Around this time, *Jīva* predicted the falling of the country in the near future, so she planned to go to India, where she would attain the *Anāgāmins* (the third fruition of *śrāvakas*) fruition. Before leaving, she told her son, "The profound teachings of the *Vaipulya Sūtras* should be promulgated in China, and only you have the capability to disseminate them to the eastern lands. However, it will induce harm (no benefit) on yourself. How will you decide?" *Kumārajīva* replied his mother, "Cultivating the Bodhisattva path is to benefit others and to forget oneself. If I am able to spread the Mahayana edification so as to awaken those delusional worldly beings, I will feel no regret even if enduring the torments in burning caldrons."

Yearning for learning from *Kumārajīva*'s profound wisdom and proficiency in Mahayana teachings, the emperor of the Former Qin, Fu Jian (苻坚; 337-385CE)

sent General Lü Guang (吕光; 337-400) with an army of 70,000 soldiers to conquer the *Kucha* state in order to get *Kumārajīva* in 382 CE. Lü Guang succeeded in conquering *Kucha* and took *Kumārajīva* with him to return home. However, when they arrived in Liangzhou (凉州), on the way back home, Fu Jian was assassinated by Yao Chang (姚萇), who usurped the throne, and established the Yao Qin. Lü Guang then rebelled and established an independent state in Liangzhou.

Although Lü Guang had no belief in Buddhism, he still kept *Kumārajīva* as a hostage for more than 16 years, refusing to deliver him to Yao Chang out of fear of him helping Yao's power. During this period, *Kumārajīva* extensively studied the Chinese culture and the language, preparing for his great mission of translating and promoting Mahayana Buddhist teachings in China.

In 401, Yao Xing (姚兴; 394-416CE) succeeded the emperor, and sent troops to vanquish Lü's army, freeing *Kumārajīva* from hostage. He was invited to Chang'an, the capital, and was conferred the title of "national master", being treated with immense respect and honour. Finally, *Kumārajīva* fulfilled his great aspiration to translate Mahayana teachings from Sanskrit into Chinese. At the same time, the emperor gathered the most scholarly monks from India and China to establish a translation academy. *Kumārajīva* led this great team, translating and expounding Mahayana teachings for more than ten years until his demise.

Around 412, *Kumārajīva* did not feel well and knew that his death was coming. To ensure the learners have faith in his translations, he made the solemn statement: "Now I truly swear before you: if my translations are correct without any mistake, then after my body is cremated, my tongue will not be burnt." After he passed away, his tongue truly remained whole and unscathed upon his cremation.

## 2. His Main Translation Works

Among the most important texts translated by *Kumārajīva* are the *Diamond Sūtra*, the *Amitabha Sūtra*, the *Lotus Sūtra of Wonderful Dharmas*, the *Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sūtra*, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, *Mahāprajñāpāramitāupadeśa* which was a commentary

(attributed to *Nagarjuna*) on the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*. The Taisho Tripitaka contains 74 texts in 384 volumes attributed to him.

All the translations by *Kumārajīva* achieved wide prevalence compared to other versions, if they have alternative translations. This is because, first of all, his translations are rendered based on precise meaning rather than on verbatim translation. Secondly, his translation style is elegant, concise and simple, and avoid the archaic style of Chinese articles, so that the texts are embraced by scholars and ordinary people as well. Thirdly, the texts are endowed with characteristics of rhythm, so they sound like melodies when recited.

Especially the *Amitabha Sūtra*, not only is it universally studied and recited by Pure Land practitioners as the routine programme during morning and evening practices, but it is recited by all Chinese monasteries as well.

#### IV. STUDY *THE AMITABHA SŪTRA*

Having studied the fivefold profound meanings of the *Sūtra* and its translator, we will now learn the text, mainly following the annotations by Master Ouyi. Master Yinguang, the thirteenth patriarch of Pure Land, praised the annotation to its extreme, “*the Amitabha Sūtra* was commented by Master Ouyi in his Essential Annotation, which reaches the acme in both phenomenon and noumenon aspects. It is the number one annotation after the *Sūtra* was expounded by the Buddha, most wondrous and most precise. Even if the ancient Buddhas manifest in the world again to annotate the *Sūtra* another time, it would not surpass this.” (《阿弥陀经》有藕益大师所著《要解》，理事各臻其极，为自佛说此经以来第一注解，妙极确极。纵令古佛再出于世，重注此经，亦不能高出其上矣) [24]

According to Master Ouyi, the text of the *Sūtra* is categorised into three sections: the introduction, the main text and the transmission section, all of which are excellent and cannot be neglected. The introduction is like the head, complete with the five sensory organs (the eyes, ears, nose, tongues and tactile sensory faculties). The main text is like the body, not lacking the internal organs. And the transmission is like hands and feet, moving forward without hindrance. The structure of the Amitabha Sutra is schematically shown in Fig 4.1.

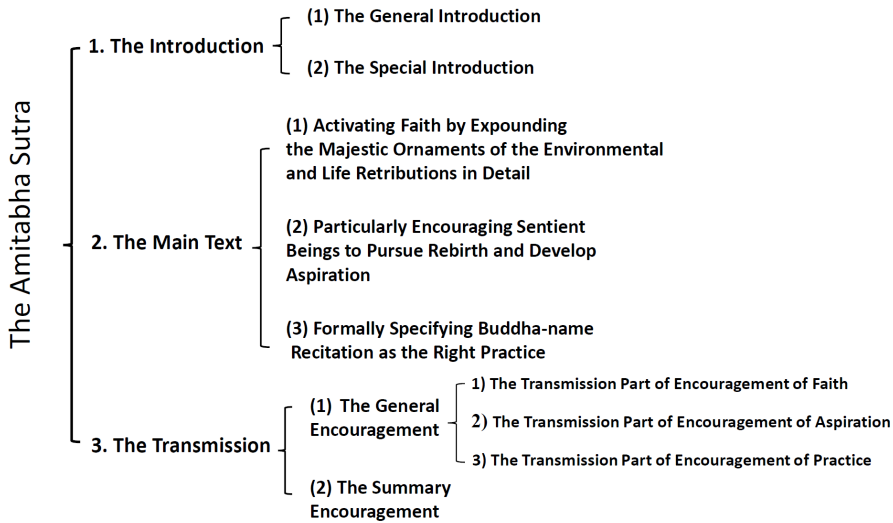


Fig 4.1 The Schematical Structure of the Amitabha Sutra

## 1. The Introduction

The introduction of the *Sūtra* is composed of two parts: the general introduction, which is common to all *Sūtras*, and the special introduction, which is specific to this *Sūtra*, pointing out the conditioned origination of the *Sūtra*.

### (1) The General Introduction

#### 1) The Introduction of Certifying Faith

The Buddhist *Sūtras* always begin with “Thus I have heard” and “at one time, the Buddha was dwelling in somewhere, together with an assembly of some *bhikṣus* and Bodhisattvas, etc.” It is distinctive from teachings of other religions and worldly articles. This arrangement is to certify that the following scripture is spoken by the Buddha himself, so as to activate our faith in it. This part of introduction is often referred to as the sixfold accomplishments of the *Sūtra*: the accomplishment of faith by “Thus I have heard”, the accomplishment of hearing by “I have heard”, the time accomplishment by “at one time”, the place accomplishment by “at somewhere”, the master accomplishment by “the Buddha”, and the assembly accomplishment by “with an assembly of ...”.

**“Thus I have heard:**



**“At one time the Buddha was dwelling in the *Anāthapiṇḍika* Garden with *Jeta* trees in the land of *Śrāvastī*, together with an assembly of 1,250 great *bhikṣus*, who all were great Arhats, well-known by the multitudes.”**（如是我闻：一时，佛在舍卫国祇树给孤独园，与大比丘僧千二百五十人俱，皆是大阿罗汉，众所知识。）

**Notes: “Thus I have heard”:** It denotes the faith accomplishment, with two types of indications:

① **To observe the testament of the Buddha.** When the Buddha is preparing to enter *Parinirvana*, *Ananda* asked the Buddha four questions:

- 1) When the Buddha was alive, the assembly respected the Buddha as the teacher; after the Buddha entered nirvana, whom should be respected as the teacher?
- 2) When the Buddha was alive, they (meaning their mind, not body) abide in the Buddha; after the Buddha entered nirvana, what should they abide in?
- 3) After the Buddha entered nirvana, how should they treat the evil-natured *bhikṣus*?
- 4) The Buddha expounded teachings for forty-nine years, what words should be used at the beginning of the scriptures when they compile the *Sūtras* in the future?

The Buddha told *Ananda*: 1) to respect the precepts as the master; 2) to abide in the fourfold mindfulness; 3) to silently ignore the evil-natured *bhikṣus*; and 4) to begin a *Sūtra* with “Thus I have heard”.

② **To eliminate the doubt of the assembly.** At the first council to compile the *Sūtras*, *Ananda* was responsible for repeating the *Sūtras* expounded by the Buddha, because of his foremost memory. Empowered by the Buddha, *Ananda* manifested majestic countenance, so the others conjectured that 1) The Buddha had come back; 2) A Buddha from other worlds had come to expound the *Sūtra*, or 3) *Ananda* had attained Buddhahood. When they heard *Ananda* pronounced “Thus I have heard”, they were all aware that it was *Ananda* repeating Buddha’s words.

The Chinese translation of “Thus” is “*ru shi*, 如是” meaning “thus is”. According to Master Ouyi’s annotation, “the wondrous truth of the reality is invariable from the ancient to the contemporary, hence called ‘thus’; In accord with the truth of the reality, reciting the Buddha-name to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land is definitely not false, hence called ‘is’.” (实相妙理，古今不变名如。依实相理，念佛求生净土，决定无非曰是。)

“**I have heard**”: It denotes the hearing accomplishment, signifying that the following is what Ananda personally heard from the Buddha directly.

“**At one time**”: It is the time accomplishment. The reasons why it does not specify a concrete time and date as in present reports are: 1) the audience in the Buddha’s assembly were from different realms, with different time standard. For example, one day in the second celestial plane is equivalent to one hundred years of our time. 2) Master Ouyi states, “Time is not a real dharma, so when the master and the disciples are compatible to complete the speaking and listening to the Dharmas, it is call ‘at one time’.” (时无实法，以师资道合，说听周足名一时。)

“**the Buddha**”: It denotes the master accomplishment, signifying that the Buddha was the host of the Dharma expounding occurrence.

“**dwelling in the *Anāthapiṇḍika* Garden with *Jeta* trees in the land of *Śrāvastī***”: It denotes the place accomplishment.

“***Śrāvastī***” is the name of the capital of a large country, *Kosala*, in ancient India. King *Prasenajit* was the ruler of the country at the time of the Buddha.

“**the *Anāthapiṇḍika* Garden with *Jeta* trees**” was the famous place where Buddha dwelled and expounded Dharmas for about twenty-five years. The establishment of the park is replete with legend, the gist is as follows:

“***Anāthapiṇḍika***” is the Sanskrit name, meaning giving alms to orphans and solitary ones. His name was *Sudatta*, a wealthy merchant and philanthropist in *Śrāvastī*, who was fond of giving alms to relieve orphans and solitary old people. When *Sudatta* heard of Buddha, he paid homage to the Buddha immediately and resolved to build a permanent place for the Buddha and his assembly to inhabit and expound Dharmas. He found the garden owned by

prince *Jeta* to be the most suitable for the purpose, so he approached the prince to buy the garden. The prince, to dissuade him, proposed that the garden was not for sale, unless *Sudatta* could cover all the land of the garden with gold coins. However, *Sudatta*'s will to purchase the garden was so adamant that he immediately ordered his family members and assistants to start covering all the land with gold coins. Moved by his determination, prince *Jeta* asked for the reason and his purpose for the garden. When he realised the merits of making offerings to the Buddha, he donated all the trees in the garden, which could not be covered by gold coins, as offerings. Hence came the name “the *Anāthapiṇḍika* Garden with *Jeta* trees”

**“together with an assembly of 1,250 great *bhikṣus*, who all were great Arhats, well-known by the multitudes”**: This denotes the assembly accomplishment, meaning the participants of the Dharma expounding meeting. The 1,250 *bhikṣus* were the permanent assembly, its composition was introduced in Chapter 3 of Vol I. **“great Arhats”** indicates that these *bhikṣus* manifested as Arhats, but they were actually Bodhisattvas following the Buddha to assist the promulgation of the Mahayana *Sūtras*.

## 2) The List of Assembly of Attendants

### i) The *Śrāvakas* Assembly

The following paragraph enumerates sixteen eminent representatives of the *śrāvakas* assembly.

**“They included the Elder *Śāriputra*, *Mahāmaudgalyāyana*, *Mahā-kāśyapa*, *Mahākātyāyana*, *Mahākauṣṭhila*, *Revata*, *Śuddhipanthaka*, *Nanda*, *Ānanda*, *Rāhula*, *Gavāṃpati*, *Piṇḍola-Bharadvāja*, *Kālodāyin*, *Mahākaphiṇa*, *Vakkula*, *Aniruddha*, and other great disciples like them.**” (长老舍利弗、摩诃目犍连、摩诃迦叶、摩诃迦旃延、摩诃拘絺罗、离婆多、周利槃陀迦、难陀、阿难陀、罗睺罗、憍梵波提、宾头卢颇罗堕、迦留陀夷、摩诃劫宾那、薄拘罗、阿菟楼駄，如是等诸大弟子。)

These sixteen Arhats were the most eminent disciples of the Buddha, and each one represented one of the most prominent talents or powers.

**“the Elder *Śāriputra*”**: the word “elder” is not limited to describe *Śāriputra* alone, it is used to describe all the following Arhats. It possesses four meanings:

1) elderly in age, for example, over 80 or 90 years old; 2) elderly in years of formal ordainment, for receiving the complete monastic precepts for more than 30 years; 3) elderly in virtues and knowledge, for someone who maybe young but eminent in virtues and learning; or 4) complete in attainment, for those who have attained *Arhatship*, whether they are old or young.

*Śāriputra* was the foremost in wisdom, who attained *Arhatship* within seven days after seeing the Buddha. *Śāriputra* is listed first to indicate that *the Amitabha Sūtra* and the Buddha-name recitation method can only be believed by beings with great wisdom.

*Mahāmaudgalyāyana* was the foremost in transcendental powers.

*Mahākāśyapa* was the foremost in ascetic cultivation, who was the first patriarch of Chan school.

*Mahākātyāyana* was the foremost in debate.

*Mahākauṣṭhila* was the foremost in questions and answers.

*Revata* was the foremost in non-inversion.

*Śuddhipanthaka* was the most obtuse in talent, who could not remember even one stanza.

*Nanda* was the foremost in appearance, who was the half-brother of Buddha.

*Ānanda* was the foremost in hearing Dharmas, who was the cousin of Buddha and later served as the attendant of Buddha.

*Rāhula* was the foremost in esoteric cultivation, who was the son of Buddha.

*Gavāṃpati* was the foremost in receiving offerings from celestial beings, who habitually chewed like a cow due to previous verbal karmas of laughing at an elderly Arhat.

*Piṇḍola-Bharadvāja* was the foremost as the field of merits, who permanently abide in the world to receive offerings from sentient beings.

*Kālodāyin* was the foremost in edification.

*Mahākaphiṇa* was the foremost in telling the constellations.

*Vakkula* was the foremost in long lifespan.

*Aniruddha* was foremost in possessing the celestial eye, who was another cousin of Buddha.

There are many detailed introductions about these disciples in all the references [11][12][13][14][15][16][17]. Readers who are interested can learn from them and can also read the introductions about them on the Wikipedia.

## ii) The Bodhisattva Assembly

“Also present were Bodhisattva-Mahāsattvas, such as *Mañjuśrī*, the Dharma Prince, *Ajita* Bodhisattva, *Gandhahastin* Bodhisattva, and Constant Diligence Bodhisattva, and great Bodhisattvas such as these,” (并诸菩萨摩诃萨，文殊师利法王子、阿逸多菩萨、乾陀诃提菩萨、常精进菩萨，与如是等诸大菩萨)

Here only four Bodhisattvas are enumerated as the representatives in the assembly, indicating the primary requirements for the practice of Pure Land method divulged in this *Sūtra*.

*Mahāsattva* denotes the great Bodhisattvas who have developed the great Bodhicitta, that is, they will pursue the attainment of Buddhahood and undertake the rescue of sentient beings out of great compassion.

“***Mañjuśrī*, the Dharma Prince**”: The Buddha is the king of Dharma; *Mañjuśrī* Bodhisattva would succeed and glorify the lineage of Buddhas, hence he was called the Dharma prince. He was the foremost in wisdom among Bodhisattvas. He was listed as the first to indicate that this *Sūtra* and the Buddha-name recitation method cannot be believed without great wisdom, and faith is the first factor in the three provisions of Pure Land method.

“***Ajita* Bodhisattva**”: He is dwelling in the *Tuṣita* heaven now as a Bodhisattva to attain Buddhahood in one-lifetime, preparing to descend to this world as the next manifested Buddha. He was listed here to indicate that he will definitely

expound the Pure Land when he becomes the Buddha. Furthermore, he is eminent in great vow, implying that aspiration or vow is crucial for the practice of Pure Land method.

**“*Gandhahastin* Bodhisattva, and Constant Diligence Bodhisattva”:** *Gandhahastin* is a Sanskrit word, meaning “non-rest”. These two Bodhisattvas represent the diligent cultivation of practice in all Mahayana path, including the Pure Land method as well.

### iii) The Assembly of Celestial and Other Beings

**“as well as the god-king *Śakro-Devānām-Indra* and an innumerable multitude of heavenly beings.”** (及释提桓因等，无量诸天大众俱。)

Here the “the god-king *Śakro-Devānām-Indra*” is the lord of the thirty-three heavens. He was listed together with innumerable heavenly beings to represent all the celestial beings and other beings as well.

#### 1) Some Commentaries

① In the annotation, Master Ouyi explained the reason for the sequence of participants in the assembly. “The *śrāvakas* were listed first because they demonstrate the appearance of the monastic, they permanently follow the Buddha, and Buddha’s teachings depend on the *Sangha* to be disseminated. The Bodhisattvas were listed secondly because their appearances are not fixed, they do not constantly follow the Buddha, and it represents the meaning of middle path. The celestial and human beings are mentioned last, because they exhibit mundane beings’ appearances, they are mixed with saintly and mundane beings, and their responsibility is external protection.” (声闻居首者，出世相故，常随从故，佛法赖僧传故。菩萨居中者，相不定故，不常随故，表中道义故。天人列后者，世间相故，凡圣品杂故，外护职故。)

② These three groups of participants in the assembly also indicate that the Pure Land method is suitable for all beings with diverse capabilities. First of all, whether one is talented like *Śāriputra* or obtuse like *Śuddhipanthaka*, whether one is inclined to ascetic and meditative cultivations like *Mahākāśyapa* or enjoyed affluent offerings like *Piṇḍolabharadvāja*, whether one possessed the most transcendental powers like *Mahāmaudgalyāyana* or other capabilities like

the rest of the listed Arhats, they are all qualified to practice the Pure Land method. Furthermore, the Bodhisattvas as intelligent as *Mañjuśrī* Bodhisattva, and *Ajita* Bodhisattva who will come forth as the next Buddha, are still not excluded from the Pure Land method, how can we not devotedly cultivate it?

## (2) The Special Introduction

Master Ouyi elaborated on this part quite comprehensively, and we will excerpt a few paragraphs from his annotation to help the reader appreciate its meaning.

“Next is the special introduction. The wondrous Dharma gateway of the Pure Land is inconceivable, and no one is capable of asking it, hence the Buddha spontaneously chanted the environmental retribution, life retribution and the Buddha’s name as a start. In addition, because the Buddha can evaluate the opportunity and the capacities of beings without error, when he perceived that the sentient beings should hear the Pure Land wondrous Dharma gateway so as to obtain the four universal benefits, he spontaneously started without waiting for any request.” (净土妙门，不可思议，无人能问，佛自唱依正名字为发起。又佛智鉴机无谬，见此大众应闻净土妙门而获四益，故不俟问，便自发起。)

The four universal benefits are the four ways of universal giving introduced in Vol I. They represent four types of methods employed by the Buddha to expound a teaching so as to induce the beings to enlightenment or four types of benefits obtained by beings when hearing a Dharma. In Sanskrit, they are named the four *siddhāntas*, as alternatively defined in *the Buddha Light Dictionary*:

① **The worldly *siddhānta*:** It is also called the *siddhānta* of joy. It denotes expounding the meaning of conditioned origination and combination, following the worldly rules, that is, explaining the truth of conditioned origination based on worldly thoughts, languages, and concepts. In this *Sūtra*, when we hear the Buddha speaking of the Pure Land, its pure adornment, and Amitabha speaking Dharmas now, we feel delight and accept them.

② **The *siddhānta* for distinctive persons:** It is also called the *siddhānta* for generating virtues. It denotes expounding various supramundane Dharmas in accordance with the distinctive faculties and capacities of sentient beings so as

to enable them to generate virtuous roots. For this *Sūtra*, the Buddha told us that Buddha-name recitation is the cause and effect of generating enormous meritorious virtues, hence we should recite the Buddha-name as much as possible to generate virtues.

③ **The *siddhānta* of antidote:** It is also called the *siddhānta* of elimination of evil. It denotes to prescribe specific Dharma medicine (teaching) according to the afflictions of greed, hatred or delusion of sentient beings, so as to eliminate their various afflictions and evil karmas. For Pure Land practice, if one can exclusively cultivate the Buddha-name recitation, and be mindful of the Buddha-name thought-moment after thought-moment without distraction, one will prevent transgressions in physical, verbal and mental conducts.

④ **The *siddhānta* of the ultimate truth:** It is also called the *siddhānta* of entering the tenets. It denotes to directly expound the ultimate truth of the reality of various dharmas, so as to enable sentient beings to truly realise the ultimate truth of the reality. As pointed out in the exposition of powers and functions, by reciting the Buddha-name up to the stage of single-mindedness without distraction at noumenon level, one will truly destroy at least one part of the ignorance, and attain enlightenment of the ultimate truth.

**“At that time the Buddha told the Elder *Śāriputra*, ‘Passing 100,000 *koṭi* Buddha-lands westward from here, there is a land called Ultimate Bliss (*Sukhāvatī*). In that land there is a Buddha named Amitabha, who is right now expounding the Dharma.’”** (尔时，佛告长老舍利弗：“从是西方过十万亿佛土，有世界名曰极乐，其土有佛，号阿弥陀，今现在说法。)

“The Pure Land Dharma gateway, embracing all the three types of faculties, is beyond duality and is perfectly integrating and inconceivable. It perfectly encompasses and perfectly transcends all the Dharma gateways, so it is truly profound and difficult to believe. Therefore, the Buddha particularly tell it to the one with foremost wisdom. Without unsurpassed wisdom, one cannot directly become doubtless.” (净土法门，三根普摄，绝待圆融，不可思议。圆收圆超一切法门，甚深难信。故特告大智慧者，非第一智慧，不能直下无疑也。)

**Notes:** “embracing all the three types of faculties”: It indicates that the Pure Land method is suitable for anyone to cultivate, from the most virtuous Bodhisattvas with great wisdom to the dullest mundane beings.



“beyond duality and is perfectly integrating and inconceivable”: It denotes that the Pure Land practice is based on the tenets of the reality, that is, the mind that is mindful of the Buddha is inseparable from the mind of Buddha. The ornament of the environmental retribution of the Pure Land and the meritorious virtues of the life retribution there, as well as our present thought-moment are all manifestations of the mind-nature, or the Dharma-realm. Hence, they are all non-impeded between phenomena and noumenon, and non-impeded between various phenomena, as discussed in the subsection of believing in noumenon.

“It perfectly encompasses and perfectly transcends all the Dharma gateways”: According to Master Yuanying’s commentary [12], all the Dharma gateways proposed by the Buddha through his forty-nine years’ preaching, are not beyond the three cultivations: precept, concentration and wisdom. Here the Pure Land Dharma gateway encompasses all the three cultivations. While we are mindful of the Buddha, we hold the six faculties under control, so our physical, verbal and mental conducts remain purified, without violating any precept. When we achieve single-mindedness without distraction, we realise right concentration. Furthermore, while we are reciting the Buddha-name, we are aware that the mind reciting is empty in self-essence, and the Buddha being recited is unobtainable. At the same time, we are also aware that the reciting mind consecutively continues thought-moment after thought-moment, and the Buddha name being recited are clear and distinct in every recitation. In addition, we are aware that the Buddha is the mind, and the mind is the Buddha, the perceiver and the perceived disappear, and the emptiness and the existence are oblivious, realising the wondrous wisdom of the three contemplations. Therefore, one recitation of “Namo Amitabha Buddha” is replete with precept, concentration and wisdom, hence it encompasses all the Dharma gateways.

Due to its utmost convenience to practice and its all-embracing attributes, Buddha-name recitation also perfectly transcends all the other Dharma gateways, hence, it is truly inconceivable.

“it is truly profound and difficult to believe”: A lot of people, consider the Buddha-name recitation as too simple for them to practice. In fact, from the annotations by Master Ouyi, this method is extremely profound in both phenomenon and noumenon level. It is so easy to cultivate yet its effect is so unexcelled, hence it is truly difficult to believe. Even the Buddha himself declared at the end of the *Sūtra* that it was hard for him to expound this Dharma that is difficult for all the worlds and people to believe.

Master Ouyi explicated the four types of lands in the Pure Land and the three bodies of Buddhas, but he emphasised that “the presently mentioned Land of Bliss specifically denotes the pure land shared by mundane and saintly beings, it is also horizontally endowed with the upper three pure lands.” (今云极乐世界，正指同居净土，亦即横具上三净土也。)

He also specified that, “the presently mentioned Amitabha Buddha specifically denotes the manifested body in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings, it is also inseparable from the Dharma-body and the reward-body.” (今云阿弥陀佛，正指同居土中示生化身，仍复即报即法也。)

Master Ouyi pointed out that the Amitabha mentioned in the special introduction specifically denotes the manifested Buddha in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings, because it pertains to the majority of practitioners.

“Furthermore, there are four meanings in saying that both the land and the Buddha do actually exist: 1) It confirmatively marks the real existent land, so as to enable us to cherish and pursue (rebirth there). 2) It instructs us with sincere words to enable us to concentrate (on one target). 3) It negates being a *Gandharva* city or a mirage, a provisional demonstration or a skilful manifestation, a perceptive image or a falsity, or the mere-empty nirvana attained (by the two-vehicle practitioners) or the separate-nonduality, so as to enable us to destroy demons, falsities, provisional and small attainments. 4) It perfectly exhibits the intrinsical endowment so as to enable us to profoundly attain it.” (复次世界及佛皆言有者，具四义：的标实境，令欣求故；诚语指示，令专一故；简非干城阳焰，非权现曲示，非缘影虚妄，非保真偏但，破魔邪权小故；圆彰性具，令深证故。)

**Notes:** This paragraph enumerates the four types of benefits indicated by the special introduction.

① “It confirmatively marks the real existent land, so as to enable us to cherish and pursue (rebirth there)”: It confirmatively identify that the environmental and life retributions are real and are present existence, so as to encourage beings to delightedly wish for rebirth there. This is the worldly *siddhānta*, enabling people to be joyous.

② “It instructs us with sincere words to enable us to concentrate (on one target)”: *Śākyamuni* Buddha and numerous Buddhas in the six directions all instruct us with the most sincere words, the Buddha-name recitation Dharma gateway. They encourage us to concentrate our mind one-pointedly, with pure mindfulness continuing consecutively. This is the *siddhānta* for distinctive persons, enabling them to develop virtues.

③ “It negates being a *Gandharva* city or a mirage”: Both the *Gandharva* city and mirages are illusory phenomena. A *Gandharva* city sometimes appears like castle and heavenly palace in the air; and a mirage is sometimes seen as water in the desert, or some other image in the air above grass land etc.

“a provisional demonstration or a skilful manifestation”: This is to refute the assertion of Li Tongxuan, who claimed that the environmental and life retributions of Pure Land were merely a provisional demonstration and skilful manifestation in his *Comprehensive Commentary on the Flower Ornament Sūtra*.

“a perceptive image or a falsity”: A perceptive image is the image captured by the sixth consciousness and a falsity is the conceptual configuration of the sixth consciousness, so both of them are not real existence.

“the mere-empty nirvana attained (by the two-vehicle practitioners) or the separate-nonduality”: The mere-empty nirvana is attained by the two-vehicle practitioners, which is not ultimate enlightenment. The separate-nonduality is cultivated by Bodhisattvas of distinctive teachings, who cultivate the contemplation of emptiness first, then the contemplation of conventional truth, and finally the contemplation of the separate-nonduality. According to the categorisation of the fourfold teachings of Tiantai school, neither the mere-empty nirvana nor the fruition of the separate-nonduality of Bodhisattvas of the distinctive teachings is ultimate truth.

“to destroy demons, falsities, provisional and small attainments”: The existence of both the environmental and life retributions are real. First, they are not a *Gandharva* city or a mirage to destroy demons, because these images are supposed to be perceptual fields created by demons. Secondly, they are not perceptual images or conceptual configurations of the sixth consciousness to negate the falsities, because both of them are false reflections and processing

results, not real. Thirdly, they are neither provisional demonstrations or a skilful manifestations nor separate-nonduality fruition to demolish the assertion that the Pure Land method is merely a provisional practice. And fourthly, they are not mere-empty nirvana to refute attainment of the two-vehicles. All these four negations are to destroy evil dharmas; it is the *siddhānta* of antidote of the evil.

④ “It perfectly exhibits the intrinsically endowment so as to enable us to profoundly attain it”: It indicates that both the environmental and life retributions of the Pure Land are intrinsically endowed in the mind-nature, divulging the wondrous tenet of the reality. Hence it is the *siddhānta* of the ultimate truth.

“The saying ‘**is right now expounding the Dharma**’ signifies that the above-mentioned existence of environmental retribution and the life retribution are neither a past event that has already disappeared, nor a futural event not realised yet. Hence we should aspire to achieve rebirth so as to directly listen to the teachings and to swiftly attain right enlightenment.” (今现在说法者，简上依正二有，非过去已灭，未来未成，正应发愿往生，亲觐听法，速成正觉也。)

It indicates that the Pure Land is different from our world, where *Śākyamuni* Buddha entered *parinirvana* more than two thousand years ago, and the future *Maitreya* Buddha will not descend to manifest in our world until millions of years later. Since the Buddhas are all omniscient, they can bestow upon us the most appropriate instructions pursuant to our capacities so as to accelerate our process in the accomplishment of our Buddha Path. Because Amitabha Buddha is still expounding Dharmas in the Pure Land right now, we should try all means to achieve rebirth there so that we can acquire instructions from him directly.

“Moreover, the current validity of the two existences is the introduction of encouraging faith. That the land is called the Bliss is the introduction of encouraging aspiration. And ‘**there is a Buddha named Amitabha**’ is the introduction of encouraging wondrous practice of Buddha-name recitation.” (复次二有现在，劝信序也；世界名极乐，劝愿序也；佛号阿弥陀，劝持名妙行序也。)

One of the salient characteristics of Master Ouyi’s annotation is repeatedly stressing the three provisions of the Pure Land method, that is, faith, aspiration and the Buddha-name recitation.

## 2. The Main Text

Before annotating the main text, Master Ouyi categorised it into three sections, based on the three provisions of the Pure Land, and he further clarified the necessary conditions.

“The main text is segmented into three sections: The first is activating faith by expounding the majestic ornaments of the environmental and life retributions in detail. The second is specifically encouraging the development of aspiration to pursue rebirth. And the third is formally specifying Buddha-name recitation as the right practice.” (正宗分三：初广陈彼土依正妙果以启信、二特劝众生应求往生以发愿、三正示行者执持名号以立行。)

“Faith, aspiration and Buddha-name recitation is the essential instruction of the *Sūtra*. Faith and aspiration are the practices of wisdom and Buddha-name recitation is the practice of action. Whether one achieves rebirth or not depends entirely on whether one has faith and aspiration or not; the upper or lower grade of rebirth depends entirely on reciting the Buddha-name profoundly or slightly. Therefore, the practice of wisdom is the guidance, and the practice of action is the right cultivation, similar to the eyes and legs operating together.” (信愿持名，一经要旨。信愿为慧行，持名为行行。得生与否，全由信愿之有无。品位高下，全由持名之深浅。故慧行为前导，行行为正修，如目足并运也。)

This paragraph points out the relationship between the three provisions of the Pure Land. The sentence “Whether one achieves rebirth or not depends entirely on whether one has faith and aspiration or not; the upper or lower grade of rebirth depends entirely on reciting the Buddha-name profoundly or slightly” is one of the most famous statements in the Pure Land literature. It stresses that sincere faith and earnest aspiration are the absolute necessary conditions for achieving rebirth in the Pure Land. Master Ouyi would emphasise this principle later.

## (1) Activating Faith by Expounding the Majestic Ornaments of the Environmental and Life Retributions in Detail

Although the text is extremely concise, this part of the *Sūtra* is structurally sophisticated, as shown in Fig 4.2.

### 1) General Explanation of the Meaning of Bliss

#### i) The Enquiry

“Śāriputra, why is that land called Ultimate Bliss?” (舍利弗，彼土何故名为极乐？)

#### ii) The Explanations

#### A) The Explanation Based on the Life Retribution

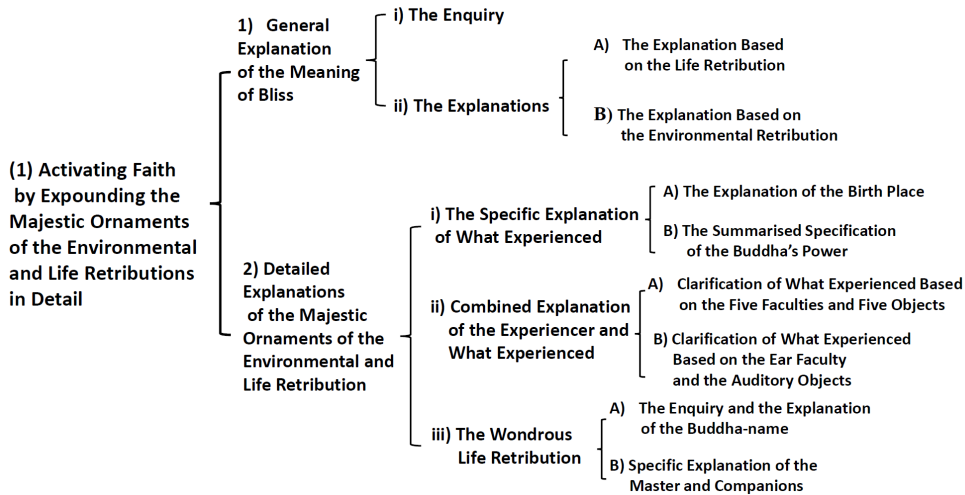


Fig 4.2 Environmental and Life Retributions of the Pure Land

“Sentient beings of that land have none of the various sufferings but only experience myriad joys. Therefore, that land is called Ultimate Bliss.” (其国众生无有众苦，但受诸乐，故名极乐。)

We have comprehensively elaborated on sufferings such as the three sufferings and the eight sufferings in Vol I of this book, and extensively elucidated on the bliss of the Pure Land in the previous two chapters of this volume, so they are not repeated here. Ciyun Chanzhu (慈云忏主; 964 – 1032) enumerated ten aspects of comparison between the sufferings of this world and the bliss of the Pure Land, pertaining to the cultivation of the Buddha Path [17].

- ① One endures the suffering of rarely encountering Buddhas in this world, whereas one can enjoy the bliss of frequently approaching the Buddha as long as his flower unfolds in the Pure Land.
- ② One endures the suffering of not hearing the expounding of Dharmas in this world, whereas one can enjoy the bliss of water, birds and trees in the Pure Land all expounding wondrous Dharmas.
- ③ One endures the suffering of entanglement of evil friends in this world, whereas one can enjoy the bliss of congregation only with the multitude of superior virtuous ones in the Pure Land.
- ④ One endures the suffering of disturbance by various demons in this world, whereas when one is in Pure Land he can enjoy the bliss of mindful protection by Buddhas, and is apart from demonic disturbances.
- ⑤ One endures the suffering of incessant transmigration in this world, whereas one can enjoy the bliss of termination of the birth-and-death cycle, and permanently escape from transmigrations when one is in the Pure Land.
- ⑥ One endures the suffering of being difficult to avoid the three woeful realms in this world, whereas one can enjoy the bliss of permanent departure from the woeful realms, and even not hear their names when one is in the Pure Land.
- ⑦ One endures the suffering of obstructions in the path by worldly affairs in this world, whereas one can enjoy the bliss of all materials for enjoyment being spontaneously emanated and no toils needed when one is in the Pure Land.
- ⑧ One endures the suffering of short lifespan in this world, whereas one can enjoy the bliss of same length of lifespan as that of Buddhas, without limit, when one is in the Pure Land.

⑨ One endures the suffering of retrogression in cultivations in this world, whereas one can enjoy the bliss of entering the right definite assembly, and never retrogress when one is in the Pure Land.

⑩ One endures the suffering of being difficult to accomplish the Buddha Path in this world, whereas one can enjoy the bliss of accomplishment of the practice in one lifetime and fulfilment of all aspirations when one is in the Pure Land.

## **B) The Explanation Based on the Environmental Retribution**

**“Moreover, Śāriputra, the Land of Ultimate Bliss is surrounded by seven tiers of railings, seven layers of nets, and seven rows of arrayed trees, all made of the four treasures. Therefore, that land is called Ultimate Bliss.”** (又舍利弗，极乐国土，七重栏楯，七重罗网，七重行树，皆是四宝周匝围绕，是故彼国名为极乐。)

Here the railings (some translate as balustrade) are used to adorn the boundaries, nets adorn the sky, and the arrayed trees adorn the ground. They are all arranged in sevenfold to indicate the seven groups of the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment. The four treasures indicate the four virtues of nirvana: permanence, bliss, self and purity. All the reborn ones enjoy real and permanent bliss with unlimited lifespan and non-decaying vajra bodies. All the reborn ones experience no suffering, but all enjoy ultimate bliss. All the reborn ones possess sovereignty over body and mind, with their spontaneously obtained transcendental powers. And all the reborn ones are not disturbed by any afflictions, and enjoy pure and tranquil state of mind.

## **2) Detailed Explanations of the Majestic Ornaments of the Environmental and Life retribution**

### **i) The Specific Explanation of What is Experienced**

#### **A) The Explanation of the Birth Place**

**“Also, Śāriputra, in the Land of Ultimate Bliss are ponds (or lakes) of the seven treasures, filled with water of the eight meritorious virtues. The bed of each lake is covered with pure gold sand. The steps and walkways on the four sides of each lake are made of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and crystal.**



**Above are lofty towered palaces, all adorned with gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, conch shell, ruby, and red agate. The lotus flowers in the lakes are as large as chariot wheels. The blue colours gleam with blue light; the yellow colours, yellow light; the red colours, red light; the white colours, white light. They are subtle, wondrous, fragrant, and pure.”**（又舍利弗，极乐国土有七宝池，八功德水充满其中。池底纯以金沙布地。四边阶道，金、银、琉璃、玻瓈合成。上有楼阁，亦以金、银、琉璃、玻瓈、砗磲、赤珠、玛瑙而严饰之。池中莲花大如车轮，青色青光，黄色黄光，赤色赤光，白色白光，微妙香洁。）

**Notes:** This paragraph describes the splendid environment of the place that we will see and enjoy when we arrive in the Pure Land as our lotus flower unfolds. First of all, the lotus flowers are grown from the treasured lakes, which are composed of seven jewels, and the lakes are filled with water of the eight meritorious virtues. The water is emanated from the *mani* pearls, as introduced in the previous two chapters.

**“Above are lofty towered palaces”:** These palaces are the abodes and places for cultivation. Some are located on the ground beside the walkways around the treasured lakes, others are suspended in the space above the lakes and streets, based on the difference of grades of rebirth and the progress of the reborn ones.

**“The lotus flowers in the lakes are as large as chariot wheels”:** Here the chariot wheels are those of the chariot of the saintly wheel-turning monarch. The smallest ones are one *yojanā* in diameter, equivalent to 20 kilometres, and the large ones can reach hundreds of thousands of *yojanās* in diameter. The size of the flower also depends on the grade of rebirth. Using wheels as simile for the lotus flower indicates the meritorious virtues of the flowers. First, the wheels have the function of transportation, and the lotus flowers also possess the function of conveying the Pure Land practitioner from other worlds to the Pure Land at the end of this life. Second, the wheels have the power of crushing things, and the lotus flowers also possess the power of destroying various afflictions. Therefore, some reborn ones with lower grade of rebirth will remain in the flower for some time, ranging from one night to twelve kalpas, so as to eradicate their afflictions.

**“The blue colours gleam with blue light...”:** Unlike the lotus flowers in our world which are small and without light, the lotus flowers of Pure Land are brilliant with different colours and lights, like everything in the Pure Land.

**“They are subtle, wondrous, fragrant, and pure”**: Master Ouyi annotated the four types of attributes as “they briefly extol the four kinds of virtues of the lotus flower: having substance without form is subtle; being non-impeded is wondrous; having no form indicates not from dust objects, so it is pure.” (略叹莲华四德。质而非形曰微。无碍曰妙。非形则非尘，故洁也。)

*Notes*: ① “having substance without form is subtle” denotes that the lotus flowers do not have fixed form like the flowers in our world, although they have some sort of substance. Their sizes vary in accordance with the power of our mindfulness. When we cultivate the mindful recitation of the Buddha-name vigorously, the flower will grow exuberantly, but when we are indolent in cultivation, the flower will shrink or wither.

② “being non-impeded is wondrous”: One salient characteristic of lotus flower is its simultaneous growth of flower and seeds, that is, when the flower blooms, the seeds are already grown, indicating the simultaneous occurrence of cause and effect. As soon as someone in any world in the ten directions recites the Buddha’s name, there will be a lotus flower growing in the treasured lake simultaneously, without impediment.

③ Master Ouyi did not stress the fragrance of the lotus flower. However, even the lotus flower in our world can emanate fresh fragrance, not to mention the lotus flowers in the Pure Land.

④ “having no form indicates not dust objects, so it is pure” : Here “dust objects” mean eye sense objects, which usually possess concrete fixed shapes and colours. Therefore, having no form indicates that they are not ordinary form objects, but like ethereal images merely manifested from our mind, hence they are pure.

## **B) The Summarised Specification of the Buddha’s Power**

**“Śāriputra, the Land of Ultimate Bliss is accomplished with such majestic adornments of meritorious virtues.”** (舍利弗，极乐国土成就如是功德庄严。)

*The Amitabha Sūtra* stresses four times the fact that **“the Land of Ultimate Bliss is accomplished with such majestic adornments of meritorious virtues.”** Master Ouyi elaborated extensively on the profound meaning of this sentence.

“The above describes that the various majestic adornment of the dwelling and birth place are all accomplished by the essence-conforming meritorious virtues from Amitabha Buddha’s grand vows and great practices. Therefore, they can completely adorn the four types of Pure Lands and universally embrace all saintly and mundane beings of the three periods and ten directions to enable them to achieve rebirth.” (明上住处生处种种庄严，皆是阿弥陀佛大愿大行称性功德之所成就。故能遍严四种净土，普摄十方三世一切凡圣令往生也。)

This is declaring the power of the Buddha. The grand vows denoted the Forty-Eight Great Vows made by Amitabha Buddha when he was at the causal ground. He pledged to establish the supreme Pure Land with the most majestic adornment so as to receive all sentient beings to pursue rebirth there. As introduced in Chapter 2, the 32nd vow states, **“When I attain Buddhahood, in my land, from the ground to the open sky, there will be palaces, towers, ponds, streams, flowers, and trees. Myriad things in my land will be composed of innumerable varieties of treasures and hundreds of thousands kinds of fragrances. These magnificent adornments are extraordinary and wondrous, surpassing all those of devas and humans. As the fragrances pervade all worlds in the ten directions, Bodhisattvas who smell them will all cultivate the Buddha Path. If this should not come true, I would not attain perfect enlightenment.”** The great practice refers to the extremely strenuous unceasing cultivations of the *pāramitās* which Buddha undertook for ineffably innumerable *kalpas* after he made the grand vows.

**Notes:** “the essence-conforming meritorious virtues”: It indicates that all the meritorious virtues are in accord with the self-nature, which are intrinsically endowed by all beings, yet only completely realised by Buddhas. It is said that when *Dharmākara* Bodhisattva made his grand vows, he had already attained the ground stage of Bodhisattva, hence his vows and his cultivations were all made conforming to the reality. They differ from vows and practices made by mundane beings, which are from discerning and discriminating mind, pursuant to conditions and situations, hence are variable, usually unable to last.

“completely adorn the four types of Pure Lands”: Because the meritorious virtues conform with the reality, which is perfectly pervasive throughout the space, they can completely adorn all the four types of Pure Lands, so as to encompass all beings with different achievements and capacities to get rebirth in the Pure Land.

“Furthermore, the Buddha made the grand vows as the cause of the abundant virtuous roots of sentient beings, and the great practices as the condition for the plentiful merits of sentient beings. They enable those, with faith, aspiration and Buddha-name recitations, to accomplish such meritorious virtues in each and every thought-moment. They are already accomplished, and not being accomplished now or will be accomplished in the future.” (复次佛以大愿作众生多善根之因，以大行作众生多福德之缘。令信愿持名者，念念成就如是功德，而皆是已成，非今非当。)

It is quite difficult to comprehend why Amitabha Buddha’s great vows and practices act as the supreme causes and conditions for rebirth of sentient beings. Amitabha Buddha accomplished the four pure lands for sentient beings based on the grand vows and great practices. He further condensed the meritorious virtues accomplished by the grand vows and practices into the Buddha-name “Amitabha Buddha”. When Amitabha Buddha attained Buddhahood, he had already fulfilled all the Forty-Eight Great Vows, thus they became the true existence conforming with the reality, which permeates all beings’ mind. Hence, all sentient beings who possess faith, aspiration and recite his name will activate the power of the grand vows and great practices, transforming Buddha’s power to become their own power.

This is similar to a worldly entrepreneur who have established a colossal business empire with unlimited resources and wealth, and encrypted his wealth into a code, so that anyone can access and enjoy the wealth as long as one possesses the code and uses it. It is also analogous to a company, which having accomplished a sophisticated game program, puts the program in the virtuous web space and issues a code for the execution of the program, so that any player can access and play the game as long as one enters the code.

In conclusion, why we can achieve rebirth in the Pure Land to enjoy all the bliss there by having faith and aspiration, and reciting Amitabha Buddha’s name almost all depends on what Amitabha Buddha have accomplished based on his

grand vows and great practices. With sincere faith and earnest aspiration, each utterance of mindful recitation of the Buddha's name will activate the meritorious virtues on our behalf, converting to our provisions to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. If we rely entirely on our own effort, almost none of us could attain emancipation from the cycle of birth-and-death, not to mention being able to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, hundred thousand *koṭis* Buddha-lands away.

Regarding why taking Amitabha Buddha's great practice as our condition to achieve rebirth, Venerable Yanxu has another explanation [16]. While *Dharmākara* Bodhisattva was undertaking the strenuous practice for inconceivably countless *kalpas* of time, he must have had established affinity with us then. Consequently, we can establish solid faith and earnest aspiration to get rebirth in his Pure Land, and delightedly cultivate Buddha-name recitation. Otherwise, it is almost impossible for us to have solid faith and to yearn for getting rebirth there, a place which we have never seen before.

The last sentence emphasises again that the Pure Land is already established based on Amitabha Buddha's grand vows and great practices, to further encourage us to generate faith and aspiration and commence our practice now. Just like an enormous bank, which already exists, so we can access it and withdraw money whenever we want to. If it is still under construction or will be constructed, we cannot use it now.

“This is to depend on the various majestic adornments accomplished by Amitabha as the augmenting conditions and the natural perceptual field, so as to incite the various adornments inside the mind of sentient beings. All Buddhas are inseparable from sentient beings, and all the others are inseparable from the self. Hence, it is said that it is accomplished with such majestic adornment of meritorious virtues.” (此则以阿弥种种庄严作增上本质，带起众生自心种种庄严。全佛即生，全他即自。故曰成就如是功德庄严。)

**Notes:** Here the first sentence is elaborating on the relationship between the various majestic adornments and sentient beings based on the doctrines of Consciousness-Only. According to the doctrines of Consciousness-Only, the generation of every thought is based on four types of conditions: the causal condition, the successive condition, the condition of perceptual objects and the augmenting conditions.

- ① **The causal condition** (亲因缘) : It denotes all those dharmas that can produce the fruition of the same nature. For example, the seeds of wheat result in the generation of wheat when planted, and the seeds in our *alaya* consciousness can bring about the fruition of the same nature when they become mature.
- ② **The successive conditions** (次第缘) : They refer to the uninterrupted continuum of consciousnesses, with the former thought-moment eliciting the following thought-moment, without interruption.
- ③ **The condition of perceptual objects** (所缘缘) : They denote the perceptual objects inducing the generation of mind or mind factors. For example, some scenes or images can induce the generation of eye consciousness, and some impressive memories can incite the generation of the sixth consciousness whether they are pleasant or detestable.
- ④ **The augmenting conditions** (增上缘) : They represent all the other conditions not included in the above three conditions. These conditions are not only necessary, but also crucial for the generation of results. For example, without appropriate temperature and humidity, the grain seeds will not sprout, and are unable to produce results.

There are three types of perceptual fields for the generation of consciousness: **the natural perceptual fields, the nature-associated perceptual fields and the purely imaginative perceptual fields.**

- ① **The natural perceptual fields** (性境): They are also called **the real substance perceptual fields**, denoting the real perceptual fields which possess real substance and functions not affected by minds. They are objective forms manifested by the real seeds in the *alaya* consciousness, as represented by the form aggregate in the five aggregates. They are the directly perceived objects by the five sensory faculties before the involvement of the sixth consciousness. For example, the direct image of a mountain is a mountain, without emotional feelings or any descriptions.
- ② **The purely imaginative perceptual fields** (独影境): They represent the images purely generated by the false discriminations of the perceiving consciousness. They possess no real perceptual fields as background. For

example, the purely fictional stories fabricated by someone, or the concepts of the rabbit's horns or the turtle's hair etc, which are purely imagined by our conceptual mind.

③ **The nature-associated perceptual fields (帶質境)** : They refer to the distorted perceptual fields derived from false conceptualization on the perceived objects with real substances by the discriminating consciousness. This type of perceptual field is formed by the combination of mind and real objects, it is neither an objective reflection like the natural perceptual fields nor a purely imaginative perceptual field. For example, when we see a rope lying on the road at night, we may misconstrue it as a snake. Our sixth consciousness, or the discriminating consciousness seldom objectively perceive the perceived objects, out of inherent attachment of self.

Having introduced the concepts involved in this paragraph, we can now understand its meanings. The various majestic adornment accomplished by Amitabha Buddha are based on his grand vows and great practices which conform with the Buddha-nature. They act as the natural perceptual field, with the power and functions of augmenting conditions. Depending on the natural perceptual fields of the Buddha and their augmenting powers and functions, sentient beings transform them into various majestic adornments inside their mind, which are the nature-associated perceptual fields, perceived by themselves. Hence the natural perceptual fields can be transformed into the nature-associated perceptual fields, which are not apart from the natural perceptual fields. Therefore, it is said that Buddha is not inseparable from sentient beings, and the self is non-dual with others. This is the non-impediment between phenomena, and is truly inconceivable. These few paragraphs required repetitive reading to understand their meanings.

## ii) **Combined Explanation of the Experiencer and What is Experienced**

### A) **Clarification of What is Experienced Based on the Five Faculties and Five Objects**

#### a) **The Right Clarification**

**“Also, *Śāriputra*, celestial music is always playing in that Buddha-land, and its ground is made of yellow gold. In the six periods of day and night, the sky rains down celestial *māṇḍarāva* flowers. At dawn, sentient beings of that**

**land fill their robes with myriad wondrous flowers to make offerings to 100,000 koṭis Buddhas [in worlds] in other directions. At mealtime, they return to their own land to eat and do walking meditation.”**（“又舍利弗，彼佛国土常作天乐，黄金为地，昼夜六时雨天曼陀罗华。其土众生常以清旦，各以衣祴盛众妙华，供养他方十万亿佛。即以食时，还到本国，饭食经行。）

*Notes:* According to the annotation of Master Ouyi, this paragraph enumerates the amazing enjoyments by the five faculties. The celestial music represents both music played by celestial beings or automatically emanated from celestial space, denoting the marvellous auditory object. The ground composed of gold is the visual object and tactile object. The flowers pertain to both visual and fragrant objects. Spontaneously appeared food indicates the taste object. Filling their robes with myriad flowers and walking meditation are related to tactile objects.

**“In the six periods of day and night”** represents all the time of a day. According to the ancient India temporal partition, a day and night is divided into six segments, each equivalent to four hours of modern time scale. In fact, unlike our earth with day and night, everything in the Pure Land from the ground to the space emanates brilliant light, hence the Pure Land remains bright all the time, without night. The statement of six periods of day and night is mentioned only for the habit of our people.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the beings in the Pure Land actually do not need to eat food for sustenance; the food is mentioned merely for adapting to the habits of newly reborn beings. In fact, what the beings in the Pure Land do all the time is not apart from cultivation. They can visit, pay homage to and learn from other Buddhas in the ten directions. When they return, they can carry out walking meditation or other practices. Or they can listen to Dharmas disseminated by Buddha, Bodhisattvas, or even by the birds, the breeze and the trees as explained in the next paragraph.

## **b) The Summary Clarification**

**“Śāriputra, the Land of Ultimate Bliss is accomplished with such majestic adornments of meritorious virtues.”**（舍利弗，极乐国土成就如是功德庄严。）

This is the second time the Buddha stressed that the Land of Ultimate Bliss is accomplished with such majestic adornment of meritorious virtues.



## **B) Clarification of What is Experienced Based on the Ear Faculty and the Auditory Objects**

### **a) Specific Clarification**

**“In addition, *Śāriputra*, in that land are various kinds of unusual, wonderful birds of variegated colours, such as white cranes, peacocks, parrots, *śāris*, *kalaviṅkas*, and *jīvajīvas* (shared-life birds). In the six periods of day and night, these birds sing in harmonious, elegant tones. These tones expound and proclaim the five faculties, the five powers, the seven enlightenment factors, and the Right Eightfold Path, and teachings as such. Sentient beings who hear these tones are all mindful of the Buddha, mindful of the Dharma, and mindful of the *Śaṅgha*. ( “复次, 舍利弗, 彼国常有种种奇妙杂色之鸟, 白鹤、孔雀、鸚鵡、舍利、迦陵频伽、共命之鸟。是诸众鸟, 昼夜六时出和雅音, 其音演畅五根、五力、七菩提分、八圣道分如是等法。其土众生闻是音已, 皆悉念佛、念法、念僧。 )**

Because sentient beings of the *Saha* world possess the most acute and powerful ear faculty, as clarified in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* [20], *Śākyamuni* Buddha specifically pointed out the special benefits obtained by sentient beings in the Pure Land through their ear faculty. First there are various variegated birds chanting and expounding the relevant factors of the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment. The thirty-seven factors of enlightenment are explicated in Chapter 5 of Vol I, hence they are not repeated here.

Here the *Sūtra* lists six kinds of birds as examples, of which cranes, peacocks and parrots are familiar precious and beautiful birds. The other three *śāris*, *kalaviṅkas*, and *jīvajīvas* are not so familiar to contemporary people. It is said that *kalaviṅkas* have wondrous voice, because they can emanate wondrous sound even before they are hatched out from their crust. *Jīvajīvas* are very special in that they have two heads sharing one body, that is, they are two bird consciousnesses dwelling in one physical body.

The *Sūtra* omits the first three groups of the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment: the four foundations of mindfulness, the four right exertions and the four bases of spiritual powers. Master Yuanying pointed out the reasons [12]. The reborn beings in the Land of Bliss are all born from transformation from lotus flowers. They are pure in nature, hence there is no need for

contemplation of impurity of the body. They are devoid of any suffering and enjoy all sorts of bliss, thus there is no need for contemplation of suffering of feeling. They are spontaneously endowed with all the five supramundane powers, hence no need to hear and learn the four bases of spiritual powers. They constantly assemble with superior virtuous Bodhisattvas, and perfectly attain the three types of non-retrogression, with all their wishes fulfilled, thus there is no need to hear the four right exertions.

**“Śāriputra, do not say that these birds are born from retribution of transgressions [in their past lives]. Why is that so? Śāriputra, that Buddha-land does not have the three evil paths. Śāriputra, even the names of the three evil paths do not exist in that Buddha-land, much less the actual paths. These birds are all created by manifestations of Amitābha Buddha to enable the propagation of the Dharma voices.”** (舍利弗，汝勿谓此鸟实是罪报所生。所以者何？彼佛国土无三恶道。舍利弗，其佛国土尚无恶道之名，何况有实？是诸众鸟，皆是阿弥陀佛欲令法音宣流变化所作。)

In order to prevent people from misconstruing these wondrous birds as animals, Śākyamuni Buddha exhorted that these birds are not animals; they are manifested by Amitabha to facilitate the propagation of Dharma voices. He stressed that woeful realms do not exist in the Pure Land, not even the names of these realms, because Amitabha stated in his first vow, **“When I attain Buddhahood, if there should be any hell-dwellers, hungry ghosts, or animals in my land, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.”**

Amitabha Buddha manifested these birds to promulgate the Dharmas purely for the benefit of reborn beings. As annotated by Master Ouyi:

“Question: What is the meaning of manifesting these birds? Answer: They are the causes and conditions of the four *siddhāntas*. Mundane beings are fond of these birds, so he manifested them pursuant to their affections, and enable them to be joyous. Even the birds can speak Dharmas, so anyone hearing them will develop virtues. Being free from disdaining these birds as inferior, they counteract discrimination in their mind. These birds are inseparable from Amitabha, enabling sentient beings to awaken to the uniform nature of the Dharma-body, which is endowed in everything and creates everything.” (问：化作众鸟何义？答：有四悉檀因缘。凡情喜此诸鸟，顺情而化，令欢喜故；鸟尚说

法，令闻生善故；不于鸟起下劣想，对治分别心故；鸟即弥陀，令悟法身平等，无不具无不造故。)

Master Ouyi identified again the four *siddhāntas*, or the four types of universal benefits. The explanations of the first three types are obvious, we do not need to elaborate on them. The fourth *siddhānta* is to enable the recipients of the Dharmas to realise or enter the ultimate truth of the reality. These birds are all manifested by Amitabha Buddha hence, these birds are inseparable from the Dharma-body of Amitabha Buddha. Realising that nothing is intrinsically beyond the endowment of it in noumenon aspect, and nothing is apart from the creation of it in phenomenon aspect facilitate the reborn beings to enter the tenet of the reality.

Master Ouyi concluded, “The manifested sounds from breeze, trees and nets, as well as the environmental and life retributions, false or real, all are the three bodies and four virtues of Amitabha Buddha per se, with no difference.” (此中显微风、树、网等音，及一切依正假实，当体即是阿弥陀佛三身四德，毫无差别也。)

This identifies the tenet of all dharmas being mind-only, that is, none of the six sense objects is apart from the Dharma-realm. Breeze represents tactile objects, trees and nets denote visual, fragrance and tactile objects. Sounds signify auditory objects. The first five objects are real dharmas with substance, and their images retained as the mental objects of the sixth consciousness are false dharmas. These six objects represent the environmental retribution, and beings represent the life retribution. The three bodies are Dharma-body, reward-body and response-body. The four virtues are the virtues of nirvana: permanence, bliss, self and purity. In summary, all phenomena and occurrence in the Pure Land are inseparable from the three bodies and four virtues of Amitabha Buddha, demonstrating the ultimate truth.

**“Śāriputra, as breezes blow in that Buddha Land, the arrayed trees of treasures and the jewelled nets emanate exquisite and wondrous music, like hundreds of thousands of melodies playing at the same time. Those who hear these tones are spontaneously mindful of the Buddha, mindful of the Dharma, and mindful of the Saṅgha.”** (舍利弗，彼佛国土微风吹动，诸宝行树及宝罗网出微妙音，譬如百千种乐同时俱作，闻是音者，自然皆生念佛、念法、念僧之心。)

Master Ouyi commented on this paragraph to further clarify the unexcelled benefits obtained by the reborn ones in the Pure Land.

“The animated and unanimated simultaneously propagate the wondrous Dharmas. The thirty-seven factors of enlightenment pertaining to the four teachings, and the countless Dharma gateways are concurrently expounded. They are respectively comprehended by beings in accordance with their different varieties and capacities, enabling those having heard them to be mindful of the Triple Jewels. The mindfulness of the Triple Jewels is derived from the benefits of the four types of universal benefits. When beings start hearing these teachings, they are filled with exultation, acquiring the joyous benefit. When their minds interact with the Triple Jewels, they will definitely activate their Bodhicitta, and obtain the benefit of generation of virtuous dharmas. From hearing these teachings, beings subjugate and eliminate various afflictions, and get the benefit of destroying evil. Attaining awakening to the Triple Jewels of the one-essence, is the benefit of realising the ultimate truth.” (情与无情，同宣妙法。四教道品，无量法门，同时演说，随类各解，能令闻者念三宝也。念三宝是从悉檀获益。凡夫创闻，大踊遍身，是欢喜益；与三宝气分交接，必能发菩提心，是生善益；由此伏灭烦恼，是破恶益；证悟一体三宝，是入理益也。)

It should be noted that although all the animated, such as Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and even birds, and the unanimated, such as breeze, and trees simultaneously promulgate teachings; they do not interfere with each other. All these voices and sounds are ideally coordinated purely pursuant to the propensities and capacities of beings. One only hears the teachings which are compatible with his own preference at a specific time, and realise his comprehension according to his capacity, with other sounds oblivious to him.

**Notes:** “Attaining awakening to the Triple Jewels of the one-essence”: When we are mindful of the Triple Jewels, there is a clear distinction between the subject who is mindful and the object of being mindful of. We are the subject and the Buddha, the Dharma and the *Sangha* are the objects of being mindful of. However, when the reborn ones experience the marvellous phenomena of all the animated and unanimated expounding Dharmas, they realise that the Triple Jewels are inseparable from the one-essence. According to *the Dictionary of Buddha Light*, there are three meanings of the Triple Jewels of the one-essence: ① From the phenomenon perspective, the essence of Buddha

possesses the meaning of enlightening and illuminating, which represents the Jewel of Buddha; the meritorious virtues of the Buddha has the function of specification and regulation, which represents the Jewel of Dharma; and the Buddhas are completely free of dispute, which represents the Jewel of *Sangha*. ② Based on the truth of emptiness, although their characteristics are different, their quintessence is the same emptiness, hence it is one essence. ③ According to the ultimate truth of the reality, all the Triple Jewels are inseparable from the reality.

## b) Summary

**“Śāriputra, the Land of Ultimate Bliss is accomplished with such adornments of meritorious virtues.”**（舍利弗，其佛国土成就如是功德庄严。）

“Repeatedly summarising and clarifying enable us to profoundly believe that all the majestic adornments are accomplished by the vows and practices of the guide master, and they are manifested by his universal omniscience. They are also induced by our pure conducts, and merely transformed from our consciousness. Hence, the mind of Buddha and the minds of beings, interact with each other, exchanging roles of objects and images, exhibiting like all the lights of many lamps, all pervasive just like one. Thus, all the noumenon is associated with phenomena, all the phenomena are inseparable from the noumenon. One activates cultivations to accomplish the essence; and the cultivations are inseparable from the essence. One should profoundly and constantly ponder on it.”（重重结示，令深信一切庄严，皆导师愿行所成，种智所现；皆吾人净业所感，唯识所变。佛心生心，互为影质，如众灯明，各遍似一。全理成事，全事即理，全性起修，全修在性。亦可深长思矣！）

**Notes:** “All the majestic adornments are accomplished by the vows and practices of the guide master, and they are manifested by his universal omniscience” : This is to stress on the aspect of Amitabha Buddha. All the majestic adornments of the Pure Land are accomplished from his grand vows and from his countless kalpas of arduous practice. When Amitabha Buddha attained Buddhahood, he realised all universal omniscience, that is, he obtained the power of sovereignty over all dharmas to establish his Pure Land and fulfilled his grand vows.

“they are also induced by our pure conducts, and merely transformed from consciousness” : This is to emphasise the power and effect of our mind. According to the Consciousness-Only doctrines, all the environmental and life retributions of sentient beings are induced and transformed by their consciousness. When their consciousnesses are dominated by heinous greed, hatred or delusions, they are inclined to indulge in committing evil acts, which will drive them to the three woeful realms. Similarly, when their consciousnesses are replete with virtuous or moral thoughts, they tend to perform virtuous conducts, which will propel them to the human or even celestial realms when the virtuous karma matures. By the same token, when our consciousnesses are preoccupied with sincere faith, earnest aspiration and mindfulness of Amitabha and the Pure Land, these pure conducts will lead us to get rebirth in the Pure Land.

“the mind of Buddha and the minds of beings, interact with each other, exchanging roles of objects and images” : The minds of sentient beings regards Amitabha Buddha as the nature perceptual fields, eliciting the generation of nature-associated perceptual fields. That is, when sentient beings are mindful of the Buddha, they establish Buddha’s image in their minds, as their mental object. Similarly, Amitabha Buddha is constantly mindful of sentient beings, preparing to rescue and deliver them. Hence the Buddha’s mind considers sentient beings as the natural perceptual fields and generates the nature-associated perceptual fields. That is, when Amitabha is mindful of or responds to those with mindful recitations, his mind takes the sentient being as the perceived object. This sentence reveals that “Amitabha Buddha is a Buddha inside the mind of sentient beings and sentient beings are sentient beings inside Amitabha Buddha’s mind.”

“all the noumenon is associated with phenomena, all the phenomena are inseparable from the noumenon” : This is to stress again the non-duality between the noumenon and phenomena, and non-duality between essential emptiness and conventional existence.

“one activates cultivations to accomplish the essence; and cultivations are inseparable from the essence” : When we realise the intrinsically endowed essence and immeasurable meritorious virtues in the noumenon aspect, we will activate the cultivations to accomplish them. Otherwise, they will remain obscured without any power and functions, like gold in ore. However, all our

cultivations are never apart from our intrinsically mind-nature, and all the cultivations are nothing but to reveal and realise the intrinsically endowed meritorious virtues.

### iii) The Wondrous Life Retribution

#### A) The Enquiry and the Explanation of the Buddha-name

##### a) The Enquiry

**“Śāriputra, what is your opinion? Why is that Buddha called Amitābha?”**  
“(舍利弗，于汝意云何，彼佛何故号阿弥陀？)”

Ordinary readers of *the Amitabha Sūtra* will read this short paragraph through without second thought, but Master Ouyi elucidated it thoroughly.

“This *Sūtra* definitely identifies the wondrous practice of name recitation. Hence, it specifically enquires on and then explicates the name, in order to enable people to profoundly believe in the inconceivable attributes of the grand name of meritorious virtues so as to recite and uphold it single-mindedly, without any doubt or suspicion.”（此经的示持名妙行，故特征释名号，欲人深信万德洪名不可思议，一心执持，无复疑贰也。）

Among all the Pure Land *Sūtras*, only *the Amitabha Sūtra* exclusively advocates the Buddha-name recitation practice. It is extolled as wondrous practice by patriarch masters. By merely reciting the Buddha-name, we can attain horizontal transcendence of the three worlds, so it is wondrous in simplicity and directness. Depending merely on even ten utterances of recitations, we can take our immeasurable karmas with us to achieve rebirth, so it is wondrous in supreme convenience. As long as we achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, we are ensured to attain all the three types of non-retrogressions, so it is wondrous in perfect suddenness.

The following text will introduce life retributions of both the master and his companions. At the beginning, *Śākyamuni* Buddha firstly asked *Śāriputra* why that Buddha was called Amitābha, in order to emphasise the inconceivable meritorious virtues of the Buddha-name, so as to encourage people to establish profound faith and to recite Buddha-name single-mindedly.

Having signified the purpose of enquiry on the Buddha-name, Master Ouyi then explicated the meaning of Amita.

“Amita is translated as immeasurable, it is essentially ineffable. Our original master used the meaning of light and lifespan to encompass all the immeasurable attributes. Light horizontally pervades ten directions, and lifespan vertically extends infinitely through the three periods. The interpenetration of horizontal and vertical extremes is the essence of the Dharma-realm. Stating that this essence manifests the bodies and lands of Amitabha Buddha is equivalent to stating that this essence constitutes the name of Amitabha Buddha. Therefore, the name of Amitabha Buddha is the noumenon nature of the inherent enlightenment of sentient beings. Reciting Buddha-name is merging the initial enlightenment with the inherent enlightenment. The initial and the inherent are non-dual, and sentient beings and Buddha are also non-dual. Hence, one thought-moment of correspondence is one thought-moment of Buddha, thought-moment after thought-moment of correspondence is thought-moment after thought-moment of Buddha.” (阿弥陀，正翻无量，本不可说。本师以光、寿二义，收尽一切无量。光则横遍十方，寿则竖穷三际。横竖交彻，即法界体。举此体作弥陀身土，亦即举此体作弥陀名号。是故弥陀名号，即众生本觉理性。持名，即始觉合本。始本不二，生佛不二。故一念相应一念佛，念念相应念念佛也。)

Although our patriarch masters and contemporary Dharma masters have repeatedly explicated the special features of the Buddha-name, especially the name of Amitabha Buddha, many people still consider it as an ordinary term. They consider it to be no different from any name assigned by people, such as apple, tree, earth, or the name of general people. We have tried to use the code of bank account or the code of program as simile to describe the functionalities of the Buddha-name, but those are mere explanations on the phenomenon aspect. On the other hand, Master Ouyi reiterated the meaning of the Buddha-name on the noumenon aspect. He wanted us to profoundly comprehend the essence of the Buddha-name, so as to enhance and strengthen our faith. This paragraph is not easy to understand for initial learners, it needs repeated pondering, following Master Ouyi’s instructions.

**Notes:** “Amita is translated as immeasurable, it is essentially ineffable”: Amita is a Sanskrit word, meaning immeasurable or infinite, indicating that every aspect of Amitabha Buddha is immeasurable. His wisdom, meritorious virtues,



transcendental powers, his compassion etc, all are immeasurable. Essentially, these immeasurable attributes are beyond verbal descriptions and mental conceptualization.

“Our original master used light and lifespan to encompass all the immeasurable attributes.”: Among all the immeasurable attributes, our original master, that is, *Śākyamuni* Buddha specifically chose immeasurable light and immeasurable lifespan to represent all the immeasurable attributes, because of their special significance as described in the following.

“Light horizontally pervades ten directions, and lifespan vertically extends infinitely through the three periods.” From the phenomenon perspective, light pervades space of the ten directions, representing spatial domain. Lifespan can extend and cover the temporal domain of past, present and future.

“The interpenetration of horizontal and vertical extremes is the essence of the Dharma-realm”: Our universe is composed of unlimited spatial domain and the immeasurable temporal domain. The combination of immeasurable light and immeasurable lifespan can encompass and cover the whole universe, that is, the Dharma-realm, which is manifested by the reality. This indicates that through the combination of immeasurable light and immeasurable lifespan, the Buddha-name, can represent the essence of the whole Dharma-realm.

“Stating that this quintessence manifests the bodies and lands of Amitabha Buddha is equivalent to stating that this quintessence constitutes the name of Amitabha Buddha”: In conclusion, all three bodies and the four types of pure lands manifested by Amitabha Buddha are inseparable from the quintessence of the Dharma-realm, or the reality. Since the name of Amitabha Buddha represents both infinite spatial and infinite temporal extensions and pervasions, it is equivalent to the nature of the reality, or the quintessence of the Dharma-realm.

“the name of the Amitabha Buddha is the noumenon nature of the inherent enlightenment of sentient beings; reciting the Buddha-name is merging the initial enlightenment with the inherent enlightenment”: The inherent enlightenment is the intrinsically endowed Buddha-nature of all sentient beings, it exists in all sentient beings, only obscured in mundane beings by ignorance and afflictions. It is similar to the natural existence of pure gold in gold ores, or

the water molecules in all states of water. From the noumenon perspective, the name of Amitabha Buddha is equivalent to this inherent enlightenment, which is also the Buddha-nature.

The initial enlightenment denotes the wisdom that sentient beings learn about the existence of their endowed inherent enlightenment and begin to cultivate Buddhist practice so as to attain complete final enlightenment. When we recite the Buddha-name, our reciting mind is the initial enlightenment. It learns and cultivates the wisdom of realising the Buddha-nature by formulating Buddha through name recitation. The recited Buddha-name is the inherent enlightenment as explained above. Since our mind is inseparable from the Buddha-nature, the initial enlightenment of reciting mind merges with the inherent enlightenment of recited Buddha-name. They are non-dual.

“one thought-moment of correspondence is one thought-moment of Buddha, thought-moment after thought-moment of correspondence is thought-moment after thought-moment of Buddha”: One thought-moment of correspondence represents one thought-moment of mindfulness of the Buddha, created by one recitation of the Buddha-name. This one thought-moment of mindfulness of the Buddha is preoccupied with the Buddha, hence formulating the Buddha in our mind, which is Buddha per se at the present moment. Consecutive Buddha-name recitations have the same effect.

### b) The Explanation

**“Śāriputra, that Buddha’s radiance is immeasurable, illuminating lands in the ten directions without hindrance. Therefore, He is called *Amitābha*. Moreover, Śāriputra, the lifespan of that Buddha and his people is immeasurable, boundless *asaṃkhyeya* kalpas. Therefore, he is called *Amitāyus*.”**（舍利弗，彼佛光明无量，照十方国无所障碍，是故号为阿弥陀。又舍利弗，彼佛寿命，及其人民，无量无边阿僧祇劫，故名阿弥陀。）

This paragraph defines the immeasurable light and immeasurable lifespan, on which Master Ouyi elaborated based on the comprehension of mind-nature.

### • The Explanation Based on Light

“The mind-nature is tranquil yet constantly illuminates, so it is called light. Now he has completely attained the immeasurable essence of mind-nature, hence his light is immeasurable.” (心性寂而常照，故为光明。今彻证心性无量之体，故光明无量也。)

The mind-nature is the reality, which is intrinsically tranquil in essence, without moving. At the same time, it is inherently endowed with all the meritorious virtues, and manifesting various powerful functionalities, adapting to conditions and situations. These powerful functions are denoted as illuminating light here. Even though all sentient beings are endowed with both tranquil and illuminating mind-nature, they are obscured by ignorance and afflictions. Amitabha Buddha has completely attained this immeasurable essence when he accomplished his Buddha Path, after countless *kalpas* of cultivations of the *pāramitās*. Therefore, his immeasurable illuminating light is completely realised, constantly performing its functions.

“All the Buddhas have completely attained the essence of mind-nature, all illuminate the ten directions, so all can be called immeasurable light. However, their vows and power in causal ground are different, so they are designated with different names according to causes and conditions. When Amitabha Buddha was *Dharmakāra bhikṣu*, he made the Forty-Eight Great Vows, which contains the vow of light constantly illuminating the ten directions. Now it is the fruition fulfilling the vow.” (诸佛皆彻性体，皆照十方，皆可名无量光。而因中愿力不同，随因缘立别名。弥陀为法藏比丘，发四十八愿，有光明恒照十方之愿，今果成如愿也。)

Although immeasurable light is a universal powerful function possessed by all Buddhas, they are not all called immeasurable light Buddhas. To distinguish them, people designate to each Buddha a specific name or a few names to represent their distinctive characteristics and virtues, based on their original vows and their causes and conditions to accomplish their Buddha Path. When Amitabha Buddha was at the causal ground, as *Dharmakāra bhikṣu*, he made the unexcelled Forty-Eight Great Vows to guide his cultivation and establishment of the Pure Land of Bliss. In the 12<sup>th</sup> vow, he vowed, “**When I attain Buddhahood, if my bright light should be limited, unable to illuminate at least a hundred thousand *koṭīs* of *ṇayutas* of Buddha-lands, I would not attain perfect enlightenment.**” Now, he has attained Buddhahood, so all his

vows have been fulfilled, with immeasurable light demonstrating the fulfilment of the 12<sup>th</sup> vow.

“The light of the Dharma-body is boundless, and the light of the reward-body conforms with the true essence, commonly shared by all Buddhas. But the lights of the response-body are different, with some illuminating one *yojanā*, some illuminating hundreds of thousands of *yojanās*, up to one world or hundreds of thousands of worlds. Only Amitabha Buddha is pervasively illuminating, so he is specifically named immeasurable light (Amitabha). Nevertheless, the three bodies are neither one nor disparate. Making such distinctions is merely for enabling the sentient beings to obtain the four types of universal benefits.” (法身光明无分际，报身光明称真性，此则佛佛道同。应身光明有照一由旬者，十百千由旬者，一世界十百千世界者。唯阿弥普照，故别名无量光。然三身不一不异，为令众生得四益故，作此分别耳。)

**Notes:** The nature of the Dharma-body pervades ten directions boundlessly, so its endowed powers and functions can also manifest in the ten directions boundlessly adaptive to conditions. Hence, the light of the Dharma-body is definitely boundless. The reward-body is the complete realisation or manifestation of the Dharma-body, so its power and functions are congruous with those of the Dharma-body, manifesting boundlessly in the ten directions adaptive to conditions. All the Buddhas have completely attained the Dharma-body and the reward-body, so all of them commonly share these attributes.

The response-body is the manifestation of the reward-body for the purpose of edifying and delivering sentient beings. Hence, it mainly depends on the virtuous roots, the capacities of the sentient beings, and the affinities between the Buddha and the sentient beings. Therefore, the lights of the response-bodies of different Buddhas are different at different manifestations. Some illuminate only one to many *yojanās*, some illuminate one to many worlds, depending on the multitude of beings to be edified and rescued in the specific manifestation. Only Amitabha Buddha resolves to rescue and deliver immeasurable innumerable sentient beings of all the worlds of the ten directions. Hence, the light of his response-body illuminates all the ten directions boundlessly, so he is distinctively designated with the name immeasurable light.

Master Ouyi pointed out the four universal benefits another time based on the essence of the three bodies being non-dual. It is as follows:

“It should be noted that ‘without impediment’ is mentioned with reference to sentient beings. Due to the profound affinity between sentient beings and Amitabha Buddha, wherever the Buddha light arrives, there is nowhere in the worlds which cannot perfectly perceive it.” (当知无障碍，约人民言。由众生与佛缘深，故佛光到处，一切世间无不圆见也。)

This is to say that Amitabha Buddha’s light pervades the ten directions without obstruction in essence; whether one can receive or perceive it depends entirely on the affinity between this being and Buddha. From the perspective of Amitabha Buddha, there is no difference and discrimination, he renders universal and uniform compassion towards all sentient beings. Hence, the affinity between Amitabha Buddha and any being completely relies on the standpoint of the sentient being. As *the Contemplation Sūtra* emphasised, **“Amitabha Buddha has 84,000 excellent characteristics; each characteristic includes 84,000 excellent marks; each mark radiates 84,000 beams of light. Each beam of light universally illuminates all worlds in the ten directions, embracing sentient beings who are mindful of the Buddha, never abandoning them.”**

Therefore, as long as anyone at any time in any world is mindful of Amitabha Buddha, he or she will automatically receive the illumination of Amitabha Buddha’s light. The magnitude of light perceived by sentient beings depends on the power of their mind and the strength of their afflictions. The more concentrated one’s mind is on mindfulness of the Buddha, the stronger the light that one receives. When one attains the Buddha-remembrance-samadhi, one can even witness Buddha’s magnificent golden body. If we cannot perceive the light of Amitabha Buddha, it only reflects the weak scattered state of our mind, not the absence of his light. However, even though we have not apparently perceived the light of Amitabha Buddha, it does not mean that there is no implicit effect of the light. As Master Ouyi stressed in the explication of functions of Buddha-name recitation, even scattered recitations still have the efficacy of destroying evil karmas. They will eventually lead one to accomplish the Buddha Path.

Here is an example of the efficacy of Amitabha light recounted in *the Records of Responses of Buddha-name Recitation* by Lin Kanzhi (林看治) [25].

This real case happened in Huzhuxin Village of Taizhong on the 24 December 1963. Ms. Lai (赖) was 54 years old, widowed for three years. On the noon of 24<sup>th</sup>, while she was preparing lunch, she suddenly fell on the floor, with her whole body shaking spasmodically. Her five-year old grandson was very clever. Seeing the situation, he immediately ran to the neighbour, shouting, “Shicai Grandma, Shicai Grandma, please quickly help my grandma to counteract shock.”

Her lotus friend, Ms. Jinfang Li (李金芳) hurriedly came and was frightened when she saw Ms. Lai unconscious and showing up white in her eyes. Her seventy-year-old mother-in-law was holding her right side and her son was holding her left side, both terrified and shouting. Jinfang asked them to calm down and to recite Amitabha Buddha’s name.

After they kept reciting the Buddha-name together for twenty minutes, Ms. Lai sighed in unconsciousness, “He is standing there, asking me to follow him to go away.” Jinfang asked, “Who is he?” “He is my husband, Mr. Lin(林),” answered Ms. Lai. Jinfang then kept reciting the Buddha-name loudly, and told the ghost, “Mr. Lin, you cannot take Ms. Lai to go with you. Instead, you should protect her peace and health, because she is a filial daughter-in-law. She needs to support your mother, and bring up your children who are not mature yet.” She then counselled the ghost, “Mr. Lin, you should recite the Buddha-name.” After saying those words, she persistently recited “Namo Amitabha Buddha” without interruption.

After reciting the Buddha-name for another thirty minutes, Ms. Lai started to speak again, “The three gods are shining brilliant golden light, the three gods are shining brilliant golden light. The mister has gone.” Jinfang then asked her, “Could you ask what are the names of the three gods?” Ms. Lai replied, “He said he is Amitabha Buddha who emits light to empower and protect me.” Having answered her, Ms. Lai recovered from unconsciousness, and completely returned to a healthy state a few days later.

The sincere and devoted Buddha-name recitation of Jinfang not only induced the manifestation of Amitabha Buddha’s brilliant golden light, but the light cured the ghost husband of his obsession of Ms. Lai.

#### • The Explanation Based on Lifespan

It should be noted that both the life of Amitabha Buddha and the life of all the reborn beings in the Pure Land enjoy immeasurable lifespan, hence Amitabha is also named as *Amitayus*, a Sanskrit name, meaning immeasurable lifespan.

“The mind-nature illuminates yet it constantly remains tranquil, hence, it is called lifespan. Now he has completely attained the immeasurable essence of mind-nature, so his lifespan is immeasurable.” (心性照而常寂，故为寿命。今彻证心性无量之体，故寿命无量也。)

Master Ouyi explicated lifespan based also on the mind-nature. The mind-nature’s spatial expansiveness is represented by immeasurable light, and its temporal extensiveness is represented by lifespan. Mundane beings are governed by segmented lifespan, revolving in consecutive birth and death. However, the intrinsic essence of the mind-nature is free from segmental birth and death, extending boundlessly without beginning or end. Amitabha Buddha is a consummate cultivator, eradicating all the delusions of ignorance, the delusions like dust and sand, and the delusion of afflictions, hence he has attained eternal tranquillity and immeasurable lifespan.

“The lifespan of the Dharma-body is devoid of beginning and ending, and the lifespan of the reward-body has beginning but has no ending. These two attributes are commonly shared by all Buddhas, so all can be said to have immeasurable lifespan. The response-body manifests adaptive to the vow (of Buddha) and opportunities (of sentient beings), hence it varies in length. The king of vows, *Dharmakāra* Bodhisattva generated the vow that both he and all beings in his Pure Land will possess immeasurable lifespan. Now its fruition fulfils the vow, so he is particularly named as the one with Immeasurable Lifespan.” (法身寿命无始无终，报身寿命有始无终。此亦佛佛道同，皆可名无量寿。应身随愿随机，延促不等。法藏愿王，有佛及人寿命皆无量之愿，今果成如愿，别名无量寿也。)

Theoretically speaking, the Dharma-body is the embodiment or the congregation of the ultimate truth; it is inherently tranquil and pervasive, without motion or variation, hence it is definitely without beginning or end. The reward-body is completely realised or manifested only when one attains Buddhahood, so it has a starting point, but it will not terminate, thus is without end.

The response-body is manifested only for the purpose of edifying and delivering sentient beings, so its initiation and duration depends on the sentient beings whom the Buddha is to edify and rescue in that specific manifestation. For example, *Śākyamuni* Buddha manifested in our world for eighty years, and he entered *parinirvana* after he had edified and delivered all sentient beings who have conditioned affinity with him. Amitabha Buddha resolved to deliver innumerable multitude of sentient beings, so he made the grand vow, **“When I attain Buddhahood, if my lifespan should be limited, even to the extent of a hundred thousand *koṭīs* of *ayutas* of kalpas, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.”** Hence his immeasurable lifespan is merely the fulfilment of this vow, when he attained Buddhahood.

Not only does Amitabha Buddha have immeasurable lifespan, but all the sentient beings will spontaneously obtain immeasurable lifespan, as long as they achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. This is also the fulfilment of Amitabha Buddha’s 15<sup>th</sup> vow, **“When I attain Buddhahood, if devas and humans in my lands should have limited lifespans, except those with original vows who could lengthen or shorten them at will, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.”**

“Furthermore, because of the meaning of immeasurable light, one who achieves rebirth in the Pure Land is equivalent to getting rebirth in the ten directions; seeing Amitabha Buddha is equivalent to seeing Buddhas in the ten directions; being able to deliver oneself is equivalent to being able to benefit all sentient beings.”（复次由无量光义，故众生生极乐即生十方，见阿弥陀佛即见十方诸佛，能自度即普利一切。）

Our rebirth in the Pure Land depends on our faith, aspiration and mindful recitation of Amitabha Buddha, which is immeasurable light. Hence, when we achieve rebirth after this life, we will automatically transform the meritorious virtues of immeasurable light into our own meritorious virtues. Therefore, we will spontaneously obtain all the transcendental powers, enabling us to visit, to make offerings to and learn from all the Buddhas in the ten directions. Consequently, it is equivalent to getting rebirth in all the worlds in the ten directions. Moreover, as soon as we get out of the lotus flower to see Amitabha Buddha, we will be able to visit all the Buddhas. Having delivered oneself by



achieving rebirth in the Pure Land, we will swiftly accomplish the Buddha Path, realising all the omniscient wisdom to edify and deliver sentient beings in the ten directions.

“Because of the meaning of immeasurable lifespan, the people in the Pure Land are all equivalent to Bodhisattvas to attain Buddhahood in one-lifetime, definitely attaining Buddhahood in this life, no need for next life. ” （由无量寿义，故极乐人民，即是一生补处，皆定此生成佛，不至异生。）

The significance of immeasurable lifespan is obvious, no need for further explication.

## **B) Specific Explanation of the Master and Companions**

### **a) The Specific Explanation**

#### **• The master**

**“Śāriputra, it has been ten *kalpas* since Amitabha Buddha attained Buddhahood.”**（舍利弗，阿弥陀佛成佛已来于今十劫。）

The significance of this sentence is revealed by Master Ouyi as the following.

“Furthermore, the lifespan of the Buddha is immeasurable, and it has only passed ten *kalpas* now, so he is still expounding Dharmas, which is right now, not finished yet. It is to encourage all sentient beings of the three periods to swiftly pursue rebirth to obtain the same immeasurable lifespan as the Buddha, so as to accomplish the Buddha Path in one lifetime. All the innumerable *śrāvakas*, Bodhisattvas and those Bodhisattvas to attain Buddhahood in one-lifetime mentioned in the following text are accomplished in ten *kalpas*. It directly exhibits that the reborn ones with non-retrogressions from the worlds of the ten directions and the three periods are numerous and easy to achieve.”（又佛寿无量，今仅十劫。则现在说法，时正未央。普劝三世众生速求往生，同佛寿命，一生成办也。又下文无数声闻菩萨及与补处，皆十劫所成就。正显十方三世往生不退者，多且易也。）

#### **• The Companions**

**“Furthermore, Śāriputra, that Buddha has innumerable, countless voice-hearer disciples. All of them are Arhats, their numbers unknowable by calculation, so are the multitude of Bodhisattvas.”**（又舍利弗，彼佛有无量无边声闻弟子，皆阿罗汉，非是算数之所能知，诸菩萨众亦复如是。）

We all know that the Pure Land of Bliss is established by Amitabha Buddha to receive Mahayana practitioners so that they can swiftly attain Buddhahood. Why do voice-hearer disciples and Arhats exist there? Master Ouyi’s explication is, “The determined two-vehicle practitioners of the other worlds are unable to get rebirth there. If anyone originally cultivates the Theravada practices, but transforms to Bodhi on the verge of death and generates great vows, he can get rebirth there. After he achieved rebirth there, the Buddha will expound teachings pursuant to his capacity, enabling him to eradicate the afflictions of insight and cultivations, so he is called an Arhat. These Arhats are equivalent to the Bodhisattvas of the seventh abode stage, who have eradicated the afflictions of insight and cultivations. They are not real voice-hearers. Since practitioners of the *Tripitaka* and the shared teachings have never heard of Buddhas of the other worlds, those who hear the name of Amitabha Buddha, and believe and aspire to achieve rebirth there, generally belong to the capacities embraced by the distinctive and perfect teachings.”（他方定性二乘，不得生彼。若先习小行，临终回向菩提，发大誓愿者，生彼国已，佛顺机说法，令断见思，故名罗汉。如别教七住断见思之类，非实声闻也。盖藏通二教，不闻他方佛名，今闻弥陀名号，信愿往生，总属别圆二教所摄机矣。）

From Master Ouyi’s explanation, those voice-hearers and Arhats are mentioned based on their original cultivations during their lifetime and on their status of elimination of afflictions after they get rebirth in the Pure Land. First, they have to transform from their habitual cultivation of the two-vehicle practices and establish sincere faith and earnest aspiration for achieving rebirth in the Land of Amitabha. Otherwise, they cannot achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, no matter how diligent they cultivate the practice to eliminate their afflictions, if they do not have faith and aspiration in the Pure Land. Next, they are not real Arhats, whose ultimate destination is to enter nirvana. They are all Bodhisattvas, and their Arhat name only pertains to the status of their complete eradication of afflictions, which is equivalent to the status of Arhats.

## **b) The Summary**

**“Śāriputra, the Land of Ultimate Bliss is accomplished with such majestic adornments of meritorious virtues.”** (舍利弗，彼佛国土成就如是功德庄严。)

The previous three summaries of the majestic adornments pertain to the environmental retributions, but this fourth summary is to emphasise the majestic adornment of the life retribution.

“The Buddha, *śrāvakas* and Bodhisattvas, all are accomplished by Amitabha Buddha’s vows and practices in his causal ground. They are also all accomplished based on one accomplishment in the fruition ground. Of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas and *śrāvakas*, each and every one is non-self, non-others. The self and others are non-dual. Hence it says accomplished with such majestic adornment of meritorious virtues. They enable those beings who have faith, aspiration and recite the Buddha-name, to make such accomplishments with each and every of their thought of mindfulness.” (佛及声闻菩萨，并是弥陀因中愿行所成，亦是果上一成一切成。是则佛、菩萨、声闻，各各非自非他，自他不二，故云成就如是功德庄严。能令信愿持名者，念念亦如是成就也。)

This paragraph is explicated differently by the Dharma masters listed in the reference. Here we will refer to Venerable Jingjie’s explanation [14] to summarize the three powers advocated by Master Ouyi.

**Notes:** “All the Buddha, *śrāvakas* and Bodhisattvas are accomplished by Amitabha Buddha’s vows and practices in his causal ground, and they are also all accomplished based on one accomplishment in the fruition ground”: This sentence signifies the power of Amitabha Buddha. From the phenomenon perspective, not only all the environmental retributions of the Pure Land, but all the inconceivable meritorious virtues of the life retributions of Amitabha Buddha and all other reborn *śrāvakas* and Bodhisattvas, all are accomplished by Amitabha Buddha’s grand vows and practices in his causal ground. In his Forty-Eight Great Vows, he vowed to establish the unexcelled Pure Land, and to ensure that all beings in the ten directions will be able to get rebirth in the Pure Land. The conditions for rebirth there are faith, aspiration and Buddha-name recitation or perform the three pure conducts enumerated in *the Contemplation Sūtra*. Furthermore, he also vowed to bestow the reborn beings with all transcendental powers, perfect non-retrogressions, etc. After he cultivated for inconceivably innumerable *kalpas*, he fulfilled all his vows, and

every aspect of majestic adornment of the Pure Land is spontaneously accomplished. These results are merely the realisation of his vows.

When Amitabha Buddha made his great vows and undertook his arduous cultivations, his sole purpose was to render sentient beings a blissful and peaceful environment to swiftly accomplish their Buddha Path. For this reason, when his vows were fulfilled, all the benefits and powers enjoyed by the Pure Land practitioners are also accomplished automatically, just as he vowed. It is similar to that of a successful entrepreneur, who has accumulated an enormous amount of wealth, and delightedly awards all his descendants the privilege to share his wealth. Then as long as one is simply born into his family, one will spontaneously possess the power to be able to spend much more money than others who are born into poor families.

“Of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas and *śrāvakas*, each and every one is non-self, non-others. The self and others are non-dual. Hence it says accomplished with such majestic adornment of meritorious virtues”: This sentence indicates the inconceivable power of the mind of sentient beings. From the noumenon perspective, all sentient beings are intrinsically endowed with identical mind-nature, which is inherently pure and pervasive, and also intrinsically endowed with all the meritorious virtues. In essence level, there is no difference between Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, *śrāvakas* and ordinary beings.

“They enable those beings who have faith, aspiration and recite the Buddha-name, to make such accomplishments with each and every of their thought of mindfulness”: This sentence emphasises the inconceivable power of the Buddha-name. On the phenomenon aspect, Amitabha Buddha condensed all his meritorious virtues into his grand name “Amitabha” and awarded it to all sentient beings in the ten directions. Anyone with faith and aspiration and recite his name will activate the inconceivable power. On the noumenon aspect, Amitabha and *Amitayus*, with the meaning of immeasurable light and lifespan, represent infinite spatial and temporal domains, that is, the reality. Therefore, by reciting the Buddha-name, we are aligning our minds to that of immeasurable light and immeasurable lifespan, that is, revealing our true mind-nature.

## **(2) Particularly Encouraging Sentient Beings to Pursue Rebirth and Develop Aspiration**

At the beginning of this section, Master Ouyi gave a summarised introduction of all the extraordinarily significant features of the Pure Land from the perspective of sentient beings. “This section particularly encourages sentient beings to pursue rebirth and to develop aspirations. It contains two subsections: the first is to reveal the unsurpassed causes and conditions, and the second is to stress the supreme excellence of the Pure Land. They state that sentient beings take along their karmas when they get rebirth and horizontally transcend the three spheres; they horizontally dwell in the four types of lands, which expound the Dharma-wheel of the four teachings; sentient beings perfectly purify the four types of lands, perfectly see the three bodies and perfectly attain the three non-retrogressions; and that all people in Pure Land will attain Buddhahood in one lifetime. The extraordinary and supreme features will be divulged in these two subsections, it should be attentively pondered.” (净土殊胜，谓带业往生，横出三界；同居横具四土，开显四教法轮；众生圆净四土，圆见三身，圆证三不退；人民皆一生成佛。如是等胜异超绝，全在此二科点示，须谛研之。)

**Notes:** Here Master Ouyi enumerated four categories of inconceivable benefits spontaneously obtained by sentient beings, especially mundane beings like us, as long as we achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.

① “sentient beings take along their karmas when they get rebirth and horizontally transcend the three spheres”: For all practitioners of other schools, one cannot escape the cycle of birth-and-death as long as they have not completely eradicated all their afflictions of insight and cultivation. At the end of their life, their previous karmas stored in their *alaya* consciousness will interact with their afflicted consciousness to form the projecting karma, which would then lead them to ascend or descend. However, the salient benefit enjoyed by Pure Land practitioners is that their karmas created in this life and previous lives are all subdued, no matter how evil or grave they were. They will be welcomed and escorted to get rebirth in the Pure Land, at the end of this life. With sincere faith and earnest aspiration, they can achieve rebirth in the Pure Land by simply reciting a few recitations of the Buddha-name.

When they get rebirth in the Pure Land, they will permanently terminate transmigrations in the birth-and-death, hence horizontally transcend the three spheres. If following the general practice of other schools, one has to cultivate persistently life after life, to achieve such a stage. There is a well-known simile to describe this difference. Suppose there is a stalk of bamboo, and there is a worm born within one section near the bottom of the bamboo. If the worm wants to get to the top of the bamboo, it can bite out vertically junction after junction, until it reaches the top section and then bites through it. Otherwise, it can also bite a hole horizontally, gets out of the bamboo and crawls to the top easily and swiftly.

② “they horizontally dwell in the four types of lands, which expound the Dharma-wheel of the four teachings”: When we achieve rebirth in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings, even though we have not eradicated the afflictions of insight and cultivations, we can still enjoy the benefits of the upper three types of lands. For example, we can congregate with those Bodhisattvas to attain Buddhahood in one-lifetime, and we can see Amitabha Buddha and visit Buddhas in the ten directions. We can hear any teachings which are adapted to our capacities, either directly from Amitabha Buddha or from Bodhisattvas, or from the voices of birds, breeze, trees and waters etc, which are manifested by Amitabha Buddha.

③ “sentient beings perfectly purify the four types of lands, perfectly see the three bodies and perfectly attain the three non-retrogressions”: The practice of Buddha-name recitation conforms with the Buddha-nature, so when we achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, Amitabha Buddha enables us to cultivate to perfectly purify the four types of lands and we can perfectly see the three bodies of the Buddha. It is also inconceivable that all the reborn ones will spontaneously be endowed with all the three types of non-retrogressions.

④ “all people will attain Buddhahood in one lifetime”: Master Ouyi decidedly declare that all the people (reborn in Pure Land) will attain Buddhahood in one lifetime, which is truly unbelievable by any other schools.

### 1) Revealing the Unsurpassed Causes and Conditions

**“Furthermore, *Śāriputra*, sentient beings reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss are all *avinivartanīya*, among whom there are many [Bodhisattvas] to attain**

**Buddhahood in one-lifetime. Their numbers are so large that they are unknowable by calculation, and can be reckoned only in terms of immeasurable, boundless *asamkhyeyas*.**”（又舍利弗，极乐国土众生生者皆是阿鞞跋致，其中多有一生补处，其数甚多，非是算数所能知之，但可以无量无边阿僧祇说。）

Here, *avinivartanīya* is a Sanskrit word, meaning non-retrogression. Master Ouyi further commented on this feature. “According to the teachings, if one is a mundane being, one is not called the stream-enterer yet; if one is a two-vehicle practitioner, one is not called a Bodhisattva; if one is still a Bodhisattva below the saintly stage, one is not called a Bodhisattva of the saintly stage (the ground stage of distinctive teachings), etc. Furthermore, those of non-retrogression in thoughts, are not Bodhisattvas below saintly stage; those of non-retrogression in practice, are not those merely awakened to the enlightenment (the stream-enterers); and those of non-retrogression in state, are not mundane beings. A being who professes to attain stages higher than one’s actual attainment has brought about grave transgression of lying precept. When one has progressed to the next stage, one will abandon the previous inferior stage. Only the land shared by mundane and saintly beings in the Pure Land of Bliss negates all and confirms all. The Buddha lands in the ten directions have no such terminology, no such stages, no such Dharma gateway. If it is not because of the extreme perfection of the mind-nature, the extraordinary powers of Buddha-name recitation or the grand vow of Amitabha Buddha, how can it be like this!”（然据教道，若是凡夫，则非初果等；若是二乘，则非菩萨等；若是异生，则非同生性等。又念不退，非复异生；行不退，非仅见道；位不退，非是人民。躡等则成大妄，进步则舍故称。唯极乐同居，一切俱非，一切俱是。十方佛土无此名相，无此阶位，无此法门。非心性之极致，持名之奇勋，弥陀之大愿，何以有此！）

According to the teachings of other schools (see Chapter 7 of Volume I), all the saintly stages are distinctively attained and attested. Claiming higher stages than one’s actual attainment constitutes transgression of grave lying. Master Ouyi particularly stressed the inconceivable features or benefits of the land shared by mundane and saintly beings, because this land is the most pertinent to most of us. Finally, he clarified the three powers of the mind-nature of sentient beings, the power of the Buddha-name and the power of Amitabha Buddha’s grand vows.

After extensively explicating the meanings of the three types of non-retrogression, and the significance of all beings being able to reborn in the Pure Land and able to attain the stage of Bodhisattva to attain Buddhahood in one lifetime and to accomplish Buddha Path in one lifetime, Master Ouyi concluded, “Moreover, among all the teachings expounded by Śākyamuni Buddha, only *the Flower Ornament Sūtra* proposed accomplishment in one lifetime. Nevertheless, the cause of accomplishment in one lifetime is the ten great king of vows enumerated at the last section of the *Practice and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*. He encourages and guides the oceanic assembly of the Flower Treasury World to return to the Pure Land. Fantastic! Mundane beings can attain the stage of Bodhisattvas to attain Buddhahood in one-lifetime. It is a marvellous advocacy and extreme proposition, truly unfathomable. What *the Flower Ornament Sūtra* proposes to us is in this *Sūtra*.” (复次释迦一代时教，惟《华严》明一生圆满。而一生圆满之因，则末后《普贤行愿品》中，十大愿王导归安养，且以此劝进华藏海众。嗟乎！凡夫例登补处，奇倡极谈，不可测度。《华严》所禀，却在此经。)

## 2) Particularly Stressing the Supreme Excellence of Pure Land

**“Śāriputra, sentient beings who have heard [of that land] should vow to aspire to be born in that land. Why is that so? It is to congregate in the same place with those of superior virtues.”** (舍利弗，众生闻者，应当发愿愿生彼国。所以者何？得与如是诸上善人俱会一处。)

According to Master Ouyi, the superior virtues represent the Bodhisattvas to attain Buddhahood in one-lifetime, who are going to attain Buddhahood in this life. He extolled the land shared by mundane and saintly beings of the Pure Land again, and stressed the significance of faith and aspiration.

“We should know that in our great course and its causes and conditions, the fortress of the land shared by mundane and saintly beings is the most difficult to penetrate and escape. Only the land shared by mundane and saintly beings of the Pure Land transcend all the lands shared by mundane and saintly beings of the ten directions. Only when understanding this can we sincerely believe in the vows and powers of Amitabha Buddha. Only after having faith in the Buddha’s power, can we deeply believe in the meritorious virtues of the Buddha-name. Only when having faith in Buddha-name recitation, can we



profoundly believe that our mind-nature is essentially inconceivable and ineffable.” (当知吾人大事因缘，同居一关，最难透脱。唯极乐同居，超出十方同居之外。了此，方能深信弥陀愿力。信佛力，方能深信名号功德。信持名，方能深信吾人心性本不可思议也。)

*Notes:* Here “the great course and its causes and conditions” refers to the process of accomplishing the Buddha Path. In the whole process, the most difficult step is the part of transcending the mundane stage, that is, to traverse the ocean of birth-and-death. This is the stage when we dwell in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings. There are many reasons causing this difficulty to surpass. For instance, firstly, we are gravely disturbed and instigated by all the afflictions of insight and cultivations, inducing us to commit various transgressions. Secondly, we are heavily entangled in all sorts of worldly affairs, intensifying our afflictions. Thirdly, we frequently encounter some evil friends or devious views interfering with our right cultivations. Fourthly, we are retrogressive, that is, our cultivations are interrupted and frequently retreated at the end of life. Only the land shared by mundane and saintly beings of the Pure Land is unique, where mundane beings all possess immeasurable lifespan and non-retrogressions, so as to attain Buddhahood in one lifetime. They assemble with Bodhisattvas and are immersed in the voice of right Dharmas, are free from the disturbance of afflictions, and dwell in an environment replete with blissful enjoyment and devoid of suffering.

Having comprehended the unique features of the land shared by mundane and saintly beings of the Pure Land, we will realise that it is actually manifested by the universal omniscient wisdom of Amitabha Buddha, induced by the pure conducts of recitation of the Buddha-name, and manifested by our mind-nature. We recite the inconceivable Buddha-name with our inconceivable mind to achieve rebirth in the inconceivable land shared by mundane and saintly beings that is accomplished by Amitabha Buddha’s vow and powers. These are the three inconceivable aspects. Only after having realised the above, can we establish profound faith in the inconceivable vows and powers of Amitabha Buddha, the inconceivable power condensed in the Buddha-name, and the inconceivable power of our mind-nature.

“Only having established such profound faith can we activate great aspiration. The word ‘should’ in the text indicates profound faith. To profoundly believe and to activate aspiration are to cultivate utmost Bodhi. The combination of

faith and aspiration is definitively the guidance of Pure Land. Buddha-name recitation based on them is the right practice.” (具此深信，方能发于大愿。文中应当二字，即指深信。深信发愿，即无上菩提。合此信愿，的为净土指南。由此而执持名号，乃为正行。)

If we have established the above three types of faith, we can generate great aspirations of horizontally transcending birth-and-death and attaining Buddhahood in one lifetime. This is called great aspiration. Therefore, having established sincere faith, and then activating great aspiration is to develop the unsurpassed Bodhicitta. It should be noted that Master Ouyi here pointed out that only these Buddha-name recitations based on sincere faith and aspiration are called right practice. Other practices are categorised into the supportive conducts. On the other hand, Buddha-name recitations without sincere faith and aspiration are not right conducts of Pure Land either, as he stressed in the next paragraph.

“If the faith and aspiration are solid, we will definitely get rebirth with ten recitations or one recitation on the verge of death. Without faith and aspiration, even if we recite the Buddha-name [so intensively], that wind cannot penetrate them and rain cannot wet them, as if they are similar to silver walls or iron barriers, we still cannot achieve rebirth. Those who practice the Pure Land gateway, should not neglect this.” (若信愿坚固，临终十念一念，亦决得生。若无信愿，纵将名号持至风吹不入，雨打不湿，如银墙铁壁相似，亦无得生之理。修净业者，不可不知也。)

### (3) Formally Specifying Buddha-name Recitation as the Right Practice

#### 1) Specification of the Foremost Causes and Conditions

“*Śāriputra*, one cannot achieve rebirth in that land with the causal conditions of few virtuous roots and a meagre store of blessed merits. *Śāriputra*, if, there are virtuous men or virtuous women, who, having heard of Amitābha Buddha, single-mindedly uphold and recite his name without being distracted for one day, two days, three days, four days, five days, six days, or seven days, as their life approaches the end, Amitābha Buddha, together with a saintly multitude, will appear before them. When these people die, with their minds not being inverted, they will instantly be reborn

**in Amitābha Buddha's Land of Ultimate Bliss.**”（舍利弗，不可以少善根福德因缘得生彼国。舍利弗，若有善男子、善女人，闻说阿弥陀佛，执持名号，若一日、若二日、若三日、若四日、若五日、若六日、若七日，一心不乱。其人临命终时，阿弥陀佛与诸圣众，现在其前，是人终时心不颠倒，即得往生阿弥陀佛极乐国土。）

Having motivated us to establish sincere faith and earnest aspiration, the *Sūtra* next emphasises the most effective and efficient practice to ensure sentient beings to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. First, *Śākyamuni* Buddha pointed out the necessary requirements for achieving rebirth in the Pure Land. Then he stated the concrete practice needed for the rebirth, and finally he presented the phenomenon one will experience on the verge of death.

### **A) The Fundamental Requirement for Achieving Rebirth**

First, the Buddha told *Śāriputra*, “**one cannot achieve birth in that land with the causal conditions of few virtuous roots and a meagre store of blessed merits.**” Buddhism is established on the foundation of cause and effect. That is, every phenomenon exists or occurs based on the law of cause and effect. Rebirth in the Pure Land is not beyond the control of this law. However, the causes and conditions of rebirth in the Pure Land is also wondrous and inconceivable due to the empowerment of Amitabha Buddha's meritorious virtues.

Master Ouyi's annotation explicated this sentence, “The Bodhi right path is named virtuous roots, the intimate cause. Various supportive practices such as generosity, precepts and meditation, are called blessed merits, the auxiliary conditions. The voice-hearers, conditioned (or solitary) enlightened ones, possess less Bodhi virtuous roots. The tainted conducts for human and celestial blessings are inadequate in blessed merits. Neither of them can achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. Only with faith and aspiration, and upholding and reciting the Buddha-name, then each and every utterance is replete with plentiful virtuous roots and blessed merits. Even Buddha-name recitation with scattered mind has immeasurable virtues and merits, not to mention single-mindedness without distraction. Therefore, it results in the interactive correspondence and alignment of path, like the formation of print with the damage of the seal. Amitabha Buddha and his saintly companion come without coming, to personally welcome and escort (the practitioner). The consciousness of the practitioner goes without going, to manifest in the

treasured lotus.”（菩提正道名善根，即亲因。种种助道施戒禅等名福德，即助缘。声闻缘觉菩提善根少，人天有漏福业福德少，皆不可生净土。唯以信愿执持名号，则一声悉具多善根福德。散心称名，福善亦不可量，况一心不乱哉！故使感应道交，文成印坏。弥陀圣众，不来而来，亲垂接引。行人心识，不往而往，托质宝莲也。）

**Notes:** According to Master Ouyi, development of Bodhicitta and cultivation of the right practice of Buddha-name recitation are real virtuous roots, because they are the seeds, the intimate cause for attaining Buddhahood. The other practices such as generosity, precepts and meditation are various auxiliary conditions. From the perspective of self-power to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, the two-vehicle practitioners have not generated their Bodhicitta, and lack the genuine cause for attaining Buddhahood. For those undertaking various virtuous deeds, such as observing the five precepts, cultivating the ten virtuous conducts, etc. they have inadequate merits, because all their virtuous conducts are tainted. Therefore, relying on self-power, both the two-vehicle practitioners and those seeking human and celestial blessings cannot achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.

For the purpose of rebirth in the Pure Land, faith, aspiration and upholding and reciting the Buddha-name generate plentiful virtuous roots and blessed merits; they are unsurpassed causes and conditions. Master Ouyi stated previously that the grand vows of Amitabha Buddha act as the cause of plentiful virtuous roots for sentient beings. These virtuous roots are bestowed or dedicated to us by Amitabha Buddha through the Forty-Eight Great Vows. Hence as long as we have faith in his grand vows, it activates our virtuous roots. The great practices of Amitabha Buddha act as our conditions for plentiful merits, and he condensed all the meritorious virtues into his name Amitabha. When we mindfully recite the name of Amitabha Buddha, we transform his immeasurable meritorious virtues into our own merits. Therefore, upholding and reciting the Buddha-name with sincere faith and aspiration is creating both virtuous roots and blessed merits, it fulfils both the causes and conditions.

“the interactive correspondence and alignment of path” is a well-known metaphor to describe the relationship between Amitabha Buddha and sentient beings practising the Pure Land method. The name recitation with faith and aspiration is the inducing power, which is the active side; and Amitabha Buddha is the response effect, which is the passive side. This is similar to a great bell hanging quietly, and as soon as someone knocks it, it will emanate

sound instantly. The stronger the knock, the louder the sound. Without knocking, the bell remains silent. The alignment of path indicates the intimate fusion between Amitabha Buddha's mind and the minds of beings who is mindful of him. That is, **“while the mind is formulating the Buddha, the mind is the Buddha.”**

“the formation of print with the damage of the seal”: It is another simile to describe the process of rebirth. In ancient times, there was a technology of impressing patterns on melted metal instruments using wax seals. The pattern was engraved on a wax seal. When the seal was impressed on the hot metal, the pattern on the metal was formed, but at the same time, the seal was destroyed. This metaphor indicates that during the process of rebirth in the Pure Land from other worlds, the beings directly go to the Pure Land in the treasured lotus flower, they do not experience the intermediate stage, unlike the process when they transmigrate in some realms. According to Buddhist doctrines, when people descend to hell or ascend to heavens, their consciousness may not experience the intermediate stage, the bardo stage, but rather go there directly. However, when people are to be reborn as human beings or animals, their consciousness will first be transformed into the intermediate stage before they search for their potential parents with affinity, then get reborn.

“Amitabha Buddha and his saintly companion come without coming, to personally welcome and escort”: It means that Amitabha Buddha and his companions truly come to welcome and escort the reborn being in phenomenon aspect, yet in the noumenon aspect, they are all manifested forms, while their Dharma-body never moves.

“The consciousness of the practitioner goes without going”: From the phenomenon perspective, the consciousnesses of the reborn beings truly go to the Pure Land in the treasured lotus flower, following Amitabha Buddha and his companions. But from the noumenon perspective, the Pure Land is not beyond our true mind-nature, which does not go or come, because it pervades all the space in the ten directions.

## **B) The Concrete Practice**

### **a) The definition of virtuous men and virtuous women**

Who are the virtuous men and women in this context? According to Master Ouyi's definition, they include all those having heard of and established faith in Amitabha Buddha's name.

“The so-called virtuous men and women could be anyone - monastic or laity, privileged or underprivileged, old or young, or even beings of the six realms from the four types of birth. As long as they hear the Buddha's name, it signifies that their virtuous roots had matured. Even those who committed the five heinous acts or the ten unwholesome conducts, are still called virtuous.” (善男女者，不论出家在家，贵贱老少，六趣四生。但闻佛名，即多劫善根成熟，五逆十恶皆名善也。)

First of all, the virtuous men and women are not limited to male and female human beings, they encompass all male and female beings in the six realms. Secondly, not anyone can hear the Buddha's name in this world, not to mention beings in other realms. Just investigate how many of our population in this world have heard of Buddha's name? If anyone who has the opportunity to hear Amitabha Buddha's name, and then believes in what it represents, it implies that he or she must have had planted virtuous roots, that is, had established affinity with Amitabha Buddha, in previous lives.

### **b) The Buddha-name recitation is the right practice**

“Amitabha Buddha is the grand name of tremendous meritorious virtues. Using the name to induce virtues is complete and inexhaustible. Therefore, we designate upholding and reciting Buddha-name as the right practice. It is not necessary to involve contemplations and meditations, so Buddha-name recitation is ultimately simple and convenient, and is ultimately direct and swift (to be reborn in Pure Land).” (阿弥陀佛是万德洪名，以名召德，罄无不尽。故即以执持名号为正行，不必更涉观想参究等行。至简易，至直捷也。)

The meaning of Amitabha Buddha's name has been explicated before, here Master Ouyi just stressed that Buddha-name recitation alone is the right practice.

### c) The wisdom from hearing

“Only when one establishes faith upon hearing, and generates aspiration based on faith, can one uphold and recite (the Buddha’s name). Without faith and aspiration, hearing is equivalent to not hearing. Although it is the remote cause (of Buddha path), it is not called wisdom from hearing.” (闻而信，信而愿，乃肯执持。不信不愿，与不闻等，虽为远因，不名闻慧。)

This paragraph annotates the meaning of “**having heard of Amitābha Buddha**” in the *Sūtra*, emphasising the indispensability of the three provisions, of which faith and aspiration are the foundations.

### d) The wisdom from contemplation

“‘**Upholding and reciting**’ means recalling and being mindful of the Buddha-name thought-moment after thought-moment, thus it is called wisdom from contemplation.” (执持则念念忆佛名号，故是思慧)

Master Ouyi defined the practice of recitation as keeping mindful of the Buddha-name thought-moment after thought-moment without interruption. This is the same as the “**gathering in of the six faculties and keeps pure mindfulness continuing consecutively**” (都摄六根，净念相继). He also defined the practice as the wisdom from contemplation, indicating that the Buddha-name recitation must be performed with mindfulness, not merely as verbal conducts.

From the operational perspective, the recitations are categorised into two levels:

“Recitation at phenomenon level: having faith in the existence of Amitabha Buddha in the west, but one has not realised that while the mind is formulating the Buddha, the mind is the Buddha. However, because the practitioner decisively resolves to aspire to achieve rebirth, he or she upholds and recites the Buddha-name without momentary forgetfulness, as if a son recalls his mother.” (事持者，信有西方阿弥陀佛，而未达是心作佛，是心是佛。但以决志愿求生故，如子忆母，无时暂忘。)

This applies to those Pure Land practitioners who have not extensively studied and comprehended the profound tenets of the Buddha-name based on the reality,

or mind-nature. However, they sincerely believe that all the wondrous meritorious virtues of the Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha are real existence. They also absolutely believe that they can get rebirth in the Pure Land as long as they recite the Buddha-name attentively. Based on their sincere faith, they have developed earnest aspiration to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, so that they extremely detest this world, and longing for escape from it as soon as possible. Therefore, they undertake their Buddha-name recitation diligently and perseveringly.

“Recitation at the noumenon level: When one believes that Amitabha Buddha in the west is endowed in our mind and is formulated in our mind, one would regard the grand name endowed and formulated by the self-mind as the perceptual objects, and tether one’s mind without momentary forgetfulness.” (理持者，信西方阿弥陀佛，是我心具，是我心造。即以自心所具所造洪名，为系心之境，令不暂忘也。)

This applies to those practitioners who have realised that the Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha are both intrinsically endowed in our mind-nature. They recite the Buddha-name diligently and perseveringly in accord with their mind-nature.

It should be noted that regardless of whether one realises the reality of Pure land and Amitabha Buddha or not, as long as one mindfully recites the Buddha-name with sincere faith and earnest aspiration, one can still achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. Only they cannot directly achieve rebirth in the reward-land.

#### e) Fulfilment within definite time

Master Ouyi designated the phrase “**for one day, two days, three days, four days, five days, six days, or seven days**” in the *Sūtra* as fulfilment within definite time. He annotated, ““For one day to seven days’ denotes fulfilment of the course within a definite time. Those with acute faculties can attain single-mindedness without distraction within one day; those with obtuse faculties need seven days to attain single-mindedness without distraction; while those with medium faculties take indefinite number of two, three, four, five or six days, to attain single-mindedness without distraction. Moreover, those with acute faculties can maintain single-mindedness without distraction for seven days; those with obtuse faculties can only maintain single-mindedness without



distraction for one day; and those with medium faculties can maintain single-mindedness without distraction for six, five, four, three or two days.” (一日至七日者，克期办事也。利根一日即不乱，钝根七日方不乱，中根二三四五六日不定。又利根能七日不乱，钝根仅一日不乱，中根六五四三二日不定。)

According to Master Ouyi’s annotation, those who achieve single-mindedness without distraction will, within seven days, have fulfilled the requirements of definitely achieving rebirth. This is a very high standard for ordinary Pure Land practitioners. Even those with obtuse faculties are still above most of us. They usually achieve rebirth in the land of convenience with residues, or the reward land as explicated later. We should not be discouraged by these annotations, since we are assured to achieve rebirth with even ten mindful recitations on the verge of death, if we have sincere faith and earnest aspirations. We can also achieve rebirth in the Pure Land by dedicating all the three pure conducts enumerated in *the Contemplation Sūtra*. The only disadvantage is that rebirth will be limited to the land shared by mundane and saintly beings, with nine grades, instead of the upper lands.

#### **f) Commentary on singlemindedness**

“There are two kinds of single-mindedness. Whether reciting at the phenomenon level or reciting at the noumenon level, if one recites up to subjugating the afflictions of insight and cultivations, even eradicating the afflictions of insight and cultivations, it is all called single-mindedness at phenomenon level. Whether reciting at the phenomenon level or reciting at the noumenon level, if one recites up to one’s mind enlightened to perceive inherent essence Buddha, it is all called singlemindedness at noumenon level. With single-mindedness at the phenomenon level, one is not affected by the afflictions of insight and cultivations; with single-mindedness at noumenon level, one is not affected by the two extremes, hence it is wisdom from cultivation.” (一心亦二种。不论事持、理持，持至伏除烦恼，乃至见思先尽，皆事一心。不论事持、理持，持至心开见本性佛，皆理一心。事一心不为见思所乱，理一心不为二边所乱，即修慧也。)

**Notes:** It should be noted that Master Ouyi defined the recitation at the phenomenon level or noumenon level dependent on the operational aspect, in accordance with their comprehension of the mind-nature. He defined single-mindedness at phenomenon level or noumenon level dependent on the resultant

aspect, relying on their level at subjugating and eradicating the delusions of afflictions and ignorance.

If we can subjugate the afflictions of insight and cultivations, we will be temporarily free from disturbances by afflictions. It is similar to dust and earth in a bottle of turbid water precipitating to the bottom after the bottle remains still for an adequate period. However, the dust and earth are not removed, so they will mix up with the water if they are stirred or shaken. Similarly, if one has merely subdued the afflictions of insight and cultivations, they will still agitate the practitioner under appropriate conditions or circumstance. If one has completely eradicated the afflictions of insight and cultivations, one would be free from the disturbances permanently, and remain tranquil and at peace under whatever conditions and circumstances. Similarly, if the dust and earth are completely removed from the turbid water, it would remain clear and clean, even if you stir it or shake it.

With single-mindedness at noumenon level, one has realised the enlightenment to directly perceive the mind-nature, or the reality. These are the Bodhisattvas at least of the ground stage, who have destroyed at least one part of the ignorance, perceiving one part of the Dharma-body. Therefore, they are not attached to or affected by the two extremes of birth-and-death and nirvana, because they are non-dual.

### **C) The Wondrous Results of Rebirth**

With sincere faith and earnest aspiration, after one has cultivated Buddha-name recitation up to the state of single-mindedness, one will achieve rebirth in the respective lands in accordance with one's practice.

“Since they are not affected by the afflictions of insight and cultivations, they induce the response-body Buddha and the multitude of saintly beings to manifest before them. Their mind will not give rise to inversions of the three existences of the *Saha* world, so they will achieve rebirth in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings, or the land of convenience with residues of the Pure Land.” (不为见思乱，故感变化身佛及诸圣众现前，心不复起娑婆界中三有颠倒，往生同居、方便二种极乐世界。)

**Notes:** Since the practitioners merely subjugate or eradicate the afflictions of insight and cultivations, they have not destroyed any part of the ignorance yet,

so they cannot directly perceive the reward-body Buddhas. Therefore, they can only induce the response-body Buddha and his saintly companions to manifest before them at the end of their lives. Furthermore, because they have subjugated or eradicated the afflictions of insight and cultivations, their cravings and attachment to the three existences of the sensuous sphere, the form sphere and the formless sphere are dormant or stopped. Thus, they have untethered their entanglement with the *Saha* world, so they can escape it and get rebirth in the Pure Land. If their afflictions are merely subjugated, they will achieve rebirth in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings. And if they have eradicated the afflictions, they will get rebirth in the land of convenience with residues.

“Since they are not affected by the two extremes, they induce the reward-body Buddha and a multitude of saintly beings to manifest before them. Their mind will not give rise to inversions of the two views of birth-and-death and nirvana, so they will achieve rebirth in the land of reward, or the land of (permanence), tranquillity, and light, the two lands of the Pure Land.” (不为二边乱，故感受用身佛及诸圣众现前，心不复起生死涅槃二见颠倒，往生实报、寂光二种极乐世界。)

Because the practitioners have destroyed at least one part of the ignorance, they have realised or are enlightened to the reality, and they can directly perceive the reward-body Buddhas. Hence the reward-body Buddha and his saintly companions will manifest before them at their end of lives. They have already attained at least the first ground stage of Bodhisattvas, so they will directly get rebirth in the land of reward, or the land of permanence, tranquillity and light, if they have eradicated all the forty-two parts of ignorance through Buddha-name recitation.

#### **D) Accolade of the name recitation**

Having commentated on the stages that can be achieved through the practice of Buddha-name recitation, Master Ouyi further praised the supreme efficacy of this practice.

“It should be noted that upholding and reciting the Buddha-name are simple, convenient, direct and swift. They are also ultimately sudden and ultimately perfect, because each and every thought-moment is inseparable from the Buddha. It is not necessary for contemplative meditations, and

contemplations and examinations, it is perfect and illuminous, without surplus or inadequacy.” (当知执持名号，既简易直捷，仍至顿至圆。以念念即佛故，不劳观想，不必参究，当下圆明，无余无欠。)

**Notes:** The Dharma gateway of Buddha-name recitation is merely based on reciting “Namo Amitabha”, so it is extremely simple. Everyone can easily learn and practice it, so it is definitely convenient. As long as one mindfully recites it, one will achieve rebirth, how direct and swift it is. As soon as one achieves rebirth in the Pure Land, one will horizontally transcend the birth-and-death instantly. Once one gets rebirth in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings, one will perfectly attain all the three types of non-retrogressions. Hence, it is sudden and perfect. Why does it have such extraordinary efficacy? It is because each and every thought-moment is formulating the Buddha by reciting his name, which represents the Buddha-nature. It is not necessary to practise further cultivations such as contemplations, because the thought-moment recitation of the Buddha-name is perfect and illuminous per se, replete with immeasurable Dharma gateways.

“Those with superior capacities cannot transcend its boundary, and those with inferior capacities can still arrive at its domain. Their induced Buddha and reborn lands progress [according to their level of practice], and cannot be generally stated. It can be described as encompassing all the eight teachings horizontally and penetrating the five periods vertically. Therefore, [*Śākyamuni* Buddha] expounded it without request, out of his supreme compassion, and he also sighed deeply as it is difficult to believe.” (上上根不能踰其阂，下下根亦能臻其域。其所感佛，所生土，往往胜进，亦不一概。可谓横该八教，竖彻五时。所以彻底悲心，无问自说，且深叹其难信也。)

**Notes:** The *Sūtras* reveal that Bodhisattvas like *Mañjuśrī* and *Samantabhadra* aspire to get rebirth in the Pure Land, and they also encourage all the other Bodhisattvas to aspire to get rebirth in the Pure Land so as to swiftly accomplish their Buddha Path. On the other hand, according to *the Contemplation Sūtra*, those who have committed the five heinous acts and/or the ten unwholesome conducts can still achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. Even some animals like parrots can get rebirth, as recorded in *the Record of Saints and Sages of the Pure Land*. However, the induced Buddhas who manifest to welcome and escort the reborn one, and the land that one will get rebirth vary from being to being. They progress in accordance with one’s level in the recitation practice,

as explicated above. They can be generally categorised into four types of lands, with each land further classified into nine grades.

Adapting to the capacities of sentient beings and circumstances, *Śākyamuni* Buddha's teachings can be categorised into eight teachings and all his forty-nine years of expounding Dharmas are classified into the five periods according to Tiantai school. However, all the teachings are given for the purpose of liberating the appropriate sentient beings and instructing them to attain Buddhahood. The Buddha recitation fulfils all these purposes; hence it encompasses all the eight teachings expounded in the five periods.

Because of the inconceivable advantages of this Dharma gateway of Buddha-name recitation for all sentient beings, *Śākyamuni* Buddha expounded it spontaneously without request, out of his supreme compassion to liberate all sentient beings. Due to its unbelievable and ineffable characteristics, this method is extremely difficult for mundane beings to believe, so he sighed deeply at the transmission section.

## 2) Second Time Encouragement

**“Śāriputra, I see this benefit, so I speak these words. If there are sentient beings hearing what I say, they should vow to be born in that land.”** (舍利弗，我见是利故说此言。若有众生闻是说者，应当发愿生彼国土。)

Master Ouyi extensively elaborated on this short conclusion. Below are some excerpts.

### A) The danger of cultivation based entirely on self-power

“‘I see’ indicates that what the Buddha eyes see are ultimate, and exactly right and clear. ‘This benefit’ denotes horizontally transcending the world of the five types of turbidity, perfectly purifying the four types of lands, up to attaining the non-retrogressions. They are all benefits of inconceivable meritorious virtues.” (我见者，佛眼所见究尽明了也。是利者，横出五浊，圆净四土，直至不退位尽，是为不可思议功德之利也。)

“Furthermore, ‘this benefit’ refers to the non-inversion at the end of one’s life. If one were to use only self-power to cultivate in this defiled land, the most difficult barrier to pass is the gate of birth-and-death. Whether one has

undertaken obstinate cultivation or is endowed with boasting talent, they are all ineffective. Even those who had profoundly awakened to the gateway, or who had cultivated diligently based on profound right comprehension, as long as they still possess slight habits that are not removed, they will be unable to avoid descent, consequence of the grave [karmas]. Hence Patriarch Yongming said, ‘nine out of ten persons will detour from the path. When the intermediate stage manifests, one will go swiftly to follow it’. This is truly terrifying.” (复次是利，约命终时心不颠倒而言。盖秽土自力修行，生死关头，最难得力。无论顽修狂慧，么罗无功。即悟门深远，操履潜确之人，倘分毫习气未除，未免随强偏坠。永明祖师所谓十人九蹉路，阴境若现前，瞥尔随他去。此诚可寒心者也。)

**Notes:** In the first paragraph, Master Ouyi generally summarized the significant and inconceivable benefits introduced above. In the second paragraph, he specifically pointed out the benefits we would obtain at the end of our lives. As long as we have not eradicated completely the afflictions of insight and cultivations, we cannot escape transmigration. It is the combined power of karma and consciousness that determine which realm we will go to after terminating this life.

“one has undertaken obstinate cultivation” denotes those who cultivate diligently but blindly, so they do not follow the right path, because they neglect the learning of doctrines.

“is endowed with boasting intelligence”: indicates that one is talented and prone to study and explore the teachings, for scholastic purpose or for boasting in front of others, and devoid of practice.

The above two types of persons will find their cultivation or intelligence entirely useless at the gate of death-and-birth. This is because the devious cultivations or intelligence neither have effect on subduing or eradicating afflictions, nor do they mitigate any of one’s karmas. On the contrary, they tend to enforce afflictions and karmas.

“those who profoundly awaken to the gateway” denotes those who cultivate diligently, following the right master and the right path, so that they have profoundly awakened to the gateway, in contrast to the blind obstinate cultivators.

“who cultivate diligently based on profound right comprehension” refers to those practitioners who have comprehended the right doctrines profoundly and cultivate diligently based on their right understanding.

Even for these two types of people, as long as they have not eradicated their afflictions of insight and cultivation, at the end of their lives, they still have no sovereignty over the destination of their next life. Therefore, Master Yongming proposed the four options pertaining to Pure Land and Chan practitioners. One option is, “With Chan but without Pure Land, nine out of ten persons will detour from the path. When the intermediate stage manifests, one will go swiftly to follow it.” (有禅无净土，十人九蹉路，阴境若现前，撇尔随它去) According to Master Yinguang, “with Chan” refers to someone who practices Chan meditation, and has awakened to the mind-nature, which is rarely achieved now. “Without Pure Land” denotes someone who does not have sincere faith or aspiration in the Pure Land, or who does not diligently recite the Buddha-name. The verse signifies that even if one has attained awakening to the true mind, yet if one does not practice the Pure Land method, it is most probable for one to detour from the path at the end of one’s life, because one has weak control over one’s destination. It is not certain how long it would take for one to get rebirth as a complete human, who fortunately comes with all the adequate conditions to re-activate his or her cultivations again. Hence it is truly a detoured path.

“The stream-enterers still get deluded when reborn out of womb, and Bodhisattvas get confused when passing through the intermediate stage. Hence, how can one be so conceited as to impose mastery, and foolishly betting on chance.” (初果昧于出胎，菩萨昏于隔阴。者[这]里岂容强作主幸，侥幸颠预。)

This is the conclusion for those who cultivate entirely on self-power. Even the stream-enterers who have eliminated the afflictions of insight, still get lost, forgetting all their previous lives, when they are reborn again. The Bodhisattvas of the ten faith stages still cannot control their destination after they depart from the five aggregates of this life and enter the intermediate stage. At this critical point, we should not be so conceited to ignore the Pure Land method, betting our crucial destination on fortuitous chance.

## **B) The ensured benefits of the Pure Land method**

“Only faith, aspiration and Buddha-name recitation will definitely not be wasted, because they depend on the other-power, the loving-kindness and compassionate vows of the Buddha. Since Amitabha Buddha and his companions will manifest to comfort and guide, hence one will not fall into inversion, and will achieve rebirth at ease. Because Buddha recognises the suffering of inversion when sentient beings are on the verge of death, he particularly ensures this matter [to prevent the happening of inversion]. Therefore, [*Śākyamuni* Buddha] affably encourages us to give rise to aspiration again, because aspiration can motivate practice.” (唯有信愿持名，仗他力故，佛慈悲愿，定不唐捐。弥陀圣众，现前慰导，故得无倒，自在往生。佛见众生临终倒乱之苦，特为保任此事，所以殷勤再劝发愿，以愿能导行故也。)

This paragraph discloses a piece of crucial information to us. For anyone who has sincere faith and aspiration, and has undertaken diligently the Buddha-name recitation, at the end of their lives, it is Amitabha Buddha's comforting and guiding manifestation that prevent them from falling into inversions. Just as the other version of Amitabha Sūtra translated by Master Xuanzang states, **“Furthermore, Sariputra, suppose there are virtuous men or virtuous women with pure faith, who hear of the Immeasurable Lifespan Buddha's name of such immeasurable, boundless, and inconceivable meritorious merits, and the adornment of meritorious virtues of the World of Ultimate Bliss. Upon hearing of them, they will meditate upon it -- whether for one day and night, or two, or three, or four, or five, or six, or seven (days and nights) – they maintain mindfulness without distraction. When this virtuous man or virtuous woman approaches the end of his or her lifespan, the Infinite Lifespan Buddha accompanied by his companions of innumerable voice hearers and Bodhisattvas will surround him or her, and abide before him or her. They loving-kindly and compassionately empower and protect him or her, and enable him or her not be distracted in mind. When he or her has left this current life, he or she will follow that Buddha and his assembly and be reborn into the purified Buddha-land of World of Bliss of Immeasurable Lifespan Buddha.”**[8] (又，舍利弗，若有净信诸善男子，或善女人，得闻如是无量寿佛无量无边不可思议功德名号、极乐世界功德庄严，闻已思惟，若一日夜，或二，或三，或四，或五，或六，或七，系念不乱。是善男子或善女人，临命终时，无量寿佛与其无量声闻弟子、菩萨众俱，前后围绕，来住其前，慈悲加祐，令心不乱。既舍命已，随佛众会，生无量寿极乐世界清净佛土。)



Hence, we do not need to worry whether we can or cannot keep our mind single-mindedly on the recitation of Buddha-name on the verge of our death, we just need to ensure that our aspiration to achieve rebirth remains unwavering, and try to concentrate our mind on the Buddha-name.

“This Dharma gateway is profound and wondrous, it completely devastates all the sophistry, and eliminates all the devious views. Only those like *Aśvaghoṣa* Bodhisattva, *Nāgārjuna* Bodhisattva, Master Zhizhe, and Master Yongming can completely convey it. The others with worldly intelligence and eloquence, proficient in Confucianism or good at Chan, ponder and research on it, exhausting their ingenuity. However, the more they conjecture about it, the farther they depart from it. They lose to those simple men and women who honestly recite the Buddha-name, and who tacitly penetrate the Buddha’s wisdom and implicitly conform with the wondrous path. ‘I see this benefit, so I speak these words’ evidently indicates that he authenticated this fact with his Buddha eye and Buddha voice. How dare we disobey him, not following and accepting it!”（法门深妙，破尽一切戏论，斩尽一切意见。唯马鸣、龙树、智者、永明之流，彻底担荷得去。其余世智辩聪，通儒禅客，尽思度量，愈推愈远。又不若愚夫妇老实念佛者，为能潜通佛智，暗合道妙也。我见是利，故说此言，分明以佛眼佛音，印定此事。岂敢违抗，不善顺入也哉！）

**Notes:** The Pure Land Dharma gateway is extremely profound and wondrous, because it is established based on the non-duality between Buddha’s mind and sentient being’s mind. That is, Amitabha Buddha is the Buddha inside being’s mind, and sentient beings are beings inside Amitabha Buddha’s mind. They are all inseparable from the reality, the Buddha-nature. They are inconceivable and ineffable, beyond any worldly verbal descriptions, but they can be realised and experienced through cultivations of serene and contemplative meditations. Of course, when we achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, we will instantly or swiftly realise it, thanks to Amitabha Buddha’s empowerment. If anyone wants to analyse or evaluate it through worldly logic inference or deductions, the more effort they exert, the farther they will be from it.

*Aśvaghoṣa* Bodhisattva, who composed *the Treatise on Awakening the Faith of Mahayana*, was purportedly the first one to advocate the method of Buddha-name recitation in this world.

*Nāgārjuna* Bodhisattva was the most eminent Bodhisattva in this world, who was recognised as the patriarch of all the eight Mahayana schools in China. He was the first to categorise the Pure Land method as the easy path, in contrast to all other gateways based on self-power.

Master Zhizhe was the third patriarch of Tiantai school, but he was actually the one who established the doctrinal system of Tiantai school. He composed *the Treatise on the Ten Doubts of Pure Land*, and also encouraged people to practice the Pure Land method. He was also recognised as the small *Śākyamuni* Buddha in the oriental world.

Master Yongming was the sixth patriarch of Pure land. He was acknowledged as the manifestation of Amitabha Buddha himself.

Master Ouyi here emphasised that only great Bodhisattvas and patriarch masters, who are actually manifested Buddhas, are capable of penetrating and expounding this method. The others only need to accept it and believe it, and diligently cultivate the Buddha-name recitation for the purpose of achieving rebirth in the Pure Land.

“those simple men and women who honestly recite the Buddha-name, and who tacitly penetrate the Buddha’s wisdom and implicitly conform with the wondrous path”: This phrase unveils the crucial fact that as long as we devotedly recite the Buddha-name with faith and aspiration, irrespective of whether we comprehend the profound tenets or not, we will obtain incredible benefits. It applies to the majority of contemporary people, because most of us can hardly comprehend the underlying tenet, the tenet of the reality, of the Pure Land, not to mention to get awakened to it. Even though we can spend a lot of effort in studying the literal expressions, and the commentaries of Dharma masters, most of us are still at the verbal level.

However, the bleak fact that we cannot penetrate the tenet does not affect our acquisition of the vital benefit of rebirth. Similarly, most people do not understand the biochemical process of digestion, but they spontaneously seek food when they feel hungry, and as long as they take in the food, their energy necessity for sustenance of their life is fulfilled. On the same token, although most people do not understand the profound and wondrous tenet of the Pure Land, they comprehend the sufferings of this world, and have faith in the majestic adornment of the Pure Land, and they generate the earnest yearning

for rebirth there. This is similar to the fact that we are aware of hunger, and believe that eating food can assuage hunger, so we are urged to find food. Believing that simple Buddha-name recitation can help us to fulfil the purpose of getting rebirth in the Pure Land, one will honestly and devotedly recite the Buddha-name. The final effect is that through sincere faith, earnest aspiration and simple Buddha-name recitation, we can actually achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.

Therefore, theoretically we may not completely comprehend the profound tenet, but, in reality, our actual conducts enable us to realise and experience what the tenet manifests. These behaviours implicitly follow Buddha's ultimate purpose to induce all sentient beings to accomplish the Buddha Path. Master Yinguang repeatedly exhort his disciples that only two types of people can acquire real benefits from the Pure Land method. The first type of people are those with great wisdom such as the patriarch masters mentioned above, who profoundly believe in the Pure Land and diligently recite the Buddha-name till the end of their life, after they had awakened to the tenet of Pure Land. The second group are those simple men and women who cannot penetrate the tenet of the Pure Land, due to their inadequate wisdom or lack of conditions, but they directly believe in the Pure Land and its benefits when they read about it or learn about it from Dharma friends. They possess undoubted faith and unwavering aspiration, and they undertake their recitation practice perseveringly till the end of their life. They usually manifest various auspicious signs when they die. The worst are those who are too conceited with their talent to accept and believe in anything if they cannot directly perceive it or prove it based on their worldly logic conjectures. Even though they may spend painstaking effort in studying or talking about the tenets, they fail to get rebirth without sincere faith, aspiration or actual practice. It is similar to those cashiers who count others' money without owning a penny, or those who merely study or talk about the menu of a banquet but are unable to gratify their hunger.

### 3. The Transmission Part

Having studied the main text of the *Sūtra*, we come to the transmission part, which signifies by whom and how the *Sūtra* will be transmitted. Master Ouyi stressed the reason that only Buddhas can expound and transmit this *Sūtra*.

“The Dharma gateway of faith, aspiration and Buddha-name recitation perfectly encompasses and perfectly transcends all Dharma gateways. It is

completely identical with all the Dharma gateways vertically, but it is totally different from all other Dharma gateways horizontally. It is even expounded without request, so who can undertake advocating and transmitting it. Only the Buddha and Buddhas can ultimately exhaust the reality of all dharmas. What this *Sūtra* reveals are entirely the perceptual field of Buddhas, hence only Buddhas can transmit it.”（信愿持名一法，圆收圆超一切法门。竖与一切法门浑同，横与一切法门迥异。既无问自说，谁堪倡募流通。唯佛与佛，乃能究尽诸法实相。此经唯佛境界，唯佛佛可与流通耳。）

From the vertical perspective, all the Buddhist Dharma gateways are composed of faith, comprehension, practice and attainment. The Pure Land method also comprises these processes, hence it encompasses all the other Dharma gateways. However, from the horizontal perspective, by merely possessing faith, aspiration and cultivating Buddha-name recitation, one can completely escape the three spheres, achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, attain all the three types of non-retrogressions, and swiftly accomplish the Buddha Path. This attribute of the Pure Land method is totally different from other methods.

## **(1) The General Encouragement**

The transmission part also encompasses the encouragement of faith, the encouragement of aspiration and the encouragement of practice.

### **1) The Transmission Part of Encouragement of Faith**

#### **A) Briefly Referring the Title**

##### **a) The Buddhas in the East Direction Praise**

“*Śāriputra*, just like I now praise the benefits of Amitābha Buddha’s inconceivable meritorious virtues, there are also, in the eastern quarter, Akṣobhya Buddha, Sumeru Appearance Buddha, Great Sumeru Buddha, Sumeru Light Buddha, and Wonderful Voice Buddha, and Buddhas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. Each of them, in His own land, extends His broad and long tongue, completely covering the great-thousandfold-world, speaks these sincere and truthful words: ‘You sentient beings should believe this ‘Sūtra of Inconceivable Meritorious Virtues and the Mindful Protection by All Buddhas.’ ”（“舍利弗，如我今者赞叹阿弥陀佛不可思议功德之

利，东方亦有阿閼鞞佛、须弥相佛、大须弥佛、须弥光佛、妙音佛，如是等恒河沙数诸佛，各于其国出广长舌相，遍覆三千大千世界说诚实言：‘汝等众生，当信是称赞不可思议功德，一切诸佛所护念经。’）

It is evident that *the Amitabha Sūtra* particularly stresses the significance of the transmission by Buddhas. The whole content of the short text is composed of 2,227 Chinese characters only, but it utilises 617 characters (27.7%) to enumerate repeatedly how the Buddhas in the six directions all praise and protect this *Sūtra*. This is also a realisation and solid verification of Amitabha Buddha’s 17<sup>th</sup> vow, **“When I attain Buddhahood, if innumerable Buddhas in the land of the ten directions should not all praise and glorify my name, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.”**

Master Ouyi summarised the salient representatives of the inconceivable benefits of meritorious virtues of Amitabha Buddha.

“There are briefly five meanings of ‘inconceivable’: ① horizontally transcend the three spheres without the necessity of eradicating all afflictions; ② achieving rebirth in the West is equivalent to rebirth in the four types of lands in the Pure Land, they are not progressively attained; ③ only reciting the Buddha-name, without dependence on contemplative meditation and other skilful means; ④ only seven days for accomplishment, rather than multitude of *kalpas*, lifetimes, years and months; ⑤ upholding one Buddha’s name to receive mindful protections from all Buddhas, non-different from reciting the names of all Buddhas.” (不可思议，略有五意：一、横超三界，不俟断惑；二、即西方横具四土，非由渐证；三、但持名号，不假禅观诸方便；四、一七为期，不藉多劫多生多年月；五、持一佛名，即为诸佛护念，不异持一切佛名。)

The first four meanings have been explicated in previous sections, and the fifth meaning will be discussed later in this section.

**“Sūtra of Inconceivable Meritorious Virtues and the Mindful Protection by All Buddhas”** is the formal title of this *Amitabha Sūtra*, which is adopted in Xuanzang’s translation. However, Master *Kumārajīva* adopted the title of *“The Buddha Expounded the Sūtra of Amitabha”* for emphasising the Buddha-name recitation practice proposed in this *Sūtra*, and for the simplicity of title so as to facilitate remembrance of it.

**b) The Buddhas in the South Direction Praise**

“Śāriputra, in the southern quarter, there are Sun-Moon Lamp Buddha, Renown Light Buddha, Great Flame Shoulder Buddha, Sumeru Lamp Buddha, and Immeasurable Diligence Buddha, and Buddhas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. Each of them, in His own land, extends His broad and long tongue, completely covering the great-thousandfold-world, speaks these sincere and truthful words: ‘You sentient beings should believe this *‘Sūtra of Inconceivable Meritorious Virtues and the Mindful Protection by All Buddhas.’*” ( “舍利弗，南方世界有日月灯佛、名闻光佛、大焰肩佛、须弥灯佛、无量精进佛，如是等恒河沙数诸佛，各于其国出广长舌相，遍覆三千大千世界说诚实言：‘汝等众生，当信是称赞不可思议功德，一切诸佛所护念经。’ ” )

**c) The Buddhas in the West Direction Praise**

“Śāriputra, in the western quarter, there are Immeasurable Lifespan Buddha, Immeasurable Form Buddha, Infinite Banner Buddha, Great Light Buddha, Great Radiance Buddha, Treasure Form Buddha, and Pure Light Buddha, and Buddhas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. Each of them, in His own land, extends His broad and long tongue, completely covering the great-thousandfold-world, and speaks these sincere and truthful words: ‘You sentient beings should believe this *‘Sūtra of Inconceivable Meritorious Virtues and the Mindful Protection by All Buddhas.’*” ( “舍利弗，西方世界有无量寿佛、无量相佛、无量幢佛、大光佛、大明佛、宝相佛、净光佛，如是等恒河沙数诸佛，各于其国出广长舌相，遍覆三千大千世界说诚实言：‘汝等众生，当信是称赞不可思议功德，一切诸佛所护念经。’ ” )

Among the representative Buddhas listed in the western quarter, there is a Buddha named Immeasurable Lifespan Buddha, who can be Amitabha Buddha himself, or another Buddha bearing the same name. We have learned that all Buddhas possess immeasurable meritorious virtues, thus have countless names, so it is not strange for more than one Buddha to have the same name.

**d) The Buddhas in the North Direction Praise**

“Śāriputra, in the northern quarter, there are Flame Shoulder Buddha, Supreme Victorious Voice Buddha, Hard-to-Conquer Buddha, Sun Birth Buddha, Web-of-Radiance Buddha, and Buddhas as numerous as the sands

of the Ganges. Each of them, in His own land, extends His broad and long tongue, completely covering the great-thousandfold-world, and speaks these sincere and truthful words: ‘You sentient beings should believe this **‘Sūtra of Inconceivable Meritorious Virtues and the Mindful Protection by All Buddhas.’**” ( “舍利弗，北方世界有焰肩佛、最胜音佛、难沮佛、日生佛、网明佛，如是等恒河沙数诸佛，各于其国出广长舌相，遍覆三千大千世界说诚实言：‘汝等众生，当信是称赞不可思议功德，一切诸佛所护念经。’ ” )

e) The Buddhas in the Direction towards Nadir Praise

“**Śāriputra**, toward the nadir, there are Lion Buddha, Renown Buddha, Renown Light Buddha, Dharma Buddha, Dharma Banner Buddha, and Dharma Upholder Buddha, and Buddhas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. Each of them, in His own land, extends His broad and long tongue, completely covering the great-thousandfold-world, and speaks these sincere and truthful words: ‘You sentient beings should believe this **‘Sūtra of Inconceivable Meritorious Virtues and the Mindful Protection by All Buddhas.’**” (舍利弗，下方世界有师子佛、名闻佛、名光佛、达摩佛、法幢佛、持法佛，如是等恒河沙数诸佛，各于其国出广长舌相，遍覆三千大千世界说诚实言：‘汝等众生，当信是称赞不可思议功德，一切诸佛所护念经。’ ” )

f) The Buddhas in the Direction of Zenith Praise

“**Śāriputra**, toward the zenith, there are Brahma Voice Buddha, Constellation King Buddha, Fragrance Superior Buddha, Fragrant Light Buddha, Great Flame Shoulder Buddha, Varicoloured Jewel Flower Adorned Body Buddha, Sala Tree King Buddha, Jewelled Flower Virtue Buddha, Seeing-All-Meaning Buddha, and Like *Sumeru* Mountain Buddha, and Buddhas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. Each of them, in His own land, extends His broad and long tongue, completely covering the great-thousandfold-world, and speaks these sincere and truthful words: ‘You sentient beings should believe this **‘Sūtra of Inconceivable Meritorious Virtues and the Mindful Protection by All Buddhas.’**” ( “舍利弗，上方世界有梵音佛、宿王佛、香上佛、香光佛、大焰肩佛、杂色宝华严身佛、娑罗树王佛、宝华德佛、见一切义佛、如须弥山佛，如是等恒河沙数诸佛，各于其国出广长舌相，遍覆三千大千世界说诚实言：‘汝等众生，当信是称赞不可思议功德，一切诸佛所护念经。’ ” )

## B) Enquiry about the Title

**“Śāriputra, what is your opinion? Why is this Sūtra called the Sūtra of Mindful Protection by All Buddhas? Śāriputra, if there are virtuous men and virtuous women who have heard and upheld this Sūtra, and have heard Buddhas’ names, they are mindfully protected by all Buddhas. They will never retrogress from attaining *anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi*. Therefore, Śāriputra, you all should believe and accept my words and other Buddhas’ words.”** ( “舍利弗，于汝意云何？何故名为一切诸佛所护念经？舍利弗，若有善男子、善女人，闻是经受持者，及闻诸佛名者，是诸善男子、善女人，皆为一一切诸佛之所护念，皆得不退转于阿耨多罗三藐三菩提。是故，舍利弗，汝等皆当信受我语及诸佛所说。 )

Why is this Sūtra formally called *the Sūtra of Mindful Protections by All Buddhas*? Again, Śākyamuni Buddha raised the question, and he proposed the answer without request. He divulged the fact that anyone, as long as one has heard the Sūtra, who establishes faith, aspiration and recited the Buddha-name, and has heard the Buddha-names enumerated here, one will be mindfully protected by all the Buddhas. Hence one will not be disturbed by demons and other evil deities during cultivations, so that one will never retrogress and eventually attain Buddhahood.

As for those who will be mindfully protected by the Buddhas, Master Ouyi proposed two categories: From the specific perspective, only those having attained samadhi or single-mindedness without distraction can be mindfully protected by all Buddhas. However, from the general perspective, he stated, “All the Buddha are compassionate and inconceivable. The meritorious virtues of the Buddha-name are also inconceivable. Hence, as long as one hears the Buddha-name, whether intentionally or unintentionally, with faith or without faith, it will become the seed of conditions. Moreover, when Buddhas deliver sentient beings, they do not distinguish kins or foes, and without weariness for eternal time. If we have heard the Buddha-name, the Buddhas will definitely mindfully protect us. Why suspect this?” (诸佛慈悲，不可思议，名号功德，亦不可思议。故一闻佛名，不论有心无心，若信若否，皆成缘种。况佛度众生，不简怨亲，恒无疲倦，苟闻佛名，佛必护念，又何疑焉。 )



## 2) The Transmission Part of Encouragement of Aspiration

**“If there are those who have vowed, are now vowing, or will vow to be reborn in Amitābha Buddha’s land, they will never retrogress from attaining *anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi*, and they have already been reborn, are now being reborn, or will be reborn in that land. Therefore, *Śāriputra*, among virtuous men and virtuous women, if there are those who have faith, they should vow to be reborn in that land.”** ( “舍利弗，若有人已发愿、今发愿、当发愿，欲生阿弥陀佛国者，是诸人等，皆得不退转于阿耨多罗三藐三菩提，于彼国土若已生、若今生、若当生。是故，舍利弗，诸善男子、善女人，若有信者，应当发愿生彼国土。 )

The above paragraph was commented by Master Ouyi as follows:

“Those having vowed had already got rebirth, those who are now vowing achieve rebirth now, and those who will vow will achieve rebirth later. These properly demonstrate that the vows (or aspirations) developed based on faith are not vacuous. Without faith one will not give rise to aspiration; without aspiration, one cannot achieve rebirth by mere faith. Therefore, it is said that anyone with faith should give rise to aspiration.” (已愿已生，今愿今生，当愿当生，正显依信所发之愿无虚也。非信不能发愿，非愿信亦不生。故云若有信者，应当发愿。 )

“Furthermore, aspiration is the proof of faith and the pivot of practice, so it is crucially important. Having aspiration, one must have faith and practice accompanying it. Hence [the Buddha] affably encouraged [to give rise to aspiration] three times.” (又愿者，信之券，行之枢，尤为要务。举愿则信行在其中，所以殷勤三劝也。 )

Here it is to emphasise the pivotal importance of earnest aspiration, although the three provisions of faith, aspiration and practice are all indispensable. That is, even if one believes in the existence and the meritorious virtues of the Pure Land, however, if one does not have the aspiration to get rebirth there, one cannot achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.

“Moreover, aspiring to achieve rebirth in that land is the two gateways of delight and detest. Detesting and departing from the *Saha* world comply with the two grand vows generated based on the two truths of suffering and origin.

Cherishing and pursuing rebirth in the Pure Land conforms with the two grand vows generated based on the two truths of the path and cessation. Hence they attain the non-retrogression on the great Bodhi path.” (复次愿生彼国，即欣厌二门。厌离娑婆，与依苦集二谛所发二种弘誓相应。欣求极乐，与依道灭二谛所发二种弘誓相应。故得不退转于大菩提道。)

Here Master Ouyi aligned pursuing rebirth in the Pure Land with the Four Grand Vows of accomplishment of the Buddha Path. Given the truth of suffering of the *Saha* world and the difficulty in eradicating the origin of the suffering, the afflictions of insight and cultivations, we should aspire to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. As soon as we get rebirth there, we will get complete and permanent emancipation from the sufferings of this world, and spontaneously subdue and eradicate all the afflictions. Furthermore, we can instantly obtain all the supramundane powers, and rapidly enhance the capability in wisdom and skilful means so as to rescue other beings in suffering. Because of inferior capacity and short lifespan, it is truly hard for us to master many Dharmas, not to mention immeasurable Dharmas. Due to our short lifespan and uncontrollable retrogressions, it is almost impossible for us to accomplish the Buddha Path in this *Saha* world based purely on self-power. However, as soon as we achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, we will be immersed in the Dharma teaching world, and we can also visit all other Buddhas in the ten directions to directly learn from them with the spontaneously acquired supramundane powers. These benefits together with the immeasurable lifespan ensure that we would definitely and rapidly master all Dharmas. With the above-mentioned advantages and the automatically attained non-retrogressions, we will swiftly accomplish the ultimate Buddha path.

“Question: Those who are vowing now can only be said to aspire to be reborn, why are they called achieve rebirth now? Answer: this also has two meanings: the first is called now based on one lifetime, that is, one gives rise to aspiration and recites Buddha-name in this lifetime, one definitely gets rebirth at the end of this life. The second is called now based on instant: one thought-moment of complying [with the Buddha-name], one thought-moment is reborn; thought-moment after thought-moment of complying [with the Buddha-name], then thought-moment after thought-moment are reborn. The wondrous cause and wondrous effect are inseparable from the one mind. It is similar to the two sides of a scale, the lowering of one side and the rising of the other side are simultaneous. Hence why do we have to wait until the end

of life in the *Saha* world to get reborn in the treasured lake. As soon as we have faith and aspiration, and begin to recite the Buddha-name, our lotus flowers [in the treasured lake] will grow and flourish, the golden pedestals will manifest, we are already beyond the beings of the *Saha* world. This is extremely perfect and extraordinarily sudden, difficult to express and difficult to contemplate, only those with great wisdom can truly believe it.” (问：今发愿但可云当生，何名今生？答：此亦二义。一、约一期名今，现生发愿持名，临终定生净土。二、约刹那名今，一念相应一念生，念念相应念念生。妙因妙果，不离一心，如称两头，低昂时等。何俟娑婆报尽，方育珍池。只今信愿持名，莲萼光荣，金台影现，便非娑婆界内人矣。极圆极顿，难议难思，唯有大智，方能谛信。)

We should contemplate the second meaning he proposed. From the phenomenon perspective, as soon as we have established sincere faith and earnest aspiration, every recitation of the Buddha-name will flourish the lotus flower with our name on it in the treasured lake in the Pure Land, as demonstrated by many examples. From the noumenon perspective, the Pure Land and the lotus flower are inseparable from our mind, hence the response to the inducement is effective instantly.

### 3) The Transmission Part of Encouragement of Practice

#### A) The Praise from Numerous Buddhas

“Śāriputra, just like I now praise those Buddhas’ inconceivable meritorious virtues, those Buddhas also praise my inconceivable merit, making such a statement: ‘Śākyamuni Buddha is able to accomplish the extremely difficult, rare thing. In the *Sahā* world during the evil times of the five types of turbidity—the turbidity of the *kalpa*, the turbidity of view, the turbidity of affliction, the turbidity of sentient beings, and the turbidity of lifespan, he has attained *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*. For the sake of sentient beings, he expounds this Dharma, which is hard to be believed by the entire world.’” (舍利弗，如我今者称赞诸佛不可思议功德，彼诸佛等亦称赞我不可思议功德，而作是言：‘释迦牟尼佛能为甚难希有之事！能于娑婆国土五浊恶世——劫浊、见浊、烦恼浊、众生浊、命浊中，得阿耨多罗三藐三菩提，为诸众生说是一切世间难信之法。)

In this paragraph, Śākyamuni Buddha personally stated the two extraordinary endeavours he accomplished in this world: to attain Buddhahood in this evil

time of five types of turbidity, and to expound the inconceivable teachings of the Buddha-name recitation method. The first difficulty is evident. The following are Master Ouyi's annotation on the second difficulty.

**a) Hierarchical explication of the various difficulties**

“Although all the Buddhas are equal in meritorious virtues and wisdom, their edifications are different in the degree of difficulty and easiness.” (诸佛功德智慧，虽皆平等，而施化则有难易。)

“It is easy to accomplish Bodhi in the Pure Land, whereas it is difficult to accomplish Bodhi in the defiled world. It is easy to expound Dharmas for the beings in the Pure Land, whereas it is difficult to do so for sentient beings in the defiled world. It is even easy to expound gradual Dharmas for the sentient beings in the defiled world, while it is difficult to expound the sudden Dharma to them.” (净土成菩提易，浊世难。为净土众生说法易，为浊世众生难。为浊世众生说渐法犹易，说顿法难。)

“It is even easy to expound the other sudden Dharmas to the sentient beings in the defiled world, it is particularly difficult to expound the horizontally transcending sudden Dharma of the Pure Land.” (为浊世众生说余顿法犹易，说净土横超顿法尤难。)

“It is already not easy to expound the horizontally transcending, sudden cultivating and sudden attainment, and the wondrous contemplations to the sentient beings in the defiled world. It is even more difficult than all other difficulties to expound such unique, wondrous, inconceivable number-one convenient [method], which is merely dependent on reciting the Buddha-name to directly attain non-retrogression, without the necessary diligent cultivations for attainment. Therefore, none of the Buddhas in the ten directions does not extol Śākyamuni Buddha as courageous and valiant.” (为浊世众生说净土横超顿修顿证妙观，已自不易，说此无藉劬劳修证，但持名号，径登不退，奇特胜妙超出思议第一方便，更为难中之难。故十方诸佛，无不推我释迦偏为勇猛也。)

*Notes:* “the horizontally transcending, sudden cultivating and sudden attainment” indicates the Buddha mindfulness based on the reality, that is, contemplating the self-nature Buddha to attain sudden enlightenment.

“the wondrous contemplations” denotes the cultivations based on the contemplations introduced in *the Contemplation Sūtra*.

Why is it easy to expound the difficult methods to the sentient beings compared to expounding easy methods? It is because human beings have an adamant standard of evaluation based on their empirical experience, that the greater the result, the more difficult it is to acquire. Such simple, easy method of Buddha-name recitation which is capable of inducing all the beneficial results as introduced previously is truly beyond the mindset and judgement of all sentient beings. Hence it is the most difficult mission to accomplish.

### **b) Elucidation of the five types of turbidity**

When the human lifespan is reduced to 20,000 years, the time of the five types of turbidity begins. There are several different versions of their definitions, such as the definition by *the Śūraṅgama Sūtra* [20] etc. Let us study how Master Ouyi defined them pertaining to the Pure Land gateway.

“The turbidity of the *kalpa* represents the time when various dharmas of turbidity congregate. At the time of the turbidity of the *kalpa*, one cannot be delivered depending on any practice other than the horizontal escaping method which takes along all karmas.” (劫浊者，浊法聚会之时。劫浊中，非带业横出之行，必不能度。)

It is clear that the turbidity of the *kalpa* has no distinct substance per se. It just represents the time when all sorts of turbidity congregate. At this time, because of combined oppression and disturbance of all sorts of afflictions and other negative factors, such as short lifespan, it is extremely difficult for anyone to achieve emancipation based purely on self-effort. Only by relying on the power of great vows and practices of Amitabha Buddha, can one achieve emancipation by getting rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this life, and taking along all previous karmas, which will remain dormant in the Pure Land.

“The turbidity of view denotes the five acute drives of devious views that proliferate, that is, the view of the self, the extreme views, the attachment to wrong views, the attachment to rites and rituals, the false views that delude and submerge [sentient beings], so it is called turbidity. At the time of the turbidity of view, one cannot get delivered if not based on provisional skilful

practice.” (见浊者，五利使，邪见增盛。谓身见、边见、见取、戒取及诸邪见，昏昧汨没，故名为浊。见浊中，非不假方便之行，必不能度。)

For the detailed explanation of the five acute drives and the following five obtuse drives, please see Chapter 5 of Vol I. At this time, people are gravely inundated in various devious views or are affected by evil teachers, especially with the proliferation of website, all sorts of peculiar and strange information bombard everyone all the time, and constantly aggravating the five acute drives. It is even more difficult for most people to distinguish between right and wrong, not to mention to cultivate right contemplations. Only by cultivating the direct method of Buddha-name recitation, can one easily escape the entanglement of this world fraught with flooding devious views.

“The turbidity of affliction denotes the proliferation of the five obtuse drives of afflictions, that is, greed, hatred, delusion, arrogance, and doubt keep disturbing and agitating [the beings], so it is called turbidity. At the time of the turbidity of afflictions, one cannot be delivered if not based on the practice that the mind of mundane beings is inseparable from the mind of Buddhas.” (烦恼浊者，五钝使，烦恼增盛。谓贪、嗔、痴、慢、疑，烦动恼乱，故名为浊。烦恼浊中，非即凡心是佛心之行，必不能度。)

With the incessant interference of the five obtuse drives, it is difficult for one to concentrate on one object. Since we are trapped by greed and hatred, etc, we will definitely be harmed by karmas created by evil conducts. Given that our mind is intrinsically inseparable from the mind of Buddha, we can establish sincere faith and aspiration in pursuing rebirth in the Pure Land. The cultivation will be mindfully protected by all Buddhas as guaranteed in *the Amitabha Sūtra*.

“The turbidity of sentient beings refers to that the combination of the coarse and inferior five aggregates induced by devious views and afflictions are named sentient beings, whose form and mind are both degraded and inferior, thus named turbidity. At the time of the turbidity of sentient beings, one cannot get delivered if not based on the practice of cherishing and pursuit (of Pure Land) and detesting and escape (*Saha* world).” (众生浊者，见烦恼所感粗弊五阴和合，假名众生，色心并皆陋劣，故名为浊。众生浊中，非欣厌之行，必不能度。)

Induced by grave afflictions of insight and cultivation, our mental capacity is inferior, our physical body is subjected to weariness and sickness, and preventing us from persevering cultivation. In addition, we are used to and are attached to the filthy environment and the inferior retribution of this miserable life, thus unwilling to escape from them. Therefore, purely based on self-power, it is almost impossible to eradicate all the afflictions of insight and cultivations. Only by riding the boat of the grand vows and great practices of Amitabha Buddha, can one traverse the ocean of birth-and-death to arrive in the Pure Land in this life.

“The turbidity of lifespan indicates that the cause and fruition [of sentient beings] are both inferior, with a short lifespan not even up to 100 years, so it is called turbidity. At the time of the turbidity of lifespan, one cannot be delivered if not based on the practice that neither requires *kalpas* of time nor necessitates diligent arduous endeavours.” (命浊者，因果并劣，寿命短促，乃至不满百岁，故名为浊。命浊中，非不费时劫，不劳勤苦之行，必不能度。)

This conclusion is evident.

### c) The power of Buddha-name recitation

“Moreover, merely using faith and aspiration to adorn one utterance of Amitabha Buddha will transform the turbidity of *kalpa* into pure oceanic assembly; transmute the turbidity of view into immeasurable light; convert the turbidity of affliction into permanence, tranquillity and light; change the turbidity of sentient beings to transformation birth from lotus flowers; and turn the turbidity of lifespan into immeasurable lifespan. Therefore, one recitation of Amitabha Buddha is the Dharma gateway of *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* realised by our original teacher, *Śākyamuni* Buddha, in the evil time of the five types of turbidity.” (复次只此信愿庄严一声阿弥陀佛，转劫浊为清净海会，转见浊为无量光，转烦恼浊为常寂光，转众生浊为莲华化生，转命浊为无量寿。故一声阿弥陀佛，即释迦本师于五浊恶世，所得之阿耨多罗三藐三菩提法。)

By mindfully reciting Amitabha Buddha’s name with sincere faith and earnest aspiration, we will assuredly achieve rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this inferior life. Leaving this defiled world fraught with all sorts of turbidity, we will dwell in a pure environment, and congregate with saintly beings. Spontaneously eradicating all devious views, we will swiftly acquire

immeasurable light, that is, wisdom. Cutting off the afflictions of greed, hatred, delusion, arrogance and doubt in the Pure Land, we will enjoy the permanence, tranquillity and light. Born from the jewelled lotus flower in the treasured lake, we will get rid of our inferior body and mindset eternally, and enjoy the vajra *nārāyaṇa* body with all its supramundane powers. Once we achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, we will automatically enjoy immeasurable lifespan.

## B) The Summary from the Master Teacher

**“Śāriputra, you should know that, in the evil times of the five types of turbidity, I have done this difficult thing, attaining *anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi*. For the sake of the entire world, I expound the hard-to-believe Dharma. It is extremely difficult!”** (舍利弗，当知我于五浊恶世，行此难事，得阿耨多罗三藐三菩提，为一切世间说此难信之法，是为甚难。)

Having accepted the difficult endeavour undertaken by *Śākyamuni* Buddha in this turbid world in order to rescue us, we should give rise to utmost veneration to him and categorically believe and follow his instructions, and mindfully recite Amitabha Buddha’s name to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.

## (2) The Summary Encouragement

**After the Buddha expounded this *Sūtra*, *Śāriputra* and other *bhikṣus*, as well as gods, humans, asuras, and others in the entire world, having heard the Buddha’s words, rejoiced, believed in, and accepted the teachings. They made obeisance and departed.** (佛说此经已，舍利弗及诸比丘，一切世间天人阿修罗等，闻佛所说，欢喜信受，作礼而去。)

This is the epilogue added by the council after they repeated and recorded what the Buddha had said in the assembly. Let us use the following paragraph by Master Ouyi to conclude this chapter.

“The Dharma gateway is inconceivable, difficult to believe and difficult to know, hence no one could ask about it. However, Buddha was aware of the capacity of beings. Thus, when he realised that the opportunity for sentient beings to attain Buddhahood was mature, he spontaneously expounded it, in order to enable them to obtain the four universal benefits. He edified sentient beings similar to timely rain, so they all delightedly believed and accepted it.



The joy of body and mind is called delight; without doubt and suspicion is called believing; accepting and upholding without forgetfulness is called accepting. Out of gratitude to the great grace and virtues, taking refuge with one's life is called paying obeisance. Cultivating based on the teaching to achieve rebirth [in the Pure Land, so as to attain] the non-retrogression, is called departing.”（法门不可思议，难信难知，无一人能发问者。佛智鉴机，知众生成佛缘熟，无问自说，令得四益，如时雨化，故欢喜信受也。身心怡悦名欢喜。毫无疑惑名信。领纳不忘名受。感大恩德，投身归命，名作礼。依教修持，一往不退，名而去。）

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## Chapter 5 Introduction of the Patriarchs of the Pure Land School

*Who are the thirteen Pure Land Patriarchs?*

*What are their prominent contributions?*

*How has the Pure Land school developed in China?*

The formation and development of the Pure Land school in China can be classified into three salient periods: 1) From East Han (东汉; 25 – 220 CE) to East Jin (东晋; 317 – 420 CE) constituted the period of practical corroboration. 2) From South North Dynasty (南北朝; 420-589 CE) to Sui (隋; 581 – 619 CE) and Tang (唐; 618 – 907 CE) was the period of establishment and development of the Pure Land theory and doctrines. 3) From Song (宋; 960-1279 CE) to present time belongs to the period of further incessant perfection and development. Through the brief introduction of the patriarchs of the Pure Land school, the following will explain its establishment and development in China.

The materials of the following text are mainly from Venerable Yanxu [1] and Venerable Da'an [2].

### I. THE PERIOD OF EARLY CORROBORATION

#### 1. The Prelude of Pure Land School

The *Sūtras* of the Pure Land belong to the group of *Sūtras* that were translated into Chinese at the earliest period. Most of the *Sūtra* translators before Tang dynasty were from India or the Mid-Asia area. When they translated a *Sūtra* into Chinese, they had to consider its suitability to the capacities and inclinations of and its benefits to most Chinese people.

It is amazing that most of the *Sūtras* of the Pure Land had been successfully translated into Chinese during the early period from East Han to South and North Dynasties. For instance, as early as 179 CE, *Tripitaka* Master *Lokakṣema* (支娄迦讖) translated *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sūtra* (《般舟三昧經》), the earliest Pure Land *Sūtra*. He also translated *the Immeasurable Pure Equal Enlightenment Sūtra*, the first version of *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*. All the three Pure Land *Sūtras* and the one *śāstra* were translated subsequently: *Tripitaka* Master *Samghavarman* (康僧铠) of Wei State translated *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* in 252CE; *Tripitaka* Master *Kumārajīva* (鳩摩罗什) translated *the Amitabha Sūtra* in 402CE; *Tripitaka* Master *Kālaṃyaśas* (瞿良耶舍) translated *the Contemplation Sūtra* in 424CE; and *Tripitaka* Master *Bodhiruci* (菩提流志) translated *Vasubandhu's Treatise on the Rebirth* in 531CE.

All the three Pure Land *Sūtras* have depicted the wondrous majestic adornment of the environmental and life retributions of the Pure Land. They also pointed out the specific cultivations required to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. However, people only believe what they see. If no one from this world had ever successfully achieved rebirth in the Pure Land based on cultivations prescribed in the Pure Land *Sūtras*, not many people would have been motivated to cultivate according to them. Hence the Pure Land practice was not widely accepted until the time of Master Huiyuan, our first Patriarch of the Pure Land School.

## 2. Master Huiyuan: the First Patriarch

As the founder and the first patriarch of the Pure Land school in China, Master Huiyuan (慧远大师; 334-416CE) was born in Loufan (楼烦; present day Dai county of Shanxi). He was gifted in talent and diligent in study at a young age. At age 13, he followed his uncle to Luoyang (洛阳) area to travel and expand his learning. He was profoundly proficient in Confucianism and versed in Laozi (老子) and Zhuangzi (庄子).

When Master Daoan (道安大师; 312-385CE) was preaching Buddhism in Hengshan (恒山) of Shanxi, Huiyuan went to attend the assembly, taking his younger brother Huichi (慧持) with him. After hearing Master Daoan's exposition of *the Prajna Sūtra*, he was greatly awakened, and sighed, "the nine branches of Confucian teachings are all like chaffs." He then renounced

household life and joined the monastic, cultivating under the guidance of Master Daoan, at age 21. Three years later, he began to ascend the alter to expound Dharmas. Master Daoan praised, “Who will disseminate the teachings in the east but Huiyuan!”

At 31, Huiyuan followed Master Daoan to Xiangyang (襄阳), where he frequently preached Dharmas in place of his teacher. When asked about the meaning of *prajna*, he usually referred Zhuangzi as simile, enabling the requester to easily comprehend it. When he was 44, general Fupi (苻丕) of Former Qin (前秦; 350—394CE) besieged Xiangyang. Master Daoan dismissed his disciples, so Huiyuan with his brother and about ten disciples bade farewell to their master, and went south to Jingzhou (荆州).

At that time, one classmate of Master Huiyuan, Venerable Huiyong (慧永) already inhabited Xilin Temple (西林寺) of Lushan. He invited Master Huiyuan to join him to dwell and cultivate together. However, as more and more followers joined Master Huiyuan in addition to his original companions, Xilin Temple became too small to hold them. Therefore, the prefectural governor Huanyi (桓伊) helped to establish another temple, called Donglin (东林), at the east side of Lushan. Master Huiyuan then established the first Lotus Society, and commenced the practice of Pure Land there with his 123 followers. He persisted in cultivation throughout the rest of his life without leaving the temple once.

In 416CE, Master Huiyuan passed away peacefully in sitting posture, at age 83. Fig 5.1 is the Dharma image of Master Huiyuan (All the pictures of the thirteen patriarch masters of the Pure Land are from Venerable Da'an's *Thirteen Patriarchs of the Pure Land*).

According to *the Records of Saints and Sages of the Pure Land* [3], “One night at the end of July of 416CE, when Master Huiyuan came out of concentration in the Buddhist Pagoda at the east side of the *Prajna* alter, he witnessed Amitabha Buddha with his vast body pervasive throughout the entire space. Innumerable manifested Buddhas in pure round light, and *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva and *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva stood at both sides. He also perceived the water streams in the Pure Land, bright and illuminating, splitting into fourteen branches, flowing back and forth, expounding the Dharma voice of suffering, emptiness, impermanence and non-self. Then Amitabha Buddha

told Master Huiyuan, ‘Out of power of my original vow, I now come to endorse you. You will get rebirth in my land, the Land of Bliss, in seven days.’

In addition, he saw the early reborn ones in the Pure Land from his Lotus Society, such as *Buddhayaśas* ( 佛 陀 耶 舍 ), Huichi, Huiyong, Liu Yimin ( 刘 遗 民 ) etc, all beside Amitabha Buddha, paying homage to Master Huiyuan, saying, ‘Master was the earliest one to develop the aspiration, but why come so late!’ Master Huiyuan told his disciples Fajing ( 法 净 ) and Huibao ( 惠 宝 ), ‘Since the time I came to dwell in Lushan till now, I have witnessed the holy images of the Three Saints of the West Land three times in the past eleven years. I see them again today, demonstrating the certainty of my rebirth in the Pure Land.’ After those words, he instituted the bequeathed precepts. On the sixth of August, he demised in sitting position, at age 83.”



Fig 5.1 Master Huiyuan

### 3. The First Lotus Society

After Donglin Temple was established, Master Huiyuan led his followers to dig a pond to plant lotus flowers. They planted twelve lotus flowers in the water as the time scale, to guide their walking meditation duration. Out of veneration of Master Huiyuan’s eminent moral influence, many prestigious scholars pursuing Pure Land faith gathered at Lushan to adhere to him.

In 402 CE, when he was 68, Master Huiyuan formally established the Lotus Society, with his 123 elite followers, including Liu Yimin of Pengcheng, Lei Cizong ( 雷 次 宗 ) of Yuzhang, Zhou Xuzhi ( 周 续 之 ) of Yanmen, Bi Yingzhi ( 毕 颖 之 ) of Xincal, Zong Bing ( 宗 炳 ) of Nanyang, and Zhang Laimin ( 张 莱 民 ) and Zhang Jishuo ( 张 季 硕 ) etc. Master Huiyuan led the 123 followers, to stand

before the image of Amitabha Buddha, and solemnly made vows to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land. They formed the Lotus Society, and asked Liu Yimin to compose *the Essay of Aspiring to the West* (《西方发愿文》) to record the epoch-making event.

The Lotus Society primarily cultivated Buddha-remembrance-samadhi, based on *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* and the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sūtra*. Master Huiyuan and the other members of the society assiduously practiced walking meditation, paying obeisance and sitting meditation.

Master Huiyuan saw the Buddha three times during periods of concentration. Liu Yimin exclusively cultivated the Buddha-remembrance-samadhi for merely half a year, when he, in concentration, saw the Buddha in the sky, brilliantly illuminating the ground, into gold colour. All the 123 members of the Lotus Society had experienced seeing the Buddha.

## **4. The Influence of Master Huiyuan**

### **(1) Translation of Buddhist Scriptures**

During the era of East Jin, although many *Sūtras* had been translated and transmitted in China, the task was still far from perfectly accomplished. Hence, many western monks continually came to China to disseminate the teachings. Master Huiyuan then established the *Prajna* platform to translate *Sūtras*, which was the first private *Sūtra* translation site in the history of *Sūtra* translation, in contrast to the state-established translation site of *Kumārajīva*.

The translation and expounding site of *Kumārajīva* was the centre of Buddhism in north China. Master Huiyuan frequently wrote to Master *Kumārajīva* to consult him about some doubts and problems raised in Buddhist cultivation and attainment process, demonstrating the modesty and broad-mindedness of a great master. Master *Kumārajīva* praised Master Huiyuan as “the eastern Dharma protection Bodhisattva.”

### **(2) Works and Propositions of Master Huiyuan**

Not only did Master Huiyuan organised the *Sūtra* translation site, established the Pure Land practice to corroborate its truthfulness, but also composed many significant works to propose his insights on Buddhist teachings and practices.



He composed the 20 volume *Annotation of the Treatise on the Great Prajñāpāramitā* (《大智度论钞》), the *Preface of the Treatise on the Great Prajñāpāramitā* (《大智度论序》; one volume), the *Preface of the Dharma Flower Sūtra* (《法华经序》; one volume), the *Chapter on the General Meanings of Mahayana* (《大乘大义章》; three volumes), the *Treatise on śramaṇas not Saluting the Emperors* (《沙门不敬王者论》; one volume), *Treatise on the Identification of Mind and Consciousness* (《辩心识论》; one volume), *Treatise on the Dharma-Nature* (《法性论》; one volume), *Treatise on the Costume of śramaṇas* (《沙门袒服论》; one volume), *Treatise on the Clarification of Retribution* (《明报应论》; one volume), and *Treatise on the Three Periods of Retributions* (《三报论》; one volume).

Master Huiyuan emphasised the law of cause and effect. Based on the *Sūtras*, he expounded the non-perishing existence of three periods of lives: the past, the present and the future; the three types of retributions of karmas: present life, next life and subsequent lives.

His thoughts on the dharma-nature can be categorised into three parts: ① Corresponding to everything in the universe, the dharma-nature is the self-nature or the true essence. ② From Buddhist commentaries, the dharma-nature is nirvana, the ultimate state of Buddhist cultivation, and the eternal existence after emancipation. ③ The dharma-nature of everything in the universe and the nirvana of Buddhism are united—nirvana takes the dharma-nature as self-essence, and enlightening to the dharma-nature is experiencing and attaining nirvana.

### **(3) His Eminent Moral Demonstration and Extraordinary Powers**

The virtues and fame of Master Huiyuan was widely recognised. Numerous foreign monks heard that a Bodhisattva manifested in China, so they frequently lighted incense and paid homage in the Lushan direction. Though it is impossible to fathom his original vestige, his occasional exhibition of supramundane powers subdued many people.

When Master Huiyuan first came to Lushan, he led his disciples to seek a place for the site of the future temple. One day, after seeking in the forest, they were

taking a rest, exhausted and thirsty. He then made a vow, “If this spot is suitable for establishing the temple, we wish sweet spring will come out here by the power of deity.” After these words, he poked the ground with his staff, and spring water gushed out immediately. Hence, they chose the site for the temple.

At the early stage of construction of the temple, Master Huiyuan worried about the lack of wood. Then he dreamed one night of a mountain deity encouraging him, “This mountain is adequate to accommodate you, please do not leave.” Then frightening thunders and lightnings roared and flashed in the sky, followed by gusty winds and pouring rain. Subsequently, the pond in front of the hall miraculously surged out plentiful good woods. The prefectural governor Huanyi was astonished, believing that Master Huiyuan was definitely a deity monk. He then urged the workers to work harder to accelerate the construction, and the hall was named Deity Transporting Hall.

When Tao Kan (陶侃) was the governor of Guangzhou, a fisherman saw some uncanny light on the sea. Casting a net at the lighted area, he obtained a gold statue of *Mañjuśrī* Bodhisattva, with imprinted words “made by King *Asoka*” on it. Tao Kan sent this gold statue to Hanxi Temple (寒溪寺) in Wuchang to make offering. Unfortunately, Hanxi Temple was devastated by fire later, but the gold statue was intact. Later Tao Kan moved to Jiangzhou (江州) as an official there, he then asked someone to fetch the gold statue. It was amazing that as soon as they carried the statue onto the boat, it sank to the bottom of the water, and no matter how hard they searched that area to no avail. A folk song stated, “the gold statue can only be invited by sincerity, not be collected by power.” After Donglin Temple was constructed, Master Huiyuan went to the river to pray earnestly, and suddenly the statue emerged from the water. He then respectfully welcomed the gold statue to the Deity Transporting Hall, and built another multi-layered pavilion for it.

#### **(4) The Corroboration of Rebirth in the Pure Land**

The most significant contribution of Master Huiyuan was his corroboration of rebirth in the Pure Land. As the most respected and prestigious Buddhist scholar and practitioner of the time, his selection of the Pure Land, especially his real practice with his 123 elite members of the Lotus Society marked the inception of the Pure Land cultivations in China. Their experience of witnessing the Buddha and the Pure Land while in concentration, and their

successful rebirth in the Pure Land demonstrate the actuality and the reachability of the Pure Land, and the operability of practice. Furthermore, they undoubtedly verified that the Pure Land is not only suitable for the ordinary even illiterate people, but also applicable to the prestigious and erudite scholars like the master himself and his colleagues. Their influence is long-lasting.

In the past 1,600 years after Master Huiyuan, successive Pure Land patriarchs continued investigating and clarifying the doctrines of the Pure Land method on both the noumenon and phenomenon perspective, and established its doctrinal foundation. At the same time, more and more pragmatic aspirants of the Pure Land school have cultivated mindful recitation of the Buddha-name with sincere faith and earnest aspiration. Many have succeeded in rebirth in the Pure Land with various auspicious signs at the end of their lives.

## II. THE PERIOD OF ESTABLISHMENT OF THEORETICAL SYSTEM

Even though Master Huiyuan and his 123 elite followers demonstrated the practice of Pure Land cultivation with their successful rebirth in the Pure Land, the method did not achieve prevalence in the next two hundred years. Most of the Pure Land *Sūtras* were translated into Chinese, yet their profound doctrinal meanings were not completely revealed. More importantly was that the theoretical system of the Pure Land school had not been established. The method utilised by Master Huiyuan and his fellow practitioners were based on Buddha-remembrance-samadhi, which was too difficult for ordinary people.

In the era of the South and North Dynasty, Master *Kālaṃyaśas* (曇良耶舍) translated the third Pure Land *Sūtra*, the *Contemplation Sūtra*. Not only does this *Sūtra* depict the environment of the Pure Land more clearly, but it provides people with much more operational instructions on the practice of the Pure Land gateway. It clearly enumerates the necessary and sufficient conditions for achieving rebirth in the Pure Land, such as the three types of minds, the three pure conducts, especially the hierarchical exposition of practice and the reborn grades in the chapter of nine grade rebirth.

*The Contemplation Sūtra* rapidly gained its overwhelming influence. Not only did the Dharma masters of the Pure Land school widely studied it, but even patriarch masters of other schools vied to study and comment on it. For instance, Master Huiyuan (慧远大师; 523-592CE) of Jingying Temple (净影寺) of Sui Dynasty composed *the Commentary on the Meaning of the Contemplation Sūtra* (two volumes), Master Zhizhe (智者大师; 538-597CE) of Tiantai school wrote *An Annotation of the Contemplation Sūtra* (two volumes) and *the Ten Doubts of the Pure Land*, Master Jizang (吉藏大师; 549-623CE) of the Three Treatise school made *An Annotation of the Contemplation Sūtra*, etc.

On one hand, the participation of these patriarch masters in annotating and commentating the Pure Land *Sūtras* had greatly accelerated the awareness of the Pure Land method. On the other hand, their annotations and commentaries were constituted based on their personal comprehension and viewpoint, which was deeply affected by their own preference, background and even prejudiced judgement. For example, the answers to the following critical questions were not clearly given, and more confusions were created by them.

“Is the Land of Bliss pure land or defiled land?”

“Can one achieve rebirth by Buddha-name recitation?”

“What are the conditions for successful rebirth?”

“What do the status of the nine-grade rebirths represent?” etc.

Between the late South and North Dynasty and the early Tang Dynasty was an era of fervent involvement and debate, which facilitated the clarification of many doubts and the answers to the above critical questions. The theoretical system of the Pure Land School was established.

In this period, three eminent Pure Land masters constituted monumental foundations. They were Master Tanluan, Master Daochuo and Master Shandao; the last was the most prominent in conclusively clarifying the doubts and summarising the operational instructions for the cultivation of Pure Land method.

## **1. Master Tanluan**

### **(1) A Brief Introduction of Master Tanluan**

Master Tanluan (昙鸾大师) was born in Yanmen (雁门; the current Dai county of Shanxi province) in 476CE, in the dynasty of North Wei (北魏; 386 – 534CE).

At age 14, when making a pilgrimage to Mount Wutai (五台山), he witnessed many auspicious signs of *Mañjuśrī* Bodhisattva. He then renounced household life. Initially, he systematically studied the works of Confucianism, Taoism and the teachings of various Buddhist schools. He was particularly fascinated by *Nāgārjuna* Bodhisattva's works, obtained profound comprehension of *the Treatise on the Great Prajñāpāramitā*, *Root Verses on the Middle Way* (中论; *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*), *Treatise on the Twelve Gateways* (十二门论; *Dvādaśanikāya Śāstra*).

When he was reading the *Sūtra of the Great Assembly* (*The Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra*; 《大集经》), he found it too profound for ordinary people to understand, so he was determined to annotate it. Only half of the annotation work was finished when he was suddenly stricken by serious illness. Although he eventually recovered from the illness, he realised the impermanence of life. After his recovery, Master Tanluan conceived an idea that it would be better to find some elixir so that he could accomplish more in annotating and explicating the *Sūtras* and treatises. He then went to southern China to look for Ge Hong (葛洪), a hermit, to seek for the method of deity to eschew illness and death. Having received ten volumes of *the Scripture of Deity* from Ge Hong, Master Tanluan was elated and prepared to cultivate according to them.

On the way back home, he met *Tripiṭaka* Master *Bodhiruci* in Luoyang. Master Tanluan then asked him, “Is there any method for permanent life without death in Buddhism, which is superior to this *Scripture of Deity*?” Master *Bodhiruci* contemptuously replied, “Where is there any method for permanent life without death in the East land (China)! Even if you can prolong your life to escape death in short period, you will ultimately transmigrate in the six destinies. It is not worth embracing. Genuine permanence without death only exists in Buddhism!” He then bestowed and expounded *the Contemplation Sūtra* to Master Tanluan, and finally told him, “After studying this *Sūtra*, we will stop getting rebirth in the three worlds, and terminate transmigration in the six realms. Waxing or waning, positive or negative, growth or reduction, blessings or misfortunes, success or failure, gain or loss, good or bad will perplex and afflict us no more. The length of our lifespan is similar to *kalpas*, as numerous as the grains of the

Ganges sands, immeasurable and boundless. It is beyond fathom and analogies. This is the method of permanent life provided by our Buddhist greatly enlightened golden Deity.” Having heard these words, Master Tanluan was exulted. He immediately burnt *the Scripture of Deity*, and turned to exclusively cultivate the Pure Land gateway.

Not only did he assiduously cultivate the method personally, but he also edified a great multitude of people, and created great influence. Master Tanluan composed *Annotation of the Treatise on Rebirth* (《往生论注》), which proposed many insightful clarifications and statements of the Pure Land theory and practice. It is still widely studied by most Pure Land adherents as a primary treatise.

The emperor of Wei Dynasty respected and venerated Master Tanluan extremely, honoured him as “Sacred Luan”, and invited him to dwell in the great temple of Bingzhou by imperial order. He moved to inhabit Xuanzhong Temple (玄中寺) in Fenzhou (汾州) in his later years.

One night in the year 542CE, he witnessed a pure monk in his room telling him, “I am *Nāgārjuna*. I achieved rebirth in the Pure Land long time ago. Because of the conformity of our aspirations, I specifically come to see you.” Master Tanluan realised that his date of rebirth was coming, so he gathered the assembly and exhorted them, “We have been endlessly toiling and endeavouring life after life without terminating date. We have to maintain the fear of the immeasurable and boundless sufferings of the hells; we have to diligently cultivate the Pure Land gateway to get rebirth in the nine-grade lotus flower of the Land of Bliss.” Having said that, he ordered his disciples to recite the Buddha-name loudly; he then prostrated to the west and got rebirth.

## **(2) Major Theoretical Contributions of Master Tanluan**

Master Tanluan composed one of the most influential treatises of the Pure Land school: *An Annotation of the Treatise on Rebirth* [4]. Not only did he precisely expose and comprehensively explicate the profound meanings of the original treatise, but he also made many insightful propositions on Pure Land doctrines. His other works include *A Concise Commentary on the Meaning of Peaceful and Blissful Pure Land* (《略论安乐净土义》; one volume), *Verses to Praise*

*Amitabha Buddha* (《赞阿弥陀佛偈》; 195 lines of seven characters), and *Annotations of the Sūtra of the Great Assembly* (《大集经注》; not extant).

Many Pure Land adherents consider Master Tanluan to be the first one in the process of establishing the theoretical edifice of the Pure Land school. His major theoretical and doctrinal contributions are as follows:

### 1) Classification of the Two Paths and Two Powers

Up to Master Tanluan, the Pure Land practice had not been categorised as a distinctive method from other Buddhist practices. It was he who first clearly classified Buddhist cultivations into two categories: the difficult path—the other paths, and the easy path—the Pure Land gateway.

According to *Nāgārjuna* Bodhisattva, all Buddhist practices can be classified into two types: the difficult path and the easy path, as stated in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra-śāstra* (《十住毗婆沙论》), “**There are countless gateways in Buddhism. Some are difficult, some are easy, just like the worldly paths. It is painful to travel on foot by road, but it is pleasurable to travel by boat on water. The Bodhisattva path is similar: some persevere diligently (on self-power); some swiftly attain *Avinivartanīya*, based on faith and easy-practice skilful means.**” (佛法有无量门，如世间道，有难有易。陆道步行则苦，水道乘船则乐。菩萨道亦如是，或有勤行精进，或有以信方便易行，疾至阿惟越致者。)

At the beginning of his *Annotation of the Treatise on Rebirth*, he directly asserted: “According to *Nāgārjuna* Bodhisattva’s *Daśabhūmikasūtra-śāstra*, there exist two types of paths for a Bodhisattva to achieve *Avinivartanīya*: the difficult path and the easy path. The difficult path is to attain *Avinivartanīya* in the period of the five types of turbidity, when no Buddha is manifesting. There are many reasons for the difficulty, which are grossly classified into five types to illustrate their meaning: the first is interference by heterodox doctrines, which confuse the Bodhisattva Dharma; the second is *śrāvaka*’s seeking self-benefit, which impedes great compassion; the third is unscrupulous evil ones disparaging others’ supreme virtues; the fourth is inverting the virtuous fruition, which devastates the pure practice; and the fifth is merely depending on self-power, without support of the other-power. Such matters are

witnessed everywhere. It is painful like traveling by foot on road. The easy path is merely aspiring to get rebirth in the Pure Land based on the causes and conditions, and faith in the Buddha. Rebirth in that Pure Land is achieved through the power of Amitabha Buddha's vows. With the empowerment of the Buddha's power, one enters the right definite assembly of Mahayana. The right definite is *Avinivartanīya*. Hence it is pleasant like travelling by boat on water.” (谨案龙树菩萨十住毗婆沙论云，菩萨求阿鞞跋致，有二种道。一者难行道。二者易行道。难行道者，谓于五浊之世，于无佛时，求阿鞞跋致为难。此难乃有多途。粗言有五，以示义意。一者外道相善，乱菩萨法。二者声闻自利，障大慈悲。三者无赖恶人，破他胜德。四者颠倒善果，能坏梵行。五者唯是自力，无他力持。如斯等事，触目皆是。譬如陆路，步行则苦。易行道者，谓但以信佛因缘，愿生净土。乘佛愿力，便得往生彼清净土。佛力住持，即入大乘正定之聚。正定，即是阿鞞跋致。譬如水路，乘船则乐。)

This paragraph reveals the following information:

- ① It concretely clarifies the definitions of the difficult path and the easy path as mentioned by *Nāgārjuna* Bodhisattva: The difficult path refers to all other Buddhist paths based on self-power; whereas the easy path exclusively denotes the Pure Land gateway. Master Tanluan for the first time distinguished the Pure Land method as a distinctive one in contrast to all other methods.
- ② It further clarifies that the difference between the difficult path and the easy path is derived mainly from the relied powers: The difficult path is entirely reliant on self-power, in which one cultivates the *pāramitās* for innumerable *kalpas*, to attain the 52 Bodhisattva stages. The easy path depends on both the other-power and the self-power. Here the other-power is from Amitabha Buddha's grand vows and meritorious virtues. The self-power is mainly faith, aspiration and various Pure Land practices such as Buddha-recitation, and dedication of all other meritorious virtues to the Pure Land. Therefore, it was Master Tanluan who first clarified the difference in utilising self-power and the other-power in cultivating the Buddha path.
- ③ It also enumerated the five types of difficulties one can hardly eschew if one were to follow the difficult path.

## 2) Confirmation of Rebirth by Buddha-recitation



Regarding the rebirth of lower grade in the inferior rank, some might consider the five heinous acts and ten evil conducts would bring about grave karmas, while the ten easy recitations of Buddha-name would elicit light karmas. So how could they get rebirth? To clarify this doubt, Master Tanluan explained, “Now they should be compared with respect to their meanings. The meaning of gravity or lightness depends on mind, conditions and determination, not on the acting time of long or short, remote past or near.” (今当以义较量。轻重之义，在心，在缘，在决定。不在时节久近多少也。)

“What is depending on mind? Those who commit evil transgressions are based on void, delusional and inverted views. But those uttering ten recitations of Buddha-name are based on hearing Dharma of the reality, after skilful counsel from virtuous learned friends. One is real, while the other is void; how can they be compared? It is similar to a room which is dark for thousand years turning to bright as soon as a light appears. The dark cannot say it will remain in the room for a thousand years and not go.” (云何在心。彼遭罪人，自依止虚妄颠倒见生。此十念者，依善知识方便安慰，闻实相法生。一实一虚，岂得相比。譬如千岁暗室，光若暂至，即便明朗。暗岂得言在室千年而不去耶。)

We cannot compare the weights of two loads of materials merely based on their volumes. For example, a load of gold is much heavier than a load of cotton even a hundred times larger in volume, because gold is solid, while cotton is fluffy. The ten recitations of Buddha-name generated on true mind is analogous to the solidity of gold, while transgressions instigated by delusional thoughts are analogous to cotton. The mind is the cause to drive one to recite the Buddha-name or to induce one to commit transgressions.

“What is depending on conditions? Those who commit evil transgressions are based on their own delusional thoughts as well as on those sentient beings born of afflictions and void delusional retributions. Reciting Buddha-name ten times is dependent on unsurpassed faith, and on real pure Buddha-name of immeasurable meritorious virtues adorned by Amitabha Buddha with skilful means.” (云何在缘。彼遭罪人，自依止妄想心，依烦恼虚妄果报众生。此十念者，依止无上信心，依阿弥陀如来方便庄严真实清净无量功德名号生。)

When committing transgressions, the perpetrators are instigated by various delusional greed or hatred; the objects of transgressions are also sentient beings born of afflictions and karmas. For example, when we commit killing transgression, we are usually either driven by greed for their flesh, fur etc., or spurred by blazing hatred. Those being killed are also beings born from retributions of karmas and afflictions. Both the afflictions of the perpetrators and the objects of transgressions are subject to arising and perishing. The weight is hence limited. The Buddha-name, however, represents the reality, and all the meritorious virtues of Amitabha Buddha. That is immeasurable, free from arising and perishing. An analogy can illustrate this meaning. Suppose a destitute person owes someone a million dollars. Even if the poor debtor utilises his or her whole life to earn and accumulate money, he or she is unable to pay back all the debt. Nevertheless, if this miserable person happens to meet a billionaire who is resolved to relieve all those in need, his or her debt can be easily repaid. What one needs to do is to ask the benevolent billionaire for help.

“What is depending on determination? Those who commit evil transgressions are with subsequent thoughts and intermediate thoughts. Those who utter ten recitations are without subsequent thoughts or intermediate thoughts.” (云何在决定。彼遭罪人依止有后心，有间心生。此十念者，依止无后心，无间心生。)

Being human beings, they definitely have some moral seeds stored in their *alaya* consciousness. Therefore, when committing transgressions, most people are not so determined, without any regret or hesitancy. On the contrary, when evil people witness or anticipate the vehement fires or other torments in hells on the verge of their death, their determination to escape the descent into hell and to get rebirth in the Land of Bliss is incomparable. Their ten recitations are from the bottom of their heart, without any hesitation or interruption.

From the above three comparisons, Master Tanluan confirmed that the ten recitations of Buddha-name at the end of one's life are much stronger than one's heinous and unwholesome transgressions. One can definitely achieve rebirth by mindfully reciting the Buddha-name.

### 3) Other Theoretical Contributions

Additionally, Master Tanluan was the first master to claim that the mind which aspire to get rebirth in the Pure Land and to swiftly accomplish the Buddha Path so as to skilfully rescue sentient beings is the Bodhicitta. In *the Annotation of the Treatise on Rebirth*, he also systematically classified and explained the seventeen categories of majestic adornments of the Pure Land.

Not only did Master Tanluan clarified many doubts and questions about Pure Land doctrines and practice, but he also deeply influenced Master Daochuo and Master Shandao. The three of them basically accomplished the establishment of the fundamental theoretical system of the Pure Land school.

## **2. Master Daochuo**

### **(1) A Brief Introduction of Master Daochuo**

Master Daochuo (道綽大師; 562-645CE), with family name Wei (魏), was from Wenshui of Bingzhou (并州汶水; current Taiyuan of Shanxi). He was widely praised for his generous and humble character from childhood. At 14, he joined the monastic in Mount Wutai (五台山). He studied *the Nirvana Sūtra* there and expounded the *Sūtra* 24 times.

Later, Master Daochuo followed Master Huizan (慧璣大師; 536-607) to study *the Prajna Sūtra* and to practice contemplative meditation.

In 609CE, at age 48, he went to Xuanzhong Temple of Shibi (石壁玄中寺), where Master Tanluan dwelled in his later years. Although Master Tanluan had passed away for 20 years, his experience of propagating and cultivating Pure Land as well as the auspicious signs he demonstrated at rebirth were recorded in detail in stone. After reading the memorial text on the stone, Master Daochuo was deeply moved by the determination and cultivation of Master Tanluan. He then stopped the study and expounding of *the Nirvana Sūtra*, to exclusively cultivate the Pure Land method.

Master Daochuo expounded *the Contemplation Sūtra* more than 200 times, and he routinely recited the Buddha-name 70,000 times each day. At the same time, he edified all the people of Bingzhou area to cultivate the Pure Land method. All children above seven years old knew how to practice Buddha-recitation. He used soybeans at the beginning to count the number of recitations, and later he invented the rosary, which is still used now.

One day when he was 67, the assembly saw Master Tanluan on a boat of seven treasures, speaking to Master Daochuo: “You have already accomplished your Pure Land palace, yet you have not exhausted your residual retributions.” They all witnessed manifested Buddhas hovering in space, and celestial flowers falling from the sky. Men and women used their clothes to catch the flowers, which were fresh and purely white, adorably thin and satiny. From that day, he was rejuvenated in both physical and spiritual conditions. On 24 April 645, Master Daochuo bade farewell to his monastic and lay colleagues. Three days later, white clouds came from the west and then transformed into three rays of white light, illuminating his room. He then passed away, at age 84.

## **(2) Theoretical Contributions of Master Daochuo**

Following the doctrines of *Nāgārjuna* Bodhisattva and the Pure Land thoughts of Master Tanluan, Master Daochuo composed *the Compendium of Peace and Bliss* (《安乐集》)[5]. In this compendium, he not only collected the kernel contents of the Pure Land *Sūtras*, but adopted excerpts from more than 50 other *Sūtras* and treatises, such as *the Dharma Flower Sūtra*, *Prajna Sūtras*, *the Flower Adornment Sūtra*, *Nirvana Sūtra*, as well as *the Treatise on Rebirth*, *the Treatise on the Great Prajñāpāramitā*, *the Treatise on Awakening the Faith of Mahayana* etc. It is one of the indispensable works of Pure Land school, and is widely recommended by our patriarch masters.

*The Compendium of Peace and Bliss* is concise in volume but comprehensive in contents. Only a few salient points are enumerated here. Interested readers can learn from the original treatise [5] or its English translation [6].

① He perfectly integrated the ultimate and conventional truths. The ultimate truth exposes and represents the reality of all dharmas, emphasising the emptiness aspect of dharmas; whereas the conventional truth represents the phenomenon aspect of dharmas. Most people then stressed and uplifted cultivation methods based on ultimate truth, degraded and even rejected cultivation methods based on phenomenon level. Master Daochuo emphasised the balanced cultivation of both methods. Although the Pure Land method is inseparable from the reality, cultivations based on phenomenon, such as Buddha-recitation, is more suitable for most people.

- ② He confirmed that the Land of Bliss was the reward-land, not a transformed-land, and Amitabha Buddha was the reward-body Buddha instead of a manifested Buddha.
- ③ He concluded that the ten recitations of the Buddha-name instructed in *the Contemplation Sūtra* definitely enables an evil person to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. In his *Explanation of the Summary of Great Vehicle* [7], *Vasubandhu* Bodhisattva pointed out that the ten Buddha-name recitations could only be the cause of achieving rebirth in future lifetime rather than this life. This claim dissuaded or frustrated many Pure Land practitioners. Both Master Tanluan and Master Daochuo refuted this assertion. They unequivocally claimed that the ten Buddha-name recitations conducted at the end of one's life could definitely enable one to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.
- ④ He summarised that fruitful cultivation requires appropriate teachings, timing and capacities. The Pure Land method is the most effective method at this Dharma-ending age as during this evil time of the five types of turbidity, the capacity of beings is inferior; and mundane beings are severely afflicted and deluded. Apart from skilful Buddha-recitation method, they need countless *kalpas* of consecutive cultivations to attain non-retrogression, which is almost improbable for most people.

### **3. Master Shandao: the Second Patriarch**

#### **(1) A Brief Biography of Master Shandao**

Master Shandao (善导大师; 613-681CE), our second patriarch master, was from Zibo (淄博) of Shandong province, born in Sui Dynasty (581–618 CE). He renounced household life under Master Mingsheng (明胜大师), a famous monk of the Three Treatise school, at age 10. Not only did he systematically studied the teachings of the Three Treatise school, but he also frequently read and recited *the Dharma Flower Sūtra* and the *Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sūtra*.

After years of diligent study, Master Shandao established a solid foundation in Buddhist doctrines. Nevertheless, he was not satisfied. He often pondered that the Buddhist Dharma was extremely extensive and profound, and the scriptures are numerous, hence all the cultivation would be futile if the doctrines and methods were not compatible with one's capacity. Therefore, it would be better

for one to select a single method and to intensively study and cultivate according to it.

One day, when he saw the pictorial drawings of the Pure Land, he was exultant, exclaiming, “Why not ride the lotus flower to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land?” Later, he got ordained and received the complete monastic precepts under Master Miaokai (妙开). He once walked into the *Sūtra* library. After silently beseeching the empowerment of Buddhas to direct him to the cultivating method to adopt, he randomly withdrew one *Sūtra* from the shelf like drawing lots. It was *the Contemplation Sūtra*! He was so delighted that he immediately went to dwell solitarily in Mount Zhongnan (终南山), exclusively cultivating the sixteen contemplation methods according to *the Contemplation Sūtra*.

After a few years, Master Shandao was completely proficient in the contemplation. He often perceived the palaces, gold pedestals, the treasure lake, etc. of the Pure Land, as if directly viewing them with his own eyes. He successfully attained the Buddha-remembrance-samadhi. Subsequently, his faith in and his aspiration of the Pure Land was more steadfast, and he cultivated even more assiduously.

Master Shandao greatly respected and venerated Master Huiyuan, so he went to Donglin Temple of Lushan to pay his obeisance. After that he travelled to visit eminent monks and virtuous ones.

In 641CE, when he was 29, Master Shandao heard that Master Daochuo was promulgating the Pure Land teachings in Shanxi, he then travelled more than 1000 km to Xuanzhong Temple to learn from him. Master Daochuo was already more than 80 years old then, but he was moved by Master Shandao’s sincerity, so he personally expounded the profound meanings of *the Contemplation Sūtra* to him. Master Daochuo exhorted him to contemplate the nine-grade rebirth instructed in the *Sūtra*.

Master Shandao further enhanced his faith and aspiration, and soaked in Dharma joy, stated, “This is truly the primary path of Buddhism. Cultivating other methods is circuitous and difficult to accomplish. Only this gateway leads to swift transcendence of birth-and-death.”

Four years later (645CE), Master Daochuo passed away. Master Shandao then returned to Mount Zhongnan to continue his cultivation.

Later, he went to Chang'an (present day Xi'an) and promulgated the Pure Land method in Guangming Temple (光明寺) and Ci'en Temple (慈恩寺). He encouraged all four categories of multitudes (monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen) to cultivate the Buddha-recitation method to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land. He not only preached, but also personally demonstrated diligent cultivation, and edified and influenced enormous number of people.

It was Master Shandao's doctrinal clarifications and his practical cultivations that finally resulted in the wide prevalence of the Pure Land practice. During his time, the whole Chang'an city was replete with the voices of Buddha-recitation. "Each and every family recites Amitabha Buddha, and each and every home invokes *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva," was the real reflection of the circumstances. As a result, numerous people of various occupations successfully achieved rebirth in the Pure Land, most with auspicious signs.

On one occasion, Master Shandao debated with Master Jingang (金剛大師) pertaining to the superiority or inferiority of the Buddha-recitation method. He pledged, "If this Buddha-recitation method is futile in ensuring rebirth in the Pure Land so as to cheat and delude sentient beings, Shandao then will descend to the great hells to endure eternal torments without departing time. Otherwise, let all the statues of Buddhas in the hall emit bright light." He then pointed with his wish-fulfilling stick to the statues in the hall, and all the statues radiated splendid light.

In his whole life, while exclusively cultivating the Pure Land gateway, Master Shandao completely observed the precepts, never violated the slightest in behaviour and dignity. Whenever he entered the cultivation hall, he kept reciting the Buddha-name in kneeling posture until entirely exhausted. Even in chilly wintertime, he cultivated so assiduously to become soaked in sweat.

Due to his diligent cultivation, Master Shandao exhibited extraordinary effects. He once demonstrated that with each utterance of Buddha-recitation his mouth emitted a ray of light; with hundreds of utterances, then hundreds of light rays emitted.

Besides cultivating Buddha-recitation, Master Shandao undertook many activities in promoting Buddhism, especially the Pure Land method. He helped to repair or renovate many temples. By imperial order, he was called to

supervise the construction of the Grand Buddha Statue in Longmen Cave in Luoyang (洛阳龙门石窟). He also drew more than 300 pictorial drawings of the Pure Land and sponsored writing more than 100,000 volumes of *the Amitabha Sūtra*.



Fig 5.2 Master Shandao

In 681CE, Master Shandao anticipated his date of demise, and passed away peacefully.

## (2) Master Shandao's Theoretical Contributions

### 1) Master Shandao's Works

Master Shandao's works can be classified into two categories: the elucidations of doctrines and instructions for practices.

The major composition on elucidation of doctrines is *the Annotation of the Contemplation Sūtra* (《观经四帖疏》), which was introduced and discussed in Chapter 3.

The works pertaining to instructions for practices are *Verses on Praising the Rebirth* (《往生礼赞偈》; one volume), *Praises of the Rituals and Liturgies of the Pure Land* (《法事赞》; two volumes), *Praises of Illustrating the Rebirth Based on Pratyutpanna Samādhi Practice According to the Contemplation Sūtra* (《依观经等明般舟三昧行道往生赞》; one volume), and *the Dharma Gateway of Contemplation and Recitation* (《观念法门》; one volume).

### 2) Master Shandao's Major Contributions on Pure Land

The Pure Land thoughts of Master Shandao have distinctive features. On the faith perspective, they have strong religious affections. On the theoretical



perspective, he succeeded and integrated the theories of Master Tanluan and Master Daochuo, expanded and developed them into a Pure Land theoretical system based on the kernel of “other-power and original vows”. He further clarified many issues and confusions prevalent in China at that time, established the solid foundation for the development and promulgation of the Pure Land school. The following will provide a few salient points.

### ① Explication of the faith and profound mind

In *the Annotation of the Contemplation Sūtra*, Master Shandao stressed that perfectly developing the three types of minds are the right cause to get rebirth. The first is sincere mind, the second is profound mind, and the third is the dedication and aspiring mind, see Chapter 3.

### ② Clearly emphasising the affectional aspects of detesting and departing from the *Saha* world, and cherishing and pursuing rebirth in the Pure Land

In *the Annotation of the Contemplation Sūtra*, Master Shandao explicated *Vaidehī*’s mind process in detesting and departing from the *Saha* world and seeking methods for rebirth in the Pure Land. He emphasised that the detesting and departing from the *Saha* world and cherishing and pursuing rebirth in the Pure Land are the prerequisites of accomplishment of the Pure Land conducts. They are also the essential contents of Bodhicitta. He stated, “The mere one frame of thought of detesting sufferings and cherishing rebirth in the realms of the Buddhas, so as to swiftly fulfil the great compassionate vows and practices of Bodhisattvas, and then to return to birth-and-death to deliver sentient beings, is called the unsurpassed Bodhicitta.” (唯发一念厌苦，乐生诸佛境界，速满菩萨大悲愿行，还入生死普度众生，故名无上道心也。)

Master Shandao claimed that if anyone could immediately expound the Pure Land gateway to others to encourage them to renounce this body of birth-and-death, it was named truly repaying the debt owing to Buddhas. He realised that sentient beings are shallow in wisdom but grave in karma entanglement. Fully aware of the difficulty for them to generate the detesting and departing mind from *Saha* world, and the cherishing and pursuing mind for rebirth in the Pure Land, he composed many verses to exhort them. Here are two excerpts to show the readers.

“Return there,  
Linger no more in this home of demons.  
Having transmigrated for countless *kalpas*,  
Experiencing all the six realms.  
Happiness is found nowhere,  
Only distressed lamentations are heard everywhere.  
After finishing this life,  
Enter that nirvana city (the Land of Bliss).”  
(归去来，魔乡不可停。旷劫来流转，六道尽皆经，到处无余乐，唯闻愁叹声。毕此生平后，入彼涅槃城（极乐世界）！)

“Gradually becoming chicken skin and crane hair,  
With decrepit looks and unsteady steps.  
Even though you have a house replete with gold and jade,  
You cannot escape decaying aging and illness.  
No matter how happy you are,  
The impermanence will definitely come.  
Only cultivate the convenient path,  
Exclusively recite Amitabha Buddha.”

(渐渐鸡皮鹤发，看看行步龙钟；假饶金玉满堂，难免衰残老病。任你千般快乐，无常终是到来；唯有径路修行，但念阿弥陀佛。)

### ③ Revelation of the Buddha-recitation and confirming the definite rebirth by the practice

Although all the three Pure Land *Sūtras* instructed and emphasised the Buddha-recitation practice, it was not widely recognised and practised before Master Shandao's time. Master Shandao, with his unique wisdom eye, distinctively revealed that the Buddha-recitation is the essence of Pure Land school:

- ◆ In the Forty-Eight Vows in *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*, rebirth by exclusively reciting Buddha-name is instructed.

- ◆ In *the Amitabha Sūtra*, only rebirth achieved by exclusively reciting the Buddha-name from one to seven days is singled out, which is further confirmed as truthful by the Buddhas of six directions.
- ◆ Although *the Contemplation Sūtra* introduces benefits from both concentrated and distracted gateways, the original intention of the Buddha is to advise sentient beings to exclusively recite the Buddha-name.
- ◆ No matter how grave are their transgressions, as long as they can exclusively recite the Buddha-name, at the end of their lives, for even one day or seven days, all sentient beings are assured of getting rebirth in the Pure Land.

The light of Amitabha Buddha illuminates all ten directions, embracing all sentient beings that recite the Buddha-name, without abandonment. Master Shandao illustrated the three conditions for the Amitabha Buddha's light to embrace:

- ◆ Sentient beings recollect and are mindful of the Buddha; the Buddha also recollects and is mindful of sentient beings, hence they do not separate in three conducts. This is called the intimate conditions.
- ◆ When sentient beings are longing to see the Buddha, he will manifest before their eyes as a response to their mindfulness. This is named close conditions.
- ◆ When sentient beings recite the Buddha-name, their transgressions of numerous *kalpas* will be eliminated; and on the verge of their death, the Buddha and his companions will personally welcome and escort them to prevent any evil karmas' impediments occurring. This is the augmenting conditions.

With the above-mentioned intimate conditions, close conditions and augmenting conditions, if we have faith and aspiration, and mindfully recite the Buddha-name, we will definitely accomplish the pure conducts of rebirth.

#### ④ Establishment of the essential objective of Pure Land school as the rebirth in the reward land by mundane beings

In the era of Sui (581–618 CE) and early Tang dynasty (618 – 907CE), although Master Tanluan and Master Daochuo advocated that mundane beings could get rebirth in the reward land of the Pure Land, many other Dharma masters refuted the proposition, based on the doctrines that Pure Land is induced by one's own karmas. Their refusal actually obstructed the applications of extraordinary functions and powers of the Pure Land method in delivering beings widely. Later, some masters took an eclectic view, categorising the Pure Land of Bliss into two types: the reward land and the transformed land. The saintly beings will achieve rebirth in the reward land, while the mundane beings will get rebirth in the transformed land. This, of course, did not comply with the essential objective of the Pure Land gateway.

It was at this background full of controversial propositions, that Master Shandao, based on his erudite knowledge and insightful wisdom, unequivocally confirmed that mundane beings will achieve rebirth in the reward land.

Master Shandao confirmed that all rebirths of the nine grades in the three ranks are achieved by mundane beings and their rebirths are acquired depending on the power of Amitabha Buddha's great compassionate vows. Otherwise, if based exclusively on one's own effort to cultivate to eradicate afflictions and to attain fruition, even the saints of the two-vehicles cannot achieve rebirth in the reward land. Neither can they directly see the reward body of Buddhas. Nevertheless, in the Pure Land gateway, relying on the other-power of Amitabha Buddha's original vows, mundane beings without eliminating any afflictions, can still achieve rebirth in the untainted reward land. They can also directly see the reward body of the Buddha.

He advocated that the Pure Land gateway of rebirth by Buddha-recitation is a convenient method specifically established for mundane beings in the time of evil turbidity. All sentient beings of the Dharma-ending age can get rescued by relying on this special gateway. Amitabha Buddha has more sympathy and compassion towards those beings immersed in predicaments and tribulations. He thus encourages them to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land to escape the birth-and-death cycle. It is similar to the situation in which one first rescues those drowning in the water prior to rescuing those on land.

It was these clarifications by Master Shandao that directed the masters of other schools to reconsider the Pure Land gateway, incited great faith and aspiration

of the Pure Land practitioners, and consolidated the position of the Pure Land school. His works fostered the systematic and theoretic establishment, and the localization and prevalence of the ancient India Pure Land teachings in China.

### ⑤ **Classification of the causal practices of the Pure Land gateway**

Master Shandao summarised the required activities of the Pure Land gateway as mental arrangement, practice and cultivations.

The mental arrangement denotes establishing the three types of minds: the utmost sincere mind, the profound (faithful) mind and the aspiration mind by transferring all merits, as revealed in *the Contemplation Sūtra*. These three types of minds are the necessary conditions for achieving rebirth in the Pure Land.

The practice refers to the required mental, verbal and physical conducts. They are classified into two types: proper practice and mixed practice. The proper practices are conducts performed exclusively on the instructions of the Pure Land *Sūtras*. There are five kinds:

- ◆ **the proper practice of reading and reciting:** exclusively reading and reciting the Pure Land scriptures;
- ◆ **the proper practice of contemplation:** constantly pondering and contemplating the environmental and life retributions of Amitabha Buddha and the majestic adornment of Pure Land;
- ◆ **the proper practice of paying homage:** exclusively paying homage and obeisance to Amitabha Buddha;
- ◆ **the proper practice of Buddha-recitation:** exclusively reciting the name of Amitabha Buddha;
- ◆ **the proper practice of praising and making offerings:** exclusively praising and making offerings to Amitabha Buddha and the majestic adornments of the Pure Land.

The above-mentioned five types of the proper practices can be categorised into proper concentrated practice and supportive practice. The proper concentrated practice refers to the fourth proper practice of Buddha-recitation, whereas the other four types belong to the supportive practices.

All virtuous conducts other than the proper concentrated and the supportive practices are mixed practices.

Master Shandao highly recommended the proper practice, especially the proper concentrated practice. To execute the proper practice, he pointed out four principles of cultivation:

- ◆ **cultivating with respect and veneration:** paying obeisance with respect and veneration;
- ◆ **cultivating exclusively:** exclusively cultivating the Buddha-recitation, and not the other mixed practices;
- ◆ **cultivating uninterruptedly:** keeping the mind continuously concentrated on the cultivation, without interruption;
- ◆ **cultivating lastingly:** continuously cultivating without retreat until the end of this life.

It is evident that Master Shandao particularly emphasised the exclusive cultivation of the Pure Land method. In his opinion, to cultivate exclusively or not is the key factor of whether one can achieve rebirth or not.

Because of his prominent contribution to the theoretical and practical establishment of the Pure Land school, he was acknowledged as the second patriarch master of the Pure Land school by the following masters. Patriarch Master Yinguang (印光大师) highly recommended him, writing in one letter, “Shandao monk was the manifestation of Amitabha Buddha. He possessed great supernatural powers and wisdom. His promulgation of the Pure Land was free from wondrous mysteries, but only edify people to cultivate the real truthful pragmatic methods. The benefits of the two types of practices advocated by him -- exclusive and mixed—are enormous. The exclusive practices refer to physically paying homage exclusively, verbally praising exclusively, and mentally being mindful exclusively. Cultivating in this way will result in rebirth in the west, ten thousand [will succeed] without leaving one. The mixed practices are simultaneously cultivating various methods, then dedicating the merits to rebirth. Because the mind is not purely unified, it is hard to obtain benefits. Hence merely one or two out of one hundred, or three or four out of one thousand may get rebirth. This is the sincere words from

golden mouth, the iron case eternally immutable.” (善导和尚，系弥陀化身。有大神通，有大智慧。其宏阐净土，不尚玄妙，唯以真切平实处，教人修持。至于所示专杂二修，其利无穷。专修谓身业专礼，口业专称，意业专念。如是则往生西方，万不漏一。杂修谓兼修种种法门，回向往生。以心不纯一，故难得益。则百中希得一二，千中希得三四往生者。此金口诚言，千古不易之铁案也。) (《文钞》复永嘉某居士昆季书)

### III. THE PERIOD OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

After Master Shandao, the Pure Land school in China became theoretically mature and practically prevalent. Many masters successively developed and enriched the doctrines and practice, making it the most widely cultivated gateway.

#### 1. Master Cimin

##### (1) A Brief Introduction of Master Cimin

Master Cimin (慈愍大师; 680-748CE), named Huiji (慧日), is an eminent Pure Land monk after Master Shandao. After taking the complete precepts, he went to meet Master Yijing (义净大师; 635-713CE), on hearing about his pilgrimage experiences in India. Master Cimin greatly admired his adventure and was determined to visit India himself.

In 701CE, Master Cimin took a boat to traverse the ocean, passed Sumatra and Sri Lanka, and finally arrived in India three years later.

Master Cimin looked for the Sanskrit versions of scriptures all over India, visited many virtuous learned fellows, and sought for gateways of escaping suffering and obtaining happiness. All the *Tripitaka* masters he met praised and recommended the Pure Land gateway, hence he turned his study of the Consciousness-Only to practice of the Pure Land gateway. After visiting and studying for thirteen years, he returned to China.

On his way back home, he passed the *Gandhāra* state (犍陀罗国; in present Afghanistan and Pakistan area). He encountered a statue of *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva in a large mountain, and earnestly paid homage to him. After he devotedly prayed for seven days, he witnessed *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva

manifesting in the space and touching his head, instructing him, “**Since you want to promulgate the Dharma to benefit yourself and other beings, you should know that the Pure Land gateway is superior to all other methods. The Western Blissful Pure Land is the Buddha land of Amitabha Buddha. You encourage them to recite the Buddha-name and *Sūtras*, then dedicate the merits to aspiration of rebirth. After getting rebirth in that land, you will see the Buddha and me, obtaining enormous benefits.**” (汝欲传法，自利利他；当知净土法门，胜过诸行；西方净土极乐世界，弥陀佛国也；劝令念佛诵经，回愿往生，到彼国已，见佛与我，得大利益。)

Having been advised by virtuous Dharma friends and instructed by *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva, he resolved to exclusively promote the Pure Land gateway after he returned to China.

After he fulfilled his purpose of gathering *Sūtras* and study the Pure Land gateway, Master Cimin returned to China via the “silk road”, travelling for four years. In 719CE, he came back to Chang’an, where the emperor Xuanzong (唐玄宗; 685—762CE) paid him great respect, and honoured him “Cimin *Tripiṭaka* [Master]”. He passed away in Wangji Temple (罔极寺), in 748CE, at age 69.

## (2) Master Cimin’s Main Contributions

The main works of Master Cimin include *the Collection of Pure Land Loving-Kindness and Compassion* (《净土慈悲集》), *the Praises of Pratyutpanna Samādhi* (《般舟三昧赞》), *the Praises of Aspiring Rebirth in the Pure Land* (《愿生净土赞》), and *the Praises of the West* (《西方赞》).

Although exclusively advocating the Pure Land methods, Master Cimin did not reject the joint cultivations with Chan, the Teachings and Precepts schools, by transferring all the merits to rebirth in the Pure Land. He was respected as the pioneer of “joint cultivation of Chan and Pure Land”, “joint cultivation of Precept and Pure Land” etc. His thoughts influenced Master Chengyuan, Master Fazhao and Master Yongming.

## 2. Master Chengyuan: the Third Patriarch Master

Master Chengyuan (承远大师; 712-802CE) was from Mianzhu (绵竹) of Sichuan province. He initially followed Master Tang (唐公) of Chengdu. At



24, he left Sichuan and went to Yuquan Temple (玉泉寺) of Jingzhou to join the monastic under Master Huizhen (惠真). Subsequently, following the instruction of his master, he went to Hunan to receive the complete precepts under Master Tongxiang (通相), and to study *Sūtras* and precepts.

When he heard that Master Cimin went to Guangzhou, Master Chengyuan followed to visit and pay respect to him, beseeching Dharmas respectfully. Master Cimin told him not to seek transcendental self virtues, but ought to cultivate the Buddha-remembrance-samadhi according to *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*, so as to deliver sentient beings. Master Chengyuan then ceased all worldly affairs and started to exclusively cultivate the Pure Land gateway.

In 742CE, Master Chengyuan returned to Hengshan (衡山); constructed a hall in the southwest side of the mountain, named Amitabha Altar, with merely an Amitabha Buddha image. He then commenced his diligent and ascetic cultivation. When someone made offerings to him, he would eat the food, otherwise, he would eat only wild fruits, flowers or grass for sustenance. He was clothed in ragged garments only for covering his body. When those who admired him came to learn from him, they often saw a thin weak man, with defiled appearance carrying fire-wood or water. They all mistook him for his assistant, hence despised him. Only later did they find out that he was the master himself.

Because the master relinquished all worldly attachments and diligently cultivated the mindfulness of the Buddha, he attained the Buddha-remembrance-samadhi, and often induced sacred objective fields to manifest before him.

During that period, Master Fazhao, the fourth patriarch master, was cultivating meditation in Lushan. One day, while he was in deep concentration, he went to the Land of Bliss, saw a monk in shabby clothing standing beside the Buddha. He was informed that the monk was Master Chengyuan. Once he came out of concentration, Master Fazhao immediately went to Hengshan to pay respect to him. With tears of happiness and sorrow, he besought Master Chengyuan to teach him cultivation methods, then transformed to Pure Land practice.

Multitudes of monastic and laity from near and afar heard of Master Chengyuan's virtuous conducts, came to approach him for teachings. Not only did they carry cloth, cut woods and pile up stones to build huts to live, but they also donated money to construct a temple. Master Chengyuan neither refused their offerings, nor did he ask for them. When completed, the temple was named Amitabha Temple. All the residual money and materials after the construction were given to those in hunger and the destitute.

When edifying others, Master Chengyuan first helped them to establish the middle-path, and then taught them pursuant to their capacities and inclinations.



Fig 5.3 Master Chengyuan

To enable sentient beings to rapidly accomplish the Buddha path, he inculcated them to cultivate the Buddha-recitation gateway. In addition, he wrote the Dharma sentences or phrases, as well as the name of Amitabha Buddha on the walls of streets, or engraved them on cliffs, to encourage people to practice the Pure Land method to achieve rebirth in the Land of Bliss. Thousands of people followed him to cultivate. Even the emperor, Daizong (代宗; 726–779CE) greatly respected him and honoured his temple as “the *Pratyutpanna* Enlightenment Site”.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of July, 802 CE, Master Chengyuan bade farewell to his disciples, and passed away peacefully at the Amitabha Temple, at the age of 91.

Master Chengyuan was preoccupied with the practice of Buddha-mindfulness throughout his life. He was not fond of writing treatises or commentaries; hence no works by him have been found. He followed Master Cimin's instructions,

observed perfectly the precepts, exclusively cultivated *Pratyutpanna* samadhi, and widely edified others to cultivate the Pure Land method, profoundly influenced and benefited many people.

### **3. Master Fazhao: the Fourth Patriarch Master**

#### **(1) A Brief Introduction of Master Fazhao**

Master Fazhao (法照大师; 747-821CE) is the fourth patriarch master of the Pure Land school, who has the most legendary responses. Most data of his life are oblivious.

At age 18 in 765CE, out of admiring the eminent vestige of Master Huiyuan (the first Patriarch Master), he formed a Pure Land society in Donglin Temple, to exclusively cultivate the Buddha-remembrance-samadhi.

One day, while in concentration, he went to the Land of Bliss, where he saw a monk in shabby clothes standing beside the Buddha. The Buddha told him that the monk was Master Chengyuan of Hengshan. He then immediately went to Hengshan, found Master Chengyuan in the valley under cliffs, and followed him to study and practice the Pure Land gateway.

He dwelled in Yunfeng Temple (云峰寺) in Hengzhou (衡州), when he was 20 in 767CE. One day, while he was eating in the dining hall, he suddenly witnessed five-coloured auspicious clouds, temples, forest, ravine streams, and a stone gate, etc., in his bowl. Behind the stone gate was a temple, with the golden words “Bamboo Forest Temple of Great Saint” (大圣竹林寺) on the plaque. A few days later, he saw the clear images in his bowl again. Master Fazhao consulted other monks, and realized that they were the scenes of Mount Wutai. He thus engendered the desire to pilgrim to Mount Wutai, but did not put into action because of many impeding conditions.

In the summer of 769CE, while he was directing a cultivating assembly to practice the five-section Buddha-recitation in the Hudong Temple (湖东寺) of Hengzhou, it induced five-coloured clouds to cover the temple. Numerous palaces, and temples appeared in the clouds; and Amitabha Buddha and the two Bodhisattvas with gigantic bodies manifested in space. All the participants witnessed the miraculous scenes, which lasted for four hours. None of them was not exultant. They lighted incenses and paid homage. That night, Master

Fazhao encountered an old man outside the cultivating site, who asked Master Fazhao, “you have vowed to the golden world to pay veneration to the saints, why stop?”

“It is only because the time is difficult, and the road is perilous, not easy to go,” he replied.

The old man encouraged, “If you have steadfast aspiration, where is the difficulty?” After those words, he disappeared.

Master Fazhao then, in front of the Buddha statue, made a solemn vow again to fulfil the pilgrimage, regardless of whatever difficulties. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of August of that year, he started his journey from Hengshan with a few Dharma friends. They walked northwards for seven months to arrive at the Foguang Temple (佛光寺) of Mount Wutai, without encountering any danger or difficulties in their journey.

Under the guidance of the Buddha light, they walked to the Bamboo Forest Temple of Great Saint, which exhibited no difference from what he witnessed in his bowl. Master Fazhao entered the temple, walked into the lecture hall in dignified posture. He then saw *Mañjuśrī* Bodhisattva and *Samantabhadra* Bodhisattva sitting on their lion thrones, expounding Dharmas to the great assembly around them.

Master Fazhao paid veneration in front of the two Bodhisattvas, and then asked, “In this Dharma-ending age, when the saints have left long time ago and teachers are inferior, the Buddha-nature of mundane beings can hardly be revealed because of their thick obstructions and defilements. Since the Buddha Dharmas are immense, I cannot judge which gateway is the most primary to cultivate. Hence, I beseech the great saints to clarify my doubt nets.”

(“末代凡夫，去圣时遥，知识隘劣，障垢尤深，佛性无由显现；佛法浩瀚，未审修何法门，最为其要；唯愿大圣，断我疑网。”)

*Mañjuśrī* Bodhisattva instructed, “**Now you are cultivating Buddha-mindfulness, it is the right time. No other practicing cultivations can surpass the Buddha-mindfulness and making offerings to the Triple Jewels. The two gateways are the most virtuous and primary in cultivating merits and wisdom. I attain the universal omniscient wisdom from contemplation of the**

**Buddha, from mindfulness of the Buddha, and from making offerings in the past kalpas. Therefore, all the Dharmas, *Prajñāpāramitā*, the profound meditative concentrations, up to the Buddhas, all are generated from mindfulness of the Buddha. Hence, it should be known that the Buddha-mindfulness is the king of all methods.”**（“汝今念佛，今正是时。诸修行门，无过念佛，供养三宝。福慧双修，此之二门，最为善要。我于过去劫中，因观佛故，因念佛故，因供养故，得一切种智。是故一切诸法，般若波罗蜜，甚深禅定，乃至诸佛，皆由念佛而生，故知念佛，诸法之王。”）

The master further requested, “How should we be mindful?”（“当云何念？”）

*Mañjuśrī* Bodhisattva replied, **“Westwards of this world, there exists Amitabha Buddha, whose power of vows are truly inconceivable. You should consecutively be mindful of him without interruption, which ensures definite rebirth at the end of this life and have eternal non-retrogression.”**（“此世界西，有阿弥陀佛，彼佛愿力，不可思议。汝当继念，令无间断，命终决定往生，永不退转。”）

After these words, the two Bodhisattvas extended their golden arms concurrently to touch the crown of his head, making prophetic ordination for him. **“You will soon attain the unsurpassed equal enlightenment because of your mindfulness of the Buddha. If any virtuous man aspires to swiftly attain Buddhahood, there is no better method than Buddha-mindfulness.”**（“汝以念佛故，不久当证无上正等菩提。若善男子等，愿疾成佛者，无过念佛。”）

Having heard these words, Master Fazhao clarified all his doubt nets. He was filled with delight and exultance, paid homage and retreated. In an instant, all the scenes disappeared. The Master felt lost and distressed. He erected a stone at the place to mark the experience.

From then on, Master Fazhao’s faith and aspiration were further consolidated. He exclusively cultivated the Buddha-mindfulness, perseveringly and diligently, day and night without interruption.

One day, while he was cultivating Buddha-recitation, a western monk suddenly entered the temple, stating, “Your flower pedestal has already manifested in the Pure Land, the flower will blossom three years later, and you will achieve rebirth then.” Three years later, Master Fazhao knew in advance that his time

to get rebirth was coming. He then told the assembly, “I am going.” After that, he passed away in sitting position.



Fig 5.4 Master Fazhao

## (2) Master Fazhao's Main Contributions

Master Fazhao diligently cultivated the Buddha-mindfulness gateway all his life. He also taught his followers in the Bingzhou area the five section Buddha-recitation method, which was so prevalent and resonant that even the emperor heard their voices in his palace. He then invited Master Fazhao to teach the method to his imperial members and assistants, and honoured him with the name of “State Master”.

Master Fazhao composed *the Contemplation and Practice Rituals of the Five Section Buddha-recitation and Sūtra Recitation of the Pure Land* (《淨土五會念佛誦經觀行儀》; three

volumes), and *the Praise of Rites and Rituals of the Brief Method of the Five Section Buddha-recitation of the Pure Land* (《淨土五會念佛略法事儀贊》).

The five section Buddha-recitation was the main method cultivated by Master Fazhao, who taught others to practise it. It condensed most of his Pure Land thoughts. It adopted five different tones in five sections respectively to free the practitioner from distracted or scattered thoughts, so as to concentrate his mind on Buddha-recitation.

- ◆ **The first section:** slowly recite “Namo Amitabha Buddha” in flat tone;
- ◆ **the second section:** slowly recite “Namo Amitabha Buddha” in up flat tone;

- ♦ **the third section:** recite “Namo Amitabha Buddha” in a no-slow, no-rapid speed;
- ♦ **the fourth section:** recite “Namo Amitabha Buddha” with gradually rapid speed;
- ♦ **the fifth section:** rapidly recite “Amitabha Buddha”.

Master Fazhao was acknowledged as the Fourth Patriarch Master of the Pure Land school.

## **4. Master Shaokang: the Fifth Patriarch Master**

### **(1) A Brief Introduction of Master Shaokang**

Master Shaokang (少康大师; 736-805CE), with family name Zhou (周), was from Jinyun Xiandu (缙云仙都) of Zhejiang province. His life was also full of legends.

One night, his mother had a dream, in which she travelled to Dinghu peak, where a jade girl bestowed her a green lotus with both hands, saying, “This flower is auspicious, now put in your possession. You will give birth to a noble child. Please cherish and take good care of him.” Her mother then conceived. When he was born, the whole room was illuminated with blue light, and filled with the fragrance of lotus.

Shaokang had broad forehead with blue eyes and red lips. During his childhood, he often sat in a straight position smiling, and loved by all who saw him. But he never spoke a word until he was seven years old.

One day, his mother took him to the Lingshan Temple (灵山寺) of Mount Xiandu to pay homage to the Buddhas. His mother pointed to a Buddha statue and asked him, “Do you know him?” He suddenly replied, “*Śākyamuni* Buddha,” astonishing all who heard him. Recalling her dream before she conceived him, her mother realised her son’s profound virtuous roots with Buddhism. Hence, she chose an auspicious day to send him to Lingshan Temple to practise as a monastic.

Five years after he renounced home, he started to study precepts and widely explored the Mahayana *Sūtras* and commentaries. Ten years later, he was proficient in *the Dharma Flower Sūtra*, *the Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, and *the Flower*

*Ornament Sūtra* etc. He was also versed in traditional Chinese literature and poems, and frequently associated with prominent poets and other elites.

At age 49, he visited the Baima Temple (the White Horse Temple) in Luoyang. One day, while he was paying homage to the Buddhas, he saw something radiating light; he then took it out to see what *Sūtra* or commentary it was. It was *the Treatise on Edifying and Directing to the West* (《西方化导文》) by Master Shandao. Next, he silently prayed, “If I have close affinity with the Pure Land, then let this article emit light again.” As soon as he finished his prayer, the article flashed again, with numerous Buddhas and Bodhisattvas manifesting in the light.

Witnessing these signs, he realised that it was the Patriarch Master’s response. He subsequently determined to forsake all worldly affairs, and to completely convert to Pure Land cultivation, following the example of Master Shandao. He then went to the Guangming Temple in Chang’an to worship Master Shandao’s image. Suddenly, Master Shandao’s image rose to the space, and spoke to him, “You will follow my method to benefit sentient beings, and your cultivation will result in your rebirth in the Pure Land.” ( “汝依吾事，利乐有情，则汝之功，同生安养” ) He then further strengthened his resolution to exclusively cultivate and promulgate the Pure Land gateway.

One day, when he went to Jiangling (江陵) of Hubei province to promote the Pure Land method, and to pay homage in Guoyuan Temple (果愿寺), a Dharma master came to Master Shaokang and told him, “If you want to edify people, you should directly go to Xinding (新定), since your affinities are there.” After those words, he disappeared, leaving behind a westward fragrant light. Master Shaokang was aware that this must be the instruction of Buddha or Bodhisattva, so he immediately made his journey to Xinding of Zhejiang.

When Master Shaokang first arrived at Xinding, no one knew about the Pure Land method, so it was truly difficult to edify those people. He then started begging in the streets every day. When he obtained some money from offerings, he would allure the children to recite the Buddha-name by giving them one penny for each utterance. Many children vied to recite the Buddha-name in that area very soon. The Buddha-name recitation of the children created enormous influence in the area, and many people, old or young, gradually started reciting the Buddha-name.



At age 58, Master Shaokang constructed the Pure Land temple in the south of Mount Wulong (乌龙山) in Xinding, and he began to ascend to the altar to expound the profound meanings of the Pure Land teachings.

On *Upavasatha* (observance days), more than three thousand people attended his assembly. Master Shaokang ascended the Dharma seat, asked the audience to watch his face, then recited the Amitabha Buddha name loudly. At every utterance, there was a Buddha image emanating from his mouth; and at ten utterances, there were ten Buddha images consecutively emanating from his mouth, like stringed pearls. The Master then told the audience, “Whoever saw the Buddha, he/she will definitely achieve rebirth.” ( “汝见佛者，必得往生。” ) Hearing his prophecy, the audience were exultant, and recited the Buddha-name even more diligently. Those few who could not see the emanating Buddha images felt distressed and filled with remorse, turned to double their effort in recitation.



Fig 5.5 Master Shaokang

At age 69, Master Shaokang knew in advance that his death was approaching, so he gathered his disciples and exhorted them, “You should generate the mind of cherishing and pursuing for the Pure Land, give rise to the mind of detesting and escaping the *Jambudvīpa*. All those that see my light are my genuine disciples.” (当于净土，起欣乐心，于阎浮提，起厌离心。汝曹此时见我光明，真我弟子。) After those words, he emanated several rays of lights, then passed away peacefully in lotus sitting position.

### (1) Master Shaokang’s Main Contributions

Although Master Shaokang did not write any works extant in the world, his

prominent contributions in promulgating the Pure Land benefited enormous multitude of people.

- ① Following Master Shandao's example, he practiced Buddha-name recitation all his life, exclusively cultivating and promoting the Pure Land gateway.
- ② Master Shaokang particularly undertook the edification of ordinary people, invented special skilful means to induce them to cultivate the Buddha-recitation.
- ③ He established the Pure Land temple for exclusive Pure Land practice.
- ④ His influence resulted in the wide prevalence of the Pure Land method in Zhejiang and Jiangsu area, where most of the later Pure Land patriarch masters were born or lived.

## **5. Master Yongming Yanshou: the Sixth Patriarch**

### **Master**

#### **(1) A Brief Introduction of Master Yongming**

Master Yongming (永明大师; 904-975CE), named Yanshou (延寿) and Chongyuan (冲元), was from Danyang (丹阳), and moved to live in Yuhang (余杭) of Zhejiang province later. At a young age, he was fond of reading and reciting *the Dharma Flower Sūtra*. During the era of King Mu of Qian State (钱穆王), he was a tax officer.

He was a vegetarian, and always bought fish and other animals with his income to release them. Later, realising his income was inadequate for the purpose, he used the tax money to buy and release animals, which incurred his death penalty. On the day of the execution, King Mu sent someone to supervise the process, ordering that if the criminal was frightened, then have him killed, otherwise, release him. Facing execution, Master Yongming remained composed, without sorrow or fear. He claimed, "I have not used any penny of the tax money for my personal expense, but only for releasing beings, with countless lives saved. Now after death, I will directly achieve rebirth in the Western Land of Bliss. Is it not delightful?" (吾于库银, 毫无私用, 尽买放生命, 莫知其数。今死, 径生西方极乐世界, 不亦乐乎?) On hearing the report, King Mu ordered to release him, and exonerated him from all his crimes.

After his release, Master Yongming joined the monastic under the Chan master Cuiyan (翠岩禅师) of Mingzhou (明州). Later he visited and cultivated under State Master Deshao (德韶国师) of Tiantai school, and got awakened to the mind-nature. He thus received the Dharma inheritance as the third patriarch master of Fayen (法眼宗) lineage.

Master Yongming used to practice the Dharma Flower Repentance, and to vigorously cultivate the meditative contemplation, with frequent auspicious responses. One day, while cultivating circumambulation, he suddenly found the lotus flower that was offered to the *Samantabhadra* Bodhisattva statue in his hand. He then pondered on his two aspirations: one was to recite *the Dharma Flower Sūtra* all his life; the other was to widely benefit sentient beings. Recollecting the two aspirations, he was undecided. He then went to the Zhizhe meditation Hall (智者禅院) to cast lots to decide. First, he made two lots: one was to cultivate single-minded meditation, the other was to adorn the Pure Land by reciting *Sūtras* and performing ten thousand virtuous conducts. After silently praying in front of the Buddha, he blindly picked a lot. He consecutively casted seven times, and seven times he got the lot for the Pure Land practice. From then on, he exclusively cultivated the Pure Land practice. Having recited *Sūtra* for three years, he perceived *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva pouring nectar into his mouth; henceforth, he developed the eloquence of *Avalokiteśvara*.

In 960CE, Master Yongming was invited by King Zhongyi of Wuyue, to renovate the Lingyin Temple (灵隐寺) in Hangzhou. He moved to Yongming Temple the next year to edify disciples and beings.

Master Yongming performed 108 conducts as daily routine practice. Among them were upholding mantras (the Great Compassion Mantra, etc.), Buddha-recitation, repentance, reciting *Sūtras*, meditation, and expounding Dharmas. He earnestly aspired to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, so he recited the name of Amitabha Buddha a hundred thousand times each day. Every night, he would go to other mountains to lead hundreds of people to practice the Buddha-recitation, with celestial music being frequently heard by others.

Master Yongming recited *the Dharma Flower Sūtra* thirteen thousand times in his life, repeatedly conducted Bodhisattva precepts for others, performed food

donation rituals for ghosts, bought and released animals. All the virtuous acts were dedicated to rebirth in the Pure Land.

On 26 February 974, he passed away in lotus sitting posture.

In Pure Land school, not only was Master Yongming respected as the sixth patriarch master, but he was also believed to be the manifestation of Amitabha Buddha. Hence, his birthday (17th of November in Chinese Calendar) is celebrated as the birthday of Amitabha Buddha. The following record is adopted from *the Collections of Sleepwalking by Master Hanshan* (《憨山大师梦游集》), which is introduced by Venerable Renchan (仁禅法师) in his article: *the Legendary Life of Master Yongming* ([www.163.com/dy/article](http://www.163.com/dy/article)).



Fig 5.6 Master Yongming  
attend this feast?"

In the third year of Qianyou (乾佑; 950CE), King Zhongyi of Wuyue State celebrated his birthday by making feast offerings in Yongming Temple, with Master Yongming expounding right Dharms.

There was a large-eared monk who directly sat on the seat of honour. He wore shabby garments and looked filthy, with his body covered by scabies. The other guests loathed him. King Zhongyi also showed disrespect for him for he unscrupulously sat on the honoured seat, and thus expelled him. The monk then returned to the mountains, sitting in a room composedly.

After the banquet, King Zhongyi asked Master Yongming, "Is there any saintly monk descending to

“The large-eared monk sitting on the honoured seat a moment ago was the manifestation of the ancient *Dīpaṃkara* Buddha,” replied Master Yongming.

On hearing those words, King Zhongyi felt deep regret. He immediately rode a cart to the monk’s residence to pay his homage, pleading, “Your disciple (I) is a mundane being with flesh eyes, and did not recognise the ancient Buddha. I sincerely implore you for repentance.”

“Amitabha talked too much.” After speaking those words, the large-eared monk passed away in sitting position. Happily realizing that Master Yongming was the manifestation of Amitabha Buddha, King Zhongyi directly went to see him, only to find that Master Yongming had also passed away.

## **(2) Master Yongming’s Main Contributions**

Master Yongming integrated and synthesized different doctrines of the Tiantai school, the Huayan school and the Consciousness-Only school, composed the voluminous *Records of the Dharma Source and Reflections* (《宗镜录》; 100 volumes). He also wrote *the Collections of the Ten Thousand Virtues Returning Together* (《万善同归集》), *Essay on the Divine Dwelling in the Pure Land of Peaceful Nurturing* (《神栖净土安养赋》), and *the Four Types of Categorizations of Chan and Pure Land* (《禅净四料简》).

Master Yongming succeeded and developed Master Cimin’s thoughts, advocating the joint cultivation of Chan and Pure Land, and directed rebirth in the Pure Land as the ultimate objective. His main contributions can be summarised in the following:

### **1) The Mind-Only Pure Land Does Not Impede the Fervent Pursuit of Rebirth**

The persecutions of Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty (845CE) and the Five Dynasties (955CE) devastated most Buddhist schools except the Chan and the Pure Land. The cultivation of Chan pursues the direct awakening to the intrinsic mind-nature, emphasising non-appearance; while the cultivation of the Pure Land is directed to rebirth in the Pure Land, relying heavily on Buddha-name or Buddha images. How can one reconcile the two ostensibly controversial methods?

Some challenged Master Yongming: “the mind-only pure land pervades ten directions, why should one give rise to the difference of pursuit and escape, and to develop the thoughts of taking or relinquishment? These do not conform with the tenet of mind-only, so how can you achieve equal wisdom?” Regarding these questions, Master Yongming first referred to Master Zhizhe’s *Treatise on the Ten Doubts of the Pure Land*: Master Zhizhe pursued rebirth in the Pure Land, but he was fully aware that there was no real substance in rebirth. It should be noted that birth is inseparable from non-birth, non-birth is inseparable from birth, the noumenon and phenomenon are perfectly compatible.

However, for those whose power of faith is not complete, whose mind is scattered and distracted, and whose practice of contemplation is superficial, they must aspire to get rebirth in the Pure Land. Relying on the augmenting condition of the power of Amitabha Buddha’s vow, they can swiftly accomplish the Bodhisattva path, and then return to rescue and deliver sentient beings. Therefore, realising the tenets of mind-only pure land, one should fervently pursue rebirth in the Pure Land.

## **2) The Cause of Rebirth in the Pure Land**

In self-practice and edifying others, Master Yongming emphasised observing precepts and reciting Buddha-name. He especially lauded the Bodhisattva precepts. According to his belief, if we aspire to receive the Bodhisattva precepts, and to believe and accept Mahayana Buddhism, even though we sometimes may violate some precepts due to severe afflictions, we still can achieve rebirth if we repent and recite Buddha-name. Suppose some people have received the Bodhisattva precepts, but they commit evil acts later. However, out of the power of having ever observed the precepts and the power of virtuous roots of hearing the Mahayana Buddhism, they will encounter some virtuous learned friends to encourage them to recite the Buddha-name on the verge of their death. Although with grave evil karma, their receiving of the Bodhisattva precepts will become their condition to get rebirth. Generating the Bodhicitta is the right cause of rebirth in the Pure Land.

Master Yongming also confirmed that evil persons could get rebirth with ten recitations of the Buddha-name at the end of their lives. In his opinion, at the end of one’s life, the power of one’s mind, because of its intense strength, can

surpass the power of karma accumulated in all of one's life. It is similar to that of a small fire which can kindle a large stack of hay.

### 3) The Four Types of Categorizations of Chan and Pure Land

As a patriarch master of both Fayan lineage of Chan school and the Pure Land school, Master Yongming clarified the doctrinal meanings of and their relationship between Chan and Pure Land. He summarised them into four verses to represent four types of practices pertaining to Chan and Pure Land.

“With Chan together with Pure Land,

It is similar to a tiger with horns.

One can be a teacher of human and celestial beings in the present life,

And he will attain Buddhahood in the next life.

(有禅有净土，犹如带角虎，现世为人师，来生作佛祖。)

“Without Chan but with Pure Land,

Ten thousand will go if ten thousand cultivate.

When they see Amitabha Buddha,

Why worry about not awakening?

(无禅有净土，万修万人去，若得见弥陀，何愁不开悟?)

“With Chan but without Pure Land,

Nine out of ten will detour on their path,

When the intermediate state appears,

They will instantly follow it.

(有禅无净土，十人九蹉路，阴境若现前，瞥尔随他去。)

“Without Chan and without Pure Land,

Iron beds and bronze pillars await them,

For ten thousand *kalpas* and thousand lifetimes,

They have no one to rely on.”

(无禅无净土，铁床并铜柱，万劫与千生，没个人依怙。)

There are many different interpretations about the meanings of the four types of categorizations. The following brief explication is based on Master Yinguang's *Treatise on Clarification of Pure Land Doubts* [8].

To comprehend precisely the profound meanings of the four types of categorisations, we must first understand the meanings of the four terms: Chan, with Chan, Pure Land and with Pure Land.

According to Master Yinguang, the two terms “Chan” and “Pure Land” are defined on the perspective of tenets and doctrine, while “with Chan” and “with Pure Land” are discussed on the perspective of capacities and cultivations of the practitioners. From the point of view of tenets and teachings, there is no difference between Chan and Pure Land. Whereas from the point of view of capacities and cultivations, Chan differs from Pure Land drastically. Although the paths of cultivation are different, the attained noumenon essence is identical.

What is Chan? It is the Buddha-nature intrinsically endowed by all beings, the original appearance before the birth of its parents of the Chan school. Here, parents refer to the fundamental ignorance and afflictions.

What is Pure Land? It denotes pursuit for rebirth in the Pure Land based on faith, aspiration and Buddha-recitation. It is not the mind-only pure land or the self-Amitabha.

What is “with Chan”? It represents attaining tranquil mind with passions ceased after the power of contemplative meditation reaches its extreme, so as to penetratingly perceive the original appearance before the birth of its parents. It is the state of awakening to the real mind or self-nature. If one practices contemplative meditation, yet without attaining awakening or with awakening but incomplete, it cannot be called “with Chan”.

What is “with Pure Land”? It denotes that one truly generates the Bodhicitta, gives rise to sincere faith, establishes earnest aspiration, and recites the Buddha-name, so as to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land. If one is mindful of the Buddha but attaches to mind-only, without faith and aspiration, or with faith and aspiration but not sincere or earnest, it cannot be called “with Pure Land”.

Having defined the meanings of the terms, the following will briefly explicate the four types of categorisations.

#### ① “with Chan together with Pure Land”

This type represents those who jointly cultivate Chan and Pure Land. On the aspect of Chan, they have completely awakened to the mind-nature. Then they



explore the *Sūtra* canon, get proficient in the provisional and ultimate Dharma gateways. Among the various methods, they single out the Pure Land method as the right practice for themselves and others.

They are endowed with great wisdom and eloquence, like tigers with horns, valiant and invincible, so the devious demons and externalists are all fearful of them.

When some people come to consult or learn from them, they expound the Dharmas adaptive to their capacities and inclinations. If the joint cultivation of Chan and Pure Land are suitable to them, these masters will teach them the joint cultivation method. Otherwise, if it is more appropriate for them to exclusively cultivate the Pure Land gateway, the masters will encourage them to practice the Pure Land method. People with diverse capacities of superior, medium or inferior, can all benefit from them. Hence, they are teachers of human and celestial beings.

On the verge of their death, the Buddha and his companions will welcome and escort them to get rebirth of upper grade in the superior rank. Once reborn in the Pure Land, they will directly attain the first ground stage of Bodhisattvas, achieve all non-retrogression. With the empowerment of Amitabha Buddha, they will swiftly attain Buddhahood in one lifetime.

## ② “Without Chan but with Pure Land”

Although they have not got awakened to the mind-nature, yet they have sincere faith and earnest aspiration to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, thus they diligently cultivate Buddha-recitation. According to the three Pure Land *Sūtras*, as long as they fulfil the three provisions (sincere faith, earnest aspiration, and Buddha-name recitation), they will definitely achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, since these three conditions are both necessary and sufficient conditions for successful rebirth.

After they get rebirth in the Pure Land, when the lotus flowers unfold, they will see Amitabha Buddha or *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva and *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva, and they will acquire all the transcendental powers, and attain non-retrogression. With the empowerment of Amitabha Buddha and the guidance of the Bodhisattvas, they will sooner or later attain awakening of their mind-nature.

③ **“With Chan but without Pure Land”**

This category refers to those who cultivate Chan and get awakening, yet they do not have faith or aspiration in the Pure Land. Although they attain awakening of their mind-nature, yet their afflictions of insight and cultivation are not eradicated yet, thus they are still subjected to segmented birth-and-death. When they enter the intermediate state, their rebirth destinies are mainly decided by the grave karmas that mature at the time of their death. It is the projecting karma that directs their rebirth, hence most of them cannot control their destination after death, resulting in uncertain rebirth in the next and subsequent lives. Since most of them cannot guarantee consecutive cultivation of the Bodhisattva path in their following lives, so nine out of ten practitioners tread a circuitous path.

④ **“Without Chan and without Pure Land”**

All the four types of people here are Buddhist practitioners. This type of practitioners denotes those who neither get awakened in Chan practice, nor have faith and aspiration in the Pure Land, but perfunctorily practice other methods. Neither can they attain samadhi to eliminate the afflictions of insight and cultivations, nor can they take their karmas along with them to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land after this life.

The merits obtained from the cultivations of this lifetime are transformed to blessings and rewards of human and celestial beings in the next lifetime, usually resulting in rebirth with wealth and power. Nevertheless, the nature of wealth and power are defiled, most probably inciting people to commit transgressions. With enormous wealth and power, their capability to conduct unwholesome acts are much stronger than those who are inferior and destitute. Having committed grave transgressions in the next life, they are destined to descend to the three woeful realms to endure various torments in subsequent lifetimes. Therefore, Master Yinguang called this situation the enemy of the third lifetime. That is, cultivate in this lifetime, enjoy the fruition in the next lifetime, and descend to endure sufferings in the third lifetime.

## **6. Master Xingchang: the Seventh Patriarch**

### **Master**

Master Xingchang (省常大师; 959-1020CE), with family name Yan (颜), was from Qiantang (钱塘) of Zhejiang province. He was born talented; and his parents sent him to the monastery to renounce household life at the age of 7. After ten years of *śrāmaṇera* life, he was formally ordained and received the complete monastic precepts at the age of 17.

Master Xingchang extensively studied the *Sūtras* and commentaries of Mahayana Buddhism, and was especially proficient in the cultivation of tranquil and contemplative meditation of Tiantai school. Nevertheless, he was particularly inclined to the Pure Land method, admiring the Lushan Lotus Society established by Master Huiyuan.

At age 32, he started to exclusively cultivate the Pure Land method in Zhaoqing Temple (昭庆寺) of Hangzhou. He also invited those who are knowledgeable and virtuous to establish a society for Buddha-recitation practice. Once they carved an Amitabha Buddha statue with sandalwood, Master Xingchang led



Fig 5.7 Master Xingchang

the followers, lit incenses, and made the vow: “I, together with the one thousand assembly and the eighty *bhikṣus*, generate the Bodhicitta today, and will perform Bodhisattva practice for unlimited future. We aspire to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land after this retribution body.” ( “我与一千大众，八十比丘，始从今日，发菩提心，穷未来际，行菩萨行，愿尽此身，以生安养国。” ) They emulated the example of Lushan Lotus Society, with 120 elites participating in the society, with the prime minister Wang Wenzhang (王文正) as the director of the society.

Master Xingchang observed the precepts perfectly all his life, and was endowed with unimpeded eloquence. He wrote *the Pure Conduct chapter of the Flower Ornament Sūtra* with his own blood as ink.

Based on the Pure Land method, he persistently and perseveringly cultivated for himself and edified others.

When he was 62, while Master Xingchang was sitting in the temple, reciting Buddha-name, he suddenly shouted, “the Buddha has come.” All the participants of the assembly witnessed the ground turning into golden colour, which lasted for quite a long while. Master Xingchang quietly passed away during that period.

Master Xingchang had no written works left in the world. He innovatively introduced *the Pure Conduct Chapter of the Flower Ornament Sūtra* to support the practice of the Pure Land, so as to purify the mental, verbal and physical conducts of the practitioners. He also transformed the name of lotus society into the Pure Conduct Society, advocated observation of precepts and Buddha-recitation, representing his skilful means in promoting the Pure Land gateway.

## **7. Master Lianchi: the Eighth Patriarch Master**

### **(1) A Brief Introduction of Master Lianchi**

Master Lianchi (蓮池大師; 1535-1615), with family name Shen (沈), and first names Zhuhong (株宏) and Fohui (佛慧), was from Renhe (仁和) of Hangzhou area. Born into a prestigious family, he was famous for his talent and filiality while young. He started the Pure Land practice, when he heard his neighbour, an elderly lady, telling him of the inconceivable effects of Buddha-recitation.

His father and mother passed away when he was 27 and 32 respectively. He then renounced household life and joined the monastic under Monk Xingtian (性天和尚), received the complete precepts under precept master Wuchen (无尘律师) at Zhaoqing Temple (昭庆寺). His wife Ms. Tang (汤氏) also became a nun.

After receiving the full precepts, he travelled on foot to visit and study under the learned ones and to cultivate ascetic practice for six years. When he visited Chan Master Bianrong (遍融禅师) in Longhua Temple (龙华寺) in Beijing, Master Bianrong exhorted him, “Do not crave for benefits, do not seek for fame, do not attach to conditions. The primary gateway is single-minded cultivation, honestly observing precepts and reciting Buddha-name.” (“无贪利, 无求名, 无攀缘。贵要之门, 唯一心办道, 老实持戒念佛。”)

Master Lianchi later visited Master Debao (德宝禅师) in Xiaoyan (笑岩). On the way back to Dongchang (东昌), when he heard the drum sound from the watchtower, he suddenly got awakened and spoke a verse.

“What happened twenty years ago are suspectable,  
Why feel curious at what are encountered three thousand miles away?  
It is just like in dreams to light incense or throw a lance,  
The demons and the Buddhas invalidly dispute over right or wrong.”  
(二十年前事可疑，三千里外遇何奇？焚香掷戟混入梦，魔佛空争是与非。)

At age 36, he went on alms for his food in Yunqi (云栖). He was fond of the serene and tranquil environment, so he built a hut and settled there. At that time, there were tigers frequently endangering the local people, Master Lianchi then performed food giving rituals to them, entailing the vanishment of tigers' harm.

When a severe drought struck the area, the villagers asked Master Lianchi to help them to implore for rain. Master Lianchi then knocked on the wooden fish, led the peasants to chant Amitabha Buddha's name, while walking along the ridges in the field. In a short while, wherever they went, rain poured down. The villagers were exultant at this event. They thus generated sincere faith in Buddhism, and voluntarily constructed a monastery for him.

All his life, Master Lianchi sincerely believed in the law of cause and effect, put emphasis on real cultivation, set precepts as foundation, and practiced the Pure Land as the objective. He rectified the pure rules and strengthened the observation of precepts, requesting the *bhikṣus* to recite the monastic precepts and Bodhisattva precepts every half month. He wrote *the Elementary Introduction to Complete Precepts* (《具戒便蒙》) and *the Exposition of Bodhisattva Precepts* (《菩萨戒发隐》) etc., to expound the significance and profound meanings of the precepts.

Out of great compassion, Master Lianchi spared no effort in rescuing lives of sentient beings by advocating no-killing and releasing captive animals. They constructed a releasing pond in front of the Temple, and established an animal sanctuary in the mountain, to rescue and set free various forms of animals. He also composed *the Essay on Refraining from Killing and Releasing Captive Animals* (《戒杀放生文》), which is widely transmitted in the world.

Master Lianchi was simple and frugal in daily life, humble and modest in behaviour, cordial and amicable in language, honest and moral in character. Since Yunqi Temple was established, he had never spent any money for himself; he gave all the offerings he received to the other monks, or to others in need. Master Lianchi treasured his blessings all his life. For instance, he insisted personally to wash his own clothes and cleanse his urinal, not letting his assistant to do such matters even at old age.



Fig 5.8 Master Lianchi

*Complete Works of Master Lianchi* [9], which is truly voluminous, with 1,600,000 Chinese characters. His typical works *the Explication and Annotation of the Amitabha Sūtra* [10], *the Essays [composed] by the Bamboo Window* (《竹窗随笔》), *the Collection on Rebirth* (《往生集》) and *the Doubts and Clarification of the Pure Land* (《净土疑辨》) are still widely studied.

At end of June 1615, Master Lianchi bade farewell to his disciples and old friends. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, he went to the hall and told the assembly, “I am leaving tomorrow.” On the next day, his disciples asked him to leave some words as bequest. He then opened his eyes and exhorted them, “You should honestly recite the Buddha-name, do not follow abnormal [conducts], do not destroy my rules.” (“大众老实念佛，莫捏怪，莫坏我规矩。”) After these words, he faced west and passed away while reciting the Buddha-name.

## (2) Summary of Master Lianchi’s Thoughts on Pure Land

Master Lianchi composed abundant works in his lifetime, compiled in *the*

Master Lianchi lived during the end of Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644CE), when the Dharma path was declining. He, however, revitalized the Pure Land practice through his genuine cultivation and knowledge. His thoughts on Pure Land are profound and unique, which has influence for more than three hundred years until today. The following will enumerate five aspects to exemplify them.

### **1) Exclusively Promote the Pure Land, Integrate and Unify Other Schools**

Master Lianchi was the integrator of unifying Chan, Pure Land, the Teachings, and Precept schools. He advocated the non-duality of Chan and Pure Land; claimed the purport of Buddha-recitation encompassing all Dharmas. He was painfully aware that sentient beings of the Dharma-ending age who dabbled in Chan practice but neglected the Pure Land gateway, was similar to mad elephants. Most of the teaching schools (such as Tiantai, Consciousness-Only, Huayan school etc.) explained the meanings literally, and that was analogous to talking about food but unable to gratify hunger. Having pondered in accordance with the doctrines, he realised that only the Buddha-recitation gateway enable beings to transcend birth-and-death horizontally. And it embraces all beings with superior, medium and inferior capacities. He thus exclusively advocated the Pure Land method, composed the monumental *Explication and Annotation of the Amitabha Sūtra*. He extensively surveyed the twelve divisions of the *Tripitaka* so as to glean all the essence to elucidate the profound meanings of *the Amitabha Sūtra* and the Pure Land method.

Master Lianchi explicated the “single-mindedness without distraction”: “Single-mindedness” is concentrating on the right objective; “without distraction” indicates non-arising of deluded thoughts. “Single-mindedness without distraction” can be achieved in two levels: phenomenon level and noumenon level.

Like the prior mentioned recollection and mindfulness, thought-moment after thought-moment continues consecutively without different thoughts arising. It is accomplishment of faith power, called single-mindedness without distraction at phenomenon level, encompassed in the concentration gateway.

About the single-mindedness at noumenon level, Master Lianchi proposed, “Like the prior mentioned investigation of essence, one realises the original

mind, hence it is called single-minded. There are also two aspects: the first is realising that the being mindful and the being mindful of are not two different matters, because they are both from one mind only. The second is that they are not existent, not non-existent, not existent-and-non-existent, not neither-existent-nor-non-existent. They depart from all the four propositions, because they are from one mind only. This is purely contemplation of the tenets, not exclusively cultivating on the phenomenon aspect. When the power of contemplation is accomplished, it is called single-mindedness at noumenon level, it is encompassed in the gateway of wisdom, with concentration attained simultaneously.” (理一心者。如前體究。獲自本心。故名一心。於中復二。一者了知能念所念。更非二物。唯一心故。二者非有非無。非亦有亦無。非非有非無。離於四句。唯一心故。此純理觀。不專事相。觀力成就。名理一心。屬慧門攝。兼得定故。)

The single-mindedness is the reality, the Dharma realm, the concentration of concentration, the Buddha-remembrance samadhi, the Chan directly pointed by Patriarch Dharma (the first Patriarch Master of Chinese Chan school), the three contemplations based on one-mind, and the transformation of consciousness into wisdom. Therefore, the Buddha-mindfulness encompasses all the Dharma gateways.

With unprecedented courage and insight, Master Lianchi proposed that *the Amitabha Sūtra* belongs to the perfect teachings, like *the Flower Ornament Sūtra*.

## 2) The Buddha-recitation Encompasses All Meritorious Virtues

Master Lianchi used the perfectly compatible principle of one being inseparable from all, from *the Flower Ornament Sūtra*, to explicate the mindfulness of Buddha. He asserted that mindfulness of Buddha is a great all-encompassing gateway, which includes all the conducts of Bodhisattva *pāramitās*, covers all the essential purports of the teachings and doctrines of the whole canon. Therefore, Master Lianchi did not encourage people to read the whole canon of *Tripiṭaka*, but exhort them to cultivate Buddha-recitation wholeheartedly.

In *Essential Words on Reading Tripiṭaka Canon* (《示閱藏要語》), he stated, “All the canon *Sūtras* explicating are merely precepts, concentration and



wisdom. The precept, concentration and wisdom are the Buddha-recitation gateway. Why is it so? The meaning of precept is to prevent one from wrongdoing. When one recites the Buddha-name single-mindedly, no evil can enter, which is the precept. The meaning of concentration is dispelling distractions. When one recites the Buddha-name single-mindedly, the mind does not contact other objects, which is concentration. The meaning of wisdom is illuminating. When one contemplates the voice of Buddha-recitation with word after word being uttered distinctively and clearly, he also contemplates both the reciting and the recited unable to be attached, this is wisdom. Such Buddha-recitation is precept, concentration and wisdom.” (大藏经所论者，不过戒定慧而已。… 此戒定慧即是念佛法门。何也？戒乃防非为义，若能一心念佛，则诸恶不敢入，即戒也；定乃除散为义，若一心念佛，心不异缘，即定也；慧乃明照为义，若观佛声，字字分明，亦观能念所念，皆不可得，即慧也。如是念佛，即是戒定慧也。)

### 3) Explicating Faith, Aspiration and Practice

Master Lianchi clearly elucidated on faith, aspiration and practices of the Pure Land method, stressing on the practice of Buddha-recitation. He emphasised that the three provisions of faith, aspiration and practice are all indispensable.

According to Master Lianchi, faith indicates that when one hears of the Pure Land, one does not have any doubt or suspicion in mind. It comprises two aspects: faith in self and faith in others. Faith in self means that all sentient beings and the Buddhas are non-dual; all sentient beings are intrinsically endowed with the Buddha-nature, intrinsically replete with the wisdom and virtues of the Buddha, hence all beings are capable of attaining Buddhahood. Faith in others is believing the phenomena and tenets of the Pure Land introduced by *Śākyamuni* Buddha. It is also believing that our Buddha-nature does not manifest because it is obscured by our afflictions and habits, and that we can achieve rebirth in the Pure Land to swiftly attain Buddhahood by faith, aspiration and Buddha-recitation practice, based on the power of Amitabha Buddha's vows. Hence, we rely on the Buddha-name to manifest our Dharma-body.

Aspiration indicates that we yearn to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land like children's recollections of and longing to see their mothers. We should not be

contented with faith only. We need to establish earnest aspiration for rebirth in the Pure Land and to undertake practice. Based on sincere faith, we should constantly aspire to return to the homeland of bliss, to return to Amitabha Buddha. Our resolution to escape the *Saha* world is unwavering, and the determination to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land is also steadfast.

Practice is to diligently conduct Buddha-recitation, thought-moment after thought-moment, continuing without interrupt, so as to attain single-mindedness without distraction. Buddha-recitation is extremely simple and convenient, utmost sublime and profound, embracing all types of capacities. Based on the compassionate power of Amitabha Buddha, whether men or women, monastic or laity, noble or underprivileged, worthy or foolish, as long as they have sincere faith and earnest aspiration, recite the Buddha-name wholeheartedly, they can all take their karma along with them and get rebirth in the Pure Land. Master Lianchi fervently advocated the Buddha-recitation method. He encouraged all to truly cultivate it at all places, at all times, and under all circumstances.

“There is no one in this world who is not suitable to recite the Buddha-name. If one is wealthy, with the needs of living being adequate, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one is poor, with small family and less toil, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one has a son, with the lineage of family being succeeded, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one has no child, with solitary freedom, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one's children are filial, supportive and caring, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one's children are disobedient, thus preventing one to give rise to passion and attachment, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one has no ailment, being healthy, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one is ill, approaching the impermanence (death), it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one is getting old, without many years left, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one is still young, with vigour and acuteness, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one has leisure, without entanglement of worldly affairs, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one is busy, stealing some leisure in the labour, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one is monastic, free from worldly affairs, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one is laity, realising the flaming house, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one is intelligent, penetrating the Pure Land, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one is mediocre or stupid, incapable of other skills, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one observes precepts, with the precepts being instituted by the Buddha, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one reads *Sūtras*, with the *Sūtras* being spoken by the Buddha, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one cultivates Chan meditation, with Chan being the Buddha mind, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

If one gets awakened, with enlightenment being attained by the Buddha, it is perfect for Buddha-recitation;

Universally encourage all people to immediately turn to recite the Buddha-name:

To achieve rebirth with nine grades, to see the Buddha when the flower unfolds;

To hear teachings when seeing the Buddha, to ultimately attain Buddhahood;

To realise the self-mind, being Buddha intrinsically.”

（“故知世间无有一人不堪念佛。

若人富贵，受用现成，正好念佛；若人贫穷，家小累少，正好念佛；

若人有子，宗祀得托，正好念佛；若人无子，孤身自由，正好念佛；

若人子孝，安受供养，正好念佛；若人子逆，免生恩爱，正好念佛；

若人无病，趁身康健，正好念佛；若人有病，切近无常，正好念佛；

若人年老，光景无多，正好念佛；若人年少，精神清利，正好念佛；

若人处闲，心无事扰，正好念佛；若人处忙，忙里偷闲，正好念佛；

若人出家，逍遥物外，正好念佛；若人在家，知是火宅，正好念佛；

若人聪明，通晓净土，正好念佛；若人愚鲁，别无所能，正好念佛；

若人持律，律是佛制，正好念佛；若人看经，经是佛说，正好念佛；

若人参禅，禅是佛心，正好念佛；若人悟道，悟须佛证，正好念佛。

普劝诸人，火急念佛；九品往生，华开见佛；见佛闻法，究竟成佛；

始知自心，本来是佛。” )

#### 4) Value Observing Precepts

Master Lianchi was filled with deep sorrow for the sentient beings of the Dhama-ending age, who were afflicted by deep karmas and grave defilements. Since the teachings and guiding principles were decayed and damaged, the precepts and rules were lax, thus cultivating at such time should take precepts as the foundation. Therefore, he clarified and reinstituted the pure regulations. The circumstance was that the ordination shrines had been banned without practice in southern and northern areas for a long time. Hence, he ordered that those receiving precepts must formally wear the three monastic robes to accept the precepts in front of the Buddha statue, with the Master as the witness. For those who had received the precepts, they must recite *the Brahma Net Sūtra Precepts* and the monastic precepts every fortnight.

The monastery where he dwelled and presided was extremely strict in rules and regulations. The duties and obligations of the directors of each hall were clear and detailed. They must patrol at night, struck the board to lead the chanting of the Buddha-name, with sounds permeating and echoing throughout the mountains and valleys.

In summary, stressing the observation of precepts and reciting the Buddha-name constitutes one distinctive characteristic of Master Lianchi's thoughts of the Pure Land.

#### 5) Encourage Studying *Sūtras* and Teachings

Master Lianchi emphasised, “I have been esteeming the Buddha-recitation all my life, but I also diligently encourage people to read the teachings. Why is it so? Where do the propositions of Buddha-recitation come from? If they were not spoken by the golden mouth [of the Buddha], and clearly recorded in the volumes of scriptures, how can we know that there is an Amitabha Buddha beyond ten trillion Buddha-lands away? Those who cultivate Chan meditation, take special transmission outside the teachings as an excuse. They do not know that it is an errant cause to meditate apart from the teachings and it is errant awakening to get awakened apart from the teachings. Even if you have awakened by meditation, it has to be attested by the teachings. If it does not

conform with the teachings, it is errant. Therefore, the Buddhist followers must take the twelve divisions of the *Tripitaka* as the model.” (“予一生崇尚念佛，然勤勤恳恳劝人看教，何以故？念佛之说，何自来乎？非金口所宣，明载简册，今日众生何由而知十万亿刹之外有阿弥陀佛也？其参禅者，藉口教外别传，不知离教而参，是邪因也，离教而悟，是邪解也。饶汝参而得悟，必须以教印证，不与教合，悉邪也。是故……学佛者必以三藏十二部为楷模。”)

## 8. Master Ouyi: the Ninth Patriarch Master

### (1) A Brief Introduction of Master Ouyi

Master Ouyi (藕益大师; 1599-1655CE), with Dharma name Zhixu (智旭) and family name Zhong (钟), was from Suzhou (苏州). To pray for a child, his father kept reciting the Great Compassion Mantra for ten years, entailing his mother to dream that *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva sent a son to her. His mother then conceived and later gave birth to him. During his late years, he dwelled in the Lingfeng Temple (灵峰寺), located in Mount Tianmu (天目山) north of Hangzhou, hence he was respectfully called Master Ouyi of Lingfeng.

Master Ouyi started to be a vegetarian at age 7; and he began to learn the Confucian works at age 12. He was so convinced by the Confucian doctrines that he was determined to promote the ancient sacred scriptures as his obligation. He swore to uplift Confucianism and to destroy Buddhism and Taoism. Thereafter, he started to eat meat and drink alcohol, and also composed several dozen papers to refute Buddhism.

At 17, by chance he read *the Preface of Records of Self-Knowledge* and *the Essays Written by the Bamboo Window* by Master Lianchi. He suddenly understood their profound meanings, and realised that his previous views were wrong. He then expressed his repentance by burning all his papers which criticized Buddhism.

At 20, when he was writing annotations for the Yanyuan (颜渊) section of *Analects of Confucius*, he was stuck at “If a man can for one day subdue himself and return to propriety, all under heaven will ascribe perfect virtue to him.” (一日克己复礼，天下归仁焉) After perseveringly pondering on it for three days, he penetrated the ideas of Confucius and Yanyuan. His father passed away that winter. On hearing *the Sūtra of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisttva’s Fundamental Vows*

during the funeral ritual, he was moved and engendered the thought of renouncing worldly life. He thus reverted to be a vegetarian.

At 23, he learned *the Śūraṅgama Sūtra* from a Dharma master. When he heard “the world is based on emptiness and emptiness is generated from the great enlightenment,” he got perplexed. He then wondered, “Why is there such a great enlightenment, which acts as the foundation of emptiness?” (“遂疑何故有此大覺，致為空界張本？”) [11] Because of the serious distractions of household life, he found it difficult to concentrate his mind to solve his perplexity. He thus resolved to renounce worldly life to cultivate and practice.

At 24, Master Ouyi, in one month’s time, dreamed three times that he paid homage to Master Hanshan (憨山大師) to respectfully ask for ultimate teachings. Master Hanshan was dwelling in Caoxi (曹溪) of Guangdong at the time, so he went to get ordained under Master Hanshan’s disciple Venerable Xueling (雪嶺法師). He got his Dharma name Zhixu, indicating his wisdom is similar to the rising sun in the morning. He went to visit Yunqi Temple that summer. Master Lianchi had passed away for seven years. While he was attending a lecture given by Master Lianchi’s disciple, Venerable Gude (古德法師), on *the Treatise on the Establishment of Consciousness-Only*, he heard that the doctrines of the school of ultimate truth and the school of dharma characteristic are not completely compatible. Confused and perplexed by this assertion, he went to Jingshan (徑山) to meditate and contemplate on the tenets.

At 25, Master Ouyi went to Mount Tiantai to pay respect to Master Youxi Chuandeng (幽溪傳燈大師). Because his will and inclination of cultivation were in Chan meditation, he acquired no benefit from this trip. But soon after, he wrote with his blood an *Article on Lighting Incense to Make Offerings to Uncle Master Wujin* (《燃香供无尽师伯文》) and sent it to Tiantai to express his repentance. He then returned to Jingshan to continue his meditation. Suddenly, he perceived the surrounding world and his body and mind all vanished. He thus realised that this body, from time immemorial, arises in accordance with circumstances and perishes following conditions. It is nothing but the image manifested by tenacious delusion, varying instantly, so it was definitely not generated from parents. From then on, he completely penetrated all the doctrines of both schools on the ultimate truth and the Consciousness-Only, realising that there exists no contradiction between them. All the *Sūtras* and commentaries, all the koans (Chan cases) appeared in his mind. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of

December, he aspired to receive precepts in front of the pagoda of Master Lianchi, and formally re-received the Bodhisattva precepts the next year.

At 28, his mother passed away. After the rituals of fulfilling his filial piety, Master Ouyi vowed to sever all worldly affairs, and went to retreat in Suzhou to conduct ascetic cultivation. Because of an unexpected severe illness during the retreat, he gave rise to the aspiration to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. After the three-year retreat, he composed *the Collected Essentials of Vinaya Matters and Meanings* (《毗尼事义集要》) to help his colleague Venerable Xuehang (雪航法師), who aspired to promote the Vinaya.



Fig 5.9 Master Ouyi

After 32 years old, Master Ouyi was preoccupied with the study of Tiantai teachings and doctrines, with abundant acquirements. Nevertheless, on witnessing that the Tiantai school, the Xianshou school, and the Consciousness-Only school separately adhere to their own doctrines, he refused to be acknowledged as a disciple of Tiantai school.

In autumn of the next year, he went to dwell in Lingfeng Temple. Subsequently, he travelled to provinces of Jiangxi, Anhui, Zhejiang, Fujian etc to study, gave lectures and wrote articles or treatises to expound and promote the Pure Land method, for the rest of his life.

In January, 1655CE, while he was reciting Buddha-name, facing west in lotus posture, he raised his hand and passed away peacefully, at age of 57.

As his last will, he ordered his disciples to cremate his body, then to mix his bone with flour crumbs to distribute to animals in water and on land, so as to create affinity of rebirth in the Pure Land.

Three years later after his demise, his disciples followed routines and prepared to cremate his body. However, when they opened his shrine, they found him sitting majestically in lotus position, with hair grown covering his ears and with countenance as vivid as alive. After cremation, his teeth were not destroyed, demonstrating verification of truthfulness of his writings, similar to Master *Kumārajīva*'s tongue. Reluctant to follow his last will, his disciples constructed a pagoda in Lingfeng Temple to revere his relics.

## **(2) The Main Contributions of Master Ouyi**

### **1) Master Ouyi's Works**

Master Ouyi's works are copious, the foremost among all the patriarch masters of the Pure Land. His works can be classified into the following categories.

① **Instructions for learning the *Tripitaka* Canon:** *Instructing Path for Reading the Canon* (《阅藏知津》 44 scrolls), *Watching Waves of the Dharma Ocean* (《法海观澜》 5 scrolls).

② **Annotation of *Sūtras*:** *Essential Annotation of the Amitabha Sūtra* (《阿弥陀经要解》 1 scroll), *Annotation of Meanings of the Sūtra of Foretelling the Consequences of Wholesome and Unwholesome Karmas* (《占察经义疏》, 2 scrolls), *The Profound Meaning of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (《楞严经玄义》, 1 scroll), *the Words and Sentences of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (《楞严经文句》, 10 scrolls), *the Treatise on Destroying Emptiness by the Diamond Sūtra* (《金刚经破空论》, 2 scrolls), *the Explications of the Three Sūtras of Buddha's Bequest* (《佛遗教三经解》, 3 scrolls), *Elucidation of the Essence of the Heart Sūtra* (《心经释要》, 1 scroll), *the Comprehensive Meanings of the Dharma Flower Sūtra* (《法华会义》, 16 scrolls).

③ **Explication of Precepts:** *the Profound Meanings of the Brahma Net Sūtra* (《梵网经玄义》, 1 scroll), *the Comprehensive Annotation of the Brahma Net Sūtra* (《梵网经合注》, 7 scrolls), *Explication of the Text of Karma of Bodhisattva Precepts* (《菩萨戒羯磨文释》, 1 scroll), etc.

④ **Commentaries and Explications:** *the Essentials of Contemplating Mind Based on the Treatise on the Establishment of Consciousness-Only* (《成唯识论观心法要》, 10 scrolls), *the Essential Explications of the Mahayana Gateways of Tranquillity and Contemplation* (《大乘止观法门释要》, 6 scrolls), *the Annotation of Breaking the Net of the Treatise on Awaking the Faith of Mahayana* (《大乘起信论裂网疏》, 6 scrolls), *the Outline of Teachings and*



*Contemplation* (《教观纲宗》, 1 scroll) and *the Elucidation of the Outline of Teachings and Contemplation* (《教观纲宗释义》, 1 scroll), etc.

⑤ **Collection of Articles:** *the Comprehensive Essays Composed at Lingfeng* (《灵峰宗论》, 38 scrolls), etc.

⑥ **Instructions for Repentance Rituals:** *the Conducting Method of Repentance Based on Brahma Net Sūtra* (《梵网经忏悔行法》, 1 scroll), etc.

⑦ **Miscellaneous:** *The Explication of the Four Books by Ouyi* (《四书藕益解》, 3 scrolls), etc.

Additionally, Master Ouyi compiled *the Ten Essential Essays of the Pure Land* (《净土十要》), which contains ten great treatises and commentaries composed by other Dharma masters and himself. It is an indispensable book for comprehending the profound meanings of the Pure Land.

## 2) Master Ouyi's Thoughts on The Pure Land

### ① Three schools are from one source and all return to the Pure Land

Master Ouyi advocated that the three types of schools of Chan, the teachings (including Tiantai, Huayan and Consciousness-only) and discipline are all from one resource, and that they all converge to one target: the Buddha mindfulness gateway of the Pure Land. The Buddha-remembrance-samadhi, named the treasure king samadhi, is the king of all samadhis. Of various samadhis, partial or perfect, provisional or ultimate, none of them does not flow out from this samadhi, and none of them will not return to this samadhi gateway. The essential perfect and sudden purport of the Buddha mindfulness gateway of the Pure Land reflects the skilful convenience for widely delivering sentient beings with acute or obtuse capacities.

Master Ouyi stressed that the three types should benefit each other, rather than practice independently, like drinking water from segregated rivers. He emphasised, “The first is the discipline, which indicates the start of cultivation; next is the various teachings, which expresses the path of comprehension; next is Chan, which denotes the conduct of practice; succeeded by Esoteric, which displays the subtle responses; and culminated by the Pure Land, which designates the common returning target of self and others.” (故首律宗，明造修之始。次诸教，明开解之途。次禅，明实践之行。继密宗，明感应之微。终净土，明自他同归之地也。)

From the point of view of the perfect and sudden tenets of one being inseparable from all, Master Ouyi asserted that the Buddha-recitation gateway universally uphold all the wondrous Dharmas. He summarised, “If one can genuinely recite the Buddha-name, let go of one’s body and mind, and the surrounding world, it is great generosity; if one can genuinely recite the Buddha-name, does not give rise to greed, hatred and delusion, it is greatly observing precepts; if one can genuinely recite the Buddha-name, does not bother about the right or wrong of self and others, it is great patience; if one can genuinely recite the Buddha-name, rid of interrupts and distraction, it is great energy; if one can genuinely recite the Buddha-name, free from delusional chasing and attachment, it is great meditation; if one can genuinely recite the Buddha-name, devoid of confusion by heterodox, it is great wisdom.” (真能念佛，放下身心世界，即大布施；真能念佛，不复起贪嗔痴，即大持戒；真能念佛，不计是非人我，即大忍辱；真能念佛，不稍间断夹杂，即大精进；真能念佛，不复妄想驰逐，即大禅定；真能念佛，不为他歧所惑，即大智慧。)

## ② The necessary conditions of rebirth: faith and aspiration

In his monumental work, *the Essential Annotation of the Amitabha Sūtra*, Master Ouyi repeatedly clarified and confirmed the three provisions of the Pure Land method: faith, aspiration and Buddha-name recitation practice. He further emphasised that faith and aspiration are the necessary conditions, determining whether one can achieve rebirth or not; the degree of Buddha-name recitation otherwise affects the grade of rebirth (see Chap 4). He stressed, “If the faith and aspiration are solid, we will definitely get rebirth with ten recitations or even one recitation on the verge of death. Without faith and aspiration, even if we recite the Buddha-name (so intensively), that wind cannot penetrate them and rain cannot wet them, as if they are similar to silver walls or iron barriers, we still cannot achieve rebirth. Those who practice the Pure Land, should not neglect this.”

Based on Master Shandao’s two types of profound faith and Master Lianchi’s faith in oneself and faith in others, Master Ouyi defined six types of faith: believing in self and others, believing in cause and effect, believing in noumenon and phenomenon. These definitions greatly enhance the profundity, the scope and the clarity of faith in the Pure Land gateway.

He also pointed out that aspiration is the pivot of the three provisions. It is the guidance of all cultivations. Only with earnest aspiration, can one diligently

undertake the Buddha-recitation practice; only with earnest aspiration, can one verify that one's faith is sincere.

### ③ **Buddha-recitation and single-mindedness without distraction**

Of all the Pure Land practices, Master Ouyi exclusively championed the Buddha-recitation method. He clearly defined the different levels of this method: Buddha-recitation with scattered mind, Buddha-recitation with single-mindedness without distraction at phenomenon level, and Buddha-recitation with single-mindedness without distraction at noumenon level.

Buddha-recitation is usually considered a simple and inferior method, suitable only to those who lack knowledge or wisdom. To counteract this opinion, Master Ouyi asserted that if one can achieve the single-mindedness without distraction at the phenomenon level, one can directly get rebirth in the land of convenience with residuals. Furthermore, if one can achieve single-mindedness without distraction at noumenon level, one can even directly attain rebirth in the land of reward and adornment, even the land of permanence, tranquillity and light (see Chap 4).

### ④ **Buddha-recitation is an extraordinary method**

In *the Essential Annotation of Amitabha Sūtra*, Master Ouyi extensively elucidated the profound meanings of the name of Amitabha Buddha.

#### i) **The Buddha-name represents mind-nature**

From the meaning of Amitabha, which typically denotes immeasurable light and immeasurable lifespan, Master Ouyi derived the conclusion: the name of Amitabha inherently represents the Dharma-realm. For immeasurable light designates spatial domain, expanding boundlessly in ten directions; immeasurable lifespan indicates the time domain, extending limitlessly into two directions. According to the ultimate truth of Buddhism, the Dharma-realm is the mind nature.

In his causal ground, Amitabha Buddha made the Forty-Eight Great Vows, and he had cultivated the *pāramitās* for inconceivably innumerable *kalpas* to accumulate meritorious virtues before he attained Buddhahood. Out of great compassion to rescue all sentient beings, he designated his name to represent all his meritorious virtues, so that anyone who mindfully recite his name with faith and aspiration will assuredly achieve rebirth in his Pure Land. Master

Ouyi pointed out, “The name can invoke the meritorious virtues. Since the meritorious virtues are inconceivable, the Buddha-name is also inconceivable.”

**ii) Buddha-recitation is utmost perfect and sudden**

In the preface of *the Essential Annotation*, Master Ouyi stated, “The Buddhas are sympathetic towards and mindful of all the deluded, they hence edify them in accordance with their capacities. Although there is no difference in the returned origin, there are diverse gateways based on skilful convenience. Among all the skilful means, if one wants to select the utmost direct and swift, and ultimate perfect and sudden, there is no other gateway than mindfulness of the Buddha to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land. Furthermore, among all the gateways of the mindfulness of the Buddha, if one wants to choose the extremely simple and easy, and the most stable and assured method, there is no other method than exclusively reciting the Buddha-name with faith and aspiration.” (原夫诸佛悯群迷，随机施化。虽归元无二，而方便多门。然于一切方便之中，求其至直捷至圆顿者，则莫若念佛求生净土。又于一切念佛法门之中，求其至简易至稳当者，则莫若信愿专持名号。)

Therefore, according to Master Ouyi, the Buddha-recitation method is simple and convenient, direct and swift, and utmost perfect and sudden.

He also lauded the Buddha-recitation method being all-encompassing. “The method of Buddha-name recitation does not involve the conducts of giving, does not need cultivation and attestation. Only by reciting the Buddha-name, one can directly attain non-retrogression. It vertically penetrates the five periods, horizontally encompasses all the eight teachings. All the Dharma gateways converge to it.” (持名一法，不涉施为，无劳修证，但称名号，径登不退。竖彻五时，横该八教。一切法门，尽归于此。)

**⑤ With faith, aspiration and Buddha-recitation to transcend the four types of lands**

Master Ouyi elucidated rebirth in the four types of land, in accordance with the degree of cultivating Buddha-recitation. Nevertheless, he particularly praised rebirth in the land shared by mundane beings and saints. First of all, this land is applicable to most Pure Land practitioners, who cannot recite the Buddha-name up to the level of single-mindedness without distraction at either phenomenon level or noumenon level. Second, the shared land of mundane

beings and saints is unique, it is endowed with most of the advantages of the other lands exclusive for saints, see Chapter 4.

## 9. Master Xingce: the Tenth Patriarch Master

### (1) A Brief Introduction of Master Xingce

Master Xingce (行策大师; 1628-1682CE), named Jieliu (截流), with family name Jiang (蒋), was from Yixing (宜兴) of Jiangsu province. His father Quanchang (全昌) was a well-known Confucian scholar, a good friend of Master Hanshan. On one night after Master Hanshan passed away for three years (1626CE), Quanchang dreamed that Master Hanshan entered their bedroom. Later, Xingce was born, so his father named him Menghan (梦憨; Dreamed of Hanshan). While Master Xingce was still young, both his parents passed away.



Fig 5.10 Master Xingce

At 23, he went to Li'an Temple (理安寺) in Wulin (武林) to join the monastic under Chan master Ruo'an Wen (箬庵问). He diligently cultivated for five years without reclining, and was awakened to the Dharma source.

After Master Wen passed away, Master Xingce moved to dwell in Bao'en Temple (报恩寺), where he encountered his colleague practitioner, Chan master Xi'an Ying (息庵瑛), who recommended to him to practice the Pure Land gateway. Later he also met Dharma master Qiaoshi (樵石) from Qiantang (钱塘), who instructed him to cultivate the teachings and contemplation of Tiantai. When they both cultivated the Dharma Flower Samadhi in the same purified room, he suddenly

penetrated the wisdom from previous lives, and completely comprehended the essence of Buddhism.

At 36, Master Xingce constructed a temple by the mountains and streams to the west of Hangzhou, to exclusively cultivate the Pure Land practice.

At 42, he dwelled in Puren Temple in Yushan (虞山普仁寺), and established a lotus society, which attracted many followers.

To ensure persistent cultivation, Master Xingce pioneered and advocated the seven-day retreat for Buddha-recitation. He instituted in detail the rules and regulations of the seven-day retreat, such as commencement, chanting tones, instruments, and rewards and penalties, etc.

After dwelling in Puren Temple for twelve years, Master Xingce passed away with various auspicious signs, on 9 July 1682, at the age of 55.

## **(2) Master Xingce's Main Contributions**

Master Xingce emphasised true cultivation; he did not leave behind many written works except *the Pure Land Admonitions*. Here we will adopt a few points to demonstrate his Pure Land thoughts.

### **1) Generate Sincere Faith to Pursue Rebirth in the Pure Land**

The following paragraphs are excerpted from the section of *Encouraging Generation of Sincere Faith in the Pure Land Admonitions*.

“The Buddha-remembrance-samadhi has been cultivated for a long time. Since Patriarch Master Huiyuan started establishing the Lotus Society to cultivate the Pure Land practice in the six periods (twenty-four hours) in Lushan, it has become an eternal wonderful tradition. Nevertheless, although its effect is sublime and it is easy to enter, the practitioners in the Dharma-ending age seldom achieve real attestation. It is all because their faith and aspiration are not focused, so they cannot direct their virtuous practices to dedicate them to rebirth in Pure Land.” ( “念佛三昧，其来尚（久远）矣。自远祖崛起庐山，肇兴莲社，六时净行，遂成千古芳规。虽曰功高易进，乃末世行人罕获灵验，良由信愿不专，未能导其善行，以要归净土故也。” )

“For sincere faith, first, we must believe in that the mind, the Buddha and sentient beings are not different. We are Buddhas unrealised, and Amitabha

Buddha is an accomplished Buddha; our Buddha-nature are identical to that of the Buddha. Although we are obscured, confused, inverted and deluded, the Buddha-nature has never left us; though we have been transmigrating for innumerable *kalpas*, our Buddha-nature has never been moved. Therefore, do not slight the non-enlightened; if they return light in one thought, it is the same as the inherent mind-nature.” ( “所谓真信者，第一要信得心、佛、众生三无差别。我是未成之佛，弥陀是已成之佛，觉性无二。我虽昏迷倒惑，觉性未曾失。我虽积劫轮转，觉性未曾动。故曰莫轻未悟，一念回光，便同本得也。 )

The non-enlightened mundane beings always chase and attach to outside possessions rather than contemplating their intrinsic mind-nature. Here light indicates illuminating wisdom, the power of perception and conceptions. Returning light means to stop chasing and grasping the six objects, to contemplate and abide in the true nature of the mind. We need to realise that tranquil and pure mind is congruous with the inherent mind-nature.

“Second, we should believe in that we are merely Buddha in principle, or Buddha in name and word; but Amitabha Buddha is an ultimate Buddha. Although we are the same in essence, yet our stages [in attainment] are as different as the sky and the earth. If we do not exclusively recite the name of that Buddha, to achieve rebirth in his land, we cannot escape from revolving in birth-and-death in accordance with our karmas, and from experiencing immeasurable torments. It is said that when the Dharma-body transmigrates in the five realms, it is not called the Buddha, but rather sentient beings.” ( “次要信得我是理性佛、名字佛，弥陀是究竟佛，性虽无二，位乃天渊。若不专念彼佛，求生彼国，必至随业流转，受苦无量。所谓法身流转五道，不名为佛，名为众生矣。 )

“Third, we should believe that although we are deep in obstruction, grave in evil karmas, and have been inhabiting realms of suffering for a long time, we beings are still in Amitabha Buddha’s mind. Although Amitabha Buddha is adorned by enormous meritorious virtues, residing ten trillion Buddha-lands away, he is still the Buddha inside our mind. Since our minds, in essence, are not different from that of Buddha, they are naturally capable of interactive correspondence and path aligned. Our suffering must be able to induce, and the compassion of Amitabha Buddha must be able to respond. Just like

magnet attracting irons, it should not be suspected. It is said that the Buddha is constantly mindful of sentient beings as if a mother is mindful of her children. If a child is mindful of his/her mother in the same way as the mother is mindful of him/her, the mother and the child will not turn against each other or depart far away from each other. Hence, if sentient beings recollect and are mindful of the Buddha in heart, they will definitely see the Buddha currently or in the future, and are not far away from the Buddha.” ( “次要信得我虽障深业重，久居苦域，是弥陀心内之众生；弥陀虽万德庄严，远在十万亿刹之外，是我心内之佛。既是心性无二，自然感应道交。我之苦切必能感，佛之慈悲必能应，如磁石吸铁，无可疑者。所谓佛念众生，如母忆子。子若忆母，如母忆时，母子历生不相违远。若众生心，忆佛念佛，现前当来必定见佛，去佛不远也。 )

“If we have the above-mentioned sincere faith, we will dedicate every piece of virtuous conducts, every mote of merits to the rebirth in the Pure Land, not to mention the various virtuous conducts such as being vegetarian and observing precepts, releasing lives and practising generosity, reciting Mahayana Sutras, making offerings to the Triple Jewels, etc. Are these not sufficient for Pure Land provisions? We should realise that if one’s faith is not sincere, they are turned into tainted merits. Therefore, for our current cultivation, there is no extra requirement other than to add these three types of faith all the time. Then all the practices will be effective without failure.” ( “具如上真信者，虽一毫之善，一尘之福，皆可回向西方，庄严净土；何况持斋秉戒，放生布施，读诵大乘，供养三宝，种种善行，岂不足充净土资粮。唯其信处不真，遂乃沦于有漏。故今修行，别无要术，但于二六时中，加此三种真信，则一切行履，功不唐捐矣。 ” )

## 2) Sever Passion and Affection to Incite Cherishing and Detesting

Master Xingce found that many Pure Land practitioners recited the Buddha-name diligently, yet they could not succeed in achieving rebirth in the Pure Land. He realised that the primary reasons for their failure are passion and affection, which tether the beings in the *Saha* world like ropes tightly fastened on posts. To counteract the passions and affections, he inculcated us to realise their fake and false characteristics and their detrimental effects.

“The ancient said that if affection was not heavy, they would not be born in the *Saha* world. They also said, ‘If their mindfulness of the path was as strong



as their mindfulness of passion, they would have attained Buddhahood a long time ago.’ All beings below the saintly fruition are rarely not bound nor unburdened by it. Afflictions are unlimited; they are the roots of birth-and-death. Only greed and affection can drown the Pure Land practitioners, impeding their rebirth. If only the passion and affection are mitigated and light in one portion, one portion of the Pure Land practice becomes mature. Please note the above.” ( “古云：爱不重不生娑婆。又云：道念若同情念，则成佛多时。圣果以还，鲜有不被其系累者。烦恼无尽，而生死根本，则唯贪爱能漂溺行人，障往生法。但情爱一分疏淡，则净业一分成熟。勉之。” )

Master Xingce exhorted that genuine Pure Land practitioners should cultivate as follows. “With truthful and earnest aspiration, we should develop the cherishing and pursuing thoughts. We should view the three spheres as prisons; the family as shackles; the sensual enjoyments as poison; fame and benefits as ropes and locks; the experience of several decades with poverty or wealth as a dream of last night; one lifetime in the *Saha* world as a journey of suffering. We should sincerely escape them quickly, only take reciting the Buddha-name wholeheartedly to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land as the right task. Suppose we perform as such, if we cannot achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, all the Buddhas become liars. Let us exhort each other.” ( “具真实愿，发忻愿心。视三界如牢狱、视家园如桎梏、视声色如鸩毒、视名利如缰锁、视数十年穷通际遇如同昨梦、视娑婆一期报命如在逆旅。信速舍离，惟以一心念佛，求生净土为务。果能如是，若不生净土者，诸佛皆成诳语矣，愿共勉之。” )

To those who want to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, but they still indulge in sensuous desires, Master Xingce admonished, “Suppose some people are preoccupied with all worldly affairs. They [cultivate] sporadically with scattered mind. However, when they encounter the five desires, they become attached to them as glue and paint; when they confront adversities, they harbour grudge and resentment. At the end of their lives, if they expect the Buddha to welcome and escort them, would it not be difficult? From such observation, we should realise that the Pure Land gateway is the medicine, but the passion and affection of the *Saha* world are incompatible food or behaviour. If one takes prescribed medicine, but takes incompatible food or conducts detrimental acts at the same time, is it allowed?” ( “倘若娑婆事业，

在在萦怀，一暴十寒，心不专笃，遇五欲时，如胶如漆。遭逢逆境，结怨衔恨，而欲命终，彼佛接引，岂非难事！由此观之，净土法门，药也。娑婆贪爱，忌也。服其药，复饱食其忌，可乎？”)

### **3) Give Rise to Three Types of Minds to Cultivate Valiantly and Diligently**

Master Xingce exhorted that whether we cultivate alone at home or together in assembly, we should always take the Buddha-recitation as the proper practice, the other virtuous acts as supportive conducts. Anyone who want their Buddha-recitation practice to be effective without failure should develop the following three types of minds:

① **The mind treasuring the precious time:** Life is between the breath, so Master Xingce exhorted us, “As if a prisoner of death penalty walking towards the execution field, every step is approaching death. Therefore, we should recite the Buddha-name without interrupt diligently day and night, from winter to summer. We will then definitely achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. Be careful not to be assiduous at the beginning but lax at the end.” ( “如囚赴市，步步近死，直需孜孜昼夜，矻矻 (kū, 努力) 暑寒，一句洪名，无时间歇，净土决定可生，慎勿锐始怠终。 )

② **The mind of pursuing departure wholeheartedly:** “We should neither seek worldly blessings and rewards; nor meritorious virtues, wisdom, eloquence, awakening and comprehension; nor to become a monk life after life to promote and expose the Buddhist teachings. We only aspire to achieve rebirth in that land after death to emancipate from sufferings of birth-and-death. This aspiration should appear in our mind all the time.” (非但不求世间福报，亦并不求功德智慧辩才悟解，与夫世世为僧兴显佛法等愿。唯愿命终得生彼国，脱生死苦，此愿直须刻刻现前。 )

③ **The mind of harmoniously respecting rules:** When cultivating Buddha-recitation together in assembly, Master Xingce exhorted all participants to live and eat together, respect and encourage each other, to be humble and cordial towards each other. They should respect the rules without violation.

## **10. Master Xing'an: the Eleventh Patriarch**

## Master

### (1) A Brief Introduction of Master Xing'an

Master Xing'an (省庵大师; 1686-1734CE), named Shixian (实贤) and Siqi (思齐), with family name Shi (时), was from Changshu (常熟) of Jiangsu province. He was born into a family of scholars, and was a vegetarian from birth.

His father died when he was a child. Realising his affinity with Buddhism, his mother led him to Qingliang Nunnery (清凉庵) to study Buddhist teachings and worldly knowledge from Monk Rongxuan (容选和尚) when he was 7.

At 15, he formally joined the monastic and received the complete monastic precepts. He was already proficient in Buddhist teachings and Confucian literature; he was also versed in poems, essays, and calligraphy. Nevertheless, he was aware that the matter of birth-and-death was important, and that impermanence (death) would come at any time, so he did not spend much of his effort in worldly affairs. One day, he went to visit Shanren Temple (善仁寺), and witnessed a monk suddenly falling to the ground and died. He further realised that life was impermanent, so he cultivated even more diligently, observing precepts strictly, eating one meal per day, and kept sitting without reclining at night.

At 25, Master Xing'an studied teachings and doctrines from Dharma master Qucheng (渠成) and Dharma master Shaotan (绍昙). He penetratingly comprehended the teachings and doctrines of the Essence school and the Consciousness-Only school in three years. Master Shaotan designated him as Lingfeng IV (灵峰四世) of the Tiantai lineage.

At 29, He went to Chongfu Temple (崇福寺) in Lishui (丽水) to cultivate Chan meditation under Monk Lingjiu (灵鷲和尚). Having assiduously cultivated for 120 days, he suddenly got awakened, saying, "I wake up from dreams." From then on, he became unimpeded in eloquence, at ease in responding to different capacities. Master Lingjiu knew his potential in promoting Buddhism, so he wanted to pass his succession to Master Xing'an. But Master Xing'an kindly declined the offer and left.

The following year after he got awakened, Master Xing'an cultivated in retreat. He read and studied the *Tripitaka* Canon at daytime, recited the Buddha-name at night. After three years of strenuous and vigorous cultivation, he attained Buddha-remembrance-samadhi. He wrote 108 poems to encourage cultivating the Pure Land gateway, annotated *the Essay on Aspiring for West* (《西方发愿文》) by Master Lianchi during this period.

After he completed his cultivation in retreat, the monks of Zhenji Temple (真寂寺) reverently invited him to expound *the Dharma Flower Sūtra*. Master Xing'an was unimpeded in eloquence, precise and insightful in his commentaries, thus praised by both monastic and laity. Later, he was invited by Dharma master Shaotan to expound *Sūtras* and *Vinaya* in Longxing Temple (龙兴寺) in Hangzhou. All the participants of the Dharma assembly commented the lectures being excellent, entailing his fame being widely recognised.

At 34, Master Xing'an visited Ningbo to worship the Buddha relics in *Asoka* Temple. He made offerings to the Buddha by burning his fingers five times, dedicated wholeheartedly to the Pure Land, and pledged solemn vows, which effected the Buddha relics to shine light.

At 43, he established a lotus society in Fantian Temple (梵天寺) in Hangzhou, to facilitate more people to cultivate Buddha-recitation. The daily routine practice was divided into 20 sections: ten sections for Buddha-recitation, nine sections for contemplation and one section for prostrating and repentance practice. They cultivated diligently day and night, with definite resolution to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land in this lifetime.

Master Xing'an edified others through both words and real practice, attracting many followers. He was also invited by Yongfu Temple (永福寺), Puqing Temple (普庆寺), Haiye Temple (海业寺), and Xianlin Temple (仙林寺) to preside over their management. He helped to standardize these cultivating sites in accordance with purified rules and precepts. He expounded teachings of Tiantai, Chan and Pure Land to benefit people. But more importantly, he instructed and encouraged his followers to generate sincere faith, to develop steadfast aspiration and to recite Buddha-name wholeheartedly to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land.

Later, Master Xing'an retreated to Xianlin Temple in Hangzhou like a hermit. He refused to leave the temple, relinquished all worldly affairs and contacts, and exclusively cultivated the Pure Land practice.



Fig 5.11 Master Xing'an westwards in lotus posture.

On 8 December 1733, Master Xing'an told his disciples, "I am going to leave permanently on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April next year." After saying that, he retreated to Cunxiang chamber (寸香齋) to cultivate in solitude. He kept reciting the Buddha-name a hundred thousand times every day, until the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April of the next year. Ten days later, he said to the assembly, "I saw the Three Saints of the West manifested in space ten days ago; today, I saw them again. I am going to get rebirth in the Pure Land." He then entrusted the monastery affairs, and also went to the city to bid farewell to the Dharma-protecting lay persons. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, he ceased taking food, and sat silently with eyes closed. At 5 am of 14<sup>th</sup>, he washed himself and changed robes, then sat facing

At about 9 am, his disciples of both monastic and laity wept to beseech him to stay in the world. He looked around and said, "I will be back after I get there. The matter of birth-and-death is serious, it is adequate for each of you to recite the Buddha-name with pure mind." Having said those words, he joined his palms, recited the Buddha-name, and attained rebirth in the Pure Land, at the age of 49.

## (2) The Main Contributions of Master Xing'an

Although Master Xing'an only lived for 49 years, he was an erudite monk, proficient in teachings of Tiantai school and Consciousness-Only school. He profoundly studied *Vinaya*, and perfectly observed precepts. Nevertheless, his

objective was to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. He did not write many works, but he did leave behind *the Poems of Pure Land* (《净土诗》), *the Essay on Encouraging Generation of Bodhicitta* (《劝发菩提心文》), *Annotation of Essay on Aspiration for the West* (《西方发愿文注》), and *the Sequel of the Biographies of the Rebirth* (《续往生传》)

Of his works, *the Essay on Encouraging Generation of Bodhicitta* was expounded by many Pure Land Dharma masters, and was learned by almost all Pure Land practitioners, completely or partially. Its influence is still overwhelming till the present day. The following paragraphs are excerpts to share with the readers.

“I have heard that among the primary gates of entering the enlightenment path, to generate the Bodhicitta is the foremost; of the urgent tasks in cultivation and practice, to establish aspiration is the primary. By establishing aspiration, sentient beings can be delivered; by generating the Bodhicitta, one can accomplish the Buddha Path. Without the generation of the grand Bodhicitta and the establishment of solid aspiration, after experiencing innumerable *kalpas*, one still remains in *samsara*. Even with cultivation and practice, one’s arduous endeavours are all futile. Therefore, *the Flower Ornament Sūtra* says, ‘Forgetting or losing the Bodhicitta, all the cultivated virtuous dharmas are called demon conducts.’ Even forgetting or losing the Bodhicitta is as such, not to mention without generating it. Hence if we want to study the Tathagata vehicle, we must generate complete Bodhicitta without procrastination. Nevertheless, there exist many different aspects in Bodhicitta and aspirations. If they are not clarified, how can they be developed, so I will briefly describe them for the multitude.” ( “尝闻入道要门，发心为首。修行急务，立愿居先。愿立则众生可度，心发则佛道堪成。苟不发广大心，立坚固愿。则纵经尘劫，依然还在轮回。虽有修行，总是徒劳辛苦。故华严经云，忘失菩提心，修诸善法，是名魔业。忘失尚尔，况未发乎？故知欲学如来乘，必先具发菩萨愿，不可缓也。然心愿差别，其相乃多，若不指陈，如何趣向？今为大众，略而言之。” )

Master Xing'an clearly defined the four pairs of aspects of Bodhicitta: devious and proper, true and false, large and small, partial and perfect.

### ① Devious and proper:

“During Cultivation and practice, if practitioners do not contemplate their self-mind, but rather chase and be attached to worldly affairs, either seeking material benefits, or pursuing good fame, or craving sensual pleasure of the present life, or going after retributions of subsequent lives, such generation of Bodhicitta is called devious.” (世有行人，一向修行，不究自心，但知外务。或求利养，或好名闻，或贪现世欲乐，或望未来果报。如是发心，名之为邪。)

“If they neither seek material benefits or fame; nor crave satisfaction of sensual desires, or retributions; they aspire only for escaping birth-and-death and for enlightenment; such generation of Bodhicitta is called proper.” (既不求利养名闻，又不贪欲乐果报，唯为生死，为菩提。如是发心，名之为正。)

## ② True and false:

“Thought after thought is on pursuing accomplishment of the Buddha path, frame after frame of mind is on delivering sentient beings. Hearing the extremely long range of the Buddha Path does not lead to one’s fear and retreat; knowing the difficulty in delivering sentient beings does not result in weariness. Like climbing a ten-thousand-feet mountain, one resolves to reach its summit; like ascending a nine-storey tower, one is determined to get to its top. Such generation of Bodhicitta is called true.” (念念上求佛道，心心下化众生。闻佛道长远，不生退怯。观众生难度，不生厌倦。如登万仞之山，必穷其顶。如上九层之塔，必造其巅。如是发心，名之为真。)

“With transgressions, one does not repent; with misconducts, one does not eliminate; with impurity inside, one shows purified outside; with diligent commencement, one slackens off at the end. Though one has good intention, it is usually mixed with fame and benefits; though one performs some virtuous conducts, they are mostly defiled by evil karmas. Such generation of Bodhicitta is called false.” (有罪不忏，有过不除，内浊外清，始勤终怠。虽有好心，多为名利之所夹杂。虽有善法，复为罪业之所染污。如是发心，名之为伪。)

## ③ Large and small:

“When the realms of sentient beings are exhausted, our vows are consummated; when the Bodhi path is accomplished, our vows are fulfilled.

Such generation of Bodhicitta is called large.” (众生界尽，我愿方尽。菩提道成，我愿方成。如是发心，名之为大。)

“Regard the three spheres as prisons; view birth-and-death as enemy. Only pursuing self-deliverance with no intention of delivering others. Such generation of Bodhicitta is called small.” (观三界如牢狱，视生死如怨家，但期自度，不欲度人。如是发心，名之为小。)

#### ④ **Partial and perfect:**

“Suppose one believes that there exist sentient beings and the Buddha Path is beyond one’s mind, nevertheless one vows to deliver beings and to accomplish the path. One can neither forget one’s merits, nor can one eliminate one’s perceptions and views. Such generation of Bodhicitta is called partial.” (若于心外见有众生，及以佛道，愿度愿成。功勋不忘，知见不泯。如是发心，名之为偏。)

“Suppose one realises that the self-nature is sentient beings, so one vows to deliver them; that the self-nature is the Buddha Path, so one vows to accomplish it. One perceives that no dharma exists beyond one’s mind. With our mind based on the principle of “emptiness”, one pledges empty vows, performs empty conducts, attains empty fruition, and acquires no appearances of emptiness. Such generation of Bodhicitta is called perfect.” (若知自性是众生，故愿度脱。自性是佛道，故愿成就。不见一法，离心别有。以虚空之心，发虚空之愿，行虚空之行，证虚空之果，亦无虚空之相可得。如是发心，名之为圆。)

In his essay, Master Xing'an also enumerated and elucidated ten causes and conditions for the generation of Bodhicitta. Here only the titles are listed, interested readers can study his essay to comprehend the contents.

“This Bodhicitta is the king of all virtues, hence it depends on causes and conditions to be generated. These causes and conditions are summarised into ten types:

The first is mindfulness of the great gratitude to the Buddha;

The second is mindfulness of the gratitude to our parents;

The third is mindfulness of the gratitude to our teachers and the elders;



The fourth is mindfulness of the gratitude to our donors;  
The fifth is mindfulness of the gratitude to sentient beings;  
The sixth is mindfulness of the suffering of birth-and-death;  
The seventh is respecting our souls;  
The eighth is repentance of our evil karmas and obstructions;  
The ninth is pursuing rebirth in the Pure Land;  
The Tenth is to enable the right Dharma to remain in the world permanently. ”

( “此菩提心，诸善中王，必有因缘，方得发起。今言因缘，略有十种。何等为十。一者念佛重恩故，二者念父母恩故，三者念师长恩故，四者念施主恩故，五者念众生恩故，六者念生死苦故，七者尊重己灵故，八者忏悔业障故，九者求生净土故，十者为令正法得久住故。 ” )

## **11. Master Chewu: the Twelfth Patriarch**

### **Master**

#### **(1) A Brief Introduction of Master Chewu**

Master Chewu (彻悟大师; 1741-1810CE), named Jixing (际醒) and Mengdong (梦东), with family name Ma (马), was from Fengrun (丰润) county of Hebei province. He was gifted since childhood, fond of Confucian teachings, and versed in composing poems and essays.

When he was 22, he fell seriously ill, so he deeply realised that the illusive body is impermanent, and gave rise to the aspiration for renouncing household life. After he recovered, he went to Sansheng Nunnery (三圣庵) to join the monastic under Monk Rongchi (荣池和尚), and received the complete precepts the next year.

Later, Master Chewu visited various places to learn from many Dharma masters. First, he studied *the Perfect Enlightenment Sūtra* (《圆觉经》) from Dharma master Longyi (隆一), penetrating the primary purport of the *Sūtra*. Next, he learned teachings of the Consciousness-Only school from Dharma master Hui'an (慧岸), and profoundly understood their essential meanings and principles. Furthermore, from Dharma master Biankong (遍空), he assiduously studied and contemplated *the Dharma Flower Sūtra*, *the Śūraṅgama Sūtra* and *the Diamond Sūtra*. He thus perfectly comprehended them, and was proficient in the doctrines of both the Essence school and the Consciousness-Only school,

without impediment in understanding the profound import of Mahayana and Theravada teachings.

At 27, he cultivated Chan meditation under Monk Cuiru (粹如) of Guangtong Temple (广通寺), and was awakened. He was then designated as the successor--36<sup>th</sup> generation-- of Linji lineage (临济宗) of the Chan school.



Fig 5.12 Master Chewu

yet aspired for rebirth in the Pure Land, with a hundred thousand Buddha-recitations per day.

At 32, while presiding over the Guangtong Temple, he led all monks to cultivate Chan meditation. They meditated diligently for fourteen years as if it was one day, thus drastically revitalized the Chan practice. During that period, he was stricken by illness again, but was cured by reciting the Buddha-name. Master Chewu then pondered that even great Bodhisattvas like *Mañjuśrī* and *Samantabhadra*, patriarchs such as *Aśvaghōṣa* and *Nāgārjuna*, eminent masters as Zhizhe, Yongming, Chushi (楚石), and Lianchi, all praised and recommended the Pure Land method. He further thought that Master Yongming was an accomplished master of Chan lineage, famous near and afar,

He believed that we should follow Master Yongming's practice even more at this Dharma-ending age. "Who am I? How dare I not follow?" he asked himself. From then on, he turned to exclusively cultivate the Pure Land method. Not only did he burn all his manuscripts written in the past several decades, but he stopped Chan meditation to cultivate the Pure Land gateway wholeheartedly. The transformation from Chan meditation to exclusively cultivate the Pure Land gateway created great astonishment at that time. Although there was much misunderstanding, even slandering, most of those who followed him for Chan meditation turned to Buddha-recitation practice.

Master Chewu penetrated the profound tenets of both Chan school and Pure Land school, expounding Dharmas with unimpeded eloquence. Being extremely self-disciplined, he limited the time of each day for meeting guests and conducting other chores to a duration of burning one-foot-long incense. He led the assembly to cultivate the Buddha-recitation method assiduously, and greatly promoted the Pure Land method. Multitude of monastic and laity, near and far, esteemed him, and came to follow him, respecting him as the number one among Buddhist practitioners.

At 55, Master Chewu retired to Zifu Temple (资福寺) of Mount Hongluo (红螺山, in the north suburb of Beijing) to prepare to recite Buddha-name for rebirth. However, too many people of both monastic and laity followed him there. Hence, he could not evade the multitude, but rather led them to practice, turning Zifu Temple into a large temple in a short time. He cultivated and worked together with the multitude, following the regulation of “One day not working, one day without food”, for another ten years.

At 69, after he swept the pagoda of Master Cuiru in February, he dismissed the external Dharma protectors, exhorting them, “The illusive affinity is not long, life is impermanent, so it is a shame to waste this life. Everyone should diligently recite Buddha-name, so as to meet again in the Pure Land later.”

In March, he returned to Mount Hongluo to assign the succeeding abbot, and to order his disciples to prepare for his cremation matters. Master Chewu then addressed his assembly, “The Buddha-recitation gateway universally encompasses all three types of capacities, unsuitable for no one. For these years, you and I have strenuously established this cultivating site for the purpose to facilitate those who come to cultivate Pure Land method. All the rules and regulations should be observed. You should not change directions, and do not disappoint our sincere expectations.”

In early December, he exhibited slight illness. He then asked the assembly to supportively recite the Buddha-name. Having witnessed numerous banners in the sky, coming from the west, he told his followers, “The Pure Land has appeared now, I am going to the West.” When his disciples pleaded with him to remain in the world further, he replied, “A hundred year is like sojourn, one

has to return home. I have now attained the saintly land, thus you should be happy for me, why do you ask me to stay?”

On the 16th of December, he arranged a Nirvana feast. He informed the assembly on the 17th, “I saw *Mañjuśrī* Bodhisattva, *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva and *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva yesterday. Today, I also saw Amitabha Buddha personally welcome and escort me, so I am leaving today.” Hearing these words, the assembly recited the Buddha-name even more loudly. In the afternoon of the 17th, Master Chewu was sitting facing westwards with palms joined, and he announced, “With one utterance of the Buddha-name, one sees one part of excellent appearance.” After these words, he posed in Amitabha mudra, and passed away peacefully at the age of 70. All the assembly smelled exotic fragrance permeating space.

## **(2) The Main Contributions of Master Chewu**

Since Master Chewu burnt all his earlier works, and he concentrated on practical cultivation of Buddha-recitation in his later years, he had not many written materials left in the world. Nevertheless, his extant *Quotations of Chan Master Chewu* (《彻悟禅师语录》) was universally studied by Pure Land Dharma masters and practitioners. The following will excerpt some paragraphs to demonstrate his thoughts on Pure Land.

### **1) Specifying Ten Aspects of Faith to Consolidate Faith and Aspiration**

Master Chewu was clearly aware that most of the contemporary Pure Land practitioners either did not possess faith or had faith but not solid. Based on his personal study and practice experience, he then penetratingly integrated the essential doctrines of Mahayana teachings to formulate ten aspects of faith, so as to consummate faith in Pure Land. His words are simple, precise and concise, direct to the point, enabling those without faith to generate faith and those with faith to become more unwavering.

① “To believe that birth definitely turns to death: all over the world, no one has ever escaped it from ancient times to the present.” (信生必有死：普天之下，从古至今，曾无一人逃得。)

② “To believe that life is impermanent: the existence of in-breath does not guarantee the out-breath; with one breath not coming, it will be next life.” (信人命无常：出息虽存，入息难保，一息不来，即为后世。)

③ “To believe that transmigration is precarious: with one thought of negligence, one will descend to the woeful realms. To get rebirth as human is similar to the earth in hand, but to lose rebirth as human is analogous to the earth on the ground.” (信轮回路险：一念之差，便堕恶趣。得人身如掌上土；失人身者，如大地土。)

④ “To Believe that the destiny of suffering is extremely long: one retribution in the three woeful realms will last five thousand *kalpas*, it is hard to know when one will return to being a human.” (信苦趣时长：三途一报五千劫，再出头来是几时。)

⑤ “To believe that the words of the Buddhas are not false: even the sun and moon can decay, Mount Sumeru is moved, but the words of Buddhas are not varied.” (信佛语不虚：此日月轮，可令堕落，妙高山王，可使倾动，诸佛所言，无有异也。)

⑥ “To Believe that there really exists the Pure Land: just like the existence of the *Saha* world, it does exist.” (信实有净土：如今娑婆无异，的的现有。)

⑦ “To believe that with aspiration for rebirth, one will achieve rebirth: with past, present or future aspiration, one has already attained, are getting or will get rebirth. This is clearly stated in the *Sūtras*, how can they cheat us?” (信愿生即生：已今当愿，已今当生，经有明文，岂欺我哉。)

⑧ “To believe that once one achieves rebirth, one will not retrogress: with unexcelled environment and strong virtuous conditions (in Pure Land), the mind of retrogression cannot arise.” (信生即不退：境胜缘强，退心不起。)

⑨ “To believe that one can attain Buddhahood in one lifetime: with immeasurable lifespan (in Pure Land), whatever can be accomplished.” (信一生成佛：寿命无量，何事不办。)

⑩“To believe that all dharmas are mind-only: mind-only has two meanings—endowed and implemented. The above mentioned dharmas are all endowed by our minds, all implemented by our mind.”（信法本唯心：唯心有具造二义，如上诸法，皆我心具，皆我心造。）

## **2) Cultivating with Strong Mind Will Definitely Achieve Rebirth in the Pure Land**

Master Chewu particularly emphasized the three provisions of Pure Land: faith, aspiration and practice. He once instructed, “At the pivotal time of birth-and-death, there exist only two types of power: One is the mind power, which ranges from the distracted and perplexed (attracts rebirth) to that of the strong mind. The other is the power of karma, which projects the rebirth to the destiny by its weight, similar to that one has to repay the heavy debt first amidst many debt-collectors. The Karma is powerful, yet the power of the mind is even stronger. For karmas have no self-nature, they depend entirely on the mind, hence the grave mind can strengthen the power of karma. If one cultivates the Pure Land practice with a strong mind, it will strengthen the Pure Land karma, which will definitely project one to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this life. One cannot get rebirth in other destinies. It is similar to a big tree or a large wall that is inclined towards west can fall to no other direction but west.”（“吾人生死关头，唯二种力。一者，心绪多端，重处偏坠，此心力也。二者，如人负债，强者先牵，此业力也。业力最大，心力尤大。以业无自性，全依于心，故心重能使业强。今以重心而修净业，则净业强。他日报尽命终，定生西方，不生余处矣。如大树大墙，寻常向西而歪，他日若倒，决不向余处也。”）

Similar to Master Shandao’s criteria on sincere faith, Master Chewu further clarified, “What is the strong mind? If we cultivate the Pure Land method, it is important to have sincere faith and earnest aspiration. Because if the faith is sincere and the aspiration is earnest, no devious teachings can sway or perplex us; no conditions or circumstances can attract or convert us. Suppose while we are cultivating the Pure Land gateway, if Patriarch Master Dharma suddenly appears in front of us and tells us to relinquish the Pure Land method and to cultivate Chan so as to attain Buddhahood instantly, we will not follow his instructions. Even if *Śākyamuni* Buddha suddenly manifests to tell us that

there are other extraordinary and convenient methods superior to the Pure Land gateway, and to enjoin us to abandon this for that, we will not follow his order. This is called sincere faith.” ( “何为重心。我辈修习净业，信贵于深，愿贵于切。以信愿深切，故一切邪说不能摇惑。一切境缘，莫能引转。假正修净业时，达摩祖师忽现在前，令我舍净修禅，可以立地成佛，我不敢从命。即释迦如来忽尔现身，谓更有异方便，胜于净土，令我舍此从彼，我亦不敢从教，此谓之深信。” )

To consolidate the earnest aspiration for rebirth in the Pure Land, Master Chewu instructed us, “Even if there is a sizzling hot iron disc turning above our head, we will not retreat from our aspiration for rebirth because of this torment. Moreover, even if the wondrous sensual desires as those of the wheel-turning monarch appears in front of us, we will not retreat from our aspiration for rebirth due to such pleasure. Such extreme adversity or fortune will not move our aspiration, it is called earnest aspiration. Having sincere faith and earnest aspiration is called strong mind.” ( “假如赤热铁轮，旋转顶上，不以此苦，退失往生之愿。又若轮王胜妙五欲现前，亦不以此乐，退失往生之愿。如此逆顺至极，尚不改所愿，此之谓切愿。信深愿切，是谓重心。” )

He then concluded, “Cultivating the Pure Land practice with such a mind, the Pure Land karma must be strong, and the strong karma will mature. If the karma of the Pure Land is mature, the defiled affinity with the *Saha* world ceases. On the verge of death, even if one desires the revolving destinies to reappear, it will not happen; if one wants the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha not to manifest, it will not be realised.” ( “以是修净，净业必强，业强则熟。极乐净业若熟，娑婆染缘便尽。临终时，虽欲轮回境界再现在前，不可得矣。虽欲弥陀净土不现在前，亦不可得矣。” )

### **3) The Essential Principle with Sixteen Chinese Characters**

Master Chewu summarised in sixteen Chinese characters the essential and universal principle for cultivating the Pure Land method: “Truly for birth-and-death, generate Bodhicitta; with sincere faith and earnest aspiration, recite the Buddha-name.” ( “真为生死，发菩提心，以深信愿，持佛名号” )

He also derived eight directories for the Pure Land practice based on the sixteen-character principles.

- ① “To generate Bodhicitta truly for birth-and-death is the universal path for study and cultivation;” (一真为生死，发菩提心，是学道通途；)
- ② “To recite the Buddha-name with sincere faith and earnest aspiration is the right principle of the Pure Land;” (二以深信愿，持佛名号，为净土正宗；)
- ③ “To recite wholeheartedly with gathered mind is the convenience for execution;” (三以摄心专注而念，为下手方便；)
- ④ “To subjugate the present afflictions is the primary task for cultivating mind;” (四以折伏现行烦恼，为修心要务；)
- ⑤ “To observe the four essential precepts is the foundation for entering the cultivating path;” (五以坚持四重戒法，为入道根本；)
- ⑥ “To endure various ascetic practices is the supportive condition for the cultivating path;” (六以种种苦行，为修道助缘；)
- ⑦ “To achieve single-mindedness without distraction is the target of the Pure Land practice;” (七以一心不乱，为净行归宿；)
- ⑧ “To witness various auspicious signs is the verification of successful rebirth.” (八以种种灵瑞，为往生证验。)

#### **4) Buddha-Recitation with Four Types of Thoughts will Ensure Rebirth**

Master Chewu exhorted the Pure Land practitioners, “To cultivate the Buddha-recitation, we should give rise to four types of thoughts. What are the four? The first is generating remorseful and shameful thoughts, because we have been committing [unwholesome] conducts from time immemorial. The second is generating delightful and celebrating thoughts for hearing such Dharma gateway. The third is generating sorrowful and mournful thoughts, because this method is hard to meet and difficult to encounter due to karmic obstruction from beginningless time. The Fourth is generating grateful thoughts for such loving-kindness and compassion of the Buddhas. Possessing even one of the four thoughts, one’s Pure Land practice can be fulfilled.” ( “念佛当生四种心。云何为四。一无始以来造业至此。当生惭愧心。二得闻此法门。当



生欣庆心。三无始业障。此法难遭难遇。当生悲痛心。四佛如是慈悲。当生感激心。此四种心中有一。净业即能成就。” )

### 5) The Tenets of Buddha-Recitation Is “While the Mind Is Formulating the Buddha, the Mind Is the Buddha”

Master Chewu was proficient in both Chan meditation and Pure Land practice. He was awakened to the mind-nature through Chan meditation, so his comments on the mind is both insightful and direct.

He commented, “The saying of ‘**while the mind is formulating the Buddha, the mind is the Buddha**’ from *the Contemplation Sūtra* is more direct and straightforward compared to ‘**directly point to the mind, perceive the essence to become Buddha**’ of the Chan school. Why is it so? To perceive the essence to become Buddha is difficult, while to formulate Buddha is easier. What is perceiving the essence? Only when one is apart from consciousness and the illuminating light suddenly manifests, can it be called perceiving the essence. Hence, it is difficult. What is formulating Buddha? To recite the Buddha-name and contemplate the environmental and life retributions of the Buddha is called formulating Buddha. Therefore, it is easier.” ( “《观经》 ‘是心作佛，是心是佛’ 二语，较之禅宗 ‘直指人心，见性成佛’ 尤为直截痛快！何也？以见性成佛难，而作佛易故。何为见性？离心意识，灵光迸露，始为见性，故难。何为作佛？持佛名号，观佛依正，即为作佛，故易。” )

“To all Dharma gateways, realising the mind is essential; to all the practicing methods, purifying the mind is primary. Nevertheless, to realise the mind, there is no better way than Buddha-recitation. By recollecting the Buddha and being mindful of the Buddha, one will definitely see the Buddha now or later. Without depending on any convenience, the mind will be realised automatically. Is Buddha-recitation as such not the essentials of realising the mind?” ( “一切法门，以明心为要。一切行门，以净心为要。然则明心之要，无如念佛。忆佛念佛，现前当来，必定见佛，不假方便，自得心开。如此念佛，非明心之要乎？” )

“Furthermore, for the primary purpose of purifying the mind, there is no better way than Buddha-recitation. If one thought-moment corresponds with that of the Buddha, one thought-moment is the Buddha; if thought-moment

after thought-moment corresponds with that of the Buddha, then thought-moment after thought-moment is the Buddha. When a purifying pearl is dropped into turbid water, the turbid water cannot but to become clear; when the Buddha-name is put into a scattered mind, the scattered mind can be nothing but the Buddha. Is such Buddha-recitation not the primary conduct of purifying mind?” ( “复次，净心之要，亦无如念佛。一念相应一念佛，念念相应念念佛。清珠投于浊水，浊水不得不清。佛号投于乱心，乱心不得不佛。如此念佛，非净心之要乎？” )

“Our present frame of mind is transformed from the reality into delusion, yet all delusions are inseparable from the reality. It remains invariable all the time, yet it adapts to conditions all the time. If it is not adapted to the Buddha realm to be mindful of the Buddha realm, it must be mindful of the other nine realms. If it is not mindful of the three vehicles (saints), it must be mindful of the six mundane realms. If it is not mindful of human or celestial realms, it must be mindful of the three woeful destinies. If it is not mindful of ghost or animals, it must be mindful of hell.” ( “吾人现前一念之心，全真成妄，全妄即真。终日不变，终日随缘。夫不随佛界之缘而念佛界，便念九界。不念三乘，便念六凡。不念人天，便念三途。不念鬼畜，便念地狱。” )

It should be understood that our mind cannot remain vacant unless we attain Buddhahood. Its activities always fall into the ten realms, without exception. At the same time, our mind is exclusively occupied by only one thought, it cannot process more than one thought simultaneously at any time. Therefore, if we train our mind by occupying it with being mindfulness of the Buddha, at that moment, it is automatically free from wandering among other thoughts, not to mention being attached to any evil thoughts. Gradually, our mind will become more and more preoccupied with mindfulness of the Buddha, expelling other habitual thoughts out of the mind. Hence, Master Chewu further commented.

“For all those with mind, they cannot remain thoughtless. Only Buddha has attained the thoughtless mind essence, so all beings below the virtual enlightenment have thoughts. Whenever one thought arises, it must fall into one of the ten realms. And no thoughts fall beyond the ten realms, for there is nothing outside the ten realms. Every arisen thought will become conditions

for future rebirth. If one has truly realised this principle, yet does not practice the Buddha-recitation, there exists no such person.” ( “以凡在有心，不能无念。以无念心体，唯佛独证。自等觉已还，皆悉有念。凡起一念，必落十界，更无有念出十界外。以十法界，更无外故。每起一念，为一受生之缘。果知此理而不念佛者，未之有也。” )

## **12. Master Yinguang: the Thirteenth Patriarch**

### **Master**

#### **(1) A Brief Introduction of Master Yinguang**

Master Yinguang (印光大师; 1861-1940CE), named Shengliang (圣量), also self-named “Constantly Remorseful and Shameful Monk” (常惭愧僧), with family name Zhao (赵), was from Heyang county (合阳) of Shanxi (陕西) province. At six-month old, he was stricken by eye-illness, almost leading to blindness. When he was young, he used to study Confucian teachings under the guidance of his brother, and wrote articles to criticise and malign Buddhism. Later he was afflicted by chronic disease for many years, which made him realise his previous mistakes.

At the age of 21, he converted to monastic under Monk Daochun (道纯和尚) at Lianhuadong Temple (莲华洞寺) in south Wutai, Zhongnan mountains. Subsequently, he went to dwell in Lianhua Temple (莲华寺) in Hubei, and was in charge of monastery receptions. Once, while he was drying the *Sūtras* under the sunshine, he found a copy of *Essays on the Pure Land by Longshu* (《龙舒净土文》). Having read the essays, he realised that if one were to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, Buddha-recitation is the primary path for emancipating birth-and-death, so he turned to cultivate Buddha-recitation practice exclusively.

In the next year, he received the complete monastic precepts under precept master Yinhaiding (印海定律师) in Shuangxi Temple (双溪寺) in Xing'an (兴安) county. Because he was good at calligraphy, all the documents and notes in the process of precept ordination ceremony were written by him. His eye illness reoccurred due to excessive weariness, inciting him to further realise that the form body was the source of suffering. He then wholeheartedly recited the Buddha-name at rest time; even while writing, his mind was not apart from the Buddha-name. At night when others fell asleep, he would get up to recite the Buddha-name in sitting position. When the precept ordination ceremony was

finished, he also recovered from the eye illness, entailing his profound faith in the inconceivable meritorious virtues of Buddha-recitation. Due to this experience, for the rest of his life, Master Yinguang either practiced the Pure Land method himself or edified others exclusively based on the Pure Land method.

At 26, Master Yinguang heard that Zifu Temple in Mount Hongluo was a site exclusively for cultivating the Pure Land gateway, so he left his master to visit it. He cultivated Buddha-recitation in the Buddha-recitation Hall, making significant progress in the Pure Land practice. While dwelling in Zifu Temple, he cultivated Buddha-recitation as the primary practice, studied Mahayana teachings, and profoundly explored the *Sūtra* Canon.

At 30, he went to Longquan Temple (龙泉寺) in Beijing, acting as the service monk during mealtime.

At 33, Master Yinguang accompanied Monk Huawen (化闻和尚) to transport the Chinese Buddhist Canon to Fayu Temple (法雨寺) in Mount Putuo (普陀山). On arrival, he dwelled in the Buddhist text library in solitude to diligently cultivate the Pure Land practice.

At 35, he went to pay homage to the Buddha's relics in the *Asoka* Temple for three months.

At 37, he once expounded *the Elementary Explication of the Essential Annotation of the Amitabha Sūtra* (《阿弥陀经要解便蒙钞》) at the request of the assembly. After that, he immediately returned to retreat cultivation for six years, resulting in great progress in the Pure Land practice. During his later years Master Yinguang frequently took retreat of several years to wholeheartedly cultivate Buddha-recitation. Although he had never overtly proclaimed that he had attained Buddha-remembrance-samadhi, he had definitely attained the stage, as divulged in his letters to Mister Gao Henian (高鹤年, 《复高鹤年居士书三》).

When he was young, Master Yinguang resolved to exclusively cultivate the Pure Land method to ensure rebirth in the Pure Land. He was also determined neither to take any abbot position nor to formally receive any disciples. Nevertheless, he enthusiastically undertook the promotion of Buddhist teachings and rescuing sentient beings through a unique way: writing letters to

his followers both monastic and laity in accordance with their capacities and inclinations. His letters influenced millions of people in China then, and are even more widely studied nowadays.

At 52 (1912CE), *Upāsaka* Gao Henian selected several articles to publish in the Shanghai Buddhist Paper. Later, *Upāsaka* Xu Weiru (徐蔚如) collected a few dozen letters of Master Yinguang which were written to his followers, and published them in a compiled book, named *Compilation of Dharma Master Yinguang's Articles* (《印光法师文钞》). Since then, *the Compilation of Master Yinguang's Articles* was extended several times, and published in Beijing, Shanghai and Yangzhou, etc. It was widely transmitted and welcomed, and influenced more and more people.

Through his teachings and practical demonstrations, Master Yinguang attracted an enormous multitude to turn to cultivate Pure Land practice to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land. He cultivated assiduously and ascetically all his life. He wore an old and ragged robe all the time, ate coarse and simple food every day, giving away the received new robes and delicious food to other monks. He personally took care of daily chores, never bothering his assistant. Although he received many offerings from his adherents all over China, he never spent one penny for himself, but he donated all the offerings to those in need or to subsidize the publication of Buddhist texts or his *Compilations of Articles*. Whenever required, he would donate money for relieving those suffering from disasters or tribulations, and he helped established several charity houses and schools for children, etc.

He established the Promotion and Edification Press, which printed and donated over five million Buddhist texts and one million Buddha images. He also personally edited and corrected numerous *Sūtras* and commentaries, codified *the Five Sūtras and One Treatise of the Pure Land*.

In 1930, he was invited to dwell in Baoguo Temple (报国寺) in Shanghai.

At 73 (1933), he established the Lingyanshan Temple (灵岩山寺) in Suzhou as an exclusive Pure Land cultivating site, but he still dwelled in Baoguo Temple.

In 1937, he moved to live in Lingyanshan Temple, because Shanghai was invaded and occupied by the Japanese army.

On 27 October 1940, Master Yinguang exhibited slight illness. He then gathered the assembly, saying, “The abbot position of Lingyanshan Temple cannot be vacant any longer; I recommend Dharma master Miaozhen (妙真法師) to take the position.” All the assembly agreed, and they planned to hold the enthronement ceremony on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November. Master Yinguang told them, “It is too late.” They then changed to the 4<sup>th</sup>, he still said it was too late. Until they selected the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, he nodded his head, “It is alright.” After that, they discussed about other issues for two hours as per normal.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November, Master Yinguang got up to cultivate as usual. He had a small bowl of gruel for dinner, then exhorted Monk Zhenda (真達和尚), “There is nothing peculiar about the Pure Land method. As long as one practises with sincerity and honesty, one will definitely be welcomed and escorted to achieve rebirth, taking one’s karmas with one.”

At 1:30 am on the 4<sup>th</sup>, Master Yinguang sat up, and asserted, “To recite the Buddha-name to see the Buddha, one definitely gets rebirth.” Having said that, he began to recite the Buddha-name loudly.

At 2:15 am, he washed his hands, stood up, and claimed, “Thanks to Amitabha Buddha. He is welcoming and escorting me, I am going. All of you should recite Buddha-name, should generate aspiration to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.” After these words, he sat on the chair, facing westward, and recited the Buddha-name wholeheartedly.

Around 3 am, Monk Miaozhen came. Master Yinguang then exhorted him to preside over the cultivating site, to promote the Pure Land practice, and not to emulate arrogant behaviour. He then stopped talking, silently reciting the Buddha-name.

At 5 am, Master Yinguang passed away peacefully with a smile, as if in meditative concentration and accompanied by the Buddha-recitations of the assembly. He was 80.

100 days later, he was cremated. More than one hundred variegated relic pearls, and a thousand small relic flowers were found. His teeth were intact, and his skull was cracked into five petals like a lotus flower.



Fig 5.13 Master Yinguang

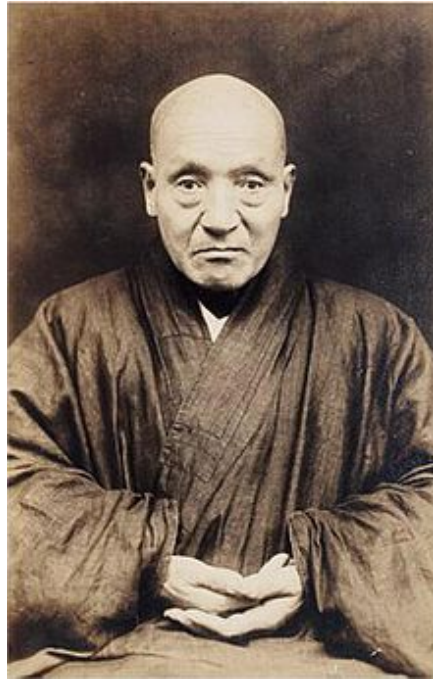


Fig 5.14 Master Yinguang's photo

(Courtesy to Wikipedia)

## (2) Legendary Manifestation of *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva

Master Yinguang remained humble and low-profile all his life, assiduously and exclusively cultivated the Buddha-recitation himself and encouraged others to practice the same. In his letters and articles, he used simple and direct language to expound the Pure Land doctrines and the law of cause and effect, never talking about supernatural or uncanny matters. He was, however, widely acknowledged as the manifestation of *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva, after Ms Yang Xinfang (杨信芳) divulged her extraordinary experience.

One year after Master Yinguang passed away, *the Collected Articles in Memory of Master Yinguang* (《印光大师永思集》) was published. It had an article by Ms Yang Xinfang, which is adopted here.

“When I was 18, I was studying in a girl school in Shanghai. I had a close friend, Miss Zhang Xiaojuan (张孝娟), who lived in Run'an street (润安里) of Ximen

road (西门路). Her mother Mrs Zhang especially loved me, treated me as her daughter and I also called her ‘mother’. After school, I often came and stayed at her home.

“On the night of 23 November 1936, I stayed in Miss Zhang’s home as usual, and slept on the same bed with Xiaojuan. After I fell asleep at midnight, I saw from afar *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva standing on a small island, which was surrounded by water, with the sky and water in one colour. *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva was ten feet tall, majestically adorned with necklaces, holding a pure bottle, just like the image in pictures. I was on a boat approaching the island. The Bodhisattva then waved at me and told me, ‘*Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva is edifying sentient beings in Shanghai now. Why are you so deluded as not to go to hear his teachings?’ I could not answer. The Bodhisattva told me again, “Monk Yinguang is the manifestation of *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva, and his conditions of edification will end in four years.

“He vanished after those words. Suddenly great waves surged up, almost capsizing the boat. I shouted, ‘help.’ Xiaojuan pushed me to wake up, asking, ‘Did you have a nightmare?’ I told her what I dreamed, and we smiled at each other.

“The next morning, I told Mrs Zhang about my dream, and asked her, ‘Is there a Bodhisattva named *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva? And is there a monk called Yinguang?’ Mrs Zhang was a devoted Buddhist believer, she exclaimed, ‘*Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva is a Bodhisattva of the Western World of Bliss. I once heard from Xiaojuan’s father that Monk Yinguang is an eminent monk with accomplishment in Mount Putuo.’ I further requested, “Is Monk Yinguang in Shanghai now?’ Mrs Zhang replied, ‘I don’t know.’

“I felt disappointed at the last answer. The next day, I read the Shenbao (《申报》) newspaper, saw an advertisement ‘the Announcement of a Dharma Congregation for Protecting the Country and Ceasing the Catastrophe in 1936’. We then realised that the elite people in Shanghai had invited Monk Yinguang to preside over the Dharma Congregation in Jueyuan (觉园). Such an extraordinary dream. The three of us were all astonished, so we all went to Jueyuan to attend the assembly, listening to Master Yinguang expounding the Dharma. After the congregation, all three of us took refuge in the Triple Jewels.



Master Yinguang gave me a Dharma name ‘Huifen’ (慧芬), Mrs Zhang, ‘Huifan’ (慧范), and Xiaojuan, ‘Huiying’ (慧英).

“I feel ashamed that because of grave obstructions, I have not practiced diligently. Now, I have a boy and a girl, idled away my time, and laxed in the Pure Land practice. Yesterday, I got a letter from a friend in Suzhou, telling me that Master Yinguang had passed away in Lingyanshan Temple. Alas, The Master has gone. His last four-year edification is consonant with my previous dream.

“I had a period of affinity with the Master as master and disciple, so I cannot help not to write something. With tears running, I wrote this incoherent article, sent to publish in *Awakening the Sentient Beings* (a half-month magazine) to express my condolence.”

Why did Ms Yang wait to reveal this information until Master Yinguang’s death? It is because Master Yinguang strictly warned her not to divulge the information in her dream to anyone, when she later consulted him about her dream. It is another demonstration that when Bodhisattvas manifest in the world to edify sentient beings, they will absolutely conceal their real identity. Therefore, if anyone in this world professes himself or herself being some saintly figure, it is definitely fake.

### **(3) Master Yinguang’s Thoughts on the Pure Land**

Throughout his life, Master Yinguang exclusively cultivated and advocated the Pure Land gateway. His thoughts on the Pure Land principle and instructions on its practice are expressed and expounded in his letters, treatises, prologues, epilogues, chronicles and other forms of articles. These articles have been compiled into *the Compilation of Dharma Master Yinguang’s Articles* (《印光法师文钞》), which was consecutively extended during his lifetime and shortly after his demise. The latest and complete version, *the Complete Compilation of Master Yinguang’s Articles* (《印光法师文钞全集》 [12]), with 1,620,000 Chinese characters, is truly a voluminous and comprehensive collection, an encyclopaedia of Buddhism, and a small Buddhist Canon. There are numerous books and lectures on Master Yinguang’s Pure Land thoughts. Here we can only adopt a few points to share with the readers.

#### **1) Designating the Pure Land as a Special Gateway**

Master Yinguang classified the Buddhist teachings and gateways into two categories: the general gateway and the special gateway. According to his classification, most of the teachings and all the cultivating methods expounded and instructed by Śākyamuni Buddha enable the sentient beings to cultivate precepts, concentration and wisdom so as to sever their greed, hatred and delusion. Only when they have exhausted their karmas and eliminated their afflictions can they emancipate from birth-and-death, and further attain the essence of real permanence. Nevertheless, these are all doctrines of general path, which depend entirely on self-power, so they are all difficult to accomplish, as difficult as climbing the clear sky. However, the Buddha had mercy and compassion towards sentient beings. He was clearly aware that at the evil period of the five types of turbidity, especially at the Dharma-ending age, the situation of weak Dharma and powerful demons deteriorates each day; their flaming lust, hatred, and delusion aggravate all the time. Hence to cultivate and study based on self-power is by no means easy. Therefore, the Buddha proposed a special gateway of Buddha-recitation with faith and aspiration. Depending on the grand power of Amitabha Buddha's compassionate vows, any person, whether acute or obtuse in capacity, slight or severe in affliction, can definitely be welcomed and escorted by the Buddha to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this life, as long as they practice the Buddha-recitation with faith and aspiration. After arriving in the Pure Land, he will automatically attain non-retrogression and swiftly accomplish the Buddha path in one lifetime.

Master Yinguang instructed, “*The Sūtra of Great Assembly* (大集经; *The Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra*) says that of millions of millions of people cultivating and practicing in the Dharma-ending age, there is rarely anyone attaining accomplishment; and that only by Buddha-recitation can one be rescued from birth-and-death. Therefore, the Buddha-recitation gateway is a cultivating path shared by both the saintly and the mundane, a universal practice method for the foolish and the intelligent. Its undertaking is easy, while its achievement is sublime; its effort is less, while its effect is swift. Since it particularly relies on the power of Buddha, its benefits are extraordinary, surpassing the other general path and teaching doctrines. The ancients said that to cultivate based on other methods was like ants climbing mountains, whereas to cultivate Buddha-recitation to achieve rebirth is similar to

travelling in a boat with tailwind and forward water flow. This is truly the best simile.” ( “大集经云，末法亿亿人修行，罕一得道，唯依念佛得度生死。是知念佛一法，乃上圣下凡共修之道，若愚若智通行之法。下手易而成功高，用力少而得效速。以其专仗佛力，故其利益殊胜，超越常途教道。昔人谓余门学道，似蚁子上于高山。念佛往生，如风帆扬于顺水，可谓最善形容者矣。” )

He further emphasised that since the Pure Land gateway is special, it cannot be commented based on the general teachings and tenets that instruct elimination of afflictions and attainment of the reality. The phenomenon of the Pure Land is of great causes and conditions; the noumenon of the Pure Land is esoteric repository. Because of its uniqueness, the Buddha categorised it as a method difficult to believe. Its practice is convenient and simple, yet its achievement is supreme and swift. It is perfect and sudden, direct and swift, extensive and grand, surpassing all the general teachings and doctrines. Hence without plentiful virtuous roots previously planted, one can hardly believe in it and cultivate according to it.

Master Yinguang repeatedly asserted that the Pure Land method universally benefits all three types of capacities (superior, medium and inferior), encompassing the acute and obtuse; saintly beings even up to the Dharma-body Bodhisattvas are not beyond its scope, while mundane beings lower to those who are to descend to the Avici hell are also embraced by it. On the other hand, the general gateways are different—the small method are not needed by those with superior capacities, while the great method cannot be cultivated by those with inferior capacities.

He also used analogies to describe the differences between the general gateways and the special gateway. For instance, practising cultivation based on the general teachings and methods is similar to pursuing official positions based on one's diligent study and qualifications; practising cultivation based on the special method is analogous to being born as a prince, who is respected by all ministers from his birth.

Master Yinguang's classification of the Buddhist teachings and gateways into general gateways and special gateway can be traced back to Master Ouyi's classification of vertical emancipation and horizontal emancipation gateways; further traced back to Master Shandao's classification of proper practice and mixed practice; Master Daochuo's classification of the sacred path and Pure

Land path; Master Tanluan's classification of "two paths and two efforts"; and finally to *Nāgārjuna* Bodhisattva's classification of the difficult path and easy path. It is evident that Master Yinguang's Pure Land thoughts are aligned with the previous patriarchs of Pure Land lineage.

## 2) Advocating the Law of Cause and Effect

Master Yinguang repeatedly emphasised the retributions of virtuous and evil karmas as well as the truth of transmigration of sentient beings in the six realms to edify the deluded beings at the Dharma-ending age. He also enthusiastically published books advocating virtuous conducts and *Sūtras* to promote the positive influence of Buddhist doctrines.

Master Yinguang expounded, "the noumenon of mundane and supramundane is not beyond the mind-nature; the phenomenon of worldly and transcendental is not apart from cause and effect. The noumenon of mind-nature is subtle, even saints cannot completely comprehend it; the phenomenon of cause and effect is obvious, even the foolish are able to be aware of it." ( "世出世间之理，不外心性二字；世出世间之事，不外因果二字。心性之理微，虽圣人犹有所不知；因果之事显，纵愚夫亦可以略晓。" )

"Even the most foolish people are definitely not fond of evil omen but detest auspices, are delighted in disasters and enjoy misfortunes. Hearing that by accumulating virtues one will definitely result in residual happiness, and by accruing evils one will surely induce residual catastrophe, the virtuous will assuredly cultivate more diligently, and the non-virtuous ones will try to conduct virtuous acts. Having tried long enough, their karmas are eliminated, and their wisdom is manifested; their transgressions are dissolved, and their wisdom is illuminous. The previous evil person is transformed into the present virtuous one." ( "人虽至愚，决无好凶恶吉，幸灾乐祸者。闻积善必有余庆，积不善必有余殃，贤者必益加勤修，不肖者亦必勉力为善。勉为既久，则业消而智朗，过无而德明。昔为不肖，今为大贤。" )

"Therefore, advocating the law of cause and effect is most easily inciting people to cease evil and to cultivate virtues. Based on the foundation of cause and effect, one who cultivates Buddha-recitation with faith and aspiration, will eventually attain Buddhahood and become a patriarch, to widely benefit

sentient beings. We can also achieve liberation from birth-and-death, and to transcend samsara. At the lowest level, we can be virtuous mundane people, and get rebirth in the happy realms. Hence, it is said, ‘The law of cause and effect is the great skilful means for saints to govern the world and for the Buddha to deliver sentient beings. On the perspective of Buddhist doctrines, from the mundane ground to the Buddhahood stage, all the dharmas are not beyond the law of cause and effect. On the perspective of mundane dharmas, why is it exceptionally not so?’” ( “由此可知，提倡因果最易激劝人们除恶修善。以因果为根，信愿念佛，终可成佛作祖，广利大众；也可了生脱死，超越轮回；再次之，亦可为世间善人，得生善道。故曰：‘因果者，圣人治天下，佛度众生之大权也。约佛法论，从凡夫地乃至佛果，所有诸法皆不出因果之外。约世法论，何独不然？’ ” )

According to Master Yinguang, if we do not advocate the law of cause and effect, or we even negate the law of cause and effect, not only does the Buddhist doctrines lose their bases, but the worldly virtues also depart from their foundation. He stressed, “If there is no cause and effect, no subsequent lives, Yao (尧) and Jie (桀) terminated altogether. Then who will diligently cultivate for seeking the vacant fame after this life? Because of the non-existence of a real self, what is the use of seeking vacant fame? Hence there is nothing to encourage virtues and nothing to punish evil.” ( “既无因果，无有后世，则尧桀同归於尽，谁肯孜孜修持以求身后之虚名乎？以实我已无，虚名何用？由兹善无以劝，恶无以惩。 ” )

\*Here Yao was the famous earliest moral and virtuous emperor and Jie was one of the most notorious tyrants in Chinese history.

### **3) Clarifying the Relationship between Chan and Pure Land**

Master Yinguang clarified the relationship between Chan meditation and the Pure Land cultivation in his comprehensive annotation of Master Yongming’s four types of categorizations (see section 5).

In order for us to precisely understand the relationship, he first gave unequivocal definitions of Chan and the Pure Land, as well as related terms. He defined Chan as the mind-nature, which is intrinsically endowed by all beings; “with Chan” is to reach awakening through diligently cultivating contemplative meditations. He defined the Pure Land as pursuit for rebirth in

the Pure Land by reciting the Buddha-name with faith and aspiration, not as the mind-only pure land or the self-nature Amitabha. By “with Pure Land”, he referred to one who genuinely generates the Bodhicitta, establishes sincere faith and earnest aspiration, adherently recites the name of Amitabha Buddha so as to pursue rebirth in the Western World of Bliss.

Pertaining to “with Pure Land”, he further clarified, “Suppose people recites the Buddha-name, but attaches to the mind-only Buddha, thus without faith or aspiration; or although having faith and aspiration, yet not sincere or earnest but superficial, hence their practices are perfunctory; or although their cultivations are vigorous, but their mind is attached to worldly affairs; or they seek rebirth in wealthy and noble families in the next life to enjoy the sensory desires; or to seek rebirth in celestial realm, to enjoy the heavenly blessings; or seek rebirth as a monk in the next life, attaining greatly awakened once hearing the Dharma and acquiring the great general upholding (*dhāraṇī* or *mantras*) , so as to promote the enlightenment path and widely benefit sentient beings. All the above mentioned cannot be called ‘with Pure Land’.” ( “倘念佛偏执唯心而无信愿；或有信愿而不真切，悠悠泛泛，敷衍故事；或行虽精进，心恋尘境；或求来生生富贵家，享五欲乐；或求生天，受天福乐；或求来生，出家为僧，一闻千悟，得大总持，宏扬法道，普利众生者，皆不得名为有净土矣。” )

In many letters, he instructed that Chan cultivation was inappropriate for contemporary Buddhist practitioners, divulging its difficulty in enabling ordinary cultivators to escape birth-and-death. He enumerated many real examples of some elite Chan cultivators, who succeeded in awakening, yet they could not escape transmigration. For they have not eradicated their afflictions of insight and cultivations yet, albeit they achieved awakening to the mind-nature. However, his disparagement of the Chan practice, especially by practitioners at home, was not from parochial discrimination, but entirely for the purpose of rescuing and delivering sentient beings mired in samsara. Moreover, his conducts actually protected the Chan school by dissuading unqualified cultivators from blindly practicing Chan. Furthermore, if one cultivates the Buddha-recitation up to single-mindedness without distraction, one can automatically realise awakening, hence it is non-dual between Chan and the Pure Land in noumenon aspect.

#### 4) Emphasising Following Ethics and Fulfilling Obligations, Severing Evil and Remaining Sincere

Master Yinguang always encouraged people to cultivate Pure Land method at home. He stressed that they should follow moral standards, and advocated following ethics and fulfilling one's obligations, severing evil and remaining sincere. He also promoted the eight Confucian virtues--filial piety, fraternity, loyalty, honesty, courtesy, justice, integrity, and shame—to transform the people to become simple and lenient. On such foundation, he then enthusiastically promulgated the Pure Land practice, and expounded Buddhist teachings, so as to enable people to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.

In a letter to *upāsaka* Jin Yiping, he wrote, “If you want to take refuge in the Buddha Dharma, to escape birth-and-death and to transcend the mundane world and to enter the saintly realm, you must fulfil ethical obligations. Suppose you are unable to follow ethics and to fulfil your obligations, to sever evils and to remain sincere, to be free from evil conducts and to perform all virtuous acts, then you will lack the foundation and do not conform with Buddha. How can you expect the Buddha to kindly welcome and escort you, with all your karmas, to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land? By fulfilling worldly obligations, one is a worldly worthy and virtuous person. It is easier for the worthy and virtuous people to recite the Buddha-name to induce Buddha's response. Hence to emancipate from birth-and-death, one cannot neglect social morals and ethics.” ( “欲皈依佛法，了生脱死，超凡入圣，必须要克尽伦常之道。倘不能敦伦尽分，闲邪存诚，诸恶莫作，众善奉行，则根本欠缺，与佛相应，何由蒙佛垂慈接引，令其带业往生也。……尽其职分，即为世间贤人善人。贤善之人念佛，则易于感佛。欲了生死，不可不注意伦常也。《复金益平居士书二》 )

Master Yinguang wrote in another letter to an *upāsaka* from Ningbo, “Born into this world, people cannot do nothing, but they should fulfil their obligations, without craving anything beyond their obligations. Whether engaged in public affairs, or agriculture, or industry, or commerce, one should perform his or her responsibilities as the basis to sustain one's body and one's family. One should also persistently recite the Buddha-name, pursuant to one's circumstance and effort, to resolve to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land.” ( “人生世间，不可无所作为，但自尽谊尽分，决不予谊分之外，有所覬觐 (jìyú) ,

士农工商，各务其业，以为养身养家之本，随分随力，执持名号，决志往生。”  
《复宁波某居士书》)

It is evident that Master Yinguang absolutely refuted those who take cultivating the Buddha-recitation as an excuse to ignore or forsake their worldly obligations. According to his preach, not only are they not contradictory, but fulfilling one's mundane obligations and cultivating Buddha-recitation for rebirth in the Pure Land empower each other.

Based on Master Chewu's sixteen-character aphorism, Master Yinguang added another sixteen characters: "Following ethics and fulfilling obligations, severing evils and remaining sincere, not committing evil conducts, and performing all virtuous acts." ( "敦伦尽分，闲邪存诚，诸恶莫作，众善奉行。" ) He emphasised that if people want to cultivate Buddhism to escape birth-and-death, yet neglect these four phrases, they are not even qualified as an upright human, not to mention to attain Buddhahood.

For the practice of Pure Land gateway, he repeatedly stressed the fundamental principles: "Truly for birth-and death, generate Bodhicitta, with sincere faith and earnest aspiration, recite the Buddha-name." ( "真为生死，发菩提心，以深信愿，持佛名号。" ) Combined with the previous four phrases, these eight phrases are the sufficient provisions of the Pure Land practice. If one cultivates in accordance with these eight phrases, one will be ensured to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this life.

### **5) Encouraging Cultivation at Home**

Master Yinguang did not encourage people to renounce home to practice Buddhism. On the one hand, it is quite convenient for anyone to learn Buddhist teachings and to cultivate Buddhism in modern times. The present is unlike olden times, when one could only access Buddhist teachings and cultivate Buddhism by following masters in the monasteries. This is especially true for the Pure Land gateway. Regardless of whatever career or status, it does not prevent one from learning principles from the widely available Pure Land literature and to cultivate Buddha-recitation. Since the government of Qing dynasty abolished the qualification certificate for monastic personnel, it was impossible to judge and select qualified people to join the monastic, thus degrading the general monastic standard. Therefore, Master Yinguang



encouraged people to stay at home to cultivate the Pure Land gateway to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land, and dissuade those who did not genuinely join the monastic for the cultivation of Buddha path.

Of course, for those who have sincerely generated Bodhicitta, and want to join the monastic purely for the purpose of propagating the Dharma and benefiting sentient beings, Master Yinguang praised and encouraged them to renounce household life. It would be better if there are more of these kinds of people. Nevertheless, for some unqualified people, he criticized, “Some people may have some slight faith, but without great will and determination. They want to rely on the name of monastic so as to enjoy leisure or to waste their lives depending on the Buddha. Though named as sons of the Buddha, they are merely people without hair. Even if they do not commit any evil conducts, they have already become the futile seeds of the Dharma and the useless people of the country. If they violate the precepts or commit transgressions, they will induce insults for Buddhism. Even if they may escape punishment from the law, they will definitely descend to hells. It is not beneficial to both the Dharma and to themselves. Of such kind of people, one is more than enough, not to mention more.” ( “若或稍有信心，无大志向。欲藉为僧之名，游手好闲，赖佛偷生。名为佛子，实是髡民。即令不造恶业，已是法之败种，国之废人。倘或破戒造业，貽辱佛教。纵令生逃国法，决定死堕地狱。于法于己，两无所益。如是则一尚不可，何况众多。” )

Master Yinguang praised those who renounce household life to have the behaviour of great husbands. He clearly stated the standard for becoming a member of the monastic: “For those who pursue monastic life in the future, the first condition is genuinely generating the great Bodhicitta for benefiting oneself and others; and the second is possessing extraordinary talent. Fulfilling these two conditions, one can be shaved, otherwise, one cannot be.” ( “以后求出家者，第一要真发自利利他之大菩提心，第二要有过人天资，方可薙落。否则不可。 《复泰顺谢融脱居士书二》 )

## **6) Instructions on Buddha-Recitation by Gathering the Mind**

For novice practitioners of the Buddha-recitation, many feel frustrated by the difficulties in concentrating the mind. Even after practicing for quite a long time, some people still find their mind being scattered or distracted while they

are reciting the Buddha-name. To counteract this weakness, Master Yinguang bestowed instructions from both the mentality and methodology aspects.

First, we must have a sincere and earnest attitude while cultivating Buddhism. He enjoined, “I often say that if people want to gain real benefit from Buddhist Dharma, they should beseech it with sincerity and veneration. With one part of sincerity and veneration, they dissolve one part of transgression, and obtain one part of benefit; with ten parts of sincerity and veneration, they eliminate ten parts of evil karmas, accumulate ten parts of benefit. Without sincerity and veneration, although they may plant some remote cause, their transgression from disrespect and irreverence is unimaginable.” ( “吾常谓欲得佛法实益，须向恭敬中求。有一分恭敬，则灭一分罪业，增一分福慧。有十分恭敬，则灭十分罪业，增十分福慧。若全无恭敬，虽种远因，其褻慢之罪，有不堪设想者。” )

Second, Master instructed on how to counteract distraction while reciting the Buddha-name by attentively listening to each utterance clearly. In a letter to Gao Shaolin, he wrote, “No better method in gathering the mind than sincerity and earnestness. If one is insincere, it is impossible to gather the mind. If you have a sincere mind yet still cannot concentrate the mind single-mindedly, you should use your ear to listen attentively. Whether you recite loudly or silently, you should ensure the recitation is from your mind, the sound is uttered from your mouth, and voice enters your ears. Your mind and mouth recite each utterance clearly and distinctively, then your ear hears them clearly and distinctively. If you gather your mind as such, your scattered thoughts will cease automatically.” ( “摄心之法，莫先于至诚恳切。心不至诚，欲摄莫由。既至诚已，犹未纯一，当摄耳谛听。无论出声默念，皆须念从心起，声从口出，音从耳入。心口念得清清楚楚，耳根听得清清楚楚，如是摄心，妄念自息矣。《复高邵麟书》 ” )

He also instructed us, “While reciting the Buddha-name, the mind (mental faculty) must recite each utterance clearly and distinctively, the mouth (tongue faculty) must utter each sound clearly and distinctively, the ear (ear faculty) must listen to each voice clearly and distinctively. With the mental, tongue and ear faculties all gathered on the Buddha-name, then one’s eyes will not look around, one’s nose will not smell other odours, one’s body will

not turn to indolence and slacken. This is called gathering the six faculties.” ( “念佛时，心中（意根）要念得清清楚楚，口中（舌根）要念得清清楚楚，耳中（耳根）要听得清清楚楚。意、舌、耳、三根，一一摄于佛号，则眼也不会东张西望，鼻也不会嗅别种气味，身也不会懒惰懈怠，名为都摄六根。” )

Third, even when we have employed the above methods, and still cannot control the scattered or distractive mind, what will we do? Master Yinguang gave a simple yet effective method—the ten-recitation counting method, to tackle this problem. “The so called ten-recitation counting method is that one counts from one to ten while reciting the Buddha-name. The recitation should be uttered clearly and distinctively, and the number of recitations should be remembered clearly and distinctively. When the ten recitations are completed, the counting should be reset to restart from one to ten. It cannot be lasted to 20 or 30 utterances. Following each recitation, you entirely count it in the mind, do not finger rosary for counting. If you find it difficult to count up to ten at one time, you can part them into two segments—from one to five, and from six to ten. If you still find it difficult, then you can separate them into three segments—from one to three, from four to six, and then from seven to ten. The recitation is clear, the counting is clear, and the hearing is clear, so that the distracted thoughts have nowhere to stand. Single-mindedness without distraction will automatically be attained after long time practice.” ( “所谓十念记数者，当念佛时，从一句至十句，须念得分明，仍须记得分明。至十句已，又须从一句至十句念，不可二十三十。随念随记，不可掐珠，唯凭心记。若十句直记为难，或分为两气，则从一至五，从六至十。若又费力，当从一至三，从四至六，从七至十，作三气念。念得清楚，记得清楚，听得清楚，妄念无处著脚，一心不乱，久当自得耳。” )

Fourth, we adopt a paragraph from a letter to *upāsaka* Ye Fubei to share his comprehensive instructions on Buddha-recitation practice, “Whether being laity or monastic, we must respect the superior and be gentle to the inferior. We should endure the unendurable, perform the conducts too difficult for others; replace others’ toils, fulfil others’ wishes. We should constantly ponder on our own faults while sitting in solitude, and never talk about other’s misbehaviour while chattering. From morning to evening and from evening to morning, whether we are walking, or standing, or sitting, or reclining, or putting on clothes, or eating meals, we should keep reciting the Buddha-name

without interruption. We can either recite in low voice or recite silently, but we should not give rise to any other thoughts except Buddha-recitation. Whenever any deluded thought arises, it should be vanquished immediately. We should constantly generate thoughts of shame and regret, as well as thoughts of repentance and remorse. Even if we have performed some cultivation, we should always feel that our practice is not enough, never boasting with conceit. We should only manage ourselves, not regulate others; we should only look at others' good aspects, not the bad aspects; we should consider all others being Bodhisattvas, only ourselves being real mundane beings. If you can behave as I said, you will definitely achieve rebirth in the Western Land of Bliss.” ( “无论在家在庵，必须敬上和下。忍人所不能忍，行人所不能行。代人之劳，成人之美。静坐常思己过，闲谈不论人非。行住坐卧，穿衣吃饭，从朝至暮，从暮至朝，一句佛号，不令间断。或小声念，或默念，除念佛外，不起别念。若或妄念一起，当下就要教他消灭。常生惭愧心，及生忏悔心。纵有修持，总觉我工夫很浅，不自矜夸。只管自家，不管人家。只看好样子，不看坏样子。看一切人皆是菩萨，唯我一人实是凡夫。汝果能依我所说而行，决定可生西方极乐世界。” 《复叶福备居士书一》 )

### **7) Exhortation on Supportive Buddha-Recitation at the Verge of Death**

According to the eighteenth vow of Amitabha Buddha, all sentient beings are ensured to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, as long as they have sincere faith and earnest aspiration, with as few as ten recitations of the Buddha-name at the end of life. Furthermore, from *the Contemplation Sūtra*, evil people who committed various unwholesome conducts, even the five heinous acts, can still get rebirth in the Pure Land at the three lower grades of the inferior ranks. The conditions are that they have some virtuous learned friends instructing them on the meritorious virtues of the Pure Land and encourage them to recite the Buddha name wholeheartedly on the verge of their death. And having heard what they are told, they immediately generate sincere faith and unwavering aspiration due to the fear and will of escaping from descending to hell, so they recite the Buddha-name with all their effort.

Therefore, it is of great significance for anyone to learn the Pure Land gateway from some virtuous learned friend, even at the end of one's life. The last minute preach may completely transform one from transmigration into a saint- to-be in

the Pure Land. Even if we have learned and cultivated the Buddha-recitation practice for many years, most of us still need Dharma friends to assist us by supportive recitation at the end of our lives. This is because the situation on the verge of death is much more complicated than normal time. First, various seeds in the *alaya* consciousness will vie to project our next rebirth, thus grave karmas will interfere. Second, our mind is not as strong as when we are healthy and vigorous, so it is vulnerable to distractions. Hence the encouragement and the supportive recitation at deathbed is truly indispensable for most of us.

Master Yinguang inculcated to us the importance of encouragement and supportive recitation at deathbed, and he bestowed upon us concrete instructions on how to perform these conducts. He wrote, “When people are dying, the four great elements (the earth, water, fire and wind) are disintegrating, various torments all congregate. If they have not attained samadhi for a long time, it is truly not easy to manage. It is even worse that some kins are not aware of the detriment, they often destroy the dying person’s proper mind by some worldly affairs. If dying practitioners obtain supportive instructions, they will generate the aspiration of cherishing and detestation, cease the greedy craving and passion, with their ears hearing the Buddha-name and their mind attached to the Buddha-land. They will spontaneously induce Buddha’s response, and achieve rebirth in the West under the welcome and escort of the Pure Land assembly. It is similar to a weak and timid person climbing a high mountain. With someone dragging in front and pushing from behind, and some other people supporting and protecting on both sides, the person will surely not stop halfway. Suppose someone has never heard of Buddhist teachings before. The person gets some instructions from some virtuous learned friends on the verge of death, so as to generate faith, and to recite with voice or to recite silently in the mind, following others’ supportive recitation. With such supportive recitation, free from issues that destroy the proper mind, one can also get rebirth. For the Buddha’s power is inconceivable, the power of the Dharma (Buddha-name) is inconceivable, and the power of sentient being’s mind is inconceivable, hence one can obtain such extraordinary benefits. I wish that those who are either sons or grandsons, or various kins, or parents of others, all should be aware of this significance, all should perform in accordance with this. Only as such can they be called genuinely benevolent, filial, intimate and love.” ( “临命终时，四大分张，众苦毕集。若非三昧久证，诚恐不易得力。况眷属不谙利害，往往以世

情而破坏彼之正念。… 盖以行人当此时节，得人开导而辅助之，则欣厌心生，贪爱情息，耳闻佛名，心缘佛境。自可与佛感应道交，蒙佛接引往生西方。譬如怯弱之人，欲登高山，前有牵者，后有推者，左右有扶掖将护者，自不至半途而废耳。即使平素不闻佛法之人，临终蒙善知识开导，令生信心。又为助念佛号，令彼随大众音声，或出声念，或心中默念。果能如法助念，无一切破坏正念等事，亦可往生。以佛力不可思议，法力不可思议，众生心力不可思议，故得此殊胜利益也。愿为人子孙与诸眷属及父母等，同知此义，同依此行，方可名为真慈孝亲爱也已。（《新编全本印光法师文钞》卷二十一第 1813 页 饬终津梁提要）

In a letter to *upāsaka* Huang Hanzhi (黄涵之), Master Yinguang instructed in detail the supportive recitation for Hanzhi's mother, who was 83 years old and was not feeling well. He enjoined her female family members such as daughters, daughters-in-law and granddaughters to perform supportive recitation in shifts of half-hour. Each group took turns to recite the Buddha-name in front of the elder lady without interruption. Whether the elder lady recited by following their supportive recitation or just listened to their voice, the Buddha-name would occupy her mind. This conduct would benefit both the elder lady and all the female members of the family.

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## Chapter 6 Cultivations of the Pure Land Method

*What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for getting rebirth in the Pure Land?*

*How to confirm the sincerity of our faith?*

*How to establish and strengthen our faith?*

*How to verify the earnestness of our aspiration? How to enhance our aspiration?*

*What are the effective practices of the Pure Land gateway?*

*How to practice every day to guarantee our successful rebirth?*

The previous chapters introduced the fundamental principles and the basic practices of the Pure Land method, as well as its patriarch masters and its development in China. If you have reached here, we rejoice wholeheartedly on your progress, virtuous roots and patience. You must have comprehended the basic doctrines of the Pure Land method, have started your practice based on your conditions and preferred method. This chapter will briefly review and summarise the primary practices of the Pure Land gateway, to help genuine practitioners effectively cultivate to ensure rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this life.

### I. THE CONDITIONS TO ACHIEVE REBIRTH

From Chapters 2, 3 and 4, we have clearly comprehended that the conditions to get rebirth in the Pure Land are the three provisions: faith, aspiration and practice. There are almost no differing opinions on considering these three provisions as conditions. Nevertheless, there exist various annotations and elucidations of these provisions by different Dharma masters based on their own understanding. When



hearing different explanations, how do we judge and follow the right one? The criterion is very simple and unequivocal.

① Always follow the *Sūtras* first, because they are the words of the Buddha.

② Follow the annotations or explications of Bodhisattvas, such as *Aśvaghōṣa* Bodhisattva and *Nāgārjuna* Bodhisattva.

③ Follow the annotations and explanations of the patriarch masters of the Pure Land school.

Any other expressions or descriptions which are contradictory with the above three sources are not correct, and thus should be ignored.

The following will summarise the conditions for successful rebirth in the Pure Land.

## **1. The Conditions Prescribed in the Three Pure Land *Sūtras***

### **(1) The Conditions Enumerated in the Forty-Eight Great Vows in the *Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan***

In his Forty-Eight Vows, Amitabha Buddha enumerated three types of conditions for sentient beings with different capacities and inclinations to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. They are given in the three vows: the eighteenth, the nineteenth and the twentieth vows respectively.

#### **1) The Eighteenth Vow: Vow of All Achieving Rebirth in My Land with Ten Recitations (十念皆生我国愿)**

**“When I attain Buddhahood, if sentient beings in the lands of the ten directions who have utmost sincere mind of faith and delight, desire to be born in my land, and recite my name even ten times (or even with ten mindful thoughts), should not be born there, I would not attain perfect Enlightenment. Excluded, however, are those who committed the five heinous acts and malign the right Dharma.”**

## **2) The Nineteenth Vow: Vow of My Receiving and Escorting All with Diligent Cultivation (勤修我皆接引愿)**

**“When I attain Buddhahood, if sentient beings of lands in the ten directions, activated the Bodhicitta, and cultivated various meritorious virtues, and desire to be born in my land with utmost sincere aspiration, at their death, should they not see me appearing before them surrounded by a great assembly, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.”**

## **3) The Twentieth Vow: Vow of Assured Rebirth with Mindfulness (系念必得往生愿)**

**“When I attain Buddhahood, if sentient beings in the lands of the ten directions who, having heard my name, keep mindful of my land, plant various virtuous roots, and sincerely dedicate their merits towards my land with a desire to be born there, should not eventually fulfil their aspiration, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.”**

### **(2) The Conditions Proposed by *the Amitabha Sūtra***

*The Amitabha Sūtra* first introduces various meritorious environmental and life retributions of the Pure Land to motivate sentient beings to generate faith. To enhance and consolidate faith, the transmission part of the *Sūtra* enumerated numerous Buddhas in the six directions to verify what *Śākyamuni* Buddha expounded in the *Sūtra*. Then it encourages beings to establish aspiration to get rebirth in the Pure Land to achieve non-retrogressions and to swiftly attain Buddhahood in one lifetime. Finally, it singles out Buddha-name recitation as the practice needed for achieving rebirth in the Pure Land.

**“*Śāriputra*, one cannot achieve birth in that land with the causal conditions of few virtuous roots and a meagre store of blessed merits. *Śāriputra*, if, there are virtuous men and virtuous women, who, having heard of Amitabha Buddha, single-mindedly uphold and recite his name without being distracted for one day, two days, three days, four**

**days, five days, six days, or seven days, as their life approaches end, Amitabha Buddha, together with a saintly multitude, will appear before them. When these people die, with their minds not being inverted, they will instantly be reborn in Amitabha Buddha's Land of Ultimate Bliss."**

### **(3) The Conditions Introduced in *the Contemplation Sūtra***

As introduced in Chapter 3, *the Contemplation Sūtra* concretely and comprehensively enumerates all the conditions of getting rebirth in the Pure Land. They include conditions pertaining to faith and aspiration in the form of three types of minds, and various practices. The practices are generally categorised into two types: concentrated practices—the thirteen contemplations or visualizations, and the distracted practices—the three pure conducts and the Buddha-recitation. This chapter will only discuss the distracted practices.

#### **1) The Three Types of Minds**

The three types of minds denote faith and aspiration, corresponding to both concentrated practice and distracted practices, albeit they are listed in the rebirth of upper grade in the superior rank.

**"First, an utmost sincere mind; second, a profound (faithful) mind; and third, a mind which aspires for rebirth by transferring merit. Those with these three types of minds will definitely be reborn in that land."**

#### **2) The Three Pure Conducts**

The practitioners of these pure conducts will achieve rebirth in the three grades of superior rank and the three grades of medium rank, as introduced in Chapter 3.

**"Those who wish to be born in that land should cultivate the three merits. First, they should filially support their parents, serve and respect their teachers and elders, cultivate compassion and not kill sentient beings, and undertake the ten wholesome conducts. Second, they should take and uphold the Three Refuges, and fully observe the**

precepts without violating dignity of conduct. Third, they should activate Bodhicitta, profoundly believe in the law of cause and effect, read and recite *Mahāyāna sūtras*, and persuade others to practise. These three types of activities are called the pure conducts (karmas)."

### 3) The Buddha-Recitation

In the *Contemplation Sūtra*, Buddha-recitation is introduced as the practice for those who commit evil conducts all their lives. The last-minute Buddha-recitation will rescue them from descending to hell and achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. Here, we excerpt a paragraph from the rebirth of the upper grade in the inferior rank to demonstrate it.

"Those to be born of upper grade in the inferior rank: There may be beings who have committed myriad evil conducts. Although they have never maligned the *Vaipulya Sūtras*, these foolish people have repeatedly conducted evil deeds with no sense of shame or remorse. When such a person's life is ending, he (she) encounters a virtuous learned friend who will pronounce the titles of *Mahāyāna Sūtras* in the twelve divisions. By hearing the titles of such *Sūtras*, his gravest evil karmas of 1,000 *kalpas* will be eliminated. The wise friend will also teach him (her) to join his (her) palms and to recite 'Namo Amitabha Buddha.' By reciting Amitabha Buddha's name, his (her) evil karmas entailing 50 *koṭi kalpas* of birth-and-death will all be eradicated.

"Thereupon, that Buddha will immediately send manifested Buddhas and manifested Bodhisattvas *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahasthamaprabhata* to come before this person, praising, "Good man, your evil karmas are eliminated because you recite the name of the Buddha. I have come to welcome you." After these words have been said, the person immediately sees the radiance of manifested Buddhas filling his or her room entirely. Having beheld this scene, he (she) is delighted and then passes away.

"Riding a jewelled lotus flower, and following the manifested Buddhas, he gets reborn in a jewelled lake. After forty-nine days, the

lotus flower will open. When the flower unfolds, the great compassionate *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva, and *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva, emit immense radiance, standing before the reborn one, expound the profound *Sūtras* of the twelve divisions. Upon hearing these teachings, with faith and comprehension, he activates the unsurpassed Bodhicitta. After ten small *kalpas*, he will realise the clear door of the one hundred dharmas, attaining the first ground.”

## **2. Summary of the Conditions Based on the Pure Land *Sūtras***

From the discussions in the previous chapters and the above summary, the conditions to get rebirth in the Pure Land can be classified into two categories: the absolute necessary conditions and the alternative necessary conditions.

### **(1) The Absolutely Necessary Conditions**

Although the three Pure Land *Sūtras* enumerated different conditions for rebirth pursuant to the difference in sentient beings’ capacities and circumstances, there are two absolutely necessary conditions: faith and aspiration. Master Ouyi’s comment was, “Whether one can achieve rebirth or not entirely depends on whether one has faith and aspiration or not.” Without these two conditions, one cannot get rebirth in the Pure Land regardless of whatever practices one performs and how diligent one cultivates. With sincere faith and earnest aspiration, even with as few as ten recitations or even one recitation of the Buddha-name at the end of one’s life, one can still achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.

Furthermore, if we have established sincere faith and aspiration, we will definitely cultivate the Pure Land practice diligently. We will either recite the Buddha-name wholeheartedly every day or actively participate in various virtuous conducts and dedicate the merits purely as provisions for rebirth. Thus, faith and aspiration are also the foundation of enthusiastic practice.

### **(2) The Alternative Necessary Conditions**

The alternative necessary conditions are those that can be selected to practice based on the practitioner's capacity and conditions. They can either exclusively cultivate one type of practice or perform two or all the practices and then dedicate the merits to the Pure Land as the provisions. But they have to cultivate at least one type of practice, to demonstrate they have faith and aspiration otherwise they cannot get rebirth in the Pure Land. All the following alternative conditions are performed based on sincere faith and earnest aspiration.

### 1) Buddha-Name Recitation

The Buddha-name recitation is the most common practice for rebirth in the Pure Land, and is highly recommended in all three Pure Land *Sūtras*.

① The eighteenth vow unambiguously points out **“recite my name even ten times, should not be born there, I would not attain Perfect Enlightenment”**. It signifies the minimum practice required for rebirth. These ten recitations of the Buddha-name refer to those performed on the verge of death, not daily practice. However, it singles out that **“Excluded, however, are those who committed the five heinous acts and malign the right Dharma.”** Therefore, the eighteenth vow pertains to those ordinary people who have neither committed the five heinous conducts nor maligned the right Dharmas, especially Mahayana teachings. In conclusion, as long as we have faith and aspiration, and recite the Buddha-name wholeheartedly, at the end of our life, we can get rebirth in the Pure Land.

② *The Amitabha Sūtra* proposes **“single-mindedly uphold and recite his name without distraction for one day, two days, three days, four days, five days, six days, or seven days”**. This is referring to normal cultivation objective. That is, having established sincere faith and earnest aspiration, if we can cultivate the Buddha-recitation up to the status of single-mindedness without distraction, we will absolutely be guaranteed to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. It is the highest standard for Buddha-recitation cultivation.

According to Master Ouyi's annotation, one can achieve rebirth in the saintly lands of the Pure Land, if one can attain single-mindedness

without distraction at phenomenon level or noumenon level (see Chapter 5). Master Ouyi also encouraged that even if we practise Buddha-recitation with a distracted mind, we can still get rebirth in the land shared by mundane and saintly beings, as long as we have faith and aspiration.

③ *The Contemplation Sūtra* enumerated three types of vicious people who get rebirth in the Pure Land of the three grades in the inferior rank based on Buddha-recitation at the end of their lives. Whether they have committed various heinous conducts or violated precepts without any shame or remorse, they still can get rebirth as long as they wholehearted recite the Buddha name with sincere faith and earnest aspiration at the end of their lives.

In conclusion, the Buddha-recitation with sincere faith and earnest aspiration is the most effective practice. It is the practice commonly proposed in all the three Pure Land *Sūtras*. It is also the method universally cultivated and repeatedly emphasised by all our patriarch masters.

As Master Ouyi inculcated, “Among all the skilful means, if one wants to select the utmost direct and swift, and the ultimate perfect and sudden, there is no other gateway than mindfulness of the Buddha to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land. Furthermore, among all the gateways of the mindfulness of the Buddha, if one wants to choose the extreme simple and easy, and the most stable and assured method, there is no other method than exclusively reciting the Buddha-name with faith and aspiration.”

Both Master Chewu and Master Yinguang stressed the four phrases of Pure Land cultivation, “Truly for birth-and death, generate Bodhicitta; with sincere faith and earnest aspiration, recite the Buddha-name.”

## 2) The Three Pure Conducts

① If we can diligently study the Mahayana teachings, comprehend the ultimate truth, generate Bodhicitta, edify and encourage others to practice, and cultivate various virtuous conducts, we will achieve rebirth

of the three grades in the superior rank. These are conducts of the Mahayana practice.

② If we can receive and observe the precepts without violation for the rest of our lives, we will achieve rebirth of the upper grade in the medium rank. If we can receive and observe any precept perfectly for one day and one night, we will achieve rebirth of the middle grade in the medium rank. This is the practice of observing precepts.

③ If we can follow social moral ethics, filially support our parents, respect our teachers and the elders, perform generous conducts, we will achieve rebirth of the lower grade in the medium rank. This is the practice of ethical conducts.

The conditions proposed in the nineteenth and the twentieth vows can be included in the above three pure conducts.

It should be noted that to get rebirth by performing the pure conducts, one must dedicate all the merits to the Pure Land as the provision. Moreover, it will be much more effective and we are ensured to get rebirth if the practitioners of the three pure conducts can concurrently undertake the Buddha-recitation practice.

### **3. The Exclusive Cultivation and the Perfect Cultivation of the Pure Land Gateway**

From the above discussion, it is clear that of cultivations of the Pure Land gateway, the two absolute conditions—faith and aspiration—are universal for all practitioners. But the practice provisions can be diversely cultivated. They can be classified into two categories: the exclusive cultivation and the perfect cultivation. The exclusive cultivation denotes exclusively reciting the Buddha-name with faith and aspiration, without participating in any other virtuous acts. Perfect cultivation indicates that one cultivates other virtuous conducts in addition to reciting the Buddha-name, on the basis of faith and aspiration. The perfect cultivations are derived from the nineteenth vow of Amitabha Buddha or the three pure conducts of the *Contemplation Sūtra*. Regardless of whether we follow the exclusive cultivation or the perfect



cultivation, our patriarch masters inculcate us to perform Buddha-name recitation as the foundation.

The great masters from ancient times emphasised exclusive cultivation or the perfect cultivations based on their preference. For instance, Master Shandao and Master Yinguang particularly lauded the exclusive Buddha-recitation, while Master Yongming etc. encouraged the perfect cultivation. However, although Master Yinguang repeatedly exhorted his followers to cultivate the Buddha-recitation, he also advocated the perfect cultivation, as reflected in the eight phrases: “Follow ethics and fulfil obligations, sever evils and remain sincere; do not commit evil conducts, perform all virtuous acts. Truly for birth-and death, generate Bodhicitta; and with sincere faith and earnest aspiration, recite the Buddha-name.”

Whether to follow the exclusive cultivation or perfect cultivation is totally dependent on the capacity, inclination and conditions of the practitioner. There is no differentiation in which type of cultivation is superior or inferior. Master Yinguang instructed, “Whether expensive or cheap, the medicine that cures illness is better; there is no superior or inferior Dharma, those that are compatible with the capacity are wondrous.” ( “药无贵贱，愈病者良；法无优劣，契机则妙。”)

For instance, some people are inherently simple and have planted abundant virtuous roots in their past lives. Once they hear the Pure Land method and Amitabha Buddha, they immediately establish sincere faith and earnest aspiration. Furthermore, they have unwavering belief that they can get rebirth in the Pure Land by merely reciting the Buddha-name wholeheartedly. In addition, they generate enormous Dharma joy in reciting the Buddha-name, so they extremely enjoy Buddha-name recitation. Maybe they do not comprehend the meaning of the name of Amitabha Buddha on the perspective of noumenon, but they will surely get rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this life. There are many cases of this type in *the Records of Saints and Sages of the Pure Land* [1].

There is another group of people, especially the intellectuals, who prefer the perfect cultivations. Due to their knowledge from years of education,

they habitually tend to explore the meaning and principle before they establish belief. For these people, it is better to learn the Pure Land *Sūtras* or the commentaries given by Dharma masters so as to get a penetrating comprehension of the Pure Land tenets and principles. Through these studies, they establish profound faith and earnest aspiration in the Pure Land. At the same time, they cultivate the Buddha-recitation or perform other virtuous conducts, dedicating all the merits as the provisions for rebirth in the Pure Land.

It is similar to careers in worldly affairs. There are some people who have not attained higher education due to various reasons. Nevertheless, they learn and master a skill in some area by following a master or through self-education and practice. Based on whether extraordinary talents in arts or some technical skills, they can still build a good career, even become a master in an area, and respected by others. Some other people undertake formal education from undergraduate to postgraduate, then start their work, and gradually develop a successful career. Both kinds of people can make great achievements in their area of choice. We cannot judge or evaluate them based on their different paths. The different choice of path is entirely subject to their capacities or other conditions. If the first group is forced to attend university studies, they may find it hard to even graduate. Likewise, the second group may end up being mediocre if they drop out of their formal education.

Moreover, the classification of the two groups of cultivators is based on their major practices. There exists no absolute demarcation between the exclusive cultivators and the perfect cultivators. Those who are inclined to follow the perfect cultivation usually also spend quite some time in Buddha-recitation. Similarly, those who enjoy the exclusive cultivation also participate in learning the Buddhist teachings, especially in reciting the Pure Land *Sūtras*, and other virtuous activities under proper circumstances. Like Master Yinguang who inculcated us to cultivate the Buddha-recitation exclusively, but he wrote letters and articles to edify people, participated in all sorts of activities for relieving others from tribulation etc.

It should be noted that perfect cultivation is not mixed cultivation. Although perfect cultivators may activate Bodhicitta, undertake various virtuous activities for the benefit of sentient beings, they dedicate all their merits to the Pure Land as their provision. Their objective is to exclusively pursue rebirth in the Pure Land. The mixed cultivators are different. They may cultivate the Pure Land practices for some time under some circumstances, then they turn to cultivate Chan meditation or esoteric tantras on hearing about their advantages. Even if they follow the Pure Land gateway, they undertake any practice randomly and perfunctorily, with their mind wandering about over worldly affairs.

## II. FAITH IS THE FOUNDATION

The three provisions of faith, aspiration and practice are the necessary and sufficient conditions for rebirth in the Pure Land. That is, as long as we fulfil these three conditions, we are ensured to achieve rebirth at the end of this life. Otherwise, if any of the three conditions is inadequate, then we cannot be guaranteed to get rebirth. Of the three conditions, faith is the primary foundation. Only if we have established sincere faith in Amitabha Buddha and the Pure Land, can we generate earnest aspiration and undertake diligent cultivations. On the contrary, if any one does not believe in Amitabha Buddha or the meritorious virtues of the Pure Land, it is impossible for one to establish earnest aspiration. Without faith and aspiration, no one will put into practice for the purpose of rebirth. Therefore, to cultivate the Pure Land gateway, we must first build up sincere faith.

### 1. The Contents of Faith

Our patriarch masters have elucidated faith to its extreme. Master Shandao proposed two types of profound faith, and Master Ouyi extended to six aspects of faith. Having learned these, the reader must have comprehended the essence and characteristics of faith. Here we will schematically review faith on the perspective of its definition. According to Consciousness-Only teachings, faith is defined as **“the profound acceptance of and delight inclination to the real existence,**

**virtues and capacity.”** (于实德能深忍乐欲。)[2] Thus, faith encompasses three aspects: faith in real existence, faith in virtues and faith in capacity. We will explicate them pertaining to the Pure Land gateway.

### **(1) Faith in Real Existence**

For a Pure Land practitioner, faith in real existence includes the following real facts:

- ① Believe that *Śākyamuni* Buddha is a truth teller, so what he expounded on Amitabha Buddha, and the meritorious virtues and adornments of the Pure Land are real and not false.
- ② Believe that the Buddhas in the six directions are truth tellers, so what they verified about the truthfulness of the Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha are real and not false.
- ③ Believe that what are introduced in the three Pure Land *Sūtras* about the great compassionate Amitabha Buddha are real and not false.
- ④ Believe that the Forty-Eight Great Vows made by Amitabha Buddha in his causal ground are real and not false, and that all the vows had been fulfilled and become facts ten *kalpas* ago.
- ⑤ Believe that the Pure Land accomplished by Amitabha Buddha through accumulating inconceivable meritorious virtues in countless *kalpas* is real and not false.
- ⑥ Believe that transmigration in *samsara* being endless and that suffering being unendurable are real and not false.
- ⑦ Believe what were exposed in the two profound faith by Master Shandao and the six aspects of faith by Master Ouyi are real and not false.

### **(2) Faith in Virtues**

For a Pure Land practitioner, faith in virtues encompasses the following aspects:

① Definitely believe that the meritorious virtues of the Pure Land pertaining to peaceful happiness are real and not false:

- i) believing that all the adornment of the environmental retributions of the Pure Land are real and not false;
- ii) believing that the human and celestial beings in the Pure Land are all endowed with the appearance of a great man;
- iii) believing that the human and celestial beings in the Pure Land are all automatically endowed with the five types of transcendental powers;
- iv) believing that there exist no woeful realms in the Pure Land, even without the names and expressions of the woeful realms;
- v) believing that the lifespan of the human and celestial beings in the Pure Land is eternal;
- vi) believing in the enjoyment of spontaneous food, celestial music and spectacular sights, etc.

② Definitely believe that the meritorious virtues of the Pure Land pertaining to emancipation are real and not false:

- i) believing that all human and celestial beings in the Pure Land are completely liberated from transmigrations;
- ii) believing that all beings in the Pure Land are free from attachment of self.

③ Definitely believe that the meritorious virtue of the Pure Land pertaining to the accomplishment of the Buddha Path are real and not false:

- i) believing that we will spontaneously abide in the right concentration assembly, attain the three types of non-retrogressions and achieve the stage of Bodhisattva to attain Buddhahood in one-lifetime, as long as we get rebirth in the Pure Land;
- ii) believing that we will dwell together with the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, such as *Avalokiteśvara* Bodhisattva and *Mahasthamaprapta* Bodhisattva, once we achieve rebirth in the Pure Land;

- iii) believing that all the inanimate matters and the various birds are transformed by Amitabha Buddha, expounding Dharmas all day, hence human and celestial beings automatically give rise to mindfulness of the Buddha, the Dharma and the *Sangha*;
  - iv) believing in all empowerments bestowed by Amitabha Buddha to the Bodhisattvas in the Pure Land.
- ④ Definitely believe that the sufferings in the *Saha* world are unendurable and real:
- i) definitely believing that it is almost impossible to escape revolving in *samsara* if we do not get rebirth in the Pure Land;
  - ii) definitely believing in the law of cause and effect, thus we will descend to the woeful realms to endure the unbearable torments most of the lifetimes according to our behaviour;
  - iii) definitely believing in the extreme anguish of the woeful realms, the eight sufferings of human beings, and the three levels of sufferings of all beings.

### **(3) Faith in Capacity**

For a Pure Land practitioner, faith in capacity consists of the following aspects:

- ① Definitely believe that as long as we fulfil the three provisions—faith, aspiration and practice, Amitabha Buddha will surely come to welcome and escort us to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this life.
- ② Definitely believe that the necessary and sufficient conditions to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land are faith, aspiration and practice, and no other conditions.

## **2. How to Verify our Faith**

Although faith belongs to the domain of thoughts or mentation, it can be verified whether sincere and solid or not.

### **(1) Verified by Attestation from Other Attractions**

If we entirely believe in the above mentioned three aspects of faith without the slightest doubt and suspicion, unable to be moved, our faith is sincere and unwavering. Master Shandao enumerated four hierarchically attestations based on different persuasions. Not only can mundane people not sway our faith in the Pure Land, but the saints such as Arhats, Bodhisattvas, even Buddhas cannot change our determination to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land. Master Chewu added that even *Śākyamuni* Buddha himself telling us other superior method cannot vary our faith and resolution in the Pure Land gateway.

It should be noted that Master Shandao and Master Chewu did not propose these attestations as pure hypotheses. Many Pure Land practitioners, in reality, do get affected by Dharma masters of other schools, such as Chan, Esoteric or the Humanistic Buddhism, or even swayed by other heretical practitioners or other religions.

## **(2) Verified by Aspiration and Practice**

Sincere faith can be attested by our aspiration and practice. If we truly believe in all the three aspects of faith pertaining to the Pure Land, we will definitely generate earnest aspiration to pursuit rebirth in the Pure Land. Furthermore, we will try our best to find time and opportunity to recite the Buddha-name; we will also try to transform our attention from worldly affairs to the provisions of rebirth in the Pure Land; we will perform virtuous conducts and dedicate the merits to the Pure Land. Otherwise, if we are still attached to the worldly affairs, indulged in sensuous enjoyments, preoccupied with seeking wealth and fame etc., instead of diligently cultivating the Pure Land practices, we cannot say that our aspiration is earnest. The fundamental cause for the lack of earnest aspiration is inadequacy of sincere faith.

## **3. How to Establish Sincere Faith**

To be honest, it is truly not easy for human beings to establish solid faith in something. It is much more difficult for us to generate sincere faith in the Pure Land. Even *Śākyamuni* Buddha himself sighed at the difficulty in expounding this hard to believe gateway to sentient beings in this turbid time. Doubt is one of the five fundamental afflictions of sentient

beings. It is also an inherent affliction. Hence it is extremely difficult for us to believe wholeheartedly in something we have never personally seen or experienced.

However, human beings have a distinctive advantage—a powerful sixth consciousness, in study, contemplation and comprehension. In addition, we tend to accept and believe something told to us by prestigious people, or someone we trust, or by authorities. For example, during childhood we tend to believe what our parents tell us and what our teachers teach us.

Actually, most knowledge of contemporary people are learned indirectly from our parents, teachers and other media such as books, TVs or internet, instead of from personal empirical process. We believe in what we have learned, although we have never personally experienced or experimented them. For instance, we have been seeing the sun rising from the east every morning and setting to the west every evening. We have also been perceiving our ground being flat, expanding endlessly in the four directions, due to our limited eyesight. However, our teachers and textbooks tell us that our ground is in fact a globe orbiting around the sun. We believe in it, regardless of the fact that it is against our intuitive perception. We even believe in the evolution hypothesis that human beings are evolved from monkeys, from our textbook. Most of us have never been to Antarctica, but we believe in its existence from our geographic textbooks. Our lifespan is less than one hundred years, thus almost none of us lived more than one hundred years ago, not to mention thousands of years ago. Yet we believe in what happened in history, because our history textbooks contain the information. We believe in the eminent historical figures such as emperors, heroes, or philosophers etc., and the notorious figures, and their stories that occurred hundreds or thousands of years ago.

Another characteristic of our thoughts is that they can be casted by repeated instructions. For instance, we may not believe in something we hear for the first time, but we tend to slightly believe it if told again by others, and we will believe it without doubt if told repeatedly by others, especially by different people.



Therefore, if we want to establish sincere and solid faith, we have to repeatedly learn about the three aspects of faith pertaining to Pure Land. We should repeatedly and attentively read the Pure Land *Sūtras*, and the annotations or commentaries by our patriarch masters. We should also read explanatory books or listen to lectures given by contemporary Dharma masters of the Pure Land school. It is of extreme significance for us to repeatedly read *the Record of the Saints and Sages of the Pure Land*, to help us consolidate our faith in the Pure Land gateway.

It is equally important for us to avoid reading controversial teachings or doctrines either from Dharma masters of other schools or heretical religions, before our adamant faith has been established. Our mind is very vulnerable to different disturbances. Being so extraordinary and beyond our common perceptions and conceptions, the Pure Land doctrines require us to believe them out of respect and devotion initially. The challenges from other Buddhist schools or other religions or modern science concepts can damage our respect and devotion towards Pure Land doctrines, thus impeding the establishment of our faith.

While we study Pure Land teachings, we should ponder on the profound meanings and try to contemplate the various meritorious virtues of the Pure Land and the benefits we can directly obtain as long as we achieve rebirth there. We should repeatedly study the Forty-Eight Great Vows of Amitabha Buddha and the descriptions of the Pure Land from *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* and *the Contemplation Sūtra*. Imprint those wondrous images in our mind. The repeated contemplation will make us gradually become familiar with the supreme environment and the unsurpassed companions of the Pure Land. Familiarity enhances belief. Read the real cases of various successfully reborn ones from *the Record of Saints and Sages of the Pure Land* or from other resources. Try to visualise their achievements and emulate their practices. They are human like us; if they can succeed in attaining rebirth in the Pure Land, why not us?

Moreover, Pure Land practitioners should try to stop or limit their discussions about worldly affairs or frivolous chatters, but rather exchange ideas and comprehensions about Pure Land teachings and

practices. Since our mind can only process one thought at any moment, if our mind is preoccupied with Pure Land teachings and practices, it cannot be scattered by other thoughts. Conversely, if our mind is indulged in worldly affairs or other frivolous chatters, it cannot concentrate on Pure Land teachings. The persistent and uninterrupted adherence to Pure Land doctrines, will gradually purify our mind, and definitely strengthen our faith. It is similar to a tank of defiled water with only one input pipe. If the pipe is used to constantly instil pure water, defiled water has no way to get in. Gradually, the defilement of the water in the tank will decrease. On the contrary, if the pipe is occupied with instilling defiled water, pure water has no way to get in, thus aggravating the defilement.

Some people can establish sincere and unwavering faith as soon as they hear about the Pure Land and Amitabha Buddha, like a long-lost child suddenly finding his/her mother. This happens because of profound virtuous roots implanted in their previous lives. There do exist some people like them, but not common. For most of us, the effective way to establish and consolidate our faith in the Pure Land is to repeatedly perfume our mind with the fragrance of Pure Land teachings and practices.

### III. ASPIRATION IS THE KERNEL

Of the three provisions of the Pure Land method, faith is the foundation, aspiration is the kernel and pivot, and practice is the power or fuel. Having established sincere faith, we will definitely generate earnest aspiration; with aspiration, we will wholeheartedly undertake practice. Aspiration possesses two aspects: to detest and escape the *Saha* world, and to cherish and pursue rebirth in the Pure Land. Once aspiration is formed, we will turn our concentration from seeking various enjoyment of the five desires into the pursuit for rebirth. Thus, our purpose for generating aspiration is to cultivate how to enhance our yearning for rebirth in the Pure Land and how to grow our detestation of and desire to escape the *Saha* world.

## **1. How to Generate and Enhance the Aspiration for Cherishing and Pursuing Rebirth in the Pure Land**

The generation and enhancement of cherishing and pursuing rebirth in the Pure Land can only be obtained through continuous study of Pure Land teachings. We have never been there, thus we cannot establish the cherishing and pursuit through empirical enjoyment. Through constant study and contemplation of the environmental advantages and the excellent saintly companions in the Pure Land, we will gradually transform the impressions of the Pure Land from unfamiliar to familiar, then from familiar to yearning.

It is our nature to stay at where we are familiar. We are hesitant or reluctant, even fearful to move to anywhere that we are unfamiliar with. For instance, before planning to immigrate to another country to work and live, we tend to spend much time and effort to study every important aspect of that target country. Even when planning to move to a new city or area to work, study or live for a long period, we still spend quite some time to evaluate that new city or place concerning its natural or social environment.

Furthermore, people are inherently inclined to seek safety and pleasure, and to evade danger and suffering. People's aspiration is built on desires; desires are often generated from comparison between the current situation and expected situation. The Buddhist cultivators' aspirations may vary from seeking human and celestial pleasures to the attainment of ultimate enlightenment. Nevertheless, the Pure Land gateway can benefit and attract everyone. Thus, we should initially contemplate the benefits and advantages of the Pure Land pursuant to our personal capacities and inclinations.

① For those who have strong inclination in seeking peaceful happiness in future lives, they can summarise and enumerate the various benefits of the Pure Land concerning peaceful happiness and contemplate on them frequently.

- ② For those who are fond of self-emancipation, they can list out and contemplate the purified advantages of the Pure Land.
- ③ For those who have generated Bodhicitta and resolved to attain Buddhahood, they can catalogue and contemplate the unsurpassed conditions provided in Pure Land for swiftly attaining Buddhahood in one lifetime.
- ④ Even for those who have committed grave transgression in this life and fear to descend to the woeful realms in the next life, they can contemplate that the Pure Land does not have woeful realms.

For beginners of the Pure Land practice, regardless of our inclinations and capacities, we should first list out the attractions of the Pure Land which most appeal to us. Recite and review them every day to completely comprehend their meanings. Our initial aspiration for pursuing rebirth in the Pure Land will then be generated. This is the crucial step.

Once we have established the initial aspiration for achieving rebirth in the Pure Land, it will motivate us to spend more time and effort to study the Pure Land more profoundly and thoroughly. We should repeatedly study the contents of the Forty-Eight Vows, *the Amitabha Sūtra* or *the Contemplation Sūtra* at least once every month. We should also review the benefits of the Pure Land every month to consolidate and improve our aspiration. To save time, one can even read the contents of this book periodically to refresh one's comprehension and the impression of the advantages of the Pure Land. With progress in our comprehension of the Pure Land, our aspiration will be reinforced and constantly upgraded towards ultimately accomplishing the Buddha Path. During this process, we can expand our study of the Pure Land teachings to comprehend the profound principles of the Pure Land both on the perspective of phenomenon and noumenon. By such extensive study, not only can we enhance our aspiration, but we can strengthen our faith in the Pure Land gateway as well.

## **2. How to Generate and Cultivate the Detestation of and Desire to Escape the *Saha* World**

For most Pure Land practitioners, through learning the Pure Land *Sūtras* and commentaries, or through cultivations according to the methods introduced above, they can generate earnest aspiration to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land. Otherwise, they truly lack virtuous roots. Based on the aspiration to get rebirth in the Pure Land, they usually undertake some practices such as Buddha-recitation or performing some other virtuous activities. However, some Pure Land practitioners cannot succeed in achieving rebirth at the end of their lives, regardless of their faith, aspiration and practice. The primary cause for their failure in getting rebirth is the hindrance resulting from their entanglement in the *Saha* world. They are still tenaciously attached to some matters in this world, just like a boat cannot depart its quay if it is anchored or tightly tied to a post. This section will introduce some methods to help us to generate and strengthen our detestation of and the desire to escape the *Saha* world.

### **(1) Problems Faced by Lay Pure Land Practitioners**

In reality, most Pure Land practitioners only access Pure Land teachings and begin practice at middle or old age. They usually learn and cultivate at home, which leads to two difficulties: The first is that they cannot dedicate all their time and effort in the learning and practice of the Pure Land method. They have to spend most of their time and effort in worldly affairs, either out of their indulgence in sensuous enjoyments or due to obligations they needed to fulfil. Most of them can only spare a small amount of precious time and effort for the study and cultivation of Buddha-recitation. The second is that they have all fostered some tenacious habits which are hard to destroy and established some nets of relationships which are difficult to break.

Regarding this phenomenon, Master Hanshan (憨山大师) inculcated to us, “The gateway of Buddha-recitation to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land is to solve the grave problem of birth-and-death. Thus, it is called Buddha-recitation to terminate birth-and-death. Contemporary people aspire to emancipate from birth-and-death, so they perform Buddha-

recitation. Although all say that Buddha-recitation can solve the problem of birth-and-death, if we do not know the roots of birth-and-death, then where do we turn to for solution? If the mind of Buddha-recitation cannot eradicate the roots of birth-and-death, how can we terminate birth-and-death? What are the roots of birth-and-death? The ancients say, 'if the karma is not grave, one will not be born in the *Saha* world; if affection is not eradicated, one will not achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.' Therefore, it should be known that the root of affection is the root of birth-and-death. Various sentient beings endure sufferings of birth-and-death all because of the faults of affection and desire. (念佛求生净土一门，元是要了生死大事，故云念佛了生死。今人发心，因要了生死，方才肯念佛。只说念佛可以了生死，若不知生死根株，毕竟向何处了？若念佛的心，断不得生死根株，如何了得生死？如何是生死根株？古人云：“业不重不生娑婆，爱不断不生净土。”是知爱根乃生死之根株，以一切众生，受生死之苦，皆爱欲之过也。)

“If we explore this root of affection, it is not originated from this life, not generated from one, two, three or four lives, but it has existed from time immemorial. Since there was birth-and-death, we have been abandoning bodies and born in bodies life after life. It is all because of affection and desire, that we have been transmigrating until today. Through retrospection of the past, when have we had any single moment in our mind free from this root of affection? The seeds of such root of affection have been accumulated for innumerable *kalpas*, hence our birth-and-death is endless. (推此爱根，不是今生有的，也不是一二三四生有的，乃自从无始最初，有生死以来，生生世世，舍身受身，皆是爱欲流转，直至今日。翻思从前，何曾有一念暂时离此爱根耶？如此爱根种子，积劫深厚，故生死无穷。)

“Today we start to resolve to recite the Buddha-name, looking at space to aspire to achieve rebirth in the West. If we do not even know the expression that affection is the root of birth-and-death, when do we have one moment of thought apart from it? Since we are not aware of the root of birth-and-death, while we are reciting the Buddha-name, our root of birth-and-death is also growing spontaneously. Such

Buddha-recitation and birth-and-death are irrelevant to each other. If we recite in this way, even reciting till the end of our life, once the root of affection of birth-and-death appears in front of us, we will realise the ineffectiveness of our recitation. We then blame that Buddha-recitation is futile, but it is too late to regret. (今日方才发心念佛，只望空求生西方，连爱是生死之根的名字也不知。何曾有一念断着。既不知生死之根，则念佛一边念，生死根只听长，如此念佛，与生死两不相关。这等任你如何念，念到临命终时，只见生死爱根现前，那时方知念佛不得力，却怨念佛无灵验，悔之迟矣。)

“Therefore, I advise that all practitioners of Buddha-recitation should first know affection being the root of birth-and-death. While reciting the Buddha-name, each frame of mind should lead to eradicating this root of affection. When we cultivate Buddha-recitation at home, suppose on seeing our sons and daughters, grandchildren, family possessions and wealth, we find none of them that we do not cherish. Then none of the matters or no time moment is apart from birth-and-death, just like one completely sunken in a fire pit. (故劝今念佛的人，先要知爱是生死根本，而今念佛，念念要断这爱根。即日用现前，在家念佛，眼中见的儿女子孙，家缘财产，无一件不是爱的，则无一事无一念，不是生死活计，如全身在火坑中一般。)

“We are not aware that while we are reciting the Buddha-name, the root of affection in our mind never departs even for one moment. We do not realise that while we are reciting the Buddha-name, we only blame the insincerity of our recitation, yet we do not know that affection is the master, and the Buddha-recitation is only superficial. In such a way, while the Buddha-name is recited, yet the affection is growing concurrently. Once the affection for our children manifests in front of us, if we reflect on this Buddha-recitation, can it subjugate this affection? Can it eradicate this affection? If it cannot eradicate this affection, how can it terminate birth-and-death? Because the affection has been with us for numerous lives, it is habitual and familiar; our Buddha-recitation is developed recently, so it is unfamiliar and insincere, hence it is not effective.” (不知正念佛时，心中爱根，未曾一念

放下，不知正念佛时，只说念不切，不知爱是主宰，念佛是皮面，如此佛只听念，爱只听长。且如儿女之情现前时，回光看看这一声佛，果然敌得这爱么？果然断得这爱么？若断不得这爱，如何了得生死？以爱缘多生习熟，念佛才发心，甚生疏，又不切实，因此不得力。)

According to Buddhist doctrines, whether we commit evil conducts or cultivate Pure Land practices, the mind is the master. Hence all our patriarch masters emphasised that while reciting the Buddha-name, the recitation must come from our mind. Our mind must concentrate on each recitation, rather than wandering about over worldly affairs. Of course, most of us cannot guarantee to concentrate our mind on the Buddha-name while reciting, especially for new practitioners. However, we should try to subjugate the scattering or distracted mind by constantly contemplating the state of the mind. Once we find the mind straying from the Buddha-name, we should stop the wandering thoughts, and return the mind to the recitation of the Buddha-name. After a period of cultivation, the effect will manifest, demonstrating increased attentive recitation with lesser scattering thoughts or distractions.

Generally speaking, the usual random or sporadic scattering of the mind while practicing Buddha-recitation will not constitute definite impediment for rebirth in the Pure Land. However, if there exist some tenacious deluded attachments while we are cultivating Buddha-recitation, they will jeopardise our rebirth later. Thus, they should be subjugated or terminated using some specific contemplation techniques. For instance, if some resentment always arises and keeps vexing us while we are reciting the Buddha-name, we have to stop the Buddha-recitation temporarily, to dissolve this resentment by contemplating the law of cause and effect, or great compassion etc. If our mind harbours some obstinate affection or passion for somebody, or craving for and attachment to someone or something, we should also stop the recitation to subdue this distracting affection by contemplating the law of cause and effect, or impermanence of dharmas.

While practicing Buddha-recitation, we cannot neglect these strong and persistent affections, such that when we recite the Buddha-name in our mouth, yet our mind is attached to something else. Not only are the



recitations ineffective, but reciting in such a way will gradually form a bad habit. This bad habit has homogeneous flux power, which will be detrimental for our rebirth at the end of our life, for it is difficult for us to establish right mindfulness then. In fact, this kind of perfunctory recitation reflects the insincerity of our faith and aspiration.

Master Hanshan continued, “If we have no sovereignty over this affection at present, we are surely unable to control it at the end of our life. Consequently, I exhort all Buddha-recitation practitioners that it is primary to be sincere for the awareness of birth-and-death, be sincere for the eradication of birth-and-death. We should eradicate the root of birth-and-death at each and every thought-moment, then each and every thought-moment is the time of ceasing birth-and-death. Why should we wait to the 30<sup>th</sup> of December (the end of our life) to eradicate it? It will be too late! It is said that all the present matters are matters of birth-and-death, so we should terminate and evacuate birth-and-death at the present. Suppose we are sincere in each thought-moment, like drawing blood with each cut. Cultivating our mind as such, if we cannot emancipate from birth-and-death, the Buddhas descend to be liars. Hence, whether monastic or laity, as long as one is aware of birth-and-death, it is the time to liberate from birth-and-death. Is there any other wondrous method?” (若目前爱境主张不得，则临命终时毕竟主张不得。故劝念佛人，第一要知为生死心切，要断生死心切，要在生死根株上，念念斩断，则念念是了生死之时也。何必待到腊月三十日，方才了得？晚之晚矣！所谓目前都是生死事，目前了得生死空，如此念念真切，刀刀见血，这般用心，若不出生死，则诸佛堕妄语矣。故在家出家，但知生死心，便是出生死的时节也，岂更别有妙法哉？)

Almost all middle-aged or old lay practitioners who cultivate the Pure Land method, whether male or female, wealthy or destitute, healthy or unhealthy, have experienced the vicissitude of life. Which one of us is not fraught with various entanglement in our mind? Having been frustrated by inherent greed, hatred, delusion, arrogance and doubt, our afflictions deteriorate dramatically out of the proliferation of various exaggerating information on TV or internet. The aggravating

discrimination and passion continue inflaming contemporary people day and night, making them unable to remain composed even for a moment.

Suppose there are some lay Pure Land practitioners, who can maintain their mind calmly like water. They can focus their mind on the study of the Buddhist doctrines or Buddha-recitation wholeheartedly without distraction for most of the time. It should be noted that such people must have implanted profound virtuous roots in their previous lives by concentrative cultivations. Most of us are not so fortunate.

Every day, before we fall asleep, each of us should reflect on how much time we have spent on the study of Pure Land teachings or on Buddha-recitation practices or other virtuous conducts; how much time we have wasted on other worldly chores and sensual indulgence? To be specific, how much time and effort have we squandered on working, eating, drinking tea or coffee, chattering, shopping, watching TV, searching website, reading books for pleasure, or doing physical exercises, etc.? Suppose we merely spend a short period of time for the cultivation of Buddhism, and most of the time we are engrossed in other worldly affairs. Do we truly believe that our cultivation in a short while can surpass the long-time afflicted conducts? Not to mention that we had been completely indulged in seeking gratification of sensuous desires before we started to cultivate Pure Land practice. Even after we have established faith and aspiration to pursue rebirth in the Pure Land, we still spend most of our time and effort in worldly affairs, constantly aggravating our attachments to the *Saha* world. Do we truly aspire to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this life? It is evident that our mouth is saying aspiring to get rebirth in the Pure Land, yet our mind and body are still tightly fastened to the post of the *Saha* world. This entanglement will be the real hindrance for our rebirth in the Pure Land. It is really fortuitous if someone with such ostensible aspiration achieves rebirth in the Pure Land. Genuine Pure Land practitioners cannot bet on such luck.

## **(2) How to Generate and Cultivate the Detestation of and Desire to Escape the *Saha* World**

### **1) The Conditions Affecting Rebirth**

From the introduction in Chapter 2 of volume I, we have learned the fundamental principles of rebirth by projecting karma and mental power on the verge of one's death. The two powers—the karmic power and the mental power interact with each other. For those who have committed grave or heinous conducts in their lifetime, the evil karmas usually mature first to generate the projecting karma to drive the perpetrators directly to hell. Conversely, for those who have perfectly performed the ten virtuous conducts, and strictly observed the precepts, the virtuous karmas will mature first to generate the projecting karma to lead the virtuous ones to ascend to heavens. During this process, the mental power has strong influence in the maturity of karmas. A determined mind at the deathbed has pivotal significance in fostering wholesome or unwholesome karmas to ripen, especially for those who have done neither grave evil conducts nor extraordinary virtuous conducts. Recollection of the evil activities tends to provoke evil karmas to ripen; recollection and mindfulness of the virtuous conducts will incite the maturity of virtuous karmas.

For Pure Land practitioners, in addition to the karmic power from Buddha-recitation and various virtuous conducts, and the mental power of the practitioner, there exists an inconceivable third power--the empowerment from Amitabha Buddha. But the effect of the power of Amitabha Buddha needs to be activated by sincere faith, earnest aspiration and practice, especially the resolute aspiration at the end of life. Some eminent Pure Land practitioners, such as our patriarch masters, have accomplished their Pure Land karma, so that they will spontaneously achieve rebirth in the Pure Land whenever their lives end. Nevertheless, for most Pure Land practitioners, whether they can succeed in getting rebirth in the Pure Land or not is the result of combined operational effect of karmic powers and their mental power manifested at the end of their lives.

We can use a scale as a simile to describe the situation of dying process in determining whether one remains in *samsara* or gets rebirth in the Pure Land. On each side of the scale, let us put two weights—the karmic power and the mental power. On the side of transmigration, the weight of karmic power represents all wholesome and unwholesome karmas

accumulated from time immemorial. These karmas will form the projecting karma when ripening at the end of one's life. The weight of mental power encompasses all the afflictions of greed, hatred and delusion, especially the thoughts attached to mundane existence and worldly passions. On the side of Pure Land power, the weight of Pure Land karmic power represents all the accumulated Pure Land practices such as Buddha-recitation and all the dedicated virtuous conducts as provisions from beginningless time. The weight of the mental power denotes sincere faith in the Pure Land and the determined yearning for rebirth in the Pure Land, and the detestation of and the desire to escape the *Saha* world. The weight of the mental power on the verge of death is crucial.

At the end of our lives, if the combined weights of transmigration powers are heavier than those of Pure Land powers, we will remain revolving in the cyclic lives. Otherwise, if the combined weights of the Pure Land powers are heavier than those of the transmigration powers, we will achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. From the experience of our present life, we can judge by ourselves that the weight of the karmic power is almost certain to be much heavier than the weight of Pure Land karmic power. Therefore, the transforming and determinant factor for achieving rebirth lies in the weight of mental power at the end of one's life.

Our patriarch masters have repeatedly elucidated to us on the principle of the inconceivable weight of our mental power generated from determined and earnest aspiration for rebirth. Many real cases from *the Records of Saints and Sages of the Pure Land* and current practice have also demonstrated it. The consolidation of the unwavering aspiration for getting rebirth in the Pure Land is mainly derived from frequent perfuming by repeatedly contemplating the suffering nature of the *Saha* world and the meritorious virtues of the Pure Land. The Pure Land practice of Buddha-recitation and other virtuous conducts also enhance earnest aspiration. These practices conform with the vows of Amitabha Buddha; they are also congruous with our Buddha-nature.

Consequently, to increase the weight of combined Pure Land powers, we should endeavour in cultivating both the Pure Land karmic powers and our mental powers.

① We should attentively study the Pure Land *Sūtras* and commentaries, contemplate the advantages and benefits of the Pure Land. We should specifically contemplate those factors which appeal to us. At the same time, we should repeatedly contemplate the sufferings and impermanence of this world, in accordance with our particular conditions and circumstances.

② We should try our best in Buddha-recitation practice; receiving and observing precepts, even better if we can receive and observe Bodhisattva precepts; and doing all the virtuous acts, and avoid committing any unvirtuous acts.

## **2) How to Generate and Cultivate the Detestation of and Desire to Escape the *Saha* World**

For most people failing to get rebirth in the Pure Land, the critical reason is not without aspiration for rebirth, but being unable to let go of the *saha* world. It is even sadder that they are unaware of their adherence to the *saha* world, because they are used to it, and have lived with it. Although they intentionally aspire to get rebirth in the Pure Land, they aspire to get there later, not in the near future, not now. Even when some Pure Land practitioners witness Amitabha Buddha coming to welcome them, they are still not prepared to go with him delightedly, but rather want to stay longer to finish their unfulfilled worldly affairs. The following will elaborate on how to cultivate to let go of this miserable world in different aspects.

### **i) Contemplating imminent death**

We are all aware of the fact that we are mortal, and that we are going to die someday. We also know that there is nothing we can take with us when we die. Yet we are still attached to worldly matters and affections tenaciously, as if we can possess them forever. Master Yinguang inculcated to us that if we can stick the word “death” on our forehead,

contemplating it frequently, none of us will not establish the earnest aspiration for rebirth in the Pure Land. In fact, as soon as we are born, we are like a prisoner with death sentence, approaching death execution every year, every day, every hour, and every minute. Although we all feel the approaching of death, especially for the middle-aged and old people, yet we seldom realistically ponder about it. Most people even avoid talking about it. Having witnessed the death of our friends, relatives, or even family members, we think of death striking only them. It is still far away from us. By neglecting or ignoring the imminence of death, we indulge ourselves in seeking sensuous pleasures, wealth, fame or powers etc. Death has been fooling us since time immemorial only because of its uncertainty in time. We mistake this uncertainty as if it is eternal, so forgetting it completely in our daily life.

There is a well-known story, which is enlightening. One old man died and was led to the underground court to see Yama, the legendary judge. He complained to Yama, “I still have many issues unfinished in the world. Why have you not informed me earlier before suddenly taking me here?” Yama asserted, “I have sent you three letters a long time ago. How can you complain that I have not informed you?” The old man asked, “Really? Why have I not received them then?” Then Yama challenged, “When did your hair turn grey?” “At fifty-two.” The old man answered. Then Yama confirmed, “That was the first letter I sent to you. When did you lose your first tooth?” “sixty-six,” the old man answered. Yama continued, “That was the second letter I sent you. When did you feel decrepit and feeble, relying on a stick to walk?” “About seventy-four,” answered the old man. Yama concluded, “That was the third letter I sent you. Have you not received them all?” The old man became silent.

At the same time there was a young man beside the old man. He felt depressed and desperate at the beginning, but now got relieved after hearing the conversation between the old man and Yama. He boldly and confidently asked Yama, “So it is. But I am still young. Why have you not informed me before bringing me here?” Yama sneered, “Nonsense. I have also sent you three letters much earlier. Why do you deny it?” “Where are they? I have not received any of them.” the young man

replied. Then Yama retorted, “When you were at primary school, a girl in your class died of pneumonia. You were already twelve then. You should remember it, shouldn’t you?” The young man fell to lamentation, and answered, “It was true. I was deeply affected.” Yama said, “That was the first letter. When you were at the secondary school, your neighbor was stabbed to death by a robber, don’t you remember?” “How can I forget that anguished scream and the bloody site?” answered the young man. Yama then continued, “That was second letter. As for the third letter, do I need to remind you?” The young man pleaded grievingly, “Please don’t. That was my brother who died in a car accident when he was only 22.” Yama sighed, “Life is like a dream; it is impermanent. One’s gain or loss in wealth and fame are determined by karma; people’s lifespans are not fixed. This is natural law. How can you ignore it?”

If we are informed that we are definitely going to die in one hour, in one day, in one month, or even in one year, do we still endeavour in the toils to accumulate wealth or to seek the illusive fame etc? Suppose we are going to die immediately; what can we do even if we are still attached to the affections of spouse or children or friends? Therefore, for Pure Land practitioners to see through and let go of the *Saha* world, the most effective is the contemplation of death, and realising that death is coming at any time. When death is coming, there is nothing we can do about it, no matter how much money we have saved, or how powerful we are. Otherwise, the opulent wealthy people and the top leaders of many countries would escape death. Some people can be saved from serious illness or catastrophe only because their lives have not expired yet. When the lifespan determined by the projecting karma is exhausted, no worldly means can save them, unless they have performed extraordinary virtuous conducts as exemplified in Chapter 2 of Volume I.

We should further contemplate that we can take nothing except karma with us when we die. We should retrospect on all our behaviour in our whole life: how much meritorious virtues have we accumulated and how much unwholesome activities have we committed? We should realise that all the evil karmas we have accumulated will drive us to descend to

the woeful realms to endure torment. Upon such reflections, we will consolidate our aspiration for escaping this suffering and defiled world without any reluctance and hesitation.

## ii) **Contemplating the affections from conditions and debts**

The second factor tethering us to this *Saha* world is intimate affections. Ordinary people consider various affections very seriously, unable to let go of them, just like what Master Hanshan said. Actually, all the affections between parents and their children, between husband and wife, between intimate friends and relatives are derived from intertwined associations in past lives. They can congregate or associate with each other, because of the affinity established in innumerable lives. Even Dr. Weiss revealed this phenomenon in his book *Many Lives, Many Masters* [3]. Whether a man and a woman can get married or not, or even whether they can live happily to the end of their lives are entirely dependent on the affectional relationships established in their past lives. It never randomly happens.

Here is a famous story in Buddhist literature. In the Liang Dynasty (502–557CE), there was an eminent monk, Monk Zhigong (志公和尚; 418–514CE), who possessed supernatural powers, and was able to see transmigrations between lives. At that time, it was popular to invite monks to recite *Sūtras* at big events such as wedding or funeral ceremonies.

Once, one wealthy family held a large feast for his son's wedding, and invited Monk Zhigong to recite *Sūtras*. As soon as he entered the gate, he sighed with the following verse.

“How strange and weird, the grandson marries the grandmother.

Pigs and lambs are seated on the *kang*\*, the relatives of six kins are boiled in the cauldron.

A daughter eats her mother's flesh, while a son was striking a drum made of his father's skin.

The multitude all come to congratulate [the wedding], I say it is truly painful.”



(古古怪，怪怪古，孙子娶祖母。猪羊炕上坐，六亲锅里煮。女食母之肉，子打父皮鼓。众人来贺喜，我说真是苦！)

\*kang: It is a large heatable brick bed in northern China, which is used for sleeping at night, and eating meals on it in cold season.

The following is what this verse reveals. After this son was born, his grandmother cherished him very much, and was always afraid that his parents are unable to take good care of him. When he was one year old, the grandmother died. At the death bed, she held the grandson's hand, and would not let go. She sighed, "All of you have established family and careers, only this little grandson has no one to take care of him. How miserable." She died after these words, with great reluctance and attachment. It was this attachment that incurred the strange affinity of the marriage later. In the next life, the grandmother reincarnated as a little girl in the next village. After she grew up, she became the wife the grandson from previous life.

When Monk Zhigong looked at the relatives sitting on the kang, he knew that they were all pigs and lambs raised by this family in their previous lives. They were killed and eaten by their relatives then, and later became their relatives in this life, sitting on the kang enjoying the feast. The pigs and lambs boiled in the cauldron were their relatives then, and became pigs and lambs in this life to repay their debts of taking lives.

Outside the room, he saw a girl eating a delicious pig foot, which was from a pig that was her mother in a previous life. When he beheld the music band, he saw a man striking a drum made of the skin of a donkey that was the man's father in one previous life.

This story truly demonstrates what *the Śūraṅgama Sūtra* illustrated [4], **"Suppose then that a human being eats a sheep. The slaughtered sheep is reborn as a human. When the human who ate the sheep dies,**

**he in turn becomes a sheep. This pattern holds among all ten kinds of beings as they devour one another in a continuing cycle of death and rebirth. The evil karma of this mutual devouring accompanies each of them from life to life to the farthest reaches of the future. The root of all this is the urge to steal. Suppose you are in debt to someone for having taken his life; he will want to take your life in repayment. Due to such causes and conditions, beings must pass through hundreds of thousands of eons in an everlasting succession of deaths and rebirths. Suppose someone loves someone else for his or her mind, or for his or her beauty. Due to such causes and conditions, beings must pass through hundreds of thousands of eons in an everlasting succession of entanglements”** (以人食羊，羊死为人，人死为羊，如是乃至十生之类，死死生生，互来相啖，恶业俱生，穷未来际，是等则以盗贪为本。汝负我命，我还汝债，以是因缘，经百千劫，常在生死。汝爱我心，我怜汝色，以是因缘，经百千劫，常在缠缚。)

Here is another story to illustrate the conditions for spouses. Once there was a young man who was engaged to a girl for three years. Just before they planned to get married, the girl broke off their relationship and turned to marry another man. The young man was so distressed that he fell seriously ill and dying. At that time, a roaming monk visited the village and showed the young man a mirror. In the mirror, the young man saw a great ocean, and a young girl lying on the beach, dead and naked. One person passed the dead girl, looked at her, shook his head and walked away. Another man came into the scene, took off his clothes and covered the dead girl, then walked away. Then a third man appeared, dug a hole in the ground and buried the dead girl. The monk explained to the young man that the dead girl was his fiancée in her previous life. The young man appeared as the second man who took off his clothes to cover the dead girl, so the girl was engaged to him to repay his kindness for three years, while the third man who buried the dead girl became her

husband. Seeing this past causes and conditions, the young man felt relieved and recovered.

It is said, “sons and daughters are debts, so they will not come without debts.” That is, the relationship between parents and their children are built on debts, which can be classified into four types:

① **The children come to repay their gratitude from past lives.** In this case, they are obedient and filial to their parents, never cause any trouble to their parents, try to make their parents happy, even bring honour to the family, and support their parents when they are old.

② **The children come to repay their debts from past lives.** They are obedient with good behaviour, yet their relationship with the parents is not so intimate or affectionate. Nevertheless, they fulfil their obligations and support their parents economically when needed.

③ **The children come to collect their debts from past lives.** They are also obedient with good behaviour, making their parents happy to spend a large sum of money on them to bring them up, sending them to good school, or helping them start a business etc. However, all these expenditures turn to futile. Either the business always fails, or the children die at a young age without paying back a penny. There are some even worse cases. The child is lovely and cherished by the parents as a pearl, but he or she is stricken by a chronic disease at a young age, causing the parents to spend all the family savings, then dies.

④ **The children come to avenge their anguish and torment from past lives.** This is the worst case. The child is rebellious from birth, always creates trouble for the parents, causing the parents to worry about him or her all the time. The parents deeply regret having him or her, only relieved when the child dies or is imprisoned. The serious ones bring

catastrophe to the family by causing the entire wealth of the family to be confiscated and all family members to be massacred in the old times.

At present, with competition in every arena becoming more intense, and people becoming more selfish, hence more children are from the last two categories. They either come to collect past debts or take revenge on their parents. Many children live a dissipated life on their parents, without slightest shame or hesitation. After they graduate from expensive schools or universities, they still stay in the parents' home like parasites, captivated in games, or living in virtual worlds.

In *the Complete Compilation of Master Yinguang's Articles* [5], he recounted a story recorded in *the Record of Qingliang Mountain* (《清凉山志》). In the Sui dynasty, there was a landlord named Zhao Liangxiang (赵良相), with opulent wealth, in Daizhou (代州) area. He had two sons: the elder son named Zhao Meng (赵孟) who was mediocre, and the younger son named Zhao Ying (赵盈) who was capable. Before Liangxiang died, he split his wealth and estates between his two sons, bequeathing relatively more wealth to Zhao Meng than Zhao Ying. After Liangxiang passed away, Zhao Ying seized all the wealth and estate belonging to Zhao Meng except one small hut to dwell. Zhao Meng had to endeavour in hard toils to sustain his life. Later, when Zhao Ying died young, he reincarnated as the son of Zhao Meng, named Zhao Huan (赵环). When Zhao Meng died later, he reincarnated as the grandson of Zhao Ying, named Zhao Xian (赵先). Zhao Huan grew up, and became a servant of Zhao Xian. He harboured fierce resentment for Zhao Ying who seized his father's wealth. Once, Zhao Huan was ordered to accompany Zhao Xian to Mount Wutai for a pilgrimage. When they walked to a desolate place, Zhao Huan suddenly grabbed a knife, intending to kill Zhao Xian, and indignantly announced, "Your grandfather seized all the wealth of my family, I am going to kill you now." Out of fear, Zhao Xian ran fast to escape, and Zhao Huan chased

him rapidly. They ran into a hut, where a monk stopped them, gave them some medicine tea to drink. Having drunk the tea, they penetrated the experiences of past lives, and became extremely sad. The monk told them, “Zhao Ying was the previous life of Zhao Huan. He seized the wealth of others in his life, so he should relinquish what he snatched. Zhao Xian is the reincarnation of Zhao Meng. He came back to collect what belonged to him. Therefore, their fathers’ will is still effective.” Having heard these words, Zhao Huan and Zhao Xian both renounced home and became monastics in Mount Wutai.

### iii) Contemplating the vulnerable wealth

*The Sūtra of Forty-Two Sections* states, “**It is difficult for the wealthy and prestigious to cultivate the enlightenment path.**” Generally speaking, the more success one achieves in one’s career, the more powerful is one’s attachment to one’s possessions; and the more is one’s tendency to dominate worldly affairs, the more difficult for one to let go of them. The modern society is based on commercial success. Everyone’s success and status are mostly evaluated on one’s accumulation of wealth, driving most people to become slaves of money. The destitute are desperately inspired to endeavour arduously to earn more and more money; the affluent not only crave to accumulate more, but they exhaust their ingenuity and precautions to protect their hard-earned accrued wealth. They are not aware that what one can earn in this life are totally dependent on what one saved in previous lives in the form of merits and blessings. The ostensible wealth one hardly or easily earned is simply a manifestation of past merits. If we are obsessed with making more wealth or accumulating wealth in our daily life, it is truly difficult for us to relinquish them completely at the end of our life. The severe craving and attachment to our wealth at the end of our life are even perilous in driving us to descend to the woeful realms. Thus, it is imperative for us to contemplate the vulnerable and detrimental characteristics of wealth so as to take it easy and to let go of it at usual times, to avoid any attachment to it at the end of life.

- ① We should have deep faith in the law of cause and effect, profoundly believe that what we possess are entirely derived from the merits of generosity from our previous lives. If we have not saved plentiful blessings in our past lives, it is impossible for us to earn affluent wealth no matter how smart we are or how strenuous we are in our endeavour.
- ② We should penetratingly realise that we can take nothing with us when we die, no matter how much we have saved in our lifetime.
- ③ We should understand that it is inappropriate to leave too much wealth to our children. First, how much our children can possess is dependent entirely on their merits, not ours. If their lives are endowed with plentiful wealth, they will obtain it whether we leave them enough or not. If their lives are destined to be destitute, they will lose or dissipate how ever much wealth we leave them. Second, we should also insightfully contemplate that the relationship between our children and us is purely from debts. Hence, regardless of how much wealth we leave them, they are just collecting their debts from past lives, without gratitude to us, even begrudging us for not giving them more. Third, leaving excessive wealth to our children usually bereave their aspiration to improve themselves in talent and diligence. Fourth, if what we leave our children is more than what they deserve, it will be detrimental to them, leading to their premature death if they exhaust their merits too quickly.

For those who have earned and saved adequate money, we remind and encourage them to calculate how much money they need to sustain a reasonable life till their death. If it is enough, then they should stop or at least reduce their endeavour in the worldly toils, turning to concentrate on the cultivation of Pure Land practices. This is the most valuable business we should attend, since it will enable us to terminate the endless sufferings in birth-and-death and enjoy peaceful happiness in Pure Land eternally. Furthermore, we should donate the surplus wealth to help those in need or distribute them properly to our children and other kinsmen. Not only can this virtuous conduct increase our provisions of the Pure Land if we dedicate the merits to it, but it can prevent our attachment to the excessive wealth at the end of our lives.

#### **iv) Contemplating the dangerous power**

For mundane people, power has enormous magic captivation. It can drive people to lose rational judgment and even abandon their affections towards intimate or family members. Those on the top of the hierarchical power tower enjoy unbelievable sovereignty and privileges, but they are constantly under various threats from their internal and external enemies or rivalries. Vying for upper position in any social organizations, many seekers exhaust their ingenuity and employ whatever means in the competition. Since authority comes from the control of subordinates, those presiding key positions tend to worry about or even suspect their subordinates' loyalty and capability. Most of those craving for promotion tend to try to please their superior, and to control their subordinates simultaneously. On judicious reflection, we find that those on top positions are not at peace.

People are sentimental and affectionate animals. They seldom judge other people without prejudice. Almost all leaders are inclined to have faith in their long-time followers, believing their loyalty and capability, thus delight in sharing the benefits derived from power with them. Nepotism is unavoidable in any political system, anywhere and anytime. It causes another danger of associated persecution or deprivation. That is, if the one in key position loses his or her power, his or her followers are usually demoted or even expelled.

Even kings or presidents of a country, with almost absolute power, cannot evade from threats and dangers. According to statistics, there existed more than 300 emperors in Chinese history before 1911, when the monarchy system was abolished. These emperors had supreme sovereignty over the country and its people, enjoyed almost unlimited material and spiritual resources, with the best medical treatments. Nevertheless, the average lifespan of these emperors was 41 years old, much shorter than that of ordinary people. Astonishingly, premature or abnormal death rate of emperors are extremely high, up to 44%, with 147 in number. Many kings or emperors are usurped from or overthrown from their throne, then beheaded, poisoned, starved, or imprisoned to death.

As mentioned in *the Contemplation Sūtra*, “**we have learned from the Vedas that since the beginning of this *kalpa*, 18,000 evil kings have killed their fathers to usurp the throne.**” In fact, not only are the kings and emperors in perilous situations, but the contemporary presidents and prime ministers of the democratic systems are also fraught with life danger. For instance, President Lincoln and President Kennedy were assassinated. Several presidents of South Korea were either assassinated, committed suicide, put into prison, or exiled. Several prime ministers of India and Pakistan were assassinated as well.

No matter how prestigious or glorious you are when you hold the top position, is it still so captivating if you contemplate the sad endings of these powerful people? Therefore, rather than undertake the arduous endeavour in climbing the power tower or living in a perilous and worrying life, why don't we relinquish these ambitions and cultivate Pure Land practice? Not only can we live a peaceful and contented life, but we will enjoy the ultimate bliss of the Pure Land and swiftly accomplish the Buddha path.

#### v) **Contemplating the illusive fame**

The ambitious politicians or military generals always claim that their endeavour in craving for the top position or their waged war are purely for the benefit of their people. Really? How many of them are truly for the benefit of people instead of fame? Considering the damages that they have caused to society, is it worth it? In history, most of these insurgencies failed, resulting in most rebellious leaders being exterminated. Even if they succeeded in fulfilling their proposed objective, how long can they last? For instance, in China more than 2000 years ago, the king of Qin state conquered all the other six states and formed a united monarch after several decades of bitter and large-scale wars. He was so proud, complacent and ambitious that he named himself the first emperor, his son would be the second emperor, until eternity. He also ordered his subjects to search all over the country and its oceans for elixir of eternal life. Unfortunately, despite all his efforts, he died at the age of 49. More astonishingly, his empire lasted merely 14 years after his death, with his descendants all killed. Millions of people got



killed because of his ambition, succeeded by another large-scale protracted war after the collapse of the Qin empire.

Not to mention how catastrophic and destructive were the ancient wars, just look at how many lives were killed and how many homes were demolished during the second world war. Adolf Hitler, the *Führer* of Nazi Germany, claimed to benefit the German people through notorious propaganda, and incited all the people of Germany to participate in the war. In six years, tens of millions of soldiers and civilians were killed in other countries, only Germany had a casualty of more than 3.5 million. After Hitler was defeated, Germany was split into two countries, much worse than its status before the war.

Many thinkers or intellectuals of the old times always want to establish an immortal name or to leave esteemed fame after their death. To achieve their objective, many of them get involved in some form of military or social activities. For example, in China in the period of the Three Kingdoms, there was a famous thinker and strategist, Zhuge Liang (诸葛亮). Invited by Liu Bei (刘备), a warlord who aspired to restore the Han dynasty, Zhuge Liang joined Liu Bei. He helped Liu Bei with all his effort and ingenuity for the rest of his life. He designed many strategies and tactic schemes to fight tenaciously with other kingdoms. Because of his diligent work without rest, he died at age of 54, only a few years lasted before the kingdom he fought for was conquered. He was loyal to the Liu family all his life, and his objective was to free people from protracted wars. But the reality was ironically opposite to his aim. It was because of him that the war was prolonged and much more casualties resulted.

According to Buddhism, there is no reason for killing other beings, not to mention killing people. There is no right cause for killing others or causing damages to others. Most of the worldly fame is earned based on claims for the benefit of people, but usually cause more damages for them instead, at least for some other people. People's living conditions are determined by their karmas conducted in their previous lives. What we can do is to cultivate our compassion towards them, and to try to bestow upon them material support or spiritual encouragement. No one

can truly change the others' life, which can only be transformed by themselves. If we cause any killings or damages to others in the pursuit of fame, the fame is illusive, yet the evil karmas have real power, which will drive us to the woeful realms to atone for our transgressions.

**vi) Contemplating the segmented birth as human and celestial beings**

Even though some people recite the Buddha-name, they cultivate it not as the provision to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land, but rather as merits for getting rebirth in the human or celestial realms to satisfy sensuous desires. Some others may pursue rebirth as a talented Dharma master with extraordinary eloquence in the next life to promote Buddhist Dharmas. All these aspirations are not wise. We should be vigilant of the problem of the enemy of the third life inculcated by Master Yinguang. That is, to cultivate Buddha-recitation or other virtuous practices, yet we desire to get rebirth as wealthy or powerful people or to go to celestial realm to enjoy various benefits in the next life. However, because of the defiled nature of sensual enjoyment, we tend to create enormous unwholesome karmas accompanying the enjoyment. These karmas will drive us to descend to the woeful realms in the third life. Even if we get rebirth as a talented monk with eloquence to continue our cultivation in the next life, suppose we cannot eradicate the afflictions of insight and cultivation in the next life, we will still be unable to escape birth-and-death. It is most probable that the cultivation in the next life will be transformed into merits for the enjoyment of the third life, which will drive us to descend in the fourth life. How can these results compare to achieving rebirth in the Pure Land to fulfil all the wishes? Hence it is similar to bartering a precious diamond for candy.

Through repeated contemplation and exercise, the practitioners will see through the above aspects. Our aspiration for achieving rebirth in the Pure Land will become earnest and unshaken. If we can cultivate to let go of these attachments now, we will be able to let go of them at the end of our life. Otherwise, if we cannot see through them, and keep clinging to them tenaciously at normal time, it is too optimistic for us to expect to let go of them easily at the end of our life. Many patriarch masters

said that the mind at normal time is the mind at the end of life. It cannot be changed suddenly and drastically.

We should not misinterpret the conditions of rebirth in the inferior rank. Those getting rebirth by merely reciting a few utterances of the Buddha-name with faith and aspiration are not common people like us. First, they have never learned Buddhism before; they commit various transgressions based on devious views or severe afflictions. Second, having witnessed the fire from hell, they generate desperate aspiration to escape the torment and to get rebirth in the Pure Land. Their recitations, though merely a few, are from the bottom of their heart, resolute and devoted. It is similar to that a drowning man struggling in water will hold onto anything tightly, and never let go. The power of the resolute and desperate mind is inconceivable. Third, they are so fortunate to encounter some virtuous learned friend at their death bed; this is definitely not a fortuitous event, but a reflection of the profound virtuous roots implanted in previous lives. They must have cultivated the Pure Land gateway before. Only because of unwholesome conditions and circumstances of this life, they have committed various evil conducts. Otherwise, they can neither encounter virtuous learned friends, nor can they believe what are instructed, not to mention generating aspiration and practice immediately.

We are different. We have learned the principles of the Pure Land, aware of the suffering of this world and the inconceivable meritorious virtues of the Pure Land. We have also established faith and aspiration for getting rebirth there. Nevertheless, our aspiration is not earnest, entailing our practice being perfunctory. Because of the homogeneous flux of our mind, it is truly difficult for us to transmute this kind of undetermined and scattered mind into a definite resolved mind at the end of our life.

### **3. What is Earnest Aspiration**

#### **(1) Attestation by Practice**

Master Ouyi clearly instructed us, “Without faith, it is not sufficient for one to activate aspiration; without aspiration, it is not sufficient for one to guide practice; and without the wondrous practice of name

recitation, it is not sufficient for one to fulfil one's aspiration and to verify one's faith."

It is evident that without earnest aspiration, it is improbable for us to undertake diligent cultivation of the Buddha-recitation. On the other hand, we can attest whether our aspiration is earnest and adequate, or not. How is our aspiration called earnest? It is simple. Suppose Pure Land practitioners put various Pure Land cultivations such as Buddha-recitation or other virtuous conducts as the first priority. They think of Pure Land first when they wake up in the morning, pay homage to the Buddha or the Three Saints of the West after they washed up, before they start anything else. They dedicate some time every day specifically for the Buddha-recitation no matter how busy they are. And they reflect on their behaviour and reaffirm their aspiration for achieving rebirth in the Pure Land before they fall asleep every day. These practitioners demonstrate that they have established earnest and adequate aspiration, which will guarantee their successful rebirth in the Pure Land.

On the contrary, suppose the practitioners still put worldly affairs with higher priority. They remember to recite the Buddha-name only when they find nothing to do, or they always find excuse to procrastinate the Buddha-recitation practice. They are still indulged in worldly affairs and affections, seldom reflect on the suffering nature of this life and the wondrous advantages of the Pure Land. They never ponder on the fact that they may die at any time, so they do not prepare for death. These phenomena expose that the aspiration is not earnest or adequate, which does not ensure the practitioners get rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of life.

## **(2) Attestation by Situation and Circumstance**

The next criterion for evaluating whether the aspiration is earnest is from our reactions in different situations or circumstances. For instance, suppose we confront some adversity. We are still deeply distressed and desperate, and keep complaining or blaming the unfortunate situation. Neither can we take this best opportunity to help us see through the suffering nature of this world, nor can we consider it an incentive to enhance our aspiration to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. Conversely,

facing the same adversity, we remain composed and relieved. We contemplate how fortunate we are, because we find the most effective gateway to escape this miserable land at the end of this very life. Anyway, we are about to leave this world and completely escape all these unfortunate situations forever, so why should we still bother about them? Obviously, the former reactions reflect that our aspiration is still superficial, not earnest or adequate, whereas the latter response demonstrate that our aspiration is earnest and adequate.

On the other hand, suppose we face some fortunate or beneficial situation or circumstances. We are still indulged in the enjoyment of sensuous pleasures, reluctant to relinquish these enjoyments. We cannot use this best opportunity with leisure and adequate sustenance to concentrate on cultivating various Pure Land practices. It is an accurate reflection of our aspiration being not earnest or adequate. Otherwise, facing the same fortunate situation, if we feel relieved of toils so we can put all our effort in Pure Land cultivations, it represents that our aspiration is earnest and adequate.

Another situation to attest the genuineness of our aspiration is when there is a dramatic change in our living condition from hardship to enjoyment. Suppose we undertake our cultivations diligently under hard living conditions, which instigates us to yearn desperately to escape this environment. However, once our living conditions suddenly changed to pleasant, with plentiful material resources, we abruptly or gradually turn to sensuous enjoyment, neglecting the Buddha-recitation practice. This reflects that our aspiration to escape this world and pursue rebirth in the Pure Land is not genuine or earnest, it is only a desire to escape the suffering situation.

For example, under the pressure of destitute living conditions, some practitioners abhor the miserable situation and desperately desire to escape it, so they cultivate diligently. However, the merits and blessings of their cultivation manifest in the form of good fortune, such as winning a large sum of money in lottery or inheriting a big legacy. Under such circumstance, if the practitioners continue their cultivation, even more diligently, because they have been relieved of their worries and

frustrations, their aspiration is genuine and earnest. Otherwise, if they become engrossed in sensuous enjoyment to compensate for their previous hard life, their aspiration is not genuine or earnest.

Here is another good example. When some people are diagnosed to have a fatal disease such as cancer or Aids etc., they are so despaired that they generate a very strong desire to escape this world and pursue rebirth in the Pure Land. However, after they cultivated diligently and desperately for a while, the symptoms of their fatal disease disappeared either out of the dissolvment of their unwholesome karmas or the original diagnosis being false. Under such great fortunate transformation, if they can still continue assiduous cultivation, their original aspiration is earnest and genuine. Otherwise, if they stop their previous diligent cultivation and turn to endeavour in their worldly affairs, their original aspiration is false and not earnest.

### **(3) Attestation by Receiving Notice to Achieve Rebirth**

The primary objective for Pure Land practitioners is to achieve rebirth at the end of this life. Due to our diligent cultivation of the Buddha-recitation, some fortunate people may receive some notice from Amitabha Buddha himself or from other saints in dreams or by other means that Amitabha Buddha will come to escort them to the Pure Land. On receiving such exciting notice, if we feel exultant about our achievement and our departure from this suffering world, our aspiration is earnest and genuine. Otherwise, if we feel reluctant or not prepared to go immediately since we still have some worldly obligations to fulfil or some other attachment, our aspiration is not genuine or earnest. There are some real cases where people fail to get rebirth in the Pure Land because of their hesitation or reluctance on getting the notice of their immediate rebirth.

In summary, it is ourselves who are most clear whether our aspiration for achieving rebirth in the Pure Land is earnest or not. We do not need to ask anyone. Checking against the above criteria, if we find that our aspiration is not completely earnest or genuine or unwavering, our rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this life is not hundred per cent guaranteed. In that case, there must be a blind spot. We should examine

objectively all the aspects mentioned above and other issues, find out the chief factor that we are attached to, contemplate on its detriment and let go of it. If the reason for our aspiration being not earnest is because we have not established fervent yearning for rebirth in the Pure Land, we should study more attentively *the Pure Land Sūtras* and commentaries. Try to enumerate the benefits or the meritorious virtues of the Pure Land, select one or several aspects appealing to us, and contemplate on them.

## IV. PRACTICE IS THE POWER

The three provisions of the Pure Land gateway support each other and enhance each other. All the three constitute the unified causes and conditions for achieving rebirth in the Pure Land, all indispensable.

### 1. The Methods of the Pure Land Practice

As introduced at the beginning of this chapter, for successful rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this life, the absolute conditions are sincere faith and earnest aspiration. In addition to these absolute conditions are practices, known as alternative conditions. It should be noted that being alternative does not mean that they are not necessary, but because there exist alternative methods of Pure Land practices. Performing any of these methods combined with sincere faith and earnest aspiration will ensure one to get rebirth in the Pure Land. However, we have to cultivate at least one or more of these methods to fulfil our objective to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. Sincere faith, earnest aspiration, together with cultivating one or more Pure Land practice form the necessary and sufficient conditions for rebirth in the Pure Land. Here we enumerate the most prevalent methods of Pure Land practice.

#### (1) Buddha-Recitation

The Buddha-recitation is the most primary method of the Pure Land practice. It is proposed in all the three Pure Land *Sūtras*, advocated by all the patriarch masters of the Pure Land school as well. *It can be*

*announced that the Buddha-recitation method is an absolute necessary practice among the alternative methods.*

The Buddha-recitation method is the most effective method. It is simple, direct and convenient, without any danger or risk in practice. It is formulated from Amitabha Buddha's ultimate compassion to liberate sentient beings from sufferings. It is suitable for all beings with their diverse capacities and dispositions. He designated into this name all the powers of his grand vows and all the meritorious virtues accumulated from his cultivations of innumerable varieties of virtuous conducts in inconceivably countless *kalpas*. Whenever we recite this name wholeheartedly, we will automatically activate all the power and meritorious virtues of Amitabha Buddha. It is similar to being able to withdraw money from a bank when we know the account number and the code. The name of Amitabha Buddha is the code of Amitabha Buddha's empowerment.

To cultivate Buddha-recitation, the practitioner can choose any one or more of the recitation methods introduced in the next subsection. Anyone can cultivate this method by reciting Buddha-name at one's convenient time and circumstances. The more recitations, the better. Although we can recite more or fewer number of the utterances, yet we have to maintain reciting at least a fixed number each day. No matter how busy we are, we should not spend one day passing by without Buddha-recitation practice. Moreover, we should recite each utterance of the Buddha-name from our heart, not casually, so that each recitation is replete with gratitude, veneration and yearning for Amitabha Buddha.

## **(2) Observing Precepts**

Strictly observing the precepts and without violating the dignity of conducts are the merits of precepts of the three pure conducts stated in *the Contemplation Sūtra*. By strictly observing the five precepts or the eight precepts and dedicating the merits of precepts to the Pure Land alone, we can achieve rebirth of the upper or middle grades in the medium rank. In brief, observing precepts has the following extra benefits for Pure Land practitioners:



① Habitually observing the precepts enables us to remain peaceful in the mind, because it induces us to refrain from committing any transgression, and even extinguish the motive or impulse to commit any vile conduct. Without causing damage to any sentient being will prevent reciprocal or revenging attacks, thus relieving us from worries and fears.

② Observing precepts leads to concentration. Strictly observing precepts will restrain our behaviours, indirectly regulating our mind from madly craving and clinging to worldly affairs. It will help us to concentrate our mind while reciting the Buddha-name. Hence, it enhances the quality of Buddha-recitation, even helping us to attain single-mindedness without distraction.

③ The merit of strictly observing precepts will mitigate the power of unwholesome karmas stored in our *alaya* consciousness. Its benefit is to avoid disturbances of these karmas, thus preventing the maturity of evil karmas at the end of our life. We can then remain calm and preoccupied with Pure Land practices on the verge of death, to ensure successful rebirth in the Pure Land.

### **(3)Generate Bodhicitta and Observing Bodhisattva Precepts**

① According to *the Contemplation Sūtra*, generating Bodhicitta and observing Bodhisattva precepts are the conditions for rebirth of the three grades in the superior rank.

② To generate the Bodhicitta for delivering all sentient beings and to attain Buddhahood is completely aligned with the vows of Amitabha Buddha. The ultimate purpose for Amitabha Buddha to welcome us to get rebirth in the Pure Land is to provide us with a platform to swiftly attain Buddhahood. Therefore, we are guaranteed to receive the ultimate empowerment of Amitabha Buddha with these practices.

③ To generate the Bodhicitta to accomplish the Buddha Path is congruous with our intrinsic Buddha nature, which is inseparable from the Pure Land gateway in principle. Thus, these are supreme provisions for pursuing rebirth in the Pure Land.

#### (4) Read and Recite Mahayana Teachings

① According to *the Contemplation Sūtra*, reading and reciting the Mahayana *Vaipulya Sūtras* constitute one component of the three pure conducts, and they are also the provisions for rebirth of upper grade in the superior rank.

② By repeatedly and attentively studying the Mahayana *Sūtras*, especially the Pure Land *Sūtras* and commentaries, not only can we improve our comprehension of the Pure Land principles, but we can also enhance and consolidate our faith and aspiration. Neglecting the study of Pure Land *Sūtras* and commentaries for a long time will entail our unfamiliarity with the meritorious virtues of the Pure Land and the great compassion of Amitabha Buddha. We will gradually lose our enthusiasm in cultivating the necessary practices. There exists a prevalent saying among Buddhist adherents, “For those who have learned and cultivated Buddhism for the first three days, the Buddha is within their heart; for those who have learned and cultivated Buddhism for three years, the Buddha is far away in the border of the sky.” (学佛三天，佛在心间；学佛三年，佛在天边。)

#### (5) Cultivate the Ten Virtuous Conducts and the Six *Pāramitās*

① According to *the Contemplation Sūtra*, to cultivate the ten virtuous conducts is advocated in the three pure conducts. It is also the provisions for rebirth of the lower grade in the medium rank.

② In *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan*, the nineteenth vow states, **“When I attain Buddhahood, if sentient beings in the lands of the ten directions, who activate the Bodhicitta, cultivate various meritorious virtues, and desire to be born in my land with utmost sincere aspiration should not, at their death, see me appearing before them surrounded by a great assembly, I would not attain the perfect enlightenment.”** That is, to cultivate the six *pāramitās*, then to dedicate all of them to the Pure Land with faith and aspiration, we will be guaranteed to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land.

③ By habitually performing various virtuous conducts, we will plant more wholesome seeds in our *alaya* consciousness, which will effectively postpone the maturity of evil karma seeds. It will help us remain composed and concentrated on pursuing rebirth in the Pure Land on the verge of death, preventing any disturbances from evil karmic forces.

## **2. The Buddha-Recitation**

### **(1) Different Varieties of Buddha-Recitation**

People can cultivate the Buddha-recitation with any method depending on their dispositions, preferences or conditions. Our patriarch masters and contemporary Pure Land Dharma masters have advocated the following ten methods, which are commonly practiced in solitary or collective cultivations.

#### **1) Loud Recitation**

The practitioners recite Amitabha Buddha's name loudly and distinctively. By reciting loudly, we concentrate all of our energy on the sound of each utterance of the Buddha-name. This method possessed the following benefits:

- ① It can help to counteract drowsiness or torpor. For some practitioners, reciting the Buddha-name tends to make them drowsy. By reciting loudly with all their energy, they can keep their mind clearly concentrated on the Buddha-name.
- ② It can dispel distractions. By reciting the Buddha-name loudly and clearly, the practitioners concentrate their mind on the Buddha-name, preventing it from scattering or being distracted.
- ③ It can encourage others to participate in the cultivations. Hearing the loud recitation of the Buddha-name, others may be attracted to join in the cultivation.

One disadvantage of loud recitation is exhausting one's energy for long-time practice, so it cannot be performed for too long period. Secondly,

it is not appropriate to recite loudly in some environment and circumstances, where quietude is needed.

## **2) Silent Recitation**

The practitioners recite “Namo Amitabha Buddha” silently in the mind, without uttering any voice. It is imperative for the practitioners to recite each word clearly and distinctively in their mind. This method is normally used while one is lying in bed, taking a bath, going to toilet, or feeling sick, as well as when one enters some public places.

## **3) Vajra Recitation**

The practitioners recite the Buddha-name clearly in the mind, with their lips slightly moving in accordance with the recitation, but without uttering any voice. This method is very effective, best suitable for collective cultivation during silent period.

## **4) Consecutive recitation**

The practitioners recite “Amitabha Buddha” consecutively, one name after another without interval in between. Because of the continuous recitation of each utterance, distracted thoughts are difficult to cut in, hence it is very effective in concentrating the mind on the Buddha-name, temporarily subduing scattered or afflicted thoughts. Moreover, due to its fast repetition, it is the best choice for those who cultivate with routinely large number of recitations, such as ten thousand recitations, or fifty thousand recitations per day.

## **5) Recitation with prostration**

The practitioners prostrate in front of a Buddha statue or image for each one or every several recitations of the Buddha-name. For instance, we can utter one recitation when we start to bow down, utter another when we kneel down, and then utter another recitation when we begin to get up. This method has the following benefits:

① We can unitedly cultivate the Buddha-recitation with mental, verbal and physical practice at the same time, enabling us to concentrate our mind more effectively.

② By prostrating in front of the Buddha image while reciting, we pay homage and obeisance to the Buddha at the same time, so as to repent for our transgressions and mitigate our evil karmas.

③ By rhythmical prostration, we can also improve our physical health, curing some chronic diseases.

## **6) Recitation with counting**

The practitioners count the number of recitations during the process. There are two types of popular methods.

① Use rosary to count the number of recitations. Finger one bead at each recitation or every five or every ten recitations to count the total number of recitations in each section. For example, suppose we use a rosary with 108 beads to count the total number of recitations. We can finger one bead at every ten recitations. After we finished the whole rosary, we have recited 1080 times; if we perform ten rounds of the rosary, we have recited 10,800 times of the Buddha-name.

② Master Yinguang recommend another counting method for the purpose of concentrating our mind. While we are reciting the Buddha-name, we can count from one to ten, then reset and repeat the process. The key point is to try to remember each recitation in the mind to prevent the mind from straying away. If we find it difficult to remember ten times of recitation, we can separate them into two or three segments: from one to five, then from six to ten; or from one to three, from four to six, and then from seven to ten.

## **7) Recitation for ten breaths**

After we inhale one breath, we start reciting the Buddha-name consecutively until the breath is exhausted, then repeat the process ten times. This is called recitation with ten times of mindfulness. It is not important for us to recite how many utterances with each breath. But it is imperative for us to concentrate our mind on the Buddha-name, and on nothing else. This method takes up a very limited time period, suitable to those extremely busy practitioners. However, if we can spend

merely a few minutes on this practice persistently every day until the end of our life, we are guaranteed to get rebirth in the Pure Land.

### **8) Recitation with fixed time interval**

The most effective aspect of Buddha-recitation is persistence without interruption. It is futile for one to start cultivating diligently but dwindle away to stop after a while. Some people formulate a plan to cultivate the Buddha-recitation for a fixed period --like one hour, half an hour etc-- each day pursuant to their conditions and circumstances. They will stick to this plan without exception or excuse every day. When drawing up this plan, we should consider the length of the period seriously, making sure that we can execute the plan without too much difficulty or pressure. Otherwise, we will feel frustrated, and unable to carry on for a long time.

### **9) Recitation with circumambulations**

This method is usually adopted by collective cultivations. People line up into one row or several rows to circumambulate while reciting the Buddha-name together. For instance, when we raise the right foot, we utter the “Namo” sound; next when we raise the left foot, we utter the “Ami” sound; next when we raise the right foot, we pronounce the “Tuo” sound, and finally when we raise the left foot, we pronounce “Fo”. Here, “Amitufo” is the Chinese pronunciation of “Amitabha Buddha”. Repeat the process until the end of the section. It should be noted that we always circumambulate clockwise, never counter-clockwise. Usually, the practitioners walk slowly and steadily in pace, and recite with uniform utterance of each word.

### **10) Recitation with contemplation**

While reciting the Buddha-name, we simultaneously contemplate Amitabha Buddha and the meritorious virtues of the Pure Land. For instance:

- ① Contemplate the illuminating Buddha image with all the excellent characteristics.
- ② Contemplate the illuminating images of the Three Saints of the West.

- ③ Contemplate Amitabha Buddha shining and stretching his golden arm to touch the top of our head;
- ④ Contemplate the unsurpassed brilliance of the Pure Land environment, such as the treasured lakes and lotus, etc.
- ⑤ Contemplate the process of our rebirth in the Pure Land, in which we delightedly sit in the lotus flower and see the Buddha when the flower unfolds in the Pure Land.

## **(2) How to Cultivate Concentrated Recitation**

Regardless of what method one adopts to cultivate the Buddha-recitation, there is one crucial requirement: to concentrate on the Buddha-name. Ordinary light with scattered frequencies is soft and powerless, whereas laser, also light but with unified coherent frequency, is much more powerful. Master Hanshan said, “It is easy to recite the Buddha-name, but it is difficult to establish faith. If the mind and the mouth are not unified, it is futile. Suppose one recites the Buddha-name in one’s mouth with a scattered mind, it is useless even if one shouts until one’s throat is injured.” (念佛容易信心难，心口不一总是闲；口念弥陀心散乱，喊破喉咙也枉然。)

We have been indulging our mind habitually in wandering about for many years, so it is not natural for us to concentrate on the Buddha-name when we cultivate the recitation method. It needs time and practice. There are many methods to tether our mind on the Buddha-name while reciting in accordance with one’s inclination and disposition. The essential condition is to have faith in the power or functionality of the Buddha-name. The following will provide some simple techniques to improve the concentration pertaining to three types of practices.

### **1) Usual solitary recitations**

Having established sincere faith and earnest aspiration for rebirth in the Pure Land, we will try our best to accumulate the provisions of practice. The Pure Land *Sūtras* and our patriarch masters have inculcated to us that Buddha-recitation is the best and most effective provision. With

sincere faith and earnest aspiration, even with only ten wholehearted recitations at the end of our lives, we can achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. To guarantee that we can keep reciting the Buddha-name on the verge of death, we have to cultivate daily, to train the reciting behaviour as a habit. Hence usual solitary cultivation of Buddha-recitation is indispensable.

How much recitations one performs or for how long one performs the practice is entirely dependent on one's conditions and circumstances. Some people with great blessings can retire early from their worldly career, and they can spend most of their time studying Buddhist teachings and cultivating Buddha-recitation practice. Other people have to work very hard to make ends meet; they will have less time for Buddha-recitation practice. Nevertheless, even if they are extremely busy, they can still allocate some fixed time for the Buddha-recitation practice. The effect of their limited number of recitations is still indescribable if they perform it wholeheartedly.

Therefore, it is imperative for us to cultivate concentrated recitation in our usual practice. We should try to recite each utterance with single-mindedness without distraction. The following techniques are quite effective in helping us to concentrate on the Buddha-name in practice.

**i) Be mindful, recite and listen to each utterance**

In order to keep our mind concentrated on the Buddha-name in practice for a while, we have to train ourselves to concentrate on each recitation of the Buddha-name. To ensure that our mind would concentrate on the Buddha-name, Master Yinguang taught us the following effective method:

① **Be mindful of the Buddha-name:** Guarantee that each recitation is generated from our mind with sincere faith and earnest aspiration, with gratitude for Amitabha Buddha. Ensure that no recitation is uttered perfunctorily from the mouth alone. When we recite each phrase of “Namo Amitabha Buddha” or simply “Amitabha Buddha”, our mind is clearly preoccupied with the Buddha-name, and nothing else.



② **To recite from mouth with voice:** If conditions allow, we should try to recite with clear voice to ensure our ears can hear the sound.

③ **To listen to the Buddha-name:** It is critical in the technique to listen attentively to the sound of the Buddha-name. The auditory faculties of sentient beings of this world are the most acute, hence while our ears are hearing the sound of the Buddha-name, our mind rehearses it again. We do not live in a vacuum, thus are unable to avoid various noise disturbances. When we cultivate with this technique, we just try to concentrate our mind on listening to the sound of the Buddha-name, and ignore any other sounds.

This closed loop of recitation starting with generating from the mind, to uttering from mouth with voice, and finally to hearing back to the mind, perfectly blocks any distracted thought from cutting in. It reinforces the impression of the Buddha-name in our mind by each recitation.

#### ii) **Count to ten recitations to form a series**

Being able to concentrate on each recitation, we can stretch the process into a series of ten recitations. Master Yinguang bestowed upon us another effective technique: count to ten recitations.

① We can recite ten times and count them by heart, then repeat the process.

② We can break the ten recitations into two parts-- from one to five, then from six to ten--counting by heart. Then repeat the process.

③ We can alternatively break the ten recitations into three parts: from one to three, from four to six, then from seven to ten. Then repeat the process.

Since our mind needs to concentrate on the Buddha-name and the counting, all distracted thoughts are blocked off. Otherwise, we will forget the counting. In this way, we can ensure to recite a series of ten times without distraction.

#### iii) **Five-point counting to constitute a segment**

Based on Master Yinguang's instructions, Venerable Jingjie [6] proposed another technique—the five-point counting method, to extend the ten-recitation series to a fifty-recitation segment. First, we try to ensure that the ten-recitation series is performed with concentrated mind; then repeat the series five times, count them by heart. To avoid confusion and forgetfulness during the practice, we can visualise five points on the ground as shown in Fig 6.1.

We focus our mind on the first point, recite ten times of the Buddha-name; then move our attention to the second point, recite another ten times of the Buddha-name, proceed until we finish the fifth point recitation of ten times of the Buddha-name.

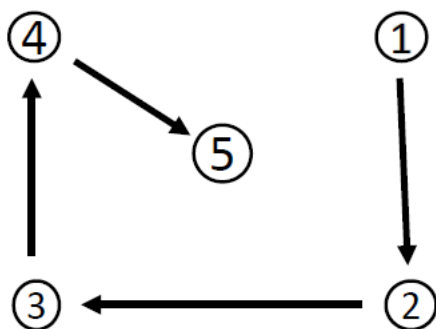


Fig 6.1 the Five-Point Counting Method

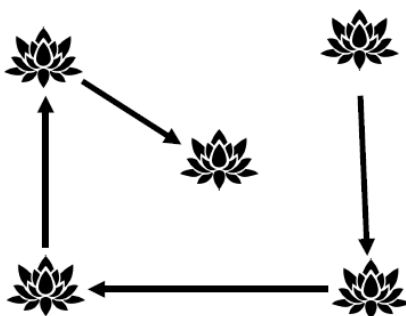


Fig 6.2 Contemplating Five Lotus for Counting Recitations

We can also visualize each point on the ground as a lotus flower while we count the five points, Fig 6.2. In this way, we can recite the Buddha-name without distraction for fifty times, forming a segment. We can

repeat the concentrated recitation of every segment as many times as we like.

## **2) Collective recitations**

Since the establishment of the Pure Land school, our patriarch masters have invented many recitation methods and organisations. They developed many forms of assembly for collective Buddha-recitations, such as seven-day Buddha-recitation retreat, three-day Buddha-recitation retreat etc. The collective retreats for Buddha-recitation are usually led by a Dharma master or some eminent lay practitioners. The Dharma master is responsible for instructing the participants on how to contemplate the sufferings of this world, the benefits of the Pure Land, as well as how to cultivate to ensure our rebirth in the Pure Land etc. These dedicated cultivation retreats are very rewarding.

- ① Out of veneration for the Dharma master and inspiration from his or her instructions, they tend to recite the Buddha-name more attentively with more profound faith and aspiration.
- ② They lay off all their worldly affairs temporarily, dedicating these several days for Buddha-recitation practice.
- ③ These retreat-form practice are usually assigned with a leader and a musical band to orchestrate the tone and rhythm of the recitation, which is more effective in harnessing the mind, entailing more concentrated cultivation.

It should be noted that when participating in collective cultivations, we ought to forget all worldly affairs and to completely untether various entanglements. Furthermore, we should recite each utterance by following the tones and rhythms set by the leader, and avoid any inharmonious sounds. Even though we may have established some habitual tones or rhythms in daily practice, we have to obey the collective tone and rhythm. Otherwise, our discordant sound can cause serious disturbance even annoyance to other practitioners.

## **3) Recitation on the verge of death**

It is impossible for us to predict when, where and how we are going to die, hence death is usually called impermanence. Unless someone has accomplished his or her Pure Land conducts, like our patriarch masters, who can realise the exact time of their death, we have to prepare for it.

- ① Reinforce our faith and aspiration through the study of Pure Land teachings, and contemplate on the sufferings of this world and the advantages of the Pure Land.
- ② Try to observe precepts, repent our previous transgressions, and perform virtuous conducts in daily life, to prevent any unpredicted death from accidents, terrorist attacks or heart attacks, etc.
- ③ Make arrangement for the allocation of our wealth and settle all serious concerns, to ensure we can leave this world readily and delightedly at any time.

For most of us, we will gradually become old and feeble, or stricken by some terminal disease such as cancer etc. Realising that death is coming, then we will let go of all worldly affairs and affections, and try our best to concentrate on consolidating our faith and aspiration, and on Buddha-recitation. Contemplate that this day will eventually come after so many years of yearning and cultivation. Consider the Buddha-recitation as the only means to rescue us from endless birth-and-death and to ferry us to the Pure Land. Then recite this Buddha-name as desperately as a drowning person grasping a floating wood in a vast ocean. Whether one recites the Buddha-name loudly or silently, recites “Namo Amitabha Buddha” or simply “Amitabha Buddha”, it does not matter. The critical point is to keep contemplating the Pure Land and reciting the Buddha-name without interruption, as a door fixated on the hinge. Imagine another simile. Visualise a person tightly grasping a dangling rope from a flying helicopter in the high sky. If the person loses the grip, he or she will definitely fall from the sky and die. The Buddha-name is the dangling rope, if our recitation is distracted, we will fall down to the woeful realms to endure torment eternally.

On the verge of one’s death, it would be of much benefit if one has some Dharma friends to support one’s Buddha-recitation. With the reminder

from the Dharma friends, one's faith and aspiration will not waver. Following the recitation of the Dharma friends, one will not pause or interrupt the recitation, until one sees Amitabha Buddha come to welcome and escort him or her to the Pure Land. Even if one cannot recite with a loud voice, one can still recite silently in the mind following each utterance from the Dharma friends.

## V. SUMMARY

In this Volume, we have learned the Forty-Eight Great Vows of Amitabha Buddha, the establishment of the Pure Land, *the Contemplation Sūtra* and *the Amitabha Sūtra*. We have also studied Master Shandao's *Annotation of the Contemplation Sūtra* and Master Ouyi's *Essential Annotation of the Amitabha Sūtra*, as well as the brief history of Pure Land school and the patriarch masters. These studies enable us to systematically comprehend the principles of the Pure Land gateway.

In this chapter, we have summarised the conditions and practices for successful rebirth in the Pure Land. If any person cultivates in accordance with the method introduced in this book, he/she will cease transmigration in this *Saha* world, and achieves rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of this life.

As a conclusion of this book, we will emphasise the key practices to remind the readers.

### 1. Persistently Adhere to One's Practice Plan

Buddha-recitation is simple and convenient to practice. Anyone can cultivate it diligently for some time. But it is more significant for us to persistently undertake the practice every day for the rest of our life. This requires discipline and determination. It is best if we can allocate a fixed time to perform the practice every day, either in the morning after we wash up or in the evening before we go to bed. Regardless of what happened in the day, or how tired we are, we have to finish the quota of recitation for that day, and never postpone it or neglect it. In extreme

cases, we have to make up the unfulfilled quota on the next day. Adhering to it for a period, we will form a habit, and will feel easy and convenient to practice it every day. To guarantee the fulfilment of the practice every day, we should evaluate our conditions and dispositions objectively, so that we can make a reasonable practice plan. The strict execution of the daily plan not only reflects the sincerity of our faith and the earnestness of our aspiration, but it also helps us to refresh them each day.

## 2. Repeatedly Review the Pure Land Teachings

It is necessary for Pure Land practitioners to repeatedly review Pure Land teachings. The teachings are alternatives. Our choice depends on our intellectual levels and preferences. Some people recite *the Amitabha Sūtra* every day as a routine practice before reciting the Buddha-name. Some people recite *the Sūtra of Immeasurable Lifespan* or the text of the Forty-Eight Vows. Some recite *the Contemplation Sūtra* every day. Other people study *the Annotation of the Contemplation Sūtra*, or *the Essential Annotation of the Amitabha Sūtra*, or *the Compilation of Master Yinguang's Articles* etc. As necessary conditions, we should at least read or listen to some Pure Land *Sūtras* or commentaries every week. The emphasis is on persistent undertaking of the task. Not only are reading and reciting of these Pure Land *Sūtras* and commentaries the best provisions for achieving rebirth in the Pure Land, but they will ensure constant reinforcement of our faith and aspiration.

As we have learned, our mind cannot stay unoccupied at any waking time. At the same time, it can process only one thought exclusively at any moment. If our mind is preoccupied with the contemplation and pondering on Pure Land teaching, it leaves no vacancy for other distracted thoughts, especially those deluded afflictive thoughts. Furthermore, due to the homogeneous flux nature of our mind, repeatedly perfuming our mind with Pure Land doctrines will entail our mind to be habitually inclined to Pure Land. This will enable us to focus our mind on the aspiration of the Pure Land on the verge of death.

## 3. Reflecting on One's Aspiration Every Day

Since whether we can achieve rebirth or not entirely depends on sincere faith and earnest aspiration, we should reflect on them every day before we fall asleep. Every night, after we lie in bed, we should contemplate and check objectively, asking ourselves the following questions: Am I guaranteed to get rebirth if I die on this night? Is my faith sincere and my aspiration genuine? If Amitabha Buddha comes to welcome and escort me to get rebirth in the Pure Land now, do I feel exultant and go with him immediately? Do I still have any unfulfilled obligations? Do I have any unsettled issues pertaining to wealth and other matters? Do I still worry about or still attached to something in this world? Once we find any attachment or worries, we should employ one or more methods introduced in this book to see through them and let go of them. If we find some unfulfilled obligations or unsettled matters, we should try to solve them as soon as possible and then let them go.

Having checked the above questions to ensure that our faith and aspiration are genuine, then we begin to recite the Buddha-name slowly and silently in our mind, until we fall asleep.

#### **4. Other Rewarding Practices**

If we undertake every day all the practices summarised above, we are ensured to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land. The following practices will not only enhance our certainty to get rebirth in the Pure Land, but they may raise our grades in the ranks when we achieve rebirth there.

- ① To receive and strictly observe the precepts. It will be much to our advantage if we can generate Bodhicitta and receive the Bodhisattva precepts.
- ② To help to organise collective cultivations. We can sponsor or help to organise various Buddha-recitation retreats, which will benefit a large number of people. Or we can support or help to organise some collective cultivations at home or other places, to enable some Dharma friends to cultivate together. For many ordinary people, cultivating Buddhism is an arduous and long-term mission. Hence it requires strong determination to guarantee continuous practice in solitary conditions. If we can periodically organise some collective cultivations, it will help

most people to counteract the weariness and laziness. Furthermore, it is unavoidable for lay learners of the Buddhist teachings to have problems and questions. Without masters or virtuous learned friends, they can turn to no one to solve their problems, and gradually they will feel frustrated. Studying together, practitioners can discuss and clarify some questions and doubts, and enable all to progress together.

③ In addition to fulfilling the Buddha-recitation quota every day, we should recite the Buddha-name as long as we have any free time, such as while we are walking, jogging, waiting for transportation, waiting for some appointment, having rest during work, or when we are performing any routine job which does not need close attention, we can always recite the Buddha-name.

④ Cease all evil conducts, and perform any virtuous acts when conditions and circumstances are suitable, then dedicate all the merits to the Pure Land.

Dear readers. How fortunate we are to encounter this inconceivable gateway! We should be grateful to our previous lives for planting the virtuous roots.

Having encountered this precious opportunity, we should try our very best to cultivate so as to terminate the miserable transmigrations permanently and achieve rebirth in the Pure Land: our homeland.

See you there!

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## Index

### A

absolutely necessary conditions

**505**

adapts to conditions 18, 272, 280, 478

afflictions of insight and cultivation 110, 146, 296, 542

alternative necessary conditions

**505**

*Amita* 66,340

*Amitabha Sūtra* 10, 108, **264**, 312, 372, 506

*Amitayus* 66

*Anāthapiṇḍika* Garden with *Jeta* trees **309**

Annotation of the Contemplation Sūtra 170, 400, 412, 561

Annotation of the Treatise on Rebirth 402

apart from all characteristics **273**

appearance 94, 181, 204, 209, **269**

aspiration **5**, 46, **143**, **289**, 353, **518**, **543**

attain Buddhahood in one lifetime 8, 295, 302, 353, 358, 437, 502

attainment of Buddhahood 4, 69, 108, 301

### B

believing in cause **283**

believing in effect **284**

believing in noumenon **285**

believing in others **283**

believing in phenomenon **285**

believing in self 18, **280**

benefits at the end of life **135**

benefit from Buddha light 65

benefits obtained from Name Recitation **128**

Bodhicitta 5, 43, 52, 56, 150, 175, 195, 199, 220, 222, 336, 413, 439, 466, 475, 490, 509, 549, 563

Bodhisattvas to attain Buddhahood in one-lifetime 8, 301, 349, 356

Bodhi-tree 54, **86**, 87

body of the Vajra-god *Nārāyaṇa* 7, 54, 116

Buddha-lands 45, 52, 53, 56, 57, 58, 80, 87, 120, 174, 176, 180, 191, 256, 285, 286, 448

Buddha-mindfulness 14, 15, 423, 424, 425, 444

Buddha-name-recitation 5

Buddha-recitation 5, 410, 411, 414, 445, 448, 449, 454, 455, 456, 477, 478, 486, 495, 496, **504**, **547**, **551**

Buddha-recitation by gathering the mind **493**

## C

categorisation of the teachings **302**

celestial ear **49**, 100

celestial eye **49**, 99

clear doors of one hundred dharmas 196

climate and weather of the Pure Land **85**

Compilation of Dharma Master Yinguang's Articles 481, 485

Compendium of Peace and Bliss 408

conditions affecting rebirth **526**

conditions to get rebirth in the Pure Land **136**, 417, 458, **505**

contemplation of images **184**

contemplation of lake waters **180**

contemplation of one's rebirth in a lotus flower **192**

contemplation of the body of Amitabha Buddha **186**

contemplation of the body of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva **188**

contemplation of the body of Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva **190**

contemplation of the jewelled trees **179**

contemplation of the lotus flower **182**

contemplation of the sun **177**

contemplation of water and the ground **177**

Contemplation *Sūtra* **12**, 17, 73, **168**, 209, 213, 225, 400, 410, 412, 477, 507, 561

contents of faith **511**

cultivation of the path for emancipation **2**

cultivations of the path for peaceful happiness **1**

cultivations of the Pure Land **5**, **501**

## D

*Dhāraṇī* 56, 126, **127**

*Dharmakāra* 4, **44**, 47, 62, 63, 343, 347

diamond pedestal **193**

different varieties of Buddha-recitation **551**

difficult path **403**, 404, 488

dignity of conduct 175, 220, 222

discernment of the substance **269**

## E

easy path 374, **403**, 404, 488

eight emancipations 197, **244**

eight meritorious virtues 82, **83**, 180, 181, 324

eight precepts 172, 196, 197, 242

emptiness 61, 67, 76, 82, 178, 196, 243, 270, 291, 321, 337, 408, 46

environmental retributions 11, 16, 206, 212, 277, 279, 286, 318, 319, 321, 322, 325, 326, 335, 351, 513

environment of Pure Land 65, **70**, 206

Essential Annotation of the Amitabha *Sūtra* 265, 452, 454, 480

essential principle with sixteen Chinese characters **475**

establishment of the Pure Land 4, **42**

eternal lifespan, see infinite lifespan

exclusive cultivation 418, **508**

explanation of the title **266**

explication of the principle **278**

exposition of the powers and functions **295**

## F

faculty of knowing the thoughts of others **49**, 101

faith **5**, 51, 57, 120, **137**, 139, 140, 142, 195, 209, 211, 228, 239, 279, **280**, 298, 308, 321, 329, 361, 362, 363, 365, 372, 376, 380, 387, 413, 415, 445, 454, 458, 460, 472, 475, 480, **511**, 514, 515

filially support their parents 175, 197, 220

five core vows **64**

five gateways of mindfulness **15**

five heinous acts 51, **136**, 196, 200, 243, 254, 362, 405

five-point counting method **558**

five precepts 5, 242, 548

five repentances **293**

Five *Sūtras* 9

five types of turbidity 268, 369, **385**, 388, 409, 486

Flower Ornament *Sūtra* **13**

Forty-Eight Great Vows 10, **41**, 47, 212, 343, 501

four types of categorizations **435**, 489

four universal benefits **315**, 388

fruition of the Pure Land method  
18

fundamental tenets of rebirth in  
the Pure Land 12

G

general Buddhist cultivation paths  
**1**

golden lotus flower **195**

I

immeasurable lifespan **68**, **95**

immeasurable light **66**, 268, 343,  
344, 347, 348, 387, 455

impermanence 76, 82, 181, 196,  
243, 414, 446, 560

infinite lifespan 65, **68**

inseparable from all dharmas 269

interactive correspondence 15, **17**,  
169, **204**, 206, 259, 360

intermediate stage 361, 370

K

*Kumārajīva* 11, 265, **304**, 307

L

lakes and water of the Pure Land  
**81**, 180, 207, 287, 324

land of convenience with residue  
146, **365**

land of permanence, tranquillity  
and light 146, 274, 297, 298, 455

land of reward 146, 297, 298, 367,  
455

land shared by mundane and  
saintly beings 146, 296, 299, 303,  
356, 357, 366

Land of Ultimate Bliss 6, 11, 14,  
106, 145, 175, 177, 178, 181, 184,  
185, 190, 191, 194, 195, 196, 197,  
198, 201, 219, 268, 324, 332, 337,  
354, 359

law of cause and effect 106, 175,  
194, 195, 220, **223**, 237, 488, 489

light of Amitabha Buddha **66**

Liu Yimin 287, 395

lotus flowers **82**, **84**, 180, 185,  
188, 194, **325**, 387, 395, 437

Lotus Society **395**, 396

M

majestic adornment of meritorious  
virtues 329, 332, 351, 352

malign the right Dharma 51, 137,  
255, 256

manifested Buddhas 186, 187,  
188, 192, 193, 194, 195, 198, 215,  
238, 240, 250, 374, 394, 408, 504

Master *Bodhiruci* 401

Master Chewu **469**, 515

Master Chengyuan **420**, 423

Master Cimin **419**

Master Daoan 394

- Master Daochuo **407**, 487
- Master Fazhao **423**
- Master Hanshan 432, 450, 457, 521, 555
- Master Huiyuan 161, 287, **393**
- Master Jizang 401
- Master *Kālaṃyaśas* 400
- Master Lianchi 23, 157, 265, **440**, 451, 464
- Master Ouyi 17, 109, 146, 267, 307, 311, **449**, 506, 512, 543
- Master Shandao 138, 142, 169, 171, 209, 212, 216, 223, 226, 227, 231, 256, **409**
- Master Shaokang **427**
- Master *Samghavarman* 393
- Master Tanluan 15, 151, **400**, 402, 413, 416
- Master Xing'an **462**
- Master Xingce **457**
- Master Xingchang **438**
- Master Xuanzang 11, 33, 304, 372
- Master Yinguang 33, 129, 134, 148, 371, 418, 435, **479**, 510, 529, 553, 558
- Master Yongming 125, 157, 371, 373, **430** 510
- Master Yuanying **156**
- Master Zhizhe 169, 251, 373, 400
- meritorious virtues of Amitabha Buddha **66**, **377**
- mind-nature 269, 286, 343, 347, 355, 436
- mind of lovingkindness 192, 231
- mindfulness by Buddha-name recitation **226**
- mindfulness by contemplative meditations **225**
- mindfulness of contemplation of image **225**
- mindfulness of the reality **225**
- mixed contemplation **191**, 192, 208
- mixed practice **227**, 417
- N
- nine grades of rebirth **230**, 296
- three rebirths in the inferior rank **248**
- three rebirths in the medium rank **242**
- three rebirths in the superior rank **230**
- non-appearance 61, 269, **273**
- non-dual 276, 277
- non-retrogression 60, 106, **107**, **298**, **299**, 301,

non-retrogression in practice 105,  
106, **298**, 355

non-retrogression in state 105,  
107, **299**, 301, 355

non-retrogression in thought **298**,  
355

noumenon level 146, 297, **365**,  
443

## O

observing precepts 232, 246, 448,  
**549**

omniscient wisdom 53, 114, 169

on the verge of death 17, 103, 131,  
144, **148**, 149, 358, 391, 475, 497,  
556, 559

one-Buddha-vehicle 295

other-power 47, 404, 413

overall contemplation **181**

## P

path for ultimate enlightenment **3**

patience of non-arising of dharmas  
56, **126**, 127, 193, 195

perfect cultivation **508**, 511

phenomenon level 147, 290, **297**,  
**363**, 365, 455

power of knowing past lives **48**

power to know others' thoughts  
**101**

practice **5**, **18**, **206**, **291**, **547**

*pratyekabuddhas* 2, 109

profound faith **211**, 212, **280**, 358,  
**511**

proper practice **418**

pure conducts 12, **175**, **220**, 503

purple-golden pedestal **194**

## R

read and recite *Mahāyāna sūtras*  
**175**, 220, **223**, 504

Reality 126, 225, **269**

rebirth in the Pure Land 1, 5, 6,  
12, 105, **137**

rebirth of lower grade in the  
inferior rank **200**, **254**

rebirth of lower grade in the  
medium rank **198**, **246**

rebirth of lower grade in the  
superior rank **196**, **239**

rebirth of middle grade in the  
inferior rank **200**, **252**

rebirth of middle grade in the  
medium rank **197**, **245**

rebirth of middle grade in the  
superior rank **194**, **236**

rebirth of upper grade in the  
inferior rank **199**, **248**

rebirth of upper grade in the  
medium rank **197**, **242**

rebirth of upper grade in the  
superior rank **193**, **230**

recitation at noumenon level **365**, 366

recitation at phenomenon level **365**, 366

response-body 68, 274, 276, 344, 347, 366

right definite assembly 8, **50**, **103**, 105, 324, 404

## S

saintly beings in the Pure Land **107**

self-attachment 49, 104

self-emancipation 109

self-nature 126, 269, 273

self-power 258, 360, **403**, 486

seven core vows **64**

seven types (of titles) **266**

single-mindedness without distraction 146, **296**, 297, 359, 364, 443, 455, 476

single-mindedness without distraction at noumenon level **297**

single-mindedness without distraction at phenomenon level **296**

six kinds of mindfulness **232**

Six *Pāramitās* 8, 61, 95, 151, 215, 223, 235, 550

*śrāvakas* 3, 50, 84, **109**, 110, 223, 311

*śrāmaṇera* precepts 197

superior virtuous ones 301, 323

supernatural powers 7, **98**

supportive Buddha-recitation **496**

suffering **2**, **6**, 45, 90, **323**

*Śūraṅgama Sūtra* **14**, 271, 281, 282, 450

*Sūtra* of Immeasurable Lifespan **9**, 15, 42, 73, 84, 86, 98, 123, 393, 414, 550, 562

## T

teachings difficult to believe 268

teachings of the Pure Land **9**

ten aspects of faith **472**

ten great vows of *Samantabhadra* Bodhisattva **13**, 118

ten-recitation counting method **495**

ten virtuous conducts 1

tenets of the Pure Land method **16**

thousand thusness 272

thirteen contemplations 12, 169

Thirty-Two Characteristics 52, 94

tranquil **274**

transcendental travel and flight **49**, **101**

transformation-body, see response-body



three pure conducts 12, 169, **220**,  
**503**, **507**

Three Refuges 175, 220, 222

three types of minds **192**, **208**,  
**209**, 503

three provisions **5**, **137**, **279**, 547

transcendental powers 7, 244, 268

Treatise on Rebirth **15**, 74

trees of the Pure Land **78**

turbidity of affliction **386**, 387

turbidity of lifespan **387**, 388

turbidity of sentient beings **386**,  
387

turbidity of the kalpa 383, **385**

turbidity of view 383, **385**, 387

## U

ultimate non-retrogression **299**

unlimited lifespan 7

uphold or recite *vaipulya Sūtras*  
192, 236

uphold and recite the Buddha-  
name 280, 363

## V

*Vaidehī* 168, 169, 171, 173, 174,  
182, 193, 203, 207, 220, 226

virtuous learned friend 197, 198,  
219, 224, 249, 253, 497, 504, 543

virtuous man 372, 425

virtuous woman 372

virtuous roots 8, 52, 53, 59, 69,  
109, 117, 118, 152, 161, 196, 216,  
223, 241, 248, 251, 293, 328, 359,  
362, 518, 526, 543

vow of all achieving rebirth with  
ten recitations **136**

## W

while the mind is formulating the  
Buddha, the mind is the Buddha  
12, 17, 169, **184**, 203, 204, 206,  
226, 270, 361, 363, **477**

wisdom from contemplation 363

wisdom from hearing 363

without impediment 286, 345, 470

woeful realms 2, 6, 47, **89**, **91**,  
123, 323, 473

World Sovereign King Buddha 4,  
**43**, 44, 46, 47